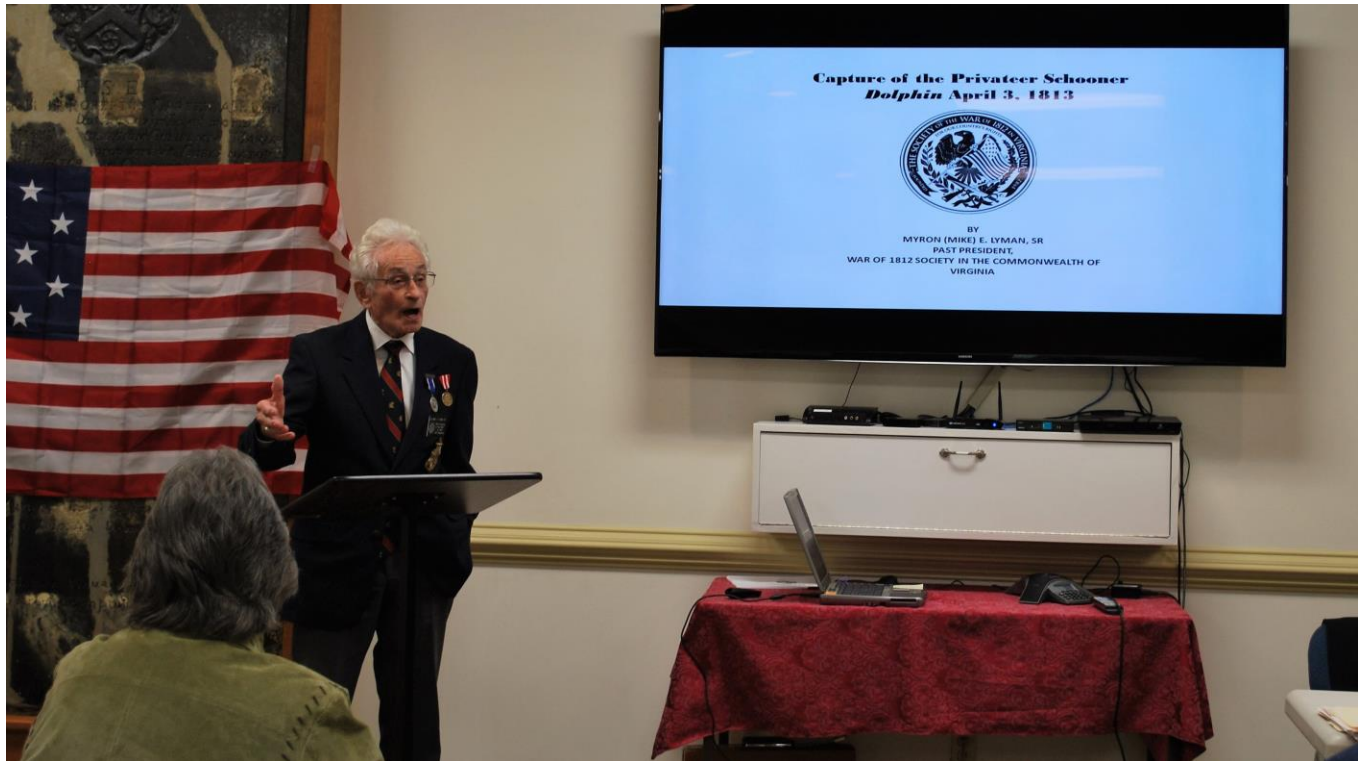


### ***Capture of the Dolphin Presented to U.S. Daughters of 1812 Society Oct 22 2018***

On October 22 1812 at the Historic Christ Church in Weems, Lancaster County, past President Mike Lyman, of the War of 1812 Society in the Commonwealth of Virginia gave a presentation to the newly formed Rappahannock Chapter, U.S. Daughters of 1812 Society in Virginia. The subject was about a naval encounter in the nearby Rappahannock River on April 3 1813 where the Privateer Schooner, *Dolphin* and three other U.S. schooners were captured by a British naval force.

A newspaper article about the chapter and the presentation was in the local newspaper, "Rappahannock Record" in Kilmarnock on November 1 2018. This article and the slides of the presentation follow.



