

Learning “The Dreadful Trade of Death”

Training the U.S. Army at Legionville, 1792-1793

Timothy C. Hemmis

The enemy abruptly woke the troops of Maj. Gen. Arthur St. Clair’s army on the morning of 4 November 1791 on the banks of the Wabash River in present-day Fort Recovery, Ohio. Under the leadership of Little Turtle, a Miami chief, a force of about one thousand warriors attacked St. Clair’s untrained army of 1,669 soldiers and a few hundred camp followers at daybreak.¹ The Native American force first targeted the Kentucky militia that camped on the other side of the river. Rumors circulated that an enemy offensive would begin in the morning; these reports arrived to Gen. Richard Butler, but he did not relay them to St. Clair because he did not want to disturb the sleeping commander. The attack caught the American Army by surprise; the militiamen retreated as the battle began. Little Turtle’s warriors quickly targeted the artillery at the center of the camp—St. Clair had eight howitzers, and the Native Americans knew that they were the Americans’ force multiplier. Chaos reigned. Even the teamsters and civilians were drawn into the fight. A teamster named Benjamin Van Cleve recalled that he saw “there were about thirty of our men and officers laying scalped around the pieces of Artillery.”² Van Cleve joined a group of soldiers who were “pressing like a drove of bullocks” to retreat.³ The survivors—soldiers and camp



An artist's depiction of Little Turtle. (Artwork courtesy of the U.S. Army)

worse than a murderer! How can he answer it to his country;—the blood of the slain is upon him—the curse of widows and orphans—the curse of Heaven!⁵

St. Clair's defeat, also known as the Battle of the Wabash, in 1791 was the pivotal moment in the Army of the early republic. Immediately, Washington sought to reorganize the Army, and he put his trusted general, Maj. Gen. Anthony Wayne, in charge of reforming it. Much has been written about the transformation of the Army under Wayne in the Legion of the United States.⁶ Many early scholars have focused on the etymology of the Legion of the United States and how the name was used to ease fears of a standing army. Historian Andrew Birtle suggests that it had a more practical reason based on its organizational structure with little resemblance to the Roman legions.⁷ Despite the interest in the historiography, there has not been much written about Legionville, the Army's first training center. Today's Army focuses much of its time on readiness and lethality, but one does not have to look too hard to find an example of how training led to a direct victory. The story of Legionville is intrinsically linked to the success at Fallen Timbers.

On the banks of the Ohio River, just northwest of Fort Lafayette in Pittsburgh, Wayne decided to create a training center for his legion. Near the Native American town of Logstown, near present-day Baden, Pennsylvania, Wayne sought out the flat plateau that had several natural ravines for defense. He understood that he could not train his legion in Pittsburgh because there would be too many social distractions. Wayne moved his 1st and 2nd Sub-Legions to Legionville to set up a camp with no walls to mimic a forward camp.

The forward camp paralleled the Ohio River and was located on a flat area of land situated between two tributaries. It was not walled but had four redoubts for defense along with a grand parade field. The officers had better quarters than the enlisted, and they were divided by specialization. Artillery and cavalry officers' barracks were at the center of the camp, while infantry and rifle corps quartered in huts near the grand parade field and near the creeks. The cavalry stables were located near the river. Surgeon's mate Joseph Strong estimated that there were about five hundred huts constructed at Legionville.

Wayne understood that readiness was the key to a successful campaign, but that started with the soldiers.

As historian James Ripley Jacobs put it, "St. Clair's men ... were mostly waifs of misfortune," but Wayne knew that if he was to transform his men into a cohesive fighting force he needed to start with training.⁸ Wayne issued each officer a copy of the *Regulations for the Order and Discipline of the Troops of the United States*, which was the drill manual written by Gen. Friedrich von Steuben at Valley Forge in 1778–1779.⁹ On 13 September 1792, Wayne requested that "Baron Steubens blue Book & The Rules & Articles of War are much wanted ... for they are all new to Manoeuvre & Discipline."¹⁰ Wayne believed that "even some of the Old Officers are rather rusty tho' conceited & refractory—however they will be made sensible of their error, or shall quit."¹¹ Stationed at Pittsburgh, Wayne began to focus on training the new recruits. In summer 1792, Wayne anxiously waited for the arrival of the new troops. Through Secretary of War Henry Knox, Washington expressed his wishes for Wayne to "halt at Pittsburg for the present, in order to arrange the troops and discipline them."¹² Washington understood St. Clair's problems and did not want to have them repeated with Wayne's legion. St. Clair rushed into the field with less manpower and paid dearly for it. Wayne waited at Pittsburgh for his men to arrive.

