Forgotten Victory: The Sullivan Expedition of 1779

by

COLONEL JOHN B. B. TRUSSELL, JR., US ARMY, RETIRED

Though generations have gone since then,
And scenes of life are often shifted,
We see John Sullivan and his men,
As mists of a hundred years are lifted.[1]

After the Battle of Monmouth on 28 June 1778, conventional fighting of any significance in the northern part of the United States during the Revolutionary War virtually came to an end. From then on, the opposing armies under George Washington and Sir Henry Clinton limited themselves primarily to patrol actions and skirmishes, punctuated by occasional fair-size but limited-objective raids.

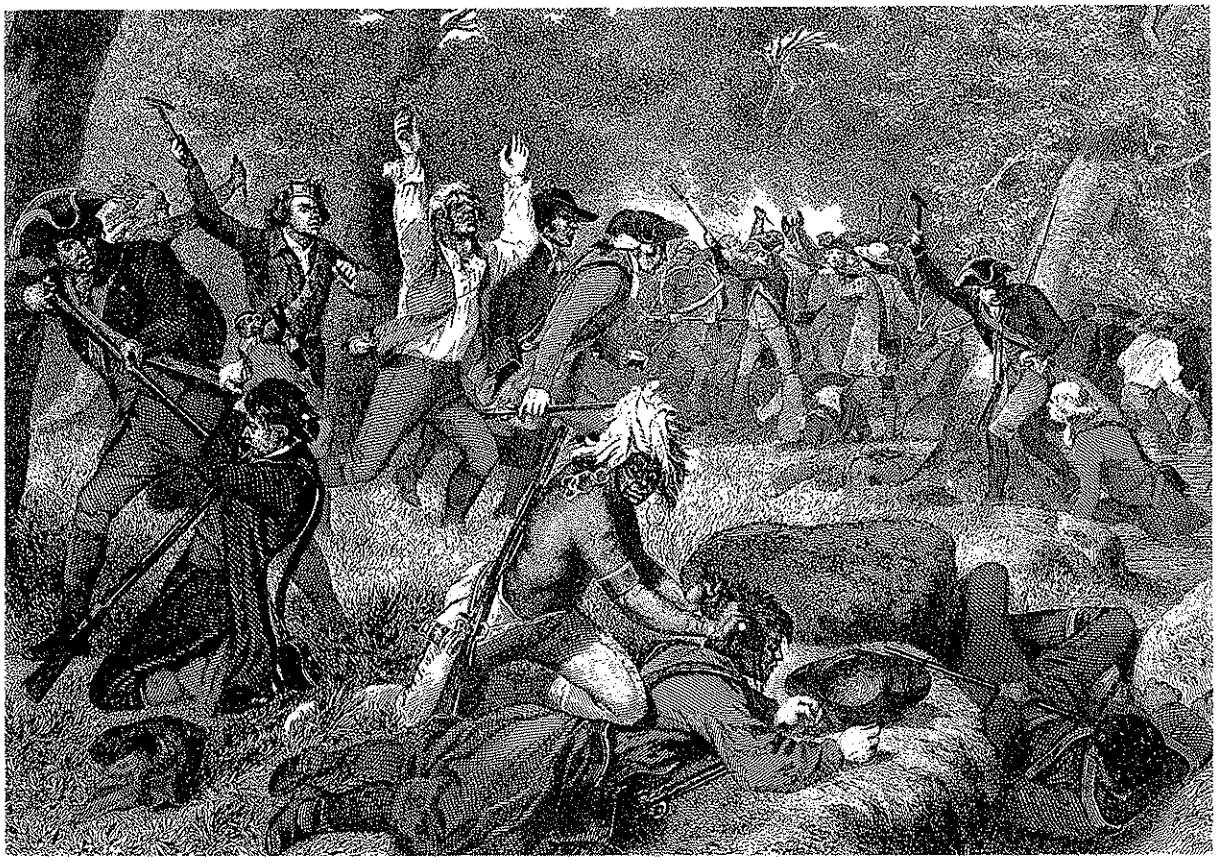
The center of action was to move southward into Georgia, the Carolinas, and ultimately Virginia. So far as regular formations were concerned, however, this development did not begin to take shape until the summer of 1779. For almost a year after Monmouth, therefore, activity was spasmodic and limited, at least in what are generally considered the war's major theaters.

There was one exception. This was a major operation, carried out against Indians and Tories deep in their own territory by a force which, for the times, represented a massive commitment in terms of intelligence effort, troop strengths, and logistical resources. It is known simply as "The Sullivan Expedition."

Although a tendency exists to overlook the fact, British influence was not restricted to the vicinity of the seaboard. From headquarters at Quebec, General Frederick Haldimand commanded the independent British "Northern Army," presiding over a chain of outposts stretching from Oswego and Niagara to Detroit and Vincennes. With activity in the New Jersey and New York City area subsiding, and operations in the south not yet begun, it was from this "Northern Army" that a newly serious threat began to emerge.

It took the form of intensified raids, directed from Niagara and carried out chiefly by Tories and Indians, against the New York and Pennsylvania frontiers. Some of the operations, such as the assaults on Wyoming, Pennsylvania, on 3 July 1778 and against Cherry Valley, New York, on 10-11 November 1778, were fairly sizable actions. What in the long run was more wearing, however, were the scattered but frequent small-scale raids on outlying settlements and isolated farms.

These led to what Washington described as "the increasing clamor of the country and the repeated applications of the States immediately concerned" for protection.[2] Certainly, the government had an obligation to provide a degree of security for the population. Beyond this, the attacks threatened serious troubles for American military capacity. Since the inland farms had thus far felt relatively little impact of the war, they were important sources of the cattle and



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Tory-Indian Raid on Wyoming Valley, Pennsylvania.

grain on which the Army largely subsisted; but with the increasing numbers of settlers abandoning their farms, this source was in a fair way to be lost.

