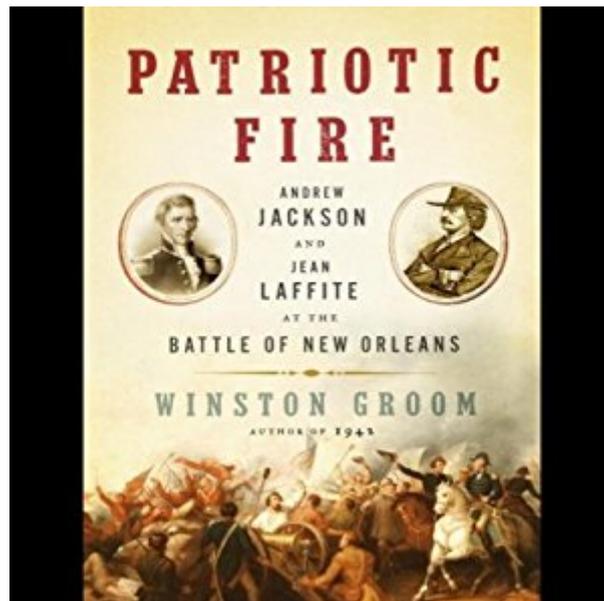


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# Patriotic Fire: Andrew Jackson And Jean Laffite At The Battle Of New Orleans



## Synopsis

From the author of best-selling works of history and fiction, a fast-paced, enthralling retelling of one of the greatest battles fought on the North American continent, and of the two men who-against all expectations and odds-joined forces to repel the British invasion of New Orleans in December 1814. It has all the ingredients of a high-flying adventure story. Unbeknownst to the combatants, the War of 1812 has ended, but Andrew Jackson, a brave, charismatic American general-sick with dysentery and commanding a beleaguered garrison-leads a desperate struggle to hold on to the city of New Orleans and to thwart the army that defeated Napoleon. Helping him is a devilish French pirate, Jean Laffite, who rebuffs a substantial bribe from the British and together with his erstwhile enemy saves the city from invasion . . . much to the grateful chagrin of New Orleanians, shocked to find themselves on the same side as the brazen buccaneer. Winston Groom brings his considerable storytelling gifts to the re-creation of this remarkable battle and to the portrayal of its main players. Against the richly evocative backdrop of French New Orleans, he illuminates Jackson's brilliant strategy and tactics, as well as the antics and cutthroat fighting prowess of Laffite and his men. Patriotic Fire brings this extraordinary military achievement vividly to life. --This text refers to the Preloaded Digital Audio Player edition.

## Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 10 hours and 10 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Tantor Audio

Audible.com Release Date: September 1, 2006

Whispersync for Voice: Ready

Language: English

ASIN: B000ICM29M

Best Sellers Rank: #27 in Books > History > Military > War of 1812 #508 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > History > Military #694 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > History > United States & Canada

## Customer Reviews

Many people will recognize Winston Groom as the creator of "Forrest Gump." But Groom is also an accomplished chronicler of military history, and here he applies his considerable narrative talents to

the climactic engagement of the War of 1812, the Battle of New Orleans. Sadly, many Americans have little or no knowledge of this epic battle, one of the most consequential and lopsided victories in U.S. history. Andrew Jackson and a polyglot band of Tennessee and Kentucky "brown shirts," French Creoles, Indians, Free Men of Color (many of them refugees from the slave revolt in Haiti), Privateers, and ordinary New Orleans citizens did not just repulse a vastly superior force of British invaders. They decimated Wellington's Finest, fresh off their victory over Napoleon. The British suffered some 3,750 casualties, including 850 killed, as compared with 55 Americans killed and 333 total casualties. Included among the 850 was Wellington's brother-in-law, General Sir Edward Pakenham, overall commander of the British ground forces. Pakenham, whose remains were shipped back to England preserved in a vat of rum, inherited a bad strategic situation and, Grooms says, made it worse. Groom maintains there may never have been a New Orleans victory - or thus a Jackson Presidency - without Jean Laffite and his Privateers from the island of Barataria. Rejecting British offers of cash and bounty, the Baratarians provided the Americans with desperately needed munitions, especially gunpowder; an intimate familiarity with the terrain and waterways leading to New Orleans; and a skill in handling artillery that may have been decisive. What's more, it was Laffite who convinced Jackson to strength and extend his left line, prescient counsel that helped to thwart the British attack plan. Overall, Groom says, the Baratarians' contributions to victory "were substantial, if not crucial." The New Orleans triumph came at a time of extreme peril for the young nation. To that point, The War of 1812 had largely been a series of ignominious setbacks or worse, punctuated by the torching of the nation's capital. Secessionist fever gripped New England. And the British invasion of New Orleans was clearly the first move in a land grab designed to cut the U.S. in half. None of this transpired, thanks to the stalwart defense of New Orleans mounted by Jackson, Laffite and their compatriots. This is a terrific story of patriotism and heroism, which Groom recounts masterfully. A very worthwhile read.

