



The most famous battle of the War of 1812, General Andrew Jackson's decisive victory over the British at New Orleans, had nothing to do with the actual end of the war. Peace had already been solidified by the Treaty of Ghent signed on Christmas Eve of 1814, a full two weeks before the battle occurred. Contrary to popular belief, the Battle of New Orleans was not the crushing blow that forced Great Britain to throw in the towel. The real significance of the battle was revealed several years later. Because the overwhelming victory instantly transformed Jackson into a national war hero, it essentially served as his campaign for the presidency (his 1824 bid for the White House fell short, but in 1828 "Old Hickory" became America's seventh President). In the fall of 1814, some 10,000 Redcoats headed toward New Orleans. Once there, the British forces prodded through a maze of swamps and bayous, initially undetected by Jackson. On January 8, the British launched an all-out frontal assault against Jackson's significantly smaller force of 4,500. [When the fighting stopped, the British had suffered 2,100 casualties \(another 500 soldiers were taken prisoner\); Jackson's losses were miniscule—eight dead and 13 wounded for a mere total of 21 casualties \(even fewer according to some sources\).](#) And, had some of the Americans not been so overzealous (they vaulted over the parapet and chased the retreating enemy forces), the American casualty numbers would have been even less! The Battle of New Orleans was made famous by singer Johnny Horton's song of the same title, which reached #1 on the Billboard Hot 100 in 1959. The words of the catchy tune are those of Jimmy Driftwood, a school principal in Arkansas, who sought a unique way to boost his students' interest in learning history.