



Daniel D. Tompkins, War Governor

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New York and the contiguous British provinces of Upper and Lower Canada were the center of fighting for the duration of the war. From the Niagara River across Lakes Ontario and Champlain and down the Saint Lawrence River toward Montreal, soldiers, sailors, and native warriors contended fiercely while civilians suffered grievously. While the U.S. Constitution assigned the defense of the nation and the function of declaring and waging war to the federal government, it was widely understood that the conduct of war was a shared enterprise between the federal and state governments. While the governors of the New England states avoided participation in the conflict, Governor Daniel D. Tompkins of New York worked closely with the Madison Administration to prosecute the war.

General studies of the war focus largely on the conduct of the federal government. However, the role of New York, both as a staging area for the invasions of the Canadas and as a source of material and human resources, has been treated lightly. Historians have cited Tompkins as an ardent supporter of the war, but his specific contributions receive minimal attention. This is somewhat odd, since in his role as commander-in-chief of the state militia, he had a potential land force larger than the regular army. This essay is a preliminary examination of his efforts over five years to prepare New York for war with the British Empire and his work resourcing the conflict once Congress declared war.

Daniel Tompkins was born in Westchester County in 1774. His father, Jonathan Griffin Tompkins, was an unabashed supporter of the revolution. Westchester County was a no-man's land, positioned as it was between British-occupied Manhattan Island and rebel forces to the north. Jonathan Tompkins moved his family to relative safety in Dutchess County until the end of the fighting. Then, he brought the family back to the family farm in Scarsdale.¹

Tompkins entered Columbia College in 1792 as a sophomore. His prior education included language skills in Greek and Latin, prerequisites for admission to Columbia. He

¹ Ray W. Irwin. *Daniel D. Tompkins: Governor of New York and Vice President of the United States* (Kingsport, Tennessee: The New York Historical Society, 1968), pp. 5-6.

graduated as valedictorian in a class of twenty-six and read the law in preparation for a career in politics. At the time, politically-minded persons were aligning into two parties, Republican and Federalist. The two parties contended vigorously for dominance in New York, but rarely would the governorship, Assembly, and Senate be under the control of a single party. New York Republicans further divided themselves into followers of prominent politicians. Aaron Burr, Robert R. Livingston, George Clinton, his nephew DeWitt Clinton, all had their adherents.

Tompkins moved easily in state politics. He worked strenuously to gather support for Republican candidates in the 1800 election and thus came to the attention of the Republican leadership. He served in the state Assembly and as an associate justice in the New York State Supreme Court. He defeated Morgan Lewis for the governorship in 1807. Tompkins was the first state governor of modest means and family connections.² He won three more elections, leaving the governorship for the vice-presidency in 1817. Tompkins first took office on July 1, 1807, just nine days after *HMS Leopard* fired upon *USS Chesapeake*. Under Jefferson's direction, Congress passed the widely unpopular and ultimately destructive Embargo Act in December. New York communities along the border had close trading connections with Canada. Traders evaded the embargo and turned to widespread smuggling.

Tompkins was a personal friend and a strong political supporter of Jefferson. He used the state militia to curb smuggling, a policy that raised the influence of the Federalists who soundly denounced Jefferson's economic policies. However, Tompkins' greatest challenge was to prepare the state to defend itself. British forces in Upper and Lower Canada were well situated to raid settlements along New York's extensive frontier. Tompkins clearly understood that the state could not depend upon the small federal army and navy. He focused the state's defensive measures in two areas, first to arm the militia and second to improve the defenses of New York City and its exceptional harbor.

In peacetime, there were only a few full-time paid positions in the state militia: the Adjutant General, the Commissary of Military Stores and his deputy, and the superintendents and guards at the two state arsenals. Armorers were contracted as necessary to repair weapons. Congress set the general requirements for state militias. The Militia Act of 1792 provided that every free able-bodied white male citizen between the ages of 18 and 45 was to be enrolled into a local militia company. State law exempted some professions such as clergy, teachers, college students, sailors, and some state officials. In 1807, the state militia was an impressive

² Irwin, *Tompkins*, pp. 55-56.

organization on paper.³ The size of a local company varied, but normally none would exceed 100 militiamen. The state organized several companies, eight or nine, into a regiment. The state further paired regiments into brigades commanded by a brigadier general. A varying number of brigades were organized as a division, commanded by a major general.

