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Madison's Redans, Ravelins and Bastions: A Short History of the War of 1812

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ABSTRACT.
The employment of earthworks and breastworks in defense of dense communities is considered in light of the advice of Baron Henri de Jomini through the Secretary of Defense, soi-disant to be sure. Our Constitutional Logic investigates why Madison was not impeached after August 25, 1814.

KEY WORDS. Earthworks, Breastworks, Redans, Ravelins, Bastions.

The Governor and I locate a sunny spot.
Construction cranes tower overhead.
Jimmy and Dolley are ‘shooting the lines.’
“It doesn’t have to be perfect,” I suggest.
“Every city – and especially every coastal city – should be protected by elaborate fortifications,” Madison explains.
“Jimmy’s learned from experience,” Dolley looks up from her transit.
“Last week we built coastal defenses in San Dog.”
“That’s localese for ‘San Diego’,” Jimmy adds, noting the distance.
“They like to blend,” Mr. Whitecheese pushes his piano down the ramp from his pickup truck.
“Hence turning the Port of Anchorage into the Maginot Line,” Jimmy explains. “Take it away, Maestro,” he calls for the downbeat.
“Hold the phone,” I still the chorus of voices.
“‘We will fight them on the beaches’,” Winston Churchill growls. “At least I know my lines.”
“You’re recreating Bladensburg here? In the mudflats of Ship Creek?”
“There’s plenty of work to be done,” the Governor opines. “You couldn’t raise enough regular troops; then, you couldn’t pay them; then, you wrote an 800 word memo to the Secretary of the Treasury regarding proper procedures for paying the militiamen who did not turn out to defend the City.”
“Recreate that!” I guffaw.
“Jimmy wasted the month of July, 1814,” Dolley informs us. “He should have been instructing the Secretary of War to do his job.”
“It’s rather tedious to recall all the things I didn’t do,” Madison sighs. “In recompense for not being impeached, I travel America digging trenches.”

“Henri Jomini advised defending forces to dig ‘redans, redoubts or bastions, one of these with an epaulement behind it . . . ’ But what the hell is a redans?”

“Baron Jomini’s Art of War was plagiarized by the Secretary of War,” Clementine consults her smartphone.

“I took him for a fellow bookworm,” Jimmy goes on, “so I gave him a job.”

“It’s lucky you didn’t lose yours,” the Governor adds. “Congress couldn’t impeach my husband,” Dolley explains, “because they had no one to replace him.”

“Same deal with me,” Churchill lights a fresh Monte Christo. “I mean, who the hell is Clement Atlee?”

“Wasn’t your Vice-President Elbridge Gerry?” I ask Madison. “I mean, before he died in November, 1814.”

“Did you use a hyphen?” the Governor peeks at my ‘talking points.’

“I follow the Twelfth Amendment religiously,” I assure her.

“And what’s with the hyphen?” James Madison asks. “No one asked me about orthographic reform and I was Secretary of State at the time.”

Dolley signals for the picnic luncheon to be spread. Mr. Whitecheese strikes up the band.

“Jimmy’s constitution – the Constitution of the year Eleven as we call it, in our intimate circles – doesn’t have such gew-gaws as hyphens in ‘two thirds’ or ‘Vice President’,” she declares.

“It’s original spelling,” Madison takes a handful of deviled eggs. “Pretty soon, they’ll be calling it ‘hyphenation.’ So much for my constitutional theories.”

“You’ve brainstormed so many of them,” Clementine Churchill consoles our fourth President. “Try the asparagus tips in beurre blanc. I made them especially for you.”
“Jimmy loves hors d’oeuvres. He should have ridden up the Avenue to met Co’burn’s challenge.”
“The Trans-Atlantic Culinary Cook-off?” the Governor asks. “I’ve heard about this.”
“Ross and Co’burn threw down the gage at the corner of Pennsylvania and Louisiana Avenues. Actually, they brandished their grillin’ tongs,” I relate information not in evidence.
“It was supposed to be an old fashioned Potomac barbeque,” Winnie asides to Clemmie. “Everything went swimmingly until the drapes caught fire.”
“In both the Capitol and the White House?” I gasp.
“It was Jimmy’s idea,” Dolley concedes. “If we won, they would leave peacefully, taking our first constitution as their trophy.”
“But that’s the Articles of Confederation,” Winston exclaims. “You flim-flammed British officers!”
“That’s when things got ugly,” Dolley explains.
“If only I’d known what a ‘redans’ was. And how to build it,” Jimmy sobs. “We should have settled our differences on the banks of the Potomac River. The Eastern Branch, that is. A riparian entertainment. Rowing contests between manly men. Badminton for everyone else and, sigh, whist!”
“We dug a trench,” Dolley narrates, “across the route of Alternate U.S. 1, as you call it now, but according to James Monroe, it was not up to Napoleonic standards.”
“Monroe was wounded at Princeton,” Jimmy adds. “He thought he could do everything better. So I had to give him the job of Secretary of War.”
“To salve his conscience,” Winnie concludes, “Jimmy has fortified every burg, ville, towne and dorf in America. Alaska’s last on the list.”
“Fairbanks wants a city wall,” Jimmy declares. “Nome wants concrete poured all over the beach.”
“This proves that forts are cheaper than ports,” the nearly but not quite Duke of London intervenes. “Hey! I said that ‘jaw jaw is better than war war’.”

“Maryland’s Senator Smith built a rampart at Baltimore and General Jackson did likewise at New Orleans,” the Governor consults her screen. “History’s judgment has been pretty severe on Jimmy, since, after all, intrenchments seem to have worked. And then there are the works Washington and Rochambeau built at Yorktown. They’re still there.”

“With proper deployment,” Dolley appeals to us, “earthworks could have stimulated the martial spirit in the troops who turned out.”

“You know what they say about citizen-soldiers,” Madison appeals to us. “‘Have Gun, Won’t Travel’.”

“That’s the Second Amendment you’ve desecrated, Mr. President,” the Governor ripostes.

“And Henry Adams’ judgment of ‘incompetence’?” I ask. “He wrote an entire history devoted to your two administrations.”

“He said my cabinet exhibited ‘incompetence’, Madison ripostes. “In any event the good people of Washington hired their own carts and wagons to save their possessions from the British.

“In my opinion Jimmy’s certainly turned the tables on everyone,” Dolley laughs. “Instead of serving as a punching bag for the Bar Rag faithful!”

“Madison brought your political philosophy into disrepute,” Winnie jabs at the Governor.

“It’s true! For two years,” the Governor replies, “the federal government did nothing to protect the good citizens of Chesapeake Bay.”

“We could have sold insurance cover and made a fortune,” Dolley declares. “If catastrophe were to visit your neck of the woods, Jimmy and I could protect you from the danger that the government did nothing to stop.”

“I can’t tell if Madison is making fun of himself. Or me. Or both of us,” the Governor consults with me.
“All the answers may not be in your dusty books,” Dolley consoles her husband.

“How does it feel to be on the wrong end of a gag?” Mr. Whitecheese guffaws in our general direction.

“There must be some revenge here,” the Governor insists.

“Some way to get even?” I respond. “That’s going to take another two hundred years less fifteen percent,” I add.

“What’s the discount for?” the Governor wants to know.

“Time off for good behaviour,” I reply.

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