

“Our Loss Was Heavy”: Brigadier General Josiah Harmar’s Kekionga Campaign of 1790

A Monograph

by

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Abstract

“Our Loss Was Heavy”: Brigadier General Josiah Harmar’s Kekionga Campaign of 1790, by MAJ (P) Edwin D. Matthaide III, 48 pages.

In the fall of 1790, Brigadier General Josiah Harmar led the nascent US Army on a campaign designed to defeat a confederation of Indians blocking white settlement north of the Ohio River. Over the course of a month, Harmar’s forces travelled over 350 miles along widely separated axes, destroyed hundreds of Indian homes and over 20,000 bushels of agricultural goods, and killed between 100-120 warriors in two major engagements. Yet, Harmar ended the campaign having failed impose a peace on the frontier.

While many histories assign blame for the US Army’s failure in the Harmar campaign to poor leadership, unreliable militia, or faulty logistics among others—these reasons may fail to identify and explain the impact of a commander’s understanding of his strategic guidance and the ensuing planning and execution of a campaign. This monograph evaluates the Harmar campaign against the current US Army operations process and the concepts of *understand*, *visualize*, *describe*, and *direct*. In doing so, it argues that the US Army lost against the Northwest Indian Confederation in 1790 due to Brigadier General Harmar’s construction of a campaign plan that failed to recognize its strategic context, while also neglecting to account for the limitations of American organization and capabilities.

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Acronyms

ADP	Army Doctrine Publication
ADRP	Army Doctrine Reference Publication
JP	Joint Publication

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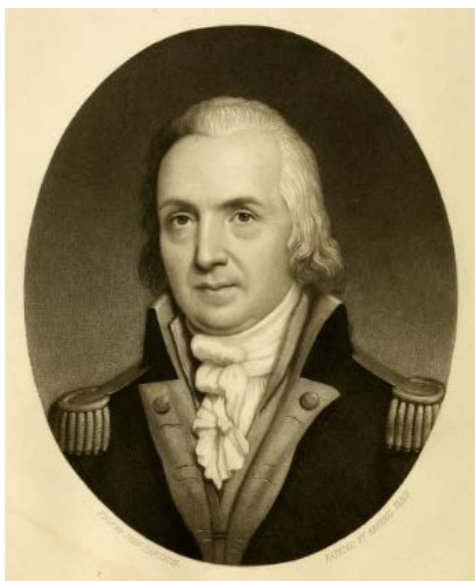


Figure 1 – Brigadier General Josiah Harmar

Source: Military Journal of Major Ebenezer Denny: An Officer in the Revolutionary and Indian Wars (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1859), 32.

Introduction

Our prospects are much changed. Instead of peace and friendship with our Indian neighbors a horrid Savage war stares us in the face. The Indians instead of being humbled by the destruction of the Shawnee Towns & brought to beg for peace, appear determined on a general War.

– Rufus Putnam to Secretary of War Henry Knox
6 January 1791¹

These words from Ohio Company Director Rufus Putnam serve as a fitting epitaph to the US Army's first campaign.² Launched with high hopes of destroying a recalcitrant confederation of Indians along the Miami River in late September 1790 and securing the land north of the Ohio River for white settlement, the small and motley army of regulars and militia under Brigadier

¹ Rufus Putnam, *The Memoirs of Rufus Putnam and Certain Official Papers and Correspondence*, ed. Rowena Buell (Cambridge, MA: The Riverside Press, 1903), 247.

² Harmar's 1790 campaign was the first major operation conducted by the US Army following the ratification of the Constitution and the election of President George Washington.

General Josiah Harmar returned just over one month later publicly proclaiming victory, but privately recognizing it lost against an enemy who “fought desperately” and inflicted, “considerable slaughter upon our side.”³ Though quickly acquitted in a court of inquiry and found “irreproachable” in his conduct, Harmar’s failed campaign initiated four continuous years of violence in the Northwest Territory before another American army under Major General Anthony Wayne finally secured a lasting victory over the Indians at Fallen Timbers.⁴

Despite his experience in the Revolutionary War, despite having spent over six years leading the army in the Ohio River Valley, and despite the detailed guidance from both the president of the United States and the secretary of war; Harmar still failed in dramatic fashion when given the opportunity to combat his long time Indian antagonists. But, why did this happen? Common explanations for the US Army’s poor performance during the 1790 campaign range from poor leadership at all levels, to unreliable militia, to faulty logistics among many others.⁵ While these reasons are compelling, they may fail to identify and explain the impact of a commander’s understanding of his strategic guidance and the ensuing planning and execution of a campaign. By evaluating the 1790 campaign against the current US Army operations process and

³ Josiah Harmar, *Outpost on the Wabash: 1787-1791*, ed. Gayle Thornbrough (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1957; repr. Whitefish, MT: Literary Licensing, 2011), 268. The varied groupings of Indians that fought the US Army from 1790-1795 are variously described as the Northwest Confederacy, the Wabash Confederacy, the Ohio Confederacy or the Miami Confederacy.

⁴ The court of inquiry examining Harmar’s defeat concluded on 23 September 1791 and quickly notified Governor Arthur St. Clair of Harmar’s “irreproachable” conduct, and “judicious” actions regarding the organization of the Army, the order of march, and order of encampment and battle. US Congress, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, vol. 1, ed. Walter Lowrie and Matthew St. Clair Clarke (Washington, DC: 1830: Gales and Seaton). The US Army groups the military operations of Generals Harmar (1790), St. Clair (1791), and Wayne (1792-1795) all under a single “Miami, 1790-1795” campaign. However, while the Miami Indians were a leading antagonist throughout the era, each of these operations faced a different and ever changing group of American Indian opponents.

⁵ Richard W. Stewart, ed., *American Military History*, vol. 1, *The United States Army and the Forging of a Nation, 1775–1917* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center for Military History, 2009), 117-118.

the concepts of *understand*, *visualize*, *describe*, and *direct*, it becomes apparent that the US Army lost against the Northwest Indian Confederation in 1790 due to Brigadier General Harmar's construction of a campaign plan that failed to recognize strategic context, while also neglecting to account for the limitations of American organization and capabilities.⁶

Historiography of Harmar's Campaign

Historians have examined the Northwest Indian War of 1790-1795 from numerous perspectives. Biographies of key leaders, chronologies of the various campaigns, and studies on the army profession and material culture have considered the military aspects of the era. Social and political histories have further examined white-Indian relations, Anglo-American conflict over the Ohio Country after the American Revolution, and the debate over creating an army during the early Federalist period.⁷

A large collection of primary sources makes the Harmar campaign accessible—even if under examined—to historians.⁸ For example, *The Territorial Papers of the United States* covers the Northwest Territory from 1787-1830.⁹ *The Territorial Papers* encapsulate the correspondence of Governor Arthur St. Clair with key political and military leaders both east and west of the Appalachians during his early efforts to establish control of the region in the years between the

⁶ For a full description of the operations process, see Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 5-0, *The Operations Process* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), 1-2-1-6.

⁷ Historians working in this area interchangeable use the terms Northwest Territory, the Ohio Country, the Ohio River Valley, the Lower Great Lakes, and the *pays d'en haut* to describe the region.

⁸ Not utilized in this monograph, but important to understanding the role of the executive branch are *The Papers of George Washington*. George Washington, "The Papers of George Washington," University of Virginia, accessed 30 November 2014, <http://gwpapers.virginia.edu>.

⁹ US Department of State, *The Territorial Papers of the United States*, vol. 2, *The Territory Northwest of the River Ohio, 1787-1803*, Clarence Edwin Carter, ed. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1934).

adoption of the Northwest Ordinance and Ohio's statehood. *The Papers of the War Department* is an online collection of original documents ranging from 1784 to 1800.¹⁰ *The Papers of the War Department* parallel *The Territorial Papers*, but narrow the focus to communications between Secretary of War Henry Knox and his various agents in the Northwest Territory. Similarly the *American State Papers*, published by the Congress in the early 1830s, address topics relating to the Legislative Branch. Two volumes of the *American State Papers*, *Military Affairs* and *Indian Affairs*, provide a host of information regarding the Harmar campaign.¹¹ Rounding out the major primary source materials are various collections of papers collated around American military leaders to include Brigadier General Josiah Harmar and Major John Hamtrack, and political leaders including Governor St. Clair.¹² Diaries and reports of multiple Northwest Indian War participants further augment these materials.¹³ Despite the wide range of American primary correspondence, American Indian primary sources are few and are limited to *The Papers of Joseph Brant*, and transcripts or recollections of Indian correspondence or speeches contained within some of the aforementioned American sources.

¹⁰ Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media, "Papers of the War Department: 1784-1800," George Mason University, accessed 30 November 2014, <http://wardepartmentpapers.org/index.php>.

¹¹ US Congress, *American State Papers: Indian Affairs*, vol. 1, ed. Walter Lowrie and Matthew St. Clair Clark (Washington, DC, 1832: Gales and Seaton); US Congress, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, vol. 1, ed. Walter Lowrie and Matthew St. Clair Clark (Washington, DC, 1830: Gales and Seaton).

¹² Josiah Harmar and John Francis Hamtramck, *Outpost on the Wabash*, ed. Gayle Thornbrough (Reprint, Whitefish, MT: Literary Licensing, 2011); Arthur St. Clair, *The St. Clair Papers*, vol. 2, ed. William Henry Smith (Cincinnati: Robert Clarke, 1882).

¹³ For examples of diaries see Ebenezer Denny, "The Campaign in Indian Country," in *The St. Clair Papers*, 251-62; or Ebenezer Denny, *Military Journal of Major Ebenezer Denny: An Officer in the Revolutionary and Indian Wars* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1859). For examples of reports from the Ohio Company, see *The Memoirs of Rufus Putnam*.

Biographers of the first president dating from Washington Irving's 1855 *Life of George Washington* through Ron Chernow's recent *Washington: A Life* all devote minimal attention to the Northwest Indian War and even less to Harmar's operations in the Ohio Country.¹⁴ Broadening the search for other American personalities involved in the Northwest Indian War reveals that key figures like Brigadier General Harmar or Major John Hamtramck either lack a biography entirely, or have biographies so dated and sympathetic in the case of Governor St. Clair, that they are of limited value.¹⁵ The biographies that do exist for characters such as Secretary of War Henry Knox generally focus on Revolutionary War experiences more than their service to the new republic.¹⁶ Lastly, paralleling the dearth of primary sources, American Indian

¹⁴ Irving ignores both the Harmar and Wayne campaigns and only uses St. Clair's defeat to illustrate Washington's famous temper. Washington Irving, *George Washington: A Biography*, ed. Charles Neider (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976), 667-79. James Thomas Flexner includes just nine pages on the Harmar and St. Clair campaigns in *George Washington and the New Nation (1783-1793)*, and just one page on the Wayne campaign in *George Washington: Anguish and Farewell (1793-1799)*. James Thomas Flexner, *George Washington and the New Nation (1783-1793)* (New York: Little Brown, 1970), 296-304; James Thomas Flexner, *George Washington: Anguish and Farewell (1793-1799)* (New York: Little Brown, 1972), 172. Harmar's campaign makes a brief two paragraph appearance in Chernow's book, but outside of his assessment that the defeat "only reinforced Washington[']s...long-standing prejudice against the militia," the analysis remains focused towards overall Indian policy. Ron Chernow, *Washington: A Life* (New York: Penguin, 2010), 665-66.

¹⁵ There are no book-length biographies on either General Josiah Harmar or Major John Hamtramck. John Parker Huber did examine Harmar's seven-year leadership of the US Army in the Ohio Country in his 1968 dissertation; however, Hamtramck remains unexamined. See John Parker Huber, "General Josiah Harmar's Command: Military Policy in the Old Northwest, 1784-1791" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1968). Biographies of Governor (Major General) Arthur St. Clair date back to the early-twentieth century and include S.A.D. Whipple, *Arthur St. Clair of Old Fort Recovery* (Fort Recovery, OH: Broadway Publishing, 1911); Frazer Ellis Wilson, *Arthur St. Clair: Rugged Ruler of the Old Northwest* (Richmond: Garrett and Massie, 1944).