## Rappahannock Chapter Daughters of the War of 1812 holds inaugural meeting

WEEMS—The Rappahannock Chapter, Daughters of the War of 1812 (D1812), held its first meeting October 22 at the Bayne Center, Historic Christ Church, Weems.

President Jo Ann Fickling reminded everyone the purpose of the D1812 organization is to focus on learning about and preserving the history of the war.

“This will be accomplished by our efforts supporting patriotic and civic projects,” said Fickling, urging all members to share ideas as everyone learns together over the next year.

The Rappahannock Chapter has already participated in two ceremonies. On September 21, a Rappahannock Chapter D1812 wreath was presented at the POW/MIA recognition ceremony at Essex Courthouse in Tappahannock. On October 6, a wreath was presented at a War of 1812 plaque dedication ceremony in the Old City Cemetery in Lynchburg.

Vice president Dr. Cheryl Brown Davis reported wonderful programs and field trips are being arranged and registrar Dinah Balderson welcomed associate member, Mary Stewart.

Upcoming activities will include a ceremony at Burnt Chimney in Richmond County on November 4, a Computer Users Group’s Genealogy meeting on November 8, and an upcoming Rappahannock Community College Lifelong Learning Class on the War of 1812.

### Presentation

The highlight of the meeting was Mike Lyman’s program “The Capture of the Privateer Schooner The Dolphin, April 3, 1813.” Lyman is nationally recognized for his research on the War of 1812 and is the past president of the War of 1812 Society in Virginia.

His presentation started with the arrival of British naval forces and their blockade of the Chesapeake Bay in February 1813 followed with the movement of various U.S. and British warships and land-based battles that shaped the British ultimately being defeated, reported publicity coordinator Susan Hudson.



Mike Lyman

Lyman mentioned local events such as the British occupation of Tappahannock and battles at Farnham Church in early December 1814. He shared insights about the Baltimore schooner, The Dolphin, a 161-ton clipper with a crew of 100 men and 12 cannons. The Dolphin’s first venture as a privateer was in 1812 and before the end of the year, she captured numerous British ships including the British schooner Fancy followed by capturing the 550-ton John Hamilton.

In March 1813 The Dolphin, under the command of Capt. W. S. Stafford, left Baltimore during a severe storm and when the weather cleared she was in the midst of a squadron of British warships in the lower Chesapeake Bay. Capt. Stafford headed back towards Baltimore and joined up with three other schooners, the Arab, the Lynx and the Racer. These four ships took refuge mooring in the area where the Norris Bridge now crosses the Rappahannock River. On April 3, 1813, a battle ensued where all four U.S. ships were ultimately taken. The Dolphin was the only one that did not surrender and the British had to strike the American flag after boarding the ship.

Lyman then provided several official and newspaper accounts

of the battle which differed significantly depending if the report was filed from the British or U.S. perspective. In closing, Lyman mentioned a Virginia historic road sign placed in Lancaster County near the Norris Bridge on December 3, 2003, which reads:

“On 3 April 1813, one of the largest naval engagements in Virginia waters during the War of 1812 took place at the mouth of Corrotooman River. One hundred five British naval and marine

forces under Lt. Polkinghorne managed to subdue four American privateers: Arab, Dolphin, Lynx and Racer. The largest ship, Dolphin, out of Baltimore, had twelve guns and one hundred men commanded by Capt. W. J. Stafford. Stafford stubbornly refused to give up when the other ships were taken and defended his ship until he was severely wounded and his ship boarded.”

Membership in the Rappahannock Chapter, D1812 is open to women ages 18 and older who can offer satisfactory proof that they are lineal descendants of an ancestor who, during the period of 1784-1815, rendered civil, military, or naval service to our country, rendered material aid to the U.S. Army or Navy, or who participated in the Lewis and Clark Expedition. If lineage cannot be established, there is still an opportunity to join the chapter and participate in the activities as an associate. To join, call 438-6276.

