

# McRae Monument

By Stephen J. Rauch

On September 10, 1813, Commandant Oliver Hazard Perry, in command of the US fleet on Lake Erie, soundly defeated the British fleet commanded by Commodore Barclay. Perry communicated his victory in the famous dispatch to Major General William Henry Harrison that said “We have met the enemy and they are ours.” This signal victory of the US Navy over the British Navy could not have been secured without the assistance of the soldiers and men of the United States Army, who made up almost 40 percent of the crews aboard Perry’s ships.<sup>1</sup> Such men came from various regular, militia and volunteer units serving with Harrison’s Northwestern Army. Men such as Pvt. John H. Smith, Pvt. William Harrison, and Lieutenant John Henderson who served with probably one of the most well respected, well disciplined and combat effective units that fought during the campaign for the Old Northwest – the Petersburg Volunteers.<sup>2</sup>

Based on the current resurgent Civil War interest and tourism campaign, if one did not know any better, the only war fought by Virginian’s was the American Civil War. However, the city of Petersburg’s place in history was secured long before then, when Americans commanded by the Marquis de Lafayette clashed with British forces in and around Petersburg in 1781 during the American Revolution. British General William Phillips, who died of illness during the campaign, is buried somewhere in a forgotten grave in the Old Blandford Church cemetery, which also stands on the site of the Civil War battlefield. Drawn to the church and cemetery by interest in the Civil War, a visitor might overlook a display in the small reception center that depicts uniforms of the War of 1812 Petersburg Volunteers. However, an even more important remembrance in the cemetery is Petersburg’s honoring of its heroes of the War of 1812 with a monument above the grave of the unit commander, Captain Richard McRae. This monument to the Petersburg Volunteers, local heroes, who played an important role in a largely forgotten war stands as a quiet, but majestic reminder amid the more numerous remembrances of the Civil War.

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<sup>1</sup>David C. Skaggs and Gerard T. Altoff, *A Signal Victory: The Lake Erie Campaign, 1812-1813*, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1997), 79.

<sup>2</sup>Gerard T. Altoff, *Deep Water Sailors/Shallow Water Soldiers*. (Put-in-Bay, Ohio: The Perry Group, 1993), 101, 149-150, 182.

This article is an attempt to shed some new light on this rare memorial to the soldiers of the War of 1812. Though others have written about the Petersburg Volunteers, not much has been said about this monument to their legacy. However, to understand the importance of the monument, a short history of the Petersburg Volunteers and their accomplishments is in order.<sup>3</sup>

The Petersburg Volunteers were formed in response to President Madison's call for twelve month volunteers to supplement a militia levy against the states in reaction to the surrender of Detroit to the British in August 1812. In 1812, Petersburg was a town of about 5,000 people and on September 8, a public meeting was held in Petersburg that voted to raise funds for a volunteer infantry company. By September 10, 75 men had already joined the company, enough so that on September 12 an election of officers was held. The company elected Captain Richard McRae as its commander and appointed William Tisdale as first lieutenant.<sup>4</sup> The company had a strength of 103 officers and soldiers as follows; one captain, one first lieutenant, one second lieutenant, one ensign, four sergeants, six corporals, two musicians, and 87 privates.<sup>5</sup> As with any unit raised by a community, many members were related, brothers, cousins, uncles, or nephews.<sup>6</sup> Though specific occupations of the men are unknown, they were described as "the flower of our youth and the best blood of our country," as opposed to "the dregs of society, culled from the by-lanes & alleys of the town."<sup>7</sup> Assuming everything written in the *Richmond Enquirer* was true, the United States was very fortunate to obtain the

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<sup>3</sup> A comprehensive history of this unit has been written by Lee A. Wallace, Jr., "The Petersburg Volunteers, 1812-1813," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 82 (October 1974): 458-485. Wallace's account serves as a model for the history of a military unit, from mobilization to discharge and all the associated details one would expect regarding the men who joined it. This article has recently been placed on the Internet at <http://www.ls.net/~newriver/va/pete1812.htm> along with a detailed roster of the company members.

<sup>4</sup>Wallace, "Petersburg Volunteers," 459.