The chief threat came from the "Six Nations" of the Iroquois Confederation. Their mobility and their familiarity with the territory meant that there was little chance of defeating them decisively in battle. They *would* be vulnerable, however, to a "scorched earth" campaign that destroyed their crops and villages. Besides curtailing their ability to raid, thereby easing the pressure on the American frontier, such a campaign could turn the tables on Haldimand; it could deny him access to vital food sources, shake the Indians' confidence in their British allies, and make them dependent on already straitened British resources. In the long run, moreover, it would give the Americans, when peace was finally established, a basis for claiming more than the eastern seaboard.

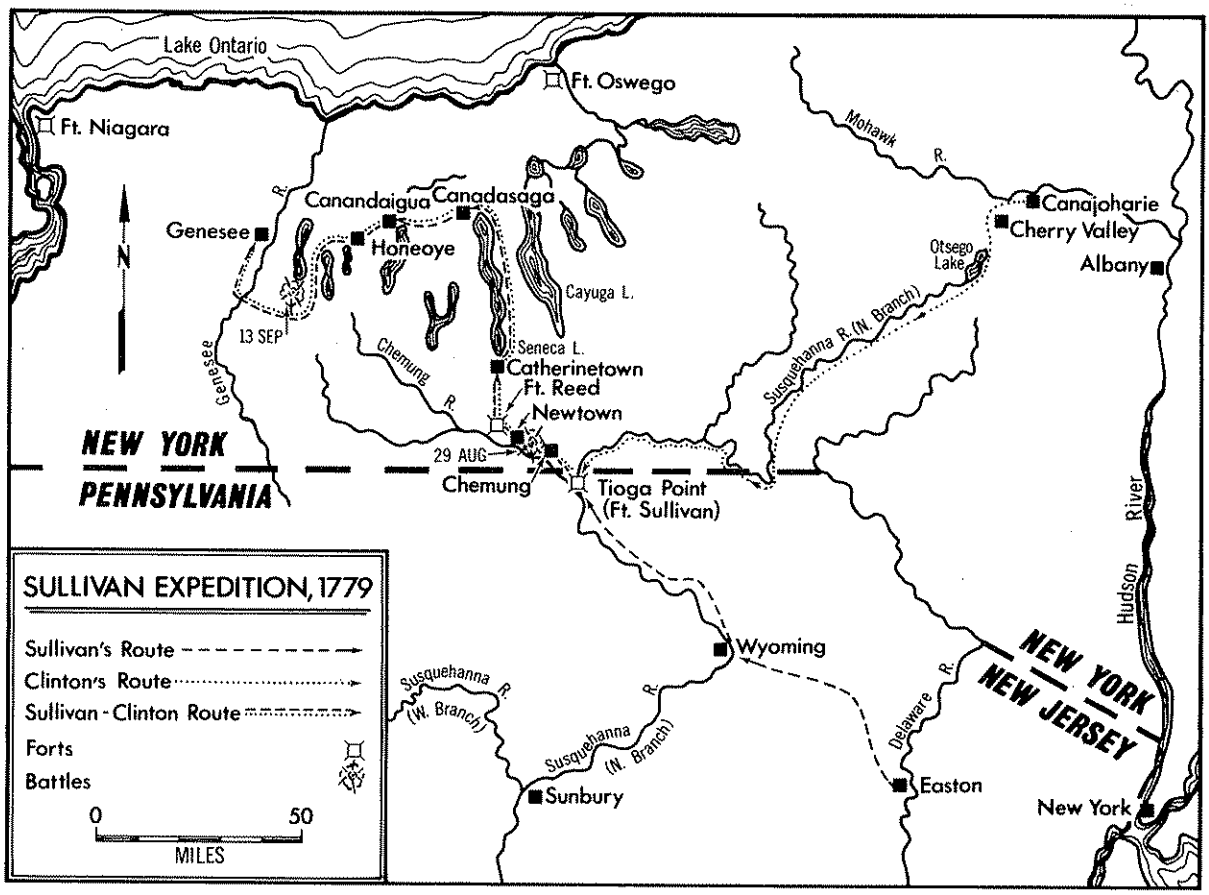
Consequently, by 13 January 1779, Washington was proposing a major operation against the Iroquois. The resulting campaign, Sullivan's Expedition, has been called one of the most carefully planned and best executed operations of the entire war.[3] Certainly, it was one of the most complex. Employing as it did no less than 15 regiments of infantry and one of artillery, penetrating deep into unknown but hostile territory, demanding months of intelligence preparation, and involving vast numbers of boats, pack-horses, and cattle as well as hundreds of tons of scarce supplies, it was carried out on an ambitious scale. In the end, the expedition overcame enormous difficulties to achieve

substantial if not complete success. It is both curious and unjust, therefore, that the operation has been so largely ignored.

The plan which finally took shape had three aspects. One column of 10 infantry regiments, plus an artillery regiment, under Major General John Sullivan, was to assemble at Easton, Pennsylvania, move overland to Wyoming, Pennsylvania, and then advance up the North Branch of the Susquehanna River to Tioga Point, just below the New York border. A second column, of 5 infantry regiments under Brigadier General James Clinton, was to start from Canajoharie, on the Mohawk River, march to Otsego Lake, and then proceed down the Susquehanna to rendezvous with Sullivan. From there, under Sullivan's command, the whole force was to drive northward, deep into the "Seneca Country" in the Finger Lakes region of New York.

In a tangentially associated but essentially independent operation, Colonel Daniel Brodhead was to lead a force from Fort Pitt up the Allegheny River and, if feasible, make contact with Sullivan, after which (at Sullivan's discretion) the combined columns might go on to attack the forts at Niagara and Oswego. In the campaign, Brodhead never joined Sullivan. Since his operation had no direct bearing on the Sullivan Expedition as it actually developed, it will not be mentioned further.

