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“To Keep Up the Spirits of the People and Alarm the Enemy”: Sumter’s Rounds in South Carolina

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By early 1781 the Revolutionary War in South Carolina should have been over. South Carolina was controlled by British troops in Charlestown and in numerous outposts under Lieutenant Colonel Francis, Lord Rawdon. Patriots’ hopes rested largely on South Carolina militia generals Francis Marion and Thomas Sumter. Although Sumter was suffering from a bullet wound received two months earlier, between February 16 and March 9, 1781 he led 280 volunteers in attacks on several British outposts in a campaign they called “the rounds.” Sumter’s Rounds failed to capture any outposts, but it was by no means a failure.



Figure 1. Gen. Thomas Sumter (1734-1832) and Lt. Col. Francis, Lord Rawdon (1754-1826).¹

¹ Sumter portrait by Rembrandt Peale; Rawdon portrait by Martin Archer Shee. Each painted about 20 years after the war.

A War of Posts

After Charlestown surrendered on May 12, 1780, most of the Continental Army of the South were prisoners, and militiamen were paroled on condition that they not aid the Patriot cause unless exchanged.² The British soon established outposts throughout the state (Fig. 2), and in early June conquering Gen. Sir Henry Clinton confidently returned to New York, leaving Lt. Gen. Charles, Lord Cornwallis in command with orders to hold South Carolina. Yet not all was going well for the British. Clinton had left South Carolina with a proclamation that “it is become unnecessary that such paroles should be any longer observed; and proper that all persons should take an active part in settling and securing His Majesty’s government.”³ This perceived abrogation of the terms of surrender led men to choose to fight for one side or the other. A second British blunder was brutal treatment of rebels, most notoriously at the Battle of the Waxhaws by Lt. Col. Banastre Tarleton’s Legion on May 29. It is often stated that on his way to Waxhaws Tarleton detached troops who destroyed Sumter’s home and mistreated his wife, Mary.⁴

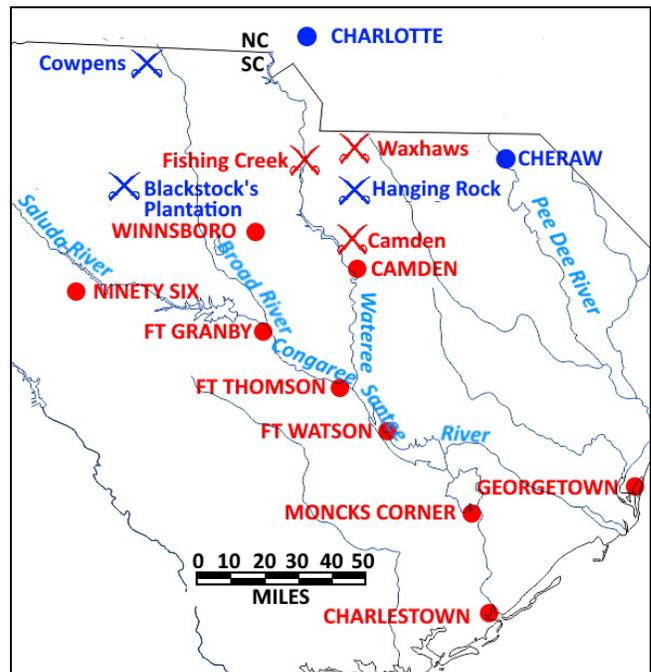


Figure 2. Outline map of South Carolina showing locations of some British posts and battles in late 1780 and early 1781. American posts and victories are shown in blue; British in red. In this and other maps in this paper, north is toward the top.

² For concise descriptions of the surrender of Charlestown and other actions mentioned in this paper, see the following: Patrick O’Kelley, *Nothing but Blood and Slaughter* (hereafter *NBBS*), Vols. 2 and 3. (Lillington, NC: Booklocker.com, 2004, 2005). John C. Parker, Jr., *Parker’s Guide to the Revolutionary War in South Carolina*, 4th ed. (Columbia, SC: Harrelson Press, 2022); and J. D. Lewis, carolana.com. https://www.carolana.com/SC/Revolution/SC_Revolutionary_War_Known_Battles_Skirmishes.htm.

There are two standard biographies of Sumter: Anne King Gregorie, *Thomas Sumter* (Columbia, SC: R. L. Bryan Co., 1931) and Robert D. Bass, *Gamecock: The Life and Campaigns of Thomas Sumter* (Orangeburg, SC: Sandlapper, 1961). For brief biography of Francis, Lord Rawdon, see J. D. Lewis, “Francis, Lord Rawdon – Colonel,” https://www.carolana.com/SC/Revolution/british_army_fran_cis_rawdon.html and Todd W. Braisted, “Top Ten Quotes by Francis Lord Rawdon,” *Journal of the American Revolution* (June 30, 2022) <https://allthingsliberty.com/2022/06/top-ten-quotes-by-francis-lord-rawdon>.

³ In Banastre Tarleton, *A History of the Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, in the Southern Provinces of North America*, (London: T. Cadell, 1787), 73-74.

⁴ The first mention of such an event appears to have been by William Dobein James, *A Sketch of the Life of Brig. Gen. Francis Marion*, first published in 1821. James stated simply, “The American cause appeared to be lost; but, on this expedition, Tarleton burnt the house of Gen. Sumter, near Stateburgh, and roused the spirit of the lion.” Bass in *Gamecock*, 51-52, added many details but gave no source. According to Bass, the detachment was under Capt. Charles Campbell of the 71st Regiment, but Ian Saberton, ed., *The Cornwallis Papers* (hereafter *CP*) 6 vols., (East Sussex: Naval & Military Press, 2010), 1:227 has noted that no part of the 71st Regiment was with Tarleton at the time. Tarleton, who was not shy about burning other Patriots’ homes, did not mention such an event in correspondence with his superior officers or in his *History*. What little is known about Mary Sumter is summarized in the text box below, based on notes by Lyman Copeland Draper’s Sumter Papers 9VV22, and on Joseph S. Ames, “Cantey Family,” *South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine* 11, no. 4 (Oct. 1910), 234-235.

Little is known about Thomas Sumter's wife, Mary, the daughter of Joseph and Mary Cantey. Some time before 1762 she married William Jameson, who had acquired large tracts of land north of Santee River. He died in 1766, leaving no children and Mary a wealthy widow. She apparently married Thomas Sumter about a year later and gave birth to Thomas Sumter, Jr. on August 30, 1768. Another child, Mary, is mentioned in a 1771 will, but she apparently died young. Mary Cantey Jameson Sumter died on October 24, 1817, according to the stone marking her grave in the family plot in Stateburg. That stone also states that she was born in 1723, which, if correct, means that she was 11 years older than Thomas, Sr. and gave birth to Thomas, Jr. at age 45.

It is hard to understand why Tarleton would have taken time in his rapid march to Waxhaws to single out Sumter for harsh treatment. Forty-six-year-old Sumter was retired from active military duty after a respectable but not extraordinary service. He had been aide-de-camp in the Snow Campaign of December 1775 and colonel of a rifle regiment in the Cherokee campaign of 1776. His regiment became part of the Continental Line in 1776, but by then there was little fighting in South Carolina for the next three years. He was elected to the Provincial Congress, which later became the General Assembly. On September 3, 1778, following a campaign to Florida troubled by petty bickering, failure of logistics, and conflicting commands, he resigned his commission as colonel in order to attend to private affairs, and he took no part in the defense of Charleston in the spring of 1780.

⁵ Joseph McJunkin, transcribed by Will Graves. "McJunkin's Narrative: Draper MSS, Sumter Papers 23VV153-203," *Southern Campaigns of the American Revolution* 2, No. 11.1 (November 2005), 39. <http://www.southern-campaigns.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/v2n11.pdf>.

If Tarleton's men did burn Sumter's home and mistreat his wife it might explain his subsequent zeal in the Patriot cause. Sumter once more took up the sword and recruited a few hundred militiamen to maintain an armed resistance to the British. On August 6, 1780, his militia defeated British and Loyalists at the Battle of Hanging Rock. Sumter's satisfaction was muted, however. "We had got a great victory," he is quoted as saying, "but it will scarcely ever be heard of, because we are nothing but a handful of raw militia, but if we had been commanded by a Continental officer, it would have sounded loud to our honor."⁵ Ten days later at the Battle of Camden, Cornwallis and Rawdon defeated a new southern army under Gen. Horatio Gates, and two days after that Tarleton's Legion surprised and routed Sumter's troops at Fishing Creek.

In spite of his defeat at Fishing Creek, Sumter persisted, and on November 20 he defeated Tarleton at Blackstock's Plantation.⁶ Three days later Cornwallis paid Sumter the compliment of calling him "the greatest plague in this country."⁷ At Blackstock's Sumter suffered a bullet wound to the right shoulder that would keep him out of action for two months and trouble him for the rest of the war.⁸ (Appendix A) In the meantime Marion and other partisan leaders found relatively easy targets among the British posts, which were too dispersed for mutual support and tied up large number of regular and Loyalist troops to maintain lines of supply and communications. Relatively small bands of rebels could interdict supply trains and messengers and capture men, supplies, and money. On the day after Sumter's defeat at Fishing Creek militias from both Carolinas and Georgia beat Loyalist militiamen and British provincials at Musgrove's Mill. In September and October of 1780 Lt. Col. Francis Marion's partisans struck

⁶ C. Leon Harris, "Blackstock's Plantation, November 20, 1780: A Revolutionary War Battlefield in the South Carolina Backcountry," <https://www.academia.edu>.

⁷ Cornwallis to Tarleton, Nov. 23, 1780, in Tarleton, 203.

⁸ Sumter to Gates, Nov. 25, 1780, in the Horatio Gates Papers, New-York Historical Society, New York City; Ann King Gregorie, *Thomas Sumter*, 112-113.

successfully at Loyalist militias posted at Blue Savannah, Black Mingo Creek, and Tearcoat Swamp in the eastern part of the state.

Thomas Sumter (1734-1832) and Francis Marion (1732-1795) had much in common. Both were veterans of the Cherokee War of 1758-1761 (part of the French and Indian War), Sumter in Virginia and Marion in South Carolina. Both were elected Delegates to the 1st South Carolina Provincial Congress and held command positions in the South Carolina Continental Line.

In February 1776 Thomas Sumter was appointed colonel to command the 6th South Carolina Regiment, which was eventually placed on the Continental establishment.

In 1775 Francis Marion was appointed a captain in the 2nd South Carolina Regiment commanded by Col. William Moultrie. After working his way up the ranks, Marion was appointed Lt. Col. Commandant of the regiment in January 1779.

Because of their experience and native abilities, each was chosen by their militias as their leader. The choice was made official by Governor-in-exile John Rutledge, who commissioned them brigadier generals of South Carolina militia—Sumter in October 1780 and Marion in December 1780.

“Whet Up Your Sword”

In early December Gen. Nathanael Greene replaced Gates in command of the Southern army. While Sumter was recuperating at the home of John Price near Charlotte, North Carolina, Greene came to encourage his return to action to maintain the rebellion in South Carolina until the Southern

army was sufficiently recovered from the Camden defeat.⁹ Being from Rhode Island and never having fought in the South, Greene needed someone like Sumter who understood the terrain and could mobilize the people. Greene had intelligence that Cornwallis would soon leave South Carolina and march through North Carolina to invade Virginia, drawing Greene’s army out of South Carolina but leaving the British outposts vulnerable to attack by Sumter and other partisans.

I have good intelligence this morning both from Congress and Europe, that this State and Virginia are to be the great objects of British vengeance this winter and Spring. Great exertions are necessary to counteract them. You will therefore whet up your sword, to be in readiness to take the field as soon as your wound is healed.¹⁰

Greene wrote from his camp near Cheraw on Pee Dee River on January 8, 1781, that as soon as Sumter had recovered, he was to assemble troops to join Gen. Daniel Morgan. “Your influence in bringing them out is not only necessary, but the means you have of obtaining intelligence is not less important,” Greene wrote.¹¹ Greene, eight years younger and less experienced than Sumter, then offered advice that Sumter may have taken as patronizing:

When I was with you, your soul was full of enterprise. The salvation of this Country don’t depend upon little strokes; nor should this great business of establishing a permanent army be neglected to pursue them. Partizan strokes in war are like the garnish of a table, they give splendor to the Army and reputation to the Officers, but they afford no substantial national security.

Greene went on with an implied rebuke of Sumter for paying his men in plunder and seeking glory.

⁹ Richard K. Showman and Dennis M. Conrad, eds., *The Papers of General Nathanael Greene* (hereafter *PNG*), (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 7:96-97.

¹⁰ Nathanael Greene to Thomas Sumter, Dec. 15, 1780, *PNG*, 6:581.

¹¹ Greene to Sumter, Jan. 8, 1781. *PNG*, 7:74.

Plunder and depredation prevails so in every quarter I am not a little apprehensive all this Country will be laid waste. Most people appear to be in pursuit of private gain or personal glory. I persuade myself though you may set a just value upon reputation, your soul is filled with a more noble ambition.¹²

Sumter continued to provide intelligence to Greene, but it took him three weeks to respond politely to Greene's criticism. By then Morgan had defeated Tarleton at the Battle of Cowpens on January 17 and was retreating northward.

I am happy to know, that the service for which you most Immediately wanted me, is no longer needfull, & Gen'l Morgan has fortunately relieved you from your apprehensions for his safety, by defeating Coll. Tarleton, a circumstance of great consequence, upon which I must beg leave, more heartily to congratulate you.... When I had the Honour of a conference with [you], if I discovered [displayed] any injudicious thirst for enterprise, private gain, or personal Glory, I am sorry for it, and shall be doubly Mortified to find that my endeavours, together with the Good people of South Carolina, have not tended the least Degree to promoted the Publick Good.¹³

Morgan had captured some 600 prisoners at Cowpens, many of whom were regular British soldiers that Cornwallis could ill afford to lose. Instead of waiting for reinforcements to arrive at his Hillhouse Plantation camp 28 miles southeast of Cowpens, Cornwallis destroyed much of his baggage to race after Morgan. Greene moved his troops from Cheraw into North Carolina to reinforce Morgan, keeping just ahead of Cornwallis and luring him farther from his supply lines. On February 3, in spite of being in a tactical

retreat from Cornwallis, Greene took the time to soothe Sumter's hurt feelings:

When I had the pleasure of an interview with you I discovered nothing mercenary or illiberal in your disposition. On the contrary I was charmed with the spirit of enterprise which I flatter'd myself wou'd be no less beneficial to your Country than honorable to your self. I Still entertain the same sentiments; and I can assure you I shall be equally happy in an opportunity to do justice to your merit as to Gen'l Morgans. In what respect General Morgans command embarrassed you I am at a loss to Imagine.¹⁴

Apparently during the interview Sumter had expressed displeasure with Morgan, possibly because Morgan had given orders to Col. William Hill, who was under Sumter's own command. In a letter to Greene on January 15, Morgan complained that he had ordered his commissary to call on Col. Hill to furnish a number of men to assist in foraging, but Morgan was told by the commissary that "General Sumpter directed [Hill] to obey no orders from me, unless they came through him." Greene replied to Morgan that he was surprised and thought there must have been some mistake, "for tho' it is the most military to convey orders through the principal to the dependants... yet this may not always be convenient or even practicable, and therefore to give a positive order not to obey, was repugnant to reason and common sense."¹⁵ Sumter's embarrassment may have been heightened by Morgan's defeat of Tarleton. Although Sumter must have been happy about Tarleton's defeat, he must also have realized that the victory at Cowpens under a Continental general would eclipse his own earlier defeat of Tarleton. Sumter's victory at Blackstock's Plantation may have been essential to Morgan's victory at

¹² Greene to Sumter, Jan. 8, 1781. *PNG*, 7:75. For different interpretations of relations between Greene and Sumter, see Edward McCrady, *The History of South Carolina in the Revolution 1780-1783* (New York: Macmillan, 1902), chapters 3 and 4; Andrew Waters, *The Quaker and the Gamecock* (Philadelphia: Casemate, 2019).

¹³ Sumter to Greene, Jan. 29, 1781. *PNG*, 7:216-217.

¹⁴ Greene to Sumter, Feb. 3, 1781. *PNG*, 7:245.

¹⁵ Morgan to Greene, Jan. 15, 1781, *PNG*, 7:127; Greene to Morgan, Jan. 19, 1780, *PNG*, 7:146.

Cowpens by shattering Tarleton's aura of invincibility, but "Tarleton's defeat" would forever denote Morgan's triumph and not Sumter's.

Sumter Begins His Rounds

On January 31 Sumter had written to Greene (with "excessive Difficulty" because of his wound) that South Carolinians appeared "Disposed to Take up Arms against the British." Sumter was eager to lead them, although he could ride "but Slowly," and a ride on the previous day had brought on a fever.¹⁶ In the February 3rd letter to Sumter quoted above, Greene expressed the "ardent wish you should embody your Militia as soon as your health will permit," and he promised Sumter "command of the whole."¹⁷ Greene did not expect partisan forces to wrest control of South Carolina from British regular and provincial troops under Rawdon. He had more realistic objectives: "destroying the enemies' stores and perplexing their affairs in South Carolina" in order to "keep the spirits of the people from sinking, as well as to alarm the enemy, respecting the safety of their posts."¹⁸

Sumter put out the word for his men to assemble at the Waxhaws settlement, possibly at the Presbyterian Church there. Although his wound still troubled him, and would continue to do so for the rest of the war, he joined them on February 9th.¹⁹ Two hundred and eighty men answered Sumter's call. (See Appendix B for a list of units and officers engaged.) All were mounted, and "about a fourth of them were armed with swords as

cavalry and had excellent horses."²⁰ Most may have joined Sumter for patriotic reasons, but they may also have joined for their own safety. The "plunder and depredation" that Greene lamented continued among Whigs and Tories, and many found it safer to be with comrades in arms than to be at home. Another reason to join Sumter may have been a share of whatever they could take from the British.

Sumter persuaded at least one man, John Murphey, to violate his parole and risk hanging:

[Murphey] went to the Camp of Gen'l. Sumpter who persuaded him that no good man and patriot would be bound by such a promise, he then tore up his parole and joined Gen'l. Sumpter.²¹

Rawdon alleged that Sumter used more persuasive methods.

[Sumter] summoned by proclamation all the inhabitants to join him, offering to all such as would take part with him a full pardon for their former attachment to us and denouncing penalty of death to all who did not range themselves under his standard by the 23rd of February. To give weight to these threats several persons known to be friendly towards us were inhumanly murdered, tho' unarmed and remaining peaceably at their own houses.²²

¹⁶ Sumter to Greene, Jan. 31, 1781. *PNG*, 7:230-231.

¹⁷ Greene to Sumter, Feb. 3, 1781. *PNG*, 7:246.

¹⁸ Greene to Marion, Feb. 11, 1781, in R. W. Gibbes, ed., *Documentary History of the American Revolution: Consisting of Letters and Papers Relating to the Contest for Liberty, Chiefly in South Carolina in 1781 and 1782*, 3 vols. (Columbia SC: Banner Steam-Power Press, 1853), 3:20.

¹⁹ Sumter to Greene, Feb. 9, 1781. *PNG*, 7:417.

²⁰ Sumter to Greene, March 9, 1781. *PNG*, 7:417. Rawdon to Cornwallis, March 7, 1781, *CP* 4:49.

²¹ Federal pension application of John Murphey (Murphy) S7260. This and other pension application cited in this paper are transcribed mainly by Will Graves and posted at

revwarapps.org. Murphey had taken his parole so seriously that 52 years later he was able to recite it by heart: "I John Murphy of Fishing Creek acknowledge myself a prisoner on parol to a detachment of his majesty's troops under the command of the right Honorable Lieutenant Gen'l. Earle of Cornwallis and I do promise that I will not act directly or indirectly against his majesty's government nor stir up others so to do, that I will not speak or say anything that shall be prejudicial to his majesty's interest and will confine myself to my own plantation not exceeding one mile from thence until further enlarged."

²² Rawdon to Cornwallis, March 7, 1781, *CP* 4:47.

Siege of Fort Granby, February 19-21, 1781

Sumter with his 280 mounted men left the Waxhaws on February 16.²³ Although their commander was still suffering from his wound, and they probably rode at night to preserve secrecy, Sumter's troops covered almost 90 miles in three days. (Fig. 4, next page) At about 4 a.m. on February 19 they arrived at Friday's Ferry on Congaree River just south (downstream) of the convergence of Saluda and Broad Rivers near present Columbia, an area known as the Congarees.²⁴ Shortly after crossing the river, they attacked the British garrison at Fort Granby.

