

THE U.S. ARMY CAMPAIGNS
OF THE WAR OF 1812

*The
Gulf Theater
1813-1815*



*A detail view of the Battle of New Orleans, by Jean Hyacinthe de
Laclotte (Library of Congress)*

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The Gulf Theater
1813–1815

by

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Introduction

The War of 1812 is perhaps the United States' least known conflict. Other than Andrew Jackson's 1815 victory at New Orleans and Francis Scott Key's poem "The Star-Spangled Banner" written in 1814 during the British attack on Baltimore, most Americans know little about the country's second major war. Its causes are still debated by historians today. Great Britain's impressment of American sailors, its seizure of American ships on the high seas, and suspected British encouragement of Indian opposition to further American settlement on the western frontier all contributed to America's decision to declare war against Great Britain in June 1812.

None of these factors, however, adequately explain why President James Madison called for a war the country was ill-prepared to wage. Moreover, the war was quite unpopular from the start. Many Federalists—chiefly in the New England states—opposed an armed conflict with Great Britain, continued to trade with the British, and even met in convention to propose secession from the Union. Some members of the president's own Republican Party objected to the war's inevitable costs and questionable objectives, such as the conquest of Canada.

To declare war was one thing, but to prosecute it successfully was a different matter. Much of the story of the War of 1812 is about the unpreparedness of America's Army and Navy at the conflict's outset, and the enormous difficulties the new nation faced in raising troops, finding competent officers, and supplying its forces. Most of America's military leaders were inexperienced and performed poorly, particularly in the first two years of war. Only gradually did better leaders rise to the top to command the more disciplined and well-trained units that America eventually fielded. But despite costly initial setbacks, by the time the fighting stopped American arms had won key victories at Chippewa, Lundy's Lane, and New Orleans under excellent officers such as Winfield Scott, Jacob Brown, and Andrew Jackson. Although the United States achieved few of its political objectives in the War of 1812, its Regular Army emerged more professional, better led, and fit to take its place as the foundation of America's national defenses.

I encourage all Army leaders and soldiers to read this pamphlet and the others in our series of campaign pamphlets in commemoration of the bicentennial of the War of 1812. We can all profit from greater knowledge about the beginnings of our Army: an Army forged in victory and defeat during what has often been called the second war of American independence.

RICHARD W. STEWART
Chief Historian



The Gulf Theater

1813–1815

Most of the fighting between the United States and Great Britain occurred along the Canadian border during the War of 1812, but the Gulf of Mexico eventually became another important theater of conflict. To understand the nature of this struggle, one must first understand the importance of the Mississippi River to the United States and the multicultural city of New Orleans.

STRATEGIC SETTING

Stretching for over 2,300 miles, the Mississippi River is the fourth longest river in the world. At a time when most of North America was a trackless wilderness, the Mississippi and its many tributaries served as the primary means of transportation and communications into the central and western reaches of the continent. Whoever controlled the Mississippi would dominate the continent. Although Canadian and American settlers could access the Mississippi watershed from the north and east, respectively, the most economical way to export the vast region's rich bounty was to the south, where the river emptied into the Gulf of Mexico. At this critical juncture lay the city of New Orleans. Founded by the French in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, whoever owned New Orleans could either promote or strangle the economic development of the trans-Appalachian west.

In 1763, New Orleans passed to Spain as a consequence of France's defeat in the Seven Years' War (or, as the conflict's North American component was known, the French and Indian War). After the United States won its independence from Britain in 1783, the number of Americans moving west of the Appalachian Mountains increased, making access to the river, and particularly the port of New Orleans, of growing interest to the new republic. The Treaty of San Lorenzo, or Pinckney's Treaty, between the United States and Spain in 1795 seemingly guaranteed American navigation on the Mississippi and access to the Gulf of Mexico. Spain's agreement to transfer New

Orleans and much of the territory west of the Mississippi River to France, however, introduced an element of uncertainty in 1800. Even though France was a more powerful and active state than Spain at this time, the terms of the Franco-Spanish treaty specifically stated that France could not under any condition transfer its newly acquired lands to an English-speaking country. President Thomas Jefferson nevertheless sent a delegation to Paris to inquire if French leader Napoleon Bonaparte might be willing to sell New Orleans. Fortunately for the American diplomats, a slave uprising in the Caribbean island colony of Saint-Domingue had drained French resources and diverted Napoleon from building a colonial empire in North America. Moreover, Napoleon needed money to finance an imminent war with Great Britain, a nation whose mighty navy would likely capture New Orleans in any case should war occur. Consequently, in November 1803, Napoleon ignored Spanish protests and sold New Orleans and its associated territories to the United States in what became known as the Louisiana Purchase. Twenty days later, detachments of the U.S. Army and Mississippi territorial militia lowered the French tricolor and raised the Stars and Stripes over New Orleans.

The sale caused relations between Spain and the United States to become difficult. The Spanish considered the sale to be illegal on the grounds that France had promised not to sell the land to an English-speaking country. Moreover, Spain feared further American encroachment into its remaining colonies adjacent to the United States—East and West Florida and Texas. In 1806, disputes along the Sabine River, the border between Spanish Texas and Louisiana, nearly propelled the two nations into war. Napoleon's 1808 invasion of Spain further weakened the Spanish empire, and the next year, tensions flared again between the United States and Spain in a dispute over the ill-defined boundary of West Florida. American and British settlers living in Spanish territory along the Gulf Coast between the Mississippi and Perdido Rivers rebelled and declared the formation of an independent Republic of West Florida. More trouble followed when the governor of Louisiana Territory, William C. C. Claiborne, denied Spanish access to the Gulf of Mexico through New Orleans and Lake Pontchartrain. Spanish authorities countered by hindering traffic on the Mobile River and by denying Americans the use of the river's port city of Mobile, both important for the economic livelihood of Americans living in what would become the state of Alabama. In response, Claiborne personally led a flotilla of a dozen gunboats to Mobile Bay and threatened to capture the town if the Spanish officials did not relent. The Spanish backed down, but tension

remained between a resentful but weak Spain and an American nation that increasingly regarded the acquisition of all of North America as its natural destiny.

By 1812, the United States seemed poised to gain all of Spain's land along the Gulf Coast with minimal effort. The acquisition of this land would allow the United States to consolidate the gains made over the past decade, hinder the ability of foreign powers to encourage disaffection among the Indian nations in the southeast, and secure opportunities for further western expansion. The outbreak of war between the United States and Great Britain in June of that year dramatically changed the situation, particularly because by



William C. C. Claiborne

this point Spain had become Britain's ally in the war against Napoleonic France. Britain, like Spain, feared losing its North American territories to American expansionism while it was heavily tied down in Europe fighting Napoleon. Unlike Spain, however, Britain had sufficient sea power to threaten the United States.

Although the defense of Canada was uppermost in their minds, British leaders recognized that they might accrue some advantages by spreading the conflict to America's Gulf Coast. Harassing actions in the south might divert U.S. troops away from the U.S.-Canadian border. A more substantial offensive to capture New Orleans would require more resources, but would hurt the United States economically and provide Britain with a bargaining chip that it could use during peace negotiations. It would also give Britain the option to curb the further westward expansion of the United States, either by keeping the Louisiana Territory for itself or by returning the land to Spain. Britain was also interested in fostering an independent Native American entity that could block further American expansion. Toward that end, the British had been assisting the Shawnee leader Tecumseh's bid to create a pan-Indian confederacy that would stretch from the Great Lakes to the Gulf Coast. Canada provided the means

for supporting Tecumseh's activities in the north; but to assist Tecumseh's followers in the south—most notably those among the Creek Indians who lived in the area of modern-day Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi—Britain would need a presence on the Gulf Coast, thus offering another incentive for activity in the region. Conversely, all of these reasons made it important for the United States to thwart any British designs on the Gulf Coast.

OPERATIONS

Securing the Gulf Coast

The Americans were the first to militarize the situation in the Gulf. Three months before the United States declared war against Great Britain, elements of the Georgia militia, aided by members of the U.S. Army and U.S. Navy, invaded Spanish East Florida in an attempt to capture St. Augustine. The invasion was motivated by desires for enhanced local security and territorial aggrandizement. President James Madison disavowed any involvement and condemned the action, leading the invaders to withdraw. Congress, however, used the apparent weakness of the Spanish government to press the claim that West Florida should have been included in the Louisiana Purchase of 1803. Accordingly, on 14 April 1812, Congress ordered the governor of the Mississippi Territory to administer all the lands west of the Perdido River. Spain objected, but it could do little to oppose the action. Spanish troops continued to garrison Fort Charlotte in Mobile, but Spain exercised no actual authority in the territory beyond.

Toward the end of the year, the U.S. government authorized Maj. Gen. Andrew Jackson to lead about two thousand Tennessee militia to New Orleans to help secure that city against possible attack. The 46-year-old Jackson harbored an intense hatred for the British that originated from his service in the Revolutionary War. After joining a militia unit at age thirteen to serve as a courier, he was captured and treated cruelly. He still bore the scars on his left hand and head where a British officer had slashed him with a sword for refusing to clean his boots. While in captivity, Jackson nearly starved and contracted smallpox before being released. After the war, he became a successful lawyer, planter, and land speculator. He served as a delegate to Tennessee's Constitutional Convention in 1796. After Tennessee achieved statehood that same year, voters elected him first to the U.S. House of Representatives and later to

the Senate. After resigning his seat, he received an appointment as a justice on the Tennessee Supreme Court. Remaining active in the militia, he rose to the position of commanding officer with the rank of major general.

Jackson and his militia army departed Tennessee for the Gulf Coast in January 1813. An unabashed expansionist, Jackson hoped to exploit the opportunity and to invade Spanish Florida. It was not to be. Adverse weather and inadequate supplies hampered his progress, as did confusion and tensions in the U.S. military command, which in February instructed him to halt near the Mississippi port town of Natchez, 176 miles northwest of New Orleans. There, his army endured harsh weather with inadequate food and shelter until March, when



Andrew Jackson,
by Thomas Sully
(Philadelphia History Museum)

the War Department ordered Jackson to disband his army and return to Tennessee. The mood in Congress had shifted. A series of military disasters along the Canadian frontier had dampened enthusiasm for offensive operations, and voices arose against doing anything that might drive Spain into a closer alliance with Great Britain. Jackson tramped back to Tennessee in a cold fury.

