

## The Canadian Campaign of the War of 1812

The United States declared war against Great Britain on June 18, 1812 and this war has since been called the War of 1812. Due to the lack of communications in the 1800s, the United States Congress and the President Madison didn't know that Great Britain had agreed to U.S. demands to repeal the Orders in Council just two days before war was declared. This is one war that possibly could have been avoided.

In 1812 Canada was already a British territory and one of the problems that contributed to the War of 1812 was that the boundary between the United States and Canada was not clearly defined. Both British and Americans claimed some of the same territory plus both countries wanted control over the Great Lakes. Great Britain had the best navy in the world and had sailed ships across the Atlantic Ocean, then on the St. Lawrence River to the Great Lakes. American ship builders were located on the Atlantic Coast and the U.S. had only a few large vessels on the Great Lakes.

Great Britain had the best navy in the world while the U.S. had only a small fleet of naval ships, so the U.S. decided not to wage war on the sea. Instead they decided to attack Canada where most of the British troops were located. The American military knew that the British had just 8,000 soldiers to defend about eighteen thousand miles of border between Canada and the United States.

The American government also knew that Great Britain was also at war with France and would not likely send more troops to defend Canada. Another thought the American military had was that the Indians who were fighting with the British would be easy to defeat since they had already beaten an Indian army at the Battle of Tippecanoe in November 1811. The attack on Canada was planned to begin with the British forts in the Great Lakes area.

Yet the American forces had problems of their own that the military leaders didn't realize were there. Entering military service wasn't as formal as process on the frontier as it is today. Men signed up for a year of duty and then went home; there weren't orders to be a certain place like there are now. Life in the military was hard and morale was poor. Without roads and transportation supplies were limited so soldiers suffered many hardships far away from home. Simply put, the United States wasn't developed enough as a country to be able to manufacture sufficient supplies for the troops.

## **The Canadian Campaign of the War of 1812 (Cont'd)**

Another problem that the country faced was a lack of military leadership. When Secretary of War William Eustis decided to attack Canada neither he nor members of Congress nor the military leaders had a plan on what strategy to use. The military leaders were either old officers who served in the Revolutionary War or young men without any battle experience.

William Hull had served in the Revolutionary War and became a general in the War of 1812. He sent a military force to an American fort on Lake Erie, Fort Detroit. Meanwhile General Dearborn's plan was to attack Canada from Lake Champlain and on to the city of Montreal while another group of soldiers would move into Canada from Fort Niagara in what is now New York State.

General Hull's men had a difficult time traveling through the rough terrain on their way to Fort Detroit and many soldiers died from malaria and exposure. When they reached Lake Erie by chance they came across an American vessel which they hired to move the cannon and other heavy equipment to Fort Detroit. General Hull also loaded his trunk containing all the military plans onboard the ship. The British fleet on the Great Lakes captured the vessel shortly thereafter.

When Hull's forces reached Fort Detroit, General Hull could not decide when to attack the British. He then sent six hundred of his men to get more supplies. These men were ambushed by a group of British soldiers and Tecumseh's warriors. The survivors returned to the fort.

A British general, General Brock, used the naval fleet on the Great Lakes to move troops to Fort Detroit. General Brock was in possession of General Hull's trunk. General Brock offered not to attack Fort Detroit if General Hull would surrender and Hull did. Americans from Kentucky and Tennessee formed an army under William Henry Harrison who had fought at the Battle of Tippecanoe. Their goal was to retake Fort Detroit but due to bad weather they couldn't travel the rough terrain. Fort Detroit remained under British control.

The American troops at Fort Niagara and those who were supposed to cross Lake Champlain fared no better. Between American blunders and good leadership by the British generals, both of these campaigns to attack Canada were failures. Thousands of American settlers and soldiers died and the frontier was not safer for settlers. This part of the War of 1812 has been called "the most inglorious chapter in American military history."

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## The Canadian Campaign of the War of 1812 Questions

Circle True or False after analyzing each of the following statements.

1. True False The War of 1812 occurred because Great Britain refused to agree to the U.S. demand to repeal the Orders in Council.
2. True False In 1812 the boundary between Canada and the United States was not well defined.
3. True False In 1812 France and the United States had the best navies in the world.
4. True False At the start of the War of 1812 the United States decided to attack the British troops in Canada.
5. True False At the start of the War of 1812 American military leaders thought it would be easy to defeat Indian warriors because of the victory at the Battle of Tippecanoe.
6. True False Lack of roads and rough terrain were a problem for American soldiers during the War of 1812.
7. True False American military leaders of the time were competent to face the challenges of the War of 1812.
8. True False British General Brock waged a fierce battle in order to conquer Fort Detroit.
9. True False Fort Niagara was located in what today is part of New York State.
10. True False Americans were proud of the U.S. military accomplishments during the early part of the War of 1812.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

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## The Canadian Campaign of the War of 1812 Answers

1. False
2. True
3. False
4. True
5. True
6. True
7. False
8. False
9. True
10. False