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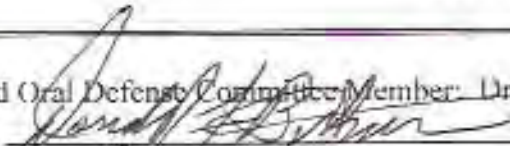
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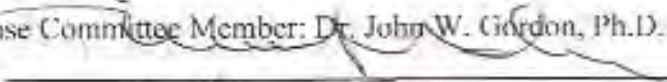
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Mentor and Oral Defense Committee Member: Dr. Donald F. Bittner, Ph.D.

Approved: 

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Oral Defense Committee Member: Dr. John W. Gordon, Ph.D.

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Executive Summary

Title: Failure in Campaign Design: The British Defeat at New Orleans December 1814 – January 1815.

Author: Major Adam W. Harless, United States Army

Thesis: The British defeat at the battle of New Orleans led to the failure of their Southern campaign of 1814-1815, hence the non-achievement of their operational and strategic goals.

Discussion: A campaign is a series of related military operations aimed at accomplishing a strategic or operational objective within a given time and space. The British continued to execute a campaign plan even after a series of key tactical events in that plan failed to occur. The British just moved past each evolving event that did not occur according to the plan as if each part was optional to achieve the strategic goal. Although a new plan was formed it failed to address the original concerns of the campaign.

Originally, the southern campaign was to divert American military resources from the Canadian border. Once the campaign was underway the potential to establish a British foothold at the southern end of the Mississippi Valley in New Orleans took precedence. The British were not able to establish a landing site at either Pensacola or Mobile, which caused them to attempt a ground frontal assault north of the mouth of the Mississippi River on the defenses of New Orleans from only one direction with limited tactical logistical or naval support.

The British could have taken New Orleans and been successful in their southern campaign to control the Mississippi River and the Gulf of Mexico if they had stayed committed to the campaign plan, or at least maintained the fundamentals of the campaign. Those fundamentals were that a land and naval force with solid logistical lines would be needed to successfully capture New Orleans. This was a campaign plan that each level of war did support. The campaign plan was good for the gulf coast as it addressed each legitimate concern that arose during the planning, highlighted by the logistical concern leading to the need to secure Mobile before moving across land ending in New Orleans. Once the campaign began the reasons for the planned events to conduct a successful campaign were lost in a concern regarding time, resulting in the British withdrawing from United States for the last time.

The British did not take into account the impact on the American south that the burning of Washington, the looting by British forces in Florida, the British support of Indian warfare on the frontier, and British encouragement of slave uprisings would have on unifying the isolated Louisiana Territory and the gulf coast region against any British efforts to control New Orleans and the Mississippi River.

Conclusion: The British defeat at New Orleans illustrates how tactical, operational, and strategic levels of war are interlined, as objectives at each must support the goals of each level of war.

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Preface

I first became interested in the Battle of the New Orleans and the War of 1812 while I was stationed in Louisiana as a lieutenant and was able to see the area first hand. With the bicentennial anniversary of the war coming during a time while as a student, it was logical topic for me to study.

My approach is from the British perspective and their Southern campaign of 1814-15 via their operational and strategic goals. Although tactical events were an important part of the evolving events, they are not the point of focus in this paper. The British efforts during the southern campaign were to divert American resources away from threatening Canada so the British could secure what the Americans had attacked. The Journal of Major C.R. Forrest, who was the Assistant Quarter Master General, 34th Regiment of Foot, was an excellent source as nothing happens without logistical support and he was exposed to many of the British processes that determined their execution of the Southern campaign plan.

I wish to thank the Grey Research Library and the professional staff that has supported and assisted me while I conducted research and reviewed the material. I want to especially thank the Leadership Communication Skills Center that was invaluable during the early stages of this process. Dr. Donald Bittner was the most helpful with direction and assessments of my goals early on in this process and continued his support within the framework of time to enable me to complete this paper.

I am not sure if I can fully express my thanks to my wife, Kathryn, who has faithfully supported my efforts in so many ways and managing our three young children while I was occupied with research, reading, writing, and reviewing my work. Most of all I want to thank her for the support that has allowed me to serve the service to our country.

Prologue

Tactical success in combat does not of itself guarantee victory in war. What matters ultimately in war is strategic success: attainment of political aims and the protection of national interests. The operational level of war provides the linkage between tactics and strategy. It is the discipline of conceiving, focusing, and exploiting a variety of tactical actions to realize a strategic aim. With that thought as a point of departure, the intermediate, operational level of war and the military campaign is the vehicle for organizing tactical actions to achieve strategic objectives.¹

A campaign is a series of related military operations aimed at accomplishing a strategic or operational objective within a given time and space. A campaign plan describes how time, space, and purpose connect these operations. A campaign is typically aimed at achieving some particular strategic result within a specific geographic theater. A war or other sustained conflict sometimes consists of a single campaign, sometimes of several as the British did during 1814. If there is more than one campaign, these can run either in sequence, again as the British did in 1814, or simultaneously. Campaigning is a reflection of the operational level of war, where the results of individual tactical actions are combined to fulfill the needs of strategy.²

Military campaigns are not conducted in a vacuum. Military power is employed in conjunction with other instruments of national power—diplomatic, economic, and informational—to achieve strategic objectives. Depending upon the nature of the operation, the military campaign may be the main effort, or it may be used to support diplomatic or economic efforts. The military campaign must be coordinated with the nonmilitary efforts to ensure that all actions work in harmony to achieve the ends of policy. Frequently, particularly in military operations other than war, the military campaign is so closely integrated with other government

operations that these nonmilitary actions can be considered to be part of the campaign³.

In 1812 New Orleans was essentially an isolated outpost of the United States. The United States had purchased the Louisiana Territory from France and took control in 1803. The city had a population of 24,552 ,of which 10,824 were “Negro” slaves and with more than half of the white population of French ancestry.⁴ New Orleans was then the only American naval station on the Gulf Coast and was geographically cut off from the rest of the country by the Mississippi territory, Spanish Florida, and the rest of Louisiana (see Appendix A).

In 1812, Britain and the United States went to war. As important as New Orleans was for the American government, the northern theater presented a more immediate concern early in the conflict that became known as the War of 1812. The same is true for the British as their first concern was the defense of the Canadian territories against threatened and actual U.S. invasion. None-the-less, the British were also well aware of the value that the Gulf Coast, the Mississippi River, and the Louisiana Territory held for the Americans after two years of war, the conflict came to this region.

The British realized that the American control of this area was not secure and wanted to capitalize on this weakness by mounting a campaign to seize the city of New Orleans and gain control of the mouth of the Mississippi River. If successful, they would control the entire Mississippi River Valley up to the Great Lakes. The confidence that the British had after defeating Napoleon when they started their southern campaign of 1814 became a point of weakness and ultimately prevented them from treating any of the American defenses as any serious obstacle to campaign success. Even after losing battles and key terrain in both Pensacola and Mobile, which they needed for both shaping and sustaining actions according to their original campaign plan, the British pushed on with their concept of attacking New Orleans, the

objective of the campaign. This study seeks to examine the results of campaign operations when planning and decisions are not updated based on evolving events during the execution of a campaign. By doing so, they ensured that the strategic goal was not attained due to tactical and or operational failures.

