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The Worthy but Troubled Continental Service of Capt. Barent J. Ten Eyck

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With the clash of arms that began the American Revolution, Capt. Barent J. Ten Eyck, of the Albany County Militia, served as courier for the Committee of Safety, Correspondence, and Protection in Albany, NY. The first week of May 1775, the “worthy” Ten Eyck delivered a letter of solidarity to the Massachusetts Committee of Safety in Cambridge.¹ A week later, following the fall of Fort Ticonderoga to Ethan Allen and the Green Mountain Boys, he delivered the Albany Committee’s written concerns of a British counter attack to the Committee of Safety in New York City.² On June, 21, 1775, the Committee of Safety, Correspondence, and Protection of Albany resolved that Ten Eyck again be engaged to deliver letters. This time it would be for both the Provincial Congress in New York City and the Continental Congress in Philadelphia.”³

Finally upgraded from messenger duties, Ten Eyck was named the first adjutant of the newly formed 2nd New York Regiment, commanded by Col. Goose Van Schaick, on June 30, 1775.⁴

On July 19, 1775, Barent J. Ten Eyck was commissioned third captain of the new 2nd New York Regiment. A replacement for one Peter Roseboom, who declined his appointment, Ten Eyck was given command of the third company, which was recruited in Albany County.⁵

Following the disastrous assault on Quebec on December 31, 1775, the Congressional forces were getting pretty thin. Back in November 1775, the New York regiments in Canada had extended their enlistments until spring,⁶ but they were woefully under strength. The enlistments of the Connecticut men had just expired and the Green Mountain Boys had already gone home.

The Continental Congress and the Colony of New York did what they could to stop the flow of troops out of Canada. In early January 1776, the 2nd New York’s field officers were pulled from their regiment and assigned to a new un-numbered battalion.⁷ Known as Van Schaick’s Battalion, this regiment is often confused by researchers to be the old 2nd New York from 1775, which was still on the books. Serving in the Lake George/Champlain area (known as “the Lakes”) and out of the Saratoga barracks, Colonel Van Schaick’s new battalion was nearly all new recruits, but a number of the officers were from the 1775 2nd New York, whose commissions were not extended beyond 1775.⁸

Congress had also resolved to allow New York to form what became known as Nicholson's Battalion. Commanded by a former captain from the 3rd New York, Col. John Nicholson, it was an under-strength regiment made up of veterans of the previous campaign, still in Canada, whose extended enlistments were expiring in the spring of 1776.⁹

Ten Eyck's old 2nd New York company was one of those still on the books. Like the others it was under strength, but it was still there, including all its officers.¹⁰ Come February 28, 1776, Ten Eyck himself was rated the third highest captain the New York Line stationed in Canada.¹¹ Considering the Line started out with over forty captains the previous spring, this was quite an evaluation. In fact, for the initial arrangement of Nicholson's new regiment, per a general order from Lt. Col. Frederick Weisenfels, Major of the New York Brigade, Ten Eyck was to command the first company. The officers named in the arrangement, so inclined to serve, were to apply for enlisting orders.¹²

There is no official explanation for this, but Ten Eyck was, ultimately, not included in the final arrangement of the new battalion.¹³ Instead, on or before April 24, 1776, he was appointed to captain a schooner as part of the Continental Army's St. Lawrence River Squadron. He and his schooner were ordered to Pointe aux Trembles to support the agent, Hector McNeil, and check on suspicious vessels.¹⁴ However, the siege of Quebec was soon broken and things began to turn. Ten Eyck's schooner was driven ashore on May 7, 1776, at Point au Plauton by the British brig HMS *Martin* and frigate HMS *Surprise*. Luckily he and his crew escaped ashore.¹⁵ With that, Ten Eyck's brief Continental Army "naval" career was over.

Since the original four New York Line units were no longer active, and there were no longer any positions in the two current infantry battalions (Nicholson's and Van Schaick's), it would be logical for Ten Eyck to get a position in one of the four new regiments being raised in accordance with the new establishment of the Continental Army ordered by Congress.¹⁶ This did not happen. Like it has occurred for so many military officers throughout time, he was passed over and not included in the new arrangement. He did find himself, though, as the lieutenant colonel of something called the Albany Draft Militia.¹⁷

With the coming third establishment of the Continental Army, near the end of 1776, New York was looking to form five new regiments. They needed dedicated officers willing to serve for the duration of the war, and not the shorter one-year terms of the previous two establishments. So, on October 22, 1776, a meeting was held at Saratoga with the Albany Committee of Safety, along with Maj. Gen. Philip Schuyler and Lt. Col. Peter Gansevoort, to analyze the situation. In their report, they listed eight "officers who served in Canada & are not provided for." Six of them were rated "v.g." (very good), one was rated "good" and another was listed as a "drunkard." That drunkard was Barent J. Ten Eyck.¹⁸

Obviously not being one to take things lying down, Ten Eyck petitioned Jacob Cuyler, a leading member of the Committee of Safety, Correspondence, and Protection in Albany, as to why he was passed over for the new arrangement. Cuyler describes this meeting in a letter to William Duer, New York Provincial Congressman and a member of the Committee of Arrangement:

