The Sullivan Campaign of 1779 on the New York Frontier:

An American General Fails to Grasp Victory

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Major General John Sullivan failed to meet the implied orders of George Washington to seek and act upon any advantage gained against the British and Seneca as a means to march upon Fort Niagara. Sullivan failed not because of logistical or supply issues but through his own shortcomings as a military commander and waning ambitions as a gentleman general serving the Patriot cause. The victims of his choices went beyond the thousands of Haudenosaunee families that starved near Niagara that winter, and included his Commander in Chief's chances of capturing that key fortification for the Americans.

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1.0 Introduction and Thesis

1778 saw the war on the New York frontier intensified by the devastating raids of the British army led by Butler's Rangers and supported by Seneca, Cayuga, and Mohawk of the Iroquois League. Major General John Sullivan was sent by Congress and George Washington to respond by devastating the Iroquois farmlands and homelands the following summer. Initially, the goals included overcoming the British garrison at Niagara and capturing that strategic fortification if possible. Lacking manpower and resources to guarantee success, the mission instead became directed toward making it impossible for Britain's Iroquois allies to continue to fight by destroying their crops, livelihoods, and safe havens. Nevertheless, Washington continued to desire an assault on Niagara, and he provided Sullivan with the support of able generals, artillery, and veteran troops to accomplish the deed. Sullivan's failure to meet the implied order to seek and act upon any advantage gained against the British and Iroquois as an opportunity to march to Fort Niagara that ought to be seized with both hands. The kind of advantage Washington had in mind did indeed present itself after Sullivan's victory at Newtown, and his failure to seize it was not due to delays or logistical problems. .

Sullivan failed to capitalize on the victory at Newtown and afterward chose a militarily conservative course that accomplished significant destruction to Iroquois country, and little else. After the Battle of Newtown, the Continental Army had Butler's Rangers and the Seneca in full retreat northwest to Niagara. Rather than strike for Niagara across rough country without guides versed on the land, instead Sullivan turned north along established routes and marched his army for more than two weeks. His army stopped at length to destroy farms and property before he ended the campaign and marched home. The following spring the Seneca raids intensified again and guerilla warfare claimed the New York frontier for the remainder of the war. Niagara was

never captured and only later gained through negotiations. Primary documents suggest that it was well within Sullivan's ability and the 3500 veteran soldiers he commanded to march on Fort Niagara and complete his mission against the British and their Indian allies. Potentially reinforced by some of the 700 fighting men led by Colonel Brodhead from Fort Pitt, Sullivan could have reached Niagara at or near full strength. Even without the resources for a prolonged siege against the British garrison, the Continental Army could have forced the Seneca to retreat far into Canada, then disengaged the siege and destroyed the Iroquois homelands as they marched back to Fort Tioga.

Leadership and logistical difficulties led to a delay in the commencement of the campaign and no doubt hindered Sullivan's ability to accomplish either besieging Niagara or breaking the Seneca. But was his "well executed failure" inevitable?[1] This paper explores Sullivan's Campaign through primary documents and identifies the causes, course and consequences of General Sullivan's military leadership from planning to prosecution. The evidence will show that, counter to Joseph Fischer's assessment that Sullivan's Campaign failed due to the shortcomings of Washington's command and support, ultimately Sullivan failed because he chose to. He managed to veil his failure in the appearance of success and the popular feeling that retribution had been paid to a hated enemy while not engaging in another risky, bloody fort siege deep in the wilderness.

He was not the Sullivan of Germantown or the early part of the war. He was finished with war and desired retirement so he could move on to a political career. He was a lawyer turned gentleman officer who demonstrated his valor on the field early in the war. But he was also as

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[1] Joseph R. Fischer, *A Well-Executed Failure* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2008).

disillusioned as Benedict Arnold with the army, his position in it, and even George Washington, though he remained unswervingly loyal to the patriot cause. He was unpopular with his fellow generals and made rivals and political enemies daily. John Sullivan was apparently popular with the common man and his own soldiers, and he cultivated his popularity to advance his career ambitions. So Sullivan chose to bring total war to the Seneca countryside because he knew it would cement his popularity in New York, the one place that mattered most to him. By doing so he locked in his political future and sidestepped the responsibility to take the battle to the British.

1.1 Overview of Research Methodology, Themes, and Topics

To better understand Sullivan's actions and the American War of Independence on the New York frontier in the summer and fall of 1779 this paper will be presented in sections. I will first begin with some background information on Sullivan's Campaign and discuss how events unfolded from the planning stages of the Expedition through Major General John Sullivan's commencement and prosecution of his orders. I will also place the campaign in the greater context of the American Revolution in order to better highlight the consequences of his actions and inaction at critical points of the summer and fall of 1779. I will further touch on some conditions both armies faced in support, logistics, and provisioning. Where necessary I will tie in the political and economic factors involved to provide a greater contrast between Sullivan's facts and claims.

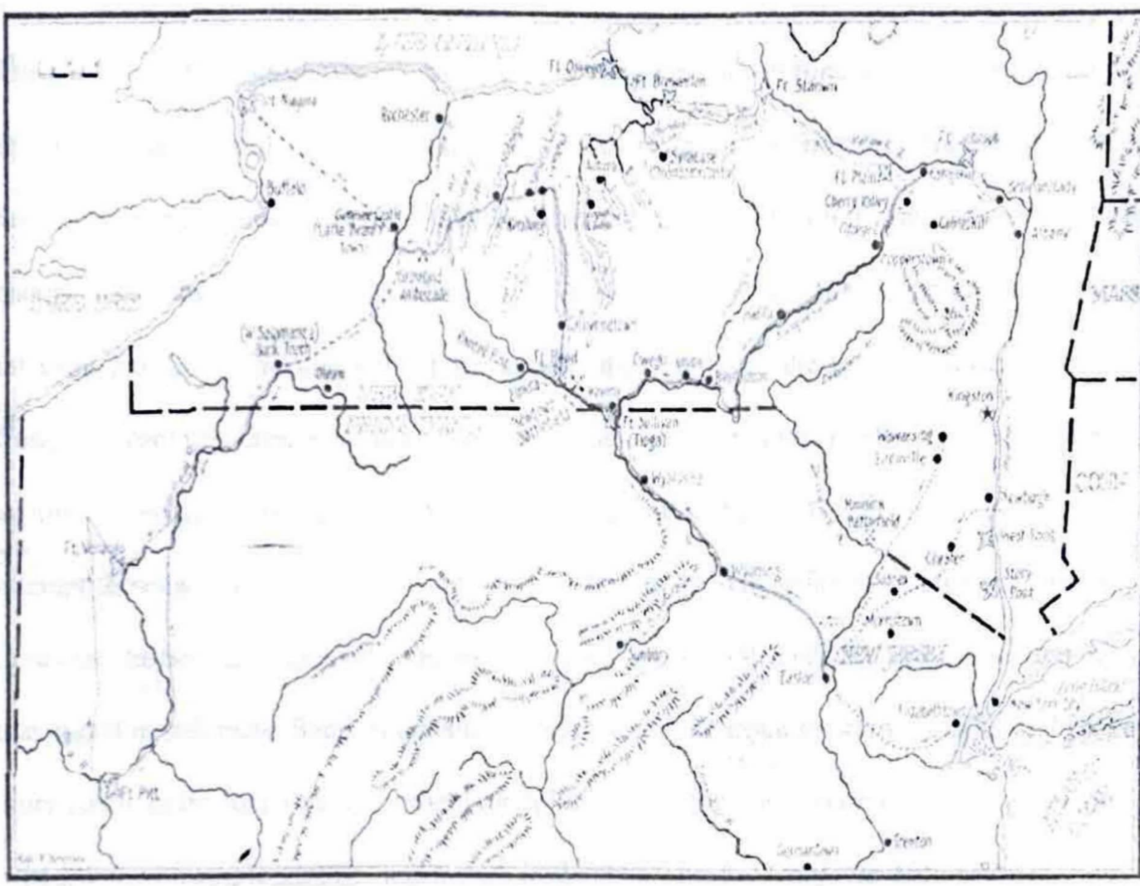
I will then begin an analysis of the campaign from a personal, political, and military perspective from the same planning stages to Sullivan's return victory march to Tioga. I will examine the logistic issues that claimed prevented him from advancing to Niagara, provide an overview of the battle of Newtown, and illuminate the conditions Sullivan was met with on his

arrival in Genesee. This will provide the basis for making my argument. Using primary correspondence, field reports, maps, and secondary academic sources, I will show that Sullivan lacked the vision and the will to fulfill Washington's implied orders to besiege Niagara should he rout Butler and the Iroquois. Concluding, I will also address some of the popular questions and theories about Sullivan's Campaign. These will include my views on military strategy, the Iroquois variable, and Joseph Fischer's assessment that the blame falls squarely on Washington's broad shoulders for the failure of the expedition.

There is another important matter to address in order to improve clarity when discussing the Native Americans so integral to this campaign and the American Revolution as a whole. It is important to remember that these regions on the New York frontier were populated by cultured, industrial indigenous people with economic and familial ties to many colonial families. Because of these ties these First Americans in the New York region are called by many names in the documents examined. I will briefly shed some light on this matter before moving forward. The specific nations we will be addressing in this paper are the Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida, Mohawks, and Tuscarora. These are the names they know themselves by "nationally". Ethnically and linguistically, these Five Nations self identify as the Haudenosaunee, or the "People of the Longhouse".

The Haudenosaunee were labeled the Iroquois by their traditional Algonquin rivals in the early seventeenth century, a name solidified in trading relations by first the French and later the English. Consequently, the Haudenosaunee are rarely called by their proper name, most often referred to as the League of Six Nations or Iroquois Confederacy, and occasionally by their individual tribal nation names. All of these names are essentially correct, though some are certainly more so. It is important for the reader to understand that the Seneca and Cayuga and

Mohawk are all Iroquois, and that the names Iroquois and Haudenosaunee are interchangeable when presented in this historical context. They are the same people, and colonial references to "Iroquoia" are to the regions of the Finger Lakes from Niagara to the Cherry Valley that comprised the homelands of the Six Nations at the time of the war for American independence.



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[2] Roger H. Stonehouse, *The Sullivan-Clinton Campaign in 1779 Chronology and selected documents. . .* (Albany: New York University, 1929), 18.

1.2 Reasons and Intent of the Sullivan Campaign of 1779

During the early summer of 1778 in the Wyoming and Cherry valley regions of Western New York, colonial Patriots and their Oneida allies on the frontier braced themselves when word reached of Seneca and Cayuga Iroquois on the warpath. News of their raids reached General Philip John Schuyler on May 25.[3] By May 30, the Iroquois destroyed the village of Cobleskill in a conflagration of homes and crops, and the anxiety of Governor Henry Clinton was aroused.[4] The Continental Congress reacted swiftly, legislating support on June 11for missions against the British garrisons and the enemy Iroquois "by another expedition from the Mohawk river to the Seneca country, in order to chastise that insolent and revengeful nation, and to dispossess the enemy from Oswego."[5] Congress also reached two very important conclusions regarding these missions into Iroquois country. First, recorded in the minutes of the Journals of Continental Congress from that same session on June 11, in the order and authorization for a campaign against the Seneca in western new York, is the assertion that if the Continental Army was to attempt these tactical campaigns to dislodge the British from their forts in Detroit or Niagara, or to ravage the Seneca homelands; the mission could not be an ill-prepared or half-hearted mission that ended in stalemate. Such an outcome would exacerbate troubles on the frontier and prove more costly in the long run. The rebellious colonies therefore had to commit to provision the expedition with ample supplies and superb leadership. This too Congress demonstrated awareness of in the specific request for General Horatio Gates to lead the expedition, or an

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[3] George Clinton, *Public Papers of George Clinton V4 Part 1: First Governor Of New York, 1777-1795 and 1801-1804* (New York: Kessinger Publishing, 2008), 3:356.

[4] Ibid., 4:377-78.

[5] Library of Congress, "Journals of the Continental Congress --THURSDAY, JUNE 11, 1778." (American Memory from the Library of Congress), 1: 589-590.

officer of Gates's choosing should Gates himself decline.[6] Gates did decline, saying "the man who undertakes the Indian service, should enjoy youth and strength; requisites I do not possess."[7]

Second, these same June 11 minutes also included approval for other military personnel to redeploy under Horatio Gates's supervision to begin preparation for the expedition under the planning of Commander in Chief George Washington. George Washington was shrewd to include secondary orders for Major General John Sullivan to take command of the campaign along with the original offer of commission to Gates. General Washington knew of Gates's poor health and probable refusal of frontier service. John Sullivan became the best candidate for the job of those serving under General Horatio Gates based on his military record and experience fighting against British veteran outfits. Sullivan was also probably the only general under Gates that Washington thought trustworthy of the assignment.

Earlier the same year Sullivan had been seeking retirement, but Washington had refused on the basis that Sullivan's skill and experience was invaluable for the time being. Now Washington wanted to make use of the accomplished Sullivan one last time, especially if Congress dictated he draw on leadership from Gates's camp. But choosing the precise leadership of the expedition was not the only focus of Congress, as its initial actions supporting the campaign demonstrated. Congress also began funding allocations on preliminary organization of supplies for the expedition more than a year before Sullivan finally ordered the mouth of Lake Otsego undammed to launch his Brigadier General James Clinton's supply bateaux carrying additional but what Sullivan viewed as inadequate supplies on August 8, 1779.

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[6] Ibid., Vol. 11, 589-590.

[7] Division of Archives and History, University of New York. *The Sullivan-Clinton Campaign in 1779 Chronology and selected documents . . . ,* (Albany: University of the State of New York 1929), 189.

It can even be argued that Congress was proactive in attempts to supply the campaign. However, in classic style "to starve the army at pleasure,"[8] Congress estimated the Indian pacification expeditions would require a minimum of $932,743 to prosecute, yet on June 17, 1778 authorized only $600,000.[9] Presumably, more money was to be allocated later. However, acquiring supplies without hard specie in hand or even the quickly depreciating Continental dollars became the first of many challenges to supplying the expedition. According to scholar Wayne Carp "we now know that an increase of the money supply was the fundamental cause of the depreciation of the Continental currency. Until 1780, Congress issued approximately $226 million in paper money, more than half that amount— $124 million—in [OR 20] 1779 alone."[10] Continental dollars flew off the presses ramping up to the campaign, but they bought less and less, especially since the British and even the French competed for the same goods and were cash rich in hard specie by comparison.

