



# Sackets Harbor Powder Monkey: The War of 1812

*Hope I. Marston*

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Rankin has wanted to join the crew on the Oneida since the first time he saw the ship anchored in Black River Bay. But what can a ten-year-old do on a warship? He hangs around outside the tavern listening to the farmers talk of the coming war with the British, hoping to find out. The brig Oneida has been built to patrol Lake Ontario and protect Sackets Harbor from an attack. Local farmers are frustrated with restrictions against trading with Canada which cause them to resort to smuggling in order to survive. When the ship's captain finally calls for recruits nearly a year later, many men want to sign up in hopes of putting an end to these rules. Pa gives Rankin's older brother Will permission to do so. Rankin badgers Will to take him along. On the day set by the captain of the Oneida, Rankin and Will are the first to sign on. During their first months on board, the new crew members gain experience as the Oneida patrols the lake. Too late, they find out that until the war begins, her mission is to apprehend potash smugglers. Rankin learns to run gunpowder up from the hold to the guns on deck. He sulks when months pass with no battles on the lake. Things change soon after the United States declares war against the British. On the morning of July 19, 1812, the lookout on Oneida spots five British warships heading toward Sackets Harbor. The brig prepares to defend the village. Rankin is assigned to carry powder to the huge three-ton long gun up on the cliff. Royal George comes into range and the locals open fire. The unique way the battle is fought and the unusual way it ends surprises both sides. Although this is a work of fiction, the historical events portrayed and the persons named are real.

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