

My patriot, William Baird, was born on January 26, 1758 in Path Valley, Cumberland County, Pennsylvania. His military service with the Cumberland County militia resulted in his involvement in an infamous battle near the Crooked Billet tavern which is near the present day town of Hatboro, Pennsylvania.

The Pennsylvania militia had been under the command of Brigadier General James Potter, but as Potter was currently on leave, now was under the command of Brigadier General John Lacey-aged 23. General Washington and his troops were still in winter quarters in Valley Forge, and the Pennsylvania militia was tasked with disrupting the British supply chain between Philadelphia and New York City-both occupied by the British. Washington was not happy with Lacey's performance, and hoped Potter would soon return to his command.

On April 27, 1778, one of Lacey's patrols was attacked by a British patrol in the area, and they informed British General Howe of the American unit's location. Howe ordered John Simcoe and Robert Abercromby to "secure the country and facilitate the inhabitants bringing their produce to market." The British were currently paying farmers with gold. On April 30, 1778 Simcoe and Abercromby led their troops (850 strong) towards Crooked Billet.

That evening the American commander, Lacey, ordered Lt. William Neilsen to begin a patrol between 2:00-3:00 am and keep a brigade on alert for attack. Neilsen failed to follow the orders, and left camp on patrol shortly before dawn where they sighted the rapidly approaching British unit. Unable to warn their fellow troops, the American troops (300-500 strong) were surprised and outnumbered.

The militia was routed, 26 were killed, 8 wounded, and 58 were captured, including my patriot, William Baird. Only 7 British soldiers were wounded and they confiscated ten wagons of supplies. The militia retreated into Bucks County where Lt. Neilsen was court-martialed, and Lacey was relieved of his command. Potter returned to command the unit.

The captured Americans were taken to New Jersey and confined to a stone barn until 15 of the prisoners (Baird included) dug under a wall and escaped. After the war, William Baird was awarded 400 acres on the waters of Buffalo Creek, Virginia (present day Bethany, West Virginia). In 1789, Baird married Nancy Moore, and in 1814 they relocated to Brown County, Ohio, near the present day town of Russellville.

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