

Which Theaters of War Experienced the Largest Number of Military Actions during the War of 1812?¹

Ralph Eshelman

It has generally been presumed that the border between the United States and British North America (the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River regions) experienced the most sustained fighting during the War of 1812. Certainly the actions in the north held greater significance towards either side achieving their war aims. A comprehensive inventory of engagements during the war, consisting of 4,265 actions, has been compiled. This working database includes battles (land and sea), skirmishes, raids, massacres and privateer captures. Maritime engagements from all oceans total 3,187 or 74.7 percent of all actions during the war and 95.9 percent of all naval/privateer actions took place in the Atlantic. Of all the theaters of war, the Atlantic Maritime Theater including privateer captures has the largest number of actions at 3,059, representing 71.7 percent of all engagements during the war. The Chesapeake Theater totals 363 actions compared to the Great Lakes Theater at 243, the Northwest Theater at 132 and the St. Lawrence Theater at 92. If the Great Lakes Theater and St. Lawrence Theater are combined into a United States-Canada Borden Theater, the Chesapeake Theater still experienced more actions. During the war there were 849 actions which occurred in the United States (and its then territories) and 224 that occurred in Canada (then British North America). The province of Ontario and the states of Virginia, Maryland and New York experienced more actions than any other political region of North America during the war. While results of this database may change as new information is uncovered, the findings thus far call for a reevaluation of previously held assumptions. Excluding blue water naval operations, the most military actions occurred in the Chesapeake Theater closely followed by the United States-Canada Border Theater.

Introduction

In his article "The Many Wars of 1812," historian Donald Graves states, "regional beliefs for the War of 1812 [are] regarded differently in different areas of North America. Each area or region has its own established view on the origins of the war, how it was fought, who was victorious and what it accomplished. That these views may or may not be sound is not really the question -- they exist and must be acknowledged."¹

Despite these regional beliefs, most scholars presume the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence River experienced the most military engagements in the war. Historian Ronald Dale in

¹This is an updated version of a paper presented at the International Conference on the War of 1812 and its Aftermath: From Enemies to Allies, U.S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland, June 2013.

The Routledge Handbook of the War of 1812, published just after the end of the war's bicentennial in 2016, states, "The War of 1812 had been fought primarily in Upper Canada and Lower Canada, the present day Provinces of Ontario and Quebec, with American armies invading British North American (Canada) in 1812, 1813, and 1814, only to be repelled by an outnumbered force of well-trained British soldiers and sailors assisted by Canadian volunteers and native North American allies."²

Regional prejudices aside, which theater of war experienced the most actions during the war? Weren't more engagements fought along the United States-Canada border than anywhere else in North America? Fully two-thirds of all American regular troops who served in the war were deployed along that border.³ Graves states that "northern and western New York...witnessed some of the heaviest fighting and suffered some of the worst destruction in the war," and "Ontario suffered much destruction."⁴ Graves also claims that the United States invasion of Upper Canada by crossing the Niagara River in July 1814 resulted in "the longest and bloodiest military campaign of the War of 1812."⁵ It may have been the bloodiest and longest land campaign but Rear Admiral George Cockburn's 1814 campaign in the Chesapeake beginning with the British raid at New Point Comfort, Virginia on March 17 and ending September 14 at Baltimore, Maryland, was longer. For his brutality, the nation's leading magazine, the *Niles' Weekly Register*, called Cockburn a "Great Bandit" and "THE LEADER OF A HOST OF BARBARIANS" and branded his troops "water-Winnebagoes," a reference to the militant Indians in the Old Northwest. The same magazine also called the British troops a "NEW RACE OF GOTHES, OUTRAGING THE ORDINANCES OF GOD, AND THE LAWS OF HUMANITY".⁶

Historian Donald Hickey notes that during the War of 1812, no one battle determined the outcome of the war, "only battles that turned the tide in a particular theater, and even then the result was often not lasting."⁷ Hickey adds that no matter how spectacular an operation elsewhere might have been, "contemporaries understood that they were subordinate to the campaigns in the North."⁸ In an article reviewing new scholarly contributions, Hickey affirms, "This conflict [the War of 1812] could only be won or lost on the Canadian-American border."⁹ After all, England was protecting its North American colonies from American aggression. While true, winning or losing the war in one theater does not necessarily mean other theaters did not experience large or even larger numbers of military actions.

Sarah McCulloh Lemmon, in her book on the War of 1812 in North Carolina, wrote, "The major fronts during the War of 1812 were in Upper and Lower Canada, in the Old Northwest against British and Indians, in Alabama against the Indians, and along the lower Mississippi River in defense of New Orleans."¹⁰

Journalists are not immune to this narrow viewpoint. John Ivison wrote on March 14, 2011 that "The war [of 1812] was launched by the Americans in response to British attempts to constrain western expansion and impede trade with France. It was fought at sea, along the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River frontier and on the Gulf coast."¹¹ Ivison and Lemmon do not even mention the Chesapeake.

But others understood that the Chesapeake also experienced a heavy number of military actions. In a newspaper article written on October 11, 2011, Peter Shawn Taylor states that "Each side traded victories and defeats in what became an increasingly bitter struggle. American forces burned Toronto, then called York, as well as Niagara-on-the-Lake. The British torched Buffalo, N.Y., and Washington, pillaged the width and breadth of Chesapeake Bay, and blockaded most of the eastern seaboard."¹² Taylor recognizes the Great Lakes and the Chesapeake were areas of heavy action during the war.

The high number of actions in the Chesapeake region in the war was first suggested in a 2008 National Park Service report to the United States Congress on the preservation of Revolutionary War and War of 1812 sites in the United States. In a distribution map depicting War of 1812 sites by state, Maryland is shown as having the highest number (not all necessarily engagements) followed by New York.¹³ In 2010 Eshelman et al. in the reference guide *The War of 1812 in the Chesapeake* state that "Maryland was the site of more battles, skirmishes, and raids than any other state in the Union".¹⁴

It is not the intent of this paper to argue that the Chesapeake Theater or the Atlantic Maritime Theater (including all naval and privateering actions) experienced more suffering or more significant actions than the Great Lakes or St. Lawrence River Theaters, but to statistically demonstrate that the Chesapeake had more military engagements than any theater of war with the exception of the Atlantic Maritime Theater. Most of these Atlantic Maritime Theater actions were captures, recaptures and ransoms of vessels by privateers. The Canadas were better defended and commanded against American attack while on the Chesapeake the British forces were able to operate almost at will. Thus more of the actions in the Great Lakes and along the St. Lawrence River were actual battles while many in the Chesapeake were undefended British raids or skirmishes with poorly trained and equipped local militia. Still, the battles of Craney Island and St. Leonard Creek were largely fought by U.S. regulars and the battles of Bladensburg and Baltimore were partially defended by U.S. regulars.

Where are the statistics to support the conclusion that the Chesapeake Theater had the largest number of actions during the war outside of the Atlantic Maritime Theater? Neither the National Park Service report nor the Eshelman et al. reference guide includes a holistic listing of engagements during the war. In a search for a definitive answer it was determined that there was no comprehensive inventory that would allow statistical comparison of states, provinces and theaters of the war. To fill this void the compilation of a holistic engagement inventory was undertaken. The inventory includes not only engagements such as battles, skirmishes and raids, but also massacres, naval engagements and privateering activities.¹⁵ This database (minus privateering and all but the significant naval engagements) was published in the *War of 1812 Magazine*, May 2013.¹⁶

Early results of this effort were presented at the Annapolis, Maryland, June 2013 "International Conference on the War of 1812 and its Aftermath: From Enemies to Allies." Comments received during the discussion portion of the presentation suggested that without including the blue water open ocean engagements the analysis would be flawed. To that end the statistical results of this more holistic effort are presented here. One of the unexpected results of

researching the maritime actions was not only the addition of hundreds of privateering actions on the high seas but also over one hundred vessel captures or burnings that occurred in the Chesapeake Bay not previously included in the database. Because most of the blockading action was at the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay, Virginia received a large bump and surpassed Maryland in total number of actions.

While the numbers of actions will no doubt change as new information is uncovered, the results thus far call for a reevaluation of previously held assumptions. The current database totals 4,265 engagements.¹⁷ The Chesapeake Theater totals 363 actions compared to the Great Lakes Theater at 243, the Northwest Theater at 132, the St. Lawrence Theater at 92, the Northeast Theater at 91, the Southeast Theater at 64 and the Gulf Theater at 56. If the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence regions are combined into a single United States-Canada Border Theater, the Chesapeake Theater still has a narrow but larger number of actions with a total of 363 versus a total of 335. However, if all the U.S. Atlantic States are combined into one theater of war, it has the second largest number of engagements at 495 after the Atlantic Maritime Theater. Comparing provinces and states with the highest numbers of engagements, Ontario has 185 actions, Virginia 160 actions, Maryland 141 actions and New York 108 actions.

Methodology

This study, updated since its publication in May and conference presentation in June 2013, includes two appendices: Appendix I “War of 1812 Chronology” and Appendix II “A List of Anglo-American War of 1812 Land Battles, Actions, and Engagement: Naval and Maritime Actions and those Engagements involving Civilians, Native People and Non-Combatants”.¹⁸ The chronology in Appendix I includes all engagements including battles (land and sea), raids, skirmishes, massacres, invasions, privateering captures, recaptures and ransoms, blockades, capitulations and occupations as well as embargoes, treaties and dates when news of the declaration of the war or the end of the war reaches major cities. Many so called battles were actually skirmishes and many skirmishes and battles were the result of invasions so overlap and precise distinction between these actions are not always possible. The comprehensive engagement inventory in Appendix II was used as the database to compile the bar graphs in the result section of this paper. Both appendices appear at the end of this paper.

