

## Futile Defiance

The final explanation of the Black Hawk War is to be found not in any chronicle of the events leading up to the struggle nor in the immediate precipitating circumstances, but rather in an abstract principle — the concept of historical inevitability. Just as the bloody heaps of hacked bodies of the men who defended their homes in Gaul from Caesar's legions were gruesome monuments erected in the dark and savage forests of northern Europe to the climbing flame of civilization, so the conquest of the American Indian, even though often accomplished by injustice and intolerance, is largely justified. The Sauk Indians offered a dangerous and sometimes bloody opposition to the ingress of settlers to a fertile land destined to become the granary of the nation. To have permitted a few hundred breech-clouted primitives to restrain a process that was as much a movement of the world as of a single nation would have been as foolish as it was impossible.

The Indian mode of living was based more on the roving occupation of the hunt for meat and furs than on the stabilizing factor of agriculture. Manifestly it was uneconomical to permit a tribe

of two thousand red men to possess a vast area capable of supporting many times that number of white men, solely because the means of existence of the former were so primitive as to require such an area.

The source of much of the trouble between the Rock River Sauks and the white settlers was the treaty of 1804, signed at St. Louis by William Henry Harrison and five Sauk and Fox chiefs. The Indians had been sent down to intercede for the life of a tribesman held for the death of a white man who had insulted the murderer's daughter. Fifty million acres of land between the Illinois and Mississippi rivers were obtained for an annuity of \$1000 and the payment of \$2,234.50 in goods purchased by the Indian delegation, most of whom were drunk practically all the time they were in St. Louis.

Black Hawk always asserted that he did not know that the treaty deprived him of his lands and village, and Thomas Forsyth, the Indian agent for the Sauks and Foxes, himself testified that the sale was not known to the Hawk. However, Black Hawk signed treaties in 1816, 1822, and 1825 reaffirming the treaty of 1804. Harrison was popular among westerners for the large number of land cessions he secured, but that his methods were sometimes dubious is suggested by President

Jefferson's disapproval of his actions in 1805, and his order to Harrison to make explanations to certain chiefs and to "counteract the effect of his own questionable methods". Further, it was the custom for all land purchases to be made from the Indians in council, as the consent of the entire tribe was deemed necessary for the disposal of land. This principle of Indian government had been recognized as far back as the British proclamation of 1763 in regard to Indian lands and incorporated in the American policy.

Black Hawk was hostile to the Americans. In his autobiography he records his grief at the murder of an adopted son by settlers. He served under Tecumseh in the War of 1812, and led attacks against Fort Madison, compelling its abandonment. He was amenable to British influence, and it is probable that the anti-American intrigue of British traders moved him strongly. Black Hawk made annual pilgrimages to Malden in Canada, where he was given presents by the British. It is recorded that when the warrior heard of the signing of the Treaty of Ghent between England and America he wept like a child.

Intertribal wars kept the Sauks constantly embroiled with the Osage, the Ioway, the Sioux, and the Menominee Indians, and attempts of the United States to adjust these troubles led only to

greater disharmony. The Sauks almost destroyed the Ioway at their village on the Des Moines River in 1824, and in 1831 killed twenty-five Menominee near Prairie du Chien. Retaliations for such outbreaks usually followed, and in the strife between tribes it is difficult to distribute the blame equitably.

One of the clauses in the Treaty of 1804 provided that the Indians were to live on their Illinois lands until they were surveyed and sold. In 1823 settlers moved in near Saukenuk. At that time the line of settlement was still fifty miles to the east, the lands had not been surveyed and offered for sale, and of all the vast area of the treaty land this was the only part constantly used by the Indians. Manifestly, the settlers were violating the law and should have been ejected by the government, as the squatters at the Dubuque lead mines were later ejected by United States troops. Instead, they continued to encroach upon the Indian village. Not only were the Indian corn fields plowed up, but the cemetery, the most sacred earthly place to an Indian, was also invaded.

