

# FRONTIER MILITIAMAN IN THE WAR OF 1812

Southwestern Frontier



ED GILBERT

ILLUSTRATED BY ADAM HOOK

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**ED GILBERT** is a native of Alabama, with a lifelong interest in the Creek War. He was a Marine Corps artilleryman, an NCO instructor in the USMCR, a college professor, and for 28 years worked in geological research and oil and gas exploration worldwide. Now semiretired, he works only on special projects. In addition to other volumes for Osprey, Ed is the author of a three-volume series on the history of Marine Corps tank units, *Marine Tank Battles in the Pacific*, *Marine Corps Tank Battles in Korea*, and *Marine Corps Tank Battles in Vietnam*.

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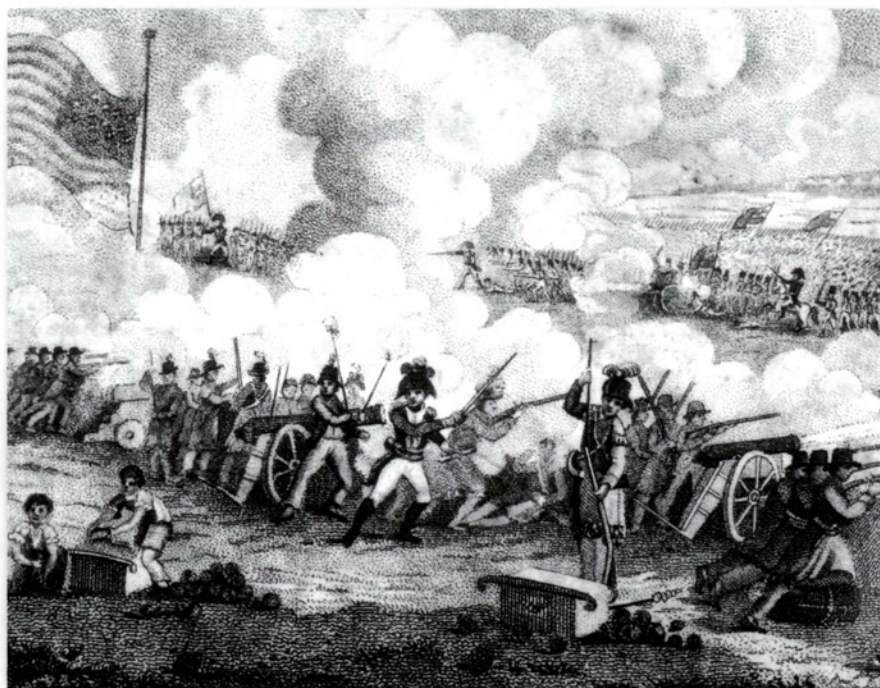


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## GLOSSARY

- Bit** A small, wedge-shaped piece of a coin, usually a silver dollar. Coins were cut into eight segments, or "bits," to make change. This is the origin of both the American slang term "two-bits" for one-quarter dollar (\$0.25), and the "pieces of eight" in pirate lore.
- Chicory** An herb favored as a substitute for or additive to coffee.
- Congreve rocket** An early area-bombardment weapon devised by Sir William Congreve in 1805, adapted from similar rockets encountered in India. They often exploded in mid-air, or skittered about on the ground before exploding. Though some accounts laud their effectiveness, their effect was largely psychological.
- Debride** To physically remove debris from a wound to reduce the likelihood of infection. Such debris might include dead tissue, soil, battlefield litter, cloth, et cetera.
- Dutch oven** A large cast iron pot with a heavy dished lid. By putting hot coals onto the lid, it can be used to bake over a campfire.
- Gorget** A symbolic breastplate worn on a chain around the neck, probably most familiar from those worn by German military police in World War II. These were popular trade items.
- Grits** Coarsely ground corn, a by-product of grinding corn meal. Usually boiled and eaten as a hot cereal.
- Trews** Tight-legged trousers.
- Written memorial** An internal communication. This is the origin of the modern term "memo."





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# FRONTIER MILITIAMAN IN THE WAR OF 1812

There was a time when I had a choice. I have none, now. Even hope is ended.  
Once I could animate my warriors, but I cannot animate the dead.

*William Weatherford (Red Eagle) addressing Andrew Jackson, 1814*

## INTRODUCTION

State militias conducted most of the military campaigns along the southwestern frontier of the United States between 1813 and 1815. Yet despite their widespread use, few military units have been the subject of so much misconception and outright fantasy. Indeed, this entire theater of war remains one of the least known in American history, although the events of this brief period decided the fate of the new nation.

Many historians treat the southwestern frontier campaigns as a sideshow to the larger War of 1812, yet they had far different stakes. The War of 1812 was largely a maritime war waged to control the eastern seaboard of North America and to determine America's access to global trade. Secondary land campaigns defined the boundary between the United States and Britain's remaining North American colony, Canada.

At stake in the southwestern frontier was the issue of whether the United States could absorb the vast Louisiana Purchase<sup>1</sup> to become a major nation. At the time, America's western boundary stretched from the Great Lakes to the old French ports of Mobile and New Orleans, but geographic and human obstacles blocked westward expansion.

The grasslands of the Great Plains were then called The Great American Desert, a seemingly empty plain with uncertain water supplies. Commerce and settlement would be funneled along river systems that converged at New Orleans and a secondary port at Mobile. Spain controlled what is now the state of Florida, further blocking expansion.

The human obstacle was the Muscogee, or Creek, Nation in what is now Georgia and Alabama. Commerce and intermarriage had mingled white and Creek cultures, but the Creeks maintained a formidable military reputation from the days when they raided as far north as the Great Lakes.

<sup>1</sup> The Louisiana Purchase was the acquisition by the United States of 828,000 square miles of French territory, "Louisiana," in 1803. It encompassed portions of 15 current US states and two Canadian provinces.





The Creeks remained largely neutral in white affairs, playing the colonial powers against each other until the Revolutionary War (1776–83). Alexander McGillivray (c.1750–93), raised and educated in white society, led the Creeks to establish a central council that replaced the loose alliance of clans. Under McGillivray affluent Creeks were assimilated into the white culture, living in established towns and villages, farming, and raising livestock.

Other Creeks strove to maintain a traditional way of life, and civil war between the two factions grew into a conflict with the white settlers. The Creek War, or Red Stick War of 1813–14, destroyed the Creek Nation and opened vast areas to white settlement. It established the reputations of some of the towering figures of American history, including Andrew Jackson, Sam Houston, and Davy Crockett; and was largely fought by a mixture of various militia forces supplemented by regular troops.

Jackson would go on to decisively defeat the might of the British Army using his part time army of militiamen at the battle of New Orleans in 1815, and as President he set the nation on a course of relentless expansion. But it all began with a little-known war in Alabama.

We will follow two fictional characters, Billy McCullough and the Deacon, through the two wars against the Creeks and the British as the militiamen of the southwestern frontier forged a formidable fighting reputation against all expectations. The minor character Joshua is also fictional. Others characters mentioned by name are actual persons, though their exact words are fictional. The reader should be aware that in fact militia units consisted of short-service volunteers, and virtually no one except a few very senior officers served in all the campaigns described here.

"A Scene On The Frontier As Practiced By The Humane British and Their Worthy Allies!" British support for warlike tribes along the western and southern frontiers inflamed public opinion, as evidenced by handbills and newspaper editorials. This example shows a British officer offering two Shawnee a reward from their "King and Master". (Library of Congress)

## CHRONOLOGY

- 1810** The Federal Road connecting Georgia and Mississippi is opened across Creek (Muscogee) lands in Alabama, leading to a massive influx of white settlers. Not all move into the western Mississippi Territory, and Creek resentment against the settlers grows.
- 1811**  
**Spring** The Shawnee chief Tecumseh and his brother the Prophet visit the Choctaw and Creek nations in Alabama in an attempt to foment a tribal rebellion intended to drive out the white settlers. The effort is unsuccessful but Tecumseh lays the foundation for the Creek Red Stick war faction.
- 1811–12** Relations between the United States and Britain deteriorate. Unofficial British agents, mostly traders, attempt to foment unrest among the tribes.
- 1812**  
**Spring** A party of Red Sticks returning from Canada murder seven white settlers in the Duck River Valley of Tennessee and carry one captive to the Creek country. The killers are hunted down and killed by Creek agents, leading to further discord.
- June 18** The United States declares war on Britain. The southwestern frontier is little affected.
- 1813**  
**February** Red Sticks participate in atrocities in the Ohio River Valley.
- Spring** Civil war breaks out between the Red Stick faction and Creek tribal leadership.
- July 27** A party of Mississippi volunteer militia attacks a Red Stick supply train returning from Spanish Pensacola at Burnt Corn Creek, south Alabama. In a chaotic fight, the settlers, though routed, carry off most of the military supplies. Red Stick leaders view this as an act of war.
- August 30** White settlers have gathered at local stockades for protection. The Red Sticks plan to attack stockades throughout the Tombigbee River Valley. The only successful attack is at Fort Mims, north of Mobile, Alabama, killing at least 247 men, women, and children (including whites, friendly Creeks, and black slaves). Others are carried into captivity. Greatly exaggerated rumors of the massacre circulate throughout the region.
- Late October** John Coffee's Tennessee Mounted Rifles raid Creek towns in northwestern Alabama.
- November 3** Coffee's force achieves the first defeat of the Red Sticks at Tallusahatchee, Alabama.





- November 6** President James Madison appoints Major General Thomas Pinckney to coordinate war against the Red Sticks, relieving some of the confusion of conducting a war spanning two military districts. Four major offensives are to be launched from Georgia (Major General John Floyd), East Tennessee (General John Cocke), West Tennessee (General Andrew Jackson), and Mississippi (Brigadier General Ferdinand Claiborne) with both militia and US Army regulars.
- November 9** Jackson is called to aid the besieged friendly Creek town of Talladega. Cocke, ever jealous of battlefield and political glory, summons his troops away from the impending battle. Jackson defeats the Red Sticks.
- November 11–18** General James White's East Tennessee militia, acting on Cocke's orders, destroys the Hillabee Towns, unaware that they had agreed to surrender to Jackson. The Hillabees become the bitter enemies of the whites.
- November 29** Floyd's surprise attack on the Red Stick stronghold at Autossee fails because of poor intelligence.
- December** Jackson's army is seriously weakened when the term of service ends for most of his militia force, as well as Cocke's force, which has at last joined him. By the end of the month his army has disintegrated.
- December 23** A force of Mississippi militia and US Army regulars advance east along the Alabama River. They attack and defeat a large Red Stick force at Holy Ground but withdraw into Mississippi, where most of the militiamen are mustered out of service.

#### MISSISSIPPI TERRITORY 1812

The Mississippi Territory included the present states of Alabama and Mississippi, and the Creek Nation lay generally east of the Tombigbee River, extending into western Georgia, and south into Spanish Florida. Two major routes were opened in an attempt to encourage settlement, the Natchez Trace (primarily a horse path) and the Federal Road, a wagon and mail route. The Federal Road in particular encouraged white settlement on Creek lands.

#### ABOVE

There is virtually no artwork or other images from the period of the Red Stick War. This romanticized rendering of Ensign Sam Houston at the battle of Horseshoe Bend appeared in J. C. Derby's *The Life of Sam Houston* in 1855. Note the inaccurate summer uniform with white trousers. (National Archives)



#### ABOVE

Though not entirely accurate, the clothing and equipment of this reenactor give a good impression of the clothing and equipment of a typical militiaman. Note the cross-belts with a brass center-plate, supporting a utility bag and cloth bayonet scabbard (the left hand is grasping the bayonet). NCOs and officers typically wore bright red waist sashes, rather than the blue one shown here. (Author)

#### ABOVE RIGHT

This assortment of personal items includes flintlock pistols, not very practical weapons in battle. At the time many small American factories manufactured pistols, rifles, and smoothbore muskets; there was very little standardization. At lower left are forged-iron cooking and eating utensils. The two implements on the right (a spoon and a knife) are carved from horn, an inexpensive substitute. At center note the silver dollars, one cut into halves, the other into "bits" or "pieces of eight," a common way of making change. (Author)



## 1814

January 22

Jackson launches an offensive with raw troops achieving a marginal victory at Emucfau Creek.<sup>2</sup> Weakened and burdened with wounded, he withdraws.

January 24

The Red Sticks fall upon Jackson's retreating column at Enitachopco Creek, panicking the green militiamen. The situation is saved by the steadfastness of some older militia companies and the artillery.

January 27

Floyd again advances into Red Stick territory and is driven back after a battle at Calabee Creek. Wounded and plagued by chronic supply problems, Floyd withdraws.

February–March

Jackson assembles and trains a new army, imposing harsh discipline.

March 27

After a two-week approach march, cutting a road through the forest, Jackson attacks the major Red Stick position at Horseshoe Bend on the Tallapoosa River. The battle breaks the power of the Red Sticks.

May

Unaware of the Red Stick defeat, the British begin landing supplies at Apalachicola, Spanish Florida. They discover thousands of starving refugees rather than potential allies.

May 22

Jackson is appointed Brigadier of the Line and Brevet Major General in the US Army.

<sup>2</sup> Transliteration of Muscogee place names into English is variable; for example, Emuckfaw is another common version of this place name.



- June** Major Edward Nicolls of the Royal Marines is instructed to raise a force of Indians and black troops for operations along the Gulf Coast, to divert American attention from the defense of New Orleans. The Spanish governor is unable to prevent the British from using Pensacola as a base.
- August 9** The Treaty of Fort Jackson is signed with friendly Creeks, punishing them and effectively ceding control of their lands to white settlers. Neither fugitive Red Sticks nor the British recognize the agreement.
- August 27** Jackson arrives in Mobile.
- September 13** A British attempt to capture Fort Bowyer, guarding the sea approaches to Mobile, is repulsed. In the overland retreat, troops loot local properties, including those belonging to British trading companies.
- November 7** On his own authority Jackson invades Spanish Florida. He attacks Pensacola, and the British withdraw after wrecking the protective forts. This disrupts British plans for a land campaign against New Orleans.
- December 1** Jackson arrives in New Orleans and sets about organizing the defense. Short of arms and men, he soon reaches an accord with the privateer Jean Lafitte and scours local depots for weapons.



The southern campaigns, and the battle of New Orleans in particular, catapulted Jackson into national prominence and eventually the presidency. This is one of many depictions lionizing Jackson. (Library of Congress)



This reenactor wears a few of the basic field items, including a powder horn, sheath knife, and a small hand-sewn shot pouch. The hand-carved wooden shot gauge, with seven holes, could be used as a "speed-loader" by putting several balls and wadding into the gauge for quick use. Nearby hangs a carved wooden powder measure. A homemade pan brush is just above the belt buckle. (Author)

<b>December 22</b>	After a brief naval campaign to clear American resistance, Admiral Alexander Cochrane ferries troops across Lake Bourgne and establishes a position near Villere Plantation, downriver from New Orleans. Jackson launches a pre-emptive night attack.
<b>December 24</b>	Treaty of Ghent officially ends the War of 1812.
<b>December 28</b>	Unaware of the treaty, local British forces launch a preliminary attack to test American defenses.
<b>1815</b>	
<b>January 1</b>	Artillery exchange. British delay any significant ground action, building forces and logistics for a major attack.
<b>January 8</b>	Battle of New Orleans. A powerful British force is decisively defeated.
<b>January 19</b>	After abortive attempts to capture forts protecting the river approaches to New Orleans, the British evacuate Louisiana. They will attempt a land campaign by way of Mobile and Baton Rouge.
<b>February 11</b>	British forces besiege and capture Fort Bowyer at Mobile Bay, Alabama, exposing Mobile to attack.
<b>March 28</b>	British forces in the Gulf of Mexico region learn of the Treaty of Ghent, but there is confusion about the terms. Admiral Alexander Cochrane interprets the terms to include cessation of hostilities in support of the Red Stick cause and withdraws troops, ending both wars.

## RECRUITMENT

The members of state militias along the southwestern frontier could be both the best and the most exasperating of soldiers. They were combative, inured to hardship, fiercely loyal to their own chosen leaders, and spectacularly effective in their own environment. They were fiercely independent, with deep mistrust for distant authority. Enlisted for periods of service as short as 60 days, they were prone to simply leave the army to attend to the needs of their farms and families.

The culture of the frontier was derived largely from the Ulster Scots whose remote ancestors plagued the Romans on the northern borderlands of England until the frustrated Romans built Hadrian's Wall to hold them at bay. In bloody wars with England the Scots were fierce if erratic warriors. Leaders such as William Wallace and Robert the Bruce led by "approval from below," based on personal prowess and charisma. Eventually conquered by England, many lowland and border Scots were transported to Northern Ireland to work the new Ulster Plantation. Victimized by religious and nationalistic wars, many emigrated to the new colonies in North America.



The new immigrants found conditions in the fertile coastal plain regions, dominated by English landlords, unpalatable. In many colonies even their Presbyterian marriages were not legal. Some colonies encouraged them to move westward into the Appalachian Mountains to provide a warlike buffer population against the equally warlike Indian tribes.<sup>3</sup>

Restless settlers spilled over the mountains to settle Tennessee, Kentucky, and the Mississippi Territory, which then included Alabama. Farther south along the margin of the Gulf Coastal Plain, settlers intermingled with others moving westward from the Georgia Colony. Descendants of transported convicts, they too held little love for the Crown. The Ulster Scots culture easily absorbed outsiders, and waves of immigrants from other lands were absorbed into the developing frontier culture.

In the early days of the American War of Independence the southern colonies were not actively hostile to Britain. Wealthy planters of the coastal region wished to continue trade, and the frontier folk wished only to be left alone. Lord General Cornwallis's "Southern Strategy" soon changed that. Determined to separate the southern colonies from New England, Cornwallis launched a major offensive in the Carolinas. Subordinate commanders such as the infamous Lieutenant Colonel Sir Banastre Tarleton launched campaigns of terror, killing prisoners and destroying the property of rebels and Loyalists alike.

The brutality would come to haunt the British Army, hardening rebel resistance. One seemingly insignificant victim was a 13-year-old messenger boy, Andrew Jackson. Taken captive, legend has it that when Jackson refused to clean the boots of a drunken British officer, the man slashed him across the face and arm with his sword. Released in a prisoner exchange, he was left an orphan when all his brothers died in British captivity and his widowed mother died of disease while nursing prisoners. Jackson grew into a man not likely to forget or forgive.

The state militias did not particularly distinguish themselves in the war, but at King's Mountain, South Carolina (October 7, 1780), "over the mountains" frontiersmen trapped and destroyed a British force. Then, characteristically, they went home. The militias also played a significant role in the decisive British defeat at Cowpens, also in South Carolina (January 17, 1781). Both battles became legendary on the frontier.

