

## **Wrap Yourself in History Bicentennial Celebration Crucial Sea Battle on Lake Erie Set for 2013**

***By CAPT Edward Lundquist, USN (Ret)***

(Put-in-Bay, Ohio) -- One of the most famous sea battles in U.S. naval history took place in September 1813, not upon the sea, but on the waters of Lake Erie, between what is now Ohio and Ontario, Canada. In the War of 1812 against Great Britain, the Battle of Lake Erie was a crucial and decisive victory for America and its Navy, and the flotilla led by 27-year old Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry.

That battle was recently commemorated with events on Lake Erie. And next year—the 200th anniversary—will be even bigger.

While the actual bicentennial will be celebrated in 2013, a number of events occurred this year, according to Peter Huston of the Perry Group, which supports the commemorative events of the Battle of Lake Erie. The 199th anniversary was celebrated in conjunction with the Coast Guard and Navy during Navy War of 1812 Week at the Port of Cleveland Docks 28-30 on Aug 27-Sept. 4; and Put-in-Bay, Ohio on Sept. 8th 2012.

On Sept. 8, 2012, a harbor illumination took place at Put-In-Bay at the monument, with dozens of red flares illuminating the pathway as the Toledo Symphony Orchestra concludes its performance.

This story begins at Presque Isle, now Erie, Pa., where six wooden ships of green timber were constructed in eight months, yet they were well designed and solidly built. On the day of the great battle, the U.S. fleet on Lake Erie included two ships of 260 tons, Niagara and Lawrence, and seven other ships for a total of 54 guns and 960 tons. The British fleet comprised of six vessels, led by Detroit and Queen Charlotte, totaling 826 tons and 63 guns. It isn't certain exactly where the battle was fought.

Perry had a major impact on all the battles fought on Lake Erie, and on the outcome of the war, but he will always be remembered for his battle flag, emblazoned with the epitaph "Don't Give Up the Ship," the dying words of Capt. James Lawrence aboard the USS Chesapeake earlier that year. Perry was aboard Chesapeake at that time, and Lawrence was his Commanding Officer. Perry's flagship was named for him.



*Canadian Consul General Roy Norton speaks to assembled dignitaries on the buoy deck of Coast Guard Cutter Mobile Bay during the dedication Sept. 8, 2012 of a buoy to mark the location of the pivotal Battle of Lake Erie during the War of 1812. The battle, a major reversal for British forces on the Great Lakes, was being highlighted as part of the Bicentennial of the War of 1812 commemoration, which toured Great Lakes ports this summer. U.S. Coast Guard photo by Chief Petty Officer John Masson*

He is also remembered for his message to General William Henry Harrison, his superior in what was then the country's Northwest Territories, immediately after the victory: "We have met the enemy and they are ours; two ships, two brigs, one schooner and one sloop."

During the battle, Perry's flagship, USS Lawrence, was pummeled by the British fleet. Perry took his battle flag—draped around his shoulders—and was rowed across to the brig Niagara where he continued the battle to its successful conclusion.

That flag—on display at the U.S. Naval Academy—still inspires. And a group of citizens

known as the Perry Group are helping to keep history alive with a reenactment of that "transfer of command." In this event, to be conducted at the Port of Cleveland, the restored USS Niagara will join with active U.S. warship, USS DeWert (FFG 45), an Oliver Hazard Perry class frigate, where direct descendants of Commodore Perry—carrying a replica of the flag—will transfer by longboat from one ship to the other, ending with a commemoration of the event from the flight deck of DeWert. The Perry Group is underwriting the construction of the historically accurate 18'6" longboat of that era.



*Battle of Lake Erie by William H. Powell, painted 1865, shows Oliver Hazard Perry transferring from Lawrence to Niagara.*

Rear Adm. Joe Horn, who is the Commander of the Navy Air and Missile Defense Command at Dahlgren, Va., was a keynote speaker at the Put-In-Bay event. He said these observances are part of a series of events the Navy has undertaken in communities across the nation commemorating the War of 1812. "Yet few, if any, can match the strategic importance of the battle fought and won here. Some would say this was the center of gravity of the war."

Fittingly, Horn served previously as Commanding Officer of the guided missile cruiser USS Lake Erie (CG 70), named for the battle. The ship continues to have a close relationship with the communities on Lake Erie, and especially with Put-In-Bay.

Horn said Perry had joined the Navy at age 13, and by 28 was a combat veteran. "America victory rested on the shoulders of Oliver Hazard Perry."

"Perry's efforts—building and manning a fleet on the frontier of our nation was alone an accomplishment worthy of notoriety," said Horn. "His next task, however, to beat the world's strongest navy, was daunting. His battle orders—clear and concise: stay in a straight line to engage the enemy and fight your adversary in close action."

"Many tenants of naval warfare came into play that afternoon: linear battle, maneuverability, weather gauge, ordnance selection and ship design," said Horn.

Although some ships were badly damaged, no ships sunk that day. While Lake Erie is not deep, there is no apparent wreckage to mark the site. The USS Niagara was intentionally sunk in Misery Bay at Presque Isle in

1820 to "preserve her," and raised April 2, 1913 to be eventually restored (so much so that the present day Niagara is essentially an all new ship).

Control of the western end of Lake Erie was critical for access to a vast amount of territory. "The turning point of the war was the Battle of Lake Erie," said David Zavagno, Chairman of the Perry Group's battle of Lake Erie Bicentennial Committee.

"If Perry had lost, the war could have gone either way," added Huston.

The Perry's Victory and International Peace Memorial, located at Put-in-Bay on South Bass Island, a short boat ride from Port Clinton, Ohio, is operated by the National Park Service, with support from the Perry Group. It includes an interpretive center and the 352-foot monument, and is the place of interment for three American officers and three British officers killed in the Battle of Lake Erie.

The Battle of Lake Erie Bicentennial Celebration in late August through September 10, 2013 will attract people to Put-in-Bay and other Lake Erie locations. The events will include a fleet of Tall Ships in an historic reenactment of the Battle of Lake Erie, a grand Parade of Sail and Port Festivals in waterfront cities in the U.S. and Canada. Visitors will be able to tour the Ships, enlist as Crew Members in the reenactment, or be part of the Bicentennial Fleet or Militia.

For information about these events, visit the Perry Group website: [www.BattleofLakeErie-Bicentennial.com](http://www.BattleofLakeErie-Bicentennial.com).

