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The Dawn of Mobile Warfare in North America Part Two

INSIDE:

Did Lt. Col. Henry Lee Hang Prisoners at Fort Motte?

C. Leon Harris

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The Journal

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IN THIS ISSUE

From the Editor

Hello All,

We are off and running toward the 250th Anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. For me, that realization carries a deeply personal weight. In 1976, I had the privilege of celebrating the Bicentennial. Like many Americans at the time, I was caught up in the pageantry, optimism, and renewed interest in our nation's founding. It never crossed my mind that I might still be here to witness the next great milestone—much less to help tell its story. And who knows? Perhaps I'll even live to see the Tricentennial. :-)

As we begin 2026, the energy surrounding the historical significance of the American Revolution is unmistakable. Across the country, historians, educators, preservationists, reenactors, museums, and local communities are pouring extraordinary effort into making this semiquincentennial a landmark moment. Much of that work is being coordinated and inspired by those involved in the America 250 project, whose dedication is helping ensure that this anniversary is more than a date on a calendar—it is an opportunity for reflection, learning, and renewed civic understanding.

Here at Southern Campaigns of the American Revolution, we are especially mindful of the responsibility that comes with this moment. The Southern theater was decisive, complex, and deeply human, shaped by neighbors, families, faith, hardship, and resilience. Over the next year and beyond, we remain committed to presenting this history accurately, with balance, and with respect for those who lived it—famous and forgotten alike.

Richard C. Meehan, Jr.

I am proud to be an American. That pride is rooted not in perfection but in perseverance: in a people who argued, struggled, sacrificed, and ultimately committed themselves to the idea that liberty was worth the cost. It is an honor to help preserve and share that story with you.

Thank you for being part of this journey.

In liberty,
Richard C. Meehan, Jr.
Editor, **THE JOURNAL**

Hear Ye, Hear Ye

The South Carolina American Revolution Trust is on a mission to preserve, protect and promote (into perpetuity) the stories, artifacts and history of South Carolina's role in the American Revolution. We take this work very seriously and have developed an effective system that acknowledges the donor's work, celebrates the story of your collection and honors the legacy this information represents.

We primarily work with donors that have information, stories or artifacts related to South Carolina's role in the American Revolution. The Trust exists to honor your life's work and build a repository of stories, data, facts and artifacts from this period so that this information can be preserved for and accessed by future generations.

Are you interested in donating, but have some questions? Contact us below, and we will happily answer your questions or concerns about your potential donation.

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The Dragoon

by C. Leon Harris

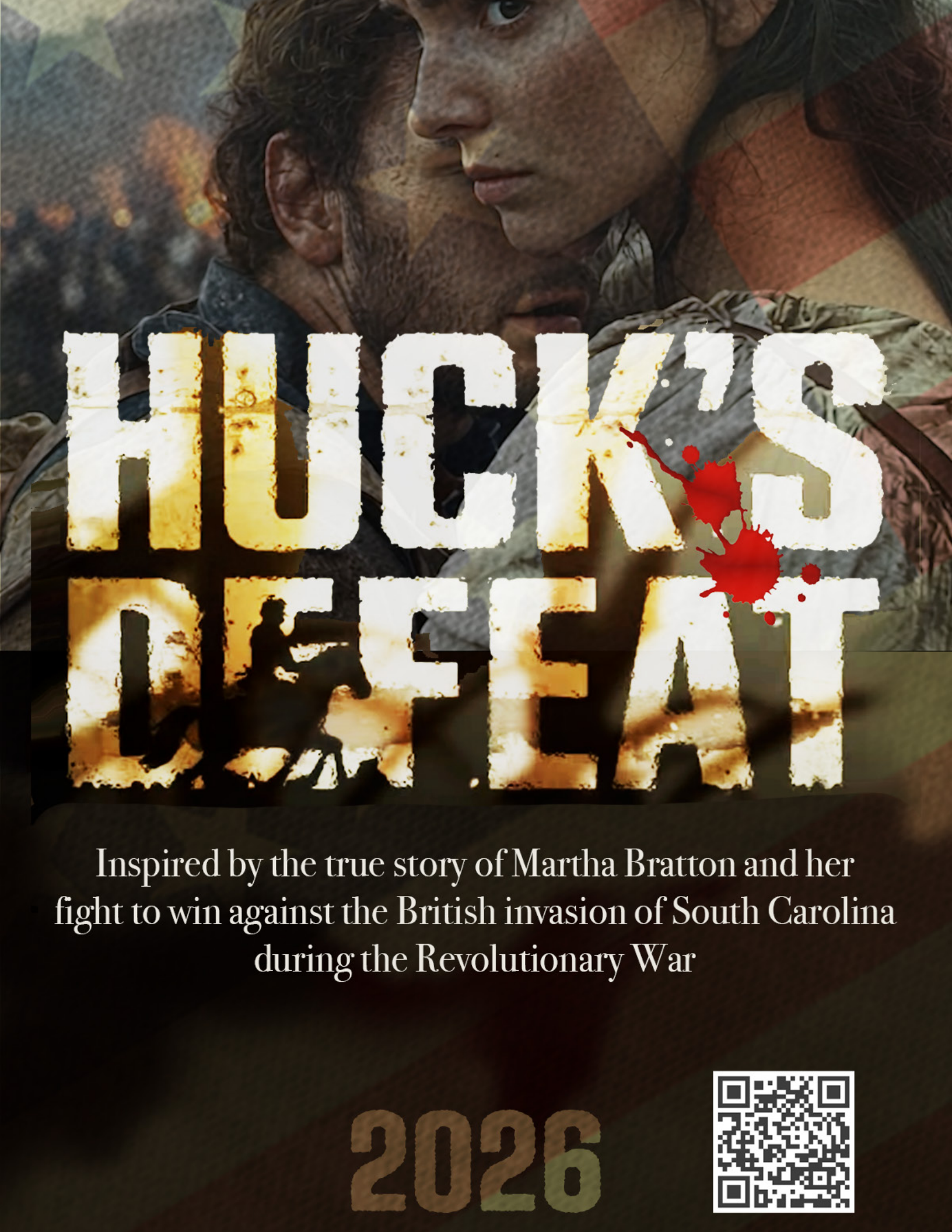
General Nathanael Greene is often said to have "smiled seldom, laughed never." He would have had little reason to do either in Charlotte in early December 1780, when he took command of the Southern Department. He found an army shattered after the disastrous Battle of Camden on August 16, with clothing so scarce that some men were too embarrassed to leave their tents. According to a family legend, however, there was one occasion when Greene did laugh heartily.

The 1949 letter by Kate Blackard that I referred to in the last issue includes the following story handed down from Willoughby Blackard. "Gen-Green was a very serious man and the story I always enjoyed — That Willy Bee said the only time he ever saw Gen Green laugh heartly was when a half wit soldier painted the end of a log like the mouth of a canon and in the night dragged the log in to position over looking a small town of the enemy and at day break called on the people to surender and that they did promptly."

Like the legend of Blackard being spared from execution, this one has many errors but also kernels of fact. It was not a halfwit soldier who concocted the scheme to disguise a log as a cannon, but Lt. Col. William Washington, commander of a Continental regiment of light dragoons and a distant cousin of Gen. George Washington. Francis Miller, in his pension application (W23984), stated that "at the request of Col. Washington he (the said Miller) made a wooden cannon about the size of a 6 pounder." (It seems likely that Miller had help.) And it was not a "small town of the enemy," but a fortified barn that was made to surrender. The rest of the legend appears to be well supported.

Twenty pension applicants mentioned this memorable event, and except for minor details, they gave a consistent description. Col. Henry Rugeley and more than a hundred other Loyalists were holed up at Rugeley's plantation about twelve miles north of Camden, South Carolina, when Washington arrived. Washington had little hope of capturing them without artillery, so during the night he ordered a pine log blackened and mounted on wagon wheels to resemble a cannon. Around dawn, Rugeley's men peered through the fog and saw what looked like a cannon. Washington sent in a demand that they surrender, which they did without firing a shot.

On December 4, 1780, Cornwallis ruefully wrote, "Dear Tarleton. Rugeley will not be made a brigadier." If Cornwallis could find wry humor in the event, maybe Greene actually laughed heartily about it.



Inspired by the true story of Martha Bratton and her fight to win against the British invasion of South Carolina during the Revolutionary War

2026

THE LOYALIST

by
Paul Wood

Babies napping in strollers, children running through loose sand, teens listening carefully to the owners of colonial weapons, adults studiously learning from weavers, blacksmiths, and carpenters. On both sides of the wide avenue of interpretive displays and sutlers' canopies stand dozens of bright white tents and cooking fires for the battle reenactors. The public is free to stroll through both encampments and converse with men and women who have driven hundreds of miles to interpret the war that won American independence.

The public learns how to load and shoot muskets, rifles, and cannons. Merchants sell 18th century wares ranging from children's toys and cloth to period-authentic shoes, hats, and clothes. For sale are teas and coffees of colonial times, non-fiction and historical fiction books, maps, and more. The sellers energetically interpret their wares and relate how they were used 250 years ago.

After lunch the guests walk under pines and find vantage points for the largest force-on-force Rev War reenactment in the country. Somewhat like a TV football analyst, an announcer with deep knowledge of the historic action identifies the units and provides ongoing commentary as British and American units re-load their muskets, march forward, and fire at fifty to seventy-five yards. The gunshots, the cannon blasts, and the gunpowder smoke wafting into the pines often surprise the uninitiated. Soldiers and militia approach one another, fire their weapons, and then run away if the tide of battle has turned against them. Many fall to the ground to remind the audience of the great toll of human life.

Those are a few of the scenes at the annual Carolinas Revolutionary War Weekend and Battle Reenactments. For more than fifty years, Kershaw County, South Carolina, has hosted the event. Previously held in the Town of Camden on the grounds of Historic Camden, the event now enjoys a more spacious, rural location. It draws several thousand spectators and hundreds of living historians from northern states, the Midwest and the Deep South. Each year the Battle of Camden is reenacted; another battle such as Cowpens,

Hobkirk's Hill, or Stono Ferry takes place on the other day.

The three-day event is held on the second weekend of every November. The grounds of are not open to the public on the first day, Friday. That day is devoted to public and private school students and the home schooled. Almost two thousand students, teachers, and chaperones attend each year.

In recent SCAR Journal articles, I have highlighted the wide variety of ways the Revolutionary War is being interpreted to the public. The work of true historians such as archeologists and researchers of archives is only a starting point. Our work is never adequate until we write for all age-level readers and use imaginative means to interpret what we know to the public. The words "living history" say it all. Books, articles, and Rev War museums might be the oldest means for teaching the public about the war. But creative Americans continue to invent new methods for the all-important work of interpretation.

Learn more about the weekend's activities at https://southerncampaign1780.org. On the site one finds a short video produced by Wide Awake Films. It is a moving tribute to what happens every November just outside of Camden, South Carolina.

Dr. Erick Nason, a retired Army Special Forces Noncommissioned Officer, military historian, and author, demonstrates a cannon. Dr. Nason commands the 2nd Regiment, South Carolina Continental Line and serves as Chairman of the Continental Line that includes reenacting groups from Maine to Georgia.

Photos retrieved from https://southerncampaign1780.org.

The Dawn of Mobile Warfare in North America:

Cavalry during the French and Indian War

Originally published in The Cavalry & Armor Journal as edited by Jim Piecuch and MG Julian Burns.

Stephen L. Kling, Jr., Esq.

Editor's Note: In this essay on Cavalry in the French & Indian War, Stephen L. Kling demonstrates the power that the study of history can yield: what can be learned, or not learned - to advantage, or to painful disadvantage. The mounted formations employed in North America, first in the French and Indian War and later in the War for Independence, had their roots in European doctrine, employing French, Prussian, and British practices that were imperfectly suited to frontier conditions. The lessons derived about Cavalry operations in the varied and rugged terrain over which the French and Indian War was waged caused many leaders, including the great General George Washington, to disparage the value of a mounted force, and the struggle of the American Army during the Revolution to relearn the lessons of the earlier conflict proved costly at the outset, in both blood and material, as we shall see. ***Jim Piecuch Editor, MG JB Burns, US Cavalry***

Cavalry tactics first developed in North America during the French and Indian War, although mounted soldiers served sporadically as scouts, messengers and guards for frontier settlers before the war.[1] However, neither side in the war used cavalry frequently, and while utilization was expanded as the war unfolded, rigid thinking and prejudices also developed that required a certain amount of relearning during the American Revolutionary War, particularly for the British officers but also for American officers with British training. Moreover, none of the cavalry units in the French and Indian War were regular units of the British or French armies. Rather, they were local or provincial units who were not always led by regular army officers and were mostly viewed as auxiliaries, and therefore did not figure prominently in military doctrine for North American warfare. In other words, snobbery, stubbornness and inherent prejudice against "amateurs" kept both sides from using their cavalry troops to their greatest advantage.

This article will examine cavalry usage in the French and Indian War in three case studies: two British campaigns and one French campaign. Each analysis will include a description of the attendant history and an exploration of the tactical use or misuse of cavalry. In many respects, the early use of cavalry mirrored the early development of light armor, a similar mobile force using motorized and mechanized platforms instead of horses, albeit with more protection and firepower. Both cavalry use in North America and early armor would see continuous improvements in organization and techniques to take advantage of advances in tactics, weaponry and equipment.

