

## Excerpt from *The Adventures of Johann Carl Buettner (1828)*

Johann Carl Buettner was born in 1754 in Senftenberg on the eastern border of modern-day Germany. Upon completing his studies, he traveled to Amsterdam in search of an apprenticeship as a surgeon. There he was promised an opportunity on an America-bound ship, but upon boarding, he was taken prisoner and sold into bondage in Philadelphia as an indentured servant. After two attempts to run away from various masters, he joined the Continental Army. He was eventually captured by Hessians (Germans) serving on the British side.

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“I was persuaded to enter this volunteer corps, and although I was less concerned about the freedom of North America than about my own, and though I longed for my fatherland, still when I saw the great enthusiasm for the cause of freedom manifested in Philadelphia, I straightway forgot Germany and the plans for my own freedom, took service in Major Ortendorff’s corps and received my twenty dollars earnest money. While I remained in Philadelphia, one of the men of the corps was sent with a letter to my master requesting him to come to headquarters in order to make arrangements with the commander of the corps for my enlistment. My master, who, as I have mentioned before, was a lieutenant of the militia, was very happy on the following day when he saw me in the blue uniform with the green collar and cuffs, and wished me good luck in my new profession. However, he demanded that I pay him every month for twenty months one pound sterling out of my wages, and although I appreciated that he was asking far too much, I consented. As the corps of Ortendorff had reached the number of three hundred, we marched to join the Great North American army which was under the command of General Washington.

The service of this corps was very hard. As we received no tents, we were obliged to build huts for ourselves out of boughs. We had to serve as outposts for the main army, and were obliged to patrol all night long. We also had to forage for cattle to be slaughtered for the use of the soldiers. As a rule we took the cattle from the planters who remained loyal to the king. Although the United States were trying as hard as they could to free themselves from English rule, yet there were a few that did not favor the insurrection, and worked against the cause of liberty partly because they were born Englishmen, and partly on grounds of conscience. But they suffered often very keenly for their loyalty to the English government. To discover their attitude in this matter, usually six men went into their houses, pretended to be Hessians and asked questions about Washington’s army: how strong it was, where it was located at the present time, and such details. If these people seemed to be glad to see us, and gave us information about the North American army, soon the entire detachment entered and took possession of the plantation, drove away the cattle and often stripped the house. The duped people

then sincerely regretted their frankness, gazed with tears in their eyes after their cattle that we were driving away, and seeing the "U.S." on our powder pouches, realized too late that we were soldiers of the United States. Such matter occupied almost every night.

After I had served about six months in the corps of Ortendorff, I with six other men decided to desert to the English and Hessians, whose tents we could see in daytime not far from the camp...

A few days after this unsuccessful attempt to desert to the combined armies, we received orders to break camp. At daybreak we reached a mountain which was occupied by some thousand regular soldiers of the North American troops, who had with them a few cannon. Here we had command of the road that led to the mountain, which we saw covered with a multitude of soldiers, and the newly risen sun glittered on thousands of bayonets. This was a regiment of the English army with a vanguard formed of Hessian grenadiers. As soon as we came within range we fired our cannon at them. All at once, the endless marching line stood still, separated into divisions and, then disregarding our fire, charged down the mountain with fixed bayonets. When we saw that we were outnumbered and that resistance was hopeless, we abandoned our cannon and baggage and fled down the other side of the mountain. Many threw away their rifles and knapsacks, and ran like hares into the forest. I fell into a ditch and my comrades, leaving me there for dead, jumped over me. As the cannon balls and rifle bullets were falling all around me, and I was afraid of being run through by the enemy that were pursuing us, I crawled on my hands and knees to some thick undergrowth nearby and lay there until I could no longer hear any firing.

After this I arose and went up to the place on the mountain where the skirmish had started. Here I found the Hessian grenadiers in possession of the camp. When I was still twenty feet distant from them, the Colonel called to a petty officer: "There comes a rebel!" The petty officer approached me and led me to the Colonel, who addressed me with stern and threatening words: "Well, you urchin, where did you come from? You were not able to make your escape were you?" I answered that I had for a long time cherished the wish to be associated with my countrymen, and then I told him briefly all that had happened to me since my arrival in America. My story made a favorable impression on the Colonel and he ordered one of his orderlies to give me a glass of rum and some bread. At the same time he ordered me to remain in his batallion until it should go into winter quarters; also he promised that later on he would make some provision for my future."