# **Capture of the Privateer Schooner *Dolphin* April 3, 1813**



BY  
MYRON (MIKE) E. LYMAN, SR  
PAST PRESIDENT,  
WAR OF 1812 SOCIETY IN THE COMMONWEALTH OF  
VIRGINIA

## VIRGINIA SELECT CHRONOLOGY WAR OF 1812

- **US DECLARES WAR 18 JUNE 1812. BRITISH WERE FIGHTING NAPOLEON**
- **BRITISH SHIPS ARRIVE FEBRUARY 1813. CHESAPEAKE BAY IS BLOCKADED**
- **US ARMY & VIRGINIA MILITIA PROTECT NORFOLK, RICHMOND & PORTSMOUTH**
- **USS *CONSTELLATION* SLIPS BY BLOCKADE & MOORS BETWEEN FORT NORFOLK & FORT NELSON AT PORTSMOUTH. THIS LOCATION NOW WELL DEFENDED BY JULY 1813**
- **BRITISH DEFEATED AT CRANEY ISLAND 22 JUN 1813 AT ENTRANCE TO ELIZABETH RIVER**
- **BRITISH CAPTURE CITY OF HAMPTON 25-28 JUNE 1813**
- **BRITISH OCCUPY TANGER ISLAND APRIL 1814. USE AS BASE OF OPERATIONS**

VIRGINIA SELECT CHRONOLOGY WAR OF 1812 Continued

**BRITISH CAPTURE & BURN WASHINGTON DC 24-25 AUGUST 1814**

**BRITISH SHIPS ASCEND POTOMAC & ALEXANDRIA SURRENDERS 29  
AUG 1814**

**BATTLE WITH BRITISH SHIPS DECENDING POTOMAC AT BELVOIR 1-5  
SEP 1814**

**BATTLE OF BALTIMORE 13-15 SEPTEMBER 1814.**

**BRITISH OCCUPY TAPPAHANNOCK 1-4 DEC 1814**

**BRITISH ATTACK MILITIA AT FARNHAM CHURCH 7 DEC 1814**

**TREATY OF GHENT 24 DECEMBER 1814, WAR IS OVER**

**BATTLE OF NEW OLEANS JANUARY 1815**

**TREATY RATIFIED US CONGRESS 17 FEBRUARY 1815**

The *Dolphin* Baltimore Clipper was described as sharply-built, with a low profile, severely raked masts and lofty white sails. It was fast, maneuverable and could fight effectively larger vessels and capture them easily with hit and run tactics. It was normally manned with a crew of 100 men, and weighed 161 tons



Photo of similar Baltimore Clipper ship *Pride of Baltimore*

Photo by Greg Poole.

Capt William Stafford reported in his journal that he set sail with 100 men which had 12 guns.  
Shown is my photo of a schooner's cannon in Northern Neck cemetery



#### BALTIMORE SCHOONER *DOLPHIN* EXPLOITS AS A PRIVATEER

In the summer of 1812 on her first venture as a privateer she captures the schooner *FANCY* and took her back to Baltimore.

In November 1812 she captured the 550 ton *John Hamilton* with its cargo of mahogany. It was valued at \$45,000 in Baltimore in 19th century money.

From the Atlantic she returned to Baltimore in Feb 1813 at night slipping past the British blockade at the entrance to the Chesapeake

MANEUVERS OF *DOLPHIN* PRIOR TO BATTLE IN RAPPAHANNOCK RIVER

On March 18, 1813 she departs Baltimore with a 100 man crew during a rain and snow storm with very limited visibility.

When weather cleared she found herself in the midst of a squadron of British warships in lower part of Chesapeake Bay.

Capt Stafford headed the clipper back up the Bay, but for nearly two weeks she maneuvered with the British warships trying to get past them.

She met and joined three larger schooners, the *Arab*, the *Lynx*, and the *Racer*. They decided take refuge in the Rappahannock and took up a defensive position six miles past Mosquito point at the entrance to the Corrotoman River. There was no wind to give the heavy British ships an ability to venture up the Rappahannock. So they felt safe but made defensive plans.

ACTIONS BEFORE BATTLE MORNING OF APRIL 3 2013

Captain Stafford of the *Dolphin* observes a Baltimore clipper rounding Mosquito Point. He saw men straining at their oars to maneuver a vessel.

