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BATTLE OF BLADENSBURG - 1814

Compiled by Donald F. Stewart

1958 - 1964

British Admiralty Archives; Admiral Cockburn's Plan in Letter Book, 1813-1814

"On the second of June the British 74-gun ship Royal Oak, Rear-Admiral Pulteney Malcolm, Captain Edward Dix, accompanied by three frigates, three sloops, two bomb-vessels, five ships armed en flûte, and three transports having on board a body of troops under Major-General Ross, sailed from Verdon road at the mouth of the Gironde. On the twenty-fourth of July the squadron arrived at Bermuda, and there joined me, in the 80-gun ship Tonnant. On the second of August, having received on board the Tonnant Major-General Ross and his staff, I sailed, in company with the 36-gun frigate Euryalus, Captain Charles Napier, for Chesapeake Bay; and on the fourteenth of August arrived, and joined the Albion, under my command, off the mouth of the Potomac. On the next day Major-General Ross, accompanied by me, went on shore to reconnoitre.

My knowledge of the country, as well as the plan adopted to prevent surprise, enabled us to penetrate further than would otherwise have been prudent. In my frequent walks through the country he invariably moved forward between two parties of marines, occupying in open order the woods by the roadside. Each marine carried a bugle, to be used as a signal, in case of casual separation, or the appearance of an ememy. It was during the excursion with General Ross, that I suggested the facility of an attack upon the City of Washington; and General Ross determined, as soon as the troops should arrive from Bermuda, to make the attempt.

On the seventeenth of August, Rear-Admiral Malcolm arrived with the troops, and joined me off the mouth of the Potomac; and the whole proceeded to the Patuxent, situated about twenty miles further up the bay. In the meantime Captain James Alexander Gordon, of the 38-gun frigate Seahorse, with

some vessels of the squadron, had been detached up the Potomac, to bombard Fort Washington, situated on the left bank of that river, about fourteen miles below the federal city; and Captain Sir Peter Parker, with the 38-gun frigate Menelaus, had been sent up the Chesapeake, above Baltimore, to create a diversion in that quarter. The direct route to Washington, from the mouth of the Potomac, was up that river, about fifty miles to Port Tobacco; thence, overland by the village of Piscataway, thirty-two miles, to the lower bridge across the eastern branch of the Potomac; but, as no doubt could be entertained that this bridge, which was half a mile long, and had a draw at the west end, would be defended as well by a body of troops, as by a heavy sloop-of-war and an armed schooner, known to be in the river, a preference was given to the route up the Patuxent, and by Bladensburg; where the eastern branch, in case of the bridge at that spot being destroyed, could be easily forded.

Commodore Barney's gun-boats were still lying in the Patuxent. An immediate attempt against this flotilla offered two advantages; one, in its capture or destruction; the other, as a pretext for ascending the Patuxent, with the troops destined for the attack of the federal city. Part of the ships, having advanced as high up the river as the depth of the water would allow, disembarked the troops, about four thousand in number, on the 19th and 20th of August, at Benedict, a small town about fifty miles southeast of Washington. On the 20th, in the evening, Admiral Cockburn, taking with him the armed boats and tenders of the fleet, having on board the marines under Major Robyns, and the marine-artillery under Captain James H. Harrison, proceeded up the river, to attack Commodore Barney's flotilla; and to supply with provisions, and, if necessary, afford protection to the army as it ascended the right bank. The boats and tenders were separated into three divisions. The first division was commanded by Captains Thomas Ball Sullivan

and William Stanhope Badcock, the second, by Captains Rowland Money and James Somervell, and the third, by Captain Robert Ramsay; and the whole was under the superintendence and immediate management of Captain John Wainwright, of the Tonnant. The frigates Severn and Hebrus, Captains Joseph Nourse and Edmund Palmer, accompanied by the brig-sloop Manly, Captain Vincent Newton, had been also directed to follow the boats up the river as far as might be practicable.

On opening the reach about Pig Point, I, who had just before been joined by Captains Nourse and Palmer with the boats of their two frigates, which they could get no higher than Benedict, discovered Commodore Barney's broad pennant in the headmost vessel, a large sloop, and the remainder of the flotilla extending in a long line astern of her. The British boats now advanced as rapidly as possible, but on nearing the flotilla, the sloop bearing the broad pennant was observed to be on fire, and soon afterwards blew up; as did fifteen out of the sixteen remaining gun-boats."

G. R. Gleig - Captain

Gleig Reports - British Archives

on

Bladensburg

Washington

Having started on the 24th at an early hour, our march was for some time both cool and agreeable. The road-- if road it could be called---wound for the first five miles through the heart of an immense forest, and being, in every sense of the word, a by-path, was completely overshadowed by projecting branches of trees, so closely interwoven,as to prevent a single sunbeam from making its way, even at noon, within the arch. We continued to move on, therefore, long after the sun had risen, without being sensible that there was not a cloud in the sky to screen us from his influence; whilst a heavy moisture continually emitted from the grass and weeds on both sides of us, produced a coolness, which, had it been less confined, would have proved extremely pleasant. So far, then, we proceeded without experiencing any other inconvenience than what was produced by the damp and fetid atmosphere which we breathed; but no sooner had we begun to emerge from the woods and to enter the open country, than an overpowering change was perceived. The sun, from which we had been hitherto defended, now beat upon us in full force; and the dust arising in thick masses from under our feet, without a breath of air to disperse it, flew directly into our faces, occasioning the greatest inconvenience both to the eyes and respiration. I have stated this at length, because I do not recollect a period of my military life during which I suffered more severely from heat and fatigue; and as a journey of a few miles, under such circumstances, tells more than one of thrice the distance in a cool day and along a firm wintry road, it is not surprising that before many hours had elapsed numbers of men began to fall behind from absolute inability to keep up.

Yet, in spite of all this, there was that in to-day's march which rendered it infinitely more interesting than any we had performed since the landing.

We had learnt, from various quarters, that the enemy was concentrating his forces for the purpose of hazarding a battle in defence of his capital. The truth of these rumors we had no cause to doubt, confirmed as they were by what we had ourselves witnessed only the evening before; indeed the aspect of various fields on each side of the high road (which we had now regained), where smoking ashes, bundles of straw, and remnants of broken victuals were scattered about, indicated that considerable bodies of troops had passed the night in this neighborhood. The appearance of the road itself, likewise, imprinted as it was with fresh marks of many feet and hoofs, proved that these troops could be no great way before us; whilst our very proximity to Washington, being now distant from it not more than ten or twelve miles, all tended to assure us that we should at least see an American army before dark....

We had now proceeded about nine miles, during the last four of which the sun's rays had beat continually upon us, and we had inhaled almost as great a quantity of dust as of air. Numbers of men had already fallen to the rear, and many more could with difficulty keep up; consequently, if we pushed on much farther without resting, the chances were that at least half of the army would be left behind. To prevent this from happening, and to give time for the stragglers to overtake the column, a halt was determined upon, and being led forward to a spot of ground well wooded,and watered by a stream which crossed the road, the troops were ordered to refresh themselves. Perhaps no halt ever arrived more seasonably than this, or bid fair to be productive of more beneficial effects; yet so oppressive was the heat, that we had not resumed our march above an hour, when the banks by the wayside were again covered with stragglers; some of the finest and stoutest men in the army being literally unable to go on.

The hour of noon was approaching, when a heavy cloud of dust, apparently not more than two or three miles distant, attracted our attention. From whence it originated there was little difficulty in guessing, nor did many minutes expire before surmise was changed into certainty; for on turning a sudden angle in the road, and passing a small plantation, which obstructed the vision toward the left, the British and American armies became visible to one another. The position occupied by the latter was one of great strength and commanding attitude. They were drawn up in three lines upon the brow of a hill, having their front and left flanks covered by a branch of the Potomac, and their right resting upon a thick wood and a deep ravine. This river flowed between the heights occupied by the American forces and the light town of Bladensburg. Across it was thrown a narrow bridge, extending from the chief street in that town to the continuation of the road, which passed through the very center of their position; and its right bank (the bank above which they were drawn up) was covered with a narrow strip of willows and larch trees, whilst the left was altogether bare, low and exposed. Such was the general aspect of their position as at the first glance it presented itself; of which I must endeavor to give a more detailed account, that my description of the battle may be in some degree intelligible.

I have said that the right bank of the Potomac was covered with a narrow strip of willow and larch trees. Here the Americans had stationed strong bodies of riflemen, who in skirmishing order, covered the whole front of their army. Behind this plantation, again, the fields were open and clear, intersected at certain distances by rows of high and strong palings. About the middle of the ascent, and in the rear of one of these rows, stood the first line, composed entirely of infantry; and at a proper interval from this, and in a similar situation, stood the second line; while the third, or reserve, was posted within the skirts of a wood, which crowned the heights. The artillery, again, of which they had twenty pieces in the field, was thus arranged:

On the high road and commanding the bridge, stood two heavy guns; and four more, two on each side of the road, swept partly in the same direction, and partly down the whole of the slope into the streets of Bladensburg. The rest were scattered, with no great judgment, along the second line of infantry, occupying different spaces between the right of one regiment and the left of another; whilst the cavalry showed itself in one mass, within a stubble field, near the extreme left of the position. Such was the nature of the ground which they occupied, and the formidable posture in which they waited our approach; amounting by their own account, to nine thousand men, a number exactly doubling that of the force which was to attack them.

In the meantime, our column continued to advance in the same order which it had hitherto preserved. The road, having conducted us for about two miles in a direction parallel with the river, and of consequence with the enemy's line, suddenly turned, and led directly towards the town of Bladensburg. Being of course ignorant whether this town might not be filled with American troops, the main body paused here till the advanced guard should reconnoitre. The result proved that no opposition was intended in that quarter, and while the whole of the enemy's army had been withdrawn to the opposite side of the stream, whereupon the column was again put in motion, and in a short time arrived in the streets of Bladensburg, and within range of the American artillery. Immediately on our reaching this point, several of their guns opened upon us, and kept up a quick and well-directed cannonade, from which, as we were again commanded to halt, the men were directed to shelter themselves as much as possible behind the houses. The object of this halt, it was conjectured, was to give the General an opportunity of examining the American line, and of trying the depth of the river, because at present, there appeared to be but one practicable mode of attack, by crossing the bridge, and taking the enemy directly in front. To do so,

however, exposed as the bridge was, must be attended with bloody consequences, nor could the delay of a few minutes produce any mischief which the discovery of a ford would not amply compensate.

But in this conjecture we were altogether mistaken; for without allowing time to the column to close its ranks, or to be joined by such of the many stragglers as were now hurrying, as fast as weariness would permit, to regain their places, the order to halt was countermanded, and the word given to attack, and we immediately pushed on at a double quick time, towards the head of the bridge. While we were moving along the street, a continued fire was kept up, with some execution, from those guns which stood to the left of the road; but it was not till the bridge was covered with our people that the two-gun battery upon the road itself began to play. Then, indeed, it also opened, and with tremendous effect; for at the first discharge almost an entire company was swept down; but whether it was that the guns had been previously laid with measured exactness, or that the nerves of the gunners became afterwards unsteady, the succeeding discharges were much less fatal. The riflemen likewise began to gall us from the wooded bank with a running fire of musketry; and it was not without trampling upon many of their dead and dying comrades that the light brigade established itself on the opposite side of the stream.