The forbearance of the Indians during this period is remarkable, and rather disproves the popular belief that Black Hawk was a blood-thirsty savage, quick to seize a pretext for murder. Black Hawk claimed the Sauks and Foxes had

killed not one white man since the treaty of 1814. Meanwhile, however, Indian women and children were frequently whipped by the settlers, and Black Hawk himself was once severely beaten. It is not difficult to imagine the effect of such ignominy upon a man of his great personal pride.

Settlers continued to move in, and finally in 1829 took out pre-emption rights over a few quarter sections of land, including the Indian village, the corn fields, and the revered graveyard. Thus the spirit of the Treaty of 1804 was cleverly evaded. The settlers ordered the Indians to evacuate, but Black Hawk refused. Petitions and memorials were sent to Governor Reynolds, who declared Illinois in a state of actual invasion, and in June a force of six hundred volunteers and ten companies of regulars under Brigadier General Edmund P. Gaines marched on Saukenuk. The Indians slipped across the Mississippi on the night of the twenty-fifth in a terrific storm and the volunteer troops vented their spleen by destroying the village. A treaty was concluded at Fort Armstrong whereby Black Hawk agreed never to cross to the eastern side of the Mississippi, except by government permission. Keokuk, who had become the principal Sauk chief while Black Hawk was fighting with Tecumseh in 1812, had previously established a large village in Iowa.

In 1831 one of Black Hawk's lieutenants, Neapope, had gone to Canada, and returned with a persuasive fabrication of aid from the British and from the Winnebago, Pottawattamie, and Chippewa tribes in regaining Saukenuk. The prophet Wabokieshiek, in the manner of the prophets who had given supposedly divine sanction for the wars of Pontiac and Tecumseh, assured Neapope and Black Hawk that in visions he had seen the success of any predatory move they might make against the white people.

The attitude of the settlers readily predisposed them to take arms against their savage neighbors. American frontiersmen had always looked on the Indians disdainfully, either ignoring their rights and presence entirely, or blaming them for the mere fact of their existence on the coveted land. Contrary to the earlier policy of the French and English in the fur trade, which was calculated to conciliate and flatter the Indians and, whether just or not, was at least ingratiating, the policy of the Americans was thoughtless and peremptory, tending to incite rather than placate the worst qualities of the savage. Characteristic of the American attitude was an act of the Illinois Territorial legislature offering a bounty of fifty dollars for an Indian and two dollars for a wolf. The discrimination, while it may possibly have flat-

tered the Indians, could hardly have been expected to foster self-restraint on the part of the whites.

The character of Black Hawk was the real cause of the war. In the face of repeated insults to the women and children of his tribe and to his own person, of depredations on his fields and village by white men whose very presence on the Rock River was a violation of national law, he refused to retaliate, suppressing the motive of revenge which is such an integral part of Indian character. But the Hawk had a full share of three qualities that are deep in the Indian nature — pride, courage, and love of the ancestral home. It was injury to all these that drove him to his last and final folly.

He was proud of being an Indian and a Sauk. In a council at Fort Armstrong, General Gaines asked disparagingly, "Who is this Black Hawk? Is he a chief? By what right does he appear in council?" Black Hawk was so aroused that he rose and left the council, not daring to let himself speak. The next day he returned and said, "My father, you inquired yesterday, 'Who is Black Hawk? — why does he sit among the chief men?' I will tell you who I am. I am a Sauk. My father was a Sauk — I am a warrior, so was my father. Ask these young men who have followed me to

battle, and they will tell you who Black Hawk is! Provoke our people to war, and you will learn who Black Hawk is!" He had attained the rank of brave at fifteen, and at sixteen killed and scalped an Osage. His life had been a succession of military exploits. For a man so warlike in spirit to sit idly by and watch his home being burned and his tribesmen beaten is inconceivable.

