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A Loyalist's War

Private Lewis Fisher in the American Revolution, 1775-1783

Robert C. Fisher

We have not embraced the loyalist military experience as our own. Canadians largely consider the loyalists, whose swelling numbers formed the first large-scale English settlement of Canada, as pioneers and founding fathers in our national myth. Much of the writing on the loyalists has emphasized the men of birth and breeding, the cream of colonial society who sacrificed all for their loyalty to the Crown.¹ But ordinary men, labourers and farmers, filled the ranks of the loyalist regiments as privates and non-commissioned officers and fought against their neighbours in revolt. What follows is an attempt to discover, reconstruct, and imagine the wartime experience of one loyalist soldier, my ancestor, Lewis Fisher, a private in the New Jersey Volunteers. No diaries or letters survive in his own hand but a vivid portrait still emerges of a soldier's war: fighting with musket and bayonet, capture, imprisonment, defeat, and expulsion.

Lewis Fisher was born about 1740 or 1745, in Bergen County in northeastern New Jersey, of German ancestry, the son of Michael and Maria Fisher.² The Dutch from New Amsterdam had settled Bergen County in the 1600s, and most of its inhabitants still spoke Dutch in the home as late as the 1780s. In the years

Abstract: Canadians celebrate the loyalists as pioneers and founding fathers, but have neglected the formative impact of their military experience. This article attempts to reconstruct the wartime experience of Lewis Fisher, a loyalist private in the 4th Battalion of the New Jersey Volunteers. No diaries or letters survive in his own hand, but from rare and disparate sources a portrait emerges of bloody battles, night raids, camp life, capture and imprisonment in hideous conditions, defeat and expulsion. Lewis Fisher's war was long and hard, and ended in exile in the New Brunswick wilderness. Seven years of war shaped his world-view and through him, and other loyalists, the new nation rising in the north.

following 1710, Germans from the Palatine region settled the Ramapo tract at the fringes of settlement in the western part of the county, where the lush farmlands of the Hackensack and Passaic River valleys give way to the highlands of the Appalachian Mountains.³ Michael Fisher was a farmer in Ramapo whose property included "horses, horned cattle, sheep and live stock; bed, cupboard, wagon, weaving loom and other utensils." It was evidently a modest, but comfortable farm. Lewis appears in his father's will as "Lodwick"; his name is seldom spelled the same way twice in 18th century records appearing most often as Lewis,

Lodewick, and Ludwig, but also Ludovic, Ludwick, Lodewig, and other variants.⁴

Lewis married Mary Barbara Till in 1772,⁵ but we do not know what he did for a living in New Jersey. Lewis did not make a claim for lost property to the British government after the revolutionary war. Nor is there a record of the State of New Jersey confiscating land owned in his name. From this lack of evidence, we may assume that he had little if any property in his own name.⁶ It seems likely that as the eldest son he worked his father's land in Ramapo assuming that the farm would pass to him one day. Indeed, he and his wife may have lived with his parents. Mary Barbara Fisher, later recalled of their first year in New Brunswick, that "it was a hard winter to those that had left good homes."⁷

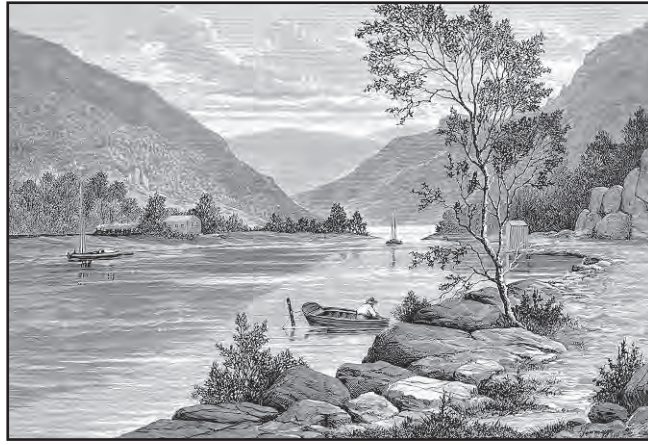
We do not know why Lewis Fisher remained loyal to the King but his ethnicity and place of origin likely influenced his decision. Loyalty to the Crown prevailed in Bergen County generally and particularly so in the Ramapo settlement. The loyalism of Bergen has been the source of much embarrassment to local historians since the War of Independence, but there is no denying its strength. The Germans of Ramapo proved even more loyal than the Jersey Dutch in

the rest of Bergen County. Local resident David Baldwin warned the revolutionary leadership on 29 June 1776 that the “people of Ramapo were in correspondence with the British men of war.” When the Continental Army, commanded by General George Washington, retreated through Ramapo in December 1776, Sergeant John Smith of Rhode Island recorded in his diary that “the inhabitants Abus[e]d us Cal[li]ng us Dam[ne]d Rebels.”⁸

Reflecting the prevailing Ramapo sentiment, Lewis’s brother Peter Fisher, and their sister Anne’s husband David Byard, also enlisted with the loyalists. Their father and five other brothers watched events unfold from the sidelines.⁹

The root causes of the American Revolution were a long series of ill-considered moves by the British government between 1763 and 1774, largely involving the taxation of its colonies in the New World to support the British military establishment. Many Americans remained loyal to the British Crown in spite of these measures, believing that their differences could be resolved through negotiation.¹⁰ The opening moves of the summer of 1776 proved disastrous for the revolutionary cause. General Sir William Howe’s British and German Army quickly defeated Washington on Long Island and then again on Manhattan Island. When the British crossed the Hudson River on 20 November into Bergen County, New Jersey, Washington withdrew from his camp at Hackensack and retreated west. The British advance guard under General Lord Cornwallis pursued and harried them until Washington’s bedraggled force crossed the Delaware River on 7 December to the safety of Philadelphia.¹¹

Lewis Fisher too made his own crucial move on 7 December 1776



Source: W.C. Bryant, ed., *Picturesque America* (New York: Appleton, 1874)

The Ramapo River in northeastern New Jersey, not far from Lewis Fisher’s home.

when he enlisted with the New Jersey Volunteers, a loyalist regiment.¹² The British successes in New York and New Jersey had rallied the flagging spirits of the loyalists. Prominent men formed “royal provincial” regiments to fight along side the British regulars in defence of their homes, and loyal Americans enlisted in thousands. General Howe had commissioned Brigadier General Cortlandt Skinner, the last royal attorney-general of New Jersey, to raise a brigade called the New Jersey Volunteers.¹³ Abraham Van Buskirk, a surgeon of Teaneck, New Jersey, raised and commanded its Fourth Battalion as lieutenant-colonel. Van Buskirk was highly respected as a leader among the German community of Ramapo, where he recruited over a hundred men in November and December 1776.¹⁴ These included Captain Peter Ruttan of Ramapo who outfitted 50 men at his own expense for the loyalist regiment.¹⁵ The muster rolls of the New Jersey Volunteers list Lewis Fisher, his brother Peter, and brother-in-law David Byard as privates in Ruttan’s company of the Fourth Battalion.¹⁶ But they did not long enjoy service in the royal cause: within two weeks they would be held prisoner by the revolutionary forces.