The British commander in North America was Sir Alexander Forester Inglis Cochrane, Vice Admiral and Commander of the North American station. Major General Robert Ross was the ground commander of British forces during the start of the Eastern and Southern campaigns of 1814. Major General Sir Edward Pakenham later replaced Ross due to his death in battle during the attack on Baltimore. Before assuming his command Pakenham had to travel from Britain after his appointment. This caused a loss of time, as he did not join the forces until December of 1814. Cochrane was the overall commander during the Southern campaign.

Originally, the southern campaign was of the same motivation that drove the northern and eastern campaigns of 1814. That motivation was to divert American military resources from the Canadian border. Once the campaign was underway, however, the potential to establish a British foothold at the southern end of the Mississippi Valley in New Orleans took precedence.⁵

The Theatre Environment of the Southern Campaign

Much of the fighting during the War of 1812 took place in the north along the border between the United States and Britain's Canadian provinces, on the open ocean, or in the Chesapeake Bay area. Even so, leaders on both sides near the end of the war understood that the key to overall victory (however defined) might very well be found not in the North but in the South. Thus, the attentions of the combatants turned southward.

The threat to the South became all too apparent to the United States in 1813 when thousands of Creek Indians, calling themselves "Red Sticks," engaged in a war against the

Americans now called the Creek War. The Red Sticks were Creeks in present-day Alabama, were drawn mainly from the Upper Creek townships, and numbered perhaps as many as four thousand.⁶

A militia army led by General Andrew Jackson crushed the Red Sticks at Horseshoe Bend on 27 March 1814 in Alabama. Many of the Indian nations sided with the British against the U.S, believing that a British victory might mean an end to the Westward expansion of the United States as the British promised an Indian Territory to be created west of the Appalachian Mountains. After the defeat of the Creeks by Jackson, the southern tribes began to have a different opinion about the possibility of a British victory. Although the Creek War of 1813-1814 is not usually viewed as a part of the War of 1812 it indeed was, as Creek resistance to the U.S. Army in the south led to a series of battles that eventually crushed Indian military power in that region. With this Britain was deprived of allies in the area. The defeat of the Creeks resulted in the signing of the Treaty of Fort Jackson on 9 August 1814, which ceded some 23 million acres of Creek Territory to the United States.⁷ This greatly depleted the Indians that joined the British forces in the south and gave the southern American forces combat experience and confidence that the British did not expect to face during the southern campaign.

Black soldiers and sailors were fighting on both sides of the war, but the British promise of freedom for slaves gave the British a small advantage in the competition for recruits, but also had symbolic consequences. This caused the United States to charge Cochrane with fomenting domestic insurrections and helped lead the American south, New Orleans, to support the U.S. and not the British during the execution of the Southern campaign. In April 1814 Vice-Admiral Sir Alexander Cochrane made the British position official, which added a different and emotional element to the conflict.

All those who may be disposed to emigrate from the United States, will, with their Families, be received on board of His Majesty's Ships.... They will have their choice of either entering into His Majesty's Forces, or of being sent as FREE Settlers to British possessions, ... where they will meet with all due encouragement⁸.

Cochrane then ordered Rear-Admiral George Cockburn to form the Colonial Marines, two of the four fighting units made up of refugee slaves. The recruiting of more blacks was to occur once the British landed at both Pensacola and Mobile. However this did not occur as American forces prevented either landing. Not only did these interfere with the British logistical plan to attack New Orleans it also affected their recruiting efforts along the entire Gulf Coast area.

Background: The Napoleonic Wars and the Causes of the War of 1812

In Europe, France and Britain had been at war from 1793 to 1802. There were a few months of peace, and then in 1803 the French ruler, Napoleon Bonaparte, resumed the war. Napoleon was anxious to reestablish French hegemony on the continent. One step in this direction was persuading Spain to return to France the North American territory of Louisiana granted to Madrid in 1763⁹. The news that land lying to the west of the Mississippi River had again become French proved disturbing to the Americans. There was the possibility, they believed, that if Britain should defeat France in Europe Louisiana might fall into British hands. In either case, the people of the United States were not happy with the new development.¹⁰

By 1803, Napoleon had become discouraged by the reality of British sea power. The chance of France's holding and developing Louisiana was growing so slim that Napoleon decided, rather hurriedly, to sell the territory to the United States. American negotiations in Paris, seeking to purchase the city of New Orleans, were stunned by the offer and agreed to the purchase. Here was a magnificent opportunity to acquire vast areas of land by means of a simple and friendly business arrangement.¹¹ This was also an opportunity that also supported the American development east of the Mississippi River – and potentially further.

On April 12, 1803 for the price of fifteen million dollars, the United States bought territory from the French stretching from the Gulf of Mexico to Canada, from the Mississippi to the Rockies. Here was a land area, approximately one third the size of the present United States, which in time was to be divided into new vigorous states. In 1803, however, the purchase of the Louisiana Territory actually doubled the size of the country. Not since King Charles II of England had signed the Charter of Hudson's Bay Company had such a huge territory changed hands in North America by peaceful means.¹²

Although peaceful but stressful relations existed between the United States and Great Britain after the American Revolution (1775-1783), there were a number of Americans who still harbored ill will towards Great Britain¹³. Many Americans were soon given added reason for ill feeling as a result of events taking place during the European conflict. After the Royal Navy, in 1805, had defeated the French in the sea battle of Trafalgar, Britain became "Mistress of the Seas" with no other nation strong enough to challenge her maritime supremacy. In order to cripple the British, Napoleon Bonaparte issued decrees ordering Russia, Prussia and other European nations to cease trading with Britain. In reply, the British Navy blockaded European ports, preventing ships from delivering their cargoes to the continent.¹⁴

The War of 1812 has been referred to as a "Second War for Independence" for the United States and helped to define Canadian identity, but for Britain the main event of 1812 occurred when Napoleon marched to Moscow. In British eyes, the new conflict with America would remain an annoying sideshow. The British felt that the Americans had tried to take advantage while they were busy fighting a total war against the French Empire. For a nation fighting Napoleon Bonaparte, James Madison and his country was an annoying irrelevance. Consequently the American war would be fought with whatever money, manpower, and naval

force that could be spared. Ultimately, this would consume no more than seven percent of the total British military effort.¹⁵

War with America was a direct consequence of the Napoleonic conflict. Britain relied on a maritime economic blockade and continental's allies to defeat France. When American merchants tried to exploit their neutral status to breach this blockade, the British introduced new laws, the 'Orders in Council', to block illegal trade. In the same spirit, when British warships stopped American merchant ships, they forcibly impressed any sailors they thought to be British into the Royal Navy. While some of these men were Americans, most were British. Some had deserted from the Royal Navy, a hanging offence. Britain was in a total war with France. There would be no place for neutral traders and no amnesty for British deserters found on American ships. The British deserters would be placed in service on British ships, thus reducing the number of able sailors to serve on American ships. Although American statesmen complained in public, in private they admitted that fully half of the sailors on American merchant ships were British subjects.¹⁶

Some in Britain thought the Orders in Council could be relaxed, and in fact they were suspended in June 1812. But no one doubted Britain's right to impress her sailors, and all blamed the Americans for employing British seamen when the Royal Navy needed them.¹⁷

This sudden stoppage of trade affected the United States as it affected other countries engaged in trading. Although considerable business was lost, many Americans, particularly those in the eastern states, accepted the situation because substantial trade was still being conducted with Great Britain. However, elsewhere in the United States, particularly in the south, various groups of were greatly angered by the British blockade.¹⁸

A decade of American complaints and economic restrictions only served to convince the British that Jefferson (1801-1809) and Madison (1809-1817) were pro-French and anti-British. Consequently, when the United States finally declared war, she had very few friends in Britain.