In 1812 all adult males between 16 and 60 years of age were subject to military conscription into state militias. Individual states regulated their own militias and jealously guarded against interference by the federal government.

The best and most reliable units were the standing militia units, organized by region. These units mustered for annual training and were equipped at their own expense. In contrast, volunteer militias were enlisted for short terms of service and usually not well equipped or trained. The short enlistment terms of volunteer militias would plague Andrew Jackson throughout the Creek War. Even his decisive final offensive was delayed by the expiration of the service terms of his army of 60-day volunteers.

Drafted militias were conscripted – often unwillingly – from local government voting rolls. Usually with poor morale, they were not considered to be as reliable as other units and were most often used as laborers or to garrison small forts.

3. The period term "Indian" will be used here for simplicity, as opposed to the currently used "Native American." The tribes most involved in the wars along the southern frontier were the Creek, Cherokee, and Choctaw.





These Creek re-enactors are wearing typical attire of the period – long shirts, leggings, and moccasins. The tribe was extensively intermarried with settlers and traders, and many Creeks were three-quarters or more genetically white. The man in the background is holding a stickball racket. The Creeks called this violent game “the little brother to war.” (Author)

## Origins of war

By 1800 the Indian tribes along the southwestern frontier were extensively intermarried with white settlers. Many Creek leaders had one-quarter or less Native ancestry; their best-known leaders were William Weatherford (Red Eagle) and Alexander McGillivray.

The Creeks had long carried on a lucrative trade in deer hides, and the “Lower Creeks” of the Gulf Coastal Plain were quite assimilated into the white economy. The “Upper Creeks” in the mountains of Alabama were less assimilated, and therein lay the seeds of the Creek War.<sup>4</sup> The Creek Confederacy was under pressure from settlers pushing in from the east (Georgia), west (Mississippi Territory), and north (Tennessee).

In early 1811 the Shawnee chief Tecumseh and his brother the Prophet journeyed from the Great Lakes region in an attempt to foment trouble. They met with a cool reception but planted the idea of a movement to eliminate white influence. This burgeoned into the Red Stick movement, named for the traditional Creek war club stained with a mineral dye.

The movement divided the Creek Nation, with the strongholds of the Red Sticks in the Upper Creek towns. Atrocities such as the Duck River killings, committed by Creeks passing through Tennessee, fueled hostilities. Creek leaders and Indian Agent Benjamin Hawkins labored to calm the situation. By 1813 the Red Sticks had failed to enlist the Choctaw in their war plans, and the struggle was largely a civil war within the Creek Nation. The Red Sticks assembled at Holy Ground, west of the present city of Montgomery, Alabama, and prepared to eradicate settlements of mixed-race Creeks in the river valleys north of Mobile. Not scorning the white man’s

4. Ethnically and linguistically the Muscogee belonged to a much larger group of tribes that included the Apalachee, Hitchitee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Alibamos, Coushatta, and others who played only ancillary roles, or were simply victims of the white settlers’ misplaced wrath.

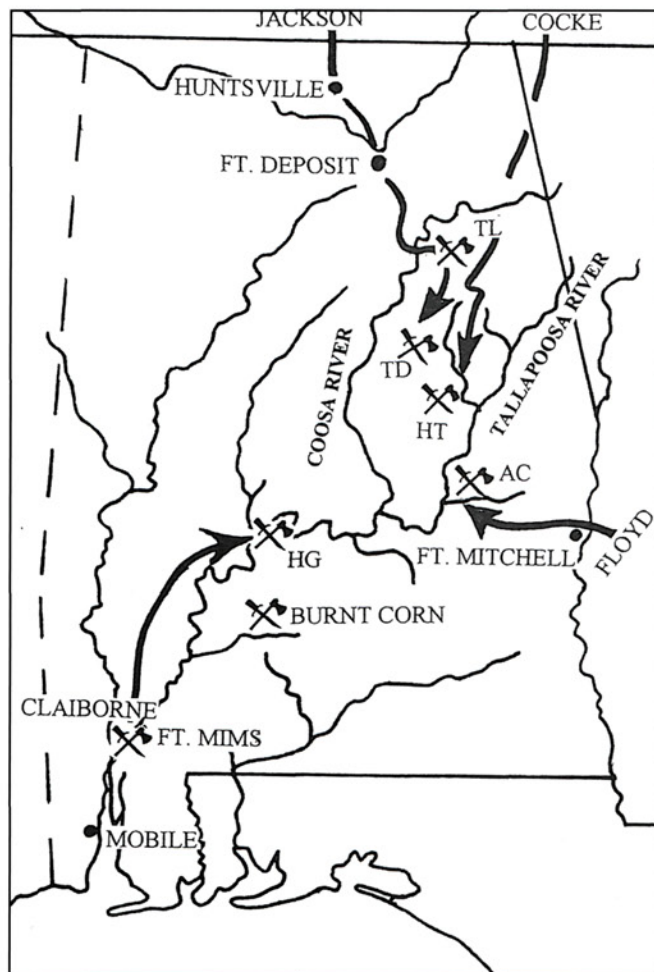
## A

### TENNESSEE MILITIA, CREEK WAR AND WAR OF 1812

These three militiamen depict the variations in the basic militia uniform, particularly the hunting shirt and field equipment. The figure at left represents an affluent member of an established pre-war militia regiment. He wears the uniform of a hunting shirt and trousers, and is armed with a privately purchased rifle. The drab cloth is more typical of the latter periods of the Creek War and subsequent campaigns, as are the canvas army leggings. He is also equipped with a butcher’s knife at his belt, a camp knife worn around the neck, and rifle tools on a lanyard around his neck. The center figure is a member of a wartime volunteer militia regiment in the New Orleans campaign, wearing the uniform of drab-colored hunting shirt and trousers. Additional gear provided by the Federal government to the state of Tennessee includes a smoothbore musket and bayonet (held by the left hand), white cloth cross-belts supporting the bayonet and black leather shot pouch, and leggings. The figure at right is a gun captain in the Nashville Volunteers artillery company, wearing the early war blue uniform. He is armed with a privately purchased sword, and wears a leather thumb-stock, used to plug the vent while swabbing the cannon’s tube, on his right hand. Additional gear, clockwise from lower left, includes: a powder horn made from a cow’s horn; a boat gun – a cut-down musket suitable for firing from a canoe – with a woven wool sling; a hand-carved shot gauge used to hold shot for immediate use; a butcher knife and simple belt sheath; a metal canteen; one of several designs of tomahawks, this one with a cloth cover; typical weapon tools – pan brush, powder measure, vent pick, and screwdriver; a small camp knife, which often substituted for a screwdriver to seat musket flints, and pan brush; another type of trade tomahawk, this one with a riveted leather sheath; gourd canteen with leather cover and carved wooden plug; and a metal drinking cup with a deer-antler flint knapper attached. The knapper was used to shape musket flints.







#### FIRST CREEK CAMPAIGNS

The initial plan was to attack the Creek Nation with four armies: Georgia (Floyd), East Tennessee (Cocke), West Tennessee (Jackson), and Mississippi (Claiborne). The elaborate plan foundered on poor logistics, short enlistment terms, and Cocke's political ambitions. Battle sites mentioned in the text are: TL (Tallaseehatchee), TD (Talladega), HT (Hillabee Towns), AC (Autosee/Calabee Creek), HG (Holy Ground), Burnt Corn, and Fort Mims.

weapons, they sent a supply column to Pensacola to obtain gunpowder and lead from the Spanish. En route they took hostages and burned farms.

Settlers began to gather at defensive stockades along the rivers of southern Alabama. The Creeks at Pensacola boasted of their power to the Spanish governor and announced their intention to attack settlers in the Tombigbee and Alabama River valleys.

Colonel James Caller called out the Mississippi militia, and a force of mounted volunteer militiamen assembled to intercept the Creek supply party. Gathering more recruits along the way, the militia rode into southern Alabama, carrying only to elect a new suite of officers, as was typical of the militias.

About 180 militiamen surprised the Red Sticks encamped near Burnt Corn Creek. Achieving nearly complete surprise, the militia drove the Red Sticks across the creek, but the larger part of the militia force stopped to loot the supply train. The Red Sticks counterattacked, and despite the best efforts of a few officers, routed the militia, who succeeded in carrying off most of the munitions in their panicky flight. The militia straggled back across the Tombigbee River, and reportedly "each man mustered himself out of service."

The Red Sticks resolved to eradicate the mixed-race settlers. Most of their attacks failed, but the August 30, 1813, assault on Fort Mims resulted in one of the largest frontier massacres in American history. A few survivors escaped the four-hour battle to carry tales of Red Stick atrocities.

Sixteen-year-old farm boy Billy McCullough heard of the Fort Mims Massacre and observed the outrage it caused in central Tennessee. Before the corn harvest Billy had free time to spend in town, listening to the men talk about the state legislature's call for 3,500 men under Major General of Militia Andrew Jackson. The desire for war was by no means universal. Most argued that the deaths of over 500 (an exaggerated number) at Fort Mims must be avenged and Tennessee made safe from a repetition of the Duck River killings. Unknown to Billy were the machinations of land speculators who coveted the expansive Creek lands. Others argued that it was not Tennessee's problem. Still, the Red Sticks were an undeniable threat.

One day Billy noticed two men moving a table onto the porch of a prominent lawyer's office, and stopped to gawk. "Son, you gonna join the militia and protect your ma and sisters?" inquired one. Billy replied that he had "not rightly considered it," but he was willing to be convinced. Like many, he had been raised on stories of fighting in the Revolutionary War and was as eager as any to enlist.



The officer and his sergeant posted several inflammatory newspaper articles and political cartoons depicting events at Fort Mims and elsewhere. A printed broadsheet announced Governor Willie Blount's order authorizing a force of volunteer militia.

The militia officer promised a short campaign of adventure and "Maybe even a chance to get at the lobsterbacks," using an old term for the British. "You'll get eight dollars a month hard money and free rations." The regiment had already participated in the early 1813 expedition to secure Natchez, but had not seen any fighting.

Billy signed the ledger book with a quill pen and accepted the first of his promised pay, a few silver bits.<sup>5</sup>

"Congratulations, son." The officer motioned to an older man. "Sergeant, issue this man a weapon and gear." Billy was handed an old musket and surplus military cross-belts with an ammunition pouch and bayonet – but no ammunition. "Stand right here, son. You're my guard."

A crowd of the usual townsmen and farmers in town for market day had gathered. Billy listened as men came to enlist or simply to argue. In the newspapers Major Beasley had become a scapegoat for the Fort Mims incident. He had tapped a keg of whiskey for distribution to his troops the day before, and each afternoon the guards took a post-lunch nap. He had argued with a scout who warned of the enemy approach, and he had a slave, who reported prowling Red Sticks flogged (the master of another refused to allow his man to be punished). Sand had washed against the stockade gate, and it could not be closed when the attack came.

Others argued that the Tombigbee country was the Mississippi Territory's problem. Still, women and children had been brutally murdered and scalped, defenders of the blockhouse burned alive in the ruins, and slaves killed or carried away.<sup>6</sup>

Billy spent the remainder of the day listening to the arguments and watching men sign the enlistment ledger. Like him, they received instructions on where to report when summoned and the personal gear they were expected to provide. The officer quizzed men to determine which ones possessed certain useful skills. A few were recruited as specialists: drivers for teams of animals used to pull the supply train, clerks, men who possessed some experience working with sick humans or animals to serve as surgeons' mates, and musicians. Musicians who could play the infantry's traditional fife or drum were particularly important. They would be taught to play simple signals used to control the men amid the noise and confusion of battle.

For many the enlistment day provided an excuse for drinking the harsh whiskey that was a frontier staple. A few drunken fights broke out, but none of the serious ones that often left men permanently maimed or missing an eye. The officer finally dismissed Billy with instructions that he would be summoned when the company mustered into service. The sergeant was careful to recover the musket and gear.

"Pa" McCullough, a hardened and prematurely old man of 55, was not as pleased as Billy had expected. He worked himself into a rage at the British, the Creeks, and most of all the militia officers who "ought to have more

5. Unfamiliar terms are explained in the glossary on page 2.

6. African slaves were generally considered to be noncombatants but fought on both sides, some with distinction. One anonymous defender of Fort Mims held off the attackers with an axe until overwhelmed. Caesar – belonging to Captain Sam Dale of the Mississippi militia – was widely celebrated as a hero of The Canoe Fight, a river battle in November 1813.



The Red Sticks possessed few firearms; about one in three or one in four was armed with any sort of firearm. Some, like this "chief's grade" trade musket displayed in the Horseshoe Bend Museum were equal to the best of the weapons used by the militia and Army soldiers. (Author)

sense." He finally cuffed Billy on the side of the head. "Damn it, boy, killin' a man ain't like killin' a hog. They fight back, and they don't die so easy."

Eventually he provided Billy with an old British musket, while his mother sewed the prescribed uniform from cloth purchased with family funds.

## TRAINING

The training received by the state militias was at best inconsistent. The men were largely volunteers, who by tradition elected their own officers, and in some cases did not feel particularly bound by the orders of superiors, particularly high-level superiors with whom they had little or no direct relationship. Discipline, particularly by the standards of the era, was inevitably lax, a tradition that would in some cases plague the US military well into the 20th century. The recruiting system, under which men enlisted for a particular term of service, was another continual source of conflict, as men chose to leave when their term of service was up, even in the midst of a campaign.

American military forces in the Creek War and War of 1812 largely consisted of amateurs. A tiny handful of older veterans had fought in the Revolutionary War that ended nearly three decades earlier. Few had any real experience fighting against the Indian tribes along the frontier, simply because the frontier was relatively peaceful, with only isolated incidents of violence. The United States had maintained no real standing army to form a cadre upon which to build a new army.

Most senior leaders of the state militias had no military experience. Some had experience as low-level soldiers; the most senior officer of the Tennessee militia, Andrew Jackson, had been an adolescent messenger boy in the Revolutionary War. In both the regular Army and the state militias, officers learned their trade by reading drill manuals, with no real practical experience even in peacetime service.

The complete lack of even the most rudimentary practical military experience soon became painfully obvious. As in the Revolutionary War, the militias did not often distinguish themselves in battle, and particularly not in the early years of the war. After a string of easy victories, British officers grew openly scornful of the American militias and regular Army soldiers alike,

### B

#### VOLUNTEER MILITIA RECRUITMENT, CENTRAL TENNESSEE, 1813

This recruiting officer is probably a local attorney, merchant, or other prominent member of society. He will recruit and train his troops, and serve as their officer. The camp knife, worn around his neck, served such utilitarian tasks as sharpening the turkey quill pens like the one in his hand. The guard at left is probably a local farm boy, one of his first recruits. He is equipped with a state-supplied musket, bayonet, black leather shot pouch, and cross-belts. Probably after much argument, recruits will sign the ledger book and receive a small advance on their eight dollars per month pay. The men at right are local farmers and townsfolk. The double fly trousers are typical of the era.







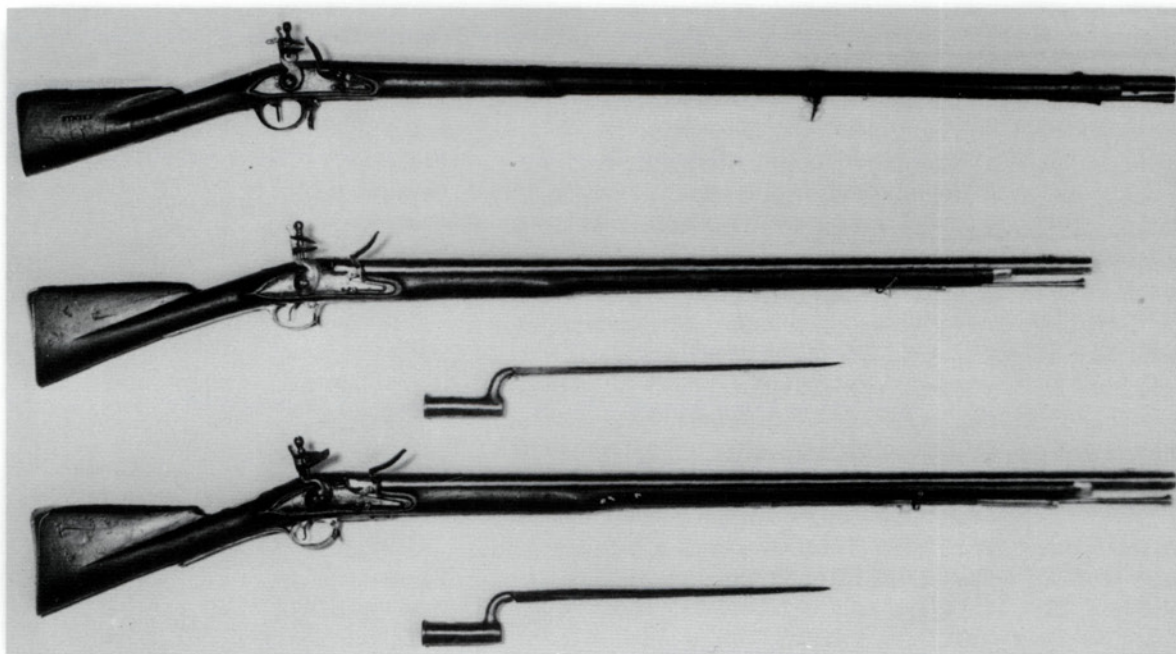
which led to overconfidence. This is probably best illustrated by the British commander at the battle of Chippewa (July 5, 1814) during the American invasion of Canada. Accustomed to watching his disciplined regulars routinely defeat the Americans, he watched in surprise as the Americans advanced through a hail of artillery fire to close with his infantry. Realizing his mistake, he marveled, "Those are Regulars, by God!"

The prewar standing militias were generally located in more settled regions, where militia service was both a social activity and a civic duty. Participants, and particularly the more highly educated, saw this as an honorable tradition dating back to the hoplite infantry of classical Greece. Elected officers were generally established leaders in the community and probably knew each other socially. Such men tended to take militia drill seriously, and they voluntarily subjected themselves to higher levels of discipline and training than wartime volunteer units. Attending annual musters for one week of training each year was largely a social activity and could hardly be expected to raise them to the standards of regular Army troops, but standing militias were considerably more militarily proficient than the short-service volunteers.

Some units such as the Nashville Volunteers artillery company had little choice but to adopt a well-disciplined, orderly gun drill. Firing muzzle-loading artillery was not an activity that could be done at random, and in that era the highly organized French Gribeauville artillery drill was the standard. This drill required a well-disciplined team of gunners executing an orderly, well-practiced drill. Artillery companies owned their artillery pieces and had often drilled together for years.

