


1-1-1974

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Military Aspects of the War of 1812
on the Eastern Shore of Maryland

by

Jo Ann Maloney Staples

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts at Longwood College.

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January 1, 1974

This work is dedicated to Mrs. Louise L. Bromwell, Mr. & Mrs. Robert D. Maloney, and Mr. William C. Staples in deepest appreciation for their guidance and understanding.

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Chapter 1

May 1812 - May 1813

On June 18, 1812, the United States of America declared war on Great Britain. Numerous factors, such as impressment of American seamen by the British navy, continued Indian attacks on American settlers prompted by British forces in the Northwest territory, and the loss of American commerce due to the Napoleonic Wars in Europe, accounted for the declaration of war.

The United States quickly prepared for war by organizing military districts within the country, also military preparations were made on the state and local level. These preparations were grossly inadequate in terms of the British fitness for war. The United States had ten frigates, ten sloop-of-war, and 170 gunboats. While the mistress of the seas, Britain had a total of 1,042 ships. Land forces told much the same story. The United States had approximately 7,000 men in its regular army. In addition, each community had a standing volunteer militia company. These companies drilled only occasionally and did not have to serve beyond their own state. Britain, on the other hand, was engaged in war with France and had been almost continuously since

1793. This prolonged conflict necessitated large numbers of well trained troops. At the beginning of the War of 1812, there were 6,000 British troops stationed in Canada alone.¹

One of the most vulnerable areas in the American defense was the Chesapeake Bay. The Bay, 200 miles long, was fed by nineteen navigable rivers and numerous streams. Along the rivers were many villages whose life blood depended upon the bay commerce, villages which were widely separated by farm land or marsh terrain. Further, the Bay contained a number of small islands located along its shore lines. The Americans found this area difficult to defend against the intrusion of the British Navy.

The Bay region, which included Maryland, the District of Columbia, and a portion of Virginia, made up the Tenth Military District of the United States. The headquarters for this District were at Washington and under the command of Brigadier General William Winder.

Winder's task was difficult. Having had little war experience, Winder set about to do battle with the British arms and Washington bureaucracy. He received little assistance from the Secretary of War John Armstrong,

¹Charles G. Muller, The Darkest Day: 1814 (Philadelphia: 1963), 9-10.

who earlier had opposed his appointment. Winder did not have a staff and was soon swamped by a sea of correspondence. He was further hindered by the traditional policy of assembling militia.

The national government supervised the United States Army, which in June of 1812 numbered less than 7,000 men, while the state governments controlled the standing militia and the volunteer militia companies. The militia theoretically included all white men who were old enough to carry a weapon.

After the June 18th declaration of war, the states called their militia to action. The nine counties of the Eastern Shore of Maryland were no exception. The numbers of men in each unit of the different counties had so dwindled due to indifference since the time of the American Revolution that it was necessary to institute a recruiting program.

Easton, in Talbot County, was the center of war activity on the Eastern Shore. It was the principle recruiting station for the "Shore". Funds for the recruiting program were supplied by the state of Maryland and the staff were members of the Talbot County militia.² An armory was also constructed to supply the area with firearms and ammunition. However, the firearms consisted only of

²Printed Form, Recruiting Regulations, April 2, 1812, Maryland Historical Society, Manuscripts, William H. Winder Papers.

muskets and the ammunition was limited.³

Recruiting stations were established in each of the Eastern Shore counties. Lieutenant James McDonald, who was in charge of recruiting in Caroline County, reported to Gen. Winder that on three consecutive weeks he was unable to recruit any volunteers. Lieut. McDonald accounted for the lack of enthusiasm by reporting that sufficient funds for proper recruiting did not exist. He also lacked funds for a staff and could not adequately advertise the recruiting program.⁴

Recruiting in Dorchester County was conducted by Captain Clement Sullivan.⁵ Capt. Sullivan stated that during the spring of 1812, he was unable to enlist even twenty-five men.⁶ It was hoped that a new location would bring better results. Therefore, by August 27, 1812, another recruiting station was established at the town of

³Letter, Brig. Gen. Benjamin Chambers to Brig. Gen. William H. Winder, September 9, 1814, M.H.S., William H. Winder Papers.

⁴Letter, First Lieutenant James McDonald to Brig. Gen. William H. Winder, July 29, 1812, M.H.S., William H. Winder Papers.

⁵Letter, Captain Clement Sullivan to Brig. Gen. William H. Winder, May 12, 1812, M.H.S., William H. Winder Papers.

⁶Letter, Sullivan to Winder, May 23, 1812, M.H.S., William H. Winder Papers.

Vienna in southern Dorchester County and was in operation.⁷ This station proved equally unsuccessful. Throughout the year 1812, apathy reigned on the Eastern Shore. The people did not feel the need to defend their homes until war reached their vicinity and since the British did not institute a blockade of the Chesapeake Bay until December 1812, they simply were not concerned with the war.

In addition to the recruiting program, several other military preparations were attempted by the Eastern Shore counties. These preparations included the organization of militia units and the establishment of defense features.

Cecil, the northernmost county, supplied men who served in two regiments. Each regiment had ten companies containing seventy-five men. These 1,500 volunteers represented a large portion of the total population of the county. The total white population of Cecil County numbered 9,652 in 1810. Accounting for females and children under the age of fourteen, census records show that one out of every two men volunteered for service.⁸

⁷Letter, Captain Kenneth McKenzie to Brig. Gen. William H. Winder, August 31, 1812, M.H.S., William H. Winder Papers.

⁸George Johnston, History of Cecil County Maryland (Elkton, Maryland: Published by Author, 1881), 479. No explanation has been given for the large number volunteers from Cecil County while other counties had difficulty in enlisting men.

The people of this county also constructed several forts. Fortifications at Fredericktown on the Sassafras River, Welsh Point on the Elk River, Frenchtown on the Bohemia River, Fort Hollingsworth on the Elk River at Elk Landing, Fort Defiance at the town of Elkton, Charlestown on the North East River and Port Deposit on the Susquehanna River were the focal points of military preparedness.

Men from Kent and Queen Anne's counties formed four regiments.⁹ These regiments possessed five six-pound field pieces, three in Kent and two in Queen Anne's.¹⁰ The Queen Anne's County militia was stationed at Kent Island and the village of Queenstown. This County also took the precaution of sinking small vessels in the channels of its creeks. Vessels such as barges and fishing boats were used to prevent the enemy from approaching the towns by water.¹¹

Talbot, Caroline, and Dorchester counties supplied men to form six regiments. These six regiments formed the Twelfth Brigade. Commanding officer for the Twelfth was Brigadier General Perry Benson.¹² Benson was born in Talbot

⁹William M. Marine, The British Invasion of Maryland 1812-1815, ed. by Louis Henry Dielman (Hatboro, Pennsylvania: 1965), 195-96 & 130.

¹⁰Letter, Chambers to Winder, September 9, 1814, M.H.S., William H. Winder Papers.

¹¹Letter, Lemuel Purnell to Dr. Edward Harris, May 16, 1813, M.H.S., Vertical File Collection.

¹²Gilbert Byron, St. Michaels: The Town That Fooled the British (Easton, Maryland: Easton Publishing Company, 1963), 7.

County in 1757. Little is known about his early life except that his formal education was meager. He enlisted as a private in the Fourth Battalion of the Maryland Flying Camp in 1776. When the Flying Camp was reorganized in March 1777, Benson became a First Lieutenant. In June 1779, he received a captain's commission in the Continental Army and was transferred to the Southern theatre during the Revolutionary War. He served at the battles of Cowpens and Guilford Court House and was severely wounded at the battle of Hobkirk's Hill. Benson was incapacitated during the remainder of the war having lost the use of his left arm. He farmed in his native Talbot County until 1794 when he re-enlisted as Lieutenant Colonel during the Whiskey Rebellion. In 1800, Benson was made Brigadier General in the Maryland Militia. During the War of 1812, he commanded all military forces in Talbot County.¹³

Men from certain Eastern Shore counties also formed mounted militia units. Caroline and Dorchester formed the Tenth Cavalry Regiments while those from Queen Anne's and Talbot formed the Ninth. Commander of the Ninth Cavalry was Lieutenant Colonel Edward Lloyd.¹⁴ Lloyd, the offspring of one of the most prominent families of the

¹³Oswald Tilghman, History of Talbot County Maryland 1661-1861 (2 vols.; Baltimore: 1915), I, 304-316.

¹⁴Byron, St. Michaels: The Town That Fooled the British, 7.

Eastern Shore, is better known as "the Governor". He was governor of Maryland from 1809 to January of 1812. In addition, he had served as a member to the Maryland State Legislature and the United States Senate. In February 1812, he was commissioned Lieutenant Colonel in the Ninth Cavalry Regiment of Maryland Militia. Lloyd's contributions to this regiment, as a commander and financier, were generous. He could well afford to give financial assistance as he owned extensive tracts of land and many slaves. In 1817, Frederick Douglas, the great Black abolitionist of the Nineteenth Century, was born to a slave owned by Edward Lloyd.¹⁵

All military preparations such as the construction of forts, the formation of military units, and the establishment of recruiting stations were to prove inadequate in light of the eventual numerical superiority of the British forces that came to the Chesapeake Bay. To have adequately protected the Eastern Shore the Tenth Military District should have provided additional military units, more firearms, and funds.

On February 4, 1813, a British squadron entered the Chesapeake Bay.¹⁶ This squadron, consisting of four ships of the line, six frigates, and several

¹⁵Tilghman, History of Talbot County Maryland 1661-1861, I, 184-190.

¹⁶Byron, St. Michaels: The Town That Fooled the British, 7.

sloops, commanded by Admiral George Cockburn, anchored in the waters of Virginia off Norfolk.

