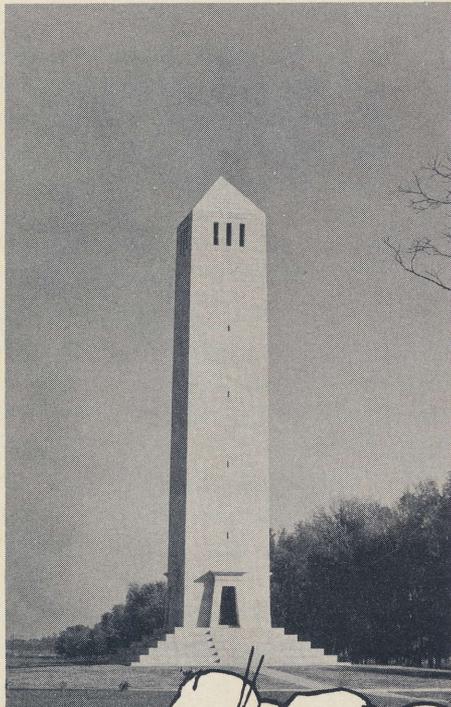


CHALMETTE

National
Historical
Park



LOUISIANA



COMMEMORATING THE
BATTLE OF NEW ORLEANS

CHALMETTE

NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

OSCAR L. CHAPMAN, *Secretary*

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, NEWTON B. DRURY, *Director*

Scene of the Battle of New Orleans, January 8, 1815, where Andrew Jackson won from the British the greatest American land victory of the War of 1812

More than 135 years ago, on January 8, 1815, at Chalmette, La., near New Orleans, British and American land forces met in battle against each other for the last time. Since the end of the War of 1812 the two nations have been at peace with each other.

In 1803, Napoleon remarked that the nation that held the Mississippi Valley would eventually be the most powerful on earth. The engagement of January 8, 1815, or the Battle of New Orleans as it is commonly known, was waged for the control of the mouth of the Mississippi and for the lower American West of that day. The battle took place after the Treaty of Ghent, providing for peace, had been signed on December 24, 1814—but 40 days before ratification on February 17, 1815, formally ended hostilities in the War of 1812. Seldom, if ever, has a British force of recognized valor and proven ability, and superior to its opponent in numbers, met such an overwhelming defeat at the hands of a force of irregulars. Against the flower of the British Army had been pitted a motley group of Tennesseans, Kentuckians, Mississippians, Creoles, sailors, pirates, Indians, and Negroes.

The Battle of New Orleans was to have far-reaching consequences on American history. Not only did it mark a brilliant victory for American arms, saving New

Orleans from conquest, but it stimulated American nationalism, made a popular hero of Andrew Jackson, and did much to stamp the effect of frontier democracy upon the American social and political order.

The New Orleans Campaign

In the first year and a half of the War of 1812, the United States directed its efforts to the conquest of Canada, but was wholly unsuccessful. During 1814, Great Britain, temporarily released from the heavy burden of the struggle with Napoleon, made preparations to press the war in America more vigorously. Perhaps the most important part of this new plan was the proposal to capture New Orleans and gain control of the Mississippi Valley. This would have effectively hemmed in the youthful nation and prevented further expansion.

The British Plan

Embarking from England under sealed orders, a British fleet sailed for Jamaica in the West Indies where it was joined by the expeditionary force that had recently engaged in the capture of Washington and in the attack on Fort McHenry at Baltimore. The combined strength of the British force was about 10,000 men. Sir Edward Pakenham, brother-in-law of



Andrew Jackson as portrayed in 1815 by John Wesley Jarvis. (From the collection of Stanley Clisby Arthur.)

the Duke of Wellington, was commander in chief of the expedition. Sailing from Jamaica, the British arrived in American waters in early December 1814. It was decided that the route of approach to New Orleans offering the greatest chance of success was by way of Lake Borgne, an arm of the Gulf of Mexico. On December 14, after a brief but sharp engagement, the British captured five small American gunboats on guard there to protect one of the two main water approaches to the city. Effecting a landing on the shore of Lake Borgne in the vicinity of Fisherman's Village, the advance British forces, then about 2,080 strong, penetrated by way of bayous Bienvenu and Mazant to a point on the Mississippi River 7 miles below New Orleans. There, on December 23, at the Villeré, Lacoste, and De la Ronde Plantations, the British decided to camp for the night. If instead they had advanced immediately upon the city, it

probably would have been at their mercy, for at that time it possessed no organized line of defense against an attack from this direction.