¹⁶ North Callahan does note in his introduction that, "As Washington's Secretary of War, [Henry Knox] continued his leadership in civilian life and the results of his labors are a valuable legacy. Knox strove with great persistence and success to settle the disturbing problems of the Indians in the South and West." Callahan further expands upon Knox's centrality to the Northwest Indian War in Chapter 18, "The Indian Troubles." North Callahan, *Henry Knox: General Washington's General*, (New York: Rinehart, 1958), viii, 314-37.

personalities are also underrepresented in biography. John Sugden worked with the limited sources on hand to write the encompassing *Blue Jacket: Warrior of the Shawnees*, in an effort to balance the viewpoints and provide insight into one of the dominant military leaders in the Northwest Confederation.¹⁷ Similarly Colin G. Calloway explores Blue Jacket's entire tribe in *The Shawnees and the War for America*, to have the "Shawnees speak from the records" and explain "that for them the struggle for America was not only a contest for resources but also a clash between two ways of life and between two different worldviews."¹⁸

Despite authors' focus on the politics of the early Washington administration, there is limited literature devoted to the Northwest Indian War itself and there are no books solely examining Harmer's campaign.¹⁹ The lone book about all the campaigns against the various Northwest Confederacies is Wiley Sword's *President Washington's Indian War*. Sword envisions the Northwest Indian War as "a five year struggle crucial to securing and sustaining American nationalism" and considers the outcome "the decisive confrontation in the Indian-United States wars."²⁰ Sword provides a detailed chronology of the various campaigns and highlights key political and social events, but generally avoids assessing the success or failure of US Army operations. Narrowing the focus from the entire Northwest Indian War, military collector William

¹⁷ John Sugden, *Blue Jacket: Warrior of the Shawnees* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000).

¹⁸ Colin G. Calloway, *The Shawnees and the War for America* (New York: Penguin, 2007), xxxvii.

¹⁹ As examples of the Northwest Indian War's centrality to the Washington administration it is worth noting that the war consumed 5/6 of the Federal budget from 1790-1795, and that the president highlighted that "the most important of these [priorities] is the defence and security of the western frontiers," in his Third State of the Union Address. Colin G. Calloway, *The Victory with No Name: The Native American Defeat of the First American Army* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 26; George Washington, Third State of the Union Address, October 25, 1791 in *George Washington: In His Own Words*, ed. Maureen Harrison and Steve Gilbert (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1997), 98.

²⁰ Wiley Sword, *President Washington's Indian War: The Struggle for the Old Northwest, 1790-1795* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), xiii.

H. Guthman's *March to Massacre* examines the material culture of the Federal Army in addition to a brief review of the Harmar and St. Clair campaigns. Guthman assesses that Harmar's expedition could not be considered a "total loss," for while it antagonized the Indians, it also proved "to the War Department that a large force could penetrate the uncharted forests of the Northwest Territory" and fight the Indians in "previously uncharted territory."²¹ In contrast to Sword and Guthman, a more detailed assessment of Harmar's campaign emerges in Michael S. Warner's article, "General Josiah Harmar's Campaign Reconsidered: How the Americans Lost the Battle of Kekionga." Warner argues that while, "conditions imposed upon Harmar by his superiors and by his army made his failure likely," defeat actually "rested with Harmar's men, who had, but lost, the opportunity to snatch victory from defeat"²² That said, Warner critically evaluates Harmar and notes that his "generalship failed at several crucial moments" during the campaign.²³ Outside of these few works, Harmar's campaign serves only as a stage setter for further defeat under St. Clair or eventual victory with Major General Anthony Wayne and the Legion of the United States at Fallen Timbers.²⁴ Even the U.S. Army's own official publication, *American Military History*, only devotes three paragraphs to the campaign.²⁵

²¹ William H. Guthman, *March to Massacre: A History of the First Seven Years of the United States Army, 1784-1791* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1975), 195-6.

²² Michael S. Warner, "General Josiah Harmar's Campaign Reconsidered: How the Americans Lost the Battle of Kekionga," *Indiana Magazine of History*, 83 (March 1987): 45. The only other book that "assesses" Harmar's Campaign as a stand-alone component is James M. Perry, *Arrogant Armies: Great Military Disasters and the Generals Behind Them* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1996), 31-47. Perry concludes that "Harmar was a calamity."

²³ Warner, "General Josiah Harmar's Campaign Reconsidered," 63.

²⁴ Harmar's Campaign sets the stage in for future operations in John F. Winkler, *Wabash 1791: St. Clair's Defeat* (New York: Osprey, 2011); John F. Winkler, *Fallen Timbers, 1794: The U.S. Army's First Victory* (New York: Osprey, 2013); Calloway, *The Victory with No Name*; Alan D. Gaff, *Bayonets in the Wilderness: Anthony Wayne's Legion in the Old Northwest* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004). One of the more unusual books on the subject is Wilbur Edel's, *Kekionga! The Worst Defeat in the History of the U.S. Army*. While Edel insinuates an assessment of St. Clair's campaign, his social history only devotes some four pages

While military-centered examinations of the Northwest Indian War are few, numerous authors include the conflict in their examination of cross-cultural engagement between Americans and Indians. For example, Richard White's *The Middle Ground* examines the changing nature of Euro-American and Indian interaction from first French contact through the end of the War of 1812 and the creation of a cultural "middle ground." Regarding the Northwest Indian War, White highlights how both American settlers and ensuing governmental policy aggressively changed the nature of white-Indian relations across the region, forcing the Algonquian people to shape a new existence²⁶ Other authors such as Eric Hinderaker, Gregory H. Nobles, and Sarah E. Miller further expand upon this argument of America's military role in changing the nature of White-Indian relations, while others such as Patrick Griffin and R. Douglas Hurt address these issues in the Ohio Country more specifically.²⁷ Despite the impact of the US Army in helping change the

to the actual operation itself. Wilbur Edel, *Kekionga! The Worst Defeat in the History of the U.S. Army* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishing, 1997).

²⁵ Stewart, devotes one paragraph to the Harmar campaign and only notes "the two-pronged campaign was a disaster." Stewart, *American Military History*, 117-118. Similar surveys of American military history also largely neglect the Harmar campaign. See Allan R. Millet, Peter Maslowski, and William B. Feis, *For the Common Defense: A Military History of the United States from 1607-2012* (New York: Free Press, 2012), 85; Russell F. Weigley, *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977), 41.

²⁶ White argues throughout most of his book that Euro-American and Indian relations were historically those of mutual accommodation. White focuses the balance of his argument addressing how the rise of the United States changed this constructed society in Chapter 10, "Confederacies." Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 413-68.

²⁷ Eric Hinderaker argues that the American Revolution spawned, "a new organizing principle," that supported an, "aggressive pursuit of western expansion... [and] hastened the process by which Indians could be dispossessed of their lands." Eric Hinderaker, *Elusive Empires: Constructing Colonialism in the Ohio Valley, 1673-1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), xii-xiii. Similarly, Gregory H. Nobles contends that the expansion of the United States "depended on the participation, even the active promotion, of the national government," of which the Northwest Indian War is just one example. Gregory H. Nobles, *American Frontiers: Cultural Encounters and Continental Conquest* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1997), 15. Likewise, Sarah E. Miller notes that the United States took advantage of periodic cross-cultural violence to make it "an integrated part of the political engagements between United

nature of white-Indian relations highlighted in these works, the Harmar campaign is not examined in more than cursory detail in any of these.

The competition between Britain and the United States after the Revolutionary War and their relationship to the Indian nations offers another vantage point on the Northwest Indian War. For example in *Crown and Calumet: British-Indian Relations, 1783-1815*, Colin G. Calloway highlights how Britain advised and supplied the Indians in order to maintain “a neutral Indian state...constructed as a barrier between [Canada] and the United States” without escalating the frontier conflict into another Anglo-American war.²⁸ Similarly, in, *The Shawnees and the War for America*, Calloway notes how Britain maintained the military posts scattered across the Great Lakes for more than thirteen years after ceding the region to the United States in the 1783 Treaty of Paris as a means to enable the “tribes to remain united in defense of their lands [while also] cultivating them as allies in case war broke out” with the Americans.²⁹ Complementing Calloway’s works is *Fighting for America: The Struggle for Mastery in North America, 1519-1871*, by Jeremy Black.³⁰ Black highlights British efforts to maintain control of lands

States and Native authorities.” Sarah E. Miller, “‘Foolish Young Men’ and the Contested Ohio Country, 1783-1795,” in *Contested Territories: Native Americans and Non-Natives in the Lower Great Lakes, 1700-1850*, ed. Charles Beatty Medina and Melissa Rinehart (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2012), xxv, 35-54. Patrick Griffin suggests that the United States-Indian conflict in Ohio demonstrated that, “whites and Indians could not live together,” and that, “the government would from this point forward be in this business,” of expansion and war against the Indians. Patrick Griffin, “Reconsidering the Ideological Origins of Indian Removal,” in *The Center of a Great Empire: The Ohio Country in the Early American Republic*, ed. Andrew R.L. Cayton and Stuart. D. Hobbs (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005), 11-35. R. Douglas Hurt similarly identifies that the eventual victory in the Northwest Indian War set a pattern for the United States government that “whenever it wanted more land, the Indian nations would sell it on demand.” R. Douglas Hurt, *The Ohio Frontier: Crucible of the Old Northwest, 1720-1830* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 142.

²⁸ Colin G. Calloway, *Crown and Calumet: British-Indian Relations, 1783-1815* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 16.

²⁹ Colin G. Calloway, *The Shawnees and the War for America* (New York: Penguin, 2007), 91-92.

³⁰ Jeremy Black, *Fighting for America: The Struggle for Mastery in North America*,

relinquished in the Treaty of Paris and how “American relations with the Native Americans could not be separated from the real, or possible, role of Britain.”³¹ Despite the centrality of a potential British response to any US military operation into the Northwest Territory, the Harmar Campaign rates just a few sentences in any of these works.

The rise of the US Army comprises another area of study addressing the Northwest Indian War. Richard H. Kohn in his *Eagle and Sword: The Federalists and the Creation of the Military Establishment in America, 1783-1802* argues that the Northwest Indian War was not as important to the rise of the United States Army or the greater American military establishment as were political efforts by former Continental Army officers and Federalist elites.³² This argument challenges the more prevalent argument that the army owed its rise to functional requirements to defend the frontier. The defense of the frontier forms the basis of James Ripley Jacobs’ *The Beginning of the United States Army, 1783-1812*, serves as a foundational assumption in Russell F. Weigley’s chapter on early military professionalism in *Towards an American Army: Military Thought from Washington to Marshall*, and is carried to its fullest development in Francis Paul Prucha’s *The Sword of the Republic: The United States Army on the Frontier, 1783-1846*.³³ Prucha notes that the Army established itself after “meeting or preventing challenges to American authority by Indian tribes,” and that “the regular army of the United States owed its existence to the American frontier.”³⁴ Weigley similarly argues the regular army arose from its requirements

1519-1871 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011).

³¹ Black, *Fighting for America*, 143.

³² Richard H. Kohn, *Eagle and Sword: The Federalists and the Creation of the Military Establishment in America, 1783-1802* (New York: Free Press, 1975), xii.

³³ James Ripley Jacobs, *The Beginning of the U.S. Army, 1783-1812* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1947); Francis Paul Prucha, *The Sword of the Republic: The United States Army on the Frontier, 1783-1846* (London: Macmillan, 1969).

³⁴ Prucha, *The Sword of the Republic*, xvi, 1.

as a “police force to maintain order in the Indian country.”³⁵ Regardless of the author, the Harmar campaign is generally deemed a failure serves only as a piece of evidence regarding the eventual development of the US Army.

Spiraling Violence: The Northwest Territory from 1783-1790

The fate of the Northwest Territory consumed much of the early republic’s attention. Despite crippling debts, the United States found itself land rich after the Revolution, and the Ohio Country provided an opportunity for economic salvation if the government could only overcome barriers blocking exploitation of the land. While conflict between white settlers and American Indians was the obvious and most visible concern, relations with Britain and Spain over control of the frontier, the right of deposit at New Orleans, the establishment of government sovereignty in the west, and the overall organization of the nascent American government all played dominant roles during this period.³⁶

In the years following the American Revolution vast numbers of settlers flooded into the Ohio River Valley in pursuit of economic opportunity in lands ceded by Great Britain in the Treaty of Paris.³⁷ During the winter of 1786-1787 alone, over “one hundred and seventy-seven boats, two thousand six hundred and eighty-nine souls” and a host of other livestock moved down

³⁵ Russell F. Weigley, *Towards an American Army: Military Thought from Washington to Marshall* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962.), 19.

