

## NEW JERSEY IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

6. In a successful flanking action, Howe defeated Washington at White Plains, New York, on October 28, 1776, thus undermining the American position in the area and setting the stage for the battle of Fort Washington.

7. The Hudson River was sometimes called the North River.

8. There was no Fort Greene; Post undoubtedly has in mind Fort Lee (originally Fort Constitution) which occupied the New Jersey side of the Hudson River directly opposite Fort Washington on Harlem Heights; General Nathanael Greene was commandant at the time.

9. James Christie.

10. Elias Romine or Romeyn.

11. Jacobus Jaroloman.

12. Jonathan Kinsey.

13. The British raid on Little Egg Harbor, October 5-7, 1778.

14. The reference is to General Anthony Wayne's successful assault on Stony Point on July 16, 1779; Wayne reported fifteen men killed and eighty-three wounded in taking the strategic Hudson River fortification.

### 16 Samuel Sutphen, Wartime Experience of a New Jersey Slave

[A. Van Doren Honeyman, ed., "The Revolutionary War Record of Samuel Sutphin [*sic*], Slave," *Somerset County Historical Quarterly* (1914), 3:186-90.]

The following record of military service during the revolutionary war is an extraordinary document from several perspectives. First, as the wartime experience of an enslaved New Jersey black man, it is unique. Samuel Sutphen (b. 1747), served as a private in the First Regiment, Somerset County Militia, from 1776 to 1778 and then joined the New York militia to participate in the expedition against the Iroquois in 1779. Second, being one of several reminiscences recorded in 1834 by Dr. Lewis Condict (1773-1862), a prominent physician and politician from Somerset County, it is a rare piece of oral history dating from the revolutionary era. Third, as the recollection of a man who was eighty-seven years old, the narrative is an example of extraordinary mental recall. Although misinformation and distortions have crept into the account as the inevitable result of the passage of time, they are for the most part insignificant and do not detract from the overall reliability of the service record. Sutphen (he apparently took the surname of his most recent owner) makes no comment about his personal feelings regarding military service or his condition of servitude; yet one wonders what thoughts must have passed through the mind of this slave who risked his life in the cause of the freedom he was denied.

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[ca. 1834]

At beginning of the War was a slave to Guisbert Bogert<sup>1</sup> of Somerset co[unty] on the Raritan. Caspar Berger of Readington<sup>2</sup> proposed to buy him of Bogert on condition of doing militia duty in Berger's stead during the War.<sup>3</sup> I agreed to the terms,<sup>4</sup> and Bogert sold me to Berger for £92.10, which I believe was paid. Berger had been out one month, and I afterward was to serve in his place. Capt. Matthias Lane<sup>5</sup> commanded the militia co[mpany] and Col. Taylor<sup>6</sup> the Regiment. This was the 6th year of the War.<sup>7</sup> Berger bought me in the season of plant seed sowing.<sup>8</sup> Berger went out one month after I went to live with him, in Capt. Lane's Co[mpany]. Immediately after I had finishing planting 4 acres corn, Co[mpany] was [called?] and I took my turn with others; sometimes 12, sometimes 15 or 20 went at once. I believe Capt. Lane went on my 1st tour;<sup>9</sup> marched thro' Boundbrook and Scotch Plains and Newark to Communipaw,<sup>10</sup> where we were stationed 1 mo.; large militia force was there;<sup>11</sup> a Regt. or more; built breastworks; Col. Abm. Ten Eyck,<sup>12</sup> Major Livin,<sup>13</sup> Col. Hunt,<sup>14</sup> Col. Schamp,<sup>15</sup> Gen. Dickinson,<sup>16</sup> Gen. Blair.<sup>17</sup> Staid a month in sight of New York—guard duty.

