

# **Fort Frederick, the Maryland Rifle Regiment, and Joseph Neale: A Personal Reflection**

By Joe Wagner

There are three stories to be told here I suppose. It started out to be a history of Fort Frederick Maryland during its early days in the French & Indian War. But this historic site ties in closely with two other subjects worthy of being passed along - the Maryland Rifle Regiment and my great (five times) grandfather Joseph Neale.

The reenacting community and 18<sup>th</sup> century aficionados generally have been going to Ft. Frederick for decades. Over the years, the activities held there have changed but it is the perfect venue for doing so many things. They hold an annual 18<sup>th</sup> century trade fair and for many years they have allowed reenactors to stay in their recreated barracks and conduct live fire on their ranges, including cannon. However, an interest in the history of the Fort presents some problems. The Maryland Park Rangers will tell you parts of the story, and there are things to learn in the Welcome Center and from the Civilian Conservation Corps museum located in front of the Fort. But if you are looking for a comprehensive narrative that begins in 1755, when construction began, and carries through at least the Revolutionary War, you need to do a lot of literary digging. There is no complete narrative that I am aware of, but research in the Maryland Archives Online, among other sources, has produced a general outline of the Fort Frederick story for its first 25 years.

The second and third stories to be told here concern the fact that Fort Frederick was once home to the Maryland & Virginia Rifle Regiment, better known in its later incarnation as the Maryland Rifle Corps., and the fact that my 5<sup>th</sup> generation grandfather, Joseph Neale, was recruited into that unit while it was based at the Fort in 1778.

## **Story One – Fort Frederick**

The Fort, sited on the frontier border of Maryland at the Potomac River, just south of the Pennsylvania line, was funded and built by the Colonial government of Maryland to provide a haven and defensive position against the French and their Indian allies in the opening phases of the French & Indian War. A \$6,000 appropriation by the Maryland Legislature in 1755 resulted in construction of the large stone structure that still stands on the site. It served as logistical support and travel waypoint to Fort Cumberland, MD, about 50 miles further west, which in turn served as a supply base and jumping off point for forces moving against the French and Indians in western Pennsylvania and the Ohio country. The Fort was named for Frederick Calvert, 6<sup>th</sup> Lord Baltimore, proprietor of the Colony. Between completion of construction in 1756 and the end of the F&I War in 1763, the Fort served as a defensive post and safe haven, manned by Maryland forces or militia, as well as a link in the westward movement of forces against Fort Duquesne in 1758. Emphasizing the importance of the post at the time, the Royal Governor of Maryland, Horatio Sharpe, spent much of 1758 at the Fort coordinating the defenses of

the Colony, and supporting the movement of English and colonial forces and supplies towards now West Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Ohio territory held by the French and their Indian allies. Fort Frederick was the meeting place for militia and royal colonial forces from Virginia, Pennsylvania, as well as Maryland, and provided a refuge for friendly Indians seeking help and protection from the French and their Indian allies. During this period, based on supply orders and correspondence dealing with militia call-ups, it appears that typical manning of the Fort, apart from transient troops, was in the neighborhood of a company or two – perhaps 100 to 150 men. By 1761-62, with the capture of Fort Duquesne and securing of the immediate frontier, the status of the Fort gradually fell, although it continued to serve its original purpose as a refuge for the local inhabitants –

*“What was then only feared has since come to pass for there have been two or three persons killed in the Western Part of Frederick County & the People who had settled beyond Fort Frederick retired thereupon to that place for Shelter, but as some Parties of Militia & Volunteers were sent out to range on the Frontiers & Colonel Bouquet marched with six hundred men to reinforce the Garrison at Pittsburg which the Indians were said to have invested, the Terror that our Frontier Inhabitants were in on the first Alarm is I understand pretty well over tho in prudence I think the people who lived beyond Fort Frederick where the Plantations are so far distant from each other that they could not give one another Assistance, ought not to return to their Habitations untill the Indians are reduced”*

Gov. Sharpe to Lord Calvert. August 1763.

Between 1763, the end of the F&I War, and the American Revolution, the Fort largely stood unmanned, and based on an order for \$570 for wall repairs in 1777-78, had been partly demolished in the intervening years. The impetus for the renewal of the defenses was the decision in early 1778 to send some 800 British soldiers captured at the Battle of Saratoga (the Convention Army) from Charlottesville, VA to the Fort as prisoners. The man put in charge of preparing for this new mission was Colonel Moses Rawlings, late of the Maryland & Virginia Rifle Regiment.

