Baltimore in 1813: A Study of Urban Defense in the War of 1812

Frank A. Cassell

Military Affairs, Vol. 33, No. 3 (Dec., 1969), 349-361.

Stable URL:
http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0026-3931%28196912%2933%3A3%3C349%3ABI1ASO%3E2.0.CO%3B2-B

Military Affairs is currently published by Society for Military History.

Note to Librarians: There will be no Number 4 of Volume XXXIII, since this issue, Number 3, is double size. Volume XXXIV, Number 1, will be published in February 1970.

BALTIMORE IN 1813: A STUDY OF URBAN DEFENSE IN THE WAR OF 1812

FRANK A. CASSELL
Assistant Professor of History, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee

IN the spring and summer of the year 1813 a marauding British fleet twice menaced the city of Baltimore. Although no attack took place nor had one ever been seriously considered by the British commanders, the mere presence of the squadron alarmed the citizens and adversely affected the economic well-being of the seaport. For most of the summer Baltimore was in a state of blockade and cut off from the world commerce upon which its prosperity depended. In the resulting economic stagnation merchants lost money, sailors went jobless, businesses closed, and increasing numbers of citizens packed their belongings and migrated to other areas of the country. For those who remained, the burden of guarding the city from the possibility of invasion became ever heavier. Militia duty, which affected all males between the ages of 18 and 45, took up weeks at a time, while the city treasury was emptied to build and repair fortifications. The strain was severe, but when the British finally left the Chesapeake in the fall Baltimore stood ready to resist assault. Indeed, had not Baltimore citizens feverishly exerted themselves in 1813, the repulse of the British a year later would hardly have been possible.[1]

Baltimore's vulnerability during the War of 1812 was not unique. The American war strategy aimed not at protecting the nation's seacoast, but at achieving victory in Canada. There simply was not enough money or military power to accomplish both. The government's policy towards coastal security relied almost entirely upon local self-defense. By placing the militia of threatened areas on the federal payroll and by supplying arms and technical advice, President Madison and his advisers hoped that regional forces could repel attack. The government, however, possessed insufficient resources to aid all of those places open to British invasion, and officials of necessity had to be selective in distributing scarce funds and materials. "It must be obvious," wrote Secretary of War John Armstrong in March 1831, "that on this long [coast] line of 1500 miles we can but look to prominent points which may from various causes be most likely to [attract] the Enemy's attention."[2] Inevitably the heavily populated coastal cities received preference over the sparsely settled rural areas, but even among the cities fierce competition raged for a larger portion of the discouragingly small amount of federal assistance available. Since at best only small amounts of federal aid could be expected, every urban center had to rely upon its own material and human resources when danger threatened. Part of the challenge, therefore, was to a city's capacity to mobilize men and money quickly and efficiently.

In Baltimore the principle burden of organizing the city's defenses fell upon General Samuel Smith, commander of Maryland's

third militia division. There was not a man in Maryland better qualified to deal both with the government in Washington and with the merchants and bankers of Baltimore who controlled the city's wealth. Smith was himself one of the most successful merchants in the city. His firm, Smith & Buchanan, had long been among Baltimore's largest, most influential business institutions. Serving on the board of several banks, owner of ships, warehouses, and real estate, Samuel Smith definitely belonged to the affluent elite of Baltimore.

Smith's influence inside the city extended far beyond the ranks of the rich and privileged. The citizens recognized him as a comrade of George Washington and a hero of the Revolutionary War in his own right. His credentials as a military man had prompted the state of Maryland to appoint him to successively higher positions in the militia. In the 1790's the General used his military position to promote his political ambitions. By skillful manipulations he filled the officer corps of the Baltimore militia with men loyal to himself; and he gained the political support of the common militia soldiers partly because he was their commander and partly because he frequently plied them with rum and whiskey. By such methods General Smith constructed a loyal political machine which not only ran Baltimore, but also sent him to the Congress of the United States. Thus the man who commanded Baltimore in 1813 and 1814 exercised power greater than any that could officially be conferred on him as Major General of the third Maryland militia division. Smith's roles as merchant, bank director, hero of the Revolution, and political boss complemented his position as commanding general of Baltimore. Almost alone he had the stature and contacts to galvanize the city into effective action to protect itself.[3]

General Smith's position in Washington also contributed to his strength as a military commander. In 1813 he was completing 20 years of service in Congress, first as a representative and from 1803 as a member of the Senate. If nothing else, Smith would have brought to his job as commanding general of Baltimore a thorough knowledge of the people running the government and the legislation under which they acted. But Smith was no ordinary senator. Not only did he belong to the same political party as President Madison, but he had also helped to found that party during John Adams's administration. Because of his services President Jefferson in 1801 had offered him a position in his cabinet. Although declining the honor, Smith continued to work for Jefferson and the Republicans as a party leader in Congress. Despite recent disagreements with Madison, Smith in 1813 continued to wield significant influence in the Senate. When the administration contemplated what federal assistance should be granted to Baltimore, it could hardly forget that General Smith was also Senator Smith.

