

### **Thomas Ward**

You are Thomas Ward, the son of an iron worker. You were raised in Orange County, on the west bank of Hudson's River, in the province of New York. It was there that you learned to ride, to handle boats, and seize opportunities.

The start of the present rebellion found you living in the town of Newark, in the province of New Jersey. In the spring of 1777, you enlisted, in the rank of sergeant, in a newly-formed unit of the Rebel army, Malcolm's Additional Continental Regiment. Fourteen months afterwards, in June of 1778, you changed sides, leaving the Rebel ranks in order to take up the cause of the King. However, rather than enlisting in one of the many Provincial regiments located in areas held by Loyal forces, you provide services, on an *ad hoc* basis, for the British military authorities in the city of New York.

In November of 1778 you took part in a raid that resulted in the capture of Joseph Ward, the muster master general of the main Rebel army; William Bradford, his deputy; and a collection of muster rolls for the main Rebel Army. Along with five comrades, you crossed Hudson's River, landed at Bull's Ferry, and traveled overland to the village of Kakiat, in Orange County, not far from the place in which you spent your childhood. (As the crow flies, Bull's Ferry is about 30 miles away from Kakiat.) As a reward for this achievement, you receive the sum of 350 shillings, which is more than 500 times the daily rate of pay for a private soldier in the King's service.

In the course of the year that followed you continue to conduct minor operations in Rebel-held territory on the west bank of the Hudson. Sometimes these missions involve the gathering of information about the main Rebel army, which is encamped at West Point, on Hudson's River, some fifty miles north of the city of New York. At other times, you lead small bands of volunteers, some of whom are escaped slaves, in raids against the homes of prominent supporters of the rebellion. (In June of 1779, the general officer commanding all Loyal forces in North America, Sir Henry Clinton, issued a proclamation that emancipated all slaves who belonged to Rebel masters.)

Towards the end of 1779, at the start of what promised to be the coldest winter ever experienced in the British provinces in North America, you received a proposition from a prominent member of the Loyalist community in the city of New York. Abraham Cuyler, who had been driven out of the town of Albany by a Rebel mob, told you that he has received permission to raise a battalion of Loyalists who, having been mistreated by the Rebels, had taken refuge in the city of New York. Cuyler added that, if he could enlist 600 men into this battalion, which he called the Loyal Refugee Volunteers, he would be given, with the rank of lieutenant-colonel, command of the unit. He concluded by offering you a deal comparable to the one given to him by the British authorities. If you filled the ranks of a 60-man company, you would be granted both command of that company and the rank of captain on the Provincial establishment.



In the two months that followed the start of recruiting on 2 November 1779, neither you nor any of the other would-be captains of the Loyal Refugee Volunteers managed to fill the ranks of your companies. This failure led Major General William Tryon, who is both royal governor of New York and the general officer commanding all Provincial forces in North America, to withdraw his support from the project to raise the unit. This meant that the men who had already enlisted would get neither rations nor pay and, consequently, would have to fend for themselves until the matter was resolved.

Abraham Cuyler dealt with this dilemma by turning his would-be infantry battalion into a commercial enterprise. Noting the high price of fire wood in the city of New York, he began to organize expeditions to the western shore of Hudson's River and, in particular, those parts of Bergen County, in the province of New Jersey, that lay across the water from the island of Manhattan. As the chief customer of this enterprise was the barrack master general of the British forces in New York and the western shore of Hudson's River was occupied by Rebel forces, the Provincial battalion stationed at Paulus Hook, one of the few places in Bergen County under the control of Loyal forces, sent detachments to protect Cuyler's woodcutters.

In the spring and summer of 1780, the woodcutting enterprise prospered. In addition to procuring firewood for the British garrison in New York, you and your colleagues obtained fuel and food for the civilian market. (Some of the food was taken from farms and herds in possession of Rebel sympathizers and some was bought from inhabitants who did not wish to go to the trouble required to take it to market in New York.)

It was not long before you and your boss decided upon a division of labor. Cuyler, who had many contacts among the Loyalist elite in New York, had run a metalware company in Albany. Thus, he had the contacts and skills needed to deal with such things as marketing, contracting, and government relations. You, with a great deal of first-hand knowledge of both the west bank of Hudson's River and the ongoing conflict, handled forward operations and security.

July of 1780 found you and your woodcutters operating out of a place called Bull's Ferry. As the name suggests, this was a place where boats from the island of Manhattan made landfall on the western shore of Hudson's River. Located across from the village of Bloomingdale's, on the island of Manhattan, some five or six miles north of the city of New York, Bull's Ferry stands upon one of the few places where a person can come ashore without having to climb the Palisades. (The Palisades are a series of steep cliffs, some of which are as high as 150 yards, that begins three miles or so north of Paulus Hook and runs north for twenty miles.)

At Bull's Ferry, you have built a fort that serves as an operating base. Consisting of a two-story blockhouse and a small stockade, this fort is made entirely of wood. The sole armament of this fort is a pair of four-pounder naval guns, which you have placed on the second floor of the blockhouse, and the motley collection of second-hand muskets with which your woodcutters are armed.



**Bull's Ferry, as seen from Hudson's River**



**Blockhouse and Stockade, of the type built at Bull's Ferry**

On 21 July 1780, a force of several hundred Rebel soldiers attacked your fort at Bull's Ferry. After an artillery bombardment that lasted for ninety minutes, killing four of your woodcutters and wounding several more, the Rebel infantry attacked. Notwithstanding their great advantage in numbers, these attackers proved unable to surmount the stockade that protected your men. Thus, after suffering the effects of a thousand or more musket balls fired at close range, the Rebel infantry withdrew, leaving the mortal remains of forty or so of their comrades on the ground.

The successful defense of this blockhouse did wonders for your reputation and that of your men. In the weeks that followed, you received accolades from the Loyal press, obtained uniforms and equipment from the British authorities, and acquired, in the form of William Franklin, the royal governor of New Jersey, a powerful patron.

At the same time, you realized that your victory at Bull's Ferry had been a close-run thing. (When the Rebel infantry broke, most of your men were down to their last cartridge.) Thus, you decided to move your operations to a place that would be harder for the Rebels to reach. Thus, in the course of the late summer and fall of 1780, you built a new fort at Bergen Point.