When once there, however, everything else appeared easy. Wheeling off to the right and left of the road, they dashed into the thicket, and quickly cleared it of the American skirmishers; who, falling back with precipitation upon the first line, threw it into disorder before it had fired a shot. The consequence was, that our troops had scarcely shown themselves when the whole of that line gave way and fled in the greatest confusion, leaving the

two guns upon the road in possession of the victors.

But here it must be confessed that the light brigade was guilty of imprudence. Instead of pausing till the rest of the army came up, the soldiers lightened themselves by throwing away their knapsacks and haversacks; and extending their ranks so as to show an equal front with the enemy, pushed on to the attack of the second line. The Americans, however, saw their weakness, and stood firm, and having the whole of their artillery, with the exception of the pieces captured on the road, and the greater part of their infantry in this line, they first checked the ardour of the assailants by a heavy fire, and then, in their turn, advanced to recover the ground which was lost. Against this charge the extended order of the British troops would not permit them to offer an effectual resistance, and they were accordingly borne back to the very thicket upon the river's brink; where they maintained themselves with determined obstinacy, repelling all attempts to drive them through it; and frequently following, to within a short distance of the cannon's mouth, such parts of the enemy's line as gave way.

In this state the action continued till the second brigade had likewise crossed, and formed upon the right bank of the river; when the 44th regiment moving to the right, and driving in the skirmishers, debouched upon the left flank of the Americans and completely turned it. In that quarter, therefore, the battle was won; because the raw militia-men, who were stationed there as being the least assailable point, when once broken could not be rallied. But on their right the enemy still kept their ground with much resolution; nor was it until the arrival of the 4th regiment, and the advance of the British forces in firm array to the charge, that they began to waver. Then, indeed, seeing their left in full flight, and the 44th getting in their rear, they lost all order and dispersed, leaving clouds of riflemen to cover

their retreat, and hastened to conceal themselves in the woods, where it would have been madness to follow them. The rout was general throughout the line. The reserve, which ought to have supported the main body, fled as soon as those in its front began to give way; and the cavalry, instead of charging the British troops now scattered in pursuit, turned their horses heads and galloped off, leaving them in undisputed possession of the field, and of ten out of the twenty pieces of artillery.

This battle, by which the fate of the American capital was decided, began about one o'clock in the afternoon, and lasted till four. The loss on the part of the English was severe, since, out of two-thirds of the army, which were engaged, upwards of five hundred men were killed and wounded; and what rendered it doubly severe was, that among these were numbered several officers of rank and distinction. Colonel Thornton, who commanded the light brigade, Lieutenant-Colonel Wood, commanding the 85th regiment, and Major Brown, who led the advanced guard, were all severely wounded; and General Ross himself had a horse shot under him. On the side of the Americans the slaughter was not so great. Being in possession of a strong position they were of course less exposed in defending than the others in storming it; and had they conducted themselves with coolness and resolution, it isnot conceivable how the battle could have been won. But the fact is, that, with the exception of a party of sailors from the gun-boats, under the command of Commodore Barney, no troops could behave worse than they did. The skirmishers were driven in as soon as attacked, the first line gave way without offering the slightest resistance, and the left of the main body was broken within half an hour after it was seriously engaged. Of the sailors,however, it would be injustice not to speak in the terms which their conduct merits. They

were employed as gunners, and not only did they serve their guns with quickness and precision which astonished their assailants, but they stood till some of them were actually bayoneted with fuses in their hands; nor was it till their leader was wounded and taken, and they saw themselves deserted on all sides by the soldiers, that they quitted the field. With respect to the British army, again, no line of distinction can be drawn. All did their duty, and none more gallantly than the rest; and though the brunt of the affair fell upon the light brigade, this was owing chiefly to the circumstance of its being at the head of the column and perhaps also, in some degree, to its own rash impetuosity. The artillery, indeed, could do little, being unable to show itself in presence of a force so superior; but the 6-pounder was nevertheless brought into action, and a corps of rockets proved of striking utility.

Our troops being worn down from fatigue, and of course as ignorant of the country as the Americans were the reverse, the pursuit could not be continued to any distance. Neither was it attended with much slaughter. Diving into the recesses of the forests, and covering themselves with riflemen, the enemy were quickly beyond our reach; and having no cavalry to scour even the high road, ten of the lightest of their guns were carried off in the flight. The defeat, however, was absolute, and the army which had been collected for the defence of Washington was scattered beyond the possibility of, at least, an immediate reunion; and as the distance from Bladensburg to that city does not exceed four miles, there appeared to be no further obstacle in the way to prevent its immediate capture."

Pictorial Field Book - War of 1812

Benson J. Lossing Papers.

1867 Publication

...The government was aroused to a sense of danger and responsibility by intelligence that a number of the largest class of transports had been fitted out at Portsmouth, England, "as well as all troop-ships in that port," for the purpose, it was believed, of going to Bordeaux and taking on board there the most effective of Wellington's regiments and conveying them to the United States. This was confirmed at near the close of June by the arrival at New York of a cartel from Bermuda, which brought intelligence that she left at that port "a fleet of transports, with a large force, bound to some port in the United States, probably the Potomac." Official intelligence of this fact reached the government on the 26th, and on the 1st of July the President called a cabinet council and laid before them a well-considered plan of defense against threatened invasion, which had been suggested, if not actually prepared, by General William H. Winder, who had lately been exchanged, and had returned from Canada.[2] It contemplated the establishment of a camp of regular troops, two or three thousand strong, somewhere between the Eastern Branch of the Potomac and the Patuxent Rivers, in Maryland, and the concentration of ten thousand militia in the vicinity of Washington City.

The Cabinet approved the President's plan.[1] A new military

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2. Letter to the Secretary of War, June 30, 1814, in Winder's Letter-Book.

1. The Secretary of War could not be made to believe, even as late as August, when the enemy was almost at the door of the capital, that Washington City was his object. "What the devil will they do here?" was his question to one who expressed a belief that the capital was in danger. "No, no; Baltimore is the place, sir; that is of so much more consequence."---Statement of General Van Ness before a Committee of Inquiry. In his Notices of the War of 1812, the Secretary says that the attack on Washington was an after-thought of Admiral Cochrane when he had caused the destruction of Barney's flotilla. Cochrane, in a letter to the Board of Admiralty in September, says that the presence of a flotilla at the head of the Patuxent gave him a "pretext for ascending that river," while "the ultimate destination of the

district, entitled the Tenth, was formed, comprising Maryland, the District of Columbia, and the portions of Eastern Virginia lying between the Potomac and Rappahannock Rivers. Brigadier General Winder was appointed to the command of it, and the government made a requisition upon the several States for militia to the aggregate of ninety-three thousand men, who were to be organized at home and held in readiness.[3] The District of Columbia and the State of Maryland were called upon to furnish their respective quotas immediately, the former being two thousand men and the latter six thousand. Pennsylvania was directed to send five thousand and Virginia two thousand to the militia rendezvous at once. The naval defenses were intrusted to Commodore Barney, a veteran commander, who was in the Patuxent with a small flotilla of gun-boats.

In official orders there appeared an army of fifteen thousand militia for the defense of Washington, and General Winder was envied as the fortunate commander of a larger force than had yet

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combined force was Washington, should it be found that the attempt might be made with any prospect of success." And at the beginning of August, a letter, written by some one on compulsory duty in the British fleet in the Chesapeake, dated July 27th, was placed in Winder's hands, and submitted to the Secretary of War, in which the intentions of the enemy to rush to the capital were fully revealed. "The manner in which they intend doing it is," said the writer, "to take advantage of a fair wind in ascending the Patuxent, and, after having ascended it a certain distance, to land their men at once and to make all possible dispatch to the capital, batter it down, and then return to their vessels immediately. In doing this there is calculated to be employed upward of seven thousand men."----Winder Papers.

3. The requisition upon the several States was as follows: New Hampshire, 3500; Massachusetts, 10,000; Rhode Island, 500; Connecticut, 3000; New York, 13, 5000; New Jersey, 5000; Pennsylvania, 14,000; Delaware, 1000; Maryland 6000; Virginia, 12,000; North Carolina, 7000; South Carolina, 5000; Georgia, 3500; Kentucky, 5500; Tennessee, 2500; Louisiana, 1000; Mississippi Territory, 500. Of this force 8400 were to be artillery, and the remainder infantry.

appeared in the field. But that army remained hidden in official paragraphs, and only a small portion of it confronted the invader, for he came before the States on whom the government had made a requisition for militia had moved in the matter. There was extraordinary tardiness every where, and indications of the most fatal official apathy or weakness. The Governor of Maryland, residing within an easy day's ride of the War Office, did not receive a copy of that requisition until six days after it was ordered; and the Governor of Pennsylvania did not receive his until ten days afterward. And it was not until the day when the British appeared in heavy force in Chesapeake Bay (July 12, 1814) that the Secretary of War placed a copy of it in the hands of General Winder, and then it was accompanied by a cautious order directing him, in the event of an invasion, to call for a part or the whole quota required of Maryland, but to "be careful to avoid unnecessary calls, and to apportion the call to the exigency."[1] Five days afterward another order from the War Department reached him, which gave him authority to draw, in addition to the Maryland quota, two thousand men from Virginia and five thousand from Pennsylvania, and assuring him that the whole of the militia of the District of Columbia, amounting to about two thousand, were kept in a disposable state, and subject to his orders.

General Winder had comprehended the difficulties of the situation from the beginning. As early as the 9th of July, before he had received notice of his appointment of the command, he wrote a letter to the Secretary of War, full of sound advice, wholesome warning, and sagacious predictions, but that functionary never deigned to reply to it.[2]

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1. The Secretary of War, as we have seen, did not believe that the British would attempt to penetrate to Washington; and on the day when he gave this cautious order, the National Intelligencer (the government organ) said, "It is not probable they will be required to be embodied unless the enemy should attempt to execute his threats of invasion."

2. Autograph Letter, Winder Papers: Report of an Investigating Committee of Congress.

He issued orders in accordance with his own judgment alone, and with an apparent obliviousness to stern facts---orders which implied the organization and readiness of the troops mentioned when there was not a shadow of such force in existence. The Governor of Maryland (Levin Winder), after issuing drafts for three thousand men, found that scarcely so many hundreds could be collected; and the Governor of Pennsylvania informed the Secretary of War that, in consequence of the defect of the militia laws of that commonwealth, the executive had no power to enforce the draft.

General Winder entered upon his duties with alacrity, under the inspiration of seductive promises by the government; and, notwithstanding he was soon made to feel that he was the victim of official incompetency, he was untiring in his exertions to make the defense of the District a certainty. He visited every part of the region to be defended, inspecting every fortification under his command, and reconnoitring every position thought to be favorable for the defense of the capital. He was in daily communication with the government, giving information, sounding notes of alarm, and making wise suggestions. "The door of Washington" (meaning Annapolis), he wrote on the 16th of July, "is wide open, and can not be shut with the few troops under my command." Fort Madison there was utterly defenseless, and too unhealthful for a garrison to occupy it. He warned the government that its heavy armament might be easily seized by the invaders, and turned upon the town and Fort Severn with fatal effect.[4] He begged in vain for efforts to save that post, and made stirring appeals to the people to come forward for the defense of the state. Yet, notwithstanding the danger that threatened, and his great personal popularity, heightened by good deeds on the Northern frontier, Winder was compelled to report on the 1st of August that he had actually in camp only one thousand regulars, and about four thousand militia enrolled, a larger proportion of them yet to be collected. The government had neglected to call for cavalry and riflemen, very important branches of the service.

