

As you will recall, British troops, greatly outnumbering our own, met and routed our forces at Bladensburg and then went on to burn and sack our new capital city on the banks of the Potomac. The only nest of resistance that remained was Baltimore, haven of the "clippers" which slipped in and out of Baltimore harbor to roam the high seas and harass British shipping wherever they found it. If Baltimore could be conquered, then the war for the British would be won.

To us in Maryland, of course, Sam Smith is a great hero. I have often thought in the recorded history of our country he is not given the credit that is due him. In the history books, the hero of the War of 1812 was Andrew Jackson, with his brilliant victory at New Orleans. But that battle was fought after the British had fled and the war had been won.

General Smith had been made Commander-in-Chief of all the American forces in Baltimore and his task was to delay the British land forces until the city's defenses could be completed and manned. On September 12, 1814, the British troops, having landed at North Point, encountered the Americans under the command of General Smith. A heavy engagement ensued, in which the British commander, Major General Ross, who had vowed he would "sup in hell or Baltimore tonight", lost his life. The enemy, after a sharp battle, decided that the strong earthworks put up by the city and the valiant defense offered by its citizens, were too strong to crack, and so they decided to retire and attempt to penetrate the defenses elsewhere. As subsequent events proved, this action of Sam Smith was a decisive factor in the war. His fight at North Point changed the British aim from reconquest of the former colonies to retreat and quest for peace.

After their defeat at North Point, the British decided on a naval attack upon this fort. They struck with sixteen warships, pouring bombs, rockets and shells into the fortification, while 1,200 British seamen attempted a landing through Ferry Branch in the back of the fort. In all of our illustrious history, there is no incident more dramatic, more moving, more poetical than that which occurred the next day. Francis Scott Key, restrained on a British ship lying off here, had listened to the roar of the battle through the night, uncertain of the fate of the men who were defending his city. Through the dim light of dawn, he described the banner of stars and stripes still flying over the fort and he knew that the victory had been won. The poem he wrote, as we know, became our national anthem.

Sam Smith at North Point, then, and the troops that garrisoned