

The Washington/Armistead Flask

by Antonio Picadio

The G1-17 historical flask features a bust of Washington on the obverse and the bust of an unidentified military officer on the reverse. The flask was probably made about 1828 and carries the inscription: "Baltimore Glass Works." Most collectors, dealers and auction catalogues accept the unidentified bust as a profile of General Zachary Taylor. However, there has always been some uncertainty about the Taylor designation due to the youthful appearance of the unidentified officer and the date of the flask, which preceded by 20 years the exploits that made Zachary Taylor famous during the war with Mexico. Helen McKearin pointed out this anomaly and suggested that the mystery officer may be Andrew Jackson, but the Taylor designation persisted. Recently, Jeff Noordsy and I looked into this question, and I believe solved the mystery. We can now say with a high degree of confidence that the unidentified officer is neither Taylor nor Jackson, but rather Lt. Colonel George Armistead. Lt. Colonel Armistead successfully commanded the defense of Fort McHenry against the British bombardment in 1815, thereby saving the city of Baltimore from capture. The large American flag that he flew during the battle is the flag that inspired

Francis Scott Key to write the Star-Spangled Banner. Armistead's left-facing likeness on the flask appears to have been taken directly from a print of his profile, which no doubt was circulated widely in the Baltimore area. The hero of Baltimore has been immortalized by a marble monument constructed on Monument Hill overlooking the City of Baltimore, and by a large full-body bronze installed at Ft. McHenry. Armistead died at the age of 38, in 1818, three years after the Battle of Baltimore.

