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46. Charles W. Dulles, ed., "Extracts from the Diary of Joseph Heatly Dulles," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 35 (1911), p. 278.
47. George Izard to John Armstrong, July 24, 1814. In: Izard, *Correspondence*, p. 55.
48. Augustine Smith to Moses Porter, July 26, 1814, Moses Porter Papers, Peabody Institute Library, Danvers, Massachusetts. For a complete discussion of this long-standing problem, consult Donald E. Graves, "Dry Books of Tactics: U.S. Army Infantry Manuals of the War of 1812 and After," *Military Collector and Historian* 38 (Summer, Winter, 1986): pp. 51-60; 173-177.
49. George Izard to John Walbach, February 21, 1814, War of 1812 Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.
50. Isaac D. Barnard, May 13, 1814, War of 1812 Collection, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library.
51. Henry Grindage, July 30, 1814, Hawley Collection, Minnesota Historical Society.
52. George Izard to John Armstrong, July 19, 1814. In: Izard, *Correspondence*, p. 55.

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The great things a man does appear to be great only after they are done. When they're at hand, they are normal decisions and are done without knowledge of their greatness.

General George S. Patton, Jr.

Fort Harrison Under Siege—1812

By David C. Bennett

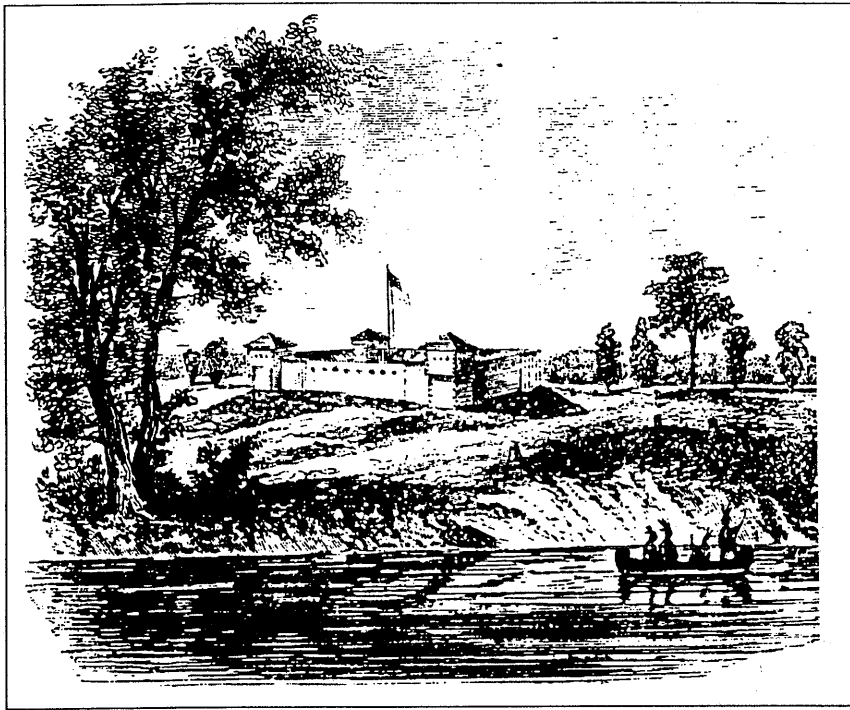
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A former interpreter at Historic Fort Osage near Kansas City, Missouri, David C. Bennett is currently researching material for a book on the First U.S. Infantry during the War of 1812. He is the founder of the recreated First U.S. Infantry, a living history unit, and resides in Collinsville, Illinois.

