

# Treachery Within The United States Army

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The date was August 20, 1794. Anthony Wayne, a general in the United States Army, had just defeated a coalition of Indian tribes in the Battle of Fallen Timbers. Wayne enjoyed the victory which would ensure his name a place in future history texts, but he had little idea that he had also foiled an attempt to destroy him and his army. The incidents surrounding the Battle of Fallen Timbers, more than any other crisis during this era, reveal the Republic's fragility. The story is fraught with broken treaties, international mischief on the part of Great Britain, disregard for the rights of Native Americans, the inability of the United States government to control its citizens, and intrigue and disloyalty by at least one of America's highest ranking military officers. For years historians have debated the existence of this plot against Wayne. Even when they agree that a devious plan had been formulated, scholars disagree about who was involved or had knowledge of the sinister plot. By piecing together letters written by the main participants and evaluating other salient information it is evident that there was, in fact, a scheme to crush Wayne. Furthermore, those who participated in its implementation can be determined with good probability.

In retrospect, Fallen Timbers proved to be a turning point in the development of the United States. It occurred when the survival of the nation was more in doubt than at any other time between the Revolution and the Civil War. Wayne's victory helped to safeguard the American frontier and ensure the survival of the young nation. If he had been unsuccessful, the Northwest Territory would have either remained under the influence of the British or a costly war between the United States and Britain might have commenced.

After the Battle of Fallen Timbers, while Wayne was preparing to meet the Indians at Fort Greenville for treaty negotiations, Wayne learned of information that changed how he perceived his victory and the entire campaign. A deserter from the American army named Robert Newman, who had been Wayne's Quartermaster of the Militia,<sup>1</sup> returned telling a wild tale about an alleged conspiracy involving General James Wilkinson, Wayne's second-in-command. Wilkinson's purported scheme not only had been designed to bring down his long time rival, Anthony Wayne, but also involved turning over the United States army to the British. According to Newman, the conspirators' planning had solidified the Indian resistance and nearly brought defeat out of the jaws of victory. In addition, Newman implicated Wayne's private supply contractors. If Newman's assertions proved accurate, than the

conspirators were also trying to provoke Kentucky to secede and to save the British Fort Miami (near present-day Toledo, Ohio) from attack. Moreover, the conspiracy, if real, demonstrated the lengths to which some British officials were willing to go to protect Canada and hinder the expansion of the United States. As will be seen by the evidence presented in this paper, Newman's story proved accurate, the conspiracy was a reality, and Wilkinson was the most likely culprit.

The animosity between Wayne and Wilkinson had begun many years before the Battle of Fallen Timbers. Wayne, as a young officer stationed in Philadelphia during the American Revolution, was active in the social scene and had won the affections of many of the local women. Among Wayne's admirers was Ann, the daughter of John Biddle,<sup>2</sup> who in 1778 married James Wilkinson.<sup>3</sup> Wayne's continued friendship with her would later cause tension between the two men.<sup>4</sup>

Wayne and Wilkinson again would come into contact as they rose through the ranks of the military. In 1792, as he planned to conquer the Northwest Territory from the Indians, George Washington was considering both Wayne and Wilkinson to command the western army.<sup>5</sup> A Cabinet memorandum described Wilkinson as "enterprising to excess, but [having] many unapprovable points in his character."<sup>6</sup> Thus, even before he was appointed second-in-command, American officials had questioned Wilkinson's integrity. Despite his apparent shortcomings, Wilkinson was appointed a brigadier-general in Wayne's army, partly in order to appease the new state of Kentucky where Wilkinson had relocated. Wilkinson, however, was not pleased that Wayne was his superior. Because of the success of the government-sponsored raids against the Indians which Wilkinson had led into the Ohio Valley, he had considered himself the logical successor to Arthur St. Clair, the commander of a previous disastrous attempt to subdue the Northwest tribes.<sup>7</sup> Describing his animosity towards Wayne, Wilkinson wrote:

I owe so much to my own feelings and to Professional reputation, that I cannot consent to sacrifice the one, or to hazard the other, under the administration of a weak, corrupt minister or a despotic, Vain glorious, ignorant General.<sup>8</sup>

Even before Wayne left Philadelphia for the Northwest Territory, he had a high-ranking enemy within his own army.

Almost as soon as his campaign began in September 1793, Wayne experienced problems which he later learned were the designs of conspirators. The first sign of trouble was the tremendous difficulties he had obtaining supplies. As with Josiah Harmar's unsuccessful campaign against the Indians in 1790,<sup>9</sup> the private contractors Robert Elliot and Eli Williams were in charge

of provisions.<sup>10</sup> Wayne's army had such extreme problems that many men deserted.<sup>11</sup> The lack of supplies also made it difficult for Wayne to train his men and to keep morale high. Thus, the conspirators' plans were already hindering the progress of Wayne's army long before the Battle of Fallen Timbers.

