

# The First Battle of the War of 1812

By Stephen K. Andrews

Growing up in Indiana, there was a belief that American history had side-stepped our state, that nothing of exciting historical consequence took place here. The adventures of our country's pioneers, settlers, soldiers, and Native Americans never seemed to include Indiana. When it came to exciting historical events, we felt we had been cheated, like a jilted bride at the altar of history. No Gettysburg, no Saratoga, no Fort Dodge, no Alamo. It seemed that every other state had at least some significant historical event to celebrate their state's rite of passage into the annals of American history, but not Indiana. We were here, we grew corn, made automobiles, and history passed us by. The local school systems did little to correct this view.

Oh sure, we had Morgan's raid during the Civil War. A few confederate raiders slipped north of the Ohio River, shot up a couple of small towns, scared the hell out of the locals, riled up the militia, and then headed back east to disrupt things in Ohio. Even though Indiana was a major contributor of soldiers to the Civil War, it did not experience the conflict in the same way as many of the other states.

My perspective began to change when our local antique arms club visited Prophet's Town Battlefield. Several days later, I got a phone call from fellow ASAC member, Don Silvey, who was in downtown Indianapolis. He phoned to tell me that he had checked the stone carvings on the Indianapolis Monument Circle War Memorial. He had taken the time to see what inscriptions regarding the major wars involving Indiana citizens up through the Civil War were etched in stone. The memorial was constructed a few



years after the civil war to commemorate Indiana's participation in not just the Civil War, but all the wars fought by our state up to that time. He told me that there, in the chiseled inscriptions in the side of the monument half-way up the north face, was a listing of early battles . . . and a name, place, and date: War of 1812, the Battle of Prophet's Town, November 7, 1811 (Figure 1)! How could that be? The War of 1812 actually had a battle fought in the Indiana Territory? Not only a battle, but the first battle of the War of 1812 in 1811!

From that point, he and I took an interest in the battle and Indiana's role in the conflict. To begin with, Indiana was a territory, only a portion of the Northwest Territory to be precise, but uniquely set north of Kentucky and west of Ohio. Reading about the settlement and development of the Northwest Territory, and Indiana in particular, we discovered that while there were few big battles of consequence, the opening of the Northwest Territory and what was later to be the State of Indiana was a bloody and violent affair for many years.

Engagements up to the Battle of Fallen Timbers and later Prophet's Town were more personal conflicts, consisting of a small numbers of combatants, i.e., 20 Native Americans verses a similar number of settlers or militia. Many times, these fights were lopsided and bloody due to ambush, unprovoked attacks on both sides, and the basic desire to exterminate the other leading to massacres by both sides. Few large scale battles took place because that was not the nature of warfare in the wilderness.



Figure 1. Indianapolis Monument Circle.

## BACKGROUND TO THE BATTLE

The story of the Battle of Prophet's Town begins shortly after the American Revolution. The Treaty of Ghent ceased hostilities between England and the newly established American government. The treaty's terms required the British garrisons to vacate their fortifications west of the Allegheny Mountains, including portions of Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, Kentucky, and the majority of the eastern portion of the Northwest Territory. Despite the treaty, the British tended to stay in place. Native Americans were aware of the American Revolution, and some even participated on both sides. When the British were defeated and the terms became known, the Indians did not understand why the British did not keep their promises and leave. The British explained to the Indians that they only gave up political rights to the territory but the Indians still owned the land. The British said they stayed at the invitation of the Indians to trade. The Americans, they said, merely had political hegemony of the land. So, the British simply did not leave and the American central government had no army to evict them or enforce the terms of the treaty.

The British had learned from the French traders that preceded them that maintaining a good trade relationship with the indigenous tribes, enhanced by their presence in forts scattered about the American territorial frontier, permitted them to have and maintain great influence over their native inhabitants, the western Indian tribes. It was also quite profitable for the English to continue their trade relationship. The forts served not only as military garrisons, but also as population and trading centers for the local tribes. Many of the tribes established their villages within easy travel of the English fortifications, further reinforcing the British influence.

Tribes such as the Miami, Iroquois, Wyandot, Mohawk, Potawatomi, and particularly the Shawnee sought friendship with the British primarily for their trade goods. Since the strong trade influence of the French, and now the British, the tribes had developed an increasing reliance on European goods, particularly weapons, powder, and shot. During the previous century, many of the tribes had drifted away from their ancestral or traditional manner of hunting, trapping, and fighting. The European goods held up better than Indian made traps. The tribes became more dependent on the fur trade and the goods that came from it. This reliance on trade with the Europeans accelerated the tribe's transition from their historical means of hunting and warfare. The bow and arrow, while still used, had taken a secondary role to the trade musket, metal tomahawk, and knife.