Thursday evening, 3 September 1812: the report of four rifle shots broke the silence at Fort Harrison. It was just after the musicians had sounded retreat, and the garrison colors had been taken down. Everyone in the post assumed the worst. The commanding officer, Zachary Taylor, was a twenty-eight year old Kentuckian. Taylor had been commissioned in 1808 as a First Lieutenant in the Seventh Regiment of Infantry. Promoted to Captain in 1810, Taylor had recently returned from the East, after serving as a witness in a court martial.¹

Earlier in the day, friendly Miami and Wea Indians had informed Taylor of the coming storm. They had been warned to leave the area of Fort Harrison, as the followers of the Prophet would soon begin hostilities against the "long knives". Despite the warning, two young civilians ventured 400 yards from the garrison to cut hay. John Guffy and a friend were either not informed or ignored the warning. When the shots rang out, the young captain recalled that he "was immediately impressed with an idea that they were killed by the Indians..."²

Having been an officer for only four years, Taylor took no chances. He decided to wait until morning before venturing out of the protection of the stockade to find the two settlers. At 8 a.m. on 4 September, a corporal with a small squad set out to locate them. Taylor sent only a few men, believing that there could be an ambush planned to pounce on the corporal's detachment. The corporal soon sent word back to his commander that both men had been found. Taylor then sent a cart pulled by oxen to the corporal, who brought the two bodies back to the fort to be buried. John Guffy and his friend had both been shot twice, "cut in the most shocking manner" and of course scalped.³

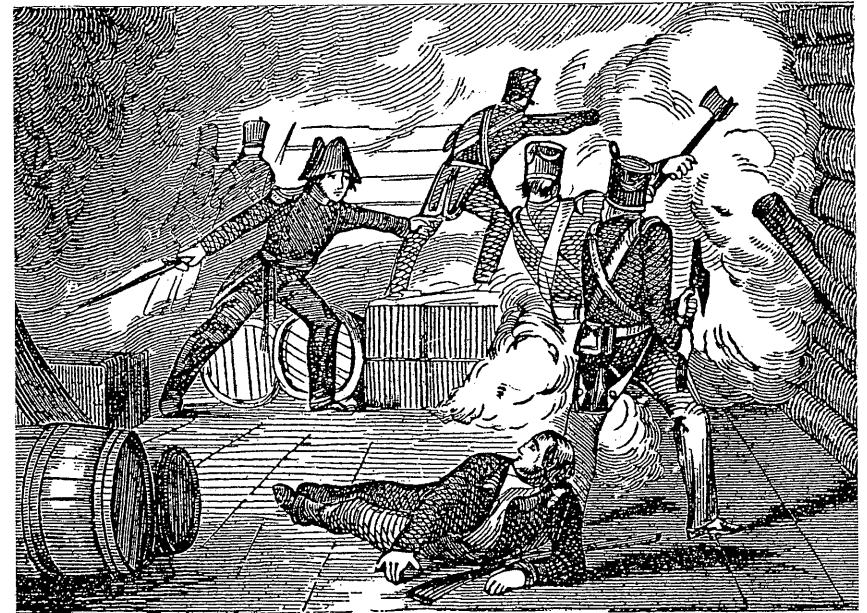


Fort Harrison, from Benson J. Lossing's *The Pictorial Fieldbook of the War of 1812* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1868).

The death of the two young men certainly made an impact on the soldiers of the garrison, as well as on the settlers who had taken refuge behind the black walnut pickets of Fort Harrison. Fort Harrison had been built in October, 1811, during William Henry Harrison's campaign against Tecumseh's brother, known as the Prophet. This campaign would culminate in the battle of Tippecanoe.

Harrison had contemplated building a fort closer to the treaty line of 1809, and north of Fort Knox, which was situated near the town of Vincennes, Indiana Territory, ever since 1809. On 9 August 1811, Governor Harrison wrote that "I have authority from the Secretary of War to build a fort or two higher up the Wabash than Fort Knox..."⁴

The site chosen was known as *Battelle des Illinois*, named by the French due to a story about the Illinois and Iroquois nations having fought a battle there many years before. The site was on the east side of the Wabash River (on the site of modern day Terre Haute, Indiana), on ground about 30 to 40 feet above low water. The militia received



Defense of Fort Harrison, Henry W. Harrison's *Battles of the Republic by Sea and Land from Lexington to the city of Mexico* (Philadelphia: Porter & Coates, 1858).

the task of constructing the fort. It was a typical fort, enclosing about an acre, with a well and two-story blockhouses about 20 feet square, on at least two corners. Pickets and barracks were between the blockhouses, with a four-foot trench around the garrison. The construction was delayed, due to the defective metal of the axes, but was completed by 28 October.⁵

