

The Star-Spangled Banner



By JOHN DICKINSON SHERMAN
O may, does that Star-Spangled Banner yet wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave?

FORT M'HENRY will be restored and preserved as a national park and perpetual national memorial shrine as the birthplace of "The Star-Spangled Banner," written by Francis Scott Key—if a bill (S. 3349) introduced by Senator France of Maryland goes through congress.

An act was passed in 1914 which granted the use of the Fort M'Henry Military reservation to the city of Baltimore for park purposes. The new bill amends the 1914 act so as to read, in part:

"The secretary of war is hereby authorized and directed, so soon as it may no longer be needed for uses and needs growing out of the recent war, to begin the restoration of Fort M'Henry, in the state of Maryland, now occupied and used as a military reservation, including the restoration of the old Fort M'Henry proper to the condition in which it was on the 1st of September, 1814, and to place the whole of said military reservation in such a condition as would make it suitable for preservation permanently as a national park and perpetual national memorial shrine as the birthplace of the immortal 'Star-Spangled Banner,' written by Francis Scott Key; and that the secretary of war be, and he is hereby further authorized and directed, as are his successors, to hold the said Fort M'Henry in perpetuity as a military reservation, national park and memorial, and to maintain it as such . . . the said reservation to be maintained as a national public park, subject to such regulations as may from time to time be issued by the secretary of war: Provided, That the citizens of Baltimore city and of the state of Maryland shall be given as free and full access to and use of said national park as they would enjoy if this were a part of the park system of Baltimore city."

Provision is made for restoration and improvements under approval of the secretary of war and at the expense of the United States. The sum of \$100,000 is appropriated for the work and \$10,000 annually for maintenance.

Nothing is said in the bill about a museum of appropriate relics. Nevertheless, if Fort M'Henry is to be restored and preserved as a "perpetual national memorial shrine as the birthplace of the immortal 'Star-Spangled Banner,'" it would seem that the flag which inspired the national hymn should be a feature of the shrine.

For the original Star-Spangled Banner—the actual piece of red, white and blue bunting that Key was so anxious to see "by the dawn's early light," is still in existence. It is probably the most interesting bit of bunting in the world to good Americans. It is in the National museum in Washington and thousands go to see it every year.

This sacred relic is now more than one hundred years old and looks its age. It has, however, been mounted on net and has been carefully mended. With good care it should last a long time.

As every good American knows—or should know—the flag now consists of thirteen alternate red and white stripes, representing the thirteen original states, and a blue field on which are forty-eight white stars, arranged in six rows of eight stars each, representing the forty-eight states now constituting the Union. The forty-seventh and forty-eighth stars were added in 1912 when New Mexico and Arizona were admitted.

The original flag was adopted by congress June 14, 1777—that's why June 14 is observed as Flag Day. It had thirteen stripes and thirteen stars. It was the plan in the early days to add both a star and a stripe to the flag for each new state. But it was soon seen—by 1812 there were five new states—that while a star could easily be added, additional stripes were out of the question. The addition in 1794 of two stripes for Vermont (1791) and Kentucky (1792) destroyed the proportions of the flag. So there were never more than fifteen stripes and the fifteen were officially reduced to the original thirteen in 1818.

It's of interest to note that the Fort M'Henry flag has but fifteen stars, though in 1814 there were eighteen states, Tennessee (1796), Ohio (1802) and Louisiana (1812) having been admitted. But fifteen it has—six alternate rows of three and two stars, beginning at the edge of the field next the staff. The explanation is that no official change was made in the flag between 1794 and 1818. The flag in 1818 was given twenty stars, Indiana and Mississippi having been admitted, and thirteen stripes.

Did you know that by correct usage the flag in time of peace is not permitted to float all night, except at the grave of Francis Scott Key?

