CHAPTER HEADING

SEPTEMBER, 1813 -- THE AMERICANS INVADE CANADA – AGAIN

Narration: In the fall of 1813, William Atherton would be marched from Michigan to a military prison in Quebec. But there were other Americans marching north as well. With Lake Erie secure, the United States was free to try again to conquer the Eastern heart of the Canadian colonies – Montreal, and even Quebec. Suthren: In the fall of 1813 Canada faced the most serious threat to its continued existence as a British colony. The Americans sent one large army of seven thousand men down the St. Lawrence towards Montreal, and another army of five thousand men marching up the Champlain Valley to then rendezvous with them at Montreal.

Narration: With a total 12,000 soldiers, this was the largest American operation of the war; but once again the Americans put an invasion into the hands of incompetent officers.

Suthren: The larger army was commanded by James Wilkinson, a somewhat strange, corrupt Revolutionary War veteran. Commanding the other army coming up the Champlain Valley, was a Carolina planter named Wade Hampton of whom it could be said his most salient feature was that he loathed Wilkinson. Neither man could stand each other.Narration: The two forks of America's 1813 invasion would never be in tune. Wilkinson and Hampton each carried out his own private war. [Borneman, p.163] On October 25th, ~~,~~ Hampton led his army to the Chateauguay River, just inside the Canadian border, there he engaged the enemy, but not the British.Chartrand: There were no British troops. There was a Canadian force that was at Chateaugay [Borneman 166]. And mostly French Canadian [Latimer 203]. The French Canadian population basically sided with the British because as one British officer put it they trusted the Americans even less than the British.Narration: The French-Canadian regiment at Chateuguay, the Voltiguers, was commanded by Lt. Col. Charles-Michel de Salaberry. [Berton, Flames 221; Hickey 157]. The Americans hoped that he and his volunteers wouldn't have their heart in the battle. Suthren: Hampton sent an officer forward on horseback who could speak French and asked him to harangue the Canadians, tell ‘em to surrender. So this officer dutifully rode forward and said, “You brave Canadians, give yourselves up. We have no argument with you. We come to bring you liberty and freedom.” de Salaberry took a musket from one of his men and he fired a long range shot which dropped the American officer in mid speech. [Berton, Flames 224] Chartrand: They formed, they attacked. The Americans were repelled on the west side of the river. And on the east side of the river they tried to surround the Canadian force. They were beaten there too by an ambush in the woods.Narration: The Canadians were outnumbered 5 to 1 – still Hampton had the American forces retreat across the border. Half the invasion of 1813 was finished. [Borneman 166] Dale: the Battle of Chateaugay loomed very large in Canadian mythology. The battle was fought primarily by Canadians and their Aboriginal allies [Latimer 203]. And so that one is rightfully claimed as a great Canadian victory. Suthren: There were principally French Canadians there but there were also Scottish, Irish, even German Canadians [Latimer 205] who took part, all of whom used French as kind of a, a, a, a common language at the time and who fought well together in defense of their of their farms. It was perhaps one of the first times in Canadian history that the disparate populations of Canadian had ever fought together in a common cause.Narration: Hampton’s wing of the invasion had been beaten back. But Gen. James Wilkinson was still sailing his 7000-man American army toward Montreal.Twist: Wilkinson is heading east along the St. Lawrence River,.Dale: But it’s estimated that a log would float down the St. Lawrence River faster than Wilkinson’s fleet went. Don Graves: Almost from the day they set out to go down the St. Lawrence, General Wilkinson began dosing himself a lot of laudanum to fight off dysentery. Wilkinson appears from witnesses to have miscalculated his dosage. And from time to time he was wont to break into song and tell funny stories about previous experiences [Borneman 167, Latimer 209] when he should maybe have kept his nose to the grindstone.Narration: Wilkinson had never commanded even a regiment in battle, and expected the worst. "In case of Misfortune," he decided, "the army must surrender." When his forces met up with the British at Crysler's farm, Wilkinson stayed behind.Twist: His army outnumbers the British three to one, the vast numerical superiority he enjoys is completely negated by the fact that he doesn’t even show up to conduct the battle himself .Wilder: The Americans attacked through the mud of the fields at Crysler’s Farm and were driven back by volley after volley of accurate gun fire. The Americans were forced to retreat.Twist: Wilkinson simply withdraws and abandons the, the entire attempt. His army hasn’t been destroyed. He just doesn’t have the stomach to continue.

Narration: Wade Hampton resigned his commission and returned to South Carolina [Berton, Flames 242]; James Wilkinson faced a court-martial, but was acquitted [Borneman 298]. In the United States, the invasion of 1813 was forgotten as quickly as possible; in Canada the battles of Chateaugay and Crysler's Farm would be remembered forever.

Suthren: Canadians weren’t quite sure who they were before the War of 1812. But after the War of 1812 the key populations knew who they weren’t, and they weren’t Americans.Grodzinski: In Canada we have the emergence following the war of something known as the militia myth which would plague the Canadian military right up until the First World War. And this was the idea that the farmer, the clerk, the ordinary individual could be called up, given a weapon, sent to the field, and defeat whomever opposed. Cause after all in the Canadian mind, it was these people who have won the War of 1812.

Narration: Laura Secord was another ordinary Canadian who came to Britain’s aid in the war of 1812. A 37 year-old housewife from Queenston, she became famous for struggling through 20 miles of wilderness, alone, to warn the British about an impending attack. There’s been debate about the usefulness of her trek, but over time she became a legend. On the 100th anniversary of her journey, a Canadian chocolate company adopted her name and image as its logo. By 1992 she was put on a postage stamp – as a true national hero. [Hickey, Don’t Give Up, p196]

Dianne Graves:  Modern historians look at her representing the entire pioneer woman's experience.  A lot of courage, a lot of fortitude was necessary for many pioneer women to survive in the Canadas in those days.  And I think in a sense she became representative of that collective experience.

Decroix: It’s indicative also of the post war thinking process that both nations have coming out of the war. Both Canada and the United State have this grasping for national heroes.