

# The Spy and the "Guard" House

October 16,1777 through December 18,1777

Among the prisoners held by General Clinton's army was a convicted spy, Lt. Daniel Taylor, of Captain Stewart's Company of the 9<sup>th</sup> Royal Regiment. This was a unit of New York and Connecticut men who were loyal to the Crown and willing to fight the Americans. He had been captured at Little Brittan in southern Ulster County on October 10<sup>th</sup>, carrying a message from General Henry Clinton to General John Burgoyne. His job was that of "express" which meant that he was a trusted junior officer who traveled in civilian clothes on horseback carrying messages between various units of the British Army. An "express" was supposed to blend in with the civilian population.

When he entered Little Brittan, he was deceived by the red uniforms of General Clinton's Guard into thinking he had met an outpost of the British Army. Unfortunately, that was not true and he was captured. General Clinton later wrote that Taylor was seen to swallow something and administered him a very strong emetic, "calculated to work wither way. This had the desired effect; it brought it from him; but though close watched, he had the art to conceal it the second time... I demanded the ball on pain of being hung up instantly and cut open to search for it. This brought it forth. It was a small silver ball of an oval form, about the size of a fusee bullet and shut with a screw in the middle." Opened, the ball yielded a message written on tissue paper:

Fort Montgomery, October 8, 1777

"Nous y voici (I am here), and nothing now between us but Gates (American General Horatio Gates). I sincerely hope this little success of ours may facilitate your operations. In answer to your letter of the 28<sup>th</sup> of September by C.C. I shall only say, I cannot presume to order or even advise, for obvious reasons. I heartily wish you success.

Faithfully yours,  
Clinton

Under normal circumstances, "express" from either army were not considered spies of such a nature that their conviction would call for the death sentence. A popular Connecticut soldier names Nathan Hale was captured by the British a year earlier and hung as a spy. Lieutenant Taylor was tried in New Windsor by a Courts Martial composed largely of Connecticut officers and was condemned to be hung "at such time and place as the General shall direct."

The American troops, trying to reach and defend Kingston from the British, set out immediately from new Windsor and took Taylor with them. He had a long thin rope around his neck, which was coiled and carried after him by a soldier. On halting at Marbletown, he was held in a church. The evening of the 16<sup>th</sup>, Clinton issued an order that the hanging be carried out "when the troops are paraded and before they march tomorrow morning," probably to let his men see that someone was paying for the spiteful destruction of Kingston. But the sentence was not carried out the following morning. The troops moved on to Hurley on October 17<sup>th</sup>, where Taylor was held in the Dumond House, the "Spy House".

On the morning of October 18th, Lt. Taylor was moved by horse and wagon to the sweet apple tree on the side of Schoolhouse Lane, about halfway down the lane. The noose had been placed around his neck earlier. The loose end of the rope was run over a limb of the tree and tied to the trunk. Before the death sentence could be read and the wagon moved out from under him, Lt. Taylor fainted and died. His boots were given to the soldier who acted as a hangman, as was the custom. The body hung from the tree for a least two days, during which time all the units of General Clinton's Army were paraded by the body as a lesson to any British sympathizers among them as to what their fate would be if found out. The body was buried at the edge of the road. It was later removed by relatives and taken to a private burial location.

After leaving Kingston, the British fleet sailed upriver to Livingston Estate and remained a anchor there until the 23<sup>rd</sup> of October. On that date, the British force set sail to the south, passing Kingston without incident and on the 24<sup>th</sup>, rejoined the British forces at Fort Clinton. Once the British threat had passed, General Clinton left Hurley and moved his troops south to their original base at Little Brittan. Thus, for one brief week, Hurley was the center of the war effort for the continental forces in the mid-Hudson area.