No sooner had Jackson returned to Tennessee than officials in Washington changed their minds once again. In April, the secretary of war ordered the commander in New Orleans, Brig. Gen. James Wilkinson, to expel the Spanish from Mobile. The presence of British traders in Mobile who sold arms and supplies to the Indians, and the nagging fear that Spain would cooperate with any possible British military operation in the Gulf region, justified the move.

Wilkinson promptly led eight hundred men and five gunboats into position at the mouth of Mobile Bay to block Spanish reinforcements coming by sea, while four hundred soldiers moved east from Fort Stoddert to block reinforcements coming from Pensacola by land.

After effectively isolating Fort Charlotte, Wilkinson demanded its surrender. Fortunately for everyone involved, the Spanish commander, Capt. Cayetano Pérez, recognized the hopelessness of his situation and capitulated. Wilkinson allowed the Spanish soldiers to leave the fort with their personal weapons and equipment, but the United States took possession of the fort as well as its artillery and military stores.

The Spanish minister to Washington, Luis de Onís, lodged a cautious protest. He believed that diplomacy was the best way to handle the United States. As long as Spain was fighting for survival in Europe, it could send little support to its colonies. Indeed, threatening military action might provoke the United States into seizing even more territory. Although Onís' cautious policy dampened tensions with the United States, it did not sit well with other Spanish officials in the New World. Juan Ruiz Apodaca, the captain-general of Cuba, wanted to use the threat of force to deter the United States from invading any more Spanish land. He dispatched a militia regiment from Cuba to reinforce the garrison at Pensacola, but could do little else. To compound the problem, the soldiers already in Pensacola suffered from low morale and had not received pay in fifty-six months. Apodaca realized that if the Americans made a serious attempt on the colonies under his care, he might be forced to call on Spain's ally Great Britain for assistance. That act would be personally embarrassing to the Spanish commander and possibly encourage a British takeover of the threatened colonies. Caught between several unpalatable outcomes, the captain-general came round to Onís' point of view that inaction was perhaps the wisest course.

A New Threat

Although America enjoyed some success in bullying Spain in 1813, the situation in the southern United States remained perilous. With British encouragement, elements of the Creek Nation allied with Tecumseh launched a war against the United States in midyear, and subduing the "Red Sticks," as the hostile warriors were called, was proving difficult. Moreover, during 1813 Britain and its allies made significant progress in their war with France in Europe, allowing officials in London to contemplate sending more forces to North America.

British officials began planning operations in the Gulf of Mexico in mid-1813. Charles Cameron, the Royal Governor of the Bahamas at Nassau, provided his superiors with detailed information about the region culled from his connections with area traders visiting the Bahamas and their friendly Indian contacts. Cameron's intelligence

presented the Gulf Coast as an easy target. According to his sources, scores of Indians, as well as French and Spanish whites and both free and slave Africans, would leap at the opportunity to fight against the United States. Cameron proposed sending British military personnel into the region to help organize and train the local allies.

Spanish West Florida became the focal point of British machinations. Despite America's seizure of Mobile, Spain still maintained neutrality in the Anglo-American conflict. Not wanting to provoke the United States into annexing more of its land, Spain hesitated to openly assist in Cameron's scheme. The British suggested that the Spanish quietly abandon their fort on the Apalachicola River, in a sparsely traveled area east of Pensacola, to give the Americans little reason to encroach into the area. The British would then quietly move in, and if the United States discovered their presence, Spain could disavow knowledge and feign outrage at the British intrusion.

In April 1814, as Emperor Napoleon abdicated his throne in defeat, Capt. Hugh Pigot of the Royal Marines sailed for the Apalachicola to make contact with Indians hostile to the United States. Ten prominent Creek and Seminole chiefs heartily greeted the officer, but also brought the news of a major defeat in which Jackson's forces had killed almost one thousand Red Stick warriors at the Battle of Horseshoe Bend. The Tennessee general had continued his advance deeper into Creek territory and had compelled the Creeks to surrender. The defeat of the main Red Stick forces, together with the defeat of Tecumseh at the Battle of the Thames River in Canada the previous October, dealt fatal blows to the dream of creating an Indian confederacy to contain American expansion and to raising significant numbers of Indian recruits to help the British attack the Gulf Coast.

The setback notwithstanding, Pigot proceeded to assemble supplies and to gather as many native allies as he could. Scarce provisions plagued his efforts and limited his ability to train the disparate group as a cohesive force, but early results were promising. The marine officer reported that the warriors showed great enthusiasm and might even prove effective light cavalymen if properly equipped. He also argued that boys as young as ten years of age were willing to fight but that the muskets Britain had supplied were too long. In response, British officials sent Pigot both saddles and short-barreled carbines.

By August 1814, Maj. Edward Nicholls of the *3d Battalion of Royal Marines* had arrived on scene to assume command of the operation. Before continuing to his destination, Governor Cameron briefed Nicholls about conditions on the Gulf Coast. The Spanish still had reservations about giving direct aid to the British. Although the fort

at Apalachicola provided the British with a useful base for recruiting native allies and runaway slaves, Britain required a deepwater port on the Gulf to harbor an invasion fleet. When the British asked for permission to use Pensacola, the captain-general of Cuba refused to allow such a flagrant violation of Spanish neutrality. Fortunately for Nicholls, the governor of Pensacola, González Manrique, had no such concerns. Fearful of an impending American attack, he asked Nicholls to bring his troops to the town.

Nicholls' contingent of marines and native allies quickly took over Pensacola. Many Spaniards soon regretted their governor's decision. The British imposed a strict passport system to control movement and began recruiting the slaves of Spanish owners into service. British rule was so oppressive that even British commercial agents began supplying the United States with intelligence.

Satisfied with his new base of operations, Nicholls assembled more forces for his growing army. On Pigot's advice, he sought to enlist the service of Jean Laffite, the leader of a band of smugglers operating as privateers with dubious letters of marque from various Latin American authorities in rebellion against Spain. Laffite's base of operations lay south of New Orleans on islands in Barataria Bay, one of the swampy inlets along the Gulf of Mexico. The self-styled "Baratarians" knew intimately the myriad bayous and waterways that snaked across lower Louisiana. If Nicholls could secure the Baratarians' assistance, the British could secretly move an attack force to the very gates of New Orleans.

Nicholls sent two trusted officers to bribe Laffite and his men for their help. The Crown offered Laffite a commission, title, \$30,000 prize money, and proportional gratuities for his subordinates. Laffite asked for time to consult his various ships' captains and sent the British on their way, then forwarded the British documents to Governor Claiborne and warned him of the impending attack. Laffite and his men had often had legal troubles with the United States over smuggling, but they enjoyed significant popular support in New Orleans due to their ability to smuggle luxury goods past the British blockade. Additionally, the British alliance would have required Laffite and his men to refrain from attacking Spanish shipping, their most common and lucrative prey. An alliance with the British was simply not in Laffite's best interest.

First Battle of Fort Bowyer, 15 September 1814

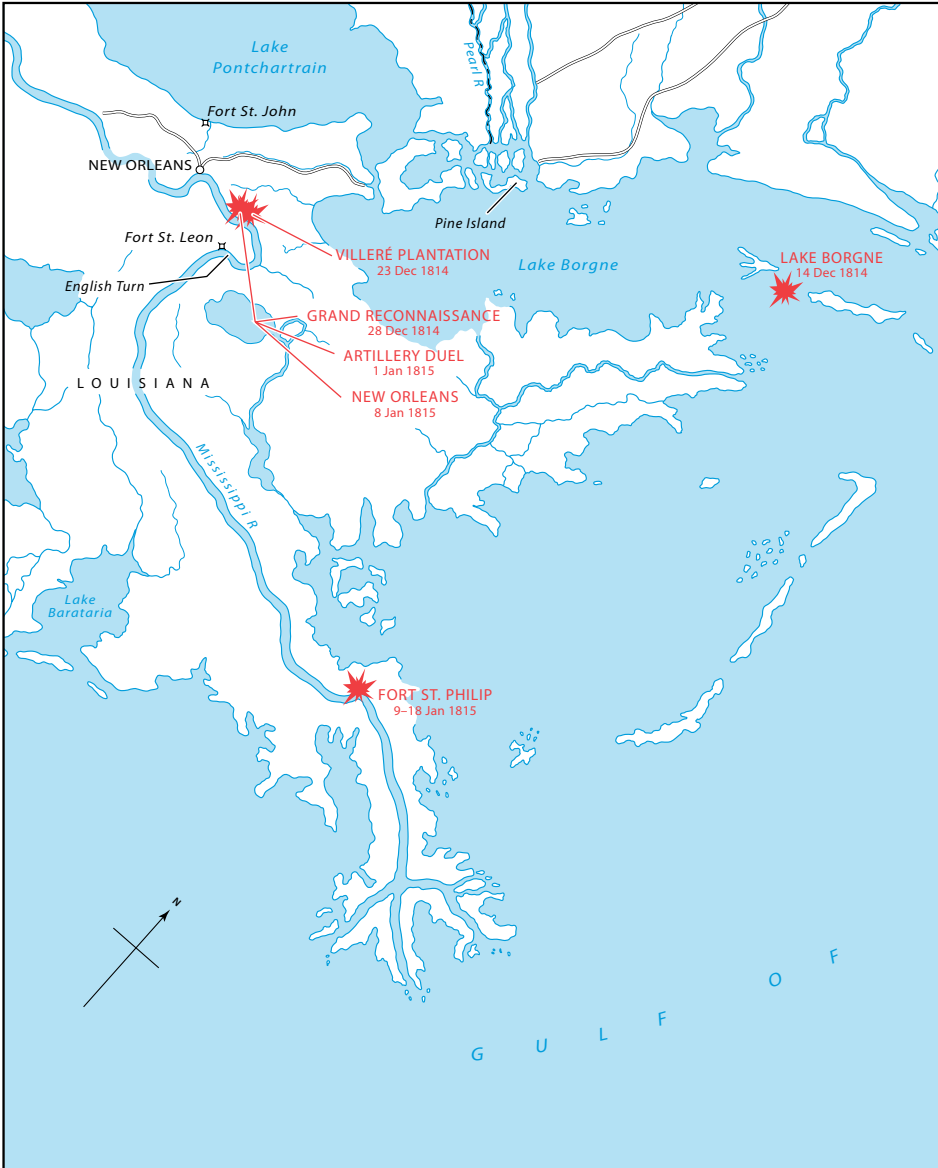
Fort Bowyer, located at the end of the Mobile Point peninsula, commanded the narrow entrance to Mobile Bay. In August 1814,

General Jackson, having replaced Wilkinson as commander of the U.S. 7th Military District, learned that British forces at Pensacola intended to attack and capture Mobile before moving by land against New Orleans. He also knew that Britain's Spanish allies, who had abandoned the area in 1813, were eager to regain possession. After posting some regulars near the town and calling for militia reinforcements, Jackson sent Maj. William Lawrence with one hundred thirty men from the Corps of Artillery and 2d U.S. Infantry to man and strengthen Fort Bowyer. Construction of the post had been begun shortly after the Spanish evacuation but had since been abandoned. Lawrence improved the sand-walled redoubt, erected battery positions, and increased the armament from nine to twenty guns (*see Map 1*).