Recruiting in summer 1792 was far from optimal. Knox repeatedly mentioned in his letters to Wayne that "the recruiting service seems to languish."¹³ Knox even complained to Wayne that "the recruiting service languishes in the Western district of this State [Pennsylvania]. If you can devise any thing to push it, I pray you to do so."¹⁴ It was tough to recruit soldiers after the two disastrous campaigns of Harmar (1790) and St. Clair (1791), where both armies relied heavily on ill-trained militia and were met with total embarrassment and defeat on the battlefield. Despite these obstacles, the War Department worked tirelessly to fill the Legion's ranks.

While waiting for the rest of his men and supplies

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to arrive in Pittsburgh, Wayne also started experimenting with new designs of muskets. Wayne believed musket redesigns would improve the rate of fire for his troops. He moved the touch hole so the mechanism would self-prime, which meant that “the eye of the soldier will therefore be constantly upon his Enemy, and he can pursue & load in full trot without danger of losing any part of his powder.”¹⁵ The new design allowed the soldier to just bite the paper

whole in the course of four or five days.”¹⁷ Many times it was the first time the men had ever shot a musket in their lives. Wayne described these recruits as “equally awkward & timid at first.”¹⁸ Wayne exclaimed that “we must burn a good deal of powder, in order to make them marksmen and Soldiers.”¹⁹

Additionally, the artillery soldiers lacked many supplies including shot, so Wayne instructed they

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cartridge and not have to prime his firearm. Wayne’s redesigns allowed for a quicker reload, and he wanted his troops to practice these maneuvers. Wayne insisted that this is a manoeuvre that must be practiced by the Light troops—it will accustom them to the report of their own Muskets, so as not to be alarmed at their own fire—and with the aid of a powerful and well appointed Cavalry (shou’d the Indians prefer the Hatchet to the olive branch) I trust, will produce a Conviction, not only to the savages but to the World, that the U S of America are not to be insulted with impunity.¹⁶

Harmar’s and St. Clair’s defeats embarrassed the United States on a world stage, and Wayne looked to correct every shortfall through preparation and training. Even today, soldiers learn in two ways: through experience and repetition.

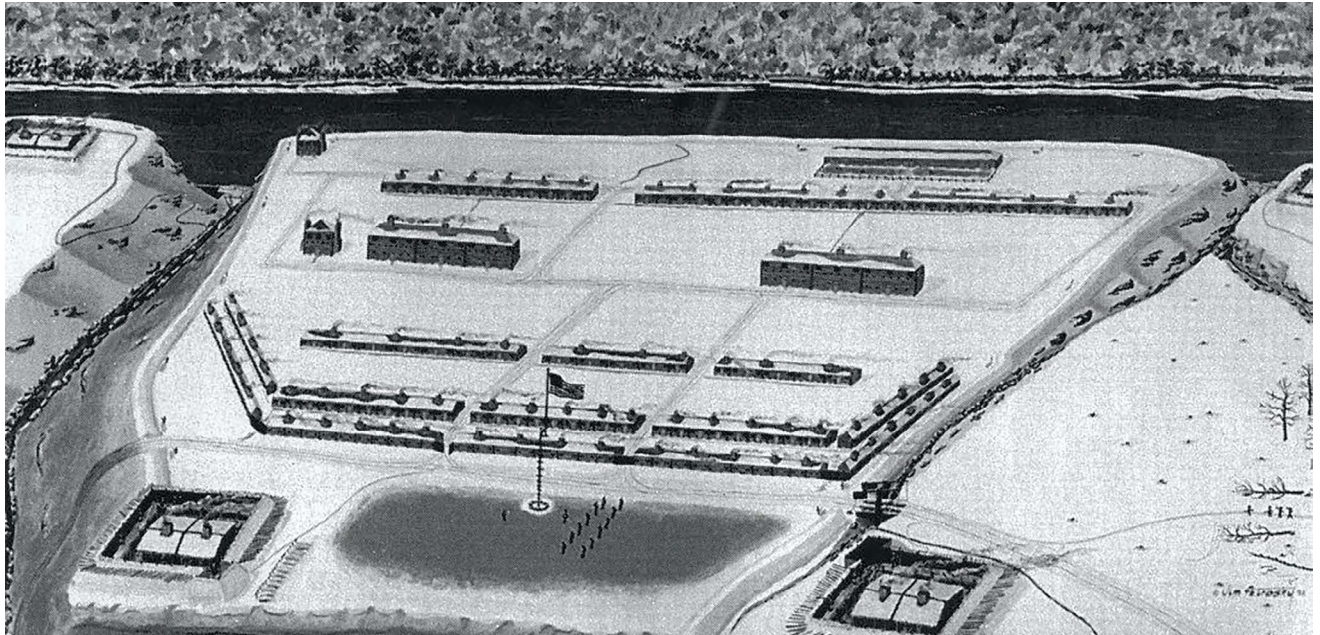
The infantry and riflemen practiced continuously on marksmanship; at first, they shot into trees because of the ease of retrieving the lead. Wayne understood that no one should waste lead during training because supplies were at a premium. In order to boost morale and marksmanship, Wayne created a shooting contest between each corps. Wayne reported that “the very men who four or five weeks since, scarcely knew how to load, or, draw a tricker—begin now to place a ball in a deadly direction—altho’ they practise only one shot, every time they come off guard—which goes round the

