**MISSISSIPPI TERRITORY AND THE WAR of 1812-1815**

**As the prospect grew of war between the United States and Great Britain, there was speculation as to the attitude of the south, particularly among the  European nations which wished to see the Union divided.  Luis de Onis, minister from Spain, wrote to the captain-general at Caracas, February 2, 1810:**

**"If England should display her energy, in however small a degree, and if, on our part, some vessels should be sent to their coast, and some troops should be drawn near to Louisiana, there is reason to believe that we should see these provinces separate and divide into two or three republics, and, consequently, they would remain in a state of perfect nullity.  We should soon have from the republic of the north, which would be our friend, all the supplies which are now drawn among the others, who would perish from poverty and quarrels among themselves."**

**But the sentiment of Mississippi Territory in July 1812, was thus expressed in the letter of Governor Holmes to Secretary Monroe:**

**"The intelligence of a declaration of war by the United States against Great Britain (June 18th) was received by the citizens of this part of the country with great satisfaction, from a thorough belief that no other course would secure the government from degradation.  You may rest assured sir that the measure will meet with all the support that the people of the Mississippi Territory are able to give it.  It is true that from obvious causes we cannot promise much, but we will cheerfully exert the physical force of the country as far as it may be practicable, and upon any occasion that shall be approved by the general government."**

**The governor gave the declaration of war official proclamation at the same time, July 14, calling for a detail from each of the 13 regiments of militia (except the four drawn upon to meet the Creek danger) to form a regiment to be held in readiness for active service.  The Calvary was instructed to be prepared en masse.  F. L. Claiborne, recently appointed brigadier-general of militia, was entrusted with the execution of this order.  To General Wilkinson at New Orleans the governor wrote that to draw any large force from the territory "might hazard our domestic safety," yet he was confident he could furnish as many men as the general thought it prudent to require. The militiamen were almost totally destitute of arms and ammunition, and the general was called upon for six hundred guns and adequate ammunition.  A new order of things had just begun on the river. Wilkinson was asked to send the guns by "the steamboat."**

**General Claiborne reported August 18 that the various regimental commanders had their detachments ready to march to the rendezvous at Washington. The counties of Wilkinson, Jefferson, Claiborne, Warren and Marion had no occasion to resort to a draft.  Amite and Franklin drafted but a few privates.  Adams was completed by a draft principally.  All await your orders with solicitude . . . . I am confident they will march when ordered with great promptitude, and in all situations will discharge their duty with fidelity and zeal."  Three troops of forty each was the limit of the Calvary force.  A battalion would be organized in the Mobile District under Col. Carson as major.  A company was formed at Natchez by men legally exempt from military service, who offered their services to the governor, which he accepted with hearty recognition of their patriotism.  They were ordered on patrol duty.  The steamboat arrived at Natchez with the arms and camp equipage Sept. 19, and the regiment began to assemble at Cantonment, Washington.  About 600 men were in camp in the latter part of September, when a further detail of about 300 was ordered.  The troops understood that they were called to six months service.  They were formed into two battalions.  Gen. Claiborne accepted the command of the regiment with the rank of colonel.  Capt. A. H. Holmes of the United States army, was detailed as inspector.  Lt. Benjamin Salvage was quartermaster.**

**The Mississippi regiment began the march to Baton Rouge, November 3.  It was held there, in readiness to meet an attack of New Orleans, but had no occasion for active service.**

**Claiborne wrote from Baton Rouge, December 30, 1812 to Cowles Mead, speaker of the house, in acknowledgement of resolutions of the legislature regarding the detachment of Mississippi militia in the service of the United States:**

**"Every citizen soldier felt as he should when the resolution were read, and . . . with one look manifested a determination to deserve well under any circumstances, and if an opportunity should occur in the field to do honor by their prowess to the standard present them, as Americans united to maintain the best interests of their country."**

**He asked that the tanks of the Mississippi regiment be rendered to the assembly.  Governor Holmes wrote of this regiment July 6, 1813:  "When their term of service was near expiring a considerable number of them, with many others from the same district of country, entered the volunteer corps.  This has very much reduced our militia force."  The service of their regiment probably corresponded to Col. Claiborne's service, September 6, 1812 to February 28, 1813.**