Senator France, in introducing the Fort M'Henry bill, put into the Congressional Record the contents of a booklet prepared by himself and other patriotic citizens. This booklet contains, among other things, the following interesting matter:

The 1st of September, 1814, saw the city of Washington burned, the handful of American warships driven to port by force of superior numbers, the Atlantic coast from Maine to Louisiana open to attack, and the fate of the Union in the balance. It was then that Fort M'Henry stood firm against the invader, redeemed our eastern seaboard, and delivered the federal government from serious disaster or utter ruin.

In the two and a half years of war preceding the defense of Fort M'Henry, scores of the fastest



sailing vessels afloat had set forth from beside its parapets. Eluding the frigates that once impressed American seamen, these light-armed clipper ships pursued and captured enemy merchantmen by the hundred, prisoners by the thousands, and booty that ran into millions.

To the enemy the waters of the Chesapeake had now become little better than a "nest of privateers and pirates." It was clear to them that the Chesapeake must be rid of these pests, the federal capital captured, and Baltimore forced to pay for damage done and be made the point of a wedge to drive the North and South apart. Then Fredericksburg and Richmond could be threatened or captured on the south, Philadelphia and New York on the north.

The British were driving south from Canada and were at Plattsburg. They proposed to sweep down and make a junction with the 9,000 troops quartered on the fleet in the Chesapeake. Then by uniting their forces from Lake Champlain and the Chesapeake and having neutralized New England, they would coerce and subjugate America once again.

Washington had fallen easily, a body of our regulars and militia had been defeated at Bladensburg, and the Chesapeake coast line was at the mercy of the "redcoats"—all but that section protected by the guns of Fort M'Henry and troops gathered in the vicinity. To be pitted against our soldiers were continental veterans fresh from their victories on the continent of Europe. In the Chesapeake were not only Wellington's Invincibles but Nelson's marines, distinguished at Trafalgar and the battle of the Nile.

The invading fleet numbered some fifty sail—a large proportion of them classed as men-of-war and frigates of the line. Against this armada with its troop transports, America could oppose nothing at all.

The hope of the Middle Atlantic seaboard and perhaps the Union itself lay in the city of Baltimore, and the hope of Baltimore lay in the garrison and guns of Fort M'Henry and such untrained troops as could be mustered for other land defenses.

No wonder that Gen. Sir Robert Ross, who commanded the British troops, declared that he would "eat his supper in Baltimore" subsequent to his first day on land. Nothing seemed to him more certain even if, as he said, "it rains militia." Baltimore was picked to be his winter headquarters and a logical base for further operations north, south or west.

Early on Sunday morning, September 11, the alarm was sounded through the streets of Baltimore. The British fleet had entered the Patuxent river. The cannon boomed on the courthouse plaza, summoning the militia to arms.

The defensive force and equipment of Fort M'Henry were supplied largely by the citizens of the beleaguered port. Regardless of a blazing sun, men and women toiled with pick and shovel to throw up breastworks at every approach to the city and its chief reliance, Fort M'Henry. Maj. Gen. Samuel Smith was in command of the militia, and under him was Brigadier General Stricker. Sailors, lacking ships to go to sea, were converted into land forces under the brilliant Commodore John Rogers.

Before dawn had streaked the sky on the 12th of September the British were astir, and boat after boat carried men and arms to North Point, where now stands Fort Howard. General Ross, who had won his laurels in Holland, Egypt and the peninsula, took command. At his side was Rear Admiral Cockburn, who was hated for his plundering of defenseless villages. Admiral Sir Alexander Cochrane, successor of Admiral Warren as commander in chief of the British forces in America, remained on his flagship and in person supervised the plans for the attack by water.

The American commanders sent forward outposts to engage the British, and scarcely were the latter assembled on shore when General Ross fell. Tradition has it that two youths, perched in a tree, shot him when he passed within range of their rifles. As he was carried to the rear, he demanded that he be covered, for fear the knowledge of his fall would reach his men and dismay them. Shortly after giving these directions he lost consciousness, and died in the arms of his aid, Sir Duncan McDougall.

