

The Bicentennial of the Battle of Craney Island

June 22, 2013

Why was this particular battle important?

The battle was fought on 22 June 1813, involving the US Army, US Navy, US Marine Corps, Virginia Militia, and US Revenue Service (today's US Coast Guard), under the overall command of Brigadier General Taylor of the Virginia Militia. This was a true example of a successful joint military operation. Though outnumbered by a factor of three to one, the Americans soundly defeated the opposing force and prevented two key strategic seaports (Norfolk and Portsmouth) from falling into enemy hands and perhaps changing the outcome of the war. Given the latter fate of the city of Hampton at the hands of the British force, it is a safe assumption that the two cities were spared from pillage and destruction as a result of the determined and courageous American defense.

British Admirals George Cockburn and Sir John Borlase Warren planned to attack and seize Norfolk and Portsmouth in 1813. The key to the defense of both cities was Craney Island. The American force defending Craney Island was 737 men in strength: the majority consisted of Virginia Militia (416) and

Riflemen (50), and also augmented by the US Navy (100), US Marine Corps (50), US Army (30), and the Virginia State Artillery (91). The enemy force consisted of approximately 2500 British Army soldiers, Royal Marines and Royal Navy sailors.

Facing the enemy advance was an American battery of 7 canon – two 24 pounders, one 18 pounder, and four six pounders – under the command of Major Faulkner of the Virginia Militia. Lt. Neale of the Navy (USS CONSTELLATION) commanded the 18 pounder, which was fired with notable accuracy. Defense of Craney Island was spirited and the Americans soundly defeated the British force, killing approximately 200, *without the loss of a single American life*.

What's Being Planned

- ◆ **"Battle of Craney Island" Speaker Series**
◆ (12 June)
- ◆ **"Old Ironsides" (or appropriate) Open Air Movie Screening** (20 June)
- ◆ **Hoisting of the Colors, 21-Gun Salute, Victory Bell Peal, and POW Memorial Dedication** (22 June)
- ◆ **Victory Tea Party with the "Ladies of the Garrison"** (22 June)
- ◆ **Retreat (Colors) Ceremony at Fort Norfolk** (22 June)
- ◆ **Bicentennial Victory Period Ball** (22 June)

◆ **Remembrance Service(s)** (23 June)

◆ **"Enemies Past – Allies Present" Waterborne Wreath-Laying Ceremony off Craney Island** (23 June)

Primary Sponsor -- **Norfolk Historical Society**

Website – Craneyisland1813.com

Committee Chair – Chris Melhuish (camelhuish@aol.com)

Committee Deputy Chair – Peggy Haile McPhillips
(Peggy.haile-mcphillips@norfolk.gov)