Stafford weighed anchor and the crew rowed the schooner down river to where Norris bridge is today. He recognized it as the Baltimore clipper, *Highflyer* and reasoned it may need assistance.

Then he saw the British flag on the schooner and a flotilla of small armed boats heading his way.

He fired a cannon ball at them and with the crew pulling hard at the sweeps the *Dolphin* returned to its position with the others.



**APR 3, 1813 CORROTOMAN RIVER ENTRANCE, LANCASTER COUNTY**

**THE ARAB WAS ATTACKED FIRST WITH A BARRAGE OF CANNONADES.**

**SHE TACKED TO BRING HER STARBOARD SIDE TO FACE THE ENEMY BUT THIS SEPARATED IT FROM OTHER US SHIPS AND SHE PEELED TOWARD SHORE.**

**THE ARAB KEPT UP A CONTANT FIRE FROM GUNS AND SMALL ARMS ON ADVANCING BARGES, BUT SHE WAS BOARDED ON ONE SIDE AND MOST OF THE CREW JUMPED OVERBOARD AND THE REST SURRENDERED.**

**THE *LYNX* AFTER FIRING SOME GUNS AND MUSKETS STRUCK ITS COLORS.**

**THE *RACER* CAME UNDER HEAVY ASSAULT FROM THE ENEMY'S 12 POUNDER'S CANNONADES. IT DEFENDED GALLANTLY BUT WAS SOON CARRIED BY SUPERIOR NUMBERS AND SURRENDERED.**

**THE ENEMY TURNED *RACER*'S GUNS ON THE *DOLPHIN*. ALL OF THE *DOLPHIN*'S CREW EXCEPT ABOUT 15 TOOK BOATS TO THE SHORE. THE REMAINING KEPT UP A BRISK FIRE UNTIL CAPTAIN STAFFORD WAS WOUNDED AND TAKEN BELOW. THE ENEMY STRUCK ITS COLORS**

*Drawing of Capture of Arab, Lynx & Racer*

Watercolour by Irwin Bevan, from Mariner's Museum  
Newport News ref QW319





## SKETCH OF CAPTURE OF *DOLPHIN*



BALTIMORE WHIG ISSUE OF APR 12, 1813 FROM A REPORTER VICINITY URBANNA  
“... WE WENT TO THE RIVER BANK OPPOSITE ROSEGILL TO OBSERVE...THE AMERICAN FORCE  
WAS THREE LETTERS OF MARQUE...& THE PRIVATEER DOLPHIN MOUNTING 12 POUNDERS  
AND TWO 9'S; THE ENEMY FORCE WAS 14 BARGES WELL MANNED AND A TENDER.  
THE BATTLE LASTED FOUR HOURS, AND UNFORTUNATELY BECALMED, THE AMERICAN  
VESSELS WERE TAKEN. I CANNOT EXPRESS THE SENSATIONS I EXPERIENCED WHEN I SAW  
HOW HARD THE LITTLE BALTIMORE PRIVATEER FOUGHT. BEING BECALMED, AND  
ALMOST DEFENSELESS, SHE FOUGHT TO THE LAST MOMENT, AND HER COLORS WERE NEVER  
TAKEN DOWN UNTIL THE BRITISH BOARDED HER AND STRUCK THEM THEMSELVES.  
I HOPE THE BRAVE AMERICANS WHO FELL IN THE ENGAGEMENT THIS DAY, ARE  
SLEEPING IN THE ARMS OF THEIR HEAVENLY REDEEMER”

BRITISH REPORT OF BATTLE BY LIEUTENANT SCOTT OF THE MARLBOROUGH

THE BATTLE LASTED A MERE THIRTY MINUTES.

FOUR AMERICAN VESSELS MOUNTING 31 GUNS AND MANNED BY 219 MEN WERE CAPTURED BY FIVE LAUNCHES, ONE 12 POUND CANNONADE AND 105 MEN.

