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Stacking the Deck:
Indian Involvement in the
Fight for Control of Fort Mackinac During the War of 1812

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The British occupied a small fort on St. Joseph Island when the War of 1812 broke out. Captain Charles Roberts, who commanded the British at this fort, learned of the declaration of war on July 8, 1812. However, earlier that spring rumors had reached commanders there of the upcoming war with the United States. This prompted them to gather the sympathetic Indian tribes from the area in anticipation of the conflict. "British authorities gathered 400 Odawa, Ojibway, Menominee, Winnebago, and Dakota warriors. These sympathetic Native Americans, along with one hundred fifty French-Canadian and Metis voyagers and nearly fifty red coat soldiers, constituted an imposing force ready to support the British cause."¹

On July 16, 1812, Captain Roberts sailed to attack the Americans at Fort Mackinac on nearby Mackinac Island. With the help of captured American spy Michael Dousman, the British were able to set up quietly behind Fort Mackinac. With that, the war's first land action had begun. On July 17, 1812, Lieutenant Porter Hanks, commander of the American Army at Fort Mackinac, awoke to find his garrison completely surrounded by some three hundred and six British soldiers accompanied by over seven hundred Native American warriors. Hanks, having in his command only fifty-seven soldiers and three gentlemen prisoners, decided that surrender was the only way to

¹ Phil Porter *Mackinac: an Island Famous in these Regions*, (Mackinac Island: Mackinac Island State Park Commission, 1998) p. 21

² Porter, 21-22

prevent a general massacre by the "savages".³ In the Capitulation that was signed by Hanks and Captain Roberts the American soldiers became Prisoners of war in the British service and control.⁴ Roberts was very proud of the fact that "not one drop either of man's or animal's blood was spilt".⁵

On August 4, 1814, the Americans launched an attack against the British at Fort Mackinac in an attempt to regain control. It soon became clear that they could not attack the fort from the sea. Colonel George Croghan decided to adopt the British strategy of two years earlier; he decided to attack the fort from behind. What the Colonel did not plan for, however, was that the British-friendly Indians warned their allies of the coming attack and an ambush was set up, the American force was pushed back to the sea.⁶

From the beginning of the war to the end, it seemed there was no stopping the British machine at Mackinac. "The War of 1812 was a series of frustrations for the Americans at Mackinac."⁷ It seemed that no matter what they did, the Americans were never successful. The British force was superior to the young American army and their allegiance with the region's Native Americans gave them the upper hand through out the war. The British were successful in gaining, and keeping, control of Fort Mackinac during the War of 1812 because of the aid they received from their Indian allies.

From the beginning of the century the British had worked to foster a friendship with Native Americans. Their experience in the French and Indian War had taught them

³ Lieutenant Porter Hanks to General Hull, 8/4/1812
<http://www.hillsdalesites.org/personal/hstewart/war/America/1812-surrender-hanks.htm>

⁴ "Capitulation" 7/17/1814 *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections Vol. 15* (Lansing: Wyankoop Hollenbeck Crawford Company, state printers, 1909), 10
Captain Roberts to Maj. Gen. Brock 7/17/1812 *Michigan Historical and Pioneer Collections vol. 15*, 108

⁶ Porter, 24-25

⁷ Eugene T. Peterson. *Mackinac Island: It's History in Pictures* (Mackinac City, Mi: Mackinac Island State Parks Commission, 1973), 14

how important having the Indians on their side actually was. Right after contact, British policy toward the Indians was one of avoidance, but as the years went on it became increasingly clear how important alliances with the Indians were and policy changed towards that end.⁸ "Indian policy became a major concern of the British ministry in the 1760s and 1770s."⁹

Fort Mackinac, and Mackinac Island, was of strategic military importance during the War of 1812. First, it was important because it stood between the Americans and Canada, impeding a major war aim, the capture of Canada.¹⁰ The United States needed Mackinac because of its location on the straits as it was in close proximity to Canada. The United States hoped that the people of Canada would join them in ousting the British from their territory. William Hull delivered a speech in July of 1812 in which he warned the Canadian people to join them in their fight or be destroyed in the process.¹¹ Four days later their foothold at Mackinac was taken by Britain. The British now had their fortress

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back that they had lost after the American Revolution.