Not only was the efficiency of the army compromised by the conspirators: they also may have planned an attempt on Wayne's life. When the incident occurred Wayne did not realize that he had almost been murdered, but after Newman revealed the conspiracy the pieces began to fall into place. The attempt occurred when Wayne was at Fort Adams (about twenty-five miles southwest of present day Lima, Ohio).<sup>12</sup> While he was sleeping, a tree fell on top of his tent, which smashed through and severely injured his knee and loins.<sup>13</sup> He described the incident in a letter by explaining that he almost was killed by a falling tree but was saved by a stump diverting the blow.<sup>14</sup> From that day on, Wayne needed help to mount his horse.<sup>15</sup>

On October, 12 1794, almost two months after the Battle of Fallen Timbers, Robert Newman was discovered on a boat preparing to descend the Ohio River on his way to Fort Washington, present-day Cincinnati. Newman was allegedly a deserter who had fled the army prior to the battle for no known reason. Upon being arrested, Newman claimed that the Indians had captured him, and he now wanted to receive pay for the time he was absent. The arresting officers, not believing Newman's story, placed him in chains.<sup>16</sup> Newman was then sent to Greenville, Ohio, where Wayne questioned him. The tale Newman related to Wayne was one of intrigue and mystery; it also confirmed many of Wayne's suspicions.

Newman claimed that he first became involved with this conspiracy through a man he met in South Carolina. While he was living there, he became acquainted with a mysterious man named James Hawkins, who later asked Newman if he would act as a courier and deliver a message to the British. Hawkins told Newman that the letter was to be kept secret, and that Newman was to deliver the note without asking questions. Hawkins also told Newman that if he successfully delivered the letter he later would learn more about its contents.

Newman soon forgot the promise he had made to Hawkins. However, one night when he was in Ohio, a man whom he could not recognize because of the darkness, approached him and gave him a letter. Although Newman did not know the contents, the letter was addressed to Colonel Alexander McKee, the British Indian agent, who was stationed near Fort Miami. The person who gave Newman the letter told him that "Your Safety alone, depends on the Security of that Letter."

Newman then delivered the letter to Colonel McKee upon arriving at the Miami Village on the Maumee River. McKee asked Newman if he knew either who wrote the letter or what it contained. He then asked Newman why

Hawkins had not told him the contents of the message. Newman did not know the answer to any of these questions, but his curiosity was piqued.

Newman first learned mischief was afoot when he met Matthew Elliot, another British Indian agent stationed at the Miami Village. Elliot, who had lived in Maryland prior to the outbreak of the American Revolution, fled to Detroit after the United States declared its independence. He went on to serve in the British Indian Department and the British Army. As Newman soon discovered, Elliot's brother Robert was one of the contractors for Wayne's army. It was Robert's role to keep the army ill-supplied so that men would desert, Wayne's progress would be slowed, and the Indians would be encouraged to resist. Newman also learned that numerous letters had passed between General Wilkinson and the Elliot brothers. Newman, however, did not learn the contents of the letters and complained that "The more I strived to know, the further I was put in the dark."<sup>17</sup>

Despite the secrecy surrounding the letters, Newman eventually discerned what was going on when he overheard a conversation between Major E. B. Littlehales and George James, both British officials stationed with McKee. Apparently, the British expected that the command of the United States Army would be given to James Wilkinson. Until that time arrived, both the British-Canadians and Wilkinson would work to keep the Indian War from ending. Ultimately, the aim of the conspirators was the union of Kentucky with Canada. McKee stated that the Indians were mere "tools or creatures, to trouble the frontier, in order to prevent a dissolution of the [United States] Army, until things...are in Order, for the 'Happy Event.'" Littlehales continued that the occasion would bring about amity and unity between Kentucky and Canada. Matthew Elliot argued that Kentucky would be much better off if it were in a union with Canada, as the Kentuckians would then have access to the Great Lakes. Moreover, if Kentucky remained a part of the United States, it would be under the power of the Atlantic States, whose "interest was in dire opposition to theirs [the Kentuckians]." In addition, Newman explained that although he was not positive that Kentucky Senator John Brown was involved in the scheme, from what he heard, it was his opinion that Brown was friendly to the conspiracy.<sup>18</sup>

It has always been difficult for scholars to determine the accuracy of Newman's account. One must question if Newman was a hostage of the Indians, a deserter, a conspirator, or a mindless dupe of Wilkinson or Wayne. The available evidence suggests that Newman was probably employed by Wayne. Little evidence supports the position that he was a prisoner of the Indians. Although first reporting that he was a hostage, Newman later changed his story in his interview with Wayne,<sup>19</sup> as well as in the account he gave his brother, Obadiah.<sup>20</sup> In addition, a captured Shawnee Indian stated that a deserter (Newman) came to the Indian village of his own free will.<sup>21</sup> There is

no apparent credibility to the explanation that Newman was captured by the Indians.

