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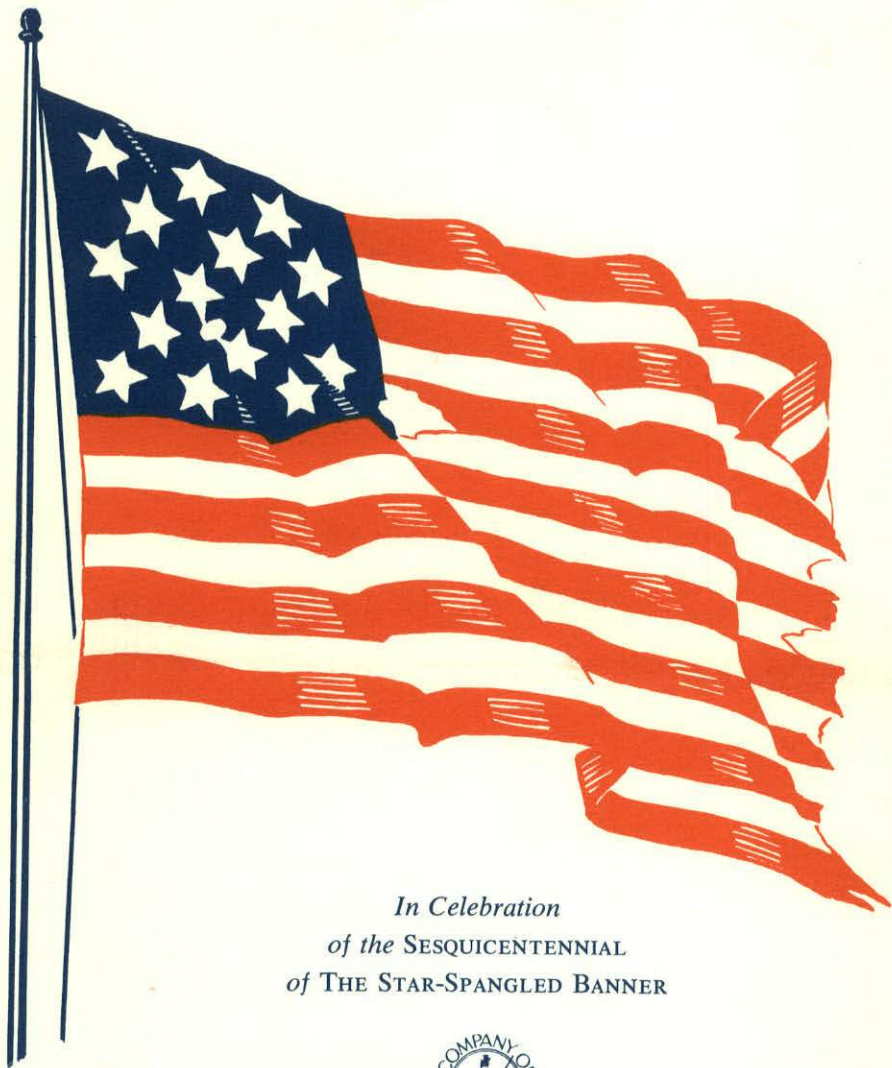
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AN ACCOUNT OF
THE BATTLE OF BALTIMORE
SEPTEMBER 12-14, 1814



In Celebration
of the SESQUICENTENNIAL
of THE STAR-SPANGLED BANNER



Upon the occasion of
THE ANNUAL MEETING
of
THE COMPANY OF MILITARY HISTORIANS
MAY 8-10
AT BALTIMORE — 1964

The Battle of Baltimore

September 11-14, 1814

Bladensburg and Washington lay behind, Baltimore, "that nest of Pirates" lay before, when a British Fleet of upwards of 50 sail with more than 5000 troops embarked entered the mouth of the Patapsco River, September 11, 1814.

But the Battle for Baltimore was not going to be like Bladensburg, where, of the American militia, a few had stayed to fight, but most had stayed not upon the order of their going. After Bladensburg, Washington had fallen almost without a shot being fired.

Baltimore was made of sterner stuff. Its merchants, who had sent more than 125 privateers to sea, were under no illusions as to British intentions or determination. If the wanton and deliberate destruction of Washington and the ransome of Alexandria was not warning enough, over a year and a half of blockade, bombardment, "requisition" and just plain looting, arson and rape had been credited to British forces roaming the Chesapeake Bay. In short, it would be difficult to list a crime His Majesty's forces had not committed.