With the new post completed, Colonel Joseph H. Daviess, a United States attorney, delivered a dedication speech. Daviess exclaimed, "In the name of the United States and by the authority of the same, I christen this Fort Harrison." The colonel then broke a bottle of whiskey over the East Gate, to the delight of the cheering soldiers. Harrison's army continued to move north, leaving only the sick and extra baggage behind. On 7 November 1811, Harrison's army tangled with the several tribes that followed the Prophet. In a gallant charge, leading only eight men, Colonel Daviess was mortally wounded and never saw Fort Harrison again.⁶

After William Henry Harrison's campaign had ended, Captain Thornton Posey's company of the 7th Infantry received orders to garrison the new post. In the spring of 1812, Captain Taylor would be

ordered to leave his recruiting duties in Louisville, and to repair to Fort Harrison to command. Sometime in May or June, the Captain had arrived in the vicinity of Fort Knox and Fort Harrison. There is still confusion as to exactly when Taylor's recruits arrived at Fort Harrison. There is also evidence that Taylor's recruits and Posey's company may have been combined.⁷ Posey's company was without officers, after Posey had murdered his First Lieutenant, Jesse Jennings, on 23 June 1811. Posey had fled into Kentucky, and in a bizarre turn of events, would never be charged with murder but eventually promoted to Lieutenant Colonel of the 7th Infantry. Muster rolls for the period 30 June to 31 August 1812 reported Posey's company at 35 men present for duty at Fort Knox.⁸

Taylor reported having approximately 55 soldiers, but with over half sick with "a severe attack of the fever". The garrison guard consisted of only eight men, which Taylor felt was too low. He wrote that, "I had not conceived my force adequate to the defense of this post, should it be vigorously attacked, for some time past."⁹

With the surrender of Fort Mackinaw, the massacre at Fort Dearborn and the surrender of Detroit by General Hull, many Indians rallied to the teachings of the Prophet and the leadership of his brother, Tecumseh. Governor Harrison wrote that "[T]he Prophet has told them that the Great Spirit did not mean that the white and red people should live near each other, that the former poison'd the land and prevented it from producing the things necessary for their subsistence."¹⁰ The calm that had existed in the early summer of 1812 had now all but evaporated. Outside the walls of the Fort Harrison, warriors from several Indian nations began to converge. While Fort Wayne was holding out against the Potawatomis, silently moving down the Wabash River toward the despised fort that sat on the 1809 treaty line were Kickapoos, Winnebagos, Miamis and Shawnees.¹¹

Thus, when the silence was broken on the evening of 3 September, the Indians made a fatal mistake in making their presence known to Captain Taylor. Late in the evening of the 4th, a delegation from Prophetstown arrived. "Old Joseph Renard", a Kickapoo chief carrying a white flag and leading between 30 to 40 Indians, including ten women, approached the fort. The men were chiefs from several different tribes who resided at Prophetstown. "Old Joe", using a Shawnee man to interpret, told Taylor that they came in friendship and were only wanting food, and would return the following day. Despite this show of friendship and need, Taylor suspected a ruse and took action.¹²

At the evening retreat, he issued 16 rounds to each man and inspected their muskets, which he found "all in good order."¹³ Tattoo

was beat by the drummer, indicating lights out for the garrison. Taylor, having no other officers, had only a contract civilian doctor to assist him. The non-commissioned officer of the guard was instructed to remain on the parade throughout the night, as "the sentinels could not see every part of the garrison." Like most of his men, Taylor had also been suffering from the fever, and was "not able to be up much through the night."¹⁴

Chief Shabonee, a Potawatomi Chief who fought at Tippecanoe and other battles during the War of 1812, related how many Indian warriors felt concerning the Americans, when he said that "[W]e are ten to their one... These white soldiers are not warriors. Their hands are soft. Their faces are white. One half of them are calico peddlers. The other half can only shoot squirrels. They can not stand before men... We will attack them in the night."¹⁵

