

## JOSEPH KERR--"THE CRIPPLE SPY"

Joseph Kerr was born in Chester county, Pa., Nov. 3rd, 1750. At an early age moved with his parents to North Carolina, and settled in Mecklenburg county. He was a cripple from infancy, but becoming indignant at the ravages of the British and Tories, and actuated with a true, patriotic spirit, he repaired to the camp of Gen. McDowell and offered his services as a spy. In this capacity Gen. McDowell accepted him, and immediately sent him to Blackstock's Ford, on Tiger River, S.C., where the British and Tories were encamped, about fifteen hundred strong. After secreting his horse he proceeded as a poor cripple, and beggar-like, made a full examination of the enemy's camp. Furnished with this information, he quietly withdrew, returned quickly as possible to General McDowell, and apprised him and Captain

Steen of his discoveries. He was well mounted, and traveled day and night--a distance of ninety miles. General McDowell's forces, upon this intelligence, marched in great haste, attacked the enemy near Blackstock's Ford, and routed them. In this engagement four of Captain Steen's men were killed and seven wounded. He took no prisoners and gave no quarters. Kerr then returned to Mecklenburg county, and soon after joined Colonel Williams' command as a spy. Captain Steen informed Colonel Williams that he might safely rely upon Kerr in this kind of service. They then marched to join the over-mountain boys, under Sevier, Shelby and other officers. Upon the junction of their forces, a council of war was immediately held, at which Kerr was present. They learned that Ferguson was about twenty miles from them, at Peter Quinn's old place, six miles from King's Mountain. The result of the council of war was that he (Kerr) should go and reconnoiter Ferguson's camp. He did so without delay, and found the British and Tories encamped--arms stacked, and about twelve hundred strong.

As a poor, innocent cripple, they informed him they were ready and willing to give "protection" to all who would join them. He soon afterwards withdrew, mounted his fleet charger, and in a brief space of time reported to Colonels Shelby, Sevier and other officers the enemy's strength and situation. Acting upon his report, these officers marched that night a distance of twenty-seven miles, and reached the mountain on the next day, about three o'clock. After a brief consultation as to the plan of the engagement, Ferguson was vigorously attacked on his boasted eminence of security, and, after a fierce conflict of about one hour, was completely conquered. Ferguson and two hundred and twenty-five of his men were killed; one hundred and eighty

wounded, and upwards of six hundred made prisoners. The loss of the Whigs was twenty-eight killed and a great many wounded. Colonel Williams was severely wounded in the groin, from the effects of which he died a few hours after the battle. In a few days after this victory, Kerr returned to Mecklenburg county, to the house of his uncle, Joseph Kerr. The brave Captain Steen was afterwards killed by the Tories. He was from Union county, S.C., and not far from "Thicketty Mountain," in the district known as Ninety-six.

At the instance of Captain Barnett, in command of some refugees who returned

with him to Mecklenburg, Kerr was sent to York county, S.C., to gain information of the enemy's force and position. His crippled condition readily gained him access to the camp of Colonel Floyd and Major Hook--the latter in charge of the dragoons. He was recognized by some of the Tories, and came very near losing his life. He managed, however, to escape, and traveled all night in order to inform Captain Barnett of the enemy's strength. Captain Barnett immediately set out with thirty-one men, and uniting with Captains Bratton and McLure, completely surprised and routed the enemy, killing ninety-seven, among the number Major Hook and Colonel Ferguson, of the Tory militia. This was Kerr's last service as a spy. After the war he moved to Tennessee, and died in White county, at a good old age.

Source: Sketches of Western North Carolina, Historical and Biographical  
by Author: C. L. Hunter