

“Oliver Perry Presentation for Grand Lodge”



**The Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of Ohio
Committee on Education and Information
2013 Mandatory Education Program (3 of 4)**

Preparation: Read the lesson in its entirety prior to your presentation to familiarize yourself with the names as well as other terms in it.

Materials: None

Instruction: This lesson is being presented as part of the 200 year celebration of the victory gained on Lake Erie in 1813 by Commodore Oliver Perry and the United States Navy. The lesson is longer than most that are presented, but well worth the discussion. Feel free to paraphrase to save time for discussion.

Demonstration:

President James Madison addressed Congress on June 18, 1812 and declared war on Great Britain. This act was the culmination of several years of difficulty between our new nation and its former mother country. Over the previous years, Britain had impressed many sailors into serving in the British Navy declaring them defectors from the British Navy and, in essence, kidnapping them and forcing them to serve on naval vessels. There were also British troops stationed on what was claimed to be American soil around the Great Lakes area who were inciting troubles between the new American citizens in the Western frontier and the native peoples.

At the time war was declared, the military of the country was ill prepared. President Jefferson, more of an idealist than a general or a businessman, believed that a strong army and navy would encourage war and neglected both. At the time of the beginning of the war, the American Navy consisted of about 16 serviceable ships carrying 450 guns and 5000 sailors. Britain came forth with a crushing advantage bringing to bear more than 1000 ships, 25,000 guns, and 150,000 sailors. In spite of this disadvantage, President Madison thought this war would be over quickly because the Americans had an advantage having very short supply lines and having recently trounced the "Red Coats" just 30 years earlier.

This conflict did not go well on many fronts the British being able to enter the Chesapeake Bay and burn the nation's capital, Washington City, before the end of the war. There were failed invasions into Canada, and frequent intrusions of the British into the American countryside both in the Midwest and in upstate New York. One great land victory for the Americans, the Battle of New Orleans, actually occurred after the conclusion of a peace treaty. However, this battle did produce a hero who was later to become Brother and later President Andrew Jackson.

Another hero that emerged from this conflict was United States Navy Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry. Commodore Perry was born August 23, 1785 in South Kingstown, Rhode Island, the son of USN Captain Christopher Raymond Perry and Sarah Wallace Alexander. He was educated in Newport, Rhode Island, and at the age of 13 was appointed a midshipman in the United States Navy on April 7, 1799.

At his request Perry was given command of United States naval forces on Lake Erie during the War of 1812. On September 10, 1813, Perry's command fought a successful fleet action against a task force of the Royal Navy in the Battle of Lake Erie. It was at the outset of this battle that Perry famously said, "If a victory is to be gained, I will gain it."

Nine vessels of the United States Navy defeated and captured six vessels of Great Britain's Royal Navy. Initially, the exchange of gunfire favored the British. Perry's flagship, the USS Lawrence, was so severely disabled in the encounter that the British commander, Robert Heriot Barclay, thought that Perry would surrender it, and sent a small boat to request that the American vessel pull down its flag. Faithful to the words of his battle flag, "DON'T GIVE UP THE SHIP," a paraphrase of the dying words of Captain James Lawrence, the ship's namesake and Perry's friend, Perry ordered the crippled Lawrence to fire a final salvo and then had his men row him a half-mile through heavy gunfire to transfer his command to the USS Niagara.

Once aboard the Niagara, Perry dispatched the Niagara's commander, Captain Jesse Elliot, to bring the other schooners into closer action while he steered the Niagara toward the damaged British ships. Breaking through the British line, the American force pounded Barclay's ships until they could offer no effective resistance and surrendered. Although he had won the battle aboard the Niagara, he received the British surrender on the deck of the recaptured Lawrence to allow the British to see the terrible price his men had paid. Perry's battle report to General William Henry Harrison was famously brief: "We have met the enemy and they are ours; two ships, two brigs, one schooner and one sloop."

This was the first time in history that an entire British naval squadron had surrendered, and every captured ship was successfully returned to Presque Isle. His leadership materially aided the successful outcomes of all nine Lake Erie military campaign victories, and the fleet victory was a turning point in the battle for the west in the War of 1812. His victories allowed the British to be pushed out of the American Midwest into Canada and secured these borders. This victory opened Canada up to possible invasion, while simultaneously protecting the entire Ohio Valley. The loss of the British squadron directly led to the critical Battle of the Thames, the rout of British forces by Harrison's army, the death of Tecumseh, and the breakup of his Indian alliance.

On January 6, 1814, Perry was honored with a Congressional Gold Medal, the Thanks of Congress, and a promotion to the rank of Captain. This was one of 27 Gold Medals authorized by Congress arising from the War of 1812.

In 1814, both sides were weary of a costly war that offered little but a stalemate. During the war, the British had blockaded the New England coast cutting off economic trade. However, this hurt both Canada and the Caribbean who relied on open trade with New England for economic growth. In addition, Britain maintained military forces on American soil in Maine and various places in the upper Midwest continuing to incite troubles between the Americans and the native peoples. Negotiations began at Ghent, Belgium and concluded with an agreement being reached on December 24, 1814.

The British ratified the treaty on December 27, 1814 and it was ratified in Washington on February 17, 1815 going into effect on February 18, 1815. This treaty established boundaries between Canada and the United States essentially cementing "the status quo" but failed to settle grievances about the impressment of American sailors onto British ships.

During the years following the war, many attempts were made to disk but a memorial to this event. However, this was never successful due to a lack of organization and financing.

On February 28, 1908, the General Assembly of Ohio, by joint resolution, provided for the appointment of a commission to observe the approaching centennial anniversary of the Battle of Put in Bay. The states of Pennsylvania, Michigan, Illinois, Wisconsin, New York, Rhode Island, Kentucky, Minnesota, and Louisiana all appointed commissioners to cooperate in this venture. This memorial was "to inculcate the lessons of international peace by arbitration and disarmament."

This memorial was constructed by the multi-state commission from 1912 to 1915. Beneath the stone floor of the monument lie the remains of three American officers and three British officers. Carved in the rotunda walls are the names of Perry's vessels along with the names of the Americans who were killed or wounded in the battle.

The memorial consists of the great Doric column of pink-white granite 45 feet in diameter and 352 feet tall standing in the center of the plaza which extends from a museum on one hand to a heroic bronze statue flanked by a colonnade.

Records from the Grand Lodge of Ohio indicate that a corner stone laying ceremony was held at 'High 12' on July 4, 1913. An emergent communication was opened by the MW Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Ohio, Edward S. Griffiths aboard the City of Buffalo as it sat in the harbor at Put in Bay. Present at the laying of the cornerstone were over 5000 members of the Craft including officers and representatives from many of the Grand Lodges from states involved in this project. A procession was formed under the direction of the RW Grand Marshall, Matthew Smith and was escorted by more than 1000 knights Templar who marched to the base of the memorial.

Although substantially completed in 1915, funding problems prevented the proper completion of a fully realized memorial complex.^[2] In 1919 the federal government assumed control of the monument and provided additional funding. The official dedication was celebrated on July 31, 1931.

This monument is by the National Park Service and is the only federal monument dedicated to Peace. As such, its purpose clearly reflects the Masonic tenet of Brotherly Love.

Written by Bro. Daniel D. Hrinko, Bro. John Sanner, and Bro. Robert Spiller at the request of the Grand Lodge Education Committee.