

While Thomas Boyle and *Chasseur* were approaching the coast of Britain, things were looking grim back home. British forces intent on capturing Washington marched unopposed through Southern Maryland. On August 24th, at Bladensburg - just five miles east of the city, 6,700 ill-prepared militia and regulars faced 5,400 British troops led by Major General Robert Ross.



Marines and sailors of the Chesapeake Flotilla man the batteries at Bladensburg.

In just a few hours, the U.S. forces were in full retreat and the road to Washington was open.

By 8:00 p.m., British troops occupied the city and the Capitol, the White House and other public buildings were in flames. After 26 hours, British troops left to rejoin their ships on the Patuxent River. Now all eyes were turned toward the next target: Baltimore.



Major General Robert Ross and the burning of public buildings in Washington.

“Every American heart is bursting with shame and indignation at the catastrophe... Everyday, almost every hour, bodies of troops are marching in to our assistance”

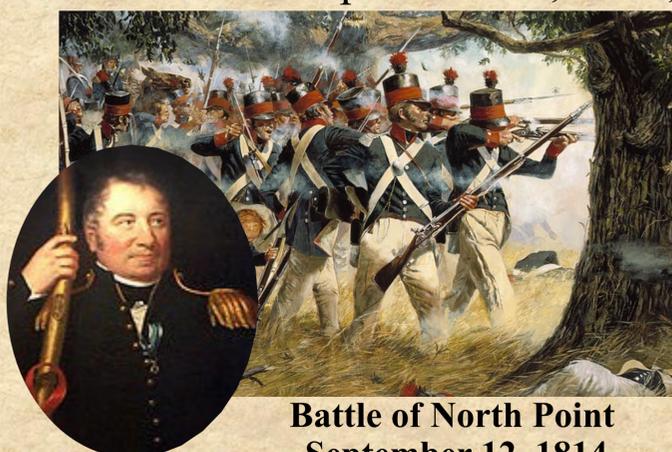
- George Douglas of Baltimore, August 30, 1814

As British forces regrouped and prepared to sail, militia and volunteers from nearby states poured into Baltimore. Led by General Sam Smith, the city mobilized resources to strengthen its defense against the anticipated attack: water batteries and more heavy guns at Ft. McHenry, sunken ships to block entry to the port, and a mile of earthworks and gun batteries to block an attack from the east. When the British fleet arrived at the outer harbor on September 11, 1814, nearly 20,000 soldiers, sailors, militia and citizen volunteers were ready to oppose them. The British planned to attack by land and sea: a force of 4,700 soldiers and marines led by General Ross would attack city from the east,



Major General Samuel Smith

while the fleet’s heavy guns and bomb ships would reduce the fort and attack the city from the water. On September 12, 1814, the British encountered General Stricker’s force of 3,200 militia volunteers at North Point, about 15 miles east of the city. After a 3-hour skirmish, U.S. troops withdrew to the city defenses. The British had suffered heavy casualties, including General Ross; and decided to delay further action until Ft. McHenry was reduced and the fleet could support them.



Brigadier Gen- John Stricker

Battle of North Point September 12, 1814

On September 13, at 6:00 a.m., the British fleet opened fire on the fort. Defenders led by Major George Armistead returned fire, forcing the British battleships to stay out of range of their heavy guns. British bomb vessels and rocket ships pressed the attack, lobbing over 1,400 bombs, incendiary shells, and Congreve rockets at the fort. 25 hours later, unable to reduce the fort defenses, the British land and sea forces abandoned the attack and withdrew. The “troublesome nest of pirates” had repelled the British invaders!



Major George Armistead

The Bombardment of Ft. McHenry September 13 - 14, 1814

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Next: *Chasseur*- “The Pride of Baltimore”

