

Reading Article GP1

Article #5: The War of 1812

It wasn't long after the American Revolution that England and France were at war again. Both nations began to use force to regulate American trade. They each wanted to stop the United States from trading products to its enemy. Both nations attacked American ships.

Jefferson thought that he could convince England and France to leave U.S. ships alone by prohibiting shipment of American goods to their countries or any other country in Europe. To carry out this plan Congress passed the Embargo Act of 1807.

The embargo was a failure. It hurt the United States far more than it hurt England or France. Business was so poor that tens of thousands of people in the port cities were out of work. People from all over the country, and especially the New England merchants, protested against the embargo. Finally, in 1809 the embargo was discontinued.

James Madison, who followed Jefferson as President, also tried to keep the country from going to war over freedom of the seas. At times it seemed that the United States should go to war against both England and France. However, the British were much harder on the Americans than the French were. The British actually fired upon U.S. battleships. They often impressed, or forced, sailors from American ships to work in the British navy. Furthermore, Indians from Canada were still raiding American settlements in the Northwest. The British who controlled Canada received much of the blame for the raids.

Some American congressmen known as War Hawks pressed hard for war. They said that war with Great Britain would give the United States a good reason to invade Canada and capture it. In this way Indian raids would be stopped and Canada would provide cheap land for American settlers. Madison asked Congress to decide the question of war with England. In June, 1812, they voted "yes." The fighting that took place during the next three years is known as the War of 1812.

Just as the War Hawks desired, an invasion of Canada was planned and carried out. In 1812 American forces attacked British forts at Detroit and Niagara. A third force advanced on Montreal. The Americans were beaten back by British soldiers, the Canadians, and their Indian allies. The Canadians were defending their own country, and they fiercely

resisted the advance of the Americans. The Indians saw the war as a way to keep American settlers from moving into Indian territory.

American forces made a second attempt to invade Canada in 1813. The American forces won some important battles. Toronto, the city where Canadian government met, was taken but not held. In spite of all the United States' efforts, the end of the year saw Canada still in the hands of Canadians.

In 1814 the British invaded the United States. After years of fighting in Europe, they had finally defeated the French. Now they could devote their full energies to the war with the United States. First, they planned to separate New England from the rest of the country as they had tried to do in the Revolutionary War. But the result was the same—failure. An American fleet on Lake Champlain, commanded by Captain Thomas McDonough, destroyed the British fleet as it tried to sail south on the lake.

The second part of the British plan for attacks on American cities and villages along the coast. These places could offer little resistance to the British. So, the British were quite successful. Even Washington, the capital of the United States, was captured. President Madison and his wife, Dolley, were forced to flee from the city. The British burned the White House and some other public buildings in revenge for the United States' capture and burning of Toronto, Canada.

The third part of the British plan was to capture New Orleans. This would help them control the Mississippi River. The British sent about 7500 well-trained and experienced troops to New Orleans. General Andrew Jackson and about 5000 untrained troops met the British attack. The battle which was fought on January 8, 1815, was a terrible defeat for the British. About two thousand of the British soldiers were killed or wounded. The Americans lost no more than 75 troops. At the time of the battle, neither Jackson nor the British knew that a peace treaty had already been signed between the United States and Great Britain.