

NOTABLE GERMAN-AMERICANS

Major David Ziegler (1748-1811), From Revolutionary War Soldier to First Mayor of Cincinnati, Ohio

By Don Heinrich Tolzmann

Introduction

In an article on “The German Contribution to the American Revolution” I discussed German officers and soldiers in the Continental Army, and the contributions they made to the winning of American Independence. (1) Prominent soldiers such as Baron Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben (1730-94) are relatively well known, but many others are not. (2) David Ziegler is a good example of one of them. He served in the armies of Prussia and Russia, then immigrated to America, where he joined the Continental Army, and was involved in many battles. After the war, he continued his military service in the U.S. Army, serving on the western frontier, and then retired in Cincinnati, Ohio, where he opened a store, and was elected its first mayor. What follows is a chronology of his life story.



Major David Ziegler
Courtesy of Wikipedia

Chronology

1748: Johann David Ziegler was born in Heidelberg on 16 August, the son of Johann Heinrich and Louise Friedericka Ziegler, nee Kern. His father was an innkeeper whose inn was frequented by students of the Heidelberg University. Due to his interest in military service, rather than university study, he joined the Prussian Army while a teenager. Other youths did likewise such as von Steuben. After service in the Prussian Army, Ziegler looked to Russia whose empress, Catherine the Great (1729-96), was a German princess from Pomerania. She encouraged German immigration and settlement in Russia, and her German-friendly approach likely encouraged German soldiers to seek military service there. One of them was Ziegler.

1768-74: At age 20, he enlisted in the Russian Army, and participated in battles during the Russo-Turkish War in the lower Danube region and Crimea. According to George A. Katzenberger: “He had served for almost six years with meritorious distinction, and been promoted to an officership. He had shown bravery on the field of battle, and was wounded in the head by a Turkish saber, and as a mark of appreciation was awarded a badge and an honorable discharge.” (3) Peacetime was the goal of course, but for a professional soldier it meant the loss of a position. Just as German soldiers had looked to Russia as a place of employment, so too did some look to America. Ziegler did likewise.

1775: He arrived in America at the port city of Philadelphia, and moved to Lancaster, Pennsylvania, where many Germans had already settled. Not long after his arrival, the Battle of Lexington, the first military engagement of the American Revolution, took place on 19 April. For a soldier this provided an opportunity for military service. He enlisted in the Continental Army, and was commissioned on 25 June as 3rd Lieutenant in Company H of the 1st Pennsylvania Regiment. (4) Its charge was to escort an ammunition wagon to the army of General George Washington (1732-99) at Cambridge. Ziegler helped carry out this task admirably, and this led to his appointment as Adjutant. His unit, which was well known as the Pennsylvania Rifle Regiment, had many German soldiers in its ranks, so Ziegler must have fit in well.

1776-77: On 1 January 1776, Ziegler was promoted again, this time to the rank of 2nd Lieutenant in the 1st Continental Infantry. He participated in the Battle of Long Island on 27 August 1776, was seriously wounded, and had to be transferred to a hospital in Philadelphia. On 16 January 1777, he was commissioned 1st Lieutenant of the 1st Pennsylvania Regiment, and participated in several battles, including spending the winter

of 1777-78 at Valley Forge. It was there that von Steuben trained and drilled American troops, transforming them into a well-organized and effective fighting force. Due to his presence at Valley Forge, Ziegler's knowledge of Prussian military training no doubt increased. (5)

1778-81: On 8 December 1778, Ziegler was promoted to Captain in the 1st Pennsylvania Regiment, and appointed Brigade Inspector of the Pennsylvania Brigade. From 1779 to 1780, he served as Commissary General of the Department of Pennsylvania. He then returned to his regiment, and was at the Battle of Yorktown, which led to the surrender on 19 October 1781 of British forces under the command of General Charles Cornwallis (1738-1805). Ziegler's regiment was one of the regiments from Pennsylvania and Virginia in the division under the command of von Steuben, so their paths had crossed again.