At 11 p.m. Taylor was awakened by one of his sentinels firing his musket. Taylor "sprung up, ran out and ordered the men to their posts." His First Sergeant, who was in the upper blockhouse, called out to the Captain that the Indians had fired the lower blockhouse. Depending on the story, a Kickapoo Chief had crept up to the blockhouse, and using dried grass and wood shavings or possibly a kettle with coals in it, pushed the flammable material through holes near the base of the blockhouse. Captain Taylor blamed the holes in the blockhouse on the cattle in the area. He believed the several holes in the building were caused by the livestock licking the walls, going after the salt that was stored there.¹⁶

A corporal and 10 privates were on the upper floor, assigned there as an alarm post. The lower floor held flour, pork, beef, candles, vinegar and most importantly, 25,316 rations of whiskey.¹⁷ These items belonged to the post's contractor, John Dickson, who held the contract to supply the soldiers with rations. Dickson and his wife were in Vincennes at the time, yet his children Mary and Joseph were still at the fort, under the care of their aunt, Julia Lambert.¹⁸ There was a total of nine women and children within the walls of Fort Harrison that night; some were civilians and some were dependents of the soldiers. Taylor ordered the buckets filled at the well, and the fire extinguished. In an underlying theme of Zachary Taylor's own account of the siege, he blamed his men for the failure to extinguish the flames. The men moved slowly, most likely due to the fact that the majority of them were sick with the seasonal fevers. Taylor wrote that "the word fire appeared to throw the whole of them in confusion; and by the time they had got the water and broken open the door, the fire had unfortunately communicated to a quantity of whiskey."¹⁹



The Defense of Fort Harrison. An amazing wood engraving by Felter. Felter has managed to include four different uniforms; one is remarkably similar to an 1840s Mexican War uniform. The accuracy is so poor, the engraving is interesting.

The scene now degenerated into a desperate situation. They were unable to control or to put out the fire, the blockhouse was ablaze and the barracks roof was beginning to catch on fire as well. Taylor remembered that he "had the greatest difficulty in getting any of my orders executed..."²⁰ Only about 15 men were physically able to exert themselves. The Indians' fierce yells, mixed with the cries of the women and children, convinced two of Taylor's ablest men that enough was enough, and they jumped the pickets.²¹

Taylor now displayed his character. He quickly saw that by throwing off part of the roof of the barracks, and keeping it wet, the whole row of barracks could be saved. He also realized that by tearing down the guard house, he could build a temporary breastwork or picket to breach the gap of the burning blockhouse. This gap would be 18 to 20 feet. Relating his orders to his men, and convincing them that it could be done, "it appeared to inspire them with new life, and never did men act with more firmness and desperation."²²

In the meantime, rifle and musket fire was now hot and furious between the Indians and the soldiers and the dozen or so male civilians inside the post. Men were firing from the two other blockhouses and from the bastions. Doctor Clark led a party of soldiers to the roof of the barracks, and began ripping off burning shingles, amidst a shower of bullets and arrows. Buckets of water were passed to the men on the roof, who used the water to wet down the side of the barracks next to the burning blockhouse.²³

The women were not idle during all of this. Many were helping at the well to fill the buckets. When it appeared that the well was drying out, legend has it that Julia Lambert volunteered to climb down into the bottom of the well, and filled the buckets herself, using a gourd.²⁴

Illuminated by the flames of the blockhouse, the men on top of the roof were prime targets. One man was killed and two more were wounded. In a strange statement, Taylor blamed the soldier for his own death. Instead of crowning him for bravery or placing blame on the enemy outside the walls, Taylor stated that the soldier was "a little deranged, and did not get off the house as soon as directed or he would not have been hurt."²⁵

After the barracks buildings were saved, Taylor's men labored to build a temporary picket before daylight, about five to six feet high. Both sides continued to fire, with "an innumerable quantity of arrows...in every part of the parade." Taylor's command now suffered another man killed while returning fire from the bastion. Taylor reported that this soldier lost his life on account of being "too anxious". Apparently, the man fired at an Indian, and neglecting to "stoop down", he called out to his fellow soldiers to boast that he had killed an Indian. In an instant, he was shot dead.²⁶