Cockburn had entered the British Navy at the age of nine as a servant and had his first command of a ship at the age of twenty-one. In 1812, he was made a rear-admiral. His success in the navy was due in large part to his personality. Overbearing and ruthless, he quickly achieved rank.¹⁷ He eagerly planned for the Chesapeake expedition. One of Adm. Cockburn's objectives in the Bay area was to destroy the shipyards which produced the Baltimore Clipper ships. These vessels had proven a serious menace to His Majesty's Navy.¹⁸ He also hoped to satisfy the men under his command with plunder and to antagonize the inhabitants of the Eastern Shore to such a point that they demanded peace.¹⁹ Cockburn and many of his fellow officers looked upon this expedition as a lark after their service in the European campaigns of the

¹⁷Muller, The Darkest Day: 1814, 16.

¹⁸Gilbert Byron, The War of 1812 on the Chesapeake Bay (Baltimore: 1964), 34. These vessels known as "Baltimore Clippers" were schooners. Twenty-eight of these vessels were built in Talbot County.

¹⁹Marine, The British Invasion of Maryland 1812-1815, 30 & 57.

Napoleonic Wars.²⁰

Many British officers had a personal contempt for Americans. Vice-Admiral Alexander Cochrane, whose brother, Charles, was killed in the American Revolution, was a good example.²¹

On March 24, 1813, Cockburn's squadron was joined by Admiral Sir John B. Warren in the flag ship, the seventy-four gun San Domingo.²² Adm. Warren had been appointed commander of the British squadron on the Halifax and West India stations in August of 1812. This command also included the entire east coast of North America. Originally, the appointment was of a diplomatic nature for Warren was to discuss peace with the Americans in terms of the revocation of the British Orders of Council. When the Americans refused to negotiate until the impressment of their sailors was stopped, the British Admiralty ordered Warren to blockade the Delaware and Chesapeake Bays. The Admiral looked upon this order as an opportunity to bring the Americans to their knees.²³

²⁰Muller, The Darkest Day: 1814, 16.

²¹Ibid., 45.

²²Tilghman, History of Talbot County Maryland 1661-1861, II, 57.

²³Muller, The Darkest Day: 1814, 16-17.

After the forces of Warren and Cockburn joined, the British squadron left its anchorage at Lynnhaven Bay and sailed up the Chesapeake. They planned to establish bases on the numerous islands of the Bay which were small enough to be guarded by the British warships. These islands were easily protected and could be used as points from which the British invasion plans could be directed.

The first island to be used for this purpose was Virginia's Tangier Island. Its location near the mouth of the Bay offered an easy avenue of escape for the British. Tangier served as the major British base in the Bay during the War and was not abandoned until February 1815, when the news of the peace reached the United States. Prizes of war were stored here. Also the Island offered a fresh water supply and lumber to repair ships damaged in battle. The British constructed two barracks, one on either side of a grove of trees which had served as a religious camp ground for the inhabitants of the Island. The camp also consisted of tents which were pitched in a semi-circle extending from each of the two forts and around the grove.²⁴

Originally, the number of men housed on the Island was about 200 but this number swelled to several

²⁴Marine, The British Invasion of Maryland 1812-1815, 131.

thousand. Eventually, between fifty and sixty ships of war were anchored off Tangier.²⁵

During the course of the war, Joshua Thomas, an American Methodist minister, lived on Tangier. The British forces stationed there gave him the title of "Parson of the Islands."²⁶ Thomas reported that the inhabitants were treated kindly by the invaders and paid generously for the provisions taken.

Having established a base of supply, Adm. Warren sent marauding expeditions into the rivers and inlets of the Bay. On March 30, 1813, British vessels were sighted near Easton Point. The citizens of Easton, fearful of an attack upon the armory, called out the Talbot County Militia to investigate. The British, however, made no attempt to land.²⁷ Again, in early April a portion of the British squadron anchored in the mouth of the Choptank River. This time they went ashore at a point known as Castle Haven. They gathered supplies and water and re-embarked without further incident.²⁸

On April 12, 1813, the British fleet under the

²⁵ Adam Wallace, Parson of the Islands (Philadelphia: Published by Author, 1861), 127 & 131.

²⁶ Ibid., 18.

²⁷ Republican Star, March 30, 1813, M.H.S., Harrison Collection.

²⁸ Letter, John Kerr to Dr. Edward Harris, April 25, 1813, M.H.S., Vertical File Collection.

command of Adm. Warren seized Sharp's Island located near the mouth of the Choptank River.²⁹ The island was owned by Jacob Gibson, who openly fraternized with the invaders.³⁰ In return for the grain and livestock taken by the enemy fleet, Gibson received a large sum of money and the hatred of the people of the nearby town of St. Michaels. Hoping to get revenge, Gibson decided to play a joke upon the townspeople. Climbing aboard a sloop, he proceeded along with several of his slaves toward St. Michaels. He then placed a red bandanna on the masthead and ordered one of the slaves to beat upon a barrel. The inhabitants of St. Michaels believed they were under British attack. However, when he reached the shore and the citizens saw that it was Gibson and his slaves they became so enraged that he feared for his life. He immediately begged forgiveness of the inhabitants. The prankster later attempted to expiate his deed by purchasing two six-pound cannons which were used in the defense of St. Michaels later in the same year.³¹

²⁹Byron, St. Michaels: The Town That Fooled the British, 8.

³⁰Letter, Kerr to Harris, April 25, 1813, M.H.S., Vertical File Collection.

³¹Byron, St. Michaels: The Town That Fooled the British, 8.

The British now began to disrupt shipping between the Eastern and Western Shores. On April 14, 1813, the Queenstown packet owned by William Bromwell and John Meredith was captured.³² This ship sailed from Annapolis, the state capital, to the Eastern Shore carrying passengers and mail. A number of the passengers and Mr. Bromwell were held on board Adm. Warren's ship overnight. The captives were questioned concerning the type and extent of military preparations made by the Americans in the Bay area, but they refused to give any information, and were released the following day. The packet and its property were retained by the British.³³

On April 23, 1813, Spesutie, the most northern of the islands in the Bay, was occupied by the British forces.³⁴ While the inhabitants fled the island, the invaders seized a number of cattle and swine. The inhabitants returned when the British promised them protection. This followed a policy established by the British. If the inhabitants of an area offered no resistance to the enemy invasion, the invaders paid for the grain and livestock taken and

³² Tilghman, History of Talbot County Maryland 1661-1861, II, 154-55.

³³ Republican Star, April 20, 1813, M.H.S., Harrison Collection.

³⁴ Marine, The British Invasion of Maryland 1812-1815, 29.

did no damage to dwellings or barns. This policy was followed so that the British forces might secure provisions from the same locality at a later date.

After having established bases on several of the islands in the Bay, the British, in the spring of 1813, began a systematic program of searching for and destroying shipyards and fortifications which could benefit the American cause. Cecil and Kent counties, the most northern, were struck first.

On April 29, 1813, the British landed at Turkey Point on the Elk River to reconnoiter the Americans' position and to gather supplies. Later in the same day the same British raiding party came ashore at Welsh Point, on the Elk River. Here the invaders were met by the Cecil County Militia, but greatly outnumbered, the Americans retreated.³⁵

A second raiding party consisting of thirteen barges and approximately 400 marines also moved up the Elk River. This force commanded by Lieutenant George Westphal of the Marlborough reached Frenchtown before midnight of April 29th. Frenchtown was a strategic position as it was the major shipping point between

³⁵J. Frank Holt, "History of Cecil County" (unpublished text, Historical Society of Cecil County, 1942), 2.

Baltimore and Philadelphia for stagecoach lines.

The inhabitants of the town soon after the declaration of war had erected a small fortification which had four four-pound guns. This fort quartered a small squad of poorly trained American militia. As the British came ashore, the greatly outnumbered American militia retreated without firing a shot. Unaware of the British conciliatory policy toward passive localities, local residents along with several stagecoach drivers manned the fort rather than lose the town to the enemy. Twice these defenders fired upon the British and forced them back. The British, however, did capture the fort when the ammunition was exhausted and the defenders were forced to flee.³⁶

After seizing the fort, the British marines marched into Frenchtown where they met no further opposition from the Americans. The marines burned all the buildings in the town except six dwellings.³⁷ In addition, a wharf and five ships moored in the harbor were destroyed.³⁸ After devastating Frenchtown, the British moved farther up the Elk River.

³⁶Marine, The British Invasion of Maryland 1812-1815, 32 & 43.

³⁷No explanation has been given why the British left six dwellings standing while destroying the remainder of the town.

³⁸Holt, "History of Cecil County," 2.

On a bluff, overlooking the main channel of the Elk River, was Fort Defiance. It was so constructed that fortifications were on either side of the waterway. Also, a small earth-work was 300 yards up the river. Chains had been placed across the channel of the Elk. When a ship passed above them, the chains could be drawn and the vessel captured.

The British continued to move up the river and were fired upon. Realizing the danger presented by the cross fire, they retired down river to a landing known as White Hall. Here they bribed a female slave to show them the way to Elkton by land. Instead she guided them in the opposite direction to Fort Hollingsworth.³⁹ The fort, only a small earth-work, contained a few small cannon and a squad of American militia. When the Americans opened fire, the British quickly retired to their barges. They then proceeded down the Elk River and back into the Chesapeake Bay.

Next, the British marines turned their marauding to the Western Shore. On May 3rd and 4th, the marines attacked the Principio Iron Works.⁴⁰ This company, located on the Northeast River, supplied

³⁹Holt, "History of Cecil County," 2.

⁴⁰Johnston, History of Cecil County Maryland, 419.

most of the firearms used by the Americans in the Bay area. The Works were nearly unguarded, because the Americans did not know that the British had penetrated the Northeast River area. The British quickly overran the weak American defenses and set about to destroy the furnace. By twilight on May 4, 1813, the company buildings had been burned. The British also destroyed the bridge over Principio Creek, which further hampered American communications between Washington and Philadelphia. This was the main route of communication between the two cities and with the British seizure of this area it forced the Americans to use a longer route.