The next two days of mid-June saw both Springfield and Andrustown share the fate of Cobleskill, and two weeks later British Colonel John Butler began a fortnight of devastation in the Wyoming Valley that claimed dozens of lives, eleven palisade forts and over 1000 homes and vital structures including grist mills and barns.[11] Butler and Mohawks led by chiefs Joseph Brant and Cornplanter continued the calculated devastation of the Mohawk, Wyoming and Cherry valleys until the cold of winter and dwindling supplies forced a halt. As David Levinson argues, these campaigns against colonists and, more specifically, Oneida allies left Oneida villages devastated. This drove many Oneida refugees to distant Schenectady to be cared for by

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[8] Wayne E. Carp, *To Starve the Army at Pleasure: Continental Army Administration and American Political Culture, 1775-1783* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984).
[9] Library of Congress, "Journals of the Continental Congress --WEDNESDAY, JUNE 17, 1778." (American Memory from the Library of Congress), 11: 614.
[10] Wayne E. Carp, *To Starve the Army at Pleasure,* 104.
[11] Excerpt from 1778 Pennsylvania Packet edition on Wyoming valley massacre.

the Colonials or to Niagara and into the arms of the British. Only a few Oneida warriors remained to serve as scouts for the Americans, while the rest were concerned with their immediate families, their homes, and their need to survive the coming winter.[12] Butler's campaign of 1778 was smaller in scale than the operations planned for Sullivan's and Brigadier General James Clinton's expeditions the very next summer, but eerily similar in aim and effectiveness with regard to breaking their adversaries' spirits. Although the raids damaged Oneida security, the Oneida remained valuable allies of the colonists and served as scouts, warriors and informants in the campaign against their brother nations. Oneida country and Fort Stanwix in particular continued to play key roles during the course of the war.

The 1778 British campaign in New York was a testimony to the Continental Congress's assertion that a war of ineffective hampering and indecisive outcome would be unhelpful and costly. Butler's Rangers were too few to take and hold territory or do more than destroy the rich and fertile countryside the rebels relied on for food, fodder and economic security. Likewise, the Continental Army would have to do more in return than simply scour the countryside and destroy Loyalist, Seneca and Cayuga agricultural, animal, and other natural resources. These resources were desperately needed by all peoples of the region, and prolonged destruction of them was not a sustainable strategy for either party. The British knew it and so always feared eventual attack on their fortifications. They could transport adequate supplies for the Redcoat soldiers stationed at Niagara and other forts, but were not prepared to provide for the surrounding populace. Nor did they mean to. Lieutenant Colonel Mason Bolton served as commander of Fort Niagara for the British and kept a constant balance between maintaining his garrison and his tenuous Seneca alliance, always aware of the needs of his own "men necessary to defend works

[12] David Levinson, "An Explanation for the Oneida-Colonist Alliance in the American Revolution," *Ethnohistory* 23, no. 3 (1976): 265-289.

of 1100 yards in circumference where there are five bastions, two blockhouses, and many other places to be manned."[13]

The Iroquois allies were supposed to serve as the self sufficient armed buffer that enabled communications between British posts and provided warnings of attack. Their military purpose (from the British standpoint) was to soften and slow the marching army through delaying actions and steady attrition of the enemy's manpower and support system. Until the invading Continental Army had to be faced, Colonel John Butler used the Iroquois to destroy enemy towns and be an instrument of spreading terror among the rebels. Raids upon Patriot farmsteads and families were brutal. Bitter Loyalists like William Tryon appealed to British authorities "that the Indian Nations lying between Quebec and West Florida be let loose on the Frontiers of the revolted Colonies, unrestrained, excepting to Women and Children."[14] Butler was indeed unrestrained in his conduct. Eyewitness accounts of his raids of 1778 demonstrate the total warfare he brought to the New York frontier:

> About 70 of the men, who had enlisted in the Continental service to defend the frontiers, they inhumanely butchered, with every circumstance of horrid cruelty; and then shuttered up the rest, with the women and children, in the houses, they set fire to them, and they all perished together in the flames.[15]

The Seneca and Cayuga had a vested interest in protecting their farmlands, orchards, villages, and mills against similar retaliation from the Americans. They would fight hard to defend these lands and add great strength and potentially numbers to the garrisons at Niagara and to Butler's Rangers. They knew the land, how to defend it, how to use it to their advantage, how to move through it with information, trade goods, or malicious intent. An expedition against such

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[13] Mason Bolton to Frederick Haldimand, *Documents of the American Revolution 1770-1783, XVII Transcripts 1779*, (London: Irish University Press, 1977), 204.
[14] University of New York, *The Sullivan-Clinton Campaign in 1779 Chronology and selected documents. . .*, (Albany: University of the State of New York, 1929), 756.
[15] Ibid., 51-54.

a people and their British allies would have to employ knowledge of the region, disciplined tactics, excellent soldiery, and of course, ample provisions. They were simply too formidable an enemy to obliterate, and so had to be broken like a stallion, removed as a danger, and then made useful. Success from Washington's view meant that once subdued "they may possibly be engaged, by address, secrecy, and stratagem, to surprise the garrison of Niagara, and the shipping on the Lakes, and put them into our possession. This may be demanded, as a condition of our friendship, and would be a most important point gained."[16]

Nevertheless there were fundamental differences between what Congress and Washington wanted to occur in Western New York and what either was willing and able to accomplish regarding the battle on the frontier. It was generally agreed that in order to both assault the countryside and lay siege to either Niagara or Detroit, a combined force of approximately 10,000 soldiers coordinated from Fort Pitt, the Mohawk Valley, and Sullivan's starting point of Easton in the Wyoming Valley were necessary. This was far more than were available to draw upon or supply. Butler's roughly 400 Rangers were hardened veteran frontiersmen, augmented by the Seneca and Cayuga warriors supporting the British, and the garrison at Niagara made the British military strength in the area roughly 4000 strong plus cannon. With Brigadier General James Clinton's colonial contingent, Brigadier General Enoch Poor's artillery and Brigadier General Edward Hand's light infantry units, and the half dozen Oneida scouts, Sullivan led an army of over 3500 able bodied men plus light cannon. In contemporary military terms, these were essentially equal forces set in opposition.

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[16] George Washington to Sullivan, *The Writings of George Washington from the original manuscript sources, 1745-1799,* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1937), 7: 460-63.

Washington shaped the terms of the mission well in his orders to General Sullivan on May 31, 1779, stating that "parties should be detached to lay waste all the settlements around, with instructions to do it in the most effectual manner, that the country may not be merely **overrun**, but **destroyed**."[17] In fact, the plan as far as Washington was concerned, seemed to be to punish the Seneca and Cayuga fiercely, get them to sue for peace, and then demand the defeated Iroquois help in acquiring Niagara along with Brant and Butler. Better yet, Washington would have preferred Sullivan defeat Butler decisively and then proceed for a try at Niagara without further fear of a large force flanking his expedition. But even should this strategy fail, Washington's goal was always to take Fort Niagara by hook or by crook. He reminded Sullivan in the letter sent May 31, 1779 that "hostages are the only kind of security to be depended upon. Should Niagara fall into your hands in the manner I have mentioned—you will do everything in your power for preserving and maintaining it, by establishing a chain of posts, in such manner as shall appear to you most safe an effectual and tending as little to reduce our general force as possible—this however we shall be better able to decide as future events of the campaign unfold themselves—"[18]

This letter from Commander in Chief Washington to General Sullivan is important because it highlights the two major goals of the 1779 campaign. The first is that despite troop numbers, personality conflicts, or logistical difficulties with obtaining adequate supplies, Washington fully expected Sullivan to get the campaign launched, enter Seneca country, and find a way to harass the British at Niagara. Ideally, he wanted Sullivan to drive fear into the hearts of the Iroquois and then parlay that fear into forcing Seneca and Cayuga cooperation against the Redcoats. George Washington supported this underlying plan by coordinating the

[17] Ibid., 15: 189-193.
[18] Ibid..

campaign from Fort Pitt, in addition to the preliminary "softening" campaigns executed by James Clinton prior to joining his force to Sullivan's command. Sullivan seemed first unaware of and then reluctant to accept his superior officer's prompting to get a move on, make the most of the supplies and opportunities he had, and build on those through aggressive campaigning. This is the Washington hardened from the Valley Forge winter of 1777-1778, during which he watched his inactive army of 11,000 soldiers become a starving, sickly, and atrophied force. He had learn to appreciate the value of action and innovations to remedy provisioning challenges, but Sullivan—who had spent that same bitter winter with Washington—came away from it with a different lesson in mind.[19]

In fact, Sullivan continued to complicate his supply problems essentially by ignoring his commander's advice and orders and delaying the campaign in the hopes of more favorable conditions. These conditions never arrived. The delay in launching the campaign complicated its organization and shortened its potential length and effectiveness significantly before the first boots set to marching.[20] Washington and Brigadier General James Clinton clearly expressed their frustration in letters to each other and to Sullivan, who staunchly defended his martial protocol and planning. Nevertheless, evidence suggests Sullivan could have launched the campaign weeks earlier, under conditions comparable to when the expedition into Indian country finally began.

He finally marched his army to meet with Clinton's detachment and build Tioga, then further onto the New York frontier. If Washington was hoping that Sullivan could draw Butler into a decisive conflict and set the Seneca on their heels, he essentially got his wish in the outcome of the Battle of Newtown on August 29, 1779. Sullivan had only launched his main

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[19] Joseph J. Ellis, *American Creation: Triumphs and Tragedies in the Founding of the Republic*, (New York: Random House inc.), 63-69.
[20] Joseph R. Fischer, *A Well-Executed Failure* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2008), 110-114.

force upriver on August 8. A mere twenty-one days later and just west of his newly constructed and garrisoned fort at Tioga, he combined his force with Clinton's roughly 1500 able bodied soldiers, several cannon, and light artillery. Days outside of Tioga, Sullivan had his major victory, his enemy on the run, and could have marched west to Niagara instead of turning north into Seneca country.

But turn north he did, and by that route he "pushed into Six Nations country, ravaging and destroying; his farthest point of advance was Genesee . . . He punished the Six Nations for siding with the British but had nothing else to show for a season's campaigning with a very respectable force."[21] The Iroquois in turn fled to Niagara by the thousands, leaving Colonel Bolton reeling from the impact on his stores from "the Indian families now being driven into Niagara for protection and subsistence, where 5000 rations are issued daily."[22] By the time Sullivan reached Genesee, and Lt. Boyd's scouting detachment was ambushed and massacred on September 13, Sullivan's circuitous campaign route from Fort Tioga to Genesee Castle had taken him over 150 miles. This is essentially the point at which the expedition began an orderly retreat, continuing to destroy Seneca and Cayuga lands as they went. When Sullivan gave the order to turn back, his army was only about sixty miles east of Niagara. The moment was described by one of Sullivan's lieutenants, Robert Parker:

> September 15th.- At 6 o'clock the whole army was ordered to destroy the corn, which grew in amazing quantities in this place, with almost every kind of vegetables–which we entirely destroyed, first by collecting it & carrying it into the Houses, which we filled and then set on fire, & gathering large quantities of wood, mixed the corn with it and burnt it in a pile of ashes. At 12 we finished the destruction of the corn and likewise the Business of the Expedition, when receiving the General's thanks, we set out on our return.[23]

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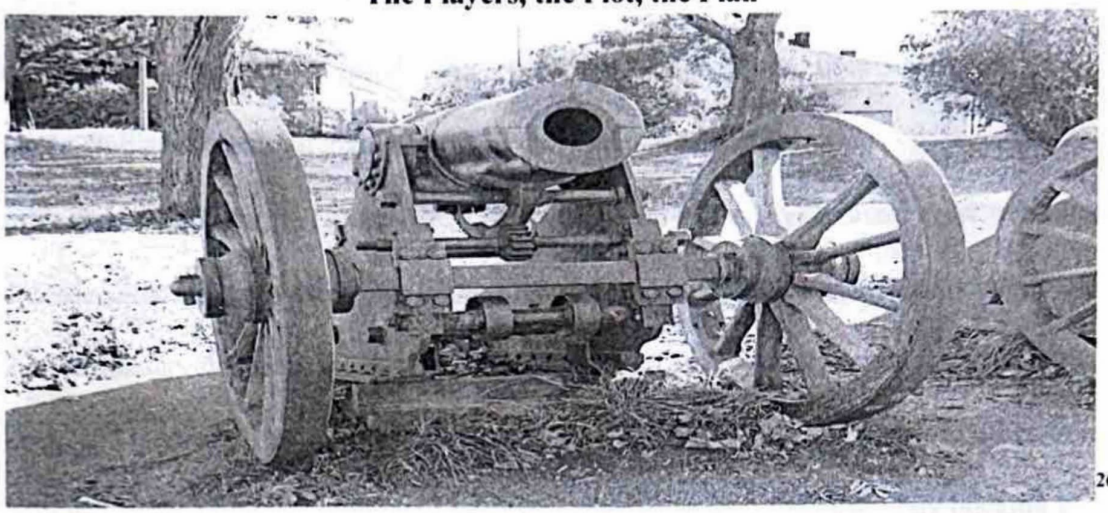
[21] K.G. Davies, *Documents of the American Revolution 1770-1783, XVII Transcripts 1779*, 10.
[22] Frederick Haldimand to Lord Germain, ibid., 231.
[23] Journal of Lt. Robert Parker, 2nd Continental 1779, *The Sullivan-Clinton Campaign*, 189-190.

Whether this was caution displayed in the field after facing a series of ambushes, conservative adherence to his battle orders, or lack of faith in his chances against the British garrison entrenched at Niagara is uncertain. Sullivan was done with his campaign. It is obvious that despite low rations there were plentiful provisions the army could have gathered and consumed instead of destroyed. Sullivan was preoccupied with security throughout the campaign, but his army was just as spread out and vulnerable when employed destroying crops and fodder. Nor was the threat against his superior force that great. We know that the majority of Seneca warrior allies serving with Colonel John Butler abandoned him, much to his frustration, immediately after the battle of Newtown. Butler could neither keep more than roughly forty of them with him nor convince them to make another stand.[24] Meanwhile, Sullivan's obsession with the security of his marching army demanded constant scouting and flanking maneuvers that could and did prove successful against surprise attack, but slowed his pace to a crawl.[25] He argued that this used up supplies needed to reach Niagara, leaving only enough for the feast at Genesee and all the way home.

[24] Butler to Haldimand, Ibid., 100-101.
[25] Joseph Fischer, *A Well-Executed* Failure, 61-82.