Earlier versions of this database included not only battles, skirmishes, raids and massacres, but also blockades, invasions, occupations and capitulations. These have been removed from the current database as they do not reflect actual engagements. Most privateering actions did not result in exchange of fire but they are included here since the vessels were captured and many destroyed.

Several sources were utilized to compile the database (full citations can be found in “Where’s the Action: the Challenges of Constructing a Comprehensive Inventory of War of 1812

Engagements” and “War of 1812 Battles, Skirmishes, Raids, Massacres, Occupations and Invasions” by Eshelman, *The War of 1812 Magazine* Issue 20: May 2013). Among the most complete chronologies of the war are Alastair Sweeny, *Fire Along the Frontier: Great Battles of the War of 1812*; Bud Hannings, *The War of 1812: A Complete Chronology*; and Donald R. Hickey, *Don't Give Up The Ship!: Myths of the War of 1812*, Chronology. The Sweeny website was updated as necessary and Hickey updated his chronology in an unpublished document entitled "Chronology" dated January 16, 2012. Wherever possible, Hickey used primary documentation, such as Clarence Edward Carter's *Territorial Papers of the United States*.

Additional sources include *The Encyclopedia of the War of 1812* edited by Spencer C. Tucker; *Report to Congress on the Historic Preservation of Revolutionary War and War of 1812 Sites in the United States* (American Battlefield Protection Program, National Park Service); Patrick Richard Carstens and Timothy L. Sanford, *Searching For The Forgotten War - 1812*, Volume 1 *Canada* and Volume 2 *United States* Appendix A: The Chronology of the History of the War of 1812; Gilbert Collins, *Guidebook to the Historic Sites of the War of 1812* Appendix A: Chronology of the War of 1812; *Encyclopedia of the War of 1812* Chronology, edited by David S. Heidler and Jeanne T. Heidler; Wikipedia List of War of 1812 Battles; and The Official War of 1812 Website Historic Timeline of the War of 1812.

Among the sources used for gathering the naval and privateering actions are George Foster Emmons, *The navy of the United States, from the commencement, 1775 to 1853; with a brief history of each vessel's service and fate...Comp. by Lieut. George F. Emmons...*; Timothy S. Good, *American Privateers in The War of 1812: The Vessels and Their Prizes as Recorded in Niles' Weekly Register*; *The Naval War of 1812: A Documentary History*, 3 vols., edited by William S. Dudley, Michael J. Crawford, et al.; *London Gazette*; and the already mentioned *The War of 1812: A Complete Chronology*. Faye Kert kindly shared her extensive privateer database used for her book *Privateering: Patriots and Profits in the War of 1812*.

Also used were regional sources such as Ralph E. Eshelman, Scott S. Sheads, and Donald R. Hickey, *The War of 1812 in the Chesapeake: A Reference Guide to Historic Sites in Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia*; Myron E. Lyman, Sr. and William W. Hankins, *Encounters with the British in Virginia during the War of 1812*; Stuart L. Butler, *Defending The Old Dominion: Virginia and its Militia in the War of 1812*; Sarah McCulloh Lemmon, *Frustrated Patriots: North Carolina and the War of 1812*; Lemmon, *North Carolina And The War of 1812*; "Illinois War of 1812 Bicentennial Commission Timeline"; Gillum Ferguson, *Illinois In The War of 1812*; James H. Ellis, *A Ruinous and Unhappy War: New England and the War of 1812*; George F.W. Young, *The British Capture & Occupation of Downeast Maine 1814-1815/1818* and "Forts and Battle Sites Alabama."

Other resources apparently overlooked by these studies added to the completeness of the database. A case in point is Daphne Smith, *Burlington Connections To The War of 1812*. Three new actions were added from this source.

However, the most important resource of all were regional experts. While the author is familiar with the Chesapeake region, he does not have the same level of knowledge for all the

regions of the war. These regional historians, who are also co-authors of Appendix II, reviewed their areas of expertise, making corrections, providing additional actions and in a few cases removing entries that were questionable.¹⁹

Difficulties of Using These Sources

Some sources contained vague entries such as "September 27 [1812], Florida" or "April 15 [1813], West Florida (Alabama/Louisiana, US)" making them unclear as to which specific event is meant. There are also errors such as "August 10 [1813], USS Julia and USS Prowler captured (Lake Ontario)" when the actual name of the latter schooner was *Growler*. Battle of Châteauguay is given as October 1, 1813 (apparently taken from Wikipedia Battles of the War of 1812 website) although the battle actually took place on October 26, 1813. In one instance Odelltown is listed as being in Ontario province although it is actually in Quebec, and the Battle of Rock Island Rapids is sometimes mistakenly located in Iowa but actually took place across the river in Illinois.

In those books with multiple contributors, such as *The Encyclopedia of the War of 1812*, caution must be used as errors and inconsistencies in dates escaped correction by the editor. For example, the Burlington Races is presented as having occurred on September 18, 1813, which is probably a typographical error of September 28, the correct date used elsewhere in the text. Other examples of errors include the date for the capture of US sloop *Levant* as March 20, 1815 in the heading while the text states March 11. The text for St. David's, Upper Canada, mistakenly states it is located near Queenstown, New York when Queenston, Ontario is meant. The chronology also mistakenly refers to Ogdensburg as Orangeburg.

In many cases different spellings are used for the same incident. Examples include Calabee versus Callabee, Beekmantown versus Beakmantown, Hoople's Creek versus Uphold's Creek, and Prophetstown versus Prophet's Town. Examples of multiple names for the same incident include Battle of Thames versus Battle of Moraviantown; Battle of Longwood versus Battle of Long Woods versus Battle Hill; Battle of Lundy's Lane versus Battle of Bridgewater versus Battle of Niagara Falls versus Battle of Niagara versus Battle of the Falls versus Battle of the Cataract; and a personal favorite, Battle of Horseshoe Bend versus Battle of Tohopeka versus Battle of Cholocco versus Litabixbee versus The Horseshoe. Another writer does not refer to this battle by any of these names but by the name of the river along which the battle was fought, the Tallapoosa. Some engagements have been mistakenly combined into one engagement. For example, the Battle of (more correctly, the battle for) Baltimore consisted of two distinct battles and two skirmishes -- the bombardment of Fort Henry (with a naval night diversion against nearby forts protecting Fort McHenry's flank) and a land battle at Patapsco Neck (better known as North Point despite being eight miles from that location) preceded by a skirmish. The Battle of (more correctly, the battle for) New Orleans is often regarded as one battle when it actually consisted of several engagements. Another example is the skirmish on the day prior to the attack

at Cook's Mills combined with the battle the next day. Mackinac and Michilimackinac are sometimes confused as the same action when in fact they are two different distinct, but nearby, places.

The terms battle and skirmish are often used interchangeably and minor engagements are frequently called battles (see endnote 15 for definitions used in this paper). The so called Battle of the Ice Mound took place between opposing forces of less than twenty men each. The Battle of Slippery Hill consisted of about twenty pickets who fired a few volleys at a British force of about three-hundred men before withdrawing. Finally, where does one draw the line on every minor Indian raid or British burning of a canoe or rowboat? Even if only one person was involved on one side, it was included in the database. Such occurrences were usually Indian attacks on a lone settler. Instances such as the foundering of U.S. vessels *Hamilton* and *Scourge* in Lake Ontario during a sudden squall on August 8, 1813 are not included in the database because their loss was not the result of military action. Such inclusions and exclusions have no statistical significance on the final totals.

Limitations of Study

In compiling this database it became clear some states, provinces and regions are woefully under-represented because they have not received the same level of study as others. At the upper end of a well-studied region is the Chesapeake Theater and Niagara frontier where many books and papers have been researched and published. While it could be argued that further research is warranted for most, or even all states and provinces, specific need is noted for Georgia, New Brunswick, New Jersey, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Quebec, Rhode Island and South Carolina. There has recently been some significant work on privateering but there are still many questions remaining on names and capture dates of many prizes. Lemmon, in her book on the War of 1812 in North Carolina, wrote in 1973, "Should histories of other southern states in the War of 1812 be undertaken, not only will ample data be found, but, I am convinced, a reevaluation of the war effort on the southern seaboard will eventually result."²⁰ Unfortunately, her call has thus far gone largely unanswered.

The publication of one well-researched book on a state or region not previously studied comprehensively potentially can make a significant difference in the total number of actions. Only 13 actions were listed for Illinois but largely with the 2012 publication of Gillum Ferguson's *Illinois In The War of 1812*, this number jumped to 47. Ferguson's book also added additional actions for neighboring states; Indiana jumped from 17 to 26 and Missouri from 10 to 13. How many new additions might be discovered when Michael J. Crawford, et al. eds., *The Naval War of 1812: A Documentary History*, vol. 4, covering the war in 1815, is published? Similar future studies will no doubt reveal more actions as well.

