

Upper canada – pontiac essay sample

War



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Pontiac the Ottawa chief was an ally of the French and when French forces were defeated by the British, he plotted, planned and fought to keep the English from overrunning Indian country. Brant the Mohawk chief sided with the King over Congress in the War of Independence and was finally forced to lead his defeated people to Canada to find homes on Canada's soil.

Tecumseh the Shawnee chief threw his fortunes and forces with the British in the War of 1812 and gave his life in their service to save for his people land they were rapidly losing. While all three great chiefs were valuable allies of the European powers their ultimate aim was the vain struggle to save for their people a place in the sun. " Pontiac is forever famous in the annals of North America" someone wrote as early as 1765 and history has maintained his a name of note despite his failure to accomplish the results he fought to achieve. All who knew him saw a commanding, respected, highly intelligent leader.

To the author of The Journal of Pontiac's Conspiracy Pontiac appeared " proud, vindictive, warlike and very easily offended." According to a British officer who met him on one occasion, " He is in a manner ador'd by all Nations hereabout and he is more remarkable for his integrity and humanity than either Frenchman or Indian in the Colony." Little is known of the first thirty years of this war chief of the Ottawa Confederacy. Neither the exact place of his birth is known nor is the tribal affiliation of his parents. One of his widows, Kan tuck ee gun, who was still alive in 1807, had two sons. The Ottawa (Traders) were a tribe of the Ojibwa or Chippawa nations. Both names are forms of the same word meaning ' people whose moccasins have puckered seams'. They lived in the Georgian Bay region and for a time

occupied parts of Manitoulin Island. The Ottawa tribe had a village near the the French settlement of Detroit. In 1754 the French seized a trading post being built by the English and enlarged it to create Fort Duquesne on the site of present-day Pittsburg.

Thus began hostilities between France and Britain which led to the Seven Years' War. This world wide conflict was known to Americans as the French-Indian War because the latter played such a prominent part in it. In 1755 a British force comprised of redcoats and American Colonials under General Edward Braddock attempted to take the fort but suffered a terrible trouncing from a force of French-Indian forest fighters. Pontiac is thought to have been among the Indian warriors who inflicted that disastrous defeat on the British. It was the Indian allies of the French who had wrought the worst havoc on that fatal day. Tales of their triumph were oft repeated around Indian camp fires. Later Pontiac fought under Montcalm and on great occasions he wore a French uniform, the gift of Montcalm. This seven-year war ended in North America when Wolfe defeated Montcalm on the plans of Abraham.

Following British victories around the world, France finally conceded defeat and signed the Treaty of Paris on the 10th of February, 1763. By its terms France ceded Canada and Acadia to England. Small British garrisons also occupied forts at Niagara, Detroit, Michilimackinac, at Great Bay on the Maumee and Wabash, at Presqu'isle at the junction of French Creek with the Allegheny, at the forks of the Ohio and at less important localities in the West and South-West. The western Indians looked with alarm at the influx of English settlers into the Ohio Valley. Although the French had come into the valley, they came as fur traders and settled among the Indians as tenants,

<https://assignbuster.com/upper-canada-pontiac-essay-sample/>

not as owners of the land. British-American settlers on the other hand were coming not for fur but for farms. The Natives knew the French had not conquered them nor had they bought the land from them. Pontiac argued, therefore, that their territory could not be handed over to the British by the French when they surrendered.

Despite this there was a very real fear by Native chiefs that this, in fact, was what was going to happen. The French surrender to the British led to the occupancy and colonization of what Pontiac claimed was Indian land. Pontiac looked upon the British as invaders when they came to take possession of the western forts. Loss of Native land was imminent and to add insult to injury the British said they were dropping the old French custom of offering to their Indian allies gifts and hospitality at the trading posts. This decision was made by the British governor Sir Jeffrey Amherst who distrusted and disliked the Natives and saw no reason why Britain should purchase the friendship of Indians who had sided with the French. Natives were deeply concerned and lost no time in protesting. Sir William Johnson, the British Superintendent of Indian Affairs, urged Amherst not to eliminate presents. He understood that they were more than mere bribery for services rendered. They represented proof of a “chain of friendship” between Natives and the English. To eliminate presents was a hostile act compounded by the flood of settlers moving into the vast region between the Allegheny Mountains and the Mississippi.

Chiefs began to fear European encroachment on this, their prime hunting grounds. The abrupt cessation of presents gave Pontiac and other chiefs reason to preach hatred of the whites and called upon Indians to unite for

<https://assignbuster.com/upper-canada-pontiac-essay-sample/>

the first time in an all-out war to force them back to the coast from which they had come. “ All Nations from Nova Scotia to the Illinois were told to take up the Hatchet against the English.” The few French officers and traders still actively involved in the Mississippi valley fostered hostility and fear of these foreigners and incited the Aborigines to revolt. The consequence was the Pontiac Rebellion, a formidable Indian insurrection of all the western tribes.

