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of 1832

Introduction

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• The Black Hawk War: Phase Three

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The Black Hawk War might be conveniently divided into four phases. The Black Hawk War: Phase One

By mid-April 1832, just days after Black Hawk's band crossed the Mississippi into Illinois, both the U.S. Army and the state militia had begun their pursuit. On April 1, Gen. Henry Atkinson (left) had received orders to take a detachment of federal troops from St. Louis up the Mississippi to Rock Island. These orders said nothing about Black Hawk. Atkinson's mission was to prevent a war between the Sauks and Foxes, on one hand, and the Menominees and Sioux, on the other. Still, as a result of these orders, Atkinson already had his men organized and their provisions and steamboats arranged when Black Hawk crossed into Illinois. On April 8, Atkinson and his troops left Jefferson Barracks in St. Louis; late on April 12, they arrived at Fort Armstrong on Rock Island. The next day, Atkinson took three steps that had an immense impact on the events of the next four months. First, he held a council with some of the "friendly" Sauk and Fox chiefs. When they refused to



concluded that Black Hawk's intentions had to be hostile. Second, even though Black Hawk and his warriors were still near the mouth of the Rock, Atkinson decided against not only trying to use his small force to stop them, but also sending a messenger to meet with them. As a result, Black Hawk's band continued further up the Rock and deeper into Illinois. Third, Atkinson wrote Illinois Governor John to justify . . . pursuing the hostile party." Reynolds received this letter on April 15. The next day, he informed Atkinson that he had ordered Major Isaiah Stillman to assemble immediately a force of two hundred mounted militia to patrol the

attempt to control Black Hawk and the rest of the band, Atkinson

Reynolds informing him that the federal force under him was "too small frontier "from the Mississippi eastward." Reynolds also issued a public call for another twelve hundred militia to meet at Beardstown in central Illinois within a week. On April 17, Reynolds wrote to Secretary of War Lewis Cass informing him that the state was "in imminent danger," that Atkinson's force was too small, and that he (Reynolds) had called out the militia. This letter, and others from federal officers and agents on the scene, would eventually bring additional federal troops from the East to northwestern Illinois.

and commanded. The regular militia muster days were often as important for their social functions as for any military training. They brought together men from scattered farms and small hamlets who rarely saw anyone other than their nearest neighbors. The men practiced marching and firing in something approaching unison (though often with hoes, umbrellas, and even corn-stalks substituting for guns). Muster days generally ended with drinking, gambling, wrestling, and eating. They fostered community identity and reinforced male authority far better than they produced cohesive and competent fighting units.

As federal and state troops organized to pursue them in mid-and late April, Black Hawk's band proceeded up the Rock to the Winnebago prophet's village. There, in late April and early May, all of Black Hawk's hopes collapsed as he discovered that his people would not be allowed to live along the Rock in peace. On April 26, Napope (the principal civil chief), Black Hawk (the war chief), and the other leaders of the band met with two Sauk chiefs sent by Atkinson. Through these messengers, Atkinson made it perfectly clear that the government would not permit the band to remain

east of the Mississippi. He also informed Black Hawk that he had been misled if he expected British assistance. Even as Black Hawk

messengers and the Winnebago agent Henry Gratiot, and flying a British flag over their camp.

Aware that Atkinson would soon bring his troops up the Rock, Black

to settle in their villages and, thus, expose them to attacks by the army or militia. In fact, Black Hawk learned, the Winnebagoes were not even

and Napope stated that they had no hostile designs, they defied Atkinson by insisting upon living with the Winnebagoes, harassing the

Hawk began to make preparations. What he soon discovered was that, just as Atkinson had said, Napope and White Cloud had misinformed him. They had promised British support in the form of men, guns, and supplies; but no British assistance was coming. They had told him that the Winnebagoes and other native groups would rush to the band's defense. But the Winnebagoes did not even want Black Hawk's band

willing to share their corn with the band. Sometime in early May, Black Hawk's band left the Winnebago prophet's village and continued up the Rock. Black Hawk's last hope was that the Potawatomis would provide the food and support that the Winnebagoes had refused. At the Kishwaukee River (near modern Rockford, Illinois), he held a council with the Potawatomi chiefs. It quickly became apparent that he could expect little from them. With no

