

= Battle of Horseshoe Bend ( 1832 ) =

The Battle of Horseshoe Bend , also referred to as the Battle of Pecatonica and the Battle of Bloody Lake , was fought on June 16 , 1832 in present @-@ day Wisconsin at an oxbow lake known as " Horseshoe Bend " , which was formed by a change in course of the Pecatonica River . The battle was a major turning point in the Black Hawk War , despite being of only minor military significance . The small victory won by the U.S. militia at Horseshoe Bend helped restore public confidence in the volunteer force following an embarrassing defeat at Stillman 's Run . The Battle of Horseshoe Bend ended with three militia men killed in action and a party of eleven Kickapoo warriors dead .

The militia men involved in the Battle of Horseshoe Bend proved their ability to obey orders , act as a disciplined unit , and show bravery . Unlike at Stillman 's Run , the troops waited for Colonel Henry Dodge 's commands before acting on the field of battle . When ordered to charge , the men obeyed and eventually won a fight that descended into a bloody hand @-@ to @-@ hand battle . A memorial marker was erected to commemorate the battle in 1922 . Today the battleground at Horseshoe Bend is a county park .

= = Background = =

As a consequence of an 1804 treaty between Governor William Henry Harrison of Indiana Territory and a group of Sauk and Fox leaders regarding land settlement , the Sauk and Fox tribes vacated their lands in Illinois and moved west of the Mississippi in 1828 . However , Sauk Chief Black Hawk and others disputed the treaty , claiming that the full tribal councils had not been consulted , nor did those representing the tribes have authorization to cede lands . Angered by the loss of his birthplace , between 1830 and 1831 Black Hawk led a number of incursions across the Mississippi River , but was persuaded to return west each time without bloodshed . In April 1832 , encouraged by promises of alliance with other tribes and the British , he again moved his so @-@ called " British Band " of around 1000 warriors and non @-@ combatants into Illinois . Finding no allies , he attempted to return to Iowa , but the undisciplined Illinois Militia force 's actions led to the Battle of Stillman 's Run . A number of other small skirmishes and massacres followed and the militias of Michigan Territory and Illinois were mobilized to hunt down Black Hawk 's Band . The conflict became known as the Black Hawk War .

The period between Stillman 's Run and Horseshoe Bend was filled with war @-@ related activity . A series of attacks at Buffalo Grove , the Plum River settlement , Fort Blue Mounds and the war 's most famous incident , the Indian Creek massacre , all took place between mid @-@ May and late June 1832 . In the week before the Battle of Horseshoe Bend , Colonel Henry Dodge of the western Michigan Territory militia was busy responding to various incidents across the region . On the afternoon of June 8 , 1832 , Dodge and his men , including James W. Stephenson , proceeded to Kellogg 's Grove and buried the victims of the St. Vrain massacre . That night Stephenson returned to Galena , Illinois , while Dodge moved to Hickory Point where he remained overnight . The next morning Dodge set out for Dixon 's Ferry , where he camped with General Hugh Brady .

= = Prelude = =

On June 11 , Dodge escorted Brady to the mouth of the Fox River to confer with overall commander General Henry Atkinson . Dodge left the conference with clear authority from Atkinson to deal with the violence in the mining region . He first traveled to his home fort , at Gratiot 's Grove , which he reached on June 13 . The Spafford Farm massacre occurred the following day , and Dodge set out for Fort Hamilton as soon as he heard about it , stopping at Fort Blue Mounds for supplies . On the way to Hamilton , the soldiers passed a German immigrant , Henry Apple , exchanged greetings and kept traveling . Shortly afterwards the soldiers heard gunshots in the distance ; Apple had met with a Kickapoo ambush , likely meant for Dodge himself . Dodge was probably saved by his last minute decision to make a detour from the main route . Later Apple 's horse galloped wildly back past the men , wounded and carrying a large amount of blood in its saddle . The horse continued all the way

to Fort Hamilton , where it raised a furor among the inhabitants .

A Native American band from the Kickapoo tribe , eleven warriors in all , was responsible for the attack on Apple ; the same band had killed five men at Spafford Farm on June 14 . This band was only loosely affiliated with Black Hawk 's British Band .