Similarly, it seems unlikely that a deserter would risk his life returning to the United States army since execution was a likely fate. Newman would have been safe if he had journeyed to Canada. Moreover, when Newman returned he did not attempt to avoid the army. In fact, he was attempting to go to Fort Washington, where Wayne was stationed, when he was captured. Newman must have known that his desertion would be forgiven or he would never have wanted his presence to be discovered. It is improbable that his tale was invented only after his capture. Although Newman may have made up his story after he was in British hands, it is unlikely that a deserter facing the death penalty would pin his hopes for survival on such an unbelievable story of which he had neither proof or first-hand knowledge.<sup>22</sup>

Not only is it unlikely that Newman was a deserter, but it is also improbable that he was a fellow-conspirator with Wilkinson.<sup>23</sup> Newman was not a Kentuckian; he did not have family ties with the British. Also, he would not have returned and risked his life to expose the scheme if he was part of the conspiracy. Finally, it does not make sense to argue that Newman was returning to Ohio to contact Wilkinson and that, after being captured, he turned on his fellow conspirators. It is doubtful that the conspirators would have risked Newman's capture and subsequent exposure of their scheme in the hopes that Newman, a suspected deserter, might have been able to contact Wilkinson. The conspirators easily could have used a different messenger without risking the discovery of their plot.

Determining whether Newman was an unwitting partner to Wilkinson's scheme or whether he was part of Wayne's attempt to discover traitors within the army is more difficult to assess. Most historians claim that Newman, unaware of the contents of the letter, was used as a courier by Wilkinson. Newman's deposition tends to justify this belief.<sup>24</sup> This explanation does not, however, take other significant information into consideration. If Newman was an unwitting courier, he probably would not have told the British and the Indians that he was a deserter. He could just have told them that he was a messenger for Wilkinson. In his deposition he gave no indication that he was told by Wilkinson to pose as a deserter. Moreover, according to the statement by a captured Shawnee, Newman volunteered valuable information about the size of Wayne's army and its location to the Indians.<sup>25</sup> In addition, numerous letters between British officials described the accurate intelligence Newman gave them.<sup>26</sup> An unwitting courier would not have provided intelligence to the British. Finally, if Wilkinson had told Newman to pretend he was a deserter, he would have later reported this fact to Wayne or his brother. Although the information Newman gave to the Indians and the British appeared on the surface to be valuable, as will be discussed below, the intelligence was actually

similar to the information the British already had learned. In addition, Wayne actually desired Newman to give the information to the British in order to hide Newman's true objective. Since Newman was probably not a simple dupe of Wilkinson, another explanation must be correct.

When all the evidence is considered, it is logical that Newman was probably employed by Wayne to uncover traitors within the army. According to Newman's brother, Wayne told Newman to "become associated with such persons as might be suspected of being in favor of the Indians or British." Newman's brother related that Newman claimed that he received papers from General Wilkinson or someone else in his name. Upon receipt of the sealed letters, Newman gave them to Wayne's aide who delivered them to Wayne. Wayne then read the letters, resealed them and gave them back to Newman. Next, Wayne gave Newman verbal directions on how to proceed to the Indian villages and Detroit. Wayne also informed him what he should say while he was there and the way by which he should return. Finally, Wayne told him to make sure that the letters were delivered to the British at Detroit.<sup>27</sup>

By combining the information Newman relayed in his deposition with the statement by his brother, it is apparent that Newman was working for Wayne. Wilkinson's agent, Philip Nolan, believed that Newman was in the service of Wayne. After talking to Newman he wrote: "I find the poor fellow was employed by Hawkins—Wayne...and Hawkins were leagued together . . . He [Newman] insists that he served the army."<sup>28</sup> This explains why, although he was not a deserter or a part of the conspiracy, Newman gave valuable information about Wayne's army to the Indians and the British. As instructed by Wayne, Newman gave the British information that would provide for his safe passage and make him look like a legitimate deserter. The information Wayne gave to his opponents was not damaging considering that numerous deserters had already left Wayne's army and provided similar information.

Although Newman did fool the Indians and the British for a while, eventually the British began to question if he was a spy. The Lieutenant-Governor of Canada, John Graves Simcoe, wrote: "As far as I can judge Newman must have been sent in for some sinister purpose."<sup>29</sup> Similarly, Alexander McKee believed that "Newman was not the character he represents."<sup>30</sup> McKee's distrust of Newman would explain the numerous questions he asked Newman about who gave him the letters.<sup>31</sup> Distrusting Newman, he would have to ensure that the letters were really from Wilkinson. The British at first believed and then distrusted Newman because Wayne, via Newman, was providing false information. An example of the questionable material Newman provided to the British was his claim that Wayne had "positive orders" to reduce Fort Miami and that "his operations against Detroit will commence...in the Spring."<sup>32</sup> Wayne, although he was authorized to assault Fort Miami, never had direct orders to attack the fort. Moreover, Wayne was not given permission

to lead an offensive against Detroit. Nevertheless, the British believed Newman's story and feared an imminent attack on Fort Miami and Detroit. This information was most likely part of Wayne's attempt to intimidate the British.