On the morning of May 14, the crisis created by Black Hawk's return to Illinois five weeks earlier could still have been easily ended without any bloodshed. By the end of the day, Black Hawk found himself in the midst of a war that ultimately destroyed his people. In the midst of his council with the Potawatomi chiefs, Black Hawk learned that two or three hundred mounted soldiers had been seen less than ten miles away. He sent three warriors under a white flag to arrange a meeting with the soldiers in order to arrange a safe return down the Rock. Unfortunately, the soldiers were Major Stillman's Illinois militia rather than the U.S. Army. No one in the militia camp could speak Sauk. Already suspicious, the soldiers grew alarmed when they saw other warriors in the distance. They seized the messengers, grabbed their horses, and took off after the other scouts. Several of Black Hawk's scouts were killed, but others made it

Abandoning their camp, they fled across the prairie in terror.

should return peacefully down the Rock to the Mississippi.

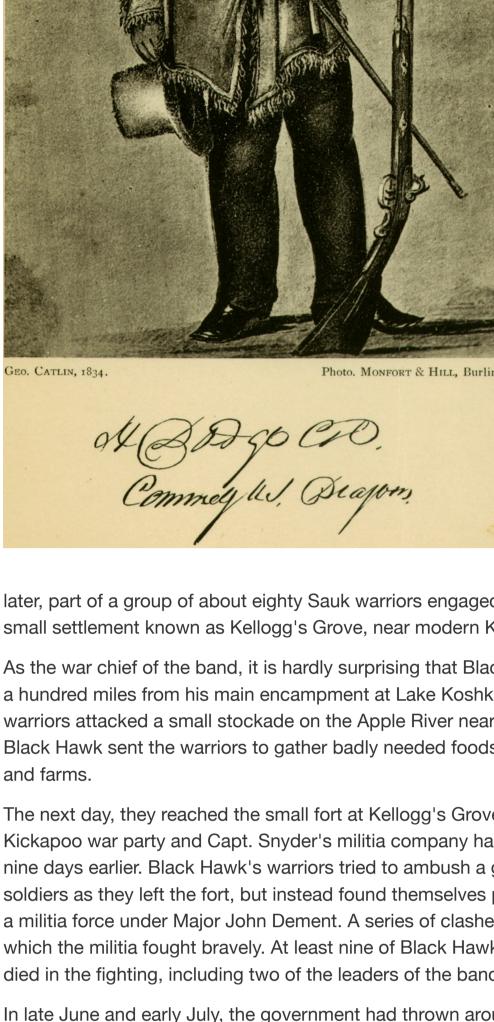
battle by calling out another two thousand militiamen. Black Hawk was amazed at how easily a few of his warriors had driven off nearly ten times as many soldiers. But he decided that the band, which included hundreds of women and children, could not simply return down the Rock. It would have to continue north in order to avoid its pursuers before negotiating or turning west. The Black Hawk War: Phase Two

Koshkonong in southern Wisconsin. There, Black Hawk hoped to find food for his starving people and at least temporary relief from the pursuit. But, from their bases at Dixon's Ferry and Galena, Illinois, respectively, Gen. Atkinson and Col. Henry Dodge (right) continued to send out troops in search of Black Hawk's trail. In this period of activity and uncertainty, one of the few things that neither Black Hawk nor Atkinson did, however, was to send messengers to try to resolve the crisis peacefully. After Stillman's Run, both men apparently decided that the time for negotiating would come after Black Hawk's band had returned, or been driven, back across the Mississippi.

Wisconsin, Michigan, Indiana, and Missouri, hundreds of men turned out for militia and volunteer companies that had to be organized,

armed, and sent wherever they were needed. From their camp at the mouth of the Kishwaukee, Black Hawk's band of Sauks, Foxes,

Kickapoos, Winnebagoes, and Potawatomis moved north into the swampy region known as the "trembling lands" around Lake



mutilated. Two teenage girls, Rachel and Sylvia Hall (ages 17 and 15) were taken away, unharmed, as captives. For the next eleven days, they would remain captives, spending most of this time at Black Hawk's camp, where they were well treated by the Sauk women. With the help of the Winnebagoes and their agent Henry Gratiot, the Hall sisters were ransomed for ten horses, wampum, and corn. In 1838, they published an account of their captivity. At the Battle of the Pecatonica (June 16) in southwestern Wisconsin, it

was Kickapoos, again at best loosely under Black Hawk's supervision, involved in the fighting. Two days earlier, they had attacked a group of