The Disastrous British Defeat at the Battle of Monongahela

This battle came to be more commonly known as "Braddock's Defeat." France and Great Britain had been fighting over the Ohio Territory since 1754, and Great Britain formally declared war against France in 1756. The war in North America was commonly known as the French and Indian War as the French and their Native American allies fought against the British. At the time, France controlled most of Canada and huge swathes of land on both sides of the Mississippi River while Great Britain controlled the Thirteen Colonies and some Canadian territory, leaving a long and winding border ripe for aggression by both sides.

George Washington's Retreat from Monongahela in 1755 by Howard Pyle, 1890-1896, Boston Public Library, https://www.digitalcommonwealth.org/search/commonwealth:c247gh10n. The blue-faced red uniforms of the Virginia provincial regiment are clearly seen.

In 1755, British Major General Edward Braddock arrived from England with two regiments of British infantry. He had a long career as an officer in the British army. Braddock soon planned a major offensive against French Fort Duquesne, on the site of present-day Pittsburgh. The British saw the recently-established Fort Duquesne as an intrusion into their territory. The attack force gathered for the offensive was large for the time, consisting of around 2,100 men and 10 cannon. Two-thirds were regular soldiers, all infantry, and one-third were so-called "provincial units" (local recruits). The bulk of these provincials for the expedition came from Virginia, loosely organized into a unit known as the "Virginia Regiment" which consisted of several companies, one of which was mounted and referred to as "light horse" under Captain Robert Stewart. The light horse company (or troop) was authorized on February 15, 1755, to consist of one captain, two lieutenants, two sergeants, two corporals, and thirty privates.[2] In a very short time, the troop was fully raised. Twenty -nine men of the troop were assigned to Braddock's command, and they were mostly fully equipped and dressed in uniforms of blue-faced red.

How much training these mounted troops had is not fully known, and likely as provincial troops, training in European methods was limited. However, virtually all of the men owned their own horses and were experienced riders. The inclusion of a mounted company in the Virginia Regiment was probably due to the previous success on the Virginia frontier of irregular mounted ranger units that patrolled between frontier forts.

Braddock's expedition could not simply march to the fort; they had the difficult task of clearing a road capable of accommodating horse-drawn cannons and supply wagons through the rough and often heavily wooded terrain. The fighting force had to perform even more extensive road work as they wanted to ensure the road would remain clear enough to accommodate future supply trains once Fort Duquesne was captured. This process slowed the advance to little more than a crawl. A contemporary sketch by British engineer Patrick MacKellar shows the rough deployment of the light horse troop

Sketch of the Field of Battle with the Dispositions of the Troops in the Beginning of the Engagement of the 9th of July [1755] on the Monongahela 7 Miles from Fort Duquesne by Patrick MacKellar, Library of Congress, https://www.loc.gov/resource/g3824p.ar303900/. The long procession of the British army as well as the rugged terrain is clearly depicted on the map.

as they marched through the forest to the site of the battle, and some post-battle reports and correspondence helps fill in the gaps. Six men of the light horse troop were in the front of the column along with a few Native American scouts and a few volunteers A few more, including Captain Stewart, were part of the personal guard of General Braddock. The remainder rode at the head of the main column toward the front.[3]

The surroundings soon proved to be more than inconvenient. The British officers were entirely unfamiliar with the wilderness, and while their cannon would give an advantage on open ground, they were useless in the forest. The French, who knew the area and had excellent scouts, planned to take the British by surprise and eliminate any advantage the cannon provided. As the expedition crossed the Monongahela River and entered into a heavily forested area, several hundred French and Native Americans attacked, firing at Braddock's men from behind trees and other protected terrain. The resulting battle was a disaster of the greatest magnitude and a costly lesson on wilderness warfare for the British. Over 500 men were killed, including Braddock, and almost as many were wounded. George Washington, acting as one of Braddock's aides, led the retreat.

Twenty-three men of Stewart's light horse troop were killed. Stewart himself was wounded and had two horses shot from under him. The absurdly high mortality rate was either an indication of their bravery, or improper deployment. George Washington later commented that the regulars behaved poorly but the "Virginia Companies behaved like Men, and died like Soldiers."[4] This leads to the conclusion that Stewart probably did possess superior leadership qualities and he and his men possessed and exhibited exceptional courage.

So, the question is: could the light horse troops have been used more effectively? One of the traditional roles of light horse was to act as scouts. While Braddock deployed light infantry several paces out on either side of the main column, any warning they provided was not far enough in advance to allow for a better defense. Information is key to appropriate reaction on the battlefield and Braddock clearly had none. While Braddock pushed to the front of the column to direct the defense after a light horse messenger gave warning of the initial attack, he largely only managed to get himself killed. Had Braddock positioned his light horse scouts farther afield, assuming the terrain permitted, he might have had more warning

and his response may have been more effective. The light horse may also have provided some cover to the retreating forces, but it seems likely the troop was virtually destroyed in the early stages of the battle given their deployment and could provide no further assistance.

The Forbes Expedition and the Capture of French Fort Duquesne

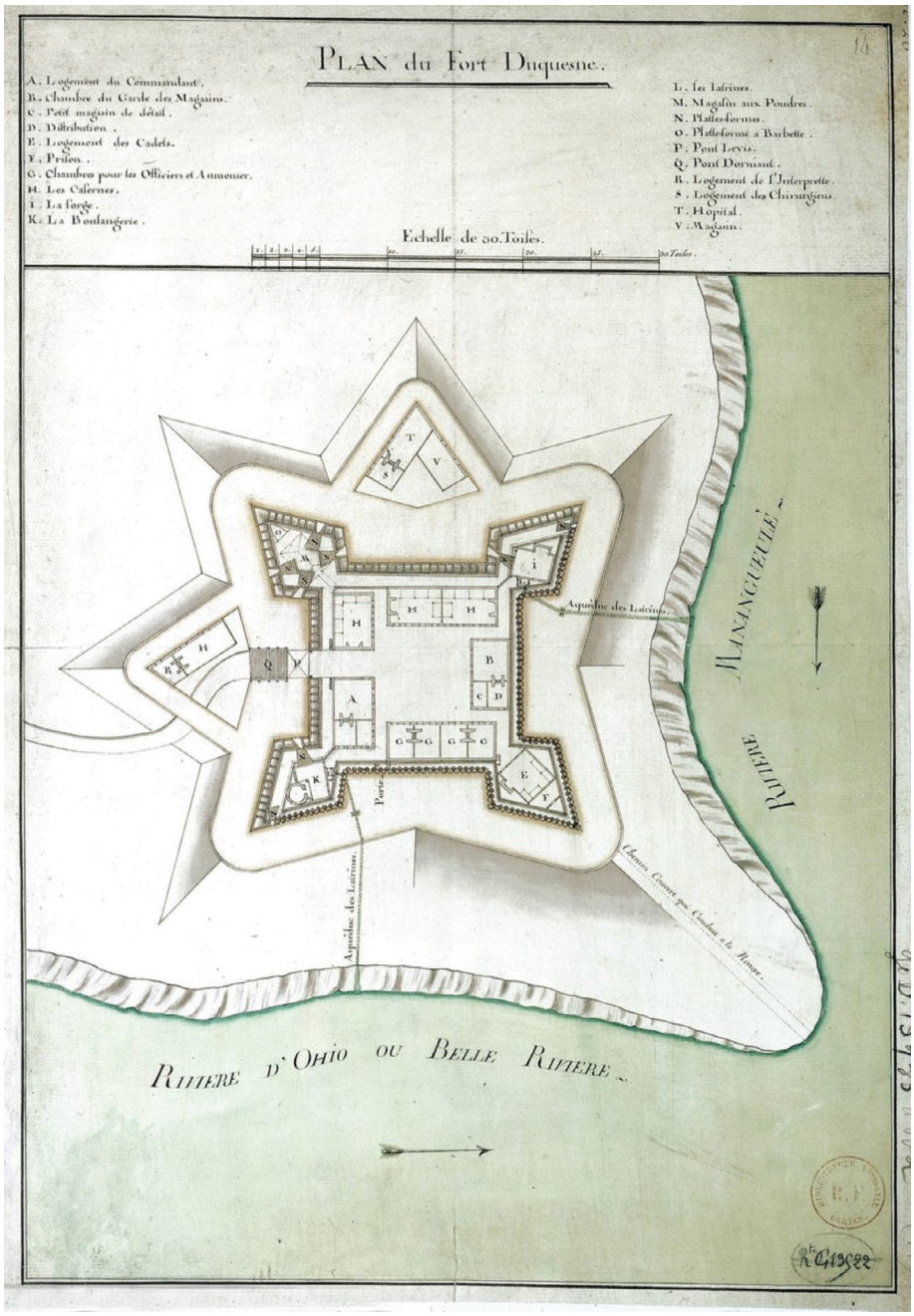
Great Britain made a second attempt against Fort Duquesne in 1758 commanded by Brigadier General John Forbes. He, too, would need to construct a road as he advanced through the wilderness by a different route than the one that Braddock had taken. Forbes's force was considerably larger than Braddock's had been, consisting of around 6,000, of which over two-thirds were provincial units.

Three troops of light horse were included in this expedition: Stewart's reconstituted Virginia troop and two new troops raised in Pennsylvania that were each attached to a Pennsylvania battalion. Forbes approved the issuance of carbines, pistols, swords, saddles, tents, haversacks, canteens and camp kettles to the reconstituted troop but refused the request for fancier uniforms. In that regard, Forbes noted, "they were not to be cloathed like the troops of the Kings Guards."[5] At least the Virginia troop must have looked sharply enough as George Washington was asked to send several of them and an officer to provide an example to the Pennsylvanians. However, it seems not all of them were equipped to the satisfaction of British Colonel Henry Bouquet. Bouquet requested that Forbes authorize the purchase of curved sabers for the Pennsylvania mounted troops, noting that their existing small, straight swords were a "joke" and that they "could not kill a chicken."[6]

The ignominious first action of the Forbes expedition began when Major James Grant, leading an advance force of 750 men, ignored his orders to fully reconnoiter. Instead, he led his soldiers in a full-out attack against Fort Duquesne, marching a decoy detachment with drums beating and flags flying to draw the French into battle. Unfortunately for Grant and his men, the French and their Native American allies quickly overwhelmed the decoy detachment and outflanked the rest of the British force. In the process, the French secured the strategic high ground forcing the British into the woods where the wilderness fighting expertise of the French and their allies took its toll. The result was a devastating defeat with over 300 British casualties and minimal French losses. Stewart's light horse suffered eight casualties, including two officers.[7]

In this case, Stewart's light horse troop bravely kept the French forces from totally encircling the rest of Grant's men, allowing them to retreat. They were the last to leave the field of battle, a clear improvement from their lack of any real contribution in the Battle of Monongahela. While the loss of 300 men was significant, Grant's defeat could have been much more calamitous if there had been no covering cavalry, which would have allowed the French to harry the British in their retreat back to Forbes's camp.

Despite Grant's defeat, Forbes's army marched on. While his large army moved as slowly as Braddock's expedition, Forbes



Plan du Fort Duquesne 1755, BnF Gallica Digital Library, by unknown creator, Bibliothèque nationale de France, httpsgallica.bnf.frark12148btv1b8016442z. The fort was built in the classic style of the times to allow multiple fields of fire against attacking forces.

was more organized and methodical. He had fortified supply depots built periodically along the newly constructed road. As they arrived near Fort Duquesne, Native American scouts informed the British command that the fort was in the process of being abandoned and its supplies destroyed. A number of Native Americans had suddenly deserted the French cause due to a British diplomatic coup in securing a peace treaty with 13 Ohio tribes, and the French command rightly realized they could not hold the fort against the approaching British juggernaut. Forbes issued orders to "immediately march & reconnoiter the French fort [and] if they find it abandoned, they are to take it." Galloping forward, a troop of Pennsylvania light horse arrived in time to save the gunpowder and hog meat, though the fort itself was in flames. While the fort could not be taken intact, the capture of these supplies was a significant benefit to the British, who had been experiencing ongoing supply problems.[8]

The expansion of light horse troops and their inclusion in the Forbes Expedition despite the losses at Monongahela shows that some British officers were beginning to understand their potential in frontier warfare, not only as scouts but as a quick reaction force. Of course, the light horse officers were quick to sing their own praises. Stewart noted on August 9, 1759:

> "I'm perswaded even a few properly equipt & well mounted [light horse] will clearly evince the vast utility of a Body of them would be Off, as they are certainly capable of performing many essential Services the best foot in the Country are unequal to."[9]

General Forbes was also eventually persuaded of their value, remarking a few days before the capture of Fort Duquesne, "I think some of the light horse might now be usefully employed, particularly in gaining all of the heights and reconnoitering the grounds on the flanks, and bringing quick intelligence of whatever happens."[10]

As provincial units they did have some deficiencies, particularly with regards to discipline in the early years of the war. During a Shawnee raid, Washington sent some men to relieve one of the beleaguered settlements that had a small garrison of light horse. When he arrived, he found

French Corps de Cavalerie protecting the St. Lawrence River shore from British landings in 1759. *(Painting by Mitchell Nolte, courtesy of THGC Publishing)*

that the men were drunk, "carousing, firing their pistols and uttering the most unheard-of imprecations."[11] Of course, he had them were arrested on the spot, but the incident exemplified some of the problems with the provincial cavalry, particularly those who were often the more propertied men who could afford a horse and thought of themselves as above infantry soldiers. Washington would later write some profound words on the matter, "Discipline is the soul of an army. It makes small numbers formidable; procures success to the weak, and esteem to us all."[12]

The French Defense of Quebec

The French did not consider cavalry until the later stages of the French and Indian War. While initially the war went well for the French, the tide soon began to turn. The British grand strategy directed military operations toward the capture of many of the important French forts and towns. As the British and their colonial auxiliaries outnumbered the French and their remaining Native American allies several times over, the end was inevitable. By 1759, it was clear that Quebec, the most important city in French North America, would soon be attacked.