The British then sent a portion of the fleet under Lieut. Westphal up the Sassafras River. Westphal's forces were joined by additional marines under Adm. Cockburn on May 5, 1813. This force consisting of 500 men and twelve barges, continued up the Sassafras about fifteen miles until they reached the two villages of Fredericktown and Georgetown.⁴¹ Fredericktown was in Cecil County and Georgetown in Kent, facing each other across the river. The British objective here was to gather supplies and to rout any American military units in the vicinity.

⁴¹Letter, Dr. Edward Scott to Congressman Charles Goldsboro, May 6, 1813, Simon Wickes Westcott Collection, Locust Grove, Kent County, Maryland.

Enroute to Fredericktown, the British captured two inhabitants of the area. These men were sent ahead to give the town's people a warning that if they fired upon the British, the town would be destroyed. If, however, the citizens offered no resistance to the British maneuvers, they would be paid in full for any provisions taken and no damage to property or individuals would be done.⁴²

Fredericktown had one crudely constructed fort. The fort contained one cannon and a force of thirty-five men under the command of Colonel Thomas Ward Veazey. After hearing the ultimatum, Col. Veazey refused to accept the terms and prepared to defend the town.

At four o'clock, Col. Veazey received word of the approach of the British from his scouts. Two hours later the British sighted the Fredericktown fort.⁴³ The Americans opened fire but the British continued to advance. Col. Veazey's militia defended the fort until their ammunition was exhausted. The Americans then fled from the fortification as the overwhelming British marines took the fort. The invaders burned the fort and proceeded to the town,

⁴²Marine, The British Invasion of Maryland 1812-1815, 46.

⁴³Johnston, History of Cecil County Maryland, 420.

leaving only a tavern and seven houses untouched. They also destroyed a large sea schooner and three smaller boats moored in the Sassafras River.⁴⁴

The British then crossed to the opposite shore and continued their destruction in Georgetown. This village contained a meeting house, several commercial buildings, and about thirty dwellings. All the buildings, except for the meeting house and eleven of the dwellings were burned by the British.⁴⁵ One of the houses which was saved from the devastation belonged to Kitty Knight.⁴⁶ Twice she was ordered to leave her house, but refused to do so. Twice the British marines set the house afire, and twice the mistress extinguished the fire. Finally, the officer in command spared the house from further conflagration.⁴⁷ After completing their destruction of Fredericktown and Georgetown, the fleet retired to the southern part of the Bay, for fear of being trapped in the

⁴⁴Letter, Scott to Goldsboro, May 6, 1813, Westcott Collection, Kent County Maryland.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Byron, The War of 1812 on the Chesapeake Bay, 26. Kitty Knight has become a folk hero for the determination she showed in defending her home against the British attack.

⁴⁷Fred G. Usilton, History of Kent County (Chestertown, Maryland: William B. Usilton and Sons Printer, 1917), 67. The Kitty Knight house still stands today and is used as a restaurant.

narrower northern end by the French fleet, which had been sighted in the Atlantic off the mouth of the Chesapeake.⁴⁸

Although the Eastern Shoremen attempted to defend their Bay against the intrusion of the enemy, their preparations were useless in light of the British numerical superiority. A well-equipped and well-trained American militia could have repulsed the British from their position in the Chesapeake Bay region.

⁴⁸The French fleet had been sighted by British frigates patrolling the American coast. Recognizing the danger, word was sent to the British fleet.

Chapter 2

June 1813 - August 1813

After their expedition to the northern part of the Bay, the British returned to the vicinity of Norfolk, where they waited the arrival of reinforcements from Bermuda. They also expected the French fleet to venture into the Chesapeake Bay where the two fleets might engage in battle. However, the French never appeared.

Early in June, 1813, Adm. Warren arrived with 1,800 marines, 300 marine artillery pieces, and 550 land troops.⁴⁹ Commanding the land troops was Major - General Sir Sidney Beckwith and second in command was Lieutenant - Colonel Charles James Napier. Col. Napier served with distinction in the British peninsular campaign of 1810. From Spain, he was sent to Bermuda to join the expedition in the Chesapeake Bay.

Since the British Admiralty sanctioned any action which would damage the American naval strength, Adm. Warren ordered an attack on Norfolk. The navy yard in near-by Gosport had a large quantity of supplies which the British were anxious to seize.⁵⁰ As a result of the

⁴⁹Muller, The Darkest Day: 1814, 31.

⁵⁰Gosport is the modern city of Portsmouth.

desertion of many marines and sailors, the British attack of June 12, was not successful.⁵¹ On June 25, in retaliation for their unsuccessful venture at Norfolk, they attacked Hampton, then a small village on the York River peninsula. The British captured Hampton and for two days the pillage continued without restraint. News of this violent act caused the Eastern Shoremen to change their attitude. From this time, they set about to defend themselves from the enemy who viciously attacked them.⁵²

In July 1813, the British probed into the James and Potomac rivers. The movement up the Potomac caused the populace in that vicinity great alarm but the enemy fleet did not attack the Capitol because of dysentery and other shipboard sicknesses.

In order to combat these sicknesses, the British landed on Kent Island early in August. The island, the largest in the Chesapeake, was difficult to protect. It was separated from the mainland by a small stream and a narrow strip of marsh land. Here the British established a base similar to the one on Tangier.

The news of the seizure of Kent Island prompted

⁵¹Many British seamen and soldiers deserted the British force while in America. Conditions in British service were unbearable and they deserted in hopes of establishing a better life.

⁵²Ibid., 33-38.

the near-by Talbot County militia to intensify its protection of the near-by towns and to speed up the buildings of defense works at St. Michaels. This town was the most vulnerable point in Talbot County. It was located directly on the Miles River, only seven miles from the British base on Kent Island. Also six Baltimore Clippers were under construction in the shipyards, during August 1813.⁵³

The warnings of a British deserter from the base at Kent Island of an impending attack by water and land encouraged the town's people to complete their military preparations. East of the St. Michaels' harbor a breast-work was constructed at Parrott's Point. It had four cannon, two six-pounders and two nine-pounders. The fort was manned by Captain William Dodson and thirty members of the Talbot militia. Capt. Dodson was born at St. Michaels, January 19, 1786. He worked for many years as a captain on packets sailing from his hometown. Besides his participation in the battle of St. Michaels, he later served as commander of a barge in Barney's flotilla and fought in the

⁵³Tilghman, History of Talbot County Maryland 1661-1861, II, 149 & 161-62.

battle of Bladensburg.⁵⁴

In addition to the fort at Parrott's Point, Gen. Benson, commander of military operations in St. Michaels, ordered lanterns placed in tree tops, the third story of houses, and mastheads of ships. This tactical precaution would make the town appear as if it were located on a hill. The British would misjudge the projectile range and over-shoot the town. Also logs and chains were placed in the mouth of the harbor. They extended from Parrott's Point to Three Cedars Point, a protrusion of land on the west side of the harbor. The two six-pound cannons given by Jacob Gibson were placed in a defensive position at the head of the harbor.

By August 9, 1813, a defense force of 500 men was stationed in or near the town.⁵⁵ Most of the men were quartered in the two churches in the village. However, Captain Clement Vickers' Talbot Volunteer Artillerists were positioned west of St. Michaels. This force had two cannon and was ordered to protect the town

⁵⁴Ibid., 163. Barney's flotilla under the command of Joshua Barney consisted of twenty-six gunboats. This flotilla successfully harassed the British in the Patuxent River. On August 24, 1814, Barney's flotilla-men served at the battle of Bladensburg.

⁵⁵Marine, The British Invasion of Maryland 1812-1815, 55.

from an invasion by way of the Bayside peninsula.⁵⁶

Capt. Vickers was typical of Eastern Shoremen in that he worked on the water most of his life. Born in Dorchester County in 1773, he commanded packets sailing from Easton for many years. He was the first captain of the steamboat, Maryland, a position he held until his death in 1825.⁵⁷

In addition to Capt. Vickers' forces, the town of Easton provided three units. Other villages in Talbot County sent six units. Finally, the town of St. Michaels provided the St. Michaels Patriotic Blues.⁵⁸

On August 9, Gen. Benson ordered videttes stationed at certain points near the town to be on the lookout for the enemy's approach. Capt. Dodson and his men took their position at Parrott's Point. The remainder of troops were stationed throughout the town and at various shipyards. The defenders felt the British would not attack for several hours because of the heavy rain and fog. The enemy would need good visibility in order to recognize certain geographical

⁵⁶Refer to map titled "St. Michaels and Vicinity" in end papers.

⁵⁷Tilghman, History of Talbot County Maryland 1661-1861, II, 164.

⁵⁸Byron, St. Michaels: The Town That Fooled the British, 10 & 17.

features used for navigation.⁵⁹

On August 10, shortly after midnight, the British barge, Conflict, under Captain H. L. Bakers, anchored at Tilghman's Point. This vessel was followed by a flotilla of barges with 300 British soldiers and marines. The British proceeded up river and by keeping close to the opposite shore went unobserved by the Americans. When the British reached a point above the town, they crossed to the other side of the Miles River. At four o'clock in the morning, the invaders, concealed by the fog, disembarked on the shore directly above Parrott's Point.⁶⁰ The defenders were completely unaware of the British position until the enemy appeared in front of them. This sudden appearance of the enemy so unnerved the American militia that they fled to the town for safety, leaving Capt. Dodson, one member of the militia, and a black man in the fort. The three men were able to move one of the nine-pound cannons into position and to fire one shot at the invaders before they retreated. The shot contained a ball and a parcel of scrap iron. This discharge inflicted considerable damage upon the enemy's column as evidenced by the quantity of

⁵⁹Hulbert Footner, Rivers of the Eastern Shore (New York: 1944), 250.

