



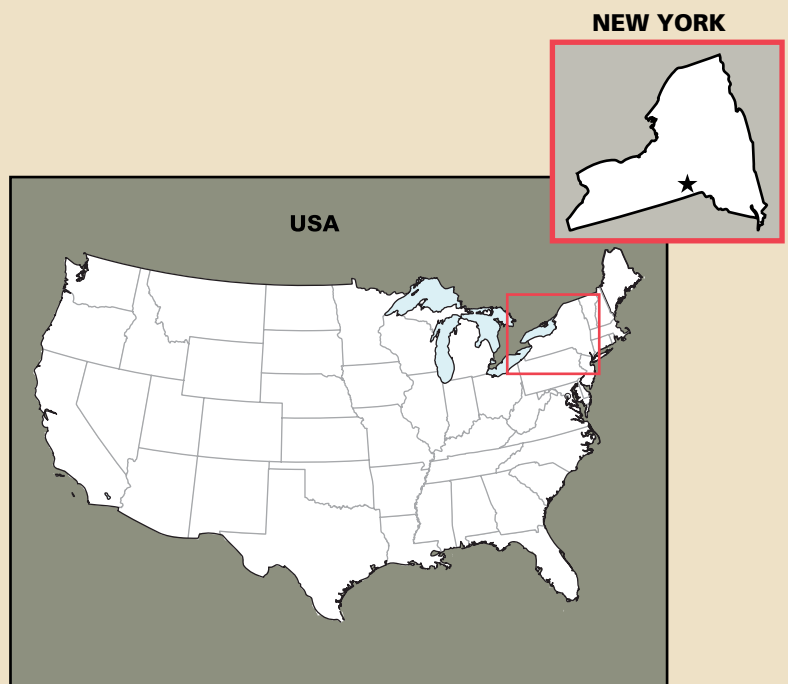
## The Battle of Newtown 1779

*In a companion piece to his article “Clash of Empires” (The Standard Volume 2 No.41), James H. Hillestad relates George Washington’s emphatic response to colonial frontier raids by the British and their Indian allies.*

**I**n early 1779, the Continental Congress instructed General George Washington to send an expedition of the Continental Army into northeastern Pennsylvania and lower New York. This foray involved one-third of Washington’s entire army — a measure of the relative importance attached to the mission.

Its purpose was to chastise the Iroquois Nation, which had been attacking colonial frontier settlements for the last two years. In 1778 the Wyoming Massacre occurred in Pennsylvania, when more than 300 Colonial militiamen were killed or taken prisoner. This was followed by the Cherry Valley Massacre in eastern New York.

**TOP**  
Looking out toward  
the Chemung Valley  
from Sullivan’s Hill  
— the river is just  
beyond the tree line.





The purpose of the campaign of terror, which was supported by the British, was to divert the attention of the Continental forces which were threatening their occupation of New York City. The attacks also kept the back-country alarmed — which interfered with recruiting and damaged the Continental Army's supply system.

The constant threat of attack and devastation was intended to weaken support for the cause of independence.

On June 18, 1779, under the command of Major General John Sullivan, the American expedition set off over the Pocono Mountains, headed for the Wyoming Valley. The force numbered 3,200

Continental regulars, two companies of militia, and 10 field pieces. They were joined by 1,500 troops of Brigadier James Clinton's New York Continental Brigade.

Their mission was the total destruction and devastation of the settlements of the Iroquois Nation. Destroying the Iroquois crops and villages would force them to leave



Chief Joseph Bryant directs the ambush



Butler's Rangers supported by British regulars defend the ridge



Battle of Newtown diorama, 24" x 45"



The Iroquois fire from their entrenched position

the area and rely on the British at Fort Niagara, straining the British logistics in Canada in the process.