Because of the requirements of seniority, Washington originally offered command of the expedition to Major General Horatio Gates, pointing out that it was a major operation and that "I have strained the supply of Continental troops to the utmost extent" to provide a 4,000-man force. Although he did not expect Gates to accept, he was offended at the tone of the reply, in which Gates wrote that "The Man who undertakes



the Indian Service, should enjoy Youth and Strength; requisites I do not possess; it Therefore Grieves me Your Excellency should Offer me The only Command, to which I am intirely unequal."[4]

Selection of Sullivan as the second choice seems also to have been based chiefly on seniority. Sullivan was forceful and energetic, but had been associated with a succession of failures; although these had been due largely to factors outside his control, he was not regarded as an especially successful general. The need he clearly felt to vindicate his reputation helps to explain the scale of demands he made for troops and supplies, and the extremes to which he went in denouncing the staff departments' failure to meet those demands fully. The resentments which this caused, combined with the access that some of the targets of his charges had to Congress, may explain why his campaign's accomplishments were minimized at the time, and therefore the tendency for them to be overlooked in subsequent appraisals of the war.

As an old wilderness fighter, Washington was acutely aware of the logistical problems of a frontier operation. Long before tackling the issue of command, he had begun to assemble every item of pertinent information he could acquire. He wrote to senior officers who had some knowledge of the region, forwarding a list of 19 detailed questions for them to answer. While a few of these concerned enemy strength and capabilities, the bulk dealt with the terrain and climate, existence and trafficability of trails, navigability of rivers, and availability of grass for horses and cattle and of food for troops.[5] In one case, he sent for a junior officer who had escaped from captivity at Niagara to debrief him personally.[6]

All this was essential, for the Americans previously had practically no reliable information on this region. Indeed, one officer who took part in the campaign complained that the few available maps "seem rather to blind than enlighten."[7]

Washington also initiated action to gather supplies and transport in time to be ready (he hoped) for the expedition to start early in May. A forward supply depot was to be established immediately at Sunbury, Pennsylvania. Major General Nathanael Greene, the Quartermaster General, was directed to arrange for construction of 160 cargo boats, some capable of carrying up to 10 tons. Efforts were begun to collect cattle—to accompany the force as a source of fresh meat—pack-horses, and stocks of meat, salt, and flour.

But accumulation of supplies progressed slowly. On arriving at Easton on 7 May, Sullivan discovered that practically nothing had been collected, despite the assurances of the Board of War that he would find everything waiting for him. There were few pack-horses and even fewer pack saddles. The boats which were supposed to be waiting at Wyoming, already loaded with supplies, had not even been built. The only route from Easton to Wyoming was a trail, impassable for wagons and artillery. The flour and salt meat that were on hand were grossly inadequate; worse, much of the meat was spoiled. On one day, 2,528 pounds of salt beef had to be condemned "as entirely unfit for the

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soldiery," and on the following day another 421 pounds of beef were similarly condemned.[8]

In defense of the Board of War, it should be mentioned that the sudden enormous demand for casks and kegs greatly exceeded available supplies. Proper materials to manufacture additional containers could not be obtained in sufficient quantity, so green wood had to be used. This, as Colonel Timothy Pickering of the Board of War explained, "in summer, is ruinous to whatever is put in them." Pickering conceded, however, that Sullivan's angry charges of negligence, dishonesty, and incompetence throughout the supply echelons "have undoubtedly but too much foundation."[9]

Major General John Sullivan

Sullivan, however, did not merely complain. While continuing to goad the Quartermaster and Commissary departments, he put three regiments to work cutting a road to Wyoming. Meanwhile, he began procuring horses, cattle, and flour to the extent that these were locally available. But improvement was far from sufficient, and it was 31 May before Washington saw fit to issue the Letter of Instructions for the operation which he had hoped would begin a month earlier.

In this letter, Washington stated that "The immediate objective is their [the Six Nations'] total destruction and devastation. . . . It will be essential to ruin their crops now in the ground to prevent their planting more." Sullivan was to act so that "the country may not be merely overrun, but destroyed." As for tactics, Washington told Sullivan to "make, rather than receive attacks attended by as much impetuosity, shouting, and noise as possible"; formations were to be as loose as they could be without sacrificing control and mutual support; and "It should be previously impressed upon the minds of the men . . . to rush on with the warhoop and fixed bayonet. Nothing will disconcert and terrify the Indians more than this."[10]

Road construction and bad weather delayed departure from Easton until 18 June. Moving out with the brigades of Brigadier General William Maxwell and Brigadier General Enoch Poor and Colonel Thomas Procter's 4th Continental Artillery, Sullivan arrived on 23 June at Wyoming, where Brigadier General Edward Hand's brigade was already assembled. Here again, adequate supplies had not arrived, and the quality was as poor as the quantity was inadequate.

Meanwhile, the five regiments of General James Clinton's force had begun assembling at Canajoharie. Here, progress was faster. Advance parties were soon at Otsego Lake, and large numbers of boats (eventually totalling 228), hauled on wagons from the Mohawk, began to arrive at the lake in a steady stream. At the lake, the immediate threat of Indian attack was greater than at Wyoming, and there were several alarms and an occasional incident of sniping. A new problem was discovered, also, when a scouting party found that for a considerable stretch the river issuing from Otsego Lake was too shallow to float the boats. Resourcefully,

troops went to work building a dam at the foot of the lake to raise the water level; when the time came to depart, they would breach the dam and thus create a flow of water sufficient for the boats to move to the area where the river gained greater depth. Preparations moved so steadily that Clinton was able to get word to Sullivan on 28 June that he had 1,700 effective troops with provisions for three months, and was ready to move as soon as he received instructions to do so.

