

River Raisin

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

National Battlefield Park
Michigan



© COURTESY CRAGFORD MUSEUM HOUSE, ARTIST: RALPH E.W. EARL

GEN. JAMES WINCHESTER led Kentucky volunteer militia and regular army troops in the US invasion force's western flank. His pistol is at Fort Amherstburg in today's Ontario, Canada.

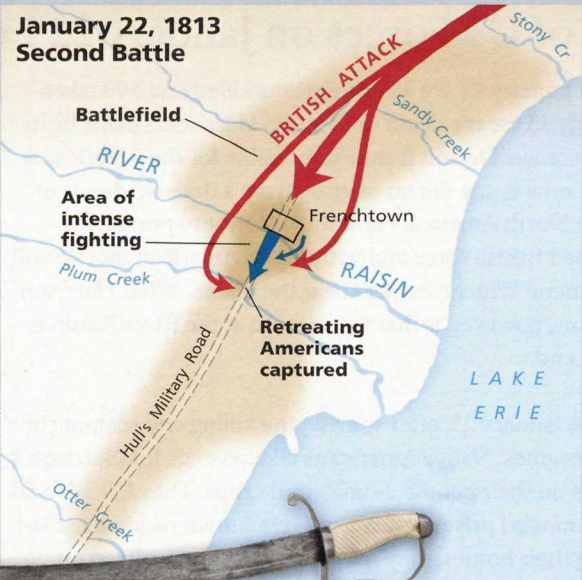
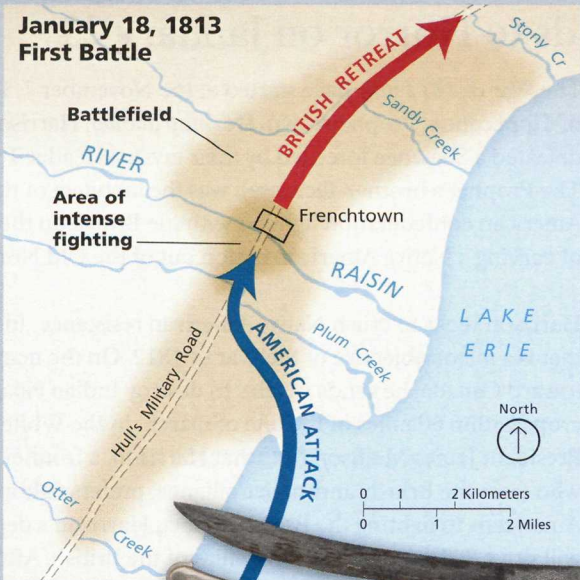


What produced the rallying cry “Remember the Raisin!” was not the two battles of Frenchtown but the killing of American prisoners the day *after* the second battle. It heaped humiliation on defeat. Native American allies of the British regulars and militia swept down on the Americans. In chaotic flight, some 60 Americans were killed or mortally wounded. In the first battle, January 18, 1813, US forces drove out the British garrison force. On January 22, British and allied forces routed the Americans. Native Americans returned the following day, killing US wounded prisoners: *Remember the Raisin!*

PAINTING OF SECOND BATTLE January 22 British regulars, Upper Canada militia, and native allies 1 approach Frenchtown before dawn. As the battle progresses, Americans burn a barn 2 so the enemy can't use it for shelter.

American regulars in their open camp flee as the enemy cuts through their ranks. Americans soon flee 3 helter-skelter across the frozen River Raisin and down the Hull Road 4 they had taken north.

© TIM KURTZ



Officer's saber carried by Lt. Gabriel Jones Floyd, 17th US Infantry.

© COWAN'S AUCTION

No frustrated general will need to prod the Kentuckians across the Canadian border; they will, if necessary, swim the Detroit River to get at the British.

