

An Eyewitness to the Surrender of Lord Cornwallis



The siege of Yorktown, Virginia commenced on October 17, 1781 when General George Washington led a force of 17,000 French and Continental troops against the British General Lord Charles Cornwallis.

Actually, Lord Cornwallis was outnumbered by some 7,000 troops. A brilliant stroke of strategy was his order rendered to Marquis de Lafayette to employ his army of 5,000 troops to block the escape of Lord Cornwallis. Meanwhile the French naval fleet blocked an escape by sea.

By the end of September, Washington had completely encircled Cornwallis and Yorktown with the combined forces of Continental and French troops and after three weeks of non-stop bombardment from cannon and artillery, Cornwallis surrendered to Washington in the field at Yorktown on October 17th. Pleading illness, Cornwallis did not attend the formal surrender ceremony held two days later. Instead, he employed his second in command, General Charles O'Hara, to carry the Cornwallis sword to the

American and French commanders. Among those many brave soldiers present at this occasion was Jesse Bryant of Wake County, North Carolina, who had originally substituted for another soldier in the 4th Virginia Regiment.

He served under Capt. John Watkins and Lt. Charles Judkins for sixteen months, later fighting at the battle of Petersburg before returning home and waiting to be recalled.

This time, he marched to Williamsburg near Little York under General Washington and fought in the battle of Yorktown. He saw first hand General Muhlenburg, Marquis de Lafayette, and the surrender of Lord Cornwallis. His rather descriptive pension application provided sufficient details to put together the part which Bryant played in helping to win freedom for the American colonies.