<sup>5</sup>Jeff Weaver, "The Petersburg Volunteers, 1812-1813 – Roster," document on Internet <http://www.ls.net/~newriver/va/peteros.htm>, September 1998.

<sup>6</sup>There were two Bently's, three Brooker's, two Branch's, two Clements, two Harrison's, two Perry's, four Scott's, three Stevens', three Williams', and two Worsham's who joined the company. Weaver, "Petersburg Volunteers – Roster."

<sup>7</sup>Wallace, "Petersburg Volunteers," 460.

services of the Petersburg Volunteers. By September 25, Madison formally accepted the company's services and ordered them to march to Ohio as soon as possible.

The Petersburg Volunteers were officially mustered into federal service on October 16 for a period of 12 months. The unit departed Petersburg on October 21 after a rousing ceremony on the lawn of Centre Hill that included a presentation of the unit flag made by the ladies of the city. The movement to the theater of operations took a little over two months. During that journey, the soldiers of the company enjoyed much hospitality from their fellow citizens, subsisting almost entirely on frequent feasts and banquets given in their honor. Perhaps the most notable of these was their meeting Thomas Jefferson at Montecello, who was initially described by one company member as "a very homely old man, dressed in plain Virginia cloth, his head uncovered and his venerable locks flowing in the wind . . . nine ways for Easter Monday."<sup>8</sup> The company soon learned that this "overseer" was the former President, who introduced himself and proceeded to bestow his generosity upon his fellow Virginians.

After enjoying a Christmas feast at Chillicothe, the capital of Ohio, the company began its journey into the wilderness and uncertainty. Upon learning of the assignment of the Volunteers to his command, General Harrison ordered them to march for Upper Sandusky as soon as possible. During their journey through Ohio during a cold and wet winter, the Volunteers met up with other units slowly making their way to the rendezvous near the Maumee Rapids near present day Toledo.<sup>9</sup> The troops were tested by suffering through deep snow, freezing temperatures, lack of shelter, howling wolves and wading over boggy roads often churned into a quagmire by pack animals. One member of the company wrote, "we marched thirty miles, under an incessant rain; and I am afraid you will doubt my veracity when I tell

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<sup>8</sup>Cited in Wallace, "Petersburg Volunteers," 466.

<sup>9</sup> Much of the information regarding the movement of troops, weather, construction of Ft. Meigs and the military events in Ohio comes from the orderly book kept by Captain Daniel L. Cushing who commanded a company of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Regiment of US Artillery. Daniel L. Cushing, *Captain Cushing in the War of 1812*, ed. Harlow Lindley, (Columbus: Ohio State Archeological and Historical Society, 1944).

you, that in 8 miles of the best road, it took us over the knees and often to the middle.”<sup>10</sup>

The defeat of General Winchester at Frenchtown on January 22, 1813 threw Harrison’s plans in disarray. Determined to reconstitute his army, he established a strong point at the Maumee Rapids. Fort Meigs arose out of the wilderness to become a formidable position and forward base for US Army operations in the theater until the end of the war. Harrison faced the spring with a grim outlook, as many of his militia units returned home, their term of service having expired. As the militia came and went, the few regulars and volunteers became the backbone of the Northwestern Army. Composite organizations were formed for command and control of many of these units. The Petersburg Volunteers joined with two Pennsylvania volunteer companies to form a volunteer battalion commanded by Major John B. Alexander.<sup>11</sup>

Life at Ft. Meigs consisted of daily fatigue duty constructing the fortification and improving defenses. However, the conditions were not healthy and many men soon succumbed to illness and died. On February 1, the Volunteers lost their first comrade, Private Andrew Andrews, whose death was followed shortly by several others. Nathaniel Vernon of the Pittsburgh Blues described the Volunteers, “Never have I seen a company of finer looking men, but the climate and hardships of the campaign were too much for them and they were cut down as by a pestilence.”<sup>12</sup> Captain McRae particularly spent much of his service afflicted by illness that often prevented him from leading his command, a responsibility that often fell upon Lieutenant Tisdale. By April 23, the weather turned more favorable and the strength of Harrison’s army had increased to about 1,600 men. Soon the Petersburg Volunteers and the rest of the army would be tasked to demonstrate their yet

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<sup>10</sup>Cited in Wallace, “Petersburg Volunteers,” 469.

