



Beaufort County 250 Committee
Revolutionary Era Biographies

Colonel Edward Barnwell
Commander
Beaufort District Militia

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SC250
ANNIVERSARY
American Revolution

BEAUFORT COUNTY
SOUTH CAROLINA

Beaufort County 250 Committee Biographical Sketch
Colonel Edward Barnwell
Commander - Beaufort District Militia

Edward Barnwell, who was a Lieutenant Colonel commanding in the Militia of South Carolina in the War of the Revolution. entered the service at age 18 in June 1775. Immediately after the breaking out of the war in the North and the levying of an army in South Carolina by the provincial Congress, his commission was among the first issued.

Edward entered the service as First or Second Lieutenant in the SC Provincials under the command of Colonel Stephen Bull, who was sent in March 1776 to Georgia by the Charleston safety committee to assist the Council of Safety of Georgia in “quelling some alarms and disaffections, around Savannah and Purysburgh.”

He was acting as First Lieutenant in the company of Cavalry, commanded by his brother, Captain John Barnwell, when they routed the British on Port Royal Island early in February 1779, and he served until May 20 1779 with the same company , which had been raised in Beaufort and the surrounding area. The Company, then under the orders of Captain James Doharty from Bear Island on Mackeys Creek, was surprised by the British in the dead of night at the Mathews plantation on John’s Island, near Charleston. The British in the area had been alerted prior to the attack by the traitorous Loyalist, Thomas Fenwick, who owned the plantation adjacent to Mathews.

Another officer, “Leacross” (John Leaycraft, a nephew of Doharty from HHI) was in command of the post at the time of the surprise. A severe fight ensued, when Edward’s younger brother Robert Barnwell, only sixteen years of age. who was also serving with the Americans, received seventeen bayonet wounds after he had offered his surrender to a British NCO. Robert was taken off the field by the Negro Harry, body servant of Edward Barnwell, to his Aunt’s house nearby where he eventually recovered. The rest of the party was either killed or captured and were taken to Charleston, and confined aboard the prison ship *Packhorse*, then lying at anchor in the harbor of that City. Robert returned to service after his recovery but was captured when Charleston surrendered in May 1780 and was imprisoned on the *Packhorse*.

Edward and his uncles, John and Robert Barnwell, were among those 129 prisoners on the *Packhorse* who, fearing for their lives on board the *Packhorse*, signed the request to General Nathaniel Greene to rescind his threat of retaliation against British

officers for the hanging of Patriot Col Isaac Hayne for treason for the violation of his parole.

When an exchange of prisoners was ordered by General Clinton prior to the evacuation of Charleston by the British, which did not occur until 14 Dec 1782, the schooner *Packhorse* was ordered to New York for the exchange. Off the coast of North Carolina, a favorable incident occurred which allowed Edward Barnwell and his companions, thirty-five in number, to rise upon the guard, take possession of the ship, and run the vessel into Halifax North Carolina where they jumped ship and escaped into the forest nearby.

After many hardships, the thirty-six men made their way through the pine barrens of North Carolina to their homes in the Beaufort District, arriving in a very destitute condition. Soon after his return, Edward was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel, and continued serving in arms against the enemy until the close of the war.

Edward returned to the public service soon after reaching home, but, during the War of 1812 with Great Britain, he held a Captain's commission in the staff of Gen John A Cuthbert, who rose to command the 2nd Brigade in this section of the State. Cuthbert appointed him to command the Beaufort Regiment towards the close of the war and it was in this command that he acquired the title of Colonel, by which he was afterwards known, until the time of his death.