

War of 1812



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Rating: Not Rated Yet

Price

Price £44.95

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Manufacturer [COLUMBIA GAMES](#)

Description

War of 1812 is an elegant strategy wargame depicting the Anglo-American struggle to control the Great Lakes and Canada.

War of 1812 sets up in five minutes and plays in 1-2 hours. This classic game has been enjoyed by thousands of gamers for over 30 years.

Unit types in this edition include artillery, cavalry, infantry, and navies. The map board is unchanged from previous editions.

History of the War of 1812:

On Christmas Eve 1814, American and British diplomats signed the Treaty of Ghent. This brought an end to a thirty-month struggle known as the War of 1812, the result of which has been disputed ever since.

The British, fighting against Napoleon at the time, tend to forget the war ever occurred. When they do remember, they see it as a minor colonial affair they won handily. The Americans did win a small naval engagement or two, but the Royal Navy still dominated and easily imposed a naval blockade that brought chaos to a prosperous economy.

The Americans, on the other hand, regard the war as a successful defense of their Revolution, but since their primary objective, in a war they declared, was to invade and annex the British territory now called Canada, to see the war as a defense of anything is very interesting. It should also be noted that the famous American victory, The Battle of New Orleans, actually took place two weeks after the war ended.

The United States declared war on Britain on June 18th 1812. The main grounds for the declaration were stated to be a violation of American neutrality caused by British interference with their commerce and shipping. This was the result of a British decree intended to prevent neutral countries from trading with France in the Napoleonic Wars. A secondary excuse was British impressment of a few dozen American seaman to serve in the Royal Navy - a result of over-zealous attempts by the undermanned British navy to recapture deserters who had enlisted on

American ships.

Nationalist and expansionist politicians from the southern and western states argued for war not in defense of maritime rights, but because the British supported the Indian resistance to American expansion. This and other long standing territorial disputes dating back to the Revolution are unquestionably the real motives for war. Unlike the pro-war West and South, New England (which had most to lose by British naval policy) was anti-war and voted against it.

Neither side was prepared for the ensuing struggle. On paper, the U.S. army had a strength of 36,700 regulars, but less than 12,000 had been raised and more than half of these were raw recruits. Although the American militia had an impressive theoretical strength of 400,000 men, rarely were 10,000 available at any one time, and these were always untrained and undisciplined.

The British were equally unprepared. Committed to the struggle against Napoleon, they had less than 4,000 regulars in Canada in 1812. However, man for man, these troops were far superior to anything their opponent could put in the field at the time. This strength was augmented by about 2000 Canadian regulars and the same number of militia who had a minimum of 90 days training. Although there was a potential militia strength of 60,000, the few thousand raised saw very little action.

The obvious battleground for the war was British North America, a vast and sparsely settled land now called Canada. At the time this territory was divided into three administrative areas: Upper Canada (now Ontario); Lower Canada (now Quebec); and the Atlantic Colonies. The latter area was relatively safe from attack because of British sea-power and the antipathy of the New England States to the war. Hence Sir George Prevost, Governor and Military Commander, only had to worry about Upper and Lower Canada, where he committed his forces to a strategy of defense. Two thirds of his army was deployed in Montreal and Quebec. The remaining one third (about 3000 men) had the task of defending the vulnerable frontiers of Upper Canada.

The American war-aim was to annex British North America. American strategists decided on an invasion of Upper Canada. It was widely believed that numerous American settlers in the area would welcome U.S. troops as liberators. The pro-war west also saw greater opportunity for expansion here than in the more densely populated, mainly French-speaking Lower Canada.

Struggle for the Lakes:

Throughout the War of 1812 poor land communications meant that the prerequisite to a successful campaign was control of the Lakes. This was clearly demonstrated on Lake Erie where British control in 1812 gave them mastery of the West and American control in 1813 reversed this situation.

To this end, naval commanders on both sides evolved similar strategies; to out-build opponents, seek battles when stronger, and avoid them when not. On Lake Ontario in particular this translated into a classic arms race which escalated until the British launched at Kingston in 1814, HMS St. Lawrence, a three deck 112 gun ship-of-the-line bigger than Nelson's flagship at Trafalgar.

In any event, the fleet that was temporarily inferior generally remained in port. Both naval commanders were unwilling to gamble because a severe loss would be catastrophic; wood was plentiful, but guns and seamen were not. The crucial American naval victories on Lake Erie in 1813 and on Lake Champlain in 1814 occurred mainly because British naval officers were hounded into action by army officers who outranked them.

