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## General Thomas Sumter's Surprise at Fishdam Ford

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Many people know the name of General Thomas Sumter, but few know about the battles that made him famous. One of the the least known was a surprise attack at Fishdam Ford by Loyalist Major James Wemyss, the “second most hated man in South Carolina.” Even historians who know about the battle disagree on when and where it occurred. Historical markers within inches of each other give different dates—November 8 and November 9, 1780. As uncertain as the date of the battle is its exact location, said to be on either the west or east bank of Broad River, at or near the Indian fishing weir in Figure 1. Thanks to a chance discovery of a map showing the location of Fishdam Ford, together with other documentation, archaeology and imagery, we can now say where, when, how and why the skirmish happened.



**Figure 1. The fishing weir, or fish dam, at low water on Broad River just north (upstream) of the Col. William Farr Memorial Bridge.<sup>1</sup> Indians designed the weir to funnel fish into the V-shaped area where they were trapped, not unlike the way Fishdam Ford funneled Sumter's troops to a place where Wemyss could trap them.**

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<sup>1</sup> Photo from Scott Butler, “Archaeological Survey and Testing of the SC 72/121/215 Broad River Bridge Replacement, Chester and Union Counties, South Carolina” (Atlanta: Brockington and Associates, Inc., 2004), 27.



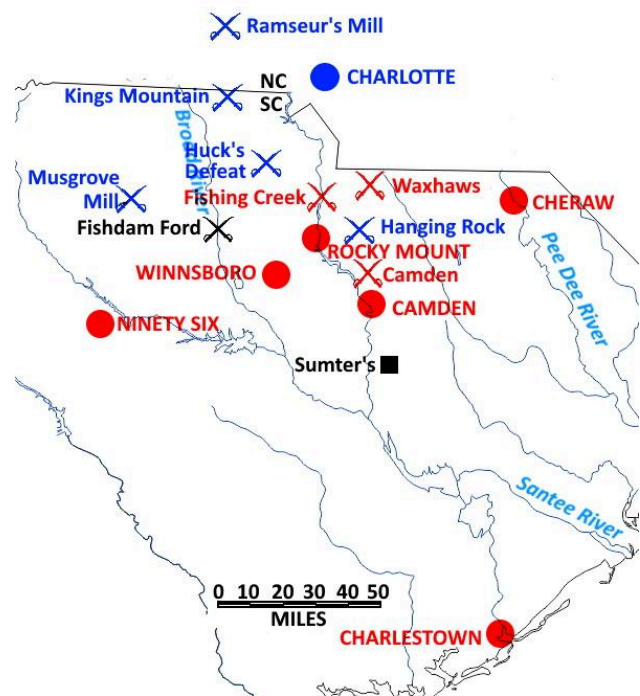
## South Carolina in November 1780

The war should have been going well for the British in South Carolina. On May 12, 1780 virtually the entire Continental Army in the South had surrendered to Gen. Sir Henry Clinton and been imprisoned at Charlestown, and militiamen had been sent home honor-bound by their oaths (paroles) not to aid the rebellion until exchanged.<sup>2</sup> The British soon established outposts along the northern tier of the state, like a noose around the neck of the rebellion. (Fig. 2) In early June Clinton returned to New York, confident that South Carolina was once more under British control. He left Gen. Charles, Lord Cornwallis in command with orders to hold South Carolina from his headquarters in Charlestown. The American Revolution in South Carolina might have ended at that point.

Two missteps by the British prompted Sumter and others to resume the rebellion. One was a proclamation by Clinton 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.”<sup>3</sup> This perceived abrogation of the terms of capitulation forced militiamen to choose sides. The second British blunder was brutal treatment of the rebels. The most notorious in this regard was Lt. Col. Banastre Tarleton, whose British Legion massacred surrendering troops at the Battle of Waxhaws on May 29, 1780.

<sup>2</sup> Concise descriptions of the surrender of Charlestown and other actions mentioned in this paper are in the following: Patrick O’Kelley, *Nothing but Blood and Slaughter*, Vol. 2. (Lillington, NC: Booklocker.com, 2004). John C. Parker, Jr., *Parker’s Guide to the Revolutionary War in South Carolina*, 4<sup>th</sup> Ed. (Sumter, SC: harrelsonpress.net, 2022). J. D. Lewis, Carolana.com. [https://www.carolana.com/SC/Revolution/SC\\_Revolutionary\\_War\\_Known\\_Battles\\_Skirmishes.htm](https://www.carolana.com/SC/Revolution/SC_Revolutionary_War_Known_Battles_Skirmishes.htm)

<sup>3</sup> In Banastre Tarleton, *A History of the Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, in the Southern Provinces of North America*, (Dublin: Colles, et al., 1787), 75-78.



**Figure 2. Posts and actions mentioned in this paper. Red circles show Cornwallis’s headquarters in Charlestown and later at Winnsboro, and four outposts. Crossed swords in red show British victories, and crossed swords in blue show American victories. The location of Thomas Sumter’s plantation is shown as a black square. In this and other maps in this paper, except where noted, north is toward the top.**

Second only to Tarleton in the opinion of some historians was Maj. James Wemyss (pronounced Weems).<sup>4</sup> On August 28, 1780, Cornwallis ordered Wemyss to sweep the country for fifty miles northward as far as Cheraw to “disarm in the most rigid manner all persons who cannot be depended on and punish the concealment of arms and ammunition with a total demolition of the plantation.” Those who had volunteered in the Loyalist militia and afterwards joined the rebels were to be “instantly hanged up.” On the same day Wemyss promised “to execute with the greatest pleasure every part of [his]

<sup>4</sup> Randy A. Purvis, “Major James Wemyss: Second Most Hated British Officer in the South,” *Journal of the American Revolution*, (hereinafter *JAR*) (November 27, 2018).

<https://allthingsliberty.com/2018/11/major-james-wemyss-second-most-hated-british-officer-in-the-south>

Lordship's commands."<sup>5</sup> Wemyss with the 63<sup>d</sup> Regiment and South Carolina Loyalist troops executed Cornwallis's orders from September 7 through the 20, when Wemyss boasted to Cornwallis, "I have burnt and laid waste about 50 houses and Plantation, mostly belonging to People who have either broke their Paroles or Oath of Allegiance, and are now at arms against us."<sup>6</sup>

According to militiaman William Brandon, "no man was safe unless he was in the Army."<sup>7</sup> Taking only what they and their horses could carry, Brandon and many other South Carolinians fled to the area of Charlotte, North Carolina, which was dominated by Whigs, especially after the defeat of North Carolina Loyalists at Ramseur's Mill on June 20, 1780. Dressed in hunting garb, armed with their personal rifles, and mounted on their own horses, many allied themselves with militia officers they had known from home. Unlike militias, however, they were not called out for tours of definite duration but served voluntarily under officers they elected. They chose Thomas Sumter as their leader.<sup>8</sup>

Sumter had retired from military service in 1778 at age 44 but fled to North Carolina in May of 1780, possibly because Tarleton's troops on their way to Waxhaws burned his home. In the words of historian William Dobein James, "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."<sup>9</sup> On July 12, 1780 at James Williamson's Plantation, a detachment of Sumter's militia under colonels William Bratton, William Hill, Edward Lacey, and Richard Winn decisively defeated provincial soldiers and South Carolina Loyalist militia under Capt. Christian Huck, including a troop of Tarleton's British Legion cavalry.<sup>10</sup> On July 30 Sumter attacked the British post at Rocky Mount. That attack was unsuccessful, but on August 6 he soundly defeated and dispersed British and Loyalist troops at Hanging Rock.<sup>11</sup> In the meantime, Cornwallis had marched northward, and on August 16 about 9 miles north of the British post at Camden he defeated a new southern army under Gen. Horatio Gates. The resulting battle, called by the troops Gates's Defeat, but now referred to as the Battle of Camden, was a major setback for the Americans.

Two days after the Battle of Camden, Sumter's troops with some Maryland Continentals were camped between Catawba River and Fishing Creek, resting, eating, drinking rum, and bathing in the creek to get some relief from the oppressive heat. Sumter himself is said to have been half dressed and sleeping under a wagon, not expecting that Tarleton's legion cavalry could have covered the 30 miles from Camden. Tarleton's sudden appearance scattered Sumter's men, and Sumter himself barely escaped by riding into the woods. On the next day, August 19, North and South Carolina militia, together with refugees from Georgia under Col. Elijah

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<sup>5</sup> Cornwallis to Wemyss and Wemyss to Cornwallis, August 28, 1780, in *The Cornwallis Papers*, (hereafter *CP*) Vol. 2, ed. Ian Saberton (Uckfield, East Sussex, England: Naval & Military Press, 2010), 208-209.

<sup>6</sup> Wemyss to Cornwallis, September 20, 1780, *Cornwallis Papers* 2, 215. Parker, *Parker's Guide*, 229, 475-479.

<sup>7</sup> William Brandon, pension application W71. <https://revwarapps.org/w71.pdf>. Pension applications cited in this paper are transcribed mainly by Will Graves at [revwarapps.org](http://revwarapps.org).

<sup>8</sup> There are two standard biographies of Sumter: Anne King Gregorie, *Thomas Sumter* (Columbia SC: R. L. Bryan Co., 1931); Robert D. Bass, *Gamecock: The Life and Campaigns of Thomas Sumter* (Orangeburg SC: Sandlapper, 1961).

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<sup>9</sup> William Dobein James, *A Sketch of the Life of Brig. Gen. Francis Marion*, first published in 1821.

<sup>10</sup> Williamson's Plantation adjoined SC militia Col. William Bratton's plantation. This site is now in Historic Brattonsville in southern York County three miles east of McConnells, SC.

<sup>11</sup> C. Leon Harris, "Thomas Sumter at Rocky Mount and Hanging Rock, South Carolina: 'A Great Victory Scarcely Ever Heard Of.'"

[https://www.academia.edu/116805346/Thomas\\_Sumter\\_at\\_Rocky\\_Mount\\_and\\_Hanging\\_Rock\\_South\\_Carolina\\_A\\_Great\\_Victory\\_Scarcely\\_Ever\\_Heard\\_Of](https://www.academia.edu/116805346/Thomas_Sumter_at_Rocky_Mount_and_Hanging_Rock_South_Carolina_A_Great_Victory_Scarcely_Ever_Heard_Of)

Clarke, defeated a much larger enemy force at Musgrove's Mill. Weighed against the defeat of Gates and of Sumter, however, it did little to discourage Cornwallis. Still believing he would find popular support farther north, he marched into Charlotte, where he suffered losses in a skirmish on September 26 and also from yellow fever. Far more serious, however, was the defeat of Loyalists by Patriot militiamen at the Battle of Kings Mountain on October 7. "Prospects were then brighter"<sup>12</sup> for the Americans. Cornwallis was compelled to withdraw to Winnsboro, South Carolina where, if necessary, he could reinforce either of the posts at Camden and Ninety Six.

