

Pension Application for William Nelles or Nellis

S.5825

Declaration in order to obtain the benefit of the Act of Congress passed June 7th 1832.

State of Pennsylvania

County of Venango SS

On this twenty fifth day of August personally appeared in open court before the Hon. Henry Shippen president and the Hon. John Levins and Thomas McKee associates of the Court of Common Pleas now sitting and holding a court of Common Pleas in and for the County of Venango, William Nellis a resident of the County of Venango and State of Pennsylvania aged seventy two years who being first duly sworn according to law doth on his oath make the following declaration in order to attain the benefit of the act of Congress passed June 7th 1832.

That he entered the service of the United States under the following named officers, and served as herein stated.

In the month of May or June, he cannot distinctly recollect which of the year 1778, he was, to the best of his knowledge and belief enlisted in the State of New York in a company called "Rangers" and that the term of service he understood to be during the war, that he entered the service under Captain John Wyn, or (Wynd) who commanded the company of Rangers, that at the time of his enlistment he was a resident of Montgomery County in the State of New York, that when he was enlisted he was informed the enlistment of the soldiers was for the purpose of raising some companies of Rangers of which there were three raised, and which were to be stationed on the frontiers of the State of New York, the states that "in war to find our own guns and clothes" which we did and were to get one dollar per day.

After the company to which I belonged Captain John Wyn's was formed, its first place of rendezvous was at fry's Mill on the Mohawk river in the County of Montgomery in the State of New York. From thence we marched to the foot of Otsego Lake at which place the company was stationed and remained there during the summer and fall and most of the winter of 1778-1779.

Our constant employment was in traversing the frontier and along the Mohawk River in scouting parties watching for the Indians and the British from Canada. Every day eight men were sent out as scouts and sometimes we were out for several days at a time. I was frequently on those excursions.

In the month of March 1779 as near as I can recollect we were marched to a place called Sacondaga in the state of New York at which place there were many tories, and it was feared the enemy might get into the settlements by their means. At this place we remained during the spring and summer of 1779 and part of the fall of that year, engaged in watching the frontiers; about the time the cold weather set in the fall we were marched back again to the foot of Otsego Lake. We were constantly employed here in scouting parties as we had been the summer and fall preceding at Otsego.

Whilst at Sacondaga our Captain killed one of our men whose name was Weaver. He was arrested and tried by what was called a committee, composed of several justices of the peace, but was released, and as usual restored the command of

the company—Nothing of importance occurred during this or the preceding summer. Sometime after we returned to Otsego Lake the Captain received orders at last so we were informed to dismiss the company from service.

The other two companies had the same orders—We as well as the other two companies were dismissed sometime in the month of December of the year 1779. The snow was pretty deep on the ground at the time we were discharged. My discharge was written and signed by the captain but has been lost or destroyed a long time ago.

We had no colonel or Major and was commanded entirely by the captain. The whole three of the companies were called Rangers, one of the other companies was commanded, I recollect, by Captain Christian Getman, the captain of the other company is not now recollected by me, neither can I recollect by what names the places were called at which they were stationed. I always understood that our captain received his general orders from General Washington—I may be mistaken in using the word “enlisted” but thinks it is what it was called and understood to be by the men.

After we were discharged, I returned home to my father’s in Montgomery in the State of New York and remained at home until some time in the month of February in the year 1780. I was enlisted or called into the service the term of service was to be for one year. The company to which I belonged [?] in Albany our captains name was Young, we were marched down the Hudson river to Fishkill, which we did pretty much all the way on the ice.

When arrived at Fishkill we were all set to work. I understood something about the carpenter business and was set to work to assist in building a topsail Schooner at Fishkill creek. In this way I was employed during the summer. In the latter part of August or beginning of September we launched the schooner, we rigged her and sailed up the river to a place called at that time Sopas, we then got a load of provisions for the Army and returned with it to Newburg. About this time, being sometime in the month of September, whilst the schooner was lying or running just above West Point we saw Benedict Arnold leave West Point in a [?] and make his escape down the river. We did not ruin his intentions. I recollect well of seeing him—Major Andrew I think [???) taken the day before as I [?] understood. I saw him a day or two or perhaps the same day of Arnold’s escape in Poughkeepsie jail. I was retained on board the schooner until sometime in the latter part of January of the year 1781 at which time I got a discharge which is also lost or destroyed and I returned once more to my father’s who lived near Fort Plain in Montgomery County—

The company to which I belonged when in [?] arrived at Fishkill were drilled and the roll called twice a day. Then we were ask to work, this continued until the company got scattered by being sent in different directions to work. One Majors name also Young. His [baptismal?] name I don’t recollect. I always understood that we belonged, during this year, to the quarter master’s department. I remained at home during the latter part of the winter.