Campaign of 1812:

American strategy for 1812 called for attacks in three areas: Lake Champlain (a feint); the Niagara frontier; and the Detroit frontier. On July 12th an American force of 2000 men led by the aging general William Hull crossed the Detroit River and occupied Amherstburg. General Isaac Brock, the military commander of Upper Canada, reacted quickly to the invasion by reinforcing the west from Fort George. Hull, plagued by supply problems, chose to avoid battle by retreating back to Detroit. Brock then took the initiative by surrounding Detroit and managed to bluff Hull into surrender on August 18th. It was an important victory for the British. The western Indians, who had numerous grievances against American expansionism, now gave their support to the British cause.

The conflict then focused on the Niagara frontier. General Brock, flushed with his success at Detroit, prepared to mount an offensive across the Niagara River before the Americans could build up strength in the area. To his disgust he found that Prevost, not anticipating the British success at Detroit and seeking to buy time, had negotiated a truce with the Americans which lasted two months. Brock could only watch the Americans build up strength on the opposite bank of the river and prepare for their inevitable invasion.

The attack came on October 13th. About one half of an American force of 6000 crossed the river at Queenston (near Fort George). Brock quickly brought reinforcements to the scene and a fierce battle developed. Brock was killed early in the battle and the demoralized British defenders were hard pressed to hold their position. At the critical moment, British reinforcements arrived while the American militia, the remaining half of the American army, refused to cross the river, claiming they were only required to fight on American soil. This refusal to move resulted in a total defeat for the Americans.

Later that month, the Americans launched their third campaign when General Dearborn led a force of 6000 regulars and militia from Plattsburg against Montreal. The advance proved to be a fiasco. Again the American militia refused to invade Canada and Dearborn had no choice but to retire to winter quarters without a shot being fired. This ended American activity for 1812. They had failed due to poor generalship, unreliable militia, and poor planning: it is generally conceded that a concentrated attack in one area rather than on three fronts would have been a better American strategy.

Campaign of 1813:

Both sides received reinforcements in the spring of 1813. British strength increased to about 12,000, American strength to 19,000, although many of these were new recruits.

Brooding over their failure of 1812, the Americans planned a more ambitious campaign for this year. General Harrison (a future president) fought a British advance from Detroit to a standstill at Sandusky. In September, a naval squadron commanded by Captain Oliver Perry won a decisive battle over the British Lake Erie squadron.

Proctor, the British general in the west, cut off from lake-borne supplies, decided to retreat. Harrison was then able to recapture Detroit and overtook the retreating British at Moraviantown (near London). The resulting battle was a decisive victory for the Americans. Tecumseh, the brilliant Indian leader, was killed in the battle and the discouraged Indians deserted the British cause. Harrison did not follow up his victory but returned to Detroit with the west completely under his control.

The second American objective - to capture York (now Toronto), Kingston, and the Niagara Peninsula was less successful. During a temporary naval supremacy on Lake Ontario a force of 1800 Americans attacked York in April. The outnumbered British garrison promptly retreated to Kingston after a brief resistance. Before departing the Americans burnt part of the town including the Parliament Buildings of Upper Canada. Kingston was not attacked, however, because the Americans believed it to be too strongly guarded.

On the Niagara front the Americans moved on Fort George which they occupied after the British retreated to Dundas. This effort was soon wasted when the same American force advancing towards Dundas was surprised by a night attack. Two American generals were captured and their army retreated in confusion back to Fort George. The Americans then withdrew to Sacket's Harbor to take part in an assault on Montreal. The British quickly recaptured Fort George, attacked and captured Fort Niagara, and laid waste to Buffalo in retaliation for the destruction of York.

Meanwhile the third American objective, Montreal, was to be attacked by an ambitious plan. One force of 6000 men led by General Hampton (an alcoholic) was to advance down the Chateauguay River from Malone. Another force of 8000 men led by General Wilkinson, whose greatest claim to fame was that he never won a battle but never lost a court martial, was to simultaneously advance down the St. Lawrence River from Sacket's Harbor. As was now becoming customary, most of the militia under Hampton's command refused to cross into Canada. Undaunted, Hampton pressed on and blundered into a British force halfway down the Chateauguay River. After a brief skirmish the Americans retreated back across the border.

Wilkinson met a similar fate. His army crossed the St. Lawrence River at Prescott and advanced along the north bank towards Montreal. He was pursued by a British force from Kingston. They overtook the American rear guard and defeated it at the Battle of Chrysler's Farm. Wilkinson now had a British army in his front, another in his rear, and had little choice but to retreat back across the border. With the exception of the west, American strategy had again been foiled and, as it turned out, they had also lost the opportunity to win the war.