Major changes on both sides of the world occurred in the spring of 1814. Napoleon's defeat was complete by April, which allowed for more British veterans to move from Europe to North America. In North America the war assumed a more menacing character. The British strength rose to 30,000 in Canada alone and the Royal Navy also appeared in greater strength and joint operations began to occur.

By late July 1814 the situation on the Upper Lakes had stabilized into a stalemate as American invasions of Canada and British of the United States failed. U.S. Naval victories on Lake Erie contributed to this situation.

Due, however, to its fight in Europe throughout 1812 and 1813, Britain could not provide the military and naval strength needed to capitalize on this weakness by mounting a major campaign along the Gulf Coast. All Britain could do was send agents to try forge alliances with the disaffected Indian Nations, such as the Creeks, as well as with the large population of black slaves living in the Louisiana and Mississippi Territories. With the stalemate almost everywhere the British had met with little success along the Gulf Coast by 1814.

America and Britain had been at war since 1812, but it was only with the defeat of Napoleon that the British Empire could focus the full force of its military might to squash its former colonies. The British southern strategy concentrated on capturing the city of New Orleans, which would give them control of the Mississippi River and sever America's vital commerce route to the Gulf of Mexico.¹⁹ The British began accumulating its southern invasion force in the summer of 1814. As the British did not make an effort to keep this a secret, the

United States government learned of this strategy. This information came from newspapers in Britain. To counter this, Washington ordered Major General Andrew Jackson, military commander of the Seventh Military District, to immediately proceed to New Orleans and develop a defense for the city.

Strategic and Operational Overview during 1814

A key event in the war between the United States and Britain was the abdication of Napoleon Bonaparte in April 1814. This gave the British the option of increasing their military effort to secure a decisive victory in North America. The Duke of Wellington's army remained in Europe, but some of his veterans' regiments were sent across the Atlantic to facilitate the campaign. The British focus on Europe remained absolute from 1803 to 1815: securing a peaceful, stable, and durable settlement on the continent was far more important than the security of the Canadian frontier or the efforts to stop the American expansion beyond the Mississippi River.²⁰ Thus, the war in America, while important, did not become the main effort.

Due to the collapse of Napoleon's regime in the spring of 1814 thousands of British troops were thus freed up for service in North America. No longer obliged to remain on the defense in Canada, the reinforced British forces could invade the United States from multiple directions. The British public now longed to punish the Americans as aggressors who had indirectly assisted the hated French emperor.²¹ The British cabinet worked out a plan of victory to bring the American nation to heel. The goal was "to destroy and lay waste the principle town and commercial cities assailable either by their land or naval forces."²² The strategy consisted of a three-pronged invasion from three widely separated areas of the North American continent: 1) an amphibian thrust into the Chesapeake Bay area aimed at Washington, Baltimore, and other coastal cities, 2) another from Montreal into New York State via Lake Champlain, and 3) along

the Gulf of Mexico into Louisiana with the purpose of seizing New Orleans and detaching the Mississippi Valley from the rest of the former colony.²³ The greatest prize was New Orleans since it controlled the sea access to the Mississippi, the water highway of the states west of the Appalachian Mountains. The British commander, Vice Admiral Sir Alexander Forester Inglis Cochrane, felt the area along the Gulf Coast could be taken with minimal forces with the help of the Spanish and Indians.

The British had initial success as they began their three-pronged campaign strategy. The amphibian force sailed into Chesapeake Bay in August 1814 with an army of four thousand British soldiers and marines that landed at Benedict, Maryland. After brushing aside a defending force at Bladensburg, they marched onto Washington where they set fire to the Capitol, the White House, and all other public buildings with the exception of the Patent Office on August 24 (see Appendix B). They also burned any private dwelling from which shots were fired from at the British.

Next came Baltimore. Thirteen thousand Americans, who had fortified the heights around the city of Baltimore, then stopped the British ground advance in that city on September 13. The British fleet then tried to bombard Fort McHenry, the main coastal defense position, into submission but failed. With this, the British expeditionary force withdrew.²⁴ About the same time as the advance on Baltimore was happening, a British army of 10,000 crossed the Canadian border and moved on Plattsburg, New York. On September 6, 1814, the ground force waited for a British fleet to assist them in an attack on the United States naval forces defending in Plattsburg bay. The American Navy squadron, however, prevented the superior British from entering the bay and thus won the control of Lake Champlain. After this action the British army retreated back into Canada, as it was unable to proceed further without naval assistance.²⁵

British Shift of Strategic Focus: The American Southwest, 1814-15

In the early summer of 1814, the British decided that they would move to the Gulf Coast to execute the southern campaign and strike New Orleans (see Appendix C). Although this was decided in the summer, they would not conduct the attack on New Orleans until December when cooler weather would replace the stifling heat of the south. Major General Robert Ross would lead the combined land and naval force inland against New Orleans after he and Vice Admiral Cochrane conducted the campaign in the Chesapeake Bay along the east coast of United States in August. The first part of the British New Orleans offensive was straightforward enough. Some of Ross' troops would proceed down to the Gulf of Mexico in the summer to assess the American defenses, secure support from disaffected portions of the population, and generally stir up as much trouble as possible while keeping the Americans guessing as to British intentions.²⁶ If possible, they were to retake the Spanish West Florida fort of Mobile, which had fallen into American hands the previous spring. Meanwhile, Cochrane would proceed with a portion of the naval force to Jamaica in order to prepare the men for the December campaign.

The southern campaign, with the focus always on New Orleans, was fully supported by Sir Alexander Cochrane. His arguments in favor of the expedition were strong enough to overcome the objections of even the Duke of Wellington who, in July 1814, had indicated that a strike against New Orleans would be particularly difficult without adequate naval support and a well organized train of logistical support.²⁷ In addition to the strategic control of North America, the apparent desire of the captured goods to be had in New Orleans was a lure to that objective. After the attempted southern campaign was over, Wellington wrote to Lord Longford, a relative to General Pakenham who ultimately lead the British attack on New Orleans, and

condemned the expedition and its objectives: “The expedition to New Orleans originated with that colleague (Cochrane); and plunder was its object...this evil design defeated its own end.”²⁸

From Bermuda, in May 1814, Cochrane dispatched Captain Hugh Pigot to Apalachicola, Florida to approach the Creeks and other Indian tribes and ascertain whether or not the British could count on their assistance in an overland assault across the Gulf Coast to Baton Rouge and New Orleans. Pigot’s report convinced Cochrane that an overland march on Baton Rouge could be made with only 3,000 Englishmen, augmented by a force of several thousand disaffected Indians, Negroes, Frenchmen, and Spaniards living in the area. The part missing from the report was its failure to account for General Andrew Jackson and his riflemen.²⁹ The Battle of Horseshoe Bend was the climatic act between the United States and elements of the Creek Nation during the Creek War. With a militia army raised of mostly Tennessee and Georgia volunteers and one regular regiment Andrew Jackson and John Coffe marched deep into Creek country, defeating the Red Sticks at both Tallushatchee on 3 November and Talladega on 9 November 1813, with the climatic battle occurring at Horse Bend on 24 March 1814. The Creek War ended near Tohopeka with the Treaty of Fort Jackson on 9 August 1814³⁰, and with this Creek power was shattered and Britain’s best Indian friend crushed. Neither in this report or any other report found is there an account of Jackson being a concern worth mentioning to the British command. Cochrane’s plan to keep the Americans focused on the east coast leads to the belief that Cochrane did not have any intelligence that would lead him to assess an American fighting force operating in the south although the British knew before the attack on New Orleans that the Creeks had been defeated.

