

# U.S. Navy Museum Hosts Battle of Lake Erie Commemoration at Washington Navy Yard

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by Patrick Gordon NDW Waterline

The National Museum of the U.S. Navy held a commemoration at the Washington Navy Yard Sept. 10 to honor the Battle of Lake Erie during the War of 1812.

The commemoration coincides with the bicentennial of the battle, which occurred Sept. 10, 1813, in Lake Erie. At the time, President James Madison was concerned with invading Canada to use as a bargaining chip to gain concessions from England regarding violations of neutral trade. This required securing the northern lakes to support any land-based operations in the area. It would be at Lake Erie, off the coast of Ohio, where U.S. Navy Master Commandant Oliver Hazard Perry would

face the British with six ships and three converted merchant vessels. Aboard his flagship, USS Lawrence, Perry flew a flag with the words "Don't Give Up The Ship!" emblazoned upon it, words attributed to fallen American naval officer James Lawrence.

What followed was vicious fighting between the two forces. Perry and his men manned USS Lawrence until the last of her guns were rendered useless. With only a few uninjured men available, Perry and a small crew boarded a row boat and sailed under harassing fire to USS Niagara, where he continued to bring the fight to the British, who by now had assumed the Americans were going to surrender. Instead, Niagara penetrated the British line, and along with the remaining American vessels continued to fight until the British surrendered. The battle was a boon to the young American Navy, proving their might and resolve in the face of adversity and presumed defeat.

To honor this action, The Navy Museum treated guests to various events centered around the Battle of Lake Erie, including tours of the museum's "1813: Don't Give Up The Ship" exhibit by Dr. Edward Furgo, curator of the U.S. Navy Museum, discussions with historic reenactor Leigh Jameson as Dolly Madison on the first lady's experiences during 1813, performances of period music by The Chantymen of Ships Company, and a lecture by Charles E. Brodine, historian at the Naval History and Heritage Command.

"If anyone wanted an example of 'Honor, Courage, and Commitment' in one action it is Perry at Lake Erie," said Furgo on the importance of the commemoration. "He understood the strategic value of his tactical operations. He didn't get out there and say, 'Oh, I'm just going to go and defeat the British fleet.' Rather, Perry understood that he needed to beat the British Fleet, in order to retake Detroit and then invade Canada - which was the military aim from the beginning - and Perry did just that."

Also included was a gun drill of the 24-pounder canon at the "Old Ironsides" exhibit at the museum run by reenactors of Ships Company, who answered guests' questions about the purpose of such drills, the effect the cannons had, and life aboard sailing ships during the War of 1812.

The National Museum of the U.S. Navy collects, preserves, displays, and interprets historic naval artifacts and artwork to inform, educate, and inspire naval personnel and the general public. Devoted to the display of naval artifacts, models, documents and fine art, the museum chronicles the history of the United States Navy from the American Revolution to the present conflicts. Interactive exhibits commemorate the U.S. Navy's wartime heroes and battles as well as peacetime contributions in exploration, diplomacy, navigation and humanitarian service.



U.S. Navy photos by Patrick Gordon Dr. Edward Furgo, curator of the U.S. Navy Museum, describes the Battle of Lake Erie to guests in front of a model of USS Niagara. Master Commandant Oliver Hazard Perry led Niagara to victory over the British during the battle.

For more information on events in Naval District Washington, visit [www.facebook.com/NavDistWash](http://www.facebook.com/NavDistWash).