

BEHIND THE ATTACK ON WYOMING Part 2

WHEN? 1778

VOCABULARY

Breadbasket	Iroquois
Loyalists	Moravian
Pennamites	proximity
Yankees	partisans
rabble	Tory



WHERE? Wyoming Valley

EVENT

Events leading to July 3, 1778

The wildlife, fish, and rich fertile soil attracted many here—both Natives and white. King Charles II had inadvertently given what is now the northern half of Pennsylvania to Connecticut in 1662 as part of their colony. Nineteen years later, he gave the same land to Pennsylvania. Of course, the area was occupied by Natives under the guidance of the Iroquois who were not pleased by what they considered settlements on their land.



By 1778 we were involved in our war for independence. This picturesque valley had a blend of Patriot and Loyalist partisans though those in the Yankee government that controlled the valley had declared it to be Patriot. The Pennamites, many of whom were Loyalists, had been pushed out of the valley in 1775. Now, other Loyalists began to slip out of the valley to join British Major John Butler who was leading an invasion into our home territory. This valley on the frontier pictured as an oasis was really more like

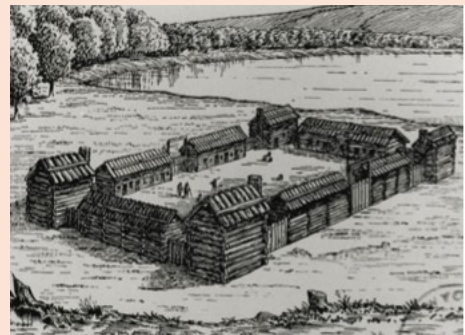
a pot boiling with revenge and fear. Yankees feared an invasion from the British, Loyalists, and Natives was close at hand. They were right.

We were being invaded because of our proximity to the Susquehanna River—a crucial route to move supplies from New York to Maryland. In addition, there were nine forts or stockaded houses along this vulnerable position on the frontier, and valley residents had supplied five times our quota of men to Washington's army. We were also considered to be the breadbasket for Washington's army. We had provided thousands of bushels of grain for the army's use.

From the British point of view this land was a gateway to Philadelphia, the people living here were rabble on the frontier who needed to be punished for their role of Patriot support. John Butler, a Connecticut Tory was chosen by the British to lead the contingent of British Rangers, Tories, and Natives in this attack.

The Tories wanted their valley back from the Yankees. The Natives were looking at revenge for their losses at Fort Stanwix the year before, plus they wanted to move white settlements back and away from them, away from their longhouse. (They had lost hundreds of men while helping St. Leger through the Mohawk Valley in New York. He was trying to help Burgoyne who loses at Saratoga.) From the perspective of the colonists, they had to stand against and fight this incursion by attacking the enemy.

Both the colonists and the British tried hard to win the favor and influence of Natives. The colonists were going to fight an uphill battle to win Natives to their side as they had often been accused by the



Natives who complained to Sir William Johnson (head of the Indian Affairs of the British government) that the colonists were breaking treaties, taking land, and murdering their families. The colonists, of



course, had their own versions of atrocities. Within this story is the story of the breakup of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Confederacy. The six Native nations, the Seneca, the Oneida, the Cayuga, Onondaga, Mohawk and later the Tuscarora, worked together so successfully that Ben Franklin visited to see how they governed themselves. However, when the American Revolution broke out, the Iroquois loyalties also broke down.

It was to be a no-win situation for the Natives. The colonists had taken heart from the grievances listed in the Declaration of Independence against the king. King George III had proclaimed that the colonists could not go any further west than the Appalachian Mountains because of the threat of Native reprisals. The colonists, who had fought with the British against the French in the French and Indian War, were angry that they could not access the land they had helped to win. They accused the king in their list that he had not helped them against the “savages of the interior. Those were insulting words for the Natives. Judging from the atrocities committed against the Natives of murder, deception, and stealing land, it is little wonder that four tribes of the Haudenosaunee wanted the British to win this war so the Natives might reclaim some of their land.

A meeting was held in 1777 in Oswego, New York, with the British and the Iroquois (Haudenosaunee). Joseph Brant, a Mohawk, argued that the entire Iroquois nation should side with the British. (His sister married Sir William Johnson who was in charge of the Indian Affair Council for the British government.) Some Natives, such as Cornplanter of the Seneca, initially felt that the Natives should stay out of this quarrel. In the end, the council fire that symbolized unity among the tribes was ceremonially covered and that enabled each tribe to decide for itself which role to take side with British, side with the colonists, or remain neutral.

The Seneca under their war chief Old Smoke, the Cayuga, Onondaga and Mohawk were persuaded to side with the British. The Oneida were divided among themselves with some of the tribe wanting to fight with the British. However, there was a strong contingent of warriors under Shengandoah who were pro-colonist. The Tuscarora sided with the colonists.



When it came time to raid frontier settlements of the colonists, many Natives remembered what had happened to them at the hands of the colonists and were persuaded, though sometimes reluctantly to join with the British in the hopes to reclaim their land. Unfortunately, the Natives who sided with the Americans gained no recognition for their help after the war as they had hoped.

ONLINE RESOURCES

[Revolutionary War battles](#)

PRINT RESOURCES

Dziak, Mark. *Battle of Wyoming*: Pittston: Our History Initiative. 2008.

Glickman, Jay. *Painted in Blood Remember Wyoming: America's First Civil War*. Affiliated Writers of America. 1997.