1781-83: After victory in the American Revolution, Ziegler returned to his commissary duties, and in 1782 to his regiment. He retired on 1 January 1783, an event that caused him to shed tears, as he left his comrades in arms. Alexander Garden recorded Ziegler's thoughts, which were expressed in a mixture of German and English. He translated and paraphrased them as follows: "Although I am happy in the thought that my fellow soldiers may now seek their homes and enjoy the rewards of their toils and all the delights of domestic felicity, I cannot but remember that I am left alone on the busy scene of life, a wanderer, without friends, and without employment; and that a soldier from infancy, I am now compelled to seek a precarious subsistence in some new channel, where ignorance and inability may mar my fortune, and condemn me to perpetual obscurity." (6)

1784: Now in retirement, Ziegler moved to Carlisle, Pennsylvania, where he opened a grocery store. The Continental Army had been disbanded, so Congress established the U.S. Army by authorizing the formation of the 1st American Regiment. General Josiah Harmar (1753-1813), was appointed its commanding officer. He was greatly influenced by the Prussian style of military training that had been introduced by von Steuben. Ziegler desired to get back into military service, so he enlisted, and was commissioned Captain of the regiment on 12 August. Its chief goal was to protect American interests and settlers in the unorganized region that became the Northwest Territory (1787). Although Britain had ceded it to the U.S., it still had agents in the area who supplied Indian tribes with guns and ammunition, as well as food and clothing, thus fueling the embers of frontier warfare. (7)

1785-88: For his newly appointed assignment Ziegler raised a company of soldiers, probably drawing on Germans who belonged to his regiment in the Continental Army. The troops were first stationed at West Point, and on 17 November 1785 were ordered to proceed to the western frontier. They arrived four days later at Fort Pitt, and then moved on to Fort McIntosh at Beaver, Pennsylvania. For the next several years, Ziegler's regiment, which was under the command of Harmar, was stationed at various places on the frontier, ranging from Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Kentucky. In 1785, Fort Harmar was constructed at Marietta, Ohio, and it became headquarters for the regiment.

1789: Lucy Anne Sheffield (1761-1820) arrived at Marietta in December 1788 with her mother, a widow from their hometown of Jamestown, Rhode Island. The mother owned shares in the Ohio Company, and this led to their move to Marietta. At the fort, Lucy Anne became acquainted with Ziegler, and on 22 February 1789, they were married. (8) In December, General Harmar's troops moved from Marietta to Fort Washington, which had just been constructed in southwest Ohio, and subsequently became the nucleus of the town of Cincinnati. Ziegler, however, was left behind at Fort Harmar with twenty soldiers. A contemporary, Major Ebenezer Denny, described Ziegler as a German who "takes great pride in having the handsomest company in the regiment, to do him justice his company has been always considered the first in point of discipline and appearance. Four fifths of the company have been Germans, majority of the present are men who served in Germany." (9)

1790: In the summer, Ziegler's troops arrived at Fort Washington, and in September accompanied Harmar on an expedition to the north, near the present city of Fort Wayne, Indiana. His troops consisted of 1,453 men (320 regulars and 1,133 militia). The goal was to quell any Indian disturbances, and rid the region of any remaining British who were regarded as trouble-makers. The campaign led to a series of battles on 19-20

October, causing Harmar's troops to face 1,050 Indians of the Northwestern Confederacy led by Little Turtle (1752-1812). The troops were overwhelmed in what became known as Harmar's Defeat, causing President Washington to be outraged by this development. Harmar, therefore, resigned and a court-martial was held at which Ziegler was one of the chief witnesses. He claimed the defeat was not due to the incompetence of Harmar, but rather to the insubordination of the militia, which had fled when the battle began. (10) Harmar was exonerated, but was replaced by General Arthur St. Clair (1737-1818) as head of the army. The area still was not safe for settlers, and even Fort Washington was threatened. However, on 22 October Ziegler cleared the area nearby, making it relatively safe for the fort.

