

# ZEBULON BUTLER PART ONE

## OFFICER AND GENTLEMEN

WHEN?  
1731-1795

WHERE?  
Wilkes-Barre, PA.



EVENT  
Early life including French and Indian War to Rev. War

VOCABULARY  
£ Pounds  
militia

John and Hannah Perkins Butler welcomed their first child, Zebulon, on January 23, 1731. Young Butler grew up in a prosperous farming family in Ipswich, Connecticut. There he learned the importance of accurate record keeping from his father who was regarded as a highly successful farmer and businessman. The family moved from Ipswich to Lyme, CT., where John and brother-in-law James Perkins purchased several hundred acres. Most men in colonial Connecticut had estates of 100 to 500 £ (pounds) but when John died in 1755, he left an estate worth over 5,000 £ (pounds). By 1763, Zebulon was a wealthy landowner, farmer, trader, and shopkeeper in Lyme (Wilkinson and Foster WF 3).



During most of the previous decade he served with various Connecticut militia regiments attached to the British army in their war against the French. He was 24 years old when he began his career as a soldier at the fight for the strategic Crown Point in 1756 (Butler Grave). The conflict, known as the French and Indian War in North America would keep him busy over the next few years.

Within that time, he rose to the rank of Captain while gaining valuable leadership experience. Meanwhile he married Anne Lord in 1760 and in 1761 they welcomed a son named Lord.

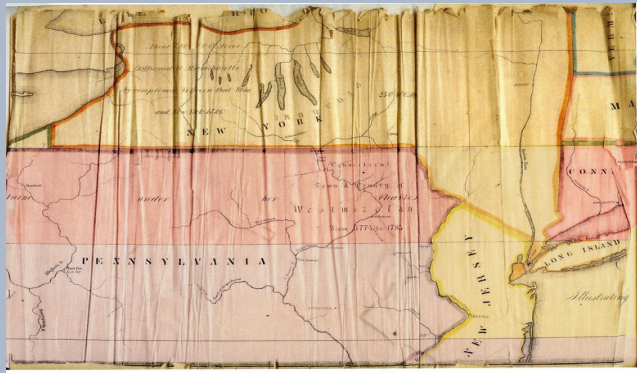
In March of 1762, Captain Butler and the 8<sup>th</sup> Company, 1<sup>st</sup> Connecticut Regiment went with English forces plus colonial forces from New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island to invade Havana, Cuba. The island was controlled by Spain who had become an ally of France in the war against the British. A violent storm shipwrecked 500 men including Butler. Fortunately, all the men survived and under the command of Lyman Putnam, went on to help capture the city in August of 1762 (WF 9). Butler was discharged from service upon his return to Lyme.



Between 1762 and 1769, Butler and his brother-in-law Captain Ebenezer Brockway, purchased two ships named *Polly* and *Anne* and traded goods with merchants in St. John, Antigua (WF 11). Frequent trips were made trading corn, fish, oxen,

sheep, red-oak stave, oats and other commodities. There were 15 other Lyme merchants who were following the same or similar routes.

Their profits were increasingly threatened by new taxes imposed under the British Stamp Act. The taxes were a financial burden for the colonists provoking widespread protests. Resistance grew until a mob ransacked the house of the Massachusetts acting governor, Thomas Hutchinson. The most notorious and influential group called themselves the Sons of Liberty. That moniker came from a speech by British Parliament member Isaac Barre--an outspoken ally of the colonists. Butler became active in the group alongside Major John Durkee. Both men would play an important role in the settlement and protection of the Wyoming settlement within a few years.



Unfortunately, that area was claimed by Connecticut and Pennsylvania as well as the Haudenosaunee Confederacy often referred to as the Iroquois. Competition between the three

groups would come to deadly blows over who would own the fertile land alongside the Susquehanna River. The Pennsylvania settlers dubbed Pennamites, did not accept that Connecticut settlers--called Yankees--claimed territory that the Pennamites felt was clearly in their colony. The confusion came from the fact that King Charles II had given overlapping claims to the same land nineteen years apart. Starting in 1769, the

resulting hostilities —arrests, kidnappings, court cases, construction of rival forts, killings-- were called the Yankee-Pennamite Wars.

After one Yankee defeat, Butler was wounded, captured and spent four months in prison in Philadelphia. Major Durkee, the founder of Wilkes-Barre, was captured at the same time. He spent nearly two years in the same prison. The fighting continued off and on until interrupted by the Revolutionary War. That proved to be a temporary lull in the fighting. Following the Revolutionary war, the Pennamites and Yankees picked up where they left off earlier. The dispute finally ended in 1807 in court. Each side would savor victories and defeats; both sides would be pushed out of the area and fight their way back to possession.



