

Lieutenant John Van Tuyl¹ and the Minisink Company of Allison's Third (Goshen) Regiment of Orange County, New York Militia

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6/15/2018

Fortification of the Minisink

In anticipation of feared Indian or Tory attacks, many houses along the Neversink River and the upper Delaware River valleys had stockades constructed around them, some dating to the early years of the French and Indian War (1754-1763) and remaining in use through the end of the Revolutionary War (1783). By the autumn of 1755 there were approximately fifty private forts, or fortified farmhouses, constructed along Pennsylvania's frontier borders.² In 1756 New Jersey began the implementation of a plan to construct six forts along the upper Delaware River valley and into what is now New York but which was disputed territory at the time between New York and New Jersey. Blockhouses and fortified farm houses were planned to strengthen the defense between forts. The two northern most forts were Cole's Fort in Port Jervis, NY and Fort Gardiner in Gardnerville, both now in Orange County, New York.

Cole's Fort was the home of William Cole and played an important role in both the French and Indian and Revolutionary Wars. William Cole was a deacon of the Dutch Reformed Church in Port Jervis and had given the land for the church and burying grounds next to it. The church stood a few yards from Cole's cabin and it is almost certain that the stockade surrounded the church as well as Cole's home. It was described as a "wooden dwelling house, 60 foot by 26 foot, and two small blockhouses with a palisade enclosure about 120 foot square that would garrison 30 men"³ Fort Gardiner was the home of Captain Richard Gardiner of the New Jersey Frontier Guards and was described as "a wooden dwelling house, 5 log houses surrounded by a palisade 100 foot square and 2 swivel guns."⁴ Fort Gardiner was located in what is now the hamlet of Gardnerville in the southern portion of the town of Wawayanda, Orange County, New York and only a few miles north east of Fort Van Tyle. Fort Gardiner could garrison 30 men. Not wanting to tie up New Jersey militia troops to build or garrison these forts, New Jersey created the Frontier Guard for this purpose.⁵ Both of the above forts are examples of structures created first as residences and which were then later fortified for defensive purposes.

In anticipation of impending Indian hostilities, in 1753 Peter Gumaer built a fortified farmhouse in the area of Deckertown (now Sussex in Wantage township, Sussex County, about 15 miles south of Fort Van Tyle). "About two or three years before the French War was commenced, Peter Gumaer built a stone

¹ Various forms of the surname exist including Van Tuyl, Van Tuyle, Van Tyle, Van Tile; the author has standardized the spelling to the most common form in the US, Van Tuyl; the exact spelling is used verbatim in direct quotations; the current spelling of the name of John Van Tuyls stone house is Fort Van Tyle.

² Richards, p53

³ Ibid, pp61-62

⁴ Ibid, p62

⁵ Ibid, p57

house 40x45 feet, a cellar under the whole, and a high roomy chamber above the upper floor. Along two sides, below the eaves of the roof, were made port holes through which to shoot either when the house was built or the war commenced. When the French War commenced, a picket fort was erected on its front and rear sides, and all families of the neighborhood moved into it.”⁶ The Gumaer house is a good example of a house designed with defensive intent prior to its fortification.

In 1778 Adonijah Middaugh was the 19 year old son of Ephraim Middaugh, ensign in the Minisink company of New York militia in which John Van Tuyl was First Lieutenant. In his Revolutionary War pension application, Adonijah Middaugh, states that in February 1778 his Goshen Regiment militia company⁷ “**marched to Vantiles where they built a fort which was called after wards Vantiles fort**”⁸ and where he remained garrisoned for the next nine months because “**the Indians and Tories were so troublesome that there had to be a continual guard kept up to protect the inhabitants**”. Clearly the interpretation of his statement must be that the house already existed in 1778 prior to its fortification in that year since Middaugh says they “marched to Vantiles” suggesting that the John Van Tuyl dwelling already existed.

Standard practice in the Minisink at this time (1778) was to fortify existing structures with log stockades and a number of houses were fortified during this period along the Neversink valley from Port Jervis⁹ to Godeffroy¹⁰. A company of militia would guard the workmen while they threw up the log stockade around the house and adjacent buildings. Palisade or picket fortification involved digging a trench three to six feet deep and placing posts vertically in the trench that were between fifteen to eighteen feet high, one foot in diameter and sharpened at one end¹¹. Gumaer in his history of Deerpark estimates that each of these forts were occupied by 80-120 people, including 8-12 soldiers per fort, for about 9 months of each year, excluding winter, starting in 1777-78 through the end of the Revolutionary War.¹²

One of these stockades was erected around the house of Jacob R. Dewitt which stood on the left hand side of the road where it crosses the Neversink River on the way to Cuddebackville. The other stockade was built on two sides of the new stone house which Peter Gumaer had built on the knoll across the flats from the (William) Cuddeback house (at Godeffroy).”¹³ A third stockade was

⁶ JC Richards, *Flames Along the Delaware: The French and Indian War in the New Jersey Frontier and Northampton County, PA*, Flayre Printing, Belvidere, New Jersey, 1997, pp51-62.

⁷ The company was likely the Minisink Company because the deponent states that officers of the company included Ephraim Middaugh, ensign and his father, who was known to be an ensign in the Minisink company as of 1775

⁸ Pension application of Adonijah Middaugh

⁹ Gumaer, p89

¹⁰ Osborne, p50

¹¹ Osborne, p51

¹² PE Gumaer, *A History of Deerpark in Orange County, NY*, Minisink Valley Historical Society, Port Jervis Union Printing, 1890, p86-91

¹³ Angell, Pauline Knickerbocker, *Fifty years on the frontier with the Dutch congregation at Maghaghkamik*. Port Jervis, N.Y.: Printed by Port Law Press, 1990., p14

constructed at the house of Benjamin DePuy. Fortifications in or near Port Jervis included the houses of Major John Decker, Daniel Van Auken and Martinus Decker.

Officers of the Minisink Company

On the 22nd of August 1775 the Provincial Congress of New York passed a law under which the state militia was organized. Each company was to consist of about 83 men between the ages of 16-50. The counties of Ulster and Orange formed the fourth brigade under Brigadier General George Clinton. The brigade was composed of five regiments in Orange County, one of which was the Goshen or Third Regiment commanded by Colonel William Allison. Colonel Allison's regiment was drawn from the town of Goshen and the western part of Orange County, including Deerpark and the lower Neversink River valley, and comprised 6 companies in April 1776 lead by Capts George Thompson, Moses Cortright, Samuel Jones, John Jackson, John Little and Daniel Rosekrans.¹⁴

On 30 September 1775, a month after the Provincial Congress of New York created the militia, the committee of safety met to elect the officers of the Minisink Company: **“Agreeable to the directions of the Committee of the Precinct of Goshen, we, the subscribers, attended the Minisink Company, on Saturday, the 30th day of September, 1775, for the choice of their Officers, at the house of Mr. John Wells, and the following gentlemen were duly elected, viz: Moses Cortright, Captain; John Van Tile, First Lieutenant; John Decker, Second Lieutenant; and Ephraim Medaugh, Ensign.”**¹⁵ All five above-named men, Wells, Cortright¹⁶, Van Tuyl, Decker¹⁷, and Middaugh, are listed in the same taxation district¹⁸ which encompassed the southern portion of Deerpark and Greenville.