The Players, the Plot, the Plan

 [26]

2.0 Introduction to Major General John Sullivan- Politician, Patriot, General

John Sullivan was a lawyer from New Hampshire turned politician in New York. He was born in 1740, started his practice at age twenty and was an assemblyman by 1774. He was known for his oratory, contentious by nature, and flush with political rivals. He was commissioned a brigadier-general in 1775 and promoted to major general the following year.[27] Despite Washington's reputation and best efforts in 1779, Sullivan was not impressed with the supplies sent him. But his dissatisfaction went beyond the campaign circumstances to his opinion of the commissary officers and the colonial quartermaster system as a whole. This was not the first time Sullivan perceived his men had been given the short end of the stick, and it was characteristic of Sullivan to delay the campaign long enough to rectify what he perceived as another snubbing by the commissary officers with whom he was in constant bitter conflict.

Sullivan also saw the shortage in provisions as a legitimate excuse to shorten the expedition he reluctantly agreed to in the first place. Either way, even if it meant the provisions he had would spoil, Sullivan would not set off on the expedition until he got his material goods

[26] 18th century smooth bore Howitzer, as used at Battle of Newtown, August 29, 1779.
[27] Robert Broadwater, *A Biographical Dictionary of American Generals of the Revolutionary War*, (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Co., 2007), 133-134.

from somewhere. Carp states that Sullivan's actions regarding provisioning was an example of a major hurdle to Washington faced when providing for his army. He uses Sullivan as a specific example. Sullivan's sense of entitlement had been a constant obstacle to his service of his country and commander. In November 1778, Washington had to give a direct order to Sullivan to decease purchasing provisions for his command through private enterprise and circumvention of the commissary due to an increase of 25% in costs that led to supply crises elsewhere. Sullivan had ignored all previous pleas and protests by fellow officers to desist. In other words, even in the early planning stages of the campaign to come, Sullivan was directly bucking the colonial commissary and quartermaster system and damaging the war effort through his actions. Although his men loved him for it, he made enemies throughout the army and its civilian support system. His were dangerous actions, for "though motivated by genuine concern for their men, Continental officers' interference with supply operations had disruptive and costly consequences."[28] There is no doubt that Sullivan was dissatisfied with the level and condition of his provisions. It was his favorite complaint besides claims of insult to his honor. He was a man of his time, and no stranger to duels over military honor.

He was quick to take offense and injury to pride, and perhaps still felt stained by his association to the dishonored Thomas Conway. From the battle of Brandywine on September 9, 1777 forward Conway and Sullivan had supported each other on numerous occasions. Once the suspicions of some form of "cabal" headed by Conway arose, Sullivan employed deft political maneuvering to put space between him and the pariah Conway, who lost his commission and shipped off to France dishonored. Nevertheless by this point Sullivan was clearly disillusioned with his place in the Continental Army, and said so:

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[28] Wayne E. Carp, *To Starve the Army at* Pleasure, 111-112.

> I Realize my Command as high in The Army at the Same time Consider it arising from mere Fortuitous Circumstances & not from any notice that has been taken of my Constant & faithful Services-In fact I have never yet had a post assigned me where there was Even a probability of Acquiring Honor Those posts are Either Reserved for older or for younger officers (more in favor Than myself) I have often Sensibly felt The Degrading prefference given to others & have Suffered it So far as to operate upon me: That I am now unhappy in the Service- I am willing heretofore to Live upon my own fortune in the Service a Campaign or Two Longer provided I can have an opportunity of putting my affairs in Such a Situation as will afford me the necessary Subsistance but if I might have my Choice it would be that Some more Suitable person Should fill my place in the Army & I be permitted to retire.[29]

Such was John Sullivan's state of mind and working relationship with George Washington going into the spring of 1778. He still had the lessons of Newport and Rhode Island ahead of him, where he seemed to develop a heightened fear of seeing his force made impotent through calamitous drenching of the gunpowder magazines or reliance upon outside commanders to guarantee his forces reach set waypoints on schedule.[30] Literally left out in the cold, he never forgot his "army now miserable beyond Description [.] most of my troops without any kind of Covering & those who have tents but Little better Guarded against this violent and uncommon storm my ammunition mostly ruined & arms rendered useless."[31] Feeling unappreciated, constantly on the political defensive, and unable to wriggle out of further duty Sullivan turned abrasive on all counts and quickly earned the enmity of the War Board, Quartermaster General, and fellow officers alike. Despite this he was a staunch Patriot, admired by his own soldiers, and a steady fighter for the Continental cause.

So was John Sullivan blind to the quickly narrowing window of time he had in which to conduct his military expedition to scorch the earth of the Iroquois homelands? The frustration he caused generals Washington, Clinton, Schuyler, and Hand would seem to suggest so. It must also

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[29] Sullivan to Congress, *A General of the Revolution: John Sullivan of New Hampshire*, (New York – London: Columbia University Press, 1961), 80.
[30] Charles Whittemore, ibid., 98.
[31] Ibid..

be remembered that Sullivan was the choice of the accomplished Horatio Gates, and that Washington initially held great confidence in his ability to succeed in his particular theater of the war. Washington himself once told Sullivan when the latter's honor and conduct were called into question that though he might not be liked by his fellow officers, none could challenge his patriotism, courage, or skill in battle.[32] So the answer must then be no. General Sullivan was indeed aware of his thinning opportunities, the political consequences, and decided in the end that a short or ineffective campaign was preferable to an ignominious defeat by the British and their Indian allies.

2.1 The Plans and Schemes of George Washington (Why Niagara in 1779?)

According to the Continental Congress, what was truly needed by the Patriots and feared by the British was a concerted effort to take Niagara or Detroit and force the Seneca and Cayuga to sue for peace. The obvious reality to everyone but the self-obsessed Sullivan was that George Washington was not going to have anywhere near the projected 10,000 men in the Continental Army to assign to the 1779 summer campaign needed to guarantee capture of Niagara. There just were not enough Continental soldiers or provisions or Indian allies available to fight on the frontier on such a level. The war in western New York would instead have to be prosecuted on a much smaller scale. Insufficient Patriot manpower for a more comprehensive military campaign simply forced an official change in campaign priorities. Instead of directly threatening Niagara, and in the process successfully breaking the Seneca and Cayuga will to fight, the goal became merely the latter. But to the Continental Commander in Chief what could not be achieved by frontal assault might still be gained by deft strategy.

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[32] Washington to Sullivan, *The Writings of George Washington*, 9: 425.

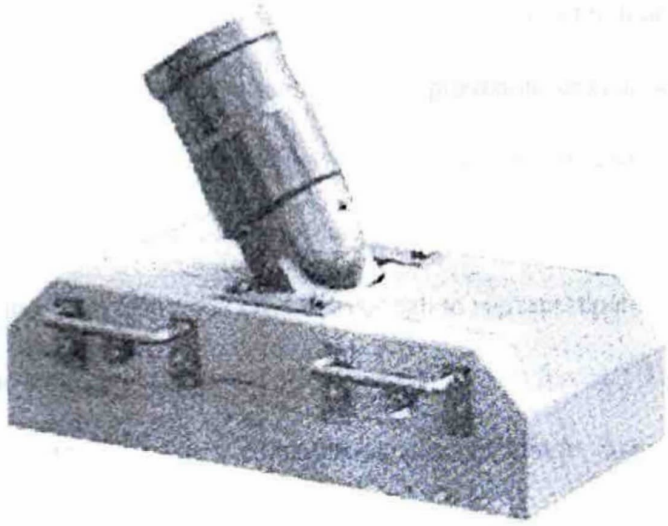
In lieu of direct march to Fort Niagara, the plan called for an attack on the stronghold of the Seneca and punitive retribution for the raids of 1778. The hope was to bait Butler's Rangers and Seneca allies into a field battle in the open countryside. Washington argued that if Sullivan could locate, confront, and destroy or capture all or some of Butler's regiment, the shift in strength of the opposing armies would open up an opportunity to besiege Fort Niagara. Washington knew that it would be easier to deal a decisive blow to the British than to the Iroquois. The key point had been made two centuries earlier by Machiavelli: to succeed in total war "you must scatter, disorganize, and destroy the people so completely that they can in no way injure you; for, were you merely to impoverish them, ' the spoliated still have their arms'; or if you disarm them, 'their fury will serve them instead of arms'; if you kill the chiefs and continue to oppress the others, new chiefs will spring up like the heads of a Hydra."[33]

In other words, Washington knew that the Seneca were better allies than enemies, and that assault on the forts was a more viable way to win the war on the frontier. After all, forts concentrated the enemy in one locale, for better or worse. As the British quickly discovered, their forts were a liability in the sense that "in time of war they are most useless, because they will be assailed by the enemy as well as by [allies] and cannot possibly resist both."[34] If the Americans could shake British hold of the area and threaten the precious fur trade, the tenuous faith the Seneca placed in the Redcoats might become irreparably damaged. Faced with the possibility of losing their homes and livelihoods permanently to a Continental Army victory, Seneca and Cayuga warriors would seek to avoid the bloody warfare to come if they could save their lands. On the other hand, what Congress rightfully feared was that if Sullivan and Clinton failed to completely break the spirit of the "revengeful Seneca" and Cayuga along with their faith in the

[33] Niccolo Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 364.
[34] Ibid.

British to protect their food, homes, and families, they were in essence only setting fire to their own homes and competence along with that of their enemies. Washington therefore coordinated and supplied the multipronged assault into Iroquoia intent upon his lead general finding a wedge point to leverage Fort Niagara into the hands of the continental Army by winter of 1779.

2.2 Overview of Coordinated Expeditions of Brodhead and Clinton in 1779



[35]

George Washington sought to confuse the British in Detroit, Niagara, Quebec, and New York, and his reasoning was sound. If the Continental Army was to send a marching army against either the Six Nations or Niagara it would be best to soften the enemy on multiple fronts as well as establish staging grounds in Seneca territory from which to march on Fort Niagara. General James Clinton sent raids through the Cherry Valley and marched to Oswego destroying enemy homes and farmlands along the way. His forces cleared the lands north and east of the planned Sullivan expedition of possible flanking Tory soldiers and Indian allies that might have endangered the mission. Meanwhile, leading up to the campaign Lieutenant Colonel Daniel

[35] 12lb. colonial era Cohorn mortar shown similar to those operated by Colonel Proctor's regiment against the Iroquois. This field piece could be carried easily by infantry and was able to fire ball, chain and grape shot. It was ideal for bringing the threat and advantage of artillery to bear deep on the frontier.

Brodhead had been charged by Washington to campaign deep into southern Seneca lands from his garrison in the west at Fort Pitt, establish forts and staging grounds at the foot of the Finger Lakes, and prepare to join Sullivan in besieging Niagara. This he did, marching nearly 400 miles in the progress,[36] finding few Seneca but finding large villages and bountiful orchards and farmlands which he put to the torch.

Daniel Brodhead possessed all the resourcefulness and ambition that Sullivan lacked heading into the summer of 1779. Encouraging through provisions or coercion, he began his own expedition into Seneca lands with as many as 100 Delaware warriors, and even ordered his own light infantry to dress as Native scouts that he may give the impression his force contained more Indian allies than it did. This tactic was effective enough to warrant reporting to Sullivan on August 6, in case the latter might wish to employ it with his own forces.[37] Taking him at his word, Brodhead sought to do all that Washington had charged him to, down to the intent behind the words. Furthermore, he understood and agreed with the logic behind the tactics ordered and required in the war. He was a realist, an improviser, and willing to do what his Commander in Chief requested of him. He understood modern frontier was and that "as to new stratagems, when armies are engaged in conflict, every captain should endeavor to invent such as will encourage his own troops and dishearten those of the enemy."[38]

This he did with much fervor and conviction, to the dismay of the Seneca and Cayuga in his path. Brodhead's expedition followed the frontier strategy laid out by Washington quite effectively, despite the difficulties he faced with supplies and the like. He achieved his objectives and waited on word from Sullivan prepared to carry out Washington's implied mission of a

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[36] Robert Broadwater, *American Generals of the Revolution*, 14-15.
[37] Barbara Alice Mann, *George Washington's War on Native America*, (London: Praeger Publishers, 2005), 40.
[38] Niccolo Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 458.

march on Niagara. He was a classic commander in contrast to some of his more demagogic or excessively cautious colleagues. He would almost certainly have been a better leader of the campaign Washington hoped Sullivan would carry out, had the Commander in Chief the latitude to promote younger officers faster. The frontier war was one that took initiative and decisive action. "A good general, then, has to do two things; the one, to try by novel stratagems to create alarm amongst the enemy; and the other, to be on his guard to discover those that the enemy may attempt to practice upon him, and render them fruitless."[39] These things he accomplished, torching eight towns, more villages, over 500 acres of farmlands. He also discovered and destroyed the large staging point at Yoghroonwago that would have enabled raids deep into colonial territory.[40] "Brodhead experienced as much difficulty as Sullivan in gathering up his supplies, although he was far less of a crybaby about it . . . The Continental Army made a habit of supplying its deficiencies by grazing on Native commissaries."[41]

2.3 The State of Provisions and War on the New York Frontier

To accept Joseph Fischer's argument that George Washington failed to properly equip and supply Sullivan's and all corresponding expeditions into the land of the Six Nations is to reject the realities in colonial America at this point in the revolution. E. Wayne Carp explains the enormous logistical problems succinctly in his examination of the difficulties faced by the Continental Army throughout the war, but especially in the northern colonies in 1779. Sullivan bitterly complained that he lacked enough heavy wagons, barrels, provisions, and boats to perform the task he had been given. But no sensible Patriot officer could have been unaware of the extent to which all these things were hard to find. Carp argues that "throughout the war the

[39] Ibid., 459.
[40] Barbara Mann, *George Washington's War on Native America*, 44-45.
[41] Ibid., 40.

army's shortages of wagons remained a problem for many reasons. Their constant use, day in and day out, during inclement weather, over miserable roads, and by careless drivers kept many wagons out of service. Farmers gave priority to the harvest and were reluctant to part with their wagons and eager to reclaim them."[42]

This was complicated by the many colonial legislatures that exempted wagons, drivers and the artisans who made them from service in the Continental Army, leaving officers short on manpower and the means of legally obtaining the basic machines of war for the seriously impacted war effort.[43] This led many officers to take matters into their own hands, thereby causing direct conflict between those who supposedly shared in the same cause against the British. The shortage of wagons and wagon drivers throughout the colonies during the war led to similar actions on the part of the British commissary as well. In fact, the impressment of wagons by both sides damaged harvesting and thus popular support for the cause of whichever army stripped the farmers, ranchers and tradesmen of their property. Sullivan's insistence on additional provisions and the wagons to carry them were made by a general who must have understood the wagons, like the additional provisions he wanted to carry in them, and the drivers needed who were willing to transport for the army, were in excessively short supply. In short, Sullivan's actions demonstrate that he embraced those delays caused by his demands despite his insistence otherwise.