Substantial revolutionary forces remained in the highlands around New York City in spite of the Continental

Army’s withdrawal to Philadelphia. Major-General William Heath held Forts Clinton and Montgomery on the Hudson River north of New York City with four brigades of 3,500 New York and Connecticut militia men. Heath detached Colonel Ebenezer Huntington and 400 men to establish Camp Ramapough at Suffern, New York, a strategic location guarding the Clove, a pass through the

mountains, just a few miles distant from Lewis Fisher’s home. New Jersey would be a battleground for the next five years.¹⁷ Huntington provided another perspective on the outpouring of loyalist sentiment in Bergen County, remarking on 24 November: “the greatest part of the people are friendly to the British and will do them all the service in their power.” Huntington reacted more strongly when news of the formation of Van Buskirk’s regiment reached him the following day: “Every man, and I was going to say every woman, within a large circle of this place who stand for Whigs, and for ought I know are really such, are continually distressing me from their fears and apprehensions of the enemy and Tories....their anxiety has gone far towards intimidating some of my own troops.”¹⁸

Skirmishing broke out immediately between revolutionary forces and Van Buskirk’s regiment. The British, while pursuing Washington’s army, had left Hackensack in the hands of the New Jersey Volunteers. General Heath marched 12 miles from Tappan, New York on 14 December with 600 soldiers to attack the loyalist camp. Van Buskirk was absent in New York with his officers on military business. The patriots, as the revolutionary forces termed themselves, relieved

his Teaneck house of 50 barrels of flour and several hogsheads of rum. They took about 50 of the town's loyalists prisoner, a store of muskets, and other goods. Whoever remained in the town of the loyalist regiment scattered on their approach.¹⁹ Lewis would likely have been among the men who fled this attack. Heath's force retired to Paramus, hastened by the imminent return of British regulars to Hackensack to set up winter quarters. With the town and New Bridge, the first bridge over the Hackensack River, safe in their hands, the British quartered the New Jersey Volunteers to the east at English Neighbourhood (now Englewood) in farmhouses spread out along the King's Road.

Peter Zabriskie, a supporter of the revolution from Hackensack, offered to lead Brigadier George Clinton and his troop of light horse in a daring attack on these isolated men by descending from the highland forts and moving south between the Hudson and Hackensack Rivers to English Neighbourhood. In the extreme cold of the night of 19-20 December, Clinton led 500 men out from Camp Ramapough. He detached 200 men to seal off escape by the roads to Burdett's and Bull's ferries and with the remaining force fell upon the New Jersey Volunteers asleep in their quarters.²⁰ In Clinton's words,

"About break a day we surprized and took their Advanced Guard, about a Mile from Bergen Woods. At the instant we had effected this and were about advancing to attack their Main Body, One of their Horse Men rode up & notwithstanding on being challenged was fired upon by one of our People; This alarmed their Party. They turned out, fired on our People; we returned the fire upon which they fled..." Roused by the shots, most of Van Buskirk's provincials made good their escape before the revolutionary detachment could seal off their retreat. Still, Clinton's force killed four or five men, took eighteen muskets, eight horses and a wagon, and captured 21 men, including "Lodwick Fisher," whose name appears in the list of prisoners

appended to Clinton's report of the raid. This is one of the earliest mentions of him in official records.²¹

Captain Peter Ruttan's company likely formed the night sentry caught by surprise because Clinton's list of prisoners reveals that the revolutionaries also captured Peter Fisher, David Byard, and 13 other men of the company. Ruttan, however, avoided capture. The list of prisoners shows that most of the men came from Ramapo and also listed their personal effects: Peter had one copper penny, while Lewis had with him "1 Stock Buckle 1 Copper & 1 Sleeve Button."²²

Lewis Fisher spent almost two years as a prisoner of the rebels thanks to the daring raid. He and his comrades were held in Connecticut

in Hartford Gaol and later the notorious Newgate Prison at Granby, Connecticut, though details are scarce as to the exact whereabouts of individual men.²³ British authorities inquired quickly about the condition of the prisoners and took steps to effect an exchange of prisoners. Sir William Howe wrote to the British commissioner for the exchange of prisoners, Lieutenant-Colonel Walcot, on 3 February 1777 that "Information has been giv[e]n to General Howe that Sixteen Men of Skinners Brigade who were made Prisoners at Hackinsack are confined in Hartford Gaol, ill treated, and that it is refused to



"Burning the Stamped Paper," 1765. The British Stamp Act of 1765 provoked a hostile response from the American colonies. The act could not be enforced and was repealed in 1766, but permanently damaged British prestige and colonial relations.

Library and Archives Canada (LAC) C-26185

exchange them....I am directed to desire you will be particular in your Demands for the immediate Release of the above Men, and to enquire into the Causes of their Detention."²⁴ The negotiations for a general exchange of prisoners, however, dragged on for over two years.

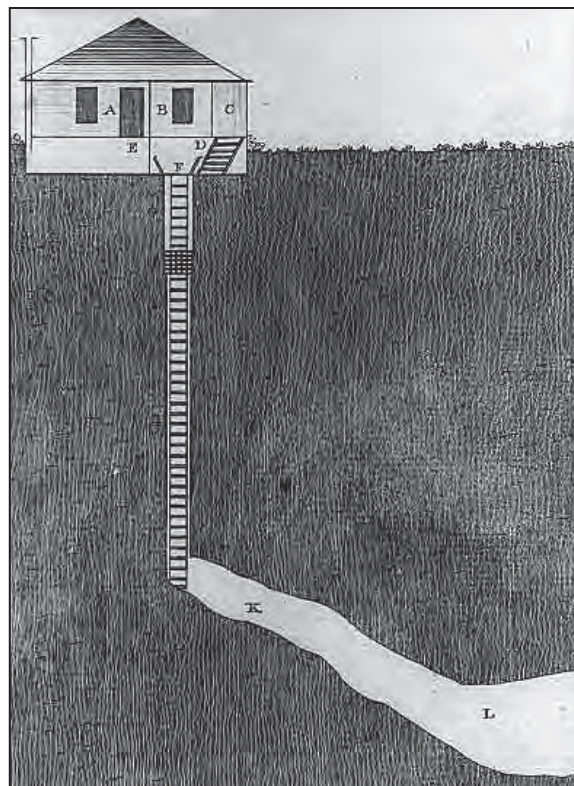
If Lewis was in Hartford Gaol in early 1777, he would have shared his imprisonment with Captain Moses Dunbar of the King's American Regiment who escaped on the night of 1 March 1777 with the assistance of a fellow loyalist. Dunbar was captured in short order and publicly hanged on 19 March, an event that would not have escaped the notice of Lewis and those confined with him.²⁵ The New Jersey loyalists were soon moved to Newgate Prison, the former Simsbury Copper Mines which had been purchased in 1773 by Connecticut for use as a state prison. Named "Newgate" after the infamous prison in London, it came into its own in the revolutionary war as a prison for Tories. The prisoners were kept below ground in a complex of mine shafts and caverns. A blockhouse was built above the mine shaft to control access to and from the prison. Entrance to the prison was by a ladder down a mine shaft 40 feet deep. A Victorian era visitor described the interior in suitably gothic terms: "The horrid gloom of this dungeon can be realized only by those who pass among its solitary windings. The impenetrable vastness supporting the awful mass above, impending as if