In some instances it is somewhat arbitrary as to where an action should be listed. In these instances the action was included where it most logically fit. For example, Ball's Battle, located twenty miles south of Lake Erie, could be considered part of the Great Lakes Theater or the

Northwest Theater. Because it was an Indian skirmish, it was placed in the Northwest Theater. When political boundaries are located along rivers that boundary is usually divided down the middle of the river. However, the Potomac River is regarded as Maryland waters all the way to the Virginia shore so all such occurrences in the Potomac are listed under Maryland although many took place closer to the Virginia shoreline. When a vessel is captured “running out the [Chesapeake] bay” or “Virginia capes” that vessel is included in Virginia as presumably the capture occurred there, but when a vessel is captured “off Cape Henry” it is considered in the Atlantic. Such instances do not change the relative standings. Artillery duels across a river bordering Upper Canada and the United States are listed as actions from each side of the river.

Results

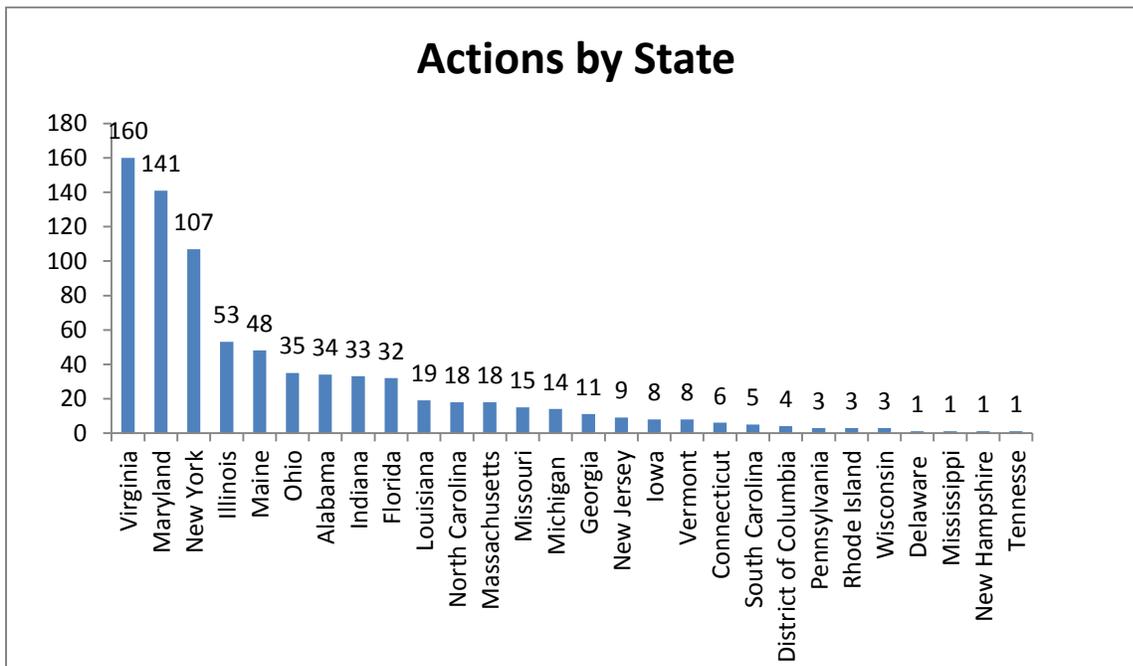
The justification for claiming the Chesapeake Theater tallied the highest number of military actions outside the Atlantic Maritime Theater rests with the statistics of the engagement database (Appendix II). These results are discussed here. The database is broken down by state, province, ocean and theater of war. While the chronology begins with the Jay Treaty of November 19, 1797 and ends with the Wea and Kickapoo peace treaty of June 4, 1816, the database only contains actions that occur between the Battle of Tippecanoe, November 1, 1811 and ends with the US sloop-of-war *Peacock* defeat of the East India cruiser *Nautilus* in Indian Ocean, the last known engagement of the war, June 30, 1815. This is consistent with the period of significance used by the American Battlefield Protection Program, U.S. National Park Service.²¹ While this starting date includes a few actions that occur prior to the official declaration of war it has little statistical effect on rankings. Poorly known actions that appear to be local legend are not included in the analysis. The database currently lists 4,265 total actions.²²

Actions by State (arranged in descending order by number of actions):

| | | | |
|----------|-----|----------------|----|
| Virginia | 160 | Indiana | 33 |
| Maryland | 141 | Florida | 32 |
| New York | 107 | Louisiana | 19 |
| Illinois | 53 | Massachusetts | 18 |
| Maine | 48 | North Carolina | 18 |
| Ohio | 35 | Missouri | 15 |
| Alabama | 34 | Michigan | 14 |

| | | | |
|----------------------|----|---------------|---|
| Georgia | 11 | Rhode Island | 3 |
| New Jersey | 9 | Wisconsin | 3 |
| Iowa | 8 | Delaware | 1 |
| Vermont | 8 | Mississippi | 1 |
| Connecticut | 6 | New Hampshire | 1 |
| South Carolina | 5 | Tennessee | 1 |
| District of Columbia | 4 | Texas | 1 |
| Pennsylvania | 3 | | |

Note: there are an additional 57 vessel captures or burnings in the Chesapeake Bay for which it is unclear if the action occurred in Maryland or Virginia waters. These captures are omitted here but are included in the theater of war graph below.

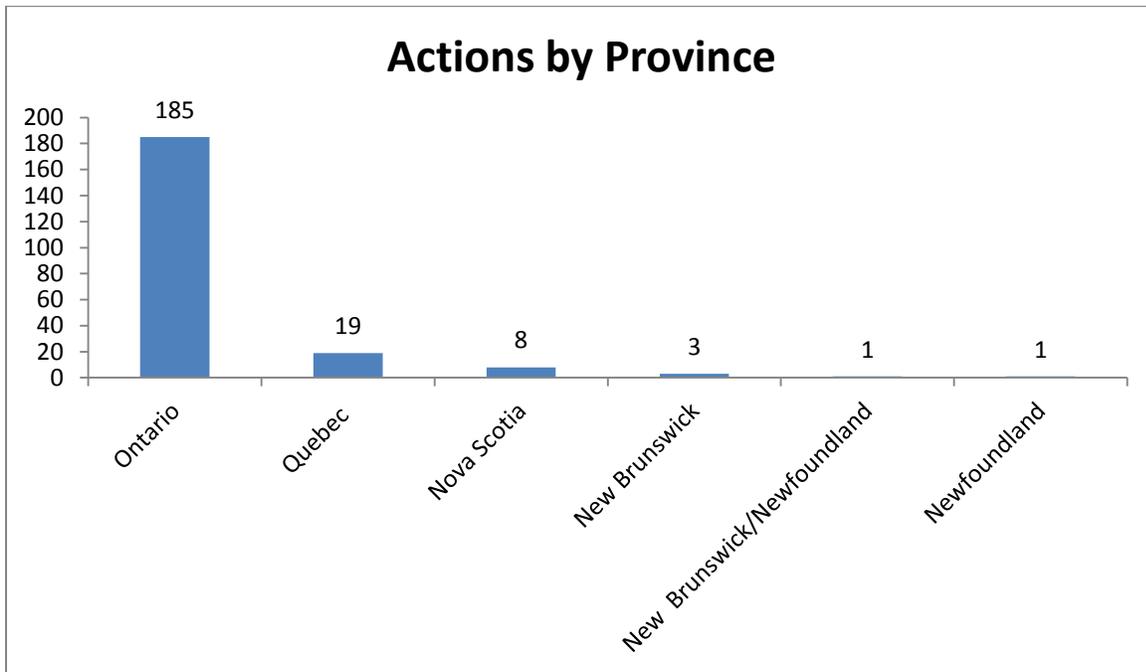


Actions by Province (arranged in descending order by number of actions):

| | |
|---------|-----|
| Ontario | 185 |
| Quebec | 19 |
| | 9 |

| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| Nova Scotia | 8 |
| New Brunswick | 3 |
| New Brunswick/Newfoundland | 1 |
| Newfoundland | 1 |

Note: there are an additional seven vessel captures or burnings in the Bay of Fundy for which it is unclear in which provincial waters the action occurred. These captures are omitted here but are included in the theater of war graph below. No bar is visible for provinces where only one action occurred.



