

VICTORY ON LAKE ERIE

Written by

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Based on true events.

FADE IN:

EXT. WASHINGTON, D.C., WAR DEPARTMENT - DAY

INT. NAVY SECRETARY OFFICE -

Navy Secretary, PAUL HAMILTON, 40s, dour, alcoholic, sips wine while speaking to OLIVER PERRY.

Perry is 20s, fit, and listens anxiously for his new assignment.

HAMILTON

The court of inquiry feels the loss of your ship was due to pilot error. You are cleared.

Perry relaxes and sighs quietly.

PERRY

What is to become of me now Mr. Secretary?

Hamilton hands him a document.

HAMILTON

Your new orders are there. You will serve closer to shore not at sea.

PERRY

Thank you Mr. Secretary.

HAMILTON

Despite the wreck, I retain confidence in you. You are assigned to Newport, Rhode Island to command a gunboat flotilla.

PERRY

For what purpose sir?

HAMILTON

To guard our shores.

Perry smiles relaxed.

PERRY

This new post suits me. I am soon to be married.

HAMILTON

I wish you happiness in this union.

PERRY

Thank you sir.

Hamilton stands and moves closer to Perry.

HAMILTON

Be assured your skill and capacity are not lost on me. Your naval career is still promising.

PERRY

I am ready for any task you have for me.

HAMILTON

Your new task will test you completely. You are dismissed.

PERRY

Yes Mr. Secretary.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - DAY

THE PRESIDENT'S OFFICE -

An urgent meeting occurs between PRESIDENT MADISON, 60s, short, JAMES MONROE, Secretary of State, 50s, slender, and WILLIAM EUSTIS, Secretary of War, 50s and lean.

MADISON

Congress gave me a declaration of war against England today 12 June 1812.

He holds a document up then signs it before handing it to Monroe. He is anxious as he scans it.

MONROE

I fear we will suffer greatly if we let slip the dogs of war.

MADISON

We had no choice. England impresses our sailors, blockades our ports, and the Northwest frontier is threatened.

MONROE

It was only a narrow vote in Congress. We now face a powerful enemy again sir.

MADISON

We must end impressment and control our frontier.

EUSTIS

If we act promptly, the war may be short. We will either gain new land or end in destruction.

Madison paces thinking aloud.

MADISON

In war we shall be purified as if by fire. If we remain timid, England will devour us.

MONROE

I shall convey this document to the British ambassador at once.

He exits. Madison and Eustis study maps on a table.

MADISON

What strategy do you suggest?

Eustis points as he speaks.

EUSTIS

We must take Canada in stages. We attack at the Niagara river, then take Detroit, and finally take a fort on Lake Huron.

MADISON

But, our forces are small. We must build more ships and enlarge our armies to do this.

EUSTIS

Our conquest of Canada is a mere matter of marching.

MADISON

I pray you are right.

INT. WAR DEPARTMENT - DAY

NAVY SECRETARY OFFICE -

Months later Perry and Hamilton hold a tense meeting.

HAMILTON

I have your request here for a new assignment to sea. However, you are still at Newport correct?

PERRY

I am sir.

HAMILTON

I sent you there to save your career. Are you unaware of my effort to protect you?

He drops Perry's request on the floor. Perry speaks slowly making his case for sea duty.

PERRY

Sir, I am sensible of your favor to permit me to remain on duty. Yet, I entreat you to call me into service at sea in our war against England.

HAMILTON

I cannot put you there. You lack sufficient combat experience. Other officers in the Navy rank above you.

Perry pleads as Hamilton stares at him.

PERRY

Sir, I can lead men. I possess gunnery and seamanship skills perfected by years of service. I am useless where I am.

HAMILTON

Return to your station. Do well in the posting you have now. In time you will merit greater opportunities to distinguish yourself.

PERRY

Thank you sir. I will resume my duties as I await new orders.

He salutes Hamilton.

HAMILTON

Be patient. This war is only three months old. You may still gain honor for yourself and a reputation for your country later.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - DAY

THE PRESIDENT'S OFFICE -

Madison, Hamilton, Eustis meet with DANIEL DOBBINS. Dobbins is 30s, shipbuilder, eager to help the war effort. War plans are made.

DOBBINS

I am here to give you a report of our defeat at Detroit. I was captured there, but paroled.

MADISON

We must regain it or surrender. The northwest territory cannot be lost to us.

EUSTIS

We cannot replace our losses of men there quickly.

MADISON

I know. Our armies are weak and untrained. Even governors refuse to call up their militia for our defense.

EUSTIS

Our position is dire so early in the war. What is our strategy now?

Madison points to a map outlining his plans.

MADISON

We retake Detroit, build a fleet on the lakes, and invade Canada.

HAMILTON

I have a few ships on Lake Ontario.

MADISON

How many?

Hamilton hands him a list.

HAMILTON

Here is the list sir.

MADISON

(reading aloud)

Three sloops, seven schooners, one brig, and nothing else?

HAMILTON

Mr. Dobbins can build all the ships we need.

MADISON

(to Dobbins)

Tell me your plans to create a lake fleet. Your report can wait.

Dobbins points to a map.

DOBBINS

We need two squadrons...one for Lake Erie and the other for Lake Ontario.

MADISON

Where would you build the Erie fleet?

DOBBINS

Presque Isle, Pennsylvania. It's a small harbor on Lake Erie.

MADISON

Why there?

DOBBINS

We have abundant timber and a sandbar protects us from enemy attacks.

MADISON

How soon can you begin?

DOBBINS

Once I have funds for craftsmen and laborers, I can start.

Madison goes to his desk, writes a brief note, and hands it to him.

MADISON

This note directs the Treasury secretary to give you two thousand dollars now. Begin at once.

DOBBINS

Yes Mr. President.

INT. NAVY SECRETARY OFFICE - DAY

Weeks later Hamilton meets Captain ISSAC CHAUNCEY, 40s, energetic and known for organizational skills.

HAMILTON

I require your services on an urgent matter.

CHAUNCEY

What are your orders sir?

Hamilton shows him a map of the Great Lakes.

HAMILTON

You must join Captain Dobbins now at Presque Isle and hasten his labors to build vessels for both Lake Erie and Ontario.

CHAUNCEY

I see, but I have no command at present.

HAMILTON

I now appoint you as Commander of the Great Lakes.

CHAUNCEY

What progress has he made so far sir?

Hamilton rages exasperated.

HAMILTON

None yet! It is almost November and his latest dispatch requests more men and supplies. These are excuses for his delay.

He hands the dispatch to Chauncey.

CHAUNCEY

Winter is fast approaching. I may not achieve much before then.

HAMILTON

Act swiftly. I grant you authority to use whatever means necessary to achieve this objective.

He writes a note and hands it to Chauncey.

CHAUNCEY

This gives me enough power to build your ships.

HAMILTON

I only hope you finish in time to face the enemy fleet.

CHAUNCEY

I will act promptly, but I fear you expect too much.

Hamilton grips Chauncey's right arm.

HAMILTON

I appointed you with high confidence. Our government saw evidence of your capacity in the New York shipyard.

CHAUNCEY

Where shall I begin?

HAMILTON

Lake Erie is your first object. Begin naval operations there.

CHAUNCEY

What about Lake Ontario?

HAMILTON

We must reclaim the western frontier first. Then we will move to the Niagara front. Otherwise our cause is lost.

CHAUNCEY

I shall begin at once.

EXT. NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND - DAY

Perry's headquarters is a brick building guarded by SENTRIES.

Gunboats lie at anchor in the distance.

INT. PERRY'S OFFICE - DAY

Perry reads dispatches, pauses and looks up. His aide, ENSIGN SMITH, 20s, energetic awaits orders.

PERRY

(holds dispatch)

I'm directed to reduce my crews. I cannot secure our coastline with fewer men.

SMITH

This came by messenger today sir. New orders perhaps?

He hands it to Perry. He reads it and tosses it aside.

PERRY

It's from clerks in Washington disputing my accounts. I despair of ever returning to sea in this war.

SMITH

Have you contacted Secretary Hamilton for sea duty?

PERRY

Yes, but my petitions remain ignored. I must protest this accounting claim.

SMITH

You were promoted to Master Commandant recently. Is this not a favorable sign.

PERRY

Perhaps, but my protests may block me from a sea command. I must be cautious.

SMITH

Are we ready for battle here?

PERRY

We are, but with my present forces little can be done if the enemy attacks.

SMITH

Have you any political allies who can help?

PERRY

I used them to no effect.

SMITH

What shall you do now?

Perry stands and paces the room frustrated.

PERRY

I will command our flotilla and suffer my fate in obscurity. I must embrace my trials without malice. I will fight to join the war at sea.

SMITH

Your skills are well known in the navy.

PERRY

Yes, but I will fight no battles of consequence if I remain here. I have no friendship with Secretary Hamilton.

He points to a map on the wall of the Great Lakes.

SMITH

Can you be posted there?

PERRY

We may soon fight a battle in the lakes, but I don't know where.

SMITH

We need a lake fleet to retake Detroit and invade Canada.

PERRY

I will ask Mr. Hamilton to consider assigning me there.

SMITH

It's an easy matter for him to grant your request.

PERRY

I will request Captain Chauncey to assign me to his command there. He needs experienced officers badly.

SMITH

Your talents can only benefit him.

PERRY

I am ready to fight anywhere now.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - DAY

THE PRESIDENT'S OFFICE -

New appointee for Navy Secretary, WILLIAM JONES, 50s, efficient and organized meets Madison.

MADISON

I wish to appoint you as the new Navy Secretary in the new year of 1813.

JONES

Why do you request my services sir?

MADISON

Secretary Hamilton resigned in December. His incompetence and drinking could not be ignored.

JONES

I accept the post. Where do you have need of me?

Madison points to a map on the wall.

MADISON

You must hasten construction of two new fleets for Lake Erie and Lake Ontario.

JONES

Has any work been done yet?

Madison sighs.

MADISON

Yes, but more men and materials are needed to finish the projects.

JONES

As a former merchant, I can remedy supply shortages. Sailors and workers I cannot provide.

MADISON

Begin now by contacting Mr. Chauncey at Presque Isle. Have him guide your labors for greatest effect.

JONES

Yes, Mr. President.

INT. PERRY'S OFFICE - DAY

Perry and his aide Smith discuss Perry's future.

PERRY

In this new year we have a new naval secretary Mr. Jones. He sends me no word for a transfer. I languish here awaiting a future assignment.

SMITH

Have you contacted anyone else on this?

PERRY

Captain Chauncey knows of my plight. However, he is building vessels in New York.

SMITH

Can he not assist you?

PERRY

He can, but only if Secretary Jones approves. My requests get no responses.

KNOCK on the door interrupts them.

PERRY (CONT'D)

Come in.

SENTRY enters and salutes.

SENTRY

This dispatch just came by a rider sir.

He hands Perry a dispatch case and exits. Perry opens the case and reads the message.

PERRY

It's from Captain Chauncey. His message holds my future.

SMITH

Are you reassigned now?

PERRY

Yes, and I am so grateful.

SMITH

Fortune has come to you at last.

PERRY

(reading aloud)

"Nothing could be more agreeable to me than your offer of service. I accept it with pleasure. You are the very person I want."