From March 1776 (promotion of Martines Decker to second lieutenant replacing John Decker) to July 1779 (death of Ephraim Middaugh at the Battle of Minisink; Middaugh was replaced as ensign by Solomon Kuykendall) there was a stable command structure for the Minisink Company consisting of Major John Decker, Captain Moses Cortright, First Lieutenant John Van Tuyl, Second Lieutenant Martines Decker, and Ensign Ephraim Middaugh. In March

¹⁴ B Fernow, *New York in the Revolution*, vol 1, pp291-292, Weed Parsons and Company, Albany, NY, 1887

¹⁵ *Return of Officers for Goshen, Orange County, New-York*. American Archives Series 4, Volume 3, Page 0851

¹⁶ In April of 1789 the first town meeting for Minisink was held at the home of John Van Tuyl in Greenville. In this meeting Moses Cortright and John Van Tuyl were elected constables for Minisink, suggesting they were men of considerable physical and mental prowess to be elected to this responsibility and may reflect their successful leadership of the Minisink Company during the War.

¹⁷ In February 1776 the Goshen regiment was divided and John Decker was promoted to the rank of Second Major. In March 1776 Martines Decker became Second Lieutenant of the Minisink Company replacing John Decker following his promotion to Major and John Van Tuyl remained First Lieutenant of the Minisink Company.

¹⁸ EM Rutenber and LH Clark, *History of Orange County, New York*, vol 2, Heart of the Lakes Publishing, Interlaken, New York, 1980, p704 (District 3 tax assessment of 1775)

1783 Wilhelmus Westfall replaced Moses Cortright who resigned as captain of the Minisink Company.¹⁹ John Van Tuyl continued to serve as First Lieutenant of the Minisink Company until at least 1781.²⁰

Method of Sourcing the Minisink Company's Military Engagements

Most of the military service records for the Minisink Company of Allison's Goshen Regiment have not survived. With the passage of the Revolutionary War pension acts, soldiers and their wives were able to apply for government pensions based on military service during the War. In order to establish proof of service, pension applicants were required to provide detailed affidavits or other documentation describing when and where they served and under what field officers. Many of the early pension applications were destroyed by fire in 1800 and again in 1814; however the majority of post-1814 applications survive in the National Archives and the original documents can be accessed online using Fold3²¹.

Since militia applicants served for short periods of time, often only a few weeks, over the course of the War they sometimes served in multiple companies and regiments and under various field officers, sometimes volunteering and sometimes being drafted. However, by carefully comparing the various field officers under whom a soldier says he served with the recorded officers of a specific company, it is possible to place a soldier within a specific company and to assemble a narrative of the activities of that company during the War, acknowledging that the pension applicant's statements may be clouded by the passage of time, often 50-60 years.

From September 1775 through March 1783, Moses Cortright was Captain of the Minisink Company and from September 1775 to at least 1781, John Van Tuyl was First Lieutenant. Because of the stability of their positions as field officers in the Minisink Company over at least a six year period, it is possible to use the names of these two men as search terms for the military activities of the Minisink company during this period. By searching Fold3 using the keywords Moses Cortright or John Van Tuyl, including surname variants, it was possible to identify nine militiamen who stated that they spent a significant portion of their War service under the command of Moses Cortright and/or John Van Tuyl and thus can be assumed to be members of the Minisink Company since applicants rarely identified the actual name of their

¹⁹ Fernow, *ibid*

²⁰ Pension application of John Brink, W15759, New York, NARA M804, Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land Warrant Files, roll 341, p94; also Levi Van Etten affidavit in support of Martines Decker (R7158): **"That some time during the year 1781 Wilhelmus Westfall was appointed to the Captaincy of Kortrights company but the Lieutenants (John Van Tuyl and Martines Decker) continued to serve as before"**. There is a discrepancy between Fernow (1783) and Brink/Van Etten (1781) as to when Wilhelmus Westfall replaced Moses Cortright as the captain of the Minisink company.

²¹ www.fold3.com; website focuses on digitalizing military records, including those at the National Archives

company in their affidavits. Unfortunately pension applications could not be located for Capt Moses Cortright, Lt John Van Tuyl or Ensign Ephraim Middaugh; by contrast the application filed by Lt Martines Decker's widow includes 93 pages of valuable detail regarding his service and that of his company. In addition to Martines Decker, the following eight militiamen with significant Minisink Company service were identified: John Brink, Wilhelmus Cuykendall, George Quick, Nathaniel Van Auken, Henry Van Etten, Levi Van Etten, James Van Fleet and Wilhelmus Westfall. Further, using nonpension sources these nine men have all been verified as residents of southern Deerpark or Greenville at the time of the Revolution,²² Because five of these men died prior to application submission, only four of the nine Minisink company applications provide eyewitness, first-hand knowledge of militia service events; these are **Nathaniel Van Auken (b 1764), Henry Van Etten (b 1761), Levi Van Etten (b 1758), and James Van Fleet (b ca 1753)**. In describing the Minisink Company's service, we relied heavily on the veracity of service information gleaned from the pension applications of these four primary sources. However, information provided by spouses and family gathered from the remaining five pension applications has been included when deemed appropriate and of historical value.

Fort Montgomery and the Hudson River Campaign

In an effort to prevent British ships from moving up the Hudson River, construction of Fort Montgomery began in March 1776. It was located about six miles below West Point, NY and had a cable chain supported by a boom across the Hudson River to prevent ships from moving up or down the river. It is estimated that Fort Montgomery and its sister installation Fort Clinton required a thousand men for their proper defense, but in October 1777 they had only 600-700.²³ In early October 1777 Forts Montgomery and Clinton mounted thirty-two cannon manned by two companies (one in each fort) of Col. John Lambs 2nd Artillery and parts of the regiments of Col Lewis Dubois (5th New York Regiment of the Line) and Cols William Allison (3rd Orange Militia), Jonathan Hasbrouck (4th Orange Militia), Jesse Woodhull (1st Orange Militia) and James McClaughry (2nd Ulster Militia).