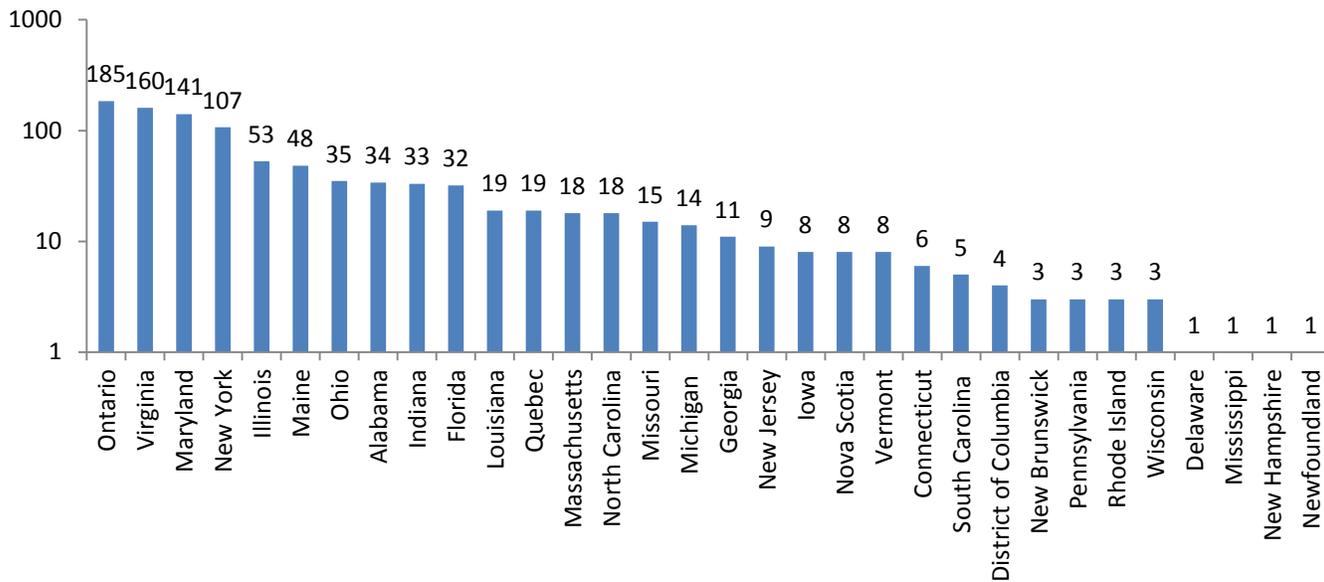
Actions by Province and State (arranged in descending order by number of actions; no bar is visible for states and provinces with only one action):

| | | | |
|----------|-----|----------|----|
| Ontario | 185 | Illinois | 53 |
| Virginia | 160 | Maine | 48 |
| Maryland | 141 | Ohio | 35 |
| New York | 107 | Alabama | 34 |

| | | | |
|----------------|----|----------------------|---|
| Indiana | 33 | South Carolina | 5 |
| Florida | 32 | District of Columbia | 4 |
| Louisiana | 19 | New Brunswick | 3 |
| Quebec | 19 | Pennsylvania | 3 |
| Massachusetts | 18 | Rhode Island | 3 |
| North Carolina | 18 | Wisconsin | 3 |
| Missouri | 15 | Delaware | 1 |
| Michigan | 14 | Mississippi | 1 |
| Georgia | 11 | New Brunswick/Nfd. | 1 |
| New Jersey | 9 | New Hampshire | 1 |
| Iowa | 8 | Newfoundland | 1 |
| Nova Scotia | 8 | Tennessee | 1 |
| Vermont | 8 | Texas | 1 |
| Connecticut | 6 | | |

No bar is visible for states or province where only one action occurred. Vertical scale is logarithmic.

Actions by Province and State



Actions by Theater of War (arranged in descending order by number of actions):

Atlantic Maritime Theater (ship engagements and privateering activities; includes 2,925 actions plus an additional 134 actions for which it is probable the action occurred in the Atlantic. Because the Caribbean is considered a sea of the Atlantic Ocean we include 98 actions that occurred in the Caribbean and an additional 6 for which it is probable the action occurred in the Caribbean; see Maritime Actions at Sea bar graph below for other blue water totals) **3,163**

Chesapeake Theater (Virginia [160], Maryland [141], vessels captures where it is unclear whether in Maryland or Virginia waters [57] and District of Columbia [4]) **363**

Great Lakes Theater (including western and central Ontario [158], north-central and western New York [55], Michigan [14], northeast Ohio [10], Pennsylvania [3] and Wisconsin [3]) **243**

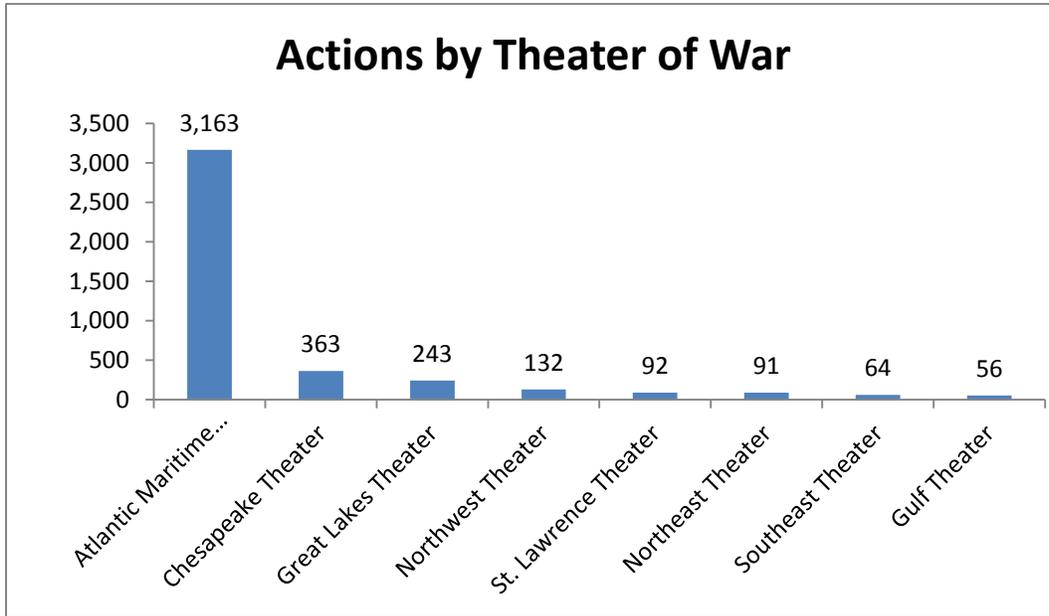
Northwest Theater (Iowa [8], Illinois [53], Indiana [33], Missouri [15] and western and southern Ohio [23]) **132**

St. Lawrence Theater (Quebec [19], eastern Ontario [17], Lake Champlain and northeastern New York [44] and Vermont [8]) **92**

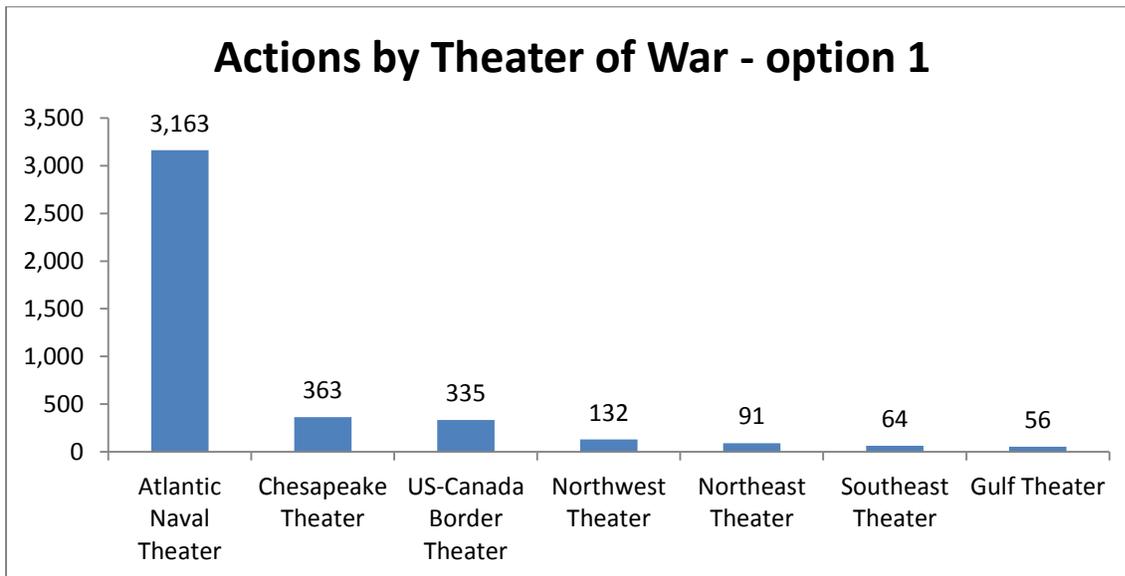
Northeast Theater (Maine [48], Massachusetts [18], New Jersey [8], southeast New York [8], Connecticut [6] and Rhode Island [3]) **91**

Southeast Theater (eastern Florida [30], North Carolina [18], Georgia [11] and South Carolina [5]) **64**

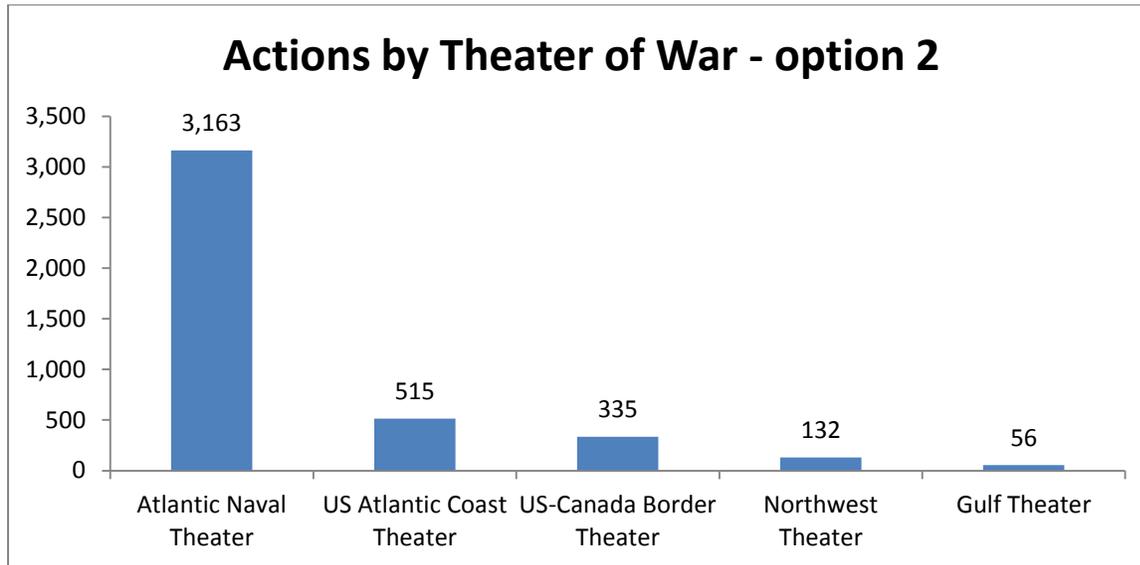
Gulf Theater (Alabama [34], Louisiana [19], western Florida [2] and Tennessee [1]) **56**



