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Foundations of Revolutionary Mounted Troops (Part Three)

INSIDE:

BRIGADIER GENERAL ROBERT CUNNINGHAM: DISTINGUISHED LOYALIST

Dr. Paul Wood

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The Journal

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IN THIS ISSUE

From the Editor

Hello everyone,

For many years, I've had the privilege of reenacting, teaching classes, and leading tours in Spartanburg, SC, focused on our area's role in the American Revolution. I often begin by asking audiences where they're from. The responses usually show that many attendees are new to Spartanburg or to South Carolina. That insight helps me shape each presentation so it connects with people who may be encountering this history for the first time.

I've noticed that many people are more familiar with well-known Revolutionary War moments from other regions, such as Washington crossing the Delaware or Paul Revere's midnight ride, than they are with the Southern Campaigns. This isn't limited to newcomers. Even longtime residents sometimes haven't had the chance to learn about the significant events that took place here at home. As Spartanburg continues to grow, sharing that local history becomes even more important. That's one reason my wife and I remain committed to reenacting and teaching.

Another common point of confusion is the difference between the American Revolution and the Civil War. Questions and comments sometimes blend the two periods together. While both are important chapters in our nation's story, they reflect very different times, causes, and outcomes. Helping clarify that distinction is an opportunity for all of us who care about history, including educators, community leaders, and volunteers.

South Carolina, and Spartanburg in particular, has a meaningful Revolutionary War heritage. Recognizing that history does not mean celebrating war itself. Rather, it means acknowledging the experiences, choices, and sacrifices of those who lived through that era. At the same time, we should approach the past honestly. The founding of our nation included both aspirations for liberty and realities that fell short of those ideals, including the displacement of Indigenous peoples and the continuation of slavery. Understanding both the achievements and the failures of our early history allows us to learn from it more fully.

The principles expressed in our founding documents continue to shape national conversations today. The statement that "all men are created equal" has served as an enduring ideal, one that generations have worked to interpret and expand. It reminds us that freedom and responsibility go hand in hand, and that each generation plays a role in preserving and strengthening

Richard C. Meehan, Jr.

our institutions.

The American Revolution laid the groundwork for a system of government that protects freedoms of religion, speech, press, assembly, and petition. No system is perfect, and civic life has always involved debate and improvement. Still, the opportunity to participate openly in that process is something many people around the world continue to seek.

When Benjamin Franklin was asked by Elizabeth Powel what form of government had been created by the Constitutional Convention, he replied, "A republic, if you can keep it." Those words remain a thoughtful reminder that our shared civic life depends on engagement, learning, and respect.

Thank you for being part of this ongoing journey of understanding and discovery.

In liberty,

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

P.S. - Advertise your Rev War event in ***The Journal*** for free! Send your full color 8.5x11 ad to me before the 10th of each month. ***CLICK THIS BOX.***

Hear Ye, Hear Ye

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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.

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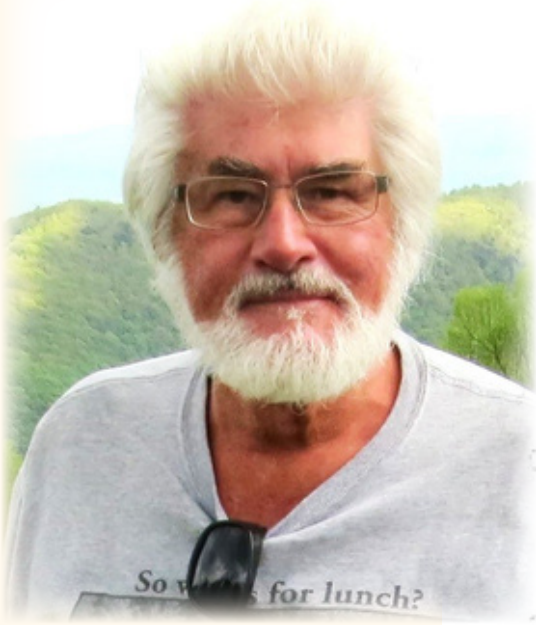

