



## The Star Spangled Banner

August 24th, 1814, Washington D.C.: The capitol buildings of the United States of America burned so brightly that the citizens of Baltimore 40 miles away could see them. In horror they watched the city burn, and knew the British would come there next.

War between the United States and England began in June of 1812. Fresh from the defeat of Napoleon, the British arrogantly proclaimed that they would chastise the American savages, that they would punish America, instill fear, and do away with our Constitution and the Republic of law it had created.

Well, for the first two years of the war, England more or less had her way with America. On every front, Americans were humiliated. Numerous towns and villages begged for peace from the British, even when they weren't threatened by them. And indeed, the British did turn north up Chesapeake Bay towards America's third largest city, Baltimore, which was a rich and a rough town famous for harassing the British by sea. It would be a worthy prize, the British felt. But the people of Baltimore led by General Samuel Smith, a veteran of the American Revolution, decided not to lie down. They armed and readied themselves for a fight.

September the 12th, 1814, the British attack on Baltimore began. 4700 soldiers came ashore to attack Baltimore from the east by land, while the British war fleet positioned itself near Fort McHenry just south of Baltimore.

Fort McHenry by the way was named for James McHenry, a delegate from Maryland and a signer of the United States Constitution. The fort protected Baltimore by Sea.

Around 7:00 A.M. the war fleet opened up on the fort. They fired bombshells weighing more than 200 pounds that could travel more than 2 miles. These bombs carried a warhead lit by a fuse when fired. When the bombs ignited, it scattered shrapnel in every direction. They were unpredictable and sometimes these bombs went off before they struck their target, but they were deadly. Another killer weapon used by the British was the Congreave Rocket.

Well, the fort fired back on the British armada, but the British ships were out of range. The Americans didn't stand a chance. As their useless cannon fell silent, the Americans felt like pigeons tied by the legs to be shot at. All that day the British pounded Fort McHenry mercilessly.

# Glenn Rawson Stories

Every building in Baltimore shook from the explosions. The rain filled skies flashed with bursting bombshells and the glaring red stream of the rockets. How could anyone survive this most awful spectacle?

Meanwhile, held by the British 8 miles downstream was a 35-year-old Washington lawyer named Francis Scott Key, a member of the militia and a man devoted to family and faith. Key was on a mission of mercy. All through the day he watched Baltimore fight for its life, and prayed that it would live.

As twilight deepened amidst the explosions, Key could see the flag flying over Fort McHenry. It was 30 by 42 feet in size, and flew 90 feet over the Fort. If it came down anytime, it was a signal of surrender.

Through the night and into the wee hours of dawn the next morning, the battle for Baltimore continued. And it was as though the men of Fort McHenry led charmed lives. At one point, a live bomb fell through the roof of the Fort's powder magazine, but didn't go off. It just sputtered, and then a quick thinking man doused the fuse.

Anxiously, Key watched the Fort all through the night. The burst of rockets in the darkness told him that the flag was still there. And then around 4:00 A.M., the firing suddenly stopped. Had the fort surrendered? Key waited and watched pacing the deck, and then finally, by the dawn's early light Key saw the flag. The Star Spangled Banner was still waving in the breeze. It filled him with such joy that he pulled an old letter from his back pocket, and wrote out his exuberant feelings in poetic verse. After 25 hours, nearly 2000 bombs and 700 rockets, the fort still stood – and the British gave up. They withdrew by land and sea, and after defeats in Canada and New Orleans, the British gave up, and the War of 1812 was over. And with it, America gained a new respect before the world. They were now no longer a fledgling nation, but a power to be reckoned with internationally.

And as for the poem – well, Key finished that poem, and borrowing an already known tune gave it to a friend who quickly had it published. Key never titled it, nor did he sign it. But it caught on and spread across the country like a wildfire, growing in power until March of 1931 when The Star Spangled Banner became our national anthem. It is an anthem of dignity that speaks the prayer of patriots in its last verse:

Oh, thus be it ever, when free men shall stand

# Glenn Rawson Stories

Between their loved homes and the war's desolation!  
Blest with vict'ry in peace, may the heav'n - rescued land  
Praise the Pow'r that hath made and preserved us a nation!  
Then conquer we must, when our cause it is just,  
And this be our motto: "In God is our trust!"  
And the star-spangled banner in triumph shall wave  
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave!

As God lives, may it ever be so.

*Glenn Rawson - October 2003*

*Music: Jayson Steed - Amazing Star Spangled Banner*

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