

Bicentennial Moment #4: The Sullivan Campaign of the Revolutionary War – 1779



In 1779, General George Washington sent General John Sullivan into the heart of Seneca territory with orders to destroy all settlements. Sullivan combined forces with General James Clinton's army for a total of about 5,000 men to lead the largest offensive movement of the Revolution into Central and Western New York with the objective of stopping the deadly British-Tory-Indian raids on frontier settlements across the state. When the army reached present day Livingston County they encountered the only organized resistance of the campaign, outside of the Newtown Battlefield near Elmira.

On Sunday, September 12, 1779 as the army set up camp in Conesus and Sullivan sent a scouting party out, most of whom never returned. The scouting party was ambushed on what is now Groveland Hill and more than 16 soldiers including an Oneida guide were slain. Lt. Boyd and Sgt. Michael Parker were captured and taken to Cuylerville, site of the largest Indian settlement in western New York. When the army reached Cuylerville on September 14th, the tortured and mutilated bodies of Boyd and Parker were discovered and buried with military honors. The

army then destroyed the recently abandoned village on 128 homes and burned hundreds of acres of crops and gardens, deterring the Seneca from returning that season and forcing the British to care for them at Fort Niagara.

This was the western limit and the ultimate destination of the Sullivan Campaign. Having fulfilling General Washington's orders, the army left Livingston County on September 16, 1779 the same route they advanced. The bodies of the soldiers killed on Groveland Hill were discovered when the army retreated and also buried with honors.