On October 6, 1777 a combined force of roughly 2100 Loyalists, Hessians and British regulars attacked Forts Montgomery and Clinton from the landward side where the defenses were only partially completed. By the end of the day both forts had fallen to the British, who burned the forts, tore down the stonework buildings²⁴ and dismantled the Hudson River chain. At the time they were attacked, Forts Montgomery and Clinton garrisoned about 600-700 men of which 75

²² PE Gumaer, *A History of Deerpark in Orange County, NY*, Minisink Valley Historical Society, Port Jervis Union Printing, 1890, pp62-76; Ruttenber, EM and Clark, LH: *History of Orange County, New York*, Philadelphia, 1881, p66; Calendar of Historical Manuscripts, War of the Revolution, vol 1, p6, Weed Parsons, Albany, NY 1868

²³ J Riker, *Evacuation Day, 1783*, Crichton and Co Printers, Fulton Street, New York, 1883, p30

²⁴ Fort Montgomery (Hudson River), Wikipedia, accessed 2/16/2016.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fort_Montgomery_\(Hudson_River\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fort_Montgomery_(Hudson_River))

were killed or wounded and 263 were captured including Col William Allison commanding the 3rd Orange Militia.²⁵ The British troops lost 41 killed and 142 wounded. None were captured.²⁶ Following is the number of men taken prisoner from each American regiment:²⁷

Regiment	Commanding Officer	Prisoners**
5 th New York Line Regiment	Colonel Lewis Dubois	106
2 nd Artillery – 2 companies	Colonel John Lamb	26
1 st Orange Militia	Colonel Jesse Woodhull	23
3rd Orange Militia	Colonel William Allison*	21
4 th Orange Militia	Colonel Jonathan Hasbrouck	11
2 nd Ulster Militia	Colonel James McClaughry*	41

*Taken prisoner; both survived the War

**Excluding officers

When the battle ended in the evening “the prisoners ...were kept under guard for a day or two at the forts, then put on board the British transports and taken to New York. Forty-four of the 2nd Ulster regiment were among them including the brave colonel McClaughry (who was suffering from seven wounds), and his brother-in-law Capt. Humphrey who is quoted to have said that **“it was said by one Van Tuyl (among the last to escape from Fort Montgomery) that, when he left, Humphrey was yet throwing stones!**”²⁸

So who was this Van Tuyl at Fort Montgomery who was said to be “among the last to escape Fort Montgomery”, an anecdote reported 100 years after the fall of Fort Montgomery? A search of the rosters of all six regiments above shows only one Van Tuyl and that is Lt John Van Tuyl of the Third Orange militia. Based on available eyewitness testimony below given under oath, the Minisink Company of the Third Regiment was not present at Fort Montgomery on October 6, 1777. This is consistent with Gov. Clinton’s order of August 5th that directed Allison and McClaughry to march all the militia to Fort Montgomery, **except the frontier companies, which were to be left for home protection.** The extant pension applications report that members of the Minisink Company were discharged from Fort Montgomery a few days before the British attack. However, possibly they don’t tell the whole story. Possibly not all of the

²⁵ Battle of Fort Montgomery, Wikipedia, accessed 2/18/2016, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Forts_Clinton_and_Montgomery

²⁶ ibid

²⁷ Riker, footnote 29

²⁸ Riker, p40

company was discharged at that time leaving some to remain at the fort with their officers, including Lt Van Tuyl who would likely remain at the Fort until all of his company had departed. It is clear that other companies from Allison's Regiment were present the day of the attack; possibly some men from the Minisink company were also. One can never know the truth behind a hundred year old story that a Van Tuyl was one of the last to escape Fort Montgomery. However, we can say with some certainty that if the anecdote is true, it must very likely refer to Lt John Van Tuyl of the Minisink Company.

After capturing Forts Montgomery and Clinton, the British moved up the Hudson River and attacked and burned the city of Kingston on October 13, 1777. Having been forewarned of their coming, many of the residents of Kingston left the city in advance of the British arrival. The area was a major granary for the colonies at the time, so the British burned large amounts of wheat and all but one or two of the buildings before returning down the river to New York City.²⁹

Following the capture of Fort Montgomery, the Minisink Company again were called out and followed the British as they moved up the Hudson toward Kingston and apparently engaged the British in sniper-style gunfire as they moved along the river toward Kingston. There is no evidence of any large scale direct engagement between the Minisink Company and the British enroute to Kingston. The Minisink Company followed the British up the river as far as Banks Bridge but not all the way to Kingston.

Below are the narratives of individuals³⁰ from the Minisink Company regarding their being called out to Fort Montgomery³¹:

Levi Van Etten (S28921) -- "in the early part of the season of the year 1776, and he thinks in May or June, Captain Kortrights company was called out by Colonel Allison to Fort Montgomery and this deponent went with the rest of the said company to Fort Montgomery and served one month in helping to build the said fort and helped to draw a rope across the River (Hudson) and was discharged at the expiration of the term of one month."

Wilhelmus Cuykendall (S23295, by Henry Van Etten) -- "that about the middle of August 1777 he again entered the service under Major John Decker in Col Thurston's (Tusten) Regt and in Capt Moses Cortrights company of militia; he marched from the settlement called Minisink in said town of Goshen to Fort Montgomery on the Hudson River; deponent served

²⁹ Kingston, New York. Wikipedia, accessed 2/16/2016. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingston,_New_York

³⁰ Pension application numbers are in parentheses following each applicant's name

³¹ Abbreviations for military titles have been standardized: Gen, Col, Lt Col, Major, Capt and Lt

in the same ~~company~~³² said Wilhelmus and deponent remained at Fort Montgomery until a few days before the capturing of said fort by the British army;”

Wilhelmus Westfall (W1511, by wife Margaret Terry) -- “that about the last of August or the first of September of the said year (1777) Col Allison's regiment was called out to Fort Montgomery and Capt Kortwright's company went from a place now called Carpenters Point on the Delaware River across the mountain to Goshen, from Goshen they went by land to Fort Montgomery on the Hudson River where after the said regiment under Col Allison or a part of them had been at the Fort one month were discharged with orders to be in readiness at short warning in this service; her said husband Wilhelmus Westfall served one month in the company under Capt Cortwright and under Capt Allison and was discharged with the rest of the company a few days before Fort Montgomery was taken;”

James Van Fleet (R10864) -- “he again entered the service in October 1777, was drafted under the command of Capt Cortwright and Lt John Van Tuyl; they marched for the purpose of reinforcing the garrison at Fort Montgomery but arrived too late, the enemy having already captured the fort; they then marched to New Windsor on the Hudson River and from thence to Banks Bridge on Wallkill Creek; declarant was in service at this time about three weeks.”

Nathaniel Van Auken (W6360)-- “he entered the army of the United States as a substitute for James Vanauken in the year 1777 in the fall of the year, that he entered in the company of Capt Moses Cortright, First Lt John Vantile, Second Lt Martin Decker; that he entered at Carpenters Point³³ in the state of New York and marched to Goshen, Orange County from thence to Newburgh and New Windsor;³⁴ the British came up the North (Hudson) River while we were at New Windsor on said river and we fired at them as they proceeded up the River; they proceeded up the river to Sopus (Kingston) which place they fired and burned and then returned down the river to the city of New York; we marched from New Windsor to Banks Bridge to the northeast of Newburgh at which place we were stationed sometime; was there until we were discharged and returned home after serving at least two weeks.”

Henry Van Etten (S11630) -- “in August following (1777) he again entered said service in the company commanded by Capt Moses Cortright in the regiment of militia commanded by Col Tusten and Major Decker and marched with said company to Fort Montgomery where he

³² Strikethrough is in the original document

³³ Just south of present day Port Jervis, NY and now located in NJ

³⁴ During much of the Revolutionary War, New Windsor served as the major depot for the Continental Army and Army Medical Dept.

was stationed until about eight days before said fort was taken by the British in October following.”