An additional 2200 regulars under Major General John Lambert would sail from England to join the expanding expeditionary force for the scheduled start date for the operation of 20

November. In mid-August, the British made their presence known in the Gulf of Mexico when a small force of Royal Marines landed at the capital of Spanish Florida, Pensacola.³¹ Tucked away in a secure bay, the spot was perhaps the best natural port in the Gulf of Mexico, and would be an ideal launching pad from which to seize Mobile and then New Orleans. The British occupied the village declaring it a safe haven for all those who were at odds with the United States - Red Sticks, fugitive slaves, pirates.

The Spanish, who had tried to remain neutral in this war, were not at all comfortable with this development. But since they had no way to outfit the Red Stick Creeks, who had been helpful in protecting Spanish territory from the United States, they were dependent on Britain to provide them with the necessary supplies. The British soon began arming and training the Creeks for new operations base on the south coast. Unfortunately for the plan, this British force of regulars, Indians, and naval ships failed in their attempt to take Fort Bowyer at Mobile in mid-September 1814.³² The rebuff at Mobile included the loss of one frigate. Jackson made the securing of that fort a priority when he wrapped up his Red Stick campaign, outfitting it with new batteries and more guns. This small attacking British force thus proved inadequate to secure this needed base in support of the main effort of the southern campaign.

Always eager to drive further into Spanish territory, the British presence at Pensacola provided Andrew Jackson with a legitimate reason to attack and capture that long-coveted village which also served as a British base. Edward Nicholls actions on the Gulf Coast at Pensacola and Mobile brought Jackson's attention to the area.³³ Nicholls' over all actions are caught in his proclamation to the populous in the south (see Appendix E) that he distributed along the Gulf Coast. A large American force approached Pensacola unnoticed in early November catching the 200 British and 500 Spanish soldiers off guard. After only a brief

resistance, the British escaped to their ships and thus left the Spanish to deal with the wrath of Jackson. The British managed to blow up a few important defensive buildings before they departed, but they had lost a key position in support of their southern campaign to capture the city of New Orleans. They could only wait for Cochrane to appear on the horizon with more reinforcements and a new plan.

Due to Ross's death at Baltimore, the repulse of the British attack on Mobile on 12 September 1814, and Andrew Jackson's seizure of Pensacola on 7 November 1814, the original campaign plan had collapsed. While awaiting a replacement for Ross, Cochrane developed a new tactical plan. Since attacking from Lake Pontchartrain was unfeasible and the approach to New Orleans via the Mississippi River was well guarded, Cochrane decided to attack through Lake Borgne.³⁴ Many waterways pointed their way toward the city of New Orleans and all presented natural physical issues. All of the waterways, minus the Mississippi River and the lakes were shallow and their turgid waters wandered almost aimlessly through great expanses of marsh and swamp³⁵. Even the route up the Mississippi River would require beating upstream against a strong current, subjecting vessels to raking fires from the shore installations. Any route was a concern due to the need for shallow draft vessels due to the depths of all of the waterways. Consequently this plan led to a fight on Lake Borgne that cost the British time, and time for Jackson was the most precious thing he needed to prepare the defenses of New Orleans.³⁶

Intelligence and Execution of the Campaign

Britain's goal was to capture New Orleans and gain control of the Mississippi River that was open year round and would ensure a significant British strategic advantage in North America. This meant preventing the Americans from using the Mississippi River as an outlet to the Gulf of Mexico. With negotiation underway to end the war, capturing New Orleans would

give the British representatives a significant negotiating advantage. With its vast stores of sugar and cotton, New Orleans also held a financial goal in addition to the strategic goal that would benefit all of the British force. On 10 December, Vice Admiral Alexander Cochrane's fleet landed on the east bank of the Mississippi and defeated the small flotilla of American gunboats protecting the mouth of the river and under the command of Lieutenant Thomas Ap Catesby Jones at the Battle of Lake Borgne. The British captured American Lieutenant Thomas Ap Catesby Jones, of the regular Navy, on the night of December 14, 1814. The British forced the greatly outnumbered American seamen to surrender but the Americans had inflicted considerable damage. Jones's courage in the face of British superiority in numbers earned him praise and bought time for the defenses of New Orleans to be secured. As the British interrogated Jones he reported that 500 men who manned forty guns garrisoned Fort Petit Coquille, which guarded the entrance into Lake Pontchartrain³⁷. This was too strong of a force for the British to force a passage into the inner lake. Due to Jones being very convincing in his comments the British abandoned any idea of an attack by way of Lake Pontchartrain and into the city by way of Bayou St. John. The British won control of the lakes but the delay gave General Andrew Jackson more time to consolidate and prepare his defenses.

The British advance guard was 1,600 men strong, but did not press the attack until the arrival of their commander, Sir Edward Pakenham. Pakenham arrived after this action movement began due to having to travel across the Atlantic to replace Ross, who died of wounds received at Baltimore. Had Keane pushed forward to New Orleans at this time, he would have been able to capture the city – but his real concern was being able to hold the city if there was a counter attack by the Americans. Keane also did not believe that a formidable defense of New Orleans could be made, hence he decided to wait for the rest of the force before moving on New Orleans.

The efforts to make the landing at Bayou Bienvenue were an immense effort of the British. The process began from their anchorage off Cat Island, where the troops would be rowed to Pea Island (see Appendix A) where they would next wait until transported another thirty miles west to Bayou Bienvenue (see Appendix C). This was agony for the British as the seamen rowed for at least ten hours to make the distance one way. With each trip they could only move two thousand troops. It took three round trips of a total of sixty miles each to insert the British troops from ship to shore. Moreover, these three trips did not include equipment and supplies.³⁸ As the British soldiers were exposed to the elements of wind, rain, and cold on this first leg of the operation for five days, Keane's concerns of moving towards New Orleans at this time were sound. From the moment that the British decided to attack New Orleans through bayou Beinvenu, their defeat could almost be said to be a foregone conclusion if a determined defense was encountered, as the logistical problems were formidable in supporting any sustained operation.³⁹

Here is where lost time set the British on a path of campaign failure. Tactical and operational events allowed the Americans to be able to determine the route the British would use to approach New Orleans. This allowed Jackson to mass his forces and resources to meet a larger British force behind a determined and prepared defense.

If they had pressed their advance on the 24th, as previously stated, the British would have found New Orleans' defenses in shambles. American general and future president Andrew Jackson had not yet solidified his defenses. However Keane, by waiting for the rest of the British forces and Pakenham to arrive, gave Jackson the time he needed to build and secure his defensive structures and prepare for an attack.

