

Fort McHenry

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine
Maryland



“The Powder Magazine was not bombproof ...”

Library Field Guide No. 2

Was Fort McHenry damaged during the British bombardment?

The answer to this question is the story of the 1814 powder magazine, the only documented structure to receive a direct hit. This is what we know about the incident and the magazine’s contents.



“I was blown up once, whilst in the act of removing powder from the Magazine...”

Severn Teakle, Private, Baltimore Independent Artillerist

Private Teakle survived to tell the story of how he saved the magazine from a direct hit during the bombardment of September 13-14, 1814. For nearly twenty-five hours, amidst a thunderstorm, nearly 1,500 British 200 lb. cast iron mortar bombs and rockets exploded over Fort McHenry. One shell made a direct hit on this magazine in the midst of three hundred powder barrels and munitions. Dousing water on the shell, already affected by the weather, the shell failed to explode. Teakle came away only with his trousers torn and soiled.



History. This brick vaulted structure, built in 1800, served as Fort McHenry’s powder magazine during the War of 1812. The interior vaulted chamber remains original. Air vents, on the side walls provide circulation within the chamber that is entered by two sheet iron covered doors. The rear interior shuttered window provides fresh air while the window alcove above the entrance door has a lantern to light the chamber. In October 1814 the exterior walls were enlarged to its present day appearance.

Powder Barrels and Boxes were arranged as wine is arranged in a cellar, stacked three tiers high. As many as 300 barrels, containing loose powder, flints, artillery fuses and musket cartridges were stored here. "Our fixed ammunition for cannon is all put ammunition boxes, carefully packed with tow [flax fibers or hemp]. In each box, we put two pieces of slow match...and a proportion of portfires and tubes..."

Stenciling Baltimore firms such as the *Aetna Gun Powder Factory*, the *Bellona Gunpowder Company* and the *E.I. du Pont Nemours Company* (Delaware) were major gun & cannon powder producers. *The U.S. Arsenal at Schuylkill* [River], Pennsylvania was the major U.S. Government warehouse for military supplies during the war.

Musket Flints were shipped in kegs containing as many as 600 musket flints.