

# A THOUSAND SLAIN: ST. CLAIR'S DEFEAT AND THE EVOLUTION OF A NATION

by

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(Under the Direction of Claudio Saunt)

## ABSTRACT

On November 4, 1791, Indian warriors defeated the US Army under Arthur St. Clair at present-day Fort Recovery, Ohio. It was the worst defeat US soldiers ever incurred at the hands of Natives, three times more deadly than Custer's Last Stand, wiping out over half of the entire US Army. Its importance is often overlooked, however. It was not merely a singular event in the Northwest Indian War, but rather the culmination of one hundred eighty-four years of English colonialism in North America.

The US government was unable to effectively manage the difficult conditions that it faced after the American Revolution. The national economy was mired in a depression, the national and state governments owed large debts, and the central government created by the Articles of Confederation did not have the power to effectively manage foreign and domestic policy. The lands acquired from England in the Treaty of Paris were seen as a potential remedy, but the possibility achieving of peaceful westward expansion was undermined by a flawed Indian policy, a weak army, and the aggressive actions of white frontier settlers.

The Indians who lived east of the Mississippi River also faced an uncertain future after American independence. The United States saw the Natives as conquered people because of their

alliance with Great Britain during the late war, and demanded massive land cessions in the Ohio Country as indemnification. To protect their lands, Indians formed a pan-Indian resistance movement that vexed US government for the next decade both militarily and diplomatically.

The Northwest Indian War played a significant role in the creation of a strong federal government under the Constitution. But the new republic found that its western problems were intractable, especially Indians, protecting federal sovereignty, and peaceful territorial expansion, all of which required a strong US Army to bring to completion. It was only after the Battle of a Thousand Slain that US politicians and citizens realized a standing army was not a threat to liberty and self-government, but perhaps the only thing that could save it.

INDEX WORDS: Early US Republic, Northwest Indian War, Arthur St. Clair, Articles of Confederation, US Constitution, Indian Warfare, Ohio history, Native Americans, Land speculation, Squatters, Treaty of Paris, US Army, Manifest Destiny, US Indian policy

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## DEDICATION

To Grandpap Miller, Grandma Schmidt, Tiger, and Bubba. Gone but not forgotten.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	v
LIST OF MAPS .....	ix
CHAPTER	
INTRODUCTION: THE BATTLE OF A THOUSAND SLAIN .....	1
1 BRITISH IMPERIALISM IN THE OLD NORTHWEST .....	44
2 CONFEDERATION IN CRISIS .....	63
3 SQUATTERS .....	108
4 LAND SPECULATION AND THE FOUNDING FATHERS .....	139
5 THE NORTHWEST INDIAN WAR .....	172
6 INDIAN DIPLOMACY AND THE SANDUSKY ALLIANCE .....	191
7 SANDUSKY ALLIANCE TO THE NORTHWEST CONFEDERACY .....	228
8 THE MEN OF AMERICA'S POSTBELLUM ARMY .....	253
CONCLUSION: THE AFTERMATH .....	319
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	381

## LIST OF MAPS

	Page
Figure 1: Disputed Frontier Posts, 1783-1796.....	74
Figure 2: Treaty of Paris Boundary, 1783.....	77
Figure 3: Treaties Between US and Native Americans, 1784-1786 .....	85
Figure 4: Old Northwest Territory: Cities and Forts, 1783-1796.....	111
Figure 5: Old Northwest Territory: Battles, 1782-1794.....	177
Figure 6: Treaty of Greenville, 1795.....	360

## INTRODUCTION

### THE BATTLE OF A THOUSAND SLAIN<sup>1</sup>

Shortly before daylight on November 4, 1791, a group of hearty Kentucky woodsmen gathered around their campfires to cook breakfast. Although they did not realize it at the time, they were encamped along the Wabash River near the present-day town of Fort Recovery, Ohio. It was exactly one year and one day since the US Army returned to Fort Washington from what was, up to that point, its most embarrassing loss to native warriors—a defeat at the Miami Indian village of Kekionga, near present Fort Wayne, Indiana.<sup>2</sup> Now, many of the same soldiers again found themselves deep in the woods of the Northwest Territory on a campaign aimed at destroying the Native American confederacy once and for all. A light wind blew in their faces from the northwest. The air was frigid. Snow, almost an inch thick, covered the ground. The men

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<sup>1</sup> The “Battle of A Thousand Slain” is the name used by the Miami Indians to refer to their defeat of the United States Army led by General Arthur St. Clair on November, 4, 1791, along the banks of the Wabash River at present Fort Recovery, Ohio. Roger L. Nichols, *American Indians in U.S. History*, Second Edition (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014), 65. The battle is alternately referred to as St. Clair’s Defeat, The Battle of the Wabash, and the Victory with No Name, among others.

<sup>2</sup> Kekionga was the main village of the Miami Nation from approximately 1718 until 1790, when it was destroyed by the US Army. Located where the Saint Marys and Saint Joseph’s Rivers combined to form the Maumee River near present Fort Wayne, Indiana, Kekionga’s location held several strategic benefits for the Miami. It was situated on the portage between the Maumee and Wabash Rivers, deep inside Indian Territory, far from expanding US settlements along the Ohio River in western Virginia and Kentucky. Its position on the Maumee-Wabash line, between the British Empire to the north and the United States to the south, made it a refuge for native peoples displaced by white encroachment from the east. In this study, it is alternately referred to as Kekionga, the Miami Towns, and the Miami Villages. Bert Anson, *The Miami Indians* (Norman, Ok.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970), 93-96, 118; Erminie Wheeler-Voegelin, Emily J. Blasingham, Dorothy R. Libby, eds., *Miami, Wea and Eel-River Indians of Southern Indiana: An Anthropological Report on the Miami, Wea, and Eel-River Indians* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1974), 110-115; Donald H. Gaff, “Three Men from Three Rivers: Navigating between Native and American Identity in the Old Northwest Territory,” in Daniel P. Barr, ed., *The Boundaries Between Us: Natives and Newcomers Along the Frontiers of the Old Northwest Territory, 1750-1850* (Kent, Oh.: The Kent State University Press, 2006), 145; Wiley Sword, *President Washington’s Indian War: The Struggle for the Old Northwest, 1790-1795* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 101; Colin G. Calloway, *The Victory with No Name: The Native American Defeat of the First American Army* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 29.

were cold and exhausted. Their day had been a long one—they had marched nine miles over mostly wet ground, a distance considerably longer than the six miles they had averaged per day up to that point. It was after dark when they halted their advance at the Wabash. Upon their arrival, everyone was so fatigued that the army's commanding officer, Major-General Arthur St. Clair, ordered his army to quickly set up camp, eat, and get to sleep rather than build defensive works to protect them from a surprise nighttime attack by Indians. After all, there would be plenty of time to secure the encampment the next day. Soldiers quickly pitched their tents in two parallel lines atop the high ground next to the river. The baggage, camp followers, and officers' marquees occupied the center. Throughout the night the army's sentries, posted several hundred yards away in the dense forest beyond the encampment, fired their guns sporadically. The constant crack of gunfire made sound sleep impossible.<sup>3</sup>

Deep in Indian territory with no idea where the enemy was, plagued by daily rumors of native warriors skulking in the woods beyond their view, the soldiers' morale was at a low ebb. Desertions were a daily occurrence. Only five days before, nearly seventy Kentuckians deserted and threatened to raid a pack train of food and other supplies that was en route from Fort Hamilton, over eighty miles to the south. The public execution of a pair of deserters two weeks earlier apparently had done little to deter similar insurrectionary behavior, much to the chagrin of the army's commanding officers. Fear of the enemy, frustration with short rations, and poor weather hung like a pall across the entire camp. The Kentucky militiamen felt this tension more than the other soldiers. The senior officers of the army and even the Secretary of War, Henry

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<sup>3</sup> Ebenezer Denny, *The Record of the Court at Upland in Pennsylvania, 1676 to 1681, and A Military Journal Kept by Major E. Denny, 1781 to 1795* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co. for the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 1860), 362-369; Winthrop Sargent, *Diary of Colonel Winthrop Sargent: Adjutant General of the United States Army During the Campaign of 1791* (Savannah, Ga.: Wormsloe, 1851), 24, 30.

Knox, saw them as uncontrollable and did not trust them to perform anything but the most menial tasks. Over the previous several months, they had been used almost exclusively as scouts, convoy escorts, and pioneers to cut down trees and build roads for the army as it marched toward its objective. These were the worst jobs the army had to offer, backbreaking and dangerous. To make matters worse, when the march halted the night before, they were ordered to encamp three hundred yards away from the rest of the army, across the Wabash River, as a vanguard against a surprise attack by the Indians. Huddled around their breakfast fires in the pre-dawn darkness, they felt isolated and disrespected. They longed to go home.<sup>4</sup>

While his comrades stirred in the militia camp twenty yards behind him, one of the advanced guards, William Kennan, detected movement at the edge of the woods in front of him. He squinted against darkness and noticed a group of thirty Indians emerging from the forest, quietly approaching the militia's position. Kennan dropped to his belly and fired; one of the Indians flailed and fell to the ground. Suddenly, the darkness was pierced by a sound that reminded one observer of "an infinitude of horse-bells." The Indians of the Northwest Confederacy, who had surreptitiously surrounded the camp during the night, issued their war-whoop and charged by the hundreds out of the woods toward the Kentuckians, firing guns and brandishing tomahawks.<sup>5</sup> The terrified Kentuckians, some of whom had never fired a gun before joining the army, turned and ran through the frigid, knee-high water of the river toward the rest of the army, desperately seeking safety from the onrush of painted, screaming warriors.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Sargent, *Sargent's Diary*, 22-24; Denny, *Military Journal*, 369-70; "Account of Thomas Irwin," in Tony DeRegnaucourt, *The Archaeology of Fort Recovery, Ohio: St. Clair's Defeat and Wayne's Victory* (Arcanum, Oh.: Upper Miami Valley Archaeological Research Museum, 1996), 41; "Account of William Kennan," in Henry Howe, *Historical Collections of Ohio*, vol. 2, (Columbus, Oh: Henry Howe & Sons, 1889) 229.

<sup>5</sup> Sargent, *Sargent's Diary*, 34.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 34-35.

Kennan's initial shot was answered in short order by fifty more as the Natives stormed toward the militia camp. The sudden burst of gunfire shook the morning grogginess from the soldiers in the main encampment like a slap across the face. Following the sound of the firing, they saw what appeared to be an entire regiment of terrified militia troops racing toward them pursued by a large group of Indian warriors, their tomahawks raised to dispatch any unfortunate, slow-footed men who fell behind. The frenetic retreat smashed through the army's first line, and their momentum carried them through the second line as well, knocking over tents, trampling cooking fires, and generally threw the entire right side of the camp into complete chaos. After the Kentuckians breached the second line, they continued their flight and ran toward the dense forest behind the army, hoping to find the road that would lead them back to Fort Jefferson. Before they reached the woods, however, Indians concealed behind the trees sprang out, opened fire, and drove the retreating militia backward. They took cover between the lines and sought safety by huddling together among the baggage carriages in the middle of the camp.<sup>7</sup>

An hour before sunrise, over one thousand Indian warriors of the Northwest Confederacy encircled the US encampment in a crescent formation and waited for the right moment to launch their attack.<sup>8</sup> They were so close, one warrior recalled later, that they could see the cooking fires burning inside the camp. They had marched fifty miles over the previous four days from their base at the Grand Glaize, at the confluence of the Auglaize and Maumee Rivers near present Defiance, Ohio. An additional six hundred Indian fighters were hunting close by, reserves for the

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<sup>7</sup> DeRegnaucourt, *Archaeology of Fort Recovery*, 40; Howe, *Historical Collections*, 2:229.

<sup>8</sup> The Northwest Confederacy was a pan-Indian alliance of native peoples who inhabited the lands west of the Ohio River, east of the Mississippi River, and south of the Great Lakes, lands that Great Britain had ceded to the United States after the Revolutionary War. This collaboration, which will be described in great depth, was organized around one singular principle—to defend their lands from US encroachment.



main force. On the night of November 3, the warriors camped within a half mile of the US lines. There they performed traditional rituals to prepare themselves for the next day's fight—fasting, abstinence from sex, and prayer—to give themselves the greatest chance for success. The Shawnee warrior, Blue Jacket, prayed for the blessings of the Great Father, that he would bring them to victory the next day despite being outnumbered almost two-to-one. Shortly before dawn, after the US troops had been dismissed from their morning muster and returned to their tents to cook breakfast, the attack began when chief Wapacomegat led a band of Ojibwa warriors out of the woods and threw themselves upon Kennan and the unsuspecting Kentucky militia positioned on the north side of the Wabash River.<sup>9</sup>

Artillery commander Major William Ferguson scrambled to direct cannon-fire toward the Indians as they chased the Kentuckians. The hastily launched barrage checked the warriors' pursuit seventy yards short of the army's defensive lines. Thwarted, native fighters fanned out to the left and right, took cover behind trees and fallen logs, and began firing into the array of tents in front of them. Over two hundred sentries, who had been detached the night before as an advanced guard, were quickly inundated and wiped out by the Indians as they surrounded the hollow rectangle of the army's encampment and poured a murderous fire upon the stunned troops. St. Clair and the other officers believed the eight field pieces they carried with them would frighten the Indians from attacking them directly, but the warriors neutralized this advantage by firing their guns and bows from behind cover, moving back and forth constantly so the artillery batteries could not aim their shots effectively. The fact that the army's camp lay on

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<sup>9</sup> Calloway, *Victory with No Name*, 112-113, 117; "Story of George Ash," in John Frost, *Thrilling Adventures Among the Indians* (Philadelphia: J.W. Bradley, 1850), 434-435; Joseph Brant to Joseph Chew, 30 December 1791, in *Historical Collections: Collections and Researches Made by the Michigan Pioneer and Historical Society*, vol. 24 (Lansing, Mi.: Robert Smith & Co., 1895), 358.

high ground meant that volleys from the cannons sailed over the attackers' heads. Smoke from those wasted shots and the soldiers' guns hung three feet above the ground, further shielding the Indians from view.<sup>10</sup>

As St. Clair's soldiers and artillery fired impotently into the early morning light, the Northwest Confederacy implemented a brilliant two-pronged offensive strategy to vanquish their foe. First, Indian marksmen targeted US officers, knowing that disabling or killing them would throw the rest of the army into chaos. They presented obvious targets as they stalked back and forth behind the lines in their gaudy officers' coats—replete with gold epaulets and shiny brass buttons—waving their swords and cheering their men amidst the bullets and arrows that stung the air around them. The officers of the artillery suffered proportionally greater losses than any others in the fight. Major Ferguson, Captain James Bradford, and Lieutenant Edward Spear were killed and Captain Mahlon Ford was gravely wounded.<sup>11</sup>

While some warriors systematically incapacitated the officers, others focused their attention on the army's cannons. St. Clair's artillery was the one thing which could have negated the advantage native fighters gained when they concealed themselves behind the cover of the surrounding forest. The right wing of the Indian formation immediately followed the Ojibwa attack on the militia and surged forward to silence the artillery battery on the left flank of the US line. Twice, St. Clair launched counterattacks to drive the warriors back and recapture the cannon. The warriors, who scalped injured men and plundered the camp before being driven out for the second time, were “[i]rritated beyond measure, . . . retired to a little distance . . . [and

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<sup>10</sup> Denny, *Military Journal*, 369; Sargent, *Sargent's Diary*, 35, Account of Benjamin Van Cleve, in DeRegnaucourt, *Archaeology of Fort Recovery*, 37, 39.

<sup>11</sup> Denny, *Military Journal*, 369; DeRegnaucourt, *Archaeology of Fort Recovery*, 39-40; Sargent, *Sargent's Diary*, 35, 41, 47-48.

separated] into their different Tribes.”<sup>12</sup> A chief named Black Fish met the scattering warriors and “in the voice of thunder, asked them what they were doing, where they were going, and who had given them orders to retreat?”<sup>13</sup> The men stopped, turned around, and with Black Fish in the lead, threw themselves back at the American line shouting, “we conquer or die!”<sup>14</sup> Inspired by similar displays of bravery from their own leaders, other warriors who had stopped to take cover behind the trees “returned like furies to the Assault, and almost [*sic*] instantly got possession of nearly half the Camp.”<sup>15</sup> According to George Ash, a white captive who fought alongside the Indians during the battle, many warriors were so inspired that they threw down their guns and “did the butchery with a tomahawk.”<sup>16</sup> By eight o’clock, nearly two hours into the fight, the batteries had lost two-thirds of their men and were essentially silenced.<sup>17</sup>

The soldiers’ situation was dire; death was all around them. Their encampment, which was devoid of trees, quickly became a hellscape of wounded, bloody, and dying men. The left side of the line, especially General Richard Butler’s infantry battalion and the artillery, endured the worst of the fight because they were positioned in a marshy depression below the high ground that the rest of the army occupied. This placed them closer to the woods where hundreds of warriors took careful aim behind the cover of the trees. After receiving a wound to his arm early in the battle, Butler continued to encourage the defense of the camp from the front line,

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<sup>12</sup> Robert Hamilton to William Robertson, 24 November 1791, William Robertson Papers, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library, b.1, f.6.

<sup>13</sup> Frost, *Thrilling Adventures*, 434.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Hamilton to Robertson, 24 November 1791, in Robertson Papers, b.1, f.6.

<sup>16</sup> Frost, *Thrilling Adventures*, 435.

<sup>17</sup> Sargent, *Sargent’s Dairy*, 36-37.

“his coat off and his arm in a sling,” until he received a shot in his side that knocked him from his horse thirty minutes before St. Clair ordered the retreat.<sup>18</sup>

As the Indians’ guns exacted their deadly toll, the handful of artillerymen who had not been killed spiked the guns and retreated as native fighters overran their position. Benjamin Van Cleve, a carriage driver for the Quartermaster’s Department, remembered, “[t]he ground was literally covered with dead and dying men,” who made inviting targets for warriors who rushed in and smashed the skulls of both the living and dying with tomahawks and scalped everyone who laid around the artillery carriages.<sup>19</sup> Jacob Fowler, a subaltern and surveyor in St. Clair’s army, later recalled that in the cold morning air, the steam rose from the heads of men who had been scalped, many of whom were still clinging to life. Against the blanket of snow that covered the ground, their heads “looked like so many pumpkins through a cornfield in December.”<sup>20</sup> Soldiers who were still able to walk attempted to drag the most seriously wounded men into the middle of the camp to protect them from the scalping knife.

The center of the US position at that moment was crowded place to be. As the situation grew more desperate, many soldiers had given up, threw down their weapons in fear, and huddled together in the center of the encampment, hoping that being farther away from the gunfire would make them safer. Instead, the pockets of bewildered soldiers made easy targets for Indian sharpshooters. They “huddled closely like a flock of sheep and became stupefied,” one

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<sup>18</sup> Quote from William David Butler, John Cromwell Butler, Joseph Amarion Butler, eds. *The Butler Family in America*, (St. Louis: Shallcross Printing Co., 1909), 158; Sargent, *Sargent’s Diary*, 35, 44.

<sup>19</sup> DeRegnaucourt, *Archaeology of Fort Recovery*, 38.

<sup>20</sup> Account of Major Jacob Fowler, in Howe, *Historical Collections of Ohio*, 2:226-228.

soldier recalled, and were “rapidly mowed down by the enemy.”<sup>21</sup> Some scrambled under baggage wagons to hide themselves from the withering fire. Native warriors fired coolly from behind their concealed positions, methodically picking off the unarmed men one at a time. As many as two hundred women had accompanied their husbands on the campaign. During the attack, many of them used firebrands, skillets, and anything else within reach to prod frightened soldiers to take up arms and defend the camp. A handful of soldiers sneaked into the officers’ tents and started eating partially cooked breakfasts that were abandoned once the shooting started. Several were killed by enemy fire as they stuffed themselves with their last meal. As the piles of dead and injured men grew, St. Clair grew so desperate to find able-bodied men who could assist in the defense that he was seen aiming his pistols at soldiers who were trying to hide instead of fight.<sup>22</sup>

General St. Clair had been crippled so badly by gout over the previous week and a half that he had to be carried on a litter as the army had advanced toward their objective, Kekionga, which the War Department believed was the main population center of the Indian Confederacy. When the attack began, St. Clair emerged from his tent dressed in a blanket coat, not in his officer’s uniform, and a three-cornered hat with his long hair flowing out from underneath. He attempted to mount a horse, but the sound of the gunfire frightened the animal, and four men had to lift the debilitated general into the saddle. As soon as he seated himself, the horse and the man holding it were both killed by a bullet. Three more times he attempted to climb atop a horse but

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<sup>21</sup> Frazer E. Wilson, *Journal of Captain Daniel Bradley: An Epic of the Ohio Frontier* (Greenville, Oh.: Frank H. Jobs & Son, 1935), 16.

<sup>22</sup> Sargent, *Sargent's Diary*, 37, 46-48; Account of Captain Little, in DeRegnauccourt, *Archaeology of Fort Recovery*, 69-70; Denny, *Military Journal*, 370-1; Frost, *Thrilling Adventures*, 435; Fowler’s Account, in Howe, *Historical Collections*, 2:226-228.

each was killed by enemy gunfire before he could complete the task. He resigned to limp up and down the lines on foot, shouting encouragement to his troops and directing a counterattack. In the thick of the fire, a bullet nicked his cheek and clipped off a wisp of his hair. The adrenaline from this close call no doubt invigorated him and provided temporary relief from his gout as he barked orders and directed the defensive positions with a vitality that had been absent for some time. By the time he arrived at Fort Jefferson after the retreat, St. Clair discovered eight bullet holes in his coat, a testament to his courage in the face of a murderous crossfire.<sup>23</sup>

Three hours passed from the time the fight commenced, around 6:30 a.m., until St. Clair ordered the shattered remains of his army to retreat from the field. “Both officers and men seemed confounded, incapable of doing anything,” Major Ebenezer Denny recalled, “until it was told that a retreat was intended.”<sup>24</sup> Most of the wounded men who could not walk were abandoned, essentially sacrificing them to the Indians. This was a calculated move, according to one officer, hoping that the Indians would be so preoccupied with plundering the camp—as well as killing and scalping the wounded—that the rest of the army would be saved. Several officers led the retreat as the rest of the army followed close behind. The Indians initially thought the move was an attempt to turn their right flank, not a retreat. They parted to let the soldiers pass through with the idea of surrounding and cutting the Americans off before killing them. Two hundred retreating soldiers passed before they realized what was happening. A large group of two to three hundred warriors pursued the retreating army down the road, tomahawking stragglers

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<sup>23</sup> William Henry Smith, ed., *The St. Clair Papers: The Life and Public Services of Arthur St. Clair*, vol. 1 (Cincinnati: Robert Clarke & Co., 1882), 176-177.

<sup>24</sup> Denny, *Military Journal*, 371.

who fell behind. After chasing them for four miles, the Natives doubled-back to plunder the camp.<sup>25</sup>

Back along the banks of the Wabash, the warriors enjoyed the spoils of war and dispatched the enemy wounded. Several years later, one warrior recalled that “he tomahawked and scalped the wounded, dying and dead, until he was unable to raise his arm.”<sup>26</sup> One soldier survived the battle by hiding among the branches of a fallen evergreen tree. He witnessed a gruesome game of target practice from his hiding spot: wounded men were tied to trees and warriors took turns throwing tomahawks at them, seeing how close they could get to the victims’ heads without actually hitting them. “If the cruel weapon chanced to strike the cheek or the brow, bringing forth gushing blood,” he painfully recalled, “it only brought forth shouts of merriment, giving additional zest to the game.”<sup>27</sup> After the battle, warriors paraded around their villages dressed in blue coats which had been taken from dead soldiers and officers, carried scalps of their victims, and even fashioned earrings out of watches they found on the field.<sup>28</sup>

One American who visited the battlefield three months later observed the fate of those left behind. “Those unfortunate men who fell into the enemy’s hands with life were used with the greatest torture,” he wrote.<sup>29</sup> Some corpses had their limbs torn away. Several of the women who

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<sup>25</sup> DeRegnaucourt, *Archaeology of Fort Recovery*, 38; Arthur St. Clair to Henry Knox, 9 Nov 1791, in William Henry Smith, ed., *St. Clair Papers: The Life and Public Services of Arthur St. Clair*, vol. 2 (Cincinnati: Robert Clarke & Co., 1882), 264; Denny, *Military Journal*, 371; Joseph Brant to Joseph Chew, 30 December 1791, in *Michigan Pioneer*, 24:358; Calloway, *Victory With No Name*, 113-114, 124; Frost, *Thrilling Adventures*, 435.

<sup>26</sup> Howe, *Historical Collections*, 2:231.

<sup>27</sup> DeRegnaucourt, *Archaeology of Fort Recovery*, 70.

<sup>28</sup> Eugene F. Bliss, ed. and trans., *Diary of David Zeisberger, A Moravian Missionary Among the Indians of Ohio*, vol. 2 (Cincinnati: Robert Clarke & Co., 1885), 229.

<sup>29</sup> Howe, *Historical Collections*, 2:232.

were killed had “stakes as thick as a person’s arm driven through their bodies.”<sup>30</sup> General Richard Butler, who was incapacitated after receiving the wounded to his side, was dragged to the edge of the encampment near the road and propped upright against a tree with a loaded pistol in his hand. His wound was mortal, and he requested to be left on the field so he would not encumber the army as it made its escape. Two Shawnee warriors discovered him after the main body of the army departed. They drove a tomahawk into his head then scalped him. Simon Girty, an employee of the British Indian Department who participated in the battle, claimed that Butler’s killers cut his heart out, “divided [it] into as many pieces as there were tribes in the battle,” and ate it.<sup>31</sup>

During the retreat, the road to Fort Jefferson was inundated with panicked men. Many of them were injured and most were defenseless, having thrown down their guns in their haste to quit the battlefield. Kennan survived the initial attack on the militia; he picked up a gun from a fallen comrade joined in the defense of the camp. When the army retreated, he attempted to carry a close friend of his who had broken his thigh during the battle. They only made it a few hundred yards before the pursuing Indians were nearly upon them. When his friend refused to release his arms from around Kennan’s shoulders, Kennan unsheathed his knife and slashed the man’s hand until he released his grip. The warriors stopped to kill and scalp his friend, which bought Kennan enough time to get away. Another survivor saw a woman abandon her baby in a snowdrift along the road as the Indians closed-in on her.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Quote from Butler et al., *Butler Family*, 161-162; Sargent, *Sargent's Diary*, 45; Phillip W. Hoffman, *Simon Girty, Turncoat Hero: The Most Hated Man on the Early American Frontier* (Franklin, Tn.: Flying Camp Press, 2009), 307; Sword, *Washington's Indian War*, 187-188.

<sup>32</sup> Howe, *Historical Collections*, 2:228-230; Denny, *Military Journal*, 371-372.



The First United States Regiment, commanded by Major John Hamtramck, had missed the battle. They had been detached five days earlier to protect the supply train after the Kentucky deserters threatened to pillage it. The First Regiment had nearly reached Fort Jefferson on their way to rejoin the army when the fight erupted. They heard the firing in the distance and marched forward only to be met by the vanguard of the retreat who informed them about what had transpired. Rather than continue forward to provide reinforcements and guard the retreat, Hamtramck ordered his men to fall back to Fort Jefferson to protect it against an attack.<sup>33</sup>

Most of the survivors reached Fort Jefferson by the evening, but injured men continued to arrive throughout the night. The situation at the fort was nearly as grim as the one on the road from the battlefield. Colonel William Darke noted that the post had only one day of bread left and had run out of meat. Because there was not enough food there to support the garrison, much less all of the injured men, the wounded were left behind with a small group of able-bodied soldiers to defend the fort while everyone else continued their retreat to Fort Washington at ten o'clock that night. On the afternoon of November 8, 1791, four days after the battle, St. Clair's bedraggled army reached Fort Washington. For several days afterward, men who had fallen behind the retreating columns made their way to Fort Washington and Fort Hamilton. Some had been without food for over a week as they moved stealthily through the woods, fearing that traveling along the main road would expose them to a surprise attack by Indians who were tracking the army's movement southward. When St. Clair's force embarked on the campaign two months earlier, it took them two months to advance from Fort Washington to the banks of the

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<sup>33</sup> Denny, *Military Journal*, 372.

Wabash, a distance of one hundred miles. Terrified survivors of the battle completed their return trip in less than five days.<sup>34</sup>

Soldiers who had been left for dead on the battlefield dragged themselves to Fort Jefferson for several days after the battle, including one man who “came in scalped, a tomehawk [*sic*] in his head in two places.”<sup>35</sup> For two months after the battle, the most severely injured men succumbed to their injuries as they languished inside the fort. The garrison’s remote location made it hazardous to resupply the post. Food nearly ran out several times. The garrison was forced to eat their horses and uncured hides to survive. By Christmas, only a month and a half after the battle, the post had but six days of provisions left. If not for the timely arrival of a supply convoy which gave them enough food to hold their position, the garrison faced the possibility of having to once again abandon their injured comrades. Anyone left behind faced certain death either from their injuries, starvation if the Indians laid siege to the fort, or death by torture if native warriors breached its walls.<sup>36</sup>

The casualties at the Battle of a Thousand Slain reflected the totality of the Americans’ defeat. Out of the estimated 1,669 US soldiers who fought in the battle, six hundred thirty men perished and two hundred forty-four were injured. Darke surmised that most of the soldiers who were killed were from the levy regiments, many of whom had volunteered to serve in the army due to depressed economic circumstances or legal trouble in their own lives. “[I]ndeed many of

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<sup>34</sup> William Darke to George Washington, 9-10 November 1791, *Founders Online*, National Archives, last modified November 26, 2017, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/05-09-02-0094> (accessed 4 January 2018); Denny, *Military Journal*, 372-374; Sargent, *Sargent's Diary*, 263.

<sup>35</sup> Wilson, *Bradley's Journal*, 17.

<sup>36</sup> Wilson, *Bradley's Journal*, 17; Sargent, *Sargent's Diary*, 29.

them are as well out of the world as in it,” Darke believed.<sup>37</sup> Thirty seven officers were killed and thirty others wounded. The Indians also took an unknown number of prisoners. Provisions and supplies, which had been so hard to come by along the march, were abandoned on the field: packhorses, food, tents, cannons, guns and ammunition, among other things, valued at \$32,810 (nearly \$840,000 in today’s dollars according to historian Colin Calloway). Only three women made the retreat safely. Fifty were found dead on the field, and an unknown number of women and children were taken captive. The losses for the Northwest Confederacy were minuscule in comparison—twenty-one killed and forty wounded.<sup>38</sup>

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Throughout the Revolutionary War and in the postbellum period, the erstwhile British colonies were defining the makeup and authority of their national government. The causes, conduct, and outcome of the conflict between white settlers and the native peoples of the Old Northwest—the Northwest Indian War—embodied the most difficult challenges the new government faced. The war itself, and the Battle of a Thousand Slain in particular, are oft-forgotten events in the history of the United States. The significance of the battle lies not only in its outcome—it was largest defeat the US Army ever suffered at the hands of Indian fighters, three times more deadly than the Battle of the Little Bighorn—but also in the impact St. Clair’s defeat had on the US government, its military establishment, and US Indian policy.

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<sup>37</sup> William Darke to George Washington, 9-10 November 1791, *Founders Online*.

<sup>38</sup> Brant to Chew, 30 December 1791, in *Michigan Pioneer*, 24:358; Calloway, *Victory with No Name*, 125, 127; Hoffman, *Simon Girty*, 309.

Politicians hoped that millions of acres of western land acquired from England in the Treaty of Paris were a panacea for the country's post-war financial woes.<sup>39</sup> But Native Americans had lived in the Old Northwest for thousands of years, and the land itself held spiritual, ancestral, and economic significance for them. Prehistoric glacial deposits had turned it into some of the most fertile farmland in all of North America. It offered an abundance of wild game whose pelts were valued trade commodities. The location of the Ohio Country imbued it with great geopolitical value. It was sandwiched between the Great Lakes and the Ohio River, the largest tributary of the Mississippi River, which connected it to the global trade market in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. Throughout the 1780s and 1790s, conflict among frontiersmen, Indians, and the US government quickly put an end to any optimism that the Old Northwest would be immediately profitable for the US government. For twelve years, Indians and whites engaged in a bloody war for control over this region.

The Northwest Indian War revealed the flaws of the central government created by the Articles of Confederation and spurred the creation of the constitutional republic that followed it. The Confederation could not raise its own army; it relied on individual states to supply it with troops. Funding the national army was a constant battle in Congress for several reasons, not the least of which was the fact that the Confederation had no power to levy direct taxes on its citizens. Instead, Congress relied on the beneficence of the individual states for survival at the same time a severe postbellum economic recession squeezed state budgets and prevented them

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<sup>39</sup> The present study focuses on the lands of the present-day Upper Midwest—roughly the states of Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Michigan, and Wisconsin—which lie east of the Mississippi River, south of the Great Lakes down to the Ohio River, terminating at southwestern shore of Lake Ontario. This study refers to this land in several ways: the *pays d'en haut*, the Old Northwest Territory, the Old Northwest, Indian Country, Indian Territory, and the Ohio Country. The definition of *pays d'en haut* was articulated by historian Richard White in *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

from making significant contributions to the war effort. In other cases, states without western land claims felt they did not benefit directly from pacifying the West and therefore refused to contribute either soldiers or money. Beyond financial concerns, Americans were ideologically wary of large standing armies, even one they had created for themselves. The memories of British colonialism were still too fresh in their minds.

The causes and outcome of the frontier conflict were emblematic of difficulties the US government faced in establishing a coherent Indian Policy in the early years of independence. The Articles only authorized the national government to negotiate with native peoples who lived outside the boundaries of individual states and the western lands they claimed, but not Indian Nations who occupied land inside existing states. This prevented the Confederation Congress from taking decisive action when advancing the national interest conflicted with states' rights. White settlers believed they were entitled, even obligated, by religion and the natural rights of mankind to expand into and "civilize" what they felt were "unsettled" western lands. Eventually, the US government adopted this narrative to justify the creation of a continental empire, succinctly described by one journalist in 1845 as "Manifest Destiny." These emigrants came from a wide range of backgrounds. Some were squatters who could not afford to purchase land for themselves and had few other options to find work in the depressed postwar economy. Others were farmers and artisans who had been marginalized or displaced due to rapid population growth along the East Coast. In some cases, cash-strapped and debt-ridden citizens believed that moving to the loosely governed lands of the West would allow them to escape the increasing burden of state taxes and allow them to achieve economic independence. Immigrants from other

countries also sought refuge in the western territory to escape similar economic turmoil in their home countries.

The military establishment played a leading role in US expansion. It was responsible for removing Natives from the most desirable lands. The army also became a police force that protected investments made by wealthy, politically connected Americans. It forcibly removed squatters whose illegal settlements undermined the land's investment value and guarded surveying parties who measured and divided the land before it the government sold it to speculators and would-be settlers. These responsibilities essentially empowered the army to determine who the owners of the land would ultimately be: white or Indian, rich or poor.

Native Americans who lived in the Old Northwest were faced with several dilemmas that clouded their future in North America. The 1783 Treaty of Paris transferred ultimate sovereignty over western lands from England to the United States and initiated significant debates inside Indian councils. They had to determine how far they were willing to go to defend their territory. Would independent action by individual Nations protect their lands or would they need to join with other native peoples in a grand alliance? Would aligning themselves with the United States or Great Britain increase their chances of success? Alliance-forming necessarily raised questions about leadership and who would have the authority to negotiate with foreign powers. The Six Nations had filled that role before the American Revolution. Would they continue to assume leadership or would one of the western, more militant tribes establish themselves as the new standard-bearers of the indigenous resistance movement? Pan-Indianism was further complicated by internal divisions, traditional rivalries, and the extent to which individual tribes and villages had been integrated into the Anglo-American economy.

Fusing a common identity and common cause with an effective military strategy was a struggle for the indigenous peoples of the Old Northwest. Some signed treaties of peace with the United States, gave up their lands, and moved to reservations. Others favored pragmatism. They signed treaties with the United States and hoped that capitulation would allow them to avoid armed conflict and protect their long-term interests. Several factions engaged in playoff diplomacy, manipulating the interests of England and leveraging them against the United States to protect native lands. The most militant tribes rejected compromise and negotiation, resigned themselves to warfare, and appealed to British Indian Department officials at Detroit for military assistance. Indians in the Deep South, who also faced pressure from white expansion, were internally divided. Some offered their services as scouts and warriors to the US Army, hoping that collaborating with the United States would protect their homelands. Others figured that the conquest of the northern tribes would allow the United States to concentrate its full military force against the Southern Indians, so they joined their northern brethren in a burgeoning pan-Indian confederation to defeat the American threat before it grew too powerful to stop.

Wealthy, politically connected Americans saw the West as a financial opportunity. They used the system to their advantage, secured the best lands for themselves, and devised ways to profit from them. In many cases, aspiring land speculators were directly involved in national, state, or territorial politics. Other speculators worked inside the military command structure and became the “inside traders” of their day. Their job entailed the removal of squatters and Indians, which gave them firsthand knowledge of the best plots, which areas were pacified, and the power, literally, to safeguard their investments. Some wealthy settlers were entrepreneurs who

courted government contracts to supply food, supplies, and materiel to the army while others offered their skills as tradesmen to support the war effort.

The soldiers who fought in the US Army during this time occupied the bottom of the socio-economic ladder. Many worked menial jobs or were unemployed and could not afford land of their own. With few other options, they succumbed to the lofty promises of army recruiters: regular pay, clothes and food, and the possibility of adventure in the West. To their chagrin, the pay was infrequent, insufficient, and Congress decreased it several times throughout the course of their enlistments. Clothing and food were often of poor quality and were in chronically short supply. Some men were forced into service either through deception or impressment due to convictions for crimes. Ironically, the soldiers of the postwar army—many of whom enlisted due to economic uncertainty of the postbellum period—were demographically and economic similar to the squatters they were charged to remove.

I believe that the Northwest Indian War was a microcosm of the political, economic, and military turbulence that defined the Postwar Era in North America. It exposed the flaws of the Articles of Confederation and contributed to the push for a more powerful, centralized constitutional government that could establish policies and enforce them in the national interest. After 1789, prosecuting the war tested the authority and boundaries of the new federal government created by the Constitution: the separation of powers, revenue generation, foreign policy, and Indian relations. The war revealed how the new government could impact the lives of its citizens by protecting the interests of the few while imposing its will on others.

The defeat of St. Clair's army—the Battle of a Thousand Slain—was the watershed event of the Indian war. The Northwest Confederacy's triumph forced Americans to re-assess their



aversion to standing armies, which spurred their hesitant acceptance of a permanent military establishment. St. Clair's defeat also redefined US Indian policy. The battle at the Wabash River illustrated that the pan-Indian collaboration was both a military and diplomatic threat to US expansion. From that point forward, US overtures to sign treaties with the Indians were mostly disingenuous, a distraction to hide increased federal militarization.

St. Clair's defeat was an early test for the new constitutional government, specifically how its institutions would function in times of national crisis. The congressional investigation that followed the battle was the first of its kind under the Constitution. The House of Representatives claimed the authority to conduct an inquiry, subpoena witnesses, and compel politicians to provide information. This inquest prompted President George Washington to consider whether his correspondence with members of his cabinet should be withheld to protect the public interest. This was the first invocation of Executive Privilege. When the investigation was over, the US government used the lessons learned from the battle to create a more powerful army that could implement its expansionist objectives.<sup>40</sup>

Victory along the Wabash River also had a profound effect on native peoples in the Northwest. For a fleeting moment, indigenous warriors made the dream of turning the Old Northwest into a sovereign Indian state a real possibility. At the same time, their military success sowed the seeds of internal division instead of fostering greater unity inside the pan-Indian movement. Some pushed to negotiate with the United States from a position of strength. Others wanted to continue the war and appealed to British Indian Department officials for more

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<sup>40</sup> Calloway, *Victory With No Name*, 5, 136.

assistance. These divisions eventually weakened the pan-Indian alliance and undermined its ability to serve as a check against US land greed.

British colonialism in North America, the War for Independence, the Confederation Era, and the early years of the constitutional republic have been the focus of numerous studies by previous scholars. None of those historians, however, has looked at the Northwest Indian War as a seminal event that not only tied the United States to its British colonial past but also drove the collapse of the Confederation government and influenced the way the constitutional powers of the federal government would be interpreted in the coming years. St. Clair's defeat, more than any other event, forced a reckoning that influenced how the federal government operated and how it imprinted itself onto the lives of all Americans, rich and poor, as well as the Indians who lived within its boundaries. That connection is the focus of this study.

The United States faced a number of difficulties in the first twenty years of self-governance after it declared independence. Many of those issues were similar to ones that plagued Great Britain in the final years of the colonial period, which historian Fred Anderson described in his book, *Crucible of War: The Seven Years' War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754-1766*. Anderson suggests that the outcome of Seven Years' War fueled the rise of the independence movement in the thirteen colonies. Great Britain's efforts to recoup its financial expenditures after the war led to the assessment of new taxes, increased regulation of trade, and a new emphasis on regulatory enforcement that eventually pushed Americans toward rebellion.

I suggest that many of the same issues England faced in America—squatters, land-hungry speculators, massive war debt, Indian policy, territorial sovereignty, assembling an army to

secure the western frontier—were not unique to the British colonial period. To the contrary, these problems were endemic and whichever nation-state was in control of North America—Great Britain, Spain, or the United States—would need to resolve them. US politicians worked to balance the establishment of national authority against how to properly wield it. At the same time they struggled to hold the fragile coalition of states together to prevent them from becoming pawns in a game of geopolitical dominance among competing imperial powers. Resolving those problems was not only critical to the survival of the fledgling nation, it was essential to the establishment of the United States as an economic, military, and diplomatic entity on the global stage.

First, the Confederation had to fight for its independence. In their book, *A Respectable Army: The Military Origins of the Republic, 1763-1789*, James Kirby Martin and Mark Edward Lender described the difficulties of funding the war effort due to the lack of economic and plenary power granted to the US government under the Articles of Confederation. It was not empowered to levy direct taxes on citizens nor could it compel the individual states to contribute financial resources and manpower to the Continental Army. Woody Holton's book *Unruly Americans and the Origins of the Constitution* follows that fiscal crisis into the postwar period, where the war debt incurred by the Confederation and individual state governments during the war threatened economic development. The lack of centralized power handicapped the ability of the Confederation to provide debt relief to its citizens and individual state governments during the deep financial depression that gripped the US economy after the war. As Richard Maxwell Brown and Don E. Fehrenbacher noted in their book *Tradition, Conflict, and Modernization*:

*Perspectives on the American Revolution*, domestic unrest, including Shays' Rebellion, resulted largely because the Confederation was unable to alleviate the plight of debtors.

The downfall of the Articles of Confederation and the transition to the constitutional republic has long been the subject of spirited scholarly debate. Forrest McDonald, Woody Holton, and other historians have challenged the "creation myth" of the US Constitution, popularized by historians like John Fiske and Jared Sparks, that the United States had a pseudo-national identity before and after the War for Independence, and that America's "Founding Fathers" called for a constitutional convention to replace the Articles of Confederation when it became apparent that the Confederation Congress was simply unable to address the many challenges Americans faced during the so-called "Critical Period" in US history. McDonald emphasized that the ideological battles republicans and nationalists waged during and after the American Revolution proved there was no real consensus about whether the United States was a nation or merely a collection of independent states who only came together to gain their independence from England. In *Unruly Americans and the Origins of the Constitution*, Woody Holton suggested that the need for stronger national authority resulted from oppressive tax legislation that individual states passed to pay their outstanding debts. When efforts to amend the Articles of Confederation failed, politicians realized that creating a strong national government would be the only way to overcome those difficulties and ensure financial stability moving forward.

My research agrees with the preceding works but departs from them in several significant ways. McDonald is correct that a strong national government and cohesive national identity were not a foregone conclusion after the war. At the same time, however, the government created by

the Articles of Confederation was weak by design and was unable to effectively manage the challenges of governing in the post-independence era. In *A Hercules in the Cradle*, Max Edling wrote that the principal weakness of the Articles was that it was created merely to hold the states together during the war against England, not necessarily to grant Congress the power to assert US sovereignty relative to other nation-states. The Constitution, on the other hand, was drafted to establish financial stability for the government and allow it to create an army that could implement federal sovereignty on the domestic and international levels. I make the case that these different interpretations are all correct but they essentially point to one undeniable theme—the Articles of Confederation created a weak national government that was simply unable to mitigate the challenges of independence. The only way the United States would survive was to create a stronger national government that had economic and military power.

The Confederation's inability to enforce the terms of the Treaty of Paris was perhaps the greatest example of its impotence. The US government could not force its citizens to honor their prewar debts to English merchants, a failure James R. Albach outlined in this book, *Annals of the West*. This prompted Great Britain's refusal to relinquish control over its frontier military posts in the Great Lakes region, land that had been ceded to the United States. Historian Mann Butler pointed out that in Kentucky, the national government failed to prevent Indian attacks on Kentucky communities. This, combined with the Confederation's failure to secure navigation rights on the Mississippi River, alienated western settlers who worried about the security of their frontier settlements and faced economic hardship if they were unable to transport their surplus goods to the national and international markets. These insecurities fed secessionist movements in

Kentucky and Tennessee and threatened US sovereignty over the trans-Appalachian West, raising the possibility that Spain or Great Britain could usurp US authority over those western lands.

The decentralized authority of the Confederation also prevented it from implementing an effective policy toward Native Americans. The events of this period fall into the *in situ* phase of US Indian Policy, when the national government sought to assert its authority over the lands Great Britain ceded to the United States in the Treaty of Paris, while at the same time trying to establish peace with the Natives who lived there. This process involved negotiating treaties to acquire legal title to those lands, establishing defined boundaries between white and native settlements, and preventing violence between them.

My research has found that within this initial era of US Indian Policy, the government's strategy to achieve territorial expansion was in a constant state of change because of repeated failure. During the first years of independence, the Confederation pursued what I call "peaceful expansion through division and intimidation." Congress appointed several Commissioners of Indian Affairs who forced the Ohio Indians to cede their lands as a consequence of their alliance with Great Britain during the Revolutionary War. The commissioners worked to divide the Indian Nations among themselves to forestall a growing pan-Indian movement whose *raison d'être* was to resist US expansion. The US Army was a looming presence at these councils, a not-so-subtle reminder that native lands would be taken by force, if necessary. Between 1784-1786, the commissioners secured land cessions that encompassed most of the present state of Ohio. The pan-Indian confederacy repudiated the validity of these treaties. They launched raids across the Ohio River into Kentucky, initiating a cycle of violence that multiplied the tension that already

existed among westerners. Peace was nonexistent and expansion was impossible because Ohio was still not safely habitable for white settlers.

Ineffectual treaties and the ratification of the Constitution prompted the development of a new strategy, “peaceful expansion through division and bribery.” Federal officials now offered to compensate the Indians for their ceded lands, hoping that money would undermine Indian unity and allow the peaceful settlement of the Ohio Country to begin. The moderate and peace factions within the pan-Indian alliance saw this as an opportunity to negotiate a compromise with the United States, while militant nativists remained steadfast that the Ohio River should be the boundary between whites and Indians. While bribery did successfully divide the pan-Indian alliance, frontier bloodletting actually escalated. US officials realized that “peaceful expansion” was not possible.

From that point forward, the federal government settled on “expansion through conquest, then assimilation.” The way the United States achieved this was through what I call “obfuscatory diplomacy.” US Indian Commissioners launched half-hearted efforts to negotiate peace treaties with the militants, while at the same time Congress and President Washington used the federal government’s new centralized power to create a large national army. The War Department developed plans to invade Indian Country with that military force and strike a fatal blow to the pan-Indian rebellion. This belligerent approach eventually achieved success, but not before the United States suffered two humiliating military setbacks. The US victory in the Northwest Indian War proved to be nothing but a temporary reprieve, however. The basic premise of the *in situ* phase of US Indian Policy—asserting federal supremacy over Indian Nations and their lands and assimilating them into American culture, hoping this would allow them to peacefully coexist as

US territorial expansion proceeded—proved to be inherently flawed. Racial tension, white land greed, and indigenous resistance created conflict throughout the early years of the Constitutional Republic. Eventually, the republic's *in situ* Indian Policy was replaced by the idea of systematic removal that first gained traction after the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 and was implemented by law under the presidency of Andrew Jackson.

One problem the Confederation government never solved was the proliferation of squatter settlements in Ohio. Professor Andrew R.L. Cayton saw these illegal settlers as trailblazers in a dual sense, because they initiated white settlement of the Ohio frontier and brought the idea of popular democracy with them. Cayton suggested that immigrants were drawn to the Old Northwest by the hope of economic independence, its abundance of natural resources, and the area's distance from established centers of power along the East Coast. Illegal settlements in Ohio threatened the authority of the national government because squatting would inevitably subvert the Confederation's plans to sell that land to achieve financial stability through repayment of the national debt. Contrary to the popular image of illegal settlements as lawless, Cayton emphasized that squatters' attempts to establish local governments were proof that they were not advocates of anarchy. Rather, they craved self-government and believed political stability would bring financial independence for their families. Squatters were not always poor citizens seeking refuge from the financial turmoil of the postbellum period. Some held considerable material wealth. Others held legal title to lands on the western frontier of Virginia, Pennsylvania, and in Kentucky. These well-heeled settlers formed a "natural frontier aristocracy" who dominated local politics.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Andrew R.L. Cayton, *The Frontier Republic: Ideology and Politics in the Ohio Country, 1780-1825* (Kent, Oh.: The Kent State University Press, 1986), 5-6.



Recent scholarly analysis has focused on the dynamics of frontier life, part of a growing historiographical trend of telling “history from the bottom-up.” Michael N. McConnell’s *Army and Empire: British Soldiers on the American Frontier, 1758-1775* looked at frontier life between Seven Years' War and the War for Independence. His work asserted that the common experiences of life in the backcountry broke down class distinctions between officers and common soldiers in the British Army, a dynamic that he believed was uncommon in civilian life. To the contrary, careful analysis of primary source material proves that same dynamic was present and very influential in the squatter communities of the Old Northwest after the revolution. The lives of the frontier aristocracy and poor squatters were defined by the harsh environment, the ever-present threat of Indian attacks, and the persistent efforts of the US government to remove them and impose its sovereignty over the land.

My research for this project included compiling a list of squatter settlements in Ohio and their locations, which revealed several interesting characteristics of these frontier communities and their inhabitants. Illegal settlements were established through a deliberative process. Squatters lived close to major population centers in western Pennsylvania and Virginia but far enough away from frontier military posts to give themselves time to react when the US Army tried to dispossess them. When the army arrived to force them out, squatters devised ways to avoid removal. Some used subterfuge. Others played upon the empathy of military officials to gain temporary reprieves in exchange for promises that they would eventually remove themselves. On several occasions, the army indulged these requests only to find out later that the squatters had stayed or left briefly before they returned to Ohio, rebuilt their destroyed settlements, and lived as they had before. The squatters’ perseverance reveals the desperation of

the men and women who established these communities as well as the ineptitude of the Confederation government to remove the squatters permanently. In the end, it was the Indians of the Old Northwest, not the national government, who permanently ended the Squatter Era in Ohio.

Illegal settlements north of the Ohio River threatened the Confederation's economic plans. The massive debt incurred during the Revolutionary War led US politicians to look for revenue sources that could remediate outstanding debts, establish the national treasury on sound footing, and court domestic and foreign capital investment. The territory England ceded to the United States in the Treaty of Paris presented a unique financial opportunity to accomplish those objectives. Therefore, acquiring the lands from the Indians and securing them from squatters became an essential function of the Confederation government. In his book, *The Great American Land Bubble: The Amazing Story of Land-Grabbing, Speculations, and Booms from Colonial Days to the Present Time*, Aaron Sakolski discussed how the national government sought to accomplish its financial objectives by selling those lands wholesale to large speculation companies that sold parcels to individual citizens. Sakolski's research shows that many of the most prominent boosters of western land speculation were powerful state legislators or politicians in the national government. These men used their positions to facilitate land sales, then acted as boosters for western immigration. In "The Ohio Company and the Meaning of Opportunity in the American West, 1786-1795," Timothy Shannon noted that membership in the Society of the Cincinnati, a controversial organization of veteran officers from the American Revolution, was a significant factor that bound many of these early speculators to their political

allies. The interconnectivity between politics and speculation meant that westward expansion would occupy a considerable position in postbellum political discourse.

My research revealed several intriguing patterns among the would-be speculators who operated below the macro level. Here, land speculation was not exclusively reserved for the wealthy and politically connected; it was dominated by men who were firmly “middle class.” Both commissioned and non-commissioned military officers held advantages that positioned them to become successful speculators. Unlike regular soldiers whose monthly pay was often in arrears, officers were paid on time. Having cash on hand made them a resource when troops needed money. Desperate soldiers sold their Revolutionary War land bounties to these speculator-officers to pay outstanding debts or to purchase supplies and food when the War Department’s mismanagement left frontier garrisons nearly naked and on the brink of starvation. The two main responsibilities of the army were to remove squatters and fight Indians. Consequently, military officers knew which areas were pacified and their service in the West gave them an intimate knowledge of the best lands. A number of officers parlayed these advantages into a small fortune.

Conquest of the Ohio Country came at a steep cost, however, as the land’s indigenous owners launched a fierce resistance to protect their homeland. For historians Reginald Horsman, William H. Bergmann, Richard Kohn and others, the war revealed the nature of Indian-white relations on the frontier, US Indian Policy, westward expansion, and the formation of the US military establishment. Sword’s work, *President Washington’s Indian War: The Struggle for the Old Northwest, 1790-1795*, stands as the definitive account of the war itself. In it, Sword postulated that land-hungry American settlers created escalating frontier violence that drew the

Confederation reluctantly into a war against the Natives of the Northwest Territory. Squatter communities sprang up in Ohio once the war with England was over, and native warriors began raiding these settlements. They also attacked legal residents across the river in Kentucky, where white occupation was a contentious issue for Algonquian peoples. This was especially the case with the Shawnee, who had hunted in Kentucky for centuries and resented losing that land in the 1768 Treaty of Fort Stanwix. Indian raiders were determined to depopulate the Bluegrass region, discourage squatting north of the Ohio River, and reestablish native sovereignty over the lands that Great Britain ceded to the United States in the Treaty of Paris.

In the early years of this frontier conflict, the US government remained focused on removing illegal settlers north of the river and negotiating treaties with the Indians of the Old Northwest. US politicians hoped this would bring peace to the frontier and facilitate the survey, sale and settlement of the land to pay down the war debt, remunerate land bounties promised to veterans from the late war, and establish the creditworthiness of United States. The US Army was not involved in fighting Indians at that point. In the absence of military intervention on their behalf, both legal and illegal settlers in the West launched retaliatory raids into Indian Country to avenge Indian attacks on their communities. These raids were a defining feature of frontier self-identity, a phenomenon Peter Silver detailed in his book, *Our Savage Neighbors: How Indian War Transformed Early America*. White frontiersmen dehumanized native peoples and justified their depredations against peaceful Indian settlements by emphasizing the perceived “savagery” of the Natives. Historian Jane Merritt followed Silver’s hypothesis and took it a step further, remarking that once “the language of savagism entered the daily parlance of white Americans,” it became the way they justified the seizure of Indian lands and absolved themselves of guilt from

taking that land by force.<sup>42</sup> Even Indians who had assimilated did not escape the violence. James H. Merrell pointed out that Christianized “Praying Indians” often were victimized by both sides. They were looked upon with suspicion by their unassimilated brethren, and contempt by whites who saw them as still inherently “savage.”<sup>43</sup> Dehumanizing Indians as a whole became more and more necessary when the national government realized that territorial expansion could only proceed after a bloody conquest of native peoples.

Several of Sword’s assertions have been challenged or reinterpreted by more recent scholarship. Colin Calloway’s book, *The Victory with No Name: The Native American Defeat of the First American Army*, depicted the conflict as a “war over real estate,” driven not by squatters but instead by well-connected speculators who saw the defeat of the pan-Indian confederacy as necessary before they could profit from their investments.<sup>44</sup> William H. Bergmann described cyclical frontier violence as a “property war.”<sup>45</sup> This conflict threatened the government’s efforts to assert control over westward expansion via “economic and institutional expansion,” which entailed building infrastructure, establishing national institutions like the post office and military, and the economic integration of western settlers. George Ablavsky described the political and military process by which the US government tried to assert its authority over the western territories after the Revolutionary War. Congress devised the “territorial system,” which failed because “Native peoples, French settlers, Anglo-American intruders, and land companies,”

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<sup>42</sup> Jane Merritt, *At the Crossroads: Indians and Empires on a Mid-Atlantic Frontier, 1700-1763* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 15.

<sup>43</sup> James H. Merrell, *Into the American Woods: Negotiators on the Pennsylvania Frontier* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 81, 144.

<sup>44</sup> Calloway, *Victory with No Name*, 9.

<sup>45</sup> William H. Bergmann, *The American National State and the Early West* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 5.

battled over the land itself and who would control it.<sup>46</sup> The “adjudicatory state” that the US government eventually settled on was a compromise effort that merged local imperatives with the desire to assert more control by the national government.

My work departs from previous scholarship on the Northwest Indian War in several ways. In terms of periodization, historians disagree on when the war actually began. Sword felt it started in 1790, when the federal government began to pursue active military operations against the pan-Indian confederation. Others have made a case for 1785, when the US Congress passed land ordinances to survey the western territory and established rules that would be used to govern it. My research finds that the conflict started right after the Revolutionary War officially ended in 1783, when the pan-Indian alliance formed at Sandusky. Because its founding principle was the belief that Indian land was held in common by all native peoples, squatter settlements in Ohio were met with aggressive, violent force. This initiated an cycle of retaliatory frontier raids. The Confederation initially searched for a way to avoid armed conflict. The national government was in a distressed financial situation and several other pressing issues required immediate attention: the machinations of England, Spain, and separatist movements in Kentucky and Tennessee that threatened US sovereignty over its new western lands. As the violence grew in frequency and scope—targeting legal settlements in Kentucky and the western borderlands of Virginia and Pennsylvania—members of Congress and the US military establishment felt they had no choice but to authorize the US military to engage. If the government failed to provide relief to besieged frontier communities, it would have undermined the government’s claims of

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<sup>46</sup> George Ablavsky, “The Adjudicatory State: Sovereignty, Property, and Law in the U.S. Territories, 1783-1802,” *Publicly Accessible Penn Dissertations*, 1571 (2016), <https://repository.upenn.edu/edissertations/1571> (accessed 5 June 2018).

legal, territorial, and military sovereignty in the West, thereby jeopardizing the viability of the US government itself.

Sword's interpretation of St. Clair's defeat borrowed largely from the findings of a congressional investigation that placed primary blame on the poor performance of the soldiers themselves. Calloway on the other hand, argued that the government's reaction to the battle was an acknowledgement that shortcomings of the US military establishment and government were equally at fault in the disaster. It marked a significant test for the newly created constitutional republic which subsequently reconfigured the military establishment, its army, and established long-standing precedents for the interpretation of constitutional authority. My work builds on the work of both Sword and Calloway to suggest that several other factors, specifically internal conflict among St. Clair's subordinate officers, as well as the mental and physical condition of President Washington, shared equal blame for the disastrous outcome along the Wabash River.

The most imposing obstacle the US government faced in its quest for territorial expansion was a determined pan-Indian resistance movement, which has been analyzed by scholars like Richard White, Randolph C. Downes, Gregory Evans Dowd, Calloway and others. Downes' work, *Council Fires on the Upper Ohio: A Narrative of Indian Affairs on the Upper Ohio Valley until 1795*, found that after the War for Independence, native leaders in the Old Northwest attempted to preserve their territorial sovereignty by aligning themselves with Great Britain. After 1783, British officials in Canada were concerned that US expansion would jeopardize English control over the Ohio Country's fur trade and cause the "inevitable restriction of the possibilities of expansion of British influence and empire."<sup>47</sup> Downes portrayed this

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<sup>47</sup> Randolph C. Downes, *Council Fires on the Upper Ohio: A Narrative of Indian Affairs in the Upper Ohio Valley until 1795*, third paperback edition (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989), 280.

relationship as largely paternalistic, with English officials attempting to curb the aggressive actions of native peoples both for the Indians' safety and to avoid disruption of the peltry trade. He believed Great Britain abandoned their native allies after the Battle of Fallen Timbers because direct intervention on the Indians' behalf would have plunged England into yet another war against the United States. James H. Merrell and Richard White emphasized the extent to which native leaders influenced the quest for Euro-American domination over North America. Merrell pointed out that frontier treaty negotiations were typically conducted according to native customs, countering the narrative that white colonialism was all-encompassing. White described how Indians shaped the impact European colonialism had on their communities. They created a "middle ground" where Natives and Europeans met to treat, trade, and make war on terms that were largely dictated by the Indians. According to White, after the American Revolution, Indians of the Old Northwest believed that a strategic alliance with British officials in Canada presented them with their best chance of protecting their lands from land-hungry American settlers. Like Downes, White believed that native leaders were unwise to place so much trust in English officials who made faint promises to intervene on the Indians' behalf if the United States gained the upper hand in the war. When Great Britain reneged on that promise, it precipitated a rapid downfall for the pan-Indian resistance.

My research finds that the truth was actually much more complicated than a simplistic narrative of exploitation and deception. While many British Indian Department officials did mislead the Indians, it was not always intentional. The language barrier and translating speeches between both sides sometimes created confusion and misunderstandings. In other cases, white Indian agents, interpreters, and traders working for the British Indian Department made sincere



but unrealistic promises of English assistance. These men often lived among the Indians and were often torn between loyalty to their employer and native peoples who they shared strong kinship ties with. Most of these men had been adopted as captives, married Indian women, and fathered children with them. They hoped that providing native peoples with food, trade goods, and weapons would allow them to resist US encroachment. Senior officials in Canada and London directed the British Indian Department to protect the Indians while encouraging them toward peaceful coexistence with the United States. Unbeknownst to them, however, lower-level Indian Department employees were making promises of direct military support that would have constituted acts of aggression and could have started a war with the United States if the British government had followed through on them.

The suggestion that Native American leaders were mere victims of British duplicity suggests that they were unsophisticated and simply out of their depth when they conducted diplomatic relations with whites. To the contrary, I have found that native leaders entertained an alliance with England as a matter of utility and convenience. They realized that defending their land would be impossible without outside assistance in the form of food, supplies, weapons and ammunition. Additionally, they recognized that the relative weakness of the British Army in Upper Canada meant that an alliance between native warriors and England would be mutually beneficial: England could maintain possession of the disputed frontier posts and continue their monopoly over the Old Northwest peltry trade, while the Indians would receive the weapons and supplies they needed to defend their sovereignty over the Ohio Country. British officials acknowledged as much. Native leaders knew that trusting and forming an alliance with Great Britain entailed great risk—England's failure to protect native interests in the Treaty of Paris

proved as much—so they planned their military operations independently, free of English input, and never fully expected that Great Britain would support them with military forces. For Natives, the risk was acceptable if such an alliance increased the likelihood of successfully defending their land.

Previous historians of this pan-Indian alliance treat it as a single entity, created at Sandusky in 1783, that persisted until Anthony Wayne's victory at Fallen Timbers in 1794. Colin Calloway, Sword, Richard White, Gregory Evans Dowd, and others have referred to this collaboration by several names: the Northwest Confederacy, the Miami Confederacy, the Wabash Confederacy, the Algonquian Confederacy, and Little Turtle's Confederacy. Dowd's seminal work about pan-Indian collaboration, *A Spirited Resistance: The North American Indian Struggle for Unity, 1745-1815*, suggested that spiritual nativism was the foundation of Native American collective resistance against Euro-American colonialism throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. During the Northwest Indian War, nativists formed an alliance of convenience with accommodationists who favored negotiation and compromise with British, French, and US officials. The result was the creation of a formidable pan-Indian resistance movement. Dowd suggested that after the confederacy defeated Harmar and St. Clair in 1790 and 1791, unity within the alliance fractured. Accommodationists wanted to negotiate with the United States from a position of power, hoping that US officials would be more amenable to compromise, while nativists wanted to continue their military campaign. Despite this internal division, Dowd wrote, the native confederacy remained intact, albeit ineffective, against persistent pressure by the US government.

My research departs from the current scholarship about pan-Indianism between the 1780s-1790s in several ways. While previous studies emphasized that the membership and leadership structure of the pan-Indian alliance evolved over time, my research finds that the pan-Indian alliance changed so much over the course of the 1780s, it became unrecognizable from the one formed at Sandusky in 1783 in terms of its goals, membership, and leadership. Contrary to Dowd, I believe that the rift inside the native resistance movement actually occurred three years prior to St. Clair's defeat, in the summer of 1788, when US Indian Commissioners began pressing the Ohio Country Indians to negotiate a definitive treaty that would solidify land cessions made by Indian nations from 1784-1786. The Indian Confederation rejected the validity of these treaties because they were conducted without the approval and participation of the alliance, but its members were divided about how to respond. Moderate leaders like Joseph Brant of the Six Nations advocated a compromise boundary between the United States and Indian Territory to avoid a prolonged and destructive war. The militant factions of the alliance rejected Brant's compromise, maintaining that the Ohio River was the only boundary they would accept. The debate between negotiation and war became so contentious that it fractured the pan-Indian movement into two separate entities that operated entirely independent of each other from that point forward. I refer to the first iteration of the pan-Indian movement as the "Sandusky Alliance," which existed from 1783 through 1788 and was composed of both militants and moderates. After the schism in 1788, pro-war advocates abandoned the Sandusky Alliance to form the Northwest Confederacy. They vowed to continue the war against the United States, depopulate all of the white settlements north of the Ohio River, and establish Ohio River as the permanent border between whites and Indians. Although the Sandusky Alliance continued to

exist after 1788, these two wings of the pan-Indian movement operated separately and had no meaningful influence on the policies of the other. Each worked to defend native lands using the diametrically opposed tactics of peaceful negotiations and warfare, while simultaneously trying to discredit and undermine the other side and win support from neutral Indian Nations and the British Indian Department.

While internal division hindered the Indians' ability to defend their territorial sovereignty, the most direct threat to native lands was the army and military establishment of the United States. The most comprehensive works that focus specifically on the early years of the post-independence US Army are William H. Guthman's book *March to Massacre: A History of the First Seven Years of the United States Army, 1784-1791* and Richard M. Lytle's *The Soldiers of America's First Army, 1791*. Guthman followed the creation of the US Army from the end of the Revolutionary War: how the soldiers were recruited, paid, trained, and subjected to discipline, as well as the nature of the work they performed during their service. Lytle focused on the "chain of events" that led to the Battle of a Thousand Slain. He also described the military organizations that composed St. Clair's army—regular soldiers, levies, and militia units.<sup>48</sup> McConnell's book, *Army and Empire*, is perhaps the most detailed work that investigates the daily lives of British troops who occupied England's frontier posts between the Seven Years' War and the American Revolution, but his study does not extend into the period after the Revolution. In fact, there were many parallels between the experiences of those British soldiers and the lives of men who served in the US Army after the war. Both faced the seasonal fluctuations of temperature and weather in the Old Northwest, and their daily routines were defined more by difficult physical labor rather

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<sup>48</sup> Richard M. Lytle, *The Soldiers of America's First Army, 1791* (Lanham, Md.: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2004), 2.

than fighting battles. Commissioned officers in both armies separated themselves from their men according to the social norms of that time, while noncommissioned officers were responsible for supervising the daily work routines of the enlisted men and administering discipline. Frontier service had an equalizing effect on the men and officers because they shared privation amid scarcity in the encampments and on campaign. Reducing the size of the British and US armies in peacetime meant that men who could perform skilled labor or artisanal work typically left the army because they could make more money in civilian life. Frontier posts were places of great gender and racial diversity due to the presence black servants, as well as the wives and children of soldiers and officers who accompanied their husbands during their deployment.

My research has found that the similarities between the experiences of British and US soldiers can only be taken so far. McConnell emphasized that English soldiers were well supplied, as food and equipment arrived at British frontier posts through somewhat reliable supply chains established by the British government in North America. They were paid on time and received bonuses for performing manual labor at the forts. The same things could not be said about US soldiers in the postwar army, as political dysfunction and bureaucratic mismanagement created significant difficulties for American troops over the course of the 1780s and 1790s. Congress failed to appropriate funds to pay them and decreased their monthly wages on a regular basis. Mismanagement by the War Department left remote frontier outposts on the brink of starvation at times. In other cases, the Quartermaster's Department failed to supply the men with proper tents to shelter themselves or forgot to send the equipment needed to construct fortifications and defensive works on campaigns into Indian Territory.

No previous historian has studied the individual soldiers who served in St. Clair's army, specifically what motivated them to enlist and persevere through the hardships they faced. Calloway was correct that "blaming the troops [in St. Clair's army] was a convenient way to deflect criticism from generals, politicians, contractors, and land speculators whose actions of lack of action might have contributed to the disaster," but no other scholar has challenged the findings of the congressional investigation and provided evidence that reassigns the blame elsewhere.<sup>49</sup> My research disputes the contention that the soldiers were to blame for the loss. By examining why the soldiers were drawn into the army, the daily hardships they faced, and the inadequacies of their training and preparation, my findings show that much of their conduct is easily explained. At the same time, I suggest that St. Clair, his subordinate officers, the War Department, and President Washington, deserve much more blame than previous historians have assigned to them. The reality was that the soldiers' poor performance was the direct result of things that were completely beyond their control—lack of economic opportunity, political pressure, and bureaucratic dysfunction. Perhaps more than any other factor, members of the military and political establishment eschewed a conservative, methodical approach to winning the war because they believed it would be tantamount to losing face—diplomatically and militarily—to the Northwest Confederacy and their warriors. It was this stubborn pride, imbued with undertones of native inferiority, that doomed the US Army in 1791.

This study suggests that the issues of statecraft, economic and territorial management, Indian Policy, land speculation, and the pan-Indian resistance movement must be looked at collectively to comprehend the evolution of the US government from a confederation of

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<sup>49</sup> Calloway, *Victory with No Name*, 8.

autonomous states into a constitutional republic. The Northwest Indian War revealed the need to strengthen the national government's power, and St. Clair's defeat motivated the constitutional republic to bring that power to bear upon Indians and settlers in the Old Northwest, enabling the United States to assert its sovereignty as a nation-state. It gave birth to the idea that territorial conquest would allow the United States to join the ranks of the world's imperial powers.

## CHAPTER 1

### BRITISH IMPERIALISM IN THE OLD NORTHWEST

Many of the problems that plagued the US government in its earliest years were rooted in conflicts that had simmered since the 1760s, the height of the British Empire in North America. The conclusion of the Seven Years' War saw England replace France as the dominant imperial power in North America.<sup>50</sup> It was also the catalyst for the colonial independence movement when, after the war, colonial officials found it increasingly difficult to control defiant British subjects who seemingly challenged every edict issued by the Royal Government. They smuggled goods to avoid tariffs, refused to pay taxes, chafed when England sent its army to provide security in the colonies, and pushed their settlements westward over the Appalachian Mountains onto Indian lands. While these issues fed the spirit of unrest through the 1770s, they also reflected elements of a unique political culture that affected US self-governance during the Revolution and afterward.<sup>51</sup>

After the era of French imperialism in North America ended in 1763, British officials asserted their control over the intricate web of Indians and traders who dominated the frontier fur trade. The Algonquian Indians of the *pays d'en haut* in the 1760s had previously been displaced from their land by the Iroquois Confederacy during the Beaver Wars in the mid-to-late 1600s, forcing them to seek refuge around the southern and western shores of Lake Michigan. French

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<sup>50</sup> Also referred to as the French and Indian War.

<sup>51</sup> Fred Anderson, *Crucible of War: The Seven Years' War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754-1766* (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), 520–522; 649–651.



colonial officials at Detroit developed a military and cultural alliance with these besieged peoples that enabled them to push the Iroquois and their English allies out of the Ohio Country, reasserting French and Algonquian control over the Old Northwest. This symbiotic relationship, which Richard White called “the middle ground,” was both strategic and economic in nature. It was based on reciprocal trade and gift-giving, conducted largely on Native American terms, and endured until England ousted France from North America in 1763.<sup>52</sup>

England’s borderland policies were often contradictory and self-defeating. After 1763, General Geoffrey Amherst tried to cut expenditures while simultaneously trying maintain peace with the Indians on the frontier. Part of these cost-cutting measures included the rejection of reciprocal exchange and gift-giving with native peoples because Amherst felt England’s victory over the French would awe them into submission. English officials believed such diplomatic measures were unnecessary, a sign of weakness, and too expensive to maintain over the long term. The Indians would have no choice but to submit to British authority, Amherst’s believed, because they feared Great Britain’s military capabilities and had no other imperial powers to use as leverage. Both assumptions proved to be fatal, literally and figuratively.<sup>53</sup>

The Seven Years' War had a profound impact on diplomatic interactions between Indians and whites. Setbacks in the early years of the war taught the English the importance of having native allies in frontier warfare. To secure Indian neutrality during the later years of the war, the British vowed to abandon the military posts they held in the Ohio Country, to act as mediators in disputes between the Great Lakes Indians and the Six Nations, to provide trading posts in the

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<sup>52</sup> White, *Middle Ground*, 1–13, 29–36, 115, 260.

<sup>53</sup> White, *Middle Ground*, 1–13, 256–268.

interior of the Ohio Country, trade with Indians on favorable terms and, most importantly, prevent whites from crossing the Appalachian Mountains to settle on Indian lands. After the war was over, however, British officials in Canada quickly reneged on their word. Several factors, including excessive land lust among white frontiersmen and the thriftiness of the British Indian Department, subverted those promises.<sup>54</sup>

British colonists took advantage of the chaos created by the war and established communities beyond the Appalachian Mountains, which had long served as the *de facto* barrier between white and Indian settlements. Many emigrants were drawn by the chain of British forts that ran from the southern shores of the Great Lakes through present-day western Pennsylvania into Tennessee. Settlers occupied Indian lands near the frontier posts to exploit economic opportunities created by the garrisons' need for food and hand-crafted goods, offering their services as farmers, blacksmiths, gunsmiths, coopers, and wainwrights. While these frontier communities eased the logistical burden for the British government, they also created "an ironic symbiosis . . . between the forts and settlers," historian Fred Anderson explained, "that placed contradictory pressures on commanders . . . who sought to discourage the squatters on whom their garrisons were coming to rely."<sup>55</sup> Increased migration to the frontier created conflict between whites and Natives and created a widespread Indian uprising in the *pays d'en haut* known as Pontiac's War. Native warriors hoped that defeating the English would inspire their

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<sup>54</sup> David Dixon, "'We Speak as One People': Native Unity and the Pontiac Indian Uprising," in Daniel P. Barr, *The Boundaries Between Us: Natives and Newcomers along the Frontiers of the Old Northwest Territory, 1750-1850* (Kent, Oh.: The Kent State University Press, 2006), 52–53.

<sup>55</sup> Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 525.

former French allies to return and reinstate the paternal relationship of trade and diplomacy that had defined the French colonial period in North America.<sup>56</sup>

### Pontiac's War and the Causes of the Revolutionary War

Encroachments upon native lands and abandoning the middle ground sparked a rebellious spirit among Natives. The ideological foundation of the revolt was a revivalist, nativist, anti-British religious movement first articulated by the Delaware prophet, Neolin, who drew on the colonial experience of native peoples to foster unity among the Algonquians, regardless of tribal boundaries. The high-point of the rebellion occurred in the summer of 1763, when Indian warriors cut off outside communication to Fort Pitt and captured every British fort west of Detroit. Pontiac's War continued until 1765, but its greatest legacy was the Royal Proclamation of 1763, which prohibited white settlement west of the Appalachian Mountains. The Proclamation was both an acknowledgement of the power of pan-Indianism and an attempt to reassure the Indians that the English government had no designs to colonize their land. The Indians had proven that an armed rebellion could alter imperial policies to accommodate indigenous interests.<sup>57</sup>

In theory, the Royal Proclamation and England's suppression of Pontiac's Rebellion rendered England's military posts in the Old Northwest obsolete. If there were no illegal western settlers, there would be no conflict with the Indians. To the contrary, between the 1750s and 1760s, the Ohio Country was "a place where British authority, though assumed, was of

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<sup>56</sup> Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 522, 525–527; Solon J. Buck, *The Planting of Civilization in Western Pennsylvania* (Pittsburgh: The University of Pittsburgh Press, 1939), 139–140; Dixon, "We Speak as One People," 52–53.

<sup>57</sup> Buck, *Civilization in Western Pennsylvania*, 275–286, 288–313; Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 540–546, 550–551, 565, 633–637.

questionable validity,” according to historian Michael N. McConnell.<sup>58</sup> Amherst slashed the size of England’s western army to a skeleton-force of 350 men whose job was to support the British Indian Department and garrison six western posts: Forts Pitt, Detroit, Erie, Niagara, Oswego, and Michilimackinac. England abandoned its other forts north of the Ohio River and gave minimal attention to those south of it. The territory occupied by British troops was expansive, and the “cultural complexity of the world within which redcoats lived and worked,” made it especially difficult to manage.<sup>59</sup> Above all, they needed to forge compromises with Indians and white settlers to impose effective control—the introduction of “garrison government” in the West. The reduced military presence emboldened white squatters who flooded into the West with little fear of repercussions. British officials were helpless to stop them nor could they discourage the Indians from taking retaliatory measures into their own hands.<sup>60</sup>

Aspiring yeoman farmers from eastern Pennsylvania, western Virginia, and Maryland had been moving to western frontier of Pennsylvania even before the French and Indian War ended. Colonial officials turned a blind eye to many of these squatters for several reasons. First, as mentioned before, the western communities these settlers formed were a crucial link in England’s supply chain to its western posts. These settlements also increased the agricultural production of the colonies as a whole, created new trading partners for eastern merchants, and provided piece-of-mind for easterners because they were a buffer against Indian raids that might have otherwise targeted larger, more populated settlements in the East. Finally, wealthy eastern planters saw

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<sup>58</sup> Michael N. McConnell, *Army and Empire: British Soldiers on the America Frontier, 1758-1775* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 22.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, xvii.

<sup>60</sup> Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 635–637; McConnell, *Army and Empire*, 22, 51.

western land as a potential gold mine where they could expand their plantations. Virginia promised fifty acres of land to white men who agreed to move to the area and cultivate it as farmland, in an attempt to bolster Virginia's territorial claims over those of Pennsylvania. The interests of would-be speculators and Virginia intertwined, and they moved quickly to put themselves on the forefront of what they hoped would be a western land boom.<sup>61</sup>

The British government unintentionally boosted western settlement by taking basic steps to protect the territory it acquired from France in the 1763 Treaty of Paris. The massive acquisition of land necessitated the deployment of English soldiers at former French trading posts in the West: at St. Vincent's (present Vincennes), along the Wabash River in Indiana; Cahokia, on the Mississippi River across from present St. Louis; and Kaskaskia, a fur trading settlement located nearly eighty miles south of Cahokia on the east bank of the Mississippi River. The troops who campaigned in the West and garrisoned the frontier posts did not curtail or discourage westward migration, however. To the contrary, many of them were among the foremost speculators and boosters of westward expansion. When these men passed through Indian Country, they remarked on the abundance of trees, wild game, and fertile soil. At the war's end they joined the aspiring farmers and entrepreneurs who moved to the West seeking economic independence.<sup>62</sup>

The Proclamation itself was antithetical to England's imperial identity. The colonists, like English citizens, clung tightly to the Lockean notion of "natural rights"—life, liberty, and

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<sup>61</sup> Buck, *Civilization in Western Pennsylvania*, 130–138; B. Scott Crawford, "A Frontier of Fear: Terrorism and Social Tension along Virginia's Western Waters, 1742-1775," in *West Virginia History*, vol. 2, no. 2 (Fall 2008), 3–4, 9.