Jackson's Defense Line at Rodriguez Canal

Meanwhile, Andrew Jackson, commanding the military district which included Louisiana, had arrived at New Orleans. He immediately called the diverse elements that then made up the population of New Orleans to the support of his Kentucky and Tennessee militia. There had scarcely been time for this when Jackson learned from an escaped prisoner, about noon on December 23, that the enemy was encamped on the Villeré Plantation, virtually on the outskirts of the city. Arriving unexpectedly along a poorly guarded route, the British had caught the Americans completely by surprise. Upon receiving news of the British approach, Jackson acted immediately. In a fierce night attack he struck the British in camp on the very day of their arrival. Although at first successful, darkness and fog created such confusion among his men that the attack had to be abandoned before any decisive results had been achieved.

Jackson withdrew his forces to the Chalmette and Macarty Plantations, situated 6 miles below New Orleans. There in the rear of the Rodriguez Canal, an old abandoned millrace about 20 feet wide, he established his first line of defense. This line, approximately a mile long, enjoyed a most fortunate position, situated as it was on a narrow neck of dry land with the Mississippi River on one side and an impassable swamp on the other. Eight batteries were erected along this line. Since 1815, about 800 feet of the line

has been lost in the river, which at this point has encroached on the land. Battery positions Numbers 1, 2, and 3 were on that part of the line which has disappeared in the "Father of Waters." The approach to the American line from the British position was across a flat open plain. The Chalmette Plantation was situated immediately in front of the American line of breastworks.

Jackson's men hastily threw up an irregular, crude breastwork. Against this position Pakenham sent a strong force on December 28, but the British withdrew after almost breaking through on the left near the swamp. Pakenham then spent several days in bringing up artillery with which to blast away the American breastworks.

