

Walter Butler 1752 – 1781 was the eldest son of Colonel John Butler a Captain in the Butler's Rangers. Colonel John Butler was the founder and commander of Butler's Rangers a Loyalist in the provincial corps that operated out of Fort Niagara during the American Revolution. The Butler family was well known in the Mohawk Valley due to their long standing ties to the British Indian Department and relationships with the Six Nations, especially the Mohawk. Walter's mother Catherine Butler was the great granddaughter of two sisters that were of the Mohawk Turtle Clan – Ots-Toch married Jacques Cornelise Van Slyke and Kenutje married Arent Bradt.

Walter Butler was born in the Mohawk Valley near Caughnawaga/Fonda or the Johnson settlements. He was raised in a prominent frontier family closely tied to the British Indian Department. His father, Colonel John Butler, was one of Sir William Johnson's most trusted officers and the most powerful Loyalist in the region after Johnson's death. As a result young Walter grew up amid diplomacy with Mohawk and Six Nations leaders, military life, and an elite society of the valley.

Walter has been described as slender and athletic, accustomed to frontier travel. He was said to have been of medium height 5'7" to 5'9" typical for the era. He was of fair complexion, sharp features, dark piercing eyes with dark hair tied back in the Loyalist style.

Walter received a refined education for a frontier officer's son and studied law under the Johnson family's patronage. He had begun establishing himself in the profession before the Revolution disrupted his career. This legal background explains why early American authorities initially thought he would be valuable as an educated prisoner prior to his escape.

Walter was very close to the Johnson's, one of the wealthiest and most influential families in colonial New York. His father served as deputy to Sir William Johnson, Superintendent of Indian Affairs. Walter and his siblings (including his brother Thomas, my 3x's great grandfather) were raised in the Johnson social circle and were friends, allies and political partners of the Johnson children – particularly Sir John Johnson and Colonel Guy Johnson. These families shared business, land, military service and Loyalist political alignment. During the Revolution, Walter fought alongside the Johnson family Loyalist units. Walter was essentially part of the Johnsons' extended political and social network.

When the American Revolution began 1775-1776, the Butler family fled to British held territory. Walter joined his father on the Loyalist side and became an officer in the newly formed Butler's Rangers. Walter rose to Captain within Butler's Rangers and quickly gained a reputation for being bold, fierce and at times ruthless in frontier warfare.

During the 1777 campaign, Walter Butler was sent on a mission near Fort Stanwix (Fort Schuyler). He was captured by Continental forces. Initially sentenced as a spy, his execution was prevented due to British threats of retaliation. Instead he was jailed, but he escaped and returned to Fort Niagara, where he resumed command under his father. This escape added to his legend and, from the Patriot point of view, to his notoriety.

The Cherry Valley Massacre 1778 was the event for which Walter Butler became most infamous. In November 1778, Walter and the Mohawk war leader Joseph Brant led a mixed force of Rangers and Haudenosaunee warriors against the settlement at Cherry Valley, New York. The attack resulted in the deaths of many settlers, including women and children. Although historical accounts differ, American sources blamed Walter Butler personally for excessive brutality. His reputation among Patriots led to

him being one of the most hated Loyalists of the war. However some evidence suggests that control broke down among all fighters, and he probably didn't order civilian killings. Even British officials debated his responsibility.

Walter continued serving as a Ranger officer in raids throughout upstate New York. Between 1779 and 1781 campaigns included Mohawk Valley raids, frontier outposts, the defence of Fort Niagara and nearby settlements. He remained a key field commander under his father.

Walter Butler was killed on October 25, 1781 at the Battle of Johnstown in the Mohawk Valley. He was shot while attempting to retreat across the West Canada Creek. After being wounded, he reportedly pleaded for mercy, but an Oneida warrior loyal to the Americans killed him saying "Sherry Valley" - a reference to Cherry Valley. Whether this quote is literal or legendary is debated, but it became part of the folklore surrounding his death.

Walter Butler's legacy remains one of the most polarizing of the Loyalists. To the Loyalists he was a brave and daring officer, a key leader in frontier warfare and loyal to the Crown until his death. To the American Patriots he was remembered as a brutal figure associated with Cherry Valley. His name was linked with fear throughout the frontier.

Walter dying young and without surviving children, left no direct line, but his place in early Canadian Loyalist history is significant.

Walter was one of the most polarizing men on the frontier. Loyalist and British described him as intelligent and well educated, loyal to the Crown and family, determined, disciplined, brave, resourceful in wilderness warfare and charismatic with Indigenous allies. On the other hand the American Patriots described him as cruel, vengeful, hot tempered and fanatical in his Loyalist loyalty.

His reputation among Loyalists he was a brave, loyal and a wronged officer. A symbol of the frontier struggle. A soldier who died honourably in battle. His death was considered tragic and unjust. His reputation among the Patriots was he was demonized as a villain and brutal. Rebels used propaganda to stir up anger among the Patriots. His evil reputation among Americans was largely political.