train with rocks as a substitute for shot. Wayne recorded that “Pray what is become of our sixteen little Howitz’s—we have plenty of round pebbles that will answer in the place of shot for practicing and our Artillery men—have everything yet to learn.”²⁰ Supplies were used sparingly during training, but Wayne knew the importance of realism. For example, the cavalry needed experience of live firing with gun powder “to load & fire in full trot.”²¹ The purpose of using powder in this maneuver was to get the men and horses used to the “noise and fireing.”²² Similar to the training exercises today with blanks and live fire, soldiers needed to be conditioned to these sights, smells, and sounds of battle.

One of the ways the legion prepared for battle was in the use of sham engagements because great units master the basics. During these sham engagements, and similar to warfighting exercises that take place today, the rifle corps of the sub-legions acted like the enemy, which included painting themselves. They would simulate an attack and the rest of the legion would have to respond. Wayne praised the roles of the rifle corps as it “acted well the part of Savages—which required all the skill & fortitude of Our little Legion to sustain.”²³ In one such sham engagement, the cavalry and infantry maneuvered together but were outflanked and charged by the opposing rifle corps (acting as the Native American force). A part of the cavalry had to cross and recross the Allegheny River during this engagement, which led to real-time decisions and lessons

learned. Wayne glowingly stated that “this little representation of an Action has had a good effect, by inspiring the respective Corps with a spirit of Emulation.”²⁴ However, he also believed that he could not do these engagements too much because he “had no idea that the mind could be so diffusively inflamed by imagination only—fortunately no material accident has happened, some have had their faces a little burned with powder—and two or three slightly wounded with wadding—but in a manner that

Wayne sent the legion forward with an escort and a party of artificers attached to start preparing for the Army’s arrival at Legionville. The fortified encampment was well protected because of the natural topography. On the shores of the Ohio, however, Wayne often worried about getting general provisions at the cantonment. There were few nearby mills that could supply the amount needed by a standing army. Additionally, the waters of the rivers were too low to move the goods from Pittsburgh.



caused more anger than hurt.”²⁵ The competitive spirit of these mock battles enabled the men let go some of their frustrations, but Wayne worried that it would hinder their training. Despite the frustrations of the troops, sham battles were great tools to help ready the Legion of the United States for actual hostilities.

Washington made it clear from the beginning that he did not want Wayne to advance his men too early like St. Clair had done. Washington often reiterated that the Legion of the United States should have plenty of supplies and training before its advance westward. In mid-October, Wayne had already chosen the place where he was to build winter quarters that would become Legion Ville, or Legionville. Wayne chose the spot himself because of its close access to the Ohio River. Knox instructed that Wayne should “hut them in a compact manner and fortify your encampment so as to guard against all surprise with constant patrols ... for your own security as for the general security of the Country.”²⁶ Legionville fit the exact training and security needs for Wayne and the Army.

A re-creation of the military training site, Legionville, which was established in 1792 by Maj. Gen. Anthony Wayne in Pennsylvania. (Image courtesy of the *Beaver County Times*, www.timesonline.com)

The roads that existed were terrible at best, but the terrain was mostly “thick woody Country.”²⁷ Wayne constantly dealt with the fear of starving, so cattle and other livestock were also vital to the new training center. Before moving the Army to Legionville, Wayne ordered the contractors to provide rations to the troops for the upcoming winter as it could be difficult resupplying the encampment.