Black Hawk was a deeply reverent man. The depths of his heart were outraged when he saw the bones of his ancestors turned up by the plow, and hills of corn rising amid the graves of relatives and friends who had gone to the spirit land. His brooding mind must have been troubled by the bitterness of his position. To retreat across the Mississippi would have been to abandon these familiar hills and valleys to people he hated, and to acquiesce in the illegal white settlement would have been cowardice. Old and probably a little weary, for he was sixty-five, he must have moved more slowly than in his youth. But the time came when patience was no more, when the adamant heart grew too bitter to be restrained, and the gathering forces of resentment and wrath and violated piety broke the restraints of age and common sense. In the tragic events that followed, Black Hawk was striving to retain not alone his lands and rights, but what Emerson has called the

most essential thing in a man's living — the preservation of the integrity of his own mind.

The winter of 1831-1832 was rigorous for the Black Hawk band of Sauks at their new village in Iowa. Their corn crop of the previous year had been destroyed and they could get only the barest subsistence. By spring Black Hawk had had enough of famine. At the invitation of the Winnebago prophet, he moved up the Mississippi from his camp on the site of old Fort Madison to go to the prophet's village on Rock River "to make corn", as he said in his autobiography.

Before leaving he tried to enlist Keokuk's band in his cause at a war dance. The two men, both orators of high ability, addressed the gathered savages. Black Hawk had converted a great number to his side when Keokuk stepped forward, saying that he would lead his men across the river on one condition — that all the women and children and old men be put to death first. This destroyed the fervor of the council, and Black Hawk was forced to go up the river and across in full sight of Fort Armstrong with only his original braves, including their women and children. News of his move early reached Jefferson Barracks at St. Louis and Fort Crawford at Prairie du Chien, and troops were despatched on the trail of the Hawk before he reached Rock River.

Rumors were so thick as almost to darken the skies. Not only was Illinois in a state of abject terror, but the entire nation was aroused. Newspapers printed gory accounts of pillage and murder. For so small a fire as actually was burning, there was a terrific amount of smoke.

Black Hawk was warned to return to his Iowa village almost as soon as he left it, but he steadfastly refused to turn back, reiterating the peaceful nature of his trip. That he did not contemplate immediate warfare is apparent from the presence of the women and children of his four hundred warriors. But that he had some vague plan of future attack on the settlers, after he had enlisted the aid of other tribes, is probable. Messages were sent to him, but he refused to listen to any demands to return.

On the seventh of May, sixteen hundred volunteers under Brigadier General Samuel Whiteside were sworn into United States service by Brigadier General Henry Atkinson at Fort Armstrong. On the ninth an expedition took up the trail along Rock River, General Whiteside in command of one force moving by land while General Atkinson followed with a second force in boats with supplies and cannon and four hundred regular infantry as well as three hundred volunteers.

Almost constant rain, with swollen streams and

treacherous swamps, made progress extremely difficult and slow. Whiteside outdistanced Atkinson and arrived at Dixon's Ferry on the twelfth. Two independent battalions constituting a force of three hundred and forty-one men under Major Isaiah Stillman and Major David Bailey were waiting for him. The volunteers, having been there several days, were restless and impatient, so Whiteside permitted them to go forward as a scouting party under the command of Stillman. On the fourteenth they encamped in a grove three miles below the mouth of Sycamore Creek.

Meanwhile Black Hawk had found that the Winnebago would give him no aid, so he left the prophet's town and pushed on to Chief Shaubena's Pottawattamie village on Sycamore Creek. There he finally realized that he had been deceived, for he could enlist only a few braves. After the war Black Hawk said that if General Atkinson had again requested him to return to the west side of the Mississippi he would have done so gladly.

