

would not do until October because of the fever season. Codrington tried to hold him to this line of reasoning, but after the interview with Ross, Cochrane for some reason switched back to the bay. The most credible explanation for his about-face is Cockburn's success in marauding in spite of chills and fever. In any case the expedition cleared Bermuda on 3 August, and sighted Cape Charles on the fourteenth. It then sailed into Chesapeake Bay with 20 warships and several transports. The troops expected Ross to lead them Wellington-style, and there was temporary consternation when a senior, Major General Gerard Gosselin, appeared, but his orders were for Canada and he soon departed.¹¹

Admiral Cockburn sought and received permission to accompany the land force, and as he knew the territory well, Cochrane asked him what was the best point of debarkation. Since Washington was always Cockburn's objective, he unhesitatingly recommended Benedict on the Patuxent, 45 miles from the capital on a good road. At that village there would be scant danger from Fort Washington on the Potomac, there would be quiet water for anchorage, quarters for troops, plenty of horses, and forage for the army. Within 48 hours after occupying Benedict, Cockburn claimed, Washington could be taken almost without opposition. In addition, there were roads leading to both Annapolis and Baltimore, and guides were available to conduct them anywhere in the area. Admiral Cochrane followed Cockburn's advice.¹²

Three days' rations—three pounds of pork and seven and one-half pounds of bread—were cooked on board and issued to each man. By 3:00 P.M. Saturday 20 August around 4,500 men were established in a strong position two miles above the village of Benedict. The inhabitants had deserted the place. Horses were not as abundant as Cockburn had claimed, and when the column moved out at dawn on 21 August none but general officers and their staffs rode. Only one 6-pounder and two 3-pounders were with the force. The column was well screened by flankers, and a flotilla of boats kept abreast of its right flank. At the head were Ross and Cockburn. (Admiral Cochrane had remained with the fleet.) The column halted at Nottingham when evening came, having covered 20 miles without hostile incident. Many of the men had fallen out, though, weakened by the sea voyage and debilitated by the high humidity and a temperature close to 90 degrees.¹³

Next morning, Monday, 22 August, the march was under way at seven o'clock, but Ross halted it at Upper Marlboro to thrash out with Cockburn which route to take. In the distance they heard the explo-

sions as Commodore Barney blew up his barges. Cockburn continued to argue for Washington, and Ross at length agreed. One route toward that city led to the banks of the eastern branch of the Potomac where two bridges spanned the river. The commanders ruled this out as being too heavily defended and too dependent upon the two bridges. At Old Fields they could continue northwest, instead of turning west, and reach Bladensburg. This route was eight miles the longer, but at Bladensburg they could ford the eastern branch of the Potomac. Ross and Cockburn selected this course in the hope of achieving surprise. Their debate, and subsequent preparations, had delayed the march from mid-day 22 August to 4:00 P.M. 23 August. The advance started so late in the day was to continue into the night in order to put the troops into position in the morning. The marines stayed at Upper Marlboro to make it a stronghold to retire upon, if there should be a failure.¹⁴

The troops were resting at two o'clock on the morning of 24 August when a courier on a lathered horse found General Ross at Admiral Cockburn at "Melwood," the Digges estate. The messenger carried an order from Admiral Cochrane to return to Benedict and re-embark. Ross said it left no room for discretion, but Cockburn insisted that they were past the point of return. The two walked and talked, and the staff at a distance could hear Cockburn arguing for continuing the advance. At dawn they saw Ross strike his forehead and announce, "Well, we will proceed." The march now resumed on the direct route to Washington, and its direction convinced the United States officers guarding the eastern approaches to the city that they must resort to extremes. Accordingly, between eight and eight-thirty on the morning of 24 August Captain John O. Creighton of the navy destroyed the bridges east of Washington. At about the same time, the British column reached the crossroads at Old Fields and swung onto the road which ran northwest into Bladensburg.

At the time the British landed, General Winder had controlled about 1,700 troops. He at once issued an alarm call to Pennsylvania for a regiment and summoned en masse the militia of Baltimore and two counties of Maryland. He published notices in newspapers urging companies and individuals to hurry to Bladensburg without delay, not waiting for the usual militia processes to work themselves out. When the *National Intelligencer* printed the general's order, it added, "We feel assured that the number and bravery of our men will afford complete protection to the city." Similar confidence in numbers without cohesion and in bravery became the military policy of the United States in future years, and was to be the cause of many disasters.¹⁵