



Battle of Craney Island Bicentennial

22 June 2013

Bicentennial of a Virginian Victory

NORFOLK – (MAY 13, 2013) – Portsmouth and Norfolk will celebrate the bicentennial of the Battle of Craney Island in a series of events on both banks of the Elizabeth River June 8-23.

On June 22, historic Fort Norfolk will ring with the sounds of a bygone era as uniformed reenactors, civilian and military officials commemorate the exact bicentennial of the War of 1812's Battle of Craney Island.

The free, public event will feature a victory ceremony; 21-gun salute; a three minute victory bell peal from participating Norfolk and Portsmouth churches; an Anglo-American wreath laying; and a mayoral Victory Proclamation, said Chris Melhuish, chairman of the Battle of Craney Island Bicentennial Committee.

The fort will be open throughout the weekend and the public will be able to observe live cannon and musket fire demonstrations.

Since the commemoration represents the collaborative efforts of the Portsmouth History Commission and the Norfolk Historical Society, Melhuish described the overall bicentennial as a “tale of two cities.”

Capt. Arthur Emmerson, a Portsmouth hero of the battle, will be honored June 14 at Trinity Episcopal Church in Portsmouth, while the final bicentennial event will take place June 23 at the Hoffer Creek Wildlife Preserve, where a public picnic replete with reenactors, music and family activities will be held a short distance from where the British force first landed.

In the summer of 1813, Craney Island was then a barren plot of land some 900 yards long by 250 yards wide. It was selected as the outer defensive position against a large British force determined to capture Norfolk, Portsmouth and the USS *Constellation*, which was then moored between the two cities.

The inner defense included Fort Norfolk (still standing) and Fort Nelson (now gone, replaced by the Portsmouth Naval Hospital).

Facing the British assault was an American force numbering less than 800 men under the overall command of Brigadier General Robert Taylor of the Virginia Militia, who established his headquarters at Fort Norfolk. Only 7 artillery pieces at Craney Island and 19 Navy gunboats defended the approaches. The Americans were outnumbered by at least 2 to 1.

At first light on June 22, 1813, the British mounted their assaults on Craney Island. The British force met a deadly hail of artillery fire. On Craney Island, Capt. Emmerson of the Portsmouth Artillery encouraged his men by declaring, “Now my brave boys, are you ready?”

After a few hours, the British force was driven off and the assaults abandoned. No American lost his life. A few days later the same British force sacked the city of Hampton, and in August 1814 burned the city of Washington.

For more information on the bicentennial go to www.craneyisland1813.com