Ft. Granby, also called Friday's Fort or the Congaree Store, had been a collection of storehouses and outbuildings. On January 13 Sumter informed Greene that "a detachment of 100 men under Major Maxwell is erecting a fort at Congaree Store." The detachment under Maj. Andrew Maxwell of the Prince of Wales American Regiment had dug a ditch around the house and outbuildings and used the dirt to create a wall with two bastions at opposite corners.²⁵ (Fig. 3.) After the war Ft. Granby was converted into the residence of James Cayce. According to Benson J. Lossing, Cayce's house stood "upon an eminence near the Charleston road, within three fourths of a

mile of Friday's Ferry."²⁶ (Fig. 5, page 9) The exact location of the Cayce house, and therefore of Ft. Granby, is known from a 1939 aerial photograph, but the site has since been excavated as a quarry.²⁷

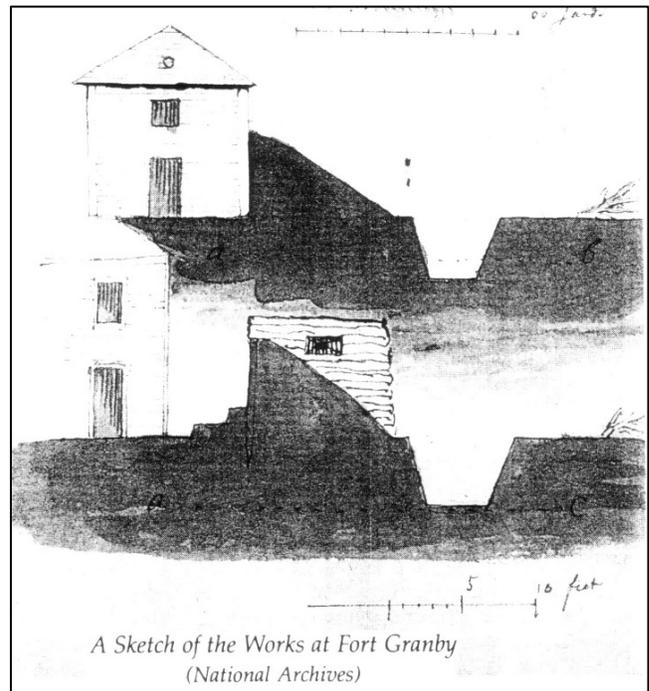


Figure 3. A military engineer's sketch showing two cross-sections of British defenses at Ft. Granby: the dirt wall, ditch, and surrounding abattis. From PNG, 8:265.

²³ Sumter to Greene, March 9, 1781. *PNG*, 7:417. As was often the case, the other side exaggerated the number of the enemy. Lt. Col. Nisbet Balfour, the commandant in Charlestown, reported to Gen. Clinton on Feb. 24, 1781, that "the Post at Congarees had been for three days invested by 7 or 800 Men under Colonel Sumpter." "Letterbook of Lieut. Col. Nisbet Balfour, British Commandant of Charleston, S.C., Jan. 1 - 1 Dec., 1781." American Revolution Institute of the Society of the Cincinnati, Washington DC. <https://societyofthecincinnati.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p16923coll6/id/1358>

²⁴ Sumter to Marion, Feb. 20, 1781, in Gibbes, *Documentary History*, 3:23. For the location of Friday's Ferry see "The Top Finds in Granby," accessed May 22, 2022 http://www.historysoft.com/granby/top_20_artifacts.html

²⁵ Sumter to Greene, Jan. 13, 1781. *PNG*, 7:118. Rawdon in his letter to Cornwallis described Ft. Granby as "a square redoubt enclosing two or three storehouses." It was built around a Chesnut & Kershaw Co. trading post. Sumter had trounced the Prince of Wales American Regiment at the Battle of Hanging Rock in August 1780.

²⁶ Benson J. Lossing, *Pictorial Field-Book of the Revolution*, 2 vols. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1852), 2:Ch. 26.

²⁷ David Brinkman's "Fort Granby (Cayce House)," accessed May 15, 2022. Kathryn F. Kenan, "In Search of Granby: A Colonial Village of South Carolina" (MA Thesis, University of South Carolina, 2016), 39-41 (with different location). <http://www.historysoft.com/sax/FortGranbyLoc.html> and http://www.historysoft.com/granby/1818_1870_granby.htm.

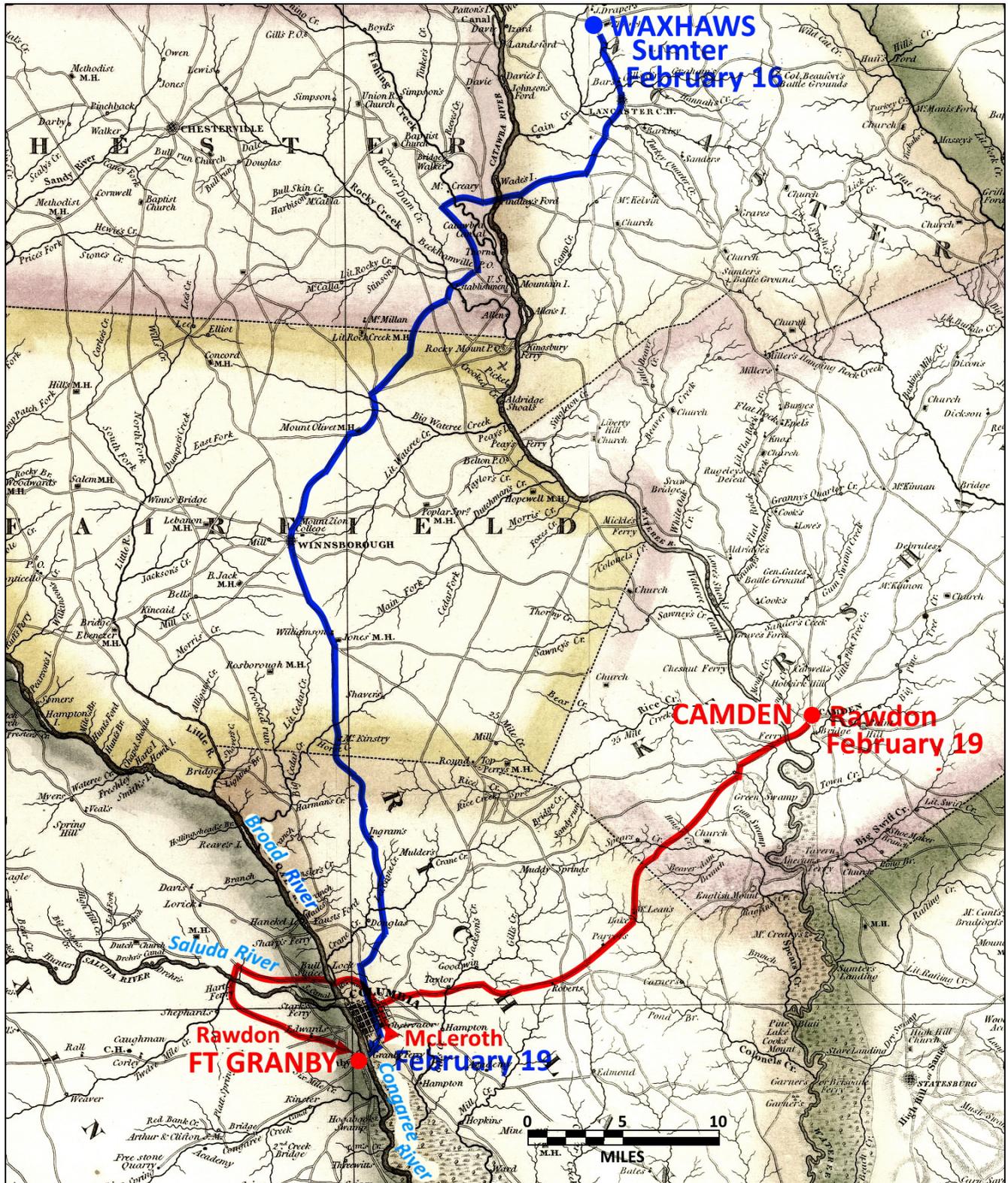


Figure 4. Possible routes taken by Gen. Sumter from Waxhaws settlement to Ft. Granby and later by Lt. Col. Rawdon from Camden to Ft. Granby and by Maj. Robert McLeroth to Friday's Ferry, plotted on roads shown on the 1822 map of South Carolina by John Wilson.

https://www.davidrumsey.com/luna/servlet/detail/RUMSEY~8~1~38011~1211031:Composite--Map-Of-South-Carolina?sort=Pub_List_No_InitialSort&qvq=q:1825%20mills%20south%20carolina;sort=Pub_List_No_InitialSort;lc:RUMSEY~8~1&mi=102&trs=105

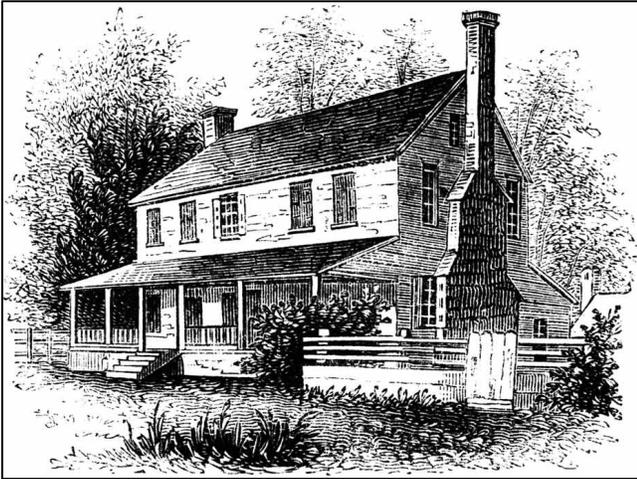


Figure 5. The home of James Cayce as drawn in 1848 by Benson J. Lossing. This house was built in 1766 as the Chesnut & Kershaw Company Trading Post. It survived into the late 1930s replete with bullet holes. The main building of the Cayce Historical Museum is a replica of the house.

(<https://www.scpictureproject.org/lexington-county/cayce-museum.html>)

It is hard to imagine that Sumter thought he could overcome the defenses of Ft. Granby without artillery, but he had a secret weapon: hunger. Ft. Granby was short of food, thanks to Wade Hampton. (Fig. 6) Hampton, born in Virginia in the early 1750s, had become a successful merchant by trading with the Cherokee Indians in the South Carolina backcountry. Early in the Revolutionary War he rose to the rank of captain and paymaster in the South Carolina Continental Line, but after the surrender of Charlestown on May 12, 1780, he swore allegiance to the crown.²⁸

While the British occupied Ft. Granby, they paid Hampton to keep them provisioned, but Hampton was also conspiring with Sumter, as Rawdon discovered after Sumter's attack:

Wade Hampton was in contract to furnish a certain quantity of provision to this post on a fixed day. As he maintained a secret correspondence with Sumter, he delayed fulfilling his agreement till he thought the stores in the redoubt were all expended, of which circumstance he gave Sumter notice. Sumter therefore concluded that a blockade of a few days would reduce Major Maxwell to surrender.²⁹



Figure 6. Wade Hampton I. Portrait c. 1800.

²⁸ "Hampton, Wade I," *South Carolina Encyclopedia*, accessed May 27, 2022, <https://www.scencyclopedia.org/sce/entries/hampton-wade-i> J. D. Lewis, "Carolana.com," accessed May 27, 2022,

https://www.carolana.com/SC/Revolution/patriot_military_sc_captains.htm

²⁹ Rawdon to Cornwallis, March 7, 1781, *CP* 4:47.

On February 20 Sumter wrote to Marion that he had no doubt that he would succeed “if not interrupted by Lord Rawdon.” To prevent interference by Rawdon, Sumter wished that Marion “would be pleased to move in such a direction as to attract his attention, and thereby prevent his designs.”³⁰ Marion was unable or unwilling to comply, possibly because his troops and supplies were exhausted after the attack on Georgetown on January 24 and 25. Rawdon had received intelligence that Sumter was collecting troops, but he originally thought their objective was the post at Ninety Six. Sumter had reached Friday’s Ferry on February 19 before Rawdon learned of his real target, and he immediately left Camden. On his first day’s march Rawdon learned of Sumter’s attack on Ft. Granby. He “detached Major [Robert] McLeroth with the 64th Regiment of Foot, 260 infantry and a piece of cannon to bar the enemy’s retreat at Friday’s Ferry whilst [he] endeavored to get round them.” (Fig. 7, next page.) While McLeroth went down the east side of Congaree River, Rawdon with his Volunteers of Ireland (provincial) Regiment made a difficult crossing of Broad River at an unspecified location, then crossed the Saluda River at Weaver’s (Hart’s) Ferry.³¹

Above thirty of the infantry were carried away by the force of the stream [Broad

River], but fortunately they were all saved (excepting one man of my light company) by the exertions of some of the New York dragoons, who were stationed lower in the ford for that purpose. The Saluda was so swollen that it was not fordable, but we passed it securely at Weaver’s Ferry on the 22nd of February under cover of our cannon.³²

Accounts by American participants in the action at Ft. Granby are not entirely consistent or credible, but it does seem plausible that James Hood was correct in stating that “a firing was kept up for a day & night.”³³ James Clinton, on the other hand, stated that Sumter’s troops merely “lay some time near, but having no artillery, we made no attempt on it for the present.”³⁴ William Jesse Taylor, a grandson of Col. Thomas Taylor who was present, related the following incident:

One of the British during the siege, repeatedly slapped his buttock to the Americans, & Taylor’s men would shoot, & so far would miss. Finally the fellow was so insulting, that Col Taylor said to one of his men, a good shot “Can’t you punish that fellow for his impudence?” He drew up his gun, took a good aim, fired, & the fellow tumbled over.³⁵

³⁰ Sumter to Marion, February 20, 1781, in Gibbes, *Documentary History* 3:23.. Sumter followed his request to Marion with the following: “I wish and beg that you may suppress every species of plundering, as the greatest evils to the publick, as well as individuals, are experienced thereby. You cannot be too particular. The enemy oblige the negroes they have to make frequent sallies. This circumstance alone is sufficient to rouse and fix the resentment and detestation of every American who possesses common feelings.”

³¹ It is often stated that Lt. Col. Welbore Ellis Doyle rather than McLeroth was detached to Friday’s Ferry, but we have found no primary source to support that.

<https://wc.rootsweb.com/trees/233195/I144/-/individual>

³² Rawdon to Cornwallis, March 7, 1781, *CP* 4:47. What Rawdon referred to as Weaver’s Ferry is shown in Fig. 4 as

Hart’s Ferry between Twelvemile and Kinley creeks about 1.5 miles west of present I-20.

³³ <http://revwarapps.org/sc1250.pdf>. The unknown author of Appendix D stated that “advances were made by forming batteries of logs and tobacco hd’s [hogsheads],” and the attack was “kept up two days.”

³⁴ <http://revwarapps.org/s2437.pdf>.

³⁵ Lyman Copeland Draper’s summary of a letter by William Jesse Taylor of Columbia SC. Sumter Papers 11VV526. William Jesse Taylor also told Draper that Col. Taylor “had a rail pen built up, from which to fire over into the fort.” There is no other account of such a structure being built at Ft. Granby, and it is possible that William Jesse Taylor confused the siege of Ft. Granby with the siege of Ft. Watson in April 1781, Augusta, Georgia, or Ninety Six, where “Maham” towers were constructed.

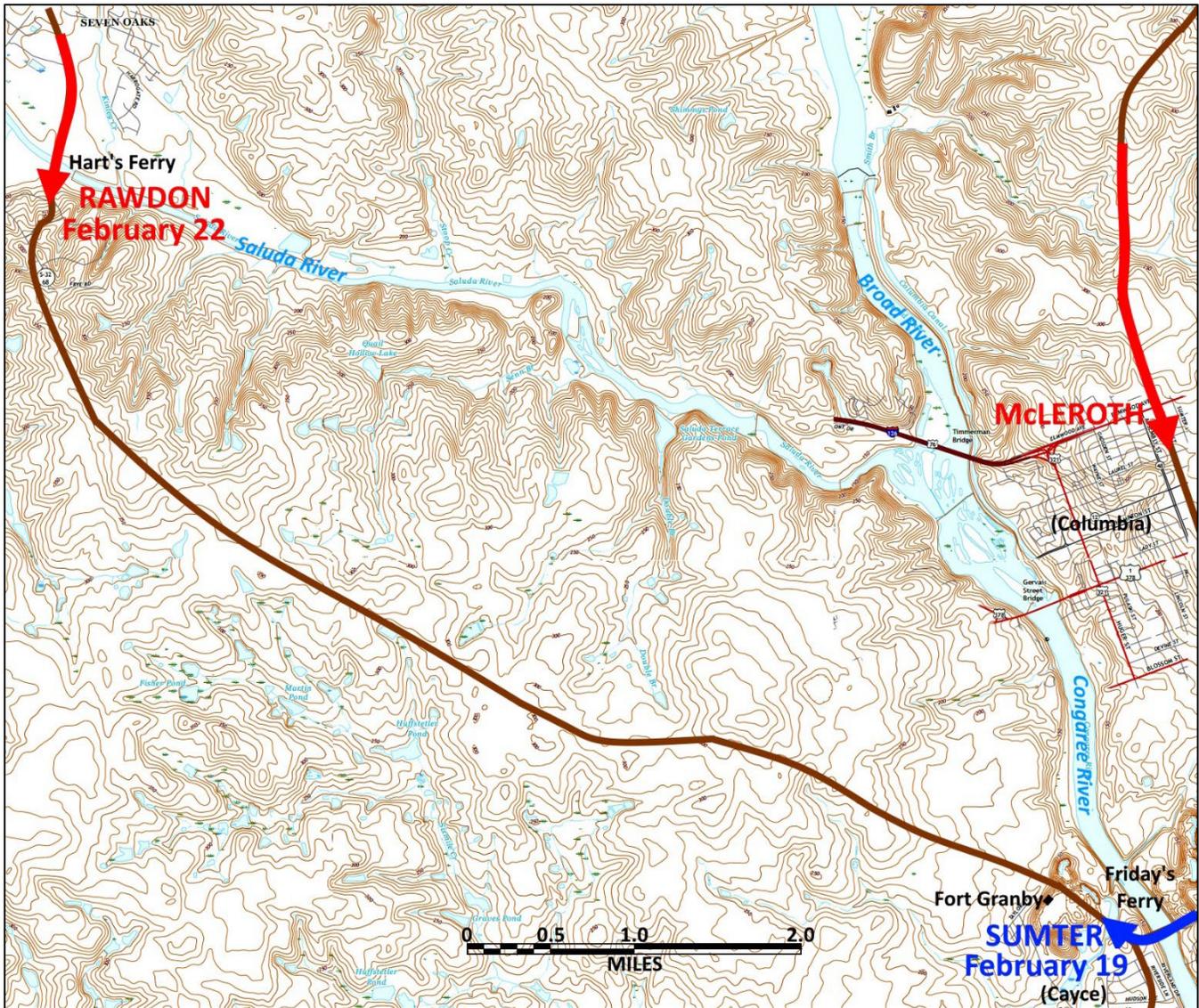


Figure 7. Possible final approaches of Sumter and then Rawdon and McLeroth toward Ft. Granby shown on roads depicted on an 1820 survey (<http://dobrinkman.net/bridge/1820maps.htm>) overlaid onto the current USGS topographic map. Some modern roads are shown for reference.

Another brief and credible account is in the pension application of Leonard Miles: “we surrounded the fort, and had several skirmishes with them, and had a prospect of taking them, but they were relieved by a reinforcement under Lord Rawdon.”³⁶ (Fig. 8)

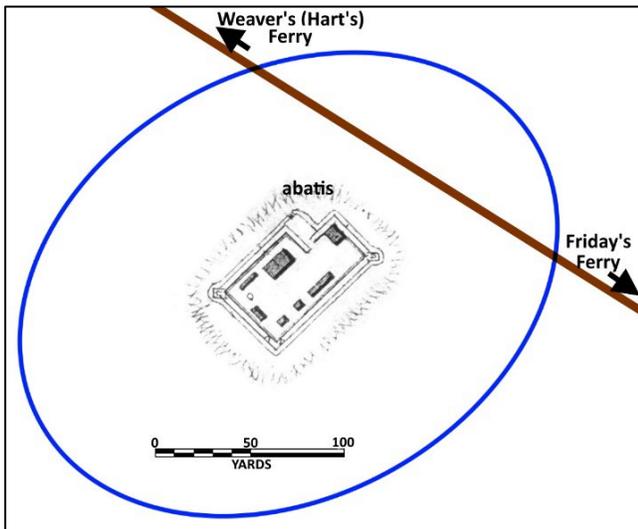


Figure 8. A depiction of Sumter’s investment (blue oval) of Ft. Granby. We assume that Sumter’s riflemen stayed out of range of British muskets but close enough to shoot any of the enemy who ventured out. The British works are from *PNG*, 8:265, oriented as depicted in the 1820 survey (Fig. 7).