Men with a martial inclination and motivation to greater social or political standing organized themselves into volunteer companies. These men acquired their own uniforms and weapons and chose their own officers. Rather than organize as generic infantry, the volunteer companies typically armed and equipped themselves into something more exotic, such as rifle or dragoon or artillery companies. The state recognized the volunteer companies and exempted them from enrollment in the local militia and mandatory training. However, the state assigned volunteer companies to militia regiments.

In the run up to war, the New York militia consisted of 159 infantry regiments, 9 cavalry regiments, and an assortment of artillery regiments and separate artillery companies. While state law prescribed a uniform, it allowed a great deal of leeway to the volunteer companies to wear something more ornate and differently patterned than the prescribed uniform. Distinct uniforms were a source of pride for these citizen-soldiers. In the non-volunteer companies, it was typical that officers provided their own uniforms while the enlisted soldiers wore civilian dress to training.

State law spelled out who was required to serve in the militia but was less clear on who would serve as officers. The appointment of officers was a joint function between the Council of Appointments and the governor. The Council of Appointments was unique to New York State government. This body was composed of four senators elected by the Assembly. It controlled the appointment of thousands of state officials. The governor nominated persons to fill vacancies, but his nomination needed a simple majority of the Council. If the Council was composed of persons of the opposite party than the governor, then the governor's nominee might not be appointed, or the process would devolve into political horse-trading.

The Council could grant military commissions, but the governor assigned the officers to positions. In 1810, the Federalists controlled the Assembly, and Federalists also dominated the Council of Appointments. The majority of new militia commissions and promotions went to Federalists, yet Tompkins managed to evade putting some Federalists into high command by

³ In 1814, New York reported 95,026 members of the state militia. *American State Papers: Military Affairs*. Vol. I, p.679.

granting brevet promotions to Republicans. He could also deny a command indefinitely, as he did to Major General DeWitt Clinton during the war.⁴

As the *Chesapeake* crisis unfolded, various communities along the border with the province of Upper Canada formed committees of safety and requested arms from the state. Tompkins ordered state arsenals to make some arms available, but he noted rather sternly that the militia laws required that citizens provide their own arms and accoutrements. He also commented that he, the governor, was personally responsible for issuing the weapons and therefore he expected their return in good condition when the emergency subsided.⁵

However, the shortage of state weapons was glaringly apparent and Tompkins appealed to the legislature to purchase more weapons. In 1808 the state legislature passed “An Act to Provide for the Defense of the Northern and Western Frontiers.” This act directed the governor to store a total of 4,000 stand of arms (musket, bayonet and scabbard, cartridge box and belt) in Onondaga, Genesee, Oneida, Jefferson, Clinton and Essex Counties. Tompkins issued orders to the Commissary of Military Stores, John McLean, to transport weapons, accoutrements, and ammunition and deliver them to state officials, often the local judges, who would oversee the security of the items until the state could construct proper storage facilities.⁶ Between 1808 and 1812, the state built an additional fifty gun houses in communities for a total cost of \$3,000. This moved state weapons even closer to the communities rather than issuing from the few state arsenals.⁷ Tompkins was thus expanding the state’s system of arsenals that had been previously limited to New York City and Albany. Pre-positioning weapons and equipment closer to the frontiers would save time. Militia companies moving to the frontier would pass through one of these new facilities to draw weapons. Presumably, when ordered to muster, militiamen would receive these weapons as required and return them with the completion of their tour of duty.

In 1808, the state contracted with weapons manufacturer Eli Whitney of New Haven Connecticut for 2,000 stand of arms for \$26,000. In 1811, the state contracted with Whitney for an additional 2,000 stand of arms, of which 500 were delivered by the end of the year. However,

⁴ Irwin, *Tompkins*, p. 137.

⁵ Tompkins to Pliny Moor et. al., 6 October 1807. Found in Irwin, *Tompkins*, pp. 61-62.

⁶ Tompkins to John McLean, May 9, 1808. *Public Papers of Daniel D. Tompkins: Military*. vol. II, (Albany: J.B. Lyon Company, State Printers, 1902) pp.72-76.