³⁶ For a detailed look at the period see Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism: The Early American Republic, 1788-1800* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

³⁷ Article 2 of the Treaty of Paris awarded the United States the land area comprising the modern states of Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, Wisconsin, and parts of Minnesota. See The Definitive Treaty of Peace 1783, US-Great Britain, 3 September 1783.

the Ohio River past Fort Harmar.³⁸ This flood of people into the Ohio Country was the primary catalyst for conflict.

For the various Indian tribes living in the region, the end of the American Revolution brought major changes to their political relationships with whites and set the conditions for continued violence.³⁹ The Indians, appropriately, felt cheated at the close of the war when Britain ceded control of nominally Indian lands to the United States without consultation.⁴⁰ The Americans quickly communicated to the Shawnees for example that, “the English have made Peace with us for themselves, but forgot you their Children, who Fought with them, and neglected you like Bastards.”⁴¹ Forced to interact with an emboldened and aggressive new white “Father,” the Indians were immediately put onto the defensive. This new political relationship led to a series of treaties between the Indians and the United States that supposedly protected Indian lands and prerogatives, but actually sowed the seeds of discontent.⁴² For example, despite a concerted

³⁸ Josiah Harmar to Henry Knox, 14 May 1787, *St. Clair Papers*, 22.

³⁹ The British continued to dominate economic influence over the Indians in the Ohio Country during this period. While the US began to authorize individual trade with Indians in the “Ordinance for the Regulation of Indian Affairs” of 1786, it took another ten years before the government adopted the “Act for Establishing Trading Houses with Indian Tribes” and implemented a deliberate approach towards improving Indian reliance on American trade goods. In the interim, the Ohio Indians continued to use the convenient British post at Detroit and other British traders with long established ties to the region. See, *American State Papers: Indian Affairs*, 14; Francis Paul Prucha, ed., *Documents of United States Indian Policy*, 3rd ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 16-17; Timothy D. Willig, *Restoring the Chain of Friendship: British Policy and the Indians of the Great Lakes, 1783-1815* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008) 23, 27-30.

⁴⁰ Calloway, *The Shawnees and the War for America*, 74-75.

⁴¹ Quoted in Calloway, *The Shawnees and the War for America*, 75.

⁴² The United States and various Indian tribes signed the Treaties of Fort Stanwix (1784), Fort McIntosh (1785), Fort Finney (1786), and Fort Harmar (1790) in an effort to establish boundaries in the Ohio Country. Prucha, *The Sword of the Republic*, 7-10, 18-9. For more background on the treaties and US-Indian relations in general, see Francis Paul Prucha, *American Indian Treaties: The History of a Political Anomaly* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1997); Francis Paul Prucha, *The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indians*, 2 vols. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984).

effort across several years, the Americans never succeeded in negotiating a single treaty with true plurality of the Indians in the Ohio Country.⁴³ While many tribes did sign onto a treaty, many others did not and continued to live, hunt, and fight against the whites as they saw fit. Similarly, as frontier whites surged across the Appalachians, they disregarded the treaties and established communities in un-ceded areas or raided and committed other random acts of violence against “Treaty” and hostile Indians alike.⁴⁴ While the common American narrative supported the idea that Indians drove much of the violence, Governor St. Clair noted early in his tenure that, “there is too much reason to believe that at least equal if not greater Injuries are done to the Indians by the frontier settlers.”⁴⁵ This apparent inability for either side to halt the actions of “foolish young men” soured relations and opportunities for peace on the frontier.⁴⁶

Although white settlers proved an existential threat to Indians in the Ohio Country, the surge of Americans westward also threatened the new United States. While the lands outside of the thirteen original states served as a reservoir of economic potential, the government had to assert control over the territory to reap the financial reward. Government control took two forms. First it required a means to sell the land and incorporate it into the United States, and second, it

⁴³ One of the most viable attempts by the Indians to secure a pan-Indian treaty with the United States occurred on 28 November 1786 at Brownstown, Michigan, near Detroit, where the Mohawk leader Joseph Brant attempted to get the tribes to act with, “one mind and one voice.” Brant failed and various tribes signed separate treaties with the United States. See Hurt, *The Ohio Frontier*, 100-101.

⁴⁴ In one glaring example of frontier settler disregard for official US government-Indian relations, a group of rogue militiamen from Nelson County, Kentucky killed nine friendly “Treaty” Indians in within sight of Major Hamtramck at Fort Knox, near Vincennes, Indiana. Hamtramck described his exchange with the militiamen and his horror at their actions for Indians in, “a pacific state and under the protection of the United States. John Francis Hamtramck to Josiah Harmar, 31 August 1788, *Outpost on the Wabash*, 115.

⁴⁵ Arthur St. Clair to Henry Knox, 27 January 1788, *Territorial Papers*, 89.

⁴⁶ Sarah E. Miller fully develops the idea of reciprocal violence on the frontier in her “‘Foolish Young Men’ and the Contested Ohio Country, 1783-1795,” *Contested Territories*, 35-54.

required gaining control over white settlement in the region. The Continental Congress under the Articles of Confederation passed the Ordinance of 1787 to address the first requirement.⁴⁷ The Northwest Ordinance established the framework for territorial governments to include a governor and judiciary, identified the conditions necessary to establish a legislature, and identified that the territory in whatever future form, “shall forever remain a part of this Confederacy of the United States of America.”⁴⁸ In doing this, the government provided a legal framework for the actions it would implement to assert sovereignty over the region. The second, and more controversial, requirement for asserting control in the region centered on controlling white immigration. On the one hand, rogue white settlement north of the Ohio River frequently incited Indian reprisals that kept the frontier in a continual state of violence. On the other hand, these same settlements limited the ability of the Confederation and later Federal government to sell land in the valley. Prior to passing the Northwest Ordinance, much of the military activity in the Ohio Country had focused on removing squatters from Indian or US Government owned lands.⁴⁹ Once the Northwest Ordinance went into effect, however, the US Army transitioned into the mission of defending legal settlements.

A final key factor at play in the region and era was the British, who had resolved to support Indian actions that might delay or prevent the continued expansion of the United States across the North American continent. While Governor St. Clair in the Northwest Territory and others in the Washington administration recognized the “pernicious counsels of the English,” who “will most probably prevent [the Indians] from listening to any reasonable terms of

⁴⁷ Ordinance of 1787, July 13, 1787, *Territorial Papers*, 39-50. The Washington Administration passed another Northwest Ordinance of 1789 to insure continuity of government under the newly effective Constitution of the United States.

⁴⁸ Ordinance of 1787, 13 July 1787, *Territorial Papers*, 47. The Ordinance allowed for between three and five future states to be formed from the territory.

⁴⁹ For one example of the US Army being used to remove squatters see, St. Clair to Knox, 12 July 1786, *St. Clair Papers*, 14.

accommodation,” they also recognized that avoidance of a renewed Anglo-American war was not in the young nation’s best interest.⁵⁰ To this end the Americans would conduct operations in a manner addressing the “existing jealousies in the minds of the British officers,” while also informing them of the “pacific disposition of the United States towards Great Britain and its possessions.”⁵¹ All of these conflicts, white-Indian violence, a need to exert Federal control over the Northwest Territory, and an effort to reduce British influence led to calls for action.

“Extirpate the Banditti”: The Harmar Campaign of 1790

Plans and Preparations

By the fall of 1789 Governor St. Clair believed that the conditions across the Northwest Territory required government action and requested President Washington to “take the matter into consideration, and give me the orders you may think is proper.”⁵² Over the next twelve months President Washington and Secretary of War Knox at the national level and Governor St. Clair and Brigadier General Harmar at the territorial and army level examined and developed the objectives and ends that would constitute a campaign against the Wabash tribes in 1790. In first approaching the president, Governor St. Clair also noted that “the handful of Troops Sir, that are scattered in that country, tho’ they may afford protection to some settlements, cannot possibly act offensively by themselves.”⁵³ In doing so he also began shaping the means and ways arguments that so greatly affected the forthcoming campaign. Within the month, Washington responded to St. Clair’s inquiry and provided his initial guidance. Surprisingly, it left much in St. Clair’s and Harmar’s hands to conduct “such operations, offensive or defensive, as you and the commanding

⁵⁰ St. Clair to Knox, 1 May 1790, *St. Clair Papers*, 136.

⁵¹ Knox to St. Clair, 23 August 1790, *St. Clair Papers*, 162.

⁵² St. Clair to George Washington, 14 September 1789, *Territorial Papers*, 216.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

officer of the troops conjointly shall judge necessary for the public service and the protection of the inhabitants and posts.”⁵⁴ The only end or objective that the president articulated was the requirement for the United States to “punish [the Indians] with severity.”⁵⁵ While the president left the potential ways up to St. Clair and Harmar, he did begin to address the means available and articulated that St. Clair was “hereby authorized and empowered in my name to call on the lieutenants of the nearest counties of Virginia and Pennsylvania for such detachments of militia as you may judge proper.”⁵⁶ Not long after, Secretary Knox communicated with General Harmar in communications parallel to those between the president and Governor St. Clair regarding the potential for military operations within the Northwest Territories. However, Knox offered more restrained guidance and noted that the president was of “the opinion that the best foundation for peace with the Indians is by establishing just and liberal treaties with them.”⁵⁷ Knox expanded upon this point by noting that American “frontier people” were just as responsible for the violence and that it may be “nay impossible for an impartial mind to decide which party is right, or which is wrong.”⁵⁸ Knox’s guidance began to shape the timeline of potential operations against the conclusion of a treaty with the “Wabash Indians,” while also limiting the potential scope of operations against an enemy force that was not unilaterally responsible for the enduring conflict.

⁵⁴ Washington to St. Clair, 6 October 1789, *St. Clair Papers*, 125-126.

⁵⁵ Washington to St. Clair, 6 October 1789, *St. Clair Papers*, 126.

⁵⁶ President Washington assessed that he could call forth the militia based on a 29 September 1788 Act of Congress that authorized militia service to protect the frontiers. That said, the President did put a numerical limit on the militia called to service with a maximum of 1000 drawn from Virginia (Kentucky) and 500 drawn from Pennsylvania. Washington further provided guidance on the pay and equipping of said militia forces. See Washington to St. Clair, 6 October 1789, *St. Clair Papers*, 125-126.

⁵⁷ Secretary Knox wrote his initial letter (now lost) on 29 October 1789. He confirms this letter and the guidance it contained in a later letter. Knox to Harmar, 19 December 1789, *Outpost on the Wabash*, 211.

⁵⁸ Knox to Harmar, 19 December 1789, *Outpost on the Wabash*, 211.

Within the guidance of these initial communiqués, St. Clair and Harmar began to plan their campaign.

Through the winter and spring of 1790 planning and preparations for an operation against the various recalcitrant tribes progressed in both the capital at New York and the Northwest Territory. Secretary Knox first continued to address the means by securing a modest increase in the size of the army from Congress.⁵⁹ More importantly Knox proposed to the president a small, short duration operation against “the Indians hostilely disposed,” consisting of a mix of federal and militia troops numbering about four hundred in number and “all mounted on horseback for the sake of rapidity.”⁶⁰ Knox argued that this force would be able to “get in the rear of the said banditti” while also delivering a precise instrument that would not “act offensively against any well-disposed Indians.”⁶¹ Knox’s plans reflected Washington’s desire both to limit costs and prevent escalation into a general war against the Indians. Knox’s letter also confirmed earlier ends of the expedition in noting that “the immediate object of it” will “tend to strike a terror in the minds of the Indians.”⁶² Knox’s plans evidently secured presidential approval, as his note to Governor St. Clair and General Harmar just over one week later confirmed the “direction of the President” and the outlines of an expedition for “extirpating the said band of murderers.”⁶³ Unfortunately, the operation conceived by Knox was not one that the small US Army forces

⁵⁹ Jacobs, *The Beginning of the U.S. Army*, 50.

⁶⁰ Knox to Washington, 27 May 1790, *St. Clair Papers*, 146-147.