Old New-Gate Prison and Coppermine Museum, East Granby, CT.

ready to crush one to atoms: the dripping water trickling like tears from all sides; the unearthly echoes responding to the voice, all conspire to strike the beholder aghast with amazement and horror."²⁶ It was to be Lewis's home for a year or more.

The mines did not prove to be as secure as anticipated. In its first nine years as a prison, over one half of all prisoners escaped.



Library of Congress / LC-USZ62-50390

The loyalists set the blockhouse on fire in 1777 and "burned it to the ground. Nearly all escaped, but several of them afterwards were retaken." The exact date of this escape is not given by the sources so it is possible that Lewis and his brother took part, creating some uncertainty about their exact whereabouts. Did Lewis escape and reach the safety of British lines in New York or was he quickly recaptured and put back in prison? We do not know for there are no lists of prisoners for this period²⁷ but his continued incarceration is likely for the muster rolls do not show him returning to active service until 2 October 1778 when negotiations finally produced a general exchange of prisoners. Though the muster rolls continued to list his brother Peter and brother-in-law David Byard as prisoners until the end of the war, they had in fact been released during the general exchange which had emptied Newgate, if they had not escaped beforehand.²⁸ If Lewis had escaped, then he used the announcement of the exchange to come out of hiding and return to his regiment.

Newgate Prison, near Hartford, Connecticut. The Simsbury copper mine was purchased for use as a prison in 1774 and used to hold loyalists in the revolutionary war. Lewis Fisher was likely held here following his capture in December 1776. He spent nearly two years as a prisoner before being released in an exchange of prisoners in 1778.

Top: Newgate as it appeared in 1802.

Bottom: Print by J. Bew of London, dated 1st November 1781, titled "A View of the Guard-House and Simsbury-Mines now called Newgate - A Prison for the Confinement of Loyalists in Connecticut."

Peter and David chose to return to the comparative quiet of their homes rather than risk further active service; both were still living in 1802 when Michael Fisher named them in his will.²⁹ In fact, none of the other men captured with him returned to the ranks of the Fourth Battalion. Lewis's will to fight for the King marked him out.

This picture of Lewis's imprisonment and return to service is complicated by the birth of a daughter, Elizabeth. A family memoir written many years after the fact gives Elizabeth's date of birth as 4 April 1777, four months after the patriots took Lewis prisoner.³⁰ But a transcription of the register of Ramapo Lutheran Church shows that Elizabeth was born 4 May and baptised 8 June 1778. No year is attached to the 4 May date and the register does not include any baptisms for 1777, making a birth in that year possible, therefore no real conflict exists between the two sources.³¹ If Elizabeth was born in May 1778, it would suggest that Lewis had escaped from prison or otherwise returned home before October 1777. Another possibility, of course, is that he was not the child's father – which raises the spectre of infidelity, or even rape, showing another impact of the war on ordinary women.

Lewis rejoined the Fourth Battalion in October 1778, stationed then at the north end of Staten Island, New York. In the intervening two years, the New Jersey Volunteers had won a reputation for its raids on the New Jersey countryside. From Staten Island, "Skinner's Greens," as they became known for their green uniforms, could cross the narrow channel to New Jersey to forage crops and cattle, terrorize local patriots and rally the spirits of the loyalist faithful. The British came to depend on Skinner and Van Buskirk's extensive network of eyes and ears, and their inside knowledge of the terrain, towns, and inhabitants. Bergen

County became the "dread neutral ground"; rebel troops based in the surrounding highlands plundered it with as much enthusiasm as the royal forces.³² Indeed, Washington had complained of his own New Jersey militia officers who "instead of setting a good Example to their men, are leading them into every Kind of Mischief, one Species of which is Plundering the Inhabitants, under pretence of their being Tories...unless there is something done to prevent it, the People will throw themselves, of Choice, into the hands of the British Troops."³³

During the period of Lewis Fisher's imprisonment, revolutionary forces had attacked the New Jersey Volunteers on Staten Island on 23 August 1777 and captured Lieutenant Edward Earle and Abraham's son Lieutenant Jacob Van Buskirk, along with 30 or 40 other men.³⁴ In its most significant engagement during the period of his imprisonment, the Fourth Battalion won applause for its performance in the Battle of the Passaic in September 1777. General Sir Henry Clinton, Howe's second-in-command (and eventual successor in 1778), remarked upon the Bergen County loyalists with favour: "To give opportunity to the provincials, I ordered Buskirk's battalion to march through a corn field, with the intention of taking in flank a body of the rebels posted behind a stone wall, and which it would have been difficult to have removed by a front attack." The revolutionaries quit the position without firing a shot.³⁵

Sir Henry Clinton's magnanimity in granting "opportunity" to the provincials underscores the ambivalence and inherent contradictions of British military policy toward the loyalists. Sir William Howe had considered the loyalists-in-arms "a conditional resource for use in special situations. Although his thoughts on the subject remained vague and undefined, he felt that their main value would not involve

their direct military participation."³⁶ Anticipating a quickly decided test of arms between the battle-hardened professionals of the British Army and the ill-disciplined rabble of the Continental Army, Howe and Clinton did not envision a significant role for the provincials in the military campaign. They would be auxiliaries to the regular force: providing logistical support and holding conquered territory. Though a few of the loyalist regiments were ultimately put on the British regular establishment (or the special American establishment), most of the royal provincial regiments, like the New Jersey Volunteers, occupied a secondary status as Provincial Corps, receiving fewer perquisites, and less support and prestige. The British government, in contrast to its senior commanders, viewed the use of provincial regiments as a welcome and viable alternative to the burden of investing in a large standing army of regulars in the North American war. Rather wishfully, they expected loyalist soldiers to flock to the royal standard when required, but did little concrete to bring forth such a response.³⁷

As hopes for a speedy victory waned in October 1777 with the surrender of General John Burgoyne at Saratoga, the British gradually began to accord the loyalists a larger place in their military policy. The entry of France into the war on America's side in March 1778 compelled a revision of British plans. Sir Henry Clinton, who had by then replaced Howe, received instructions from the government to invade Georgia and South Carolina, considered among the most loyal of the thirteen colonies, with a force detached from his command in New York. British regulars would form the nucleus of a much larger force composed of southern loyalists who would answer the call to arms and reconquer the southern colonies. Though it evolved further during 1778 and 1779, this southern strategy,

with loyalist military participation at its core, dominated British military policy until its ultimate failure at Yorktown in 1781.³⁸ Though the provincial regiments occupied an enhanced, even essential position in the southern campaign, the British continued in the north to use the New Jersey Volunteers mainly for garrison duty, logistical support, raiding, and providing forage and fuel for New York City.