1791: "Bristling now with self-confidence" Indian forces renewed their depredations on the frontier, causing Washington to order military action be taken against them. (11) St. Clair, therefore, led a force of 1,400 men northwards from Fort Washington. Their campaign led to another frontier disaster at the Battle of Wabash (located at Fort Recovery, Ohio) on 4 November, which became known as St. Clair's Defeat. An Indian force of 1,100 Indians of the Northwestern Confederacy led by Little Turtle and Blue Jacket (1738-1810) surrounded St. Clair's troops, inflicting heavy casualties. As was the case with Harmar's Defeat, many members of the militia fled from the battle. Ziegler was ordered to cover their retreat, and lead surviving troops back to Fort Washington, which they reached on 8 November. (12) After returning to the fort, St. Clair turned over his command to Ziegler, who was then briefly in charge of the fort. He was then succeeded by General James Wilkinson (1757-1825). Ziegler remained on active duty into the new year.

1792-96: Before retiring on 5 March, Ziegler testified at a congressional committee hearing that investigated St. Clair's Defeat. Ziegler defended St. Clair, noting: "I think, from my own experience, I never saw such a degree of trouble thrown on the shoulder of any other general I have served with, as upon General St. Clair..." He also stated: "That the general, in his opinion, always showed a zeal to accomplish the objects of the expedition." (13) Ziegler's testimony, the encirclement of the troops, and the flight of members of the militia led to the exoneration of St. Clair. This was the second time that Ziegler defended a commanding officer. St. Clair resigned his position at the request of Washington, but continued to serve as Governor of the Northwest Territory. In retirement Ziegler decided to go into farming, and acquired land four miles from Cincinnati, where he constructed a stone house. (14)

1797-1804: After giving it a try, farming seemed not to be Ziegler's liking, so he sold his farm, and acquired a store in Cincinnati on Front Street east of Sycamore, near a tavern belonging to well-known tavern owner, Griffin Yeatman (1769-1849). His store offered groceries and dry goods. After news reached Cincinnati of Washington's death in 1799, the town held a memorial service, in which Ziegler participated, with the main address delivered by Governor St. Clair. After Cincinnati was incorporated as a town on 2 January 1802, Ziegler was elected President of Council, an office now known as mayor. In 1803, he was re-elected, but declined another term in 1804. His appearance was described as follows: "His was a stately and commanding presence, especially when he chose to array himself, literarily, in the purpose and fine linen of his elaborate wardrobe. His was an erect, military bearing, with broad shoulders, full round face. Smooth shaven...with large regular features; in all a fine, open countenance, that challenged inspection and invited confidence." (15)

1804-11: In 1804, President Thomas Jefferson appointed Ziegler as the first Marshal of the Ohio District, and in 1807 he was appointed Adjutant General of Ohio. In 1809, he was also appointed Collector/Inspector of the Port of Cincinnati, a position he held until his death on 24 September 1811. Ziegler was buried at the Presbyterian cemetery on Fourth Street in Cincinnati, with a funeral service with military honors and representatives. In 1844, his remains were re-interred at the Woodland Cemetery in Dayton, Ohio, where his wife was buried. According to his last will and testament, Ziegler died a wealthy man, leaving bequests mainly to his wife's nephews and nieces, as the Zieglers did not have children. Later on, Ziegler's wife moved to Dayton, where she died in 1820, and was buried at Woodland Cemetery, that being the reason Ziegler's remains were moved there.

Conclusion

Today, Ziegler is memorialized by a park that bears his name, Ziegler Park, in Cincinnati's Over-the-Rhine district, and also by a plaque several blocks away in Memorial Hall. This was dedicated by the German-

American Citizens League in 1983 during the celebration of the German-American Tricentennial. For the 40th anniversary of the Federal Republic of Germany in 1990 the author edited and updated Katzenberger's biography of Ziegler as a contribution to U.S.-German relations, and also as a way to illuminate the life and work of Ziegler. (16)

By all accounts, Ziegler was an honorable, loyal, and trustworthy soldier on both sides of the Atlantic, and after retiring from military service, contributed to the commercial and political life of Cincinnati, Ohio. Finally, it should be noted that he was a member of the Society of the Cincinnati, a fraternal society founded in 1783 by officers who had served in the American Revolution, with membership restricted to them and their descendants. Its name derives from Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus, a Roman consul, whose name inspired St. Clair to give Cincinnati its name; its original name was Losantiville. The city's name reminds us of those who served in the American Revolution, including its first mayor: Major David Ziegler. (17)



