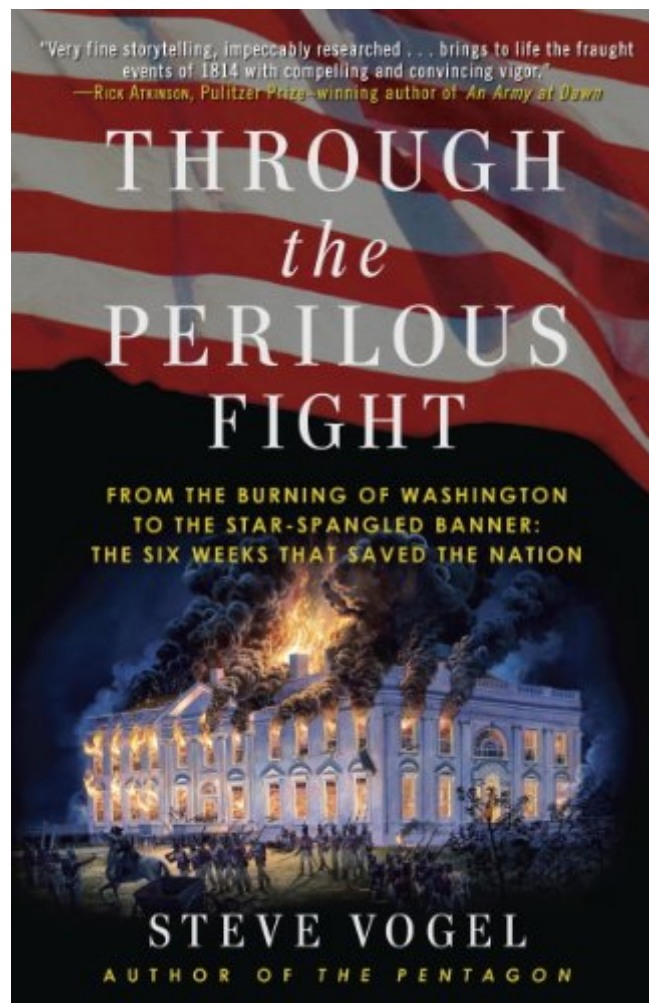




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# Through The Perilous Fight: Six Weeks That Saved The Nation



## 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. — Gary Anderson, The Washington Times

— “[Steve] Vogel does a superb job. . . . [A] fast-paced narrative with lively vignettes. — Joyce Appleby, The Washington Post

— “Before 9/11 was 1814, the year the enemy burned the nation’s capital. . . . A splendid account of the uncertainty, the peril, and the valor of those days. — Richard Brookhiser, author of James Madison

— “A swift, vibrant account of the accidents, intricacies and insanities of war. — Kirkus Reviews

From the Hardcover edition.

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## Customer Reviews

A real eye-opener, but far from "saving" the nation, Vogel's well written and masterfully researched book demonstrates how Madison-Monroe and company nearly lost it all in 1812. I never realized what a blunder it was for this small, weakly organized country to think they could just declare war on Britain and invade Canada. They were on the low end of the learning curve for Manifest Destiny. But in doing so, Madison really stepped on the sleeping British Lion's proverbial tail and found out the

hard way that Britannia still had a big bite in America. I always thought the American stand at Fort McHenry was more heroic and legendary than strategic, the original "shock and awe", stuff you write National Anthems about. Not so by a long shot - the defense of Baltimore gave our peace negotiators at Ghent lead by John Quincy Adams just barely enough negotiating leverage to sign a peace treaty that returned us to the pre-war status quo; nothing gained, but fortunately nothing lost. Before that victory, they were on the verge of giving the Brits control of the Great Lakes and relinquishing the then northwest as a "buffer nation" under Indian rule. That would have been a game changer for American history. You've got to read it to believe it.

"Through the Perilous Fight," by Washington Post reporter Steve Vogel, tells the story of the War of 1812 in the Washington-Baltimore area--a story of events that had at least as significant an effect on our country as 9/11. Yet, the most important thing most Americans know about the War of 1812 is that Dolley Madison saved the Gilbert Stuart portrait of George Washington. Vogel's subtitle, "Six Weeks that Saved the Nation," is spot on. This book has three important things going for it: \* First, an astounding story: foreign troops invading Washington; the White House and Capitol in flames; the President on the run; the populace fleeing for their lives; private citizens arrested by the enemy; battles ending in devastating defeats or inspiring victories. \* Second, solid scholarship-- Steve Vogel's research is impeccable, and there's not a paragraph that isn't backed up by primary sources, carefully cited in end notes that are conveniently identified by page number, as well as quoted text where necessary, thereby avoiding interruption of the flow with reference numbers. \* Third, first-rate writing that's up to the task of recounting events day-by-day, without losing sight of the big picture. The story is told mainly in terms of the people who were part of it, with all their foibles; their histories, families, and friends; their strengths and weaknesses, virtues and vices, successes and failures. Even the battle scenes (which some of us find daunting to read) come alive when they're related in the words of the participants explaining their motives (or excuses). "Through the Perilous Fight" provides both a serious history lesson and a terrifically good read.

Good book. Learned things about the War of 1812 that I did not know. Enjoyed it.

I'm 2/3 through the book and am really enjoying it. It feels like I'm there in the way the book is written from American leaders and British leaders viewpoints on a day to day basis. I'm anxious to get to the part where Francis Scott Key is inspired to write the Star Spangled Banner.

Extraordinary history of sea and land battles during the Chesapeake campaign of the War of 1812. Strong personalities and vivid details made the story a must read for a deep dive in American History.

Truly enjoyed this overview of the Battle of Bladensburg, Occupation and Burning of Washington DC, and the Defense of Baltimore. I have come across information on the 16th Regiment of the Maryland Militia, that they mobilized in Frederick Maryland on the 22nd and marched directly to defend Washington. They arrived just in time to fire two volleys as a holding action to allow the rest of the militia to retreat, after which they marched to Baltimore to assist with its defense.

This book hit the sweet spot for me of being clearly and well-researched while still being parsimonious in word. Instead of writing a decent book in 800 pages, he wrote a compelling book in half that. Not sure it adds much for the experts, but if the area between the revolutionary war and the civil war is a black box, this will fill in a lot of the gaps.

A good read for those looking for more on the burning of Washington and attack on Baltimore in 1814. My mother-in-law tells me how dysfunctional Washington is and "it's never been this bad." Steve Vogel provides a great/bad picture of how Washington really hasn't changed much from our beginning. Additionally he provides examples of how patience and perseverance can carry the day in military operations.

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