<sup>62</sup> Mann Butler, *A History of the Commonwealth of Kentucky* (Louisville, Ky.: Wilcox, Dickerman and Co., 1834), 18.

property—which made colonialism an essential expression of their personal freedom. White Christian men believed they had a God-given right to sustain themselves and their families, so they felt entitled to own land in fee simple and put it to plow. Landless colonists looked to the countless acres of “unoccupied” western land as an opportunity for self-sufficiency. Americans therefore felt justified when they claimed Indian lands for themselves. In their opinion, the Proclamation encroached upon their God-given rights.<sup>63</sup>

The motivations and actions of white trans-Appalachian settlers were emblematic of English settlement patterns that had existed since the beginning of British colonialism in North America. Historian Richard M. Brown speculated that the first settlers in the North Carolina Piedmont, western Virginia, western Pennsylvania, and eventually Kentucky, were squatters who had been denied land ownership along the East Coast by the colonial gentry. These men and their families held fast to the so-called “homestead ethic” which entailed “the right to have and hold, incontestably, . . . a homestead unencumbered by a ruinous economic burden,” and to live there “without fear of violence to person and property.”<sup>64</sup>

The origins of the homestead ideal were born in colonial New England, where towns gave away free plots of public land to encourage settlement. Over time, this evolved from a strategy to boost population numbers into a pervasive feeling among colonists that private land ownership was a right. State governments encouraged this belief. The Fifteenth Article of the Pennsylvania Bill of Rights declared, “All men have a natural inherent right to emigrate from

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<sup>63</sup> John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* (Project Gutenberg, 2010), sect. 6, 25–51, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/7370/7370-h/7370-h.htm> (accessed 13 July 2017); Alan Kulikoff, *From British Peasants to Colonial American Farmers* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 133–134, 138–141.

<sup>64</sup> Richard Maxwell Brown and Don E. Fehrenbacher, eds., *Tradition, Conflict, and Modernization: Perspectives on the American Revolution* (New York: Academic Press, Inc., 1977), 76.

one state to another that will receive them, or to form a new state in Vacant Countrys [*sic*], or in such Countries as they can purchase, whenever they think that thereby they may promote their happiness.”<sup>65</sup> In the southern and mid-Atlantic colonies, colonial governments made headright grants of fifty acres or more to families, feeding the ubiquitous notion that moving to “open” land, and “improving” it, would entitle the occupant to a fee-simple title, safe from legal challenge, because they were protected by “the Rule of Natural Justice.”<sup>66</sup> Theoretical ownership and hopeful promises by colonial and state governments were not admissible evidence in courts of law, however. For settlers without title in fee simple, feelings of insecurity grew in tandem with indignation about their “God-given right” to private property. Headright claims were often disputed in the legal system, seized through violence, or confiscated due to excessive debt. For squatters, punitive actions such as these proved that powerful public officials and wealthy citizens were leveraging their wealth and power to deprive ordinary men of economic freedom. Illegal settlers feared they would be reduced to penury, like peasants in Europe.<sup>67</sup>

The settlement of Kentucky, western Pennsylvania, and western Virginia marked the beginning of the trans-Appalachian land rush. Settlers who moved into these areas were in many cases the ideological descendants of the piedmont migrants. Most were uneducated. Some were former indentured servants who had fulfilled their contracts but were denied their “freedom dues” due to a lack of arable land in the East. Many of these would-be farmers were too poor to

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<sup>65</sup> Debate about military vs. civil authority in Northwest Territory, no date, in Northwest Territory Papers, 1755-1822, William Clements Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>66</sup> Brown and Feherenbacher, *Tradition, Conflict, and Modernization*, 78.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 76–79.

purchase titles to land in the western North Carolina or Virginia, so they fled across the mountains into Kentucky.<sup>68</sup>

A small number of squatters in the West were motivated by profit. This group included middling land-jobbers, who wanted to add farmland to their portfolio, and aspiring land barons in search of speculative opportunities. These were men of mostly moderate means who hoped to make money from a growing but largely untapped market for goods in the West. While the possibility of constructing a western trading empire was tempting, it was mostly fantasy. The largest markets for surplus goods were often far away, either sixty miles upriver in Pittsburgh, six hundred miles downriver in Louisville, or over a thousand miles away in New Orleans. Furthermore, these settlers had established themselves in the middle of Indian territory, surrounded on all sides by native peoples who were determined to defend their villages, farms, families, and hunting grounds. Water was a necessity for farming and husbandry, so white interlopers typically established their fields and pastures close to rivers or creeks, which were highly susceptible to flooding during the rainy seasons of spring and fall, or when the winter snowpack melted. Because the ever-present danger of Indian attacks prevented most frontiersmen from venturing deep into the woods to hunt game, they exhausted the resources around their settlements instead. Due to these difficult conditions, most early settlers barely eked out a subsistence for themselves. Selling surplus goods or entering the peltry trade was usually the furthest thing from their minds.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Brown and Fehrenbacher, *Tradition, Conflict, and Modernization*, 76-79; Buck, *Civilization in Western Pennsylvania*, 129-131.

<sup>69</sup> Stephen Aron, *How the West Was Lost: The Transformation of Kentucky from Daniel Boone to Henry Clay* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 30.



Economic hardship had been a reality for many white Americans since the establishment of the colonies, but the turbulent economic and political environment of the second half of the eighteenth century exacerbated the plight of the poorest colonists and drove them toward the West. Many European peasants emigrated to America when they were unable to acquire their own land in Germany, England, Ireland, or Scotland. As population density along the East Coast increased, poorer, landless settlers could choose between two options: submit to tenancy on the farms of landed elites or push west onto Indian land.<sup>70</sup>

Poor farmers abandoned the relative security of coastal areas and moved into the piedmont of North Carolina to gain autonomy over their situation and to become freeholders. Opportunities for land ownership were limited in the East because of what historian Richard Maxwell Brown referred to as a “land-population-wealth crisis.” With only a fixed amount of land available, rapid population growth along the eastern seaboard created a significant disparity between the wealthiest thirty percent of the population, which grew rapidly. The rich got richer in a booming economy, while the fortunes of middle- and lower-class farmers either stagnated or declined.<sup>71</sup>

Westward migration increased as settlers came to Kentucky and western Virginia after the Seven Years' War to claim the military bounties they had earned for their service to Great Britain. These men surveyed plots of land, undeterred by the Royal Proclamation of 1763. Although such actions were illegal, these western areas were so remote that colonial governments along the eastern seaboard could do little to stop them. The first whites who ventured into these lands in

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<sup>70</sup> Kulikoff, *British Peasants to American Farmers*, 129, 132–138.

<sup>71</sup> Kulikoff, *British Peasants to American Farmers*, 150; Brown and Fehrenbacher, *Tradition, Conflict, and Modernization*, 74–75.

the 1750s and early 1760s marveled at the seemingly endless expanse of fertile land. Pioneers marveled at large bison traces that crisscrossed the countryside and penetrated the forests. These paths ran for miles and often converged at salt licks, which made excellent hunting spots for the abundance of wild game that permeated the area. Such observations inevitably made their way to the East Coast and ignited a veritable “land fever” over the Kentucky wilderness.<sup>72</sup>

Much of the land these westward-bound emigrants settled had not been ceded by its indigenous owners, however. Would-be speculators and the Iroquois Confederacy—who had formed an alliance with the colony of Pennsylvania to control white and Algonquian settlement of the Pennsylvania borderlands—protested these illegal land seizures. Pennsylvania made several ineffective attempts to remove the squatters who, despite threats that trespassers would be left to the Indians, were undaunted. Neither the Pennsylvania militia nor the British army had enough troops to remove them.<sup>73</sup>

The influx of squatters into the West and the interracial violence that followed prompted England to negotiate the Treaty of Fort Stanwix in 1768. This agreement established a definitive physical boundary along the Ohio and Tennessee Rivers that separated whites and Indians which, in theory, and, would be easier to enforce than the Appalachian Ridge. British officials hoped that legalizing the contested settlements would promote peace in the West. Moving the border also enriched a handful of land speculators who were directly involved in the negotiations, British negotiators Thomas McKee and George Croghan. Croghan acquired over one hundred thousand acres in the cession for his efforts. The 1768 treaty had other far-reaching implications.

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<sup>72</sup> Butler, *History of the Commonwealth*, 20–24.

<sup>73</sup> Merrell, *Into the American Woods*, 35–36.

From 1783 until the mid-1790s, Indians from the Old Northwest cited the 1768 Treaty of Fort Stanwix to justify their belief that the Ohio River should continue to serve as the physical border between white and native settlements, and were willing to go to war to defend that principle.<sup>74</sup>

Treaty of Fort Stanwix in 1768 marked England's final effort to forestall a race war in the West. Through negotiations with the Six Nations—who presented themselves as the representatives for the Algonquian tribes who occupied western Pennsylvania, western Virginia, and Kentucky—England secured a modified border that accommodated the illegal settlements. Rather than holding the squatters accountable, the proceedings at Fort Stanwix retroactively endorsed their aggressive actions and set a precedent that the US government grudgingly upheld in the 1780s and 1790s. Squatters on Indian lands henceforth expected the protective power of their government to shield them from the consequences of stealing Indian land.<sup>75</sup>

The settlement of Kentucky now began in earnest. Daniel Boone was the most famous of this first wave of legal settlers into Kentucky. He was a veteran of the French and Indian War who served as a wagoner during General James Braddock's defeat in July of 1755.<sup>76</sup> During Braddock's ill-fated campaign, Boone became friendly with a fellow teamster, James Findley, who had worked as a packer for English fur trader George Croghan in the Ohio Valley before the war. Through the long days and nights as Braddock's army marched toward its doom, Findley

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<sup>74</sup> Eric Hinderaker, *Elusive Empires: Constructing Colonialism in the Ohio Valley, 1673-1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 168–170; Buck, *Civilization in Western Pennsylvania*, 139–142; Merrell, *Into the American Woods*, 295.

<sup>75</sup> Hinderaker, *Elusive Empires*, 165; Michael N. McConnell, *A Country Between: The Upper Ohio Valley and Its Peoples, 1724-1774* (Lincoln, Ne.: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 253.

<sup>76</sup> To avenge George Washington's defeat at Fort Necessity in 1754, General James Braddock led a British soldiers to make a punitive strike against Fort Duquesne in the summer of 1755, with Washington serving as his aide-de-camp. Braddock's force was ambushed along the Monongahela River by a combined force of French soldiers and their Indian allies who killed or wounded nearly one thousand of the two thousand troops Braddock had with him. Braddock, who received a fatal wound in the chest during the battle, died as the remnants of his force retreated to Fort Cumberland and was buried in the middle of the road. Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 77, 86, 92, 104-107.

regaled Boone with stories about the lush river valleys of the trans-Appalachian West. Findley even accompanied Boone on his first hunting trip into Kentucky, along the Red River, in the late fall and winter of 1769-1770.<sup>77</sup>

Over the course of the 1770s, the boosterism of individuals like Boone was not the only factor that encouraged settlers from western Virginia and North Carolina to relocate into Kentucky. Land syndicates like the Transylvania Company offered plots to landless farmers for reduced prices and other incentives. Some adventurers sought land of their own, where they could live free from the oppressive colonial hierarchy in North Carolina. Others émigrés were former loyalists to the British Crown. When the Revolutionary War moved into the Carolina backcountry, Patriots targeted Tories with aggressive reprisals and forced them to move to Kentucky to escape the violence. Patriot though he was, Boone certainly did nothing to stop the arrival of these British sympathizers. In fact, he had familial connections to some of them. Boone's uncle by marriage, Morgan Bryan, was a Loyalist who was killed in a battle near the Bryans' family settlement outside of present Farmington, North Carolina. The presence of bitter ex-Tories, who harbored strong feelings against the US government, played a significant role in Bluegrass politics until Kentucky gained statehood in 1792.<sup>78</sup>

It did not take long for the land in Kentucky to fill up with would-be settlers. In many cases, the same people who had left western North Carolina, Virginia, and Maryland to settle in Kentucky were once again victimized by many of the same forces that had drawn them into

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<sup>77</sup> Butler, *History of the Commonwealth*, 18–19; John Mack Faragher, *Daniel Boone: The Life and Legend of an American Pioneer* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1992), 69.

<sup>78</sup> Faragher, *Daniel Boone*, 47, 98, 108–109, 120–123, 202–203; Samuel Cole Williams, *Dawn of Tennessee Valley and Tennessee History* (Johnson City, Tn.: The Watauga Press, 1937), 345–346; Kulikoff, *British Peasants to American Farmers*, 150.

Kentucky in the first place. Virginia's ambiguous land laws and lack of state regulation favored land speculation, and a general lack of oversight inevitably generated conflict. Aspiring land speculators hedged their bets by purchasing many claims at one time—oftentimes more than they could afford to pay for—hoping that by making claims in such large quantities, one or two would eventually pan out. This generated a mountain of paperwork and conflicting claims that only added to the confusion. Poor settlers who fled to the West as a matter of survival could not afford to purchase multiple claims, nor did they wield the political influence that speculators often enjoyed. Once their situation in Kentucky became untenable, poor and middling farmers were once again faced with a decision. They could choose between tenancy or destitution in Kentucky or push farther onto the frontier. Many of them contemplated moving to Indian Territory on the other side of the Ohio River.<sup>79</sup>

#### Birth of the “Spirit of Revolution” in British North America

Although the 1768 Treaty of Fort Stanwix legalized the squatters' aggressive actions, the colonists never forgot the lengths British officials had gone to deprive them of what they felt was their natural right to gain title to Indian lands in the West. Resentment over the Royal Proclamation manifested itself thirteen years later, in 1776, when the Declaration of Independence denounced the King for “raising the conditions of new Appropriations of Lands.”<sup>80</sup> The Founders realized that territorial expansion would be necessary to alleviate population pressure and cement the nation's position as geopolitical powerhouse. The inclusion of territorial expansion in the Declaration of Independence, which arguably embodies US national identity

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<sup>79</sup> Faragher, *Daniel Boone*, 240–245.

<sup>80</sup> “The Declaration of Independence” [http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration\\_transcript.html](http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration_transcript.html), (accessed 29 June 2016).

even more than the Constitution, indicated that the acquisition and settlement of new lands would be a controversial topic of political discourse in new United States.

When colonists pressed against the eastern and southern boundaries of the Ohio Country, increased violence between whites and Indians prompted a shift in the relationship between the colonists and the British Empire that culminated in the War for Independence. The financial costs of the Seven Years' War inspired a growing sentiment among English officials that the colonies should assume some of the financial burden for maintaining order in North America, especially for regulating trade and maintaining a military presence that would help to establish peace on the frontier. Colonial officials believed “there was no relying on Americans, . . . [Their] assemblies would only support the empire if they could profit from it; that American taxpayers were tightfisted and self-interested; and that American soldiers were too insubordinate and desertion-prone to be entrusted with colonial defense.”<sup>81</sup> The British government tightened its grip, assumed total control over the Indian trade, and taxed it unilaterally. Royal officials also clamped down on smuggling to prevent Americans from circumventing tariffs that were paid to the Crown. Revenue-generating measures like these, British officials hoped, would defray the costs of colonial governance and maintain an army strong enough to deter Indian attacks in the West. Colonial authorities did not predict the sharp reaction that followed.<sup>82</sup>

Instead of fostering a greater sense of “ownership” among Americans for their own defense, England’s post-war policies precipitated a colonial backlash that resulted in the American Revolution. In short, Parliament’s passage of the Revenue Act (the so-called Sugar

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<sup>81</sup> Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 585.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 570–571.

Act) and the Currency Act in 1764 prompted an outcry from Americans against the power of the imperial government to tax colonial subjects who had no direct representation in Parliament. Colonial governments were also saddled with war debt. They, too, had contributed a great deal of money and soldiers to the British war effort against France. Americans believed that the assistance they offered was not an indication of their dependency on the Crown. Rather, it proved how effective collective action could be when they united a common cause, in this case, ending French imperialism in North America.<sup>83</sup>

Despite the fact that the parliamentary acts of 1764 affected a small subset of Americans, mainly merchants in East Coast cities, resistance to the American Duties Act and the Currency Act was widespread and forced England to rescind the laws. But the problem of revenue-generation remained. The Stamp Act and the Quartering Act were passed the following year and touched-off a new round of colonial resentment. The revenue from the Stamp Act was expected to grow as the colonies expanded and their legal dealings became more complex and intertwined. Unlike the acts passed in 1764, the Stamp Act affected nearly everyone in the colony, rich and poor alike, who conducted official business, read newspapers, or even played cards. These proposals were met with vocal opposition by colonial governments and mob violence until Parliament repealed the Stamp Act on March 17, 1766.<sup>84</sup>

The Quartering Act was no more popular in America than the Stamp Act. It was originally conceived as an amendment to England's annual Mutiny Act which outlined the rules by which the British Army operated within the British Isles. The Mutiny Act, however, did not

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 574–587.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 641–651, 657–661, 664–671, 679, 705–708.

apply to troops stationed in England's colonial possessions. General Thomas Gage appealed to have the Mutiny Act amended after the Seven Years' War because he feared that colonial assemblies would refuse requisitions for money, supplies, and lodging for the peacekeeping forces the Crown kept in America. Per the Quartering Act, Parliament dispatched troops to enforce adherence to the Stamp Act and forced Americans to provide shelter to them. The Quartering Act was not a broad usurpation of sovereignty from individual colonies, however. Benjamin Franklin admitted that the mandates of the Quartering Act did not exceed what had been expected of the colonies in the past because it did not allow military commanders to commandeer private dwellings to house English troops. But the optics were bad. Many colonial citizens and politicians were enraged that Great Britain would take such measures in a supposed time of peace.<sup>85</sup>

The rebellion in the New England worked in parallel with uprisings of restive colonists and slaves in the Tidewater region of Virginia. Unlike in Boston, where the movement was more of a top-down phenomenon, historian Woody Holton found that the spirit of revolution in Virginia was spurred by the actions of "Indians, merchants, slaves, and debtors" who occupied the lower end of the economic spectrum.<sup>86</sup> Wealthy Virginians—specifically the upper ten percent who owned the most slaves, the largest tracts of land, and set themselves apart from the lower classes through their consumption of luxury goods from England—formed a quasi-gentry who dominated electoral politics and the Virginia House of Burgesses. People on the bottom of

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<sup>85</sup> Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 647–651.

<sup>86</sup> Woody Holton, *Forced Founders: Indians, Debtors, Slaves, and the Making of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), xvii.



the socioeconomic scale pushed well-heeled Virginians to support revolutionary ideology through economic boycotts that challenged the gentry's connections to British merchants.<sup>87</sup>

Other factors played an equally significant role in uniting Virginians of all economic stripes behind independence. To suppress a growing wave of revolutionary sentiment in Virginia, its royal governor, Lord Dunmore, issued a proclamation in 1775 that promised freedom to slaves who fought for the British army. Dunmore hoped his edict would foment a large-scale exodus of enslaved labor and indentured servants that could be leveraged to England's advantage. Considering that Virginia's slave population had increased over the course of the 1760s and into the 1770s, wealthy Virginians were justifiably frightened that England was trying to incite a slave rebellion to undercut the independence movement. The worst-case scenario in their minds was the possibility that liberated bondsmen would form an alliance with disaffected Indians to the west, whose fealty had been cultivated by England since the end of Pontiac's Rebellion. Such an alliance would threaten the lives of western Virginians and Kentuckians, and could undermine the war effort in the East. Wealthy Virginians therefore embraced the revolutionary cause out of necessity, believing that achieving independence from England would allow them to reimpose order through self-government and forestall the possibility of an armed rebellion by disaffected Indians, slaves, and small landowners.<sup>88</sup>

Much of the colonial tumult Great Britain faced during 1760s presaged challenges that would plague the United States throughout the American Revolution and into the postbellum period. Land-hungry US citizens continued their aggressive movements onto Indian land in the

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<sup>87</sup> Holton, *Forced Founders*, 133-137, 142, 152-154, 163.

<sup>88</sup> Eric Foner, *Gateway to Freedom: The Hidden History of the Underground Railroad* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 32-36; Alan Taylor, *The Internal Enemy: Slavery and War in Virginia, 1772-1832* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2013), 20-24; Holton, *Forced Founders*, 139-142.

West. The Confederation government was powerless to stop them because land laws were mostly enforced by the individual states that claimed sovereignty over those areas. The national and state governments were saddled with an enormous war debt, but the Articles of Confederation did not grant Congress the power to levy direct taxes. Without revenue from taxation, the Confederation had no money to pay outstanding obligations to the soldiers who had fought for independence, nor could it pay off substantial debts to other countries that had helped to fund the war effort. To make matters worse, the US economy was mired in a deep recession that was particularly devastating for ninety-percent of the population who were farmers and merchants. Violent uprisings among disenchanted citizens and the threat of warfare in the West revealed that Congress held inadequate authority to field an army capable of keeping the peace. Over the next four years, these challenges created a push for a strong federal republic that could effectively manage those issues.

## CHAPTER 2

### CONFEDERATION IN CRISIS

On July 4, 1776, a set of loosely organized British colonies formally announced their independence from Great Britain. Statecraft was more complicated than simply declaring independence, however. The so-called “Founders” had to figure out how to govern the new country as they went. US politicians borrowed some ideas from their former British colonizers and created new ones based on the unique circumstances they faced. The colonies needed a national government that could direct the war effort against England and bring it to a successful conclusion. After the war, the United States faced several challenging issues. Its central government and the individual states were saddled with an enormous war debt. The national economy was mired in a deep depression. The 1783 Treaty of Paris contained a number of provisions that the US government was obligated to enforce. It had to establish governance over, and manage the settlement of, several million acres of land that England ceded to the United States. Territorial acquisition required the creation of a national Indian Policy that would guide diplomatic relations with the Indians who owned those lands. When native peoples challenged US expansion, the frontier plunged into a decade-long war. This conflict—the Northwest Indian War—tested the Confederation government, exposed its shortcomings, and influenced the authority the Constitution granted to the federal government regarding foreign relations, Indian policy, management of the economy, and military affairs.

The First Challenge of Self-Government: Fighting for Independence

US politicians realized that collective action was the only way to manage the challenges of war. On June 11, 1776, members of the Continental Congress discussed organizing the colonies under a mutual agreement. The final version of the Articles of Confederation was completed on November 15, 1777, and submitted to the states for ratification. In theory, the Articles were not binding until all thirteen states ratified them. Disputes between landed colonies and those that claimed no western lands delayed the ratification until Maryland joined the Confederation on March 1, 1781, six months before Lord Cornwallis surrendered at Yorktown. Nevertheless, the Congress operated under the Articles throughout the War for Independence.<sup>1</sup>

From its inception, the Confederation was designed to prosecute the war against England. For the individual states, the Confederation was “a firm league of friendship . . . for their common defense, the security of their liberties, and their mutual and general welfare,” and offered protection “against all force offered to, or attacks made upon them.”<sup>2</sup> It enabled Congress to create the Continental Army and call up state militia forces. Issues such as territorial expansion and admitting new states, which had nothing to do with the war effort, were conspicuously omitted. The narrow scope of authority granted to the national government proved to be its biggest shortcoming both in war and peacetime.

Throughout the war, General George Washington and other military commanders were handicapped by inadequate funding for the Continental Army. The Articles failed to grant Congress the power to impose direct taxes, which severely hindered the prosecution of the war.

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<sup>1</sup> “The Articles of Confederation, March 1, 1781,” *The Avalon Law Project: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy* (Yale Law School: The Avalon Project, 2008), [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th\\_century/artconf.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/artconf.asp) (accessed 27 June 2016); Forrest McDonald, *E Pluribus Unum: The Foundation of the American Republic, 1776-1790*, Second Edition (Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1979), 38-50.

<sup>2</sup> United States, Articles of Confederation, art. 3.

The individual states, according to historian Worthington C. Ford, expected the Articles to “contribute much to the support of their public credit and the restoration of the value of the paper money; produce unanimity in their councils and add weight to the negotiations abroad, and ... establish the best foundation for [post-war] prosperity.”<sup>3</sup> In practice, the Confederation Congress achieved none of those things.

Throughout the war, Washington and his commanding officers foundered at the mercy of state governments. Other than a small revenue stream from tariffs, the money to fund both state and national forces came from the states themselves or loans from private citizens and foreign governments. During the war, many states experienced their own financial hardships and protected their resources to provide for their own citizens. Consequently, they were inconsistent and unreliable when it came to supplying the Continental Army with provisions, clothes, and munitions. The Continental Congress had to rely on the states’ beneficence because the Articles did not grant it compulsory power to force states to comply with its requisitions for supplies and money. Financial issues did not end with the war, either. Without a more significant contribution from the states, financial disaster loomed ahead in the postbellum period.<sup>4</sup>

### Challenge Two: The Economy

Economic stagnation gripped the country in the years after the war. The United States borrowed total of \$170 million to fund the war (equivalent to \$3.9 billion in today’s dollars). \$66 million of that amount was printed or coined by the states, while Congress issued nearly \$48 million in specie and Continental scrip. The thirteen states collectively borrowed \$24 million,

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<sup>3</sup> Worthington C. Ford as quoted in Samuel B. Griffith, II, *The War for American Independence: From 1760 to the Surrender at Yorktown in 1781* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 525.

<sup>4</sup> Fiske, *Critical Period*, sect. 1543, 1579, 1593–1617, 1696–1703; Griffith, *War for American Independence*, 489–491..

while Congress had issued just over \$28 million of private debt certificates and borrowed an additional \$10 million dollars from foreign creditors. The first priority of Congress in the postbellum period was to repay those obligations to establish the “full faith and credit” of the United States for domestic and foreign investors.<sup>5</sup>

The war caused a recession that rivaled the Great Depression of the 1930s. Economic productivity decreased sharply. With such a large part of the workforce enlisted in the army, many jobs went unfilled. Seventy-five percent of the free population at this time worked in agriculture, so filling the ranks of the army caused a dramatic downturn in farm productivity. As a result, families had fewer surplus goods to sell and many incurred debt to make up for the shortfall. Furthermore, the war was fought on US soil. It destroyed homes, mills, fields, shops, boats, and other property that contributed to economic productivity. Slave owners in the South lost millions of dollars in human property when their slaves took advantage of war-time chaos and escaped to British lines in exchange for promises of freedom.<sup>6</sup>

Money shortages also contributed to the financial downturn. In times of financial distress, specie—coins minted from gold and silver—were the only widely accepted form of currency. The only coins that circulated in the United States at that time were foreign (the federal government did not mint its own specie until 1793). As a result, the Confederation had no control over the money supply, which declined steadily throughout the war and in the years that followed. Two factors caused an unending outflow of money. First, foreign merchants only

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<sup>5</sup> John L. Smith, Jr., “How Was the Revolutionary War Paid For?” *Journal of the American Revolution: Online Magazine*, 23 February 2015, [https://allthingsliberty.com/2015/02/how-was-the-revolutionary-war-paid-for/#\\_edn14](https://allthingsliberty.com/2015/02/how-was-the-revolutionary-war-paid-for/#_edn14) (accessed 1 August 2016); Woody Holton, *Unruly Americans and the Origins of the Constitution* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), 22–23, 97; present value of 1783 dollars converted at “Measuringworth.com.”

<sup>6</sup> Holton, *Unruly Americans*, 26–28; Forrest McDonald, *We the People: The Economic Origins of the Constitution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 359–360.

accepted specie for the goods they sold in the United States. Second, after the war, foreign investors hesitated to invest large sums of money in the new nation due to its financial instability. The net effect was an unending decline of specie at a time when demand for gold and silver coins in the United States was extremely high. The value of the specie that was in circulation fluctuated wildly. In times of high demand, those who had access to specie often hoarded it to create scarcity that increased its value.<sup>7</sup>

Specie was the only legal tender universally accepted by creditors to pay debt and tax obligations. In an economy where hard money was scarce, creditors held the upper hand. Farmers were at a severe disadvantage when they borrowed money. Real estate values declined in some areas by nearly sixty-six percent,. The value of livestock fell by half. One contemporary observer remarked that currency fluctuations and the devaluation of agricultural produce meant that debtors repaid their debts at a ratio of three pounds to every one pound of debt they owed. Government relief was not forthcoming because many states were torn between their financial obligations to the federal government and their own citizens. State legislatures were inundated with requests for relief, especially calls to print legal-tender paper money that could be used to pay debt obligations.<sup>8</sup>

Agriculture was not the only sector of the economy that suffered. In 1783, Parliament passed a bill mandating that all trade from the United States to the British West Indies be confined to British vessels only and placed import restrictions on goods shipped to the English mainland, hoping to issue a fatal blow to the East Coast maritime economy. Shipbuilders in the

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<sup>7</sup> Holton, *Unruly Americans*, 30-31, 81.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

United States held several advantages over their British counterparts. Their manufacturing costs were lower and the vessels they produced were of better quality. US shipbuilders sold their ships to domestic merchants who had a relatively short distance to travel between the East Coast and England's sugar islands compared with ships outbound from the British Isles. English officials were convinced the Americans would not respond to these restrictive measures because disunity among the states would prevent them from joining together in an embargo that could force England to backtrack. These actions effectively brought the US export trade to a halt and devastated the manufacturing centers and port cities along the eastern seaboard.<sup>9</sup>

Scarcity of money started a vicious cycle that made the recession of the 1780s intractable. Because Congress had little power over the national economy, it had few options to restore its damaged credit and could not take measures to mitigate the crisis. To make matters worse, the Articles could only be amended with the consent of all of the states. "In practical terms," historian Max Edling noted, this gave each state "a veto over national affairs."<sup>10</sup> Several members of Congress floated ill-fated proposals to amend the Articles and grant Congress the power to levy direct taxes on citizens and increase the import tariff. Both plans failed to gain unanimous consent and deprived Congress of the income it needed to pay one million dollars of interest that accrued on its foreign debts. Some politicians suggested generating revenue by selling the western lands the United States had recently acquired from England after the war.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> McDonald, *E Pluribus Unum*, 219; John Adams to John Jay, 19 July 1785, *Founders Online*, National Archives, last modified April 12, 2018, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/06-17-02-0141> (accessed 12 May 2018).

<sup>10</sup> Max E. Edling, *A Hercules in the Cradle: War, Money, and the American State, 1783-1867* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 31.

<sup>11</sup> McDonald, *E Pluribus Unum*, 49-57, 70, 229-230; Richard H. Kohn, *Eagle and Sword: The Federalists and the Creation of the Military Establishment in America, 1783-1802*, First Paperback Edition (New York: The Free Press, 1985), 20-21.



Beyond those measures, the national government's only option was to request money from the states and hope they complied. The Requisition of 1785 asked the thirteen states to collectively pay three million dollars to Congress. Individual states attempted to meet the request first by levying taxes on their own citizens, which was problematic because the tax burden Americans faced after the war was three to four times greater than during the colonial period. It was also ironic, Holton pointed out, that Americans had "rebelled against British tax collectors only to face even more voracious ones at home."<sup>12</sup> Tax increases only deepened the fiscal crisis and created pressure for the states to enact debt relief measures. Some Americans proposed that individual states print legal-tender paper money while others suggested consumption taxes on luxury and trade goods. One proposal required debtors to pay only the face value on bonds that had risen in value amid rampant speculation. When debt relief failed to materialize, some farmers had their property seized while other borrowers were imprisoned for non-payment. Such punitive measures did nothing to ameliorate the recession. Credit remained constricted and rural productivity continued to stagnate.<sup>13</sup>

Disaffection and alienation were not reserved to civilians. On June 21, 1783, a group of discharged Pennsylvania soldiers surrounded the Pennsylvania statehouse to pressure the state legislature to give them the back pay they were owed. Continental Army troops were called out to drive them away. In 1786, the state of Massachusetts levied a fifty dollar tax on all citizens—men, women, and children—to meet the state's debt obligations. Starting in late August 1786, a junior officer during the late war, Daniel Shays, led a group of protestors against this new tax.

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<sup>12</sup> Holton, *Unruly Americans*, 29.

<sup>13</sup> Holton, *Unruly Americans*, 28-29, 43-45, 55-57, 60-61, 65-66, 134-137; McDonald, *E Pluribus Unum*, 40.

His mob shut down several county courts and disrupted a meeting of the Massachusetts Supreme Court at Springfield. Local militia were unable to stop them, and neighboring states refused Governor James Bowdoin's request for assistance because they did not want to inspire rebellions among their own citizens.<sup>14</sup>

Veterans were not alone in their dissatisfaction. Vermont, New Hampshire, Virginia, and the Carolinas experienced anti-tax uprisings by farmers, debtors, and other citizens who were hit hard by the recession. Congress was helpless to intervene. Its operating expenses for 1785 were estimated at \$435,000, nearly half of which was set aside to pay for the national army. Despite the fact that military spending was the largest single line-item in the Confederation's budget, the US Army simply was too small and weak to intervene. The tax rebellions proved that Congress held neither the authority to fix the economic situation, nor the ability to raise an army that could effectively suppress or prevent domestic turmoil.<sup>15</sup>

The depressed economy, oppressive state taxation, the heavy yoke of debt, and agrarian uprisings also had another effect: they drove Americans from the East to the West. In the East, land was scarce, the economy was weak, and state governments levied taxes that sent many citizens to the poorhouse. For beleaguered Americans, many of whom had risked their own lives and financial security fighting for independence, the lands in the West represented a place where they hoped to settle peacefully and establish their financial independence free from the oppressive yoke of government.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Brown and Fehrenbacher, *Tradition, Conflict, and Modernization*, 83–88; Holton, *Unruly Americans*, 11–12, 145–148.

<sup>15</sup> Kohn, *Eagle and Sword*, 68–69.

<sup>16</sup> Rufus Putnam to George Washington, 5 April 1784, in Rowena Buell, ed., *The Memoirs of Rufus Putnam and Certain Official Papers and Correspondence* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1903), 223–224; Charles Gayarré, *History of Louisiana: The Spanish Domination* (New York: Redfield, 1854), 158–159.

### Challenge Three: Enforcing the Treaty of Paris

While post-war dissatisfaction among veterans and citizens was significant, the Confederation Congress faced a multitude of other problems that threatened postwar peace, prosperity, and the stability of the government. One of the Confederation's most vexing issues was its inability to enforce even the most basic elements of the Treaty of Paris. The Treaty was the result of seven years of armed conflict, thousands of lives lost, and millions of dollars in property damage. The treaty's provisions were the product of masterful negotiations by US commissioners Benjamin Franklin, John Jay, John Adams, and Henry Laurens, who capitalized on the momentum of the United States' improbable victory and skillfully pushed the parameters Congress had set for them. In doing so, they exacted concessions that were inconceivable when the war began and optimistic even at the war's end: unequivocal British recognition of US independence, massive territorial expansion, fishing rights off the Canadian coast, and navigation rights on the Mississippi River. At the same time, the US commissioners avoided making guarantees to protect Loyalists or their property and accomplished all of this largely without the input of their allies. Both France and Spain had been secretly working together to limit what England conceded to the United States as a way to curtail US power in the postwar world. Despite the laudable efforts of Adams, Jay, Franklin, and Laurens, it soon became apparent that the Confederation was too weak to enforce the treaty's provisions at home nor could it compel foreign powers to abide by the agreement. These failings discredited the legitimacy of the US government in the eyes of its own citizens and undermined its credibility on the global stage.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Richard B. Morris, *The Peacemakers: The Great Powers and American Independence* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1983), xiii, 18, 205-210, 308-310, 438-441.

In the postwar period, the first conflict between England and the United States arose over slavery. After the war began, Dunmore's Proclamation and similar decrees, like Sir Henry Clinton's Philipsburg Proclamation, cast the English army as liberators, and enslaved African Americans flocked to British lines seeking protection from their colonial masters. Many sought refuge in New York City, an impregnable military stronghold for the English Army after 1776. Of the estimated six thousand slaves who escaped during the war, one-third died, mostly from disease, while another third were repatriated to their masters after the war. When the British evacuated New York in November of 1783, Sir Guy Carleton took three thousand African Americans with him to Nova Scotia, two thirds of whom were former slaves, to honor the promises made by British officials.<sup>18</sup>

Virginians and other slaveholders were outraged and accused the English generals of violating the seventh article of the Treaty of Paris, which called for the immediate evacuation of the British Army "without causing any Destruction, or carrying away any Negroes or other Property of the American inhabitants."<sup>19</sup> Congress was powerless to do anything beyond protest the violation. Unsatisfied by the Confederation's lack of action, Virginians rejected the treaty's fourth article which required the full repayment of pre-war debts owed to British creditors. Citing Virginia's non-compliance with the fourth article, and the US government's inability to force them to do so, England refused to evacuate British soldiers from the forts it occupied along

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<sup>18</sup> Foner, *Gateway to Freedom*, 32–36; Taylor, *Internal Enemy*, 28–29.

<sup>19</sup> "Treaty of Paris," 3 September 1783, <https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?doc=6&page=transcript> (accessed 30 June 2016), art. 7.

the northern frontier bordering Canada: Fort Oswegatchie, Fort Oswego, Fort Niagara, Fort Presque Isle, Fort Sandusky, Fort Detroit, and Fort Michilimackinac [see Figure 1].<sup>20</sup>

British and US officials realized that the United States had no way to force either Virginia or Great Britain to comply with the treaty's articles. John Adams, who was serving as the US Ambassador to England, remarked that the British were confident the United States would not be able to seize the posts. Raising an army of that size would be difficult and expensive, "therefore, they think they may play with us as long as they please."<sup>21</sup> Adams correctly predicted the British would justify their actions based on the states' refusal to honor "old debts, and some other resolutions concerning the tories [*sic*] . . . contrary to the treaty."<sup>22</sup> The conflict over slaves thus neutered US sovereignty on several consequential levels. British occupation of the Great Lakes forts violated US territorial sovereignty (the issue would not be resolved until a decade later). In 1791, Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson suggested economic sanctions against England due to their continued occupation of those posts. Alexander Hamilton and others government officials opposed the sanctions, fearing they would undermine any chance of acquiring the forts through peaceful diplomacy. By 1791, however, the controversy over the frontier posts had morphed beyond a straightforward dispute about stolen slaves and delinquent debt. It had become a controversial issue in an ongoing war between the United States and a growing Indian alliance of

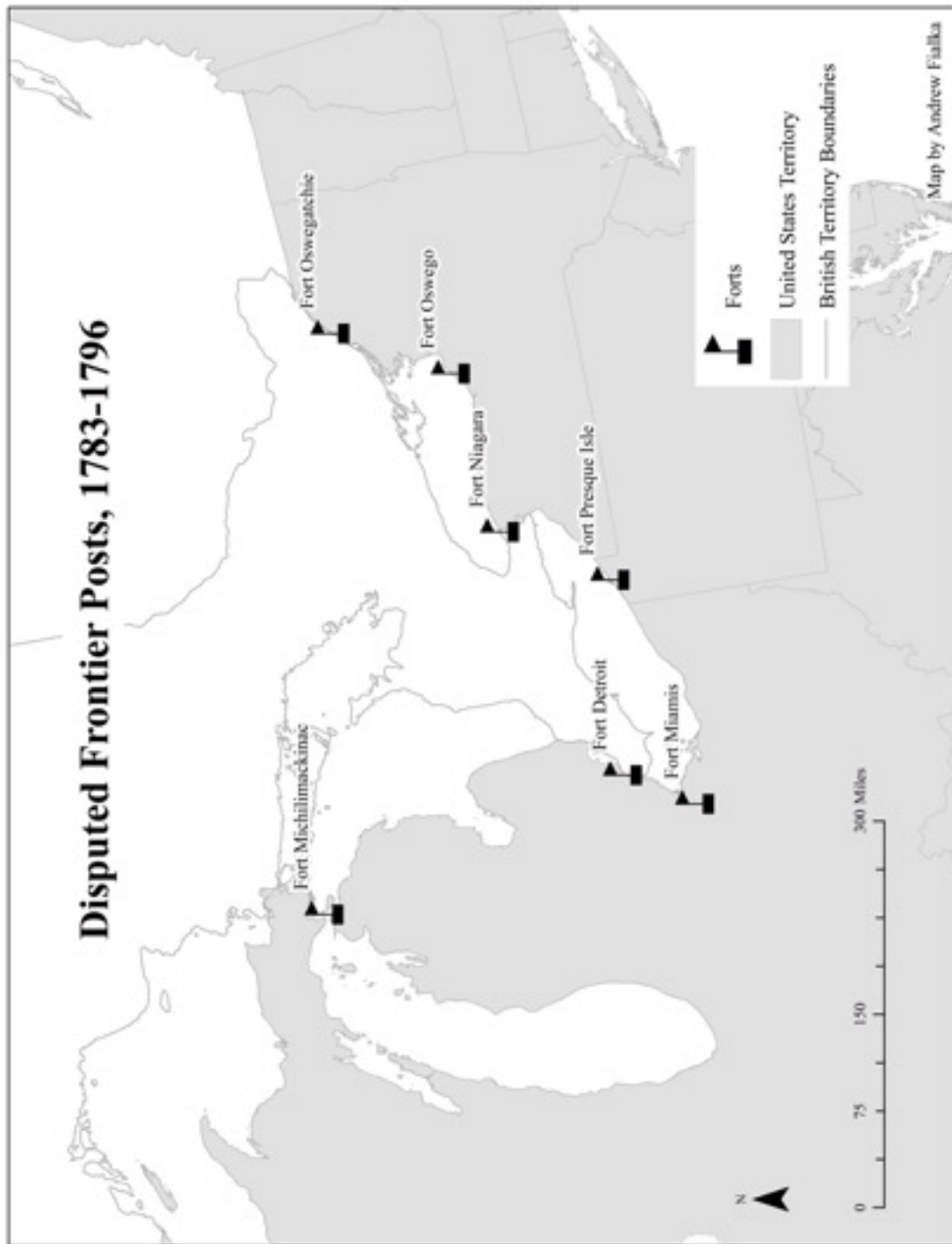
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<sup>20</sup> "Treaty of Paris," art. 4.; James R. Albach, *Annals of the West: Embracing a Concise Account of Principal Events Which Have Occurred in the Western States and Territories, from the Discovery of the Mississippi Valley to the year 1856* (Pittsburgh: W.S. Haven, Book and Job Printer, 1858), 414–417; "A Memorial to the Marquis of Carmarthen on the Frontier Posts," 30 November 1785, *Founders Online*, National Archives, last modified April 12, 2018, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/06-17-02-0320> (accessed 14 May 2018).

<sup>21</sup> John Adams to John Jay, December 1785, in United States State Department, *The Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States of America, from the Signing of the Definitive Treaty of Peace, 10th September 1783 to the Adoption of the Constitution, 4 March 1789*, vol. 2 (Washington: Blair & Rives, 1837), 556.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

Figure 1: Disputed Frontier Posts, 1783-1796



tribes from the Old Northwest Territory. It would not be the last time that the debate over slavery caused national divisiveness, political tension, and military conflict.<sup>23</sup>

From the mid-1780s through the 1790s, British Indian Department officials used their occupation of the Great Lakes forts to retain influence among the native peoples of the *pays d'en haut*. British traders helped them organize a resistance against US expansion into the Ohio Country. US politicians and military commanders knew this and debated the long-term ramifications. Henry Knox predicted that the forts would be “a source from whence will issue much evil,” and frontier peace would be impossible unless the posts were turned over to the United States.<sup>24</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel Josiah Harmar agreed and admitted that any treaties with the Indians would be “a farce,” as long as England occupied the forts.<sup>25</sup>

The experiences of Knox and Harmar during Revolutionary War had shaped their opinions about the influence British officials held among the Indians. During the late war, English officers had encouraged Indians to attack white settlements in the West to divert US troops away from military operations in the East and supplied Indians with guns, munitions, and other supplies to carry out their raids. White frontier communities were so decimated by these raids that the state of Virginia dispatched a force led by General George Rogers Clark to seize or destroy the British posts and neutralize Great Britain’s influence among Native Americans. Retaining the forts put England in an enviable strategic position. If the US government collapsed

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<sup>23</sup> Adams to Jay, December 1785, in US Department of State, *Diplomatic Correspondence*, 2:556; Franklin B. Sawvel, ed., *The Complete Anas of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: The Roundtable Press, 1903), 66–67.

<sup>24</sup> Henry Knox to Josiah Harmar, 23 August 1785, vol. 2, Josiah Harmar Papers, William Clements Library, University of Michigan (hereafter cited as Harmar Papers).

<sup>25</sup> Harmar to Knox, 7 May 1786, Harmar Papers, vol. 28.

or if some of the western territories seceded from the union, England would be close by to pick up the pieces.<sup>26</sup>

Economic concerns also motivated Great Britain's to keep the Great Lakes posts. General Richard Butler, one of three US Commissioners for Indian Affairs appointed by Congress to conduct treaties with the pan-Indian alliance, noted that frontier disturbances between US citizens and native peoples were often encouraged by fur traders who worked for the British Indian Department. These men wanted to protect their monopoly over the lucrative fur trade in the Great Lakes and Ohio Valley and, by extension, England's economic interests. English occupation of posts would also act as a bulwark to protect Canada from conquest if the trans-Appalachian region became too heavily populated with land-hungry Yankees.<sup>27</sup>

#### Challenge Four: Territorial Management and Federal Indian Policy

The dispute over the Great Lakes posts was merely one of several challenges to US territorial sovereignty that plagued the Confederation after the Treaty of Paris. In the second article, England granted a massive land cession to the United States that encompassed all of land east of the Mississippi River and south of the Great Lakes to the thirty-first parallel [see Figure 2]. The treaty more than doubled the geographic area of the United States: 490,000 square miles of territory were added to the 340,000 square miles that composed the thirteen original colonies. This land would become the industrial heart of the nation in the nineteenth century, but that future was decades away. In the immediate aftermath of the war, controlling it stretched the country's thin resources and drew the US into a decade-long war against the native peoples who

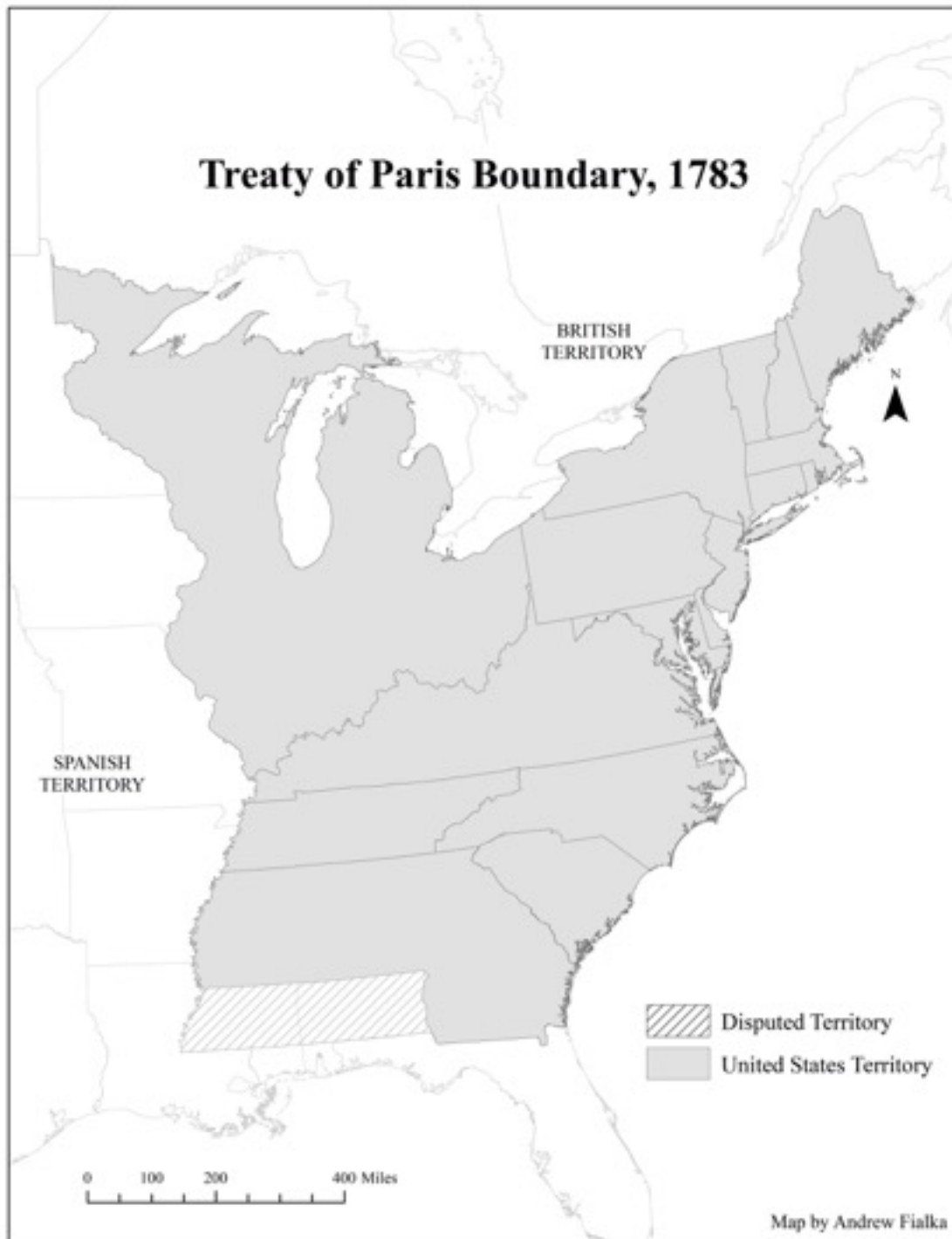
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<sup>26</sup> Butler, *History of the Commonwealth*, 46–58.

<sup>27</sup> “Journal of General Butler, Part I,” in Neville B. Craig, ed., *The Olden Time*, vol. 2 (Cincinnati: Robert Clarke & Co., 1876), 457–459; Albach, *Annals of the West*, 415–417.



Figure 2: Treaty of Paris Boundary, 1783



lived there. The Confederation was forced to come up with a plan of territorial management at the same time that it formulated the government's first Indian Policy.<sup>28</sup>

British officials had claimed sovereignty over the Old Northwest after the Seven Years' War, but the land was owned and occupied by Natives who did not participate in the Paris negotiations from 1781 through 1783. Any acknowledgement of their ownership and occupancy of the *pays d'en haut* was conspicuously absent from the ratified treaty. Despite this glaring omission, US officials recognized that Indian occupancy meant they would have to convince the Indians to cede the land before it could be divided, sold, and occupied by white settlers. The only territory that actually changed hands in the Treaty of Paris was four small military reservations around Kaskaskia, Vincennes, Cahokia, and Detroit. Those were the only lands that France owned title to before the 1763 Treaty of Paris. Great Britain had claimed sovereignty over the rest, yet recognized native ownership over it.

But how would the United States convince the Natives to surrender their lands? Although most Nations in the Old Northwest aligned themselves with England during the war, they did not consider themselves to be conquered people despite Great Britain's defeat. To the contrary, they had successfully defend their lands from US incursions during the conflict. Two months before the British Army surrendered at Yorktown, native forces led by Mohawk chief Joseph Brant inflicted a devastating defeat on Archibald Lochry and his company of Pennsylvania militia near present-day Aurora, Indiana. The Americans were traveling down the Ohio River to reinforce George Rogers Clark for an attack he planned against Fort Detroit. At the same time their British

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<sup>28</sup> "Treaty of Paris," art. 2; T.A. Frail, "Top 10 Nation-Building Real Estate Deals," in *Smithsonian Magazine Online*, 6 September 2009, <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/top-10-nation-building-real-estate-deals-135815933/?no-ist> (accessed 3 August 2016).

allies were negotiating a cessation of hostilities with the United States from 1781 through 1783, native warriors won an impressive series of victories against US troops in the West, at Sandusky near Lake Erie and again at the Battle of Blue Licks near present Maysville, Kentucky. Indian raids destroyed settlements and villages across Kentucky and western Pennsylvania and terrorized frontier inhabitants. Despite those successes, England abandoned their Indian allies, leaving them to deal with the United States separately.<sup>29</sup>

On September 5, 1783, two days after the United States and British signed the Treaty of Paris, the Indians of the Old Northwest Territory met along the Sandusky River near present Fremont, Ohio, to discuss their next move. Joseph Brant, one of the leading figures of the Six Nations and a staunch English ally during the late war, formed a pan-Indian alliance at the behest of Sir John Johnson, the British Superintendent for Indian Affairs.<sup>30</sup> The “Sandusky Alliance” organized around one fundamental belief, that all native people possessed a common racial identity that bonded them together despite traditional rivalries and language barriers. The primary objective of the Alliance was to establish the Ohio River as the physical boundary between white and Indian settlements per the Treaty of Fort Stanwix in 1768. Johnson hoped that a native alliance would be a formidable adversary against US expansion and protect Great Britain’s monopoly over the fur trade.<sup>31</sup>

For the United States, management of Indian affairs through a cohesive policy was an important precursor to its territorial ambitions. Article Nine of the Articles of Confederation granted the national government limited authority to regulate Indian affairs. Individual states

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<sup>29</sup> White, *Middle Ground*, 406–408; Sword, *Washington’s Indian War*, 20–21; Albach, *Annals of the West*, 522.

<sup>30</sup> The dynamics of this alliance will be explored in Chapters 6 and 7.

<sup>31</sup> Buck, *Civilization in Western Pennsylvania*, 200; Sword, *Washington’s Indian War*, 19–21.

assumed the primary responsibility of managing relations with Indians inside their borders and in any western lands they claimed. The Confederation Congress was authorized to work in conjunction with state governments during such negotiations and was responsible for managing Native American issues that arose on public lands, including those acquired in the Treaty of Paris.

General George Washington foresaw the tension that lay ahead for the United States and the native peoples of the *pays d'en haut*. He encouraged Congress to formally define its Indian policy, one that would exhibit humanity toward the Indians while at the same time allow the national government to reap the benefits of the newly acquired territory. He believed that the Indians' alliance with England during the late war had abrogated their rightful claims to the land. Washington felt reasonable boundaries should be established and enforced, while at the same time the national government should regulate trade and prevent illegal land seizures which could potentially start an expensive and destructive frontier war.<sup>32</sup>

Ironically, native peoples were almost an afterthought in the document that articulated the first US Indian Policy, a report issued by the congressional Select Committee on Indian Affairs barely a month after the Treaty of Paris was ratified. The report itself focused primarily on the centrality of land acquisition to the future stability of the United States. Land sales of the Old Northwest Territory were needed to fulfill land bounties the Confederation government and several states had promised to soldiers who enlisted in the army, to accommodate a rapidly expanding population, and to restore the credit of the United States by selling the land to pay down the national debt. The Indians, the report continued, were willing to negotiate but were

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<sup>32</sup> George Washington to James Duane, 7 September 1783, in Francis Paul Prucha, ed., *Documents of United States Indian Policy*, Third Edition (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 1-2.

unwilling to make large territorial cessions and would oppose white settlement of the Ohio Country. The committee surmised that taking the land by force would be successful only if it was seized by an army large enough to garrison frontier posts and secure it. The areas in the extreme north and west of the territory were so remote and heavily populated by indigenous peoples that the United States could not hope to control it, no matter how big its army was.<sup>33</sup> Another concern was that forced removal of the Indians could drive them toward an alliance with the British in Canada and prevent US entry into the western fur trade, a decided advantage for Great Britain if war between England and the United States ever resumed.<sup>34</sup>

In the opinion of the Select Committee, the native inhabitants would have no choice but to accede to US demands because the Indians' alliance with Great Britain had violated promises of neutrality the Six Nations had made at Albany, New York in 1775. The sale of ceded areas would recoup the expenses the Confederation had incurred to fight Indians in the West during the war and indemnify the destruction their wartime raids caused to frontier settlements. The report emphasized that the Indians "possess no other means to do this act of justice than by a compliance with the proposed boundaries," but at the same time, "care ought to be taken neither to yield nor require too much; to accommodate the Indians as far as the public good will admit."<sup>35</sup> These treaties would be, to borrow a phrase from James Merrell, "engines of empire."<sup>36</sup> Above all, the committee believed that US demands for land cessions should be backed by the

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<sup>33</sup> The outlying lands referenced here comprise the present states of Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, and parts of Minnesota that bordered Spanish Louisiana and British Canada.

<sup>34</sup> "Report On Indian Affairs, 15 October 1783," in *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789*, vol. 25 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1922), 681–684 (hereafter referred to as *JCC*).

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 683.

<sup>36</sup> Merrell, *Into the American Woods*, 281.

threat of force. These recommendations formed the essence of postbellum US Indian Policy. In order to facilitate peaceful westward expansion, the United States would take Indian lands through treaty negotiations backed by the threat of military action and the national government would regulate trade between Natives and whites. All of it would be justified by the “right of conquest.”<sup>37</sup>

Per the recommendations of the Committee on Indian Affairs, Congress appointed Oliver Wolcott, Richard Butler, and Arthur Lee as Commissioners of Indian Affairs in 1784 to “unite together in holding one convention with the Indians . . . their allies and dependants.”<sup>38</sup> They traveled to Fort Stanwix in present-day Rome, New York—the site of the 1768 treaty—to negotiate the United States’ first acquisition of Indian territory west of the Appalachian Mountains. They joined three men authorized to represent the state of Pennsylvania at the negotiations, Samuel J. Atlee, William McClay, and Francis Johnston, to extract land cessions for all Indian territory lying east of the Great Miami River in present southwest Ohio.<sup>39</sup>

The Sandusky Alliance viewed the Fort Stanwix council as the first opportunity to assert its founding principle, that the Indians of the *pays d'en haut* spoke with one voice. The Six Nations delegates who traveled to Fort Stanwix believed they were negotiating on behalf of the entire Alliance. The proceedings, which were scheduled to convene in September 1784, were delayed until October 3. By then, Brant and other Six Nations leaders from the Alliance had

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 681-684.

<sup>38</sup> “Report on Indian Affairs, 15 October 1783,” in Hunt, *JCC*, 25:687.

<sup>39</sup> In addition to the lands added to western New York state, Pennsylvania acquired the territory that composes the northwest part of the state, nearly one third of its present size. Pennsylvania Department of Internal Affairs, *Annual Report of the Secretary of Internal Affairs of Pennsylvania for the Year Ending November 30, 1904* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Wm. Stanley Ray, 1905), 60.

grown frustrated with what they felt were US delay tactics and left the council grounds. Brant embarked on a trip to England while the others returned home to begin their winter hunts.<sup>40</sup>

All of this worked to the commissioners' advantage. None of the Six Nations diplomats who signed the Treaty at Fort Stanwix held significant power within the Sandusky Alliance. Before Brant departed for his overseas journey, he deputized his future son-in-law Captain Aaron Hill, a secondary Mohawk chief, as his proxy. Among those who remained to treat with the commissioners, only Cornplanter was considered a principal chief. He was also a well-known opponent of the Indian Confederacy and favored peace with the United States. When confronted with the commissioners' demands, Hill and his fellow native leaders argued that the Six Nations were speaking for all Indians north of the Ohio River, and as mere representatives they were not authorized to make land cessions on behalf of the entire alliance.<sup>41</sup>

This admission convinced the US commissioners to press them harder to sign, hoping that their inexperience would make them easier to intimidate and thus avoid having the terms of the treaty scrutinized by leadership council of the Sandusky Alliance. Butler, Lee, and Walcott explained the Indians' unenviable situation, that their alliance with England justified the land seizure as the spoils of war. The commissioners demanded the Iroquois Confederacy relinquish their lands in western Pennsylvania and New York, as well as their claims north of the Ohio River. Failure to accept the Americans' offer of "magnanimity and mercy" would result in the land being seized by force.<sup>42</sup> Faced with the threat of war and unable to consult the leadership of

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<sup>40</sup> Sword, *Washington's Indian War*, 23–27; Pennsylvania Department of Internal Affairs, *Annual Report*, 61–62.

<sup>41</sup> Sword, *Washington's Indian War*, 23–27; "Treaty of Fort Stanwix, in 1784," in Craig, *Olden Time*, 2:406–408, 410, 418–420, 424–426.

<sup>42</sup> "Treaty of Fort Stanwix, in 1784," in Craig, *Olden Time*, 2:425.

the Sandusky Alliance, Hill and Cornplanter submitted and joined ten other Iroquois headmen who signed away the Six Nations' claims in western New York and northwestern Pennsylvania [see Figure 3]. The only money the commissioners spent was for a small number of trinkets and supplies which were distributed to the Indians at the council. By accident, the United States' new diplomatic strategy of negotiating with Indians, "peaceful conquest through division and intimidation," was born. US officials used it to devastating effect over the next three years.<sup>43</sup>

Although the commissioners had asserted their dominance inside the council house, their claim that the US government held sovereignty over the deliberations at Fort Stanwix was challenged by other US citizens who had attended the negotiations. Major Peter Schuyler and his translator, Peter Rightman, observed the proceedings on behalf of the state of New York. Problems between the US commissioners and the New Yorkers began immediately. Three days after the council began, Schuyler was observed talking with some of the Indians outside the council house and plying them with alcohol. He spoke negatively about Butler, Lee, and Walcott to undermine their authority and undercut their proposals, presumably to improve the standing of the New Yorkers in the eyes of the Natives and give them more clout at the bargaining table. The commissioners issued several warnings to Schuyler and Rightman, ordering them to refrain from sabotaging the proceedings. The New Yorkers ignored them. On October 11, the commissioners ordered Schuyler and Rightman to be forcibly removed if they were seen anywhere near the council house or associating with native leaders in any way.<sup>44</sup>

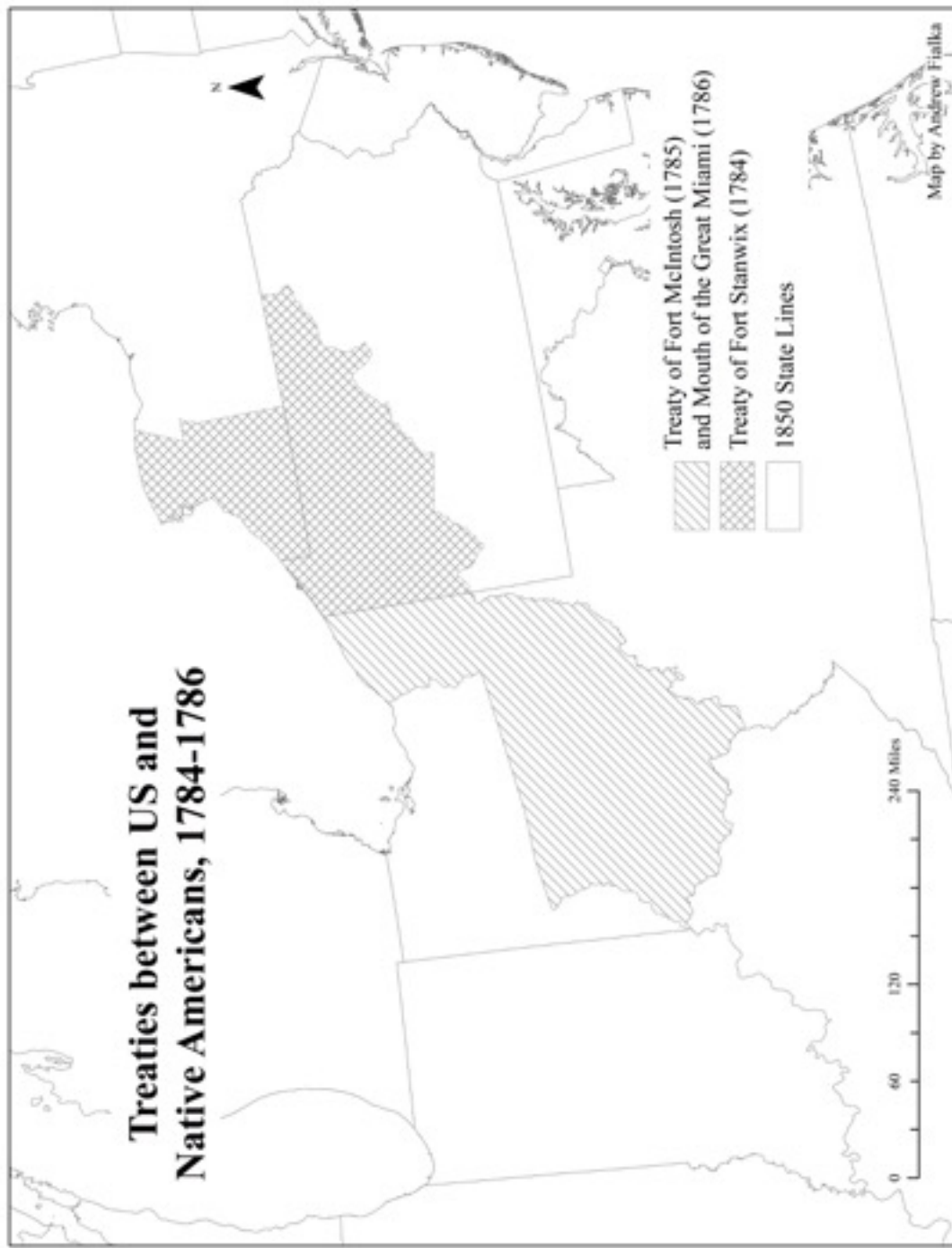
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<sup>43</sup> Sword, *Washington's Indian War*, 23–27; "Treaty of Fort Stanwix, in 1784," in Craig, *Olden Time*, 2:406–408, 410, 418–420, 424–426; "Treaty of Fort Stanwix , 1784 (Transcript)," [http://www.ohiohistorycentral.org/w/Treaty\\_of\\_Fort\\_Stnwix\\_\(1784\)\\_Transcript?rec=449](http://www.ohiohistorycentral.org/w/Treaty_of_Fort_Stnwix_(1784)_Transcript?rec=449) (accessed 5 July 2016); William Leete Stone, *Life of Joseph Brant*, vol. 2 (Albany, Ny.: J. Munsell, 1865), 245.

<sup>44</sup>"Treaty of Fort Stanwix, in 1784," Craig, *Olden Time*, 2:409–410, 412–413, 415; Hunt, *JCC*, 26:208.



Figure 3: Treaties Between US and Native Americans, 1784-1786



Enterprising merchants had also flocked to the treaty grounds, hoping to profit by selling liquor to the native assemblage. Consequently, inebriated Indians continually disrupted the proceedings and ground official business to a halt. After several failed attempts to prohibit the sale of liquor to the Indians, Lieutenant John Mercer was ordered to confiscate the stores of all traders near the fort and catalog their goods so they could be reclaimed after the council ended. The court of Montgomery County, New York, ruled that the US commissioners, the Confederation government, and its military officers did not possess the authority to confiscate the traders' goods and ordered the local sheriff to arrest and imprison Lieutenant Mercer. Lee, Walcott, and Butler were incensed. They fulminated that "the dignity and rights of the United States" had been violated by a court of "inferior jurisdiction," and that Mercer had acted in consequence of "the high and important powers vested in [the Indian Commissioners] by the United States, for the peace and security of all the citizens of these Sates."<sup>45</sup> They ordered Mercer's immediate release and demanded that those responsible for his arrest be publicly censured for their "insulting and opprobrious" actions.<sup>46</sup>

Native unity was an essential weapon during treaty and peace negotiations, which made the commissioners' "divide and conquer" tactics so effective. The United States reaped the benefits of discord among the Indian leaders and from that point forward, US Commissioners resolved to treat with the Indian Nations separately, set them against each other, and alienate them from British authorities to achieve maximum leverage. Although the United States happened upon this strategy purely by accident, the results at Fort Stanwix in 1784 proved how

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<sup>45</sup> "Treaty of Fort Stanwix, in 1784," Craig, *Olden Time*, 2:411.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 408–413, 415.

easy it would be to extract large land cessions with minimal effort when only a small and unrepresentative group of native leaders came to negotiate. The presence of the US Army at treaty councils would be much more of an effective show of force when the number of US troops dwarfed those of the Indians who attended the councils.

This same strategy was used at Fort McIntosh in 1785 when leaders of the Delaware and Wyandot Nations were intimidated into ceding all of their claims east of the Great Miami River up to the Ohio River bordering Pennsylvania and western Virginia [Figure 3]. The Delaware and Wyandot were left with nothing but a small reservation bordered by the United States to the east and south, by Lake Erie to the north, and by other more militant tribes to the west. The Wyandot and Delaware leaders who signed their names were ostracized by the pan-Indian alliance.<sup>47</sup>

All that remained for the United States to solidify its control over the present state of Ohio was one final set of negotiations with the Shawnee, Miami, and Wabash Confederacy. Those Nations had voiced the most staunch opposition to land cessions; securing an agreement with them was essential before the peaceful settlement of the Ohio Country could proceed. This council, conducted at Fort Finney at the confluence of the Great Miami and Ohio Rivers in the winter of 1785-1786, produced the Treaty at the Mouth of the Great Miami River [Figure 3]. Only a handful of Shawnee chiefs bothered to attend, while the Miami and Wabash Confederacy refused to participate altogether. Intelligence reports from deep inside the Ohio Country indicated that British Indian Department officials had been actively undermining the council,

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<sup>47</sup> Sword, *Washington's Indian War*, 23–27; Albach, *Annals of the West*, 522–523; Jon W. Parmenter, “The Iroquois and the Native American Struggle for the Ohio Valley, 1754-1794,” in David Curtis Skaggs, Jr., and Larry Lee Nelson, eds., *The Sixty Years' War for the Great Lakes, 1754-1814* (East Lansing, Mi.: Michigan State University Press, 2001), 115; Sarah E. Miller, “‘Foolish Young Men’ and the Contested Ohio Country, 1783-1795,” in Charles Beatty-Medina and Malissa Rinehart, eds., *Contested Territories: Native Americans and Non-Natives in the Lower Great Lakes, 1700-1850* (East Lansing, Mi.: Michigan State University Press, 2012), 39–40.

encouraging the Indians not to attend. In fact, the largest native groups who attended the proceedings were the same Wyandot and Delaware bands who had signed away their lands at Fort McIntosh the previous year. They came as advisors to compel the Western Nations to accede to the Americans' demands. Predictably, the few Shawnee who showed up were bullied by the Americans to give up all of their land east of the Great Miami River on behalf of the entire Shawnee Nation. Leaders of the Sandusky Alliance were unanimous in their assertion that the land acquisitions from all three treaties were invalid because they were made without their approval. Nevertheless, the US commissioners and Congress convinced themselves that the efforts had been a success. Now that the final legal hurdle had been cleared, the division, sale, and settlement of the Ohio Country could begin in earnest. England's native allies had been divided among themselves and their lands now belonged to the United States, or so Congress believed. The violent war that gripped the frontier in the coming years would tell a different story.<sup>48</sup>

The conclusion of the three treaties was seen as the fulfillment of the recommendations made by the Select Committee on Indian Affairs, so the Commissioners of Indian Affairs were officially disbanded in July 1786. The next month, Congress passed an "Ordinance for the Regulation of Indian Affairs," which established the US Indian Department, and empowered it to manage Indian relations from that point forward. The ordinance established rules to regulate trade between native peoples and US citizens and divided Indian Affairs into two departments, Northern and Southern, delineated by the Ohio River. Each department was given a

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<sup>48</sup> Sword, *Washington's Indian War*, 29–30; Josiah Harmar to Henry Knox, 28 Dec 1785, Harmar Papers, vol. 28; "Treaty at the Mouth of the Great Miami," 31 January 1786, *The Avalon Law Project: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy* (Yale Law School: The Avalon Project, 2008) [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th\\_century/shaw1786.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/shaw1786.asp) (accessed 26 July 2016).

superintendent who reported directly to the Secretary of War. Representatives from Georgia and North Carolina expressed concern that the national government was assuming complete control over Indian affairs inside their boundaries, so the ordinance required the Superintendent of Indian Affairs for each district to work with state-appointed Indian officials when national interests overlapped with those of the individual states.<sup>49</sup>

US officials were convinced that peaceful expansion was finally within reach. Their confidence proved to be premature. Since 1783, native warriors had been attacking white adventurers who had strayed north of the Ohio River onto Indian lands. The treaties from 1784-1786 had changed nothing. In fact, the treaties were so controversial in Indian Country that the raids between both sides actually increased.

While the growing pan-Indian movement posed the most significant threat to US expansion, US officials refused to acknowledge that the Indians could sustain their coalition without British assistance. They attributed the organization and operation of the Sandusky Alliance to the meddling of English traders and British Indian Department officials in Canada whose support, they believed, was the lifeblood of the resistance. “Those that has got passes to Trade with the Shawanoes and Delaware the Windotte [*sic*] &c. are all Chiefly Composed of the Indian Department and Some French Scoundrels,” one observer wrote, who were “[u]sing all Manner of Means to make the Indians Entertain a Bad Opinion of the Americans.”<sup>50</sup> The British-held forts in the Northwest Territory were suspected to be main source of this influence.

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<sup>49</sup> Reginald Horsman, *Expansion and American Indian Policy, 1783-1812*, First Oklahoma Paperback Edition (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), 32-33; quote from an “Ordinance for the Regulation of Indian Affairs, August 7, 1786,” in Prucha, *Documents of Indian Policy*, 9.

<sup>50</sup> Obediah Robbins to Josiah Harmar, 17 May 1785, in Harmar Papers, vol. 2, 66.

Secretary of War Knox feared that “until we shall be in possession of those posts,” peace with the Indians would be impossible.<sup>51</sup>

To restore peace in the West, US officials worked diligently to discredit British officials, misrepresented their true intentions, and directed threats to native peoples who collaborated with them. At Fort Finney in 1786, the Indian commissioners pulled Wyandot leader Half King into a private meeting and told him that they knew British traders continued to live among the Indians, even those who had already signed treaties with the United States. They were “officiously intermeddling in things they have no concern,” and continued to give the Indians bad advice to continue their war against the United States.<sup>52</sup> Any natives who continued to be influenced by Great Britain “will not escape our resentment when we take possession of Detroit,” they warned.<sup>53</sup> The commissioners hoped Half King would pass this message through native communication networks in the Old Northwest and bring an end to the attacks.

But Natives knew that US possession of the disputed frontier posts was far from certain. The Buffalo Creek Indians, who were Iroquois closely aligned to the Sandusky Alliance, challenged US Lieutenant John Jeffers, “the Americans pretend to own [the posts] . . . [so] why don’t you go and take [them?]”<sup>54</sup> When Jeffers offered his opinion that England would inevitably cede them to the United States, the Indians replied that Great Britain would never give up the posts, “and you are afraid to go and [attack them].”<sup>55</sup> Jeffers was outraged at the accusation of

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<sup>51</sup> Henry Knox to Josiah Harmar, 23 Aug 1785, in Harmar Papers, vol. 2, 109.

<sup>52</sup> Intelligence from Sandusky, 15 May 1786, in *Michigan Pioneer*, vol. 24, 27.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> John Jeffers to Richard Butler, 16 August 1791, in *Superintendent of Indian Affairs of the Northern District of North America*, MG 19, F 35, Library and Archives Canada—Ottawa, 4 (hereafter cited as SIA), Series 1, Lot 734, 4.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

US cowardice and told Richard Butler that if the United States failed to respond to such insolence, “the Black Rascals will walk about with all the pomposity in the world,” and concluded he would “rather wade up to my [ankles] in blood than to be so insulted.”<sup>56</sup> Luckily for Jeffers, he was attached to the First US Regiment during St. Clair’s campaign against Kekionga. He and his regiment were detached five days before the Battle of a Thousand Slain to double back and protect the army’s supply train from deserters, which saved him from being in the battle. Otherwise, he may have gotten his wish.<sup>57</sup>

Once the land of the Ohio Country was acquired, managing it was a greater expense than the government had anticipated. The Old Northwest Territory quickly transformed from a “golden goose” into a bottomless money pit as the Confederation incurred massive debt to manage and protect it. The United States built a line of forts along the Ohio River to serve as bases for military expeditions against squatter settlements that had begun to form on the Ohio side of the river. Despite the treaties, settlements there were still prohibited. These bases would also provide security for communities throughout Ohio, western Virginia, and Kentucky against raids by Indians who maintained that the treaties of 1784-1786 were invalid. Congress also paid surveyors to catalog, measure, and divide the land, guarded by US soldiers detached from the forts to protect them. None of the Articles of Confederation detailed a process by which these territories would be governed nor how they would be divided into states and admitted into the union. Congress soon rectified that omission. The Land Ordinance of 1784 outlined provisional boundaries for up to fourteen states within the Old Northwest Territory and established criteria to

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Lytle, *America’s First Army*, 169.

admit them on equal footing with the original thirteen states. The Confederation passed the Land Ordinance of 1785, which created a system to survey, divide, and sell the land in an orderly manner.<sup>58</sup>

### Challenge Five: Foreign Diplomacy

The Confederation government also struggled to conduct effective foreign diplomacy. This was critical to “to internal political and economic developments,” historian Max Edling wrote, because most of the issues Congress confronted after the war—the economy, tensions between individual states, asserting US sovereignty, and creating an effective national army—were tied to foreign diplomacy.<sup>59</sup> One problem was securing free navigation on the Mississippi River. The Treaty of Paris promised both the United States and Great Britain equal access to the entire course of the river. On the same day England signed the Paris agreement, it also agreed to the Treaty of Versailles. This agreement surrendered East and West Florida to Spain, which already controlled Louisiana.<sup>60</sup> Adding the Floridas gave Spain control over the east bank of the Mississippi River at New Orleans, which allowed them to implement tight restrictions on goods and naval travel that passed through that port. But there was one more problem. The Treaty of Paris established the thirty-first parallel as the southern boundary of England’s cession to the United States, but the Crown’s agreement with Spain did not specify the exact location of

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<sup>58</sup> Clarence Edwin Carter, *Territorial Papers of the United States: The Territory Northwest of the River Ohio, 1787-1803*, vol. 2 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1934), 12; “Ordinance of 1784, 23 April 1784,” (Founders Online, National Archives, last modified November 26, 2017) <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-06-02-0420-0006> (accessed 1 July 2016); John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard, *The Economy of British America, 1607-1789* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 373–374.

<sup>59</sup> Edling, *Hercules in the Cradle*, 6.

<sup>60</sup> France had ceded control over Louisiana to Spain in the secret Treaty of Fontainebleau (1762), specifically “the country known by the name Louisiana, as well as New Orleans and the island in which that city is situated.” Quote from Charles G. Herbermann, Edward A. Pace, Condé B. Pallen, Thomas J. Shahan, and John J. Wynne, eds., *The Catholic Encyclopedia: An International Work of Reference on the Constitution, Doctrine, Discipline, and History of the Catholic Church*, vol. 9 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910), 380.



Florida's northern boundary.<sup>61</sup> For the first dozen years after US independence, Spain and the United States disputed which nation controlled the territory between 31° and 32° 28'. This conflict escalated in 1785 when the state of Georgia claimed the vast swath of land that lay between its western border and the Mississippi River, part of which overlapped the disputed tract.<sup>62</sup> Paranoid Spanish officials feared that Georgia's actions were an aggressive expansionist plot by the United States to settle Spanish territory and eventually take New Orleans by force.<sup>63</sup>

As early as the winter of 1782-1783, Spain began charging excessively high duties on all merchandise that US citizens brought to New Orleans for shipment to the East Coast or overseas. For many poor white farmers who lived west of the Appalachian Mountains, taking their goods to New Orleans was often the least expensive and fastest way to access large markets. It was a lesson that British fur traders had learned years before during the colonial period. Historian Claudio Saunt pointed out that these men opted to send their pelts downriver in lieu of sending them overland to the East Coast because "they could, with minimal labor, float down the Mississippi and sell them illegally but for a premium in Spanish New Orleans."<sup>64</sup> Traveling down river, the journey could take anywhere from four to six weeks depending on the time of year. The only other option was to transport them upriver to Pittsburgh. Ascending the Ohio

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<sup>61</sup> Spain claimed the northern border of West Florida to be 32° 28'. Henry E. Chambers, *West Florida and Its Relation to the Historical Cartography of the United States* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1898), 24n.2.

<sup>62</sup> This disputed territory would later be the subject of the Yazoo Land Scandal, a land speculation scandal that exploded in Georgia in the mid-1790s. Aaron M. Sakolski, *The Great American Land Bubble: The Amazing Story of Land-Grabbing, Speculations, and Booms from Colonial Days to the Present Time* (Mansfield Centre, Ct.: Martino Publishing Edition, 2011), 124–146.