⁷ New York State Archives Record Series A0269. General Account Ledgers, 1775 – 1918. Vol. 25, Ledger C. April 1805 - Dec 31 1812

Whitney was unable to complete delivery of the remaining 1,500 on time, which drew a rebuke from Tompkins.⁸

By March 1811, Tompkins reported to the legislature that the project of providing arms at strategic locations throughout the state was largely complete. At that time, there were 7,395 state muskets positioned at the two major arsenals and five other storage facilities. He reported, "...the state is now supplied with an adequate part of artillery, fit for service; and that when the small arms now manufacturing are received, the supply of muskets and ammunition will be amply sufficient to equip as large a detachment of the militia of this state as will probably ever be called into service at one time." Tompkins also bragged that the requirement for gun powder had encouraged entrepreneurs in Columbia County to establish a powder factory, the first in the state.⁹

The state continued acquiring weapons and moving them closer to the frontiers. On January 12, 1812, the state reported the contents of the arsenals at Russell, Onondaga, Canandaigua, Rome, Watertown, Batavia, Niagara, Black River, Russia, Sackett's Harbor, Geneva, and Oneida. Presumably, these numbers include weapons stored in local gun houses, attached to an arsenal. These arsenals stored:

Four iron guns, 4 and 12 pounders.
 Nine brass guns ranging from 2 to 9 pounders.
 10,541 muskets
 381 rifles
 176 tents
 680 camp kettles¹⁰

Since squads of six to eight soldiers shared a tent and a camp kettle, clearly there would not be enough of these to support a major mobilization.

While the state focused its efforts on arming the militia, it paid less attention to training. In general militia units would demonstrate the incapacity to maneuver on the battlefield. This stemmed from deficiencies in training. Certainly, militia officers wanted their units to be able to contribute to battlefield success, but their own lack of training was duly reflected in their men.

⁸ Irwin, Tompkins, p.139. Tompkins to State Legislature, March 11, 1811, Tompkins, *Public Papers*, II, 257-61. Tompkins to Oliver Wolcott, September 21, 1812.

⁹ Tompkins to State Legislature, March 11, 1811, Tompkins, *Papers*, II, 257-61.

¹⁰ New York State Archives Record Series A0802-78. New York State Office of Audit and Control, 1783-1858.

An incident occurring one year before the declaration of war is illustrative of the many deficiencies of the militia. Nineteen-year-old Henry Leavitt Ellsworth, a Yale graduate, was travelling through Goshen in Orange County and recorded these observations of a small infantry company on training day. While no one was in uniform, Ellsworth recorded, "...I must acknowledge there was an exact uniformity in their fire arms, but this was owing rather to physical than moral causes. A thick crust of oxide of iron gives them a wonderful similarity." He went on to comment that few could perform properly the simplest of commands, such as ordering arms. At least one constant of military service appeared to remain intact. When the men started idle chattering, "...the orderly sergeant grew wroth and was denouncing his most bitter anathemas upon them for their disorderly behavior." However vivid a sergeant's invectives, these are not sufficient to turn civilians into soldiers.¹¹

Tompkins was concerned that when it came time for militia and regular formations to come together on the battlefield, that they would not share the same tactical doctrine. Trainers of the time used the term 'discipline' to denote soldier's individual movements, such as handling a musket and facings, and the movement of units, such as forming a line from a marching column. These formations and movements allowed a large unit to maneuver on the battlefield in order to gain a positional advantage on the enemy. While militia officers trained their soldiers using Von Steuben's *Blue Book*, the regulars may have been trained using a more modern doctrine, a doctrine with different formations and commands.¹² The *Blue Book*, was entirely appropriate for use during the American Revolution; however, the French had developed newer modes of fighting which combined the strength of assault columns, the firepower of lines, and the close coordination of skirmishers. American officials attributed French successes in the wars of the French Revolution to these new tactics as well as the enthusiasm of citizen-soldiers. In a letter to General William Paulding, Tompkins wrote, "It is certainly desirable that a national system of discipline and tactics for the militia and Regulars should be devised and sanctioned by Congress. Until something of that kind be done, we may expect to have a great many ignorant officers in both corps, and of course some very indifferent troops." The War Department and Congress did

¹¹ Phillip R. Shriver, ed. "Broken Locks and Rusty Barrels: A New York Militia Company On the Eve of the War of 1812," *New York History*, 67 No. 3 (July 1986): 355-56.