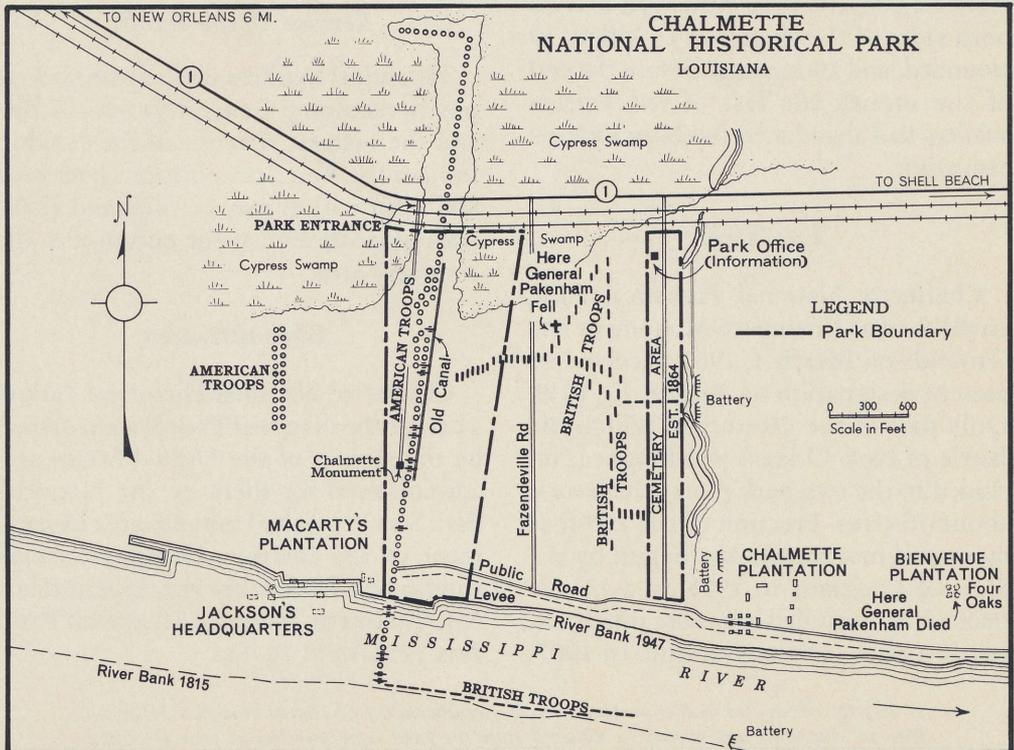
Artillery Duel—January 1, 1815

On the morning of New Year's Day, 1815, the British batteries, numbering 24 guns, began a terrific fire accompanied by a shower of rockets. The 15 guns of the American batteries answered slowly at first but with increasing rapidity and unerring accuracy. So severe was the American fire that by noon the British batteries were completely silenced. Frustrated in two attempts to break the American line, Pakenham waited a full week for reserves to come up before making the final assault.

Final Battle—January 8, 1815

Early on the morning of January 8, Pakenham sent his veterans forward in a

Historical Map



frontal attack on the American position. About 5,000 Americans waited behind their breastworks as nearly 8,000 British troops moved across the flat open fields in the morning mist. Twice a long line of British columns advanced under a murderous fire, and twice they were thrown back. General Gibbs fell mortally wounded within 20 yards of the American line. General Pakenham likewise was mortally wounded while trying vainly to rally the retreating men. The main action lasted only about 2½ hours. The British lost 1,900 men killed or wounded, including many officers. The American loss was 7 killed and 6 wounded.

A subsidiary British advance on the west side of the river was successful, but had to be recalled because of the rout of the main force. The total British loss in the action on both sides of the river exceeded 2,000; the total American loss on both sides of the river was 13 killed, 39 wounded, and 19 missing. Before the end of the month the last of the British soldiers had abandoned the New Orleans campaign.

The Park

Chalmette National Historical Park, established as Chalmette Monument and Grounds on March 4, 1907, received its present designation on August 10, 1939. Only part of the ground on which the Battle of New Orleans was fought is included in the two park plots which total about 66 acres. Erection of the 100-foot memorial monument was begun by the State of Louisiana in 1855 on a 13-acre tract which included the more important portion of the American line. In 1907,

the State transferred the monument and grounds to the Federal Government, which completed the shaft the next year. The State of Louisiana recently purchased and donated to the park 36 additional acres, which includes well-preserved portions of the Rodriguez Canal. One-half mile east of the monument is the other portion of the park, the former Chalmette National Cemetery, in which over 15,000 interments have been made since its establishment in 1864.

How To Reach the Park

The park is situated about 6 miles below the heart of New Orleans on State Highway No. 1. In leaving the city, this highway follows Rampart Street across Canal Street and merges into St. Claude Avenue, which leads directly to the park.

Service To the Public

Historical markers identify important positions along General Jackson's line and the historic remains of the canal in front of the American position. Literature and information may be obtained at the park office located at the entrance to the cemetery area.