Fort Mackinac began as a French fort on the lower peninsula of Michigan. The British gained control after the French and Indian war. The French had little interest in the island and rarely went there out of respect for the esteem that the Indians had for island as a home for their gods.¹³ The British had no such respect when they came to the island. They purchased it from the local Indians for a price of about five thousand pounds

⁸ Richard White *The Middle Ground Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 318

⁹ White, 320

¹⁰ Undressed Letter without signature or date *Michigan Pioneer and Historical collections vol. 15*, 61-63

¹¹ Proclamation to Canada by William Hull 7/13/1812 *Michigan Historical and Pioneer Collections vol. 15*, 107

¹² The Jay Treaty; November 19, 1794 The Avalon Project www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/diplomacy/britain/jay.htm

¹³ McCabe, 4

which they saw as "being the adequate and compleat of the before mentioned island of Michilimackinac..."¹⁴

When the American Revolution began, the British were concerned that the fort would be vulnerable to rebel attack. Governor Patrick Sinclair decided to have the Garrison moved during the winter of 1779-80.¹⁵ Sinclair decided that Mackinac Island with its high limestone bluffs would make the perfect location for his new post because the height it offered would make it hard for enemies to attack it from the harbor below.¹⁶ It would be only later that Sinclair's insight would pay off.

Native Americans played a key role in the fight for control of Fort Mackinac. Their intelligence was of vital importance to the British cause and helped them prepare for their enemy better.¹⁷ Their allegiance gave Britain the boost it needed, both in

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confidence and in numbers, to sure victory against their enemy at Mackinac. The United States was aware of this advantage and feared it.¹⁹ The Indians gave the British an advantage in the fight for control of Fort Mackinac during the War of 1812.

The War of 1812 is a topic that scholars have written extensively about. A work that many after it have cited is Theodore Roosevelt's *the Naval War of 1812*. In it he discusses, as the title suggests, the battles that took place on the seas and the great lakes. He analyzes the battles, the reasons for the war, and the politics behind the battles. This is

¹⁴ Indian Deed for the Island of Mackinac 5/12/1781 *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections vol. 10* (Lansing: Wayankoop hallenbeck Crawford Co., state printers, 1897), 633

¹⁵ Keith R. Widder *Reveille Till Taps: Soldier Life at Fort Mackinac, 178-1895* (Mackinac Island: Mackinac State Historic Parks, 1972, 1994), 1, 3

¹⁶ Widder, 3

¹⁷ Lieut. Bulger to Lieut. Col. McDouall 9/7/1814 *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections vol. 15*, 641-642

¹⁸ Letter from Maj. Gen. Brock unaddressed 12/2/1811 *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections vol. 15*, 56-61

¹⁹ Unaddressed letter without signature or date *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections vol. 15*, 61-63

considered a great work on the War of 1812 in general, but did not mention much about Fort Mackinac except to say that a battle occurred there on August 4, 1814.

Other works on the war of 1812 in general included Donald R. Hickey's book *The War of 1812: A Forgotten Conflict*. It aided in the understanding of why the war was fought and the politics involved. It also gave an insight into the outcomes of the war; he believes that the war established the United States as a major player on the world stage.

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He also believes that most historians have overlooked the war's importance. In an article he wrote some years later, Hickey discusses the historiography on the war since 1989 when his book was published and discusses whether or not the war is still generally

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overlooked by historians.

Walter R. Borneman's book *1812: The War that Forged a Nation* also gave insight into the outcomes of the war. In addition, his book also helped with the understanding of why the fight for control of Fort Mackinac occurred. He writes that its loss helped to open up the Northwest Territory to attack by the British and the Indians that aided them. He also talks about Indian relations with the Americans and points out that some of the American citizens living in the village below the fort in 1812 were loyal to Britain.²²

Books on the history of Mackinac Island include Kathy- Jo Wargin's book *Michigan: The Spirit of the Land*. This talks about the Straits of Mackinac, the area between the lower and upper peninsulas of Michigan, and its importance to the early commerce and settlement of the region. She also points out the importance of Mackinac

²⁰ Donald R. Hickey *The War of 1812: A Forgotten Conflict* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 327

²¹ Donald R. Hickey "The War of 1812: Still a Forgotten Conflict?" *The Journal of Military History* 65 (2001): 741-769 JSTOR, www.jstor.org.