SMITH

Please continue.

PERRY

(reading aloud)

"I shall write to Secretary Jones requesting you be ordered to the lakes where you can be employed to great advantage particularly upon Lake Erie."

Perry looks up.

SMITH

This is an honorable command sir.

PERRY

I must now join my men with his already there. The journey to his location will be hard in winter.

SMITH

Yes, but your time as arrived sir.

PERRY

Prepare a roster of men fit to travel with me.

SMITH

Yes sir.

PERRY

Until Secretary Jones sends us word, we cannot leave here. Prepare to march while I await his orders.

SMITH

Yes sir.

INT. NAVY SECRETARY OFFICE - DAY

Jones and his AIDE discuss a dispatch from Chauncey.

AIDE

Is this the news you expected from Captain Chauncy on his shipbuilding efforts?

JONES

No, he asks me to order Mr. Perry be sent to him to build the fleet on Lake Erie.

AIDE

Doesn't he have enough men for this project already? Captain Dobbins has already begun that work.

JONES

Let Captain Dobbins continue, and send Mr. Perry to join him after meeting Captain Chauncey.

AIDE

Travel in winter from Perry's station to Chauncey in New York requires weeks.

JONES

It may be difficult, but he will succeed. After meeting Captain Chauncey, he can proceed to Lake Erie.

AIDE

Will Mr. Perry have his ships ready by spring on Lake Erie?

Jones writes two dispatches and hands them to his AIDE.

JONES

They must be, or the war is lost. Send one to Captain Chauncey. It gives him authority to gather more resources. Send the other to Mr. Perry. He can now join the fight.

AIDE

Yes sir.

INT. PERRY'S OFFICE - DAY

Perry and his OFFICERS discuss plans. He reads the latest message from Secretary Jones.

PERRY
(reading aloud)
"Go with all the best men in your
flotilla and join Captain Chauncey.
He will direct you from there."

OFFICER ONE
Shall I assemble the men sir?

PERRY
Yes, but send them out in three
detachments of fifty men each.

OFFICER ONE
They face heavy snow and ice on
this journey.

PERRY
Gather the clothing, maps, and all
provisions needed for their travel.

OFFICER ONE
Yes sir.

PERRY
We must hurry to build a new lake
fleet by spring. I leave now to
meet Mr. Chauncey in Albany.

INT. ALBANY TAVERN - NIGHT

Chauncey and Perry discuss plans to create a lake fleet.

CHAUNCEY
I engaged NOAH BROWN, a competent
shipbuilder in New York to join you
at Lake Erie.

PERRY
How big is the fleet we must build?

CHAUNCEY
Only six vessels...two brigs, three
gunboats, and a schooner.

Perry gasps, but he accepts the assignment with calmness.

PERRY
Taking raw trees to finished
vessels ready for war is a great
task.

CHAUNCEY

You also need sails, iron, rope, cannons, nails, powder, tools, and small arms.

PERRY

I will need craftsmen most of all.

CHAUNCEY

Mr. Brown will bring them with him.

PERRY

Will there be enough?

CHAUNCEY

Enough to begin. Your men will be your largest group of workers.

PERRY

I will pursue this task with zest and ability.

CHAUNCEY

Tomorrow we travel by sleigh to Sackett's Harbor on Lake Ontario to see shipbuilding there. Dress warmly.

PERRY

The British cannot attack us in winter. We are safe.

CHAUNCEY

True, but our project is delayed by winter too.

PERRY

We still may do much.

CHAUNCEY

So much rests on us both. We put the fate of this war on a desperate attempt to build our lake fleets.

PERRY

By doing the needful, we shall succeed.

EXT. SACKETT'S HARBOR - DAY

THE SHIPYARD -

Snow covers the ground. Perry inspects a ship hull and frame.

INT. CHAUNCEY'S HEADQUARTERS - DAY

THE OFFICE -

Perry gets his final orders.

PERRY

You are doing well here. Your vessels will be done soon.

CHAUNCEY

I need most of the men here for my crews.

PERRY

How many can go with me to Presque Isle on Lake Erie?

CHAUNCEY

Only twenty five.

PERRY

I cannot do much with so few. The disadvantages ahead are endless.

Chauncey is unmoved.

CHAUNCEY

Captain Dobbins is already at work there. Noah Brown is coming with craftsmen. Contain your fears and embrace this challenge.

PERRY

What role is left to me then?

Chauncey hands him papers. He composes himself hearing his orders.

CHAUNCEY

Your task is directing the total enterprise to completion. Procure all supplies needed to build the fleet and collect crews to man them.

PERRY

I am humbled by your expectations of my abilities.

CHAUNCEY

You are now in charge of the Lake Erie station. You will command that squadron in battle.

PERRY

Where are my supplies to come from?

CHAUNCEY

Pittsburgh is your closest source.

They examine a map on the wall.

PERRY

What about cannons?

CHAUNCEY

They will be sent later.

PERRY

How can I recruit sailors in the wilderness around the lake?

CHAUNCEY

A militia unit is there now. You may take men from their ranks. More men will be sent once they're available.

PERRY

I can offer prize money and a short enlistment to enlarge my forces.

CHAUNCEY

Do whatever you must. I expect you to be ready by June. It is now March. Time is our enemy.

PERRY

I shall not fail you.

CHAUNCEY

March at once to Erie, Pennsylvania where construction has begun on your ships.

Perry is alarmed knowing the challenges of a long march in winter.

PERRY

How do I find supplies on my journey? Heavy snow lies ahead. It will take ten days.

CHAUNCEY

Seize whatever you need along the way. Building a fleet in the wilderness is a great feat.

PERRY

I shall surpass all obstacles
ahead.

CHAUNCEY

Communicate with me often so I may
furnish you all the means needed to
execute the objectives of our
government.

PERRY

I shall not fail our country.

CHAUNCEY

Your execution of this task may
ensure you of imperishable fame.

PERRY

I seek not fame sir, but to serve
our nation in war. Posterity will
either bless or curse us.

EXT. ERIE SHIPYARD - DAY

MEN are working cutting frames and shaping planks for hulls.

INT. THE OFFICE - DAY

Perry and Dobbins discuss plans to build vessels.

PERRY

What are your pressing needs?

DOBBINS

Here is what I require.

He hands Perry sheets of paper. He studies them closely.

PERRY

(reading aloud)

Gunpowder, sails, tools, rope,
oakum, iron fittings, and lead
shot. They must be brought here.

DOBBINS

We already have timber.

PERRY

I must go to Pittsburgh for these
items.

DOBBINS

You face a hard journey of several days.

PERRY

How far have you progressed on shipbuilding?

DOBBINS

We have laid keels and planked two vessels. Mr. Brown's men did this.

PERRY

They are to be admired for their labors in such conditions.

DOBBINS

His men built a forge, barracks, and storehouse also.

PERRY

There is a weakness which may ruin us if the British attack here.

DOBBINS

What is it?

Perry opens the door and points to the waterfront.

PERRY

You must reinforce the blockhouse with cannons and get infantry to protect us.

Perry closes the door. They resume the meeting.

DOBBINS

We asked for troops. None have arrived.

PERRY

We must rely on state militia. When will they come?

DOBBINS

The governor must send them. I will ask him again.

PERRY

We can only build our vessels with the men we have now. Delays in creating our forces may end badly.

DOBBINS

I've seen no signs of a future
British attack.

Perry pulls a map from his pack. He unrolls it and points to
Canada.

PERRY

The weather keeps our enemy at bay.
By late spring, we may face
invasion.

DOBBINS

They need time to rebuild their
forces before attacking us.

PERRY

Our labors are enormous. I will
rest and then prepare for my trip
to Pittsburgh.

DOBBINS

My men are tired also, but they
must press on.

EXT. ERIE SHIPYARD - NEXT DAY

INT. THE OFFICE - DAY

NOAH BROWN, 30s, intense, and confident unrolls ship plans on
a table as Perry watches.

BROWN

Here are my plans to build your
vessels.

PERRY

We must build six ships total.
Which are the largest ones?

BROWN

The brigs. They are one hundred and
eighteen feet long and thirty feet
wide.

PERRY

What is your greatest need now?

Brown holds up a wooden dowel.

BROWN

Iron nails to secure planks to the frames. We're using wooden pins now.

PERRY

They won't hold. Anything else?

BROWN

Oakum and pitch to make seams watertight.

PERRY

Lead sheets may work too.

BROWN

I have none. Green timber is not without problems.

PERRY

I shall return with all the supplies I can. Continue the work you are in.

BROWN

We have laid keels for both brigs. Two gunboats are ready for planking.

PERRY

You have done much. With more men and supplies, we may finish in June.

BROWN

We still lack enough food and shelter for all our men.

PERRY

Have your carpenters build living quarters for those still coming. Food can be brought in from nearby farms.

BROWN

Our nation demands great sacrifices in this war.

PERRY

Yes, and greater sacrifices will come in the battles ahead. You have done well here despite hardships.

EXT. PITTSBURGH - DAY

Sign outside warehouse reads: MARINE SUPPLIES

INT. WAREHOUSE - DAY

Perry and a CLERK, 40s, review his list of supplies.

PERRY

I require these items if you have them.

CLERK

(scans list)

I can furnish everything except iron fittings and sails.

PERRY

Where can get sails?

CLERK

Philadelphia has sailmakers.

PERRY

Can you order them?

CLERK

Yes, but tell me what type of vessels you have.

PERRY

Two brigs, a schooner, and three gunboats.

CLERK

I will send an order to a firm there for you.

PERRY

What about iron fittings and hardware?

CLERK

Local foundries will supply those.

PERRY

Where are they found?

CLERK

A mile from here you will find an ironworks.

PERRY

I see.

CLERK

How will you pay me?

PERRY

Here is a Treasury warrant from the Navy.

He hands the clerk a document.

CLERK

Give me a few days to prepare your order. Your sails will be sent here in a few weeks.

PERRY

Anything else?

CLERK

You will need wagons to carry your order home.

PERRY

Can you secure wagons?

CLERK

Yes, but you need TEAMSTERS also.

PERRY

I have craftsmen coming from New York City. Where would they be lodged?

CLERK

Check the seaman's hiring hall by the river.

PERRY

Thank you.

INT. HIRING HALL - DAY

Perry sees MEN milling about. He speaks to them loudly.

PERRY

I am Lieutenant Perry. I am building vessels on Lake Erie. Was anyone sent here for this task?

WORKMAN ONE steps forward to respond.

WORKMAN ONE

Yes sir. A hundred of us were sent from New York City.

PERRY

I will need your help as teamsters first. Wait here until I send for you.

WORKMAN ONE

Aye Mr. Perry.

EXT. WAREHOUSE - DAY

Few days later wagons and TEAMSTERS line up outside loaded with supplies.

PERRY

I need four men per wagon. The rest can march with me.

WORKMAN ONE

How long is this journey? What about provisions?

PERRY

Ten days perhaps more. Our progress depends on weather and trail conditions. Provisions are in the wagons. You will not starve.

WORKMAN ONE

Have you funds to pay us later?

PERRY

Yes, but that is not important. We must hurry and finish building our ships soon.

He moves to the head of the wagon train. He signals the GROUP. They move out.

