

protect the rear of Fort Mifflin, which was highly vulnerable to attack from the rear. In addition to these there was a small flotilla of gunboats and floating batteries, commanded by Commodore John Hazelwood. The flotilla belonged to the State of Pennsylvania, and Hazelwood took his orders from the state and Congress. This ultimately proved unfortunate, because the commanders of Forts Mifflin and Mercer often did not receive the cooperation from Hazelwood that they required.

In late September, a twenty-five year-old Marylander, Lt. Col. Samuel Smith, had been summoned to Washington's headquarters. Smith was handed orders placing him in charge of Fort Mifflin. Shocked at the enormous responsibility the commander in chief had just delegated to him, Smith nonetheless hastened to the fort. Smith was appalled at what he saw: only ditches, a palisade, and wooden blockhouses protected the bastion from the land side, and the fort was so extensive that it required at least 800 soldiers to man the lines and Smith had only 300. Furthermore, by the best intelligence available, Smith had less than two weeks to prepare the fort for the onslaught by the British men-of-war that were making their way from the Chesapeake Bay to the Delaware River. On October 22, the British, under the command of Col. Carl von Donlop, made an unsuccessful land assault on Fort Mercer sustaining severe losses, including that of Donlop who received a mortal wound. The next day Smith discovered that two ships engaged in the attack on Fort Mercer had run aground. Under his directions, the cannon of Fort Mifflin destroyed the sixty-four-gun Augusta, which exploded, and the eighteen-gun frigate Merlin, which burned. The events of October 22-23 so encouraged General Washington that he believed there was a realistic chance of retaining control of the river until winter would make the channel impassible. His report to Congress was so complimentary of the commanders of Forts Mercer and Mifflin, that each was ordered on November 4 to receive an "elegant sword" in appreciation for their gallantry.

Smith, however, was far from optimistic that his fort could be saved. Above the fort separated from Mud Island by a channel less than 500 yards wide were two small islands. By November 10 the British had succeeded in erecting four batteries of large guns on these islands. On November 11 Smith began a letter to General Washington:

This Morning the Enemy open'd their Battery in the Rear of our N. West Block House about 500 yds. dist. from it of 6 pieces of Cannon & one Howitz & another Howitz opposite the Right of our Battery. They were so fortunate to strike one of our 18 pounders in the two Gun Battery on the Mussle by which she is render'd unfit for service. Their Shot from the Battery rakes the Pallisades fronting the Meadow & cuts down 4 or 5 at a time.

Smith predicted that "in 5 or 6 days (unless the siege can be raised) the fort will be laid open & everything destroy'd." Smith then informed