⁶⁰Niles Register, August 21, 1813, M.H.S., Ms., Harrison Collection.

blood upon the shore after the battle.⁶¹ The British then stormed into the fort and spiked the guns.

While the British seized Parrott's Point, the American militia stationed at the various shipyards opened fire on the enemy. Further, the troops positioned west of the town under Capt. Vickers advanced their position to Mill Point, near the town, and began firing.

The enemy barges moving into the harbor were stopped by the logs and chains in the channel.⁶² Finding the fire too heavy, the enemy returned to their barges and began to shell the town. The elevated lights of St. Michaels caused the British gunners to overshoot the target but the third story of a shipwright's home was struck. The shelling continued until sunrise when the British vessels withdrew three miles down river. It was necessary to withdraw because of lack of ammunition.⁶³

The Americans had fired fifteen rounds, extensively damaged one British barge but suffered no casualties, while the British had twenty-seven men killed

⁶¹Footner, Rivers of the Eastern Shore, 251.

⁶²Private interview, Jerimiah Harrison, October 1, 1874, M.H.S., Ms., Harrison Collection.

⁶³Marine, The British Invasion of Maryland 1812-1815, 56.

or wounded.⁶⁴

Later the same day, August 10, the British seized Poplar and Tilghman's islands, south of Kent Island.⁶⁵ A portion of Talbot County's militia under the command of Captain John Caulk established a camp on Tilghman's Island on August 12, 1813. The naval force assembled here consisted of two schooners, several small scows, and barges. The British did not attack the camp on Tilghman's Island until late August, because their first goal was the bigger prize, the shipyards at St. Michaels.

After failing to capture St. Michaels, the British turned their attention to other American militia units stationed in the vicinity of Kent Island. The closest unit was stationed at Queenstown, a small town in Queen Anne's County about ten miles from the British base. A portion of this county's militia had been stationed at Queenstown since the early part of 1813. In August 1813, it was strengthened. The increase in military strength was in anticipation of a British attack.⁶⁶

The American force consisted of a detachment of

⁶⁴Tilghman, History of Talbot County Maryland 1661-1861, II, 169.

⁶⁵Republican Star, August 10, 1813, M.H.S., Ms., Harrison Collection.

⁶⁶Letter, Lemuel Purnell to Dr. Edward Harris, May 16, 1813, M.H.S., Ms., Vertical File.

the 38th Militia. It was under the command of Major William H. Nicholson and had 244 men. A cavalry unit commanded by Major Thomas Emory had approximately 100. Also present was an artillery company of thirty-five men commanded by Captain Gustavus Wright. This company had two six-pound cannons.⁶⁷

Increased activity of the British and the attack on St. Michaels on August 10, 1813, seemed to indicate that the American force at Queenstown would be challenged. Therefore, on the night of August 12, Maj. Nicholson sent a scouting detachment to the Piney Neck peninsula. This peninsula served as a natural defense barrier between the central part of Kent Island and Queenstown. A second party of eighteen men was sent to scout the road which connected Kent Island with the mainland.⁶⁸

At 2:30 on the morning of August 13, members of the scouting party which had been sent to the Kent Narrows Road reported to Maj. Nicholson that British forces were approaching from Kent Narrows. Maj. Emory's cavalry which was quartered one mile from town was readied.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Report, Maj. William H. Nicholson to Colonel Thomas Wright, August 16, 1813, M.H.S., Ms., Vertical File.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Frederic Emory, Queen Anne's County, Maryland Its Early History and Development (Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 1950), 434.

The British, planned to attack Queenstown by sending one party down the Kent Narrows Road, while a second force moved undetected up the Queenstown Creek to the village. The British troops engaged in this attack were commanded by Gen. Beckwith and Col. Charles Napier.⁷⁰

During the early hours of August 13, as British troops proceeded down the Kent Narrows Road, 1,500 British marines and soldiers in forty-five barges mistakenly landed at Blakeford, the residence of a former governor of Maryland. The plan called for these troops to continue up the creek and land at Queenstown but they had become confused and landed at Blakeford instead. This error caused a waste of time and enabled the Americans to take up a position along the Kent Narrows Road two miles from Queenstown.

The two British units were eventually united and proceeded down the Kent Narrows Road toward Queenstown. As the British neared, the Americans opened fire from their position behind a fence. After firing one volley, they retreated, circled around the British forces, fired a second volley, and retired in good order to Queenstown. In the course of this skirmish, Gen. Beckwith's horse was

⁷⁰Report, Maj. Nicholson to Col. Wright, August 16, 1813, M.H.S., Vertical File.

shot from under him, and several British soldiers were killed.⁷¹

The Americans retreated to the town but were followed closely by the British. Maj. Nicholson called for a retreat from Queenstown when the enemy was about one hundred and fifty yards from the town. The Americans retreated to a position about one and a half miles from town. Capt. Wright's artillery unit remained in the town until fired upon by British rockets. When Capt. Wright's unit joined the other American forces, a second retreat was ordered. This time the American militia retreated to Centreville, the county seat.⁷²

The British entered Queenstown on the morning of August 13, 1813. They neither burned nor sacked the town as had been their policy of dealing with captured villages in the past. Realizing that increased hostility was the major outcome of such tactics, Adm. Warren had instituted a more conciliatory policy. The British forces then returned to Kent Island.

The British now made plans to evacuate their bases on the islands in the Bay. During the late summer and early fall, hurricanes often pass through the Chesapeake Bay region. The British encampments were not

⁷¹Marine, The British Invasion of Maryland 1812-1815, 55.

⁷²Report, Maj. Nicholson to Col. Wright, August 16, 1813, M.H.S., Ms., Vertical File.

strong enough to withstand the forces of these storms. The British planned to depart for their winter quarters in Bermuda before the start of the hurricane season. In addition, the winter would be less severe in Bermuda than in the Chesapeake Bay region. On August 24, the British broke camp on Kent Island but they did not sail for Bermuda that day.

Instead they remained aboard their ships for two days. On August 26, they again attempted to attack St. Michaels. This time a force of 1,800 men landed on Tilghman's Island at Wade's Point.⁷³ At the same time a brig and three schooners were sent up the Miles River toward St. Michaels. The enemy hoped to trap any American militia in the area between these two units.

The British force which landed at Wade's Point was divided into two groups. The first under Gen. Beckwith marched toward St. Michaels. However, they marched only a few miles inland. Fearing the possibility of an ambush from the heavily wooded countryside, the troops under Gen. Beckwith's command returned to Wade's Point.⁷⁴

⁷³Byron, St. Michaels: The Town That Fooled the British, 28.

⁷⁴Byron, The War of 1812 on the Chesapeake Bay, 31.

The remainder of the troops, commanded by Adm. Cockburn, proceeded down the peninsula in search of the American militia under Capt. Caulk. British reconnaissance forces had reported the presence of Capt. Caulk's camp on Tilghman's Island.

Caulk's forces learned of the enemy's advance and fled across Harris' Creek which separated the Bayside peninsula from Broad Creek peninsula.⁷⁵ However, Adm. Cockburn's unit seized sixteen of Caulk's men before they could cross. These captives were sent to Annapolis and used in exchange for British prisoners of war.

After plundering the countryside for supplies, the combined forces of Cockburn and Beckwith re-embarked at six o'clock in the evening of the same day. They then joined their waiting fleet at Kent Point off Kent Island.⁷⁶

Captain Robert Barrie of the seventy-four gun Dragon was left in charge of a skeleton force in the Bay. His task was to blockade the mouth of the Bay during the winter months, and prevent the Americans from using the Bay as a trade route.⁷⁷

The British fleet spent the winter months in

⁷⁵Refer to map titled "St. Michaels and Vicinity" in end papers.

⁷⁶Tilghman, History of Talbot County Maryland 1661-1861, II, 174-75.

⁷⁷Byron, The War of 1812 on the Chesapeake Bay, 32.

Bermuda. Here the men rested and recuperated from illnesses and wounds, gathered supplies, and repaired their vessels.

The summer of 1813 had been successful for the British. They took possession of three islands in the Chesapeake Bay and established a major camp on Kent Island. They also planned and executed attacks against American militia units located at St. Michaels and Queenstown.

However, their actions during this summer had an impact upon the Eastern Shoremen. The terrorizing of citizens and the destruction of property by the British helped to unite the Americans and made the war effort more popular in the United States. Previously, the Eastern Shoremen were unconcerned about war activities until they touched their immediate area, but the British activities during the summer of 1813 and Adm. Warren's warning that "the British fleet would return in 1814 to destroy Baltimore and desolate both shores of the bay" made the Eastern Shoremen change their nonchalant attitude to active concern.⁷⁸

⁷⁸Muller, The Darkest Day: 1814, 40.

Chapter 3

September 1813 - February 1815

The inhabitants of the Eastern Shore were free of British harassment from late August 1813 to May 1814 when the enemy fleet returned to the Bay. During the winter 1813-1814, the people of the Eastern Shore organized new military units. They feared Adm. Warren's threat that the British would return in the spring and devastate the countryside. They hoped the formation of additional units would help to combat the British military superiority. Companies already in existence established regular drill sessions and became better trained and equipped. One such established company was the 9th Cavalry Regiment of Talbot County, under the command of Lieut. Col. Lloyd.⁷⁹ Lloyd wrote to the Secretary of State, James Monroe, requesting 200 rifles. He stated in the request that it had been necessary to form such a unit to stop the "outrageous and wanton" destruction by the enemy and as it now existed, his unit was not effectively armed to achieve such a goal.⁸⁰ Monroe referred the request to Brig. Gen. Winder, military

⁷⁹ Tilghman, History of Talbot County Maryland 1661-1861, II, 157 & 177.