⁶¹ Knox to Washington, 27 May 1790, *St. Clair Papers*, 147.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.* The 7 June 1790 letter from Knox to Harmar is missing from the historical record. However, in the absence of any specific guidance in the letter from Knox to St. Clair indicating a contrary concept of operations, we must assume that Knox articulated a concept similar to that described to the president.

under Harmar could execute, as they lacked a mounted regular element that could move with the rapidity Knox desired, or in parallel with a mounted militia element.⁶⁴

It is unknown if, when, or how Governor St. Clair or General Harmar initially communicated their inability to conduct an operation similar to the one outlined by Knox earlier that summer. However, by July 1790 Harmar finalized his plans for an operation markedly different from that envisioned by Knox. In guidance to Major Hamtramck at Fort Knox in Vincennes, Indiana, Harmar articulated an infantry-based, two pronged attack involving separate operations against the “Miami Villages” along the Miami and Maumee Rivers and another against the “Weea Towns” along the Wabash River.⁶⁵ St. Clair finally forwarded this concept of operations in a letter sent to Secretary Knox a month later.⁶⁶ Despite this noticeable change in intended operations, Secretary Knox did not acknowledge this change or redirect operations back towards his initial intent. Secretary Knox did, however, counsel General Harmar that he should “make the best arrangements for obtaining intelligence,” and should conduct the operation “so rapid[ly] and decisive as to astonish your enemy” while also using all foresight to “prevent surprise.”⁶⁷ In a concurrent, but separate letter to Governor St. Clair, Knox confirmed that attempts to secure a treaty with the “Wabash Indians” had failed and that President Washington authorized offensive operations while also identifying a larger political purpose of “produc[ing] in the Indians proper dispositions for peace” and “the prevention of future murders and

⁶⁴ The US Army establishment in the summer after the Congressional Act of 30 April 1790 consisted of 1,216 regular troops organized into one infantry regiment and one artillery battalion. The army possessed neither cavalry, nor dragoons that could conduct a mounted operation in parallel with mounted militia. Jacobs, *The Beginning of the U.S. Army*, 50.

⁶⁵ Harmar to Hamtramck, 15 July 1790, *Outpost on the Wabash*, 236.

⁶⁶ St. Clair to Knox, 23 August 1790, *American State Papers: Indian Affairs*, 92.

⁶⁷ Knox to Harmar, 25 August 1790, *Papers of the War Department*.

robberies.”⁶⁸ Knox further identified a requirement to inform the British forces operating in the Great Lakes region, “by sending some officer or messenger, at a proper time, to assure the commanding officer of the real object of the expedition” is the Indians and of the “pacific disposition of the United States towards Great Britain and its possessions.”⁶⁹

Somewhere late in this continually evolving planning process, Harmar proposed the establishment of a permanent fort somewhere among the Miami villages. In contrast to his passive acceptance of Harmar’s proposed two-pronged attack against the Wea and Miami villages, Knox quickly denied this potential sequel to the upcoming attack. Knox reaffirmed that the purpose of the upcoming operation “is intended to exhibit to the Wabash Indians our power to punish them for their positive depredations.”⁷⁰ In denying Harmar’s proposed fort, Knox further noted that it would “bring on inevitably an Indian War of some duration” and antagonize nearby British garrisons.⁷¹ Knox also attempted to remind both St. Clair and Harmar that the operation “will be demonstrated by a sudden stroke.”⁷² Unfortunately for Knox and frontier America, Harmar’s operation would neither be sudden, nor a solid demonstration of American power.

Operations

In the end, Governor St. Clair and Brigadier General Harmar’s expedition against the Indians in September 1790 looked much like the one they had first envisioned earlier that year, despite continued efforts by Secretary of War Knox to shape an aggressive, but focused campaign. St. Clair called on the states of Virginia and Pennsylvania in mid-August to supply

⁶⁸ Knox to St. Clair, 23 August 1790, *St. Clair Papers*, 162.

⁶⁹ Knox to St. Clair, 23 August 1790, *St. Clair Papers*, 163.

⁷⁰ Knox to St. Clair, 14 September 1790, *St. Clair Papers*, 181.

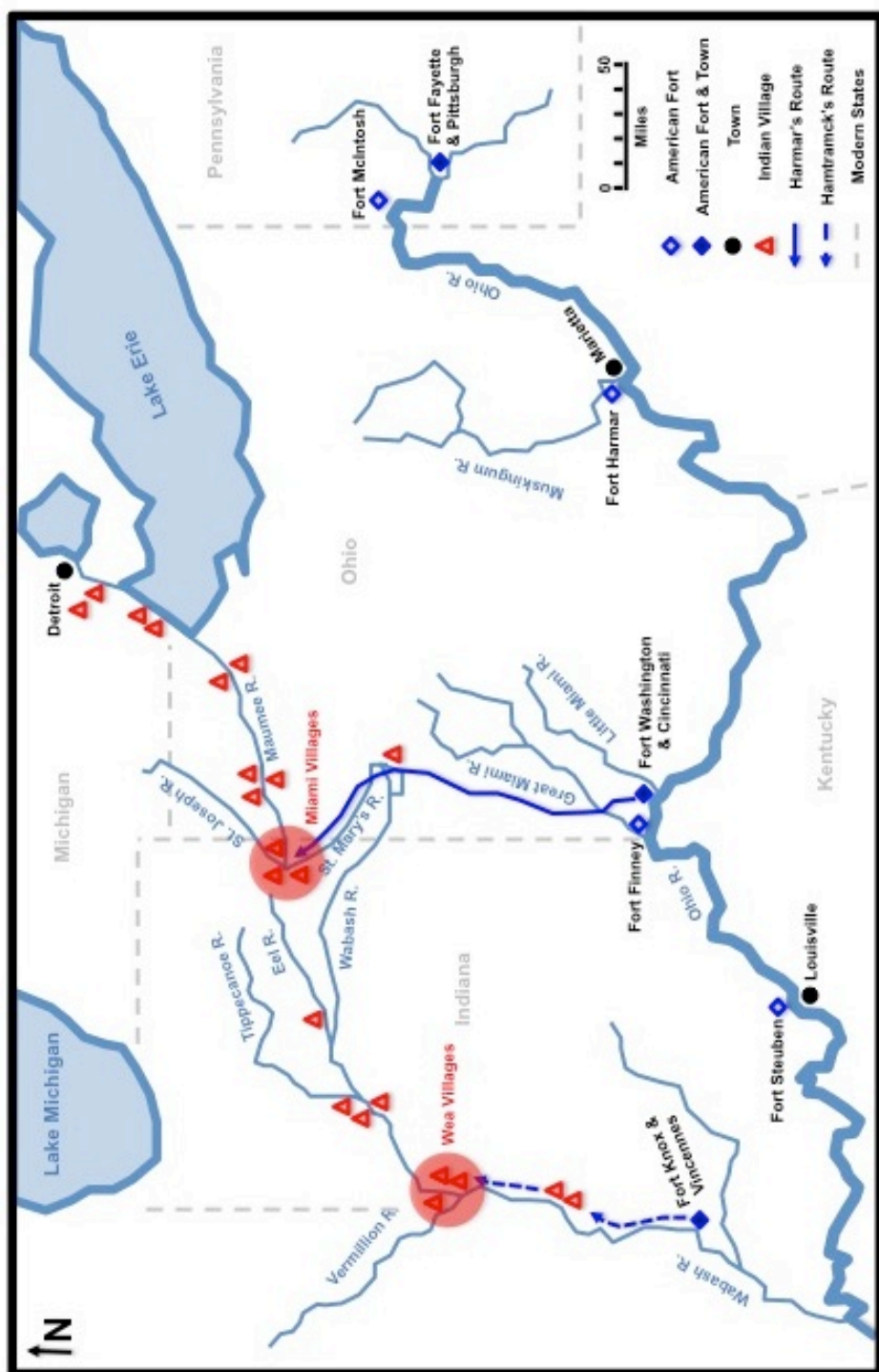
⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Knox to St. Clair, 14 September 1790, *St. Clair Papers*, 181-182.

militia as authorized by Congress and the President and divided them, with some 300 allocated to Major Hamtramck for operations against the Wea tribes and the remaining 1200 allocated to Brigadier General Harmar for operations against the Miami tribes.⁷³ Per Knox's most recent guidance, Governor St. Clair also dispatched a messenger to Detroit to notify the British garrison of American intentions regarding the operation.⁷⁴

⁷³ Arthur St. Clair to Richard Butler, 16 August 1790, *St. Clair Papers*, 150-151; St. Clair to Knox, 23 August 1790, *American State Papers: Indian Affairs*, 92.

⁷⁴ St. Clair lacked the manpower to send an army officer on this mission, so he sent a civilian instead. St. Clair to Knox, 19 September 1790, *Territorial Papers*, 306-308. The letter itself departed Marietta (Ohio) some four days before the start of operations. Arthur St. Clair to the Commanding Officer of Detroit, 19 September 1790, *American State Papers: Indian Affairs*, 96.



Harnmar's Campaign of 1790

On 26 September 1790, the first militia elements of Harmar's army began departing Fort Washington (modern day Cincinnati, Ohio) and Harmar's regulars followed some three days later.⁷⁵ Some 200 miles to the west, the forces assembled under Major Hamtramck departed as one on 30 September, from their location at Fort Knox (modern day Vincennes, Indiana).⁷⁶ By 3 October, Harmar's entire element had assembled some 31 miles north of Fort Washington on the banks of the Little Miami River and began preparing in detail for the advance against the Miami Towns with practice in "forming the line of march, encampment and battle."⁷⁷

While both wings of the American army slowly advanced, Major Hamtramck's force reached the first Indian towns near the intersection of the Wabash and Vermillion Rivers eleven days into its march. Having "gone so far without seeing an enemy" and finding the area abandoned with "nothing but empty houses" Hamtramck's operation amounted to a symbolic destruction of "several of the hostile Indian towns" before a dearth of supplies and a near mutiny by Kentucky militiamen led him to return quickly to Fort Knox instead of continuing his advance up the Wabash to the Wea Towns.⁷⁸ In abandoning the field early into the operation, Hamtramck enabled the Indians throughout the region a singular focus on Harmar.

Unaware of the abbreviated operations to his west, Harmar continued trudging north until 13 October 1790, when a "patrol of horsemen captured a Shawnee Indian."⁷⁹ The capture of

⁷⁵ Denny, *Military Journal of Major Ebenezer Denny*, 141; *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 21.

⁷⁶ Hamtramck to Harmar, 2 November 1790, *Outpost on the Wabash*, 259.

⁷⁷ Denny, *Military Journal of Major Ebenezer Denny*, 141.

⁷⁸ Hamtramck argued in a letter to Harmar that by the time he reached the Indian towns along the Vermillion there "was only remaining on hand fourteen days' flour, and ten days beef." Hamtramck also noted that "a number of the militia deserted on our march," and that when talk circulated around camp about transitioning to half-rations to extend operational reach "eleven [more] of them deserted." Hamtramck to Harmar, 2 November 1790, *Outpost on the Wabash*, 259-260; Knox to Washington, 14 December 1790, *American State Papers: Indian Affairs*, 104.

⁷⁹ Denny, *Military Journal of Major Ebenezer Denny*, 143.

the Shawnee finally reinvigorated the army's movement and between 16 and 17 October elements of "the army [finally] arrived at the Miami village, or Maumee towns, on the Omee River, distant from Fort Washington about one hundred and seventy miles."⁸⁰ Finding the six towns in the area "abandoned before we entered" the Americans spent the next three days burning and looting to the total of "300 log-houses and wigwams" and over "20,000 bushels of corn" and "vegetables in abundance."⁸¹

Not content to simply destroy Indian property and foodstuffs, General Harmar launched a series of patrols designed to "reconnoiter the country and to make some discovery of the enemy" during their stay along the Maumee.⁸² The Americans' first attempt at a patrol involved some 300 men under the command of a Kentucky militia officer, Lieutenant Colonel Robert Trotter.⁸³ Harmar gave Trotter's composite command of militia and regulars some "three days' provisions" and expected them to "examine the country around their camp" after having found many signs of Indians still remaining in the general area.⁸⁴ Trotter's command stumbled upon several Indians after a few miles of movement, killing two at the cost of one wounded militiaman, but quickly returned back to the main encampment that same evening, "contrary to the General's orders."⁸⁵ Disappointed by Trotter's performance, Colonel John Hardin "desired [General

⁸⁰ According to Lieutenant Denny, the intelligence gained from the prisoner that, "the Indians were clearing out as fast as possible, and that the towns would be evacuated before our arrival." Denny, *Military Journal of Major Ebenezer Denny*, 143, 145.