By the fall of 1813 Samuel Smith had created the army and built most of the fortifications that discouraged the British attack in 1814. Yet these achievements would not have been possible had the British navy not conducted raiding operations in Chesapeake Bay during the spring and summer of 1813. Before Rear Admiral Sir George Cockburn's fleet entered the Chesapeake in February, Smith had been unable to convince apathetic federal or state authorities of Baltimore's exposed position. As late as the first two weeks of March, when the British squadron began moving slowly up the Chesapeake toward Baltimore, virtually nothing had been done to repair or improve the city's defenses. Finally, almost in desperation, Smith wrote Governor Levin Winder of Maryland demanding support. "The vicinity of the enemy and the facility with which he might pass a force

suddenly against this City," he warned on 12 March, "makes it necessary to be in a state of preparation to repel any attempt that may be made." The General bluntly told Governor Winder that fewer than 50 regular army troops manned Fort McHenry and, therefore, "the defence of this important city appears to be committed to the local Militia of this State." He asserted that more muskets, cannon, tents, and every other implement of war were needed to preserve the city. After personally inspecting the city's situation the Governor authorized Smith on 13 March "to take the earliest opportunity of making the necessary arrangement of the militia for the defence of the Port of Baltimore." Winder's order was vague and unsatisfactory. It did not specify that Smith had been called into active service by the Governor, nor did it make clear whether he could now call up the Baltimore militia for service at the expense of the state. Smith, however, chose to interpret Winder's letter in the broadest possible way—as a full grant of power to defend the city by any means available. Significantly, Smith in his own letters misquoted the Governor's order by dropping the phrase "of the militia," thus making it appear that his commission was far broader than it was.[4]

When Smith assumed active command of Baltimore the city stood nearly defenseless. Because no fortifications existed on Patapsco Neck or on Hampstead Hill, a land invasion could not have been seriously contested. In the harbor area Fort McHenry mounted but a pitifully few guns manned by an insignificant number of army troops. The earthworks, entrenchments, and batteries in front of the fort built in the 1790's had long since been washed away. As a United States Army post Fort McHenry was not even subject to General Smith's orders; and its commander, Major Lloyd Beall, proved more an adversary than a cooperative colleague.[5] Although a major port, Baltimore was protected by only a single naval gunboat, commanded by Capt. Charles Gordon. As for the militia, the four brigades in Smith's division were an uneven lot. The second and ninth brigades, drawn from inland rural counties, were practically worthless, lacking arms, training, and leadership. The eleventh brigade, from Baltimore County and under the command of Brigadier General Tobias Stansbury, was of better quality, but hardly ready for combat. The finest militia troops in Maryland filled the ranks of Baltimore's own third brigade, led by Brigadier General John Stricker. Within an hour up to 4500 men could be at their posts ready to protect the city from attack. The third brigade constituted the heart of Baltimore's defense force, but in March 1813 fully one-third of the troops lacked weapons.[6] Smith operated on two levels in his efforts to fill the gaps in the city's security protection: He vigorously sought state and federal aid for Baltimore, while at the same time he systematically improved the efficiency of the men and the fortifications responsible for warding off assault.

Between 13 March and 16 April, when the British fleet blockaded the Patapsco River, Smith succeeded in convincing officials in Annapolis and Washington to send a significant amount of material and technical assistance to Baltimore. Of the two sources, the national government was by far the more important. Besides the fact that the government of Maryland was strongly Federalist and anti-Baltimore in sentiment, the state itself was extremely susceptible to British raids and its resources had been stretched too thin to permit large-scale aid to its largest city. As noted earlier, however, the federal government was in much the same situation, having too few resources to meet the ever-increasing demands of the nation. That so much assist-

ance came from the national government to Baltimore can only be attributed to Smith's influence in Washington. This idea is strengthened by the fact that both Secretary of the Army John Armstrong and Secretary of the Navy William Jones, while close associates of Smith, privately believed that Baltimore would not be attacked. Indeed, Jones described the port of Baltimore as "one of the most secure in the U.S."[7] Despite this view the two secretaries could not or would not resist many of General Smith's demands for more and more of the scarce materials they felt would be of more use elsewhere.[8]

Federal aid to Baltimore, although helpful, was meager compared to the critical needs of the city. Moreover, what assistance was allocated frequently took weeks to arrive. The approach of Cockburn's fleet and the brutal raiding expeditions of the British forces against defenseless American settlements showed Smith and the citizens of Baltimore that they were mainly dependent on themselves for their own defense, and Smith initiated numerous programs to increase the effectiveness of his forces. Under an agreement negotiated with Major Beall at Fort McHenry, the artillery companies of the third brigade received training in the use of the fort's big guns. Since Secretary Armstrong had ruled that no regular army artillerymen would be sent to the fort, these militia would help operate the cannon in case of attack. On 24 March Smith put the entire third brigade on full alert. Guards were posted around Fort McHenry, the equipment of the troops was inspected, and cavalry units were ordered to ride out along both sides of the Patapsco River in order to familiarize themselves with the terrain. Smith made sure that every man and every unit in the third brigade participated in the new duties by frequently rotating them. The purpose was twofold: All the troops of the third brigade would receive some training and experience and, more importantly, it required no money, as each militiaman served for such a short time that his service counted as regular duty. Smith utilized this device because neither the federal nor the state government had officially called out the Baltimore militia, and until this was done there was no one to pay the soldiers.