These considerations of high strategy played out in London and New York while Lewis Fisher stewed in the Simsbury Mines. Released in October 1778 and back in the ranks of the Fourth Battalion on Staten Island, Lewis would have settled down and adapted to the more structured camp life and soldiering that he had missed in the very brief period of service before his capture and imprisonment. Drill, sentry duty, and camp maintenance would have formed the core of camp life in the lengthy intervals between action with the enemy. The dreadful consequences of his company's lax attitude toward sentry duty in December 1776 would have convinced him of the need for vigilance at all times. Through constant drill, Lewis would have mastered the 12 motions required to load and fire his "Brown Bess" flintlock musket. Bayonet practice was another essential, if not the most important, component of the soldier's training, and one that would serve him well in the close fighting to come. Drill parade and marching under the weight of a heavy knapsack would also have filled many hours.³⁹

The Fourth Battalion moved in February 1779 from Staten Island to a new post at Hoboken, New Jersey. With the move across the Hudson River, the pace of raiding and skirmishing with the enemy intensified. Van Buskirk's provincials raided the Jersey countryside with an enthusiasm that made them feared and hated by the patriots. Brief descriptions of a few of these raids in

the spring and summer of 1779 will give an idea of the tempo and type of engagements in which Lewis Fisher participated. Captain Joseph Ryerson led a raid on the home of a tavern-keeper in Woodbridge on the night of 8 February that resulted in the capture of a prominent patriot. The loyalists pursued a troop of Carolina militia into Bergen Woods on 14 March and captured two men, and in a raid from Hoboken on the 27th they took four patriots prisoner. Captain William Van Allan's company captured an outpost of the Continental Army at Little Ferry on 12 April. Van Buskirk's men skirmished again with patriot forces on the 21st at Peter DeGroot's Farm, at English Neighbourhood. Two battalions of the New Jersey Volunteers took part in a large invasion of Monmouth County on 26 April with British regulars. In this operation, the Fourth Battalion attacked Middletown and Shrewsbury, plundering and burning the homes and barns of known patriots.⁴⁰

This pace continued in May with a raid on Closter on the 10th, in which the loyalists took Samuel Demarest prisoner, killed one of his sons and wounded another. Van Buskirk led the battalion in a movement up Bergen Neck on the 17th and 18th, in concert with British regulars who landed along the Jersey shore of the Hudson River in force and moved through Closter to attack the patriots at Paramus Church. The loyalists and redcoats skirmished at New Bridge with a patriot force that had failed to remove the planks on the bridge in time to prevent the British from crossing. The Fourth Battalion held the bridge until the main force withdrew from Paramus to New York. Again, on the night of 4 June, a small detachment of Van Buskirk's men surprised some patriots, taking two men prisoner, both considered "noted spies and robbers." The battalion moved in the summer from Hoboken to the British fort at Paulus

Hook (now Jersey City), from which troops sortied on 12 and 16 August to skirmish with patriot forces in Bergen Neck. By then, the patriots had had quite enough of the New Jersey Volunteers' raids, and the result was the battalion's one major battle in the summer of 1779.⁴¹

In an attempt to put an end to the loyalist marauding, Major "Light Horse" Harry Lee, a cavalry officer from Virginia, led a patriot force of about 400 men in a bold attack on the night of 19-20 August on the fort at Paulus Hook.⁴² Van Buskirk, however, had sortied earlier that night with 130 men, 100 provincials and 30 soldiers of the 64th Regiment, on a raid up Bergen Neck after having received intelligence that the patriots intended to carry off forage and grain from English Neighbourhood and Bergen.⁴³ This sortie left the garrison weakened. In the dead of night, Lee's men crossed the causeway through the marsh separating Paulus Hook from the mainland at low tide. Much to their surprise, the fort offered no opposition because the night sentry believed it was Van Buskirk returning from the raid.⁴⁴

With bayonets fixed, the patriots burst into the blockhouse and captured the surprised guards without a fight. Lee's men promptly captured the other blockhouses and the fort at bayonet point. "So rapid was the movement of the troops," Lee reported, "that we gained the fort before the discharge of a single piece of artillery." With the element of surprise on their side, the patriots surrounded the barracks and captured 150 men, including 48 from the New Jersey Volunteers. This time, Lewis Fisher was not among the prisoners taken in the action; evidently he had accompanied Van Buskirk on the raid. Stiff resistance from a small band of Hessians who took refuge in a redoubt on a rise beyond the fort and kept up a steady fire prevented Lee's success from being complete; his men neither

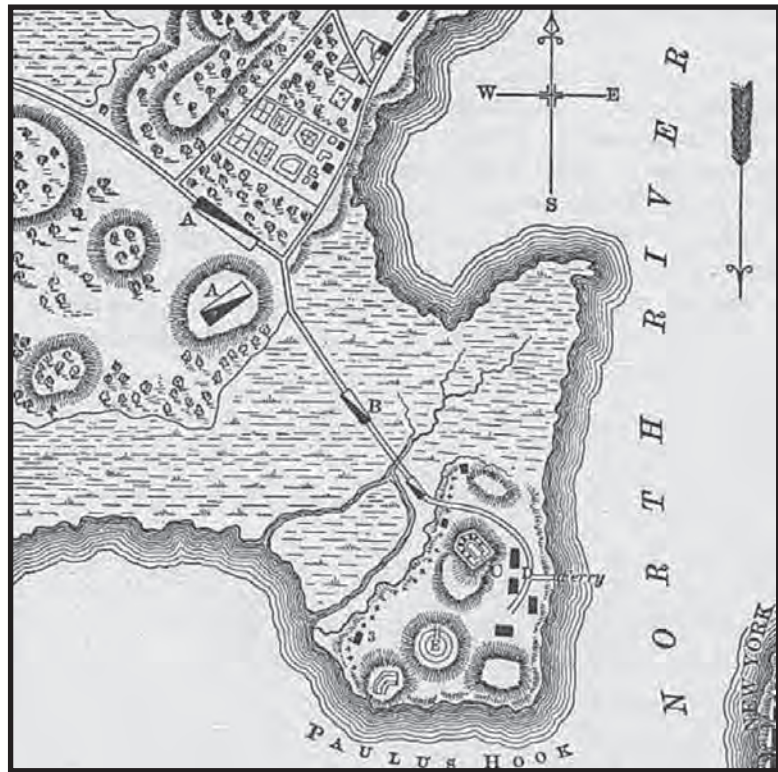
spiked the cannon nor damaged the barracks or fort defences. Lee had learned from the prisoners that Van Buskirk's regiment was at large in the countryside. With daylight fast approaching, and aware of the impossibility of holding a fort so exposed to counter-attack from across the Hudson River, Lee retired with the prisoners.⁴⁵