American traders had begun to trade with the tribes as well, but met with limited success due to a poor quality of

goods, shortsighted politicians in Washington who refused to take trade with the tribes seriously, and the strong, adverse British influence. In the years after the Revolutionary War, American settlers trickled, and then streamed into western Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Kentucky. As those areas became more populated, eventually the trickle of Americans (trappers, hunters, adventurers, and farmers) went north of the Ohio River seeking more promising land.

As the need for land increased, representatives of the American government negotiated with resident tribal chiefs for the purchase of land and treaties promising trade goods, with agreements not to infringe on areas designated as Indian land. The chiefs who negotiated these sales were usually what have been described as minor chiefs of the various Indian nations. The American government claimed that these minor chiefs represented all the Indians of the tribes. The sales and many of the treaties were a sham that most of the "non-treaty" tribes quickly saw through and resented. This also played to the advantage of the English.

Beginning in 1795 with the Treaty at Greenville, Ohio, and culminating with the Treaty of Fort Wayne in 1809, six separate treaties were negotiated, covering territory in southern and central Indiana. These treaties with the minor chiefs took land that was disputed by other non-treaty tribes. Nonetheless, pioneers streamed into these areas and established farms and settlements.

The British were quick to encourage and enflame the non-treaty tribes' resentment of the Americans. They provided the tribes with firearms, powder, shot, and other goods that reinforced further reliance on English traders.

With the establishment of the Northwest Territory in 1800, three principal players emerged as relations worsened and tensions between Native Americans and American settlers grew more strained: William Henry Harrison, the Governor of the Indiana Territory; Tecumseh, a Shawnee war chief; and his brother, Tenskwatawa, better known through history as "The Prophet," a Shawnee shaman.

Harrison was born in Charles City County, Virginia, February 22, 1773, the son of Benjamin Harrison, a signer of the Declaration of Independence (Figure 2). He attended Hampden-Sidney College and went to Philadelphia to study medicine and surgery. In 1791 he enlisted as an ensign in the US Army. He was later appointed aide-de-camp to General Anthony Wayne and fought well at the Battle of Fallen Timbers in Northwestern Ohio in 1794. He was appointed the captain in command of Fort Washington, Ohio, but resigned his commission in 1798 to pursue a political career. He served as Territory Secretary and later delegate to Congress, winning an appointment as the Territorial Governor of Indiana in 1800.

The Indiana Territory was established in 1800 by subdividing the Old Northwest Territory with the land west of the



Figure 2. William Henry Harrison.



Figure 3. Indiana Territory.

Indiana-Ohio border becoming the Indiana Territory (Figure 3). This area comprised present day Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, and western Michigan. Harrison served as delegate for the Northwest Territory to Congress, and was a natural choice for appointment to the post of Territorial Governor.

Harrison's tenure as Territorial Governor was marked by an aggressive policy to add to the United States what had been set aside as protected Indian land. Before 1805 there had been almost no growth in the territory, the population approximating 6550. However, in 1805, the Whitewater valley was opened for settlement resulting in a population explosion such that by 1810 the census reported 24,520 inhabitants. Harrison's land expansions were intended to open the territory for settlement and eventual statehood, most likely with Harrison as its first governor. His acquisitions culminated in 1809 with the Treaty of Fort Wayne that added more than 3 million acres to the United States.

Tecumseh was one of nine children born between 1768 and 1780 at Old Piqua on the Mad River in western Ohio (Figure 4). While still a child, his Shawnee father was killed in battle and his mother, a Creek, moved with some of her tribe to Spanish Louisiana. Tecumseh stayed in Ohio under the care of an older brother who taught him to fight the Americans and raid their settlements. Early on, he was an unremarkable war chief and had only a very small following of warriors. He was



Figure 4. Tecumseh.



Figure 5. The Prophet.

present at St. Claire's debacle in 1791, but did not participate in the fighting. At some point in his career, Tecumseh developed a mastery of the English language which was to serve him well in his future relations with the United States and England.

The Prophet was Tecumseh's younger brother (Figure 5) who was best described as a boy who could never measure up. He was a poor warrior, a poor hunter, and a poor husband. At one point in his life he determined that the Great Spirit had chosen him to become a shaman of his people. He was said to have the ability to foretell the future, and he actually predicted an eclipse of the sun. His reputation grew such that he began to attract followers to his village.

In the early 1800s, events occurred that changed the Prophet and Tecumseh's lives. The Prophet claimed he had a religious experience in which he died and was given a doctrine of revitalization. In this vision of revitalization, he argued that the Great Spirit had shown him that the white man was the child of the great serpent (a satanic being) and the Indian nations should have nothing to do with him.

