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Another Look at the Battle of St. Michaels

by Norman H.
Plummer

Early on the morning of 20 August 1813, British forces entered the Miles River in eleven small boats. They attacked an American battery on Parrott's Point at the mouth of St. Michaels harbor. After a brief exchange of fire, the British overran the battery, and its defenders retreated to the town. The British returned to their boats, fired on the town for a time,

Admiral George Cockburn, who commanded the British fleet in the Chesapeake Bay during most of the War of 1812, dispatched boats and marines to wipe out the St. Michaels battery.



then moved back down the river to the larger vessels from which they had come.

This engagement, one small incident in the War of 1812, has given rise to two intriguing legends: first, that the defenders of the town hung lanterns at the tops of tall buildings and trees and on the mastsheads of ships in the harbor, fooling the British into firing their cannonballs above the town; second, that the British forces suffered as many as twenty-nine killed in the skirmish. How much basis in fact do these legends have?

The British naval and marine forces in the Chesapeake Bay were under the overall command of Vice-Admiral Sir John Cochrane Warren (1753-1822) who flew his flag in *Sax Dominick*, a 74-gun ship of the line. Immediately subordinate to Warren was Rear-Admiral George Cockburn (1772-1853), best known to Americans as the man who burned the nation's capital in 1814. Cockburn's ship, also 74 guns, was *Scepter*. Warren's fleet contained another 74-gun ship, *Aberforth*, and the brig-sloop *Confidit*, 14 guns, commanded by Henry Lorraine Baker. Although the British fleet had many other ships in the bay, these were the only ones connected with the battle at St. Michaels.

The Americans had no naval force to defend the villages along the bay. St. Michaels had to

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THE WARREN GAZETTE



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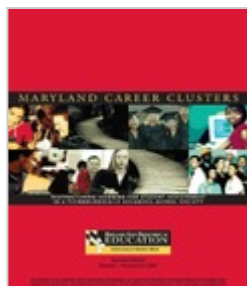
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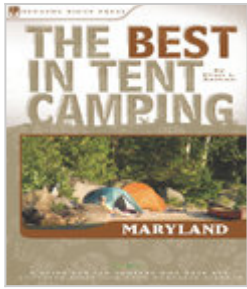
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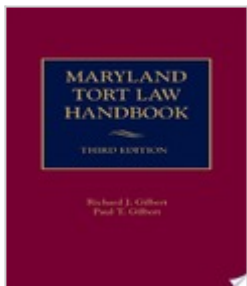
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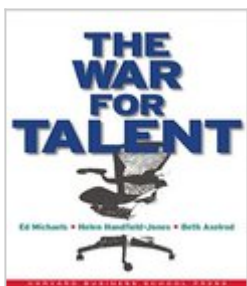
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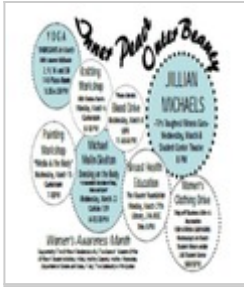
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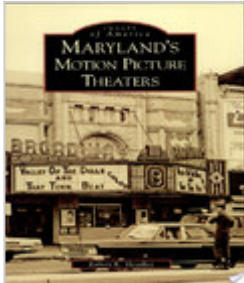
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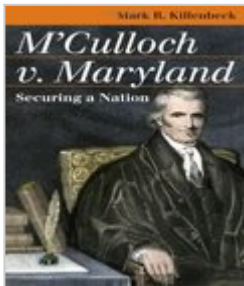
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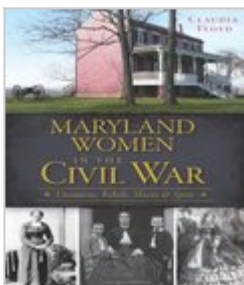
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