

## NEW JERSEY IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

willingness to fight stemmed increasingly from the will to survive, to protect homes and families from the dreaded enemy (Doc. 6). And with the passage of time, as patriotic fervor gave way to the realization that the war would be long and hard, much of the soldiery became hardened, even cynical. Officers competed for promotion (Doc. 9) and complained about inadequate compensation (Doc. 11), while the men in ranks became embittered by a host of grievances ranging from arrears in pay to excessively long tours of duty (Doc. 14). It became predictable, even in times of crisis, that many militiamen would desert or fail to turn out (Docs. 4 and 7); others shirked military service by paying small fines or providing substitutes. However, although some veterans would later wonder whether the new nation recognized or appreciated their sacrifices (Doc. 15) most men, whether chaplains (Doc. 2) or privates (Doc. 3), freemen or slaves (Doc. 16), for reasons known only to themselves stoically endured untold hardships (Doc. 12) and fought on.

Just as a sizable number of men who served in the army never fought, another group of "citizen-soldiers" contributed materially to the war effort without serving in the army—the women of New Jersey. Their contributions were legion. A ragtag, mixed bag of females known as "camp followers"—seamstresses and laundresses, wives and whores—accompanied armies on their marches. Most women, however, remained behind minding the home fires, tending the farms and shops, making clothing and equipment for the men in arms. When the occasion presented itself, they were able to shoulder muskets (Doc. 5) and man cannon (Doc. 10). One especially zealous female took up the pen and boldly suggested subtle ways in which her sisters could support the war effort (Doc. 8). More demure but no less determined, a group of Trenton ladies organized a statewide relief society (Doc. 13). All in all it is hard to conceive how the martial enterprises in the state could have been maintained without the encouragement and assistance of Jersey women.

Americans were able to endure nearly eight years of warfare against invading troops and home-grown Loyalists precisely because they were "citizen-soldiers"—men and women, blacks and whites, freemen and slaves—engaged in a folk uprising inspired by the Spirit of '76 and dedicated to the achievement of self-government.

### 1 Philip Vickers Fithian to Elizabeth Fithian

[Philip Vickers Fithian, *Letters to His Wife*. . . (Vineland, N.J., 1932), pp. 18-20.]

For Elizabeth (Betsey) Beatty Fithian, the revolutionary war was literally a family affair. When her husband of nine months joined Colonel Silas Newcomb's First Battalion of Cumberland County Militia as chaplain on June 20, 1776, and

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set off to meet the British at New York, four of her brothers were already under arms. Like other Jersey families the Fithians felt the anguish of separation and the anxiety of disaster attendant on military service. But they were willing to face the dangers and hardships to defend their liberties. Many paid the ultimate price; Fithian himself died from war-related illness at Fort Washington on October 4, 1776. Brothers John and Reading Beatty were subsequently captured at Fort Washington in November 1776; they were later exchanged.

New York—July 19th, 1776.

My dear Betsey.

You will expect that I make use of the first, & of all Opportunities to inform you of my State: I do it most gladly. Always when I do any thing for you, it engages all my Heart. That free & unlimited Friendship which I have for you, & which you have approved and returned, dwells steadily in my Thought. Therefore I live for you, & thankful to heaven for the Indulgence of your Society, I own you always to be my dearest & most entertaining companion.

I arrived in this City last Fryday Evening, as I wrote you, an hour & a half after the Cannonade; you will immediately guess at, but cannot easily comprehend, the Situation of Matters after so unexpected an Event. Two Ships & two Tenders are however gone up the North River<sup>1</sup> & lie above us, to obstruct the Market as much as Possible. They lie in what is called Tanpons Bay,<sup>2</sup> a broad part of the River where they are secure. The remainder of the Fleet lie within the Narrows in plain view from the City only eight Miles Distance, near the Staten Island Shore, of which they have full Possession.

There is a vast Army in this City & its Neighborhood; up the East & North Rivers & on the Jersey Shore they are spread from Powles-Hook<sup>3</sup> quite to South Amboy; on Long Island where I expect to go in a few Days; on Governor's Island & on Bedlows.<sup>4</sup> But the Number of the Army I cannot ascertain. Every possible Preparation is making & it is now certainly expected there will be an Action, but that will be a day of dreadful Name.

The Inhabitants of the City who are unfit for military Duty, the Aged, the Women & Children, have chiefly left the Town; & Guards are now at all Places of passing, that no Boat or Person can leave or enter the City without an authentic Pass.

Yesterday at the City Hall Independency was proclaimed amidst the Acclamations of Numbers, after which the King's Arms were thrown down to the Multitude, & by them devoured with the greatest rage!

Your Brother John<sup>5</sup> is yet at King's Bridge;<sup>6</sup> I have heard from him several Times that he is in health; last Week he was in town. I supped with Reading<sup>7</sup> last Night; this morning he also is gone to King's Bridge to join his Battalion; lately he has been appointed Ensign to the 5th Battalion of Pennsylvania Troops: he showed me a Letter from Charles<sup>8</sup> dated June the 13th at the mouth of the Sorel:<sup>9</sup> he was in the Action when General Thompson<sup>10</sup> was taken, but escaped & was well when he wrote. This Day I saw & Spoke with Arkee:<sup>11</sup> he came yesterday from Long Island & is now stationed in this Town; he belongs to our Brigade; of Col. V. Cortlands<sup>12</sup> Battalion in Capt. Morrells<sup>13</sup> Company. He is hearty but complains like me of sore Bones. You see, my dear Girl, that all your

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Brothers who are capable of Duty, are engaged in the American Cause.