The Prophet had established a village in the Greenville, Ohio, area. As a religious leader without governing skills, the village came under the governance of Tecumseh. With the

Prophet serving as its spiritual and religious leader of the tribe, Tecumseh recognized the opportunity that his brother's fame presented to expand his dream of an Indian empire, with Tecumseh as its emperor.

Expounding an anti-settler, anti-American philosophy, Tecumseh saw the advantage of combining his views with the Prophet's religious popularity. The two brothers developed a policy of a unified political structure that would prohibit individual tribes and chiefs the ability to negotiate the sale of Indian land directly with any American state or federal negotiators. They argued that all the land belonged to all Indians and no one chief or tribe had the right to sell off what was owned by all the tribes. The only way that land could be sold was if all the Indian tribes agreed. A large number of tribes and individual warriors found this doctrine appealing and allied with Tecumseh, some even joined the Greenville village.

By 1806, the Greenville village had become so large that the local settlers became paranoid and encouraged the Indians to move west. The village had become so large that it was becoming difficult to provide food for all the inhabitants. The Prophet's philosophy of separation from the white man gave an excuse for the Indians to move. Tecumseh had for years hunted and traveled the Indiana Territory and knew that the area around present day Lafayette, Indiana, provided good hunting, trapping, and farm land. Since the Indians had depleted much of the local resources for their own use, they voluntarily moved to what is modern day Lafayette, Indiana, establishing a village along the Tippecanoe River near its junction with the Wabash River. The village became known as Prophet's Town.

A part of Tecumseh's empire agenda was to organize an Indian confederation to drive out and keep out white settlers in the territory north of the Ohio River. Coupled with the religious attraction of the Prophet, the two were able to amass a respectable following. So respectable was the following that the growing village at Prophet's Town became a real concern for Harrison and the growing numbers of settlers along the Ohio River and in the southern portions of the Indiana Territory.

One British official wrote the following shortly after Tecumseh and the Prophet's moved to Prophet's Town:

The Prophet's brother, who is stated to me to be his principal support and who appears to be a very shrewd intelligent man was at Amherstburg while I was there. He told Col. Claus and Capt. Elliot that they were endeavoring to collect the different nations to form one settlement on the Wabash about 300 miles southwest of Amherstburg in order to preserve their country from all encroachments. That their intention is not to take any part in the quarrels: that if the Americans encroach on them they are resolved to strike—but

he added that if their father the King should be in earnest and appear in sufficient force they would hold fast to him.

Since the USS Chesapeake crisis during which seamen were impressed from an American warship, the British had been telling any tribe that would listen that they expected a war might break out between England and the Americans. They reminded the Indians how generous their English father had been with them. Further, they reminded the Indians that it was the Americans who were stealing their lands with sham treaties.

Acting on his concerns in August of 1808, Harrison invited Tecumseh and the Prophet to meet with him at the territorial capital at Vincennes to discuss relations between the American settlers and the Indians. Tecumseh was meeting with the British in Canada at the time of the meeting, but the Prophet met with Harrison. He was accompanied by a large party of warriors, women, and children. The warriors were present for his protection and the women and children showed their peaceful intentions. Each party reassured the other that they only had the most honorable and peaceful intentions.

The Treaty of Fort Wayne in 1809 caught Tecumseh by surprise. The concession of 3 million acres of Indian land to the United States was a major setback in Tecumseh's eyes. As a result he decided the only way to end the encroachment problem by American settlers was to step out of the shadows of his brother and seriously organize the Indian confederation. The Treaty of Fort Wayne ceded lands along the Wabash River north of Vincennes to the Americans, prime Indian hunting and farming land.

Harrison was no novice when it came to the frontier and dealing with the Indians. He maintained a solid relationship with the fur traders who interacted regularly with the various tribes. Thus, Harrison was aware of Tecumseh's activities stirring up the other villages against the settlers. In July 1810, an invitation was delivered to Tecumseh to meet with Harrison. He was to come with only 30 warriors as escort. On August 12, 1810, Tecumseh appeared unannounced at the gates of Vincennes accompanied by 400 warriors wearing war paint. The meeting lasted for several days.

The Treaty of Fort Wayne, which transferred substantial Indian Territory to the United States, compelled Tecumseh to meet with Harrison to demand its rescission. Tecumseh stated that the treaty was illegal because all of the Indian tribes owned the land; therefore, it could only be sold with all of the tribes' approvals. He further warned Harrison that white settlers should not attempt to settle the treaty territory. Harrison rejected the demand asserting that the individual tribes could have individual dealings with the United States and sell whatever land they wished. Tecumseh also warned that if pushed, he would ally with the British.

