

CHAPTER HEADING
SPRING 1813: THE BRITISH INVADE

Narration: For James Madison and his nation, 1812 was a year of debacle and defeat: the utter collapse of the ambitious three-part invasion of Canada. Now 1813 had begun with the massacre of American troops at River Raisin. Even worse, the British navy had begun a strangling blockade along the Eastern seaboard. By the end of March, 1813, the blockade extended from the Delaware Bay to Florida.

Lambert: The American economic system just stops -- trade dries up, money stops moving. The British have just closed down American shipping.

Narration: As the spring of 1813 arrived, British General Henry Procter was marching his army into Ohio. But William Henry Harrison, after the disaster at River Raisin, would be ready for him.

Decroix: He moves part of his army up to the rapids of the, the Maumee River, near modern Toledo, Ohio. He builds what will become Fort Meigs. Meigs is essentially a fortified camp, it's a ten acres, it's a picketed stockade.

Narration: With seven two-story blockhouses, five raised batteries, and sheltering embankments 12 feet high [Sugden 329], Fort Meigs was built to withstand almost any attack. Soon, it would have to.

Decroix: In early May of 1813, the British and Natives under Procter and Tecumseh come to lay siege to the Fort. Up until now the British and the Natives have, have enjoyed an unbroken string of victories in, in the northwest and humiliations to boot. Well, that's not gonna happen at Fort Meigs. Harrison understands frontier warfare and he's not going to be scared into surrendering like his predecessors had been.

Narration: Harrison waited inside the fort, much to Tecumseh's fury. "It is hard to fight people who live like groundhogs," the Shawnee said.

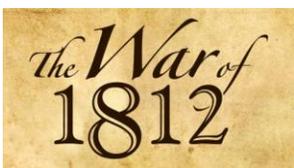
Decroix: About four days into the siege, Harrison receives word that there is a party of reinforcements, Kentuckians, coming down the river. The Kentuckians storm the British batteries. They are cut off and surrounded by the Native force.

Narration: Once more, defeated American soldiers were in the hands of the Native warriors -- as they had been at River Raisin. Once more a massacre begins.

Decroix: It's not the British that put an end to this massacre -- it's Tecumseh. Tecumseh rides in waving his tomahawk, according to the stories, and puts an end to this massacre where the British had stood by and literally done nothing. [Sugden 336, Latimer 138, Langguth 243]

Sugden: He had a sense of honor. He was he was a humane compassionate man. He was a man who, who didn't believe in gratuitous violence. He didn't believe in slaughtering people out, out of any sense of triumph.

Narration: Inside the fort, Harrison and his army were still safe. For over four days the British blasted



away, pounding the fort with cannonballs, to no avail. Procter refused to make a direct assault on the fort. Tecumseh was furious; his warriors would not make war by sitting and waiting. He later said that Procter was "a fat animal, that carries its tail on its back, but when affrighted... drops it between its legs and runs off." [Latimer 185, Borneman 157]

Decroix: This is a really good example of, of the dynamic between Tecumseh and Procter versus the dynamic between Tecumseh and Brock. In one point supposedly he says to, to Procter, you are unfit to command. Go and put on petticoats. [Borneman 157, Latimer 138]

Narration: In the end, Procter simply departed -- leaving the fort in Harrison's hands.

Decroix: And so for a change it's the British have been turned back. Fort Meigs is the beginning of the end for Tecumseh and for the British in the northwest.

Narration: But the American success at Fort Meigs was not repeated along the Niagara border. In the spring of 1813, an American army again crossed the Niagara River. As the Americans camped near Stoney Creek, a small British force launched a raid at night. [Latimer 145]

Grodzinski: The British had the advantage of surprise. It's pitch black, there's only ambient light from the stars. So when the British charged into the camp the American units are trying to figure out where is the enemy.

Narration: Two American generals got lost and wandered into enemy lines. A third American officer led a valiant cavalry charge – only to find out that the army he was cutting to pieces was his own. [Berton, *Flames* 76-80]

Decroix: The, the Battle of Stony Creek is in many ways representative of the War of 1812 in microcosm. The American commanders are captured. The British commander gets lost in the woods. The Americans technically are defeated but they retain the field. The British are victorious but they retreat.

Dale: The term 'the fog of war' was coined at that time, in the age of muskets, because every musket fired gave off a cloud of black powder smoke. Muskets were dreadfully inaccurate and they were also slow to load. You had to get within about eighty paces of an enemy to shoot your musket at them and hope to hit them. So the most effective way of using your muskets was to mass your men together in tight formation and have them fire a volley.

Rick Hill: What I have here is a war club, it's an Indian weapon in the War of 1812 even though they have muskets and carbines. We call it the skull cracker. It cracks your skull. And that's what it was intended to do, hit a guy hard enough on the head and you are going to knock him out of commission. And sometimes they would decorate them with their totem animal or your dream animal, something of power, something that would come to you. But you would use this thing in battle, you would go running up to a guy, crack him in the head with this thing which you are going to do some damage. During the War of 1812 they began to add sharp deer antler pieces or even knives or blades on here because it became more powerful to cut through the soldier's uniforms.

