

San Juan Island

National Historical Park
Washington

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



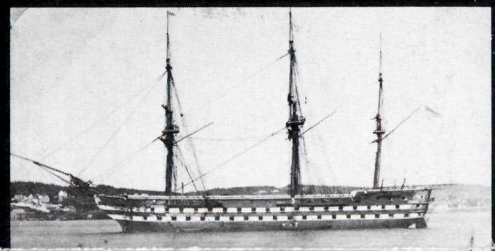
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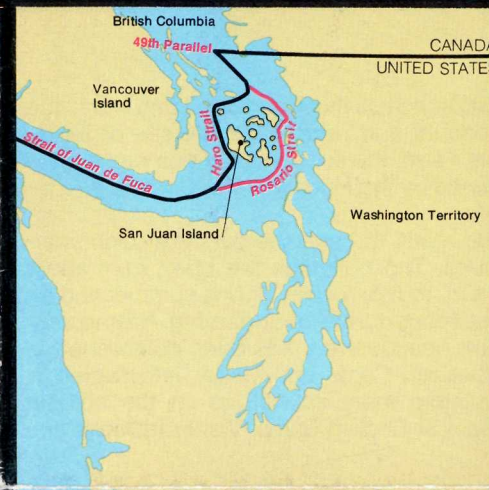
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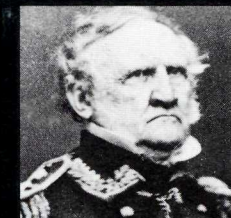
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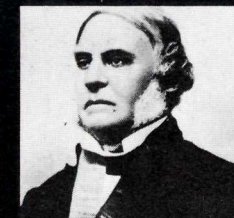
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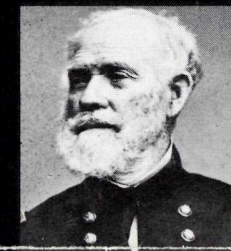
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San Juan Island in the summer of 1859 was an international tinderbox as military forces of Great Britain and the United States stood face to face in a confrontation that could at any moment plunge both nations into war. The cause of the crisis—the death of a pig!

“It would be a shocking event if . . . two nations should be precipitated into a war respecting the possession of a small island. . . .”

From the instructions to General Winfield Scott, 16 September 1859.

The “Pig War,” as the confrontation on San Juan Island came to be called, had its origin in the Anglo-American dispute over possession of the Oregon Country, that vast expanse of land consisting of the present States of Washington, Oregon, and Idaho, parts of Montana and Wyoming, and the Province of British Columbia.

An Anglo-American agreement of 1818 had provided for joint occupation of the Oregon Country, but by 1845 both parties had grown discontented with this arrangement. The British, determined to resist the tide of American migration sweeping across the Rocky Mountains, argued that the Americans were trespassing on land guaranteed to England by earlier treaties and explorations and through trading activities of the long-established Hudson’s Bay Company. Americans considered the British presence an affront to their “manifest destiny” and rejected the idea that the great land west of the Rockies should remain under foreign influence. Both nations blustered and threatened, but wiser counsels eventually prevailed and in June 1846 the Oregon question was resolved peacefully.

The Oregon Treaty of 1846 gave the United States undisputed possession of the Pacific Northwest south of the 49th parallel, extending the boundary “to the middle of the channel which separates the continent from Vancouver’s Island; and thence southerly through the middle of the said channel, and of Fuca’s straits to the Pacific Ocean.” But while the treaty settled the larger boundary question, it created additional problems because its wording left unclear who owned San Juan Island.

The difficulty arose over that portion of the boundary described as the “middle of the channel” separating Vancouver Island from the mainland. There were actually two channels: one, Haro Strait, nearest Vancouver Island, and another, Rosario Strait, nearer the mainland. San Juan Island lay between the two. England insisted that the boundary ran through Rosario Strait; the Americans proclaimed it lay through Haro Strait. Thus both sides considered San Juan theirs for settlement.

As early as 1845 the Hudson’s Bay Company had posted a notice of possession on San

Juan. In 1850 it established a salmon-curing station there and, 3 years later, a sheep ranch called Bellevue Farm. About the same time, the Territorial Legislature of Oregon (which then included the present State of Washington) declared San Juan to be within its territorial limits, and in January 1853 incorporated it into Island County. In March 1853, Washington Territory having been created, San Juan was attached to Whatcom, its northernmost county.

By 1859 there were about 25 Americans on San Juan Island. They were settled on redemption claims which they expected the U.S. Government to recognize as valid but which the British considered illegal. Neither side recognized the authority of the other. Tempers were short and it would take little to produce a crisis.

