

## Andrew Jackson to Robert Hays, February 17, 1815, from Correspondence of Andrew Jackson. Edited by John Spencer Bassett.

### TO SECRETARY MONROE.1

1 *Niles' Register*, VII. 372; Latour, app., pp. lii–liv.

Camp 4 Miles below New Orleans, January 9, 1815.

*Sir:* During the days of the 6th and 7th, the enemy had been actively employed in making preparations for an attack on my lines. With infinite labor they had succeeded on the night of the 7th in getting their boats across from the lake to the river, by widening and deepening the canal on which they had effected their disembarkation. It had not been in my power to impede these operations by a general attack: added to other reasons, the nature of the troops under my command, mostly militia, rendered it too hazardous to attempt extensive offensive movements in an open country, against a numerous and well disciplined army. Althoughpage my forces, as to number, had been increased by the arrival of the Kentucky division, my strength had received very little addition; a small portion only of that detachment being provided with arms. Compelled thus to wait the attack of the enemy, I took every measure to repel it when it should be made, and to defeat the object he had in view. General Morgan, with the New Orleans contingent, the Louisiana militia and a strong detachment of the Kentucky troops, occupied an entrenched camp on the opposite side of the river, protected by strong batteries on the bank, erected and superintended by commodore Patterson.

In *my* encampment everything was ready for action, when, early on the morning of the 8th, the enemy after throwing a heavy shower of bombs and Congreve rockets, advanced their

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columns on my right and left, to storm my entrenchments. I cannot speak sufficiently in praise of the firmness and deliberation with which my whole line received their approach — *more* could not have been expected from veterans inured to war. For an hour the fire of the small arms was an incessant and severe as can be imagined. The artillery, too, directed by officers who displayed equal skill and courage, did great execution. Yet the columns of the enemy continued to advance with a firmness which reflects upon them the greatest credit. Twice the column which approached me on my left, was repulsed by the troops of General Carroll, those of General Coffee, and a division of the Kentucky militia, and twice they formed again and renewed the assault. At length, however, cut to pieces, they fled in confusion from the field, leaving it covered with their dead and wounded. The loss which the enemy sustained on this occasion, cannot be estimated at less than 1500 in killed, wounded and prisoners. Upwards of three hundred have already been delivered over for burial; and my men are still engaged in picking them up within my lines and carrying them to the point where the enemy are to receive them. This is in addition to the dead and wounded whom the enemy have been enabled to carry from the field, during and since the action, and to those who have since died of the wounds they have received. We have taken about 500 prisoners, upwards of 300 of whom are wounded, and a great part of them mortally. My loss has not exceeded, and I believe has not amounted to ten killed and as many wounded.

The entire destruction of the enemy's army was now inevitable, had it not been for an unfortunate occurrence which at this moment took place on the other side of the river. Simultaneously with his advance, upon my lines, he had thrown over in his boats a considerable force to the other side of the river. *These* having landed were hardy enough to advance against the works of General Morgan; and what is strange and difficult to account for, at the very moment when their entire discomfiture was looked for with a confidence approaching to certainty, the Kentucky reinforcements, ingloriously fled, drawing after them, by their example, the remainder of the forces; and thus yielding to the enemy that most fortunate position. The batteries which had rendered me, for many days,

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the most important service, though bravely defended, were of course now abandoned; not however, until the guns had been spiked.

This unfortunate route had totally changed the aspect of affairs. The enemy now occupied a position from which they might annoy us without paghazard, and by means of which they might have been enabled to defeat, in a great measure, the effects of our success on this side the river. It became therefore an object of the first consequence to dislodge him as soon as possible. For this object, all the means in my power, which I could with safety use, were immediately put in preparation. Perhaps, however, it was somewhat owing to another cause that I succeeded beyond my expectations, In negotiating the terms of a temporary suspension of hostilities to enable the enemy to bury their dead and provide for their wounded, I had required certain propositions to be acceded to as a basis; among which was this one—that although hostilities should cease on this side the river until 12 o'clock of this day, yet it was not to be understood that they should cease on the *other side* ; but that no reinforcements should be sent across by *either* army until the expiration of that day. His excellency major-general Lambert begged time to consider of these propositions until 10 o'clock of today, and in the meantime recrossed his troops. I need not tell you with how much eagerness I immediately regained possession of the position he had thus hastily quitted.

The enemy having centered his forces, may again attempt to drive me from my position by storm. Whenever he *does* , I have no doubt my men will act with their usual firmness, and sustain a character now become dear to them.

I have the honor to be, with great respect, Your obedient servant.