

NOAA Chesapeake Bay Interpretive Buoy System
Norfolk Buoy at Nauticus
Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trail Highlights

In the early 1800s, the young United States was politically independent from Britain, yet severely hampered economically by Britain's insistence on unfavorable trade restrictions. British troops continued to occupy American territory along the Great Lakes and were suspected of backing Indian raids against U.S. settlers on the frontier. Most dramatically, the British Navy periodically captured and impressed American sailors into service on British ships, denying thousands of American citizens their freedom. By June 1812, overall discontent with Britain's actions had grown so strong that the United States declared war.

The British entered the Chesapeake Bay in early 1813 and sustained a military presence until early 1815. No other theater of the war suffered as many skirmishes, battles, and raids as in the Chesapeake. Military events here had far-reaching effects on American society and our country's cultural identity. The new nation successfully defended itself against the British Empire, the world's most powerful navy.

Craney Island, at the mouth of the Elizabeth River, served as the first line of defense for Norfolk and Portsmouth. Despite its importance, Craney Island was defended by only 800 men, and its fortifications were incomplete when the British launched a two-pronged attack in June 1813. The attack was repulsed, thanks in part to a high tide that prevented British forces from gaining the fort, but three days later the British took control of Hampton. The occupation force included troops of French prisoners of war and deserters. These French soldiers retaliated for events at Craney Island by going on a rampage of murder, rape, robbery, and arson. The rampage at Hampton was long remembered and became a byword among Americans for enemy atrocities during this war.

The National Park Service's Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trail commemorates the people, places, and events of the War of 1812 in the Chesapeake. Several NOAA CBIBS buoys are located along the Star-Spangled Banner Trail.