

The ARW Frontier's Wyoming Massacre

James H. Hillestad recruits figures from W. Britain's new 'Clash of Empires' range to re-create an ARW frontier raid launched by Loyalists and Indians in Pennsylvania

Text: James H. Hillestad Photos: James H. Hillestad & W. Britain

The American Revolutionary War was in full fury.

After spending the winter of 1777-1778 in Philadelphia, British forces marched across New Jersey and returned to their base in New York City. With its main army bottled up in that area, the British government sought to exploit a perceived Patriot weakness: the fact that the frontier to Gen. George Washington's rear was vulnerable to Indian raids.

British Loyalists incited and encouraged Indians of the Iroquois Confederacy in the heartland of New York state to attack frontier settlements in Northeastern Pennsylvania. It was there that the Wyoming Massacre -- one of the war's most horrific events -- occurred July 3, 1778.

GUERRILLA WAR

The site of the massacre, also known as the Battle of Wyoming, is less than 30 miles from where I sit writing these lines in the Pocono Mountains. The word "Wyoming"

derives from the Munsee Indian language and means "at the big river flat."



ABOVE: Indians attack a Colonial homestead defended by militia in Jim Hillestad's diorama.

BELOW: The Susquehanna River bisects the Wyoming Valley in Pennsylvania.



LEFT: W. Britain's "Eastern Woodland Indian Attacking With War Club."

BELOW: A mayhem-minded Indian makes his way through woods toward settlers' farm.



The Wyoming Valley is a wide, bucolic plain bounded on two sides by mountain ranges bisected by the Susquehanna River. Following the French and Indian War, 40 settlers from Connecticut established a town along the river. It became known as Forty Fort due to the number of original pioneers.

The tiny frontier community became a big target in the wake of events of the previous year – particularly the surrender of British Gen. John Burgoyne

and his trapped army Oct. 17, 1777, following the Battles of Saratoga in New York state. This spurred France to enter the war as an ally of the rebel colonists.

As a result, the British adopted a defensive posture in Quebec over worries that France might try to seize parts of New France lost in the French and Indian War. The British also actively enlisted Tories and Indian allies to conduct guerrilla warfare along the

northern and western frontiers of the Thirteen Colonies.

A regiment of Loyalist Rangers was recruited by Lt. Col. John Butler. Chiefs Cornplanter and Sayenqueraghta collected Iroquois warriors, mostly from their own Seneca tribe. Joseph Brant marshaled fellow Mohawks for the campaign. Of the Iroquois Six Nations, only the Oneida and Tuscarora became allies of the Patriots.

The Senecas started launching raids



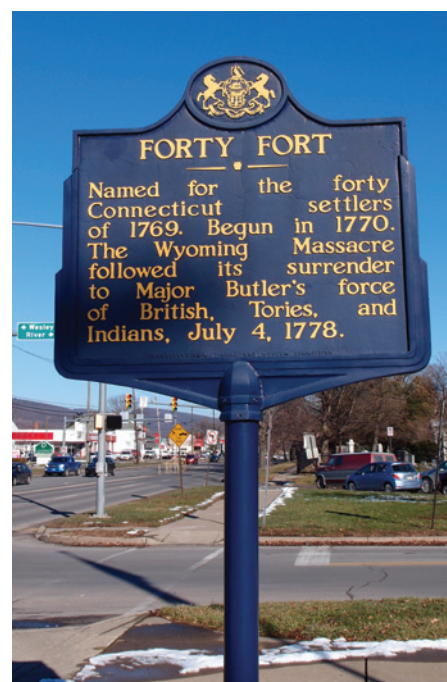
ABOVE: W. Britain's figure of Chief Joseph Bryant directs the attack. The Mohawk leader was not present during the Wyoming Massacre, but nevertheless vilified for it.

TOP: Indians launch a raid along the frontier.

RIGHT: Historical marker for Forty Fort, site of the ARW massacre.



RIGHT: "Eastern Woodland Indian Running With Musket No. 1" by W. Britain.



