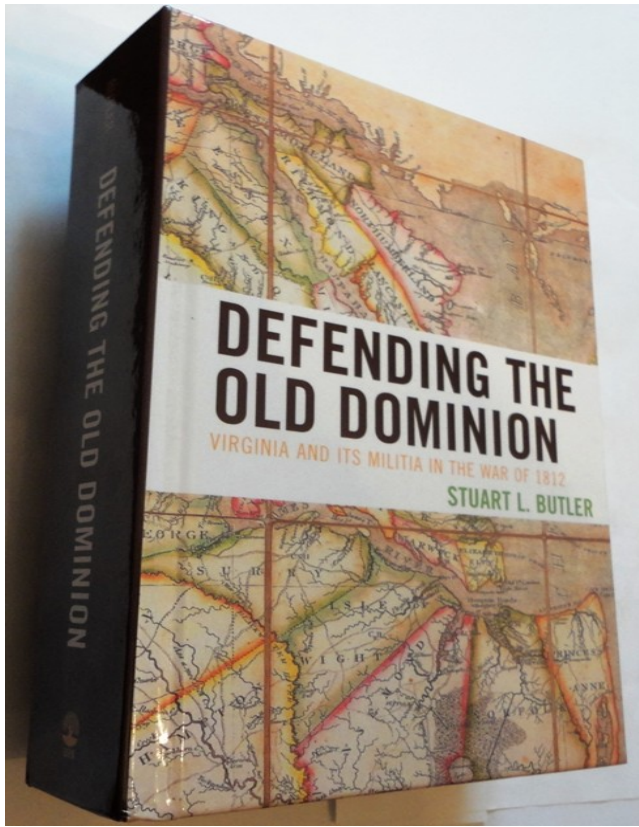


**A WAR OF 1812 SOCIETY MEMBER, STUART L. BUTLER, AUTHORS THE MOST COMPLETE BOOK ON THE WAR OF 1812 IN VIRGINIA EVER PUBLISHED**



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#### **#211 Photo: View of Belvoir bluff from Potomac River**



Photo taken from the River of the battle site by Mike Lyman

## **Between the Burning and Bombardment: The Potomac Squadron and the Battle of the White House**

By Patrick L. O'Neill, M.A.

Seven British warships sailed up the Potomac River as a feint and to assist the attack on Washington in August 1814. Arriving after the invasion, the Potomac Squadron occupied Alexandria, Virginia, for six days, emptying the warehouses and refitting vessels they took as prizes. President James Madison, Acting Secretary of War James Monroe, and Secretary of the Navy William Jones planned the first response to the burning of the capitol by sending Navy heroes John Rodgers, David Porter, and Oliver Perry and crews, along with militia, to intercept the squadron on their descent from Alexandria to try and annoy or destroy the squadron. Porter's forces, including 2,500 Virginia militia, engaged the squadron from land to river during a battle known as the Battle of the White House. The squadron was trapped in the middle channel of the river next to Mount Vernon. Rodgers sent fire boats down from the Navy Yard, and Perry took his crew and Maryland militia down to Indian Head, Maryland to erect additional batteries. The American forces, mainly armed with muskets and a few field pieces, were able to delay the squadron for five days. Even though they were constantly under fire from the British, they damaged the rigging, hulls, and sails, and wounded three captains. News of the attack on the squadron reached Vice Admiral Cochrane in the Chesapeake close to the same time Francis Scott Key and John Skinner intercepted him to gain the release of Dr. Beane. Cochrane reacted immediately and turned the main fleet up the Potomac to rescue the squadron, who had already passed the batteries by the time the fleet arrived. After thorough research, the American attack on the Potomac Squadron appears to have been the catalyst for Cochrane's decision to attack Baltimore, where the Star Spangled Banner was born.

Editors note: The location of the White House referred to above today is at Fort Belvoir where the officers club is located that overlooks the Potomac River. The details of the Virginia land forces involved in the battle are in Stuart Butler's book advertised on the left. Also, in the Virginia Cavalcade Magazine issue of Summer 1968 is a very detailed battle description taken by author Bertram H Greene from the notes of Captain Thomas Brown who commanded forces in the battle, His title is *A Trap for the British: Thomas Brown and the Battle of the White House*