<sup>11</sup>The other units were the Greensburg Riflemen, a company of 23 men that had been commanded by Alexander, and the Pittsburgh Blues commanded by James R. Butler with 39 men. Wallace, “Petersburg Volunteers,” 471; Nathaniel Vernon, “The Pittsburgh Blues and The War of 1812: The Memoir of Private Nathaniel Vernon,” edited John C. Fredriksen, *Pennsylvania History* 56 (July 1989): 196-212.

<sup>12</sup>Vernon, “Pittsburgh Blues,” 203.

unproved military abilities against the British allied forces commanded by General Henry Procter.

On April 30, the British and Native American forces began to surround and besiege Ft. Meigs. The British established four artillery positions on the opposite side of the Maumee River to bombard the fort. Heavy firing occurred over several days, along with sniping on part of the Native forces. During the night of May 3, the British established a flanking battery consisting of one six pounder and one five and a half inch howitzer on the American side of the river, positioned three hundred yards away to fire the length of the fort and subject the defenders to a crossfire.<sup>13</sup> In addition, Procter had sent the grenadier and light infantry companies of the 41<sup>st</sup> Regiment, some Canadian militia and Native Indians, for about 850 men.<sup>14</sup> On 4 May a messenger arrived informing Harrison that Brigadier General Green Clay was two hours away on the Maumee River with 1,200 Kentucky troops. Harrison quickly developed a plan that he hoped would break the British siege. He told Clay to land about eight hundred men on the north bank of the Maumee where they would attack the main British artillery positions, spike the cannon, and then retreat to the safety of the fort. The remaining four hundred troops would land on the south side of the river, fight through the Native American cordon and enter the fort. While the Kentuckians destroyed the artillery and distracted the Native American's, Harrison would send a task force from the fort to destroy the enemy flanking battery. One of the units in the task force that undertook this sortie was the Petersburg Volunteers.

As the Kentuckian efforts on the other side of the river quickly turned to disaster due to lack of discipline of the militia, the sortie to attack the flanking batteries proved more successful. The task force was commanded by Colonel John Miller, 19<sup>th</sup> US Infantry, whose troops consisted of three hundred and fifty men from seven companies of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> US Infantry, a company of Kentucky militia,

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<sup>13</sup>Cushing, *Cushing in the War*, 103.

<sup>14</sup>Harrison to Secretary of War, Headquarters Lower Sandusky, 13<sup>th</sup> May 1813 in Logan Esary, ed., *Messages and Letters of William Henry Harrison, Volume II 1812-1816*. (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Commission, 1922.), 443-444. John Richardson, *Richardson's War of 1812*, ed. Alexander C. Casselman, (Toronto: Historical Publishing Co., 1902), 149.

and Alexander's battalion of volunteers. Lieutenant Tisdale commanded the Petersburg Volunteers, who only mustered 64 men because the rest of the company, along with McRae, was ill. To conduct the attack, the Americans used a deep ravine outside the east corner of the fort to mask their movement and provide cover to their assault positions. Harrison stood in the fort at a nearby battery to observe the action.

The Americans moved out at trail arms and the Volunteers were given a position on the right flank of Miller's line. The task force climbed the steep embankment within 200 yards of the enemy but was ordered not to fire until they reached the woods occupied by the Native Americans. As one participant explained, "Our men became excited, and charged fiercely into the wood, driving the enemy, who precipitately fell back upwards of a mile. We now fell back to the edge of the wood followed by the enemy. Again we charged; and again fell back. This alternate charging and retreating continued until we were finally ordered into the fort."<sup>15</sup> During the battle, the task force captured and spiked the guns, but took heavy casualties on their right flank as the Native Americans fired and almost turned the American line. At about noon, the battle halted and Miller returned to the safety of the fort with 42 enemy prisoners.<sup>16</sup> American casualties were about 30 killed and 90 wounded for the entire task force. Alexander's battalion suffered two killed, both from the Pittsburgh Blues, and 29 wounded. The Petersburg Volunteers had no one killed in battle, however, 17 men were wounded, three critically. Within the next thirteen days, Nicholas Massenburg, George Booker, and George Clough died from their wounds.<sup>17</sup> Harrison cited the Volunteers in his report to the Secretary of War on May 9 and Captain Eleazer Wood wrote, "The company of volunteers from Petersburg particularly distinguished themselves by their intrepid and cool conduct."<sup>18</sup> Of all the events associated with their service, the battle fought at Ft.

