

WAR

Beyond the Ohio Continues, Parts IV and V



by Andrew Frantz

Part IV – Anthony Wayne and the Legion of the United States

When President Washington heard the news of General Arthur St. Clair's disaster on the banks of the Wabash in December, 1791, he knew he had a crisis on his hands. Hundreds of soldiers had been killed or wounded – losses that the 3,000-man United States Army could ill afford. Further, the defeat significantly weakened the federal government's claim on lands north of the Ohio River and its ability to protect settlements in the territory from what would surely be a new wave of American Indian raids. Most importantly, the battle profoundly demonstrated that the fledgling army lacked strong leadership. Effective as he was as a territorial governor, the gout-ridden St. Clair was no military genius and those of his

subordinates who survived the carnage of 4 November were poorly prepared for the realities of frontier campaigning. In the aftermath of the defeat, the Scottish-born general was forced to resign. If the United States was to secure the Ohio country, as the presence of thousands of American citizens obliged the government to do, then the army would need to once again be rebuilt and a commander found who could go toe-to-toe with the Indian adversaries and deliver a much needed victory to the new republic.

The president understood that once he chose a field commander he could trust, an effective fighting force would come together on its own, yet selecting the right man for the job was no easy task. A list of 16 officers, all veterans of the War for Independence, was presented to the cabinet for consideration, but many were passed over after the most basic scrutiny. Some were seen as too old or unwell, while others either had undistinguished records, lacked experience with independent command, were largely unknown on the national stage, or were simply too junior in rank, as was the case with the president's favorite candidate, his fellow Virginian, Colonel Henry "Light Horse Harry" Lee. The famed drillmaster Friedrich von Steuben was certainly qualified, but concerns were raised over the prospect of a foreign-born

Our series on the U.S. frontier, post American War for Independence continues with Parts IV and V, on the struggles in the Ohio Valley.

We refer you back to Vol. 5, Issue 2, 2019 of *The Standard* for the opening essays.

officer commanding. Several others were removed from consideration in light of their willingness to rely too much on the bottle to make their command decisions.

Ultimately, the list was narrowed down to three contenders: Daniel Morgan, James Wilkinson, and Anthony Wayne. Morgan gained notoriety in several battles but his failing health made him unfit for the rigors of an active frontier campaign. Wilkinson was presently in charge of the forces on the frontier, but did not have much battlefield experience (having resigned twice during the Revolution over personality differences). He was also seen as somewhat of a gossip and intriguer and, unbeknownst to the cabinet, was serving as an agent in the pay of Spain.

Lastly there was Wayne. The Pennsylvanian was wounded four times during the War for Independence, in which he distinguished himself both as subordinate and independent commander, earning the respect and admiration of his men and other officers alike. His success, however, came at a price, as many viewed him as brash and overaggressive, and



A nice belt plate from the period. This is the first regulation American officer's accoutrement plate authorized by government regulation. Die-struck of heavy brass with gold plate with American "frog-legged eagle." The first known reference appears in the General Orders published 26 June, 1795 "Oval breastplate on white shoulder belt, 3" x 2-1/2", ornamented with an eagle in gold or silver to match the buttons."