The obvious approach to New Orleans was up the Mississippi River, but British intelligence discovered that the bars at the mouth of the river shoaled to thirteen to fifteen feet. This shoaling would prohibit the passage of heavy men of war.⁴⁰ The accuracy of this information was later validated on January 8, 1815, when eight light vessels were ordered to pass and only five of the eight made it across the bar.⁴¹

With little time to organize his forces with enemy forces on American soil Jackson chose to make a very bold move. He attacked the British at their camp on the night of December 23. This move caught the British off guard and resulted in the British believing that they were being met with a more formidable force than that which really existed. Keane's concerns of being able to hold New Orleans left no doubt that waiting for more forces was the correct decision, although this lost time and momentum. General Jackson then with drew his men to the Rodriguez Canal that separated the Chalmette and Macarty plantations. The canal in reality was a ditch of about fifteen feet wide. To add to the ditch Jackson's forces threw up a mile-long shoulder-high rampart, using mud, rails, fence posts, wooden kegs, and anything they could get their hands on.⁴² Constructed by soldiers and African slaves, Jackson's hastily made a defensive position that stretched from the Mississippi River to an impassible swamp that gave his men a strong defensive position to repel a British attack. Even if in a strength nearly 25,000 strong, it would have to be a frontal assault on a prepared position as no flanking attack was possible due to the American positions being anchored by the Mississippi River on one side and an impassable swamp.

It was only after the arrival of General Pakenham on December 25 did the British determine that the true strength of Fort Petit was only fifty men and eight guns.⁴³ The British disregarded the suggestion to pull back and direct their assault along this route with the

explanation that preparation for a frontal attack had been made and was “thought to be the readiest...”⁴⁴ If Pakenham would have chosen to attack through Fort Petit he could have fixed Jackson in his now prepared position and would have been able to approach New Orleans and not conduct a frontal assault on a prepared American position. This also would have brought back the aspect of the original campaign plan to prevent the American defenses of New Orleans to know the true attack route of the British ground forces.

The Duke of Wellington wrote after the battle of Salamanca, where Pakenham commanded and broke the French center, “Pakenham might not be the brightest genius, but my partiality for him does not lead me astray when I tell you he is one of the best we have.”⁴⁵ A confident and seemingly over-ambitious officer, Pakenham impatience refused him to recognize the impossibility of his situation.⁴⁶ With him came a commission as Governor of Louisiana and, it was said, to be the promise of an Earldom for victory.⁴⁷ In addition to this personal incentive, a sense of over confidence existed. As one historian has written “Wellington’s victories against Europe’s best had increased the myth of British invincibility; so much so that the maxim that in situations of limited maneuverability the basic advantage always lay with the defense was completely disregarded.”⁴⁸ This is a point that a general should have recognized if they were focused on the reality of the situation and not desired endstates on a timeline and assumptions (see Appendix B).

New Orleans: Plans, Execution, and Failure

The battle of New Orleans was undertaken with an assumption that the population of Louisiana would not offer much of a resistance to a British advance. Moreover, that the British believed that they would be victorious and did not consider that the city of New Orleans in the

isolated territory of Louisiana could put up a formidable defense that could ultimately prevent them for seizing the city and gaining control of the Mississippi River.

The preparations made by the British government for the conquest of New Orleans were immense. They were so certain of success that a full set of officers had embarked with the expeditionary force to undertake the administration of civil government, “from the Judge down to the tide-waiter.”⁴⁹ Their certainty of success was such that they did not even believe it necessary in Europe to conceal the object of the expedition.⁵⁰ This is how and why the Americans became informed of the British efforts to seize New Orleans and gain control of the Mississippi River. With his appointment Andrew Jackson had the full support of the government to defend the Gulf Coast against any British invasion. In the background to these events, the progress of the peace negotiations induced the British to continue a descent upon the Gulf Coast to capture New Orleans and possibly sever Louisiana from the United States. The British knew that in holding New Orleans and having control of the Mississippi River that their negotiation strength would increase at Ghent.

The most serious issue for the British was the distance that they were removed from their supplies and uncertain navigation. Another serious issue was the impossibility of gaining intelligence as the inhabitants had abandoned their houses and the information of the prisoners taken was vague and contradictory while that of the “Negroes” was “trifling and unsatisfactory.”⁵¹ The logistical problem for the attacking force was formidable. The initial phase was transporting the army a distance of sixty-two miles from Cat Island in small open boats to the point of debarkation, Bayou Bienvenu. Due to the limited number of the small vessels, the troops be moved in relays.⁵²

The point of debarkation was determined by the reconnaissance of Lieutenant Peddie who brought the most satisfactory accounts of the location (see Appendix D). He reported the place was perfectly practicable and that the Americans had no look out in that quarter.⁵³ Although Peddie performed his duty with great diligence and no doubt that the landing could be made unobserved, the water was a foot lower than at the time of the reconnaissance. This resulted in the British force having to move by foot through Bayou Beinquen instead of boat. This too cost more time when General Keane decided to continue.

Pakenham actually had hoped that he had escaped the conflict in America. After Ross was killed Pakenham received his orders, in October, 1814, to command the expedition originally entrusted to Ross he revealed his feeling in a letter to his mother:

The affairs in America have gone ill – staff officers have become necessary, and I have been called on by the Ministers to proceed to the other side of the Atlantic. I confess to you that there is nothing that makes this employment desirable – but under the circumstances of my improved health, I cannot resist a National call or the feelings of my Personal Duty.

According to George Napier, whom he saw the day before he sailed, the new commander remarked that he “much doubted the policy of the expedition or the correctness of the information upon which the Government had decided to make an attempt on that place.”⁵⁴ Pakenham understood that he was sent to America to execute the southern campaign successfully. However, a very practical issue existed: he was not a part of the planning or execution of any part of the campaign until he arrived. By late December when he was on the scene the issue is that he was not a part of the planning or execution of any part of the campaign until he arrived, his forces were already deployed with no real chance of withdrawing undetected by the American forces. Fearing that further delay would demoralize his army, Pakenham made preparations for a head on assault against the Americans, even though some of his junior officers

thought that such an attack would fail.⁵⁵ Being concerned with lost time that had plagued the campaign, he could not lose any more time. A suggestion was made that the British should pull back and take the route through Fort Petit Coquille when the British learned it was poorly manned, but it was dismissed with the explanation that preparations for a frontal attack had been made and was “thought to be the readiest...”⁵⁶ He led his men and lost his life trying to prevent a defeat not of his own making during the British attack on Jackson’s prepared forces in what has become known as the Battle of New Orleans.

Analysis and Relevance

As the British southern campaign evolved, they did not reassess their efforts after many parts of their plan did not unfold as anticipated. Cochrane saw a need for a new plan and developed one, yet he did not apply the facts that led to the design of the original campaign plan. The British were not able to secure Pensacola as a base, and at the same time lost the support of the Spanish along the Gulf Coast. They were unable to secure Mobile bay and Mobile, which was to be the landing site of the British invasion force for a proposed land attack on New Orleans. The Creek War had caused the majority of their Indian allies not capable to support any actions, hence no increased numbers of supporting operations along the frontier. Since the British could not secure any landing sites along the Gulf of Mexico in preparation for the attack on New Orleans their recruiting efforts towards the blacks and all other disaffected people towards America were greatly unsuccessful as a result of not making any contact with the local population or able to provide security for them.

