

## COMMITTEE REPORT : WAR OF 1812

You are a member of a committee of the House of Representatives which has been asked to review a series of reports and letters. Some of these reports deal with possible causes for war, while other reports explain the point of view of those who oppose the war.

A number of Congressmen (War Hawks) are demanding a declaration of war against Great Britain. Other Congressmen are opposed to an action that would lead to war. Read each report carefully and consider the pros and cons of each report. You are to decide what Congress should do.

### DIRECTIONS:

1. Your group should select a chairperson, who will report to the class your committee decision, and a secretary who will record your decision.
2. When you have decided what course of action the United States should follow, the secretary should write your recommendation on the Committee Report form.
3. Each committee member should sign the recommendation. Those who oppose the recommendation should sign the form and write opposed after their name.

TO: House Foreign Affairs Committee

FROM: Charles Fitzgerald  
3rd Congressional District  
Boston, Mass.

Gentlemen:

Since you are considering the present state of our foreign affairs and our relationship with the British Empire, please consider the following letter. This letter was written by Nicholas Smyth of Boston to the Editor of a New York City newspaper. Mr. Smyth is replying to an editorial that urged America to declare war against the British.

Sirs:

We of New England have already suffered grievously from this affair. The recent Embargo Act of 1808 cut our income by fifty per cent over an eighteen months period. If you and other Republicans have your way, we will be forced to lock up our commerce, close our ports, and abandon the seas.

Now you demand a declaration of war against the British Empire. You claim they have insulted our national honor, and that they do not treat us as an equal. We are not their equal. The United States has 16 ships-of-the-line and the British have over one thousand. We have a standing army of twenty-five hundred men and they have over one hundred thousand men under arms.

You claim the United States has a right to use the oceans of the world. That "freedom of the seas" is the right of every nation, and that we ought to go to war to defend that right. Eight-tenths of the seamen and ocean shipping of this country comes from New England. Yet it is not us who cry out for war; it is the Western and Southern "War Hawk," who would sacrifice New England's prosperity and substance for their own wild dreams.

We hear from the halls of Congress the cry "On to Canada!" It is the fur dealer and the land speculator who want war, but it is we of New England who will pay the price. If war comes, it is our seaports that will be blockaded; it is our cities that will be destroyed. The War Hawks of Tennessee and Kentucky are safe. I doubt if the English navy can reach them. It is the Republican Party and its chief-of-state, Mr. Madison, who would risk disaster.

Must we give up our neutrality to protect our neutrality? How will the conquest of Canada and the defeat of the Indians in the West solve our problems at sea? How will war upon the land protect our commerce on the sea?

If our honor demands a war with Great Britain, what lulls that honor to sleep over the wrongs done us by France? Think, Sir, before it is too late. You court disaster.

## SPECIAL REPORT: IMPRESSMENT

TO: House Foreign Affairs Committee

FROM: Secretary of the Navy

Honorable Congressmen:

In answer to your request for an explanation of the British policy of impressment and the extent of its use, I respectfully submit the following report:

In the recent battle of Trafalgar, the British fleet practically destroyed what was left of the French fleet. At the same time they suffered heavy losses of men and ships. The British navy for the past three years has been suffering greatly from a shortage of trained seamen.

The British navy - with its beatings and flogging, its low pay, and its dirty and dangerous conditions on ship board - is a "floating hell" for most sailors. Desertion rates among impressed English sailors is at an all-time high. To check this loss of vital manpower, the British claim the right to stop and search American merchant ships for deserters. They do not claim the right to native-born Americans, but they do seize naturalized Americans born on British soil. For, according to the laws of England, a true born subject cannot give up his allegiance to the King. "Once an Englishman, always an Englishman."

In actual practice the British often impress native as well as naturalized Americans. Six thousand sailors claiming the protection of our flag have thus been kidnapped. To these helpless men impressment is little better than slavery. The only way to rescue an American thus carried off is to prove to the British navy that he is an American and then an order for his release will be issued. This process has proved to be painfully slow. It usually takes three years.

British warships have continually violated the American flag on every sea. They have carried off thousands of persons sailing under the protection of our flag. Now they hover off our coast and harass our entering and departing commerce. Recently, they have attacked an American warship in our territorial waters, and killed and wounded members of the crew.

Gentlemen, how long must we be plundered before we are allowed to stand and fight? We are rapidly reaching a point of no return. We must either submit to England, nay surrender, or we must fight.

