

William Hull Biography

William Hull

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Biography

William Hull (1753-1825), American military commander, surrendered United States troops at Detroit to the British during the War of 1812, dealing a severe blow to the American war effort.

William Hull was born June 24, 1753, in Derby, Conn. After graduating from Yale College, he studied law in Litchfield and was admitted to the bar in 1775. That July he joined the American army besieging Boston and served actively throughout the Revolutionary War, rising to the rank of lieutenant colonel. After the war Hull set up law practice in Newton, Mass., the home of his wife, Sarah Fuller. He participated in the suppression of Shays' Rebellion and served as a state senator and as a judge of the court of common pleas.

In March 1805 President Thomas Jefferson appointed Hull governor of the newly organized Michigan Territory. Hull was instrumental in obtaining land cessions from the Indians, which added to their growing unrest. In the spring of 1812, after the declaration of war on Great Britain, he accepted a commission as brigadier general and command of the army which was to defend Michigan and to invade Upper Canada. Hull stressed the necessity of controlling Lake Erie, but he incorrectly argued that a large American army at Detroit might compel the British to abandon their naval forces on the lake.

Hull brought a 2,200-man army into Detroit, crossed the Detroit River into Canada on July 12, and occupied Sandwich. There he hesitated. When British commander Gen. Isaac Brock concentrated his forces on him, Hull retreated to Detroit and tried to reopen his lines of communication. This failed, and on August 12 Hull surrendered to Brock. This left Lake Erie and the Michigan country in British control. In defense of his actions Hull claimed that the army had had only a month's provisions and that continued resistance would have provoked the Michigan Indians, who were with the British, to massacre the civilian population.

A court-martial found Hull guilty of cowardice and neglect of duty, but he was pardoned because of past services. He lost his army position and retired to Newton, where he died on Nov. 29, 1825.