

“Times that try men’s souls:” How the
U.S. Army Stumbled into the War of
1812

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Main idea

- The United States Army was very small after the American Revolution.
- The nation still struggled after gaining independence.
- Many Native American tribes lived on both sides of the American-Canadian border
- On top of the British impressment of American sailors, Britain also aided the natives.
- Fighting the Indians was a big part of what led to the declaration of war in 1812
- The British arming of Native Americans is the main reason how the United States Army stumbled into the War of 1812.



After the war

- After the Revolution, the army was small and spread out along the frontier.
- The British still occupied forts along the western frontier.
- With the United States looking to expand, Indian tribes grew restless over the settler and sought aid from the British.



Figure 1. View of Fort Pierre, Dakota Territory, 1855, a watercolor by Frederick Behman of the Chouteau Fur Trading Company, was given to the War Department. Records of the Office of the Quartermaster General, RG 92.



Managing the army

- Army were debated heavily between the Federalists and Jeffersonian Republicans.
- Federalists wanted a strong professional army.
- Jeffersonian Republicans wanted to use the militia for defense
- In the early years of the republic, most of the army's actions was fighting against the Indians.



Figure 2. "Lexington Common," by Don Troiani. *Massachusetts Historical Society*.



St. Clair's Defeat

- The Indians formed a confederacy in the Northwest territory.
- After a failed attempt in early 1791, another attempt was led by General Arthur St. Clair to suppress the uprising.
- Discipline and disorganization was a major plague for St. Clair's forces. Started with 2,000 men, had around 1,000 by November.
- On November 4th, Indians attacked the Americans and slaughtered them.
- Worst American defeat by an Indian force.

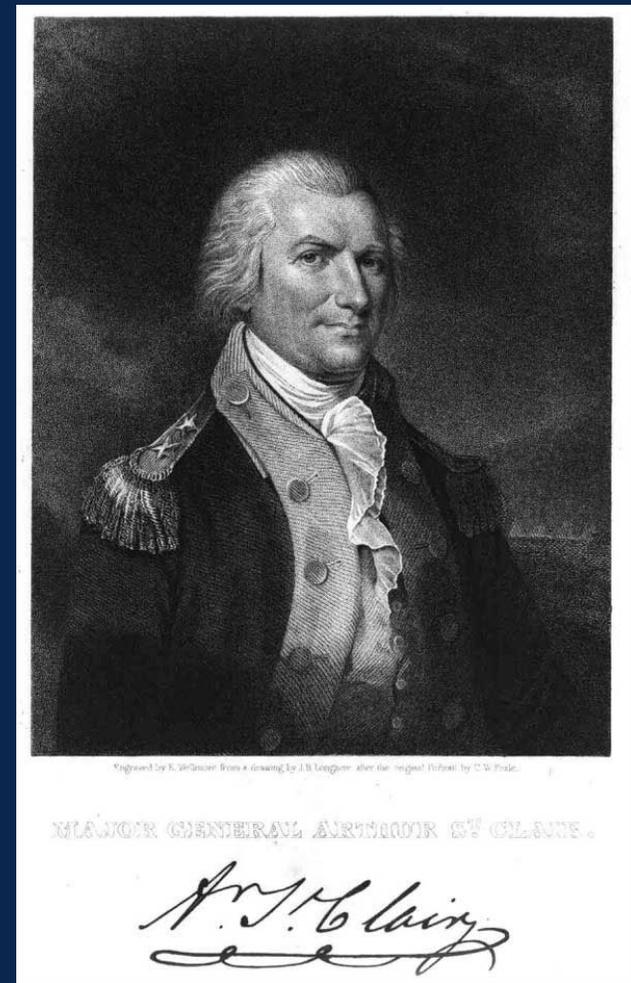


Figure 3. Major General Arthur St. Clair (1736-1818). Edward Wellmore (fl. 1834-1867). Engraving, undated. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division. Reproduction Number: LC-USZ62-16735.