In contrast, wartime service volunteer militias consisted of men who had enlisted for a set term of service that was often too short to accomplish any significant training, much less prosecute a protracted campaign. Volunteer militiamen simply mustered, or assembled, at some predetermined rendezvous on the eve of a campaign and marched off to war. There was little uniformity, with each man supplying his own clothing, field gear, weapons, and mount in

Many older weapons dating back to the Revolution were still in common use, including, from top to bottom, the British Tower Musket, Short Tower Musket, and the French Charleville Musket. (Marine Corps Historical Center)





the case of cavalry. Weapons might be a jumble of ancient military weapons or civilian items, such as Captain Sam Dale's prized double-barreled shotgun. The lack of standardization made organized weapons training all but impossible. This lack of any discipline and training led to fiascos such as that which occurred at the battle of Burnt Corn in 1813 when victorious American troops on a looting spree were badly mauled by the same Creeks they had earlier defeated.

Drafted militias, conscripted by the state government, were by their very nature composed of the unwilling and were not very amenable to discipline or training. With only rudimentary training, lacking in discipline, and usually with poor morale, they were primarily useful as garrison troops and labor.

The quality of state militias also varied according to the affluence of the state they represented. Standing militias in the old Atlantic seaboard states tended to be longer established, higher in social status, and better equipped. Unfortunately many members of these formations jealously guarded their social and perceived military prerogatives of rank and status, and many were dilettante soldiers.

However, it is risky to make too many generalizations about the often chaotic standard of training in the militias. At one end of the social spectrum were most of the Mississippi Territory volunteer militias, self-equipped and untrained farmers. However, even in the Mississippi Territory some standing militia units, such as the Hinds' Dragoons, made up largely of socially prominent citizens, were well equipped and trained to the standard of Army regulars. Oddly, this sometimes worked against them. When Major Thomas Hinds asked for a more active role for his troops in the first Creek campaign of 1813, the district commander responded to his impertinence by removing the Dragoons from the expedition.<sup>7</sup>

Since the regions around Knoxville and Nashville were more established and affluent, Tennessee militia units were more organized and better equipped. In addition there was the further complication of state politics. The affluent Nashville region was supplanting the older Knoxville region as the political, economic, and cultural center of the state, and the struggle for political power was expressed in rivalries between militia officers from the two regions.<sup>8</sup>

Since volunteer militias were enlisted for a set term of service, there was considerable pressure to assemble as late as possible and to make campaigns as brief as possible. This tended to further limit the time available for training.

As a general officer in the Tennessee militia, Andrew Jackson's primary accomplishment was to mold the militia into a disciplined fighting force by whatever means necessary: cajolery, harsh training and discipline, and sheer force of will. Jackson also convinced the commander of the 9th Military District to assign a regular Army regiment, the 39th Infantry, to his command to help train his troops and enforce discipline.

In September 1813 Billy McCullough reported to the muster of the 1st Tennessee Volunteer Infantry. His induction consisted of receiving some surplus military gear provided by the Federal government. He retained his shoes and broad-brimmed sun hat. His civilian shirt was worn under the hunting shirt, and it would become a general-purpose shirt worn while sleeping and around camp.

7. Hinds was promoted to Colonel, and his dragoons were later reinstated to active service, fighting at New Orleans.

8. In period documents, and the naming conventions of militia units, the Nashville region in the center of the modern state was referred to as West Tennessee. This practice is followed here.





#### ABOVE

This crew of reenactors fires the National Park Service's muzzle-loading cannon at Horseshoe Bend. They are dressed in the dark blue Tennessee militia uniform of hunting shirt and trousers used during the early part of the Creek War. From left to right they are holding the implement bag, worm (used to remove any burning wadding or other obstructions from the bore), linstock (to touch off the powder charge), and at far right the double-ended wet sponge and rammer, used to extinguish any smoldering powder or wadding in the bore and to seat the charge and projectile. (Author)

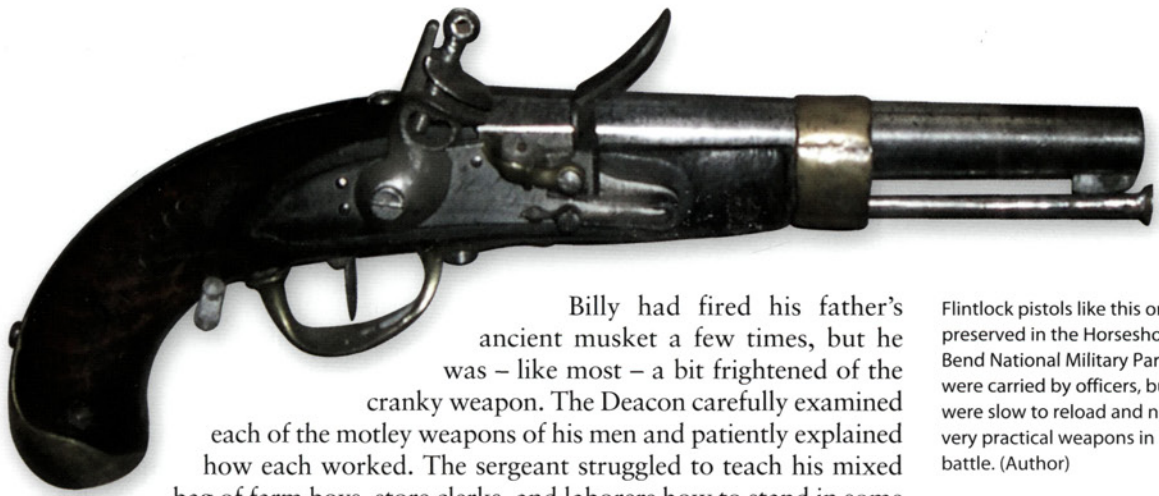
#### RIGHT

The six-pounder (57mm) field gun was the most common field piece in use by both militia and regular Army artillery units. Militia units like the West Tennessee artillery detachment at Horseshoe Bend purchased and maintained their own artillery pieces with private funds. This replica is positioned on the small knoll where Jackson sited his two guns to fire at the Red Stick barricade. (Author)

Billy became part of Captain Brice Smith's company of infantry. A middle-aged sergeant, an intensely religious man who had fought the British as a teenager in the Revolutionary War and had been on the Natchez Expedition of 1813, was assigned to teach the recruits rudimentary military skills in the short time available. The sergeant, nicknamed the Deacon, was experienced enough to realize that he had no chance of drilling them to a level where they could stand up to experienced infantry. His goal was to train them to fire one organized volley, after which each man would load and fire at his own pace. The Deacon's job was delicate. Though most were eager to learn, heavy-handed discipline might lead to desertions or a series of fights as the more hotheaded or prideful ones challenged his authority. Such fights could be quite brutal, as a fairly common tactic was to gouge out an opponent's eye.







Flintlock pistols like this one preserved in the Horseshoe Bend National Military Park were carried by officers, but were slow to reload and not very practical weapons in battle. (Author)

Billy had fired his father's ancient musket a few times, but he was – like most – a bit frightened of the cranky weapon. The Deacon carefully examined each of the motley weapons of his men and patiently explained how each worked. The sergeant struggled to teach his mixed bag of farm boys, store clerks, and laborers how to stand in some semblance of a formation and how to straggle along in a line. A few simple drill evolutions included presenting arms and coming to a firing position while standing in a densely packed mass of men.

Finally, he demonstrated loading a weapon, but without powder and ball, and how to bring the piece to a half-cocked and fully cocked position ready for firing. Each man practiced dry firing, snapping the trigger to strike a spark that would ignite the powder in the pan. A number of the younger recruits were openly impatient with the slow introduction but were unwilling to challenge the intimidating old man.

Finally the sergeant took his charges to the edge of camp with a small supply of the company's precious powder and lead ball. Anticipating what was to come, Billy was relieved when the old man selected one of his more rowdy charges named Joshua, instructed him to load the piece, and watched to assure that it was done correctly. The private held the piece at the present position.

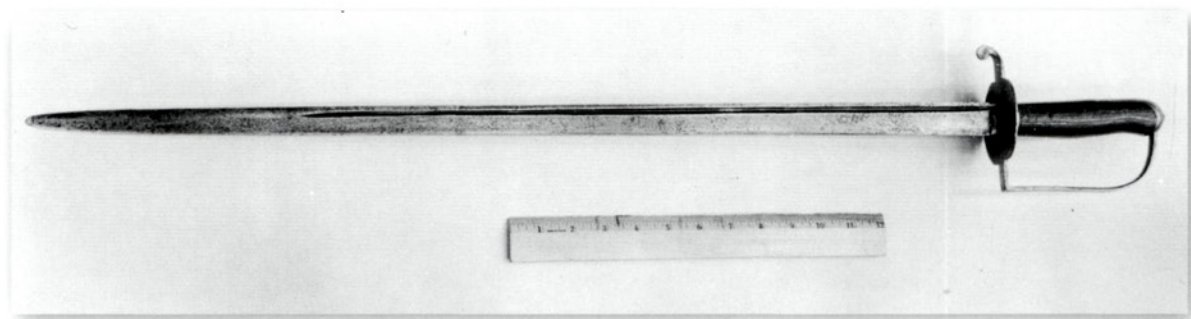
"Private, at my command I want you to fire one round at the trees."

"Which tree do you want me to fire at, Sergeant?"

"Which tree? Son, you'll do well to hit any tree at all."



A wide variety of straight-handled tomahawks and sheath knives like the ones shown here were the weapons of choice for close combat. Most knives were simple butcher's knives, and lacked the elaborate antler handle of this example. (Author)



Officers and NCOs carried a variety of privately procured swords, like this Star sword used at the battle of New Orleans. (Marine Corps Historical Center)

The recruit blushed and fumed.

“Reaaady!” the old sergeant drew out the command. “Aim!” Joshua pointed the long musket at the tree line, his arm shaking under the weight of the long barrel.

At the order “Fire!” Joshua jerked the trigger. The old musket struck a spark and ignited the powder in the pan with a loud “shoosh” that threw sparks and a billowing cloud of white smoke. Reflexively Joshua jerked back and began to turn his face away. The muzzle rose several inches just as the main powder charge fired. Billy watched in fascination as the slow-moving musket ball cleared the line of trees at about four or five times the height of a man’s head.

Joshua, his pride stung, blustered, “The barrel must be crooked.”

Faster than Billy had ever seen a man move, the Deacon covered several paces that separated him from the unfortunate Joshua and kicked his feet from under him. Joshua fell heavily, and the sergeant was instantly astride him. Whipping out a long ragged-edged butcher’s knife, he grabbed Joshua by the hair and pulled back his head, exposing his throat and pressing the blade to his forehead a few inches above his unfocused eyes.

“Crooked! Boy, don’t make excuses! You do that down in the Territory and some Red Stick’s gonna cut your hair off while you’re still alive and leave you for some buzzard to finish off! Now get up!”

“Next lesson. Fix bayonets,” the old sergeant grunted.

In the few days remaining the Deacon drilled his recruits as best he could, given the time consumed by camp chores and preparation for the march south. At best they could manage a rolling, ragged volley and a straggling march. The limited training, and the indifferent discipline that accompanied it, would prove to be a major frustration for the commander of the West Tennessee militia, Andrew Jackson, in the 1813 campaign. Jackson would in the future place considerable emphasis upon drill and training, and turning his militia into a disciplined fighting force. Most important, Jackson would provide the victories that inspired his independent-minded militiamen. The dark side was that Jackson used ruthless measures to impose discipline, measures that would one day come back to haunt his political career.

## DAILY LIFE ON CAMPAIGN

For most of the population everyday life on the southwestern frontier would be considered harsh by modern standards. Subsistence farming was the primary occupation, and many did not formally own the land that they farmed. Farming was a dawn-to-dusk, year-round occupation, with only a



few slack periods when winter cold prevented outside work or when crops were well established in the growing season. Farms tended to be small, and there was considerable pressure for the often numerous children to establish their own families at an early age. These new families frequently moved farther west in search of land, pushing back the frontier.

The few affluent owners of large plantations or farms lived a considerably more luxurious lifestyle, with slaves, large homes, and luxuries such as musical instruments and fine, custom-made china. By the early part of the 19th century cities such as Nashville and Knoxville hosted educated professional classes of physicians, attorneys, and judges. A fairly high proportion of the population had at least some formal education at private schools, for which families of the students paid tuition in cash or trade items.<sup>9</sup>

For the militiaman, there was of course no everyday garrison life. He assembled at a regional muster point with his weapons and equipment, and embarked upon campaign as quickly as possible. The life of the soldier or militiaman on these campaigns, exposed to the elements, with limited medical care and an erratic food supply would today be cause for national outrage.

The militiaman, like his civilian counterpart, had no effective rain gear to protect him from the elements in a climate that averages 58in. (148cm) of rainfall each year. A heavy woolen coat with its natural oils provided the best protection against the elements, but through most of the year the militiaman was exposed to a natural wetting and drying cycle. In winters, during which temperatures are routinely below freezing, soldiers on campaign were protected from the cold only by coats made from old woolen blankets.

Housing in the field was at best a canvas fly that provided some protection from rain and none from the cold or wind. In settled camps the militiamen were expected to construct their own shelters from locally felled logs and whatever materials they could improvise. A major task of many volunteer and drafted militia units was to construct and garrison small forts that were used to secure supply lines and communication routes through the wilderness. These forts typically consisted of a small stockade built of upright pointed logs, with cabins for housing and storage for military supplies inside. Larger forts might have two-story log blockhouses for more secure defense. Militiamen were also used as labor to build simple roads or trails through the forest and to construct boats to transport supplies down the rivers that comprised the main transport routes.

There was no central quartermaster corps. Civilian contractors engaged by the Federal or state government handled logistics. These contractors purchased, transported, and distributed food and supplies under government contracts. All too often, states, or even the Federal government, would send a force into the field without adequate funding for their support. Supply wagons and the draft animals that pulled them were owned by the contractor, who was often reluctant to risk his property to capture or destruction by the enemy. As a result of this chaotic situation many units went short of supplies for protracted periods. Many commanders were quite frank in stating that they feared famine more than any enemy.

The simple issue of what was edible on campaign probably played a significant role in determining the soldiers' diet. On campaign the basic diet

9. As a teenager the ever-ambitious Sam Houston (later to become a military hero and eventually President of an independent Texas) operated one such single-room school near Knoxville.



**RIGHT**

Small groups of men, or messes, that might include both junior officers and enlisted men prepared communal meals using implements shown here. The most durable cooking ware was cast iron. Two Dutch ovens are shown being used as kettles to boil stews or soups. Hot coals could be placed in the dished lid and the pot used for baking. Also shown are two boiler pots, a skillet for frying, and a coffee pot. (Author)

**BELOW**

Corn whiskey was distributed from jugs like this one, plugged with a simple cork. Senior officers used ironbound wooden chests like the one shown here to store and transport valuable personal possessions. (Author)

**BELOW RIGHT**

The ability to build a fire with flint and steel was a paramount skill. Small scraps of cloth or rope were placed in a metal can with a small hole, and put into a fire. Combustion in the oxygen-deficient environment produced carbonized tinder. Chunks of flint were valuable trade items, transported long distances. (Author)

of the militiaman consisted of salted meat, flour or meal, and a whiskey ration. Meat, preserved in brine and packaged in small barrels, consisted of pork, or less desirable, beef. Most militiamen would have been more familiar with pork in their daily diet, as easily raised pigs were the more common domestic food animals. The fat content of pork made it a better energy source, met more nutritional requirements, and was easier to chew than stringy beef. The problem of course was that preparation and preservation was hardly an exact science, and salted pork or bacon might be rancid.

Corn, or maize, was the staple grain crop of the frontier regions, but it was considered less desirable than wheat flour for baking bread for military purposes. Corn meal – finely ground dried corn – required that the grain be thoroughly dried in kilns before it was ground into meal, a process that might take weeks. Corn meal was used as a military ration, and in fact a shortage of meal delayed Jackson's first campaign against the Creeks. Corn meal had the advantage that it could easily be baked or fried to produce bread.

Wheat flour was less common but probably more desirable as it produced bread that was easier to chew. Though more expensive, it was more useful as





a military ration because it could be baked into hardtack biscuit. Hardtack, if protected from moisture and vermin, could be packed in barrels by contractors and shipped to the troops or carried in knapsacks. However, all too often the hardtack was not adequately packed or protected and thus might be ridden with weevils. Notoriously hard to chew, it could be soaked in water to soften or held in the mouth to dissolve. Hardtack biscuit was the basic “combat meal” of the period. One often-overlooked factor in the supply of troops in the field is dental hygiene. Tooth cleaning was not common, flour or meal contained bits of stone that wore away the teeth, and the only practical remedy for any dental problem was a painful extraction. This was an all-too-frequent, and unpleasant, aspect of life on campaign for both militiamen and regular soldiers.

This rather Spartan diet was probably augmented by other staples such as dried beans (although slow to prepare), dried fruit, and locally acquired foods. Food supplies captured from the Creeks were also gladly utilized, and in fact the Creeks probably ate a more diverse and healthy diet than the white settlers. Wild game including deer, turkey, and other birds, though relatively abundant, was unreliable as a food supply on campaign. Even for civilians wild game was not a major staple of the diet, simply because hunting was time consuming and often failed to produce enough food to warrant the effort.

Because of the limited transport for heavy cooking gear and the time involved, food preparation was done in small messes, or groups of men who would prepare communal meals over a wood fire. In militia units junior officers and enlisted men might belong to the same mess. Basic cooking gear consisted of civilian pots and pans, although records exist of Dutch ovens, used for baking over an open fire, supplied under contract. Mess gear consisted of a metal cup – an all-purpose tool for heating beverages, drinking, and eating. Plates might be simple metal pans or less expensive bowls carved from wood.

High-ranking officers had “camp waiters,” orderlies who attended to such menial tasks as cooking. These might be either hired men or slaves. Senior officers generally lived far better than the troops, with tents, and occasionally cots and camp furniture, though such luxuries were rare even for senior officers.

#### BELOW LEFT

This drinking cup and flint knapper are typical of the militiaman’s simple gear. The flint knapper was made from bone or antler, and used to shape lumps of flint by chipping. The other object is a small powder horn. (Author)

#### BELOW

The small camp knife was a multi-purpose tool used for eating, as a substitute for a screwdriver in repairing weapons, and for general utility tasks from cleaning fingernails to repairing clothing. This one is worn on a lanyard around the neck with a pan brush. (Author)



The ability to start a fire was a necessary skill, and most men carried flint and steel for the purpose. A common practice was to place old bits of cloth into a metal can with a small hole punched in it and place it into a fire. With limited oxygen the cloth would carbonize, producing easily ignited tinder for starting fires. If dry wood was available a knife could be used to produce fine wood shavings for tinder.