EXT. ERIE SHIPYARD - DAY

Wagons are unloaded as Perry and Brown supervise.

BROWN

Your supplies and men will speed our progress.

PERRY

Have any cannons arrived yet?

BROWN
No. Did your men bring tools?

PERRY
Yes. They brought tools from New York.

Brown points to waves splashing against rocks by the waterfront.

BROWN
The lake ice has melted. We can launch our ships when finished and prepare them for duty.

PERRY
I will notify Mr. Chauncey of our progress.

BROWN
Press him to have cannons and arms sent to us at once.

INT. THE OFFICE - DAY

Perry lays down in a bed exhausted. SHOUTING outside alarms him. Door OPENS. His aide Smith enters distressed.

SMITH
Sir, the men you brought here wish to speak to you.

PERRY
Our war gives them a purpose. What is their objection?

SMITH
I do not know sir.

PERRY
Let us resolve this matter quickly.

EXT. ERIE SHIPYARD - DAY

Perry pushes through a crowd of WORKMEN restoring order.

PERRY
What is this delay?

WORKMAN ONE
We are hungry sir. Your rations are not enough for us all.

PERRY

Did you raid the local farms for food? You may seize whatever is needed.

WORKMAN ONE

They have nothing to spare for us.

PERRY

You will be fed enough to survive. Return to your work now.

WORKMAN ONE

How can we finish without more carpenters and tools?

PERRY

They are coming soon. You must continue without pause before we are attacked.

WORKMAN ONE

Aye sir.

MEN return to work as Perry watches in disgust.

INT. THE OFFICE - DAY

Dobbins and Perry anguish over severe problems facing them daily.

DOBBINS

Do we have enough funds to finish our work here?

PERRY

Barely...our greatest need is labor not money. We need men now.

DOBBINS

I pray they will arrive soon.

PERRY

Secretary Jones expects more from us than is possible.

DOBBINS

He wants us to build a fleet here to save our country.

PERRY

I know, but will it be done in time for battle?

A KNOCK on the door interrupts them. Dobbins opens it.
WORKMAN TWO enters holding an empty barrel.

DOBBINS
What is it you need?

WORKMAN TWO
We have no more spikes for planking
sir.

PERRY
I'll bring more on my next trip to
Pittsburgh.

DOBBINS
Use wooden pegs for now.

WORKMAN TWO
They won't hold green timbers sir.

DOBBINS
They will if carpenters nail them
in correctly.

WORKMAN TWO
Aye sir.

He exits. Perry is numb with frustration and delays.

PERRY
Much depends on such small details.
Planks improperly fastened will
fail on the water and sink the
vessel.

DOBBINS
Let us check the work in progress.

EXT. ERIE SHIPYARD - DAY

Perry and Dobbins inspect new planking work.

Ten MEN are marched up to Perry under guard. He turns to the
SERGEANT for an explanation.

PERRY
What is this about Sergeant?

SERGEANT
We found these men in the woods not
working sir.

PERRY
What were they doing there?

SERGEANT
Foraging for food sir.

DOBBINS
Why did they leave without notice?
Desertion is a serious crime.

SERGEANT
They are hungry and see no relief
sir.

Other WORKERS see the group, stop working, and surround Perry and Dobbins. SOLDIERS rush up to protect them.

Dobbins pulls a pistol from his coat prepared to shoot. Perry has the SOLDIERS form a screen around him for security.

DOBBINS
(to men under guard)
You men expect too much. You have
enough food to survive. Desert
again, and you will be punished.
Return to your labors.

CROWD moves in closer. SOLDIERS push them away with bayonets. Perry tries to calm them.

PERRY
I am aware of your plight. It is
our duty to make the best of our
misfortunes and not submit to
passion.

DOBBINS
Sergeant escort these men to their
duties.

Sergeant escorts GROUP away. CROWD disperses quickly.

PERRY
I will make every effort to satisfy
them. We cannot let a mutiny occur.

DOBBINS
We must continue without pause.

PERRY
Secretary Jones expects more than I
can deliver with this lot.

INT. THE OFFICE - DAY

Brown informs Perry of an urgent matter in construction.

BROWN

The frames are done. We have enough wood to complete the hulls.

PERRY

Providence favored us with a great supply of timber.

BROWN

I must show you a grave issue in the shipyard.

EXT. ERIE SHIPYARD - DAY

Brown and Perry check the hull of a brig closely. They see gaps in the planking.

BROWN

We still lack oakum and pitch to seal the seams.

PERRY

We have lead sheets here. Have you used them for sealing the joints?

BROWN

No, but I will try.

PERRY

We want no extras just plain work to finish these vessels.

Perry points to a nearby blockhouse.

BROWN

We need more soldiers there.

They go to the waterfront scanning defenses. Waves break on the shore.

PERRY

I sent the militia commander a request for more soldiers.

BROWN

How many can he spare?

PERRY

Five hundred perhaps. His force is a thousand men.

BROWN

They can man the blockhouses and guard our fleet.

PERRY

I still need information about our enemies across the lake. Their strength and plans remain unknown to me.

BROWN

They won't strike until ready. We gain strength daily.

PERRY

When we are done, we must give them a powerful blow in battle.

BROWN

Once our fleet is launched, we must still arm them and train the crews.

PERRY

We are putting the fate of this war on such a small naval force.

BROWN

I am confident we will prevail.

PERRY

The sword is the best preservation of our liberties.

BROWN

Your leadership will give us victory.

SUPER IN/OUT "April 1813"

EXT. ERIE SHIPYARD - DAY

Perry, Brown, WORKERS watch two finished gunboats get launched into the lake.

PERRY

These vessels are small.

BROWN

They are yet to be armed.

PERRY

Where are the rigging, sails, and fittings for them?

BROWN

They are coming. We ordered them weeks ago.

PERRY

Bad roads and weather still hinder our deliveries.

Perry points to a brig still under construction. Brown joins him.

BROWN

The frame is ready.

PERRY

Our brigs give me grave concern. They will give us victory or be sunk. Gunboats only patrol our shores.

BROWN

A few weeks more, and it will be done.

PERRY

We have used oak to build them.

BROWN

These vessels will triumph.

PERRY

Many are our difficulties, but we will surmount them all.

BROWN

Where are the small arms and cannons?

PERRY

Four cannons are coming from Pittsburgh with round shot and grape shot.

BROWN

Tis a start.

PERRY

I lack sleep and this gives me great fatigue. I've had no rest since embracing the work here.

BROWN

We labor dawn to dusk. My greatest fear is disease...the lake fever.

PERRY

Yes, it could kill us all and leave our ships abandoned.

INT. ERIE SHIPYARD - DAY

One month later.

THE OFFICE -

Perry shares a dispatch with his OFFICERS.

PERRY

Captain Chauncey directs me to join him in attacking Fort Erie.

OFFICER ONE

You must travel up Lake Ontario to do it.

PERRY

Yes, but he promises to give me supplies, five vessels, and the men involved in this action.

OFFICER ONE

We need all those resources.

Perry traces his travel route on a nearby map.

PERRY

I will sail to Buffalo, ride on overland, and meet him at the Niagara river.

OFFICER ONE

What are my orders here sir?

PERRY

Finish the work we are in. Our brigs must be ready when I return.

OFFICER ONE

Aye sir.

PERRY

Fit them with rigging once it arrives. We will arm them with carronades later.

OFFICER ONE

Why? Our long guns have a greater range and need to be fired less in battle.

PERRY

Carronades have a shorter range, but they fire more metal with each salvo.

OFFICER ONE

You may surprise our enemy doing this.

PERRY

The shorter range forces us to be closer to defeat them. Our crews must be well trained to do that.

INT. WARSHIP - DAY

THE CABIN -

Perry joins Chauncey on his warship. They review attack plans for Fort Erie.

CHAUNCEY

Our forces will join the Army tomorrow for the attack.

PERRY

What is my role?

CHAUNCEY

Set buoys, direct our bombardment on the fort, and land the troops.

PERRY

This is my first action.

CHAUNCEY

I presume you will conduct yourself with skill and courage.

PERRY

I will be sure our navy performs its duties well.

EXT. WARSHIP - NEXT DAY

THE MAIN DECK - Perry directs gun crews. Boats carry horses and SOLDIERS ashore. Attack has begun.

Cannons FIRE. He watches results through his telescope.

SAILOR ONE
Are we hitting the fort sir?

PERRY
Yes, but continue the barrage. Two
of our boats are not landing.

SAILOR ONE
What will you do sir?

PERRY
I must leave here and direct them
to shore. Gather four SAILORS to
join me.

SAILOR ONE
Aye sir.

Perry and four SAILORS lower a rowboat into the water and
move quickly to two vessel needing help. Perry's action gets
them safely ashore.

INT. WARSHIP - NIGHT

THE CABIN -

Chauncey holds a document as Perry awaits his review.

CHAUNCEY
This report says you behaved with
skill and courage directing landing
operations.

PERRY
I was lucky to escape unhurt. All
our men showed bravery.

CHAUNCEY
Five vessels on the Niagara river
must be sailed to Presque Isle to
join your fleet.

PERRY
I need men and oxen teams to pull
them into Lake Ontario.

CHAUNCEY
Why?

PERRY

The river current is too strong to sail against.

CHAUNCEY

You have my authority to take whatever men you need here. Here is the list of vessels to be moved.

He hands Perry a document.

PERRY

Can you give me any sailors for this task?

CHAUNCEY

No, I'm sorry. The soldiers should be enough for your needs.

PERRY

I have five vessels to sail a hundred miles on the lake. This is a severe test for us.

CHAUNCEY

Depart when you're ready.

PERRY

I fear a storm or British patrol may stop me.

CHAUNCEY

I trust in your skill to succeed. This task is not beyond your capacity.

PERRY

Our great victory here was due to our combined forces.

CHAUNCEY

Tis true, soon you will secure greater victories alone.

INT. FORT MALDEN - DAY

HEADQUARTERS -

Perry's enemies across the lake are now forming plans to create a fleet to attack him.

British commander ROBERT BARCLAY, 30s, meets Captain YEO for his assignment.

Yeo is 30s, stern, and the senior British commander on the Great Lakes. Barclay has part of his left arm missing due to battle. Yeo points to this with concern.

YEO

Are you crippled or can you still command a ship in battle?

Barclay raises his left arm slightly.

BARCLAY

My wound does not impair my fighting spirit sir.

YEO

We shall see. Our mission here is protecting upper Canada by controlling both Lake Erie and Lake Ontario.

BARCLAY

What are my orders sir?

YEO

You will command the squadron here and finish building the Detroit. It is a brig and your flagship.

BARCLAY

Once it's ready, may I commence operations?

YEO

Yes, it's now June. The Americans may soon attack us. You must cruise Lake Erie and engage them once they appear.

He points to a map as he instructs Barclay.

BARCLAY

Do you know where they are based?

YEO

Your enemy, Mr. Perry, is building his fleet at Presque Isle near Erie. Spies keep us informed of his progress.

BARCLAY

Will he engage us once his fleet is built?

YEO

Yes since he must control Lake Erie if he invades Canada and wants to retake Detroit.

BARCLAY

Have you enough men and supplies for me to do this mission?