By 23 November 1792, the waters of the Ohio began to rise with the return of wet weather. Wayne reported that “as long as the river keeps clear of ice; all the Mills, are at work; therefore I will embark the troops the first Clear Day & descend the river to Legion Ville.”²⁸ On 28 November the legion moved to its winter quarters. Wayne loaded his men and supplies on flat bottom barges and descended the Ohio River to Legionville. By 30



November, the last men disembarked at Fort Lafayette. As they pushed off the garrison, a fifteen-gun artillery saluted the legion as it moved twenty-two miles down the Ohio River to its winter quarters.

Training was essential for the legion. Wayne understood his mission as he had to protect the American frontier and train the “New Army—who have yet to learn the dreadful trade of death.”²⁹ He also believed that it was “not only the duty but it should also be the study and pride of every Officer to make himself acquainted with the tactics, so that if a change of position should be found necessary even in the heat of action it would be performed with less confusion, than that which took place yesterday.”³⁰ As readiness was the key for his soldiers, Wayne also drew upon his experiences at Valley Forge during the Revolutionary War. However, this time Wayne was in charge and he took charge. Legionville provided an area away from the distractions of the public and to be ready to launch a campaign in the spring to link up with Gen. James Wilkinson in the Ohio Country.

In December 1792, besides training, the men had to prepare the encampment by building huts and defenses. Wayne complained, “I have not a single officer of sufficient scientific knowledge or experience to assist me.”³¹ Despite this shortcoming, Wayne optimistically stated that “the business is so far completed & our chain of Redoubts so advantageously situate—that were all the Indians in the Wilderness to assemble for the occasion, it would not be in their power to dislodge us.”³² Legionville was in a forward position and Wayne worried about his defenses constantly. Wayne had four redoubts constructed at the four corners of the cantonment, which were laid out in a rectangle that paralleled the Ohio River. Redoubt 1, or Point Independence, was the closest to Wayne’s headquarters, but the redoubt could watch over the Ohio River and was garrisoned by riflemen. Each redoubt was fortified with a ditch and earthen structures. Additionally, a defensive ditch was dug around the entire cantonment. Wayne noted that in most of the defenses, “nature has done much for us,” which meant that with the steep hills and creeks, they did not have to do too much construction.³³

The legion heavily regulated the consumption of illegal liquor. The only alcohol that was allowed was the daily rations allotted to the troops, and sometimes it was used as an incentive. For example, after a soldier left guard duty, he had to shoot at a mark, and if he hit his target, he received a ration of whiskey. There were plenty of rumors of illegal stills operating throughout western Pennsylvania at the time. Only a few years before the infamous Whiskey Rebellion, local civilians attempted to sell their goods, including contraband booze, to the troops. A local legend suggests that Jonathan Hill, a civilian contractor, often sold whiskey to the soldiers. The legend mentions that Hill’s distillery had been discovered on Crow Island and Wayne ordered his artillery to train on the illegal still.³⁴ Although there is little evidence to confirm this action, soldiers somehow procured contraband liquor from a source. In one account, Sgt. Thomas Davis was found to be drunk on guard duty. If liquor consumption was regulated, Davis must have had a black-market source.

Legionville witnessed a variety of challenges to readiness including food rations, cleanliness, and discipline. These issues are integral parts of readiness and training. Before they disembarked to Legionville, Wayne waited for supplies and food to arrive in Pittsburgh. In the eighteenth century, much of the protein for the Army often marched alongside the troops in the form of cattle. Because of the difficulty of land travel to Legionville, Wayne figured if he ordered the food into rations that it would be easier to transport. Therefore, he ordered that rations be issued for the entire year of 1793. Wayne worried that Legionville would be cut off from Pittsburgh and their mills and stores. Wayne also looked to the standard ration of the British army in North America and compared that to his own army. He argued that his army “by no means sufficient of their comfort or support, unaided by either root or vegetable ... [by] the nature of the service, can not possibly be procured.”³⁵ At Legionville, he could not expect there to be an ample supply of flour and beef; it had to be either hauled or driven west. So, when building his legion, Wayne often looked to the British army as a model. The British soldiers standardly received one pound of flour

Top left: Warriors led by Miami Chief Little Turtle ambush Gen. Arthur St. Clair’s force in 1791 on the banks of the Wabash River in present-day Fort Recovery, Ohio. **Bottom left:** St. Clair’s force tried to rally, but to no avail. It was the worst-ever defeat of a U.S. Army force by American Indians. (Illustrations by Peter Dennis from John Winkler’s, *Wabash 1791: St. Clair’s Defeat* [Oxford, UK: Osprey, 2011]. Both images courtesy of Fort Recovery State Museum)

daily, and one pound of meat. Each week, British soldiers also expected to get rice, butter, and some vegetables. Wayne wanted his soldiers to learn how to live off rations in the field. It kept them ready for the coming campaign.

