

Advice for the city fathers

Choose the ideal name for the Fort McHenry tunnel

By James M. Merritt

HIS MILITARY DEFENSIVE SKILLS, honed at Long Island, Monmouth, the Brandywine and Fort Mifflin, were legendary. So the U.S. Army officers in the Baltimore of 1814, led by Gen. John Eager Howard, told the Committee of Vigilance and Safety that this man was the one to mastermind the defense of the city against the oncoming British. The committee agreed unanimously.

The man accepted the charge with alacrity, but under one condition. He was a major-general of militia and he did not want some regular army dude coming over from the War Department and giving him a hard time. So he wanted a letter from Governor Levin Winder granting him supreme authority to carry out the mission. It was quickly forthcoming.

And the man went to work. After mobilizing his own command he sent word to Virginia and Pennsylvania that he needed all the help he could get. Units from those states came streaming in. The man put them to drilling and digging.

Figuring that the attack would come from the east, he ordered a pattern of entrenchments anchored on the harbor and extending up over Hampstead Hill (Patterson Park) to a terminus at the Belair Road. Houses and trees in front of the earthworks were removed to afford perfect fields of fire. He was everywhere, cutting corners, throwing Standard Operating Procedure to the winds, but getting things done.

Observing this, the citizens began to take heart. The miasma of defeatism that had settled over the city lifted and soon young and old of high and low degree were at the palisades digging from dawn to dark. When finished, the line was manned by more than 10,000 troops and bristled with 62 guns strategically placed.

How was all this financed? The committee had called on the War Department and the reply was essentially, "Baltimore, you are on your own. We are broke."

Did the man reply with a bush-league remark like "Ask them whose side they are on,

anyhow?" No. He handled the finances himself. He had ponderous clout in the political and financial fields and he soon had finagled loans totalling \$650,000 from local banks.

Now he turned his attention to Fort McHenry, the key to the harbor approach. To help Major George Armistead, he crowded 57 extra guns and 1,000 troops into the fort and stationed a row of barges on the Patapsco and a boom across the Middle Branch. Not entirely satisfied, he talked a group of ship owners into sinking a line of their vessels between Whetstone Point and the Lazaretto, in front of the armed barges.

Just as the man had figured, the British fleet was sighted on September 10, standing in to North Point and beginning to disembark troops. When word reached the city the next day, a Sunday, he wasted no time. He ordered General Stricker with his brigade of 3,200 to proceed down the Patapsco Neck. He suggested a stretch between Bear Creek on the west and an inlet of Back River (Bread and Cheese Creek) on the east, the narrowest part of the peninsula, as a good place to establish a line. The general would find provisions for his troops and hay for the horses already stashed there.

The man wanted to know whether the British commander had landed his first string or if, in view of the easy pickings at Bladensburg, he had put his scrubs ashore to get in a little skirmish time. Stricker was not long in finding out. Contact was made with the enemy at about 2.30 p.m. on the 12th and there ensued a two-hour battle, the final 20 minutes of which were red-hot.

Forced to withdraw, Stricker pulled back to the northern end of the earthworks and reported to the man that night. He had faced Wellington's Invincibles, conquerors of Napoleon. There were about 5,000 of them backed by rocket launchers and light artillery. They had good move and execution. When his casualties reached 165 killed and wounded plus 50 captured, he had broken contact. The British loss was at least 300 and, in addition, Daniel Wells and Harry McComas, two young Baltimore sharpshooters, had picked off Brit-



MYSTERY MAN

A chance to honor him?

ish Gen. Robert Ross. Col. Arthur Brooke was now in command of the land forces and Rear Admiral George Cockburn was with them.

This Cockburn was a rambunctious sort and had conned Ross into burning Washington. The man figured Brooke would be putty for the admiral. He may have been had the colonel not received a letter from Vice-Admiral Sir Alexander Cochrane, the supreme commander out with the fleet, advising that he was unable to perform his part of the planned two-prong at-

tack on Baltimore because he couldn't get past Fort McHenry. The line of sunken ships had sealed off the most direct water route to the city and every time he sent a force in close to blast the fort it received such damaging hits it had to pull back.

Cochrane maintained a sporadic bombardment that night of the 13th and the next morning "the flag was still there". So he sailed downriver to meet the troops.

This withdrawal was a terrific blow to the British. Not only had they wanted to avenge reported American atrocities in Canada but, also, Baltimore was the home nest for the privateers that had plagued British shipping to the score of 500 ships seized or sunk. The city would have been sacked and torched without a doubt.

But the man's defenses prevailed. Has the city revered his memory? Well, hardly. There is an unpretentious statue of him that, after several moves, has found a roost atop Federal Hill. What a spot for an old militiaman! The town is peppered with streets named after 1812 heroes but not even an alley him.

Francis Scott Key would never have set pen to paper if it had not been for this man, and Key is remembered by a statue big enough to block an intersection, an important waterfront highway, and a stupendous outer harbor bridge. The pen is mightier than the sword, right?

Why has the man been neglected? Maybe because most military historians save their ink for the attack artists rather than the defensive stars; or, maybe, because some of the man's contemporaries considered him a veritable s.o.b. in action.

But means to make memorial amends is close at hand. A new harbor tunnel is under way that will pass right under Fort McHenry's old impact area. How about it, city fathers? What more appropriate name to give it than the SAM SMITH tunnel?

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William Safire

Here's what Reagan has planned for your future

WASHINGTON: **HERE IS THE FEARLESS** forecast for Phase II of the Reagan Revolution, wherein ideas that were considered jejune in January will, this fall, become the top ten items on the nation's domestic agenda.

Although the President has not yet made all these decisions, the educated guesses of the men closest to him point the direction of his thinking:

1. *Education.* Tuition tax credits as proposed by Sens. Bob Packwood and Pat Moynihan, presently considered moribund, will be dusted off and partially embraced by the Reaganauts as the surprise feature of Tax Cut II. Private and parochial schools will get a new lease on life.

2. *Federalism.* This subject, which usually reaches a nine on the MEGO scale (My Eyes Glaze Over), will snap every governor to attention when Reaganauts propose to shift federal excise taxes to state control as part of Tax Cut II. Welfare costs will be shifted to states along with an earmarked percentage of the federal income tax, which the individual taxpayer will send directly to the state. The hollering about this avoid-Washington scheme will be fierce.

3. *Social Security.* Reagan will keep his televised promise and no current recipient will get less than he is now getting, but that is where geezer power will end: the prime solution to solvency of the funds is in cutting early-retirement incentives and moving the retirement age to 68.

Reagan's compromise will come in delaying implementation for three or four years:

4. *Cities.* Cynics assumed that the "Enter-