Second tour in hay and harvest time.<sup>18</sup> Capt. Jacob Ten Eyck<sup>19</sup> stationed at Communipaw; 1 mo. guard duty. The Asia<sup>20</sup> was then in the harbor. British fleet came into N. York harbor whilst on this tour.<sup>21</sup> A large body of militia out. Frelinghuysen<sup>22</sup> and Schamp were out.

Third tour, 1 mo. Believes Capt. Lane commanded. Station and duty the same as before. British fleet came into the bay and harbor when on his 2nd tour.<sup>23</sup> Large force of British was out. Was at the Long Island battle in Aug't;<sup>24</sup> and Lane, and Col. Frelinghuysen. Lord Stirling<sup>25</sup> had command of Jersey troops; our comp'y was in the heat of the battle. In the battle and after our defeat we were all dispersed. I found a colored man who took me from L. I. to Staten Isl'd in a skiff with two others of my Co[mpany], viz., Wm. Van Syckle<sup>26</sup> and Jacob Johnson,<sup>27</sup> a man of our age. The bl[ac]k man piloted us across Staten Isl'd to Eliz 'town point, where we crossed to E[lizab]eth T[own]; came through this town and by Wheat-sheaf<sup>28</sup> and Short Hills, Quibbletown<sup>29</sup> and Bound Brook, and so home in about 3 days after the battle. 2 of our co[mpany] were taken prisoners in this battle, viz., Peter Low<sup>30</sup> and John Van Campen;<sup>31</sup> they were exchanged some months after and got home.

His 3rd tour now begins under Capt. Lane as before.

4th tour under Capt. Ph. Van Arsdale<sup>32</sup> toward Pluckemin in frosty weather, fall of the year. This was probably in October [1776]. Stationed at Commun'w and Bergen point.

5th tour was in very cold weather; was marched up along the Millstone under Capt. Van Arsdale and Col. Schamp about New Year's holidays [1777]; out a month.

Cornel's Lane<sup>33</sup> of our Co[mpany] was shot through the hip the morning after the battle by the accidental dischage of a musket by one Todd. The ball passed in near the naval and came out near the back, as he was lying near a sapling. I assisted, with Thomas Oliver,<sup>34</sup> to carry him home in a litter between 2 horses, made with poles and a bed thereon. Was out at this tour for 3 or 4 days. Went from Readington with the whole Co[mpany] by way of Milltown; escorted Col. Frelinghuysen to Princeton by Griggstown, and on Rocky Hill we heard the firing, and soon got into the heat of the battle.<sup>35</sup> Believes Gen'l Washington marched with his army to Pluckemin into winter quarters.

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Some time in this same Winter a distinguished Tory named Christopher Vought,<sup>36</sup> or Voke, led on a large body of Refugees and Tories from Lebanon in Hunterdon, said to be from 500 to 6 or 700, attempting to make their way to the headquarters of the army then at Brunswick. They were discovered by Dr. Jennings,<sup>37</sup> and he made it known to Capt. Lane, and the Co[mpany] was immediately called out with Capt. Jacob Ten Eyck's Comp'y to intercept them; fell in with them at the 2 Bridges, junction of the N. and S. branches of the Raritan; had a fight with them. Wm. Van Syckle<sup>38</sup> of our Co[mpany] was wounded in the head; they [blank] and ran to a fording place near Cornelius Van Derveer's mill on the N. Branch, where they crossed and made their way toward Brunswick. Ten Eyck's Co[mpany] took one prisoner, who was mounted, and Capt. Ten Eyck took his horse. In the night—toward last of winter.

In the spring following, probably March,<sup>39</sup> a party of the enemy from N[ew] B[runswick] came out to Van Ess'<sup>40</sup> mills on the Millstone. A party of militia under Lieut. Davis<sup>41</sup> was stationed near the two bridges, when an express rider on a black horse from Col. Frelinghuysen gave tidings of the enemy at V. Ess' mills. I piloted Davis' Co[mpany] and as many others as we could assemble to a fording place over the S[outh] branch, and hurried on to the mills. They had plundered the mill of grain and flour, and were on their way back to Brunswick, but had not got out of the lane leading from the mill to the great road. We headed them in the lane. The team laden with the flour was the first we fell in with; the lane, 100 yards, was filled with 4-horse teams. Davis ordered us to fire, and then we shot part of the 1st team, which stopped the whole drove. The drivers left their teams and run. A guard escorting the teams made their escape. We took, as was said, about 40 horses, and all the waggons, about 10, which were all sent off under an escort to Morristown.