Disease and injury were facts of everyday life, not just in battle. Two classes of practitioners, physicians and surgeons, provided medical care. Physicians were generally more educated; they provided general care for disease and prescribed simple medications. Medications could be prepared by the physician or, in large towns, by an apothecary. Surgeons, who accompanied the troops, were generally practitioners of more rough and practical medicine: debriding and closing wounds, occasionally extracting bullets, and performing amputations. Probing and extraction of bullets was hazardous, and Jackson himself carried two pistol balls from duels embedded in his body, one near his heart, the other in his neck near his spine. Medical procedures were performed without effective anesthesia, and one of the duties of the surgeon's mate, an enlisted specialty, was to help subdue patients.

Another military specialist was the clerk, who performed administrative tasks. The duties of the clerk were often nominal, since officers up to company grade were responsible for maintaining their own records. Military teamsters drove the teams of horses or mules that pulled gun carriages and wagons carrying specific military stores such as ammunition and tents. Their duties were strictly tactical, as contracted civilian teamsters drove most transport for general haulage.

Foremost among the issues that confronted militiamen – and particularly their leaders – was morale. Tedium and disenchantment were the greatest factors in reducing the combat effectiveness of militia units. Most militiamen quickly grew bored with camp life and were all too mindful of the needs of their farms and families. The disorganization of many early campaigns also led to disillusionment and poor morale as the troops stumbled about without bringing the enemy to conclusive battle. Jackson, for all his harsh disciplinary practices and hard campaigning, proved a popular leader because he actually fought – and won – battles.

## APPEARANCE AND EQUIPMENT

Members of the standing and volunteer militias were expected to provide virtually all their own weapons, field gear, and uniforms. A few very expensive and rare items such as firearms might be issued through the states, if available from federal stores. Some federal gear was made available through trade or simple corruption. As a result the appearance of even uniformed militias could hardly be described as “uniform.”

Most state government orders authorizing the formation of militia units specified a uniform based on hunting garb for enlisted men and more formal clothing for officers. In practice, however, the expense of equipment and clothing led to subsequent orders authorizing a less formal uniform for officers. Badges of rank typically were epaulets for officers and colored waist sashes for officers, corporals, and sergeants.

The typical militiaman's uniform was individually made, according to loose specifications provided by the state. He carried a few “suggested” items



of personal gear and others according to his tastes. With little transport available, the emphasis was on "traveling light."

The basic uniform of an infantryman or mounted rifleman consisted of a cotton or coarse linen hunting shirt and trousers. The hunting shirt was a thigh-length single- or double-layered jacket with an integral shoulder cape that provided additional warmth and protection for the shoulders. The seams were sewn back from the edge of the cut cloth, with the edges allowed to unravel to produce a fringed effect. The primary advantage of this design seems to be that it facilitated more rapid drying of the cloth when wet, an advantage when virtually no one possessed waterproof rain gear. A secondary advantage was that it broke up the outline of the wearer's body, much like a modern sniper's Ghillie suit. The hunting shirt was worn over a civilian shirt, typically one with long tails that could be worn as a nightshirt or for light wear in camp.

Trousers had a double-button fly, a flap with a row of buttons down each side, in the fashion of the day. The trousers suffered much wear from underbrush and from the ground, resulting in ragged cuffs and patches after any significant time in the field.

Initial regulations for uniforms typically specified a color for the cloth; for example, blue for infantry and artillery and black for riflemen of the Tennessee militia. The black was actually a dye called copperas, which if not properly fixed tended to fade to dirty gray rather rapidly. Later in the war, gray or brown cloth, treated with locally acquired dyes such as boiled walnut husks, came to predominate. These brown or gray uniforms appeared as early as the Creek Campaign of early 1814. Certainly these colors were predominant by late 1814, as British officers at New Orleans remarked on how well the colors blended into the bleak winter terrain. The color was in part the origin of the "dirty shirts" epithet used by the British for the militia.

Officers wore elaborate civilian-style coats with a single epaulet and braid. Even before the war, state regulations relaxed this requirement because of cost to the individual. In practice a red sash knotted about the waist identified an officer or sergeant.

At least some militiamen wore animal-skin caps made from raccoons, foxes, or even skunks, which made a considerable impression on period observers and are beloved of artists. However, floppy civilian felt hats were a more common and practical headwear. They provided protection from the sun, rain, and the ubiquitous biting flies and mosquitoes, and were far more desirable in the summer heat. These were civilian items in a wide variety of designs, decorated with hatbands and a variety of feathers, sprigs of vegetation, or plumes. Observers reported that a common item plundered from British casualties after the battle of New Orleans was officers' elaborate hat plumes.

Shoes were of a variety of civilian designs, but sturdy high-topped laced farmers' work shoes were common. Most men attempted to obtain or manufacture canvas or leather leggings, both to protect the lower legs and to keep rocks and debris out of the shoes. Soft deer-hide leggings were likely one of the few "buckskin" items commonly worn.

Mounted men wore more expensive high-topped, low-heeled riding boots and simple spurs with rounded spikes to prevent damaging the horse's flanks.

In the humid climate and rocky or swampy terrain, leather shoes suffered perhaps more than any other clothing item, and it was not unusual for shoes to rot off the wearer's feet. After long field service or in poor districts, so-called "frontier boots" were common. These were simply moccasins or fairly



#### ABOVE

Canteens could be any one of a number of privately obtained types, including wooden keg canteens, cloth- or leather-covered gourds like the one shown here, or rare metal canteens. (Author)

#### ABOVE RIGHT

Powder horns, like this small one, were made from hollowed-out cow horn, with a carved wooden plug. (Author)

#### RIGHT

This painting prepared for the Company of Military Historians depicts Tennessee militia (center figures) and members of Coffee's Mounted Brigade (flanking) at New Orleans. The uniforms – and the men – of the militia units were undoubtedly much the worse for wear after nearly two years of campaigning in the hostile climate of the southern swamps, forests, and mountains. The wealthier officer at right wears the regulation blue uniform specified in prewar orders, with single epaulette and red waist sash, and is armed with a sword and pistol. The mounted rifleman at far left is distinguished by riding boots and spurs. The infantry officer, second from right, is identified only by his red sash. The enlisted infantryman, second from left, has a keg canteen with a typical “star” decoration, and a government bayonet. Both infantrymen wear scavenged Army black canvas leggings. (Peter Copeland estate)



PC<sub>94</sub>



crude sacks of leather (or even cloth) worn over the feet and tied with drawstrings. The accompanying leggings were often strips of old blankets or other heavy cloth held on with string.

The militiaman carried minimal field gear, and many necessary but heavy or bulky items were held in the communal mess groups. Most personal gear was locally made or acquired and highly individualistic. Some material was supplied to the states from Federal stores and issued to state troops, particularly later in the war. Each man's basic personal gear included a shoulder pouch, a canteen, a powder horn, and one or two blankets for sleeping on the ground.

Shoulder bags used to carry small gear were usually made of soft leather or cloth, decorated according to personal tastes and supported by a broad shoulder strap. This bag was used to carry lead ball ammunition, extra rifle flints, a fork or more commonly a spoon for eating, and any personal items.

The canteen was another highly personalized item. Most common were keg canteens, miniature barrels with a shoulder strap; some were military issue, but most were privately obtained. It was common to decorate keg canteens with paint, or cloth or felt on the flat sides (this could also be wetted to cool the contents by evaporation). A star motif was common, often produced by fastening cloth to the round faces of the canteen and cutting through a second layer of contrasting color to create a symbol such as a star. Gourd canteens with wooden plugs were also common and were often covered with cloth or soft leather. Least common were expensive but durable metal canteens; unknown at the time, the lead-based solder was toxic.

The small powder horn was another necessary item, usually made from a cow's horn with a carved plug and leather or string strap for carrying. These items varied widely in size and design.

Small personal items included a metal cup that could be used not only for drinking but for heating drinks in a fire or eating. A spoon, or less commonly a fork, would be carried in the shoulder bag. The flint knapper, a small piece of bone or antler used to shape musket flints, was often attached to the cup or clothing with twine or a hide strip.

A small camp knife was a multipurpose tool for cutting, eating, and making simple repairs to weapons or clothing.

#### BELOW LEFT

The screwdriver or utility knife was a critical tool in seating a new flint, held on by the ball-head clamp visible just in front of this reenactor's thumb. Note also the design of the hunting shirt, with deliberately frayed edges to the cut cloth. (Author)

#### BELOW

A full set of weapons tools might include, from left to right: pan brush, non-sparking brass powder measure, soft metal wire vent pick, and a forged iron screwdriver for repairs and setting the flint. All are attached to a leather lanyard. (Author)



A few simple tools used to support and repair firearms were typically carried on a cord or lanyard, usually attached to the clothing for quick access. A small brush for cleaning powder residue from the musket pan was a necessity, as was a short wire prick of brass or soft iron used to clear clogs from the narrow vent tube that connected the pan to the weapon's bore. A nonsparking brass powder cup for measuring the charge and perhaps a forged screwdriver completed the maintenance kit. A carved wooden shot gauge could be used both to measure the ball for proper caliber and as a speed-loader. Holes bored in a flat piece of wood could be used to store several balls held in by scraps of cloth wadding, so that it was not necessary to dig into the shoulder pouch in a moment of crisis.

## Weapons

Contrary to popular myth, firearms were hardly ubiquitous along the frontier. In some cases militiamen from poor districts went into battle without firearms, and it was in some districts common for men to enlist in order to obtain a musket. In some districts there were problems with men who enlisted and then deserted with the prized weapon. Some formations such as the 1st Regiment of East Tennessee militia were equipped with firearms that were impressed, or confiscated, from civilians en route to their operational area.

Available firearms were a mix of types, including British-, French-, and American-manufactured weapons dating back to the Revolutionary War, as well as those manufactured in a myriad of small workshops. Civilian weapons included single-barreled fowling pieces and such oddities as Mississippi Militia Captain Sam Dale's prized double-barreled shotgun, an extraordinarily rare weapon in that era.

Weapons manufactured at government arsenals became more common during the war as the Federal government supplied weapons to the states. Such firearms were shipped and distributed through civilian contractors, which engendered considerable confusion and graft. In late 1814 unarmed

Lead for shot was typically transported as strips, lumps, or ingots, and cast in the field using a fire to melt the lead in a pot or ladle, like the one shown at right. Forged iron single shot molds like those resting against the log were most common. The nippers (second from left) were used to cut away the lead neck left over from the molding process. More complex molds like the one at lower right could make both small "buck" and full-caliber "ball" shot. The modern ballpoint pen is for scale. (Author)







Full-caliber ball was the standard military ammunition, and today standard military ammunition is still traditionally called "ball." Note that the molding necks have not been trimmed from these balls. The brass device immediately above the large screw on the musket is a modern safety device to prevent burning bystanders with the flash from the musket pan. (Author)

Tennessee militiamen being transported down the Mississippi River to defend New Orleans overtook riverboats loaded with new government muskets. They simply looted the contractor's boats.

Pistols were rare, and they were primarily used by officers. Their limited range and accuracy, and slow reloading, made them fairly impractical as weapons. Many, such as heavy "dragoon" pistols, could double as clubs once their single shot was fired.

Each mess group or other larger group molded their own ammunition from lead ingots melted over a fire using a simple ladle and mold. In some cases large supplies of shot might be molded in advance. A common military load was "buck and ball," a standard-caliber ball with several smaller shot loaded on top. This load was probably derived from hunting practices, and it offered the advantages of the stopping power of a ball with the dispersal of a shotgun.

Because firearms were slow to reload once battle was joined, edged weapons were common for close combat. Bayonets might be issued to men armed with military firearms but were not a preferred weapon. Similarly swords, privately purchased by officers or NCOs, were relatively rare. Most men carried a large, straight-bladed, single-edged knife of the type used for butchering livestock or game, with wooden, or less commonly, antler handles. These were locally made and entirely nonstandardized.

The close combat weapon of choice was the fighting hatchet, or tomahawk. There were a variety of designs, most originally manufactured for trade with the various tribes. These typically had a long, single-edged iron head fitted onto a straight wooden shaft. Made of relatively soft iron they were not truly cutting weapons, functioning more as narrow, edged clubs for smashing through skulls and other body parts by brute force. With the ability to parry blows and to serve as either an edged weapon or club, it was a brutal, effective weapon.

Drafted militias were usually the most poorly equipped. Kentucky in particular had been denuded of all military stores to supply the needs of units

fighting along the Canadian border and against the northwestern tribes. The Kentucky-drafted militias that served at New Orleans were shipped down the river on barges, with the expectation that they would somehow acquire clothing and weapons en route. Many of these men arrived at New Orleans barefoot, while others according to period accounts lacked even trousers. The citizens of New Orleans donated cloth for clothing and blankets that could be cut into crude coats to protect against the bitter cold. Some were equipped with weapons scavenged from around the city, but many were armed only with clubs, axes, or farm implements, also obtained in and around the city.

## BELIEF AND BELONGING

Volunteers who served in the state militias of the southwestern frontier of the young United States were motivated by complex cultural, military, and even religious traditions; some new, the others reaching back thousands of years.

As previously noted, the settlers who lived along the southwestern frontier were largely descended from those who had emigrated – by choice or unwillingly – from Scotland, Ireland, and to a lesser degree, England. For various reasons few had cause to love the English Crown.

When the colonies rebelled in 1776, they were already divided into two largely separate cultures: the citizens of the long-settled coastal regions and cities, and the citizens of the Appalachian frontier. Both groups shared a common pride in their success in overthrowing colonial rule by the most powerful nation on earth, but it was in reality still a weak bond of nationalism.

In most military forces, soldiers bond through shared experience and suffering, and the ties to a soldier's comrades often become stronger than those to a family distant in both time and space. The soldier's loyalties tend to become weaker with distance; his primary loyalties are to his immediate comrades, his unit, his branch of service, and his country, in that order. Shared experience and suffering (real or imagined) are the fundamental basis for morale in many military organizations, and these bonds by their nature develop only through long service and isolation from society as a whole.

For the state militiaman along the frontier the short terms of enlistment did not encourage such bonding within units. Men might serve in units that were recruited from defined geographic districts, but there was little else to bond them together. Ties to families left behind on isolated farms and in small towns, themselves sometimes at risk of attack by the enemy, exerted a stronger pull upon the militiaman's loyalties than his immediate comrades.



### HARSH DISCIPLINE

Throughout the war short-service militiamen were notorious for poor discipline and desertion. At times even Jackson turned a blind eye to desertion; before the final campaign against the Red Sticks he tacitly encouraged desertion as a means of trimming down his bloated force to one he could support with its limited logistics. At other times desertion, and particularly insubordination, were brutally punished. In December 1814 Col. Philip Pipkin's 1st Regiment of West Tennessee militia garrisoned forts in southern Alabama. Disease and desertion were rampant, and in December 1814 a court martial at Mobile convicted six militiamen of disobedience. The men were executed on February 21, 1815 – the day before word of the Treaty of Ghent reached Mobile. One other militiaman and one Army regular were also executed during Jackson's period of command. In 1828 Congress re-examined the courts martial, a political attack on Jackson who was then seeking election to the Presidency.







The short terms of service also discouraged development of a habit of obedience to orders among men who tended by nature to be independent minded and argumentative. As citizens of the new democracy, militiamen often felt free to dispute orders they thought unjust or ill advised. Leaders were usually elected, which provided some degree of coherency, but also led subordinates to openly question the ability of leaders they did not personally respect.

One of the few issues that could unite the men in a militia unit was a disagreement over terms of service. Disputes with superiors over terms of service were astonishingly common, and on many occasions led to mass desertions and the disintegration of the assembled army.

Typical of such disputes was one over the terms for the very first units of Tennessee militia to be called to service. The men in some units who served in the 1813 Natchez Expedition had enlisted in December 1812 for one year of service – an unusually long period in itself. The units were released after the expedition and later recalled for the first campaign against the Red Sticks in late-1813. Jackson interpreted their terms of enlistment to be one year of active service, but most of the men interpreted the term to be one calendar year.

Militiamen zealously counted the days until their term of service expired and did not tend to stay one day longer than required. The departure of masses of men also aggravated the chronic logistical problems experienced along the frontier, as departing men usually felt free to help themselves to any supplies they thought necessary to sustain them on their trip home. Chronic supply problems that left men ill equipped and frequently starving did little to improve morale.

The confusion and ineptitude that marked the early campaigns also contributed to poor morale. Soldiers by their nature tend to be proud of accomplishments, either of endurance or victory, but the early campaigns provided little to be proud of. Jackson's ability to actually fight and win battles was a major factor in uniting his troops.

The final battles against the British around New Orleans united the soldiers of Jackson's patchwork force as the struggle against the Creeks never did. Hatred of the Crown, aggravated by British support for the hostile tribes along the frontier, finally provided a strong unifying force for an army now accustomed to victory. At New Orleans the militiamen and others actually wanted to engage the British army, aggressively sought battle, and on the climactic day actually cheered the British attack.

Ironically the militiamen and other members of Jackson's army were more united after the war than during. The victory at New Orleans quickly became a major point of pride that united not just the militiamen but also the entire nation.

## **CAMPAIGN – THE CREEK WAR**

The American strategy was to launch offensives into the Creek territories from four directions. The plan foundered on poor planning and logistics, and only Jackson's western Tennessee offensive played a critical role.

### **Early campaigns**

Jackson established a supply base, Fort Strother, on the Coosa River and dispatched a force to surround the Creek town of Tallusahatchee. In a 30-minute battle on November 3, 1813, John Coffee's mounted troops killed about 200 Red Sticks. Jackson was soon summoned to the aid of friendly Creeks



besieged at Talladega. Major General John Cocke, a political rival of Jackson, led his East Tennessee army away from Talladega. On November 9 Jackson encircled the Red Sticks who were encircling the fort. The militia's extended front was little more than a skirmish line, backed by Coffee's mounted troops. Jackson's inexperienced troops enthusiastically attacked the Red Sticks but when the enemy counterattacked, one brigade retreated, leaving Brice Smith's company exposed to the full fury of the enemy. The Deacon's small squad was badly outnumbered, and several attempted to bolt until the old man bullied them back into position.

The militiamen fired a few rounds, and then the Red Sticks were upon them. Billy fell as he stepped back from an onrushing warrior. He frantically tried to fend off the Red Stick with his empty musket, but the man pushed aside the long, unwieldy barrel and raised his war club. Before he could strike, the Deacon crashed into the warrior, parrying the descending club with his tomahawk and using his long-bladed butcher's knife to kill the warrior immediately. Other Red Sticks rushed by, and as quickly as they had appeared, the enemy troops were gone. Brice Smith's company suffered numerous casualties in this baptism of fire.

On November 17 Jackson learned that the Hillabees, a Creek tribal group, wished to surrender. Unaware of this on November 18 Cocke's forces attacked the Hillabee towns, killing 70 and carrying away 250 women and children.