Alerted to Rawdon’s approach, Sumter abandoned the siege of Ft. Granby on the evening of February 21st and withdrew down the west side of Congaree River, “destroying the bridges as he went.”³⁷ (Fig. 9, next page) Rawdon learned of Sumter’s retreat at Weaver’s Ferry on the next day from “the fugitives of some parties which we had fallen in

with and dispersed as they were on their way to join [Sumter].”³⁸ Maj. Robert McLeroth had been posted at the eastern landing of Friday’s Ferry in case Sumter tried to escape by that route. When Sumter retreated down the western side of the Congaree River, McLeroth was supposed to have proceeded about 25 miles down the east side of the Congaree to block Sumter from crossing back to the north at McCord’s Ferry. By mistake, however, McLeroth crossed the river at Friday’s Ferry. Instead of having McLeroth make the time-consuming recrossing of the river, Rawdon ordered him to follow the tracks of Sumter’s horses southward.

I [Rawdon] was likewise informed that Major McLeroth, deceived by false intelligence, had crossed the Congaree at Friday’s Ferry instead of moving down to meet the enemy at McCord’s as had been intended. To prevent loss of time I sent Major McLeroth directions to follow the track of the enemy, and I detached the cavalry to join him.³⁹

Rawdon crossed Friday’s Ferry eastward on the night of February 23, “and next morning struck across the fork by forced marches in expectation of falling in with the enemy between McCord’s and Camden.”⁴⁰ Rawdon marched 30 miles northeast and crossed the Wateree River at Camden on the 25th. He did not encounter Sumter, who had decided to withdraw southeast and attack the British post at Col. William Thomson’s Belleville Plantation on the lower Congaree River.

³⁶ <http://revwarapps.org/w1453.pdf>.

³⁷ Zachary Kitchens, federal pension application R5999. <https://revwarapps.org/r5999.pdf>

³⁸ Rawdon to Cornwallis, March 7, 1781, *CP* 4:47-48.

³⁹ Rawdon to Cornwallis, March 7, 1781, *CP* 4:48. The cavalry may have belonged to the South Carolina Royalists commanded by Maj. Thomas Fraser.

⁴⁰ Rawdon to Cornwallis, *ibid*.

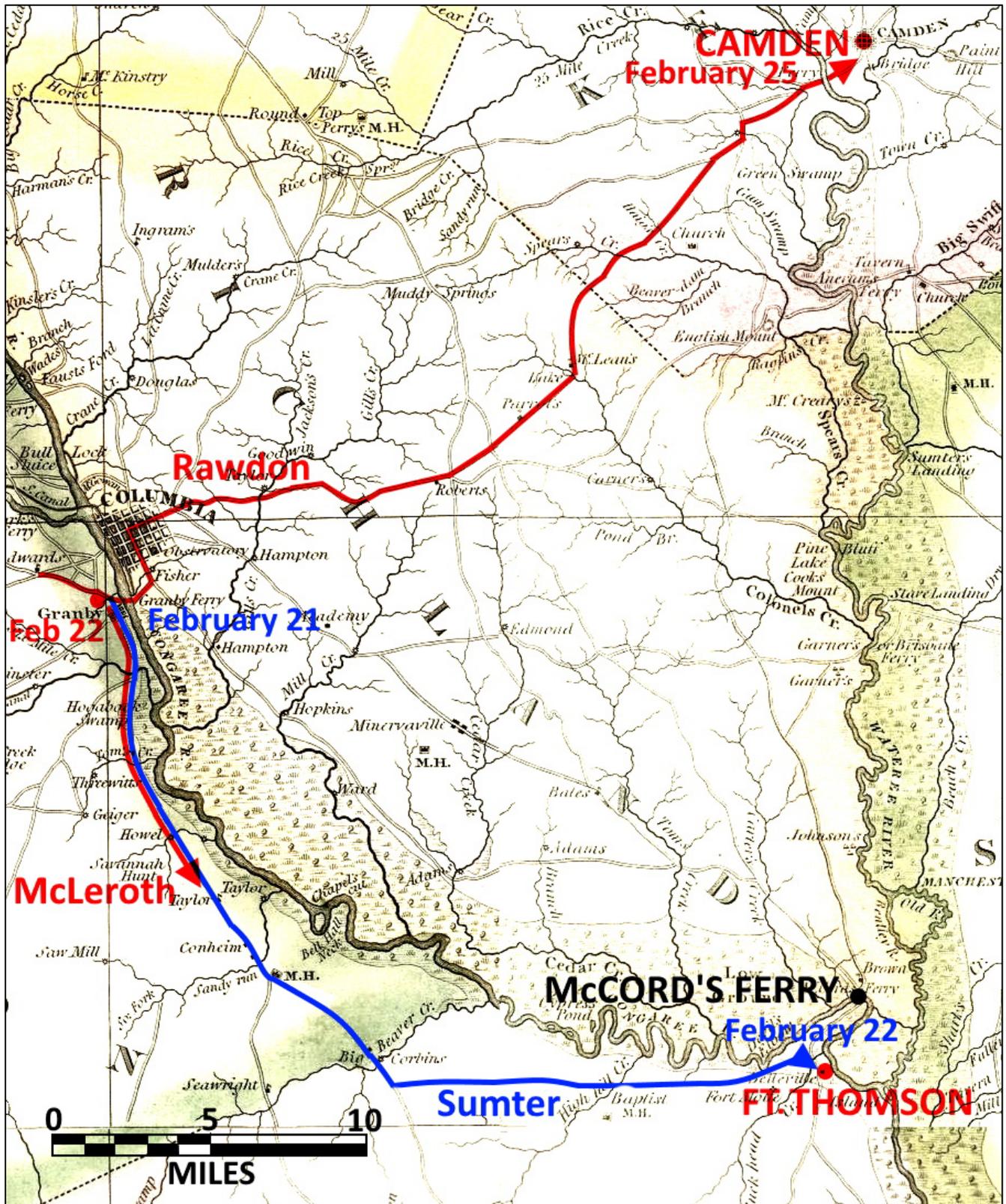


Figure 9. Possible routes of Sumter from Ft. Granby to Ft. Thomson, and later by Rawdon and McLeroth, plotted on roads shown on the 1822 map of John Wilson and on Mills Atlas for Orangeburg District.

Attack on Fort Thomson, February 22, 1781

Belleville was the plantation of Col. William “Danger” Thomson, former commander of the 3rd South Carolina Continental Regiment. (Fig. 10) Thomson had distinguished himself on June 28, 1776 during the Battle of Sullivan’s Island by leading the successful defense at Breach Inlet against an attempted assault by Clinton and Cornwallis.⁴¹ Clinton and Cornwallis returned almost four years later, captured Charlestown, and twice imprisoned Thomson in the Provost Dungeon of the Exchange Building. Thomson was on parole at his plantation when the British arrived, erected a stockade around it, and established it as a way fort guarding the McCord’s Ferry Road. They destroyed Thomson’s crops and animals, and some 100 of his slaves were taken away or died of disease. Thomson was later exchanged, and he returned to service as an advisor to Gen. Greene, though often ill.⁴²

Thomson’s home at Belleville Plantation, called Fort Thomson or Buckhead Fort during the British occupation, was at the “high point of the property,” as revealed by “broken, fire charred bricks and many small shards of broken china,” and by a sketch made in 1784. (Fig. 11, next page) The mansion was well preserved until it burned in the 1940s.⁴³ The site of the house is about three-fourths of a mile southwest of where US Highway 601 crosses Congaree River, on private property not accessible to the public. (Fig. 12, page 16) The fort was manned by a single company of Provincial Light Infantry under Capt. Morris Robinson.⁴⁴ Had it not been stockaded, Sumter should have been able to overpower the defenders of the fort by sheer numbers.

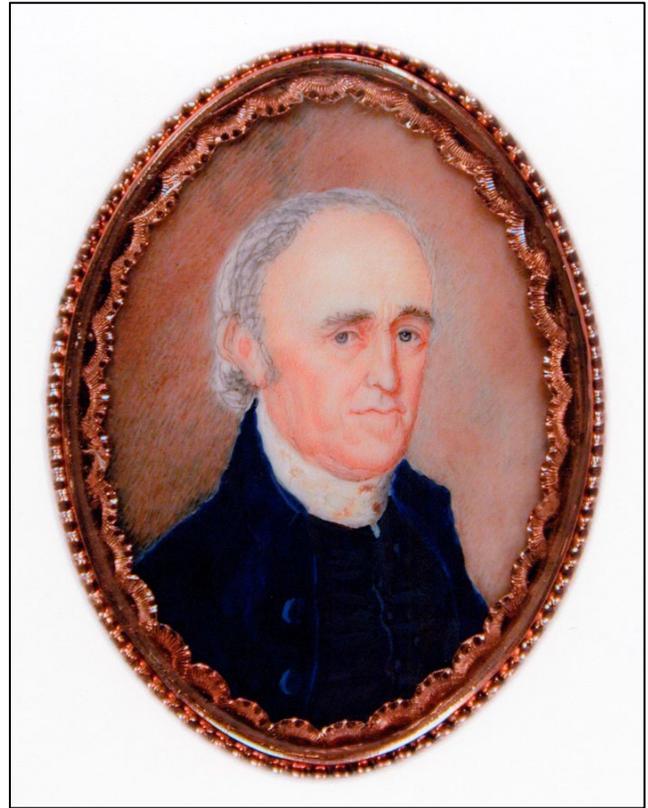


Figure 10. Miniature portrait of Col. William Thomson (1727-1796) painted by Edward Savage around 1790. (Gibbes Museum of Art/ Carolina Art Association)

Sumter arrived at Ft. Thomson on February 22nd, while Rawdon was still crossing Saluda River 25 miles to the northwest, and McLeroth was still on the east side of Congaree River not yet in pursuit. Pension applications are the only known first-person accounts of the fighting at Ft. Thomson, and as expected for fifty-year-old recollections, they are not entirely consistent.

⁴¹ “Thomson Park Revolutionary War Battle Site,” accessed May 24, 2022, <https://thomsonpark.wordpress.com>

⁴² Appendix D of this paper. “Colonel ‘Danger’ Thomson,” accessed May 24, 2022, <https://thomsonpark.wordpress.com/colonel-william-danger-thomson-1727-1796>

⁴³ James Hane, email to Doug MacIntyre, May 6, 2022. Keith Krawczynski, “William Drayton’s Journal of a 1784 Tour of the South Carolina Backcountry,” *South Carolina Historical Magazine*, 97, No. 3 (July 1996), 182-205. Kate McLemore, *Kith and Kin: Data of Certain Lines in the Goodwyn, Theus, Raoul, Thomson and Related Families of South Carolina* (Montgomery, AL: Paragon Press, 1948), 27.

⁴⁴ Rawdon to Cornwallis, March 7, 1781, *CP* 4:48, note 29.

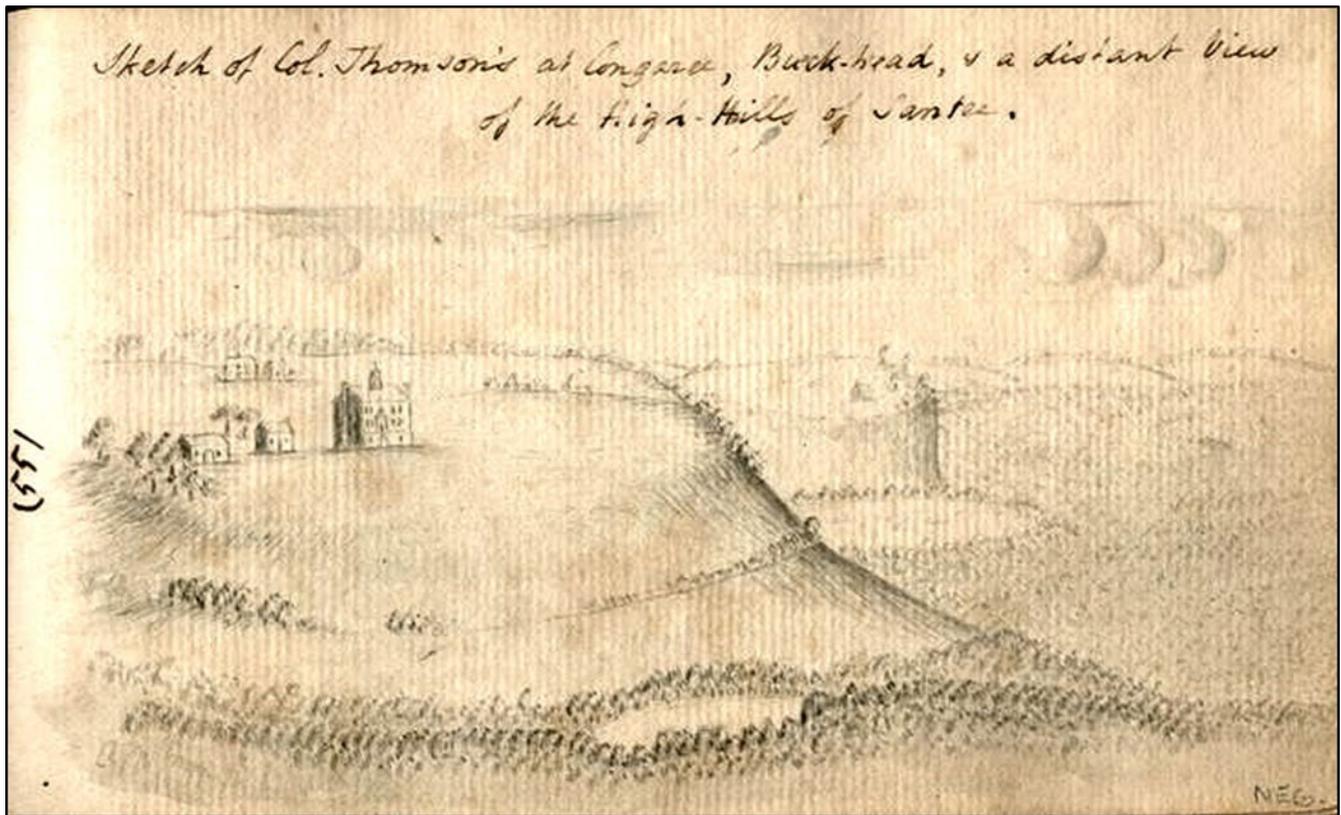


Figure 11. “Sketch of Col. Thomson’s at Congaree, Buck-head, & a distant view of the High-Hills of Santee” by unidentified artist “NEG.” The sketch was apparently made looking northwest from near present Colonel Thomson Highway (US 601). The High Hills of Santee are east of present Columbia and not actually visible in that direction. From “William Drayton’s Journal of a 1784 Tour of the South Carolina Backcountry” in the South Carolina Historical Society’s collection, Addestone Library of the College of Charleston.

In their federal pension affidavits Hamilton Brown and Francis Wylie described the action at Ft. Thomson as a siege, but it appears that Sumter stayed for less than a day. Stephen McElhenney stated that “Sumpter tried to storm said Fort,” and Zachary Kitchens stated that they “fired on it one hour.” Four pension applicants described the action as skirmishing, but they provided few details.⁴⁵ The author of Appendix D gives a detailed account

of the action, but it is not known whether he was present.

Sumter knew he would be pursued – in fact, one of the objectives of the rounds was apparently to draw the British away from their posts. To keep an eye on his pursuers and prevent a surprise, he detached Capt. Wade Hampton, who had joined Sumter in active service after his betrayal of the British at Ft. Granby.

⁴⁵ Hamilton Brown <http://revwarapps.org/w1707.pdf>; Francis Wylie: “then besieged Thompsons fort & skirmished with the British who was in the fort,” <http://revwarapps.org/s21592.pdf>; Stephen McElhenney <http://revwarapps.org/s21368.pdf>, and Zachary Kitchens <http://revwarapps.org/r5999.pdf>. Leonard Miles <http://revwarapps.org/w1453.pdf>: “we then marched down the River to Thompson’s Fort where some British forces were stationed and had a skirmish with them, but did

not succeed in driving them out of the Fort.” Thomas Stanford <http://revwarapps.org/s11463.pdf>: “marched to Thompson’s Fort where we had a skirmish against the British and Tories.”

James Hood <http://revwarapps.org/SC1250.pdf> stated, “He was in 2 Skirmishes at Col Thompsons where there were about sixty prisoners taken.” It is unlikely that Sumter captured 60 prisoners, if any.

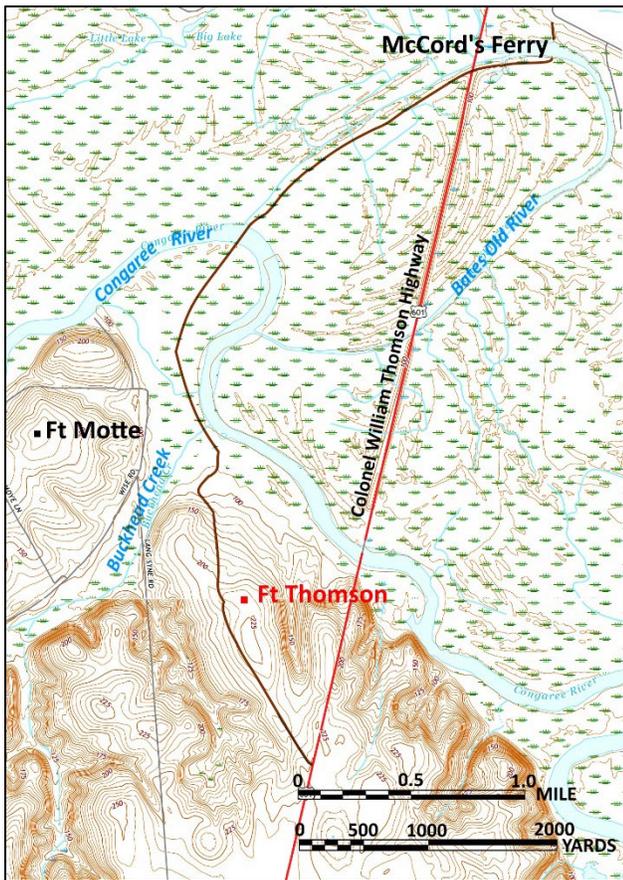


Figure 12. The site of Fort Thomson on the current USGS topo map. In the 18th century the main channel of Congaree River ran to McCord's Ferry and looped back southwestward in the bed of Bates Old River to its present course, as shown in Fig. 9. It was called the Great Loop of the Congaree. The road past Ft. Thomson to McCord's Ferry, shown in brown, is inferred from lidar, walked by Baxley, and extant old roads. Buckhead Creek is also shown.

Hicks Chappell was with Hampton and gave the following account of a skirmish in which the British—presumably McLeroth's infantry and

cavalry—dispersed the Americans and took several prisoners.

Sumter marched down the Country to the west of the Santee River, that on the march down a guard was detached under the command of Wade Hampton, to observe the movement of the British & Tories whom it was supposed would pursue Sumter, that this deponent was one of the Guard, the advance of the British met them & a skirmish ensued in which this Guard had to retreat, after loosing several of their party made prisoners. They returned to the main army which was then encamped at Manigaults plantation a little below Belleville.⁴⁶

Skirmish at Big Savannah, February 23, 1781⁴⁷

As stated by Hicks Chappell, after leaving Ft. Thomson, Sumter camped at Manigault's Mount Harriett Plantation. Shortly after arriving on February 23, Sumter got intelligence of a convoy of British wagons approaching from the south, and he quickly set up an ambush nearby at Big Savannah (sometimes called Big Glade). Manigault's Plantation and Big Savannah are not shown on any maps that we have found. John Patton stated that "about 2 miles below Buckhead we captured 15 wagons loaded with munitions of war to supply the Fort," and Zachary Kitchens stated that the attack on the wagons was "three miles distant" from the fort.⁴⁸ These suggest that the ambush at Big Savannah occurred two to three miles southeast of Ft. Thomson.

⁴⁶ Hicks Chappell federal pension affidavit W22758. The location of this skirmish is not known, but presumably it was on the road between Ft. Thomson and Ft. Granby. The anonymous author of Appendix C stated that "Sumter lay encamped at Manigault's, two miles below Thomson's."

⁴⁷ The skirmish at Big Savannah is sometimes referred to as the skirmish at Big Glade or Manigault's Ferry. Manigault's Ferry (private) is generally assumed to have been at the north end of present Sawmill Landing Way. Parker, *Parker's Guide*, 322. There was a second Manigault's Ferry (private) on Santee River about 21 miles southeast just upstream from

the mouth of Webbs Creek, according to local historian Richard Watkins. See also Terry W. Lipscomb, "South Carolina Revolutionary Battles Part 5," *Names in South Carolina XXIV*, Winter 1977:16. South Carolina Department of Archives and History (SCDAH <https://www.archivesindex.sc.gov>), "Dwight, Daniel, Plat For 400 Acres on Webbs Creek, 12/30/1767."

<https://digital.tcl.sc.edu/digital/collection/nsctest/id/937>

⁴⁸ <http://revwarapps.org/w162.pdf>,

<http://revwarapps.org/r5999.pdf>.

Big Savannah may have been named for a geologic feature similar to Blue Savannah in Marion County SC. Before it was drained for agriculture, Blue Savannah was a wetland known as a Carolina bay—a shallow, oval, treeless depression with the long axis oriented northwest to southeast.⁴⁹ The topographic map in Figure 13 shows several such depressions. We believe Big Savannah was an area near one of the largest depressions, and that the

British wagons were captured on the road in that area.⁵⁰

The anonymous author of Appendix D stated that “Sumter lay encamped at Manigault’s, two miles below Thomson’s.” A survey of Orangeburg District made about 1820 and published in Mills Atlas shows the home of one “Haskill” at about that location.

