



Local students get history lesson at Fort McHenry

They take part in activities to mark Defenders' Day

By Joe Burris, The Baltimore Sun

10:55 p.m. EDT, September 10, 2010

Many of the 1,400 students at [Fort McHenry](#) on Friday had heard about the defense of Baltimore in 1814 against a British amphibious invasion, an American triumph that inspired Francis Scott Key to pen what would become the national anthem.

Taking part in the "Young Defenders" event enabled the youngsters to experience the historic moment, as they shrieked to the near-deafening sounds of cannon blasts and captured the demonstrations on cell phone cameras.

"We hear about it in class, but to actually see it is totally different; you understand the environment from actually seeing it," said Jennifer Vukov, 16, of [Dundalk](#), a junior at [Patapsco](#) High School.

She joined classmates in a program that's part of "Defenders' Day and Star-Spangled Weekend." The three-day event marks the Maryland holiday that celebrates the anniversary of one of the turning points in the War of 1812, as militia beat back a British land force and soldiers at Fort McHenry withstood a 25-hour bombardment by British invaders.

U.S. National Park Service officials say that "Young Defenders" is a way to create interest among local youngsters in a historic site that many have never visited. They said that Friday's gathering of students was the largest since Fort McHenry began holding "Young Defenders" events in 2003. Students came from several schools in Baltimore City as well as from neighboring counties.

"The story of the defense of Fort McHenry and the Battle of Baltimore has a greater relevance for kids who grew up in Baltimore," said Gay Vietzke, superintendent of the Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine. "This is a story about the citizens of Baltimore choosing to defend their own city, their own homes.

"The national capital was literally in flames. They burned the [White House](#) a week or so before these events," Vietzke added. "And rather than giving in, folks here in Baltimore decided that they would defend this city. There is a tremendous story that relates to civic pride and love for your city."

Some parents accompanied their children on what for many was a class field trip.

"I came here when I was a kid. It's an important part of history," said Tiffany Frey of Morrell Park, who

attended with her daughter, Maqueila Morales, 9, and other students from Morrell Park Elementary School.

Students drilled as soldiers with wooden replica muskets, staged mock sword battles with re-enactment actors and watched cannon-firing exercises.

Near the conclusion of the program, the students formed a giant American flag by standing in a grid and placing colored placards above their heads. The moment was similar to a 1914 scene that marked the 100th anniversary of the battle.

While many of the students in attendance visited as part of field trips, Davon Woodard, 17, of West Baltimore was there for work. The senior at Coppin Academy has been serving as a part-time youth ranger at Fort McHenry since June.

"I didn't know about Fort McHenry until I started working here," Woodard said. "Then I learned about the Battle of Baltimore and why the Key Bridge is where it's at. It was a good learning experience."

Woodard works on call during a portion of his regular school day, receiving excused absences from school. Among the job's perks, he says, is the Park Service uniform, complete with a forest green sweater and tie.

"At first I said, 'What do I have on?'" said Woodard when he first tried on the uniform. "I don't even look like a kid from West Baltimore anymore. I look like somebody important, somebody with a purpose."

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Images on the following pages are from

<http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/photos/bal-defenders-day-pg,0,7030971.photogallery>



Musket drill

(Baltimore Sun photo by Kim Hairston / September 10, 2010)

Aaron Bradford, of Sutherland, VA, leads 7th grade students from Francis Scott Key Elementary/Middle School in the musket drill. Bradford is dressed in the uniform of a 3rd Regiment US Corps of Artillery soldier. The uniform would have been used late in the War of 1812. Nearly 1,400 state school children took part in Young Defenders Day at the Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine.



Patrick Callahan

(Baltimore Sun photo by Kim Hairston / September 10, 2010)

Patrick Callahan, of Preston, MD, portrays a cook who is contracted labor to Fort McHenry as nearly 1,400 state school children visit the Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine for Young Defenders Day. Reenactors are camping out on the site for the weekend of activities that commemorate the writing of "The Star-Spangled Banner" and the defense of Baltimore during the War of 1812.



William O'Brien:

(Baltimore Sun photo by Kim Hairston / September 10, 2010)

William O'Brien, 9, Ft. Wayne, IN, 1st US Light Artillery, watches the activity as nearly 1,400 state school children take part in Young Defenders Day at Fort McHenry.



Pick-up sticks

(Baltimore Sun photo by Kim Hairston / September 10, 2010)

Students from Beechfield Elementary and Middle School try their hand at pick-up sticks, one of the games played in the early 1800s, as Wendy Alexander, Catonsville, portraying Mrs. Eva Maria Schwartzauer, a tavern owner, talks about tells them how to play. The tavern, a two story brick building with a kitchen, sat on this site outside the walls of Fort McHenry.



Hardtack and coffee

(Baltimore Sun photo by Kim Hairston / September 10, 2010)

Fourth and Fifth grade students from Beechfield Elementary and Middle School get a look at hardtack and coffee beans in the Combat Catering tent. The students are visiting the Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine for Young Defenders Day activities.



Drum adjustment

(Baltimore Sun photo by Kim Hairston / September 10, 2010)

Tim Schulte, of St. Paul, MO, adjusts his rope-tensioned bass drum inside the soldier's barracks.



Davon Woodard

(Baltimore Sun photo by Kim Hairston / September 10, 2010)

Davon Woodard, of West Baltimore, Corps of Artillery, stands outside the barracks. Nearly 1,400 state school children take part in Young Defenders Day at the Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine.



Raising the flag

(Baltimore Sun photo by Kim Hairston / September 10, 2010)

Justin Thomas, 12, 7th grader at Francis Scott Key Elementary and Middle School, is guided by Walter Crowther, a volunteer, as he and other children help to raise the flag over Fort McHenry.



Cutlass drill

(Baltimore Sun photo by Kim Hairston / September 10, 2010)

Makaila Elmore, 8, Aberdeen, a third grade student at Church Creek Elementary School, gets help during a cutlass drill from Danielle Taylor, a teacher at Church Creek who is also providing living history. Taylor is portraying a seamstress, laundress and washerwoman from 1814 who was contracted by the US Army to come to Fort McHenry once a month to repair and clean the soldier's uniforms.



Musket drill

(Baltimore Sun photo by Kim Hairston / September 10, 2010)

Avanta Sutton (left) is one in a line of seventh grade students from Francis Scott Key Elementary and Middle School taking part in the musket drill inside Fort McHenry.



"Huzzah!"

(Baltimore Sun photo by Kim Hairston / September 10, 2010)

School children shout "Huzzah!" before lifting up their cards to form the flag as they take part in Young Defenders Day at the Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine.



Fife and Drum Corps

(Baltimore Sun photo by Kim Hairston / September 10, 2010)

A fife and drum corps marches on the grounds of the Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine.