



# Bullet'n Backstory

Joint Munitions Command

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## Commemorating the 250th Birthday of the U.S. Army Mr. Madison's War: The War of 1812 (1812-1815)

By early 1812, despite years of escalating tension between the governments of the United States and Great Britain, pro-war sentiment in Britain was in decline. Then on May 11, disgruntled merchant John Bel-  
lingham assassinated pro-war Prime Minister Spencer Perceval. This raised hope in Britain that things could  
deescalate with the United States, especially when Lord Liverpool became Prime Minister on June 8 and  
publicized his intention to open talks and rescind the Orders in Council that the Americans opposed.

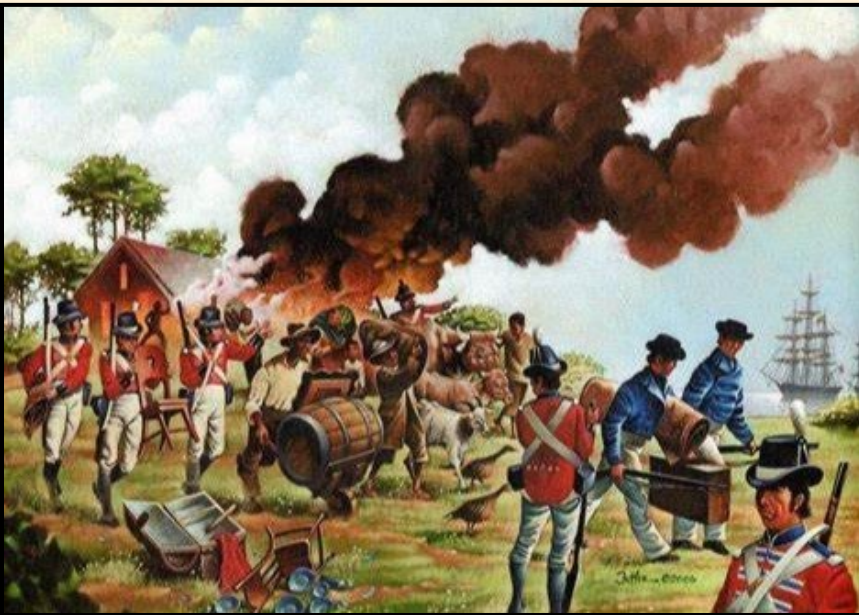
Unfortunately, communication delays caused by Atlantic Ocean travel times would plague the conflict from the start. By the time Lord Liverpool took office, President James Madison had already asked Congress for a Declaration of War in an effort to assert freedom of the seas, establish commercial rights, and defend the nation's honor. Ironically, the United States officially declared war on Great Britain on June 18, the same day Britain repealed the Orders in Council. Fortunately for the British, word of the American war declaration reached Canadian Maj. Gen. Isaac Brock quickly, prompting him to shore up defenses and launch the successful capture of U.S. positions at Fort Mackinac and Fort Detroit.

In 1812, neither side was well positioned to wage war. Britain only had 10,000 soldiers scattered throughout North America, compared to 6,700 active U.S. Army soldiers. Despite this, Madison entered the war believing northern state militias would quickly capture key positions in Canada and force a peace. However, early U.S. efforts in Canada failed, due to lack of discipline and poor organization. Congress would have no choice but to call up 450,000 men during the course of the war, most of whom likewise were neither well trained nor properly supplied. Thanks to the Naval Act of 1794, the United States was in better shape at sea, with 5,000 sailors and marines, 14 new warships and two frigates. These men were divided into two divisions: Northern (New York), under Commodore John Rodgers and Southern (Virginia) under Commodore Stephen Decatur.

By contrast, the British fleet was renowned. Though France demanded most of its attention, the British fleet still effectively blockaded American ports, while winning several critical battles from the Great Lakes and Atlantic Ocean to the Gulf Coast and the Upper Mississippi River. To make up for its lack of ground forces, Britain leaned on alliances, using indigenous tribes along the Canadian border to fight the United States for them. These groups included Tecumseh's Shawnee and the Iroquois. Native involvement significantly contributed to Canada's ability to repel dozens of U.S. invasion attempts. While the Americans would recapture Detroit, U.S. efforts to control the Great Lakes and capture strongholds in Canada met with disaster in 1812 and 1813. At the same time, Native tribes conducted regular raids on settlements throughout Ohio and Indiana. U.S. efforts on the Western frontier fared no better. British soldiers and their Native allies, particularly Sauk-Fox leader Black Hawk, achieved victories at Prairie du Chein and the Rock Island Rapids, defeated Maj. Zachary Taylor at Credit Island and forced the U.S. to abandon its positions at Forts Madison and Johnson on the Mississippi River and Fort Osage on the Missouri River, giving the British control over Illinois and Wisconsin.



U.S. Infantry - War of 1812



British raid on Chesapeake Bay - 1812



British Infantry - War of 1812





Andrew Jackson

U.S. failures early in the conflict led many citizens to voice opposition to what they derisively called “Mr. Madison’s War.” Anti-war sentiment was particularly strong in northern states bordering Canada, where the quest for unity faced consistently bad news. Mid-1814 saw glimmers of hope in the form of decisive American victories, by Maj. Gen. Andrew Jackson at the Battle of Horseshoe Bend in May and by Brig. Gen. Winfield Scott at the Battle of Chippewa in July. Unfortunately, this period of American success was brief. A temporary peace had been established in Europe, freeing Britain to refocus on North America. Consequently, 4,500 British regulars landed in Maryland in August 1814, quickly defeating the

Maryland militia at the Battle of Bladensburg before capturing Washington, D.C. and burning several of its buildings, including the White House. Anti-war sentiment now reached its peak, with New England states threatening secession. Consequently, Madison authorized U.S. diplomats to meet with British officials at Ghent, Belgium, to negotiate a treaty to end the war.

At the same time, American morale received a lift from a few noteworthy victories. At the Battle of Baltimore in September, the Maryland militia and U.S. Navy successfully repelled land and sea attacks on Fort McHenry, inspiring Francis Scott Key to write “The Star-Spangled Banner.” Then came the most decisive American victory in the war. On January 8, 1815, in just 30 minutes, Andrew Jackson crushed a British assault on New Orleans. Despite having a larger force, with better training, experience and equipment, the British suffered more than 2,000 casualties, compared to just 71 on the American side. In retrospect, of course, the battle was pointless. Unknown to the U.S., the conflict had actually ended 15 days earlier with the signing of the Treaty of Ghent. Even so, Jackson would get credit for winning the war, then be elected Governor of Tennessee and, eventually, President.



The Burning of Washington - 1814

JMC Historical Document Collection

The JMC Public and Congressional Affairs Office maintains the JMC Archives, which collects and maintains historically significant records, including: emails, manuscripts, letters, reports, studies, images, videos, films, photographs, oral history interviews, briefings, SOPs, policies, decision papers, memoranda, statistics, newspapers, newsletters, brochures, maps, blue prints, drawings, and artifacts. Such records are pertinent to the Army’s knowledge of active and predecessor installations, the ammunition industrial base, and JMC missions. JMC regularly uses these materials to research command history, and to answer research queries. When JMC workers leave positions or make physical moves, it is vital that their records be assessed before disposal. If employees are uncertain about the historical value of materials, the best policy is to make the items available to Paul Ferguson (paul.t.ferguson14.civ@army.mil).

This Month in Military History

**June 1, 1215:** After a two-year siege, Mongols under Genghis Khan capture the city of Zhongdu (Beijing), a major step to the khan’s complete conquest of Jin Dynasty China.

**June 4, 1940:** Using a flotilla of over 800 boats, Britain completes the week-long evacuation of 338,226 Allied troops from Dunkirk, France, saving them from German capture. Many were repatriated, while some later participated in the D-Day invasion.

**June 7, 1494:** Pope Alexander VI negotiates the Treaty of Tordesillas, which effectively divides the world, both known and unknown, between Spain and Portugal. When explorers complete their map of South America, the only part of the New World on the Portuguese side of the line is Brazil.

**June 10, 1190:** While leading a German army to Jerusalem on the Third Crusade, Holy Roman Emperor Frederick I “Barbarossa” drowns while bathing in the Saleph River in Turkey. Only one third of Frederick’s men continued their crusade.

**June 13, 1777:** Gilbert du Motier, the Marquis de Lafayette, lands in the American colonies. The French officer then joins George Washington’s Continental Army and later leads the Siege of Yorktown in 1781.

**June 16, 1873:** President Ulysses S. Grant gives part of the Wallowa Valley in Oregon to the Nez Perce people. By 1877, the U.S. rescinds the order and forces the Nez Perce to relocate to reservations in Oklahoma.

**June 19, 1819:** Seeing smoke while off the coast of Ireland the HMS *Kite* attempts to overtake and assist an apparently burning ship. Unable to catch it, the *Kite* fires a warning shot. The SS *Savannah* then stops and allows the British crew to visit the first seaworthy American steamboat.

**June 22, 1815:** Following his final defeat at the Battle of Waterloo, French Emperor Napoleon I abdicates for the second time. He will live out the rest of his life in exile on the South Atlantic island of St. Helena.

**June 25, 1266:** During the Second Barons’ War, English King Henry III lays siege to Kenilworth, bastion of the last remaining forces of the late Simon de Montfort (d.1265). The siege continues until December, making it the longest in English history.

**June 28, 1914:** Austro-Hungarian Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife Sophie are assassinated in Sarajevo by Gavrilo Princep, one of several Bosnian-Serb conspirators. In response, German-backed Austria declares war on Russian-backed Serbia, sparking World War I.