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# Birch Bark Express

The newsletter of Butler's Rangers

Editor: *Private Michael Trout, UE*

August 2003

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## **Commander's notes**

*Lieutenant Dave Solek*

As we are heading towards autumn, so arrives some of the best events for this campaign season. Next is the Battle of Rhode Island, 30-31 August. This will take place on the original battlefield, which is now a beautiful multipurpose open space and recreational park, with a view of the ocean. Unfortunately, due to work, I cannot attend (damn), but I have asked Ken Santilli (long time Ranger and "border ruffian") to lead Capt. Frey's Company at this event. Your *BAR Courier* has details on this 225th anniversary reenactment.

In the beautiful Mohawk Valley, we'll do our famous raids on Cherry Valley and German Flatts (see enclosed). On the same weekend as Cherry Valley is the Battle of Fredricksburg in Pawling, N.Y. Some of you folks to the south may wish to stop at Pawling before heading up to Cherry Valley. Watch for the next *BAR Courier* for details.

When the "war" starts to head south in the coming years, Butler's Rangers will still have many of our 225th actions to celebrate in our own backyard up north. I hope to see many of you at these historic and beautiful sites.

In our ranks we have a couple of new members who are ready to raise the hatchet and go on our many daring raids. We welcome Mickey Wind and his girlfriend Kristin Negrycz, and Dale Dennis. Mickey and Dale have proven their mettle on the "warpath" at events, and I believe Kristin will whack us with something metal if we get outta' hand.

Do you need clothing? Our own Christina Brooks, at (215) 822-9485, and her sister Sandy Thomas, at (570) 779-0910, of Thread the Needle, are willing and able to assist you in getting suited up in new duds, or to replace those old worn-out ones. I've asked the two seamstress sisters to help locate some reasonably-priced checked linen, but we've had no luck yet. They have found some very nice 100% woven checked cotton, and have already made shirts with it for a couple of our Rangers. Also, I am still working to get the small Butler's Rangers waistcoat buttons made up -- I hope by this winter or at our annual meeting.

At Monmouth a Continental Ranger told me that he and his comrades were impressed by our daring tactics. They decided they were going to try to capture one of us (we looked like we were having too much fun), and singled out Ken Santilli. But as they continued to watch us, their courage started to wane. Ken's muscles seemed too big, and they worried he might take them prisoner instead (way to go "animal"! ). I informed them they had taken a wise course of inaction, for if they attempted to seize one of us, the rest of us would be all over them like a nest of hornets -- Green Hornets, that is!

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## **After action reports**

### **Battle of Cobus Kill 225th North Blenheim, N.Y. 31 May-1 June**

All weather forecasts called for a weekend deluge, which probably accounted for the poor turnout of both participants and the public. The monsoon did arrive, but not until noon Saturday. That allowed for a superb morning tactical in perfect sunny weather. There were enough reenactors (including about a half-dozen BVMA Rangers) to make for a great back-and-forth battle that was a brisk physical workout for all.

After the rains arrived, most scheduled activities were canceled. A nice collection of sutlers stuck it out both days while many participants grew discouraged and left for home.

The Sunday afternoon tactical was moved up to the morning when it was discovered that the only Crown forces remaining were the Rangers. We were allowed the honour of seizing a building held by a strong force of Whigs, which we accomplished with enthusiasm despite the rain.

This fascinating site, Lansing Manor, is owned by the New York Power Authority as it abuts a reservoir. The Manor, built by a wealthy family in the upper Schoharie in 1819, has been beautifully restored. The grounds cover an impressively large area and include fields, hills, woods, brush, and ponds. This was the first event held at this site, and they want to invite us back someday when it's a little drier.

### **Johnson Hall Market Fair Johnstown, New York 7-8 June**

One of the wettest springs in upstate New York history continued to torment us (little did we know the weather pattern was to continue through the summer). Nevertheless, a valiant effort was made by all, helped by (badly inaccurate) forecasts for a dry weekend. We had a special obligation: a large contingent from the King's Royal Regiment of New York had committed to attend, on the promise that they would be treated to challenging tacticals.

Saturday morning saw a light but persistent drizzle, and we all marched to the location off site -- a series of hilly fields broken by thick tree lines and some gullies. As was expected, the dozen or so BVMA Rangers were asked to help oppose the Yorkers and so fell out as the 4th Tryon County Militia.

The tactical was indeed challenging, with both surprisingly large armies dashing from field to field in rapid maneuvers. Action was swift and decisive, with both Crown and Congressional forces clobbering and getting clobbered.

