

Chalmette Battlefield

Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve
Louisiana

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Battle of New Orleans, from the painting made in 1815 by Hyacinthe de Laclotte, an engineer in Jackson's army. New Orleans Museum of Art, gift of Col. and Mrs. Edgar Garbisch

Gen. Andrew Jackson's stunning victory over crack British troops at Chalmette plantation on January 8, 1815, was the greatest American land victory of the War of 1812. Commonly called the Battle of New Orleans—the last battle of the last war ever fought between England and the United States—it preserved America's claim to the Louisiana Purchase, prompted a wave of migration and settlement along the Mississippi River, and

Maj. Gen. Sir Edward Pakenham, commander of the British army at Chalmette, was sitting for this portrait when he was summoned to command the Louisiana expedition. He was killed at New Orleans and the painting was never finished.



National Portrait Gallery, London

restored American pride and unity. It also made Jackson a national hero.

The War of 1812 was fought to vindicate America's maritime rights, secure the western frontier from provocative British influence with the Indians, and pave the way for the annexation of Canada. It was pursued half-heartedly by both sides, and with little success for either. England, battling Napoleon's armies in Europe, could spare few troops to fight in the United States and did little more than help to defend Canada. American victories were few, and these mostly at sea. When England defeated Napoleon in the spring of 1814, the character of the American war changed dramatically. Thousands of battle-tested British soldiers sailed for the United States, and invasion thrusts were planned via Lake Champlain, the Chesapeake Bay, and, later, the Gulf coast.

The first thrust ended when Comm. Thomas MacDonough defeated the British fleet in

the Battle of Lake Champlain in September 1814. The second was turned back about the same time at Fort Mchenry, the main defense of Baltimore, but not before the British had burned the White House and the Capitol at Washington. The third began in late December when 36-year-old Maj. Gen. Sir Edward M. Pakenham led a 10,000-man army overland from Lake Borgne to attack New Orleans. The capture of this important port was Britain's main hope for exacting a favorable peace settlement from the Americans. By controlling the mouth of the Mississippi River, England could seriously threaten the economic well-being of the entire Mississippi Valley and hamper U.S. westward expansion.

Defending New Orleans were about 5,000 militia and volunteer soldiers (including a contingent of Jean Lafitte's Baratarians) under 47-year-old Maj. Gen. Andrew Jackson. On December 23, when Pakenham's troops were within 14.5 kilometers (9 miles) of the city, Jackson halted their advance in a fierce night attack that caught the British off guard. The Americans then withdrew behind the banks of the Rodriguez Canal.

The Rodriguez Canal formed the boundary between the Chalmette and Macarty plantations and marked the most narrow strip of dry land between the Mississippi River and an impassable cypress swamp. The stubbled sugar cane fields provided an excellent field of fire for American artillery and small arms. Jackson's men widened and deepened the canal and partially filled it with water. Behind it they built a mud rampart shoulder-high and thick enough to withstand a cannon shot. Then they waited for the British to attack.

Pakenham tried to dislodge the Americans on December 28 with an infantry attack and again on January 1 with artillery fire. When these efforts failed, he knew he must either withdraw, risking the demoralization of his men and an American attack, or assault Jackson's line, trusting to good leadership

and the general superiority of the British soldier. Instinctively, he chose to attack.

On January 8, 1815, Pakenham sent 5,400 soldiers head on against the American positions. The withering fire from Jackson's artillery and small arms tore through their ranks with devastating effect. Gen. Samuel Gibbs' brigade came under tremendous fire from Gen. John Coffee's Tennesseans holding

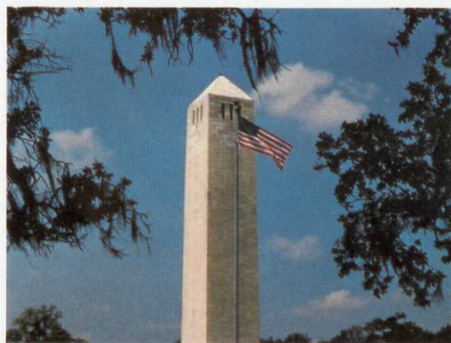


Maj. Gen. Andrew Jackson, commanding U.S. forces at Chalmette, vowed to drive the British, whom he called "the common enemy of mankind," from American soil. His victory at New Orleans launched him on the road to the White House.

National Portrait Gallery, Washington, DC

the American left flank near the swamp, and many of the British officers, including Gibbs, were killed. Gen. John Keane, attempting to come to Gibbs' aid, ordered the 93rd Highlanders to march diagonally across the field from near the river. This movement exposed the regiment to a raking fire from the American line that inflicted frightful casualties, including Keane himself. Pakenham rode forward to rally his men for another attack and was mortally wounded. Col. Robert Rennie's British units nearest the river actually gained the top of the mud rampart before being repulsed.

