

NOAA Chesapeake Bay Interpretive Buoy System Susquehanna Buoy Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trail Highlights

From February 1813 until February 1815, the Chesapeake Bay was the center of a fierce struggle between a young America and a powerful British Royal Navy.

In the spring of 1813, British forces commanded by Rear Admiral Sir George Cockburn were on the move around the Upper Bay. On the morning of May 3, Cockburn attacked Havre de Grace. One member of the local militia was John O'Neill, an Irish immigrant.

Lieutenant O'Neill's mission was to hold a small parapet of three cannons. The heavy British fire caused many of his fellow soldiers to abandon their posts, but O'Neill stood fast, taking charge of one of the cannons himself. Later he said, "The grape shot flew thick about me. I loaded the gun myself without anyone to serve the vent, which, you know is very dangerous, and when I fired her, she recoiled and ran over my thigh." This injury forced O'Neil to leave his position and flee into town.

British forces soon landed at Concord Point, eventually capturing O'Neill. Hanging surely awaited, but as the story has it, his teenage daughter, Matilda, rowed out to Admiral Cockburn's ship to seek mercy. So impressed was the Admiral with the young girl's courage that he released O'Neill and gave Matilda a gold snuff box, which is housed today at the Maryland Historical Society.

Today, the nearby Concord Point Lighthouse is open to the public, offering wonderful views of the scenic upper Bay including the NOAA smart buoy, and lies within a designated historic district. The lighthouse protected the large volume of commercial river traffic from the shoals and currents of the Susquehanna Flats for close to 125 years, from 1827 until its decommissioning in 1975. The first keeper of the lighthouse was John O'Neill.

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