It is also quite easy to understand the side of the farmers and tradesmen who felt reluctant to part with their transportation and livelihood. They often did not get their wagons back at all, let alone their horses, or beasts of burden. The practice of systematically cannibalizing wagon

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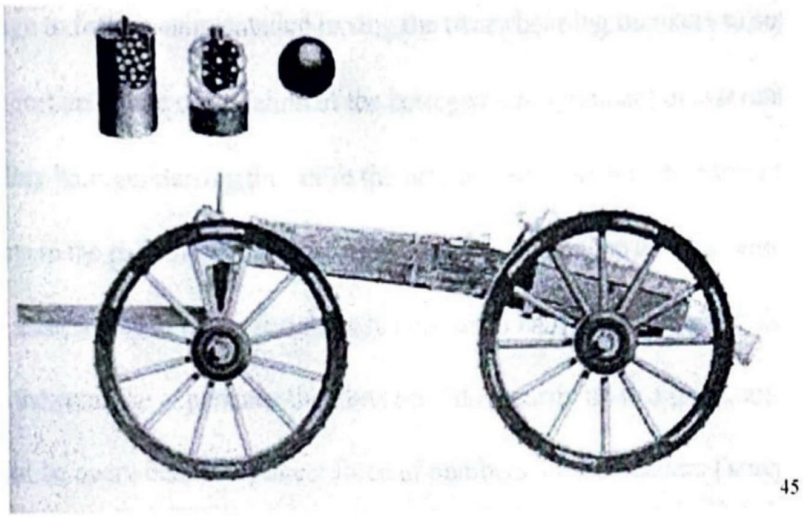
[42]E. Wayne Carp, *To Starve the Army at Pleasure*, 61.
[43]Ibid., 33.

parts to repair and consolidate supply caravans also meant that there was a good chance that the remaining wagons, once returned, could not with any accuracy reach their original owners. To ward against this owners might drive their own wagons for either army to ensure return of their conveyance, but usually for only short distances whereupon they would dump the load, to the dismay of commissary and field officers alike, and go back to their farms. Still, the demand for wagons to move much needed provisions characterized the entire war. Staff officers squared off with commissary officers, and generals like Sullivan took matters into their own hands, circumventing the system, driving up prices and causing critical shortages to key forces. As Carp succinctly puts it:

> Clearly, the army's supply lines were at the mercy of geography, prey to the elements, and easy targets for Continental officers and state officials, making overland transportation at all times an expensive and inefficient means of provisioning the army. The weakest link, however, in the entire complicated system of transportation services, was the Wagonmaster Department. There were so many interdependent aspects in operating the army's overland transport system efficiently that failure in any one often resulted in the nondelivery of supplies to the army. Wagons were often in short supply, and without wagons, military officials were unable to ship food, shoes, clothing, or forage.[44]

Carp also argues that Washington's hands-on dealing with supply and logistics throughout the war was to be commended. Because of Washington's persistence and constant direct collaborations with Henry Knox of the Board of War, Nathaniel Greene in the Quartermaster Department, and state leaders like Henry Clinton of New York, the Continental Army progressed to become the outfitted and professional force that Sullivan commanded in the summer of 1779. The sheer amount of supplies that Sullivan gathered at Easton, and then added to at Tioga, is clear proof that despite all the failings of the provisioning system he was actually fairly well supplied with wagons, horses, oxen, fodder, and supplies.

[44] Ibid., 60.



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2.4 Frontier and Fort Warfare Tactics and Technology in the 1770s

Traditional warfare in the eighteenth century often relied upon disciplined volley fire on an open field, usually involving a brief exchange of fire followed by bayonet charge and close combat. Battles of attrition were expected, in which both sides hoped to gain a discernible advantage during the first few volleys that would enable them to charge and break the ranks of the opposing force. Discipline was often a factor that determined victory, but good generals and officers would seek to avoid unacceptable losses. Often, victory could be attained by out maneuvering the opponent to occupy advantageous ground prior to engagement with the enemy. Strategy, misdirection, and outright deceit "in the conduct of war [was] laudable and honorable; and a commander who vanquishe[d] an enemy by stratagem [was] equally praised with one who gain[ed] victory by force."[46] Nevertheless at some point fighting came down to facing each other across a killing field and seeking to make the other side falter.

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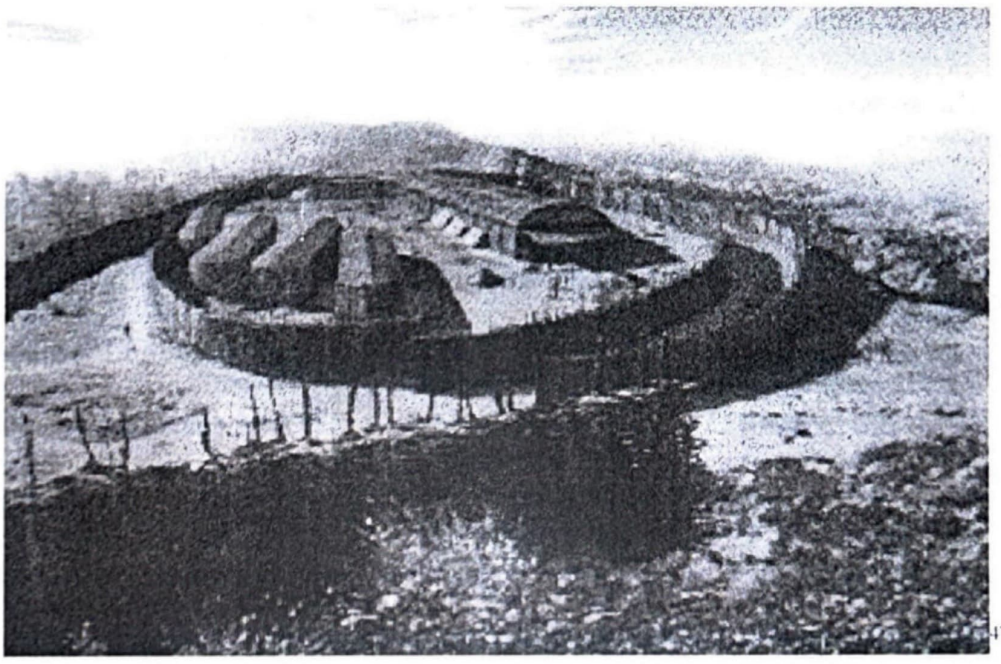
[45] Typical 18th century smooth bore field cannon wagon as used in American Revolution and projectile variants. This British design was simple and effective, and essentially a reinforced wagon frame with the cannon mounted over the rear axle for stability and recoil during use. Image provided by WarandGame.info.

[46] Niccolo Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 526.

Laying siege to forts usually entailed having the overwhelming numbers to surround and subdue a palisade fort and force capitulation of the besieged through threat of starvation, thirst, and constant artillery barrage. Barring this, or in the face of a stalwart foe, the object became to exploit weak points in the palisade fort with artillery and fire, breach the defense, and take the fort by force. The easiest way to take a fort though, appears to have been to merely show that you *could.* It was the common experience that forts provide security up to a point, after which palisade forts could be overwhelmed by sheer force of numbers. Fort defenders facing certain annihilation by an approaching army would simply abandon the fort and fall back, setting flame to their own battlements if surrendering the fort meant giving an unacceptable strategic advantage to the enemy. Colonel Butler was able to overwhelm and torch a dozen small colonial forts in 1778 with only a few hundred soldiers and as many warrior allies.

 [47]

[47] This rendition of Seneca Castle at Genesee illustrates the Iroquois defenses were as formidable as their British and American equals.

If the British and Americans were fond of forts on the frontier, then the Iroquois were doubly so. The Iroquois had spent a century adapting and evolving European palisade fort assault and defense techniques and technology. Thus all parties employed the same tactics and technology.[48] Hence, a direct charge to breach defenses of a palisade fort was quite costly in souls whether successful or not and was not generally attempted unless the besieging army possessed overwhelming numbers. Overwhelming numbers would force either quick capitulation of the enemy upon seeing the massive army reach the outer defenses, or at least ensure adequate strength to safely besiege and capture the bastions and blockhouses inside the perimeter of interlacing palisade defenses.

Speed is of the Essence!

3.0 Sullivan's Delay at Easton: A Bad Start

> Rapidity is the essence of war: take advantage of the enemy's unreadiness, make your way by unexpected routes, attack unguarded spots.[49]

So why was Sullivan lingering so long at Easton and so seemingly reluctant to launch the campaign earlier in the summer? Was it really about inadequate provisions? Sullivan had already ordered General James Clinton to bring additional provisions to their rendezvous at the green wood fort at Tioga, exaggerating to Clinton on July 11 that they would otherwise "all starve together, as the Commissaries have deceived us in every article. You [Clinton] will, therefore, bring forward the Provision I directed."[50] Even when the lake Otsego was raised to minimum levels necessary to launch the heavy bateaux down the Susquehanna Clinton was made to continue to wait on Sullivan completing his road, gathering his final troops, and setting off with his precious wagons.

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[48]Craig S. Keener, "An Ethnohistorical Analysis of Iroquois Assault Tactics Used against Fortified Settlements", *Ethnohistory* 46, no. 4 (1999), 777-807.
[49] Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, 49.
[50] Sullivan to James Clinton, *Public Papers of George Clinton*, 5: 150.

It could be argued, and certainly was by George Washington, that even had the state of provisions have been as scanty as Sullivan claimed, he should still have commenced the campaign and made up for his unsatisfactory supplies. Washington had worked hard to coordinate campaigns from Fort Pitt and other staging areas to keep the British uncertain of the true aim of the expedition. Colonel Brodhead was already proving how well this tactic succeeded on the frontier against the Six Nations, even keeping both Sullivan and Washington current with his actions. The same success was expected of Sullivan on an even greater scale. Washington intended Sullivan's army achieve not just militarily superiority in the region but also to do so with the greatest mobility possible. He told Sullivan as much in a letter dated May 24, 1779:

> The success and efficacy of the expedition depend absolutely upon the celerity of your movements and may be defeated if you do not, proceed as light as possible. I am led to this observation by the large [demand on Ordinance] department especially in the article of rifle powder. The quantity required is in my opinion more than can on any calculation be necessary. I know it proceeded from an anxiety to prevent a scarcity; but you will excuse the freedom of cautioning you against another extreme, that of accumulating a superfluity. I am, etc. G.W.

While foraging for food and pasturing hundreds of horses, pack animals and cattle required time and use of manpower, if the campaign season were longer it was feasible. Sullivan could have begun marching with his perishables and built Tioga weeks earlier. While Fischer argues that the droughts that caused low river levels forced the damming of Otsego in order to launch the expedition upriver, in the month waiting for this to occur an overland march by Clinton would have negated the necessity. Clinton reached Lake Otsego on July 2, 1779. His men got to work on damming while he sent scouts to reconnoiter the march to Tioga. His scouts found no army of Indians or British in the field waiting to ambush the march to the Tioga

rendezvous. Clinton wrote to his brother George Clinton in New York on July 20 to say as much, explain his delay and reassure the governor the expedition would begin again soon.[51]

James Clinton was forced to spend much of July waiting for Sullivan, highly frustrated. On July 30, 1779 George Clinton complained that Sullivan's delays had left the frontier exposed to attack.[52] Coincidentally, that same day Sullivan sent James Clinton orders to set off from Otsego with his men and supplies. These orders reached him a days later, and on August 8 the bateaux were launched and the feet marching. In short, Sullivan waited until the day before he left Fort Wyoming before sending orders to Clinton when he could have sent them earlier and coordinated the two marching armies more effectively. Both were large enough to conduct a secure if slow overland march to their destinations, and whichever arrived first to Tioga could begin the time consuming task of erecting fortifications. The supplies could have caught up to Sullivan, as they did in any case, once Tioga was established. Tioga itself was so well chosen as a strategic fortification that once garrisoned, the surrounding tree lines cleared, and emplaced with cannon it was a secure staging point. What needed to be avoided at all costs was a short campaign season on few or bad supplies, which Sullivan's actions made inevitable. The longer Sullivan waited, the less likely it became that his military expedition would achieve its purpose.

Herein lay the rub. Each day that Sullivan delayed meant that soldiers waited on call for muster, bad supplies got worse, good supplies went bad, and the depreciating Continental Dollar bought fewer replacements. Slow communication between regiments caused more delays, as did waiting for water levels of Lake Otsego to raise enough for Clinton to begin rendezvous along the Susquehanna, as did the building of the corduroy wagon road by Sullivan on the planned

[51] Ibid., 5:149.
[52] Ibid., 5:164.

route through Wyoming to establish Fort Tioga (with wagons) and wait for Clinton (with more supplies); and so it went.

The buildup and transportation of soldiers and supplies, along with the gathering of bateaux in the dammed Otsego, gave the British the time to react, dig in, and set ambushes against the impending attack. This stratagem Sullivan kept to despite Washington's constant urging not to telegraph his intentions to the enemy. Sullivan harangued Clinton to bring plentiful provisions to his staging area and then to Tioga, leaving a frustrated Washington writing to Clinton on June 27, chastising that "by the transportation of so large a quantity of stores to the lake, you clearly announce your route; and it is to be apprehended that the enemy may collect their force and fall upon you. Unless you move with great circumspection, this may prove the ruin of your detachment [and consequently the Expedition]."[53] Clinton did deliver the provisions however, though still not to the satisfaction of General Sullivan.

The later in the season Sullivan began the expedition also limited the overall campaign length as winter approached, limited his choices and opportunities in conquest of the countryside, and made inefficient the time and labor needed to feed and fodder his soldiers, mounts, and livestock. In other words, Sullivan's stubborn insistence on having ample supplies made it impossible to carry out his orders. It seems clear from our vantage point how these complications should have spurred Sullivan out of his inertia and into western New York sooner. Instead, Sullivan chewed through both his supplies and the most productive campaign days of the summer of 1779. He finally left Easton on June 18, tarried in Wyoming waiting on wagons until July 31, and joined with Clinton at Fort Tioga the third week of August![54]

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[53] Washington to Sullivan, *The Writings of Washington*, 16: 325-326.
[54] University of New York, *Sullivan-Clinton Campaign in 1779*, 33-35.