<sup>63</sup> National Archives, "Treaty of Paris"; John Debrett and Charles Jenkinson, *A Collection of All the Treaties of Peace, Alliance, and Commerce, Between Great-Britain and Other Powers, From the Treaty Signed at Munster in 1648, to the Treaties Signed at Paris in 1783*, vol. 3 (London: Published for J. Debrett, 1785), 396; Gayerré, *History of Louisiana*, 157–159, 181.

<sup>64</sup> Claudio Saunt, *West of the Revolution: An Uncommon History of 1776* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2014), 178.

River from Louisville to Pittsburgh in good weather, with the river at a manageable level, could take longer than a month and was exhausting work even with a large crew of strong rowers. The choice, as it was, was no choice at all. As British military commander Thomas Gage remarked, “Trade will go with the Stream.”<sup>65</sup>

The river itself could be a major impediment during the journey. Its course often flowed at a trickle during the dry summer months. In the winter, it was choked with treacherous ice floes and could freeze over completely, making it impossible to ascend. Heavy rains combined with melting the winter snows to create raging floods during the spring. The ever-present threat of Indian attacks added an additional hazard. Slow-moving boats made inviting targets, especially when all of the occupants were engaged in rowing, because they offered hostages, horses, and plunder. If a crew survived those obstacles and made it to Pittsburgh, their goods were off-loaded onto horse-drawn wagons to transport them overland across the mountains to the eastern seaboard. This second half of the trip was nearly as perilous as the river passage because the roads across the Appalachian Mountains were barely passable even in good weather. The trip from Pittsburgh to Philadelphia could take two months or more and was very expensive due to the lack of improved roads that could accommodate large wagons.<sup>66</sup>

The contest over free navigation on the Mississippi River had far-reaching implications beyond simply providing convenience for western farmers. Failure to secure passage on the Father of Waters threatened to undercut the legitimacy of the Confederacy government and its claims of territorial sovereignty. The inability to use the river was such a serious issue for

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<sup>65</sup> Thomas Gage as quoted in Saunt, *West of the Revolution*, 178.

<sup>66</sup> John S. Williams, *American Pioneer, A Monthly Periodical, Devoted to the Objects of the Logan Historical Society*, vol. 2 (Cincinnati: John S. Williams, 1843), 113-127, 162-163; Butler, *History of the Commonwealth*, 151, 163; Gayarré, *History of Louisiana*, 181-182; Denny, *Military Journal*, 289-290, 293-295.

westerners that it fostered a separatist movement that nearly led to the secession of Kentucky and parts of Tennessee. In 1775, Virginia won a long battle with North Carolina over which state would control the land in Kentucky. The Old Dominion state expended considerable resources to defend Kentucky's settlers from Indian raids during the Revolutionary War, attacks that had been encouraged by British Indian Department officials at Detroit and the other western posts. In March 1783, Kentucky was designated as a District of the state of Virginia and received authorization to form its own municipal government. Kentucky's first capital city was established at Danville, in the geographical middle of the state, thirty-five miles southwest of present-day Lexington, to protect it from the threat of Indian raids that made it too dangerous to settle the areas of northern Kentucky along the Ohio River.<sup>67</sup>

Between December 1784 and April 1792, eight conventions met at Danville to debate Kentucky's ties to Virginia and the United States. Access to the Mississippi River was but one of several factors that empowered the secessionists. Kentuckians wanted to be reimbursed for money they had spent defending their homes against Indian raids during the Revolutionary War. After the war, resentment grew in Kentucky and other western territories because neither Virginia nor the Confederation had been able to prevent Indian raids. When Kentucky frontiersmen launched counter-raids into Ohio, they were chastised by politicians in Virginia and Congress, none of whom had been elected by Kentuckians themselves. These settlers had "long groaned under their misfortunes, [but] they see no prospect of relief," one author warned Secretary of War Knox.<sup>68</sup> They were "accused as the aggressors, and [had] no representative," to

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<sup>67</sup> Butler, *History of the Commonwealth*, 38, 40–58, 114, 141–142.

<sup>68</sup> Harry Innes to Henry Knox, 7 July 1790, Walter Lowrie and Matthew St. Clair Clarke, eds., *American State Papers: Class II, Indian Affairs*, vol. 4 (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1832), 88 (hereafter cited as *Indian Affairs*).

advocate on their behalf.<sup>69</sup> Their requests for financial and military relief were passed-along, ignored, or rejected outright by politicians who justified their inaction by citing economic concerns.

Kentuckians' lack of representation in the Virginia state legislature and Congress was merely symptomatic of a much larger problem of political sovereignty and democratic participation. As a District of Virginia, Kentucky lay wholly within the legal jurisdiction of that state, which meant that the District's legal proceedings were adjudicated in Virginia courts. This process was expensive and time-consuming. Many frontiersmen believed that such an arrangement was biased toward wealthy and politically connected eastern interests. Furthermore, Kentucky farmers had complained of "seizures, confiscations, fines, imprisonments, extortions, or vexatious delays," by Spanish officials when they tried to transport their goods downriver to New Orleans.<sup>70</sup> Revenue from trade was often the only money they had to support their defense. The incompetence of elected officials, and not having a political voice on the state or national level, convinced a significant number of Kentuckians that independence and self-government would be the only way to improve their situation.<sup>71</sup>

Pro-secession advocates were not members of the lunatic fringe, either. In fact, many of the most vocal supporters of a free and independent Kentucky were prominent national and local figures. John Brown had served as a Virginia state senator after the Revolution and had been a member of Virginia's delegation to the Continental Congress. After Kentucky was granted statehood in 1792, the state legislature elected him as a US Senator, and he eventually served as

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Quoted from Gayerré, *History of Louisiana*, 181–182.

<sup>71</sup> For details regarding the Danville Conventions, see Butler, *History of the Commonwealth*, 144–211.

president *pro tempore* of the US Senate. Isaac Shelby was a prominent war veteran who formerly held political positions in North Carolina and Virginia and eventually served as Kentucky's first governor. James Wilkinson was perhaps the most prominent member of the secessionist cabal. He had risen to national fame for his service during the war as aide-de-camp to Benedict Arnold, Nathaniel Greene, and Horatio Gates and was recognized for his heroics at the Battle of Saratoga. After the war, he was elected to the state government of Pennsylvania and for a time was the one of the most prominent merchants in Kentucky before serving twice as the commanding general of the entire US Army, from 1796-1798 and 1800-1812. In addition to his duties commanding the US Army, President Thomas Jefferson appointed him as the first Governor of the Louisiana Territory from 1805-1807, and he was James Madison's Envoy to Mexico from 1816 until his death in 1825. A true jack-of-all trades, evidence emerged after his death that implicated him as a double, even triple, agent for Spain and possibly Great Britain from the mid-1780s through 1795.<sup>72</sup>

By 1787, restricting free trade along the Mississippi River was a strategic move by Spanish officials to undermine US sovereignty in the West. If Kentucky seceded, the ensuing chaos could bolster emigration to Louisiana, and Kentucky would serve as a buffer state to protect New Spain from US expansion.<sup>73</sup> Spanish officials tried to achieve that end in several ways. First, they cultivated a close relationship with Wilkinson. His boats were granted free passage on the Mississippi and all tobacco and flour he brought to New Orleans were purchased at \$9.50 per hundred pounds, compared to the going rate in Kentucky of \$2 per hundred.

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<sup>72</sup> Sword, *Washington's Indian War*, 266–267, 332–333; Lytle, *America's First Army*, 180-184.

<sup>73</sup> New Spain refers to Spain's colonial holdings in North America west of the Mississippi River and south to the isthmus of Panama.

Exclusive access to the river and the biggest port on the Gulf of Mexico essentially granted Wilkinson a monopoly on all flour and tobacco shipped from Kentucky. Bluegrass farmers increasingly relied on him to transport their goods to market. For the first time since the end of the war, they were reaping profits from their hard work, elevating Wilkinson to hero status among them. To protect his personal financial interests, Wilkinson became a vocal advocate for separation from Virginia and the United States, all the while feeding information to Spain regarding the secession debates at the Danville Conventions. In addition to their efforts with Wilkinson, Spanish officials encouraged Kentuckians to move to Louisiana by offering a two-year moratorium on duties for any possessions they wished to bring with them, including cattle, farming tools, and slaves.<sup>74</sup>

Most Kentuckians held strong opinions on secession and fell into one of five categories. The first group wanted a free and independent Republic of Kentucky that had a close trade relationship with Spain. Two groups wanted to go to war. One wanted Kentucky to launch an attack to capture New Orleans, while the other wanted the Confederation Congress to threaten an attack against Louisiana if Spain did not restore free navigation on the Mississippi. The final two groups wanted to appeal to other foreign powers to annex Kentucky. One faction wanted to become part of Spanish Louisiana, subject to its laws and sovereignty, whereas the second wanted France to reassume control over Louisiana and annex Kentucky into French Louisiana.<sup>75</sup>

This unrest occurred at the same time as a similar uprising in the western territories of North Carolina. In 1786, John Sevier founded the short-lived State of Franklin after the state of

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<sup>74</sup> Spain's emigrant-friendly policies eventually led to the founding of New Madrid, a colony of US ex-patriates under the leadership of Colonel George Morgan. Albach, *Annals of the West*, 485-489, 505; Gayerré, *History of Louisiana*, 192-255; Jean Francois Hamtramck to Josiah Harmar, 1 January 1788, in Harmar Papers, vol. 7.

<sup>75</sup> Gayerré, *History of Louisiana*, 193.

North Carolina and the Confederation Congress proved unable, or unwilling, defend western North Carolina from Indian raids. While the majority of Franklinites had been suppressed by 1787, the intrigue was not over. In September 1788, after North Carolina's delegates to the Constitutional Convention refused to ratify the Constitution, Sevier reached out to the Spanish Minister to the United States, Diego de Gardoqui, to convince Spain to assert control over the State of Franklin. Gardoqui declined Sevier's request, but not because he opposed the idea on its face. The Spanish minister secretly hoped that Wilkinson could convince the Kentuckians to secede along with Franklin, which would allow Spain to deny that it was interfering with US territorial sovereignty.<sup>76</sup>

Knox was so worried that agents of England and Spain would encourage domestic insurrection that he dispatched several military expeditions into Kentucky and the State of Franklin to determine the sincerity of their independence movements. What made this situation particularly terrifying for US politicians was that many of the co-conspirators were veterans of the disbanded Continental Army. When the war was over, more than two-hundred thousand veterans reentered the population amidst the post-war economic depression. The financial condition of the national treasury, which had caused so many problems for US soldiers during the war, continued to plague veterans in the postbellum era. Disaffected soldiers, who felt their sacrifices in the name of liberty entitled them to some measure of financial security, posed a particularly grave threat not only to the Confederation government but to social stability itself.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 257–258.

<sup>77</sup> Henry Knox to Josiah Harmar, 14 November 1787, and Knox to Harmar, 18 December 1787, in Harmar Papers, vol. 6.

One such veteran was Captain John Sullivan, a former member of Fourth Continental Light Dragoons who served under Captain Stephen Moylan. Sullivan was an Irishman, “a young gentleman of some fortune,” according to Moylan, who held naturalized citizenship in France.<sup>78</sup> After emigrating to Philadelphia midway through the war, he developed a friendship with Moylan, who offered him an appointment as a lieutenant in his horse troop in October 1779. As the war wound to a close and Congress began to disband the Continental Army, Sullivan emerged as one of the primary instigators of the infamous Pennsylvania Line Revolt in June 1783. The soldiers’ main grievance was a rumor that Congress secretly planned to furlough the entire army before they had been paid for their service. Several of the conspirators testified that Sullivan and another officer, Henry Carbery, had approached Sergeant James Bennett in Philadelphia and informed him of Congress’s plans. They told Bennett that the only way the soldiers would get their backpay was to arm themselves and collectively march on the Pennsylvania State House, where the Confederation Congress was in session. Sullivan and Carbery offered to lead them.<sup>79</sup>

On June 20, 1783, a group of four hundred soldiers surrounded the State House. Congress felt so threatened that it adjourned and fled to Princeton, New Jersey, in the middle of the night after Pennsylvania Governor John Dickinson refused to call out the state militia to disperse the

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<sup>78</sup> Stephen Moylan to Joseph Reed, 14 April 1780, in “Selections from the Correspondence of Colonel Stephen Moylan, of the Continental Cavalry,” in *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, vol. 37, no. 3 (1913), 356–357.

<sup>79</sup> Louis C. Duncan, *Medical Men in the American Revolution, 1775-1783* (Carlisle, Pa.: Medical Field Service School, 1931), 376–78; “John Sullivan,” *Compiled Service Records of Soldiers Who Served in the American Army During the Revolutionary War, compiled 1894 - ca. 1912, Documenting the Period 1775-1784*, RG 93, M881, National Archives, r.48, 606 <https://www.fold3.com/image/10773054> (accessed 13 August 2016, hereafter cited as *CSRa*); Thomas Lynch Montgomery, *Pennsylvania Regiment of Cavalry. Colonel Stephen Moylan, 1777-1783*, vol. 3 (Harrisburg, Pa.: Harrisburg Publishing Company, 1906), 836; Kenneth R. Bowling, “New Light on the Philadelphia Mutiny of 1783: Federal-State Confrontation at the Close of the War for Independence,” in *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, vol. 101, no. 4 (October, 1977), 420, 424-425, 436, 443, 450.



mutineers. This undignified exodus and the inability of Congress to force Pennsylvania to call out its state military force perfectly embodied the Confederation's lack of compulsory authority over the individual states. The uprising was also a major reason that the national capital city was eventually moved out of Philadelphia.<sup>80</sup>

Four days later, George Washington dispatched fifteen hundred Continental Army soldiers to put down the rebellion. Sullivan and Carbery fled to London to avoid the same fate as the other conspirators, who were courtmartialed and sentenced to hang.<sup>81</sup> By August 1784, however, Sullivan had returned to the United States. In October 1785, he filed a claim for \$368.90 worth of back pay, including interest, and a commutation for his officer's commission.<sup>82</sup> Sullivan received his back wages by 1787, but his commutation was denied on a technicality. Because he had quit the service in June 1783 and fled to England, he was absent from his post when the war officially ended in September and was therefore ineligible to receive it.<sup>83</sup>

Sullivan seethed at being denied his officer's commutation. His anger and resentment inspired him to contrive yet another treasonous plot, one he hoped would undermine US sovereignty over its western territory and possibly cause Spain and the United States to go to war. In March 1787, Sullivan secretly informed the Spanish Crown that the United States planned to seize New Orleans by force. Amid the heightened tension caused by the secession

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<sup>80</sup> Bowling, "Philadelphia Mutiny of 1783," 420, 424-425, 436, 443, 450.

<sup>81</sup> Pardons were granted to the convicted men before their sentences were carried out. Bowling, "Philadelphia Mutiny," 445.

<sup>82</sup> According to a congressional act passed on March 21, 1783; a commutation was either an annual payment made over a five year period or a security given at six-percent interest, for officers who had been in service at the end of the Revolutionary War. Hunt, *JCC*, 24:207.

<sup>83</sup> John Pierce to Richard Henry Lee, 26 October 1785, John Pierce to John Nicholson, 15 May 1786, and John Nicholson to Joseph Howell, 28 May 1787, in *Papers of the War Department, 1784-1800* <http://wardepartmentpapers.org/searchresults.php?searchClass=fulltextSearch&fulltextQuery=Sullivan> (accessed 10 August 2016); Bowling, "Philadelphia Mutiny of 1783," 443-45; *CSR*, r. 0048, 606.

crisis in Kentucky, Sullivan's letter fed Spanish paranoia about US intentions in the West and further damaged the already strained relations between the two countries. Six months later, in September 1787, US Secretary of War Henry Knox received a copy of a note Sullivan had sent to Major William Brown in Charleston, South Carolina, detailing the scheme.<sup>84</sup>

At the same time Sullivan was trying to start a war with Spain, rumors spread throughout the West that John Jay and Congress were negotiating with Spanish officials to relinquish navigation rights on the Mississippi River below the southern border of the United States for thirty years.<sup>85</sup> Knox feared that the rumors about Jay's negotiations might combine with Sullivan's machinations to create a perfect storm that would destabilize the frontier and draw the United States into another war. To prevent that, the Secretary of War took aggressive action to undermine the conspiracy. In November 1787, he ordered Sullivan's arrest but warned Lieutenant-Colonel Josiah Harmar not to pursue Sullivan outside US borders, lest Spain interpret that as an invasion of their territory. In a situation fraught with so much peril, he was aware that any wrong move could have cataclysmic consequences.<sup>86</sup>

Harmar discretely gathered intelligence to determine whether the threat of western secession should be taken seriously, to find out whether British Agents in Canada were assisting those designs, and to decide what action, if any, was required. Harmar's investigation turned up

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<sup>84</sup> John Sullivan to William Brown, 24 September 1787, and Henry Knox to Josiah Harmar, 13 October 1787, in Harmar Papers, vol. 6.

<sup>85</sup> Jay had made the proposal to Congress out of the belief that the navigation along the Mississippi would not be a contentious issue until the early 1800s after the population in the West had grown. Seven states from the northeast supported the proposal while five southern states rejected it with one abstaining. Since the laws of the Confederation required nine of thirteen states to enact a law, Jay's proposal was rejected. On September 16, 1788, Congress issued a resolve stating, "the free navigation of the river Mississippi is a clear and essential right of the United States and that the same ought to be considered and supported as such." Roscoe R. Hill, ed., *JCC*, 34:534.

<sup>86</sup> Knox to Harmar, 14 November 1787, Harmar Papers, vol. 6.; John Pierce to Richard Henry Lee, 26 October 1785, John Pierce to John Sullivan, 6 June 1786, 26 June 1786 and 29 June 1786, John Pierce to John Nicholson, 26 June 1786, and John Pierce to Colonel Oswald, 29 June 1786, in *Papers of the War Department*.

nothing and revealed that the threat posed by Sullivan had been greatly exaggerated. By the summer of 1788, Sullivan realized that his stillborn plan had placed a target on his back. He gave up his mutineering career and exiled himself to England.<sup>87</sup>

Turmoil in Kentucky and the State of Franklin proved that the postwar US Army was simply not big enough to police the western borderlands. After Congress disbanded the Continental Army on June 2, 1784, it kept only seventy-five active-duty soldiers to guard the federal arsenals at West Point, Springfield, Massachusetts, and Fort Pitt. The next day, Congress supplemented that force with a bill calling for Connecticut, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania to recruit, equip, and supply a militia force of seven hundred men that would operate under the direction of Secretary of War Henry Knox. Political in-fighting regarding the size of the US Army, and whether it would become a permanent force, prevented Congress from raising a larger, more effective force. A portion of the new troops were detached to guard the Commissioners of Indian Affairs during the treaty negotiations at Fort Stanwix, Fort McIntosh, and Fort Finney. The remainder were spread across nearly one thousand miles of frontier, from the head of the Ohio River to its confluence with the Mississippi, to garrison posts at Cahokia, Kaskaskia, Vincennes, the Falls of the Ohio River, Fort Harmar, Fort McIntosh, Fort Pitt, and others. The quota of seven hundred soldiers was never filled, however. New York refused to contribute even one soldier toward its allotment. The men who volunteered were often fresh recruits, not the seasoned war veterans whom Knox had hoped for. Desertion and poor discipline undermined the effectiveness of the soldiers who did enlist. In what would become a disturbing

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<sup>87</sup> William Knox to Harmar, 18 December 1787, in Harmar Papers, vol. 6; Knox to Harmar, 21 April 1788, John Armstrong to John Wyllys, 28 April 1788, and Wyllys to Harmar, 12 May 1788, in Harmar Papers, vol. 7; Knox to Harmar, 21 July 1788, in Harmar Papers, vol. 8.

pattern in the years to come, supplies and pay for the soldiers were chronically late. Perhaps the only good news that came from England's continued occupation of the Great Lakes forts was that it spared the Confederation from raising additional troops to garrison those posts, too.<sup>88</sup>

The wide distribution of US military forces meant that the national government was powerless to stop Indian raids in Kentucky and western Virginia, which created a pervasive fear and resentment among westerners. Many decided to leave Kentucky rather than risk their lives to stay there. Failure to protect these vulnerable frontier areas undercut the legitimacy of the US government not only in the eyes of the poorest frontier settlers but also among aspiring land speculators because the mass exodus caused land values in the West to plummet. Frontier leaders realized this and used the secession controversy to pressure US officials into quick action. Judge Harry Innes recognized that without Congressional action, Kentuckians and other westerners would launch retaliatory attacks that would inevitably target all Indians north of the Ohio River, even Natives who had already signed peace treaties with the United States. The result could be a protracted, expensive, and bloody war that would threaten the lives and property of every American in the West.<sup>89</sup>

Knox realized the that the ultimate source of frontier unrest was white settlers who were "continually encroaching by treatees [*sic*] force or fraud on [the Indians'] hunting grounds."<sup>90</sup> This was literally a matter of life-or-death for semi-nomadic peoples who relied on hunting to feed themselves throughout most of the year, and they were obliged to respond in kind for the sake of their own survival. The Secretary of War ordered the garrisons at Vincennes and Fort

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<sup>88</sup> Kohn, *Eagle and Sword*, 60–65; Hunt, *JCC*, 27:529–31, 536–40, 552–55.

<sup>89</sup> Jacob Burnet, *Notes on the Settlement of the North-Western Territory* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1847), 92.

<sup>90</sup> Knox to Harmar, 21 July 1788, in Harmar Papers, vol. 8.

Franklin to stock extra supplies in case they were cut off by an Indian attack. But collecting US troops at the frontier posts deprived the settlers of protection, so Kentuckians decided to take matters into their own hands, and the Confederation government was powerless to stop them. US officials wanted to avoid a war in the West, but squatters, separatist movements, and aggressive frontiersmen made US officials acutely aware of the tenuous connection between the thirteen states and their western territories. In order to avoid alienating western settlers, the United States became involved in a bloody war that it neither wanted nor had the manpower to conduct effectively.<sup>91</sup>

Western chaos had created sense of urgency for the Confederation. Congress assured westerners that it would provide better protection from homegrown insurrectionist movements and Indian raids moving forward. It also agreed to review Kentucky's petition for statehood and redouble its efforts to secure navigation rights on the Mississippi River. Most of these promises went unfulfilled until nearly a decade later.

### Toward a New Republic

Increasing violence and instability on the western frontier, failed foreign diplomacy, unrest among Revolutionary War veterans, and an intractable economic depression revealed that the decentralized government created by the Articles of Confederation was simply incapable of ensuring domestic tranquility and economic prosperity. The Confederation's military establishment was woefully inadequate. Congress could not compel the states to raise enough troops to pacify the frontier and creating a large national army was too controversial. Consequently, the US Army was unable to prevent racial violence, deter squatters from

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<sup>91</sup> John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., *JCC*, 28:223–224.

establishing unauthorized settlements in Ohio, and chasten foreign interference in the West. Without the power of direct taxation, Congress had no money to supply, train, and pay the soldiers who did enlist. The United States could not even afford to pay its obligations to veterans who had sacrificed so much to win independence. The citizens of its western territories believed the national government should protect them from physical danger and foster conditions that would advance their financial stability. The Confederation did neither. Its Indian Policy was flawed because individual states had too much authority to conduct their own negotiations with Indian Nations. The Indian Commissioners operated on the flawed supposition that Natives had no choice but to give up their lands because they discounted the power of the growing pan-Indian movement. They chose instead to negotiate meaningless treaties that the vast majority of Ohio Country natives rejected. The Confederation's inability to effectively manage this list of crises revealed the core issue that plagued the United States throughout its infancy as a nation: territorial expansion and asserting national sovereignty were fundamentally at odds with the desire for a frugal, limited government.

As will be seen in subsequent chapters, the United States' victory over England unleashed a variety of challenges that US officials navigated with few precedents to follow. American citizens gradually realized that a strong central government was the only way to protect their newfound independence. Although the Constitution vested the federal government with the authority to solve those problems, the impact of those new powers was not felt immediately. The republic held more centralized authority to negotiate with competing nation-states and articulated a clear path to statehood for the territories, yet it took several years to completely pacify the separatist impulse in the West. Kentucky gained statehood in 1792. In 1795, Pinckney's Treaty

resolved the outstanding issues between Spain and the United States and granted Americans free access to the entire course of the Mississippi River down to New Orleans. With those issues solved, the secessionist impulse south of the Ohio River went into hibernation until the 1860s.<sup>92</sup>

Even more than sedition in the West, nothing highlighted the challenges of upholding US territorial sovereignty more than the proliferation of illegal squatter settlements in Ohio. Not only did the squatters undermine the power the Confederation government wielded over its citizens, illegal settlers also drew it into armed conflict with the Indians. The intransigence of squatters threatened to depress land values in the West, which would undermine the government's plan to sell that land to pay down the war debt and establish the United States on sound financial footing.

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<sup>92</sup> "Treaty of Friendship, Limits, and Navigation Between Spain and The United States, 27 October 1795" George Washington's Mount Vernon <http://www.mountvernon.org/education/primary-sources-2/article/pinckneys-treaty/> (accessed 8 December 1795).

## CHAPTER 3

### SQUATTERS

The race war in the West originated, strangely enough, as a conflict between white settlers and their government. Illegal settlements proliferated in the Old Northwest after the Treaty of Paris was ratified in 1783 and forced the Confederation government to aggressively establish its sovereignty over the territory it had acquired from Great Britain. Although the treaties of the 1780s settled the issue of land ownership in the eyes of the US government, Americans had different ideas. Desperately poor citizens who lacked a means of subsistence, aspiring entrepreneurs, and disenchanted veterans of the late war cared little about the Confederation's plans to settle the West in an orderly manner. They looked at the Ohio Country as free land for the taking. Some had even established themselves in Ohio before the war with England was over. Over the next several years, squatters flouted the authority of Congress and illegally occupied lands north of the Ohio River in increasing numbers. Repeated efforts to remove the squatters failed miserably and called into question whether the Confederation government was capable of keeping its own house in order.

#### Squatters Come to Ohio

As early as 1779, military officials were aware that illegal settlers were crossing the Ohio River to live on Indian lands. Colonel Daniel Broadhead wrote General George Washington in late October of that year, informing him that he had sent a detachment of sixty men from Fort Pitt to evict a community of squatters on the other side of the river. The soldiers found a sizable



collection of cabins across from Wheeling, but the trespassers had escaped. Frustrated, the troops soothed their anger by burning the settlement to the ground before returning to Fort Pitt. Broadhead reported rumors that the number of squatters on Indian lands along the Ohio River was growing at a rapid pace from Pittsburgh all the way down to the mouth of the Muskingum River. Some of them had moved deeper inland, in some cases nearly thirty miles up the tributaries of the Ohio River.<sup>1</sup>

Such migrations increased dramatically once the war ended. Unchecked, squatting threatened to undermine the authority of the national government and ignite a border war with the Indians. By January 1785, settlements had spread all the way down to the confluence of the Ohio and Wabash Rivers, the present-day border between Illinois and Indiana. Clearly, squatters in the Ohio Country were undaunted by the authority of the Confederation government and were skeptical it would forcibly remove them.<sup>2</sup>

One such settler was a man named Pry who had settled in Kentucky and purchased a plot of land only to lose it in court when another settler disputed his claim and sued him. The court ruled in favor of the plaintiff. After his eviction, Pry was out of options. He had spent nearly all of his life savings to fight the lawsuit, and now he had no money left to start over. Left with no other choice, Pry crossed the river into Indian Country. There, he hoped that the US government would eventually grant him title to the land based on preemption rights and prior occupancy.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Randolph C. Downes, "Ohio's Squatter Governor: William Hogland of Hoglandstown," in *Ohio Archaeological and Historical Publications*, vol. 43, no. 3 (July 1934), 274–276.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Craig, *Olden Time*, 2:437; Faragher, *Daniel Boone*, 240–245.

Some came to Ohio to hide from justice. James Maxwell left his home in Virginia when he was falsely accused of murder in Berkeley County. He crossed the river in 1772 and lived in a cabin by himself at the mouth of Rush Run near present-day Rush Run, Ohio. Maxwell lived there for two years until October 1774, when violent conflict between whites and Indians along the Ohio River forced him to abandon his claim.<sup>4</sup> He returned to Rush Run in 1780 after being cleared of the murder charges and built a small, ramshackle cabin for himself, his wife, and his newborn daughter. During the Northwest Indian War in the late 1780s, Maxwell eschewed the erection of a more substantial house that would be easier to defend against native attacks because he had always had good relations with the Indians. It was a decision he would eventually regret. An Indian raid destroyed his house, and the warriors kidnapped his young daughter. In despair, his wife committed suicide.<sup>5</sup>

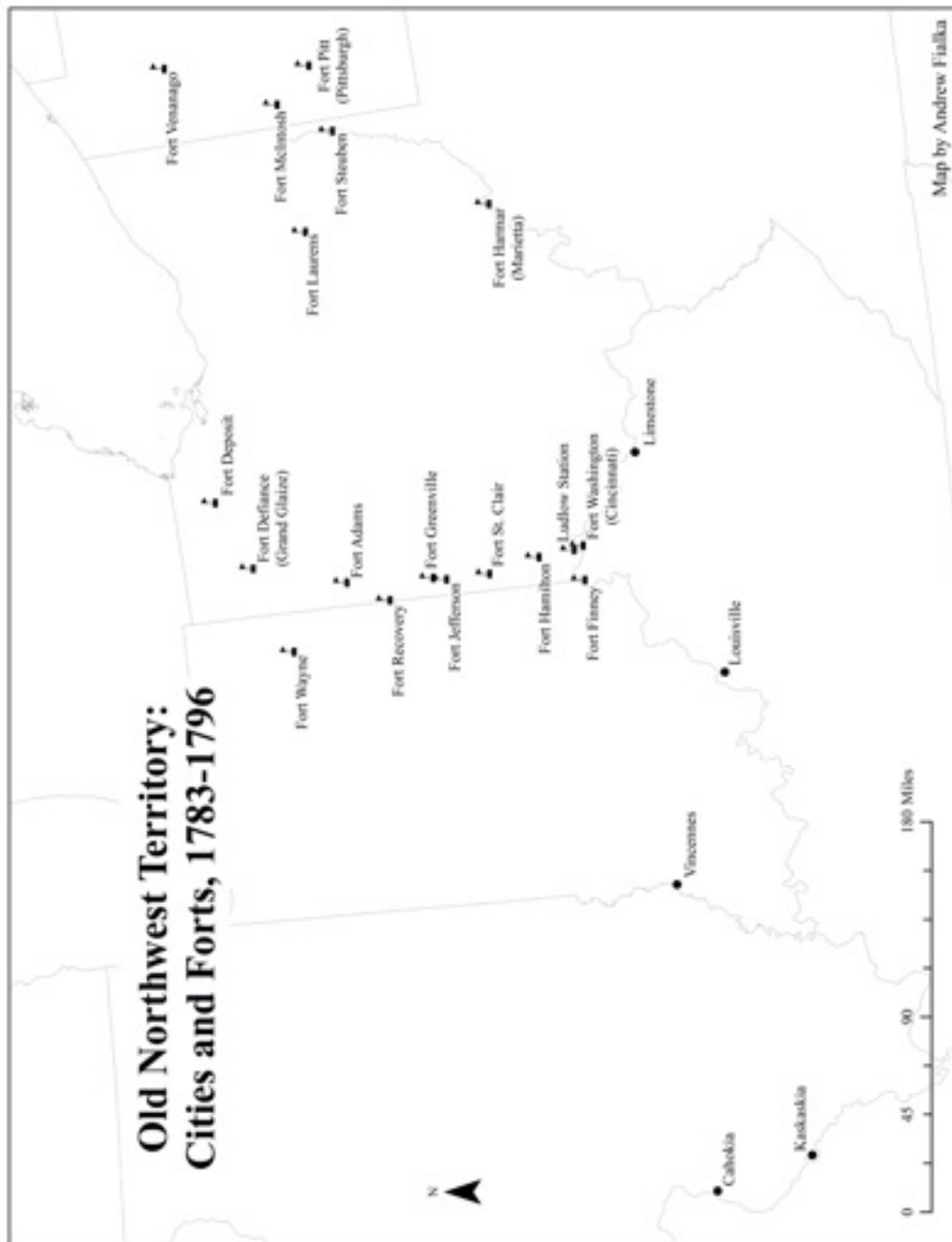
Devastated, Maxwell vowed to take revenge. He presented himself at Fort Steuben along the Ohio River and volunteered to work as a scout for the US Army under Major Jean Francois Hamtramck [see Figure 4]. Avenging the deaths of his wife and daughter turned out to be an ill-fated endeavor. He was captured by Indians and nearly executed before escaping and reenlisting as a scout for Harmar's doomed campaign in 1790. He continued to live at Rush Run after St. Clair's defeat and ended his military after serving under General "Mad" Anthony Wayne in the

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<sup>4</sup> This conflict, known as Dunmore's War, started when Virginians began settling lands in Kentucky after the Treaty of Fort Stanwix in 1768. The treaty allowed the Shawnee to hunt and occupy ceded lands in Kentucky. When whites began moving into the area, each side launched a string of violent raids. Eventually the colonial governor of Virginia, Lord Dunmore, dispatched the Virginia colonial militia who inflicted a serious defeat on Indian forces at the Battle of Point Pleasant, ending the war and forcing the Indians to agree to the Treaty at Camp Charlotte. There, the Indians ceded their hunting rights in Kentucky in exchange for a promise that white settlers would not cross to the north side of the Ohio River. Randolph C. Downes, *Council Fires on the Upper Ohio: A Narrative of Indian Affairs in the Upper Ohio Valley Until 1795* (Pittsburgh: The University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989), 152-177.

<sup>5</sup> W. H. Hunter, "The Pathfinders of Jefferson County," in *Ohio Archaeological and Historical Publications*, vol. 6, no. 2-3 (April-July, 1898), 158-162; Betty Pokas, "Remember When . . .," *Martins Ferry Times Leader* (Martins Ferry, Oh.), 23 March 2012 <http://www.timesleaderonline.com/page/content.detail/id/537612/Remember-When---.html?nav=12> (accessed 26 April 2016).

Figure 4: Old Northwest Territory—Cities and Forts, 1783-1796



mid 1790s. In a strange twist of fate, his missing daughter was returned to him when Indian captives were ransomed after the Treaty of Greenville in 1795. Frontier warfare had torn his family apart; peace now brought it back together.<sup>6</sup>

Some of the wealthier squatters in the Old Northwest owned legal claims on the south side of the Ohio River and simply wanted more land for farming and husbandry. This lightened the burden on their own land, allowed them to diversify their crops and raise surpluses that could be sold for a profit. But farming on Indian land was dangerous. Two Virginia landowners, Ruhama Builderback and her husband, Charles, were ambushed and captured while grazing their livestock in the Ohio Country. Their captors separated the couple and took them back to their village by separate routes. When they arrived there, the Indians bragged that they had killed her husband and proved it by showing her a scalp. Ruhama instantly recognized it was her husband's by its tell-tale red hair. The warriors bragged that his death was revenge for his participation in the deaths of Christianized Indians at Gnadenhutten in 1782.<sup>7</sup> Builderback was a captain in the Pennsylvania Militia troop that committed the massacre.

### What Did Squatter Settlements Look Like?

By the spring of 1785, an estimated two thousand squatter communities had been established in Ohio. As their numbers increased, so did the threat they posed to the Confederation government, which inevitably brought them into increasing contact with the US Army. The accounts of military officers on the frontier provide an interesting picture of what life was like for these early white Ohioans. The circumstances under which these squatter

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<sup>6</sup> Hunter, "Pathfinders of Jefferson County," 158–162.

<sup>7</sup> The details of this massacre will be detailed in Chapter 6.

communities were created, and the conditions the inhabitants endured, fed the perception that they were lawless places where anarchy and chaos reigned, and the inhabitants lived “in . . . a state of nature.”<sup>8</sup> Squatters occupied land that was not theirs. They built permanent structures, planted crops and raised cattle, and ferociously defended their claims against Indians, other settlers, and the government. The truth about the organization and operation of these communities was much more complicated, however.<sup>9</sup>

Evidence suggests that some of these illegal settlements adhered to unwritten codes of rules and regulations. Many practiced self-government to bring a measure of order and predictability to life amid the chaos of the frontier. One such example was found in western Pennsylvania, along the tributaries of the Susquehanna River, in present Lycoming County, Pennsylvania. Although the 1768 Treaty of Fort Stanwix established the Ohio and Tennessee Rivers as the boundary between white and Indian settlements, the misidentification of several physical landmarks created ownership disputes between whites and Indians over sections of western Pennsylvania, including the Susquehanna Valley.<sup>10</sup>

Settlers who flocked to this tract protected their claims with what Pennsylvania law scholar Charles Smith called the “fair-play” code. Historian John Blair Linn found evidence of how this system operated in depositions filed in Pennsylvania state courts for a series of nineteenth-century land disputes. Persons who wished to settle in the area had to first get permission from a three-man tribunal elected by other squatters. Although no evidence has been

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<sup>8</sup> William Irvine to Josiah Harmar, 31 May 1785, Harmar Papers, vol. 2.

<sup>9</sup> John Armstrong to Josiah Harmar, 13 April 1785, Harmar Papers, vol. 2.

<sup>10</sup> John Blair Linn, “Indian Land and Its Fair-Play Settlers, 1773-1785,” in *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, vol. 7, no. 4 (1883), 420.

found to suggest that fair-play law was ever formally codified in writing, the rulings of the commission were binding for members of the local community. The workings of this arrangement provides a window into how squatters understood their natural “rights” to the land.<sup>11</sup>

The first and most important element of the fair-play code was community enforcement. When William Greer served in the Continental Army from 1776 through 1784, settlers around his claim dispossessed a man named John Martin who had moved onto Greer’s land after he left. Community policing not only protected the claims of individual settlers but was also used to prevent absentee ownership. If a settler left his land for more than six weeks for any reason other than military service, fair-play doctrine held that their ownership rights were forfeit. After that, other people were free to settle there. Local enforcement legitimized these laws and established trust and reliance among neighbors.<sup>12</sup>

Another central tenet of fair-play was the plenary power of the squatters’ elected council. William King purchased a plot of land along Lycoming Creek from a man named Isaiah Sutton in 1775. When King left temporarily to harvest corn in another area, a settler named William Paul arrived in the region, placed some of his possessions in a cave on King’s land, and staked claim to it.. King returned a short time later and threw Paul’s goods out. A group of men armed with axes and a keg of whisky forcibly removed the original claimant, King, in favor of Paul. King appealed his ejection and argued that his original claim predated Paul’s, plus he had not left

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 420–421.

<sup>12</sup> Depositions in *Greer v. Tharpe* (1799), in *ibid.*, 421–422.

his land for more than six weeks. The commissioners ruled for King. They mandated that if Paul wanted to stay, he would have to pay King thirteen pounds for title to the land (which he did).<sup>13</sup>

After the Paul assumed ownership of the King's plot, a man named Robert Arthur moved onto it and erected a cabin for his family. Local settlers ordered him to leave. Arthur rejected the validity of Paul's ownership and remained there, undaunted. Paul's neighbors soon arrived with an axe and a keg of whiskey—the apparent weapons of choice for fair-play “eviction parties”—and tried to kick him out. Arthur threatened to shoot members of the mob if they did not leave and barricaded himself and his family inside their cabin. The aforementioned William King, who was among the group who tried to evict Arthur, recalled, “Thomas Kemplen, our captain, made a run at the door, burst it open and instantly seized Arthur by the neck. We pulled down the cabin, threw it into the river, lashed two canoes together and put Arthur and his family and his goods into them and sent them down the river.”<sup>14</sup> Paul reoccupied his land and continued to live there until 1778, when Indian raids chased all of the fair-play settlers on Lycoming Creek out of the region.<sup>15</sup>

The western theater of the Revolutionary War was an Indian War that was so brutal, most of the settlers in the Susquehanna Valley completely abandoned their lands in what became known as “The Runaway.” The 1784 Treaty of Fort Stanwix settled the disputed boundary in the Susquehanna Valle. After that, Pennsylvania's courts and legislature assumed legal jurisdiction over the area. On December 21, 1784, the Pennsylvania state assembly granted preemption rights to squatters who had claims along Lycoming and Pine Creeks per the fair-play doctrine, citing

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<sup>13</sup> Depositions in *Huff v. Satcha* (1801), in *ibid.*, 423–424.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 424.

<sup>15</sup> Linn, “Fair-Play Settlers,” 423–424.

the hardships they endured defending that land against the Indians during the Revolution. The legislature's decision validated the squatters' unwritten code of law, a decision that was later upheld by Pennsylvania's Supreme Court, which made fair-play claims legally binding. Acquiring fee-simple title to the lands was of course contingent upon the squatters taking advantage of their preemption rights and purchasing their claim at fair market value from the Pennsylvania Land Office. Legal recognition of these claims in western Pennsylvania gave new hope to squatters across the West that their illegal settlements would someday gain legitimacy.<sup>16</sup>

The ruling of Pennsylvania's Supreme Court validated the squatters' logic, that cultivating and "taming" the land entitled them to ownership of it. They believed that the Native Americans who occupied the land had forfeited their right to ownership because of their perceived "savagery." Indians did not practice animal husbandry. They did not use heavy plows and draft animals to till their fields. In most native cultures, women did the farming instead of men. Perhaps the biggest difference between the two sides was their opposing views on what "land ownership" entailed. Anglo-Americans viewed land as private property where an individual could own title to it in fee-simple. It was an idea based on exclusion. Conversely, Natives believed that land rights were usufruct and revolved around usage of an area. In Indian societies, many people had the right to use the land to farm, hunt, and live on. They moved around on a yearly cycle—called a seasonal round—which meant that they never stayed in one place for the entire year, often spending the planting season in one area that was part of a larger village, then breaking into smaller groups and removing to a hunting camp in a completely different area in the winter. By design, this lessened the burden on the land and meager food

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 424–425.



supplies during the colder months. White settlers observed these patterns and believed that they had abandoned their lands. They rarely hesitated to occupy those areas after the Indians left.<sup>17</sup>

The Treaty of Fort Stanwix in 1768 provided yet another excuse for squatters across the West to flout the law and create an autonomous legal structures to govern themselves. Many of the fair-play settlers were among the staunchest advocates of independence from England. They believed the Proclamation of 1763 and the Fort Stanwix agreement were unfairly restrictive and convinced themselves that Royal Government was too incompetent and weak to enforce the treaty. They resented the inaction of colonial officials who were doing little to protect vulnerable settlements on the borderlands. Establishment of the fair-play system reflected their desire for security and stability. They wanted to create those structures on their own, free from outside interference by the colony of Pennsylvania and Great Britain, because they believed that local government was the most effective way to respond to the unique conditions they faced. Ironically, despite their mistrust of centralized government, the squatters dreams of fee-simple ownership became a reality only through government intervention, when Pennsylvania courts legalized their claims.<sup>18</sup>

Although the fair-play system in western Pennsylvania contradicts the idea that frontier settlements were inherently lawless, it bore little resemblance to the statutory government that most colonial officials regarded as “legitimate.” Fair-play was defined by informality; its laws were unwritten and enforced by mob violence. But not all squatters rejected the idea of a more

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<sup>17</sup> William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England*, First Revised Edition (New York: Hill & Wang, 2003), 53–67; “Native American Agricultural Labor,” Oregon Encyclopedia: A Project of the Oregon Historical Society [https://oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/native\\_american\\_agricultural\\_labor\\_in\\_the\\_willamette\\_valley/#.WjARpoZryRs](https://oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/native_american_agricultural_labor_in_the_willamette_valley/#.WjARpoZryRs) (accessed 12 December 2017).

<sup>18</sup> Linn, “Fair-Play Settlers,” 424–425.

centralized government modeled after systems that were familiar to East Coast politicians. By the mid-1780s, nearly twenty years before Ohio gained statehood in 1803, Ohio Country squatters had elected a representative central government to provide order in their settlements. In the spring of 1785, the squatter communities north of the river elected a man named William Hogland as their governor. Much like fair-play law in the 1770s, Hoagland's election represented a unique dichotomy that motivated squatters: the desire for order coupled with a staunch expression of independence from US authority.<sup>19</sup>

The prospect that impoverished, uneducated frontier settlers would assume the right to vote was undoubtedly a shock for people like Washington, Knox, and other wealthy Americans who had grown accustomed to the politics of deference. At this time, voting was mostly restricted to land-owning white males who formed a quasi-landed gentry in the United States. Western squatters did not own title to the lands they occupied, nor did they appear "genteel" in any way. Even middling farmers who had purchased land in western Virginia, western Pennsylvania, and Kentucky—who were not as wealthy and powerful as East Coast aristocrats—looked down upon illegal settlers as "banditti whose actions are a disgrace to human nature."<sup>20</sup>

Wealthy and powerful Americans worried that squatters were setting a dangerous precedent that could undermine social and cultural norms beyond their illegal communities. William Irvine was one such person. He had served as a brigadier general in the Continental Army, was a delegate to the Continental Congress, and later became a member of the House of Representatives. Irvine was horrified to "see people of all rank acquire property."<sup>21</sup> This view

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<sup>19</sup> Downes, "Ohio's Squatter Governor," 273–275.

<sup>20</sup> John Armstrong to Josiah Harmar, 12 April 1785, Harmar Papers, vol. 2.

<sup>21</sup> William Irvine to Josiah Harmar, 31 May 1785, in *ibid.*

was shared by many other high-ranking officers from the war, men who felt that their leadership and personal contributions to the cause of independence entitled them to reap the benefits in the postwar period. If they were the only ones following the rules, however, they might be denied the opportunity to become freeholders, achieve economic prosperity, and gain the right to vote.

In March 1785, an announcement circulated throughout the Ohio Country, calling for an election to select delegates to a constitutional convention that would be held the following month. The message, which was written by a man named John Emerson, invited western settlers to cast their votes in person at the mouths of the largest tributaries of the Ohio River: the Great Miami River, the Scioto River, and the Muskingum River, as well as at the home of Jonas Menzons, a squatter who had settled along the western bank of the Ohio River across from Wheeling. After the initial round of voting, the elected men were to report to the mouth of the Scioto River on April 20, 1785, to draft their ruling document. “[A]ll mankind, agreeable to every constitution formed in America, have an undoubted right to pass into every vacant country, and there to form their constitution,” Emerson wrote.<sup>22</sup> Emerson’s circular rejected the notion that the Confederation Congress had the authority to prevent them from electing a government and settling the land, nor did it have the right to divide up the land and sell it to pay down the national debt. To thwart the election, US troops destroyed settlers’ cabins in the days leading up to the vote. Despite these efforts, Captain John Armstrong was convinced that the election had taken place and their elected delegates would attend the upcoming convention.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Downes, “Ohio’s Squatter Governor,” 276.

<sup>23</sup> Downes, “Ohio’s Squatter Governor,” 273–280; *Transactions of the Illinois State Historical Society for the Year 1918*, vol. 24 (Springfield, IL: Illinois State Journal Co., State Printers, 1919), 52.

Armstrong's suspicions were confirmed by an announcement from the *Pittsburgh Gazette* printed two years later, which announced the wedding of Henry Hogland, "the son of governor William Hogland, west of the Ohio," to Elizabeth Carpenter, the daughter of a squatter family who lived nearby.<sup>24</sup> The wedding had taken place earlier that year at "the governor's hall," located near present-day Steubenville, Ohio.<sup>25</sup> The *Gazette* noted that "the evening was most agreeably spent in dancing, firing of guns, and drinking of toasts for the success of the new state, and prosperity to the new and first married couple in it."<sup>26</sup> The formation of a constitutional government and electing officials, and establishing order so squatters could enjoy the trappings of so-called "civilized society," proves that squatters feared the same violence, political chaos, and social unrest that concerned US citizens in the East. They asserted their own agency to make decisions and implement laws that would affect their local community and provide the stability they yearned for.

This wedding occurred in May 1787, which indicates that illegal settlements in Ohio existed well into the late 1780s despite considerable efforts by the Indians and the US government to remove them. Downes noted that the removal of illegal settlers only came to fruition when Indian raids increased after the Treaty of Fort Harmar in 1789. At that point, the "nameless state cease[d] to exist as its citizens fled," back to their former homes in the surrounding areas of Kentucky, Virginia, and Pennsylvania.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Downes, "Ohio's Squatter Governor," 273; Clifford Neal Smith, *Federal Land Series: A Calendar of Archival Materials on the Land Patents Issued by The United States Government, with Subject, Tract, and Name Indexes*, vol. 1 (Chicago: American Library Association, 1972), 161.

<sup>25</sup> Downes, "Ohio's Squatter Governor," 273.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 282.

Removing the squatters was not a small task. Military officials received complaints from legal settlers south of the river about migrants who traversed their lands en route the Ohio Country. Many of them were moving inland in large groups, sometimes fifty strong, blatantly ignoring orders posted by the army that warned of severe penalties for any caught squatting. Three hundred families were rumored to be living at the Falls of the Hocking River, northwest of present-Lancaster, Ohio, while a similar number were living at the Falls of the Muskingum River (present-Duncan's Falls, Ohio). A handful of families had settled around the former Moravian Towns, three abandoned Indian villages that lay along the Tuscarawas and Muskingum Rivers in Ohio between Coshocton and New Philadelphia. An estimated fifteen hundred people were said to have settled farther to the west, along the Little Miami River, the Great Miami River, the Mad River, and the Scioto River. One observer noted that "there is scarcely a Bottom on the [Ohio] river but has one or more families living thereon."<sup>28</sup> Reports of several thousand white settlers in the Ohio Country were likely exaggerated. As George Rogers Clark and Richard Butler made their way downriver in 1785 to negotiate the treaty at Fort Finney, they noted only a scattered number of dwellings along the riverbanks. US soldier Israel Shreve drew the same conclusion when he traveled down the Ohio River three years later. If the claims had been true, the white population of Ohio would have been more numerous than the cities of Richmond, Albany, or Hartford were at that time.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Quote from John Armstrong to Josiah Harmar, 13 April 1785, Harmar Papers, vol. 2; J.F. Everhart, *1794: History of Muskingum County, Ohio, with Illustrations and Biographical Sketches of Prominent Men and Pioneers* (Columbus, Oh.: J.F. Eberhart & Co., 1882), 396–397; *Illinois State Historical Society, Transactions for 1918*, 24:52.

<sup>29</sup> Israel Shreve Journals, vols.1 and 3, William Clements Library, University of Michigan; "Journal of General Butler," in Craig, *Olden Time*, 2:434–454; George Rogers Clark to Josiah Harmar, 28 August 1785, Harmar Papers, vol. 2; "Historical Metropolitan Population of the United States," <http://www.peakbagger.com/pbgeog/histmetropop.aspx> (accessed 4 June 2016).

Legal settlers knew that squatters endangered the safety of their settlements south of the Ohio River. Interracial frontier violence was often retaliatory and did not discriminate between the “guilt” or “innocence” of the victims. For Indian raiders, larger settlements south of the Ohio River were much more common, made easier targets, and yielded more opportunities for plunder. Raids by legal settlers rarely targeted the same villages that had previously raided them; to the colonists, all Indians were suspicious and untrustworthy. As time passed, the line between victims and perpetrators blurred to the point that it became indistinguishable. Legal settlers, therefore, had good reasons to inflate the numbers of squatters in Indian Country. By portraying the situation as out of control, they hoped to create a sense of urgency for US officials, forcing them take decisive action to remove the squatters. They were also concerned about the value of their investments. If squatters were allowed to stay without consequences, more settlers go to Ohio, driving down the value of legitimate claims in Virginia, Kentucky, and Pennsylvania.

#### US Efforts to Remove Squatters

Politicians realized the time was nigh to take immediate action to protect the nation’s newly acquired public lands and prevent open hostilities with the Indians who lived there. The Governor of Virginia, Patrick Henry, himself an avid land speculator, issued a proclamation on January 6, 1785, to prevent settlers from establishing themselves north of the Ohio River. Those who already lived there were ordered to leave immediately. Anyone who refused to comply would do so “at their peril.”<sup>30</sup> Few heeded Henry’s warnings. The problem was so bad that by the end of that month, he dispatched the Virginia state militia to remove them.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> “A Proclamation,” 6 January 1785, William P. Palmer, ed., *Calendar of Virginia State Papers and Other Manuscripts from January 1, 1785, to July 2, 1789*, vol. 4 (Richmond, Va.: R.U. Derr, Superintendent of Public Printing, 1884), 2.

<sup>31</sup> “Indian Commissioners to Josiah Harmar, 29 March 1785,” Harmar Papers, vol. 2.

The Confederation also started to take more aggressive action against the illegal settlements. Amid the ongoing economic crisis, the inability of Congress to secure navigation rights on the Mississippi River, and the threat posed by western secession, failing to protect the squatters could signal that the national government was simply too weak to defend its citizens. Squatting had to be prevented, not managed, or the United States risked being pulled into an Indian war that Henry Knox worried “would be particularly disagreeable in the present embarrassed state of the public finances.”<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, England and Spain were geographically positioned to offer succor to disenchanted frontiersmen and seize a considerable portion of US territory. Political and military officials realized that enforcing law and order on the frontier were essential to prove the viability and sovereignty of the new government. Pressure to remove the so-called “banditti” was relentless and came from all quarters.<sup>33</sup>

Only nineteen days after the Treaty of Paris, the Confederation took its first steps to regulate the settlement of the vast new territory it had acquired. On September 22, 1783, Congress issued “An Ordinance Prohibiting the Settlement and Purchase of Certain Lands,” which explicitly banned illegal settlements in Indian Territory.<sup>34</sup> General Richard Butler cited this law on March 29, 1785, when he authorized Lieutenant-Colonel Harmar to eject Ohio Country squatters on behalf of the Commissioners for Indian Affairs.<sup>35</sup>

Harmar sent twenty men from Fort McIntosh under Ensign John Armstrong to affect their removal, the first of five such campaigns launched by the US government over the next two

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<sup>32</sup> Henry Knox to Josiah Harmar 12 May 1786, Harmar Papers, vol. 3.

<sup>33</sup> John Armstrong to Josiah Harmar, 13 April 1785, Harmar Papers, vol. 2.

<sup>34</sup> Also known as the Ordinance of 1783.

<sup>35</sup> “A Proclamation,” 22 September 1783, in Hunt, *JCC*, 25:602; Richard Butler to Josiah Harmar 29 March 1785, Harmar Papers, vol. 2.

years. Armstrong's expedition in March and April 1785 preceded campaigns by Ebenezer Denny in August 1785, James Doughty in November 1785, John Hamtramck in April 1786, and John Mercer in August 1786. US officials often dismissed the squatters as barbaric, savage people. Secretary of War Knox assured Harmar that extreme force was justified and absolutely necessary because the "payment of the public debt, and the due management of the public interests," made it so.<sup>36</sup> "[T]hose lawless men," Knox continued, "have acted in defiance of the order and interest of the United States."<sup>37</sup> Evicting them would restore order, permit the orderly and peaceful settlement of the frontier, and secure US economic and social stability.<sup>38</sup>

Congress authorized Harmar to construct a post at the confluence of the Muskingum and Ohio Rivers as a base "for removing intruders from the lands of the United States" and to deter further encroachments.<sup>39</sup> Knox believed that removing squatters was the Western Army's first priority, before preventing Indian attacks. He ordered Harmar to conduct regular patrols of the riverfront, remove the squatters, and prevent their return. It was a lot to expect for a force of only seven hundred men. Throughout the mid-1780s, the United States struggled to build enough forts and deploy sufficient numbers of troops to effectively gain control over the situation.<sup>40</sup>

### Squatter Settlements Patterns and Resistance

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<sup>36</sup> Henry Knox to Josiah Harmar, 12 May 1786, Harmar Papers, vol. 3.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Downes, "Ohio's Squatter Governor," 278–279; John Armstrong to Josiah Harmar, 12 April 1785, Armstrong to Harmar, 13 April 1785, Ebenezer Denny to Harmar, 23 August 1785, and John Mercer to John Hamtramck, 16 August 1786, in Harmar Papers, vol. 2; "Journal of General Butler," in Craig, *Olden Time*, 2:442–459; Smith, *Federal Land Series*, 1:149.

<sup>39</sup> Resolution by Congress, 27 June 1785, Harmar Papers, vol. 2.

<sup>40</sup> "By the United States Congress Assembled," 1 April 1785, Resolution of Congress, 27 June 1785, and Henry Knox to Josiah Harmar, 23 August 1785, in Harmar Papers, vol. 2; Henry Knox to Richard Butler, 12 May 1786, Harmar Papers, vol. 3; Fitzpatrick, *JCC*, 28:223–224.



The settlements along the Ohio River from Fort McIntosh to the Muskingum River were typically small, usually one or two families living together. The biggest squatter communities contained no more than ten cabins. Most of the primary source evidence for these settlements focused on the sixty-eight mile stretch from Fort McIntosh to Wheeling, the approximate limit of the US Army's anti-squatter patrols. The largest settlements and most dense clusters were within a ten-mile radius of Wheeling. Predictably, no squatter settlements were found in western Pennsylvania above the mouth of the Beaver River near the present Ohio-Pennsylvania border, which was only ten miles from Fort McIntosh. This distance gave settlers more time to react and avoid detection by army patrols, but it also placed them farther from Pittsburgh, the largest commercial market in the region. The close proximity of squatter settlements to legal communities on the Virginia-side of the river can be explained in several ways. First, this provided ready access to supplies that were needed due to the relative isolation of the frontier. Second, when squatters were able to produce surplus corn, ginseng, or slaughtered beef, communities on the other side of the river were the most convenient place to sell them. In the slumping post-war economy, self-sufficiency and financial concerns were obviously of the utmost importance.

Unsurprisingly, many squatters settled near family members whenever possible. Governor Hoagland's son, Henry, settled alongside his brother, William, at the governor's settlement at Hoagland's Town (present Martins Ferry, Ohio). The brothers remained together despite repeated attempts to remove them in the 1780s. The Eddington brothers, Isaac and Joseph, settled together with their families five to six miles above Mingo Bottom until they were evicted by the army in August 1785. Security in frontier areas depended on the force of numbers.

Settling in groups protected squatters against Indian raids and the efforts of their own countrymen—soldiers and legal settlers alike—to remove them. Family ties and other alliances were therefore essential for survival. These familial bonds also imported some familiarity from their former homes and laid the foundation for small, tight-knit borderland communities that would come to define the rural Midwest.<sup>41</sup>

Squatters responded to eviction in a number of different ways, vacillating between compliance, procrastination, and outright defiance. They looked at the land they occupied in much the same way that legal settlers did: they felt an intense bond to the land and did whatever they could to stay there. Some responded by talking out of both sides of their mouths, pleading for mercy while at other times they threatened physical violence against the US soldiers who repeatedly attempted to remove them. The methods of resistance they used largely depended on their financial circumstances, where they had come from, and why they had settled in Ohio to begin with.

The most compliant trespassers were those who owned legal claims on the other side of the river. Abraham Croxton was a homesteader in Virginia, and when Denny's men arrived to scuttle his family's improvements, the "dispossessed were all very submissive & promised to move over the River immediately [*sic*] after we left them."<sup>42</sup> Squatters like Croxton rarely erected permanent dwellings in Ohio, so they rarely lost much of their personal property when the army came through. Even if the soldiers destroyed their fields, which rarely happened, they could easily replant their crops and feed their cattle in Indian Country after the army left, knowing that

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<sup>41</sup> Ebenezer Denny to Josiah Harmar, 23 August 1785, and John Armstrong to Josiah Harmar, 12 April 1785, Harmar Papers, vol. 2.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

it would be some time before they came back. For the most part, this group received eviction orders with compliance, crossed the river back into Virginia or Kentucky and stayed there until the dust settled. Then, they returned to Ohio to repair their fences and farm the land.

The nonchalance of legal landowners was a luxury poor squatters did not have. Economic desperation made them tacticians in the arts of delay and subterfuge. In late September 1785, General Richard Butler remarked that the squatters he encountered “generally promise compliance, but I observe it is with a degree of reluctance, . . . They are fond of construing every indulgence, in the most favorable and extensive manner for themselves.”<sup>43</sup> When they agreed to leave, there always seemed to be a caveat. They “seem to hint that saving their crops includes feeding their cattle on the ground the ensuing winter, and of course give them a footing in the spring, and so on,” Butler remarked.<sup>44</sup> Simply abandoning their settlements was impractical because in some cases they had spent their life savings, to clear the land, build cabins and fences, and plant crops there. Denny observed a number of communities that were bounded by fences containing thousands of split rails, which took a great deal of time and labor to construct, and cornfields that ranged in size from three to four acres. One of the largest farms encompassed ten acres. Settlers who did not own land south of the river obviously planned to stay, so they built finished cabins instead of temporary dwellings. These homesteaders had too much on the line to simply abandon their homes and fields.<sup>45</sup>

The enforcement of eviction notices was especially difficult when commanders in the field saw the grinding poverty and poor conditions that many of the squatters lived in. In April

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<sup>43</sup> Richard Butler to Josiah Harmar, 4 October 1785, Harmar Papers, vol. 2.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ebenezer Denny to Josiah Harmar, 23 August 1785, Harmar Papers, vol. 3.

1785, Armstrong was touched by three families living near the confluence of the Beaver and Ohio Rivers. They were destitute and did not have a boat to transport their belongings to Virginia. To avoid depriving them of their few meager possessions, Armstrong gave them an eleven-day reprieve as long as they promised to destroy their cabins before they left.<sup>46</sup>

Several months later, in August 1785, Denny marked on his campaign, destroying cabins, fences, and nearly every other improvement they encountered. The only things that remained untouched were the squatters' cornfields, which were left standing as a sign of mercy. There were exceptions to these scorched-earth tactics, however, especially when soldiers confronted the impact that endemic disease and the forces of nature had on the settlers. These were things that nearly every American experienced, whether they lived on the frontier or in cities, which created an empathy that blunted the soldiers' desire to follow their orders to fullest extent. Denny spared one family's cabin because their child had been bitten by a snake and was deathly ill. Farther downriver, the troops found two cabins which had been erected by the aforementioned Eddington brothers. The first of the two houses was occupied by the ailing wife of one of the men. In the other house were three children who were basically caring for themselves. The woman informed Denny that Isaac and Joseph were "abroad," but promised to give them Denny's message when they returned and assured him that they would tear down both cabins before departing. The troops left both cabins and two fields of corn standing because of their distressed circumstances. The woman's promises would suffice for the time being.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Indian Commissioners to Josiah Harmar, 12 April 1785, The United States Congress Assembled, 1 April 1785, John Armstrong to Josiah Harmar, 12 April 1785, and Henry Knox to Josiah Harmar, 23 August 1785, in Harmar Papers, vol. 2.

<sup>47</sup> Ebenezer Denny to Josiah Harmar, 23 August 1785, Harmar Papers, vol. 2.

Unlike regular soldiers, military and civil officials had limited patience for the squatters' clemency appeals. When the settlers of Hoagland's Town begged for a reprieve, Harmar granted them a one-month stay while their appeal was reviewed by Congress (predictably, it was rejected). Because squatting undercut the sovereignty the national government to enforce its laws on public land, politicians realized that eviction was the only way to assert the Confederation's plenary power and deter a wave of similar disrespect for the rule of law. In a letter to Knox in the summer of 1785, Harmar remarked that a group of squatters who were killed near the mouth of the Scioto River were "not much to be pitied," because their law breaking abrogated the government's responsibility to protect them.<sup>48</sup>

The destruction of squatters' homesteads did not always defeat their resilience. Many simply moved to a different area to form a new community after the troops left. In November 1785, soldiers under Captain John Doughty encountered John Carpenter and a collection of families living along Cross Creek near present Deandale, Ohio. Soldiers burned their cabins and fences and ordered them back across the river. Rather than move back to western Virginia, Carpenter relocated thirteen miles downriver to Norris Town (present Rayland, Ohio) where his family lived for the next five months in a small settlement along with four other men. In April 1786, John Hamtramck came through this area on his way to Wheeling. Once again, the troops pulled down the squatters' cabins into piles of splintered timbers but left their planted corn undisturbed. Carpenter's rebuilt home was spared only because the family of George Norris was living inside, afflicted with a severe illness. Like many others who lived on the Ohio side, Carpenter ignored repeated warnings and persisted despite the loss of two cabins. For him, the

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<sup>48</sup> Quote from Josiah Harmar to Henry Knox, 1 July 1785, in Harmar Papers, vol. 28; Josiah Harmar to the Settlers North and West of the Ohio River, 21 April 1785, in Harmar Papers, vol. 2.

risk of being evicted was worth taking if the reward was a chance to be a freeholder.<sup>49</sup> For squatters like Carpenter, being chased around the river bottoms was more appealing than tenancy in the East or homelessness.<sup>50</sup>

Some settlers stayed put and simply rebuilt their houses as soon as the army moved out. Joseph Ross, Charles Norris, and William Hoagland, the three most powerful squatters in the Ohio Country, continually defied orders to relocate their settlements. Ensign John Armstrong first encountered Ross at Mingo Bottom, present Mingo Junction, Ohio, in the spring of 1785. Armstrong got into a heated argument with Ross, the proprietor of the settlement, who believed Armstrong's orders "never came from Congress, that he had late Accounts from that Honorable Body, that he knew the [Indian] Commissioners had no such Instructions" to force their removal.<sup>51</sup> Even if Armstrong's orders were legitimate, Ross stated that he did not "care from whom they came, he was determined to hold his possession . . . [and] cast many Reflections on . . . the Congress the Commissioners & the commanding Officer."<sup>52</sup> Ross vowed to replace any structures the soldiers destroyed at a six-to-one rate. Fearing for his own safety, the security of his men, and the potential of a violent confrontation, Armstrong placed Ross under arrest and sent him under armed guard to Wheeling, where he was imprisoned in the military barracks at Fort Henry.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Due to the dates of these settlements and their location, John Carpenter was likely Elizabeth Carpenter's father, the father-in-law of Henry Hoagland.

<sup>50</sup> Smith, "Report of Houses Destroyed," *Federal Land Series*, 1:149; John Hamtramck to John Wyllys, 27 April 1786, in US Department of State, *Papers of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789*, RG 360, roll 164, 293-294 (hereafter cited as *PCC*).

<sup>51</sup> John Armstrong to Josiah Harmar, 12 April 1785, Harmar Papers, vol. 2.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

By the time of Armstrong's encounter with Ross, he and his men had left eleven cabins in smoldering ruins since they left Fort McIntosh. Word of their slash-and-burn approach spread downriver faster than his soldiers could move. Their encounter with Ross was not the last time they would face threats from local squatters. The same night that Ross was arrested and taken to Wheeling, Charles Norris approached Armstrong's camp "in a hostile manner" with a party of armed men.<sup>54</sup> Norris was the leader of Norris Town, eleven miles downriver. He informed Armstrong that there were nearly eighty armed men at their settlement, standing ready to defend their homes against the army. "By threatening and persuasion," Armstrong convinced Norris and his men to back down, to leave their guns with him for the night, and to accompany the troops into Norris Town the next day.<sup>55</sup> Armstrong told him that he wished to avoid bloodshed, if possible, but he would "treat any Armed party I saw as Enemies to my country," and was prepared to use lethal force if necessary.<sup>56</sup> The next day, as the soldiers approached Norris's settlement, Armstrong ordered his men to load their weapons, to stay alert, and prepare for battle. These preparations were made in front of Norris, who was then sent ahead to inform the settlers of the army's intentions.<sup>57</sup>

Upon their arrival, the troops discovered that the townspeople had been scrambling to prepare their defense. Forty unarmed men welcomed them into the town, but informed Armstrong that they had stashed their weapons close by. One family had barricaded their front door and outfitted the walls of their cabin with embrasures to allow the occupants to fire on the

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> John Armstrong to Josiah Harmar, 12 April 1785, Harmar Papers, vol. 2.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> John Armstrong to Josiah Harmar, 12 April 1785; and Armstrong to Harmar, 13 April 1785, Harmar Papers vol. 2.

troops as they approached. It was clear to Armstrong that some of the villagers were preparing to make a final, bloody stand to defend their homes. With the tension at a breaking point, Armstrong made a gesture that brought a peaceful resolution to the standoff without shirking his responsibilities. Severe spring storms had recently bombarded the area, so Armstrong granted the townspeople two weeks to gather their belongings, tear down their cabins, and remove to the Virginia side. No blood was shed and the settlers at Norris Town agreed to leave, a testament not only to the cool-headedness of Armstrong but to the shrewd and pragmatic leadership of Norris, who realized that by feigning compliance, they could rebuild their homes as soon as the army left. The inhabitants of Norris Town followed through on the letter, not the spirit, of their promise. When Butler came through the area several months later, Norris and his followers had relocated their community to a spot three miles upriver on the Ohio side.<sup>58</sup>

Ross's arrest and confinement at Wheeling in April 1785 left him undaunted. In August of that year, Ebenezer Denny noted that two houses he destroyed at Mingo Bottom belonged to a man named Ross who, according to five other families who lived at Mingo, was the proprietor of the settlement but now lived on the other side of the river. Ross was still living in that area three months later, when Richard Butler found him back on the Ohio side. Butler warned him that if he did not leave, his cabin would be destroyed again. Butler's threat was apparently the final straw for Ross. When Hamtramck came through in April 1786, Ross was not mentioned among the squatters who had their dwellings destroyed by the army.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> "Journal of General Butler," in Craig, *Olden Time*, 2:438; Armstrong to Harmar, 12 April 1785, Harmar Papers, vol. 2.

<sup>59</sup> Armstrong to Harmar 12 April 1785, and Ebenezer Denny to Josiah Harmar, 23 August 1785, Harmar Papers, vol. 2; "Journal of General Butler," in Craig, *Olden Time*, 2:437; Smith, *Federal Land Series*, 1:149.



William Hoagland, the squatter-governor of Ohio, was perhaps the most interesting of all of Ohio's early land proprietors. He had served with distinction in the American Revolution before he established Hoagland's Town and assumed leadership over the ten families who settled there. More so than the other "Squatter-Kings of Ohio," Ross and Norris, Hoagland defied the profile of the typical squatter. He was a life-long speculator who owned land in Pennsylvania, western Virginia, and eventually Kentucky. Men of wealth like Hoagland were early movers in the game of land speculation, well before the government sold public land to large speculative enterprises such as the Ohio Company and speculator-politicians like John Cleves Symmes. By claiming lands and bringing others along with them, the Squatter-Kings established themselves, albeit fleetingly, in positions of power and influence. Shut out from political offices and speculative opportunities in the East, the West now became a land of opportunity where they could wield political influence. Their long-term plans were thwarted by the speculative interests of powerful, politically connected Americans and by the resolute stand that native peoples took against western squatters. Hoagland was chased out of Ohio by Indian raids after the Treaty of Fort Harmar in 1789. When he died in 1799, he was living along the Green River in what is now Taylor County, Kentucky. Despite his elevated economic and social position, life on the frontier exposed Hoagland to the same difficult circumstances as fellow squatters who came from more modest or impoverished backgrounds.<sup>60</sup>

Indian attacks were the biggest threat to settlers in the Ohio Country. In April 1785, Hoagland and nearly one hundred eighty squatters wrote an appeal to Congress, hoping to gain

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<sup>60</sup> John Schmeeckle, "William Hoagland, abt. 1740-abt. 1799" <http://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Hoagland-147> (accessed 13 June 2016); Settlers West of the Ohio River to Congress, 11 April 1785, in *PCC*, roll 51, 320; Montgomery, *Pennsylvania Regiment of Cavalry*, 3:835, 837, 848; Franklin Ellis, *History of Fayette County, Pennsylvania: With Biographical Sketches of Its Pioneers and Prominent Men* (Philadelphia: L.H. Everts & Co., 1882), 565; Ebenezer Denny to Josiah Harmar, 23 August 1785, Harmar Papers, vol. 2.

permission to stay on their land. Like the fair-play squatters on Lycoming Creek, they felt that the privations and difficulties they faced defending the settlement against Indian raids had given them the “right” to stay. “[W]e had scarce Enough left us to Support the Crying Distress of our Families Occasioned wholly [*sic*] by being Exposed to the means of a Cruel and Savage Enemy,” Hoagland wrote to Congress.<sup>61</sup> The settlers suffered through this difficult period “[c]onfined in forts for the Preservation of our lives by which we have Reduced almost to the Lowest Ebb of Poverty,” after such attacks victimized their neighbors, destroyed their crops, and killed their livestock.<sup>62</sup> Harmar, Knox, and the Continental Congress were not moved by their appeals and declared that eviction patrols would continue until the squatters were removed permanently.<sup>63</sup>

Other trespassers appealed to the *esprit de corps* of US military commanders, hoping their status as veterans from the late war would allow them to stay. In a letter to Harmar, Hoagland remarked that he and the other settlers were not trying to subvert the authority of the government when they settled in Ohio. To the contrary, they had been staunch supporters of independence, “for which we fought and Suffered in the Late Great Conflict for Liberty, and which we are Zealously Determined to Defend to the Last.”<sup>64</sup> From 1778 to 1781, Hoagland had served in the Continental Army as a member of Colonel Stephen Moylan’s Fourth Regiment of Light Dragoons (coincidentally, the same unit that mutineer John Sullivan belonged to). After his service in the Continental Army was over, he was the captain of the Washington County, Pennsylvania, militia from 1782 until 1785 when he moved to Ohio. Like Hoagland, many

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<sup>61</sup> Settlers to Congress, 11 April 1785, *PCC*, roll 51, 320.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 320-321

<sup>64</sup> Inhabitants from the Western Side of the Ohio to Harmar, 4–5 August 1785, Harmar Papers, vol. 2.

veterans of the war believed their sacrifices for the cause of freedom entitled them to special considerations: free land in the west and the right to defend it against the Indians and the US Army. The logic was reminiscent of the feelings held by many senior military officials and politicians who felt their contributions to the independence movement entitled them to free land and political self-determination.<sup>65</sup>

The US Army's efforts to remove squatters in Ohio had failed. Not only were the squatters not leaving, frontier intelligence indicated that their numbers were increasing rapidly despite the risks. The dispersed nature of the squatter settlements made it difficult to police them. To truly remove the squatters, the army would have to be an occupying force that launched daily eviction missions from forts that were located close together. Effective anti-squatter campaigns would have to penetrate deep into the forests of the Ohio Country, which could expose the army to ambush attacks by the area's native inhabitants. For an army of only seven hundred men, that was an impossible task. Federalists and anti-Federalists in the national government were deeply divided on the issue of a large standing army, not to mention what it would cost to sustain one. As a result, squatters would continue to populate Indian Country for the foreseeable future.

Squatter settlements endured in Ohio until at least 1787, when Secretary of War Knox informed Congress that their numbers had increased to the point that "[a]ll future attempts to remove intruders may be abortive."<sup>66</sup> In the end, it was the native peoples of the Northwest Territory who put an end to the Squatter Era in the Ohio Country. Harmar observed that "[t]he circumstance of a few adventurers . . . down the river, having been [killed and scalped], has had

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<sup>65</sup> Settlers to Congress, 11 April 1785, in *PCC*, 320; Western Inhabitants to Harmar 4–5 August 1785, Harmar Papers, vol. 2; Schmeeckle, "William Hoagland."

<sup>66</sup> Henry Knox as quoted in Kohn, *Eagle and Sword*, 65.

this good effect—it has halted them in their rapid emigrations,” and he cited reports that similar attacks had driven interlopers back across the Ohio in large numbers.<sup>67</sup> Outsourcing the work to the Northwest Confederacy proved to be the most effective way to resolve the problem. It saved the government a considerable amount of money and allowed Knox and Harmar to divert the army’s meager resources toward preventing Indian raids on legal settlements south of the river, rather than stationing small companies throughout the Ohio frontier to act as border control agents.<sup>68</sup>

### Conclusion

In the years after the Revolutionary War, the borderlands of the United States hosted a mix of people from different economic classes who had unique motivations for emigrating to the West. Economic pressures had pushed Americans across the Ohio River onto Indian lands, which caused several problems for the US government. First, it undermined the Confederation’s plan to sell public lands to pay down the national debt. Squatters also challenged the authority of Congress and its army because they disregarded the rule of law, assumed autonomy for themselves, and unilaterally created their own forms of autonomous self-government that were outside of the jurisdiction of the United States. Third, illegal settlements drew the US Army to the frontier, first to remove the squatters, then to act as a police force over thousands of miles of territory to prevent retaliatory raids by Indians against legal settlements in Kentucky, western Pennsylvania, and western Virginia. Congress’s failure to provide security for those settlements threatened to tear the young country apart as disenchanting settlers looked to secede from the

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<sup>67</sup> Josiah Harmar to Henry Knox, 1 August 1785, Harmar Papers, vol. 28.

<sup>68</sup> Thomas Hutchins to Josiah Harmar 30 Sept 1786, Harmar Papers, vol. 4; Dumas Malone, *Dictionary of American Biography*, vol. 9 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1932), 435.

United States or sought alliances with other foreign powers for increased economic security and protection from Indian attacks.

For many of these interlopers, their story was one of economic hardship, often passed down from one generation to the next, which forced them to take drastic measures to survive. Their ancestors were impoverished, powerless settlers along the East Coast who were pushed out of the Tidewater region due to population growth and land scarcity. They fled to the West in a growing wave, but settled only briefly before they were again inundated by the same forces that had driven them out of the East. Their descendants took up land in Ohio and were determined to stay there, regardless of the consequences.

Others emigrants to the Ohio Country were aspiring entrepreneurs. William Hoagland was a land speculator, the proprietor of Hoagland's Town, and the elected governor of all squatters north of the Ohio River. His financial resources gave him a greater access to political power than many of those who settled around him, and he used it to his full advantage. He boosted his prestige by resisting the will of the Confederation government, rebuilding his cabins, and replanting his fields each time the army destroyed them. Much of what he accomplished during his governorship has been lost to history, but his resolve inspired many squatters to rebuild rather than relocate.

The frontier blurred economic boundary lines that existed among the squatters because it forced people together in a common struggle for survival. All of Ohio's squatters, both rich and poor, collectively endured Indian raids, food shortages, disease, brutally cold winters, scorching hot summers, and the persistent efforts of the US Army to kick them out. When the Ohio River and its tributaries flooded, everyone was forced to rebuild cabins, mend fences, and replant

crops. Egalitarianism only went so far, however. Despite the fact that many of the first white Ohioans had emigrated to Ohio to be free from the dominance of wealthy, politically connected men, poor squatters still deferred to people like Hoagland to lead them.

Squatter communities in Ohio were surprisingly organized, contrary to the characterizations of chaos and lawlessness that US officials used to describe them. They elected governments and followed established rules, even if they were not written down. Many of these settlements featured a socioeconomic hierarchy. In the end, Indian raids drove them away, but their impact on the future of the Old Northwest cannot be discounted. They started a war between the Indians and the US government, taxed the resources of the US Army, and exposed the inability of Congress to govern its territory. Several provisions in the Constitution were designed, in part, to shore up these weaknesses. In the years to come, managing westward expansion and exerting territorial sovereignty were two of the most important functions of the constitutional republic.

## CHAPTER 4

### LAND SPECULATION AND THE FOUNDING FATHERS

The lands England ceded in the Treaty of Paris increased the size of the United States by nearly half a million square miles. This newly acquired territory symbolized different things for different people. Congress saw the land as an opportunity to assert its sovereignty relative to other competing imperial powers, establish its foreign and domestic policy, and pay down the war debt. Squatters viewed the land as a vehicle for economic and political self-determination. It was the ancestral homeland of the native peoples who lived there, and they were willing to defend it with their lives. Great Britain hoped to maintain its monopoly over the Old Northwest peltry trade and, if possible, use their control over the disputed posts to destabilize the US government. Another influential group was land speculators. They advocated for public-private partnerships that became a hallmark of the constitutional government and forced Congress to develop a codified system to divide the land and govern new territories. Ultimately, it was the actions of these speculators that laid the foundation for a continental US empire. Their boosterism populated Ohio and set it on the path toward statehood. Most importantly, these speculators were a who's-who of influential politicians, legal experts, and military leaders on the national, state, and local levels who used their inside knowledge, and the influence of their positions, to advance their personal financial interests.