Campaign of 1814:

The balance of power now shifted to the British. With the Napoleonic Wars in Europe winding down, thousands of British troops and dozens of ships became available for service in North America. Nearly 16,000 Peninsula veterans disembarked at Quebec, bringing total British strength to about 25,000. The problem for the United States was no longer the conquest of Canada, but the defense of its own territory. Fortunately, capable American officers had replaced the incompetents of 1812 and 1813.

The campaign opened with a successful British amphibious attack on Oswego. The Americans quickly retaliated on the Niagara Peninsula when a force of 5,000 men captured Fort Erie and defeated a nearby British force at Chippewa. The retreating British were reinforced, however, and in the bloodiest battle of the war at Lundy's Lane near Niagara Falls, fought the invaders to a standstill. The Americans retreated back to Fort Erie, which they then destroyed and withdrew to Buffalo.

All that remained to be settled now was the British threat from Montreal. In early September Sir George Prevost led 11,000 British regulars into American territory. At Plattsburg he waited idly for a supporting naval squadron to secure his flank. Instead, the British squadron was annihilated by an American fleet and with his communications exposed, Prevost timidly retired back to Montreal.

Treaty and Peace:

Throughout 1814, British and American diplomats met in Gent, Belgium, to work out a peace. Both sides demanded territorial concessions. The American economy by this time was in danger of total collapse. Faced with rumblings of New England secession, American diplomats came close to accepting British demands. However, news of the American victory at Plattsburg undermined the British position. The Americans pressed for a return to the pre-war situation to which the war-weary British agreed.

And so this dirty little war ended with nothing settled, nothing changed. Maritime rights were not even mentioned in the treaty. But the indirect results of the war were significant, far more significant than many people realize.

Had the pre-war influx of American settlers into Upper Canada continued for a few more years, it is likely that this territory, and all of western Canada, would have drifted into political union with the United States, and French speaking culture in Quebec would have vanished as it did in Louisiana. But as a result of the war, hostility towards the United States prevailed in the north for many years, and reinforced the British connection. This attitude was buried in time, but not before it gave birth to an independent Canada.

Pragmatically, the Americans celebrated a victory at New Orleans and came to see the war as a successful defense of their Revolution. This fostered the isolationism of American foreign policy for the next century, during which the United States grew into a world power.

The 'Atlantic War':

During 1814 the increased availability of British troops and the dominance of the British navy produced two amphibious operations of note that were designed primarily to ease pressure on the Canadian frontier. The first of these, in August, saw a force of 4000 British regulars sail into Chesapeake Bay and attack Washington. 5000 militia turned out to meet the invasion, but at the Battle of Bladensburg most of them fled in panic after the first British volley, hotly pursued by the redcoats in the Bladensburg Races. Washington was then occupied and several public buildings set on fire. The White House owes its name to this event when its fire scarred walls were later covered up with a coat of white paint.

The British thrust soon faltered. A naval attack on Baltimore was canceled after it became apparent its defenses were too strong. The British then timidly withdrew to Jamaica. Inspired by this repulse, Francis Scott Key, a young Baltimore lawyer, wrote the words of what later became the U.S. National Anthem - The Star Spangled Banner.

Later in 1814, a major assault by 7000 regulars was launched by the British against New Orleans. Led by General Pakenham (brother-in-law of Wellington), a prompt assault on the city might have succeeded, but this was not done. The Americans, led by a future president, Andrew Jackson, were given time to prepare a strong defensive position. On January 8th, 1815, Jackson inflicted a crushing defeat on the advancing British which cost Pakenham his life and forced the British to retreat down the Mississippi to the Gulf of Mexico. Ironically, the treaty ending the war had been signed in Europe two weeks before the battle, but news of the peace had not yet reached the two armies.

Wargame Strategy:

When playing 1812, it is generally better to concentrate forces. This allows a player to attack or defend in strength. But some division of forces is necessary to control key towns such as naval bases, wintering and reinforcement towns, etc. Beware of wintering attrition, especially in enemy territory.

The burden of attack generally falls on the American player in 1812. It is best for him to concentrate his efforts on one or two of the four major fronts: Detroit, Niagara, Kingston, and Champlain. Trying to mount an attack on three or four fronts simultaneously is usually futile. During 1813, the American must make decisive gains because of the large number of reinforcements the British receive for 1814.

The British player is usually forced to remain on the defensive, at least until mid-1813. However, some limited offense to force the American to respond, such as an aggressive western campaign with the assistance of the Indians may buy valuable time. Protection of Montreal and Quebec is crucial since they are worth 9 VPs. Control of the lakes is often decisive.

CONTENTS:

50 wooden blocks (20mm)
Labels
Mapboard (11 x 34 inches)
Rules 3.0
4 Dice