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<sup>15</sup>Vernon, "Pittsburg Blues," 204-205.

<sup>16</sup>Richardson, *Richardson's War*, 166-170; Cushing, *Cushing in the War*, 104.

<sup>17</sup>Weaver, "Petersburg Volunteers – Roster."

<sup>18</sup>Cited in Wallace, "Petersburg Volunteers," 11.

Meigs on May 5, 1813 secured the Petersburg Volunteers place in history as a well trained, disciplined, and courageous combat unit.

The Petersburg Volunteers also manned one of the Ft. Meigs artillery batteries, under command of Sgt. John Henderson. During the fighting on May 5, Private John Shore was wounded by a splinter from a British shot and died three days later from lockjaw. Henderson's distinguished service operating the battery won him personal recognition by Harrison and a subsequent commission as a lieutenant in the 2<sup>nd</sup> US Artillery. Harrison wrote, "The battery managed by Sergeant Henderson was . . . managed with peculiar efficacy and effect."<sup>19</sup> Following the action on May 5, Procter found he was no longer in a position to continue the investment, called off the siege, and returned to Amhearstburg. This determined stand by the Northwestern Army enabled the US to maintain a forward position to eventually carry the war into the Michigan Territory and Canada.

Throughout the summer of 1813, individual members of the Volunteers participated in the defense of Ohio during subsequent sieges of Ft. Meigs in July and the action at Ft. Stephenson in August. In fact, two Volunteers, Edmund Brown and Edward Mumford, were cited by Harrison for their role in manning Fort Stephenson's sole artillery piece, a six pounder named "Old Betsy," which wrecked havoc on the attacking British force.<sup>20</sup> The poor sanitary conditions and effect on health continued throughout the summer, with several more Volunteers dying from disease. Many soldiers, including Captain McRae, moved to Cleveland in hopes of a better climate and recovery. The ranks of the company were further reduced by the transfer of several individuals to the regular army, much as Sgt. Henderson had done.<sup>21</sup> On

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<sup>19</sup>Harrison General Orders, Headquarters Fort Meigs 9 May 1813, in Esary, ed., *Messages and Letters*, 436.

<sup>20</sup>Harrison misspelled their names and transposed their first names in his report, calling them "Edward Brown, and Edmund Munford." He cited them for their "skill and coolness manifested by them in the management of a piece of Artillery which contributed so largely to the defeat of the enemy." General Orders, Headquarters Seneca Town August 8<sup>th</sup> 1813 in Cushing, *Cushing in the War*, 55. The artillery piece has been preserved and now sits in front of the library in Fremont, Ohio along with appropriate monuments and commemorations to the battle.

<sup>21</sup>During this period, Henderson was court-martialed on six charges primarily related to inebriation, abuse of his rank and assault upon several soldiers and noncommissioned officers on duty at Ft. Meigs, including, "making use of violence in beating said Tinsley with his sword unprovokedly and at a time when said Tinsley

August 28, the Independent battalion of Volunteers was broken up with the departure of the Pittsburg Blues and Greensburg Rifles. The Petersburg Volunteers were attached to James V. Ball's cavalry squadron for the impending invasion of Canada.<sup>22</sup> When Perry faced the dilemma of manning his ships, he turned to Harrison for soldiers who had sea experience to supplement his crews. Three of the Petersburg Volunteers found themselves assigned to the sloop *Trippe*. These were John Henderson, who had prior service with the Royal Navy before emigrating to the US; John H. Smith, a private, who had enough experience to serve as a master's mate; and William Harrison, a private whose experience is unknown. These men from Petersburg contributed their part to Perry's victory and both Henderson and Smith were listed on the prize pay list to receive a share of the bounty from the British property.<sup>23</sup>