While these feeble efforts were in operation the enemy appeared in strong force. On the 16th of August the small British squadron in the Chesapeake was re-enforced by a fleet of twenty-one vessels under Admiral Sir Alexander Cochrane, the senior commander on the American station. These were soon joined by another under Commodore Sir Charles Malcolm. These vessels bore several thousand land troops commanded by General Ross, and Irish officer, and one of Wellington's most active leaders. Washington and Baltimore appear to have been chosen objects of atttack simultaneously. A part of the British naval force, under Captain Gordon, went up the Potomac, and another portion, under Sir Peter Parker, went up the Chesapeake toward Baltimore.

At that time Commodore Barney, with a flotilla of thirteen armed barges and the schooner Scorpion, with an aggregate of about five hundred men, was in the Patuxent River. His vessels had been chased out of the Chesapeake, and blockaded in St. Leonard's Bay. Of this confinement they were relieved by some artillery under Colonel Henry Carbery,[1] with which he drove away the Loire, the blockading frigate, when the released flotilla went up the Patuxent, first to Benedict, and then to Nottingham, that it might be within co-operating distance of both Washington and Baltimore. Seeing this, the British determined to capture or destroy it, and on the 18th of August a force of a little more than five thousand men, composed of regulars, marines, and negroes,[2] went up the Patuxent, and landed at Benedict with three cannon under cover of an armed brig. Most of the other large British vessels were below, some of them aground, and all too heavy to ascend the comparatively shallow stream.

Barney, then at Nottingham,[3] promptly informed the Navy Depart-

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2. These "disciplined negroes" had been forced by threats, and bribed by promises of freedom, to enter the British service.

3. Barney had been very active with his flotilla in opposing the marauding expeditions of the British. On the 9th of July he wrote from Nottingham to a friend, saying, "Six times in one month I have beat the enemy, always increasing in their force, so that I believe they are tired of me. They now lie at the mouth of the Patuxent."--- Autograph Letter.

ment of this movement, and of a boast of the British admiral that he would destroy the American flotilla, and dine in Washington the following Sunday. General Winder, by direction of the War Department, immediately ordered General Samuel Smith's division (the Third) of the Maryland militia into actual service. He also called upon General John P. Van Ness, (August 18, 1814) commander of the militia of the District of Columbia, for two brigades, to be encamped near Alexandria; and he sent a circular letter (August 19) to all the brigadiers of the Maryland militia, asking for volunteers to the amount of one half of their respective commands. By his orders, his adjutant general, Hite, issued a stirring appeal to the citizens to come forward, "without regard to sacrifices and privations," in defense of the national capital. Winder also asked General Stricker, of Baltimore, to send to Washington his volunteer regiments of infantry and his rifle batallion. These calls for volunteers were approved by the Secretary of War, who enjoined Winder so to word the requisition as "to guard against interfering with the legal draft."[4]

The veteran patriot, General Smith, promptly responded to the call of the government. He at once issued a division order, (August 19, 1814) in which he gave notice of the invasion, and directed the whole of General Stansbury's brigade (the Third) to be held in readiness for active service, adding, "The third brigade is now under the pay of the United States, in its service, and subject to the Articles of War."[1] That corps General Smith declared to be "the finest set of men he ever saw."[2] They paraded at four o'clock the same day, and on the following morning General Stansbury[3] left Baltimore for Washington with thirteen hundred of

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4. Autograph Letter, Winder Papers.

1. General Smith's MS. Order-book. I am indebted to the kind courtesy of General John Spear Smith, of Baltimore, son of General Samuel Smith, and his aid-de-camp in 1814, for the use of his father's military papers of this period.

2. Autograph Letter to General Winder.

3. Tobias E. Stansbury lived to the great age of ninety-three

his corps. Another force, under Lieutenant Colonel Joseph Sterett, consisting of the Fifth Regiment of Baltimore Volunteers, Major Pinkney's rifle battalion, and the artillery companies of Captains Myers and Magruder, left Baltimore on the evening of the 20th, and joined Stansbury on the evening of the 23d. With wise precaution, General Smith ordered (August 20) the eleventh brigade and Colonel Moore's cavalry to hold themselves in readiness to march to Baltimore at a moment's warning, for it seemed probable that the enemy would strike at both cities simultaneously. They were ordered to Baltimore on the 23d.

The British in the mean time had moved up the Patuxent from Benedict, the land troops being accompanied by a flotilla of launches and barges that kep abreast of them. The naval forces were under the command of the notorious marauder, Cockburn. They reached Lower Marlborough on the 21st, when Barney's flotilla, then in charge of Lieutenant Frazier and a sufficient number of men to destroy it if necessary, moved up to Pig Point, where some of the vessels grounded in the shallow water. Barney had landed with four hundred seamen and pushed on toward Winder's head-quarters, then at the Wood Yard, on the road between Upper Marlborough and Washington, and twelve miles from the latter, where he had established a slightly-intrenched camp. Frazier was instructed to destroy the flotilla at Pig Point rather than allow it to fall into the hands of the foe. This order was obeyed, and the flotilla was blown up on the morning of the 22d, when the enemy moved up from Nottingham in forty barges, and commenced firing upon it with cannon and rockets.[5] They found only the ruins of Barney's vessels at Pig Point. Their land force pressed forward to Upper Marlborough, whence a road led directly to Washington City, and there encamped, leaving Cockburn and the British flo-

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years. He was an active public man from the commencement of the Revolution almost to the time of his death, which occurred in Baltimore County, Maryland, on the 25th of October, 1849. He was repeated a member of the Maryland Legislature, and was Speaker of its House of Delegates. He always enjoyed the perfect confidence of his fellow-citizens.

5. Barney's autograph Letter to the Investigating Committee, October 30, 1814.

tilla at Pig Point.

Now let us see what forces were at the disposal of General Winder for the defense of Washington. There were two small brigades of District troops. One of these comprised the militia and volunteers of Washington and Georgetown, arranged in two regiments under Colonels Magruder and Brent, and was commanded by General Walter Smith, of Georgetown. Attached to the brigade were two companies of light artillery, commanded respectively by Major George Peter, of the regular army, and Captain Benjamin Burch, a soldier of the Revolution. There were also two rifle companies under Captains Doughty and Stull. This brigade numbered, on the morning of the 21st of August, one thousand and seventy men. The second brigade was commanded by General Robert Young, and numbered five hundred men. It comprised a company of artillery led by Captain Marsteller. It was chiefly employed in defending the approaches to Fort Washington, about twelve miles below the capital. Brigadier General West, of Prince George's County, had troops on the look-out toward the Potomac.

The troops from Baltimore comprised a greater portion of the brigade of General Stansbury, formed in two regiments under Lieutenant Colonels Ragan and Schutz, thirteen hundred and fifty in number; and the Fifth Regiment, under Colonel Sterett, with artillery and riflemen already mentioned, the latter under the celebrated William Pinkney. The whole force from Baltimore was about two thousand two hundred, commanded by General Stansbury as chief. Besides these there were various detachments of Maryland militia, under the respective command of Colonels W.D. Beall (of the Revolution) and Hood, Lieutenant Colonel Kramer, and Majors Waring and Maynard---in all less than twelve hundred. There was also a regiment of Virginia militia under Colonel George Minor, six hundred strong, with one hundred cavalry. The regular army contributed three hundred men from the Twelfth, Thirty-sixth and Thirty-eighth Regiments, under Lieutenant Colonel William Scott. To these must be added the sailors of Barney's flotilla,

four hundred, and one hundred and twenty marines from the navy yard at Washington, furnished with two 18-pounders and three 12-pounders. There were also various small companies of volunteer cavalry from the District, Maryland, and Virginia, under Lieutenant Colonel Tilghman, and Majors O.H. Williams and Charles Sterett, three hundred in number, and a squadron of United States dragoons commanded by Major Laval. The whole force was about seven thousand strong, of whom nine hundred were enlisted men. The cavalry did not exceed four hundred in number. The little army had twenty-six pieces of cannon, of which twenty were only 6-pounders. This force, if concentrated, would have been competent to roll back the invasion had the commanding officer been untrammeled by the interference of the President and his Cabinet.

Winder's vigilance was sleepless after the appearance of the invaders in the Patuxent. He was actively employed with the cavalry in reconnoitring; and on the morning of the 22d he ordered Lieutenant Colonel Scott's command, Laval's cavalry, Major Peter's artillery, and the rifle company of Stull, and another under Captain Davidson, acting as riflemen, with several field-pieces, numbering about eight hundred men, to proceed immediately to Nottingham, where the enemy had encamped during the night just passed, and reconnoitre and harass them. The remainder of Winder's force in hand was directed to follow in their support. The general himself, accompanied by his limited staff, proceeded in advance of the troops, and soon discovered the enemy moving up the river. He was convinced that an encounter with that overwhelming force would be perilous, and he ordered Scott and Peter to fall back to the Wood Yard and wait for him. The main body of the troops, under General W. Smith, had arrived in the mean time within two miles of the advance; and the whole American force, then within five miles of the invaders, including Barney's men and marines from the Washington Navy Yard, numbered about twenty-five hundred, fairly armed with muskets and rifles, and five pieces of heavy artillery.

On arriving at the junction of the roads leading respectively

to Marlborough and the Wood Yard, General Ross, who led the British column in person, turned into the latter with the seeming intention of pushing on toward Washington. He was induced to do so by Cockburn, who thirsted for plunder, and who argued that the prestige which the British would acquire by the capture of the metropolis of the republic would be of immense advantage to the cause, and that no doubt the government, to save the city, would make a liberal offer of money, a circumstance that would greatly increase the marauder's amount of prize-money. After proceeding a short distance, Ross changed his course and proceeded toward Marlborough. Winder deemed it prudent to avoid an encounter, and in the afternoon he retreated toward the capital, and encamped at a place called Long Old Battalion Fields, about eight miles from the city, where he might be within easy striking distance of Bladensburg, the bridges over the East Branch of the Potomac, and the road leading to Fort Washington.

Colonel James Monroe, the Secretary of State, who had been several days with Winder reconnoitring the enemy, and watching all military movements, believed that Washington was in great peril, for he well knew the weakness of the American forces. While Ross was yet advancing, and before he retraced his steps and went toward Marlborough, Monroe sent the following dispatch to the President:

> "The enemy are advanced six miles on the road to the Wood Yard, and our troops are retiring. Our troops were on the march to meet them, but in too small a body to engage. General Winder proposes to retire till he can collect them in a body. The enemy are in full march to Washington. Have the materials prepared to destroy the bridges.---
>
> J. Monroe.
>
> P.S.---You had better remove the records."[2]

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2. Mr. S. Pleasanton, then employed in the office of the Secretary of State, made immediate arrangements for the removal of the books and papers of the State Department. He had linen bags made in which they were placed, and then conveyed in carts across the Chain Bridge, over the Potomac, two miles above Georgetown, to the grist-mill of Edgar Patterson, in Virginia. Considering them unsafe there, Mr. Pleasanton had them conveyed to Leesburg,

This message produced the wildest excitement in the national capital, then a straggling town of between eight and nine thousand inhabitants, and caused a sudden and confused exodus of all the timid and helpless ones who were able to leave.

