

## **Fredericksburg Newspaper Records Society Grave Marking**

Ceremony for War of 1812 soldier opens door to fact that Northern Neck was hotspot

- BY ROB HEDELT THE FREE LANCE-STAR



During a ceremony to unveil a grave marker at Yeocomico Episcopal Church near Kinsale, Mike Lyman shows audience the type of headgear soldiers wore in the War of 1812.



As a region and a country, we spend a lot of time and resources commemorating and sharing the history of the Revolutionary War and the Civil War.

A ceremony I attended recently in Westmoreland County was a good reminder that it and the rest of the Northern Neck were a hotbed of action in the less remembered War of 1812.

Who remembers that in the later stages of the war, the British fleet made Tangier Island their base of operation for the war effort in the region, stretching the seams of the island that's just larger than a square mile?

They did, calling it Fort Albion and amassing some 4,500 soldiers and freed slaves.

From there, they could dispatch raiding parties up and down the Northern Neck to burn ships and houses, steal crops and cattle and tangle with American militias in hit-and-run attacks.

The recent event that underscored that history was a ceremony unveiling a grave marker for Pvt. Thomas Bennett Dashiell, "a soldier in the War of 1812."

Because Dashiell's son Thomas Grayson Dashiell became rector of Cople Parish—which includes historic Yeocomico Church—it makes sense that the elder Dashiell died at the rectory, in 1859. He was buried in the church graveyard.

The elder Dashiell, who was born on the Eastern Shore in Maryland, received a total of 160 acres of land for his service in the War of 1812. At the unveiling of his grave marker, he was honored with music, a historical recounting of his life and a full color guard from the Society of the War of 1812 in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Mike Lyman, a past president of the society who presided over the ceremony, noted to a handful of guests that the group is doing all it can to mark the gravesites of 1812 war vets all over Virginia.

And he noted during his remarks and to my questions afterwards that no county in Virginia saw more action during the War of 1812 than Westmoreland.

“The trouble the American militias had in the fighting was that the British forces had control of the seas and the superior naval force,” said Lyman. “That meant that they could show up anywhere with ships carrying the British marines, and the local militias had trouble knowing where to be to fight them.”

Lyman noted that major skirmishes took place around Kinsale on the Yeocomico River in Westmoreland County, where the U.S. 301 Bridge crosses the Potomac River at King George County, and at a handful of other spots up and down the Potomac River.

He and representatives of several memorial groups that put wreaths on Dashiell’s grave noted that the Northern Neck Historical Society detailed the battles, skirmishes and naval confrontations in issues of its historical magazine a few years back.

I thumbed through those recently and was fascinated by the breadth of the action in the Northern Neck.

Yes, I’d known that some of the first shots of the war took place on the Yeocomico River near Kinsale, where the commander of an American vessel was shot and killed by British troops in a naval battle that involved a handful of British and American ships.

But I didn’t know about subsequent battles where the Westmoreland militia, backed up by American troops from other counties, confronted British raiders in subsequent battles on the Yeocomico Creek near Kinsale, at Sandy Point on the Potomac and at or near Nomini, Rosier and Mattox creeks in Westmoreland County.

Another major skirmish happened at Hollis Marsh, now known as Hollis Island or Shark’s Tooth Island, near the modern-day development of Stratford Harbour.

The magazine accounts say that the local militias would hit and retreat from the larger British forces, harrying them enough to eventually make them get back on their boats and away from American fighters who positioned themselves in homes, forests and marshes.

The magazine notes that while the British were successful at destroying homes, disrupting shipping and creating havoc for nearly three years in the region, they were thwarted from their goal of taking Washington and Baltimore.

And from even getting footholds that they could hold in places like Kinsale or Nomini Creek.

And that's why the Society of the War of 1812 is marking those who fought in the war, a worthy endeavor.

For more information on the society, go online to [1812va.org](http://1812va.org).

**Rob Hedelt: 540/374-5415**

**[rhedelt@freelancestar.com](mailto:rhedelt@freelancestar.com)**