The Petersburg Volunteers participated in the invasion of Canada on September 27, however their role was that of a rear guard, causing them to miss the culminating battle with the British at the Thames on October 5. The Volunteers federal service officially ended on October 17, 1813, when they were released from active duty in Detroit. The orders in part said, "the General feels at a loss for words adequate to convey his sense of their exalted merits. . . .their conduct in the field has been excelled by no other Corps; The General requests Captain M'Rae, his Subalterns, Non-Commissioned Officers and Privates, to accept his warmest thanks – and bids them an Affectionate Farewell."<sup>24</sup> With that order, the Petersburg Volunteers turned in their weapons and made their way back to Virginia in small groups taking various routes. Their ranks had been reduced from 103 to 79; twelve

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was on guard." The court dismissed the charges and Henderson was released from arrest and his sword returned. Cushing, *Cushing in the War*, 52-53.

<sup>22</sup>Wallace, "Petersburg Volunteers," 478-479.

<sup>23</sup>Altoff, *Deep Water Sailors*, 101, 149-150, 182.

<sup>24</sup>Janet B. Nichols, *Sketch of Old Blandford Church built in 1735: Created A Confederate Shrine, 1901*. (The Ladies Memorial Association, Petersburg, Virginia, 1957, reprint 1990), 12.



had died of sickness or other causes, four killed by enemy action, six had transferred to the regular army, and two discharged early for administrative reasons.<sup>25</sup>

On January 8, 1814, Petersburg honored the Volunteers with a great celebration at Centre Hill, with subsequent events at Poplar Lawn. Thomas Shore, brother of John Shore who was killed at Ft. Meigs gave a speech to the heroes saying, "The pride of Sparta were the heroes of Thermopylae, the pride of Virginia the heroes of Fort Meigs."<sup>26</sup> The legacy of the Volunteers however rests with the sobriquet they brought to their home city as a result of their service – the "Cockade City of the Union" now shortened to simply, "The Cockade City." This attribution by President Madison reflects the uniform of the Volunteers, in particular the cockade ornamentation of their hats.<sup>27</sup> During subsequent years and local celebrations, this sobriquet was further entrenched into the psyche of the city and continues to the present day. The heroes of Fort Meigs had brought an everlasting legacy to their hometown and fellow citizens.

Richard McRae died in 1854 under suspicious circumstances. His body was discovered floating in the Potomac River near Aquia Creek, with bruises and marks on his head. This perhaps violent death of the often sickly leader of the Volunteers again galvanized Petersburg patriotism when McRae's body was brought to Petersburg for burial in the Old Blandford Church cemetery.<sup>28</sup> In early 1856, the citizens of Petersburg decided to erect a monument over the grave of Richard McRae in honor of him and the Volunteers service. Mrs. John Jackson and James McIlwaine sought "subscriptions" or donations from the citizens; the amount they needed to raise was three hundred dollars. A local paper advertised and supported

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<sup>25</sup>Weaver, "Petersburg Volunteers – Roster."

<sup>26</sup>Cited in Wallace, "Petersburg Volunteers," 482.

<sup>27</sup>The volunteers hats were not in the form of the standard shako, but more elaborate in the fashion of dragoons or of Wayne's Legion. A reproduction of this hat is in the reception center at Blandford Church and in the Centre Hall Mansion museum. Lee Wallace conducted a detailed investigation into the origins of this term. Since the volunteers made their return to Petersburg in small groups, there is little possibility they could have been reviewed by the President as a unit in 1813 and thus prompted this designation. It is possible that this honor was bestowed upon them when Captain McRae visited Madison before their service in September 1812 or when he settled accounts in Washington after the war. Wallace, "Petersburg Volunteers," 482-483.

