

## CRUSHING DEFEAT AT THE BATTLE OF WYOMING part 3

WHEN?  
July 3, 1778

WHERE? Wyoming Valley,  
Pennsylvania

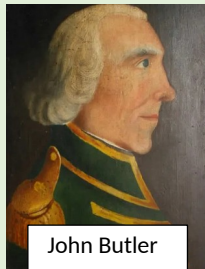


EVENT  
Revolutionary War battle  
fought

VOCABULARY  
foragers

### The Final Approach - The Decision

The residents of the valley knew they were in line to be attacked due to their location on the frontier and the men and goods supplied to Washington's army. In late June scouts saw a large number of the enemy coming down the river toward the valley. Many inhabitants of the settlement around Forty Fort were more than concerned as many of the able-bodied men were away fighting with the Patriots. What to do was on everyone's mind. Some wanted to move into the fort while others wanted to leave the settlement as quickly as possible. No one wanted to see their homes and barns burned and animals lost yet how best to protect their investments. Should they surrender? In the end, the majority decided that they would rather march out to meet the British and Indians than wait in the fort while their homes were destroyed. Consequently, when Major John Butler demanded the surrender of Forty Fort on July 1st, Colonels Butler and Denison refused. The settlers at Forts Wintermoot and Jenkins had quickly surrendered, after being assured that their peaceful concession and promise to remain neutral in the war would ensure their protection from harm. When Colonel Zebulon Butler declined Major Butler's request to give up Forty Fort and surrender the entire Wyoming Settlement, Major Butler knew his army would have to take the fort by force.



John Butler

After the Yankees resolved not to surrender, they were faced with another critical choice: leave the fort and confront their attackers, or hold their ground, hope that Major Butler was bluffing, and buy time until reinforcements could arrive. (Over 160 valley men in two companies were fighting with Washington.) Zebulon Butler and Nathan Denison wanted to stay in the fort as they thought that was the best protection. However, when smoke was rising from the burning of homes and barns and the men knew they were losing all they had worked for, an argument started. Denison and Butler were accused of cowardice by an irrational Lazarus Stewart and his Paxton Boys. The older men and young boys fed by the rhetoric of Stewart rallied behind those who wanted to attack. Denison and Butler felt they had no choice but to lead the righteous New Englanders out of the fort.



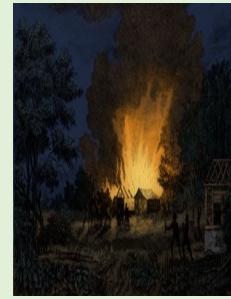
Zebulon Butler



The sun was hot when the Americans prepared to march on July 3, 1778; they marched out to St. Patrick's Day in the Morning. About a mile and a half from the fort, Denison and Butler stopped the men at Abraham's Creek. The two leaders thought that place was advantageous for defense. It had a water, was on a slight rise, and the plain and woods were in clear sight (Dziak 138). The fort was also close to run back to if needed. Once the men set up their defenses, however, they grew weary of the wait and wanted to strike the enemy. In the hours that passed, Captain Durkee of the Westmoreland Independent Company and two others rode up to the group. They told Denison and Butler that the rest of their company, about sixty men,

were within two days march of the valley. If the enemy could be held off, more help would arrive. Unfortunately, delay was not an option for the men.

By 2:00 p.m., Native foragers in the area reported the Americans were approaching. This was good news to the Indians as they were reluctant to attack a fort and would rather fight on open ground. Around 4:00 p.m. the Americans were within one mile of the British. Hoping to deceive the Americans into believing that his forces were retreating, Major Butler ordered Forts Wintermoot in Exeter to be set on fire. The Americans did think the British were going to leave and so continued their progress without faltering. Major John Butler put his Rangers on the left and the Natives on the right, a combined force of 600 (some accounts have as many as over 1000) men lay flat on the ground and silently awaited the approach of the Americans.



American Colonels Zebulon Butler and Denison formed their soldiers into battle lines and instructed the mostly poorly trained men to stand their ground after the first shock. The Americans fired their first volley at two hundred yards, but the Rangers and Natives continued to lie still without returning fire. By the time the Americans were within a hundred yards of Butler's forces, they had fired three volleys. It was then that Sayenqueraghta, the Seneca war chief, gave the signal for the Natives to fire, and the Rangers followed. At such close range, the Americans suffered greatly. The Natives closed in around their flanks and an attempt by the American left wing to fall back to a better position was misinterpreted as a signal for retreat. As

the flank collapsed, men began to run toward the river and toward the fort.

Overpowered and unprepared, the Americans panicked, dropped their guns, and fled in different directions. The British and their allies were relentless in their pursuit, cutting the Americans down as they ran and tomahawking many who attempted to escape across the river. After half an hour, less than half of the Americans made it back to the fort. Lazarus Stewart and many of the Paxton Boys who had been wanted for the murder of Conestoga Indians in Lancaster, were wounded and then killed by those Natives avenging the deaths in Conestoga and Lancaster. With the loss of so many of the men and boys who marched out that morning, it was a disaster.

On the dawn of the following morning, July 4, the survivors had nothing to celebrate. Fort Pittston would also surrender their freedom; Fort Jenkins had already done so the day before. Forty Fort would be offered terms of surrender about eight o'clock in the morning. Nathan Denison opened the gates and rode out to meet John Butler. The terms were clear. All forts were to be handed over, any continental soldiers were to be made prisoners of war, and all militiamen were to be disarmed (Dziak 195). By July 8, the enemy would be gone from the valley.

#### ONLINE RESOURCES

[Revolutionary War Journal](#)

[Wyoming Valley Massacre](#)

#### PRINT RESOURCES

Dziak, Mark. *The Battle of Wyoming*. Pittston, Our History Initiative. 2008.

Glickman, Jay. *Painted in Blood Remember Wyoming: America's First Civil War*. Affiliated Writers of America. 1997.