

July 21, 1918 WHEN WAR CAME TO ORLEANS (AGAIN!)

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1918 marks the centennial anniversary of the shelling of the Town of Orleans by a German U-boat. On July 21, 1918, the tiny town of Orleans (pop.1012 at the time) was shelled by a German U-boat making it the only point on U.S. soil to be attacked during World War I. The German submarine, U-156 attacked the tug Perth Amboy, heading south about three miles off Nauset Beach with four barges in tow. Several shells from the U-156 deck gun exploded on shore. The Perth Amboy was heavily damaged; its four barges in tow were sunk.

Like much of the rich history of Orleans, this story is compelling, fascinating, complex, and often surprising. What stands out as truly incredible is that this was the **second** time in our then 121 year history that our town was attacked by a foreign power during one of our nation's wars. On December 19, 1814, Orleans was attacked by a British Navy landing party intent on destroying boats in Rock Harbor and nearby salt works. That assault was repelled by the Orleans Militia, establishing our reputation as "defiant and self-reliant". The 200th anniversary of that event was commemorated in 2014.

The story of the attack on Orleans is rich with incredible tales of bravery, mystery, and resiliency, all of which reinforce the "defiant and self-reliant" reputation we earned in 1814. During 2018, we will be remembering:

- The bravery and skills of the Coast Guardsmen of Orleans Station 40, who launched a rescue mission under enemy fire.
- The response of the Navy to the attack from the newly opened Chatham Naval Air Station.
- The unresolved mysteries surrounding the attack, such as what the U-156 was doing off the coast of Orleans, and whether the shells that struck our shores were intentional or the result of poor marksmanship.
- The calling out and deployment of the Militia (then called the State Guard) to repel any landing that might come from the assault.
- The real-time transmission of the events of the attack by a Nauset Heights resident by phone to the Boston Globe.
- The role of the French Cable Station in our Nation's war effort.

The centennial provides us with the opportunity to take a look at Orleans in 1918. How did the war impact our citizens? What did Orleans look like, what buildings were here that are gone now?

The Orleans Historical Commission, in conjunction with the Historical Society, the US Coast Guard, the French Cable Station, the Chamber of Commerce, the Nauset Heights Association, Snow Library, and undoubtedly other interested organizations will be planning appropriate ways that we can recognize this seminal event in our history. We hope that all our residents and visitors join us in 2018 in remembering our history.