⁸⁰ Letter, Lieut. Col. Edward Lloyd to James Monroe, July 3, 1814, M.H.S., Ms., William H. Winder Papers.

commander of the 10th District. The commander, however, was unable to supply the rifles and suggested that muskets, which could be procured from the arsenal at Easton, be used. This is an example of the inadequate state of military affairs in the United States during the War of 1812.⁸¹

Once again, the preparations made by the Eastern Shoremen would prove to be inadequate. Events in Europe greatly affected the course of the war in America. In October 1813, Napoleon was defeated in the Battle of Nations at Leipzig. On April 11, 1814, he abdicated and was ordered confined to the island of Elba. The defeat of Napoleon enabled the British Admiralty to transfer thousands of seasoned troops to the United States.

The Admiralty also realized the need for a change of command. Adm. Warren seemed to lack the foresight to bring the Chesapeake Bay campaign to a successful conclusion. Warren was replaced by Vice Admiral Sir Alexander Cochrane. In addition, the first expedition of seasoned troops sailed from England in June, 1814. It included three frigates, three sloops, two bomb vessels, five naval transport ships, and three army transport ships.

⁸⁰Letter, Lieut. Col. Edward Lloyd to James Monroe, July 3, 1814, M.H.S., Ms., William H. Winder Papers.

⁸¹Letter, William H. Winder to Lieut. Col. Edward Lloyd, August 15, 1814, M.H.S., Ms., William H. Winder Papers.

The soldiers included in this expedition were under the command of Major General Robert Ross.⁸²

In early August, Adm. Cochrane aboard the seventy-four gun Albion, arrived in the Bay. The delay in their arrival was caused by a stop in Bermuda where a British squadron from the Mediterranean joined Cochrane's expedition.

Early in August, Cochrane and Ross rendezvoused with Adm. Cockburn at the mouth of the Potomac. It was during this meeting that Cochrane proposed his plan of action. They would attack Washington but would first create two diversions to distract the Americans. One squadron was sent up the Potomac River to attack Fort Washington, fourteen miles below the capital city. The fort contained a large quantity of gunpowder which the British were eager to seize.⁸³

On the morning of August 27, the squadron headed up the river toward the fort. However, scouts soon informed the American commander that the enemy was proceeding in the direction of the fort. When the British came in sight of Fort Washington the American commander fired all of the powder in the magazine. He had been ordered by Gen. Winder to destroy the powder rather than have it fall into the

⁸²Byron, The War of 1812 on the Chesapeake Bay, 39 & 45.

⁸³Ibid., 46.

hands of the enemy. Seeing and hearing the explosion, the British expedition realized a shore excursion was useless and rejoined the fleet down river.

The second diversion was sent to the northern part of the Chesapeake Bay. It was under the command of Sir Peter Parker on the thirty-eight gun frigate, Menelaus. With this expedition, the British hoped to divert the attention of the Americans from the attack aimed at Washington. Parker was also ordered to prevent the American militia from crossing the Bay and aiding their comrades in arms.⁸⁴

On August 20, the Menelaus sailed up Worten Creek in Kent County. Here the British destroyed several farm buildings and the crops in the fields.⁸⁵ From Worten Creek, they sailed northward and sent marauding parties in small boats into the numerous inlets along the Chesapeake. On August 30, Parker with a command of 260 men landed at the estate of Richard Frisby.⁸⁶ Here they burned the buildings and captured four of Frisby's slaves.

⁸⁴On August 19, Gen. Robert Ross landed 4,000 British troops near Washington. For five days, the British marched inland along the bank of the Patuxent river. At the village of Bladensburg, the American militia unsuccessfully attempted to stop the British. The American resistance was soon overcome and Ross reached Washington on the evening of August 24.

⁸⁵Usilton, History of Kent County, 43.

⁸⁶Byron, The War of 1812 on the Chesapeake Bay, 59.

Misinformed by the slaves that the American militia was encamped at a distance of a half mile, Capt. Parker ordered his small force back to the frigate, fearing that he was greatly outnumbered by the Americans. Then they sailed down the shore line and landed at Tolchester Beach.⁸⁷

Capt. Parker learned from the many marauding and reconnaissance parties which he had sent ashore that American forces were stationed in the vicinity of Tolchester Beach. He sent two groups of marines ashore, in the hopes of surrounding and annihilating the American forces.

The 21st Regiment of the Maryland Militia was camped near the town of Fairlee five miles from Tolchester.⁸⁸ This regiment was under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Philip Reed.

Reed was born in Kent County in 1760. On October 13, 1778, he received his commission as lieutenant in the 3rd Regiment of the Maryland line. Reed served throughout the Revolution and distinguished himself at the attack of Stoney Point on July 16, 1779. For service in the War of 1812, he was made a brigadier-general of the Maryland 6th Brigade. In

⁸⁷Usilton, History of Kent County, 44-45.

⁸⁸Footner, Rivers of the Eastern Shore, 336.

addition, he served as United States Senator from 1806 to 1813 and Congressman from 1817 to 1819 and again from 1822 to 1823. He died November 2, 1829.⁸⁹

The 21st Regiment under Col. Reed was made up of five companies of infantry, one cavalry unit, and one artillery unit. The total force consisted of 174 men with twenty rounds of ammunition for each man.⁹⁰

Col. Reed was kept well informed of the enemy's activities by the citizens who lived near the Bay. He had been aware of the enemy's presence since August 27th. On August 30, Col. Reed sent several pickets to the Bay shore. These men would give warning of when the British came ashore. At approximately twelve midnight, the American commander was informed by his scouts that the British had landed and were marching inland. Reed ordered his men to advance toward the Bay and finally positioned them at the farm of Isaac Caulk. The Caulk farm offered a good position for the Americans. The farm house was situated on a ridge of land. To the left of the ridge was the main road which ran down to the Bay. Directly in front of the ridge were fifty acres of cleared farm land. The Americans found a sheltered position on the ridge from which they could fire at the British

⁸⁹Marine, The British Invasion of Maryland 1812-1815, 117.

⁹⁰Usilton, History of Kent County, 46.

as they crossed the open field and the road.⁹¹ Col. Reed stationed his troops, so that the right flank stood in front of the Caulk house, the artillery in the center, and the left flank on the road. The rifle company under Captain Simon Wickes was stationed along the road. It had formed two lines with each man about three paces apart.⁹²

As the enemy approached, the Wickes' rifle company fired one volley but retired to the main body of the American forces because of the numerical superiority of the enemy. The British attempted a frontal attack. Failing in this, they tried an assault upon the left flank. The British, again, were unable to break through the line. As the firing decreased, the American commander ordered his forces to retire a short distance because in some parts of the line the cartridges had been expended. While the Americans regrouped, the British suddenly retired from the field. It was later learned that Capt. Parker had been mortally wounded during the battle and this had so unnerved the British that they withdrew from the field.⁹³

⁹¹Ibid., 46-47. Isaac Caulk is no relation to John Caulk who is mentioned in chapter 2.

⁹²Byron, The War of 1812 on the Chesapeake Bay, 60. Refer to map titled "Lower Kent County" in end papers.

⁹³Footner, Rivers of the Eastern Shore, 337.

The battle lasted only fifty-nine minutes. Only three Americans were wounded while the British suffered the loss of fourteen men killed and twenty-eight wounded.⁹⁴ The dead were buried by the Americans along the roadside where they had fallen.

The Battle of Caulk's Field fulfilled the British objective by creating a diversion from the invasion of Washington. Although the 21st Regiment of Maryland Militia was the only unit engaged in the battle, fourteen Eastern Shore regiments were free to cross the Bay and participate in the battle to save Washington but they did not do so.

The Tenth Military District of which the state of Maryland was a part, was a highly disorganized military unit. The commander, Gen. Winder ordered the state militia to participate in the defense of Washington but those from the Eastern Shore did not answer this summons. The Eastern Shore units accounted for their absence by stating that they had to protect their home area from a British invasion. The Eastern Shoremen believed that the troops used in the defense of Washington should be drawn from Western Maryland and from Virginia as these areas were not as vulnerable to British attack as was the Eastern Shore.

⁹⁴Marine, The British Invasion of Maryland 1812-1815, 120-22.

The greatest loss suffered by the enemy at Caulk's Field was the death of Sir Peter Parker. His body was preserved in Jamaica Rum as was the body of Gen. Robert Ross, who was killed during the Battle of Baltimore, and sent to England for burial.⁹⁵ To honor his distinguished service as an officer, Lord Byron wrote a poem to commemorate the death of Parker, who was his cousin.

While the diversion at Caulk's Field was taking place the British were engaged in capturing and burning Washington. Their next objective was the port city of Baltimore. This campaign ended in failure because the British were unable to capture Fort McHenry which guarded the entrance to the harbor.

On September 19, 1814, the British Fleet withdrew from the vicinity of Baltimore to the lower Bay region. Shortly afterward, most of the British fleet sailed from the Chesapeake for the West Indies. There they joined the expedition headed for the attack against New Orleans. A skeleton force operated from Tangier Island. This force under the command of Capt. Robert Barrie aboard the seventy-four gun Dragon would continue

⁹⁵At this time the preservation of a body in alcohol was a common practice. However, it was officers who merited this consideration. Enlisted men who were killed were buried in enemy soil.

the harassment of the Eastern Shore on a smaller scale. From mid-October until late November this squadron patrolled the area of the Bay from the mouth of the Choptank River on the Eastern Shore to the Patuxent River on the Western Shore. This was the narrowest section of the Bay and, therefore, the easiest to patrol.⁹⁶

Since Capt. Barrie's orders were to continue the harassment against the Eastern Shoremen, he sent a detachment of eighteen barges and a schooner up the Choptank River to the point known as Castle Haven on October 19. Still fearful of an invasion, the militia of both Talbot and Dorchester counties were kept on the alert. The British briefly put ashore at a farm to take supplies and then returned to their base on Tilghman's Island. By the time the Americans learned of the enemy excursion and rushed to Castle Haven to investigate the British had returned to their base. Surprise attacks always left the Americans ineffective.⁹⁷

Talbot County militiamen aboard small guard-boats spotted the barges and the schooner which landed at Castle Haven. They fully expected an attack upon Easton by way of the Tred Avon River. Twice before the

⁹⁶Byron, The War of 1812 on the Chesapeake Bay, 82.