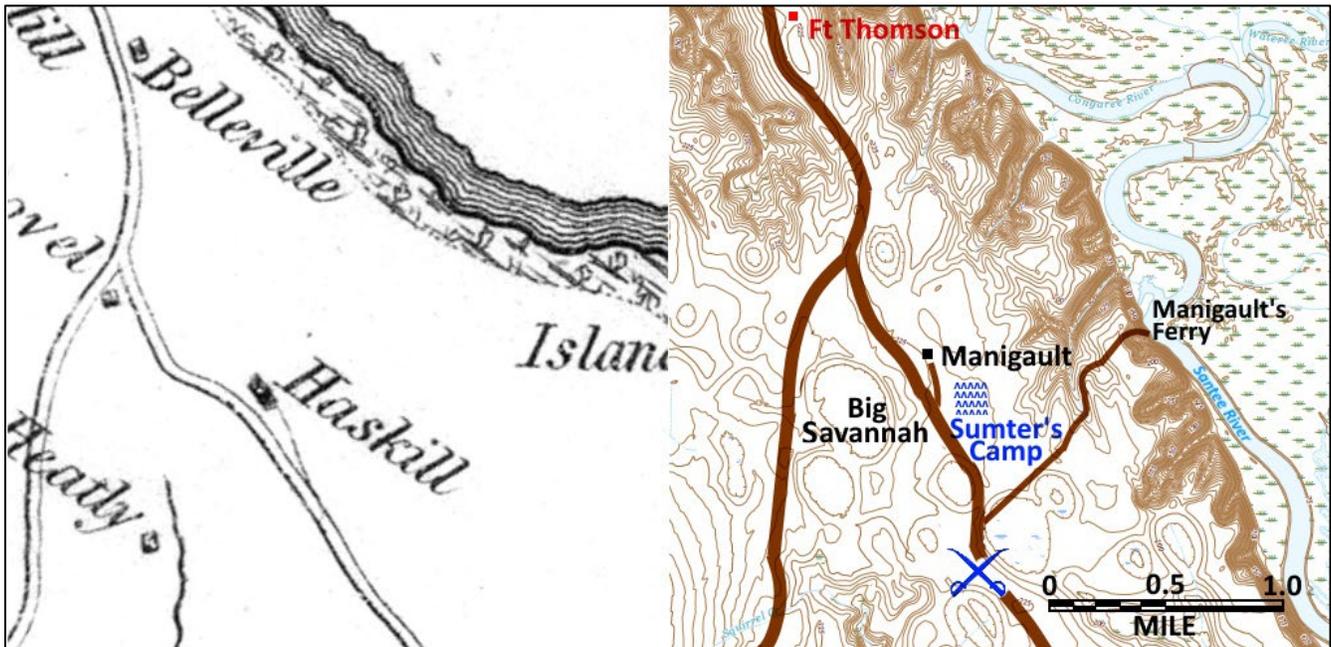


Figure 13. Possible locations of Big Savannah and Manigault’s Plantation and ferry. (Left) Part of Mills Atlas, Orangeburg District map, surveyed about 1820. (Right) Current USGS topo map showing approximately the same area with roads shown on Mills Atlas plotted on high ground and avoiding changes in elevation. Big Savannah is assumed to be an area named for one of the large oval depressions (Carolina bays). Sumter’s camp was somewhere on Manigault’s Mt. Harriot Plantation (Haskill on Mills Atlas map). The blue crossed swords indicate a possible site of Sumter’s capturing British wagons. We assume the road to Manigault’s Ferry corresponded to present Sawdust Landing Way.

Richard Watkins, who has studied the plantations of that area extensively, informed us that “Haskill” was Elnathan Haskell (1755-1825), who had been an officer in the Massachusetts Militia. In 1791 he moved to South Carolina, and in the following year he married Charlotte Thomson, daughter of Col. William Thomson. In 1809 Haskell bought the Mt. Harriet plantation of Joseph Manigault (1763-

1843).⁵¹ It appears, therefore, that the Manigault’s Plantation where Sumter camped was at the location labeled “Haskill” on the 1825 Mills Atlas map of the Orangeburgh District.

Soldiers’ versions of the action at Big Savannah vary slightly in details. John Patton: “about 2 miles below Buckhead we captured 15 wagons loaded

⁴⁹ Parker, *Parker’s Guide*, 322. “Carolina Bays” <https://www.dnr.sc.gov/geology/carolina-bays.html>.

⁵⁰ If this location is correct, Big Savannah was the area around the intersection of present Col. Thomson Hwy. (US Hwy 601) and McCords Ferry Road (SC Hwy 267).

⁵¹ Richard Watkins, email May 30, 2022. Details of Col. Elnathan Haskell’s military service and marriage are in his widow’s pension application (W21254), which is not transcribed at revwarapps.org, because Haskell did not serve in the South. Joseph Manigault was the son of Peter Manigault (1731-1773), who first owned the plantation.

with munitions of war to supply the Fort, we also killed, wounded & made prisoners of the guard attached to said wagons.” David Sadler: “went down to a little Fort near Buckhead – short distance below captured he thinks 18 wagons of baggage & the British guard fought hard until nearly all killed.” John Craig: “we took seven wagons Loaded.” Francis Adams: “met & took seventeen loaded wagons of arms, goods &c. on the road to Lord Rawdon at Campden.” William Hope: “They then fell in with 16 Wagons belonging to the British, with a guard of 40 or 50 men they killed several of the guard, and took the rest prisoners, – burned the Wagons, – and, put the plunder they had taken, in boats, and sent it down the river with a view to meet it again.”⁵²

Greene, possibly quoting Sumter, stated that “the Enemy lost sixty Men, who had under their care a large quantity of Stores which were taken.”⁵³ The account in Appendix C by Thomas McDill is more detailed and possibly based on recollections of his father, John McDill. British Lt. Col. John Watson Tadwell Watson complained that at Big Savannah Sumter’s men killed surrendered prisoners:

A few days ago, after Gen’l. Sumter had taken some wagons on the other side of the Santee, and the escort to them had laid down their arms, a party of his horse who said they had not discharged their pieces came up, fired upon the prisoners and killed seven of them.⁵⁴

⁵² <http://revwarapps.org/w162.pdf>,
<http://revwarapps.org/s9471.pdf>,
<http://revwarapps.org/w22864.pdf>,
<http://revwarapps.org/w5198.pdf>,
<http://revwarapps.org/s1956.pdf>.

⁵³ Greene to Samuel Huntington, March 23, 1781. *PNG*, 7:465. Hicks Chappell (W22758) stated that most of the wagon escort were “killed or made prisoners.”

⁵⁴ Lt. Col. John Watson to Marion, March 9, 1781 in Gibbes, *Documentary History*, 3:33-34. Watson was not an eye-witness.

⁵⁵ <http://revwarapps.org/r5999.pdf>.

⁵⁶ From a copy of a June 6, 1873, letter by J. C. McLure of Chester, SC to Lyman Copeland Draper providing additional

The captured provisions were no doubt much appreciated by Sumter’s men, who were travelling light and probably running out of supplies. The captured British wagons also contained something else of interest—two trunks or boxes of gold and silver coins. According to Zachary Kitchens, “The waggons were taken off in the night – the goods & money of which last there were two trunks.”⁵⁵ The troops expected to receive a share of the captured money, and it appears some were annoyed at Sumter because he refused to divide it immediately. Kitchens stated in 1832 that “a suspicion was then entertained that Sumpter used the money – deponent believes so yet.” Many years later Thomas McDill stated:

His father told him of some boxes of gold and silver taken at Big Savannah in the sixteen (16) wagons that were captured there. The men wanted to divide it at once; but Sumter would not allow them; he proposed to wait till they got into camp and then proceed regularly in the matter.⁵⁶

Sumter may have worried that some of his men would desert him as soon as they received their shares of gold and silver. In addition, Sumter needed hard money to pay informants. In a March 9th letter to Greene he complained, “I am extremely bad off for little hard money for which I can procure every information I wish for.” Sumter put the money and captured provisions into boats, possibly at Manigault’s upper ferry nearby, and sent them down the Santee.⁵⁷

information from Thomas McDill obtained from his father, John McDill, Sumter Papers, 4VV58.

⁵⁷ Jacob Gillham (<http://revwarapps.org/s3397.pdf>) stated that there were “twelve wagons which were taken, & all the contents of the wagons were put on board of boats, flats, and canoes & sent across the River.” James Gill (<http://revwarapps.org/r4023.pdf>) stated that the contents were put on a barge, and Hamilton Brown (<http://revwarapps.org/w1707.pdf>) stated that they were put on “an American keel boat.” Rawdon informed Cornwallis that the goods were “put into the boats at McCord’s Ferry,” but it seems unlikely that Sumter would have risked sending them that far in the direction of the enemy. Sumter was a local and knew well the run of the Congaree and Santee Rivers.

On his march from Ft. Granby to Camden, Rawdon learned what Sumter had done, and he sent word to Ft. Watson below Wright's Bluff that they "should be on the watch for the boats." Consequently, the boats "were retaken with all the baggage as they attempted to pass Wright's Bluff."⁵⁸

According to Hicks Chappell,

the goods were placed in Boats with one Robert Livingston as Pilot, & Captn. McLure⁵⁹ with a party as a Guard. the Pilot from ignorance or other cause carried the Boats to a British station near Wrights Bluff on Santee, where the Boats & Goods were recaptured by the British."⁶⁰

William Hope stated that they

put the plunder they had taken in boats, and sent it down the river with a view to meet it again, but the British had a fort at Wrights bluff, and in going down the river found the British firing upon them before they were aware that they were near them. The British retook the plunder taken from the Wagons.⁶¹

Skirmishes at Fort Watson, February 28 and March 1, 1781

Sumter and his men rode down the west side of Santee River hoping to recapture the money and provisions and to join forces with Marion.⁶² With Maj. McLeroth still pursuing Sumter, Rawdon saw an opportunity to trap him. After crossing the Wateree River at Camden on the evening of the 25th, Rawdon turned southward on the next day toward Nelson's Ferry where some British troops

were already posted. Rawdon believed Sumter intended to cross the river at Manigault's lower ferry just above Webbs Creek "as the only means of escaping." (Fig. 14) He ordered that Lt. Col. Watson, "who was on the High Hills, should hasten before me to Manigault's." In addition, "Lt Colonel Small was advancing from Monk's Corner with the 84th and Fanning's regiment, so that Sumter's retreat appeared scarcely possible."⁶³ (Fig. 15, next page)

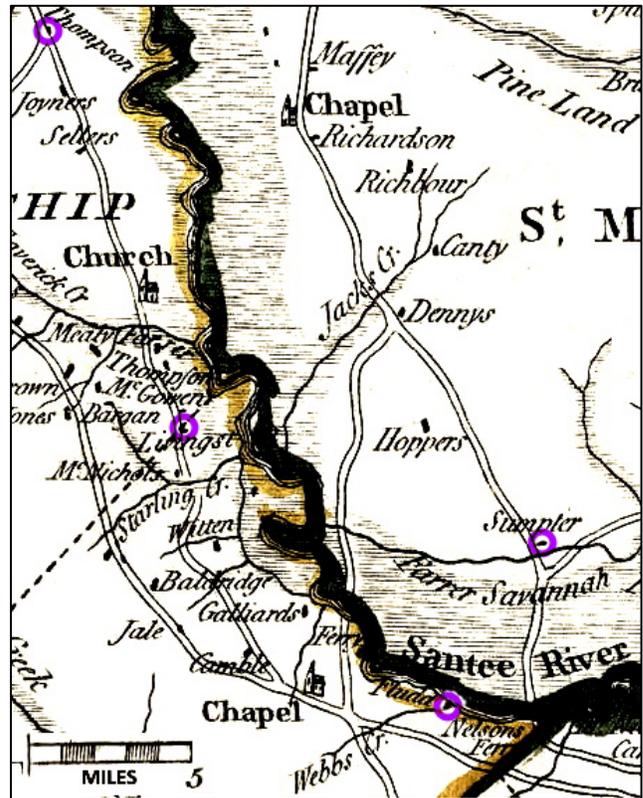


Figure 14. Part of Henry Mouzon's 1775 map. "Thompson" = Ft. Thomson; "Fludd" = Flud's Plantation on Webbs Creek; "Sumpter" = Sumter's Plantation. "Livingst" may have been the home of Robert Livingston, the boat pilot.

⁵⁸ Rawdon to Cornwallis, *op. cit.*

⁵⁹ Hugh McClure, <http://revwarapps.org/w21789.pdf>.

⁶⁰ <http://revwarapps.org/w22758.pdf>. James Gill (<http://revwarapps.org/r4023.pdf>) and Hamilton Brown (<http://revwarapps.org/w1707.pdf>) also stated that the provisions and money were recaptured at Wright's Bluff.

⁶¹ <http://revwarapps.org/s1956.pdf>.

⁶² Sumter to Marion, March 4, 1781, in Gibbes, *Documentary History*, 3:27-28.

⁶³ Rawdon to Cornwallis, March 7, 1781, *CP* 4:48. Col. Edmund Fanning was the commander of the King's

American Regiment, but the field commander was Lt. Col. George Campbell until he was captured by Marion and Lee at Georgetown. The Kings American Regiment arrived at Moncks Corner on Feb. 27, 1781 and was attached to the 84th Regiment under Lt. Col. John Small. Small's force did not arrive at Nelson's Ferry until March 2, and they arrived at Ft. Watson on March 6. "Diary of Henry Nase, King's American Regiment," The New Brunswick Museum, St. John, Archives Division, Nase Family Papers, transcribed by Todd Braisted. <https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/read/14756359/-1-diary-of-henry-nase-kings-american-regiment->

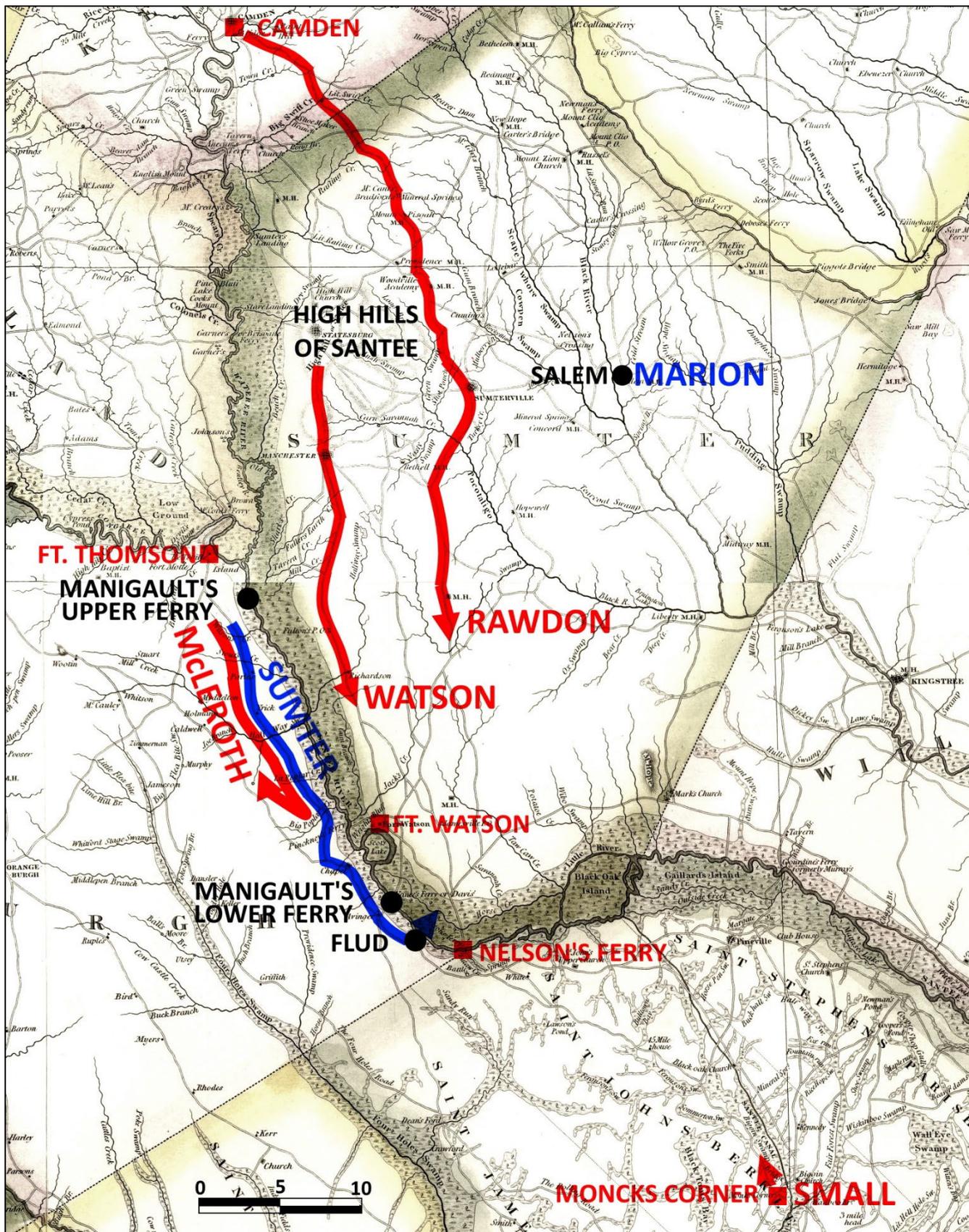


Figure 15. Possible movements of Sumter and the British anti-partisan campaign on February 26 and 27, 1781, shown on the 1822 Wilson map.

Sumter, now deep in enemy territory and in danger of being surrounded, was desperate to retreat northward but also determined to recapture the provisions and money. Sumter did not cross the Santee River at Manigault's (lower) Ferry as Rawdon expected, but continued a little downstream to Flud's Plantation, (Fig. 16) where luck for once favored him. According to Rawdon,

upon a rumor that Marion had crossed the Santee and joined Sumter, Major McLeroth unfortunately discontinued the pursuit. Sumter, finding that his rear was not pressed, undertook to cross the Santee by swimming his horses and passing his men in two canoes which he found by accident at Fludd's Plantation.⁶⁴

Sumter made what must have been a dangerous and time-consuming crossing of the swollen Santee River in the night of February 27.⁶⁵ Several days earlier he had requested that Marion reinforce him (Appendix E), and on February 28th he wrote again to Marion pleading for assistance, but without betraying any alarm.

I think it advisable that we should form a junction, or at least approach so near each other as to co-operate upon the shortest notice. Nothing can at this time be more essentially necessary to the interest of this country, than to form a well regulated army in the interior part of this State, while the enemy's principal force is so far removed.

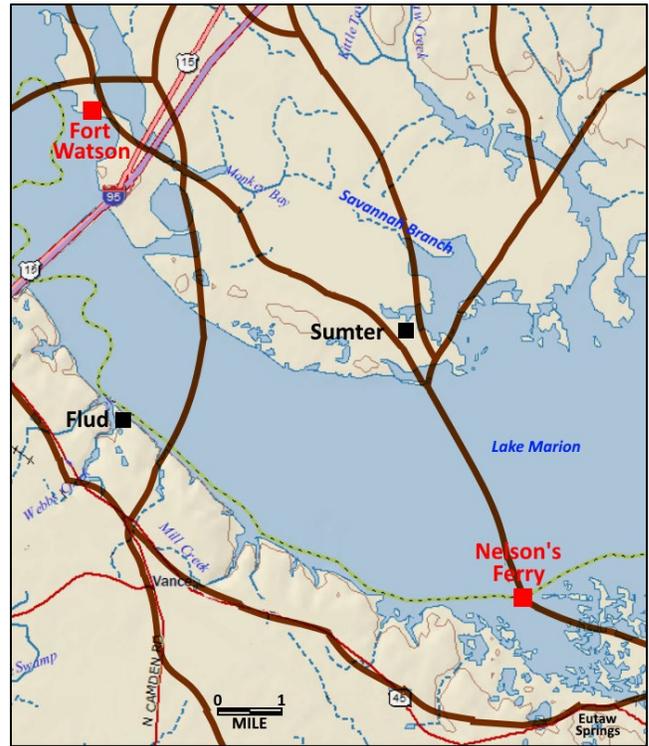


Figure 16. Locations of Flud's and Sumter's plantations and of Nelson's Ferry and Fort Watson on a modern map (TopoUSA). The dotted line showing the boundary between Orangeburg and Clarendon counties approximates the course of this section of Santee River before it was flooded by Lake Marion in the early 1940s. Flud's Plantation is shown at the mouth of Webb's Creek in Fig. 14. The possible location of Sumter's home is approximated by tracing the roads in Fig. 15 and placing the house in relation to them according to Fig. 14. This location is in Santee National Wildlife Refuge.