Withdrawing from Paulus Hook, they joined with troops sent out to support their retreat. In the first light of dawn, Van Buskirk's raiding party and Lee's weary but reinforced troops stumbled upon each other at Liberty Pole, where the King's Road branched west to New Bridge and north to Closter. Lee's version of this encounter likens it to a sudden ambush, attesting to the skill of the loyalists, who "made their appearance, issuing out of the woods on our right, and moving thro' the fields directly to the road. They immediately commenced a fire upon my rear. Lieutenant Reed was ordered to face them, while Lieut. Eudulph threw himself with a party into a stone house which commanded the road... On the enemy's observing this disposition, they immediately retired by the same route they had approached, and took the woods. The precipitation with which they retired preventing the possibility of Colonel Ball's falling in with them, [and] saved the whole."⁴⁶

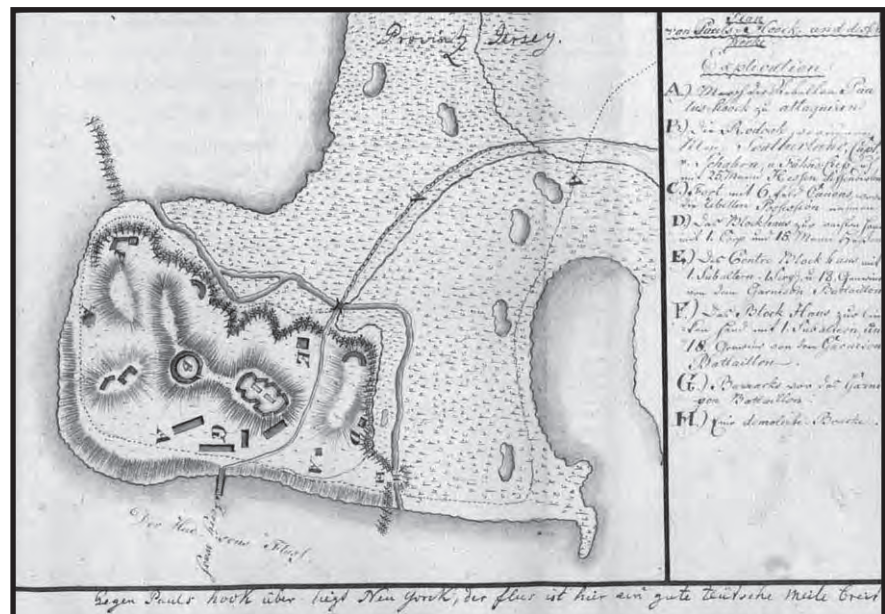
From the loyalist perspective, Van Buskirk had moved his men into the main road in the dim light where they suddenly found themselves in the midst of a column of several hundred patriot soldiers. The provincials and redcoats "attacked the enemy with such spirit that notwithstanding their great superiority in numbers, put them to the rout, killed five, wounded many, took three prisoners, and threw them into such confusion, as obliged them to throw away coats, knapsacks, hats, &c. and 30 stands of arms." Out-numbered and fearing they would be surrounded, Van

Buskirk ordered his men to fight their way back the heights, "to gain which, was a matter of contest for some time, at about 60 yards distance, when perceiving the rebels (from the advantage of ground) were likely to

succeed, the men were ordered to fix bayonets and advance briskly, which so disconcerted them, that they immediately wheeled to the right and left," allowing the loyalists and redcoats to quit the field "without



Edward J. Lowell, *The Hessians and the other German auxiliaries of Great Britain in the Revolutionary War* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1884)



Joseph P. Justin papers, Bloomsburg University Archives, Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania.

Two plans of the attack on the British fort at Paulus Hook, on the night of 19/20 August 1779. In the image above, the causeway across the marsh is marked point B; the fort and barracks are points C and D; while the redoubt held by the Hessian troops is point E. The image below is a contemporary map by Captain Johann von Ewald, a Hessian officer.

the loss of a single man either of the 4th or garrison battalion."⁴⁷ Lee's weary men crossed New Bridge and returned to the safety of the highland forts with the loss of only a dozen men for the entire excursion. The Fourth Battalion, with Lewis among them, made their way back to Paulus Hook to find most of their comrades gone, prisoners of the patriots.

The success of Van Buskirk's raid and the Hessians' stout defence of the redoubt, however, did not absolve the garrison of its failure to prevent Lee from storming the fort undetected and taking 150 prisoners. For the failure of the blockhouse guard to detect or resist the assault, its commander, Sergeant John Taswell of the Fourth Battalion, was court-martialled and sentenced to death—a sentence later commuted on a personal appeal for clemency by Van Buskirk.⁴⁸ The patriots considered the raid on Paulus Hook a signal victory and showered accolades upon Lee for his daring success.⁴⁹ George Washington wrote to William Livingston, "The Major displayed a remarkable degree of prudence, address, enterprise, and bravery upon this occasion – which does the highest honour to himself and to all the officers and men under his command. The situation of the post rendered the attempt critical, and the success brilliant."⁵⁰ Lee, for his part, received a Congressional Gold Medal. Lewis, for his part, avoided re-capture in the fort by being one of Van Buskirk's men who won the heights with bayonets fixed.