In 1759, General Louis-Joseph de Montcalm, the French military commander-in-chief, proposed a new kind of fighting force to Pierre de Rigaud, marquis de Vaudreuil-Cavagnial and governor general of New France. Montcalm was an experienced cavalryman having commanded a French cavalry regiment during the War of the Austrian Succession (1740 -1748). A cavalry regiment was named after him in 1749 and command of the regiment went to Montcalm's son after the senior Montcalm was ordered to take

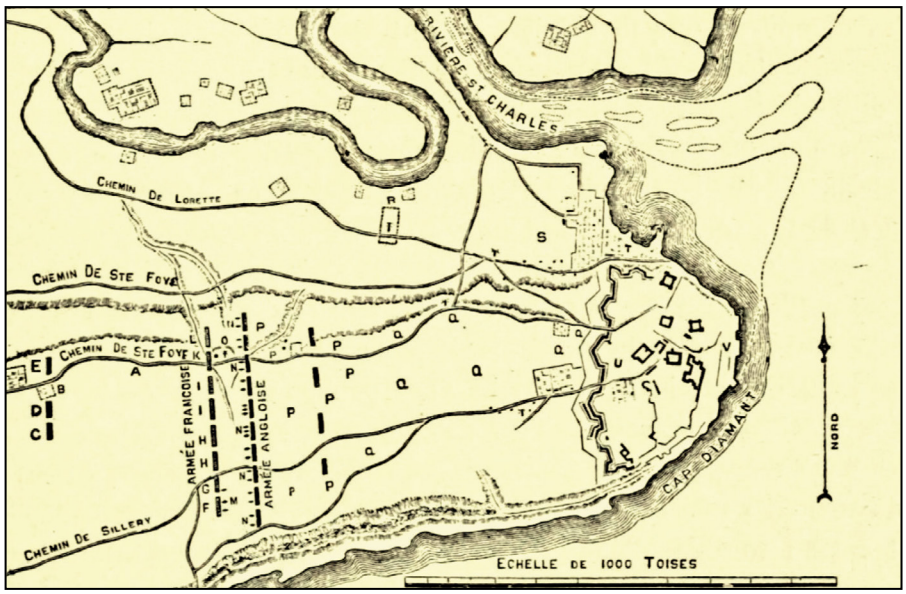
command in North America. Recognizing the vulnerability of the French towns along the St. Lawrence River, Montcalm contemplated raising a "Corps de Cavalerie" from the local inhabitants in and around Quebec. A detailed proposal submitted to Governor Vaudreuil gives considerable insight into Montcalm's intended role for this unit:

> "The formation of a cavalry unit has been proposed and it is believed that this could be of some use.
>
> "There is no doubt that very good cavalry, well trained in the long run could be useful in fighting on the flat plain, especially if it had a thousand or six hundred horses. It is not possible here to have such a number. If we had them, it would be of the wrong kind, and, if we make it a large unit, it could only ever be at the expense of the army, which is not the strongest; and, the larger this unit, the worse this cavalry will be, because it is easier to compose well a small number than a large one, secondly, because officers are needed and there aren't any leftover in the corps and one should attach to this cavalry only those who have at least some experience in this type of service. You will ask what this small cavalry can be used for:
>
> 1st To patrol along the coast;
>
> 2nd To move quickly to a dis-embarkment with an infantryman riding double to oppose it, if any barges or longboats want to attempt one, as long as there are no cannons; because if there were, I assure you this cavalry would not hold out. It could also serve to surprise the enemy, and for this purpose it must it be kept during combat either behind the troops, or behind some bunch of trees or behind blockhouses, to lead with audacity and impetuosity, once the enemy is charged and shaken by infantry fire; because if one makes the mistake of placing it in line or in a forward position, it is to bet that instead of contributing to our winning the battle, it will cause it to be lost, because a heavy infantry fire from the enemy would before long put it in a state of disarray and there is nothing as contagious in warfare as disorder."[13]

Of interest is the very European thinking of Montcalm on this matter. He already believed that regulars were the answer for most warfare in North America, having limited respect for the militia and woodsmen. In his vision, the Corps de Cavalerie was to be used on the "flat plain" – the open deforested areas around Quebec. There is also mention of them carrying an infantryman mounted behind the cavalry trooper to provide additional mobility for some of his infantry. While noting the aid these troops could provide, Montcalm for all his brilliance seems to have had little regard for their use outside of shore defense or in a pitched battle.

Unlike the British provincial units, this French unit would be captained by experienced soldiers in the French regular army. However, the actual amount of cavalry experience of these officers was limited as noted by Montcalm in his proposal, as there were no cavalry units in North America from which to draw officers. Four troops of fifty men each were formed, with the first troop ready for action on June 13, 1759. They were assigned to patrol the shores of the St. Lawrence River to warn of expected British landings, to deliver messages to subcommanders and to fight on foot if circumstances required. To "give them an air of war," they were to be armed with tall bearskin hats (usually reserved for elite units), blue uniforms, sabers and good guns.[14] These decisions demonstrate that the French recognized the elements needed to instill some élan as well as discipline through their choices of equipment and troop commanders.

Once the British entered the St. Lawrence River with a large invasion force, they took their time in deciding where an effective landing could be made. The French in turn were busy fortifying and patrolling the numerous expected landing points. On August 8, 1759, the British made a surprise landing at Pointe-aux-Trembles and conducted a major forage operation. While they succeeded in rounding up two to three hundred cattle, a French reaction force including the Corps de Cavalerie quickly recaptured the cattle, with many of the cavalry troops dismounted at the shore line to stop the British embarkment. The British returned to Pointe-aux-Trembles on August 10, landing with 27 barges and a larger force of soldiers, but the well-prepared French defenders (including many dismounted cavalry troops) won that day as well. 140 British soldiers were killed or wounded, a stinging rebuke that effectively dissuaded the British from attempting any further



Plan de Quebec et de la bataille de Sainte-Foy sous les murs de Québec le 28 avril 1760 by unknown creator, from Guerre Du Canada 1756-1760: Montcalm and Levis, 1891, by l'abbé Henri-Raymond Casgrain, BnF Gallica Digital Library, Bibliothèque nationale de France, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k63549294/f367.item.r=Moncalm%20Levis.zoom. The Corps de Cavalerie is stationed in the rear designated as "E" on the map

landings at Pointe-aux-Trembles.[15] For a brief moment, France was triumphant.

The French had heavy patrols at every conceivable landing point surrounding Quebec, so on September 12, 1759, the British took the chance of debarking at the base of the dangerous heights leading to the Plains of Abraham. Twenty-four scouts scaled the heights first. They were met in the darkness by a few French sentries, who did not suspect trickery when a British officer spoke to them in French to allay any suspicion. After the sentries were subdued, 4,000 British soldiers followed, hauling up a few pieces of artillery with them. The majority of the French patrol forces, including the Corps de Cavalerie, were nowhere nearby when the British formed their ranks outside Quebec the following day.

In response, a shocked Montcalm attacked immediately instead of waiting for the various detachments scattered along the St. Lawrence River, and the resulting battle was a resounding British victory. Many French soldiers were killed during the battle and Montcalm was seriously wounded, dying a few days later. Historians have long debated Montcalm's decision to attack since he could have waited to gather all the men scattered in and around Quebec guarding the potential landing spots and would then have had a substantial numerical superiority. Likely he hoped and gambled on a quick lightning strike that would catch the British unprepared and undersupplied.

British purser Thomas More wrote in a letter following the battle that some 300 men of the Corps de Cavalerie were cut to pieces by British Highlanders.[16] However, no other contemporary sources verify they were even present.[17] Such an incident would also be contrary to the known actions of the corps after the battle and during the subsequent battle at Sainte-Foy.[18] In reality, the Corps de Cavalerie was patrolling so far away that they did not arrive in time to participate in the battle at the Plains of Abraham.

Quebec did not immediately surrender after the battle. A troop of the Corps de Cavalerie managed to circle around the British and deliver several thousand pounds of badly needed food to the starving French inhabitants and garrison at

Sir Jeffrey Amherst, victor at Montreal. Field Marshall and "... the raising of Company's of light horse, it is quite unnecessary..." in America.

Quebec. The cavalry commander and additional troops followed shortly thereafter to bolster the defenders, hoping to prevent a panic-induced capitulation. However, they were minutes too late, as a delegation had already been dispatched to the British camp to conclude a surrender.[19] Rather than wait for the British to capture them along with the garrison, the cavalry troops left the city to join other men who had previously guarded the St. Lawrence River.

Their next task was to round up the various St. Lawrence River detachments to form a new army that would attempt to recover Quebec. The Corps de Cavalerie served once again in a reconnaissance and foraging role, but were kept in the rear in the subsequent Battle of Sainte-Foy, outside Quebec, on April 28, 1760. While the French won the battle, the British expected reinforcements so they did not surrender immediately. When a large British relief fleet arrived, the French lost any hope of recapturing Quebec. The British regrouped and soon captured Montreal in 1760, virtually ending the war on the North American continent. The Corps de Cavalerie was disbanded following the French surrender. The war continued in Europe with a final peace in 1763, whereby the French lost almost all their North American colonies.

While hardly garnering a mention in most histories, the Corps de Cavalerie rendered valuable service in both the defense of the St. Lawrence River landing sites and the relief of Quebec. The fact that they were not used in a battlefield role may have been a grand error. The British had no cavalry of the Battle at Sainte-Foy. While Montcalm correctly concluded that the cavalry could not stand in a formal line of battle, there were other viable options. An enveloping action or a pursuit of the retreating British could have had a much more impactful result on the Battle at Sainte-Foy in terms of casualties and prisoners, which may have forced the British to an immediate surrender. Montcalm's vision of cavalry was limited and he had little confidence in them as fighters because they were not regular soldiers. Montcalm's successor commanding at the Battle of Sainte-Foy, François-Gaston, Chevalier de Lévis, shared Montcalm's limited vision for these men, at least in terms of use on the battlefield. It would not be until the next war in North America that local irregular and semi-regular cavalry would demonstrate their usefulness.

Postwar Thinking

Few British officers who had direct experience in wilderness fighting remembered the lessons of the French and Indian War. Colonel Henry Bouquet was one of them and appreciated the effectiveness of light horse in Forbes's campaign. He later wrote that the light horse "were found of good service, and…I am of the opinion that we might employ horses with success."[20] In addition to his service in the French and Indian War, Bouquet served as active commander in Pontiac's Rebellion, which broke out in 1763 and lasted until 1765. Afterwards, he recommended establishing two companies of light horse. These would be armed with a short musket, a hunting sword, and a long-handled hatchet and uniformed in a short brown-lapelled coat, leggings and moccasins. Training was not to be ignored, either. The men would be taught to ride, mount and dismount while holding weapons, and to gallop through the woods. Interestingly, Bouquet also recommended that bloodhounds be used in conjunction with the mounted troops, to more effectively conduct military operations in the wilderness and counter the irregular warfare of the Native Americans. At least Bouquet realized the need for cavalry

tactics to evolve as circumstances or needs changed.

These forces were proposed to be stationed in the newly-acquired and largely unsettled French territories on the east side of the Mississippi River. However, Bouquet's recommendations were largely ignored. Instead, the British high command took the advice of French and Indian War hero Sir Jeffery Amherst. Amherst, commander-in-chief of the British army in North America during the French and Indian War, refuted any need for light horse in a published document in 1766:

> "In regard to the raising of Companys of light Horse, it is quite unnecessary. The Regiments [of infantry] in America are the best Troops to answer all Purposes for the effectual security of the Colony in its Infancy, and the best foundation for the Colony for the Benefit of Great Britain, is the Establishing a Seat of Government."[21]

Amherst's standing in the military practically ended further discussion of the topic. His opinion was generally shared by other senior military officers, and the post-French and Indian War garrisons in the west consisted solely of infantry and were largely withdrawn in the years following. The British did not further consider raising cavalry units in North America until the American Revolutionary War.

Conclusion

The foregoing events demonstrate the potential usefulness of lightly armed mounted units. But Great Britain's unwavering pride and belief in her infantrymen, combined with prejudice against irregular troops, ensured that cavalry companies were effectively discontinued in North America at the end of the French and Indian War. This coupled with the lack of an ongoing war on the North American continent with a European power, precluded any further assessment or development of mounted troops. It would take a new war to revisit the use and value of cavalry on the North American continent by the British and their adversaries.

At a broader level, these episodes demonstrate how useful a mobile, lightly armed force can be in rugged terrain. Mounted troops would provide valuable battlefield intelligence, perform reconnaissance,

Montcalm, French Commander in defense of Quebec. Killed in battle 14 Oct 1759 as his foe British General Wolfe was also killed.

capture key terrain, deter hostile activities, cover tactical retreats, and have many other benefits known to more modern forces that were yet to be developed.