## **Story Two – The Maryland and Virginia Rifle Regiment**

The Continental Congress directed the organization of the Maryland and Virginia Rifle Regiment in resolves dated 17 and 27 June 1776. The unit comprised three independent Continental rifle companies that had formed in Maryland and Virginia in mid-1775, and six new companies—two from Maryland and four from Virginia. The three 1775 companies were raised and initially commanded by Capts. Michael Cresap, Thomas Price, and Hugh Stephenson. The nine-company force became a rifle regiment on the same table of organization as the 1st Continental Regiment (originally the Pennsylvania Rifle Regiment). However, unlike the Pennsylvania unit, the Maryland and Virginia Rifle Regiment was an extra-continental unit - it was not part of a state line organization because of its two-state composition. The Maryland and Virginia Rifle Regiment’s field

officers were drawn from members of the original three 1775 companies based on their seniority—Hugh Stephenson became the Colonel, Marylander Moses Rawlings the Lieutenant Colonel, and Otho Holland Williams the Major. All company officers were appointed in the summer of 1776, and subsequent recruiting for the unit in the two states extended to the end of the year.

By early November 1776 most of the unit's officers and enlisted men had joined Washington's Main Army while it was engaged in the battle for New York City. They were initially stationed at Fort Washington on Manhattan Island and nearby Fort Lee on the opposite side of the Hudson River. On November 16th, when the British assaulted Fort Washington, most of the regiment was captured or killed. Lieutenant Colonel Moses Rawlings was in command of the Regiment at that time because Colonel Stephenson had died of illness in August and had not been replaced. Approximately two companies from the unit were on detached service and thus not captured

Just over a year later, in early 1778, Lt. Col. Rawlings and some of his men were exchanged from British captivity. He returned to Maryland and at the direction of the Maryland Council, assumed command of the soon-to-be prisoner-of-war camp at Fort Frederick, Maryland, as well resuming command of the remaining elements of his old unit, the Maryland and Virginia Rifle Regiment. The intent was that Col Rawlings would prepare the Fort, and using his troops as guards, receive the incoming British prisoners. In the late spring of 1778, Rawlings began marshalling his Regiment (mostly returning prisoners of war) and recruiting new members from Maryland, creating a guard force for the British Convention Army prisoners that were being sent to Fort Frederick. Among his officers were old hands from the Rifle Regiment, including Captain Thomas Beall, who was serving as his adjutant, and to whom he entrusted the buildup of supplies and equipment for his rejuvenated unit.

*“Ordered that:*

*the Treasurer pay to Captain Thomas Beall five hundred and sixteen pounds, seven shillings and six pence to be expended in the purchase of Blankets for the use of Col. Rawlings's Regiment to be charged to the Continent.*

*the Commissary of Stores deliver to Capt Thomas Beall 25 Coats, 25 Jackets, and 25 pr Breeches of Cloth for use of Col Rawlings's Regiment.*

*the gentleman who has the care of the public lead in Montgomery County is requested to deliver to Capt Thomas Beall for the use of Col Rawlings's Regiment 100 pounds Lead taking & transmitting to this Board the Capt's Receipt that the same may be charged to the Continent.”*

Maryland Council Journal - Friday, September 11<sup>th</sup>, 1778

The wording “charged to the Continent” reflects the policy of the period that while the colony was responsible for outfitting its troops, the ultimate bill-payer was intended to be

the Continental Congress. There are many other entries in the Maryland archives attesting to the rebuilding of the unit by transfers of weapons, ammunition, and other materials during the summer of 1778. Of some note is the fact that “arms” are identified as such and were ordered in case lots, indicating that the “Rifle Regiment” was henceforth armed with smoothbores. Likely most had lost their rifles, if indeed they still had them at the time, in the battle at Fort Washington, and that new recruits to the now prison-guard unit were musket-armed.

While Col. Rawlings was getting his unit together, the Continental Congress was in the process of changing his orders. The assignment of the rebuilt Rifle Regiment was changed from Fort Frederick prison guards to that of active troops. The orders authorized the rebuilding Maryland and Virginia Rifle Regiment to be consolidated into three full-strength companies, and reassigned from Fort Frederick to Fort Pitt, PA, the headquarters of the Continental Army’s Western Department. They would serve as reinforcement to the Pennsylvania and Virginia regiments already there. Despite the orders to the Regiment for its new mission, the state of Virginia had already reassigned its remaining portion (a single company) of the scattered rifle unit to serve as an adjunct to the 11<sup>th</sup> Virginia Regiment. Therefore, Rawlings’ Fort Frederick force in the summer of 1778 now consisted almost solely of Marylanders and was thenceforward identified as the “Maryland Rifle Regiment” or “Maryland Rifle Corps” during its service on the western frontier. Because no unit-redesignation orders accompanied the reorganization orders, the unit’s formal name remained the Maryland and Virginia Rifle Regiment despite being essentially all Marylanders, and probably not armed with many rifles.