A party of Hessians, about 1 company (70), an escort for these teams from Brunswick, was discovered secreted behind a hedge with some 4 or 5 field pieces. They fired upon us and retreated. We followed on a piece, but Lt. Davis ordr'd us to retreat. Davis' Capt. Westcott<sup>42</sup> from Cumberland had been left sick at Guysbert Bogert's, where he died, and was taken back to Cumberland Co[unty]. There was a large body of militia out, and Gen'l Dickinson commanded. The firing was principally across the river at the bridge. I was out on this alarm but one day. We mounted guard along the branch above the 2-bridges almost every night; nearly all this winter and spring on guard duty.

About corn planting in the same year,<sup>43</sup> as I think, my master was called on to go to the North. Capt. Isaiah Younglove<sup>44</sup> and Lieut. Robt. Robertson<sup>45</sup> were along the branch recruiting men for the northern service. Master Berger order'd me to go with Capt. Younglove for 9 months; this was the term of engagement for all his company. 3 men were furnished by each company for this expedition: 3 from our's, 3 from Ten Eyck's. David Seely from Cumberland Co[unty] was Col. of this regim't.<sup>46</sup> James Ray,<sup>47</sup> a free mulatto man and Hendrick Johnson<sup>48</sup> went from our Company. Our Reg't, under Col. Seely, assembled at Cornelius Slack's, Suckasunny plain, after corn planting, about last of May. Marched thro' Sussex Co[unty], and Goshen to N[ew] Windsor, Newburg, [New York]. At Esopus<sup>49</sup> we fell in with Domine Hardenburg,<sup>50</sup> whom I knew at Somerset. Went to Westpoint first. A chain was fastened to a large rock and stretched across the river to prevent vessels from going up. Thence by Schenectady by Fort

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Schuyler, now Utica. Here we were for three days. Found here three children massacred by Indians, and had been brought here to repel the Indians who had massacred the whites. A massacre had also been made by the Indians at Cherry Valley,<sup>51</sup> through which we passed on our way to Utica; also at Fort Montgomery. We pursued the Indians through the wilderness as far as Buffalo; had five [blank] pieces. Gen'l Sullivan commanded.<sup>52</sup> When we reached Buffalo it was husking corn time.

It was a week after New Year's before we set out on our return march.<sup>53</sup> The Indians retreated before us as we went onward. We got home about middle of January, returning by the same route, and were discharged after being home about a month. At Westpoint on our return we halted; and, standing sentry one cold night, snow knee deep, a party of Hessians and Highlanders, who had crossed the Hudson on the ice, came on us by surprise.<sup>54</sup> After hailing the first one and he giving no answer, I fired and he fell. The whole guard came out, and all fired and killed sixteen. It was moonlight. The Light Horse soon rallied and came in their rear, and they surrendered prisoners (70). The Highlanders were dressed in woolen blue plaid trousers and armed with broad swords. As soon as I had fired, and repeated the fire twice or thrice, they returned my fire, and I fled till the guard came to my relief. I received a bullet upon the button of my gaiters, which drove the button and ball into my right leg just above the outer ankle bone. The ball and button were both cut out of the leg by Dr. Parrott, the surgeon of our Regiment, next morning. The fight was about at 10 at night. At the same time I received a wound in the tendon of the heel, just opposite the ankle, which seemed to be a cut, and divided the large tendon almost through.<sup>55</sup> I was two weeks and five days confined at Westpoint by this wound. Dr. Parrott attended me all this time. The Company and Regiment remained there all this time, but [I] hobbled along and kept up with the Regiment homeward. Capt. Younglove was wounded in the thigh this same night with a musket shot—fleshy part of the under side of the thigh. This was my last service. . . .

