Chapter 1

OVERVIEW: THE BATTLES FOR NEW ORLEANS

Background . . .

The Battle of New Orleans was not an isolated event but part of a far broader plan of imperial conquest.

The War of 1812 marked the United States' baptism into the world community . . . its bloody "right of passage"! This was the first "world war" that America would fight since becoming an independent nation. It began much the same as World War I and World War II. Attempts by America to maintain neutral trade with belligerent European nations at war drew her into an unwanted conflict.

The French Revolutionary Wars and the later Napoleonic Wars dominated the late 18th and early 19th centuries. They raged for 23 years. In 1812, England and France both sought to draw America to its side, while simultaneously attempting to inhibit American trade with the other. This created a confused and dangerous situation for America. The newly created United States could not afford a war, especially one against a major European power.

Once Napoleon Bonaparte became First Consul the war changed character. A military and foreign policy genius now commanded French forces. His aggressive military strategy resulted in victory and thoughts of invading Great Britain itself.

After its naval victory at Trafalgar, Britain enjoyed safety from the threat of invasion and secured uncontested control over the seas. That done, the British navy sought to strangle France by cutting off all trade with the outside world. The Admiralty ordered a naval blockade on continental Europe. A component of this tactic required intercepting neutral shipping destined for the continent.

Britain's Continental Blockade required a large, well-manned navy. Britain could build ships, but it lacked experienced seamen to man those vessels. Prior to the Napoleonic Wars, the British navy employed 10,000 sailors. By 1812 that number had increased to 140,000. The vast majority of this increase came from impressments, forcibly placing men into service. Lord Nelson stated that much of the losses stemmed from 40,000 desertions due in large measure to the brutality of life on British ship.

The King George III issued the first Orders in Council in 1807. Several refinements were later added. This permitted his navy to restrict American commercial shipping. In addition, the Royal Navy began to stop and board American ships at sea and to "impress" American sailors into Royal Service to gain the needed seamen. Many soon resorted to the futile effort of carrying official papers attesting to their American citizenship believing this would protect them from such an outrage. It did not. Americans equated these forced "impressments" to kidnapping American citizens. Tensions between the two nations rose to a fever pitch.

France, for its part, sought to seize American merchant ships in continental harbors thereby preventing them from trading with England. Since Napoleon's Continental System closed all ports to British trade, any ships coming into Europe were suspect and seized for fear they may embark for Britain.

Thus, American interests came into conflict with those of both England and France on the high seas. For most Americans, however, England's actions were more immediate and insulting. The kidnapping of American citizens at sea was viewed as a direct assault on the sovereignty of the United States. America was divided between two contending war parties, but England's actions fostered greater anger in some sectors of the United States than those of France.

Since the founding of the United States, a succession of presidents from George Washington to Thomas Jefferson sought to prevent a war that would destroy the new nation. But anger was growing.

Napoleon eliminated some tensions by ending France's "Quasi War" against the United States. He saw nothing to be gained by it. He won further approval after engineering the Louisiana Purchase

in 1803. The south and west leaned toward France. New England merchants, in contrast, supported England.

Thus, America was divided over the issue of war or peace. Indeed, as the situation festered, some wanted war with France (Federalists), while others demanded a show of force against Great Britain (Anti-Federalists). The American/British controversy at sea weighted the controversy in favor of the Anti-Federalists who soon forced these two nations to war.[16]

During the 1810 mid-term elections voters elected a group of anti-British "War Hawks" to Congress. In reaction to the persistent expansion of England's Orders in Council, this new Congress declared war on Great Britain with President James Madison's approval on June 18, 1812. Interesting to note, modern communications might have prevented this war because Great Britain had suspended the offending documents just two days before . . . on June 16, 1812.

American military efforts at first proved worthwhile. When the war began, the United States aggressively moved against English interests in the new world. The Hawks believed that Canada would willingly join with the United States . . . it did not!