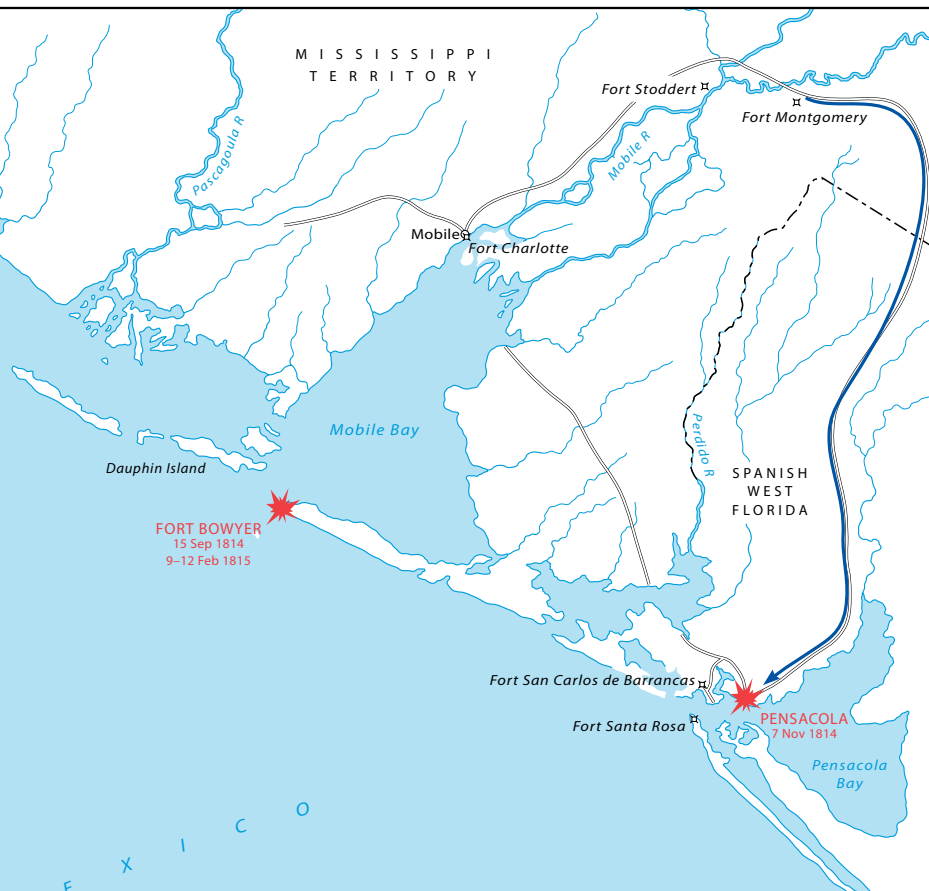
V. Adm. Alexander Cochrane, commander of the Royal Navy's North American Station, ordered Capt. Henry Percy, who held the local rank of commodore, to reduce harbor defenses. Percy's command included a flotilla of four warships, several tenders, and a mixed landing force of British marines and trained Seminoles and Red Stick Creeks under now Lt. Col. Edward Nicholls. With more than thirteen hundred men and ninety cannon, Percy was confident that he could easily capture Fort Bowyer.

The British ships appeared off the peninsula on 12 September and anchored about six miles to the east of the fort. Shortly after Nicholls led the landing force ashore, he took ill and returned to the flagship. Capt. George Woodbine assumed command of the shore party and advanced to within eight hundred yards of Fort Bowyer, where Royal Marine artillerymen established a firing position for their 5½-inch howitzer. They would create a diversion on the landward side, while Percy's ships pounded the fort into submission. For the next two days, the British sent sailors in launches to take soundings offshore and reconnaissance parties to scout the land approaches through the dunes to the defensive works. Whenever they drew uncomfortably close, U.S. artillery fire drove them back.

At 1200 on 15 September, the four warships weighed anchor and stood out to sea, struggling against contrary winds. Two hours later, they changed tack and bore down on the fort until they were close enough for the U.S. gunners to engage. The batteries commenced firing, and the Royal Navy answered with all the shipboard guns aboard HMS *Hermes*, followed shortly with those of HMS *Sophie*, but the rest could not get close enough to bear. By 1600, Percy's flagship, HMS *Hermes*, anchored within musket range, and the other vessels took station forming line of battle astern. When the firing became general, the marines' artillery piece joined the attack, only to be silenced in short



MAP 1

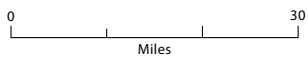


GULF THEATER

1814-1815

← General Jackson's Advance

★ Battle



order by U.S. counterbattery fire. The British shore party advanced with sixty Creek and Seminole warriors in the center and an equal number of marines on the flanks. When the group got within range of the fort, grapeshot from the U.S. artillery pinned them down, compelling Woodbine to break off the engagement and retire.

Meanwhile, a projectile had cut *Hermes*' anchor cable, and the ship drifted to shore and ran aground. Captain Percy ordered the crew to abandon the helpless ship and to set it on fire to prevent its capture. Intense gunfire from the fort drove off the remaining warships, damaging two and inflicting numerous casualties in the process. The fort's gunners then directed their attention on the stricken flagship until the flames ignited its powder magazine. At about 2300, *Hermes* blew up in a tremendous explosion. After exchanging signals with Percy, Woodbine and his force retreated back to the beach and re-embarked. Percy sailed the remnants of his battered flotilla back to Pensacola. The British had suffered thirty-two dead and forty wounded both ashore and afloat, including Colonel Nicholls. The Americans sustained four dead and five wounded.

The Capture of Pensacola, 7 November 1814

General Jackson responded to the attack on Fort Bowyer by calling the Mississippi Territory militia into active service. He correctly deduced that the British intended to use Mobile or Pensacola as a base for future operations. He sent reinforcements to Mobile and strengthened Fort Bowyer. He then planned an attack to drive the British out of Pensacola. As a pretext to crossing the international border of a neutral nation, Jackson contended that Spain's inability—or unwillingness—to secure its own territory from British invasion had violated its neutrality. Within a few weeks, Jackson had about four thousand troops assembled at Fort Montgomery on the Alabama River poised to advance into West Florida. He informed the Spanish governor that he must evict the British from Pensacola and allow the United States to occupy the forts guarding Pensacola harbor. Should the governor refuse, Jackson threatened to take matters into his own hands.

The governor rejected Jackson's demand but could do little to resist his army. By all accounts, the 500-man Pensacola garrison lacked motivation and coordination and had few supplies. The garrison's poor condition had been the reason the Spanish had allowed the British to land in the first place. Just as the Spanish could not prevent the British takeover, they could do little to halt the Americans without British assistance.

On 7 November, Jackson began his assault. Knowing the U.S. camp lay to the west of the town, the Spanish positioned the bulk of their forces to meet an attack from that quarter. The British ships in the harbor likewise trained their guns in that direction. Jackson deceived both by leaving a force of five hundred men in camp to hold their attention. Then, in the predawn darkness, he marched most of his forces around to the east side of the town. At dawn, with the sun at their backs, the Americans attacked.

Jackson's army advanced in four columns: three of white troops and one of allied Choctaw warriors. Each of the columns that would penetrate the main enemy defenses included a company of regulars in the van with orders to conduct immediate bayonet assaults on any enemy encountered. The British warships in the harbor attempted to repel the Americans with gunfire, but Jackson's soldiers advanced into the town so quickly that the Royal Navy could not fire without risking setting Pensacola afire. Hardened after over a year of campaigning in Creek country, the American forces carried the town within minutes of initiating the attack.

With the town securely under his control, Jackson planned to capture the outlying forts guarding the harbor the following day. His delay gave the enemy time to detonate the powder in the magazines at Forts San Carlos de Barrancas and Santa Rosa before he evacuated them, thereby destroying the defenses. The Americans had captured the town, but they could not hold it against a determined naval attack without those forts. Nevertheless, Jackson had dealt a serious blow to British plans.

The Battle of Lake Borgne, 14 December 1814

While in Pensacola, Jackson received reports that the British had assembled a major invasion force at Jamaica with intentions to attack New Orleans. He immediately ordered his troops back to Mobile before traveling to New Orleans to supervise preparations for its defense. He arrived in New Orleans on 1 December and immediately went to work. His first objective was to prevent any British attempt to advance directly up the Mississippi River. He ordered Fort St. Philip at Plaquemines Bend, about sixty-five miles downriver from the city and thirty miles from the river's mouth, reinforced with additional artillery. He also ordered the strengthening of the entrenchments and artillery redoubts at Fort St. Leon. Located closer to the city, its guns commanded an S-shaped bend in the Mississippi called the English Turn, where sailing vessels would be exposed to withering fire as they waited for the wind to change direction before proceeding.