Battle of Fallen Timbers

- Secretary of War Henry Knox quickly ordered a new campaign to subdue the natives.
- General Anthony Wayne, organized a small force and sent out from Fort Knox in 1794 and fought at Fallen Timbers.
- After some maneuvering, the Indian forces were quickly surrounded.
- Many of the surviving Indians fled the battlefield.
- Treaty of Greenville was which ceded land to the U.S. and forced Britain to abandon the forts in the Ohio Territory.



Figure 4. *Charge of the Dragoons at Fallen Timbers* by R. T. Zogbaum, 1895, Library of Congress.



Battle of Tippecanoe

- The frontier remained relatively quiet from any major campaigns.
- Chief Tecumseh formed a confederacy of his own in the Northwest.
- In 1811, William Henry Harrison led a campaign into Indiana.
- On November 7th, American and Indian forces clashed at Tippecanoe Creek. Resulted in an American victory.
- Upon arrival to Prophetstown, the troops discovered gun and ammunition crates bearing the royal stamp of the British crown.
- In retaliation, the Americans burned the village.



Figure 5. *Battle of Tippecanoe*. Photograph. Washington DC., 1890. Washington DC. .



Legacy

- After Tippecanoe, the Americans were furious of British encroachment into American territory.
- Along with the issue of impressment, the American public demanded a declaration of war against Britain.
- Congress declared war in June 1812.
- The army struggled in the first year, but quickly reformed itself.
- After 2.5 years, the Treaty of Ghent ended the war in the *status quo antebellum* .

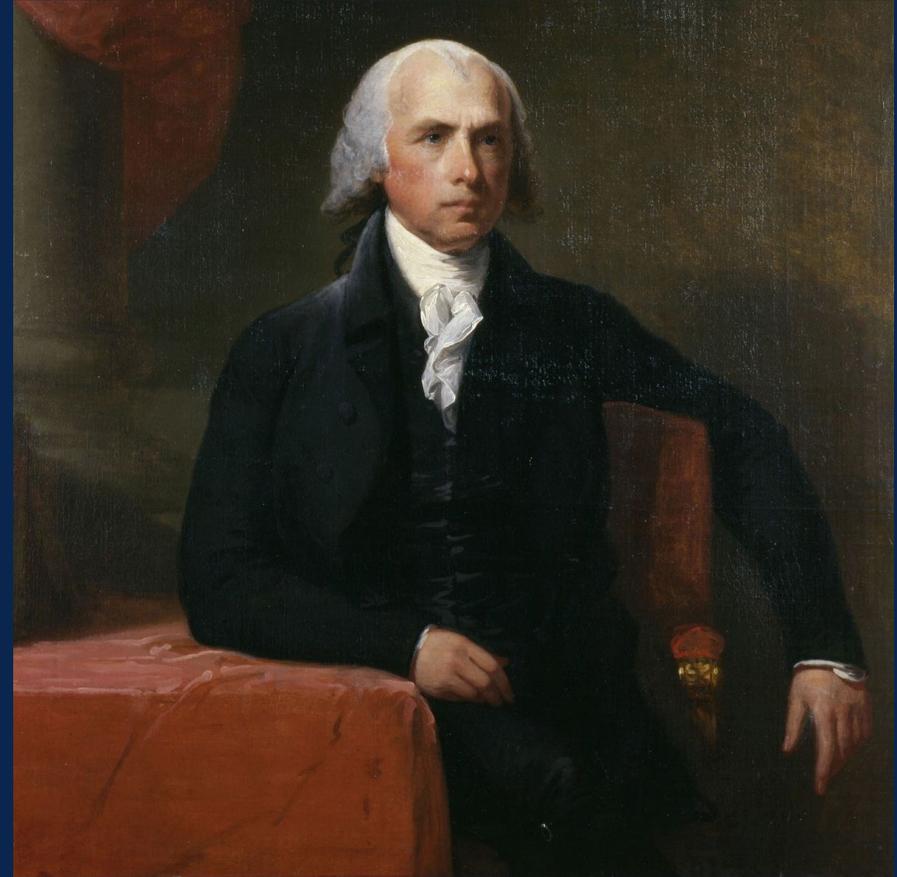


Figure 6. President Madison, Portrait, *Biography*.
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