Winder's situation was an unenviable one. With a comparatively strong foe on his front, ready to fall upon him or the capital he was expected to defend, he had only about twenty-five hundred armed and effective men in camp, and many of these had been from their homes only three or four days. They were undisciplined and untried, and surrounded and influenced by a crowd of excited civilians, to whose "officious but well-intended information and advice" the general was compelled to listen. In addition to this intrusion and interference of common men, he was embarrassed by the presence and suggestions of the President and his Cabinet

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thirty-five miles from Washington, where they were locked up in an unoccupied house, and the keys given to the Rev. Mr. Littlejohn, who had been one of the collectors of the internal revenue. Thus the precious documents of the Revolutionary period and other valuable papers now in the Office of the Rolls at Washington City were saved from destruction. -----Autograph Letter of S. Pleasanton to General Winder, August 7, 1848. Mr. Pleasanton, in his account of this transaction, says: "While engaged in the passage-way of the buildings with the papers, the Department of State being on one side, and the War Department on the other side of the passage, General Armstrong, then Secretary of War, on his way to his own room, stopped a short time, and observed to me that he thought we were under unnecessary alarm, as he did not think the British were serious in their intentions of coming to Washington." To this belief the Secretary adhered until they were in full march upon the capital.

ministers, the most of them utterly ignorant of military affairs. Better would it have been for Winder and the country if these civilians, from the President down, had kept away from the camp and the field, and prudently preserved silence.

The fatigued little army at Long Old Fields had reposed but a short time when, at two o'clock in the morning (August 23), a timid sentinel gave a false alarm, and they were summoned to their feet in battle order. They were soon dismissed, and slept on their arms until dawn. At sunrise they were ordered to strike their tents, load the baggage wagons, and have every thing in readiness to move within an hour. When every thing was prepared for marching they were reviewed by President Madison. In the mean time Winder had ascertained from scouts that the British were resting quietly in their camp at Upper Marlborough, and he resolved to concentrate all the troops within his reach at some point between his present camp and that of the enemy. He accordingly sent orders to General Stansbury, at Bladensburg, to march with his own and Lieutenant Colonel Sterett's troops, and take position in the road within seven miles of Marlborough. The same order was sent to Lieutenant Colonel Beall, supposed to be then approaching with his corps from Annapolis. A detachment from General Walter Smith's brigade, under Major Peter, composed of the same companies as the detachment sent forward the day before, was ordered to move from camp in the same direction and for the same purpose---to approach as near the enemy as possible without incurring too much risk, and annoy him whether in motion or at rest. General Winder himself, accompanied by a troop of Laval's cavalry, started for Bladensburg at noon for the purpose of holding a conference with General Stansbury. When within four or five miles of that place, he was overtaken by Major M'Kenney with intelligence that Major Peter had met and skirmished with the vanguard of the advancinb enemy, two or three miles from Marlborough, on the road toward the Wood Yard, had been driven back toward the Old Fields, and that General Smith had sent off the baggage toward Washington across the Eastern Branch, and had drawn up his own troops

and Barney's seamen in battle order to await an attack from the foe. Winder immediately sent orders to Stansbury, now moving forward, to fall back toward Bladensburg, take the best position possible with his own and Sterett's troops in front of that village, and resist the enemy if attacked. If driven, he was to retreat toward the capital. He then hastened back to the Old Fields, where he found Smith and Barney well posted. Stansbury's force took position in an orchard (near a mill yet standing near Bladensburg) on a gentle eminence, and there, behind a slight breastwork, he placed six heavy guns in position to command the pass into the town and the bridge southwestward of it. About one hundred yards in the rear of this position, in the small dwelling on Tournecliffe's farm, the surgeons of the command were placed, to receive and take care of the wounded soldiers.

General Ross rested at Upper Marlborough until after noon of the 23d, when, being joined by Cockburn and his seamen and marines, he moved forward at two o'clock, and, as we have observed, encountered and drove back Major Peter and his command. He then pressed steadily on unmolested to the junction of the roads leading respectively to Washington City and the Alexandria Ferry, on the Potomac River, not far above Fort Washington. There they halted. The Americans were puzzled. Some believed that an attack on Fort Washington in the rear, simultaneously with an assault by the British fleet in front, was contemplated; but more, and among these General Winder and Colonel Monroe, believed the national capital to be the prize sought to be won. Impressed with this conviction, Winder issued orders toward the borders of the city, where greater facility would be afforded for assisting General Young, who was covering Fort Washington with a small force, and for drawing to himself Stansbury and Sterett if the enemy should advance rapidly upon the capital. Late at night the troops, greatly wearied and dispirited, encamped within the limits of the city. "Thus," said General Smith, "terminated the four days of service of the whole of the time, both night and day; had traveled, during their different marches in advance and retreat, a considerable

tract of country, exposed to the burning heat of a sultry sun by day, and many of them to the colddews of the night, uncovered. They had in this period drawn but two rations, the requisition therefor in the first instance being but partially complied with, and it being afterward almost impossible to procure the means of transportation, the wagons employed by our quartermaster for that purpose being constantly impressed by the government agents for the purpose of removing the public records when the enemy's approach was known, and some of them thus seized while proceeding to take in provisions for the army."

The night of the 23d of August was marked by great excitement in the National capital. The President and his Cabinet indulged in no slumbers, for Ross, the invader, was bivouacked at Melwood, near the Long Old Fields, about ten miles from the city, and Winder's troops, worn down and dispirited, were fugitives before him. Laval's horsemen were exhausted, and Stansbury's troops at Bladensburg were too wearied with long marching to do much fighting without some repose. What the morning would reveal no one could tell, and the dark hours were passed in great anxiety by the troops and people. The Secretary of State was in his saddle half the night; and at midnight he had visited the head-quarters of Stansbury, acquainted him with the relative positions of Winder and Ross, and advised him to fall in the rear of the latter. Fortunately the military leader did not follow the advice of the civilian.

Winder's head-quarters were at Combs's, near the Eastern Branch Bridge, and at dawn the President and several of his Cabinet ministers were there.[2] Before their arrival, General Winder (who was greatly fatigued in body and mind, and had received a severe injury from a fall during the night) had sent a note to the Secretary of War, expressing a desire to have the counsel of that officer and the government. This was a mistake. He had had too much of that bane to success already, and it

2. Secretaries of War, Navy, and Treasury, and the Attorney General.

was now administered too liberally for the good reputation of himself, and his country. These government officers were so officious as well as fickle---fickle, because impulse, and not judgment, guided them---that the general's thoughts and plans were interfered with at a moment when one mind should control all movements, and that mind be free to act untrammeled and unbiased.[1]

While Winder and the government were in council, Ross moved toward Bladensburg. Laval's scouts first brought intelligence of the fact to head-quarters. They were soon followed by an express from Stansbury, giving positive information that the British were marching in that direction, with the view, no doubt, of crushing the little force of Baltimoreans near the Bladensburg Mill. Up to that moment the council believed that Ross would move on Fort Washington, or on the city by the very bridge near which they were in consultation. This delusive idea now vanished, and government, general, and troops all moved off toward the point of danger. Winder had now under his command at Washington and Bladensburg five thousand one hundred effective men. The force of the enemy was about the same.

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1. It appears from contemporaneous testimony that, at the interview at Winder's head-quarters that morning, it was resolved by the President to give the supreme control of military affairs to the Secretary of War, but that in a short time the President changed his mind, who told the Secretary that "the military functionaries should be left to the discharge of their own duties on their own responsibilities."---see General Armstrong's account of the matter in his Notices of the War of 1812. The now (1867) venerable Jacob Barker, of New Orleans, who was at the seat of government at this time, in an interesting narrative of these events, says: "The President left Washington at about 9 A.M. (August 24), in great haste, to recall General Armstrong, who had preceded him about an hour with the President's order to supercede General Winder in the defense of the capital, and reaching the ground a few minutes before the fight began, said to General Armstrong, 'It is too late to make any change. Come with me, and leave the defense with the military authorities, where it belongs.'" ---Letter to Mr. Carroll, February 8, 1848, in reply to one from that gentleman in the New York Herald, December 1, 1847. General Armstrong was offended, and, as he says in his narrative, "now became, of course, a mere spectator of the combat."

It was ten o'clock in the morning when Winder ordered General W. Smith, with the whole of his troops, to hasten toward Bladensburg. Barney was soon afterward ordered to move with his five hundred men, and the Secretary of State, who had seen some military service in the Revolution, was requested by the President and General Winder to hasten to Stansbury and assist him in properly posting his troops. Mr. Monroe was immediately followed by General Winder and his staff. The Secretary of War then followed; and lastly the President and Attorney General, accompanied by some friends, all on horseback, rode on toward the expected theatre of battle.[2] Stansbury seems not to have been well pleased with the aid of the Secretary of State, for he afterward intimated that "somebody," without consulting him, changed and deranged his order of battle. That "somebody" was Colonel Monroe, as we shall presently observe.

Let us for a moment take a glance at the theatre on which the opposing forces were soon to meet face to face. It was the slopes and plain around Bladensburg, then a little straggling village at the head of small-craft navigation on the Eastern Branch of the Potomac, up which for four miles vessels of largest class might ride. The village is about six miles from Washington by the old post-road from that city to Baltimore. Another road from Georgetown joined the Washington Road at an acute angle a few yards from the bridge less than a hundred feet long, that spanned the stream at Bladensburg. Above the bridge the creek was every where fordable.

In the triangular field formed by the two roads just mentioned, and near the mill, General Stansbury's command was posted on the morning of the 24th. On the brow of a little eminence in that field, three hundred and fifty yards from the Bladensburg Bridge, between a large barn and the Washington Road, a barbette earth-work had been thrown up for the use of heavy cannon. Behind

2. Richard Rush, then Attorney General, says that the President informed him, when they were riding out toward Bladensburg, that one motive that caused his going to the field was to be on hand to give the requisite sanction to the claims to superior command of General Armstrong.

this work were the artillery companies from Baltimore, under Captains Myers and Magruder, one hundred and fifty strong, with six 6-pounders. These were too small for the high embankment, and embrasures were cut so that they might command the bridge and both roads. Major Pinkney's riflemen were on the right of the battery, near the junction of the roads, and concealed by the shrubbery on the low ground near the river. Two companies of militia, under Captains Ducker and Gorsuch, acting as riflemen, were stationed in the rear of the left of the battery, near the barn and the Georgetown Road. About fifty yards in the rear of Pinkney's riflemen was Sterett's Fifth Regiment of Baltimore Volunteers, while the regiments of Ragan and Schutz were drawn up en echelon, their right resting on the left of Ducker's and Gorsuch's companies, and commanding the Georgetown Road. The cavalry, about three hundred and eighty in all, were placed somewhat in the rear, on the extreme left, and seem not to have taken any part in the battle that ensued.

This, all things considered, seems to have been a judicious arrangement; but Colonel Monroe, without consulting General Stansbury, and in the fact of the enemy, then on the other side of the Eastern Branch, proceeded to change it, by moving the Baltimore regiments of Sterett, Ragan, and Schutz a quarter of a mile in the rear of the artillery and riflemen, their right resting on the Washington Road. This formed a second line in full view of the enemy, within reach of his Congreve rockets, entirely uncovered, and so far from the first line as not to be able to give it immediate support in case of an attack. This was a blunder that proved disastrous, but it was made too late to be corrected, the enemy was so near.