“that immediately after the fort (Fort Montgomery) was taken, the regiment was again called out to New Windsor in a rendezvous at New Windsor under Major Decker and this deponent then belonged to Capt Kortwrights company and John Van Tuyl and Martines Decker were the Lieutenants. The British had gone up the river and the regiment followed them as far as Banks Bridge; before they started from Banks the British returned and the regiment was ordered to return back in this service.”³⁵

Wilhelmus Westfall (W1511, by wife Margaret Terry) --“that immediately after the fort was taken those of Col Allisons Regiment who had been discharged previous to the taking of the fort were again called out to Murders Creek or New Windsor to follow the British shipping which had gone up the River; Capt Kortwrights company again rendezvoused along the Neversink and went to New Windsor and followed the enemy up the River some piece and returned again and she further saith that her said husband was again out in service in Capt Kortwrights company and went with the said company under Major John Decker and served in the said company at this time one month and was discharged sometime in November of the said year (1777).”

The Minisink Company pension applicants who address their service at Fort Montgomery all confirm that Capt Cortwrights company was called out to help garrison Fort Montgomery in August 1777 but were discharged a few days prior to the British attack and capture of the fort. Henry Van Etten specifically reports that he left the fort eight days before it was attacked. The Minisink Company did provide support in 1776 to assist in the forts construction and they were called out in October of 1777 to reinforce the garrison at Fort Montgomery but arrived after the fort had been captured by the British. They then followed the British up the Hudson as far as Banks Bridge before learning that Kingston had been burned; upon learning this they returned home. It remains uncertain whether or not Lt John Van Tuyl remained at the fort beyond his companies discharge and if he may have participated in the defense of the fort on the day of its attack.

Service at Paramus, NJ, New City and Ramapo, NY

Although no major Revolutionary War battles were fought in Bergen County, NJ, Paramus was part of the military activity since colonial troops were stationed in Ramapo under the command of Aaron Burr. Paramus, NJ was a major staging area for the Americans. In the summer of 1777 about 80-100 men were regularly stationed there to guard military provisions,

³⁵ Henry Van Etten in support of the pension application of Mary Decker, wife of Martines Decker

including tea, a substantial amount of which had been stolen from Paramus stores that summer.³⁶ During the War in 1777, the British raided the Hackensack area and Burr marched troops to Paramus where he attacked the British, forcing them to withdraw. In addition, the pass at present day Hillburn and Suffern, known at the time of the Revolution as Ramapo Pass, was critical because it was here that the Americans blocked the British from moving out of the City of New York into Orange County and up the Hudson.

Martines Decker (R7158, by Levi Van Etten) -- He states that he was in a “company commanded by Capt Moses Kortright, John Van Tuyl first and Martines Decker second lieutenants and Ephraim Middaugh ensign. He further says that he makes the following statements in explanation of a former affidavit made by him in case of the widow Mary Middaugh formerly widow of Martines Decker in which he states that Capt Kortrights company served one month at Paramus in the fall of 1776. The company of Capt Kortright rendezvoused at Paramus under Col Allison in the month of September 1776 and after the said company had been at Paramus a short time this deponent with the rest of the company was detached from Col Allison's regiment to go to Morristown³⁷ as a guard to guard the baggage wagons that was sent from Paramus with Rum and provisions to Morristown; this duty this company faithfully performed and returned to Paramus where we served out our tour of service for which we were called out and were discharged by Col Allison after a service of one month in this service”³⁸

“that in November or December of the said year (1776) the company of Capt Kortright was again called out and went to a place called New City on the Hudson frontier, Orange County and this deponent went with the said company and served with the said company at New City, Tappan, Paramus and went as a guard with the military stores that went from Paramus to Morristown and returned again and was discharged with the rest of the company sometime in January 1777 after a term of at least six weeks.”

James Van Fleet (R10864) – He states that early in the winter of 1776 he again entered service under the command of Captain Moses Cortright and Lieutenants Martines Decker and John Van Tuyl and that he “was marched to Tappan in New Jersey and was at this place when General Washington surprised and captured the Hessians at Trenton³⁹; During this term of service declarant with the troops present had a skirmish with the enemy consisting of Tories etc who after a few shots retreated, and during this term of service declarant and the troops

³⁶ Anonymous, Ridgewood: Bergen County New Jersey Past and Present, Citizens Semi-Centennial Association, Ridgewood, NJ, 1916, p6-8

³⁷ Morristown, NJ was the winter quarters for Gen Washington's army January through May 1777

³⁸ Levi Van Etten in support of pension of Mary (Penneton) Decker, widow of Martines Decker

³⁹ December 26, 1776

with him surprised a party of the enemy consisting of Hessian and regular troops at a small village about three miles from Hackinsack who fled and left behind them a quantity of stores consisting of spirits, Brandy, Jamaica Rum, Tea, Biscuits, etc, declarant was this time drafted.”

Henry Van Etten (S11630)–“That on the first day of May 1777 then being a resident of the town of Goshen in the county of Orange and state of New York, he was drafted ... and marched with said company to a place called Ramapo in the state of New Jersey near the Hudson River where he was stationed as a guard a term of twenty two days when he was discharged; that said company was composed of a number of men taken from each company in the militia regiment drafted for the purpose of keeping guard.”

Service as Frontier Guards Along the Neversink Valley

Beginning in 1778 the Minisink settlement began experiencing increased hostility from the Indians and Tories resulting in more frequent and violent raids into the area. In response it was deemed desirable to have the frontier militia companies remain in their local areas and to serve as a home guard to construct and garrison the frontier forts on a rotating basis and to provide scouting and reconnaissance.

Wilhelmus Westfall (W1511, by wife Margaret Terry) – “that in the year 1778 the Indians had become so formidable on the western frontier of the counties of Orange and Ulster that instead of drawing away the militia from that place it was necessary to send men to assist in guarding the inhabitants and defend the frontiers of the Delaware from the incursions of the Tories and their allies the savages and from the spring of 1778 Captain Kortrights company was ordered to guard along the frontiers; the said company was classed into four classes to one of which her said husband belonged and that the said company was under the command of Col Newkirk⁴⁰ who had command along the western frontiers; the said classes were so arranged that each class was under arms one week in a month during the summer and fall except on alarms and when they were out on scouting parties; they served under their own officers who took their turns in commanding the classes; this kind of service continued through the years 1779, 1780, 1781 and 1782 and the beginning of 1783, sometime serving at Major Deckers fort, Van Fleets fort, Martines Deckers fort and Van Ettens Fort.”

