

War of 1812

The Second War for American
Independence

Causes of the War

- Freedom of the Seas/Respect of American neutrality/Impressment
- Frontier Pressures – influence of the British on the American frontier
- Influence of the “War Hawks” in Congress

The War Hawks

- Young Congressmen, mostly in the House of Representatives (some in Senate)
- Mostly from the frontier states (Kentucky, Tennessee, Ohio) and the south
 - Definitely NOT New England
- Main leaders were Henry Clay (KY) and John C. Calhoun (SC)
- They wanted expansion of US territory (land from Britain and/or her allies) – Canada and Florida AND destruction of Native American resistance

Frontier Pressures

- Americans believed the British were arming the Native Americans and encouraging them to attack US frontier settlements to prevent Americans from moving westward
- The attempted establishment of an Indian Confederacy by Shawnee brothers Tecumseh (war leader) and The Prophet (religious leader)
 - Tried to unite tribes east of the Mississippi River
 - Gen. William Henry Harrison attempted to destroy this growing confederacy at the Battle of Tippecanoe in 1811
 - Tecumseh not present, The Prophet was defeated

Impressment

- British Navy needed more sailors to fight its war against France/Napoleon
- Sought “British citizens” on trade ships owned by neutral nations – particularly American ships
 - Some may have been British citizens claiming US citizenship to avoid naval service
 - Harsh conditions in British Navy
- Would stop American ships on the high seas and “kidnap” sailors

The American Military

- The American army is relatively small and inexperienced. The main fighting units would be comprised mainly of militia (non-professional soldiers AKA farmers with guns)
- The American navy is bigger – now up to 16 warships – but has a fair amount of experience based on their actions fighting the Barbary Pirates off the coast of North Africa

“Mr. Madison’s War”

- New England opposed the war because it would interrupt trade – their livelihood
 - They saw impressment and raids on shipping as the cost of doing business
- The West and South supported the war
 - They felt that war against Britain would give them the opportunity to expand US territory (Canada and perhaps land belonging to any of Britain’s allies)
 - Would remove an Indian threat by removing the Indian’s source of arms if the British were defeated

Possible Secession?

- Hartford Convention
 - In 1814 politicians from New England met in Hartford, Connecticut
 - They passed resolutions condemning the war and recommended constitutional amendments that would protect New England interests
 - Some extremists even talked of secession from the Union and negotiating a separate peace with Britain but the war ended before any action could be taken

Plan of Action

- Success depended on two things
 - A land based invasion of Canada
 - The American Navy had only 16 ships so a war at sea was not really possible
 - The British strength was in Canada (the only British land in continental North America)
 - Napoleon continuing his war in Europe
 - His success would keep the British military busy and split by forcing them to fight on two continents

The Land Based War

- The US would launch a 3 point invasion of Canada at
 - Detroit
 - Niagara
 - Lake Champlain
- Shown at right is Detroit
 - Major General William Hull failed miserably and was forced to surrender his 2000 troops to a smaller British and Indian force



Invasion of Canada

- Fort Niagara
 - The Americans invaded Canada in October 1812
 - The invasion failed when the NY militia refused to cross the border to come to the aid of the army



Invasion of Canada

- Lake Champlain
 - Located in Northern New York
 - This was the final attack of a three-part invasion
 - As with the first two, it failed miserably
- Fort Dearborn
 - Not a part of this invasion of Canada but this was one of the many frontier outposts that the Americans were also forced to surrender
 - This gave Britain control of the entire Great Lakes region

Weapons

This .69-caliber pistol was manufactured in Bridgewater, Massachusetts, during the War of 1812. It bears the mark of the 21st Light Dragoons, a New England militia unit. The War of 1812 affirmed U.S. independence in the minds of European nations.