So, while Baltimore's 5th Regiment and Rifle Battalion were straggling back into town after Bladensburg and rumors were spreading, Baltimore was doubling and redoubling its preparations

City and private coffers were thrown open for defense. 50,000 persons turned out to help repair the ramparts and emplace heavy guns in the shore batteries at Fort McHenry and to build and arm earthworks on the heights called Loudenslager's Hill (now Patterson Park) about 3 miles east of the city.

Major General Samuel Smith, Revolutionary War hero, former U. S. Representative and Senator from Maryland and head of a prosperous shipping firm, took command of the defense. Lieutenant Colonel George Armistead, U. S. Artillery, commanded the 1,000 man force at Fort McHenry and Commodore John Rodgers led a detachment of seamen and marines from Philadelphia.

Martial law was proclaimed, the militia was mustered and, as the British fleet drew nigh, Baltimore became an armed camp.

In his estimate of the enemy's intentions, General Smith properly deduced that the British would make full use of their amphibious capabilities and land to the southeast of the city on Patapsco Neck, near North Point. Here, conditions of water, beach, terrain and roads were most favorable. Accordingly, he entrenched on the high ground to the east of the city and reinforced Fort McHenry. This left the city open to the north, west and southwest, but with the advantage of interior lines of communication, he felt that he could concentrate in time to deal with anything the British might develop in those quarters—so long as Fort McHenry held the water approaches to the city.

Fort McHenry squats at the tip of Whetstone Point, (now Locust Point) where the Patapsco River forks; the North West Branch leads into the harbor at the city's heart and the westerly Ferry Branch (now Middle Branch) swings around to within a mile of the city.

To forestall a flank attack to the west of Fort McHenry, General Smith constructed two small fortifications on the Ferry Branch,—Forts Babcock and Covington. Across the North West Branch from McHenry he established a battery on Lazaretto Point. To shorten the distance between the eastern defenses and the Fort McHenry sector, a floating bridge of scows was rigged.

Commodore Rodgers sank about 25 vessels—schooners, brigs and ships—across both branches. Behind them, in the North West Branch, he stationed a fleet of twelve one-gun boats. He manned the shoreline batteries at McHenry and the satellite forts with seamen and marines.

The earthworks, trenches and bastions of Loudenslager's Hill ran north from the harbor, roughly in line with Fort McHenry and parallel to the city limits. Some 100 guns were emplaced and Baltimore troops were bolstered by Maryland county militia and volunteers from Pennsylvania and Virginia. All told, the city's defenders numbered about 12,000.

The British fleet hove to off North Point—where the Chesapeake Bay and the Patapsco join. Church bells clanged alarm during services and the City Brigade, comprised of 3,185 infantry, riflemen, cavalry and artillery under Brigadier General John Stricker set out down Long Log Lane (North Point Road) to check the British landing. They encamped for the night near Patapsco Neck Methodist Meeting House, about 7 miles from Baltimore and halfway between the city and the point. Scouts advanced another three miles, supported by a cavalry detachment.

By 7 o'clock next morning the British force of some 3,000 veterans of the Napoleonic Wars and 2,000 sailors, led by General Ross and Admiral Cockburn, had disembarked. They carried as little gear as possible, three days cooked rations and 80 rounds of ammunition—20 more than standard issue. Bomb vessels and other ships stood off towards Baltimore for their phase of the attack.

Ross, confident of another rapid rout of any militia that faced him, paused at farmer Robert Gorsuch's to eat breakfast. As he left the farm with Cockburn, Ross was asked his destination. "We are going to Baltimore," he replied. Reminded that he might meet opposition, it is said that the general asserted, "I will eat supper in Baltimore—or in hell."

This apocryphal remark was prophetic, for within a few miles the invaders encountered an advance

party from Stricker's force, the main body of which he had deployed through Godley Wood, astride the mile-wide peninsula, in a line from Bread and Cheese Creek off Back River on the north to Bear Creek off the Patapsco on the south.

Ross, on a white horse, rode forward to observe the skirmish; shots rang out and the British commander fell, mortally wounded. Tradition credits Privates Daniel Wells and Henry M. McComas as the sharpshooters. Both were killed shortly after Ross fell.

Command fell to Colonel Arthur Brooke, of the 44th Regiment, whom Lieutenant George Robert Gleig, of the 85th Regiment, described as "an officer of decided personal courage, but, perhaps, better calculated to lead a battalion than to guide an army...".