Ziegler Plaque at Memorial Hall in Cincinnati
Courtesy of the Author

Notes

1. Don Heinrich Tolzmann, "The German Contribution to the American Revolution," *The Palatine Immigrant*. 35:2 (2010): 25-29. This is also available in the author's *German Heritage Explorations*. (Indianapolis: NCSA Literatur, 2019), pp. 14-19.
2. Don Heinrich Tolzmann, "Baron von Steuben (1730-94): From Prussian Soldier of Fortune to Inspector General," *The Palatine Immigrant*. 36:1 (2010): 26-32. This is also available in: Tolzmann, *German Heritage Explorations*, pp. 20-27.
3. George A. Katzenberger, *The First Mayor of Cincinnati: George A. Katzenberger's Biography of Major David Ziegler*. Edited by Don Heinrich Tolzmann. (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1990), p. 5.
4. Regarding the 1st Pennsylvania Regiment, see: Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, *German-Americans in the American Revolution: Henry Melchior Muhlenberg's History*. Edited by Don Heinrich Tolzmann. (Bowie, Maryland: Heritage Books, Inc., 1992), pp. 171 ff.
5. Regarding Valley Forge, see: Paul Lockhart, *The Drillmaster of Valley Forge: The Baron de Steuben and the Making of the American Army*. (New York: HarperCollins, 2008).
6. Katzenberger, *The First Mayor of Cincinnati*, p. 14.
7. Eugene H. Roseboom and Francis P. Weisenburger, *A History of Ohio*. (Columbus, Ohio Historical Society, 1988), p.43-44.
8. Regarding Ziegler's wife, see: Katzenberger, *The First Mayor of Cincinnati*, pp. 26, 40, 45-46.
9. *Ibid*, pp. 26-27.
10. R. Douglas Hurt writes: "The first reaction of the militia was to flee, retreating so rapidly that they ran through the regulars who had just arrived at the clearing and were attempting to form a battle line. The militia behind the regulars joined their colleagues in flight, leaving thirty regulars and nine militia alone. Little Turtle's combined force of Miamis, Shawnees, and Potowatomis overwhelmed them." See: R. Douglas Hurt, *The Ohio Frontier: Crucible of the Old Northwest, 1720-1830*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), p. 108.
11. Roseboom and Weisenburger, *A History of Ohio*, p. 60. Regarding St. Clair's Defeat, see: R. Douglas Hurt, *The Ohio Frontier*, pp. 113 ff.
12. According to an article in the *Western History Magazine*: "Mr. Ziegler (recently promoted before this expedition) during this fierce and cruel engagement in which half the army was killed, exhibited coolness and courage which were characteristic of him." See: Katzenberger, *The First Mayor of Cincinnati*, p. 30-31.

13. For Ziegler's testimony, see: *Ibid*, pp. 67-69, esp. p., 69.
 14. The conditions were still rather precarious in the Northwest Territory. Johann Heckewelder (1743-1823), a Moravian missionary, visited the area in 1792, and published a report on his visit. He began as follows: "A week ago the Indians killed and scalped a man under the walls of the fort (at Marietta, Ohio), and another man, who was with him, was shot in the shoulder." See: Johann Heckewelder, *The First Description of Cincinnati and other Ohio Settlements: The Travel Report of Johann Heckewelder (1792), With an Introduction by H.A. Rattermann*. Edited by Don Heinrich Tolzmann. (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1988), p. 29. For the history of subsequent developments on the frontier, see: R. Douglas Hurt, *The Ohio Frontier*, p. 120-42.
 15. *Ibid*, p. 37.
 16. Katzenberger's biography of Ziegler appeared in 1912, but had been long out of print, so the author edited and updated it for republication.
 17. Regarding the founding of the Society of the Cincinnati, see: Rudolf Cronau, *The Army of the American Revolution and its Organizer: Rudolf Cronau's Biography of Baron von Steuben*. Edited by Don Heinrich Tolzmann. (Bowie, Maryland: Heritage Books, Inc., 1998), pp. 99-103, and also: Lockhart, *The Drillmaster of Valley Forge*, pp. 281-82.
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