

Iti Fabussa

Choctaws and the War of 1812: A high point in relations with the U.S.

Part 1 of 2

January 8th marks the 200th anniversary of the end of the Battle of New Orleans. This battle was the final engagement in the War of 1812. During this war, which actually lasted from 1812-1815, the United States fought against Great Britain and its allies to maintain the independence that it had won 20 years earlier in the American Revolution. The War of 1812 was eventful. It saw the United States attempt to invade Canada and it saw British troops invade Washington D.C. and burn the White House. The U.S. National Anthem "The Star-Spangled Banner", was written during another battle in which U.S. forces repulsed an attempted British invasion of Baltimore. Ultimately the United States, with its allies won the war, and gained recognition as a world power. Within the Southeast, the Choctaw people played a significant role in U.S. victories both the War of 1812 and the Battle of New Orleans.

For the Choctaws, involvement really began in 1811. During that year, a delegation from the Shawnee Tribe, made up of Tecumseh, Seekabo, and 20 mounted Shawnee warriors visited Choctaw country. Tecumseh wished to create a unified Native American confederacy to check the continued expansion

of the United States into tribally held lands. He visited many tribes to seek their participation. In 1811, his delegation traveled from Choctaw village to Choctaw village. At each settlement, Tecumseh gave impassioned speeches about Anglo-Americans taking Native American land and marginalizing native people. He urged Choctaw people not to participate in inter-tribal wars, but rather to join an independent, pan-Native American confederacy and to fight on the side of Britain in the upcoming war between Britain and the U.S. Seekabo, who spoke four languages, translated these speeches into Choctaw. Choctaw Chief Pushmataha traveled to many of these talks, speaking after Tecumseh, he gave counter arguments to Tecumseh's proposal. Pushmataha took the position that the United States was an ally of the Choctaw people and that if the Choctaws attacked American settlements, the Choctaw Nation would be destroyed. At each meeting, the Choctaw people sided with the words of Pushmataha. After speaking at a number of Choctaw villages without success, the Shawnee were eventually ordered by a committee of Choctaw chiefs to leave the Choctaw Nation.

The Shawnee delegation left for the Muscogee "Creek" Nation, to seek their support against the U.S. The Shawnees were escorted to the Muscogee border by a party of Choctaws that included David Folsom. In crossing the Tombigbee River, this joint Choctaw/Shawnee party was attacked by a Muscogee war party. After hours of fighting, the Choctaw and Shawnee were victorious, although a number of warriors killed on both sides and a number of Choctaw horses were stolen. Tecumseh's party went on to speak at the Muscogee villages. The Choctaws went to the Black Warrior River valley and attacked a Muscogee village in retaliation, recapturing their stolen horses in the process.

Tecumseh's pleas for a pro-British pan-Indian alliance were well received by a number of Muscogee, whose lands were being encroached upon by Anglo-American settlements on every side. At this time, Muscogee society saw increasing disagreement between traditionalists, known as the Red Sticks, who wanted to maintain a unique Muscogee lifeway, with other tribal members who favored assimilation. By mid-1813, disagreement escalated into violence, in which Anglo-American forces became involved. This conflict, called the Creek War, was one theater of the much broader War of 1812.

In the summer of 1813, a war council was held between Muscogee Red Stick leaders and a number of Choctaw chiefs including Pushmataha, Moshulitubbee, and Yowannee Mingo. The

Red Stick leaders sought the Choctaw people as their ally in war with the U.S. Pushmataha spoke for two days at the council, urging peace. The council ended with the Choctaws still in favor of peace, and the Red Sticks still in favor of war.

It was impossible for Choctaws to remain neutral in the conflict. About 30 Choctaw warriors and their families, from the towns of Yannubee and Patchelchovoka moved in with Muscogee Red Stick villages on the Black Warrior. Red Stick leaders sent notice to the Choctaw village of Fvkitchimpona (located

on the Choctaw / Muscogee border) to abandon their town or be considered enemies. Initially, the Red Sticks, armed by the British, had military success against U.S. defenses in the area. Against Tecumseh's original urgings, they killed a number of women and children. Local U.S. settlements went into hysteria.

Pushmataha approached U.S. General Flournoy offering to form a company of Choctaw warriors to fight for the United States against the Red Sticks. He reasoned that with war all around them, young Choctaw men would end up fighting for one side or the other, and he wanted them to fight for the United States. Initially, Pushmataha's offer was refused, but it was later accepted. Around this time, two of Pushmataha's nephews were murdered by U.S. citizens who saw nothing but the color of their skin. The murders cooled Pushmataha's fervor for the U.S. somewhat, but he never dropped his support.

Part 2 continued in February Biskinik.

Unless otherwise noted, the above information is summarized from "The Creek War of 1813 and 1814" (Halbert and Ball 1895).



Photo Provided
Caleb Sullivan and Raven Baker participating in the bicentennial reenactment of the Battle of New Orleans.