#### Precursors to Speculation in the Old Northwest

Land speculation in the District of Kentucky encapsulated the critical intersection of property rights, boosterism, entrepreneurship, and corporate interest that defined the settlement of the trans-Appalachian West. In spite of the war in the East, or perhaps because of it, migration to Kentucky began in earnest after Virginia passed the Land Office Act of 1779. In the spring of 1780, three hundred boats disembarked at the Falls of the Ohio, near Louisville, loaded with settlers bound for the Bluegrass interior. Observers estimated that between ten and fifteen wagons per day departed the riverside, loaded with families seeking a new beginning.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the best intentions of the Virginia State Assembly, the division of land in Kentucky was chaotic and disordered. The Land Office Act granted Virginia's governor the power to appoint a four-man Board of Commissioners who processed land claims, settled disputes, and evaluated the preemption claims of settlers who had settled in Kentucky before the law was passed. The board held exclusive authority in all land cases, and its decisions were binding if three of its four members agreed. It could issue subpoenas, and civil officials were obligated to enforce the board's rulings. Their job was difficult, however. They had to determine the veracity of witnesses' accounts before they could verify individual claims. In cases where witnesses were unavailable for either party, the board simply rendered its own judgement. Claims made by former officers of the Virginia state militia were given special preference when no witnesses were available, as long as the claim had been filed within one year of them leaving the service.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Butler, *History of the Commonwealth*, 99.

<sup>2</sup> Butler, *History of the Commonwealth*, 99–101; Henry Marshall, *The History of Kentucky: Exhibiting An Account of the Modern Discovery; Settlement; Progressive Improvement; Civil and Military Transactions; and the Present State of the Country*, vol. 1 (Frankfort, Ky.: Geo. S. Robinson, 1824), 97–102.



One complicating factor was that the board had to sort through several types of claims and certificates. As described in Chapter 3, the first settlers to arrive on a piece of land were usually squatters. In most cases, these trespassers arrived either when Indians still held title to the land or immediately after they ceded it to the Americans by treaty. The Virginia State Assembly granted squatters in Kentucky preemption rights, or the right of first refusal, to purchase those lands. Land bounties given to veterans of the Virginia state militia were given second priority after preemption claims. The lowest priority was assigned to certificates purchased directly from the Virginia Land Office. The commissioners were soon inundated by claims, almost three thousand over one three-month period, each of which had to be recorded by the clerk.<sup>3</sup>

Claimants had priority if they could prove that they had settled, improved, or cultivated a plot, which was not claimed by any other party, before January 1, 1778. If the claim met those conditions, the applicant was granted preemption rights for up to four hundred acres at \$2.35 per acre and the option of purchasing up to one thousand acres of land adjacent to their claim at a cost of forty cents per acre. Preemption rights were not the same as receiving title in fee simple, however. They were merely an acknowledgement that the claimant had the right to purchase the land if they wished. If they declined, the land could then be claimed by another party who had no legal obligation to compensate the previous occupant. Cash-poor squatters were allowed to pay for their land on credit until December 1781, when Virginia depreciated its currency from \$1.50 paper per one dollar specie to one thousand dollars paper for every one dollar in specie. Virginia issued depreciation certificates in exchange for the old currency which, by law, could be used to

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<sup>3</sup> William Walter Hening, ed., *The Statutes at Large, Being A Collection of All the Laws of Virginia*, vol. 10 (Richmond, Va.: George Cochran, 1822), 50–65; Butler, *History of the Commonwealth*, 101; Marshall, *History of Kentucky*, 1:99.

purchase land or pay taxes. Land claims in Kentucky quadrupled now that land was selling for less than fifty cents specie per one hundred acres. This land rush overwhelmed every cash-strapped settler in its path.<sup>4</sup>

The massive influx of new settlers magnified an already-confusing situation regarding the boundaries of individual claims. Virginia's ambiguous land laws had created an inexact and often contradictory process of granting land patents.<sup>5</sup> The first problem was that the number of land certificates Virginia had issued for both preemption and military warrants exceeded the amount of acreage available in Kentucky. Eventually, the Virginia Military District was created north of the Ohio River to satisfy the left-over claims.<sup>6</sup>

The path to land ownership was regulated by laws that were flawed and hard for the Board of Commissioners to enforce. Some land in Kentucky had been sold prior to being surveyed, which caused disputes when the boundaries of otherwise legitimate claims overlapped. Virginia never set limits on the amount of land that could be claimed by preemption, and it placed no limitations on absentee ownership. Both loopholes favored speculators and absentee landlords who filed claims on several plots they had improved but did not live on. Sometimes the only effort they had made to prove their occupancy was to gather a few downed trees into a mini-

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<sup>4</sup> Butler, *History of the Commonwealth*, 99–101, 137.

<sup>5</sup> It is important to note the difference between a land “bounty,” “warrant” and “patent.” When an individual performed military service for a state like Virginia or Pennsylvania, they were issued a land “bounty” that entitled them to a certain number of acres of land in the West. A survey “warrant” was issued when a claimant applied to have their land bounty located and surveyed. A bounty and a warrant did not grant the bearer ownership of the land, however. After the survey was completed, the applicant then had to occupy the land for a certain amount of time or in some cases make “improvements” on the land—plant corn, raise a cabin, or build a fence—before a “patent” was issued. A patent was an agreement between an individual and the land office to pay for the land. Once the land was paid for, or an agreement worked out to pay for the land on credit over time, the ownership of the land was settled for the claimant with a fee-simple title. Buck, *Civilization in Western Pennsylvania*, 207.

<sup>6</sup> Faragher, *Daniel Boone*, 239; John S. Williams, ed., *American Pioneer; A Monthly Periodical, Devoted to the Objects of the Logan Historical Society*, vol. 1 (Cincinnati, John S. Williams, 1842), 71.

cabin measuring only a few feet square or plant a small patch of corn on several square yards of cleared ground. With a minimal amount of effort, speculators could claim preemption on four hundred acres several times over and apply for the extra one thousand acres for each parcel. When Virginia devalued its currency in 1781, speculators buried the land office with requests to purchase plots. These claims were a sound investment and worth the risk, especially in lieu of being stuck with piles of worthless scrip that had devalued by over 660%.<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, the process of surveying the land was poorly regulated. Although Virginia had appointed an official surveyor, independent surveyors offered their services to locate and measure lands for individual applicants. As private contractors, they were paid to obtain the best parcels to maximize profit for their customers. They paid little regard to the effect their work would eventually have on boundary disputes, preemption rights, or the creation of land monopolies in the West. They measured claims that maximized the natural features of the area, which made them more valuable, and this often created conflicts with neighboring claims. The lack of regulation meant that many surveyors eschewed modern equipment and methods or were not trained professionals. They often located parcels by the naked eye and used landmarks and topographical features to delineate boundaries instead of fixed points of latitude and longitude. Such crude methods created a disorganized web of claims with oddly shaped boundaries that frequently encroached on neighboring plats. Their knowledge of the intricacies of the system and its flaws enabled many of these independent surveyors to become speculators themselves.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Aron, *How the West Was Lost*, 70–72; Butler, *History of the Commonwealth*, 137.

<sup>8</sup> Faragher, *Daniel Boone*, 238–241.

One of the most famous early speculators in the West was the frontiersman and squatter, Daniel Boone. Biographer John Mack Faragher remarked that Boone was the quintessential frontier capitalist and held interests in many different businesses. He served as the town trustee of Limestone (present Maysville, Kentucky). He and his wife owned Boone Tavern in Limestone, a boarding house that hosted and fed travelers on their way to the West. Boone was also a merchant and a key link in the bilateral trade between the East Coast and the western territories. He acquired animal pelts, ginseng, and moonshine from frontier settlers, mostly through bartering, which he then sent upriver to Pittsburgh. But these activities were ancillary to his devotion to horse-trading and land speculation. He purchased horses from frontiersmen settlers in exchange for scrip that they used to purchase land patents from the land office in Fayette County, Kentucky. As deputy surveyor for Fayette County, he often surveyed their lands for them and accepted parcels of land as payment for his services, which enabled him to amass over twelve thousand acres of frontier land over the course of his career.<sup>9</sup>

Speculation closely resembled gambling. Experienced speculators, like card sharps, knew how to manipulate the system. They developed an intimate knowledge of the land: which topographical features indicated the presence of valuable natural resources, and they were familiar with which parcels were unclaimed. Speculators also knew the rules of the game and used their inside knowledge to their full personal advantage. They purchased warrants from preemptors and military veterans, surveyed the best lands for those claims, then applied for patents. Because only a fraction of claims eventually received patents, often after much legal

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 235–238.

wrangling, many of these gamblers applied for patents on more plots than they could afford to pay for, expecting that most of them would eventually be rejected.<sup>10</sup>

Boone's career as a speculator highlighted the pitfalls of gambling in a market that was defined by instability. He submitted warrants for one hundred thousand acres of land and gained patents for only twelve percent of his claims. In the mid-1780s, Virginia passed a law that taxed the untitled lands claimed by individuals (preemption grants that had not been fully paid for), which meant that the vast majority of Boone's twelve thousands acres was taxable. The amount he owed surpassed his income as a surveyor—perhaps no more than fifty to seventy-five dollars per year—combined with his earnings as a merchant and tavern owner. Boone was forced to liquidate 11,279 of his 12,179 acres at a sale price of forty-three cents per one hundred acres. He tried to sell his unclaimed warrants but because most of the parcels were disputed, no one bought them. To pay his debts and save himself from bankruptcy, Boone sold the nine hundred acres of titled land he owned at prices below par value.<sup>11</sup>

Boone's misfortune in the land market had a cascading effect that eventually bled him dry. By 1785, he was forced to hire a lawyer on retainer. He had significant outstanding debts, plus his work as a surveyor had involved him in at least ten lawsuits between 1786 and 1789, either as a witness or a defendant. He lost most of the cases. By the winter of 1788, Boone quit the speculation business, sold the few acres he owned along the riverfront at Limestone, and moved upriver to Point Pleasant, Ohio. In 1789, he reestablished himself as a small merchant who served the militia and assisted the shipment of goods downriver from Pittsburgh to the

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 240–245.

<sup>11</sup> Faragher, *Daniel Boone*, 240–245.

frontier. His speculative gambit, Faragher observed, had “collapsed under its own weight.”<sup>12</sup> Boone’s experience was common in the hyper-competitive, cutthroat, and volatile business of western land speculation. Only the strong survived. The man who is most readily identified with the image of the grit, ingenuity, and perseverance of early white pioneers was apparently not up to the task.<sup>13</sup>

Gambling on land prices was not an activity reserved exclusively for ambitious frontiersmen like Daniel Boone. In fact, many of the so-called “Founders” were the among the most active land speculators from the late colonial period into the early postwar period. Speculation among prominent politicians, judges, lawmakers, and military officials created significant conflicts of interest, however. These men, who were responsible for setting the rules of land acquisition and enforcing them, had much to gain from the removal of squatters and the pacification of Indian conflict on the frontier. In this way, they were the original “inside traders” of what historian Aaron Sakolski called “the Great American Land Bubble.”<sup>14</sup>

Unquestionably, the most famous American who speculated in western lands was George Washington, who became enamored with the lands of the Old Northwest during his service in the Seven Years' War. As early as 1767, he reached out to William Crawford to secure large tracts of land for him in western Pennsylvania and western Virginia. Crawford, who had served as an ensign during Washington’s campaign against Fort Duquesne in 1758, had moved to the West after the war and settled near present Connellsville, Pennsylvania, where Braddock’s military road crossed the Youghiogheny River. There, he took up farming, surveyed the

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 248, 261–263.

<sup>14</sup> Sakolski, *Great American Land Bubble*.

surrounding area to satisfy land warrants of fellow soldiers, traded with local Indians, and partnered with his old commander, Washington, in a speculative enterprise that would last for nearly the next twenty years. Crawford's military service during the French and Indian War and Pontiac's Rebellion gave him considerable knowledge of western lands, especially in the regions Washington coveted. By the end of the Revolution, Washington had accumulated nearly fifty-eight thousand acres west of the Appalachian Mountains.<sup>15</sup>

Washington's position as the commanding general over the Virginia Regiment during the Seven Years' War gave him two advantages that were common among commissioned officers in those early years. First, it was his responsibility to secure land for bounties England and Virginia granted to himself, as well as the the soldiers and officers under his command during the war against France. Once those responsibilities were completed, he knew which lands remained and had first access to purchase them for himself on the side. He used his influence to have Crawford appointed as the principal surveyor for the Ohio Company of Virginia.<sup>16</sup> This gave both men the inside track on the best farmland, areas with good access to the river, and plots that contained valuable natural resources, like salt springs. In the fall of 1770, Washington journeyed to the West with Crawford and examine the Ohio Valley for himself.<sup>17</sup>

The fame, fortune, and reputation of the United States' first president did not spare him from many of the indignities that befell other speculators at that time. In some cases, the

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<sup>15</sup> George Washington to William Crawford, 21 Sept 1767, Washington to Crawford, 25 Sep 1773, and Washington to John Witherspoon, 10 March 1784, in C.W. Butterfield, ed., *The Washington-Crawford Letters: Being the Correspondence between George Washington and William Crawford from 1767 to 1781, Concerning Western Lands* (Cincinnati: Robert Clarke & Co., 1877), vii-5, 29, 77.

<sup>16</sup> The Ohio Company of Virginia was a wholly separate entity from the Ohio Company of Associates, which was created after the end of the War for Independence.

<sup>17</sup> William Crawford to George Washington, 20 Apr 1771, and Washington to Crawford, 25 Sep 1773, in Butterfield, *Washington-Crawford Letters*, 19, 29-36; 11fn.3; 16fn.2; 42fn.1.

financial interests of other men sometimes obstructed his grand design. George Croghan hovered around Crawford's surveys, Crawford believed, to pre-empt land so he could sell it to Washington for an inflated price. Crawford also suspected that Croghan wanted to use any sales he made to Washington as "a handle" to lend credibility "to all bargains he is making with other people."<sup>18</sup> The boundaries of several plots Washington purchased conflicted with adjacent parcels. Until his death in 1799, Washington was involved in court cases regarding his land holdings despite the fact that he had sold most of them many years before.<sup>19</sup>

To validate a claim, Washington needed to occupy the land and make improvements on it, so he hired a man to live on and improve his claim along Chartier Creek in present Washington County, Pennsylvania. Croghan's half-brother, Major Edward Ward, encouraged a dozen squatters to drive off Washington's hired man and occupy the land for themselves. Ward told Washington's proxy that this parcel had been previously granted to Croghan by the King of England personally and accused Washington and Crawford of cheating the brothers by claiming all the valuable land in the area. Crawford realized that the only way to resolve the dispute, outside of removing these claim-jumpers at gunpoint, was to obtain a patent which would give Washington legal ownership over the land. The reason that this dispute over the Chartier parcel was so contentious was due to its location, within twenty-five miles of Pittsburgh, which meant that its value would increase exponentially as the settlements around Pittsburgh expanded.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Crawford to Washington, 20 Apr 1777, in *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>19</sup> Crawford to Washington, 15 Mar 1772, and 1 May 1772 in *Ibid.*, 25–26; 17fn.1; "George Washington, Covenantor Squatters Historical Marker," <http://explorepahistory.com/hmarker.php?markerId=1-A-28F> (accessed 5 January 2017).

<sup>20</sup> Crawford to Washington, 29 Sept 1767, Crawford to Washington, 29 December 1773, and Crawford to Washington, 6 Mar 1775, in Butterfield, *Washington-Crawford Letters*, 6, 37–39, 58.



To stave off threats from claim-jumpers like Ward and Croghan, Washington and other aspiring land barons hired workers who would perform the back-breaking work of improving the land on their behalf. It was work fraught with immense personal danger, isolated in the wilderness surrounded by hostile Indian nations, squatters, and other land owners who were willing to take any measures necessary—legal or otherwise—to acquire new claims and protect the ones they already held. Such work often fell to convict servants—men, women, and boys from England—who were shipped to the colonies to perform forced labor for the duration of their sentence. Many of the adult servants were skilled in a trade: blacksmiths, coopers, shoemakers, tailors, or carpenters. Upon their arrival, they were sold into servitude, sometimes on credit, to their new owners.<sup>21</sup>

As a slave owner, Washington was not concerned about the moral implications of using convict labor. He was, however, concerned about the risk of entrusting his investments to the hands of convicted criminals. Washington hired a man he trusted—Crawford's brother, Valentine—to supervise a crew of a dozen convict servants to make improvements on his land. Their job would be to clear it, plant small patches of crops, and erect small structures to establish a legal foundation for survey warrants. But before Valentine and his crew could go to work in the spring of 1774, conflict between whites and Indians, Dunmore's War, grew so turbulent that downriver travel was too risky. Crawford waited near Fort Pitt, hoping the conflict would eventually die down, all the while incurring expenses to feed, clothe, and house Washington's servants. A year later they were still in Pittsburgh, waiting. Crawford tried but failed to rent the servants to local residents. They did not want to accept the risk of Washington's servants running away while

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 84fn.3.

under their supervision. Instead, Crawford put them to work building forts and serving as soldiers in the local militia. The commandant of the fort would not allow them inside because of overcrowding and an abundance of drunkenness at the post. When it became apparent that the frontier conflict would not be resolved any time soon, Crawford sold away Washington's army of convict labor. These troubles, along with the aforementioned legal entanglements, prompted Washington to remark years later that land speculation was "more pregnant of perplexities than profit."<sup>22</sup> His experience was indicative of the boom-bust nature of land speculation in the West. Even with all the advantages he held—money, power, political connections—investing in land was not the "golden goose" he had hoped for. The volatile nature of the economy and wage labor, and the sheer abundance of open land, combined with the considerable expenses required to gain ownership over it, made land a risky investment.<sup>23</sup>

#### Postwar Land Speculation: Officer-Speculators

Washington and other military officers held a considerable advantage in speculation compared to regular soldiers-of-the line not only because they were paid a considerable amount more, but because their rank and authority positioned them to profit when soldiers in their ranks died or experienced tough economic times. Washington acquired half of his ten thousand acres of western land by purchasing warrants from soldiers who had served under him during the Seven Years' War. Another prominent officer-speculator who acquired land in this way was John Armstrong. Armstrong had served as an officer in two Continental Army regiments from Pennsylvania and reenlisted as a Lieutenant in the First US Regiment after the war was over. The

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<sup>22</sup> Charles H. Ambler, *George Washington and the West* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1936), 204.

<sup>23</sup> William Crawford to George Washington, 14 Nov 1774, Valentine Crawford to George Washington, 8 Jun 1774, and Valentine Crawford to Washington, 27 Jul 1774, in Butterfield, *Washington-Crawford Letters*, 57, 91–93, 96.

commonalities between Washington and Armstrong's speculative efforts reveal how army officials, especially officers, exploited the advantages of their military service to further their personal financial interests.<sup>24</sup>

Armstrong helped the soldiers under his command during the late war claim their land bounties, just as Washington had done for his subordinates after the French and Indian War. William Mitchell and John Fancour, for example, had both served in the Pennsylvania Line under Armstrong, and his testimony on their behalf prompted the Pennsylvania Supreme Executive Council to grant them patents, two hundred total acres for Mitchell and one hundred for Fancour. Helping soldiers claim their land bounties was not an entirely selfless act for officers like Washington and Armstrong who parlayed this duty to boost their own speculative ventures. By the end of 1783, while Armstrong was still attached to his Continental Army regiment, he had already purchased the land rights from thirty-six men who needed quick cash in the postwar depression. He continued this practice over the next decade as a commissioned officer in the First Regiment. By the 1790s, he had acquired nearly 9,500 acres.<sup>25</sup>

Other than purchasing bounties from fellow soldiers, the case of Richard McCarty shows another tactic Armstrong used to accumulate his lands. During the War for Independence, McCarty served as a captain in George Rogers Clark's Illinois Regiment from Virginia and was

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<sup>24</sup> "John Armstrong," in *Compiled Service Records of Volunteer Soldiers who Served between the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812*, RG94, M905, National Archives, r.01, 24 <https://www.fold3.com/image/1/287074559> (accessed 22 June 2016) (hereafter cited as *CSRb*); James H. O'Donnell III, "Armstrong, John (1755-1816)," American National Biography Online <http://www.anb.org.proxy-remote.galib.uga.edu/articles/03/03-00013.html?a=1&g=m&n=Armstrong%2C%20John&ia=-at&ib=-bib&d=10&ss=1&q=4> (accessed 22 June 2016); Ambler, *Washington and the West*, 173.

<sup>25</sup> "John Armstrong," in *CSRb*, 24; Smith, *Federal Land Series*, 1:9, 51, 55; Pennsylvania Supreme Executive Council to John Armstrong, 6 April 1787 and 16 April 1787, in John Armstrong Papers, 1772-1950, William H. Smith Library, Indiana Historical Society, b.1, f.20 (hereafter cited as Armstrong Papers); "List of Soldiers' Names who have sold their lands to John Armstrong, 1783," Armstrong Papers, b.1, f.13.

killed in an Indian raid at Silver Creek (in present southern Indiana) after the war was over. In 1788, Armstrong wrote to Joseph Francis Perrault, McCarty's relative by marriage, and offered to act as power of attorney to obtain McCarty's land grant for his heirs. In exchange for a third of the claim, Armstrong offered to secure McCarty's grant from the Land Office, have it surveyed, and either transfer the balance to Perrault or sell it on his family's behalf. Perrault accepted Armstrong's terms. True to his word, Armstrong worked tirelessly to fulfill McCarty's claim. As late as May 1790, Armstrong petitioned Arthur St. Clair, the governor of the Northwest Territory, to acknowledge McCarty's title to 4,440 acres of land near Cahokia that he had purchased before his death, which included a grist and saw mill.<sup>26</sup>

If not for the postwar depression and the financial difficulties of the Confederation, Armstrong's speculative aspirations might have gone unrealized. As will be explained in Chapter 8, the pay scale for enlisted men was so low that military service attracted only the most desperate members of society. When their pay did arrive, it was rarely on time and was often short of the amount they had been promised. Additionally, frontier posts were chronically short on food and supplies. Cash-poor soldiers, who were hungry and exposed to the elements without proper lodging and clothes, gladly sold away their land bounties for quick cash to buy extra food or supplies from local merchants.

The War Department prioritized paying its officers before the enlisted men to secure their loyalty to the government and keep the western army from devolving into chaos and mutiny. As a result, frontier military leaders were often the only people in the encampments who had cash.

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<sup>26</sup> John Armstrong to Joseph Francois Perrault, 24 February 1788, and Perrault to Armstrong, 17 June 1788, in Armstrong Papers, b.1, f.21; Armstrong to Arthur St. Clair, 9 May 1790, in Armstrong Papers, b.2, f.6; "Richard McCarty," in *CSRa*, r.1086, 492.

This gave them considerable financial power which they leveraged to lend money to the soldiers on interest or to purchase land bounties. John Bradshaw, who served in the Virginia Line as a spy from 1776 to 1779 and was drafted into the infantry in 1781, was among the men who sold their claims to Armstrong. Years later, he admitted that when he sold his country to Armstrong, he felt it would never be of use to him. Some soldiers sold their claims for fifty pounds specie for two hundred acres, while others sold similar parcels for one pound, two shillings and six pence of Pennsylvania currency.<sup>27</sup> The value of each warrant fluctuated dramatically based on demand and the desperation of the person selling it.<sup>28</sup>

Frontier deployment entailed marches which traversed hundreds of miles through Indian Territory. This made US Army soldiers well-acquainted with the lands of the Old Northwest, a knowledge unparalleled among other whites, second only to the Indians who lived there. While stationed at Fort Pitt in fall 1788, Armstrong proposed a business proposition to two men who had served with him during the late war, Major Matthew McConnell and Major William Alexander. If McConnell and Alexander sent him money, Armstrong would purchase large numbers of deeds from soldiers. He would then locate the claims in large blocks together to could corner the market on smaller areas within the boundaries of those claims that were much

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<sup>27</sup> Relative to the currencies of other states, Pennsylvania currency remained relatively stable during the colonial period. This stability was the reason that many people during the Revolutionary Era transacted business using Pennsylvania money. The Pennsylvania dollar was valued at seven shillings, six pence to one Spanish dollar from 1742 until the late years of the war when it was replaced by the Continental dollar. Even after the adoption of the Continental dollar, citizens still referred to money in denominations of pounds, shillings, and pence. United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *History of Wages in the United States From Colonial Times to 1928: Bulletin of the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, No. 604* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1934), 16, 18 (hereafter cited as *USBLS, No. 604*).

<sup>28</sup> John Armstrong to William Alexander, 5 September 1788, and Jacob Lindersmith Deed, 26 November 1788, Armstrong Papers, b.1, f.21; Indenture for Lands, 2 March 1789, Armstrong Papers, b.2, f.1; "John Bradshaw," in *Case Files of Pension and Bounty-Land Warrant Applications Based on Revolutionary War Service, compiled ca. 1800 - ca. 1912, documenting the period ca. 1775 - ca. 1900*, RG 15, M804, National Archives, r.319, no. S.6738, 3-7 <https://www.fold3.com/image/1/12212765> (hereafter cited as *PBLWA*) (accessed 14 December 2017); Henry Knox to Josiah Harmar, 29 October 1789, in Harmar Papers, vol. 11.

more valuable than the surrounding land itself due to their location, natural resources, access to watercourses, or proximity to nearby settlements. Armstrong believed that monopolizing such areas which would create “an independent fortune to the proprieter [sic],” beyond merely selling their surplus land.<sup>29</sup> Land speculation was often a contentious business, however, even among investment partners. Armstrong requested a five-hundred acre plot, up front, as compensation for his efforts in organizing the scheme. McConnell hesitated because he was not confident the land would be worth the investment. Instead, he offered to pay Armstrong after the land had been located, surveyed, and divided into lots, not a moment before.<sup>30</sup>

In 1792, barely three months after St. Clair’s defeat, Armstrong was serving as the commandant at Fort Hamilton along the Great Miami River, thirty miles north of Fort Washington. Armstrong contacted an old friend, Colonel Francis Johnston, a fellow veteran from the Continental Army. He informed Johnston that the land next to the fort would soon be a hot commodity. Despite the fact that the area was vulnerable to frequent Indian raids, once it was pacified it could accommodate “seven or eight families . . . & a Mill [within one] mile [of] the Garrison.”<sup>31</sup> These advantages, Armstrong predicted, would value the land at \$10 per acre, so it was urgent to move quickly, before the Indians were defeated.<sup>32</sup> He was confident that early entry outweighed the risk that the Indian War would continue indefinitely.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> John Armstrong to Matthew McConnell, 5 September 1788, Armstrong Papers, b.1, f.21.

<sup>30</sup> Matthew McConnell to John Armstrong, 29 October 1788, Armstrong Papers, b.1, f.21.

<sup>31</sup> Armstrong to Francis Johnston, 1 February 1792, in Armstrong Papers, b.2, f.14.

<sup>32</sup> For point of comparison, the land the Ohio Company purchased from Congress in 1787 was sold at \$1 per acre. Sakolski, *Great American Land Bubble*, 101-103.

<sup>33</sup> Armstrong to Johnston, 29 March 1792, in Armstrong Papers, b.2, f.14; “First Lieutenant John Armstrong,” and “Colonel Francis Johnston,” in *The State Society of the Cincinnati of Pennsylvania—Officer List* <http://pasocietyofthecincinnati.org/Names/NameList.html> (accessed 15 February 2017).

### Postwar Land Speculation: Wholesale Purchases

The Old Northwest represented an economic opportunity for people other than active-duty military commanders. One example of this entrepreneurial spirit was the Ohio Company of Associates, founded in 1786. The Ohio Company consisted of two groups of investors. Many of the biggest shareholders were prominent national and state political figures, primarily from New England. The second group was veteran military commanders from the late war who saw Ohio as a place that could provide “hard-pressed New England yeoman with better and cheaper lands” and a chance for economic security.<sup>34</sup> Commissioned officers from the late war envisioned themselves as an ascendant aristocracy because their wartime experiences had given them skills that made them ideal leaders, setting them apart from the likes of the squatters who had already claimed those lands for themselves.<sup>35</sup>

Benjamin Rush, the famous Revolutionary-era doctor, saw three kinds of settlers in the West. The first were white squatters who adopted many of the “savage” habits of Indians. They lived in a “state of nature” and either adapted to change or moved on when order was imposed. The most common group were the small farmers who purchased land on credit. Rush believed they were for the most part lazy and uncivilized. The most “worthy” group, according to Rush, made significant improvements to their environment. They owned large amounts of property which made them more likely to remain in that area. They supported the establishment of public institutions, like elected government and schools, and practiced organized religion. They used manure for fertilizer, constructed stone buildings, erected fences, diversified their crops, built

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<sup>34</sup> Sakolski, *Great American Land Bubble*, 101.

<sup>35</sup> Cayton, *The Frontier Republic*, 4–8.

large houses and furnished them with all of the comforts of “civilized society.” According to Rush, they supported public institutions because they believed that wealth and independence naturally gave birth to “benevolence and public spirit,” thus making them the purest example of “republican virtue.”<sup>36</sup>

Early settlers from the Ohio Company internalized Rush’s glowing assessment of their efforts without the least bit of humility. They favored a strong centralized government because, in their eyes, the Revolutionary War had proven the consequences of breakdowns in the social order. They had personally experienced the dysfunction of Congress under the Articles of Confederation and saw the social and economic chaos that gripped the United States during and after the war. Economic uncertainty would inevitably drive many struggling Americans westward in search of a fresh start. The proprietors of the Ohio Company felt their service and leadership during the war endowed them with a higher social and economic status than those who did not serve, which made them ideally suited to be the patriarchs of western expansion. The joint-stock venture of the Ohio Company represented their best opportunity to be compensated for their sacrifice and service.<sup>37</sup>

Dr. Solomon Drowne, one of the original shareholders and pioneers of the Ohio Company, believed that the settlement of Marietta would be exalted in the annals of history as greater than the founding of the Roman Empire. Conveniently ignoring the ongoing chaos that gripped the frontier at that time, Drowne insisted that Marietta had been established without bloodshed and endemic warfare. He felt that the agricultural pursuits of the settlement were

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 13-15.



similar to those of the Romans who “took many of their best statesmen and generals from the plough,” which gave “a nobler air to several parts of nature” and filled “the earth with a variety of beautiful scenes . . . like [divine] creation,” he concluded.<sup>38</sup> Drowne was convinced that the self-reliance of settlers in the West would make them “the most virtuous and independent citizens,” because “[c]orruption of morals in [farmers] is a phenomenon of which no age nor nation has furnished an example.”<sup>39</sup> His oration spoke to the high-minded esteem that Marietta’s early settlers held for themselves. Drowne was not alone in lauding the early settlers of the Ohio Company. George Washington remarked that he knew many of them personally, because they had served under him during the war, and felt that “never were men better calculated to promote the welfare of such a community.”<sup>40</sup> The “virtue” of men who had sacrificed so much for their country was seen as the perfect foundation upon which to build the prototypical trans-Appalachian community.

The men who formed the Ohio Company of Associates represented an elite class of military and political figures in the post-colonial era. Many had their eyes on the West even during the war. In June 1783, before the Continental Army was disbanded, Rufus Putnam, a Brigadier General in the Continental Army, and Timothy Pickering, Washington’s Adjutant General and later the Quartermaster General of the entire Continental Army, petitioned Congress along with 288 other officers. They requested land north of the Ohio River as payment for their service and sacrifices, which they believed were not fully appreciated by an American public

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<sup>38</sup> Solomon Drowne’s Oration at Marietta, 7 April 1789, in Solomon Sibley Papers, 1750-1918, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library, b.5, f.1.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> George Washington to Richard Henderson, 19 June 1788, *Founders Online*, National Archives, last modified April 12, 2018, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/04-06-02-0304.5> (accessed 5 June 2018).

who looked upon them suspiciously. A key point of controversy was their membership in the Society of the Cincinnati, an organization whose exclusive membership was reserved for commissioned officers from the late war.<sup>41</sup>

William Doyle, a historian of the Revolutionary Era, wrote that the Society of the Cincinnati was “a closed caste of former warriors, transmitting membership down the generations by primogeniture: a sort of American nobility.”<sup>42</sup> Membership was limited to officers who had served the country for three years, and it could be passed down to the firstborn son of living members or the eldest son of officers who had been killed in action. It was founded by Henry Knox and Baron von Steuben (a nobleman from Europe). George Washington, a wealthy planter and slaveowner before he served as Commander in Chief of the Continental Army, was the Society's first president. Many Americans suspected that the organization aimed to establish a hereditary aristocracy in the United States.<sup>43</sup>

The notion that some Americans were more worthy of leadership than others was a rejection of one main ideal of the Revolution, to eradicate entrenched nobility. Despite the charitable intentions of the organization—namely providing financial assistance to families who had been impoverished due to the war—the breadth and prevalence of the Society was a subject of much controversy. It had branches in each of the thirteen states, and its legality was debated by state legislatures who worried about what its members' ultimate intentions might be. Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson were among the Society's most vocal

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<sup>41</sup> Timothy J. Shannon, “The Ohio Company and the Meaning of Opportunity in the American West, 1786-1795,” in *The New England Quarterly*, vol. 64, no. 3 (September 1991), 396–397.

<sup>42</sup> William Doyle, *Aristocracy and Its Enemies in the Age of Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 100.

<sup>43</sup> Doyle, *Aristocracy and Its Enemies*, 86-137.

critics. They attacked its underlying premise and decried hereditary privilege as unbefitting a republic. Such public pressure convinced Washington to push for the elimination of hereditary membership, which was adopted by some, but not all, of its branches.<sup>44</sup>

Even though “the Cincinnati were warned that the ‘factitious’ nobility they were attempting to become would not impress the nobles of Europe,” that did not stop members from pursuing an agenda that would benefit their personal political and financial aspirations.<sup>45</sup> The extent of their ambition was most clearly displayed in the Ohio Country. The Ohio Company was founded by Reverend Manasseh Cutler, General Rufus Putnam, Benjamin Tupper, Winthrop Sargent, Samuel Parsons, and James Varnum. Of these six men, only Cutler was not a member of the Society of the Cincinnati. He served as a chaplain during the war and was a close friend of Sargent. Beyond those six, twenty-eight members of the Cincinnati were among the original shareholders. Many of them held leadership positions in the Company’s first permanent settlement at Marietta and in the government of the Northwest Territory.<sup>46</sup>

More broadly, the list of shareholders in the Ohio Company and attendance records from its early meetings were replete with prominent military and political figures from the country’s formative years. Four future governors of Massachusetts held shares: James Bowdoin, Elbridge Gerry (who later served as the Vice President of the United States), Caleb Strong (one of two inaugural US Senators from Massachusetts), and renowned revolutionary figure Samuel Adams. Rhode Island governors William Greene and Jonathan Trumbull (who also later served in the US Senate) were among the investors, as were several serving members of Congress, including

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 98–100, 102–106, 110–112, 117–118.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>46</sup> Shannon, “The Ohio Company,” 410.

Alexander Hamilton. Henry Knox, who served as the Secretary of War for the Continental Congress and the Washington administration, counted one share of Ohio Company stock among his various speculative holdings.<sup>47</sup>

The government of the Northwest Territory was dominated by Ohio Company shareholders. General Arthur St. Clair and Winthrop Sargent were appointed by Congress to serve as the first territorial governor and secretary, respectively. John Cleves Symmes, Samuel Holden Parsons, and James Mitchell Varnum were selected to serve as justices on the Northwest Territory Supreme Court. Of the five, Symmes was the only non-shareholding partner in the Ohio Company. Symmes was the chief proprietor of the Miami Purchase, a speculative venture that ran concurrently with the Ohio Company, which encompassed land in present southwest Ohio. His appointment was undoubtedly an attempt to foster unity among these two ventures because both would have input into how the territory was governed. Several Ohio Company investors became politicians who represented Ohio on the state and national level. Three of its early pioneers—Putnam, Benjamin Ives Gilman, and Ephraim Cutler—sat on the Ohio Constitutional Convention in 1802. Return Jonathan Meigs, Jr., the son of shareholder Return Jonathan Meigs, Sr., was the fourth governor of the State of Ohio.<sup>48</sup>

The founders of the Ohio Company requested one million acres of Ohio Country land that Indians had ceded at the Treaty of Fort McIntosh. They offered to pay for it with one million dollars in Continental Certificates. A down-payment of two hundred-fifty thousand dollars was to be raised within one year, and the balance paid after the land was formally acquired from

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<sup>47</sup> Sakolski, *Great American Land Bubble*, 39; Archer Butler Hulbert, *The Records of the Original Proceedings of the Ohio Company*, vol. 2 (Marietta, Oh.: Marietta Historical Association, 1917), 239.

<sup>48</sup> Burnet, *Settlement of the North-Western Territory*, 38; Hulbert, *Proceedings of the Ohio Company*, 2:239.

Congress. William Duer, the Secretary of the Board of Treasury and former member of the Continental Congress representing New York, partnered with Cutler and Putnam to facilitate the purchase. Because Congress was asking a price of one dollar per acre, Duer recommended that Cutler request a much larger grant, between three and four million acres, that could be offered as an investment opportunity for wealthy men in New York. A larger grant, Duer believed, would prompt Congress to accept much more easy terms of payment for the Company's original request. After Cutler agreed, Duer and other officials inside the Treasury Department worked behind the scenes to secure congressional approval. In the end, the Confederation set aside five to six million acres that could be purchased for one dollar per acre in specie or through "loan office certificates reduced to specie value, or certificates of liquidated debts of the United states."<sup>49</sup> The payment terms were changed to five hundred thousand dollars up front, the next half-million after the land was surveyed, with the remainder payable in six semi-annual payments with interest. The first million acres of land would be turned over once the first million dollars was received.<sup>50</sup>

Per the agreement, the Ohio Company investors collected money and made their first payment on October 27, 1787. To make the first half-million dollar payment, however, Duer had to advance Cutler \$143,279, because investor interest was tepid. The rest was paid in depreciated government debt certificates that had an actual value of between \$60,000 to \$130,000. Each share cost \$1,000 in debt certificates, along with \$10 in gold or silver specie to cover additional expenses. After the Ohio Company failed to raised enough money to make its second payment,

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<sup>49</sup> Sakolski, *Great American Land Bubble*, 102.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 101–103.

Congress changed the terms of sale to fifty cents per acre in March 1792. When the land sale was complete, the Ohio Company had purchased one million acres for one million dollars of government certificates that were worth between twelve and a half cents to fifty cents on the dollar. Two hundred fifteen thousand of those acres were set aside to satisfy land bounties from the Revolutionary War. While the sale did generate nearly a half-million dollars of revenue for the US government, the fact that the land was sold at such a deep discount proved that western land sales would not replenish the national treasury on their own.<sup>51</sup>

The remaining three to four million acres of the grant were set aside for a speculative enterprise called the Scioto Land Company. The two ventures were born together but organized to operate separately to prevent the failure of one from bringing down the other. Many Ohio Company shareholders were completely unaware that the two companies were connected in any way. The Scioto Company consisted of thirty shares. Twenty-six were divided among Cutler, Sargent and Duer. The remaining four shares were held in common to be sold, with the profit divided evenly among them. Duer's strategy for selling the shares was called "dodging," meaning they were sold before the Scioto Company paid the government for the land. Duer, Cutler, and Sargent attempted to sell three million acres in large sections at a dollar per acre to French investors. Contrary to their wishes, their proxy in France, Joel Barlow, divided the land into smaller tracts to generate more interest. The French settlers who came to settle the purchase were a mix of French aristocrats fleeing persecution during the French Revolution and members of the lower class brought along by the wealthy Frenchmen to either rent or buy subplots.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 103–106.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 103, 105–108.

Sakolski remarked that while the Ohio Company was a “colonization scheme,” the Scioto Land Company was purely a speculative gamble. According to those criteria, both were abject failures. By July 1793, only two hundred thirty adult men were living on Ohio Company lands. The French investors in the Scioto Company who arrived at present Gallipolis, Ohio, in 1790 found that the lands set aside for them by Duer were poorly suited for agriculture and subject to frequent Indian attacks. Furthermore, many of the French settlers were wholly unprepared for the harsh environmental conditions of the frontier. To make matters worse, the Scioto Company never actually paid the US government for the land. By 1800, only sixteen of the five hundred French families who emigrated remained. The rest had either died during the first decade or abandoned their claims altogether. Congress eventually granted the survivors tracts of land along the Scioto River, compensation for the trouble Duer’s scheme had caused them.<sup>53</sup>

Many investors who purchased shares in the Ohio Company to avoid the unpredictability of other economic ventures were victimized due to its connection to the Scioto Company. Once the relationship between the two companies became public, eastern investors became suspicious that Cutler, Putnam, and Duer were engaging in subscription fraud, cherry-picking the best lands for themselves, and gratifying their own self-interests by monopolizing the governance of the Ohio Company. The way the Ohio Company was run and the division of its lands caused considerable rifts between western settlers and eastern investors. The early settlers held impromptu shareholder meetings, which made eastern absentee shareholders feel left out of the decision-making process. When lands were divided for incoming settlers, those who arrived first selected the most fertile lands and plots that were easier to defend due to their proximity to

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 103, 108–110.

Marietta and Fort Harmar. Non-shareholding immigrants, who were often poor, were promised donation lands in exchange for their labor, which elevated their claims over absentee shareholders. The donation settlers worked to build the settlement, defend it from attacks, and provide much-needed skilled labor as blacksmiths, millers, and carpenters. Company funds were often used to bolster Marietta's defenses and to encourage immigration, none of which enriched easterners who had no intention of moving to Ohio.<sup>54</sup>

Eventually, the ratification of the Constitution and the end of the Northwest Indian War brought the Ohio Company to an inglorious end. The value of continental scrip stabilized, which meant that future payments the company had set aside would be made at face value instead of a deep discount. The stabilization of the economy meant that fewer Americans were willing to invest in western land and decided to stay put along the East Coast. The end of the war meant that it was safe to settle throughout the Ohio Country, not just around Marietta. Newcomers purchased these lands directly from the federal land office. The protection and services offered by the Ohio Company were rendered obsolete.<sup>55</sup>

Beyond the Ohio Company and Scioto Purchase, Congress approved only one other large land sale during the Northwest Indian War. In October 1788, John Cleves Symmes purchased the land between the Great Miami and Little Miami Rivers in present southwest Ohio, the so-called "Miami Purchase," on the same terms Congress had granted to the Ohio Company. To increase the number of investors, Symmes used the same "dodging" tactics that brought the downfall of Duer's Scioto Land Company. As early as the summer of 1788, several months before his

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<sup>54</sup> Sakolski, *Great American Land Bubble*, 405–407.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 408–412.



purchase was finalized by Congress, Symmes had taken out advertisements in New Jersey newspapers to publicize his enterprise. He kept forty thousand acres of the best land as a “proprietor’s reserve,” which he divided between himself and congressman Elias Boudinot. Symmes then sold shares for depreciated Continental securities and assigned parcels to others in exchange for land warrants.<sup>56</sup>

When the land between the two rivers was surveyed, Symmes’ grant contained only 311,862 acres, not even a third of what he had expected. Symmes, however, had sold tracts on the presumption that he would acquire the full million acres he had requested from Congress. Consequently, many of the tracts he sold were outside of the boundaries of his original purchase, especially those around present Dayton, Ohio. Investors who purchased and settled those lands were essentially turned into squatters. This put Governor St. Clair in a very difficult situation. He knew that removing them, “if it could be done, would be ruin to them,” a disagreeable outcome because he viewed the settlers as “innocent, not willful trespassers.”<sup>57</sup> Instead, he issued a proclamation advising the settlers about their situation and warned future immigrants not to occupy land purchased from Symmes. St. Clair allowed the squatters to remain and left their fate to Congress.<sup>58</sup> In 1790, Congress began selling land north of Symmes’ purchase at two dollars per acre, preventing him from expanding his claim to encompass many of the sales he had already made. Jilted claimants filed lawsuits that eventually brought Symmes to financial ruin.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Sakolski, *Great American Land Bubble*, 115.

<sup>57</sup> Arthur St. Clair to Alexander Hamilton, 25 May 1791, in Smith, *St. Clair Papers*, 2:210.

<sup>58</sup> The Confederation eventually granted these pseudo-legal squatters preemption rights on March 3, 1801. George W. Julian, “The Spoliation of the Public Lands,” *The North American Review*, vol. 141, no. 345 (Aug., 1885), 176.

<sup>59</sup> Sakolski, *Great American Land Bubble*, 111–119; Smith, *St. Clair Papers*, 2:211–213; Smith, *Federal Land Series*, 1:xvii.

Land speculators were often the same politicians and military figures who were the chief architects and executors of US foreign and domestic policy. The fact that so many senior military officials and politicians owned shares in the Ohio Company and other similar ventures were evidence of a conflict of interest, what historian Richard H. Kohn called a “military business complex.”<sup>60</sup> Those officials determined state and federal policies toward public lands, negotiated treaties with Indians in the West, and encouraged them to make large land cessions under the threat of military force. They also determined the fiscal policies of the new nation. In many cases, their personal financial interests and those of their business associates influenced how they performed their civic duties. More often than not, speculators were not settlers but profit-seekers. Most of the shareholders in western land companies were absentee landlords who never intended to settle there. The greediest speculators often over extended themselves, which brought bankruptcy. The fact that even powerful and politically influential speculators could gamble their way into insolvency proves that while the US economy and political system were geared toward maintaining the socio-economic status quo, the vacillations of the free market could ruin anyone.

#### Territorial Government in the Old Northwest

The complexity of wholesale land purchases aside, the process by which the Ohio Company of Associates surveyed and sold the land they purchased from Congress was very orderly and rational, the consequence of lessons learned from the mess that had occurred in Kentucky years before. In fact, the sale of Ohio Company land was so organized and successful that it became the model for the way public lands would be surveyed, divided, and sold in the United States up to the present day. This system originated when Congress passed the Land

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<sup>60</sup> Kohn, *Eagle and Sword*, 100, fn\*.

Ordinances of 1784 and 1785, which established an orderly, methodical process for surveying and dividing public lands.

The Confederation faced several pressing issues when it came to governing the region. What would be the balance between national versus local control? Would civil or military officials control the local government? Congress passed the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 to answer these questions. The Ordinance outlined a process for territories to achieve statehood with equal standing to the original thirteen. The debate over the Ordinance revolved around national versus local authority, individual property rights, protecting the lands from squatters, and guarding legal settlers from Indian attacks.

In the end, the territorial government was the product of compromise: a civil government dominated by veterans of the late war, backed up by the US Army. It consisted of a governor, a secretary, and three supreme court justices, all of whom were congressional appointees. Governance would take place mostly on the local level, but the national government retained broad power to declare war and to negotiate with Indians and foreign governments, which limited the autonomy of local authorities. The Ordinance did not grant the territorial government the ability to create new laws. Instead, the governor and judges consulted together to “adopt and publish” statutes from the thirteen states. Predictably, these laws were inadequate to deal with the unique problems that arose on the frontier, challenges the other states had not experienced since the earliest days of colonial settlement. Under the burden of those heavy restrictions, the Northwest Territory Government was largely inefficient and ineffective.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Once the territory’s voting population reached 5,000, they would elect a bicameral Territorial Legislature to create laws, subject to the veto power of the Territorial Governor. This finally occurred in October of 1798. Patrick J. Furlong, “The Governor versus the Judges,” in Lloyd A. Hunter, ed., *Pathways to the Old Northwest: An Observance of the Bicentennial of the Northwest Ordinance* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1988), 47–48, 55.

The ambiguous wording of the Northwest Ordinance added to the challenges the territorial government already faced. St. Clair and the judges fought about the extent of their authority. A military man to the core, Governor St. Clair was a strict rule-follower and perhaps the first “originalist.” He interpreted the Northwest Ordinance literally and believed that the power of the territorial government went no further than what was expressly stated in the document. The three supreme court justices, on the other hand, felt that the Ordinance’s provisions should be left open to interpretation. They believed the legislature should have the authority to modify existing laws from other states and fit them to the unusual circumstances they faced. St. Clair informed the judges that forming new laws was “overpassing the line of our duty,” and would “certainly expose ourselves to censure from Congress.”<sup>62</sup> Repeated disputes between St. Clair and the judges created animosity and an adversarial relationship between the two branches of the territorial government. Eventually, St. Clair relented. He realized that the judges were all trained lawyers, whereas he had no formal legal training. St. Clair had made his name as a military leader, land owner, and mill operator so, against his better judgement, he deferred to them. In 1795, Congress ruled that the Territorial Legislature had overstepped its mandate by modifying the laws of other states and overturned every law passed in the territory up to that point. St. Clair had the last laugh, one of the few times in his political or military career that he was given such satisfaction.<sup>63</sup>

Significant conflicts of interest were created by a territorial government dominated by investors in speculative enterprises whose lands fell within the jurisdiction of that government.

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<sup>62</sup> Smith, *St. Clair Papers*, 2:68.

<sup>63</sup> Furlong, “The Governor versus the Judges,” 49–51; Smith, *St. Clair Papers*, 2:68; Cayton, *Frontier Republic*, 45–46.

Speculator-politicians passed laws and established standards for their enforcement, which enabled them to mold the laws of the territory in a way that directly benefitted their own financial interests. The only check against their actions was congressional review, which counted many Ohio Company investors among its membership. No evidence exists to suggest that any members of Congress or the Northwest Territory Government recused themselves due to conflicts of interest created by their speculative investments.

### Conclusion

Many Americans of moderate or poor economic standing reviled land speculation, which they believed was way to make money without the effort of hard work. Some prospective western settlers believed that their opportunity for landownership would be denied by the “selfish and the grasping speculator.”<sup>64</sup> Despite this stigma, gambling on western lands was nevertheless instrumental in the settlement of the western frontier. For that reason, land speculation played a critical role in the rise of the United States as a coast-to-coast empire. Western expansion created opportunities for poor and middling Americans to improve their lives through homesteading. The legacy of the Ohio Company, which was conceived partly to restrain speculation in Ohio lands, was mixed. It was tainted by its association with the Scioto Land scheme, but at the same time it was instrumental in the settlement of the present Midwest. The birth, life, and death of the Ohio Company reveals several truths about economic opportunity in early US history. From its inception, it attempted to democratically distribute land across the socioeconomic spectrum, which drew a wide diversity of settlers to the West. While political

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<sup>64</sup> Butler, *History of the Commonwealth*, 117.

power in the West was held by genteel men, economic opportunities abounded for would-be small farmers as well as people who could not afford to purchase shares.<sup>65</sup>

The Confederation government facilitated the orderly sale of public lands in Ohio for two reasons. First, Congress attempted to curb the rampant land speculation that had made division and sale of lands in Kentucky so chaotic. National politicians also hoped that selling the public lands would help it to pay down the debt from the Revolutionary War. Ultimately, the sale and settlement of public lands became the foundation of Manifest Destiny, a central element of US domestic and foreign policy throughout the nineteenth century. The Ohio, Scioto, and Miami land schemes forced the government to assert its authority over the western territory with a combination of civil and military force. Today, this is taken for granted as an essential function of the federal government. In a fitting coda to the impact that land speculation and westward expansion had on the national government, when the Northwest Ordinance passed Congress on July 13, 1787, the Constitutional Convention was already underway in Philadelphia, where the delegates were hard at work, looking to replace the Articles of Confederation with something much stronger. In many ways, the controversies over land speculation, settlement of western lands, making territories into states, and defending those territories from foreign and domestic enemies, had exposed the weakness of the Articles of Confederation and made drafting the Constitution a priority.

As will be described in subsequent chapters, the pan-Indian movement was the main obstacle that threatened the United States' colonial ambitions. Native peoples across the Old Northwest interpreted the aggression of white frontier settlers and the persistence of US Indian

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<sup>65</sup> Buck, *Civilization in Western Pennsylvania*, 128.

Commissioners, as evidence that the United States had adopted a national policy of territorial conquest. Faced with this threat, the Indians of the *pays d'en haut* developed a strategy to defend their territory from US aggression. They worked to unite all native peoples east of the Mississippi River against the growing threat of US expansion, and established a precedent that had a long-lasting impact on the US government and its relations with native peoples. This alliance was met with the full force of the US military in a conflict known to history as the Northwest Indian War.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE NORTHWEST INDIAN WAR

US expansion into the trans-Appalachian West was a violent process. Between 1783 and 1790, nearly one thousand Kentuckians were killed or taken prisoner when Indian warriors attacked white settlements south of the Ohio River. The number of Indians killed by land-hungry Americans was never recorded, although given the cyclical nature of the violence that gripped the West, it is safe to assume that it equaled or exceeded that number. This conflict is known the Northwest Indian War, and it marked the United States' first attempt to assert its sovereignty over the indigenous peoples who lived within its expanded borders. What began as a series of retaliatory frontier raids between Native Americans and white frontiersmen escalated into a full-scale military conflict between the US Army and the Indians of the Old Northwest.<sup>1</sup>

Most of the native peoples who lived in the *pays d'en haut* had felt the effects of white expansion before. Some groups like the Shawnee and the Delaware had migrated from their ancestral homelands along the East Coast as white settlements progressively displaced them over the Appalachian Mountains into what is now Kentucky, Ohio, and Indiana. Most of them had experienced the destructive impact of European mercantilism during the Beaver Wars of the late seventeenth century. A considerable number had fought against British imperialism as allies of the French Army during the Seven Years' War. The underlying lesson of those conflicts was that white expansion inevitably went hand-in-hand with native dispossession. This lesson was re-

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander S. Withers, *Chronicles of Border Warfare: Or a History of the Settlement by Whites, of North-Western Virginia* (Clarksburg, Va.: Joseph Israel, 1831), 285.



enforced after the Revolutionary War when US Indian Commissioners demanded land cessions from the Indians as a consequence of their late alliance with England. Despite these shared experiences, Native Americans in the Old Northwest were divided on how to deal with the United States. One faction wanted to remain at peace with the new nation, while others believed that armed resistance was the only realistic way to protect their lands. Consequently, warriors from the most militant Indian Nations began to raid white settlements in Kentucky, hoping to stop white emigration into the trans-Appalachian West. After all, if Kentucky was uninhabitable for American settlers, no reasonable person would dare encroach upon native lands north of the Ohio River. Kentuckians retaliated with incursions of their own into Indian Country. Thus began over a decade of cyclical frontier violence.

Border control along the Ohio River had been a pressing issue for Virginia Governor Patrick Henry since at least 1784. Henry's proclamation of January 6, 1785, warned squatters that state of Virginia would not intervene on their behalf. Despite these admonishments, trespassing on native lands continued. By the spring of 1785, native warriors were attacking white communities north and south of the Ohio River with increasing frequency. The Confederation took several measures to stop the violence, but they were ineffective. US Indian Commissioners negotiated the three treaties between 1784 and 1786, hoping they would pacify the conflict by acquiring legal title to Indian lands in western New York, Pennsylvania, and most of the present state of Ohio, but the conflict raged on. Natives were so enraged by the commissioners' cockiness and bluster that the volume of hostile raids into Kentucky actually increased. Amidst those efforts, rumors spread throughout Kentucky that the Indian Confederacy

was planning a massive fall offensive in 1785 which, if successful, threatened to destroy the already-tenuous foothold white settlers held there.<sup>2</sup>

Governor Henry made several pleas for the Confederation to relieve the besieged District of Kentucky. Virginia's representatives in Congress informed Henry that states without western territories were "[reluctant to] assent to relieving us from difficulties to which they are not themselves likely to be exposed."<sup>3</sup> Absent relief from the US Army, Kentuckians felt that their only option to defend themselves was to go on the offensive by launching large, coordinated strikes into Indian Territory. The first such effort crystallized in the summer of 1786. In July, fifty-four citizens of Jefferson County, Kentucky, circulated an appeal throughout neighboring Nelson, Lincoln, and Fayette Counties, calling for "the settlers of this Country to support and defend each other against the invasions and attack of our relentless and common enemies."<sup>4</sup> The letter referenced the devastating effects that Indian raids had inflicted upon their communities, families, and property. The only way to prevent the complete destruction of the whites settlements in Kentucky, they believed, was through a preemptive strike.<sup>5</sup>

This cycle of violence was driven by other factors beyond revenge and self-preservation, however. One contemporary observer speculated that beyond the "gratification of their individual resentments," white raiders attacked Indian peoples with the expectation that the Indians would

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<sup>2</sup> Richard Henry Lee to Patrick Henry, 14 February 1785, Patrick Henry to the Delegates from Virginia in Congress, 16 April 1785, and Joseph Martin to Patrick Henry, 19 September 1785, in William Wirt Henry, *Patrick Henry: Life, Correspondence and Speeches*, vol. 3 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1891), 281, 292–293, 321–322.

<sup>3</sup> The Virginia Delegates in Congress to Patrick Henry, 8 June 1786 in Henry, *Patrick Henry*, 3:358.

<sup>4</sup> Palmer, *Virginia State Papers*, 4:160–161.

<sup>5</sup> Patrick Henry to the Virginia Delegates in Congress, 16 April 1785, 16 May 1786, and 5 July 1786, and Henry to the President of Congress, 16 May 1786, in Henry, *Patrick Henry*, 3:292–294, 350–355, 362–368; Palmer, *Virginia State Papers*, 4:160–161.

strike back, knowing that “an Indian War leads to the spending [of] money in their country.”<sup>6</sup> The idea that whites were trying to escalate the war for personal financial gain was not merely cynical. A considerable number of frontiersmen had come from areas that were garrisoned by the US Army, like Pittsburgh. They had personally experienced the economic benefits of living near an army garrison, advantages which were certainly enticing for people who were mostly living off of subsistence agriculture at that time. This may have been but one of several motivating factors for launching raids into Indian Country, but it is undeniable that the frontier conflict was a money-making opportunity in the slumping post-war economy. In several instances, the food Kentucky raiders took with them had been purchased from the agricultural surpluses of local farmers.<sup>7</sup>

Coincidentally, in the summer of 1786, Congress approved orders to deploy two companies of US troops to the Falls of the Ohio River where they would join the militia’s defense of the Bluegrass settlements. It was too little, too late; by the middle of July, Jefferson County officials had already started preparing their attack against a series of Indian towns along the Wabash River, which were believed to be the source of most of the raids into Kentucky. George Rogers Clark, who had gained national fame fighting Indians on the western frontier during the Revolutionary War, was chosen to lead the campaign that would feature a two-pronged offensive stroke. Clark would lead half of the force in a march up the Wabash from the Ohio River to attack a series of Wea, Piankashaw, and Miami villages. The second wing of the attack would emanate from Limestone, Kentucky, led by Colonel Benjamin Logan, and target a

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<sup>6</sup> Letter Relative to Western Indians and the United States, n.d., in *Michigan Pioneer*, 24:260.

<sup>7</sup> Bergmann, *American National State*, 34.

string of Shawnee villages that lay upon the Great Miami and Mad Rivers in the western part of present-day Ohio near Springfield [see Figure 5].<sup>8</sup>

The two expeditions yielded vastly different results. Clark left Louisville on September 17. After a nine-day layover in Vincennes to wait for supplies (which ultimately arrived spoiled because of the excessive late-summer heat), he marched toward his first objective, an Indian village at the confluence of the Big Vermillion and Wabash Rivers. Clark's troops had other ideas. Rumors spread that the Wabash Indians had been informed about their plan-of-attack. Frightened at the prospect of fighting warriors who knew they were coming, Clark's militia soldiers began to desert and even threatened to mutiny. Reluctantly, he retreated back to Vincennes. Once they were ensconced safely at the fort there, the soldiers impressed an estimated twenty thousand dollars of supplies and terrorized the local population throughout the month of October 1786. Clark ordered six French inhabitants of the town to be arrested as spies and executed by hanging, accusing them of leaking his plans to the Indians. Inhabitants of the town were outraged. They fulminated that Clark was "playing Hell," that he was "eternally drunk," and sat by passively, watching as his men ravaged the town.<sup>9</sup> When Clark was warned that he could be brought up on charges for the depredations committed by his men, he dismissively remarked that he would "take refuge among the Indians" if any legal action was taken against him.<sup>10</sup> The uncomfortable standoff continued as Clark pondered his next move.<sup>11</sup>

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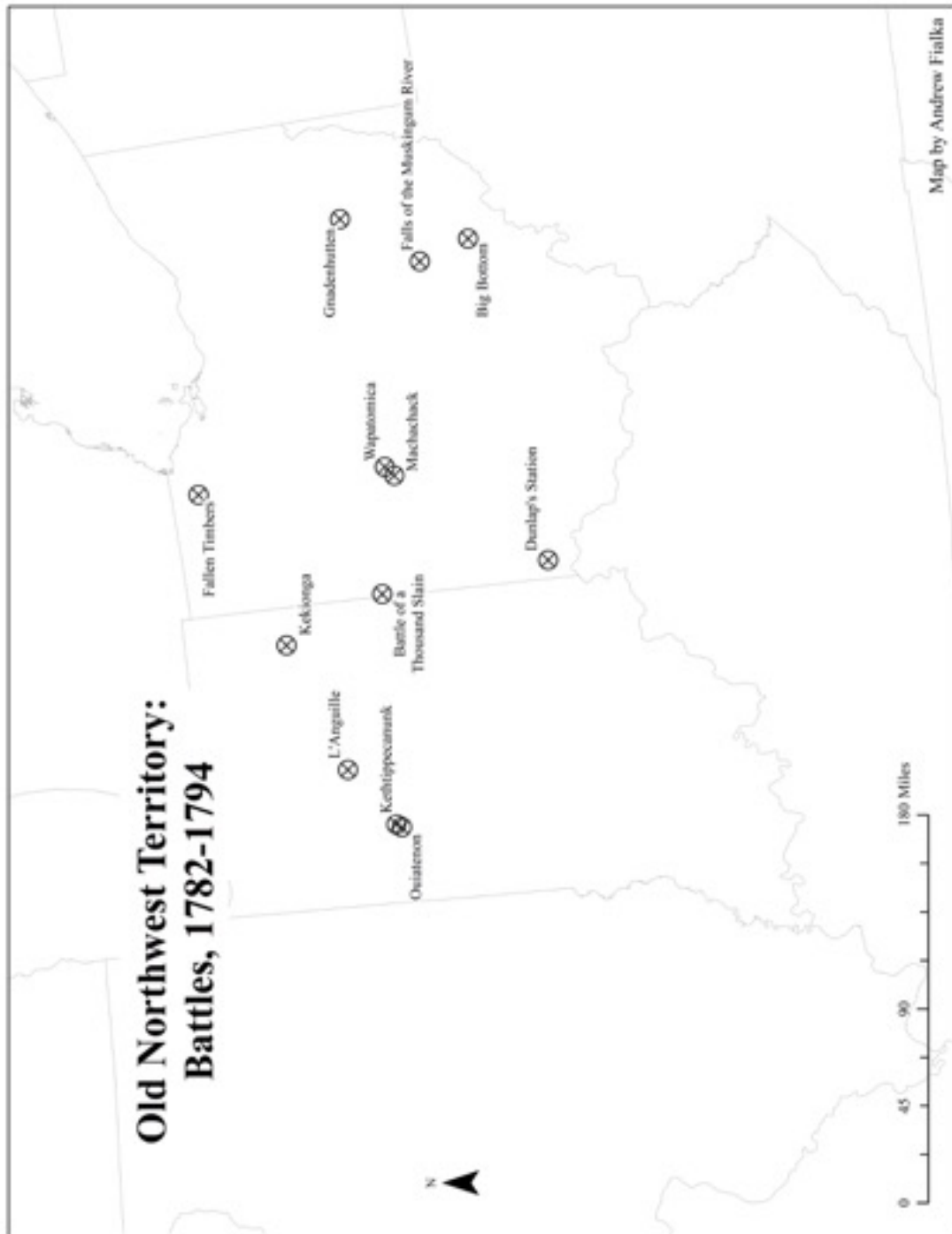
<sup>8</sup> Charles Thompson to Patrick Henry, 3 July 1786, and John May to Henry, 14 July 1786, in Henry, *Patrick Henry*, 3:361–362, 369–370; Sword, *Washington's Indian War*, 33–37.

<sup>9</sup> Extract from a Letter to A Citizen of Kentucky, 12 December 1786, in Palmer, *Virginia State Papers*, 4:202.

<sup>10</sup> George Rogers Clark to Patrick Henry, December 1786, in Palmer, *Virginia State Papers*, 4:213.

<sup>11</sup> Joseph Martin to Edmund Randolph, 28 June 1787, in Palmer, *Virginia State Papers*, 4:304; Sword, *Washington's Indian War*, 37; Albach, *Annals of the West*, 529–530.

Figure 5: Old Northwest Territory—Battles, 1782-1794



Logan's campaign met with an entirely different outcome. His eight hundred mounted troops moved quickly up the Great Miami and Mad Rivers in early October and razed eight Shawnee villages along the way. They killed eleven warriors, ten chiefs, and took twenty-eight women and children captive. In addition to the human toll, Logan's force destroyed fifteen thousand bushels of corn and all of the Indians' livestock, which caused a widespread famine in the Mad River Country during the winter of 1786-1787. Logan's force suffered only six casualties, including three men killed. While Logan's raid was an impressive tactical victory, it was a complete failure from a strategic standpoint. Prior to the attack, the Shawnee were deeply divided about whether to pursue peace or war with the United States. Native communication networks quickly spread the news that the Americans had killed old men and carried a large number of women and children into captivity, galvanizing the entire Shawnee Nation to adopt a steadfast anti-US position. From that point forward, the Shawnee were among the most vocal leaders of the growing pan-Indian alliance.<sup>12</sup>

Through 1788, racial violence on the frontier increased at the same time that US diplomatic relations with England and the Indians on the frontier continued to deteriorate. Great Britain refused to cede the Great Lakes forts while English traders and agents of the British Indian Department provided materiel and moral support to the Indian confederation. White squatters had left Ohio, for the most part, but not because of actions taken by the US government. Vesting the national government with increased authority in the Constitution was not enough to solve the country's problems. The US needed to effectively bring that power to bear, specifically by creating a strong military force capable of controlling its citizens,

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<sup>12</sup> Sword, *Washington's Indian War*, 37–42.

neutralizing the threat posed by hostile Indian Nations on the frontier, preventing encroachment by competing imperial powers, and fostering an environment where expansion could proceed peacefully. Fiscal concerns and ideological resistance, specifically the anti-Federalists' reservations about standing armies, were the biggest obstacles to achieving those important foreign and domestic policy objectives. But by 1788, there was no turning back; the passage of the Northwest Ordinance in 1787 "made it quite clear," Richard Horsman wrote, that "whatever was said to the Indians and however strong the fears of war, the United States intended to settle the area from the Ohio to the Mississippi River."<sup>13</sup> Westward expansion was now a national imperative, and the government had no choice but to answer the escalating violence by sending a large professional army to the frontier to assert US sovereignty.

#### Changes to US Indian Policy and More Failed Diplomacy

US officials realized that their strategy of dealing with the pan-Indian alliance needed to change. Justifying land seizures based on the right of conquest, intimidating natives with threats of a military strike, and dividing the Indians among themselves had failed to facilitate peaceful expansion. Per the recommendations of Henry Knox, the United States would now acknowledge the Indians' right to the land based on their prior occupancy. Their territory could only be taken from them either "by their free consent, or by the right of conquest in case of a just war."<sup>14</sup> The government promised to compensate them for future land cessions. This was the basis of the "peaceful expansion through division and bribery" phase of federal Indian relations.

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<sup>13</sup> Horsman, *Expansion and Indian Policy*, 37.

<sup>14</sup> Quote from "Report of Henry Knox on the Northwestern Indians, June 15, 1789," in Prucha, *Documents of Indian Policy*, 12; Horsman, *Expansion and Indian Policy*, 42-45.

Governor St. Clair put this new strategy into practice in 1788, when he announced plans to hold a negotiate a new treaty at the Falls of the Muskingum River. The government hoped these negotiations would put an end to frontier violence and expedite the survey, sale, and settlement of the lands in the Ohio Country. Soldiers from Fort Harmar were dispatched to the falls to construct a council house. Before they were finished, a war party of fifteen Chippewa warriors attacked them, killing two soldiers and wounding three others. Six Chippewa—who came to trade after the attack occurred—were captured as the soldiers prepared to retreat to Fort Harmar. Rumors circulated in Indian Country that St. Clair had executed the prisoners. Warriors redoubled their attacks against US troops throughout the Old Northwest, along the Wabash River, the Scioto River, and near the Falls of the Ohio. Eight soldiers died and eleven more were wounded.<sup>15</sup>

The attack at the Falls of the Muskingum prompted St. Clair to relocate the treaty council to Fort Harmar for sake of additional security. He sought to achieve several key objectives in the upcoming negotiations. First, St. Clair would solidify previous cessions made to the US government between 1784-1786. At the same time, he hoped to undermine the claims of the Sandusky Alliance—that the previous treaties had been punitive in nature—and avert a costly war on the western frontier. Above all, he wanted to drive a wedge through the pan-Indian movement. To that end, St. Clair negotiated two separate treaties at Fort Harmar, one with the Algonquians and the other with the Six Nations. “The reason why,” he explained to President Washington in May 1789, “was a jealousy that subsisted between them, which I was not willing to lessen by appearing to consider them as one people [because] they do not so consider

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<sup>15</sup> Sword, *Washington's Indian War*, 61–64.



themselves.”<sup>16</sup> By leveraging those internal divisions, he continued, “it would not be very difficult, if circumstances required it, to set them at deadly variance.”<sup>17</sup>

The native leaders who attended the negotiations at Fort Harmar in January 1789 were the same Northwestern and Six Nations leaders who had already made peace with the United States between 1784 and 1786. To show the “benevolence” of the US government, St. Clair offered to pay the Indians for their land, a precursor to the “annuities” that would become a staple of US Indian Policy in the nineteenth century. The Sandusky Alliance maintained that the chiefs who signed those documents were either minor chiefs not affiliated with the pan-Indian movement or had acted outside of the authority granted to them by the Alliance. St. Clair responded to such criticism by citing the Half King who “declared he spoke in the name of all the Nations present,” when he signed the Treaty of Fort McIntosh four years earlier.<sup>18</sup> “[H]ow are we to know who comes by accident, or who by appointment,” St. Clair asked, “[i]f you admit them into council and speak in their Names must we not conclude that they are all by appointment[?]”<sup>19</sup> He continued, “the United States ask no lands of the Indian Nations Gratis, when they want lands, and the Nations are willing to sell, they will buy them from them at an agreed price, [and] they scorn equally to tell them falsehoods as to Cheat them.”<sup>20</sup> The militants

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<sup>16</sup> Arthur St. Clair to George Washington, 2 May 1789, in Smith, *St. Clair Papers*, 2:113.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Arthur St. Clair Speech to the Indian Nations at Fort Harmar, 6 January 1789, in *Records of the Six Nations—Niagara and Upper Canada, 1763-1819*, Library and Archives Canada—Ottawa, Reel C-1224, 274 (hereafter cited as *RSN*).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Quote from St. Clair’s Speech at Fort Harmar, 6 January 1789, in *RSN*, C-1224, 274; Sword, *Washington’s Indian War*, 74-75.

summarily rejected the previous treaties on their face and labeled the proceedings at Fort Harmar a sham.

Moderates, to prove they had come to Fort Harmar in good faith, modified their previous insistence on the Ohio River boundary and suggested locating the eastern border of Indian Territory at the Muskingum River, which would give the United States the eastern third of Ohio. This compromise would have accommodated the Ohio Company's community at Marietta. St. Clair refused to even consider it. His obstinance proved what the militants had already suspected: the United States would accept nothing less than complete capitulation. Emboldened, warriors raided white settlements with increased frequency and force, resolving to purge their borders of the white invaders.<sup>21</sup>

White settlements located close to the Ohio River were steadily abandoned over the previous five years, a result of the rising violence. Westward-bound settlers increasingly fell prey to Indian ambushes as they traveled down the Ohio River toward Kentucky. New settlers who successfully navigated the hazards of the river passage typically moved farther inland and established fortified settlements deep in the heart of Kentucky. The ferocity of the new attacks started a mass exodus out of those areas as well. The impact of the violence, combined with the intelligence federal officials received about the secession debates in the Danville Conventions, convinced US officials to use the new military power granted by the Constitution to pacify the frontier. In August 1789, Congress authorized the use of state militias to defend the frontier, created the US War Department, and placed Indian affairs under its control. The federal

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 63–67.

government also authorized the expansion of the federal army by over forty percent. After that increase, there were still only twelve hundred US soldiers in uniform.<sup>22</sup>

### Diplomacy to Defeat

Despite its larger size, the US Army in the West was unable to stop the cyclical violence. Governor St. Clair warned President Washington in 1789 that the raids of Western Nations against Kentucky settlements could quickly spiral out of control because the Kentuckians were “in the habit of retaliation, perhaps, without attending precisely to the nations from which the injuries are received.”<sup>23</sup> If federal troops could not protect Kentucky, St. Clair feared “the government will be laid prostrate,” not only in the eyes of westerners, but the Indians as well.<sup>24</sup> “[V]ery bad consequences will follow,” St. Clair believed, because Indians would see that the government was too weak to control its own citizens, “that the United States . . . pay no regard to their treaties[,] or that they are unable or unwilling to carry their engagements into effect.”<sup>25</sup> Washington agreed but instructed St. Clair to warn the Indians that if they continued to raid white settlements, “the United States will be constrained to punish them with severity.”<sup>26</sup>

The federal government’s initial forays were miserable failures. Its first embarrassment was Josiah Harmar’s attempt to prevent the Indians from attacking boats on the Ohio River. According to James Wilkinson, the attacks had grown so serious that Kentuckians were

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<sup>22</sup> Thomas Hutchins to Josiah Harmar, 30 September 1786, in Harmar Papers, v.8; Alexander S. Bullitt to the Governor of Virginia, 16 May 1787, in Palmer, *Virginia State Papers*, 4:284–285; Sword, *Washington’s Indian War*, 79–84; “Establishment of the War Department, August 7, 1789,” in Prucha, *Documents of Indian Policy*, 13–14. Indian affairs would remain the purview of the War Department until they were transferred to the newly created Interior Department in 1849. Prucha, *Documents of Indian Policy*, 13.

<sup>23</sup> Arthur St. Clair to George Washington, 14 September 1789, in Smith, *St. Clair Papers*, 2:124.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> George Washington to Arthur St. Clair, 6 Oct 1789, in Smith, *St. Clair Papers*, 2:126.

considering reaching out to the Indian Alliance separately to negotiate a peace treaty of their own. Harmar resolved to thwart further raids by attacking their source, and led an expedition against a series of Indian villages along the Scioto River in April 1790. Over the course of two weeks, Harmar and his three hundred soldiers were unable to locate a single native warrior in the Scioto Country. Dissatisfaction quickly set in and Harmar was forced to return downriver to Fort Washington amid rumors of a mutiny.<sup>27</sup>

Far more humiliating than the Scioto debacle was Harmar's infamous defeat near present-day Fort Wayne, Indiana, in October 1790. In September, US forces marched north out of Fort Washington to destroy the Indian village of Kekionga, where the St. Joseph and St. Marys Rivers joined to form the Maumee River. Secretary of War Henry Knox hoped the campaign would show the Wabash Nations "our power to punish them for their . . . depredations . . . and for their refusing to treat with the United States [at Fort Harmar] when invited thereto."<sup>28</sup> Harmar devised a two-pronged attack that mimicked the strategy used by Clark and Logan in 1786: a diversionary feint up the Wabash by five hundred soldiers under Hamtramck, followed by a main force of fifteen hundred under Harmar that would move directly overland to attack the unsuspecting Miami village while their warriors were occupied with Hamtramck.<sup>29</sup>

The details of Harmar's campaign revealed a disturbing pattern that crippled the US Army under General St. Clair. Harmar, whose experience with military tactics was based on Baron von Steuben's drill manual from the Revolutionary War, was not prepared for the guerrilla

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<sup>27</sup> James Wilkinson to Josiah Harmar, 7 April 1790, Harmar Papers, vol. 12; Sword, *Washington's Indian War*, 85–86.

<sup>28</sup> Henry Knox to Arthur St. Clair, 14 September 1790, in Smith, *St. Clair Papers*, 2:181.

<sup>29</sup> Sword, *Washington's Indian War*, 86.

tactics used by indigenous warriors. His force did not have enough rations or equipment when they started their march. They were so short of ammunition and fresh powder that they were forced to cast bullets themselves and substituted cannon powder for gunpowder (with poor results). The number of troops Harmar took with him never equaled the quotas Congress had authorized, and his men were chronically under-trained. Eighty-percent of Harmar's force were militia soldiers who, according to Ebenezer Denny, were "raw and unused [*sic*] to the gun or the woods."<sup>30</sup> Many of them arrived at Fort Washington without any weapons of their own, which was problematic because the army required militia troops to provide their own weapons. Denny reported that these men were sent forward, unarmed, to "serve no other purpose than to swell [the ranks]."<sup>31</sup> Harmar's poorly trained, ill-prepared force was not ready mentally or physically to confront the challenge that awaited them. Consequently, the only way the campaign could succeed was through strong leadership. Unfortunately for the army, federal officers fought with militia leaders over seniority. This prevented Harmar from conducting joint training exercises between the two forces, hindering their ability to perform effectively together. Time constraints were also a factor, as rumblings of mutiny and desertion forced Harmar to proceed forward before his reinforcements arrived.<sup>32</sup>

Although the attack on Kekionga was supposed to be surreptitious, the army's element of surprise was taken away. Per Knox's orders, St. Clair informed British officials at Detroit about Harmar's campaign, so his march into Indian Country would not be mistaken as an attack against the disputed posts. The British Indian Department quickly dispatched messengers across the *pays*

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<sup>30</sup> Denny, *Military Journal*, 344.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Sword, *Washington's Indian War*, 89–95.

*d'en haut* to warn their Indian allies. This advanced knowledge enabled Indian scouts to track Harmar's force immediately after it departed Fort Washington. The army was advancing straight into an ambush organized by Miami war chief Little Turtle.<sup>33</sup>

"Harmar's Defeat," as it came to be known, was a series of three separate clashes between Indian warriors and the US Army, not one decisive battle. Harmar's columns found Kekionga deserted when they arrived on October 17. Three times over the course of the next several days, Harmar detached soldiers to search for Indians in the surrounding area. On October 18, Colonel James Trotter led a reconnaissance group of three hundred militia, only to withdraw after they stumbled upon a group of fifty native warriors preparing an ambush. Colonel John Hardin believed Trotter's retreat was a sign of cowardice. The next day, he ventured out with nearly two hundred Kentuckians and led them straight into a trap laid by one hundred fifty warriors under Little Turtle. Forty of his group were cut-off and killed while Hardin and the rest retreated to the safety of Harmar's main force encamped at Kekionga. Humiliated, Harmar ordered his men to destroy every Indian village in the surrounding area. After the army finished the work, they began their march back toward Fort Washington. As Harmar's columns marched southward, he sent Hardin and Major John Wyllys back with four hundred soldiers to surprise anyone who attempted to reoccupy the village after the soldiers left. This group fell victim to yet another surprise attack set by Little Turtle and two hundred fighters. The warriors killed sixty more US troops, including Wyllys, and wounded twenty-eight before Hardin ordered a retreat.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 94–97, 111–114.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 101–115.

