

406 War of 1812

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(Theme music)

Voiceover: The following is a production of the Pritzker Military Museum and Library. Bringing citizens and citizen soldiers together through the exploration of military history, topics, and current affairs, this is *Pritzker Military Presents*.

(Applause)

Williams: Welcome to *Pritzker Military Presents* featuring historians Dr. Allan Millett and Gary Johnson for a discussion on the Native American tribal confederation in the War of 1812. I'm your host Jay Williams, and the following program was part of the Pritzker Military Museum and Library's Sixth Annual On War Military History Symposium held in November 2018. Support for this program comes from our sponsors the Boeing Company, Rita and John Canning, Reed Smith, and Motorola Solutions. This program and hundreds more are available on demand at PritzkerMilitary.org. The War of 1812 was a conflict between the United States and Great Britain over British violations of US Maritime rights. The underlying tensions behind this war arose from the French revolutionary and Napoleonic wars. During this time there was nearly constant conflict between France and Great Britain. American interests were injured by the attempts of each of these belligerents to block trade with the other. The Battle of the Thames, also known as the Battle of Moraviantown resulted in a decisive American victory against Great Britain and its Indian allies from the Tecumseh confederacy. The battle took place on October 5, 1813 in Upper Canada near present day Chatham Ontario. Here to discuss this topic are Dr. Allan Millett and Gary Johnson. Dr. Allan Millett, a retired colonel in the US Marine Corps Reserve, is an acclaimed military historian, award-winning author, and internationally recognized authority on the Korean War and the United States Marine Corps. He is the Ambrose Professor of History and director of the Eisenhower Center for American Studies at the University of New Orleans. He is also the Raymond E. Mason Jr. Professor Emeritus of history at the Ohio State University. Professor Millett has earned numerous awards for his writings and his teaching. These include the 2008 Pritzker Military Museum and Library Literature Award for Lifetime Achievement in Military Writing and the Samuel Eliot Morison Prize from the Society for Military History, which also named its doctoral research fellowship in his honor. Mr. Gary T. Johnson was named eighth president of the Chicago History Museum in August 2005. Mr. Johnson is a life-long Chicagoan and has a strong passion for Chicago history. This is evident through his leadership at the museum, focusing on community outreach and strengthening the institution's financial capacity. He especially enjoys visiting Chicago's grade schools to share artifacts from the museum's collection, and he has visited more than 300 classrooms in neighborhoods throughout the city. Mr. Johnson serves as president of the Museums in the Park, the association of eleven of Chicago's major museums and leads their Museums Work For Chicago campaign, comprising fifteen cultural institutions. He was educated at Harvard University, Oxford University, and Yale College. And now here are Allan Millett and Gary Johnson at the Pritzker Military Museum and Library.

(Applause)

Johnson: Thank you. So, I want to begin by taking us back to a moment in February of 2009. The city of Chicago was celebrating the 200th anniversary of the birth of Abraham Lincoln. There was a big civic event; everyone was there. After it was over I was leaving, and I was accosted by a solitary figure wearing a frontier outfit, and he stopped me dead

in my tracks, and he said, "It's coming." I said, "What's coming?" He said, "Just three years, the 200th anniversary of the War of 1812 is coming. Are you ready for it?"

(Laughter)

Johnson: And I hadn't given it much thought, but he gave me his card. He said, "My whole life I've been ready to serve as a re-enactor for celebrating the anniversary of the War of 1812. Here's my business card." I have a confession: did I call him? No, I didn't. Did the history profession give the War of 1812 its due? I'm afraid it didn't. That's why we're here today. We're here today to give the War of 1812 its due, 200 years and a few years later than that. We have one of the titans of the military history field with us, Allan Millett who has written about a number of wars, Korean War and others, who is going to use his military historian toolkit to help us look at the War of 1812 and what led up to the war of 1812. I will serve as the interviewer and kind of the moderator here. It's my honor to be here on the stage with Allan Millett. But let's face it. In talking about the Northwest Territory side of the War of 1812 we're going to be talking about a forgotten part of a forgotten war, but I think we're ready for it. So, let me just take a moment to kind of set the stage. There is a map of the old Northwest. It's actually a map from 1795 in our collection at the Chicago History Museum. We don't think of places like Illinois and Ohio and Wisconsin as the Northwest. That's somewhere else in the country. But back then that was the Northwest. Allan Millett, where I'd like to begin is, what do you think about the theory that some people have that really the War of 1812 is part of nothing less than a sixty-year war that leads all the way from sixty years before right up to that? Is that a valid way to look at that?