settlers, killing five. On June 16, they ambushed another settler. From

the Kickapoos in a bend of the Pecatonica River. All eleven of the Kickapoos were killed and scalped by Dodge's soldiers. Two days

nearby Fort Hamilton, Col. Dodge set off in pursuit and quickly trapped

Throughout these two months, armed groups, native and white, moved

all, supervised by Black Hawk, Atkinson, or Dodge. Under these violent

and chaotic conditions, conflicts between natives and whites flared up

across northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin, often miles from the

clashes involved as many as a couple of hundred men on each side,

main camps of the army and Black Hawk's band. Some of these

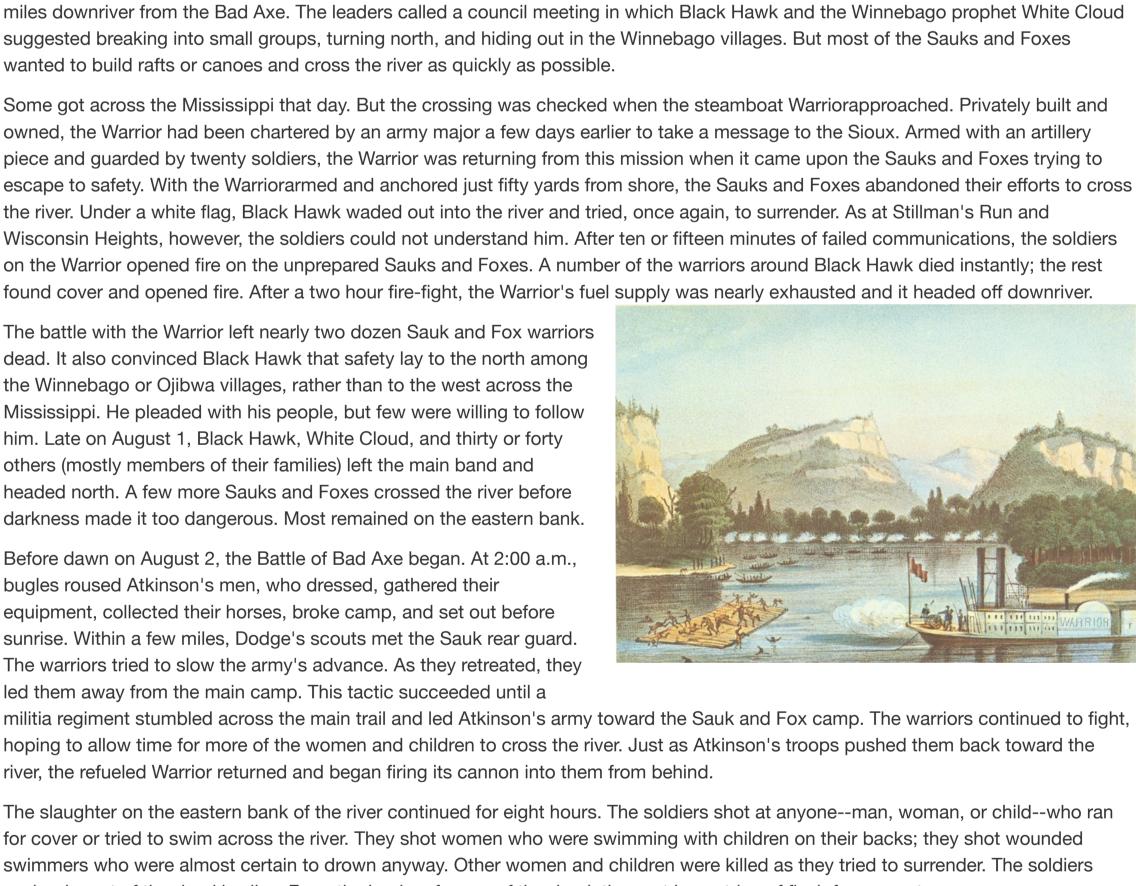
others as few as a couple of dozen.

