

Southern Campaign American Revolution Pension Statements & Rosters

Petition of William Lee Davidson [Jr] NC20

Transcribed by Will Graves

6/7/11

[Methodology: Spelling, punctuation and/or grammar have been corrected in some instances for ease of reading and to facilitate searches of the database. Where the meaning is not compromised by adhering to the spelling, punctuation or grammar, no change has been made. Corrections or additional notes have been inserted within brackets or footnotes. Blanks appearing in the transcripts reflect blanks in the original. A bracketed question mark indicates that the word or words preceding it represent(s) a guess by me. Only materials pertinent to the military service of the veteran and to contemporary events have been transcribed. Affidavits that provide additional information on these events are included and genealogical information is abstracted, while standard, 'boilerplate' affidavits and attestations related solely to the application, and later nineteenth and twentieth century research requests for information have been omitted. I use speech recognition software to make all my transcriptions. Such software misinterprets my southern accent with unfortunate regularity and my poor proofreading fails to catch all misinterpretations. Also, dates or numbers which the software treats as numerals rather than words are not corrected: for example, the software transcribes "the eighth of June one thousand eighty six" as "the 8th of June 1786." Please call errors or omissions to my attention.]

Petition from William Lee Davidson concerning his father's military service in the Revolutionary War Davidson, William Lee, Volume 22, Pages 115-120, State Records of North Carolina

(Petition filed in 3d Auditor's Office.)

To the Honorable, the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States in Congress assembled—

The petition of William Lee Davidson sheweth to your Honorable bodies that he is the son and heir of General William Davidson who was a soldier of the Revolutionary War and served his country faithfully from the beginning of said war until he was killed at the battle of Cowan's Ford on the Catawba River, in the County of Mecklenburg in the State of North Carolina.

“When the Revolution broke out on the 22d of April, 1777, the State Congress at Halifax raised four additional regiments, to the two already in service. Of the 4th Regiment Thomas Polk was Colonel, James Thackston Lieutenant Colonel, and petitioner's father, William Davidson, Major. With this regiment, under General Francis Nash he marched to join the Army of the North, under General Washington, where he served until Nov, 1779, when the North Carolina line was ordered South to reinforce General Lincoln, at Charleston, S. Carolina. Previous to this your petitioners Father, Wm. Davidson had been promoted to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel in the line. As the troops passed through North Carolina Colonel Davidson obtained a furlough for a few days visit to his family which he had not seen for three years. This saved him from the fate that befell Lincoln at Charleston; for when he approached Charleston, he found it so closely beleaguered by the British Army, that he was prevented from joining his regiment. When Lincoln surrendered, your petitioner's Father returned to Mecklenburg and rendered important services in subduing the Tories, who, encouraged by the success of the British became numerous, daring and dangerous.

He raised a troop of volunteers and marched against them. At Colson's Mill he encountered a strong force of Tories, and a severe engagement took place in which petitioner's Father was severely wounded. A ball entered the umbilical region and passed through his body near the kidneys. This had nearly been fatal. He was confined for two months with this wound. On his recovery he took the field having been promoted for his bravery to a brigadier general in the place of General Rutherford, taken prisoner at Camden, S. C. He was active with General Sumner and Colonel Davie in checking the advance of the British, and throughout this dark period of our fortunes gave unceasing evidence of his untiring zeal in the cause of his Country.

After the brilliant affair of the Cowpens (17th Jan., 1781), in which General Morgan, with an inferior force, chastised the temerity and insolence of Colonel Tarleton, Genl. Davidson was most active in assembling the militia of his district to aid Genl. Green (who had on the east bank of the Catawba joined the light corps of Morgan) in impeding the advance of the enemy, and it was his fortune to guard the very ford at which Cornwallis attempted to pass. At the head of three hundred men, he took post at Cowan's Ford.

At day break on the 1st of February, 1781, the British Army under Cornwallis entered the waters of Catawba (then swollen by heavy rains) at Cowan's Ford. The morning was dark and rainy. The light infantry under Col. Hall entered first, followed by the grenadiers and the battalions. The picket of General Davidson challenged the enemy, receiving no reply, the guard fired. This turned out the whole force of General Davidson, who kept up a galling fire from the bank. The guide of the British alarmed at the firing, turned about and left them. This caused an unexpected diversion of the enemy from the expected landing of the force, and Col. Hall led them directly across. Col. Hall was killed as he ascended the bank. Lord Cornwallis's horse was shot in the river and fell as he reached the bank; three privates killed, and thirty-six British wounded.

Petitioner's father, General Davidson, in riding from the point where he expected the enemy to the point where they landed, was shot; the ball passed through his heart and he fell dead from his horse. "Your petitioner further sheweth to your Honorable bodies that in consideration of the gallant services of his Father in the defence of his country—the Congress of the United States, in 1781, passed the following resolution—"Resolved, That the Governor and Council of the State of North Carolina be desired to erect a monument at the expense of the United States not exceeding in value of five hundred dollars, to the memory of the late Brigadier General Davidson who commanded the militia of the District of Salisbury in the State of North Carolina and was killed on the first of February fighting gallantly for the defense of the liberty and independence of these States."

That petitioner's Father entered the service of his Country at the commencement of the Revolutionary War and continued in active service until his death at Cowan's Ford¹—a period of more than five years, serving part of the time as Lieutenant-Colonel and part as Brigadier General.