Millett: I think the valid way to look at it is that the War of 1812 is simply the end of a long conflict that probably dates back to the 1760s and the British effort after the French and Indian War to control settlement west of the Appalachians. I'd really like to talk about William Henry Harrison winning the Korean War, but I think I'll--

(Laughter)

Millett: --work this somewhat differently. If you were a member of the Shawnee people or the Delaware or Wyandot or Potawatomi, there's no real distinction between these wars. In fact within tribal culture they're remembered as our united tribes against this strange place called Kentucky. It's the war against the long knives who all seem to be clustering in the land south of the Ohio River. And so it really goes back to Pontiac's rebellion. Tecumseh for example was part Creek and part Shawnee and looked upon Pontiac as his great idol and the dream of some kind of tribal confederacy that would be strong enough with British or Spanish or both backing to resist the flood of settlers, most of whom were coming from western Pennsylvania but the largest number were coming from Virginia. The Virginians thought of Virginia as something that started at the tidewater and ended at the Mississippi River and that Kentucky was simply a conglomerate number of Virginia counties of people that just happened to cross the mountains. And for example in the Battle of the Thames in 1813 there were people there, particularly Isaac Shelby, governor of Kentucky, who had first fought the Shawnee at Point Pleasant, Virginia on the Ohio River in 1774, so there were people in this expedition into Canada whose war, particular with the Shawnee, had begun thirty, forty years before when Kentucky was being settled. We forget that Kentucky is part of a two-pronged knife of white settlement--the state of Kentucky, state of Tennessee--that pushed right past the Appalachians very aggressively, even before the revolution. There were Virginian trappers and traders dealing with the Indian tribes as early as 1770. One of my wife's ancestors was doing this sort of thing in 1776, '75, and so it's a continuous conflict basically between the tribal nations that they run into, and Point Pleasant is one big war battle in 1774, which protected the land south of the Ohio River, but it didn't do much for the settlers in what is now the state of Ohio. And the settlement there was

constrained certainly by tribal interests constrained in Indiana. It's fundamentally a war among confederations, confederacy-related tribal groupings, and whites south of the Ohio River. And so the battleground is really the Great Lakes to the north and the Ohio River to the south, and that battleground continued through 1780s certainly. The Treaty of Paris didn't make much difference in Chillicothe, Ohio, then called Chalakatha. It's a Shawnee name.

Johnson: Well, you know, that's one of the themes when historians talk about the American Revolution, the war of 1812, they often look at the big picture, and the conventional big picture is, what's going on between Britain and France. But as you move west and into the Northwest, the old Northwest, it's more a question of what's happening between the Shawnee and the Miami, for example. So, why don't we pick apart those tribes a little bit, because sometimes they were in confederation, sometimes they weren't. Let's hear more about the Miami and the Shawnee.