After completing the roster of the three companies totaling just over 120 men, Rawlings’ unit made the journey from Fort Frederick to Fort Pitt sometime between November 1778 and March of 1779. Rawlings did not accompany his men, however, as he had resigned his position as Commander and chosen to remain at Fort Frederick as Commandant of the prisoners, with the additional duty of Deputy Commissary of Prisoners for Maryland. The Maryland Rifle Regiment, now commanded by the senior Captain Thomas Beall, joined the 8<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania and 9<sup>th</sup> (formerly 13<sup>th</sup>) Virginia Regiments as garrison at Fort Pitt. Their arrival date at Fort Pitt from Fort Frederick is not certain, but based on the following, no later than April 1779.

*“Ordered that the Treasurer pay to Col Moses Rawlings . . . the sum of one thousand pounds to be expended in the Purchase of Stores for the Use of the Officers in the Rifle Regiment they being on detached Service at Fort Pitt.”*

Maryland Council Journal - Friday April 16<sup>th</sup>, 1779

From mid-1779 until late 1780, the Maryland Rifle Regiment was primarily deployed in detachments at several of the frontier outposts in the general vicinity of Fort Pitt, including Fort Laurens, Fort McIntosh, and Fort Henry (Wheeling) in what is now eastern Ohio, western Pennsylvania, and northernmost West Virginia. They participated in several forays against Indians in the Ohio territory to the west and north, including a

major raid in August and September 1779 by a force of 600 continentals against Indian villages at the headwaters of the Allegheny River. The unit was finally disbanded as part of a consolidation of the Continental Line and returned from Fort Pitt in the latter half of 1781.

### Story Three – Private Joseph Neale

Joseph Neale was a native of Charles County, Maryland. He was born about 1750, and before the War, lived on 165 acres in the Mattawomen Creek area that was bequeathed to him by his father in 1766, and after the War, in the southern part of the county, near Cobb Island. He was the great, great grandson of one of the founding families of Maryland, that of Captain James Neale, who had arrived in the colony in 1635. Joseph Neale was about 28 years old in 1778 when he enlisted in the Maryland & Virginia Rifle Regiment. As noted above, the Regiment was rebuilt at Fort Frederick from a combination of released prisoners of war, the return of members from the detached companies, and a smattering of new recruits. It is likely that Joseph Neale was one of the latter, as there is no record of his being a part of the original unit prior to the capture at Fort Washington, and the following narrative may well represent his enlistment:

*“I hereby certify that there are at present under my command at Pittsburg four Sergeants and fifty privates of the Maryland part of the Regiment lately commanded by Col. Moses Rawlings and who were in the Service of the United States before May in the Year 1779. This is to certify that Nathaniel Beall Magruder was a vollentear in Col. Rawlings Ridgement in November Seventy Six and was taken prisoner at Fort Washington and in sevent eight joind said ridgement at Fort Frederick. **Col Rawlings then furnished Mr. Magruder with cash and promised him if hed inlist twenty men he wood indiver to git him a commision. Mr Magruder inlisted twenty five men in November Seventy Eight.** I was sent to Philadelphia for clothing. Col Rawlings requested I wood mentin it to the Board of War sertified as above. The Bord then requested me to let Col. Rawlings know Mr. Magruder shood have a insigns Commision in said Ridgment and not to make any more promises. Col. Rawlings then appointed Mr. Magruder as Insign in said Ridgement and has been mustered and received pay as such ever since.*

Thomas Beall, Capt. Commandt. to the Maryland Council of Safety  
February 10, 1780

Aside from the relevant information on Joseph Neale’s likely recruitment, this correspondence offers up a host of interesting observations. Recall the order for 25 sets of uniform clothing dated September 11<sup>th</sup> of 1778 noted above – for the new recruits. Was Nathaniel Beall Magruder a cousin or other relation to Captain Thomas Beall? The Board of War apparently was not enamored with promises to him of a commission for recruiting.