⁸¹ Harmar to Knox, 4 November 1790, *American State Papers: Indian Affairs*, 104.

⁸² Denny, *Military Journal of Major Ebenezer Denny*, 145.

⁸³ General Orders as Issued by General Harmar, 17 October 1790, *American State Papers: Indian Affairs*, 105.

⁸⁴ Court of Inquiry Testimony by Major Ferguson, 16 September 1791, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 21.

⁸⁵ Denny, *Military Journal of Major Ebenezer Denny*, 145; Ferguson Testimony, 16

Harmar] give him the command of the detachment” for “the remaining two days” in order to resume patrolling; Harmar acquiesced.⁸⁶

Hardin led the same detachment of three hundred men—thirty Federal troops, forty light horsemen, and 230 militia riflemen—out of the camp towards the northwest “with great reluctance” on the morning of 19 October 1790.⁸⁷ After a movement of around ten miles, the loss of over one-third of his men to straggling, and a company’s worth of men left behind at a recent security halt, Colonel Hardin led his element into an Indian ambush along the Eel River.⁸⁸ Despite Indian numbers totaling only around one hundred, the Americans found themselves surprised by the “very brisk fire on the detachment” and cohorts of advancing Indians.⁸⁹ Hardin compounded the shock of the ambush by failing to deploy his elements into any kind of tactical formation, “giving no orders, nor making any arrangements for an attack.”⁹⁰ With the Indians quickly closing in on the disorganized Americans, Colonel Hardin noted the militia “retired without making but very little resistance” and the “thirty regulars that were of the detachment,

September 1791, Court of Inquiry Testimony by Ensign Britt, 16 September 1791, Court of Inquiry Testimony by Major Zeigler, 20 September 1791, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 21, 24, 25.

⁸⁶ Hardin served as the overall commander of the militia during Harmar’s campaign. Denny, *Military Journal of Major Ebenezer Denny*, 145; Ferguson Testimony, 16 September 1791, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 21. Hardin indicated that Harmar “ordered the same party out again that evening, and for this deponent to go the next morning and take charge of them.” Affidavit of Colonel John Hardin, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 34-35.

⁸⁷ General Orders 17 October 1790, *American State Papers: Indian Affairs*, 105; Denny, *Military Journal of Major Ebenezer Denny*, 145; Court of Inquiry Testimony by Captain Armstrong, 20 September 1791, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 26.

⁸⁸ Armstrong Testimony, 20 September 1791, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 27.

⁸⁹ Hardin Affidavit, Armstrong Testimony, 20 September 1791, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 35, 27; Denny, *Military Journal of Major Ebenezer Denny*, 146.

⁹⁰ Armstrong Testimony, 20 September 1791, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 27.

stood [to cover the retreat] and were cut to pieces.”⁹¹ Routed on the battlefield, many militiamen simply vanished from service and “pushed for the Ohio,” while a smaller handful regrouped under Hardin and returned to the army’s encampment along the Maumee.⁹² In the end, the Americans lost some twenty-five to thirty-five men killed and another forty missing during the engagement, with the greatest casualties falling on the regulars under Captain John Armstrong.⁹³ Satisfied with their initial victory, the Indians took no further action in the area for several days.

While General Harmar berated in his General Orders the “shameful cowardly conduct of the militia, who ran away, and threw down their arms,” he did not plan any further operations to avenge the losses on the Eel River, and instead refocused the army on completing the destruction of another Indian town at Chillicothe.⁹⁴ Colonel Hardin noted that Harmar believed “he had not yet completed the object he was ordered to do,” and until the Indians towns in the area were completely destroyed that would remain the army’s core focus.⁹⁵ More tellingly, Hardin also noted that Harmar “thought it would not answer a good purpose to go to the battle ground, as the men’s spirits appeared to be very low at the hearsay of so many men being killed, and that the sight of the mangled bodies would make them more so.”⁹⁶ Whatever the reason for Harmar’s tempered offensive spirit, he concluded on 21 October, that, “the army having

⁹¹ Hardin Affidavit, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 35; Denny, *Military Journal of Major Ebenezer Denny*, 146.

⁹² Denny, *Military Journal of Major Ebenezer Denny*, 146.

⁹³ Denny reported twenty-five regulars killed and forty militiamen missing. Denny, *Military Journal of Major Ebenezer Denny*, 146. Captain Armstrong reported twenty-four regulars and nine militiamen killed. Armstrong Testimony, 20 September 1791, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 27.

⁹⁴ General Orders as Issued by General Harmar, 20 October 1790, *American State Papers: Indian Affairs*, 105.

⁹⁵ Hardin Affidavit, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 35.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

completely effected the object for which they were ordered...are now to commence their march and return to Fort Washington.”⁹⁷

The army marched about nine miles that first day on its journey back to the Ohio, but reports of Indians returning to their towns and Colonel Hardin’s desire for “an opportunity to retrieve the credit of the militia” soon led to discussions about one last attack against the Miami.⁹⁸ Despite Harmar’s initial reluctance, he eventually agreed to support the sally under the direction of regular army Major John Wyllys with a force “consisting of sixty regulars, three hundred foot militia, and forty horsemen, rank and file, properly officered.”⁹⁹ After leaving the American encampment around 2:30 a.m., the Americans quickly closed the distance with the Indians and arrived on the banks of the Maumee River around daybreak where they finalized their plan of attack.¹⁰⁰ As envisioned, the Americans would execute a double envelopment with militia forces, while Wyllys and his regulars along with the mounted element initiated the attack in the center.¹⁰¹ Despite Wyllys best intentions, the plan he implemented required synchronization and surprise, both of which were lacking that morning as the attacked commenced. Shortly after the Americans began movement into their attack positions, shots began to ring out and “the Indians then fled with precipitation.”¹⁰² In the confusion that followed, the Americans launched a series of

⁹⁷ General Orders as Issued by General Harmar, 21 October 1790, *American State Papers: Indian Affairs*, 105.

⁹⁸ Hardin Affidavit, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 35.

⁹⁹ Ibid. There are multiple explanations for the final American attack on the Miami Towns, but the most prevalent is the idea that “the defeat of the 19th [of October] so panic struck the army, that, had the Indians attacked on the retreat, it might have been lost.” Ferguson Testimony, 16 September 1791, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 22.

¹⁰⁰ Court of Inquiry Testimony by Captain Asheton, 20 September 1791, in *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 28.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Asheton Testimony, 20 September 1791, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 28.

uncoordinated attacks with “the battalions of militia pursuing in different directions,” the mounted element making an unsupported “charge upon a small party of savages” that left the commander dead “and his troops dispersed,” and the regulars alone, once again, facing “the largest party of Indians that had been seen that day.”¹⁰³ Predictably, the regulars suffered horrendous losses and Major Wyllys fell fighting alongside his men.¹⁰⁴ Somewhat less expectedly, and despite their dispersal across the battlefield, the militiamen eventually secured control of the Miami Town where they then leisurely cleaned and reloaded their weapons before “proceed[ing] to join the army unmolested.”¹⁰⁵

For the second time in as many days, the Indian Confederacy had bested the Americans in combat. Even though the After Orders for 22 October 1790, noted “the General is exceedingly pleased with the behavior of the militia in the action of this morning,” no sense of bravado could cover the exceedingly heavy losses suffered by the Americans on two separate fields.¹⁰⁶ While acknowledging “our loss is great,” Harmar tried to balance these losses against the idea that “it is inconsiderable in comparison of the slaughter made among the savages.”¹⁰⁷ Still, Harmar made no further attempts to engage the Indians in combat, left the bodies of American soldiers on the battlefield, and grew increasingly worried about the conditions of his logistics trains.¹⁰⁸ In the

¹⁰³ Asheton Testimony, 20 September 1791, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 28.

¹⁰⁴ Wyllys’s regulars lost forty-eight men and two officers on October 22, 1790. Denny, *Military Journal of Major Ebenezer Denny*, 148.

¹⁰⁵ Asheton Testimony, 20 September 1791, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 28.

¹⁰⁶ After Orders as Issued by General Harmar, 22 October 1790, *American State Papers: Indian Affairs*, 106.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ferguson Testimony, 16 September 1791, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 21.

end, his decision to continue movement back to Fort Washington reflected not only the physical, but also the moral defeat of the Americans.

Aftermath

The army returned to Fort Washington on 4 November 1790 and Brigadier General Harmar aggressively worked to create and promulgate a perception of victory.¹⁰⁹ In his General Orders releasing the militia from service that same day, Harmar highlighted “that the army, in five weeks, not only effected the capital object of destroying the Miami village, and the Maumee towns...with the vast quantity of corn and vegetables therein, but, also, killed upwards of one hundred of their warriors, it must afford every man the greatest satisfaction.”¹¹⁰ Harmar similarly pushed a message to the Secretary of War that same day and noted “our loss was heavy, but the head quarters of iniquity were broken up,” while noting Indian manpower, agricultural, and shelter losses.¹¹¹ Governor St. Clair piled on a few days later in writing to Secretary Knox that “the savages have got a most terrible stroke,” although he began to introduce the caveats that would define the enduring descriptions of the campaign when he characterized success as “nothing can be a greater proof than that they [the Indians] have not attempted to harass the army on its return.”¹¹²

Despite his best efforts at claiming victory, many others immediately recognized Harmar’s Defeat for what it was. A prominent member of the Ohio Company sounded the alarm to Secretary Knox, that “the Indians instead of being humbled by the destruction of the Shawnee

¹⁰⁹ General Orders as Issued by General Harmar, 4 November 1790, *American State Papers: Indian Affairs*, 106.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ Harmar to Knox, 4 November 1790, *American State Papers: Indian Affairs*, 104.

¹¹² St. Clair to Knox, 6 November 1790, *American State Papers: Indian Affairs*, 104.

Towns & brought to beg for peace, appear determined on a general War.”¹¹³ Knox echoed similar concerns to the president not long after and concluded “the late expedition was entirely unfortunate in its results—that the Wabash and Miami indians will consider themselves as victorious,” and continue to escalate violence on the frontier.¹¹⁴ While Congress reacted furiously, the Washington administration remained quietly content to let General Harmar serve as the focus of outrage as it made plans for a second expedition.¹¹⁵ Privately, however, Washington confided in Secretary of War Knox, that, “I expected little.” Knox dutifully informed Harmar that “it would be deficiency of candor on my part were I to say your conduct is approved by the President of the United States, or the public.”¹¹⁶ With the defeat of America’s first army, the Ohio Country spiraled into violence. Despite Harmar’s humiliation, a court of inquiry in September 1791, found “the personal conduct of the said Brigadier General Hamar was irreproachable.”¹¹⁷ The Harmar Campaign was over.

Assessment: Harmar’s Failure and the Operations Process

The United States Army describes the operations process as, “the major mission command activities performed during operations: planning, preparing, executing, and continuously assessing the operation.”¹¹⁸ In practical application “commanders, supported by

¹¹³ Putnam to Knox, 6 January 1791, *The Memoirs of Rufus Putnam*, 247.

¹¹⁴ Knox to Washington, 22 February 1791, *Papers of the War Department*.

¹¹⁵ Kohn, *Eagle and Sword*, 107-108.

¹¹⁶ Washington to Knox, 19 November 1790, *The Territorial Papers*, 310; Knox to Harmar, 31 January 1791, *Papers of the War Department*.

¹¹⁷ Court of Inquiry Findings as issued by Major General Richard Butler, 23 September 1791, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 30.

¹¹⁸ Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 5-0, *The Operations Process* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), 1. The Army defines the concept of mission command as, “the exercise of authority and direction by the commander using mission orders to enable

their staffs, use the operations process to drive the conceptual and detailed planning necessary to understand, visualize, and describe their operational environment; make and articulate decisions; and direct, lead, and assess military operations.”¹¹⁹ While the doctrine of mission command and the operations process are recent additions to the Army lexicon, the ideas that underlie them are generally ageless and can provide a useful framework in evaluating why Brigadier General Josiah Harmar’s campaign against the Northwest Indian Confederation failed in the fall of 1790.¹²⁰ By using the operations process concepts of *understand*, *visualize*, *describe*, and *direct* as evaluative tools, it is clear that the United States Army’s operations against the Northwest Confederation failed due to Brigadier General Harmar’s construction of a campaign plan that failed to recognize strategic context, while also failing to account for American capabilities and frontier warfare.