Millett: My vast knowledge of these things is based in reading books and going to powwows. I have no Native American ancestors; my daughter wishes we did, but it seems to be possible to correct. But my family settled in Indiana as early as 1819. And as part of sort of family heritage. I've lived in Ohio obviously about fifty years. It's pretty hard to escape some knowledge. I'll tell one very short story. The chair of my department discovered I'd written a three-part series about the Indian Wars called "Julius Caesar and the Conquest of the Northwest Territory," 'cause I learned about Anthony Wayne with Henry Harrison. And he came up to me and said, "You're supposed to be doing WWII and Korea. Why are you writing about things you don't know anything about?" I said, "Well, I can still read. I go to the library, and this is kind of interesting stuff." And my feeling is that to be a real historian you have to root yourself in family and place, and that's where historical sensitivity builds. If you really want to go global or something like that later it's still, I think, important to develop a sensitivity to people and local places, which is why I think Gary, you running your museum and everything is terrifically important. Everybody who supports local history, city history, state history is doing a tremendous favor in advancing historical awareness. Anyway, very quickly, the Shawnee are really southeastern Indians. They were rooted linguistically and culturally in the Creek and the Cherokee nation. They had pushed north into Pennsylvania and had been run out of that area by the Iroquois, the seven nations. This is all about 17th century. And so they were a kind of in between. They were not quite part of the five civilized tribes of the Southeast but they weren't part of the Iroquois confederacy, and they had very weak roots to the Hurons in Canada and to the lakes and tribes, Potawatomie and others, this part of the country. So they were always a kind of oppressed minority caught between other tribal federations, and yet they tended to roam in western or northeastern Kentucky and southern Ohio, and that to them by the 17th, 18th century was sort of their homeland. And for those of you who know anything about Ohio topography, rivers on the northern third of the state run into Lake Erie, the southern two-thirds of the state run into the Ohio River, so you have the Maumee, the Miami River, other--the Hocking, rivers that run south, and those were the homeland of the Shawnee. One thing to remember is that the eastern woodland Indians were relatively sedentary. They had villages, they had stock, they raised corn, pumpkins, this kind of thing. Don't think of these so much as Sioux running around on horses shooting buffalo, because they're much more settled than that. Some people like the Creeks had an alphabet, they had slaves, they had big plantations. It was the kind of thing where they were always shifting alliances going on at one time or another, and the Iroquois had been on the side of the British during the Revolution and then had been given lands in Canada where many of their ancestors are still today. And so they had done pretty well for remaining neutral. Joseph Brant, who managed to kill a few of my ancestors in New York, a tribal leader, and he remained very

close to British agency. And in the South the same thing happened. The Cherokee kind of made their peace with the Americans, but the Creeks remained basically allied with the British and the Spanish there in Florida. And so Tecumseh's dream when he came to influence in the 1790s was to try to join what he could of the lakes Indians, Ohio Valley Indians, and maybe the Creeks and the Cherokee into some mass confederacy that would then resist the spread of western civilization. And his dream fundamentally was to solidify tribal relations with the British in Canada and the British and the Spanish in the gulf coast, and thought that either by having British military advisors, British military weapons. The British actually had rangers who pretended to be Indians, that are present in most of these battles, sort of Indian battles but the British had advisors with them. In the South you had creek and Cherokees intermarried with Scots-Irish. The chiefs of the Cherokee and the Creeks had two sets of names, English and tribal names, so it got a little hard to keep track. But William Weatherford, who was a really tough Creek chief, so impressed Andrew Jackson that he didn't hang him. Weatherford was half Scot, and John Ross I think was probably all European, kind of an adopted Creek Cherokee. So you find some very interesting cultural mixing. One of the things I know you and I are interested in is the number of young men captured as settlers who were then as teenagers and as young warriors, white men who became Indian.

Johnson: And we have one right here. William Wells, who was a remarkable individual, and that raises the Miami tribe. William Wells was captured at the age of thirteen, and he was taken by the Miami and people were--during these various engagements, wars, people were captured on all different sides. This was not a unique experience. He was captured in 1784. Others who were captured with him made their way back to their own families, but he appeared to have made the choice to stay. And he culturally became a member of the Miami tribe. He was given a name, which I'm told means Carrot Top, because he was a redhead. And he went beyond that because he eventually wound up marrying the daughter of Chief Little Turtle of the Miami tribe. And he had a very interesting life, because he wound up serving with the Miami in engagements against the Americans. People died; he was part of it. But he also made the choice to go back later and join his own family, but he maintained relations with both sides. And as a matter of fact, in this painting that I focused on before, on signing the Treaty of Greenville, you can see him, William Wells. He is the one who's kneeling on the ground. He's wearing a US Army uniform, which he was entitled to wear. He was serving in the US Army in 1785, but he is translating back and forth between his father-in-law who is there, the Indian who is making the case to the American General Anthony Wayne. And he engaged on both sides, and as a matter of fact after the Treaty of Greenville and beyond he was appointed an Indian agent and as such was working for the federal government and had the honor, the pleasure, whatever the work assignment, of taking prominent members of the Native American communities to Washington D.C. to meet presidents of the United States. So he is someone who had a fascinating life crossing both sides and not burning bridges. Now, we'll get to him when we get to Fort Dearborn, but that's an example of what you're talking about.

