

Oliver Hazard Perry Biography

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Biography

Oliver Hazard Perry (1785-1819) was the American naval officer in command during the Sept. 10, 1813, victory on Lake Erie, one of the great American naval triumphs of the War of 1812.

Oliver Hazard Perry was born in South Kingston, R.I., on Aug. 20, 1785. He received his elementary education there. In 1799 he served as midshipman with his father, Capt. Christopher Raymond Perry, in the West Indies during the quasi-war with France. He also served in the Mediterranean during the Tripolitan War, performing creditably.

Perry was in command of a flotilla at Newport, Va., when war broke out in 1812, but he was given command of American naval forces on Lake Erie in March 1813. Perry built a small fleet under conditions of extreme difficulty. By August he had 10 ships, the brigs *Lawrence* and *Niagara* being the largest. Perry could not get his largest ships across the Erie bar in the presence of the enemy fleet led by Comm. Robert H. Barclay until the latter relaxed his blockade for unknown reasons.

Barclay finished a large new ship, the *Detroit*. Desperately short of supplies, he challenged the Americans. The fleets met on Sept. 10, 1813. The Americans had superior firepower, but there was little difference in manpower. At 10 A.M. the *Lawrence* was cleared for action and hoisted its battleflag, "Don't give up the ship." Action lasted from 11:45 A.M. until 3:00 P.M. After all the *Lawrence's* guns were disabled, Perry rowed to the *Niagara*. Fifteen minutes after the *Niagara* moved into the heavy action, the British fleet surrendered. American casualties numbered 27 killed and 96 wounded, and British losses were 41 killed, 94 wounded. Perry dashed off his famous dispatch following the victory, "We have met the enemy and they are ours."

The victory was of major significance, for America now controlled Lake Erie until the war ended. Also, Gen. William Henry Harrison was enabled to capture much of Upper Canada, and the American peace negotiators were able to assert American claims to the Northwest.

Perry was promoted to captain in September 1813 and shortly thereafter received the thanks of Congress. Following the war he served in the Mediterranean. He died of yellow fever on Aug. 23, 1819, after completing a diplomatic mission to Venezuela and Buenos Aires. His body was interred at Port of Spain, Trinidad.