

# The War of 1812

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The War of 1812 was mostly a maritime battle fought in the North Atlantic. During the first several months after war was declared, battles were centered around the Middle States. In fact, on October 14th, 1812, the senior naval officer at Charleston, South Carolina, wrote: "Till today this coast has been clear of enemy cruisers; now Charleston is blockaded by three brigs, two very large, and they have captured nine sail within three miles of the bar."

Two months he expressed surprise that the inland navigation behind the sea islands had not been destroyed by the enemy, due to its lack of defense. In January of 1813, the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay was guarded by a ship of the line, two frigates and a sloop. A commercial blockade had not been established, yet the hostile divisions remained outside and American vessels continued to go out and in around Charleston.

A Letter-of-Marque and Reprisal was a government license authorizing a privateer to attack and capture enemy vessels and bring them before the

admiralty courts for condemnation and sale. This method of cruising on the high seas for prizes with a Letter-of-Marque was considered an honorable calling because it combined patriotism and profit. Otherwise, captured vessels were done so by "piracy" which was punishable by law.

The privateer employed a fast and weatherly fore-and-aft rigged vessel heavily armed and crewed, and its primary objection was for fighting. There existed a robust trade with France by Letters-of-Marque for commercial vessels which carried cargo and guns. By February 12th of 1813, conditions grow worse. The commercial blockade was proclaimed and blockaders entered the Chesapeake while vessels under neutral flags (Spanish and Swedish) were turned away.

Two Letter-of-Marque schooners had been captured, one after a gallant struggle during which her captain was killed. Nautical misadventures of that kind became frequent. On April 3rd, three Letters-of-Marque and a privateer, which had entered the Rappahannock, were attacked at anchor.

The Letters-of-Marque had smaller crews and thus offered little resistance to boarding, but the privateer, having near a hundred men, made a sharp resistance. The Americans lost six (killed) and ten were wounded, while Britain had two killed and eleven wounded. Source: Sea Power In Its Relations to the War of 1812 by Captain A. T. Mahan, D. C. L., LL. D., United State Navy. (London, 1899) Protecting Georgia During the War of 1812