One more piece of evidence supporting the theory that Newman was working for Wayne is Rice Burrock's testimonial. A prominent resident of the Ohio Territory, Burrock claimed that immediately after Newman was released from confinement he paid Burrock the full amount of a debt. He further claimed that Newman used brand-new, non-bank bills from American army funds. Finally, Burrock reported that Newman was in good spirits, appeared decent, and spoke with ease.<sup>33</sup> This suggests that Newman had received a large sum of money while confined by Wayne. In addition, he was not worried for his safety, nor had the time spent in jail been hard on him. It appears that Wayne had paid him the money for his services.

Although Newman was working for Wayne, that does not mean that his conspiracy story was contrived. The considerable evidence independent of Newman, presented later in this paper, suggests the authenticity of Newman's account. Other historians claim that Wilkinson was using Newman to spy on the British. They argue that Wilkinson did not tell Wayne because Wayne had reprimanded Wilkinson for a similar incident.<sup>34</sup> Although this explanation would explain Newman's return and the information he gave to the British, it does not account for the claim made by Newman's brother or the wealth of evidence indicating Wilkinson's guilt which will be presented later in this paper.

In the final analysis, after reviewing every possible scenario, there is but one explanation which does not contradict common sense or existing evidence. Wayne employed Newman to discover traitors within the army. While working for Wayne, Newman let it be known that he was available as a courier to the British. Not knowing that Newman was employed by Wayne, Wilkinson gave Newman the letter to McKee. After Wayne read it, Newman carried it to the British in order to uncover further evidence against Wilkinson and to learn the extent of the conspiracy. To appear as a deserter and to provide for his safe passage, Newman imparted information to the British about Wayne's army. After learning about the conspiracy, Newman then returned to the United States to inform Wayne and to receive his money.

Numerous corroborations of Newman's story point to Wilkinson's involvement in the conspiracy. Wilkinson indeed was capable of betraying his fellow officers and his country. His indifference to personal and national allegiances appeared in many questionable activities during the Revolutionary War and the early years of the Republic. During the British invasion of New York in 1777, Wilkinson took credit for discovering the British position, denying the real heroes of the battle, Benedict Arnold and John Hardin, the credit they were due and contributing to Benedict Arnold's decision to defect to the British.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, Wilkinson was involved with Horatio Gates'

scheming in 1777 to remove Washington as commander of the army. In fact, Wilkinson was considered by some to be the mastermind of the plot<sup>36</sup> and he later betrayed Gates in order to save himself.<sup>37</sup> During the same incident, Wilkinson attempted to blame his uninvolved friend, William Alexander, who claimed to be the sixth Earl of Stirling, for disclosing the plot when Wilkinson himself had actually done so during a “convivial hour.”<sup>38</sup>

After the Revolution, Wilkinson became deeply involved in a conspiracy to join Kentucky with Spain. He made many trips to Spanish New Orleans. In 1796, a large quantity of money was discovered being shipped to Wilkinson, presumably from the Spanish as payment for pleading their cause to the Kentuckians.<sup>39</sup> Wilkinson was similarly connected to the Aaron Burr conspiracy, although the role he played in the affair is confusing. Burr enlisted Wilkinson’s aid to attack Mexico in 1806. In the end, Wilkinson went against the directives of the United States government, raised his own army consisting largely of Spaniards, and tried to stop Burr in what many historians believe was an attempt to curry favor with the King of Spain and the United States government.<sup>40</sup>

Much earlier, Wilkinson had penned a secret expatriation declaration disavowing his citizenship to the United States:

I hope that it may never be said of me, with justice, that in changing my allegiance from the United States of America to the Honorable Court of Madrid. I have broken any of the laws of nature or of nations, nor of honor and conscience . . . the policies of the United States having made it impossible for me to obtain this desired and [happiness] under its Government. I am resolved to seek it in Spain.<sup>41</sup>

Wilkinson made this pronouncement in 1787, seven years before he was the second-in-command at Fallen Timbers.<sup>42</sup> Wilkinson clearly had no misgiving about betraying Arnold, Hardin, Gates, Alexander, Washington, Burr, and his country. Thus disloyalty to Wayne—a man Wilkinson loathed—would not be aberrant.