The next article in this series will examine the first large-scale mounted operations of the War for Independence, as practiced by the Cherokees and the militia of the southern colonies in 1776. Ed.

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Notes

1 Rene Chartrand, *Colonial American Troops 1610-1774*, 3 vols. (Oxford, UK: Osprey Publishing, Ltd., 2002-2003).

2 Andrew J. Wahll, ed., *Braddock Road Chronicles 1755* citing the "Establishment for the Troop of Horse Rangers, February 28, 1755" (Westminster, MD: Heritage Books, 2006), 63.

3 Stephen L. Kling, Jr., *Cavalry in the Wilderness: Cavalry in the Western Theater of the American Revolutionary War and the French and Indian War* (St. Louis, MO: THGC Publishing, 2021), 26-28.

4 George Washington to Robert Dinwiddie, July 18, 1755, in W. W. Abbot, ed., *The Papers of George Washington*, Colonial Series, 10 vols. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1983-1995), 1:349-42.

5 "Minutes of Council Meetings," April 4, 1758, in H. R. McIlwaine, ed., *Executive Journals of the Council of Virginia*, 6 vols. (Richmond: Virginia State Library, 1966), 6:85-86; John Forbes to Arthur St. Clair, May 25, 1758, *Forbes Papers (Headquarters papers of Brigadier-General John Forbes relating to the expedition against Fort Duquesne in 1758)*, Accession # 10034, Special Collections University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Virginia.

6 Henry Bouquet to Forbes, July 11, 1758, in S. K. Stevens, Donald H. Kent, Autumn L. Leonard, Louis M. Waddell, eds., *The Papers of Henry Bouquet*, 6 vols. (Harrisburg: The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1951), 2:438.

7 James Grant to Forbes, September 14, 1758, ibid., 2:499-503; Washington to Francis Fauquier, September 25, 1758, *Papers of Washington*, 6:44-46; Washington to Lord Fairfax, September 25, 1758, ibid., 6:38-41; "List of Casualties of the First Virginia Regiment," ibid., 6:46-47.

8 "Orderly Book," in *Papers of Washington*, 6:156-58; Douglas MacGregor

and Melissah Pawlikowski, eds., "This Wretched World: The Journal of John Mitchell Lindenworth," Pennsylvania History 74, no. 3 (2007):381.

9 Robert Stewart to Bouquet, August 9, 1759, *Papers of Bouquet.*, 3:522-23.

10 Forbes to Bouquet, November 22, 1758, ibid., 2:607.

11 Washington to Dinwiddie, October 11, 1755, in David M. Matteson, ed., *The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources, 1745-1799*, 39 vols. (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1931-44), 1:203-204.

12 "Instructions to Company Captains," July 29, 1757, *Papers of Washington*, 4:346.

13 "Points to be Decided upon after having Conferred with the Intendant," June 5, 1759, in H. R. Casgrain, ed., *Lettres et pièces militaires: instructions, ordres, mémoires, plans de campagne et de défense, 1756-1760 (Letters and Military Documents, Instructions, Orders, Memoirs, Plans for Campaign and Defense, 1756-1760)* (Quebec, Canada: J. Demers & Frere, 1891), 175-77.

14 Ibid.

15 Jean-Claude Panet, "The Siege of Quebec, 1759 in Charles Mayhood, *Quebec Under Siege: French Eye-Witness Accounts from the Campaign in 1759* (Warwick, UK: Helion and Company, 2019).

16 Earl John Chapman, "A New Account of the Battle of the Plains of Abraham," *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research* 94, no. 379 (Autumn, 2016):193-197.

17 Ibid., 193. Chapman noted "More's account of the battle on the Plains of Abraham is obviously that of a gentleman who did not actually witness it, but who acquired a version of the details that were circulating very shortly afterwards."

18 Kling, *Cavalry in the Wilderness*, 50-53.

19 D. Peter MacLeod, *Northern Armageddon: The Battle of the Plains of Abraham and the Making of the American Revolution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), 321.

20 Bouquet to John Penn and the Provincial Commissioners, June 4, 1764, in Leonard W. Labaree, ed., *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, 33 vols. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967), 11:224-26.

21 "Amherst's Observations on the Illinois Settlement, November, 1766," in Clarence W. Alvord and Clarence F. Carter, eds., *Trade and Politics* 1767-1769 (Springfield: Illinois State Historical Library, 1921), 103-104.

Figure 1. "Mrs. Motte Directing General Marion and Lt. Col. Lee to Burn Her Mansion to Dislodge the British," by artist John Blake White (1781-1859), U.S. Senate Collection.

Fort Motte in Brief

by

Richard C. Meehan, Jr.

The surrender of Fort Motte in May 1781 stands out as a dramatic moment in the Southern Campaign of the American Revolutionary War. Situated on a strategic bluff overlooking the Congaree River in central South Carolina, Fort Motte was a crucial British outpost that safeguarded important supply and communication routes between Charleston and the backcountry. Its fall not only disrupted British logistics but also highlighted the increasing effectiveness of coordinated efforts between Continental troops and militia, led by Major General Nathanael Greene, Brigadier General Francis "Swamp Fox" Marion, and Lieutenant Colonel "Lighthorse Harry" Henry Lee. The siege is particularly notable for Mrs. Rebecca Motte's decisive actions, which exemplified civilian commitment to the Patriot cause.

Rebecca Motte Miniature
Public Domain Image on Wikipedia

First developed as Mt. Joseph Plantation by Miles Brewton of Charleston in 1767, the home became the

View of the Congaree River commanded by Fort Motte, formerly Mt. Joseph Plantation.

Figure 2. Image credited to Matthew Johnson by Audubon South Carolina. Accessed 1-6-2026: https://sc.audubon.org/news/nearly-mile-congaree-river-frontage-permanently-protected.

property of his sister, Rebecca Brewton Motte (1737-1815), in early 1775, after Miles and his immediate family perished at sea en route to Philadelphia. Miles was to serve as a delegate to the 2nd Continental Congress. He was also one of the wealthiest planters in South Carolina and the most prominent slave trader. Rebecca inherited both of his plantations, several elegant Charleston homes, and more than 240 enslaved people. When her husband, Jacob Brewton, died in 1780, he left her all his holdings. Thus, Rebecca was likely the wealthiest woman in South Carolina at that time.[1]

Charleston surrendered to the British in May 1780, so Rebecca, her mother, and her two unwed daughters fled to Mt. Joseph. British Lieutenant Donald McPherson and 107 men soon followed,[2] seizing the site for its strategic position overlooking McCord's Ferry on the Congaree River (Figure 2). In early 1781, he converted the mansion into a fortified position, surrounding it with earthworks, a ditch, a parapet, palisades, and abatis, and mounting several cannons. McPherson also dug a well, renamed the mansion Fort Motte, and used it as a depot for convoys moving toward Camden, Granby, and Ninety-Six.[3] River traffic was monitored, and supply routes to inland British garrisons were guarded. Rebecca and her children were forced to move into a nearby outbuilding.[4]

On May 6, 1781, Lt. Col. Henry Lee brought Lee's Legion of Continentals to join Francis Marion's South Carolina militia—a combined force of 300-400 men—to assault Fort Motte. Without heavy artillery, Lee and Marion had to devise a way to break the heavy defenses now surrounding the Brewton mansion.[5] Initial efforts focused on preventing the British from accessing supplies and escape routes. The British garrison resisted tenaciously, relying on the strength of its position and expecting relief from nearby British posts. However, Lee and Marion understood that a prolonged siege could allow the British to reinforce, so they aimed for a swift resolution.[6] It fell to Lee to inform Rebecca Motte that they had decided to burn her house to take the fort expeditiously.[7]

Rebecca Motte's cooperation proved critical. Instead of allowing British forces to remain in her home and hinder Patriot progress, she agreed to the daring and risky strategy of setting her mansion on fire to compel the garrison to surrender. To Lee's relief, she at once requested it should be done and, as the means of effecting it, furnished an Indian bow and arrows. Historical accounts note that Motte supplied the attackers with bows, arrows, and firebrands—implements designed to ignite the roof while reducing risk to nearby areas' structures.[8]

On May 12, 1781, Patriot marksmen set fire to the mansion's roof. As the flames spread and smoke filled the interior, the British position became untenable. With the fire threatening to

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[1] "Rebecca Motte and the Revolution Historical Marker." 2025. Hmdb.org. September 2025. https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=283063.
[2] Bass, R. D. (2017). *Gamecock*, p. 220. Pickle Partners Publishing.
[3] Ibid, p. 222.
[4] Robert M. Dunkerly, and Irene B. Boland. 2017. *Eutaw Springs: The Final Battle of the American Revolution's Southern Campaign*, p. 26. Columbia, South Carolina: The University of South Carolina Press.
[5] Henry Lee, *Memoirs of the War in the Southern Department of the United States* (Philadelphia: Bradford and Inskeep, 1812), pp. 74-86.
[6] Landrum, J.B.O. 2019. *Colonial and Revolutionary History of Upper South Carolina*, pp. 317-318.
[7] Lee, *Memoirs, 2:77*.
[8] William Dobein James, *A Sketch of the Life of Brig. Gen. Francis Marion* (Charleston: Gould and Riley, 1821), 94–95.

consume the entire building and no means to extinguish it under siege, the garrison surrendered. They handed over the fort, arms, and supplies to Lee and Marion, ending the engagement.[9]

The seizure of Fort Motte had swift and far-reaching implications. It eliminated an important British stronghold and cleared the Congaree River corridor for Patriot access. Strategically, it helped dismantle British dominance in South Carolina's interior by cutting supply lines and isolating garrisons such as Ninety-Six. The win also lifted Patriot spirits and strengthened Greene's plan for coordinated efforts between Continental regulars and militia forces.[10]

The event also held significant symbolic meaning. Rebecca Motte's willingness to risk her property for the Patriot cause became a well-known symbol of civilian patriotism, often cited in 19th-century histories and memorials. This incident underscored the revolutionary truth in South Carolina: the war was not only fought by soldiers but also by families whose homes, livelihoods, and lives were directly at stake in the conflict.[11]

245th Anniversary of the Battle of Cowpens Cowpens National Battlefield

Fee: Free.
Date: Saturday, January 17, 2026
Time: 9:00 AM
Duration: 8 hours

Type of Event:

Cultural/Craft Demonstration
Guided Tour
Living History
Description

Join us on Saturday, January 17 (9:00 am to 5:00 pm) and Sunday, January 18 (9:00 am to 5:00 pm) 2026 to observe the 245th anniversary of the Battle of Cowpens. There will be free programs for all ages, including historic weapons demonstrations, children's activities, cavalry demonstrations, special guest presenters, ranger programs, and more! For a schedule of events: 245th Anniversary Commemoration (U.S. National Park Service)

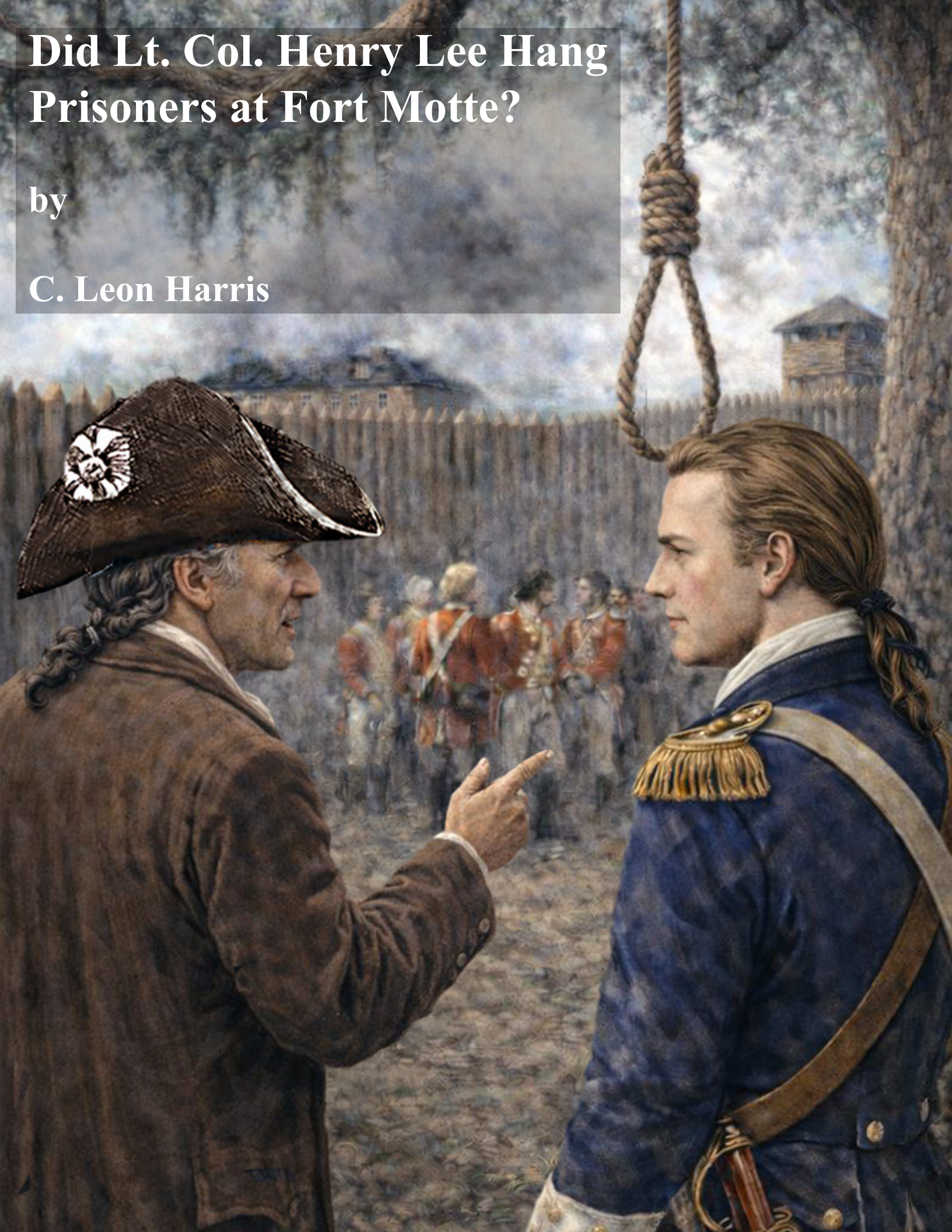
Lantern tours are held on January 17, beginning at 5:40 pm. Lantern Tours require registration in advance. We begin taking reservations on Saturday, January 10, 2026. Call 864-461-2828 ext. 2. The Visitor Center is open 9:00 am to 5:00 pm, Wednesday through Sunday

[9] Steven D. Smith et al., *"Obstinate and Strong": The History and Archaeology of the Siege of Fort Motte* (Columbia: SCIAA, 2007). Steven D. Smith, *The Battles of Fort Watson and Fort Motte 1781* (Yardley PA: Westholme Publishing, 2024), 74.
[10] Lawrence E. Babits and Joshua B. Howard, *Long, Obstinate, and Bloody: The Battle of Guilford Courthouse* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 34–36.
[11] Walter Edgar, *South Carolina: A History* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), 242.