General John Floyd commanded some 3,000 Georgia militiamen, but the Georgia legislature failed to appropriate funds for supplies. By November 1813 Floyd's force was reduced to about 950 men and 400 friendly Creeks. Despite food shortages, Floyd established a forward base, Fort Mitchell, in Alabama.

Floyd planned a November 9 surprise attack on Autosse, 60 miles (100km) inside hostile territory. The plan foundered on inadequate reconnaissance; the river was too deep to ford, and a second Creek town forced the Georgians to extend their front. Despite heavy losses, most of the Red Stick warriors escaped.

Floyd retreated to Fort Mitchell. In mid-January 1814 he moved into hostile territory and established a camp on Calabee Creek. In the predawn hours of January 27 the Red Sticks attacked. The Red Stick planned to capture two small cannon, but the Baldwin Volunteer Artillery successfully fought off the attackers. Both regular and militia artillery units, with their higher levels of group discipline and morale, longer service history, and a tradition that stressed never allowing a serviceable gun to be lost to the enemy, were often the most steadfast formations in such actions.

Floyd retreated to his base camps, and forces along the eastern boundary of the Creek nation played no further role in the war.

The western force, Choctaws and Mississippi militia under General F. L. Claiborne, augmented by the 3rd US Infantry, was hampered by the threat of a British invasion. Despite a "written memorial" from militia officers complaining of inadequate supplies, tents, and clothing, Claiborne advanced up the Alabama River. He left his baggage train, artillery, and sick at Fort Deposit and marched toward Holy Ground, a Red Stick stronghold.

On December 23, 1813, Claiborne attacked the fortified camp. The frontal attack drove the Red Sticks back against the river bluffs. According to legend the Creek leader William Weatherford escaped by jumping his horse from a bluff into the river.<sup>10</sup>

10. Some researchers have disputed this almost cinematic exploit, insisting that he simply rode along the shore below the bluffs.



The distinctive weapon of the Red Sticks was the wooden war club, dyed red with hematite, a mineral widely available in northern Alabama. Also shown are bone-tipped arrows, and a typical Creek bow. (Author)

The militiamen found about 100 scalps and a letter from the Spanish governor of Pensacola congratulating the Red Sticks on the Fort Mims victory. Claiborne's troops retreated into Mississippi. Most were mustered out in January 1814, their term of service completed.

### **The second campaign**

Jackson's army disintegrated when terms of enlistment for his troops expired in December. Only a handful, Billy and the Deacon among them, remained with Jackson. Through the winter the army remained in camp at Fort Strother. Supplies failed to arrive, and the men went hungry in the bitter cold. New recruits were late in arriving, and rumors of British landings in Florida circulated. Scouts reported numerous Red Sticks gathered at Horseshoe Bend on the Tallapoosa River.

On January 15 Jackson took his available force – 930 new volunteer militiamen and 100 allied Indians – on a raid he hoped would reduce the resistance facing Floyd. Billy and the other old hands under the Deacon's command were assigned to march with Captain David Deadrick's small artillery battery. For three days they marched south along the river, then turned east; their final camp was near Emucfau Creek.

Before dawn on January 22 the Red Sticks attacked, but Coffee rallied the experienced men. When Coffee counterattacked, he was cut off and withdrew. Again the Red Sticks attacked, and again Coffee counterattacked. Throughout the daylong fight Billy and the artillery held a position near the creek.

On January 23 Jackson reluctantly decided to retreat. Burdened by wounded, they camped that night near the crossing of Enitachopco Creek,



about ten miles away. Jackson feared another attack at the usual stream crossing and on January 24 marched toward an open area of forest alongside the creek.

As the column crossed the stream, the Red Sticks fired a ragged volley and burst out of thick cover. Many of the new militiamen fled, but Billy's small group held fast. A Red Stick rushed at him with club upraised, and Billy shot him in the face, the heavy ball blowing out a cloud of blood and bone. With no time to reload, Billy quickly pulled the tomahawk from his belt as a Red Stick leaped onto a wounded militiaman. Billy smashed the hatchet into the man's skull, feeling the crunch as the dull edge went through bone. Musket balls whizzed past as men farther back fired into the melee.

The single cannon roared out from a nearby position. Billy saw several Red Sticks knocked off their feet by grapeshot. Almost as soon as they came, the Red Sticks melted away in the face of the cannon fire.

Jackson collected his panicked troops, and the column limped back toward Fort Strother. Politicians were desperate for good news, and the small battles were praised from Nashville to Washington. A flood of new recruits helped to spread the glorious tales of the fight back, to the amusement of the men who were actually there.

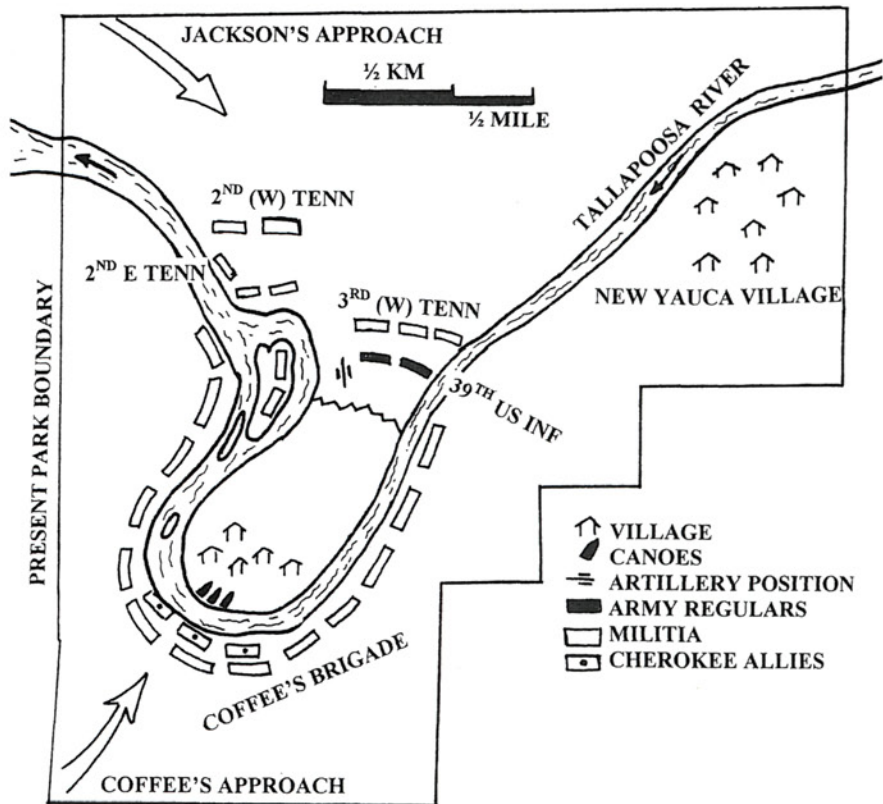
This National Park Service gun crew is positioned with a six-pounder gun at Horseshoe Bend National Military Park. The annual re-enactment is held at the same time of year as the battle; note the early spring vegetation. The wooden gun carriage is painted light blue, with black ironwork in the fashion of the period. (Author)





## HORSESHOE BEND BATTLEFIELD

This battle site is one of a few that are wholly contained within a national park, and preserved from commercial encroachment. Jackson sent Coffee's Mounted Brigade and the Cherokees to the left bank to cut off the escape of any Red Sticks. The 39th US Infantry, supported by the (West) Tennessee Militias bore the main role in the attack, though all units participated as indicated by casualty roles.



## The climactic battle – Horseshoe Bend

General Pinckney, overall commander in the South, was impressed that Jackson could win battles with 60-day militiamen, and Jackson received his long-wished reinforcement, the 39th US Infantry. Jackson used the 39th to enforce a new level of training and discipline on his often rebellious militiamen. The regulars provided Jackson with a highly disciplined force, answerable only to him. As a result he issued a precisely worded order to all his men: "Any officer or soldier who flies before the enemy without being compelled to do so by superior force and actual necessity shall suffer death." The men who had fought in the two small battles used the remainder of their terms to construct boats to haul supplies down the Coosa River. All was not going well for Jackson. One of his generals refused to bring his troops into camp, trying to extract a promise of three-month terms of service, and John Cocke continued to encourage disobedience. Jackson ordered Cocke arrested, but he had already left to return home.

Eventually a new army was assembled. One of the new units was the 1st West Tennessee Volunteer Militia, and Billy and the Deacon transferred into Captain James McMurray's company.<sup>11</sup>

On March 14, 1814, the expedition marched south, with the 39th Infantry transported by boat. The army numbered 2,400 white troops reinforced by about 500 friendly Creeks and Cherokees. On March 24 Jackson left his forward base, widening an old trading trail toward Horseshoe Bend.

11. The vast majority of militiamen served their entire term of service with a single unit, but records exist documenting transfers between units.





Battlefield archaeology reveals progressively more about the battle site at Horseshoe Bend. These artifacts on display in the museum include, clockwise from top, an iron axe head (with restored handle), three-pounder (47mm) and six-pounder (57mm) cannonballs, stone arrowheads, a .38-caliber (9.6mm) bullet mold (probably for a pistol), iron grapeshot in two sizes, and oxidized musket balls for .44-caliber (11mm) and .69-caliber (17.5mm) muskets. (Author)

On the frigid morning of March 27, 1814, officers roused the men out of their blankets. After a meal of salt pork and hardtack, they set off on a march through the forest. The captain tried to describe the plan as best he knew it.

"Spies say the Red Sticks are in a big bend of the river. Coffee's mounted men have circled downriver to cut off any who try and get away. Us and the regulars are the main attack," the captain said.

The militiamen could clearly see the formidable Red Stick defenses. The river made a broad loop, and across the neck of land was a log barricade. The artillerymen were already busy emplacing two cannon, a six-pounder and a three-pounder, on a knoll that was the nearest point to the barricade.

"Take a knee, boys," instructed one of the officers. "This will take a while." Billy made himself as comfortable as he could in the cold, damp leaves. At about 10:30 a.m. the larger of the two cannons boomed. The two-inch ball embedded itself in the barricade.

The bombardment drove the defenders into frenzied activity. The prophets, religious fanatics who were the heart of the Red Stick movement, exhorted the defenders. Many wore animal tails fastened to their upper arms, which flapped around as they waved their arms.

"Never mind them, boy," muttered the Deacon, who had traded with the Creeks and knew many men on the other side of the log wall. "See that ol' fat man there, by them redbud trees?" He pointed a bony finger toward a grove of trees resplendent with reddish-purple winter flowers. Billy saw a stocky middle-aged man who stood and let the activity swirl around him.

"That's Menawa, their big chief. Menawa's like a lot of the old chiefs. He didn't want to fight, but he does it smart. Like that log wall. Better'n any fort we ever built," the Deacon snorted.

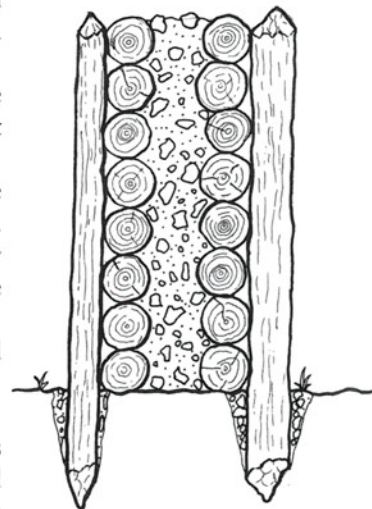
Billy could see that the cannons were accomplishing little. Hits on the barricade splintered the pine logs, but the earthen fill absorbed the impacts. Riflemen fired at the defenders but accomplished little. Occasionally Billy glimpsed Jackson as he rode to and fro across the front. For two hours the futile cannonade continued.

Shortly after 11:00 a.m. a mounted militiaman rode up to Jackson and pointed toward the far point of the river bend.

"What's happening, Deacon?" asked one of the men.

"Shush!" Deacon replied, and cupped one hand to his good ear. "That's musketry," he said, pointing toward smoke starting to rise from inside the Red Stick fortress. Red Sticks began to run away from the barricade, toward the

An illustration of the Red Stick Barricade. The sophisticated double wall of pine logs with an earth fill effectively absorbed the fire of Jackson's artillery, protecting the defenders. Portholes pierced the double wall, but the construction is uncertain. Some restorations show a row of sharpened stakes set slanting outward along the outer wall of the barricade.







Today all that remains of the Red Stick barricade, a sophisticated work of military engineering for the early nineteenth century, is a double row of postholes discovered by archaeologists. (Author)

river. To their right the drummers of the 39th Infantry began to beat assembly, and their own drummer joined in. Men began to scramble to their feet.

“Boys!” shouted a lieutenant. “Friendly Indians have crossed the river and taken the foe from the rear!” The militiamen began to arrange themselves in a ragged line. “Fix bayonets!”

A chief named Whale had swum the frigid river and stolen a dugout canoe. He ferried more Cherokee across to seize other canoes. Now a sizeable force was inside the fortified river bend.

Billy heard shouted orders and the drums of the 39th began to roll, followed by their own. The regulars advanced in front of the ragged line, moving slowly and deliberately toward the barricade.

Halfway across the open ground a few militiamen broke into a run toward the barricade, yipping like hounds. The rest followed, so that the militia struck

## D

### ASSAULT ON THE BARRICADE, HORSESHOE BEND

The Red Stick position at Horseshoe Bend was a combination of a natural defensive position formed by the sweeping bend of the Tallapoosa River, with a sophisticated barricade to close off the narrow land approach. The barricade consisted of a double log wall with earthen fill, pierced by firing loopholes. Details of how the loopholes were constructed are unknown, and some archaeological interpretations depict a row of sharpened wooden stakes protruding outward from the base of the wall. A prolonged cannonade directed at the wall had no effect. The main assault was led by the US Army's 39th Infantry, with Tennessee militia infantry both acting as forward skirmishers and flanking the Army infantry in the attack. The day-long battle was quite brutal, and even the reserve militia units suffered casualties. Note that several of the militiamen carry brightly decorated keg canteens, and one wears an animal-skin cap, which were actually fairly rare. Wooden war clubs were the favored close-combat weapons of the Red Sticks, and a variety of types are seen here.







the barricade only shortly after the deliberately advancing regulars. The militia attack veered to one side, where the log barricade was slightly lower.

Muskets fired through loopholes in the log wall, and a few militiamen were struck. Others were pierced by bone- and stone-tipped arrows. Billy shoved the muzzle of his weapon, loaded with buck and ball, into a loophole and fired into the mass of Red Sticks beyond. Men tugged at weapons that appeared through the loopholes. The wall became a fortress for both sides as they exchanged fire through the loopholes.

Billy scrambled atop the wall. A Red Stick grabbed at him, but Billy yanked the man toward him and smashed the butt of his weapon into his face. The man tumbled backward.

Billy could see the regulars in action farther along the wall. An officer briefly stood on top of the wall, until he was shot down. A very young officer stood on the wall waving his men onward and was struck by an arrow. Fumbling at the wooden shaft protruding from his bloody thigh, he clubbed a Red Stick with his pistol and pulled his sword.<sup>12</sup>

Militiamen were already over the wall and among the enemy. Another man fired his musket into a nearby Red Stick, deafening Billy. Billy nearly tumbled into the maelstrom below, and his vision jittered from the concussion.

As additional militiamen scrambled over the barricade, their superior weaponry began to tell against the Red Sticks. Only about one in four Red Sticks had a firearm, and many of those were nonfunctional. The rush of men to defend against attack from the river had also fatally weakened the Red Stick defense of the barricade.

Red Sticks ran from the barricade, the initial trickle growing into a rout. Among the last to go were some of the prophets. One danced in front of Billy, waving his arms and exhorting his followers. Billy loaded his weapon with double ball and at close range fired into the man's chest.

The day became the most brutal of Billy's life as the battle degenerated into absolute chaos. Militiamen advancing from the landward side and allied Indians coming from the river mixed with Red Sticks who were fighting, fleeing, and attempting to hide. Red Sticks tried to escape down the icy river, but Coffee's mounted riflemen on the outside bank carefully shot them. Bodies sank, others floated downstream to lodge in bushes or on gravel bars. Many hid under overhanging riverbanks, only to be relentlessly picked off by the riflemen. The river was purple with blood, the sky hidden by a haze of smoke.

Billy and his comrades searched the underbrush and huts for survivors. Wounded warriors were dispatched with tomahawks or bayonets. When fired upon from inside a collapsed shelter, one of the sergeants had his men fire a volley into the rubble. He flung a burning log from a nearby fire to set aflame the dry boughs of the collapsed roof. The militiamen took a short rest as they listened to the screams from inside the burning hovel.

Late in the day Billy and others helped gather women and children. The weeping noncombatants were prodded toward an open area where others guarded a large group. One guard pulled aside a boy of about ten. Lifting him off the ground by his hair, he slashed the boy's throat with his knife and dropped the writhing body. "Pups grow up to be wolves," he said, wiping the knife with some grass.

12. This was Ensign Sam Houston of the 39th US Infantry, a unit recruited largely in eastern Tennessee. Sent to Jackson's home to recuperate, he became a political protégé, a leader of the Texas Army in the war of independence against Mexico, the first President of the Republic of Texas, and a US Senator.



“There’ll be no more of that,” growled the Deacon. “Ain’t no cause to kill innocents.”

“Shut up, ol’ man. They’s Injuns, one the same as another.”

The Deacon put his hand on his tomahawk and took a step forward.

Both men were brought up short by the double click of a weapon being brought to full cock. An officer pointed his pistol casually into the air.

“You,” he said, pointing at the murderer, then to one side. “Over there. The General says there’ll be no more killing of noncombatants. Deacon, assemble the boys. The General wants an accurate count of enemy bodies tomorrow.” Under pressure to justify the cost – economic and political – of campaigns, “body count” was an important measure of success to the generals.

Jackson and Coffee believed that only a handful of Red Sticks escaped, though Talwatustunugge (a Hillabee, wounded nine times that day) reported that as many as 200 had fled.

The next day militiamen scoured the battlefield looking for enemy bodies. The nose was cut from each and carried away to be counted. Some took the opportunity to cut away earrings, gorgets, and other silver jewelry, or other valuables. Flocks of turkey vultures and crows watched the men’s activities. There would be no effort to bury the Red Stick dead; there were far too many of them – 557 noses counted, in addition to 300 or so lost in the river. An unknown number were never found in the forest. Carrion birds and scavenging animals would cleanse the battlefield.