Battle of Lake Borgne, by *Thomas Lyle Hornbrook*
(U.S. Naval Academy Museum)

New Orleans rested on relatively high ground along the east bank of the Mississippi River. A myriad of waterways and bayous crisscrossed the surrounding landscape. An invading army would require reliable guides to traverse them. The city's multilingual population of about twenty-five thousand, of whom a fraction were American, teemed with ethnic, racial, and social tension, which made it difficult to know who would be loyal to the United States when the British arrived. Jackson had to assume that some residents might assist the invaders and guide them through the swamps. Therefore, he imposed martial law on 15 December and posted the most reliable local militia units to guard the approaches. He kept the more experienced troops he had brought with him near the city proper. From that location, he could quickly move to block an attempted British landing as soon as it was discovered. Meanwhile, his ground forces prepared entrenchments to cover the most likely avenues of approach. To the east of the city, Jackson supplemented the defense with a naval force of seven vessels and 209 men commanded by Lt. Thomas ap Catesby Jones on Lake Borgne, a shallow body of water separated from the Gulf of Mexico by marshes.

As it happened, the British chose to advance via Lake Borgne. Admiral Cochrane sent Capt. Nicholas Lockyer, of HMS *Sophie*, in command of a squadron of forty-five ship's boats, each armed with a

bow-mounted cannon, and about twelve hundred sailors and marines to overcome the U.S. flotilla. After withdrawing up the lake, on 13 December Jones positioned the one-gun tender *Seahorse* to protect his stores on the shore. *Seahorse* fought seven British launches for a half hour before its crew abandoned ship, setting fire to both the vessel and the stores to prevent their capture.

The next day Jones moored his gunboats, most of which mounted five guns each, on line in shoals between two islands. The lighter British launches closed in on them and opened fire at about 1050. After quickly capturing the one-gun tender *Alligator*, the launch carrying Captain Lockyer assailed Jones' gunboat. U.S. gunboats quickly sunk two enemy launches and repelled two attacks before British sailors boarded Jones' gunboat and turned its guns on the other American craft. Having ruptured the U.S. line, the British boarded and captured the rest of the gunboats in quick succession. The battle ended by 1230. The loss of the barges allowed the British to land troops unimpeded. They could now strike overland toward New Orleans or, if they chose, Baton Rouge, where they could cut New Orleans off from communications and reinforcement coming down the Mississippi River from the north.

When the British questioned the captured Lieutenant Jones, he convinced them that five hundred Americans with forty guns guarded the Rigolets, the narrow waterway that linked Lake Borgne with Lake Pontchartrain, a large body of water immediately north of New Orleans. Cochrane took Jones' word at face value and ruled out an attempt to advance by Lake Pontchartrain. Instead, Cochrane decided to have his sailors row their shallow-draft vessels to a site where the British land forces under the command of Maj. Gen. John Keane would face a difficult trek through bayous and swamps to get to New Orleans.

The Royal Navy disembarked British soldiers on a pile of sand generously called Pine Island at the north end of Lake Borgne. There, the soldiers regained their land legs as the sailors prepared to row the men across to the main landing site on Bayou Bienvenu. British light infantrymen surprised a militia picket near a small fishing camp inhabited by Spanish-speaking "Isleño" residents. British officers persuaded at least one Isleño to guide their convoy of troop-laden small craft through the swamps along Bayou Mazant. The bayou connected to a canal that ended where the soldiers could disembark on dry land at the plantation home of the adjutant general of the Louisiana militia, Jacques Villeré, which was located on the east bank of the Mississippi about eight miles below New Orleans.

Keane divided his force into three brigades. On the morning of 22 December, he accompanied the sixteen hundred men of his *1st, or Light Brigade*, forward. Under the command of Col. William Thornton, it consisted of the *4th* and *85th Regiments of Foot*, and six companies from the *95th (Rifle Corps) Regiment*. The *4th* and *85th* were specially trained as light infantry, while the *95th*, equipped with rifled muskets and green uniforms, was ideally suited for light infantry missions. All had seen considerable service in Europe against Napoleon, and both the *4th* and *85th* had fought at Bladensburg and Baltimore, Maryland.



Edward M. Pakenham
(National Park Service)

After hours of moving from Lake Borgne through the swamps along Bayous Bienvenu and Mazing and the Villeré Canal, Thornton's troops arrived at the Villeré Plantation. Riflemen from the *95th* surprised and captured a small guard of about thirty militia commanded by the general's son, Maj. Gabriel Villeré.

By questioning the prisoners and Isleño fishermen, the British discovered that Jackson might have as few as two thousand men in New Orleans. Although he actually had twice that number, the general had spread them out across the region to cover several possible avenues of approach. Thornton urged Keane to bring the rest of the available troops forward so they could move quickly on the city before Jackson concentrated his forces. Keane, however, chose to wait for reinforcements led by Maj. Gen. Sir Edward Pakenham.

The Villeré Plantation Night Battle, 23 December 1814

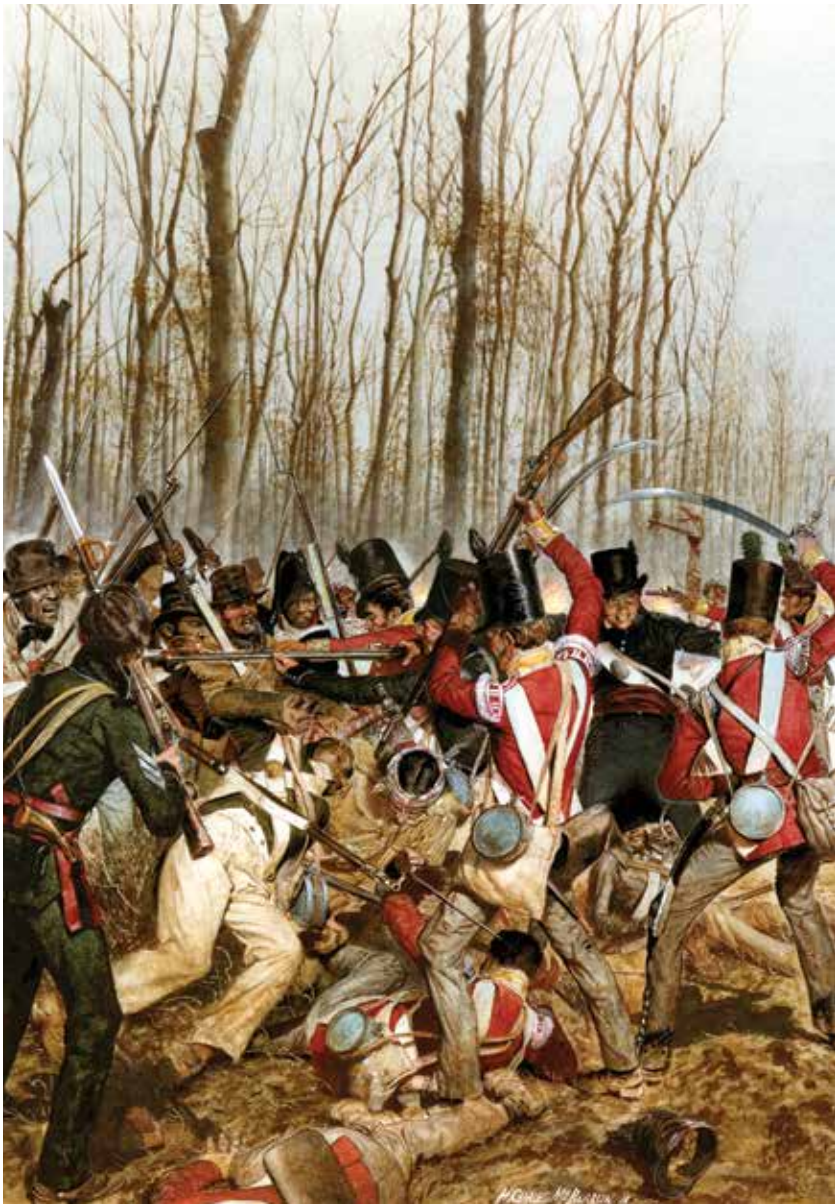
At about noon on 23 December, after he had learned that the British had landed, Jackson ordered some of his most reliable troops to assemble from all around the city for an immediate attack. He pledged, "By the eternal they will not sleep on our soil tonight!" After ordering Maj. Gen. William Carroll's division of Tennessee militia to remain in reserve at New Orleans, Jackson assembled a

number of militia and regular units, including an artillery detachment with two 6-pounder field pieces. While Jackson's dragoons reconnoitered the British positions, Maj. Jean Baptiste Plauché's volunteer militia battalion answered Jackson's call. Determined to get in the fight, the French-speaking men jogged from Fort St. John. Hearing the commotion when he saw Plauché's men approaching, Jackson bellowed, "Ah, here come my brave Creoles!" At 1400, the general ordered his force of 2,131 men to advance (*see Map 2*).