The encounter at North Point was that phase of the engagements which in their entirety might be called the Battle of Baltimore, the attack upon

Fort M'Henry being the crucial or decisive action. The first encounter, wholly on land, was on the afternoon of the 12th. The British stormed the American earthworks, but were checked by a fire of shot, slugs, scrap iron and nails. The lines of both armies swayed back and forth, with victory smiling first on one side and then on the other. The British lost 600 that day, the Americans 150.

At dusk a great storm broke and the fighting halted. At daybreak the rain ceased and the battle began anew, the British commander, Brooke, who had succeeded Ross, ordering his men forward to avenge the setbacks of the day before.

The fleet was all commotion, for an officer from Colonel Brooke's staff had urgently requested Admiral Cochrane to open the bombardment of Fort M'Henry, which, if successful, would seal the fate of the city. Soon the ships weighed anchor and sailing up the Patuxent, got into battle formation 2½ miles off the fort. The decks were stripped, the bomb and rocket vessels opened their fire, and 16 ships hurled bombs, rockets and solid shot into the ramparts. The garrison of the fort—1,000 volunteers and regulars—was under Col. George Armistead. Armistead unmasked his batteries and directed a brisk fire, but the range of his guns and mortars fell short of the ships. This was disheartening, and his anxiety was not lessened when a 24-pounder in the southeast bastion was demolished by an exploding bomb, mortally wounding an officer and several of the cannoneers.

Observing the confusion in the fort, Admiral Cochrane signaled three of his bomb vessels, and they moved closer to the ramparts to hasten the victory. Armistead seized his opportunity, and ordered a well-directed fire, and his wide-mouthed cannon wrought havoc on the decks of the three, one of them, the Erebus, being disabled.

In the shadow of the British fleet that day and night rode the American vessel Minden, flying a flag of truce, and used by American agents in the exchange of prisoners. While the bombardment raged, none watched with more anxiety than Francis Scott Key. He had gone to the British fleet in the Potomac to seek the release of an old friend, Dr. William Beanes, a physician seized on charges of taking up arms against British stragglers. Key obtained his release, but on the eve of the operations both were transferred to the Minden, which was detained under a guard of marines until the British plans should be carried out.

From the decks of the cartel ship Key and his companions watched every bech of the cannon. Midnight came and 1,250 men, equipped with scaling ladders, dropped from the fleet into barges, with the intention of surprising from the rear.

How the hearts of the patriots beat as, helpless to give the alarm, they saw this strategy under way with every prospect of success. In attempting to effect a landing, however, the expeditionary force struck lights and these lights cost it a possible victory. The defenders promptly set fire to a haystack and, as its glow revealed the barges, Fort M'Henry and the redoubts shook with the salvos of the guns. The six-gun battery under Sailing Master Webster, which the British had planned to take by storm, was served that midnight coolly and quickly by a little group of cannoneers, whose valor was sustained by the thought of home and country, and to whom Colonel Armistead afterward said he was "persuaded the country was much indebted for the final repulse of the enemy." Many of the landing party were killed and others wounded; two boats were sunk and the survivors made back to the fleet. The defenders lost 4 killed and 24 wounded. The master stroke had been delivered and had failed; 1,800 shells had been thrown into the fortifications, but no white flag flew from the great staff.

Sunset had cast a leaden gloom upon the spirits of the defenders, but dawn found their hopes high and the invader beaten off. That night, with the fate of the city and perhaps the existence of the Union hanging by a thread, Key paced the deck of the Minden, and each shell that sped screaming from the ships was a stab at his heart, a challenge to all he held dear. When the first blush of morning tinged the sky Key gazed toward the battlements and with straining eyes beheld the Stars and Stripes, scarred, but still defiantly floating. The cannonading had ceased; the troops, many of them wounded, had been conveyed to the ships and the fleet was setting its sails. The joy of Key was unrestrained, and from his soul there came "the Star-Spangled Banner."

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