3.1 More Wasted Supplies, and Too Much Rum

John Sullivan fired a volley of complaints about the inadequacy of the supplies he received and held at Easton, but was his condition really so dire? Examination of the record suggests differently and tends to support Barbara Mann's representation of Sullivan's larder over the bleak picture Joseph Fischer paints. The large gathering of men and provisions at Easton told the British all they needed to know about the strength and intent of the gathering army. Butler reported all of this to Colonel Mason Bolton at Niagara, based upon intelligence from a deserter who gathered comprehensive statistics of the planned Sullivan campaign accurately and conveyed that information to the British. Butler relayed the information in order to stress the urgency of reinforcements and supplies for their side, telling Bolton "they have already got six hundred pack horses together and are to have four hundred more, and that a great number of boats laying in the river and that part of the troops were encamped about five miles above Wioming."[55] There were so many boats, wagons, and pack animals concentrated in and around Easton that only squirrels and chipmunks would not have known that the Continental Army was in town and preparing for a major engagement. Of course, the announcements of the campaign progress throughout July in newspapers from New York to Boston to Philadelphia[56] confirmed British suspicions about the coming expedition.

Strategically, Easton was the perfect place for Sullivan to tarry, and "instead of proceeding, Sullivan had been attacking the departments responsible for supplying him"[57] from his position of power and current priority in the war. In other words, John Sullivan had never given up his grudge against Jeremiah Wadsworth and the commissary system and was acting in

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[55] John Butler to Mason Bolton, *Documents of the American Revolution 1770-1783*, 158.
[56] Barbara Mann, *George Washington's War on Native America*, 61.
[57] Charles Whittemore, *A General of the Revolution*, 131.

precisely the same way he had when he had been in trouble with both Washington and Congress during the preceding year. However, instead of circumventing it by sending his own buyers and wagon impressing crews or pilfering of commissaries by his soldiers for his soldiers, Sullivan employed a new tactic. He decided that if the commissary was going to "deceive him in every way,"[58] as he complained to James Clinton, he would do the same and create his own duplicate commissary system at Easton, with a supplemental one at Tioga. In so doing he arranged it so that when he really needed more ammunition or provisions sent he could give a direct order to his own men and bypass the commissary officers with whom his relationship had long been toxic.

Sullivan finally got his last shipment of boats and supplies and prepared to move out in mid-June, having already in effect shortened the season available for his campaign substantially. He had rejected Washington's methods despite the fact that Brodhead had used them with great success. All the extra boats and wagons he had impressed from the counties surrounding Easton despite Washington's urgings to avoid such behavior were carrying more than ammunition and flour. The most vital provision for Sullivan's campaign appears to have been alcohol. "All told, in June alone, the quantity of rum and whiskey made available to Sullivan's expedition included ten hogsheads of rum and twenty-nine hogsheads, nine tierces, and sixty barrels of whiskey."[59] It was Sullivan's style to encourage his men with ample liquor rations, giving quarter pint shots to infantry before engagements to steel their nerves.[60] Although it may have strengthened their nerves, it is unlikely to have benefited their marksmanship. While this was a standard practice in

[58] Sullivan to Clinton, *Public Papers of George Clinton*, 5: 149.
[59] Barbara Mann, *George Washington's War on Native America*, 59.
[60] Ibid..

a hard drinking age, even by eighteenth-century standards, Sullivan was stocking and marching with a dangerous amount of alcohol.

Barbara Mann's speculation about the relationship between Sullivan's inebriated soldiers and the atrocities they committed in the field gives pause. Nevertheless, loaded down with ammunition, rum and flour, the latter of which many soldiers would later leave in swamps when forced to prioritize their cargo, Sullivan's campaign set off for Tioga and the junction with General Clinton. Sullivan transported his load over his fresh hewn corduroy road to Fort Wyoming on wagons that strained under the heavy loads and constant bumping. There Sullivan tarried again building up the fort with additional defenses and blockhouses for storage of his mountain of stores. Finally, as August began he marched slowly and deliberately to the site that would become Fort Tioga.

3.2 Finally Fort Tioga, the Staging Ground to Invade Iroquoia

John Butler wrote to Bolton and the Niagara garrison on the progress of the "rebel" army's march on August 10, 1779 informing him that

> the enemy means to establish a strong Post at Tioga; this must take them some time. So that we shall probably have sufficient Time to assemble a considerable Body before they advance any further; this however is uncertain, as they may perhaps come on immediately. As ammunition will be much wanted, I must Request of you to send off as many Horses as can be got, with that article; and to give those People that come from Niagara as much Provisions as they can carry with them.[61]

Well organized and defense minded, Sullivan marched to Tioga and established a greenwood fort at the fork of the Tioga and Susquehanna rivers. He ordered the tree line cleared for a few hundred feet, the wood used to build the palisade and blockhouses, sent back to Wyoming for munitions and supplies to be brought forward, and conducted a raid on the nearby Chemung.

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[61] Butler to Bolton, *Sullivan-Clinton Campaign in 1779*, 120.

Returning to Tioga convinced of his present security, he continued the works and sent a detachment to meet up with Clinton to bring his additional provisions to the river Fort.[62] Butler was certainly accurate in his estimation of the lengthy period it would take the rebel army to fortify the junction at Tioga to Sullivan's satisfaction.

The British had time to dig in and await reinforcements. Sullivan stayed with his slow and deliberate pace, not leaving Tioga until August 26. Lieutenant Obadiah Gore described the departure in his journal:

> At 11 o'clock this morning after great difficulty, we got under way and began our march towards the Indian country in the following order—Gen. Hand with a brigade of light Infantry and Rifle Corps formed the advance guard. Gen. Poor's formed the right and Gen. Maxfield the left flank—Gen. Clinton's brigade brought up the rear—after light infantry and between the flanks was the Park consisting of two 5 ½ Irish Howitzers, Six light 3 pounders and one small Cohorn with ammunition &c. &c. The flank marched at such a distance from each other as to admit the pack horses in the centre- We carried with us 30 days provision & 1200 pack horses, in this manner we proceeded up the Tioga River about 3 miles through very level & open country—Encamped on the bank of a beautiful & extensive meadow, that afforded a delightful prospect and plenty of grass for our horses.[63]

This was the starting pace of three miles a day for Sullivan, and the standard marching orders he kept to for most of his trek through open country. Later, once he had taken to the Cayuga trade routes and knew there was no British army in the field to oppose his own, Sullivan's soldiers covered as much as twelve miles in a day. On the march outside of Tioga, he was taking no chances and maintaining strict discipline. He even kept some mobile artillery at the ready, a demanding feat for any marching force. He maintained textbook discipline in his protection of his artillery at the cost of speed.

> The detachments which march at the heads of the brigades, are to take care that the army baggage does not cross the artillery, and the prisoners, if any carriage is overset or

[62] Charles Whittemore, *A General of the American Revolution*, 136-137.
[63] Journal of Obediah Gore, *Sullivan-Clinton Campaign in 1779*, 196.

> stopped, to assist it; and in that case, word is given to the brigades before to stop, till all are ready to march, and when there is any stopping behind, those before draw up close at the side of each other, till the rest come up, and then march on a common pace. Regularity and order should be observed by all means to prevent confusion, which is almost impossible where there are so many carriages.[64]

All of this precise maneuvering slowed Sullivan's march down to a third of his army's potential pace. His focus on defense robbed him entirely of the advantages of surprise and coordinated attack that Brodhead had used against the British and their Indian allies.

Being out of sync with Brodhead's expedition was just another symptom of Sullivan's inability to cover ground aggressively. "Originally, Washington had envisioned a light army, split into pincers, snapping shut over Iroquoia with lightening speed. Due to Sullivan's dilatoriness, the pincers closed more like rusty hinges, but given the inability of Iroquoia to respond in any case, lumbering proved good enough."[65] Sullivan had no intention of moving past his junction with Brodhead's men at the ultimate destination of Genesee, so he placed no priority or timetable on the rendezvous. He was going to march the forces he had hoping to have free rein in the Iroquois countryside, watch it burn in his wake, and keep his men in enough rum and plunder to sustain their morale in case of an eventual showdown with a hardened British army and horde of Indian warriors. So Sullivan left Brodhead to his own expedition and instead made his way towards the Chemung and Newtown.

3.3 Battle of Newtown and Sullivan's First Missed Cue

The Battle of Newtown was the only genuine field engagement of the entire expedition, and it clearly demonstrated the professionalism and ability of the Continental Army in the second half of the Revolutionary War. Joseph Fischer's examination of the soldiery displayed on the

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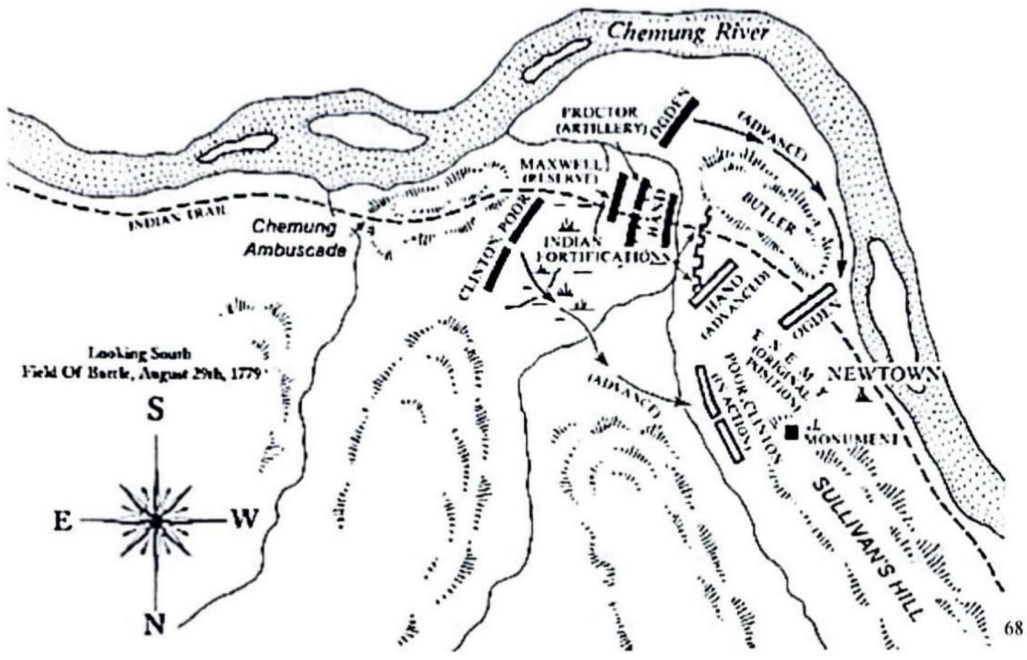
[64] John Muller, "*A Treatise on Artillery*", 193.
[65] Barbara Mann, *George Washington's War on Native America*, 66.

field highlights just how disciplined and effective John Sullivan's army truly was. However, two important points should be made. The first is that Butler's detachment and his Indian allies were grossly outmatched and outnumbered and that Butler himself could not maintain order of the latter sufficiently to change the outcome. The second is that the unheralded star of the show was Colonel Proctor and his artillery. It was his concentrated, relentless, accurate bombardment that created havoc in the Seneca lines, blasted the ambuscade in tree burst and shrapnel, and gave the Iroquois behind it the impression that they had been flanked and surrounded. Generals Clinton and Poor were in fact attempting to do just that, but were too slow to tighten the noose. One officer wrote to George Clinton in New York with an update and described the battle:

> The enemy had erected an extensive work on a very advantageous ground about a mile below this town & waited eight days for our arrival. The work, though in the woods and artfully concealed, was discovered before a shot was fired. After the General had sufficiently reconnoitered their lines & gained some conception of their numbers, made the necessary disposition. Generals Clinton and Poor with their brigades were ordered to fall upon the enemy's left flank & rear. The Cayuga [Chemung][66] river secured their right. When it was supposed these two brigades had obtained their stations, orders were issued for the attack in front. The attack was announced by the playing of artillery. A few minutes gave us complete possession of their works in front, which they abandoned after a very insignificant opposition. The attack in front was something too early, for Generals Clinton and Poor had not gained their positions before the enemy had begun their precipitate retreat. General Poor was warmly engaged on their flank where they made the greatest resistance. The enemy left eleven dead on the field & no prisoners were taken . . .
>
> T. Barber[67]

[66] Barber mistakes the Chemung River for the Cayuga. The rest of his account matches British and American reports of the battle. Most in Sullivan's army had little knowledge of the lands they invaded. Many Continental soldiers like Barber tried to piece it together as they went and keep it in their journals or letters.

[67] Barber to Governor George Clinton, *Sullivan-Clinton Campaign of 1779*, 135.



Colonel John Butler also wrote of the battle to Lieutenant Colonel Mason Bolton at Niagara, who in turn forwarded the bad news to Sir Frederick Haldimand, who served as a British brigadier general and governor of Quebec:.

> . . . a few of the enemy made their appearance in the skirt of the wood at our front and amused us with some scattering shots from their rifles, while under cover of the wood they were planting their artillery and fetching a compass round the mountain to our left in order to surround us and gain the passes by which we must retreat. I suspected their design and endeavored to prevail upon the Indians to retire and take the mountain. Joseph Brant also and the Cayuga chief came up from our right to point out the necessity of this step as it was evident the enemy had discovered us and knew our situation, but the Indians were obstinately bent on staying the lines. After a little while they began to play their artillery, consisting of six pieces of cannon and cohorns against our breastwork, discharging shells, round and grapeshot, iron spikes, etc., incessantly which soon obliged us to leave it. I retreated with the rangers and a number of Indians to the hill, which I found the enemy had gained before us as I foresaw they intended. The shells bursting beyond us made the Indians imagine the enemy got their artillery all around us and so startled and confounded them that great part of them ran off. We then proceeded along the hill, skirmishing with the rebels for above a mile before till they had nearly surrounded us, and we were obliged then to make the best of our way, some along the hill and others across the river to prevent being cut to pieces, which the greatest part of us must inevitably have been had the rebels acted with any spirit. Many of the Indians made

[68] Map of Battle of Newtown, Ibid., 134.

> no halt but proceeded immediately to their respective villages; the different parties of the rest and the rangers rendezvoused in the evening. . .[69]

Instead of pursuing Butler and the Redcoats who ran like rain from the battlefield and Colonel Proctor's deadly and demoralizing cannon fire, Sullivan reined in his troops again and failed to capture either Butler or any of his Rangers. His officers and his men recognized that the enemy was in full flight and that the much smaller force they just trounced was the biggest the British and Iroquois could muster in the region at the moment. And these were the much feared frontier veteran Rangers and fiercest Seneca warriors! This could only have meant that Iroquoia was undefended and the path to Fort Niagara now wide open! Sullivan could have chosen either to chase Butler down or set a direct path for the British garrison, knowing Butler could not stop him from taking his pick of prizes. While "the commander of an army should always mistrust any manifest error which he sees the enemy commit, as it invariably conceals some stratagem,"[70] it was equally clear that there was no army in Butler's rear to spring Sullivan into a trap.