At Wyoming, however, stocks were down to a single day's reserve. The situation was only temporarily relieved on 29 June by the arrival from Sunbury of 34 boatloads of food—but "Thro. negl't & carelessness in the Commissaries great quantities of Beef was so damaged that the men could not possibly eat it. . . ." Furthermore, due to the irresponsibility of the civilians hired as "Conductors" for the pack train, many of the horses which had been purchased had been lost.[11]

All these preparations had not gone unnoticed by the enemy. On 3 July, the Tory Colonel John Butler wrote to Lieutenant Colonel Mason Bolton, the British commander at Niagara, that an American deserter had provided a report (it proved to be completely accurate) of Sullivan's scheme of maneuver. In consequence, Butler was assembling Indians to oppose the coming invasion, and asked Bolton to send provisions, rations, and horses.

Colonel John Butler

Whether it was from the continuing shortage of rations at Wyoming, or merely from curiosity, an officer of the 3d New Hampshire reported in his journal that "I eat part of a fryed Rattle Snake to day which would have tasted very well had it not been snake."[12] On 9 July, another 43 boats carrying supplies arrived, but it was still impossible to issue full rations. On the following day, Sullivan sent General Hand to the main supply base near Harris' Ferry (modern Harrisburg) to provide the "spirited exertions" which one observer considered essential to expedite the flow of provisions.[13]

Meanwhile, Sullivan had other difficulties. Periodic cases of desertion had been almost continuous. Most of the deserters were caught, tried, and awarded sentences ranging from 50 lashes to death—sentences which in many cases of flogging and practically all cases of execution were cancelled at the last minute. On 12 July, however, 33 men of the German Regiment (a Pennsylvania and Maryland organization), whose three-year enlistments had expired, announced that they were leaving and marched defiantly out of the Wyoming camp led by a fifer and drummer. Mounted troops were sent in pursuit and within less than a week had rounded up 29 of the deserters. They were tried; five were sentenced to death, two corporals were reduced to private, and the remaining 22 were to run the gauntlet through two brigades and the artillery regiment. After visiting the condemned men and finding them "much dejected," Chaplain William Rogers asked Sullivan to pardon them. The General had already decided to do so, but in issuing the pardon on 27 July he declared emphatically that he would never again pardon a deserter, even though the man's enlistment had expired, who "shall quit his corps without a proper discharge from his Comd. officer."[14]

Sullivan's leniency may have reflected a reduction in his frustrations. He had been angry because, on 20 July, only 200 head of cattle (he had requested 1,000) had arrived,

but on the 24th General Hand had returned with approximately 100 boat, ao. of provisions. This raised stock levels to the point that the expedition could begin as soon as a train of pack-horses with flour from Carlisle and 80 wagons with supplies from Easton could arrive. The wagons came in on 28 July, and the pack-horses on the 29th.

On 30 July, a detail of 600 men worked from dawn until after dark, loading everything possible on the 1,200 pack-horses which made up the full train. Everything else was stowed aboard the 120 boats. In addition, there were approximately 700 beef cattle.

The army, now consisting of just over 2,300 men, finally moved out on 31 July. From the very beginning as the column advanced up the left bank of the North Branch, "the difficulty of the Way . . . gave inconceivable Embaressments to the Troops,"[15] and frequently the narrow trail forced the men to move in single file along the face of mountains which dropped abruptly to the river far below. Some improperly loaded packs fell off and were lost. A number of the pack-horses and cattle missed their footing and were crushed when they struck the river bank. At least one boat was sunk in a stretch of rapids. An artilleryman was drowned, and two infantrymen died of exhaustion. A regimental surgeon observed, "How hard is the soldier's lott who's least danger is in the field of action? Fighting happens seldom, but fatigue, hunger, cold & heat are constantly varying his distress."[16] All the same, another officer was moved to write that "To see with what patience the soldiers endured the fatigues of this march wadeing rivers, climbing mountains and a number of other things too tedious to mention, afford[s] a pleasing prospect that in time we shall have soldiers equal to any in the world."[17]

Although there was no enemy opposition, the force was under continuous Indian observation, and Colonel Butler kept a constant stream of reports flowing to Niagara on its progress. He told his son, Captain Walter Butler, that "I think it beyond doubt that they are very strong and seriously bent upon this expedition,"[18] but the British authorities were unwilling or unable to provide the assistance he repeatedly requested.

On 11 August, Sullivan's column reached the junction of the North Branch and the Chemung River. After the opposite bank had been bombarded by artillery, the troops forded the North Branch, moved north for a mile or two, "drums . . . beating, fifes playing, colors flying,"[19] then turned east to ford the Chemung and make camp on Tioga Point. In both streams the current was swift and the water, up to the troops' armpits, deeper than expected. Men had to clasp hands and steady each other to get through. "Several men wold Bin Drounded if the horsemen had not helped them," one soldier wrote, and "Colln. [Francis] Barber Like to Bin Drounded and his hors By Riding after A man Down the Falls."[20] But no lives were lost, and as soon as the army had closed on the camp, work was begun on a stockade fort (to be called Fort Sullivan). Sullivan also sent Captain John N. Cummings, 2d New Jersey, to scout toward the nearest known Indian settlement, the village of Chemung, some 12 miles away. Based on the information Cummings brought back the next afternoon, Sullivan ordered the bulk of his force to move out immediately to attack Chemung.

