

# Why did America go to war in 1812?

As the new nation grew and its foreign policy of avoiding permanent alliance became defined it sought out trade relationships. America was determined to grow and become prosperous. It was inevitable that there would be affairs with England and France as they were the two strongest powers of the time. Eventually that contact, as Washington feared, brought America to the brink of war.

## I. The United States Enters the War of 1812

### A. How did the United States first get involved in a conflict with European nations?

1. In 1803 the expected war between France and Great Britain broke out, and it continued for 12 years. Before it ended, the US was "drawn into the conflict."
2. As has been detailed earlier President Adams had worked to avoid becoming involved in the conflict between France and England. Jefferson attempted to follow that policy at great political cost.
3. Jefferson was criticized heavily for being too weak in regard to the British and French policy of seizing or "impressing" American sailors. When Madison, pushed by the "War Hawks" in Congress was pressured to take stronger action.

### B. What factors led to a declaration of war?

1. For centuries, the British had manned their fleet by kidnapping British men and forcing them into a naval service. This was known as **impressment**. The British justified their actions by denying the fact that America was an independent nation. They considered us all British subjects.
2. The Chesapeake Incident—In June 1807, the U.S.S. Chesapeake was cruising in international waters just outside the three mile limit off of Virginia. The British Warship Leopard approached and ordered the Chesapeake's captain to permit a search of British deserters. When the captain refused, the Leopard opened fire. Three Americans were killed and 18 wounded. The British allegedly took four deserters.

### C. What conflict arose with the Indians prior to the War of 1812?

1. In the Ohio river valley many displaced Indian tribes led by the Chief Tecumseh formed a large confederation.
2. Tecumseh's goal was to fight for the Indians common homeland. In 1811 Tecumseh went on an eight month journey to rally support. While he was away his brother, disregarding his instructions, attacked troops led by Governor William Henry Harrison.
3. Harrison's troops crushed the Indian Confederation at the Battle of Tippecanoe. Harrison became a national hero. British guns seized at the battle became yet another rallying cry for the War Hawks in their quest for war

against England.

D. What happened during the War of 1812?

1. The Canadian Front

a) Madison called for 50,000 volunteers for a year's service in the regular army. 5,000 signed up. Because of this situation, the first attempts to invade Canada were disastrous.

b) The American fleet on Lake Erie defeated a British fleet. The Americans regained Detroit, and two American armies invaded Canada, winning the battles at the Thames River, York (Toronto), and Fort George.

2. The British Burn Washington D.C.

3. By 1814 British landing parties were burning towns all along the coast. That summer they sent a sizable force up to Chesapeake Bay.

4. In revenge for the American raid on York, the capital of Canada, the British burned the Capitol, the White House, and other public buildings.

5. From Washington, the British moved to Baltimore.

E. How did Andrew Jackson become an American hero during the war?

1. Jackson invaded Spanish territory in western Florida to head off any British attempt to take the port of Pensacola

2. In 1815 he turned westward to help defend New Orleans. He had collected 5400 frontiersmen, sailors, regular troops, and pirates.

3. The Americans were ready, waiting for the redcoats. The British commander ordered a frontal assault. Before he was killed, he watched his soldiers fall down in rows. Jackson instantly became known as the Hero of New Orleans.

4. The Battle of New Orleans provided the Americans with their only really decisive land victory of the entire war. Ironically, the war was already over. On Christmas eve of 1814, the American and British peace negotiations had reached an agreement. The news just had not arrived in time.

F. What were the results of the war?

1. Britain and the United States signed the Treaty of Ghent. In this treaty the British formally recognized the existence of the United States and gave up all claims to most land south of Canada.

1. Most Americans assumed that Spanish Florida would eventually become part of the US, and American settlers began to move in on their own. Unfortunately