### A Cunning Plan?

In October Sumter and some of his officers went to Hillsborough, North Carolina, to beg supplies from John Rutledge, the South Carolina Governor-in-exile. They came away with nothing but Sumter's commission as Brigadier General of South Carolina militia and a plan to attack Cornwallis. Sumter would march toward the crucial British post at Ninety Six, knowing it would lure some troops from Winnsboro. Gen. William Smallwood of the Maryland Continentals, in temporary command of North Carolina militias,<sup>13</sup> would then attack Cornwallis at Winnsboro. Sumter went to Stalling's plantation to begin his part of the plan.

Genl. Sumter returns from Hillsboro to the New acquisition and forms his Encampment at Stallions [Stalling's] plantation high up Fishing Creek in Order to Collect his Men and get Supplies as soon as this was done Sumter with his party Consisting of about 400 Men begun

their March for Fish dam ford on Broad River.... As Genl. Sumter & Colo. Winn was together day & Night they Conversed with Each Other on all confidential points as well as other matters as respected War Measures Genl. Sumter previous to leaving Stallions Communicated to the Colo. the Object of his intended Movement & wished his Opinion Ld. Cornwallis's head Quarters at Winnsboro, Sumter goes on to Say it has been Agreed that I shall March as near Winn's borough as can be done with Safety this will draw Tarleton and a large Body of Infantry after we [sic] this will weaken Cornwallis so much that Genl. Smallwood with the Continental Troops and what No. Carolinians as Could be Collected was to fall on Cornwallis.<sup>14</sup>

According to Winn, Smallwood decided not to go ahead with the plan for fear that if it failed he would be blamed by Gen. Nathanael Greene, Gates's replacement as head of the Southern Army.<sup>15</sup> It seems that Smallwood either did not inform Sumter of his change of mind, or Sumter decided to proceed with the plan anyway. He would march his 400 or so men toward Fishdam Ford, putting them within 30 miles of Cornwallis's regular army of perhaps 2,000 men. Sumter led his mounted troops from Stalling's about four miles southeast of present York, South Carolina southward, probably through present Chester, South Carolina. From there a road led southwest to Fishdam Ford. (Fig. 3) Local Tories no doubt kept Cornwallis informed of Sumter's progress.

<sup>12</sup> Samuel Gordon, pension application S30441 <http://revwarapps.org/s30441.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> J. D. Lewis [https://www.carolana.com/NC/Revolution/revolution\\_nc\\_troops\\_1780\\_09\\_10.html](https://www.carolana.com/NC/Revolution/revolution_nc_troops_1780_09_10.html).

<sup>14</sup> General Richard Winn's "Notes," transcribed by Will Graves <https://revwarapps.org/scx2.pdf>. The New Acquisition was land formerly in North Carolina that was acquired by South Carolina in 1772, in what is now York County, SC.

<sup>15</sup> "Smallwood failing on his part as I was after informed was that Genl. Green was Expected on Every day to take the Command if he miscarried in this enterprise he would be highly blamed." Winn, "Notes." Greene replaced Gates at Charlotte on December 3, 1780.



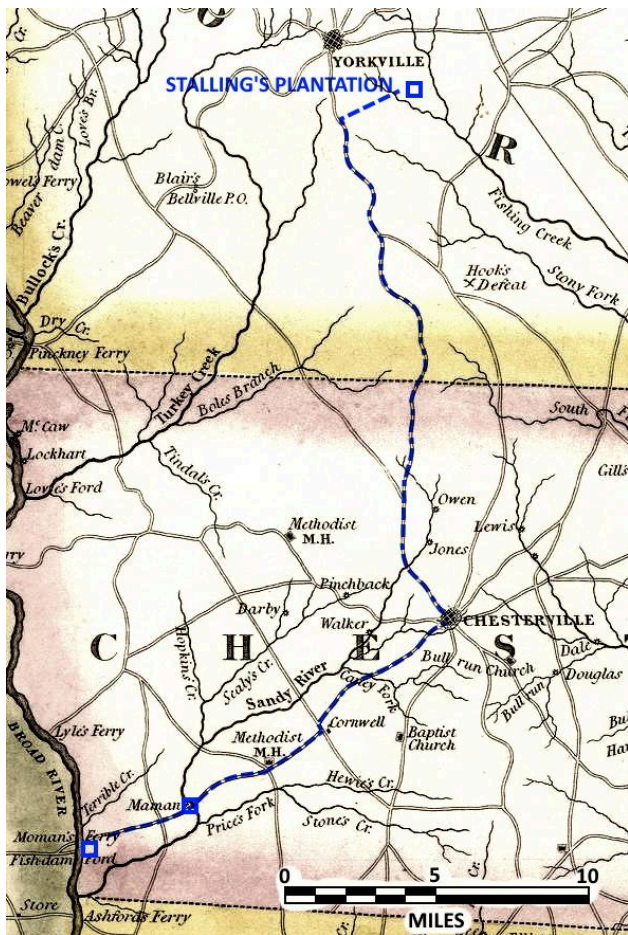


Figure 3. Possible route of Thomas Sumter from Stalling's plantation to Fishdam Ford plotted on roads shown on the Wilson map of 1822.<sup>16</sup>

### Finding Fishdam Ford and Sumter's Camp

Although Fishdam Ford was a major crossing of Broad River, it has been difficult to locate. A historical marker states that the ford was "by an old Indian fish dam," (Fig. 4) and the United States Geological Survey (USGS) gives

<sup>16</sup>[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%20mils%20south%20carolina;sort=Pub\\_List\\_No\\_InitialSort;lc:RUMSEY~8~1&mi=102&trs=105](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%20mils%20south%20carolina;sort=Pub_List_No_InitialSort;lc:RUMSEY~8~1&mi=102&trs=105). According to Gregorie, *Thomas Sumter*, 114, on the night before reaching Fishdam Ford Sumter camped at Moore's Mill five miles from the ford. This is apparently shown on the Wilson map as Maman, but the correct name is probably Moorman. See caption for Fig. 5.

coordinates for Fishdam Ford that are the same as for the fishing weir.<sup>17</sup>

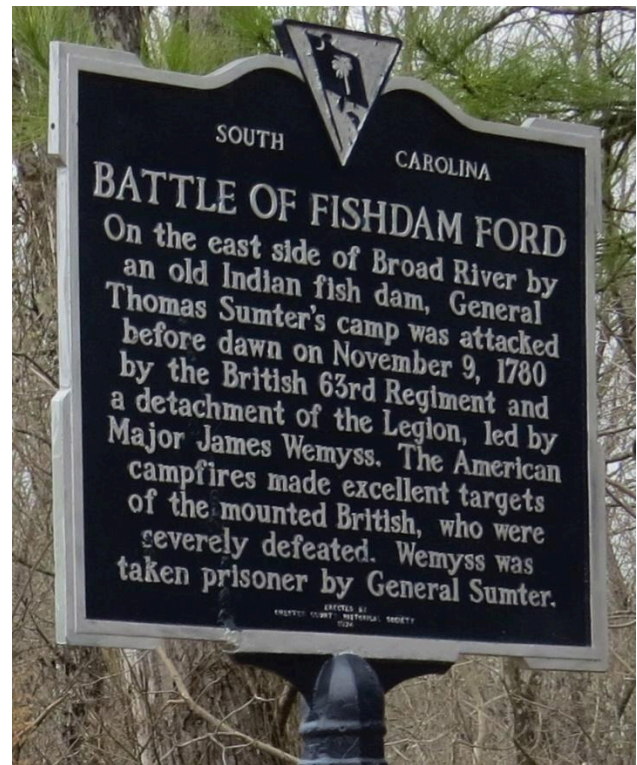


Figure 4. Historical marker at the east end of the Col. William Farr Memorial Bridge on West End Road (72/121/215) in Chester County. (C. Leon Harris)

There has even been uncertainty about which side of Broad River Sumter's camp was on. As early as 1837 "local tradition" held that it was on the west side,<sup>18</sup> but archaeology and a map

<sup>17</sup> U.S. Board on Geographic Names.

<https://edits.nationalmap.gov/apps/gaz-domestic/public/search/names>

<sup>18</sup> "Historians generally state that Sumter's camp was on the east side of the river; this is a mistake. His position was west of Broad River, and his camp midway between that stream and a small creek which, flowing from the west, falls into the river near a mile below the ford. Here, says local tradition, was Sumter's camp." Rev. James Hodge Saye, "Major McJunkin or An Original Sketch of the Revolutionary History of South Carolina," originally printed as articles by the *Watchman and Observer* (Richmond VA) in 1847-48 based on a "narrative" by Saye and notes from an interview with McJunkin on July 17, 1837. For more about the Saye article, see Will Graves, "What Did Joseph McJunkin Really Saye?," *Southern Campaigns of the American Revolution* (hereinafter *SCAR*) 2 (no. 11.1), (Nov. 2005), 29-47

by Winn clearly place the camp on the east side of the river. Some have proposed a location of the ford 50 yards above the weir, and Mills Atlas shows it about 1,000 yards below the weir.<sup>19</sup> (Fig. 5)

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<http://www.southern-campaigns.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/v2n11.pdf> accessed 16 Feb 2022.

<sup>19</sup> Cited in Butler, "Archaeological Survey," 28-31.



**Figure 5. An overlay of part of Mills Atlas for Chester County (recolored green) onto the current USGS topo map. The overlaid map, based on an 1818 survey, was positioned using the Chester-Fairfield county line as reference. The bridge on route 72/121/215 (red line) is just south of the weir. Moman’s Ferry should be Moorman’s Ferry.<sup>20</sup>**

<sup>20</sup> “Moorman, James And Thomas Moorman, Petition For The Re-Establishment Of A Ferry On Broad River In Their Name, For The Re-Establishment Of An Old Unimproved Road Leading From Their Ferry And For The Forfeit Of The Charter Of Clarks Ferry On The Same River.” SC Department of Archives and History.  
<http://www.archivesindex.sc.gov/>



Several lines of evidence suggest that Fishdam Ford was actually about 350 yards below the weir. First, a 1775 plat shows the road to Fishdam Ford on the east side of Broad River. (Fig. 6) “Road to fish Dam ford” is almost illegible on this plat and was not noted on the catalog of plat locations. This plat was fortunately found among dozens of others for properties in the area.

The road shown on the plat is apparent in lidar imagery (Fig. 7), and the road and shallows apparently at the ford are visible in satellite photos (Fig. 8). The road is also easily followed on the ground. (Fig. 9) This location is also supported by lead balls found nearby by archaeologist Scott Butler.<sup>21</sup> (Fig. 10)

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<sup>21</sup> Butler, however, depicted the ford as being about 150 yards upstream from the location we propose. Butler, “Archaeological Survey,” 39.