Butler and the Iroquois had had ample time to prepare and taken their best shot at repulsing Sullivan's expedition. They had failed disastrously and were in flight back to Niagara. Sullivan must have realized this and finally understood how thinly the British were spread in the northwestern territory. Yet he still opted for a safe campaign of pillaging and devastating Iroquois towns and farmlands instead of exploiting the tactical advantage he now knew he possessed over those defending Fort Niagara. We can be certain of this because he sent his precious heavy artillery to Tioga instead of continuing to keep it close to hand.[71] He had argued for wagons vehemently so that as they broke down, he would be able to take his artillery deep into the campaign. Then he sent them back after the first real engagement. He never would have

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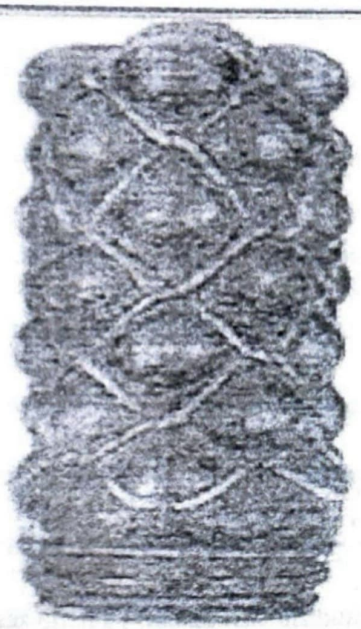
[69] Butler to Mason Bolton, *Documents of the American Revolution*, 198-199.
[70] Niccolo Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 537.
[71] Charles Whittemore, *A General of the Revolution*, 142.

abandoned the very guns that gave him victory over Butler unless he had no intention of using them again. It is inescapable that he had decided to ignore Washington's implied orders and instead wage war on the Iroquois.



A TYPICAL 18th CENTURY GRAPE SHOT

IT CONSISTED OF A WOODEN BASE WITH A WOODEN ROD CENTERED LIKE A BOLT AROUND WHICH IRON BALLS, APPROXIMATELY 1" IN DIAMETER WERE PILED IN TIERS. THE SHOT WAS HELD IN PLACE BY TWINE AND USUALLY COVERED WITH CANVAS OR COTTON. WHEN FIRED THE COVERING AND TWINE WOULD FALL AWAY. [72]

Sullivan's Ignorance, Ego, and Incompetence

4.0 The Haudenosaunee (People of the Longhouse) Way of War and Peace

The Haudenosaunee, which means the People of the Longhouse in their own tongue, were mostly commonly known to both colonials and British by the name their Algonquian rivals gave them—the Iroquois. Banding together into a loose but strong confederacy at the close of the seventeenth century, the League of Five Nations consisted of the warrior Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida, and Mohawks, and later included the Tuscarora at the height of influence to become the Six Nations confederacy that finally shattered under the pressures of the American

[72] 18th century cannon grapeshot projectile. "It consisted of a wooden base with a wooden rod centered like a bolt around which iron balls approximately 1" in diameter were piled in tiers. The shot was held in place by twine and usually covered with canvas or cotton. When fired the covering and twine would fall away." Photo by RevolutionaryWarArchives.Org

Revolution. Not only did the war pit nation against nation and brother against brother in the confederacy, it exposed Native Americans to a type of fighting they were culturally unaccustomed to. Previous wars had sometimes been fought for personal glory, but even in the latter part of the eighteenth century the Iroquois still fought mourning wars and conducted raids against rivals, but did not openly engage in the kind of total war that the British and Americans waged against each other.[73]

This explains much of the Iroquois reluctance to follow orders of British or American commanders alike, as well as what was often perceived as a lack of discipline in the field among Indian scouts and warriors who tended to stay with the same parties they traditionally hunted or went to war alongside. Seneca warriors characteristically removed their dead from the field of battle the moment they fell,[74] placing priority on recovery of the body over the outcome of battle. This was often a personal responsibility among clan or family members which could result in an entire hunting party abandoning the conflict entirely depending upon the fallen. It also served to confuse Continental officers as to whether their victories were as effective as first perceived. In addition, there were many factors that determined whether an individual, war party, or nation in all of Iroquoia would even pick up the hatchet in the first place, or for whom.

As sovereign tribal nations, each was neutral, but each contained individuals who supported one side or the other. The Iroquoian sense of political sovereignty played a central role. The Six Nations as the Iroquois Confederacy, and the tribal council that governed it, was considered sovereign. So too were each of the individual nations of Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida, Mohawk and Tuscarora, and the governance of their national tribal councils. So too

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[73]Daniel K. Richter, "War and Culture: The Iroquois Experience", *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Vol. 40, No. 4 (Oct., 1983), 530-531.

[74]Ibid..

were the village councils of each nation. So too was the Iroquoian individual who governed his/her own actions.[75] Each was autonomous and sovereign, though they were part of the same whole. Hence, the Oneida Tribal Council could decide on neutrality, but each village council could take its own position of support or opposition to the national council.

Each matrilineal household and each individual warrior had to also decide upon its position and actions.[76] Sullivan's failure to comprehend or accept Iroquois matrilineal society or unique politics of war explain why he had taken the Oneida nation at face value when warriors were promised to aid him, and also his deep frustration when only four scouts joined the expedition. It reveals his expectations and desperation for more Indian support in Indian country, and his concern that the British had all the active Iroquois warriors the besieged countryside had to offer. So too did his failure to know his enemy shape his judgment in the field after Newtown, the length of his march, and his decisions following the ambush outside of Genesee that took the life of the foolhardy Lt. Boyd. Since the fortifications at Fort Niagara were fairly static and understood by the American command, it must have been what he imagined might be enormous numbers of Iroquois warriors in the wilderness between his army and Niagara that haunted Sullivan so much that he threw away the fruit of his triumph at Newtown and locked himself into an impressive but strategically unhelpful march of fiery destruction.

4.1 The Importance of Iroquois Allies in the Northwestern Theater of War

It must be remembered that both the American and British forces, while limited as to troops and provisions, were attempting to control a very large amount of territory. The wilderness between Forts Pitt, Niagara, Stanwix, Wyoming, and Tioga contains much of New

[75] Judith K. Brown, "Economic Organization and the Position of Women among the Iroquois", *Ethnohistory*, Vol. 17, No. 3/4 (Summer - Autumn, 1970), 153-154.
[76] Ibid. 155.

York and a good swath of Pennsylvania as well. Its varied topography includes the glacially cut Finger Lakes, many rivers, ravines, and defiles, and many miles of gentle rolling hills.[77] It was also the key to Ohio country. The entire frontier contained a number of established roads, many of which Brodhead and Sullivan followed in their campaign routes despite their claims otherwise; they were forced to cut their paths roughly only a few times. This meant, and the record confirms, that when Sullivan really wanted to move his army quickly and deeply into Seneca lands he could do so.[78] It was not really what lay in Six Nations territory that gave him pause, but whom. Sullivan's own failure to gather more Indian allies undermined his confidence about guiding his force safely to Genesee and back without suffering serious casualties or defeat. The resentment he felt about the lack of Iroquois support may have driven his desire to entirely remove all signs of the Six Nations from the frontier.

The Indian variable is the likeliest source of Sullivan's perplexity and his insistence on security rather than offensive maneuvers. He knew that in the previous summer and fall, Butler had wreaked havoc on the borderlands with only 400 of his notorious Rangers and more than 300 Iroquois warriors. Some reports showed that Butler and Joseph Brant had swelled the Iroquois ranks to over a thousand warriors. It could only stand to reason then that given so much time to prepare for the Continental Army assault, Butler had retained at least some of that Indian support, and perhaps would have more Iroquois manpower to call upon as Sullivan and Clinton pushed deeper into Seneca and Cayuga lands. Sullivan also held out hope that more Oneida warriors, who pledged to support the Patriot cause, would arrive to buttress the small party of four Oneida scouts who had little or no knowledge of Seneca homelands. He expressed his disappointment in letters such as this one written on the first week of September 1779:

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[77] Barbara Mann, *George Washington's War on Native America,* 48.
[78] Ibid..

> It is with no small degree that I find only four of your warriors have joined me, though I have far advanced into the enemy's country, and those totally unacquainted with every part of the country through which I have yet passed. I would not wish to suspect your declarations of friendship to the American States, nor am I under the lest necessity to ask your aid as warriors; but as your immediate joining my force is the best evidence you can give of the sincerity of your professions, I shall expect shortly to be joined by those of your people who are friendly to the American cause, and particularly by such who have a perfect knowledge of the country through which I am to pass. [79]

Sullivan was not to see any more warriors "friendly to the American cause" of exterminating their brethren until he was marching home. Sullivan was not alone in his disappointment about Indian support or commitment to his patriotic cause.

Butler too had difficulty in mustering, commanding, and retaining many of the Indian allies the British had convinced to fight on their side. Iroquois political and military structure, self-interest, and the preservation of Iroquois villages and families threatened by the Continental Army's march all undermined the British ability to gather, motivate, and utilize their Indian allies as a formidable military force.[80] In addition, difficulties in transporting trade goods and specie to pay Indian mercenaries for their assistance often resulted in non-cooperation from them. The outcome was that both the British and the Americans failed to maximize troop potentials in the northwestern theater of the war. Butler often complained that mere fractions of promised war parties from the Seneca, Cayuga, or other Native American allies actually showed up to report for "duty." Those who did he asserted were undisciplined even by the low standard expected on the frontier, failed to heed the orders of any but their own sachems, and wasted their meager ammunition (and telegraphed their position to the enemy) by shooting at any bit of game the marching army rustled from cover as it traveled.[81]

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[79] Sullivan to the Warriors of the Oneida Nation, *The Sullivan-Clinton Campaign in 1779*, 142.
[80] John Butler to General Haldimand, Ibid., 88-91.
[81] Ibid..

In the retreat after Newtown in the Chemung Valley, to Butler's dismay his detachment of two hundred Seneca diminished to less than sixty, the rest having left with the dead and wounded to their respective villages to extract their families before the arrival of Sullivan's army. Try as he might, Butler could not convince the Iroquois on his side to remain and make a second stand. To complicate matters for the British in their alliance with the Iroquois, the continuing devastation of the raids and the disruption of food sources caused by the war meant that when the Seneca and Cayuga warriors did gather in war parties, they could not long remain in large numbers before depleting local food sources. Hence, war parties that were often composed of traditional hunting parties broke off from the main group to forage independently, trap and hunt. This made Butler's coordination of large Seneca and Cayuga war parties far less successful than Sullivan feared they would be. On June 18, in a letter to Lt. Col. Bolton, Butler wrote:

> The party under my command is near three hundred strong Exclusives of Indians, and I find myself under the necessity of ordering them to Irondoquot tomorrow that they may be supplied with Provisions from Niagara, otherwise we cannot subsist, as every Resource in this Country is exhausted & the Indians themselves starving.[82]

Irondoquot was chosen as camp and depot because its abundant supply of fish served as a basic staple for British and Iroquois alike. In essentially every way, Butler shared Sullivan's frustrations in mobilizing Indian allies and gathering enough supplies to carry the fight to the enemy. Sullivan, however, remained convinced of the opposite.

All the while, reports of inflated numbers of Indian allies joining, mobilizing, and amassing in large war parties reached British and American commanders and newspapers through military correspondence or Committees of Safety. The reality appears to be that Iroquois

[82] Ibid., 100-101.

allies frequently promised large numbers of warriors to the British or Americans, only to fail to deliver them. Individual warriors most attached to either cause (through marriage or trade interests, or concern for their villages) would show up to fight. On the whole most of the Iroquois preferred the classic Iroquoian neutrality as a nation but with a personal preference as to outcome.[83] Each side identified with the British or Americans for their own reasons, and David Levinson's statement that the Oneida were neutral but in favor of the Americans while the Mohawk were neutral but in favor of the British is accurate and characteristic of the war for colonial America. One thing that seems evident is that whomever the Six Nations did side with immediately enjoyed a strategic and tactical advantage in the war.

4.2 The Situation at Genesee: Sullivan's Second Missed Chance to March on Niagara

> The following are the principals to be observed by an invading force: the further you penetrate into a country, the greater will be the solidarity of your troops, and thus the defenders will not prevail against you.[84]
>
> Soldiers when in desperate straits lose the sense of fear. If there is no place of refuge, they will stand firm. If they are in the heart of hostile country, they will show a stubborn front. If there is no help for it, they will fight hard.[85]
>
> For it is precisely when a force has fallen into harm's way that it is capable of striking a blow for victory.[86]

Sullivan spent the march through Iroquois country plying his men with rum and the rewards of pillaging some of the most fertile lands in the colonies. By the time he was approaching Genesee, it was clear that Butler still had little to offer outside of harassing sniper fire and small delaying actions against flanks of the marching Continental soldiers. Sullivan's men spent entire days at a time destroying food and game and any structures they came across without fear of being engaged by another large force like the one they had defeated at Newtown.

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[83] Richard Haan, "The Problem of Iroquois Neutrality: Suggestions for Revision." *Ethnohistory* 27, no. 4 (1980): 325-330.
[84] Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, 49.
[85] Ibid..
[86] Ibid., 53.

He had the tactical advantage in every way, except knowledge of the terrain, and he knew it. He worked hard to strip any advantage the British or Seneca might gain from the Genesee stronghold, but he should have used it as his furthermost fort on the frontier. This was a terrible oversight on his part, and it displays how eager Sullivan was to call an official end to his obligations to the Army.

What Sullivan did accomplish was the temporary but complete decimation of all resources, wild and stewarded, through the heart of the Cayuga and Seneca lands. Barbara Mann argues that historians have given this process of destroying the Six Nations homeland only a cursory glance, when it is actually the most important aspect of the Sullivan Campaign of 1779. In a methodical and deliberate way, Sullivan destroyed anything living or useful that might help the Iroquois people survive the coming winter.[87] She explains that

> since genocide by starvation and exposure was the goal, targeted for immolation were houses and civic buildings; crops, both harvested and in the field; next year's seed stock; orchards, and all their fruit; livestock, both tame and game; fishes in the waters; and all good and implements necessary to life. Although food necessarily leaps to the fore as vital, the reader should stop to consider what the loss of hearth, home, household goods, and clothing meant to the people, heading into the frigid winter of 1779.[88]

And to this task General Sullivan committed the majority of his time and provisions during the expedition. He essentially failed to obey Washington's implied orders by ignoring them from the start and achieving instead his own interpretation of a mission well accomplished.

