

The universal respect and reverence felt by the whole American army for the Commander-in chief was amusingly displayed in an adventure related by Col. Dabney, which occurred during that anxious night. Captain John Overton of Louisa, a brave soldier to whom my uncle was warmly attached, was on that day in the detachment commended by General Charles Lee, which had been pushed forward by General Washington for the purpose of amusing the enemy, and keeping him in check until the main American army could come up. This corps having been defeated and driven back in confusion before the principal conflict began, it so happened that Captain Overton, much to his mortification, was prevented from participating in the general battle. After night-fall Col. Dabney heard some one calling his name in a loud tone, and soon ascertained that it was Captain Overton, who having lain all day several miles in the rear, had ventured under cover of the darkness into the American camp, and was now anxious to learn the particulars of the engagement. For this purpose he proposed to his old comrade that they should spend the night together under a neighboring apple tree. As they proceeded to carry this arrangement into effect, Captain Overton talking with much vociferation, they were stopped by a sentinel, who warned them in a whisper, that they were approaching the bivouac of the Commander-in-chief. Captain Overton instantly sunk his voice to the very lowest tone, and continued to observe the same caution till they had retired to such a distance as to preclude the possibility of disturbing the repose of their beloved Commander.

Col. Dabney fully sustained, from his own recollections of the battle, and of the statements of his brother officers, the charge of misconduct and disobedience of orders, of which General Lee was subsequeently convicted by the sentence of a court martial. He was decidedly of the opinion that Lee was an ambitious, disappointed man, impatient at all times of subordination, and particularly chagrined that Washington, his inferior, as his vanity suggested, in military fame and experience, should have been elevated to the chief command of the American forces in preference to himself....

That my uncle acted on all occasions with courage and conduct, and was always exact and punctual in the discharge of his military duties, is demonstrated by the fact that he was afterwards regularly promoted to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel¹, which title he held at the close of the war.

Col. Dabney continued to share the fortunes and hardships of the Northern Army until that veteran force, in conjunction with the French, terminated the arduous struggle by that glorious consummation of their toils -- the capitulation at Yorktown.² He took part, under the command of General Wayne, in that brilliant exploit -- the storming of Stony Point -- one of the most daring and hazardous enterprises undertaken during the war. It was indeed a bold conception to propose an assault on a whole garrisoned fortress with the bayonet alone even under cover of night; but the gallant execution of the scheme well justified the confidence of its author in the bravery and steadiness of the American troops. I have heard my uncle, in his vivid description of this great achievement, mention as a specimen of the horrors of war, the painful impression made on his feelings by the agonies of a British officer, who had his thigh broken in the first onset, and in that condition was repeatedly trampled on by the combatants in the fury of the melee.

¹ In the army records in Washington he is recorded as Lieutenant-Colonel until the end of the war, when he was promoted to the rank of Colonel.

² An exact copy of the Articles of Capitulation found among Colonel Dabney's papers, now in the Virginia Historical Society Library, indicates that he took part in carrying out the surrender.