²² Borneman, 64-69

Island to the straits²³. The geography of the island was one of the main reasons that the British military decided to move the fort there in the 1700s. In his book, *Mackinac Island: Its History in Pictures*, Eugene T. Peterson discusses how its geography shaped the history of the island and the fort. George S. May's *Pictorial History of Michigan: the early years* discusses the history of Michigan and talks about a primary cause of the war being the feeling that the British were behind Indian attacks on the frontier.²⁴

Other books discussing Mackinac's role in Michigan history include *Grand Hotel Mackinac Island* by John McCabe, *Michigan: an illustrated History of the Great Lakes State* by George S. May, and *Voyages into Michigan's Past* by Larry B. Massie. These offer great insight into the History of the state of Michigan and include the best histories of Mackinac Island that I have found. They mention the war of 1812, but do not focus on it. It is only part of the broader topic of Michigan history that is discussed in these books.

Also of great importance in understanding the link between the British and the Indians are Richard White's *The Middle Ground*, and John R. Elting's *Amateurs to Arms! A Military History of the War of 1812*. White Discusses Britain's Indian policies and how they changed over time. He points out that their exploitation of the anti-American sentiment among the Indians was one of the main reasons that they secured their allegiance.²⁵ Elton points out that British intentions on land were defensive in nature and that they needed control of the waterways in order to move supplies and men. He also

²³ Kathy Jo Wargin *Michigan: the Spirit of the Land* (Stillwater: Voyager Press, 1999), 74

²⁴ George S. May *Pictorial History of Michigan: the early years* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdman's Publishing Co., 1988), 64

²⁵ White, 511

²⁶ John R. Elting *Amateurs at Arms! A Military History of the War of 1812* (DeCapo Press, 1995), 15, 19

points out that near the end of the war Americans were trying to get the Indians out of the fighting.²⁷

Reginald Horsman wrote two articles discussing Indian policy in the old northwest region. His article *American Indian Policy in the Old Northwest* talks about the ways in which Americans tried to gain land from the Native Americans in the region and helps us to understand why they would want to aid the British and fight against them. He discusses Britain's policies in the region in his article *British Indian Policy in the Northwest, 1807-1812*. In this article he explains that Britain's interest declined between 1794 and 1807 when their interests in the region's Indians was renewed. It was then that they realized that a war was coming with the United States and they actively sought the "aid of their old allies".²⁸ Beverley W. Bond, Jr. also wrote an article discussing Indian policies in the region. In his article *William Henry Harrison in the War of 1812* he explains the situation of both the American and the British points of view and helps the reader fully understand the reasons why each side wanted the loyalty of the region's Native Americans.²⁹

In terms of the actual battles that occurred for control of Fort Mackinac, Phil Porter's *Mackinac: an Island famous in these regions* was of great importance in understanding the dynamics of the battles. He discusses several factors that helped to determine the outcome of the two battles. These factors included the strength of the British and American forces and the link between the Indians and the British. He cites the British allegiance with Native Americans as the reason for the 1812 surrender of Fort

²⁷ Elting, 511

²⁸ Reginald Horsman "British Indian Policy in the Northwest, 1807-1812" *The Mississippi Historical Review* 45 (1958): 51-56 JSTOR www.jstor.org.

²⁹ Beverley W. Bond, Jr. "William Henry Harrison in the War of 1812" *The Mississippi Historical Review* 23 (1997): 499-576 JSTOR www.jstor.org.

Mackinac by Lt. Hanks and as a major factor in the failed American attempt to regain control in 1814. Borneman's book also gave good details of the actual battles that took place at the fort.

The consensus among Historians seems to be that the British army was simply too strong for the American force to overcome at Mackinac in 1814. "The British position was too strong and their men too well disciplined for Croghan's troops."³⁰ In fact, songs were written about the might of the British army. Lyrics such as "and when before the enemy, their shining steel appears, goodbye, goodbye, how they run, how they run, from the British Bayoneteers!" were intended to not only tell how great their army was but to also strike fear into their enemies.³¹

The British Military was strong, there is no doubt, but to say that its might is the only reason they were victorious at Mackinac is to minimize the contribution of the Native Americans. The Native Americans were key players and without the Indians, the British would not have been successful in gaining and keeping control of the fort.