The redcoat advance continued and found the American line. There was a barrage of screeching rockets. American and British artillery duelled briefly. Despite some confusion and even panic among the militia, the American line withstood attack for an hour until the American left was turned and Stricker ordered withdrawal to his second line of defense, 1/2 mile to his rear. Brooke did not follow. Later that night Stricker pulled out, his mission, to check the British, accomplished. American casualties were 35 killed, 115 wounded or missing. British losses were estimated at twice those numbers.

September 13 began wet and dreary. The British moved out at dawn, leaving behind nearly all personal equipment. It was slow going; the retreating Americans had felled trees across the road. Gleig reports that this so delayed the column that it did not sight the American lines until near evening, and then came the shock: "It now appeared that the corps which we had beaten yesterday was only a detachment, and not a large one, from the force collected for the defense of Baltimore."

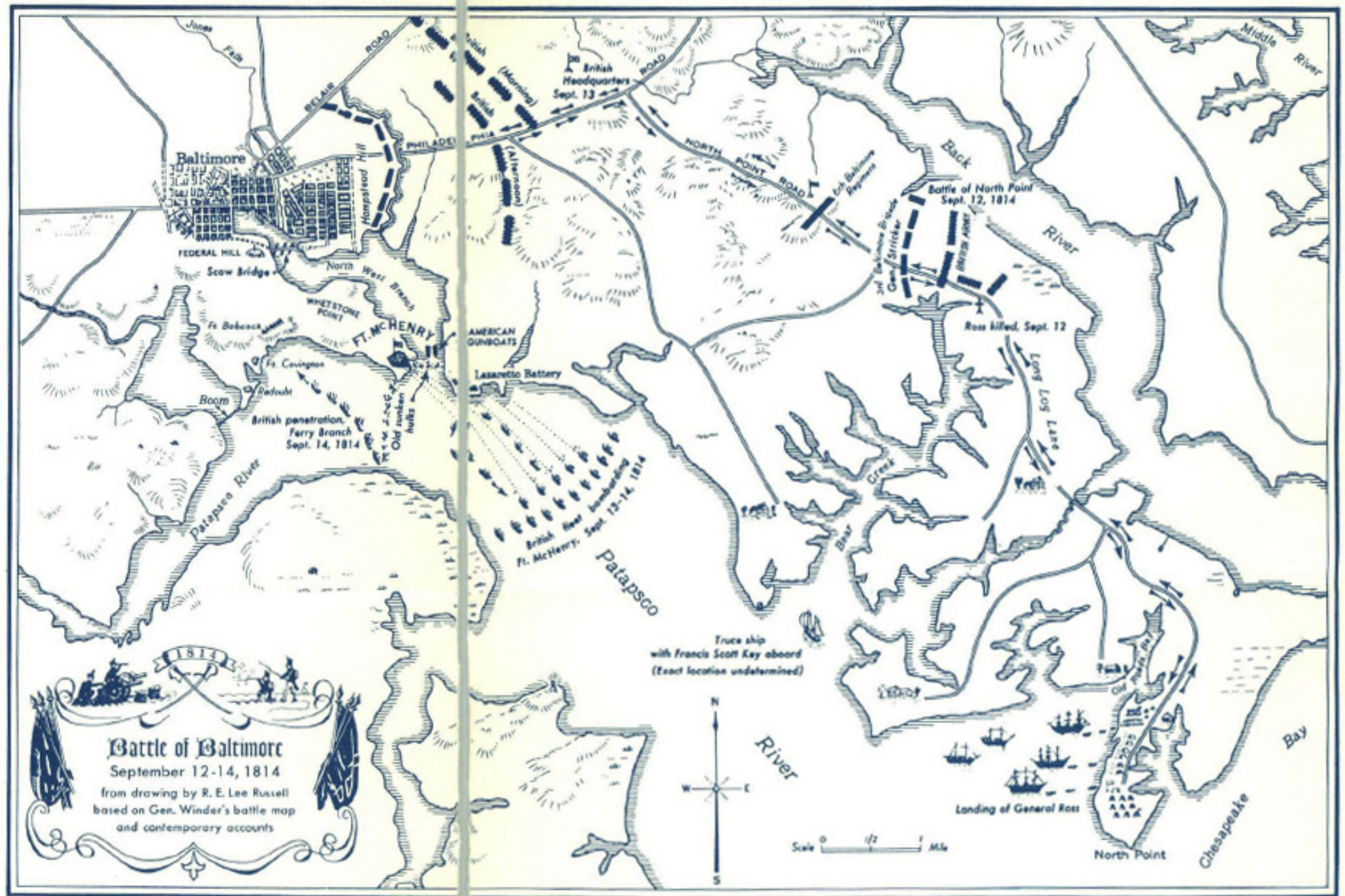
Brooke again tried to outflank the American left, but General Smith had anticipated him and the night before had extended his lines. Frustrated, the colonel moved to his left front, driving in the Yankee pickets and advancing to within a mile of the entrenchments.