Did Lt. Col. Henry Lee Hang Prisoners at Fort Motte?

by

C. Leon Harris



Early in 1781, British troops fortified and occupied the home of the recently widowed Rebecca Brewton Motte, high on Buckhead Hill overlooking the crucial crossing of the Congaree River at McCord's Ferry.[1] (Fig. 1) On July 12, after a four-day siege, American forces under General Francis Marion and Lt. Col. Henry Lee took Fort Motte by setting the roof on fire. The story of the taking of Fort Motte is often told, but less known are allegations that Lee had some of the prisoners hanged. The most detailed account was by Levi Smith, who commanded the Loyalist militia during the siege. Below, I present an annotated transcription of Smith's letter published in *The Royal Gazette* of Charlestown on April 17, 1782,[2] followed by a discussion of

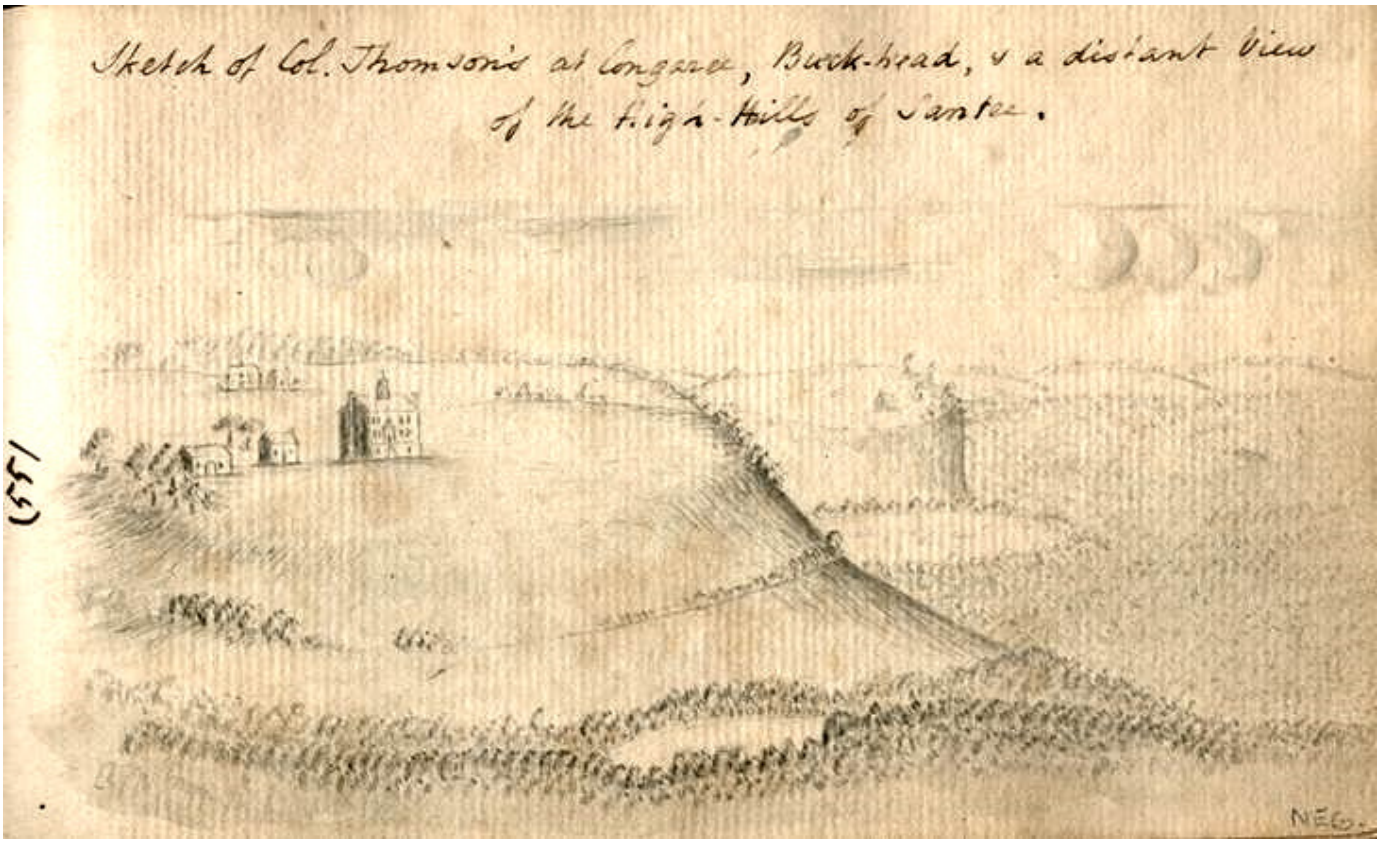


Figure 1. "Sketch of Col. Thomson's at Congaree, Buck-head, & a distant view of the High-Hills of Santee" by unidentified artist "NEG" in 1784. The Figure 1 sketch was apparently made looking northwest from the road to McCord's Ferry near the present Colonel Thomson Highway (US 601). Thomson's Belleville Plantation is in the foreground. The building in the distance might be Fort Motte, if still standing, or the house that replaced it, although it should be shown on Buckhead Hill farther away. The High Hills of Santee lie east of present-day Columbia and are not visible in this sketch. From "William Drayton's Journal of a 1784 Tour of the South Carolina Backcountry," in the South Carolina Historical Society's collection, Addlestone Library of the College of Charleston.

[1] Steven D. Smith, James B. Legg, Tamara S. Wilson and Jonathan Leader, "Obstinate and Strong": The History and Archaeology of the Siege of Fort Motte (Columbia: South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology, 2007) https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1052&context=anth_facpub.

[2] Transcribed from *The Royal Gazette* Vol. II, No. 117 (From Saturday, April 13 to Wednesday, April 17, 1782.), 1-2. https://www.newspapers.com/image/605013183/?match=1&terms=Royal%20Gazette.

To the Printers of the ROYAL GAZETTE.

GENTLEMEN,

BY one of your late papers, I perceive Colonel Hayne's unhappy case[3] has made some noise[?] in England. This confirms the truth of an assertion I have often heard made that nothing is less understood there than the true state of affairs in this country; which is certainly not at all surprizing, when we consider that our enemies are indefatigable in propagating and spreading accounts of every circumstance, by which they think themselves aggrieved, or improperly treated by our Government, when an uniform silence prevails on our side, under the harshest usage, and although we have had by far the greatest reason to complain.

The gentle and humane treatment which the Rebel prisoners in our hands received from us, is well known; but it is by no means equally well known, that our militia, when prisoners to them, are, in general, treated in the most cruel manner. I beg leave, through the channel of your paper, to make known to the world the usage which I, and many other prisoners, received from General Greene's[4] army last summer. As the narrative, in some places, will appear shocking to every man of humanity, I beg leave to premise, that most of the participants are well known to many Refugees now in this place; and that Capt. McPherson of Delancey's corps,[5] Capt. Neil Campbell of the 84th, Lieut. Amiel of the 17th, Lieut. Partridge of the [?]d,[6] — Hildebrand, and — Lory of the Hessian troops,[7] some of them at present within the British lines, were eye witnesses to some of the most material parts of it.

I was born in Bedford county in Virginia, and settled as a merchant in this province in 1774, near Col. Thompson's in Amelia Township.[8] (Fig. 2) After the reduction of this country by the British army in 1780, 1 took an active part in favour of Government, and, on the 14th of October, I received a commission to act as Justice of Peace, from Col. Balfour, the present Commandant of this place.[9] In February 1781, after Lord Cornwallis had marched into North-Carolina, Lord Rawdon,[10] who commanded on the frontiers of this province, applied to me to procure him intelligence of the movements of Sumpter[11] and the other Rebel partisans on the western frontier. From this time I gave his Lordship, whose head-quarters were at Camden,[12] all the information I could procure; and to prevent accident, from my letters being lost or miscarried, I kept copies of those I sent to Camden, and also preserved such as I received from thence. About this time a plundering party of the enemy having robbed my store, which was on the north side of the Congaree River, near McCord's Ferry, and finding neither my life nor property secure in that situation, I removed my effects to a house within two hundred yards of Fort Motte, on the opposite

[3] The hanging of American Col. Isaac Hayne on August 4, 1781.
[4] Nathanael Greene, commander of the Southern Department.
[5] Lt. Charles McPherson or Lt. Donald McPherson; Smith et al., "Obstinate," 22.
[6] Robert Amiel and Walter Partridge of the 23rd Regiment of Foot; Smith, "Obstinate," 22.
[7] John Hildebrand and Henry Lorey; Smith et al., "Obstinate," 22,
[8] Col. William Thomson, a prisoner on parole.
[9] Lt. Col. Nisbet Balfour.
[10] Lt. Col. Francis, Lord Rawdon.
[11] Gen. Thomas Sumter.
[12] Until May 9, 1781.

side of the river.[13] (Fig. 2) The fort was commanded by Captain McPherson of Delancey's corps, and had a garrison of British troops and militia. That gentleman appointed me to take the command of the militia in the fort, until a commission, in proper form, could be procured from Lord Rawdon.[14] Shortly after, Gen. Greene, having marched to Camden,[15] detached Col. Lee, [16] with his legion, to join Gen. Marion[17] with his brigade of Rebel militia, from the country betwixt Santee and Peedee,[18] with orders to Gen. Marion to invest Fort Watson on Wright's Bluff on the north side of Santee.[19] Having reduced that fort, Marion crossed Santee, on the night of the 8th of May, and invested Fort Motte next morning about 10 o'clock.[20] Having no suspicion of any enemy being then near me, I had walked down from the fort to my own house to breakfast, when a party of Lee's cavalry, under the command of Capt. Rudolph,[21] rode up suddenly and made me a prisoner. I told him I hoped to be treated as an officer and a gentleman; he assured me I had nothing to fear on that score, and then rode off, leaving me in charge with a Cadet called Lee,[22] literally known among them by the name of Little Lee. The gentleman immediately ordered the dragoons to strip me of my cloaths, which they soon did, leaving me nothing but my shirt. They then set out for Col. Thompson's, where Gen. Marion lay, which was about a mile distant, and rode at a hard trot, making me run before them. As my breath and feet soon began to fail, they wounded me with their swords, in three places in the head, to make me keep up. It was in vain to beg for mercy and intreat them to moderate their speed. It only served to increase their rage, and redouble their blows. As I grew weaker, I fell several times; but they continued to beat me until I got up again. When I reached General Marion's camp I fainted, being quite spent with fatigue. 1 was then given in charge to the Quarter Guard, and had a supply of decent cloaths from Mrs. Thomson. Next morning I was accosted by one William Cooper from Peedee, a lieutenant of Marion's militia, who was afterwards wounded in the arm, and taken prisoner at the affair of Quinby House.[23] He proposed an exchange betwixt me and one Samuel Cooper, his brother or cousin, who was at that time a prisoner with Lord Rawdon, having been taken some weeks before by a detachment of the garrison of Camden under Col. Doyle, in an excursion to Snow's Island, near the mouth of Lynch's Creek.[24] I readily

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[13] A possible site of this house was found by Smith et al. ("Obstinate," 61) and is indicated in Figure 3 below.

[14] J. D. Lewis gives the following list of British forces at Fort Motte https://www.carolana.com/SC/Revolution/revolution_battle_of_fort_motte.html:
Lt. Donald McPherson - Commanding Officer
84th Regiment of Foot (Royal Highland Emigrants), 2nd Battalion (Young Royal Highlanders) led by Lt. Donald McPherson with 80 men
Frederick Starkloff's Troop of Light Dragoons led by Corp. John Ludvick with 58 men
Artillery - 1 Cannon
Loyalist Militia - 45 men, unknown unit

[15] April 22, 1781.