After the War ended applied and demanded my freedom of Berger. He sold me to Peter Ten Eyck<sup>56</sup> for £110, a slave for life. Ten Eyck sold me to Rev. John Duryea<sup>57</sup> for £92.10. I lived with him 2-1/2 years, and [he] sold me to Peter Sutphen for the same money. Lived with him and his for two years as slave. Then lived with my mistress for one year. I agreed to pay him from the proceeds of my labor £92.10. I paid it and bought my freedom after the additional servitude of 20 years under different masters.

1. Bogert (Bogart), a farmer, was an active Whig, serving on the County Committee of Correspondence in 1775.

2. Casper Berger, a German immigrant, was a stonemason; Readington (Reading Town) was in Hunterdon County.

3. It was possible to avoid militia duty either by paying a modest monthly fine or providing an able-bodied substitute.

4. It was neither a legal necessity nor a common practice for slaves to have a voice in their disposition; Sutphen was apparently accorded considerable personal status despite his debased legal position.

5. No one by this name serving as an officer in the Hunterdon or Somerset

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Militia has been identified; there were two Matthias Lanes living in Somerset County, one of whom served as a private and later sergeant in the militia.

6. John Taylor, who rose to the rank of colonel in the Fourth Regiment, Hunterdon Militia, in 1777; in 1776 he was either a captain or major, John Mehelm holding the commission as colonel at the time.

7. As the remainder of the narrative makes clear, this could not have been the sixth year of fighting (1781 or 1782); it was almost certainly 1776.

8. Early spring.

9. The chronology of the first three tours of duty is confused. They probably occurred in rapid succession and became blurred with the passage of time. During the fall of 1775 the First New Jersey was on guard duty opposite Staten Island; in the spring of 1776 a major militia force was sent to the vicinity of New York City to prepare for the expected British invasion of that strategic port; in July 1776 Jersey troops flocked to New York City to do battle with the invading armies of the Howe brothers; beginning in August 1776 the two battalions of state troops drawn from the general militia establishment saw duty in alternate months for the duration of the war. If Sutphen's first tour occurred in the spring of 1776, which seems likely, then the second occurred before "hay and harvest time" since the battle of Long Island referred to in the third tour took place in August. In any event, the precise order of events is less important than his recollections.

10. Now part of Jersey City.

11. On June 14, 1776, the Provincial Congress ordered the formation of a five-battalion unit to reinforce the Continental army at New York City, one of the battalions to be comprised of militiamen from Hunterdon and Somerset. Hence, Sutphen served with and under men from both counties.

12. Colonel Abraham Ten Eyck (Ten Eyck), First Battalion, Somerset Militia.

13. No one by this name served in the militia. The reference is probably to Major James Linn, First Battalion, Somerset Militia.

14. Probably Colonel Stephen Hunt, First Battalion, Somerset Militia, who resigned because of disabilities on July 12, 1776.

