

The Black Hawk War, 1832

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Letters – "The Battle of Wisconsin Heights: Black Hawk's account"

During our encampment at the Four Lakes, we were hard put to, to obtain enough to eat to support nature. Situate in a swampy, marshy country. . . . there was but little game of any sort to be found--and fish were equally scarce. . . . We were forced to dig roots and bark trees, to obtain something to satisfy hunger and keep us alive! Several of our people became so much reduced, as actually to die with hunger! . . . I concluded to remove my women and children across the Mississippi, that they might return to the Sac nation again. Accordingly, on the next day, we commenced moving, with five Winnebagoes acting as our guides, intending to descend the Ouisconsin. . . . we were proceeding to the Ouisconsin, with our women and children. We arrived and had commenced crossing them to an island, when we discovered a large body of the enemy coming towards us. We were now compelled to fight, or sacrifice our wives and children to the fury of the whites! I met them with fifty warriors, (having left the balance to assist our women and children in crossing) about a mile from the river, when an attack immediately commenced.

I was mounted on a fine horse, and was pleased to see my warriors so brave. I addressed them in a loud voice, telling them to stand their ground, and never yield it to the enemy. At this time I was on the rise of a hill, where I wished to form my warriors, that we might have some advantage over the whites. But the enemy succeeded in gaining this point, which compelled us to fall back into a deep ravine, from which we continued firing at them and they at us, until it began to grow dark.

My horse having been wounded twice during this engagement, and fearing from his loss of blood, that he would soon give out--and finding that the enemy would not come near enough to receive our fire, in the dusk of the evening--and knowing that our women and children had had sufficient time to reach the island in the Ouisconsin, I ordered my warriors to return, in different routes, and meet me at the Ouisconsin--and were astonished to find that the enemy were not disposed to pursue us.

In this skirmish, with fifty braves, I defended and accomplished my passage over the Ouisconsin, with a loss of only six men; though opposed by a host of mounted militia. I would not have fought there, but to gain time for my women and children to cross to an island. A warrior will duly appreciate the embarrassments I labored under--and whatever may be the sentiments of the white people, in relation to this battle, my nation, though fallen, will award to me the reputation of a great brave in conducting it. The loss of the enemy could not be ascertained by our party; but I am of opinion, that it was much greater, in proportion, than mine. We returned to the Ouisconsin, and crossed over to our people.

Myself and band having no means to descend the Ouisconsin, I started, over a rugged country, to go to the Mississippi, intending to cross it, and return to my nation. Many of our people were compelled to go on foot, for want of horses, which, in consequence of their having had nothing to eat for a long time, caused our march to be very slow. At length we arrived at the Mississippi, having lost some of our old men and little children, who perished on the way with hunger.

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