As early as 1800, it was clear that a war was coming between the United States and Great Britain. In fact Britain's Indian spies reported that the Americans had settled all disputes with the French and "that they were now to act in concert against Great Britain."³² In 1807 it became even clearer when the British attacked *the Chesapeake*, an American ship, claiming that there were British deserters on board. In fact one of the four men that were taken off the ship was indeed a deserter and a British subject, although there was some dispute as to the true status of the other three men. After the four men ere

³⁰ Widder, 34

³¹ "The British Bayoneteers" *Songs of the War 0/1812*], gathered by Donald Graves; <http://www.warof1812.ca/songs.htm>

³² Letter from Col. McKee to Mr. Claus, 8/15/1800 *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections*, vol. 15, 24-25

on board the *Leopard*, the British ship, Captain Humphreys forced the *Chesapeake* to join the British squadron. Americans were so incensed by this incident that it was clear to both sides that war was inevitable.³³ It was after this incident that Britain stepped up its efforts to gain Indian loyalty in light of the coming war.³⁴

The British government wasted no time in securing the aid of North America's Indian nations. The British exploited the growing Anti-American sentiment among the Indians to acquire their allegiance. They also gave presents and promises of protection from encroaching American settlers.³⁵

Britain sought Indian aid for several reasons. The first and most important reason being that they needed them to boost their numbers. The second was that if they had Indian aid, the Americans did not. Third, because the Americans were afraid of the Native Americans, the use of Indian warriors gave them a psychological weapon against their enemy. And lastly, they needed the Indians as spies against their enemy.

With the Napoleonic wars happening in Europe, the British force available for the War of 1812 in America was minimal. They needed more fighters if they were going to defeat the Americans.³⁶ What better pool to recruit from than the Indians? They knew the land; they could sneak in and out of American camps without their knowledge and acquire vital information. They could also endear themselves to the Americans because of the fervor in which the United States sought Indian lands. Also, because the Indians hated the Americans, they could exploit that and get the Indians to fight for them.³⁷

³³ Borneman, 23

³⁴ White, 513

³⁵ unaddressed letter from Maj. Gen. Brock *Michigan Historical Collections vol. 75, 58*

³⁶ Borneman, 20

³⁷ Borneman, 75

. The British were intent on gaining every advantage they could prior to, and during, the war with the sole purpose of keeping these advantages out of the hands of their enemy. This included both land and Indian aid. They met with several tribes, gave them presents, and exploited their hatred of Americans in order to secure their allegiance.³⁸ In taking Fort Mackinac, one of the major goals for the British was to keep it out of enemy hands and keep them from their goal of reaching Canada. The British employed this tactic elsewhere as well, and even before the war began they knew that if America was allowed to put up military forts in certain strategic areas, it could potentially spell disaster for them.³⁹

Many Indian tribes were considering joining forces against the Americans before the war began. In 1805, representatives of the Sauk, Fox, Odawa and Potawatomi nations met to discuss joining forces against the United States.⁴⁰ The British were well aware what it would mean if the United States were able to secure the aid of the Native Americans before they could.⁴¹

In fact, the United States did try to secure the aid of the Indians. Their land practices, however, worked against them. In his address to the Indians in 1809, Governor Hull promised that he personally would stop the encroachment of white settlers on Indian lands if they would place themselves under the protection of the United States. "Your

³⁸ Letter from Mr. Claus to Lieut. Gov. Gore 2/27/1808 *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections Vol. 15*, 44-45

³⁹ "Statement of the Province of Upper Canada" 8/24/1808, *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections Vol. 15*, 8-17

⁴⁰ Indian Council at Amhestberg 6/8/1805 *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections Vol. 23* (Lansing: Wyankoop Hallenbeck Crawford Co., State Printers, 1893), 39-42

⁴¹ Letter from Mr. Nichol to Gen. Brock, 5/21/1808, *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections Vol. 15*, 50

great father, the president, he is taking you under his wing of his great protection... if you are dutiful children you will be safe and happy."⁴²

The United States failed in securing the Indian allegiance because the Indians felt that they were not protecting them as well as the British could. Britain went to great lengths to make sure that the Indians knew that the Americans were not on their side. They told the Indians that if war did break out they would be left to their own devices and "great pains were taken to instill this idea into the minds of the Indians".⁴³ The British played on the fear and resentment the Indians had against the Americans to manipulate them into giving them what they wanted.