Little Turtle's tactics decimated the US force. Two hundred of the 1,133 soldiers Harmar had started out with were dead by the time they regained Fort Washington on November 3, 1790. Harmar had completed his objective, destroying Kekionga, and insisted that his mission had been a success. Knox and Washington disagreed after they saw the casualty numbers. If not for a fortuitous lunar eclipse on the night of October 22, the defeat would have been far more devastating. Shawnee war leader Blue Jacket planned to pursue Harmar's retreating force with seven hundred warriors to destroy what remained of the bedraggled army. The two-hour eclipse was seen as a bad omen, however, and the mission aborted.<sup>35</sup>

The Miami Villages were devastated, but the army had inflicted minimal losses on the Indians, who lost between forty and one hundred men. The warriors of native resistance were unbowed. As a deterrent against future Indian attacks, Harmar's campaign was disastrous. Flush with confidence from their victory, war parties sent a blood-stained message to the US government with an offensive campaign against Symmes' Purchase and the Ohio Company. In January 1791, the Northwest Confederacy launched separate, nearly simultaneous attacks against Dunlap's Station along the Great Miami River, less than twenty miles from Fort Washington, and the so-called Big Bottom Massacre, thirty miles up the Muskingum from Fort Harmar and Marietta, Ohio [Figures 5 and 6]. Sixteen whites died and three others were taken captive.<sup>36</sup>

The US military establishment responded with several attacks of its own. General Charles Scott led a band of mounted Kentucky militia in a raid against the Wea Villages along the Wabash River in early June 1791. Scott made a brief feint toward Kekionga to divert Indian

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<sup>35</sup> Sword, *Washington's Indian War*, 117–122; R. Ernest Dupuy and Trevor N. Dupuy, *The Encyclopedia of Military History from 3500 B.C. to the Present* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 725.

<sup>36</sup> Sword, *Washington's Indian War*, 115, 126–130.

warriors away from the main thrust of his attack, the village of Ouiatanon near present Lafayette, Indiana. At the same time, he entrusted Colonel John Hardin to attack two smaller nearby villages (despite his poor performance during Harmar's defeat seven months earlier). Combined, Scott and Hardin took fifty-eight Indians prisoner and killed thirty-six. The victims were mostly women, children, and elderly men; the warriors had all left to defend the Miami Towns. In August of that same year, General James Wilkinson used the same strategy for yet another raid into Wabash Country. He feinted toward Kekionga before leading over five hundred mounted troops in a raid against L'Anguille, along the Eel River. He burned the village, killed six, and took thirty-four prisoners before returning to Fort Washington [Figure 5].<sup>37</sup>

While Scott, Hardin, and Wilkinson reveled in their successes, Harmar was disgraced and quit the service. Upon their return to Cincinnati, the militia's commanders started rumors that Harmar was drunk throughout the campaign, presumably to distract attention from their own ineptitude and the cowardly performance of their soldiers during the battle. A Court of Inquiry led by General Richard Butler and several other high-ranking military officers found no evidence to support those accusations and absolved Harmar of any wrongdoing. Government officials disregarded the Court's findings and were only too happy to blame Harmar's shortcomings for the embarrassing loss. Sword remarked that scapegoating Harmar ignored the real culprit—"the existing United States army system" that the federal government had itself created.<sup>38</sup> Congress had not earmarked enough money to properly supply its army. To fill the quotas set by Congress, military officials relied too heavily on undisciplined militia soldiers and recruits who received

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<sup>37</sup> Sword, *Washington's Indian War*, 139-141, 155-156.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.



little practical training before they embarked on the campaign. The War Department also made poor choices for Harmar's subordinate officers, failed to establish a defined chain-of-command among them, and set unrealistic goals for such an inadequate force to accomplish. Military leaders underestimated the skill of Indian fighters and their resolve, which was compounded by the fact that the army used standard battle tactics in what was essentially an irregular guerrilla fight.<sup>39</sup>

### Conclusion

After the humiliation of Harmar's army, US officials resolved to take a more aggressive approach to defeat the Northwest Confederacy. The centerpiece of this effort entailed yet another attack against the Miami Towns, led by Arthur St. Clair. St. Congress commissioned St. Clair as a Major-General and gave him command over the entire US Army in addition to his duties as the Governor of the Northwest Territory. Unbeknownst to the War Department, the Miami had largely abandoned Kekionga after Harmar's attack razed the Indians' lodgings and destroyed the food stores there. Seeking a more secure location, the Northwest Confederacy relocated its base-of-operations to the Grand Glaize, a Shawnee village located at the confluence of the Auglaize and Maumee Rivers (present Defiance, Ohio), less than sixty miles from the British post at Fort Detroit. The fact that St. Clair's impending attack was directed at Kekionga, instead of the Grand Glaize, was an ominous sign for the outcome of St. Clair's mission, which US officials hoped would issue a decisive, destructive blow to the pan-Indian resistance movement. The success of the aforementioned raids by Scott, Hardin, and Wilkinson—which were launched due to significant delays St. Clair incurred while assembling his force—convinced senior officials in the

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 122, 126–130.

War Department and the Washington administration that they were on the right track. This overconfidence was their undoing.<sup>40</sup>

The Northwest Indian War proved that although the new constitutional republic had the power to martial a large military force, frugality and ideological resistance to a professional standing army, poor frontier intelligence, as well as underestimating the skills and resolve of native warriors, would continue to hamstring the US government's expansionist project.

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<sup>40</sup> Lytle, *America's First Army*, 136.

## CHAPTER 6

### INDIAN DIPLOMACY AND THE SANDUSKY ALLIANCE

The War for American Independence affected the balance of power in Indian Country in subtle and not-so-subtle ways. In the postbellum period, native communities confronted the reality that white settlement of their lands posed a serious threat to their territorial sovereignty, autonomy, and traditional lifeways. In response, they looked inward, challenging cultural norms and intertribal divisions that had divided them in the past. North America's First People debated about whether to push back against US expansion or to accept it. Ultimately, accommodation or resistance were the only choices. Neutrality was never a viable option.

For many Natives, siding with Great Britain in the American Revolution was not an easy choice. After all, it was British officials who touched off Pontiac's Rebellion with their misguided attempts to bend the Indians to their will. Pontiac and his allies forced Great Britain to revise its Indian policy to mirror the one French officials had used with such great success from the late-1600s to mid-1700s. Great Britain coupled gift-giving and generous trade terms with a concerted effort to prevent British colonial subjects from expanding their settlements beyond the Appalachian Mountains. However, population pressure and economic conditions in the East fed a nascent desire among colonists to settle in the West, which undermined the Crown's efforts to maintain peace on the frontier. White settlers openly violated the Royal Proclamation of 1763 and forced British officials to modify the boundary between white and Indian settlements at the Treaty of Fort Stanwix in 1768. By 1775, most Native Americans in the West believed that the

United States, not Great Britain, posed a greater threat to their land and autonomy. As a result, most Indians fought alongside the King's Army during the war. The land cessions outlined in the Treaty of Paris created a fear in Indian Country that American citizens would soon invade their lands. Native peoples searched desperately for ways to defend their territory.

### The History of Pan-Indian Collaboration

Native peoples had a history of intertribal cooperation even before the arrival of European colonialism. No later than the 1500s, the Iroquois Great League of Peace was formed by five linguistically separate Indian Nations that had historically fought each other for control over the land south of the Great Lakes.<sup>1</sup> According to Haudenosaunee cosmology, these separate nations formed an alliance under the guidance of Deganawida, or the The Great Peacemaker, along with Hiawatha and Jigonhsasee. Anthropologist Dean R. Snow referred to this arrangement as “a nonaggression pact” that eventually “took on a more formal political structure and came to operate as a political confederacy” once Europeans and their trade goods flooded into Iroquois territory.<sup>2</sup> This collaboration successfully protected Haudenosaunee sovereignty over the next two-hundred years and became a model of diplomatic and military cooperation that would both lead and inspire collective action among other Indian Nations in the years to come.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Iroquois Confederacy was composed initially of five tribes—the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca—who were referred to as the Five Nations. The Tuscarora joined them after the Yamasee War in North Carolina (1711-1713), at which point they were known as the Six Nations. Depending on the context, the Iroquois will be referred to alternately as the Five Nations, the Six Nations, the Haudenosaunee, or, when applicable, by the individual Nations that constituted it. Daniel Richter, *The Ordeal of the Longhouse: The Peoples of the Iroquois League in the Era of European Colonization* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 1, 238.

<sup>2</sup> Dean R. Snow, “Dating the Emergence of the League of the Iroquois: A Reconsideration of the Documentary Evidence,” in *Rensselaerswijck Seminar V—Historical Archeology: A Multidisciplinary Approach*, September 1982 (Albany, Ny.: New Netherland Publishing, 1991), 139.

<sup>3</sup> Richter, *Ordeal of the Longhouse*, 15.

English colonialism challenged Iroquois hegemony over their own territory and the authority they claimed over other native peoples who lived east of the Mississippi River. The five Iroquois Nations faced several threats caused by white settlement: depopulation due to European diseases, growing dependence on European trade, entanglement in the imperial competition between France and England for control over North America, and the growing erosion of their territory and sovereignty due to white expansion. The Iroquois' confederation created several advantages to neutralize these effects. They held geographic control over major trade routes. Their inland territory was relatively isolated, which mitigated the shock of contact with whites and positioned them as a buffer between France and England. They had a diversified subsistence—a balance of hunting and agriculture—and replenished their population losses by adopting captives. The dual nature of their political system allowed them to use their League of Peace to generate internal cohesiveness while the Iroquois Confederacy used its military prowess to project that power outward against Europeans and other native peoples. As white expansion progressed and European settlers surrounded their lands, the Iroquois lost these advantages and their internal cohesion.<sup>4</sup>

Although Euro-Americans saw them as a single entity, the Iroquois Confederacy stands as the most enduring, and perhaps most successful, example of pan-Indian collaboration. Other instances of native cooperation throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries were influential and effective in their own right, although not as long-lived. Like the Haudenosaunee, these movements were intertribal, religious, political, multi-generational, and featured both sacred and secular aspects. The premise of the Iroquois Confederacy and pan-

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<sup>4</sup> Calloway, *Victory with No Name*, 12; Richter, *Ordeal of the Longhouse*, 2.

Indianism more broadly was that sacred power could overcome the impact of white imperialism. What set other pan-Indian alliances apart was that they were a continental phenomenon, unlike the Haudenosaunee who were geographically isolated in present western New York (around the Finger Lakes region). Another point of difference was that cultural divisions and traditional rivalries among the member nations, combined with the aggressive and divisive tactics used by white settlers and their governments, were significant obstacles that undercut their effectiveness. The Great League of Peace had in large part mitigated such issues.<sup>5</sup>

Indian prophets did not call for the complete rejection of white culture. According to historian Gregory Evans Dowd, they sought a “new way” within “traditional” norms, to secure power through ceremonies that would connect the physical and spiritual world together, and achieve balance between themselves and the plant and animal world around them.<sup>6</sup> To attain this balance, pan-Indian collaborations blended cultural tradition with non-traditional elements. The symbiotic relationship between warfare and sacred power was one such adaptation. Warfare against whites involved a number of rituals to maintain favor with the spirit world, including the execution, torture, or adoption of captives, practices that had been common in inter-Indian conflicts before European colonization. To be effective, pan-Indian alliances also required the establishment of new diplomatic relationships among native leaders to replace a traditional, more insular, mindset that was focused on tribal identity.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Gregory Evans Dowd, *A Spirited Resistance: The North American Indian Struggle for Unity, 1745-1815* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), xiv-xx.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., xx, xxiii, 2-4, 9.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 11-18.

Advocates of intertribal alliances challenged traditional leadership structures as well as those that Euro-Americans attempted to impose upon them. At the same time, however, confronting white imperialism and expansion often magnified internal divisions inside these movements. Perhaps the greatest obstacle to inter-tribal unity was the persistent internal conflict between nativists and accommodationists. Nativists flatly rejected white influence while accommodationists leveraged Euro-American support of their political power to help their people and, at times, to advance their personal interests. Although these two factions sometimes worked effectively with each other, they were often at odds because nativists believed that cooperation with whites would inevitably lead to the loss of sacred power.<sup>8</sup>

Algonquian peoples had been forming alliances long before the Seven Years' War.<sup>9</sup> In the Beaver Wars of the seventeenth century, French officials encouraged the Indians of the Old Northwest to unite together to defend themselves against the combined military and diplomatic power of the Five Nations and their British allies. The success of this alliance established a precedent for cooperation among Algonquians who had historically had been in conflict with each other. Among the most influential figures of this movement was the Delaware prophet Neolin, who believed that whites blocked the Indians' path to the afterlife. He believed that rejecting European trade and returning to traditional rituals would emancipate them from their dependence on European goods and save them from the degradation and disease that accompanied white expansion. These ideas provided the ideological foundation for Pontiac's

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 20-22.

<sup>9</sup> The term "Algonquian" refers broadly to the speakers of a similar linguistic family who inhabited what is now the region north of the Ohio River, south of the Great Lakes, and east of the Mississippi River. Although all native peoples who lived in that region did not speak the Algonquian language, Algonquians were certainly the most dominant political and military force. As Richard White does in *The Middle Ground*, the term "Algonquian" is used in this study to differentiate them from the Six Nations and Siouan peoples who lived around them and, at times, were in conflict with them. White, *The Middle Ground*, xi.

pan-Indian uprising against England's western posts in 1763. Although Pontiac's quest to dislodge Great Britain failed, the suppression of his rebellion did not spell the end of the pan-Indian movement. A future generation of Indian rebels believed that the internal conflict between nativists and accommodationists was what ultimately undermined Pontiac's confederation and led to his defeat. They were confident that if they could suppress internal dissent, their efforts to resist US expansion would be successful.<sup>10</sup>

The native alliances that formed between the Seven Years' War and the American Revolution were not designed merely as a check against Anglo-American involvement in the West. They also challenged the Six Nations' claims of hegemony over all Native Americans living north of the Ohio River. The Six Nations' role in the Treaty of Fort Stanwix in 1768, and their long-standing alliance with England, cast them as "Slaves of the White People," in the eyes of many Algonquians.<sup>11</sup> During the Revolutionary War, Indians from the trans-Appalachian West rejected Haudenosaunee dominance and created an alliance that included the Chickamauga, militant Cherokees who had broken away from their kinsmen and formed a separate diplomatic entity led by Dragging Canoe. Both accommodationists and nativists participated in an "alliance of convenience" with England during the Revolution because the United States was seen as the greatest threat to native lands and sovereignty. Repeated incursions into the Ohio Country by US troops during the war also alienated Indian nations who had initially professed neutrality. They, too, cast their lot with Great Britain.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Dowd, *Spirited Resistance*, 25-26, 29-37; Downes, *Council Fires*, 142-151.

<sup>11</sup> As quoted in Dowd, *Spirited Resistance*, 43.

<sup>12</sup> Dowd, *Spirited Resistance*, 49-61; White, *Middle Ground*, 394-407.



The Treaty of Paris in 1763 marked the end of French involvement in North America and left the native peoples of the *pays d'en haut* to contend with Great Britain as the dominant colonial power on the continent. The 1783 Treaty of Paris created a similar dynamic with a new adversary, the United States. For the second time in twenty years, Native Americans confronted a future riddled with uncertainty. With varying levels of success, Indians in the Old Northwest drew upon a rich tradition of native collaboration to neutralize the threat of US expansion through a mix of warfare and diplomacy.

### The Origins of the Postwar Pan-Indian Alliance

The situation Native Americans faced in the postbellum period was marked by both continuity and radical change, which produced negative effects for native peoples. Disease continued to threaten Indian populations. A smallpox epidemic in 1787 ravaged the decentralized native communities of the *pays d'en haut*. An American trader remarked that the outbreak left “24 Mingoes . . . [and] Eighteen of the Wyandots Dead and a great many Dying,” before the epidemic was halfway over.<sup>13</sup> As white settlers pushed into frontier areas, disease and warfare made premature death a common visitor in native communities. This great loss of life magnified long-standing internal divisions that split traditionalists from those who had begun to assimilate economically and socially into Anglo-American culture.

In the prewar and postwar periods, native independence from Anglo-Americans was limited by their demand for items that could only be acquired through trade, including guns, ammunition, and metal pots. To maintain access to those goods, Indians hunted, trapped, and traded at the frontier posts of Detroit, Michilimackinac, Niagara, and Oswego. As Indians

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<sup>13</sup> David Duncan to Josiah Harmar, 11 September 1787, Harmar Papers, vol. 6.

became increasingly reliant upon trade to hunt and go to war, their demand for these goods required them to foster relationships with whichever colonial power occupied the frontier posts. When British colonial officials refused to turn those posts over to the United States after the war, Natives again found themselves dependent on the British trade monopoly in the Old Northwest.

Perhaps the most dramatic change was a massive increase in the number of white settlers. The Royal Proclamation had done little to deter the settlement of Kentucky, western Pennsylvania, and western Virginia, but the 1768 Treaty of Fort Stanwix, for the most part, had prevented American colonists from settling north of the Ohio River. Other than a few scattered squatter settlements and communities that developed around the frontier posts, the only whites who lived in the *pays d'en haut* were the French-speaking residents of Vincennes, Kaskaskia, Detroit, trading towns that France had established before the Seven Years' War. When England relinquished its control over the Old Northwest, British soldiers no longer acted as border control agents. After the war, the US treasury was so impoverished that it could not afford to dispatch traders with presents or trade goods for the Indians. The national government did not have the power, resources, or desire to create an army large enough to prevent encroachment onto Indian lands. Squatters, speculators, and adventurers took advantage of this power vacuum. Financial instability, combined with England's geopolitical objectives in North America and native desperation over what US dominance would entail, created the perfect conditions for the development of a pan-Indian confederation that would align itself with Great Britain.

Rumors about the provisions of the Treaty of Paris spread throughout Indian Country before it was signed. One article in particular generated serious controversy: England's cession of the territory east of the Mississippi River and south of the Great Lakes to the United States.

The fact that Great Britain sacrificed this land without consulting the Indians first, plus England's failure to include protections for native land rights, left the Indians whipsawed. Native leaders across the West correctly assumed that it was only a matter of time before US settlers threatened their homelands.

Their worst fears were soon realized. Before their war ended, illegal white settlements had already appeared north of the Ohio River. These early squatters were merely canaries in the proverbial coal mine. After the treaties of Fort Stanwix, Fort McIntosh, and Fort Finney, white settlement began in earnest, sanctioned by the US government. These settlements were born partly out of necessity, a consequence of crippling postwar national debt, economic depression, and population pressure along the East Coast. But they also promoted US colonialism by gaining foothold that could allow the United States to exploit the lucrative fur-trade economy.

Another factor that fostered Indian collaboration was the evolution of diplomacy between rival Indian nations. Historic rivalries between the Algonquian and Iroquois peoples, which dated back to the Beaver Wars, had waned in the years leading up to the Seven Years' War. The economic and diplomatic needs of both groups helped them to put aside past differences. The Six Nations sought to increase their influence in the Ohio Country while the Algonquians looked for increased access to British trade goods and protection from French officials who were trying to maintain their trade monopoly with the western Indians. The former enemies came together in a common cause, albeit fleetingly, when French forces attacked a village of separatist Miami Indians at Pickawillany, near present-day Piqua, Ohio, in 1752. The Natives who lived there had moved away from Kekionga to gain access to English traders who plied their wares on the western edge of Iroquois territory. Although the Six Nations and Algonquians fought on separate

sides during the French and Indian War, England's victory over France removed the final obstacle to increased diplomatic cooperation between the Eastern and Western Indians in the years to come.<sup>14</sup>

### Creation of the Sandusky Alliance

England's alliance with the Indians of the Old Northwest during the Revolutionary War set a precedent for Anglo-Indian collaboration that continued to vex the United States through the War of 1812. Pan-Indianism after the Revolution was inspired by European influence and indigenous religion, working in unison to defend Indian land. Despite the fact that the English had ignored their native allies during the peace negotiations in Paris, any postwar Indian confederation would necessarily be dependent on British assistance to defend their territory.<sup>15</sup>

England's postbellum strategy in North America focused on maintaining a foothold in the *pays d'en haut* for the furtherance of two intertwined goals. First, Great Britain hoped to continue its dominance over the region's lucrative fur trade economy. British officials realized that the depressed US economy and the desperate financial situation of the US treasury, along with increasing unrest among white inhabitants on the frontier, would likely prevent the Confederation from asserting its sovereignty over the entirety of its newly acquired western domain. Secondly, if the United States' experiment in self-government failed, England would be close at hand to pick up the pieces. For those reasons, England retained the frontier posts it had relinquished in the Treaty of Paris and continued to supply the Indians of the Old Northwest with guns, ammunition, and supplies. Publicly, they insisted that the growing conflict between the

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<sup>14</sup> White, *Middle Ground*, 224-268.

<sup>15</sup> Dowd, *Spirited Resistance*, 88-93.

United States and Native Americans was a matter to be settled between the Americans and the Indian Confederation.

In the immediate aftermath of the war, however, the controversial terms of the Treaty of Paris positioned employees of the British Indian Department as the middlemen between angry Indians and the high-ranking British officials who had given away their land. Major John Ross, the commandant at Fort Oswego, reported to Quebec Governor Sir Frederick Haldimand that the Six Nations “reproached us with their ruin.”<sup>16</sup> They worried that England would do nothing to defend them against attacks by Americans who were angry at perceived Indian treachery. The hardships endured by the Natives, Ross believed, would have a significant impact “with respect to the Trade and Safety of this Province, [due to] the Expectations their services entitles them to from us, or upon the fatal consequences that might attend our abandoning them to the Intrigues of the Enemy, should they persist in the war, or to their resentment in case of a Peace.”<sup>17</sup> Such feelings of insecurity were not confined to the Six Nations. Most native peoples on the western frontier harbored similar fear and resentment when the provisions of the Paris agreement were made public.

Great Britain positioned itself to be the biggest beneficiary of the chaotic situation in the West. The centerpiece of this design was encouraging the Western Indians to form an alliance that would act as a buffer between the United States and Canada. Before that plan could be set into motion, however, British officials first had to mollify Indians who felt England’s role in the

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<sup>16</sup> John Ross as quoted in Frederick Haldimand to Guy Carleton, 18 September 1782, in *Historical Collections: Collections and Researches Made by the Michigan Pioneer and Historical Society*, vol. 20 (Lansing, Mi.: Robert Smith & Co., State Printers and Binders, 1892), 57.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

Treaty of Paris was “treacherous and cruel” because the Crown “pretend[ed] to cede to America what was not his own to give.”<sup>18</sup>

These efforts culminated at Lower Sandusky in September 1783, where England organized a council of thirty-five Indian Nations to address their concerns. British Indian Agent Alexander McKee acknowledged that the King had indeed relinquished its control over the Old Northwest to the Americans. He emphasized that the Treaty of Paris did not take that land away from the Indians. It was merely a transfer of sovereignty, not ownership. Native peoples retained control, subject to the sovereignty of the United States. McKee preemptively absolved England’s culpability in any future land seizures when he opined that the US would not “act so . . . [i]mpolitically as to endeavour to deprive you of any part of your Country under the pretence [sic] of having conquered it.”<sup>19</sup> It was a clever attempt to dodge the fact that British officials had, indeed, abandoned the Indians to the Americans. He beseeched them to “bear [their] losses with Manly Fortitude, forgiving and forgetting [sic] what is past,” and encouraged them to coexist peacefully with the United States.<sup>20</sup> The English presented the Indians with gifts that they hoped would pacify any lingering resentment. Coercion had defined the paternalistic relationship between the English and the Indians since the end of the Seven Years' War, and it continued to be the diplomatic tool British Indian Department officials employed time and again after the Revolution ended.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Allan Maclean to Frederick Haldimand, 18 May 1783, in *Ibid.*, 20:118.

<sup>19</sup> Alexander McKee to Indian Nations Assembled at Sandusky, 6 September 1783, in *Frederick Haldimand Papers: Reports on Indian Meetings, Treaties, etc. n.d., 1778-1784* (hereafter cited as *FHP-R*), MG 21, Add. Mss. 21779, (8-119), Library and Archives Canada—Ottawa, 225.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> McKee to Indian Nations, *FHP-R*, 224; Alexander McKee’s Speech at Lower Sandusky, 6 September 1783, in *Michigan Pioneer*, 20:177-178; Sword, *Washington’s Indian War*, 17-21.

After England absolved itself from the guilt surrounding the treaty, McKee moved on to the second element of England's postbellum strategy: encouraging the formation of a pan-Indian alliance. He emphasized that cooperation was the most effective way for Indians to protect their lands from US expansion and anointed the Six Nations as the spokesmen for all native peoples in the West. Indian unity in the face of US aggression, McKee believed, would allow them "to speak and act like one man . . . [so that a] single breath which rashly blows can have no effect in turning you aside from the straight path laid before you by your Father [the King]."<sup>22</sup> He promised to support them with food, guns and supplies. The postbellum pan-Indian confederation was thus founded on the premise that through pan-Indianism and British assistance, Natives could defend their lands and maintain peace in the Old Northwest. The Sandusky Alliance was born.

The Alliance borrowed elements from previous pan-Indian confederations. Similar to Pontiac's confederation, it emphasized that Indian people belonged to a common race. The assertion of a pan-Indian racial identity surmounted the traditional linguistic, cultural, and geographic boundaries that had divided native peoples in the past. In a council at Wakitiwinikie in May 1785, Shawnee war chief Captain Johnny stated, "We People of one Colour are united so that we make but one Man, that has but one Heart & one Mind."<sup>23</sup> This unity was important in the face of Anglo-American imperialism, a common threat founded upon racism and the supposition that Native Americans were "inferior." One unique aspect of the Sandusky Alliance set it apart from its predecessors: its assertion that the land of the Old Northwest belonged to all

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<sup>22</sup> McKee's Speech at Lower Sandusky, 8 September 1783, *Michigan Pioneer*, vol. 20:182.

<sup>23</sup> Captain Johnny Speech at Wakitiwinikie, 18 May 1785, in SIA, Series 1, Lot 714, 2.

Indians in common. Historian John Sugden suggested this was “a purely political construct . . . devised to ensure that no group of Indians could sell land without the authority of the entire confederacy.”<sup>24</sup> These defining characteristics pointed the direction for the Alliance in the years to come, but they were not universally embraced by all Natives who lived in the West. This sowed the seeds of division that would eventually tear the confederacy in two.

### The Makeup of the Sandusky Alliance

The pan-Indian cooperative that emerged out of the Lower Sandusky conference included many different Nations who held divergent opinions on the most effective way to push back against US expansion. The Six Nations were joined by the Chippewa, Delaware, Hurons, Mingo, Ottawa, Piankashaw, Potawatomi, Shawnee, the Wyandot, and the Wabash Confederacy, composed of the Kickapoo, Mascouten, Miami, Piankashaw, and Wea Nations who lived north of the Ohio River. Several Creek and Chickamauga Cherokee villages who lived south of the Ohio River also joined the Alliance. Participation in the pan-Indian movement was far from comprehensive, however. Not all of the members of each Nation actively participated in the Sandusky Alliance or even supported its efforts. Despite this lack of universal support, the broad spectrum of membership in the Alliance spoke to the fact that most of the Indians living east of the Mississippi River saw the United States as an imminent threat. It also foreshadowed the difficulty of what lay ahead: maintaining solidarity to create an effective diplomatic and military response in the face of relentless US pressure.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> John Sugden, *Blue Jacket: Warrior of the Shawnee* (Lincoln, Ne.: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 67.

<sup>25</sup> Dowd, *Spirited Resistance*, 89-94; Sword, *Washington's Indian War*, 6; Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 631.



The Sandusky Alliance pursued tangible geostrategic goals that were inspired and reinforced by native spiritual imperatives. Its councils featured speeches that referenced supernatural inspiration and indigenous imagery, such as the Chain of Friendship and terms of fictional kinship, that advanced their central objective of defending native territory. A month after the meeting at Sandusky, representatives of the Six Nations met at Niagara with British Indian Department officials and representatives of the Shawnee, Delaware, and Cherokee Nations. The Cayuga encouraged the Western and Southern Nations to join in “Brotherly love amongst the different Nations, be unanimous, and bound fast together in one Chain of friendship, as we the Six Nations are determined to be of one sound, and act as one man.”<sup>26</sup> The Cayuga chief, Tagaia, recalled that the British had “repeatedly recommended and . . . requested us to defend our country,” and emphasized that the pan-Indian alliance had adopted that as its primary objective.<sup>27</sup> They wished to remain at peace with the United States but were determined to protect their lands at any cost.

The problem with maintaining unity was that geographic differences created strife across the political spectrum of the alliance. The “Right Wing” of the confederacy consisted of the Wyandot, Delaware, and Seneca Nations, who pursued relatively conservative goals in the postbellum period. Because their settlements were located close to those of the whites, they were more familiar with the capabilities of Euro-American society, especially its advanced technology and massive population numbers. They ceded land to the United States because they believed

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<sup>26</sup> Shoharise Speech to Chiefs of the Shawnee, Delaware, and Cherokee Nations in Council at Niagara, 6 October 1783, in SIA, Series 1, Lot 708, 1.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

their villages would be victimized if frontier tensions turned toward violence. The Delaware knew this from hard experience.<sup>28</sup>

The western theater of the Revolutionary War was essentially a war between Indians and frontier settlers. In 1781, the English commander at Fort Detroit feared that German Moravian missionaries in Ohio might provide intelligence to US officials at Fort Pitt. He ordered the removal of the Moravians and their Delaware Indian converts to Sandusky, where they could be more carefully watched. The Delaware who lived at Gnadenhutten, a mission village situated along the Tuscarawas River in present Tuscarawas County, Ohio, were among those evacuees. When famine struck at Sandusky in the spring of 1782, Delaware converts returned to gather corn from their abandoned settlements to avoid starvation. On March 8, 1782, a militia company from Washington County, Pennsylvania, attacked a band of refugees who had returned to Gnadenhutten. The soldiers rounded-up over ninety Delaware men, women, and children of all ages, separated the men from the women and children, and barricaded them into two separate cabins. The Pennsylvanians bound their hands and murdered the Indians as they prayed and sang Christian hymns. The militia burned the cabins and left.<sup>29</sup>

The Americans justified the murders as revenge for a series of Indian raids into western Pennsylvania earlier that spring, which killed several whites and led to the captivity of one white woman and three children. The Delaware at Gnadenhutten had taken no part in the attacks; when the raids occurred, they were already at Sandusky. Ironically, the traditionalist Indians who lived

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<sup>28</sup> Sword, *Washington's Indian War*, 41-42.

<sup>29</sup> R. Douglas Hurt, *The Ohio Frontier: Crucible of the Old Northwest, 1720-1830* (Bloomington, In.: Indiana University Press, 1998), 87-92; John Frost, *Heroic Women of the West: Comprising Thrilling Examples of Courage, Fortitude, Devotedness, and Self-Sacrifice Among the Pioneer Mothers of the Western Country* (Philadelphia: A. Hart, Late Carey & Hart, 1854), 109-113.

near their refugee camp at Sandusky had ostracized them for supporting the US cause of independence. The victims were merely in the wrong place at the wrong time. The massacre proved that frontier whites did not discriminate between friend and foe when they avenged attacks on their settlements. Wyandot, Delaware, and Seneca leaders realized that without the protection of treaties, removal, and reservations, their people would inevitably be victimized once again.<sup>30</sup>

Signing treaties with the United States did not necessarily guarantee immunity from white depredations. Moluntha was the leader of Mequashake, a large Shawnee village along the Mad River in present western Ohio near Springfield. He was staunch advocate of peaceful coexistence with the United States, one of the few Shawnee leaders who signed the Treaty at the Mouth of the Great Miami in January 1786. After he departed the council along the Great Miami, Moluntha built a good rapport with US commanders on the frontier who commended him for “striving . . . to fulfill the promises made” at Fort Finney.<sup>31</sup> When Benjamin Logan’s soldiers rampaged up the Mad River in the fall of 1786, Moluntha was killed, “tomahawked in the head after he had delivered himself up.”<sup>32</sup> The carnage along the Mad River—and the Gnadenhutten Massacre four years earlier—illustrated that even native peoples who favored peace with the United States were not safe. Such incidents boosted the strident factions of the pan-Indian movement who were pushing the Alliance to adopt a more aggressive posture toward US negotiators and settlers.

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<sup>30</sup> White, *Middle Ground*, 389-391; Craig, *Olden Time*, 2:478.

<sup>31</sup> Denny, *Military Journal*, 291.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 298.

Opposite the Right Wing were the militants who composed the “Left Wing” of the Sandusky Alliance. This group demanded that the United States honor the Ohio River boundary established at Treaty of Fort Stanwix in 1768. The Left Wing believed that any attempt to violate that line was an act of aggression and should be met with military force. The Shawnee, Miami, and Wabash Confederacy belonged to this faction. Their homelands in the Great Miami River valley and along the Wabash River in present-day western Ohio and Indiana were more isolated from white contact. Their lands were not threatened by US expansion in the 1780s-1790s. The Shawnee had already been displaced by Anglo-American expansion. Their ancestors had hunted in Kentucky for generations until the Six Nations ceded that land to Great Britain in 1768. Shawnee dispossession was very influential among the pro-war faction. If the past was any indication of what the future held, failure to hold the Ohio River boundary could endanger all Indian land east of the Mississippi River. Captain Johnny warned a US Indian Commissioner that if the United States could not stop white incursions into Indian Country, the Alliance was prepared to “take up a Rod & whip [the squatters] back to your Side of the Ohio.”<sup>33</sup> If whites retaliated, Captain Johnny told him, “the Consequence of what may happen hereafter will be your Fault.”<sup>34</sup>

Mohawk Chief Joseph Brant and other Six Nations leaders were the moderate centrists of the Sandusky Alliance. Their homelands were also close to the whites, so they had a long economic and diplomatic history with Anglo-Americans that gave them unique insight into the motivations and persistence of white settlers. Brant, who was the *de facto* leader of the Alliance,

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<sup>33</sup> Captain Johnny Speech at Wakitiwinikie, 18 May 1785, in SIA, Series 1, Lot 714, 3.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

initially supported the Ohio River boundary but was not prepared to go to war over it until every diplomatic option was exhausted. His history as an emissary between the Six Nations and the English during the Revolutionary War made him confident that he could convince the Crown's officials to support the Indians when they negotiated with the US Indian Commissioners. Brant hoped that gaining English support or, at the very least, convincing them to act as intermediaries between the two sides, would dramatically increase the Alliance's bargaining power.<sup>35</sup>

### The Diplomatic Tactics of the Sandusky Alliance

Contrary to the idea that the pan-Indian confederacy was largely beholden to and manipulated by the British, the strategies and tactics employed by the Sandusky Alliance were actually self-developed and quite dynamic. The Alliance emphasized unity, used internal pressure to ensure compliance among its members, dictated negotiating terms with the United States, and engaged in play-off diplomacy. When those methods failed to yield positive results, many of its members were prepared to fight.

Establishing and maintaining a unified front was the predominant theme of Alliance's councils the Alliance conducted from 1783 through 1788. Anglo-Americans viewed all Indians as belonging to an inferior race. Since the earliest days of North American colonization, whites had discounted and dehumanized native peoples and accorded them little or no intellectual respect. When native leaders articulated the idea of a common racial identity, they essentially adopted the language of their oppressor but turned that prejudice on its head. Rather than allow white racism to collectively victimize and dismiss them, Natives embraced their

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<sup>35</sup> Sword, *Washington's Indian War*, 42.

commonality and thrust the Sandusky Alliance forward as the diplomatic and military embodiment of that newfound collectivism.

The Alliance moved aggressively to eliminate dissent. Anyone who acted outside of its authority was immediately discredited and ostracized. This was especially true of the native leaders who had signed treaties with the US Indian Commissioners. Captain Johnny accused the Indian signatories at Fort McIntosh of having “sold their Lands & themselves with it to [the United States].”<sup>36</sup> This indictment was directed specifically toward Captain Pipe and Half King—leaders of the Delaware and Wyandot Nations, respectively—whose actions, the nativists believed, undermined pan-Indian unity and violated the Chain of Friendship that had been established at Sandusky in 1783. Ignominy hung over Captain Pipe, Half King, and others who had ceded parts of the *pays d'en haut* to the United States. It made them pariahs among their people. Captain Johnny’s words reflected the nativists’ belief that anyone who acted outside of the pan-Indian movement was more white than Indian. Native leaders, even if they supported pragmatic negotiations over the possibility of warfare, were careful to fall in line with the mandates of the Alliance to avoid the shame and embarrassment that befell Captain Pipe and Half King.

Native leaders found that delay tactics were an effective defense against the US strategy of “divide and conquer” because they allowed native negotiators to save face when confronted with the unappealing choice between accommodation and war. In November 1785, the US commissioners awaited the arrival of delegations from the Shawnee and Miami before the proceedings at Fort Finney could begin. One of the Shawnee leaders invited to attend the treaty

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<sup>36</sup> Captain Johnny Speech from the Shawnee Towns, 20 March 1784, in SIA, Series 1, Lot 713, 2.

was Peteasuva. He was undoubtedly aware of what had occurred at Fort McIntosh and the impact it had upon the reputations of Half King and Captain Pipe. He sent a message to the Commissioners, informing them that his band would not attend any meeting held earlier than the spring of 1786 because his people had to consult first with the Western Nations. “Nothing can be done by us, but by General consent,” he said, because “we act and speak like one man.”<sup>37</sup> It is not known whether Peteasuva’s refusal was a true expression of his allegiance to the Sandusky Alliance or whether he simply wanted to avoid being held up as an example of treachery among his own people. In either case, when the Treaty at the Mouth of the Great Miami was finalized on January 31, 1786, Peteasuva was not among those who signed it.<sup>38</sup>

Running afoul of the pan-Indian movement did not always result in complete ostracism, however, especially if the offenders still served a purpose to the Sandusky Alliance’s objectives. Despite the role Half King played at Fort McIntosh, the Grand Council of the Alliance used him as an intermediary between itself and the United States due to his close relationship with US civil and military officials. They dispatched him to the negotiations at Fort Finney, carrying messages from the Alliance to the US commissioners. The leaders of the Grand Council were infuriated when they learned that Half King not only advised the Shawnee to sign the treaty but made his own mark on the document as well. Instead of sending a private message to admonish him, their rebuke was issued to every Indian in the Old Northwest: “your directions from this Council . . . were to receive Speeches or Messages, and not to determine upon them, but to rise up and lay

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<sup>37</sup> Speech of Peteasuva to the American Messengers, 8 November 1785, in *Michigan Pioneer*, 24:25.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

them before the Council yourself to be settled here.”<sup>39</sup> In Half King’s mind, he owed no loyalty to the Alliance. He did not consider himself a member and felt no obligation to operate according to their rules and directions. After all, they had expended considerable effort to damage his reputation in Indian Country. To the members of the Alliance, however, Half King’s independent-mindedness at Fort Finney was indisputable proof that he had sold out his native brethren to the United States. They hoped that publicly humiliating him would deter other Natives from flouting its authority in the future.<sup>40</sup>

In a letter to Congress, the Grand Council denounced the treaties at Fort Stanwix, Fort McIntosh, and Fort Finney as “illegal and of no effect” because they had been negotiated without the assent of the Sandusky Alliance, contrary to their stated intention to “be all of one mind and one voice in our speeches.”<sup>41</sup> They chastised US negotiators for undermining pan-Indianism with divisive tactics and asked the Confederation government to “meet half way and pursue such steps as become upright and honest men.”<sup>42</sup> If the United States rejected their pacific overtures, “we are confident we shall be able to exculpate ourselves & most assuredly with our united force be obliged to defend those immunities which the Great Spirit has been pleased to give us.”<sup>43</sup> US officials dismissed such threats and refused to recognize the Sandusky Alliance as a legitimate diplomatic entity. Their interactions with Indians were mostly confined to native leaders who opposed the Sandusky Alliance. This distorted their perception about the size of the movement

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<sup>39</sup> Indian Council [Sandusky Alliance] to the Nations on the South Side of the Lake [Erie], 20 September 1785, in *Historical Collections: Researches and Collections Made by the Michigan Pioneer and Historical Society*, vol. 11, (Lansing: Thorp & Godfrey, State Printers and Binders, 1888), 466.

<sup>40</sup> Treaty at the Big Miamis in *Michigan Pioneer*, 24:24.

<sup>41</sup> Indian Speech to the Congress of the United States, 18 November 1786, in *Michigan Pioneer*, 11:468.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 469.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*



and led them to discount the resolve of its adherents. Above all, they doubted that the Indians could marshal the military force to defend their territory from the US Army.

Unauthorized military action by renegade warriors thwarted the Alliance's strategic goals as much as turncoat negotiators did. As late as 1786, its membership had not reached a consensus on whether war or negotiation was the best strategy to protect their territory. The official position of the Alliance was that individual leaders should restrain their people who "continue to carry on depredations" because they undermined "the Quiet of the Country, as well as the good works the General Councils of our Confederacy are labouring to accomplish."<sup>44</sup> Raids would undermine the peace process and "operate as much against themselves as those they are endeavoring to injure."<sup>45</sup> Independent diplomatic and military action only reinforced the belief among US officials that the pan-Indian movement was fractured and ineffective, which further undermined the Alliance's efforts to compel the United States to negotiate with them directly.

To gain more leverage against the US commissioners, native leaders implied that English officials in Canada supported Indian territorial sovereignty. When Captain Johnny rejected an invitation he received to the council at the Mouth of the Great Miami, he issued a counterproposal suggesting that the United States move the negotiations to Detroit, where "our Brethren [the English] who stand at our Backs will hear you."<sup>46</sup> While the Shawnee firebrand's speech seemed to confirm something US officials had long suspected—that employees of the British Indian Department were encouraging the native rebellion—few inside the US military

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<sup>44</sup> Meeting Held by the Lake Indians, 20 September 1785, in *Michigan Pioneer*, 11:467.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Captain Johnny Speech at Wakitiwinikie, 18 May 1785, in SIA, Series 1, Lot 714, 2.

establishment believed that Great Britain would support the Indians with its army unless the United States directly threatened the disputed frontier posts.

Some villages aligned with the Alliance exploited their economic and trade connections with American citizens on the frontier to support the objectives of pan-Indianism. In the summer of 1786, the commandant at Fort Pitt supplied guns and ammunition to several bands of Mingo and Chippewa Indians who had been loitering about the fort for several months, begging for supplies. Not long afterward, a group of Mingo warriors attacked several white settlements along the Big Kanawha River in present West Virginia. Ten Americans died. The raiders also kidnapped four young girls and executed them after they returned the Shawnee Towns. Several years later, Chippewa warriors raided the fatigue party of US soldiers who had been deployed to construct the council house at the Falls of the Muskingum in 1788. Because villages across the Old Northwest were connected together through kinship and trade ties it was possible, if not likely, that the United States had supplied these bands with the very weapons that were used to raid American frontier settlements. It was an example of “play-off diplomacy” at its finest.<sup>47</sup>

Both the Left and Right Wings of the Sandusky Alliance realized that if diplomatic peace efforts failed, military action should remain on the table. Both groups remained divided about which circumstances would make warfare necessary, however. Brant and his acolytes held out hope that negotiations between the United States and the Alliance would eventually bear fruit, especially if England intervened on the Indians’ behalf. The Western Nations, on the other hand, believed the events of 1784-1786 proved that the United States was uninterested in peace, which

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<sup>47</sup> Henry Knox to Josiah Harmar, 27 June 1786, Information of Captain Teunies (a Delaware Indian) to Josiah Harmar, 6 July 1786, and William North to Josiah Harmar, 29 July 1786, in Harmar Papers, v. 3; Arthur St. Clair to Henry Knox, 17 August 1788, in Smith, *St. Clair Papers*, 2:81; Sword, *Washington’s Indian War*, 62-63.

made war the next logical step. Disagreements between the two factions over this central issue—war versus peace—ignited a contentious struggle over which side would lead the pan-Indian movement in the years ahead.

### Leadership in the Sandusky Alliance

The Alliance's leadership structure was dynamic and changed over time. Despite attempts by various individuals to elevate themselves into a preeminent leadership role, major decisions were often made in council meetings of leaders from the different Nations. In the infancy of the Alliance, the Six Nations, especially Mohawk chief Joseph Brant, positioned themselves as its primary leaders and acted as intermediaries between it and Great Britain. The Iroquois felt entitled to overall leadership due the close economic and diplomatic relationship they had fostered with the England over the previous two centuries. After the French and Indian War, the Six Nations believed their relationship with British officials had positioned them as the "Elder Brethren" of the Indians from the Ohio River Valley and Great Lakes region. The Iroquois maintained that they spoke on behalf of the Western Nations in economic, diplomatic, and military affairs. The Iroquois negotiated on behalf of the Algonquians at Fort Stanwix in 1768 and recruited them to the British side during the Revolutionary War. They believed their role in founding the Sandusky Alliance gave them "ownership" over it, and they presumed supremacy over their "younger Brethren the Southern and Western Nations" who joined.<sup>48</sup>

British officials did their part to reinforce the Six Nations' place atop the hierarchy of the pan-Indian movement. English officials were familiar with the Iroquois, which made them easier to negotiate with. This was especially true of Brant's Mohawks. The Deputy Agent for the British

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<sup>48</sup> Meeting Held by the Lake Indians, 20 September 1785, in *Michigan Pioneer*, 11:466; The Six Nations and Confederates Answer to General Philip Schuyler's Speech, 22 October 1783, in SIA, Series 1, Lot 709, LAC, 1.

Indian Department, Colonel John Butler, once remarked, “You the Six Nations have always recommended Union and Friendship to all the Other Nations. The Mohawks from their Situation and their experience of our Customs have acquired a superior Knowledge of the Blessings which Union and Harmony produce in all Nations.”<sup>49</sup> Johnson and other senior British officials hoped to exert influence over the pan-Indian movement through Brant and other Haudenosaunee leaders.

Leadership of the Sandusky Alliance was never as simple as deference to the will of the Six Nations or Great Britain, however. Iroquois influence was already declining by the time the War for Independence started. Previous scholarship has put forth different theories on why this occurred. Downes believed that Iroquois submission at the Treaty of Fort Stanwix in 1784 damaged their credibility among the Algonquians. Sword suggested that the Six Nations’ status as diplomats started to erode after Iroquois leaders ceded Algonquian lands to England at Fort Stanwix in 1768, without consulting the Algonquians first. Whatever the reason, by the time the Sandusky Alliance was formed in 1783, there was a growing perception among the Western Nations that Brant and other Six Nations leaders were pawns of the whites. The course of events over the next several years only added to the Algonquians’ suspicions and set the stage for a permanent fracture within the confederacy.<sup>50</sup>

To most of the Sandusky Alliance, the land cessions made by Haudenosaunee leaders at Fort Stanwix in 1784 were invalid because they were made without the consent of the whole confederacy. The fact that a number of Iroquois headmen had signed that treaty proved that Brant

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<sup>49</sup> John Butler Speech at Niagara, 10 February 1789, in SIA, Series 2, Lot 673, 1.

<sup>50</sup> Downes, *Council Fires*, 290-295; Sword, *Washington’s Indian War*, 26.

and other Six Nations leaders who belonged to the Alliance were unable to maintain a united front even among their own people. If the self-proclaimed “Elder Brethren” of the Western Nations could not control their own internal affairs, how could they possibly command respect and ensure compliance from native peoples who, in many cases, had been their historical enemies?

Anti-Iroquois sentiment was stoked by other factors as well. In late 1784, Brant and a significant portion of the Mohawk Nation were in the final stages of relocating to a reservation along the Grand River in present-day Ontario, Canada. Brant encouraged other Six Nations bands and some Algonquian refugees to join them there. On October 25, 1784, only three days after the Treaty of Fort Stanwix was signed, Frederick Haldimand issued the so-called “Haldimand Proclamation,” which granted ownership over the reserve to the Mohawks. Plans for this reservation had been in progress since 1783, a reward for the Six Nations’ loyal service during the late war, but the timing of Haldimand’s grant created the appearance that the Mohawks at Fort Stanwix had capitulated to US pressure because they knew they would soon receive their own reservation in Canada.<sup>51</sup>

Taking refuge in Canada instead of fighting to remain on their traditional homelands was but one of several options native peoples in the Old Northwest could choose from in the years to come. For Indians whose villages were located close to expanding white settlements, maintaining peace was of utmost importance. Some accomplished this through building alliances with the United States or ceding large parts of their territory. Many Seneca Indians, especially those of Cornplanter’s band, chose this path. In 1785, Cornplanter relocated his people from their home

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<sup>51</sup> Alan Taylor, *The Divided Ground: Indians, Settlers, and the Northern Borderland of the American Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006), 120-122.

along Buffalo Creek (present Buffalo, New York) to a pair of villages along the Allegheny River in northwestern Pennsylvania near the New York border.<sup>52</sup> Close proximity to Pittsburgh, where his people often went to trade, necessitated a conciliatory position toward the Americans to protect them from attacks by white settlers. That also meant that Cornplanter necessarily became one of the foremost opponents of the Sandusky Alliance.<sup>53</sup>

Membership in a pan-Indian alliance meant that native leaders and their people had to make sacrifices. Belonging to the Sandusky Alliance offered a stronger negotiating position, through the strength of numbers and the ability to back up their diplomatic positions with a large collection of warriors, but that also meant that individual leaders had to sacrifice their autonomy for the greater good. Leaders of the Iroquois Confederacy had grown accustomed to such an arrangement, but it was a dramatic departure from the way Algonquian leadership functioned historically. For the Alliance to be effective, individual Nations had to embrace the fact that “the greater good” was synonymous with the best interests of their own people. After Half King capitulated to the US Commissioners, his public humiliation was a reminder that the nature of native leadership had changed. Membership in the pan-Indian alliance required Algonquian headmen to relinquish insular strategic concerns and the individual autonomy they once held to conduct diplomatic relations with Euro-Americans.

Convincing Natives to redefine the nature of Indian leadership for the sake of pan-Indianism was not a simple task because individual factions and leaders sometimes held radically

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<sup>52</sup> Cornplanter, son of a Seneca woman and a white trader named John Abeel, was among the chiefs who signed the Treaty of Fort Stanwix in 1784. His support of the treaty made him a target of criticism from other Six Nations leaders, specifically Joseph Brant and Red Jacket. Archer Butler Hulbert, *The Records of the Original Proceedings of the Ohio Company*, vol. 1 (Marietta, Oh.: Marietta Historical Commission, 1917), 82.

<sup>53</sup> Taylor, *Divided Ground*, 246-249; Sword, *Washington's Indian War*, 61.

different agendas and goals. Additionally, leadership among Algonquian peoples was not compulsory, which made independent action more common than in societies where leaders ruled by force and demanded compliance. Individual warriors, especially young men who were looking to make names for themselves to boost their political stature, were motivated to raid white settlements to achieve war honors. Such feats of bravery were a prerequisite before they could marry or assume positions of leadership inside their village or nation. Young Miami men, for example, often did not marry until age thirty because they were expected to take scalps and prisoners in several war parties before they were eligible to marry or become chiefs. Older chiefs, who had already achieved those honors, were inclined to maintain the status quo and advocated for peace and restraint.<sup>54</sup>

#### British Support for the Alliance

Support from the British Indian Department was necessary for Indian raids to be effective. During a council at Black Rock in September 1787, a British official repeated a pattern that had been common since the beginning of the Revolutionary War and continued through the War of 1812. He reassured the Six Nations and Delaware in attendance of the King's generosity and fondness for his Indian subjects. He implored them to conduct "all your Measures with . . . Moderation by Endeavoring to prevent War with the Subjects of the Neighbouring States," but encouraged their "Steady adherence to the Engagements you have entered into with all your Confederates, and to continue United in your Councils," then sent them away with four-hundred pounds of gunpowder and the requisite amount of ball and shot for their fall hunt.<sup>55</sup> Encouraging

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<sup>54</sup> Anson, *Miami Indians*, 15-16; W. Vernon Kintz, *The Indians of the Western Great Lakes, 1615-1760* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1965), 204.

<sup>55</sup> Speech to the Six Nations &c. at Black Rock Opposite Fort Erie, 4 September 1787, SIA, Series 2, Lot 659, 3.

the Indians to remain at peace with the United States on one hand, while offering them hunting supplies that could be used to raid white settlements with the other, perfectly embodied the Janus-faced tactics that defined England's postbellum Indian policy.

Sword implied that the relationship Great Britain had with the Indians was largely exploitative, that they used the Indians as pawns to achieve their larger strategic goals in North America without regard to the consequences for their native allies. Evidence suggests that the relationship between the English and its native allies was more co-dependent than Sword allowed. McKee's words were certainly true. The Indians' best chance to defend their lands from white encroachment was through collective action. However, his advocacy for such an alliance was not completely detached from England's larger strategy to manipulate the turbulent post-war situation to benefit the Crown and the Canadian economy. In a sense, the Northwest Indian War placed a buffer between England and the United States. Native warriors acted as pseudo-auxiliaries for the British soldiers who garrisoned the disputed posts, because their raids against settlements in the Ohio Valley prevented the US from hatching plans to take the forts by force and solidified England's control over Upper Canada. For their part, Indians realized that their alliance with England during the late war created the conditions whereby they could be forced to give up large swaths of their territory to the United States. Their only chance to minimize those losses was to resist at all costs, which would be impossible without access to weapons and ammunition. The only way to ensure continued access to that materiel was through an alliance with England.<sup>56</sup>

British forts and trading outposts also supplied the Indians with food in times of drought, famine, or when the US Army attacked and destroyed native food stores. Traders benefitted

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<sup>56</sup> General Haldimand's Policy in Delivering Up the Upper Posts, 14 November 1784, in *Michigan Pioneer*, 20:269; Sword, *Washington's Indian War*, 20-22.



handsomely from this business, so they encouraged the Indians toward a more belligerent stance. English officials also provided the Alliance with intelligence about US military campaigns into Indian Country, information which US officials provided to their British counterparts to prevent misunderstandings about troop movements into the *pays d'en haut*. This open sharing of information contributed directly to several military setbacks for the US government. It played a role in Harmar's defeat at Kekionga in 1790, after British officials at Detroit warned the Miami at Kekionga about Harmar's campaign in advance, supplied them with corn and flour, and circulated "a number of Belts" in Indian Country to rally warriors for a successful defense against Harmar's attack.<sup>57</sup>

There were limits to the amount of help Great Britain was prepared to offer to the Indians. The official position of the colonial government in Upper Canada was that the flow of trade goods and supplies would continue, but for obvious reasons His Majesty's troops would never join them in military action against the United States. Throughout the course of the Northwest Indian War, British officials emphasized that the Crown was prepared to defend his North American possessions, and the only instance that would justify the use of British troops would be if the United States attacked the disputed frontier posts.

Despite such definitive statements by English officials, members of the pan-Indian movement believed that England would eventually intervene on their behalf. This was more than a simple misunderstanding or desperate naivety on the part of the Indians. It is far more likely that mixed messages created this misconception. Congress learned a of council held between several native leaders and employees of the British Indian Department at Fort Niagara in the

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<sup>57</sup> John Hamtramck to Josiah Harmar, 15 June 1791, Harmar Papers, v. 14.

summer of 1783, prior to the creation of the Sandusky Alliance. Great Britain's Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Sir John Johnson, announced he would "take the Tomahawk out of [the Indians'] hand; though he would not remove it out of sight or far from them, but lay it down carefully by their side, that they might have it convenient to use in defense of their rights and property if they were invaded or molested by the Americans."<sup>58</sup>

Superficially, Johnson's statement proved that high-ranking British officials acknowledged that the Indians retained the right to go to war if the United States attempted to seize their lands. He also implied that by taking away the Indians' tomahawk, England had the authority give it back to them at some point. When the Alliance was first created at Lower Sandusky several months later, Brant repeated Johnson's speech before the entire assembly. If Brant was exaggerating Johnson's position—that the Indians had the right to protect their lands with violence and England would have some input into what circumstances would make warfare justified—none of the British officials moved to correct him. Johnson's words contradicted the official stance of the British Indian Department, that England was counseling its native allies to maintain peace at any cost. This official, more conciliatory, position was repeated in councils and negotiations England held with the Indians and the United States over the next several years.<sup>59</sup>

In the early postbellum period, Johnson sincerely hoped that peace would prevail and the grievances of the Indians could be addressed without bloodshed. England had no interest in involving itself in another war so soon after the last one ended. But ominous signs emanated from Indian Country that made Johnson increasingly skeptical that peace was possible. He

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<sup>58</sup> Ephraim Douglass to John Dickinson, 2 Feb 1784, in Samuel Hazard, ed., *Pennsylvania Archives*, First Series, vol. 10 (Philadelphia: Joseph Severns & Co., 1854), 552.

<sup>59</sup> Sword, 20-21; Brant's Speech at Lower Sandusky, 7 September 1783, in *Michigan Pioneer*, vol. 20, 177.

received frequent messages that there were whites living among the Indians who were actively inciting them to violence against frontier settlements. John Butler, a deputy agent for the British Indian Department, denied such reports in September 1787, when he informed Johnson that although many Six Nations Indians were suspicious of the Americans' intentions, he did not believe that any member of the Department had stoked such feelings. "[I]f such a person could be discovered, " he told Johnson, "no punishment would be bad enough for him," and he promised to conduct a deeper investigation.<sup>60</sup> Unbeknownst to Johnson, Butler was one of the foremost instigators of this anti-American sentiment and had himself spread the idea that England would support the Alliance with the British Army. A Seneca chief, Stiff Knee, reported to one US military officer that Butler had promised to support the Western Nations with up to one thousand Canadian militia soldiers if their defeat appeared to be imminent.<sup>61</sup>

Simon Girty, a notorious Loyalist, frontier outlaw, and white trader who worked for the British Indian Department as an interpreter, was a controversial figure whose connections to the Natives of the Old Northwest were often stronger than his loyalty to Great Britain. A white man who grew up in western Pennsylvania, Girty was taken captive in an Indian raid at age fifteen and adopted by the Mingo tribe. He lived among the Six Nations until he was repatriated to his family at the end of the Seven Years' War. Living among the native peoples of the *pays d'en haut*, he developed strong cultural and kinship connections with them. He served in the Virginia Militia during the Revolutionary War until 1778, when his participation in the infamous "Squaw

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<sup>60</sup> John Butler to Sir John Johnson, 27 April 1787, in SIA, Series 1, Lot 657, 2.

<sup>61</sup> Sword, *Washington's Indian War*, 20-22; Proceedings of a Council with the Six Nations, 24 May 1791, John Butler to Lord Dorchester, 13 June 1791, and John Jeffers to Richard Butler, 16 August 1791, in *Michigan Pioneer*, 24:236-237, 257-258, 316.

Campaign” alienated him with the US cause.<sup>62</sup> The atrocities he witnessed convinced him to side with England from that point forward. He defected to Canada, became a Loyalist, earned a reputation as a fierce fighter alongside England’s Indian allies in the western theater of the war, and gained respect among Indian warriors and leaders. Despite his ties to both the United States and Great Britain, his loyalty was strongest for those with whom he most identified—the Natives.<sup>63</sup>

Beyond his kinship connections, Girty’s loyalty to the Indians was undoubtedly boosted by the fact that Native Americans held him in very high esteem. He had a lot of credibility as a so-called “white Indian.” He was an adopted captive who chose to live among the Indians despite numerous opportunities to rejoin white society. He was what Merrell called a “Fair Trader,” a man who was integrated into native society and provided the Indians with the trade goods they wanted and needed at a fair price. Such loyalty showed respect to Indian traditions. People who had embraced native culture and worked with Indians as translators, negotiators, and traders, like Girty, were often looked down upon by Anglo-Americans and typically hailed from the bottom of society. In Indian culture, those diplomatic skills vested men with prestige and power.<sup>64</sup>

Girty’s support for the Indian cause created a conflict of interest that often compromised his adherence to Indian Department policy. One example was his participation in the siege of

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<sup>62</sup> The “Squaw Campaign” refers to a raid launched from Fort Pitt in 1778 during the Revolutionary War. General Edward Hand led five hundred militia soldiers from Fort Pitt to attack a band of Indians along the Mahoning River, near the present Ohio-Pennsylvania border, who were using British-supplied weapons to attack white settlements in the area. When Hand was unable to locate the marauders, his soldiers attacked two peaceful villages of Delaware and Munsee Indians. They killed one man, four women, several children, and took two women captive. Because Hand’s mission failed to locate the hostiles and inflicted only a minimal number of casualties against helpless neutrals, it was contemptuously referred to as the “Squaw Campaign.” Hurt, *Ohio Frontier*, 67-69.

<sup>63</sup> Hoffman, *Simon Girty*, 6, 16-44, 83-121, 123-130, 305; Sword, *Washington’s Indian War*, 126-128.

<sup>64</sup> Merrell, *Into the American Woods*, 51, 53, 59, 64-67, 80-81, 92.

Dunlap's Station from January 8-10, 1791. He joined a group of Shawnee raiders under Blue Jacket in an attack against a fortified encampment of settlers along the Great Miami River in present Colerain Township, Ohio. This raid led to the death of two Americans, one of whom was tortured, disembowled, and burned to death in front of the entire thirty-five man garrison. Ten months later, Girty personally commanded a band of Wyandot warriors against St. Clair's army at the Battle of a Thousand Slain. Girty's position as an interpreter and trader for the British Indian Department lent the impression to his native comrades that his actions were sanctioned by his superiors. In fact, Girty's hands-on support for the pan-Indian movement may have caused the Indians to overestimate England's intention to support the native army with English soldiers.<sup>65</sup>

Matthew Elliott was another Indian Department employee with kinship ties to the Indians who encouraged them to take a more belligerent stance toward the United States. He married a Shawnee woman, lived with her people, and fathered two children with her. One observer noted that "the Shawnoe in general were not well disposed to the Americans," and Elliott's influence was thought to be a significant factor.<sup>66</sup> The actions of men like Butler, Girty, and Elliott indicated that some employees of the British government, especially those who had close kinship ties to the Indians through adoption or marriage, were forced to choose between loyalty to their adopted families and their responsibilities to their employers. They also faced internal conflicts between their racial identity as white people and their adoptive identity as Indians. Contemporary

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<sup>65</sup> Hoffman, *Simon Girty*, 295-299, 305-321.

<sup>66</sup> Philip Leebeert to Josiah Harmar, 20 July 1786, Harmar Papers, v. 3.

descriptions of Girty often referred to him as a “relentless barbarian,” “cruel,” and “fiend-like,” terms that whites typically assigned to hostile Indians at that time.<sup>67</sup>

The mixed-messages Indians received from the British Indian Department encouraged them to adopt a more belligerent posture toward the United States. They also sowed the seeds for an internal struggle that eventually caused the Sandusky Alliance to collapse and laid the foundation for England’s ultimate betrayal of their native allies. The commandant at Fort Niagara, Major Robert Mathews, promised Joseph Brant that the Governor-in-chief of Canada, Guy Carleton, promised “to defend the [frontier] posts; and that while these are preserved, the Indians must find great security therefrom, and consequently the Americans greater difficulty in taking possession of their lands.”<sup>68</sup> The Indians only had to “remain firm in doing their part of the business, by preventing the Americans from coming into their country, and consequently from marching to the posts.”<sup>69</sup> The offer of “security” at the frontier posts was ambiguous enough to prevent England from feeling guilty in the aftermath of the Battle of Fallen Timbers, when British military officials refused to help retreating warriors after the US Army defeated them.<sup>70</sup> Taken literally, Brant certainly felt justified in expecting a safe haven, at the very least, and perhaps reinforcements and supplies in the event of a defeat. The trust the alliance put in

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<sup>67</sup> Reginald Horsman, “British Indian Policy in the Northwest, 1807-1812,” in *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, vol. 45, no.1 (June, 1958), 55; derogatory descriptions of Girty found in Albach, *Annals of the West*, 262.

<sup>68</sup> Robert Mathews to Joseph Brant, 29 May 1787, in Stone, *Life of Brant*, 2:271; contemporary writings also referred to Carleton as Lord Dorchester.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> In the immediate aftermath of General Anthony Wayne’s victory at the Battle of Fallen Timbers in August 1794, the army of the Northwest Confederacy fled east up the Maumee River from the battlefield to the British post at Fort Miamis. Contrary to promises made by Guy Carleton, Robert Mathews, and others—that the English would use their frontier posts to protect the Indians—the commandant of the fort refused to open the gates and offer refuge to warriors as they retreated from Wayne’s advancing forces. This battle will described in greater detail in the Conclusion. Sword, *Washington’s Indian War*, 306.

their British friends was largely based on the perceived meaning of Mathews' speech and the actions of men like Elliott and Girty. Such gestures appeared to offer a subtle promise that England would do whatever was necessary to help. Whether that promise would stand the test of time remained to be seen.

## CHAPTER 7

### SANDUSKY ALLIANCE TO THE NORTHWEST CONFEDERACY

The US government's strategy to divide the pan-Indian movement worked because it exploited preexistent divisions among the different factions and Nations that composed the Sandusky Alliance. By refusing to negotiate directly with the Alliance, the United States rejected its validity and extracted land cessions from individual leaders. These tactics increased tension between the United States government and native peoples, escalated the level of frontier violence, and fostered distrust and resentment among Indians themselves. Pan-Indian leaders engaged in heated debates regarding which strategies would be the most effective to prevent native dispossession. Militants stuck to their demand for the Ohio River boundary, while the moderates hoped that a compromise might forestall the escalation of the war. These internal divisions caused the movement to rupture in 1788, before any of its objectives had been achieved. This cataclysm did not mean the end of the pan-Indian resistance, however. To the contrary, its greatest achievements still lied in the future.

#### The Fall of the Sandusky Alliance and the Rise of the Northwest Confederacy

Oddly, the earliest divisions inside the Alliance occurred among the Six Nations. Although the Iroquois had been a formidable adversary to European imperialism over the previous two centuries, the Six Nations were not immune to internal strife. During the Revolution, the Oneida Nation had largely sided with the United States instead of joining the rest of their Haudenosaunee brethren in an alliance with Great Britain. Some Mohawk factions had



supported neutrality with the colonies during the late war, which separated them from the majority of their Nation who supported England.<sup>1</sup>

In the postwar period, these internal divisions continued to play out while new ones emerged. A letter from John Butler to Sir John Johnson in November 1786 warned that strife among the Six Nations could have a detrimental impact on the broader pan-Indian movement. Butler described a council at the Huron Villages south of Detroit where Brant courted leaders from the Seneca, Tuscarora, Cayuga, and Onondaga Nations to support the Sandusky Alliance. This meeting instead revealed that “by far the greater part of the Six Nations are for Peace with the Americans.”<sup>2</sup> The pan-Indian confederation was barely three years old, but the divisive US strategy, combined with a fear of being victimized by wanton frontier violence, had already weakened support for pan-Indianism.

The chasm inside Six Nations reached a breaking point at a council along Buffalo Creek in early 1788. There, a significant portion of the Six Nations voiced their opposition toward Brant’s Sandusky Alliance. They resented the special treatment British officials had given to the Mohawks, undoubtedly a reference to the Grand River Reserve, and felt Great Britain “had given nothing to the other tribes of the Six Nations who had done more for the King and suffered as much.”<sup>3</sup> A heated exchange followed between Brant and Seneca chief Old Smoke. Brant told Old Smoke that “the King did not care for the Senecas,” and if they would not fall in line with the

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph T. Glatthaar and James Kirby Martin, *Forgotten Allies: The Oneida Indians and the American Revolution* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006); Proceedings of a Council at Niagara, 10 February 1789, in SIA, Series 2, Lot 673, 1-12.

<sup>2</sup> John Butler to Sir John Johnson, 22 November 1786, in SIA, Series 2, Lot 654, 2.

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Heart to Josiah Harmar, 2 February 1788, in Harmar Papers, vol. 7, 16.

Alliance, “the King would not do anything more for [the Senecas].”<sup>4</sup> Old Smoke responded by expressing regret that he and his people had fought for England and vowed to side with the United States in the future. The fight between Brant and Old Smoke embodied a growing philosophical rift among the Iroquois regarding diplomatic relations with the United States. As the Northwest Indian War progressed, the divergence between both sides grew and created lasting resentment. These tensions began to infect the rest of the Alliance.<sup>5</sup>

The following year, Brant’s leadership faced a far more significant challenge, this time from a member of his own family. Brant’s son-in-law, Aaron Hill, who had attended the Fort Stanwix negotiations in 1784 as Brant’s proxy, chafed when Brant assumed ultimate authority over the Mohawk reservation at Grand River. Hill’s dissident faction was part of a growing sentiment among many Six Nations’ Indians who rejected Brant’s leadership in a council at Fort Niagara in February 1789. To establish his independence from Brant, Hill argued that his people had served the Crown during the late war by their own choice, not under orders from Brant. Others Mohawks criticized Brant’s unilateral decision to sell surplus reservation lands at Grand River to white settlers without consulting the Indian inhabitants first. This land sale at Grant River was curious, indeed, considering that Brant was among the most vocal critics of native leaders who had ceded Indian lands to the United States without the approval of the Alliance. These disputes were a microcosm of much deeper issues which not only divided the Mohawks and the Six Nations, but were beginning to stir division inside the Sandusky Alliance more broadly.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Proceedings of a Council at Niagara , 10 February 1789, in SIA, Series 2, Lot 673, 1-12.

This in-fighting posed a serious problem for British officials. After the Iroquois aired their grievances with Brant, John Butler attempted to pick up the pieces. For the good of all Indians, he encouraged the Six Nations—and the Mohawks, specifically—to put aside their internal divisions and “[s]et a good example to their Confederate Brethren who look up to them for it.”<sup>7</sup> Brant’s role in the Alliance created so much resentment, Butler worried, that other Iroquois might join the United States and take up the hatchet against their own people. Butler hoped that resolving the disputed land sales at Grand River would be the first step toward restoring harmony among them.<sup>8</sup>

Conflict among the Iroquois was part of a growing trend inside the Sandusky Alliance’s councils. From 1784 through 1788, cyclical frontier raids and the US treaties increased the divisions between the three factions of the Sandusky Alliance. Peace advocates like Captain Pipe and Half King rejected pan-Indianism and left the group entirely. Moderates continued to work toward a possible compromise with the United States, while militant factions remained steadfast in their insistence that US settlers should abide by the Ohio River boundary or prepare themselves for all-out war.

When approached by the Alliance to join the movement, groups like the Chippewa challenged them, “why Should we fight for your land?”<sup>9</sup> Their territory was safely ensconced inside Canada, running south from Hudson Bay to the northern shores of Lake Huron and Lake Superior. Chippewa leaders challenged the idea that the United States had designs on seizing the

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<sup>7</sup> Speech of John Butler at Niagara, 10 February 1789, in SIA, Series 2, Lot 673, 1.

<sup>8</sup> Speech Delivered by Aaron & Isaac Hill to Lord Dorchester & Sir John Johnson, 20 September 1788, in SIA, Series 2, Lot 666; Brant Speech at Niagara Council, 10 February 1789, in SIA, Series 2, Lot 673.

<sup>9</sup> Rufus Putnam to Henry Knox, 8 July 1792, in Buell, *Memoirs of Putnam*, 281.

lands of all Indian peoples, knowing that the US would have to conquer Canada itself before their land would be threatened. Joining the fight would only subject them to the enmity of the United States, so the Chippewa resolved to “mind our own business and live in peace.”<sup>10</sup>

The permanent rupture of the Sandusky Alliance occurred in a council at the Maumee Rapids during the summer of 1788. Leaders from Nations across the Old Northwest participated: the Six Nations, Chippewa, Delaware, Huron, Kickapoo, Miami, Potawatomi, Shawnee, and Wea. The Alliance called this conference to stake out their negotiating position during upcoming treaty negotiations with Northwest Territory Governor Arthur St. Clair. The meeting devolved into chaos when Brant unexpectedly deviated from his previous support for the Ohio River boundary. After consulting with leaders from the Chippewa, Delaware, Huron, Ottawa, and Potawatamie Nations, Brant suggested a compromise that would establish the Muskingum River as the new eastern boundary of Indian Territory in lieu of the Ohio River. Each of the aforementioned tribes agreed to “give up a small part of their country” between the Muskingum and the Ohio to the United States to facilitate peace.<sup>11</sup> Brant lobbied the Grand Council of the Alliance to embrace his “Muskingum Compromise,” hoping that modify their position would force St. Clair to negotiate in good faith. This new boundary would accommodate the Ohio Company’s settlement at Marietta situated along the east bank of the Muskingum. The communities in John Cleves Symmes’ Miami Purchase, located over a hundred miles west of the Muskingum, would be forced to evacuate.

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<sup>10</sup> Quote from Putnam to Knox, 8 July 1792, in Buell, *Memoirs of Putnam*, 281; Roger C. Owen, James J. F. Deetz, Anthony D. Fisher, eds., *The North American Indians: A Sourcebook*, Fourth Edition (London: The Macmillan Company, Collier-Macmillan Limited, 1969), 193.

<sup>11</sup> Joseph Brant to Patrick Langan, 7 October 1787, in Stone, *Life of Brant*, 2:278.

The council exploded with anger after hearing Brant's proposal. Western Nations like the Miami and Shawnee immediately and forcefully dismissed the mere suggestion of a compromise. They accused Brant and his supporters of being slaves to the whites, and even threatened to kill the Mohawk leader. Brant confided to a friend that his compromise met such fierce resistance, he believed, because the militants were "much addicted to horse-stealing . . . as that kind of business is their best harvest, [and] will of course declare for war."<sup>12</sup> The Alliance was no longer viable at this point. Radicals refused to compromise and were convinced that war was the only answer, whereas centrists wanted to continue with diplomacy. Its members could not agree on the fundamental issue of war or peace. Brant's personal ambition and desire to remain at the forefront of Indian diplomacy, even if that meant compromising the Alliance's goals, now divided the movement he had helped to build.

When leaders from the Sandusky Alliance offered the Muskingum Compromise at Fort Harmar, St. Clair rejected it outright and proceeded to divide the Six Nations from the Algonquians, according to his plan. St. Clair gleefully informed Knox that "their confederacy is broken, . . . Brant has lost his influence," and the cause of it all, St. Clair hinted, was his insistence on two separate treaties.<sup>13</sup> While both observations were correct, his claim that he was responsible for both was as audacious as it was untrue.

Brant continued his fight to retain influence among the Six Nations and hold the Sandusky Alliance together. After the Maumee Rapids council adjourned, however, nativists took control of the pan-Indian resistance. They prepared for war and pushing the centrists off to the

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<sup>12</sup> Josiah Harmar to John Hamtramck, 13 October 1788, in Smith, *St. Clair Papers*, 2:93.

<sup>13</sup> Smith, *St. Clair Papers*, 2:109.

side with the peace advocates who had already rejected pan-Indianism. This second, more confrontational phase of the movement was embodied by the Northwest Confederacy, led by Blue Jacket of the Shawnee, Little Turtle of the Miami, and Buckongahelas of the Delaware. The ascendance of the Northwest Confederacy had implications that reached far beyond the Northwest Indian War.

The rise of the Western Nations was a repudiation of the Six Nations' dominance over indigenous politics, both real and self-proclaimed, that had existed for over a century. By 1788, the Iroquois had largely given up the fight for control over their homelands, which, for the most part, had been ceded to the United States. The Haudenosaunee had moved onto reservations that were out of the way of the Americans or lived in areas that were already surrounded by white settlers. Now, the epicenter of native rebellion shifted from Iroquoia to the Wabash Country. Just as the British envisioned the Old Northwest as a buffer state between it and the United States, Indian Nations such as the Shawnee, Miami, and the Wabash Confederacy saw the Indians of the East—like the Iroquois—as a buffer between themselves and the United States. The borders proscribed in the Treaty of Paris worried them. The postwar Indian policy of the US government, specifically the treaties of 1784-1786, made them fear that they would lose the *pays d'en haut* just as the Six Nations had lost their homelands.

The Northwest Confederacy differed from its predecessor in two ways. First, it was dominated by western Algonquians who lived primarily along the Wabash and Maumee River valleys. Native communities in these areas were heterogenous due to an influx of refugees who had been displaced during the Beaver Wars. The Revolutionary War, the Treaty of Paris, and the treaties of the 1780s worsened the refugee crisis. Indians who were forced from their lands fled

to the West in a last-ditch effort to retain their culture, language, and traditional lifeways. Antoine Gamelin, a former French trader who lived at Vincennes, journaled his travels in the spring of 1790 as an emissary for the US government. As he traveled north along the Wabash River toward the Miami Towns, he noted the diverse population of the villages he encountered along his journey. Miami chief Le Gris was the leader of Kekionga, which was populated by all of the different bands and clans of the Miami Nation. It was also home to bands of Shawnee, Potawatamie, Iroquois refugees, and dissident factions of the Delaware and Wyandot Nations. The villages along the Wabash River between Kekionga and Vincennes were similarly diverse, populated by a mixture of Kickapoo, Mascouten, Piankashaw, and Wea Indians who admitted to Gamelin that they followed the lead of their “elder brethren,” the Miami. The separate tribes of the Wabash Confederacy had been willing to discuss peace with the United States in the past. Now, in the late 1780s, such efforts drew the ire of the Miami who threatened “to chastise them” if they negotiated separately from the Confederacy.<sup>14</sup> The coalescent nature of these communities, and their fealty to the Northwest Confederacy, embodied a new reality, that European colonialism had changed the nature of native self-identification forever. Traditional boundaries and rivalries between Indian Nations were gone, replaced by a sense of geographic pan-Indianism.<sup>15</sup>

Secondly, the Confederacy was resolute that the boundary line between US and Indian lands was the Ohio River. They believed the treaties of 1784-1786 were invalidated because they were signed by individual native leaders without the approval of the broader pan-Indian

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<sup>14</sup> John Hamtramck to Arthur St. Clair, 19 March 1789, in Smith, *St. Clair Papers*, 132.

<sup>15</sup> White, *Middle Ground*, 1-50; Antoine Gamelin’s Journal, in Albach, *Annals of the West*, 530-536.

movement, which meant that the Old Northwest still belonged to the Indians. The basic premise of St. Clair's council at Fort Harmar was that those treaties had transferred ownership over Ohio to the United States. The Confederacy's leaders thus saw the negotiations as illegitimate and refused to attend. Therefore, when US citizens began to settle north of the river, it was tantamount to an act of war—an invasion of sovereign territory by a foreign power. As a result, the Confederacy prepared ambitious frontier attacks that would escalate the war.

#### Anglo-Americans React to the Northwest Confederacy

Both the Northwest Confederacy and remnants of the Sandusky Alliance realized that any chance to achieve their goals relied heavily on support from English colonial officials in Canada. Native anxiety across the *pays d'en haut* fed efforts by both factions of the pan-Indian movement to elicit a more steadfast commitment from Great Britain to bolster their respective efforts. The Northwest Confederacy sought British weapons, ammunition, and supplies for war, while the Sandusky Alliance hoped English officials would throw their influence behind a negotiated peace. The competing interests of each group generated a considerable amount of confusion for both the British Indian Department and US officials.

In the summer of 1791, while the federal government was recruiting soldiers for St. Clair's campaign against Kekionga, the British Indian Department received intelligence that suggested the War Department's efforts were actually part of a plan to seize the disputed posts. Kanonghwenya, an Oneida chief who had signed the Six Nations treaty at Fort Harmar in 1789, told two Tuscarora chiefs that the United States planned to build several forts in central New York and use those forts to launch attacks against Oswego, Niagara, Detroit and Michilimackinac. Tuscarora messengers relayed this information to Indian Agent John Butler,



who remarked that he “hardly believed a word of it.”<sup>16</sup> The reports may have simply represented an effort by US officials to convince the Six Nations to maintain the neutrality they had promised at Fort Harmar, because joining the Confederacy would lead to reprisals once those forts were controlled by the United States. They also might have been a canard created by the Northwest Confederacy to push the British government in Canada to adopt a more belligerent posture toward the United States and increase their support of the native war effort. Finally, the rumors may have been payoff diplomacy on the part of the Sandusky Alliance. If they scared British officials enough, perhaps they would take a more forceful role in facilitating negotiations between the Alliance and the United States to settle the boundary conflict once and for all. No matter their origin, such stories added to the confused diplomatic situation that fueled paranoia as the war continued.<sup>17</sup>

In the critical years leading up to his ultimate confrontation with the Northwest Confederacy, St. Clair was largely in the dark about the nature of the Indian alliance he faced. He convinced himself that the Western Indians’ refusal to treat with the US commissioners was instigated by British traders, acting under orders from the British Indian Department. He never realized the extent to which many Canadian officials— and the Sandusky Alliance, for that matter—supported peace. British assistance was always more material than it was inspirational. Maintaining the Ohio River boundary and defending native sovereignty was what united Western Indians. St. Clair’s arrogant rejection of Brant’s Muskingum River compromise proved to the

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<sup>16</sup> John Butler to Sir John Johnson, 29 June 1791, in SIA, Series 2, Lot 689, 1.