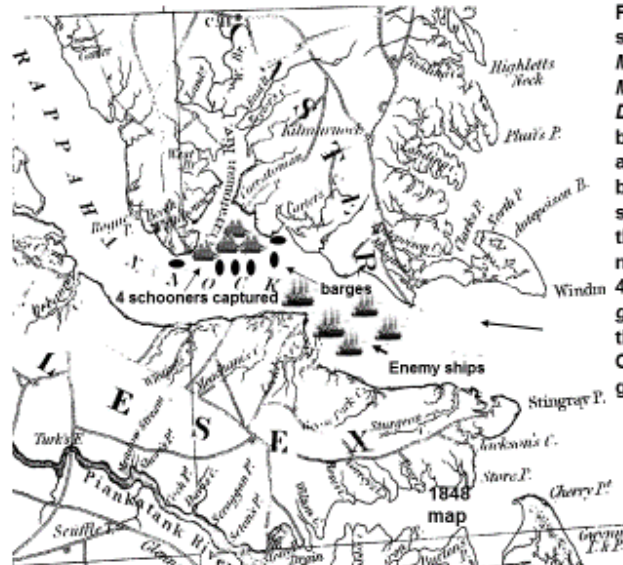
OFFICIAL BRITISH REPORT: TWO BRITISH SEAMAN DIED, ELEVEN WERE WOUNDED.

IT PUT THE AMERICAN TOLL AS SIX DEAD AND TEN WOUNDED.  
CAPTAIN STAFFORD OF THE DOLPHIN IN HIS WRITTEN REPORT INDICATED:

ESTIMATED DOLPHIN'S CASUALTIES AT FIVE WOUNDED AND NONE KILLED. HE THOUGHT THE ENEMY SUFFERED 19 KILLED AND AT LEAST 40 WOUNDED.

FREDERICKSBURG *HERALD* REPORTED THAT TWO ENEMY BARGES WERE SUNK. SOME OTHER NEWSPAPER ACCOUNTS REPORTED THAT NEARLY 200 OF THE SHIP'S CREWS ESCAPED TO MIDDLESEX COUNTY SHORES.

APR 3, 1813 MOUTH CORROTOMAN RIVER, LANCASTER COUNTY



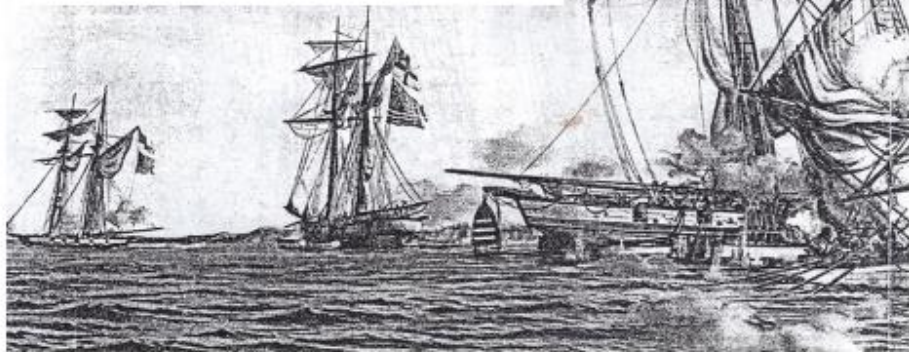
Five sail of British ships, *Highflyer*, *Marlborough*, *Statira*, *Maidstone*, and *San Domingo* unload 17 barges and a tender and after a 4 hour battle capture 4 US schooners including the *Arab*, (7 guns, 45 men), *Lynx* (6 guns, 40 men), *Racer* (6 guns, 36 men), and the Baltimore Clipper, *Dolphin* (12 guns, 100 men)