GET IN TOUCH

W. BRITAIN

Ken Osen

Phone: 563-690-1259

Email: kenosen@1st-gear.com

Web: www.wbritain.com



against settlements along the Allegheny and Susquehanna Rivers by April 1778. The three groups – Loyalists, Senecas and Mohawks – met to confer at the Indian village of Tioga, N.Y., in early June.

Brant and the Mohawks headed north, where they had already raided Cobleskill, N.Y., the previous month. Butler's Rangers and the Senecas fatefully opted to strike south into the Wyoming Valley.

GRISLY ORDEAL

On June 30, the British allies arrived in the valley. They included about 700 Seneca warriors and 400 Loyalists.

The next day Butler demanded and gained the surrender of Wintermute's Fort. He arranged for its defenders to be paroled on the condition that they would not bear arms again for the duration of the war.

On July 3, the British spotted numerous Colonial troops mustering outside Forty Fort. Butler had Wintermute's Fort put to the torch and set up an ambush while the Americans were still a mile away.

The Patriots advanced rapidly because they thought the burning fort signified an enemy retreat. They marched right into the trap.

The Rangers fired three volleys from a range of only 100 yards. The Senecas had



TOP: A Colonial militia officer squares off against an onrushing warrior.

LEFT: W. Britain re-creates the sort of fierce hand-to-hand combat that occurred during the Battle of Wyoming.

BOTTOM LEFT: A warrior takes a scalp from a fallen militiaman.

BELOW: "Eastern Woodland Indian Kneeling Firing No. 1" by W. Britain.





been lying flat on the ground to avoid being seen. The warriors sprang up, fired a volley and rushed forward to engage the Americans in fierce hand-to-hand combat.

A sharp fight erupted and lasted about 45 minutes. An attempt to reposition the American line triggered panic amongst inexperienced militiamen, then a rout. The Indians hunted down fleeing Patriot

troops. Some of them were reportedly taken captive and ritually tortured before being killed.

Out of the 300 Colonial militiamen and 60 Continentals involved in the clash, only five were taken prisoner and 60 escaped alive. Forty Fort and two other forts were surrendered the following morning.

Lt. Col. Butler claimed that his force took 227 scalps, torched 1,000 houses and

ABOVE: Civil War figures produced by W. Britain were converted into Colonial settlers

TOP: Patriot militiamen take cover behind a wagon.

drove off 1,000 cattle and other livestock. Survivors' accounts of the grisly ordeal sent chills throughout the Pocono Mountains and the nearby Delaware River Valley. However, the Loyalists and Indians actually took some pains to spare most non-



combatants and defenseless civilians.

Subsequently, the Iroquois were enraged by accusations of atrocities they claimed they had not engaged in. In the 1809 poem "Gertrude of Wyoming," Scottish poet Thomas Campbell vilified Brant as a "monster," though the famous native leader was not present at the battle.

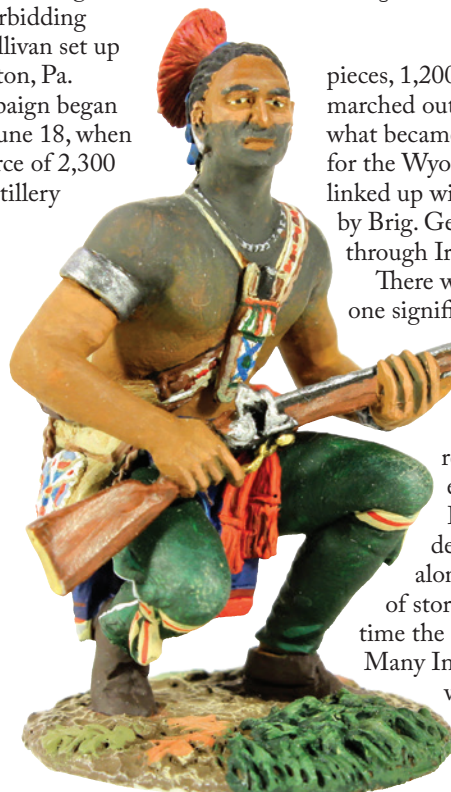
Indian ire was also roused by some American troops who violated their parole by resuming hostilities. British and Iroquois forces retaliated in the Cherry Valley Massacre in Eastern New York Nov. 11, 1778.