The meeting had lasted 9 days and the two principals had had an opportunity to each gage the other. Harrison indicates in his writings to Secretary of War Eustis that "Tecumseh was well spoken and were he European he might be another Alexander or Napoleon." Harrison would later write of his impressions of Tecumseh that, "he was the great man of the party [Indian Movement] and the Moses of the family."

The population of Vincennes in 1810 was approximately 1000. Tecumseh's warriors outnumbered the soldiers and militia and could easily have massacred the entire town. He delivered a heated condemnation of the settler's encroachment into Indian lands. In a series of speeches, he catalogued the claimed injustices by the settlers and Americans in general. When Harrison tried to rebut the accusations, Tecumseh called him a liar in the Shawnee language.

One of the officers present understood the Shawnee language and told Harrison that Tecumseh was encouraging the warriors to kill Harrison. Harrison pulled his sword and the officer ordered forward a small party of soldiers causing the Indians to react with alarm. Chief Winamac, friendly to Harrison, spoke to the Indians saying that since they came in peace they should leave in peace. Cooler heads prevailed and the meeting ended.

After the meeting with Harrison, Tecumseh secretly accepted the offer of alliance with the British. He was furnished supplies by the English, including firearms, powder, shot, and trade goods.

In August 1811, Tecumseh again met with Harrison and promised that the Shawnee had only peaceful intentions. After the meeting, he went south to recruit allies among his mother's people, the Creeks, and the "Five Civilized Tribes." Few southern Indian tribes responded to his plea. Meanwhile, Harrison went to Kentucky on business leaving John Gibson as acting governor. Gibson had lived among the Miami Indians and was able to learn of Tecumseh's plans for war against the Americans from his connections in the tribe. He immediately issued a call for the territorial militia to gather in Vincennes in September. He also wrote Harrison asking for his immediate return to take charge of what he believed was an impending crisis.

After his meeting with Tecumseh, Harrison realized that the efforts to organize an Indian confederation at Prophet's Town must be stopped. In his correspondence to the Secretary of War he stated as much, proposing to take sufficient military force as to ensure his success. He believed that by waiting until Tecumseh left Prophet's Town that many of the warriors present for duty at Tippecanoe would melt away with their weapons and supplies rather than enter combat under the Prophet's leadership.

Because Gibson issued the muster for September 1811 at Vincennes, most of the militia arrived by mid-September.

In addition to the Indiana and Kentucky militia, a regiment of the 4<sup>th</sup> United States Infantry was ordered by Eustis to accompany Harrison's force. Adam Walker, of the 4<sup>th</sup>, described the Indiana militia as the regiment arrived at Vincennes by boat:

"A rabble soon gathered about the boats and assisted in hauling them ashore. Their whooping and yells and their appearance caused us to doubt whether we had not act actually landed among the savages themselves. Many of these militia spoke the French language; their dress was a short frock of deer-skin, a belt around their bodies with a tomahawk and scalping knife attached to it. The militia from Kentucky and a few companies of Indiana were decent soldiers, yet the large knife and hatchet which constituted a part of their equipment, gave them a rather savage appearance." (From his journal published in 1816, p. 60, *Uniforms and Equipment of the United States in the War of 1812*, Rene Chartrand.)

Walker's journal went on to state that ". . . the hatchet was found to be a very useful article on the march—they [the militia] had no tents but with their hatchets would in a short time form themselves a shelter from the weather, on encamping at night."

There was no prescribed dress for the militia and most were in buckskin or other western woodland attire. Other than the regulars, no uniform was prescribed for the soldiers. The exception was Major Joseph Daviess who commanded two troops of light dragoons. The troops were composed of wealthy men who wore uniforms of blue with leather or bear fur caps and boots with spurs. All were well mounted and armed with a brace of pistols, a good sword, and a belt with a cartridge box of 12 rounds.

The force destined for Prophet's Town numbered approximately 1000 men: 250 US Regulars, 100 Kentucky volunteers, and 600 from the Indiana militia, including two companies of Indiana Rangers. The Rangers had been organized in 1807 as a territorial military response to Indian raids that had become more frequent and savage. The Rangers were modeled on the mounted troops of Anthony Wayne at Fallen Timbers. The charge to the Rangers was to safeguard the Buffalo Trace, the main road between Louisville and Vincennes, the territorial capital. Initially, they patrolled on foot, later they were mounted.