While Smith struggled with the difficult problem of getting his troops ready, he also took steps to improve his position with respect to Patapsco Neck and the works at Fort McHenry, the two places where Baltimore appeared most exposed. He had long expected that any attack on Baltimore would be a combined land-sea effort and that North Point, 16 miles from the city at the tip of Patapsco Neck, was the logical place for a British landing, for the water there was deep enough for transports to land troops under the protection of the heavily armed warships. Smith dispatched Maj. William Barney and a small cavalry troop to North Point with orders to scout the area, and their report verified his information about the possibility of a landing at North Point. Barney noted places where ambushes could be laid and lookouts placed to observe naval movements, and his observations were so thorough that he identified as the best defensive position on the peninsula the very place where the Battle of North Point would be fought over a year later. If Smith could not immediately station troops on Patapsco Neck, he at least knew where to put them when they became available.

Fort McHenry continued to be the General's most pressing problem during the spring of 1813. Located on Whetstone Point where the Patapsco branched, the fort guarded the entrance to Baltimore's inner harbor. Should the British successfully sail past the bastion, nothing could save the city from a destructive bombardment. Major Beall, commander of this vital post, lacked

energy and ability. Cautious, nervous, irascible, and chronically ill, he seriously hampered Smith's efforts to repair and expand the fort's facilities. As the weeks went by the conflict between the two men grew. One of Smith's chief complaints against Beall involved the quartering of militia units inside the fort: Beall allowed militia infantry to drill within the post during the day, but at night all the militia save a few artillerymen were evicted. Time and again Smith complained to Secretary Armstrong that Beall's extraordinary behavior endangered the safety of the post. He warned that an enemy force might easily sneak up in small boats and overpower the undermanned garrison. Beall's reasons for evicting the militia infuriated Smith. Fort McHenry had barracks to accommodate 350 men, yet Beall's force amounted to only 52 officers and men of the regular army. The soldiers, however, had brought their wives and children along. This circumstance, plus the fact that Beall and his officers requisitioned more quarters than they really needed, supposedly exhausted available space. In other words, Beall put the comfort and convenience of his men ahead of Baltimore's security. Inexplicably, Armstrong did not reprimand Beall, and the unfortunate situation persisted for several months before Smith finally persuaded Armstrong to replace Beall with a more competent officer.[9]

Smith's desire to make Fort McHenry secure took precedence over personal animosities. Since Beall had both the money and authority to build new works at Fort McHenry, the General wisely decided to cooperate with him when possible. Using plans drafted by Col. Joseph Swift of the Corps of Engineers, Smith and Beall organized militia and civilian work gangs to rebuild the two massive fortifications in front of the fort known as the Upper and Water Batteries. But Fort McHenry's greatest weakness in March and April was lack of mounted cannon. Scattered about the post were literally dozens of guns, including 56 imposing ship cannon donated by the French consul in Baltimore, but until carriages were built and the guns mounted on the batteries both inside and outside the fort Baltimore's situation remained precarious. Gun carriages weighed several thousand pounds and had to be constructed by skilled craftsmen using oak or mahogany that had been seasoned for at least a year. They were, in other words, not articles to be constructed in a day. Through unremitting labor over 60 large guns were made ready for action by the fall of 1813. In 1814 more artillery would be added, but the real work of preparing Fort McHenry had been completed a year earlier.

Impressive as Smith's accomplishments had been during his first month of command, his preparations were far from complete when the British fleet arrived in the middle of April. On 13 April the British, after weeks of aimless destruction, left the mouth of the Potomac River and moved up Chesapeake Bay towards Annapolis and Baltimore. With the enemy less than 30 miles from the city, and the defenses only half built, Smith frantically speeded preparation. In an effort to obtain additional federal support, he sent his personal aide, Maj. Isaac McKim, on a special mission to Secretary Armstrong. McKim outlined Baltimore's critical situation and asked that the national government call out part of the Maryland militia to defend the city. The evidence indicates that neither Armstrong nor his advisors shared Smith's concern over the intentions of the British. The Secretary had long believed that the enemy's fleet had too few troops for such an enterprise, and this opinion was shared by Armstrong's representative in Baltimore, Col. Decius Wadsworth, who had also told the Secretary on the day McKim arrived in Washington that the Patapsco was too shal-

low at its mouth to permit the entrance of ships of the line. "On the whole," reported Wadsworth, "I cannot imagine there is any serious cause of alarm respecting the safety of that place."[10] Despite his personal reservations, Armstrong suspended his judgment and gave Smith at least part of what he desired.