At this point Sumter's Rounds become even more confusing, with Rawdon giving an account that differs greatly from that of Sumter. It appears they described two separate skirmishes in the area of Ft.

⁶⁴ Rawdon to Cornwallis, March 7, 1781, *CP* 4:48. Flud's Plantation (also called Flood's or Widow Flud's) was owned by Susannah McDonald Flud (1744-1800), widow of William Flud (1738-1778). In early February the British ordered her to Charlestown, possibly to keep her from aiding the rebels. Petition of James Lynah, <http://revwarapps.org/sc3786.pdf>. According to Lt. Col. Nisbet Balfour, Sumter had first "reconnoitred Nelson's [Ferry], but finding it too strong passed the Santee five miles above that." Balfour to Gen. Henry Clinton, March 3, 1781, in "Letterbook of Lieut. Col. Nisbet Balfour."

⁶⁵ Sumter to Marion, Feb. 28, 1781, in Gibbes, *Documentary History*, 3:49. Hicks Chappell stated that they "eventually

crossed the Santee at Mrs. Cantey's Plantation." The Canteys owned much property on the north side of Santee River, but we have not been able to determine exactly where Sumter landed. Sumter's letter was sent from "Camp at Farr's." According to Richard Watkins, Thomas Farr owned a plantation bordering Sumter's on the southeast, at the northern terminus of Nelson's Ferry. As shown on Mouzon's map in Figure 14, the area bordering the north bank of Santee River was sometimes called "Farrer's Savannah." It was also called Great Savannah, which should not be confused with the Big Savannah previously discussed.

Watson, as stated by Hicks Chappell: “The day after crossing the River there was a battle between Sumters force & the British & Tories near Wrights Bluff, soon after there was another near Scotts Lake.”⁶⁶ (Fig. 17)

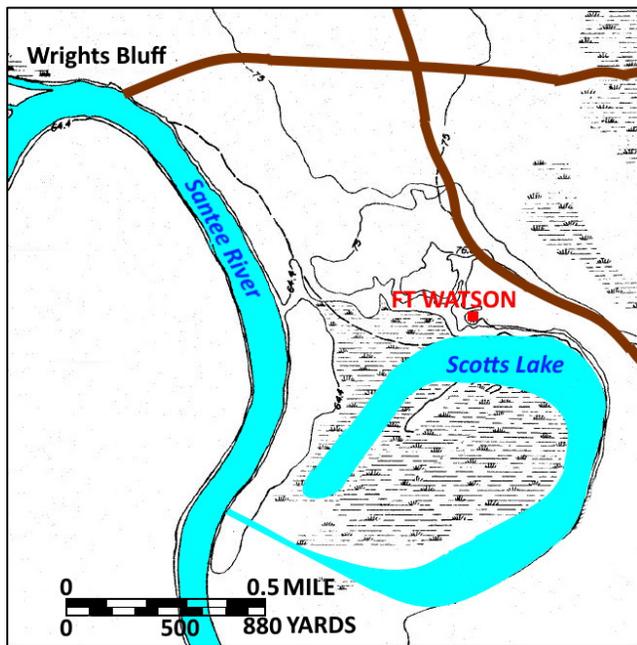


Figure 17. Fort Watson, Wrights Bluff, and Scotts Lake as they may have appeared during Sumter’s attack. Scotts Lake was an oxbow lake created by a former loop in the river; this section of the Santee River is now under Lake Marion. The base map showing the roads is from Leland G. Ferguson, “Exploratory Archaeology at the Scott’s Lake Site,” (Columbia: University of South Carolina Institute for Archaeology and Anthropology, 1972 and 1973, 1975). Scotts Lake is based on a plat for a tract of 300 acres laid out for William Cantey on December 14, 1754. (South Carolina Department of Archives and History)

Rawdon’s March 7th letter to Cornwallis apparently describes the first skirmish:

He effected his purpose [Sumter’s crossing the Santee] on the 27th and the same evening fell in with Lt Colonel Watson. An action ensued, in which the enemy were forced to

fly, leaving 18 dead on the field, several wounded and about forty horses. Our loss was only a subaltern and seven privates wounded. Harrison’s people, mounted and armed with swords, behaved very gallantly, routing the enemy’s cavalry regularly formed and thrice their number.⁶⁷

Sumter wrote to Marion on February 28 that “I passed the river last night at Mrs. Flud’s, have been at Col. Watson’s station, and find that he has collected his whole force at that place.” If Sumter crossed the river in the previous night it is unlikely that he skirmished with Watson on the “same evening,” as stated by Rawdon. Most likely he scouted Ft. Watson earlier on the 28th and skirmished later that day after writing to Marion.

Rawdon’s account to Cornwallis may have been based on a report by Lt. Col. Watson that was perhaps similar to Watson’s statements in an unaddressed, undated letter.⁶⁸ In that letter Watson wrote that the skirmish with Sumter occurred when he was “returning one day from a foraging Party [and] one of the Waggons, which was bringing a Mill, to grind the Corn, broke down.” The “one day” suggests the letter was written long after the event. Watson continued:

as it was not above one mile and a half from home, I left an Ensign, whose name was Cooper, with 20 Men, to repair, & bring it on – our Men were but just in and began to dress their dinners; when we heard a centinal firing towards the Line in which he had been left.

By “home” Watson presumably meant Ft. Watson, and the statement that the men were preparing dinner suggests that it was in the afternoon.

The letter continues:

We were soon up to the Spot which was but about a mile for having repaired the Cart,

⁶⁶ James Graham (<http://revwarapps.org/s21786.pdf>) also stated that he “was ordered out in a small partys, to another place to attack a small party [thus] was not present at the time of the Battle at the Bluff.”

⁶⁷ Maj. John Harrison, commander of the South Carolina Rangers (provincial troops).

⁶⁸ In “Light Infantry Never Surrender!” by Todd W. Braisted, *Journal of the American Revolution* (May 19, 2015). <https://allthingsliberty.com/2015/05/light-infantry-never-surrender>

they were proceeding home; when Sumpter wholly surrounded them, & called to him to surrender; but forming his Men in a Circle, round the Trees nearest him, he replied Light Infantry never Surrender, and began firing as hard as they could

The distance of about a mile is consistent with Chappell's statement that this skirmish occurred "near Wrights Bluff." Watson's main force arrived, and according to Watson's letter, Sumter's men

quitted our Gallant Ensign, & formed to receive us. This business did not last long before they fled, leaving what killed and wounded may be seen by the returns. We took some Prisoners and 30 Horses.

The letter closes with remarks that raise questions about its credibility. "Lord Rawdon came the next day, & flattered his young Corps much, by his manner of thanking them, & took that particular notice of Mr. Cooper." But if Rawdon singled out Cooper for praise, why did he mention Harrison but not Cooper in his letter to Cornwallis?⁶⁹ Moreover, it appears that Rawdon did not go to the area of Ft. Watson. In his letter to Cornwallis, Rawdon stated, "Finding on my arrival at Neilson's Ferry that Sumter had gotten clear into the country and had ensured a junction with Marion... I returned hither [to Camden] as rapidly as possible." The letter also states that "Sumpter was himself said to be wounded, which was probably the case, as he never afterwards appeared in that Quarter, & I believe not very long after died." Watson must surely have soon learned that Sumter had not been wounded and that he did appear again "in that Quarter." Watson's letter also stated that, "His Lordship too, much approved the Post, we had taken, and the manner in which we had strengthen'd it." "His Lordship" refers to Cornwallis, but at the time Cornwallis was 175 miles away pursuing Greene in North Carolina.

⁶⁹ Balfour did forward Watson's praise of "Lieut. Cooper" in a March 3, 1781, letter to Clinton: "Colo. Watson mentions with high applause the meritorious Conduct and gallant resistance of that Officer, & which, I therefore think it my

The second engagement mentioned by Hicks Chappell "near Scotts Lake" was a direct assault on Ft. Watson, which some pension applicants refer to as the fort at Wrights Bluff. Ft. Watson was named for Lt. Col. Watson, who had directed the construction of the fort on top of an ancient Indian mound. (Fig. 18) According to Watson, "we scraped it, stockaded it at the top; abattis'd it at the bottom, and rendered it as strong as the materials we could collect and the only utensils we had, Tomahawks, would admit."⁷⁰



Figure 18. Eastern side of the mound on which the stockaded Fort Watson stood. The mound is estimated to have been built about a thousand years ago by Santee Indians. It is now part of the Santee National Wildlife Refuge and open to the public.

Most sources give the date of this attack as March 1, which we think was the day after the first skirmish. As with Ft. Granby and Ft. Thomson, Sumter and his men probably had little hope of taking the fort without artillery, and only the need to recapture the provisions and money drove them. In the words of the unknown author of Appendix D:

The Americans marched against this post with a determination to succeed, or perish in the attempt. This ample supply of arms and clothing would have relieved many of their wants, and to retrieve so serious a loss, they

duty to communicate it to your Excellency." Balfour Letterbook.

⁷⁰ John Watson, undated, unaddressed letter, Sir Henry Clinton Papers 232:21, William L. Clements Library, Ann Arbor MI.

resolved to hazard all. The attack was commenced at 12 o'clock by a direct assault; Col. Watson having but a few hours before arrived with a re-inforcement of 400 men. The Americans were received with a tremendous fire. They sustained it for some time, but at length were obliged to give way, with considerable loss.

As usual, accounts by pension applicants vary in detail. William Hope stated that they were "in hopes of regaining their boats, but had at length to leave the place with the loss of several brave men." John Patton stated that they "had a severe engagement lost a considerable number of our men in killed & wounded and the General was compelled to draw his men and leave the British in possession of the Fort." According to Francis Adams, they "marched to The Fort at Rights Bluff. The British Army met Sumpter about two miles from the fort – were defeated and lost near one hundred." Hamilton Brown described it as "an engagement near Wright's Bluff where the British put us to flight & killed a great many & took some prisoners amongst whom was a brother-in-law of this applicant & Captain James Gill received a wound in his right arm & this applicant was sent home with him." David Sadler said that they "crossed the Santee after Sumter's wife – a few days after near Wrights Bluff came on the British in ambush a heavy & destructive fire & made to retreat."⁷¹

Lyman C. Draper wrote the following notes based on information from Thomas McDill (Appendix C):

left their horses behind. Sumter's men fell back – only one man hurt, & he wounded. Took seven prisoners, & lost six. In hurrying to where their horses were, — running up too

rashly – many of the horses got scared, & ran off. A few miles off, Sumter exchanged prisoners, & wrote to the British Major there that he owed him a prisoner.⁷²

According to the author of Appendix D, "After this check, the General led his troops to a secure position within five or six miles of the fort, where the wounded were attended to, and sent to places of security." David Sadler and perhaps others, however, had had enough of Sumter's Rounds, and "tired of fighting and starving went home."⁷³ Rawdon arrived at Nelson's Ferry soon afterward, and learning that Sumter had escaped, worried that he and Marion would join forces and attack his base at Camden.

Therefore ordering the infantry of Major McLeroth's detachment to cross the Santee and join Lt Colonel Watson, I returned hither as rapidly as possible with the infantry which had accompanied me and with the cavalry [that had been with McLeroth], which had just rejoined me by way of Neilson's Ferry.

In fact, however, Marion had not joined Sumter.⁷⁴

Skirmish of Ratcliff's Bridge, March 6, 1781

A day or two after the unsuccessful attack on Ft. Watson, Sumter marched his men on a mission that was not one of the objectives described by Greene. In the words of Isaac Gillham they "went to the Big Savannah to General Sumter's plantation and took his wife and son and some of his slaves which were left and took them far into the country." Gillham undoubtedly meant Sumter's plantation in the Great Savannah on the northern side of Santee River, as shown in Figure 14. Zachary Kitchens referred to the location as "Sumpters old Mills."

⁷¹ <http://revwarapps.org/s1956.pdf>;
<http://revwarapps.org/w162.pdf>;
<http://revwarapps.org/w198.pdf>;
<http://revwarapps.org/w1707.pdf>;
<http://revwarapps.org/r4023.pdf>;
<http://revwarapps.org/s9471.pdf>.

⁷² On March 15 Watson wrote as follows to Marion: "Gen. Sumter, after his lying before the post at Scott's Lake, sent a

flag to say, if we would let him have four men [prisoners], he would exchange four he had taken at Nelson's Ferry for them, three of those he sent for were killed, but we sent him six others...." Gibbes, *Documentary History*, 3:39-40.

⁷³ <http://revwarapps.org/s9471.pdf>.

⁷⁴ Sumter to Marion, March 4, 1781, in Gibbes, *Documentary History*, 3:27-28.

James Graham also stated that they “went on with Sumter to where his wife lived & he took her away.” According to James Jordan, a company under Capt. John Moffett was raised “to act as a guard for the removal of Col Sumter’s family from Santee River.” Surprisingly, the British apparently failed to anticipate that Sumter would rescue his family, and they did not set up an ambush. After collecting Sumter’s wife and eleven-year-old Thomas, Jr., they “marched on to Kingstree,” according to John McDill.⁷⁵

By March 4 Sumter’s troops and family had ridden another 25 miles from Kingstree and set up camp at Bradley’s Plantation near Salem.⁷⁶ There Sumter wrote to Marion, “My horses are so worn out that I can scarce move at all, and officers and men quite discouraged—finding no force in these parts, not even men enough to join to guide me through the country.” Sumter once more asked Marion to join forces with him, or at least come for a personal meeting. He conceded that “little may be done now” but thought that “much good might be expected to result hereafter from a personal consultation, which I hope to have the favour of by to-morrow night.”⁷⁷ Marion did not come.

⁷⁵ <http://revwarapps.org/s32270.pdf>; <http://revwarapps.org/r5999.pdf>; <http://revwarapps.org/s21786.pdf>; <http://revwarapps.org/s32346.pdf>; <http://revwarapps.org/s21879.pdf>. Bass (*Gamecock*, 133) stated without citing evidence that Sumter rode from Ft. Watson through the High Hills to Cane Savannah, then collected his wife and son at a Mrs. Clarke’s. Then according to Bass, Sumter, his wife, son and troops rode 40 miles “through the trackless pine barren stretching from the High Hills to Black River” before camping at James Bradley’s and Salem Presbyterian Church (Salem M. H. in Fig. 19). Cane Savannah (mislabelled “Caru Savannah” in Fig. 19), about four miles south of Stateburg, is no more than 20 miles from Salem Presbyterian Church. Bass may have been referring to Mrs. Ann Clarke, widow of Samuel Clarke, whose property was only about 10 miles from Bradley’s.

⁷⁶ According to John C. Parker, Jr., this was the plantation of James Bradley, who on Aug. 8, 1780, was captured and cruelly treated by Tarleton. Parker, *Parker’s Guide*, 416.

⁷⁷ Sumter to Marion, March 4, 1781, in Gibbes, *Documentary History* 3:27-28.

Much has been written about Marion’s not joining Sumter, and some historians have suggested that Marion deliberately avoided cooperating with him. A consideration of their movements and the difficulty of communicating suggest otherwise.⁷⁸ On February 28 Sumter again urged Marion to join him: “I think it advisable that we should form a junction, or at least approach so near each other as to co-operate upon the shortest notice.”⁷⁹ Marion was then camped at Salem, probably at or near the Salem Black River Presbyterian Church. Marion apparently received Sumter’s letter on the next day and immediately left Salem in Sumter’s direction. He arrived at “Clarks Plantation on Scape Hore,” probably a plantation owned by Samuel Clarke’s widow, Ann, on Scape Whore Creek,⁸⁰ which the USGS now more delicately denotes as Scape Ore Creek. (Fig. 19)

A day later, on March 2, Marion had marched about 30 miles closer to Sumter and was at “Hungres Hole Whites plantations”—the plantation of William White on Hungary Hall Branch.⁸¹ On the next day Marion passed close to Sumter’s plantation at Great Savannah, but Sumter

⁷⁸ David Neilan was likely the first to recognize that Marion made an effort to join Sumter. David Neilan and Charles B. Baxley, “Marion v. Watson, The Bridges Campaign: Asymmetrical Warfare at its Finest” (Presentation at the Francis Marion Symposium, Manning SC, October 23-24, 2015). George “Rick” Wise also reported this conclusion in his MA thesis, “Last, Best Chance to Corner the Swamp Fox”, American Public University, Dec. 2019.

⁷⁹ Sumter to Marion, Feb. 28, 1781, in Gibbes, *Documentary History* 3:49. Farr’s Plantation was just north of the Great (Farrers) Savannah near Sumter’s house at Nelson’s Ferry.

⁸⁰ Patrick O’Kelley, *Unwaried Patience and Fortitude: Francis Marion’s Orderly Book* (West Conshohocken PA: Infinity, 2006), 518. Plat surveyed for Samuel Clarke in 1773, for Thomas Coullitte in 1785, and John McDonnell and William Coppedge in 1806 <https://www.archivesindex.sc.gov>, accessed Nov. 23, 2022.

⁸¹ Plat surveyed for William White on “Hungry Hall Branch” in 1785, <https://www.archivesindex.sc.gov/>, accessed Nov. 23, 2022.

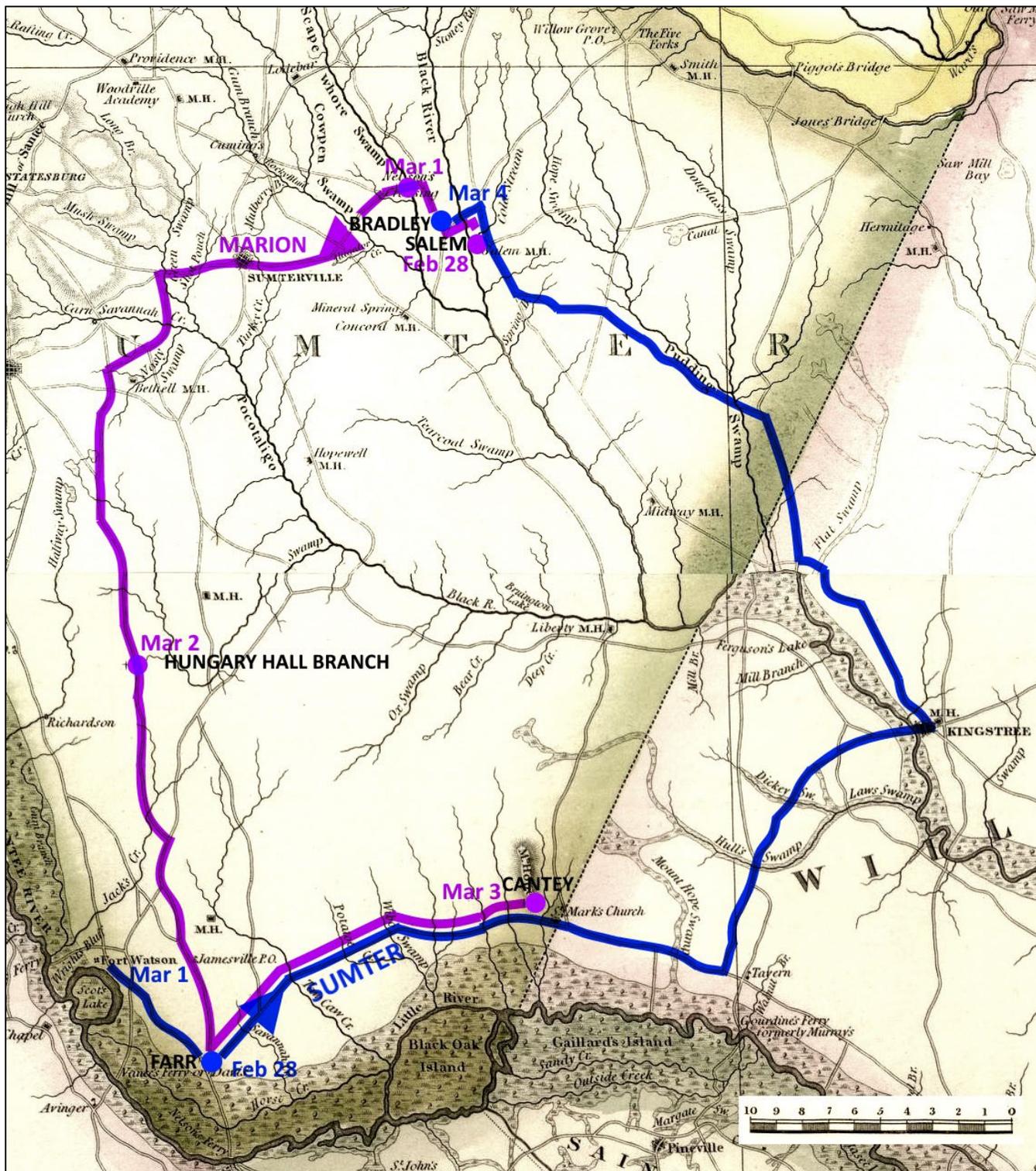


Figure 19. Excerpt of John Wilson's 1822 map of South Carolina showing the probable routes of Sumter (blue) and Marion (violet) from February 28 through March 4, 1781.

had left by then and ridden some 40 miles to Kingstree. Not finding Marion there, Sumter rode another 40 miles to Bradley's Plantation, arriving on March 4. There Sumter wrote to Marion:

I am very sorry to be so far out of the way of meeting with you at a time when there is the greatest occasion for it. I made no doubt, but your route to me would be by the way of King's Tree, or the Ferry, and after receiving yours of the 28th ultimo. informing me what the number of your men were, I found you to be very weak, and the enemy near at hand in force, this determined me to move on to meet with you—to concert measures for our further operations, which is still absolutely necessary. I shall therefore remain at or near this place for that purpose, and beg that you may come this way with all possible speed, if not convenient with all your men to facilitate an interview, please to come with a few.⁸²

Evidently Sumter had gotten about a day ahead of Marion. After camping at the Mount Hope plantation of John Cantey on March 3, Marion gave up trying to catch up with Sumter and proceeded about 15 miles south to Cordes Plantation near St. Stephen before receiving Sumter's letter. Sumter waited for Marion at Bradley's until March 6th, then continued his retreat northward on the road from Georgetown to Charlotte. Sumter gave the following explanation for failing to wait for Marion at Bradley's as promised. "My unfortunate failing herein and withal finding contrary to my expectation, that you had neither men, or surplus of any kind, and the force I had with me but small and from many causes decreasing, rendered my retreat at once both necessary and difficult."⁸³

⁸² Sumter to Marion, March 4, 1781, in Gibbes, *Documentary History* 3:27-28.