YEO

No, our shortages are many. We cannot outfit you properly.

BARCLAY

What shortages cripple you?

YEO

Food, artillery, and sailors.

BARCLAY

I will make full use of what is here. Perhaps more supplies will come later.

YEO

Train your men well. Time is short. You face a critical duty.

BARCLAY

I will begin at once sir.

INT. PERRY'S OFFICE - DAY

Perry and his builders discuss the vessels being built.

BROWN

The brigs Niagara and Lawrence are done but, we need rigging and anchors.

PERRY

Get that done, and prepare to launch them over the sandbar into the lake.

BROWN

I have an idea how to lift them over that barrier.

PERRY

Once they're ready, we shall proceed.

BROWN
After launching, we will face an
attack I presume.

PERRY
Enemy forces will cruise near us
ready to engage us.

BROWN
Our shore defenses are strong, but
can we defeat an invasion?

Perry scans the lake with his telescope.

PERRY
It is unlikely since they must
destroy our fleet to gain control
of the lake.

BROWN
Our vessels shall prevail.

PERRY
Indeed they must.

INT. FORT MALDEN - DAY

WEEKS LATER

BARCLAY'S OFFICE -

He makes plans with his staff. It is a tense meeting.

BARCLAY
We must start cruising near Presque
Isle where the American fleet is
building.

OFFICER ONE
Are they ready for battle sir?

BARCLAY
I'm not sure. It's late July, and
our intelligence is incomplete.
They will not fight unless they're
ready.

OFFICER ONE
What is our purpose then?

Barclay outlines his strategy on a map.

BARCLAY

Blockade their fleet for now. We will attack once they enter the lake.

OFFICER ONE

Sir, we still lack sufficient crews and cannons for battle. How soon can we solve this problem?

BARCLAY

I already requested more men. However, supplies are slow to reach us. I cannot hasten delivery.

OFFICER ONE

The enemy doesn't know this. A few of our ships cruising offshore should alarm them.

BARCLAY

Perhaps, but delays here prevent me from gaining a final victory.

OFFICER ONE

I will assemble a force for your inspection and be ready to sail at your command sir.

BARCLAY

Take our best men, arm your vessel fully, and be prompt in this duty.

OFFICER ONE

Aye sir.

INT. PERRY'S OFFICE - DAY

Alarm sweeps the camp. British vessels are cruising close offshore. Perry holds an urgent meeting to meet the threat.

PERRY

Our enemy is here. Dispatch three gunboats to engage them at once.

BROWN

We may lose this battle with a small force.

PERRY

True, but it is all I can spare for a fight. Are the brigs Niagara and Lawrence ready for launching?

BROWN

Yes they are. Their anchors and cables have arrived. We cannot launch them until the British are gone.

PERRY

How shall we get them into the lake?

BROWN

I will draw a sketch of the device I can build for this task.

He sketches quickly on paper as Perry watches.

PERRY

You need to build two barges and divide them into compartments.

Brown explains his device.

BROWN

The barges are called camels. Once built, we secure them beside each brig. The camels are fifty feet long, ten feet wide, and eight feet deep.

PERRY

Go on.

BROWN

We flood them with seven feet of water.

PERRY

Then what?

Brown points to his drawing as Perry listens.

BROWN

We will tow them to the sandbar, anchor a towline to each brig, position the camels, and pump them out. As they rise, they lift the brigs enough to clear the sandbar. We will tow them into the lake for final outfitting.

PERRY

It works on paper, but we will need a calm lake and mild weather to succeed.

BROWN

I will build the camels at once,
then we watch for favorable weather
and lake conditions.

PERRY

Proceed with all haste.

Both men hear cannon fire in the distance.

BROWN

An attack is underway.

PERRY

Let us watch it from the
blockhouse.

INT. BLOCKHOUSE - DAY

UPPER LEVEL -

Brown and Perry watch the gunboats engage the enemy. Perry
trains his telescope on the battle.

PERRY

Our gunboats fight well, but we
must finish this operation swiftly.

BROWN

The enemy cannot get closer due to
the sandbar.

Enemy breaks off engagement.

PERRY

(lowers telescope)
They are turning away leaving. This
is a probing attack testing our
readiness.

BROWN

They will inflict the greatest
calamity upon us if possible.

PERRY

We must frustrate their designs.

BROWN

We should build the camels in the
evening to avoid an enemy attack.
This requires using most of our
men.

PERRY

I will assemble the work parties
once you are ready.

BROWN

Moving both brigs requires great
effort. Once we begin, we cannot be
delayed by anything.

PERRY

Do not embrace fear as an obstacle.
Proceed with confidence.

BROWN

Aye Mr. Perry.

INT. FORT MALDEN - NIGHT

BARCLAY'S OFFICE -

Barclay and his OFFICERS review day's earlier battle.

BARCLAY

We inflicted no damage today. We
only engaged their smallest
vessels.

OFFICER ONE

We still have a great shortage of
men and supplies sir.

BARCLAY

I know. I need a full inventory of
what we possess now and what we
shall need.

OFFICER ONE

Can you get us more ships or men
sir?

BARCLAY

I may, but it won't be soon. We
must perform our task with what we
have here.

OFFICER ONE

I will begin the inventory at once.

He exits. Barclay studies maps on his desk. OFFICERS move
closer around him.

OFFICER TWO

What is your strategy sir?

BARCLAY

We know the Americans have larger ships to fight us. We must sail closer to their base to find them.

OFFICER TWO

If we strike first, we may win by surprise.

BARCLAY

Yes, but we must intercept them when they are unprepared.

OFFICER TWO

How about a blockade?

BARCLAY

We can't do it. We lack enough ships for that. For now we must patrol often as we strengthen our forces.

OFFICER TWO

We can dispatch a vessel tomorrow to patrol and observe their progress at a distance.

Barclay marks his map with a line.

BARCLAY

Do that. Once we see their largest vessels on the lake, then we shall attack.

OFFICER TWO

Aye sir.

BARCLAY

We cannot let them attack us. Surprise is our greatest weapon.

INT. PERRY'S OFFICE - DAY

Perry and Brown discuss how they will move the finished brigs into the lake.

PERRY

Are the brigs ready?

BROWN

Yes, we've outfitted them fully.

PERRY

How far is it to the lake?

BROWN

Two miles to the sandbar, and once over that into the lake.

PERRY

Have you checked the water's depth at the sandbar?

BROWN

Yes. It's lower than normal which is six feet. Winds have lowered it to four feet.

PERRY

Our brigs lack enough water to float them over the sandbar it seems.

BROWN

Yes, but we can pull them over the bar with men working in teams.

Perry is skeptical.

PERRY

If we are attacked while this task occurs, our fleet is lost.

BROWN

The blockhouses still protect us. The enemy will not come close enough to engage them.

PERRY

Tell our sentries to be on high alert for any ships coming over the horizon.

BROWN

Yes sir. When shall we begin moving the brigs?

PERRY

Begin tonight at five o'clock. Gather the men and materials needed at once.

BROWN

I will have the crews lighten both ships to ease their movement over the bar.

PERRY

This is a night project so mark out
your path well. We must move
carefully as we go.

Meeting is interrupted by Ensign Smith who enters breathless.
He salutes Perry and gives him bad news.

SMITH

Sir, British ships are cruising
offshore. They may bombard us soon.
What are your orders?

PERRY

Prepare a battery to fire on them.

SMITH

Aye sir.

He exits.

BROWN

This attack is testing us yet
again.

PERRY

I must now direct our fire from the
gunboats anchored off shore. Follow
me.

EXT. GUNBOAT - DAY

Perry watches enemy vessels cruising in the distance. He
signals the GUNNERS to take action.

PERRY

Commence firing.

GUNNER ONE

Aye sir.

Gunboat FIRES

at the enemy. Enemy responds by shelling the militia camp
nearby causing no damage.

Perry watches the enemy turn away using his telescope.

PERRY

They are leaving. We are safe.

BROWN

You have won this engagement.

PERRY
Cease fire and secure the guns.

GUNNER ONE
Aye sir.

Perry and Brown return to shore. They inspect the militia camp watching SOLDIERS drill.

EXT. MILITIA CAMP - DAY

PERRY
We have won today, but this harassment keeps us from launching the brigs.

BROWN
How soon will they return?

PERRY
I don't know. We move the Lawrence tonight. We must hope to finish by daybreak.

BROWN
We will achieve honor and glory on this lake or perish in the attempt.

PERRY
Do not let your love of fame exceed your prudence. The lake battle is yet to be fought by untried men.

BROWN
Your men will not fail you.

PERRY
We must hold fast to complete our mission here. We may need to borrow some militia for help.

BROWN
They will come if needed.

EXT. LAWRENCE - NIGHT

THE MAIN DECK -

Sails are lowered. MEN scurry about preparing the move holding lanterns to guide them. Perry and Dobbins discuss their plans.

DOBBINS

We should move our gunboats first.
They have a smaller draft.

PERRY

Take depth soundings near the
sandbar once they are in the lake.

DOBBINS

They can be our defense should the
enemy attack.

PERRY

Start moving them at dawn. Mr.
Brown and I will get the camels in
place and prepare the Lawrence to
follow next.

DOBBINS

Let us hope for calm waters and
mild winds.

PERRY

Nature has favored us so far. I
pray our luck holds.

EXT. LAWRENCE - DAY

THE MAIN DECK -

Perry and Brown watch the gunboats being moved over the
sandbar and into the lake.

PERRY

If any become grounded, pull them
loose using cable and anchor.

BROWN

That works for light vessels, but
it won't be sufficient for the
brigs.

Perry gives orders to the crew on the brig.

PERRY

Cast off once the gunboats reach
the lake.

Crewmen release anchor ropes. Sails fill out. Brig moves
toward sandbar gaining speed slowly.

Brown and Perry watch silently.

PERRY (CONT'D)

Steady on...hold course toward the bar.

Brig gets closer to sandbar. Perry fears running aground.

SAILOR ONE

Shall I take a sounding sir?

PERRY

Yes and measure well.

SAILOR ONE heaves line overboard with lead weight attached. It sinks to the bottom. He pulls it up. Perry examines markings on the line.

BROWN

It shows barely five feet. The brig draws nine feet.

PERRY

Bring your camels up once we get closer to the bar.

BROWN

(alarmed)

We are closing fast on it sir.

EXT. SANDBAR - DAY

Brig reaches the sandbar, moves slowly across then STOPS. It is stuck.

PERRY

Lighten our hull. Remove the ballast and all cannons.

CREW begins to remove these items quickly.

BROWN

The camels are ready to be set in place.

PERRY

Begin your operation Mr. Brown.

MEN haul empty camel boxes alongside the brig. They run ropes underneath the keel and attach them to spars attached to the mast. Brown supervises their work closely.

BROWN

Flood the boxes men.

MEN flood the boxes which sink slowly as Brown watches.

PERRY

Once we pump the camels out, we may
clear the bar.

Brown signals the WORKMEN.

BROWN

Begin pumping out the boxes.

Pumping begins emptying the boxes. The empty brig rises only two feet. Stern remains grounded. Perry is anxious.

PERRY

Remove more items. We must lighten
this vessel.