¹² For a comprehensive explanation of contending doctrines, see Donald E. Graves, "Dry Books of Tactics: U.S. Infantry Manuals of the War of 1812 and After," *Military Collector and Historian* 38 (Summer 1986: 50-61; and Winter 1986: 173-77).

not act on Tompkins' worthy suggestion, and the lack of a common tactical doctrine no doubt hindered efficiency.¹³

While providing muskets in convenient locations to protect frontier communities was certainly important, weighing more heavily on Tompkins' mind was the defense of New York City and harbor. State officials were justifiably concerned with fortifying the water approaches to New York City. As early as March 1807 the Legislature designated a State Board of Fortification headed by DeWitt Clinton. Tompkins and the Board of Fortification formed a partnership with Colonel Jonathan Williams, Chief of the regular army's Corps of Engineers. That year, Williams, along with Vice President George Clinton and Secretary of War Henry Dearborn, conducted a detailed survey of New York Harbor. The product was a document entitled "Outline of a Plan of Defence for the City and Harbor of New York."¹⁴

Colonel Williams, a well-trained engineer, understandably took the lead in the survey and the resulting plan of fortification. Williams intended to challenge warships passing the Narrows, the channel between Staten Island and Long Island, and then destroy them in the harbor. Warships of the time had distinct advantages, albeit weather dependent. A ship of the line could bring forty or fifty heavy guns to bear on a target from an extended range and from any position in which the depth of water was adequate. However, accuracy was degraded by the roll of the ship. Also, wooden ships were vulnerable to hot shot (balls heated cherry red in a furnace). Guns firing from masonry land fortifications had no such vulnerabilities.

Military engineers typically designed fortifications based upon the designs of Sébastien Le Prestre de Vauban, the foremost military engineer of the Seventeenth Century. Engineers laid out a polygonal trace of bastions that allowed defenders to bring fire upon assaults from any angle. While Williams used the basics of bastions in some of his designs, he pioneered round masonry casemate designs, not unlike the popular Martello Towers making their appearance in Europe. A casemate is a vaulted interior chamber that housed and protected one or more artillery pieces. Williams designed thick masonry structures of one to three levels, each consisting of multiple casemates. The round design would deflect some shot striking at an angle. Additionally, curved and thick masonry walls would be difficult to breach by a land attack. To further strengthen the overall defense, state officials would station militia to challenge land-based assaults. An additional advantage, in Williams' calculations, was that curved walls required

¹³ Tompkins to William Paulding, December 21, 1811. Tompkins, *Public Papers II*, p.385.

¹⁴ This paper, dated July 1807, is in the *Jonathan Williams Papers*, Indiana University, Lilly Library.

much less masonry and were therefore cheaper and easier to construct than bastioned fortifications. Williams also saw a role to be played by U.S. Navy gunboats roaming the harbor to bring enemy vessels under fire as opportunities presented themselves.¹⁵

The first order of business was to acquire land. Between 1808 and the declaration of war, the governor, the Board of Fortification, and Williams sought state or federal title or lease to land on strategic harbor islands. As the masonry went up, the governor and Williams acquired artillery guns to place inside the fortifications. Workers erected two forts on Governor's Island: Fort Columbus and Castle Williams. Bedloe's Island and Ellis Island each featured a fortification. Construction began on Fort Richmond on Staten Island.

The state government appointed the Commission of Fortifications to oversee the work and to authorize spending. Commissioners paid carpenters, stone masons, and common laborers between \$1 and \$1.65 per day. By comparison, private soldiers at this time received only \$8 per month. The commissioners authorized purchases of timber, stone, brick, and wine and brandy for themselves.¹⁶ Work on improving the defenses of New York Harbor continued unabated through the end of the war. Perhaps as a result of the state's efforts to protect the city, the Royal Navy briefly considered, but quickly rejected, any operations against New York City and instead launched a punitive expedition against Baltimore in September 1814.¹⁷