Before the end of that same day, an Indian runner had reached Butler at Canadasaga (modern Geneva, New York), 80 miles away, with word that Sullivan was building a fort at Tioga Point, but Butler was still trying to collect Indians and his Tory Rangers, and was unable to take any action. There was enough local Indian strength on hand to give the Americans a bloody nose, however. When Sullivan's men reached Chemung on 13 August after a fatiguing, all-night march, they found it abandoned; but when the advance guard pushed on a little farther, it fell into an ambush, losing seven killed and 13 wounded. The Americans pursued, but the Indians scattered. Then the troops burned the village, after which a strong detachment crossed the river to destroy cornfields. Here, two more men were killed and 15 wounded when Indians opened fire from the edge of the

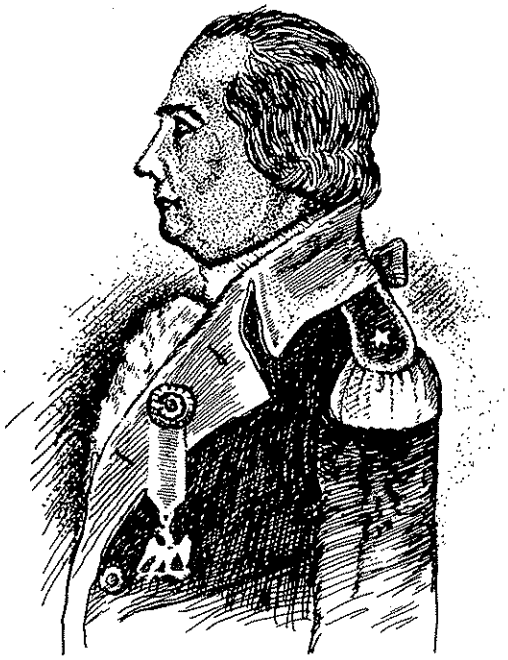
forest. The army returned to Tioga Point reasonably satisfied, although the General felt constrained to issue an order reprimanding the troops for firing blindly. Despite this rather mixed American showing, Butler was concerned. Reporting it to his British superiors, he said that "They are some of the best of the Continental Troops commanded by the most active of the Rebel Generals, and not a Regiment of Militia among the whole."[21]

On the meantime, Clinton's force had begun its move. The dam at Otsego Lake had been broken on the evening of 8 August, and by morning the river had risen sufficiently to float the boats easily. Unlike Sullivan's column, Clinton's brigade was moving through hostile country from the outset, and it began burning villages and destroying crops at once. In its progress it met no resistance from Indians, although numerous diarists reported killing large numbers of rattlesnakes.

Most of the enemy effort seems to have been concentrated around Sullivan's force. In his previously quoted report after the Chemung action, Butler said that "there are [Indian] Scouts constantly at their Camp," but "I have not yet been able to get a prisoner." Troops moving outside the camp area to drive horses and cattle to or from pasture occasionally fell victim to these scouts—on 15 August and again on 17 August, such herding parties were attacked with one man killed and one wounded in each case.

Not knowing what enemy forces might be lurking nearby, Sullivan was worried about Clinton, and on 16 August he sent General Poor with 900 men to move eastward to meet Clinton's column and escort it to Tioga Point. As it developed, Poor made contact with Clinton on 19 August, and after an uneventful march the combined columns reached Sullivan's camp on the 22d, welcomed by a 13-gun salute and "a Band of Musick which played Beautiful" as they arrived.[22]

Preparations began immediately for the entire force to start out on the serious business of the expedition. Remaining at Fort



Brigadier General James Clinton

Sullivan, under Colonel Israel Shreve, 2d New Jersey, would be a 250-man garrison, the sick, the women and children, and the civilian boatmen—a total of about 1,200 people. On 26 August, the rest of the army moved north up the Chemung River.

The force of almost 4,000 men, 1,200 pack-horses, several hundred cattle, and nine cannon was impressive. There was real cause for worry, however, as the rations available were adequate for only 27 days. The artillery also caused considerable misgivings and Captain Jeremiah Fogg, 2d New Hampshire (infantry), observed gloomily that its movement "appears to the army in general, as impracticable and absurd. . . ."[23] This feeling gained considerable support the next day, when the trail took the column into rugged terrain in which "we marched, much Impeded by the Artillery and ammunition Waggons threw thick wood and Dificult Defiles, Such Cursing, Cutting and Diging, over seting Wagons, Cannon and Pack Horses into the river &c is not to Be Seen Every Day."[24]

Movement was almost as difficult on the 28th, but on the 29th the troops found the

Brigadier General Enoch Poor

going easier. On that day, however, as they approached the Indian village of Newtown (near modern Elmira, New York), they ran into what was to be the only substantial resistance of the campaign.

Colonel Butler was at Newtown with a force of about 400 Indians, some 300 men of his Tory Ranger battalion, and 15 British Regulars. He wanted to restrict operations to harassing tactics until he could accumulate more strength, but the Indians were determined to make a stand. From the river on their right, they had thrown up and camouflaged a log barricade extending for about 300 yards to the slopes of a steep hill. Toward the top of the hill, marking their left flank, was another defensive position.

Hand's brigade, leading the American column, discovered the barricade before coming into range, and deployed. Sullivan directed Hand to maintain a steady fire to the front while the artillery was brought up and Poor's and Clinton's brigades swung right to climb the hill and turn the enemy left flank. Maxwell's brigade was in reserve behind Hand. The artillery was to give the flanking column thirty minutes to complete its move, and then lay down the heaviest bombardment possible.

As it developed, Poor and Clinton were slowed by a stretch of swamp, and were not yet in position when the guns opened fire as scheduled. The effect of a simultaneous assault on both flanks was lost, and the flanking force met considerable resistance. However, this crumbled in the face of a bayonet charge, and the cannon fire terrified the Indians behind the barricade—they fled in panic, most of them scattering to their own villages.

The Americans lost four dead and 39 wounded, captured a white man and a Negro, and found the bodies of eleven dead warriors (although Butler reported a loss of five Rangers killed or captured and five Indians killed, along with three Rangers and nine Indians wounded). Butler told Colonel Bolton that the Americans "moved with the greatest caution & regularity, & are more formidable than you seem to comprehend," going on to warn that "The Consequences of this affair will, I fear, be of the most serious nature unless there is speedily a large Reinforcement sent."[25]

The Americans were elated. Also, "to the great satisfaction of the army," Sullivan decided to send back to Tioga Point the wagons and all the artillery except four brass 3-pounders and a light (hand-carried) coehorn mortar. With them went the sick and wounded and all the boats. Halting for a full day after their engagement,

Brigadier General Edward Hand

the troops spent 30 August burning Newtown and destroying the surrounding cornfields—Hand's brigade alone accounted for an estimated 150 acres. Captain Fogg exulted that "No army can have higher spirits than ours resulting from victory and a consciousness of superiority."[26] In the evening, the regiments were assembled to hear a special message from General Sullivan.