About an hour before daylight, one of the deserters from the night before came running up to the gate and begging "...for God's sake" to open the gates. Taylor did not. He reasoned that it might be another Indian ploy and ordered his men to shoot the man. The deserter took off for the other side of the fort, and fortunately, they recognized his voice. Doctor Clarke told him to lie quiet next to the pickets, and behind an old barrel. At daylight, Taylor allowed him to enter. "His arm was broke in a shocking manner..." Captain Taylor did not believe that he would survive the wound. The soldier received his wound while fighting with the Indians. He then determined to return to the post, apparently believing that Fort Harrison was much safer than being outside with the Indians. The other deserter was not so lucky; only 120 yards from the post, the Indians caught him and literally cut him to pieces. At daybreak, about 6 a.m., the regulars' and civilians' fire became more effective. The Indians began to fall back out

of range, and after seven hours of fighting, the battle came to an end.²⁷

The Indians now attempted to round up the settlers' hogs and horses, but failed and instead shot them within sight of the fort. The 65 head of cattle, including some of the "Public oxen", were rounded up and herded off. Fort Harrison had withstood the night attack, and a temporary picket had been built in place of the burned down blockhouse. The inhabitants, however, were now in a fix; with the hogs shot, the cattle taken, and all the contractors' supplies burned, they were forced to subsist on green corn. Taylor believed that the Miamis and Weas had participated in the attack. He felt he had recognized Miami Chief Stone Eater and Wea Chief Negro Leg's voices. He didn't recognize the voice of one of his own men, the deserter; however, he remarkably recognized the voices of two Indian chiefs.²⁸

Taylor had to get word to Vincennes for relief, yet his soldiers were unfamiliar with traveling through the woods. He waited until the 10th, hoping that someone from Vincennes would turn up. Disappointed, he sent two men via canoe down the Wabash. The two men left at night, but returned soon after, as watch fires had been built below the fort along the banks of the river. On the 13th he could not wait any longer, and sent two men overland, even though neither had been to Vincennes before via the land route. He sent his Orderly Sergeant and Peter Mallory, a settler who had been farming land under the protection of the fort. Though unfamiliar with the route, the two men reached it in three days.²⁹

A large force of one thousand rangers, militia from Indiana and Kentucky, were assembling under the command of Colonel William Russell of the 7th Infantry. Russell reached Fort Harrison on 16 September to relieve the siege. Unfortunately, a supply train on the way to Fort Harrison was attacked on the 15th. Sergeant Nathan Fairbanks and all seven men under his command were ambushed and killed by Indians.³⁰

Taylor's scrappy defense earned him a hero's brevet promotion to major. Captain Taylor, and his small garrison of 55 men and several local settlers, held out against a force of some 400 to 500 warriors. Taylor suffered three killed and three wounded—not including the two settlers killed while cutting hay on 3 September. Despite the odds, Taylor never gave up. The defense of Fort Harrison provided Americans with a "bright ray amid the gloom of incompetency" during the year of 1812.³¹

One of the wounded soldiers, James Devourix, had enlisted on 25 March 1810 for five years. By 30 December 1813, he was still unfit due to his wounds. He eventually recovered, and was with the company when it surrendered to the British at Prairie du Chien on 20 July 1814. Most of



Taylor in later years.

the men who fought at Fort Harrison would either be surrendered at Prairie du Chien or would fight at Campbell's Island on the Mississippi during the summer of 1814. Taylor's and Posey's companies would spend the entire war of 1812 separated from the rest of the regiment, and earning them the title "the orphan companies of the 7th Infantry".³²

For Zachary Taylor, his gallant defense started him on his road to the Presidency. Ironically, William Henry Harrison, for whom the fort was named, would also become President of the United States.