After about two hours we marched back to our soggy camp, where we spent much of the day trying to dry out. Several Rangers commented they were actually wetter than at the Cobus Kill "flood," since most of the time we had been marching through waist-high brush that was thoroughly soaked from the never-ending rain.

As is usual with this event, there was a very impressive selection of sutlers. Johnson Hall is always a great time to add to your kit. There was even a blacksmith who hardened frizzens while you waited.

Sunday morning saw another wet but energetic tactical, with all participants reporting a great time. The rain began to quit just as the weekend drew to an end (of course). Fortunately, the Yorkers say they had a great time, with some of the most challenging tacticals they've fought in. All hope the event can be repeated next year -- without the rain.

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## **Battle of Monmouth 225th June**

**Freehold, New Jersey**

**28-29**

Rangers in attendance were Calvin Arnt, John and Christina Brooks, Ernie Coon, Phil Malvagno, Scott and Annie Palmeri, Ken Santilli, Dave Solek, Mike Trout, John Ward, Mickey Wind, and Kristin Negrycz. The weather was a few degrees cooler than normal for Monmouth. This was greatly appreciated for our first activity which was the colour (flag) ceremony. Unfortunately it was an exceptionally long one and our firelocks got exceptionally heavy -- the officers conducting the ceremony weren't holding muskets so it was mind over matter: they didn't mind so it didn't matter (to them).

In the afternoon battle, all green-coated loyalists were to represent the Queen's Rangers. We were supposed to be ambushed by the militia but they took so long in getting to us, we almost went into the bushes to beat them out. In a slow withdrawal our "QR" party took cover behind a split rail fence. Butler's "Marauders" slipped around to the enemy's right flank and charged their unloaded and unprepared artillery train, causing them to retire. Their lost position was quickly reenforced by a division of militia. We attempted this tactic a few times more, causing the militia grief until we were ordered to retire to allow the "Crimson Tide" to field and play. The Provincials were then shuffled over a bridge to a cornfield behind a copse of woods to continue battling the hordes of Congress' Own. The battle ended two hours later in a draw, as did the original.

After watering down and saying our goodbyes to those who had to leave, most of us followed our hostess, Thayne Tessenholtz and her daughter, to a restaurant called the Cabin, which was literally a log cabin (appropriate for Rangers, don't you think?). We enjoyed a fine meal, good fellowship, and the air conditioning.

Sunday was a repeat of Saturday with fewer troops. The colour ceremony was shorter and the battle less spirited -- we got posted to do more line work. Sunday evening we were treated by John Brooks with his homemade amaretto ice cream. Goodbyes were said and the Rangers stumbled off into the sunset.

In short, the event was a good time for all. My thanks go to Mike Trout for being our Corporal. Calvin got our interest perked with his new 1st Model Brown Bess -- a possible firelock for new recruits that was reasonably priced. Phil displayed his homemade backpack which again tweaked our interest in getting this item in the future. This was also the first event as Butler's Rangers for Mickey Wind and his girlfriend Kristin Negrycz, and they appear to be "hooked" for the long haul.

*-- Lt. Dave Solek*

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## **Crysler's Tory Farm                      Morrisburg, Ontario                      11-13 July**

Although the Battle of Chrysler's Farm was an embarrassing defeat for U.S. forces in 1813, this was a Rev War event. Although the battlefield is small, it is directly adjacent to Upper Canada Village, a beautifully restored working village from the mid-1800s.

Nearly a dozen BVMA Rangers crossed the border to attend, and were joined by even more members of McDonell's Company from Ontario. We were delighted to see Captain Scott Paterson, the Butler's commander at Saratoga and White Plains, as well as many other Canadian Butler's Rangers who really demonstrate what professionalism is all about.

To no surprise, there was a severe shortage of Congressional forces, so both Butler's units were asked to serve as rebels during most of the battles. Off came our regimentals as we faced off against units we normally fight alongside. This "friendly rivalry" led to some spirited sparring, as when we scattered the Royal Yorkers with an unexpected howling charge. Some of the combat took place within the village itself -- an interesting change of terrain for us.

Unfortunately, the much-anticipated Butler's Rangers Saturday night music fest did not occur, as Capt. Paterson fell ill to a mysterious but temporary ailment (a "skull-splitting headache"), and was unable to lead us in song. He also missed the Saturday dusk battle, but Sergeant "Ranger Rick" Thompson ably took command of McDonell's Company in Scott's place.

A more pleasant spot for an event would be hard to find. Located along the St. Lawrence River (at least one participant took an early morning dip), the Chrysler's Farm Battlefield/Upper Canada Village site is extremely well-maintained. Our friendly Canadian hosts made sure that everything was properly organized and prepared for this very enjoyable event.