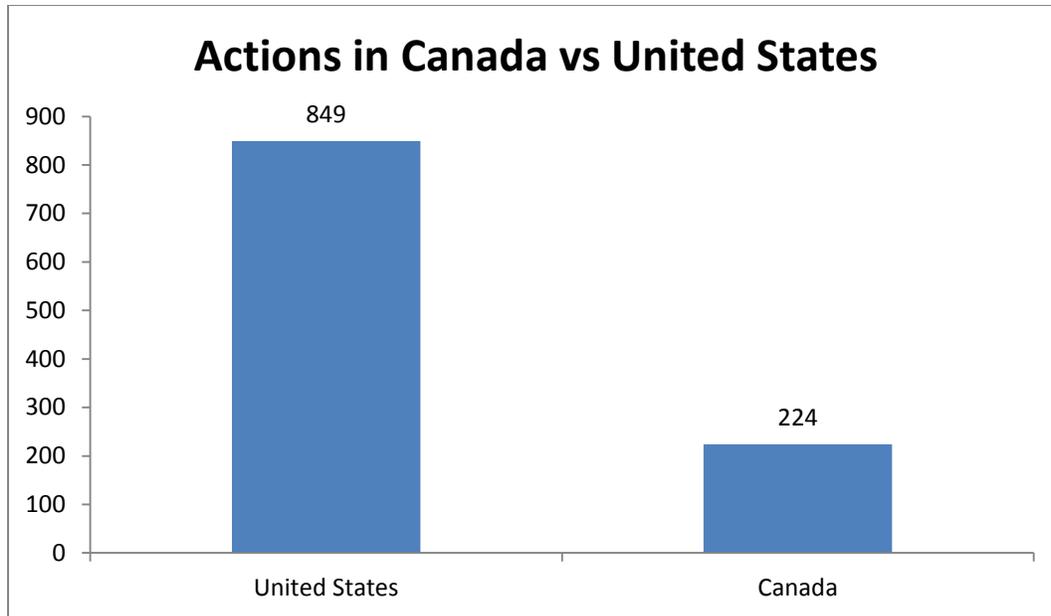
If the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Theaters are combined into a United States-Canada Border Theater it becomes the third largest theater with 335 actions. See Actions by Theater of War – option 1 bar graph below.



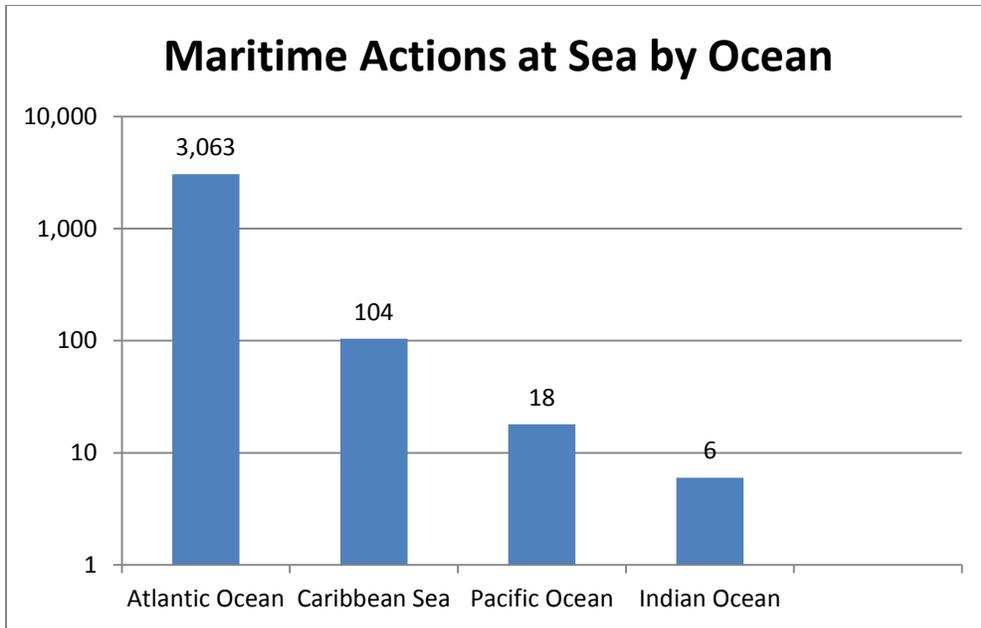
If the United States Atlantic states (Virginia [160], Maryland [141], naval actions from the Chesapeake not included in Maryland or Virginia [57], Maine [48], east Florida [30], Massachusetts [18], North Carolina [18], Georgia [11], New Jersey [9], southeast New York [7], Connecticut [6], South Carolina [5], Rhode Island [3], New Hampshire [1], and Delaware [1]) are grouped together as the U.S. Atlantic Coast Theater it becomes the second largest theater with **515** actions. See Actions by Theater of War – option 2 bar graph below.



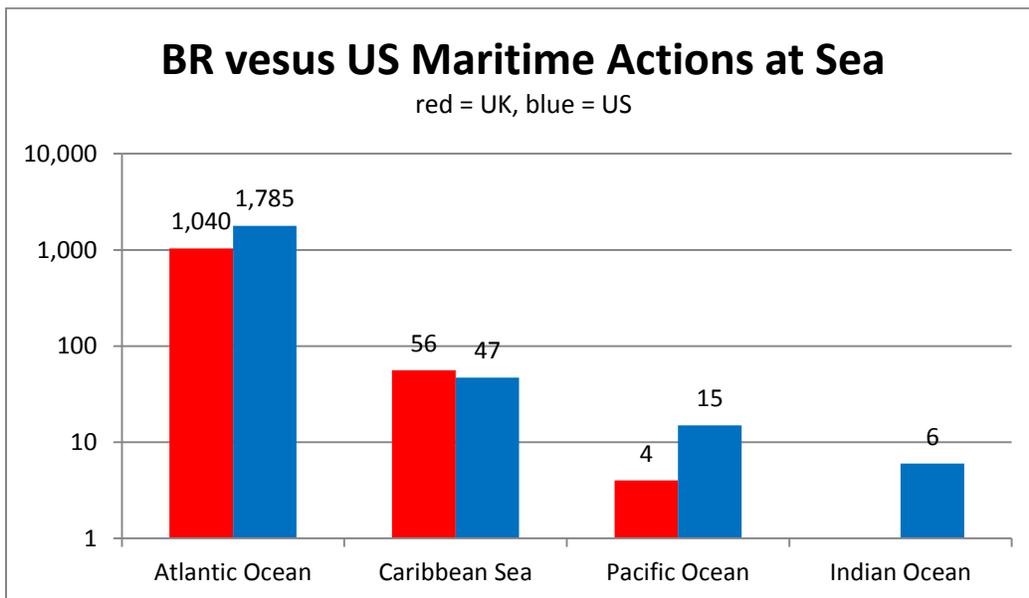
During the War of 1812 there were at least 849 actions that occurred in the United States (including what was then territories) and at least 224 actions that occurred in what today is Canada (including the Bay of Fundy but excluding off shore naval actions presumably outside territorial waters). There are also three other land actions that took place outside of continental North America. A USN contingent under Capt. David Porter attacked Happaahs on Nuka Hiva Island, Marquesas, and renamed it Madison Island, the first but only temporary overseas U.S. naval base established in the Pacific, October 29, 1813. US privateer *Midas* landed crew who attacked four settlements on Royal Island, Bahamas, September 12, 1814. Crew of US vessel *Hanina* assisted British shipwrecked crew marooned on New Island, Falklands, who then seized the vessel and marooned the American crew. The American crew were rescued by the whalers *Indispensible* and *Asp*, November 1814.



There were at least 3,187 maritime actions that took place on the high seas. They are broken down as Atlantic Ocean [3,059], Caribbean Sea [104 of which 6 are uncertain and one is capture by Spanish flotilla], Pacific Ocean [18 of which 2 are uncertain] and Indian Ocean [6]. These numbers include vessel captures, recaptures, ransoms and vessels beached or destroyed to keep out of enemy hands. Vertical scale is logarithmic. Of the Atlantic Ocean actions, 134 are probable as to whether it took place in Atlantic, 12 took place in the English Channel, 10 in the Irish Channel, 3 in the Gulf of Mexico, and one each in the Gulf of St. Lawrence and St. George's Channel. If the Caribbean Sea is included in the Atlantic Ocean the number increases to 3,163. Since most reports do not give enough detail to determine the precise location of these actions these distinctions should not be considered to have statistical importance. Vertical scale is logarithmic.