Wilkinson’s checkered career, however, does not positively prove that he was indeed conspiring against Wayne and the United States Army. Historians have debated Wilkinson’s involvement for two hundred years. But, whether arguing his complete innocence<sup>43</sup> or attempting to prove his guilt by Newman’s testimony and one or two letters,<sup>44</sup> a full account analyzing the evidence has yet to be written. Newman’s deposition and the likelihood that he was working for Wayne must be taken into consideration in determining Wilkinson’s guilt. More importantly, key letters between British officials, Wilkinson and Elliot, and Wilkinson and others must be evaluated. Together these documents offer a picture of Wilkinson’s guilt which cannot be ignored.



Crucial evidence which supports Newman's deposition is the letter that Wilkinson wrote to Robert Elliot,<sup>45</sup> the army's private supply contractor. It implicates both men in an attempt to deny Wayne's army sufficient supplies. Wilkinson described how Elliot might slow down their transportation. He began the letter by addressing it to "Dear Robin," and finished by requesting: "I beg of you, & do expect, that no Persons whatever will see my letters to you."<sup>46</sup> The second-in-command of the United States Army would have no reason to slow down the shipment of supplies unless he was hoping to hinder the army's movements or destroy its effectiveness.

Even more crucial is the correspondence between British officials discussing their interactions with Wilkinson. A letter from Alexander McKee to R. G. England, a British officer, discusses the value of information provided by a deserter. McKee wrote that because the deserter's account differed from Wilkinson's, it was probably false.<sup>47</sup> McKee's letter shows that Wilkinson was writing to British Indian agents and was providing information on a topic important enough for a deserter to feel it was of interest to the British. More conclusively, McKee was so confident of Wilkinson's reliability that Wilkinson's information set the standard he used to discount the deserter's report.

Wilkinson had numerous improper contacts with the British. More proof appears in a letter from R. G. England to Lieutenant Governor Simcoe, describing another letter he received from Wilkinson. England also alludes to the fact that other British officials had received correspondence from Wilkinson. England wrote: "I received an easy letter from General Wilkinson, which I forward to you in this packet, lest I too may become suspected of having an improper correspondence."<sup>48</sup>

Equally damaging evidence of Wilkinson's involvement with the British is a reference by Simcoe to his other messages. He wrote: "By General Wilkinson's Letters to Col. England, I have reason to hope, My Lord, that President Washington has found means to communicate to General Wayne the agreement [Jay Treaty] between Mr. Jay [John Jay, the American minister to Great Britain] and Lord Grenville [William Wyndham Grenville, the British foreign secretary]."<sup>49</sup> Simcoe continued that the information in Wilkinson's letters led him to presume that the Americans were not going to attack any of the British posts. Again, Simcoe was acknowledging that Wilkinson was corresponding with British officers. By informing the British that their forts were safe, Wilkinson enabled the British to divert their military resources to other endangered areas. This letter may not have been about the conspiracy, but it shows that Wilkinson wrote numerous letters to the British.

Robert Newman's deposition, Obadiah Newman's account, evidence supporting their claims, and letters documenting Wilkinson's guilt, provide substantial evidence that Wilkinson was involved in a conspiracy to thwart the success of Wayne's army and to join Kentucky and Canada. Once

Wilkinson's guilt is fixed, it must be questioned how a man who attempted to destroy the United States army continued to remain in power and successfully rise through the ranks. A combination of Wilkinson's early military victories resulting in great popularity in Kentucky, his continual self-promotion and scheming, and his numerous political connections allowed him to inspire confidence despite his apparent flaws.

Wayne did send the evidence of Wilkinson's guilt to President Washington, via Secretary of War Henry Knox, explaining the conspiracy.<sup>50</sup> The President's first response was disbelief. He asked Wayne to attempt to work the problem out with Wilkinson. Wayne responded by arguing that if it had been in the

true interests of my Country to accommodate with that vile assassin Wilkinson, I most certainly wou'd have made the attempt in compliance with the President's wishes. But it is impossible—for I have a strong ground to believe, that this man is a principal agent, set up by the British & Democrats of Kentucky to dismember the Union.<sup>51</sup>

Finally, after reconsidering the evidence and receiving Wilkinson's request for an investigation to clear his name, Washington decided that Wayne should hold a military Court of Inquiry.<sup>52</sup> Whether Wayne was too busy concluding the Treaty of Greeneville with the Indians, or whether he did not think that he had enough evidence, Wayne never got around to holding the hearing. Wayne died on December 15, 1796, largely as a result of lingering problems from the injury to his leg caused by the tree incident. No one else attempted to further investigate the truth about the conspiracy.

It is still not clear how Wilkinson, whose character was already questioned by the administration, avoided an investigation. Timothy Pickering, the new Secretary of War, wrote to Wayne, "Your letters & Newman's information has presented and confirmed ideas of certain character which have destroyed all confidence in him [Wilkinson]." <sup>53</sup> If even the Secretary of War believed Wayne, it is odd that no one assisted him in the investigation after Wayne's death in 1795. Perhaps the investigation stopped because of the great distance between the participants in Ohio and Philadelphia. Or maybe, there was simply a lack of evidence. It appears more likely that Wilkinson's strategy to bring charges against Wayne after Wayne made his initial complaint helped to confuse the situation. In addition, Wilkinson's numerous high-placed connections, such as Senator John Brown from Kentucky, helped to ensure that the charges made by Wayne were downplayed.

