

## Society Member Re-enactor Receives Recognition in Event

Member Steven A Forrest of the War of 1812 Society in the Commonwealth of Virginia as a re-enactor performed in an event at the Jamestown Settlement in early May 2018. An article about the event appeared in the Virginia Pilot Newspaper on May 7<sup>th</sup> and his involvement with others of his Fort Norfolk Re-enactor group was revealed by the newspaper correspondent. A copy of the newspaper article in which included a photo of a British Congreve Rocket used in the battle of Craney Island follows.



# War of 1812 re-enactors win blue ribbon for work, highlight Battle of Craney Island

- By Bob Ruegsegger  
Correspondent
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THE WAR OF 1812 had a moment of renewed glory during bicentennial celebrations a few years ago, but it has slipped out of the national consciousness. That's a shame, according to Hampton Roads re-enactors who think the American victory at the Battle of Craney Island in Portsmouth has been immensely underappreciated.

A unit of living historians and battle re-enactors, the American Forces War of 1812, was awarded a blue ribbon for their unit impression this year at Military Through the Ages, held at Jamestown Settlement near Colonial Williamsburg.

Steve Forrest is a member of the Fort Norfolk Garrison re-enactment unit that conducts living history programs at historic Fort Norfolk on the Elizabeth River.

Dressed in a blue hunting frock with red trim, the Norfolk man portrayed a member of the Virginia militiaman of the era. His trousers matched his hunting frock. He sported a round hat with a cockade on the left side. A red plume that designated infantry perched atop his hat.

Forrest was armed with a smoothbore musket – a French Charleville.

“This is a replica of a Charleville, a musket that the French gave the Americans during the American Revolution,” Forrest said. “We still had a number of them in our arsenal – magazine in Virginia – issued out to the militia. They served from 1812 to 1815.”

At the Battle of Craney Island, the British employed new technology – rockets – developed by the Indians in the Mogul wars. The Congreve rocket was a metal cylinder filled with a wet-mixed black powder that dried to a solid fuel.

“They came in three sizes. Oh yeah, they made a racket. They scared the horses,” said Roger Thor Roop, a re-enactor with the 16th Regiment of Maryland Militia from Damascus, Md. “The cavalry hated them because trying to keep the horses calm during a barrage was a nightmare.”

During the war, the Gosport Navy Yard in Portsmouth and the frigate Constellation made Hampton Roads an irresistible target for the British. They blockaded the Chesapeake Bay, and forced the USS Constellation back into the Elizabeth River.

American sailors moved the guns from the USS Constellation to Craney Island to keep the British from getting to the ship, the shipyard and Norfolk. The British launched barges loaded with Congreve rockets and troops who greatly outnumbered the American defenders.

Fought on June 22, 1813, the Battle of Craney Island resulted in a clear victory for American soldiers and sailors. It was a “short, violent encounter” decided by artillery, according to John M. Hallahan in “The Battle of Craney Island – A Matter of Credit.”

At the Williamsburg event, living historian Andy Park of Norfolk portrayed the ship’s cook aboard the USS Constellation. Park sat at a table laden with a sampling of the ship’s stores – dry goods and preserved meats. Ship staples included rice, sugar salt, peas, sea biscuits, oats and salted pork.

“Sea biscuits were called a twice-baked biscuit,” he said. “They are very, very hard and are mostly just flour with a little bit of water mixed into a dough. ... So hard, in fact, that they would have to be soaked to soften them up enough to be eaten.”

“Grog rations were a practice aboard both British and American ships,” Park said. “The rations of grog were issued each day. Twice a day in the American navy and in the British navy.”

Grog was actually a watered-down rum ration.

“The seamen would actually only get about a half-pint cup of liquor each day with one quart of water,” Park said. “That took a little bit of the flavor and zing out of the entire concoction.”

Brown sugar and citrus could be added to spice up things and make a nice punch.

“That was the recipe that was given out and administered each day as a grog ration,” he said. “That was the nickname of Admiral Vernon. He was known as ‘Old Grog’ and thus we have grog as a practice.”

During the War of 1812, American soldiers did not always have access to things that they needed, and sometimes went hungry. It became “strategically advantageous” for commanding officers to allow civilian merchants – sutlers and victualers – to come into or around camp to sell their goods to the soldiers.

“It was better to have sutlers coming into camp than to have soldiers wandering around looking for things. They may not come back. They may steal things,” said Anthony Fiore, who portrayed a sutler.

“Sometimes sutlers and victualers would sell military clothing and goods such as blankets, uniforms, and shoes,” he said. “Presented here, we have a range of things that could be supplied by a sutler – luxury items like sugar and chocolate.”

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