Dear Sir:

The bearer hereof is Mr. Barent J. Ten Eyck, who has, in a very serious manner, applied to me why he was not on the last arrangement of officers for the State of New-York. I candidly told him that his character and conduct during the last campaign was of such a nature as that he could not with propriety be appointed as an officer, and that he

had been too frequently drunk, and was too apt to pursue such a scandalous practice. He frankly acknowledged it was in a great measure too true, but begged of me to mention his name to some of my friends of the Committee of Arrangement, and has made me all the promises to a reformed life, and that he will accept of a company, which I believe he will soon be able to fill. He certainly is brave, and a very strict officer, and is remarkable to keep his men in the best order. His connexions are great and very well attached to the American cause. From those motives I am chiefly induced to comply with Mr. Ten Eyck's request, to write you upon the subject, and leave it to the consideration of the Committee....¹⁹

Ten Eyck's lobbying worked, and he got his wish. New York's Committee of Arrangement resolved, on December 25, 1776, that Ten Eyck was appointed a captain in the new 1st New York, commanded by Col. Goose Van Schaick, his former commander from the old 2nd New York. The commission was back-dated to June 28, 1775, when he technically started, even though he was actually named captain on July 19, 1775. This gave Ten Eyck seniority within the New York Line. So, under the circumstances, it could not have gone any better for him.²⁰

About three months later, things turned around again for Ten Eyck. After receiving a letter from Capt. John Copp of the 2nd New York, the Committee of Arrangement passed a new resolution that sent Captain Copp to the 1st New York and removed Capt. Ten Eyck from the 1st to the 2nd Battalion and gave him command of its fifth company.²¹ There was no known explanation for this officer swap, but as it is likely that Colonel Van Schaick would have known of Ten Eyck's alcohol problems, one has to wonder if he did not want to deal with the issue and arranged it.



Washington and Lafayette at Valley Forge (Library of Congress)
– Courtesy of the *Journal of the American Revolution*

If this supposition is true, Van Schaick's concerns were valid. The unfortunate Ten Eyck once again drew the short straw. Instead of being stationed in the north with the 1st New York, near his home, the new 2nd New York, which was part of Enoch Poor's brigade of the first division of the main Continental Army, was sent to winter quarters at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania.²²

Ten Eyck was not with the regiment that long. On January 20, 1778, he wrote directly to General George Washington, Commander in Chief of the Army:

Sir,

As my Constitution has been so much impaired and Debilitated by the last three Campaigns so as to render me incapable of bearing the Fatigues of a fourth, I therefore in Justice to my Country and myself earnestly request your Excellency to discharge me from the duties of a Service which my health prevents me to perform—

Barent J. Teneyck Capt 2^d Battⁿ23

His request was endorsed by both Major Nicholas Fish and the regimental Paymaster.²⁴ It was approved, as records indicate Ten Eyck was out of the Continental Army on January 22, 1778. These records vary as to whether he resigned or was discharged,²⁵ but the above letter makes it clear he did resign.

Ten Eyck's promise to reform after being labeled a drunkard, in 1776, is a classic response. It suggests the accusation was correct. For him, being essentially trapped at the Valley Forge encampment had to have been a living hell. Short of committing suicide, resigning because he was "impaired and debilitated" was probably his only option.

It was a tragic end to a career of a very worthy and capable Continental Army officer.

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Notes:

¹ Massachusetts Committee of Safety to the Committee of Safety, Correspondence, and Protection of Albany, May 7, 1775, Peter Force, ed., *American Archives* (Washington, D.C., 1837-53), 4th Series, 2:523-524.

² Albany Committee to the New York Committee, May 12, 1775, Force, *American Archives*, 4th Series, 2:605-606. William Bell Clark, ed., *Naval Documents of the American Revolution* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1964), 1:320. Meeting Minutes, May 12, 1775, *Minutes of the Albany Committee of Correspondence 1775-1778* (Albany, NY: The University of the State of New York, 1923), 1:31.

³ Resolution of the Albany Committee of Safety, Correspondence, and Protection, June 21, 1775, *Minutes*, 1:95.

⁴ Berthold Fernow, ed., *Documents Relating to the Colonial History of the State of New York* (Albany, NY: Weed, Parsons and Co., 1853-1887), 15:13. *Minutes*, 1:120-121. Force, *American Archives*, 5th Series, 3:954.

⁵ The New York Line on the Continental Establishment of 1775, Fernow, *Documents*, 15:528. Meeting Minutes, October 13, 1775, *Minutes*, 1:269-272. Ten Eyck is also listed as replacing Peter Vrooman.

⁶ James Van Rensselaer, aide-de-camp, Handwritten general order dated November 15, 1776, *MacPherson, Quebec March, Miscellaneous Manuscripts, Montgomery, Richard*, New-York Historical Society Library, Manuscript Department, New York, NY. At Montreal, in order to continue the campaign onto Quebec, Brig. Gen. Richard Montgomery offers winter clothing to the troops willing to extend their enlistments six months until April 15, 1776.