Some 300 women and an unknown number of children were marched toward Fort Talladega to be taken as slaves by the Cherokee and friendly Creeks. Jackson himself sent an orphaned Creek child to Nashville, where he was renamed Andrew Junior and adopted by Jackson and his wife, Rachel.<sup>13</sup>

The army marched back to Fort Williams, but as usual, promised supplies had not arrived. With only five days’ rations the army scoured the west bank of the Tallapoosa River. The searching militiamen found little food, since the Creeks were also starving. Jackson’s force and another under regular Army officer Colonel Homer Milton, on the east bank of the river, arranged a rendezvous at the confluence of the Tallapoosa and Coosa rivers. On April 17 Jackson’s column staggered into Milton’s camp, only to discover that Milton had left the longed-for food supply behind. The men had little care that Milton disputed Jackson’s seniority (Jackson was a state militia officer), but even the Deacon cursed Milton in fluent biblical prose. Thus far the war had consisted mainly of starving.

The situation worsened with the arrival of additional troops from Mississippi under another disputatious regular, Colonel Gilbert Russell, and aristocratic-acting militia from the Carolinas under General Joseph Graham. Quarreling over seniority was finally resolved by the arrival of General Pinckney, an admirer of Jackson.

Jackson expected another battle, but the starving Creeks surrendered singly and in groups. Among them was William Weatherford, the most capable of the Red Stick leaders, who had a sizeable reward on his head. He boldly strode into Jackson’s tent and made an impassioned speech, imploring Jackson to do with him what he would, but to spare his people. Impressed, Jackson pardoned Weatherford despite demands for his execution.

13. Andrew Junior died before attaining adulthood, leaving the widowed Jackson with no heirs.

This view is looking upstream at the site where the Cherokee allies crossed the river to take the Red Stick position in the rear. Red Stick canoes taken from the right bank (to the left of photo) were used to ferry fighters across the river. Coffee's Brigade of mounted riflemen and "mounted gunmen" (armed with smoothbore muskets) positioned along the slightly higher ground obscured by the trees slaughtered any Red Sticks who tried to escape down the river. (Author)



The Americans rushed to negotiate the Treaty of Fort Jackson (August 9, 1814), which punished the friendly Creeks even more harshly than the remaining Red Sticks, who did not recognize the treaty. The Americans had little time to spare for the Creeks: the British had at last taken an interest in the southwestern frontier.

## INTERLUDE: THE PENSACOLA CAMPAIGN

The local remnants of the Spanish Empire in North America were trapped among the devils. Americans threatened Florida from the north, Britain controlled the seas, and the defeated Creeks were an unpredictable factor.

Jackson was painfully aware of the British use of Pensacola as a base. He arrived in Mobile on August 27, 1814, amid rumors of a major British offensive on the Gulf Coast. Many Americans along the frontier saw Florida, the remnant of the Spanish Empire in North America, as rightfully American territory. This had already resulted in the Patriot's War, a brief occupation of parts of East Florida in 1812. Spanish sales of munitions to the Red Sticks, and British use of Pensacola and smaller Florida ports as bases further enraged the Americans, but Governor Gonzalez Manrique was unable to resist the threat of a superior British force. The local British land commander,

### E

#### DAILY LIFE IN CAMP, THE PENSACOLA CAMPAIGN

Jackson, without authorization from Washington, attacked and captured Spanish Pensacola on November 7, 1814, disrupting both British use of the port as a base to supply the hostile Red Sticks, and British plans for land assaults on Mobile and New Orleans. In the foreground a Tennessee militiaman and a Choctaw scout perform camp chores – clothing repairs, casting lead shot, and making tinder for starting fires by heating cloth in a metal can. In the background Army regulars help train other militiamen, a major task for the regular soldiers under Jackson's command. Military knowledge for both regulars and militia was gained largely from manuals like the one the officer is holding. In the foreground are typical camp items: provision barrels used for temporary storage, a personal effects chest, and a camp lantern. The tent fly to provide shelter from rain and sun would have been quite a luxury for the ill-equipped militia.

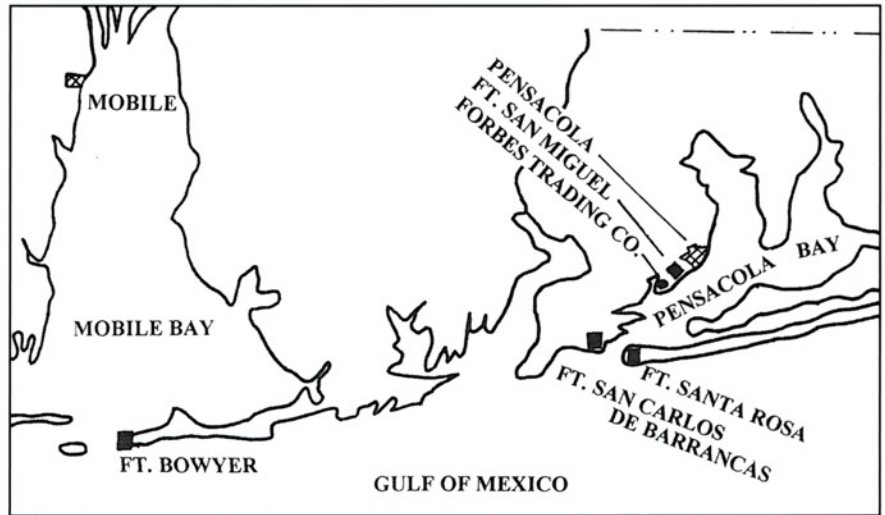






## PENSACOLA CAMPAIGN

Without authorization, Jackson attacked the Spanish port of Pensacola, which was being used by the British to re-supply the Red Sticks. The British and their allies abandoned the small city, and in the retreat British troops looted the large British Forbes Trading Company facility, leading the company to support the Americans with intelligence and material aid. Ironically, the British destruction of the forts prompted Jackson to take his entire army to defend New Orleans. The initial attack on American positions at Ft Bowyer failed.



Major Edward Nicolls of the Royal Marines, discovered that many of the locals – including British merchants – were sympathetic to the Americans. He alienated Spanish and British citizens by seizing property and recruiting their slaves as soldiers.

Nicolls also attempted to recruit Jean Lafitte and his Baratarian privateers. Lafitte forwarded a copy of a letter that detailed British plans for an attack on New Orleans to the governor of Louisiana, with an appeal for a pardon for his men.<sup>14</sup>

Nicolls and the naval commander of the expedition chose to first attempt the capture of Mobile. Tiny Fort Bowyer guarded the approach to the city. On September 13, 1814, the fort, garrisoned by US Army regulars, withstood a coordinated land and naval attack. The British land force retreated to Pensacola.

Jackson received no reply to his demands that Governor Manrique prevent the British from using Pensacola. He called up more militia and assembled a force of 520 Army regulars, 750 Choctaw and Chickasaw, and 1,200 militia and volunteers. Billy and the Deacon joined up with a group of dismounted cavalrymen from Colonel William Russell's Volunteer Mounted Gunmen.

The Spanish garrison at Pensacola consisted of about 500 dispirited troops. In the face of American demands for the surrender of the city, Manrique vacillated, but on November 2 called for aid. The British naval commander refused to land his sailors, but Major Nicolls decided to fight for the small city.

The militiamen marched south from Fort Montgomery on the Alabama River through the sandy pine forests. Billy was awakened before dawn on November 6.

"Up, boys," said the sergeant. "We're goin' to see the Spaniards." The men ate a cold meal of hardtack and water.

At sunrise they set off with a detachment of Army regulars and three mounted officers. Crude cabins in the pine forest stood empty, the entire countryside seemed abandoned. But there were prints of moccasin-shod feet everywhere.

14. From Barataria Island in southern Louisiana, Lafitte's men operated as privateers under letters of marque from France, Cartagena, and revolutionary governments opposing Spain in Latin America. The US government opposed their lucrative smuggling through New Orleans and their use of US territory, and referred to them as pirates. The Baratarians were sufficiently powerful that Lafitte traded openly and walked the streets of New Orleans.



The path widened to a crude road, and the low buildings of Pensacola came into view. "Ain't much of a town," observed Billy. An officer laughed. "Biggest town around here. It's got two streets."

The officer unrolled a white cloth, and the mounted men rode out of the tree line. A puff of white smoke appeared near the edge of the town, and a musket ball whirled overhead. A ragged volley caused the officers to spur their horses back toward the shelter of the trees.

"Lieutenant," ordered the senior officer, "go and inform General Jackson what has transpired. We will wait near that last crossroad." Jackson soon appeared, visibly enraged. A captured Spanish soldier was sent into the town to offer terms of surrender, which were refused.

That night in camp outside the town, the militia and Choctaw molded balls and performed last-minute chores. Just before dark the captain assembled his company to provide last-minute instructions.

To avoid the British naval guns, Jackson kept a diversionary force near the bay, and in the predawn hours of November 7, marched his force through the scrub forest to the east side of the town. The assault was made by four columns, three of militia and one of Choctaw.

Billy's company followed the regulars who would spearhead the attack. A Spanish cannon sited in the street at the edge of town got off one round, which went wide of the column. Billy pulled his weapon to full cock and fired at the town. Grabbing his tomahawk from his belt, he ran at the defenders with a blood-curdling scream. The Royal Marines operating the cannon abandoned it when the Spanish troops around them bolted.

The regular soldiers advanced at the double-quick, militia in a loose line on the flanks. Billy noticed a gaudily dressed Spanish officer running about in confusion with a white flag, and one of the American officers gave the order to cease fire.

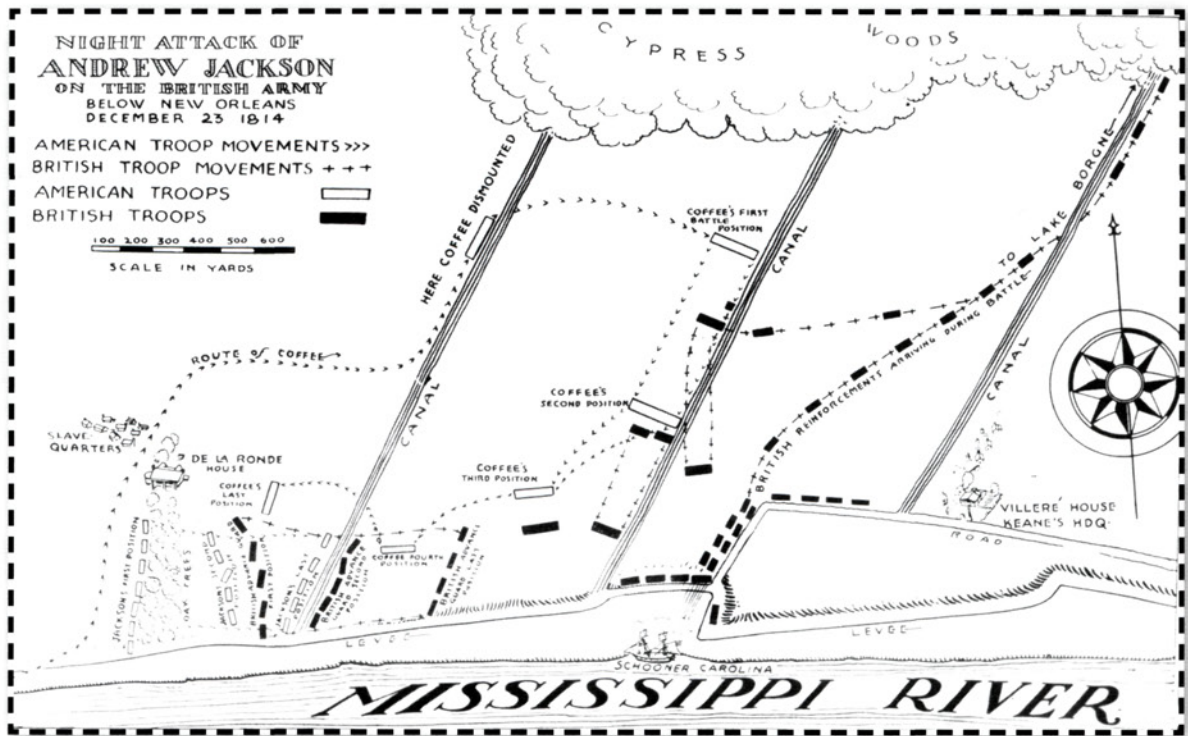
The battle for Pensacola was over within minutes. The British fell back into Fort Barrancas, saved by the confusion that accompanied the Spanish surrender. The next day they boarded ships, blowing up the forts, carrying off slaves and property, and taking 200 unwilling black Spanish troops into forced labor.

Jackson received intelligence that the British would launch their long-planned assault on New Orleans. With the forts destroyed, Jackson abandoned Pensacola and set out for Louisiana.

## CAMPAIGN – THE STRUGGLE FOR LOUISIANA

New Orleans was the great prize of the southern campaigns. In December Jackson arrived to organize a defense from whatever men and materiel he could scavenge from local sources, and he dispatched pleas for assistance from the national government. His manpower would include detachments from several Army regiments, local militias, Baratarian privateers, and four regiments of Tennessee militia. Billy accompanied Deacon and others on a trek escorting baggage to New Orleans by way of Baton Rouge.

The British chose to take advantage of their naval superiority to launch a complex amphibious campaign, described more fully in Osprey's Campaign 28, *New Orleans 1815*. The winding river course made it impossible for sailing ships to move upriver without waiting – sometimes for days – to negotiate critical turns commanded by Fort St Philip and Fort St Leon.



This map depicts the confusion of the night battle on December 23. Coffee's Tennessee mounted militiamen (large open rectangles) dismounted, moved along the margin of the cypress swamp, turned and moved along the middle canal to take the British (black rectangles) in the rear, then recoiled off them and moved into positions near the De La Ronde Plantation at left. (Marine Corps Historical Center)

The British quickly defeated a small force of American gunboats in Lake Bourgne, a bay east of New Orleans, and then transported men and equipment through winding tidal waterways toward the city. By December 23 they had established camps along the river south of the city. Jackson moved Carroll's and Coffee's Tennessee militia brigades from positions north of the city.

### The night battle

The small band from Pensacola joined Colonel James Raulston's 3rd Regiment of Tennessee Militia Infantry, in Major General William Carroll's Brigade. A mounted regular officer met Carroll's Brigade north of the city. A trooper followed, leading two spare horses.

"General Carroll! Colonel Raulston, sir!" said the officer. "General Jackson's compliments! The General fears the river landing may be a feint. You are to march your brigade to join the Louisiana militia blocking the Chef Menteur road east of the city. However, the General may need to be reinforced. You are to detail out two riders to act as couriers, men who can unfailingly find their way back here in darkness"

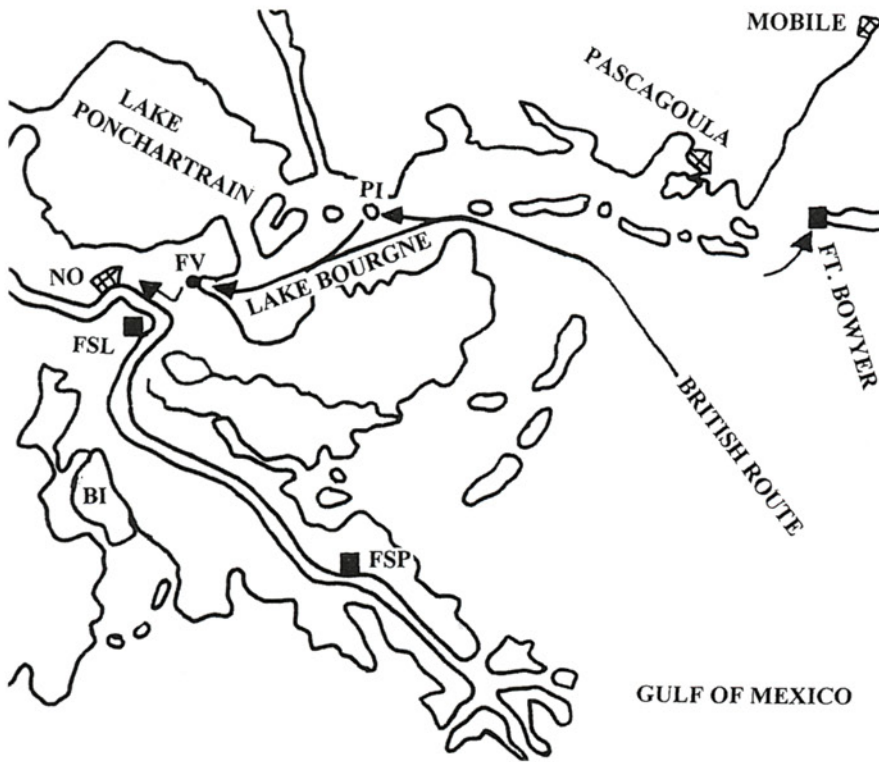
Raulston pointed at Billy and another young man. "You two! Go with this officer!"

Mounting the horses, the two teenagers jolted along behind the regulars, following the road south along the river. Seeing strange uniforms, Billy queried the army sergeant.

"Good idea, son. Fix them in your head. Those are Hinds' Mississippi Dragoons." He also pointed out various other local militias, and even Marines, explaining the "sea soldiers." When the column divided, the small group followed the larger force, near the river.

At 7:30 p.m. a cannonade began, which the officer assured them was the American ship *Carolina* firing into the British camp. The sound of firing was





#### NEW ORLEANS

The British easily defeated a small American gunboat fleet in Lake Bourgne, and established a base on Pea Island (PI). Forts St Philip (FSP) and St Louis (FSL) commanded critical turns on the winding river channel below New Orleans (NO), so the British landed at Fisherman's Village (FV) and advanced along creeks and through the swamps toward the city. Barataria Island (BI) was the stronghold of Jean Lafitte's privateers, or pirates in the eyes of both the British and Americans. Following their repulse at New Orleans, the British successfully seized Fort Bowyer, but the war had already ended with the Treaty of Ghent.

heard all around them particularly to the left, in the dark marsh. Up ahead two small cannon roared at the British. The unseen battle surged back and forth in the darkness, and the flash of gunfire seemed to come from everywhere.

Late in the night heavy firing broke out to the front, and Billy could see men falling back. "Damn! The guns! Come with me!" said the Army officer, and he rode forward. Billy followed, holding on for dear life as the horse stumbled through the darkness. A gaunt figure on a huge horse raced past: General Jackson.

This six-pounder gun is emplaced at one of the old battery positions along Line Jackson, on the Rodriguez Canal at the New Orleans battlefield. The view is looking obliquely to the left, toward the cypress swamp. The main British attack came parallel to the margin of the swamp. (Author)



Jackson waded into the melee, shouting orders. The regulars on both flanks held steady, and the gunners wheeled the precious artillery pieces rearward, protected by the Marines in their distinctive coats.

As they retreated, Billy was relieved never to have fired his weapon. Reloading the awkward weapon would have been impossible on horseback.

The confused night battle had given pause to the British commander, who had expected to encounter ill-trained militias. Jackson's frontier militiamen were now better disciplined and trained, led by experienced senior officers like William Carroll and John Coffee, but most of all full of a newly found pride. They now expected to fight and win battles, and were eager to take on the British. They were a far cry from the ill-trained men the British regulars had routinely trounced in the early days of the war. Furthermore, the British delay, while a larger force assembled, would prove disastrous.