⁹⁷Republican Star, October 25, 1814, M.H.S., Ms., Harrison Collection.

town of Easton was threatened with a British invasion. On March 30, 1813, vessels were sighted near Easton Point and the infantry was called out.⁹⁸ It proved to be a false alarm for the British sailed farther up the Bay. Again, in April of the same year a portion of the British Fleet anchored in the Choptank River.⁹⁹ Once more the British did not attempt to land their troops for unknown reasons.

This time, October, 1814, the close proximity of the British caused the inhabitants of Easton great alarm. In great haste, a fort was constructed on the property of shipbuilder James Stoakes at Easton Point.¹⁰⁰ This small redoubt, made of wood, was constructed by the workmen of the Stoakes' shipyard.¹⁰¹ The fort guarded the water approaches to Easton and was manned by the Talbot militia stationed in the town. All of the preparations were unnecessary as a storm forced the British barges to return to their base at Tilghman for fear of being swamped.¹⁰²

The blockade of the Bay now under the direction of Capt. Barrie continued through the fall and into the

⁹⁸Ibid., March 30, 1813.

⁹⁹Letter, John Kerr to Dr. Edward Harris, April 25, 1813, M.H.S., Ms., Vertical File Collection.

¹⁰⁰Tilghman, History of Talbot County Maryland, 1661-1861, 152 & 178.

¹⁰¹Private interview, Peter Tarr, June 4, 1871, M.H.S., Ms., Harrison Collection.

¹⁰²Tilghman, History of Talbot County Maryland 1661-1861, 152 & 178-79.

winter of 1814. Because of this obstruction of American trade, blockade-running became quite profitable. One such ship, the Messenger, captained by Clement Vickers made regular runs between Easton Point and Annapolis on the Eastern Shore. The Messenger was much faster than the British warships and was safe as long as the wind held strong. On November 11, 1814, the packet was returning from Annapolis when the wind on the Bay suddenly died and it was overtaken by a British barge. Capt. Vickers and several members of his crew were able to escape before the enemy captured the ship. The passengers, mainly women and children, were transferred after their capture to the Dragon, commanded by Capt. Barrie. The prisoners were well cared for by the British. An example of Capt. Barrie's concern for these captives is shown in the following story. After being taken aboard the Dragon, the prisoners dined with the officers. When Capt. Barrie saw Mrs. Edith Dawson feeding her daughter with a pewter spoon, he ordered the steward to bring a silver spoon from his own locker and presented this spoon to his little prisoner.¹⁰³

Negotiations for the release of the prisoners were begun on November 12, but an agreement was not

¹⁰³Byron, The War of 1812 on the Chesapeake Bay, 82-83. The spoon given by Capt. Barrie still remains in the Dawson family.

reached until five days later. The negotiations did not include the return of the Messenger nor the release of four American militiamen. The British refused to free these men until a similar number of British soldiers were freed by the Americans. One of the four prisoners of war was William Bromwell, who had been married the day before in Annapolis. His wife elected to remain with him in the hopes of persuading the British to liberate her husband. An agreement between the Americans and the British was reached on November 24, 1814 and on the same day the militiamen and Mrs. Bromwell were set free on Tilghman's Island.¹⁰⁴

These two incidents were to conclude the British involvement in Talbot County. The British then shifted their attention to Dorchester County. Twice in 1814 the village of Tobacco Stick, located on the Little Choptank River, felt the British invasion. Easy access from the Bay and the presence of a shipyard in the town made it a point of attack.

Sometime during the first half of 1814, British tenders entered the harbor at Tobacco Stick. There they found several vessels which they destroyed by burning.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴Tilghman, History of Talbot County Maryland 1661-1861, 181, 182, & 184-86.

¹⁰⁵Elias Jones, History of Dorchester County Maryland (Baltimore: Williams & Wilkins Company Press, 1902), 257.

One of the vessels belonged to Thomas Linthicum, a resident of the town.¹⁰⁶ Linthicum was taken prisoner and held by the British for several months on either Popular or Kent Island in the Chesapeake Bay. After this incident barracks were constructed and a portion of the Dorchester County militia was housed in the town.¹⁰⁷

The second raid occurred in November of 1814 when the brig, Dauntless, sailed into the Little Choptank River. The Dauntless sent a tender under the command of a Lieutenant Phipps farther up the river in search of supplies. The crew of the tender consisted of Lieut. Phipps, a Midshipman Galloway, thirteen seamen, three marines, and a black woman named Becca. They landed at several farmhouses as they moved up the river and carried off supplies. Arriving at Tobacco Stick, they burned a schooner and then proceeded to return to the Dauntless. The tender ran aground off the mouth of Parson's Creek a few miles down the river. Stranded on a shoal, the British were forced to wait for the tide to change. While the British waited, the Dorchester militia was mustered. They put out the fire on the schooner

¹⁰⁶Thomas A. Flowers, ed., Dorchester Tercentenary Bay County Festival (Cambridge, Maryland: Dorchester County Commissioners, 1969), 65.

¹⁰⁷Jones, History of Dorchester County Maryland 257.

and started to search for the British. They soon located the intruders and captured the entire crew of the tender.¹⁰⁸

One cannon and some small firearms were taken from the British tender by the militia. The cannon was given the title "the Becca-Phipps", a combination of the first name of the black woman and the last of the lieutenant. The cannon remains in the possession of the residents of this area.¹⁰⁹

On the following day, the prisoners were marched to Cambridge. On November 14, 1814, they were taken to Easton. There they were placed under the supervision of Gen. Perry Benson. Lieutenant Phipps and Midshipman Galloway, because they were officers, were paroled and given the freedom of the town. According to reports, the prominent citizens, especially the ladies were charmed by their conduct and manners. On Friday of the same week, the officers and men were blindfolded so that they could not observe the fortifications of Easton and were taken to Town Point near Fort Stoakes.¹¹⁰ Placed on board a packet and sent to

¹⁰⁸Byron, The War of 1812 on the Chesapeake Bay, 83-84.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., 84. Today the cannon rests in a place of honor at the foot of the Taylors Island bridge in Dorchester County only a few miles from the spot where it was captured by the American militia.

¹¹⁰Letter, John L. Kerr to the Governor's Council, November 11, 1814, M.H.S., Ms., Harrison Collection.

Baltimore, they were exchanged for American prisoners of war.

Late in November, Capt. Barrie moved his war operations to the base on Tangier Island. In December, Adm. Cockburn rejoined the squadron at Tangier. He divided the squadron in half and sailed for New Orleans with these men. The skeleton force still under the command of Capt. Barrie continued a token blockade of the Bay.¹¹¹

Peace negotiations were in progress almost from the beginning of the war. The final peace treaty, the Peace of Ghent was signed on Christmas Eve 1814. It took several weeks for the news of peace to reach America. Late in February 1815 the last of the British troops and warships left Tangier Island thus ending the British involvement in the Chesapeake Bay region.¹¹²

¹¹¹Byron, The War of 1812 on the Chesapeake Bay,
84.

¹¹²Ibid.

Conclusion

The news of the Peace of Ghent was greeted by the Americans with joy for they had grown tired of war.¹¹³ The end of the war enabled the United States to reopen commerce with Europe and to establish new trade routes and markets west of the Appalachian Mountains.

The citizens of the Eastern Shore also welcomed the end of the war. It freed them from the harassment of the British who interrupted the commerce on the Chesapeake Bay and who interfered with the agricultural pursuits. Although the Eastern Shoremen made a sincere effort to defend their land, they were never entirely successful. The Tenth Military District under the command of Gen. Winder did not provide the militia units from the Eastern Shore with proper military training or supplies. As stated earlier, Gen. Winder was bogged down with Washington bureaucracy. How could he justify supplying the Eastern Shore, a rural area, when he did not have sufficient military supplies to defend the cities of Washington and Baltimore? Therefore, the

¹¹³ Henry Adams, The History of the United States During the Administrations of Jefferson and Madison, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), 176.

Eastern Shoremen could do little to overcome the militarily superior British. The British were able to gather supplies by force from the American farms. More important they were able to capture and destroy most of the shoremen's defense works, such as shipyards, foundries, and fortifications. The foremost exception would be the shipyard at St. Michaels, which the British were never able to capture.

The shoremen held only one advantage in this conflict. In many cases the British forces looked upon the expedition in the Chesapeake Bay as a lark as compared to their participation in the Napoleonic conflict.¹¹⁴ This caused the British military expedition to be carried out in a halfhearted fashion with piecemeal attacks made on the American fortifications on the Eastern Shore.

After more than two years of conflict, what effect did the war have on the Eastern Shore? In terms of long range effects the War of 1812 had little or no significance. Life went on much as it had before the war. The citizen-soldier had defended his home and now free of the enemy he returned to his occupation.

¹¹⁴Muller, The Darkest Day: 1814, 16.