<sup>17</sup> John Butler to Sir John Johnson, 11 July 1791, in SIA, Series 2, Lot 690, 1.

Confederacy that the strategy of the Sandusky Alliance—peace through pan-Indian unity and diplomacy—was futile. War was the only option left on the table.<sup>18</sup>

St. Clair did not realize that the division of the pan-Indian movement did not break their resolve. Instead, it fed the creation of a native army that would twice embarrass the US Army on the battlefield and nearly kill him along the Wabash River. Unbeknownst to the Governor, the split merely shifted the balance of power to the western Indians. Frontier intelligence US officials received about the pan-Indian resistance was flawed because it came mostly from Indians who lived closer to the white settlements, like Cornplanter and Captain Pipe. By this time, they were so alienated from the internal organization of the pan-Indian movement that their information, although offered in good faith, could no longer be trusted.<sup>19</sup>

The Northwest Confederacy moved forward with its plan to roll back white settlements with military force. By 1790, Indian raids increased dramatically and US soldiers found themselves in greater danger as a result. In April 1790, Armstrong had been intercepted en route from Vincennes to Kaskaskia, near the Mississippi River. At Vermilion River (in present Illinois), a group of warriors approached him and his men and threatened to kill them if they did not turn back. Major John Doughty led a peace delegation to the Creek and Choctaw Indians, to propose opening a trading post in their territory and gain their support against the Northwest Confederacy. He was ambushed along the Tennessee River by Cherokee warriors, and a hasty retreat was all that saved his command from total annihilation. Boats passing down the Ohio River with emigrants bound for Kentucky, and others laden with commercial goods shipped from

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<sup>18</sup> Arthur St. Clair to Henry Knox, 13 December 1788, in Smith, *St. Clair Papers*, 2:106; Arthur St. Clair to Henry Knox, 26 July 1791, in SIA, Series 1, Lot 735, 5.

<sup>19</sup> Arthur St. Clair to Richard Butler, 26 July 1791, in SIA, Series 1, Lot 735, 9.

Pittsburgh, were increasingly victimized by warriors who lurked along the edge of the river. One particularly effective tactic was to use white captives as bait for a trap. These decoys ran up and down the shore, pleading for passersby to rescue them, hoping to lure their boats closer to the riverbank. If a boat came too close, the Indians sprung their trap, killed or captured the occupants, and plundered their cargo. Many river travelers met their fate near the junction of the Scioto and Ohio Rivers. There, a sharp bend in the Ohio concealed large parties of canoe-borne warriors who ambushed slow-moving rafts after it was too late to turn around. Even the settlements around the garrison at Louisville were vulnerable.<sup>20</sup>

This new wave of violence prompted Congress to finally abandon its dream of “peaceful expansion.” The treaties signed between 1784-1789 had produced nothing but violence. Western settlers and soldiers in the US Army lived in constant fear of Indian raids. US officials resigned themselves to pursue “expansion through conquest, then assimilation.” The key element to this strategy was the use of “obfuscatory diplomacy.” US emissaries reached out to the Northwest Confederacy with half-hearted peace offers, not because they thought a treaty would end the violence. Rather, they were trying to hide the expansion of the US Army and preparations for a massive offensive campaign against the Northwest Confederacy.

The first part of this new effort was to dispatch emissaries across the Northwest Territory to promote neutrality among the Eastern Nations and separate them from the Western Indians, while at the same time offering peace negotiations to the Confederacy. Gamelin’s aforementioned mission to Kekionga in the spring of 1790 was part of this plan. The Wabash Confederacy and the Miami rejected his message and ordered him to return to Vincennes. Before

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<sup>20</sup> John Hamtramck to Arthur St. Clair, 19 April 1790, in Smith, *St. Clair Papers*, 2:135; Frost, *Heroic Women of the West*, 85-91; John Doughty to John Wyllys, 25 March 1790, in Smith, *St. Clair Papers*, 2:134.

he left, they told him that their ultimate decision on whether to embrace peace or war would be determined in a forthcoming council with British Indian Department officials at Detroit. A year later, Colonel Thomas Proctor embarked with an overture to the Western Indians. On the first leg of his journey, from Philadelphia to Fort Niagara, the Indians Proctor encountered voiced their disdain for his proposals and dismissed them out of hand. Several threatened his life. When he reached Fort Niagara, the English commandant refused to help him cross Lake Erie to bring his message to the Indians in Canada. Proctor retreated back to Philadelphia on May 21, fearing for his life. Around the time Proctor started his travels, rumors spread throughout the frontier that US officials were negotiating a treaty of neutrality with the Six Nations and also making preparations for a military strike against Kekionga. It was possible that the hostility Proctor encountered was a consequence of those murmurings.<sup>21</sup>

As it turned out, both reports were true. US Indian Commissioner Timothy Pickering was negotiating a neutrality treaty with the Six Nations at Newton, New York, that spring and summer. Pickering also enlisted the Iroquois to transmit messages to the Northwest Confederacy on behalf of the United States. He told Captain Hendrick Aupaumut that if the Northwest Confederacy would embrace peace, they would not be forced to give up their lands. If they continued their belligerence, however, no such promises could be made. Aupaumut traveled to meet with the Grand Council of the Confederacy, but failed to convince them to sue for peace.<sup>22</sup>

At the same time federal agents like Gamelin, Proctor, and Aupaumut extended the olive branch, the War Department was recruiting and supplying a large army that would strike deep

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<sup>21</sup> Information of Thomas Rhea, 25 Aug 1791, in *Michigan Pioneer*, 24:278; Albach, *Annals of the West*, 554-58; Sword, *Washington's Indian War*, 135.

<sup>22</sup> Queries by Captain Hendrick, Answered by Pickering, 27 June 1791, and John Stagg, Jr. to Arthur St. Clair, 28 July 1791, in *Michigan Pioneer*, 24:275, 297.

into the heart of Indian Country. The military component of the US government's new strategy fulfilled threats the United States had been making since 1784, that Indian non-compliance would be met by the US Army. The campaigns against Kekionga and the mounted raids along the Wabash River were designed to prove "the vulnerability of Indian villages in even the most remote regions."<sup>23</sup> The pressure of these attacks affected the Northwest Confederacy in several ways.

#### Creating a Unified Front Behind the Northwest Confederacy

Increased US military activity in the Ohio Country drew more warriors to the pan-Indian cause and emboldened them to make more frequent attacks against white settlements. This was especially true after the Confederacy's victory over Harmar. The nature of the Indians' response, going on the attack instead of seeking peace, proved that the new leaders of the pan-Indian movement would not be intimidated into fruitless negotiations. Large-scale, coordinated attacks by the confederacy, like those at Dunlap's Station and Big Bottom in January 1791, proved that the Northwest Confederacy was truly united and committed to militarism, which made them a formidable adversary for the US Army. This unity allowed them to implement a nuanced and effective military strategy that was better suited to the nature of frontier warfare than the plans devised by the War Department. The federal government's intention of "humbling [the Indians] and inducing them to sue for peace" had failed miserably. One Ohio Company settler observed that escalation by the US Army had accomplished nothing. Quite the contrary, it brought "a general war" to the frontier, which warriors waged "against the people on the Ohio Company's

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<sup>23</sup> Sword, *Washington's Indian War*, 139.

lands.”<sup>24</sup> The leading men of Marietta worried that the garrison at Fort Harmar would be unable to protect them. White emigration to the West came to a standstill.<sup>25</sup>

Despite the successes of native warriors, US Army attacks created a sense of desperation among native leaders because it revealed the vulnerability of Indian villages deep inside Indian Country. If the attacks continued unabated, the Indians’ confidence and fighting spirit might wane. Warriors could be forced to make a choice between defending their villages instead of conducting raids against white settlements or organizing coordinated attacks against the US Army itself. Indian Nations who were not fully committed to the war might abandon the Northwest Confederacy and sign peace agreements with the United States. To provide better security for their people, the leaders at Kekionga relocated their main village to the Grand Glaize. The Glaize was much closer to Fort Detroit, making it easier for native leaders to communicate with British officials. The move also shortened the supply chain that sent food and weapons to the Northwest Confederacy.<sup>26</sup>

The Confederacy’s military successes at Kekionga, Dunlap’s Station, and Big Bottom allowed them to receive US peace overtures with an air of confidence that bordered on cockiness. They summarily rejected the messages carried by Gamelin and Proctor and forced them to flee Indian Country out of self-preservation. The Confederacy was not concerned about rumors that the US had made overtures to the Southern Indians, seeking a strategic partnership against the Northwest Confederacy. Their ambush of Doughty along the Tennessee River indicated that the Southern Nations were not interested in forming an alliance with the United

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<sup>24</sup> Proceedings of the Ohio Company, 7 January 1791, in Smith, *St. Clair Papers*, 2:201n.

<sup>25</sup> Sword, *Washington’s Indian War*, 129-130.

<sup>26</sup> Calloway, *Victory With No Name*, 29; Sword, *Washington’s Indian War*, 122.

States. Yet another factor that boosted their morale was the support they received from Great Britain, especially English traders who continued to supply them with the firearms and ammunition they needed to raid white settlements. British assistance created a self-perpetuating cycle. St. Clair realized that the “immense booty obtained by the depredation upon the Ohio” gave the Indians continued access to British trade goods, which in turn increased the lethality and effectiveness of their raids on white settlements.<sup>27</sup>

More than any external element, the Indians’ confidence came from factors internal to the Confederacy, specifically the interconnectivity of pan-Indianism, common land ownership, native spirituality, and the Ohio River border. The Northwest Confederacy sincerely believed that a higher power had given the *pays d'en haut* to all Indians in common. Thus, it was a spiritual imperative to insist on the Ohio River boundary and be willing to defend it with force. Pan-Indianism, therefore, had a spiritual foundation that the Confederacy believed would make their diplomatic and military efforts successful.

A fatal miscalculation on the part of US officials was that they focused only on the external factors that boosted the Confederacy. US emissaries worked to undermine the Northwest Confederacy’s connections to England and other Indians. The army launched strikes against distant Indian villages, thinking that insecurity and vulnerability would break the movement. In Euro-American warfare, capturing and destroying cities and was an effective tactical maneuver to win a war. But given the decentralized nature of Indian settlements in the Old Northwest, hoping to achieve victory by attacking a village, even a big one, was a fool’s errand (even if that village had not been already abandoned). Obfuscatory diplomacy also failed, because native

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<sup>27</sup> Arthur St. Clair to Henry Knox, 1 May 1790, in Smith, *St. Clair Papers*, 136.

communication networks disseminated information quickly, keeping the leaders and warriors of the Northwest Confederacy informed about the Americans' plans.

The involvement of the US Army in the war injected a newfound sense of urgency into Indian councils across the Old Northwest as native leaders looked for ways to secure their people. It also stoked concerns among Natives who had already signed treaties with the United States. They soon discovered that agreements signed with US commissioners did not necessarily guarantee the safety of their villages. After Wyandot chief Dayenti signed the Treaty of Fort Harmar in 1789, he relocated his community to a settlement inside Indian Territory near Lake Erie. Removal had not shielded his people from attacks by Kentuckians and Pennsylvanians. They were also raided by warriors from the Northwest Confederacy. Dayenti and other Indian signers of the Treaty of Fort Harmar appealed to US frontier commanders for protection, but their pleas were ignored. The federal army did not have the manpower or desire to intervene.<sup>28</sup>

With nowhere else to turn to find peace, many of these besieged villages were driven back into the arms of the pan-Indian movement they had rejected only a few years before. At a council near Detroit in the summer of 1790, Dayenti begged British Indian Department officials to “forgive your foolish Children that Listened to the Americans, we find they have deceived us and that in treaties they were omitting what the Indians were demanding, only recording what benefited their interests.”<sup>29</sup> He regretted that internal divisions had incited violence among native peoples and created Indian animosity toward British officials. He complained of “many bad Birds who wish Evil to our Father [the King]” and pleaded for the Iroquois and Seven Nations of

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<sup>28</sup> Dayenti Speech at Huron Villages, August 1790, in SIA, Series 2, Lot 686, 12.

<sup>29</sup> Dayenti Speech at Huron Villages, August 1790, in SIA, Series 2, Lot 686, 12.



Canada to resurrect the Sandusky Alliance and, with British assistance, restart peace negotiations with the United States.<sup>30</sup>

The alienation of peaceful Indians had grave consequences. Since 1783, the Miami chief, Pacanne, was one of the lone Miami leaders who supported peace with the United States. Prior to the summer of 1788, he served as an escort for the US Army in the Wabash Valley. On behalf of the US government, he secured neutrality from Indians living along the Illinois River during the early years of the Northwest Indian War. Major John Hamtramck, the US commandant at Vincennes, dispatched Pacanne to the Northwest Confederacy's council at the Maumee Rapids in the summer of 1788. Pacanne would determine the extent of England's support for the pan-Indian alliance and report back to Hamtramck. Relationships like these, especially among the more belligerent tribes of the West, were hard-earned. Special care was required to maintain them.<sup>31</sup>

Aggressive attacks by Kentucky raiders, and the inability of the US Army to stop them, marginalized Pacanne and drove him directly into the arms of the Northwest Confederacy. In late August 1788, while Pacanne was at the Maumee council, a man named Patrick Brown led a group of militia from Nelson County, Kentucky, on a raid into the Wabash Country. Brown and his men, who earlier that morning killed nine Indians and stole a pack of horses from a Miami village, attempted to cross the Wabash at Vincennes to continue their rampage. Brown, who claimed the rank of major and purported to be acting on orders from the governor of Virginia, asked Hamtramck to borrow some canoes from the garrison to ferry his men to the other side.

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<sup>30</sup> Quote from Dayenti Speech at Huron Villages, August 1790, in SIA, Series 2, Lot 686, 7; Edward Spear to Josiah Harmar, 1 May 1789, Harmar Papers, v. 10.

<sup>31</sup> John Hamtramck to Josiah Harmar, 12 August 1788, Harmar Papers, v. 8.

Hamtramck suspected that Pacanne's village was the one Brown had attacked. Mindful of the implications that such wanton violence would have on attempts to deescalate the tension between the United States and the Miami, Hamtramck refused Brown's request. He demanded that Brown return the horses, end his raid, and return with his men to Kentucky immediately.<sup>32</sup>

The Brown and his men defied Hamtramck's orders. They broke the padlocks that fastened the garrison's canoes together, stole several of them, and crossed the river despite threats from Hamtramck that the garrison would fire upon them with the fort's cannon. Hamtramck sent a small detachment to pursue the Kentuckians, but the raiders refused to give the horses back. At that time, only nine US soldiers at the post were fit for duty and the local militia refused to confront the bandits. Outgunned and outmanned, the soldiers returned to Vincennes empty handed. Hamtramck called a council of local Indians to save face, but the raid revealed an important truth. The US Army was unable to protect villages who risked their own safety to support peace with the United States. Afterward, Pacanne's people split up. Some sought refuge among other Miami communities near present Terre Haute, Indiana, while others moved to the Wea Towns along the Wabash. From that point forward, Pacanne was a staunch ally of the Northwest Confederacy.<sup>33</sup>

Kinship ties, cultural pressure, and the fear of violent retribution motivated many Natives to reject the anti-war positions of their leaders. Moravian missionary David Zeisberger and his group of Christianized Delaware Indians permanently abandoned their settlements in

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<sup>32</sup> John Hamtramck to Josiah Harmar, 31 August 1788, in Harmar Papers, v. 8; White, *Middle Ground*, 435; Harvey Lewis Carter, *The Life and Times of Little Turtle: First Sagamore of the Wabash* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 107.

<sup>33</sup> Hamtramck to Harmar, 31 August 1788, in Harmar Papers, v. 8; White, *Middle Ground*, 435; Carter, *Little Turtle*, 107.

northwestern Ohio after the Treaty of Fort McIntosh in 1785. They resettled near the Detroit River among other Delaware Indians who were loyal to the Confederacy. Their bellicose kinsmen pressed the Moravians to join the fight against the United States. Zeisberger claimed they were “threatened, in case of refusal, of being stripped of all our goods and possessions. We had not thought, when we came into this land, that there wold [*sic*] be thoughts of our taking up the hatchet.”<sup>34</sup> In another instance, a British officer warned them that if they would not join the fight willingly, they would “soon be compelled to go to war, and if ye will not do so[,] a crown will be put upon your heads with the tomahawk.”<sup>35</sup> Many Christian Delawares found themselves torn between support of their native brethren and their adopted religion. Simon Girty, in particular, frequently visited the Moravians and caused trouble, “making our Indians drunk,” encouraging them to abandon the pacifist teachings of the missionaries and join the fight against the United States.<sup>36</sup> Other aspiring warriors joined the Northwest Confederacy for the opportunity to earn war honors that would advance their social standing. By 1791, the population of Cornplanter’s village was decimated because all of the young men had “left and [went] to the Miami to take part in the war.”<sup>37</sup>

While the Northwest Confederacy was solidifying its position at the forefront of the pan-Indian cause, Joseph Brant worked behind the scenes to reestablish the influence of the Sandusky Alliance. In mid-August 1791, he held a private meeting with Guy Carleton, who had succeeded Haldimand as the Governor-in-chief of Canada, at the governor’s residence in Quebec. His

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<sup>34</sup> Bliss, *Diary of David Zeisberger*, 2:200-201.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 206.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.

objectives were twofold. He asked Carleton to support his Muskingum Compromise and offer it to the United States to see if their feelings toward it had changed since Fort Harmar. He also begged the Governor for additional military assistance. If British officials wanted to protect the Great Lakes posts—an “interest and Cause we have faithfully Espoused & supported to the utmost of our Power,” Brant reminded him—the native alliance by itself would not be able to defend the forts against a large US military campaign. He implored Carleton to erect a British fort at the Maumee Rapids for the “protection of that part of the country & Detroit.”<sup>38</sup> It was a favor Brant felt Great Britain owed to the Indians due to their history of “strong and faithful” friendship to England.<sup>39</sup>

Considering the strength and influence the Northwest Confederacy held over the pan-Indian movement after their victory over Harmar in 1790, what did Brant hope to accomplish by reaching out to Carleton? By going directly to the Governor, he was circumventing the British Indian Department, especially McKee, Elliott, and Girty, who had thrown their support behind the Confederacy’s pro-war stance. Seeking Carleton’s support for the Muskingum Compromise was a flanking maneuver that could pressure the Indian Department to give equal time to peace advocates. If Great Britain agreed to Brant’s request to build a fort in the Maumee River Valley and garrison it with English troops, it would enhance his reputation as a negotiator for accomplishing something that the Northwest Confederacy had been unable to do: secure a greater commitment for direct military support from the British government. Doing so might encourage some of the Indian Nations on the fringes of the Confederacy to defect back to the

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<sup>38</sup> Joseph Brant Speech to Lord Dorchester at the Castle of St. Lewis, SIA, Series 2, Lot 693, 1.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

Alliance. More than anything else, it was a final, desperate attempt to reverse his own declining influence and that of the Six Nations as the powerbrokers of native diplomacy. Ultimately, Brant's meeting with Carleton did nothing to elevate the stature of the Sandusky Alliance. Three months after Brant met with the Governor, the Confederacy defeated St. Clair at the Battle of a Thousand Slain. When England eventually constructed Fort Miamis at the Maumee Rapids in the spring of 1794 and supported the Indian warriors with sixty Canadian militia in the Battle of Fallen Timbers, those concessions were attributed to the military successes of the Confederacy, not Brant's lobbying.<sup>40</sup>

Instead of providing more overt support for the Indians in 1791, senior British officials responded by clarifying the official position of the Royal Government. The Lieutenant-Governor of Canada, John Graves Simcoe, issued clear instructions to the commanders at the disputed posts to avoid war with the United States at any cost. "There is no power in the Country to begin a war," he stated, unless the Americans directly attacked the forts.<sup>41</sup> British Foreign Secretary William Grenville bristled at accusations leveled by St. Clair and other US officials that England was encouraging the Indians to go to war. "The British Government feel on the contrary that they have a strong commercial and political interest in the restoration of Peace," Grenville wrote, "and nothing would be more satisfactory to His Majesty than to . . . contribute His good offices for that object."<sup>42</sup> Despite such adamant denials, mounting evidence seemed to confirm

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<sup>40</sup> Sword, *Washington's Indian War*, 298, 303-305; Richard England to John Simcoe, 23 August 1794, in E.A. Cruikshank, ed., *The Correspondence of Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe*, vol. 2 (Toronto: Ontario Historical Society, 1924), 413-415.

<sup>41</sup> John Simcoe to Andrew Gordon and John Smith, 20 January 1791, in E.A. Cruikshank, ed., *The Correspondence of Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe*, vol. 1 (Toronto: Ontario Historical Society, 1923), 19.

<sup>42</sup> Lord Grenville to George Hammond, 1 September 1791, in Cruikshank, *Correspondence of Simcoe*, 1:58.

something that was becoming increasingly difficult for Great Britain to deny: employees of the British Indian Department were actively encouraging the Confederacy's pro-war stance.

A letter from Guy Carleton to Grenville in June 1791 admitted as much. He had slowly come to the realization that the borderlands conflict had indeed been "excited by our frontier people from interested motives, as an Indian War leads to the spending money in their country as well as to the gratification of their individual resentments."<sup>43</sup> In response, the Royal Government ordered military and civil authorities in Canada "to disclaim in the most unequivocal manner any idea of [the British government] having encouraged the measures of hostility taken by the Indians."<sup>44</sup> In September 1791, British Secretary of State Henry Dundas encouraged Carleton to reach out to the United States and convince them to restart negotiations with the Northwest Confederacy, even if that meant encouraging the militants to back away from their insistence on the Ohio River boundary and embrace the Muskingum Compromise.<sup>45</sup>

Dundas's haste to position England as a moderating influence was a case of convenient timing. Earlier that summer, the suspicions of US officials were seemingly validated by intelligence reports US officials received from the frontier. A ransomed Indian prisoner, Thomas Rhea, revealed that both Simon Girty and Matthew Elliott had pledged to join the Indians in the war against the United States along with one hundred-fifty French Canadian militia soldiers. Richard Butler learned through an informant that British Indian Agent John Butler had pledged Canadian soldiers to support the Northwest Confederacy. Despite the incendiary nature of these

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<sup>43</sup> Lord Dorchester to Lord Grenville, 14 June 1791, in *Michigan Pioneer*, 24:260.

<sup>44</sup> Lord Grenville to George Hammond, 1 September 1791, in Cruikshank, *Correspondence of Simcoe*, 1:58.

<sup>45</sup> Henry Dundas to Lord Dorchester, 16 September 1791 in Cruikshank, *Correspondence of Simcoe*, 1:67; Sword, *Washington's Indian War*, 124.

rumors, the federal government did nothing more than issue protests to the Royal Government. An attack on the posts was not part of the Americans' plans. Instead, the US government remained focused on neutralizing the biggest threat to its territorial aspirations, the Northwest Confederacy. The US military establishment was confident they could achieve that end with St. Clair's campaign against Kekionga.<sup>46</sup>

### Conclusion

Building upon a rich history of pan-Indian collaboration, the native peoples of the Old Northwest unified a diverse set of peoples from different language groups and ancestral backgrounds. Many of them had been bitter rivals in the past, fighting over territory and access to European trade goods. The pan-Indian movement assembled them into an military and diplomatic force that would eventually bring the United States to its knees. One of the central features of this coalition, like pan-Indian movements before it, was a common racial identity. Unlike previous iterations, the Northwest Confederacy (and the Sandusky Alliance) coupled racial unity with the belief that native lands belonged to all indigenous people. Considering the obstacles that pan-Indian advocates had to overcome—power struggles over leadership, disputes over what they hoped to achieve and how to accomplish those goals, the divisive tactics and aggression of US officials and military officers, and the mixed-messages offered by their British allies—their successes were notable indeed. Their victory at the Battle of a Thousand Slain marked the culmination of pan-Indian efforts that had begun several hundred years earlier with the formation of the Iroquois Confederacy.

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<sup>46</sup> Information of Thomas Rhea, 25 August 1791, and John Jeffers to Richard Butler, 16 August 1791, in *Michigan Pioneer*, 24:279, 316.

Over time, pan-Indianism evolved and became more inclusive. Algonquian peoples united together during the Beaver Wars and reclaimed the territory captured by the Five Nations and their English allies. Later, imperial conflicts in North America brought the Haudenosaunee and Algonquians together to defend their common interests during the Seven Years' War and the American Revolution. After the United States gained its independence from Great Britain, indigenous peoples across the Old Northwest Territory worked together to protect native lands from US territorial expansion. For a fleeting moment, their success against the US Army at Kekionga and along the banks of the Wabash River offered the possibility that a native alliance could defend native sovereignty, secure their lands for future generations, and possibly establish the Old Northwest as a politically sovereign Indian Nation. However, the aftermath of their victory over St. Clair reignited old debates and rivalries that eventually undermined pan-Indian unity. This divisiveness led to US military conquest and the cession of the Ohio Country at the Treaty of Greenville in 1795.



## CHAPTER 8

### THE MEN OF AMERICA'S POSTBELLUM ARMY

Understanding the composition of the US Army after the Revolutionary War is essential to understanding what befell the army on the banks of the Wabash River in November 1791. In many ways, the first postwar US Army was a reflection of the challenges that faced US citizens and their government after winning independence: a depressed domestic economy, socioeconomic and racial inequality, the near-insolvency of the US treasury, ideological disputes over federalism, the army's role in foreign and domestic security, Indian policy, and whether or not the national army should even exist. St. Clair's defeat was a consequence of these issues, but it also shaped how the federal government would operate after 1791. The outcome of the battle influenced how the US government recruited, paid, and trained its military, as well as the way the military establishment interacted with—and was held accountable to—the federal government. The investigation into St. Clair's Defeat solidified civilian control over the military and set a precedent for Congress to investigate the Executive Branch. After the Battle of the Wabash, the government decided to continue the war instead of seeking peace with the Northwest Confederacy. This proved that the US Army would be the “sharp end of the spear” for US expansion, and indicated that the settlement of public lands were integral to the economic future of the US government.

#### Precursors to the First US Army

Historian Don Higginbotham wrote that the Americans who fought in the Revolutionary War were part of “a military framework that had already become a living tradition” in the colonies.<sup>1</sup> Colonial settlements were protected by local militias, not the King’s Army. Unlike in England where military service was performed by a small class of well-trained professional soldiers, “in America it fell upon nearly all,” Higginbotham explained, “for warfare at some time or another took place everywhere.”<sup>2</sup> Settlers fought against Indians, protected their communities against slave insurrections, and were involved in conflicts between England and other imperial powers in North America. Colonial militias were composed of able-bodied men from the local community who received a minimal amount of training.<sup>3</sup>

This tradition of militia service influenced how later generations of Americans conceptualized the military as well their own obligation to serve in it. Localized defense revealed an emphasis on provincialism, which also manifested as a sense of distrust among the individual colonies, especially between New Englanders and Southerners. The militia bounty system inspired the Continental Congress to use similar enticements to encourage enlistment in the Continental Army. Although provincial militia units were controlled by royal governors, funding them largely fell to the colonial assemblies, which reinforced the idea that the military should be subject to civilian control.<sup>4</sup>

By one estimate, one in five men of military age in New England had signed up for service in provincial and regular armies before the outbreak of the Seven Years' War. During the

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<sup>1</sup> Don Higginbotham, *The War of American Independence: Military Attitudes, Policies, and Practice, 1763-1789* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1971), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 1-13.

<sup>4</sup> Higginbotham, *War of American Independence*, 2-5, 7-9, 11-18.

French and Indian War, British officials in London found themselves frustrated by the difficulties created by colonial military units. Recruiting efforts lagged, and militia leaders resisted the authority of British commanders. Sometimes, colonial officials resorted to impressment to fill troop quotas. After William Pitt took over as Secretary of State in 1757, the soldiers' pay was subsidized by the Crown, not the governments of the individual colonies. To make military service more appealing, English officials raised the soldiers' pay commensurate with what they could earn in the civilian economy. Colonial troops had a minimal impact on the outcome of the war, however. The colonies' main contribution was providing supplies to the British Army.<sup>5</sup>

A major drawback to using provincial troops was their attitude toward authority and discipline. Colonial soldiers were required to submit to the authority of the English Army—from officers all the way down to soldiers-of-the-line—which was especially insulting to colonial military commanders, many of whom had considerable military experience. Colonists who enlisted were subjected to the same harsh military discipline that British regular soldiers endured, including whippings for rules infractions, executions for desertion, and courts martial. For this reason, English officials went to great lengths to make sure that the regular army operated separately from provincial troops to prevent conflicts of leadership. Volunteer soldiers believed that their service to the Crown constituted an unwritten contract: if England violated the terms promised to them when they enlisted, the soldiers believed they were no longer obligated to serve. The economic and social dynamics of the colonies required a different leadership structure than that of the English Army, where social and economic elites commanded armies filled by what historians James Kirby Martin and Mark Edward Lender described as “economically

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<sup>5</sup> Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 137-140, 228; Higginbotham, *War of American Independence*, 18-23.

marginal men.”<sup>6</sup> In other words, regular soldiers in England’s army were “the sweepings of jails, gin-mills, and poorhouses, oafs from the farm beguiled into ‘taking the king’s shilling,’ adventurers and unfortunates,” who found a sense of “belonging” through service in the army.<sup>7</sup>

The most effective way to recruit soldiers from colonial communities was to grant officers’ commissions to “ordinary farmers and tradesmen who could most effectively convince the young men of their towns to follow them for a year of campaigning.”<sup>8</sup> This recruitment model created a more egalitarian and personal relationship between officers and their troops, which obviated the use of strict military discipline. Without the power of compulsion, the quality of the individual troops in the provincial army was of paramount importance when it came to its effectiveness in the field. Throughout the colonial period, provincial soldiers, many of whom were middle-class land owners, had effectively guarded western settlements from Indian attacks and protected southern communities from slave insurrections. This narrowly proscribed set of responsibilities meant that training, drilling, and coordinating operations between militia groups from different regions and states were a non-issue.<sup>9</sup>

When hostilities erupted between England and the colonies in 1775, these armed farmer-soldiers performed admirably against British regulars at Lexington, Concord, and Boston. At the same time, however, these early battles also revealed several weaknesses that would have made it unwise to rely too heavily upon militia to fight Great Britain as the war continued. They were inefficient, and provincial commanders in Massachusetts had trouble coordinating movements

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<sup>6</sup> James Kirby Martin and Mark Edward Lender quoted in Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 147.

<sup>7</sup> James Kirby Martin and Mark Edward Lender, *A Respectable Army: The Military Origins of the Republic, 1763-1789* (Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 1982), 13.

<sup>8</sup> Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 147.

<sup>9</sup> Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 137-140; 230; Martin and Lender, *Respectable Army*, 17.

among themselves. Despite these shortcomings, militia soldiers still played a key role in the revolutionary conflict. Historian John Shy noted that the militia “became the infrastructure of the revolutionary government. It controlled its community, whether through indoctrination or intimidation; it provided on short notice large numbers of armed men for brief periods of emergency service, and it found and persuaded, drafted or bribed, the smaller number of men needed each year to keep the Continental army alive.”<sup>10</sup> The national army would conduct major field operations during the war, while militia supplemented its ranks and fought smaller battles on the local level.<sup>11</sup>

Forming an national army was a challenge, however, because many Americans held deep reservations about standing armies. According to historian Charles Royster, many colonists “clung to the conviction that a professional soldier was dangerous, vicious, and damned [because] he killed for money.”<sup>12</sup> In fact, the English Army’s occupation of the colonies during the domestic unrest of the 1760s after the Seven Years’ War was a major grievance that fed the spirit of revolution. Despite those concerns, the Second Continental Congress created the Continental Army in May 1775 and required all of the colonies to contribute to it. Members of Congress hoped that creating a truly “national” military force would bind the colonies together. They appointed a prominent Virginia plantation-owner, slaveholder, and nationally renowned veteran of the French and Indian War, George Washington, as Commander-in-Chief to increase the army’s credibility. To allay the public’s suspicions toward professional soldiers, Congress

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<sup>10</sup> John Shy, *A People Numerous and Armed: Reflections on The Military Struggle for American Independence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 177.

<sup>11</sup> Higginbotham, *War of American Independence*, 57-66, 92-94.

<sup>12</sup> Charles Royster, *A Revolutionary People at War: The Continental Army & American Character, 1775-1783* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1979), 46.

limited the terms of enlistment to one year, which created problems when men refused to reenlist after their time expired.<sup>13</sup>

Royster believed that a “*rage militaire*” existed in 1775: rapid mobilization and mass-enlistment inspired by the popular belief that American courage and virtue would lead the United States to a quick victory despite England’s experience and discipline. In many ways, *rage militaire* was the result of England’s attempts to assert its dominance after the Seven Years' War, amplified by battles between colonial militias and the English Army at Lexington and Concord. Military setbacks in 1776 and 1777 damaged public confidence, however. After that, motivating troops to enlist and subjecting them to military discipline were two major factors that made it difficult to hold the Continental Army together and enable it to fight effectively.<sup>14</sup>

When the Continental Congress passed a requisition for seventy-five thousand Continental troops in December 1776, the estimated population of American men who supported the independence movement and were of fighting age—sixteen to fifty years old—was three hundred fifty thousand. The “spirit of revolution” and the desire for political self-determination and independence would not be enough to fill a force that amounted to between one-quarter and one-fifth of the eligible population. Washington believed that “such People, as compose the bulk of an Army” would enlist only if induced by self-interest.<sup>15</sup> For that reason, financial enticements would be critical: enlistment bounties, promises of land grants, clothing allowances, food, and

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<sup>13</sup> Martin and Lender, *Respectable Army*, 39-40, 46-47; Royster, *Revolutionary People at War*, 48.

<sup>14</sup> Royster, *Revolutionary People at War*, 25-31, 96-97, 114-115, 180-189, 200-208, 245-247, 269-275; Martin and Lender, *Respectable Army*, 72-73.

<sup>15</sup> George Washington as quoted in Martin and Lender, *Respectable Army*, 77.

regular pay. As the war continued and volunteerism declined, the fighting increasingly fell upon the backs of the poorest of society who had few other economic opportunities.

In New Jersey, for example, ninety percent of the men who served in the Continental Army came from the poorest two-thirds of the population. Forty-six percent of the underage soldiers who served in the war came from families which “owned no taxable property whatsoever,” while fifty-seven percent of Continental soldiers owned no land at all.<sup>16</sup> In a society based around agriculture, men without the opportunity to become farmers had few other options to earn a living. The burden of service in the Continental Army fell mostly upon the unemployed, transients, indentured servants, enslaved blacks, deserters from the English Army, and prisoners of war, in addition to convicted Loyalists who were impressed into service. When the draft was implemented in 1777, most of men who filled the army’s ranks were paid substitutes, not the “middle-class yeomen” of popular myth. Those of lower status who enlisted hoped that fighting in the Continental Line would transform their economic position and social standing after the war.<sup>17</sup>

Much to the chagrin of the enlisted men, promises to provide regular pay, food, and clothing were broken due to depleted federal and state treasuries. Lieutenant-Colonel Ebenezer Huntington remarked that his “cowardly countrymen [held] their purse-strings as though they would damn the world rather than part with a dollar for their army.”<sup>18</sup> To overcome a dearth of specie, Congress printed \$190 million in Continental notes in the first four years of the war. This created massive inflation that devalued the soldiers’ wages to the point that they were unable to

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 90-91.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 67-77, 88, 90-97.

<sup>18</sup> Ebenezer Huntington as quoted in *ibid.*, 147.

pay for basic necessities. Morale declined. By the end of the war, mutinies and rebellions among soldiers and their officers were increasingly common.<sup>19</sup>

The suspicions Americans held toward standing armies were seemingly reinforced by disciplinary issues that pervaded the Continental Army throughout the war. Desertion rates were as high as twenty-five percent. Soldiers plundered and stole from local communities to feed themselves. Soldiers fought each other. They sold their guns and equipment to acquire liquor, then drank to excess. Profanity was common. To reign-in these excesses, corporal punishment was doled out liberally—executions, floggings, and courts martial. There was also a considerable amount of graft and corruption that attended both the enlistment of new soldiers and supplying the army. As these issues became more prevalent, Americans started to question the virtue of the cause and became more convinced that standing armies led to excesses that contradicted the values they were fighting for.<sup>20</sup>

#### Paying the Post-War Army

The end of the Revolutionary War meant that the United States no longer needed a large standing army. Congress discharged all but seven hundred soldiers who formed the “First United States Regiment,” America’s first peacetime army, under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Josiah Harmar. Its ranks were filled by men recruited from the most populous states of new nation: Connecticut, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania. Volunteers served a one-year enlistment. Their primary responsibilities were to guard the federal arsenals at West Point, New

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>20</sup> Royster, *Revolutionary People at War*, 59-115.



York, and Springfield, Massachusetts, and garrison the frontier post at Fort Pitt. In 1785, Congress reauthorized the regiment and increased the length of enlistments to three years.<sup>21</sup>

Due to the Confederation government's financial difficulties, the quality of the soldiers in the postwar army resembled that of its predecessor during the later years of the Revolution. When the Continental Army was created on June 14, 1775, the monthly pay of captains was twenty dollars per month; lieutenants, \$13.33; sergeants, eight dollars; corporals and musicians, \$7.33; and privates, \$6.33. Continental soldiers were required to provide their own clothes and guns. At that same time, an unskilled laborer working in the building trades in Pennsylvania earned \$10 per month (for twenty-five days of work). When the First US Regiment was created in 1784, its pay-scale mirrored that of the Continental Army. That changed when Congress reauthorized the regiment in 1785. Commissioned officers were given a pay increase: a captain's monthly wage rose to \$35 per month while the pay for lieutenants nearly doubled to \$26. Captains and lieutenants were also granted a monthly subsistence of \$12 and \$8, respectively. Non-commissioned officers and enlisted men, on the other hand, saw their wages decline. Sergeants now earned \$6 instead of \$8, corporals and musicians, \$5 instead of \$7.33. Enlisted privates now only earned \$4 per month, a forty-percent decline from the \$6.33 they had earned during the late war. In comparison, skilled carpenters in postbellum Philadelphia earned \$25 per month; painters, \$21.25; and plasterers, \$16.75. None of the non-commissioned officers and privates were granted monthly subsistence to compensate for the pay cut. As a cost-savings measure, the new pay scale was an unquestioned success. Guthman observed that men who signed up were enticed by promises of "food, clothing, [and] liquor ration," as well as the

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<sup>21</sup> William H. Guthman, *March to Massacre: A History of the First Seven Years of the United States Army, 1784-1791* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1975), 4-6, 23.

promise of adventure in the West. Such offerings appealed only to “masses of drifters loitering on the city streets . . . having nothing better do to than to listen, or being too intoxicated to move away.”<sup>22</sup> Men who were skilled artisans, had opportunities for wage labor, or owned land for farming, naturally stayed away.<sup>23</sup>

Many soldiers who served in the First Regiment refused to reenlist when their commitments expired between 1785 and 1789. Out of desperation to fill its quotas, the War Department threatened to withhold unpaid wages and the clothing allotments it had promised to the men unless they reengaged. Soldiers who continued in the service were promised the same signing bonus the War Department offered to new recruits: one month’s pay in advance. Threats and promises proved ineffective. By 1789, muster rolls counted only 672 men in the regiment, well below its authorized limit of eight hundred forty men.<sup>24</sup>

The unstable postwar economy and the Confederation’s lack of fiscal authority explained the increasingly poor pay enlisted men received after 1784. As explained in Chapter 2, Congress had no authority to levy direct taxes on citizens, nor did it have the power to compel individual states to meet congressional requisitions for money. As a result, each state was responsible for paying the soldiers it contributed to the First Regiment. With the ratification of the Constitution in 1787, the federal government assumed responsibility for funding the army. US officials were unsure about how much income would be generated by its new powers of taxation, so land sales

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>23</sup> Continental Army pay scale from *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789*, 2:89-90, [https://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/hlaw:@field\(DOCID+@lit\(jc00235\)\)](https://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/hlaw:@field(DOCID+@lit(jc00235))); pay for the First US Regiment found in Guthman, *March to Massacre*, 6, 22; Sword, *Washington’s Indian War*, 81; contemporary wage comparisons found in US Department of Labor, *USBLS*, No. 604, 53.

<sup>24</sup> Sword, *Washington’s Indian War*, 81; Guthman, *March to Massacre*, 4, 23-24; Walter Lowrie and Matthew St. Clair Clarke, eds., *American State Papers: Documents, Legislative and Executive, of the Congress of the United States, Military Affairs*—Class 5, Vol. 1. (Washington: Gales and Seaton, 1832), 6 (hereafter cited as *ASPM*).

in the Old Northwest were critically important to the financial stability of the nation. The purchases made by the Ohio Company and John Cleves Symmes provided the government with the money it needed to pay for the army, then assigned the regiment with the impossible task of defending those investments from squatters and hostile Indians. If the settlements around Marietta and in the Miami Purchase failed, there was little doubt that powerful and wealthy investors would demand compensation. If the republic could not deliver, the full faith and credit of the government itself would be compromised. In that sense, the army was literally fighting for its life and that of its government, just as the soldiers in the army were fighting for theirs.<sup>25</sup>

On April 30, 1790, as the War Department prepared a new, more aggressive military approach toward the Northwest Confederacy, Congress expanded the size of the army but altered its pay scale yet again. The combined monthly pay and subsistence for captains and lieutenants in the First US Regiment and newly created Second Regiment increased, to \$120 and \$82, respectively, compared to \$47 for captains and \$34 for lieutenants from 1785 through 1789. Non-commissioned officers and enlisted men found themselves on the losing end yet again. Sergeants, corporals, and privates each lost a dollar per month with no subsistence allowance to offset it. Enlisted privates now earned only \$3 per month, a wage that was fifty-five percent lower than it had been during the Revolution. Comparatively, the national average daily wage for unskilled laborers in 1790 was \$12.50 per month. To make matters worse, inflation drove up the cost of rent and staple items at the same time that the soldiers' wages were being lowered. Between 1785 and 1790, the average rent increased from \$3.50 to \$4 per month; wheat rose from \$.60 to \$.75 per bushel; corn increased from \$.35 to \$.45 per bushel; beef from \$5.50 to \$8 per barrel; and

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<sup>25</sup> Edling, *Hercules in the Cradle*, 94; Holton, *Unruly Americans*, 213-216.

cheese from \$.06 to \$.09 per pound. The men who agreed to serve in the army for such low wages, especially considering the rising cost of living, clearly had no other viable options.<sup>26</sup>

Congress also stopped paying for medicine and clothing for the soldiers. The monthly wages of non-commissioned officers and privates were docked to offset the cost of the medicine and clothing the War Department provided to them. When these deductions were taken into account, the take-home pay of a sergeant decreased to \$3.50 per month while corporals earned only \$2.65. The dollar subtracted from the monthly wage of enlisted privates left them only two dollars of take-home pay.<sup>27</sup>

The logic behind making soldiers pay for their own medicine and clothes was spurious at best. Secretary of War Knox informed Harmar that “the public will not conceive they are under obligations” to pay for the medicine and clothes with federal money, “considering the general opinion that the soldiers receive great pay and emoluments.”<sup>28</sup> If the troops refused to cooperate voluntarily, Knox warned, Congress was prepared to pass legislation that would authorize the War Department to dock their pay. Assigning blame to “the public” served a dual purpose. It deflected responsibility away from Congress, which had repeatedly lowered the troops’ wages since the end of the Revolutionary War. The mutinies that gripped the army in the waning years of the war were directed at the national and state governments, which the soldiers blamed for their hardships. Such incidents were still fresh in Knox’s mind because they proved that dissatisfied, underpaid, and armed soldiers posed a danger to civil government. Blaming the

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<sup>26</sup> *An Act for Regulating the Military Establishment of the United States*, 30 April 1790, enclosed in Henry Knox to Josiah Harmar, 7 June 1790, in Harmar Papers, v. 12; wage comparisons and price of staple goods from “Table 3—Prices current in the principal cities, etc., of the United States, showing the variation of money, etc. for 20 years, from authentic documents,” US Department of Labor, *USBLS*, No. 604, 21.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Henry Knox to Josiah Harmar, 29 October 1789, in Harmar Papers, v. 11.

general population also implied that they were utterly insensitive to the sacrifices being made by federal soldiers. Indeed, many veterans and officers in the late war had been resentful toward Americans who had not performed military service themselves. In either case, Knox provided Harmar with several ways he could pacify his troops' anger when they received the bad news about their paychecks.<sup>29</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the Treasury Department found it difficult to pay the army on time. In October 1789, the enlisted men had not been paid in over two and a half years before Congress finally passed a funding bill for the army. Back-wages would be paid in four installments. The final outlay was scheduled to arrive in December 1790, nearly four years late. Soldiers found the funding bill's provisions especially insulting because Congress borrowed \$100,000 to pay its members' salaries at nearly the same time they lowered the soldiers' monthly pay and dragged their feet about remunerating arrearages to the troops.<sup>30</sup>

When pay was distributed to the men, it was often sent in the form of banknotes instead of specie. This presented a significant problem because contractors at the posts rarely accepted banknotes at par value, and sometimes did not accept them at all, out of fear that rapid inflation would render them worthless. Only gold or silver coins held their value. Commissioned officers were often the only people in camp who held hard money because their "subsistence and forage" allowances were paid in specie. This was not the only example of pay-favoritism that benefitted commissioned officers over enlisted men and non-commissioned officers. Payments to high-

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<sup>29</sup> *An Act for Regulating the Military Establishment of the United States*, 30 April 1790, enclosed in Henry Knox to Josiah Harmar, 7 June 1790, in Harmar Papers, v. 12; for the opinion of Revolutionary War officers toward the public, Charles Royster, *A Revolutionary People at War: The Continental Army and the American Character, 1775-1783* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 114-115.

<sup>30</sup> Henry Knox to Josiah Harmar, 29 October 1789, and Erskurins Beatty to Josiah Harmar, 13 September 1789, in Harmar Papers, v. 11; Henry Knox to Josiah Harmar, 7 June 1790, in Harmar Papers, v. 12, 18.

ranking officers were prioritized above those made to the lower ranks. As a result, officers often lent money to the troops in times of need, which created an accounting nightmare for the War Department. Because the soldiers' pay was always late, enlisted men were often discharged before they paid back the loans. The government covered the enlisted men's debts and reimbursed the officers for any losses. This was problematic because there was no standardized system in place to transmit information about the unpaid loans to the War Department. When the paymaster settled arrearages and sent the discharged men their back-pay, he often had no way to know how much to deduct from the soldiers' pay, forcing the Treasury Department to pay twice for a single debt. In 1789 the War Department ordered a more complete accounting of such loans to close the loophole and minimize losses for the treasury.<sup>31</sup>

#### Enlistment vs. Impressment: Forming the First and Second US Regiments

To fill the ranks of the First and Second US Regiments, the War Department launched recruitment drives in cities and towns up and down the East Coast. From Massachusetts to Delaware, commissioned officers doubled as recruiters. They begged, cajoled, and used trickery to fill their quotas. Enlisting men for the service proved to be more difficult than anyone could have foreseen. One obstacle was the exceptionally high standards the War Department established for new recruits. Recruiters were ordered to look for the perfect embodiment of the citizen-soldier: "the best characters for honesty and sobriety . . . Every recruit must be well formed in his body and limbs[,] perfectly sound in his organs and health[,] and sufficiently robust to bear the fatigues of the Military life."<sup>32</sup> It was difficult to find enough men who fit these

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<sup>31</sup> Erskurins Beatty to Josiah Harmar, 27 September 1789, Joseph Howell, Jr. to Josiah Harmar, 11 October 1789, and Henry Knox to Josiah Harmar, 29 October 1789, in Harmar Papers, v.11; Joseph Howell, Jr. to Josiah Harmar, 22 April 1791, in Harmar Papers, v.14.

<sup>32</sup> Henry Knox to Lieutenant John Pratt, 16 April 1788, in Harmar Papers, v. 7.

requirements and were willing to enlist for such low pay. Despite the depressed postwar economy of the mid-1780s, middle-class yeomen spurned the low pay of military service and chose to pursue other opportunities. The pool of potential recruits was further limited by physical requirements. Men had to be at least 5'-6" tall and between eighteen and forty-five years of age. Recruiters were instructed not to accept "Negroes Molatoes or indians [*sic*]." <sup>33</sup>

Aggressive advertising campaigns were used to recruit in densely populated urban centers. Newspaper ads called for "Young Men who wish to become Adventurers in the New Country," promising they would "acquire a Knowledge of the Western World, subject to no expense." <sup>34</sup> After a short term of service, veterans could "set down in their own farms, and enjoy all the blessing of Peace and Plenty." <sup>35</sup> Some recruiters used florid poetry to describe the West as a place "where happier climes invite, thr'o midland seas and regions of delight, where fair Ohio rolls her ebon tide, and nature blossoms in her virgin pride." <sup>36</sup> Despite such creative methods, military recruiters struggled to fill their quotas. In 1788, Captain Jonathan Heart believed that the recruitment drives failed because all of the best prospects had already enlisted in 1785, and their three-year commitments would soon expire. Heart lamented that these soon-to-be ex-soldiers were mostly "young Lads[,] Farmers Sons [who] were never from Home before & will almost every One go & see their Friends before they will reengage." <sup>37</sup> Once they went home, the War Department feared that most of them would not to come back.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> *The American Daily Advertiser* (Philadelphia), 22 March 1791, quoted in Guthman, *March to Massacre*, 22.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> *Haught's Concord Herald* (New Hampshire), 13 April 1791, quoted in Lytle, *America's First Army*, 33.

<sup>37</sup> Jonathan Heart to Josiah Harmar, 26 January 1788, in Harmar Papers, vol. 7.

The lack of suitable recruits and low reenlistment numbers meant that Heart and other recruiters had no choice but “to take Such Men as offered themselves.”<sup>38</sup> These volunteers, Heart remarked, were “drunkards, Thieves, or worthless Fellows [who] never Should be permitted to disgrace so honorable a Profession & render forever odious the Character of the American Soldiery.”<sup>39</sup> John Cleves Symmes’ interactions with the soldiers stationed at Fort Washington convinced him that many were “purchased from the prisons, wheelbarrows and brothels of the nation at two dollars per month,” and he worried that such men would never be adequate to fight in a frontier war.<sup>40</sup>

Most of the soldiers, both willing and unwilling, lacked other options to clothe and feed themselves. They enlisted out of desperation, so they had no emotional investment in defending western settlements against squatters, British machinations, and Indian raids. Heart was so displeased with the quality of his recruits that he considered resigning his commission rather than serve as their commanding officer. He realized that instilling discipline in such men and training them to be effective soldiers would be difficult. Heart and other recruiters had no choice, however. They had take what they could get. If they failed to reach their quotas, the War Department threatened to revoke their commissions.<sup>41</sup>

When lowering the standards failed to produce an adequate number of enlistments, senior army officials looked beyond the urban population. Harmar suggested that the War Department

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> John Cleves Symmes to Elias Boudinot, 12 January 1792, Stanley V. Henkels, ed., *Washington-Madison Papers Collected and Preserved by James Madison*, (Philadelphia: The Bicking Print, 1892), 252.

<sup>41</sup> Symmes to Boudinot, 12 January 1792, in Henkels, *Washington-Madison Papers*, 252; Guthman, *March to Massacre*, 30.



should recruit “expert woodsmen” from the frontier settlements to serve as riflemen. He believed their expertise with hunting, rifles, wilderness survival techniques, and the experience of defending their settlements against Indians attacks would make them ideal fighters in an Indian war.<sup>42</sup>

There were also non-economic reasons to enlist in the army. Many new recruits were farm boys from the countryside who saw military service as a path toward adventure. Private Alfred Sebastian volunteered after he had “taken it into his head to become a warrior,” despite considerable efforts by his father to deter him with “every argument, and . . . the most alarming representation” of the hardships of military service.<sup>43</sup> Alfred’s persistence paid off. His father eventually relented and allowed him to enlist, rather than face his son’s incessant complaints about not being allowed to join.<sup>44</sup>

One volunteer, Jackson Johonnot, was raised on a farm in Falmouth, Casco Bay, in present Maine.<sup>45</sup> “My parents were poor,” he later recalled, “the farm we occupied, small and hard to cultivate, their family large and expensive,” so they encouraged him to strike out on his

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<sup>42</sup> Josiah Harmar to Henry Knox, 6 March 1786, in Harmar Papers, v. 28.

<sup>43</sup> *The American Daily Advertiser* (Philadelphia), 22 March 1791, quoted in Guthman, *March to Massacre*, 22.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> The voracity of Johonnot’s narrative has been called into question over the years due to several historical inaccuracies it contained—incorrect dates, names, confusion about which military commanders were leading different raids—and the lack of historical records on Johonnot himself (proof of his military service, pension records, wills and deeds, etc). The book was written in 1816, when Johonnot would have been about 42 years of age, an interval of twenty-five years, which could explain some of his inaccuracies regarding dates and other details. Johonnot came from an impoverished background and he may have simply continued to live on the fringes of society which could explain his absence in government documents. In 1800, a fire at the War Department destroyed many documents pertaining to this period, which could also explain his absence in the historical records of the First and Second Regiment. The story of his experience is used in this present study because even if it was fabricated, his story—especially his background—would have been familiar to his audience and was likely an accurate description about why people would volunteer to serve in the army at that time: financial issues, adventure, desperation, and so on.

own “to seek a separate fortune” away from the farm.<sup>46</sup> He left home at age seventeen on May 1, 1791, and sailed to Boston. Unemployed and homesick upon his arrival, he was desperate for work. As fate would have it, military service presented an intriguing opportunity.

One morning, Johonnot met an army officer who engaged him in a “conversation on the pleasures of a military life, the great chance there was for an active young man to obtain promotion, and the grand prospect . . . for making great fortunes in the western country.”<sup>47</sup> With assistance of “a bowl or two of punch” and the promise of a sergeant’s commission, Johonnot signed up.<sup>48</sup> He realized the gravity of his decision the next morning. Before his hangover had worn off, he was thrust into a brutal crash-course on the art of soldiering. When Johonnot protested the deceptive tactics the officer had used to recruit him, the man physically abused and mocked him until he was “convinced of the futility of complaint.”<sup>49</sup> He devoted himself to the training and, in his mind, “became [a] tolerable expert” in just a few days’ time.<sup>50</sup> He departed Boston for Fort Washington alongside his fellow enlistees two months later, in early July, where he was assigned to Captain Patrick Phelon’s company of the Second US Regiment.

Barely a month after his arrival in the West, Johonnot and ten soldiers were ambushed by a band of Kickapoo Indians while patrolling along the Wabash River. The warriors captured Johonnot and nine others, then marched them to the Miami Towns. Johonnot and his fellow prisoners could not have arrived at a worse time. In the summer of 1791, violence between

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<sup>46</sup> Jackson Johonnot, *The Remarkable Adventures of Jackson Johonnot, of Massachusetts, Who Served as a Soldier in the Western Army, in the Expedition Under Gen. Harmar and Gen. St. Clair* (Greenfield, Ma.: Ansel Phelps, 1816), 3-4.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 4-5

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

Americans and the Northwest Confederacy was at a fever pitch. Over the course of the next two weeks, five of the captives were tortured and executed. After three weeks in captivity, Johonnot managed to escape along with another soldier. Traveling only at night, they reached Fort Jefferson by September 18 where, after recovering his health, Johonnot was reintegrated into his old unit.<sup>51</sup> To his horror, he learned that the army's objective was Kekionga, the very place he had just escaped from. The prospect of returning there thrust him into a state of panic due to the "certainty of torture that awaited me in case of being captured."<sup>52</sup> With his captivity experience so fresh in his mind, he vowed to fight valiantly in the upcoming campaign "but by no means be taken alive if I could evade it by any exertion short of suicide."<sup>53</sup>

Like Johonnot, many volunteers in the army were caught between worlds. The depressed postbellum US economy was based primarily around agriculture but rapid population growth made open lands increasingly scarce. For men who did not have enough money to purchase farmland of their own, there were few other opportunities that would save them from a life of tenancy or unemployment. Westward expansion promised new possibilities for self-sufficiency once the Indian conflict was over, but that was years in the future. Unless a man was lucky enough to earn an apprenticeship into a skilled trade, military service was his only other option.

For the men who were forced to join the army against their will, the western territory was a veritable prison. John Wade, a Loyalist, had immigrated to Connecticut from Ireland before the Revolutionary War and sought refuge in Nova Scotia after the United States gained

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<sup>51</sup> According to the writings of several men who participated in St. Clair's campaign and survived the battle along the Wabash River, the army constructed Fort Jefferson between October 13-24, a full month after Johonnot claimed to have arrived there. The time Johonnot spent in captivity may have accounted for his confusion regarding specific dates.

<sup>52</sup> Johonnot, *Remarkable Adventures*, 13.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

independence. He traveled back to Connecticut in the fall of 1791 to reclaim property he owned before the war started. Upon his arrival, he refused to take an Oath of Allegiance to the United States and was labeled “a disaffected person, and inimical to the State.”<sup>54</sup> He was arrested and sent to Fort Washington, where he was promised freedom in exchange for serving in the US Army during St. Clair’s campaign against the Miami Towns. To avoid indefinite imprisonment, he agreed and was assigned to the First US Regiment under Captain Erskurins Beatty. Secretly, he resolved to escape when the first opportunity presented itself. His chance came on October 4, 1791, when he deserted from Fort Hamilton with four other men and was captured by an Indian chief who eventually freed him. He made his way to Fort Detroit and provided intelligence about St. Clair’s plans to the British officers there. After that, he was reunited with his three brothers and two sisters in Nova Scotia.<sup>55</sup>

#### Levy Soldiers: A Viable Second Option to Regular Troops?

When recruitment drives failed to fill the quotas for three-year enlistments, the War Department was forced to improvise. Secretary of War Knox devised a plan to supplement the ranks of the regular army with levy soldiers who agreed to serve only for the duration of the forthcoming campaign. On March 3, 1791, President Washington signed a bill authorizing the Knox to raise up to two thousand levy soldiers. They would serve an enlistment of six-months, which Knox believed would be plenty of time for a campaign he predicted would last, at most, four months. The War Department scheduled the regular recruits and levies to rendezvous at Fort Washington by July 10, when St. Clair would begin his march. The bulk of the new recruits did

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<sup>54</sup> Declaration of John Wade, Deserter from the American Army, 27 October 1791, in *Michigan Pioneer*, 24:328.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 328-329.

not arrive at Cincinnati on time, however, delaying the army's departure nearly two full months, until the beginning of September.<sup>56</sup>

Confusion and dissatisfaction reigned in these levy regiments for several reasons. First, the network of officers who recruited them promised different things when the men signed up. Some were told that their service time began when they rendezvoused prior to their deployment. Throughout the spring and summer of 1791, levy units assembled at locations that varied greatly in travel time to Fort Washington. Some gathered in Philadelphia, while others traveled from Carlisle, Pennsylvania, Pittsburgh, or Winchester, Virginia. Several units were informed that their six-month term began when they arrived at Fort Washington, while others were told that it started when they enlisted. When the War Department struggled to acquire enough supplies and provisions for the upcoming campaign, the subsequent delays all but guaranteed that many of the levies' enlistments would expire before the army could complete its objective. Even worse, several of the War Department's subcontractors had shipped poorly made clothing to the frontier. When the levy troops arrived at Fort Washington, the quartermaster had already distributed the best clothing to the regular troops and outfitted the levies with whatever was left-over.<sup>57</sup>

When the levies' enlistments began to expire during the march to Kekionga, Knox ordered St. Clair to reenlist as many of them as possible into regular regiments and authorized him to offer bounties of six dollars per man as an added inducement. With the winter rapidly approaching, St. Clair also tried to bribe them by offering to give them the same higher-quality

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<sup>56</sup> *Journal of the Senate of the United States of America: First Congress, Third Session*, 3 March 1791 (Washington: Gales & Seaton, 1820) [https://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/hlaw:@field\(DOCID+@lit\(sj001386\)\)](https://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/hlaw:@field(DOCID+@lit(sj001386))), 306, 309; Report of Henry Knox Relative to the Frontiers of the United States, 22 January 1791, and Instructions to Major General Arthur St. Clair, 21 March 1791, in Lowrie and Clarke, *Indian Affairs*, 4:113, 171.

<sup>57</sup> Arthur St. Clair to Henry Knox, 6 October 1791, Knox to St. Clair, 30 June 1791, and Knox to St. Clair, 14 July 1791, in Lowrie and Clarke, *Indian Affairs*, 4:137, 178-179; Denny, *Military Journal*, 363-364; Lowrie and Clarke, *ASPMA*, 1:38.

clothes that had been issued to the regular troops. These efforts were largely unsuccessful. As the army marched through the forests and prairies of western Ohio in October and November, levies whose terms had already expired threatened to abandon the army at the worst possible time. They were deep inside enemy territory, over eighty miles from Fort Washington. Chronic food shortages had debilitated the men and their packhorses to the point that St. Clair repeatedly halted the army's advance and encamped while they awaited the arrival of supply trains from Fort Washington.<sup>58</sup>

The military establishment viewed levies as regular troops, which was overly optimistic given the nature of their enlistments. Soldiers in the First and Second US Regiments had received between one to three years of on-the-job training and had grown accustomed to the daily rigors of military life. The fact that the pay for regular soldiers was several months in arrears gave the War Department considerable leverage over them. This suppressed desertion rates and ensured conformity to disciplinary regulations. The short duration of levy enlistments precluded extensive training and negated the leverage that the federal government held over regular enlisted men. Levies were told they would receive their paychecks when they were discharged at the end of the campaign, so they saw little benefit in risking their lives by reenlisting beyond the six months they had already promised.<sup>59</sup>

Even after St. Clair's campaign ended, the levies continued to be a thorn in the side of the War Department. When the levies volunteered, each man was given a \$3 advance on their pay, with the balance to be paid in full when they were discharged at Fort Washington after the

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<sup>58</sup> St. Clair to Knox, 6 October 1791, Knox to St. Clair, 30 June 1791, and Knox to St. Clair, 14 July 1791, in Lowrie and Clarke, *Indian Affairs*, 4:137, 178-179; Denny, *Military Journal*, 363-364; Lowrie and Clark, ASPMA, 1:38.

<sup>59</sup> Lowrie and Clark, ASPMA, 1:38.

campaign. Several factors prevented this from happening. First, the War Department in Philadelphia did not have a designated paymaster who could authorize the payments and send them to the frontier. This was not seen as a pressing issue when the army left Fort Washington in September. The military establishment believed that the army would be at the Miami Towns when the levies' service time expired, making it impractical to discharge them. St. Clair's defeat upended those plans. As a result, the levies' discharge settlements did not leave Philadelphia until December 4. By the time the money reached Fort Washington on January 3, 1792, the levies had all gone home. Instead, they were issued discharge certificates that could be redeemed later. These notes listed their time of service and whether or not they had received advances on their pay. The certificates did not list the specific amount of the deductions, which the War Department hoped would prevent the men from selling their certificates to speculators. St. Clair remarked that "the real sums due on the notes were various, from ten to twenty-five dollars," and many of the discharged levies sold them "for trifling considerations . . . [as low as] one dollar, or one gallon of whiskey," in some cases.<sup>60</sup> In addition to their discharge certificates, they were also given one food ration for every fifteen miles of travel required to get them back to the location of their recruitment. Clothing allowances were supposed to have been deducted from their total pay, but Knox believed the "considerable hardships" they experienced during the campaign made it "unjust" to dock their pay.<sup>61</sup> It was a token gesture, no doubt. Their return up the Ohio River took

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<sup>60</sup> Lowrie and Clarke, *ASPM*, 1:38.

<sup>61</sup> Henry Knox to Arthur St. Clair, 2 December 1791, in Lowrie and Clarke, *Indian Affairs*, 4:183.

them through hostile territory, so Knox allowed them to keep their arms until they reached their point of disembarkation.<sup>62</sup>

### The Problem with Militia Units

The difficulties caused by the levies paled in comparison to those that arose from using militia soldiers to supplement the ranks of the federal army. The experiences Knox and Washington had with militia troops during the Revolutionary War gave them a low opinion of their usefulness and capabilities. This was the primary reason Knox suggested using levy soldiers to fill out St. Clair's army instead of militia. He believed levies "would be more efficacious, and more economical," as well as more disciplined and easier to control.<sup>63</sup> Their officers would be appointed by the federal government, and they would be trained like regular soldiers. In theory, this would make the levies more effective than militia units because state troops and officers were mostly loyal to their home state. Militia commanders sometimes harbored rivalries among themselves and against federal officers. Such disputes affected their ability to work effectively with other units during deployments and on campaign. State troops received no standardized training, lacked discipline, and often arrived on the front lines dramatically unprepared for the task at hand. To alleviate the financial burden of outfitting and arming them, the War Department required militia soldiers to provide their own weapons and clothing.

Forcing state soldiers to arm and clothe themselves was a critical error that was on full display during Harmar's ill-fated campaign in the fall of 1790. Of his combined effective force of 1,453 men, 1,113 were militia soldiers from Pennsylvania and Kentucky. The Kentuckians

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<sup>62</sup> Knox to St. Clair, 2 December 1791, in Lowrie and Clarke, *Indian Affairs*, 4:113, 120-121, 183; Lowrie and Clarke, *ASPMA*, 1:38.

<sup>63</sup> Report of Henry Knox Relative to the Frontiers of the United States, 22 January 1791, in Lowrie and Clarke, *Indian Affairs*, 4:113.



who joined Harmar at Fort Washington “were very ill equipped,” one federal officer recalled; “[t]heir arms were, generally, very bad, and unfit for service,” and the gunsmith at Fort Washington did not have the time or resources to repair all of them before the army marched for Kekionga.<sup>64</sup> Some of the weapons arrived without flintlocks, while others came in without a stock. One officer sarcastically remarked that he did not realize so many defective weapons existed in all of Kentucky. Some of the militia troops arrived at Fort Washington without any weapons at all. Harmar and his officers had expected the Kentuckians to be grizzled frontiersmen, “well accustomed to arms, eager and alert to revenge the injuries done them and their connexions” by Indian raids.<sup>65</sup> To the contrary, many of the men who presented themselves for militia service were “hardly able to bear arms . . . old, infirm men, and young boys.”<sup>66</sup> Others were hired substitutes who had never fired a gun and did not know how to disassemble and maintain one, which were essential skills for any soldier. Ebenezer Denny commented that two-thirds of the Kentuckians appeared to have joined up for “nothing more than to see the country, without rendering any service whatever.”<sup>67</sup>

Harmar and his subordinates found that militia forces were hard to control and ineffective at fighting the enemy. On the march toward Kekionga, a detachment of Kentuckians was sent out on a three-day mission to reconnoiter the surrounding area as the army progressed forward. Frightened, they returned to camp that same night, after less than one day in the field. That same

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<sup>64</sup> Testimony of Major Ferguson at the Court of Inquiry on General Harmar, 16 September 1791, in Lowrie and Clarke, *ASPMA*, 1:20.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> Testimony of Ebenezer Denny at the Court of Inquiry on General Harmar, in Lowrie and Clarke, *ASPMA*, 1:24; Guthman, *March to Massacre*, 187.

group was in the vanguard of Harmar's army when it reached the Miami Towns. After the militiamen made contact with the Indian warriors who were defending the area, many of them threw down their weapons and ran away, despite the fact that the native troops were beyond shooting distance. For the remainder of the campaign, these men were unarmed, incapable of defending themselves, and refused to follow orders from their commanders. In essence, they had become parasites, consuming their daily rations but were completely useless to help the army complete its objectives. Harmar refused to punish them because he feared it might incite a general mutiny among the other militia units that composed over three-quarters of his total force.<sup>68</sup>

Even the militia soldiers who hung onto their weapons were ineffective when it came to fighting the enemy. During the battle an entire company abandoned its commanding officer, who was subsequently surrounded and killed by native warriors. When Harmar ordered them to join a detachment of regular troops to rescue the officer they left behind, several sat down, wept, and refused to go. While their apathy toward fighting the Indians was well-documented, they were much more enthusiastic when presented with opportunities to plunder Indian villages despite strict orders prohibiting it.<sup>69</sup>

To cover up their embarrassing performance, several officers and soldiers circulated rumors when they returned to Kentucky that Harmar was drunk throughout the campaign and suggested his intemperance was what led to their defeat. The accusations were so damaging to Harmar's reputation that he requested a Court of Inquiry to clear his name. The Court's findings

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<sup>68</sup> Sword, *Washington's Indian War*, 115-119.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 103-104, 110-114.

found no evidence to support those accusations and exonerated him. Their final report assigned much of the blame for the defeat on the actions of the militia soldiers and officers themselves.<sup>70</sup>

Local militia soldiers, maligned though they were by War Department officials and senior commanders on the frontier, were actually quite reliable when it came to defending their own communities. In fact, they proved much more adept than US soldiers in this regard. After their stunning victories over Harmar and St. Clair, the warriors of the Northwest Confederacy were emboldened and started attacking more populated cities and settlements along the frontier. The US Army had long been unable to effectively thwart such raids. Now, that task would be more difficult due to the high casualty numbers in St. Clair's Defeat, and the soldiers that survived the battle were necessarily dispersed over such a large geographic area. This was certainly the case at Pittsburgh. Ebenezer Denny, the commandant at Fort Pitt, noted that despite the fifty men he had at the fort, the number of Indian scouting parties seen on the outskirts of town had increased dramatically. The outlying settlements around Pittsburgh had been completely depopulated, and frequent Indian sightings "frighten the people here and cause them to dread a stroke."<sup>71</sup> Local citizens imprisoned a man who confessed to being a spy for British officials at Fort Niagara. When questioned, he claimed to have two secret associates in town who were his accomplices, one of whom was an elected official in the local government.<sup>72</sup>

Amid the hysteria of a possible invasion, Denny informed Harmar that the only purpose the regular soldiers at Fort Pitt served was to deter Indians attacks on the post itself and implied

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<sup>70</sup> Testimony of Ebenezer Denny, 18 September 1791, Testimony of David Ziegler, 20 September 1791, Testimony of Thomas Doyle, 20 September 1791, Testimony of Bernard Gaines, 20 September 1791, and Opinion of the Court of Inquiry into Harmar's Campaign, 23 September 1791, in Lowrie and Clarke, *ASPM*, 1:21, 23, 25-26, 28, 30.

<sup>71</sup> Ebenezer Denny to Josiah Harmar, 6 June 1792, Harmar Papers, vol. 14.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

that his men were too frightened to venture beyond its walls (understandable considering that many of them were survivors of the Battle of the Wabash). The day-to-day work of defending the town therefore fell to the local militia. They patrolled the outlying areas, looking for signs of Indians, and set up pickets to provide early warning to the townspeople in the event of an attack. The local residents took notice. The army's ineffectiveness in such situations reflected the fact that many of the enlisted men had no ties to the areas they were defending. They owned no land or property there, and their families lived elsewhere. Local militia, who performed so poorly in battles away from their homes, were passionate about guarding their communities and were much more likely to venture beyond the town, sometimes for several days at a time, to patrol the area for Indian warriors despite the obvious physical dangers it exposed them to.<sup>73</sup>

It was a difficult task to find militia soldiers for St. Clair's expedition. Many prospective volunteers had recently participated in Scott and Wilkinson's raids against the Wabash Towns and were reluctant to leave their homes so soon after having returned. For that reason, most of the militia troops who accompanied St. Clair's campaign had to be drafted into service. Many draftees objected, feeling that the estimated duration of the campaign was too long compared to previous service Kentuckians had performed for the US Army, which lasted no longer than two months. They did not want to abandon their homes during the harvest season and leave the burden of tending their fields to their wives and children. They also blanched at the thought of being subjected to the harsh discipline meted out by federal officers.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Denny to Harmar, 6 June 1792, Harmar Papers, v. 14; Higginbotham, *War for American Independence*, 64-65; Shy, *People Numerous and Armed*, 30-31.

<sup>74</sup> John Hurt to George Washington, 1 January 1792, *Founders Online*, National Archives, last modified November 26, 2017, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/05-09-02-0226> (accessed 4 January 2018).

With the shortcomings of militia troops in mind, it was no surprise that when St. Clair made the final preparations for his expedition to the Miami Towns, he envisioned a drastically reduced role for militia forces. Rather than relying upon them as a fighting force, he assigned them to the most menial and arduous tasks military service had to offer: scouting and escorting convoys. The hardships of the march toward Kekionga in 1791 wore down the entire army but had an especially deleterious impact on the militia. Winthrop Sargent remarked that they were generally kept separate from the main body of the army because “they have rendered no service whatever; but produce, by their example and general conduct, much disorder and irregularity amongst the [regular soldiers].”<sup>75</sup> When they encamped along the Wabash the night before the battle, they were ordered to encamp several hundred yards in advance of the army so they could be sent out through the night to scout the surrounding area and act as a buffer for the main camp if the Indians launched a surprise attack. Before dawn the next day, their panicked retreat sounded an early-morning alarm for everyone else when the Northwest Confederacy stormed their campsite.

When the levies’ enlistments started to expire in mid-October, some were granted discharges and were sent back to Fort Washington while the rest of the army continued toward Kekionga. Around that same time, discontent among the militia bubbled to the surface and large groups of Kentuckians deserted the army daily. Most of them complained about the reduced rations and poor quality of the clothes they had been issued despite the increasingly harsh winter weather. The coup de grace came on October 31, when sixty Kentuckians deserted and threatened to raid a pack train that was en route with some much-needed provisions. Out of

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<sup>75</sup> Sargent, *Sargent's Diary*, 16.

desperation, St. Clair detached the First US Regiment under John Hamtramck to guard the convoy from attack and, if possible, recapture the renegade militiamen. Sargent recalled that the men of the First Regiment were the best soldiers the army had to offer. A significant number of them had served in the regiment since its inception and were battle-hardened veterans of frontier warfare. Their absence was a critical factor in St. Clair's defeat only a few days later.<sup>76</sup>

### Camp Life

The makeup of the US Army, the shortcomings of their training, and logistical delays bore much of the blame for St. Clair's defeat in 1791, but several other factors contributed to the disaster. The greatest of these aggravating factors was incompetence and mismanagement on the part of the military establishment. The War Department had set unrealistic quotas for new recruits relative to the pay scale that Congress authorized for the army. These benchmarks could not be met without enlisting every warm body available. More importantly, the War Department failed to supply its army with adequate equipment, food, and materiel that the recruiters had promised to new enlistees when they signed up. Their service in the army was filled with hardship, deprivation, and uncertainty. They were deployed hundreds of miles away from their homes and families, deprived of food and basic provisions, exposed to Indian attacks, and stricken with debilitating or fatal diseases.

Failing to establish an effective supply chain to the western posts was an issue that would have ruined the prospects of even the most superbly recruited and trained army. These issues were not unique to St. Clair's campaign. In fact, they plagued the US government throughout the entire course of the Northwest Indian War. To ease the financial burden on the Treasury

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 22.

Department, the War Department selected the lowest bidders to supply the Quartermaster's Department instead of using contractors with the best reputations. The bidding process resulted in such razor-thin margins for the suppliers that Knox remarked they "could not be attended with much profit under any circumstances."<sup>77</sup> The postwar depression caused the prices of provisions and equipment to rise sharply, which made them hard to come by. Private contractors who fulfilled their obligations to the government incurred considerable losses. Men who were in business to make money for themselves did whatever they could to minimize the damage, even if that meant abrogating their contractual obligations to the government. The disastrous results of this lowest-bidder process proved that the War Department and Congress ultimately received what they paid for.<sup>78</sup>

Throughout the summer of 1791, St. Clair complained to Knox, and anyone else who would listen, about repeated delays and incompetency on the part of the suppliers, worrying that their bungling could endanger his mission. The contractors were supposed to arrange and pay for the supplies to be transported to Fort Washington. Time and again, they failed to communicate those preparations to St. Clair and ignored his repeated requests for more information. This prevented the General from making backup plans if their arrangements fell through. St. Clair learned that one man planned to load a large shipment of packhorses onto an impossibly small number of boats to cut costs. The General fired off a protest to Knox, complaining that crowding them together for the two-week transit to Fort Washington would weaken and injure them, rendering them unfit for the rigors of the upcoming campaign. When he discovered that several

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<sup>77</sup> Henry Knox to Josiah Harmar, 7 June 1790, Harmar Papers, v. 12.

<sup>78</sup> Guthman, *March to Massacre*, 63-69.

loads of much-needed supplies were waiting at Fort Pitt for a boat to ship them down to Fort Washington. St. Clair begged Quartermaster General Samuel Hodgdon to immediately send them overland, by wagon, to avoid delays caused by the notoriously unpredictable water levels of the Ohio River. Hodgdon declined, hoping to save shipping costs by loading the goods onto troop transport barges bound for Fort Washington. Recruiting problems delayed the soldiers' departure for the frontier, however. By the time they arrived at Fort Pitt, a summer drought lowered the river to the point where shipping the men and supplies together was impossible. St. Clair was furious.<sup>79</sup>

### Food & Supply Shortages

The War Department's most egregious failure was its inability to properly feed the army. While shortages of medicine, guns, clothes, and other essential equipment were distressing and embarrassing, the lack of adequate food destroyed the soldiers' morale and was the main reason they disobeyed orders and deserted the army. One soldier fumed, "[d]oes any man suppose that a pound of *poor beef*, a quarter of a pound of flour, and no liquor, would inspire adventitious bravery [for such] miserable beings picked from the dunghills of the United States?"<sup>80</sup> Even British officials in Canada were aware that food shortages were having a deleterious impact on US forces. Simon Girty reported to Alexander McKee that US soldiers left their posts on a daily basis because of "bad usage & scarcity of provisions obliged them," a stinging indictment of the War Department's decision to privatize the supply chain.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Arthur St. Clair to Henry Knox, 24 July 1791, in Arthur St. Clair Papers, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library, b.1, f.3 (hereafter cited as Burton-St. Clair Papers).

<sup>80</sup> Thomas S. Hinde, "Diary of St. Clair's Disastrous Campaign—Journal of the Proceedings of General St. Clair's Army, Defeated at Fort Recovery, 4th November, 1791," in Williams, *American Pioneer*, 2:137.

<sup>81</sup> Simon Girty to Alexander McKee, 28 October 1791, in *Michigan Pioneer*, 24:329.



The most remote frontier outposts were often left to the mercy of the contractors. Lieutenant John Armstrong observed there were “many days at a time without bread, & at other times without Beef,” but the contractors refused to buy them at the prices set by local farmers to avoid losing money.<sup>82</sup> Sometimes suppliers claimed they did not have enough whiskey to issue the troops’ daily ration, only to be caught later that same day selling whiskey to soldiers for cash. One man was caught charging the Quartermaster’s Department twenty-five cents per hundred pounds of flour, above the contract price of fifteen cents, despite the fact that he had an adequate supply in stock. Instead of refunding money to the soldiers for missed or short rations, which the suppliers’ contracts with the War Department required them to do, many refused to issue credits. Harmar and Knox, who were aware that the contractors had underbid and faced severe losses if they honored their commitments to the letter, ordered the quartermaster to oblige them whenever possible.<sup>83</sup>

Contractors often cut off supplies to the forts when the Treasury Department failed to pay them on time. This forced officers to beg favors and even dip into their own pockets to purchase supplies and food for their men. Despite such efforts, Captain Jonathan Heart noted several occasions when the supplies ran out at Fort Franklin.<sup>84</sup> He observed that most of the desertions from his post occurred either when rations were short or close to running out. Heart responded by creating a detachment of five men whose only job was to travel to back and forth to Fort Pitt “to scrounge and beg provisions and supplies for the men from the Contractors there.”<sup>85</sup> The

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<sup>82</sup> John Armstrong to Henry Knox, 21 February 1791, Armstrong Papers, b.2, f.8.