**The organization was begun in January at Baton Rouge, of the First Regiment Mississippi Infantry, U.S.V., of which Joseph Carson was commissioned colonel.  There was also a Louisiana regiment, forming a brigade, to command which Col. F. L. Claiborne was commissioned brigadier-general, U.S.V., in March.  This brigade was ordered, in the latter part of June, to march to the Tombigbee.  There was a panic on account of the activity of the Creek Indians.  (See War with the Creeks, 1813-1814.)**

**No British fleet was in sight during 1813, and the War with the Creeks (q.v.) absorbed the attention of the people of Mississippi, except as they read with patriotic anxiety of the battles on the Canadian frontier, where Brig. Gen. Zebulon M. Pike, who had been on duty at Fort Dearborn, fell in Gen. Dearborn's ill starred campaign, and Brig. Gen. Leonard Covington, who had recently gone north from the Natchez, lost his life in the miserable campaign under Gen. Wilkinson, who had been called north because the government was afraid to trust him at New Orleans.  New counties were cut off from old ones and named for Pike and Covington, and a few years later another county was named for Lawrence, of "Don't give up the ship" fame, who fell in this same mournful year of 1813.  These counties lie in a crescent in southern Mississippi, commemorating a strange, unfortunate and fortunate war, now long forgotten.  Mobile way, is another group of names of this period (Jackson, Harrison and Perry) amidst a galaxy of heroes of the Revolution.**

**Toward the close of the Creek war, there was another regiment of Mississippi militia in the service of the United States, put in the field in the Tombigbee country, under the command of Col. George H. Nixon.  They marched from the Alabama River July 15, 1814, with a part of the 39th regulars, under Col. Thomas H. Benton, to hunt out the remnant of the hostile Creeks on the Escambia River. A few days later Jackson made a treaty with the Creeks, in which they were compelled to surrender the territory shielding Pensacola from the United States, some British war ships arrived at Pensacola, and Maj. Edward Nicholl landed, began organizing the Indians that had fled from Jackson's army, and sent out a call for the people of Louisiana and Kentucky to join him in war on the United States.  Before this, Jackson had started his troops down the Alabama to Mobile, which he had learned as the first point of attack of the British fleet that had been sent to the Gulf region.**

**Under the call of 1814 for 93,5000 militia, the quota of Mississippi was 500 infantry.  Accordingly the governor called for five companies to be made up by volunteering or drat, to rendezvous at Washington, Liberty and John Ford's on the Pearl, September 25, to march to Mt. Vernon.  He also promised Jackson four troops of dragoons, and infantry and Calvary were sent for in haste, September 14.  The enemy's fleet was even then off Mobile Point, into which Jackson had put a garrison under Maj. Lawrence.  The attack had begun when the general wrote, the ships assisted by a land force of Indians and marines. Next day, the 15th, Lawrence repulsed the enemy, destroying one of the ships, the Hermes.**

**On the 30th of the same month Jackson wrote the governor tendering his thanks "for the promptitude with which you have assembled and marched your quota of troops.  Capt. Doherty's (Jefferson) troop is composed of fine young men calculated to endure hardship . . . . I have received the degrading news of the burning of our capital by the enemy previous to the receipt of your letter, and although I, like every American, felt much mortification at an event so well calculated to show the imbecility of our military preparation, and I might add the general measures adopted for the protection of the country, as well as the general apathy which has prevailed in the greater section of the Union; yet I am well assured that it will have the happy tendency to arouse the people to a vigorous and united effort in the defense of the country; that it will render the war popular, and that such men will be selected as are calculated to, and determined on, discharging the duties assigned them regardless of interests or popular motives.  We may then look forward to a termination of the war upon terms honorable and advantageous to our country and not until then.  I sympathize with you most cordially in the afflicting loss of your brother, Major Holmes."  The governor's twenty-two year old brother, Maj. Andrew Hunter Holmes, was killed at Fort Mackinac, August 4, 1814.  He had seen his first service against the Lafitte brigands, near New Orleans.**