Both men, soldiers to the core, would also die while in office. On 9 July 1850, President Taylor whispered to his wife, "I have always done my duty, I am ready to die." A few hours later, Zachary Taylor died, defeated by the Asiatic Cholera.³³

ENDNOTES

1. *Sketches of the War between the United States and the British Isles: intended as a Faithful History* (Rutland, Vermont: Fay and Davison, 1815), pp. 75-77; Holman Hamilton, *Zachary Taylor: Soldier of the Republic* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1941), p. 33.
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3. *Ibid.*
4. Logan Easery, Ed., *Governor's Messages and Letters; Messages and Letters of William Henry Harrison* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Commission, 1922), Vol. 1, p. 552.
5. Alec R. Gilpin, *The War of 1812 in the Old Northwest* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1958), p. 12; Freeman Cleaves, *Old Tippecanoe, William Henry Harrison and His Times* (Port Washington: Kennikat, 1969), p. 90 and p. 93.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Marlesa A. Gray, *The Archaeological Investigations of Fort Knox 2, Knox County Indiana 1803-1813* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1988), pp. 42-43.
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9. *Sketches*, *op. cit.*, pp. 75-77.

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11. John Sugden, *Tecumseh, A Life* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1998), p. 315.
12. *Sketches*, op. cit., pp. 75-77.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*
15. J. Wesley Whickar, Ed., "Shabonee's Account of Tippecanoe," *Indiana Magazine of History*, Vol. XVII (December 1921), pp. 353-360.
16. *Sketches*, op. cit., pp. 75-77; *Fort Harrison*, op. cit., p. 9.
17. *Sketches*, op. cit., pp. 75-77; *Sugden*, op. cit., pp. 315-316.
18. *Fort Harrison*, op. cit., p. 30.
19. *Sketches*, op. cit., pp. 75-77.
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*
22. *Ibid.*
23. Francis B. Heitman, *Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army* (University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1965); *Sketches*, op. cit., pp. 75-77.
24. *Fort Harrison*, op. cit., p. 11.
25. *Sketches*, op. cit., pp. 75-77.
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Ibid.*
28. *Ibid.*
29. *Easery*, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 134; *Fort Harrison*, op. cit., p. 11; *Gilpin*, op. cit., p. 138.
30. *Ibid.*; *Gray*, op. cit., p. 44.
31. John S. Jenkins, A.M., *Daring Deeds of American Generals* (New York: A.A. Kelly, 1858), p. 123; *Sketches*, op. cit., pp. 75-77; *Easery*, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 133.
32. Enlistments #1575 "D" and #1775 "C" of Hiram Clark, Private "Late Capt. Posey" company, killed in action on 21 July 1814 at "Battle of Campbells Island" (National Archives, Washington).
33. K. Jack Bauer, *Zachary Taylor: Soldier, Planter, Statesman of the old Southwest* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985), p. 316.

Friend or Foe: The Largest Natural Defense in the Old Northwest

By Mary Jo Cunningham

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A long-time member of CAMP, the author is an expert on the War of 1812.

This article is not about the specific military units or the battles in the Old Northwest but about the Old Northwest's largest natural defense itself: The Black Swamp.

To study a campaign or battle and be more able to understand what happened on site, one must learn all the factors as a whole unit such as tactics, weaponry, and uniforms of the day as well as the countryside.

I will take you, the reader, to the Great Black Swamp so you might better understand what the Kentuckians, Pennsylvanians and all the other units of regulars, volunteers and militia of the War of 1812 experienced during their push to bring men and supplies to the rapids of the Maumee River. As you read of this vast area, picture yourself as one of those soldiers in this struggle through the swamp. Is it more an enemy to you than the British themselves?

This great swamp gained its designation as "Black Swamp" because of its extensive deciduous growth—a dense canopy of trees all the same height, giving it an unending dark appearance even on a sunlit day. This is what some called the impenetrable area that covered over 1500 square miles. It covers most of the northwest corner of Ohio from Ft. Wayne, Indiana on the west and from near the northern Ohio border to the south for almost 100 miles. It is in essence a flat basin formed by an early glacial lakebed surrounded by slightly elevated sand beach ridges.

Because of the Hoytville and Blue Clay soils in the area which absorb and retain water extremely well, the high numbers of days with precipitation, and the ability of these soils to grow things well, the area has been reclaimed into useable land. Norman Faussy of the USDA Agricultural Research Service said the Black Swamp area