



## Aboriginal Veterans Autochtones

### AVA History Fact Sheet No. 3: The War of 1812

-The military support given to the British Crown by allied First Nations was an important factor in the successful defence of British North America against American invasion during the War of 1812.

-The outbreak of the War had been foreshadowed by years of worsening relations between Great Britain and the United States and was accelerated by the British practice of seizing U.S. ships on the high seas while searching for deserters from the Royal Navy and enforcing a trade embargo as part of their Napoleonic war effort.

-Although First Nations were not implicated in these matters the U.S. government remained suspicious of continuing British support provided to First Nations in areas surrounding the Great Lakes into which the Americans sought to expand.

-Shawnee religious leader Tenskwatawa had been preaching an anti-European and anti-colonial religious revival calling for a return to traditional First Nations lifestyles and values for a number of years when his half-brother Tecumseh began advocating the political idea of a sovereign independent Aboriginal nation-state centred around the Great Lakes and reaching southward to the Gulf of Mexico. Some records referred to this proposed state as the "United Native Nations of North America".

-With the declaration of war in 1812 Tecumseh allied his forces with those of Great Britain against the common American enemy. Tecumseh was later killed in action. Other First Nations leaders including John Norton emerged on other fronts to rally First Nations support to the Crown.

-Additional First Nations groups to the west (Dakota Sioux) and in Upper and Lower Canada (Anishinabeg and Iroquois) played a decisive role in supporting Canadian militia and British Army regulars in repelling advancing American forces.

-Red Stick Creeks in the American south, inspired by Tenskwatawa and Tecumseh, received moral and material support from British agents in mounting an insurgency against further American expansion into their territory.

-A British Army census compiled at the outbreak of the War indicated approximately 10,000 citizens of First Nations in Upper and Lower Canada, and among the "Western Indians" surrounding the Great Lakes, who might be counted on as allies to the British Crown. These included 300 fighters from amongst the Sioux, 400 from the Six Nations of the Grand River, 450 Wyandot, 550 Shawnee, 600 Ojibwa and Odawa, 250 Akwesasne Mohawks, 670 Kahnawake Mohawks, and 150 Kanesatake Mohawks, and many others.

-On numerous occasions throughout the War, First Nations allies to the Crown were successful in diverting American military forces away from projected attacks on Montreal, Quebec City and other trade, transportation and government hubs along the St. Lawrence River, thus forcing them to refocus their attention and resources on far distant areas in Upper Canada and around the Great Lakes.

-The Treaty of Ghent which terminated the War returned disputed border regions to their pre-War status and the services rendered by Britain's First Nations allies were largely ignored. The British Army's Indian Department was transferred to civil control in 1830.

Further Reading: Robert S. Allen, "His Majesty's Indian Allies: British Indian Policy in the Defence of Canada, 1774-1815", Dundurn Press, 1992.

(Compiled by AVA member John Moses, Six Nations of the Grand River, from various sources)

**"Lest We Forget"**