**The Mobile danger passed, Jackson turned to Pensacola, which he had said was his objective of campaign, a year before. At Mims' ferry, the Mississippi Dragoons and other mounted men left their horses, to march the rest of the way on foot.  The soldiers forced an entrance into the town November 7, the British fled to Jackson destroyed the remaining fort and set his army in motion for Fort Montgomery, on the perdido.  The Dragoons did good work in the Pensacola campaign, and in the command of Majors Blue and Kennedy was a party of Choctaw warriors.  The movements of this little army in this campaign and the return to Mobile, through a wild and almost pathless wilderness, were as well-conceived and brilliantly and rapidly executed as anything in the history of Napoleon, or the records of Jackson in the Valley or Grant in Mississippi.  Yet historians have never done the campaign justice, misled by the stupid comment of bureau officials at Washington. The capture of Pensacola, defense of Mobile and battles of New Orleans, were part of one masterly campaign by militia infantry, without railroads, against British veterans transported by the British navy.**

**What Natchez and the coast had to fear from British invasion may be inferred from the following extracts from British letters regarding the subsequent operations on the Georgia coast, captured on the ship St. Lawrence:  "We had some fine fun at St. Mary's; the bombs were at the town and had plenty of plunder.  How are you off for tables, chest of drawers, etc.?"  Concerning the taking of Cumberland Island - "Part of the black regiment employed on this service acted with great gallantry.  Blacky had no idea of giving quarters, and it was with difficulty the officers prevented their putting the prisoners to death."**

**Jackson hastened on to New Orleans and prepared for defense calling to his assistance all who could carry a gun, militia of all sorts and conditions. Lafitte's pirates and "men of color" even from Mobile.  The naval engagements at Bay St. Louis and Malheureux islands, December 13-14, left Lake Borgne exposed to the enemy's small boats from the naval station at Ship Island (See Miss. Sound.)  Tennessee militia, 2,700 strong, reached Natchez, December 13, under Gen. Carroll, whom Judge George Poindexter joined as an aide.  The Dragoons (q.v.), under Maj. Hinds, arrived at New Orleans just in time to take part of the first battle, December 23.  The Natchez Volunteer Riflemen organized under Capt. James C. Wilkins, reached the city on the day of the battle of January 8, 1815, and took position on the field.  Maj. Chotard, a gallant Mississippian, served on the staff of Jackson, and was wounded by a shell near the Villere mansion.  During the great battle of January 8 Same Dale arrived after a ride of eight days, horseback, cross-country from Georgia, bearing dispatches from the war department.  Dale carried back with equally remarkable speed, the glorious news of victory.  The British prisoners taken at New Orleans were held at Cantonment Washington, and on Mach 1, they were marched to Natchez to embark, escorted by a company of militia under Capt. James Green.  British ships were not far off, for they had made another attack on Fort Bowyer, and captured it February 11, just two days before news of the treaty of peace came from Jamaica.  The British fleet sailed away in March, after having ruled the Mississippi Sound for many months.**

**The total contribution of the Mississippi Territory to this war was as follows:**

**Calvary: officers 44, men 442 Mounted Infantry: officers 51, men 738 Riflemen: officers 21, men 326 Spies:  officers 1, men 13 For a total of 1,667.**

**Such was the record of the war department of the United States.  Of course many more performed military duty of more or less importance and danger. But the list above given exceeds that of South Carolina or North Carolina, and surpasses that of Massachusetts in all items except that a large number of artillerymen were recruited in that State.  Massachusetts' total list, including 2,700 artillerymen, was only 3,350.**

**Mississippi Territory was the principal gainer by the war of 1812-15, which nearly everywhere else was the occasion of humiliation.  The Territory gained the Gulf coast; the Spaniards at Pensacola were deprived of their military strength; the Indians were thoroughly subdued.  The belt of country along the south open to settlement was extended to the Chattahoochee, and the patriotism of the people was enriched by memories of the wonderful victory at New Orleans.**

**Source: Enclyopedia of Mississippi History, Vol. II L-Z, Southern Historical**
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