

A Daring Plot

The year was 1763. The place was the Great Lakes region of North America. A large group of Ottawa entered the grounds of the British fort at Detroit. A friendly meeting between these 300 Native Americans and the commander of the fort had been previously arranged. To any casual observer, the Native Americans looked calm and watchful, carrying blankets and other light gear. In reality, however, they were tense and poised to fight. At a signal from their leader, Chief Pontiac, the Native Americans planned to draw their weapons from beneath the blankets and attack the British. The most carefully laid plans can go wrong, however. Unknown to the Ottawa, their plot had been revealed to the British. The element of surprise was lost. The British were prepared to fight that day as well, but they offered to let the Native Americans leave the fort if they laid down their arms.



This 1921 drawing shows Chief Pontiac and his men in the British fort at Detroit. The Ottawa concealed weapons in their blankets and planned to attack when signaled by their leader.

A Leader in Troubled Times

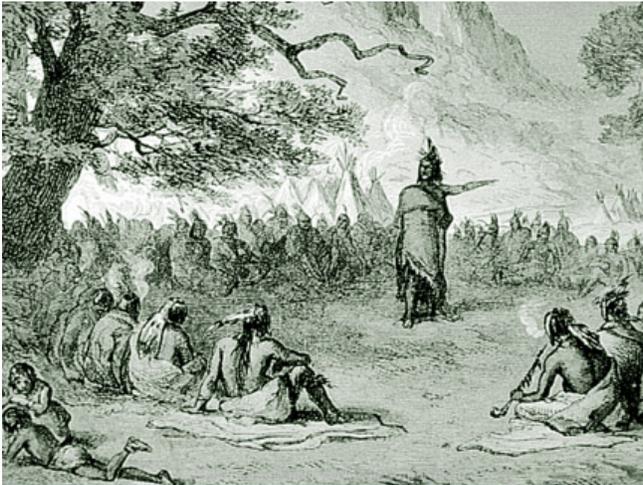
We will later see what happened after that fateful day at the British fort. First, however, let's learn more about the Ottawa leader who devised such a daring plot. His name was

Pontiac. He had become a chief in 1755, when he was 35 years old. Historians know little about Pontiac's early life, but they do know that he was the mastermind behind a major rebellion against the British in North America. He was able to unite many groups of Native Americans, even though those same people had had serious disagreements in the past. He set in motion a plan that included Native Americans from Lake Superior to the lower Mississippi River. This is an enormous geographical area. To unite so many different groups over such a large area was an astonishing accomplishment.

Historians have labeled Chief Pontiac as commanding, powerful and strong, but he was also a man of peace. These qualities would have been essential to a leader with such a dangerous and courageous plan. These qualities also made the British take Pontiac seriously and treat him with respect.

During the French and Indian War of 1754–1763, Pontiac and his Ottawa people had helped the French try to defeat the British. In the end, however, the

British won the war. This meant big changes for the Ottawa and other Native American groups in the area. At first, Pontiac agreed to let the British pass through Ottawa lands. It soon became clear, however, that the British did not treat the Ottawa in the same way that the French had treated them. For example, the British did not supply the Ottawa with trade goods in exchange for permission to stay in the area. In addition, the British did not allow the Native Americans to come and go freely in British forts. The British also began moving further and further west, settling on ancient Native American hunting grounds.



Chief Pontiac (1720–1769) speaks to a gathering of Native Americans. He persuaded them to join together to attack the British in 1763.

Pontiac's War

By 1762, Native American groups throughout the Great Lakes and Ohio Valley regions were upset and angry. Chief Pontiac knew that something had to be done. He believed his people could and should strike a deadly blow against the British. Through secret messages and meetings, Pontiac organized a bold uprising. According to his plan, groups throughout the Great Lakes region would each

attack the British fort nearest to them in May of 1763. Pontiac and his warriors would surprise the British fort at Detroit.

The beginning of this passage described their foiled plot. After the British allowed the Ottawa to leave the fort, Pontiac surprised them after all. He and his men surrounded the fort and cut off supplies. This is known as using siege tactics. In order to break the siege, the British planned an attack on Pontiac's camp. Pontiac was warned, however, and in the fighting that day, he won a decisive victory against the British in the Battle of Bloody Run. In all, 8 of the 12 British forts that were attacked fell to the Native Americans. Some 2,000 colonists were killed throughout the area, and many settlements were destroyed.

The British now recognized that they faced a powerful opponent. They sent in reinforcements to help fight Pontiac. It seemed as though things were moving in Pontiac's favor. That all changed in October 1763, when Pontiac received terrible news. The Treaty of Paris had been signed between the French and British. It marked the formal end to the French and Indian War. In the treaty, the French gave the British all of Canada, the Ohio Valley, and the Great Lakes

region. Now Pontiac knew that the French would not join the Native Americans against the British. He would have to negotiate with the enemy.

Pontiac's Legacy

The British made Pontiac promise never to wage war against them again. However, Pontiac's War was a success in many ways. It showed the British that they needed to work with the Native Americans. The British began trading with the Ottawa and other groups as the French had previously done. Even more significant, British King George III issued the Proclamation of 1763, which closed the area west of the Appalachians to colonial settlement. This area was declared Native American land, and the Native Americans were declared to be under the protection of the king. Sadly, the British government was unable to enforce the proclamation. The western frontier was just too vast an area for them to monitor, and the colonists were determined to push westward. The colonists had been greatly angered by the proclamation because they felt that the British were interfering in their affairs. Feelings of resentment continued to grow, between the colonists and the British government, all the way up to the Revolutionary War.

Although the war we call the American Revolution was between the British and the colonists from 1775 to 1783, in a way Pontiac led his own American revolution. He valiantly fought against the British and tried to stop them from taking the land of his people. For his bravery and leadership, Pontiac has been recognized in many ways. Seven cities in the United States as well as a lake in Michigan are named "Pontiac" in his honor. A line of popular American automobiles is also named after him. However, his real legacy lies in the stand he took for the rights of Native Americans. Later Native Americans groups would follow his lead and unite again against the westward expansion of white settlers. They no doubt were inspired by how close Chief Pontiac came to achieving victory against the mighty British Empire.

After reading the passage, answer the following questions:

- 1.** Which of the following best explains why Native Americans waged Pontiac's War?
 - A.** The Proclamation of 1763 was being ignored by British settlers.
 - B.** The French had finally won the French and Indian War.
 - C.** The British refused to trade with them and were taking over Native American lands.
 - D.** Their attack on the British fort at Detroit had shown that the Ottawa could win any battle.

- 2.** A major accomplishment of Chief Pontiac was
 - A.** defeating the British for control of the Great Lakes region.
 - B.** uniting many different Native Americans groups.
 - C.** carrying out a surprise attack on the British fort at Detroit.
 - D.** negotiating the Treaty of Paris with the French and British.

- 3.** What did it mean to Chief Pontiac when the Treaty of Paris was signed?
 - A.** The French had betrayed their plot to attack the British fort at Detroit.
 - B.** The British were likely to attack Native American camps at any time.
 - C.** The British would no longer trade with Native Americans.
 - D.** The French would not join the Native Americans in fighting the British.

- 4.** American colonists were unhappy with some decisions made by the Proclamation of 1763. In your opinion, was the Proclamation of 1763 a triumph or a defeat for the Native Americans who had participated in Pontiac's War? Explain your answer using evidence from the reading passage.