

As far as can be ascertained, nearly all the members, except the commander, Major Ferguson, were native born Americans, and many were descendants of the earliest European settlers in New York and New Jersey, specially chosen for that service—loyalty, intelligence and skillful marksmanship being requisite. The officers were selected by Major Ferguson from Loyal American corps, and they selected only men from their own regiments, and carried with them chosen spirits from their own companies. All were veteran soldiers, and had been in the British service from the beginning of the Revolutionary war in loyal regiments.

Major Patrick Ferguson, the commander, was born in Scotland in 1744, and entered the British army at the age of fifteen. He was the inventor of the first breech-loading rifle used in the British army,\* and a distinguished soldier. At the commencement of the revolutionary war, the boasted skill of the American marksman directed Major Ferguson to the improvement of military fire-arms, and he designed certain plans for breech-loading and other improvements for which he obtained a patent in 1776. It was admitted, however, that some of the principles had been suggested before, but had never been seriously applied to purposes of public utility. Major Ferguson made some experiments at Woolwich, England, in 1776, and in 1777 returned to America and joined his regiment, the Seventy-first Highlanders, at Halifax, Nova Scotia. He was permitted to form a corps of riflemen out of volunteers from regular regiments serving in America; this corps was armed with breech-loading rifled carbines made under his directions. At the battle of Brandywine, September 11th, 1777, extended in front and supported by a corps of rangers,

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\* National Dictionary of Biography.