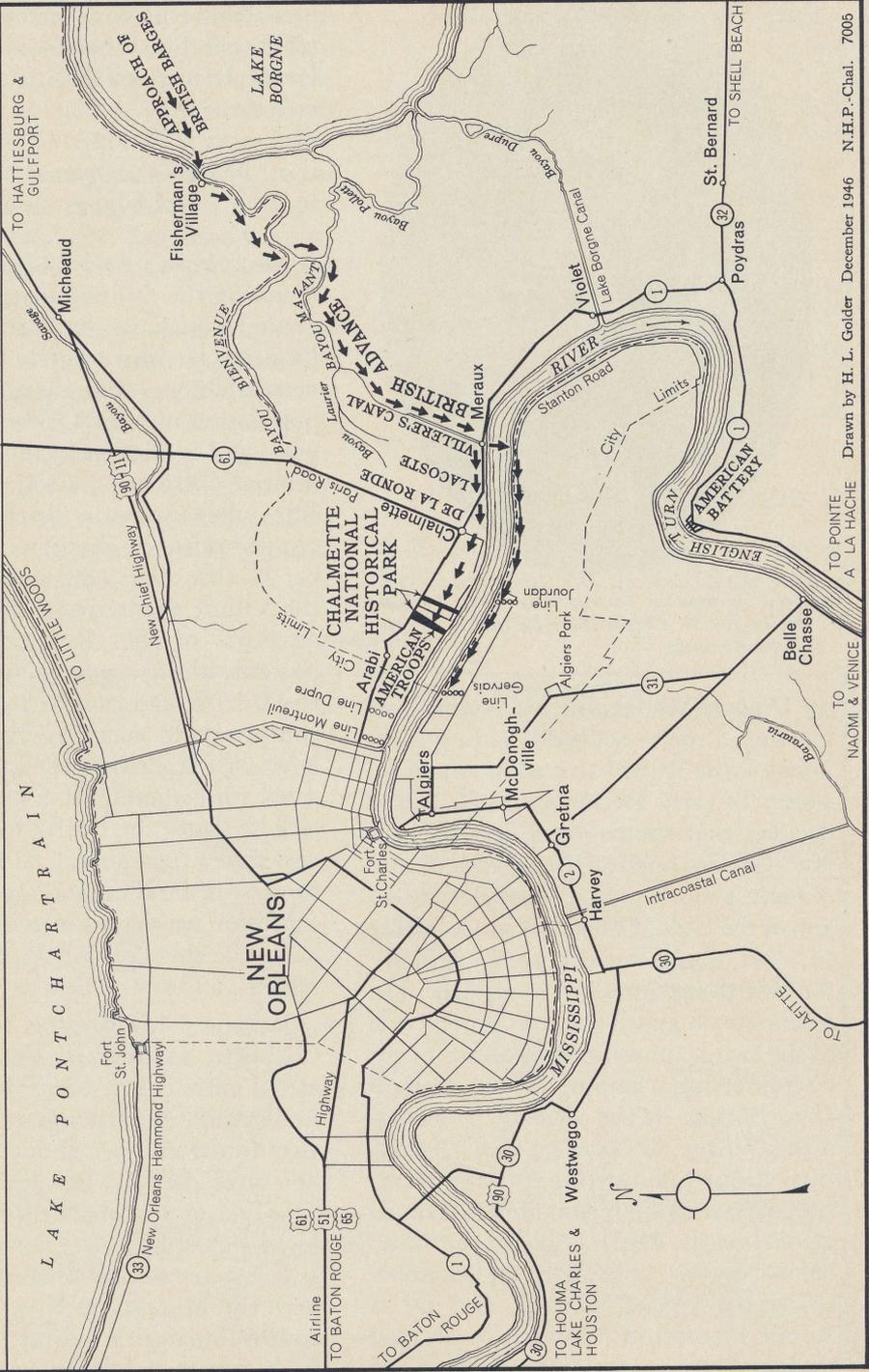
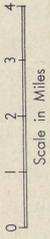
Administration

Chalmette National Historical Park is a part of the National Park System owned by the people of the United States and administered for them by the National Park Service of the United States Department of the Interior. Communications should be addressed to the Superintendent, Chalmette National Historical Park, Box 125, Arabi 16, La.

A 16-page illustrated booklet dealing with the significance of Chalmette National Historical Park in American history may be obtained from the park superintendent or from the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington 25, D. C., at 10 cents a copy.

VICINITY MAP CHALMETTE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

LOUISIANA



Drawn by H. L. Golder December 1946 N.H.P.-Chal. 7005