Soon after Wayne sent his letters about Wilkinson to Philadelphia, Knox, in order to be fair, alerted Wilkinson to the charges. Upon hearing the news of the threat to his reputation and rank, Wilkinson began a counteroffensive. He publicly questioned Wayne's abilities and he brought misconduct charges

against him.<sup>54</sup> Wilkinson then pressed for a Court of Inquiry to investigate the charges against Wayne.<sup>55</sup> In addition, Wilkinson published letters that Wayne and the British Commander R. G. England exchanged immediately following the Battle of Fallen Timbers while Wayne's forces surrounded Fort Miami. Wilkinson thereby hoped to demonstrate that Wayne had tried to provoke a battle with Great Britain.<sup>56</sup> This proved that while Wayne, who was distracted by treaty proceedings, quietly pressed charges against Wilkinson, Wilkinson, at the same time, was more aggressive in taking action against Wayne. Moreover, because both men were leveling charges at each other, it simply appeared that they were feuding, making neither seem trustworthy. The government saw little reason to investigate the squabbling between two long-time enemies after Wayne's death.

The mood of the country and the fact that Wilkinson was a prominent Kentuckian may have saved him. His highly placed connections, many of whom had recommended him for his command, would not want to see their close friend implicated in a treacherous conspiracy. They would prefer that he go unpunished, not only because they cared about Wilkinson as a friend, but also because his fall could hurt their own reputation. Wilkinson's Kentucky connections included Harry Innes, a Federal judge; John Brown, a United States Senator; and George Nicholas, a member of the Kentucky Legislature, each of whom had recommended that Wilkinson be the second-in-command to Wayne.<sup>57</sup> All had much to lose if Wilkinson was convicted.

Wilkinson was also a good friend of Arthur St. Clair, and had served on his staff during the American Revolution. The two renewed their friendship in 1787 when St. Clair became the Governor of the Ohio Territory. After his failed expedition against the Indians, St. Clair remained governor. When Wayne was trying to bring charges against Wilkinson, Wilkinson had a powerful and influential friend who was in direct contact with President Washington. It is likely that St. Clair spoke well of his old friend.

Wilkinson himself had an even more direct connection to the President. Clement Biddle, his brother-in-law, was Washington's personal attorney. In fact, Washington had given Biddle the power of attorney to run his private affairs.<sup>58</sup> Both Washington and Knox were on good terms with Biddle, as is evident from the friendly letters they wrote to him.<sup>59</sup> Wilkinson had attempted to befriend the President directly by shipping him a barrel of fish from Ohio.<sup>60</sup> Whether or not Wilkinson's tactics succeeded, Washington chose not to press for a full investigation of the conspiracy.

Wayne died in 1796 and nothing more was done about Wilkinson's potential involvement in the conspiracy. Instead, he was commended for his service. More amazingly, however, Wilkinson not only was praised, but eventually was appointed as commander-in-chief of the army during the War of 1812. After only a short stint, Wilkinson was removed from command for

incompetency. He then moved to Mexico where he tried to obtain a grant of land. Towards the end of his life, ironically, Wilkinson was employed distributing Bibles in Mexico for the American Bible Society.<sup>61</sup> He died and was buried in an unmarked grave in Mexico.

Wilkinson's conspiracy, considered in the context of the Battle of Fallen Timbers, evidently played a large role in causing the battle. The British Indian agents who were part of the scheme worked to ensure that the Indians did not make a peace treaty with the Americans, and the American conspirators worked to ensure that the Indians were not defeated until the conspiracy was completed. They did this partly through weakening Wayne's army by denying it necessary supplies and slowing its advance. The Indians were encouraged to fight when they saw the demoralized state of many of Wayne's troops. Similarly, the weapons and advice given to the Indians ensured that they would not easily be induced to sign a treaty. Conspirators from both nations helped to unite the Indians and thwart the American efforts to intimidate and negotiate with them.

The Battle of Fallen Timbers could still have occurred without the Wilkinson conspiracy. Without his actions, however, the Indians would have been less likely to stand and fight. Ironically, Wayne did win a decisive victory, despite the efforts of Wilkinson and his cohorts. The new nation's control of the Old Northwest was thus affirmed, preventing the partition of the union Wilkinson had hoped to accomplish.