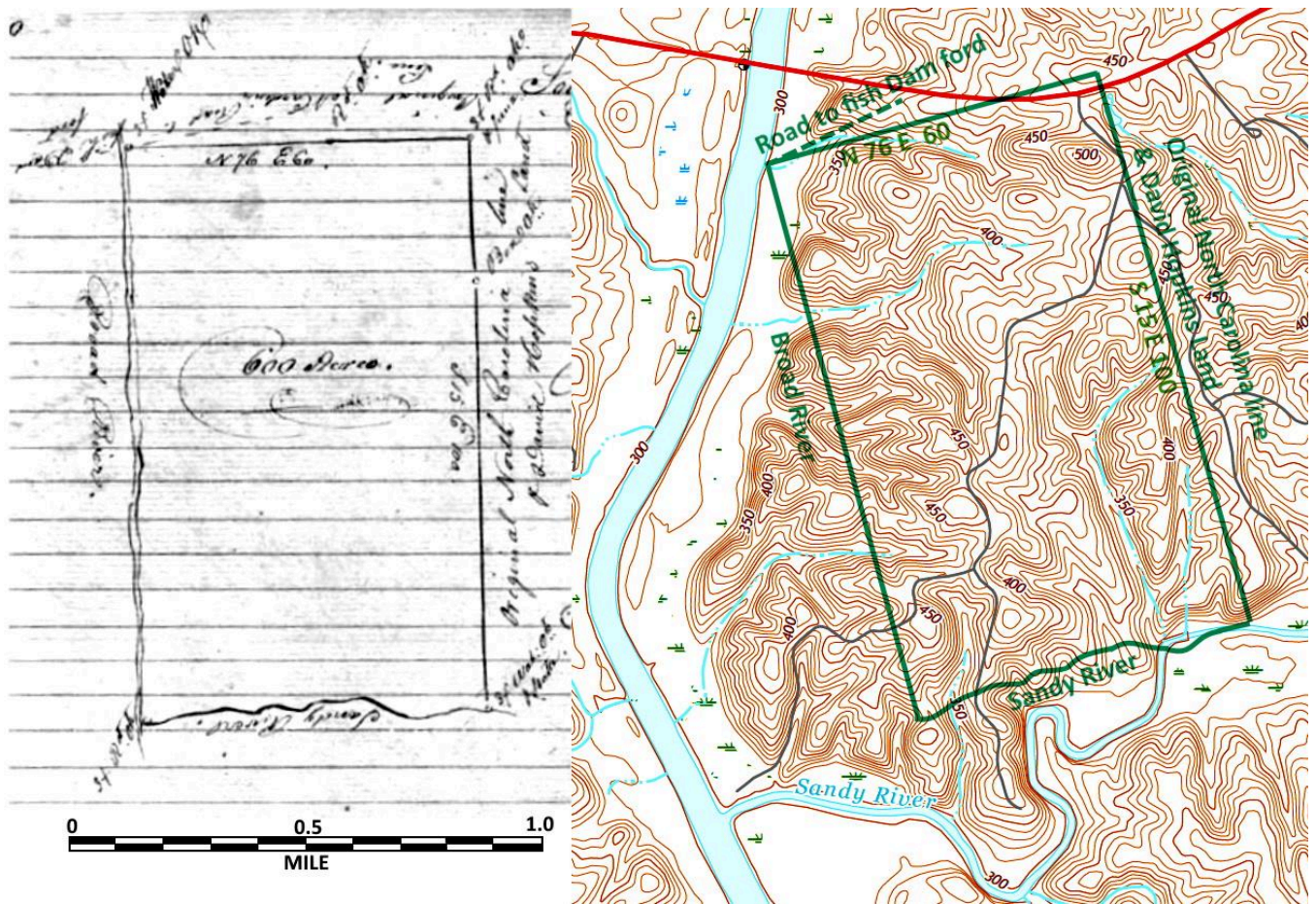


Figure 6. A 1775 plat showing the “Road to fish Dam ford.” (Left) The plat for 600 acres laid out for Richard Crosby on January 6, 1775. The survey began at the road to Fishdam Ford on the bank of Broad River and ended at the bank of Sandy River. The boundaries at the river were apparently not surveyed. The plat is available online from the South Carolina Department of Archives and History. <http://www.archivesindex.sc.gov/> (Right) An outline of the plat overlaid onto the current USGS topo map. The road to Fishdam Ford on the plat is approximately the same as the road shown by lidar in Figure 7 and leads to the mouth of the present unnamed creek.

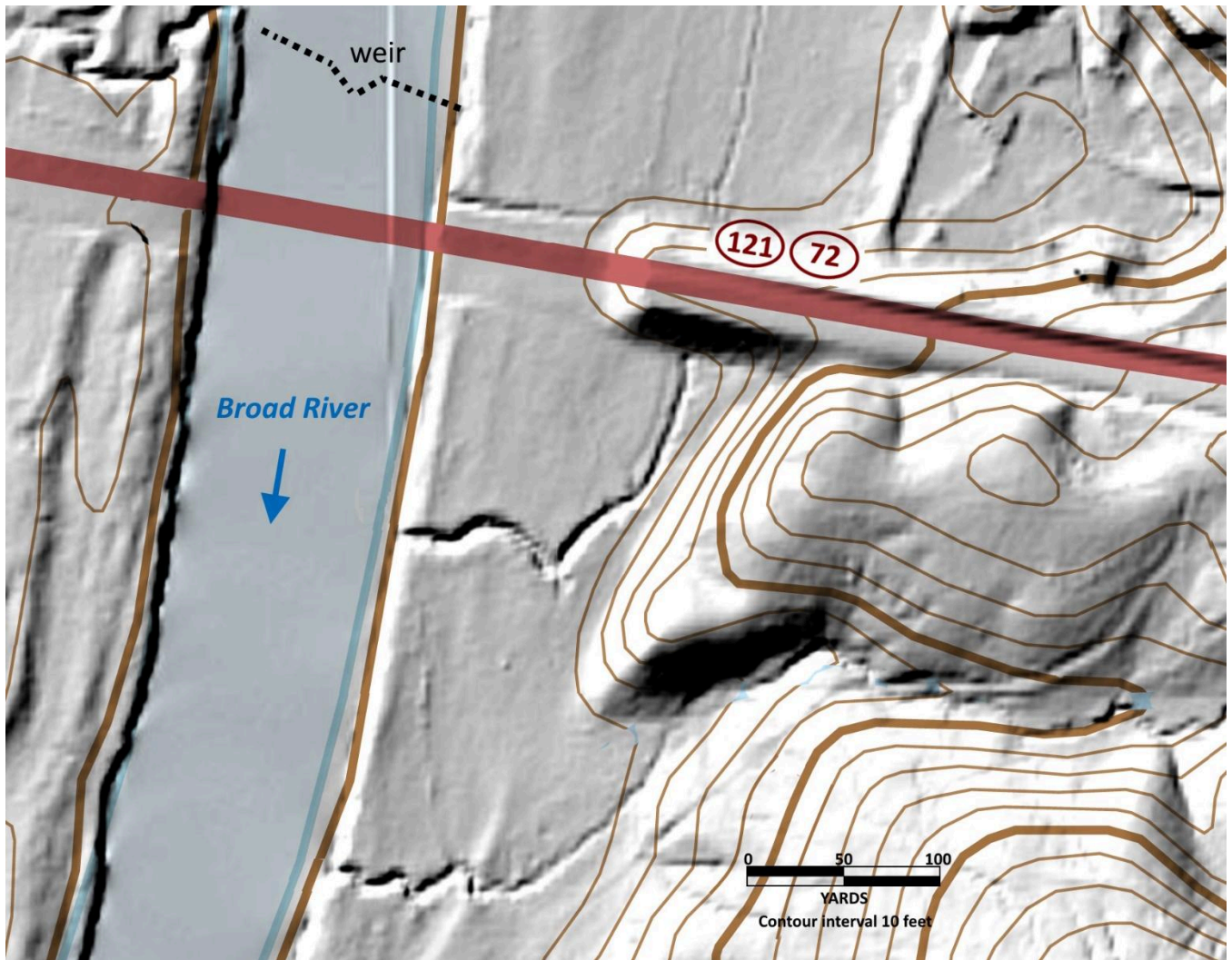


Figure 7. Lidar image overlaid onto the current USGS topo map. Note the road from the crest of the hill in the middle right, curving southward then westward along an unnamed creek toward the river—presumed to be the old road to Fishdam Ford shown in Figure 6. In the floodplain the road is buried under sediment.





**Figure 8. GoogleEarth satellite image showing approximately the same area as in Figure 7. Note the shoals — a likely location of the ford. We are grateful to John C. Parker, Jr. for pointing this out to us.**





Figure 9. The old road looking toward Broad River near the base of the hill on the right.

