



The Gulf Theater, 1813-1815 (U.S. Army Campaigns of the War of 1812)

Joseph F. Stoltz III Ph.D.

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The Gulf Theater, 1813-1815 examines the climactic military operations of the War of 1812. Most readers have heard of the legendary engagement of 8 January 1815 at New Orleans that has been told in song and story, but this publication puts it into the perspective of a much broader series of events. Although relegated as a minor theater for much of the conflict, British commanders focused attention on the Gulf Coast and the city of New Orleans after the twin defeats at Plattsburgh, New York, and Baltimore, Maryland, in September 1814. With British agents attempting to arm and train American Indian allies to fight their common foe while weak but nominally neutral Spanish troops watched helplessly, as U.S. forces commanded by Army Maj. Gen. Andrew Jackson secured present-day Alabama and took the offensive into Florida to foil enemy attempts to seize and establish bases at Mobile and Pensacola. The main U.S. effort then shifted to the defense of New Orleans and maintaining control of the Lower Mississippi River. The British invasion began with the 14 December 1814 naval battle of Lake Borgne, followed by no less than four land engagements. The narrative explains the course, outcomes, and significance of each, including Jackson's 23 December "Night Battle" at Villeré Plantation, the British "Reconnaissance in Force" of 28 December 1814, and the massive artillery duel on New Year's Day before the decisive battle of 8 January. Characterized as the British "Grand Assault," it is presented in detail. Despite lopsided casualty figures, and given the fighting that occurred on the west bank, one sees the Battle of New Orleans as more closely contested than many realized. Explaining that the Battle of New Orleans neither represented the "last battle," nor was fought "after the war ended," challenges two of the many myths associated with it. As the last in the War of 1812 series, the brochure's conclusion analyzes the significance of the War of 1812 and the lessons it still holds for today's Army.

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