<sup>28</sup>M. Clifford Harrison, *Home to the Cockade City*, (Richmond, VA: The House of Dietz, 1942), 31.

the project stating, “The grave of the noble McRae lies now neglected – few who visit the Blandford churchyard can point out where he lies . . . [citizens should] forget his faults and join hand in hand to perpetuate his virtues.”<sup>29</sup> By June a design for the monument had been completed, drawn by Seth Heath Jr., a “young man of talent and excellent tact.” The design was described as being plain and unadorned, its beauty enhanced by its simplicity.<sup>30</sup>

Exactly when the monument was erected has not always been clear. An inscription on the monument states, “Erected by the Citizens of Petersburg. Anno Domini 1856.” However, that date probably indicated the desire of the committee and citizens rather than the actual fact.<sup>31</sup> On January 13, 1857, the local paper reported that the McRae Monument was erected over his grave in the southeastern quarter of Blandford Church cemetery on January 12, 1857 by the building firm of Bowie, Wright and Sharpe.<sup>32</sup> A mere twelve days is the reason the facts of history have been clouded over time. The monument was a four-sided obelisk with a square base sculpted from Vermont marble with a height of sixteen feet. At the top of the obelisk was a cast iron eagle, 22 inches high with a wingspan of 29 inches, gilded with 23 karat gold, molded in the act of lighting upon the monument.

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<sup>29</sup>*The Daily Express*, Petersburg VA. May 19, 1856.

<sup>30</sup>*The Daily Express*, Petersburg, VA, June 17, 1856.

<sup>31</sup>Different years have been given for the date the monument was erected. The walking tour pamphlet available at the Blandford Church lists the date as 1858. Kay H. Carwile, *Blandford Cemetery, Petersburg, Virginia: A Walking Tour*, (Historic Blandford Cemetery Foundation, Inc., 1993), p. 10. The date inscribed on the monument, 1856, is given by another publication available at the church. Nichols, *Sketch of Old Blandford Church*, 10.

<sup>32</sup>*The Daily Express*, Petersburg, VA, January 13, 1857.



The monument to the Petersburg Volunteers as it stands in Blandford Church Cemetery today.

The monument was covered with inscriptions on every face of the obelisk and base or “die.” Today, much of these have eroded and faded, especially on the more exposed obelisk. On the front face was a national shield with 17 stars and the word “Patriotism” placed above the shield. Below the shield is the following inscription:<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>*The Daily Express*, Petersburg, VA, January 13, 1857.

Behold the gen'rous patriot band,  
 Brave guardians of their native land,  
 By no ignoble view inspired  
 By love of county ONLY fired –  
 March forth to combat side by side,  
 No mercenary thoughts excite –  
 For freedom and for fame they fight –  
 Virginia's flow'r, her ornament and pride!

Beneath the above inscription was another prosaic paragraph that said:<sup>34</sup>

In Memory of  
 CAPT. RICHARD M'RAE, late Commandant  
 Of the Petersburg Canada Volunteers in  
 The War with Great Britain in the year  
 1812. A corps who under the impulse of  
 a holy patriotism in the hour of their  
 country's need, leaped from their downy  
 beds, and foregoing domestic comfort and  
 ease instantly organised and took up the  
 line of march, for the Canada frontier;  
 where under the supreme command of General  
 Harrison, they met the disciplined armies  
 Of their Country's enemy, on the 5th day  
 Of May 1813, and after a bloody conflict  
 Defeated them, giving peace to a hitherto  
 Distracted district, and won for their  
 Home the exalted and imperishable  
 Appellation of the  
 Cockade City  
 Of the Union.

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<sup>34</sup>Harrison, *Home to the Cockade City*, 33.



The front of the obelisk. The inscriptions have faded some but are still legible

On the back of the obelisk, underneath the erection date, is the epitaph for McRae that is simply:

**Capt. Richard M'Rae  
Born May 15, 1787  
Died May 31, 1854.**



The back of the obelisk. The date 1856 is incorrect. The monument was actually erected in January 1857.

The base of the monument has inscriptions on all four sides. On the front is inscribed the following:

**PETERSBURG VOLUNTEERS**  
**They entered in the service of their country in the war with**  
**G. Britain on the 21<sup>st</sup> October 1812 and consecrated their**

valor at the battle of Fort Meigs on the 5<sup>th</sup> May 1813

Commanded by  
CAPTAIN RICHARD M'RAE.

Lieutenants

William Tisdale, 1<sup>st</sup>  
Henry Gary, 2<sup>nd</sup>, d. Ensign  
Shirley Tisdale, p.