Levi Van Etten (S28921) -- “That in the spring 1778 it was thought necessary that the militia on the west side of the Shawangunk Mountain should be kept to guard along the western frontiers of Orange and Ulster against the Indians who had become so formidable that they were often killing the inhabitants and destroying their property along the Delaware and

⁴⁰ Lt Col Jacob Newkirk, 2nd Ulster Regiment under Col James McClaughry

through the valley of the Neversink; that during this year this deponent was engaged in building forts along the western frontier; that during that year he helped to build the fort at Martines Deckers⁴¹ and at Major John Deckers⁴² and helped to build a block house at Kuykendalls⁴³ and helped some at building the fort at Dewitts⁴⁴; that in June 1778 there was an alarm made and the militia along the frontier was called out and Capt Kortrights company was called to Martines Deckers and this deponent served with the rest of the company on this alarm one week and was discharged and went to work again on the fort. Major Decker was the field officer that they acted under; that on the 13th day of October of the above mentioned year the frontier was again alarmed by the appearance of the Indians and the murdering of the Swartwouts and Lt Stewart and sad to relate it was on this sorrowful day that the father⁴⁵ of this deponent was killed while in the discharge of his duty as an officer in the militia in procuring provisions for the soldiers, the father of the deponent was at that time an acting quarter master along the frontier; Capt Kortrights company was again called out and this deponent went with the rest of the company to Dewitts fort where they served two weeks and this deponent was discharged with the rest of the company. This service was done under Capt Newkirk⁴⁶; that he was out a considerable (amount) of time in the fore part of the year 1779 scouting but he is unable to tell the exact times.”

“That in the month of May 1780 the frontiers were again alarmed and Capt Kortrights company was called out and went to Deckers Fort and was out one week and were discharged in this service; this deponent was out one week under Capt Kortright and Col Pawling⁴⁷; that in 1781 Wilhelmus Westfall was appointed Captain⁴⁸ and the company served under him and Lieutenants Van Tuyl⁴⁹ and Decker, Ensign Middaugh being killed at the Battle of Beaver Creek (Battle of Minisink, July 22, 1779); that in the month of June (1781) the company of Capt Wilhelmus Westfall was called out to guard the passes on the Delaware and this deponent was out with the company.”

John Brink⁵⁰ (W15759, by wife Diana Brink) -- “that she is the widow of John Brink who was a private in the Revolutionary Army and served in a company commanded at different times by Captains (Samuel) Jones, Moses Cortright and Lt VanTyle in the regiment commanded by

⁴¹ Stone house in West End or Germantown, Port Jervis; now the site of the Minisink Valley Historical Society

⁴² Located on what is now Neversink Drive, Huguenot

⁴³ House of Peter Kuykendall; a blockhouse on what is now Broome Street, Port Jervis

⁴⁴ House of Jacob Rutsen DeWitt in Godeffroy

⁴⁵ Anthony Van Etten, b 12 June 1726, d 13 October 1778

⁴⁶ Lt Col Jacob Newkirk, 2nd Ulster Regiment

⁴⁷ Col Albert Pawling, Regiment of Pawling’s Levies; they guarded forts along the Orange and Ulster Co frontiers

⁴⁸ Because of the resignation of Moses Cortright

⁴⁹ This statement confirms the continuing service of John Van Tuyl as First Lieutenant through 1781

⁵⁰ Affidavit of wife Diana; her marriage to John Brink was contemporary with his military service and although her affidavit is not first hand it provides excellent detail and is confirmatory of first hand testimony

Col Thurston (Tusten)⁵¹, Major John Decker and others she does not recollect; Said Regiment was called the Goshen and Minisink Regiment of the New York State Militia, that her husband the said John Brink lived at the time he entered the service above mentioned in Minisink in the County of Orange in the State of New York.

“said Major Decker then (1778) had orders to keep that part of said regiment belonging to Minisink aforesaid upon the frontiers as it was then called and in the neighborhood of the Delaware and Neversink Rivers in said County of Orange, to watch the movements of the Indians who began to commit depredations on said rivers; that in the spring of the year 1778 her husband John Brink together with a part or all of the company to which he belonged under the command of Lt VanTyle was stationed at Carpenters Point⁵² and other points on the Delaware Rivers and also upon the Neversink River to guard the Indians who then infested that part of the country, said regiment was then commanded (or the Minisink part of said regiment) by Major Decker – Col Thurston (Tusten) then being on the North (Hudson) River with the rest of said regiment – was the greatest part of that year (1778) under arms -- Stationed at points on said Delaware River or marching against the Indians and Tories who were continually harassing and plundering the inhabitants, burning their houses, stealing their cattle and otherwise destroying their property. At one time said Brink (and at that time her husband) was in a skirmish with the Indians and Tories at what was called Van Aukens Picket Fort⁵³ on the Delaware River; that her husband was after that battle during the remainder of that year stationed at different points or fighting small parties of Indians and Tories, also during the year 1780 her husband was the greatest part of the year in actual duty as a soldier in the remnant of the company before mentioned – and in fact until the close of the War her husband was continually engaged in fighting and driving the Indians and Tories, or guarding the frontier inhabitants and their property from the depredations by the Indians.”⁵⁴

George Quick (W24716, by wife Catharine Quick) – “In the spring of 1778 the Indians becoming so formidable and massacring the inhabitants along the frontiers of the Counties of Orange and Ulster it was thought advisable to retain on the west side of the Shawangunk all the militia to guard the western frontier of the said counties and Capt Kortwrights company was retained as one of the companies to guard along the Delaware River and through the valley of the Neversink and the said company was divided into four classes each

⁵¹ Lt Col Benjamin Tusten took command of Allison's Regiment upon the capture of Col William Allison at Fort Montgomery on 6 October 1777.

⁵² Junction of the Neversink and Delaware Rivers; Cole's Fort was located there

⁵³ There were two Van Auken forts, one on the PA side of the Delaware and the other about a mile north of Port Jervis on the Neversink River

⁵⁴ Pension application for John Brink by wife Dianna Brink

class taking its turn weekly in guarding along the frontier sometimes under the Captain and sometimes under the Lieutenants who were John Van Tuyl and Martines Decker and Ensign Middaugh; in this kind of service the company of Captain Kortwright continued to serve during the war but she is unable to state exactly the precise times that her said husband George Quick was out during the year 1778 excepting when an alarm.”

Martines Decker (R7158, by Jane (Van Auken) Hornbeck)⁵⁵ -- “that her name before marriage was Jane Van Auken;⁵⁶ that previous to and during the Revolutionary war her father (Daniel Van Auken) lived near the Neversink river in the town of Deerpark in the county of Orange and state of New York about one mile from its junction with the Delaware and on the Indian frontier of the said county; that a fort was built around her father’s house and the militia of the neighborhood and surrounding county were some of them continually guarding at that place from 1777 until almost the close of the war; She further saith that in June 1779 Martines Decker was at her fathers fort doing duty as a Lieutenant for at least one week; That in July of the same year the Indians attacked the people in the valley and laid waste their property, burnt their houses and killed their cattle; The militia were called out, Capt Kortwrights company rendezvoused at her fathers and went with Col Hathorn⁵⁷ and Tusten in pursuit of the enemy; was in what is known as the Battle of Minisink and Ensign Middaugh was killed; Lieutenant Decker rendezvoused with the rest of the company and went in pursuit of the Indians and was gone five days when they returned to her fathers fort, and Lieutenant Decker remained with a part of the company at the fort doing duty for at least one week;

Henry Van Etten (S11630) -- “he further declares that in the spring of the year 1779 after the Indians commenced their depredations upon the frontiers in Orange and Ulster counties a distance of about sixty miles which kept the country in a constant state of alarm that he lived immediately upon said frontier and for about eight months in each year from that time until the close of the war he was in said service as a guard, in scouting parties and as an Indian spy that said services would commence as soon as the spring opened and continued until the beginning of winter following; that during the winters he was not so much in service because the Indians were not so much accustomed to come down upon the inhabitants in the winter as in the summer and fall, but that he was frequently not in said service during the winter, that there were a number of Piquet (picket) forts built along said frontier to which the inhabitants were accustomed to collect for safety and from which parties were constantly

⁵⁵ This is a first-hand account of the activities at the house of Daniel Van Auken, Van Aukens Fort, about a mile north of Port Jervis

⁵⁶ Sister of Nathaniel and Jeremiah Van Auken; Jeremiah Van Auken was the school teacher killed on July 20, 1779 when Brant attacked the Minisink settlement schoolhouse

⁵⁷ Col John Hathorn, Florida and Warwick Regiment of Militia

sent out to scout and as Indian spies; that he was very frequently in said service in scouting parties and as an Indian spy, and when not out in this manner was stationed in some one of the said forts or as a guard.”