⁸³ Sumter to Marion, March 28, 1781 in *ibid.* 2:44. Bradley's Plantation was northwest and near Salem Black River Church.

⁸⁴ On Feb. 21, Greene, having crossed Dan River into Virginia, asked Sumter to destroy a mill near Camden to "prevent their obtaining supplies and oblige the Garrison to detach parties at a distance," so that Sumter could "reduce it in a short time." *PNG*, 7:328.

In the meantime Rawdon arrived at Camden about midday on the fifth. From an intercepted letter he learned that Sumter, "ignorant of our return," was "advancing towards this post to attempt fulfilling a particular purpose." The "particular purpose" was probably the destruction of a mill that supplied the garrison,⁸⁴ but Sumter may actually have intended only to take his wife and son to safety in Charlotte by the most direct route. That evening Rawdon, alarmed by a "report of a body of the enemy being within a few miles," sent out the cavalry of the South Carolina Royalists provincial regiment.⁸⁵ (Appendix G) He sent the Royalists infantry under Maj. Thomas Fraser on a different mission.

Fraser's infantrymen had marched some 20 miles eastward from Camden when they were surprised by Sumter's troops riding toward them, as Rawdon related in his March 7th letter to Cornwallis: "On the 6th, before the cavalry had joined him, Major Fraser unexpectedly met Sumter near the head of Black River," and Sumter "was not a little surprised at finding himself opposed in the open field."⁸⁶ On the same day in his letter to Watson, Rawdon wrote the following: "Frazer, yesterday fell in with Sumter (who was advancing this way) between Scape Hoar and Radcliff's Bridge." Pension applicant Zachary Kitchens stated that they "were met at the Forks of the road below Camden by the enemy."⁸⁷ These accounts indicate that the initial encounter between Sumter and Fraser occurred near the head of Black River at a fork in a road between Scape Whore Creek and swamp and Ratcliff's (or Radcliff's) Bridge.

The location of Ratcliff's Bridge has been forgotten. Besides Rawdon's mention of it in his letters to Cornwallis and Watson, we have found eighteenth-century references to the bridge only in

⁸⁵ Intercepted letter from Rawdon to Watson, March 7, 1781, in Gibbes, *Documentary History*, 2:31-32.

⁸⁶ Rawdon to Cornwallis, March 7, 1781, *CP* 4:49.

⁸⁷ <http://revwarapps.org/r5999.pdf>. The location was given similarly by the following: William Robertson: "near the head of Black River a part of the country called Scape hoar" <https://revwarapps.org/s7417.pdf>, Charles Hinson: "at the head of Scape Hore (now black River)" <https://revwarapps.org/s7014.pdf>, Charles Lisonbie: "the head of Black River" <https://revwarapps.org/s21346.pdf>.

three surveyor's plats, only one of which provides a clue to its location.⁸⁸ The 1773 plat for James Wilson was for property "on the E side of Lynches Creek, about 3 miles above Ratcliffs Bridge: Bounded S. by the land laid out for Mickson, E by John Micksons...." No plat for Mickson contiguous to Wilson was found, but the 1773 map of James Cook shows "Mixon" on the east side of Lynches Creek (now Lynches River). If this Mixson was one of the Micksons mentioned in the plat, then Ratcliff's Bridge would likely have been located along the part of Lynches Creek indicated by the red bracket in Figure 20. On the western bank of most of this stretch of Lynches River a steep bluff makes access to the river bank, and therefore a bridge, difficult. One exception, indicated by the small red square, is at the end of James Mill Road in present Bishopville where a creek has eroded the bluff.⁸⁹ (Fig. 21) In 1873 Lyman Copeland Draper collected information for a biography of Sumter that was never published.⁹⁰ None of Draper's informants knew of Ratcliff's Bridge, but several agreed with Draper's supposition that it was what they called the Burnt Bridge, remains of which were still visible near the mill of B. A. James.⁹¹

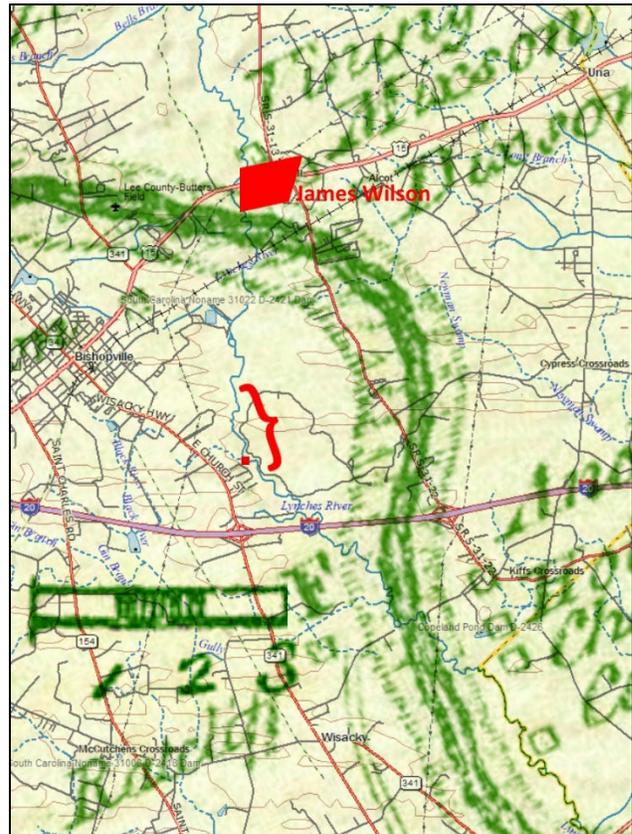


Figure 20. Part of James Cook's 1773 map (recolored green) overlaid onto a modern map (TopoUSA). Lynches Creek is inaccurately mapped but positioned for best fit at "Mixon" and Ratcliff's Ferry (F).⁹² The James Wilson plat (red) is positioned with "Mixon" on its east. The middle of the red bracket is about three miles below the plat.

⁸⁸ Rawdon to Cornwallis, March 7, 1781, *CP* 4:48; Rawdon to Watson, March 7, 1781, Rawdon to Watson in Gibbes, *Documentary History*, 2:31. Plat for 200 acres laid out for James Wilson, January 27, 1773. Plat for 200 acres "about ½ a mile below Ratcliffs Bridge on both sides of the Blk River Road" laid out for William Jones, July 24, 1771. Plat for 250 acres "two miles above Ratcliff's Bridge, on both sides Georgetown Road" laid out for James McCann, May 22, 1773. South Carolina Department of Archives and History, available online at <https://www.archivesindex.sc.gov/>.

⁸⁹ William E. Richardson to Lyman C. Draper, March 6 and 16, 1873, "The place was well selected for a Bridge. the Creek comes up to Bluff at the 'Old field,' & is very narrow there, & the swamp tho not wide one is principally beyond the Creek..., 6VV119-122.

⁹⁰ Draper Collection, Sumter Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society.

⁹¹ William Kennedy Crosswell to Draper, March 27, 1873, "your inference about the old burnt Bridge being the once Radcliff's Bridge must be correct," Draper's Sumter papers 6VV127. John O. Durant to Draper, April 16, 1873, "It is very likely that the B. bridge may have belonged to the Radcliffs," 6VV144.

⁹² It is sometimes assumed that Ratcliff's Ferry was the location of Ratcliff's Bridge, but Figure 20 shows this ferry farther to the south, and of course there would be no ferry where there was also a bridge. Mills Atlas shows at or near this location Newman's Ferry, which later became the location of Fields Bridge. (Fields, Spencer, Petition Asking A Bridge Over Lynches Creek, Originally Chartered To Isaac Bishop, Be Renewed In His Name. 11/25/1834. SCDAH.) Fields Bridge Road from Kiffs Crossroads leads to the former location of Fields Bridge and Newman's Ferry.



Figure 21. Left. Detail of the area within the bracket in Figure 20 on the current USGS topo map. The site of the eastern landing of Ratcliff’s Bridge is now in Lee State Park and accessible by road. Right. The end of James Mill Road where it descends toward Lynchess River, now private property.

Some of Draper’s correspondents believed that Sumter and Fraser first met near the line between Kershaw and Sumter Districts, about seven miles north of present Bishopville. William A. James, for example, stated that Sumter “was retreating to N. C. on the Georgetown road and that the British arrested him just above Bishopville and he fell back to Stirrup branch.”⁹³ William Kennedy Crocell, who heard about the skirmish from his father, wrote to Draper that

there is now in the direction of Tillers feerry from the battle ground the remains of an old trail or Road across Stirrup Branch that is known to this day as Sumters trail probably the Rout that Gen Sumter was going when he

Encountered Maj. Fraser coming down from towards Camden⁹⁴

Zachary Kitchens stated that the encounter was at a fork in the road, and Mills Atlas does show a fork in the road near the location given by James and Croswell. However, Rawdon, as well as Kitchens and other participants,⁹⁵ wrote that Sumter and Fraser met at the head of Black River, which is at least five miles south of the location given by James and Croswell. The only road junction on Mills Atlas of 1825 at the head of Black River was in present Bishopville at the intersection of Church and Main streets. We therefore believe that Sumter’s and Fraser’s first encounter was at this location where Bishopville is now, as shown in Figure 22.

⁹³ James to Draper, March 28, 1873, 6VV131-134. Stirrup Branch is now Bells Branch.

⁹⁴ Croswell to Draper, February 10, 1873, 6VV114-118. Tiller’s Ferry was on Lynchess Creek about three miles north of the Kershaw – Sumter line. The road described by Croswell now appears to be the bed of an abandoned railroad track.

⁹⁵ William Robertson: “near the head of Black River a part of the country called Scape hoar”

<https://revwarapps.org/s7417.pdf>, Charles Hinson: “at the head of Scape Hore (now black River)”

<https://revwarapps.org/s7014.pdf>, Charles Lisonbie: “the head of Black River” <https://revwarapps.org/s21346.pdf>.

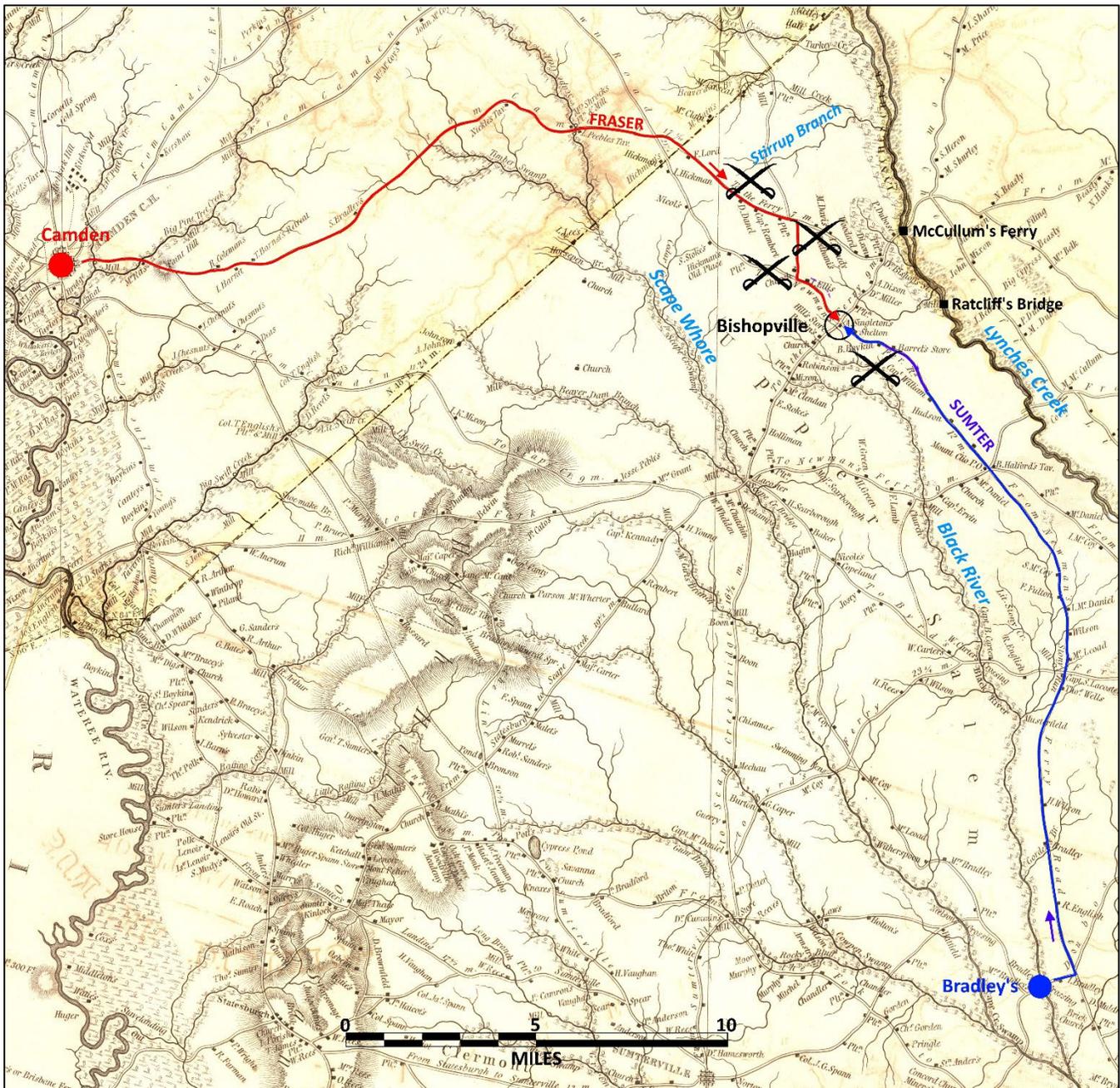


Figure 22. Parts of Kershaw (upper left), Sumter and Darlington (upper right) Districts in Mills Atlas showing possible routes of Sumter (blue line) and Fraser (red) leading to the skirmishing of Ratcliff's Bridge. Lynch's Creek (now Lynch's River) was farther west than depicted on Mills Atlas, and Stribur Branch (now Bells Branch) empties directly into Lynch's Creek rather than into Mill Creek. Fraser's march eastward from Camden as shown here would have been along roads corresponding roughly to present Old Stagecoach Road, Mount Hebron Road and Old Georgetown Road to present Lucknow near the Kershaw-Sumter District county line. Sumter's march from Bradley's at present Maysville would have probably been along US 76 and State Routes 527 and 341. Locations of skirmishing reported to Draper in 1873 are shown by crossed swords and detailed in Figure 23.

After recovering from their initial surprise, Sumter and Fraser began skirmishing. Accounts by Rawdon and by Kitchens seem to divide the skirmishing into three phases, illustrated in Figures 23 and 24. According to Rawdon, “when the parties first met, Sumter’s men were all mounted and quickly gave way before the fire of the infantry.”⁹⁶ According to Kitchens, “the enemy... after some severe firing drove us back.”⁹⁷ This first phase of skirmishing would have been near Ratcliff’s Bridge. William E. Richardson cited the following by elderly resident Ezekiel Dixon:

an old field is there at the Burnt Bridge – when he was a Boy it was called Williamsons or Williams old Field – where it was said a Fight was & that Bullets were often picked up there⁹⁸

Williams’s or Williamson’s old field may have belonged to the “Capt. William” on Mills Atlas. (Fig 23) In the same letter, Richardson wrote:

Benjamin J Barrett (PO Bishopville) was raised at the House marked Barrets Store (see Boykins Map of Sumter 1821 [Fig. 23]) near the Burnt Bridge. Has often seen Bullets ploughed up in Williamsons or Williams old Field near the Bluff of Lynchs Creek at the Burnt Bridge Has picked up some himself while ploughing near there & also ploughed up a large long knife – apparently made of a piece of Sword – has often heard it said when he was young, that Gen Sumter had a fight at that old Field & that he burnt that Bridge. ⁹⁹

The skirmishing in this first phase is represented by the lowest crossed-swords in Figure 22 and the upper left panel of Figure 23.

Sumter soon recovered from this first phase of skirmishing, and in the second phase pushed Fraser back about six miles northward to Stirrup Branch. Rawdon wrote to Cornwallis that Sumter “dismounted and advanced with tolerable countenance to attack Fraser,” and Kitchens stated that they “had another fight and drove the enemy back.”¹⁰⁰ In his 1873 letter to Draper Crosswell gave the following location:

the nearest point of the battle ground to the Road leading to Lynchs creek about $\frac{2}{3}$ of a mile about one mile from Stirrup Branch four miles from the crossing of Scape ore one and a half miles from the road leading from Camden¹⁰¹

This location is approximated by the northernmost crossed swords in Figure 22 and in the upper right of Figure 23.¹⁰² Crosswell, as well as William A. James, evidently believed this was the first fighting, which would explain why they thought Sumter and Fraser first encountered each other north of Stirrup Branch.

Fraser was apparently in a strong position at or near Stirrup Branch, and he soon turned the tide against Sumter in a third and final phase of skirmishing. Rawdon wrote to Cornwallis that “the South Carolinians [Royalists] soon repelled the attack and entirely dispersed the enemy, pursuing them for some distance.”¹⁰³ According to Kitchens, “the enemy taking a stand in an open field made ready again our officers thought it prudent to retire & did so.”¹⁰⁴ The third phase was a running firefight, as depicted in the lower left panel of Figure 23.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁶ Rawdon to Cornwallis, March 7, 1781, *CP* 4:49.

⁹⁷ <http://revwarapps.org/r5999.pdf>.

⁹⁸ Richardson to Draper, February 10, 1873, 6VV124.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* There is no evidence that Sumter burned the Bridge.

¹⁰⁰ Rawdon to Cornwallis, March 7, 1781, *CP* 4:49. <http://revwarapps.org/r5999.pdf>.

¹⁰¹ Crosswell to Draper, February 10, 1873, 6VV114-118.

¹⁰² John O. Durant to Draper, March 26, 1873, 6VV135-137: “on or near the road about opposite the head of Stirrup branch the attack was made by the British on Gen Sumter.” Durant to

Draper, April 16, 1873, 6VV142-144: “Sumter & the British met at or near the head of Stirrup Branch.” Benjamin J. Barrett to Draper, April 15, 1873, 6VV138-141: “The fight must have taken place about 1 mile west of Stirrup Branch.”

¹⁰³ Rawdon to Cornwallis, March 7, 1781, *CP* 4:49.

¹⁰⁴ <http://revwarapps.org/r5999.pdf>.

¹⁰⁵ Richardson to Draper, February 10, 1873, quoting Ezekiel Dixon quoting his father: “the fight was in his hearing a long time; and mooved down Lynchs Creek.” James to Draper, March 28, 1873, 6VV131-134; “a running fight took place.”