The United States made many treaties and land deals with Native Americans prior to the war of 1812. Reservations were set up; and provisions provided by the United States government would cease if Indians left these reservations.⁴⁴ The various Indian tribes made several complaints to the government to no avail. In September of 1809, the Wyandott Indians complained that the reservation they were given was too small and the fifty-year ownership they were promised in the treaty of Detroit was simply unacceptable.⁴⁵

America was anxious to settle the northwest and during the period immediately before the War of 1812 began they adopted policies that would bring about this end. Between the years of 1794 and 1812 the American government had developed a policy that they felt would secure land in the simplest and least expensive manner. The United

⁴² Governor Hull's Address to the Indians, 8/28/1 & Q9 *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections Vol. 8*[^] (clarke.cmich.edu/nativeamericans/mphc/warofl812/gov567.htm), 567-571, quote p. 568

⁴³ Unaddressed letter from Maj. Gen. Brock 12/2/1811 *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections vol. 15*, 58

⁴⁴ "An Act for the Relief of Certain Alabama and Wyandott Indians 2/28/1809" *The Avdon Project at Yale* <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/statutes/native/naO15.htm>

⁴⁵ Wyandott Chiefs to William Hull 9/30/1809 *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections Vol. 40* (Lansing: Wyankoop Hallenbeck Crawford Co., State Printers, 1929), 304-307

States told the Native Americans of the region that their land had been given to them in the Treaty of Paris. The Indians were told that the United States was well within their rights to expel them from this land because they fought with the British during the Revolution.⁴⁶

Indians felt that the United States was not serving their best interest and simply wanted their land. They did not feel that they should give up land that was rightfully theirs. So they decided to join with those who they thought could help them get rid the encroaching enemy. Tecumseh, a Shawnee, urged other Indians to join forces against the United States and also urged them to never give up their land.⁴⁷ Tecumseh resented the United States for taking land that didn't belong to them. "The white people have no right to take land from Indians because they had it first." The Indians did what they felt they needed to in order to stop the white settlers from stealing their land.

The Indians allied with Britain were behind several massacres of Americans during the War of 1812. Many Americans resented the British for not attempting to restrain these merciless attacks on civilians.⁴⁹ In his second inaugural address, James Madison blames Great Britain for atrocities the Indians have perpetrated against United States citizens. He claims that even though Britain did not commit these acts themselves, "they have let loose those savages armed with these cruel instruments".⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Horsman, *American Indian Policy*, 36

⁴⁷ Techkumthai (Tecumseh) speech to Patawatomi, Ottawa, Winnebago, and Sauks 11/15/1810 *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections Vol. 25* (Lansing: Wyankoop Hallenbeck Crawford Co., State Printer, 1894), 275-277

⁴⁸ *Chief Tecumseh to Governor Harrison at Vincennes 8/12/1810*
<http://www.usconstitution.com/chieftecumsehtogovernorharrixonatvincennes.htm>

⁴⁹ Lewis Cass to John Armstrong 10/6/1813 *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections Vol. 40* 540-542

⁵⁰ Second Inaugural Address of James Madison, Thursday, March 4, 1813,
<http://www.thewarof1812.com/warof1812documents/JamesMadison2ndinaugural.htm>

In June of 1812, Madison delivered a message to Congress about the upcoming war in which he talks more vividly about the actions of the Indians allied with Britain towards the citizens of the United States. "Our attention is drawn to the warfare just renewed by the savages.. .a warfare which is known to spare neither age nor sex and to be distinguished by features peculiarly shocking to humanity."⁵¹ American leaders were afraid of the Indians because of their war tactics, a fact that Britain exploited for its own benefit.

These attacks on Americans by the Indians continued and even worsened throughout the war. General Harrison wrote in 1813 of a party of Ottawa Indians who attacked settlements on the shores of Lake Erie. They captured "three families consisting of one man and twelve women and children". One woman, being pregnant, was unable to keep up and was killed and her child ripped from her. Also, he tells of three or four of the children being butchered.⁵² It was acts such as these that struck fear into the heart of Americans against the Indians. And it was this fear that the British used as a weapon against the Americans.

In exchange for their services, the Indians were given presents and promises of protection from American encroachment. In his letter to General Drummond in July of 1814, Colonel McDouall listed the presents he gave to the Indians in exchange for their help. Among the lists are items such as blankets, cloth, tobacco, guns and ammunition, baskets, and kettles.