SAILORS remove all remaining heavy objects and set them ashore. Other MEN tug at the ropes hoping to move the brig over the bar. Ropes snap. Spars break.

BROWN

Rig new lines and spars at once!

Perry watches his MEN groan failing to move the brig forward.

PERRY

We need more men. Ask the militia
troops to help us.

Ensign Smith rushes to the militia camp close by.

BROWN

Our progress is too slow and night
is coming.

PERRY

We must continue even in the night.
Bring up torches and lanterns.

SOLDIERS arrive. They have torches to illuminate the work in progress.

BROWN

Soldiers grab ropes and pull
forward with our men.

SOLDIERS pull with other MEN moving the brig closer to the lake. It is agonizing for everyone.

PERRY

We must work speedily before the
enemy stops us.

BROWN

After this we have the Niagara to move also.

PERRY

We will do better with it since we learned how.

EXT. LAWRENCE - NIGHT

THE MAIN DECK -

Holding lanterns Perry and Brown watch work parties pull the brig closer to the lake.

PERRY

Our men are tired, but we are nearly done.

BROWN

We are mere yards from the lake now.

PERRY

I have not slept for nearly two days. Fatigue overwhelms me.

BROWN

Our rest comes once we finish.

Work parties finally pull the brig off the bar and into the lake. EVERYONE CHEERS.

PERRY

Rearm the brig and prepare it for duty. We must be prepared for the enemy.

BROWN

(to crew)

Haul the cannons up and man the vessel men.

SAILORS roll the cannons up and hoist them aboard. Sails and rigging are set by other CREWMEN.

SAILOR ONE

Aye sir.

BROWN

It will be light soon.

PERRY

We must remain alert. Have sentries posted to watch for enemy ships.

BROWN

Aye Mr. Perry.

EXT. NIAGARA - DAY

THE MAIN DECK -

It is next morning and moving this brig is about to begin. Perry slumps over a rail with exhaustion. Brown joins him.

BROWN

We are securing the camels now. Once filled, we can begin again.

PERRY

This is the third day of our labors. In a few hours, I pray we'll be done.

BROWN

Our men need much rest after we finish.

PERRY

We must prepare for battle next.

The brig floats carefully past the sandbar as they watch. On shore MEN pull cables moving it forward.

BROWN

I will do another sounding. The lake level may be rising in our favor.

He tosses a leaded line into the water and hauls it back quickly. He examines the markings and is surprised.

PERRY

What is the depth now?

BROWN

Nine feet...we are safe.

The brig now clears the sandbar and enters the lake. Anchors are dropped to secure it

PERRY

Rearm the brigs and hurry supplies forward to equip them.

BROWN
A RUNNER is coming.

He points to a MAN rushing up to them. RUNNER shouts to Perry.

PERRY
What is your distress?

RUNNER
Enemy ships sighted sir. They are heading toward our gunboats. Come to the blockhouse at once.

Perry and Brown leave the Niagara and run to the blockhouse.

INT. BLOCKHOUSE - DAY

Perry uses a telescope to watch enemy ships approaching.

PERRY
I see five enemy ships coming.

BROWN
Our brigs are unarmed. They cannot fight yet.

PERRY
I know. We must use the shore batteries. Go prepare them for action.

BROWN
Aye Mr. Perry.

He exits. Ensign Smith enters as Perry scans enemy fleet.

SMITH
They haven't fired yet. Why the delay sir?

PERRY
They are waiting for us to come out.

Smith points to Niagara and Lawrence moving due to waves.

SMITH
Our brigs are turning in their direction sir.

Perry watches the brigs turn at anchor.

PERRY

Their movement is because the wind has shifted. The enemy expects us to fight. Nature has given us this advantage.

Enemy vessels turn away and retreat out of sight.

SMITH

We are safe.

PERRY

I must use this gift from nature.

He leaves the blockhouse and joins Brown at the sandbar.

EXT. SANDBAR - DAY

BROWN

What should we do?

PERRY

Send the schooner Ariel to follow the enemy. We must know where they are going.

BROWN

She is fast, but she carries only four guns.

PERRY

Direct her captain only to pursue the enemy and not engage.

BROWN

I shall row to her and relay your command.

PERRY

Our weakness is being caught by surprise. This cannot happen again.

INT. PERRY'S OFFICE - DAY

The next day Perry, Brown, and his OFFICERS hold a planning session.

PERRY

We lack enough seamen and officers for our crews. Fitting out all our vessels must be done soon also.

OFFICER ONE

We must all learn how to sail on the lake.

PERRY

Sudden storms and shifting winds can do more damage than battles.

OFFICER ONE

What are your plans sir?

PERRY

I will inform Secretary Jones our fleet is completed and anchored in Lake Erie. Draw up a muster roll and assign men to crews for each vessel. Arm and supply each vessel for action.

OFFICER ONE

Should we recruit men from Erie itself?

PERRY

Yes, offer a contract for ten dollars a month and a share of prize money for four months of service.

OFFICER ONE

This is a generous offer for untrained men.

PERRY

We need hundreds of men, and we must recruit quickly. Training to begin once they arrive.

OFFICER ONE

Illness reduces our ranks daily.

PERRY

What diseases are hurting us?

OFFICER ONE

Chills and lake fever sir.

Perry offers an answer.

PERRY

Have the men stop drinking lake water and use wells instead.

OFFICER ONE

We also need pikes, muskets, and
cannons.

PERRY

Gather small arms from the militia
and drill our men in their use.

OFFICER ONE

Aye sir.

PERRY

We are done here. Attend to your
duties.

EXT. PERRY'S FLEET - DAY

Brown and Perry inspect each vessel armaments several days
later.

BROWN

We lack enough ammunition for our
long guns.

PERRY

What do you have now?

BROWN

Only a hundred rounds for the
thirty two pounders.

PERRY

They are not critical. Install
carronades for combat instead.

BROWN

The militia here can only spare
powder and a few small arms.

PERRY

Secure those while I press
Secretary Jones for men and
supplies of every type.

Brown points to the lake as the waves roll in.

BROWN

We must soon do a test cruise and
train our men.

Perry sighs with frustration.

PERRY

We have nine vessels to man. We need over seven hundred men for crew. Yet we can only find five hundred thus far.

BROWN

We may go to battle with a smaller force if our recruiting fails.

PERRY

It is dangerous to cruise with too few men.

BROWN

What shall we do?

PERRY

Captain Chauncey has ordered forces under Mr. Elliott to sail from Buffalo to help us.

He hands Brown a dispatch.

BROWN

How many men?

PERRY

Twelve officers and ninety - one sailors. The Secretary and Captain Chauncey know the poor quality and lack of men we have here.

BROWN

Mr. Elliott's men are experienced and can train our crews.

PERRY

Our vessels are nearly ready. The enemy is within our range, but I must wait due to a want of men.

BROWN

We all have an ardent desire to meet the enemy now.

The inspections are done. Perry made notes as he went along.

PERRY

Our men know the importance of their duties preparing our vessels. Our nation will have no cause to blush for them.

BROWN

I doubt they will be fully ready
when we sail into battle.

PERRY

I share those concerns too. But,
confine them to the hidden recesses
of your mind.

BROWN

I will do my utmost to prepare our
men.

INT. PERRY'S OFFICE - DAY

Perry briefs his OFFICERS on training the crews.

PERRY

Begin cannon drills at once. Our
men must learn to fire and reload
quickly and hit the enemy.

OFFICER ONE

We can form gun crews and practice
ashore now.

PERRY

Be sure our men can handle muskets
and swords also.

OFFICER ONE

Aye Mr. Perry.

PERRY

Drills breed confidence, and
confidence achieves victory.

OFFICER ONE

Our men must function despite
wounds, death, and the chaos of
battle.

PERRY

Teach them sails, rigging, and
basic seamanship too.

OFFICER ONE

The few sailors here must teach the
rest.

PERRY

See to it now since a battle is
coming soon.

INT. FORT MALDEN - DAY

BARCLAY'S OFFICE -

Barclay and his OFFICERS outline plans to defeat the Americans in a tense meeting.

BARCLAY

We have completed all ship construction. The brigs Charlotte and Detroit have 37 guns total.

OFFICER ONE

Is this enough to win in battle?

BARCLAY

Yes, since we have three sloops and a schooner also.

OFFICER ONE

What delays your attack?

BARCLAY

We still lack enough seamen and supplies. Powder, shot, sails, and even matches are not plentiful.

OFFICER ONE

Can Sir Yeo send us more men or supplies?

BARCLAY

I asked him, but he sends me nothing. Read his latest dispatch.

He hands it to him.

OFFICER ONE

(reads aloud)

"You must be sensible of the impossibility of supplying you all the articles you need. You must obtain ordnance and stores from the enemy."

BARCLAY

This is dreadful news. We need five hundred men more for our ships.

OFFICER ONE

They must still be trained before we fight sir.

BARCLAY

Assemble crews for each vessel at once. I have less than twenty-five sailors in all.

OFFICER ONE

They can teach our men quickly enough.

BARCLAY

I presume so since our rations are limited and dwindling quickly. I must end this stalemate.

OFFICER ONE

We cannot be resupplied here until Mr. Perry is beaten.

Barclay unrolls a map on his desk to reveal his plans.

BARCLAY

Whoever strikes first will win. Mr. Perry remains near his base despite our cruising probes.

OFFICER ONE

Does he have superior forces?

BARCLAY

Perhaps, but if we attack him by surprise, we may win a swift victory.

OFFICER ONE

Can we draw him out and fight him here or at Long Point?

BARCLAY

No. Our forces must be stronger before we strike. Our base is here. Long Point is unfortified and lacks supplies.

OFFICER ONE

We must speed our readiness for battle.

BARCLAY

Return to your duties gentlemen.

He puts the map away and sits down exhausted.

EXT. ERIE SHIPYARD - DAY

Perry watches MEN drill with muskets. Others practice cannon drills. He confers with his Ensign Smith.

PERRY

What is the status of our crews now? Enough men or not?

SMITH

Here is the latest muster rolls sir.

He hands Perry several sheets of paper. Perry studies them closely.

PERRY

Many here have taken sick with fever. What is the cause?

SMITH

The surgeon feels it's lake water making them ill.

PERRY

I have illness also, but I must keep in command.

SMITH

There is a message there also sir.

Perry reads it and smiles.

PERRY

We have a hundred men coming with Mr. Elliott. Our forces will soon have over five hundred men, fifteen cannons, thirty nine carronades, and nine vessels for battle.

SMITH

How soon will we fight sir?

PERRY

Today is August fourth, and I will give sailing orders for our first lake cruise soon.

SMITH

What is our destination sir?

PERRY

We will sail to Long Point and seek the enemy there.

SMITH

Yes sir.

PERRY

Collect all my officers and report to the my office now.

SMITH

Aye sir.

INT. PERRY'S OFFICE - DAY

Perry and his OFFICERS study maps laid out on tables. Tension fills the room as his plans are reviewed.

PERRY

We sail tomorrow before dawn, cross the lake, and search Long Point.

He traces the route on a map as OFFICERS watch.

OFFICER ONE

The Niagara is not ready yet. It needs more men and a commander.

PERRY

We will leave it behind then.

OFFICER ONE

Our crews have little experience aboard ship.