He began by stating that despite every possible effort on his part to obtain adequate supplies, he had been thwarted by "the inattention of those whose business it was to make the necessary provision"; consequently, he doubted that the available stocks would, "without the greatest prudence, enable him to complete the business of the expedition." He therefore asked the troops to accept half of the standard ration, which was a pound of meat and a pound of flour per man per day, until the operation was completed. The difference, he pointed out, could readily be made up by the vast quantity and variety of vegetables now ripe in the abandoned Indian fields. Furthermore, he promised that the men would be paid the standard purchase price of the prescribed rations which they were not issued.[27]

Sullivan had chosen his moment well. Given the prevailing mood, the proposal was cheerfully accepted and was greeted in each regiment with "three hearty cheers,"[28] thereby providing "a striking instance of the virture [sic] of the army."[29]

Sullivan's precaution was indeed necessary, for only 22 pounds of flour and 16 pounds of salt meat per man were now on hand. Given the rough terrain to be covered, some of this would inevitably be lost. The cattle providing fresh meat on the hoof also had to be partially discounted, because some of them were bound to go astray. Despite the shortages, however, now that the boats were gone there was too much for the pack-horses to carry, so each man was given eight days' rations to carry in addition to his regular load.

Happily, the march on 31 August was not too difficult, but on 1 September the column had to force its way through "a most horrid swamp" in a march "so exceedingly difficult . . . that it will not admit of description." The men were sometimes knee-deep in mud. Because of steep drops blocking the route, they had to ford one creek 17 times during a four-mile stretch. Pack-horses were mired, some were killed in falls, and others were lost. There was also the constant fear that the Indians would launch a sudden attack.[30] It was nearly midnight before all the troops reached the newly-abandoned Indian village of Catherinetown. "We never had so bad a days march," Major John Burrowes asserted, "but what will not men go through who are determined to be free."[31]

At Catherinetown, the troops found an aged squaw—several diarists thought she must be over a hundred years old—who was too decrepit to flee with the other Indians. She said that the women had urged surrender, but the warriors were still determined to fight. Sullivan had a hut built for her and provided her with an ample supply of food. While some troops busily rounded up cattle and pack-horses that had strayed in the swamp, the bulk of the army spent the day destroying houses and crops.

When the march was resumed on 3 September, the army soon came to Seneca Lake and started up its eastern side. From that time on the ground was open, and progress, even for the artillery, was relatively easy. In fact, for days on end the column moved rapidly, slowed only to the extent necessary to burn villages, devastate cultivated fields, and destroy fruit trees in the orchards that were passed.

Butler, who had fallen back to Canadasaga, wrote to Bolton that he still intended to try to stop the Americans' advance, but the Indians were "much alarmed at their number, & I believe it will be but a small Body of them that I shall be able to Keep together."[32] In fact, no resistance was encountered until 5 September. It occurred when the American advance guard entered a village called Appletown and a hidden Indian fired a shot at one soldier, knocking a stick out of his hand. At that place, also, a prisoner, captured by the Indians at Wyoming the previous summer, was rescued.

At retreat that night, all units were instructed to fire their muskets to clear them of charges which had possibly become defective. The noise stampeded many of the horses and cattle. Rounding them up took so long (18, indeed, were never found) that the next day's departure was delayed until mid-afternoon.

As the advance continued, leaving devastation in its wake, the column reached the northern end of Seneca Lake and turned westward. The weather was good, the enemy fled at the troops' approach, and no opposition was met even where the terrain offered excellent defensive possibilities. On the evening of 7 September, at Canadasaga, the army found ample signs that Indians had been there recently, but the only human in the town was a naked white boy about three years old. Captain-Lieutenant Thomas Machin, 2d Artillery, took charge of the child, and later adopted him.

Except for heavy thunderstorms in the evenings, good weather continued. The dwindling supply of standard rations was, however, a cause for worry. "We eat meat twice in three days, and bread once in four or five days," one officer recorded, but "The country abounds in corn and beans which we solely live on. Salt very scarce."[33] The problem was serious enough for Sullivan to hold a council of his senior officers to consider whether it was feasible to push on to the planned objective, the Indian town of Genesee—on the far bank of the Genesee River and some distance west of modern Geneseo, New York. Most council members thought it would be impracticable and many considered it imprudent, but Sullivan decided to override their views and continue.

By 10 September, after reaching and destroying Canandaigua, the army was suffering "hungry bellies and hard Duty now which I think we may well call hard times."[34] On the following day, 14 miles farther on at Honeoye, Sullivan established a small base, garrisoned by about 50 able men with a 3-pounder, where the sick, all but the strongest pack-horses, and the flour and salt meat earmarked for the return to Tioga Point could be left. Captain Cummings was put in command, and he quickly built a small breastwork of the provision casks.

Soon after the army moved out on 12 September, the advance scouts found fresh Indian tracks. Consequently, when camp was made that night, Sullivan directed Lieutenant Thomas Boyd of the 1st Pennsylvania to take a small party of riflemen and scout the route ahead. Boyd and the men he chose were joined by a group of eager volunteers, so that the detachment he led finally totaled 26 men. They made their way uneventfully to a village about seven miles to the west, arriving near dawn on 13 September. There they surprised three or four Indians. One of these was killed but the others escaped. Suspecting that the alarm would be spread to any war parties in the area, Boyd started back to rejoin the main force.