Sergeants

James Stevens, 1<sup>st</sup> d.  
Robert B. Cook, 2<sup>nd</sup> p.  
Samuel Stevens, 3<sup>rd</sup> w.  
John Henderson, 4<sup>th</sup>, p.a.

Corporals

N.B. Spotswood, 1<sup>st</sup> p.  
John Perry, 2d., d.  
Joseph Scott, 3d w.  
Thomas G. Scott, 4<sup>th</sup> w.  
Jos. C. Noble, 5th  
G.T. Clough, 6<sup>th</sup> k.

Musicians

Daniel Eshon, w.  
James Jackson, w.



The front of the base inscribed with text and the names of the company officers, noncommissioned officers and musicians.

The names of all the soldiers of the company were placed on the right and back sides of the base. An initial following a name indicates a change in status due

to circumstances of their service; d – died, w – wounded at Ft. Meigs, k – killed at Ft. Meigs, p – promoted, and p.a – promoted in the Army.



The back of the base showing the inscription of the names of the men of the company

On the left side was a unique attribute, a complete inscription of the General Order releasing them from active federal service issued at Detroit on October 17, 1813. The inscription reads:

**“(General Orders)**

**Headquarters Detroit  
17<sup>th</sup> October 1813**



The term of service for which the Petersburg Volunteers were engaged, having expired, they are permitted to commence their march to Virginia as soon as they can be transported to the South side of the Lake.

In granting a discharge to the Patriotic and Gallant Corps the General feels at a loss for words adequate to convey his sense of their exalted merits. Almost exclusively composed of individuals who had been nursed in the laps of ease, they have for twelve months borne the hardships and privations of Military life, in the midst of an inhospitable wilderness, with a cheerfulness and alacrity which has never been surpassed. – Their conduct on the Field has been excelled by no other corps! and whilst in camp they have set an example of Subordination and Respect for Military Authority to the whole Army. The General requests Captian McRae, his Subalterns, non-commissioned Officers and Privates to accept his warmest thanks – and bids them an affectionate Farewell.

By Command

Robert Butler  
Acting Assitant Adjutant General”

To supplement the monument, the Petersburg Common Council on March 2, 1857 authorized a “neat and substantial” iron railing with granite base to surround the monument.<sup>35</sup> The four-sided fence was 93 inches long, 57 inches wide, and 35 inches high with a battle-ax on each corner. The council allocated one hundred and fifty dollars for this elaborate wrought and cast iron enclosure, designed with intricate replicas of the soldiers’ tools of war. On top of the rails on the side and rear portions are seventeen stars indicating the number of states during the War of 1812. The front design has the national emblem of an eagle with wings spread and three furled flags on each side.

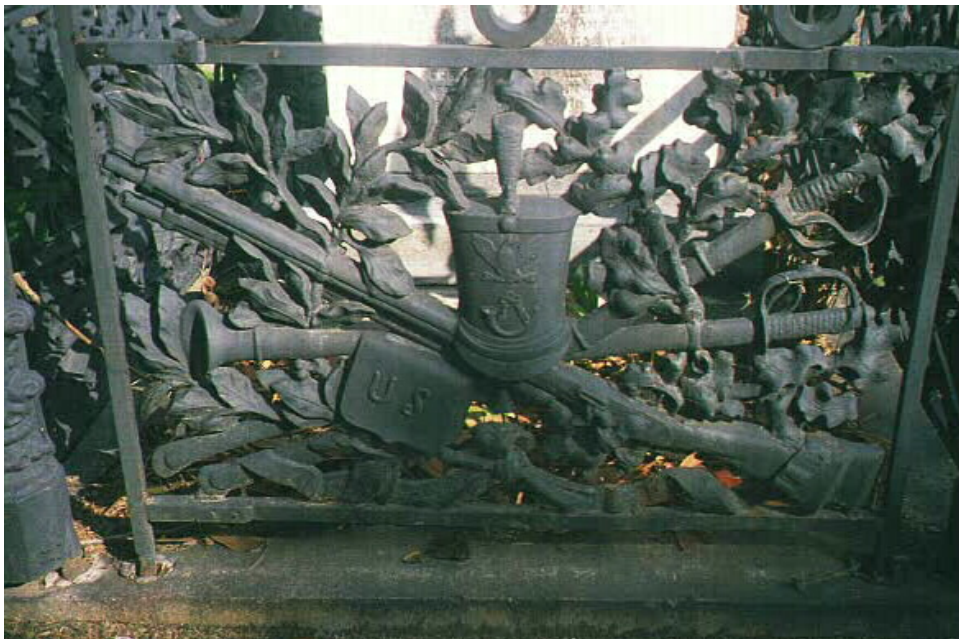
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<sup>35</sup>*The Daily Express*, Petersburg, VA, March 5, 1857.



