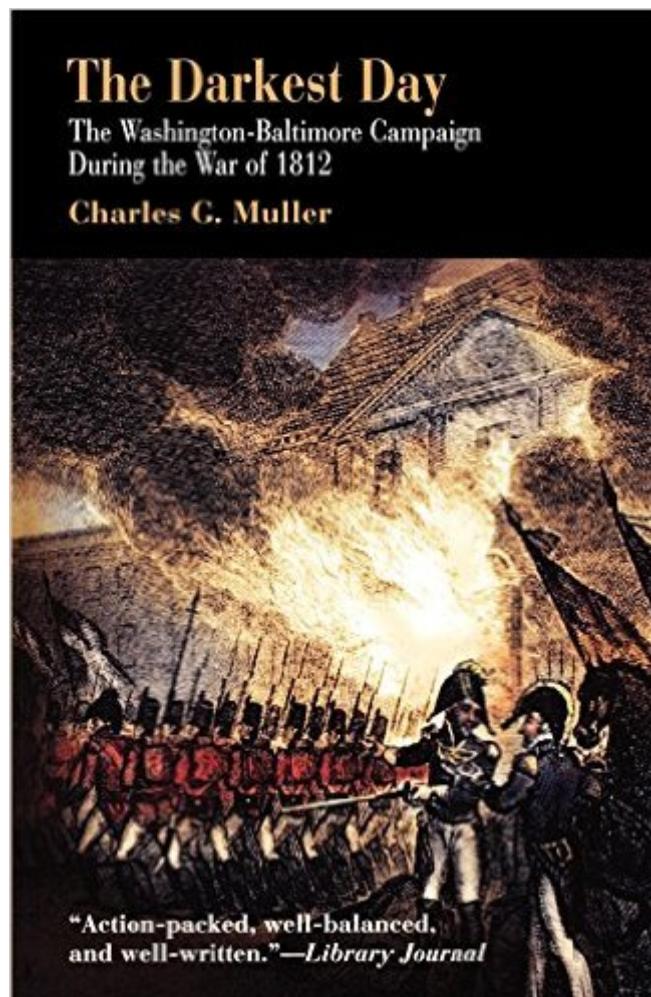


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The Darkest Day: The Washington-Baltimore Campaign During The War Of 1812



Synopsis

In the first two years of the War of 1812, the young American nation suffered setbacks at the hands of its British foe, but the most humiliating defeat occurred in August 1814, when the British navy sailed up the Potomac and landed troops near the city of Washington. The British routed the Americans at the battle of Bladensburg on the city's outskirts and then proceeded to sack Washington, burning the White House and Capitol building, and forcing President Madison and other politicians to flee. The town of Alexandria fell next, but the reeling Americans finally made a stand outside Baltimore, led by the spirited resistance of Ft. McHenry. The war ended with the Treaty of Ghent in December 1814, restoring the relationship between the U.S. and Britain to prewar conditions. This was the first severe test of the new American nation and confirmed that the country would retain the independence won a quarter-century earlier. In *The Darkest Day*, Charles G. Muller explains the political crisis that precipitated America's "second war of independence" and then provides an accurate and colorful account of the campaign's land and naval engagements, using official documents and eyewitness reports from both sides.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book extensively explains the British Fleet's Action in the Chesapeake and the attacks on Washington and Baltimore and I've not seen another that goes into as much detail. The main complaint is that the author uses naval and other military terminology -most often when using quotes of participants- from the early 1800's without explaining what those things are. For example: "We were, however, mistaken: the Euryalus opened the ball and struck or, rather, was suddenly

brought up, for nothing was felt, and the lead gave us plenty of water." From other details in the surrounding text, it's clear that the ship Euryalus had a lead (guide) boat in front. But one has to guess that the guide's soundings indicated the water was deep (the lead gave us plenty of water?) yet it apparently ran aground on a smooth sandbar (nothing was felt?). But what opening the ball ["beginning the dance" or passing first maybe?] means for certain is beyond me. While it didn't terribly muddle the explanations of what was happening, there were too many occurrences of this kind to be entirely comfortable with this book. There are attempts to fit in details of some of the common soldiers and people into the story, but not enough to keep it from being a fairly dry account of the actions. The archaic language and the brevity of personal experiences to provide a better feel for the time and locations mean 4 stars instead of five for me. All in all, though, it fills in a lot of details of which most people are not aware: like what the British really wanted to do when they captured Washington and why the defense of Baltimore was so much more organized.

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