The last entry in the history of the Maryland Rifle Corps and Private Joseph Neale dates to July 1781. The muster role of the Maryland Corps prepared by J. Crawford, Lt., Adjutant, 8<sup>th</sup> Pennsa. Regt. on July 3<sup>rd</sup>, and signed by Jno. Gibson, Colonel, Comdt, Fort Pitt, on July 13<sup>th</sup> 1781, reports that Captain Thomas Beall has gone home (August 1780), that the unit is commanded by Adamson Tannehill, Captain, and consists of six Serjeants, four Corporals, four fife and drums, and forty-six Privates, of whom three have deserted. Not among the deserters, still on duty at Fort Pitt, and enlisted for the duration of the war, is shown one Joseph Neale. He probably returned to Maryland with the unit in the latter half of 1781, where they mustered out of service sometime towards the end of that year, likely as a result of the Yorktown victory. Joseph Neale went home to his farm and his wife Ann Adderton Neale and his children, of whom the youngest was named Ursula, my great, great, great grandmother.

Muster Roll of the Maryland Corps in the Service of the U. States,  
 Commanded by Captain Thomas Beall for the Months of Jan., Feb.,  
 March, April, May, June, July, Aug., Sept. and Oct. 1780.

Commissd. Thomas Beall, absent. Dismissed the Service Aug. 14th, 1780.\*  
 \* Adamson Tannehill, Capt., April 1st, 1778.  
 \* Elijah Evans, Lieut., Aug. 8th, 1776, absent.

RANK.	NAMES.	TIME OF SERVICE.	REMARKS.
Serjt.	Joseph Jeanes	War	
"	Basil Shaw	"	
"	George Twinch	"	Appd. April 25th, '80
"	Jonathan Weden	"	Aug. 10th, '80
"	Wm. Batten	"	Reduced June 22nd, '80
"	Benj. Burch	"	
Corpl.	Elisha Cockindall	"	Appd. Apl. 10th '80
"	John Brown	"	" May 1st, 80
"	Thomas Horsfield	"	
"	Loudon Trotter	"	
Drum.	George Twinch	"	Prom'd. Apl. 25th, '80
& Pife.	Jno. McBryde	"	
"	Thos. Lovely	"	Absent with leave
"	Danl. Howe	"	
Privates	James Denniston	"	
	Patrick Quinn	"	
	Henry Dennis	"	
	Saml. Martin	3 yrs	Absent
	Elisha Cockindall	War	
	Patrick O'Harra	"	Deserted July 1st, '80
	John Stacks	"	
	Thomas McKinsy	"	
	Dennis Carty	"	
	James Kilty	"	On Command
	Jacob Aitzil	"	
	Edward Kirk	"	
	John Jordon	"	
	Roderick McKinney	"	
	Jonathan Weeden	"	Promoted Aug. 10th, '80
	William Hart	"	Absent
	John Riley	"	
	John Brown	"	Promoted May 1st, '80
	John McKann	3 yrs	Dischd. May 3rd, '80
	James Cunnigham	War	Joined July 15th, '80, absent

\* Pennsylvania Archives, Vol. XI, Second Series, page 602.

RANK.	NAMES.	TIME OF SERVICE.	REMARKS.
Privates	Jonathan Shepherd	War	
	Thomas Craigg	"	
	Wm. Beatty	"	
	Richard Hoggins	"	
	Nehemiah Lanham	"	
	George Parker	"	
	Wm. Marlow	"	
	John Burk	"	
	Wm. Wilson	"	
	Levy Davis	"	Deserted Aug. 20th, '80
	Jacob Palmer	"	
	Francis Dewist	"	
	John Gordon	"	
	Robert Pyrth	"	
	Kilbreth Wilson	"	
	Thomas Fleming	"	
	John Treviss	"	
	Wm. Tayler	"	
	Jacob Adams	"	On Command
	John Gratsinger	"	
	Thomas Hill	"	
	Joseph Neale	"	
	Wm. Jarmey	"	Deserted Sept. 30th, '80
	Zachariah Berry	"	On Command
	Pierce Deacon	"	
	James Dowden	"	

Pittsburgh July 3th, 1781. Then Mustered the Mary'd. Corps as Specified in the Above Roll.

J. Crawford, Lt. & Adj. 8th Pennsa. Regt.

I do Swear that the within Muster Roll is a true State of the three Companies of the Mary'd. Corps without fraud to the United States or any Individual According to the best of my Knowledge.

Sworn before me this 13th day of July, 1781.

Before me

Jno. Gibson, Col. Comdt. F. Pitt.