

Six Nations Legacy Consortium

Six Nations and the War of 1812

1814 Withdrawal from the War

Shakóye:wa:tha (“He Keeps them Awake,” better known as Red Jacket) and other Hodinohson:ni leaders at Buffalo Creek in New York State had tried to prevent the upcoming war from impacting upon their people. Twice they tried to meet with the Six Nations brethren at Grand River, pleading that both sides should remain neutral in the fight between the United States and Great Britain. They predicted that if the Six Nations warriors fought each other, only chaos and ruin would result for both sides.

While the Chiefs and Clan Mother at Grand River favored peace, it was the instigation of John Norton, John Brant and a few others that convinced a few Chiefs and War Captains that Grand River would defend the interests of the Crown. They warned that if the Buffalo Creek warriors intervened they would do so at their own costs. The Great Law of Peace that had bound the Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida, Mohawk and Tuscarora Nations into one Confederacy Council was beginning to falter.

Red Jacket, hoping for neutrality, could not convince others as the changing circumstances brought the war to the Senecas whether they wanted it or not. Once the British and their Native allies invaded Seneca territory in 1813, the Confederacy Council at Buffalo Creek formally declared war on Upper and Lower Canada. Red Jacket now accepted that the Senecas had to engage in the war, and he, despite being nearly 62 years old, led the warriors as they crossed over the Niagara River to attack capture Fort Erie and headed to attack Fort George in the summer of 1814.

One condition that the Buffalo Creek Chiefs had for their participation in the war was that any Hodinohson:ni warriors from Grand River that were taken prisoner would be turned over to them for humane treatment. Red Jacket understood the deep-seated American fear and resentment for Native warriors could result in tragedy. However, this requirement did not include any Mohawks who might be taken prisoner, showing that there was growing animosity for their insistence that war be waged.

The Battle of Chippawa, on July 5, 1814, was an American victory over British forces in the War of 1812. Red Jacket and approximately 500 Buffalo Creek warriors joined the American invasion of Upper Canada.