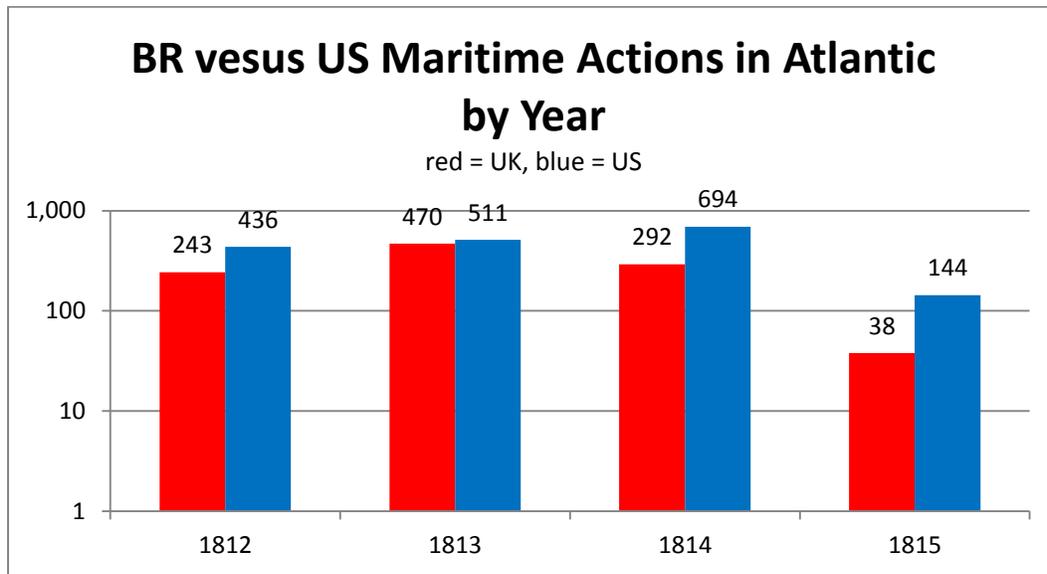


The same maritime actions as shown above are broken down below by British and United States vessel captures, recaptures, ransoms and vessels beached or destroyed to keep out of enemy hands. The numbers in this graph reflect total number of vessel captures, recaptures, ransoms etc., not necessarily number of actions as more than one vessel could be taken in one action. Vertical scale is logarithmic.

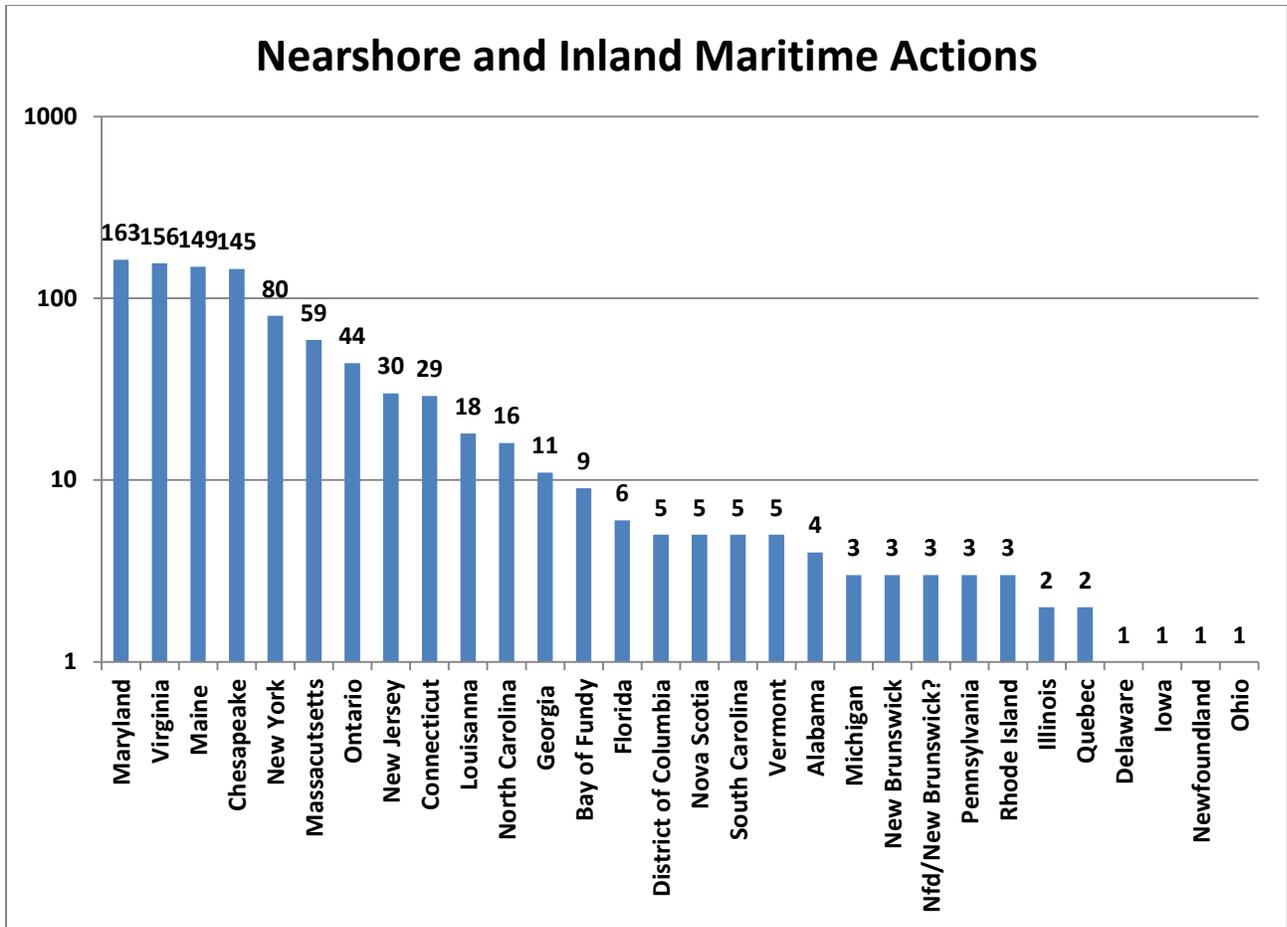


Since most maritime actions occurred in the Atlantic, a break down of BR versus US captures by year is presented in the graph below. The results indicate there were more US initiated actions

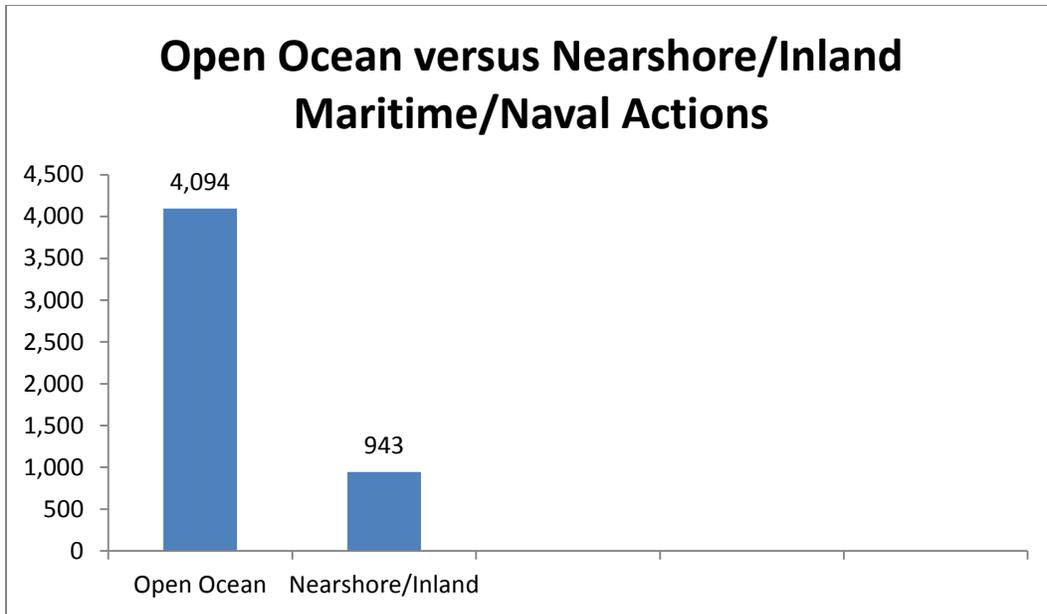
than BR actions each year, particularly in 1814 and 1815. It is unclear but possibly the BR actions are underrepresented suggesting more research may be needed. Vertical scale is logarithmic.



There are a minimum of 671 maritime actions involving at least one vessel that took place on bays, rivers, lakes and/or near shore or onshore. These actions include vessel captures, vessels destroyed to keep out of enemy hands, vessel engagements, torpedo attempts and naval cannonading and rocket firing on shore targets from vessels. The inland/near shore actions break down as follows: Maryland [163], Virginia [156], Maine [149], Chesapeake Bay (unclear whether in Maryland or Virginia waters) [145], New York [80], Massachusetts [59], Ontario [44], New Jersey [30], Connecticut [29], Louisiana [18], North Carolina [16], Georgia [11], Bay of Fundy (uncertain off which province) [9], Florida [6], District of Columbia [5], South Carolina [5], Vermont [5], Nova Scotia [5], Alabama [4], Michigan [3], Newfoundland/New Brunswick (uncertain off which province) [3], Pennsylvania [3], New Brunswick [3], Rhode Island [3], Delaware [1], Illinois [2], Quebec [2], Iowa [1], Newfoundland [1] and Ohio [1]. No bar is visible for states or provinces where only one action occurred. Vertical scale is logarithmic.



