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DENONVILLE'S EXPEDITION

A blistering sun beat down upon an army of French and Indians gathered on an Irondequoit hill near Float Bridge to hear Mass.

It was the fateful morning of July 13, 1687. The army was led by René de Brisay, the Marquis de Denonville, newly appointed governor of New France.

Spurred on by the ambitions of Louis XIV, Denonville had assembled the invaders to wipe out the Seneca segment of the powerful Iroquois League and open a channel in the wilderness leading to the eventual capture of New York and Boston for the new world domain of New France.

With 900 militia, 800 men from the regular army and a swarm of Indian allies, Denonville had massed a mighty fighting force of some 3,000 men at the mouth of Irondequoit Bay two days previous.

Some had crossed Lake Ontario in small trading ships armed with swivel guns. This section of the army had assembled at Fort Frontenac (now Kingston, Ontario).

On July 7, 1687, a portion of the army had camped eight miles west of Oswego. The next day they reached Fair Haven. Two days later they camped at Putneyville and finally converged on the shores of Irondequoit Bay.

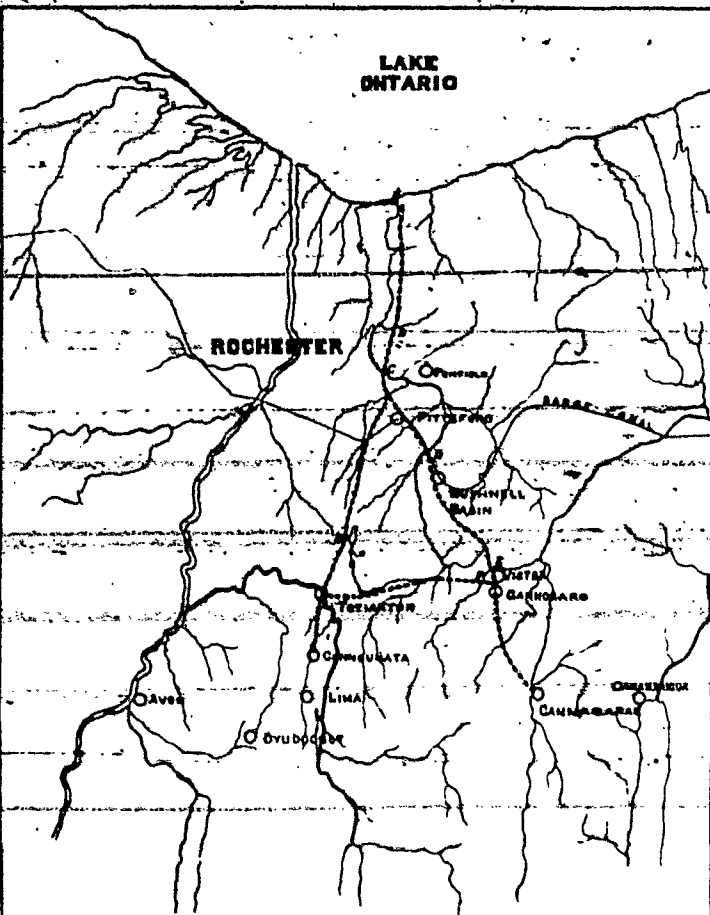
This fighting force assembled at Irondequoit Bay was the largest military expedition the New World had yet seen.

While not hoping for a decisive battle with their wily foe, Denonville's men thought the destruction of the Seneca's corn crop would produce a "fatal" famine the following winter.

The construction of a fort at this point would further curb the Seneca by acting as a base for the French allies and hold open the Niagara portage, the real gateway to the west.

This mighty army of Denonville, bristling with the raw power of European musketry and Indian ferocity could be historically traced to a fusillade from the musket of Samuel Champlain years before.

Joining the Hurons in an attack on



The entire march of the Denonville Expedition. On the opposite page appears a detail of the battlefield at the site of present-day Victor, New York, where Denonville engaged the Seneca Indians, 250 years ago.

the Iroquois, Champlain opened the fire which really sounded the death-knell of the colony of New France. He had challenged the most savage and best fighters in America and the results of that fusillade rocked the history of the North American continent.

That act of Champlain definitely lured up the Iroquois with the Dutch and English and engendered a hatred for the French. The Iroquois obtained firearms from the Dutch and English. They had an organization, military as well as political, and all served through a deep sense of loyalty. Their keen policy of fighting only one enemy at a time and carrying all wars to a complete victory either by extermination or adopting the survivors as members of the Iroquois proved highly successful.

Lastly, they built up a continent-wide fear of their fighting prowess. In 1648 the well-armed Senecas attacked the Hurons and the clash of these Indian warriors proved a thorn in the side of hitherto prosperous New France.

The Jesuits who had been working among the Hurons fell quick victims to this outbreak. Father Antoine Daniel perished with a bullet through his heart as he stood in the doorway of his chapel; Fathers Jean Brebeuf and Gabriel Lalemant, two of the North American martyr saints, were burned to death and the Hurons driven from their homes to die of cold, famine and disease.

Next the Tobacco nation, a western group of the Hurons, was destroyed. Father Charles Garnier, badly wounded, was tomahawked while crawling to baptize a dying Indian. Father Noel Chabanel was murdered by his Indian guide who blamed him for the disaster.

France answered this challenge by sending more troops and building more forts as a defense against the Iroquois. In the mid-winter of 1656, the Mohawks were attacked by the French; but a hasty peace settlement was made, lessening the French hostility for a time.

Frontenac, the French Governor, won the friendship of the Iroquois by visiting them and even insisted that some of their children live with him in Quebec. But Frontenac was removed by Louis XIV and replaced by Governor De La Barre, who reversed his predecessor's pacific practice and led another expedition against the Iro-

quois. It was a failure. He was summarily recalled and into a troubled colony occurred by blood thirsty Iroquois and scourged by fire, earthquakes, and epidemics, stepped the gallant Denonville, a soldier-steeled to battle by European campaigns and the expected saviour of a harassed people.

When Denonville arrived, the English already had built a fort on Hudson Bay. Their traders were operating in the West and arming Iroquois in the east. Denonville recommended the purchase of New England and King James II of Britain was willing to sell for \$210,000. However, Madame de Maintenon blocked the purchase because of a grudge against the English ambassador.

Then Denonville planned his New York campaign. Money, men and munitions were poured into New France. The aid of the Sioux Indians was solicited in a drive against the hated Iroquois.

Finally under a shroud of deep secrecy, the expedition started for the southern shores of Lake Ontario.

The expedition landed at Sea Breeze under the very eyes of a party of Seneca scouts routed by gunfire. Then started the task of building a stockade to protect supplies while the army was on the march.

Trees fringing the shoreline were cut down and dragged to the sandbar. The commissariat was busy baking thousands of loaves of bread, thirteen to be allotted to each man.

Through the heat of July 11 they toiled and finally on the following day the work was nearly completed with 2,000 posts in place on the site of the present ice house in Sea Breeze.

At 3 o'clock in the afternoon of that day, the legions assembled for the inland march. The cautious Denonville sent out a scouting expedition to detect any Senecas hiding in ambush. None was found.

The march started up the highland in Webster and then due south along a beaten trail which allowed the men to advance in parallel columns. Some students of the Denonville march say that the course extended west through Sea Breeze and up Woodman and Culver Roads.

We now come to the Mass celebrated near Float Bridge on that July 13th morning. With the expedition were the Abbe Belmont, Father Enjalran, Father Bescheiger, Father Bru-



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