- Weapons were similar to those from the American Revolution
- Smooth bore muskets, swords and small arms (pictured)



Other Canadian Invasions

- In 1813, the Americans attacked and burned the Canadian capital of York (Toronto)
- In 1814, the Americans under Winfield Scott attacked Fort Erie, defeated the British at Chippewa River and battled at Lundy's Lane. They retreated back into the US, giving up the conquest of Canada

The War on Water

- The Americans were supposedly the weakest (militarily) with their navy
- They had only 16 warships and the British had hundreds
- But the tiny American Navy was successful
 - The warship Constitution destroyed a British frigate in a fierce battle off Nova Scotia
 - The warship Constitution later destroyed another British ship off the coast of Brazil
 - The warship United States captured the British Macedonian
 - The warship Wasp defeated the British Frolic

More War on Water

- In 1813, in a fierce duel between the Chesapeake (Am) and the Shannon (Br) the dying American captain told his crew "don't give up the ship" which became the rallying cry of the US Navy
- Overall, the 16 US Naval Warships never lost a fight to a British warship during the entire war
 - some of the privateer vessels did lose battles
 - USS Constitution would be nicknamed "Old Ironsides" because cannonballs "bounced" off her thick oak sides in a battle and the British thought she was actually made of iron and not wood

America Battles Back

- American Naval Commander Oliver Hazard Perry was the commander of a tiny fleet that was thrown together on Lake Erie (to battle the British fleet stationed there)
- This fleet surprised and soundly defeated the British at Put-In Bay in September 1813 effectively regaining control of the Great Lakes



Perry reported his victory by saying "We have met the enemy and they are ours."

British Defeat at Lake Erie



America Battles Back

- By the end of the war, American privateers (privately owned ships given permission by the government to act as “legal pirates” on behalf of the country) destroyed or captured over 1500 British ships
- But a military blockade of the American coast was inevitable and it brought all foreign commerce to a standstill

Battle of the Thames River

- William Henry Harrison led a force of militia into Canada pursuing the retreating British, overtaking them at the Thames River in October 1813, defeating them decisively. At this battle, Tecumseh was killed, causing most of the Indians to desert the British and collapsing the Indian confederation.



The British Offensive

- By 1814, the British could focus entirely on the war with America since Napoleon had been defeated in Europe.
 - Remember, the US saw Napoleon’s continued success as instrumental to American hopes for victory
- They began sending massive numbers of troops to America
 - Over 15,000 troops were sent to Canada in 1814, ending America’s hopes for conquest

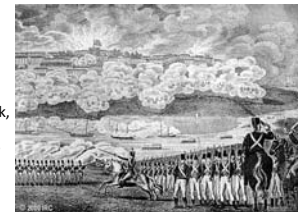
Lake Champlain

- About 11,000 troops invaded New York along Lake Champlain (but they needed to control the water too).
- Both had fleets in the lake but the British ships were better armored and more powerful
- But the Americans were able to outmaneuver the British and defeat them completely in 1814, forcing the army to retreat back to Canada



Attack on Washington

- In August 1814, the British arrived up the Chesapeake Bay and landed in Maryland. The capital was poorly defended, allowing the British to easily attack. On August 24, in retaliation for the burning of York, the British set fire to numerous buildings including the Executive Mansion. But they were driven out of the city by a large storm that hit the city.



Attack on Washington

- Dolly Madison, the president's wife was hurriedly loading valuables, furniture, paintings (including the portrait of George Washington), and documents into wagons to flee the area as the British were entering and setting fire to the building itself.



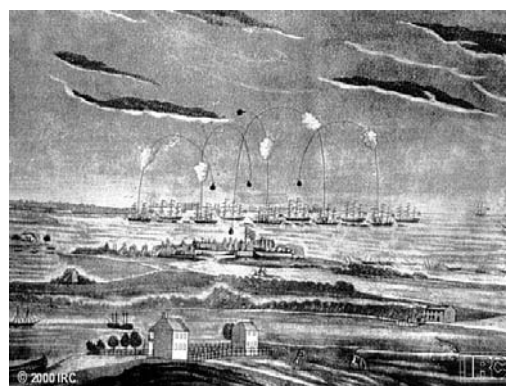
Attack on Washington



- The Mansion would later be painted white to hide the scorch marks (hence the name White House).

Baltimore

- The British left Washington and sailed toward Baltimore – the biggest port on the bay – but found it well defended. The fleet (on September 12, 1814) tried to destroy the fort protecting the harbor all through the night but was unable to do so, so they gave up (and the American flag still flew over Fort McHenry by the dawn's early light).

