



## The American Soldier, 1814

While peace negotiations to end the War of 1812 were taking place at Ghent in late 1814, the British decided to continue an operation that had been planned earlier. This was to be a raid upon the Gulf coast to capture New Orleans and possibly separate Louisiana from the United States. The Americans, having received early word of the British intentions, placed their southern defenses under the command of Maj. Gen. Andrew Jackson. Jackson arrived at New Orleans on 2 December and began making preparations to meet the British expedition.

The British force, under Major General Keane, made good progress. Arriving at the mouth of Lake Borgne on 10 December, they met and captured the American gunboat flotilla on that lake four days later. After that they conducted an undetected reconnaissance to within six miles of New Orleans.

News of the gunboats' capture caused consternation. Jackson placed the city under martial law and concentrated his scattered troop detachments nearby. General Coffee with his mounted riflemen arrived on 19 December, and Tennessee and Mississippi volunteers, under General Carroll, arrived a few days later. In and around the city itself Jackson had two regular regiments, the 7th and the 44th; a thousand state militia; a battalion of three hundred city volunteers; a rifle company of about sixty; a battalion of free blacks, mostly refugees from Santo Domingo; and twenty-eight Choctaw Indians. It was fortunate that Jackson's men had concentrated quickly, for at noon on 23 December the British advance force, a light brigade of about nineteen hundred men under Lieutenant Colonel Thornton, appeared on the banks of the Mississippi at the Villere plantation about nine miles from New Orleans, where they were to camp for the night. Jackson was told of the British arrival and decided to attack that evening. The main body of about thirteen hundred led by him would make a frontal attack, and Coffee with approximately seven hundred would hit from the flank while the armed schooner Carolina in the river would sweep the British with its guns. The action began well. The Carolina commenced her bombardment at 7:00 p.m. and soon after, Jackson and Coffee engaged the surprised British. But the early winter night had fallen and with the night came fog. Men became separated from their units and soon the action became a melee with squads and individuals meeting, often fighting hand-to-hand with little overall control. At first the Americans were successful, but the British steadied with the arrival of reinforcements. After about an hour and a half of this confusion, Jackson broke off the action and withdrew his troops. He was followed by Coffee an hour later. The Americans lost 213 killed and wounded. British casualties totaled 267.

The painting shows the Choctaws and a mixed group of Major Daquin's Battalion of Free Men of Colour. The latter were mostly attired in civilian clothes because they had been organized only for a few weeks. They are led by an officer distinguishable by his sword and red sash. Facing them are members of the British 85th Regiment in red coats with yellow facings and white lace, and members of the British 95th Regiment in green uniforms with black facings and white lace.