Millett: Yeah. It was not really that exceptional. One of the things I learned getting into this is you had a number of people who fell into this kind of transitional bonding situation between the two cultures, and in Wells' case for example, his brother who he had saved from the Miamis was a colonel in the Kentucky militia. And one of the reasons he then flipped to become a scout for Anthony Wayne in the Battle of Fallen Timbers is that he reconnected with his family through his sister who married an army officer and through his brother who was a very important leader of Kentucky militia. One of the things discovered was that all the baloney we've heard from Kentuckians over the years about their colonels and all that kind of thing, real Americans or whatever, it's rooted in a

tradition in which the Kentuckians saw themselves as embodying the true spirit of Virginians who fought the revolution and in their view won it. And they saw themselves as kind of Roman frontiersman. One of the things I found out was they all loved reading Caesar's commentary. Just like that guy, we've got to get those galls up there north of the Ohio River. And literally in Harrison's case he could read Latin, and he ended up being Anthony Wayne's Latin translator, what would Caesar have done? It was really, really weird to watch the interesting classical history and how it'd been transferred into designing the frontier campaigns.

Johnson: Well, why don't we pause for a minute there and talk about Anthony Wayne, the important name that you mentioned. And behind him was a very exasperated president of the United States George Washington, who of course was one of the few people in the eastern United States who actually had personal experience of warfare in what was then the West. And what he heard in terms of these battles that were going on during his presidency troubled him, and what did he do about that?

Millett: Well, the biggest embarrassment was in 1790, 1791, what was then the US Army, which was about a thousand people on the frontier, had two major defeats, one led by Joseph Harmer in Indian where they were rebuffed, and then in 1791 there was one of the worst disasters in American military history, which was the St. Clair expedition which went from today's Cincinnati north to near today Toledo. And the Shawnee confederation along with Wyandots and others pounced on them at a place that's now Fort Recovery Ohio. And the best thing we can do is call this the Battle on the Wabash. When you lose a big battle it's really hard to get a name right, but I guess that's what we've settle on now. The battle was fought on the site of what is now Fort Recovery Ohio. 900 casualties, dead. In fact two of the people who were instrumental were William Wells, then a Miami, and Tecumseh then and forever a Shawnee. And the two of them were leading elite troops that attacked artillery positions, because Blue Jacket and Little Turtle, who were principle war chiefs, decided if they choked out the artillery that would really simplify the battle. One of the things that they learned was you better entrench every place you go. St. Clair had not done that. Now, this occurred in November, December--I think the ground would have been a little hard to dig up. But it was a catastrophic defeat. What's interesting is, I think the people who did survive the Battle on the Wabash end up as colonels and leaders of the expeditions of 1812, 1813, so there was plenty of experience to go around. And one of the interesting thing was the Kentuckians decided you couldn't trust the US Army because they didn't know how to fight. And the other was, have a horse, because if you're losing at least you can get away fast.

Johnson: Right.

Millett: And the emphasis shifted away from artillery and foot soldiers to mounted infantry. And this was a major development and explains success in later campaigns.

Johnson: And then Anthony Wayne himself.

Millett: Right. Well, he was a veteran of the Revolution, a Pennsylvania, who was fallen on hard times politically, and Arthur Sinclair, also a Pennsylvania, had been the territorial commanding general. He decided he needed somebody who could train troops. Wayne was obsessed with organizing a frontier army that would look like the Romans, so they called regiments Legions, and they tried to put together composite forces of light infantry, heavy infantry, dragoons, some artillery. But it took two years to form an army that he thought was adequate. And quite intelligently, the secret of success was making sure your lines of supply and your logistical arrangements were satisfactory, that you may end up with two-thirds of your forces deployed along a network of roads and forts, fighting part of the army might be only a small part of the actual force that you needed. I forget the exact figures, but the battle of Fallen Timbers was fought with about 1,500