The letter Armstrong sent Smith by way of McKim contained an ambiguous order. The Secretary of War declared that the next day he would send a requisition to Governor Winder asking two thousand militia "for the defense of Baltimore." These troops would be paid and supplied by the United States Government. Armstrong recognized that it would take time for this drafted militia to be organized and marched to Baltimore. Therefore, to meet the immediate threat, he authorized General Smith to call out two thousand soldiers of his division who would also become the responsibility of the government but who would only serve until the drafted militia arrived. Armstrong's instructions, however, failed to specify exactly who was responsible for determining when the drafted militia were capable of replacing Smith's troops. Furthermore, the whole question of command at Baltimore was left unclear. Did Armstrong's order mean that Smith himself was in the service of the United States? And what of the drafted militia? Who would have authority over them when they arrived in the city? As he had before, Smith took advantage of such a slipshod, indecisive directive by defining his mandate as he saw fit and in the process unashamedly arrogated more power to himself than his superiors had intended.

As soon as Armstrong's letter reached Baltimore, Smith dispatched a flood of orders putting the entire third brigade of city militia in motion. A squad of cavalry galloped out of the city and along muddy roads toward North Point. Led by Major Barney, the troopers were assigned the task of observing the enemy's activities. At the same time Smith directed Captain Gordon of the Navy, a man over whom he technically had no authority, to establish a post at North Point from which he could signal by flag the approach of the fleet. The small flotilla of guard boats earlier sent to Baltimore by Secretary of the Navy Jones was spread out from North Point to Fort McHenry. Each boat was to pass along Gordon's flag signals until the information reached the fort.

Having established his security system General Smith proceeded to organize his militia force. Ignoring Armstrong's call for two thousand troops, Smith, after consulting with his advisers, decided to call up only one regiment of the third brigade consisting of about 1100 soldiers. In addition the General dispatched some cannon and a company of infantry to North Point. These decisions were dictated by his wish to improve the training and efficiency of the city militia by calling up a different regiment to active duty each week so that every soldier could have the opportunity of being drilled and disciplined.

The growing concern about the British intentions also led the city government of Baltimore to take additional steps to preserve the city's safety. On 13 April the mayor and the city council created a special governmental agency known as the Committee of Public Supply. Staffed by the mayor and other important citizens, including Smith's business partner, James A. Buchanan, the committee's job was to take all measures necessary for the city's defense. Later its tasks would increase, but in the early days of its existence the group acted mainly as Smith's purchasing agency. Although the federal government was responsible for arming, feeding, and clothing the Baltimore militia called into temporary service, no supplies were on hand in Balti-

more. Furthermore, despite Smith's pleas, Armstrong delayed appointing federal officials for Baltimore who would have the power and money to provide necessities for the troops. At Smith's suggestion the Committee of Public Supply assumed the duty of provisioning the militia with the expectation that the national government would reimburse the city for its expenditures. The arrangement was a good one and freed the General from the nagging problems of scrounging arms and food for his men.

The Committee of Public Supply soon became the most important agency concerned with the defense of Baltimore. Composed of leading citizens, businessmen, and bankers, it could tap the physical and monetary resources of the city as no other group could. Beginning with only $20,000, the committee soon possessed over half a million dollars loaned by city banks.[11] Where state or federal aid was often slow and hesitant, the committee could act immediately and decisively to provide needed materials or men. The relationship between Smith and the committee, whose members were nearly all friends or associates, could not have been better. It solicited his recommendations and never failed to scrupulously carry them out. The total cooperation of the Committee of Public Supply unquestionably added a new dimension to Smith's command.

On 16 April the dreaded moment finally arrived. The citizens of Baltimore awoke to find Admiral Cockburn's fleet positioned at the mouth of the Patapsco River.[12] From Fort McHenry General Smith, alerted by his flag signals, watched British barges and schooners sweep up the river to within six miles of where he stood and capture an unfortunate sloop. The audacity of Cockburn's sailors and marines nearly brought them the prize of Captain Gordon's gunboat, which barely escaped under the guns of the fort. Inside the city Smith's contingency plans were put into operation. "On the alarm gun being fired 4,000 men assembled," he wrote Armstrong on the sixteenth, but he added that many were unarmed. For the next three weeks Baltimore was blockaded and constantly in fear of attack.

With the British fleet actually operating within sight of the city, Smith had little difficulty persuading national, state, and local authorities to hasten assistance. The Navy Department, for example, ordered Captain Gordon to lease four schooners at Baltimore and after providing arms and crews to lead them against the smaller British vessels. For his part Secretary Armstrong sent additional muskets for the use of the city militia. Governor Winder cooperated by allowing Smith to buy arms in Baltimore at state expense. As expected, however, the major effort was mounted by the people of Baltimore themselves. Under Smith's directions the Committee of Public Supply purchased muskets, harness, horses, and numerous other articles for the use of the militia. Hulks were obtained and stationed between Whetstone Point and the north bank of the Patapsco. In case of attack they were to be sunk to prevent the British from sailing past the fort into the inner harbor. The Committee of Public Supply, again at General Smith's urging, hired additional laborers to hasten completion of the earth works and batteries at Fort McHenry.