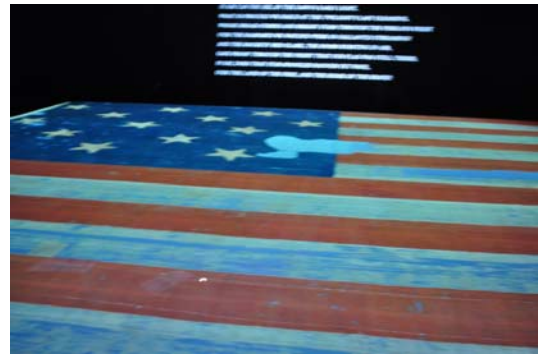


British Cannonball shot at Fort McHenry in 1814





The Star Spangled Banner

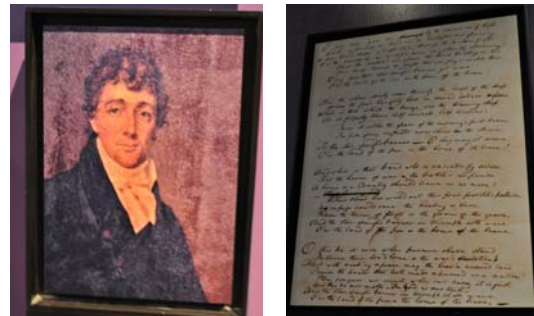


The Star Spangled Banner

- The Star Spangled Banner, a poem written by Francis Scott Key (who was an observer on a British ship in the harbor during the attack) commemorated the event
- The poem would later be set to the tune of *Anacreon in Heaven* (a popular British drinking ballad)
- It would become the national anthem in 1931



Star Spangled Banner



Francis Scott Key and his original manuscript

Attention Shifts to the South

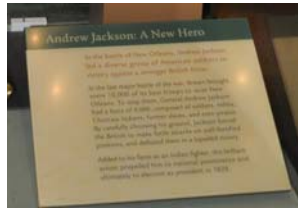
- The British sent over 7500 troops to invade the US via the Gulf of Mexico and landed them near New Orleans.
- A major naval battle occurred prior to the land battle but although the British won, they were delayed from helping at New Orleans
 - This naval battle involved privateers who fought for the US, not regular naval vessels
- General Andrew Jackson, who had been repelling Indian attacks in the Southeastern US was able to beat the British to the city and build fortifications

New Orleans



- Using the contents of warehouses (including cotton bales) Jackson and his men built significant fortifications around the city
 - Jackson also used the help of pirates who agreed to fight on the side of the Americans in exchange for a pardon on existing charges of piracy (illegal and generally punishable by death)
- On January 8, 1815 the English began their attack but the Americans were able to inflict tremendous casualties (more than 2000) with just 71 of their own
- This tremendous victory restored the nation's pride and made a national hero of Jackson

Andrew Jackson



Major General Andrew Jackson wore this uniform and sash at the Battle of New Orleans in 1815. The British brought almost 10,000 troops to the battle (versus 4000 soldiers, militia, Choctaw Indians, former slaves and even pirates for Jackson). He forced the British to attack a heavily fortified position, resulting in a lopsided victory.



Jackson at the Battle of New Orleans, artist unknown

Ballou's Pictorial Drawing-Room Companion depicts the Battle of New Orleans, the last campaign of the War of 1812. Andrew Jackson's troops—army regulars, Tennessee and Kentucky volunteers, and two companies of African American volunteers from New Orleans—held off the better-trained British troops in January of 1815. The battle made Andrew Jackson a national hero. (*Historic New Orleans Collection*)

The Treaty of Ghent

- By the end of 1814, both sides had had enough and wanted peace
- They met in Ghent, Belgium and concluded a treaty of peace
 - It ended hostilities
 - All captured land would be returned to the pre-war owner
 - No mention was made of impressment but it was generally believed that the practice would stop
- The treaty was signed and announced (locally) on December 24, 1814

Results of the War

- A new sense of nationalism
- Respect from other nations – especially in Europe
- American industry began to grow because of the blockade of shipping by the British
- Expansion westward was more feasible since the Indian threat had been removed (they were no longer being armed by the British and many had been killed or dispersed with Tecumseh)