By the spring of 1763 Pontiac with an ingenious adaptation of the visions of the famous ‘ Prophet’ of the Delawares had convinced most of the Detroit Indians that God had decreed that all white men who wore red coats must be eliminated. With stunning ferocity a coalition of Native tribes south of the Great Lakes and east of the Mississippi launched coordinated attacks on British forts and on American settlers spreading a thousand-mile trail of terror and slaughter from Canada to the forks of the Ohio. Among the allied tribes were the Ottawas, Chippewa, Hurons, Delaware, Illinois, Kickapoo, Potawatomis, Seneca and the Shawnee. Hundreds of British soldiers and American settlers died.

Pontiac In Council

At the first of a number of secret council meetings, Pontiac addressed Detroit-area tribes with fiery words. Aged fifty at the time he was a man of average height and of darker hue than is usual among Natives. He was lithe as a panther, his muscles hardened by life in field and forest and years of warfare against Indian enemies and the British. Words fell from his lips like a mountain torrent as he denounced the duplicity of the English. The time had come to strike. As he spoke he flashed before them a red and purple wampum belt which he said he had received from their father, the king of

<https://assignbuster.com/upper-canada-pontiac-essay-sample/>

France, who commanded them to fight the British. As he recalled their many victories against the redcoats, his wild words and vehement gestures stirred the blood of his listeners. Moved to want war by the eloquence of that remarkable seer, all warriors present shouted their readiness to bloody the hatchet.

Pontiac & War Belt

Pontiac's war belts had been sent around to the various Indian nations and they all recognized him as the over-chief and were ready to follow him to war. Detroit was the strongest position to the west of Niagara. It contained an abundance of stores and would make a rich prize. As Pontiac yearly visited Detroit during the trading season, he knew the locality well and was familiar with the French settlers there, a majority of whom were not friendly with the British. He decided he would lead and attack on that fort under the pretence of winning it back for the French. The conspiracy of Pontiac was the protest of the backwoods against intruding civilization. A plan of attack was devised. It was agreed that Pontiac and some young braves would go to Detroit and by using a ruse gain entry to the fort in order to determine its strengths and failings.

On the first day of May 1763 Pontiac appeared at the main gate and asked to be allowed to enter so that he and his forty braves could demonstrate their loyalty to the British by "dancing the Calumet" or peace dance. As some performed the dance of peace other warriors wandered about to discern the state of the garrison and the location of the magazines. The first step was the surprise capture of the key fort at Detroit. Detroit was less a fort than a fortified town surrounded by wooden palisade some fifteen feet high within

<https://assignbuster.com/upper-canada-pontiac-essay-sample/>

which the various military buildings and also shops and private houses were ranged along four little streets running parallel to the river. The whole had the disadvantage of being build on a slope of being completely overlooked by the rising ground on the opposite side of the river. A few weeks later the Natives asked the fort commander to arrange a great council at the fort. They planned on entering the fort hiding arms under their clothes.

Additional guns were taken in for the few French residents they expected to join them. The conspirators were to act on a signal from Pontiac. Learning of the furtive plan to take the fort, all the officers wore their swords and the garrison was put on high alert. When some 300 Indians entered and idly strolled about, they were surprised to see soldiers well armed, sentinels at their posts and all stores secured. When forty or fifty chiefs filed solemnly past the armed guards into the council chamber for the conference, they found the commander and his officers awaiting them with pistols at their belts and swords at their sides. The commander's stern demeanour troubled the chiefs who were reluctant to sit on the skins spread on the floor. When Pontiac inquired why on this friendly occasion of good will there was this unfriendly show of force, the commanding officer calmly replied they were simply going through a discipline and training exercise.

Realizing that the jig was up and their scheme was known, Pontiac decided that discretion was the better part of valour and denying any evil intent led his Indians away. As they took their leave Pontiac promised to return shortly " to smoke the pipe of peace." Another site to be assailed was Michilimackinac. There the wily warrior invited the commandant and his men to observe a game of lacrosse outside the fort. As the game progressed the

<https://assignbuster.com/upper-canada-pontiac-essay-sample/>

ball was purposely thrown close to the gate. As it rolled into the entrance the players rushed after it and once inside the palisades they seized the arms their women had smuggled in earlier. Within a minutes they mastered the garrison.