Here, after reconnaissance, Brooke became convinced that he faced an army of 20,000 men, strongly entrenched and backed by heavy guns. He messaged the commander of the operation, Vice Admiral Cochrane, for naval support.

But Cochrane did not have any help to send. Since daybreak his ships had rained rockets and 190 pound mortar "bombs" on Fort McHenry without result; he was stopped cold, and eventually ordered Brooke not to attack unless he was certain of victory.

Meanwhile, from Loudenslager's Hill, the defenders could see the 30 by 42 foot, 15-star 15-stripe "Star Spangled Banner" waving defiantly over Fort McHenry. Admiral Cochrane could see it, too; a galling sight.

During the morning the British projectiles had little effect on the Fort, most of them passing overhead. About 2 P.M., however, one crashed into a bastion, inflicting several casualties and dismounting a gun.



Cochrane took advantage of the ensuing confusion and several ships stood in to close range. Armistead's gunners opened a blistering fire and soon forced them back.

The British naval thrust stalled, too, but still the invaders hurled bombs and rockets at Fort McHenry.

As night fell, an other who watched intently the banner streaming over the Fort was Francis Scott Key, a young Frederick lawyer. He had joined the British fleet aboard a cartel to seek release of Dr. William Beanes, of Upper Marlboro, who was ar-

rested during the British retirement from Washington for his part in jailing British stragglers. Cochrane detained them to prevent their revealing his plans to the defenders.

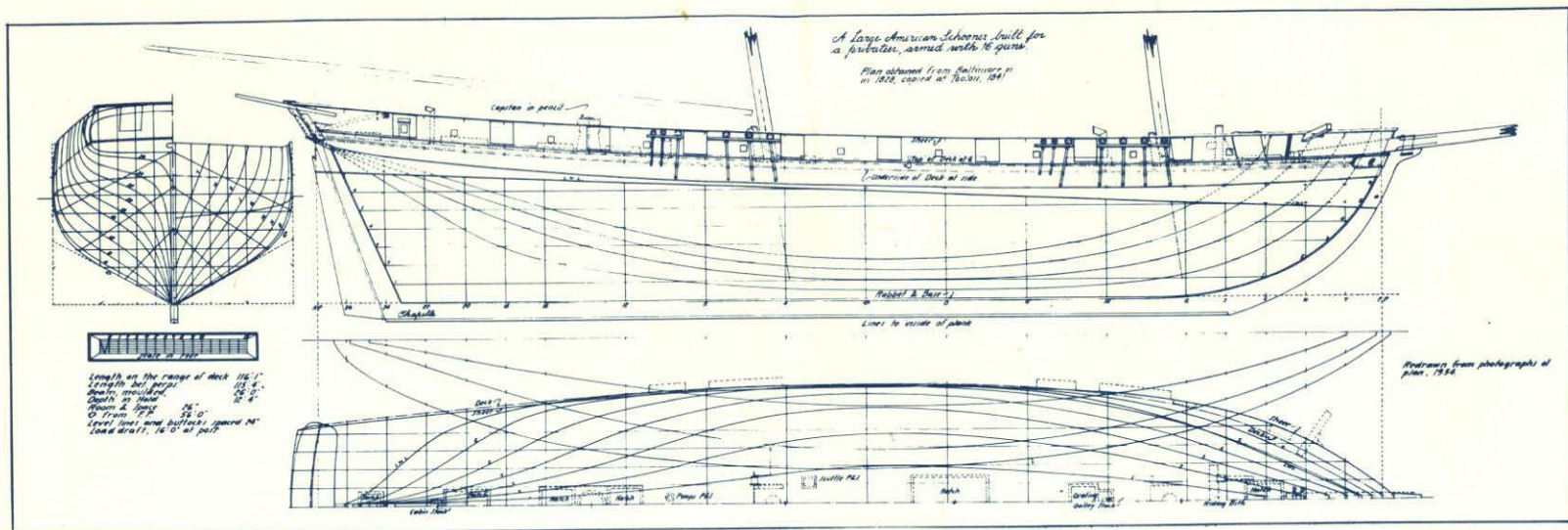
Dr. Beanes inquired repeatedly if the flag still flew, and until dark, Key answered that it did. Then—only hope.