General Winder in the mean time had arrived on the field, and posted a third and rear line on the crown of the hills, near the residence of the late John C. Rives, proprietor of the Washington Globe, about a mile from the Bladensburg Bridge. This line embraced a regiment of Maryland militia, under Colonel Beall, which had just arrived from Annapolis, and was posted on the

extreme right; Barney's flotilla-men, who formed the centre on the Washington Road, with two 18-pounders planted in the highway a few yards from the site of Rives's barn, a portion of the seamen acting as artillerists; and Colonel Magruder's District militia, regulars under Lieutenant Colonel Scott, and Peter's battery, who formed the left. About five hundred yards in front of this position the road descends into a gentle ravine, which was then, as now, crossed by a small bridge (Tournecliffe's), on the north of which it widens into a little grassy level. and formed the dueling-ground where Decatur and others lost their lives. Overlooking it, about one hundred and fifty yards from the road, is an abrupt blugg, on which the companies of Captains Stull and Davidson were posted in position to command that highway. Lieutenant Colonel Scott, with his regulars, Colonel Brent, with the Second Regiment of General Smith's brigade, and Major Waring, with the battalion of Maryland militia, were posted on the rear of Major Peter's battery. Magruder was immediately on the left of Barney's men, his right resting on the Washington Road; and Colonel Kramer, with a small detachment, was thrown forward of Colonel Beall.

Such was the disposition of Winder's little army when, at noon, the enemy were seen descending the hills beyond Bladensburg, and pressing on toward the bridge. At half past twelve they were in the town, and came within range of the heavy guns of the first American line. The British commenced hurling rockets at the exposed Americans, and attempted to throw a heavy force across the bridge, but were driven back by their antagonists' cannon, and forced to take shelter in the village and behind Lowndes's Hill, in the rear of it. Again, after due preparation, they advanced in double-quick time; and, when the bridge was crowded with them, the artillery of Winder's first and second lines opened upon them with terrible effect, sweeping down a whole company. The concealed riflemen, under Pinkney, also poured deadly volumes into their exposed ranks; but the British, continually re-enforced, pushed gallantly forward, some over the bridge,

2. Ross made the house of Mr. Lowndes his head-quarters on that day.

and some fording the stream above it, and fell so heavily upon the first and unsupported line of the Americans that it was compelled to fall back upon the second. A company, whose commander is unnamed in the reports of the battle, were so panic-stricken that they fled after the first fire, leaving their guns to fall into the hands of the enemy.

The first British brigade were now over the stream, and, elated by their success, did not wait for the second. They threw away their knapsacks and haversacks, and pushed up the hill to attack the American second line in the fact of an annoying fire from Captain Burch's artillery. They weakened their force by stretching out so as to form a front equal to that of their antagonists. It was a blunder which Winder quickly perceived and took advantage of. He was then at the head of Sterett's regiment. With this and some of Stansbury's militia, who behaved gallantly, he not only checked the enemy's advance, but, at the point of the bayonet, pressed their attenuated line so strongly that it fell back to the thickets on the brink of the river, near the bridge, where it maintaire d its position most obstinately until re-enforced by the second brigade. Thus strengthened, it again pressed forward, and soon turned the left flank of the Americans, and at the same time sent a flight of hissing rockets over and very near the centre and right of Stansbury's line. The frightened regiments of Schutz and Ragan broke, and fled in wildest confusion. Winder tried to rally them, but in vain. Sterett's corps maintained their ground gallantly until the enemy had gaire d both their flanks, when Winder ordered them and the supporting artillery to retire up the hill. They, too, became alarmed, and the retreat, covered by riflemen, was soon a disorderly flight.

The first and second line of the Americans having been dispersed, the British, flushed with success, pushed forward to attack the third. Peter's artillery annoyed, but did not check them; and the left, under the gallant Colonel Thornton, soon confronted Barney, in the centre, who maintained his position like a genuine hero, as he was. His 18-pounders enfiladed the Washington

Road, and with them he swept the highway with such terrible effect that the enemy filed off into a field, and attempted to turn Barney's right flank. There they were met by three 12-pounders and marines, under Captains Miller and Sevier, and were badly cut up. They were driven back to the ravine already mentioned as the dueling-ground, leaving several of their wounded officers in the hands of the Americans. Colonel Thornton, who bravely led the attacking column, was severely wounded, and General Ross had his horse shot under him.

The flight of Stansbury's troops left Barney unsupported in that direction, while a heavy column was hurled against Beall and his militia, on the right, with such force as to disperse them. The British light troops soon gained position on each flank, and Barney himself was severely wounded near a living fountain of water on the estate of the late Mr. Rives, which is still known as Barney's Spring. When it became evident that Minor's Virginia troops could not arrive in time to aid the gallant flotilla-men, who were obstinately maintaining their position against fearful odds, and that farther resistance would be useless, Winder ordered a general retreat. The commodore, too severely hurt to be moved, became a prisoner of war, but was immediately paroled by General Ross, and sent to Bladensburg after his wound was dressed by a British surgeon. There he was joined by his wife and son, and his own surgeon, and on the 27th was conveyed to his farm at Elkridge, in Maryland. The great body of the Americans who were not dispersed retreated toward Montgomery Court-house, in Maryland, leaving the battlefield in full possession of the enemy, and their way to the national capital unobstructed except by the burning of the two bridges over the Eastern Branch of the Potomac.[1] The Americans lost twenty-six killed and fifty-one wounded. The British loss was manifold greater. According to one of their officers who was in the battle, and yet living (Mr. Gleig, Chaplain General of the British Army), it was

1. The lower bridge, near the navy yard, had been left in charge of Captain Creighton, with orders to destroy it on the approach of the enemy. It was fired at four o'clock in the afternoon.

"upward of five hundred killed and wounded," among them "several officers of rank and distinction." The battle commenced at about noon, and ended at four o'clock.

Up to this time the conduct of the British had been in accordance with the rules of modern warfare. Now they abandoned them, and on entering the national capital they performed deeds worthy only of barbarians. In a proclamation issued by the President on the 1st of September he submitted the following indictment: "They wantonly destroyed the public edifices, having no relation in their structure to operations of war, nor used at the time for military annoyance; some of these edifices being only costly monuments of taste and of the arts, and others depositories of the public archives, not only precious to the nation as the memorials of its origin and its early transactions, but interesting to all nations as contributions to the general stock of historical instruction and political science." Let us briefly examine the testimony of history.

When Ross was assured of complete victory, he halted his army a short time on the field of battle, and the, with the fresh Third Brigade, which had not been in the conflict, he crossed the Eastern Branch Bridge. Assured of the retreat of the Americans beyond Georgetown, Ross left the main body a mile and a half from the Capitol, and entered the town, then containing about nine hundred buildings. He came to destroy the public property there. It was an errand, it is said, not at all coincident with his taste or habits, and what was done by him appears to have been performed as humanely as the orders of his superiors would allow.[2] When, on his arrival in the Chesapeake, he had been informed by Admiral Cochrane that he (the admiral) had been urged by Sir George Prevost, the Governor General of Canada (who was not satisfied with the terrible devastation of the Niagara frontier at the close of 1813), to retaliate in kind upon the Americans

2. Hoping to spare the town, Ross had sent an agent to negotiate for a pecuniary ransom. There was no competent authority to meet his agent, and if there was, the proposition would, as the President afterward said, have been treated with contempt.

for the destruction of the government buildings at York and the village of Newark,[5] he demurred, saying that they had carried on the war on the Peninsula and in France with a very different spirit, and that he could not sanction the destruction of public or private property, with the exception of military structures and warlike stores.[1] "It was not," says one of Ross's surviving aids, Sir Duncan M'Dougall, in a letter to the author in 1861, "until he was warmly pressed that he consented to destroy the Capitol and President's house, for the purpose of preventing a repetition of the uncivilized proceedings of the troops of the United States." Fortunately for Ross's sensibility there was a titled incendiary at hand in the person of Admiral Sir George Cockburn, who delighted in such inhuman work, and who literally became his torch-bearer.

The bulk of the invaders, having crossed the Eastern Branch, halted upon the plain between the Capitol and the site of the Congressional Burying-ground, when General Ross, accompanied by Cockburn and a guard of two hundred men, rode into the city at eight o'clock in the evening. They were fired upon from behind the house of Robert Sewall, near the Capitol, by a single musket,

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5. Evidently ashamed of the barbarism committed by British hands, Vice Admiral Cochrane attempted to palliate it by a pitiful trick. After the destruction of the capital, and the invaders were safely back on their vessels in the Patuxent, Cochrane wrote a letter to Secretary Monroe, in which he said to him, "Having been called upon by the Governor General of the Canadas to aid him in carrying into effect measures of retaliation against the inhabitants of the United States for the wanton destruction committed by their army in Upper Canada, it has become imperiously my duty, conformably with the governor general's application, to issue to the naval force under my command an order to destroy and lay waste such towns and districts upon the coast as may be found assailable." Cochrane then expressed a hope that the "conduct of the executive of the United States would authorize him in staying such proceedings, by making reparation to the suffering inhabitants of Upper Canada," etc. This letter was antedated August 18, or six days before the battle of Bladensburg, so as to appear like a humane suggestion, in the non-compliance with which might be found an excuse for the destruction of the national capital. It did not reach Mr. Monroe until the morning of the 31st of August, a week after Washington was devastated, when that officer, in a dignified reply, reminded the vice admiral that the wanton destruction by the British of Frenchtown, Frederick, Georgetown, and Havre de Grace, and the outrages at Hampton by the same people, had occurred long before the destruction of Newark.

and the horse on which the general was riding was killed. Mr. Sewall's house was immediately destroyed. The same fate awaited the materials in the office of the National Intelligencer, the government organ, whose strictures on the brutality of Cockburn had filled that marauder with hot anger.[2] These, and some houses on Capitol Hill, a large rope-walk, and a tavern, comprised the bulk of private property destroyed, thanks to the restraining power of General Ross. Several houses and stores were also plundered. The unfinished Capitol, in which was the library of Congress, the President's house, a mile distant, the Treasury buildings, the Arsenal, and barracks for almost three thousand troops, were soon in flames, whose light was plainly seen in Baltimore, about forty miles northward. In the course of a few hours nothing of the superb Capitol and the Presidential mansion was left but their smoke-blackened walls.[3] Of the public buildings only the Patent-office was saved.

All the glory that the British had won on the battle-field was lost in this barbarian conflagration. "Willingly," said the London Statesman newspaper, "would we throw a veil of oblivion over our transactions at Washington. The Cossacks spared Paris, but we spared not the capital of America." The British Annual Register for 1814 denounced the proceedings as "a return to the times of barbarism." It can not be concealed," the writer continued, "that the extent of devastation practiced by the victors brought a heavy censure upon the British character, not only in

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1.(from preceding page) Dr. Martin says: "General Ross was the perfect model of the Irish gentleman, of easy and beautiful manners, humane and brave, and dignified in his deportment to all. He was beloved by all his officers, and his prisoners had no reason to regret falling into such hands."

2. Cockburn was about to apply the torch, when he was prevailed upon by the women of adjoining residences not to do so, as it would endanger their dwellings. He caused all the type and other printing materials to be thrown into the street, the printing-presses to be destroyed, and the library, containing several hundred volumes, to be burned. He assisted in this work with his own hands. His companions in the business were some sailors and soldiers.

3. These buildings were fired under the direct superintendence of Lieutenant George Pratt, the second of the Sea-horse, who was shot in the gun-boat battle on Lake Borgne, near New Orleans, a few months afterward.