### Probes and alarms

Jackson set about constructing a defensive line at a point where passable ground along the river was at its narrowest point. Marshy fields between the river levee and a cypress swamp were cut by shallow ditches that drained the slope of the levee away from the river and into the swamp. The main line would be along one of these ditches, the Rodriguez Canal.

Jackson positioned his Army regulars to hold the likely approach over firm ground atop the levee, the local militias to their left. Coffee's mounted infantry and Choctaws held the low ground and the margin of the wooded swamp.

For five days they awaited the British attack, both sides struggling in the cold marshes. Unsure of the British plan, Carroll's Tennessee militia still guarded the Chef Menteur road. The British land commander, General Pakenham, arrived on Christmas Day. Unhappy with the failure to advance on the city, he was even more distressed by American ships that had enfiladed his line, lobbying cannonballs into the camp.

British naval guns were dragged through the swamps by enormous effort.

Coffee's militiamen fired at any exposed British soldier and launched raids to kill British pickets. Now confident that the main attack would come along the river, Jackson brought Carroll's Brigade from the Chef Menteur road.

The city was scoured for tools, and the motley army set to work constructing a defensive barrier. The city militias thought the heavy work was beneath them. Carroll's laborers and farmers had no such qualms, but it was nasty, backbreaking work.

Knee-deep in cold water, the militiamen dug out foul-smelling black mud to enlarge the ditch. As soon as it was heaped into a defensive wall the mud began to flow and slide.

On December 28 General Pakenham launched an attack supported by artillery and Congreve rockets. Two columns advanced on the American "dirty shirts" and "rabbit hunters," as the British called the militiamen. The militiamen were alarmed, then amused by the erratic rockets. A few of the militiamen fled in the face of the British

This sketch by A. T. Manoekian depicts the explosion of a Congreve rocket wounding a Marine Corps officer during the night attack of December 28. The clothing of the dismounted Tennessee militiaman from Coffee's Brigade at right is quite accurate. (Marine Corps Historical Center)







"General Jackson with Tennessee forces on the Hickory Ground, (Alabama) AD 1814" is an excellent example of the romanticism and confusion that immediately began to gather around the southern campaigns. Just visible on the left are Army regulars, British troops, and cotton bales; the artist has clearly confused Hickory Ground in Alabama with New Orleans, as well as myths about the battle. (Library of Congress)

infantry, but the attack was driven off when superior American artillery and ships' gunfire raked the column near the river. To the mortification of his officers, Pakenham ordered a withdrawal.

The British attack brought an end to the use of cotton bale barricades to protect the American artillery. Shell fragments ignited the bales, creating smoke that made the positions all but untenable. The bales were removed, though their brief use gave rise to a persistent legend that Line Jackson, the primary American defensive work, was a wall of cotton bales. In reality there were not enough bales in Louisiana to build such a wall. Pakenham selected the margin of the swamp, held by the despised militia, as the key point of attack.

The militiamen dug and piled mud all day, wet with swamp water and sweat. At night they slept under blankets on the damp, cold ground, huddled together for warmth. Almost all the men developed coughs and fevers, and many had infected sores from the fetid black mud.

On New Year's Day Pakenham launched another attack. Standing behind the muddy rampart Billy watched a brief artillery exchange. In the face of skilled American gunnery, particularly that of Lafitte's privateers, and suffering from a shortage of ammunition, the British attack failed.

## Decisive victory – the battle of New Orleans

For ten days the British delayed any further action, struggling to bring up additional heavy artillery, including massive ship's guns, and munitions through the swamps. The only significant action was the brief artillery duel on New Year's Day. The militiamen launched small but deadly hit-and-run raids against isolated British outposts and pickets, actions one British officer called "a return to barbarism."

On the small hours of Sunday, January 8, a mess mate shook Billy awake. He sat up, gathering his clammy blanket around him and stared into the fog. He coughed up a mass of phlegm.

"This ought to help," the mess man said, pouring a strong black chicory brew into Billy's drinking cup. "Grits and sowbelly today." A joke. Some combination of corn and salted pork made up every breakfast. "A lot of stirring this morning," he said, pointing over the mud wall. "Got some Kentuckians, Harrison's Battalion. Moved in behind us last night."

Having seen the ill-equipped Kentuckians, Billy was not impressed. Drafted militia, they had been sent down the river on barges, starving, with no weapons and inadequate clothing. The people of New Orleans had clothed them with

Jean Lafitte's privateers provided Jackson's most skilled artillerymen, manning batteries interspersed with both Army regulars and militias. As shown here, the smoke from continuous firing would have made aimed rifle fire almost impossible after the first few minutes of the action. (Author)



**F**

### MILITIA OF CARROLL'S BRIGADE, BATTLE OF NEW ORLEANS

The British officers derisively called the militiamen "dirty shirts" for the way their drab-colored and muddy clothing blended into the winter terrain. Jackson expected the main attack along the river levee, but the main British assault struck the sector of the line held by Carroll's Brigade of Tennesseans. The militia fought from behind a low, hastily built barricade of mud and debris dug out of a drainage canal. These men are firing a chaotic assortment of firearms: privately purchased, impressed civilian weapons, old muskets from depots around New Orleans, and Federal government weapons looted from the riverboats belonging to civilian contractors encountered along the Mississippi River. At the climax of the battle the British General Pakenham ordered his Highlanders to march from the secondary assault near the river obliquely across the American front to come to the aid of the faltering main assault. American small arms and artillery fire slaughtered these fine troops, arguably the best of Pakenham's army. These militiamen are dressed in typical uniforms, with Army leggings and a variety of personal gear. The red waist sash worn by the militiaman at right indicates an officer or NCO. Large supplies of ball shot, like the leather bag at lower right, were prepared before the battle.







whatever was available. In the dim light of warming fires Billy could see them milling about, armed with a variety of antique firearms and farm implements.

Billy gnawed at a pork skin and fished a bristle out of his mouth with dirty fingers. British cannon began to roar, followed by the roll of drums muffled by the fog. Gulping down the last of his drink, Billy pulled on his clammy hunting shirt. Militia drummers began to beat assembly.

The British cannonade grew in intensity as the militiamen assembled behind the mud rampart. The fog burned off under the morning sun, and Billy could see the British column to his front. "Stand, boys," shouted the sergeant. "Lick your flints, and stand steady!" The men brushed their musket pans and licked at the cold flints, clearing them of powder residue to assure that they would strike a spark.

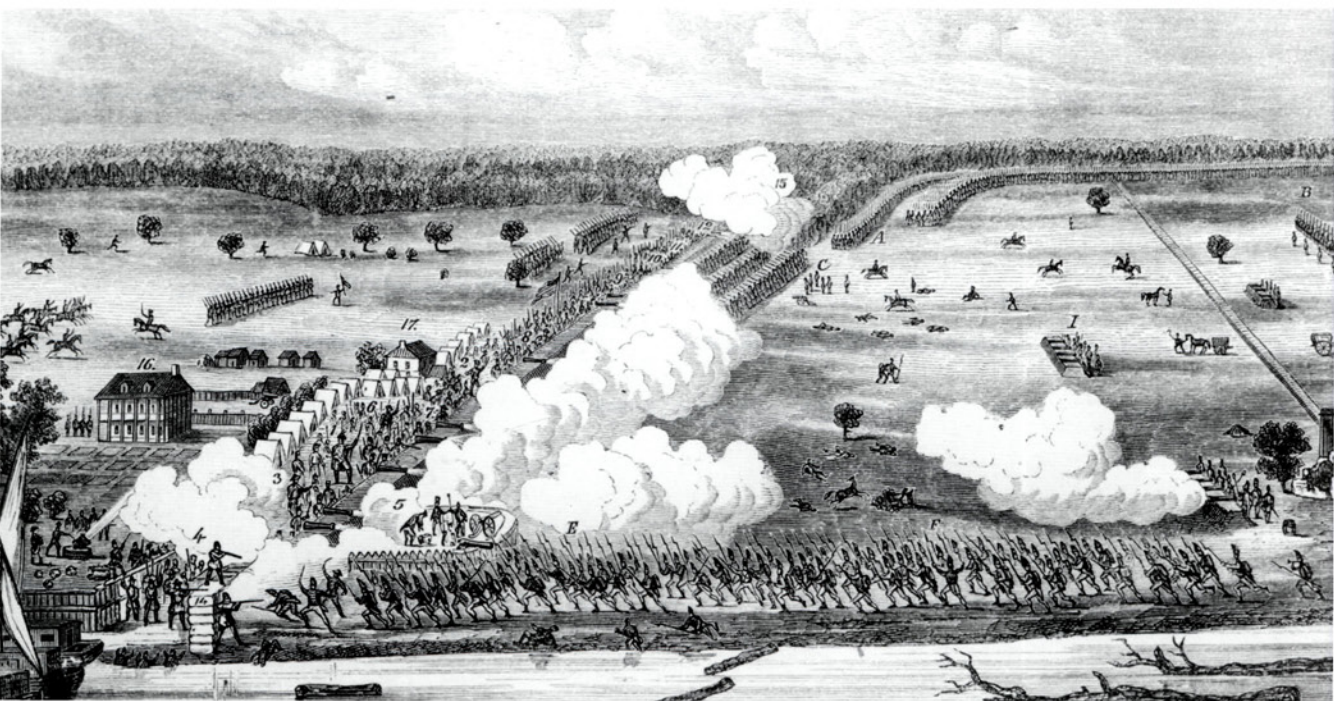
A signal rocket screeched upward from the British line. Drums on the British side began to beat signals, and the column lurched forward. The militiamen raised a cheer, eager to come to grips with the enemy and end this clammy misery one way or another.

Artillery batteries to the right of Carroll's line began to exchange fire with British guns positioned in hastily built redoubts. The disciplined British infantry advanced into the artillery fire. Billy could easily see cannonballs careening into the massed British ranks, bowling over men and flinging severed limbs and parts of bodies. Grapeshot balls tore gaps in the formations.

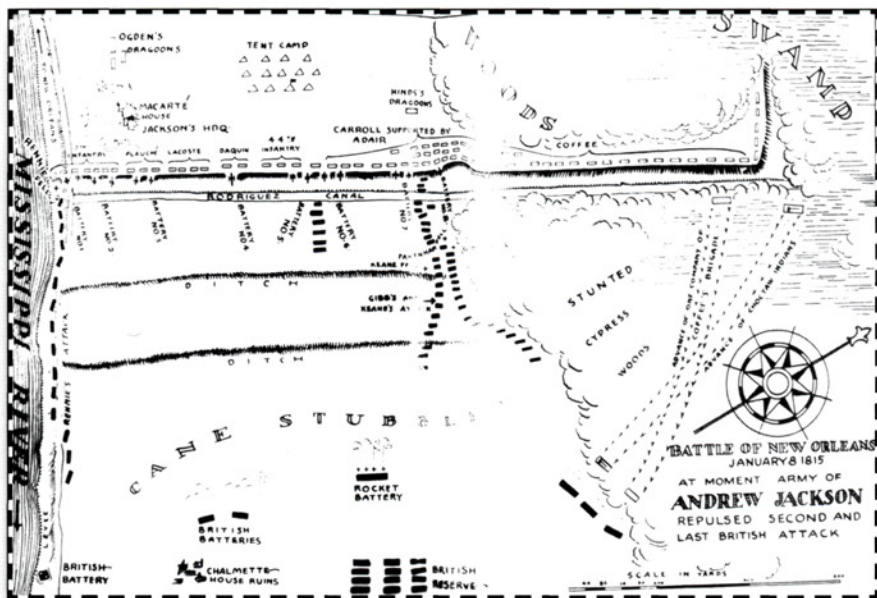
Servants positioned heavy bags of premolded lead balls and small casks of powder behind the militiamen for easy access. None of the Americans knew that the British plan had already gone amiss, tangled in its own complexity. A British force was supposed to cross the river and seize American batteries that enfiladed the British line. Their mission was fatally delayed, however, when boats were carried downriver by the current. Others carrying ladders and fascines for breaching the defenses facing the main attack were hopelessly late.

The crackle of rifle fire began to spread along the line as nervous individuals began to fire at the advancing British. The drums began to beat an order, and a sergeant shouted, "Charge muskets," above the din. Carroll gave the order to fire. The volley was ragged; a concentrated blast was a skill

"Contemporary" depictions of the battle of New Orleans like this rendering were often quite simplistic and romanticized, influenced by European depictions of battles. (National Archives)







This map depicts the final British assault of January 8. The main attack is in column of regiments (black rectangles), striking the sector of the line held by Carroll's Tennessee militia brigade along the margin of the cypress swamp. The secondary column moved along the dryer ground of the levee, next to the river. After the British West India regiments attacked through the swamp and were repulsed, part of Coffee's dismounted brigade and Choctaw Indians counterattacked through the swamp. (Marine Corps Historical Center)

the militiamen had never mastered. At first the militias ran through a standard drill, each rank loosing a volley, then stepping back to reload while a second rank fired.

The men began to reload and fire, each man at his own pace. The advance of the red-coated mass was visibly slowing, reeling under the concentrated fire. The militiamen and artillery poured a hellish fire into the British infantry. Billy's ears rang with the constant muzzle blasts. Tears caused by smoke ran from his eyes. Billy had to make a conscious effort to remember to occasionally clean the pan before charging the weapon.

British soldiers of the 44th Foot at last rushed forward with their assault equipment, but the momentum of the attack was already broken.

At the height of the firing, Billy pulled the trigger and the musket misfired. He licked at the flint, burning his tongue. He jammed the soft wire vent pick through the tiny tube. Another misfire. He fumbled with the small knife around his neck, frantically reseating the flint. Another militiaman shouted, "Here they come again!"

Billy saw a tight column of men moving from right to left, across the front of the American line. A coating of mud obliterated the tartan pattern of the 93rd Highlanders' trousers, but the red coats were bright in the smoke. Bagpipes pierced the noise of gunfire. Artillery and small arms fire brutally raked the flank of the column from end to end.

On the British right, black troops of the 1st and 5th West India regiments were ordered through the cypress swamp. Coffee's dismounted horsemen and Choctaws sent them reeling back.

The Highlanders stumbled grimly onward over their own dead and wounded. Whole ranks of men fell. Finally, willpower could stand no more, and the Highlanders broke and fled. British troops began to flee the carnage in ever-larger groups. In two hours of concentrated slaughter, the "dirty shirts" had virtually destroyed several proud regiments.

The British senior leadership was also devastated. Among the British dead was General Pakenham, killed leading the main assault. The next two ranking officers were badly wounded. Command devolved upon the fourth most

#### FOLLOWING PAGE

Kentucky militia troops were brought down the Mississippi River by barge. Many had no weapons, were shoeless, and dressed in rags. The citizens of New Orleans collected old clothing and fabric to clothe them against the bitter cold. The wealthier officer at far right wears the less expensive officer's uniform allowed by special regulation, a blue hunting shirt and trousers trimmed in red. His only rank badge is a red waist sash. The ragged infantryman at left wears "frontier boots," simple moccasins and leggings of old cloth tied on with strings. These militia formations were armed with a chaotic assortment of scavenged firearms, and even farm implements collected from around New Orleans. The private at center wears a cloth skirt, coat cut from an old blanket, and is armed only with a knife and cudgel. Jackson used the Kentucky Militia primarily as a reserve. (Peter Copeland estate)





senior officer, General John Lambert, leading inevitably to delay and confusion. The British Army, known for its tenacity, uncharacteristically pulled back to lick its wounds.

As the firing died away Jackson walked the length of his line congratulating his men and accepting their cheers.

Jackson elected not to counterattack the broken army, despite the pleadings of officers such as Major Hinds. Only individual militiamen moved forward of the line to scavenge and round up prisoners.

The victors had no effective aid to offer the grievously wounded British. The slightly wounded were gathered into the American lines, as were hundreds of prisoners. Observers reported the hideous scene: dismembered bodies, the moans and screams of the wounded, and a virtual carpet of red-clad bodies in front of Carroll's line. Across this landscape militiamen prowled, prodding prisoners toward the mud wall.

The last act was played out on the west bank of the river. Colonel William Thornton belatedly routed the poorly armed Louisiana and Kentucky militias. Several American cannon were dumped into the river to prevent capture. The victory was in vain; defeat on the east bank forced Thornton's withdrawal.

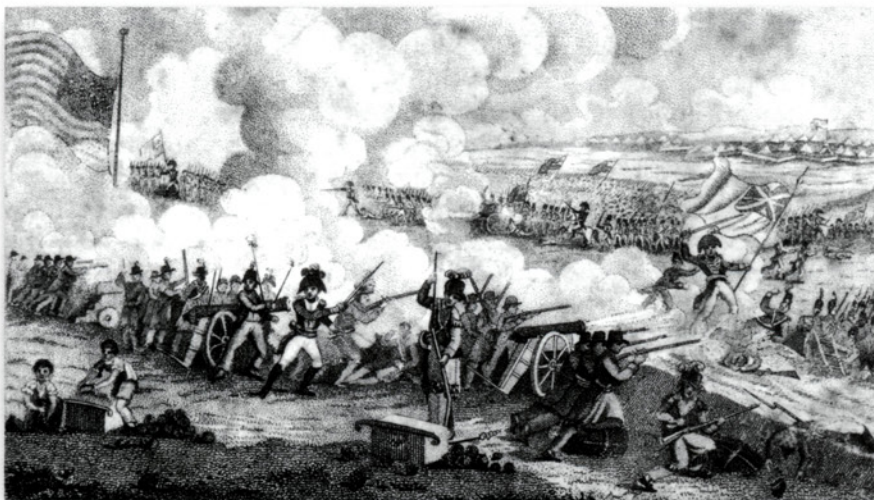
At noon the senior surviving British officer sent a truce party to arrange for the recovery of the wounded and interment of the dead. Jackson agreed to a 26-hour truce. The Americans would inter the dead and succor the wounded within 300 yards of his defenses. No information on captives would be provided until the British provided information about Americans captured at Lake Bourgne.

### The final days

Even after horrendous bloodletting and the death of Pakenham, the British were reluctant to admit defeat. The fleet commander wished to force a passage up the river. From January 9 until January 18 the fleet ineffectively shelled Fort St Philip. Jackson kept his army ready to defend against another attack up the river or landings near Chef Menteur.



The battle of New Orleans soon became even more romanticized, and early nineteenth century artwork should definitely not be considered authoritative. In this Currier and Ives tinted engraving, note the cotton bale barricade, the summer uniforms of the Army regulars, and the highly idealized hunting shirt garb of the militiamen at left. (Library of Congress)



In contrast, this less artistic period engraving more accurately depicts the mud and the garb of the Tennessee militia, though still somewhat idealized. The scene on the British side of the barricade was one of mass slaughter, quite unlike the heroic scene depicted here. Note also the correct depiction of cannon on naval carriages at far left. (Library of Congress)

American guns bombarded the British in their miserable swamp camp. Rations were short, and the troops suffered under a cold rain. One night the river rose and flooded the British camp.