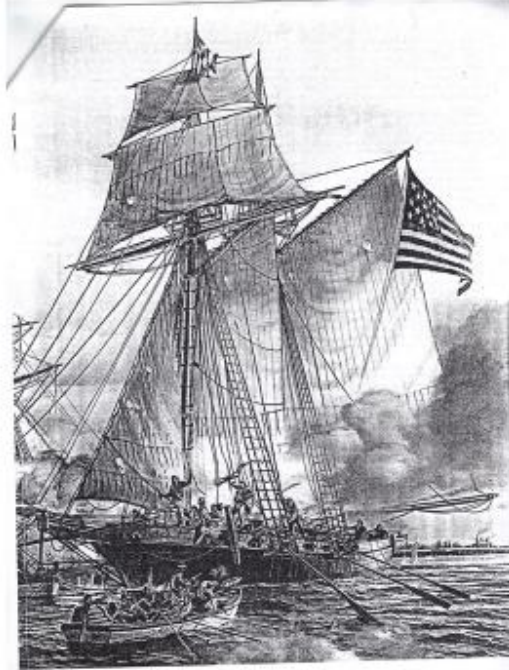
**"The Dolphin, Launched by Patriotism and Private Enterprise"**

By ANN JENSEN/Illustration by TOM FREEMAN

"Dolphin's Defiance" shows the gallant fight of the clipper Dolphin (right) on the Rappahannock against the enemy in the War of 1812. The three other privateers (from left to right), the Arab, Lynx, and Racer, have been taken by the British who are now turning forces against the other ship. Following the tradition of a captured vessel, the Arab and Lynx are flying the British flag above the American banner, while the Racer's standard is being lowered. The estate (still standing) on the far shore is "Pop Castle," (now owned by Mr. and Mrs. Thomas B. Denegre), which was fired on in both the War of 1812 and the Civil War. Painted for MARYLAND Magazine by Tom Freeman, 1984.

On the left the ARAB and LYNX is shown with the British flag with the US flag below it indicating that they are captured. On left the Racer's standard is being lowered





The *DOLPHIN* is being attacked. Notice the Star Spangled Banner Flag she flew and the cannon in front of the British attacking boat. In the shoreline the artist shows "Pop Castle." The next day when the Lancaster Militia was there the British fired a cannon ball at them.

#### Crew of the *Arab* Account

Two of the crewmen—John Bowman and Andrew Anderson—deposed in Annapolis on April 10<sup>th</sup> before Notary Public John Skinner their versions of the incident. The account concludes with:

"The launches were manned from a 74 lying in the mouth of the Rappahannock, and from 2 frigates, 2 brigs and 2 schooners, which ascended the river 12 miles. That the American vessels before mentioned were all taken, with the loss of 35 men of the privateer *Dolphin*, and they believe there were two hundred and sixty of the enemy killed and wounded. These deponents with 35 others escaped from the *Arab*, leaving 3 men on board of her."

"Baltimore, April 10, From Annapolis," *The Alexandria Gazette*, April 12, 1813.

Officers of the *Dolphin* Account

This report was written in Baltimore on April 13<sup>th</sup>, and published by four officers in the *Virginia Herald*. They state the enemy force consisted of 18 launches and barges, the *Highflyer*, two frigates and two brigs, as well as three 74s and two frigates laying at the mouth of the Rappahannock. "Capt Stafford, finding there was no alternative, ordered Mr. Rogers to get the boat out and take Mr. Foster, 2d lieut, and as many men as the boat would hold on shore, and for Mr. Rogers to return with the boat and two men. but before we reached the shore in the boat, the enemy boarded her and cut her colors down "

Captain Stafford's Journal Account

*"The showers of grape and musketry exceeded everything I had ever seen."*

"I ordered my pistols. Told the Doctor and officers to arm themselves with swords and pistols, and again told them I was determined to defend my vessel as long as possible, and would not run her ashore, and requested three cheers from all that would fight as a confirmation of their resolution, when they did I thought pretty generally fore and aft. I got all hands to quarters, except the manning of three sweeps on each side forward, in order to sweep her round either way to get the large guns to bear on the enemy.

“By this time the enemy had commenced a brisk fire from the 19 pound carronades in the barges when it was communicated to me by first officer that the people [crew] misunderstood me, that they would not fight and were determined to run my vessel ashore. “A few minutes previous to this my [launch] boat was hoisted out and manned by as many as could get in her, and shoved off for the shore, which was about 150 yards distant. “The remainder of my crew deserted the deck [i.e., jumped overboard] except 15 or 16 who with myself kept up the brisk and well directed fire of musketry for some time and kept the boats at bay, until I unfortunately received a wound on my left breast, from a 12 pound long shot, I was conveyed below and from what I can since learn, the *Dolphin* was boarded and carried in 15 minutes afterwards.