President Madison and his supporters in Congress were moving toward war in the spring of 1812. William Eustis, Secretary of War, issued a small requisition of New York militia in late March. Eustis authorized Governor Tompkins to muster 1600 militiamen for immediate deployment to the Niagara Frontier, Oswego, and the vicinity of Sackett's Harbor. The federal government would provide rations but could not provide weapons or camp equipment. These were needed by the new regular regiments. Eustis and Tompkins agreed that this militia

¹⁵ William A. Griswold, "A Reasoned Approach to the Defense of New York Harbor for the war of 1812," *The Journal of America's Military Past* vol. XXX (Winter 2004): 26-42. Williams to the Commissioner of Fortifications, May 28, 1814. *Public Papers of Daniel D. Tompkins: Military*. vol. III, (Albany: J.B. Lyon Company, State Printers, 1902) pp. 472-77.

¹⁶ New York State Archives Record Series A0802-78. New York State Office of Audit and Control, 1783-1858, Vol. 6. pp. 3-12.

¹⁷ See Alexander Cochrane to George Cockburn, July 1, 1814 and Cochrane to Robert Melville, July 17, 1814, in Michael J. Crawford, ed. *The Naval War of 1812: A Documentary History*, volume III, 1814-1815 (Washington: Naval Historical Center, 2002) pp. 129 and 132-35.

contingent would be commanded by a militia officer until a regular army general officer took command.¹⁸

Tompkins took immediate action to mobilize these forces. On April 2nd, he issued a general order specifying various commanders to assemble their militia, to select the men necessary to complete their quota, to draw weapons and equipment from an arsenal or gun house, and to march to the frontier. He also gave his senior commanders authority to appoint field grade officers to command these detached units of militia.¹⁹ Throughout the northern and western counties, local militia commanders called their men together and asked for volunteers. If the number of volunteers failed to meet the quota, then the commander drafted the shortfall. A drafted man could hire a substitute. The substitute collected money from the man he was replacing as well as the pay from the state. State law required that every militiaman in a company must serve once, or hire a substitute, before he was required to serve a second time. Volunteers or substitutes, of course, could serve as many call-ups as they wanted.

Once selected, a citizen put his personal affairs into order, gathered up whatever weapons, blanket, and equipment he might possess, and on the appointed day, moved to the designated rendezvous. For many, this meant leaving planting and harvesting to the family, a hardship to be endured. When the commander of the detached company had assembled his men, he mustered the militiamen by enrolling them in the company book. This act started their pay and their tour of duty that would last up to six months. Initially, there were no funds to pay the men on time and some men would not be paid until they were mustered out of service or well after. At some point, the company or regimental commander read the articles of war to the men. This was official notice of what constituted a crime and the accompanying penalty. Military crimes included drunk on duty, sleeping on guard, absent without authorization, desertion, striking an officer, mutiny, and many others that would negatively affect the capability of the unit.

The detached companies and regiments were hybrid units, composed of men who did not know one another. Many of the officers were strangers to their soldiers. Thus, whatever level of cohesion that existed in the standing militia was lost. Unit cohesion is the glue that holds the unit together in dangerous situations. It derives from shared experience, earned trust, and respect. The men would develop cohesion to some degree on the long march to the front and during

¹⁸ Eustis to Tompkins, March 24, 1812.

¹⁹ New York State Archives Record Series A0802-78. New York State Office of Audit and Control, 1783-1858, Vol. 21.

training. However, cohesion in a militia unit would never approach that of a regular British formation in which the soldiers had been together with the same officers, sergeants, and corporals for several years.

In some cases, many or all of the men of a volunteer company would agree to muster as a company. This was what these men had prepared for. These soldiers were already uniformed and brought their own standard weapons and equipment. It was very probable that a volunteer company enjoyed greater cohesion than found in a typical detached company.

