

BATTLE DIGEST™

Lessons for Today's Leaders

Volume 1 ★ Issue 8

Early American Wars:

New Orleans

DATE:

January 8, 1815

LOCATION:

New Orleans, Louisiana

OPPOSING FORCES

American: 5,700 regular and militia troops commanded by Brevet Maj. Gen. Andrew Jackson. Key subordinates included Brig. Gen. David Morgan commanding 1,076 men on the West Bank of the Mississippi, and U.S. Navy Commodore Daniel Patterson supporting Jackson with two ships (USS *Carolina* and USS *Louisiana*).

British: 8,000 troops commanded by Maj. Gen. Sir Edward Pakenham. Key subordinates included Maj. Gens. Sir John Keane, Sir John Lambert, and Sir Samuel Gibbs. (Adm. Sir Alexander Cochrane was the expedition's overall commander but took little part in the ground campaign.)

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

The War of 1812 had not gone particularly well for the United States. The British were blockading America's coasts, damaging commerce, and thwarting any hopes for U.S. territorial gains in Canada. After two years of fighting, Americans were further humiliated when, in August of 1814, the British burned the U.S. Capitol. The people in the young republic yearned for respect. Brevet Maj. Gen. Andrew Jackson would finally give them that respect with his lopsided victory at New Orleans. Although the War of 1812 officially ended with the signing of the Treaty of Ghent two weeks prior to the battle, the commanders on the ground were unaware of it at the time. Ironically, because news of Jackson's victory reached Washington so closely timed with word of the peace treaty, New Orleans would long be etched in the American conscience as the "victory" that ended the war. More accurately, the war was a draw. Nevertheless, the victory at New Orleans was significant enough for the U.S. to earn the respect of Britain, which never again treated America as anything less than an independent power. It would also launch the political career of a future president.

STRATEGY & MANEUVER

Actions by the Americans – Britain's heavy-handed attempts to cut off supplies to Napoleon in Europe had been pushing America toward war for years. Not only had shipping and

into service of the Crown. President Thomas Jefferson took the drastic step of halting all trade with England, but popular outrage continued to grow. Things reached a breaking point on 18 June 1812, when the Senate approved President James Madison's request for a declaration of war against Great Britain.

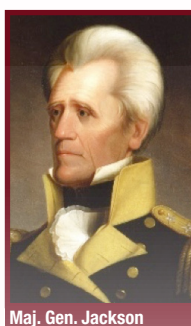
Initially, American strategy focused on invading Canada and securing the Northwest Territory. But by 1814, after two years of lackluster results and increasing British aggressiveness, U.S. strategy turned more defensive. For the first two years of the

war, British forces had not been active in the American South. Jackson was occupied against the Spanish in Florida and against the Creek Indians in the Mississippi Territory. His victory at Horseshoe Bend in March 1814 effectively ended the Creek War and propelled his appointment as a Maj. Gen. in the Regular Army.¹ In May that year, Jackson assumed command of the 7th Military District, which included New Orleans. When he learned of Britain's upcoming campaign in the Gulf, he

suspected Adm. Sir Alexander Cochrane might use an overland route to take New Orleans. Working quickly, Jackson helped thwart the initial British attack at Fort Bowyer, near Mobile. He then moved his forces to New Orleans.

When Jackson arrived on 1 December, he found the defenses in poor condition. After assembling his uniquely American army comprised of Regulars, militia, two brigades of New Orleans free black men, Choctaw Indians, and even Jean Lafitte's 800 pirates, he threw himself into preparing for the coming fight. A few weeks later, on 23 December, Jackson received surprising news from his scouts. A British force had already landed and was encamped just nine miles southeast, at Villeré Plantation in Chalmette, Louisiana. "*By the Eternal,*" Jackson roared, "*they shall not sleep on our soil!*"² He decided to attack.

Actions by the British – Britain found itself in another war with America, but her forces were heavily committed against Napoleon in Europe. This forced a strategy focused on protecting



Maj. Gen. Jackson