America, but on the Continent of Europe." Continental writers and speakers condemned the act in unmeasured terms; and yet the government of England, which has seldom represented the sentiments of the people, caused the Tower guns to be fired in honor of Ross's victory; thanked the actors through Parliament; decreed a monument to that general in Westminster Abbey at his death; and, making additions to his armorial bearings, authorized his descendants forever to style themselves "Ross of Bladensbury!"[1]

While the public buildings in Washington were in flames, the national shipping, stores, and other property were blazing at the navy yard; also the great bridge over the Potomac, from Washington City to the Virginia shore. Commodore Thomas Tingey was in command of the navy yard, and, before the battle, had received orders to set fire to the public property there in the event of the British gaining a victory, so as to prevent its falling into the hands of the invaders. Tingey delayed the execution of the order for four hours after the contingency had occurred. When, at half past eight in the evening, he was informed that the enemy was encamped within the city limits, near the Capitol, he applied the torch, and property valued at about a million of dollars was destroyed. The schooner Lynx was saved, and most of the metallic work at the navy yard remained but little injured.[2] The fine naval monument, delineated on page 124, was somewhat mutilated, but whether accidentally at the time of the conflagration, or wantonly by the British, who went there the next day to complete the destructive work, is an unsettled question.[3] At the same time,

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1. The London Times, then, as now, the exponent of the principles of the ruling classes in England, and the bitter foe of the American people, gloried over the destruction of the public buildings, and the expulsion of the President and Cabinet from the capital, and indulgeed in exulting prophecies of the speedy disappearance of the great republic in the West. "That ill-organized association," said the Times, "is on the eve of dissolution, and the world is speedily to be delivered of the mischievous example of the existence of a government founded on democratic rebellion." In long after years, when Cockburn died at the age of eighty-two, the Times lauded him chiefly for his marauding exploits in this country, and his "splendid achievement" in firing our national capital.

2. Letter of Commodore Tingey to the Secretary of the Navy, August 27, 1814. The officers and other persons at the navy yard fled in boats

the Long Bridge over the Potomac was fired at both ends. The Americans on the Virginia side thought a large body of British troops were about to pass over, and fired that end to foil them, while the British on the city side, perceiving, as they thought, a large body of Americans about to cross over from the Virginia side, fired the Maryland end of the Bridge. The value of the entire amount of property destroyed at Washington by the British and Americans was estimated at about two million dollars. The walls of the Capitol and President's house stood firm, and were used in rebuilding.

President Madison, and other civil officers who went out to see the fight and give such assistance as they might, remained on the field until Barney fell, when they fled to the city as fast as swift-footed horses could carry them, and were among the first to announce the startling intelligence that the British, victorious, were probably marching on the town. Mrs. Madison had already been apprised of the danger. When the flight of Congreve rockets caused the panic-stricken militia to fly, the President sent messengers to inform her that the defeat of the Americans and the capture of the city seemed to be promised, and to advise her to fly to a place of safety. These messengers reached her between two and three o'clock. Mrs. Madison ordered her carriage, and sent away in a wagon silver plate and other valuables, to be deposited in the Bank of Maryland.....(story related of Mrs. Madison's saving the Stuart portrait of Washington)[1]....

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to Alexandria.

3. On the day after the entrance of the British into Washington (August 26), a party of two hundred of them were sent to finish the work of destruction at the navy yard. A large quantity of powder, shot, and shell had been thrown into a well. A British artilleryman accidentally dropped a match into it, when a terrible explosion occurred, and communicated fire to a small magazine of powder near by. That also exploded. Earth, stones, bricks, shot, shells, etc., were thrown into the air, and, falling among the invaders, killed twelve men, and wounded more than thirty others.

1. ....According to letters among General Winder's papers, the President and his Cabinet fled to different places. On the 26th, the day after the British withdrew from Washington, the President, with General Mason, the Commissary of Prisoners, and Richard Rush,

It was not the design of the British to hold the territory which they had, unexpectedly to themselves, acquired. Indeed, the whole movement up the Chesapeake was originally intended as a feint---a menace of Baltimore and Washington, to engage the attention of the government and people, and to draw in that direction the military force of the country, while the far more important measure of invading Louisiana with a formidable force, and taking possession of the Mississippi Valley, should be matured and executed. Accordingly, when Winder's forces were defeated and routed, the President and his Cabinet driven from the national capital, and the public buildings were destroyed, the invaders retreated precipitately, evidently in fear of a reactive blow. While the British Cabinet, judging from metropolitan influence in European countries, were disposed to believe that, with the loss of their capital, the Americans would consider all gone, and would yield in despair to their victors, those conquerors, on the spot, saw too well the danger to be apprehended from the spirit of a people aroused to greater exertions, and with more united energy, because of that very misfortune.

Impressed with a sense of this danger, Ross and Cochrane moved away with their forces with great secrecy on the night of the 25th of August, after ordering every inhabitant of Washington to remain within doors from sunset till sunrise, on pain of death, and increasing their camp-fires, so as to deceive the Americans. It was immediately after the passage of a terrific tempest of wind, lightning, and rain, during which houses were unroofed and trees were uprooted. Softly these victors stole away in the gloom. "No man spoke above his breath," says one of the

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the Attorney General, was at Brookville, in Maryland; the Secretary of the Navy was with the President's family in Loudon County, Virginia; and the Secretary of War and Secretary of the Treasury were at Frederick, in Maryland, on the Monocacy River. As soon as the President, with the Secretary of State, arrived there on the 28th. The reunion took place on the 29th.---Autograph Letters of Monroe and Armstrong, August 26 and 27, 1814.

British officers who was present. "Our very steps were planted lightly, and we cleared the town without exciting observation."[1] At midnight, just as the moon arose and cast a pale light over the scenes, they passed the battle-field and Bladensburg, leaving their dead unburied, and full ninety of their wounded to the humanity of Commodore Barney and his men. It was humiliating to the British troops thus to steal away in the dark from the field of their conquest. They moved sullenly onward, so wearied with fatigue and loss of sleep that, when the columns halted for a few minutes, the roads would be filled with sleeping soldiers. At seven o'clock, finding themselves but little annoyed by pursuers, they halted for rest and refreshments for several hours. At noon they moved forward, encamped at Marlborough, and, marching leisurely, reached Benedict on the 29th, where they embarked on the transports the next day.[2](August 30, 1814).

The loss of the battle at Bladensburg and of the national capital filled the American people with mortification, and produced the most intense excitement throughout the country.[3]

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1. Rev. George R. Gleig, now (1867) chaplain general of the British Army....He has published two works on these campaigns, one entitled The Subaltern in America, and the other Campaigns of of Washington and New Orleans. To these books, written with great candor, I am indebted for much information concerning the movements of the British in these campaigns.....

2. The chief authorities consulted in the preparation of the narrative of the capture of Washington are the official reports of the commanders; Wilkinson's Memoirs; Armstrong's Notices of the War of 1812; files of the National Intelligencer; Niles's Register; Ingraham's Sketch of the Events which preceded the Captures of Washington; the MS. Papers of General Winder and Commodore Barney; Gleig's Campaign of Washington, etc,; Statements of Survivors, etc., etc.

3. Intelligence of the disaster reached Cincinnati on the 6th of September. General Harrison was there. Forgetful of the ill treatment which he had received from those in power, and anxious to save his country, he at once addressed a letter to the Governors of Ohio and Kentucky, to whom appeals had never been made in vain, suggesting the propriety of sending a volunteer force of dragoons and riflemen to the aid of the people on the sea-board. Movements for that purpose were set on foot, when the repulse of the British at Baltimore, and their abandonment of expeditions (if ever conceived) against Philadelphia and New York, rendered farther operations in the West unnecessary.---Autograph Letter of General Harrison to Governor Shelby, September 6, 1814.

Crimination and recrimination kindled widespread anger, that burned intensely while the actors lived. The public were disposed to hold the Secretary of War responsible for the misfortune, because of his alleged obstinacy and inefficiency, and on the 3d of September he left the Cabinet, and retired to private life.[1] The government gladly attempted to fix the odium upon the militia of Maryland and the District of Columbia, who were easily panic-stricken, and who, on being driven from the field, fled in disorder to their homes; and General Winder received a full share of blame, how worthily let the preceding narrative determine. Only Barney and his seamen were praised. Historians, puzzled by contemporaneous quarrels, have generally agreed in condemning both the government and the militia---the former for imbecility, and the latter for cowardice. A culprit more culpable than either may be discovered by close research. The late Alvan Stewart, in a letter to Dr. Bailey on the 30th of August, 1845, gives us a clew to the identity of the criminal. He says: "General Smith, of Georgetown, District of Columbia, told me in 1818, while passing over this very ground (between Bladensburg and the national capital), in a journey I was taking to Washington City, that he commanded a brigade in the fleeing army of ours, and that the secret of our disgraceful flight was, that a story had been circulated through the District and adjacent counties of the two states, that on that day the slaves were to rise and assert their liberty,[3] and that <u>each man more feared the enemy he had left behind, in the shape of a slave in his own house or plantation, than he did any thing else</u>. The officers and soldiers had their minds distracted with the possibility of this insurrection," said General Smith, "and therefore fled to their homes

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1. On the 29th of August President Madison informed General Armstrong that there was a high degree of excitement against him among the militia of the District, and that an officer of a corps had given notice that he would no longer obey any order coming through the then Secretary of War. He told Armstrong that he must so far yield to public clamor as to permit some other person to perform the duties of his office in relation to the defense of the District. Armstrong would not consent to a division of his duties, and resigned. In his letter of resignation, and in a subsequent paper, he offered a vindication of his conduct. In the year 1836 General Armstrong published a still more elaborate vindication, in two small volumes, entitled <u>Notices of the War of</u>

before an inferior force, and left Washington to the mercy of its captors.[5] Barney's men, having no such fears, fought gallantly and persistently. May we not look for the chief cause of the disaster at Bladensburg, and the loss of the national capital in 1814, to the slave system, which has cursed every thing upon which the blight of its influence has fallen?

While Cochrane and Ross were making their way toward Washington, a portion of the British fleet, consisting of two frigates of thirty-six and thirty-eight guns, two rocket-ships of eighteen guns each, two bomb-vessels of eight guns each, and one schooner of two guns, sailed up the Potomac River, under Commodore Gordon, of the Sea-horse, to co-operate with them. The only obstruction to the passage of the fleet on which the Americans might place the least reliance was Fort Washington (late Warburton), on the Maryland side of the Potomac, about twelve miles below the National capital. It was a feeble fortress, but capable of being made strong. So early as May, 1813, a deputation from Alexandria, Georgetown, and Washington waited upon the Secretary of War, and represented the importance of strengthening that post. An engineer (Colonel Decius Wadsworth) was sent to examine it. He reported in favor of additional works in the rear, while he believed that the armament of the fort, and its elevated situation, would enable a well-managed garrison to repulse any number of ships of war that might attempt to pass up the river. Nothing more was done. In July, 1814, when a British fleet and army were in the Chesapeake, the authorities of Alexandria again called the attention of the Secretary of War to the feeble condition of Fort Washington. The Secretary did not believe the enemy would push for the capital, and nothing was done. The Alexandrians appealed to General Winder, who, in a

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1812.

3. (From preceding page) On several occasions during the war the British had offered liberty to the slaves if the latter would join them, and on one occasion, as we have seen, preparations were made, on that account, for a general insurrection in South Carolina.

5. Writings and Speeches of Alvan Stewart on Slavery, edited by his son-in-law, Luther R. Marsh, page 372.

letter to the Secretary of War, (July 25, 1814) recommended the strengthening of the post. Three of the banks of Alexandria offered to loan the government fifty thousand dollars for the construction of more defenses for the District. The money was accepted, but nothing was done to Fort Washington. When the battle of Bladensburg occurred, and the seat of government was left to the mercy of the invaders, Fort Washington was as feebly armed as ever, and its garrison consisted of only about eight men, under Captain Samuel T. Dyson, who had received orders from General Winder to be very watchful, and, in the event of its being approached by the enemy on land, to blow up the fortification and retreat across the river.