Still, outside of Genesee Sullivan finally met up with Butler's men and a small Seneca detachment that was surely acting as a last effort to buy the refugees fleeing to Niagara the time they needed to escape the colonial soldiers. Sullivan was not present for the engagement, having ordered Boyd and twenty-six men to reconnoiter Genesee. The outcome of Lieutenant Boyd's

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[87] Barbara Mann, *George Washington's War of Native America*, 67.
[88] Ibid..

military blunder[89] with his scouting party that cost his life and those of his men was tragic, but viewed through the lens of war it was another opportunity for Sullivan to recognize and assess the desperate state of his enemies in the field. His awareness was keen enough, demonstrated in his report on the matter to Congress written back in Tioga on September 30.

> The town was beautifully situated, almost encircled with a clear flat which extends for a number of miles, where the most extensive fields of corn were, and every kind of vegetable that can be conceived. The whole army was immediately engaged in destroying the crops. The corn was collected and burned in houses and kilns, that the enemy might not reap the least advantage from it, which method we have pursued in every other place. Here a woman came to us who had been captured at Wyoming. She informed us the enemy had evacuated the town two days before; that Butler, at the same time, went off with three of four hundred Indians and Rangers, as he said, to get a shot at our army. This was undoubtedly the party which cut off Lieutenant Boid. She mentioned, they kept runners constantly out, and that when our army was in motion the intelligence was communicated by a yell, immediately on which the greatest terror and confusion apparently took place among them. The women were constantly begging the warriors to sue for peace, and that one of the Indians had attempted to shoot Col. Johnson for the falsehoods by which he had deceived and ruined them. . .[90]

Sullivan's own report reveals every missed opportunity at Genesee clearly. First and foremost, he had an updated account of the enemy's strength which confirmed its lack of manpower and fighting ability. He estimated his foe at twelve to fifteen hundred strong in the battle of Newtown, but now his rival Butler was down to the core of his veteran rangers, all but abandoned by the Seneca, and completely vulnerable to capture or eradication. This was the chance Washington hoped for presenting itself plainly before Sullivan once more!

Whether or not Sullivan felt his informant was providing entirely trustworthy data on the British situation, he had to realize his gross tactical and strategic advantage over Butler at that moment. At that point Sullivan could have ordered a halt to the destruction of crops and the Genesee fortress and instead taken advantage of his circumstances. His own words showed that

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[89] Joseph Fischer, *A Well-Executed Failure*, 96-97.
[90] Sullivan to John Jay and Congress, *Sullivan-Clinton Campaign 1779*, 165.

he had marched into an abandoned, well supplied fortification, with resources enough to gather and see through the winter while his enemy starved a mere week's march away. The vast flats surrounding Genesee "for miles" provided an artillery man of Colonel Proctor's skill deadly advantage over any infantry assault, and would make retaking the fort from Sullivan by force a costly and daunting task for the British. While the British and Iroquois huddled at Niagara, Sullivan would have been positioned for a short winter campaign that would have most certainly gained him Niagara and the Continental Army the lion's share of the frontier and fur trade. Had Sullivan realized this he would have made a vigorous effort to chase down and capture Butler, further handicapping the latter's military capabilities in the very least, and then replicated at Genesee what he did at the fortifications of Wyoming and Tioga. Even if he still made good his retirement, he would have left his successor in a strategically preferable position for defending against the British and Seneca retaliation that came with spring thaw of 1780.

At the very least, had Sullivan learned any lessons from Washington and his own experience, he would have realized the significance of the women "begging" their warriors to sue for peace. In Iroquoian terms, this was akin to an order for ceasefire from the clan matrons. His paternalistic worldview blinded Sullivan to the fact that this meant that each Indian household was removing its warriors from the field in the hopes that neutrality and the security of their homelands could be regained. They no longer believed the British could defend them and were at the point George Washington had been pressing to push them towards. All Sullivan had to do was spare Genesee, which was within walking distance of Niagara, and protect and secure the food supply there. He would have provided an alternative to starvation outside of Niagara for the Indian refugees and could have offered amnesty and a return to peaceful terms between colonials and the Six Nations. Such a strategy was second nature to commanders like Brodhead

and Washington, who understood that "to secure ourselves against defeat lies in our own hands, but the opportunity of defeating the enemy is provided by the enemy himself."[91] Such reasoning required a sensibility and commitment absent in Sullivan at this stage of his career. This was his moment outside of Genesee to make his campaign a success despite the logistical issues or his missed cue at Newtown. The Iroquois were at his mercy, and he chose to leave them out in the cold.

4.3 Reasons behind Sullivan's Changing Ambitions: Conway, Politics, and Disillusionment

Had John Sullivan been just a bit more like Benedict Arnold in the early days of the Revolution, glory and ambition would have outweighed caution and delay, and Niagara might well have fallen to assault. Unfortunately he too was quickly becoming disillusioned by his experience serving his country. Sullivan suffered no lack of ambition for honor and glory; he only wanted to be assured of them before taking the leap or opening himself to risk and injury. Sullivan had learned in the battle of Germantown back on October 4, 1777 the dire consequences of moving forward too quickly and displayed no intention of exposing his command to the mercy of the British again. As Fischer illustrates in *A Well-Executed Failure*, Sullivan took so much time to cross the t's and dot the i's that his entire operation took on the appearance of a dog and pony show that was well planned, cost a fortune to pull off, but had little to show for all the effort. He was clearly pursuing his own private interests, being at this time fully engaged in his political war with Thomas Burke, seeking to distance himself from the memory of Conway's actions, and wanting above all to gain advantage over the commissary system he loathed so much and often blamed for his failures.

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[91] Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, 95.

Thomas Conway, born in Ireland, was a career military man who offered his services to the colonial cause as brigadier general in 1777. He was a staunch advocate of Horatio Gates and became embroiled in a conspiracy to replace George Washington with Horatio Gates as Commander in Chief of the Continental Army after the battles at Brandywine and Germantown. Washington confronted and exposed this plot to Congress, where more support for Conway and Gates revealed itself. The initial result was Conway's promotion by Congress to Inspector General of the Army over twenty-three other brigadiers in line for promotion. In the gentleman's army that characterized the staff and high officers of the Continental Army, this was an unconscionable act and show of disrespect to many prominent men of the Revolution. Conway's abrasive nature quickly lost him support and permanently stained Gates's camp of officers including Sullivan, who tarnished his already shaky reputation more when he initially argued in favor of Congress promoting Conway.[92] John Sullivan however had no ties to Conway's conspiracy to have George Washington removed as Commander in Chief and replaced by Horatio Gates. He was simply caught up in another bad political battle. Sullivan's early professional support for Conway was probably tied to his opinion of Conway as a general in the field after the fight at Germantown.

Despite the factors of poor visibility and communication that fateful morning, both Conway and Sullivan performed admirably on the field and certainly noticed each other's efficacy in battle against the British despite the loss. Conway was after all a veteran of conflict, and Sullivan still had his zeal for gaining military honor. Evidence suggests that Germantown was entirely winnable by the Patriot forces, and Washington would be later consoled that he had defeated the British Lord Howe, but lost because the hardened British troops had defeated his

[92] Robert P. Broadwater, *American Generals of the Revolutionary War*, 24-25.

men. Sullivan and Conway found the most success on the field that day, yet came under fire for the failure of the operation.[93] Although Sullivan was exonerated of any wrongdoing he offered his resignation for one of many times in the name of his honor. It was to become his most favored tool of complaint to his commander. It is during this time that his relationship with Washington cooled noticeably, most likely due to Washington's reluctance to lend him full support prior to the conclusions of Congress's inquiry over the Germantown debacle.[94] Given the degree to which Sullivan had previously looked up to his Commander in Chief, this was arguably the largest symptom of his disillusionment with his service to the Continental Army.

4.4 Failure Cloaked in Success: The Problem with Destroying all the Food

Major General John Sullivan touted his small victory at Newtown and his scorching of Iroquois earth in order to return in triumph to his political base. His overweening ego led him to represent himself as having subdued the barbarians at the gate. Long before news of the horrors of what actually befell the towns, hamlets, and farmlands on the New York frontier reached those in the east, Sullivan was already spinning his version to Congress and the citizens of New York. The truth would be delivered in the ferocity of the Seneca retaliation the following spring, and the worst fears of Congress and Washington would take hold in Iroquoia. Worse than that, the loss of the resources crippled both armies in the region and exacerbated the deep difficulties the Continental Army faced heading into 1780.

The rapid inflation of the Continental Dollar, the dwindling provisions of all types and the means to convey them, the reluctance of the states to pony up goods, the rampant corruption in the commissary system, and the difficulties in managing a decentralized supply system were

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[93] Charles P. Whittemore, *A General of the Revolution*, 75.
[94] Ibid., 113-114.

fast approaching a critical state. Congress and Washington implemented drastic reform in the commissary pay and supply system and other areas, but it took aggressive economic measures alongside to try to stem the rising prices of commodities and precipitously declining value of the Continental currency.[95] And John Sullivan knew all these facts. They were his personal grudge with the Army, and he *knew* how critical the situation was for the rebel states. He knew that the Americans would have greatly benefitted from control of the region and access to its rich resources. He was reminded each day his men marched with moldy bread and feasted on the finest fruits, vegetables, and livestock that generations of the Haudenosaunee people had toiled to husband for the coming harvest.

Yet again, Sullivan's ignorance of the Seneca and Cayuga led him astray, coupled with his failure to understand that the Continental Army throughout the colonies supported itself on the back of the Indian commissaries. For the Seneca and Cayuga, the very game in the woods surrounding their villages was part of that commissary,[96] and whether harvested by Indian or Colonial it was a source of sustenance for many thousands if not mindlessly decimated. The vast acres of apple and peach and plum trees Sullivan's men girdled produced an easily transportable food source that was lost for a generation to the region because of the expedition. In addition more wheat, white corn, sweet corn, beans, squash, potatoes, cucumbers, pumpkins, watermelons, turnips, and garden greens were discovered and destroyed[97] than the Continental Army could have hoped to collect and distribute through the commissary system in 1779 and 1780. Sullivan's army marched virtually unopposed straight to Genesee and then missed a huge

[95] E. Wayne Carp, *To Starve the Army at Pleasure*, 174-175.
[96] Barbara Mann, *George Washington's War on Native America*, 70.
[97] Ibid., 71.

opportunity to push the frontier north and west and thereby capture a desperately needed cornucopia of produce, fodder and livery for the soon-to-be starving soldiery and citizenry.

To put it bluntly, Sullivan destroyed all the food in New York. By January 1780, General Heath wrote to Governor George Clinton to express his concern.

> The situation of the army at this instant is truly alarming and without speedy relief, most serious and disagreeable consequences may be expected. The garrison of West Point have during the winter been at a scanty allowance of Bread, and often without any at all. . . We have long been flattering the troops that relief would soon come, and during the winter the ration of Flour has been reduced to ¾ lb. per day.[98]

The soldiers of West Point were not alone in their hunger. Sullivan had requisitioned flour in preparation for his campaign, flour that he later discarded into creeks and swamps because he chose not to expend these supplies to reach Niagara. This was flour that would have been available to sustain Continental soldiers reduced to starvation through another winter of the war. Worse than that, there would be no relief, and by early march Clinton would be receiving letters from throughout New York of savage raids by desperate and hungry Indians.[99] Whittemore points out that the tally of houses and crops and farms destroyed may have made it easier for Sullivan to make the transition from gentleman soldier to gentleman hero and ostensibly end his turbulent military career on a high note. But critics like John Reed and James Madison were convinced he had not helped but hurt the American cause by neither winning the Iroquois support and respect, nor gaining their bountiful breadbasket.[100]

5.0 The Road not Taken

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[98] General Heath to Governor Clinton, *The Public Papers of George Clinton*, 5: 464-465.
[99] Colonel Klock to Governor Clinton, *The Public Papers of George Clinton*, 545-546.
[100] Charles Whittemore, *A General of the Revolution*, 146-147.

What lay between Sullivan's army after Newtown near Painted Post and Genesee Castle en route to Fort Niagara was an enigma Sullivan chewed on thoroughly. From the planning stages, and even during the expedition, he relied heavily upon the Oneida scouts to inform him of the unknown terrain ahead. But Sullivan's scouts were also unfamiliar with the region and could not reassure him that the direct path ahead was navigable though it posed no greater challenge than any other on the New York frontier. Sullivan had decided after Newtown to send back his heaviest cannon anyway, a questionable decision but an understandable one if Sullivan's intentions were to move faster and less hindered through the wilderness. Heavier cannon cost wagons or would slow the twelve miles per day Sullivan marched on averaged when not engaging in battle or destruction. Regardless of the direction he chose to march in the afterglow of victory at Newtown, the terrain would call for similar choices as the army prepared to move deeper into Iroquois country.

Sullivan's disappointment in his scouts and lack of knowledge of what lay in the wilderness past Painted Post affected his decision making. He jumped at the chance to turn his army north into more familiar territory, in doing so marching over and through much of Iroquois lake country. Nevertheless, he faced the very same "difficulties which naturally attend marching through an enemy's country, abounding in woods, creeks, rivers, mountains, morasses and defiles, [he] found no small inconvenience from the want of proper guides, and the maps of the country [were] so exceedingly erroneous that they serve[d] not to enlighten but to perplex."[101] Sullivan used these words to boast what he and his men overcame on their exploits into the heart of Seneca land but they prove that he knew and prepared well to face and overcome these very challenges to successful frontier warfare. Having already convinced his men to accept half

[101] Sullivan report to Congress, [101] Library of Congress, "Journals of the Continental Congress --JUNE 30, 1779.", (American Memory from the Library of Congress), 11: 614.

rations to cheers of huzzah, he should have used this moment to strike directly into the heart of the Seneca by forced march to Genesee.

Sullivan's men still would have arrived to an unclaimed abundance ready for harvest both at Genesee and all the lake shore towns due east clear back to Fort Stanwix past the Cherry Valley. Despite the drought all personal accounts indicate there was more than enough food in the form of corn, squash, beans, apples, nuts, and garden produce foraged throughout Iroquois lands. The harvest yield might not have been enough to sustain the dependent Seneca and Cayuga populace, but plenty for a transient army to consume in passing. More importantly, a direct march would have enabled the flanking and capture of Butler's force still rallying the retreating Seneca warriors and seeking to stage more delaying actions on the fallback to Niagara. Sullivan should have realized the potential for arriving at Genesee first, overwhelming the garrison there and digging in to lie in wait for Butler and the retreating Iroquois now traveling with their families and possessions. In the event that his arrival was timely with this exodus of the enemy, he would hold the strategic advantage and still enjoy the fruits of pillage should he have to stage a defensive withdrawal east and return to his secondary mandate of destroying Seneca and Cayuga farm lands.