The British believed that the French descendants in the south, mainly in the Louisiana Territory, would support the war efforts against America as the French descendants in the north had done in Canada. The assumption that the Indians would also rise up in support as also in the

north also did not occur in the south. The expected support, or neutral stance, by the Spanish at Pensacola was changed due to the strong showing of the American force that chased off the British in Pensacola, and forced the Spanish to protect their own holdings and remain truly neutral during the British southern campaign along the Gulf Coast.

The British relied on the support of the locals and the Indians in every military success in the north and should have stopped to examine why similar support along the Gulf Coast was lacking. Even if the British overlooked the recruiting success, the lack of acquiring a secure landing site along the Gulf Coast should have led them to reassess their chances of success for this campaign to secure New Orleans and the Mississippi River due to the type of terrain surrounding the city. Many waterways lead to the city of New Orleans and all of them presented natural physical impediments.⁵⁷ This is why the original plans called for the capture of Mobile and then march to New Orleans so that the land attacking force would have a secure line of communication and supply to support the final attack on the ultimate objective. The final cost of a frontal assault ended in disaster, costly casualties, and failed campaign, and final withdrawal for the British forces (see Appendix E).

Conclusion

The British could have taken New Orleans and been successful in their southern campaign to control the Mississippi River and the Gulf of Mexico if their overconfidence was not clouding the reality of the situation. The campaign plan was as good as one for the Gulf Coast could be as it addressed each legitimate concern that arose during the planning, highlighted by the logistical issue leading to the need to secure Mobile before moving onto New Orleans. Once the campaign began the planned sequence of events in it were not achieved.

Each of these had a culminating effect as the forces pondered on to their tactical objective. That they reached, fought their battle, and departed – mission not accomplished.

The British began with a campaign plan for the Gulf Coast that would have worked if followed. As parts of the plan failed to take place, such as securing Mobile, drawing more forces from the Indians and local population, and not receiving support from the Spanish the British pushed on towards their objective, the seizing on New Orleans – although conditions had changed. The fact that the negotiations between American and Britain were on going to end the war helped lure the British commanders conducting the campaign to be cognoscente of time more than that of either operational or tactical concerns.

The loss of General Ross at Baltimore seems to be the event that began the downfall of the British campaign in the south during the War of 1812. The late arrival of Pakenham, his replacement, did not allow for the new Commanding General to determine where and when to initiate fighting. Time thus became a key factor on the Britain's failure at New Orleans. Time lost and awareness of fading opportunity. They knew that the peace negotiations were taking place and that an agreement was coming. Both the senior naval and ground commanders wanted victory – and all that this implied. Hence, they pressed on, in altering and unfavorable conditions, while not considering another key factor: The enemy has a vote in role in what would occur.

“In retrospect, a consideration of the terrain, the elements, and the logistical problems, gives rise to the speculation that perhaps not even the great Duke of Wellington could have brought off a victory at New Orleans.”⁵⁸ The fact is that the British could have succeeded in securing New Orleans and the Mississippi River if campaign design occurred while the execution of the original campaign occurred. Major Forrest, who was the Assistant Quarter

Master General, apparently on detached service from his regular duties with the 34th Regiment of Foot, emphasizes in his journal the logistical problems that explain the basic causes of British defeat.⁵⁹ Forrest suggest that British planning evolved with a lack of foresight and did not go much beyond that of boys playing at wilderness war with wooden swords.⁶⁰ Although not specifically stated, there is the implication that obstinacy and the determination to ‘muddle thorough’ at any cost were contributing factors to catastrophe.⁶¹ Although Cochrane did develop a new plan based on current events and updated intelligence, he failed to address the critical factor in any attack New Orleans: how to approach the city by more than one route so no defense could be mounted.

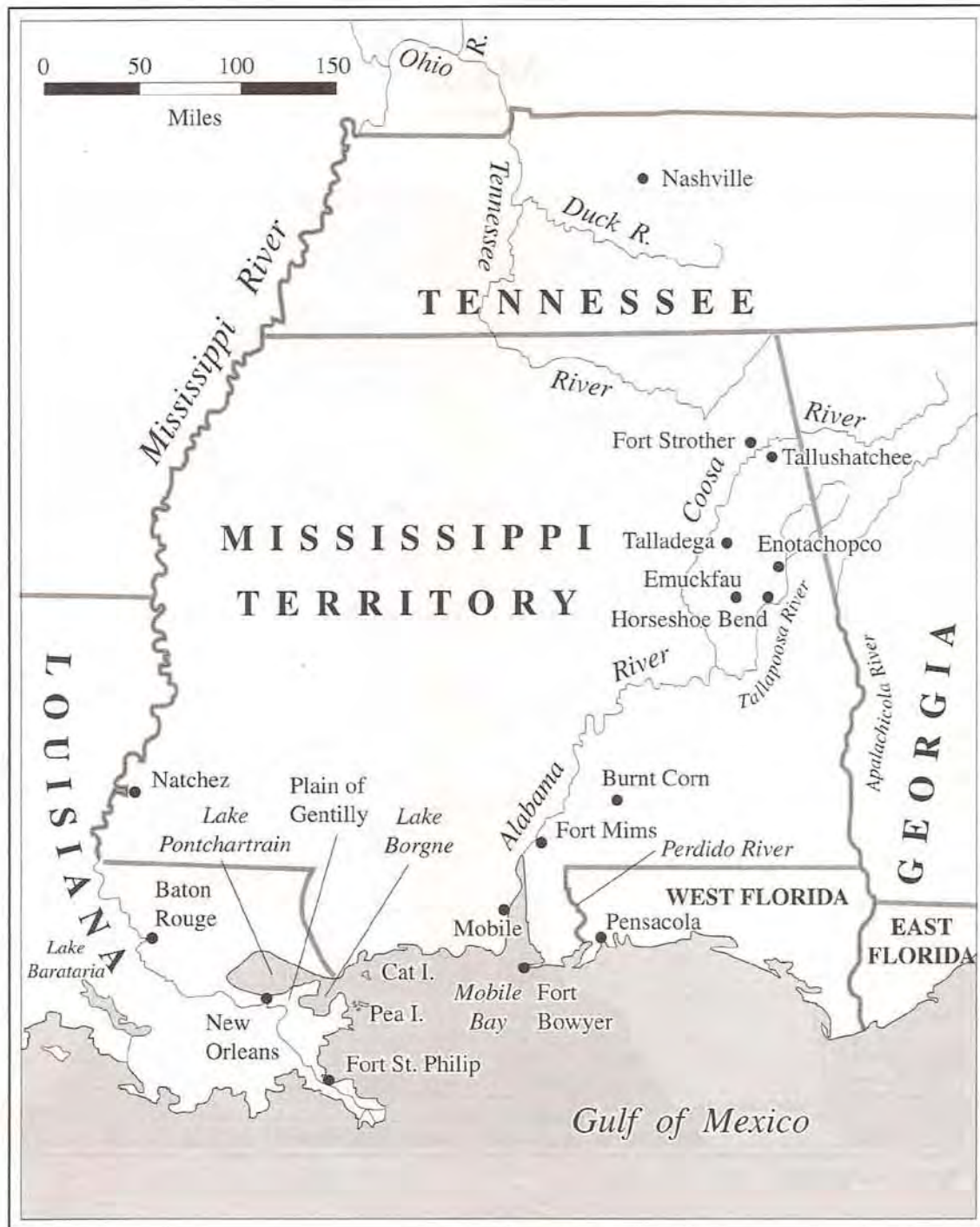
Tactical success in combat does not of itself guarantee victory in war. What matters ultimately in war is strategic success: attainment of political aims and the protection of national interests. The operational level of war provides the linkage between tactics and strategy and is where strategic goals can be lost in tactical events, as this is what occurred to the British while executing their Southern Campaign in 1814-15 in North America.⁶²