The British squadron appeared before Fort Washington on the 27th of August, three days after the capture of the capital. Captain Dyson either misunderstood General Winder's order, or was influenced by mortal fear, for he blew up and abandoned the fort without firing a shot.[2] No doubt the British fleet could have been kept below by the heavy cannon of the fort. Dyson chose not to try the experiment, and for his injurious conduct he was dismissed from the service.

The British squadron now had nothing to fear, and without hinderance it sailed on, and was anchored off Alexandria on the evening of the 28th. On the morning of the 29th it assumed a hostile attitude a hundred yards from the wharves, and was well prepared to lay every building in the town in ashes. The citizens had done what they could to protect their city.[3]

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2. In a letter to the Secretary of War, dated "Camp at Macon's Island, August 29, 1814," Captain Dyson excused his conduct by saying that he had been informed that the enemy had been re-enforced at Benedict by six thousand men, and were marching on Fort Washington to co-operate with the fleet. This was a false rumor. He acted too precipitately to find out the truth, but not until it was too late to be useful.

3. At about the time when the British fleet appeared in the Potomac, General Winder received from a unknown hand a sketch of a simple torpedo for blowing up vessels, with a description of its construction and use. The engraving of it on the next page is a fac-simile of the original pen-and-ink sketch found among the Winder papers. General Winder believed it was from General Guy, of Alexandria, who had conversed with him on the subject previously. (cf. p. 939-40 for sketches and construction).

The able-bodied men and their heavy guns had been called to the defense of Washington City, and only exempts and a few others, not more than one hundred in all, were left. When the squadron came they had no effective means to oppose the intruders, and the citizens sent a deputation to Commodore Gordon to ask upon what terms he would consent to spare the town. He replied that all naval stores and ordnance; all the shipping and its furniture; merchandise of every description in the city, or which had been carried out of it to a place of safety; and refreshments of every kind, must be immediately given up to him. Also that the vessels which had been scuttled to save them from destruction must be raised, and delivered up to him. "Do all this," he said, "and the town of Alexandria, with the exception of public works, shall be spared, and the inhabitants shall remain unmolested. These were harsh and humiliating terms, and the inhabitants were allowed only one hour for consideration. They were powerless, and were compelled to submit. The merchandise that had been carried from the town and the sunken vessels could not be given up to the invader, so he contented himself by burning one vessel and loading several others, chiefly with flour, cotton, and tobacco. With these in charge, the squadron weighed anchor and sailed down the Potomac.[1]

On hearing of the surrender of Alexandria, the government determined to annoy, and, if possible, capture or destroy the British squadron in its descent of the Potomac. The Maryland and District militia could not be rallied in time, so the Secretary of the Navy sent an express to Commodore Rodgers, at Baltimore,[2] for him to hasten to the Potomac with as large a number of seamen

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1. The loss sustained by the Alexandrians by the surrender of the city consisted of three ships, three brigs, several small bay and river craft, 16,000 pounds of flour, 1000 hogsheads of tobacco, 150 bales of cotton, and $5000 worth of wines and segars.

2. Commodore Rodgers was at Philadelphia when the British captured Washington. As early as the 26th he had received an order from the Secretary of the Navy to hasten to Washington with all the force under his command. He started with four hundred seamen and fifty marines armed with muskets, and four pieces of artillery (12-pounders), but before he reached Baltimore he heard of the fall of the capital. At Baltimore he awaited farther orders.---Rodgers to Winder---Autograph Letter among the Winder Papers.

as he could collect. These were placed under the command of Commodores Rodgers, Perry, Porter and Creighton.[3] Armed boats and fire-ships were soon prepared, and the seamen, in conjunction with the Virginia militia, gave the enemy a great deal of trouble. Batteries were erected on the river bank at the "White House," a short distance below Mount Vernon, and on Indian Head, both commanding points on the Virginia side of the stream. Musketeers were stationed on the thickly-wooded shores. Cannon were taken by District Volunteers, and placed in battery with all possible dispatch, and for several days from the 1st of September they kept the British war and plunder vessels from descending the river. Meanwhile the batteries and the militia were strengthened by accessions of guns sent down from Washington and men from the neighboring country, and at times there was heavy fighting. Finally the war vessels, ten in number, with an aggregate of one hundred and seventy-three guns, brought their concentrated power to bear upon Porter's battery at the "White House" and its supports, and drove all away. Perry's battery at Indian Head received like attention. His guns were skillfully managed by Lieutenant (late Commodore) George C. Read; but Perry, like Porter, overwhelmed by a vastly superior force, was compelled to retire, and allow the enemy, with his plunder, to pass on to Chesapeake Bay.[2]

Thus ended the invasion which resulted in the capture of Washington City, the destruction of its public buildings and navy yard, the surrender and plunder of Alexandria, and the profound regret and humiliation of the American people.[3]

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3. Perry and Porter were in Baltimore at the time, and accompanied Rodgers to Washington. The former was in command of the frigate Java, recently launched at Baltimore.

2. On the 5th of September twenty-six sail passed Point Lookout, and at four o'clock on the afternoon of the 9th twenty-one ships, six brigs, and three smaller vessels were seen beating up the Chesapeake.--- Autograph Letters from Thomas Swann, at Point Lookout, among Winder Papers.

3. The slight resistance offered to the invaders during their operations in the space of twelve days excited great surprise, alarm, and indignation. They had been performed in the midst of a population most interested in the events, and capable of furnishing at least 20,000 able-bodied men for the defense of their homes and the National capital. The national honor required an investigation, and early in the next session of Congress a committee for that purpose was appointed by

Intelligence of the capture of Washington created intense excitement in Baltimore. It was believed that the victorious Ross would fall upon it immediately, either by land or water; and the veteran soldier of the Revolution, General Samuel Smith, renewed his exertions for the defense of the city, and Annapolis, the political capital of Maryland. That vigilant officer had been active ever since the first appearance of danger in the spring of 1813, when a British squadron appeared in the Chesapeake. It was well known that the enemy felt great exasperation toward the Baltimoreans because they had sent out so many swift "clipper-built" vessels and expert seamen to smite terribly the commerce of Great Britain on the high seas. "It is a doomed town," declared Vice-admiral Warren. "The American navy must be annihilated," said a London paper; his arsenals and dock-yards must be consumed, and the truculent inhabitants of Baltimore must be tamed with the weapons which shook the wooden turrets of Copenhagen."

So early as the 13th of April, 1813, the City Councils of Baltimore appropriated twenty thousand dollars to be used for the defense of the city, under the direction of the mayor, Edward Johnson, and seven other citizens, who were named as a Committee of Supply.[1] The governor of the State (Levin Winder) also called an extraordinary session of the Legislature, to meet at Annapolis on the third Monday in May. Meanwhile a rumor reached the city that the enemy were approach, and within a few hours at least five thousand armed men were found in their proper places, and several companies of militia from the country came pouring into Baltimore. Several persons were arrested as traitors and spies. These demonstrations of preparation and power undoubtedly saved the city from assault at that time. Very soon afterward, Stricker's brigade, and other military bodies in the city,

1. These were James Mosher, Luke Tiernan, Henry Payson, Dr. J. C. White, James A. Buchannan, Samuel Sterett, and Thorndike Chase.

full five thousand strong, with forty pieces of artillery, were reviewed. At the beginning of June a battery was erected at Fort M'Henry for the marine artillery of Baltimore one hundred and sixty in number, under Captain George Stiles, and composed of masters and master's-mates of vessels there. It was armed with 42-pounders.[2]

In September (1813) the British fleet went to sea, and Baltimore enjoyed a season of repose. The blockaders, as we have observed, reappeared in the Chesapeake in the spring of 1814, and all the summer and early autumn infested its waters, during which time occurred the destructive invasion recorded in the preceding chapter, when every thing that could be done by vigilant men for the safety of Baltimore was accomplished. A Committee of Vigilance and Safety, of which Mayor Johnson was Chairman, and Theodore Bland was secretary, co-operated unceasingly with General Smith and the military. On the 27th of August, three days after the capture of Washington, that committee called upon the citizens to organize into working parties, and to contribute implements of labor for the purpose of increasing the strength of the city defenses. The city was divided into four sections, and the people of each labored alternately on the fortifications. The exempts from military service and free colored men were required to assemble for labor, with provisions for a day, at Hempstead Hill (equally well known as Loudenslager's Hill), on Sunday, the 28th of September; at Myer Garden on Monday; at Washington Square on Tuesday; and at the intersection of Eutaw and Market Streets on Wednesday. Each portion, comprising a section, was under the command of appointed superintendents. The response of the citizens in men and money

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2. This corps was celebrated for its gallantry. Dr. Martin says, in his MS. Reminiscences before me, that when he was at Bladensburg, the British officers, who were expecting re-enforcements for Winder from Baltimore, "were particularly anxious about the marine artillery---the material of which it was composed, the weight of metal, number of men, etc. I exaggerated the condition of its ability to do effective service," he said, "and I confidently believe that, had they been part of our force at Bladensburg, we would have succeeded in driving back the enemy, if not in capturing the whole force, for I never saw men so completely exhausted as were the foe."

was quick, cordial, and ample; and volunteers to work on the fortifications came from Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia. By the 10th of September General Winder was in Baltimore, with all the forces of the Tenth Military District at his command

The principal fortifications constructed by the people consisted of a long line on Hempstead, or Loudenslager's Hill, now on the site of Patterson Park. At proper distances several semicircular batteries were constructed, well mounted with cannon and ably manned, some of them by volunteer artillery companies of Baltimore, but chiefly by men-of-war's men, about twelve hundred in number, under the general command of Commodore Rodgers. The spaces between these batteries were filled with militia. One of the larger of these bastions, known as Rodger's Bastion, may now (1867) be seen, well preserved, on the harbor side of Patterson Park, and overlooking Fort M'Henry and the region about it. Four of the smaller batteries on this line were in charge of officers of the Guerriere and Erie, the former then lying in Baltimore Harbor.[2]

A brigade of Virginia Volunteers and of regular troops, including a corps of cavalry under Captain Bird, were placed under the command of General Winder; the City Brigade of Baltimore was commanded by General Stricker; and the general management of the entire military force destined for the defense of the city was intrusted to General Smith. Fort M'Henry was garrisoned by about one thousand men, volunteers and regulars, commanded by Major George Armistead. To the right of it, guarding the shores of the Patapsco, on the Ferry Branch, from the landing of troops who might endeavor to assail the city in the rear, were two redoubts, named respectively Fort Covington, and City,

2. These were Lieutenant Gamble, the first of the Guerriere, Midshipman Field, Sailing-master Ramage, and Midshipman Salter, of the same vessel, and Sailing-master De la Roche, of the Erie.

or Babcock Battery. The former was manned by a detachment of seamen under Lieutenant Newcomb, and the latter---a 6-gun battery---by another detachment from Barney's flotilla under Sailing-master John A. Webster. In the rear of these, upon high ground, at the end of Light Street, near the present Fort Avenue, was an unfinished circular redoubt for seven guns, in charge of Lieutenant George Budd. On Lazaretto Point, across the entrance channel to Baltimore Harbor, opposite Fort M'Henry, was also a small battery, in charge of Lieutenant Rutter, of the flotilla. To these several batteries, and to Fort M'Henry, the citizens of Baltimore looked most confidently for defense.[3]

Such were the most important preparations for the reception of the enemy, when, on Sunday evening, the 11th of September, they were seen at the mouth of the Patapsco, in strong force, preparing to land at North Point, twelve miles from Baltimore by water, and fifteen miles by land. Off that point the fleet anchored that evening. The night was a delightful one. The air was balmy, and the full moon shone brightly in a cloudless sky. The earth was refreshed by the fall of a heavy dew. The fleet lay two miles from the shore. Brief repose was given to its people, for, at two o'clock in the morning, (September 12, 1814) the boats of every ship were lowered, and then the land troops and seamen went to the shore, under cover of several gun-brigs anchored within a cable's length of the beach. The boats went in divisions, and the leading one of each was armed with a carronade ready for action.

