

New Jersey's Revolutionary Rivalry: The Untold Story of Colonel Tye and Captain Huddy
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We now understand that the American Revolution was much more than a contest between the Continental and British armies. Across much of New Jersey, localities split between Patriots (they called themselves “Whigs”) and Tories (they called themselves “Loyalists”). Pre-war rifts—including those between slaveholders and enslaved—catalyzed irregular warfare. In no New Jersey locale was this local warfare as intense and long-lived as Monmouth County (which included present-day Ocean County). Two important figures in this local war were Captain Joshua Huddy, a strident Whig, and Titus (nicknamed “Colonel Tye”), a formerly enslaved man who became a successful Loyalist partisan.

Rick Geffken profiles these two men in *New Jersey's Revolutionary Rivalry: The Untold Story of Colonel Tye and Captain Huddy*. In so doing, Geffken provides an attractive platform for bringing localized civil warfare to life. Huddy's military record—which included a brave but doomed defense of Toms River against a larger Loyalist force—is juxtaposed with his disreputable domestic affairs and vigilantism. Less is known about Tye, but he was a Loyalist partisan at Sandy Hook who led a string of raids into Monmouth County at the head of a group of African American Loyalists known as the Black Brigade.

While there has been a temptation in recent years to cast Tye as a “freedom fighter,” Tye's record was as complicated as Huddy's. Loyalist raiders like Tye stole livestock and household possessions for a living. They practiced “man stealings,” kidnapping prominent men to be ransomed or used as bargaining chips in prisoner exchanges. As someone who escaped

from slavery, Tye's descent into burglary and kidnapping can be explained as counter-measures against cruel enslavers. But the raids of the Black Brigade escalated the cycle of retribution that climaxed in tit-for-tat murders at war's end.

Tye and Huddy collided in 1780 when Tye led a large raiding party to Huddy's tavern at Colts Neck. The raiders took Huddy after a spirited defense. Tye's men then plundered Huddy's livestock and possessions. The delay allowed local militia to assemble and harass the Loyalists on their retreat to Black Point (present day Rumson). Under fire, the Loyalists loaded themselves and their plunder into boats. While on one of those boats, Huddy was shot in the thigh but managed to swim to shore. Tye, shot in the wrist, died shortly after the chaotic withdrawal. There is much to admire in Geffken's research and narrative. Foremost, Geffken has unearthed a number of sources that have not been used by historians previously. His narrative of Huddy's life is by far the most complete and engrossing to date. Geffken also conclusively argues against the theory advanced by some historians that Tye left New Jersey for a time to join Lord Dunmore's ill-fated Ethiopian Brigade in Virginia. Finally, Geffken is also a strong storyteller who weaves diverse sources together in a narrative that is accessible to generalist readers and interesting to scholarly readers.

One shortcoming of *Revolutionary Rivals* particularly merits discussion. Geffken offers many details that are not supported by documentation. For example, Geffken writes that Tye and Huddy recognized "strong qualities in each other" (14) without evidence to support this assertion. He dots the narrative with rhetorical flourishes (such as Tye's mother counseling her son: "Hush now, this is just the way it is," 41) that are plausible but unsupported. Plausible but undocumented detail should be called out as such. If it is impractical to do this each time, fictional dabbling can be acknowledged in a blanket statement at the start of the book.

Geffken worries that readers may find his narration of Tye to be “audacious overreach,” but audacity is not the issue. A historian has a responsibility to tell readers if he is exercising poetic license. Without this admission, readers must guess at the author’s intentions and the book’s accuracy.

The rivalry at the heart of *Revolutionary Rivals* is hobbled by uneven documentation. Huddy’s scandalous domestic life and scandalized death are vastly better documented than anything about Tye. It is not Geffken’s fault, but readers of *Revolutionary Rivals* learn much more about Huddy than Tye. And while Tye and Huddy were indeed fierce rivals for one day in 1780, there is no reason to believe they were rivals on any other day. It could be reasonably argued that Huddy’s greater rival was Richard Lippincott, the vengeful Loyalist who hanged Huddy in 1782.

Even with imperfections that will invite finger wags from historians, *Revolutionary Rivals* is a laudable book redeemed by impressive research and a story that deserves telling.

Michael Adelberg