One of the most significant additions to General Smith's forces was the "Marine fencibles," an organization of 150 seamen created and supported by the Committee of Public Supply. No unit proved more useful and reliable. Composed of sailors beached by the British blockade, the fencibles performed numerous duties. Some were assigned the job of manning guard boats at night in order to prevent a surprise attack on the fort. Others mounted and prepared the big French guns designated for use on

the vitally important Water Battery. The effectiveness of the fencibles in 1813 led Smith to reconstitute the corps in 1814 when they were partly responsible for stopping a British force attempting to land in barges behind Fort McHenry.[13]

Although General Smith clearly felt that an assault against Fort McHenry was his greatest danger, he did not entirely neglect the possibility of an assault on land. A small start was made on fortifying Hampstead Hill, located east of the city, and within a few days of the fleet's arrival several hundred troops were stationed on Patapsco Neck. At first Smith ordered these troops to resist any attempt at a landing. It soon became apparent, however, that the force was too small for anything but intelligence work. Indeed, Smith eventually instructed most of the militiamen to retire towards Baltimore because he feared boats of British soldiers might sail up one of the broad creeks on the Neck and cut off their route of retreat. Obviously the General had underrated the difficulty of protecting the city from land attack.

On 24 April the bulk of Cockburn's force moved away from Baltimore and up Chesapeake Bay, but the city remained blockaded and in a state of high tension. Unknown to Smith and the defenders of Baltimore, Cockburn and his superior, Admiral John Borlase Warren, had neither the force nor the orders to capture any American city. Their duty was to destroy American naval power in the Chesapeake, to create a diversion which would hopefully draw badly needed troops away from the Canadian border, and to bring the horror of war to the inhabitants of the Chesapeake.[14] Admiral Cockburn performed this latter duty with unseemly zest. The destruction of Frenchtown and Havre de Grace made Cockburn's name synonymous with evil among Americans. In early May Cockburn returned down Chesapeake Bay to Baltimore where he again made menacing gestures. After burning a few villages on the Eastern Shore, however, the entire fleet dropped down to Hampton Roads and awaited reinforcements.

While the British plagued the upper Chesapeake, Smith perfected his defensive position. Using the authority of the Committee of Public Supply, he ordered construction of a small battery a mile behind Fort McHenry that would eventually be named Fort Covington and would on the night of 13 September 1814 repay its cost a hundred times over. But Smith's most pressing problem in this period involved a challenge to his right to command. On 13 April Armstrong had promised to requisition two thousand militia from Maryland to defend Baltimore. For some reason this request was not transmitted to Governor Winder until 16 April and he in turn delayed acting until 23 April. On that day the governor called up the detachment, over half of which was to be drawn from the third brigade already on duty in Baltimore. Aside from this latter force most of the drafted militia did not arrive in Baltimore until the fleet had already left for Hampton Roads. To the post of commander of the drafted militia Winder nominated Brigadier General Henry Miller of Baltimore. Predictably Miller was a Federalist; but since he was also a personal friend of Armstrong, the federal government did not delay issuing him a commission in the regular army.

Confusion was now total. The vague and conflicting orders issued by Armstrong and Winder left it unclear whether Miller or Smith held supreme command. For his part Miller tried to persuade the Committee of Public Supply to recognize his authority, but it responded instead with a declaration of loyalty to Smith, who was promised continued total support. Both men then appealed to Armstrong for a decision. On 7 May the Secretary answered that Miller

was the legitimate commander unless Smith could prove he had already been called into active service by the Governor of Maryland, in which case he would be, as a major-general, the ranking officer. Smith, of course, had in his papers Winder's orders of 13 March telling him to prepare the militia to defend Baltimore. That order, however, said nothing about the General's being called into active service. Armstrong's ruling now put Smith in the embarrassing position of having to ask Winder to choose between himself, a political foe, and Miller, a personal friend and political supporter of the Governor's. With understandable misgivings General Smith sent the faithful McKim to Annapolis to seek a final solution.

For 24 hours Winder deliberated before giving McKim his answer to Smith's inquiry. "The meaning of the order [of March 13]," said the Governor on 10 May, "was, that you would proceed to compleat [sic] the organization of the Militia under your command and place them in the best possible state for defence, of course your commission as Major General commenced from that period." Winder's reply established Smith's authority beyond any doubt and the General wasted little time in passing along the Governor's letter to Secretary Armstrong. Winder's motives remain unclear. His delay in answering Smith would seem to show that he at least considered alternatives to confirming the General's position. Perhaps he believed that removing Smith while the British sat before Baltimore would be neither wise nor politic.

