

San Juan Island

San Juan Island
National Historical Park
Washington

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



ENGLISH CAMP



AMERICAN CAMP

TWO NATIONS ON THE BRINK OF WAR NEGOTIATE THEIR WAY TO LASTING FRIENDSHIP

San Juan Island National Historical Park celebrates how individuals and nations can resolve disputes without resorting to violence. For it was here in the mid-1800s that Great Britain and the United States settled ownership of the island through peaceful arbitration.

Long before the Europeans arrived, the island's temperate climate, rich soil, timber, and marine resources attracted native peoples who for thousands of years netted salmon, hunted game, and gathered camas roots. The islands were first explored, charted, and named in the 1790s by Spain and Great Britain, and later by the United States. Each staked claims to the Oregon Country—the present states of Washington, Oregon, and Idaho, and parts of Wyoming, Montana, and British Columbia. Spain withdrew by 1800, and the British and the Americans agreed to a joint occupation of the region in 1818.

Although lucrative trade agreements and capital investments existed between the two nations, the Americans living in the Oregon Country considered the British presence an affront to their "manifest destiny." The British believed they had a legal right to lands guaranteed by earlier treaties, explorations, and the commercial activities of the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC).

Nevertheless, in June 1846 the Treaty of Oregon was signed in London. The boundary was set along the 49th parallel, from the Rocky Mountains to the middle of the "channel" separating Vancouver Island from the mainland, then south to the Strait of Juan de Fuca and west to the Pacific Ocean. But there are two channels: Haro Strait, nearest Vancouver Island, and Rosario Strait, nearer the mainland. The San Juan Islands lie between. Both sides claimed the entire island group.

By 1853 the HBC established Belle Vue Sheep Farm on the island's southern shore, site of today's American Camp. The move was political, but the island's fertile soil and grazing lands also turned immediate profits. Word of good farm land spread quickly to the mainland and by the spring of 1859, at least 18 Americans had settled claims that the British believed were illegal.

An uneasy peace ended on June 15, 1859, when Lyman Cutlar, an American, shot an HBC pig root-

ing in his garden. When British authorities threatened Cutlar with arrest and his countrymen with eviction from the island, a delegation sought protection from Brig. Gen. William S. Harney, commander of the U.S. Army's Department of Oregon. Harney ordered a company of infantry commanded by Capt. George E. Pickett (of later Civil War fame) to San Juan Island. Pickett landed his 64-man unit on July 27.

In response, British Gov. (and HBC chief factor) James Douglas dispatched Royal Navy Capt. Geoffrey Hornby and three warships with 62 total guns, 400 Royal Marines, and 15 Royal Engineers with orders to dislodge Pickett but avoid an armed clash. Pickett refused to budge and sought help from Harney, who sent Lt. Col. Silas Casey with reinforcements on August 10. Soon 461 soldiers occupied the island, erecting fortifications while Hornby watched from the bay. Fortunately, Rear Adm. R. Lambert Baynes, commander of the Royal Navy's Pacific Station, had by then

returned from sea and ordered Hornby to stand fast. British naval policy dictated that he was only to fire if fired upon.

When word of the crisis reached Washington six weeks later, both governments agreed to send Lt. Gen. Winfield Scott, U.S. Army commander, to contain the affair. He arrived by steamer in late October, and within a week he and Douglas agreed to reduce their forces to no more than 100 U.S. soldiers and a single British warship.

On March 21, 1860, Royal Marines landed and set up "English Camp" on Garrison Bay, 13 miles northwest of American Camp. For the next 12 years, San Juan Island would remain under a peaceful joint military occupation.

In 1871 the boundary question was submitted for arbitration to Kaiser Wilhelm I of Germany, who a year later ruled that the islands belonged to the United States. The Royal Marines left in November 1872, the U.S. troops two years later. Peace was affirmed on the 49th parallel, and San Juan Island would be long remembered for the "war" in which the only casualty was a pig.



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Sir James Douglas
Governor, B.C.
Allowed superiors to assume that U.S. actions threatened British settlers, not Hudson's Bay Company workers.



R. Lambert Baynes
Rear Admiral
Knighthood because the only casualty was a pig. "Tut, tut, no, no, the damn fools," he was reported to say.



Geoffrey P. Hornby
Captain
Wisely dodged Governor Douglas's orders to confront Pickett. Suggested instead a joint military occupation.

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MAP The San Juan Islands' interior waterways and narrow passages provided a covered anchorage for warships. A spyglass from the American Camp prairie could track every sortie from Victoria and Esquimalt harbors beyond. This was a significant advantage in an age when commerce and warfare in the region moved primarily by sea.

JOINT OCCUPATION GAMES Royal Marines marched to American Camp to celebrate the Fourth of July, and the U.S. troops sallied forth to English Camp to toast Queen Victoria's birthday. Picnicking, libations, horse racing, gunny sack races, and track-and-field events entertained troops usually separated by 13 miles between camps.



William S. Harney
Brigadier General
No Harney, no Pig War. Rightly moved to protect U.S. settlers on disputed lands but turned hostile and escalated the events imprudently.



Winfield Scott
Lieutenant General
This sharp-minded lawyer's handling of the Pig War led to important future cooperation in U.S.-British affairs.



George E. Pickett
Captain
Bluffed the British and worked first to please Harney, then Scott, but he was ignorant of the Treaty of Oregon.



FOURTH OF JULY: AMERICAN CAMP HOSTS THE ENGLISH CAMP

ALL ILLUSTRATIONS BY RICHARD SCHLECHT

Richard Schacht 1988