The front of the wrought iron enclosure with a shield and eagle.

On the sides and back of the enclosure were depicted a cockaded shako, sabers in their scabbards crossed with a musket, a powder horn and belt with a flint and bullet pouch.



The back of the wrought iron enclosure. Note the two swords and musket. Also depicted is a plumed cockaded hat, which bears little resemblance to the one worn by the Volunteers.

The gold American eagle at the top of the monument lost its right wing when it was hit by a Union artillery shell during the siege of Petersburg. The damage was repaired, however it was done crudely with a steel plate. In 1956 the Cockade City Garden Club repaired and refurbished the 100 year old monument as a beautification project to restore the older portion of the Blandford Cemetery. The work focused primarily on the restoration of the wrought iron fence and gold eagle. Several of the 17 stars on the fence had broken off and were replaced, and the fence was generally repaired and repainted. The eagle was restored and the steel plate holding the wing together was removed because it caused a constant dripping of iron rust on the marble shaft and base which not only scarred the appearance, but created excessive erosion of the marble. The wing was reattached by welding. In addition, the gold leaf was recoated; bringing back brilliance to the sculpture that drew the attention of thieves who stole the eagle for a time. After the eagle was discovered and recovered from an area antique shop, it was placed in the Old Blandford Church reception center and a replacement eagle donated by the cemetery foundation now resides on top of the monument.



The eagle atop the monument. This is not the original eagle, which is now secured in the cemetery reception center after being recovered from thieves

Petersburg has used the legacy of the Volunteers, the monument and the famous sobriquet through the years in various local celebrations and commemorations. An example was the “Cradle of the Cockade Homecoming Week” in June 1957 where the Petersburg Volunteers were remembered in a local history pageant. Most recently, the City of Petersburg celebrated its 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, holding a commemoration that placed a wreath at the monument on December 17, 1998. A short article about the monument also appeared in the local newspaper supplement for the celebration, ensuring the War of 1812 was not forgotten at least in this community.



This wreath is a remnant of the 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration of Petersburg and indicates the monument is still included and remembered during local celebrations.



A visitor to the monument today can not fail to be struck by the irony that this commemoration, which appears to ooze patriotism for the United States, could have been erected under the ominous clouds of a divisive civil war only four years away. Even more ironic is the fact that were it not for the Civil War and the siege of Petersburg, the monument to the Volunteers would perhaps be hidden deeper from the eyes of generations of citizens. It was the gaze of those eyes that prompted General Harrison to proclaim in his General Order prior to the battle at Ft. Meigs, "To your posts then fellow soldiers and remember that the eyes of your country are upon you." The monument to the Petersburg Volunteers embodies Harrison's exhortation and with proper care and preservation, it will continue to honor the history of one of the most effective combat units that fought in the War of 1812.



The monument from the rear looking out over the cemetery toward the scene of the fighting during the Civil War

## About the Author

Steven J. Rauch is an active duty Major in the United States Army. He received his BS and MA degrees in history from Eastern Michigan University in Ypsilanti, Michigan. His masters work specialized in the War of 1812 campaigns fought in the Old Northwest. Major Rauch holds a skill identifier of Military Historian and has taught military history to the Ordnance Officer Basic and Advance Courses, and as an Assistant Professor of Military Science at the University of Michigan. He has written several battlefield guides used by the US Army to train cadets and officers in military history. These "Staff Rides" have included battlefields of the War of 1812 to the Korean War. In June 1999 Major Rauch will be assigned to the faculty of the Combat Studies Institute, the history department, of the US Army Command and General Staff College where he will teach military history.



