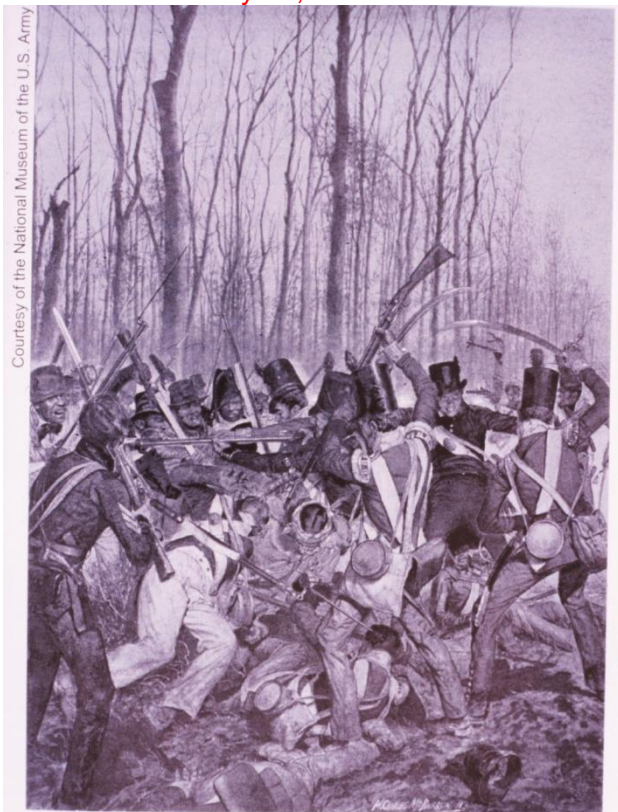


## 1812 BICENTENNIAL COMES TO AN END

The month of January 2015 marks the end of the commemoration of the Bicentennial of the War of 1812. Even though it represents a period of history that played an important role in the future of North America, the bicentennial will in all likelihood quietly fizzle out.

Nevertheless, the war did have a bizarre ending. Although the peace treaty was signed on December 24, 1814 in Ghent, Belgium, the American commissioners returning home to Washington by ship arrived with the agreement six days after the news that the Americans had achieved a great victory at the Battle of New Orleans on **January 08, 1815**.



A depiction of the close quarter hand to hand combat that took place during the American victory at the Battle of New Orleans, January 8, 1815.

Transatlantic communication being what it was back then, the battle unwittingly took place after the peace had been signed. Nevertheless, overwhelmed with joy and ignoring the ambiguity of the details, the United States had cause to assume that they had won the war.

(January 2015)

## But Canadians have a different perception.

The fact that we maintained our sovereignty after repeated invasion attempts by the United States between 1812 and 1814, gives us cause to humour our American friends despite the fact that we do little to promote the reality of our history. In truth, most Canadians, like most Americans don't have an accurate perception of what was the key to the successful defence of Canada.

Armed with that assumption, I made the following address to an international audience when asked to speak at the annual Hamilton and Scourge Commemoration on August 10, 2014 at the Naval Memorial Garden in Confederation Park overlooking Lake Ontario.

*"Two schooners sinking in a storm on Lake Ontario 200 years ago does not have the same heritage impact as a military victory such Stoney Creek. But USS Hamilton and USS Scourge represent the overlooked high drama that determined the outcome of the War of 1812. The successful defence of Canada was governed by the struggle for naval control of Lake Ontario. In fact when the schooners, USS Hamilton and Scourge sank on Aug 8 1813 and their often forgotten sister ships, USS Julia and Growler, were captured by the British squadron two days later, **all four ships were part of the American naval squadron's failed attempt to retake control of the lake and regain the initiative that they had lost two months earlier.** The British had made a successful amphibious raid on the American naval base at Sackett's Harbour on May 28, 1813. Then the British squadron arrived with reinforcements and supplies at Grimsby on June 8, 1813 to outflank the American invasion force after their upset at the Battle of Stoney Creek two days earlier."*

This is just one of many examples that illustrate the ability of the British naval squadron to move troops, equipment and supplies almost at will to the battlefields around Lake Ontario. The key to the defence of Canada in the War of 1812 was the frequently overlooked fact of "Naval Control" of our waterways. It ultimately helped bring about the 200 years of peace commemorated by the bicentennial.

*Mountain Memories, written by historian Robert Williamson on behalf of the Hamilton Mountain Heritage Society appears monthly.*