“that from the spring of the year 1779 until the fall of the year 1782 the militia regiment to which he belonged commanded first by Col Thurston (Tusten) and Major Decker and afterwards by Col Moses Hatfield⁵⁸ lived immediately upon the frontiers of Orange county and was left on said frontiers to guard them against the Indians who were accustomed to come down from the north and alarm and destroy the inhabitants and their property; that he was soldier in the militia company commanded by Capt Moses Cortright in said regiment and served under said captain until Capt Wilhelmus Westfall took the command of said company under whom he continued to serve until he resigned the command of said company at the close of the war; that he served under Lt Martin Decker and John Van Tuyl, that his ensigns name was Solomon Cuykendall⁵⁹; that said regiment was constantly in said service on said frontiers during a term of eight months in each year from the spring of the year 1779 until the fall of the year 1782; that he served as a member of said company and regiment during the whole of said term; that parties from said regiment were kept constantly out scouting and ranging the woods to give warning of the approach of the enemy and as Indian spies; that he was frequently sent out in said parties and served when he was out under other officers of said regiment than those of his own company and that when he was not so in service scouting and as an Indiana spy he was stationed on the frontier and served as a guard.”

James Van Fleet (R10864)-- “that from and after the commencement of the fall of 1778 he acted until the close of the war as a minute man in the western part of Orange County to guard that frontier against the Indians; that he very frequently went on scouting parties and acted as an Indian Spy; that he was called out daily with his rifle and other implements of war and was during this time under the command of Capt Wilhelmus Westfall and Lt John Van Tuyl and several other officers.”

Brant’s Raid and the Battle of Minisink

About midday on Tuesday, the 20th of July 1779 Colonel Joseph Brant led from the north an invading force of about 60 Iroquois Indians and 27 Tories into the Neversink valley and first attacked and burned the house of Major John Decker near Huguenot and wounded Major Decker. They moved methodically down the valley toward Port Jervis attacking and destroying as they went. Upon reaching Daniel Van Auken’s house and fort about a mile north of Port

⁵⁸ 1st Major, Allison’ Goshen 3rd Regiment; John Decker was 2nd Major

⁵⁹ Presumably a replacement for Ensign Ephraim Middaugh who was killed at the Battle of Minisink, July 22, 1779

Jervis they laid siege to the fort but were unable to breach the stockade, burning only the barn. They burned the Machachameck Dutch Reformed Church in Port Jervis and destroyed the house and fort of Martines Decker on the west end of Port Jervis as they moved out of the Neversink valley and up the Delaware valley. In his report to Governor Clinton describing the incident, Col Hathorn identified 7 houses, 8 barns and 3 mills that were destroyed.⁶⁰ In a letter to Governor Clinton a week after the attack, Rev. Nathan Ker of the First Presbyterian Church at Goshen reported that 11 houses and barns and the Machachameck Church were destroyed.⁶¹

Brant described in his report on the attack that “we have burnt all the Settlement called Minisink, one Fort excepted, round which we lay before, about an hour, and had one man Killed and one wounded. We destroyed several small stockaded Forts, and took four Scalps and three Prisoners; but did not in the least injure Women or Children. The reason that we cou’d not take more of them was owing to the many Forts about the Place, into which they were always ready to run like ground Hogs.”⁶²

The reasons for Brant’s 1779 attack are not clear. There had been long standing resentment over the encroachment of settlers into Indian lands creating a hostile environment in which the British were able to recruit the Indians to their side. Some suggest it was a strategic move to destabilize the frontier forcing General Washington and the state governors to deploy more state militia men and even continental regulars to guard the frontier at the expense of military needs elsewhere against the British. However, the most logical and widely supported motive is that Brant was intent on plundering the settlement to provide provisions, including cattle and other food stuffs, for his men and their families. In his report of the Minisink attack written on July 29th, Brant states that “I did not arrive ‘till noon (at Minisink settlement), when all the Cattle was in the Woods so we cou’d get but a few of them,” which seems to support a provisioning motive.⁶³

Following Brant’s attack at midday on the 20th of July the alarm went out for the militia to assemble. It is estimated that between 120 and 150 men left the Neversink valley late in the afternoon on the 21st, some on horseback and some on foot. Some appear to have rendezvoused at Major Decker’s burned out fort (see Adonijah Middaugh, R7157) and according to Jane (Van Auken) Hornbeck (R7158), the Minisink Company rendezvoused at her father Daniel Van Auken’s fort, one of the few forts left standing after Brant’s raid. After engaging Brant’s forces for several hours on the 22nd, the Patriot militia was defeated with

⁶⁰ Leslie, p129

⁶¹ Leslie, p133

⁶² Leslie, p117

⁶³ Leslie, p117

disastrous loss of life in what is now called the Battle of Minisink (also the Battle of Lackawaxen and the Battle of Beaverbrook).

The authors of *So Many Brave Men* have compiled a list of 103 men who appear to have been in the Minisink Battle⁶⁴ -- 9 from the 4th Regiment Orange County Militia under Col John Hathorn, 27 from the 3rd Regiment Orange County Militia under Lt Col Benjamin Tusten, 9 from the 2nd Regiment Ulster County Militia, 4 from Pawling's Levies, and 10 from the 2nd Regiment of Sussex County Militia under Major Samuel Meeker. The remaining 44 men do not have their regiment identified. The battle and events leading up to the battle are well described elsewhere⁶⁵ and a reiteration is not the goal of this author. The question relevant to the life of John Van Tuyl is what role, if any, did he and the Minisink Company play in the Battle of Minsink, the most consequential battle of the Revolution fought by men from the 3rd Regiment of Orange County militia?

