

Snap Dragon ^[1]

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by Jaquelin Drane Nash, 2006; Revised by SLNC Government and Heritage Library, June 2023

The *Snap Dragon* was the most successful North Carolina privateer ^[2] in combat with the British fleet in the War of 1812 ^[3]. The schooner was built on the West River in Maryland in 1808 and originally named the *Zephyr*. The *Snap Dragon's* length was 85.5 feet, its beam 12.5 feet, its draft 8.67 feet, and its weight 147.42 tons. It carried six guns and a crew of 80. Capt. *Otway Burns* ^[4], a skipper of legendary skill and intrepidity, commanded the *Snap Dragon* on three profitable cruises between 1812 and 1814: two in West Indian waters and one near Nova Scotia and Newfoundland. The schooner harried the invading fleet, preventing the arrival of British troops and supplies on American shores, while securing prizes of goods and capturing enemy vessels to enlarge and outfit the small U.S. fleet. During these three cruises, several British ships engaged in battle with the small American craft. Burns captured 42 English vessels and their cargo, valued at more than \$4 million, and took more than 300 English officers and sailors prisoner.

Able and swift as it was, the *Snap Dragon* could not have made its remarkable voyages without the genius of Burns. On its fourth cruise, under another skipper (Burns remained ashore, afflicted with rheumatism), the schooner was captured by a British sloop of war off Nova Scotia.

Additional Resources:

Burns, Walter Francis. *Captain Otway Burns: Patriot, Privateer and Legislator*. New York. 1905.
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McKown, Harry. "Otway Burns and the Snap Dragon." *This Month in North Carolina History* (blog). July 2010.
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Nicholson, Lee H. "Snap Dragon: An American Privateer". *Nautical Research Journal* 27: 206. December 1981.

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From:

[Encyclopedia of North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press.](#) ^[13]

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