

Comparative History: Battle of Fallen Timbers 1794

The irony of history is the apparent repetition of events that are very similar in nature that occur in far removed places in far removed time periods. Approximately one thousand years after the subjugation of the last strong independent nation of the Emishi, the Isawa of Hitakami country, the young American nation forced the last strong independent tribal nations of Native Americans to sign the Treaty of Greenville in 1795 which effectively opened up the entire Ohio Valley north of the Ohio river to American settlement. Just as the Emishi did in Hitakami in the 790's against the Japanese, the Native Americans of the Ohio Valley resisted the encroachment of American settlement into their traditional hunting lands north of the Ohio river. Just like the Emishi under Aterui and Moro did in 789 to the Japanese at the Battle of Subuse, defeating them decisively in battle, so the Native Americans under Little Turtle and Blue Jacket defeated the Americans under General St. Clair in 1791 at the Battle of the Wabash river. Despite this resounding victory, this was the beginning of the end of the independence of the Old Northwest tribes who resided in the present-day Midwest (Ohio and Indiana) as the young American nation just like the Yamato Japanese were determined more than ever to conquer those who stood in the way of colonization.

The Native tribes and confederacies of the eighteenth century were extremely powerful throughout the American Revolution and through the War of 1812. They could not be ignored because they were often in alliance with the British who still considered the young nation of the United States as rebels, and then as a threat to Canada. So though the Americans had defeated the British during the American Revolutionary War, the British for their part would not accept this as a permanent state of affairs which of course led to the War of 1812. These tribal nations were more inclined to side with the British due to their soldiers and traders not demanding land as the Americans did. The British lived mainly in Canada and their soldiers temporarily resided in fort settlements that existed mainly to trade with the Natives for furs, and to block the Americans and French rather than as an outpost for further settlement.

According to Jones (2004:8) at the battle of the Wabash river the Natives under Little Turtle and Blue Jacket numbered 1,400, and were very well organized and led. They were drawn from Native tribes made up of Shawnees, Miamis, Delawares, and Wyandots who had moved into the area in the 1730's (2004:5). These were not nomadic tribes, but settled tribes who lived like the Americans in log cabins along the Ohio and Wabash rivers and farmed the land and hunted as well. Just like the Emishi of Hitakami they lived by both hunting and farming, and lived in settled villages. They felt like they had given up enough land in Kentucky and Pennsylvania to American settlement and were determined to fight for their hunting lands north of the Ohio river, and like many tribes after them, underestimated the American settler's hunger for land. They thought they were safe from encroachment north of the Ohio river from both Americans and the still very powerful and warlike Iroquois Confederacy based in upstate New York, but whose influence reached into the Great Lakes and Pennsylvania.

However, it was not the Iroquois who were the most powerful in the 1790's it was the Natives of the Wabash Confederacy who destroyed the young American army of approximately 2,800 men under General St. Clair. It was and still remains the most lopsided defeat the American army ever suffered, more so than the Battle of the Bighorn river, and perhaps can be approached only by Pearl Harbor in 1941. The battle began when the advance guard of Kentucky militia posted across a creek near the Wabash where the main army was encamped came under a withering fire from the Native riflemen. They panicked and fled towards the main camp where the soldiers were unprepared. The Native army then surrounded the main camp firing at will from behind large trees and brush that characterized the heavily forested area. St. Clair ordered a desperate bayonet charge from the regulars that temporarily held them back. The continued cross fire from the Natives produced hundreds of dead and wounded among the Americans. Soon thereafter, realizing that the fight was not going well a retreat was ordered that turned into a flight. The Natives then attacked and proceeded to scalp the dead and wounded men in the camp as the remnants of the army broke through the enemy line where the trail had been made the previous day. The shattered remnants of the American Continental army fled back on this trail casting off their weapons as they ran.

Just as in the battle of Subuse a thousand years ago, the panicked Japanese army surrounded by the enemy fled without their armor thrown off into the Kitakami river. However, as pointed out on the page that [describes that battle](#), the Japanese army put to torch some eight hundred houses. So though victory was complete on the battlefield, it really hurt the inhabitants.

After three years the American army attacked the Ohio Valley again. This time what occurred during the campaign made it very similar to the campaign of the Japanese army under Tamuramaro. At the Battle of Fallen Timbers in 1794, General Anthony Wayne, practiced a "scorched earth" policy that effectively destroyed the granaries of the Natives (2004:77-79; Taylor 2006:287-88). The actual battle of Fallen Timbers was fought between the advance guard of the American forces and the the Natives in a field where many trees had fallen in a recent storm. The casualties on both sides did not number any more than one hundred total, however, it caused the Native tribes to withdraw due to their surprise at the uncharacteristic response they received. Despite being ambushed from "the fallen timbers" the Americans responded with a cavalry charge that broke the Native line, and the militia this time did not flee, but stubbornly held their ground and advanced. After their

withdrawal the Americans destroyed the villages and houses as well as the granaries and orchards of the tribes, and this is what eventually lead them to surrender. This material destruction would take time to recoup and in the meantime they faced certain starvation. In the words of William Clark who fought as a young Lieutenant who described the abandoned fields,

"as far as the eye can see covered with the most luxuriant groths of Corn, interspurced with Small Log Cabins around all of which you observe their well cultivated gardens, affording almost every Species of horticultural Vegetibles in the greatest abundance." (*Clark's Journal of Wayne's Campaign* in Jones 2004:77).

This is the kind of tactic which Sakanoue no Tamuramaro and Ki no Kosami (the Japanese general at Subuse) had employed in the Hitakami country, and so even when the Isawa Emishi fought his army to a standstill in the 790's, the ravages to their homes and material possessions lead them to eventually surrender in 802. Many details of the campaign are lost for the most part, but the battle was not just on the field but also waged against the dwellings and livelihood of the people that we know from existing records. What was also most effective in winning over those Emishi who were not in alliance with the Isawa Emishi was to offer goods such as rice and cloth in exchange for recognizing the Japanese government. This is the exact same tactic both the British and Americans used to win over the allegiance or at least the neutrality of Native American tribes.

References:

Jones, Landon Y.. [William Clark and the Shaping of the West](#). New York: Hill and Wang, 2004.

Taylor, Alan. [The Divided Ground](#). New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006.

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