First, as discussed above, the 3rd Orange County militia regiment was indeed present at the Battle of Minisink. Twenty-seven men from the 3rd regiment have been identified as present in the battle, of which at least three were from the Minisink company (John Brink, Ephraim Middaugh, and James Van Fleet). Col William Allison was not present because at this time he was still being held prisoner by the British in New York after his capture at Fort Montgomery. Lt Col Benjamin Tusten commanded the 3rd Regiment on July 22. There is no mention of Major John Decker being present and it is likely that he was not since he had received a gunshot wound to his side during Brant's attack two days earlier. There is also no specific mention of Capt Moses Cortright or Lt John Van Tuyl being present with Cortrights company although Lt Martines Decker is specifically mentioned below as being out with Cortright's company for at least six days following Brant's attack. This raises an interesting question because if men from their company were present at the battle, where was the leadership of the company? Of the three, only Martines Decker has a pension application on file and it has extensive support with documentation from several men in his Minisink Company. Yet, no affiant specifically places him at the battle and *So Many Brave Men* does not believe there is adequate support to include listing him as a participant in the battle.

Jane Hornbeck states that, **"Lieutenant (Martines) Decker rendezvoused with the rest of the company and went in pursuit of the Indians (presumably on the 21st) and was gone five days when they returned to her fathers fort (Daniel Van Auken) and Lieutenant (Martines) Decker remained with a part of the company at the fort doing duty for at least one week."** Levi Van Etten says that **"Capt Kortwrights company was out with the rest and went in pursuit of the**

⁶⁴ M Hendrickson, J Inners and P Osborne, *So Many Brave Men, A History of the Battle at Minisink Ford*, Pienpack Publishing, Pennsylvania, 2010, p37-92

⁶⁵ *ibid*

Indians and on the 22nd of the said month they were overtaken and a dreadful slaughter of the militia took place; in this service Martines Decker served as the second Lieutenant of Capt Kortrights company for at least six days.” In the words of Henry Van Etten, **“Martines Decker was out (after Brant) and served as Lieutenant in Capt Kortwrights company at least six days.”**

The pension applications are interestingly silent with regard to Moses Cortright and John Van Tuyl. Every affiant below says that “Capt Cortrights company was out” without specific mention of Capt Cortright and there is no mention of John Van Tuyl by any of the affiants. So where was John Van Tuyl? There may be a clue in the testimony of Adonijah Middaugh who states that as the militia assembled to pursue Brant, **“when they reached where Major Deckers fort was burnt, this deponent and others was sent back (to) Van tiles fort, the main body of the men pursued the enemy”**.⁶⁶ On July 21st did John Van Tuyl take a small group of men from his company with him to Fort Van Tuyl to protect its inhabitants from possible future Indian attack? This seems a most likely, but undocumented, course of action for him. Certainly, following Brant’s attack, the Neversink valley inhabitants would have been in a state of heightened anxiety and would have sought safety and shelter in one of the few forts that survived Brant’s raid. This was the course of action chosen by Elizabeth (Middaugh) Bloom as confirmed in her pension affidavit when she stated that she **“was with him (her brother Adonijah Middaugh) in Vantiles fort at the time that ensign Ephraim Middaugh was killed (July 22, 1779).”**

Following are the pension affidavits relevant to the militia response to Brant’s attack:

John Brink (W15759, by wife Diana Brink) – “that in the spring of the year 1779 her husband the said John Brink was called out as well as the whole company and commanded by Lt VanTyle and Major Decker and marched against the Indians who made their appearance in large numbers upon the Delaware and Neversink Rivers, that her husband aforesaid was in the action at Beaver Brook⁶⁷ (as it was called) on the 21st day of July 1779 – that he served on that day under Col Thurston (Tusten), Major Decker⁶⁸, Wood⁶⁹ and others.”

⁶⁶ A plausible explanation for this is that most of the forts in the Neversink valley were burned by Brant on July 20th leaving no place for the valley’s inhabitants to flee for safety except to Fort Van Tyle which was on the east side of the Shawangunk and was not burned by Brant. Further, not knowing if Brant might return, it was necessary for some militiamen to remain behind to protect the valley inhabitants, many of whom likely fled to Fort Van Tyle for safety (see the affidavit of Adonijah Middaugh and his sister, Elizabeth (Middaugh) Bloom)

⁶⁷ Battle of Minisink; Leslie p1

⁶⁸ It is believed to be unlikely that Major John Decker was present at the Battle of Minisink since he was wounded during Brant’s attack on the Minisink settlement two days before the Battle of Minisink

⁶⁹ Capt John Wood, Goshen 3rd Regiment

Levi Van Etten (S11630)– “the militia was immediately called out (following Brants attack); Cols Hathorn and Thurston (Tusten) commanded and went to Beaver Brook (Battle of Minisink) where they had an engagement with the Indians and were defeated; Capt Kortwrights company was out and the deponent was out at least one week;”

Adonijah Middaugh (R7157) --“Sometime in the early part of July 1779 as he believes the celebrated Indian warrior Brant with about 60 Indians and some Tories made an attack on what was called Minisink settlement in Orange County in New York, burned and destroyed a number of houses and barns and mills and burned Major Deckers fort, and wounded the major on the twentieth of July. The militia of Goshen town and vicinity collected to the amount of 140 or 50 men under the command of Col Tusten and Col Hathorn and pursued the enemy and when they reached where Major Deckers fort was burnt, this deponent and others was sent back (to) Van tiles fort, the main body of the men pursued the enemy, over took them near Beaverbrook on the Delaware River where the Indians defeated our men, on the 23 (22nd) day of July 1879 (should be 1779) and killed Ephraim Middaugh, this deponents father, Col Tusten, Capt Tyler, Sergeant Finch and many others; this deponent remained at Van tiles fort for five months.”⁷⁰

Martines Decker (R7158, by Jane (Van Auken) Hornbeck) –“That in July of the same year the Indians attacked the people in the valley area laid waste their property burnt their houses and killed their cattle; The militia were called out Capt Kortwrights company rendezvoused at her fathers and went with Col Hathorn and Tusten in pursuit of the enemy (and) was in what is known as the Battle of Minisink and Ensign Middaugh was killed; Lieutenant Decker rendezvoused with the rest of the company and went in pursuit of the Indians and was gone five days; when they returned to her fathers fort and Lieutenant Decker remained with a part of the company at the fort doing duty for at least one week”⁷¹

Martines Decker (R7158, by Henry Van Etten)⁷² – “In July 1779 the Indians came down upon the frontier and on the 19th of that month burnt the settlement called Minisink; upon this alarm the Goshen Regiment was called out to Minisink and rendezvoused at Deckers fort from Deckers they followed the Indians until they were overtaken at a place called Beaverbrook; an engagement took place and the Goshen regiment was defeated and Col Tusten was killed. Col Hathorn commanded in the alarm. Martines Decker was out and served as Lieutenant in Capt Kortwrights company at least six days.”

⁷⁰ Pension application of Adonijah Middaugh (R7157); spelling has been corrected where needed

⁷¹ Jane (Van Auken) Hornbeck pension affidavit for Martines Decker(R7158)

⁷² Pension affidavit for Martines Decker (R7158)

Martines Decker (R7158, by Levi Van Etten) – “that in July 1779 the Indians burned Minisink and the militia were again called out under Cols Hathorn and Tusten; Capt Kortwrights company was out with the rest and went in pursuit of the Indians and on the 22nd of the said month they were overtaken and a dreadful slaughter of the militia took place ; in this service Martines Decker served as the second Lieutenant of Capt Kortwrights company for at least six days.”