## Notes

1. R. G. England to Alexander McKee, August 15th 1794, E. A. Cruikshank, ed., *The Correspondence of Lieut. Governor John Graves Simcoe*, 4 vols. (Toronto: Ontario Historical Society, 1924), II, 380.
2. James Jacobs, *Tarnished Warrior* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1938), 59.
3. *Ibid.*, 60.
4. *Ibid.*, 127.
5. U.S. Cabinet memorandum, March 9, 1792, John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Writings of Washington*. (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1939), XXXI, 509-515.
6. Memorandum of Consultation on Indian Policy, March 9, 1792, Charles T. Cullen, ed., *The Papers of Jefferson* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990, XXII, 242.
7. Richard C. Knopf, "Anthony Wayne: The Man and the Myth," *Northwest Ohio Quarterly* (Spring, 1992): Vol. 64, No. 2, 40.
8. Wilkinson to Brown, August 28, 1794, "James Wilkinson Papers," Special Collections, Chicago Historical Society, Chicago, I, 29.
9. Josiah Harmar was the commander of the first campaign by the United States Army to defeat the Northwest Indians. He was defeated on October, 19 & 20, 1790.

10. Knox to Wayne, November 24, 1792, Richard C. Knopf, ed., *Anthony Wayne: A Name in Arms* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1960), 139.
11. Statement of James Davis, August 23, 1794, *Correspondence of Simcoe*, II, 403.
12. See map after page 65.
13. Notes from a Kentucky Journal, August 3, 1794, Richard C. Knopf, ed., *Two Journals of the Kentucky Volunteers* (Columbus, Ohio: Anthony Wayne Parkway Board, 1953).
14. Wayne to Isaac Wayne, September 10, 1794, Anthony Wayne Papers, Special Collections, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, XXXVII, 40.
15. Michael G. Pratt, August 28, 1996, interview by author, in person, Toledo, Ohio. As already indicated, after hearing Newman's story, Wayne came to the conclusion that the tree falling on his tent was an assassination attempt. One reason he believed this to be true was because he thought it unusual for a tree to fall in such dry weather. Although Wayne had no direct proof, if it was an attempted murder then the conspirators may have indirectly save the British Fort Miami. It is possible that if it were not for the painful injury that would eventually contribute to his death, Wayne would have attacked the fort after his victory at Fallen Timbers. Wayne was sometimes known to "run his head against a wall where success was both impossible and useless" (Memorandum on Consultation on Indian Policy—Washington's description of Wayne, March 9, 1792, Cullen, ed., *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, XXII, 242). His injury from the tree, however, was so painful that it was difficult for Wayne to ride. Therefore, despite his usual aggressive nature, Wayne's agonizing affliction may have diminished his combativeness. Hence, the conspiracy may have prevented a war from erupting between the United States and Great Britain.
16. Richard C. Knopf, *Anthony Wayne and the Founding of the United States Army* (Columbus, Ohio: Anthony Wayne Parkway Board, 1961), 221.
17. Deposition of Robert Newman, December 1, 1794, Wayne Papers, XXXVIII, 79.
18. Deposition of Robert Newman, *ibid.*
19. Deposition of Robert Newman, *ibid.*
20. Deposition of Obadiah Newman concerning Robert Newman, July 13, 1796 "James Wilkinson Papers," Special Collections, Chicago Historical Society, Chicago, I, 76.
21. Examination of a Shawnee Prisoner, August 12, 1794, Wayne Papers, XXXVII, 4.
22. Wiley Sword makes this argument in *President Washington's Indian War* (Oklahoma: Norman Publishing, 1985), 332. He wrote "The returning deserter Robert Newman, to save his own life, conveyed certain information implicating Wilkinson in treasonous correspondence with the British." Sword uses the statement by the captured Shawnee warrior to prove that Newman was a deserter. Sword uses Wayne's letters, stating that Newman was captured by the U.S. Army, to justify his theory that Newman relayed the story to Wayne in order to save his own life. Sword fails to take explain why if Newman was a deserter he would return to the U.S. Similarly, Sword does not take into account the fact that Newman was captured while making his way to Fort Washington.
23. Richard C. Knopf describes Newman as a conspirator in *A Name in Arms*, editor's note, 373. Knopf uses Newman's deposition to prove that Newman was a conspirator. Knopf argues that because Newman delivered Wilkinson's letter to the British he must have been part of the conspiracy. Knopf, however, fails to account for Newman's unusual return.
24. Using Newman's deposition, Knopf expounds the theory that Newman may have been either a mindless dupe of Wilkinson or a fellow conspirator, in *Anthony Wayne and the Founding of the United States Army*, 221-224.
25. Examination of a Shawnee Prisoner, August 12, 1794, Wayne Papers, XXXVII, 4.
26. McKee to England, August 2, 1794, *Correspondence of Simcoe*, II, 349; Information of Robert Newman, A Deserter, August 4, 1794, *ibid.*, 351; England to Simcoe, II, 387.
27. Deposition of Obadiah Newman concerning Robert Newman, July 13, 1796 "James Wilkinson Papers," Special Collections, Chicago Historical Society, Chicago, I, 76.
28. Nolan to Wilkinson, May 6, 1797, *ibid.*, 90.
29. Simcoe to England, August 19, 1794, *Correspondence of Simcoe*, II, 392.
30. England to Simcoe, August 6, 1794, *ibid.*, 358.
31. Deposition of Robert Newman, December 1, 1794, Wayne Papers, XXXVIII, 79.
32. Information of Robert Newman a Deserter, August 4, 1794, *Correspondence of Simcoe*, II, 351.
33. Rice Burrock testimonial, February, 20,

1796, "James Wilkinson Papers," Special Collections, Chicago Historical Society, Chicago, I, 41.

