

The War of 1812



President James Madison (1809-1817) inherited all of the problems of neutrality from Thomas Jefferson. Madison's diplomatic efforts failed in keeping the United States out of the conflict in Europe. The United States became a pawn in the British struggle with Napoleon. With both countries imposing blockades upon each other, Madison protested that both Britain and France were violating the United States' neutral rights. In addition, the British actions of a naval blockade and impressments threatened to bring about an economic depression in the United States.

In Congress a group of young, Western and Southern Congressmen, led by **John C. Calhoun** of South Carolina and **Henry Clay** of Kentucky – all Democrat- Republicans, blamed the British for inciting Native Indians in their regions to rebel. The most notable being **Tecumseh** who had, with aid from the British, created a confederation of the tribes that lived along the Ohio River valley. Patriotically they called for a war against Britain. These "**War-Hawks**" had the underlying idea to **take Canada from the British**.

Federalists in New England opposed these ideas, claiming that a war would totally destroy their economy. However, by 1812, these War-Hawks managed to obtain control of Congress. They pressured Madison into asking Congress for a Declaration of War against Britain. Congress declared war in June of 1812. Madison was forced to follow through and conduct a war for which the United States was unprepared. It became known as "**Mr. Madison's War.**"

Conquering Canada was a disaster for the United States. The attacks were totally uncoordinated. Detroit surrendered to British troops in August 1812, and in October the American troops lost the **Battle of Queenston Heights** (on the border) and they then withdrew from Lake Champlain in November.

On the waters, American ships won a series of battles that took place on and around the Great Lakes. However, the British navy had successfully blockaded the entire Atlantic coastline. In 1813 America again tried to invade Canada, but it was another failure. They did take back Detroit when the ships of **Oliver Hazard Perry** destroyed the British fleet on Lake Erie.

In 1814, the British defeated Napoleon in Europe. They then began to transfer large numbers of soldiers to fight in America. **In the summer of 1814, the British marched into Washington D.C. and burned most of the public buildings.** President James Madison was forced to hide in the countryside.

From Washington the British moved on toward Baltimore. An all-night British bombardment of Fort McHenry, at the entrance of Baltimore harbor, was witnessed by **Francis Scott Key**, a local lawyer. He wrote down what he saw as testimony to America's determination to stand strong. His words became **"The Star Spangled Banner."**

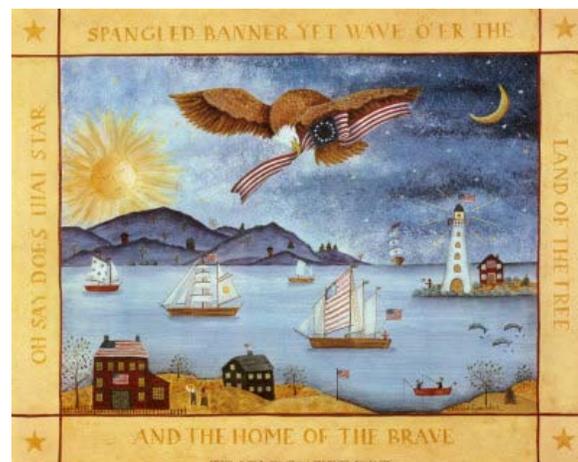


Both the British and Americans realized that this was a war that neither side wanted. Both nations had representatives in Belgium (after the Battle of Waterloo that defeated Napoleon) and on Christmas Eve, December 24, 1814 representatives of both nations met and signed the **Treaty of Ghent**. The treaty was in effect an armistice or cease-fire. All of the old boundaries between the United States and British owned Canada remained the same. None of the issues that caused the war were addressed in the treaty.

Although the Treaty of Ghent officially ended the war, the greatest victory for the United States came two weeks after the treaty was signed. On December 23, 1814, a British force of 11,000 men tried to take **New Orleans** from the Americans. General Andrew Jackson and 4,500 soldiers, volunteers from Kentucky and Mississippi, pirates, local French speaking people (Cajuns), and two battalions of free African Americans, defended the city.

On January 8 the overconfident British made a full attack. The British were easy targets for the American riflemen who held key positions. The battle was all over in an hour. The British had 2,036 casualties, the Americans 21.

The Battle of New Orleans was a remarkable victory for the United States. The battle allowed the unhappy Americans to claim a powerful victory that would restore patriotism within the nation. Andrew Jackson became a national hero.



Battle of Queenston Heights