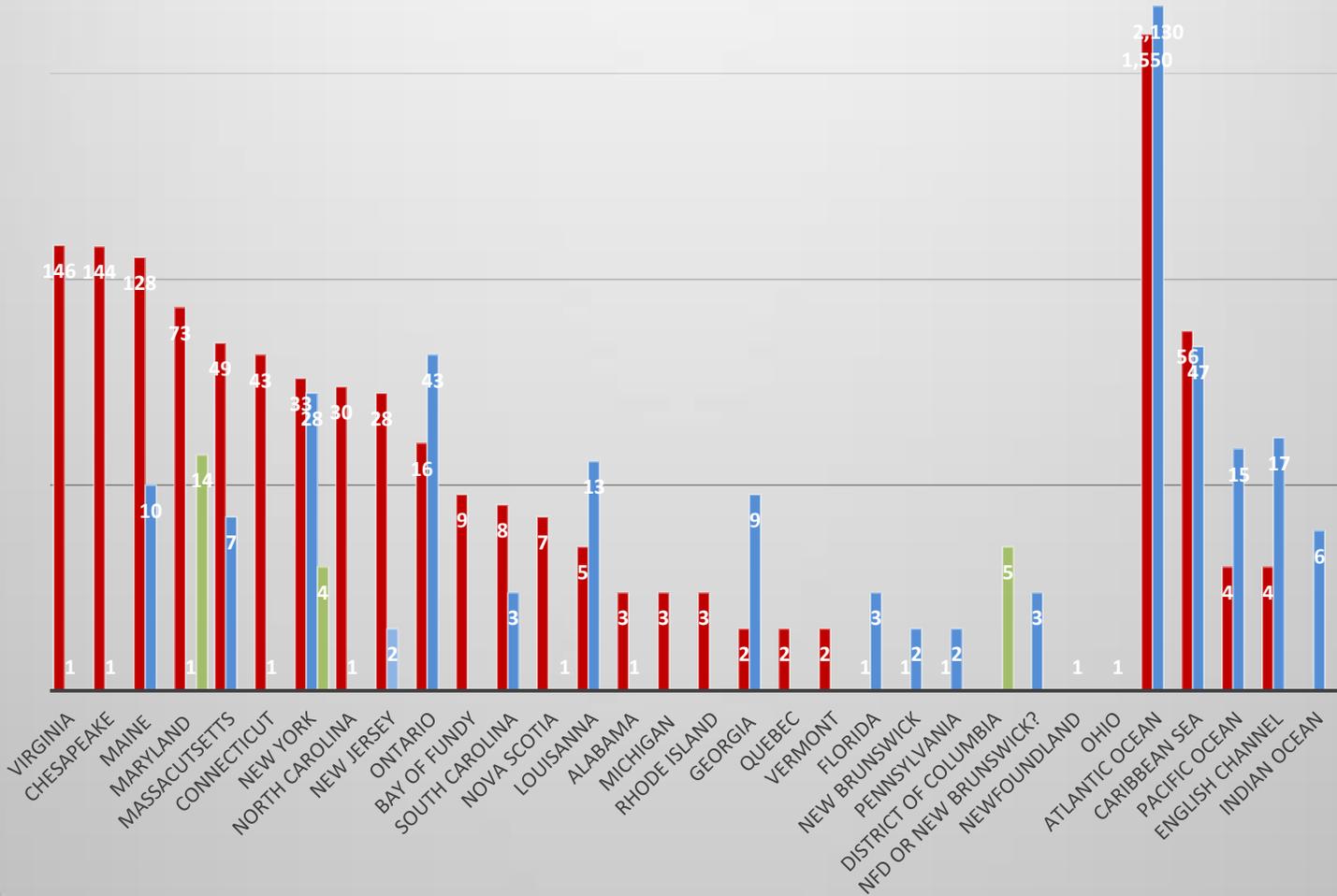
There is a total of at least 5,037 maritime/naval actions of which at least 4,094 took place on the open ocean and at least 943 took place on bays, rivers, lakes, estuaries, etc. These totals include not only naval vessel engagements including escapes or draws but also privateering captures, recaptures and ransoms, as well as torpedo attempts and cannonading and rocketing of shore locations from vessels.



Because it is often undetermined if more than one vessel capture, recapture, etc. occurred on the same day are the result of one or multiple actions, the inventory lists all such actions by one vessel, squadron or fleet as one action. But this does not provide the actual total number of vessel captures, recaptures, ransoms and vessels destroyed to keep them out of enemy hands. The graph below provides these numbers by province, state and ocean. For example, the British destroyed 27 vessels during their raid at Essex, Connecticut. No bar is visible for categories where only one action occurred. Vertical scale is logarithmic.

Vessel Captures, Recaptures, Ransoms and Vessels Destroyed to keep out of Enemy Hands

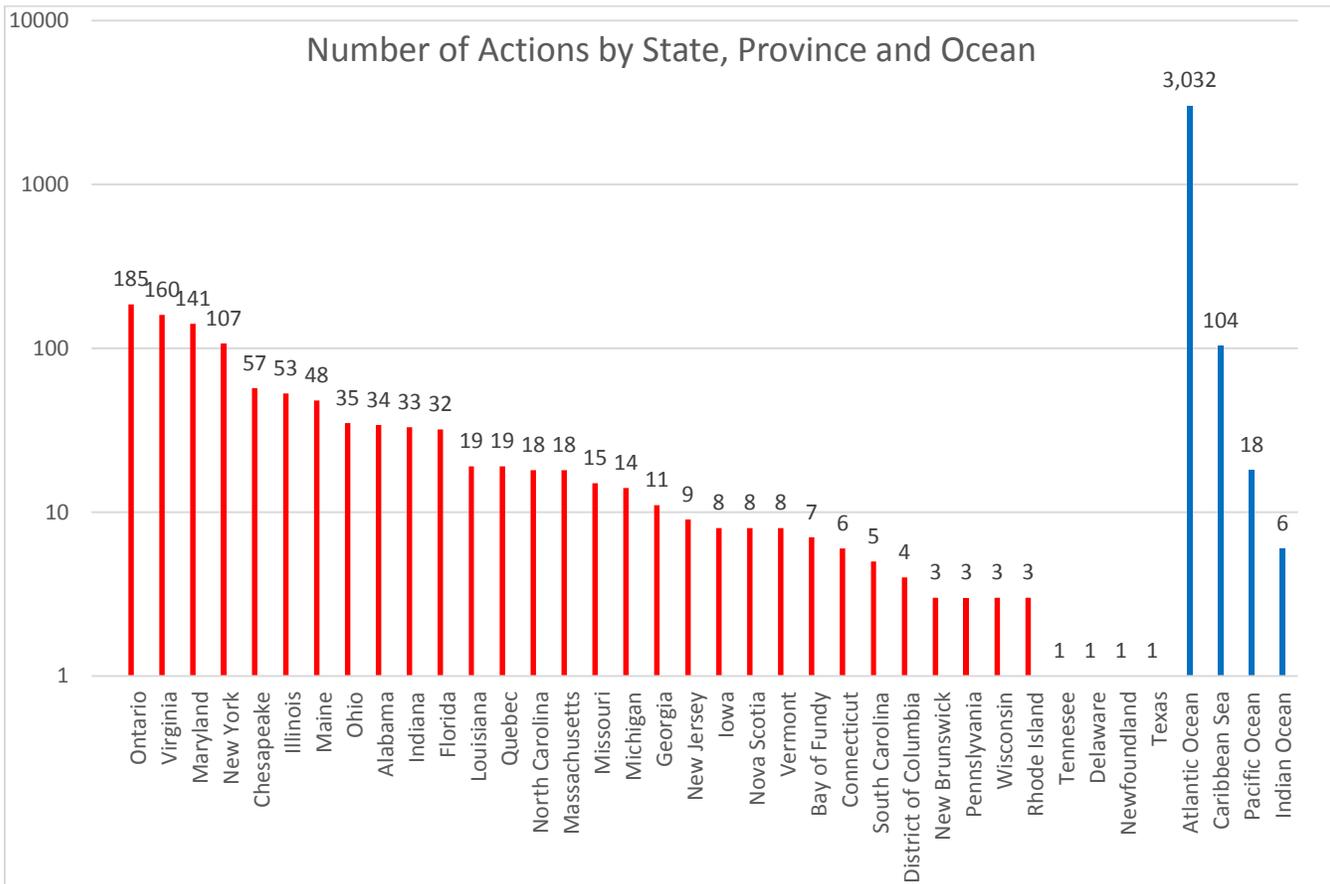
red = UK, blue = US, green = US self-destroyed



British vessels (including privateers) captured or were victorious in 3,243 maritime actions and United States vessels (including privateers) captured or were victorious in 2,515 maritime actions on the high seas (Atlantic, Pacific and Indian Oceans and Caribbean Sea). Most United States vessel captures were by privateers while most British vessel captures were by HMS vessels. This is not surprising considering the greater number of Royal Navy vessels versus the United States Navy vessels. Of the 3,160 naval and maritime actions on the high seas, 1,924

were captures by privateers (sometimes two or more privateers working together and occasionally a BR privateer working in concert with a MHS vessel).