Stephen Decatur, Commander  
United States Ship Constitution

SPECIAL REPORT: ATTACK UPON THE UNITED STATES SHIP *CHESAPEAKE*

TO: House Foreign Affairs Committee

FROM: Commodore Barron  
Commander of *U. S. S. Chesapeake*

Honorable Congressmen:

In response to your inquiry into the unprovoked attack by the British ship *Leopard* on my ship the *Chesapeake*, I submit the following report:

In June of this year, under order of the Secretary of the Navy, I set sail for the Mediterranean Sea. My ship, the *Chesapeake*, a 24 gun ship-of-the-line, departed at the turn of the tide June 14, at 0900 hours. Eight miles at sea, off the coast of Norfolk, Virginia, we were hailed by the British Man-of-war *Leopard*. The commander of the *Leopard* demanded that he be allowed to search our ship for British deserters. I replied that the *Chesapeake* was an American naval vessel and not a merchant ship. I could not submit to a search. Within five minutes of my refusal and at 150 yards range they fired their first broadside. It came without warning. For the next fifteen minutes we were raked repeatedly by canister and grape shot. We had not cleared our decks for action, nor were we prepared to fight. Since we were in our own territorial waters and not at war, we were completely surprised.

I regret to inform you that we were forced to strike our colors and to surrender. We were boarded by an English officer and crew, who forced every man to present himself. Each of us faced the possibility of being pressed into the English navy. Four of my men were selected and seized as English deserters. They were all citizens of the United States. I understand that since their seizure, one of the captives was hung.

During the English attack we suffered the loss of three lives and 18 wounded. Our ship was seriously damaged by solid shot fired at the water line. The upper decks were almost completely destroyed. Repairs should take another three months.

With all due respect to this committee, we cannot allow attacks of this type to go unpunished. The integrity of our flag, our people and our country are at stake. Honorable Sirs, must we submit to having our territorial boundaries violated? Must we submit to attacks on our citizens? Must we allow these crimes to go unpunished? I urge each one of you to consider the consequences of allowing these attacks to continue unanswered by our government.

Commodore Barron  
*U.S.S. Chesapeake*

TO: United States Congress

FROM: George Cranfield, Earl of Berkely  
Admiral Commanding the North American Station  
His Britannic Majesty's Navy

Gentlemen:

You demand redress for the attack of His Majesty's Ship *Leopard* on the *U.S.S. Chesapeake*. It is my intent to explain the present crisis.

As you know we have been at war with France for the past twelve years. The great powers of Europe have been conquered by Napoleon's armies, only our England remains free. We are now engaged in a life and death struggle with that nation. The lives of all free peoples throughout the world hang in the balance.

You question our right to violate your neutrality. You claim to favor no side, yet your acts betray you. In 1803 you purchased the Spanish territory of Louisiana from France. Napoleon had no right to sell Spanish territory, yet you paid \$15,000,000 for that land. You were aware that your money would help him destroy England.

You presently sell \$20,000,000 worth of war materials to France and her allies each year. Yes, you profit by selling to both sides. You are currently demanding that England revoke the Orders in Council and your Western farmers threaten to invade Canada. Gentlemen, I ask you, are these the acts of neutrals?

To answer your question on impressment, the British position rests on the prerogative of sovereignty to pursue fugitive nationals anywhere not barred by sovereignty of other nations. Under international law we have the right to apprehend deserters on the high seas. We have consistently followed this policy.

Recently, the entire crew of His Majesty's Ship *Halifax* deserted and escaped to Norfolk, Virginia. We contacted Captain Decatur, your naval commander in the area, and asked for the return of these criminals. Your authorities refused to return this crew; in fact, they allowed four men to enlist in your navy. They signed aboard the *U.S.S. Chesapeake*. Since your government did not see fit to return these deserters, we had no other choice but to retake them by force.

His Majesty does not want war, but you seem to be intent on driving us to it. You trade with our enemies, you provide a haven for our deserters, you threaten to invade Canada, and you discuss a declaration of war in your Congress. For the sake of all English speaking people, let us hope cooler heads prevail in your Congress.

George Cranfield  
His Britannic Majesty's Navy

## SPECIAL REPORT: INDIAN CONSPIRACY IN THE OHIO RIVER VALLEY

TO: House Foreign Affairs Committee

FROM: General William Henry Harrison  
Governor of the Northwest Territory

Honorable Sirs:

As governor of the Northwest Territory for the past ten years, I have long sought justice for the Indian. I had hoped, in the beginning, that our settlers and the red men could live in peace as God's children should. This is no longer possible. A time of crisis is upon us.

I have long suspected an English-Indian conspiracy whose ultimate aim was to drive our people out of the Ohio Valley. I now have proof of that conspiracy. The Indians are now being united by a remarkable savage leader, Tecumseh. He is chief of the Shawnees, the most numerous tribe north of the Ohio. He hopes to unite all the tribes north and south into a great federation of tribes. He is presently trying to convince the Choctaws and Chickasaws of southern Mississippi to join his cause.