There were three divisions of Rangers; each was assigned a specific territory to patrol, with two companies based in Vincennes in 1811. The Rangers were composed primarily of men but a few women also served. They were paid \$1.00 per day and required to supply their own horse, powder, shot, tomahawk, and a large and small knife with leather belt. The Rangers served in the Indiana Territory throughout the War of 1812. Their motto "Wide Awake,

Wide Awake" was earned at the Battle of Prophet's Town. The Rangers continue on to this day as a company of the Indiana National Guard. Before the outbreak of the War of 1812, they are credited with capturing a British spy who was stirring up the Indians to attack the American settlements.

Harrison's force departed Vincennes by foot and horse on September 26<sup>th</sup>. The command was structured such that Col. Boyd of the 4<sup>th</sup> US Infantry acted as temporary brigade commander with Lt. Col. Joseph Bartholomew being responsible to Col. Boyd for the militia infantry units. Regular army and militia officers in the chain of command headed their appropriate units in accordance with their actual or appointed grade levels. Advance reconnaissance was done by Capt. Dubois' Company of Spies and Guides using mounted units to screen while on the march.

The army arrived at a site near present day Terre Haute on October 3<sup>rd</sup>. They erected a wooden stockade at the site and named it Fort Harrison. On October 10<sup>th</sup>, a foraging party of Capt. Spier Spencer's Yellow Jackets was ambushed by a war party and alarmed the men such that it prevented further foraging. Supplies began to run low and rationing was instituted on the 19<sup>th</sup>. Relief supplies came from Vincennes by way of the Wabash River on the 29<sup>th</sup>. Harrison decided to push on to Prophet's Town following the Wabash River before the weather and further supply setbacks compromised the mission.

The chiefs of the tribes loyal to the Americans, primarily the Delaware, agreed to join Harrison and his force in the march on Prophet's Town. They set out from their villages on October 6<sup>th</sup>. They had proceeded only a few miles when they were met by a delegation from Prophet's Town. The delegation demanded that the Delaware declare their intentions whether they would or would not join in a war against the United States. They were told that the Indians at Prophet's Town had "taken up the tomahawk and would lay it down only with their lives." The delegation went on to say that when they had defeated the Americans, the tribes that did not join them would regret their decision.

The Delaware sent an interpreter to Harrison to advise him of the delegation, the threat, and that they were going to go to Prophet's Town to see if they could convince the Prophet not to attack the Americans. They were to join Harrison in a few days to let him know if they were successful. Meanwhile, Harrison pushed on.

Late afternoon, on November 6, 1811, Harrison's force reached the area of Prophet's Town. Several of the officers wanted to immediately attack the town. Harrison determined not to attack without knowing the size of force facing him and its disposition. Further, he wanted to wait for reinforcements from the Delaware who were to join him. Unfortunately for Harrison, the Delaware had passed Harrison's army on the opposite side of the Wabash and missed joining up with him.

**Table 1. Personnel Who Did Not Attend the Battle**

Those discharged prior to November 7, 1811 . . . . .	14
Men returned to Vincennes under Major Jordan to protect the town from Indian attack. . . . .	41
Sick and wounded left at Ft. Harrison. . . . .	70
Absent on sick and regular leave . . . . .	10
Deaths prior to the battle. . . . .	3
Dubois' Spies and Guides absent . . . . .	18
Garrisons assigned to Ft. Harrison and Boyd . . . . .	18
Desertions . . . . .	15
Total . . . . .	189

Representatives from Prophet's Town approached Harrison's force under white flag demanding to know why Harrison had brought a force when there was peace between them. A cease fire was requested until the next day when the two sides could meet and enter into new peace treaty discussion. Harrison agreed to the truce, but was wary of the Indians. He moved his force to a high, dry area about a mile from Prophet's town and set up camp.

Harrison's force had been whittled down somewhat during the march (Table 1). In addition, there were an unrecorded number of logistical personnel such as Boatmen, Wagoner's, and Quartermasters who had been left behind or fallen out.

It is difficult to number the warriors at Prophet's Town. Before the march, Harrison estimated that he expected his force to encounter about 600 warriors. As he was about to leave Fort Harrison, he received intelligence that the Potawatomi had left Prophet's Town taking about 150 warriors; this turned out to be false. Not knowing the information to be faulty, he revised his expectations of combatants to approximately 450, opposing his force of almost 900. After the battle, estimates of the number of warriors involved ranged from 700 to 1200. The Indians did not leave their dead and wounded warriors on the field of battle, so it was impossible to determine how many casualties they suffered.

In his correspondence to the Secretary of War before the march on Prophet's Town, Harrison indicated that he wanted to have a force with him that would overwhelm the Indians. By making a strong showing of force, he felt he would at least reduce the threat that Tecumseh and the Prophet presented to the territory. With this mind set, it can be understood why waiting for the Delaware reinforcements made sense to Harrison.