Throughout 1813 American victories on land and British victories at sea demonstrated the capacities of these two nations to inflict pain on one another. Soon, the tide would turn against America. Following his ill-advised invasion of Russia, Napoleon suffered a major defeat on October 16-19 of 1813 at the Battle of Leipzig, as well as severe reverses in Spain inflicted by the Duke of Wellington. A militarily humbled Napoleon retreated to France. On March 31, 1814 the allies entered Paris. On April 11th, the emperor admitted defeat. On April 14th he abdicated and sulked into exile on the diminutive island of Elba nestled between Italy and Corsica.

This served Great Britain's cause against America well. It freed Britain's hands. With pressure off of the European theater, England now shuttled more men and material against the United States. By 1814, the British were clearly on the offensive.[17]

Many highly trained and battle-groomed troops who had been pinned down fighting in Europe were suddenly crossing the Atlantic for action in America. By September 1814, 13,000 veteran soldiers were in Canada. By year's end nearly 40,000 seasoned troops had been transported to the new world.[18]

A part of Great Britain's overall plan was the taking of Washington D.C., the seizing of eastern seaports, and the protection of Canada. On a more ambitious note, the British also envisioned a campaign to the

Gulf of Mexico that included taking New Orleans and occupying the mouth of the Mississippi River . . . a powerful strategic move!

The British occupied and burned Washington. They attempted, but failed to take Baltimore. They then launched their invasion plans for New Orleans.

These aggressive and effective military actions aggravated already seething partisan tensions in the United States. These divisions would persist even to the point of nearly severing the union when the Hartford Convention met in Connecticut on December 1814 to January 1815. New England's opposition to the war had reached a fever pitch and secession was openly discussed. Only Jackson's victory in the Battle of New Orleans rendered this convention's deliberations void of meaning and sent the delegates packing home in embarrassment.

The stage was set for Great Britain's massive invasion of the Gulf of Mexico with its ultimate destination being the city of New Orleans. But who would lead this expedition, since the intended commander was gone?

General Sir Edward Pakenham . .

Major-General Sir Edward Pakenham

To achieve the goal of conquering the gulf coast of North America, Great Britain ordered a massive expeditionary force into the Gulf of Mexico. Initially, the British ordered General Robert Ross to command the invasion. However, snipers killed him during the engagement at Baltimore. Seeking a replacement, London ordered Major General Sir Edward Pakenham to take command. Who was this Pakenham?

General Pakenham, brother-in-law of the Duke of Wellington, served with Wellington as a staff officer during the Peninsular Campaign in Spain against Napoleon. Wellington's star would rise higher after he defeated a returned Napoleon at the Battle of Waterloo in (1815). However, while Napoleon lay in exile on the island of Elba, a lull befell military activity on the European continent. During this brief calm, Wellington was offered command of the Gulf expedition. He refused. In his stead, General Sir Edward Pakenham was ordered to Jamaica to command the assembled fleet, train the invasion force, and bring its combined might to bear against New Orleans. In the words of Wellington: "*He is not the greatest genius, but one of the best we have.*"[19]

Pakenham was fully versed in Wellington's strategies: importance of supply, good positioning, strong lines of communication, military intelligence, heavy artillery, extended lines of attack, lightening surprise marches, and attacks on the enemy's position.[20] Unfortunately, the circumstances on the fields of Chalmette precluded the application of many of these hard learned tenets of warfare.

Pakenham began his military career in 1794 when he joined the army at age sixteen. On May 28, 1794, he assumed the office of Lieutenant in the 92nd Foot, an Irish Regiment. Three days later he was appointed Captain. On December 6th, he was elevated to Major of the 33rd Ulster Dragoons. This last assignment would give him experience in new world campaigning . . . "*There is no mystery about his rapid promotion. In each case the entry reads 'by purchase'.*" Buying one's office was common in the British army, but money was not the whole of it, his family enjoyed good connections.[21]

On February 7, 1801, Pakenham sailed for North America for the first time. By mid-summer he was, "*peacefully installed on the Danish Island of St. Croix and supremely happy.*"[22] He spent the next several years living a tranquil tropical life in the islands: Barbados and St. Kitts. All would change due to the collapse of the Peace of Amiens on May 18, 1803 and the resumption of war with France.[23]