On hearing the ambush in the distance , Dodge hurried on toward Fort Hamilton ( present @-@ day Wiotia , Wisconsin ) where he gathered together a company of 29 mounted volunteers and sped off to intercept the attackers . He led the chase through tangled underbrush until , breaking into prairie , his force caught sight of the raiding party . The Kickapoo crossed the Pecatonica River within sight of the pursuing militia , and entered into an overgrown swamp . The militia followed across the swollen river and dismounted when they reached the swamp .

= = Battle = =

According to personal accounts of the battle , after dismounting Dodge offered his men a chance to back out of the operation . No one opted out , and 21 men advanced with Dodge in an extended firing line , unsure of the enemy 's location . The remaining eight soldiers were posted as guards on high grounds and near the horses . Unlike the disorganized and undisciplined troops at Stillman 's Run , the volunteers at Horseshoe Bend adhered to military discipline ; they waited for Dodge to give the order before they entered the thicket and swampland in search of their enemy , and once searching they awaited their commander 's order to attack .

After the militia advanced about 200 yards ( 200 m ) , the Kickapoo suddenly let loose a loud yell from their hidden position on the bank of an oxbow lake along the river . The warriors fired a volley toward the advancing militia and three men , Samuel Black , Samuel Wells and Montaville Morris , were hit and went down . Dodge did not hesitate and ordered his men to charge , they obeyed and waited until they were within six feet of the Kickapoo before discharging their weapons . The fight , after the initial charge and volley , descended into a hand @-@ to @-@ hand struggle with tomahawks , bayonets , muskets and spears the weapons of choice . The fighting only lasted a few minutes : nine Kickapoo were killed on the spot and the other two were felled while fleeing across the lake . During the hand @-@ to @-@ hand combat a fourth member of the militia , Thomas Jenkins , was wounded . Though short , the Battle of Horseshoe Bend had a lasting impact and influence on the rest of the war .

= = Aftermath = =

The Battle of Horseshoe Bend , though of little military significance , was a major turning point in the war for the volunteer militia forces and many white settlers . This minor militia victory was the first step in the process of redeeming the militia 's own morale and its standing in the eyes of the settlers on the frontier . Individual accounts claim that the battle at Horseshoe Bend " turn ( ed ) the tide of the war . " It was also notable for the proportion of killed in action to the number of combatants . All eleven Kickapoo that Dodge had pursued into the swamp were killed and scalped by his troops , while the final militia casualties were confined to three dead and one wounded . About an hour after the battle , Colonel William S. Hamilton arrived with friendly Menominee , Sioux and Ho @-@ Chunk warriors . According to Dodge , the friendly warriors were given some of the scalps his men had taken , with which they were " delighted " . Dodge also reported that the Native Americans then proceeded on to the battlefield and mutilated the corpses of the fallen Kickapoo .

Of Dodge 's casualties , Thomas Jenkins was only slightly wounded . However , the three Militia men who had been shot as they advanced towards the Kickapoo position all later died . Samuel Wells , Montaville Morris and Samuel Black were transported to Fort Hamilton ; Morris died at the fort , as did Wells , with his head in a comrade 's lap . When informed by the surgeon of his imminent death , Wells requested to speak with Dodge . Wells asked Dodge " if he had behaved like a soldier . " Dodge responded , " Yes , Wells , like a brave one . " Wells then said to the commander , " Send that word to my old father , " and died a short time later . Samuel Black was moved to Fort Defiance , where he lingered for nine days before dying .

This was the first battle in which a volunteer force defeated the Native Americans . Dodge became the first of the militia leaders to prove his ability to stand up to the enemy . He quickly became the " rising star " of the conflict , having helped negotiate the release of the Hall sisters after the Indian Creek massacre and proved himself at Horseshoe Bend .

The battlefield at Horseshoe Bend is now a campground located within a county park in Lafayette County , Wisconsin . The Black Hawk Memorial Park is maintained by the Lafayette County Sportsmen Alliance , Yellowstone Flint and Cap club , and the Friends of Woodford Park . In 1922 , a marker was erected by the Shullsburg chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution and the residents of Woodford to commemorate the Battle of Horseshoe Bend ; it is still visible today . The battlefield was listed on the National Register of Historic Places by the National Park Service on July 28 , 2011 .