across the countryside. Many of these groups were only loosely, if at

the men were mounted on horseback; they also had some artillery pieces. On June 25, two days before leading the main force out of camp, Atkinson had sent additional militia companies under Col. Dodge and Gen. Alexander Posey to southwestern Wisconsin and northwestern Illinois, respectively. In early July, Atkinson's scouts MAJ. GEN. WINFIELD SCOTT. found an abandoned camp at Lake Koshkonong. But they could not pick up the band's trail in the surrounding swamps. In early July, Atkinson decided to discharge hundreds of his Illinois volunteers (including Abraham Lincoln) in order to reduce the strain on his limited provisions. He then dispatched the brigades of Gens. Posey, James Henry, and Milton Alexander, along with the men under Col. Dodge, to Forts Hamilton and Winnebago to procure rations for the army. Atkinson's army returned to the confluence of the Bark and Rock rivers and built Fort Koshkonong (later Fort Atkinson).

militiamen had taken nearly forty Sauk and Fox scalps after the battle. In contrast, the militiamen had suffered just one dead along with seven or eight wounded. Early the next morning, Napope tried to end the fighting. Speaking in BLACK HAWK Winnebago, he described the condition of his people and asked to be allowed to re-cross the Mississippi. Just as at the Battle of Stillman's

river.



this gap fairly quickly.

Though brief, the Black Hawk War involved a number of men who would go on to important national political and military careers. Three future presidents had some part in the events of the spring and summer of 1832. Abraham Lincoln, then 23 years old, began as a captain in the Illinois militia and rejoined twice as a private after his initial term of service ended; he never saw action. Col. Zachary Taylor (right, at the time of the Mexican War) commanded all of the regular troops under Gen. Henry Atkinson during the war. The other future president was Jefferson Davis (below, at left), who presided over the Confederate States of America during the Civil War; he spent much of

appointment as governor of Wisconsin Territory. troops throughout this ultimately successful conflict, but spent the remaining decade of his life at Jefferson Barracks in St. Louis. Both Atkinson's subordinates in the field and his superiors in Washington 7. Jaylorbelieved that he had badly mishandled the conflict, first, by allowing it to turn bloody and, then, by failing to crush it immediately once it did. As early as mid-June 1832, the War Department pointedly informed PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES. Atkinson that the president believed that "some one is to blame in this matter, but upon whom it is to fall, is at present unknown." Following

the war, the official report to Congress papered over Atkinson's shortcomings. But private letters continued to criticize him. Col. Taylor

Few Native Americans benefited from the Black Hawk War in any form. Even the "friendly" Sauks and Foxes--who had remained west

government--were made to suffer. In late September 1832, Gen. Scott and Illinois Governor John Reynolds met with the Sauk and Fox chiefs just west of Fort Armstrong. Scott and Reynolds initially demanded most of eastern lowa as an indemnity for the war, offering an

annual payment of \$20,000 for the next thirty years. Since the government wanted nearly six million acres, this offer translated to about

reserving two ten-mile square parcels of land out of this cession (one each for the Sauks and Foxes) at the forks of the Iowa River. Scott and Reynolds rejected the first of these proposals, but agreed to a four-hundred-square-mile area (double what Keokuk had requested)

for the two tribes. But they insisted that the two tribes remove from the ceded lands by June 1, 1833. At the same time, they declared

that Keokuk was the principal chief of the two tribes, even the Sauks and Foxes viewed this position as hereditary. Following the Black

Hawk War, the friendly Sauks and Foxes found themselves stripped of valuable and extensive landholdings and dependent,

ten cents an acre for extremely valuable farm land. Speaking for the chiefs, Keokuk proposed increasing the annuity to \$30,000 and

of the Mississippi, disavowed any responsibility for Black Hawk, and ultimately surrendered a number of his supporters to the

even argued that Black Hawk's band could have been "removed back to the West side of the Mississippi, without there being a gun

fired" if the regular army troops under Atkinson, rather than the militia under Maj. Isaiah Stillman, had met them first.

Hawk War was devastating. It is impossible to know how many died in the four months between early April and early August. Some were killed fighting the U.S. Army or the militia; others were hunted down by Sioux, Menominee, Winnebago, and other native warriors. Many died of starvation while hiding or fleeing from their pursuers. Some drowned trying to swim to safety across, first, the Wisconsin and, later, the Mississippi rivers. Some survived, of course. Many Potawatomis and Winnebagoes simply drifted back to their villages east of the Mississippi in northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin. It was much harder for the Sauks, Foxes, and Kickapoos who had already been forced to remove west of the Mississippi. Even so, some returned to their people safely. Many of the survivors were held in custody, at least briefly, by the army.

economically and politically, on the United States.

beyond the Mississippi.