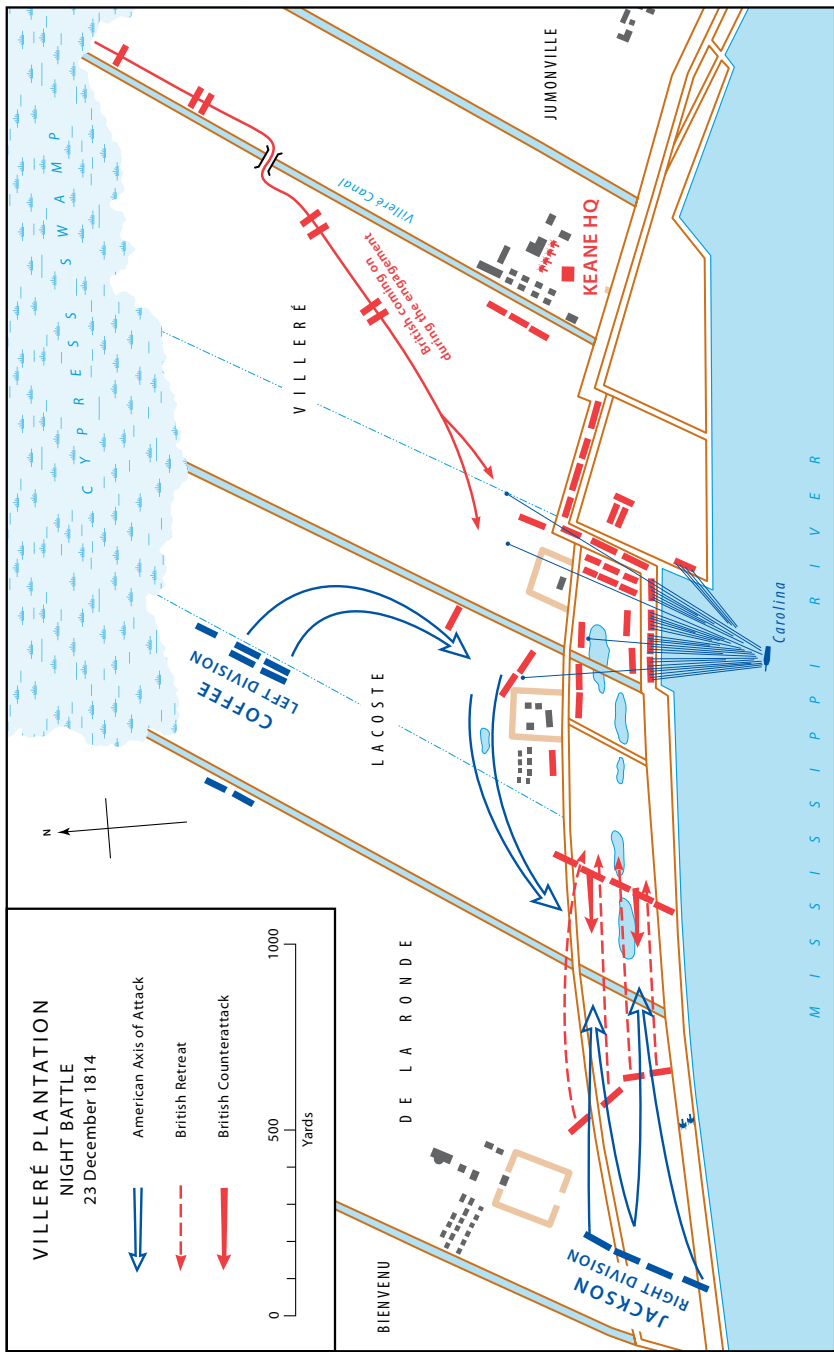


Jean Baptiste Plauché,
by Jean Joseph Vaudechamp
(Louisiana State Museum)

Halting at the de la Ronde Plantation, five hundred yards from the British camp, Jackson organized his units into line of battle with two divisions and advanced at dusk. The Right Division, under his personal command, consisted of a brigade commanded by Col. George Ross, which included the regulars of the 7th and 44th U.S. Infantry regiments; Plauché's battalion; Maj. Louis D'Aquin's battalion of Saint-Domingue Free Men of Color; and a detachment of Choctaw Indians. This division would attack the British left flank, extending to the left from the levee road, while the two-gun artillery detachment went into a battery astride the road, and a company of marines supported them from the levee road right to the riverbank. The Left Division, under the command of Brig. Gen. John Coffee, consisted of a brigade of Tennessee volunteer mounted riflemen fighting on foot, Capt. Thomas Beale's Orleans Rifle Company, and Col. Thomas Hind's squadron of Mississippi dragoons. To protect his flanks from British advancing from the direction of Lake Borgne, Governor Claiborne commanded the 1st, 2d, and 4th Regiments of Louisiana militia, totaling around twenty-five hundred men to the northeast, while Brig. Gen. David Morgan commanded a force of three hundred fifty Louisiana militiamen posted downriver at English Turn.



Free Men of Color and the Choctaw Indian Volunteers,
by H. Charles McBarron
(U.S. Army Art Collection)



MAP 2



Night Action of the Twenty-Third of December
(John Frost's 1861 Pictorial Life of Andrew Jackson)

In the twilight, British soldiers saw the masts of a ship on the Mississippi River adjacent to their position. Believing it to be a Royal Navy vessel, soldiers ran to the levee and began hailing the ship. They realized their mistake when the U.S. Navy's twelve-gun schooner *Carolina*, commanded by Capt. John D. Henley, opened fire with a broadside of grapeshot. Meanwhile, advancing under cover of darkness and guided by the British campfires, the American divisions assaulted the camp on both flanks. The attacking Right Division drove the camp's pickets before them. Fighting spread inland and Coffee's Left Division pressed the British right in an attempt to encircle the defenders. The surprised redcoats initially retreated but soon rallied. They counterattacked along the road and nearly captured the two American cannon before U.S. infantry drove them back once more. The fighting became general, confused, and hand to hand in the darkness, with some U.S. units becoming separated or lost in the dark.

At about 0400, Col. Arthur Brooke's *2d Brigade* began arriving to support the British defenders. Jackson ordered his men to disengage and retire. The 7th and 44th U.S. Infantry, along with some attached militia, covered the retreat against a possible counterattack, but Keane's army was in no condition to pursue. Perplexed over the rapid and undetected American advance, and their camp in shambles, Keane ordered his men to take defensive positions. U.S. casualties amounted

to 24 killed, 115 wounded, and 74 missing or captured. British losses included 46 killed, 166 wounded, and 64 missing.

Although he considered the battle a victory, Jackson realized that the British outnumbered his force. After falling back in reasonably good order, Jackson's troops re-formed along the Rodriguez Canal, the boundary between the Chalmette and Macarty Plantations, and started throwing up earthworks. Named "Line Jackson," the newly established defenses ran along the canal from the east bank of the Mississippi River to a cypress swamp. No longer used for irrigation, the canal had a dry bottom and caved-in banks for much of its length when Jackson's engineers started work. Soldiers cut the levee to flood the canal for much of its length—to a depth of five to six feet in some places. They raised a rampart on



Daniel Todd Patterson,
photograph of a painting
by John Wesley Jarvis
(U.S. Naval Historical Center)

the canal bank by constructing two double walls of logs, filled the space in between with the excavated spoil, and added a parapet.

General Pakenham arrived on Christmas Day and assumed command of the British land forces. The armies cautiously watched each other for the next few days. The new commander reorganized his men into three brigades as the Royal Navy ferried more troops and artillery ashore and evacuated the wounded. Pakenham realized that the U.S. Navy's vessels on the Mississippi River could enfilade his left flank in any move toward New Orleans. Under the command of Master Commandant Daniel T. Patterson, who held the local rank of commodore, the Mississippi Flotilla consisted of *Carolina*, riding at anchor; the unfinished converted sixteen-gun sloop-of-war *Louisiana*, anchored about one mile farther upriver and being used as a floating battery under Lt. Charles Thompson's command; and two gunboats. To deal with this threat, Pakenham ordered his chief of artillery, Lt. Col. Alexander Dickson, to sink *Carolina* and, if

possible, *Louisiana*. After cutting embrasures in the levee during the night of 25 December, the British erected furnaces for heating “hot shot,” and waited for more ammunition.

The British opened fire at dawn on 27 December. With guns firing round shot and howitzers firing shell, the artillerymen quickly found the range to *Carolina*. Both *Louisiana* and *Carolina* returned fire, but only the forward 12-pounder aboard the latter could reply effectively. Patterson ordered both ships and the gunboats to withdraw upstream. Shot and shell raked the deck as *Carolina* struggled against the current and northwest wind. A hot shot penetrated to the hold and started a fire. When he realized the flames were out of control, Captain Henley ordered the crew to abandon ship before the fire spread to the magazine and ignited the powder. The resulting explosion destroyed the ship at about 1020. Although at maximum range, British artillerymen now turned their attention on *Louisiana*, but the crew used their boats to tow the ship upstream to safety. The men of *Carolina* later salvaged some guns from the sunken hulk and served on shore.

The Grand Reconnaissance, 28 December 1814

With *Carolina* eliminated, and eager to determine what lay ahead of him, Pakenham directed a major probe of the U.S. defenses. By giving the appearance of a full-scale attack—without intending to bring on a general engagement—Pakenham hoped Jackson would commit his forces and reveal his dispositions and strength. His staff could use the intelligence to plan a deliberate attack once the rest of the British infantry and artillery arrived. Late on the afternoon of 27 December, Pakenham’s light infantry drove the American pickets back and occupied de la Ronde and Bienvenu Plantations. There, he discovered that U.S. artillery and retreating infantry had already destroyed many of the buildings to clear fields of fire in front of their main line.

The demonstration began as soon as the early morning mist cleared. About three thousand British troops advanced across the cane-stubble fields in two columns with skirmishers from the light infantry and *95th Rifle Corps* companies deployed in front of and between them. Maj. Gen. Samuel Gibbs led the *2d Brigade*, or Right Column, which advanced along the edge of the cypress swamp with the *4th*, *21st*, and *44th Regiments of Foot* and the *1st West India Regiment* toward the American left. Keane led the *3d Brigade*, or Left Column, as the *85th Foot*, *93d Highland Regiment*, and *5th West India Regiment* advanced along the river and the levee road against Jackson’s right. With continual supporting cannon and rocket fire, the infantrymen drove the remaining pickets of Maj. Henry D. Peire’s 7th

Infantry and Hind's dragoons off the Chalmette Plantation and back to the main U.S. defenses. However, the green militia did not panic at the sight of tight, disciplined columns of bayonet-wielding troops.

When Keane's column drew within six hundred yards of the American right, four U.S. artillery batteries engaged it in front, while the guns of *Louisiana* fired into its flank, inflicting serious loss. After the British infantry took shelter in shallow ditches and hastily built earthworks, their own light artillery came forward and went into action to silence the U.S. batteries. The troops noted the water-filled ditch but could not determine if it was fordable.

About one thousand yards from the river, where *Louisiana's* guns could not engage them, the men of Gibbs' brigade made good progress toward the American left. They saw that the ditch in front of General Carroll's division of Tennessee militia was dry and that the breastworks were unfinished. Lt. Col. Robert Rennie's light infantry, advancing through the swamp on Gibbs' flank, succeeded in driving back the American outposts. Carroll sent Lt. Col. James Henderson with a battalion of Tennesseans in an attempt to encircle them, but the British drove them back with several wounded and a number of killed, including Henderson. Nevertheless, with Keane's brigade pinned down and several of his artillery pieces destroyed or damaged by effective counterbattery fire, Pakenham halted the advance. Some of the more exposed forward British troops waited to retreat under cover of darkness. After falling back, the British began constructing new artillery positions and repairing their damaged pieces. The action had cost the British 152 killed, wounded, or captured, against 8 dead and 8 wounded Americans. Based on the experience, the British commander decided to wait for the last of his infantry and artillery to arrive, and he requested that the Royal Navy provide him with more naval cannon. Pakenham wanted to ensure success by massing as much heavy ordnance as possible to overwhelm the U.S. batteries and to breach the earthworks.