[16] Lt. Col. Henry Lee.

[17] Francis Marion, general of militia and colonel in the Continental Line.

[18] Santee and Pee Dee rivers.

[19] Siege of Fort Watson, April 15-23, 1781.

[20] Siege of Fort Motte, May 8-12, 1781. Lee and Marion actually arrived on May 6, as shown by letters from each of them to Gen. Nathanael Greene. Smith et al., "Obstinate," 21.

[21] John Rudulph, https://revwarapps.org/VAS2156.pdf or Michael Rudulph, BLWt945-300.

[22] Unknown.

[23] Battle of Quinby Bridge, July 17, 1781. I could find no other reference to Lt. William Cooper.

[24] Capt. Samuel Cooper at Marion's camp on Snow's Island on Lynches Creek (now Lynches River), attacked on March 23, 1781 by Lt. Col. Welbore Ellis Doyle.
https://www.carolana.com/SC/Revolution/revolution_snows_island.html. Lt. Samuel Cooper is mentioned in the pension application of Thomas Cooper https://revwarapps.org/s21128.pdf.

agreed to the proposal, and Gen. Marion having also assented, he gave a pass to a woman, called Clark, to carry a letter from me to Lord Rawdon proposing the exchange. The woman delivered the letter to his Lordship, who at that time lay at Nelson's Ferry,[25] on his march from Camden to Charlestown; but as she had no flag, and behaved in other respects, in a suspicious and imprudent manner, his Lordship looked upon the letter as a forgery, and considered the whole matter as a finesse to get Samuel Cooper released, and to procure intelligence of his position: he therefore gave no answer, but detained the woman as a spy.

During the siege of the fort, I was treated with humanity and indulgence, being suffered to walk about during the day, with only Lieut. Cooper as a guard. Sometimes we went a fishing in a canoe upon the Congaree River, and every day I dined in my own house. At night I was confined

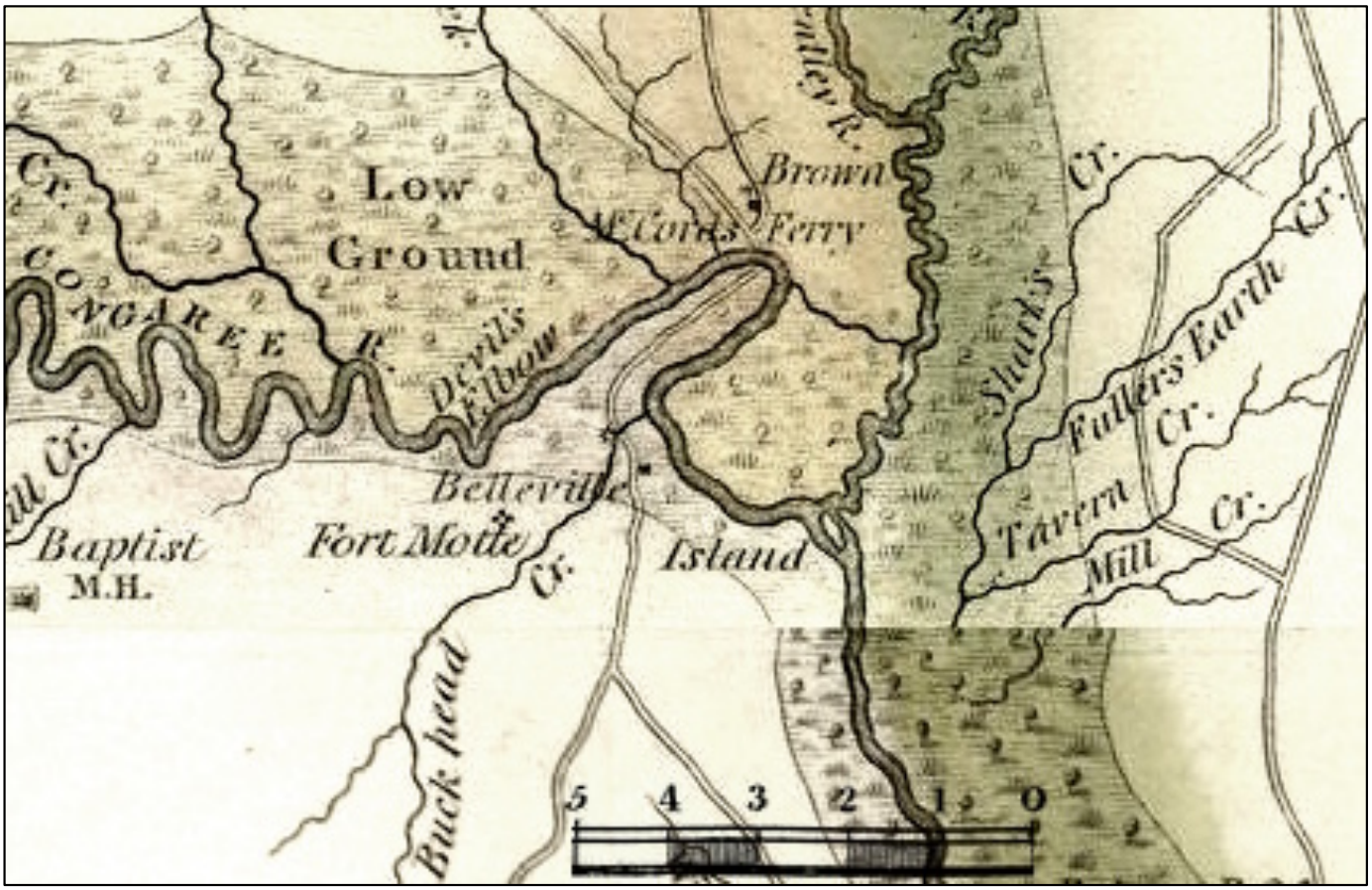

Figure 2. Part of the John Wilson map of 1822 showing McCord's Ferry, Col. William Thomson's Belleville plantation, and Fort Motte, which was approximately 1 mile northwest of Belleville. Wilson's scale is in miles.

in the quarter-guard, and was released in the morning, after the roll was called. In short, except that my house was plundered, and my property destroyed, I was treated in all other respects as a gentleman, and had no suspicion of the dreadful doom that was allotted for me. (Fig. 3)

On the 14th,[26] in the afternoon, the house in the fort being set on fire by the enemy, the garrison was compelled to surrender at discretion. The regulars and militia were instantly plundered of their cloaths, and some of the latter were even stripped of their shirts. They were all, except the regular officers, confined in Col. Thompson's mill-house, at the foot of the hill on which the fort stood.[27] These last remained with Col. Lee and the other continental officers.

[25] On Santee River near Eutaw Springs.
[26] May 12, 1781.
[27] Thomson's mill is depicted in Figure 2.

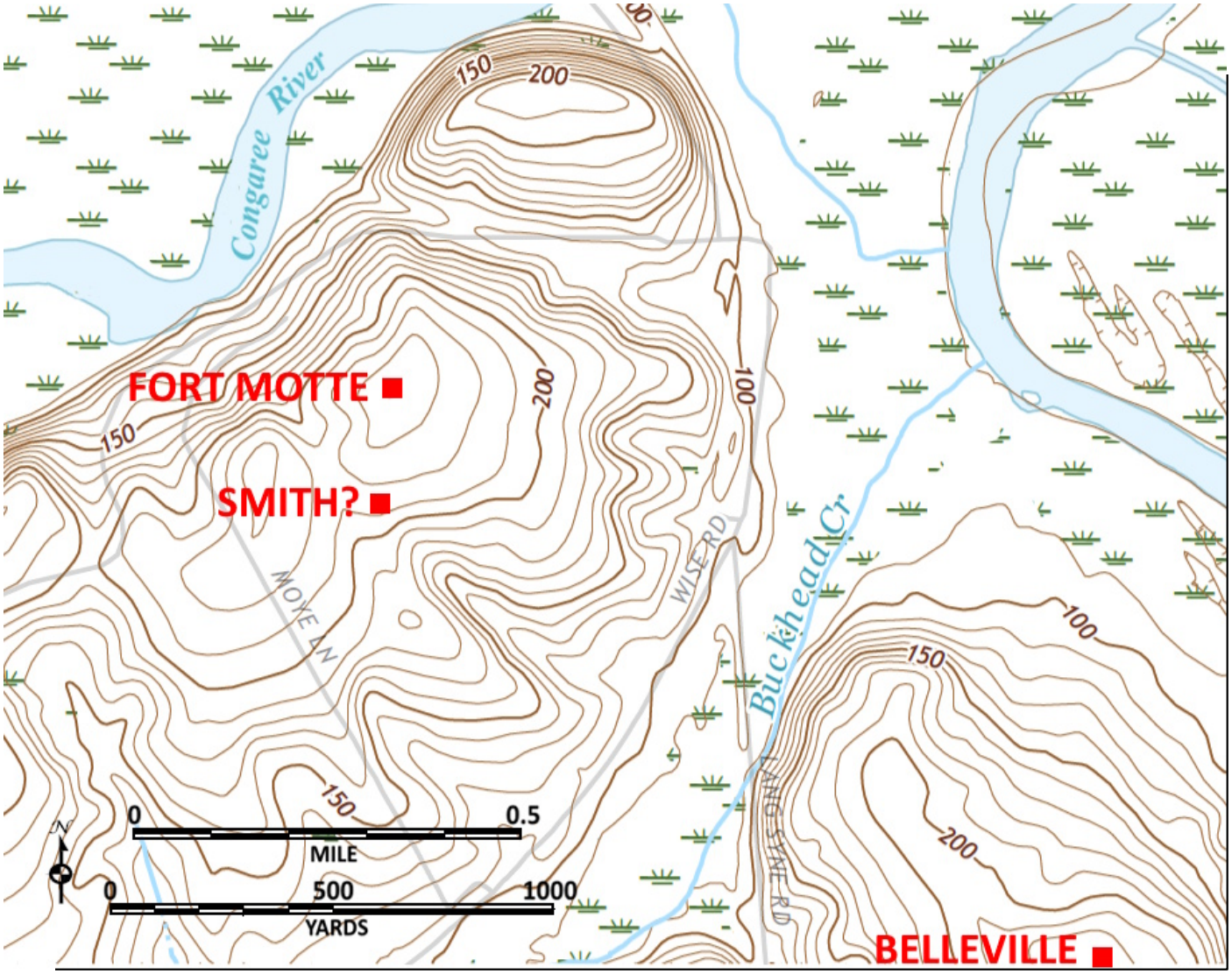

Figure 3. The locations of Fort Motte and Belleville, and the possible location of Levi Smith's house on the current USGS map (Wateree quadrangle).

A little after sunset Colonel Lee sent Little Lee to the mill-house for Lieut. Fulker, of the militia, with orders to carry him to the fort, and hang him on the gate of Mrs. Motte's fence. This unfortunate young man, who did not exceed nineteen years of age, was accused of being the cause of the death of a Mrs. Tate, on Poplar Creek, who was turned out of her house when in the small-pox, by which she catched cold and died. Her husband, after having taken protection from us, joined General Marion, along with several others from that neighbourhood; and as they often crossed Santee in small parties, and committed depredations and murders, for which purpose they received intelligence from their families, who often concealed them, Capt. McPherson had sent Lieut. Fulker to their wives, ordering them to remove twenty miles from the river before a certain day fixed for that purpose. Fulker utterly denied his being the cause of her death, and begged he might be brought to trial to make his innocence appear, but this was refused him; and Little Lee told him it was in vain to expect mercy, for he might rest assured he should be put to death. He was accordingly carried to the gate, where he was stripped naked, and hanged without a trial, or even a hearing, in his own defense. When he was dead and cut down, Col. Lee sent the same messenger for John Jackson, a private militia man, and ordered him to prepare for death, accusing him of having carried expresses for the King's troops, and of having killed, in action, one of Gen. Sumpter's men, when he made an unsuccessful attempt the 24th of the preceding February on

Colonel Thompson's house,[28] where the post had been kept before it was removed to Mrs. Motte's house, which had been previously surrounded with a redoubt for that purpose. The poor man begged to be brought to trial before he was put to death; but to no purpose. He was hurried off, stripped, and tied up about dark, and left hanging all night on the gate, while Lieutenant Fulker's body, which had been cut down to make room for him, was left naked under the gallows until the morning, when it was dragged along the ground by the end of the halter that remained about his neck, and buried together with Jackson's body, in the ditch of the redoubt which they were then levelling. As soon as Jackson was cut down, Hugh Maskelly, another private militia man, was sent for and ordered to prepare for death. He asked for what reason; he was answered for showing one of Mr. Cruden's deputies, the sequestered effects of John McWilliams in that neighbourhood,[29] and for acting as a guide to Lieut. Col. Doyle. That officer had left Camden in the beginning of April, and carried his Lady, who was far advanced in pregnancy, to Charlestown; and upon his return to Camden to join his regiment, the Volunteers of Ireland, hearing that Gen. Greene had invested that garrison, he left the high road after he passed McCord's Ferry, and got Maskelly to carry him, and Capt. McLean of the New-York Volunteers, with a few dragoons, through the woods to Camden, where they arrived in safety. Maskelly was immediately stripped of his cloathes, and had an old dirty shirt tied round him, and was then turned off, as the others had been, without the slightest trial or hearing.

