

Travis Fink

Sean Vitti

## General Sullivan's Expedition against the Iroquois Confederation

June 18<sup>th</sup> – October 3<sup>rd</sup> 1779

The expedition of General Sullivan launched in 1779 against the Iroquois Confederation, was aimed at eliminating the Native American alliance as a threat to settlements in New York and Pennsylvania. The orders sent to Sullivan, from General Washington, emphasized that Sullivan's expedition was to be "directed against the hostile tribes of the six nations of Indians, with their associates and adherents. The immediate objects are the total destruction and devastation of their settlements and the capture of as many prisoners of every age and sex as possible."<sup>1</sup> The Iroquois Confederation, an alliance of six Native American tribes including the Seneca, Cayuga, Mohawk, Onondaga, Oneida, and Tuscarora, openly harassed and raided numerous American settlements throughout the Northeast in 1777, 1778 and 1779.<sup>2</sup> The Confederation was responsible for the deadly attacks against settlements in the Wyoming Valley of Pennsylvania and the Cherry Valley of New York.<sup>3</sup>

General Washington allocated four brigades to Sullivan for his mission. The four brigade commanders were Clinton, Maxwell, Poor, and Hand.<sup>4</sup> Sullivan developed a plan that would involve a two pronged attack. First, "Sullivan would gather his forces near Easton, Pennsylvania and advance up the Susquehanna River Valley. Simultaneously, Clinton's Brigade would sweep westward from the Mohawk River Valley and down the upper Susquehanna to link up with the

---

<sup>1</sup> "Instructions to Major General John Sullivan," *Etext.Virginia.edu, University of Virginia Library*, accessed March 4, 2010, <http://etext.virginia.edu/etcbin/toccer-new2?id=WasFi15.xml&images=images/modeng&data=/texts/english/modeng/parsed&tag=public&part=165&division=div1>.

<sup>2</sup> Stanley J. Adamiak, "The 1779 Sullivan Campaign," *EarlyAmerica.com*, accessed March 3, 2010, <http://www.earlyamerica.com/review/1998/sullivan.html>.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> "Instructions to Major General John Sullivan."

main force at Tioga. From there, the combined force would travel into the Iroquois country and destroy everything in its path.”<sup>5</sup>

After a few months of inactivity, the expedition finally was underway by the end of August. From August 28<sup>th</sup> until October 3<sup>rd</sup>, Sullivan’s forces had burnt around 16 Indian towns, as well as numerous acres of crops.<sup>6</sup> The damages caused by Sullivan severely weakened the strength of the Iroquois Confederation. Sullivan’s forces did run into Indian and Loyalist ambushes and American lives were lost.<sup>7</sup> The result of Sullivan’s expedition was the complete and utter weakening of the Iroquois Confederation. The British lost an ally in the Iroquois and the numerous American settlements no longer had to fear an attack by Iroquois tribes.

---

<sup>5</sup> Adamiak, “The 1779 Sullivan Campaign.”

<sup>6</sup> Francis Whiting Hasely, “Sullivan’s Expedition, New York 1779,” *Adena.com*, accessed March 4, 2010, <http://www.adena.com/adena/usa/im/im012.htm>.

<sup>7</sup> Adamiak, “The 1779 Sullivan Campaign.”