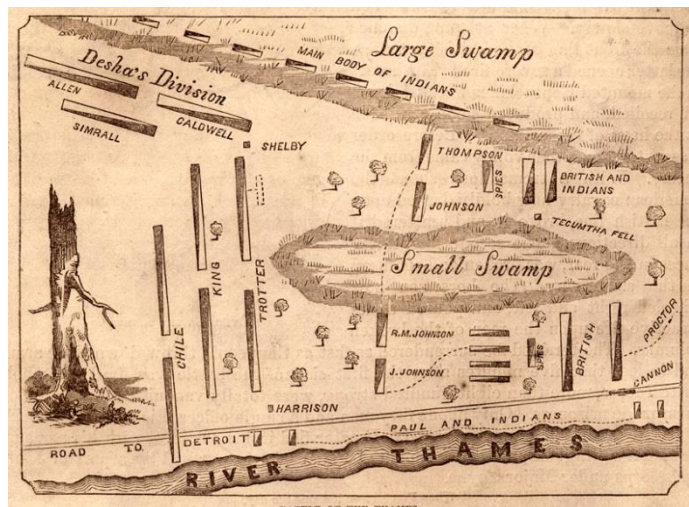


Tecumseh and the War of 1812

The War of 1812 pitted the United States against a combined British-Indian military force. While there were many causes that led up to the war, one central cause was British support for the American Indian opposition over American expansion in the Northwest, land which was still occupied by the Indians. **Tecumseh**, a skilled Shawnee warrior and charismatic orator, believed that a pan-Indian federation could stop or slow the pace of American westward expansion. He hoped that old tribal rivalries could be set aside so that the unified tribes of the Great Lakes and Mississippi Valley could move as one and resist the United States expansion into Native territory. Tecumseh had tried negotiating face-to-face with the federal governor of the Indiana Territory, **William Henry Harrison**, on two occasions. Harrison, after interacting with Tecumseh, assessed him as *“one of those uncommon geniuses who spring up occasionally to produce revolutions and overturn the established order of things.”* Negotiations between the two fell through and in a preemptive strike, Harrison gathered one thousand men and attacked Tecumseh’s base along the Tippecanoe River. At the time Tecumseh, who was not yet ready to launch a physical assault on the opposition, was recruiting allies for the impending war. His brother Tenskwatawa, known as the Shawnee Prophet, was placed in charge. Tenskwatawa, while greatly respected, was not a warrior like his brother Tecumseh. Even though Tenskwatawa’s forces outnumbered Harrison’s, Harrison and his men were still able to stand their ground and eventually overpower the Indians as they began to run out of ammunition. This operation, now referred to as the **Battle of Tippecanoe** was, in effect, the first engagement of the War of 1812.

Tecumseh’s warriors struck back in retaliation, attacking forts and sending white settlers fleeing back towards the Ohio River. They then joined up with British forces in Canada. After several altercations, the British were in need of supplies and soon retreated up the River Thames. The final stand came near Moraviantown on October 5, 1813. The combined Indian and British forces set up two miles west of Moraviantown on the north side of the River Thames, an area full of swampy thickets. When the American forces realized that the Indians were entrenched in the thickets, Harrison decided to



[Battle of the Thames](#), 18??, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago, Library of Congress

attack the British first, believing that if they retreated it would demoralize the Indians enough to allow the Americans to sweep around their flank. Within five minutes of an infantry attack toward the Indian lines and a mounted militia attack towards the British center, the British retreated in panic, led by their general Henry Proctor, who reportedly galloped past his men in the retreat back towards Moraviantown. This left only Tecumseh's warriors, who at Tecumseh's encouragement did not follow the British into a retreat. Intense fighting ensued and mounted American forces drove the Indian lines together; while the horses could not travel as fast into the underbrush towards the Indians, ammunition from American guns could. Sometime during this assault, [Tecumseh was shot and killed](#). Harrison was hailed as a national hero for his actions in battle. His later political career would remind American citizens of these accomplishments; his witty 1840 presidential campaign slogan "**Tippecanoe and Tyler Too**" referenced his days as an Indian fighter during the Battle of Tippecanoe.

Without their charismatic leader Tecumseh, the alliances between the North American tribes quickly dissolved. Many tribes lost their enthusiasm for fighting and later did little to stop the rapid expansion that occurred after the battle. The success of the American forces at the **Battle of the Thames** effectively re-established American control over the western frontier. This American success in 1813 certainly contributed to the belief held by many Americans at the time that the American Indian was destined for extinction and that westward expansion was destined to continue.

Glossary

Battle of the Thames: (October 5, 1813) a military engagement between the United States and the combined forces of the United Kingdom and a multi-Indian tribe coalition, which occurred in present-day Ontario, Canada next to the Thames River. Also referred to as the Battle of Moraviantown.

Battle of Tippecanoe: (November 7, 1811) a military engagement between the United States and Indian warriors fighting for Tecumseh's Indian coalition, which occurred in modern-day Lafayette, Indiana. This is considered the first engagement in the War of 1812.

Tecumseh: (1768-1813) Shawnee Indian political leader and leader of the pan-Indian coalition, known as Tecumseh's Confederacy which, joined by British forces, fought against the United States during the War of 1812.



Tippecanoe and Tyler Too: the campaign slogan of William Henry Harrison (“Tippecanoe”) and his vice presidential running-mate John Tyler.

William Henry Harrison: (1773-1841) Ninth President of the United States. He gained recognition during the Battle of Tippecanoe, where his tactical victory over the Indians would earn him the nickname “Tippecanoe.”