Harrison's campsite's western approach allowed an attacking force to be concealed in a heavily wooded area abutting Burnett's creek. While the camp was positioned above the creek, the thick woods worked to the defender's disadvantage. Preparing for the worse, Harrison deployed



Figure 6. The battlefield.

his force such that the infantry occupied the most likely lines of assault. The mounted troops were to screen the flanks. Guard and forward listening posts were set up outside the main perimeter of the camp.

The camp remained on alert and the soldiers were instructed to sleep with their weapons loaded (Figure 6). It began to rain during the night, further adding to the difficulty identifying any hostile approach to the camp. The men built up fires inside the main camp, but that did little to ease their discomfort. A fog settled in, further obscuring the vision of the guards.

Before leaving to speak with the southern tribes, The Prophet had been instructed by Tecumseh that under no circumstances was he to engage in hostilities with the Americans. Tecumseh wanted to have his confederation in place before any war broke out. With Tecumseh gone, the Indians met in council to discuss how to respond to the presence of Harrison and his army. The prevailing view was to wait for Tecumseh before fighting. Chief Winamac, the chief who had saved Harrison's life at Vincennes the prior year, said that if the Indians did not immediately attack the Americans he would withdraw all his warriors. This tipped the council for war and put the Indians on the warpath.

With a decision made, The Prophet further fanned the flames of war by telling his warriors that he would curse the

Americans so their bullets would not hurt them. He guaranteed them a victory saying the Americans were blind and half of them crazy. The warriors were up most of the night dancing and chanting war cries. Harrison's army, only a mile or so away, could hear the Indians, further adding to their discomfort.

#### THE BATTLE OF PROPHET'S TOWN

Harrison woke at 4 am and began dressing in his dark tent. Adam Walker, a drummer from the 4<sup>th</sup> US infantry, entered to inquire whether he should beat reveille for those not awake. As they spoke, a shot sounded and a scream rang out. Corporal Stephen Mars, a forward sentry from the Geiger's Mounted Rifles of Kentucky, had seen movement in the buffalo grass and shot, wounding an Indian attempting to infiltrate the camp. The shot alerted the camp to the surprise Indian attack. Corporal Mars was killed shortly thereafter by the attacking Indians as he tried to retreat back to the main camp.

There is some discrepancy where first attack took place along the lines. Generally it is thought that the attack was along the southwest corner of the camp. The line was manned by units from the Kentucky Militia and a portion of the 4<sup>th</sup> US Infantry. The sentries who had been outside the main camp tried to fall back quickly to the main lines, but they found that the Indians had gotten between them and their camp. The units guarding the camp were firing into the attacking Indians and at the retreating sentries. Dismounted dragoons were sent to reinforce the line. Several soldiers, realizing the camps fires were outlining the defenders, began to extinguish the fires. The soldiers within the camp at the outset of the attack formed defensive lines; however, light from the dying fires silhouetted them so that they began to take casualties.

Harrison had ridden to Prophet's Town on a gray mare. The delegation Indians had marked him, by his horse, for assassination. The Indians infiltrated the lines and were in the American camp quickly. Looking for Harrison, they spied an officer riding a gray mare. He was quickly killed. As it turned out, Harrison's gray mare had broken her tether and Harrison was mounted on the only other available horse, a bay. Col. Owen of the Kentucky militia and an aide to Harrison was the man on the gray horse mistaken by the Indians. After the battle, friends of Col. Owen accused Harrison of changing horses with Owen to avoid being targeted by the Indians. These charges were denied by Harrison.

The Indians had so cleverly penetrated the American lines that, at times, the soldiers could not tell where friendly lines were located. One soldier said it was so dark and confusing that he had to feel the man next to him to tell if he was friend or Indian. Soldiers were shot coming out of their

tents as they responded to the alarm. There was great confusion in the opening moments of the battle. In some cases, men were just firing blindly into the dark hoping to hit a hostile. The initial attack almost shattered the Kentucky and US infantry lines along the northwest corner of the camp.

Harrison organized his troops after a few minutes. He directed the rifle companies under Capt. Cook and Lt. Barton of the US Infantry to form a line to the rear of the line of the Kentucky militia that had been broken in the first wave of attack. The Indians charged the line throwing themselves at the riflemen with reckless abandon. They apparently took the Prophet at his word that the Americans were blind, crazy, and that their bullets would not harm them. As the riflemen held, Harrison was called to another section of the camp.

The Indians followed the attack in the southwest corner with heavy fire on the northwest corner of the camp, coming up from Burnett's creek. The grass along the creek had allowed them to creep up close to the camp and then attack at close quarters. The Indians were able to kill or severely wound all of the officers commanding the line. When Harrison arrived at the scene, he found the command of the whole left of the army under an untried ensign, John Tipton. Harrison had Capt. Robb's Indiana militia reinforce the left, and they were able to hold against further attack.