Unknown to Boyd, Colonel Butler had finally persuaded the Indians to stand and fight, and with a force of at least 300 Rangers and fully as many Indians, Butler was waiting in ambush for Sullivan—between Boyd and the American army's position. And it was into the rear of this ambush that Boyd and his men stumbled on their way back. They fought vigorously, but against such odds the outcome was inevitable. A few members of the scouting party escaped; Boyd and a rifleman named Michael Parker were captured; and all the rest were killed. The noise of this engagement alerted Sullivan, however, and while the American relief force that rushed forward arrived too late to help, Butler's surprise had been spoiled and his men had scattered. From this point on, he gave up any hope of offering further opposition.

In the afternoon of 14 September the Americans reached Genesee. There they found the hideously mutilated bodies of Boyd and Parker, who had obviously been horribly tortured before being killed. After burying them "with the honour of war,"[35] the troops took note of their surroundings. They were impressed with the number and quality of the houses, but one regimental surgeon

commented that "The Indians are exceedingly dirty, the rubage of one of their houses, is enough to stink a whole country."[36]

Next day, the entire army spent all morning in the task of devastation—burning the houses and destroying some 3,000 bushels of beans and approximately 60,000 bushels of corn. At midday, "The General assured the army the business of the expedition was entirely accomplished," and issued instructions to start that afternoon on the return to Tioga, "which order gave more general satisfaction than any that could have been given."[37]

By 17 September the force was back at Honeoye, finding the garrison and the supplies undisturbed. Although the weather was holding, the nights had begun to grow cold and there were heavy frosts in the mornings. Retracing its route, the column now moved faster than it had during the approach; Sergeant Moses Fellows said that "our soldiers [are] in High Spirits and are Willing to make great marches; the Reason is obvious we are Going Homeward."[38] Many of the horses, however, were incapable of keeping up and were killed to keep them from falling into enemy hands. To salvage the packs, the field and staff officers, with General Sullivan setting the example, dismounted and marched on foot so that their mounts could be used as pack-horses.

After the army reached Canadasaga, a detachment of 600 men under Lieutenant Colonel William Butler, 4th Pennsylvania, branched off to devastate the east side of Cayuga Lake; Lieutenant Colonel Henry Dearborn and 200 men carried out a similar task on Cayuga Lake's west side; and Colonel Peter Gansevoort, 3d New York, with 200 men, struck east toward Albany, with orders to destroy Iroquois villages and crops along the way. Other forces fanned out to burn villages on the west side of Seneca Lake while the main body continued down its old route along the east shore.

Wherever the troops moved, they found the country virtually depopulated. The Indians were fleeing northward toward the British forts. As of 21 September, Colonel Bolton wrote to General Haldimand, he was feeding 5,036 Indian refugees at Niagara. The few Indians who were left in the villages had no spirit to oppose the destructive progress of Sullivan's several columns.

Reaching Catherinetown on 23 September, the main force found the aged squaw in good condition, although they also found the body of a younger Indian woman. It was suspected that she had been killed by one of the army's couriers who had periodically passed between Tioga Point and the expedition, but there was no proof. Sullivan gave the old woman a keg of salt pork and almost a full keg of flour before moving on.

From Tioga Point, Colonel Shreve had sent forward a 200-man force and two cannon under Captain Jacob Reed, 2d Artillery, to establish an advance base on the Chemung River upstream from Newtown; this force had six days' rations, sufficient for the whole expedition. An earthwork named "Fort Reed" had been thrown up, and here at about 1600 on 24 September, the main body of Sullivan's column arrived to be greeted by a 13-gun salute. In honor of the occasion, they "drew each officer & soldier one Jill of Whiskey after a fatigue of near one Month without a drop."[39] Next day, to celebrate the news that Spain had declared war on England and that Congress had increased officers' subsistence pay, there was a more elaborate celebration. A *feu-de-joie* was fired (salute by muskets discharged in rapid succession). Sullivan was dissatisfied with its execution and made the men repeat it. The officers of each brigade were authorized to roast an entire ox and were issued five gallons of spirits. They "suped very hearty" together, then drank thirteen formal toasts, after which "there was two or three Indian Dances led down by Genl. Hand and performed by the rest midling well then each officer returned to their Qrs after kicking up a Small Dust of Striking tents &c." It is hardly surprising that the same diarist reported the next day that "Did not feel very well this morning after my frolick."[40]

By 28 September, the detachments which had branched out along different routes had rejoined, and the sick were sent on to Tioga

Point by boat. Early the following morning the entire force took up the march, arriving at Fort Sullivan in the middle of the afternoon of 30 September "in a proper line of March . . . with Musick playing and Colours flying."[41]

After dismantling the fort, the army started down the North Branch on 4 October, traveling most of the way to Wyoming by boat. It then marched to Easton where it arrived on 15 October, after which the force was officially disbanded.

Aside from the hundreds of miles it had covered and the information obtained about previously unknown territory, the expedition had accomplished a considerable amount. Sullivan reported that no less than 40 towns, uncounted scattered houses, and at least 160,000 bushels of corn as well as vast quantities of all kinds of other vegetables had been destroyed. He believed that the only Iroquois settlement still standing was a single village near the Allegheny, fifty miles from Genesee. Finally, he had done all this with the loss, from all causes, of less than 40 men.

Forced by deteriorating health to resign his commission in November, 1779, Sullivan could leave the Service with a sense of achievement. As a delegate to Congress, three-time President of New Hampshire, and finally (until his death at age 54 in 1795) as a Federal judge, he would continue to serve the country, but his return from the expedition against the Iroquois marked the end of his active military career.

As for the force as a whole, it was pleased with what had been accomplished. Captain Fogg noted, too, that the delay in starting which had been so deplored had actually been advantageous, since it made the Indians' crops ripe enough for the troops to eat, and without these vegetables the expedition could not have succeeded. Further, by the time the Americans left the area, it was too late for the Indians to plant another crop. He even had a good word for the artillery, which, though it "at first, seemed a clog, and totally useless, served a noble purpose." As for the campaign's objective, however, he conceded that "The nests are destroyed, but the birds are still on the wing."[42]

It was true that the force had gone only to Genesee, but with another fifteen days' rations, Sullivan thought he could have gone on to attack Niagara. The Indians had not been compelled to sue for peace or to break off their alliance with the British. Time was to prove, too, that Indian raids on the frontier had not been stopped.

