



The Oddest Wars Ever Recorded

Weird History Handout Series – Vol. 2

Wars are often associated with long campaigns, immense suffering, and political change, but some conflicts stand out for being bizarre, brief, or downright comical. This handout collects some of the strangest wars in history — where misunderstandings, unusual motivations, or pure absurdity shaped the course of events.

War Name	Years	Sides Involved	Cause	Outcome
The Emu War	1932	Australia vs. Emus	Overpopulation of emus damaging crops in Western Australia	Emus 'won'; Australian forces withdrew; became a global joke
The War of the Bucket	1325	Modena vs. Bologna	Rival city-states fought after Modena stole a wooden bucket	Modena kept the bucket; Bologna suffered heavy losses
The Pig War	1859	U.S. vs. U.K.	Dispute over San Juan Islands triggered by a shot pig	Negotiated peace; borders resolved
The Pastry War	1838–1839	France vs. Mexico	French baker demanded compensation for damages	France bombarded Veracruz; Mexico paid indemnity
The Football War	1969	El Salvador vs. Honduras	Soccer match tensions, land disputes	Ceasefire after four days; tensions persisted
The 335-Year War	1651–1986	Netherlands vs. Isles of Scilly	Forgotten declaration of war lasted 335 years	Peace treaty signed in 1986; no casualties
The War of Jenkins' Ear	1739–1748	Britain vs. Spain	Captain's severed ear used as pretext for conflict	War merged into War of Austrian Succession
The War of the Stray Dog	1925	Greece vs. Bulgaria	Border incident over a runaway dog	League of Nations intervened; Greece withdrew
The Toledo War	1835–1836	Ohio vs. Michigan (USA)	Border dispute over Toledo Strip	Michigan ceded land; gained Upper Peninsula
The Cod Wars	1958–1976	Iceland vs. UK	Disputes over fishing rights	Iceland extended fishing zones; UK recognized claim

Highlights and Stories

The Emu War (1932)

Australia deployed soldiers with machine guns to cull emus devastating wheat fields. The birds' speed and unpredictability made them nearly impossible to control, leading to a humiliating withdrawal. Newspapers worldwide mocked the "war," and it remains a classic example of humans losing to wildlife.

The War of the Bucket (1325)

The Italian cities of Modena and Bologna fought a bloody battle sparked by the theft of a wooden bucket from a well. Thousands died, and Modena proudly kept the bucket, which is still displayed in a museum. This war shows how petty rivalries escalated in medieval Italy.

The Pig War (1859)

A farmer shot a British-owned pig on San Juan Island, triggering a military standoff between Britain and the United States. Both sides sent troops, but the only casualty remained the pig. Diplomacy eventually settled the border, and the "war" became a model of peaceful resolution.

The Pastry War (1838–1839)

A French pastry chef in Mexico City demanded compensation for damages after riots destroyed his shop. France used his complaint to justify attacking Mexico. Veracruz was blockaded, and Mexico paid reparations. It's a vivid reminder of how economic interests and colonial power shaped foreign policy.

The Football War (1969)

A series of World Cup qualifiers between El Salvador and Honduras ignited existing tensions over immigration and land disputes. War broke out, lasting four days, killing thousands. Soccer wasn't the real cause, but it became the symbol of explosive nationalism and unresolved inequalities in the region.

The 335-Year War (1651–1986)

The Netherlands declared war on the Isles of Scilly, an English territory, during the Anglo-Dutch Wars — and forgot to sign peace. The "war" technically lasted over three centuries without a single casualty. A peace treaty was finally signed in 1986, making this one of history's oddest conflicts.

The War of Jenkins' Ear (1739–1748)

The war's name came from Captain Robert Jenkins, who allegedly showed Parliament his severed ear to provoke outrage. Britain and Spain clashed over Caribbean trade routes. The gruesome "ear" propaganda shows how graphic imagery influenced 18th-century politics, much like sensational media today.

The War of the Stray Dog (1925)

A Greek soldier chased his runaway dog across the Bulgarian border, sparking gunfire and escalating tension. Greece invaded briefly, but the League of Nations intervened to prevent war. This event is often cited as a success story for early international diplomacy.

The Toledo War (1835–1836)

Ohio and Michigan, still U.S. territories, nearly went to war over a disputed strip of land containing Toledo. No battles occurred, but the standoff symbolized the chaotic process of defining state borders. Michigan eventually traded the strip for the resource-rich Upper Peninsula.

The Cod Wars (1958–1976)

Iceland and the UK clashed over fishing rights in the North Atlantic, involving ship ramming and tense negotiations. Iceland ultimately expanded its territorial waters to 200 nautical miles. The conflicts shaped modern fishing law and highlighted the economic value of maritime resources.