PERRY

This cruise will test us all. We cannot train constantly ashore. The men will learn best on the water.

OFFICER ONE

Many get seasick, and the lake fever cut our ranks greatly.

Perry nods but is unmoved.

PERRY

Ailments arise when men face perils of duty. I know the discomforts of these maladies. They are seldom fatal.

OFFICER ONE

I suggest we muster crews tonight, and prepare to sail tomorrow.

PERRY

Do so since our cruise will last a few days. Mr. Elliott is arriving with more men.

OFFICER ONE

We shall welcome his company.

INT. LAWRENCE - DAY

THE MAIN CABIN -

Few days later cruise is over. Perry's fleet is anchored off Erie. He is ill in bed with a fever. Elliott is 30s, seasoned, and arrogant. Their meeting is tense.

PERRY

We did not find the enemy at Long Point. My probe failed.

ELLIOTT

Will they come to us?

PERRY

Perhaps, but I cannot wait. We are ready to fight.

ELLIOTT

Are your ships fully manned now?

PERRY

Yes, we can sail unless a storm or other hazards stop us.

ELLIOTT

I have a letter from Captain Chauncey for you.

PERRY

Read it to me. I dread his response to my letters of complaint.

ELLIOTT

(reading aloud)

"I regret you are not pleased with the men sent to you. As soon as you receive a sufficient number of men, commence your operations against the enemy. There will be a great deal expected from you by your country.

(MORE)

ELLIOTT (CONT'D)

I trust your men will not be disappointed in the high expectations of your gallantry and judgement."

He pauses waiting for Perry's response.

PERRY

Go on...finish it.

ELLIOTT

(reading aloud)

"I was mortified to see your letters to Secretary Jones of complaints. My confidence in your zeal and abilities is undiminished. I hope your success may equal your utmost wishes."

Perry sighs exhausted.

PERRY

I will send him another letter. You may command this squadron if my request for removal is granted.

Elliott is shocked.

ELLIOTT

Where would you go now? You must use the fleet you created here.

PERRY

Mr. Chauncey does not respect my feelings. I have been here for five months. I submitted myself to fatigue and anxiety of all sorts. He is aware of my condition.

ELLIOTT

You have indeed. But, you are ready to fight and can still finish your mission.

PERRY

I do not shrink from the responsibility of completing my task. His letter is an insult. I rendered honorable service building this fleet.

ELLIOTT

You may write to Secretary Jones and seek reassignment. His response may not come until after we fight.

Perry gets out of bed.

PERRY

I will send it anyway. He may grant it or grant me a furlough to see my family.

ELLIOTT

What is my command?

PERRY

Take over the Niagara. We can leave here once the lake storms have passed. We cannot control nature. We only control when we fight.

INT. PERRY'S OFFICE - DAY

Perry is recovered and lays out new plans with his OFFICERS.

PERRY

We will sail to the west end of the lake near Put-In-Bay. Our goal is to engage the enemy from here.

OFFICER ONE

We only have four hundred crew men. Will we get more and when sir?

PERRY

General Harrison is encamped on Kelley's island. He may lend us some infantry.

OFFICER ONE

How many vessels will sail today sir?

PERRY

Ten. We will signal each other using colored flags.

OFFICER ONE

Our crews barely know gunnery and seamanship despite instruction from us.

PERRY

Once we anchor, drill your crews
and practice those skills. This
knowledge will secure their lives
and give me victory.

OFFICER ONE

Distractions in battle from noise
and injury demands our men be
disciplined.

PERRY

A naval battle is only an artillery
duel within a wooden structure at
sea.

OFFICER ONE

Casualties are quick and dreadful
to watch.

PERRY

They are indeed.

EXT. LAWRENCE - DAY

THE MAIN DECK -

General Harrison comes aboard to set a time for a meeting.

PERRY

I will meet you tonight in my
cabin.

HARRISON

I must be informed of your plans so
that our joint efforts gain
success.

PERRY

We must both prepare for the coming
battle.

HARRISON

You must win control of this lake
so I may invade Canada.

PERRY

I am confident I shall succeed.

INT. LAWRENCE - NIGHT

THE MAIN CABIN -

Maps and charts lay on a small table. Perry and Harrison review them making plans.

A lantern and candles light up the dark space.

PERRY

The enemy is near, but I fear to wait for their action. A surprise strike could destroy me.

HARRISON

They must know you are here and seek to fight soon.

PERRY

Can you spare more men for my crews?

HARRISON

I will give you a hundred soldiers. Use them as marines.

PERRY

I'm sure they're better shots than my men here.

HARRISON

Marksmen can kill enemy officers and end a battle quickly.

Perry points to a map and reviews what he has done.

PERRY

I sailed to Long Point. The enemy was absent. They must still be here at Amherstburg. When will they appear for a fight?

HARRISON

What will draw them out to fight us?

PERRY

I don't know. They may be lacking men or supplies for battle. They may expect me to come there.

HARRISON

If you sail into their harbor, you could be trapped by a storm.

Perry paces anxious to solve his problem.

PERRY

Tis true, but I cannot wait too long here. My men are restless. I must lure the enemy out and win.

HARRISON

My task is to displace the enemy from Detroit and move up the Thames river. Your success enables mine.

PERRY

They have Indian allies. You face greater perils than I do.

Harrison moves to go.

HARRISON

I must return to camp as more troops are coming. Sacrifice your doubts as you contemplate your duties ahead.

PERRY

I will cruise closer to gain information and prevent a surprise attack.

HARRISON

Caution benefits us both, but we must act soon.

EXT. LAWRENCE - DAY

Perry is on the lake cruising near Fort Malden. He uses his telescope to see enemy ships. Ensign Smith stands beside him.

PERRY

I see the masts of enemy vessels...I count six or more.

SMITH

Should we not attack sir?

PERRY

We have only three ships with us. Shoals are near the harbor. We would fail.

SMITH

Shall we break off?

PERRY

Yes. We must change course and return home.

SAILORS go aloft, adjust sails as the brig turns into the wind.

SMITH

Many of our crew are ill.

PERRY

Lake fever probably. Drinking foul water is the cause.

SMITH

What remedy can our surgeons give them?

PERRY

None. They must recover on their own.

SMITH

What shall we anchor tonight?

PERRY

Near Sandusky. The men must heal and practice battle drills ashore.

SMITH

Aye sir.

INT. LAWRENCE - DAY

Heavy rains outside keep Perry's fleet at anchor. He reads the latest message from Secretary Jones to his Smith and another OFFICER. He is discouraged and wishes to leave his station.

THE MAIN CABIN -

PERRY

(reads aloud)

"Your removal might defeat the objects of the campaign. You ought to consider that the first duty of an officer is to sacrifice all personal feelings to his public duties."

He lays the message aside and sits down.

SMITH

Are you leaving this station sir?

PERRY

No. My removal is delayed for now.
I must accomplish what I was sent
here to do.

SMITH

You have overcome much sir.

Perry paces in the cabin revealing his burdens.

PERRY

We have inferior men as crewmen.
Supplies are still scarce. Weather
disrupts my plans. I am ill and
exhausted.

OFFICER ONE

Drills give our men a semblance of
order sir.

PERRY

True, but how will they perform in
battle? Everything rests on them
soon.

OFFICER ONE

Do not despair. Our enemy shares
many of these burdens also.

KNOCK on cabin door interrupts them.

PERRY

Come in.

Three American SOLDIERS enter with a GUARD.

GUARD

These men escaped from Fort Malden
recently. They were captives there
for months.

The trio are ragged, dirty, 20s, and weary. Perry questions
them quickly seeking intelligence.

PERRY

Do you have any information about
the enemy's fleet? Do you know the
size and number of guns and
sailors?

One MAN speaks up.

MAN ONE

They are preparing to attack soon. Rations are running out. They cannot be resupplied until you are defeated.

Perry presses him for more details.

PERRY

How many ships and men do they have?

MAN ONE

Over four hundred men. We saw six ships. One was a new brig the Detroit.

PERRY

How many cannons in all?

MAN ONE

Over sixty.

PERRY

What type?

MAN ONE

Mostly long guns.

Perry makes notes quickly.

PERRY

How do you know all this?

MAN ONE

We were forced to work on their ships.

PERRY

Do you other men agree with his answers?

Both MEN nod.

MAN ONE

We were starving, and we escaped.

PERRY

You are a great help. Go to the surgeon and restore yourselves.

Perry turns to OFFICER ONE.

OFFICER ONE
They have given us valuable facts.

PERRY
Let us go on deck and review our
plans.

OFFICER ONE
Aye sir.

EXT. LAWRENCE - DAY

Rain has stopped. Ship rocks as waves break against the hull.

THE MAIN DECK -

PERRY
I now know the enemy's strength.
They are desperate to engage us on
their terms.

OFFICER ONE
What do we do?

PERRY
Wait for them to attack us. Post
lookouts on the masts at once.

OFFICER ONE
Aye sir.

PERRY
Once they see enemy vessels, we
sail out to fight.

OFFICER ONE
Sickness still plagues our crews.

PERRY
Visit each vessel and record the
number of sick aboard.

OFFICER ONE
Aye sir.

PERRY
I trained our men well. I am sure
neither courage or ability will be
lacking once the fight begins.

OFFICER ONE
I have faith they will pursue the
honorable path of duty in battle.

INT. LAWRENCE - NIGHT

THE MAIN CABIN -

Perry and eight of his OFFICERS meet briefly.

PERRY

We have nine ships carrying fifteen long guns and thirty-nine carronades. We must engage at close range.

OFFICER ONE

What is our battle formation?

PERRY

We sail in a two columns. Each vessels should be only half a cable apart.

OFFICER ONE

What about signals?

PERRY

Each vessel must use colored flags hoisted in different places for signals.

OFFICER ONE

Tis a simple system.

PERRY

Here is the signal book to use.

He hands a pamphlet to each OFFICER.

OFFICER ONE

Who will command the brigs sir?

PERRY

I will command the Lawrence. Mr. Elliott will have the Niagara. All ships must stay as near to me as possible.

OFFICER ONE

Aye sir.

PERRY

The enemy has fewer ships, cannons, and men. They will fight hard.

OFFICER ONE

What are our advantages sir?

PERRY

We have more vessels and guns. The carronades can inflict more damage with each broadside. This ends the battle sooner.

OFFICER ONE

We need favorable winds as well.

PERRY

We cannot control wind. Watch for my flag signals, get into position to engage and fire your cannons with speed and accuracy.

OFFICER ONE

Our men will secure victory for you sir.

INT. FORT MALDEN - DAY

BARCLAY'S OFFICE -

Barclay and his OFFICERS hold a war council. It is September ninth. He is ready to act.

BARCLAY

We have only six vessels and less than five hundred men for battle.

OFFICER ONE

What do the Americans have sir?

BARCLAY

Two brigs and other lesser ships. A few hundred men for their crews is all spies inform me.

OFFICER ONE

Are reinforcements coming here?

BARCLAY

No. I asked for more men, but none came. We trained soldiers to be sailors. This is what we must fight with.

OFFICER ONE

We drilled our men twice a day. They will perform well in this coming fight.

Barclay puts a sack of grain on the table. His OFFICERS are puzzled by this act.