Game of Lacrosse at Michilimackinac

Some days later Pontiac returned to Detroit with 65 canoes but this time the gates to the fort remained closed to all but the chiefs. Pontiac demanded that all or none be admitted. It was time for a change of tactics. That night the warriors worked themselves into a frenzy with war dances that lasted into the early hours of the morning. For several months thereafter the garrison knew little rest as Pontiac's forces besieged it without effect. Things were different elsewhere as bloody raids resulted in redcoat deaths in most other outposts and tragic consequences for American frontiersmen and women. Niagara was never attacked but the smaller forts and posts succumbed to the devastating onslaught and fell into the hands of the Natives.

Pontiac stalks his prey

Things were different elsewhere. So successful was the uprising that within six weeks, nine forts had fallen. These bloody raids resulted in redcoat deaths in most of the outposts and tragic consequences for American frontiersmen and women. Niagara was never attacked but the smaller forts and posts succumbed to the devastating onslaught and fell into the hands of the Natives. Native warriors ravaged the border settlements of Pennsylvania and Virginia causing enormous property damage and loss of life. The extent of the violence indicated the magnitude and intensity of the revolt. The tribes

<https://assignbuster.com/upper-canada-pontiac-essay-sample/>

lamented the loss of French traders and proposed a new French-Indian alliance that would drive the English intruders back across the Alleghanies. Failing to seize Detroit in 1764 Pontiac and his warriors surrounded the fort and attempted to take it in the early months of the following year. They failed to do so, however, and then learned they could no longer expect encouragement or supplies from their old ally.

When warned by the French that henceforth the French and the English must be friends Pontiac realized that the war was effectively over. He did not give up hope of renewing it in 1764 but got no encouragement from the French. “ Pontiac is a shrewd, sensible Indian of few words and commands more respect among those Nations than any Indian I ever saw could do amongst his own Tribe. He and all his principal men of those Nations seem at present to be convinced that the French had a view of interest in stirring up the late difference between his Majesty’s subjects and them.... It will required ... a very even Conduct in those that are to reside in their Country, before we can expect to rival the French in their affection.” [Report made by Sir William Johnson,] 1764 As for the Indians trade was a necessity and much of their trade was now dependent on the English as many of them had always realized. To continue the struggle for the present would be vain.

Although enraged by what he called the cowardly conduct to the French, Pontiac decided to bury the hatchet. He would accept the situation, sue for peace and lay plans for future action. A peace mission with the British was arranged in April 1765 and the prestigious Pontiac was key signatory to the preliminary agreement. At a council of the tribes on August 17th, 1765 at Detroit Pontiac solemnly asserted, “ Father, I declare to all nations that I

<https://assignbuster.com/upper-canada-pontiac-essay-sample/>

have made my peace with you and I now deliver my pipe to Sir William Johnson that he may know that I have made peace and taken the king of England to be my father in the presence of all the nations here assembled.” Pontiac stipulated one condition for peace: that the British should not consider the surrender of the French forts gave them the right to own the whole country and to colonize it. The peace treaty did not include recognition of British sovereignty over native lands.

Sir William Johnson

Those Natives still hostile to the British turned against Pontiac and expelled him from his own village. For several years Pontiac led a wandering life, moving like a restless spirit from camp to camp and from hunting ground to hunting ground. There were outbreaks of hostilities during this period but in none of these did Pontiac participate. He had said at the time of the treaty “that what I am going to say I am determined steadfastly to perform.” He was true to his word and kept the peace. In the autumn of 1766 and the summer of 1777 dis-satisfied Native groups sought Pontiac’s support to continue the struggle against the British. Despite strong pressure he continued to declare his loyalty to the British. Pontiac’s refusal to support the dissidents alienated his former allies some of whom began to fear he would betray them and lead an attack on them.

It was decided that he should be executed. The sinister plan was carried out on the 20th of April 1767. As Pontiac moved among the black shadows of the forest his assassin, a Peoria Native, crept up behind him and with a swift stroke of the tomahawk cleft his skull. Pontiac lost power when he failed to win a quick victory against the English. The Indian who killed him was,
<https://assignbuster.com/upper-canada-pontiac-essay-sample/>

perhaps, bribed by the whites to do so. So ended the life of a warrior chief. It is believed his body was taken by the French to the other side of the Mississippi where he was buried with honours supposedly at a place somewhere in present-day St. Louis, Missouri. The exact burial location is unknown. Pontiac fought with exceptional discernment, terror and tenacity. He also perceived with great acuteness the problems that would afflict the Indians for generations to come: the threat of assimilation and the slow acquisition of their lands by a European population whose frontier and culture constantly moved further and further west.