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The Susquehanna Company formed by Connecticut settlers wanted to go Wyoming in the 1750s but were prevented by the ongoing war with France. On January 20, 1769, 40 settlers left their homes to take possession of Wyoming for the company. Two hundred more planned to follow them in the early spring. Five townships would be laid out each five miles square—three townships on the west side and two on the east side of the Susquehanna.

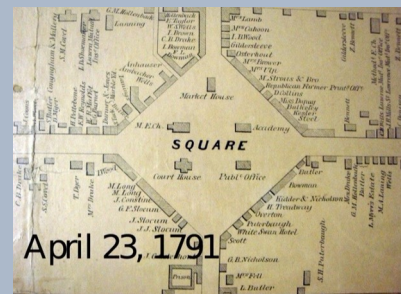
When they arrived on February 8, 1769, at Mill Creek--near present-day Wilkes-Barre General Hospital--they found Pennsylvania Sheriff John Jennings and several other Pennamites waiting for them. Company orders were to avoid fighting with the Pennamites so three men Isaac Tripp, Benjamin Follett, and Vine Elderkin met with the Pennsylvanians to discuss the matter of settlement. The three were promptly arrested and marched to Easton. The rest of the Yankees retreated to Cushutunk on the Delaware river (WF 18). After their bail was paid, the other three men trekked to Cushutunk a few days later.



The forty returned to the valley in March near the confluence of the Lackawanna and Susquehanna Rivers. There they were attacked by Pennamites under the authority of Sheriff Jennings. Eventually they started back to Connecticut but were met by Major John Durkee and 200 Susquehanna Company members on their way to the valley. All continued to Wyoming where they were able to construct 20 log cabins enclosed within Fort Durkee named in honor of their leader. (The fort was near West Ross and River Streets in Wilkes-Barre.) Within a few months, Durkee proceeded to lay out plans for the new town of Wilkes-Barre. The fighting, however, was not over.

In January 1771, the Pennamites led by Captain Ogden, erected a new fort close to the Yankees near present-day Northampton Street and South River Street and named it Fort Wyoming. It sent a message that Pennsylvania was not about to give up their land claims to the Yankees. Eight months later Yankee settlers led by Zebulon Butler, laid siege to it and forced the Pennamites to leave. Over the next four years, the Yankees established gristmills, built forts and surveyed more land. The community marked strong growth and stability though they were still vulnerable to attack.

Due to the worsening relations in Connecticut between the colonies and Britain, Butler moved his wife Anne and two children, Lord and Hannah, to the Wyoming Valley with the other settlers in 1772 (WF 29). Unfortunately, Anne would die in 1774. Since the territory on the east bank of the Susquehanna River was in dispute over the last few years, it didn't take long before hostilities broke out again. Due to his prior military service, Butler found himself as the military leader of the Connecticut group.



When war broke out between the colonies and the British government in 1775, the Continental Congress told the Yankees and Pennamites to cease fighting so all attention would be focused on the war for freedom. Instead, the Pennamites attacked the Yankees who were under the leadership of Butler at the Battle of Rampart Rocks near Nanticoke—and lost. That meant the valley was now in the hands of the Yankees for a little while.

Able-bodied men from the valley now joined the 24<sup>th</sup> Connecticut regiment to fight with Washington and the Continental Army. While strengthening the Patriot cause, the lack of men meant those left behind would be in a precarious position to defend their homes, barns, and crops from the British and Indians during the next several years. The result would bring disaster to the frontier settlement.

See Chapter 2 *Early Traders, Travelers, and Settlers in Wyoming Valley* found in the Book tab of this website for more information about the Yankee-Pennamite Wars and the Revolutionary War.

In Part 2 of Zebulon Butler, read about his military service during the Revolutionary War and his civil service to his community.

#### ONLINE RESOURCES

[Butler Wilkes University Archives](#)

[Butler Find A Grave](#)

#### PRINT RESOURCES

Dziak, Mark. *Battle of Wyoming*. Pittston: Our History Initiative. 2008.

Kashatus, William. *Valley With A Heart*. Luzerne County Historical Society and Luzerne County Community College. 2012.

Williamson, James R. and Linda A. Fossler. *Zebulon Butler Hero of the Revolutionary Frontier*. Greenwood Press, Westport Connecticut. 1995.