That crisis came on June 15, 1859, when an American settler named Lyman Cutlar shot and killed a pig belonging to the Hudson’s Bay Company because it was rooting in his garden. When Canadian authorities threatened to arrest Cutlar, American citizens drew up a petition requesting U.S. military protec-

tion. Brig. Gen. William S. Harney, the anti-British commander of the Department of Oregon, responded by sending a company of the 9th U.S. Infantry under Capt. George E. Pickett (of later Civil War fame) to San Juan. Pickett’s 66-man unit landed on July 27 and occupied a commanding spot near the Hudson’s Bay Company wharf, just north of Bellevue Farm.

James Douglas, governor of the new Crown colony of British Columbia, was angered at the presence of American soldiers on San Juan. He had three British warships under Capt. Geoffrey Hornby sent to dislodge Pickett but with instructions to avoid an armed clash if possible. Pickett, though overwhelmingly outnumbered, refused to withdraw.

Throughout the remaining days of July and well into August, the British force in Griffin Bay (then San Juan Harbor) continued to grow. Captain Hornby, however, wisely refused to take any action against the Americans until the arrival of Rear Adm. Robert L. Baynes, commander of British naval forces in the Pacific. Baynes, appalled at the situation, advised Douglas that he would not

“involve two great nations in a war over a squabble about a pig.”

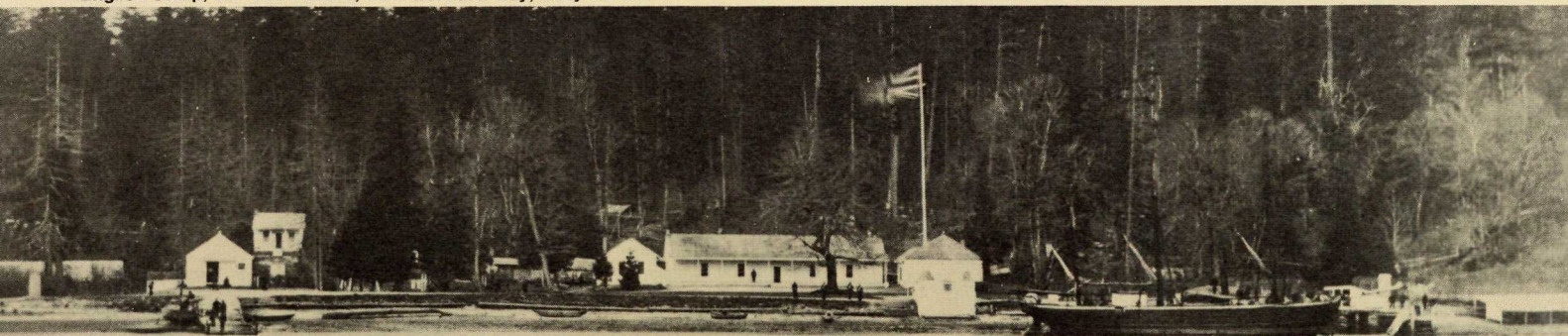
Meantime, Pickett had been reinforced on August 10 by 64 men under Lt. Col. Silas Casey, who now assumed active command. This meagre force was still no match for the growing concentration of British vessels and men, so Harney ordered in additional reinforcements. By August 31, 461 Americans, protected by 14 cannons and an earthen redoubt, were opposed by five British warships mounting 167 guns and carrying 2,140 troops, including Royal Marines, artillerymen, sappers, and miners.

When word of the crisis reached Washington, officials there were shocked that the simple action of an irate farmer had grown into an explosive international incident. Alarmed by the prospects, President James Buchanan sent Gen. Winfield Scott, commanding general of the U.S. Army, to investigate and try to contain the affair. Through correspondence with Governor Douglas, Scott managed to secure an agreement whereby a token force from each nation would occupy San Juan until a final settlement could be

reached. Harney was officially rebuked and afterwards reassigned for allowing the situation to get so out of hand. Casey’s soldiers were withdrawn and replaced by others under a different officer. On March 21, 1860, British Royal Marines landed on the island’s northwest coast and established on Garrison Bay what is now known as “English Camp.”

San Juan Island remained under joint military occupation for the next 12 years. In 1871, when England and the United States signed the Treaty of Washington, the San Juan question was referred to Kaiser Wilhelm I of Germany for settlement. On October 21, 1872, the emperor ruled in favor of the United States, establishing the boundary line through Haro Strait. Thus San Juan became an American possession and the final boundary between Canada and the United States was set. On November 25, 1872, the Royal Marines withdrew from English Camp. By July 1874 the last of the U.S. troops had left American Camp. Peace had finally come to the 49th parallel, and San Juan Island would be long remembered for a military confrontation in which the only casualty was a pig.