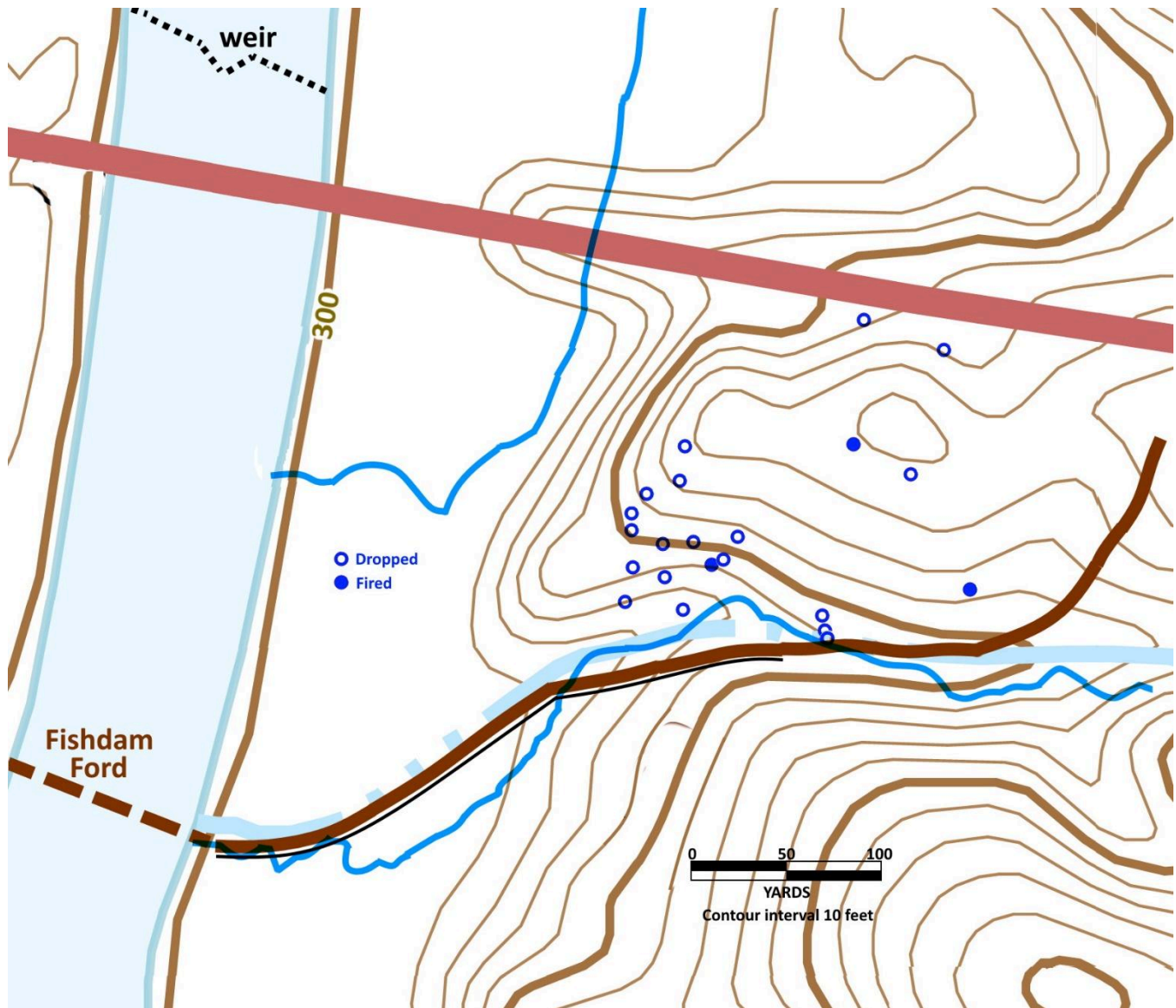


Figure 10. Lead balls found by Scott Butler. All were of diameters characteristic of American rifles (.30 to .58 inch) or of French muskets used by Americans (.60 to .67 inch). Balls are assumed to have been dropped if they showed no sign of impact. Three distorted balls were presumably fired.<sup>22</sup> Many other balls are probably buried beneath more than two feet of sediment in the flood plain, out of range of metal detectors.<sup>23</sup> The creeks are drawn to correspond to the lidar imagery in Figure 7.

<sup>22</sup> Butler, "Archaeological Survey," 37, 43, 46.

<sup>23</sup> David S. Leigh, "Geomorphology, Stratigraphy, and Archaeological Site Burial Potential of the Broad River Valley along SC Route 72/121/215 near Carlisle, South Carolina," in Butler, "Archaeological Survey," Appendix B, 7.



Figure 11 shows the end of the road to Fishdam Ford at the unnamed creek, and Broad River from that location. Elsewhere the bank of the river is more than six feet high and too steep for people or horses to ascend. Since the time of the skirmish the part of the road near the river has become covered in more than 28 inches of sediment from repeated flooding.<sup>24</sup>



**Figure 11. Fishdam Ford. (Top) Probable site of the eastern landing of the ford. (Bottom) View across Broad River toward the western landing. (C. Leon Harris)**

Knowing the location of Fishdam Ford allows us to determine the location of Sumter’s camp and the skirmish. According to Col. (later Gen.) Richard Winn, who was present at the skirmish and the major source of information, “Genl.

<sup>24</sup> A geological study shows that just south of the bridge the 1780 river bank was as steep as it is now but not as high. David S. Leigh, “Geomorphology, Stratigraphy, and Archaeological Site Burial Potential of the Broad River Valley along SC Route 72/121/215 near Carlisle, South Carolina,” in Butler, “Archaeological Survey,” Appendix B.

Sumter’s Marquee [marquee] was about 40 yards from me directly where the Road Enters the ford.” Winn provided further details of the camp in his “Notes” cited above, and he also sketched a diagram of the camp.<sup>25</sup> (Fig. 12) The sketch shows Sumter’s tent on the east bank of Broad River just north of the road to Fishdam Ford. A “Long String of Fence” bordered the south side of the road, presumably to keep passing livestock out of fields to the south. Just upstream from Sumter’s tent the diagram shows “Co’lo R. Winns Com’d”—Col. Richard Winn’s Command from Fairfield County. Farther north and at right angles the sketch shows “Co’lo Tho’s Taylors Com’d” just south of a “Deep Gut,” a reference to Col. Thomas Taylor’s state troops and militia. We believe the “Deep Gut” refers to the creek visible in the lidar image in Figure 7 and in the photograph in Figure 13. On the eastern side of the “low flat Open Ground” and at the base of the thickly wooded hillside, Winn’s sketch shows, “Posted Colonels Lacey Hill & Bratton.” This is a reference to Col. Edward Lacey’s Turkey Creek Militia, Col. William Hill’s Regiment of State Troops, and Col. William Bratton’s New Acquisition District Militia.

<sup>25</sup> Michael C. Scoggins, *Relentless Fury: The Revolutionary War in the Southern Piedmont*, (Rock Hill SC: Culture and Heritage Museums, 2006), 50.



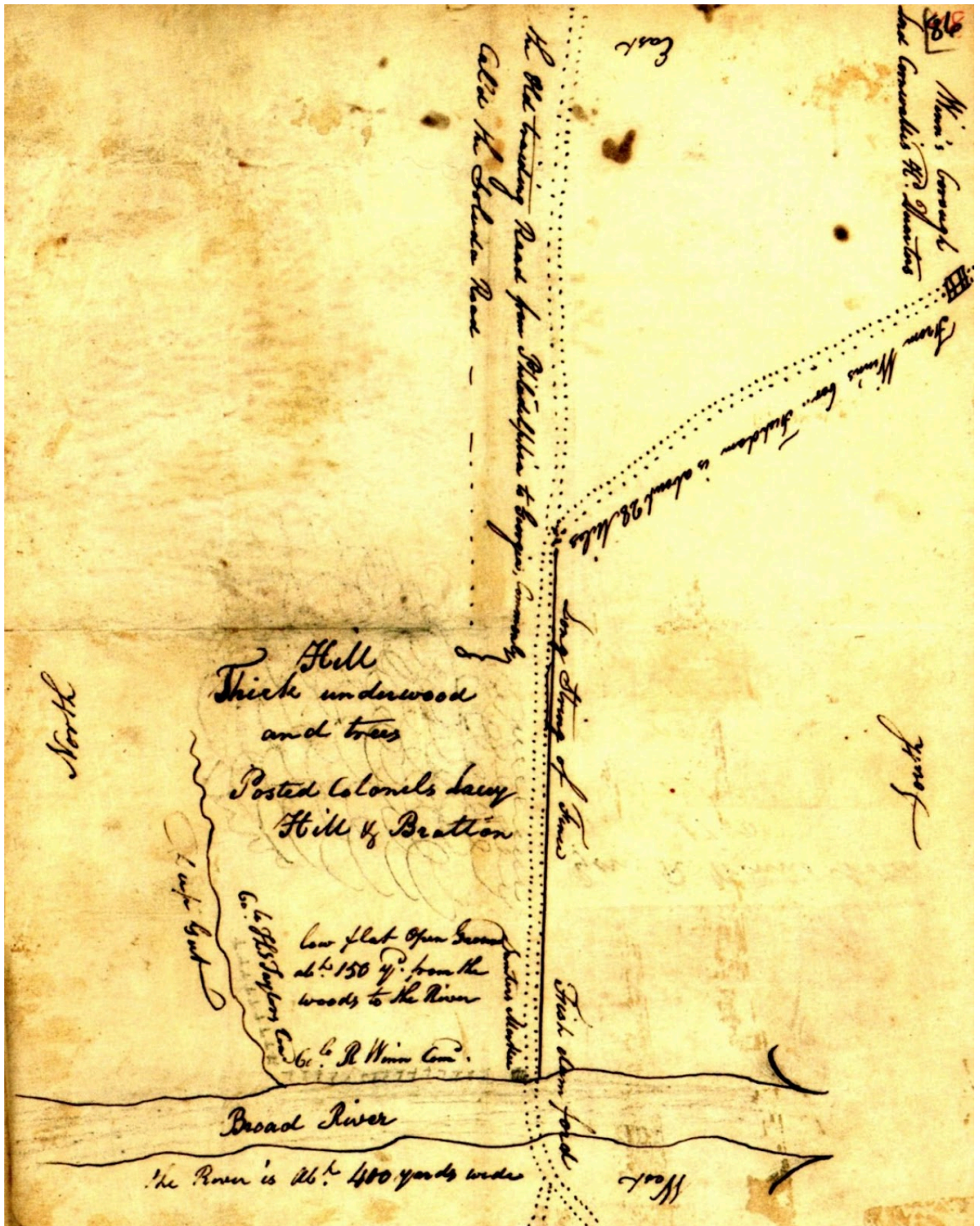


Figure 12. Richard Winn's sketch of Sumter's camp during the skirmish at Fishdam Ford. North is to the left.





**Figure 13. A creek that may be the “Deep Gut” depicted in Winn’s sketch. (C. Leon Harris)**

Not shown on Winn’s sketch are two groups that joined Sumter in the evening before the skirmish: the Long Cane militia under Lt. Col. James McCall, and refugees from Georgia under colonels Elijah Clarke and Benjamin Few. According to historian Hugh McCall, son of Col. James McCall, they occupied the ground between Winn and Taylor.<sup>26</sup> (A detailed order of battle is in Appendix A.) Standard procedure would have been to post troops on the high ground to the east, but we have found no primary source evidence that it occurred in this instance. Figure 14 is a representation of the camp based on Winn’s sketch, and Figure 15 shows the ground as it appears now.<sup>27</sup> It is likely that the site of Sumter’s camp was frequently used by travelers. Winn’s sketch labels the road as “the Old trading Road from Philadelphia to Georgia, commonly cal’d the Saluda Road.” It intersected with a road “From Winn’s boro,” where Winn lived, 28 miles southeast.

### **When Did the Skirmish at Fishdam Ford Occur, How Long Did it Last, and Why Did it Occur?**

<sup>26</sup> Hugh McCall, *The History of Georgia* (Atlanta: A. B. Caldwell, 1909), 495. McCall stated that Col. John Twiggs of Georgia, rather than Col. Few, was present.

<sup>27</sup> The property is owned by the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (Heritage Trust). It can be visited by permission from the SC DNR. Metal detecting and artifact collecting are of course illegal.

According to the historical marker in Figure 4, the skirmish occurred before dawn on November 9, 1780. A few feet away is a granite monument stating that it occurred on November 8. Winn stated that it was on November 13. Other sources give November 12 as the date.<sup>28</sup> British Gen. Lord Cornwallis wrote to Lt. Col. Banastre Tarleton on November 9, 1780, that “Major Wemyss attacked Sumpter at Fish Dam at one o’clock this morning.” (Appendix E) If the date of the letter is correct, then the skirmish must have occurred early on November 9 or certainly not later than that date.

