

Michigan Every Day

By Patrick Sullivan and Carole Eberely

Sept. 29, 1813
Americans retake Detroit

There was no resistance this day in 1813 when the Americans took Detroit back from the British. The soldiers arrived to find that the British had abandoned the village and the fort it held for just over a year. There were two bloody encounters that led the British to retreat and their Indian allies to lose heart. The first happened in May, when Henry Proctor, the British commander, decided to attack a small American stockade in Sandusky County, Ohio. In command of the American post was Major George Croghan, a 21-year-old Kentuckian. Croghan did not stand much of a chance against Proctor's superior numbers and firepower. Croghan commanded only a small post – its artillery amounted to one six-pound cannon.

Proctor demanded that Croghan surrender. In exchange he promised to protect the Americans from the Indians, a promise that must have been hard to swallow given the River Raisin massacre earlier that year. Croghan replied: "When the fort shall be taken, there will be none to massacre. It will not be given up while a man is able to resist."

A battle followed and the Americans fought with tenacity. One soldier was killed and seven officers were wounded. The British lost 50 men, including two officers.

The other significant battle that brought Detroit back into American hands happened on Lake Erie in early September. The Americans sought control of Detroit's water route to prevent movement of British reinforcements and to cut off their food supplies.

The task of taking Lake Erie fell to American Lieutenant Oliver Hazard Perry. The British fleet was commanded by Commodore Robert H. Barclay. When the armadas met, the Americans had more ships but the British had superior firepower. On the morning of Sept. 10, Perry hoisted the battle flag on his ship, the Lawrence, and steered his fleet toward Barclay's. Fighting ensued for hours until ships on both sides were battered and many lives were lost. When the Lawrence lost its last gun, Perry escaped in a boat and made it to his second ship, the Niagara, which was unharmed. Perry took that ship into battle. By now the enemy ships were in such bad shape, Perry was able to wipe out the British fleet. Barclay surrendered and Perry wrote a message to his commander, William Henry Harrison: "Dear General – We have met the enemy, and they are ours."

The victory left no alternative for the British but to abandon Detroit. When the Americans returned, on Sept. 29, 1813, they found that much of the city had been burned, but they met no resistance.