While I admit it is easy to cast judgment from the historian's armchair, it must also be taken into account that my suggestions are not at all radical in military theory or basic reason. It comes down to experience, awareness, courage, and ambition. Major General John Sullivan proved beyond reasonable doubt that he possessed the latter three early in his career. Several disappointing defeats gained him the experience he needed to apply his skills and serve his ambitions. However, by the time Washington gave him the commission he always wanted and the chance to win his long sought military honor, that ambition had turned away from war and

would instead work against true success in the battlefield. Sullivan was in a frontier war and was told to push back that frontier. This is the most classic of military objectives and demands aggressive action on the part of the invading army. With a direct march to Genesee, Sullivan would have shifted the New York frontier borderlands dramatically and placed Fort Niagara within striking distance. Greater colonial security in the east would come as result of the fighting shifting west. As Washington put it again in a letter written on September 15,

> I would mention two points which I may not have sufficiently expressed in my general instructions, or if I have, which I wish to repeat. The one is, the necessity of pushing the Indians to the greatest practicable distance, from their own settlements, and our frontiers; to the throwing them wholly on the British enemy. The other is, the making the destruction of their settlements so final and complete, as to put it out of their power to derive the smallest succour from them, in case they should even attempt to return . . .[102]

By failing to attempt to besiege Fort Niagara and by choosing not to secure and garrison Genesee for the Americans, Sullivan granted the Seneca mercy and safe harbor from which to launch their brutal attacks of retaliation the following summer. Sullivan's shortcomings permitted the British to keep Niagara in their hands and thus free from the longstanding ambitions of George Washington.

5.1 Disputation of Joseph Fischer's Analysis: G.W. not to Blame

Joseph Fischer concludes in his book that Sullivan's Campaign was largely a failure because George Washington never supplied the operation as required and caused the delay in the campaign launch that created the short length and potential of the expedition. The Clinton detachment of the campaign was certainly better supplied because General James Clinton's brother George Clinton found and funded the provisioning than was possible in Pennsylvania and Sullivan's origin point of Easton. But the record repeatedly shows that Washington continued to send additional provisions to support the campaigners well into September. As

[102] Washington to Sullivan, *Writings of George Washington,* 16: 293.

Washington told the Pennsylvania Assembly on July 5, "it was not in my power to send a greater Continental force. I stretched this string as hard as it would possibly bear, and relied on the further aid of the states more immediately concerned. I hope I shall not be eventually disappointed."[103] It was Sullivan who complicated matters and delayed the campaign a whole month through interference with supply lines and by ordering Clinton to bring additional provisions despite Washington's urging otherwise. This (in addition to drought) forced the damming up of Lake Otsego in order to get the heavy bateaux down river to the rendezvous with Sullivan.

Joseph Fischer's thoughtful analysis of the military performance of the troops and staff officers during the campaign is thorough and provides something approaching a field officer's examination of the events and outcome of the battles. He admits in his conclusion that "Washington's planning, particularly in areas of operations and intelligence, stands out as thorough and imaginative. His use of multiple routes to concentrate his forces against the Iroquois homelands confused and hindered the reaction of his foes."[104] Washington coordinated four campaigns in the summer of 1779, including a preliminary expedition in the north by James Clinton before he joined his force to Sullivan's. Let us examine Washington's "stretched string"[105] of the Continental Army on the New York frontier.

Washington could not give Sullivan 10,000 troops to work with. But in addition to Sullivan's 3,500 tested soldiers and accomplished generals, Washington provided additional support from the Fort Pitt expedition. It was 700 strong led by Colonel Daniel Brodhead and reached a staging ground deep in Seneca territory, built an outpost, and could have marched to

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[103] George Washington to President Joseph Reed, *Writings of Washington*, 15: 377.
[104] Joseph Fischer, *A Well-Executed Failure*, 40-43.
[105] George Washington to President Joseph Reed, *Writings of Washington*, 15: 377.

rendezvous with Sullivan in the event Sullivan pushed for Niagara. (Brodhead's army would instead exhaust supplies and march back to Fort Pitt after raiding the countryside and farmlands.) It makes no sense to argue that Washington would work so hard to coordinate forces, intelligence, and proven leadership for the campaign but undermine these labors through shoddy logistical support. Washington's many dispatches show he was meticulous about details and a micro manager when it came to operational issues, especially when dealing with his high ranking officers. The Commander in Chief worked tirelessly to procure all manner of provisions through the war, had to balance the needs of all theaters of fighting, and clearly favored Sullivan and his campaign in 1779 with the best of his available resources.

Finally, Joseph Fischer contends that regardless of supply issues Sullivan's failure was guaranteed from the outset by a policy failure on the part of George Washington. He argues that the "campaign did not achieve the results desired because Washington assigned Sullivan an operational objective too limited in scope to bring about the desired strategic objective. As a result, the final outcome of the campaign largely depended upon how many Iroquois perished in the snows blanketing the woods and fields around Fort Niagara in the winter of 1779-80."[106] This is Fischer's weakest argument. His premise is flawed in that it was Congress who initially dictated the aim of the military campaign, not George Washington. Even so the first Commander in Chief's intentions and expectations for the summer campaign of 1779 are clear. Emphasizing the need for great secrecy, his orders to Fort Pitt for regarding the support campaign are to "engage at a proper season as many warriors as you can to accompany you, and at all events procure good guides, who know the way from the head of the navigation of the Allegheny to the

[106] Joseph Fischer, *A Well-Executed Failure*, 194-195.

nearest Indian towns and to Niagara."[107] These orders would be moot and highly risky to Brodhead's detachment if Washington did not intend for Brodhead to reinforce Sullivan on arrival at Niagara. But it was Congress who dictated policy when resources required to meet both objectives proved too great. It was Congress who also authorized monies for the campaign. And while George Washington was Commander in Chief, his hands were tied by those with the purse strings. Nevertheless he never wavered in pushing his true intent upon Sullivan and told him so frequently.

Throughout these procedures and into the next spring, Washington constantly reminded Sullivan that although he had his direct orders, the true hope, aim and objective was Niagara. Washington continued to push this implied order, reminding Sullivan that he had not sent him General(s) Clinton, Hand, St. Clair, Schuyler, and Poor to be wasted. Washington manned and equipped Sullivan for more than a countryside march and burn, which his British counterpart Butler had accomplished the previous summer with only 800 frontiersmen and no heavy cannon. Once again, it was Sullivan who squandered the opportunity to defeat the Seneca Nation, and Washington who sat in frustration to see his operations and war strategy stymied by his own general.

5.2 Potential Consequences of Successful Attack on Niagara on Outcome of Revolution

While hindsight of the full circumstances surrounding the Sullivan, Clinton, and Brodhead campaigns of 1779 make questioning Sullivan's ambitions the heart of the issue surrounding his overall failure, they also illuminate the potential for a drastically different outcome to the end of the Revolution. Frederick Haldimand summed it up best in his letter to Lord Germain days after learning of the groundbreaking at Fort Tioga from Butler:

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[107] George Washington to Brodhead on April 21, 1779, *The Writings of George Washington*, 14: 64.

> The actual state of the province is the first point to be attended to. By recent intelligence the rebels are advancing in force into the country of the Six Nations; they fortify posts at convenient distances as they advance and seem determined to oblige them, who have hitherto (a few excepted) staunch friends to the government, to embrace a neutrality. Should these be forced to quit upon this occasion and from their weakness, as well as our inability to support them from the difficulty of pushing up provisions, be obliged to come into the terms of the rebellious colonies, Niagara, the upper country, and fur trade will soon go. If the body of rebels said to be commanded by Sullivan, to have artillery, a corps of sappers and miners, should lay siege to Niagara and take it, they will most probably soon draw into their interests all the upper country Indians and presently make use of them to retaliate upon the king's loyal subjects. . .[108]

In other words it was George Washington's exact plan for assault of the northwestern frontier. Washington knew that to threaten Niagara was to threaten the Iroquois economic livelihood permanently, and he also understood well the Haudenosaunee tendency toward neutrality once they no longer possessed a tactical advantage from siding with European or Continental armies. And to Washington, that neutrality was the same as convincing the Seneca and Cayuga to change sides. The British were stretched thin across the frontier, and Washington knew it. Without Indian support the British could not hold their forts, protect their market share of the fur trade, or control the frontier. If Niagara fell the British front would collapse from New York City to Quebec, and the all the fertile resources in between could be tapped to support the Patriot cause.

5.3 Blame Sullivan.

Despite Washington's and Sullivan's differences of opinion, and based upon examination of personal and military documents relating several first person accounts over the course of the campaign, Sullivan could have reached Fort Niagara with the elite forces he had and waged devastation upon the countryside well enough on his return to Fort Tioga. What he lacked was the ambition, the heart, and the vision to see the long term impacts his actions had on the outcome of the war. If he had any of the three he would have found some semblance of true

[108] Haldimand to Germain, *Documents of the American Revolution*, 213.

success, for he would have at least attempted an assault on Niagara, or coercion of the Iroquois population by holding their resources at ransom instead of removing any chance at all for reconciliation and future cooperation. The Seneca and Cayuga were desperate and on the fence and rather than leverage the Indians to his cause Sullivan chose to set the fence on fire.

This was one issue where Sullivan's failure is inescapable. We have also tracked his most blatant blunders and direct failure to follow his Commander in Chief's implied orders and oft spoken goals. And if Washington was hoping that Sullivan could draw Butler into a decisive conflict and set the Seneca on their heels, he essentially got his wish in the outcome of the Battle of Newtown on August 29, 1779. Sullivan had only launched his main force upriver on the August 8th. A mere twenty-one days later and just west of his newly constructed and garrisoned fort at Tioga, he combined his force with General James Clinton's roughly 1500 able bodied soldiers, several cannon, and light artillery. Reinforced, resupplied, and at full strength Sullivan had his major victory, his enemy on the rout, and could have marched to Niagara instead of turning north into Seneca country. His men voted to accept half rations in light of the plentiful plunder, ample rum, and knowledge they were the biggest dog in Iroquoia that summer. They were ready for more fighting and would have marched as deep into the wilderness as Sullivan led them. He chose not to lead them through the wilderness but over the Cayuga trade roads and missed his first chance to strike a critical blow to the British.

As Sullivan advanced he should have realized that the Seneca and Cayuga were too concerned with reaching and evacuating their own villages before the Continental Army arrived, and then in falling back to Fort Niagara where they expected to regroup with support from the British. A shrewd commander would have kept up the pressure, driven the Iroquois population straight to Niagara, and reset the Continental frontier line at Genesee. The ambush that Lt. Boyd

foolishly walked his men into just outside of Genesee on September 13 was near the last Seneca stronghold and last fallback point before Fort Niagara. The sudden concentration of Iroquois after consistently small scale conflict since Newtown was the second chance for Sullivan to realize the Seneca and Cayuga were in full flight with the British and vulnerable to the very decisive blow that Washington had been urging Sullivan to deliver. Sullivan either did not share Washington's instinct or could not abandon traditional military logistics protocol and supply a prolonged siege on a frontier fortification by foraging. The irony of course is that traditional military logistics actually rebuff Sullivan's argument.

Sun Tzu wrote in the fifth century that "a wise general makes a point of foraging on the enemy. One carload of the enemy's provisions is equivalent to twenty of one's own, and likewise a single picul of his provender is equivalent to twenty from one's own store."[109] The logic is sound and evidenced in Sullivan's difficulties during the campaign as he continued to cannibalize wagons and exhaust supplies to just to have a few wagons reach the frontier. John Sullivan was intent upon not suffering another military failure through want of anything. Yet he was campaigning in some of the most productive and fertile lands in the whole of the colonies at peak season for foraging and harvesting. To ignore the convenience and opportunity this circumstance conveyed to his expedition was simply foolish. The Seneca and Cayuga had even made a habit of staging planting areas in the same regions they used for advance raids against the Continentals in the Cherry and Wyoming valleys[110] so Sullivan, like Washington, knew these would be ripe for the picking and benefit whichever army's stomach got to them first. Still Sullivan argued against reliance on foraging as though it was socially unsavory, and it becomes

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[109] Tzu, Sun, *The Art of War*, 15.
[110] David Levinson, "An Explanation for the Oneida-Colonist Alliance in the American Revolution." *Ethnohistory* 23, no. 3 (1976): 270-275.

easy to understand General Washington's frustration with Sullivan's decisions and lack of vision. After all, John Sullivan had a history of impressing goods for the army against direct orders,[111] and had all but crippled future campaigns with his incessant demand for provisions; and now George Washington could not persuade his general to take supplies from the *enemy.*

But while Fischer placed the failure on the shoulders of Washington due to supply issues, it was Sullivan who squandered the ample support and coordination Washington sought to provide. The facts argue that the final outcome of Major General John Sullivan's campaign, despite the bombastic claims he made to Congress, was precisely what Congress feared and resolved against at the outset—an exacerbation of the frontier war into lasting bloody guerilla warfare. Not only was it an utter failure to put the British on their heels and make a play for Niagara, but it even failed to meet the conservative goal of removing the Iroquois ability and spirit to continue fighting alongside the British on the New York frontier. This must have been an especially disappointing reality for Washington, who was already planning on replicating the expedition in Ohio country[112] and who had hoped to have the Seneca and Cayuga, by voluntary service or violent coercion, lead and fight even deeper onto the frontier in the coming months.

Instead, those who suffered at the hands of Clinton, Brodhead, and Sullivan in 1779 directly and those who died of exposure and starvation in the winter months following the campaign became known as the victims of the Haudenosaunee holocaust. It is uncertain how many tens of thousands perished outside of Niagara or in the bleak wilderness stretching north to Quebec and west to Detroit, but the League was shattered and the people of the Six Nations were permanently impacted by the complete destruction of their homes and livelihood. The senseless

[111] Charles P. Whittemore, *A General of the Revolution,* 98-105.
[112] Barbara Mann, *Washington's War on Native America,* 122-124.

destruction affected the colonial supply system directly, causing shortages everywhere in the northern colonies, but especially in the army. Short supply made regulating inflation impossible, corruption and graft ensued on a massive level, and the poorly supplied soldiers often died. So did Iroquois women and children, the infirm and elderly, and anyone dependent on the empty commissary stores in the winter of 1779. At Niagara the British, who were always quick to prioritize personnel and wards separately, were equally quick to fall back to the old ruse of mixing the flour they issued the Iroquois refugees with gunpowder to thin the crowd[113] and encourage the masses to leave and rely on themselves for nontoxic victuals. It would have taken the smallest olive branch to win over the People of the Longhouse heading into the fall of 1779, but all such hopes were lost to Sullivan's shortcomings.

[113] Ibid., 107.

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