

1812 (historical novel 1812-1815) by David Nevin (1996)

The war of 1812 started because the British were seizing the US merchant ships to take the men & goods to help them fight Napoleon. At the time the British ruled the seas. The US was a young unproven Nation still in debt from the revolution. Frances Scott Key wrote the Star-spangled Banner from a prisoner of war ship as Ft. McHenry fought off the British in 1814. President Madison was unwavering & the British signed a peace treaty.

Winfield Scott was sentenced one year without pay for calling General Wilkenson a scoundrel (that he was). He took that time to intensely study the great military battles from history then demands a promotion. He trained his men professionally & did well on the battlefield near Niagara Falls. Naval battle on Plattsburgh Bay (Lake Champlain) 26-gun US Saratoga vs. 36-gun British Confiance (a new ship twice its size). US Commodore MacDonough outsmarted them.

Secretary of War Armstrong was inept & was replaced with Monroe (he was also acting as Secretary of State). Armstrong & General Winder did not protect Washington DC & the British came in & burned the Capital & White House. This united Americans & recruits flooded in. Soon after they defeated the British at Baltimore.

Andrew Jackson ruled the Kentucky Militia by anger. Later he changed and learned to control his emotions and became a better leader. He was promoted to general of the regular army and took control of the bays near Mobile AL & Pensacola, FL from the Spanish to force the British to land near New Orleans (which they wanted to capture & control the Mississippi River). But there was a fort at the mouth of the Mississippi River so they would have to sail into Lake Pontchartrain, then row through the swamps to an open field next to the great river. Jackson built a massive wall just past a canal and destroyed the British with the help of a pirate and his men & supplies.

It's a human condition to want to be what we are not. Talk is cheap: the price on the battlefield is always dear. Old politicians arguing senselessly, think little of the youth they send off to war to execute such decisions. Love dies or it deepens to a communion of souls. Anger is like riding a wild horse (it can get out of control). When your greatest strength turns on you, it becomes your greatest enemy. We're often our worst enemy.

We're the only ones who can really undermine ourselves. Hannibal crossed the Alps on elephants to trap 50,000 Roman troops & broke Roman power (weak center & closing wings). A controlled inner force requires no assertion, it just is. Any fool can say what can't be done: it's more important to figure out how it can be done. As a glass magnifies the sun's strength, so do our concentrated efforts become more powerful. In the end Jackson realized that without his wife he would have destroyed himself.

Quotes: "Fortune favors the bold." (Julius Caesar)

"The very thing that carries the seeds of greatness, carries the seeds of destruction as well."

"It's the hard knocks that turn youngsters into mature men & women."

"The power is in you: you can be a great as you decide to be." (David Nevin)