

## **Remarks for the Dedication of the American Memorial**

**at**

**Cooch's Bridge Battlefield, September 5, 2008**

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First I want to thank Bill Conley and the members of the Pencader Heritage Area Association for allowing me to speak on this occasion, and for recognizing the need for a commemoration of the Americans who fought September 3<sup>rd</sup> 1777 at the Battle of Cooch's Bridge or Iron Hill, as it is often referred to in the records.

At the distance of 231 years, it is nearly impossible to identify the names of all of the men who served in the Light Infantry Corps. Contributing to this difficulty are the temporary character of the Corps, the multi-state background of its personnel, and the fragmentary condition of the documentary record. What information we do have can be pieced together from dispatches and correspondence, muster rolls, pension records, diaries and memoirs.

The corps was formed by order of General Washington on August 28 – one week before the battle – and existed for about one month. During that brief period the corps fought at Cooch's Bridge (September 3), Brandywine (September 11), and at the aborted battle of the Clouds (September 16).

Under the command of Brigadier General William Maxwell of New Jersey, the corps was composed of officers, non-commissioned officers, and enlisted men drawn from each of the nine brigades serving with the main Continental army. Washington's order specified that for the light infantry to be successful the chosen men were to be experienced and dependable marksmen.

The Continental soldiers in the Light Corps came from the states of New Jersey, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Virginia. Added to their numbers were militia companies from New Castle County and Pennsylvania. All totaled the Light Corps numbered perhaps 800 men.

While we cannot know the names of all who fought here, we do know the identities of some. Officers included Colonel Alexander Martin of North Carolina, destined to be governor of that state; French and Indian War veteran Major Francis Gurney of Philadelphia, who was wounded at the battle, and later became a Trustee of Dickinson College; and Colonel William Heth of Virginia, who had already given his right eye at the battle of Quebec for the cause of American liberty. Colonel James Dunlap hailed from Carlisle Pennsylvania, and brought with him militia riflemen from that frontier part of the state. A young lieutenant, Derrick Lane of New Jersey, became a leading citizen and founder of Rensselaer County in New York. Perhaps the most noteworthy of all was Virginia Captain John Marshall, destined to become a Chief Justice of the United States.

Others who served at Cooch's Bridge did not survive the war, including Captain Jacob Turner of North Carolina, killed only a month later at Germantown; Virginian Lt. Colonel Richard Parker, who was killed during the siege of Charleston; and Virginia Captain Charles Porterfield, who lost his life at the battle of Camden in South Carolina.

The casualties at Cooch's Bridge are the men we know the least about. They lay beneath this battlefield somewhere, between today's village of Glasgow (known then as Aiken's Tavern) and the vicinity of the bridge. Buried by the British pioneers, their remains are unmarked, and we do not know if they are buried singly or in groups.

There were the unknown corporal and five men "killed by grapeshot" who died near the bridge. There was Ebenezer Carson of Pennsylvania, captured on September 3<sup>rd</sup> and still incarcerated in a New York prison over a year after the battle. There was William Honeyman of Pennsylvania, wounded in the chin and shoulder who continued to serve his country for the rest of the war in the Invalid Regiment in Philadelphia. There was Sergeant Richard Savage of New Jersey, who lost his arm in the fighting at Cooch's Bridge. And there was Archibald Dallas, a captain in Spencer's Additional Regiment, killed near the bridge and mill, and who left a young widow in Morris County, New Jersey. We can never know the accurate number of American casualties, partly due to the quality of the records and partly due to the passage of time, but it appears that battle of Cooch's Bridge claimed about two dozen lives and wounded countless more.

In our time the battle of Cooch's Bridge is often dismissed as a mere skirmish, a prologue to the more important engagements of Brandywine, Paoli, and Germantown. Judging by the pension applications, filed by aged veterans in their seventies and eighties, this conclusion is patently false. Like our WWII veterans, memories of the Revolutionary battles left deep and profound scars on survivors. Their own words, recorded in their pension files, speak to the magnitude of the fight on September 3<sup>rd</sup> 1777. Adjectives such as "severe", "bloody", and "sharp" punctuate their recollections, clear indicators that, for those that fought here, Cooch's Bridge was no mere skirmish. Even a British officer acknowledged the intensity of the fight, commenting that while many skirmishes were fought on the road to Philadelphia none were "considerable enough to deserve mention except the one at Iron Hill."

Perhaps there is no greater tribute to those who fought than the words of Virginian William Walker, a Revolutionary War veteran of the battle. In his 1832 pension application – when he was 75 years of age – he pointedly noted that historians had overlooked the battle, but, continuing with pride, he stated that the soldiers who fought there on September 3<sup>rd</sup> 1777 "...deserved well of their country."

Knowing the names of some of the men who fought and died here is important because it makes this commemoration personal, not an abstract remembrance of our colonial past. The names remind us that real people, with lives, families, and homes fought here. Some of them made the supreme sacrifice for their new country and to those individuals we owe a great debt. Our

dedication of this memorial to the American casualties at Cooch's Bridge, known and unknown, recognizes the sacrifices of those soldiers who gave their lives so that we can stand here today and do honor to their service.