34. James Ripley Jacobs argues that Wilkinson was using Newman as a spy without permission in *Tarnished Warrior* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1938), 156.

35. Royal Ornan Shreve, *The Finished Scoundrel* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1933), 19-56.

36. *Ibid.*

37. Jacobs, *Tarnished Warrior*, 55.

38. *Ibid.*, 47-51.

39. McHenry to Wayne, October 15, 1796. *A Name in Arms*, 535.

40. Shreve, *Finished Scoundrel*, 220-227.

41. Wilkinson's Expatriation Declaration, August 22, 1787, *Reprints of Littell's Political Transactions of and Concerning Kentucky and Letter of George Nicholas to his friend in Virginia also General Wilkinson's Memorial* (Louisville, Kentucky: John P. Morton & Company, 1938, CXXXVII-CXXXIX).

42. Temple Bodley, a historian, wrote that Wilkinson made this statement only to entice the Spanish Governor of Louisiana to pay him money (Editor's introduction, *ibid.*). If Bodley's assessment is accurate, the fact still remains that Wilkinson denounced his loyalty to the United States.

43. Jacobs, *Tarnished Warrior*, 156.

44. Richard C. Knopf wrote extensively on the Battle of Fallen Timbers and wrote numerous books and journal articles on the Wilkinson Conspiracy. In his writings, Knopf primarily uses Newman's testimony and a letter from Wilkinson to Elliot to prove the truth of the conspiracy. Moreover, Knopf argues Newman was either a conspirator or an ignorant messenger. He does not take into account the fact that Newman might be working for Wayne. See *Anthony Wayne and the Founding of the United States Army*, 222; or "Anthony Wayne: The Man and the Myth," *Northwest Ohio Quarterly* (Spring, 1992): Vol. 64, No. 2.

45. Robert Elliot was the father of Jesse Duncan Elliot, second-in-command to Oliver Hazard Perry at the Battle of Lake Erie, *ibid.*, 42.

46. Robert Elliot was killed in an Indian raid, Thomas Smith to Alexander McKee, October 26, 1794, *Correspondence of Simcoe*, III, 155.

47. Wilkinson to Elliot, April 15, 1794, Wayne Papers, XXXIV, 13.

47. McKee to England, May 22, 1794, *Correspondence of Simcoe*, II, 243.

48. England to Simcoe, November 4, 1794, *ibid.*, III, 167. The second half of this letter was even more mysterious and equally damaging to Wilkinson. England wrote: "[Wilkinson] shall have his Buffalo blanket, but probably not from hence, and as he dreams, I think I also may be permitted to dream." The term "Buffalo Blanket" most likely refers to the ceremonial dress worn by Miami Indians after military victories. England was probably pointing out that Wilkinson would eventually achieve the great military victory he desired, but it would have to be without the help of the British. Similarly, England's reference to Wilkinson's dreams was probably an allusion to Wilkinson's lofty ambitions.

49. Simcoe to Dorchester, December 18, 1794, *ibid.*, 225.

50. Wayne to Knox, December 23, 1794, *A Name in Arms*, 373.

51. Wayne to Knox, January, 29, 1795, *ibid.*, 383.

52. Knox to Wilkinson, no date, Wayne Papers, XXXVIII, 44. Richard C. Knopf claimed in "Anthony Wayne: The Man and the Myth," 41, that a Senate Committee was appointed to investigate the conspiracy, but his theory is inconsistent with this letter.

53. Pickering to Wayne, April 15, 1795, # 2, *A Name in Arms*, 407.

54. Pickering to Wayne, April 15, 1795, *ibid.*, 406.

55. Editor's note, *ibid.*, 477.

56. Washington to McHenry, August 12, 1796, *The Writings of Washington*, XXXV, 179.

57. Innes, Brown, Nicholas to Jefferson, September 30, 1791, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, XXII, 177.

58. Washington to Biddle, May 28, 1797, and June 8, 1797, *The Writings of Washington*, XXXV, 454, 462.

59. Knox to Biddle, no date, "Washington-Biddle Correspondence" Special Collections, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, II, 74.

60. Washington to Wilkinson, March 14, 1793, *The Writings of Washington*, XXXII, 32.

61. Jacobs, *Tarnished Warrior*, 339.