

The Irish Join the Fight for Freedom in America

The North Carolina Militia played a large role in defending the State of North Carolina against the British army, its soldiers enlisting for terms of three and six-months. In those days the demands of farming caused many patriots to enlist for three-month spans. Several years before the beginning of the Revolutionary War, James Conner left Antrim, Ireland with his parents. He was nineteen years old when he settled in Mecklenburg County. During August of 1775 he enlisted in the State Troops under the command of Captain George Davidson and regiment of Colonel Martin for six months.

It was autumn when they were ordered into South Carolina to suppress the Tories in the western part of the State and then to Cross Creek (Fayetteville) to suppress the Scotch Tories. He re-enlisted again during the summer of 1776 for three months and volunteered to go against the Cherokee Indians in the militia of Colonel Nixon under the command of General Rutherford. Again, during 1777 the call was made once again upon the militia of North Carolina to defend Charleston. The troops were marched to Camden where they spent the winter. Although James Conner was made sergeant during this period, once again, he missed action because his term ended.

During June of 1778 Conner went north in search for his only brother in America who was in the service of the Continental Army then encamped on the Raritan River in New Jersey. In July he was appointed a wagon master under Colonel Thompson (the wagon master General) and was attached to one of the armies of the New England Brigades.

The winter quarters were near Morristown, New Jersey. Conner was detached with a number of horses to New Canaan, Massachusetts. For the next campaign during the year of 1779 James Conner was attached to the Brigade of Light Infantry commanded by General Wayne where he

continued to act as wagon master for said Brigade and was a volunteer at the storming of Stoney Point. When the Brigade broke camp and marched to headquarters, it was met by Lord Stirling with a detachment of Continental troops marching towards Staten Island. Conner went with them for the purpose of attacking a British fort on the island but the patriots were repulsed and retreated. Upon his arrival at headquarters he was ordered to the South with the Virginia and North Carolina troops.

They caught up with a portion of the Virginians at Fredericksburg commanded by General Woodford, and Conner continued with that army until they arrived at the Yadkin River where he obtained a furlough for two weeks. Afterward the furlough, he set out to rejoin the army at Charleston and while traveling about 10 or 15 miles this side of Camden, met the baggage train and some of the Artillery retreating. The terrible news was that Charleston had fallen into the hands of the British! He returned home and took sick and remained too ill for duty until the latter part of the summer of the year 1780, but there were no Continental troops in that section to which he might attach himself.

Thus, upon the advice and request of Brigadier General William Lee Davidson (also a Colonel in the Continental Army but at that time commanding a Brigade of militia) he accepted the appointment of forage master and served a tour of duty in that capacity for three months, principally in Mecklenburg County. A part of the time Conner was with Colonel Morgan before being detached into South Carolina under General Nathaniel Greene. During the latter end of the year of 1780 there was another call upon the militia, this time to oppose the progress of Lord Cornwallis.

Once again, Conner volunteered and was appointed Brigade Quarter Master by General Davidson stationed at Beatties Ford to prevent the crossing of the British. However, as the main Army crossed the river about four miles below and were about to come after the rear guard, the patriots

retreated to the home of the widow Torrence where they attempted to make a stand. But they were surprised by the Light Dragoons under the command of the treacherous Banastre Tarleton, called "the butcher", and defeated.

They retreated to the Yadkin river where Conner helped get the military stores safely over the river, but were surprised again by the British advance guard. It was at that place that Conner lost his clothes and all of his papers, including his appointment into the Continental Army.