All this while I had no suspicion that I was doomed to the same fate. As I had been treated with so much indulgence, I expected to be sent to Charlestown along with the regular officers, on parole, there to remain until exchanged; and as these gentlemen were to set off for town that morning, I waited patiently in the quarter-guard expecting every minute to be released upon signing my parole. These agreeable ideas did not last long. A serjeant and two privates of the Continentals came to the quarter-guard, and asked if one Levi Smith was among the prisoners. I immediately came forward, and avowed myself; but I leave your readers to guess the horror and astonishment with which I was seized, when they told me they had orders from Col. Lee, to carry me to Mrs. Motte's gate and hang me. I replied, it was impossible, it could not be; but the serjeant answered, he would shew me his authority, and produced a written order in these words, which I read,

"Bring Levi Smith from the quarter guard, and hang him.

FRANCIS LEE

[28] February 22, 1781 as part of the Sumter's Rounds campaign.

[29] On September 16, 1780 Cornwallis appointed John Cruden Commissioner for Sequestered Estates, authorized to seize the property of Rebels except those captured at the surrender of Charlestown on May 12, 1780. (Ian Saberton, ed., *The Cornwallis Papers* Vol. 1 (Uckfield, England: Naval & Military Press, 2010), 219, note 49. David Ramsay, *History of the American Revolution* Vol. 2 (Philadelphia: R. Aitken, 1789), 171-172.) John McWilliams of Orangeburg District later claimed pay as a lieutenant of militia while on a prison ship after being captured at Charlestown's surrender (https://revwarapps.org/sc5332.pdf).

I now found that I had not a moment to spare; I therefore begged one of the quarter guard to run to my house, and desire my wife and children to meet me at the gallows, and take their last farewell. The fellow instantly went off, and I was delivered to the serjeant. When we began to ascend the hill on which the fort stood, my new guard desired me to strip, declaring they would have my cloaths. I very readily pulled off the coat and waistcoat I had received from Mrs. Thompson, but this did not satisfy them; they declared they would have my shirt also. I begged then not to treat me with so much indignity, but wait till I was dead; but they swore they would have it then, and wounded me slightly in two places with a bayonet, upon which I pulled it off, and delivered it to them. I now walked to the gallows, having no other cloaths on but a pair of trowsers Mrs. Thompson had also given me after being stripped when I was made a prisoner. Being arrived, I found Maskelly had been just turned off, and my wife and children coming up; they were instantly ordered away by a Captain Smith[30] of the Continentals, who desired them not to come within a hundred yards of the spot. An officer now rode up, whom I look to be Col. Lee, though I am not certain, as the agitation of my mind was so great. I asked him if it was lawful to hang a man without a trial, and received for an answer, that I had got all the trial I need expect to get; that I had acted as a Justice of Peace and Militia Officer under the Crown; that I was an enemy to the United States, and that I had been the cause of Mrs. McCord's house at the ferry being burned. This woman, who lived on the road from Camden to Charlestown, and kept a tavern and ferry, was a person of notorious disaffection to the British cause. Her son, who had broke his parole, and was then a captain in the State Troops under Sumpter,[31] came frequently down through the woods from the western frontier, with small parties, and destroyed the publick boats that carried stores from Nelson's ferry to Camden. His mother usually harboured him on these expeditions, and almost every British officer, when travelling, who stopped at her house a night, had his horses stolen before morning. In short, her ill behaviour was glaring, that, her son having about the middle of the preceding March, burnt a boat loaded with corn and salt pork for Camden, Lord Rawdon, on the 25th of that month, sent Capt. Munro of the Volunteers of Ireland, with a small party of that regiment, and Capt. Hughies' company of militia, mounted, with orders to burn her house, and order her never to be found within twenty miles of the river again; a transaction of which I knew nothing until two hours after the house was burned. I found all protestations of my innocence were vain, and that no appeal could be made to the Laws of Nations, notwithstanding Capt. McPherson, and the regular officers who were present, did every thing in their power to save me, and insisted that the British militia and regulars ought to be looked upon in the same light; that the commission of the officers of each were equally good, and that any injury done to me would be looked upon as done to one of themselves. At this time, I heard one of the Continental Officers say to another who was standing by him, in the crowd round the gallows, "It is a shame to take the life of any man without a trial. This man, let him be the devil, or what he will, ought to have had a trial."

I was now made ready for execution. The old dirty hunting shirt was taken from Maskelly's body and wrapped round mine, and my arms were pinioned. A number of indecent jokes were passed on Maskelly's naked body, and as he did not appear to be quite dead, some of the soldiers pulled down his feet to dispatch him quickly; the reason of which was, that no rope could be got to hang me by, and they were obliged to wait for Maskelly's being dead, to get his halter for that purpose. In the mean time, as they did not use a cart, and the gate was pretty low, so that they were apprehensive my feet would touch the ground, enquiry was made for a tall horse to mount me

[30] Possibly Capt. Robert Smith of the First North Carolina Continental Regiment.
[31] Possibly John McCord, https://revwarapps.org/sc5360.pdf.

upon. Upon this occasion, Mr. Hyrne,[32] who was afterwards in Charlestown negociating the general exchange that took place shortly after, and has been lately taken at Mr. Daniel Horry's plantation on Santee,[33] by Major Frazer[34] with the cavalry; this gentleman; I say, was extremely eager in offering, for that purpose, a grey horse he rode. Maskelly was now ordered to be cut down, and I had nearly taken farewel of the world, when a sudden noise turned my attention to the outside of the crowd, where I perceived Gen. Marion on horseback, with his sword drawn. He asked, in a passion, what they were doing there? The soldiers answered, We are hanging them people, Sir! He then asked them, who ordered them to hang any person? they replied, Col. Lee. "I will let you know, damn you," replied Marion, "that I command here, and not Col. Lee. Do you know that if you hang this man, Lord Rawdon will hang a good man in his place; that he will hang Sam Cooper, who is to be exchanged for him?" The General then ordered me to be returned to the quarter guard, and I found I was indebted for my life to Lieut. Cooper, who having been near the Mill-house when I was demanded for execution, and being apprehensive of what the consequences might be to Samuel Cooper, he instantly went in quest of Gen. Marion, who arrived barely in time to save my life; but his interposition must have been too late, if a spare rope could have been found for me, when I came to the gallows.

I was now put in irons, and at four o'clock in the afternoon delivered over to Gen. Greene, who had that day crossed the Congaree river with a small guard, and at night I was carried to his headquarters at the Widow Weston's, on the road to Camden, where I was confined with eighty-five other prisoners. Next morning Greene marched for the fort at Friday's Ferry,[35] on the Congarees. We arrived at Mr. George Ancrum's plantation on the 17th, when the fort, which had been previously invested for some time, surrendered upon capitulation.[36] The terms were, that the regulars and militia should be treated alike, and that they should all be sent to Charlestown upon parole. Next day, in the afternoon, the prisoners were ordered to be sent to Gen. Greene's camp, which was upon the north and opposite side of the river to that on which the fort stood.[37] As they were marching them down to the ferry, a most bare-faced assassination was committed. An officer of the State troops, said to be Col. Wade Hampton, who formerly kept a store there, had conceived a picque against an old gentleman named Dawkins, one of the prisoners, and hired one of his own soldiers to shoot him, as he passed in the ranks. The fellow, whose name was Burke, an Irishman, and who had resided many years in North-Carolina, stood by the side of the road, watching for an opportunity to fire at Mr. Dawkins, but seeing it would be difficult to get him by himself, as they marched in files, determined to take the first opportunity to kill him at any rate; therefore, as soon as Mr. Dawkins came abreast of him, he fired and killed him and the man who marched by his side, the bullet passing through them both, and wounding a woman who stood at a little distance. The name of the other man who was killed was John McWhartry[?]. Burke was immediately confined in the provost guard, where the other prisoners were, but he was not pinioned. It was said, that Gen. Greene threatened to hang him. The militia prisoners being arrived at the landing were stopped, and the Continental Officers came up, and told them it was the heighth of folly to think of going to Charlestown with the British regulars; that they must abandon their properties; that their wives and children would be sent after them; that the British had for ever lost the Back

[32] Maj. Edmund Massingbird Hyrne https://revwarapps.org/blwt1478-400.pdf.
[33] Hampton Plantation, now a State Historic Site.
[34] Maj. Thomas Fraser.
[35] Near present Cayce.
[36] Fort Granby surrendered to Lt. Col. Henry Lee on May 15, 1781.
[37] At present Columbia.

Country; that Ninety-Six and Augusta the only remaining posts they had, were invested, and would soon fall; that Lord Rawdon had evacuated Camden, and retreated to Charlestown, which, they said, was then invested by the French fleet; that if they would list in the State service, for ten months, they should have the same bounty the others had received, which was a tory's negro for that short service,[38] and that they should be forgiven for every thing, even if they had committed murder. Although these were tempting offers to poor men, who believed the French fleet was actually off Charlestown, yet, notwithstanding the gloomy aspect of our affairs, not above a third of them joined the enemy, and these were chiefly men of the largest families. The rest seemed determined to suffer every thing, rather than submit. When they came to Charlestown, Lord Rawdon ordered 100 Guineas to be distributed among them, besides their pay.

In the morning of this day, Capt. John McCord, whom I mentioned formerly, brought in sixteen prisoners in irons, being part of the garrison of Orangeburgh fort which had been taken a few days before.[39] Thirteen of them had been killed by the guard that morning as they were marching to the Congarees. As the circumstances of this massacre are generally although not particularly known in Charlestown, I beg leave to relate that story, the truth of which can be proved by many people now here. The fort surrendered upon condition that the Militia should be considered as prisoners of war. This was was [sic] very readily promised, but as soon as they were disarmed they were hand-cuffed in pairs, and confined in a cellar under the jail. About midnight the Rebels fired a platoon among them, which killed one and wounded another. Next morning they were marched under the command of Capt. McCord to the Congarees to be delivered over to General Greene. When they had got a few miles from Orangeburgh, they shot fourteen of them on the road, all of whom died, except one Joseph Cooper who has been since in Charlestown, and went to Augustine last Fall, and is well known among the Orangeburgh refugees here. The person who was hand-cuffed with him was named Conrade Millar, and was shot first. The murderer having loaded his piece again, with great deliberation took sight at Cooper, who moved his head on one side when he perceived him drawing the trigger, by which means the bullet passed through the right side of his neck and he fell; upon which one of the guard run his sword through his neck to make sure of dispatching him, and observed that he never saw a son of a bitch bleed so much in his life. The party then moved on, concluding they had killed him, and Cooper finding the heat of the sun unsupportable, got up, and as well as he could, from the pain of his wound and the loss of blood, dragged Millar's dead body with him until next day between 12 and 1 o'clock, when two women, who lived in that neighbourhood, passing along, found him in great torment from the wound, which was augmented by the stench of Millar's body, that had begun to putrify from the intense heat of the weather. He entreated the women to disengage the dead man's arm from the hand-cuff, but as they were unable to effect this, he got a cuteau knife from one of them with which he made a shift to cut it off at the elbow joint, and was helped along to a house, where the irons were knocked off. The two ruffians who committed these murders for Capt. McCord, were, Jesse Ditlow, from Amelia Township, and William Stacey, a Pennsylvanian, who had resided many years on Broad-River, in this Province, and was a noted murderer under the Rebel Col. Brenan.[40]

When Capt. McCord arrived in Greene's camp, although it was well known that they had killed some of their prisoners that morning, yet no notice was taken of it. As for myself and the other prisoners in General Greene's hands, we were under the utmost apprehensions of being put to death, and as they were continually offering to enlist us into their service, it is not to be wondered

[38] Offering a slave as enlistment bounty was a policy initiated by Gen. Thomas Sumter, known as Sumter's wages.
[39] By Sumter on May 11.
[40] Ditlow, Stacey and Brenan are unknown.

at that almost every one of us joined, among whom was Capt. Rowe of the Orangeburgh Militia, one of the sixteen survivors brought in by Capt. McCord after the massacre. For my own part I offered myself among the others, but was refused. Capt. Rowe and the greater part of those who joined them at this time, left them when they found Lord Rawdon advancing to the relief of Ninety-Six.[41]

Not to take up the time of your readers with too minute a detail, it will be sufficient to say, that during that march I was treated by the Continental troops with the grossest indignity, and in a manner that no captain of militia, or any person in a commission of the Peace among the Rebels, was ever treated by the King's troops.

