



The War of 1812 in the Old Northwest

Alec R. Gilpin

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IT HAS often been said that the War of 1812 accomplished nothing. This is far from the truth, particularly in the Old Northwest. The war did much to end the Indian skirmishes that had plagued Americans since the days of the Revolution and made it possible to extend settlements with remarkably little more bloodshed. It also increased the power and prestige of the United States, resulted in a clearer delineation of the boundaries between the United States and Canada, and ensured the rapid and permanent economic independence of the unsettled American areas. Lake Erie, New Orleans, and the capture of Washington, D. C., are familiar battles of the War of 1812. But here, for the first time, the story of 1812 concentrates on the minor and major battles in the Old Northwest. The prelude to war was the Battle of Tippecanoe, which occurred more than six months before the declaration of war against Great Britain in June, 1812—a war which was openly opposed by large segments of the American population. There was an overwhelming feeling among Washington officials that the conquest of Canada and defeat of Britain there would be merely a military exercise. But these officials were blind to the facts: the declaration of war was made with the army preparations far from complete; the regular army of the United States, which never exceeded 35,000, had trouble filling the ranks and was virtually undisciplined and untrained; many militiamen refused to fight on foreign soil; there were too few efficient and seasoned officers at the beginning of the war; and there was little co-ordination between the widely separated fronts. In the Old Northwest, the fighting had to be waged in a wilderness, with the army building its own rough roads and supply lines, and always facing the threat of sudden Indian attacks...

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