troops, but there must have been six or 7,000 deployed somewhere from Cincinnati north to the Maumee Valley. And it was--it really is in a sense a model campaign, which is the battle itself was probably ordained. The Miami tribe for example backed off. Tecumseh was mad because he thought the Shawnee were misused. And the British did not come to the aid of the Indian confederation. It's a very, very clever campaign because for once Wayne and the people helping, like William Wells who was one of the chief scouts, could get inside the psyche of the Indian leadership. William Wells, for example, told Wayne that, "Let the Indians sit there. They think they're in an ambush. They're all protected. They haven't eaten for a day or so, and the rain's falling on them. Let's just let them sit there." And by the time the battle's actually fought half the force had disappeared. And so it was really--it had its moments, but the point is that the army corrected a lot of the mistakes they'd made in the 1791 campaign and Purdue's victory in 1794.

Johnson: So 1794 this decisive battle occurred. Treaty of Greenville was signed in 1795. That's this picture. That was a decisive event in a way, although one of the things you learn about this period is that events that appear decisive aren't always. For example the Northwest Ordinance was adopted in 1787. In retrospect we think about that document as a very settled kind of document. We refer to the clause that no slavery in the Northwest Ordinance. We think about all these neat contours in laying out the land and all that. But the question of the actual ability of Americans to go in and settle that area continued to be a problem. It continued to be a challenge. These events were not so fulfilling. So the Treaty of Greenville, that delivered a lot of land, especially in Ohio, to the Americans for settlement. Does that mean the battles were all over?

Millett: No, not at all. It's very interesting to see which tribal leaders are not at Greenville. And almost every major tribal grouping had split--peace side, war side. Tecumseh would not become involved in Greenville, and there were a number of other major leaders that were not there, denied any loyalty or any obligations to fulfill the treaty. It is true that it gave American government at least the theory that probably the lower half of what's now Ohio was open for settlement. The Delawares had been more or less pacified. The Wyandots had moved north. It really sort of divided the state into land that was more or less habitable and another half of the state which was very much still under--being contested with the fact that Detroit for example, which should have been part of the United States was still fundamentally a Canadian outpost. And there was a great deal of Indiana and Illinois and Ohio what was still fundamentally under the influence of hostile tribes. The Shawnee moved out of the river valleys of Ohio and moved to the Wabash and set up what became Tippecanoe. There were certainly radical no-surrender type groups in every one of these tribes. The Miami actually pretty much decided to go abide by the treaty. And William Wells as a supervisor of Indian affairs did his best to protect the Miamis and keep Little Turtle off the warpath.

Johnson: Right.

Millett: And the other tribes resented Wells' protection of the Miamis, and he wore a price on his head from many of the other tribes as far west as the Potawatomi and the Chippewa and Ottowas in this part of the country.

Johnson: So, to take us from that Treaty of Greenville moment closer to the War of 1812 why don't we focus on these two Shawnee brothers, The Prophet and Tecumseh. We've already heard a little about Tecumseh. Tell us about his brother.

Millett: Well, his brother Tenskwatawa was called The Prophet because he began to have visions of various kinds. It's not an unusual phenomenon. You can find similar people among the Sioux and others, the Ghost Dance, plains Indians. But it was a revivalist movement which promised, if we quit drinking the white man's liquor and using his guns and revert back to our native traditions, the Great Spirit will help us and will