The Americans meanwhile strengthened Line Jackson. To give the east bank defenses more depth, Louisiana militiamen began working on Line Dupre, about one-half mile behind Line Jackson, and Line Montreuil, another one and one-quarter mile farther upriver. On the west bank, a brigade of Louisiana militiamen under General Morgan's command established Line Boisgervais. In addition, Pater's sailors removed most of the naval guns from *Louisiana* and positioned them in a "marine battery" along the riverfront, where they could fire across the Mississippi and into the flanks of a British army advance (*see Map 3*).

Artillery Duel and Battle, New Year's Day 1815

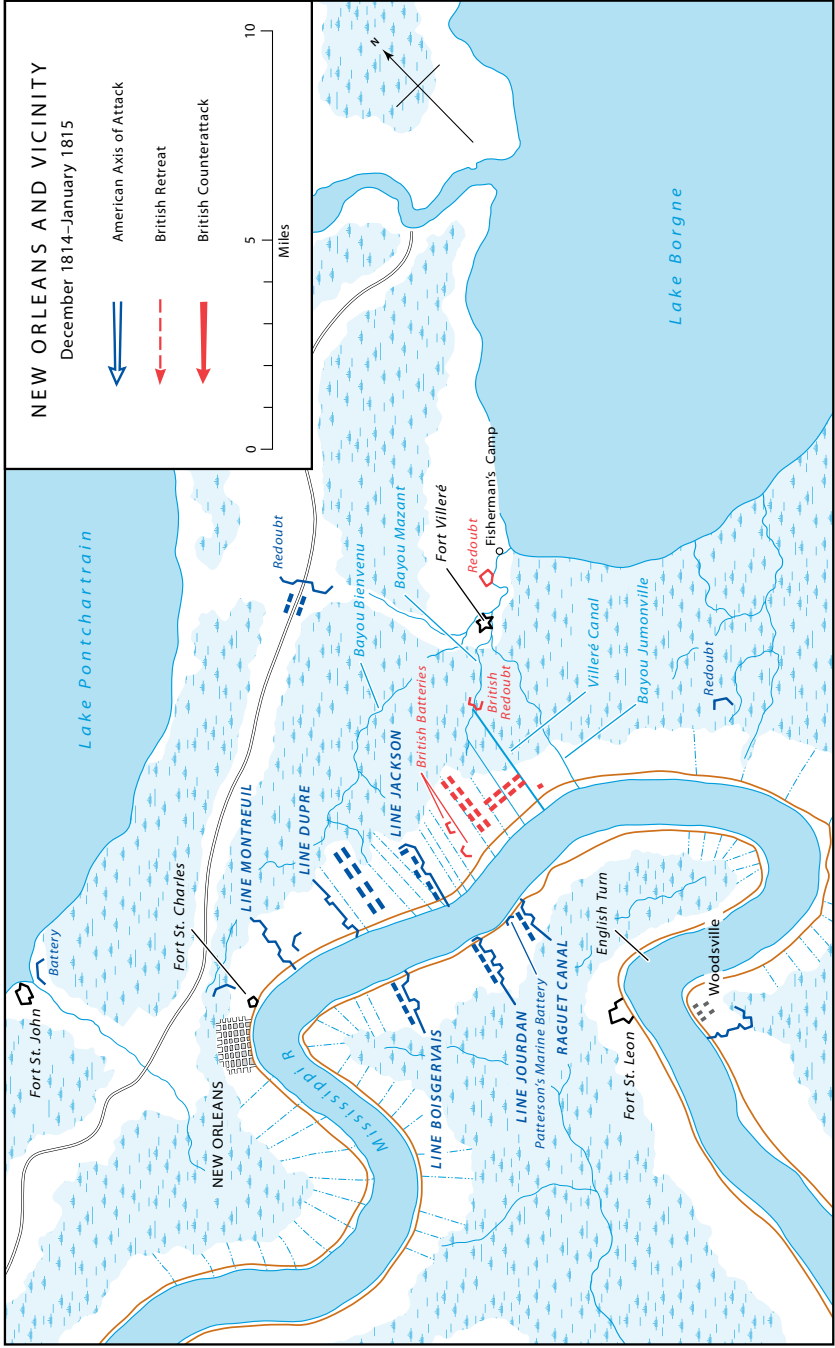
On the first of January 1815, British batteries totaling about thirty naval and field guns, howitzers, mortars, and Congreve rockets opened fire. One British battery concentrated its fire at the guns on the high road on the American right, while another fired from behind the Chalmette house at *Louisiana*. In conjunction with rockets, batteries of howitzers shelled the right and center of the U.S. line, and a grand battery of light field guns positioned astride the road provided support for the main infantry effort.

The cannonade surprised the Americans. The Macarty house, where Jackson and his staff maintained their headquarters, sustained over one hundred hits, but most rounds overshot the U.S. positions and landed harmlessly in the fields beyond. Those rounds that struck the parapet tended to bounce harmlessly off the improved earthworks. After determining the range to the British positions, U.S. artilleryists responded with effective counterbattery fire from Line Jackson, joined by Patterson's naval batteries across the river. They inflicted great damage and destroyed and disabled many of the less-well-protected British pieces. While the artillery exchange continued, a British column advanced against the left of Line Jackson to exploit the weakness observed during the earlier reconnaissance, but Coffee's Tennessee volunteers easily repulsed the probe. Off in the swamp, Colonel Rennie's light infantry again advanced to within one hundred yards of the American left, where the men took cover and waited for a signal to attack. They received a recall order instead.

After a three-and-one-half-hour cannonade with no significant effect, Pakenham ordered the artillery to cease fire. The British fell back to their positions near the de la Ronde house, leaving a quantity of ammunition and a number of guns on the battlefield—some to be captured by U.S. patrols. The action convinced British commanders that only a simultaneous attack on both sides of the Mississippi would break the defenses and clear the way to New Orleans. British losses for the day numbered thirty killed and forty wounded. The Americans suffered eleven killed and thirty-three wounded, with casualties disproportionately heavy among those in the rear bringing ammunition forward to the batteries.

The Battle of New Orleans, 8 January 1815

As the Americans wielded picks and shovels to further improve their earthworks, Pakenham again reorganized his command and planned the next attack. He eventually developed a complex scheme



MAP 3

of maneuver involving a river crossing and three coordinated assaults. Getting Thornton's *Light Brigade* across the Mississippi required moving boats through bayou and canal, over land, and then to the river by cutting an access through the levee. After landing on the opposite bank, his 700-man brigade—comprised of his *85th Regiment of Foot*, a composite Royal Marine battalion, a detachment of Royal Navy seamen, and some supporting artillery—would attack the U.S. batteries along the river and Line Boisgervais. Thornton would then turn the captured guns to enfilade Line Jackson in support of the main assault.

Once again, the twenty-one hundred men of Gibbs' *2d Brigade*, or Right Column, would conduct the primary effort against the American left. The *4th*, *21st*, and *44th Regiments of Foot* would advance in column, close to the edge of the swamp, where the irregular wood line would obscure the Americans' view for much of the distance. Advancing under cover of darkness, it was imperative that the assaulting regiments reached the ditch at first light. Using bound bundles of sticks, called fascines, to bridge the ditch and ladders to scale the earthwork, the British would then assault the apparently weaker U.S. left flank. Keane's *3d Brigade*, or Left Column, twelve hundred men strong, would conduct a supporting attack against the right of Line Jackson. Colonel Rennie's battalion, composed of the light infantry companies detached from the regiments in Brig. Gen. John Lambert's brigade, would attack the redoubt that blocked the levee road at the extreme right of Line Jackson. The *93d Highland* and *5th West India Regiments* of Keane's main column would either exploit a success by Rennie or support Gibbs by attacking the American center. General Lambert's *1st Brigade* with the *7th* and *43d Foot*—arguably the most reliable troops in the army—and the *1st West India Regiment*, minus the light infantry companies detached to Rennie, would remain in reserve, ready to exploit a breach of the U.S. line. As Pakenham's staff completed the plan, the last of his artillery and infantry arrived to bring his strength to more than nine thousand men. Meanwhile, British soldiers fashioned bundles of sticks into fascines for crossing the canal and ladders to scale the breastworks. Before the attack, soldiers would place the fascines and ladders in the battery positions that were abandoned after the 1 January artillery battle, and designated men of the *44th* would carry them forward with the leading assault companies.

By 7 January, about five thousand men defended Line Jackson. The fortification bristled with eight batteries that mounted twelve artillery pieces of various calibers and stretched from the Mississippi River across the open fields for one thousand yards, then continued into the cypress swamp for another five hundred yards. Engineers had

A 7th U.S. Infantry
Sergeant, 1815, during the
Battle of New Orleans,
by Don Troiani
(Don Troiani Image Bank)



Don Troiani
© 2012

constructed a redoubt, or “demi-bastion,” on the right and in front of the line at a point where the canal intersected the road along the river. Maj. Howell Tatum, the topographic engineer on Jackson’s staff, noted, “Two embrasures were constructed in its base to rake the Canal and plane in front of the line, and two others in its face for the purpose of raking the Levey & road. It was encircled by a [moat].” At designated Battery One, the Americans placed two brass 12-pounders and a 5½-inch howitzer—manned by regular artillerymen and supported by a company of the 7th U.S. Infantry—in the strongpoint. A bridge over the Rodriguez Canal connected the small outwork to the main line.

Battery Two rested ninety feet from the redoubt on the main line. It consisted of a 24-pounder manned by U.S. sailors. Baratarian privateers served two 24-pounders at Battery Three, fifty yards down the line. Next, only twenty yards away, U.S. sailors manned a 32-pounder at Battery Four. Regular artillerymen manned two 6-pounders at Battery Five. Over two hundred yards separated Batteries Four and Five, but the range of the naval ordnance on the right enabled them to engage troops assaulting on the left with enfilade fire. Just thirty-six yards from Battery Five, a 12-pounder, crewed by militiamen that counted a number of veterans of Napoleon’s army among its French immigrant members, constituted Battery Six. Just before Jackson’s line entered the cypress swamp, regular artillerymen and Tennesseans manned Batteries Seven and Eight. Battery Seven consisted of an 18-pounder and a 6-pounder field gun, and Battery Eight had a small brass carronade loaded with grapeshot and canister (or case shot), which contained hundreds of small musket-ball-size projectiles. Thus, the British would face heavy cannon fire as they crossed the two thousand yards of open ground that lay before Jackson’s earthwork (*Map 4*).