Understand

Brigadier General Harmar failed to effectively *understand* both the context of his campaign and the capabilities of his army. Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 5-0, *The Operations Process*, describes *understanding* as the fundamental requirement for enabling, “effective decisionmaking during planning and execution,” and provides a series of operational and mission variables for a commander to consider.¹²¹

Harmar first lacked a sufficient understanding of the strategic context and the operational variables applicable to his campaign. ADRP 5-0 identifies eight operational variables that help a commander develop a comprehensive understanding of his operational environment:

disciplined initiative within the commander’s intent to empower agile and adaptive leaders in the conduct of unified land operations.” See Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 6-0, *Mission Command* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2011), 1.

¹¹⁹ ADRP 5-0, 1-2.

¹²⁰ ADRP 5-0, 1-2-1-6.

¹²¹ ADRP 5-0, 1-3, 1-3-1-9.

political, military, economic, social, information, infrastructure, physical environment, and time.¹²² For Harmar, the political and informational variables were the most important in understanding the strategic and operational context. For example, although neither Secretary of War Knox nor Governor St. Clair directly addressed breaking the Northwest Confederation from their British support network, and in fact worked to ensure that the British were aware of America's "pacific disposition," the long term success of any actions taken against the Indians required that this support network be neutralized. Nothing in Harmar's planned or executed campaign targeted the Anglo-Indian relationship, or anything other than the total destruction of the Indians would keep the relationship intact.¹²³ Perhaps even more strategically important than the British, however, was the overall conduct of a successful campaign. Harmar's expedition to the Wea and Wabash marked the first use of American arms under the new Constitution and the Washington presidency; a defeat would be of utmost damage to the new government. Secretary of War Knox demonstrated the importance of this concept in a letter to Virginia governor Beverley Randolph, when he noted "the anxious desire of the President, that the expedition should be effectual," and that should the expedition "fail by any circumstances whatever, the public injury and disappointment will be in proportion."¹²⁴ The president also saw Harmar's operations as the means for "produc[ing] in the Indians proper dispositions for peace."¹²⁵ While Harmar might not

¹²² ADRP 5-0, 1-7.

¹²³ In contrast to Harmar's campaign, the 20 August 1794 victory of Major General Anthony Wayne at Fallen Timbers, while not decisive in the number of Indians killed (no more than 50), finally broke the Anglo-Indian relationship by demonstrating a British desire to avoid war with the United States as opposed to supporting an Indian ally. For a detailed examination of this outcome see Gaff, *Bayonets in the Wilderness*.

¹²⁴ Knox to Randolph, 2 September 1790, *Papers of the War Department*.

¹²⁵ Knox to St. Clair, 23 August 1790, *St. Clair Papers*, 162.

achieve a decisive victory over the Indians, any “effectual” operation would suffice for both public opinion and the President’s policy goals-the two defeats he enabled did not.¹²⁶

While Harmar first failed to recognize the strategic context of his operation, the more damaging failure derived from his inability to *understand* the mission variables that affected his operation. ADRP 5-0 identifies the six mission variables that might affect the conduct of operations: mission, enemy, terrain and weather, troops and support available, time available, and civil considerations.¹²⁷ For Harmar, four of these, mission and enemy, along with troops and time available, were the most important for him to consider. The relationship between the mission variables of mission and enemy were extremely important for Harmar to consider. In reviewing his guidance from Secretary of War Knox we see a desire to either “punish” and “strike a terror” in the Indians or “extirpate” them entirely.¹²⁸ While these tasks may imply an enemy-centric focus to modern readers, the American military experience in the eighteenth century generally viewed Indian wars in terms of a terrain-centric focus and the destruction of Indian agriculture and material goods.¹²⁹ The simple reason for this terrain versus enemy-centric focus stemmed

¹²⁶ For the purposes of this paper the “two defeats” reflect the ambush of Colonel Hardin at the Eel River on 19 October 1790 and the destruction of Major Wylls’s regulars at Kekionga on 22 October 1790.

¹²⁷ ADRP 5-0, 1-8-1-9.

¹²⁸ Washington to St. Clair, 6 October 1789, Knox to Washington, 27 May 1790, Knox to St. Clair, 7 June 1790, *St. Clair Papers*, 126, 147.

¹²⁹ The most prominent example of a terrain-centric fight against the Indians for regular army officers like Harmar would most likely have been Major General John Sullivan’s campaign against the Iroquois Six-Nations in 1779. While the Continental Army killed relatively few Iroquois warriors during Sullivan’s operations, they laid waste to the core towns and agricultural areas of the Six-Nations; eventually earning Washington the sobriquet of “Town Destroyer.” For a detailed look at the Sullivan campaign see, Glenn F. Williams, *Year of the Hangman: George Washington’s Campaign against the Iroquois* (Yardley, PA: Westholme Publishing, 2005). John Grenier fully examines how Americans waged war against noncombatant populations and agricultural resources from the seventeenth-century onwards. John Grenier, *The First Way of War: American War Making on the Frontier, 1607-1814* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

from two issues. First, the Americans suffered from a relative lack of mobility in comparison to their Indian opponents. While small parties of rangers or Kentucky mounted riflemen might penetrate deep into the Ohio Country and achieve tactical surprise against equally small Indian groups, operations against large and distant Indian settlements required equally large and well supplied and equipped American forces, and this generally meant infantry, wagons, and oxen or packhorses.¹³⁰ This lack of American mobility gave most Indian villages sufficient time to move non-combatants and valuable material goods-leaving only agricultural products and housing as potential targets for the Americans.¹³¹ While not as glamorous as fighting Indians, destroying Indian livelihoods was a powerful weapon that Harmar implemented during the five days spent along the Maumee River.¹³² Unfortunately Harmar had provided the Northwest Confederacy with two inspirational victories over the Americans, which did nothing to quell the violence on the frontier in early 1791 as the Miamis reestablished their villages and prepared for winter. The second reason successful American campaigns against the Indians focused on terrain instead of the enemy derived from the fact that the Indians would generally avoid direct combat with well-

¹³⁰ The Kentucky Militia did mount several large mounted raids into the Ohio Country in the years leading up to the Harmar Campaign. The most prominent being two raids of over 1,000 men each led by George Rogers Clark in 1780 and 1782. See, Richard G. Stone, Jr., *A Brittle Sword: The Kentucky Militia, 1776-1912* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1977), 16-21. The two wings of Harmar's operations against the Indians reflected this Infantry heavy mix with large numbers of livestock in support. For example, Harmar departed Fort Washington with three pieces of field artillery, 175 beef cattle and 868 pack and artillery horses. See Harmar to Knox, 23 November 1790, *Papers of the War Department*; Messrs. Elliot and Williams, Contractors, to Henry Knox, 14 October 1790, *American State Papers: Indian Affairs*, 96. Similarly Hamtramck departed Fort Knox with horses transporting some 16,000 pounds of flour, but only 26 beef cattle, well short of the 115 he had planned to take. Hamtramck to Harmar, 2 November 1790, *Outpost on the Wabash*, 259.

¹³¹ For example, it took Hamtramck some eleven days to reach the Vermillion villages from Fort Knox and it took Harmar some twenty days to reach Kekionga.

¹³² Harmar closed on the Maumee between 16-17 October 1790 and departed on 21 October 1790.

sized American armies.¹³³ Given the qualitative disparity in woodland combat capabilities between American regulars and militia against Indian warriors, striking at stationary targets was often the only possible technique. When writing to Governor St. Clair just prior to the commencement of operations, Secretary of War Knox himself acknowledged, “from the mode of Indian fighting, it will not be reconcilable to conclude that their force will be greatly reduced in the skirmishes they may have with Brigadier General Harmar or Major Hamtramck.”¹³⁴ If American forces remained in large, disciplined and mutually supporting elements, they were generally resistant to Indian attack. Instead of fighting when and where the Americans wanted then, Indians looked for smaller targets of opportunity where they could achieve local superiority. In detaching smaller, less effective elements from his main body, Harmar set the conditions that favored the Indians and enabled their defeat of Colonel Hardin’s detachment on 19 October 1790 and of Major Wyllys’s detachment on 22 October 1790. Excellent

The other two mission variables Harmar failed to effectively *understand* were those of troops available and time. Returning to the guidance from Secretary of War Knox, we see that the Washington administration envisioned a campaign built around a combination of “about one hundred Continental troops and three hundred picked militia, mounted on horseback for the sake of rapidity.”¹³⁵ With a lack of mounted regular army elements able to execute the operation envisioned by Knox, however, Harmar returned to the tried and true reliance on an infantry force with a large component of militia.¹³⁶ In constructing his campaign this way, Harmar assumed that

¹³³ One could argue that St. Clair’s defeat at Kekionga on 4 November 1791 invalidates this claim, but the Northwest Confederacy actually successfully divided St. Clair’s command and defeated them in detail-per the traditional Indian way of war. For details on St. Clair’s defeat, see Calloway, *The Victory with No Name*, 115-128.

¹³⁴ Knox to St. Clair, 14 September 1790, *St. Clair Papers*, 181.

¹³⁵ Knox to Washington, 27 May 1790, *St. Clair Papers*, 146.

¹³⁶ Harmar’s force of 1,453 consisted of only two troops of militia cavalry and another

he would draw on an experienced group of Indian fighting frontiersmen. Instead, Harmar found himself flooded with men “no means equal either in their spirit or appearance, to the generality of their [frontier] countrymen.”¹³⁷ Harmar’s aide-de-camp, Lieutenant Ebenezer Denny, similarly noted the militia were “not such as we had been accustomed to see on the frontiers,” and who “appear[ed] to be raw and unused.”¹³⁸ In addition to their inexperience, many of the militiamen arrived at Fort Washington as substitutes, both unarmed and unequipped for field service, and those few who were armed required a crash course in basic weapons employment and maintenance.¹³⁹

While the deficiency of the militia gave Harmar and the other regulars pause, it did not change the overall concept of the operation or the mission variable of time. First, the ideal timing of operations against Indian villages happened late enough in the agricultural season, when a mobilization of the militia would not affect the harvest, but would limit the Indians’ ability to reconstitute destroyed foodstuffs. Contrastingly, operations needed to conclude early enough in the season to enable army livestock pasturage for grazing and lessening the chance of inclement weather. In this regard, many regular army officers noted the deterioration of the army’s pack horses as the campaign season progressed and forage lessened to the point where “they were

troop of militia mounted rifles. While actual numbers are unknown, Harmar at one point refers to one hundred, and period accounts generally only note, “a small reinforcement of horsemen.” Denny, *Military Journal of Major Ebenezer Denny*, 141. One of Harmar’s post campaign recommendations addressed the need and utility for, “a regular body of horse on the frontiers.” Harmar to Knox, 23 November 1790, *Papers of the War Department*.

¹³⁷ Harmar to Knox, 23 November 1790, *Papers of the War Department*.

¹³⁸ Denny, *Military Journal of Major Ebenezer Denny*, 140.

¹³⁹ The Court of Inquiry into the Harmar Campaign contains dozens of references from multiple regular army officers to the shoddy condition of the militia at the start of the operation. In particular refer to the testimony of Major Ferguson and Lieutenant Denny on 16 September 1791, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 20-36.

obliged to send to Fort Washington for horses to assist in hauling [the artillery].”¹⁴⁰ These seasonal factors directly affected the second time consideration and Harmar’s balancing of training versus his execution of the operation. While cognizant of the need to implement rudimentary training for the army, Harmar felt compelled for three reasons to begin his operation almost immediately after the militia had assembled at Fort Washington. First, the militia had arrived upwards of ten days later than Harmar and Governor St. Clair had called for, which limited potential training time.¹⁴¹ Second, the longer the time the militia spent at Fort Washington, the more logistics support it consumed, which limited the operational reach of the army once out on campaign. Thus, Harmar’s early deployment of the militia north was not only a military movement, but also a more mundane logistics operation “for sake of feed for the cattle.”¹⁴² Third, Harmar needed to employ the militia in accordance with the general terms of their mobilization. When Governor St. Clair called upon Pennsylvania and Virginia to provide the militia, he noted they should be “armed, accoutered, and equipped for service of sixty days or more.”¹⁴³ While Harmar planned a short campaign against the Miami, he still needed to consider the effectiveness and commitment of the militia as they approached the potential end of their advertised term of service. Lastly, while seasons and logistics drove much of the timeline,

¹⁴⁰ Lieutenant Denny also noted during the Court of Inquiry into the Harmar Campaign that “the frost had destroyed the food early on their march out.” Court of Inquiry Testimony by Lieutenant Denny, 16 September 1791, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 25. See also Denny, *Military Journal of Major Ebenezer Denny*, 149; Ferguson Testimony, 16 September 1791, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 21.

