

# British campaign of 1812



British Campaign of 1812 War The War of 1812 is often referred to as the United States' second war of independence because, like the Revolutionary War, it was fought against Great Britain. The Conflict resulted from the clash between American nationalism and the war Britain and its allies were waging against the empire of Napoleonic France. From 1812 to 1814, the United States suffered numerous crushing defeats at the hands of superior British forces. United States offensives failed to take the Great Lakes region, and military defenses could not keep British troops from occupying Washington, D. C. The war of 1812 between the U. S. and British Empire (Great Britain, Upper Canada- Ontario, Lower Canada-Quebec, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, and Bermuda) has started in June 18, 1812 and ended in December 24, 1814 officially though the unofficial records shown that the war ended only in March 23, 1815.

#### The Sack of Washington and the Battle of Baltimore

On 19 August, a British force landed at the mouth of the Patuxent River. By 24 August they had marched north and captured Washington, almost without a fight. The British sat down at a captured White House banquet and, after a pleasant dinner, set fire to the White House and much of the city in retaliation for the American burning of a number of small villages in Upper Canada, contrary to an earlier agreement. On the morning of 13 September, British warships began the bombardment of Fort McHenry. The Bombardment failed to shake the defenders of Fort McHenry. The British completed their withdrawal on 15 September<sup>1</sup>.

Baltimore was next on the schedule, but that city had been given time to prepare its defenses. A rather formidable line of redoubts covered the land approach; the harbor was guarded by Fort McHenry and blocked by a line of

sunken gunboats. On September 13 a spirited engagement fought by Maryland militia, many of whom had run at Bladensburg just two weeks before, delayed the invaders and caused considerable loss, including General Ross, who was killed. When the fleet failed to reduce Fort McHenry, the assault on the city was called off. The burning of Washington marked a turning point in the war. The image of their capital in flames had the effect of rallying Americans to a spirited defense of their country, and the British were soon turned back in their attempts to capture the city of Baltimore. America won a great victory in their defense of Fort McHenry—the battle which was the inspiration to onlooker Francis Scott Key's poem, "The Star Spangled Banner," which would become the lyrics to America's National Anthem. The British attacks in the Chesapeake Bay region were both high and low points for the American cause. The destruction of Washington after a humiliating defeat was certainly demoralizing. However, the successful defense of Baltimore, and in particular the stirring events around the defense of Fort McHenry that would be enshrined forever in Francis Scott Key's poem, "The Star-Spangled Banner," had a far-reaching impact on the war and on later American history

#### Role of James Madison – President and Commander-in-Chief

On June 17, 1812, when Congress declared war on the British, marking the official start of the War of 1812. When Madison swore in for his second term, his primary occupation was the fulfillment of duties as Commander-in-Chief of a nation at war. Even though Madison was reluctant to go to war, America's fighting was done by state militias and volunteers, and in the first part of the war went badly. General William Hull failed in his attempt to invade Canada, instead surrendering to the British at Detroit. Several other attempts at

invading Canada also failed. President Madison responded to these defeats by focusing on building up the navy, sending fleets into the Great Lakes to defend the United States from British attacks from Canada. The American navy saw victories in the first year of the war: three of its ships, named the United States, the President, and most famously the Constitution, nicknamed "Old Ironsides," were more formidable than any ships in the British navy. Though outnumbered by the very large British fleet, the American ships held their own in close naval combat.

The Americans suffered naval setbacks, however, with the onset of the British blockade of the Atlantic coastline. The most remembered event in the war occurred when the British landed south of Washington, D. C. and, on August twenty-four, 1814, after defeating an American army at Bladensburg, Virginia, marched into the capital city and set fire to it. The White House was one of the buildings which was destroyed—it was hollowed out in the fire. President Madison had evacuated the city before seeing his house in flames; Dolley Madison, evacuating after her husband, saved a precious, life-size portrait of George Washington while leaving some of her own belongings behind in the conflagration. Many Americans viewed the First Lady as a heroine for this action. The President reacted to the destruction of Washington by firing his Secretary of War and replacing him with James Monroe, who continued to serve simultaneously as Secretary of State.

The elections of 1816 brought James Monroe into office. President Madison left the White House in February 1817, and retired happily with Mrs. Madison

to his home at Montpelier in Virginia. He looked forward to the rest retirement would afford him, though he still had a very active two decades ahead of himself.