My agents report he is abundantly supplied with gifts and money. His source of bribes are British agents in Canada. If he succeeds, we will be faced with an army of twenty thousand braves.

As you know from an earlier report, we fought a part of that army at Tippecanoe Creek. We were attacked by at least five thousand savages. Although caught by surprise in a vicious dawn attack, we inflicted heavy casualties among them. By the day's end we had decisively defeated them. An inventory of Indian equipment was taken from their dead and wounded on the field. We found over five hundred new English trade muskets and over a ton of the finest grade of English powder.

We were able to question some twenty captives after the battle. They talked of men in red coats (British soldiers) at a great fort north of the Father of Waters (Great Lakes), and how these men supplied them. They also speak of the chief of the red coats who pays for American scalps. One captive had over two hundred dollars in English gold coins on his person. When questioned, before his death, he told of obtaining the money by selling scalps of a family of white settlers.

Several facts have become abundantly clear in my investigations:

1. The Indians of this area are armed with guns received from British fur traders.
2. Tecumseh is an agent hired and financed by the British government.
3. Indian uprisings are encouraged from Fort Detroit, in British Canada.
4. Indians are paid handsomely for the scalps of white settlers.

Gentlemen to be blunt: We must have a preventative war against Tecumseh's followers. To successfully defeat him we must drive the English from Canada. We must act quickly, for the survival of the West hangs in the balance.

## SPECIAL REPORT: INDIAN POPULATION OF THE OHIO RIVER VALLEY

TO: House Foreign Affairs Committee

FROM: Winthrop Wainwright  
Director of Bureau of the Census  
Washington, D.C.

Honorable Congressmen:

To answer your question: "Does the Indian population threaten the existence of the white civilization in the Ohio Valley?" Please be advised of the following facts:

The Indians of the Ohio Valley as of the census of 1810 were distributed over not quite six million acres and were found to number 3,036. This total includes both sexes and all ages. They are divided into six principal tribes. The largest tribe, the Shawnee, numbered, in all, 840 people. The Wyandots, next in size, total 695 in all.

On the other hand, concentrated in the southern part of Ohio are 230,760 whites, of whom 64,556 are males over the age of 21. In Kentucky, the population of whites is similar. From the point of numbers, it is difficult to see how the Indian danger could ever be considered in a serious light.

Should not the question be: "Are the Indians a threat to small isolated settlements?" In this case, the answer would be "yes." In the year 1810, there were 23 reported deaths in Ohio attributed to Indian raids. In the same year there were over 1000 buildings destroyed by Indian attack.

Much of the Indian problem can be attributed to the attitudes of the pioneer. He regards the Indian as an inferior creature no better than a beast of the thicket. He refuses to extend to him the rights of English Common Law, nor will he allow the Indian to obtain citizenship or buy land. In many parts of the Northwest, Indians are hunted down and cruelly slain. In my opinion, the Indian is more sinned against than sinning.

Winthrop Wainwright  
Director, Bureau of the Census

## SPECIAL REPORT: WESTERN LAND HUNGER

TO: House Foreign Affairs Committee

FROM: Louis M. Hacker  
Congressman, 2nd District of Rhode Island

Honorable Congressmen:

The West is seeking war so that the United States might acquire rich Canadian lands. The West intends to use the threat of English control of Canada as a excuse to seize the great reserves of agricultural land in Canada.

The Western frontiersman is rapidly exhausting the soil of the Ohio River Valley. Corn and cotton is planted in great quantities year after year in the same soil. By the end of the third year the soil is worn out. The pioneer farmer does not use manure, nor does he care for his land. He ignorance, his inadequate methods of cultivation, and his limited means of transportation necessitate his frequent westward movement. Indeed, he can only succeed in virgin soil. There are now 250,000 farmers in southern Ohio and Indiana. The great tracts of land in this area are rapidly being used up.

The men of the Ohio River Valley have begun to look to Canada for farm land. The St. Lawrence River basin is rich bottom land still untouched by the plow. The Westerner feels his prosperity is linked with this new farm land. He feels the best source is Canada.

The question may be asked: What of those great prairie tracts that for millions of acres, sweep unbroken across the center of the continent from Ohio to the Rocky Mountains? The explanation lies in the fact that the prairies do not tempt these farmers. They believe these lands possess no timber for building, insufficient water, and poor soil. They also feel transportation of their crops would be impossible from these distant lands.

If the Western War Hawk has his way, the President will be bullied into a declaration of war. The West intends to have war whether this nation wants it or not. War with England is the order of the day, and Canada is the prize.

Louis M. Hacker  
United States House of Representatives