On June 20th, Pakenham sailed for the French island of St. Lucia. His British forces reduced the French fort there after a ninety minute siege. The British 64th had endured the brunt of the battle and suffered 138 casualties in this conflict, including Edward Pakenham. He

sustained a severe neck wound which gave his head a pronounced tilt once healed. Pakenham was fortunate to be nursed by a French woman who he had chivalrously protected from British abuse in an earlier engagement. Pakenham returned home to mend after three years in the field.[24]

Pakenham sustained a second neck wound on February 1, 1809 while leading an assault on a French camp. *"The shot passed from the right to the left shoulder, quite at the lower part of the neck, what a comical neck"* he wrote home to his mother. He once again returned to London in August of 1809 to heal. Curiously, the first injury that caused his head to have a decided slant due to muscle injury had been corrected by the second wound. Following his recovery, he was sent to Spain to join his brother-in-law, the Duke of Wellington, in the Peninsula Campaign.[25]

The battles in Europe raged until Napoleon's defeat after his misguided invasion of Russia. This resulted in his abdication on April 14, 1814. British attention could now be directed against the United States. The British lion was about to teach this upstart nation a lesson in respect. In the words of now Adjutant-General Pakenham; *"It appears from Madison's speech that we are not to expect peace with America; that fellow and his adherents are sad enemies of ours and are not to be brought to terms but by blows."*[26]

An unfortunate turn of events would alter the course of Pakenham's life. In the American theater of operations, the British were beginning to make effective use of combined naval and land forces. While attempting to take Baltimore, General Robert Ross, a gifted and experienced commander, was cut down by American sniper fire. He was Admiral Sir Alexander Cochrane's first choice for command of land forces in the Gulf of Mexico. His passing created a void. The British needed a new commander. The gauntlet fell to Sir Edward Pakenham. In October 1814, he was ordered once again across the Atlantic, this time to Jamaica to take command to a newly formed expeditionary force.[27] General Sir Edward Pakenham was about to enter the pages of American history.

In a letter to his mother, Edward freely expressed his feelings about this new deployment: *"It was my expectation when I left you to have returned to our little party at the Lodge. Public Events have otherwise determined my private moments. The Affairs in America have gone ill. Staff officers have become necessary, and I have been called on by the Ministers to proceed to the other side of the Atlantic. I confess to you that there is nothing that makes this employment desirable."*[28]

Pakenham's doubts about this expedition were well founded. It was driven by the greed of Admiral Cochrane who had an eye on the

vast treasure of cotton, sugar and other goods trapped in New Orleans. Some estimated its value at £3-4 million pounds sterling. On the day before he sailed, Pakenham was quoted as saying that he *". . . much doubted the policy of the expedition or the correctness of the information upon which the government had decided to make an attempt on that place."*[29] But orders were orders, and he was not given to question the wisdom of his superiors.

What is particularly sad was Pakenham's premonition when speaking with his friend George Napier just prior to his departure. When advised to take care he responded: *"I promise that I will not unnecessarily expose myself to the fire of the enemy, but you are too old and good a soldier not to be aware that a case might arise in which the Commander-in-Chief may find it absolutely necessary to place himself at the head of his troops in the hottest fire and by his own personal conduct encourage them to victory. If this happens,* ***I must not flinch, though death be my lot.*** *[Emphasis added]"*[30] Little did he know how true these words would be as he sailed from Portsmouth November 1, 1814 in the frigate *Statira.*

While on board, Edward Pakenham with his staff officers Gibbs, Burgoyne, Dickson, and Robb carefully studied his collection of maps. The voyage was slow and Pakenham soon realized that the main force under Admiral Cochrane and General Keane was far ahead. When he arrived in Jamaica, Pakenham discovered that an impatient Admiral Cochrane had not waited for him but had already disembarked the main force leaving only General Lambert and the reserves behind. A concerned Pakenham reflected: *". . . as he is sixteen days ahead of us, I fear we shall not arrive in time to partake of the operation."* Such was the confidence of Great Britain in victory. [31]

On December 22nd, *Statira* arrived at the mouth of the Mississippi River. The general then learned that Admiral Cochrane had anchored near Ship Island and had begun the process of landing troops. Lieutenant Alexander Dickson noted that: *"Sir Edward Pakenham was much annoyed at the delay."*[32] Pakenham could not have known that as he sailed to Cochrane's anchorage, shots had already been fired. Furthermore, as a land general he would not have the luxury of picking his field of battle. He would be forced to make due with a theater of operations selected by an Admiral.