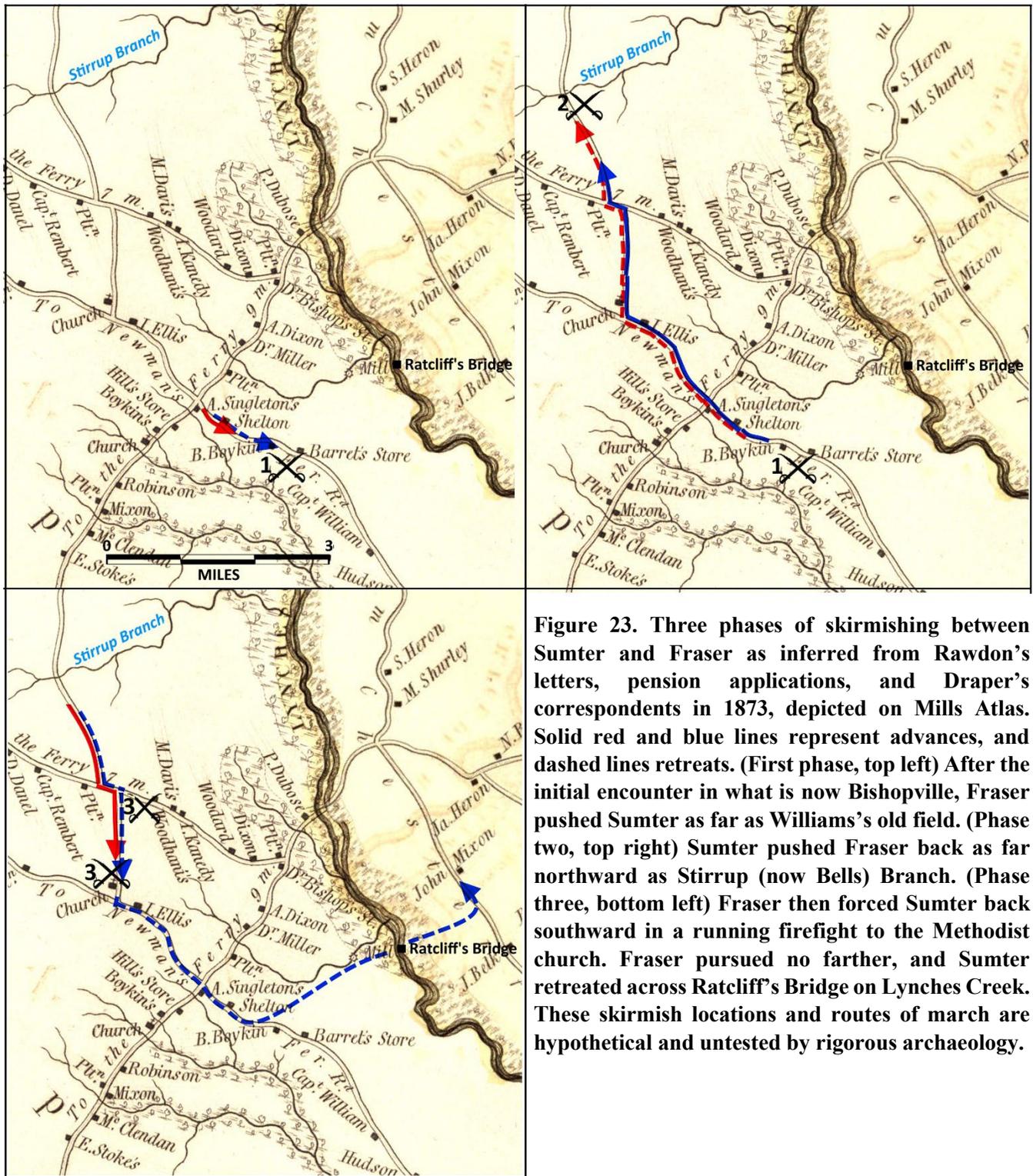


Figure 23. Three phases of skirmishing between Sumter and Fraser as inferred from Rawdon's letters, pension applications, and Draper's correspondents in 1873, depicted on Mills Atlas. Solid red and blue lines represent advances, and dashed lines retreats. (First phase, top left) After the initial encounter in what is now Bishopville, Fraser pushed Sumter as far as Williams's old field. (Phase two, top right) Sumter pushed Fraser back as far northward as Stirrup (now Bells) Branch. (Phase three, bottom left) Fraser then forced Sumter back southward in a running firefight to the Methodist church. Fraser pursued no farther, and Sumter retreated across Ratcliff's Bridge on Lynchess Creek. These skirmish locations and routes of march are hypothetical and untested by rigorous archaeology.

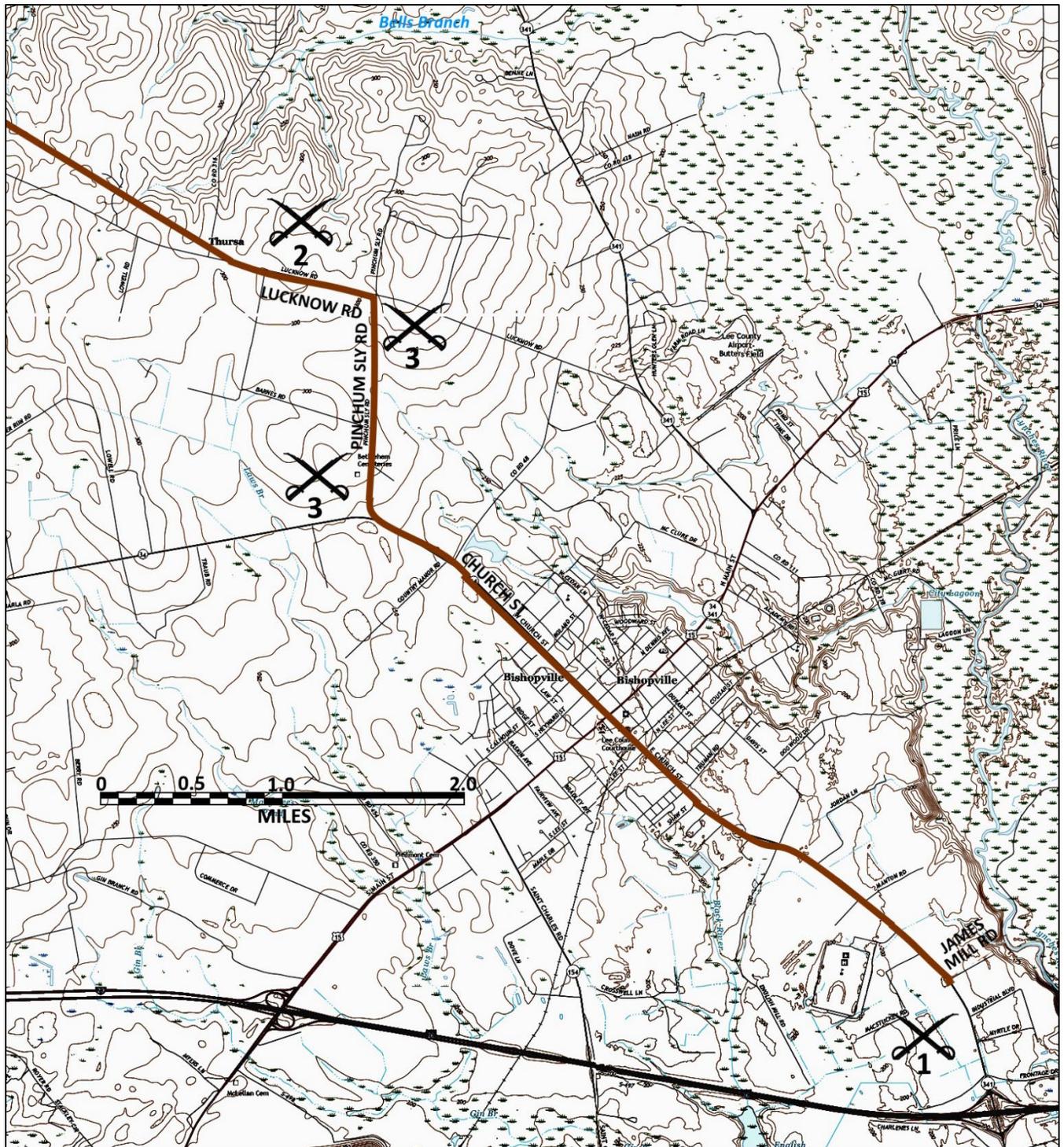


Figure 24. Approximate sites of skirmishing on the current USGS topo map, according to nineteenth-century accounts. The brown lines indicate roads shown in Mills Atlas.

Draper's correspondents described two places in particular – Woodham's and a Methodist church – where fighting occurred during the third phase, as indicated by the two crossed swords in the lower left of Figure 23 and in Figure 24. Ezekiel Dixon related to Draper what he had heard from his father, Abel Dixon, said to have died in 1853 at about 88 years old:

my Father was ploughing in the Woodham field – when he first heard the guns – after Breakfast – went home put up his horse & was out watching, – the fight passed on down to the Creek – to the Burnt Bridge where my Father was told Sumter Crossed Lynches Creek.... Bullets have been picked up many times near Woodham & at Spring Branch – between Woodham & the Burnt Bridge.¹⁰⁶

Abel Dixon was also the source of the following account of fighting at the Methodist Church, as related by William E. Richardson:

Mr. Abel Dixon then a lad of fourteen years was plowing in a field nearly opposite the present residence of Wm. K. Dixon when he heard the firing of musquetry & a while after our men passed near him retreating from the Tories. The Tories threatened him but did not molest him otherwise. The old gentleman recollects two fights, both within hearing. One was on Stirrup Branch – say from a mile and a half to two miles from W. K. Dixons & the other was a mile above Bishopville, near the Methodist Church. The old gentleman also recollects that about that time a Tory was found hanging dead to a tree near the place of this fight, & another with his head cut off.¹⁰⁷

Richardson also stated that “at the Methodist Church men now living here have when boys cut bullets from the trees that were lodged there at the time of this fight. In clearing land lately (within ten years) bullets have been found in the timber in splitting it, &c”¹⁰⁸ According to John Patton,

a sharp fire was kept up on both sides for some time but without much effect & Gen'l Sumpter discovering that Watson [sic: Fraser] had more than double the number of men under his command at that place, ordered a retreat which we effected in good order, the British seeming not to incline to pursue us.¹⁰⁹

Zachary Kitchens stated that “the enemy taking a stand in an open field made ready again our officers thought it prudent to retire & did so.” Rawdon wrote to Cornwallis that Fraser chased Sumter “for some distance, but for want of cavalry no decisive advantage could be taken of the rout.”¹¹⁰ Somewhere after the fighting at the church Fraser stood down, and Sumter withdrew to Ratcliff's Bridge, where he crossed Lynches Creek and continued his march to North Carolina.

Rawdon claimed that Sumter “lost ten killed and about forty wounded [and] Fraser had only six wounded.”¹¹¹ Accounts by pension applicants suggest a much less serious defeat of Sumter. William Barkley stated, “we had a few fires and a good number of the Army run.”¹¹² Two pension applicants described the skirmish as an American victory. John Courson: “at a creek called Scape hoar about twenty miles from Camden we had a fight with the British & whipped them.” Ralph Rodgers: “turned up to Ratliff's where we were attacked by the British & forced them to retreat.”¹¹³

¹⁰⁶ Dixon to Draper, August 20, 1873, 6VV82-84. Spring Branch is the creek at Ratcliff's Bridge.

¹⁰⁷ Richardson to Draper, April 23, 1873, 6VV86-90.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ <http://revwarapps.org/w162.pdf>.

¹¹⁰ Rawdon to Cornwallis, March 7, 1781, CP 4:49.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² <http://revwarapps.org/s16314.pdf>.

¹¹³ <http://revwarapps.org/s7417.pdf>,
<http://revwarapps.org/s4788.pdf>.

Was Sumter's Rounds a Failure?

After the skirmish of Ratcliff's Bridge, Sumter rode north with his men and family and arrived at the Waxhaws settlement by March 9. There he dismissed his troops. After 300 miles and 21 days Sumter's Rounds had come full circle. (Figure 25) Sumter had not taken any of the British forts he attacked, but all three fell soon afterward. Sumter began a second siege of Ft. Granby on May 2, 1781, but it did not succeed until May 15, when Lee's Legion arrived with a cannon. Soon after Sumter left Ft. Thomson the British abandoned it and moved to nearby Ft. Motte, which fell to Lee and Marion on May 12. Lee and Marion captured Ft. Watson on April 23, thanks to a Maham tower that allowed riflemen to shoot down into the fort. Like Morgan's defeat of Tarleton at Cowpens, these successes by Lee and Marion eclipsed whatever tangible achievements could be claimed for Sumter's Rounds.

Sumter had penetrated deep into enemy territory and managed to extract most of his men, as well as his family, back to safety, skillfully staying just beyond reach of the British and luring them farther and farther from their posts. He appears to have improvised as contingencies dictated. In the words of Ralph Rodgers, "This was no regular march of the army but a confused state of things through the country."¹¹⁴ Sumter himself apparently told Greene that his rounds had been a success "with very inconsiderable loss,"¹¹⁵ and Greene wrote to Sumter that he was "happy to hear of your successful skirmishes." (Appendix F)

The failure to take any of the British posts has led recent historians to label Sumter's Rounds a

complete failure. This may be an unfair judgment considering that Greene probably did not expect Sumter to take these posts without artillery. The objectives of the campaign, as enunciated by Greene, were "destroying the enemies' stores and perplexing their affairs in South Carolina" in order to "keep the spirits of the people from sinking, as well as to alarm the enemy, respecting the safety of their posts."¹¹⁶

A glance at British movements in Figure 25 certainly gives the impression that Sumter was "perplexing their affairs in South Carolina" and "alarming them respecting the safety of their posts." Rawdon marched his infantrymen 35 miles from Camden to Ft. Granby, sent McLeroth 60 miles in pursuit of Sumter, then marched his men back to Camden, then another 60 miles down to Nelson's Ferry, and then back to Camden in a panic that the post might fall to the combined forces of Sumter and Marion. He sent Watson and Small 30 miles each to reinforce Ft. Watson. At Ratcliff's Bridge Sumter disrupted whatever mission Fraser was on.

It is not so easy to chart the rising and sinking of the spirits of the people, but there is testimony that Sumter's Rounds did at least persuade South Carolina Patriots that their cause was not hopeless. In the words of David Ramsay, a prominent Charlestown surgeon during the war and later a distinguished statesman and historian, "Sumpter having, by this excursion, satisfied the friends of independence in the centre of the State that their cause was not desperate, retired in safety to the borders of North Carolina."¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ <http://revwarapps.org/s4788.pdf>.

¹¹⁵ Sumter to Greene, March 9, 1781, *PNG*, 7:417.

¹¹⁶ Greene to Marion, Feb. 11, 1781, in Gibbes, *Documentary History*, 3:20.

¹¹⁷ David Ramsay, *Ramsay's History of South Carolina* (Newberry SC: W. J. Duffie, 1858), 238.

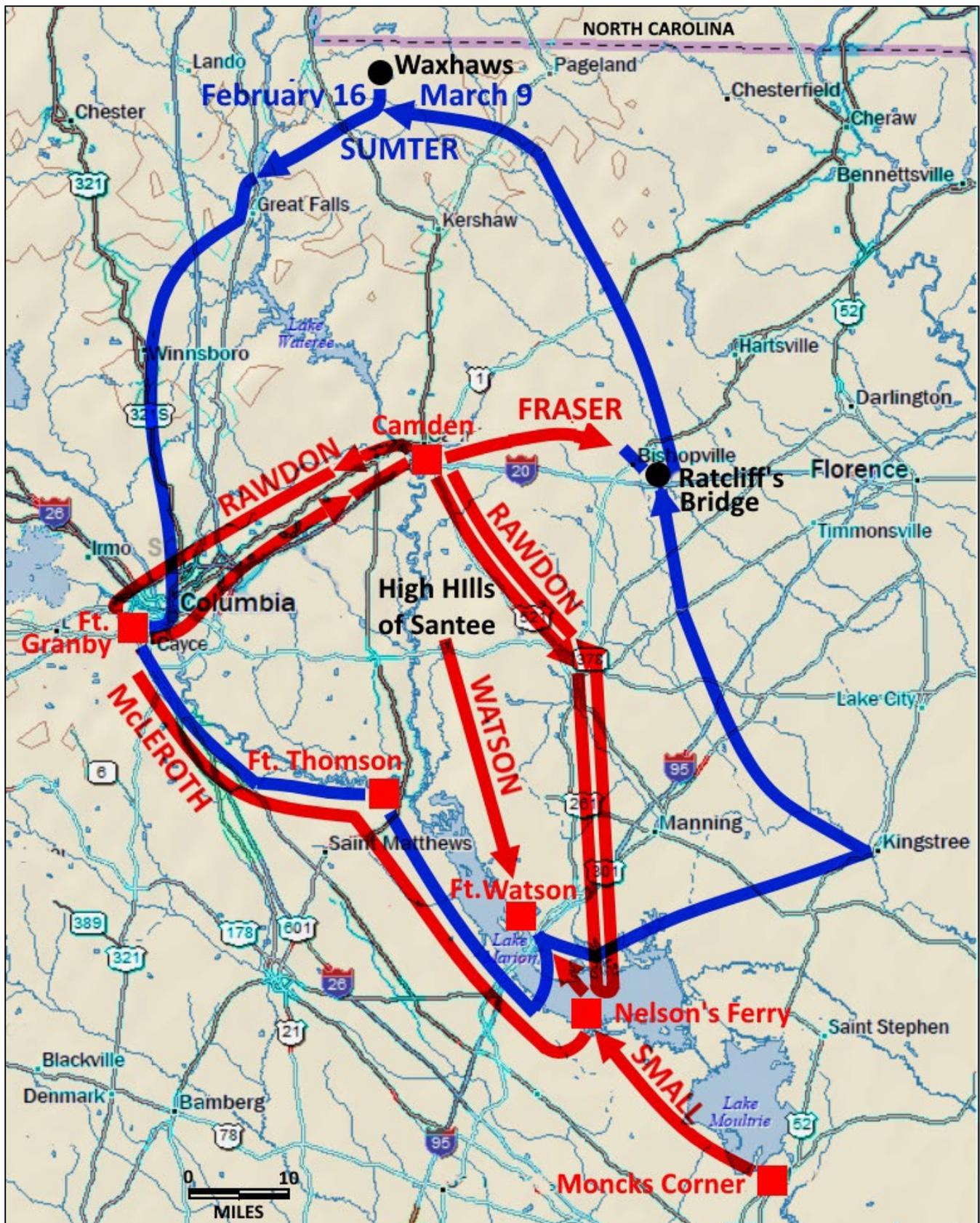


Figure 25. A modern map (TopoUSA) summarizing the possible routes of Sumter and of the British during Sumter's Rounds.

APPENDIX A

Sumter's Wound at Blackstock's Plantation on November 20, 1780

Historians have described Sumter's wound in a variety of ways. Robert D. Bass, without citing his evidence, described the wound as follows:

Sumter turned sideways in his saddle, throwing his right shoulder between his heart and their fire. Five buckshot ripped into his chest. Another plunged under his right shoulder chipped a splinter from his backbone, and came to rest in his left shoulder.¹¹⁸

Ann King Gregorie, in contrast, wrote that "the General was struck in the right shoulder by a ball that passed through and carried away a splinter of the backbone before it lodged."¹¹⁹ This is more consistent with Sumter's statement in his March 9th letter to Greene that "I still labour under the misfortune of having but little use of my right hand and writing very painful."¹²⁰

Eleven participants in the battle, including Tarleton, stated that Sumter was indeed shot in the shoulder.¹²¹ John Walker, for example, stated that "Sumter was shot through the shoulder in that Battle with a pistol Bullet."¹²² William Hatcher specified the right shoulder,¹²³ which is consistent with the following statement by Samuel Walker:

Gen Sumpter was wounded in the shoulder. I saw him when he was shot his sword fell out of his right hand and he caught it with his left before it fell to the ground.¹²⁴

Some participants gave various other locations for the wound. Joel Harvey stated that Sumter was wounded in the "breast and shoulder," and Maj. Samuel Hammond mentioned only a severe wound in the breast.¹²⁵ Moses Lindsey stated that Sumter was "dangerously wounded in the back," and Reuben Long stated that Sumter was "severely wounded in his hip or thigh."¹²⁶ The preponderance of evidence, however, suggests that the wound was to the right shoulder.

¹¹⁸ Bass, *Gamecock*, 107.

¹¹⁹ Gregorie, *Sumter*, 122-123.

¹²⁰ Sumter to Greene, March 9, 1781. *PNG*, 7:417.

¹²¹ James Alexander <http://revwarapps.org/w9327.pdf>,

James Clark <http://revwarapps.org/s32181.pdf>,

James Clinton <http://revwarapps.org/s2437.pdf>,

Jeremiah Dial Jr. <http://revwarapps.org/w914.pdf>,

William Hatcher <http://revwarapps.org/s31727.pdf>,

John Hodge <http://revwarapps.org/s21825.pdf>,

James Jones <http://revwarapps.org/r5706.pdf>,

John Walker <http://revwarapps.org/w9875.pdf>,

Samuel Walker <http://revwarapps.org/s3448.pdf>.

Richard Winn. Notes—1780 Transcribed by Will Graves.

<http://revwarapps.org/scx2.pdf>. Tarleton, *History*, 183.

Christopher Choat <http://revwarapps.org/s3144.pdf> stated that the wound was to the "shoulder or arm."

¹²² <http://revwarapps.org/w9875.pdf>.

¹²³ <http://revwarapps.org/s31727.pdf>.

¹²⁴ <http://revwarapps.org/s3448.pdf>.