English Camp, San Juan Island, from Garrison Bay, early 1860s.



Public Archives of Canada

American Camp, San Juan Island, circa 1859-60.



Provincial Archives, Victoria, B.C.

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Seeing English and American Camps

English Camp lies in the tree-sheltered cove known as Garrison Bay, about 16 kilometers (10 miles) northwest of Friday Harbor. Three original buildings (a barracks, the blockhouse, and the commissary) and the small formal garden have been restored. The sites of other buildings are known. The barracks contains a temporary exhibit about the Pig War, and during summer months audio-visual programs are presented there Friday and Saturday evenings. Costumed interpreters are located here, as well as at American Camp, during the summer.

American Camp is on the barren, windswept southeast tip of the island, about 8 kilometers (5 miles) from Friday Harbor. Two original buildings (an officers' quarters and a laundress' quarters) survive, and the locations of other structures are known. The remains of the Redoubt, the principal American defense work, are well preserved.

An interpretive shelter near the park headquarters contains an exhibit describing the background of the American-British boundary dispute. A historic trail leads from the

shelter across the American Camp site to the Redoubt and returns via the site of Bellevue Farm, the successful sheep ranch once owned by the Hudson's Bay Company.

The roads through the park are open year-round. The buildings are open from about 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily during summer and on weekends during fall and spring. A temporary park headquarters has been established at American Camp and visitor information is available there as well as on the bulletin board at English Camp. Visitor facilities and

How to Reach the Park

San Juan Island is reached by Washington State Ferries from Anacortes, Wash., 133 kilometers (83 miles) north of Seattle; or from Syd-

ney, British Columbia, 24 kilometers (15 miles) north of Victoria. The island is also accessible by private boats. There are good docking facil-

ities at Friday and Roche Harbors. Commercial air flights are scheduled regularly from Bellingham and Seattle, Wash., to Fri-

day Harbor. Private one- and two-engine planes can land at airstrips at Friday and Roche Harbors.



conveniences are minimal, but rangers are on duty during the summer to answer questions and explain various points of interest.

Picnic areas are available at both camps. No drinking water is available at English Camp. Water is available at American Camp, except during the mid-winter months. Hunting and off-road travel (by car, truck, motorcycle, or bicycle) are not allowed within the park. Pets are permitted when under physical control. Natural features and ruins must be left undisturbed.

There are no campgrounds available at either American or English Camps. There are, however, two private campgrounds on the island, and the county-owned San Juan Park has facilities. Friday and Roche Harbors have commercial sleeping and eating accommodations. There is a commercial trailer park near Friday Harbor.

The park is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. Address inquiries to Superintendent, 300 Cattlepoint Road, Friday Harbor, WA 98250.

Safety

To insure a safe visit, exercise caution and common sense at all times. Look out for insecure footing on the primitive trails and

watch for overhanging branches and downed limbs. Swimming is not advisable due to strong currents and the coldness of the water. Tree

climbing is dangerous for you and harmful to the trees.

English Camp

Activities

See and hear park employees dressed as Royal Marines as they talk about life here during the British-American occupation of the island, write letters to their families, or tend the formal garden.

Hike the fairly level trail to Bell Point or the fairly steep trail to the English cemetery and the top of Young Hill.

Join a nature walk at Garrison Bay; schedules are posted on the bulletin board. If you like to clam, check with the park ranger for location and State limits.

Note: English Camp has a few picnic tables, but fires are not allowed. If you do picnic here, be alert for yellow jackets. There is also no potable water and restroom facilities are of the privy type.



American Camp

Activities

From mid-June through Labor Day weekend, see and hear park employees in period costumes demonstrate aspects of the life of the American soldiers who once occupied this site.

Hike to Jakle's Lagoon along the old roadbed and enjoy the quiet of a Douglas Fir canopy. This wooded area shelters many birds, including raptors, and some deer.

Hike to the top of Mt. Finlayson, where, on a clear day, you can see Mt. Baker to the east, Mt. Rainier to the southeast, the Olympic Mountains to the south, and British Columbia to the west.

Walk along South Beach, the longest public beach on the island,

where numerous shore birds—terns, gulls, plovers, turnstones, greater and lesser yellowlegs, and bald eagles—abound. If you're lucky, you might even see a pod or two of whales. And during low tides, you can find a few good rocky areas for observing tide pool life. Special tide pool walks are scheduled; look for announcements on park bulletin boards.

Caution: The San Juan rabbit digs many holes in the area of American Camp. Stepping in one can cause a sprained ankle and broken bones.

Small fires are allowed on South Beach and Picnic Ground Beach but they must be 1.5 meters (5 feet) beyond the line of driftwood. Extinguish all fires completely before leaving.

