

black gaiters, white cross-belts, and heavy leather helmets topped with two sweeping plumes, one red and one black. The streets of Baltimore were lined with spectators, shouting, waving handkerchiefs, and crying. The spirits of Private John Pendleton Kennedy soared. The eighteen-year-old volunteer and his friends had their stores in a wagon, and they hired a Negro camp follower to cook for them. Even if the second day out was too hot for their winter uniforms and leather helmets, even if most of the boys were heavily encumbered with overcoat, blanket, three shirts, stockings, underwear, and in Kennedy's case a pair of dancing pumps, still the march was a lark to them. That night, when they joined Stansbury, they had a sumptuous meal of ham and chicken, and then lighted cigars and lay chatting around the fire. Hardly had they gotten to sleep when they were up again, forming for an attack. Since they had to throw on their vivid uniforms in the darkness, Kennedy put on his dancing pumps and had no chance to change. Near dawn they were permitted to lie down in the field beside the road, but in a short while were marching back the way they had come. All their marching and countermarching during the night resulted from false alarms, but it tired the men out just the same.²⁰

When the Annapolis militia pitched camp Tuesday night, they soon found that they were within half a mile of the British pickets. This discovery caused a disorderly removal in which tents were rolled up so loosely that they would not fit into the wagons and a few of them had to be left behind. The men were ordered to keep their guns loaded, whereupon one of them shot a companion in the thigh and another killed a horse. Seeing their lives imperiled by their own companions, two men deserted.²¹

Even as the British made their final march upon Bladensburg, Winder's troops were not concentrated, yet 6,000 American men, more or less, were within 30 miles of Washington, supposedly ready to fight. They were opposed by 1,500 British soldiers, unquestionably ready to fight and tightly concentrated, whose way into the hostile land had thus far been shockingly free of opposition.

About 10:00 A.M. 24 August word came to Winder that the enemy was indeed marching toward Bladensburg. Winder was just then in the vicinity of the Navy Yard at Washington, conferring with the President and other officials. He started the troops off and himself galloped toward Bladensburg. The President and the cabinet also took the Bladensburg road, with Monroe loping along far ahead of the others, including General Winder.²²

At Bladensburg, General Stansbury was arranging his tired men quite effectively. The two companies of Baltimore artillery were

placed in an imperfect barbette close to the river. Unfortunately the cannon, which ought to have been able to sweep the bridge from end to end, could only shoot obliquely across it. Five companies of rifle were stationed along the bank to the left of the cannon, and in an orchard some distance back of them stood the main force. The river protected the center and left, thick woods and a deep ravine the right. The road to Washington ran through their position up a gentle slope a mile and a quarter to its summit.²³

About this time the militia from Annapolis under Colonel William Beall came in on the double, just barely ahead of the British. They passed through Stansbury's lines and took position at the top of the slope.

Monroe outdistanced the other officers of the government and reached Stansbury's position about eleven-thirty. Without consulting the general, he began to rearrange the troops. When he had finished the Baltimore artillery and their cover of rifle men were left to face the first assault by themselves. The nearest troops were 500 yards behind, so situated that the orchard no longer protected them, nor could they observe the action on the bank of the river.²⁴

The Baltimore artillery and the rifle men had already begun to fire when the first reinforcements reached the field from Washington. General Walter Smith of the District militia disposed his men on the same ridge with Beall's Marylanders, and laid six cannon to fire across the pike. Presently Commodore Joshua Barney arrived on the double with 500 sailors and marines and took a position between Smith and Beall, blocking the Washington Pike with his five big naval guns. The American force was now all on the field, arranged in three lines. Down by the river was the Baltimore artillery and its support of rifle men. The second line consisted of General Stansbury's three regiments and the third line of Colonel Beall's and Joshua Barney's units. None of the lines was in a position to support any other line; indeed, the first two did not know that the third was behind them. Even the lieutenant of Maryland cavalry, looking over the field from the top of the hill, the American army seemed dangerously scattered. George Gleig, a subaltern with the British army who was nearing the scene from the bottom of the slope, later wrote, "They seemed count people, who would have been much more appropriately employed in attending to their agricultural occupations than in standing with muskets in their hands on the brow of a bare green hill."

The British brigades held tightly together internally in their approach to Bladensburg, but a distance of about a mile opened between them. Not choosing to rest the tired men, Ross threw the