⁵¹ James Madison War Message to Congress, June 1, 1812, <http://www.historycentral.com/documents/MadisonWar.html>

⁵² General Harrison to Maj. General Vincent, 11/3/1813, *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections Vol. 15*,436-439; quote p. 437

⁵³ Lieut. Col. McDouall to Lieut. Gen. Drummond, 7/16/1814, *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections Vol. 75*,610-616

Britain repeatedly promised Native Americans that they would stop the United States from invading and stealing their land. Their attempts to recruit Indians were not limited to the great Lakes region. Attempts were made to get the Indians in that region to entice their western tribes to join the British cause in exchange for protection.⁵⁴ The British used this fear of the land-grabbing Americans to recruit the men they needed for the war.

The British used fear as a tactic to get what they wanted and it worked. The fear of encroaching settlers helped to entice the Indians to fight with them against the Americans. The Fear of the Indians helped Britain gain control of Fort Mackinac in 1812. In his account of the surrender, Captain Roberts told Major General Brock that the Indian's minds were "much heated" towards the Americans but that they reluctantly went back to the boats after hearing of the surrender.⁵⁵ It was upon seeing the over seven hundred Indians that Lieutenant Hanks decided to surrender.⁵⁶ Thus, the British had an effective psychological weapon that they used throughout the War of 1812.

Between the surrender of Fort Mackinac in 1812 and the American attempt to regain control in 1814, the Indians were hard at work for the British instilling that fear. Political cartoons depicted Indians being paid by the British for the scalps of American soldiers.⁵⁷ The British were also continuing to use the Indians as spies. Indian canoes

⁵⁴ Mr. Elliot to Major Glegg, 1/31/1814, *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections Vol. 15*, 484-486

⁵⁵ Captain Roberts to Maj. Gen. Brock, 7/17/1812, *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections Vol. 15*^ 108

⁵⁶ Lieut. Hanks to Gen. Hull <http://www.hillsdalesites.org/prsonal/hsterart/war/America/1812-surrender-Hankes.htm>

⁵⁷ "A scene on the frontiers as Practiced by the "Humane" British and their "worthy" allies" *American Political Prints, 1766-1786*
<http://loc.harpreweek.com/LCPoliticalCartoons/DisplayCartoonMedium.asp?MaxID= 16&...>

were used to send information back and forth between military officers. This started before the war and continued to its end. As early as 1800, the British were pumping the Indians for information about the Americans.⁵⁹

It was intelligence from Indian sources that gave Captain Roberts the confidence to launch the attack on Fort Mackinac in the summer of 1812.⁶⁰ It was also Indian intelligence that allowed British Colonel McDouall to know in advance of the upcoming American attempt to retake the fort in the summer of 1814, giving him ample time to set up an ambush.⁶¹ Without such Indian intelligence, the British would not have been successful against their enemy at Mackinac.

The information received from Indian spies was of vital importance to the British cause. Indians were gathering information such as numbers of the enemy, weaponry and ammunition, and planned attacks.⁶² British Officials kept reassuring the Indians that their cause was just and the end result would be less encroachment by Americans on Indian land. As long as the Indians kept fighting for them, the British would provide them with provisions and would keep the Americans off their land.⁶³

Without the aid that the Indian intelligence provided them, the British would not have had the upper hand that they had throughout the war at Mackinac. Colonel McDouall relied heavily on this intelligence and planned in military actions accordingly.

⁵⁸ Lt. Col. McDouall to Lt. Gen. Drummond, 5/26/1814 *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections Vol. 15*, 564-565

⁵⁹ Letter from Col. McKee to Mr. Claus 8/15/1800 *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections Vol. 15*, 24-25

⁶⁰ Captain Roberts to Col. Baynes 7/17/1812 *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections Vol. 75*.J09

⁶¹ Lieut. Col. McDouall to Lieut. Gen. Drummond 7/17/1814 *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections Vol. 75*^616-619

⁶² Commodore Yeo to Lt. Gen. Drummond, 6/3/1814 *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections Vol. 15.*, 580

⁶³ Speech delivered by Lt. Colonel McDouall to the Indian Chiefs and Warriors at Michimackinac June 5, 1814. *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections Vol. 15*, 581-585

Throughout his letters are mentions of this intelligence and its uses. "Some Indians... returned to me with intelligence..." and like phrases are scattered throughout his letters to various generals and British officials.⁶⁴

In the summer of 1814, the Americans decided to launch an attack to regain control of Fort Mackinac. After the success Commander Oliver Perry had defeating the British on Lake Erie, they now seized the opportunity to regain control of the Great Lakes.⁶⁵ The British strengthened their forces at Mackinac because they were aware of an attack. Colonel McDouall writes in a letter written to General Drummond two weeks before the attack that the Indian spies in his employ alerted him to an upcoming attack from the Americans and that because of the advanced warning he had plenty of time to prepare.

