

Indian confederation and an alliance with the British would be daunting for any individual.

Tecumseh's and the other Indians' decision-making process went well beyond politics. He and his fellow leaders knew that the British and American linear minds moved from claiming the land, to colonization and exploitation of natural resources. They knew their own process was one of native logic and inclusiveness -- involving the flora and fauna and native communal values and relationships. Thus, the Indians were acting on a different system than either the U.S. or the British. Choosing the British as an ally was difficult at best, but the future of native North America hung in the balance.

Tecumseh preached his confederation and alliance point-of-view to various tribes, arguing that, in the big picture, an Indian confederation held the hope of stopping U.S. westward expansion. He gained respect in almost every case, and many followers, although the Choctaws stood firmly for neutrality. Pushmataha, the noted Choctaw leader, opposed Tecumseh's grand alliance.

Tippecanoe and the Aftermath

In 1811, when Tecumseh was in the South, a group of natives led by Tenskwatawa, attacked U.S. army forces in the Battle of Tippecanoe. The battle was a draw, but the U.S. General William Henry Harrison declared victory and then had his troops sack and burn Prophetstown, Tecumseh's home base in the Indiana territory. Following the Tippecanoe defeat, Tecumseh realized even more how important it was for a British alliance.

During the war, the Indian nations fought more than forty battles and skirmishes against the U.S. In southern Canada, pro-British and pro-U.S. Iroquois found themselves fighting each other, but in most engagements, the native forces fought alongside the British. They were key to the British success at both Detroit and Queenston; at the Battle of Beaver dams native warriors, with no help from their British counterparts, defeated the Americans, taking 500 prisoners of war. Although the Creek War of 1813-1814 is not normally viewed as a part of the War of 1812, Creek resistance to the U.S. Army in the south led to a series of battles that eventually crushed Indian military power in that region.

The Loss of a Leader

Perhaps the most significant battle took place in 1813 in Canada. Tecumseh and his warriors, deserted by the British forces, faced a pursuing army of Americans led by William Henry Harrison at the Battle of the Thames. As this confrontation became certain, Tecumseh promised his warriors that there would be no retreat. This battle, he felt, must be won in order to stop American westward expansion in all areas. But Tecumseh was mortally wounded, and his death and defeat marked the end of the native campaign to drive back white settlers. On a larger scale, the American victory cleared the way for the U.S. claim to the native interior of North America with more treaty negotiations following, resulting in numerous removals of most of the eastern woodland Indian communities to the west.

After the War of 1812, the U.S. negotiated over two hundred Indian treaties that involved the ceding of Indian lands and 99 of these agreements resulted in the creation of reservations west of the Mississippi River. Other native resistance movements sprang up, including the Black Hawk War of 1832 and the Second Seminole War (1835 to 1842), but neither affected so many different Indian nations as did the War of 1812.