⁷ Resolution of the Continental Congress, January 9, 1776, Worthington C. Ford, ed., *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1906), 4:43. Fernow, *Documents*, 15:46.

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- ⁸ Resolution of the Continental Congress, January 8, 1776, Ford, *Journals*, 4:40. Fernow, *Documents*, 15:45. Muster Roll of the Field, Staff, and other Commissioned Officers in Col. Goose Van Schaick's Battalion..., December 17, 1776, *Revolutionary War Rolls 1775-1783*, War Department Collection of Revolutionary War Records, Records Group 93, (Washington: National Archives Microfilm Publications, M246), Roll 77, Folio 163.
- ⁹ Resolution of the Continental Congress, January 8, 1776, Ford, *Journals*, 4:40. Fernow, *Documents*, 15:45. This resolution did not specifically name Nicholson.
- ¹⁰ Capt. Barent J. Ten Eyck, Company Muster Roll, February 8, 1776, New York State Library, Manuscripts and Special Collections, (N)M1524.
- ¹¹ General Schuyler's List of Officers who served in Canada last Campaign, February 28, 1776, *Calendar of Historical Manuscripts Relating to the War of the Revolution, in the Office of the Secretary of State* (Albany, N.Y.: Weed, Parsons and Company, 1898), 2:37. A List of Officers of the 4 Regiments raised by New York in 1775, now in Canada, as they rank, February 28, 1776, Fernow, *Documents*, 15:77.
- ¹² General Orders, March 26, 1776, Doyen Salsig, ed., *Parole: Quebec; Countersign: Ticonderoga, Second New Jersey Regimental Orderly Book, 1776* (Teaneck, NJ, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1980), 54-55.
- ¹³ Memo from Quebec Headquarters listing officers in Col. John Nicholson's Regiment, April 15, 1776, *Revolutionary War Rolls*, Roll 75, Folio 131. This document shows the alterations to the initial arrangement of officers in the regiment.
- ¹⁴ William Bell Clark, ed., *Naval Documents of the American Revolution* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1969), 4:1244. A common opinion is that Ten Eyck's schooner may have been the *Isabella*, which was one of the vessels under the command of Massachusetts's Brig. Gen. Oliver Prescott. Force, *American Archives*, 4th Series, 3:1693-1694. Frances B. Heitman, *Historical Register of Officers of the Continental Army During the War of the Revolution, April, 1775, to December, 1783, Reprint of the New, Revised, and Enlarged Edition of 1914, With Addenda by Robert H. Kelby, 1932* (Baltimore MD: Genealogical Publishing company, 1982), 451-452. In fact, Ensign Philip Ulmer, of the 25th Continental Regiment, after arriving in Canada following Montgomery's defeat, was detached to command that schooner. He states in his federal pension file that the *Isabella* had eight guns and he commanded it on the St. Lawrence and Sorel Rivers until the defeat in Canada. Thereafter, he returned to the army, where he received a 1st lieutenant's commission in the 1st Massachusetts Regiment in 1777. Pension application of Philip Ulmer (S.19963), (National Archives Microfilm Publication M804, Roll 2434), *Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty Land Warrant Application Files, 1800-1900*, Record Group 15, National Archives Building, Washington, DC. Heitman, *Historical Register of Officers*, 553.
- ¹⁵ Journals of HMS *Surprise* and HMS *Martin*, May 7, 1776, Bell, *Naval Documents*, 4:1432-1433.
- ¹⁶ Resolution of the New York Provincial Congress, January 19, 1776, Fernow, *Documents*, 15:47.
- ¹⁷ Rank of the Officers in the 5 N. Y. Continental Regiments in 1775, 1776, and 1777, *Calendar*, 2:51.
- ¹⁸ Minutes of Meeting of the Committee with General Schuyler & Lt. Col. Gansevoort at Saratoga, October 22, 1776, *Calendar*, 1:503. "Not provided for" meant that the officer was passed over and did not receive a current commission.
- ¹⁹ Jacob Cuyler to William Duer, December 14, 1776, Force, *American Archives*, 5th Series, 3:1221.
- ²⁰ *Calendar*, 2:8. Here, the "new" 1st New York was part of the newly formed 3rd Continental Army Establishment and "old" 2nd New York was part of the 1st Establishment. Rarely were officers, who missed time, given commissions back-dated to earlier service. Since the New York Line was started on June 28, 1775, this meant Ten Eyck now had seniority (barring rating within rank) as high as any New York captain could have.
- ²¹ Resolution of the Committee of Arrangement for the State of New York, March 17, 1777, *Calendar*, 2:10.
- ²² *Valley Forge Legacy, The Muster Roll Project*, last modified August 28, 2016, <http://valleyforagemusterroll.org/muster.asp>.
- ²³ Joseph Lee Boyle, *Writings from the Valley Forge Encampment* (Bowie, MD: Heritage Books, 2003), 4:36.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*
- ²⁵ Fernow, *Documents*, 15:191. Heitman, *Historical Register of Officers*, 536. List of officers erased from list on account of promotion, resignation, or death, *Calendar*, 2:43. Though undated, the list was in the book's 1777 section about the Arrangement of the New York Continentals.