¹⁴¹ St. Clair called for the militia to assemble at Fort Washington no later than 15 September 1790. The first militia battalions from Kentucky began arriving on 18 September, but the last battalions from Pennsylvania did not arrive until 25 September. See Denny, *Military Journal of Major Ebenezer Denny*, 139-141.

¹⁴² Ferguson Testimony, 16 September 1791, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 21.

¹⁴³ St. Clair to the County Militia Lieutenants of Virginia and Pennsylvania, 15 July 1790, *American State Papers: Indian Affairs*, 95.

Governor St. Clair's preemptive notification of the British at Detroit proved the final factor. St. Clair sent a runner to Detroit in accordance with Secretary Knox's instructions on 19 September 1790. Each day Harmar waited increased the likelihood of the British being able to warn their Indian associates.¹⁴⁴ While Harmar recognized his dilemma in regards to militia training and tried to mitigate it by training on "forming the line of march, encampment and battle," on 3 October, the requirement to complete the operation before the onset of winter weather and before the British could mobilize a greater Indian Confederation forced his immediate movement north.¹⁴⁵

Brigadier General Harmar's failure to *understand* the operation in which he was about to engage set the conditions for his eventual defeat. In not addressing the strategic importance of severing the Indians from the British while also underestimating the effect that American casualties would have on both the American polity and Northwest Confederation, Harmar designed and executed operations unlikely to achieve American policy aims. More importantly, by failing to understand the mission variables affecting both his capabilities and those of the Indians, he took actions during the campaign that contributed to his failure.

Visualize

Lacking a comprehensive *understanding* of the situation, Brigadier General Harmar next failed to effectively *visualize* how he could complete his mission in a manner consistent with his capabilities. ADRP 5-0, *The Operations Process*, notes that a key requirement of a commander during the *visualization* phase is to envision an operational approach that will enable mission accomplishment by considering the elements of operational art and design.¹⁴⁶ Of the 18

¹⁴⁴ St. Clair to the Commanding Officer of Detroit, 19 September 1790, *American State Papers: Indian Affairs*, 96.

¹⁴⁵ Denny, *Military Journal of Major Ebenezer Denny*, 141.

¹⁴⁶ ADRP 5-0, 1-4; The elements of operational art include: End State and Conditions,

varied elements of operational art and design, Harmar noticeably discounted the elements of *risk*, *forces and function*, and *culmination*.

The first, and most important, element of operational art and design Harmar neglected was *risk*. ADRP 3-0, *Unified Land Operations*, highlights the fact that “inadequate planning and preparation recklessly risks forces,” and that commander should consider “risk and uncertainty equally with friction and chance.”¹⁴⁷ While Harmar appropriately acted in a bold manner early in the campaign by pushing Colonel Hardin’s militia forces into Kekionga ahead of the army’s main body, he did not adequately adjust his operations to reduce risk after the militia’s later defeat at Eel River and its quickly degrading combat effectiveness. Harmar’s discounting of risk was most visible in his decision to launch Major Wyllys back into Kekionga on 21-22 October 1790. With the thorough destruction of the Indians towns along the Maumee, Harmar could return to Fort Washington and respectfully claim mission accomplishment. However, instead of settling for this acceptable outcome and “conceiving it improper to leave [the Indians] in the quiet enjoyment of their late success,” Harmar, “resolved to make an effort to bring on another partial engagement.”¹⁴⁸ Harmar’s decision to pursue a tactical victory instead of accepting an operationally acceptable outcome entailed significant risk. Harmar further compounded this risk by first failing to balance against friction in his selection of a composite force of federals and militia of suspect reliability to execute the operation. Almost equally as damning, Harmar then

Centers of Gravity, Decisive Points, Lines of Operation and Lines of Effort, Operational Reach, Basing, Tempo, Phasing and Transitions, Culmination, and Risk. The elements of operational design include: Termination, Military End State, Objective, Effects, Center of Gravity, Decisive Point, Lines of Operation and Lines of Effort, Direct and Indirect Approach, Anticipation, Operational Reach, Culmination, Arranging Operations, Forces and Functions. See United States Army, Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 3-0, *Unified Land Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2011), 4-3.

¹⁴⁷ ADRP 3-0, 4-9.

¹⁴⁸ Harmar to Knox, 23 November 1790, *Papers of the War Department*.

launched this element on the operation with little time to prepare or plan for it.¹⁴⁹ The risk of defeat for this hastily assembled and deployed element outweighed the potential benefits to be gained by killing a few Indian warriors, who had already “studiously avoided coming to a general action.”¹⁵⁰

The second element of operational art and design Harmar discounted derives from his poor assessment and balance of *forces and functions*. While Joint Publication (JP) 5-0, *Joint Operation Planning*, highlights that commanders can design operations that focus on defeating either adversary forces or adversary functions, it is equally as important for a commander to consider the capability of his own forces and functions.¹⁵¹ The performance of the militia throughout the whole of the campaign was a major issue during Harmar’s later court of inquiry. Thus, it is reasonable to presume that the military professionals of the time also understood the relative importance of this element of contemporary operational design.¹⁵² In spite of this potential awareness, and although the regular army officers under Harmar’s command indicated an initial concern for the capability of the militia, Harmar did not seem to take militia effectiveness into consideration until after Colonel Hardin’s fight at Eel River on 19 October 1790. Indeed, throughout the movement to Kekionga, militia troops had not only led the army, but Harmar had detached Colonel Hardin with some 600 militiamen, “to push for the Miami village” to do “something before they would all be able to clear out.”¹⁵³ Harmar even recognized

¹⁴⁹ Depending on the source, the idea for the second attack against Kekionga solidified around 9:00 p.m. on the 21 October 1790 and the Americans departed about three hours later. Denny, *Military Journal of Major Ebenezer Denny*, 147.

¹⁵⁰ Harmar to Knox, 23 November 1790, *Papers of the War Department*.

¹⁵¹ Department of Defense, *Joint Publication 5-0, Joint Operation Planning* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2011). Hereafter *JP 5-0*.

¹⁵² Multiple officers addressed militia capability and capacity issues during the September, 1791 Court of Inquiry held to examine Harmar’s performance during the campaign against Kekionga. See *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 20-36.

the militia's performance in his General Orders for 17 October 1790, when he commended "the corps which was detached under the command of Colonel Hardin," for its "zeal and alacrity."¹⁵⁴ Despite initial positive feedback, however, Harmar quickly soured on the militia after he observed them around Kekionga and scolded them for "the unsoldier-like behavior of many of the men in the army, who make it a practice to straggle from camp in search of plunder."¹⁵⁵ Harmar's distrust intensified after Eel River, when he chided the "shameful cowardly conduct of the militia, who ran away, and threw down their arms, without firing."¹⁵⁶ Yet despite this distrust, and a growing appreciation of the difficulties of employing the militia in any kind of coordinated tactical fashion, he committed a sizable force of militia under to the second attack on Kekionga and the defeat of Major Wyllys.¹⁵⁷ In failing to consider friendly *forces and functions*, Harmar set the conditions for defeat during two separate engagements.¹⁵⁸

The last element of operational art and design Harmar insufficiently addressed is that of *culmination*. ADRP 3-0, *Unified Land Operations* defines *culmination* as the "point in time and space at which a force no longer possesses the capability to continue its current form of

¹⁵³ Denny, *Military Journal of Major Ebenezer Denny*, 143.

¹⁵⁴ General Orders, 17 October 1790, *American State Papers: Indian Affairs*, 105.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ General Orders, 20 October 1790, *American State Papers: Indian Affairs*, 105.

¹⁵⁷ While Harmar put a Regular in command to help mitigate risk, Major Wyllys only had but sixty Federal troops to the 340 militiamen in his command. Asheton Testimony, 20 September 1791, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 28.

¹⁵⁸ One potential reason why Harmar kept the majority of the Federals with the main army emerges in the Testimony of Lieutenant Denny who noted that, "had the enemy made an attack upon [the Army's encampment] that evening, or the morning following, the militia were so panic struck, that very few of them would have stood; the consequences that would have happened, stared every person with horror; the sick and wounded, and all the stores, artillery, &c. would have fallen prey to the savages." Denny Testimony, 16 September 1791, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 25.

operations.”¹⁵⁹ At the tactical level culmination also applies to decreasing morale, or simple mental and physical exhaustion.¹⁶⁰ Harmar’s army demonstrated signs of culmination almost immediately after arriving on the Maumee. For one, the army marched approximately 170 miles from Fort Washington to Kekionga over 20 days, a physically taxing journey for physically unconditioned militiamen.¹⁶¹ Secondly, once combat with the Indians of the Northwest Confederacy actually began in the forests and fields around Kekionga, the militiamen quickly began shirking from duty. When Colonel Hardin marched off to the Eel River on 19 October 1790, observers noted that “the men moved off with great reluctance,” and by the time he moved around three miles from the army’s encampment, “he had not more than two-thirds of his command; they dropped out of ranks and returned to camp.”¹⁶² Harmar himself recognized some of these signs of culmination when he made the decision to withdraw from the Maumee and move back towards Fort Washington on 21 October 1790. In his General Orders for that day he notes both “the weak state of the pack horses,” but also “several other circumstances” that included increasing militia shirking and disobedience to orders.¹⁶³ Harmar’s disregard for the obvious signs of *culmination* in his movement back to Kekionga ties back into the earlier tenets of both *risk* and *forces and functions*.

Brigadier General Harmar’s failure to *visualize* the operation in which he was about to engage set the conditions for his eventual defeat. In not recognizing key elements of operational art and design, Harmar took extraordinary *risks* after failing to recognize the limitations of his

¹⁵⁹ ADRP 3-0, 4-8.

¹⁶⁰ ADRP 3-0, 4-8 – 4-9.

¹⁶¹ Denny, *Military Journal of Major Ebenezer Denny*, 145.

¹⁶² Denny, *Military Journal of Major Ebenezer Denny*, 145-146.

¹⁶³ General Orders, 21 October 1790, *American State Papers: Indian Affairs*, 105; Denny Testimony, 16 September 1791, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 25.

forces and functions and their lessened combat effectiveness after demonstrating *culmination* at Kekionga. The impact of Harmar's poor *visualization* of the campaign directly contributed to the challenges in the *describe* phase of the operations process.

Describe

Lacking a comprehensive *understanding* of the situation, and poorly *visualizing* how he could conduct major operations, Brigadier General Harmar unfortunately demonstrated inconsistencies in reconciling how he *described* the campaign to his staff and subordinates. ADRP 5-0, *The Operations Process*, outlines how commanders disseminate their vision to subordinates in an effort to facilitate shared understanding and purpose through means of a commander's intent, planning guidance and the creation of information requirements.¹⁶⁴

When given time, Harmar effectively *described* operations to subordinate elements. The strongest example of Harmar's effectiveness emerged in his planning for the forces under Major Hamtramck at Fort Knox. Harmar initially communicated his intent to Hamtramck via a letter on 15 July 1790, when he directed the major to "strike either at Vermillion, L'Anguille, or if you should judge it any way practicable, the Wea Towns."¹⁶⁵ Harmar further described the purpose of the operation, "to divert the attention of the Miamis to that quarter," while he also provided guidance on timing and means of communication.¹⁶⁶ Not long after receiving this guidance, Hamtramck confirmed his understanding of Harmar's intent while expressing apprehension at the task, but also a desire to "take every possible measures to comply with your direction."¹⁶⁷ Harmar then continued the dialogue over the next few weeks and clarified that

¹⁶⁴ ADRP 5-0, 1-4-1-5.

¹⁶⁵ Harmar to Hamtramck, 5 July 1790, *Outpost on the Wabash*, 237.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Hamtramck to Harmar, 7 August 1790, *Outpost on the Wabash*, 246.