The British moved the Fourth Battalion briefly in late 1779 to Governor's Island in New York harbour but then shifted it back to its old base on Staten Island. Sir Henry Clinton sailed south to the Carolinas in December with an army of 8,000 men which included 80 men from the New Jersey Volunteers. Lewis remained behind with the bulk of his regiment. During the bitterly cold winter, the Hudson

River froze down to Sandy Hook allowing a patriot army of 2,500 men to cross the ice to attack Staten Island. Skinner, apprised of their plans by his intelligence network, alerted the Fourth Battalion, "who evacuated their post at Decker's Ferry and marched to the redoubts at the Watering Place and the Flag Staff." With the defenders safe and warm in the forts, the invaders suffered heavily in the frigid darkness and withdrew with heavy losses.⁵¹ The extreme cold, however, did not prevent the New Jersey Volunteers from retaliating on 25 January 1780 when the First and Fourth Battalions crossed the ice to attack Elizabethtown. They captured 47 enemy officers and men without losing a man, and burned the local court house and a Presbyterian meeting house against which they "had particular Resentment" as a hotbed of seditious sentiment. Subsequent raids targeted Paramus, New Bridge, and Newark.⁵²

The First and Fourth Battalions took part in the summer of 1780 in General William Knyphausen's campaign designed to test the resolve of Washington's army at Morristown. The invasion ground to a halt at Springfield, however, when confronted by the Continental Army so the loyalists did not see a great deal of action, although the two battalions lost about ten men in two weeks of campaigning. The invasion did succeed in securing new recruits for the battalion from the New Jersey countryside.⁵³ Lewis Fisher was listed as "Sick in Reg[imen]t Hospital" in December 1780 but otherwise appeared regularly in the muster rolls of 1779 and 1780 and would have taken part in many of the battalion's raids and engagements during this period.⁵⁴

During the summer of 1781 the New Jersey Volunteers were consolidated into three battalions from four by the disbandment of the Second Battalion. As a result, the

Fourth Battalion, including Lewis Fisher's company, became the Third Battalion, still under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Abraham Van Buskirk. Captain Edward Earle, however, assumed command of Lewis' company from Peter Ruttan who was placed under house arrest for reasons that are not entirely clear.⁵⁵

The Third Battalion took part in one last major battle on 6 September 1781 at Groton Heights across the Thames River from New London, Connecticut. The British force, led by Brigadier-General Benedict Arnold, won a bloody victory against a determined foe. The attack was designed to distract Washington from his southward march to Yorktown but in this object, at least, it failed. New London was home port to a large fleet of rebel privateers. Arnold, a native of Norwich upriver from New London, knew the town well and was the ideal choice to lead the attack. He divided his force, comprising over 1,500 men from British, loyalist and Hessian regiments, into two divisions which landed on either side of the mouth of the Thames River. To prevent the ships from escaping upriver to Norwich, the British moved against the fort on Groton Heights even before their force had fully disembarked. Under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Edmond Eyre, the British regulars stormed the fort without waiting for the Third Battalion, which had landed last, to bring up the artillery. Repulsed once by withering fire, the redcoats crowned the parapet on their second assault and captured the fort at bayonet point, showing no quarter to the defenders. The British suffered 47 killed, including Eyre and his second-in-command, and over 140 wounded, mostly outside the fort. The patriots suffered 85 killed and 60 wounded, most of them mortally, inside the fort.⁵⁶

Controversy surrounds around the fort's last minutes. Patriot historians have claimed that its commander, Lieutenant-Colonel William Ledyard, was killed with his own sword after it was accepted in surrender by a British officer. Some have blamed the massacre on the patriots who opened fire again after striking their flag in surrender. Supporting this version of events, survivors claimed that some of their men who had not heard the signal to surrender kept up a steady fire on the redcoats from the southwest bastion.⁵⁷ Henry Carrington charged Van Buskirk with Ledyard's murder: "the wanton slaughter of Ledyard after he surrendered his sword is to be charged to the memory of an American loyalist, and not to a British officer." William Stryker too claimed that Van Buskirk won "applause for his great services" in Benedict Arnold's report.⁵⁸ In fact, Arnold accorded him faint praise at best: "Lieut. Col. Buskirk, with the New Jersey Volunteers and artillery, being the second debarkation, came up soon after the work was carried, having been retarded by the roughness of the country. I am much obliged to this gentleman for his exertions, although the artillery did not arrive in time."⁵⁹ Arnold emphasized that the loyalists arrived after the regulars had taken the fort. Todd Braisted has pointed to the lack of casualties suffered by the Third Battalion as evidence that it did not take part in the fighting. Lewis and his comrades had been engaged in the back-breaking but safer work of unloading and moving the artillery and supplies.⁶⁰

The townspeople of New London fled after the fort fell, allowing an immense stock of arms, gunpowder, and goods to fall into British hands. Though some ships escaped upriver to Norwich, Arnold captured most of the fleet and burned three or four armed privateers and several ships carrying naval stores. Gunpowder

in one of the ships exploded and set fire to the town. The flames destroyed 140 buildings and 80 ships, adding additional tarnish to Benedict Arnold's reputation with American historians.⁶¹

There is no way of knowing for certain if Lewis took part in the expedition to New London but it seems probable from his continued regular appearance in the muster rolls and the large scale of the attack. It would have marked a bloody end to his fighting career even if the loyalists had arrived at the fort too late. In the aftermath, the battalion settled down to an extended period of garrison duty as the war turned against the British in other theatres. The surrender of Lord Cornwallis at Yorktown in the South signalled the defeat of the British strategy and the waning of loyalist hopes for victory. Lewis's company was stationed on Staten Island for much of 1781 and 1782 and spent most of 1783 at New Town, Long Island.⁶²

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Very little is known about Mary Barbara Fisher's life during the revolutionary war. She and her young daughter Mary probably continued to live with her husband's parents after Lewis enlisted in December 1776. Harassment of wives of soldiers serving in the loyalist regiments was common in the thirteen colonies but would have been less pronounced in Bergen County where loyalist sentiment was stronger and the New Jersey Volunteers based close to home. Men of the regiment often returned to their homes in clandestine visits to their families. In addition, Lewis had several brothers, at least outwardly patriotic or neutral, in the Ramapo settlement whose presence would have deterred harassment. Their second daughter Elizabeth was born in April 1777 while Lewis was in prison. After his release in 1778, Lewis took Mary and Elizabeth

behind the safety of British lines in Staten Island or New York City, as did many New Jersey loyalists at this time. Lewis and Mary left their eldest daughter, Mary, aged four in 1778, with her grandparents in Ramapo for reasons that are not known. Mary would have had easier access to schooling in a settled community and perhaps at age four was old enough to help her grandmother about the home. But time would have been short so they may not have had a choice. Mary Barbara Fisher spent the next four years in military camps on Staten Island and Long Island. Their third child, Henry, was born in 1780 on Staten Island, and their fourth child, Peter was born there in 1782. When Lewis evacuated New York in 1783 with the loyalists, he either did not have the opportunity to return for his eldest daughter Mary or chose to leave her with her grandparents. The separation was permanent; Mary lived the rest of her life in Ramapo, marrying and raising a family there.⁶³