some of whom had helped Gen. Atkinson. The American

Two weeks earlier, Scott and Reynolds had forced an equally severe

treaty on the Winnebagoes, some of whom had joined Black Hawk and

commissioners demanded that the Winnebagoes surrender all of their

lands south and east of the Fox and Wisconsin rivers in Illinois and

placed them between the Sioux and the Sauks and Foxes, who had

long been--and would continue to be--at war with each other. Though most of the Winnebagoes had apparently remained uninvolved in the

Wisconsin. In exchange, they received a strip of land in lowa that

war, Scott and Reynolds seized this opportunity to remove them

For the Sauks, Foxes, and Kickapoos who returned to Illinois with

Winnebagoes who joined them during the next two months, the Black

Black Hawk in April 1832, as well as for the Potawatomis and

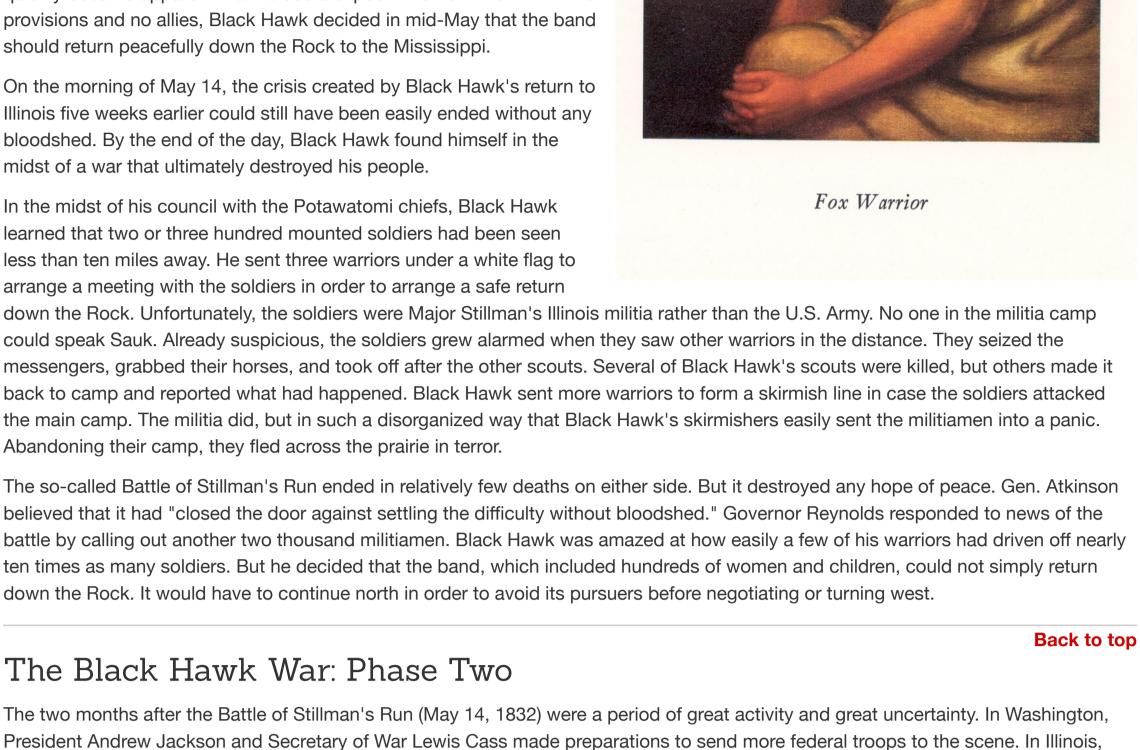
Washington Irving and the artist George Catlin, who made a number of paintings and sketches of them, some of which portrayed them (at their own insistence) in chains. The following spring, five of these men were turned over the Keokuk; the other six, including Black Hawk, were sent east.

