

This Day in History... November 7, 1811

Battle of Tippecanoe

On November 7, 1811, future president William Henry Harrison clashed with Tecumseh's warriors at the Battle of Tippecanoe, a precursor to the War of 1812.

Harrison (1773-1841) was familiar with life in the Northwest Territory, now part of America's Midwest. He first traveled to the frontier west of the Mississippi while serving in the Army during the Northwest Indian War.

After resigning from the military, Harrison sought political positions in the territory. He became secretary and then congressman, bringing new settlers to the region. Harrison was then made governor of Indiana Territory when the large Northwest Territory was divided in two. In this capacity, he signed 13 treaties and negotiated the transfer of over 60 million acres from Native Americans to white settlers and lobbied to allow slavery in the territory. He hoped to attract enough settlers to form a state.



Harrison stamp from the Presidential Series

Many of the tribes resented the treaties and the settlement of their native land. Two Shawnee Indians, Tecumseh and his brother Tenskwatawa, formed a confederacy of Native Americans to resist the terms of the agreements.

Harrison decided to attack the growing confederation while Tecumseh was traveling and recruiting more warriors. The governor led more than 1,000 men to the headquarters at Prophetstown, near the Tippecanoe River. Prophetstown was named for Tecumseh's brother, Tenskwatawa, a prophet whose followers had settled in the region. Harrison reached the area on the night of November 6. As he approached Prophetstown, he came across one of Tenskwatawa's men waving a white flag. He gave Harrison a message from Tenskwatawa asking for a ceasefire until the next day, at which time they could peacefully discuss a resolution. Though he didn't expect the negotiation to be fruitful, Harrison agreed and had his men camp nearby, at the confluence of the Wabash and Tippecanoe Rivers. That night, Harrison had men on guard, but didn't set up significant defenses.

Meanwhile in Prophetstown, Winnebago warriors grew uneasy over the close presence of the American soldiers and wanted to launch a surprise attack. While Tenskwatawa would later deny that he ordered his men to attack, he claimed to have talked to the spirits and decided that the best way to avoid a battle was to send a party to kill Harrison. He promised to cast spells that would protect his

warriors and confuse Harrison's army, keeping them from fighting back.

About 4:30 on the morning of November 7, 1811, men in Harrison's camp awoke to the sound of gunfire. (Tenskwatawa's troops were using firearms and munitions supplied by the British.) Fierce fighting quickly broke out as the warriors launched repeated charges against the American positions. Though Tenskwatawa's men caught the much larger militia by surprise, they ran out of ammunition. After two hours of fighting, the warriors withdrew.

The following day, Harrison sent some men to inspect Prophetstown and they found it deserted. They collected everything of value and burned the village. Afterwards, the residents of Prophetstown buried their dead and stripped Tenskwatawa of his power.

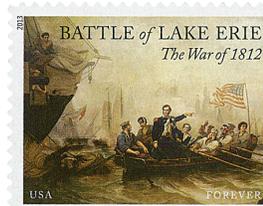
In Harrison's report he claimed a great victory for the US. He became known as "Old Tippecanoe" and became a national hero. Many newspapers described the battle as an Indian attack and turned citizens against the Native Americans and the British who supplied them with weapons. The public outcry increased tensions between the US and Britain, contributing to the outbreak of the War of 1812 a few months later.

Once the war began, Harrison was made commander of the Army of the Northwest, where he defended American settlements along Lake Erie. The victory over the British at the Battle of Lake Erie offered Harrison a chance to pursue British and Native American forces led by Tecumseh. On October 5, 1813, the forces met again at the Battle of the Thames, where Tecumseh was killed and the war on Lake Erie ended.

Disagreements with the secretary of War led to Harrison's resignation, but he remained popular with the public. In 1840 he ran for president of the United States with the slogan "Tippecanoe and Tyler too" (his running mate was John Tyler). Harrison won the election by a landslide, but died just 30 days into his presidency.



Stamp commemorated the 150th anniversary of the signing of the Ordinance of 1787 that created the more than 260,000 square-mile territory.



Battle of Lake Erie Bicentennial stamp pictures William Henry Powell's 1873 painting, Battle of Lake Erie.



Tyler raised his own militia company during the War of 1812 to defend Richmond, Virginia.

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