Dakota Information Card

1812 War and the Dakota People

On June 18, 1812, the Americans officially declared war on the British. Americans were trying to expand their territory into Canada.

British officers made promises to the Dakota and other Western First Nations saying if they fought with the British, their lands would be protected. This was repeated many times, including by British Officer McDouall:

> *… the fertile countries which they have usurped only increase their appetite for fresh encroachment & you will gradually be driven beyond the setting sun. My children you possess the warlike spirit of your fathers–you can only avoid this horrible fate by joining hand in hand with my warriors in first driving the [Americans] from the Island.*[1]

The Dakota and other Western First Nations were important to the British military success. Dakota warriors played a significant role in protecting the lands near the Mississippi River, which includes parts of what are now the province of Ontario and the States of Michigan, Wisconsin, Illinois, and Minnesota today.

For the Dakota, the decision to fight for the British was largely to protect their families and territory, but their participation had a heavy and lasting toll on the Dakota people, including the women and children. Often on the brink of starvation, Dakota women had to defend the home front from American forces who would destroy their crops and raid their camps. Dakota chief, Chief Little Crow told British officials: *One half of our Nation have died of hunger with shreds of skin in their mouths.*[2]

On July 18, 1812, a group of 500 men and 400 of the men were First Nations warriors and they crept into the American camp at Fort Michilimackinac at night. 100 of the 500 men were Dakota and they accompanied Robert Dickson and other British, French, and Métis fur traders. At dawn, British allied forces demanded the Americans surrender. The Americans surrendered and the first battle was a success without spilling any blood.

One month later, in August 1812, around 100 Dakota warriors joined the British forces in laying siege to Fort Detroit. The force of approximately 1,300 included over 500 First Nations warriors. The Americans quickly surrendered, partially due to their fear of the large First Nations forces.

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[1] Speech delivered by Lt. Colonel McDouall to the Indian Chiefs and Warriors at Michilmackinac, 5 June 1814, RG 8, C Series, Vol. 1219, 238-241, Reel C-3526, Library and Archives Canada.

[2] Speech of Chtanwakanmani or Little Crow, Chief of the Mdewkanton Sioux, June 1814, as an enclosure in Sir George Prevost to Lord Bathurst, 18 July 1814, Volume 157, Folio 12, Colonial Office 42, National Library and Archives of Canada.

As the war continued, the British promised they would not sacrifice the Dakota peoples interests to make peace with the Americans. At a gathering on January 18, 1813, Dickson said:

> *My Children, listen not to the Songs of wild birds who may tell you that the English will make Peace with the Enemy when it suits their own convenience without consulting your interest. My words are pledged to you that this will never happen.*[3]

The Dakota warriors fought alongside the British to protect the Dakota interests in their traditional territories throughout the duration of the war. The Dakota fulfilled their promises as friends and allies of the British. For the Dakota, the decision to fight for the British was not simply driven by their political alliance: it was also necessary for the protection of their families and territory.

Information Adapted From:

Danyluk, Stephanie, Max Faille, Jarita Greyeyes, and George Rathwell. *Wa Pa Ha Ska: Whitecap Dakota First Nation*. Saskatoon, SK: Whitecap Dakota First Nation and Office of The Treaty Commissioner, 2016.

[3] Dickson, "Speech of Robert Dickson," 223.