An example of this early mobilization is revealed in a letter Brigadier General Jacob Brown wrote to his commander, Brigadier General George Widrig, on April 24, 1812 from Brownstown. Widrig commanded the 5th Division headquartered at Herkimer. Widrig had ordered Brown to raise 600 men. His orders stated that volunteers were preferred. Brown reported, "...but as volunteers are preferred and I am directed first to obtain if possible volunteers I am in obedience to the orders exerting myself to procure the volunteers but I cannot count with any degree of certainty upon raising my quota in this way. About 30 have volunteered since the reception of my orders which is now five days and I shall go on with the volunteer system a few days longer. Perhaps I may get a company in this way. You may rely upon my men being ready to march by the early part of May."²⁰

In April, Tompkins brought Peter B. Porter, the state's Quartermaster General, onto duty. His task, to ensure the feeding, arming, and supplying of the militia as it mobilized and marched to the frontiers, was immense. There were no regular army quartermasters or paymasters present in the state north of West Point. Thus, the militia had responsibility to maintain all accounts and seek repayment from the federal government later. Governor Tompkins complained that, "the duty of dispensing the public funds for defraying the expenses of the Militia...was imposed upon me by the General Government without my suggestion or solicitation."²¹

However, on April 10th, Congress expanded the national mobilization by directing the states to call up a total of 100,000 militiamen. New York's quota was 13,500 detached militiamen.²² Again, Tompkins responded quickly to this eight-fold increase. As commander-in-chief, he issued orders assigning quotas and rendezvous to his subordinate division commanders.

²⁰ Brown to Widrig, April 24, 1812. New York State Archives Record Series A0802-78. New York State Office of Audit and Control, 1783-1858, Vol. 21.

²¹ Tompkins to Armstrong, January 29, 1814. *Public Papers*, III, pp. 444-48.

²² Eustis to Tompkins, April 15, 1812

Over the summer, the War Department slowly formed a strategy to seize the Canadas. Eustis conceived of three simultaneous invasions: across the Detroit and Niagara Rivers and a thrust north from Lake Champlain to seize Montreal. He assigned command of the Detroit operation to Brigadier General William Hull and the Northern Army to Major General Henry Dearborn. For some time, Dearborn did not comprehend that his command included operations west of Lake Champlain.²³ Eventually, Eustis and Tompkins agreed to assign command of the Niagara River operation to a militia general.

The choice of a man to command the invasion across the Niagara River was momentous. Typically, militia officers, even of the same rank as their regular army officers, were subordinate to their regular counterpart. Also, most typically, the militia was in a support role to regular forces. However, on the Niagara River, this model was reversed. A New York major general would command all land forces, regular and militia. Militia forces would outnumber regulars.

Tompkins had two choices for this most important command. The Council of Appointments approved both Republican DeWitt Clinton and Federalist Stephen Van Rensselaer to the rank of major general. Neither had any significant military experience. Whoever commanded a successful invasion of Canada would reap considerable fame that could be parlayed into political capital. Clinton and Tompkins both had aspirations to the presidency. Madison gained the nomination of the Republican Party in his bid for re-election in 1812. Despite this, Clinton chose to run for the presidency against Madison. Clinton, though a Republican, gained strong Federalist support for his anti-war stance. Tompkins remained a staunch supporter of James Madison; he would defer his presidential aspirations for a later time. In the election, Madison won 128 electoral votes while Clinton gathered 89, including all 29 from New York. The nation was still split on the war, but Madison had enough political strength to continue.

Rather than give the potentially rewarding campaign to a fellow Republican, Tompkins selected Van Rensselaer to command on the Niagara. Tompkins expected to gain his party's nomination for re-election in the gubernatorial race in early 1813. He presumed that he would run against Van Rensselaer, the Federalist candidate. Tompkins' choice to command on the Niagara appeared to be non-partisan; it gave the Federalists an opportunity to embrace the reality of a declared war. Perhaps Tompkins hoped that Van Rensselaer would refuse the command, thus appearing unpatriotic to most New Yorkers. Van Rensselaer agreed to command, although

²³ Dearborn to Eustis, August 7, 1812

he stipulated that his cousin, Solomon Van Rensselaer, who had wartime experience in the Fallen Timbers campaign, would serve as his aide. Tompkins graciously released the state adjutant general for duty on the major general's staff. Tompkins assigned Van Rensselaer the command of all forces from St. Regis to the Pennsylvania border.²⁴ Even though Van Rensselaer's potential battlefield success would make him a very popular candidate for the governorship, Tompkins supported him and the campaign on the Niagara unreservedly.