The British recognized the independence of the United States in the peace treaty of January 1783. Instead of easing tensions, when news of the treaty reached the New World, the proscription and persecution of loyalists intensified. Many loyalists realized that they had little choice but to abandon their homes and seek refuge in the colonies still under the British Crown – Nova Scotia and Quebec. The might of the Royal Navy had ensured British control of Manhattan, Staten Island and Long Island throughout the war, and these islands shone like a beacon to the dispossessed refugees. Thousands of loyalists poured into New York in the weeks that followed the news of peace. The British were ill-prepared for the evacuation of 30,000 to 40,000 refugees from the thirteen colonies.⁶⁴ In this chaotic situation, the garrison of Long Island had its hands full preserving some semblance of order. Lewis's battalion covered the exodus

of the loyalists and was one of the last royal provincial units to evacuate New York City. Lewis and his family embarked in the *Esther* which sailed with the *Martha* at the end of September as part of the "Fall Fleet" bound for Nova Scotia. In the dead of night, the *Martha* was wrecked on the rocks off Seal Island, Nova Scotia with the loss of 115 lives,⁶⁵ while the *Esther*, bearing Lewis and his family, reached the mouth of the St. John River without incident.⁶⁶

The story of the royal provincial soldier in the revolutionary war ends with the landfall at Saint John, and the story of Lewis and Mary Fisher as pioneer settlers begins. But for all the struggles and hardships to come of homesteading in the wilderness, seven years of war had shaped them first, and through them the new nation rising in the north. Defeat had cast the mould. Lewis' foes would not pay for their disloyalty to King and country, nor would Lewis be welcomed home, or the justice of his cause be admitted by friends and neighbours. But in spite of defeat there would also have been relief. The war was over; no more raids in the night, no more fighting at bayonet point, and no more fear of imprisonment in mineshafts deep below the surface. He and his family had survived. They would start anew in a virgin land with those who had shared their trials and ideals.

Notes

The author would like to thank Todd Braisted and Tim Dubé for sharing their knowledge of the loyalists in the revolutionary war, and the *Canadian Military History* editors and anonymous reviewers whose suggestions and comments have immeasurably improved this article.

1. Christopher Moore, *The Loyalists: Revolution, Exile, Settlement* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1994) and Walter Stewart, *True Blue: The Loyalist Legend* (Toronto: Collins, 1985), remain perhaps the best popular surveys of

- the loyalist experience from a Canadian perspective.
2. Untitled manuscript, Provincial Archives of New Brunswick (PANB), MC 1, Fisher family history reference file.
 3. Ruth M. Keeseey, *Loyalty and Reprisal: The Loyalists of Bergen County, New Jersey and their Estates* (PhD dissertation, Columbia University, 1957), pp.8-10.
 4. Michael Fisher, will dated 6 January 1802, *New Jersey Colonial Documents: Calendar of Wills, 1801-1805*, pp.161-62; and Herbert S. Ackerman and Arthur J. Goff, eds., *Ramapo Church Records, 1755-1900* (Englewood, NJ: Bergen Historic Books, 1997).
 5. Untitled manuscript, PANB, MC 1, Fisher family history reference file.
 6. American Loyalist Claims Commission, Index, British Treasury fonds, Library and Archives Canada (LAC), MG 15, T 79, reel B-4556; and Keeseey.
 7. Untitled manuscript, PANB, MC 1, Fisher family history reference file.
 8. Keeseey, pp.25-29, and 276. David J. Fowler also refers to the strength of loyalist sentiment in Bergen in his article "Loyalty is Now Bleeding in New Jersey: Motivations and Mentalities of the Disaffected," in Joseph S. Tiedemann et al., eds., *The Other Loyalists: Ordinary People, Royalism and Revolution in the Middle Colonies, 1763-1787*: (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2009), pp.51-52.
 9. "Muster Rolls of the New Jersey Volunteers," LAC, RG 8, C1856 to C1859, reels C-4216 and C-4217.
 10. Robert Middlekauf, *The Glorious Cause: the American Revolution 1763-1789* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp.70-249, 549-555; and Christopher Hibbert, *Redcoats and Rebels: The War for America, 1770-1781* (London: Grafton, 1990), pp.3-41.
 11. Hibbert, pp.119-132; Douglas Marshall and Howard Peckham, *Campaigns of the American Revolution: An Atlas of Manuscript Maps* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1976), pp.26-27, 34.
 12. "Muster Rolls of the New Jersey Volunteers," LAC, reels C-4216 and C-4217. The muster rolls date his service to 7 December 1776, although that might not be the exact day of his enlistment.
 13. Susan Burgess Shenstone, *So ObstinateLY Loyal*, p.37. Shenstone provides a short biographical sketch of Cortlandt Skinner.
 14. Adrian C. Leiby, *The Revolutionary War in the Hackensack Valley: The Jersey Dutch and the Neutral Ground* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992), pp.17, 61, and 78-79; and Peter W. Coldham, ed., *American Loyalist Claims* (Washington: National Genealogical Society, 1980), pp.500-501. Leiby and Coldham provide biographical details of Van Buskirk, who claimed the loss of a house, grist mill, and 34 acres.
 15. Keeseey, p.167; and Peter W. Coldham, ed., *American Loyalist Claims*, p.428.
 16. "Muster Rolls of the New Jersey Volunteers," LAC, reels C-4216 and C-4217.
 17. Adrian C. Leiby, *The Revolutionary War in the Hackensack Valley*, p.89.
 18. Peter Force, ed. *American Archives: Consisting of a Collection of Authentick Records, State Papers, Debates and Letters and other notices of Public Affairs*, (Washington: M. St. Clair Clarke, 1837-1853), Fifth series, 1774-1783, Volume 3, pp.833, 840-841. See also Ebenezer Huntington, *Letters Written by Ebenezer Huntington during the American Revolution* (New York: Heartman, 1915).
 19. Leiby, pp.90-92.
 20. Ibid., pp.95-96.
 21. New York State, *The Public Papers of George Clinton, First Governor of New York, 1775-1795, 1801-1804*, vol. 1 (New York and Albany: Wynkoop, Hallenbeck & Crawford, 1899), pp.477-485.
 22. New York State, *The Public Papers of George Clinton, First Governor of New York, 1775-1795, 1801-1804*, vol. 1, pp.483-485; and "Muster Roll of the New Jersey Volunteers," 18 November 1777, LAC, reel C-4216.
 23. Todd Braisted, *A History of the 4th Battalion of New Jersey Volunteers*, Part 1 (Institute for Advanced Loyalist Studies, <www.royalprovince.com>); and Richard H. Phelps, *Newgate of Connecticut; its Origin and Early History* (Camden, ME: Picton Press, 1996; reprinted from 1876 edition), pp.22-60.
 24. Great Britain, Public Record Office, Headquarters Papers of the British Army in America, PRO 30/55/398 (courtesy of Todd Braisted, New Jersey).
 25. *Connecticut Courant*, 3 March 1777 and 24 March 1777; and E. LeRoy Pond, *The Tories of Chippeny Hill, Connecticut* (New York: Grafton, 1909), chapter 7.
 26. Richard H. Phelps, *Newgate of Connecticut*, pp.26-36, and 60.
 27. Phelps, p.36; and J. M. French, "The Simsbury Copper Mines," *New England Magazine* Vol. 5, No. 29 (March 1887), pp.432-433.
 28. "Muster Rolls of the New Jersey Volunteers," LAC, reels C-4216 and C-4217.
 29. Michael Fisher, will dated 6 January 1802, *New Jersey Colonial Documents, Calendar of Wills, 1801-1805*, pp.161-62.
 30. Untitled manuscript, PANB, MC 1, Fisher family history file. The general reliability and accuracy of this memoir is discussed in my article, "The Grandmother's Story: Oral Tradition, Family Memory, and a Mysterious Manuscript," *Archivaria* 57 (Spring 2004), pp.107-130.
 31. *Ramapo Church Records, 1755-1900*, p.127. John and Elizabeth Goerlogh were the sponsors of the baptism of Elizabeth, daughter of "Lodewig and Polly Fisher."
 32. Leiby, pp.103-109.
 33. George Washington to William Livingston, 24 January 1777, United States, Library of Congress (LC),