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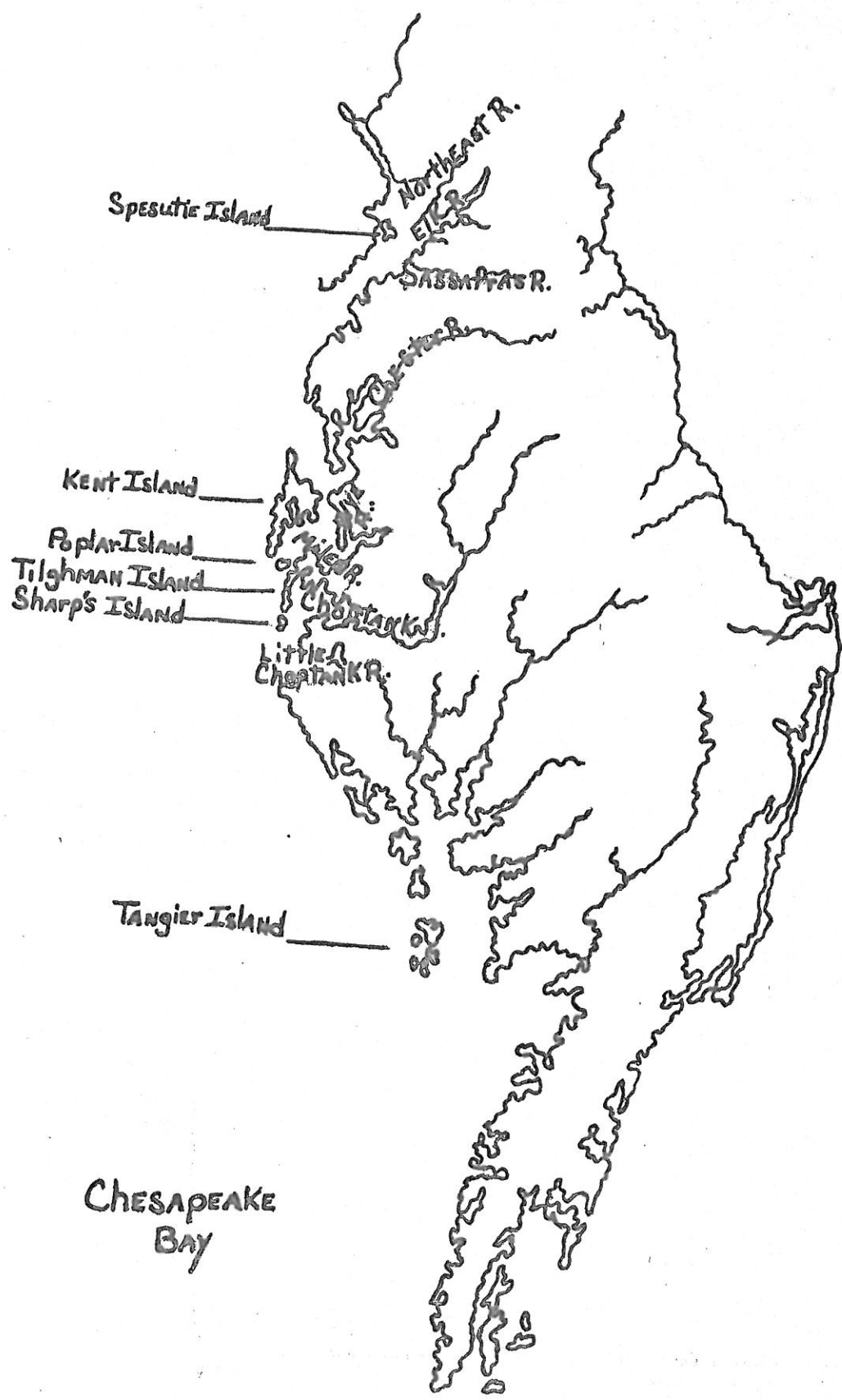
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Map of the
Eastern Shore



Spesutie Island

Northeast R.
ELK R.

SASSON R.

Kent Island

Poplar Island

Tilghman Island

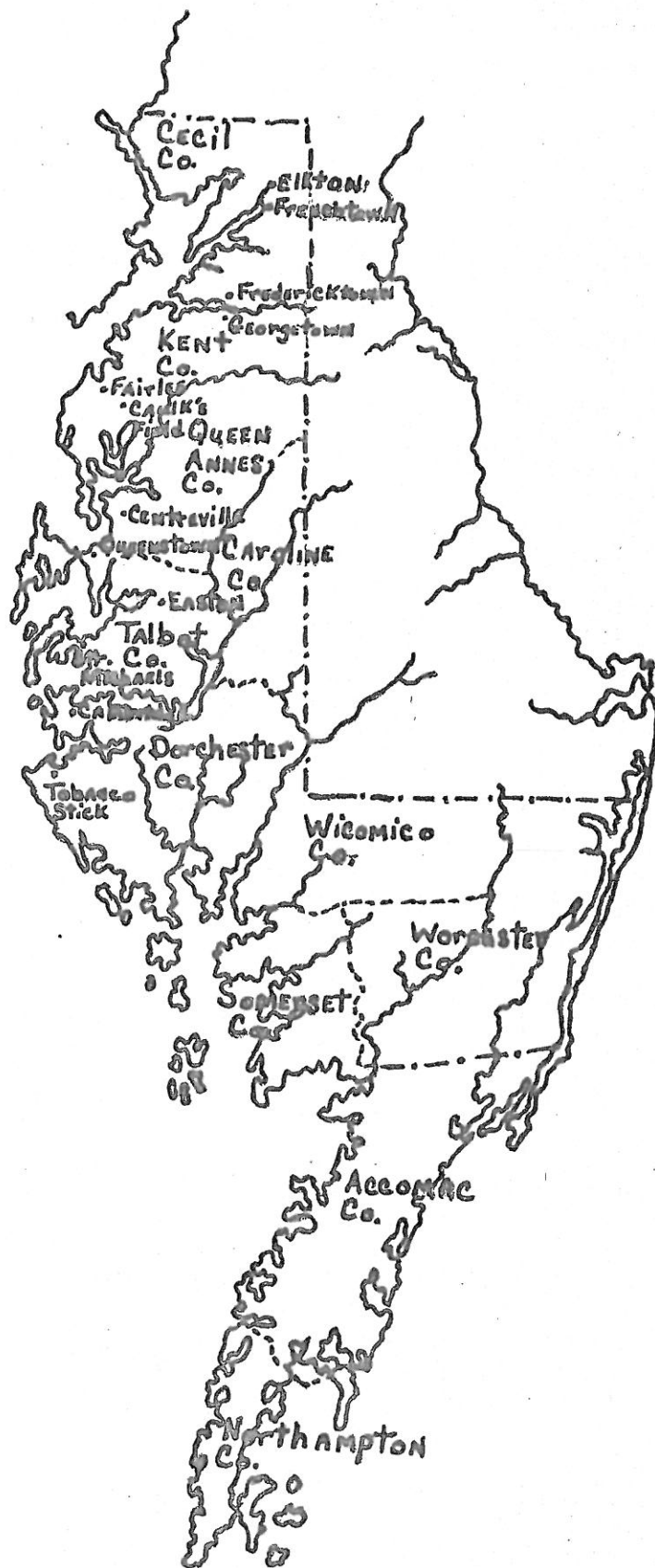
Sharp's Island

Choptank R.
Little Choptank R.

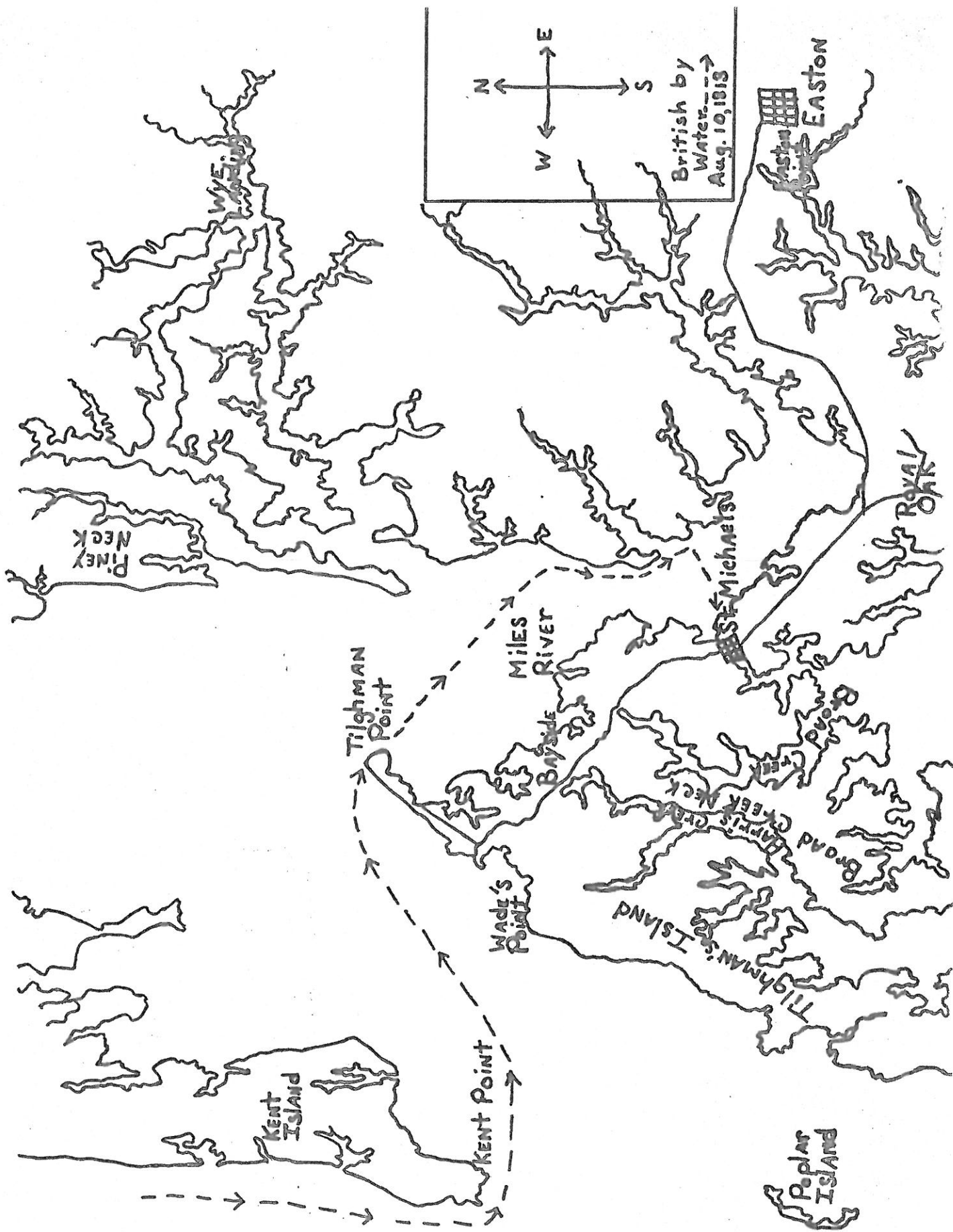
Tangier Island

CHESAPEAKE
Bay

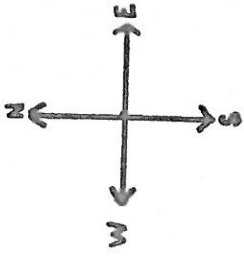
Towns and Political Divisions
of the Eastern Shore