purify our culture and form a band of warriors with the Shawnee to the north and the Creeks to the south that will sort of—we'll fall back toward the Mississippi but we're not gonna surrender what is now Indiana and Illinois without a fight. Tippecanoe was up near Lafayette. I doubt the students at Purdue know where it is, but it's not hard to find. I've been there several times. It is nowhere, but it is on the Wabash River, and it was a nice place. You had to leave central Ohio and Chalakatha, this was the substitute. But William Henry Harrison becomes territorial governor of Indiana and he used Indiana militia, Kentucky troops, and others to enforce what he believed to be a treaty agreement that was now being menaced by this group of Shawnee revivalists. Unfortunately the Shawnee--Tecumseh had gone south to negotiate with the Creeks, so he wasn't at Tippecanoe when Harrison arrived to burn the town. The Profit was, and by all accounts he stood on a rock and chanted while everybody else did the fighting. One of the interesting things that later led to Tecumseh's death, they assumed--William Henry Harrison had become so obsessed with Julius Caesar that he always rode a white horse. So any American officer in a nice uniform who could be seen on a white horse must be William Henry Harrison, and somebody'd shoot him. Well, at the battle of Tippecanoe, which begins at two in the morning, 1811, some officer ran and jumped on William Henry Harrison's horse. Aw, bad mistake. The Indians gunned him down, and Harrison got the message, which was, don't jump on a white horse when arrows and bullets are flying. So he in fact survived. But it became an obsession of Tecumseh's and others that if you could kill the chief, William Henry Harrison, then the battle would be won. And it turned out later in 1813 that didn't work out quite so well, but it did reinforce the idea that white troops needed to have horses and be mounted because the one thing that would really spook tribal warriors was some kind of mounted charge that would disrupt their fighting. The woodland Indians fought afoot.

Johnson: So from 1808 to 1813 Tecumseh headed one of these federations. It was one of the major themes during the Sixty Years War is federation. This is one of the most crystalized of these federations, and the Shawnee were key, but there were other tribes involved, and the idea behind it was, the Native American tribes need to unite.

Millett: Right. And get British sponsorship. Tecumseh was really good at negotiating with the British authorities in Canada for arms, aid, various efforts to win people over. At one time the British over a period of about five years tried to sweeten the pot for the tribes, because they weren't going to use their own regular troops that far west, and so they made all kinds of concessions. For example, prize money. I always thought the Royal Navy did prize money; turns out the British Army did too. So the Indians were guaranteed loot, some portion of loot. They were told there would be rations for their dependents. They gathered a large number of Indian villages trans--placed into what is now western Ontario. Turned out to be more of a burden than an advantage, but it really did--Tecumseh's very insistent that there could be no resistance to western movement unless the British through Canada continued to support the northern tribal confederation.

Johnson: So now let's get to the actual beginning of the War of 1812 in the Northwest. So, war was declared by the United States against Britain on June 18, 1812. The word of the war made its way to the Northwest quite slowly, but and in fact it appears that the British were aware of it before many of the Americans were aware of it. Mackinac fell the 17th of July. The British took that key position, which was the important place for the western Great Lakes. And then in August--August 15th--comes the Battle of Fort Dearborn. And we need to pause there not only because we're in Chicago, and that's where Fort Dearborn was, but because some of these characters who you have heard about in the lead up were actually there. And the word came down to the contingent in Fort Dearborn, which was a very small contingent, that they should evacuate Fort Dearborn and head to Indiana. Get out of there because this was a sparsely settled area

that it was believed couldn't be defended. And so the evacuation order went out. The local Native American tribe were the Potawatomis. They were more aligned with the British certainly than, say, the Miami were. William Wells was present. He didn't live there, but he went there to be of assistance and as the people left Fort Dearborn and had reached maybe a couple of miles south on their way to Indiana they were stopped. There was a fifteen-minute battle, and on the military side on the American side thirty-two military were killed, twenty-eight were captured. On the civilian side, those evacuating, fourteen were killed, thirteen were captured. Among those killed was William Wells who was there defending those who were evacuating against the attack with the Potawatomi. Now, there is a family connection there too, because the commander of Fort Dearborn at that point was married to a member of William Wells' family. It was his niece Rebecca. So there were all kinds of overlapping connections that go back in a family way to those early discussion years ago during this sixty-year period.

Millett: Right. The daughter of the brother who had convinced William Wells to quit being a Miami and become a white man.

Johnson: Right. Now, being the head of the Chicago History Museum, it was of interest to me when the bicentennial books did appear. There were a few of them on the War of 1812. And I have to say, I always would look for references to Fort Dearborn, and guess what. In at least one of the major books written about the War of 1812 Fort Dearborn wasn't even referred to, but it was a very important event in the Northwest, not only for whatever strategic value it had but of psychological value it was a very important and disastrous moment for those--the Americans who lived in this region about what their fate would be during the battles to come.