### Significance of events surrounding Fort McHenry

Fort McHenry, 13 September 1814. While the British marched on Washington, Baltimore had time to hastily strengthen its defenses. Maj. Gen. Samuel Smith had about 9,000 militia, including 1,000 in Fort McHenry guarding the harbor. On 12 September the British landed at North Point about 14 miles below the city, where their advance was momentarily checked by 3,200 Maryland Militiamen. Thirty-nine British (including General Ross) were killed and 251 wounded at a cost of 24 Americans killed, 139 wounded, and 50 taken prisoner. After their fleet failed to reduce Fort McHenry by bombardment and boat attack (night of 13-14 September), the British decided that a land attack on the rather formidable fortifications defending the city would be too costly and on 14 October sailed for Jamaica. Francis Scott Key, after observing the unsuccessful British bombardment of Fort McHenry, was inspired to compose the verses of "The Star Spangled Banner." 2

Fort Henry, Kingston, was originally built during the war of 1812 on Point Henry, beside Lake Ontario, to guard the outlet to the St Lawrence River and the Kingston Navy Yards. The strategic importance of the location increased after the completion of the RIDEAU CANAL, which provided a military supply route between Montréal, Bytown [Ottawa] and Kingston; the fortress was rebuilt between 1832 and 1837, the better to defend the end of the canal most vulnerable to American attack. It was the principal fortress of Canada (and also the largest), garrisoned by troops of the British army until 1870

and then by units of the Canadian Militia until 1891, when the fort was abandoned as a defensive structure.

Fort McHenry, in Baltimore, Maryland, is a star shaped fort best known for its role in the War of 1812 when it successfully defended Baltimore Harbor from an attack by the British navy in the Chesapeake Bay. Fort McHenry was built after America won its independence to defend the important Port of Baltimore from future enemy attacks. It was positioned on the Locust Point peninsula which juts into the opening of Baltimore Harbor, and was constructed in the form of a five-pointed star surrounded by a dry moat — a deep, broad trench. The moat would serve as a shelter from which musket men might defend the fort from a land attack. In case of such an attack on this first line of defense, each point, or bastion, was fortified, so that the invading army would be caught in crossfire of cannon and musket fire. The only attack the fort ever received came during the War of 1812 in the naval portion of the Battle of Baltimore. Beginning at dusk on September 13, 1814, British warships continuously bombarded the fort for 25 hours under heavy rain. The British ships were unable to pass Fort McHenry and penetrate Baltimore Harbor because of defenses including a chain, sunken ships, and the American cannon. They were, however, able to come close enough to fire rockets and mortars on the fort. Due to the poor accuracy of the British weapons and the limited range of the American guns, little damage was done on either side, but the British ceased their attack on the morning of September 14, 1814, and the naval part of the British invasion of Baltimore had been repulsed.

During the American Civil War, Fort McHenry served as a military prison, confining both Confederate soldiers as well as a large number of Maryland

political figures who were suspected of being Confederate sympathizers. During World War I, an additional hundred-odd buildings were built on the land surrounding the fort in order to convert the entire facility into an enormous hospital for the treatment of troops returning from the European conflict. Virtually none of these buildings remain, while the original fort has been preserved and restored to essentially its condition during the War of 1812. During World War II Fort McHenry served as a Coast Guard base, helping to defend the port of Baltimore. Historical re-enactment at Fort McHenry The fort was made a national park in 1925; on August 11, 1939, it was re-designated a " National Monument and Historic Shrine," the only such doubly designated place in the United States. It was placed on the National Register of Historic Places on October 15, 1966. It has become national tradition that when a new flag is designed it first flies over Fort McHenry. The first official 49 and 50 star American flags were flown over the fort and are still located on the premises. The Fort has become a vital center of recreation for the Baltimore locals as well as a prominent tourist destination. Thousands of visitors come each year to see the " Birthplace of the Star Spangled Banner."

#### Treaty and Peace

This was a war in which no territory was lost nor gained by either side. None of the points of contention were addressed by the Treaty of Ghent, yet it was a war that changed much between the United States of America and Great Britain. Pragmatically, the Americans celebrated a victory at New Orleans and came to see the war as a successful defense of their Revolution. This fostered the isolationism of American foreign policy for the next century, during which the United States grew into a world power. The war lasted from

1812 to 1815, although a peace treaty was signed December 24, 1814. By the end of the war, 1, 600 soldiers for the British side had died, and 2, 260 soldiers for the U. S. In addition, tens of thousands of slaves escaped to British lines because of their offer of freedom, or they just fled in the chaos of war. The British settled a few thousand of the newly freed Americans in Nova Scotia. Never again would the U. S. think that it could always beat Great Britain nor did Great Britain ever again fail to treat the U. S. as a national power in its own right. The Treaty of Ghent established the status quo ante bellum; that is, there were no territorial

Throughout 1814, British and American diplomats met in Gent, Belgium, to work out a peace. Both sides demanded territorial concessions. The American economy by this time was in danger of total collapse. Faced with rumblings of New England succession, American diplomats came close to accepting British demands. However, news of the American victory at Plattsburg undermined the British position. The Americans pressed for a return to the pre-war situation to which the war-weary British agreed.

### Maps

Many manuscript maps of the War of 1812 are available at the U. S. National Archives, Many other manuscript maps of the war doubtless can be found in the Canadian and British national archives, and scattered throughout other repositories,. It should also be noted that the Library of Congress has eleven manuscript maps acquired through the Blair gift that " pertain chiefly to General Jacksons operations in the lower Mississippi River Valley and the Gulf Coast during the War of 1812 and his campaign against the Creek Indians"