The Battle of New Orleans lasted less than 2 hours, with the major fighting confined to about 30 minutes. British casualties exceeded 2,000; the Americans reported only 13. On January 18 the British retreated to Lake Borgne, ending the Louisiana campaign and ensuring the United States of a bright future for the lower Mississippi Valley.



Chalmette Monument
The cornerstone of this shaft honoring the American victory at New Orleans was laid in January 1840, within days after Andrew Jackson visited the field on the 25th anniversary of the battle. Not until 1855, how-

ever, did the State of Louisiana begin actual construction. The monument was completed in 1908, a year after it was ceded to the United States.



Malus-Beauregard House
This beautiful example of French-Louisiana architecture was built some 18 years after the Battle of New Orleans and is named for its last private owner, Judge René Beauregard. Never associated with a plantation, the

house served as a country residence for a succession of wealthy people in the 19th century.



Chalmette National Cemetery
Established in May 1864 as a final resting place for Union soldiers who died in Louisiana during the Civil War, the cemetery also contains the remains of veterans of the Spanish-American War, World Wars I and

II, and Vietnam. Four Americans who fought in the War of 1812 are buried here; only one of them, however, took part in the Battle of New Orleans.

Photos courtesy Eastern National Park & Monument Association

Chalmette Battlefield

For Your Safety This park, like any historical or natural environment, contains certain inherent hazards which could spoil your visit. Be especially alert to avoid fire ant mounds and their biting inhabitants. Exercise caution and common sense.

Touring the Battlefield Begin your tour at the visitor center, where exhibits and an audiovisual program explain the importance of Louisiana and the Battle of New Orleans in the War of 1812. Chalmette National Cemetery can be reached via walkway from Tour Stop 5 or by vehicle from St. Bernard Highway a half mile east of the park entrance. Check at the visitor center for a schedule of the park's interpretive programs. Special services for groups can be arranged in advance.

A 1.5-mile tour road begins at the park entrance and contains six stops interpreting important features of the battlefield. Numbers key the descriptions of each stop to the map.

- 1 Batteries 5 and 6, along with Batteries 7 and 8 to the northeast anchoring the left flank of Jackson's line, helped to stop Gibbs' advancing column on January 8. The cannon in Battery 5 are reproductions of the two six-pounders used here the day of the battle.
- 2 Battery 4 contained the largest American cannon on the field—a 32-pounder naval gun salvaged from an American schooner. Supported by the Battalion of Louisiana Free Men of Color, it wreaked havoc among the attacking British.
- 3 Seeing Gibbs' assault falter near the cypress swamp, Gen. John Keane, commanding part of the British reserves, led the 93rd Highlanders across these fields, exposing them to a broadside fire from the American line.
- 4 Most of the British artillery was located behind you, in what is now the national cemetery. The cannon were ineffectively positioned,



Chalmette Battlefield is one of six sites (shown in green) of Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve

however, and this, coupled with an inadequate ammunition supply, kept them from playing an important role in the battle.

- 5 From here you have a panoramic view of the battlefield from the British perspective. On the far left, Rennie's attack reached and briefly overran the American rampart. On the right, Gibbs' men met disaster near the edge of the swamp. And in the center of the field the Highlanders were mowed down by a murderous artillery and small-arms fire. General Pakenham rode past here to inspire his troops for new assaults.
- 6 Pakenham's arrival at the front line indicated the desperate condition of the British army. Attempting to rally his men and lead another attack near this point, he was mortally wounded, shot in the spine by an American rifleman.

About Your Visit The Chalmette Battlefield of Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve is located in St. Bernard Parish on the

east bank of the Mississippi River, six miles from the heart of New Orleans. From Canal Street, follow the main thoroughfare that begins at North Rampart Street and merges into St. Claude Avenue, then into St. Bernard Highway (La. 46), which passes directly in front of the park. From I-10, take the Chalmette exit (La. 47) south to St. Bernard Highway and turn right. There is no public transportation to the park.

A small picnic area is provided. Organized games and recreational activities inconsistent with the historical character of the park are not permitted. St. Bernard State Park, 10 miles east of Chalmette on La. 39, maintains a modern campground with hookups. Food and lodging are available in New Orleans and nearby communities.

For more information write to: Chalmette Battlefield, 8606 West St. Bernard Highway, Chalmette, LA 70043-4204; phone 504-589-4430; on the Internet: www.nps.gov/jela. Write or call the park for information on accessibility.

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