While preparing to give a dog feast on the night of the fourteenth, he was apprised of Stillman's encampment only eight miles away. Disheartened as he was, Black Hawk sent three men with a flag of truce to arrange for a council with Stillman with a view to surrender. When the

rangers saw the Indians approaching they ran out and brought them into camp with great noise and shouting. They had enlisted on a frolic to hunt and shoot Indians, and the game was already coming to them. While the envoys of peace were explaining their mission, five other Indians, sent to watch proceedings, appeared on a hill a quarter of a mile away. At sight of more fun the excited volunteers became uncontrollable and dashed out after their quarry. The braves turned to flee and the white men fired, killing two. At the sound of the shooting one of the truce-bearers was shot down in cold blood. The entire camp rushed off after those who had first pursued the Indians, and in the bedlam which followed the two remaining envoys escaped to carry the news to Black Hawk who, though he had only forty men with him, the rest being encamped on the Kishwaukee River seven miles to the north, placed his men for defense. Stillman's troops advanced through the woods in disorderly and undisciplined array, riding gaily into the ambush after the sport for which they had enlisted.

Suddenly the little band of warriors charged — shooting, yelling, and leaping upon the foremost of the enemy. The raw volunteers had not bargained for this sort of an end to their foray, and the entire body turned and fled, not even stopping

at the camp, which could easily have been defended against a large force. On they rushed pell-mell to Dixon's Ferry where they told Atkinson that some fifteen hundred to two thousand Indians were swarming the woods, and that a great number of their comrades had been killed. Actually, the militia lost only eleven men.

The conduct of Stillman's men was doubly disgraceful. Their cowardly shooting of the envoy of peace in cold blood was the actual precipitation of the war. It is probable that if the truce had been respected and a council arranged between Black Hawk and Stillman, and later Atkinson, the war might have been averted. The craven retreat of the troops from so small a force was equally discreditable.

Black Hawk took all that he could use of the supplies abandoned by Stillman, and led his band into the deep and swampy fastnesses around Lake Koshkonong in Wisconsin. There he left his women and children and turned back to fight the white people.

Isolated attacks followed, small groups of warriors stealing up on some lonely cabin, murdering and scalping, and slipping away to fall on some equally helpless settlement miles distant. Many of the ravages were perpetrated by roving bands of ostensibly neutral Winnebago and Pottawat-

tamie Indians, though Black Hawk's band was blamed for most of the atrocities.

On the twenty-second of May, a group of Pottawattamie surprised a cabin on Indian Creek in which were gathered three families, slaughtered fifteen men, women, and children, and took captive two daughters of William Hall. The girls were taken to Lake Koshkonong and ransomed for two thousand dollars in horses and trinkets by White Crow, a Winnebago chief, who had been sent for that purpose by Henry Gratiot, sub-agent for the Winnebago. They were delivered to Gratiot at Blue Mounds on June third.

Most of the principal engagements occurred in southern Wisconsin. Five white men were killed at Spafford's farm on the Pecatonica River on June fourteenth. The eleven Indians who perpetrated this murder were pursued by Colonel Henry Dodge with a company of twenty-nine men and overtaken in a swamp. Giving one of the finest exhibitions of courage during the war, Dodge and his men charged the marauders and killed all of them, with a loss of three killed and one wounded. It is significant that the white soldiers scalped the slain braves.

Apple River Fort, fourteen miles east of Galena, Illinois, was attacked on the fourteenth, but successfully resisted a desperate siege, the women

and children molding bullets and loading rifles. The next day the same band attacked a spy battalion of Posey's brigade at Kellogg's Grove, sixteen miles to the east, but was routed by reinforcements under Brigadier General Alexander Posey.

The white forces plunged straight on to Lake Koshkonong, but upon arriving there on July second found the Indian camp deserted, trophies of recent massacres still hanging from abandoned tepee poles. With Winnebago guides the troops started west to find Black Hawk and his band, but the guides misled them through swamps and morasses until the men were worn out and disgusted with wading through mud and water all day and sleeping on their rifles all night. Governor Reynolds and his staff had had enough of Indian warfare and left for home, as did half of the volunteers, many saying that their enlistment did not require them to serve beyond the borders of Illinois.

By July 20th, the actual trail of Black Hawk had been found, strewn with hastily abandoned mats and kettles. Several old Sauk stragglers, too weak and starving to keep up, were overtaken and shot. On the twenty-first the Indians were discovered trying to cross the Wisconsin River. A party of fifty braves directed by Black Hawk fought from the bluffs and grass to protect the main body crossing the river.

