

A MESSAGE FROM TODAY'S NATIONAL ANTHEM PERFORMER

# CLAY WALKER

I wanted to take this opportunity to remind Houston Texans fans of the story behind our country's national anthem. I hope you will read this information and sing along with today's anthem louder than before. God bless the United States of America!

Sincerely, Clay Walker

It was the War of 1812. By 1814, the British had captured Washington, D.C. and several other American towns, burning down the White House, the Capitol, and many other public buildings. With momentum on their side, the British set their sights on Baltimore.

Knowing that the British might attack the port city, American forces did their best to prepare and fortify Fort McHenry. Upon the realization that they had no suitable garrison flag, Major Armistead, the fort's commanding officer, ordered the rather hasty creation of two United States flags large enough to be flown over the fort: one, a smaller storm flag, and another that would become the largest garrison flag ever flown.

Meanwhile, Francis Scott Key, an American lawyer, had been sent out to the British fleet stationed offshore on a mission to trade some British captives for a popular American doctor that the British were holding. The British agreed to the trade, but the timing of the mission allowed the Americans to be privy to the British's attack plans on Baltimore, and the British held them captive offshore until after the battle.

And so, from a ship in the Chesapeake Bay, they sat and watched helplessly as the British fleet bombarded Fort McHenry. They could see the storm flag flying over the ramparts throughout the battle, first by daylight and, after nightfall, by the glare made by rocket fire and bomb explosions. As long as the flag kept flying, they knew, the fort was holding. The battle finally ended during the night, but with no daylight and the ceasing of the rockets and bombs, the flag's status was shrouded by darkness. Not until dawn on September 14, 1814, did they see that the fort's storm flag had been replaced, not by a British flag but by the second, larger star-spangled banner now flying boldly in triumph.

Key, inspired by the sight and the pride of an American victory, wrote a four-verse poem called "Defence of Fort McHenry" on the back of a letter he was carrying. The first verse, which tells of that uncertainty just before dawn, later became the text of our national anthem:

**"O say can you see by the dawn's early light  
What so proudly we hailed at the twilight's last gleaming,  
Whose broad stripes and bright stars through the perilous fight,  
O'er the ramparts we watched, were so gallantly streaming?  
And the rockets' red glare, the bombs bursting in air,  
Gave proof through the night that our flag was still there;  
O say does that star-spangled banner yet wave  
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave?"**