¹²⁵ <http://revwarapps.org/r4709.pdf>. Joseph Johnson, *Traditions and Reminiscences Chiefly of the American Revolution in the South* (Charleston SC: Walker & James, 1851), 525.

¹²⁶ <http://revwarapps.org/s4551.pdf>, <http://revwarapps.org/r6431.pdf>.

APPENDIX B

American officers in Sumter's Rounds. Names in boldface are from pension applications and other primary sources. Other names are from J. D. Lewis's carolana.com based on various unidentified primary and secondary sources. These and other officers may have participated only in parts of the campaign.

Brig. Gen. Thomas Sumter - Commanding Officer

Turkey Creek Regiment of Militia

Col. Edward Lacey

Capt. Samuel Adams

Capt. Hugh Knox

Capt. Hugh McClure

Capt. John Turner

Capt. Philip Walker

Captains Frederick Gray, Henry Lisle,
William Morris, George Neely, Thomas
Robins, John Steel

Camden District Regiment of Militia

Col. Thomas Taylor

Capt. Wade Hampton

Captains James Craig, Andrew Leter, John
Miles, John Robertson, Thomas Starke,
Kemp T. Strother

New Acquisition District Regiment of Militia

Lt. Col. James Hawthorne

Capt. Jacob Barnett

Capt. William Hanna

Capt. John Henderson

Capt. James Jamieson

Capt. John Moffett

Capt. James Venable

Col. William Bratton; Captains William
Carr, William Hillhouse, James Wallace,
Thomas Woods, Sr

Fairfield Regiment of Militia

Capt. James Gill (wounded at Ft. Watson
and not in skirmish of Ratcliff's Bridge)

Captains John Hollis, Samuel Lacey,
Edward Martin, John Turner

Col. William Hill's Regiment of Light Dragoons

Capt. Thomas Gill

Captains William Carr, James Giles

2nd Spartan Regiment of Militia

Capt. Robert Thomson

Polk's Regiment of Light Dragoons detachment

led by Lt. Col. William Polk

Capt. Samuel Martin

1st Spartan Regiment of Militia detachment led by
Maj. William Smith

Capt. Hugh Bratton

Lt. Col. Henry Hampton's Regiment of Light
Dragoons detachment led by Capt. Joseph Robins
or Capt. John Mills

Mecklenburg County NC Regiment of Militia
detachment led by Capt. John Reid

Roebuck's Battalion of Spartan Regiment of
Militia detachment led by Capt. Major Parson

Kershaw Regiment of Militia detachment led by
Capt. William Nettles

APPENDIX C

Lyman Copeland Draper's handwritten notes on an account of Sumter's Rounds by Thomas McDill, son of John McDill.¹²⁷

[Items in curly brackets are by Draper. Annotations in square brackets and numbered footnotes are by the present authors.]

Attack on Wright's Bluff, on Wateree [sic]. Made an attack on the British there – left their horses behind. Sumter's men fell back – only one man hurt, & he wounded. Took seven prisoners, & lost six. In hurrying to where their horses were, -- running up too rashly – many of the horses got scared, & ran off. A few miles off, Sumter exchanged prisoners, & wrote to the British Major there that he owed him a prisoner. Capt. [John] Turner was in this fight – as indeed on the whole campaign.

[Siege of Ft. Motte, May 8-12, 1781]. – A boat load of meal of Sumter's was coming down, & Capt. John Mills & company were stationed for its protection between the fort & river, & saved it; & Lieut. Arch'd Gill, of Mill's Company was shot at from the fort, & his horse shot under him.¹²⁸ He was subsequently a Captain in the service – after the war a Colonel, & died in Oct. 1803: Highly respected. George Gill, was in his cousin Arch'd. Gill's company, at 15 – lived to get a pension – was a Militia Colonel.

Big Savannah Affair. – Big Savannah (since drained) about 10 miles below Belleville, Col. Thompsons — & above Nelson's Ferry. Sumter's troops in ambush – in pine woods – Bratton's¹²⁹ men fired – Lacey's kept in reserve = British fired – had got into an open field — & their balls flew among & scalped the pines where Lacey's men were – British fired seven rounds very quick; but as Lacey's men advanced, & were about pouring a deadly fire into them, the British held out

a white flag & surrendered = 16 wagons of goods – among them several small boxes so vaudged[?] that they were thought to contain gold. 7 British killed & 7 wounded. Sumter had only one man hurt — & he shot through the hand.

Sumter designed dividing the plunder among the men – but {perhaps thought if they sh'd then get the plunder & it sh'd prove rich, they might be so elated with it, they w'd want to go home with it – L.C.D.} he placed it in a boat, & it was unfortunately recaptured by the enemy at Wateree fort {or Fort Watson, Wright's Bluff}.

Crossing Santee – in canoes, & swam the horses beside — & ugly lakes in same way – thinks went from west to east side, & once to Sumter's plantation, — thinks it was on Santee, near Nelson's Ferry, & there got plenty of fat hogs, corn & fodder, which Sumter furnished freely, & the men fared finely. Thinks the British shortly after destroyed every thing of Sumter's there.

Friday's Fort or Congaree Fort. No particular recollection about the attack on it – nor about the fight with Fraser.

But Col. Henry Hampton attacked a negro British regiment, used mostly to go out & get forage — & such service found them, smashed them up, chased & dispersed them.

APPENDIX D

Draper's handwritten copy of an account of Sumter's Rounds by an anonymous writer.¹³⁰

[Items in curly brackets and notes with asterisks are by Draper. Annotations in square brackets and numbered footnotes are by the present authors. We are reluctant to use anonymous sources, but we include this transcription because Draper and other historians considered it credible.]

Gen. Sumter's Operations in Feb. 1781 & March.

¹²⁷ Sumter Papers, 11VV177-179.

¹²⁸ Lt. Archibald Gill applied for compensation for the loss of a horse at Ft. Thomson, but not at Ft. Motte. <http://revwarapps.org/sc3117.pdf>.

¹²⁹ Capt. Hugh Bratton or Col. William Bratton.

https://www.carolana.com/SC/Revolution/patriot_military_sc_captains.htm

¹³⁰ Sumter Papers, 7VV122-128.

{The following document or partial document, for it is incomplete – is without any indication as to the writer – it seems not to be in Gen. Sumter’s handwriting – yet it may be. It is written on rough dingy yellow paper – or faded to straw color — & has every indication of having been written at or about the period to which it refers — & being among Gen’l Sumter’s papers, may be properly regarded as correct, & giving Gen Sumter’s ideas of the affairs under review. L.C.D.}

In February, 1781, when Gen. Sumter had recovered of his wound, finding that Lord Cornwallis had left the state of S. Carolina, he collected his whole force in the Waxsaws, and marched for the lower country. His first attack was against Fort Granby, which was a stockade-work, defended by about 300 men, under the command of Major Maxwell, destitute of artillery. Advances were made by forming batteries of logs and tobacco hd’s [hogsheads]. The attack having been kept up two days, and all supplies cut off, the place must have surrendered in a short time, had not L’d Rawdon appeared on the opposite bank of the river early on the third day with his whole force from the post at Camden.¹³¹ The attack, however, continued during the day; but at night a movement was judged expedient. L’d Rawdon had taken measures to seize the passes above, not doubting but Sumter’s flight would be directed towards N. Carolina; but in this he was mistaken.

The objects of this expedition were not yet accomplished. Sumter pushed with all possible celerity to attack the post at Thomson’s (near the scite of Fort Motte), about thirty five miles down the river, where he arrived the next day. The place was surrounded; the supplies and water-craft seized, and at dusk a resolute attempt was made to carry the place by assault. It was a stockade, thrown up around the late Col. Thomson’s house {“late” is

here interlined, in another hand writing, as though it was placed there perhaps some time after. L.C.D.} several out-houses formed a part of the defence, or were immediately adjoining it. The troops advanced through an open field under an incessant fire, and seized a part of the works. The enemy defended themselves with great bravery. The houses were once set on fire by the Americans, but the Enemy succeeded in extinguishing it, and in repelling every assault. In about half an hour the troops were withdrawn; but the investment continued.

Early the next day information was received of the approach of a considerable body of troops, with a great number of wagons. Sumter lay encamped at Manigault’s, two miles below Thomson’s, refreshing a part of his troops, whilst a strong detachment were maintaining the attack against the British post; and having also detached several smaller commands, his force encamped did not exceed one hundred men. The convoy was advancing so rapidly, that he had only time to form for their reception, on a well-chosen piece of ground half a mile below his encampment. The British force, upwards of eighty in number, were under the command of Major Mc___¹³², formed a compact line, and advanced with a daring front, affecting contempt for the troops formed to oppose them. The ground was open, and both parties advanced as being assured of victory. The British were out-flanked, and over-powered; the whole were either killed, wounded or taken prisoners.* Upwards of twenty wagons, with a great quantity of clothing intended for L’d. Rawdon’s army, with some arms, &c., were taken.

*See Gibbes’ *Doc. Hist. S.C., 1781-82*, p. 34; Mills’ *Statistics*, 274.¹³³

To secure a prize so seasonable to the wants of the captors became a primary object. At this time the Santee was over-flowed, and impossible for

¹³¹ From Rawdon’s letter to Cornwallis, it appears that only Maj. McLeroth’s troops were on the bank of the Congaree River opposite Ft. Granby.

¹³² Maj. David McIntosh or Maj. Aeneas McIntosh, according to O’Kelley, *NBBS* 3:93 and note.

¹³³ Robert Mills, *Statistics of South Carolina: Including a View of Its Natural, Civil, and Military History, General and Particular* (Charleston, SC: Hurlbut and Lloyd, 1826). <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=loc.ark:/13960/t7cr6h063&view=1up&seq=13&skin=2021>

wagons. The boats taken at Thomson's, and those brought down from Fort Granby were collected; on board of these were placed this valuable cargo, under a determined officer, who was ordered to fall down the river to a point where the army was to meet him with a view of crossing some distance above Wright's Bluff, where the enemy had a post commanding the river.

{“These dispositions had not long been completed before L'd. Rawdon appeared again with his whole force, about 3 o'clock the day following, and {ur}ged Sumter to abandon the post he had here besieged – and which could not otherwise have held out much longer.” This sentence is erased but legible — & in its place the following substituted. L.C.D.}

These dispositions had not long been completed, when, on the day following, about 3 o'clock, L'd. Rawdon appeared to the relief of the post at Thomson's. Sumter, informed of his approach, had all his parties called in and his troops formed in order of battle, expecting only the light troops of his L'dShip, but when he saw the whole army had come forward, he moved off leisurely in the presence of his L'dShip (who did not attempt further pursuit) to meet his little flotilla at the point where he proposed crossing the river; but owing to the treachery* of the pilot, the boats were permitted to drop below the proposed point, and within cannon shot of the British post. The boats and stores fell into their hands. The guard escaped, and rejoined their General. Great as was the loss of the stores, that of the boats was still greater; without them, the passage of the river, the lakes and the swamps in the low grounds was extremely difficult. It was, however, determined on, and effected, by the aid of such canoes as could be collected, and the post of Wright's Bluff {Fort Watson – See Mills' *Statistics of S.C.* p. 274. L.C.D.} attacked to regain the stores. The Americans marched against this post with a determination to succeed, or perish in the attempt.

This ample supply of arms and clothing would have relieved many of their wants, and to retrieve so serious a loss, they resolved to hazard all. The attack was commenced at 12 o'clock by a direct assault; Col. Watson having but a few hours before arrived with a re-inforcement of 400 men. The Americans were received with a tremendous fire. They sustained it for some time, but at length were obliged to give way, with considerable loss.*

*Mills' *Statistics*, 274, note.

*Johnson's *Greene*, ii, p. 32:¹³⁴ ~~Gibbes—Doe.~~ *Hist. 1781-82*, p 89.

After this check, the General led his troops to a secure position within five or six miles of the of the fort, where the wounded were attended to, and sent to places of security.

When the army had become somewhat refreshed, he commenced his march for the Waxsaws, by way of Black river, leaving Camden about twenty miles to the left. At Lynch's Creek he was intercepted by the whole British cavalry and light troops, amounting to [blank space] who he found formed in order of battle, and with whom a severe conflict ensued.

After this affair, the Americans were permitted quietly to pursue their march to the Waxsaws, where they were disbanded for a short {time}

{Here ends the Manuscript L.C.D.}

Memos.

Sumter's attack on Granby at Friday's Ferry — & sometimes called Friday's Fort – was Feb. 19th 1781 – see Sumter's letter to Gen. Marion, in Gibbes' *Doc. Hist. of S.C. 1781-'82*, [Vol. 3] p. 23; 39.

Johnson's *Green*, II:31, 32.

¹³⁴ William Johnson, *Sketches of the Life and Correspondence of Nathanael Greene: Major General of the*

Armies of the United States, in the War of the Revolution Vol. 2 (Charleston, SC: A. E. Miller, 1822).

APPENDIX E

Letter by Gen. Francis Marion to Gen. Thomas Sumter.¹³⁵

26th Feb^y 1781 – AM

D^r Sir

Since I wrought you this morning, I find by the Bearer that you Directed I should make a Junction with you, on the S^h Santee — but Col^o Watson force is now on the high hills of Santee at Col^o Richardsons¹³⁶ & have possession of that part of the country, & is too strong for me to remove — I shall however go as near him as possible & Indeavour to cut off any forraging partys & be in the way of hearing further from you. The Bearer tells me you have failed in your Attack on the Post [page damaged]arees¹³⁷ & that you have come down [page damaged]l^o Thomps[page damaged]¹³⁸

I had forgot to acquaint you that [page damaged] men Left Geo^r town¹³⁹ last fryday Crossed over Santee & I suppose it may be intended to reinforce Nelson's ferry or Col^o Thompsons.

I wish to hear from you and I shall be the 29th at Scape hore¹⁴⁰ on the head of Black river.

Col^o Harden¹⁴¹ [illegible word] there is but one post to the S^oWard & that is at Pocotaligo¹⁴² of 50 men —

I am with esteem D^r S^r y^r obd^t s^t



¹³⁵ Transcribed from an original letter held by RR Auctions and kindly provided by David McSwain.

¹³⁶ Richard Richardson, Jr.

¹³⁷ Probably “Post at the Congarees,” i.e. Ft. Granby.

¹³⁸ Probably “come down to Colo. Thomson’s.”

¹³⁹ Georgetown.

¹⁴⁰ Now Scape Ore Creek.

APPENDIX F

Copy by Lyman Copeland Draper of a Letter from Nathanael Greene to Thomas Sumter.¹⁴³

Camp near Guilford Court House, March 23^d, 1781.

Dear Sir: I received your letter by Capt. Hampton, and am happy to hear of your successful skirmishes. I lament exceedingly that you did not succeed in getting off the stores. Capt. Hampton says you are in great want of a field piece to further your operations. One shall be sent you as soon as it can be had from Virginia. Orders shall be sent immediately for the purpose: Ammunition shall be sent also, and if possible, some matrosses to manage the artillery.

Our prospects are flattering in Virginia. They are not discouraging here, but I must refer you to Capt. Hampton for particulars.

Prosecute your operations as expeditiously as possible, and may glory and success attend you. Time will not permit me to be more particular.

I am, with the greatest respect,

Your mo. humble Serv^t.

Nath. Greene

The Honble Brigad^r. General Sumpter,
So. Carolina.

Pencil endorsement:

{Brought} by Captⁿ. Hampton, who was sent by Gen^l. Sumter as he was returning from his expedition into the lower part of So. Carolina, for the purpose of giving information to Gen^l. Greene, and to urge his return to the State. He left us at McCorpen’s creek,¹⁴⁴ and arrived at Gen. Greene’s camp a day or two after the battle of Guilford. When he returned he found us at Sugar Creek, & Gen^l. S. immediately set about raising the State troops, in consequence of Hampton’s

¹⁴¹ William Harden.

¹⁴² Pocotaligo River.

¹⁴³ Sumter Papers, 7VV227-228. An abstract of this letter is in PNG, 7:466.

¹⁴⁴ “us” apparently refers to the wife and eleven-year-old son of Gen. Sumter. “McCorpen’s creek” may be McAlpins Creek, which is now Sugar Creek, south of Charlotte, NC.

report of his interview with Gen'l. Greene. For this service he merited and received a Colonel's commission in the State troops, and completed his regiment first of any of the Colonels. I saw him set off & return.

T. S. Jr.

APPENDIX G

Lt. Col. Lord Rawdon to Lieut. Col. Watson (British) [Intercepted Letter].

Camden, March 7th, 1781

Sir: I arrived here about noon on the 5th, and on the same evening detached Major Frazer with the South Carolina Regiment to Radcliff's Bridge. The cavalry were to have accompanied him, but just as they were to March, the report of a body of the enemy being within a few miles of us, occasioned my detaching them another way; ordering them, however, to join Major Frazer after they had fulfilled their first object. Frazer, yesterday fell in with Sumter (who was advancing this way) between Scape Hoar and Radcliff's Bridge. A smart action ensued, in which the enemy were completely routed, leaving ten dead on the field and about forty wounded. Unfortunately none of our Dragoons had joined Frazer, so that he could not pursue his victory. Sumter fled across Lynch's Creek and continued his retreat northward; he has his family with him, so that I think he has entirely abandoned the lower country. By the accounts of the prisoners, Marion has but a very trifling force, and is not likely to increase it. If your intelligence corresponds with this. 33, 16, 41—17, 5, 64, 22, 57, 19, 18, 3—65, 24, 3, 14, 16, 25, 14—51, 23, 5—25, 14, 11, 8, 15, 16, 11, 53, 11, 18, 74, 11, 26, 25—1, 14, 26, 23, 4, 18, 23, 4, 14, 1—57, 16, 25, 51—29, 22, 18, 12, 2, 57, 16, 25, 51, 24, 5, 26, 18, 7, 3, 14—and 25, 2, 16, 3, 25—74, 2, 16, 53, 17—1, 14, 23, 22, 1, 11—51, 23, 5—2, 5, 11, 21, 25, 12, 5, 1, 11, 14, 1, 54.¹ I have the honor to be, sir

Your most obedient

R.¹⁴⁵

[The enciphered part of the above letter was kindly decoded by Ian Saberton in an email to Charles B. Baxley dated February 14, 2019, a copy of which follows.]

The enciphered words read: "You'll please to send Fanning's Regt here and Small's may return to Monk's Corner." Fanning's Regiment is the King's American Regiment and Small was Maj. John Small, commandant of the 2nd Batallion, 84th Reg. of Foot (Royal Highland Immigrants).

The cipher is what we in the trade call "The Camden Cipher". It was for use by the commanding officers at Camden, firstly by George Turnbull and then by Lord Rawdon. To set the cipher, an enciphering device had two concentric rings, the outer of which consisted of the letters of the alphabet in a permanently fixed order, and the inner a series of numbers, again in a permanently fixed order. To form the cipher the numbers in the inner ring were aligned with the letters in the outer, and the key to the cipher was the number aligned with the letter "A", which always appeared first in an enciphered document. It was therefore a simple matter for the recipient to make the same alignment, and so decipher the document. Numbers not part of the cipher were inserted to confuse an unauthorised recipient, in this case any number from and including "30" onwards, which had no meaning. Occasionally, but not here, other numbers were added to those that were part of the cipher. For example, if "O" were "1" it might sometimes be enciphered as "51".

As to the use of the cipher here, the key is the number "16" in the opening series "33, 16, 41", with "16" being aligned here to the letter "A". As I have previously explained, "33" and "41" have no meaning. When set to this alignment, the cipher reads as follows:

¹⁴⁵ Gibbes, *Documentary History*, 3:31-32.

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|----|----|-----|----|----|----|----|---|-----|----|----|----|----|----|
| A | B | C | D | E | F | G | 5 | 24 | 29 | 1 | 25 | 23 | |
| | H | I/J | | K | L | M | | 22 | 6 | 19 | | 9 | 17 |
| | N | | | | | | | 13. | | | | | |
| 16 | 7 | 12 | 8 | 14 | | 15 | | | | | | | |
| | 26 | 4 | 18 | | 21 | 3 | | | | | | | |
| | 2 | 11 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| O | P | Q | R | S | T | U | | | | | | | |
| | V | W | | X | Y | Z | | | | | | | |

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Charles B. Baxley died on March 30, 2024 after contributing to and editing many drafts of this paper until he was satisfied that it was ready to be reviewed for publication. He was a graduate of the University of South Carolina with a bachelor’s degree in political science and a doctorate in law, and he served as a captain in the US Air Force. He lived in and practiced law in Lugoff SC for 45 years and was a leader in many civic and governmental organizations. Starting in 2004 he and David P. Reuwer published the journal of the *Southern Campaigns of the American Revolution* and sponsored dozens of conferences, archaeological projects, roundtables, and tours featuring topics on the Southern Campaigns. He was a recipient of South Carolina’s highest civilian award, the Order of the Palmetto. In 2001 he was appointed by the Governor as Chairman of the South Carolina American Revolution Sestercentennial Commission to guide research and commemoration of the state’s role in securing American independence.

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