

## MILITARY REALITIES OF THE ERA

A. Jack Langguth: I think sometimes in the modern day we forget what communication meant during the War of 1812.

Don Hickey: Information moved slowly. It took ten days for the news of war to work its way up and down the coast; two to three weeks to reach people in the west; four weeks to reach Bermuda; five weeks to reach Jamaica and the West Indies; six weeks to reach officials in London; and six months to reach Fort Astoria on the west coast because without a Panama Canal that was like being at the other end of the world.

Andrew Lambert: It's very easy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to think of the United States as a great world power, the occupier of a large part of a continent, the dominant force in world politics, and to forget that in 1812 the United States is pretty small beer. There just aren't that many Americans. The frontier doesn't go all the way to the Mississippi. There are large parts of it which are in dispute.

Don Hickey: Information very slowly in that day and it and it moved very irregularly. If you lived in the west you might receive scattered newspapers, every week, every two weeks you might read one newspaper and then another newspaper. And so you only got bits and pieces of what was really occurring in the nation's capital, what government officials were thinking and what they were doing.

Patrick Wilder: For the United States to declare war on Great Britain in June of 1812, what appeared to many to have been a crazy notion on the part of President Madison, for the simple reason that Britain's population was just about three times that of the United States.

Ron Dale: The British army trained their men very well. The British soldier, the British red coat, was extremely well trained. A red coat advertised the fact that here is a well trained soldier.

Peter Twist: The American army was different in that it started out at the beginning of the war as a very, very tiny professional army. And so many of its units were raised as volunteers, with the enthusiasm of all wars are short, we're going to win this one in no time and we'll be back home. So it produced a problem whereas the British soldier expected he was going to be there for the rest of his life, the American soldier kept saying, why isn't this over and why can't I go home?

Peter Twist: The uniform of the American army and the British army were very similar. They both wore wool coats, jackets, cut away at the waist with high standing collars which served no function other than fashion. They had one uniform they wore all year.

In the winter they could put on a great coat to keep warmer. But great coats were incredibly heavy and a real restriction to their movement.

In night battles, they looked so similar. There was great confusion and frequently troops were firing on their own side because they couldn't tell. The red coat and the blue coat in dull light looked almost

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identical.

Ron Dale: To the untrained American militia and the poorly-trained American regulars, you could see the red coat a mile away but you couldn't shoot at him until he was about sixty yards away. So you had all that time to ponder on the fact that coming against you, shoulder-to-shoulder, fifes playing, drums beating, flags flapping in the wind, were professionals.

Peter Twist: The battle experience for a soldier was a horrifying one. Although the weapons weren't particularly accurate, there were so many hundred musket balls whizzing forward it was the effect of a giant shot gun.

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