A word of caution may be in order when you cross into Canada for an event. New Canadian firearms laws are complex. Many Customs Canada officials are still not aware that your reproduction flintlock is legally considered an antique firearm, and thus exempt from normal firearm restrictions. You might make your crossing easier by printing out the Canadian Firearms Center Fact Sheet at [www.cfc.gc.ca/en/owners\\_users/fact\\_sheets/reenact.asp](http://www.cfc.gc.ca/en/owners_users/fact_sheets/reenact.asp) and showing it to customs officials.

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## Wyoming Valley Raid 225th July      Forty Fort, Pennsylvania 18-20

The 225th Anniversary of the Wyoming Valley Battle was one of the smaller and more enjoyable events that I have had the pleasure of attending in a long while.

On the evening of Friday 18 July, I arrived to find that the Loyalist camp did not exist! The only other Ranger there was Lowell Thomas and he was setting up his sutlery. The only thing I knew for sure was Dave Solek was coming on Saturday. With the rebel camp all set for the most part, I had visions of fighting 50 rebels by myself . . . and winning?

After a heavy rain the whole mosquito population of Pennsylvania came out to use me and the others as a human buffet. It was cold and not the most comfortable night, but I enjoyed the company of the "Old Turtle" himself (Lowell) and spent the night trying to keep warm.

Saturday dawned cool, but you could feel the warmth coming on quickly. It turned into a fairly hot day. Ken Santilli and Dave joined me, as did John (and Christina) Brooks, Scott (and Annie) Palmeri, and John Ward (and his son), and we had a motley collection of Rangers. Sandy Thomas of *Thread the Needle* added her son and his friend as Indians for the coming battle. I was greatly disappointed that a larger Native contingent did not show up, but the show must go on.

Dave was the overall Crown commander, something he did very well I may add. After walking the battlefield with the rebels to set up the scenario, we organized how the attack should go to best resemble the actual fight. Surprisingly, it turned out perfectly. After being joined by many rebels who saw that the cause of the Crown was right after all, still more joined us to make the numbers look more realistic. It all went as planned.

Skirmishers were forced back by the rebels who marched across the field. Our main line was hidden behind a small hill, and we rose and delivered a volley to the enemy. We then charged forward with a yell. We then intentionally fell back behind the hill to bring the rebels closer.

The rebels moved forward unaware that Ken, John, and the Indian contingent were hidden in the woods to their left. The forces of Congress were finally routed when this party suddenly charged their flank, and we turned and pushed their front. The scenario ended when John (painted blue like a native) scalped a poor rebel left dead on the field. The crowd was much pleased and we were stunned . . . the entire scenario went off perfectly!

After the battle we rested, I got measured for my regimental and leggings, and we prepared for dinner. Dinner was provided by the nice hosts (24th Connecticut Militia). This fine pig roast was great. I wish I could eat more like that at home. Finally, I had to bid adieu to everyone as my mother has been in the hospital and I couldn't stay the entire weekend. With Dave's help I knocked down my tent, took my newly purchased Butler Ranger's mug, pin, and unit history, and went on my way.

Rhode Island is next for me. I hope to see as many of you there that can make it.

-- Pvt. Mickey Wind

Sunday's battle scenario was almost the same as Saturday's, with Scott leading the Ranger contingent, taking over and manning the artillery piece until the rebels recaptured it. Ken led the Indians again, who gave a spirited fight, taking "war trophies" (with permission of course). I ended the battle by giving the field to the rebels, as the scenario was starting to drag and the public starting to get bored. Yes, I could have beat the pants off the militia as they left some very good openings, but traditionally the Crown wins on Saturday and the Congress wins on Sunday. By all accounts everyone had a good time and the Rangers may get a couple of new recruits -- in fact I just received dues from Dale Dennis.

-- Lt. Dave Solek

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## Upcoming events (see [www.brigade.org](http://www.brigade.org) and [www.bvma.org](http://www.bvma.org) for details)

**Battle of Rhode Island 225th**    **Portsmouth, Rhode Island**    **30-31 August**  
See *Commander's notes*.

**Cherry Valley Raid 225th**                      **Cherry Valley, New York**    **19-21 September**  
An important episode in Butler's Rangers history. We're expecting Rangers from Canada.

**Battle of Fredricksburg 225th**    **Pawling, New York**                      **20-21 September**  
Same weekend as Cherry Valley; some of you downstaters may visit Pawling instead.

**Fort Klock Interrupted Harvest**    **St. Johnsville, New York**    **27-28 September**  
A small but fun BVMA event held every other year.

