

War Comes to Mount Welby

“I should not be surprised if Government persists in their determinations to quarrel with England that we should experience all the horrors of civil discord.”

Letter of Mary Welby DeButts to her brother Richard Earl Welby, April 2, 1812.

In the letter above, Mary DeButts was right to worry. The quarrel between the United States and Great Britain erupted into the War of 1812 only two months after she wrote to her brother.

This international power struggle had very personal consequences for Samuel and Mary DeButts. One of the war’s most important battles was fought within a few miles of Mount Welby. For part of the war they fled their home. And down on the Potomac, they got a close look at the might of the British Navy.

The causes of the war were complicated and reached from the American frontier across the Atlantic Ocean.

Causes of the War of 1812

In the North, some Americans hoped to invade British Canada as part of a war and perhaps annex Canadian provinces as new states of the Union.

Settlers believed British agents were encouraging American Indians to attack forts and settlements. In a war with Britain, westerners saw a chance to drive British troops off the frontier and conquer Indians lands.

Locked in a war with France, Great Britain stopped American merchant ships and sometimes confiscated their cargoes. The British Navy also searched ships for British deserters. By 1810, the British were forcing about 1,000 seamen a year off U.S. ships and onto British vessels. The treatment of American ships and sailors outraged the people and leaders of the new nation.

The territories of Florida and Texas belonged to Britain’s ally, Spain. Southerners reasoned that these lands might be opened to expansion if Britain lost a war with the United States.



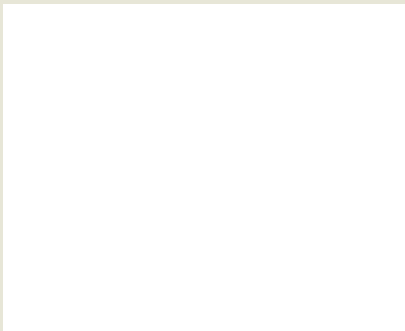
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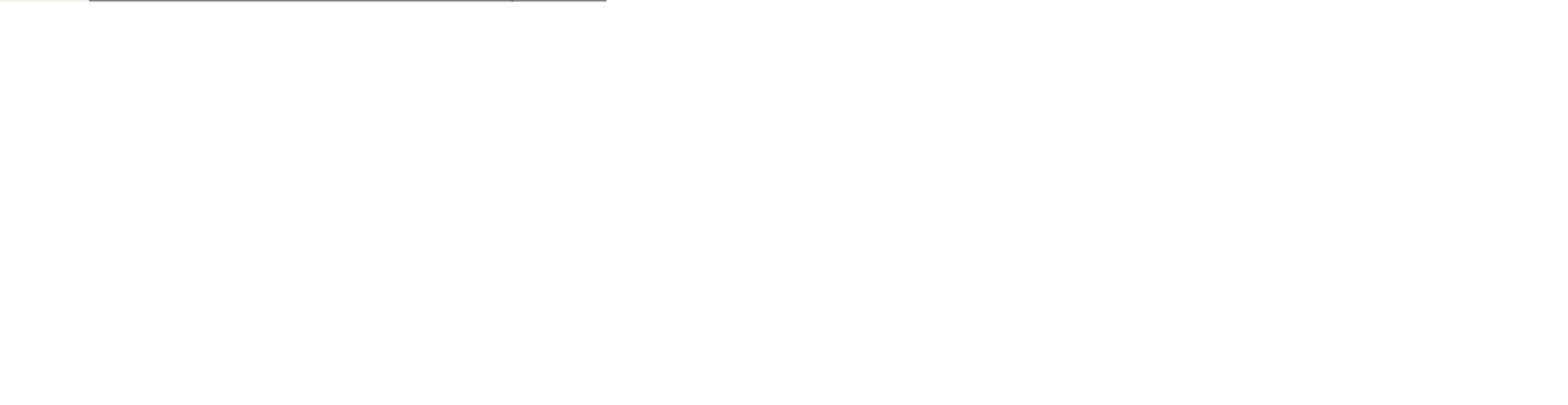
Gun Barge



Gun Boat



Rocket Ship



Bombship

Frigate

American vessels are shown in blue and the British vessels in red.

Redrawn by Jon G. Dean from original illustrations by Calvert Marine Museum for all boats, except the British Rocket Boat which is redrawn from an original illustration by Carl E. Franklin.