

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

The Patapsco buoy sits at the mouth of the river, a few miles south of Baltimore and Fell's Point and the fort that was built to protect them. The star-shaped Fort McHenry was built between 1797 and 1803 following the Revolutionary War.

In the early morning of September 13, 1814, five British bomb ships and other vessels anchored two miles out from Fort McHenry. In addition to the great guns of the fort, the narrow channel leading to the city was blocked by a chain-mast boom, gunboats, and sunken ships. Because of the strength of the American defenses, the British relied on a long-range bombardment that would enable them to shell the fort beyond the range of the American guns.

During the attack, the British fired more than 1,000 shells and 700 rockets. The American defenders, under the command of Major Armistead, had little choice but to endure the punishing bombardment, which lasted for 25 hours. Due to the great range, little damage was done on either side.

Anchored with the British fleet in the harbor was a truce ship which held Francis Scott Key, forced to witness the battle from behind enemy lines. As the bombardment ended in the early morning, Major Armistead ordered the huge garrison flag, made for the fort by Baltimorean Mary Pickersgill, to be flown. It is this flag that Francis Scott Key saw, inspiring him to write "The Defence of Fort M'Henry," which would later be renamed "The Star-Spangled Banner" and become The National Anthem of the United States of America.

Fort McHenry was made a national park in 1925 and is the only National Park unit in the United States to have the dual distinction of being named a National Monument and Historic Shrine. 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, including the Patapsco Buoy, are located along the Star-Spangled Banner Trail.