

ZEBULON BUTLER PART TWO

OFFICER AND GENTLEMAN

WHEN?
1731-1795

WHERE?
Wilkes-Barre, PA.



EVENT
Part 2 chronicles his life from Revolutionary War to his death

VOCABULARY
Militia
recruited

By 1775 the American colonies were preparing to battle the most powerful military in the world—the British empire. The Wyoming Valley, though on the frontier, was also caught in the dark clouds of war. Men were recruited to enlist in the 24th Connecticut to serve with Washington's Patriot army. Two Wyoming Independent companies of about 90 men each also left the valley to join the army.

Butler was reluctant to leave home especially since he had just married Lydia Johnson in August of 1775. Though 19 years old, she would now care for Lord, 13, and Hannah, 5. In May 1776, she and Butler had a son, named Zebulon. (Williamson and Foster WF 37). Nonetheless, the Continental Congress selected him as a lieutenant colonel while friend and neighbor Nathan Denison was selected as colonel.

So many fathers, sons, and brothers left to fight the British, the valley was left with inadequate defense—a dangerous situation. One historian, Sheldon Reynolds, estimated that Wyoming Valley gave eight times its “fair share” of men to the patriot cause (Dziak 85).



Although Butler was very concerned about this depletion of able-bodied men, he could do little about it. Washington and the army were desperate.

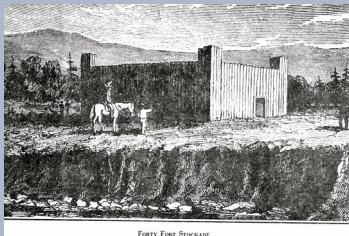
These Wyoming Yankee men joined Washington's army at Morristown on January 1, 1777. They fought in the Battles of Mill Stone River, Bound Brook, Germantown, Brandywine, and Fort Mifflin. Even after suffering the deprivations during the winter at Valley Forge, they continued to serve throughout the war.

Though the Wyoming Valley was not involved in the early conflicts, they still had to prepare though Congress could offer very little support. No extra manpower or supplies came from Connecticut. Pennsylvania did not offer very much to the inhabitants either. Butler and others recognized that the British and their Indian allies would target Wyoming because of the number of men and amount of supplies the area was supplying to the Continental army. The British recognized that attacking and destroying the area would demoralize not only the inhabitants but pull men who had families in the valley away from Washington's army as they rushed back to defend their families.

Butler repeatedly appealed for help to the government in Philadelphia, but the colonial government was slow in sending anything but meager supplies. Many surmised that the Pennamite government in Philadelphia did that intentionally thinking the British would drive

the Yankees out of the valley which would allow the Pennamites to reoccupy the disputed land. Scouts from the settlement had been watching carefully for the British intrusion, and it finally came with an attack in what is now Harding on June 30, 1778. The long-awaited assault had begun.

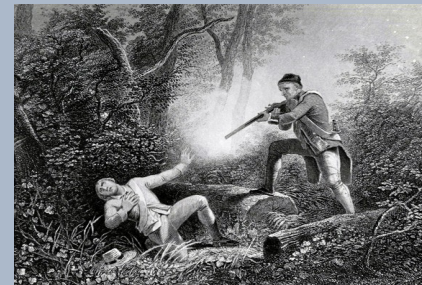
On June 30, 1778, Benjamin and Stukeley Harding, “two members of the Hadsall family, and the black servant Quocko were attacked and killed” north of West Pittston while working in their fields (WF 57). Approximately 400 to 500 hundred British Loyalists led by Butler’s Rangers had arrived to push the Yankees out of the valley. (The unit was led by British Major John Butler who was not related to Zebulon Butler.) Unlike regular British soldiers, they did not dress in the red uniforms with the shiny brass buttons of the British regulars. Their stealth, muted uniform colors, and fighting tactics more resembled the Natives. They did not march to loud drums or stand in rows to fire upon the enemy. It is thought that 400 and maybe as many as 600 mostly Seneca warriors joined the war party.



Fort Four Stukas

Now that the enemy was in the valley, the residents abandoned their homes and animals to go to the forts for protection—the largest being Forty Fort. Butler found himself as the commander of 375—386 Yankee men. Most were older men and young boys with little military training. Aside from Butler, Denison, Captain Hewitt and his men from the Continental Army, few had any combat experience. Nevertheless, they prepared face a well-prepared and experienced enemy.