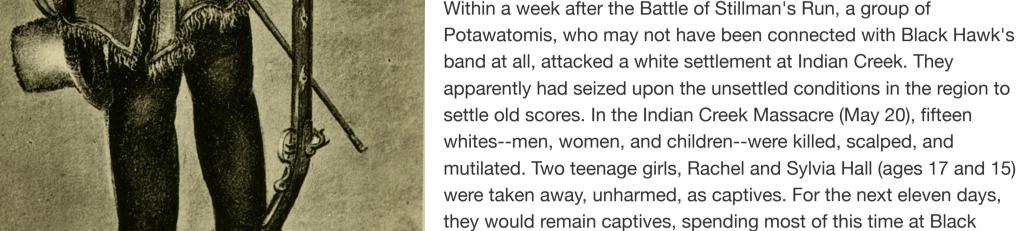
JEFFERSON DAVIS

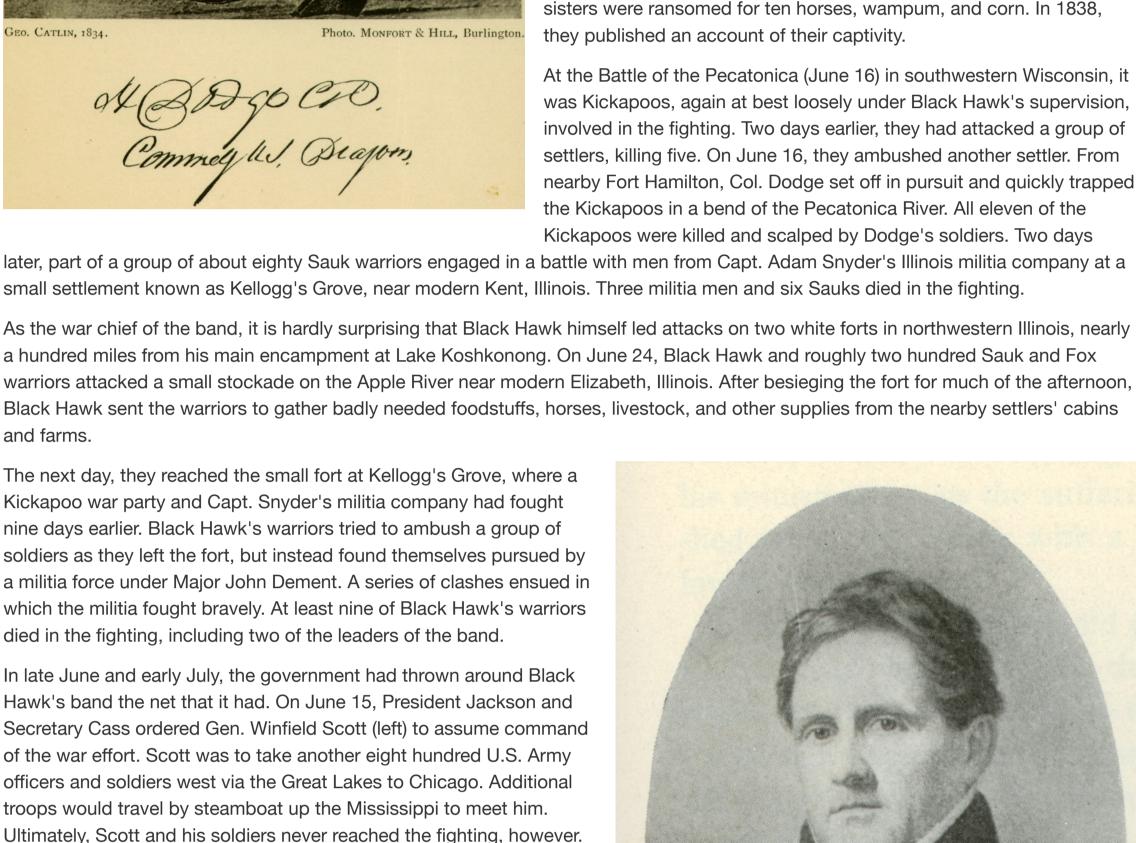
After seven months in captivity at Jefferson Barracks, Black Hawk and five others, including White Cloud and Napope, were sent east in April 1833. Their first major stop was Washington, D.C., but their final destination was another prison, Fortress Monroe in southeastern Virginia. Traveling from St. Louis to Washington by steamboat, carriage, and railroad, they attracted huge crowds wherever they went. In Washington, they met with President Andrew Jackson and Secretary of War Lewis Cass. Even before they left Washington for Fortress

met with immense crowds that clamored to see and hear them. This public enthusiasm did not extend to the west; in Detroit, an angry crowd hanged and burned effigies of the prisoners. In mid-July, the first of the prisoners (White Cloud and his son) were released at Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin. The remaining four were held at Fort Armstrong on Rock Island until Keokuk and other Sauk and Fox leaders could come to take charge of them in early October. During these final days of his captivity at Fort Armstrong, Black Hawk recounted the story of his life for Antoine LeClair, a mixed-race interpreter, and J. P. Patterson, a newspaper editor. Before the end of the year, they had edited and published Life of Ma-Ka-Tai-Me-She-Kia-Kiak, or Black Hawk. While its authenticity was questioned at the time, it is generally accepted now as Black Hawk's