Tompkins organized the 13,500 militiamen into twenty regiments and a separate corps of light infantry and riflemen. He grouped the regiments into eight brigades and organized the brigades into two divisions. He allocated one division, Van Rensselaer's, to support the invasion across the Niagara River as well as to the defense of the shore of Lake Ontario. Tompkins assigned the second, smaller, division, under Major General Benjamin Mooers, to defend from New York City to the Lake Champlain region. Van Rensselaer ordered two of his five brigades to march to the Niagara Frontier. The War Department was well aware that mobilization cost money and in May, Secretary of War William Eustis forwarded \$50,000 to Tompkins to meet immediate demands.

The story of the 1812 mobilization is told in the surviving records. On September 1st, Governor Tompkins called Lieutenant Colonel Tompson Mead's 17th Regiment of Detached Militia into active service and ordered it to march to join Van Rensselaer's invasion force gathering at Lewiston on the Niagara River. Mead's regiment consisted of militia from Chenango, Broome, and Tioga counties. The militiamen rendezvoused in Norwich and Binghamton. Nine years after the Battle of Queenston Heights, Mead was still trying to collect repayment of his personal funds expended during the march to Lewiston. In his request to the New York legislature, he wrote: "I certify that the nature of the service, and the duties it imposed were in a great measure unknown, at that time to the detachment that no munitions of war, no arms, no tents, no provisions, and no hospital stores were provided, and that the Quarter-master's department was entirely destitute of every thing requisite for subsisting and quartering the troops." Mead received \$478.34 directly from the governor, and Mead ordered his regimental quartermaster to use it to buy food. The quartermaster could spend \$.20 per ration of bread and meat. On the 20th of September, the regiment took up the line of march to Cazenovia and arrived on September 23rd. Here, the regiment came within support of the state contractor. When troops fell sick, Mead found persons along the line of march who would board and nurse the sick

²⁴ Tompkins to Van Rensselaer, July 13, 1812.

soldiers. He paid from the funds he had. The governor told Mead to draw weapons at Batavia. However, when the regiment arrived at Batavia, there were no weapons. They had been issued to units passing through earlier.²⁵

Tompkins met with every regimental and brigade commander who passed through Albany on their way to the frontier. He provided what money he could, sometimes from his personal funds. After the war, Tompkins had difficulty providing receipts acceptable to state officials and was never paid back to his satisfaction.

Van Rensselaer's Division failed at Queenston Heights. The army gathered on the Niagara Frontier was fatefully divided along two lines. The Republicans and Federalists could not suppress years of partisanship to unite in a common cause. Similarly, the regular army officers could not bring themselves to trust their militia counterparts. Typical of the deep divisions was Peter B. Porter. Porter and Solomon Van Rensselaer had scheduled a duel but Stephen Van Rensselaer intervened to stop this foolhardy event. However, after Van Rensselaer departed, Porter did duel with fellow Republican, Brigadier General Alexander Smyth. After missed volleys, the participants agreed that honor had been restored. Smyth went on to infamy, and Porter grew into one of the most competent militia generals of the war.

Stephen Van Rensselaer resigned his commission and returned to his estate near Albany. He expected to bear the blame for the debacle at Queenston Heights. Instead, his many supporters were quick to attribute failure to the lack of resolve and resources on the part of Republicans in general and Tompkins in particular. In the gubernatorial election the following spring, Van Rensselaer garnered 48% of the vote. Tompkins won reelection, but was well aware of the strong anti-war sentiment in a state that would continue to be the center of military activity.

Tompkins was much more than Madison's political ally. He was a competent war leader. He worked very closely with Madison's cabinet, especially the secretaries of war and treasury. Tompkins coordinated efforts with federal land and naval commanders as evidenced by their frequent meetings and correspondence. He navigated partisan politics to maximize preparedness of New York State. He had the foresight to acquire and distribute weapons prior to the conflict. Tompkins was decisive; he addressed issues by issuing clear orders in a timely manner. His orders granted his subordinate commanders sufficient room to use their judgment based upon the

²⁵ From a certificate drawn up by Mead November 2, 1821. New York State Archives Record Series A0802-78. New York State Office of Audit and Control, 1783-1858. Vol. 22.

local situation. His resolve and commitment to the defense of New York was unflagging throughout the conflict and especially during the crisis of 1814.

Author's Note. This essay is a foretaste of Barbuto's next book, *New York's War: the War of 1812*, under contract with the University of Oklahoma Press for publication in 2017.