At about seven o'clock in the morning, General Ross and Admiral Cockburn were on shore, with a force nine thousand strong, composed of five thousand land troops, two thousand marines, and two thousand seamen, led by Captain E. Crofton. Tehy were furnished with cooked provisions sufficient for three days. Each combatant bore eighty rounds of ammunition, and carried as little baggage

3. Letter of Commodore Rodgers to the Secretary of the Navy, September 28, 1814; Letter of Sailing-master (now Captain) John A. Webster to Brantz Mayer, Esq., July 22, 1853.

as possible, for they were to march rapidly and take Baltimore by surprise, where Ross had boasted that he should eat his Sunday dinner. At the same time, a frigate was sent to try the depth and take the soundings of the channel leading to Baltimore, as the navy, under the immediate command of Captain Nourse, of Cockburn's flag'ship Severn, was to co-operate with the army. Intelligence of these movements produced great alarm in Baltimore. A large number of families, with portable articles of value, were sent into the interior of the country, and every inn, for almost a hundred miles northward of the city, was crowded with the refugees.

When it was known that the British fleet was anchored off North Point, General Smith, who had about nine thousand troops under his command, sent General Stricker with three thousand two hundred in that direction to watch the movements of the enemy and act as circumstances might warrant. He left the city toward evening, and just before sunset reached a meeting-house (yet standing) almost seven miles from the town, near the junction of the roads leading respectively to North Point and Bear Creek. Meanwhile Major Randall, of the Maryland militia, had been sent with a light corps from General Stansbury's brigade, and the Pennsylvania Volunteers, to the mouth of Bear Creek, to co-operate with Stricker, and to check the debarkation of the enemy, should it be attempted at that point.

Stricker's little army rested until morning at the meeting-house, not far from what was then called Long Log Lane (now the road to North Point), with the exception of a detachment of one hundred and forty horsemen under Lieutenant Colonel Biays, who were ordered forward, three miles, to Gorsuch's farm, and one hundred and fifty riflemen under Captain Dyer, who were directed to take position at a blacksmith's shop one mile in the rear of the cavalry. So they remained until the morning of the 12th, when information was received

from the vedettes that the enemy had landed at North Point, when Stricker immediately sent back his baggage under a strong guard, and disposed his troops for battle in three lines, stretching from a branch of Bear Creek on his right, to a swamp on the margin of a branch of Back River on his left. The several corps were posted as follows: the Fifth Baltimore Regiment, Lieutenant Colonel Sterett, five hundred and fifty strong, were placed on the right, extending from Long Log Lane to a branch of Bear Creek; the Twenty-seventh Maryland Regiment, Lieutenant Colonel Long, numbering the same, were on the left of the Fifth, extending from the Lane to the swamp; and the Union Artillerymen of Baltimore, seventy-five in number, with six 4-pounders, under Captain Montgomery, then Attorney General of the State, were in the Lane. The Thirty-ninth Regiment, four hundred and fifty men, under Lieutenant Colonel Fowler, were posted three hundred yards in the rear of the Twenty-seventh and parallel with it; and on the right of the Thirty-ninth, at the same distance in the rear of the Fifth, were the Fifty-first Regiment, under Lieutenant Colonel Amey. These formed the second line. About half a mile in the rear of this line, near the site of the present (1867) Battle-ground House, was a reserve corps, consisting of the Sixth Regiment (six hundred and twenty men), under Lieutenant Colonel M'Donald. Thus judiciously posted, Stricker awaited the approach of Ross.

The British general disposed his troops as at Bladensburg. A corps composed of the light companies of the Fourth, Twenty-first, and Forty-fourth Regiments, the entire Eighty-fifth, a battalion of "disciplined negroes," and a company of marines, numbering in the aggregate about eleven hundred men, under Major Jones, were sent in advance. These were followed by six field-pieces and two howitzers drawn by horses; and the whole formed the first brigade. The second brigade, under Colonel Brooke, was composed of the Fourth and Forty-fourth Regiments, about fourteen hundred strong, and was followed by

more than a thousand sailors led by Captain Crofton. The rear, or third brigade, consisted of the Twenty-first Regiment, and a battalion of marines, numbering in all about fourteen hundred and fifty men, under Colonel Patterson. At the same time, the fleet moved toward Baltimore to attack Fort M'Henry.

Feeling confident of success, Ross and Cockburn rode gayly forward at the head of the troops for about an hour, when they halted at Gorsuch's farm, and spent another hour in resting and careless carousing. The American riflemen in the advance had fallen back in the mean time, with the impression that the British were landing on Back River or Bear Creek to cut them off, and they were placed on the right of Stricker's front line. When the general was informed of the exact position of the invaders, he sent forward to attack them the companies of Captains Levering and Howard from Sterett's Fifth, one hundred and fifty in number, under Major Richard K. Heath, and Asquith's and a few other riflemen, numbering about seventy, with a small piece of artillery and some cavalry under Lieutenant Stiles. They met the British advancing, and a skirmish ensued near the house occupied, when the writing visited the spot in 1861, by Samuel C. Cole as a store and dwelling, seven and a half miles from Baltimore, and about seven from the land-place of the British. Ross was mortally wounded by one of two young men, natives of Maryland, beloning to Asquith's rifle corps, and who had both fought in the battle at Bladensburg. Their names were Daniel Wells and Henry C. M'Comas. They were concealed in a hollow, and fired the fatal shot when Ross appeared upon a little knoll near them. That commander died in the arms of his favorite aid, the now (1867) venerable Sir Duncan M'Dougall, of London, before his bearers reached the boats at North Point. "He lived only long enough," says Gleig," to name his wife, and to commend his family to the protection of his country." In this skirmish Heath's horse was shot under him, and several Americans were killed or wounded. Among the slain were the two young men whose bullets brought Ross to the earth. The ad-

vancing British far outnumbered Heath's detachment, and he ordered them to fall back. Finding the companies of Levering and Howard too fatigued to engage efficiently in the impending battle, Stricker ordered them to the rear to attach themselves to the reserve.

On the fall of Ross the command of the British troops devolved on Colonel A. Brooke, of the Forty-fourth Regiment, and under his direction the entire invading force pressed vigorously forward. At about two o'clock in the afternoon they came within cannon-shot of the American line, and were immediately formed in battle order. Their first brigade, supported by the Forty-fourth Regiment, the seamen and marines, menaced the entire front of the Americans, and commenced the action by opening a brisk discharge of cannon and rockets upon them. The British Twenty-first remained in column as a reserve; and the Fourth made a circuitous march to turn the left flank of the Americans, against which also artillerists and rocketeers directed their missiles, and were replied to by Captain Montgomery's cannon. General Stricker instantly comprehended the meaning of the flank movement and artillery attack, and brought up the Thirty-ninth Regiment, with two field-pieces, to its support in a line with the Twenty-seventh, which was behaving most gallantly. He also ordered the Fifty-first, under Colonel Amey, to form in line at right angles with the first line, with its right resting on the left of the Thirty-ninth. This movement was productive of some confusion, but Stricker's sides, in the mean time, with Victory coquetting first with one and then with the other, and the armies swaying backward and forward with mutual pressure.

When the contest had been carried on for about two hours the enemy's right column fell upon and endeavored to turn the American left. The Fifty-first were suddenly struck with dismay, and, after firing a volley at random

broke, and fled in wild disorder, producing a like effect in the second batallion of the Thirty-ninth. All efforts to rally the fugitives were vain. But the remainder of the Thirty-ninth and the gallant Twenty-seventh (whose tattered battle-flag, now in the possession of its bearer in the fight, Captain Lester, of Baltimore, attests the severity of their conflict) bravely maintained their position. Finally, at about four o'clock, when the superior force of the enemy could no longer be kept in check, General Stricker ordered a retreat upon his reserved corps. This movement was performed in good order. Some of the wounded and two field-pieces were abandoned. Stricker reformed his brigade, and then fell back toward the city as far as Worthington's Mill, about halt a mile in advance of the intrenchments cast up by the citizens. There he was joined by General Winder, with General Douglass's Virginia Brigade and Captain Bird's United States Dragoons, who took post on his left. The British bivouacked on the battle-field that night, after calling in some pursuers and collecting the stragglers.

While these movements were in operation on the land, the British fleet was preparing to perform a conspicuous part of the drama. Frigates, schooners, sloops, and bomb-ketches had entered the Patapsco early in the morning of the 12th, while Ross was moving from North Point, and anchored off Fort M'Henry (then about one half its present dimensions), beyond the reach of its guns, near the present Fort Carroll. During the day and evening the bomb and rocket vessels were so posted as to act upon the fortifications on the hill, commanded by Rodgers, as well as on Fort M'Henry, while the frigates were stationed farther outward, the water being so shallow that they could not approach nearer the city than four or five miles, nor the fort within two and a half miles. The Americans had already sunk some vessels, as we have observed, in the narrow channel at Fort M'Henry, which prevented any passage by the ships of

the enemy.[2] During the night of the 12th the fleet made full preparations for an attack on the fort and hill intrenchments on the morning of the 13th, when Brooke was to move on Baltimore with the British land force from the battlefield of the day before. The fleet prepared for action consisted of sixteen heavy vessels, five of them bomb-ships.

Fort M'Henry was commanded by a brave soldier, and defended by gallant companions. The latter were composed of one company of United States Artillery, under Captain Evans; two companies of Sea-fencibles, under Captains Bunbury and Addison; two companies of volunteers from the city, named respectively the "Washington Artillery" and the "Baltimore Independent Artillerists," the former commanded by Captain John Berry, and the latter by Lieutenant Commanding Charles Pennington; the "Baltimore Fencibles," a fine company of volunteer artillerists led by Judge Joseph H. Nicholson; a detachment of Barney's flotillamen, commanded by Lieutenant Redman; and detachments of regulars, in all six hundred men, furnished by General Winder from the Twelfth, Fourteenth, Thirty-sixth, and Thirty-eighth Regiments, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Stewart and Major Lane. The regular artillerists under Captain Evans, and the volunteers under Captain Nicholson, manned the bastions in the Star Fort. The commands of Bunbury, Addison, Redman, Berry, and Pennington were stationed in the lower works; and the infantry, under, under Stewart and Lane, were placed in the outer ditch, to meet the enemy at his landing, if he should attempt it.

The bomb-vessels opened a heavy fire upon the American works at sunrise on Tuesday morning, the 13th, at about seven o'clock, at a distance of two miles, and kept up a well-directed bombardment until three o'clock in the afternoon.

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2. General Smith, on the recommendation of Commodore Rodgers, caused twenty-four vessels then lying in the harbor to be sunk in the narrow channel between Fort M'Henry and Lazaretto Point. These were afterward raised at the expense of the United States. The aggregate amount of money paid to the owners afterward was about $100,000.

Capt John Lewis Thompson (Thomson)

Aug - Sept - 1814

Bladensburg