Nevertheless, a lengthy breathing-spell had been won, and the scale of the raids did not again reach the level that had prevailed during 1778 and early 1779. Most important of all, the Iroquois Confederation, as an entity, never again achieved anything approaching its former cohesive strength. On a reduced and disconnected basis, the Indian raids remained a tactical threat, but they no longer represented the strategic menace which had existed before the Sullivan campaign.

In accomplishing that, the Sullivan Expedition must be credited with an achievement of considerable proportions.

NOTES

1. A stanza from the poem *John Sullivan's March* by A. L. Childs, read at "The Sullivan Centennial," a local celebration held in Geneseo, Livingston County, N.Y., on 18 September 1879. From *Journals of the Military Expedition of Major General John Sullivan Against the Six Nations of Indians in 1779, With Records of Centennial Celebrations*, published at the direction of Frederick Cook, Secretary of State, State of New York (Auburn, N.Y., 1887), p. 549.

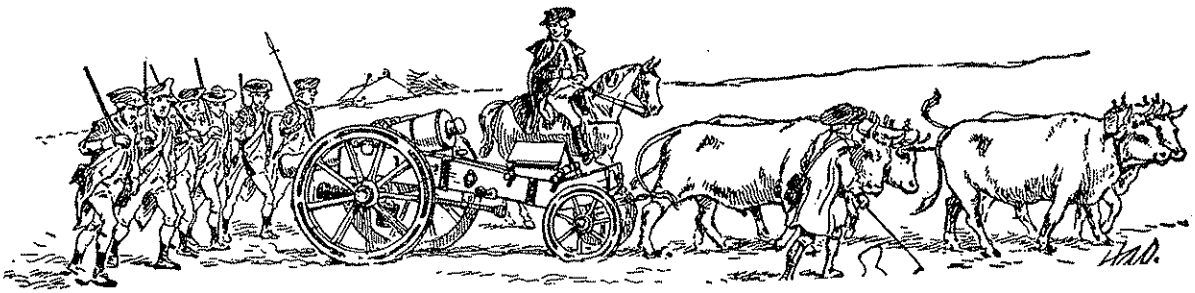
2. Quoted in Thomas C. Amory, *The Military Services and Public Life of Major-General John Sullivan* (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat, 1868, 1968), p. 116.

3. Barbara Graymont, *The Iroquois in the American Revolution* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1972), p. 194; Howard Swiggett, *War Out of Niagara* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1933), pp. 184-185.

4. John C. Fitzpatrick (ed.), *The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources*, 1744-1799 (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1936), Vol. XIV, pp. 199; 200, *n.* 61; 385. Gates, still wearing the laurels of his victory at Saratoga, considered himself Washington's superior in all but rank. In official relations, Washington tried to be scrupulously fair to Gates, but had resented and mistrusted him since the February 1778 attempt of the "Conway Cabal" to put Gates in Washington's place.

5. *Ibid.*, XIV, 76, 314-318.

6. "Journal of Lieutenant John Jenkins," in *Journals of the Military Expedition of Major General John Sullivan Against the Six Nations of Indians in 1779*, p. 169. All further references to journals are from this collection, and will be cited merely with the name of the journal author.

7. "Journal of Major Jeremiah Fogg," p. 97.

8. Sullivan's Order Book, printed in Louise Welles Murray, *Notes from Craft Collection in Tioga Point Museum on the Sullivan Expedition of 1779* (Athens, Pa., 1929), pp. 1-2. Cited hereafter as Sullivan's Order Book.
9. Quoted in Amory, p. 113.
10. Fitzpatrick, XV, 190-191.
11. "Journal of Dr. Ebenezer Elmer," p. 81.
12. "Journal of Lieutenant Colonel Henry Dearborn," p. 64.
13. "Journal of Rev. William Rogers," p. 252.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 254; Sullivan's Order Book, pp. 47-48.
15. "Journal of Major James Norris," p. 227.
16. "Journal of Dr. Jabez Campfield," p. 53.
17. "Journal of Ensign Daniel Gookin," p. 104.
18. Quoted, New York Division of Archives and History, *The Sullivan-Clinton Campaign of 1779* (Albany: University of the State of New York, 1929), p. 138. Cited hereafter as *Sullivan-Clinton Campaign*.
19. "Journal of Rev. William Rogers," p. 260.
20. "Journal of Sergeant Thomas Roberts," p. 242.
21. Quoted, *Sullivan-Clinton Campaign*, p. 131.
22. "Journal of Lieutenant Erkuries Beatty," pp. 25-26.
23. "Journal of Major Jeremiah Fogg," p. 94.
24. "Journal of Sergeant Moses Fellows," p. 87.
25. Quoted, *Sullivan-Clinton Campaign*, p. 138.
26. "Journal of Major Jeremiah Fogg," p. 95.
27. Quoted, Amory, pp. 125-126.
28. "Journal of Major John Burrowes," p. 45.
29. "Journal of Dr. Jabez Campfield," p. 56.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 57; "Journal of Major John Burrowes," p. 45; "Journal of Lieutenant William Barton," p. 9.
31. "Journal of Major John Burrowes," p. 45.
32. Quoted, *Sullivan-Clinton Campaign*, p. 140.
33. "Journal of Major John Burrowes," p. 47.
34. "Journal of Lieutenant Erkuries Beatty," p. 31.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
36. "Journal of Dr. Jabez Campfield," p. 60.
37. "Journal of Major John Burrowes," p. 48.
38. "Journal of Sergeant Moses Fellows," p. 91.
39. "Journal of Lieutenant Erkuries Beatty," pp. 33-34.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 34.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
42. "Journal of Major Jeremiah Fogg," p. 101.