On Christmas Day 1814, General Sir Edward Pakenham rushed onto the battlefield . . . to meet his opponent and his destiny.

Major General Andrew Jackson

Andrew Jackson's ancestors originally hailed from Scotland. But for five generations the family had lived in Carrickfergus near Belfast, Ireland. His grandfather was a weaver. In April of 1765, the future general's twenty-seven year old father, Andrew, his wife, Elizabeth, and their two sons (Hugh, two years old, and Robert six months old) left north Ireland. With several other families, they sailed across the Atlantic Ocean for the American colonies.[33]

Andrew and Elizabeth left Ireland because, being tenant farmers, the Jacksons had little hope of ever improving their condition in life or that of their young children. America promised new opportunities.

After two months at sea, the Jackson family arrived in Philadelphia. From there they traveled to North Carolina meeting with Elizabeth's sister, Jane. She was the wife of James Crawford, a local landowner and successful farmer. They settled on neighboring land in the same Waxhaw region.

Having found a suitable location, young Andrew built a house and started homesteading with his family. Tragically, within two years he fell ill. He soon died at the age of twenty-nine leaving a pregnant wife to care for the young family.

A desperate Elizabeth moved in with her sister Jane. On March 15, 1767, she gave birth to a third son whom she named after her now deceased husband Andrew.

Young Andrew Jackson was known for his physical ability, short temper, and toughness. He was eight years old when the American Revolution broke out. He was twelve when his older brother Hugh died of heat exhaustion while serving in the militia during the battle of Stono Ferry in 1779. At thirteen, Andrew himself was drawn into the conflict when British troops with their Loyalists allies entered the Waxhaws under the infamous Colonel Banastre Tarleton.

The two younger Jackson sons participated in the Revolutionary effort. As lads, both Roger and Andrew knew the woods well and kept close watch over goings on by the enemy and reported to the rebels. Near Waxhaw settlement, Tarleton's men surprised the continentals and began to butcher them, even the wounded. A civil war broke out in the district and in an ensuing conflict the rebels were bested. The Jackson boys escaped to the Crawford home, only to be betrayed by loyalist neighbors.

In 1781, British troops surrounded the Crawford house, entered it, destroyed the contents, and captured Andrew and Robert Jackson.

While there, one British officer ordered fourteen year old Andrew to "clean his boots." Andrew refused responding that he was a prisoner of war. The Brit unsheathed his saber and took a swipe at Jackson's head. Young Jackson blocked the stroke, but sliced his hand and suffered a gash on his head as a result. He bore the physical and mental scars the rest of his life.

Both boys were taken prisoner and held in horrid conditions until Elizabeth was able to arrange their release through a prisoner swap. Unfortunately, while in confinement, both boys contracted small pox. Upon release, their condition deteriorated. The ride home was brutal and ater gaining the safety of home, both boys illness grew worse. Robert soon died.

Once Andrew recovered, Elizabeth volunteered as a nurse on a British prison ship to care for rebel prisoners; some were relatives. While there she contracted cholera and she too died.

Thus, the American Revolution rendered a very young Andrew Jackson orphaned. He had lost both brothers and his mother during the conflict and held the British accountable for his sorrows.

Jackson's life after that is interesting. He lived a rowdy life of gambling and fighting. He then became a teacher and later an attorney. In that last capacity he left the Carolina's and in 1788 traveled to what would soon be called Tennessee where he became a businessman, public prosecutor, and later a judge.

While seeking lodgings there he meet the love of his life, Rachel Donelson Robards. The story of their love affair is too involved for discussion here. Suffice it to say that it would become the grist of scandal mongers for years after and become the cause of much pleasure and hardship.