Millett: Right. I've always thought that the death of William Wells would make the wonderful end of a movie. I'd like to direct it myself, but he went from being a captain in the United States Army to being a war chief of the Miami in a period of twelve hours. When he got ready to try to lead this column out of Fort Dearborn under terms of surrender, which he believed were false, he went into warrior garb, painted his body black. This was his last fight, and he knew that because the Potawatomi hated him for flipping sides, that he'd be the first person to go down, and so he took the lead with the assumption that they would be attacked as they were, but that the Potawatomi would be so busy hacking him to pieces that they might spare others. At least that's the way the story comes down. And in fact he ended up dying shot multiple times, scalped, heart ripped out, screaming Miami curses on the Potawatomi enemy. This is the way a chief dies. He didn't die as a captain. He certainly died as a member of the Miami Indian tribe. And it is true that apparently it gave his brother-in-law and others enough time to rally the defense of the column and at least get somebody to recognize the surrender was real, so he did save his niece and saved her husband. You can just see--doesn't that sound like something you just wait for on HBO?

(Laughter)

Johnson: Well, in Chicago he has Wells Street named for him.

Millett: Yeah, I can get by being a Choctaw, which I've done the Battle of New Orleans. I got banished from the Seminoles for not looking Seminole enough. I doubt that I could make it as William Wells even with a different hairdo, but it'd be a great role for somebody.

Johnson: So, the rest of the War of 1812 in the Northwest, this is the beginning which was not an auspicious beginning. What's the rest of the story?

Millett: Well, there's a period of about eighteen months where the war in the Northwest looks as if the Native American confederation and British allies are going to get finally what they'd hoped to get, which was control of the Great Lakes area. Couldn't do the Ohio Valley. That's pretty much gone, but they were gonna get the upper tier, Chicago

all the way through what's now Cleveland. Harrison had become a general in the US Army. What was important to him was he was appointed a major general in the militia of Kentucky, and he said, "If I don't get the Kentucky militia to fight, we're not gonna hold this place." In fact the initial American defeats around Detroit and some of the areas around Detroit were basically suffered by US regulars and by Ohio militia. A general named Hull basically gave up, and Henry Procter was a local British commander, and Tecumseh fundamentally established British presence on both sides of the Detroit River, and they were going to hold everything from Toledo north to the Great Lakes area. Harrison said if Kentucky doesn't fight then we can't hold this. He had an advantage. The governor of Kentucky was Isaac Shelby. Sixty-three years old, weighed 300 pounds, and he had commanded at Point Pleasant in 1774, Kings Mountain in 1782, and he had been fighting these damn Indians his entire adult life. He said, "I'm the governor of Kentucky. We'll turn out the best troops we have, and I'm going, too." But there are two waves of Kentucky and Ohio commitments, and the first wave is really destroyed at a battle near Monroe Michigan. It's called French Town, here the British and Indian confederation basically wiped out the first wave of Americans that tried to maintain the frontier. Harrison took personal command and then said, "We're gonna do Fallen Timbers all over again, which is, I'm gonna organize a really good line of logistics, roads. Again, if I can get five or six or 7,000 troops from anywhere I'm gonna use them to defend forts and roads, and then we won't try to do a punitive expedition into Canada until I'm sure my supply lines are secure." And they weren't really until September with the Battle of Put-in-Bay in Lake Erie, so that Harrison said if I have to move over land and move all my supplies over land it's gonna take a while, but if I can get naval support then I'm in business. So when they actually invaded Canada his two aids were Lewis Cass, who was very fine officer in the US Army, who had been with Hull when Hull surrendered Detroit, and his other aid was our guy from Put-in-Bay--

Johnson: Perry.