BARCLAY

Hunger and a lack of food forces me to fight now. We have barely enough food for one more week here.

OFFICER ONE

Our men now live on half rations.

BARCLAY

We have many civilians and Indians to feed as well. We cannot get more food until the lake is ours.

OFFICER ONE

The Indians know of our food shortage. They may turn it to their advantage.

BARCLAY

We cannot stop a massacre by them if they start an uprising.

OFFICER ONE

The weather is good. Should we prepare for sailing?

BARCLAY

Yes. We cannot wait any longer.

OFFICER ONE

If we surprise the Americans, fight them at long range, we should win.

BARCLAY

Perhaps, if they allow that. If they maneuver fast and come closer, we may suffer greatly.

OFFICER ONE

What is our best course sir?

BARCLAY

Fire once you are in range and destroy their brigs. If done this way, we will win.

OFFICER ONE

Sailing tonight will grant us surprise tomorrow.

BARCLAY
 Inspect your ships and depart this
 afternoon. Tomorrow we shall
 destroy their fleet.

OFFICER ONE
 Aye sir.

SUPER IN/OUT

10 September 1813

EXT. LAWRENCE - DAY

It is early morning. Perry's ships rest quietly at anchor.
 LOOKOUT in crow's nest spots several masts on the horizon.

LOOKOUT
 Sails ho!

OFFICER ONE on the deck below looks up alarmed.

OFFICER ONE
 What direction are they coming
 from?

LOOKOUT
 (pointing)
 North and west. Six ships are
 sailing toward us sir.

OFFICER ONE
 Stand your post. I will tell Mr.
 Perry.

LOOKOUT
 Aye sir.

INT. LAWRENCE - DAY

THE MAIN CABIN -

Perry is awakened by OFFICER ONE. He is ill and tired.

OFFICER ONE
 Six enemy ships approaching us sir.

Perry dresses quickly in a seaman's uniform.

PERRY
 We must get underway at once.
 Signal all vessels to cast off.

OFFICER ONE

Aye sir.

Perry hands him a flag resting on a table. It has the words "Don't Give Up the Ship" sewn on it.

PERRY

This is my battle flag. We will fly it today once we see the enemy closing in.

OFFICER ONE

The winds now will force us to tack while we maneuver to get past Snake Island.

PERRY

We must leave now to get upwind of the enemy fleet. Meet me on deck. Hoist the sails and prepare our cannons.

OFFICER ONE

Aye sir.

PERRY

We will serve the midday meal with grog once we leave port. Our men cannot eat during battle.

OFFICER ONE

Aye sir.

EXT. LAWRENCE - DAY

THE MAIN DECK -

Perry directs his CREW to steer to catch the wind. Breeze drops slowing the ship. Perry questions his SAILING MASTER for a solution.

PERRY

(points)

We have tacked for two hours. We are not in position. Turn the ship about.

SAILING MASTER

Sir if we do that, we will fight the enemy to the leeward away from the wind.

PERRY

To leeward or not, we will fight
today.

He scans the lake with his telescope. Enemy ships grow larger
as they come closer.

Perry and his crew are tense. Combat is imminent. Men will
die soon.

SAILING MASTER

How far away is the enemy sir?

PERRY

Ten miles out I guess. Nature
defies us today.

SAILING MASTER

Have faith sir...winds change.

Suddenly wind blows in gusts filling out the sails. Perry's
fleet moves past Snake Island heading toward the enemy. MEN
CHEER.

PERRY

(looks up)

God blesses us with proper winds.

SAILING MASTER

Indeed sir.

OFFICER ONE

Prepare for attack!

CREW distributes powder, cannon balls, pikes and muskets
quickly. Sand is sprinkled on deck. Cannons are loaded and
primed.

PERRY

We are coming within range. Call
all hands to deck.

CREW assembles on deck in front of him. He holds his flag up.

OFFICER ONE

Shall we hoist your flag sir?

PERRY

Yes do so now.

OFFICER ONE

Aye sir.

Perry hands it to a SAILOR. He runs it up the main mast. It unfurls in the brisk wind as EVERYONE watches.

PERRY

This is the most important day of my life men. Return to your stations.

OFFICER ONE

Ready for battle sir.

Perry checks each gun position roaming the deck.

PERRY

Ready boys?

GUNNER ONE

All ready sir.

PERRY

(points to enemy)

You know how to beat them. They are coming fast.

EXT. DETROIT - DAY

THE MAIN DECK -

It is 11:45am. Barclay sees the American fleet with his telescope. He is ready to attack moving closer in.

BARCLAY

Prepare to engage. Fire when ready.

Lawrence is within range. Gunners aim their cannons at it.

GUNNER ONE

We are ready sir. Aim...fire!

Salvo is FIRED. Shots SPLASH short of Lawrence.

Barclay notices his sails are collapsing from a lack of wind.

BARCLAY

The winds have dropped...we are slowing...turn about now.

Detroit turns slowly as HELMSMAN steers it toward Lawrence. Gun crews reload for new salvos.

GUNNER ONE

Ready to fire sir.

BARCLAY
Fire when in range.

Guns are elevated and sighted on Lawrence.

GUNNER ONE
Fire salvo!

Cannons FIRE. Shots hit Lawrence inflicting damage and injuries.

EXT. LAWRENCE - DAY

THE MAIN DECK - MAN near Perry is hit by a splinter, collapses and dies. Perry rallies his crew.

PERRY
Don't worry men...it'll be all right. Prepare to return fire.

His ship edges closer to the Detroit.

OFFICER ONE
We must fire long guns at them sir!

PERRY
Signal Ariel and Scorpion to fire at the enemy. Their cannons have the range.

OFFICER TWO raises signal flags to direct both vessels. They FIRE and hit the Detroit. Perry's men CHEER.

Detroit fires at the Lawrence hitting the braces and rigging.

PERRY (CONT'D)
Close the range and move in.

Lawrence steers toward Detroit. Enemy fires broadside and inflicts more damage. Perry sees more MEN around him wounded.

OFFICER ONE
We're losing many men sir!

A GUNNER is decapitated. Casualties pile up and taken below for treatment. Blood and body parts cover the deck. Perry remains steadfast despite carnage and chaos.

PERRY
Fire our carronades now!

Carronades FIRE. White smoke envelopes Lawrence. Gusts of wind blow it away quickly. Many splashes come near the Detroit, but few hits are made.

OFFICER ONE

What now sir? We are not hitting the enemy.

PERRY

Command all our ships with long guns to fire. Where is the Niagara? She must join us and support us.

OFFICER ONE

Aye sir.

He grabs a speaking trumpet and yells to Caledonia following closely behind.

PERRY

Speak loudly and signal her captain.

OFFICER ONE

(to crew of Caledonia)

Open fire! Pass this order to other vessels. Keep on station!

Perry sees enemy ships ahead in steady line.

PERRY

Set more sail and reload quickly men!

Sails are raised as GUNNERS work fast. Lawrence moves toward enemy. It is met with a broadside from the Detroit.

Lawrence takes more casualties. Perry looks astern. Five of his vessels lag behind.

OFFICER ONE

All vessels follow us.

PERRY

(to gunners)

Starboard battery fire canister shot!

GUNNERS fire at Detroit sweeping her deck. RIFLEMEN climb into rigging, tie themselves in, and shoot at Detroit's OFFICERS.

EXT. DETROIT - DAY

THE MAIN DECK -

Barclay rallies his men and hopes to end the battle by destroying the Lawrence.

BARCLAY

Sweep her main deck! Fire at will!

He points and his GUNERS fire a broadside.

Lawrence is hit again and suffers more damage.

OFFICER ONE

We shall have them soon sir.

BARCLAY

Their rigging and masts are broken.
I see MEN dying on deck.

He sees the carnage through his telescope.

OFFICER ONE

Fewer guns are firing at us.

BARCLAY

Signal Queen Charlotte to close and
fire on the enemy.

OFFICER ONE

Aye sir.

EXT. LAWRENCE - DAY

THE MAIN DECK -

It is 1:30 pm. Rigging and masts are smashed and lie on the deck. Steering is lost. Over twenty CREWMEN are dead, over sixty are wounded. MARKSMEN now fire cannons. Body parts and blood cover the decks. Debris blocks movement.

Perry, still uninjured, rallies his remaining MEN. Another OFFICER joins him.

OFFICER ONE

We need more men on the guns sir.

PERRY

You must fight by yourself. I have
no more men to give you.

OFFICER ONE

I shall go below and find any available men.

He leaves while Perry tends to a wounded SAILOR hit by cannister shot.

SAILOR ONE

I am not hurt sir.

PERRY

Can you stand if I help you?

Perry helps him rise slowly. Cannon ball SMASHES SAILOR's face killing him. Perry is bloodied and lowers him to the deck. He looks for more wounded to help.

Marine OFFICER is hit by a cannon ball. He SCREAMS in pain turning to Perry

MARINE

Shoot me...I'm done for sir.

Perry rushes to him.

PERRY

I cannot. Men take him below.

Several MARINES lift the OFFICER and carry him below decks.

Perry moves around the deck seeing damage. Fewer of his guns return fire due to casualties and broken carriages.

EXT. DETROIT - DAY

THE MAIN DECK -

Barclay directs his GUNNERS to keep up steady barrage. Queen Charlotte closes in firing on the Lawrence. Both British brigs attack her now.

BARCLAY

Keep firing until they surrender.

Suddenly he is wounded by cannister shot in the back and right arm. He goes below for treatment.

EXEC OFFICER, Lieutenant INGLIS, takes command. Heavy white smoke envelopes Lawrence and Detroit. Wind has dropped and Detroit cannot come closer.

EXT. LAWRENCE - DAY

THE MAIN DECK -

It is 2:00 pm. Few cannons are now usable. Nearly all the CREW are dead or wounded. Perry is desperate to stay in the fight. He goes to the hatch where wounded lie below.

PERRY
(shouting into hatch)
Doctor send me men! If they can
pull a rope, I need them.

Several wounded MEN come up and join Perry firing whatever cannons are still usable.

Broadside from the Detroit cuts foremast down. Rigging and sails drop on GUNNERS stopping their work.

Several MEN are crushed beneath the foremast. Perry sees wreckage must be cleared to continue fighting. OFFICER ONE reacts.

OFFICER ONE
Let me cut you loose!

He wields a cutlass slashing sails and rope away to free the GUNNERS. Water from near misses drenches EVERYONE. THUNDER from enemy cannons is deafening. Perry remains in command. He realizes the battle is nearly lost and must take drastic action.

PERRY
We must not give up! Stand fast
men!

OFFICER ONE joins him.

OFFICER ONE
Can you lend me men to handle my
guns sir?

PERRY
Yes, I will send you some.

He signals survivors of another cannon to follow OFFICER ONE. Yellow and white smoke linger in the air like a shroud. Detroit is three hundred yards away and still approaching.

The battle may end in minutes unless Perry brings more resources to counter the enemy.

EXT. LAWRENCE - DAY

THE MAIN DECK -

It is 2:30 pm. Perry and two MEN fire a final shot at the enemy. He cannot sail away or fight any longer. His ship is a smoldering wreck with heavy losses all over.

OFFICER ONE

Sir you must surrender or perish here.