Wilhelmus Westfall (W1511, by wife Margaret Terry) -- “That in 1779 when the Indians attacked Minisink and burnt the houses and barns in that place, her husbands house and barn and barrack with all their contents were destroyed; they likewise set fire to the grist mill belonging to the family but did not accomplish the design, the fire going out before it caught to the combustibles in the mill; she further saith that she made her escape and saved her life by running and after travelling about five miles got in to Vangorders fort.”⁷³

Capture of Tory Spies Robert Land and Edward Hicks

On 14 March 1779, Robert Land and Edward Hicks were captured by Orange County militia, brought before a military court at Minisink, New York and charged with being British spies. On 18 March, Land was found guilty and sentenced to death. His conviction was subsequently overturned by George Washington on the grounds that as a citizen of Pennsylvania, he was not subject to the jurisdiction of a military court. Washington ordered him to be turned over to the civil Authorities in Easton, Pennsylvania for a new trial. Released on bail to await the new trial, Robert joined with a party of Tories bound for Niagara, one of whom was Ralph Morden, a Quaker. On 12 May 1780, the party was discovered by American militia; Robert was shot and wounded but made his escape back to New York City, where his family was now relocated⁷⁴. As an interesting aside, John Van Tuyl’s brother Arthur gave testimony in the trial.⁷⁵

The following testimony was given by Lt Martinus Decker at the trial of Robert Land held in Minisink 17-19 March 1779 on charges of being a spy and carrying intelligence to the enemy:

“Lt. Decker being sworn saith that the 14th Inst. he went towards Coshithton with a party of men, after a number of Tories that were on their way from New York to Niagara. That about

⁷³ Vangorders fort was located on the Pennsylvania side of the Delaware in what is now Pike county

⁷⁴ <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-19-02-0629>; Accessed 3/19/2016. There is a discrepancy in footnote 4 in which the capture is attributed to Lt Peter Decker of Ulster Co militia; however it would appear from the pension affidavits below that it was Lt Martines Decker from the Orange Co militia.

⁷⁵ “Arthur Vantoil being sworn saith that on Thursday evening the 11th Inst. he went to Daniel Courtwrights a Neighbour of his suspecting that a number of Tories were at his House, and to see if he could get any Intelligence of them. That when he went to the Door, he saw the Prisoner (LAND) eating Supper, as soon as LAND saw him he seized his Musket which was by his side with a Bayonet fixed. At which he, the Deponent, left the door. He further says that Courtwright came out of the House, and he asked him if there was any news, or any Tories in his House, that he told him there was no need, neither was there any Tories in the House.” <http://www.royalprovincial.com/military/courts/cmland.htm>. Accessed 3/19/2016.

three O'clock P.M. he fell in with them and took Land and Hicks, he further says that Land told him after he was made prisoner that he was going to the enemy at Niagara."

Following are eyewitness accounts from the Minisink Company of the events surrounding the capture of Robert Land and Edward Hicks:

Wilhelmus Cuykendall (S23295, by Henry Van Etten) – "deponent also says that the said Wilhelmus Cuykendall was with a small party who went in pursuit of Robert Land and Edward Hicks and others (Tories) who were sent from the British Army at New York to carry dispatches to the Indians at Niagara, this was in November 1778⁷⁶ (March 1779), as near as this deponent now recollects; deponent was in the same party with said Wilhelmus, that at the distance of about twenty five miles they captured the aforesaid Robert Land and Edward Hicks whom they took back and this deponent and Wilhelmus Cuykendall, Benjamin Cox and Lt. Martines Decker took said Robert Land and Edward Hicks to Saunderstown in the county of Sussex and state of New Jersey and delivered them to Gen Pulaski."

Martines Decker (R7158, by Henry Van Etten) – "that in 1781 (1779) in the spring of the year⁷⁷ in March or April this deponent having learned that there was spies in the neighborhood of Peenpack and serving notice of the same he with fourteen others were placed under Lt Martines Decker and ordered to pursue them. They started from Levi Van Ettens and went to the Point (Carpenters Point) on the Delaware River crossed and went through the woods in Pennsylvania to a place called Pond Eddy where we waylaid an old Indian foot path and caught two of the spies named Robert Land and Edward Hicks, brought them back and delivered them to General Pulaski who was then lying in New Jersey about ten miles from the York State line; in this service Martines Decker served as Lieutenant commanding the expedition."

Martines Decker (R7158, by Levi Van Etten) -- "In 1781 (1779) in March or April it was said that there was spies in the neighborhood of Minisink and a detachment of fifteen men were ordered out to catch them; this detachment was placed under Martines Decker as Lieutenant commandant of the expedition; the detachment went to Carpenters Point, crossed the Delaware, went to a place called Pond Eddy when they recrossed the river and went to Ten Mile River where they waylaid a foot path and caught two of the spies named Robert Land and Edward Hicks; in this expedition Lieutenant Decker served one week"

Wilhelmus Westfall (W1511, by his wife Margaret Terry) – "that in the spring of the year 1781 (1779) in March or April it was rumored that there was spies in the neighborhood and a

⁷⁶ On 14 March 1779, Robert Land was captured by rebel militia, brought before a military court at Minisink, New York, and charged with being a British spy.

detachment of fifteen men was ordered out under Lieutenant Martines Decker to way lay them and if possible catch them and her said husband was one of the company that went with Lt Decker; they went to a place called Ten Mile river where they waylaid an Indian path and caught two of the spies Robert Land and Edward Hicks (out about six days).”

And So In Conclusion

John Van Tuyl was the First Lieutenant of the Minsink Company of Allison’s Third Regiment of Orange County Militia from 1775 to at least 1781 and possibly longer. The company was called out to help construct and defend Fort Montgomery on the Hudson but was not likely to have actually been present at the Fort on October 6, 1777 when it fell to the British. After the British capture of Fort Montgomery, the company was called out again and followed the British up the Hudson River toward Kingston but retreated upon hearing that Kingston had been captured. The company subsequently provided guard duty for supplies being shipped to Morristown in preparation for Washington’s encampment there during the winter of 1777 and guarded the Ramapo Pass to prevent British movement into western New York. Starting in the spring of 1778 and through the end of the war Lt John Van Tuyl and the Minisink company provided a home guard on the New York frontier providing troops on a class rotation system to help construct and garrison the various fortified houses in the Neversink valley and to spy on and to gather intelligence on Indian movements in the area. In the spring of 1779 fifteen militiamen from the Minisink Company led by Lt. Martines Decker were successful in tracking and capturing two Tory spies, Robert Land and Edward Hicks. Lt. John VanTuyl appears not to have been involved with this effort. Following the attack on the Minisink settlement in July 1779 by Brant’s raiders, the Minisink company went in pursuit of Brant and shared in the devastating defeat at the Battle of Minisink in which Ephraim Middaugh, ensign of the company, was killed. Lt. John VanTuyl’s role in this battle remains unclear. It is suggested that he may have returned to Fort Van Tyle with a small group of militiamen including Adonijah Middaugh to protect the inhabitants of the fort who fled there for safety following Brant’s destructive raid on the Minisink settlement.