Strategy is both a product and a process. Strategy involves both the creation of plans—specific strategies to deal with specific problems—and the process of implementing them in a dynamic, changing environment. Therefore, strategy requires both detailed planning and energetic adaptation to evolving events.⁶³ The original planning by the British addressed specific strategies to deal with specific problems, it was their inability to implement the plan in a changing environment where they truly failed. These inabilities led to a failure on all levels of war in this case. The British defeat at New Orleans illustrates how tactical, operational, and strategic levels of war are interlined, as objectives at each must support the goals of each level of war.

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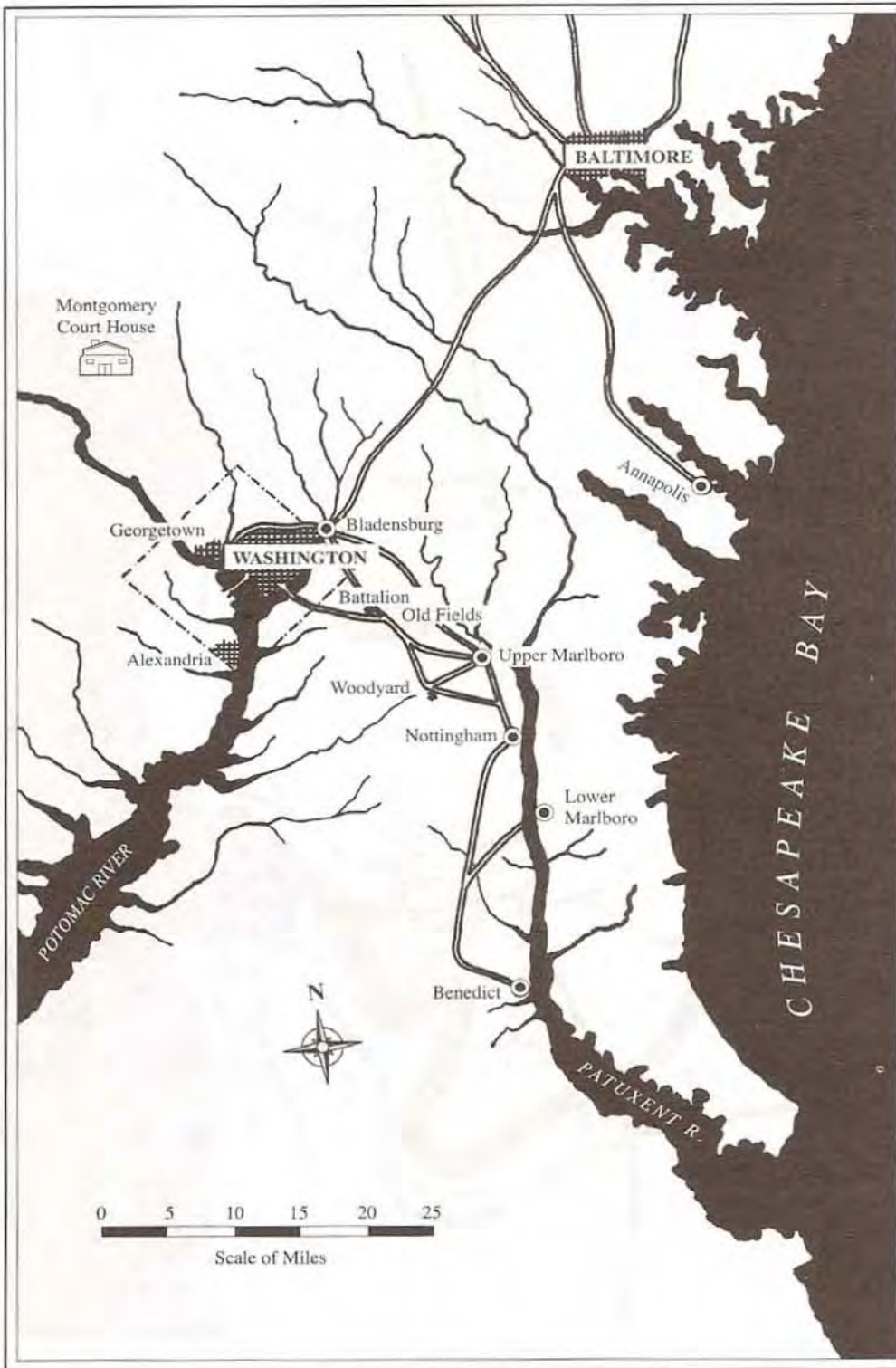
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- ⁶¹ Forrest, *The Battle of New Orleans: A British View*, 17
- ⁶² United States Marine Corps, MCDP 1-2, 5
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Appendix A: Southern Theater



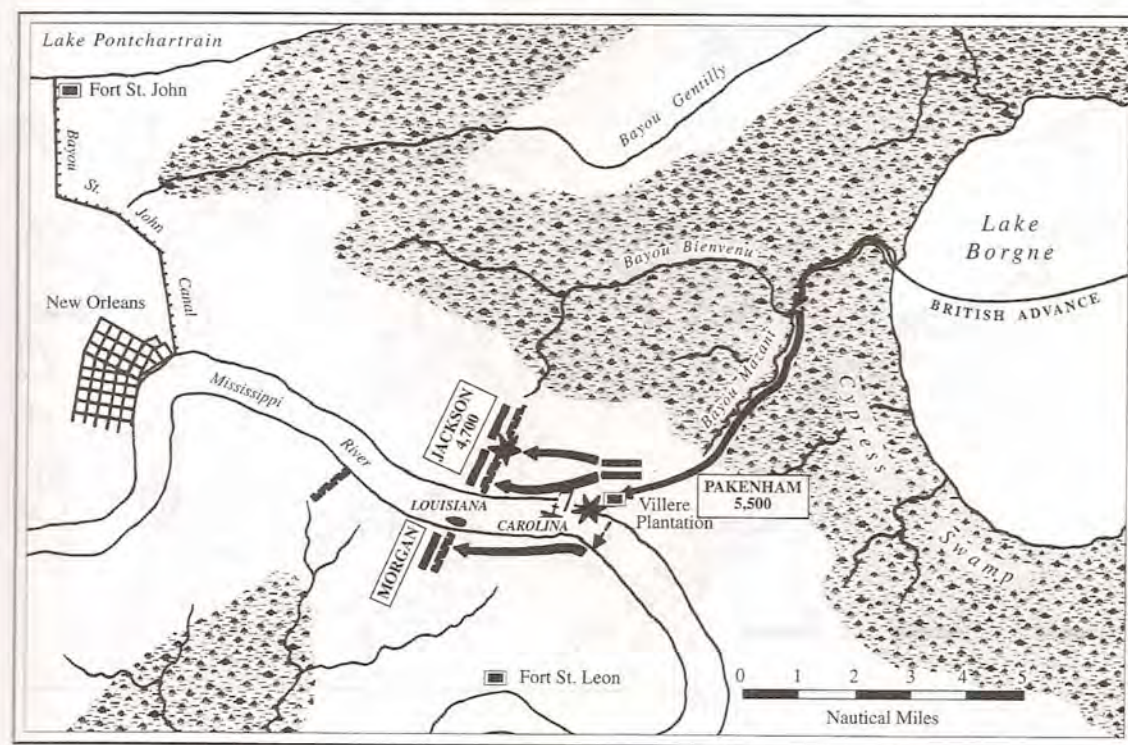
Source: Heidler, David S., and Jeanne T. Heidler. *Encyclopedia of the War of 1812*. Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press.