Cornwallis was evidently told that the skirmish began at one a.m. Not surprisingly in the confusion of a nighttime skirmish when few owned watches, others recalled different times and also durations of the skirmish. SC militia Maj. David Hopkins agreed with Cornwallis that it began at 1 a.m. and added that it lasted “about an hour.”<sup>29</sup> Edward Doyle agreed that “the Battle lasted about one hour.”<sup>30</sup> Winn stated that the skirmish began “Two Hours to day”<sup>31</sup> and that “the Action lasted about 15 or 20 Minutes.” While the precise time and duration are uncertain, there does appear to be agreement that the skirmish occurred before dawn on November 9.

<sup>28</sup> Gen. Horatio Gates’s letter to Gen. George Weedon (Appendix B) and Maj. David Hopkins (Appendix C) also give Nov 8 as the date. November 12 was given as the date by a Charleston newspaper (Appendix D) and by pension applicants George Conn (Coln)

<http://revwarapps.org/s17891.pdf>, William White <http://revwarapps.org/w8995.pdf>, and Thomas Hawkins <http://revwarapps.org/s10796.pdf>. Col. William Hill gave the date as November 13. (William Hill’s memoir transcribed by Will Graves, <https://revwarapps.org/scx1.pdf>.)

<sup>29</sup> David Hopkins, “Letter From Col. David Hopkins,” *The Union [SC] Times*, August 17, 1917, 12. Appendix C.

<sup>30</sup> <http://revwarapps.org/s32216.pdf>

<sup>31</sup> Dawn on November 9 is at 7:11 a.m. local solar time; civil twilight begins at 6:42 a.m.

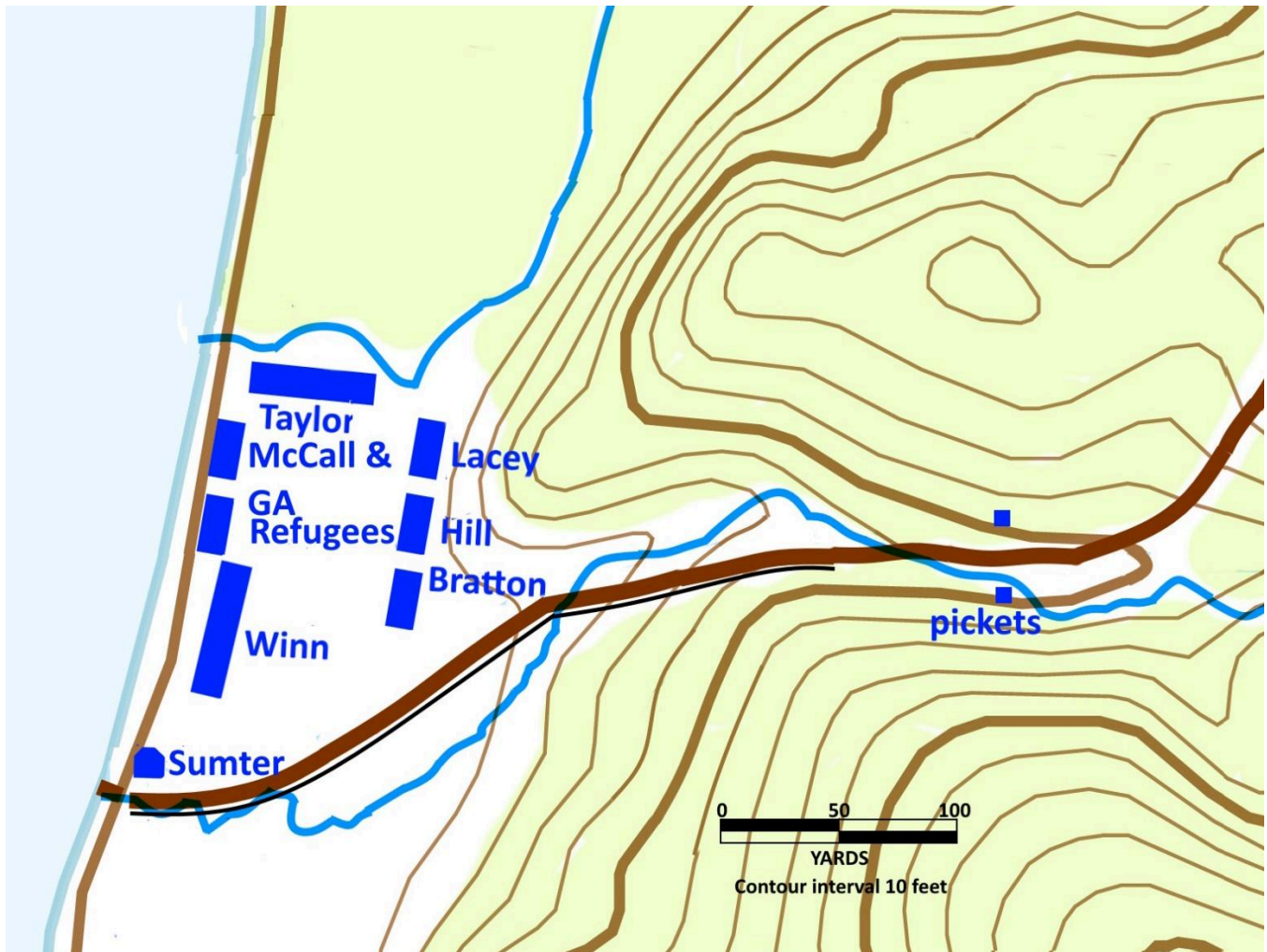


Figure 14. Schematic representation of Sumter's camp. Some contours are redrawn to show the probable terrain before construction of the bridge, and creeks are redrawn according to their present course as shown in the lidar image. Green shading indicates areas assumed to have been wooded at the time of the skirmish.



**Figure 15. The floodplain where we conclude Sumter was camped. Broad River is to the left.**

Near Fishdam Ford Sumter's 400 men were joined by about 100 Georgians under Clarke.<sup>32</sup> They were not a threat to Cornwallis at Winnsboro, but the post at Ninety Six was vulnerable. Cornwallis therefore had good reason to approve when Wemyss proposed an attack.<sup>33</sup> Wemyss would have under his command about 160 men of the 63<sup>rd</sup> Regiment and part of Tarleton's British Legion cavalry.<sup>34</sup> Tarleton himself with the rest of his legion was a hundred miles to the southeast, chasing Gen. Francis Marion and burning Patriots' homes.<sup>35</sup> According to Cornwallis's letter of November 9, Wemyss had planned to attack after daylight but did not wait. Possibly he did not want to risk Sumter's troops escaping across the river, and perhaps the sky was clear enough for an attack by the light of the moon, which was three days from being full and toward the backs of the attackers.<sup>36</sup>

A lingering mystery is why Sumter chose to camp on the same side of the river as

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<sup>32</sup> Winn, "Notes." Lt Robert Wilson (<http://revwarapps.org/w2302.pdf>) estimated that Sumter had over 600 men. According to David Madden (<http://revwarapps.org/s31835.pdf>), "About 280 men of us embodied ourselves as volunteers in Wilkes County, Georgia, and Elected Elijah Clark as Colonel to command us, we refusing to submit to the Royal Proclamation." Samuel Gordon (<http://revwarapps.org/s30441.pdf>) stated that 500 Georgians joined Sumter, but only after the skirmish at Fishdam Ford.

<sup>33</sup> James Wemyss, "British Maj. James Wemyss Manuscripts," Researching the American Revolution. <https://researchingtheamericanrevolution.com/british-maj-james-wemyss-manuscripts>

<sup>34</sup> The number of troops from the 63<sup>d</sup> Regiment is according to a newspaper account (Appendix D). David Hopkins (Appendix C) estimated the total number with Wemyss as 260. Col. William Hill ("Memoir," <http://revwarapps.org/scx1.pdf>) stated incorrectly that Wemyss had about three times as many men as Sumter.

<sup>35</sup> C. Leon Harris, "Francis Marion's Attack at Tearcoat Swamp and Tarleton's Revenge" (academia.edu, 2023) [https://www.academia.edu/115074584/FRANCIS\\_MARIONS\\_ATTACK\\_AT\\_TEARCOAT\\_SWAMP\\_AND\\_TARLETONS\\_REVENGE](https://www.academia.edu/115074584/FRANCIS_MARIONS_ATTACK_AT_TEARCOAT_SWAMP_AND_TARLETONS_REVENGE)

<sup>36</sup><http://astropixels.com/ephemeris/phasescat/phases1701.html>

Cornwallis, especially after his embarrassing surprise at Fishing Creek less than three months earlier. According to Winn,

it was the Opinion of Every Officer pres[en]t that Genl. Sumter Ought to Cross the River without delay and particular[ly] so by Colo. Winn who was well Acquainted with the people & Country— however After this Genl. Sumter thought Otherwise. Colo. Winn being so Sure of an Attack made his Men keep up good fires and Sleep with their Guns in their Arms & Shot bags under their heads and on the very Spot they rose on there they was to fight and not to fire a Single Gun untill the Enemy Came up to the fires.<sup>37</sup>

### The Skirmish

It will not be surprising that men suddenly awakened in the night gave different accounts of the skirmish. The most detailed account is by Col. Richard Winn. According to him, the first sign of the British attack was gunfire from Sumter's pickets, who were presumably posted on the road to Fishdam Ford, probably a few hundred yards from camp. (Fig. 16) According to Lt. Col. David Hopkins, "They attacked us with their cavalry in front." Wemyss was apparently with these horsemen of Tarleton's Legion and was wounded twice by the pickets, according to Cornwallis, who probably heard it from Wemyss.

out of five shots which were fired from the picket, one broke Wemyss' arm, and another his knee, the command then devolved to a young lieutenant, who knew

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<sup>37</sup> Winn, "Notes." Saye, "Major McJunkin," credits Col. Thomas Taylor with taking precautions as well. Saye's account is not credible, however, because it states that Sumter was on the west side of the ford, and that Wemyss attacked from Tyger River, which is west of Broad River.



nothing of the plan, or the ground, or the force of the enemy, and all was confusion.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Cornwallis to Tarleton, November 10, 1780, Appendix E.