Camp cleanliness and illness were other issues at Legionville. Disease was a constant threat to the legion. Wayne worried about smallpox and other contagious

to the minds of every individual of the Army.⁴¹ Many courts-martial took place under Wayne's command. The orderly books of the legion are riddled with account of the trials and their outcomes. In order to have an effective fighting force, Wayne knew that he had to have strict discipline over the legion. Some charges were mundane. For example, a Mr. Henderson (possibly a local civilian)



In 1792, when the Army was at Pittsburgh, Wayne treated desertion as punishable by death according to the Articles of War.



maladies. Even before moving the Army to Legionville, Wayne communicated to Knox about the possibility of inoculating the troops from smallpox, but he decided to wait due to the time of the year. Additionally, inoculation often caused just as many problems as an epidemic itself. Surgeon's Mate Joseph Strong described the situation in camp: "The army is sickly at present, though the ruling epidemic is abating."³⁶ That epidemic was typhus fever and it "proved mortal in a few instances."³⁷ Disease often plagued military camps in the eighteenth century, and Legionville was no exception.

Wayne himself suffered from bouts of illness regularly at Legionville. He battled "an alarming attack from a violent lax & bilious vomiting."³⁸ On 22 December 1792, Wayne threw up "green seated jelly," and he took laudanum and a variety of other medicine "with little effect."³⁹ The general's condition and situation of the campaign worried the commander. Wayne stated, "But as life's uncertain—& mine at this time rather more than usual ... should I survive this attack, my breast is not bullet-proof—nor can I step a single foot aside to shield it."⁴⁰ When the general felt better, he rode and observed the defenses and his legion. Despite the illness that ran through the camp, Wayne and his men at Legionville remained focused on their mission—preparing for the next campaign season.

Life at Legionville was monotonous when the soldiers were not training. As in any army, when soldiers get bored, some will do mischief. Consider a quote from the orderly book: "The principles of humanity as well as military discipline require the most exemplary and prompt punishment, in order to produce a conviction

accused Lloyd Blackmore of Edward Butler's Company of the 4th Sub-Legion killing a heifer."⁴² The tribunal acquitted the soldier.

Other crimes were much more detrimental to the legion. Desertion was a major issue for Wayne's legion. Earlier in 1792, when the Army was at Pittsburgh, Wayne treated desertion as punishable by death according to the Articles of War. For example, on 11 November 1792 Sgt. John Trotter of the 3rd Sub-Legion pleaded guilty to desertion. The court recommended the sentence of death according to the Articles of War. Wayne recorded, "It now becomes the painful duty of the Commander in chief to confirm the awful sentence of death passed upon the unhappy prisoner; but when an officer of such high trust and confidence as a sergeant of the Legion of the United States shews so horrid, so dangerous, and so pernicious an example."⁴³ Swiftly, in the evening of 11 November 1792, the firing squad executed Trotter. Trotter's execution set an example for the men. Unfortunately, the remoteness of Legionville made desertion enticing. Lower-ranking soldiers received lesser punishments for desertion. For example, Pvts. James Wood, Benjamin Coburn, James Russell, and Joseph R. Carroll all were charged with desertion from Capt. William Eaton's Company. Instead of death, each received one hundred lashes. Ultimately, Wayne needed troops, so he had to spare some much like Washington did during the American Revolution.

Other crimes did not warrant the same severe punishment. For example, Sgt. Thomas Davis of Capt. Richard Sparks's Company was found guilty of being drunk at guard duty on the night of 8 December 1792. Davis's

punishment was not lashing, but he was temporarily stripped of rank for one month and his pay suspended for said term.⁴⁴ As the winter dragged on, Wayne knew that supplies, especially ammunition, were at a premium. In February 1793, Wayne ordered that pay be deducted from anyone who had a shortage of powder and shot. For each missing cartridge, a soldier was charged one-eighth of a dollar (12.5 cents) per cartridge.⁴⁵ Discipline, although sometimes harsh, provided the necessary order to the legion, which made it a better fighting unit.