Incessant raids by the Tennessee militiamen sapped British morale. This was a type of warfare at which the militiamen excelled. Most had at least some experience hunting wild game, and knowledge of the Indian style of raiding and warfare was a virtual necessity on the frontier. Raiding was (and still is) a military activity that emphasizes individual initiative and field craft, also characteristics of the militiamen. In contrast their British foes were far from their normal environment, lost in an alien swamp.

A party of militiamen crept out of camp one night, their muddy uniforms blending into the sodden terrain. Creeping close to a picket post, they saw redcoats standing their posts. Others warmed themselves beside a fire, perfect targets. Wind carried noise the raiders made away from their victims.

The Deacon whispered, "It's not against the commandments. It's war, and you are Gideon's warriors." At a signal each man fired. Billy's target was struck between the shoulder blades and flew forward into the fire, throwing up sparks that illuminated the dead and dying. The raiders quickly fled deep into the swamp.

British General John Lambert, who had succeeded to command after Pakenham was killed and more senior officers were wounded, negotiated a prisoner exchange, confirming Jackson's suspicions of an impending British evacuation. On January 19 the British slipped away under cover of fog. Jackson chose to husband his strength rather than pursue.

After consultation with Admiral Cochrane, Lambert landed troops in Alabama and this time captured Fort Bowyer in preparation for a land campaign against Mobile and New Orleans.

Jackson refused to rest after the great victory, and refused to let his soldiers rest. Jackson knew he had to stand ready to again battle the stubborn British. The militiamen were not released from service but began to construct additional defenses around the city. Jackson himself labored to devise a defense against a land campaign.

Still, a celebration could not be denied. An address was read to the troops on January 21, and the men marched into the city. On January 23 an extravagant parade was held, followed by a celebratory mass in the New Orleans cathedral, with Jackson as guest of honor.

### **After the battle**

American combat casualties in the battles along the southwestern frontier were usually not great and were grossly imbalanced. Red Stick deaths were typically ten times or more the total white combat losses (dead plus wounded). American losses at New Orleans were even more absurdly low by any measure. Jackson reported only six killed and seven wounded in the main battle. British losses were great but impossible to accurately assess.

With only primitive medical care the plight of the wounded was dire. With no ambulances, the wounded were carried away in litters borne by men or horses. A serious wound was often a death sentence. Amputation was the treatment of choice for wounds of the limbs; there was no practical treatment for wounds of the head or torso.

The military surgeon practiced rough medicine – amputations, removal of debris from wounds, as well as infected flesh, and crude bandaging, all performed without anesthesia. The surgeon's was a pragmatic trade learned through brutal experience.



For the wounded who survived the rough ministrations of the surgeon and transport, infection was the greatest killer. Wounds inflicted by dirty weapons, the ground itself, and contaminated surgical tools frequently became infected or gangrenous, leading to painful death.

The fate of the dead was simple. Red Stick dead were left where they fell. British dead collected during the brief truce after the battle of New Orleans were buried in mass graves on a local plantation. The bodies of a few senior officers were disemboweled (to minimize gas buildup) and packed in rum to be shipped home. The few American dead were interred in local cemeteries.

Disease was a far greater cause of American troop mortality than combat. Field sanitation was nonexistent, and men were constantly exposed to a wide variety of diseases including dysentery, cholera, typhus, yellow fever, and malaria. Losses to disease while Jackson's victorious army remained encamped around New Orleans vastly outnumbered combat deaths.

The usefulness of a soldier did not end with death. It was not practical to ship personal belongings of the dead to their families. Personal property – clothing, shoes, and personal gear – was auctioned, the more portable money sent to the survivors. Any items that were of any conceivable use were sold, and the soldier was buried with his sleeping shirt and bits of uniform as a shroud.

### Legacy of the battle of New Orleans

Winter storms interrupted the flow of mail. For weeks Washington politicians knew only of the American defeat on Lake Bourgne and of the British landings. Then on February 4 news of the great victory reached Washington, followed on February 14 by news of the Treaty of Ghent.

Official news of the treaty did not reach New Orleans until March 13. Only then did Jackson lift martial law, relax the near-dictatorial powers he had assumed, and dismiss his militia.

The humbling of the proud and professional British Army at the hands of an amateur army would define America's view of itself for half a century. Jackson had assembled a truly American army – native-born men of European descent, Indian warriors, African slaves and freed men, Spaniards, Baratarians privateers who owed allegiance to no country, French veterans who had served Napoleon, and men of mixed race – all fighting for a common goal.

Jackson's other great achievement was to turn short-service militiamen into effective fighting men. His determination, frontline leadership, but most of all his habit of winning battles made him the ideal leader for the rough frontiersmen.

Jackson's ill-trained, half-equipped, and often near mutinous frontier militiaman would come to epitomize the ideal of the American fighting man. Immigrants and native-born Americans deeply mistrusted professional soldiers, whom European aristocracies had used to repress their ancestors. Regular soldiers were held in low esteem, but the volunteer militias were idealized as heirs to the "citizen soldiers" of ancient Greece and republican Rome.

Pride in the New Orleans victory was nationwide but nowhere as great as along the frontier. Settlers flooded into the old Creek lands, the Louisiana Territory, and then into Texas, a sparsely settled province of Mexico. The Deacon



#### ABOVE

The adulation of Jackson quickly reached a level approaching modern celebrity stardom. This is the cover of an 1816 sheet music folio, literally used to "sing Jackson's praises." (Library of Congress)





#### ABOVE

By the early 20th century many myths of the battle of New Orleans, and the role of the militia units, were well entrenched. This 1903 depiction of course shows the cotton bale barricade. However, it correctly depicts the presence of black slaves and freemen in the fighting. Firing from a prone position, as well as the hats, weapons, and uniforms of the militiamen, are strangely suggestive of scenes depicting fighting in Cuba during the Spanish-American War. (Library of Congress)

accompanied the last of the Creeks, driven out of Alabama, on their doleful journey to the Indian Territory, present-day Oklahoma. Billy settled near Cortland, Alabama, but in 1835 he enlisted in the Alabama Red Rovers, volunteers who went to Texas to fight against Mexican rule. Taken prisoner when James Fannin surrendered at the battle of Coleto on March 19–20, 1835, Billy, along with other prisoners, was shot under orders from General Lopez de Santa Ana on Palm Sunday, March 27, 1835. His body

was burned and the remains scattered in nearby fields. The vengeful Santa Ana believed destruction of the body precluded Christian resurrection.

The militiamen soon began to be viewed through an idealized lens. Paintings and engravings executed soon after the battle depict clean, buckskin-clad fighters in heroic poses. All participants were the beneficiaries of artistic idealism, but fringed buckskins and coonskin caps were irresistible to artists.

The role of the militias was an immense boost to the pride of the impoverished and often scorned people of the frontier. Their influence would propel Jackson to the presidency, reshaping the course of American history.

The myth of the militiaman's inherent superiority over the professional soldier would be reborn, and in the 1950s the individualistic, buckskin-clad, coonskin-capped, long-rifle toting militiaman resumed pride of place in American military mythology. Today the average American's only knowledge, if any, of the Creek War is Walt Disney's fantasized depiction in the 1954 film *Davy Crockett – Indian Fighter*.

The typical American's conception of the battle of New Orleans, one of the truly pivotal events in American history, is derived from the song *The Battle of New Orleans*. In the song, frontier militiamen marched south, stood beside cotton bales without saying anything, and defeated the British with squirrel rifles.

In the final analysis, however, one fact is indisputable. The militiamen formed a key part of the ragtag army that decisively defeated the greatest army in the world.

## G

### THE VICTORS OF NEW ORLEANS

The Americans captured numerous British prisoners, many of whom simply lay down to avoid the intense American fire sweeping the open terrain. Jackson's army was truly American in nature, composed of troops from all social backgrounds and several nationalities. Here an officer from one of the US Army regiments, in winter uniform with dark trousers, offers a drink of whiskey to a captured British soldier, whose clothing is much the worse for wear after weeks in the swamps. The man in white trousers is a private of the US Marine Corps detachment that supported the artillery and played a prominent role in the night battle that disrupted the initial British assault on December 22, 1814. The man at right is a Kentucky drafted militiaman, a member of the reserve force positioned behind Carroll's Brigade of Tennessee militia. The Kentuckians arrived poorly clothed and largely unarmed. This man wears clothing provided by the local citizens, a coat cut from an old blanket, "frontier boots" of moccasins and rag leggings, and is armed only with an axe. In the background Tennessee militiamen recover British wounded during the brief truce after the failed British assault. Jackson had his troops recover British dead and wounded close to his defensive line, as he did not want the British to discover how weak his positions were. Elaborate defenses like those shown were provided only for artillery batteries.







## MUSEUMS AND COLLECTIONS

Original references such as maps, field reports, and artwork (most produced well after the battles) are contained in the collections of the Library of Congress (Washington, DC) and the Tennessee State Archives (Nashville, TN). Collections in the library of the University of Alabama (Tuscaloosa, AL) are good secondary sources on the Red Stick War.

Horseshoe Bend National Military Park (Dadeville, AL) maintains an archaeological collection, as well as maps, dioramas, period weapons, and an informative battlefield trail. This rare, fully preserved battlefield is one of the overlooked gems of the National Parks system.

The Holy Ground battlefield is preserved as a small, undeveloped state park west of Montgomery. The terrain has been somewhat modified by old farming and flooding associated with impoundment of a reservoir.

The Chalmette battlefield is part of the Jean Lafitte National Historical Park near New Orleans. Only the outlines of Line Jackson and the American defenses along the Rodriguez Canal, and the killing ground upon which the British were decimated, are preserved. Most of the remainder, the British camps and most artillery positions, are under nearby industrial facilities.

The Historic New Orleans Collection and the Louisiana State Museum in the city proper maintain collections of archaeological and inherited artifacts handed down from the battle, and an extensive art collection.

"The bloody deeds of Andrew Jackson." Jackson's political enemies made considerable use of his execution of six militiamen, and one Army regular, during the Red Stick War. This "coffin handbill" published in Philadelphia in 1828 is one of several of the type. An insert shows him caning a political opponent. The additional coffins represent other deaths attributed to Jackson, including Red Stick prisoners. (Library of Congress)

## REENACTMENT

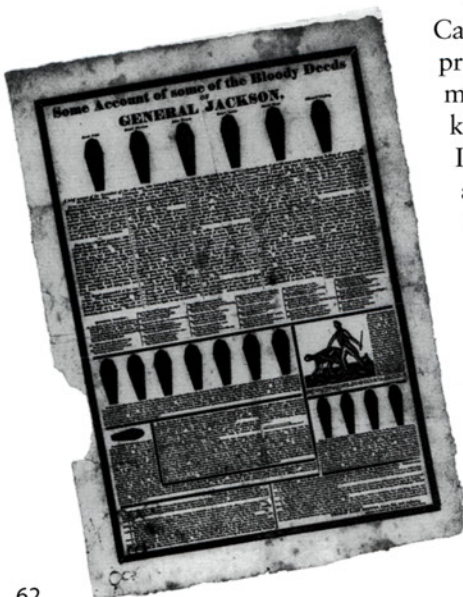
Several groups reenact the roles of all the major participants in the battles of Horseshoe Bend and New Orleans. Both battles are commemorated annually, with schedules available at [www.nps.gov/hobe/](http://www.nps.gov/hobe/) and [www.nps.gov/jela/chalmette-battlefield.htm](http://www.nps.gov/jela/chalmette-battlefield.htm), respectively.

At Horseshoe Bend reenactors portray Tennessee militia infantry and artillery, Army regulars, and Creeks. The most accurate reenactment group depicts Jackson's Nashville militia artillery. Depictions of everyday life, native dancing and sports, and weapons firing – from muskets to cannon – highlight the weekend.

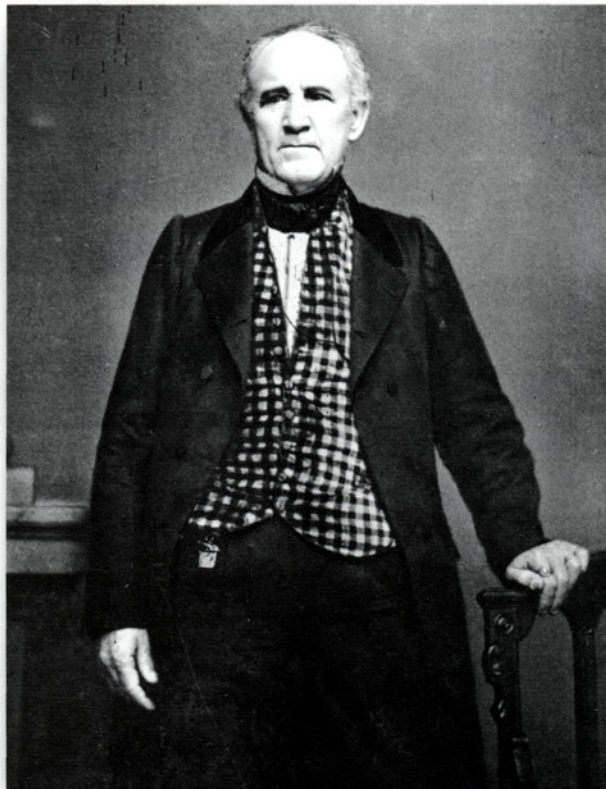
At the Chalmette battlefield re-enactors depict US Army regulars, Carroll's Tennessee militia, Lafitte's Baratarian privateers (who provided Jackson's most skilled artillerymen), Choctaws, Plache's militia in French military garb, Highlanders in trews (as opposed to kilts), other regiments of the British Army, and frightened civilians. Individual re-enactors depict Jackson, Pakenham, and their staffs. In addition to demonstrations of military skills and weapons firing, there are walkthroughs of the camps. The highlight of the weekend is an eve-of-battle tour of the British and American encampments in which the reenactors ignore the tourists and discuss their plans and apprehensions for the next day.

## COLLECTING

Artifacts and documents from this period are surprisingly rare and are almost entirely preserved in public and a few private collections. Although archaeological excavations occasionally







reveal a few new artifacts, all the major battlefields were long since picked over by scavengers, often soon after the battles. Collecting, or even searching for artifacts with metal detectors, is illegal in both Federal and state parks.

## SELECTED REFERENCES

There has been surprisingly little published about the Creek War, and most reference materials are original documents held in state and Federal archives. Most books on the Creek War have appeared as limited editions and are not readily obtainable. The references listed below are available for purchase by those wishing to learn more about the wars on the southwestern frontier.

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### ABOVE LEFT

Reenactors at the Chalmette Battlefield depict the full variety of Jackson's polyglot army, like these members of Plauché's Battalion. One of several local Louisiana militias, the French-speaking Battalion included both native-born citizens of French ancestry, and a core of immigrant veterans who had served under Napoleon. (Author)

### ABOVE

Ensign Sam Houston, wounded at Horseshoe Bend, recuperated in Jackson's home and became a political protégé. He led the Texas Army in the 1836 revolt against Mexico, became first president of the Republic of Texas, and a US Senator who unsuccessfully opposed secession. This portrait is by Matthew Brady. (National Archives)

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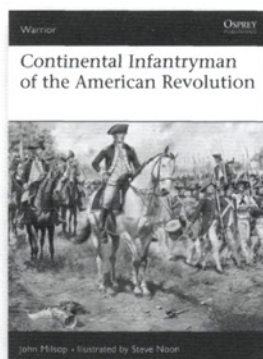
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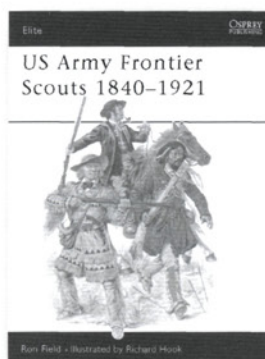
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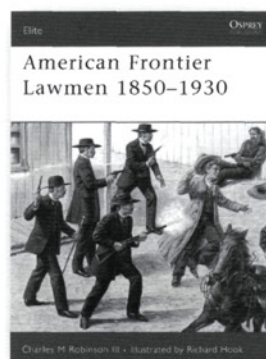
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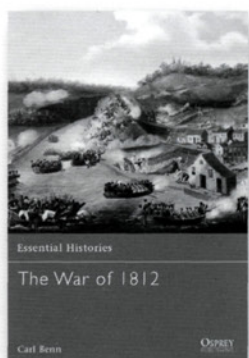
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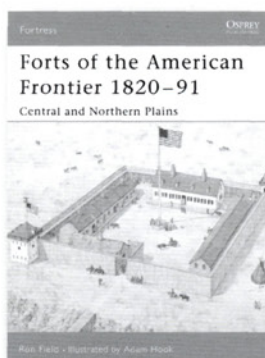
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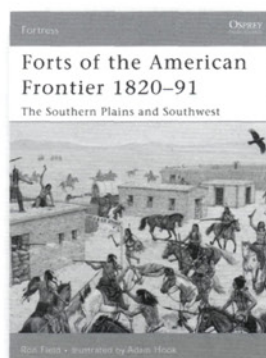
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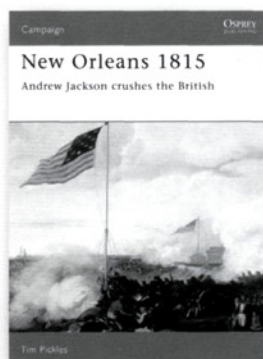
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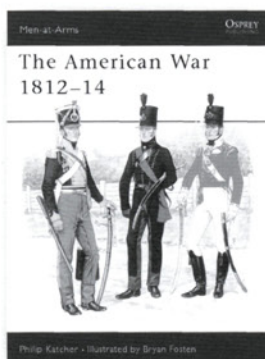
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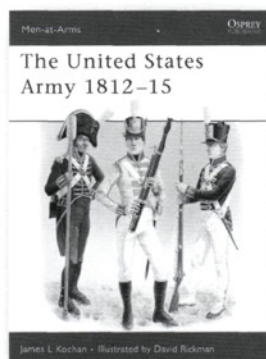
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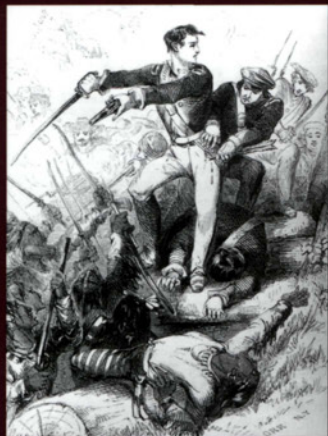
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