— Pierre Berton, *Pierre Berton's War of 1812*

The Land War in the Old Northwest

River Raisin National Battlefield Park commemorates the War of 1812 battles of Frenchtown on the Raisin River, January 18 and 22, 1813. American strategy bet on a land war, with one prong to invade Upper Canada via the Old Northwest (see top map, other side). US forces invade at three points in 1812, and all three campaigns fail. To retake lost territory, Indiana Gov. and militia Gen. William Henry Harrison musters 1,300 Kentuckians in August 1812. Before setting out, they learn that Gen. William Hull surrendered Detroit to the British. To recover Detroit is now their goal.

They take the primitive military road cut by General Hull. Controlling the Hull Road is crucial to US action in the Old Northwest, because British ships control the Great Lakes. After months of marching in summer clothes, Harrison's left flank, under Revolutionary

War veteran Gen. James Winchester, reaches its Maumee River rapids rendezvous point. There Winchester hears of a plea from Americans in Frenchtown (now Monroe) to save them from a nearby British army.

Harrison sends a letter telling Winchester not to attack, but the letter arrives too late to stop him. Winchester sends 667 Kentucky militia to Frenchtown, who are joined by about 100 local militia.



US Gen. James Winchester's camp at the Maumee River, Ohio

© LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Early on January 18, 1813, the Americans meet residents fleeing Frenchtown. Pitched fighting ensues at the settlement itself from mid-afternoon until dark. The British, with their Canadian militia and Native American allies, are driven off. They withdraw to Brownstown, 20 miles to the north.

January 22, 1813 Humiliation of Defeat

Fresh-won Frenchtown seems a paradise after five months on the march north. Imagine: apples, cider, butter, sugar, and whiskey. On January 20, General Winchester arrives with 300 more men, including the 17th US infantry. He finds undisciplined militia difficult to control and unprepared to defend the settlement enclosed by livestock fence on three sides on the river's north bank.

Winchester has his Army regulars camp 300 yards east, apart from the militia in town. He and his staff use a house across the river. He takes the guest room with fireplace. In case of attack, Winchester's quarters and the regulars' camp are too far from their militia. Even worse, the general twice ignores intelligence of a coming attack. Another officer also ignores a third report. No ammunition has been distributed. No pickets have been posted on the roads.

On January 22, before dawn a British force of 1,200—half Native Americans—are outside Frenchtown. They lose total surprise only by pausing to place artillery. A Kentuckian sees them, and a British

soldier is shot dead. The British now lose more time firing at the livestock fence whose split logs, in the dark, look like formed-up troops. Meanwhile, Upper Canada militia and native allies cut through the American regulars, who flee across the frozen river.

The noise wakes Winchester. On a horse from his host's barn he tries to rally retreating men panicked to find Native Americans on three sides—100 Americans have already been killed. Winchester again fails to rally his men—now a mile south of Frenchtown. A lull ensues as the British wait for native allies who were chasing fleeing Americans. Winchester is captured and quickly agrees to surrender his entire force even though some men beg their officers to let them fight on.

Only 33 men escape death or capture. One private sheds his shoes so his footprints mimic moccasins; he will tell Harrison of the humiliation. Victory at Frenchtown has turned into utter defeat.