We are quartered in a good House; but it is totally empty. At night we spread our Blanket & lie on the Floor; I sleep with Mr. Holmes;<sup>14</sup> he has two Blankets and a Pillow; these we spread down & cover us with one; but the hard Floor & rough Blankets, believe me, they are not pleasant.

We have Beef & Bread at Dinner & usually the same for Breakfast & Supper; if we have it not always it is when we buy a little Coffee & cook it up ourselves in our Dinner Pot. But all is good. I boast of the Fare when connected with the Duty. It is American Liberty we are trying to support, & there are many thousands in this Town, as well as me, who are resolved to suffer more before we give it up.

Nothing gives me an anxious Hour but you my kindest Friend. If I had a Security for your safety & happiness I should be contented. I have told you that nothing but direful War should detain me long from you. And surely unnumbered Curses await that Wretch who has occasioned the Division of such near Alliances. But we shall meet again—in the World to come, if not in this. Be not then unduely troubled; If I fall in Battle, or otherwise; This I ask, let my Memory be dear to you, think of me as a Person, who never viewed you without Emotion; & was never in your Company a Moment but with the highest Pleasure!

If it is equally convenient you will stay where you are, but your own choice is to be consulted; Be careful of our affairs. Remember my Charge of keeping your little Book. Give my love & Duty to Unkle, the Family, Sister, Brother; Mrs. Hunter;<sup>15</sup> And as many of my Acquaintances as you have Oppertunity.

I lent Squire Ewing<sup>16</sup> the Life of Chesterfield, you will send for it soon & put it up safely, & be careful of my Books.

I have nothing more now, only my strong Request that you write by all oppertunities, be not backward, nor indolent, but often send a Line to your most obliged Friend.

PHILIP V. FITHIAN

1. The Hudson River was also known as the North River.
2. Tappan Bay, some thirty miles north of New York City near Tarrytown.
3. Powles Hook or Paulus Hook, now Jersey City, was the site of the main ferry connection between New York City and New Jersey.
4. Bedloe's Island.
5. John Beatty (1749-1826), the oldest of the Beatty brothers, entered the medical profession after graduating from the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University) in 1769. In January 1776 he was commissioned as a captain in the Fifth Pennsylvania Battalion.
6. Kingsbridge, located at the northern tip of Manhattan, was the only structural link joining the island with the mainland and thus was the main route to upstate New York.
7. Reading Beatty (1757-1831) was studying medicine with his brother John when the war broke out; in January 1776 he joined the Fifth Pennsylvania as an ensign.
8. Charles Clinton Beatty, who, less than four months after graduating from the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University) in 1775, marched

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off to war as a second lieutenant in the Fourth Pennsylvania. He died soon thereafter when a rifle accidentally went off in camp.

9. The strategic Sorel (or Richelieu) River which connects Lake Champlain with the St. Lawrence River between Montreal and Trois-Rivieres.

10. Brigadier General William Thompson of Pennsylvania, who led the ill-fated June 8 attack on Trois Rivieres.

11. Erkuries Beatty, the youngest of the Beatty brothers to take up arms, was a private in the Continental army.

12. Colonel Philip Van Cortland, Second Regiment, Essex County Militia.

13. The Reverend Thomas Morrell, Captain in the Essex County Militia.

14. Probably Abijah Holmes, quartermaster for Fithian's unit.

15. Ann Stockton Hunter, aunt of Fithian's close friend the Reverend Andrew Hunter, Jr. (see Doc. 2).

16. Maskell Ewing, Sr. (1721-1796), patriarch of the famous Ewing clan of Cumberland County; his son, Thomas, was married to Fithian's sister, Sarah.

## 2 Andrew Hunter, Jr., The Life of an Army Chaplain

[Andrew Hunter, Jr., Diary, 1776-1779, Firestone Library, Princeton University.]

The Reverend Andrew Hunter, Jr. (1752-1823), nephew and namesake of the famous Presbyterian clergyman of Greenwich, Cumberland County, joined Colonel Philip Van Cortland's unit as chaplain on June 28, 1776. The extract from his diary that follows not only reveals something about the life of an army chaplain but also records Hunter's reaction to the first major confrontation between British and American forces. The battle of Long Island began August 22-25 when General William Howe, supported by warships in New York Harbor, landed a 20,000-man force on the island and advanced toward strategic New York City, which was occupied by an American army under George Washington. The American forces sent to Long Island to blunt the British offensive suffered crushing defeats during pitched battles on August 26-27; during the night of August 29-30 Washington withdrew his men to Manhattan Island.

[August 6-September 1, 1776]

6 Tuesday Wrote a little in the morning—very unwell with a diarrhea in the afternoon.

7 Wednesday All day very unwell with the same complication.

8 Thursday A bed chief of the day.