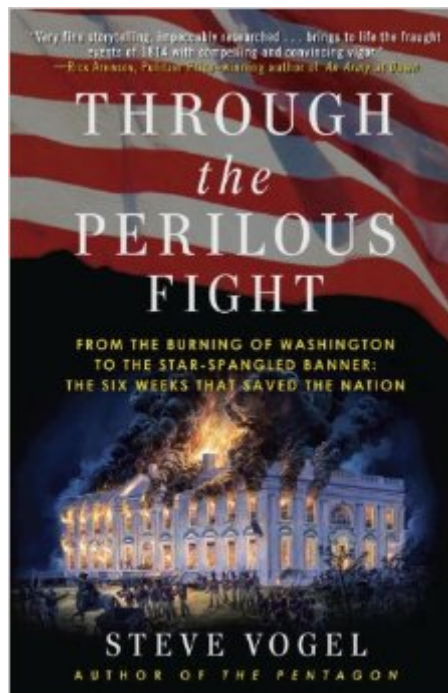


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# Through The Perilous Fight: From The Burning Of Washington To The Star-Spangled Banner: The Six Weeks That Saved The Nation



## Synopsis

In a rousing account of one of the critical turning points in American history, *Through the Perilous Fight* tells the gripping story of the burning of Washington and the improbable last stand at Baltimore that helped save the nation and inspired its National Anthem. In the summer of 1814, the United States of America teetered on the brink of disaster. The war it had declared against Great Britain two years earlier appeared headed toward inglorious American defeat. The young nation's most implacable nemesis, the ruthless British Admiral George Cockburn, launched an invasion of Washington in a daring attempt to decapitate the government and crush the American spirit. The British succeeded spectacularly, burning down most of the city's landmarks—including the White House and the Capitol—and driving President James Madison from the area. As looters ransacked federal buildings and panic gripped the citizens of Washington, beleaguered American forces were forced to regroup for a last-ditch defense of Baltimore. The outcome of that perilous fight would help change the outcome of the war and with it, the fate of the fledgling American republic. In a fast-paced, character-driven narrative, Steve Vogel tells the story of this titanic struggle from the perspective of both sides. Like an epic novel, *Through the Perilous Fight* abounds with heroes, villains, and astounding feats of derring-do. The vindictive Cockburn emerges from these pages as a pioneer in the art of total warfare, ordering his men to knock down, burn, and destroy everything in their path. While President Madison dithers on how to protect the capital, Secretary of State James Monroe personally organizes the American defenses, with disastrous results. Meanwhile, a prominent Washington lawyer named Francis Scott Key embarks on a mission of mercy to negotiate the release of an American prisoner. His journey will place him with the British fleet during the climactic Battle for Baltimore, and culminate in the creation of one of the most enduring compositions in the annals of patriotic song: "The Star-Spangled Banner." Like Pearl Harbor or 9/11, the burning of Washington was a devastating national tragedy that ultimately united America and renewed its sense of purpose. *Through the Perilous Fight* combines bravura storytelling with brilliantly rendered character sketches to recreate the thrilling six-week period when Americans rallied from the ashes to overcome their oldest adversary and win themselves a new birth of freedom. Praise for *Through the Perilous Fight* "Very fine storytelling, impeccably researched . . . brings to life the fraught events of 1814 with compelling and convincing vigor." "Rick Atkinson, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *An Army at Dawn* "Probably the best piece of military history that I have read or reviewed in the past five years. . . . This well-researched and superbly written history has all the trappings of a good novel. . . . No one who hears the national anthem at a ballgame will ever think of it the same way after reading this

book.â •â "Gary Anderson, The Washington Times Â â œ[Steve] Vogel does a superb job. . . . [A] fast-paced narrative with lively vignettes.â •â "Joyce Appleby, The Washington Post Â â œBefore 9/11 was 1814, the year the enemy burned the nationâ ™s capital. . . . A splendid account of the uncertainty, the peril, and the valor of those days.â •â "Richard Brookhiser, author of James Madison Â â œA swift, vibrant account of the accidents, intricacies and insanities of war.â •â "Kirkus ReviewsFrom the Hardcover edition.

## Book Information

Paperback: 560 pages

Publisher: Random House Trade Paperbacks; Reprint edition (May 27, 2014)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0812981391

ISBN-13: 978-0812981391

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 1.2 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 12.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.8 out of 5 starsÂ Â See all reviewsÂ (24 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #81,870 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #10 inÂ Books > History > Military > War of 1812 #165 inÂ Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > International & World Politics > European #341 inÂ Books > History > Europe > Great Britain

## Customer Reviews

During a recent two-week hospitalization, my closest companion was Vogelâ ™s account of the six-week British campaign to end the see-saw War of 1812 by capturing both the U.S. capital in Washington and the major shipping center of Baltimore, also known as a hotbed of pro-war sentiment. The book was riveting, enough to transport me daily from my near bubble boy isolation chamber existence. The book, as other reviewers have observed, is character driven, its pages filled with patriots (such as navy captain Joshua Barney) and poltroons (Secretary of War John Armstrong). Through a wealth of primary sources, the author draws rich, believable portraits of his chief characters, including the inept statesmen President James Madison and Secretary of State and de facto substitute Secretary of War James Monroe. The cerebral Madison is an inept war leader who eventually grows in the job; Monroe is a â œman of actionâ • who makes a stream of wrong-headed decisions, but learns the lessons of his limitations. Perhaps Vogelâ ™s most interesting character is British Rear Admiral Sir George Cockburn, a advocate for repaying the slightest resistance with terror, when not displaying the chivalry expected of his class. The reader

learns that Cockburn and his British army ally, Major General Robert Ross, limited their burning (and most of the looting) in Washington to government buildings and a newspaper publishing house that got under Cockburn's skin. With the exception of a few officers like Barney, whatever Americans had learned of the art of war during the eight-year War of Independence, they seem to have entirely forgotten by 1814. Again, with the exception of Barney and a few others, they could hardly have played at war more stupidly in the defense of Washington than they did.

August 24, 2014 marks the 200th anniversary of the burning of Washington D.C. by the British. It's an event remembered by few, and yet out of it came our most enduring symbols of America... and perhaps much more. Most historians (or at least those histories I've read\*) treat the War of 1812 almost as an extension of the Revolutionary War. But Steve Vogel takes a slightly different approach and emphasizes the more immediate causes, namely the impressments of American sailors by the British into the Royal Navy, and the opportunistic invasion of Canada by American forces. Britain was fighting France at the time, and when they began to run low of manpower they simply grabbed Americans on merchant vessels under the guise that they were still British 'citizens.' To combat this violation of rights, America attacked Britain along the Canadian border, believing that the Canadians would willingly and enthusiastically join the U.S. The timing seemed ideal - Britain was distracted with the war against France - but the Canadians fought back. Using the American attacks as justification, the British navy sailed into Chesapeake Bay and burned many towns, culminating in the conquest and burning of government buildings in Washington, including the president's house and the Capitol. Vogel carefully weaves the story of Francis Scott Key, an attorney, into the greater history. Key was sent as a delegate to win the release of an American who had been captured by the British. Admiral Cochrane agreed to release him, but not until after the planned destruction of Baltimore. Key ended up being an eye-witness to the bombardment of Fort McHenry from the middle of the British fleet. Fortunately, American militias were in a better state of readiness this time, and the British were driven back.

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