"Our latest Indian accounts state that the enemy had ten vessels at Detroit and were making great preparations to attack us, which was to take place in August. . . I am doing my utmost to prepare for their reception. . . I am strongly inclined to believe that the threatened attack is likely to take place in the course of next month."⁶⁶

The American force, consisting of five ships under the command of Commodore Arthur Sinclair, sailed into the straits of Mackinac in late July of 1814. After one of the ships, *the Lawrence*, determined that a frontal assault was impossible, Lieutenant Colonel George Croghan decided to copy the British strategy of two years earlier and attack them from behind. McDouall was well prepared for their arrival and marched his soldiers and over three hundred Indian warriors out to meet them. The American soldiers were

⁶⁴ Lieut. Col. McDouall to Lt. Gen. Drummond 9/9/1814 *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections Vol. J5, 643*

⁶⁵ Porter, 23

⁶⁶ Letter from Col. McDouall to Lieut. Gen. Drummond 7/17/1814 *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections Vol. 75, 618*

pounded by British canons as they crossed an open field and more than a dozen were killed in the fighting. The Americans were forced back to their ships and once again the British had defeated their enemy because of the help they received from their Indian allies.⁶⁷

Colonel McDouall had delivered a speech to the Indians at Mackinac two months before the American attack in which he encouraged them to drive the "big knives" from the island. He called upon their "warlike spirit" to fight along side his soldiers and assist them in "driving the big knives from this island" then they would open up the "great road" into their country. He manipulated them by using language that would lead them to believe they were fighting for their very survival.

Earlier that year, the United States tried to convince the Indians that this war was between the Americans and the British and that it was not their battle to fight. They told the Indians that this was now a "white man's war" and warned them that Indians on either side of the conflict could expect nothing but hardship and a growing casualty list if they chose to keep fighting in the war.⁶⁹ McDouall combated this in his speech at Mackinac by saying that

"it is sufficiently humiliating, for it acknowledges their incapacity to carry on the war with the King Your Great Father: it likewise shews their usual disregard to truth, for they say when a peace is made, he will withdraw from you, and that then they will punish all those who do not now renounce our friendship".⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Porter, 24-25

⁶⁸ Speech by Colonel McDouall to the Indians 8/5/1814 *Michigan Historical and Pioneer Collections vol. 15, 582*

⁶⁹ Elting, 312

⁷⁰ Speech by Col. McDouall to the Indians 8/5/1814 *Michigan Historical and Pioneer Collection vol. 15, 583*

McDouall goes on to call the Americans liars and warn the Indians that they will never be satisfied until they "possess all your lands". He tries to convince the Indians that Britain alone has their best interest at heart and will not allow the enemy to take their land.⁷¹ He writes that the warriors are concerned for the safety of their families who are in the path of the American army. McDouall tells Drummond of a Winnebago chief who reports about the "barbarous murder of seven men of his own nation" that incited the anger of the other Indians to produce a sentiment of "indignation and desire of

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revenge". McDouall used this desire for revenge to get the Indians' aid in fighting off the American attack in August.

McDouall knew that the Americans would not be able to defeat him if he had the Indians fighting on his side. "We are here in a very fine state of Defense and the Garrison & Indians in the highest spirits, and all ready for the attack of the enemy." Two months later he would prove to be correct. The Indians helped his men push the Americans off the island. They had succeeded in keeping their fortress and preventing their enemies from gaining a foothold on Lake Huron. McDouall's men, including the Indian warriors, had succeeded in their mission. He and his men fought very hard to hold this post, but events were soon to transpire that would prove his efforts were in vain.

On Christmas Eve of 1814, the negotiating teams from Great Britain and the United States signed the Treaty of Ghent, which brought the War of 1812 to a close.⁷⁴ The British began the process in November of 1813 when they proposed the peace talks.