**2nd Battle of German Flatts 225th**    **Little Falls, New York**    **3-5 October**  
At Herkimer Home State Historic Site. According to New York State rules, you must fill out a Volunteer Service Agreement and an acknowledgment form for the New York State black powder safety rules (in a sense a copy of the BAR safety rules and so stated on the bottom of page 2). If you plan to attend, or even remotely think you might go, contact me ASAP at (203) 268-7940 or at [soleranger@hotmail.com](mailto:soleranger@hotmail.com). I'll also bring all the forms and rules to Cherry Valley, but if you aren't going there you must contact me if you want to go to German Flatts. You must sign and return the forms to me by 20 September. This is the only warning you'll receive for this important registration, so don't cry if you aren't allowed to play when you get to German Flatts because you failed to follow through. This event looks to be a great weekend and a 225th Butler's Rangers raid! -- *Dave Solek*

**Old Stone Fort Days**                      **Schoharie, New York**                      **11-12 October**  
Returns to its usual schedule; should be larger than last year's abbreviated event.

**Fort Lee Historic Park**                      **Fort Lee, New Jersey**                      **November**

**Battles of Trenton and Princeton**    **Trenton, New Jersey**    **27-28 December**

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## From the archives

Though they were tired and hot in the afternoon sun, the men pulled their shoulders back and carried their rifles and muskets at the proper military angle. The Indians loved parades and martial display of all kinds. The Rangers were not drill-field soldiers, but it was important that they impress the Indians . . .

Children and dogs ran toward them through the fruit trees. From the fields beyond the orchards women were leaving their work and scurrying into the village . . . Several hundred Indians mixed . . . to watch the arrival of the newcomers.

When the children drew abreast of the column, they stopped yelling. Most of them stood well away from the marching men, content to stare and poke each other in naked ribs. The village dogs, however, went wild. They yipped and snarled . . . the more venturesome dogs concentrated on little Nick Smith, the company drummer, who valiantly tried to keep the beat and at the same time land a good kick or two among the curs that snapped at his heels.

A ripple of laughter at his plight ran through the column. It was instantly stifled by sharp words from the sergeants. Dan knew that this company would never shine on a drilling field—not that it would ever be asked to—but he also knew that he could count on its discipline. He felt a thrill of pride for his men. A few months at Niagara under the tireless attention of John Hare and Philip Luke had produced a fine company. Men who had recently been farmers, storekeepers, artisans of one kind or another, were now woodsrunners who had no equals as frontier soldiers in the British forces. There was only one military organization that could match Butler's Rangers: Daniel Morgan's rebel Rifle Corps.

There wasn't a man in Dan's company who didn't know that John Butler deserved the credit. They were handpicked. (Every man had been interviewed by Colonel Butler; if he wasn't suitable, he was urged to enlist in the Royal New Yorkers or one of the British regiments that accepted colonials.)

Rangers had to be marksmen. They had to demonstrate their ability to stand long marches in all kinds of weather with a minimum of food and shelter. All officers and non-commissioned officers had to speak at least one Indian language fluently; the men in the ranks were supposed to learn them. Dan had been told by John Hare that *all* the men in the first two companies of Rangers—those commanded by Walter Butler and William Caldwell—could speak at least one Indian tongue. Most of them could get along in several. Once the men were enlisted, they faced a hard life. Niagara was their base of operations, but they didn't expect to spend much time there. Through spring, summer, and autumn they would be in the Indian country, ready to strike at the rebel frontiers. They would have to live like Indians, fight like Indians, think like Indians. Already, after the spring raids on which detachments of Rangers had accompanied war parties to the Mohawk and Pennsylvania frontiers, word was sifting through from rebel settlements that Butler's Rangers were known as "blue-eyed Injuns." This came from the custom of some of the men, who had been in the Indian Department service, of stripping and painting for a raid. It was a wise precaution; rebel riflemen with long experience in Indian fighting knew that an Indian attack was likely to break up if the white men in the war party were picked off.

These Rangers were, for the most part, lean and hard-muscled and hard-eyed. Even grizzled Jacob Anguish, in Dan's company, who admitted to fifty-nine years and was probably dropping four or five, was as lithe and agile as a man half his age. The Rangers generally weren't given much to soldiers' roughhousing and raillery. The persecutions and indignities that had driven them from their homes among the rebels were still raw wounds. They were bound, one to another, by three ties: loyalty to the King, respect and affection for John Butler, and hatred for rebels.

*From the novel The King's Rangers, by John Brick; 1954, Doubleday and Company, Inc., Garden City, N.Y.; pages 122-124.*