By 10 May Cockburn's departure from the Baltimore area could not be doubted. Under existing state and federal laws Smith had no choice but to dismiss the troops he had called into service under Armstrong's order of 13 April. Miller's drafts were finally straggling into Baltimore where they would remain sullen and useless for the next month. A week after he had released his troops, General Smith on 18 May sent a detailed description of his accomplishments during the recent crisis to the Committee of Public Supply. He noted that because of the arms he had secured from the state and federal governments the third brigade now had over 3700 infantry and riflemen, 700 artillerymen, and four troops of cavalry completely equipped. Furthermore, he reported their discipline and morale as exceptionally good. Turning to the harbor fortifications, Smith described Fort McHenry in mid-March as being "little capable of opposition," but that now it presented a "formidable appearance." He emphasized with pride that the Water Battery now was completely manned by seamen in the pay of the city and that every cannon on that important work was mounted. Smith reminded the committee that Fort McHenry was nearly complete, while on the Ferry Branch Captain Babcock of the Army Engineers had commenced building a battery that would come to bear his name. Even if these works should be silenced Smith assured the committee that the British fleet could not reach the city because of the hulks that would have been sunk to block the channel and the long booms made out of ship masts that had been stretched across the various water passages to Baltimore.

Smith's report to the Committee of Public Supply, if somewhat self-congratulatory, also contained a sharp warning of future danger. With British naval units still in Chesapeake Bay and over four months of fighting weather remaining, he urged the city not only to continue but to expand its preparations for defense. He pointed out that during the blockade small British barges and schooners had easily won naval control of the Patapsco and seized American vessels. He submitted a plan to build a fleet of gunboats powered by oars and

mounting two large guns. "With such a force well-manned," Smith speculated, "I should believe that it would not only secure the rivers from insult, but enable us to render it extremely dangerous for the Enemy to water at Susque[hanna] or to lay off the [mouth of the] Patapsco." In following days Smith urged the committee to purchase cannon and other kinds of war material that he considered necessary for the city's defense. The committee faithfully implemented the General's suggestions.[15]

Smith's increasing dependence on the Committee of Public Supply resulted from a reduction in federal and state assistance following the withdrawal of Cockburn's squadron. As the pressure on Baltimore eased both Governor Winder and Secretaries Armstrong and Jones turned their attention to other more pressing problems. General Smith and the citizens of Baltimore, however, were more convinced than ever that Baltimore would be attacked and acted accordingly. Throughout June and July the city government pushed toward completion the construction of additional harbor fortifications and the gunboats Smith had recommended.

After placing Stricker in temporary command, Smith traveled to Washington in June and assumed his seat in the United States Senate. His positions as chairman of the Naval Affairs Committee and as a member of the Military Affairs Committee gave him numerous opportunities to see Jones and Armstrong and lobby personally on behalf of Baltimore. Despite his prestige the Maryland Senator gained little from the government until the end of the month. At that time the British fleet in the Chesapeake, greatly strengthened in ships and carrying over four thousand troops, attacked Norfolk and Hampton, Virginia, and showed signs of once more moving up the bay. The apparent threat to Baltimore gave Smith an opportunity to press harder for more federal support. Beginning on 27 June he deluged Secretary Armstrong with letters and personal visits demanding money, arms, and regular troops. On 1 July the General was joined in Washington by a delegation from the Committee of Public Supply who seconded his application. The results of these meetings were mixed. Armstrong refused to hold General Miller's drafted militia any longer in the service of the United States and they were accordingly dismissed. The Secretary also denied Smith authority to call up the Baltimore militia and have them paid and supplied by the federal government. He did promise to seriously consider repaying the Committee of Public Supply for some of their expenses and to order 1500 muskets to be delivered to Baltimore. He also dismissed Beall and named Maj. George Armistead to command Fort McHenry. Armistead was authorized to complete fortifications already in progress and to make other improvements.

By 12 July the British fleet lay off the mouth of the Potomac River. After informing both Armstrong and Winder that he firmly believed Baltimore to be the enemy's object, Smith raced back to Baltimore and put the third brigade on full alert. For two frustrating weeks Baltimore waited for the British to arrive. During this period there was little Smith could do. Until the fleet definitely menaced the city there was no chance that Armstrong or Winder would approve the mobilization of the militia. On 22 July the General again journeyed to Washington and pleaded with Armstrong to give him more discretion in calling out the third brigade. Even as Smith met with the Secretary the fleet finally weighed anchor and sailed slowly up the Chesapeake. Still without the powers he desired, General Smith returned to Baltimore to make what preparations he could.