In time, the Black Hawk War involved federal troops, militia companies from the states of Illinois, Indiana, and Missouri and the territories of Wisconsin and Michigan, and, on both sides of the conflict, Native American warriors. Even though nearly one third of the U.S. Army was eventually committed to this conflict, however, the roughly nine thousand Illinois militiamen made up a majority of all of the soldiers called into service against Black Hawk's band. The militia companies were organized locally and made up of men from all levels of society. In most companies, most of the soldiers and many of the officers would have been farmers. But every healthy, adult male was required to participate. As such, professionals, merchants, and shopkeepers (including the twenty-three-year-old store clerk Abraham Lincoln) also took part. In Illinois and throughout the United States, mid-nineteenth century militia companies were generally seen as poorly prepared, armed,







On the way to Chicago, his troops were exposed to the cholera

and they had to be guarantined.

epidemic that swept the United States that year (killing many times

more people than the Black Hawk War). By the time that they reached

Chicago on July 10, less than a quarter of the men remained healthy

With Scott heading west in late June, Atkinson finally set out from

next morning, sending an express messenger to inform Atkinson.

The Black Hawk War: Phase Three

Dixon's Ferry in search of the main camp of Black Hawk's band. His force consisted of about four hundred U.S. Army regulars, under Col.

Zachary Taylor, and more than two thousand Illinois militiamen. Most of

At Fort Winnebago, Dodge heard of a recent sighting of Black Hawk's band further east. While Alexander's men took provisions to Fort Koshkonong, Dodge's one-hundred-and-fifty volunteers and Henry's six hundred militiamen set off in pursuit. On July 18, two of Dodge's men and their native guide stumbled across a fresh trail. They returned to Dodge and Henry who decided to follow the trail the Back to top With their force of about seven-hundred-and-fifty Illinois and Wisconsin militiamen, Gen. James Henry and Col. Henry Dodge finally caught up to Black Hawk's band just east of the Wisconsin River on July 21, 1832. Once found, the trail had been easy to follow. It was littered with pots, blankets, and other items that had been abandoned by Black Hawk's hungry followers in order to lighten their loads. Along the trail, the militiamen also found dozens of Sauks and Foxes, mostly old people and children who were suffering from starvation. Some of them were already dead; the rest were quickly killed. The advancing militiamen also encountered small groups of Sauk and Fox warriors who had stayed behind to slow their progress. Exhausted from the chase but exhilarated by the nearness of their enemy, the militiamen pressed on. Late in the afternoon of July 21, the militia force reached the Sauk rear guard. As most of the band crossed the Wisconsin, Sauk warriors under Napope and Black Hawk fought the militia in a steady rain. Henry and Dodge had a commanding position on the highlands that bordered the river's flood plain. But Black Hawk and his warriors took positions below the heights in ravines that provided cover against the militia's gunfire and allowed them to check any further advance. With the light dimming, the rain coming down, and their men exhausted, Henry and Dodge decided to break off the battle and make camp. During the night, the remaining Sauks and Foxes slipped across the

Even though Black Hawk's band had made it across the river, the

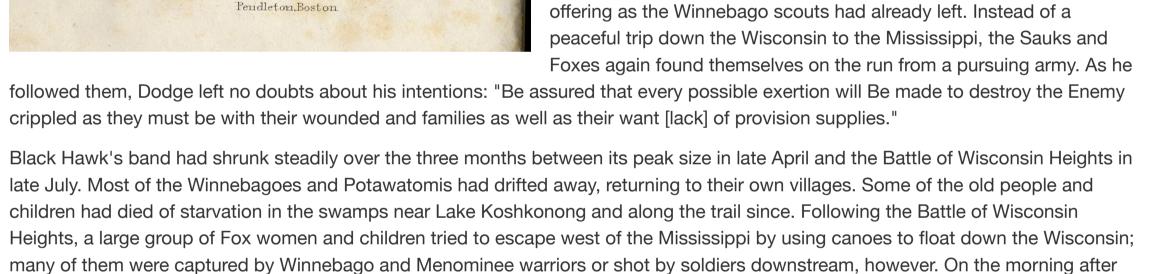
Estimates of the Sauk and Fox dead--either killed in the battle or

Dodge reported that his Winnebago scouts and his and Henry's

drowned while crossing the Wisconsin--reached as high as seventy.