Millett: Oliver Hazard Perry. Right. --commodore on horseback invading Canada, but anyway, what was non negotiable was his expeditionary force, which ended up about 3,500 men would have an infantry contingent, Kentucky militiamen with a striking arm would be about 900 riflemen, the best mounted troops that were available at any time. And the pursuit begins in early October of 1813. Procter, one small regiment of British troops, probably a thousand Indian warriors begin to fall back towards what is now the Toronto area of New York. Crossing the river down they're sandwiched. Amherstburg, it's a British fort. There's an engagement in Chatham briefly, in which British supplies also moving by the lake are captured. One of the reasons the British got kind of defeatist was because they'd had their supplies disrupted by the US Navy. Everybody could have ridden a horse, but Harrison was correct in saying we don't need everybody on horseback. So the Kentuckians found a peninsula near Chatham and created kind of a big corral, so they left more than a thousand horses and a pig. The pig had made the march all the way from Louisville, so this is a very famous Kentucky pig that's now memorialized in Louisville because he made the expedition into Canada. 1,200 horses, one pig. So now the force is about one-third mounted, two-thirds on foot because they couldn't really figure out how to deploy that many horsemen. And I mentioned supplying the horses. Tecumseh was mad because he thought they should have resisted somewhere around Lake St. Clair, Amherstburg. Procter decided he wanted to go father north, and along the Thames River there were roads on either side of the river. I've been there. They run to a little stream. But you can't cross the river. It's narrow, but deep, so there are only some places where it's fordable. So your ability to move back and forth across the river are constrained by the availability of fords. And one of the things that Harrison was very clever about doing was denying British opportunity to move back and

forth freely into different positions on either side of the river. He basically hemmed the men to the north side of the river and then brought them to battle really on the 4th of October. The battle is actually fought on the 5th of October. The battle is actually fought by the mounted, the Kentucky rifle regiment commanded by Richard Johnson. Brother "Jim" James Johnson was subordinate and divide the mounted forces into two groups. And what was really clever about this, and it's represented on the map, was instead of making a lineal attack they formed the horsemen into columns. One column would be one person in the lead and forty behind them, another two guys in front and forty behind each of them. In other words they pierced the British position, and the British couldn't reload. They just rode over the British troops. They had few very few swords, but what they did have were tomahawks and shorter Kentucky rifles, which they used both to fire and as clubs, and pistols. So it's a very interesting pattern of deployment, but they actually rode through the woods, which is why they deployed in these columns that were parallel columns. And so when they priced the British position and there were two of them, they encircled going left, put them behind the Indians going right, and put them behind the British. And so the British force was cut off, and I think there were fewer than fifty casualties but there were about 600-some British soldiers who surrendered, Proctor and his personal guard had taken off. But the other contingent of mounted riflemen went through a portion of the woods which were bordered by two marshes, and so getting into marshes was not a good idea on a horse, but they sent a group of about twenty mounted riflemen led by a guy named William Whitley, who is quite a character, sixty-three years old. He'd taken thirteen or fourteen scalps, which he displayed. I think it's safe to say he was a sociopathic killer. Part of his family had been killed by the Shawnee in the 1780s, and not a nice man, but he led this group of, they're called the Forlorn Hope. In British language that means you've had it. The rear guard assault, and they actually sprung an ambush that the Shawnee and the Potawatomi and the Wyandots had set up, which with Tecumseh himself was deployed. The battle lasted about half an hour. There were heavy casualties on both sides. Tecumseh was killed. I'll talk about that a little bit later, but William Whitley was killed. And Richard Johnson who was the leader of the Kentucky riflemen was wounded five times. His horse died. He was riding a white horse--bad idea. And there's still a debate of who was riding which horse, but it seems that both Whitley and Johnson were shot at a lot because somebody thought they were William Henry Harrison. And the story is that Tecumseh was finally killed because he was out trying to take somebody's scalp. It was actually Johnson who had left the battlefield to become vice president someday. William was as dead as a doornail with about five wounds. But eventually the mounted riflemen who'd broken the British position circled in behind the real heart of the Indian opposition, and at that point Tecumseh's dying or dead, and the others decided this is not a good day to die. And the Indians faded away still aggravated because every time they got into a battle and thought they had English help it didn't work well for them.

(Applause)

Williams: Thank you to Dr. Allan Millett and Gary Johnson for a fascinating discussion, and thank you to the Boeing Company, Rita and John Canning, Reed Smith, and Motorola Solutions for sponsoring this program. To learn more about the Pritzker Military Museum and Library, visit us in person or online at PritzkerMilitary.org. Thank you, and please join us next time on *Pritzker Military Presents*.

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(Theme music)

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