Appendix B: Chesapeake (Eastern) Theater



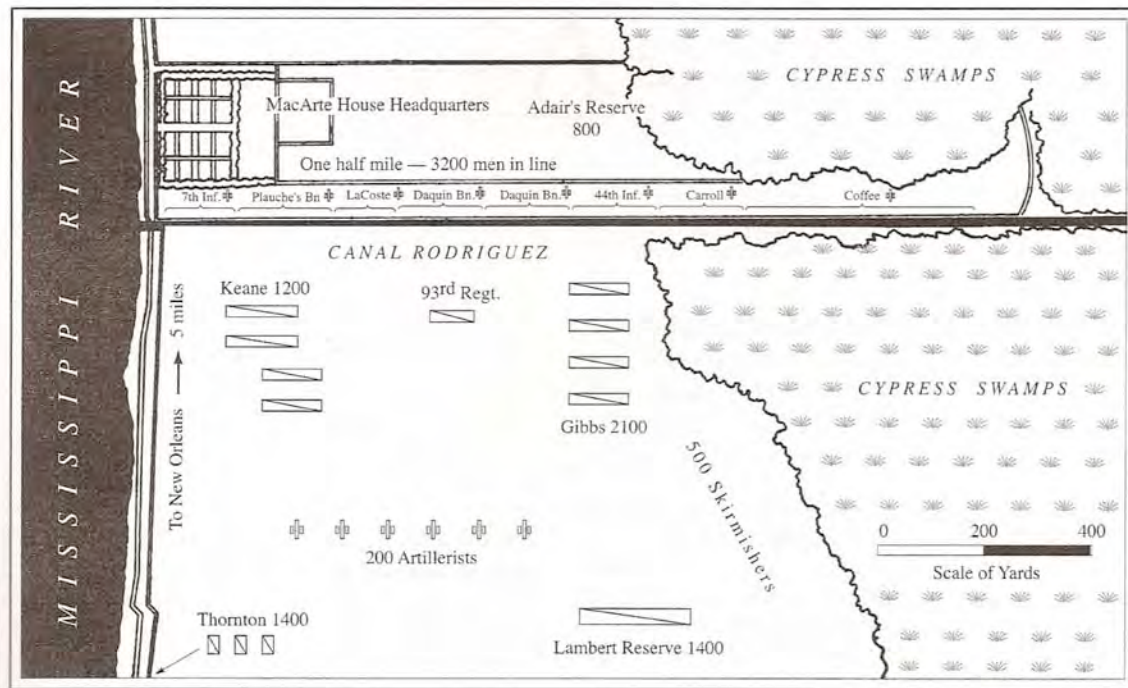
Source: Heidler, David S., and Jeanne T. Heidler. *Encyclopedia of the War of 1812*. Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press.

Appendix C: British Point of Debarkation



Source: Heidler, David S., and Jeanne T. Heidler. *Encyclopedia of the War of 1812*. Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press.

Appendix D: Battle of New Orleans



Source: historycentral.com

By lieutenant-colonel Edward Nicholls, commanding his Britannic majesty's forces in the Floridas.

NATIVES of Louisiana! on you the first call is made to assist in liberating from a faithless, imbecile government, your paternal soil: Spaniards, Frenchmen, Italians, and British, whether settled or residing for a time, in Louisiana, on you, also, I call to aid me in this just cause: the American usurpation in this country must be abolished, and the lawful owners of the soil put in possession. I am at the head of a large body of Indians, well armed, disciplined, and commanded by British officers—a good train of artillery with every requisite, seconded by the powerful aid of a numerous British and Spanish squadron of ships and vessels of war. Be not alarmed, inhabitants of the country, at our approach; the same good faith and disinterestedness which has distinguished the conduct of Britons in Europe, accompanies them here; you will have no fear of litigious taxes imposed on you for the purpose of carrying on an unnatural and unjust war; your property, your laws, the peace and tranquillity of your country, will be guaranteed to you by men who will suffer no infringement of theirs; rest assured that these brave red men only burn with an ardent desire of satisfaction, for the wrongs they have suffered from the Americans, to join you in liberating these southern provinces from their yoke, and drive them into those limits formerly prescribed by my sovereign. The Indians have pledged themselves, in the most solemn manner, not to injure, in the slightest degree, the persons or properties of any but enemies; to their Spanish or English fathers, a flag over any door, whether Spanish, French, or British, will be a certain protection, nor dare any Indian put his foot on the threshold thereof, under penalty of

death from his own countrymen; not even an enemy will an Indian put to death, except resisting in arms, and as for injuring helpless women and children, the red men, by their good conduct and treatment to them, will (if it be possible) make the Americans blush for their more inhuman conduct lately on the Escambia, and within a neutral territory.

Inhabitants of Kentucky, you have too long borne with grievous impositions—the whole brunt of the war has fallen on your brave sons; be imposed on no longer, but either range yourselves under the standard of your forefathers, or observe a strict neutrality; if you comply with either of these offers, whatever provisions you send down, will be paid for in dollars, and the safety of the persons bringing it, as well as the free navigation of the Mississippi, guaranteed to you.

Men of Kentucky, let me call to your view (and I trust to your abhorrence) the conduct of those factions, which hurried you into this civil, unjust, and unnatural war, at a time when Great Britain was straining every nerve in defence of her own and the liberties of the world—when the bravest of her sons were fighting and bleeding in so sacred a cause—when she was spending millions of her treasure in endeavouring to pull down one of the most formidable and dangerous tyrants that ever disgraced the form of man—when groaning Europe was almost in her last gasp—when Britons alone showed an undaunted front—basely did those assassins endeavour to stab her from the rear; she has turned on them, renovated from the bloody but successful struggle—Europe is happy and free, and she now hastens justly to avenge the unprovoked insult. Show them that you are not collectively unjust; leave that contemptible few to shift for themselves; let those slaves of the tyrant send an embassy to Elba, and implore his aid; but let every honest, upright American, spurn them with united contempt. After the experience of twenty-one years, can you any longer support those brawlers for liberty, who call it freedom, when themselves are free; be no longer their dupes—accept of my offers—every thing I have promised in this paper I guarantee to you, on the sacred honour of a British officer.

Given under my hand at my *head-quarters*,

Pensacola, this 19th day of August, 1814.

EDWARD NICHOLLS.

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