Your Petitioner has been informed that his said Father, Genl. Davidson was entitled to seven years half pay, by a resolution of Congress passed the 24th of August, 1780, and 21st of October, 1780, and having died or been killed in service his children are entitled to whatever may be due.

State of North Carolina, Office of Secretary of State.

I, William Hill, Secretary of State, in and for the State of North Carolina do hereby certify that it appears from the muster rolls of the Continental Line of this State in the Revolutionary War, that William Davidson entered the service in said line as a Major in the 4th Regiment on the 15th day of April, 1776, that he was a Lt. Colo. on the 4th of Octr, 1777, in the 5th Regiment, and of the 1st Regiment in 1779. Retired from the Continental service on the 1st of Jan'y, 1781.

Given under my hand this 30th day of Jan'y, 1856.

S/ W. Hill, Secretary of State

S. 512. UNITED STATES.

January, 21, 1857.—Ordered to be printed.

Mr. Evans made the following
REPORT.

[To accompany bill S. 512.]

The Committee on Revolutionary Claims, to whom was referred the petition of William L. Davidson, heir of General William Davidson, deceased, having had the same under consideration, report:

That the history of the military services of the father of the petitioner is fully set forth in Wheeler's History of North Carolina, and in the Journals of Congress from 1775 to 1781. He was a member of the Mecklenburg convention, which, in May, 1775, made the first declaration of independence which emanated from the American people.

After the battle of Lexington when it became manifest that the difficulties between the colonies and Great Britain were to be decided by the sword, the convention of North Carolina raised six battalions for the common defence, and tendered their services to Congress. Of the 4th battalion, Thomas Polk was appointed Colonel, James Thackston lieutenant colonel, and William Davidson major. These appointments were made by the Congress of the United colonies, on the recommendation of the convention of North Carolina, on the 7th of May, 1776. The North Carolina troops were marched to the North, under General Nash, to reinforce the army under the command of General Washington.

In this arduous service he remained until November, 1779, when the North Carolina troops were ordered to reinforce General Lincoln in South Carolina. In the meantime Major Davidson had been promoted to the rank of lieutenant colonel.

As the troops passed through North Carolina, he obtained leave of absence for a short time to visit his family, whom he had not seen since he left them to join the northern army. It is stated in the petition, and there is no reason to doubt the fact, that when his furlough expired, he immediately repaired to Charleston to join his regiment; but when he arrived in the neighborhood, he found the city so closely beleaguered that it was impossible for him to go in.

When Charleston capitulated, in May, 1780, his regiment were made prisoners of war, and he, being out of active employment, repaired to Mecklenburg, his native county, and raised a volunteer corps for the purpose of keeping in subjection the tories, who were numerous in that part of North Carolina and the adjoining parts of South Carolina. In this service he was actively engaged until after Gates' defeat in August, 1780. In this battle General Rutherford, who commanded the militia of the Salisbury division, was taken prisoner, and his command was conferred by the government of North Carolina upon Colonel Davidson, who thus became a brigadier of militia, retaining at the same time his rank in the continental army, ready to resume his command when his regiment should be exchanged or again recruited.

In January, 1781, whilst General Greene was retreating through North Carolina, pursued by a superior force of the enemy under Lord Cornwallis, it became of great importance to retard the march of the enemy as much as possible, and to enable the American general to cross the Yadkin before he could be overtaken. To this end Colonel Davidson, by the order of General Greene, posted his command, consisting of 300 militia, at Cowan's ford, on the Catawba river, which it was supposed was one of the passes by which the enemy would attempt to cross that river. This conjecture proved to be correct.

On the morning of the 1st of February, 1781, the enemy, in large force, appeared on the opposite side of the river. Their passage was resisted with great vigor and courage, and was effected at a heavy loss; but in the conflict the American commander was killed. In consideration of his gallant conduct, Congress, on the 20th day of September, 1781, passed a resolution requesting the Governor and council of North Carolina to erect a monument, at the expense of the United States, not exceeding in value \$500, to the memory of the late General Davidson, who commanded the militia of the district of Salisbury, in the State of North Carolina, and was killed on the 1 Feb., 1781, fighting gallantly for the defence of the liberty and independence of these States.

Under these circumstances, the petitioner claims for himself, and the other children of Colonel Davidson, the seven years' half-pay, to which they conceive themselves entitled under the resolution of Congress of the 24th of August, 1780, which is in these words: "Resolved, That the resolution of the 15th day of May, 1778, granting half-pay for seven years to the officers of the army who should continue in the service to the end of the war, be extended to the widows of those officers who have died, or shall hereafter die in the service, to commence from the time of such officer's death." A subsequent part of the same resolution gives the allowance to the orphan children of the deceased officer, in case there be no widow or she should afterwards marry. From the facts herein stated, there is no doubt that, in consequence of the death of General Davidson, his widow, if he left one, and if none, his children, who were then orphans, were entitled to the seven years' half-pay."

He was one of those who were entitled to the seven years' half-pay under the resolution of the 15th of May, 1778, and he was afterwards killed in battle acting under the orders of Major General Greene. His command of the militia, and bearing the commission of a major general of the militia, could not change the legality of the claim of his family, under the resolution of the 24th of August, 1780.

The committee, therefore, report a bill to pay to the petitioner, W. L. Davidson, for himself and the other children of his father, the half pay of a lieutenant colonel of infantry for seven years. They are not orphans now, but they were at the death of their father. If they did not receive it then, they are entitled now. Such has been the uniform construction of the resolution, as appears from many acts passed within the last thirty years.