The American infantry took position along the line between the batteries in several brigade-size units. The brigade of regulars and Louisiana volunteer militia deployed on the right and extended to the left as far as Battery Five. Commanded by Colonel Ross, the brigade included the 7th U.S. Infantry (minus those stationed at Fort St. Philip); Beale’s riflemen; Plauché’s battalion; Maj. Pierre Lacoste’s battalion of Orleans Free Men of Color; D’Aquin’s Saint-Domingue Free Men of Color; several companies of the 44th U.S. Infantry commanded by Capt. Isaac Baker; and a company of marines under the command of 1st Lt. Francis DeBellevue. General Carroll’s division of Tennessee militia manned the line from Battery Five to a point beyond Battery Eight, supported by two regiments of Brig. Gen. John Adair’s recently arrived brigade of Kentucky militia posted

behind their center. From the left flank of Carroll's division, Coffee's brigade held the remainder of Line Jackson into the cypress swamp, including where it turned ninety degrees to the left to refuse the flank. American skirmishers and Choctaw Indians deployed into the swamp to harass any British movement in that area, while the 10th Regiment of Louisiana militia posted in reserve behind Coffee's brigade.

Morgan's brigade, with the 1st and 2d Regiments of Louisiana militia, defended the west bank. Just before the battle, Jackson reinforced them with a battalion of Louisiana drafted militia and a regiment from Adair's Kentucky brigade. After receiving these reinforcements, Morgan had nearly one thousand men. He began to construct a second line lower down the river along the Raguét Canal to better support Patterson's marine battery on the Mississippi's bank, and improved his main defense on Line Boisgervais, opposite Line Jackson.

The British attack went awry almost from the start. Numerous problems hampered Thornton's crossing and reduced the size of his assault force. When the British finally launched their boats, the Mississippi current carried them about one thousand yards below the intended landing site, causing further delay. Growing impatient, Pakenham signaled the main attack to commence at about 0500 without waiting for the diversionary attack on the west bank.

Rocket and artillery batteries fired as skirmishers from the *95th Rifles* and the battalion light infantry companies moved forward. Withdrawing American pickets gave the alarm, so that U.S. forces were alert and ready when the fog lifted and the British came into view. The batteries of artillery on the American left opened a heavy fire. The green-clad British riflemen rushed the canal, scrambled into the ditch, but could not cut their way up the rampart. Meanwhile, U.S. artillery fire became more deadly the closer the main British columns approached. Gibbs' brigade inclined to the left into the open fields and presented a more lucrative target. British artillery failed to silence the U.S. guns, and as the advancing brigade came within range, the Tennessee and Kentucky infantry opened with deadly volleys of rifle and musket fire.

Although they were supposed to follow closely behind the skirmishers of the *95th*, Gibbs' column halted when officers of the *44th* discovered that the fascines and ladders that were supposed to be prepositioned had not been brought forward as planned. While waiting for a detachment to bring them up, the rest of the regiment's lead elements, contrary to orders, halted in the open and traded shots with the Americans. As small arms, grape, canister, and solid shot took



Battle of New Orleans, 1815, by *Don Troiani*,
depicting *Rennie's attack on the bastion*
(Don Troiani Image Bank)

their toll, many of the British fell back in disorder and took cover in furrows, ditches, or the previously abandoned artillery positions. After officers rallied their troops, the British advanced once more, but in the withering fire, only about four hundred reached the U.S. line. A few managed to claw their way up the embankment, but the British could not get enough men over the wall to overwhelm the defenders before either being killed, wounded, or captured.

Keane's brigade fared no better. Patterson's naval battery on the west bank commenced firing as the column advanced along the river. Pakenham rode forward toward Gibbs' column and sent orders for Keane's men to follow him. Keane complied, and in an effort to minimize the damage from Patterson's guns on the west bank, he led most of his men obliquely across the American right to assault the center. When they came within range, the American infantry—standing four ranks deep behind a protective parapet—fired withering volleys of rifle and musket fire, as the guns of Battery Four opened at point-blank range. The *93d Highlanders* took a severe punishing as they approached the American line. Their attack ground to a halt, broken, and they withdrew leaving behind many dead and wounded.



Battle of New Orleans and Death of Major General Pakenham on the 8th of January 1815, *engraving by Joseph Yeager from a painting by William Edward West* (Library of Congress)

Rennie's battalion came on in a rush along the levee road and initially enjoyed some success. After driving in the U.S. pickets it reached the redoubt. Not wanting to hit their withdrawing pickets, the Americans in the bastion had held their fire until it was too late and had to evacuate as the redcoats entered the position. With Keane's brigade no longer following them, the success could not be exploited. Consequently, some U.S. regulars and Beale's riflemen poured fire into the attackers, killing Rennie and two other officers as they tried to lead an attack across the bridge into the main line. Infantrymen of the 7th Regiment then attacked and drove the surviving British out of the bastion. The entire action lasted about twenty-five minutes. The withdrawing British light infantry continued to suffer under heavy infantry and artillery fire.

By that time the entire attack had stalled, Lt. Col. Timothy Jones' flanking maneuver through the swamp had failed, with Jones mortally wounded. Back with the main body of his brigade, Gibbs too fell mortally wounded. A messenger reported that Keane had been seriously wounded and was out of action. Pakenham came forward to rally the troops but was also mortally wounded. It is said that before he was carried to the rear where he died, he ordered Lambert



A panoramic view of the Battle of New Orleans, by Jean Hyacinthe de Laclotte (Library of Congress)

to commit the reserve, but U.S. fire had pinned it down as well. In an hour and a half, hundreds of British lay dead and wounded on the field, and many units were badly disorganized. With many senior officers killed or wounded, General Lambert assumed command and halted the attack on the east bank.

On the west bank, Thornton's brigade, reduced in number to about five hundred sixty men due to a shortage of boats, had finally advanced after the attack on the east bank had already started. It first moved to capture Patterson's guns that were enfilading the attack on Jackson's line. The British quickly routed the forward deployed pickets of Maj. Paul Arnaud's Louisiana battalion and Col. John Davis' Kentucky regiment, who withdrew to the line along the Raguette Canal. Thornton then attacked the U.S. line and Patterson's batteries, forcing the Americans to retreat to Line Boisgervais. Although the withdrawing U.S. sailors managed to spike some of the cannon, most fell intact to the British, who lost six killed and seventy-six wounded, compared to one dead, three wounded, and fifteen missing Americans.

Ultimately, Thornton advanced to about twelve hundred yards from Morgan's second line. As a detachment of his men destroyed the U.S. naval batteries, Thornton sent word to Lambert that he would need two thousand men to assault the main U.S. entrenchment and

hold the west bank position. Lambert, having already decided not to renew the attack on Line Jackson, ordered Thornton to retire and withdraw back across the Mississippi. The battle was over.

Lambert asked Jackson for a truce to gather the dead and to treat the wounded. The two sides agreed to a 300-yard-wide zone extending from Line Jackson in which the Americans would recover and care for the British casualties that remained on the field. British casualties in the battle on the east bank amounted to 285 killed, 1,265 wounded, and 484 captured or missing. The Americans suffered 13 dead, 30 wounded, and 19 captured or missing in the main battle.

For the next week, the U.S. and British troops watched each other across their lines and contemplated their next moves. As the British buried their dead and evacuated their wounded seventy miles to the fleet, a general air of defeat hovered over the camp. Naval officers like Admiral Cochrane wanted to make another attempt, but the army officers had had enough. Some of Jackson's subordinates urged him to attack, but he realized that the American army had the good fortune of fighting from behind prepared positions, and he did not care to risk a battle in the open. Since 23 December, the land battles had cost a total of 333 U.S. and 2,459 British casualties.

The Battle of Fort St. Philip, 9–18 January 1815

The day after the Battle of New Orleans, a British squadron—consisting of a sloop-of-war, a gun-brig, a schooner, and two bomb vessels—approached Fort St. Philip. The fort, which was built on the foundation of an old Spanish work at Plaquemines Bend on the east bank of the Mississippi River, had its position strengthened in recent weeks by Jackson's engineers and artillerymen. Maj. Walter H. Overton commanded the post whose armament consisted of twenty-nine 24-pounder guns, a 6-pounder cannon, eight 5½-inch howitzers, and one 13-inch mortar in the fort and two 32-pounders in an earthen battery at water level. Two companies of regular artillerymen, two companies from the 7th Infantry, and two of Louisiana volunteer militia, including one of Free Men of Color, manned the post, while a U.S. Navy gunboat lay offshore.

At 1500 on 9 January, British barges were taking soundings of the river bottom about one and one-half miles below the fort when the Americans opened fire with their cannons. Although they drove the scouts back, the artillerymen had revealed the maximum range of their guns. The British ships anchored a safe 3,960 yards below the fort, and their two bomb vessels opened fire with mortars. Problems with fuses and ammunition rendered the U.S. mortar incapable of



Genl. Andrew Jackson: The Hero of New Orleans,
by N. Currier (Library of Congress)

counterbattery fire, and consequently the garrison hunkered down as it waited for the British to approach close enough to engage. The shelling continued into the night. Several armed launches pulled close to the fort firing grape and round shot from their bow guns as a diversion for the larger vessels. When the British ships closed the range, however, U.S. artillery fire drove them back. The bombardment continued intermittently for the next eight days. When the garrison received a fresh supply of ammunition and fuses for the piece, the fort's mortar went into action. Its fire effectively disrupted the British formation. Just after dawn on 18 January, the British weighed anchor and retreated downriver. The Americans suffered two dead and seven wounded, while the British reported no casualties.

Meanwhile, back at the Chalmette Plantation, the two sides exchanged prisoners, and on the evening of 18 January, the British completed their withdrawal from the battlefield, leaving behind fourteen spiked artillery pieces. The retreat was executed in such secrecy that Jackson did not learn of it until the next day when a British doctor approached with a letter from Lambert asking the Americans to care for eighty patients too badly wounded to make the journey to the fleet. By the evening of 27 January, all the landing forces had re-embarked.