SULLIVAN STRIKES

Responding to this threatening situation, Washington ordered Maj. Gen. John Sullivan to lead a punitive expedition to the Wyoming Valley and eradicate the Indian menace during the summer of 1779. After building a road through the forbidding wilderness, Sullivan set up camp at Easton, Pa.

The campaign began in earnest June 18, when Sullivan's force of 2,300 men, eight artillery



ABOVE: The action-packed diorama depicts Indians on the warpath.

LEFT: "Eastern Woodland Indian Crouching Advancing" (ref. 16012).

BELOW: "Eastern Woodland Indian Squatting, Waiting With Musket" (ref. 16010).

pieces, 1,200 pack horses, and 800 cattle marched out of Easton and headed along what became known as "Sullivan's Trail" for the Wyoming Valley. Later on, they linked up with a smaller force commanded by Brig. Gen. James Clinton and swept through Iroquois territory.

There was only one signifi-

cant battle Aug. 29 at

Newtown, N.Y. The overwhelming American force relentlessly compelled tribes to evacuate. The Sullivan-Clinton Expedition methodically destroyed 40 Iroquois villages along with enormous quantities of stored corn and vegetables by the time the campaign ended Oct. 3, 1779. Many Indians died of starvation that winter. The Iroquois never recovered.

CLASH OF EMPIRES

W. Britain General Manager and Creative Director Kenneth A. Osen recently initiated the “Clash of Empires” series of matt-painted figures. They are designed to enable collectors to re-create conflicts between 1754 and 1794 that embroiled native peoples and European intruders while shaping North America’s destiny.

“Clash of Empires” figures were reviewed in TS&MF issues 188 and 191. A half-dozen more animated additions to the range were unveiled in the manufacturer’s 2014 Spring & Stock Catalogue. For collectors fond of traditional-style painting in gloss colors, a Huron warrior posed standing firing has joined the “Redcoats & Bluecoats” series.

W. Britain’s detailed new releases of Eastern Woodland Indians, coupled with a visit to the Wyoming Valley, were the inspiration for my diorama depicting an attack on a Colonial farmstead defended by local militia.

Various 58-mm figures from the “Clash of Empires” series were supplemented by ARW pieces from the same maker. A couple of figures that started out life as part of W. Britain’s American Civil War range were

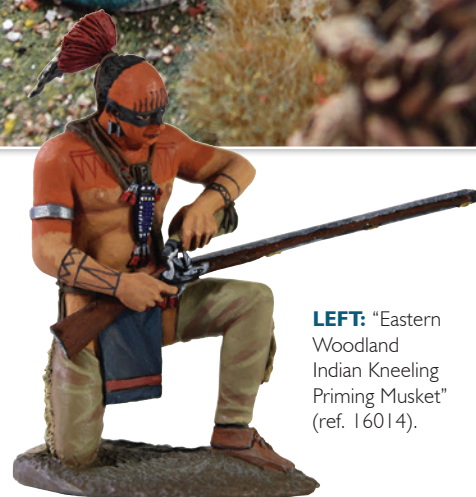


ABOVE: W. Britain’s new glossy “Native American Warrior, Huron, Standing Firing No. 2” (ref. 47046).

TOP: A farmer’s cornfield becomes a battlefield.



ABOVE: “Eastern Woodland Indian Running With Musket No. 2” (ref. 16008).



LEFT: “Eastern Woodland Indian Kneeling Priming Musket” (ref. 16014).

converted to create Colonial civilians. The overall scene measures 23 inches by 45 inches.

The diorama illustrates a historic clash of empires captured in miniature by detailed figures from by W. Britain. . .

Editor’s Note: This TS&MF article was adapted from a version that originally appeared in the February 2014 edition of The Standard, the quarterly journal of the W. Britain Collectors Club. Thanks to writer James H. Hillestad and W. Britain General Manager and Creative Director Kenneth A. Osen for sharing it with our readers.



RIGHT: The latest additions to the “Clash of Empires” series include an Indian dragging off a wounded comrade in a set titled “No One Left Behind” (ref. 16013).

about the writer

James H. Hillestad is the proprietor of The Toy Soldier Museum and shop in Cresco, Pa., USA.