

against the American position. The light brigade in the lead crossed the bridge and advanced straight down the road, but the militia artillery drove them back to the shelter of the willows on the west bank where they huddled to wait for support. In a few minutes the second brigade arrived, crossed, and turned to its right, where very shortly it got upon the end of the militia line and forced a retreat. This exposed the left flank of the American second line. General Winder now ordered the Fifth Maryland Regiment, which occupied the center of the second line, to hold at all cost while he tried to rally the collapsing left. A council of Maryland officers decided that his order, as they were outnumbered five to one, doomed them to certain destruction. They ordered a retreat.

In spite of the fact that the first line did not re-form on it, the second held for a time. But when the Fifth Maryland began to draw back, disorder quickly set in. The British Congreve rockets abetted it. They shrieked in flight, and the citizen soldiers had no way of knowing that they really did very little harm. When it is recalled that these rockets unnerved French veterans, the reaction of the American irregulars is not surprising. The officers yelled and exerted themselves to stop the rout, and Stansbury's swearing could be heard above the din of battle. To no avail.

When the attackers struck the third line they found themselves for the first time in serious trouble. Commodore Barney's guns tore them up, and at the same time the militia on the flanks poured in on them an effective fire. It was Winder himself who caused the dislocation of the third line, for on some account he ordered the militia there to retire while they were still fighting firmly. Not well enough trained to retreat in good order, before long they broke ranks and fled. Only the sailors and marines kept the field until overrun.

Before rout had set in, General Winder ordered the Maryland cavalry on top of the slope to charge. This was an unusual order to give green horsemen, and the cavalry commander protested that his men and horses had not had the training to gallop headlong into enemy fire. In the end there was no mounted charge; indeed when the wave of the advancing foe reached the top of the crest, some cavalrymen began to slip away into the woods, and in spite of the bawling of their officers, the rest could not seem to form into any sort of defensive line. They, too, were soon a part of the disorganized retreat.

Thus, by 4:00 P.M. the notorious Battle of Bladensburg came to an end. While it lasted American fire had been very effective, killing 64 and wounding 185 of the enemy, against an American loss of only 71.

The British detachment rested two hours and then began the seven-mile march to Washington. The third brigade, which had not been in the fight, passed through the other two, and took the van with General Ross, Admiral Cockburn, and their aides. Although it was dark when they reached the town, Ross and Cockburn were conspicuous because of their white horses and lace hats. When they were close to Albert Gallatin's house, a body of 300 Americans opened fire on them and killed Ross' horse. This detachment was soon dispersed and two of the buildings set on fire.

Flames now sprang up in every quarter. All of the public buildings were fired, and a few private ones. Commodore Thomas Tingey, commandant of the Washington Navy Yard, followed standing orders from the secretary of the navy and blew up the yard on the eastern branch of the Potomac. The flames from it flared high into the darkness. George Gleig said of the sight, "Except for the burning of St. Sebastian's I do not recollect to have witnessed a scene more striking or more sublime." Admiral Cockburn seemed also to enjoy the spectacle. Still conspicuous on his white horse, followed by a black colt, he made ironic inquiries for the President and joked heavily with the people standing about. He personally supervised the wrecking of the office of the *National Intelligencer*, and told his workers to "destroy all C's so they can't abuse my name." Certain officers entered the White House before it was ignited and ate a meal set on the table for the President. Commander James Scott traded his dirty shirt for a clean one found there.²⁵

Americans lost no time in denouncing the burning of their capital. *Niles' Register* pointed out that Napoleon himself had never stooped so low, although he had entered many an enemy capital. The paper claimed that in protest against the burning none of the foreign ministers would come to a grand banquet given in Vienna by the Duke of Wellington. Even British periodicals became critical of the incident. The *Annual Register* excoriated the British commanders as "More suitable to the times of barbarism. If there is such a thing as humanized war, its principle must consist in inflicting no other evils upon the enemy than are necessary to promote the success of warlike operations." But General Ross, reporting directly to Earl Bathurst, made no apology. On the contrary, he listed with pride the stores captured: 206 cannon, 500 barrels of powder, 40 barrels of fine-grain powder, and 100,000 musket cartridges.²⁶

Depredations continued throughout 25 August, but during the afternoon a violent storm put out the fires. If there was any discussion between Ross and Cockburn as to what they should do next, it is not of