

OSINT HISTORICAL REPORT

The Burning of Washington, D.C. — August 24, 1814

Executive finding: British military forces captured Washington, D.C., on August 24, 1814, during the War of 1812, and deliberately burned the President's House (now the White House), the U.S. Capitol, and other government buildings. The operation was commanded principally by Major General Robert Ross and Rear Admiral George Cockburn.

The historically accurate description is therefore: **British forces burned the White House in 1814**. Describing the attackers as "Canadians" is inaccurate if it implies that the modern Canadian state conducted the operation. Canada did not become a self-governing Dominion until Confederation in 1867.

1. What happened

British forces landed in Maryland, defeated American forces at the Battle of Bladensburg on August 24, and entered Washington that evening. The U.S. government evacuated. British troops subsequently burned major public buildings, including the President's House, Capitol, Treasury, and War Department.

2. The Canadian connection

British North America supplied colonial militia and other forces that fought for Britain during the War of 1812, and Indigenous allies also participated in the wider conflict. However, the Washington expedition itself is identified in the historical record as a British military operation under Ross and Cockburn. It is therefore anachronistic to describe the event as an attack by the country of Canada.

3. Retaliatory context

The destruction of Washington occurred amid reciprocal destruction during the war. American forces had previously attacked British North American targets, including York (present-day Toronto). British authorities presented the Washington operation partly as retaliation for American actions in British North America.

4. OSINT assessment

Claim	Assessment	Confidence
President's House/White House was burned	Confirmed	Very high
U.S. Capitol was burned	Confirmed	Very high
British forces conducted the Washington operation	Confirmed	Very high
Robert Ross commanded the land force	Confirmed	Very high
George Cockburn was a principal British commander	Confirmed	Very high
Canada, as an independent state, attacked Washington	False / anachronistic	Very high
Canadian militia participated elsewhere in the War of 1812	Confirmed	Very high

5. Source base

Primary and institutional sources include the U.S. Library of Congress, U.S. Architect of the Capitol, U.S. National Archives, U.S. Navy historical materials, and National Park Service historical materials. These sources converge on the identification of the attacking force as British and the destruction of Washington on August 24, 1814.

Key sources: Library of Congress — “The White House Attacked”; Architect of the Capitol — “The Burning of the Capitol During the War of 1812”; National Archives — War of 1812 historical materials; U.S. Navy — historical documents concerning the defense and burning of Washington; National Park Service — Chesapeake Campaign, 1814.

Bottom line

British military forces burned Washington, D.C., including the President’s House and U.S. Capitol, on August 24, 1814. British North Americans participated in the wider War of 1812, but the evidence does not justify calling the White House burning a Canadian operation.