15. Probably Captain Peter Schamp, Fourth Regiment, Hunterdon Militia.

16. Brigadier General Philemon Dickinson, commander of the state militia.

17. The reference is undoubtedly to Lieutenant Colonel Benjamin Baird, Second Battalion, Somerset Militia.

18. See above note 9.

19. Captain Jacob Ten Eyck (Ten Eyck), First Battalion, Somerset Militia.

20. The *Asia*, sixty-eight gun British warship.

21. A British fleet under Admiral Sir Richard Howe entered New York Harbor in July 1776.

22. Colonel Frederick Frelinghuysen, First Battalion, Somerset Militia.

23. Is the following account properly a part of his "second tour"?

24. The battle of Long Island, a decisive victory for the British, took place the last week in August 1776.

25. Brigadier General William Alexander (Lord Stirling), Continental army.

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26. Private William Van Sickle, Third Regiment, Hunterdon Militia.
27. Lieutenant Jacob Johnson, Third Regiment, Hunterdon Militia.
28. Now Linden.
29. Now New Market, Piscataway Township.
30. Private Peter Low, First Battalion, Somerset Militia.
31. John Van Campen, Somerset, drummer.
32. Captain Philip Van Arsdalen, First Regiment, Somerset Militia.
33. Captain Cornelius Lane, Fourth Regiment, Hunterdon Militia.
34. Private Thomas Oliver, First Regiment, Somerset Militia.
35. The battle of Princeton, January 3, 1777.
36. Christopher Vought of Kingwood, Lebanon Township.
37. Dr. Jacob Jennings, surgeon for the militia.
38. Lieutenant William Van Sicle, Fourth Regiment, Hunterdon Militia.
39. The following is an account of the January 20, 1777, skirmish in which some four hundred New Jersey militia under General Dickinson and approximately fifty Pennsylvania riflemen met a British foraging party of nearly equal size from New Brunswick. The Americans soundly defeated their adversaries, who in April sought revenge in vain at the battle of Bound Brook.
  40. Abraham Van Neste's grist mills.
  41. Identity uncertain; perhaps Lieutenant John Davis, state troops.
  42. Captain Samuel Wescott, First Battalion, Cumberland Militia, who did not die but lived to resign his commission in 1779.
  43. The account that follows describes the punitive expedition launched against the Iroquois in the summer and fall of 1779. New Jersey troops were organized in the spring under General William Maxwell and Colonel Oliver Spencer.
    44. Captain Isaiah Younglove, New York state militia. On this tour of duty Sutphen was in the service of New York, not New Jersey.
    45. First Lieutenant Robert Robertson, First Regiment, New Jersey Continental Line.
    46. There was no Colonel David Seely (Seeley) in either the Continental army or the Jersey militia. The commander in question was Colonel Oliver Spencer of Cumberland; it is possible that Sutphen confused him with Colonel Sylvanus Seeley of the Morris County Militia (see Sec. IX, Doc. 8).
    47. Private James Ray, whose military service extended from February 1776 to June 1783, saw action in some of the most important engagements of the revolutionary war, ranging from Ticonderoga to Brandywine and Germantown to Yorktown.
    48. Private Hendrick Johnson, Fourth Regiment, Hunterdon Militia.
    49. Now Kingston, New York.
    50. The Reverend Jacob Rutsen Hardenbergh.
    51. A series of raids by Iroquois under Joseph Brant and Loyalists under General John Butler culminated in a massacre at Cherry Valley, New York, on November 11, 1778. That incident, coupled with earlier depredations in the Wyoming Valley region of northeastern Pennsylvania, prompted Washington to authorize the punitive expedition of the following year.
    52. General John Sullivan of New Hampshire was the commander of the expedition, assisted by General James Clinton of New York. It is unlikely that

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Sutphen was a member of Sullivan's force, since the route detailed here does not correspond with that taken by Sullivan and Maxwell's men (from Easton, Pennsylvania, to central New York and back). Rather, he was probably attached to the special regiment formed by Colonel Spencer, which took a Hudson River route to join with Clinton in the Mohawk Valley.

53. Sullivan's army had returned to Easton by mid-October; Spencer's force retraced the route of its advance and returned later.

54. This is the unsuccessful attack upon an American outpost at Mount Pleasant, Westchester County, New York, by a mixed force of New York Loyalists, British regulars, Hessians, and Scottish Highlanders (Seventy-first Regiment) on February 2, 1780.

55. A note inserted in the manuscript at this point reads: "Both wounds or scars yet visible and tangible."

56. Peter Ten Eyck owned a farm at North Branch.

57. The Reverend John Duryea was pastor of the Dutch Reformed Church at Raritan (now Somerville).