⁷¹ Speech to the Indians 8/5/1814 *mphc vol. 15*, 583

⁷² Lieut. Col. McDouall to Lieut. Gen. Drummond 7/16/1814 *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections vol. 15*, 610

⁷³ Lieut. Col. McDouall to Lieut. Gen. Drummond 7/28/1814 *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections vol. 15*, 629

⁷⁴ "The War of 1812 Events and Locations" <http://www.galafilm.com/1812/e/events/ghent.html>

The British demanded the creation of a native territory between the United States and Canada, they were determined to respect their Indian allies and right a wrong they committed after the Revolution. In the Treaty of Peace that ended the Revolution, Britain ceded certain lands in the northwest to the United States.⁷⁶ These were Indian lands and the British sought to ease their consciences by returning the land to their Indian allies. The Americans were unwilling to comply with this demand because by this time they already had settlers on this land and did not want to open them up to Indian attacks.⁷⁷

In November of 1814, secretary of state James Monroe told the American team that the negotiations could end quickly if both sides would agree to a return to prewar conditions; everything would just go back to the way it was in 1812. On Christmas Eve, the treaty was signed and sealed and "on paper, it was as if the war had never been

fought". McDouall was glad the war was over but was furious that after repelling an American attack and putting man-hours and resources into Mackinac he now had to give it up just like that.

So with the stroke a pen the war was over and the island of Mackinac was returned back to the Americans. "All territory, paces, and possessions whatsoever taken by either party from the other during the war, or which may be taken after the signing of

⁷⁵ "The British Perspective" *The War of 1812 Background and Ideas*
http://www.galafilm.com/l_812/e/background/brit_peace.html

⁷⁶ They Jay Treaty; November 19, 1794 article 2 The Avalon Project
www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/diplomacy/britain/jay.htm

⁷⁷ "The American Perspective" *The War of 1812 Background and Ideas*
http://www.galafilm.com/l_812/e/background/amer_peace.html

⁷⁸ "The American Perspective" *The War of 1812 Background and Ideas*
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⁷⁹ Porter, 25

this treaty...shall be restored without delay and without causing any destruction.. ."80 The Negotiators had accomplished what the United States army had not been able to accomplish in two years. The Treaty of Ghent had won Fort Mackinac back from the British.

Mackinac Island was of strategic importance throughout the war of 1812. It stood between the Americans and their goal of acquiring more territory in Canada. The British knew that they must keep control of the fort so that their enemy would not have a foothold in the region. The British needed to control the Great Lakes not only to keep the Americans away from Canada but also to keep the waterways clear for the shipment of men and supplies.

The British also knew that in order to do that they would need the aid of the region's Native Americans. The Native Americans instilled fear into the heart of their enemy, and thus were the perfect psychological weapon for them. The Indians' sheer brutality with which they wiped out their enemies made them the ideal weapon to wield against the United States because they could get rid of them and not get their own hands dirty.

They secured the aid they needed by exploiting the Indians' resentment of American land policies. They fueled the hatred by filling giving speeches calling the Americans liars and telling them they would not keep their word. The Indians were desperate to hold on to their land they saw as rightfully theirs. The British saw an opportunity to secure their allegiance by convincing them that the Americans were not

⁸⁰ Treaty of Ghent 1814 article 1 The Avalon Project
www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/diplomacy/britain/ghent.htm

interested in helping them keep their land, but rather were intent on stealing it for

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themselves by any means necessary.

Colonel McDouall had many advantages at Mackinac because he had intelligence from Indian spies. If he did not have this, he would be less aware of the movements of the

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Americans, and thus not as well prepared for their attack. He needed the Indians just as Roberts needed them two years earlier. Without the Indians, Hanks would not have been

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so afraid of a brutal massacre and might not have surrendered the fort without a fight.

The British army was a strong force in the nineteenth century, but their strength alone was not the reason that they were successful in gaining and keeping control of Fort Mackinac during the War of 1812. The Indians being on their side gave them an advantage over their enemy. They were able to boost their numbers as well as use the brutal nature of the Indians' fighting style against the United States. The British knew that Native Americans instilled fear in the American people and they used that fear to their advantage. Thus, they were successful in the fight for control of fort Mackinac because of the help they received from their Indian allies.

⁸¹ Speech to Indians at Mackinac 6/5/1814 *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections* vol. 15, 581-585

⁸² Lieut. Col. McDouall to Lieut. Gen. Drummond 7/17/1814 *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections* vol. 15, 616-619

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