In the initial attack, the Indians had used only their bows arrows and knives for their silence. However, as the sky lightened, the Americans were able to see the Indians and their superior fire power began to tell. Later, it was discovered that the majority of the Indian attackers had left, crated, British muskets and rifles at Prophet's Town in favor of their traditional weapons.

The Prophet, not being a warrior, had positioned himself on a rise before a recess in a rock wall overlooking the battle, at a distance (Figure 7). He chanted and prayed for the warrior's success. The first messenger to report back told him that the warriors were dying from the American's



Figure 7. Prophet's Rock.



firing. He dismissed the messenger telling him to “go back, fight on, I will pray some more.”

With the coming of morning, the Indian attack subsided and they began to carry away their dead and wounded. Harrison began to plan a counter attack supported by dragoons. He assembled a force and waited for full daylight. Meanwhile, despite the relative darkness, Major Wells, who was defending the north side of the camp, gathered his dismounted dragoons and infantry and counter attacked the Indians, driving them from the field. Seeing Wells attack, Capt. Cook and Lt. Larrabee on Wells’ flank also attacked with great success driving off the Indians to their front. Harrison did not counter attack.

By 6:30 AM, the fighting was over. The Indians returned to Prophet’s Town and the troops spent the balance of the morning caring for the wounded and burying their dead. Harrison feared another attack; therefore, he had the men construct breastworks of logs for protection. Harrison felt that since “nineteen-twentieths of the troops had never seen combat,” they needed the reassurance of some protection in the event of another attack, which Harrison was sure would follow. Scouts were sent out and perimeter sentries established around the camp.



Figure 8. Battleground Museum.

The Indians were extremely angry with the Prophet. They threatened to kill him, but he was able to avoid being murdered. The majority of the warriors who believed that they had been deceived by the Prophet left the town immediately. They took very little with them fearing that the Americans would attack with the morning light. It was not until November 8<sup>th</sup> that the Americans entered Prophet’s Town to find it virtually deserted, except for an old Indian woman. The town was burned. The uncrated British muskets were seized by the troops and their scant supplies were augmented by the food stuffs found in abundance. What could not be carried had