As the people gathered in Forty Fort, frustration and fear grew. They could see and smell the smoke of their farms being burned, animals taken, crops ravaged. Riled up by Lazarus Stewart, who’s hatred of Indians inflamed the others, pressure grew to leave and attack the enemy. Denison and Butler argued to stay in the fort as the strength of the enemy was not fully known and reinforcements were on their way to the fort. They had received word that Captain Spalding would arrive with more men on July 5th. John Franklin and his men from Huntington-Salem Townships were also scheduled to arrive shortly. Despite the warnings, the majority of men now threatened to march on the approaching enemy with or without their leaders. Against their better judgement Butler and Denison reluctantly led mostly militia men from the fort to Exeter to engage the enemy.



The battle on July 3rd is better known as the Battle of Wyoming or the Wyoming Massacre. It lasted about thirty minutes, but the torture and killing lasted through the night. According to British Major John Butler, a total of 227 Yankee scalps were taken. Col. Zebulon Butler and Col. Nathan Denison managed to escape along with dozens of others.

The families were devastated, their homes and crops burned, animals taken by the enemy, but worst of all was the loss of husbands, fathers, sons, brothers, and relatives. Colonel Denison had little choice but to sign the Articles of Capitulation that Major John Butler had written. The people fled from the valley moving through the wilderness with little or no food or ways to protect themselves. Nearly 3,000 took part in the Great Runaway. They had little protection



from the elements, wild animals with little food or water. More died on the way to forts nearly 60 miles away.

By 1779, about 150 people had returned to the area (WF 88). Butler was assigned to guard the area from Fort Wyoming (located in Wilkes-Barre) and help to prepare the way for General Sullivan. Washington sent orders to Sullivan for the “total destruction and devastation” of the hostile tribes of the Six

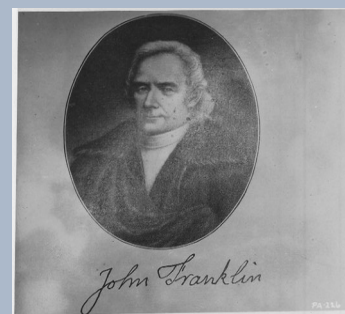
Nations (WF 81). He was to destroy their crops and orchards and make the land inhabitable for any hostile retaliation. He had about 5,000 men, several hundred boats, and needed tons of supplies including food and weapons. Butler, now promoted to colonel in the Continental army, would be assisting the oversight of the massive inventory as well as being a guard for the rear of Sullivan’s army.

During and after Sullivan’s Expedition, Butler continued to serve on the Wyoming frontier guarding it from the continual harassment and killings of the inhabitants by the Indians and British Tories. He would serve in that capacity until 1781 when he was assigned to the 4th Regiment of the Connecticut Line near West Point. Even so, Butler was kept well-informed about the activities in Wyoming.

Once the British surrendered, Butler went home to Wilkes-Barre. He was very aware that now the war was over, troops would be leaving the Wyoming Valley leaving it open to attack again from the Pennamites. While he was away, his wife Lydia died of typhus on July 26, 1781, and buried the next day (WF 96). He would not receive the news in time for him to attend her funeral. He later married Phebe Haight who bore him three children Lydia, Anne, and Steuben.

The question about who owned the land was thrown back into court. Pennsylvania lawyers stated that for 100 years, Connecticut stated their boundary was with New York neglecting the Wyoming Valley. Connecticut lawyers countered by stating that King Charles II had given the colony the “grant of land 19 years before the Penn grant, Connecticut had purchased the land from the Indians in 1754; and settlement had been made on those lands” (WF 97). The court sided with Pennsylvania. Two companies of Pennsylvania troops soon moved into the area causing the Yankee settlers to wonder what was next.

The Pennsylvania government offered one year leases to the Yankees before kicking them out. The state of Connecticut had not come to their aid, and the settlers were in trouble. Over the next few years, Butler was arrested and released several times, men on both sides killed, and the dispute would end up court—again. Tired of the disputes between Connecticut and Pennsylvania, John Franklin stirred a lot of interest in the creation of a separate state just for the lands of Wyoming. That attempt would ultimately fail. Butler continued to urge the legislators to help settle the dispute.



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By 1787, he became the leader of the new Luzerne County and oversaw the building of highways, bridges, collection of taxes and other projects. One major project was to build the County courthouse and the county jail in what is now Public Square.

Butler left public office as lieutenant of Luzerne County on January 1, 1792. At the age of 64, he died at home on July 28, 1795, a revered soldier, well-respected businessmen, and highly regarded civil leader. His final resting place is in Hollenback Cemetery where we remember his service to his community and country.

(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.)

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.