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Educating and Remembering

War of 1812 Reenactment Brings History Alive in St. Leonard

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More than 4,500 visitors attended the North American Grand Tactical at Jefferson Patterson Park in St. Leonard last weekend, one of the first major events leading to the bicentennial celebration of Maryland's role in the War of 1812.

The Grand Tactical, which drew 550 reenactors from as far as Canada, Missouri and Kentucky, focused on some of the United States' most important history, the battles that led to the burning of Washington and the Battle of Baltimore.

"The War of 1812 in the Chesapeake gave the nation two of its most important icons: the flag, the star-spangled banner . . . and the national anthem," said Bill Pencek, executive director of the Maryland War of 1812 Bicentennial Commission.

In addition to reenacting cannon fire of the Battle of St. Leonard Creek and the face-to-face combat of the Battle of Bladensburg, reenactors and members of the National Park Service's Fort McHenry Guard explained the history and nuisances of war in the 1800s to visitors.

Just after learning about how the U.S. soldier's hat added height for intimidation, Abigail VanEcko, 4, of Lexington Park said, "I liked the part when the enemy gets scared."

Abigail's siblings, Catherine, 8, and Andrew, 6, liked watching the reenactors load and shoot the cannons.

Ndidi Igbozuruike, 6, of the District said she preferred wandering around the British and U.S. camp sites.

"I had no idea there would be these huge camps," said Jean-Paul Gauthier, 39, of the District, who took his son, Tristan, 6, and Ndidi to the event. "The quality of the equipment and the kit is very impressive."



A British reenactment unit, left, practices tactical maneuvers for the Battle of St. Leonard Creek. Right, Catherine Van Ecko, 8, of Lexington Park tries on the hat of a member of the Fort Henry Guard during the North American Grand Tactical. (Mark Gail - The Washington Post)

Mikala Currington, 11, agreed. "It looks really cool how they set it all up," Mikala said as her brother, Domenick Walton, 5, was trying on a musket for size.

The Lusby family was attracted to the event by the tall ships docked in Solomons Island on Saturday. The ships sailed to Jefferson Patterson Park on Sunday, giving visitors an idea of what Capt. Joshua Barney's Chesapeake flotilla might have looked like.

Educating young people will be emphasized in the bicentennial commission's plan, which will be presented to the governor and Maryland General Assembly next year, Pencek said.

"Although it is about the past, this is very much about setting the platform for the next century of resources stewardship, both natural and cultural resources, the next century of education and interpretation [and] community revitalization," he said.