<sup>83</sup> Armstrong to Knox, 21 February 1791, Armstrong Papers, b.2, f.8.; John Armstrong to Henry Knox, 17 July 1791, Armstrong Papers, b.2, f.9.

<sup>84</sup> Fort Franklin was established in 1787 on French Creek in present Franklin, Pennsylvania.

<sup>85</sup> Jonathan Heart to Josiah Harmar, 18 May 1789, Harmar Papers, vol. 10, 1.

situation was so desperate that troops at Fort Franklin and other frontier posts cultivated gardens to supplement their daily rations and build a surplus that could be stored for winter emergencies. Heart resented the bureaucratic incompetence that had turned “the profession of Arms into that of farming.”<sup>86</sup> Although agriculture was a respectable pursuit, forcing the soldiers to grow their own food consumed valuable time that could have otherwise been devoted to training and drilling raw recruits.

One group of deserters suffered without food for twelve days before they abandoned Fort Franklin in the spring of 1789. A local family found their ringleader in the woods, near death from starvation. They nursed him back to health over the course of fifteen days, then brought him to Fort Pitt. The man was so desperate, he stole the family’s canoe and tried to escape again before he was captured by an officer at the fort. Initially, Heart thought the deserter should be executed for stealing from the people who had saved his life, but the desperate circumstances at the garrison changed his mind. Instead, Heart “[s]entenced him to run the Gauntlet ten times through the Troops of this Command, be Stripped of his Uniform & drummed out of the Garrison with a Halter round his Neck, & forfeit all his Pay.”<sup>87</sup> He also ordered “a Copy of his discharge giving a description of his Person, Character, Crimes & Punishment be inserted in the Pittsburgh Gazette,” hoping that publicizing his case would prevent him from “[disgracing] the Rolls of the American Army” in the future.<sup>88</sup>

Food shortages also made it harder to defend the posts. When rumors circulated about the possibility of an Indian attack against Fort Franklin, the thought of being trapped inside without

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

food made the troops “very uneasy . . . laying all schemes to desert.”<sup>89</sup> The officers at the post exerted considerable efforts to prevent them from leaving. The situation did not improve. Throughout the winter of 1786, the men were continually put on short rations. They were forced to do without bread after they ran out of flour. Melting winter snow flooded the Ohio River and clogged it with large, jagged pieces of ice, making it difficult for supply shipments to reach the fort. The men ate frozen potatoes to avoid starvation.<sup>90</sup>

Razor-thin profit margins and tight budgets also explain why the clothing, equipment, and weapons sent to the western army were of poor quality and short in quantity. In 1786, Harmar wrote Henry Knox to complain about clothing the Quartermaster’s Department had sent for the men. The shirts were made “of a sleezy linen, very scanty made . . . [and] will not last a soldier a week.”<sup>91</sup> Shirts were not the only problem. “The shoes,” he continued, “are too small, fit only for boys of twelve or fourteen years of age, and of a bad quality . . . The coats are also of the worst quality being made of a kind of [material] which would wear out before the troops arrive at Fort Pitt.”<sup>92</sup> Poorly made uniforms afforded the men little protection from bad weather and often fell apart due to the rigorous labor they performed at their posts.

The soldiers’ lives were defined more by hard labor than fighting battles. Enlisted men marched, cut down trees, built forts, rowed boats, and transported equipment. The work was repetitive and unending. If they failed to perform those tasks, or if their work was done poorly, they were subjected to harsh corporal punishment in full view of their fellow soldiers. These jobs

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<sup>89</sup> Joseph Buell, *Journal of General Joseph Buell, September 20, 1785 – June 29, 1789*, Marietta College Library, Marietta, Ohio, 35 (hereafter cited as *Buell’s Journal*).

<sup>90</sup> Buell, *Buell’s Journal*, 33, 35-37.

<sup>91</sup> Josiah Harmar to Henry Knox, 26 April 1786, as quoted in Guthman, *March to Massacre*, 29.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

were performed throughout the year in a wide range of harsh conditions. The summers in the Old Northwest were oppressively hot and humid with little rain. In winter, temperatures often dropped into the single digits, snow fell, and everything froze, including the Ohio River. In fall and spring, heavy rains flooded rivers and streams.

The drudgery of such work degraded the collective morale of the entire army. A survey party sent out from Fort Harmar in the winter of 1786 returned to the base dejected and miserable. Most of the men came in with worn-out or missing shoes. Some suffered from frostbite. The following spring, the soldiers at the post were “almost naked” because their uniforms had been worn out from performing hard manual labor during the cold months.<sup>93</sup> Considering the fact that these men had money deducted out of their monthly salaries to cover their yearly clothing ration, it was especially galling to find themselves threadbare and exposed to the environment.<sup>94</sup>

When clothing shipments did arrive, some soldiers sold their newly issued uniforms and accoutrements to other troops or local settlers and used the money to purchase food or extra liquor rations. They faced harsh punishments if they were caught. Mere days after the quartermaster distributed the troops’ yearly clothing allotment in the winter of 1787, one man received one hundred lashes for selling his uniform coat to a local resident in Vincennes. Another soldier was caught pawning his new shoes and was whipped ten times. The fact that men were compelled to sell what little clothing they had reflected the desperation created by frequent privation and isolation. Sergeant Joseph Buell believed “[t]he Devil has got into all the men at

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<sup>93</sup> Buell, *Buell's Journal*, 35, 40.

<sup>94</sup> “An Act for Regulating the Military Establishment of the United States, passed in New York City, 30 Apr 1790,” in Henry Knox to Josiah Harmar, 7 June 1790, Harmar Papers, v. 12.

this time to sell their public clothes,” but he acknowledged that “a man may spend a fortune very easy in [Vincennes],” due to the abundance of local women to entertain, drinks that were available at local taverns, and fresh food produced by local farmers.<sup>95</sup>

The failings of the Quartermaster’s Department were most evident in 1791 as St. Clair made final preparations for his campaign. A shipment of knapsacks to Fort Pitt arrived late, which delayed the deployment of new recruits to Fort Washington. The shipment of horses that St. Clair had complained about to Knox in August arrived so gaunt that “they bear the appearance [*sic*] of Those returned from a very active campaign, . . . therefore [little] can be expected from their active exertions.”<sup>96</sup> A month before St. Clair’s army marched out of Cincinnati, a shipment of gunpowder arrived at Fort Washington so water-logged that it could not be used for the campaign. When rumors of the defective powder began swirling around the encampment, Knox feared that it could fatally damage the morale of the army. “[U]nless they rely with confidence on the goodness of their powder,” he informed St. Clair, “no dependence can be placed on their exertions.”<sup>97</sup> Knox ordered St. Clair to set the powder out to dry in the sun, which he hoped would salvage the shipment and put an end to the controversy.<sup>98</sup>

Soldiers were often sent into the field without the proper equipment to perform even the most menial tasks. Gunsmiths at Fort Washington found that the Quartermaster’s Department had not sent the tools they needed to repair guns at the fort. The army’s blacksmiths were supplied with traveling forges, but they were useless because the quartermaster forgot to ship

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<sup>95</sup> Buell, *Buell’s Journal*, 51-54.

<sup>96</sup> John Armstrong to Francis Johnston, 30 August 1791, Armstrong Papers, b.2, f.9.

<sup>97</sup> Henry Knox to Arthur St. Clair, 18 August 1791, Burton-St. Clair Papers, b.1, f.3.

<sup>98</sup> John Armstrong to Josiah Harmar, 10 May 1791, Armstrong Papers, b.2, f.8; John Armstrong to Alexander Hamilton, 17 September 1791, Armstrong Papers, b.2, f.9.

anvils along with them. A fatigue party of two hundred men arrived at the Great Miami River to build Fort Hamilton, the first critical objective of St. Clair's planned attack, only to discover that the quartermaster sent only eighty axes, one saw, and one frow to cut and split the timber for the fort's walls. To speed the work along, thirteen soldiers were forced to surrender axes they had brought along with them from home. In other cases, men were forced to sleep outdoors, exposed to the elements, because the army did not have enough tents to shelter them.<sup>99</sup>

Disease spread easily on the frontier. Living in cramped quarters inside the walls of fortified camps, drinking dirty water, and living off of chronically short rations that were sometimes spoiled, debilitated the soldiers before the fighting even began. Careless sanitary practices bred otherwise preventable diseases. At Fort McIntosh in February 1785, Harmar recognized that "[t]he environs of the Garrison are in a most filthy condition," and he ordered severe punishment for anyone found relieving themselves outside of the post's latrines.<sup>100</sup> He authorized the creation of "necessary fatigue parties for removing the filth, & for keeping the Garrison & its environs in future, clean & wholesome," to prevent the spread of disease when the weather warmed in the spring.<sup>101</sup> Sometimes, officers quarantined entire units to protect the health of the other soldiers. In 1786, a company at Fort Harmar was kicked out of the barracks and ordered to camp outside the walls of the fort due to the filthy condition of their living quarters. Three men from that unit became sick and died over a two-month period, the only

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<sup>99</sup> Albach, *Annals of the West*, 576; Sargent, *Sargent's Dairy*, 14.

<sup>100</sup> Garrison Orders—Fort McIntosh 11 February 1785, in "Book B—Orders to Enlisted Troops," Harmar Papers, v. 32, 37.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

sickness-related fatalities in the entire garrison. Two men had deserted from that same company shortly after the outbreak began, presumably to protect their own health.<sup>102</sup>

Medical knowledge in the 1780s-1790s was archaic. Treatment for sickness or injuries could lead to permanent disfigurement or death. An investigation was launched in 1785 after Lieutenant Joseph Asheton killed a corporal in the artillery who had attacked him. The victim, a man named Kearney, was known by the camp doctor “to be disordered with the Venerial all winter[,] that his blood was in a bad state, & that he was not recovered.”<sup>103</sup> Syphilis can cause severe mental illness if left untreated, a plausible explanation for Kearney’s erratic behavior. Doses of mercury and arsenic were the accepted treatments for the disease, but neither one was proven to be effective. Too much of either could be lethal. Overdosing was typically not an issue—not in the army, anyway—because both compounds were in short supply at far-flung posts. A court martial justified Asheton’s use of lethal force and acquitted him of murder based on self-defense.<sup>104</sup> Without proper medical care, minor injuries could lead to permanent disability. One soldier suffered a minor abrasion on his leg at Fort McIntosh in 1785. Over the next four years, the wound became so infected that it “rendered [him] very lame & the leg and thigh considerably decayed,” due to the lack of sufficient treatment amid filthy living and working conditions.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Buell, *Buell’s Journal*, 23-30.

<sup>103</sup> Garrison Orders—Fort McIntosh, 14 April 1785, in “Book A - Garrison Orders 27 Aug 1784 - 13 Aug 1785,” Harmar Papers, v. 32, 31-36.

<sup>104</sup> Garrison Orders—Fort McIntosh, 14 April 1785, in “Book A, Garrison Orders 27 Aug 1784-13 Aug 1785,” Harmar Papers, v. 32, 31-36; John Frith, “Syphilis—Its Early History and Treatment until Penicillin and the Debate on its Origins” in *Journal of Military and Veterans’ Health*, vol. 20, no. 4 <http://jmvh.org/article/syphilis-its-early-history-and-treatment-until-penicillin-and-the-debate-on-its-origins/> (accessed 13 November 2017).

<sup>105</sup> John Hamtramck to Josiah Harmar, 1 January 1789, in Gayle Thornbrough, ed., *Outpost on the Wabash, 1787-1791: Letters of Brigadier General Josiah Harmar and Major John Francis Hamtramck and Other Letters and Documents Selected from the Harmar Papers in the William L. Clements Library* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1957), 147.

In the pathogen-rich environment of the frontier, medicine was critically important to maintain the health of the army. Due to careless packing and shipping practices by the contractors, it was often worthless by the time it arrived at the forts. Jonathan McDowell noted that most of the medicine shipped to Fort McIntosh in 1788 was ruined. It had been exposed to rain when the contractor shipped it wrapped in paper instead of inside sealed containers. Since most of the medicines the army used were powders that regimental doctors dissolved in water, anything that got wet was completely unusable.<sup>106</sup>

Frequent shortages of clothing, medicine, and other supplies devastated the soldiers' morale. Enlisted men learned through hard experience that the government was often unable to deliver on the lofty promises army recruiters had made to them. Ferguson wrote to Harmar that "Whiskey, Soap, Candles, and Vinigar [*sic*] [are] seldom or never issued" at Vincennes.<sup>107</sup> His men were "very Sickly," and the army doctor "has not one Single Grain of either Tarter-Emetic or Bark," to relieve dysentery.<sup>108</sup> Chronic deprivation "Sowered [*sic*] the minds of the men to such a degree that they will . . . request to go to any other post rather than engage here."<sup>109</sup> At a time when tensions between white frontier settlers, Indians, the US government, and England were escalating to a critical point, the inability of the government to supply its men with the most basic and necessary supplies was making it increasingly difficult to hold the fragile US Army together.

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<sup>106</sup> Jonathan McDowell to Josiah Harmar, 3 January 1788, in Harmar Papers, v. 7.

<sup>107</sup> William Ferguson to Josiah Harmar, 11 August 1788, in Harmar Papers, v. 8.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.



A large contingent of camp followers and skilled tradespeople, men and women alike, hovered around the army at frontier posts and accompanied them on marches into enemy territory. They provided an array of services to the soldiers: mending torn shirts, fixing worn-out shoes, cleaning laundry, and cutting hair. The military establishment mandated standardized pricing in Pennsylvania currency to ensure that the soldiers were not overcharged for basic goods and services and to prevent them from cheating the camp followers.<sup>110</sup> An enlisted private who earned a net monthly wage of two dollars could expect to pay six pence to a shoemaker to have their shoes resoled, six shillings to a tailor for a new uniform coat, two shillings for a new shirt, or two shillings and six pence for a new pair of overalls. They could pay a laundress two shillings per month to wash their clothes. At a time when payments from the War Department were irregular at best, sometimes several years in arrears, enlisted men often racked up considerable debts to commissioned officers who lent them money in order to keep their troops clothed, fed, and well-kempt.<sup>111</sup>

Unlike the enlisted men, officers had opportunities to earn money beyond their monthly wage. Sergeant Joseph Buell exemplified this entrepreneurial spirit. When men from his company deserted, died, or were discharged, Buell kept the personal property they left behind and claimed the arrearages that contractors owed them for when their food or liquor rations were short. Buell was keenly aware that liquor was “preferable to money to trade with soldiers,” so he made an arrangement with a trader at West Point to buy liquor under the table in exchange for

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<sup>110</sup> At this time, one dollar of Pennsylvania currency was equal to twenty shillings. Eric P. Newman, *The Early Paper Money of America: An Illustrated, Historical, and Descriptive Compilation of Data Relating to American Paper Currency from its Inception in 1686 to the year 1800* (Iola, Wi.: Krause Publications, 1997), 331-346.

<sup>111</sup> Garrison Orders—Ft. McIntosh, 15 January 1785, in “Book A: Garrison Orders 27 August 1784 - 13 August 1785,” in Harnar Papers, v. 32, 16; prices included in Garrison Orders at Fort McIntosh, 28 January 1785, in *ibid.* 18-19.

cash.<sup>112</sup> Buell used this extra supply to sell it to the men or barter with them. The revenue Buell generated from these various pursuits allowed him to amass a considerable personal fortune, which he used to purchase a four-hundred acre tract in Symmes' Miami Purchase.<sup>113</sup>

Mismanagement inside the War Department presented unique financial opportunities for officers, but it also fostered a sense of disillusionment and foreboding as they prepared themselves and their men for St. Clair's campaign. "I figure . . . This Campaign will be more fatiguing & hazardous then any I have served in," John Armstrong remarked, because delays forced them to "march thro an Enemys country & in it to establish Posts," in the middle of winter.<sup>114</sup> As the army slogged northward toward the head of the Maumee River, he lamented that the winter weather had killed the forage for their packhorses, which were already weak and emaciated from their journey to Fort Washington. Discipline and order in the army was disintegrating before his very eyes due to food shortages, daily desertions of militia soldiers, and a steady stream of levy discharges. "I Pray God that should the General proceed[,] the Enemy not be disposed to give us battle," he wrote to a friend.<sup>115</sup> He feared that dwindling numbers had made their force too small to be effective, for the men who remained were "the worst and most dissatisfied troops I ever served with."<sup>116</sup> The soldiers' inexperience "with the use of fire arms, or the yells of Savages," terrified him because "the consequence of a serious attack" could be complete annihilation of the army.<sup>117</sup> At that point, however, Armstrong had no choice but to

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<sup>112</sup> Buell, *Buell's Journal*, 5.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 3, 5, 23, 41, 80.

<sup>114</sup> John Armstrong to Francis Johnston, 30 August 1791, Armstrong Papers, b.2, f.9.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

move forward with the rest of St. Clair's doomed army. Fortunately for him, he survived the battle.

### The Personal Impact of Military Service

Firsthand experiences of combat, and hearing second-hand accounts from other troops, had the greatest negative impact on the soldiers' psyche. Eight months after the Battle of a Thousand Slain, the garrison at Fort Jefferson was terrified and with good reason. At one o'clock in the morning on July 8, 1792, Indian warriors attacked the post and drove off fifteen cattle that were grazing less than sixty yards from the fort's walls, depriving the troops of their entire supply of beef. Around that same time, two captured US soldiers made their way to the post. They related distressing information that the Northwest Confederacy was killing "every person who comes to them," including deserters and people carrying flags of peace.<sup>118</sup> A warrior told one of the men that the Indians were determined "to attack us in our Ground Hog Hole (as they term us for retreating to forts)" and kill everyone inside.<sup>119</sup>

Most of the fort's garrison had survived the battle at the Wabash and feared "the consequences of [the Indians'] violence against us" if they seized the fort.<sup>120</sup> The warriors would certainly cut off access to their water supply, a creek several hundred yards outside the walls of the post, and could prevent the arrival of supply convoys from Fort Washington. Sentries observed a sizable group of Indians scouting Fort Jefferson from a distance, including one apparently dressed in a government-issued uniform coat that was likely taken from a dead soldier

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<sup>118</sup> Extract of a Letter from a Subaltern at Fort Jefferson to James Wilkinson, 8 July 1792, Anthony Wayne Family Papers, vol. 6, 10, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan (hereafter cited as Wayne Papers).

<sup>119</sup> John Smith to James Wilkinson, 8 July 1792, in Wayne Papers, v. 6, 11.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

at St. Clair's battle. "Good God, what was my feelings on such news," one man wrote, especially "after hearing fifteen Bullocks taken away [from the fort] evidently by Indians!"<sup>121</sup>

Loss of companionship was incredibly impactful and happened in a number of ways. Buell mourned a close friend, a fellow sergeant who was one of his messmates when he first enlisted, after the man died from an illness he contracted at Fort Harmar. Losing him, Buell remarked, "was the heaviest shock which I have met with since I have been in the Service."<sup>122</sup> Death was not the only reason soldiers experienced loss. Bonds formed with other men were often broken when troops deployed to different areas. When several of Buell's fellow sergeants were were reassigned and sent to a different post, their departure "seemed like parting from my relatives as I had contracted the strictest friendship with some of [them]."<sup>123</sup> Companionship among soldiers was a coping mechanism that mitigated the shared difficulties of deployment, so losing close friends made the burden of military service even more difficult to bear.

Without question, the terror of battle exacted the greatest mental toll. Armstrong led a detachment to retrieve the corpse of a soldier who was killed when Indians ambushed a supply convoy near Vincennes. Upon finding his body, they saw that he had been scalped, shot, and left with arrows sticking out of his body. Further examination revealed that his attackers had taken out his heart and cut off his genitals. Such scenes were a stark contrast to the mundane daily routine of life at the garrison and drove home the danger that lurked outside of the security of their forts.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Buell, *Buell's Journal*, 56-57.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>124</sup> John Armstrong to John Hamtramck, 11 June 1789, in Harmar Papers, vol. 10.

Battle survivors often experienced the effects of post-traumatic stress disorder. In March 1790, Major John Doughty embarked on his aforementioned mission to the Creek and Choctaw Indians, seeking their approval to build a trading post along the Tennessee River. If the Southern Indians did not stop raiding settlements in Kentucky, Knox hoped to garrison this post with two hundred soldiers who could launch a punitive strike against them. Doughty and his party of fifteen men had advanced up the river two hundred thirty miles from the Ohio before they were attacked by a Cherokee war party. Six of his men were killed and five more severely wounded during a furious firefight that lasted four hours. The survivors retreated and sought refuge at a Spanish post along the Mississippi River, Anse De La Grase, where Doughty issued a desperate plea for help. "My wounded men were in so distressed a situation as to require immediate assistance," he wrote to Major John Wyllys at Kaskaskia.<sup>125</sup> Doughty begged for a relief party of ten men and an experienced river pilot to bring them to safety, adding, "For God's sake send immediately."<sup>126</sup> Help arrived on April 3 and carried Doughty and the other survivors safely to Kaskaskia by late April. They were forced to leave behind the most seriously injured soldiers in the care of Monseigneur Pedro Foucher, the fort's commander, who promised to give them medical attention.<sup>127</sup>

Doughty's traumatic experience along the Tennessee River changed his feelings toward military service. When he earned an appointment to the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel of the Second US Regiment on March 4, 1791, Doughty turned it down. Lytle believed that he

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<sup>125</sup> John Doughty to John Wyllys, 25 March 1790, in Smith, *St. Clair Papers*, 2:134.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>127</sup> Henry Knox to Josiah Harmar, 19 December 1789, Harmar Papers, v.11; Doughty to Wyllys, 25 March 1790, and Arthur St. Clair to Henry Knox, 1 May 1790, in Smith, *St. Clair Papers*, 2:134-137; John Doughty to Josiah Harmar, 17 April 1790, Harmar Papers, v.12.

“resigned both his old and new positions in protest over the reduction of enlisted pay required by the congressional act which created his new command,” then returned home to Morristown, New Jersey, “to care for his aged parents.”<sup>128</sup> Ebenezer Denny hinted at a different, more likely, explanation for Doughty’s resignation in a letter he wrote to Harmar on March 9, 1791. Denny expressed his belief that Doughty would turn down command over the Second Regiment because, “[s]ome people are troubled with the cannon fever, and if I am not much mistaken, [Doughty] was very subject to it.”<sup>129</sup> Until he recovered, “a feather bed would be a fitter place [for him] than the field.”<sup>130</sup> Given the fate of the Second Regiment along the Wabash, especially that of the commissioned officers who fought there, Doughty was fortunate to leave the service when he did.

Three months after St. Clair’s Defeat, Adjutant General Winthrop Sargent had the unfortunate experience of reliving the battle in person. Sargent accompanied a detachment that visited the battlefield to bury the dead and either recover or destroy any heavy equipment that remained. When they reached the site, he flashed back to the scene of his “brave companions falling around . . . in every quarter, without a possibility of avenging themselves.”<sup>131</sup> The ferocity of the warriors’ assault struck him. “Every twig and bush seems to be cut down, and the Saplings and larger Trees marked with the utmost profusion of their shot,” a stark contrast to the ineffectiveness of the army’s guns and artillery, which had “been directed with very little

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<sup>128</sup> Lytle, *America’s First Army*, 180.

<sup>129</sup> Ebenezer Denny to Josiah Harmar, 9 March 1791, in Smith, *St. Clair Papers*, 2:201.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Sargent, *Sargent’s Diary*, 54.

judgment.”<sup>132</sup> He remembered being “exposed for more than two hours and a half to a most galling and heavy fire, without a single ray of Hope or Consolation, but that the Enemy, deriving courage and confidence from the reduced numbers and thinness of our Ranks, would rush on to closer quarters, and suffer us to sell our lives in the Charge of the Bayonet.”<sup>133</sup>

Nearly two feet of snow covered the ground. “[A]t every tread of the Horses’ feet,” Sargent wrote, “dead bodies were exposed to view, mutilated, mangled and butchered with the most savage barbarity.”<sup>134</sup> The carnage made it apparent that the camp followers had suffered just as much as the soldiers. After administering “the last solemn rites to the Victims of War,” the soldiers turned toward the grisly task of burying the dead.<sup>135</sup> This was difficult because the bodies were covered with snow and frozen to the ground. Moving the corpses tore them to pieces. To inter the dead, General James Wilkinson ordered the detachment to dig four pits in the frozen tundra.

To Sargent’s dismay, they left the field before the work was complete. The field was so strewn with remains that burying all of them would have taken several days, and the men lacked enough food to stay until the work was finished. Spring was just around the corner, and Wilkinson worried that warmer weather could thaw the ground and turn it into an impassible morass that would prevent them from returning to Fort Washington.<sup>136</sup> They removed approximately three tons of ironwork from the wagons that had been left behind, burned the

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 55.

wooden carriages that remained, then started their march back toward Cincinnati.<sup>137</sup> Parts of the unburied bodies still remained on Christmas Day, 1793, when US soldiers arrived to build a fort on the old battlefield.<sup>138</sup> The bones that remained were held together only by sinews. Any flesh that had not been scavenged by animals had long since rotted away.<sup>139</sup>

As difficult and traumatic as life could be for enlisted men in the army, some had it worse than most. Although War Department regulations prohibited African American men from enlisting, at least one managed to circumvent the ban. William Dolphin was a black man who lived in Cincinnati and served in the First US Levy Regiment under Captain Jacob Tipton starting in June 1791. Tipton fraudulently listed Dolphin as a deserter on his muster roll in July and forced him to sign a contract as an indentured servant “for his own private Emolument.”<sup>140</sup> This arrangement was discovered in the middle of the march to Kekionga, and Tipton was tried at a court martial at Fort Jefferson for conduct unbecoming an officer. He pled “not guilty,” and the court acquitted him. Its ruling stated that Dolphin’s indenture to Tipton was legal, because “his Colour and the Circumstance [of his servitude] being known to the commanding officers of his Battalion [*sic*],” meant that Dolphin was ineligible to serve as a soldier in the army in the first place.<sup>141</sup> Furthermore, Tipton “provided a Substitute prior to the dismissal of Dolphin,” which meant that taking him out of the line did not deprive the army of much-needed manpower.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>138</sup> The post was named Fort Recovery.

<sup>139</sup> Sargent, *Sargent’s Diary*, 57; Howe, *Historical Collections*, 2:231-232.

<sup>140</sup> William H. Crawford, “Orderly Book of Gen. St. Clair’s Army—from the Commencement of the Campaign to the Defeat (4th Nov. 1791),” William D. Wilkins Papers, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library, 116 (hereafter cited as “Crawford’s Orderly Book”).

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.



St. Clair overruled the court's decision for three reasons. First, Tipton knowingly falsified his roll by listing Dolphin as a deserter. Second, St. Clair pointed out that "no officer can consistantly with his duty Enter into any Contract with a Soldier which will take him out of the public Service—Much less can he make a Servant of him for a Number of years."<sup>143</sup> Finally, St. Clair explained that no substitutes could be brought into the service without the consent of the commanding officer and without the enlisted man being discharged first. Because a discharge would have drawn undue attention, Tipton listed Dolphin as a deserter to cover up their secret agreement. Per St. Clair's ruling, the contract between them was voided and Dolphin was sent back to Cincinnati . He was instructed to perform garrison duty at Fort Washington until further notice.<sup>144</sup>

Dolphin was not the only black man who accompanied the army. Several references indicated that Captain James Bradford of the US Artillery Battalion brought along his African-American servant, Jacko. An account of the battle, offered by a contractor in St. Clair's army, referred to him (in the racist parlance of that time) as "Bradford's monkey, who had attended him while aide to lord Stirling during the revolutionary war [*sic*]."<sup>145</sup> After Bradford was killed at the Wabash, Jacko "retreated in his regimentals from the battle ground to Fort Jefferson, and there died of cold and hunger."<sup>146</sup> A letter President Washington received from the army's chaplain, complaining about conflicts inside the army's chain-of-command, included an off-handed remark

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>145</sup> "Diary of St. Clair's Disastrous Campaign, by Thomas S. Hinde—JOURNAL of the Proceedings of General St. Clair's Army, defeated at Fort Recovery 4th November, 1791," in Williams, *American Pioneer*, 2:138.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

that “if Congress was to appoint Capt. Bradfords [*sic*] Baboon to command the army[,] it ought to be obey’d.”<sup>147</sup>

Tipton’s court martial suggests several things about race relations and the social status of African Americans in the early republic. The court’s ruling reflected a straightforward interpretation of War Department regulations regarding African Americans’ eligibility to serve as soldiers in the army: it was strictly forbidden. It was almost as if the court felt that Tipton was performing a service for the army by removing Dolphin from the ranks. It also found no problem with Tipton placing him in bondage. When St. Clair overturned the court’s findings, his rationale for doing so appeared to feel that a soldier was a soldier. This may have been borne out of a feeling of racial egalitarianism or it may have been because he was so desperate for able-bodied men who were willing to serve on the front lines. On the other hand, the General also found no reason to keep Dolphin on the front lines, and sent him back to Fort Washington instead of allowing him to rejoin his old unit. The experiences of Dolphin and Jacko, provide a compelling corollary to the idea that shared frontier experiences was a great equalizer in terms of economic and social class. Racism, apparently, was insuperable.

The common perception that camp followers were prostitutes is largely a myth. To the contrary, many of these women were the wives of soldiers and officers in the army. When their husbands left home, many of them had no way to support themselves financially, so they worked for the army washerwomen, seamstresses, and nurses. War Department standards assigned four women for every seventy men. They faced the same brutal conditions as the soldiers—the filth of the encampments and the ever-present danger of Indian attack—but they rarely received

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<sup>147</sup> John Hurt to George Washington, 1 January 1792, *Founders Online*, National Archives, last modified November 26, 2017, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/05-09-02-0226> (accessed 4 January 2018).

recognition for the important contributions they made to military operations. In fact, military commanders often looked at them as an impediment, especially when they brought their children with them or if they were pregnant. They had no power to challenge the poor treatment they received in the camps or dispute their low pay, which was considerably lower than what privates earned. During the Revolution, for example, a female cook earned \$4 per month, which was less than the monthly wage of privates (\$6.33) and unskilled workers in the civilian economy, like a hostler (\$10.00).<sup>148</sup>

Like African Americans, camp women faced discrimination and personal danger. Drastically outnumbered, women occupied a vulnerable position in the camps. Space limitations often forced them to live in the same barracks as the soldiers. Sexual assault was not uncommon. Buell recorded an incident when two men from a different company stormed into his barracks and “began to abuse our virtuous women. I went in to still them and gave one of them a mortal scouring with an iron ramrod.”<sup>149</sup> Sexual relationships between the soldiers and camp women did occur and sometimes caused fights among the troops. The wife of Corporal John Johnson confessed that she had cheated on him with another man in the army. “[S]he did not make it her practice to do the like only to oblige people,” she explained, but her husband was not pacified.<sup>150</sup> Johnson “was much grieved . . . [and] was therefore contented with beating her 3 or 4 times cross the parade with a small stick about the bigness of a mans [sic] wrist.”<sup>151</sup> According to Buell such

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<sup>148</sup> Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary War Experience of American Women, 1750-1800* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1980), 174-175, 212-213; Higginbotham, *War of American Independence*, 397-398; Garrison Orders Fort Harmar, 13 April 1787, in “Book C - 26 Nov 1786 - 13 Dec 1787,” Harmar Papers, v, 32, 65; Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 56-58.

<sup>149</sup> Quote from Buell, *Buell's Journal*, 38.

<sup>150</sup> Buell, *Buell's Journal*, 26.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

incidents of infidelity were isolated in the army, possibly because most of the women's husbands were close by.<sup>152</sup>

Buell's nonchalant description of this incident reflects a cultural mindset where women were considered the property of their husbands. The officers in the camp did not reprimand Johnson for abusing his wife, nor did he face criticism from his fellow soldiers. Buell went so far as to describe it as "a pleasing scene."<sup>153</sup> A similar incident reveals the army's curious double standard toward domestic violence. One camp woman assaulted her husband and destroyed "all [of] her furniture" when he refused to let her leave him for a man in another company.<sup>154</sup> When a sergeant intervened to break up the fight, she verbally abused him and refused to comply with his orders to stop. He arrested and confined her in the guardhouse. The next morning, she was sent away on the first boat that departed their encampment. Five days later, another female camp follower was sent away "for insulting a sergeant."<sup>155</sup> While physical abuse of a woman drew no punishment and was even applauded by some, a transgression as small as talking back to an officer was enough to get a woman kicked out of camp. Soldiers who committed similar offenses were admonished privately and forced to apologize. Beyond culturally entrenched misogyny, such incidents proved that the army placed little value on female camp followers because they could be easily replaced. The same could not be said about soldiers, considering how difficult it had been to recruit them in the first place.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Corporal John Johnson, *Complied Service Records of Volunteer Soldiers Who Served from 1784-1811, U.S. Organizations, First U.S. Regiment (Harmar), 1785-90*, at <https://www.fold3.com/image/246/287084450> (accessed 22 November 2017) [hereafter referred to as *Service Records*]; Buell, *Buell's Journal*, 25-26.

<sup>153</sup> Buell, *Buell's Journal*, 25.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 44-45.

<sup>156</sup> Court martial proceedings, 14 September 1791, & 20 October 1791, in "Crawford's Orderly Book," 46, 118.

As was the case with Johnson, the physical abuse of women in the camps was rarely dealt with in a harsh manner. Ensign Robert Thompson gave his clothes to a laundress with instructions to clean them and bring them back to him “wet or dry.”<sup>157</sup> When she delivered them back to him wet, he kicked her repeatedly. The woman, who was the wife of a sergeant, reported the incident to Major Doughty and explained that the weather had been too wet to properly dry them. Doughty “ordered a Court of Enquiry to Set,” but the man was not convicted and the Major took no further action against him.<sup>158</sup>

Women who committed crimes that damaged the army’s image were dealt with harshly. A woman from Carlisle, Pennsylvania, had a brief affair with a soldier when the army stopped in her town in early December 1785. She followed her paramour several days later when the army continue their march to Fort McIntosh. Her stay with the army was short. Buell noted she “proved to be an old Campaigner & was too light fingered on the road,” after she stole some clothes and two spoons from a tavern in Pennsylvania when the army stopped there two weeks later.<sup>159</sup> When her crime was discovered the next day, they sent her off “with a Salute, with the Whores march [playing] after her.”<sup>160</sup> The man who brought her along was tied to a tree in the woods and given fifty lashes, payback for the disgrace his lover’s actions had brought upon the army.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Buell, *Buell’s Journal*, 72.

<sup>158</sup> Buell, *Buell’s Journal*, 72.; Ensign Robert Thompson, *Service Records* at <https://www.fold3.com/image/246/287081862> (accessed 22 November 2017).

<sup>159</sup> Buell, *Buell’s Journal*, 12

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 9, 12.

Few camp women left written records of their experiences. Perhaps the most famous account is the journal of Frederika Charlotte Riedesel, the wife of a Prussian general who served in the British Army during the Revolutionary War. Because of her husband's position, Riedesel's wartime experiences were much different than those of women who accompanied the US Army during the Northwest Indian War. She followed her husband by choice, not out of financial necessity. She turned down an offer to live at her mother's house during her husband's deployment because she believed "[d]uty, love and conscience forbade" her to remain at home with their children.<sup>162</sup> Instead, she brought her three young daughters with her to the battlefield. For the most part, she lived in finished houses that were a considerable distance from the front lines, traveled from point to point in guarded carriages with her children and a full wardrobe, had open lines of credit with army sutlers, and access to the best medical care available at that time.<sup>163</sup>

Despite these advantages, Riedesel's life following the army does provide some insight into the challenges that faced less-privileged camp women. The maidservants she hired to take care of her children were often forced to sleep on the floor. When the supply lines of the British Army were stretched too thin, Riedesel had to beg for food for her family from soldiers who pitied her situation. Finding clean water was sometimes a challenge, especially when an army encampment was under siege. In one instance, she and her young daughters were forced to drink wine to avoid dehydration.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Frederika Riedesel to her mother, 8 March 1776, in William L. Stone, ed. and trans., *Letters and Journals Relating to the War of the American Revolution, and the Capture of the German Troops at Saratoga, by Mrs. General Riedesel* (Albany: Joel Munsell. 1867), 37.

<sup>163</sup> Stone, *Letters and Journals by Riedesel*, 18-22, 88-92, 113, 177-180.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 90, 127, 131, 134, 138-139.

Camp followers were not immune to the terror of battle. During the Battle of Saratoga, Riedesel's carriage came under fire from American soldiers, and the house she lived in was bombarded by rebel cannons. Frederika hurried her children into the basement and "laid myself down in a corner not far from the door. My children laid down on the earth with their heads upon my lap, and in this manner we passed the entire night. A horrible stench, the cries of the children, and yet more than all this, my own anguish, prevented me from closing my eyes."<sup>165</sup> The odor she described was from the rotting flesh of wounded men who had been brought to the house for medical treatment, combined with the smell of urine and feces from the cellar's occupants. The bombardment made it too dangerous to go outside to relieve themselves. Once, when traveling near enemy lines, Riedesel held a handkerchief over young Caroline's mouth after she began to cry, to prevent enemy soldiers from hearing her. The houses she stayed in often served as makeshift hospitals, and injured men sent back from the front lines often presented a horrifying sight, coming in with mangled limbs that needed amputation. One man received a shot through his mouth that shattered his teeth and caused bleeding so excessive that he almost choked on his own blood. Riedesel found it hard to shield her daughters from such scenes and at the same time keep them quiet to avoid disturbing the wounded and dying men that surrounded them.<sup>166</sup>

Young children were especially vulnerable in the harsh environment of the frontier. Riedesel's eldest daughter, Augusta, who arrived in North America when she was five years old, contracted whooping cough, infantile asthma, and at one point developed a serious fever that afflicted her with severe spasms. A smallpox outbreak in New York City in the winter of 1779

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 116, 120-122, 127-130, 132, 138-139.

prompted Riedesel to inoculate her children. Pregnancy could be dangerous. She gave birth to two daughters during the deployment, named America and Canada. Riedesel developed breast fever while nursing Canada; the baby became sick and died at five months old.<sup>167</sup>

### Discipline and Punishment

Adjusting to the harsh discipline of military life was extremely difficult for men who were previously unemployed or worked in agriculture before joining the army. When recruits performed poorly in training, they were often relegated to the most strenuous and menial tasks. Buell assigned two particularly slow learners to work as woodcutters during the harsh winter of 1785-1786. The job was so difficult and the working conditions so poor that they deserted one day while working out in the woods. They were discovered “almost frozen to death,” and were brought back to the garrison.<sup>168</sup> They may have been better-off freezing to death in the cold winter weather. Upon their return they were tried for desertion and publicly executed by a firing squad.

The US military establishment believed that harsh discipline would be the glue that held the army together in difficult times. It instilled fear not only in the perpetrators but the rest of the men as well. Buell “thought it was best to begin pretty severe at first with these fellows” to intimidate them into compliance, so he administered severe whippings “to let them know who I am.”<sup>169</sup> Floggings and beatings were common punishments. One man who struggled to keep up with the rest of the men on a march was hit in the head so hard that he fractured his skull and nearly died. In another case, a man from the artillery was sentenced to “100 lashes for offering a

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 18-22, 169-172, 177-180, 205-206.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 5.



man 60 dollars to take his place.”<sup>170</sup> Buell reasoned that buying substitutes without permission by senior officers “was injuring the service” because if the practice became commonplace, the army would have to constantly train new recruits.<sup>171</sup> Soldiers were whipped for bringing unauthorized liquor into the encampment, stealing from their fellow soldiers, being absent from their post without written permission, being intoxicated, and sleeping on duty. They received from fifty lashes up to five-hundred, depending on the severity of their infraction.<sup>172</sup>

At times, corporal punishment became a source of entertainment for enlisted men. One soldier “feigned himself sick” during a march and remained behind the next day when the rest of his company decamped.<sup>173</sup> When several of his comrades came back to retrieve him, he tried to escape. He was caught and brought forward to the main body of the army. “We had a frolic of whipping [him],” Buell remembered, after which they “drummed [him] out of town & stripped him & let him shift for himself.”<sup>174</sup> The enjoyment this man’s comrades found in his misery reveals an underlying truth about military service. All soldiers endured the same hardships and suffering, but they continued onward for their brothers-in-arms. Quite literally, their survival depended on the exertions of their fellow soldiers. Inflicting violence upon those who were not willing to sacrifice their own comfort for the greater good was purgative, allowing them to vent their frustrations over the hardships of military service. Cathartic vengeance was most evident when soldiers were sentenced to run the gauntlet. The other soldiers formed two parallel lines

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<sup>170</sup> Buell, *Buell’s Journal*, 46.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Buell, *Buell’s Journal*, 9, 73, 75; “Crawford’s Orderly Book,” 20, 22, 50-51, 123.

<sup>173</sup> Buell, *Buell’s Journal*, 10.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

and the offender was forced to run through the middle with an officer in front and behind him, prodding the victim along with bayonets, while the troops in each line struck the man with fists, feet, and clubs. For serious offenses, soldiers could be forced to do this several times in a row.<sup>175</sup>

During St. Clair's campaign, one of the most persistent rule violations was unauthorized firing of guns around the encampment. The army's senior command outlawed the practice because, St. Clair remarked, "the Waste of Ammunition is not the only Evil that may ensue[,] for it will render it impossible to ascertain when advanced parties are [attacked] and favour the Approach of an Enemy."<sup>176</sup> Soldiers caught discharging their weapons without good reason received one hundred lashes. It developed into a serious problem during the march to Kekionga due to the mismanagement of the Quartermaster's Department. The army was placed on short rations four different times during the campaign and twice they ran out of flour completely. The wild game that populated the forests around them was a temptation many starving soldiers simply could not resist. The problem became so bad, officers started taking inventory of each man's ammunition every morning to catch the perpetrators.<sup>177</sup>

### Coping Strategies

Soldiers coped with the hardships of their military service in different ways. Desertion was so problematic that the army resorted to drastic measures to stop it. Buell chronicled a rash of desertions between 1785 and 1789. At Fort McIntosh between September 22, 1785, and January 25, 1786, Buell listed no fewer than twenty-four desertions from the garrison. To restore

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<sup>175</sup> Buell, *Buell's Journal*, 10, 30.

<sup>176</sup> "Crawford's Orderly Book," 54-55.

<sup>177</sup> General Orders, 4 October, 6 October, 13 October, 1791, in "Crawford's Orderly Book," 88-90, 93, 103-104; Sargent, *Sargent's Diary*, 13; for ration shortages, see "Crawford's Orderly Book," 96; Denny, *Military Journal*, 362, 366; Wilson, *Bradley's Journal*, 13; Sargent, *Sargent's Diary*, 15.

control over the men, officers publicly executed five deserters between January 23-25, including three men who were summarily hung without a court martial. The executions had a telling effect. Over the next three years, Buell's journal mentioned only twelve men who deserted their posts. Those who were caught during that time received comparatively light sentences, ranging from one hundred lashes to being forced to run the gauntlet twelve times.<sup>178</sup>

The executions in 1786 were not the only instance where deserters forfeited their lives for taking a chance at freedom. As Arthur St. Clair awaited the arrival of his army at Fort Washington in August 1791, four would-be deserters were caught and sentenced to death. St. Clair granted reprieves to three of them. The one unfortunate man who was denied clemency used his last words to accuse a local man of "having persuaded him to desert and . . . furnished him with cloths [*sic*] to prevent being detected."<sup>179</sup> The citizen in question was a squatter who lived around Fort Washington. St. Clair arrested the man, destroyed his cabin, and banished him from the Northwest Territory after the soldier's "regimental Cloathing [was] found in the Man's House."<sup>180</sup>

Soldiers devised other ways to cope with their suffering. Theft was especially common. Sometimes it was a crime of opportunity; in other cases, it was a manifestation of the troops' resentment toward the US government for failing to provide them with adequate food and clothing. Settlers who lived near the forts often bore the brunt of the soldiers' desperation. After the commissary at Fort Vincennes ran out of provisions in the winter of 1790, Hamtramck reported that soldiers from the garrison stole and slaughtered several cattle "to the great injury of

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<sup>178</sup> Buell, *Buell's Journal*, 20-69.

<sup>179</sup> Arthur St. Clair to Henry Knox, 17 August 1791, Burton-St. Clair Papers, b.1, f.3, 12.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*

the Citizens and to my great Mortification.”<sup>181</sup> Incidents like this created an adversarial relationship between the soldiers and the very communities they were obligated to defend.

In November 1788, the army convened a Court of Inquiry to investigate a company of soldiers from Vincennes after the citizens of Limestone, Kentucky, accused the men of pillaging their settlement. Earlier that summer, Captain William McCurdy allegedly traveled up the Ohio River with a group of men who sneaked into the town under the cover of night. They raided the sleeping residents’ houses for food, plundered their gardens, vineyards, and cornfields, then stole money and farming equipment. The complaint stated that the troops “took off [with everything, including] Water Mellons, Cucumbers, Roasting ears of Corn and other Vegetables, and destroyed the vines in such a manner as renders them useless hereafter.”<sup>182</sup> At daylight, the men returned to the river, loaded the plunder onto their boats, and returned to Vincennes.

The soldiers disputed the settlers’ accusations. One of the accused testified that he and his comrades had indeed landed at Limestone at one o’clock in the morning. They took bread from the locals but gave them flour in exchange and denied that anyone had stolen vegetables. Several others maintained that they had come to trade, a suspicious claim given the late hour at which they arrived, and emphasized that none of them were given freedom to “rove through the town” unsupervised.<sup>183</sup> No evidence exists that any soldiers were punished for this incident.<sup>184</sup>

The most frequent victims of theft were the soldiers themselves. One officer was court martialed after he cheated his men out of their daily liquor ration and got so drunk that he could

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<sup>181</sup> John Hamtramck to Josiah Harmar, 28 November 1790, in Harmar Papers, vol. 13.

<sup>182</sup> Proceedings of a Court of Inquiry Held at Fort Knox, in John Hamtramck to Josiah Harmar, 29 November 1789, Harmar Papers, vol. 11.

<sup>183</sup> John Hamtramck to Josiah Harmar, 28 November 1790, in Harmar Papers, vol. 13.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

not perform his duty. Private James Cassidy ran the gauntlet and was drummed out of the service after he robbed a group of teamsters and stole a blanket from one of his bunkmates. Although such crimes could be attributed to the tension that grew among men who were forced to live together in cramped quarters for years at a time, they were far more indicative of the precarious financial situation the soldiers faced due to the frugality and mismanagement of the US government. The men were hungry, inadequately clothed, and their promised wages were often late, if they arrived at all. In such desperate circumstances, stealing was a way to survive.<sup>185</sup>

Fighting was another form of release. Sergeant Christopher Van Harmon publicly accused Buell of watering down his soldiers' liquor ration, hoping to undermine their respect for him. These allegations led to a brutal fistfight outside of the walls of Fort McIntosh, which Buell won. Humiliated, Van Harmon challenged him to a duel. Buell refused, insisting that fist-fighting was a better way to prove their physical superiority than a battle with swords or pistols. After that, they traded insults back-and-forth. Buell called Van Harmon "an old Dutch Scoundrel, . . . a dog," and a "British Deserter," as well as "an old drunkard," and an illiterate "mean scrub."<sup>186</sup> Van Harmon, who felt that fighting was undignified and ungentlemanly, called Buell a coward for refusing the duel. The rivalry ended when Van Harmon was transferred to a different unit.<sup>187</sup>

Superficially, the fight was about the sanctity of the liquor ration. On a deeper level, it was about maintaining the respect of their fellow soldiers. Sergeants were the highest-ranking non-commissioned officers, which positioned Buell and Van Harmon as the middlemen between

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<sup>185</sup> Orders—Camp near Schuylkill River, 10 September 1784, in "Book B—Orders to Enlisted Troops, 27 August 1784-25 August 1785," Harmar Papers, v. 32, 3-4; James Bradford to Josiah Harmar, 29 March 1789, Harmar Papers, v. 9, 8.

<sup>186</sup> Buell, *Buell's Journal*, 16-19.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 15-19, 31.

senior military officials and the enlisted men. Like privates and corporals, their pay had decreased since 1784 and they received no subsistence to make up for it. At the same time, however, sergeants were responsible for administering punishments and enforcing the rules. They shared more in common with the enlisted soldiers than commissioned officers, but their rank imbued them with a sense of superiority over other enlisted men. Earning and keeping their respect was of the utmost importance.

The most common coping mechanism was drinking. Orderly books and accounts of court martial proceedings from this period reveal the extent to which alcohol had crippled and infected the entire army, soldiers and officers alike. Although War Department regulations restricted consumption of liquor to an eighth of a pint per day, soldiers often found a way to circumvent those rules. Some saved their daily ration or purchased liquor rations from their fellow soldiers until they accumulated enough to get intoxicated. One officer discovered an entire guard detail drunk on duty, a serious crime because their inattention made the encampment vulnerable to a sneak attack. Without harsh corrective measures, rampant drunkenness threatened to undermine discipline, which was already difficult to maintain. Problem drinking was made worse when settlers who lived near the forts sold liquor to the troops at the garrison. The officers at Post Vincennes banned all trade between the townspeople and the soldiers to regain control over their men. Some soldiers drank themselves to death. Officers found one unfortunate man dead in his bunk after a night of heavy drinking.<sup>188</sup>

In other cases, inebriated soldiers started trouble in neighboring Indian encampments: starting fights, stealing, or selling them liquor to get the Indians drunk. The War Department

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<sup>188</sup> "An Act for Regulating the Military Establishment of the United States, passed in NYC, 30 April 1790," in Henry Knox to Josiah Harmar, 7 June 1790, Harmar Papers, v.12; Buell, *Buell's Journal*, 15, 42, 72-73.

urged men to visit Indians “in a friendly manner” but emphasized “they are not to be furnished with so much Liquor as to intoxicate them, as experience shews how riotous and disorderly [they] are when drunk.”<sup>189</sup> Repeated incidents of this nature forced the commanders at Fort Harmar to issue orders that barred soldiers “from going to [the Indians’] encampment at all, on pain of being Severely punished.”<sup>190</sup> Predictably, the native peoples who lived closest to the frontier installations, who were often peaceably inclined to the United States, were the ones who suffered the most.

Holidays were an excuse for the men to overindulge and take their minds off of the drudgery of their daily routines. Independence Day, Christmas, and New Year’s Day were all celebrated with extra liquor rations when supplies permitted. During the first year of his deployment, Buell observed that the southern soldiers designated May first as a holiday for no other reason than it was “a gentle way of begging for liquor.”<sup>191</sup> The rest of the men soon picked up on this opportunity and by the next year, the entire command enjoyed this “holiday.”<sup>192</sup>

### Debauchery in Cincinnati

Life at Fort Washington, and the temptations available in the growing city of Cincinnati, put the soldiers of the US Army in a position that eroded much of the discipline that had been so difficult to instill over the previous several years. This dynamic had a significant impact on the army and played a much greater role in St. Clair’s defeat than has been previously considered.

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<sup>189</sup> Garrison Orders – Fort Harmar, at the Mouth of Muskingum, 8 November 1786, in “Book B - Orders to Enlisted Troops 27 Aug 1784 - 25 Aug 1785,” Harmar Papers v. 32, 148.

<sup>190</sup> Garrison Orders—Fort Harmar, 1 April 1788, in “Book D – Harmar’s Orders to the 1st US Reg’t., 5 Dec 1787 - 31 Dec 1788,” Harmar Papers, v.32, 56-57.

<sup>191</sup> Buell, *Buell’s Journal*, 22.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, 37-38, 43, 62.

Construction of Fort Washington began in the fall of 1789. By late December, Harmar had established it as the supply depot and headquarters for the Western Army. The lives of early Cincinnatians were dictated largely by the daily schedule and needs of the fort. Supplying and outfitting the army formed the basis of the local economy. By the summer of 1790, private citizens had built forty log cabins and several frame houses in the vicinity of the fort. The size of the garrison dwarfed the population of the city itself. In 1790, the local population of the city was five hundred, three hundred twenty of whom were employed by the US Army. Many settlers who emigrated to Cincinnati were skilled tradesmen—carpenters, blacksmiths, and gunsmiths—who served the growing needs of the post. One man operated a ferry across the Ohio River to move people and goods between Ohio and Kentucky. Others grew corn, distilled whiskey, and opened taverns to indulge the soldiers.<sup>193</sup>

Cincinnati embodied the prototypical “rough frontier town.” The town had very few trappings of so-called “civilized society”—no libraries, only a handful of established churches, and very few women—which meant that enlisted men and officers spent much of their spare time drinking and gambling. Historian Henry Howe wrote that between 1790 and 1791, “[i]dleness, drinking and gambling prevailed [at Fort Washington] to a greater extent than . . . at any subsequent period.”<sup>194</sup> Howe believed the soldiers’ conduct was “attributed to the fact that they had been several years in the wilderness, cut off from all society but their own, with but few comforts or conveniences at hand, and no amusements but such as their own ingenuity could invent.”<sup>195</sup> The proliferation of taverns and gambling dens debauched both the army and the local

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<sup>193</sup> Hurt, *Ohio Frontier*, 187-188; Howe, *Historical Collections*, 2:741-742.

<sup>194</sup> Howe, *Historical Collections*, 2:753.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*



citizens. Disorder in the town spiraled to the point that Northwest Territory officials passed a law to prohibit gambling and the sale of liquor in the city. It was never enforced.<sup>196</sup>

Tension between local citizens and the soldiers increased after the Northwest Confederacy broke away from the Sandusky Alliance. Previously, Indian attacks targeted only the outlying settlements. Warriors now launched raids into the city itself, and Fort Washington's garrison was unable to defend against them. In one case, Indians stole a number of horses that were tied up just outside the fort's walls. Several Cincinnatians were killed within view of the post. Vulnerable citizens grew increasingly resentful toward the army, feelings which were magnified because military officers had started assuming a greater role in settling disputes between soldiers and local residents, instead of the town sheriff.<sup>197</sup>

Between 1790 and 1791, the non-military population of Cincinnati grew from two hundred fifty to three thousand. As St. Clair made the final preparations for his campaign in the late summer of 1791, he worried that the distractions of the local area were rendering his men unfit for the arduous campaign that lay ahead. To restore order, St. Clair moved his army out of Fort Washington two weeks earlier than he had originally planned. He relocated them to Ludlow Station, a plot of land five miles north of the city along the Mill Creek. The land was owned by Israel Ludlow, the surveyor who laid out the city of Cincinnati. He was one of town's original founders and a close friend of St. Clair. Ludlow pocketed one-hundred fifty dollars per day of federal money while the army camped on his land.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Williams, *American Pioneer*, 1:98; Hurt, *Ohio Frontier*, 187-188; Albach, *Annals of the West*, 528; Burnet, *Settlement of the North-western Territory*, 36, 40-41; Howe, *Historical Collections*, 2:753-754.

<sup>197</sup> Hurt, *Ohio Frontier*, 187-188; "Van Cleve's Memoranda," in Williams, *American Pioneer*, 2:148-150.

<sup>198</sup> Thomas S. Hinde, "Diary of St. Clair's Disastrous Campaign—Journal of the Proceedings of General St. Clair's Army, defeated at Fort Recovery 4th November, 1791," in Williams, *American Pioneer*, 2:135-136; Hurt, *Ohio Frontier*, 187-188.

## Conclusion

US soldiers, bored with the drudgery of military life and traumatized by the violence that attended their service, were driven to drink, gamble, and fight to cope with their shared hardships. As a group, they were disinterested, inexperienced, poorly trained, ill-equipped, and poorly compensated. Now, on the eve of their fateful campaign, they had been relocated to land owned by a prominent, wealthy local citizen whose connections to people in power allowed him to profit handsomely from the chaotic circumstances that plagued the US Army. While the soldiers encamped at Ludlow's Station, the men slept exposed to the elements in poorly made tents supplied by the Quartermaster's Department. To make matters worse, poor sanitary conditions caused a widespread outbreak of dysentery that severely weakened the soldiers mere days before they began their arduous march north. It was a situation caused largely by the incompetence of the US military establishment and the intractable disputes that had nearly crippled the nation's political system. The move to Ludlow's Station was a perfect microcosm of the multitude of factors that debilitated the army and foretold what lay ahead for the soldiers.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> "Hinde's Diary," in Williams, *American Pioneer*, 2:135-136.

## CONCLUSION

### THE AFTERMATH

The Battle of a Thousand Slain had wide-ranging implications. The US government launched an investigation, the first of its kind, to determine what caused the defeat. Congress and President Washington reevaluated the army they had created: the way it was trained, its command structure, and the cost of building a more effective force that could achieve the government's expansionist objectives. Western settlement came to a complete halt. Americans who had already established themselves in the West fortified their communities and prepared for the full-scale war they predicted would follow. The pan-Indian alliance faced a critical decision about whether to press its advantage on the military front or seek new negotiations with the United States from a position of strength. Finally, officers and soldiers in the army dealt with the grisly aftermath of the battle—injuries, losing their comrades, and where their lives would take them next.

#### Aftermath: Chaos Reigns after the Retreat

The warriors of the Northwest Confederacy devastated the US Army. With only seventeen hundred uniformed men, nine-hundred killed and wounded soldiers wiped out over half of the army's strength. The broken, battered, and demoralized remnants of St. Clair's force started arriving in Cincinnati at noon on November 8. Most of the bedraggled survivors camped along Deer Creek, several hundred yards away from the east palisade of Fort Washington. Their condition was dire. The soldiers suffered from the mental and physical trauma of the battle,

combined with severe exhaustion after marching ninety-eight miles in just over four days. The troops slept exposed to the elements because they had abandoned their tents and equipment during the hasty flight from the battlefield. Severe storms dumped heavy rain upon them as if the gods intended to wash away the ignominy of their defeat. Their officers, who had largely lost control of the army since their retreat, gave up all semblance of soldierly empathy and sought refuge in the homes of local citizens. Without their leadership, the situation in town quickly spiraled out of control. Over the next week, Cincinnati was engulfed in a mud- and water-logged orgy of drunken, injured, and frightened soldiers.<sup>1</sup>

A riot broke out in Cincinnati after the soldiers returned. A mob of disgruntled troops and citizens attacked the local magistrate, which one horrified observer called “a dishonour to the military, and an indignity to the National Government.”<sup>2</sup> He wished “that the most exemplary Punishment should be inflicted on the perpetrators,” as a way to restore order.<sup>3</sup> With most of the senior officers lying dead along the banks of the Wabash or hiding away indoors, soldiers deserted Fort Washington in groups as large as thirty men led by non-commissioned officers. To bring the situation under control, Lieutenant-Colonel James Wilkinson—the acting commandant of the fort—issued orders that prevented soldiers from leaving the fort, “whether for Water, Wood or Provisions” without authorization.<sup>4</sup> Order was eventually restored among the regular

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<sup>1</sup> Sargent, *Sargent's Diary*, 27, 41; Guthman, *March to Massacre*, 227, 243.

<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Wade to John Armstrong, 13 February 1792, John Armstrong Papers, b.2, f.14.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

soldiers, but the levies and militia remained uncontrollable until they received their discharges and left the city altogether.<sup>5</sup>

The situation was much worse for soldiers who were too injured to make their way back to Fort Washington. Mortally wounded men were left at Fort Jefferson. Others made it as far as Fort Hamilton, which became so inundated with injured men that there were not enough beds for them to lie on. John Armstrong, who took command of Fort Hamilton on the retreat, informed St. Clair that most of the men there were “almost naked . . . having lost every particle of cloathing but what [they] had on,” during the retreat.<sup>6</sup> Several dozen of the casualties there could not continue the march. The only way they would make it to Cincinnati was by boat, carriage, or on a litter. Reports circulated between Fort Hamilton and Fort Jefferson that large war parties were seen lurking in the woods near the forts, perhaps scouting the posts for vulnerabilities. Between the injured men and others who were incapacitated by illness, Armstrong did not have enough able-bodied men to repair the fort’s defensive works, much less to defend it against a raid.<sup>7</sup>

#### Aftermath: The Investigation, its Shortcomings and Implications for the Republic

Washington was furious when he learned the fate of St. Clair’s army on December 9, 1791. He received the news at dinner party hosted by his wife, First Lady Martha Washington. A uniformed officer appeared at the door of the executive mansion in Philadelphia and informed Washington’s secretary, Tobias Lear, that he had an urgent message from St. Clair that was for the President’s eyes only. After briefly viewing the letter, Washington rejoined the party and

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<sup>5</sup> Sargent, *Sargent’s Diary*, 27, 41.

<sup>6</sup> John Armstrong to Arthur St. Clair, 29 November 1791, *Armstrong Papers*, b.2, f.11.

<sup>7</sup> John Armstrong to Arthur St. Clair, 10 November 1791, *Armstrong Papers*, b.2, f.10; Armstrong to St. Clair, 23 November 1791, in *ibid.*, b.2, f.11.

played the role of a gracious host until ten o'clock that night, when the final guests departed. Left alone with Lear, Washington paced back-and-forth silently before he launched into a vicious tirade. "It's all over—St. Clair's defeated—routed," the President fumed; "the officers nearly all killed, the men by wholesale; the route [*sic*] complete—too shocking to think of—and a surprise into the bargain!"<sup>8</sup>

His rant had only just begun. "It was here . . . in this very room, that I conversed with St. Clair, on the very eve of his departure for the West," the President continued.<sup>9</sup> Based on his firsthand experience of Braddock's Defeat, Washington made it a point to warn the General, "beware of surprise; trust not the Indian; leave not your arms for a moment; when you halt for the night, be sure to fortify your camp—again and again, general, beware of surprise."<sup>10</sup> After warning Lear that their conversation was not to leave the room, Washington added in a much more subdued voice, "General St. Clair shall have justice; I looked hastily through the dispatches, saw the whole disaster but not all the particulars; I will receive him without displeasure; I will hear him without prejudice; he shall have full justice."<sup>11</sup> Lear remarked that when St. Clair finally arrived in Philadelphia in mid-January 1792, he was "worn down by age, disease, and the hardships of a frontier campaign, assailed by the press, and with the current of popular opinion setting hard against him."<sup>12</sup> True to his word, Washington hid his anger toward

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<sup>8</sup> Richard Rush, *Washington in Domestic Life, from Original Letters and Manuscripts* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott and Co., 1857), 67.

<sup>9</sup> Benson J. Lossing, ed., *Recollections and Private Memoirs of Washington, by His Adopted Son, George Washington Parke Custis* (New York: Derby & Jackson, 1860), 417.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Quote from Rush, *Washington in Domestic Life*, 68-69; George Washington to the United States Senate and House of Representatives, 12 December 1791, *Founders Online*, National Archives, last modified November 26, 2017, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/05-09-02-0166> (4 January 2018), fn.2.

<sup>12</sup> Lossing, *Recollections of Washington*, 419.

the embattled general. He shook St. Clair's hand and listened patiently while he explained his side of the story.<sup>13</sup>

Calls for an investigation rang throughout Philadelphia even before St. Clair's arrival. He requested a military Court of Inquiry to clear his name of any wrongdoing. President Washington informed him that while his "desire of rectifying any error of the public opinion relative to your conduct, by . . . a court of inquiry, is highly laudable," too many high-ranking officers had been killed in the battle that not enough remained "in actual service, of competent rank to form a legal court, for that purpose."<sup>14</sup> On March 27, 1792, Congress debated about the best way approach an investigation, which would be the first of its kind under the Constitution. William Branch Giles, a Representative from Virginia, suggested that President Washington commission a panel to review St. Clair's actions. His proposal was promptly rejected, fearing that conflicts of interest might undermine the panel's impartiality. Instead, the House voted forty-four to ten to appoint a select committee of the House of Representatives to look into the matter. The Select Committee's examination of St. Clair's defeat was the first congressional investigation conducted under Article 1, Section 8 of the Constitution and established a long-standing precedent for the power of congressional review over the Executive Branch. Washington assured St. Clair that the congressional inquiry would grant him an ample opportunity to clear his name.<sup>15</sup>

Publicly, and to St. Clair's face, Washington professed complete support for his beleaguered general. His true feelings were revealed only to a very small circle of his most

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<sup>13</sup> Sword, *Washington's Indian War*, 201-202.

<sup>14</sup> George Washington to Arthur St. Clair, 28 March 1792, in US Archives Collection, b.1, f.2, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library (hereafter referred to as BUSAC).

<sup>15</sup> George Washington to Arthur St. Clair, 4 April 1792, in BUSAC, b.1, f.2; James T. Currie, "First Congressional Investigation: St. Clair's Military Disaster of 1791," in *Parameters: US Army War College Quarterly*, no. 20 (Dec. 1990), 97-98.

trusted advisors and confidants. Although the President did not fully blame St. Clair for the loss, he was angry that the general had not acted upon intelligence regarding the Indians' movements. He also expressed frustration that St. Clair failed to secure the army's encampment or make preparations for a possible surprise attack when the army set up camp on November 3. Washington pledged to have his cabinet help the investigation in any way it could, because "he wished that so far as it should become a precedent, it should be rightly conducted;" at the same time, however, he resolved to refuse requests for any information "which would injure the public."<sup>16</sup> His primary concern was that if the investigation dug too far, it could reveal "how far . . . persons in the government had been dabbling in stocks, banks," and land speculation.<sup>17</sup> Such revelations would inevitably incite suspicion about the government's motives behind the conquest of the Old Northwest. This was the birth of Executive Privilege.<sup>18</sup>

The Select Committee presented its report to the House of Representatives on May 8, 1792. It found no fault with the preparations St. Clair made for the campaign and stated that his actions during the battle itself "furnished strong testimonies of his coolness and intrepidity."<sup>19</sup> The committee partially blamed the defeat on the militia soldiers whose frenzied retreat threw the rest of the army into disorder. Most of the regular soldiers and levies in the main encampment were found to have "behaved as well as could be expected from their state of discipline and the suddenness of the attack."<sup>20</sup> The report was less kind to the War Department. It assigned primary

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<sup>16</sup> Jefferson's cabinet meeting notes, 31 March and 2 April 1792, in Sawvel, *Anas of Jefferson*, 70-71.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>18</sup> Jefferson's notes 10 March 1792, in Sawvel, *Anas of Jefferson*, 60-61.

<sup>19</sup> "Causes of the Failure of the Expedition against the Indians, in 1791, under the Command of Major General St. Clair," in Lowrie and Clarke, *ASPM*, 1:39.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.



blame for the disaster to the performance of the private contractors, primarily William Duer (the same William Duer of the infamous Scioto Company), who provided the Quartermaster's Department with equipment that was "deficient in quantity and bad in quality."<sup>21</sup> Supply-chain failures also reflected a lack of management by Quartermaster General Samuel Hodgdon, which indirectly implicated Hodgdon's boss, Secretary of War Henry Knox. Secretary of Treasury Alexander Hamilton also faced significant public criticism, Calloway pointed out, because he "authorized his crony William Duer to supply the army, and it was Hamilton who wanted the war in order to maintain the national debt and promote his financial policies."<sup>22</sup>

Before the House of Representatives voted on the committee's report, Knox issued a lengthy rebuttal that accused the investigators of being one-sided and offered explanations for the shortcomings of the War Department's suppliers. Knox's lobbying worked. Historian James T. Currie noted that the House eventually approved an addendum to the original report on February 18, 1793, that was nothing more than a "watered-down version of [the committee's] original report which softened the criticisms of Hodgdon."<sup>23</sup> St. Clair, however, felt that the decreased emphasis on the contractors' failures pushed the blame back onto him, and he accused the Select Committee of damaging his public reputation. Despite the General's objections, the decisions he made during the campaign certainly deserved scrutiny. He underestimated the warriors of the Northwest Confederacy, failed to fortify his encampment along the Wabash River the night

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>22</sup> Calloway, *Victory with No Name*, 134.

<sup>23</sup> Currie, "First Congressional Investigation," 100.

before the battle, and ignored repeated intelligence reports that indicated the presence of enemy forces in the woods as they advanced.<sup>24</sup>

One factor the report ignored was the extent to which St. Clair's poor health diverted his full attention from managing the army. He had always been obese and out-of-shape, but on October 23, the day before the army set out from Fort Jefferson on their final push toward the Miami Towns, he was stricken with a debilitating, recurrent case of gout that had troubled him since the end of March. Several men were needed to help him on and off of his horse during the march. St. Clair was so ill, Lieutenant-Colonel William Darke remarked, that he had to be carried in a litter "like a [corpse] between two horses," for the remainder of the campaign.<sup>25</sup>

When the army encamped, St. Clair was bedridden with little energy to manage his disintegrating army as they proceeded deeper into enemy territory. To make matters worse, he refused to yield authority to his subordinate officers. At that point, the troops were exhausted from marching and had been on reduced rations for several weeks. Militia soldiers were deserting in large groups every day. Darke believed they kept moving forward only because "our Grate [*sic*] and Good Governor could not bare [*sic*] the thoughts of anybodeys [*sic*] going to the Towns before he was able to go at their Head."<sup>26</sup>

St. Clair's stubbornness was motivated by the enormous pressure Washington and Knox had placed on him. As the army languished at Cincinnati throughout the summer of 1791, Knox

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<sup>24</sup> Currie, "First Congressional Investigation," 101; Lowrie and Clarke, *ASPMA*, 1:41-44; Arthur St. Clair, *A narrative of the manner in which the campaign against the Indians, in the year one thousand seven hundred and ninety-one, was conducted, under the command of Major General St. Clair* (Philadelphia: Jane Aitken, 1812), 3-4, 57.

<sup>25</sup> William Darke to Sarah Darke, 1 November 1791, in *Michigan Pioneer*, 24:331.

<sup>26</sup> Quote from Darke to Morow, 1 November 1791, in *Michigan Pioneer*, 24:332; Sargent, *Sargent's Diary*, 27; Rush, *Washington in Domestic Life*, 69.

informed St. Clair that Washington believed the “vigor of operations and success of the Campaign will reflect honor on you, your Troops and the Government. And that languor and want of success will be attended with consequences directly the reverse.”<sup>27</sup> St. Clair had long been insecure. He faced withering national criticism after his abandonment of Fort Ticonderoga during the Revolutionary War in 1777. His turn as President over the Confederation Congress was largely inconsequential; throughout his term, the Constitutional Convention was meeting in Philadelphia to draft a replacement for the Articles of Confederation. The early years of his governorship over the Northwest Territory was not remembered for his achievements. Rather, it was defined by notable failures—his abortive attempts to establish peace with the Indians at the Treaty of Fort Harmar and his frequent disputes with the territory’s supreme court judges. St. Clair hoped that a successful campaign would redeem the army in the eyes of the entire nation after Harmar’s defeat and restore his public image at the same time. Despite the delays, he remained confident that the army would deliver a crushing defeat to the Northwest Confederacy, and he did not want anyone else to claim credit for it. Physical ailments be damned, St. Clair was determined to continue forward and take full credit for their success.<sup>28</sup>

The Select Committee found no fault with the performance of St. Clair’s lower-ranking officers during the campaign, a glaring omission considering considerable evidence to the contrary. Many of the officers who helped St. Clair defend the army’s encampment on November 4 had been at odds with each other for years. In some instances, they were actively undermining one another to bolster their own reputations. Military officers must work together to succeed, or

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<sup>27</sup> Henry Knox to Arthur St. Clair, 1 September 1791, Burton-St. Clair Papers, b.1, f.3.

<sup>28</sup> Kohn, *Eagle and Sword*, 92; William Henry Smith, *The Arthur St. Clair Papers: The Life and Public Services of Arthur St. Clair*, vol. 1 (Cincinnati: Robert Clarke & Co., 1882), 70-71; 118-119; 146-149.

at the very least survive, in a situation like the one that confronted the US Army at the Wabash River. To the contrary, rivalries among St. Clair's subordinates clearly affected the army's ability to prepare for a surprise attack, defend itself, and survive the battle.

One particularly contentious issue was the existence of brevet rankings, a legacy of the late War for Independence. Brevet rankings were designations awarded in the field due to battlefield losses, promotions, when the army was divided to operate in multiple theaters, or when the size of the army was increased. Brevet rankings were not intended to be permanent, unlike commissions granted by Congress. After the war, the Confederation reduced the size of the postwar army, streamlined its command structure, and gave it a very narrow set of responsibilities, one of which was to work with state militia forces to prevent Indian attacks on the frontier. Combined operations between state militia and the national army created problems in the chain-of-command when militia officers held higher ranks than US Army commanders whose commissions had been awarded to them by Congress. To eliminate such conflicts, the War Department established the supremacy of federal over militia officers in 1787 and canceled brevet rankings in 1789.<sup>29</sup>

Despite these changes, resentment continued to fester. Levy troops from Virginia believed that Major-General Richard Butler disliked them and showed favoritism toward other soldiers, specifically the Pennsylvania levies (Butler's home state), which made several officers from the Virginia Levy Regiment threaten to quit.<sup>30</sup> Reducing the number of officers did not forestall

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<sup>29</sup> Henry Knox to Josiah Harmar, 24 July 1787, Harmar Papers, v. 6; Knox to Harmar, 19 December 1789, Harmar Papers, v. 11.

<sup>30</sup> Butler's official rank was Brigadier-General, but President Washington awarded Butler a brevet rank of Major-General that was effective once the campaign began. Subsequent references to Butler use his brevet ranking. Harry M. Ward, *When Fate Summons: A Biography of General Richard Butler, 1743-1791* (Bethesda, Md.: Academia Press, 2014), 101.

disputes between commanders of the same rank. As if the preparations for St. Clair's campaign were not already complicated enough, a dispute arose between Lieutenant-Colonels William Darke and George Gibson over which man outranked the other. Darke wrote President Washington that Butler favored Gibson because he earned the rank of colonel before Darke did. Darke reminded the President that "Gibson was never an officer in the Continantal [*sic*] line, he was a State officer and . . . as a Colonel of a Small Regement [*sic*]," Gibson had no right to claim superiority over him, because Darke was a colonel in the Continental Army.<sup>31</sup> Washington encouraged Darke to put aside his personal feelings and remember "that one common cause engages your service, and requires all your exertions—it is the interest of your country—To that interest all inferior considerations must yield."<sup>32</sup>

For Darke, putting aside his resentment was difficult. The tension between Darke, who commanded the Second US Levy Regiment, and Butler, St. Clair's second-in-command, extended far beyond disputes over rank and favoritism. Darke believed that Butler was secretly spreading negative rumors about him and was disturbed by what he believed was Butler's inordinately high opinion of himself. "I every day get a worse opinion of My Genl [*sic*] though I believe he thinks himself far the Greatest man in the States of America," Darke wrote to a friend; "he pertends [*sic*] the Greatest friendship to me and at the same time would do me all the injustice in his power."<sup>33</sup> To garrison the forts along the Ohio River its tributaries, Butler deployed men from the Second Levy Regiment across a wide geographic area, well beyond

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<sup>31</sup> William Darke to George Washington, 24 July 1791, in *Founders Online*, National Archives, last modified 26 November 2017, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/05-08-02-0284> (accessed 4 January 2018).

<sup>32</sup> George Washington to William Darke, 9 August 1791, *Founders Online*, National Archives, last modified 26 November 2017, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/05-08-02-0284> (accessed 4 January 2018).

<sup>33</sup> William Darke to Henry Bedinger, 27 July 1791, in Swearingen-Bedinger Papers, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, f.7.

reach of Darke's command. Darke also accused Butler of making questionable strategic decisions to draw-out the campaign, in particular, his refusal to send supplies and new recruits downriver from Fort Pitt to Fort Washington because the Ohio River was slightly flooded. The delay proved costly. When the freshet was replaced by a drought, the river level dropped and made it impossible to transport men and equipment by boat. Butler defended his actions, claiming that supply chain issues had prevented him from fully supplying the troops prior to sending them to Cincinnati. It was a specious claim at best. General St. Clair had made it known that troops were to be routed to Fort Washington as soon as they arrived on the frontier, with or without their equipment.<sup>34</sup>

Darke was a difficult man to deal with in his own right. He had noteworthy conflicts with a number of his fellow officers, not just Gibson and Butler. John Hurt, the army's chaplain, worried that Darke's command over the Second Levy Regiment would sow dissatisfaction among the rest of the officers. He even wrote President Washington directly to express his concerns. Prior to Darke's deployment to the frontier, most of the officers at Fort Washington already disliked him. Their hatred only grew after his arrival, according to Hurt, due to Darke's "unpolished manners."<sup>35</sup> To prove this point, Hurt cited Darke's long long-running conflict with Major John Hamtramck of the First US Regiment, one of "a hundred instances" he claimed knowledge of.<sup>36</sup> Hamtramck had "such a contempt of, & air of superiority over, Colo. Dark [*sic*] that I was satisfied he never would, if he could any ways avoid it, be commanded by him."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Darke to Bedinger, 27 July 1791, in Swearingen-Bedinger Papers, f.7; Lytle, *America's First Army*, 141, 250.

<sup>35</sup> John Hurt to George Washington, 1 January 1792, *Founders Online*, National Archives, last modified November 26, 2017, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/05-09-02-0226> (accessed 4 January 1792).

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

Darke was very outspoken and opinionated. His connections to men in powerful positions like Washington threatened anyone who dared to cross him, including his superior officers. He never hesitated to challenge orders he disagreed with, and his sarcasm was biting. As the army lumbered slowly toward the Miami Towns, Darke offered a cynical update to one of his friends about the army's "Glorious Campaign."<sup>38</sup> He scoffed at their slow progress, remarking that their columns were marching "Rapidly at the rate of one mile or a little better a day."<sup>39</sup> Darke mocked his nemesis, Butler, and the gout-stricken St. Clair, promising further information "over the exploits we have done and how bravely our Generals led us to victory and how we lifted them out of bed with the gout."<sup>40</sup>

Darke's feud with Hamtramck took a dark turn the morning after the battle. On October 31, Hamtramck and the First US Regiment were dispatched to double-back and guard the army's supply train from sixty militia deserters who had threatened to raid it. When the fight erupted on November 4, Hamtramck and the First Regiment were on their way back to rejoin the rest of the army and had nearly reached Fort Jefferson when they heard the sound of gun and cannon fire in the distance. Hamtramck led his men forward to investigate. Nine miles north of Fort Jefferson, they encountered the vanguard of the retreat who informed Hamtramck about the surprise attack and the carnage that followed. Hamtramck ordered his men to fall back to Fort Jefferson, bolster its defenses against a possible Indian attack (at that time, the post was garrisoned by only by ninety injured and sick soldiers), and prepare for the influx of men who arrived there throughout the day and into the evening. The next morning, Darke ordered Hamtramck's arrest on charges of

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<sup>38</sup> Letter from William Darke, 1 November 1791, in *Michigan Pioneer*, 24:333.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

“cowardice and shamefully retreating for fear of the enemy against him” because he did not march forward to join the fight or cover the army's retreat.<sup>41</sup>

Although the charges against Hamtramck were eventually dismissed, Darke's actions were likely fueled by the immense physical and mental pain he experienced as a result of the battle. During the fight, he led a several bayonet charges into the teeth of the enemy line to drive the Indians out of the encampment. Winthrop Sargent commended Darke's bravery but remarked that he was “without the most distant semblance of a general.”<sup>42</sup> In Sargent's observation, Darke was ineffective at leading other men to repel the Indians, preferring instead to do it by himself. Sargent credited Darke only for bravely leading the charge, which he claimed had been ordered by a major from another company. During this series of charges, Darke received a severe wound in his thigh. He arrived at Fort Jefferson during the retreat to find that his son, Joseph, a captain in the First Levy Regiment, was mortally wounded in the jaw and very near death.<sup>43</sup>

The most troubling example of infighting was a simmering rivalry between Major-General Butler and St. Clair. The two men had been close friends since 1774, before the War for Independence started. By the time Butler arrived at Fort Washington on September 10, something had changed. St. Clair noticed immediately that Butler “was soured and disgusted,” and “discovered an unusual distance and reserve about him.”<sup>44</sup> St. Clair presumed Butler's standoffishness “was occasioned by the fault that had been found with [Butler's] detention of the

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<sup>41</sup> Quote from Arthur St. Clair to Henry Knox, 24 November 1791, in Smith, *St. Clair Papers*, 2:270; William Darke to George Washington, 9-10 November 1791, *Founders Online*, National Archives, last modified November 26, 2017, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/05-09-02-0094> (accessed 4 January 1791); Sargent, *Sargent's Diary*, 17-18.