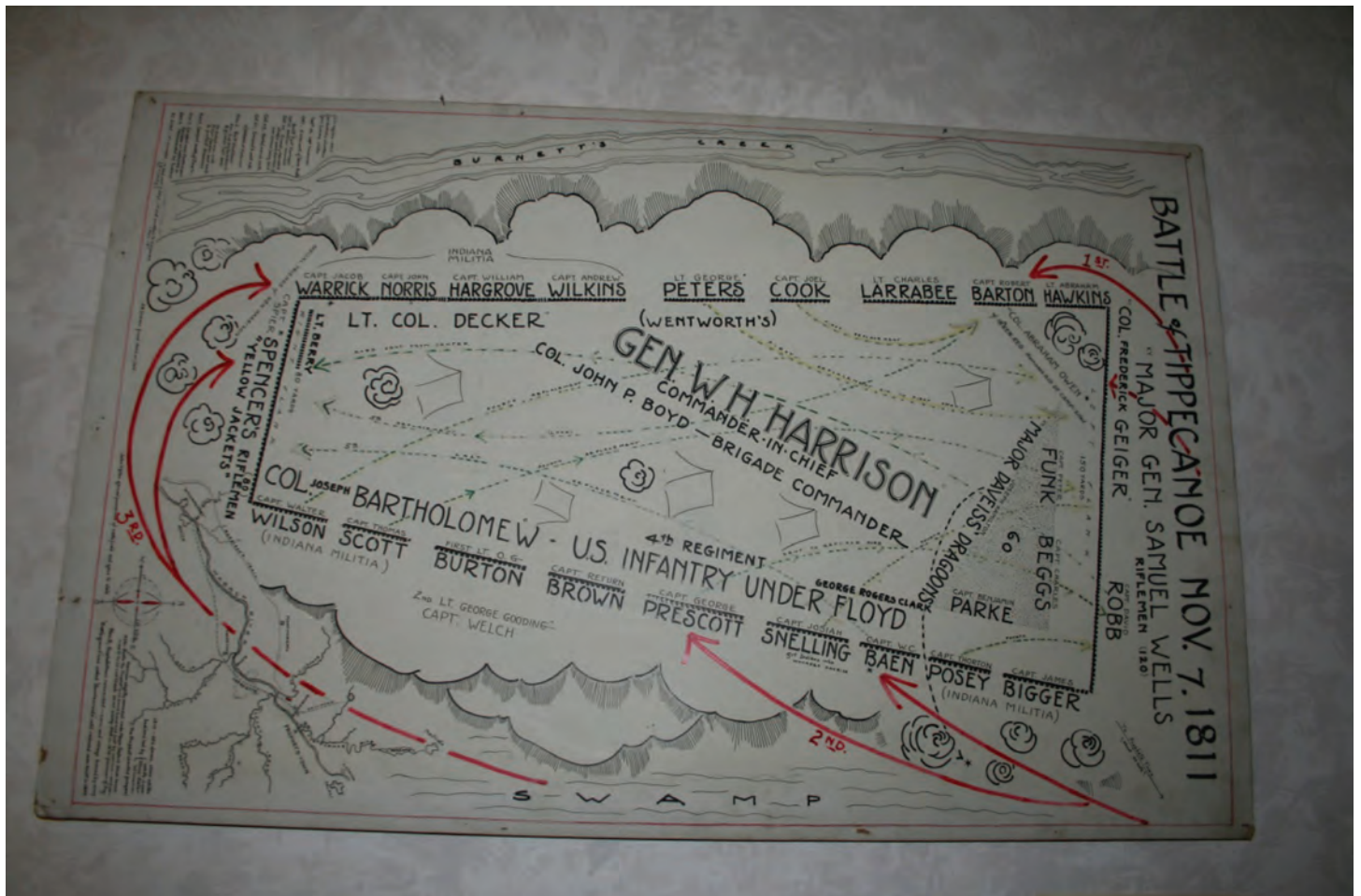


Figure 9. Battleground troop placement.

been destroyed. Harrison's army left for Fort Boyd on the Vermillion River. They were able to then send the wounded back to Vincennes by boat. Harrison marched the remainder of the army back arriving on November 18<sup>th</sup>.

Harrison was strongly criticized for not following up against the Indians on the morning of November 7<sup>th</sup>. Nonetheless, Harrison's army had suffered a loss of approximately 20% of his men: 37 officers and men killed and 126 men wounded, including several veteran officers. They were short of food: they had to eat the horses and cows that had been killed during the battle; and they were 165 miles from their home base of Vincennes. They did not know the location or strength of the remaining Indians or Tecumseh.

As it turned out, Harrison had dealt a fatal blow to Tecumseh's Indian confederation. Had the confederation succeeded, the War of 1812 in the west might have had a different outcome, adversely affecting the war in the east. Clearly, the future expansion of the United States would have been delayed.

An interesting story came out of the fight. After the battle, the 4<sup>th</sup> US Infantry marched up to Fort Detroit. The fort was taken by the British a year later, and as the soldiers stacked their weapons, a young drummer and fife were required to relinquish their instruments. Instead, they took off running with their instruments with British soldiers firing after them. In the museum at Battle Ground, Indiana (Figure 8), located on the actual site of Harrison's camp, is a fife and drum that, although probably not the original instruments, give life to the story.

As a postscript to the presentation, it should be noted that Sara Silvey (Don's wife) has an ancestor who marched with Harrison, fought at the battle, and lived to tell the tale. Amos Goodwin was in Capt. Charles Morris's Company of

the Second Regiment of the Indiana Territory Militia. Amos lived approximately 12 miles from Jeffersonville, Indiana, on tract 27 of the land distributed to soldiers after the Revolution, along the Ohio River. The display in the battle site museum shows his company's location during the battle (Figure 9). Amos Goodwin had not planned to be part of the expedition but was called in when someone fell ill. Family legend has it that he had no coat to wear, so the family women caught a black sheep, sheered the wool, carded and spun it into yarn, wove it into cloth, and sewed a coat. He went on to become a Colonel in the militia.

#### REFERENCES

1. Edmunds, David R, *Tecumseh and the Quest for Indiana Leadership*, Boston, MA: Little-Brown, 1984.
2. Watt, William J. and Spears, James R. H., *Indiana's Citizen Soldiers*, Indiana State Armory Board, 1980.
3. Reid, Richard J, Ed D, *The Battle of Tippecanoe*, West Kentucky Printing, 1989.
4. Papers of William H. Harrison (The Lilly Library Archives).
5. Chartrand, Rene, *Uniforms and Equipment of United States Forces in the War of 1812*, Old Fort Niagara Association, 1992.
6. Fredriksen, John C., *The United States Army in the War of 1812*, McFarland & Co. Publishers, 2009.
7. Pirtle, Alfred, *The Battle of Tippecanoe*, Filson Club Publications, 1900.
8. *The Battle of Tippecanoe*, Tippecanoe Co. Historical Association, 2004.
9. Jortner, Adam, *The Gods of Prophetstown*, Oxford University Press, 2012.