The War of 1812 is one of the American conflicts that is less well known to the general public. Beyond the White House being burned, the composition of "The Star Spangled Banner" as the British assaulted Fort McHenry at Baltimore, and some vague notions of the Battle of New Orleans (and that from the pop song from 1959 by Jimmy Driftwood and sung by Johnny Horton), it doesn't hold much of a place in our already too weak sense of our own history. This well written popular history of the battle by Winston Groom will help anyone who is not already a scholar on the subject, learn more about the famous Battle of New Orleans, what was really at stake, the great leadership of Andrew Jackson, the vital contributions of Jean Laffite and his Baratarian privateers (well,

pirates), and the strength of the British that was squandered by the mistakes of the British officers. Groom provides a nice background of the life of Andrew Jackson and the political context that led to the War of 1812 (and the stupidity of the political leaders on both sides) and how the Indian war led by Tecumseh contributed to Jackson and his army being where they were to thwart the British in late 1814 and early 1815. The life of Jean Laffite is also told in what detail we know. The author does a nice job in letting us know when there are different points of view and varying claims about the biographies of Jackson, Lafitte, and the forces in the battle. On paper, the battle should have gone the vast resources the British brought to the battle. A huge number of ships, thousands upon thousands of professional soldiers, tons of gunpowder, cannon, and shell, and confidence born of success in battle in Europe. The Americans were a ragged bunch; mostly militia that were under equipped and with almost no clothes. Yet Jackson had them build a huge rampart that British delays allowed them to strengthen. The Baratarians provided the Americans with much needed supplies and were experts with cannon. The British were also unable to adapt to the unprofessional style of fighting of the Americans and were demoralized that their enemies would fight according to European rules. Truly the British accomplished some difficult tasks to bring such a vast army and its resources to such a difficult point to fight, but the Americans were fighting for their native soil. The delays and mistakes and miscommunications led the British to defeat. When you go to all the trouble of building ladders and tools to scale the rampart, but leave them behind when you go to fight, well, you actually deserve to lose. One of the aspects of the War of 1812 that rhymes with our present fighting is that press from New York and Boston was strongly against the war and the administration that waged it. The war was labelled "Mr. Madison's War" and there was strong talk of the New England states seceding from the Union. George Cabot, a U.S. Senator from Massachusetts(!) and presiding officer of the Hartford Convention, branded the war as unjust and morally wrong (page 165). Does this sound familiar? The Hartford, Connecticut Courant had a headline that said, "Secession!". When Andrew Jackson heard of this he said, "I would hang them all." How things stay the same despite the turns of history. What is especially interesting is that the main part of The Battle of New Orleans occurred on January 8, 1815. However the treaty of Ghent, ending the War of 1812 was signed on December 24, 1814. The battle took place because it took a significant period of time to bring the news to the United States and then to the Gulf Coast. A significant battle was fought at Mobile even after New Orleans. Even so, one might be tempted to think that if the British had won the battle they would have had to return it to America. Not likely. The British rejected the legality of the Louisiana Purchase because they did not recognize Napoleon as the legitimate leader of France. So, if the British had won New Orleans, even after the treaty was

signed, they would have been loath to return it and would certainly kept any plunder. Many think that it was the riches in New Orleans that led Admiral Cochrane to undertake such a risky and difficult assault. The last chapter tells us in brief what life held in store for the principles of this important and historic battle. We even get a summary of The Calamity where Jackson allowed six men to be executed for desertion. This harsh act almost undid his ambitions to become President of the United States. Groom shows us why the executions were not only cruel, but an absurd mistake. There are also good maps and some fine pictures letting us see some of the action as it was recorded and even as it was fancifully imagined later. Groom also provides us with some notes about the sources and the choices he had to make in telling the history. I found this book to be quite enjoyable, informative, and an all around good read.

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