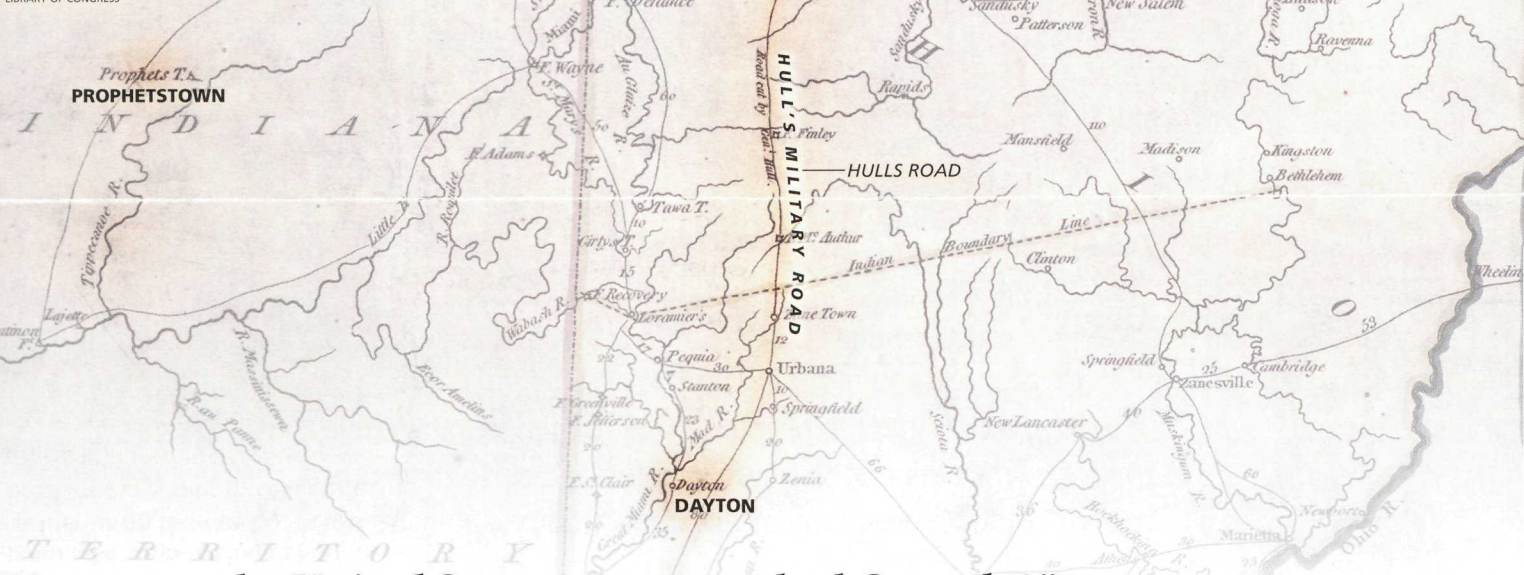
BATTLES OF FRENCHTOWN Reenactors are dressed more warmly than most original American combatants were, who left home in summer clothes. They had expected a quick victory—and glory.

© DANIEL BARRIBALL

War in the Old Northwest

THE SEAT OF WAR This 1812 British map shows the “Old Northwest.” It places the Ohio-Michigan boundary farther north than today’s maps do because the angles of Lakes Erie (right) and Michigan (above) were not represented correctly.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



“You mean the United States once attacked Canada?”

More than once. Far more of America’s forgotten war took place in the Old Northwest and on the Niagara Peninsula than elsewhere and with especially heavy casualties. The peninsula is part of today’s southern Ontario, Canada, north of Lake Erie and south of Lake Ontario. In 1812 and early 1813, the United



KENTUCKY BATTLE FLAG

States pursued a land war here because British ships ruled Lake Erie to supply their troops, militia, and native allies. In the campaigning in the Old Northwest, Kentuckians suffered casualties way out of proportion to combatants from other states.

Defeat of US Forces on January 22 Leads to Horror on January 23

US losses on January 22 are 387 Americans killed and 500 taken prisoner. Only 33 escape death or capture. Harrison’s plans lie in wreckage. To retake Detroit is now impossible for the Americans, and gone for now is any dream of glory from a decisive defeat of the British in North America. Harrison opts not to pursue the now-weakened British force and withdraws. American morale will tank, but General Winchester will bear the blame. What Harrison does not know, however, is that the carnage at the River Raisin is not yet at an end.

The next day, January 23, after sunrise, the killing and scalping of Americans resumes. Native Americans take revenge for Harrison’s depredations on their people, homes, and crops. They kill 30 to 60 American wounded prisoners. When Frenchtown residents at last emerge from their homes, they see groups of hogs, well fed on corpses, carrying arms, legs, torsos, and skulls in their jaws. When Harrison leads a new campaign north later in 1813, its rallying cry will be: Remember the Raisin! The war is now bloody and ugly. Peace dangles out of sight at the end of what will turn out to be two more years of struggle.