On 1 August the British fleet, fighting unfavorable winds, reached the vicinity of

Annapolis and Smith finally felt justified in calling up on his own authority at least some militia troops to defend the city. He was soon supported by Armstrong, who ordered federal officials to feed and supply militia units mobilized at Smith's direction. In the previous alarm Smith had succeeded in making the city's third militia brigade as ready as possible, and knew that if the British moved up the Patapsco to assault the fortifications these troops would easily have enough time to assemble. There was, therefore, no need to call them into service until the moment for battle arrived. But he desperately needed more trained men to defend the city. After all, the British had as many troops as did the third brigade, and the British soldiers were professionals. Wisely Smith decided to take advantage of the British threat by developing the military competence of the next best unit in his division, the eleventh or Baltimore County brigade. Almost exactly one year later this brigade under General Stansbury gave a good account of itself at the Battle of Bladensburg. In August 1813, however, the eleventh was a rowdy, disorganized mob lacking nearly everything to become a first-rate fighting force. Yet, despite its shortcomings, Stansbury's brigade far surpassed any other militia outside Baltimore.

General Smith had actually begun the job of rehabilitating the eleventh almost a month earlier when he had distributed among its troops the 1500 muskets Armstrong had sent him. On 1 August Smith ordered up one regiment of the eleventh, about 800 men, and directed it to assemble on Patapsco Neck. By 8 August the British fleet finally came into view of the barges and guard boats the General had stationed at the mouth of the Patapsco, and the next day the General requisitioned yet another regiment from the eleventh and ordered General Stansbury to take command of all operations on Patapsco Neck. Smith obviously expected Stansbury to whip his men into shape and severely criticized his subordinate when it was discovered that he did not even post guards around his encampment. Nevertheless at the end of the month Smith could tell Armstrong that the brigade had "improved wonderfully."[16]

Smith's estimate of the best way to protect Baltimore from land attack had matured since April. Overwhelmed by other difficulties, he had then relied on a few hundred militia troops to repel any landings. The mobility of the British barges had forced him to realize that his small force could easily be cut off and destroyed. Given a second opportunity, the General readjusted his plans; now over 1500 men camped near Bear Creek. They could not and would not contest a landing at North Point, but they might delay or even halt British columns attempting to approach the rear of Baltimore. If all four thousand English soldiers should strike at Stansbury, Smith had no illusions about the result. On Hampstead Hill, with the cooperation of the Committee of Public Supply, a line of breastworks was thrown up and an artillery park containing perhaps 50 cannon was established. This was the line of defense Smith counted on to stop an assault, just as it was to do in September 1814.

The second visit of the British fleet brought few changes in the arrangements made in April and May for the protection of the harbor area. Forts McHenry, Covington, and Babcock were virtualy complete and the hulks stood ready for sinking. Aside from an additional boom placed between Moales Point and Ferry Point, the chief improvement in river defense was the aggressive patrolling of the Patapsco by the city-owned barges that Smith had asked be built. Their presence prevented the possibility of sneak attack and made it dangerous for the smaller British ships to venture far from the men of war and frigates of the

fleet. Altogether, Baltimore's response was thoroughly professional. The miscalculations and improvisations that characterized the city's reaction two months before simply were not present. Once again, however, the British chose not to attack and by 24 August had set out for winter quarters in the West Indies.

All of the elements that made victory possible in 1814 had been put together by Samuel Smith over a year earlier. The highly trained militia that withstood the shelling of Fort McHenry and smartly skirmished with the British troops at North Point got their arms, their discipline, and their spirit in the crises of 1813. Fort McHenry, Fort Covington, Fort Babcock, and the works on Hampstead Hill, all of which contributed to the British defeat, were built or at least started the previous year. As important as the physical improvements were the institutional arrangements worked out in 1813. In 1814 a Committee of Vigilance and Safety was created to coordinate the city's defense efforts. Although differing somewhat in structure and authority, it performed essentially the same tasks as the Committee of Public Supply upon which it was clearly modeled.[17] Samuel Smith had all of these developments in mind when, some years later, he meditated on what had occurred. "[O]f this fact I can assure you," he told a government official, "the . . . preparations made in 1813 [were] the cause of [Baltimore's] preservation in 1814, and . . . the preparations made in 1813 enabled us to meet the enemy when he attacked us by land in 1814. The city was saved by the preparations of 1813. . . ."[18]

Perhaps most importantly the crises of 1813 had been the testing ground on which General Smith had perfected his methods of defending the city. The two appearances of the British fleet forced Smith to recognize serious defects in Baltimore's protective arrangements that uncorrected could have led to the city's capture in 1814. There was, for example, no move to block the entrance to the harbor with hulks until 19 April, three days after the fleet had arrived for the first time. Not until Smith personally observed the strength and mobility of the British navy did he realize how easily Fort McHenry might be passed. The danger posed by the swift British barges also led him to order the building of subordinate batteries behind the fort to counter any effort to land and assault the post from the rear. Although Smith had at first badly underestimated the potential danger on Patapsco Neck, by August he had worked out the strategic theory that would guide his actions a year later when General Ross and his troops stormed ashore at North Point. In both 1813 and 1814 General Smith stood at the center of events. He was the integrating force that meshed Baltimore's will to survive with the practical necessity of obtaining trained men, arms, and fortifications. The battle of Baltimore was won as much in 1813 as in 1814, and from first to last it was singularly Smith's victory.