- Manuscript Division, George Washington papers, series 3c, letter book 1, p.394.
34. George Washington to William Livingston, 31 December 1777, LC, George Washington papers, series 3c, letter book 2, p.217; James Robertson to William Livingston, 4 January 1778, and Livingston to Robertson, 7 January 1778, in William Nelson, ed., *Documents relating to the Revolutionary History of the State of New Jersey, Vol. 2, 1778* (Trenton, NJ: New Jersey Historical Society, 1903).
 35. Leiby, pp.133-137.
 36. Paul H. Smith, *Loyalists and Redcoats: A Study in British Revolutionary Policy* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1964), p.46.
 37. Smith, *Loyalists and Redcoats*, pp.46-49, 57, 63-78. See also Mary Beacock Fryer, *King's Men: The Soldier Founders of Ontario* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1980), pp.14-17, and Robert S. Allen, ed., *The Loyal Americans: The Military Role of the Loyalist Provincial Corps and Their Settlement in British North America, 1775-1784* (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1983), pp.10-16.
 38. Paul H. Smith, *Loyalists and Redcoats*, pp.83-85, 92-94.
 39. Earle Thomas, *Greener Pastures: The Loyalist Experience of Benjamin Ingraham* (Belleville, Ont.: Mika Publishing, 1983), pp.53-58. Thomas provides a good description of the training and base routine experienced in the King's American Regiment in New York by Sergeant Benjamin Ingraham, Lewis's future neighbour in Fredericton.
 40. David C. Munn, *Battles and Skirmishes of the American Revolution in New Jersey* (Washington: Department of Environmental Protection, 1976); and Todd W. Braisted, *A History of the 4th Battalion of New Jersey Volunteers, Part 1*.
 41. Munn; Braisted, *A History of the 4th Battalion, Part 1*; and Leiby, pp.209-212.
 42. Leiby, pp.221-223; and Braisted, *A History of the 4th Battalion, Part 1*. These recent historical studies provide a narrative of the actions at Paulus Hook and New Bridge from differing perspectives. The eyewitness accounts by participants that were reprinted in *Documents relating to the Revolutionary History of the State of New Jersey 1779* (Vol.3), however have an immediacy that is compelling in spite of the historical difficulties presented by many such accounts.
 43. *The Royal Gazette*, No.303, August 25, 1779, reprinted in William Nelson, ed., *Documents relating to the Revolutionary History of the State of New Jersey 1779* (Vol.3).
 44. Braisted, *A History of the 4th Battalion, Part 1*; and Leiby, pp.221-223;
 45. Henry Lee Jr. to George Washington, 22 August 1779, and *The Royal Gazette*, No.303, 25 August 1779, both reprinted in William Nelson, ed., *Documents relating to the Revolutionary History of the State of New Jersey 1779* (Vol. 3).
 46. Henry Lee Jr. to George Washington, 22 August 1779.
 47. *The Royal Gazette*, No.303, 25 August 1779; and Leiby, pp.221-222.
 48. Braisted, *A History of the 4th Battalion, Part 1*.
 49. Leiby, pp.222-223.
 50. George Washington to the Continental Congress, 23 August 1779, LC, George Washington papers, series 3a, letter book 4, pp.359-360.
 51. Braisted, *A History of the 4th Battalion, Part 1*.
 52. Leiby, p.227; Braisted, *A History of the 4th Battalion, Part 1*; and Todd W. Braisted, "An Excess Eagerness: What Really Happened at New Bridge on May 30th, 1780?," *Newsletter of the Bergen County Historical Society* (Spring 2005), p.11.
 53. Braisted, *A History of the 4th Battalion, Part 1*; and Henry B. Carrington, *Battles of the American Revolution, 1775-1781: Historical and Military Criticism* (New York: A.S. Barnes & Co., 1878), pp.498-502.
 54. "Muster Rolls of the New Jersey Volunteers," LAC, reels C-4216 and C-4217.
 55. Braisted, *A History of the 4th Battalion, Part 2*. Edward Earle's nephew Richard would later marry Lewis's daughter Nancy in New Brunswick.
 56. Henry B. Carrington, *Battles of the American Revolution*, pp.625-630; Benedict Arnold to Sir Henry Clinton, 8 September 1781, Sir Henry Clinton papers, University of Michigan, William L. Clements Library; and Frances M. Caulkins, *History of New London* (Second Edition 1860), pp.545-572.
 57. Carrington, p.629; Frances M. Caulkins, *History of New London*, pp.545-572; and Don Troiani, "Fort Griswold," *American Heritage* Vol. 24, No. 6 (October 1973).
 58. Carrington, p.629; and William S. Stryker, *The New Jersey Volunteers (Loyalists) In the Revolutionary War*, pp.21, 31.
 59. Benedict Arnold to Sir Henry Clinton, 8 September 1781.
 60. Braisted, *A History of the 4th Battalion, Part 2*.
 61. Carrington, pp.625-30; Benedict Arnold to Sir Henry Clinton, 8 September 1781; and Frances M. Caulkins, *History of New London* (Second Edition 1860), pp.545-572.
 62. Braisted, *A History of the 4th Battalion, Part 2*.
 63. Untitled manuscript, PANB, MC 1, Fisher family history reference file; and *Ramapo Church Records, 1755-1900*, pp.127-131.
 64. W.S. MacNutt, *New Brunswick: A History* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1984), pp.20-21.
 65. Peter Fisher, *The First History of New Brunswick*, pp.123-125; and Esther Clark Wright, *The Loyalists of New Brunswick* (Hantsport, NS: Lancelot Press, 1981), pp.85-87.
 66. "Memorandum of the Fisher family from 1783: Information and Reminiscences", by Georgianna Fisher, revised by William Fisher, New Brunswick Museum, F2-5.

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