Undeterred, Admiral Cochrane decided to revert to the earlier plan to take New Orleans by moving overland from Mobile. He dispatched a messenger to Colonel Nicholls at Apalachicola with orders to send one force of Indian allies northeast to raid the Georgia frontier and another northwest to cut off Fort Stoddert and the communities north of Mobile. Cochrane's fleet would attack up Mobile Bay and put Lambert's army ashore to capture Fort Bowyer before marching from Mobile to Baton Rouge. After cutting New Orleans off from the rest of the United States, the army would entrench and wait for Jackson's army to attack—turning the tables of 8 January.

The Capture of Fort Bowyer, 9–12 February 1815

The British received reinforcements of infantry and artillery before they withdrew from the Lake Borgne area. Meanwhile, General Lambert decided on a plan to put a brigade ashore at the end of Mobile Point to capture Fort Bowyer and the entrance to Mobile Bay. In addition to clearing the way to Mobile, a quick victory would help restore morale. The rest of the army would land on Dauphin Island to further secure the entrance to the bay and to create a supply base. Following the reduction of the fort,

Lambert would decide whether to continue up the peninsula to seize Mobile before making a second attempt against New Orleans. With the memory of the unsuccessful attempt to capture the fort the previous September still fresh in mind, the British determined to carry the works at the lowest possible cost.

On 6 February, now Lt. Col. William Lawrence and the garrison of 375 U.S. regular artillerymen and infantrymen watched as British warships anchored a safe distance offshore. Two days later, twelve hundred British soldiers landed on the peninsula. Deployed along Fort Bowyer's less defended landward side, the British effectively cut the bastion off from resupply and reinforcement. Colonel Dickson then landed with 450 artillerymen and six guns, two howitzers, and eight mortars, and Lt. Col. John Fox Burgoyne of the Royal Engineers came ashore with the army's Sappers and Miners.

At dawn on 9 February, the defenders discovered that the British had cut a trench parallel to the fort's north curtain wall, and by the end of the day, the redcoats had extended the length of the trench to one hundred fifty yards. British infantrymen took particular aim at U.S. gun crews as both sides continued to exchange artillery and musket fire. The next day, the attackers cut another trench and extended it three hundred yards to join the first one. By early morning on 11 February, the British had advanced a sap, or approach trench, to within thirty yards of the fort's protective ditch, as their batteries opened an intense cannonade. At about 1000, the firing ceased, and a British officer advanced under a flag of truce to present Lawrence with General Lambert's demand to surrender. If refused, Lambert promised to allow the U.S. soldiers' dependent women and children time to leave before he initiated an assault.

With no hope of reinforcement, ammunition running low, and facing overwhelming odds, the colonel knew further resistance would prove futile. After consulting his officers, Lawrence agreed to capitulate, and so notified his counterpart that afternoon. The garrison marched out into captivity at noon the next day. The five-day siege had cost the British 13 killed and 18 wounded, while the Americans suffered 1 dead, 10 wounded, and 366 captured.

Brig. Gen. James Winchester, commander of the U.S. forces defending Mobile, had sent a column to the fort's relief that attacked a British picket post and captured seventeen redcoats, but not before Lawrence had surrendered. Following the British occupation of the fort, Admiral Cochrane and General Lambert



The Signing of the Treaty of Ghent, Christmas Eve, 1814,
by Sir Amédée Forestier (Smithsonian American Art Museum)

gave the British Army an opportunity to rest before resuming the invasion. Two days later, the sloop-of-war HMS *Brazen* arrived with the news that a preliminary peace agreement had been signed in Ghent, Belgium.

Although U.S. and British commissioners had concluded a treaty on 24 December 1814, the war had not ended on that day. It is therefore a mistake to believe that the Battle of New Orleans was fought after the war had ended. The U.S. government in Washington learned of Jackson's victory on 4 February 1815, followed two days later by the arrival of the official copies of the Treaty of Ghent. The British Parliament ratified the treaty on 30 December 1814; the U.S. Senate followed suit on 16 February 1815. The next day, Secretary of State James Monroe, on behalf of the United States, exchanged the signed and ratified copies with a British ambassador in Washington. The day after, as specified in the treaty, the War of 1812 officially ended when peace was proclaimed on 18 February 1815.

Jackson received notification of the war's termination on 13 March. He immediately ordered a cessation of hostilities. The

next day, he released the militia and volunteers from federal service and sent them home for discharge and final pay. Jackson also revoked the order of 15 December that had placed New Orleans under martial law, and he proclaimed a “pardon for all military offenses committed.” He sent some of the regular units to replace the volunteers manning forts in the district. News of the armistice reached Mobile on 14 March, and British troops embarked and sailed for Europe the following day.

ANALYSIS

The importance of the Gulf campaign is difficult to gauge. A successful British invasion would have cut American commerce moving along the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers from access to the sea, with dire economic consequences. It also would have allowed Britain to seize control of the Louisiana Territory. Had the war continued, these would have been serious threats. But the Treaty of Ghent, already negotiated but not yet ratified by the time of the battle of New Orleans, made these points moot. Perhaps the British might have reconsidered the treaty’s terms if they had captured New Orleans; but Great Britain, tired by the long war with Napoleon, was in no mood to continue a conflict that it had never wanted in the first place just for the chance of gaining five hundred thousand acres of North American wilderness. As it happened, both sides readily embraced the treaty’s call for returning to prewar territorial boundaries.

Another possible danger stemming from a British victory at New Orleans is that Britain might have turned the region over to Spain rather than to the United States on the grounds that Spain was the rightful prewar owner. But if Britain had insisted on transferring Louisiana to Spain, it is unlikely that beleaguered nation would have been able to hold the territory against an aggressive, expansionist United States. Already fighting a losing battle to retain its Latin American colonies from indigenous independence movements, Spain was in no position to defend its North American territories from encroachment. Spain acknowledged this reality in 1819 when it ceded Florida to the United States. In exchange, the two nations agreed on a firm boundary between the United States and Spanish territory west of Louisiana. Even this did not save the Spanish empire in North America, as two years later the region’s population won its independence from Spain and established the country of

Mexico, thus ending Spain's 300-year presence in North America. In short, had Britain won the battle of New Orleans, it is difficult to see how it or any European power could have stopped the relentless westward drive of the American people.

Last but not least, a British victory might have reinvigorated efforts to establish an Indian confederacy to bottle the United States up along the eastern seaboard. But this too seems unlikely. British negotiators at Ghent had already abandoned this goal in the quest for peace. Had the British changed their minds, an Indian confederacy would have had little chance of survival given America's decisive victories over Tecumseh and his adherents during the war. If the War of 1812 had accomplished anything, it had ended Indian power east of the Mississippi once and for all—power which, given America's rising population and Indian vulnerabilities, could never have held the United States in check in any case.

The impact of the last major battle of the War of 1812 is questionable, and it is a befitting description for a war whose entire legacy is ambiguous. After roughly two and a half years of fighting, the two sides called it quits without resolving any of the issues that had led to war. America's bid to conquer Canada had failed miserably, with the two sides agreeing to return to the prewar international boundaries. British infringement on U.S. maritime rights at sea, a major irritant that had led the United States to declare war, ended, but only because Britain had defeated Napoleonic France and had no further need to continue these measures. In fact, Britain refused to renounce the right to impose similar hardships on neutrals in the future, although as events turned out it would never apply them against the United States again. After spending over \$90 million and suffering over 6,700 battlefield casualties (88 percent of whom came from the Army and militia), the United States thus had little to show for its June 1812 decision to declare war on Great Britain.

If the war neither redrew the map of North America nor established America's rights to ply the seas free of British harassment, it nevertheless had some important consequences. It cleared the way for further westward expansion by completing the destruction of Tecumseh's confederacy, and spurred domestic manufacturing. In the military realm, the nation overcame initial missteps to develop viable combat forces led by a new cohort of talented, battle-tested officers. One such officer, Winfield Scott, would dominate U.S. military affairs for another forty years. Early war disasters also

sparked reforms, such as the wartime formation of a small General Staff and a postwar revamping of the U.S. Military Academy to produce a more professional officer corps. These and other initiatives came to fruition under the energetic leadership of John C. Calhoun, the secretary of war from 1817 to 1825. The benefits would be in full evidence several decades later when Scott would lead American arms to victory in the Mexican War of 1846–1848.

Wars bring fame to the successful, and as so often happens in American history, some warriors are able to transform battlefield victories into success at the ballot box. Two such men were Maj. Gens. Andrew Jackson and William H. Harrison, who became presidents of the United States in 1829 and 1841, respectively. A third albeit lesser hero of the war, Zachary Taylor, became president in 1849, although his performance in the Mexican War was a greater factor than his 1812 service in propelling him into the presidency. Victory did not always translate into political success, however. Fame from both the War of 1812 and the Mexican War was not sufficient to win the White House for Scott when he ran for president in 1852.

The War of 1812 is often called America's "Second War for Independence." This is not literally true, as the United States was never in danger of becoming a British colony again. Yet, there is a grain of truth to the notion, at least in the abstract. Great Britain had never fully implemented the 1783 treaty that had ended the American War of Independence, and it certainly did not treat Americans as equals on the international stage. Early American defeats seemed only to reaffirm in British minds America's status as a rather uncouth and backward relative. Many Americans also harbored self-doubts, with the burning of Washington, D.C., in August 1814, adding insult to the injuries inflicted by the many embarrassing defeats of the previous two years. But this perception began to change in the summer of 1814, when American arms defied one of the most professional armies in the world at Chippewa, Plattsburgh, and Baltimore. The victory at New Orleans, fought against a large contingent of British veterans of the Napoleonic War, amplified the successes of the previous year tenfold. The fact that news of Jackson's victory arrived on the east coast of the United States just before news of the peace treaty convinced many Americans that they had trounced the British and won the war. The Battle of New Orleans thus helped generate a wave of national pride and confidence in the United States that historians would later label the "Era of Good Feelings." Having shaken thoughts of inferiority and self-doubt, Americans would

go forward with optimism and confidence to conquer a continent in the coming decades. Largely ignored in Europe at the time, in retrospect the War of 1812 indicated that the United States was beginning to come of age.



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For more information on the U.S. Army in the War of 1812, please read other titles in the U.S. Army Campaigns of the War of 1812 series published by the U.S. Army Center of Military History.

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NEW ORLEANS 1814-1815