Run, however, no one in the militia camp could translate this peace

Battle of Wisconsin Heights clearly had a devastating impact.



As Black Hawk's band disintegrated, his pursuers continued to coalesce. Dismissing even more of his militiamen, Gen. Henry Atkinson pared his force down to a few hundred men and set out to join Dodge and Henry along the Wisconsin. The forces met at Blue Mounds,

a settlement downstream from the Battle of Wisconsin Heights, but still east of the river, where Henry and Dodge had taken their troops

for provisions. On July 27 and 28, about thirteen-hundred men under Atkinson--including many of the men who had served under

Dodge, Henry, and Generals Alexander Posey and Milton Alexander in the preceding weeks--crossed the river at Helena, Wisconsin.

Black Hawk's band had almost a week's head-start. But the terrain ahead was rugged and Atkinson's men were healthy, well-fed, wellrested, and mounted, while the Sauks and Foxes were exhausted, hungry, and on foot. Over the next few days, Atkinson's force closed

On August 1, Black Hawk's band of perhaps five hundred men, women, and children reached the eastern bank of the Mississippi, a few

the battle, after his failed effort at peace, Napope abandoned the band, slipping away to a nearby Winnebago village.

the Black Hawk War on leave, but was charged with delivering Black Hawk and White Cloud to St. Louis in early September 1832. Another veteran of the war who might have been president was Gen. Winfield Scott, who received the Whig party's nomination in 1852. Like most frontier wars, the Black Hawk War provided a boost to a number of political careers. Four future Illinois governors served in the war: Thomas Ford, John Wood, Joseph Duncan, and Thomas Carlin. It also launched the careers of one future governor each for Nebraska and Michigan and of at least seven United States senators. In 1836, Col. Henry Dodge parlayed his important role in the conflict into an One of the few important figures who did not benefit from his role in the Black Hawk War was Gen. Atkinson, who commanded all of the

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A. Lincoln

Monroe, Cass was already inclined to send them home. As a result, they stayed just a few weeks at the fort, where they spent much of their time sitting for paintings and sketches by a number of artists. steamboat for the trip west. To impress upon them the number and strength of the American people, Cass directed that they be taken on a circuitous route that included most of the large cities of the east--Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York--before heading west over the Erie Canal and Great Lakes. Everywhere they went in the east, they

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The Black Hawk War: Phase Four

Prisoners taken by the army at the Battle of Bad Axe, as well as those brought in by the Sioux and Winnebagoes over the next few weeks, were moved to Fort Armstrong on Rock Island. There, within a few miles of the Sauks' old principal village of Saukenuk, more than one-hundred-and-twenty men, women, and children waited for Gen. Scott to decide their fate. At the end of August, most of them were released, in part because the cholera epidemic had reached Fort Armstrong and Scott worried that, in the cramped quarters of the fort, it would spread rapidly through prisoners and soldiers alike. Eleven men remained in custody after September 1, including Black Hawk, White Cloud, Napope, and most of the other chiefs and leaders of the band. Escorted by Jefferson Davis, a young army lieutenant, they were sent by steamboat to Jefferson Barracks in St. Louis, where they were confined, often in chains, throughout the fall and winter. Their visitors included the celebrated author

On June 5, 1833, Black Hawk and the others were loaded on a

autobiography. But it should not be viewed as entirely accurate--either as an account of events or as a record of Black Hawk's understanding of those events. What Black Hawk said to LeClair and Patterson is not precisely what appeared in the book. His words were translated from Sauk into English by LeClair and then written down by Patterson. The raw transcripts of these conversations do not survive, but it seems likely that Patterson cut and rearranged the material with an eye to his expected audience. Black Hawk spent most of the last five years of his life with his family among the Sauks in Iowa. On a few occasions, he was taken to councils between the Sauks and Foxes and the federal government, including another trip to Washington in 1837. But he had no power and little influence. To the end of his life, he blamed Keokuk for his and his people's fate. On October 3, 1838, Black Hawk died at his home on the Des Moines River.

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