In the month of April 1781 I was drafted to serve for a nine months tour in the New York troops, our Captains name was Lawrence Gross and our company belonged to Colonel Willett’s Regiment. I think the Colonel’s baptismal name was Greenswyk.

The Regiments first rendezvous was at Fort Plain in Montgomery County in the State of New York. This place was [?] quarters. About a month after we were stationed at Fort Plain, doing service on the frontier as a Ranger, I was taken from my company by Colonel Willett to serve as a spy.

I was sent out once would remain out sometimes a week or more at a time. At one time about the beginning of June I think I was out between the head waters of Bowman's creek and Canajoharie, when I fell on a trail of Indians and followed it to the [?]. I then returned and gave information to the Colonel. Three companies were marched out, I acting as pilot to the place the Indians had encamped. Colonel Willett was along and commanded. The Indians having ascertained that we were coming came out a short distance to meet us. They had taken off green bushes and stuck in the ground and were in ambush behind them. When we discovered this we stopped to consult about advancing when the Indians [?] upon us—we then attacked them and had a pretty sharp skirmish but drove them from the ground and from their incompenest—We found three Indians killed but I had reason to believe many more were killed and carried off during the engagement—Some of our men were wounded and two of them died afterwards of their wounds. After the engagement we returned to Fort Plain –

About five or six weeks after this I was sent as a spy in the neighborhood of Canajoharie and fell on another trail of a party of British and Indians. The appeared to be going in the direction of a German Settlement called Turlock Settlement. After following sometime until I got pretty near them, I returned to fort Plain about sundown. I informed Colonel Willett of what I had discovered and told him I thought there was five or six hundred of them. Our Regiment amounting to about seven hundred men were immediately ordered to march –

We took the Turlock road and marched all night. After day break in the morning we fell on the trail where they had crossed the road—after following this about a mile we came on their encampment. Our point guard fired on the camp and retreated took to the main body of the army. The enemy consisting of about three hundred British soldiers, I think they were called Sir John Johnstons [Johnson] green coats and about two hundred Indians, pursued the guard. Colonel Willett had formed a line and was ready to receive them. The battle commenced very briskly, the Indians were principally on the left wing of our line in which part I was—Colonel Willett was engaged principally with the British. The Indians after some time left us and made a general attack on the right wing which consisted of Captain McKean's company of Infantry. He was separated a little distance from the main body of the army. The battle became very hot in that quarter. We at last drove the British from the ground and hurried on to the assistance of Captain McKean where we were ordered we found all his men killed but two who were both slightly wounded one of them in mouth and the other had lost part of his ear. We now drove the enemy certainly from the field. Captain McKean was on the ground mortally wounded and died in about six hours afterwards. He found from thirty to forty of the enemy principally British on the ground –we were afterwards informed that a place was discovered near the battle

ground in which were buried between forty and fifty Indians—which were carried off as they fell during the battle. About one hundred of our men were killed which we buried in the ground and a number were wounded. The battle lasted between two and three hours. We carried Captain McKean back to Fort Plain and buried him there. This engagement went by the name of Turlock battle.

The army returned to Fort Plain and continued there without anything very material until the first of January 1782. During all the winter part of the season I was constantly engaged as a spy and frequently had little contacts by myself in the woods with small & scouting parties of Indians. On the first of January 1782 we were all discharged, my discharge has long since been lost once I returned home once more. In the spring following the Indians and Dutch beginning depredations again there was in the month of April 1782 a call made on each company of Militia to permit a certain number of men to serve for nine months, the companies were divided into classes, and each class had to provide a man. The class to which I belonged gave me [The next pages do not follow this deposition. Some of the papers in the National Archive didn't survive the neglect and mice which attacked the papers stored.]