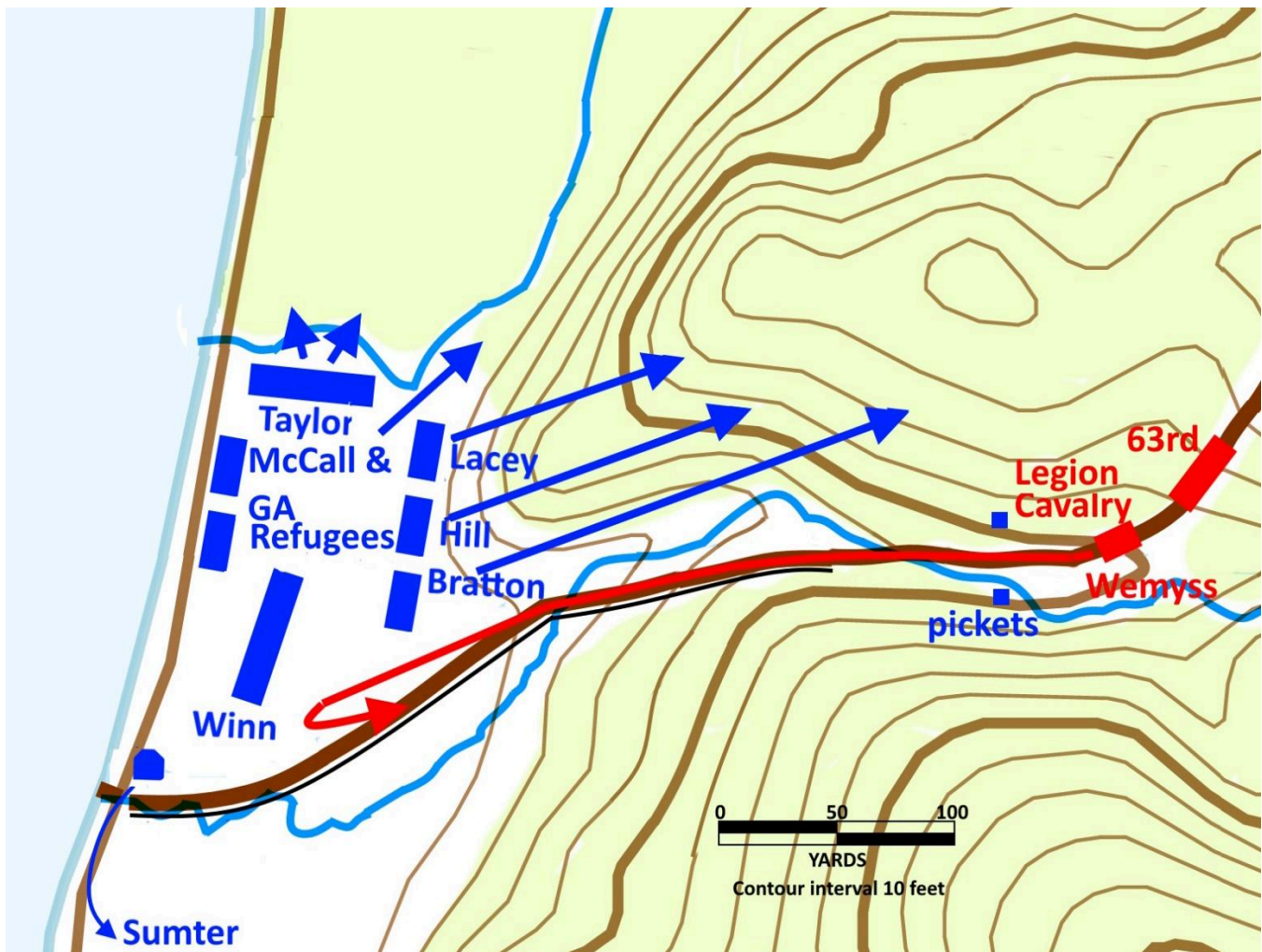


Figure 16. The beginning of the skirmish. Wemyss leading the Legion cavalry comes under fire from Sumter's pickets and is wounded. The cavalry continues into camp but is driven off by Winn's regiment. In the meantime, Sumter has narrowly escaped, and his other troops have scattered.

The charging horsemen continued into camp, where Winn's men, who had been sleeping on their guns, quickly formed into line and drove off the dragoons.

Two Hours to day the Picquets fires Alarm Guns and by the time I had my Men in Order the Horse made a Violent Charge they too put up the Indian Hollo my Men strictly Obeyed my Orders and as soon as the Enemy came up to the fires they Halted with Surprise my people poured in upon

them a well directed fire which they did not stay to return....<sup>39</sup>

Other American troops who were not as well prepared apparently scattered into the surrounding woods. From the number of dropped balls shown in Figure 6, it appears that some fled to the wooded hill and tried to load their guns in the darkness. James Clinton, who was with Col. Bratton, stated, "we were surprised by a detachment of British, and gained some advantage over us, and ran us off the ground."<sup>40</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Winn, "Notes."

<sup>40</sup> <http://revwarapps.org/s2437.pdf>

Sumter was also surprised and came close to being captured. According to Winn,

at the first onset 5 or 6 Horse men piloted by a Tory Strained down to make prisoner of the Genl. which they nearly effected Owing to the Orderly Serg[ean]t not giving him notice of the Alarm in time. Before he could put on his Cloths they was up with him[.] by Jumping a fence and running through a Brier patch he Saved himself but his Service was entirely lost...<sup>41</sup>

After the initial attack by the Legion cavalry, the infantry of the 63<sup>d</sup> regiment dismounted and advanced with muskets and bayonets. (Fig. 17)

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<sup>41</sup> Winn, "Notes." Hill also stated that Sumter was nearly captured, but he differed from Winn in the manner of Sumter's escape: "Two of the dragoons entered the Genls . markey, while he made his escape out of the back of the markey & got under the bank of the River."

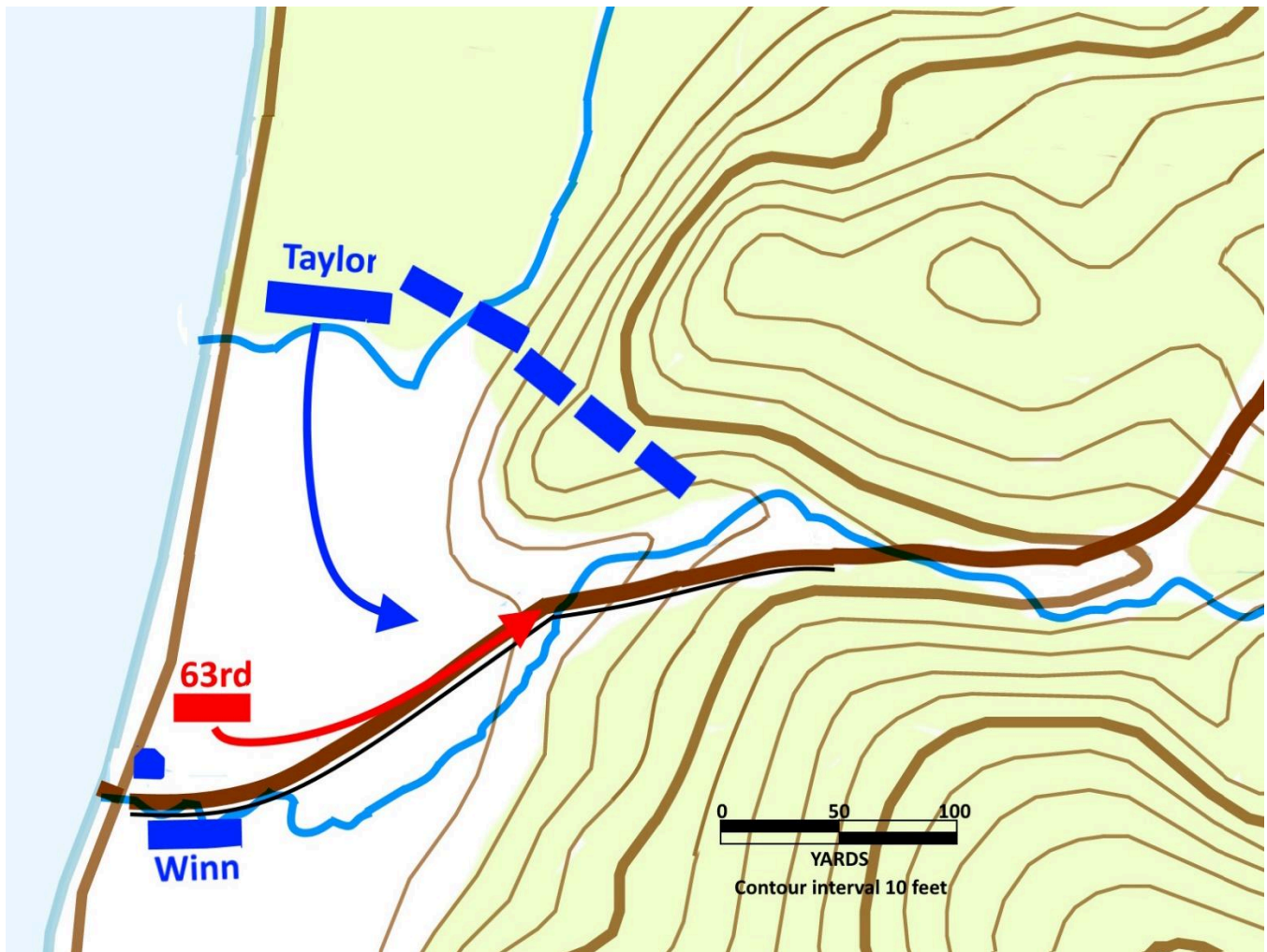


Figure 17. The 63<sup>rd</sup> regiment enters Sumter's camp and engages Winn with muskets and bayonets until driven off by Taylor.

Winn had expected the infantry charge and taken his troops to the other side of the fence. After some preliminary “trash talk” the shooting began with the two sides within musket range. The British, silhouetted by the fires in Sumter’s camp, suffered heavily from the Americans’ rifles. They charged with bayonets, but with Maj. Wemyss out of action and an inexperienced lieutenant in command, they soon gave up the fight.

As well Knowing that I should be immediately attacked by the foot I drew my Men into Close Order and took the advantage of a fence. By this time the foot was within 50 yards of us Crying Out G. D. your Souls who are you. One of my Capts by the name of Kirkland a big Spoken Man Answered and G. Dam your S[ou]ls & who are you. The fire from Both sides in a twinkling Commenced the British Charged with Bayonet my Men having the advantage of the fence Stood the Shock and made the Second fire. I had only One Man Bayoneted through the arm. Majr. Weems their Commander being badly wounded the Enemy begins to retreat.<sup>42</sup>

Hill, who had probably withdrawn to the wooded hillside, reported that some of the British busied themselves plundering Sumter’s camp until they too were driven off by rifle fire.

The Americans retreated in the dark to a commanding ground, (within Shot of their fires) where they waited until the enemy collected in great numbers around their fires, & began to plunder, not supposing that they would meet with any interruption. while they were in this position around the fires, the Americans, having the advantage of the light, poured on them such a fire that they killed & wounded a great many.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Winn, “Notes.”

