

A VALLEY IN RUIN—AFTER THE BATTLE part 4

WHEN?
July 1778

WHERE? Wyoming Valley and
points beyond



EVENT
People were fleeing the
valley after the battle

VOCABULARY
abducted

Utter Destruction and Shades of Death

The post-battle smell of burning houses and mills was still in the morning air when Thomas Bennett awoke on July 4th in Forty Fort. It certainly didn't seem like a day of celebration; it was a day of loss—loss of property for sure. The crushing weight of grief on those within the fort did not come from just that loss though. It came from the gnawing feeling that husbands, sons, fathers, and friends had not only been killed at the battle, but probably tortured through the night. Words that accused Denison and Butler of cowardice, words that melted the reluctance to attack the British and the Natives now were a torturous reminder of the devastation. The decision to leave the fort late yesterday afternoon to fight the British and Indians had resulted in the severest of penalties. Not only was yesterday's event dominant in Thomas' mind, more humiliation and danger would appear today when the enemy arrived to sign the papers that would force Thomas and what was left of his community to leave their beloved Wyoming.



After the battle, Major John Butler listed eight palisaded forts destroyed, along with all the mills, and about a thousand homes. In addition, he reported that a thousand head of cattle had been killed or driven off, as well as a great number of sheep and swine. Everything the Yankees had built over the last seven years was gone.

Many of the settlers who had such high hopes leaving Forty Fort the afternoon of July 3 had been killed. The women, children, and men who lived saw their homes and crops burned, their animals taken. Wyoming settlers had nowhere to live and nothing to eat. The terrified settlers fled in all directions without provisions or protection. Some walked east through forest and swamps to the Delaware River and north, others to Fort Penn (modern day Stroudsburg) while others fled by water down the North Branch to Fort Augusta (Sunbury). Some estimate 2,600 people fled the valley in what came to be known as the "Great Runaway." Wild animals, snakes, mosquitoes, and heat took their toll on the women, children and elderly. Few horses or oxen were around to pull loads. Some claim that up to 200 (some say up to 374) people died in the "Great Swamp" between the Susquehanna and Delaware Rivers (Dziak 214). This was not a "swamp" in the modern meaning of a water-filled forest. It was stretch of dense forest and tangled overgrowth for thirty miles (much of it thorn-covered) where moving forward was a step-by-step exercise. Without the proper amount of water and food, stricken with grief, and unprepared for such an arduous journey, this area became known as the "Shades of Death."



On July 8th, John Butler ordered his Rangers and the Six Nations Warriors to march north toward Tunkhannock and Wyalusing. Butler ordered twenty Rangers and Natives to cross the Susquehanna and march on the upper road to the Westmoreland settlements near the Delaware, the "Lackaway" District. He gave orders to "burn and destroy everything they possibly

[could].” Butler returned to Quebec and was hailed a military hero. The British victory at Wyoming ended up not only known as a massacre but also displacing Loyalists living north of Wyoming in Tunkhannock and Wyalusing. Anyone who would have been permitted to stay was clearly a Loyalist and when John Butler’s forces withdrew, they found themselves alone and exposed on the frontier of the British empire, fully anticipating a brutal response from General Washington.

While it seemed as though the enemy had left the valley, some Indians still roamed the area.

On August 25, 1778, Luke Swetland and Joseph Blanchard went down the river to Commer’s grist-mill. This mill near Hanover was the only one in the valley that had escaped destruction. They were surprised and seized by six Seneca and taken up the river as prisoners to Appletown (near present-day Romulus, New York). Swetland spent a year in captivity at Appleton before making his escape. A few months later in November 1778, the Slocum family who were Quakers were attacked in Wilkes-Barre. Their little red-haired girl, Frances, was taken by the Indians. She grew up with the Native Americans eventually marrying a Miami Indian chief. She was known as Little Bear, or Maconaquah, who kept her past a secret until she was an elderly woman. More of her story is told in another article titled *Frances Slocum A Child of Two Worlds*. In 1780, Benjamin Harvey was abducted and taken to Fort Niagara in New York. He was released after a number of months and used a canoe to help him get back to the valley. Fearing he might be recaptured, he went on foot to the lake that now bears his name and followed the outlet down to his grist mill and home. Both had been burned.



A few months later, Colonel Hartley would lead an attack to push the Natives back from the valley. In 1779, General Sullivan with several thousand men would destroy what had not been laid waste of Native villages and orchards.

ONLINE RESOURCES

[Revolutionary War Journal](#)

PRINT RESOURCES

Merrifield, Edwin. *Luke Swetland’s Captivity and Rescue from the Indians*. Scranton, Pennsylvania. 1915.