GROANS of the wounded can barely be heard above enemy gunfire.

PERRY

I shall take command of the Niagara. Bring me our flags and prepare a skiff at once.

OFFICER ONE

Aye sir.

SAILOR quickly hauls flags down and hands them to Perry. Skiff is lowered from the stern and brought alongside.

Wounded MEN on deck chant "sink the ship, sink the ship".

PERRY

Tend to the wounded. I leave it to your judgement to strike surrender or not as seems best.

OFFICER ONE

Aye sir.

Perry enters the boat with four MEN. He takes the tiller and holds his flags. Enemy sees Perry's flags are gone. They cease firing. The lull in fighting saves Perry.

EXT. DETROIT - DAY

THE MAIN DECK -

Inglis sees Perry and his MEN in a skiff rowing off. He is certain Perry is coming to surrender to him.

INGLIS

Cease fire. The Americans are ready to surrender. It is over.

Silence settles over the water. Smoke clears as winds increase.

Four MEN with Perry row furiously heading toward the Niagara. Inglis realizes Perry will resume the fight there and he must kill him.

INGLIS (CONT'D)
Fire on the skiff! It must be
stopped.

Enemy cannons and MARKSMEN FIRE at the fleeing skiff. They narrowly miss it. Spouts of water drench Perry and his MEN once they reach the Niagara and climb aboard.

EXT. NIAGARA - DAY

THE MAIN DECK -

It is 2:45 pm. Perry is exhausted. His face is coated black from cannon smoke. Mr. Elliott helps him resume the fight. Enemy gunfire has stopped.

ELLIOTT
How is the day going?

PERRY
Badly as we are cut to pieces. Take
and hoist my flag. Why are our
gunboats so far astern?

He points to them in the distance. SAILOR takes his flag and raises it up the main mast.

ELLIOTT
I shall bring them up to us.

He grabs a speaking trumpet and shouts commands to gunboats astern.

PERRY
Double shot all our guns. Don't
fire until I give the word.

CREW CHEERS once Perry takes over. Wind fills out sails pushing the Niagara fast toward the enemy.

EXT. DETROIT - DAY

THE MAIN DECK -

Barclay returns to take command. He sees he cannot maneuver due to battle damage. Queen Charlotte moves closer to attack Niagara. The captain is dead. Her SAILING MASTER steers the ship with dire results.

BARCLAY

Charlotte approaches us. Prepare to turn.

SAILORS raise sails as wind fills them pushing Detroit into path of oncoming Charlotte. Perry fires at Charlotte. It drops sails and loses control. It COLLIDES with the Detroit. Their masts and rigging are entangled.

EXT. NIAGARA - DAY

It is 2:50pm.

THE MAIN DECK -

Perry sees the collision as an incredible break. He gives orders to maneuver preparing to finish the enemy.

PERRY

Shorten the sails and prepare to fire!

CREW drops sails and his ship slows getting closer to the enemy. GUNNERS hold smoking matches ready to fire. MARINES go aloft, take positions and aim at the enemy.

OFFICER ONE

Steady men...close the range.

PERRY

Aim...fire!

Perry's guns FIRE a broadside sweeping the decks of both enemy ships. MEN are cut down as he does a slow half circle firing continuously.

OFFICER ONE

Keep firing men!

Perry's attack reduces both enemy ships to smoking wreckage with heavy losses. SCREAMS are heard from their wounded.

Attack continues until OFFICER aboard Charlotte waves white handkerchief attached to pike signaling surrender. It is over.

EXT. DETROIT - DAY

It is 3:00 pm.

Barclay sees great damage to his ship. He has great losses and realizes he cannot fight on.

BARCLAY

Strike the flag. We must surrender.

SAILOR climbs mast and tears flag loose. He returns to deck with it.

Perry ceases fire. Heavy smoke hangs over all vessels and the lake. Perry has WON.

Detroit and Charlotte become untangled and separate. Four other British ships strike their flags. All firing ends at 3:15pm.

Perry's men CHEER recognizing victory. It is over but many died for this moment.

EXT. NIAGARA - DAY

THE MAIN DECK -

Perry stands looking at the smoking Lawrence. He must go there to receive the enemy and take care of his crew.

PERRY

Prepare a boat for me. I will take their surrender on the Lawrence. It is only fitting.

SAILORS bring skiff alongside. He enters it and is rowed to the Lawrence. The journey is a silent one.

EXT. LAWRENCE - DAY

THE MAIN DECK -

British surrender party boards quietly. They see wounded MEN and step over battle debris as they approach Perry.

Perry dressed in a fresh uniform faces them as they line up. He sits in a chair nodding as each OFFICER offers their sword toward him.

PERRY

Keep your swords sirs. They were bravely used. What is the condition of your commander?

CAPTAIN O'KEEFE, 30s, speaks for the delegation.

O'KEEFE

He was badly wounded. We need medical help for our men promptly.

PERRY

I will visit him shortly. I will offer you every comfort possible. I cannot spare my only surgeon now. He is treating our many wounded below deck.

O'KEEFE

Thank you for your kindness sir. Where shall bring the prisoners from our ships?

Perry points to ship in the distance.

PERRY

Have them board the schooner Somers. I will have it anchor close to you.

O'KEEFE

Very well.

PERRY

Expect your men to be guarded. Escape is impossible.

O'KEEFE

I understand. I will begin the transfer at once.

PERRY

You may go.

Delegation departs. Perry slumps over exhausted from battle.

Ensign Smith revives him with a question.

SMITH

Sir, should we not inform General Harrison of your victory?

PERRY

(nods slowly)

Yes I must. Have you a pencil and some paper?

Smith brings these to him. He writes slowly and hands the note to Smith.

SMITH

(reading aloud)

"We have met the enemy, and they are ours. Two ships, two brigs, one schooner and a sloop."

PERRY
Go ashore and deliver it to the
General.

SMITH
Aye sir.

INT. LAWRENCE - NIGHT

THE MAIN CABIN -

Perry writes his final report by candlelight.

OFFICER ONE enters.

OFFICER ONE
What do we do with our dead sir?

PERRY
Bury all the enlisted men in the
lake tonight. The dead officers
from both sides will be buried
tomorrow on land at Put- In- Bay.

OFFICER ONE
There are twenty - two dead aboard,
and five dead on our vessels.
Ninety - six others were wounded.

PERRY
Our victory brings me sorrow, but
it saved our nation.

OFFICER ONE
I will handle the burials at once.

Perry resumes writing.

EXT. LAWRENCE - NIGHT

THE MAIN DECK -

Each BODY is sewn into a hammock and weighted with a cannon
ball. CHAPLAIN quickly reads a burial prayer.

SAILORS then lower each body into the lake. Wounded MEN still
moan awaiting treatment below deck.

The burials are finished quickly. Debris is tossed overboard
as well.

EXT. LAWRENCE - NEXT DAY

THE MAIN DECK -

Perry surveys his ship as he walks around. Smith hands him a paper and he reads it.

SMITH

A list of enemy losses sir.

PERRY

Forty one dead and ninety - four wounded. Nearly all their officers are dead or wounded also.

SMITH

What are your orders sir?

PERRY

We'll use this vessel as a hospital ship. Prepare to sail to Put-In-Bay for repairs.

SMITH

Aye sir.

PERRY

I will now visit Captain Barclay and attend to his needs.

MEN wash the decks to remove blood and body parts.

INT. DETROIT - DAY

BARCLAY'S CABIN -

Perry approaches Barclay who lies bandaged in bed. He salutes Perry.

BARCLAY

Thank you for showing humanity toward us after your victory.

PERRY

It is sad this war brings great losses to both sides.

BARCLAY

I wish to return to England as soon as may be arranged.

PERRY

I will seek permission for you to leave.

BARCLAY

My remaining officers are without any money. If paroled, they are helpless.

PERRY

I will advance them what amount you ask.

BARCLAY

A few hundred dollars should be enough.

PERRY

I can obtain money once ashore.

Perry grabs a stool and sits down.

BARCLAY

My plan was fighting you at long range to destroy your vessel.

PERRY

That tactic was sound, but bad luck and the winds overcame you.

BARCLAY

The winds shifted. I lost my best officers by then. My crews were untrained. Your men were better.

PERRY

I will send our surgeon promptly. Please rest till then.

BARCLAY

Thank you for your aid to us.

EXT. LAWRENCE - NIGHT

THE MAIN DECK -

USHER PARSONS, 20s, surgeon's mate reports to Perry on his medical work.

PERRY

I will use the schooner Ariel as my new ship. Are you done treating our men?

PARSONS

Yes, I worked for forty hours with little help and treated ninety-six men.

PERRY

Have any died?

PARSONS

Only three so far.

PERRY

You have done heroic service here.

PARSONS

I am exhausted and must retire now sir.

PERRY

Get rested. We will be ashore tomorrow to bury the officers.

EXT. ARIEL - DAY

Next morning all ships lie at anchor in Put-In-Bay. Graves for three British officers and three American officers are ready for services. Perry and Ensign Smith confer on the burial ceremony.

THE MAIN DECK -

PERRY

Use row boats with flags at half mast to carry the dead ashore. Direct the British to do likewise.

SMITH

Aye sir.

PERRY

Have the fife and drums play a dirge once we begin the burial procession ashore.

SMITH

Aye sir.

PERRY

I am going to join Captain Barclay ashore.

SMITH

Aye sir.

Procession of boats each with one dead OFFICER moves silently to shore. Full military honors are given to the dead of both sides. Signal guns FIRE from ships saluting the dead.

EXT. GRAVESITE - DAY

Perry holds Barclay up for the service. Each dead OFFICER is taken from a boat as they arrive. The burial party carries them to a gravesite.

BARCLAY
You honor my men well.

PERRY
All the dead here fought bravely
and deserve our respect.

Two CHAPLAINS read a short burial service. Each dead OFFICER is lowered into his grave.

A twelve MAN firing party fires a final salute.

EXT. THE LANDING - DAY

Perry and Barclay enter a waiting boat.

PERRY
(to crew)
Return us to the Lawrence.

BARCLAY
What is to become of me now?

PERRY
You may use my cabin on the
Lawrence to recover.

BARCLAY
Thank you for such kindness.

PERRY
I must meet General Harrison and
give him my report.

INT. HARRISON'S HEADQUARTERS - DAY

Harrison looks up after reading Perry's report. Perry stands at attention, but he shows great fatigue.

Both men know there is still fighting ahead.

HARRISON

I will send a copy of this to Secretary Jones. Your victory must be celebrated.

PERRY

I have already done so. It will raise our nation's spirits.

HARRISON

We must still prepare to invade Canada attacking Malden and ending the British threat.

PERRY

I must do repairs and gather fresh crews.

HARRISON

A week should be sufficient to rebuild your fleet.

PERRY

Once done we will be ready to drive the enemy from our frontier.

HARRISON

Till now our victory was suspended. It is no longer in doubt. Your name will live in history.

PERRY

I have given our country all I have to win here.

HARRISON

Securing control of this lake ensures more victories in the future.

PERRY

I must go seek rest, secure prisoners, and prepare for a new battle.

HARRISON

Well done Mr. Perry, so well done.

PERRY

Thank you General.

FADE OUT.

THE END

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