<sup>43</sup> Hill, “Memoir.”

According to Winn, however, “Notwithstanding the force of Lacey, Bratton & Hill was upwards of three Hundred Men they did not fire a Single gun. When I met Lacey I asked him why did you not fight. Answer I was afraid of Killing some of you.” Hill and Winn did agree that the British were pursued as they retreated back along the road. Hill stated that “they then made a very rapid retreat & were pursued by the Americans some distance.” According to Winn, “Colo. Taylor gave the Retreating party two or three fires but being dark and two [sic] far off Could not have done very great damage.” The three fired balls depicted in Figure 6 may be from that part of the skirmish.

Sumter, only partly dressed, spent the rest of the night trying to keep warm. According to Winn, “when Genl. Sumter & myself met at Nickson’s [Nixon’s the following day] he informed me when he was Cut off being in his shirt sheaves he verily believed he would have perished from the Cold had he have not got a Horse getting on him bareback & hugging his Neck.”

### **“Much Damage Done by so Few Men in so Short a Time”**

After sunrise, Sumter surveyed the scene of the skirmish from a hill. The ground was stained by the blood of killed and wounded on both sides. Among the wounded was Wemyss.

Next morning After the Sun got up Genl. Sumter from a Hill took a View found his Men was in possession of the Battle Ground he also discovered Our Horses in the field to the No. 500 the Baggage Wagons Standing he went to the Camp found the ground Stained with Killed & Wounded & the Commanding British Officer in his power.<sup>44</sup>

According to Samuel Hill, “Major Weymis [was] wounded & taken prisoner, altho’ he had

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<sup>44</sup> Winn, “Notes.”



in his pocket, the evidence of his having in cold blood hanged several of the Americans, likewise a list of a number of the houses he had burned on Black River.”<sup>45</sup> Gates, who probably heard it from Sumter, wrote that in Wemyss’s “pocket was found a List of all the Whiggs Houses he lately Burnt upon Pee Dee.”<sup>46</sup> Sumter paroled Wemyss and returned him to the British.

This skirmish, lasting probably less than an hour, inflicted a relatively large proportion of casualties. Winn quoted the British surgeon attending the wounded as saying, “I have never Seen as much damage done by so few Men in so short a time Since I have been in America.” As usual, estimated numbers of killed and wounded vary, with each side inflating the enemy’s losses and minimizing its own. Wemyss claimed, “the Rebels were dispersed, having about 70 men killed and wounded. On our side, five were killed, and Major Wemyss, two serjeants and 27 wounded.”<sup>47</sup> According to Maj. Hopkins, however, the British “had seven killed on the ground and four died of their wounds that evening. We lost five men killed and six wounded.”<sup>48</sup> From the pension application of James Clinton it appears that many of the American casualties were in Taylor’s regiment:

Colonel Taylor lost five out of his Regiment, but on the next morning we returned to the ground and found 15 of the enemy wounded & on the ground with a Surgeon attending them. These we left under the care of the Surgeon except two who preferred the American service and

one of them was afterwards a good soldier in our Army.<sup>49</sup>

Neither side suffered losses that impaired their effectiveness, and no significant ground was lost or gained. On the day after the skirmish Sumter’s troops crossed Fishdam Ford heading in the direction of the crucial British post at Ninety Six. Possibly the most significant result of the skirmish was that it forced Cornwallis to recall Tarleton from his pursuit of Marion and focus on Sumter instead. “I am under the greatest anxiety for Ninety Six,” Cornwallis wrote to Tarleton on the day of the skirmish, “and trust you will lose no time in returning to me.” Tarleton managed to turn Sumter away from Ninety Six northward, and at the Battle of Blackstock’s Plantation on November 20 Sumter was seriously wounded.<sup>50</sup> Tarleton suffered many more casualties, however, and his aura of invincibility was damaged. At the Battle of Cowpens on the following January 17 American militiamen were not cowed by the Legion’s charge, and the Americans delivered him an even more severe defeat than he suffered at Blackstock’s. Tarleton may still have been the most hated man in South Carolina, but perhaps no longer the most feared.

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<sup>45</sup> Hill, “Memoir.”

<sup>46</sup> Gates to Weedon, November 14, 1780. Appendix B. Some secondary sources state that Sumter burned the list to spare Wemyss from being murdered, but we have not found a primary source for this.

<sup>47</sup> British Maj. James Wemyss Manuscripts. Researching the American Revolution. <https://researchingtheamericanrevolution.com/british-maj-james-wemyss-manuscripts>

<sup>48</sup> Hopkins, “Letter.”

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<sup>49</sup> <http://revwarapps.org/s2437.pdf>

<sup>50</sup> C. Leon Harris, “Blackstock’s Plantation, November 20, 1780: A Revolutionary War Battlefield in the South Carolina Backcountry,” [https://www.academia.edu/34491226/BLACKSTOCK\\_S\\_PLANTATION\\_NOVEMBER\\_20\\_1780\\_A\\_REVOLUTONARY\\_WAR\\_BATTLEFIELD\\_IN\\_THE\\_SOUTH\\_CAROLINA\\_BACKCOUNTRY](https://www.academia.edu/34491226/BLACKSTOCK_S_PLANTATION_NOVEMBER_20_1780_A_REVOLUTONARY_WAR_BATTLEFIELD_IN_THE_SOUTH_CAROLINA_BACKCOUNTRY)



**APPENDIX A: Order of Battle.** Adapted from J. D. Lewis,<sup>51</sup> with additions from Patrick O’Kelley<sup>52</sup> and from pension applications (indicated by asterisks). American regiments are those that the colonels commanded, not necessarily those to which the captains or other soldiers belonged.

## **AMERICANS**

### **Gen. Thomas Sumter**

#### South Carolina State Troops and Militia

##### **Col. Thomas Taylor**

Capt. George Avery  
Capt. Gabriel Brown  
Capt. Joseph Hughes  
Capt. John Lindsay  
Capt. John McCool  
Capt. John Taylor\* [brother of Thomas;  
mortally wounded]  
Capt. John Thompson

#### Turkey Creek Militia

##### **Col Edward Lacey**

Capt. Hugh Knox  
Capt. Patrick McGriff  
Capt. Thomas Robins

#### Fairfield Regiment

##### **Col Richard Winn**

Lt. Col. David Hopkins  
Capt. William Smith  
Capt. John Winn

#### New Acquisition District Militia

##### **Col. William Bratton**

Capt. James [or William] Davis  
Capt. Thomas [Robert?] Hanna  
Capt. James Jamieson  
Capt. Thompson (or Thomson)

#### Col. William Hill’s Regiment of State Troops

##### **Col. William Hill**

Lt. Col. James Hawthorn  
Capt. John Cunningham

#### Long Cane Militia

##### **Lt. Col. James McCall**

Capt. Samuel Carr (mortally wounded)

#### Georgia Refugees

##### **Col. Elijah Clarke**

Maj. William Candler\*

##### **Col. Benjamin Few\***

Maj. James Jackson

## **BRITISH**

#### 63<sup>d</sup> Regiment of Foot (mounted)

##### **Maj. James Wemyss**

Lt. Henry Bethune Stark\*

#### British Legion Cavalry

Lt. Moore Hovenden\*

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<sup>51</sup> Carolana.com, The American Revolution in South Carolina  
[https://www.carolana.com/SC/Revolution/revolution\\_battle\\_of\\_fishdam\\_ford.html](https://www.carolana.com/SC/Revolution/revolution_battle_of_fishdam_ford.html)

<sup>52</sup> O’Kelley, *NBBS*, 2:355-356.

**APPENDIX B: Letter from Gen. Horatio Gates to Gen. George Weedon.**<sup>53</sup> Transcribed by C. Leon Harris.

Salisbury [NC] 14<sup>th</sup> November 1780

Dear General

I was favoured with your Obliging Letter of the 2<sup>d</sup> Inst, the Evening of my Arrival here the 11<sup>th</sup>; I thank you very much for giving me such particulars, and authentic intelligence of the State of Affairs in Virginia. By the Enemies taking post, and Fortifying at Portsmouth, I am in a manner convinced, The Troops under General Lesly [Alexander Leslie] are only the Advance of a more respectable Body, that will soon appear with Sir Harry Clinton at their Head in your Bay. The Heavy Cannon, the Cavalry, the Quantity of Intrenching Tools, their raising Works, &c, are to me so many convincing proofs, that I am right in my Conjectures; add to this, Lord Cornwallis being to Cooperate[?] on this side, & you will find abundant reason for believing as I do. In my Letters to Governour Jefferson & Congress I have given this as my Opinion, & recommended it to them to prepare accordingly. Many Great public misfortunes have been owing to our not providing in Time to prevent them. The moment S<sup>r</sup> Henry sees the Season for Campaigning to the Northward is Over He will Embark for the Southward – as we are not in the Trust of the Enemies General, we can only Judge from the Tendency of his [two undeciphered words] of the Object he has in View, and from what in like circumstances we would do Ourselves. Things this way might be better If Treachery, Avarice, and Hard Feelings[?] did not act so powerfully against us. Major Bryan Bruin [Peter Bryan Bruin S42092] will tell you of a pretty Sharp [undeciphered] Sumpter gave a party of the Enemy, who

<sup>53</sup> Swann Auction Galleries, Revolutionary American from the Allyn Kellogg Ford Collection - Autographs Apr 17, 2012 – Sale 2276.

<https://catalogue.swanngalleries.com/Lots/auction-lot/GATES-HORATIO-Autograph-Letter-Signed-as-Major-General-to-Br?saleno=2276&lotNo=15&refNo=649737>.

Accessed February 12, 2022.

attempted to surprize him on Wednesday morning [November 8<sup>th</sup>] at Three OClock. Major Wemys of the 63<sup>d</sup> Regiment who commanded the British, had his thigh Broke, and with Twenty five Others was taken prisoners in his pocket was found a List of all the Whiggs Houses he lately Burnt upon Pee Dee; Lord Cornwallis has Fortyfied Camden, & his Camp near Winsborough, and Evidently waits to be reinforced, & then to Cooperate with the Troops in your State, that is, to Attack when they do, in order to Distract & Divide us. In my Opinion it is High Time General Washington, and Five Thousand of our best Troops, were in full march from the Head of Elk for James River! I say General Washington, because his Influence, Authority, and Support are to the Full as much wanted as His abilities – my Compliments to Mrs Weedon, Colonel [undeciphered] & Mrs [undeciphered] – I am Dear Sir/ our Affectionate/ Humble Servant/ Horatio Gates

Brigadier General Weedon

**APPENDIX C: An Account of the Skirmish at Fishdam Ford and the Battle of Blackstock's Plantation by Col. David Hopkins from *The Union [SC] Times*, August 17, 1917, page 12.** Transcribed and annotated by C. Leon Harris.