“In the evening I was removed on board of the *Maidstone*, Captain Burdett, with the rest of the prisoners, where I had every attention paid me by Doctor Scott, surgeon of the *Maidstone*, and was otherwise treated much better than I expected, except in not returning my sword after pledging their honor to do it.

“The *Dolphin* had five wounded, none killed; the enemy from their own account, had 19 killed and 40 wounded; but I am induced to believe the number was much greater.”

Stafford ends his account by saying he was paroled on April 7<sup>th</sup> and set ashore by the *Atlas* of New York at Mr. Martin Shearman’s (owner of “Pop Castle”) “where I received every attention I could possibly wish for and from the inhabitants of Lancaster County, for which I return my hearty and sincere thanks.” He ends with the statement, “Thus have the public a correct account of the most unfortunate occurrence; during my third and final cruize.”

### The Account of the *Dolphin's* Surgeon

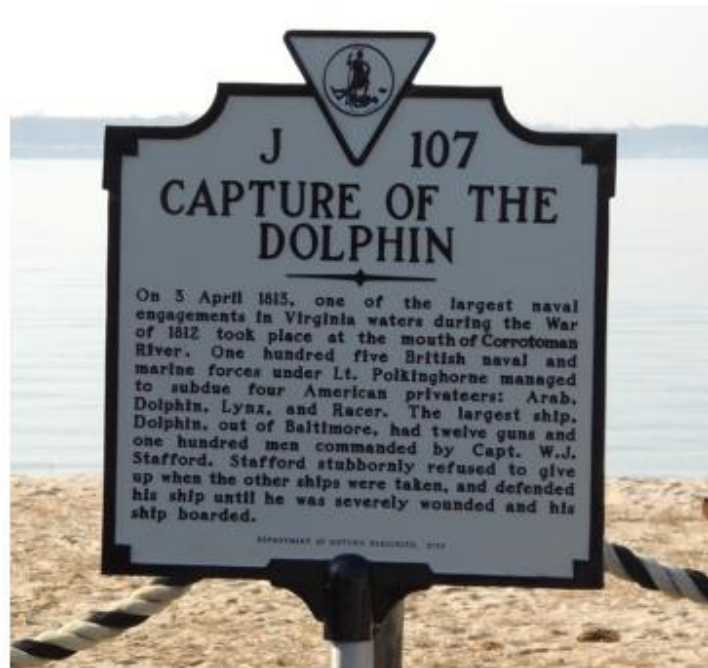
“We had yesterday the pleasure of conversing with the Surgeon of the privateer *Dolphin*” begins this article in the *Virginia Herald* on April 17<sup>th</sup>. After stating that he “confirms in all particular details the statement which we extract from the Baltimore papers copied from the Coffee House books of that place,” we read the interesting account of his own role in the events. He says that Capt. Stafford “narrowly escaped death, a cannon ball having glanced along his side and considerably injured him.”

“There were no men killed on our part, but four wounded. The British had from forty to fifty killed and wounded, as our informant thinks, he having assisted in dressing many and seen many dead. But for the perfect calm which prevailed, and the misconduct of a few, a different result would probably have been exhibited.

### OTHER ACCOUNTS

Two reports in the *Virginia Herald* on April 14<sup>th</sup> offer more details. One says the engagement took place about four miles below Urbanna, and one of the British barges (or even two) was sunk. It adds that the American forces numbered to 250 men, that 65 of them were killed or wounded and that the crew of “one of the letters of marque [*Arab*] escaped by running their vessel on shore.” Last, it was noted, “a number of the neighboring militia and inhabitants saw the whole engagement, which lasted about three hours, but they could render no assistance.”

According to Stuart E. Butler, in his book, “Defending the Old Dominion, Virginia and Its Militia in the War of 1812”, the official British report states that only two of their men were killed and 11 wounded, and the number of Americans killed at six with ten wounded



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