While training his legion at the fortified camp on the Native American side of the Ohio River, Wayne often met with members of the Six Nations, including Seneca Chief Cornplanter. The chiefs of the Six Nations sought to broker peace between the United States and the Western Indian Confederacy. Wayne skeptically viewed these attempts at peace. Wayne relayed his views as “from report, they are such, as can not be accepted, consistent with National Honor, & the true interest of the U.S.”⁴⁶ He continued training his men until he received orders from Washington and Knox. In writing to his friend Sharp Delany, Wayne freely expressed his beliefs: “I suppose that you have a peace with you [in Philadelphia] but we have war, serious war in the Western Country; nor shall we ever have peace (however desirable) until the Indians experience our superiority in the field.”⁴⁷

By March 1793, Wayne believed that “[p]eace is out of the question,” and he also predicted that “the United States will soon experience more formidable neighbors than the savages upon its margins who will immediately open a wide and deep drain to the population of the Atlantic States.”⁴⁸ Wayne kept up with the current events, and often he was sent information from Europe. For example, Delany sent him news of the execution of the French monarchy during the revolution. On 19 March 1793, Delany relayed that “France just emerging from as State of abject Slavery—will it seems find Difficulties enough to contend with in support of the plant they have so honorably reared—The Decapitation of Lewis [Louis XVI] announced by the paper of today (if true) will in all probability provoke a Declaration on the part of England & Spain.”⁴⁹ Delany went on to ponder about the prospects of the United States aiding the fledgling French Republic, knowing the European events had ripple effects in the New World, even for the United States. Regardless of the news, Wayne had to concentrate on the task at hand—defeat the Western tribes.



After ruling out fifteen other possible commanders, President George Washington selected Maj. Gen. “Mad Anthony” Wayne, the last man on his list, to organize and command a newly conceived American Legion fighting force explicitly developed to defeat the Miami tribe of American Indians and their confederates. Washington selected Wayne not only for his demonstrated capabilities as a soldier and storied coolness under fire but also because of his personal loyalty to Washington. Wayne earned the sobriquet “Mad Anthony” due to his ordering of a risky nighttime bayonet attack on a British garrison at Stony Point, New York, in 1779.

Artists' depiction of Brig. Gen. Anthony Wayne circa the eighteenth century. (Artwork by Trumbull and Forest via the Library of Congress)



Knox encouraged Wayne by saying, “You are to have everything prepared for a vigorous offensive operations and in perfect readiness to move forward from the Ohio.”⁵⁰ Readiness was the key. In March 1793, Wayne praised “the Progress that the troops have made both in maneuvering and as Marksmen,” which engaged and defeated a small group of Native Americans on St. Patrick’s Day.⁵¹ Wayne knew his legion was prepared to move forward. However, the spring weather in the Pennsylvania frontier delayed Wayne and his legion from descending the Ohio toward the enemy. Originally, he planned on moving down the Ohio around 15 April; however, it was 29 April before he could move his legion forward. Additionally, and more important to the campaign, Wayne reported to Knox that his “Quarter Master General promises to have everything belonging to his department in readiness for descending the river as soon as the season will permit the troops to Encamp.”⁵²

On a hot and steamy August day in 1794, the Legion of the United States met the enemy Native Americans and some Canadian militia near the British Fort Miami in present-day northwest Ohio. The legion pushed forward with the eager dragoons under the command of Lt. Lennard Covington and John Webb setting the pace.

Charge of the Dragoons at Fallen Timbers (1895), painting, by R. F. Zogbaum. The painting illustrates Gen. Anthony Wayne’s campaign against American Indians in the Northwest Territory in 1794. (Image courtesy of *Harper’s Magazine*, 1896)

The dragoons cut through the enemy lines and devastated the enemy and the infantry followed with bayonets fixed and drove the enemy two miles toward the British Fort Miami. The legion flawlessly outmaneuvered the Native American enemy. The Battle of Fallen Timbers lasted a little over an hour and Wayne owned the field. Unlike his predecessor, St. Clair, Wayne’s legion lost less than one percent of its fighting force at Fallen Timbers because it was trained, ready, and lethal.

The readiness of the Legion of the United States in 1792–1793 directly led to the battlefield effectiveness in the summer of 1794 at Fallen Timbers. A year later, Wayne negotiated the Treaty of Greenville that ended the Northwest Indian War, but it was only because of the effective training that began in 1792. Most of the legion experienced the training regimen Wayne instilled at Legionville, which met the enemy on the battlefield on

20 August 1794. The daily drilling and marksmanship at Legionville helped shape America's first combined arms unit. The legacy of Legionville has almost been forgotten by

most of the Nation, but the lessons the Army learned on the shores of the Ohio about readiness and lethality should be remembered by our current generation of soldiers. ■

Notes

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