LETTER FROM COL. DAVID HOPKINS

Read by Mrs. Ora Wilkes Fant.

Col. David Hopkins is the Revolutionary ancestor of Mrs. Fant.

This letter is particularly interesting and instructive as it shows the hardships endured at the time, and also gives a personal account of the battle at Blackstock, Union County. Regent.

South Carolina, Fort Larey [sic: Fort Lacey]  
Turkey Creek, Dec. 20, 1780.

My dear Sons:

I find time much worse than when you left South Carolina last. The enemy has had

possession of all I possessed and am told had come to a conclusion of the division of the negroes and plantations and under cover of the British which made them think all quite safe. they had taken off only five negroes and they on Ferguson's defeat, were left to themselves and chose to come home and on Tuesday evening, the 7th of last month, General Sumpter arrived at the Fish Dam ford on Broad river and the next morning about 1 o'clock were attacked by the British, a part of Tarleton's corps. Their number from the best information were about 260, our number consisted of about 360 and upwards. They attacked us with their cavalry in front, however, after a contest of about an hour the enemy saw cause to quit the ground with the loss of 27 killed, wounded and taken. Thei[r] commanding officer, Major Winns [sic: James Wemyss] wounded and taken among the rest. They had seven killed on the ground and four died of their wounds that evening. We lost five men killed and six wounded. My boy Moses, whom I so esteem, I believe, is mortally wounded, as he is shot between the body and shoulder and bayoneted in three different places in the body. The next day we advanced as far as Tyger river and after crossing it encamped on the south side; then we had our neighborhood under cover, which occasioned a small opening for those who had recovered or had property that they wished out of the way of the enemy to make a venture. Capt. Charles Sims concluded to run negroes for Virginia. I prevailed on him to agree to try to take mine with his and told him to take them to you if possible but in case it should happen other ways to place them as safe as he possibly could 'til he could see you—which he said he would be sure to do if he got his negroes in safe as he would go by your Uncle Glenn's where you board. I also told him to be sure to tell you that if you could possibly save the negroes from the enemy that all and every one of them should be your absolute right and property. I am informed that Capt. Sims has left the negroes on the Adkin opposite the

Moravian town [sic: Yadkin River opposite Salem NC]. If it should be the case perhaps he may leave his negroes on the way or stay with them so long that you may lose yours; therefore as I have this opportunity by Major Stogden who tells me he is going to Virginia immediately with all the speed he possibly can and through the neighborhood where you are, he has promised me either to call at Mr. Glenn's and deliver this letter to you with his own hand or to be sure and send it to you by a safe hand—and if it should be the first account you have had of the negroes I would recommend to you both to push immediately to where the negroes are and run them with all speed into Virginia and the safest you can be informed of us. I would wish you to save them if possible as they have been taken and retaken and will certainly be so much saved to yourselves and unexpectedly, and if it should so happen that you should secure the negroes and we gain our independence I would wish you two to make an equal division with your brothers and sisters, and, if it should be the will of providence that I do survive the war and it shall terminate in our favor, which I ever have and do yet believe it will, I shall and do relinquish all my right claims and pretensions to all and every one of the negroes I did formerly or do now own to you as aforesaid, all the other part of my estate except my land has fallen into the hands of the enemy. They drove off at one time between ninety and a hundred head of cattle to Winnsborough. They have also got all my sheep and the greater part of my hogs, plantation tools, household furniture and every other article that was of any value, so I am properly situated for a soldier and am determined to see the event of our cause or fall in the attempt.

There is one piece of news I have omitted, which was the Battle of Blackstocks on Tyger river, which happened a few days after I saw Capt. Sims. Col. Tarleton attacked us about an hour and a half by sun in the evening. The action continued 'til almost sundown when we



beat them off the ground; we had four killed and Gen. Sumpter badly wounded. Capt. Gabriel Brown was killed dead to my left hand and Gen. Sumpter to my right. Both happened from one plateau [platoon?] from the enemy on their retreat. It is supposed they had sixty or seventy men killed and wounded. Gen. Sumpter is on the recovery.

I have nothing more particular at present but am with sincere respect, your loving father 'til death. (Signed) David Hopkins.

Mr. Ferdinand Hopkins and Newton Hopkins in the State of Virginia.  
Cumberland County

Guinery Creek [probably Guinea Creek].

N. B.—We were so scarce of paper in camp at the time Capt. Sims started for Virginia I could scarcely get enough to send you a list of the negroes, which were only seventeen.

I am as above. (Signed) David Hopkins.

**APPENDIX D: An Account of the Skirmish at Fishdam Ford and the Battle of Blackstock's Plantation from *South-Carolina and American General Gazette* (Charlestown SC), Wed. 29 Nov 1780, p. 2.** Transcribed by Harriet Imrey.

Charlestown, November 29

By late advices from the back country we are informed, that Major Wemyss, with 160 men of the 63d regiment, on the 9<sup>th</sup> instant, came up with Mr. Sumpter, who had about 400 men with him, near Fish Dam Ford. The rebels were surprised and put to the route, and several of them who fled towards the Ford were pushed into the river; but it unfortunately happened, that at the very beginning of the action, Major Wemyss was so badly wounded, that he was obliged to be carried to the rear. By this time the rebels had fled on all sides, and the King's troops formed upon the ground; but it being thought disadvantageous, it was resolved to quit it, and Major Wemyss's situation not admitting of his removal, he was left at a farm house in the

neighborhood. The next morning the rebels not finding themselves pursued, began to collect themselves, and with great caution appeared on their old ground. Mr Sumpter having received information where Major Wemyss had been left, came to him about 12 o'clock, and gave him a parole. We are happy to inform the publick, that the wound Major Wemyss had received is not dangerous, and he hath arrived at the camp at Winnsborough. Our loss upon this occasion, was 1 serjeant and 5 rank and file killed; and besides the Major, 1 serjeant and 15 rank and file wounded. The rebels say they had near twenty killed, and fifty-two wounded.

Last Saturday Lieut McLeod of the Royal Artillery, arrived in town from the camp at Winnsborough and brought with him the following agreeable and important intelligence:

That Earl Cornwallis having dispatched Lieutenant-Colonel Tarleton with part of the Legion and 63d regiment in quest of Sumpter, that active and enterprizing officer, on the 20<sup>th</sup> instant, came up with Mr. Sumpter's rear guard on the Enoree; they were immediately attacked, and cut up to a man. Colonel Tarleton having discovered Sumpter's trick immediately pursued him with great rapidity, and came up with him at Black Storks [Blackstock's Plantation] on Tyger-river. The force of the rebels consisted of about one thousand men, headed by Sumpter, Clarke, Lacey and Brennan, who were posted on advantageous ground. All the force Colonel Tarleton could bring up was 190 Cavalry, and ninety infantry. The attack commenced, and notwithstanding the superior numbers of the rebels, and the advantage of the ground, they could not withstand the ardent bravery of the King's Troops, but after some resistance were totally defeated and dispersed; their horses, waggons, &c are all taken—The slaughter amongst them, which was very great, would have been much more so if the night had not favoured their escape. Sumpter is dangerously wounded, and it is thought must long before this have fallen into Col. Tarleton's hands. Our loss

consists of fifty killed and wounded. Amongst the former are Lieutenants Gibson and Cope of the 63d, and amongst the latter, Major Money of the 63d, and Mr Monro of the Legion, but neither of them dangerously.

**APPENDIX E:** Letters from Cornwallis Concerning Fishdam Ford

*Copy of a letter from Earl Cornwallis to Lieutenant-colonel Tarleton, dated Wynnesborough, November 9, 1780.*<sup>54</sup>

DEAR TARLETON,

MAJOR Wemyss attacked Sumpter at Fish Dam at one o'clock this morning, contrary to his plan, which was to wait until day light; the consequence is, that Wemyss is wounded and left, and about twenty men: Lieutenant Hovenden is wounded, but I believe the legion has not lost much—Must beg of you to return immediately, leaving some horses for mounting men at Camden. I am under the greatest anxiety for Ninety Six, and trust you will lose no time in returning to me.

I am, Yours sincerely,  
CORNWALLIS.

*Extract.—From Earl Cornwallis to Lieutenant-colonel Tarleton, dated Wynnesborough, November 10, 1780.*<sup>55</sup>

YOU will have received my letter of yesterday, since which we have intelligence that Sumpter has passed the Broad River, and joined Clarke, Brannen, &c. They talk of expecting some of the mountaineers; as they have excellent horses we cannot hurt them; and unless they receive some check they will be very troublesome. The 63<sup>d</sup> are well mounted for infantry, and may occasionally ride in your train, they behaved vastly well, out of five shots which were fired from the picket, one broke

Wemyss' arm, and another his knee, the command then devolved to a young lieutenant, who knew nothing of the plan, or the ground, or the force of the enemy, and all was confusion. After what I have said, I am sure I may depend on your acting for the best, on the general plan of the welfare of the army.

*Extract.—From Earl Cornwallis to Sir Henry Clinton, dated Camp, at Wynnesborough, December 3, 1780.*<sup>56</sup>

SUMPTER having passed the Broad river, and joined Brannen, Clarke, &c., I detached Major M'Arthur with the 1<sup>st</sup> battalion of the 71<sup>st</sup>, and the 63<sup>d</sup> regiment, after having sent my aid-de-camp, Lieutenant Money, to take the command of it, to Brierley's ferry, on Broad River, in order to cover our mills, and to give some check to the enemy's march to Ninety Six.

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<sup>54</sup> Tarleton, *History*, note K to Chapter 3, 205-206.

<sup>55</sup> Tarleton, *History*, 206.

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<sup>56</sup> Tarleton, *History*, note M to Chapter 3, 209

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Will Graves, Mary Jane Harris, Harriet Imrey, Doug MacIntyre and Conner Runyan made many helpful and encouraging comments on drafts of this paper!

C. Leon Harris earned a B.S. in physics at Virginia Tech and M.S. and Ph.D. degrees in biophysics at Penn State. He taught biology, wrote textbooks, and did neurobiology research at the State University of New York, Plattsburgh for more than three decades. Since retiring to Mount Pleasant SC and Adamant VT he has authored or co-authored several papers on the Revolutionary War in the South, and has helped Will Graves transcribe almost thirty thousand Revolutionary War pension and bounty-land applications, rosters, and other documents at [revwarapps.org](http://revwarapps.org). Recently he began publishing research papers in conjunction with Dr. Paul T. Carter's videos on the YouTube channel "@CarterOnConflict." He is honored to be one of hundreds drawn to the study of the Revolutionary War by Charles B. Baxley's enthusiasm, high standards and humanity.

Charles B. Baxley died on March 30, 2024 after contributing to and editing several 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. He was a recipient of South Carolina's highest civilian honor, the Order of the Palmetto. 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. Baxley 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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