

Lesson Forty-Four

Oliver Hazard Perry

LESSON IDEA

To further emphasize the importance of bold, decisive, and courageous military leadership by dramatizing Oliver Hazard Perry's victory on Lake Erie, one of the turning points in the War of 1812.

PREPARATION

Copy the map on page three for each family member. Read the "During The Week" section, then locate resource materials for the suggested family project. Assure that family members are familiar with the terms "flagship" and "masthead."

"WE MUST DEFEAT the British fleet on Lake Erie!" This was the objective that dominated Oliver Hazard

Perry's thoughts during his journey by horse-drawn sleigh across the frozen ground of upstate New York to the command base of the American naval forces on the Great Lakes. Perry, a lieutenant in the U.S. Navy, had been assigned to the Canadian frontier with orders to destroy British naval power on Lake Erie. But before he could command an American fleet, he first had to build, equip, and man it.

To Perry, the enormous task was an exciting challenge; one for which he was well prepared. He had served the fledgling American Navy for years in virtually every capacity, both afloat and ashore. His father, Christopher Raymond Perry, had sailed against the British in the Revolutionary War. Shortly thereafter he had taken Oliver, then 13, to sea as a midshipman. Four years later the young seaman was promoted to lieutenant. Now 27, he was impatient for front-line action. His appointment to the Lake Erie command in 1813 was all he could have wanted: a

chance for direct and decisive action against an enemy that meant to destroy his country's independence and nationhood.

Do you remember what led the U.S. to declare war on Great Britain in 1812? [Review the reasons listed in last week's lesson: the total disregard of America's neutrality in the war between England and France; the British blockade of the U.S. coastline; and the confiscation of cargoes, impressment of sailors, and imprisonment of sea captains.]

Do you recall whether Britain or America was winning along the Canadian frontier? [Remind family members that in the opening year of the war, three strategic American forts were surrendered to the British almost without a fight

because of weak, vacillating military leadership. The map on page three, showing the border states and the Great Lakes, will help family members visualize the British and American positions described in the remainder of this lesson.]

The ease with which the British captured forts at Detroit, Michillimackinac, and Dearborn (now Chicago, Illinois) whetted the appetites of English military and political leaders for conquest. There were shouts of approval in the House of

Commons when a British major suggested pushing the American boundary 100 miles south of the Great Lakes and sealing off the new nation on the west with a string of British forts. The proposals were more than political posturing. English commanders, capitalizing on the fear, suspicion, and hatred between Indians and Americans, had formed an alliance with Tecumseh, the powerful chief of the northern tribes. Tecumseh's ambition was to drive the white men east and keep them



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