The War of 1812 may have started at the November 7, 1811, Battle of Tippecanoe, Prophetstown, IN (*map above*). Harrison narrowly defeated a Shawnee force led by their mystical leader The Prophet. The Prophet’s brother Tecumseh was the architect of the Native American confederation fighting with the British on the promise of carving a Native American nation out of the Old Northwest.

Harrison seeks to crush Native American resistance. In his mind that is a major objective of the War of 1812. On the march north toward Canada, he sends cavalry to destroy Indian villages and crops within 60 miles of the line of march. In the White House, President James Madison frets that Harrison, a frontier governor who fears the British-and-native alliance, prefers fighting Native Americans to fighting the British. In fact, Harrison’s depredations will drive 800 warriors north as allies of the British. After Frenchtown, US strategy in the West shifts from a land war to a naval war for control of Lake Erie, to cut the British supply line to the Old Northwest. That task on Lake Erie falls to Master Commandant Oliver Hazard Perry, who builds a squadron that will defeat the British on the lake on September 10, 1813.

Timeline to War

- 1794** Battle of Fallen Timbers and British and Native allies building of Fort Miamis sets stage for War of 1812
- 1806** Britain blockades France and seizes 1,000 US ships in Napoleonic War
- 1811** Battle of Tippecanoe, at Shawnee Prophetstown, IN
- 1812** US Declares war on Britain on June 18; US strategy: land war in the West; British defeat three US attempts to invade Upper Canada
- General Hull surrenders Detroit and Michigan Territory, Aug. 16
- 1813** Battles of Frenchtown, Jan. 18 and 22, and killing of US prisoners of war on Jan. 23
- US strategy shifts: naval war in the West to cut British supply line
- US Adm. Perry defeats British fleet on Lake Erie, Sept. 10
- US defeats British and Native allies in Battle of Thames; Tecumseh



KENTUCKY MILITIA REENACTOR

- 1814** killed, Oct. 5. Indian confederation dissolves
- Peace negotiations begin at Ghent, Belgium, Aug. 8
- British take Washington, DC; burn Capitol and White House, Aug. 24
- US routs British force in naval Battle of Plattsburgh, NY, on Lake Champlain, Sept. 11
- “The Star-Spangled Banner” lyrics composed off Fort McHenry, Baltimore, MD, Sept. 14
- Peace Treaty of Ghent signed Dec. 24 in Belgium
- 1815** US defeats British forces at Battle of New Orleans, Jan. 8
- Treaty of Ghent ratified, war with the British ends, Feb. 17
- Treaty of Springwells, Sept. 8, ends war between US and the Native Americans, who were left out of the Treaty of Ghent

Plan Your Visit

The park is in Monroe, MI, 35 miles south of Detroit and 270 miles east of Chicago. Two battles here and then the killing and ransom of American prisoners galvanized the nation in the War of 1812. Contact the park or our website for visitor center hours. The visitor center has exhibits, wall maps, a fiber-optic map show, original military items, life-like figures of combatants, and guides to park trails (*map at right*).

Protect the Park and Yourself Motorists: use designated parking areas only and stay on roadways. • Metal detectors and relic hunting are prohibited. • Pets on leash—at all times—are allowed in the park and on hiking trails. • Do not climb on the cannon or on the monuments.

Accessibility We strive to make our facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. For information go to the visitor center, ask a ranger, call, or check our website.

Firearms For firearms regulations please check our website or ask a ranger.

More Information River Raisin National Battlefield Park 1403 East Elm Avenue, Monroe, MI 48162 723-243-7136 www.nps.gov/rira

River Raisin is one of over 400 parks in the National Park System. To learn more about national parks and National Park Service programs in America’s communities, visit www.nps.gov.



©GPO:2013--378-769/30115 Printed on recycled paper.

RIVER RAISIN at its mouth as it flows into Lake Erie.

© GEORGE J VALENTA