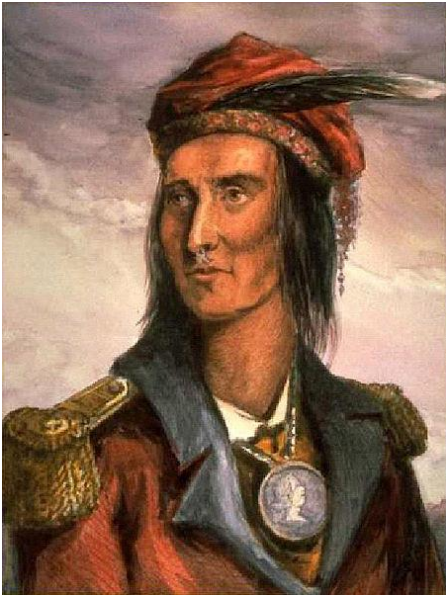


## **Tecumseh (1768-1813)**

Tecumseh was a Shawnee chief, leader of a First Nations confederacy, military leader in the War of 1812 (born c 1768 in south-central Ohio; died 5 October 1813 near Moraviantown [Thamesville, ON]).



Tecumseh was leader of the First Nations confederacy that was formed to resist American encroachment on Aboriginal land in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. When the War of 1812 broke out between the United States and Britain, Tecumseh and the confederacy allied with the British.

He was killed at the Battle of the Thames in 1813.

### **Early Life**

Tecumseh's parents were Shawnees who lived among the Cree in what is now Alabama and Georgia. The Shawnee were a fragmented wandering people who spoke Algonquian.

They had been dislodged from Ohio in the late 17th century by the Iroquois. In 1759 Tecumseh's parents moved north as part of an attempt to reunite the tribe on the Ohio River. The Shawnee believed that they were the Great Spirit's special people, that He had given them a portion of His heart. Tecumseh's father Pukeshinwau was a Shawnee chief.

- Tecumseh was born sometime in 1768. His name is generally understood to mean Shooting Star and is associated with a celestial panther.
- During Tecumseh's childhood, the Shawnee were savaged by war--Five times from 1774 to 1782 invading armies occupied tribal territory.
- In 1768 the Iroquois, who claimed to have conquered the Ohio country, sold the land to the Americans, and surveyors and American militia were a constant sight.
  - With a population of only 1,000, the Shawnee had little hope of resisting the onslaught of land-hungry settlers and the United States military.
  - Pukeshinwau, Tecumseh's father, was killed in one of the confrontations on 10 October 1774 at Point Pleasant.
- From his childhood Tecumseh considered Americans, or the "Long Knives," as his enemies. They had seized Shawnee land, killed his father and destroyed his towns.
- Tecumseh's Kispoko clan lacked the standing of the other clans but had a reputation for fighting second to none among First Nations.

### **Early years as a warrior**

- Following the American Revolution, Congress moved speedily to take over land north of the Ohio River. Organizing First Nations resistance was difficult. The tribes were deeply divided by language and outlook. There had been several attempts to form alliances, but they failed.
- In 1785 the Shawnee were summoned to meet and were intimidated into signing a treaty surrendering their homeland. The negotiators were reprimanded by the rest of the nation. In the battles that followed, Tecumseh saw his first action as a warrior.
- Tecumseh gained a reputation as a bold warrior.
- He missed participating in the single greatest victory by Aboriginals against the armed forces of the United States: on 4 November 1791, American Major General Arthur St. Clair with a force of 2,300 soldiers was routed by 2,000 warriors led by Blue Jacket and the Miami under chief Little Turtle.
- The confederacy's dream of independence was shattered in 1794 when a well-trained American army under Major General Anthony Wayne defeated a number of First Nations attacks.

## Leadup to War with America

- Tecumseh continued to move around with his Shawnee people around the United States as American forces and settlers continued to take over their land.
- In 1808 an unknown Tecumseh made his first visit to Canada at Fort Amherstburg, Upper Canada, in the place of his better-known brother (a well-known Shawnee Prophet). He was very distrustful of the British.
- In spring 1809 Tecumseh made the first of his journeys in the cause of Aboriginal unity, among the Senecas and Wyandots in Ohio and the Six Nations in New York. He had developed into a fiery speaker with a clear message: **the First Nations must stand together to save their land and cultures.**
  - While Tecumseh was on one of these journeys, the Governor of Indiana Territory established a treaty that essentially took the Shawnee's land. Tecumseh was furious.
- When he returned to talk to the British at Fort Amherstburg in 1810 he had changed his attitude. He was ready for war and to offer his support to the British

## Tecumseh in the War of 1812

- On 18 June 1812 the United States declared war on Britain. Tecumseh went north to find the British strengthening the defences of Fort Amherstburg and saw an impressive number of soldiers there. Tecumseh brought about 350 warriors from numerous tribes.
- On 25 July 120 Ohio soldiers marched toward Tecumseh's camp. Tecumseh organized an ambush, routing them and inflicting the first casualties suffered by Americans in the War of 1812.
- On 9 August 1812, soldier and future writer John Richardson met Tecumseh, whom he was the first to call the real hero of the war. He described "that ardour of expression in his eye... that could not fail to endear him to the soldier hearts of those who stood around him."
- On 13 August 1812 famous British General Isaac Brock arrived at Amherstburg and the famous meeting took place between him and Tecumseh.
- On the night of 15 August, hundreds of canoes glided across the river to land near Detroit, led by Tecumseh. The British followed at daylight on the 16th, south of the town. Brock marched directly on the town while Tecumseh's men swept north through the forest.
- Detroit's commander was surprised by the attack and feared that thousands of Tecumseh's men were supporting the British. He surrendered without having fired a single shot!
  - It was a great victory for the allies, seen by many as the saving of Upper Canada, and a demoralizing defeat for the Americans. Tecumseh played a major role and gained the admiration of Brock, who called him the "Wellington of the Indians."
  - It needs to be made clear that Tecumseh couldn't care less about the outcome for the British. His obsession was supporting his people and uniting all First Nations.

## Tecumseh's Death

- On October 5, 1813, Tecumseh joined British forces in the Battle of the Thames. The British soldiers, out in the open, were decimated almost immediately, but Tecumseh's warriors, hidden in the forest nearby, weren't going to retreat without a fight.
- Outnumbered 3,000 to 500, Tecumseh's men fought the American soldiers, and he took the lead—charging at an American with his musket before being shot. During the flurry of battle no one knew what happened to Tecumseh, but his body was found in the aftermath.
- No one knows where the body was buried. Some stories tell of his warriors spiriting it away to an unmarked grave.
- For his efforts in supporting the British against the Americans in the War of 1812, Tecumseh firmly established himself as a Canadian hero!