Sullivan's expedition travelled up the Chemung River into southern New York on August 26, where they approached the Iroquois

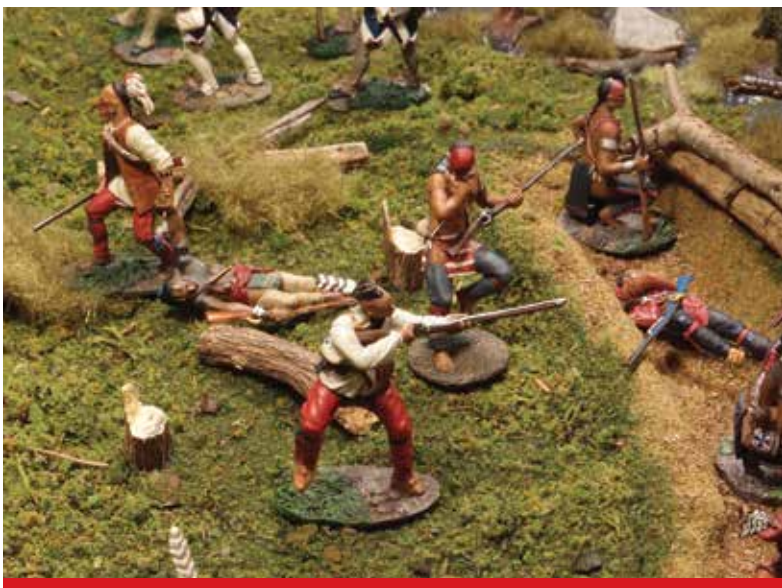
settlement of Newtown. There, they confronted a force of 1,000 Iroquois, chiefly of the Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, and Mohawk nations, led by Joseph Brant. Allied with them were 15 British regulars of the 8th Regiment of

## Who Were "Butler's Rangers"?

"Butler's Rangers" was the name given to a provincial regiment of Loyalists (or "Tories"). Most members were from upstate New York. The Rangers were accused of participating in the 1778 Wyoming Massacre and the Cherry Valley Massacre. These actions earned them a reputation for exceptional savagery.

The Rangers were made up of American loyalist refugees who had fled to Canada following the outbreak of the American Revolution. John Butler himself was a French and Indian War veteran who owned a 26,000-acre estate in the Mohawk Valley of New York.

The Rangers wore a dark green woolen coat with white facings, a white woolen waistcoat, and Indian buckskin leggings.



Iroquois casualties

Foot and 200 of the notorious Butler's Rangers.

Butler expected the American army to advance along the banks of the Chemung River or through the woods on an Indian trail. Facing the direction of the American approach was a ridge that dominated the area. At the foot of the ridge was a swamp which would impede an American assault when Butler's forces opened fire from concealed positions.

Using wood from nearby cabins and logs of trees, Butler's men constructed a breastwork that was masterfully concealed from enemy view by bushes and other foliage.

Most of the Iroquois warriors were posted at the foot of the ridge. Butler and Brant, with the rangers and a war party of Cayuga Indians, took position on the ridge. The ambush was set.

But American reconnaissance discovered the trap. Supported by artillery, they advanced against the breastworks while attacking the left flank of the enemy's position.

Nearly surrounded, the warriors, rangers, and redcoats made their escape to the west as best they could, carrying many of their dead and wounded. The rout had been complete.

By nightfall, only smoke and ashes marked the Iroquois village of Newtown. The cabins had been burned to the ground and their cornfields trampled.

The Sullivan campaign was one of the largest offensive movements in the entire eight years of the War of Independence, and the Battle of Newtown played the most significant part in it. The campaign resulted in the destruction of 40 Indian towns and major



Supported by Colonia militia, the Continentals attack



"A fight to the death"



ABOVE Sullivan's Monument atop Sullivan's Hill

LEFT Advancing through the swamp



agricultural fields yielding some 160,000 bushels of corn and other foodstuffs. Also destroyed were the hopes and prestige of the ancient league of the Ho-De-No-Sau-Neé "Long House" confederacy of the Iroquois Six Nations. ■

*Note: The author thanks Bill Farrand, Park Manager of the Newtown Battlefield, for his guidance with this article.*

Jim Hillestad is a frequent contributor to The Standard and is proprietor of The Toy Soldier Museum. His museum, containing more than 35,000 figures and a large collection of militaria, is located in the Pocono Mountains of northeastern Pennsylvania. For directions and hours, call him at 570 629-7227 or visit his website: [www.the-toy-soldier.com](http://www.the-toy-soldier.com)