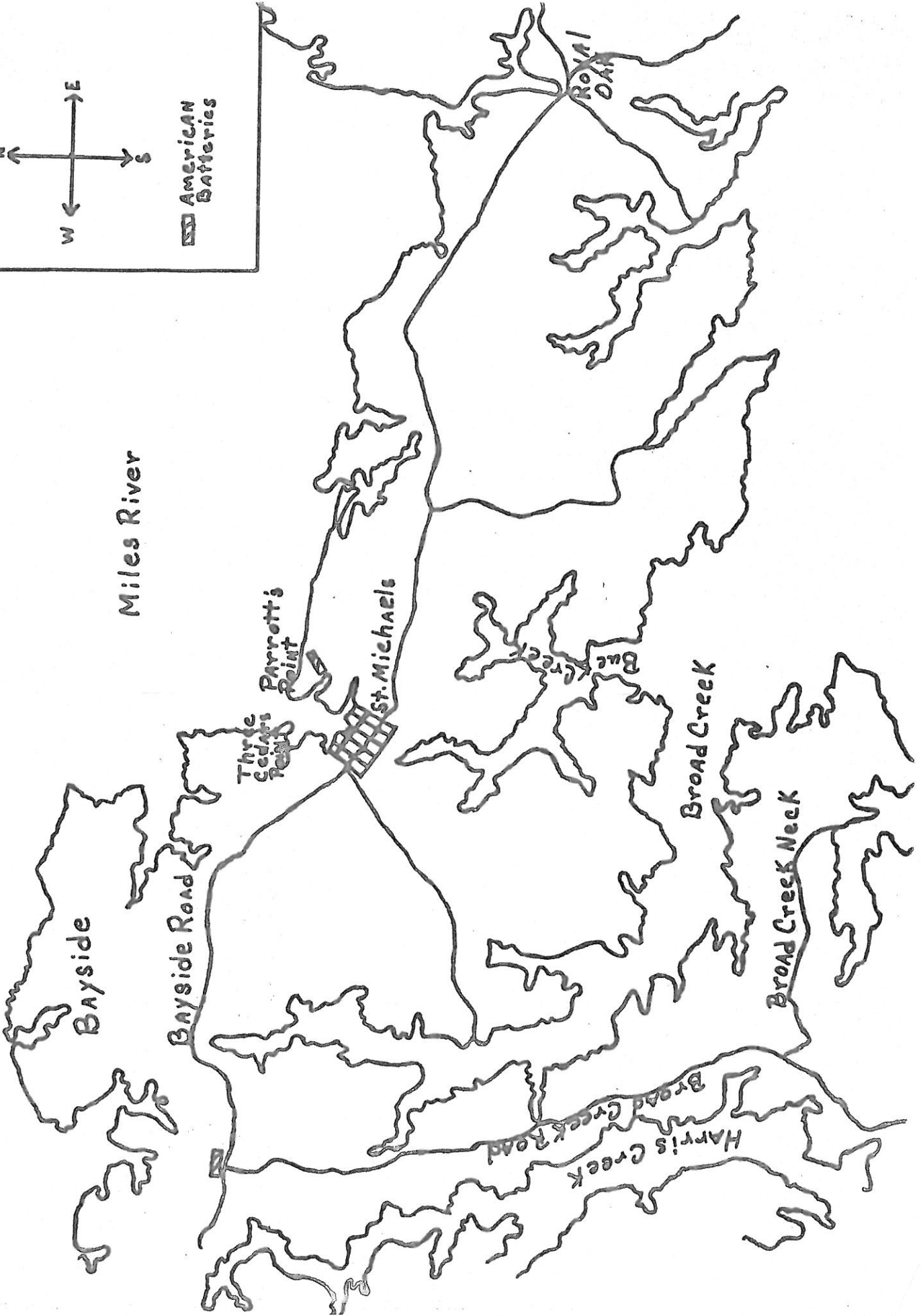
Upper Talbot County



St. Michaels and Vicinity



AMERICAN
Batteries



Lower Kent County

Chesapeake Bay

Sassafras River

Kent County

Worton Creek

Fairlee Creek

Fairlee

Caulk's Field

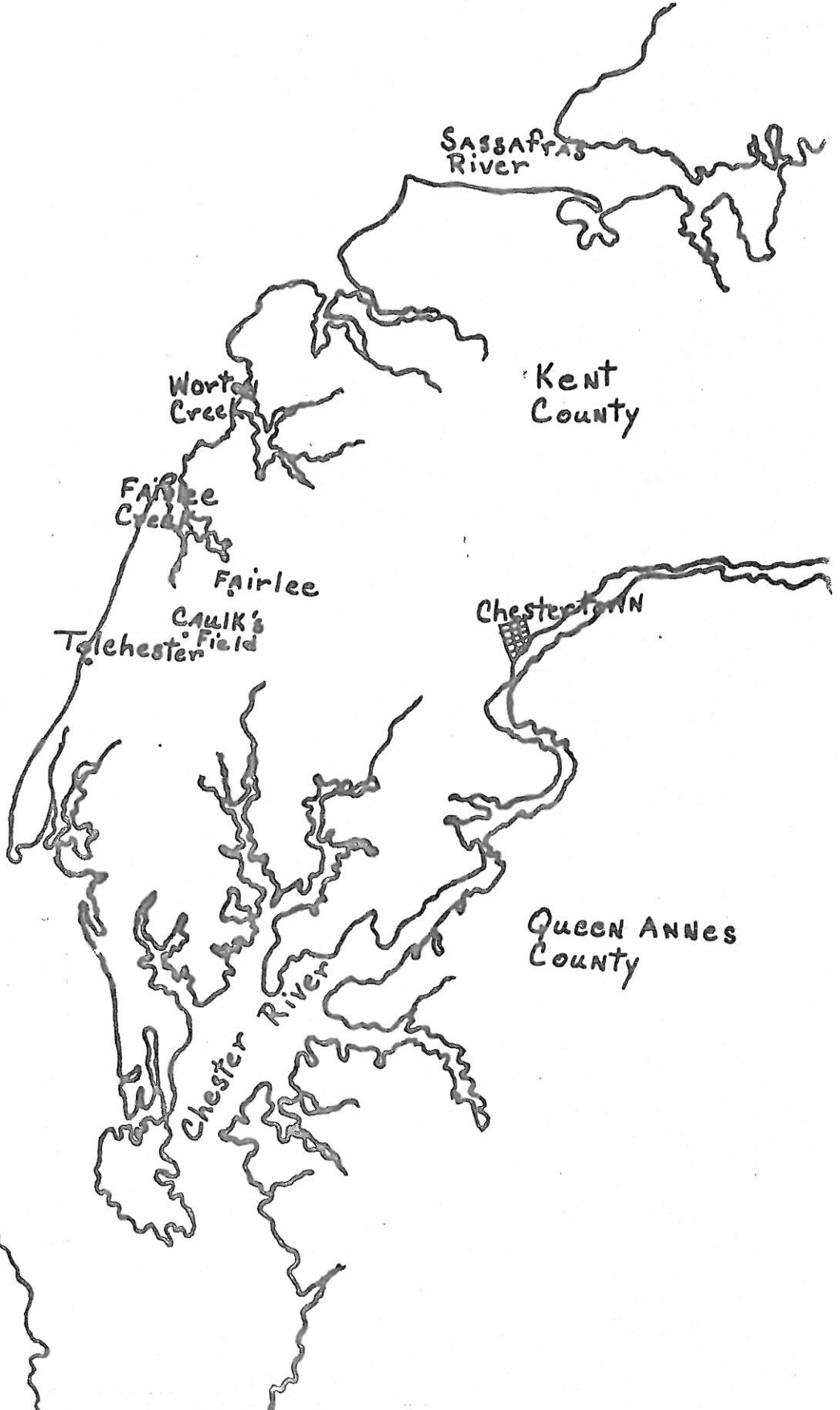
Telchester

Chester town

Queen Annes County

Chester River

Kent Island



Autobiography
of Author

JoAnn Maloney Staples is the author of the "Military Aspects of the War of 1812 on the Eastern Shore of Maryland". Mrs. Staples, a native of the Eastern Shore, received her Bachelor of Arts Degree from Salisbury State College, Salisbury, Maryland in 1970. During the 1970-71 school year, she served as assistant head resident of Tabb-French Dormitories on the Longwood College campus. Mrs. Staples received her Master of Arts Degree from Longwood College in 1974.

She is married to William Christensen Staples, a representative for the Nationwide Insurance Company. At the present time, Mrs. Staples is a family service worker for the Anne Arundel Department of Social Services, Annapolis, Maryland.