REFERENCES

1. For general discussion of Maryland and the War of 1812, see J. Thomas Scharf, *History of Maryland* (Hatboro, Penn., 1967, III, 38; William M. Marine, *The British Invasion of Maryland, 1812-1815* (Baltimore, 1913) pp. 2-3; Reginald Horsman, *The War of 1812* (London, 1968), pp. 74-75; Harry L. Coles, *The War of 1812* (Chicago, 1965), pp. 38-45.

2. Armstrong to Samuel Smith, 16 March 1813, Third Division Orderbook, Smith papers, Library of Congress. Much of the material discussed in this article is to be found in the Smith papers in the Library of Congress, and specific references will be given only where particularly instructive.

3. See Frank A. Cassell, "Samuel Smith: Merchant Politician, 1792-1812" (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Northwestern University, 1968); and *Federal Gazette & Baltimore Daily Advertiser,* 5 October 1798.

4. See for example Smith to Jones and Smith to Armstrong, 13 March 1813, Orderbook, Smith papers.

5. See for example Smith to Armstrong, 16 April 1813, Orderbook, Smith papers.

6. See Niles' *Register*, 27 March 1813 (IV, 70); and Smith to Winder, 12 March 1813, Orderbook, Smith papers.

7. Jones to Capt. Charles Gordon, 15 March 1813, Secretary of the Navy, Captains' Letters, 1813, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

8. Jones to Smith, 14 March 1813; Armstrong to Smith, 16 March 1813, Orderbook, Smith papers. See also Armstrong to Col. J. G. Swift, 31 March 1813, War Department, Secretary of War, Letters Received, Registered Series, National Archives, Washington, D.C. Hereafter cited as War Department, Letters Received.

9. See Smith to Armstrong, 9, 21 April 1813, War Department, Letters Received; Smith, order to the third division, 14 April 1813, and Smith to Armstrong, 23, 24 April 1813, Orderbook, Smith papers.

10. Wadsworth to Armstrong, 13 April 1813, War Department, Letters Received.

11. See Scharf, *History of Maryland*, p. 39.

12. See Niles' *Register*, 24 April 1813 (IV, 134); *American & Commercial Daily Advertiser* (Baltimore), 17 April 1813.

13. See Scharf, *History of Maryland*, pp. 120-21; and Irving Brant, *James Madison: Commander in Chief, 1812-1836* (New York, 1961), p. 324.

14. Horsman, *The War of 1812*, pp. 73-79; J. W. Fortescue, *A Histoyr of the British Army* (London, 1920), IX, 322.

15. See for example Smith to Committee of Public Supply, 21 May 1813, Orderbook, Smith papers.

16. See *American & Commercial Daily Advertiser* (Baltimore), 9 August 1813; Smith to Winder, 8, 11 August 1813, and Smith to Stansbury, 21 August 1813, Orderbook, Smith papers; Smith to Armstrong, 31 August 1813, Smith papers.

17. See William D. Hoyt, Jr., "Civilian Denfense in Baltimore, 1814-1815," *Maryland Historical Magazine*, XXXIX (1944), 199-224, 293-309, and XL (1945), 7-23, 137-232.

18. Smith to George Graham, 30 December 1816, quoted in Scharf, *History of Maryland*, p. 385.

ELIHU ROOT AND THE NATIONAL GUARD: FRIEND OR FOE?

LOUIS CANTOR
Associate Professor of History, Indiana University, Fort Wayne

MILITARY historians who have studied the United States National Guard generally agree that the Dick Militia Act of 1903 marked the real beginning of the "federalization" of the once exclusively state controlled forces. Subsequent legislation affecting the National Guard has followed the federalization process begun by the 1903 Act, and the Guard has thereby been converted from a disorganized state militia into an effectively organized federal reserve force.[1] Relatively little has been said, however, about the Dick Act itself or about the respective roles played in 1903 by Secretary of War Elihu Root, on the one hand, and the National Guard—represented by the organized Interstate National Guard Association—on the other.

The little that has been written on the subject often follows a definite pattern. Proponents of the National Guard carefully point out that soon after coming into office Secretary Root began reading the works of General Emory Upton. Unfortunately, the story goes, Root was quickly converted to Upton's way of thinking, and the Secretary thereafter completely misunderstood the Guard and was therefore unsympathetic to it. "It was his official endorsement of Upton," General John M. Palmer wrote in 1930, "that defeated the completion of Secretary Root's constructive programme. At the very moment of its establishment, his new planning agency was definitely committed to a false policy."[2] More recently this same kind of treatment of Root is still leading to strong criticism of the Secretary for failing to envisage a larger role for the National Guard in the nation's defense system at the time he helped push the 1903 act through Congress.[3]

It is true that Root was cognizant of the