A large party of old men, women, and children secured rafts and canoes from the Winnebago and set out down the Wisconsin to deliver themselves to the garrison at Fort Crawford. When they had almost reached their destination, they were brutally fired upon by troops from the fort and thirty-two women and children and four men were ruthlessly killed. About as many more were drowned, while nearly all who escaped were cruelly massacred by a party of Menominee under white officers.

An hour and a half before dawn, on the morning after the battle of Wisconsin Heights, in which Black Hawk skillfully covered the retreat of his band, a loud voice was heard calling outside the camp of the troops. It was thought to be part of an Indian attack and the men stood ready, but later it was learned that the speaker had been Black Hawk's aide Neapope, who, thinking that the Winnebago guides were still in camp and would understand him, had appealed in Winnebago for peace, saying that the Indians were starving, that they had been forced into war unwillingly, and would be glad to go back across the Mississippi. No one could reply, and the pursuit began again the next day. Constantly the soldiers gained upon the exhausted red men. As they fled the Indians ate the bark from trees, and devoured the flesh from their dead ponies.

On the first of August the troops found the Indian trail leading to the Mississippi near the mouth of Bad Axe River, but by a clever ruse the Indians threw them off, giving the main body a chance to begin crossing over to Iowa, though they had only three weak canoes for transporting the entire band. The steamboat *Warrior* came up in the afternoon with a detachment of regular soldiers from Fort Crawford, and Black Hawk raised a white flag, calling out in Winnebago that he wanted to surrender. The message was translated, but the commanding officer feared an ambush, and, after several minutes of parleying, opened fire upon the Indians, with deadly results. Before dark the steamboat returned to Prairie du Chien.

On August 2nd the entire body of troops charged the Indians as they were trying to cross the Mississippi. Major James D. Henry's men, being the first to engage the warriors, held them for some time until the main division came up. The slaughter was appalling. The braves, exhausted with starvation and the long retreat, fought desperately, but were driven from tree to tree back into the river. Women and children and a few men threw themselves into the water in a vain attempt to swim across; some finally reached a small willow island, but the steamboat

*Warrior* came up and raked the island with canister, after which a bayonet charge through the water to the island made a shambles of its sandy shore.

One hundred and fifty Indians were killed and an equal number were drowned. Women and children were indiscriminately massacred, many being picked off by sharpshooters as they struggled in the water. The river ran red with the blood of those who were cut to pieces by the heavy charges of grape and canister from the steamboat. Nawase, a young Indian mother, seized the skin along the back of her baby's neck in her teeth and swam, weak and exhausted though she was, across the river through a rain of bullets. The child lived, but carried the scars of his mother's teeth all his life.

Lieutenant Robert Anderson, later the defender of Fort Sumter, found a young woman dead in the grass with her four year old daughter still alive in her arms. A bullet had shattered the left arm of the child and pierced her mother's heart. Anderson took the little girl to a surgeon, who amputated the arm. Through the entire operation the starved child gnawed at an army biscuit, not one moan escaping from her lips during all her suffering. About three hundred Sauks reached the Iowa shore safely, only to be set upon by a band

of Sioux sent out by General Atkinson, who had enlisted all the Indians that he could in his cause. Half were slain outright, helpless as they were, and only a few of the survivors ever reached Keokuk's village. Out of the entire band of over a thousand who had entered Illinois in April, only one hundred and fifty survived in August.

So ended the Black Hawk War. It cost two million dollars to wage the struggle, with terrific suffering and loss to the Indians and settlers, great credit to Black Hawk for his generalship all through the campaign and especially for his masterly retreat from Lake Koshkonong, and with discredit to the volunteer troops for their unmilitary conduct. If the war proved anything, it was the depth and determination of the cry of the whites for land, the futility of Indian resistance to the great westward movement, and the essential nobility of the character of Black Hawk.

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