



The Chesapeake Campaign 1813-1814 (The U.S. Army Campaigns of the War of 1812)

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The Chesapeake Campaign, 1813–1814, examines a pivotal series of military operations during the War of 1812, many of which remain unknown to most Americans. Most know of the embarrassment that the British army caused when it entered Washington, D.C., to burn the Capitol, the president's mansion, and other government buildings. Many are also aware that during a battle three weeks later a garrison flag of a U.S. Army post inspired the writing of a patriotic song that eventually became our national anthem. In addition to the legacy of the "Star Spangled Banner," the Chesapeake Campaign holds far greater historical and military significance. As Britain concentrated its military and naval might against Napoleon in Europe, it could commit few forces to defend its possessions in North America, in what was considered a troublesome sideshow. The campaign started as a strategic effort to disrupt American commerce and divert U.S. forces, including most of the Regular Army, from continued incursions into the Upper and Lower Canadian provinces. With Napoleon's exile to Elba in 1814, the British could now concentrate on the war in America and dispatched additional ships and men. After executing a successful raid on Washington, British leaders turned their attention on the more militarily important and prosperous port city of Baltimore. Despite a combined land and sea attack, the operation failed. Together with news that American forces had also defeated a British invasion along the Lake Champlain corridor at Plattsburgh, New York, the victory at Baltimore gave U.S. peace commissioners in Ghent, Belgium, a much stronger position from which to negotiate the terms of the treaty that ended the war.

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