The army arrived at Ninety-Six, on the morning of the 24th, and invested the place.[42] About two o'clock Gen. Greene sent for me, and produced my commission as Justice of Peace, and the copies of the letters I had sent to Camden, when I procured intelligence for Lord Rawdon, with all the answers I had received from thence, and asked me if I knew these papers. I replied, I did. He asked me if I did not deserve death for corresponding with the enemy, as I was an American born. I told him, that the Province had been conquered, and that I had of course become a British subject. He told me, in reply, that I ought to have gone to the northward as many others had done; and that, as I had not acted as a plunderer or oppressor of the good people of these States, he would overlook my having taken a commission. He then ordered my irons to be knocked off, and proposed to me to go to Charlestown, and procure him intelligence, making me many offers of making up my losses, &c. but finding he could not prevail upon me, he ordered me to go to Mr. Colcock's plantation until I recovered my health, having then an intermitting fever. I was ordered afterwards to go, when able, to work with a spade in the trenches. I continued at Mr. Colcock's until the 2d of June, when I received a note from Mr. Williams, the Adjutant-General,[43] commanding me to appear in the trenches next morning with a spade. I had now no choice left, but either to submit to every species of indignity, and perhaps to an ignominious death at last, or else endeavour to get out of their hands. I chose the latter. strictly speaking, it was a breach of parole, although I never had received one; but when the treatment I suffered is considered, I fancy few will blame me for making my escape, which I did that night. When I got into Orangeburgh district, I kept the road, which I had not ventured to do before, although very much disguised by my dress, which consisted of Maskelly's hunting-shirt, and the old trowsers I had on when brought to the gallows. At Dorchester I met Lord Rawdon, going to the relief of Ninety-Six,[44] and returned with him.

LEVI SMITH

Charlestown, 17*th March,* 1782.

[41] During the siege of Ninety Six by Greene, May 22-June 19, 1781.
[42] Greene abandoned the siege of Ninety Six on June 19; Rawdon arrived on June 21.
[43] Col. Otho Holland Williams.
[44] June 16.

Discussion

Levi Smith's letter is questionable on several grounds. First, it was published in *The Royal Gazette*, which was essentially a British propaganda organ. Its articles about the war often distorted facts to cast the British in a favorable light and the Americans in the worst light. One illustration is Smith's statement that "the gentle and humane treatment which the Rebel prisoners in our hands received from us, is well known." Americans who died in the prison ships in Charleston Harbor would be spinning in their watery graves if they read that. There is no way of knowing how much the editor of the newspaper, Robert Wells, embellished Smith's letter, or indeed, whether he wrote the entire letter. The author of the letter was apparently well educated and claimed to have operated a store, so one would expect there to be some public record of him. The only record I could find that might apply to him was the 1790 census for Chester County, which lists "Levy Smith."

The most glaring problem with the letter is the death warrant, signed by "Francis Lee" rather than Henry Lee. This is such an obvious error that it almost argues that Smith's letter is valid, since anyone deliberately promulgating a lie would have been more careful. Lee's signature was usually so clear that it is hard to see how "Henry" could be mistaken for "Francis." (Fig. 4) Another question is why the death warrant would have been given to Smith anyway, since he was about to die. And if it was given to him, how did he manage to preserve it for so long when his trousers were the only article of clothing he was wearing at the time he was to be hanged?

Figure 4. Signature of Henry Lee

On the other hand, the author of the letter was clearly familiar with the terrain and accurately described several key figures and events. Moreover, there is little doubt that men in Lee's Legion on at least one occasion murdered prisoners. Some Loyalists who managed to escape Lee's massacre at Pyle's Defeat on February 25, 1781, were afterwards "hewed to pieces with broad Swords," according to pension applicant Moses Hall.[45] Most persuasive of the authenticity of Levi Smith's claim are statements by pension applicants that Tories were hanged after the capture of Fort Motte. William Kendle (W7978) stated, we "hung some tories," and Jordan Sherrod (S7489) said they hanged "one Man a Tory & one Negro."

Smith's statement that he was saved by Marion is also supported by Arthur Fuller (S9337), who testified, "general Marion joined us & ordered us not to hang any more of the tories. He said let them list [enlist] dureing the war & watch them close & they would make good soldiers." Marion's intervention on behalf of Smith was supported even by Henry Lee, who condoned the hangings but diverted responsibility for it from himself to the militiamen.

> Mercy was extended, although policy mandated death, and McPherson's obstinacy warranted it. The commandant, with the regulars, of which the garrison was chiefly composed, was taken possession of by Lee, while the loyalists were delivered to Marion. Among the latter was a Mr. Smith, who had been charged with burning the houses of his

[45] Moses Hall, pension application W10105, https://revwarapps.org/w10105.pdf.

> neighbors, friendly to their country. This man consequently became very obnoxious, and his punishment was loudly demanded by many of the militia serving under the brigadier [Marion]; but the humanity of Marion could not be overcome. Smith was secured from his surrounding enemies, ready to devote himself, and taken under the general's protection.[46]

Despite the incongruencies in Smith's letter and doubts about the newspaper that published it, the substance of Smith's allegation is strongly supported by American witnesses. Lt. Col. Henry Lee apparently did order the hanging of prisoners taken at the siege of Fort Motte, and Col. Francis Marion stopped it.

About the Author

C. Leon Harris earned a BS in physics at Virginia Tech and graduate degrees in biophysics at Penn State, then taught biology, wrote textbooks, and did neurobiological research at the State University of New York, Plattsburgh, for more than three decades. Since retiring to Mount Pleasant, SC, and Adamant, VT, he and Will Graves have transcribed more than thirty thousand Revolutionary War pension and bounty-land applications, rosters, and other documents at revwarapps.org.

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Doug MacIntyre generously provided the figure of Bellville Plantation.

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[46] Henry Lee, *Memoirs of the War in the Southern Department of the United States* (Washington: Peter Force, 1827), 232.

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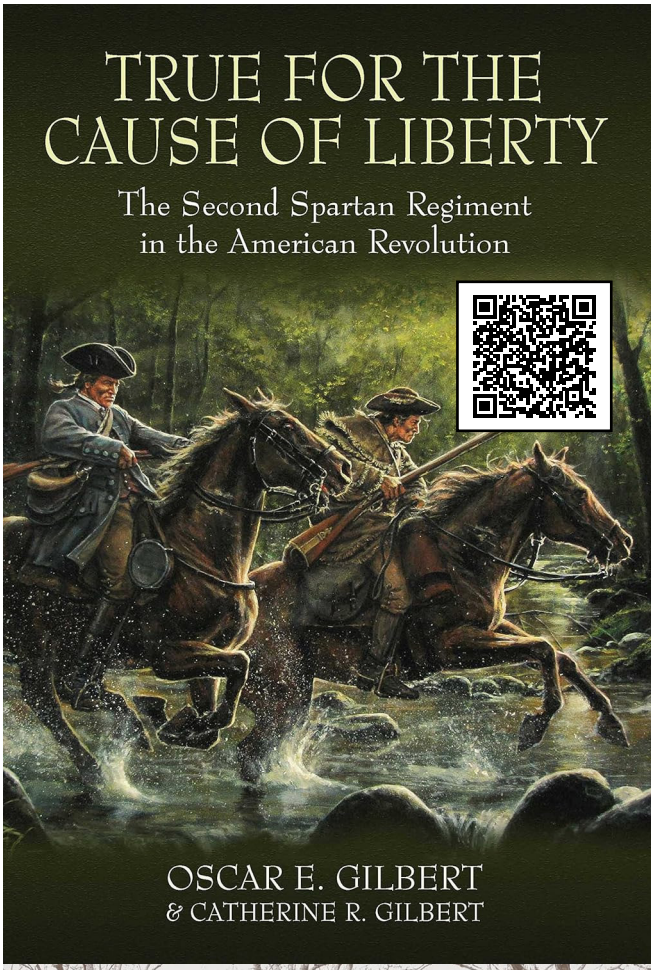

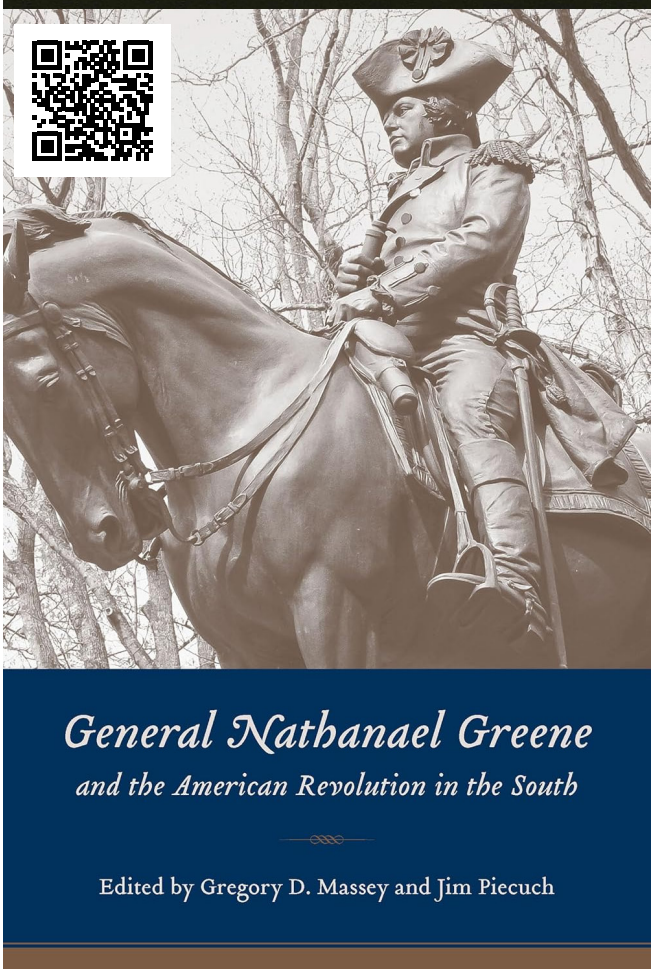

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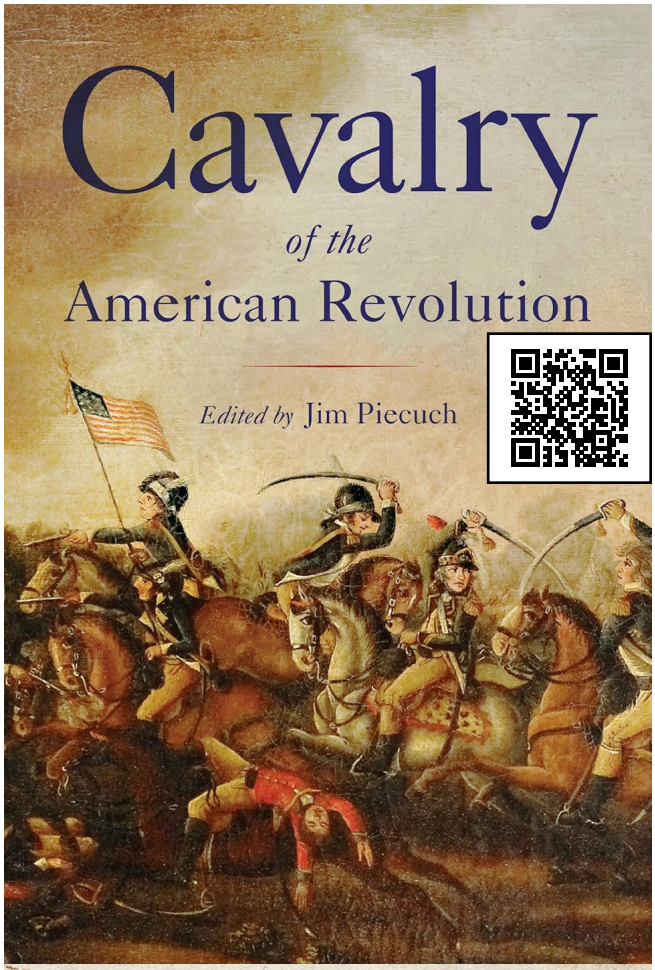

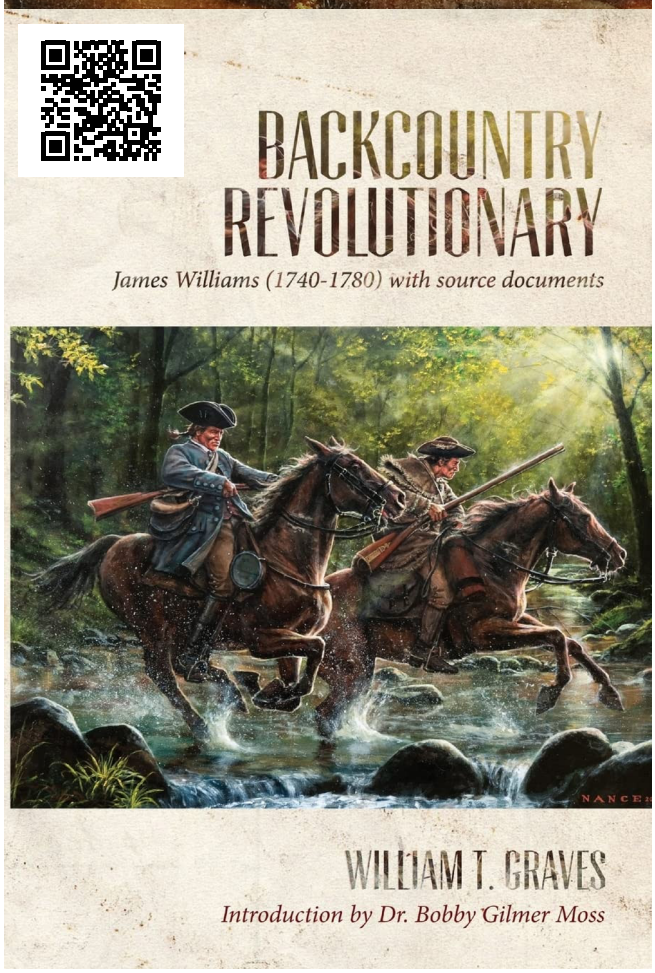

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