Interest: Privateers

Topic: What was the impact of privateers on the War of 1812?

Issue: During the War of 1812, the British used war ships to block harbors, stopping all trade and affecting the economy of America.

Guiding Questions:

1. What is a privateer?
2. What is a Letter of Marque?
3. How are pirates different than privateers?
4. What role did impressment play in causing the War of 1812?
5. Where were the British blockades?
6. Compare the number of ships in the America Navy and British Navy. How many American privateers were active in the War of 1812?
7. How did the typical design (size, hull shape, sail plan) of a privateer ship differ from the typical design of a British war ship or merchant vessel?
8. How did the privateer design affect its sailing performance as compared to a war ship?
9. How was a privateer’s sailing abilities a factor in breaking through blockades, seizing British merchant ships and avoiding capture?
10. Discuss a privateer as a money-making enterprise. Include: its purpose, investors, equipping the ship, captain and crew as shares-holders, outcome of captured ships (called prizes) and its cargo, and the handling of prisoners. How did this business-model affect the motivation of the crew?
11. Why was privateering a dangerous business?
12. What does prize captured ships) data indicate about the success privateers?
13. Which privateer was the most successful? Provide supporting data.
14. Who was Captain Thomas Boyle? What bold threat did he make to the United Kingdom?
15. How did the impact of privateers affect British trade and its economy?
16. Why were the British intent on burning shipyards in Baltimore and the Chesapeake Bay?
Sample of Suggested Resources

  From the upper menu bar, click on Education, then click on Privateer History.


- *Chasseur* (1812 clipper) and Captain Boyle

- *Niles’ Weekly Register* [https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/006903835](https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/006903835) Click on Full View v.6 Mar.-Aug 1814, then enter the words “*Comet*” in the Search box. *Comet* is a privateer. Choose the link to Page 69 and Page 80 to read about her success. (primary source)

  [https://www.prattlibrary.org/locations/central/](https://www.prattlibrary.org/locations/central/)

- Typical Design:

  **Schooner* used as a privateer  **War Ship/Merchant Ship

  ![Schooner](https://dreamstime.com)

  *The *Pride of Baltimore II* (shown above left and in the header) is a reproduction of a successful 1812 privateer, named *Chasseur*. *Pride of Baltimore II* sailed 240,000 miles to ports around the world as Maryland’s *Star-Spangled Banner Ambassador*. When home, *Pride* docks in Baltimore. A schedule of public sails are posted on her website. [http://pride2.org](http://pride2.org)*