The total number of actions during the War of 1812 is 4,265. Of this total 1,075 occurred within states or provinces of North America, 3 occurred on land outside of continental North America (not shown on graph below) and 3,187 occurred on oceans. Red columns represent actions in states and provinces; blue columns represent actions in blue water oceans and seas. The Chesapeake column represents actions where it is unclear if they occurred in Maryland or Virginian waters. Bay of Fundy column represents actions where it is unclear which provincial waters the action occurred in. No bar is visible for when only one action occurred. Vertical scale is logarithmic.



Discussion

By examining the Actions by Province and State graph above, distinct groupings are evident. Ontario, Virginia, Maryland and New York have the highest number of actions for any political areas with numbers of actions ranging from 185 to 107. They define where the largest numbers of actions occurred during the war of 1812. The Chesapeake Bay (actions unclear if

Maryland or Virginia), Illinois, Maine, Ohio, Alabama, Indiana and Florida form a second tier grouping with numbers of actions ranging from 57 to 32. The rest of the provinces and states taper off from 19 actions to 1 action.

Another way to compare actions is by a theater of war. The Atlantic Maritime Theater has by far the largest number of actions for any theater at 3,059 actions. Of these 1,924, or 62.9 percent, were privateering activities. The Chesapeake Theater has the next highest number of actions unless all the U.S. Atlantic States are combined into one unorthodox U.S. Atlantic Coast Theater. These numbers do not mean that the Chesapeake played the most significant role in the war -- far from it. As mentioned by Graves and Hickey above, actions along the U.S. and British North American border, in particular the Niagara region, are regarded as the strategic epicenter of the war. The 35-mile-long Niagara River region is regarded as a hot spot where towns were burned and people on both sides of the river were left destitute. The Chesapeake arguably experienced only three significant battles, Craney Island, Bladensburg and Baltimore, but the Chesapeake Theater (after the Atlantic Maritime Theater) saw more raids and other actions than any other theater of war (unless as stated above the U.S. Atlantic States are combined into a U.S. Atlantic Coast Theater).

The Chesapeake Theater actions are not considered the most significant, nor do they represent the largest numbers of loss of life, but it is clear from the database that the large number of raids and destruction of property in the Chesapeake led to the suffering of a great number of people, possibly more than any other region of war. The British wanted to bring the war and economic hardship to the heart of the American government. To that end they were successful, but their goal of drawing U.S. troops from the border to speed up the end of the war was not realized.

Conclusions

Entries in a database of military actions do not determine the significance or even the degree of suffering a region might have experienced. But it does tell us where the actions occurred. The Atlantic Maritime Theater far exceeds any other theater of war in this regard. It has generally been understood that the border between the United States and British North America (the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River regions) experienced the heaviest and most significant fighting during the War of 1812. However, a comprehensive compilation of known military actions during the war provides a new perspective on the Chesapeake Theater. More actions took place here than any other land theater of the war. It is not the intent of this paper to claim that the Chesapeake Theater suffered more, had the most bloodshed or played the most significant role in determining the outcome of War of 1812, but merely to illustrate that more actions occurred here than anywhere else excluding the Atlantic Maritime Theater. New research may change these results but it is clear that the Atlantic Maritime Theater and the Chesapeake Theater had more military actions than is generally recognized. Admiral Cockburn's campaign

of destruction in 1814 and to a lesser degree the campaign of 1813 brought economic ruin to much of the tidewater of the Chesapeake – especially along the Potomac and Patuxent Rivers.²³

Acknowledgements

The author made an appeal to War of 1812 community during the initial conference presentation of an early form of this paper in May 2013 and with each published rendition of the database. Gratitude is extended to all of those who responded. This paper has greatly benefited from suggestions and discussions with many colleagues but especially Alan Taylor, Donald E. Graves, John R. Grodzinski and Donald Hickey. Grodzinski and Hickey reviewed and made helpful comments on early drafts of this paper. Their efforts have greatly improved the interpretation of this database but the opinions presented here are solely those of the author. Many researchers freely provided additional information about engagements. Especially helpful was Scott Sheads who provided significant information on vessel captures for the Chesapeake Bay. Also helpful were James H. Ellis and Alastair Sweeny. Others who contributed in various ways are also acknowledged in the appendices where their contribution was most significant. To everyone who contributed to this study my sincere appreciation for helping to make this study as comprehensive as possible. Anyone with suggestions, additions or corrections, contact the author at ree47@comcast.net.

¹ Donald E. Graves, "The Many Wars of 1812", *The Journal of the War of 1812*, 2004 8(2):1.

² Ronald J. Dale, "War of 1812 Memorial and Commemorations", in *The Routledge Handbook of the War of 1812*, Donald R. Hickey and Connie D. Clark, eds. (New York: Routledge, 2016), 248.

³ Donald E. Graves, "Introduction: 'Mac' Hitsman, Sir George Prevost and the Incredible War of 1812", J. Mackay Hitsman, *Incredible War* (Toronto: Robin Brass Studio, updated ed., 1999), xxi.

⁴ Graves, "The Many Wars of 1812", 1-2.

⁵ Graves, "Why The White House Was Burned: An Investigation into the British Destruction of Public Buildings at Washington in August 1814," *The Journal of Military History* 76 (October 2012): 1095-1111.

⁶ *Niles' Weekly Register* 7 (October 27, 1814), 110; (Supplement), 158; and 6 (July 30, 1814), 365.

⁷ Donald R. Hickey, *Don't Give Up the Ship! Myths of the War of 1812* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 300.

⁸ *Ibid*, 300.

⁹ Donald R. Hickey, "The Challenge of Writing Naval History", *The War of 1812 Magazine*, no. 17 January 2012.

¹⁰ Sarah McCulloh Lemmon, *Frustrated Patriots: North Carolina and the War of 1812* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1973), 96.

¹¹ John Ivison, "Ottawa plans \$100-million celebration of War of 1812," *National Post*, March 14, 2011.

¹² Peter Shawn Taylor, "Damn Yankees are trying to steal our victory in 1812," *Maclean's*, October 11, 2011.

¹³ *Report to Congress on the Historic Preservation of Revolutionary War and War of 1812 Sites in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: American Battlefield Protection Program, National Park Service, 2007). Figure 11, "Distribution and Concentrations of Principal Sites of the War of 1812 in the United States", shows both Maryland and New York as having between 12 to 18 percent of the total 254 recorded sites in the study. While not specified in the legend, Maryland represents the 18 percent and New York the 12 percent. Since this study a significant increase in the known number of War of 1812 sites in the United States have been documented.

¹⁴ Ralph E. Eshelman, Scott S. Sheads, and Donald R. Hickey, *The War of 1812 in the Chesapeake: A Reference Guide to Historic Sites in Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), vii, end note no. 1.

¹⁵ Engagement terms as used in this study: Battle: a hostile encounter or engagement between opposing military forces and/or native allies. Skirmish: a minor engagement between small forces or between detachments from larger forces avoiding direct conflict between the main bodies of troops. Also, a minor or preliminary engagement, often on the periphery of an area of battle. Massacre: the act or an instance of killing a number of usually helpless or compliant human beings, often under circumstances of atrocity or cruelty.

¹⁶ Ralph Eshelman, "Where's the Action?: Challenges of Constructing a Comprehensive List of War of 1812 Engagements," *War of 1812 Magazine*, Issue 20, May 2013.

¹⁷ Engagement numbers do not necessarily indicate numbers of actions. For example, a raid might include the burning of several structures or vessels. When the British attacked Essex, Connecticut on April 7, 1814, they burned 27 vessels. When the British attacked Havre de Grace, Maryland on May 3, 1813, they burned approximately 40 structures. All captures of vessels by one ship on one day are grouped together as one event.

¹⁸ Appendix I War of 1812 Chronology compiled by Ralph Eshelman and Donald Hickey and Appendix II A List of Anglo-American War of 1812 Land Battles, Actions, and Engagement: Naval and Maritime Actions and those Engagements involving Civilians, Native People and Non-Combatants compiled by Ralph Eshelman, Faye Fert, Sandy Antal, Jim Ellis, John Grodzinski, James Cusick, Donald Hickey, Donald Graves, Gene Allen Smith and Gary Gibson.

¹⁹ Appendix II co-authors: Faye Kert, privateering; Sandy Antal, U.S. northwest and upper Great Lakes; Jim Ellis, U.S. northeast; John Grodzinski, Niagara, Lake Ontario and St. Lawrence River; James Cusick, southeast U.S; Donald Hickey, general review; Donald Graves, Canada; Gene Allen Smith, Gulf Coast; and Gary Gibson, northern boundary region.

²⁰ Lemmon, vii.

²¹ *Report to Congress on the Historic Preservation of Revolutionary War and War of 1812 Sites in the United States*, 21.

²² The sole incident in Oregon was not actually an action and is not included in the analysis.

²³ For a further discussion of the destruction in the Chesapeake region see “Warfare in the Chesapeake” in Ralph E. Eshelman et al., *The War of 1812 in the Chesapeake: A Reference Guide to Historic Sites in Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia*, 7-23.