In December of 1796, Jackson became a representative to the U.S. Congress from the new state of Tennessee. In that capacity he steadfastly defended the rights of state militias that often were overlooked and abused by Washington politicians. His victory in gaining them full payment for their services would serve him well later.

In 1797, the Tennessee legislature appointed Andrew to the U.S. Senate. Jackson's personality did not lend itself to a slow moving deliberative body. That, coupled with his loneliness for Rachel and his deteriorating financial situation, caused him to resign after serving only one year of a six year term.

On April 1, 1803, at age thirty-six, Andrew Jackson ran for and won, by one vote, the position of Major General of the Tennessee Militia. He ascended to this elective position despite lacking any military experience.

Andrew Jackson's career continued along a path of both business and local public service until 1810. At that time, relations between America and Great Britain had deteriorated to the point of near open warfare. In fact, many frontiersmen grew convinced that British agents from Canada incited and armed Indians in their campaign of terror along the western frontier.

Westerners became aroused over the brutal attacks of a splinter group within the Creek nation called "Red Sticks." The Indians gained this appellation because they allied with the Shawnee leader Tecumseh and his brother "The Prophet" seeking to annihilate all Whites. They painted their tomahawks red as a sign of commitment. The Red Sticks began a campaign of terror throughout the west killing and scalping men, women, and children.

A particularly brutal attack of murder and kidnapping in a local community enraged Jackson. He knew some of the murdered settlers, and in his capacity as Major General of the Militia he sought revenge. After several attempts to negotiate with local loyal Creek Indians for the return of a captured woman, Jackson went public. In an editorial in the *Democratic Clarion* on July 8, 1812 Jackson made his position known. In a call to his fellow westerners he said: *"It may be but a short time before the question is put to you: Are you ready to follow your general to the heart of the Creek Nation?"*

Not wanting to face Jackson, the loyal Creeks took it upon themselves to find the offending Red Sticks, kill them, and return the kidnapped and emotionally traumatized Mrs. Martha Crawley to what remained of her family.

In the meantime, the war with Great Britain festered. Governor Blount notified Jackson that President Madison had sent him some blank commissions for military officers. The governor signed Andrew Jackson's name on one of them. He now officially became Major General of United States Volunteers. In this capacity, he was ordered to collect troops and travel to New Orleans.

Here politics once again entered the fray. Jackson took his men down the Ohio River to Natchez. Suddenly, he was ordered to surrender the troops under his command to General James Wilkinson in New Orleans. Jackson would have none of it. He had brought 2,000 men some 500 miles from home. He would not abandon them. He refused to turn them over and set out to bring them back to the safety of their hearths and homes.

The return trip was brutal, Jackson gave up his horse for infirm soldiers and paid the costs of the return trip himself. During this return trip his men affixed to him the nickname "Old Hickory"

because of his toughness. As a supporter once said about Hickory . . . it is the most difficult wood to work.

After arriving home, Jackson once again found himself involved in a bloody personal conflict. He became party to a dual with the Benton boys. Thomas Hart Benton became angered when Jackson served as a second to Captain William Carroll in a duel with Jessie Benton. Although formerly close friends, Thomas Benton denounced Jackson. Tensions between them erupted into a bloody conflict when both parties met in Nashville. Jackson was shot in the shoulder, suffered a serious wound, almost lost his arm, and was sent to bed for weeks to heal.

During this painful recovery, Jackson learned of a renewed Indian crisis . . . an Indian massacre. He jumped from bed, placed his arm in a sling and took to action: *"The health of your general is restored. He will command in person."*[34]

Jackson responded to the news that a massacre of hundreds white settlers (men, women, and children), Negro slaves, soldiers, and friendly Indians had taken place at Fort Mims, Alabama. The Red Sticks had taken to the war path again, and Jackson prepared to exact vengeance.

These two adversaries, Sir Edward Pakenham and Andrew Jackson, came from totally different backgrounds. One was the son of devoted family and catered privilege; the other orphaned early and born to toil and self-determination. Yet both displayed unbounded honor and courage. Despite their many differences, they soon would meet on a sugar plantation in Chalmette, Louisiana. Everything they had done all of their lives prepared them for this singular event.