Hamtramck use his own judgment when deciding how far to advance against the Indian towns.¹⁶⁸ When evaluated against the contemporary definition of commander's intent and the requirement for a "clear and concise expression of the purpose of the operation" that helps "achieve desired results without further orders," Harmar comes off surprisingly well.¹⁶⁹ In defining for Hamtramck a well-delineated task and purpose—despite a distance some two hundred miles and a lack of reliable communications—Harmar set conditions for Hamtramck that effectively contributed to the overall design of the campaign.¹⁷⁰

In contrast to his relative effectiveness when afforded time during the planning process, Harmar failed in *describing* intent or identifying information requirements during the actual execution of his campaign. Two examples are worth highlighting in this regard. The first emerges during the planning of patrols that resulted in the Eel River ambush. Harmar's idea for this patrol initially enters the historical record in the General Orders for 17 October 1790 that identifies a detachment "under the command of Lieut. Col. Com. Trotter" who will "march tomorrow early" and "receive his orders from the General."¹⁷¹ In contrast to the well-defined task and purpose identified earlier for Major Hamtramck, there seemed to have been no consistent guidance for either of the two Kentucky militia officers who led patrols from the Kekionga area from 18-19 October 1790. Outside of the reference in General Orders, Lieutenant Colonel Trotter's guidance remains missing from the historic record.¹⁷² That said, the guidance might be inferred to match

¹⁶⁸ Harmar to Hamtramck, 3 September 1790, *Outpost on the Wabash*, 255.

¹⁶⁹ ADRP 5-0, 1-5.

¹⁷⁰ Hamtramck revisited Harmar's commander's intent after the operation when he noted despite a shorter operation than originally planned, "I hope that I have diverted the Indians of the Miami." Hamtramck to Harmar, 2 November 1790, *Outpost on the Wasbash*, 262.

¹⁷¹ Lieutenant Colonel Trotter had the additional title of "Commandant" (Com.) appended to his name in recognition of his overall command of Kentucky militia forces; General Orders, 17 October 1790, *American State Papers: Indian Affairs*, 105.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

that of Colonel Hardin who took command of the same patrol on the following day who identified a task to “hunt up Indian camps” in the general vicinity over the course of two to three days.¹⁷³ Other regular army officers identified similar, but varied tasks in their Court of Inquiry testimony ranging from “examine the country around the camp,” to “overtaking a party of Indians, whose trails had been discovered,” to “reconnoiter the country, and to endeavor to make some discoveries of the enemy.”¹⁷⁴ Regardless, there seems to be not only a divergence in task, but also a larger lack of purpose. Were the operations supposed to find the Indians for a larger follow-on attack? Attack the Indians on their own accord? Disrupt Indian attacks against the main army encampment or provide early warning? This lack of an understood purpose likely contributed to the disintegration of the Americas during the ambush at Eel River where militiamen fled back towards the main camp, the regulars stood and died, and all the while the attached Kentucky cavalry roamed the woods looking for an American company separated from the detachment earlier in the day.

Harmar’s second example of failure to effectively *describe* under abbreviated timelines emerges in the decision to attack Kekionga on the evening of 21 October 1790. In this case Harmar identified the requirement to “find out and fight the enemy at all events...to lessen the number of savages.”¹⁷⁵ Again, many of the militia and regular officers on the expedition identified a range of different purposes including “to give [the Indians] a check, to prevent the army from being harassed on its return,” and eliminating threats to a “panic struck” Army, to

¹⁷³ Hardin Affidavit, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 34.

¹⁷⁴ Harmar himself likewise neglects to identify either a task or purpose for the operations of 18-19 October in any of his correspondence. For references to quotes, see Ferguson Testimony, 16 September 1791, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 20; Court of Inquiry Testimony by Lieutenant Hartshorn, 16 September 1791, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 22; Denny Testimony, 16 September 1791, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 25.

¹⁷⁵ Harmar to Knox, 23 November 1790, *Papers of the War Department*.

“retriev[ing] the credit of the militia.”¹⁷⁶ While all agreed on some generic “attack the Indians” task, the lack of a larger understood purpose likely contributed to the American defeat. Was the operation supposed to kill as many Indians as possible, regardless of cost? Was the operation supposed to convince the Indians that the army was still prepared to fight? Was the operation to enable the main body a few more days of uncontested movement? While the complex plan eventually adopted by Major Wyllys signaled some kind of attack aimed at the pure destruction of as many Indians as possible, it failed to correspond to the eventual measure of success articulated in notes back to the Washington administration highlighting that the Indians had, “not attempted to harass the army on its return.”¹⁷⁷ General Harmar demonstrated an ability to *describe* planned operations when given time to do so, but under the strain of operations the guidance he provided to subordinate commanders fell short of what was needed for true understanding and execution.

Direct

In addition to the failures in *understanding*, and *visualizing*, and a mixed effectiveness in *describing*, Harmar finally fell short in *directing* his forces. ADRP 5-0, *The Operations Process*, highlights that effective commanders direct forces through not only the dissemination of orders, but also by establishing clear command and support relationships, and by positioning units and key leaders at critical places and times.¹⁷⁸ While Harmar could effectively disseminate his intent via written orders and promulgate administrative requirements to the army via the General

¹⁷⁶ Ferguson Testimony, 16 September 1791, Denny Testimony, 16 September 1791, Hardin Affidavit, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 21-22, 25, 35.

¹⁷⁷ St. Clair to Knox, 6 November 1790, *American State Papers: Indian Affairs*, 104.

¹⁷⁸ ADRP 5-0, 1-6.

Orders process, he faced issues in establishing effective chains of command and putting key leaders and units in positions to best influence operations throughout the campaign.

Harmar's initial challenge in establishing an effective chain of command was not necessarily of his own making. For one, nearly every commander of the varied militia elements arriving at Fort Washington sought overall command of the militia forces for themselves. This forced Harmar to devote "two or three days" to de-conflicting militia rivalries before "the business was settled."¹⁷⁹ Of note, the militia leader "most popular" within the force, was also, "least entitled to it," which created "many difficulties" for Harmar before the campaign even began.¹⁸⁰ In the end, Harmar settled on a structure of four militia battalions, with each under a leader of their own choosing, along with a separate commander for the Kentucky and Pennsylvania militias, and an overall commander of all militia forces chosen by Harmar.¹⁸¹ While Harmar's task organization seemingly settled militia jealousies before the operation began, personality conflicts between Lieutenant Colonel Trotter of Kentucky and Colonel Hardin as overall militia commander figured heavily into the sequence of events leading to the defeat at Eel River on 19 October 1790.¹⁸² In addition to conflicts between militia commanders, Harmar experienced difficulties in balancing command between regular and militia officers. For example,

¹⁷⁹ Ferguson Testimony, 16 September 1791, in *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 20.

¹⁸⁰ Denny Testimony, 16 September 1791, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 24.

¹⁸¹ The Kentucky militia provided three battalions under Majors Hall, McMullen and Ray with Lieutenant Colonel Trotter in command. The Pennsylvania militia provided one battalion under Major Paul with Lieutenant Colonel Trubley in overall command. Over all of these elements, Harmar placed Kentucky Colonel (and former Continental Army officer) Colonel John Hardin in command. Denny Testimony, 16 September 1791, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 24.

¹⁸² As noted earlier in the "Operations" portion of this monograph, Colonel Hardin took command of Lieutenant Colonel Trotter's element after Hardin felt Trotter did not accomplish his assigned mission.

after seeing the regulars under Lieutenant Armstrong abandoned by Colonel Hardin and the militia at Eel River, Harmar vowed himself “determined to prevent, if possible, a repetition of it upon any further occasion.”¹⁸³ Harmar’s solution then was to place a regular officer in charge of any future operations, hence the assignment of Major Wyllys to command the 22 October 1790 assault against Kekionga. Yet, even Wyllys’s assignment as commander could not affect the outcome of the events, which relates to Harmar’s second failure in directing his forces, the assignment of units during the campaign.

ADRP 5-0, *The Operations Process*, identifies a key task in the direct phase of the operations process as “positioning units to maximize combat power.”¹⁸⁴ Like the challenge in the establishment of the chain of command, Harmar faced difficulties largely beyond his control when dealing with the positioning of key units on the battlefield, all due to a lack of regular army forces participating in the campaign. Harmar departed Fort Washington with only three hundred twenty regular army men from his First American Regiment (of infantry) and Captain Ferguson’s company of artillery. He had to rely on militia to make up the bulk of his manpower for any operation.¹⁸⁵ The key turning point for Harmar’s assessment of the militia revolved around the ambush at Eel River. While he employed the militia and regulars as equals up to 19 October 1790, after that point Harmar felt no “right to expect any great support from [the militia], if he had been attacked.”¹⁸⁶ The challenge for Harmar then became fielding regular units large enough to fight and win independently, while also maintaining a reserve for which the bulk of the militia

¹⁸³ Harmar to Knox, 23 November 1790, *Papers of the War Department*.

¹⁸⁴ ADRP 5-0, 1-6.

¹⁸⁵ Harmar to Knox, 23 November 1790, *Papers of the War Department*; Denny, *Military Journal of Major Ebenezer Denny*, 141. As noted earlier, there were no regular army mounted elements (cavalry, dragoons, or mounted rifles) authorized during this time period.

¹⁸⁶ Hartshorn Testimony, 16 September 1791, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 23.

could organize around. Harmar's aide-de-camp, Lieutenant Ebenezer Denny, noted this contradiction when he identified that "the regular troops did not furnish more than two hundred," but were required to defend the army encampment because "the militia were so panic struck, that very few of them would have stood" when faced with an Indian attack and that "the sick and wounded, and all the stores, artillery, &c would have fallen prey to the savages."¹⁸⁷ With a requirement to maintain such a large element in defense of the Army's encampment, Harmar felt he could never field a sufficiently large regular force in such a manner that it could "maximize combat power" on behalf of the enemy. That said, while the offensive capabilities of the militia were doubtful, they had at least demonstrated a general ability to maintain the defense of the encampment and line of march, yet Harmar failed to seek opportunities where he could employ the regulars to greater effect. While faced with conditions generally beyond his control, Harmar nevertheless failed to exert *direction* upon the army in a manner that would enable it to achieve its aims during the Kekionga campaign.

Conclusion

While poor leadership, faulty logistics, and ineffective militia units did in fact contribute to the failure of the US Army's 1790 campaign, it was Brigadier General Josiah Harmar's design and execution of a campaign that failed to recognize strategic context and the capabilities of the army he led that ultimately doomed it to failure. Evaluating Harmar's campaign through the lens of the contemporary operations process provides new insights into both the campaign itself and the continued utility of the process to enable commanders in the application of operational art.

First, Harmar's campaign reinforces the requirement to fully *understand* strategic, operational, and tactical contexts before planning an operation, and then to continually assess that same context as the operation unfolds. Harmar had failed to consider the operational and mission

¹⁸⁷ Denny Testimony, 16 September 1791, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 24.

variables applicable to his mission, thus he designed and executed ineffective tactical actions that neglected his balancing delivering effects against the enemy while also better preserving his force and delivering a “victory,” no matter how minor. Equally as important, Harmar maintained a poor understanding of the changing operational environment once the operation began, which contributed to the error of launching Wyllis’s regulars back to Kekionga on 22 October 1790 when they were unlikely of changing the overall outcome of the campaign positively.

Second, Harmar’s campaign highlights the benefits of *visualizing* a campaign that fully considers the elements of operational art and design. In failing to account for the key elements of risk, forces and functions, and culmination, Harmar arrived at Kekionga nearly defeated before he met the Indians in battle. Harmar’s poor design and execution led to ineffective tactical actions that decreased his combat power when needed to effectively target what mattered most to the Indians.

Lastly, Harmar’s campaign underlines the continued importance of the commander in providing the requisite leadership that helps *describe* tactical actions and then *directs* their execution. While burdened by the limitations of eighteenth-century technology and army culture, as all commanders and armies are bound by their historical contexts and cultures, Harmar failed to provide sufficient commanders’ guidance before deploying his forces to execute operations after 19 October 1790. More damningly, Harmar fell short in positioning himself where he could effectively command and control or influence the battlefield when needed. While the effective employment of mission command will help a modern commander address these challenges, army leaders must still lead from the front or put themselves at personal risk when the mission demands it.¹⁸⁸ While Brigadier General Josiah Harmar is not an officer to emulate, he is a worthy study for continued insights into the application of operational art.

¹⁸⁸ The Army currently separates mission command into a philosophy, warfighting function and system. The employment of all three of these components would be relevant in Harmar’s case. ADRP 6-0, 1-4-1-5.

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