

Campaign of fire, plunder, fear

War

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of the War of 1812 in Hampton Roads.

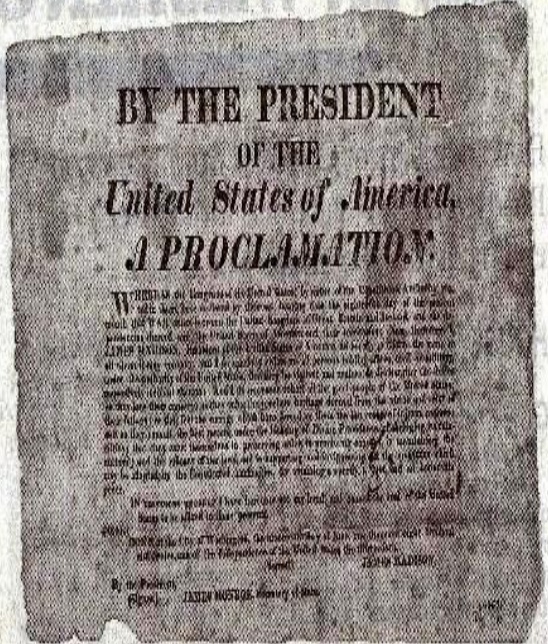
Heard as far away as Norfolk, the ferocious two-hour battle sparked a panic as residents loaded carts with furniture and raced to escape a feared invasion. But the thundering sound was merely the first salvo in a campaign of fire, plunder and fear that would terrorize Tidewater and the bay for two years.

Bent on punishing the United States for declaring war the previous June, the Royal Navy would seize or burn hundreds of vessels, launch scores of hit-and-run raids and pillage untold numbers of farms and towns in an iron-fisted answer to the Times of London's demand that "America must be BEATEN INTO SUBMISSION!"

"The War of 1812 is a forgotten war — but it shouldn't be," says Newport News historian J. Michael Moore, a contributor to the forthcoming book "Tread of the Tyrant's Heel: Virginia's War of 1812 Experience."

"For two years, the British raided up the James River as far as Lawnes Creek and Jamestown. They raided Warwick County. They attacked Norfolk. They burned and plundered Hampton. They marauded up the bay, attacking Maryland and Baltimore and burning Washington.

"In the Chesapeake Bay, the British showed they could do just about anything they wanted. And if it wasn't for the Civil War, this is the war we'd be talking about today."



The U.S. declared war on Great Britain in June 1812, prompting the Royal Navy blockade of the Chesapeake Bay early the following year.



The 38-gun frigate USS Constellation narrowly evaded capture by the British blockade fleet by dragging itself across a becalmed Hampton Roads with the aid of its boats and anchors. IMAGE COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES



Cartoonists lampooned initial British efforts in the War of 1812. But the tide soon turned against the American invasion of Canada and its lax defense of the Chesapeake Bay.