<sup>42</sup> Sargent, *Sargent's Diary*, 44-45.

<sup>43</sup> Darke to Washington, 9-10 November 1791, *Founders Online*; Lytle, *America's First Army*, 117, 154, 254.

<sup>44</sup> St. Clair, *Narrative*, 31.



troops up the river.”<sup>45</sup> The Governor’s powers of intuition were spot-on. Over the previous three months, St. Clair had fired off a series of increasingly angry letters to Knox and Washington, venting his frustrations that Butler had refused to send the soldiers who were waiting in Pittsburgh.<sup>46</sup>

On July 6, St. Clair dispatched a passive-aggressive rebuke to Butler, remarking that it was “unnecessary to make any observations [on the delay], as no doubt, you had some good Reasons for it.”<sup>47</sup> He instructed him to assemble the soldiers “immediately, and send them forward to [Fort Washington] without loss of time.”<sup>48</sup> Butler soon realized that St. Clair had taken his complaints up the chain-of-command. Later that same month, he received an urgent letter from Knox, ordering “that all the Troops be instantly collected and [sent to] Head quarters with all possible despatch.”<sup>49</sup> In that same message, Knox also remarked that the President was “exceedingly anxious that Major General St. Clair should commence his operation at as early a period as possible, and he has commanded me to urge that you and all the troops within your orders descend the Ohio immediately.”<sup>50</sup> When the soldiers and Butler had not arrived at Fort Washington by late July, St. Clair again wrote to Knox that he was “without any farther [*sic*] account of General Butler,” and criticized the “delays . . . [which] appear to me very extraordinary.”<sup>51</sup> In response, Knox informed Butler that Washington considered it “an unhappy

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> St. Clair, *Narrative*, 36; “Crawford’s Orderly Book,” 32.

<sup>47</sup> Arthur St. Clair to Richard Butler, 6 July 1791, in Richard Butler Papers, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library, b.1, f.1, 2.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Henry Knox to Richard Butler, 21 July 1791, in Burton-St. Clair Papers, b.1, f.3, 1.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>51</sup> Arthur St. Clair to Henry Knox, 24 July 1791, in Burton-St. Clair Papers, b.1, f.3, 3.

omen that all the troops of the campaign” had not arrived at Cincinnati.<sup>52</sup> If Butler was perturbed that St. Clair had the audacity to question his actions, he must have been furious to learn that the Governor’s complaints had cast him in a negative light with the Secretary of War and the President.

The discord between St. Clair and his second-in-command only grew once the campaign got underway. In fact, St. Clair became convinced that Butler was actively trying to undermine his authority and humiliate him in front of the entire army. On September 29, while the soldiers were finishing the construction of Fort Hamilton, St. Clair issued the “Order of March” he wanted the army to use as they moved north. He placed Butler in charge and returned to Fort Washington to oversee the final preparations of the quartermaster to forward supplies and additional troops to the front lines. On October 3, the day before the army departed Fort Hamilton, Butler changed St. Clair’s orders dramatically. He ordered the construction of one path, forty feet wide, instead of three ten-foot wide roads that St. Clair had called for. When St. Clair caught up with the army five days later, he was angry and privately explained to his subordinate that Butler’s plan involved more labor and would make the army more vulnerable to a surprise attack. Butler apologized for countermanding his orders. For his part, St. Clair told Butler that he would not to change it back until they moved deeper into enemy territory because of “the ill effect it might have, that the two first officers should be altering the dispositions of each other, and the impropriety of his having altered one, that had been directed in public orders,

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<sup>52</sup> Henry Knox to Richard Butler, 11 August 1791, in Smith, *St. Clair Papers*, 2:230.

and consequently known to the whole army.”<sup>53</sup> After this scolding, the tension between them increased and Butler largely avoided going near St. Clair unless absolutely necessary.<sup>54</sup>

The rupture between the two men was complete at Fort Jefferson several weeks later, when Butler approached St. Clair with a unique offer. Butler expressed doubt that they would reach the Miami Towns before severe winter weather made it impossible to continue. He offered to lead one thousand of the army’s best men to Kekionga, conquer it, and start building the fort, which would allow St. Clair to advance at an easier pace. “I received the proposal with an astonishment that . . . was depicted in my countenance, and, in truth, had like to have laughed in his face,” St. Clair recalled.<sup>55</sup> As the General struggled to compose himself, he explained that he felt it was impractical, but promised to sleep on it. The next morning, he rejected Butler’s proposal “with great gravity.”<sup>56</sup> After that point, Butler refused to interact with the General unless St. Clair specifically sent for him.<sup>57</sup>

The night before the battle, Butler ordered Captain Jacob Slough and a small detachment of men to patrol the woods around the encampment, look for Indian scouting parties, and prevent them from stealing horses from the army. A mile from camp, Slough and his men exchanged fire with a small group of between six and seven warriors and were nearly ambushed by two much larger groups who came to investigate the gunfire. Frightened, the soldiers scurried through the underbrush toward the safety of the army’s lines. Slough approached Butler, who was warming

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<sup>53</sup> St. Clair, *Narrative*, 32.

<sup>54</sup> Sargent, *Sargent’s Diary*, 8; St. Clair, *Narrative*, 31-32.

<sup>55</sup> St. Clair, *Narrative*, 33.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 32-35.

his hands by a fire, and told him what they had seen. When Slough asked if he should inform St. Clair, Butler thanked and dismissed him without answering his question. Despite Butler's nonchalance, Slough was so worried that an attack was coming that he laid down fully clothed and was unable to sleep. Throughout the night, the army's sentries fired their guns into the darkness, presumably at warriors who were probing the army's defensive perimeter and moving into position for their attack the next morning. The first time St. Clair heard Slough's story was at Fort Washington after the retreat. It is impossible to determine whether Butler withheld the information from St. Clair due to his illness or another, more nefarious, reason. There is little doubt that Butler took Slough's report seriously and likely anticipated that an attack was coming soon. One man who took dinner with Butler that same night remarked that "he opened a bottle of wine at his mess table, saying to his companions, 'Let us eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we may die.'"<sup>58</sup> Butler was the highest-ranking officer killed in the fight the next morning.<sup>59</sup>

It is worth noting that as second-in-command, Butler would have assumed control over the army if the War Department had relieved St. Clair of his command. For that reason, it is conceivable that Butler's actions were an attempt to delay or sabotage St. Clair's maneuvers and claim the title of Commanding General for himself. Butler may have been jealous that St. Clair was appointed to lead the army instead of him, or perhaps he resented St. Clair for embarrassing him in front of Knox and Washington. In either case, Butler was convinced that his own abilities were superior to those of the Governor. He felt that St. Clair knew "but little about managing Indians," and his subtle but persistent attempts to alter the General's orders proved that Butler

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<sup>58</sup> Butler et al., *Butler Family*, 157.

<sup>59</sup> Arthur St. Clair to Henry Knox, 9 November 1791, in Smith, *St. Clair Papers*, 2:266-267.

had little regard for St. Clair's military capabilities.<sup>60</sup> Years later, Butler's descendants insisted that US Army would have defeated the Northwest Confederacy at the Wabash if Butler had been in command or, at the very least, if St. Clair would have heeded his advice about the campaign. The idea that Butler's generalship would have changed the outcome of the battle is historical revisionism at best. When St. Clair's gout flared up, Butler was the de facto commanding officer. The army's poor performance during the final two weeks of the campaign—during which time St. Clair was largely bedridden—suggests that Butler was every bit as overmatched as St. Clair was.<sup>61</sup>

Another significant factor that increased the army's chance of failure emanated from the highest echelon of the military and political establishment. President Washington had built his legendary reputation as a military commander based upon his judicious use of resources throughout the War for Independence. Fully aware of the shortcomings of his own force, the difficulties the Confederation Government had funding and supplying the army, and the advantages held by Great Britain, Washington approached military campaigns conservatively. He rarely exposed his troops to battle if he was not convinced that the circumstances were in his favor or if he did not have a viable escape route. That prudence kept his army together through the bleakest years of the war and enabled it to survive until Yorktown. His experience on Braddock's ill-fated campaign in 1755 had given him a unique insight into the disaster that could befall a conventional military force engaged in irregular warfare against native warriors.

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<sup>60</sup> Richard Butler to Pierce Butler, 10 July 1788, in Butler et al., *Butler Family*, 155.

<sup>61</sup> Butler et al., *Butler Family*, 157.

It was therefore ironic that the President pressured both Knox and St. Clair to conduct the strike against the Miami Towns with utmost haste. Washington's impatience was especially surprising given the difficulties the War Department had in recruiting, training, and supplying the army, problems he was well aware of. Under pressure from Washington, Knox implored St. Clair "to stimulate your operations in the highest degree, and to move as rapidly as the lateness of the Season and and the nature of the case will possibly admit."<sup>62</sup> St. Clair faced two equally disagreeable choices. He could take his chances and put his army into the field before it was ready. His other option was to call the mission off, subject himself to public criticism, and maybe even draw a reprimand from a national hero whom he admired and considered a friend and mentor. Unfortunately for the men under his command, St. Clair chose the former.

The President's impatience can be explained in several ways. Defeating the Northwest Confederacy was a point of personal pride for him. Harmar's defeat, the relentless wave of Indian raids against frontier settlements, and the perceived arrogance of Northwest Confederacy's emissaries—who refused to negotiate for peace unless the United States promised to uphold the Ohio River boundary—embarrassed and infuriated him, and threatened to discredit his presidency and national standing. Washington, who led his ragtag army to defeat the most powerful military force in the world, could not stomach the idea that the US Army was being outclassed by a force of native warriors regardless of how well-organized, skilled, and determined they might be.

Another factor previous historians have not considered is that Washington's old age may have been catching up to him. Thomas Jefferson recalled a personal conversation with the

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<sup>62</sup> Henry Knox to Arthur St. Clair, 1 September 1791, Burton-St. Clair Papers, b.3, f.3, 1-2.

President several months after the battle, in late February 1792, where Washington revealed the toll the presidency had taken on him. “He really felt himself grown old, his bodily health less firm, his memory, always bad, becoming worse,” Jefferson remembered, “and perhaps the other faculties of his mind showing a decay to others of which he was insensible himself.”<sup>63</sup> When it came to executing the duties of his office, he found “his apprehension particularly oppressed him; . . . His activity lessened, business therefore [had grown] more irksome, and tranquillity and retirement [became] an irresistible passion.”<sup>64</sup> As Washington’s mind and body began to fail, some of his decisions may have been driven more by irascibility or the early stages of dementia instead of careful deliberation. Unwittingly, he pushed St. Clair into an impossible situation.

#### Aftermath: The Evolution of the US Military Establishment and Indian Policy

Criticism of the administration’s military and Indian policy flowed freely after the battle, especially from New Englanders who criticized the war as an aggressive assault on the land rights of its indigenous owners. Western citizens criticized the War Department’s ineffective efforts to negotiate peace treaties and provide effective frontier defense, as well as Knox’s reliance on regular soldiers instead of militia forces. Anti-Federalists were aggrieved over how much the war cost and the plans Secretary of Treasury Hamilton developed to pay for it, especially the excise tax on whiskey. Even the President’s cabinet was divided about continuing the war.<sup>65</sup>

In the early Constitutional Era, the War Department had two primary responsibilities: to successfully implement federal Indian policy and coordinate military operations in the West. The

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<sup>63</sup> Jefferson, “Conversations with the President,” 29 February 1792, in Sawvel, *Anas of Jefferson*, 52.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Kohn, *Eagle and Sword*, 117-118.

Battle of a Thousand Slain proved that the War Department had failed on both counts. The Northwest Confederacy was flush with newfound confidence. They pushed forward aggressively, believing their victory was a sign that their cause had received a supernatural blessing. The US Army, on the other hand, was decimated. Half of its manpower had been killed or injured along with most of the army's senior officers. The soldiers who survived were so traumatized that many of them refused to leave the walls of their forts. They were utterly useless to provide frontier security.

While the Washington administration worked to regroup, opinions on how the government should proceed echoed from all sides. Some wanted the government to cut its losses, negotiate a peace treaty, and end the war. Others supported a decisive and overwhelming military strike. Henry Lee and Frederick von Steuben, for their part, proposed fifteen hundred mile wall along the the border to prevent violence between the two sides. The destruction of St. Clair's army allowed opponents of the administration's policies to coalesce into the first organized political resistance to the Federalists, the Democratic-Republican Party. Much of this opposition was directed toward Treasury Secretary Alexander Hamilton's controversial Fiscal Policy, especially its emphasis on excise taxes, the nationalization of state debts, and the creation of a national bank. The connection between the war effort and Hamilton's funding plan was a rallying point for Democratic-Republicans. For the political opponents of the administration, Kohn wrote, the push to create a larger, professionalized army justified their concerns "about the growing power of the national government . . . [and] the onset of aristocracy in America."<sup>66</sup> Washington and Knox eventually resolved to pursue the same strategy of "expansion through conquest, then

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<sup>66</sup> Kohn, *Eagle and Sword*, 120.



assimilation” that they had used from 1790-1791. US emissaries again used obfuscatory diplomacy with the Northwest Confederacy, while the War Department reorganized the army and dramatically expanded its size. The biggest change was that the size of the army was expanded dramatically. Enlisted men would receive adequate compensation, and they would be well-supplied and fully trained. Knox and Washington appointed a new commander and, most important of all, did not pressure him to bring the war to a speedy conclusion. Although the final vote to rebuild and expand the federal army did not fall exclusively along partisan lines, the size of the military establishment and how to fund it continued to be a controversial political topic for years to come.<sup>67</sup>

#### Aftermath: The Impact on the Northwest Confederacy

The Battle of a Thousand Slain was both the apogee and nadir of pan-Indian attempts to thwart US expansion north of the Ohio River. Calloway believed that St. Clair’s defeat “represented a triumph of collaborative coalition leadership, collective vision, and intertribal consensus politics.”<sup>68</sup> At the same time, however, the warriors’ stunning victory sowed the seeds of internal division that ultimately fractured the Northwest Confederacy and inadvertently boosted Wayne’s forthcoming campaign to crush the native rebellion once and for all.

After the warriors drove the federal army from the field, the victorious warriors returned to scalp the dead and wounded, then plundered the encampment. According to an English trader, the Indians found five cannons that were left behind and “took all the Arms, Ammunition, Provisions, Cloathing, Entrenching Tools, and Stores of every kind . . . for the purpose of

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<sup>67</sup> Kohn, *Eagle and Sword*, 119, 196-198; Calloway, *Victory with No Name*, 141.

<sup>68</sup> Calloway, *Victory With No Name*, 95.

erecting Posts & remaining the Insuing [*sic*] Winter in the Indian Country.”<sup>69</sup> The warriors divided the plunder, dispatched the wounded, took a small number of prisoners, then dispersed. Some returned to their villages while others hurried southward to track the army on its retreat and assess the feasibility of launching attacks on Fort Jefferson and Fort Hamilton. The Confederacy’s leaders taunted the remnants of the Sandusky Alliance for not participating in the battle. McKee estimated that out of a total fighting force of approximately one thousand forty men, only ten Six Nations warriors had participated in the fight. Joseph Brant, who was at his home on the Grand River Reserve during the battle, received the scalp of General Richard Butler, sent “with a severe Sarcasm for his not being there.”<sup>70</sup>

News of the Indians’ victory reached Detroit almost immediately. Alexander McKee informed Sir John Johnson of the American casualties and the great amount of equipment they lost. He also forwarded important intelligence documents found among the officers who died on the field and the personal effects left behind by those who escaped. At the cost of only twenty-one warriors killed and forty wounded, the battle as an immeasurable success. The Northwest Confederacy seized firm control over the momentum of the war and established their warrior army as a formidable fighting force. McKee hoped their victory would boost efforts to bring other Nations into the fold who had previously stayed out of the conflict.<sup>71</sup>

McKee was correct that neutral Indians would be pulled into the conflict, but not all of those who were drawn into the vortex participated willingly. Missionary David Zeisberger,

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<sup>69</sup> Hamilton to Robertson, 24 November 1791, Robertson Papers, b.1, f.6, 1.

<sup>70</sup> Quote from Hamilton to Robertson, 24 November 1791, Robertson Papers, b.1, f.6., 2; McKee to Johnson, 5 December 1791, in *Michigan Pioneer*, 24:336.

<sup>71</sup> Alexander McKee to Sir John Johnson, 5 December 1791, in *Michigan Pioneer*, 24:336.

himself a US partisan, expressed relief that St. Clair had been defeated instead of the Northwest Confederacy because “if [defeat] had fallen upon the Indians . . . apparently we should have to suffer for it, since our people had not helped, though they were not summoned to the battle.”<sup>72</sup> After the battle, the Moravian Delawares faced severe pressure from neighboring tribes near Detroit to join the Confederacy. Native warriors threatened to shoot their livestock if they refused to fight and kill anyone who dared to offer protest.<sup>73</sup>

While the destruction of the US Army inspired increased native resistance, it also destroyed cohesion within the Northwest Confederacy. For the second time in less than a year, Indian warriors had proven they could effectively coordinate military operations among their coalition. Collaboration enabled them to defeat the US Army which, despite its shortcomings, was still a formidable opponent—armed with high-powered artillery and ensconced within impregnable forts. At the same time, however, the outcome of the battle made the Confederacy’s leaders overconfident. They believed their victory would be a touchstone for pan-Indianism, convincing neutral Nations to join them and strengthening cohesion inside the movement in the years to come.

Native self-assessment after the battle fixated on certain factors while ignoring others. The militants interpreted their victory as a sign that their efforts were divinely blessed. They were either not aware of the difficulties that handicapped St. Clair’s army or chose to ignore them. McKee reported that the Indians felt “more attached to the British Interest in due proportion to the extreme hatred and antipathy, which they bear [toward] their enemies.”<sup>74</sup> Based

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<sup>72</sup> Bliss, *Zeisberger’s Diary*, 2:230.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 206; 354.

<sup>74</sup> Alexander McKee to Sir John Johnson, 28 January 1792, in *Michigan Pioneer*, 24:366.

on the amount of support the British Indian Department had given them up to that point, they had no reason to expect anything less in future. Some native leaders felt that the destruction of the US Army would inspire England to take a more active role to defend Indian lands. Many in Indian Country were convinced that St. Clair's defeat made their families safe from further attacks. On the other hand, several of the Confederacy's leaders felt that the time was right to seek peace with the United States because their victory had maximized their leverage at the bargaining table. The same ideological debates that had previously divided the Sandusky Alliance were now creating fissures inside the Northwest Confederacy. These divisions marked the beginning of the end for a united front against US expansion.<sup>75</sup>

Indian councils after the battle were not straightforward debates about strategy and tactics. Rather, they often played out as a conflict between generations. Older, conservative, more pragmatic leaders advocated restraint and cautioned against divining too much from their recent success. Ambitious young warriors, who aspired to supplant the old men and assume leadership roles for themselves, wanted the military efforts to continue. The confidence of aspiring Indian leaders was on full public display at a council along the Ottawa River in November of 1791, mere weeks after the defeat of St. Clair's army. Egushaway, an Ottawa war chief, declared that although he wanted the war to end, he did not "see the means of attaining peace, on honourable terms, but by war."<sup>76</sup> We "feasted the wolves then, as we have lately done, with the carcasses of our enemy," a clear reference to the Confederacy's efforts against Harmer and St. Clair. The underlying message was that the Indians had the capability to achieve

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<sup>75</sup> Downes, *Council Fires*, 42-74, 139-151; Alexander McKee to Sir John Johnson, 28 January 1792, in *Michigan Pioneer*, 24:366.

<sup>76</sup> Speech of Egushaway, November 1791, in "Minutes of Debates in Council on the Banks of the Ottawa River, November 1791," <http://www.ohiomemory.org/cdm/ref/collection/p267401coll36/id/14985>, 6.

continued military successes until the United States was prepared to honor the Ohio River boundary.<sup>77</sup>

Egushaway recounted the history of how indigenous peoples in North and South America had been victimized by white colonialism: the cruelties of the Spaniards who “massacred whole nations; and made Dogs of those whose lives they spared,” and the depredations the English and Dutch committed in their conquest of the Natives in the Chesapeake region and in the northeast.<sup>78</sup> The Ottawa leader articulated a key element of the pro-war position: peace overtures from whites were not to be trusted because it was impossible to be at peace with people who claimed to “please God by exterminating us red men, whom they call heathen.”<sup>79</sup> He chided Indian leaders who had signed the treaties with the Americans at Fort Stanwix, Fort McIntosh, Fort Finney and Fort Harmar. Conciliatory leaders like Moluntha, he remarked, had “justly suffered” for their treachery.<sup>80</sup>

For his part, Joseph Brant was not intimidated by the personal attacks he received after the battle and launched a renewed effort to reinsert himself into the deliberations. The federal government assisted his efforts by trying to use him as a courier and intermediary between itself and the Northwest Confederacy. When he visited Fort Niagara in February 1792, Brant handed over several messages he had received from US officials to Colonel Andrew Gordon. In one of the letters, Indian Commissioner Timothy Pickering appealed to the Iroquois to come to Philadelphia to discuss a new plan to provide “civilization” to the Indians but made no mention

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 11.

of potential peace negotiations. Gordon warned Brant that if the United States was trying to lure the Six Nations and Brant into negotiating on behalf of the Northwest Confederacy, “it is much to be feared it will give rise to Jealousies, which may be attended with disagreeable consequences hereafter.”<sup>81</sup> Gordon advised Brant to stay out of the matter entirely, but he was undaunted. “[A]fter maturely weighing the present situation of the [Northwest Confederacy],” Brant confided to Matthew Elliott in May 1792, “[I] think it advisable to accept [the US peace terms],” because he felt that would be in the best interest of all native peoples.<sup>82</sup> He told Elliott that he planned to attend an upcoming Indian council at the Grand Glaize and advocate renewed treaty negotiations with the United States.<sup>83</sup>

News of St. Clair’s defeat produced mixed feelings in England and Canada. Some saw it as an opportunity to forge a lasting peace between the Indians and the United States. They hoped US negotiators would be more amenable to peace settlement, possibly with Brant’s Muskingum Compromise as a starting point. Although British officials envisioned themselves as mediators between the two sides, they were insecure about how the Northwest Confederacy’s victory would affect their relationship with the pan-Indian movement. Lieutenant-Governor Simcoe sensed that the Confederacy’s leaders had grown increasingly frustrated with the Royal Government’s official position of neutrality. In a letter to Secretary of State Dundas, Simcoe suggested that the

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<sup>81</sup> Andrew Gordon to Joseph Brant, 20 March 1792, in *Michigan Pioneer*, 24:385.

<sup>82</sup> Joseph Brant to Matthew Elliott, 22 May 1792, in SIA, Ser. 2, Lot 697, 6.

<sup>83</sup> Samuel Kirkland to Joseph Brant, 3 January 1792, Kirkland to Brant, 25 January 1792, Timothy Pickering to the Five Nations, 19 December 1792, Henry Knox to Brant, 25 February 1792, in *Michigan Pioneer*, 24:361-365, 370-371, 379-380; Joseph Brant to Matthew Elliott, 22 May 1792, in SIA, Ser. 2, Lot 697, 6.

capital city of Upper Canada, Newark, should be garrisoned with a military force to protect it from a possible attack by England's restive native allies.<sup>84</sup>

#### Aftermath: Obfuscatory Diplomacy

In April 1792, Congress dispatched two commissioners into the heart of the Northwest Confederacy, bearing messages of peace. Captain Alexander Trueman carried his overture to the Miami Towns, while Colonel John Hardin traveled to the Sandusky River villages. Simultaneously, the War Department issued explicit orders to the US Army and state militia forces to refrain from retaliatory attacks and raids against Indian settlements, to set the stage for Trueman and Hardin to complete their missions peacefully. The letters Trueman and Hardin carried were a stark departure from the government's position on indigenous land rights before St. Clair's defeat. The government now acknowledged the Indians' ownership over the Old Northwest and vowed to defend native territory from illegal settlers and unauthorized land seizures. The letters also emphasized that the only way both sides could coexist in peace was for the Indians to assimilate to Anglo-American culture, a preview of the "Assimilation Era" of US Indian Policy. The United States desired to keep the lands it acquired between 1784 and 1786, but if the Northwest Confederacy could prove those lands were acquired unfairly, the government would "either give up their claim or make a sufficient compensation for them."<sup>85</sup> Native leaders who met with Trueman and Hardin along their respective journeys questioned the sincerity of the messages. The government's stubborn fixation on retaining the Ohio Country proved that embarrassing military defeats had clearly not broken its desire for territorial

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<sup>84</sup> Robert Hamilton to William Robertson, 24 November 1791, Robertson Papers, b.1, f.6, 3; John Graves Simcoe to Henry Dundas, 16 February 1792, Lord Dorchester to Henry Dundas, 23 March 1792, in *Michigan Pioneer*, 24:377-378, 387.

<sup>85</sup> "Extract of a Letter Received from the Glaize, 2 June 1792," in *Michigan Pioneer*, 24:420.

expansion. Indians killed Trueman and Hardin before they reached their respective destinations.<sup>86</sup>

The deaths of Trueman and Hardin were a setback, but federal officials still held out hope that peace could be achieved. Inside the pan-Indian movement, however, the possibility of compromise remained very controversial. At the Glaize council in the summer of 1792, Brant hesitated to voice his support for a peace treaty to avoid the appearance that he was siding with the United States against the Confederacy, so he watched the proceedings play out instead. Moderates and peace advocates, while impressed by St. Clair's defeat, hesitated to divine too much from the warriors' success. Seneca chief Red Jacket and Stockbridge leader Captain Hendrick both spoke optimistically about vague promises offered by the United States that indicated their consideration of Brant's Muskingum Compromise. If Northwest Confederacy was "too loud Spirited and reject it," Red Jacket warned the assembly, "the great Spirit should be angry with you."<sup>87</sup> The militants remained unbowed. Compromise, they believed, would provide only a temporary peace. Because the United States was determined to seize control over the *pays d'en haut*, the Americans would simply wait until the circumstances favored them and remove the Indians for good. Before the council adjourned, the leaders of the Confederacy agreed to receive peace offers from the United States in the spring of 1793, but emphasized that the Ohio River boundary would be a precondition for any agreement. Brant left the council disillusioned.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> James Wilkinson to Commanding Officers of the Militia of Kentucky, 25 April 1792, and Richard England to Francis Lemaster, 5 July 1792, in *Michigan Pioneer*, 24:41-411, 427; for Trueman's mission, see *ibid.*, 390-396; Kohn, *Eagle and Sword*, 117-119; Sword, *Washington's Indian War*, 211-212.

<sup>87</sup> Red Jacket as quoted in Calloway, *Victory with No Name*, 145.

<sup>88</sup> Calloway, *Victory with No Name*, 140-146; "William Johnson's Journal," in *Michigan Pioneer*, 24:471-472.



The closest the US government came to making peace with the Northwest Confederacy came at Vincennes in September 1792, where the Ohio Company's leader, Rufus Putnam, met with leaders from the Wabash Nations to negotiate peace settlement. Putnam offered the same promises that Trueman and Hardin tried to deliver to the Indians earlier that year. A handful of Wabash leaders signed the agreement, but it was never binding. The US Senate rejected the treaty in early 1794. The prevailing sentiment among the senators was that the gradual growth of white settlements would eventually force the Indians to part with all of their lands, and the Vincennes Agreement did not grant the federal government preemption rights in the Northwest Territory.<sup>89</sup>

In early 1793, Alexander McKee was among the foremost skeptics that the United States' moderated stance toward Indian diplomacy was anything more than a ruse to designed to distract attention away from increased US militarization. With his support, the militants sent a delegation to Fort Niagara in July to meet with federal commissioners and determine their sincerity. When the Indians pressed the commissioners about the extent of their authority to modify the boundary between white and Indian settlements, the commissioners stated that they did but were purposefully vague about where that new line might be. Native negotiators recognized this and responded by rejecting the US peace proposal, citing several well-established tenets of the Northwest Confederacy' ideological position. Common Indian ownership of the land meant that the treaties of 1784-1786 and 1789 were not valid. The Indians said they had no use for the compensation the government offered. They suggested the United States should force the frontier settlers to abandon their communities and distribute those funds to them, to indemnify their

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<sup>89</sup> Kohn, *Eagle and Sword*, 119; Horsman, *Expansion and Indian Policy*, 90-95.

losses. Unless the United States would agree to honor the 1768 boundary, continuing the discussion was pointless. With that, the meeting was over.<sup>90</sup>

These diplomatic failures meant that the war would continue. It also guaranteed that the Confederacy would be dependent on British assistance to keep their resistance going. When the Northwest Confederacy assembled to defend Kekionga in 1790, the population swell depleted the Miamis' supply of dried corn. This problem was magnified when Harmar's men destroyed whatever was left after the Indians abandoned the towns. Although Harmar's campaign against Kekionga was an abject failure from a tactical standpoint, wiping out the Confederacy's food stores was a significant strategic victory because it deprived the Northwest Confederacy of the food it needed to sustain its large army of warriors in the years ahead. At the same time, rumors circulated throughout Indian Country (which were likely started by the United States) that British officials were deceiving their allies by "putting them off with vain promises, that they are as much their enemies, under the mask of Friendship, as the Americans, they furnish them with Ammunition[,] Set them on as they would a parcel of Dogs[,] wishing them to destroy each other —while they themselves sit spectators."<sup>91</sup> The British Indian Department took extreme measures to counter that narrative.

Upon relocating their main villages to the confluence of the Auglaize and Maumee Rivers in 1791, the Northwest Confederacy requested five hundred bushels of corn from the Indian Department, plus additional seed, to recoup what they had lost at Kekionga and reestablish their community on sound footing. When those supplies did not arrive, the Indians feared that the

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<sup>90</sup> Sword, *President Washington's Indian War*, 240-247

<sup>91</sup> George Ironside to Alexander McKee, 14 February 1792, in *Michigan Pioneer*, 24:376.

rumors of British deception were true. English trader George Ironside worried that if Great Britain failed to meet the Indians' requests, they might "turn their Tomahawk upon us and the unfortunate Traders will be the first victims of their cruelty."<sup>92</sup> McKee and Elliott scrambled to prevent the British-Indian alliance from completely unraveling. To reenforce England's commitment to their native allies, British officials built Fort Miamis at the Maumee Rapids in the spring of 1794 and garrisoned the new post with over one hundred Canadian troops.<sup>93</sup>

#### Aftermath: The Legion, Fallen Timbers, and the Treaty of Greenville

The second aspect of the Washington Administration's plan to end the Northwest Indian War—rebuilding the US Army—was much more successful than its attempts to negotiate peace. The War Department submitted a plan to create a five-thousand man army at a cost of one million dollars, three times more expensive than the one led by St. Clair. The House of Representatives voted 29-19 in favor of the bill on February 2, 1792. The Senate approved it by a slim 15-12 margin on February 17, and Washington signed it into law in March. Knox reorganized the structure of the army itself, adopting a legionary model instead of organizing it by regiments. The main force would be divided into four sub-legions that could operate independently of each other. Each legion included a mix of infantry, cavalry, and artillery under the command of a single officer. The key provisions of the bill included pay raises for both officers and the soldiers to bolster recruitment efforts and a promise to discharge three of the five legions once the war was over. The new army would be funded through a mix of increased tariffs and taking out new loans. All contracts the War Department signed to supply and equip the army

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Calloway, *Victory with No Name*, 148; Gary S. Williams, *The Forts of Ohio: A Guide to Military Stockades* (Caldwell, Oh.: Buckeye Book Press, 2005), 80; Sword, *Washington's Indian War*, 261, 289.

would be carefully scrutinized by the Treasury Department. St. Clair was removed as commander of the army and replaced by General “Mad” Anthony Wayne, a decorated veteran of the Revolutionary War. Wayne and St. Clair were long-time rivals, dating back to when St. Clair served as president of the Pennsylvania chapter of the Society of the Cincinnati and Wayne was the acting vice-president. Most importantly, Congress and Washington agreed to place no deadlines on the completion of Wayne’s campaign, which gave him adequate time to recruit, train, and prepare his force. When half-hearted efforts to reach a diplomatic solution foundered, the creation of the Legion of the United States enabled Congress to end the war by using overwhelming military force.<sup>94</sup>

As soon as Wayne was appointed Commanding General in April 1792, he moved aggressively to put his Legion on sound footing. When he arrived in Pittsburgh in June, forty raw recruits constituted the entire garrison at Fort Pitt. Over the coming months, he trained a steady stream of recruits who began to file in. By April 1793, his army had grown to twelve hundred well-trained soldiers. Officers and enlisted men alike were subjected to harsh disciplinary methods, Sword remarked, to “cull his army of undesirables.”<sup>95</sup> In May, Wayne moved his army downriver to Fort Washington.<sup>96</sup>

The US military establishment learned several valuable lessons from the logistical issues that had handicapped St. Clair’s expedition. The first was the disastrous consequences of building roads through enemy territory at the same time the army was marching forward. To increase the mobility of his force, Wayne widened St. Clair’s military road from Fort Hamilton to

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<sup>94</sup> Kohn, *Eagle and Sword*, 120, 122-124; Sword, *Washington’s Indian War*, 206-207.

<sup>95</sup> Sword, *Washington’s Indian War*, 234.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 205-207.

Fort Jefferson and extended it six miles farther to the banks of Greenville Creek during the spring and summer of 1793. St. Clair's supply-chain issues pointed to the strategic advantage of having fortified posts at smaller intervals, to store extra supplies and to provide refuge in case of attack. To that end, the army constructed a chain of forts from Fort Washington into the heart of Indian Country, each within one day's march in either direction. Brigadier General James Wilkinson built Fort St. Clair (present Eaton, Ohio) between Fort Jefferson and Fort Hamilton in March 1792. The largest of these posts, Fort Greenville, was established in the winter of 1793 and served as the winter quarters for Wayne's Legion during the winter of 1793-1794. Historian Gary S. Williams remarked that it "was really not a fort as much as it was a military city," big enough to accommodate two thousand soldiers.<sup>97</sup> On Christmas Eve, 1793, Wayne sent a detachment to build a fort on the site of St. Clair's defeat and named it Fort Recovery [Figure 4].<sup>98</sup>

In July 1794, Wayne's endgame was at hand. He marched out of Fort Greenville with his army to engage the Northwest Confederacy in a decisive battle. Augmented by fifteen hundred militia soldiers from Kentucky under General Charles Scott, the Legion progressed methodically to the North. From late July into early August, they established a small post named Fort Adams on the banks of the St. Marys River. On August 7, Wayne reached the Grand Glaize, which the Northwest Confederacy had abandoned as the Legion's columns advanced out of Greenville. There, he erected Fort Defiance and fired off messages to Indian leaders, warning them to ignore the influence of British officials because "they have neither the power nor the inclination to

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<sup>97</sup> Williams, *Forts of Ohio*, 57.

<sup>98</sup> Williams, *Forts of Ohio*, 64-65; Sword, *Washington's Indian War*, 205-207.

protect you.”<sup>99</sup> The leadership of the Indian alliance requested a ten-day reprieve to consider the warning.<sup>100</sup>

Wayne ignored their request and pushed northeast along the Maumee River. The army built one last fortification on August 19, Fort Deposit, where they stored their excess equipment and supplies in preparation for battle. It was located along the riverbank across from the Roche de Boeuf, a thirty-foot tall limestone outcropping in the middle of the Maumee River. The Roche de Boeuf held great significance for local Natives. It was a meeting place for generations of native leaders and the location of a trading post owned by Alexander McKee. Kentucky scouts discovered that the Confederacy’s warriors had set up an ambush midway between Roche de Boeuf and Fort Miamis in the flood plain of the Maumee River. They concealed themselves in a large thicket clogged with underbrush and uprooted trees that had been knocked over by a tornado several years earlier. Sword wrote, “within this area, amid a second growth of heavy bush and saplings, downed oak timber formed natural abatis so thick that they were nearly impervious in places.”<sup>101</sup> The warriors fasted, according to tradition, to prepare for the battle that they anticipated would start the next morning. But the construction of Fort Deposit delayed the army’s progress. By the time Wayne approached their position on the morning of August 20, most of the Indian fighters had been without food for three days. Some of them were so hungry that they broke ranks to get food and were absent when the battle took place.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Anthony Wayne as quoted in Williams, *Forts of Ohio*, 75.

<sup>100</sup> Williams, *Forts of Ohio*, 60, 70-71, 74-75.

<sup>101</sup> Sword, *Washington’s Indian War*, 297.

<sup>102</sup> Williams, *Forts of Ohio*, 77-78; Sword, *Washington’s Indian War*, 297; Calloway, *Victory with No Name*, 150; Alan D. Gaff, *Bayonets in the Wilderness: Anthony Wayne’s Legion in the Old Northwest* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004), 235, 295.

The Legion began its march at 7 A.M. in a drizzling rain. Within two hours, the vanguard of their columns approached the thicket. As the soldiers began picking their way through the briars and fallen trees, the Northwest Confederacy sprung their trap and began to encircle the Legion with the same crescent formation that trapped St. Clair's army three years earlier. At first, the battle swung in the Indians' favor. Bogged down in the tangled underbrush, the army's first line took heavy casualties. The survivors turned and ran, seeking cover behind the main the army that was advancing behind them. A large group of rifle-wielding Ottawa warriors pursued them. This was the turning point of the battle for two reasons. First, the Ottawas' ill-advised attack opened a large hole in the Indian line; most of the native fighters who remained behind carried nothing more than tomahawks. Secondly, the Ottawa exposed themselves to murderous gunfire from the main body of the US line. With those warriors pinned-down, isolated, and forced to defend themselves, the rest of the native army could do little more than fire from behind the fallen trees or hope the soldiers would continue forward into the thicket to engage in hand-to-hand combat. The momentum of the initial attack was lost. These scattered and disorganized efforts were of little consequence. Sixty Canadian militia led by Lieutenant-Colonel William Caldwell participated in the fight, painted like Indians to disguise themselves, but had little impact on the battle itself.<sup>103</sup>

Sensing that victory was at hand, Wayne ordered his men to fix bayonets, charge, and fire their guns into the backs of the retreating warriors to discourage them from reloading as they fled. Slowly but steadily, the Legion drove the warriors out of the river bottom and pursued them for two miles to within sight of Fort Miamis. When the Indians reached the fort, Major William

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<sup>103</sup> Sword, *Washington's Indian War*, 298-305; Cruikshank, *Correspondence of Simcoe*, 2:413-415.

Campbell told them, “I cannot let you in; you’re painted too much, my children.”<sup>104</sup> In hindsight, Campbell’s betrayal was not surprising. Providing refuge to the fleeing warriors could have been interpreted as an act of belligerence and would have given Wayne an excuse to lay siege to the fort. If the Legion attacked Fort Miamis, the Northwest Indian War would have undoubtedly mushroomed into a much larger conflict between the United States and Great Britain.

As the Legion approached Fort Miamis, Wayne’s actions were cautious but also featured a flair that befitted his sobriquet, “Mad Anthony.” The army scouted the area, advanced to within a quarter mile of the garrison, and set up camp. A tense, three-day standoff followed. At one point, Wayne boldly approached the post on horseback. He rode around its palisades, all the while hurling insults at the fort’s sentries, daring them to shoot at him. In the end, neither side was willing to suffer the consequences of firing the first shot. On the morning of August 23, the Legion of the United States withdrew and marched back toward Fort Defiance.<sup>105</sup>

Denied the security of Fort Miamis, the jilted warriors continued their retreat down the Maumee River toward Swan Creek, a temporary village that accommodated refugees from the Grand Glaize after they fled Wayne’s advancing army. British officials faced a serious crisis. They worried that the Indians could scatter and possibly abandon the Old Northwest for Spanish territory, which would have jeopardized British possession of the disputed frontier posts. To prevent this from happening, McKee and other British Indian Department employees scrambled to forward supplies and provisions to Swan Creek. It was a futile effort. Over the next several

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<sup>104</sup> Benjamin Drake, *Life of Tecumseh, and of His Brother The Prophet; with a Historical Sketch of the Shawanoe Indians* (Cincinnati: H.M. Rulison, Queen City Publishing House, 1856), 95.

<sup>105</sup> Sword, *Washington’s Indian War*, 306-310; Stone, *Life of Brant*, 2: 386; Calloway, *Victory with No Name*, 150.



months, Indian leaders abandoned the encampment, returned to their villages, and resolved to make peace with the United States.<sup>106</sup>

The aftermath of the Battle of Fallen Timbers led to much finger pointing and second guessing inside the Northwest Confederacy. In a war council a few days before the battle, Little Turtle spoke out against engaging Wayne's army. Based on reports he received from Indian scouts, Little Turtle remarked, "the night and day are alike to [Wayne] . . . We have never been able to surprise him . . . Something whispers [to] me [that] it would be prudent to listen to his offers of peace."<sup>107</sup> Blue Jacket, Egushawa, and other native leaders dismissed his reservations and labeled him a coward. Blue Jacket assumed overall command of the native army and worked with the other war chiefs to organize the time and place of their attack against Wayne and his Legion. Despite these rebukes, Little Turtle respected the Grand Council's decision to stand and fight. He led his men into battle the next morning and stood with them as they tried to check the US advance.<sup>108</sup>

The incident at Fort Miamis proved once and for all that the lofty promises made by McKee, Girty, Elliott, and other British officials were nothing more than words. Years later, Brant expressed his anger at Major Campbell's treachery in a letter to Sir John Johnson. He reminded Johnson that after the Revolutionary War, British officials encouraged the Indians to resist US expansion and raised the possibility that England would help them defend their land. This promise of support was a major reason the Indians rejected US peace overtures and went to war against the US Army. Fort Miamis, he continued, was built "under pretense of giving refuge

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<sup>106</sup> Sword, *Washington's Indian War*, 312-317.

<sup>107</sup> Stone, *Life of Brant*, 2: 387.

<sup>108</sup> Stone, *Life of Brant*, 2: 387-388; Sword, *Washington's Indian War*, 287-291.

in case of necessity,” Brant fumed, “but when that time came, the gates were shut against [the warriors] as enemies.”<sup>109</sup> Once they were denied the security of the fort, the defeat turned into a rout, dooming the pan-Indian movement’s bid to retain control over the Ohio Country. The native resistance movement was not self-sufficient and had no chance to win the Northwest Indian War unless Great Britain was willing to go all the way, even if that meant resuming hostilities against the United States. When that hope was shattered, the Northwest Confederacy ceased to be a significant military force.

The frustration that Brant and other native leaders directed toward Great Britain, while justified, was misplaced nonetheless. British weapons, ammunition, and food had sustained the pan-Indian resistance movement and enabled them to wage an effective resistance against US expansion. Without the supplies and materiel England gave to them, the native coalition would have lacked the resources to keep their coalition together long enough to defeat Harmar and St. Clair. Briefly, after the Battle of a Thousand Slain, it looked as though the Northwest Confederacy might actually achieve its goal of establishing the Ohio River as the boundary between whites and native peoples. British assistance was essential to that success.

But Indian leaders were not naive. Although leaders like Brant felt they had been used, their alliance with England was one of convenience and utility. They knew the risks and their leaders hesitated to place their full trust in the promises made by British officials who had let them down before. Great Britain reneged on promises they made to Natives during the Seven Years' War and failed to protect Indian interests in the Treaty of Paris. The hope of holding onto their land, especially the possibility of establishing a sovereign Indian state in the Old Northwest,

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<sup>109</sup> Stone, *Life of Brant*, 2:390.

was too enticing not to throw caution to the wind. The Battle of Fallen Timbers validated the pragmatism and caution of the centrists and Right Wing of the Sandusky Alliance, proving that they were right all along. Geopolitically, any country so situated—between England to the north, Spain to the west, and the US to the south and east—would have been a dominant economic and diplomatic force. For that reason alone, the territory was too valuable to think that land-hungry countries with colonial ambitions would have allowed the Indians to occupy it indefinitely.

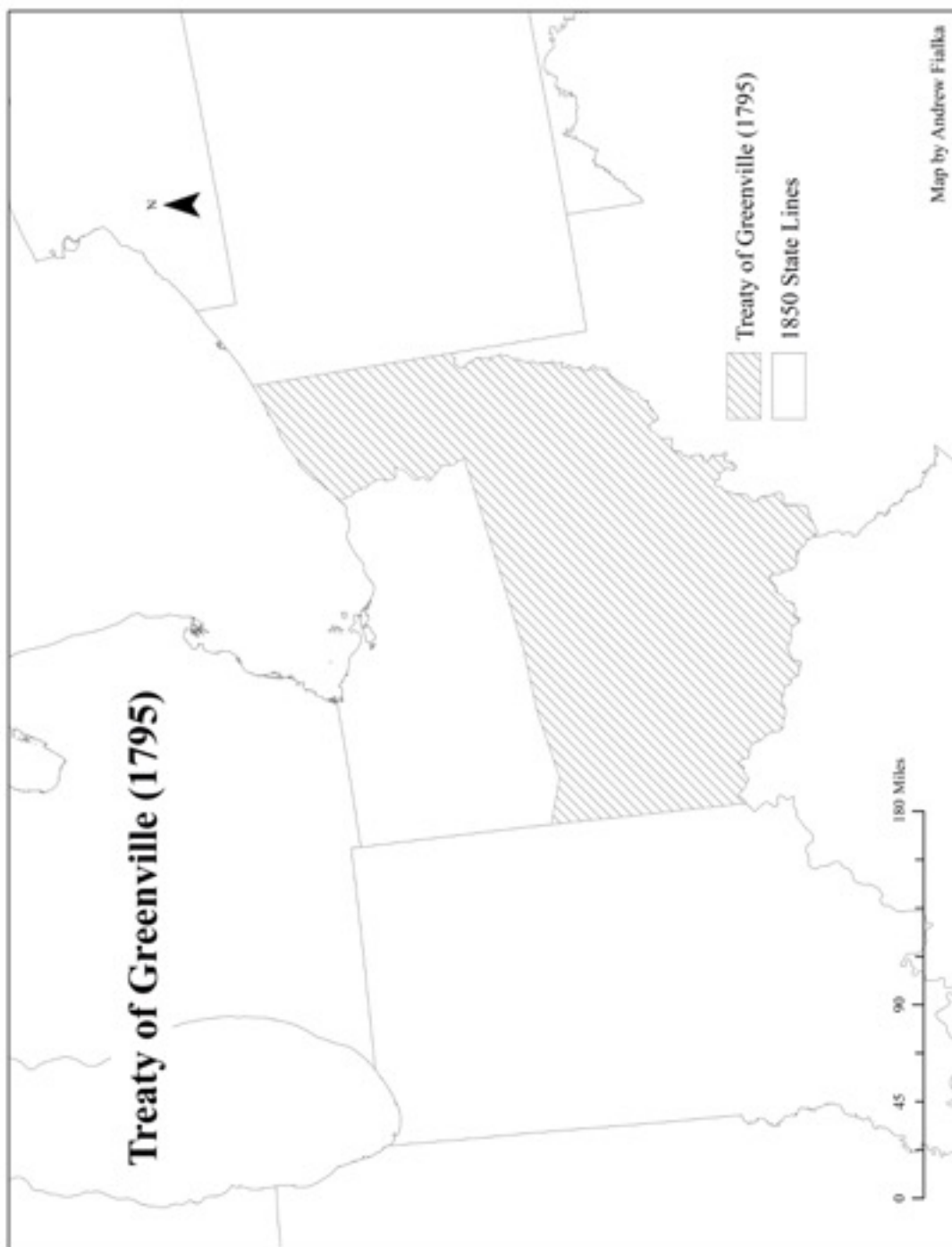
Wayne completed one more task before he withdrew to Fort Greenville for the winter of 1794-1795. He sent soldiers to the head of the Maumee River, the former site of Kekionga, where they erected a fort in September 1794, Fort Wayne. A grand council convened at Greenville on July 15, 1795, to negotiate a peace treaty and end the war. The boundaries fixed at Fort Harmar in 1789 were the basis of the new agreement [see Figure 6]. Timothy Pickering, who replaced Knox as the Secretary of War in January 1795, called for the cession of several additional tracts inside Indian Territory, “indemnification for the blood and treasure expended” by the federal government during the war, to establish military posts, provide security, and facilitate trade between both sides.<sup>110</sup> Included among these military reservations were the forts Wayne built north of the Treaty of Greenville boundary line (including Fort Defiance and Fort Wayne) and the former French trading posts located east of the Mississippi River (Vincennes, Kaskaskia, Cahokia) [Figure 4]. Several other strategic locations were also turned over to the United States, including the portage between the head of the Maumee River and Wabash River, and a cession on the western shore of Lake Michigan (the eventual cite of Chicago, Illinois).<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Timothy Pickering as quoted in Sword, *Washington's Indian War*, 324-325.

<sup>111</sup> “The Treaty of Greenville,” 3 August 1795, *The Avalon Law Project: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy* (Yale Law School: The Avalon Project, 2008), [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th\\_century/greenvil.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/greenvil.asp) (accessed 30 March 2018); Calloway, *Victory with No Name*, 151.

Figure 6: Treaty of Greenville, 1795



Ironically, it was victory not defeat that led the United States to finally acknowledge the Indians' preference for collective negotiation. Wayne negotiated the Treaty of Greenville with all of the Indians of the *pays d'en haut* as a whole instead of dividing them and signing a series of separate agreements. This was not a nod toward pan-Indianism, however. It was to save time and money, and it was extremely effective in both respects. Pickering realized that negotiating individual agreements for annuities with each individual Nation would have been laborious and costly. Instead, the US gave the Northwest Confederacy a lump sum of \$9,500 every year and let their leaders decide how to divide it. The War Department spent less than \$20,000 to purchase an array of presents—including knives, blankets, colored cloth, brass kettles, and other small gifts—and a large supply of liquor for native negotiators to consume. All of the major leaders of the Northwest Confederacy signed their names to the Treaty of Greenville, including Little Turtle, Blue Jacket, Buckongahelas, and Egushaway. With that, the Northwest Indian War was over.<sup>112</sup>

#### Aftermath: US Indian Policy and Pan-Indianism

Once the US Army achieved “expansion through conquest,” federal Indian policy shifted toward the assimilation of native peoples. Although “Indian assimilation” is commonly identified with the presidency of Thomas Jefferson, he borrowed its central tenets from Washington who first articulated the idea in his Third Annual Message to Congress on October 25, 1791. It was based on the premise that the only way whites and Indians could live in peace was for native peoples to give up hunting and turn toward farming and animal husbandry. To that end, early assimilation policy focused on two intertwined goals: establishing federal control over the Indian trade and introducing the Indians to private property by teaching them to use Euro-American

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<sup>112</sup> Sword, *Washington's Indian War*, 318, 325-329; Calloway, *Victory with No Name*, 151.

agricultural practices. The US government created the “Factory System” through the Indian Trade and Intercourse Act in May 1796. Traders would be licensed through the US government and operate out of military posts in the Northwest Territory. The new law defined the territorial boundaries between the Indians and whites and proscribed stiff penalties for American citizens who engaged in illicit trade with them and violated their territorial sovereignty. It achieved little success in this regard, as private traders continued to take advantage of Natives and supplied them with alcohol.<sup>113</sup>

The second aspect of assimilation policy, turning native peoples into “Red Yeomen,” was eventually implemented by US Indian Agents during the Jefferson Administration. The agents taught the Indians to farm privately held lands, but this also created greater reliance on trade goods and implements that were supplied exclusively by the US government. When western farmers began to pressure the federal government to acquire additional Indian lands to expand their settlements, assimilation was seen as a convenient way to facilitate westward expansion without bloodshed. Inevitably, the Indians would be drawn into increasing debt to government-licensed traders. Those debts would then be leveraged to gain additional land cessions.<sup>114</sup>

In the early nineteenth century, however, the pan-Indian movement experienced a revival that threatened the government’s assimilation program. The leaders of this new iteration of pan-Indianism were the Shawnee prophet, Tenskwatawa, and his brother, the famous war leader

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<sup>113</sup> Horsman, *Expansion and Indian Policy*, 60-63, 75, 106; Royal B. Way, “The United States Factory System for Trading with the Indians, 1796-1822,” in *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, vol. 6, no. 2 (Sep., 1919), 223; “An Act for Establishing Trading Houses with the Indian Tribes,” 18 April 1796, *The Avalon Law Project: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy* (Yale Law School: The Avalon Project, 2008), [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th\\_century/na028.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/na028.asp) (accessed 5 June 2018).

<sup>114</sup> Horsman, *Expansion and Indian Policy*, 60-63, 75, 106-110; Thomas Jefferson to William Henry Harrison, 27 February 1803, in Michael P. Johnson, ed., *Reading the American Past: Selected Historical Documents, Vol. I: To 1877*, 4th edition (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2009), 202-203;

Tecumseh. These men represented a symbiosis between native spiritualism and militance. Between 1806-1808, Tenskwatawa called all native peoples in the Old Northwest to settle with him, first outside the walls of Fort Greenville then at Tippecanoe along the Wabash River in Miami Territory. Tenskwatawa, whose spiritual guidance was the driving force behind resurgent nativism, intended these communities to be expressions of defiance, first against the 1795 Treaty of Greenville and second against Little Turtle, who had fully embraced assimilation and government annuities. In the eyes of the nativists, this made him an accomplice of US imperialism.<sup>115</sup>

The nativist resurgence was motivated by several factors. White colonialism had brought environmental degradation to native lands, primarily through overhunting encouraged by the peltry trade, which decimated the wild game populations that Indians depended on for survival. Assimilation threatened many traditional elements of native culture, especially its emphasis on Christianity, and Euro-American farming practices that reversed traditional gender roles. Nativists worried that following such a program would rob them of “their political independence . . . and sacred powers,” according to Dowd.<sup>116</sup> To mitigate those effects, Tenskwatawa and Tecumseh worked to undercut the influence of the so-called “annuity chiefs” who were designated by the US government to act as the primary conduits of annuity money.<sup>117</sup>

The Treaty of Fort Wayne in 1809 boosted the pan-Indian movement even further. For a payment of “less than two cents per acre,” Northwest Territory Governor William Henry

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<sup>115</sup> Gregory Evans Dowd, “Thinking and Believing: Nativism and Unity in the Ages of Pontiac and Tecumseh,” in *American Indian Quarterly* 16 (1992), 309-312.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 318.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 309-314, 316-318.

Harrison acquired over 2.5 million acres of Indian land in the present state of Indiana.<sup>118</sup> The annuity chiefs were among those who had signed the treaty. Native outrage over Treaty of Fort Wayne, combined with Harrison's victory over Tenskwatawa at the Battle of Tippecanoe in 1811, elevated Tecumseh's profile over that of his brother as Indians in the *pays d'en haut* realized that military resistance would be the only way they could to defend their territory. Tecumseh became the spearhead of a new wave of militant nativism that followed the example set by Blue Jacket, Little Turtle, Egushaway and others in the 1780s and 1790s, and culminated in renewed native alliance with Great Britain. Unlike during the Northwest Indian War, the English Army and native warriors fought alongside each other during the War of 1812, until Tecumseh's death at the Battle of Thames in 1813 broke the spirit of the pan-Indian resistance. After that point, Richard White, remarked, it "could no longer pose a major threat or be a major asset to an empire or a republic."<sup>119</sup> In the aftermath of the War of 1812, US expansion proceeded methodically and virtually unimpeded to the Mississippi River, a stark contrast to the immediacy of the Trail of Tears that defined the removal of the Southern Indians in the 1830s.<sup>120</sup>

#### Aftermath: Land Speculation

The events of the 1780s and early 1790s proved that the US Army was poorly suited to facilitate the settlement of the Old Northwest. It could not deter squatters. The army was unable to prevent white raiders from crossing the Ohio River and attacking Indian settlements, nor could it protect legal western settlers in Kentucky, western Virginia, and western Pennsylvania. The frontier conflict threatened the US economy, the financial solvency of the national government,

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 321.

<sup>119</sup> White, *Middle Ground*, 517.

<sup>120</sup> Dowd, "Thinking and Believing," 321-322; Horsman, *Expansion and Indian Policy*, 167-170.



and challenged the sovereignty it wielded over its western lands. The outcome of the Battle of a Thousand Slain struck fear into the hearts of frontier settlers who relied upon the US Army to be “the main barrier” between their settlements and the “incursions of our cruel & merciless enemy.”<sup>121</sup> Peace on the frontier, either through diplomacy or war, was the only way that frontier settlement could proceed safely and confidently. Wayne’s victory at Fallen Timbers and the Treaty of Greenville provided both.<sup>122</sup>

The end of the Northwest Indian War seemed to foreshadow a boom-era for western land speculators. The settlement of Ohio could begin earnest. Revolutionary War veterans hurried to exchange their land warrants for parcels in Ohio’s Virginia Military District between the Scioto and Muskingum Rivers. After the Ohio Company, Scioto Company, and Miami Purchases, the last bulk sale of public land in Ohio was the Connecticut Western Reserve, 3.3 million acres that bordered Lake Erie. The state of Connecticut retained that land when it ceded all of its western claims in 1786. Half a million of those acres, the Fire Lands, were reserved for Connecticut citizens whose homes were destroyed by British soldiers during the Revolution. The state sold the remaining 2.8 million acres to the Connecticut Land Company at a price of \$1.2 million. Politicians courted public support for the sale by promising to fund state ministries and public schools through the revenue. To suppress public accusations that the endeavor was a speculative enterprise, most of the land was divided into plots and distributed among the individual

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<sup>121</sup> Cornelius Bogard and Abraham Claypool to Governor Henry Lee, 6 December 1791, in William P. Palmer and Sherwin McRae, eds., *Calendar of Virginia State Papers and Other Manuscripts*, vol. 5 (Richmond, Va.: Rush U. Derr, Superintendent of Public Printing, 1885), 406.

<sup>122</sup> John P. Duvall to the Governor of Virginia, 8 December 1791, in Palmer and McRae, *Virginia State Papers*, 5:406.

subscribers in the Company through random drawings. Only a few parcels eventually found their way into the hands of speculators who held no stake in the Connecticut Land Company.<sup>123</sup>

The liberalization of federal land policy after 1800 undercut large speculative enterprises by selling land in smaller parcels at cheaper prices than before. Congress established land offices in Ohio's four biggest population centers, including Cincinnati and Marietta, and reduced the minimum quantity for purchase from 640 to 320 acres. The price was fixed at \$2 per acre, and purchases could be made on credit payable over four years. To remain competitive, speculators were forced "to offer more liberal terms of credit or some other special inducement to attract purchasers," when they could not match the government's price, according to Sakolski.<sup>124</sup> Out of desperation, some speculators advertised their holdings abroad, hoping to profit by selling large tracts to foreign investors.<sup>125</sup>

The most successful Ohio speculators were not involved with any of the big four land companies. They were men who arrived in the West with established connections or were men of financial means who bought shares and hung onto them until population growth drove the land values up. The four largest landowners in Ohio after the Northwest Indian War all had at least some experience as surveyors. Three of the four listed that as their primary occupation. Surveyor-speculators outside of the Virginia Military District—which was subject to the ambiguous standards set by the state of Virginia—secured large tracts with clean titles because the system to divide and sell the land was orderly and created to minimize conflicts. They knew

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<sup>123</sup> Sakolski, *Great American Land Bubble*, 119-122; Cayton, *Frontier Republic*, 53.

<sup>124</sup> Sakolski, *Great American Land Bubble*, 170.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 169-171, 191.

how the system worked, acquired an intimate knowledge of the land through surveying, secured the best tracts for themselves, then held onto them as their holdings accumulated value.<sup>126</sup>

In the end, the population boom in Ohio was driven by small-scale speculators who accumulated land and profit in a number of unique ways. One method was a practice called “town jobbing.” When land offices opened in a new area, local businessmen and politicians scanned maps to find the most suitable locations for new towns, rushed to buy up all of the land in that area, then sold it at inflated prices. Bidding wars, corruption, and bribery were all hallmarks of this practice. In some cases, the cities these town jobbers laid out were nothing more than hopeful plans; the actual plots were still densely forested or in the middle of swamps. Less-than-savvy investors lost large sums of money buying plots in these uninhabitable areas. Other speculators accumulated large land holdings by buying up foreclosures when fellow investors defaulted on their loans. Many of these self-made speculators became powerful politicians in Ohio after it gained statehood in 1803. They supported the Democratic-Republican ideals of laissez-faire economics, self-government, and local control. Above all, they resented the Federalist-controlled Northwest Territory Government, dominated by men like Governor Arthur St. Clair, whose political power was not earned but rather granted by the federal government. The ascendance of the Democratic-Republicans in Ohio politics was emblematic of the changing political current of the early nineteenth century.<sup>127</sup>

### Aftermath: Foreign Diplomacy

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<sup>126</sup> ; Cayton, *Frontier Republic*, 51; Lee Soltow, “Inequality Amidst Abundance: Land Ownership in Early Nineteenth Century Ohio,” *Ohio History Journal*, vol. 88, no. 2 (1979), 137-147.

<sup>127</sup> Sakolski, *Great American Land Bubble*, 172, 175, 178; Cayton, *Frontier Republic*, 51-53; Andrew R.L. Cayton, “The Contours of Power in a Frontier Town: Marietta, Ohio, 1788-1803,” in *Journal of the Early Republic*, vol. 6, no. 2 (Summer, 1986), 119-126.

1795 was a critical year for the US government. Several issues that had plagued the United States since its inception were finally brought to a resolution. The Treaty of Greenville ended the Northwest Indian War. US diplomats also settled several pressing foreign policy concerns that were at least partially intertwined with that conflict. The first was Great Britain's refusal to relinquish the disputed frontier posts in the Old Northwest. The worst-kept secret of the war was the assistance and moral support British Indian Department officials at Fort Detroit and the other Great Lakes forts had provided to the Northwest Confederacy. Secretary of War Henry Knox believed that as long as the posts remained under British control, "[t]hey are and will be . . . a source from whence will issue much evil."<sup>128</sup> Knox's prediction was not prophetic, however. In a sense, the Northwest Indian War ensured England's continued occupation of the posts, because the army's preoccupation with defeating the Indian alliance prevented an aggressive campaign to seize the forts. Wayne's victory at Fallen Timbers shattered the native confederacy and removed that distraction. In November 1794, Chief Justice of the US Supreme Court, John Jay, started negotiations with English officials over several pressing issues, including the frontier posts, trade restrictions, and the British Navy's impressment of US sailors on the open seas as a result of an ongoing war between France and England. The treaty that came out of those discussions was very controversial and publicly derided because it did little to solve the those maritime issues. The only part of Jay's Treaty that was considered a success was the stipulation that England would turn over the disputed forts to the United States no later than June 1796. General Wayne used his knowledge about Jay's negotiations with Great Britain to bolster

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<sup>128</sup> Henry Knox to Josiah Harmar, 23 August 1785, Harmar Papers, vol. 2.

his negotiating position at Fort Greenville. Wayne told the Indians that England was giving the posts to the United States because the US Army had “proved too powerful for the British.”<sup>129</sup>

Jay’s Treaty spurred an important foreign policy breakthrough with Spain regarding free navigation on the Mississippi River and the disputed boundary between Spanish-held West Florida and the United States. Navigation on the river was an especially contentious issue for western farmers in Kentucky and Tennessee and fed two significant secession western movements in the 1780s. When the news spread about Jay’s negotiations in England, Spanish officials grew concerned that the United States could form an alliance with England and possibly launch a joint invasion of Spanish territory. Spanish Prime Minister Manuel de Godoy reached out to US officials to negotiate a treaty of his own. President Washington sent Thomas Pinckney to Spain, where he forged an agreement that established the thirty-first parallel as the border between the two nations. The treaty also granted US citizens free navigation rights on the Mississippi River and eliminated duties on American goods at New Orleans. Alongside the Treaty of Greenville, Jay’s Treaty and Pinckney’s Treaty marked the culmination of a fifteen-year long effort by the US government to assert its federal sovereignty over the lands east of the Mississippi River relative to competing foreign powers and Indian Nations.<sup>130</sup>

#### Aftermath: Fiscal Stability

By the time of St. Clair’s defeat, the national economy was already enjoying a robust recovery from the postwar depression, primarily due to the fiscal policies of the federal

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<sup>129</sup> Quote from Sword, *President Washington’s Indian War*, 328, 315; “John Jay’s Treaty, 1794-1795,” US Department of State: Office of the Historian, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1784-1800/jay-treaty> (accessed 30 March 2018).

<sup>130</sup> “Treaty of San Lorenzo/Pinckney’s Treaty, 1795,” US Department of State: Office of the Historian, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1784-1800/pickney-treaty> (accessed 30 March 2018).

government. Contrary to the long-held notion that the efforts of the First US Congress were focused primarily on creating the Bill of Rights, Edling noted that six weeks of debate in its first session dealt with foreign affairs and revenue compared to the ten days it spent developing the first ten constitutional amendments. Using the financial powers enumerated in the Constitution, Congress enacted a series of revenue measures—the Impost Act, the Collection Act, and Tonnage Act—to generate much-needed income for the Treasury Department. By the mid-1790s, the US government was raising \$5-6 million per year from customs duties alone. Nationalizing the states' debts allowed state assemblies to lower direct taxes on their citizens because an estimated eighty percent of state expenditures during the Confederation Period were used to meet congressional requisitions and pay down war debt owed by the national and state governments. The tax obligations of individuals fell to a level commensurate with what they had been before the Revolutionary War. In most cases, state tax rates decreased by seventy-five percent between 1789-1791. Several states were able to abolish direct taxes altogether.<sup>131</sup>

Edling pointed out that Treasury Secretary Alexander Hamilton exerted limited influence over fiscal policy because the Constitution assigned the power of passing fiscal legislation to the House of Representatives and his reports on public credit and manufactures “did not signal any significant departure from the reigning ideas in the House.”<sup>132</sup> Hamilton realized that imposts and excises were the only taxes that the general population would accept to remediate the national debt. His tax proposals called for internal taxes on “carriages, snuff and manufactured tobacco, sales at auction, license for the retail of alcohol, and licenses to practice law,” as well as

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<sup>131</sup> Edling, *Hercules in the Cradle*, 50-53, 59, 61-62, 66-68.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

increased duties on alcohol, coffee, and tea and an excise on domestically produced alcohol.<sup>133</sup> Between 1792-1795, Hamilton's taxation plan generated "\$18.1 million in customs duties and \$1.2 million in internal revenue," a dramatic increase over what the Confederation raised in the 1780s.<sup>134</sup> The national economy only grew stronger during the French Revolution when the United States became a major player in the trans-Atlantic trade.<sup>135</sup>

Overall, Edling believed that "the Federalists' fiscal regime [was distinctive for] the way it managed to raise so much revenue with so little protest."<sup>136</sup> New-found financial stability led merchants to cooperate with the new tax collection measures and largely reject smuggling, which had been so integral to their income in previous years. The federal government had enough money to create a new army that allowed it to conquer the Northwest Confederacy. Reducing the tax burden for individuals allowed Americans to pay their back taxes and led to a drastic decline in the number of tax protests. The Legion of the United States effectively suppressed the ones that did occur, like Whiskey Rebellion and Fries Rebellion, which were exceptions rather than the rule.<sup>137</sup>

Predictably, paying down the war debt proved to be much more controversial than lowering the tax burden of individuals. It became synonymous with the political debates of the 1790s and was one of several contentious issues that led to the development of the two-party system. Hamilton felt that "a well-managed public debt . . . was a critical institution of the

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 51, 68-69, 74-79.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 79-80.

modern state,” essential to establishing US stability at a time of intense global competition among imperial powers.<sup>138</sup> The Secretary’s proposals for retiring the debt through issuing low-interest securities was controversial for two reasons. Anti-Federalists like James Madison believed that redeeming them in cash at par value was bad for the original holders who had sold them away. They also worried that getting rid of the national debt would erode the power of the individual states relative to that of the US government. Hamilton, on the other hand, believed eliminating the debt would make wealthy citizens invested, literally and figuratively, in the success of the federal government. Establishing the “full faith and credit” of the United States would generate capital that could boost the power the national economy, not the national government. Guaranteeing the primacy of the contract was the most important element to creditworthiness, in lieu of simply repudiating debts.<sup>139</sup>

In the end, Democratic-Republicans reluctantly embraced the framework that Hamilton and the Federalists had established in the early years of the republic and paid-off the debt. In fact, Democratic-Republicans were actually aligned with the Federalists on many fiscal issues and largely carried forward Hamiltonian Fiscal Policy when they gained full control over the federal government. Madison supported the creation of the Treasury Department and a strong Secretary of the Treasury. Jefferson refused to repudiate the national debt after he was elected president in 1800. Instead, they supported low taxes and gradual debt amortization. Contrary to popular belief, Democratic-Republicans amassed more debt than their Federalist predecessors. The Louisiana Purchase and the War of 1812 were both paid for using borrowed money.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>139</sup> Edling, *Hercules in the Cradle*, 82-86, 91, 98; Holton, *Unruly Americans*, 259.

<sup>140</sup> Edling, *Hercules in the Cradle*, 104-107.



### Aftermath: Conclusion

The Northwest Indian War, and the Battle of a Thousand Slain in particular, were cataclysmic events in early US history. It affected the US government and its citizens, Native Americans, and other foreign powers in North America. The war brought them together in a way unlike any other single occurrence in the post-Revolution period and set many precedents for how those forces would react to, and react upon, each other in the coming years.

For the United States, the war spanned two separate national governments that were radically different from each other. The Articles of Confederation were created to facilitate collective action among the thirteen states during the war. By design, the central government created by the Articles had a very narrow scope of authority in financial, diplomatic, and military affairs, which protected the rights of the individual states. This weak national government proved to be an impediment during peacetime, because the Confederation Congress lacked the authority to effectively manage the economy, establish territorial sovereignty, and implement national and foreign policy. Selling the public domain was seen as way to generate much-needed revenue for the government to pay down its war debt and meet other fiscal obligations. The national economy was mired in a deep recession, so the western territory presented intriguing economic opportunities for Americans across the socioeconomic spectrum. Prominent military and political figures on the national and state level hoped to leverage their power and wealth into lucrative land speculation ventures. Poor and middling Americans saw the West as a place where they might achieve economic self-sufficiency.

Asserting national sovereignty over the West was a violent, tension-filled process. Squatters violated US laws and established communities in the Ohio Country, which was still

Indian land. Native peoples responded to white encroachment by attacking the squatters and legal settlements south of the Ohio River, and frontiersmen launched retaliatory raids into Indian Territory. This racially charged frontier conflict was the beginning of the Northwest Indian War,. In the beginning, it was a war waged between western settlers and the Indians of the Old Northwest. The US Army was assigned to patrol the Ohio River Valley, evict the squatters, and prevent whites from attacking the Indians. Financial difficulties and long-standing suspicions Americans held toward standing armies meant that the postwar army was undersized and underfunded. Congress had no authority to create the army on its own; it had to rely on the individual states to provide the soldiers and pay for them, but Congress did not have the power to compel the states to follow through on their requisitions. As a result, the army was unable to effectively stop the frontier violence from escalating.

Managing Indian affairs was equally troubling. The Treaty of Paris granted the United States sovereignty, not ownership, over the lands east of the Mississippi River. Before peaceful expansion could proceed, the Confederation first had to convince the native occupants of the Old Northwest to cede their lands to the United States. The first US Indian Policy was based on the flawed premise that Indians were conquered people because of their alliance with England during the Revolutionary War. Congress appointed Indian Commissioners who negotiated three treaties with the Indians between 1784-1786 that acquired ownership over two-thirds of the present state of Ohio for the US government. The commissioners divided Indian leaders among themselves and intimidated them into ceding native lands in the Ohio Country. A growing pan-Indian resistance movement denounced the Americans' tactics, and declared the treaties illegitimate, and escalated their attacks against frontier settlements.

The first iteration of the postwar pan-Indian movement was the Sandusky Alliance, formed in 1783. The movement had two central tenets. First was the belief that all Indians belonged to a common race. Second, Indian land was owned by all native peoples in common. These two core elements were used to create a broad coalition from a diverse set of people who had traditionally been separated by language barriers, conflicting territorial ambitions, historical rivalries, and geopolitical concerns. The Alliance's goals were to negotiate with the United States only as a collective body and to demand that the boundary between white and Indian settlements be the Ohio River. Unity was difficult to maintain, however, due to the different ideological factions inside the movement. Some favored peace with the United States at all costs, while others cited the white settlements that had already appeared in Ohio as justification to go to war. The final group wanted to exhaust all diplomatic options before turning to armed conflict as a last resort.

Adherents to the pan-Indian movement used an array of strategies to boost their efforts. They cultivated their alliance with British officials at Detroit to secure supplies and material to sustain their movement, engaged in playoff diplomacy to gain leverage that would boost their diplomatic and military efforts, and also used threats and intimidation to ensure compliance among its members. Some of its members looked at the United States and believed that continued resistance was futile, so they signed peace treaties with the US commissioners, ceded their lands, and moved to reservations to the North and West. Others worked as emissaries between the Indians and the United States or served as scouts and interpreters for the US Army.

The Northwest Indian War and the divisive tactics used by the US commissioners worked in unison to divide the movement. By the summer of 1788, violence in the West had grown

increasingly deadly for both sides. At a council at the Maumee Rapids, the centrists suggested that the Alliance offer a compromise to the United States that modified the demand for the Ohio River boundary. The militant factions refused to consider it. They broke away and formed the Northwest Confederacy, which was based on the same ideals as the Sandusky Alliance except for one thing: if the United States did not agree to divide white from Indian lands using the Ohio River, they were prepared for all-out war. From that point forward, both groups operated independently of each other, although the Confederacy's military success quickly led it to overshadow its rival.

Foreign policy challenges made the wartime situation worse. Citing violations of the terms of the Treaty of Paris, Great Britain refused to evacuate a string of forts on US territory south of the Great Lakes, including Detroit. The British Indian Department provided ammunition, food, and guns to the pan-Indian rebels who were waging a frontier war against the United States. Such a war was advantageous for England. As long as the Americans were preoccupied with fighting the Indians, they could not attack and seize the disputed posts, which allowed the British government to maintain its monopoly over the Old Northwest fur-trade economy. If the Indian War, domestic turmoil, and the failing economy caused the US government to collapse, England would be well-positioned to regain control over its former colonies. At the same time, the Spanish government—which controlled the lands west of the Mississippi River and the Floridas—refused to grant US citizens free navigation on the Mississippi River and charged excessive duties on American goods shipped to New Orleans. Spain felt that the massive expansion of the United States' territorial domain posed a significant

geopolitical threat to its colonial holdings in North America and hoped that such measures would prevent the United States from growing too powerful too quickly.

These foreign policy disputes created significant domestic unrest. Without access to the Mississippi River, financial disaster loomed for Kentucky farmers who had no other practical or cost-effective way to transport their goods to East Coast and global markets. Indian attacks, which invariably used the guns that had been supplied by British traders at the disputed posts, only added to their insecurity. The Confederation was unable to provide relief from either problem. The US Army did not have the size or power to re-take the disputed posts or provide an effective deterrence for Indian raids. Consequently, a considerable secession movement grew in Kentucky around the same time that similar issues spawned the short-lived State of Franklin.

The continuing financial crisis generated domestic unrest among American citizens over oppressive taxation and lack of debt relief by the state and national governments. This, combined with the threat of western secession, and the Northwest Indian War, made it clear that the Confederation government was incapable of fostering peace and stability among the states in the postwar period. American citizens had long believed that a strong national government and standing army were threats to individual freedom and self-government. It was ironic, therefore, that the weak centralized government and inconsequential army they had created for themselves had proven so incompetent that they had created a situation that actually did pose a threat to the United States' continued existence.

The Constitution imbued the US government with the power to solve many of those issues, including the Indian War. The Constitution gave the federal government the power it needed to end the war, but success was not immediate. Governor Arthur St. Clair pursued

“peaceful expansion through division and bribery,” offering to pay the Indians for lands they ceded to the United States. The pan-Indian movement rejected that offer, too, and cyclical frontier violence escalated yet again, forcing US politicians and military officials to confront the harsh reality that peaceful expansion was not possible. From that point forward, the United States resolved to achieve “expansion through conquest, then assimilation.” A key component of this method was “obfuscatory diplomacy.” The government attempted to negotiate but offered terms they knew the Indians would reject, hoping that diplomacy would distract from a massive expansion of the US Army. Once the Indians were conquered, the government planned to turn them into “Red Yeomen,” which they believed would pave the way for peaceful expansion in the years to come.

Military victories over the United States in 1790 and 1791 gave the Northwest Confederacy a considerable amount of leverage with England. Against Harmar and St. Clair, native leaders successfully rallied large numbers of warriors and implemented effective, disciplined military tactics that outclassed the overmatched US Army. They used an extensive network of Indian scouts to track the army, which provided valuable intelligence and allowed native leaders to attack when the advantages favored them. They lured the army out of its forts and into carefully planned ambushes. Warriors fought skillfully from behind concealed positions to negate the US advantage of artillery firepower and targeted American officers to throw the soldiers into disarray.

The Battle of a Thousand Slain forced a reckoning for both sides. For the United States, the battle was a national embarrassment and point of crisis. Over half of the army had been wiped out, most of its senior officers had been killed, tens of thousands of dollars in equipment

had been lost. A congressional investigation was conducted, and politicians debated what the next steps should be. But there never really was any other choice than for the government to resume the war effort. Too much was riding on the outcome of the battle, not the least of which was national pride and the belief that territorial domination was one of the ways that a nation-state could take its place among other powerful nations. The federal government deployed obfuscatory diplomacy to shield the creation of “Mad” Anthony Wayne’s powerful Legion of the United States.

On the other hand, the victory over St. Clair convinced the pro-war advocates that their efforts were blessed by a higher power, boosted their confidence, and emboldened the Northwest Confederacy to reject renewed US peace overtures with lethal hostility. But the Battle of a Thousand Slain was also the high-water mark of the Northwest Confederacy. Victory created internal division between those who wanted to continue the war and others who wanted to leverage their military success and negotiate a favorable settlement with the United States from a position of strength. Little Turtle was the most prominent leader who expressed doubts about whether the Indians could defeat Wayne and his Legion.

The Battle of Fallen Timbers and Treaty of Greenville ended the Northwest Indian War and devastated pan-Indian movement, forcing it under ground for the next two decades. England had failed to protect their native allies at Fort Miamis. Great Britain turned the disputed frontier posts over to the United States, but the Northwest Indian War would not be the last time that the Crown aided a pan-Indian alliance to check US expansion. Spain, fearing that improved relations between the United States and Great Britain could endanger its control of New Orleans, granted US boats free navigation on the Mississippi River and reduced duties on US goods at the port.

The impact the battle had on the United States went beyond the military establishment and US Indian Policy. With peace established in the West, the settlement of the Ohio Country began in earnest. The War Department started implementing its program to assimilate native peoples, hoping that turning the Indians into “Red Yeomen” would allow the peaceful expansion of white settlement to the banks of the Mississippi River and beyond. It marked the beginning of US colonialism—subjugation of “the other” in order to exploit them or alienate their lands for the national benefit. Westward expansion brought a host of other issues to the forefront of the national discourse: slavery, industrialization, Manifest Destiny, and wars of territorial conquest waged against neighboring countries. Perhaps the greatest legacy of the Northwest Indian War and the Battle of a Thousand Slain was that it marked the beginning of a bloody history of native dispossession at the hands of the US government. This was especially true of the US Army, which became, in the words of historian Robert Wooster, “the federal government’s most visible agent of empire.”<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Robert Wooster as quoted in Calloway, *Victory with No Name*, 6.



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