The British fleet kept at it. The bombardment heightened and under cover of dark and rain, a force of 1,250 men was boated and attempted to outflank Fort McHenry by the Ferry Branch. The gunners in

Fort Babcock stood alert, however, and opened fire; the batteries of McHenry, Covington and Lazaretto Point joined in. The British tried to get at Fort Covington for two hours, but the fort held. The British envelopment had failed. Cochrane advised Brooke to return to the transports.

The bombardment of McHenry continued through the night, however. It is estimated that from 1500 to 1800 rounds fell on or near it within a 25 hour period. But at dawn, September 14, Key's anxious eyes saw the tattered emblem still flying over Fort

Courtesy Maryland Historical Society and National Park Service



Hitherto unpublished plans of a Baltimore Clipper Schooner thought to be those of the famous *Chasseur*, built at Baltimore in 1813 by Thomas Kemp.

Considered the best equipped and manned privateer in the War of 1812, during most of her cruises she was commanded by Captain Thomas Boyle. The latter is noted not only for his success as a privateersman, but for his considerable sense of humor. While in English waters he sent a "Proclamation" to Lloyd's of London, which speaks for itself:

PROCLAMATION

Whereas, it has been customary with the admirals of Great Britain commanding small forces on the coast of the United States, particularly with Sir John Borlase Warren and Sir Alexander Cochrane to declare the coast of the said United States in a state of strict and rigorous blockade, without possessing the power to justify such a declaration, or stationing an adequate force to command such a blockade.

I do, therefore, by virtue of the power and authority in me vested (possessing sufficient force) declare all the ports, harbours, bays, creeks, rivers, inlets, outlets, islands and sea coasts of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland in a state of strict and rigorous blockade, and I do further declare that I consider the forces under my command adequate to maintain strictly, rigorously and effectually, the said blockade.

And, I do hereby require the respective officers, whether captains, or commanding officers, under my command, employed or to be employed on the coasts of England, Ireland and Scotland, to pay strict attention to this my proclamation.

And, I hereby caution and forbid the ships and vessels of all and every nation, in amity and peace with the United States, from entering or attempting to enter or from coming or attempting to come out of any of the said ports, harbours, bays, creeks, rivers, inlets, outlets, islands or sea coasts, on or under any

Courtesy Smithsonian Institution

pretence whatever; and that no person may plead ignorance of this my proclamation, I have ordered the same to be made public in England. Given under my hand on board the *Chasseur*,

Thomas Boyle

By Command of the Commanding Officer

J. B. Stansbury, Secretary

The *Chasseur* mounted 16 long 12-pounders and carried a complement of about 100 officers and men. She was swift and deadly. The consternation and losses she and Baltimore-built vessels like her caused Lloyd's Insurance Brokers was due to the heavy blows they dealt the British Merchant Marine. There was more truth in Boyle's proclamation than the British cared to admit.

Baltimore's ships took the war to England in 1812 and 1813. In 1814 England was determined to carry it to Baltimore.

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Courtesy Llewellyn W. Lord, Jr.

Baltimore was not going to be like Bladensburg. American artillery catches a group of the Bucks Volunteer Light Infantry (85th Foot) crossing a fence on Boulden's Farm at the Battle of Godley Wood.

McHenry. His emotions at fever pitch, he began jotting notes on the back of a letter for a poem that had been going through his mind during the siege.

The 33 year old attorney worked on it all day after his release and finished that night. Next day it appeared in handbill form as "Defense of Fort McHenry." Set to the tune of "To Anacreon in Heaven," a popular English drinking song, it was soon heard in the rejoicing city.

Frustrated on land and sea, the British retreated. On September 15 Brooke re-embarked his troops and the fleet left the river. The invaders harassed towns along the bay until December 18 when they left the Chesapeake for good—taught a sharp lesson aptly expressed by Key: "Thus be it ever when free men shall stand . . .".

Published by the Committee for the 1964 Annual Meeting of The Company of Military Historians at Baltimore, Maryland, and affectionately dedicated to the memory of its Chairman

LT. COL. JOHN S. VANB. SHRIVER, U.S.A.R.

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