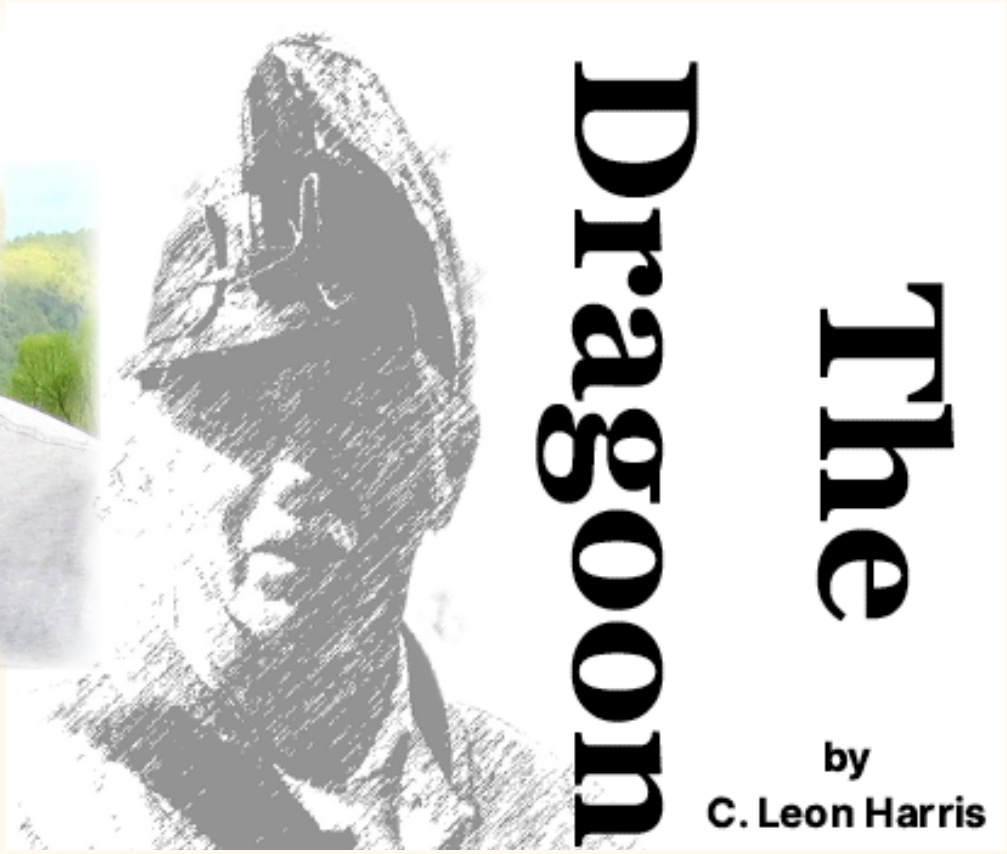

The Dragoon

by C. Leon Harris

Reenactors play an invaluable role in helping us understand the life of an American soldier of the Revolution, but most are English-speaking people of European ancestry. If we could be transported 250 years back in time we would see skins ranging from white to black and hear a variety of different languages. Adding to the diversity in the South would be Indians of the Catawba Nation, such as Peter Harris. (No known relation to me, regrettably.) The late Michael C. Scoggins devoted two pages to Harris in his short book, Relentless Fury: The Revolutionary War in the Southern Piedmont. According to Scoggins, Harris served as a Minuteman in a Georgia battalion, then enlisted in the South Carolina Continental service. He was wounded in the foot at the Battle of Stono Ferry on June 20, 1779 but still participated in the siege of Savannah three months later. After the surrender of Charleston in May of 1780 he joined General Thomas Sumter's brigade based on Catawba land in present York County. Two pay bills transcribed by Scoggins (https://revwarapps.org/b205.pdf) list Harris and forty other Catawba Indians in Sumter's brigade in 1780 and 1781. One of them named Willis was killed at Sumter's attack at Rocky Mount on July 30, 1780, and George White lost his horse at Sumter's defeat at Fishing Creek on the following August 18. Peter Harris was presumably at both of these engagements.

Plats available online at the South Carolina Department of Archives and History show that in 1794 Harris owned a total of 200 acres of land on the waters of Fishing Creek in Chester County, said to be a reward for his services. In 1815 Harris served as interpreter for the Chief and Head Men of the Catawba Nation in a petition to the state legislature. Harris signed the document with his mark. In 1822, a year before his death, Harris dictated an application for a pension from South Carolina. The application, transcribed by Will Graves at https://revwarapps.org/sc18.pdf, shows that in spite of being illiterate, Harris was not merely fluent in English—he was eloquent!

I am one of the lingering embers of an almost extinguished race, Our Graves, will soon be our only habitations. I am one of the few stalks, that still remain in the field, where the tempest of the revolution passed, I fought against the British for your sake, the British have disappeared, and you are free, yet from me the British took nothing, nor have I gained any thing by their defeat. I pursued the deer for my subsistance, the deer are disappearing, & I must starve. God ordained me for the forest, and my ambition is the shade, but the strength of my arm decays, and my feet fail in the chase, the hand which fought for your liberties, is now open for your relief. In my youth I bled in battle, that you might be independant; let not my heart in my old age, bleed, for the want of your Commissiration.

Peter his P Mark Harris

Revolutionary War Day 2026

Saturday | March 28, 2026 10-4

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Georgia's America 250 License Plate

My name is Eden Pethel. I am 13 years old and in the 8th grade. I live in Jackson County, Georgia. I submitted the winning entry in the Georgia Department of Education's contest to design a tag commemorating America's 250th Anniversary. As an active member of the Elisha Winn Society, Children of the American Revolution, I have developed a love of the history of home and country. When I heard about this contest, I felt compelled to enter to teach Georgians a little about Georgia's role in the American Revolution.

The design includes an outline of Georgia because not all battles in the American Revolution occurred in the northern colonies, as is commonly thought. Many people are familiar with the Battle of Lexington and Concord, Bunker Hill, Saratoga, and Yorktown. Few Georgians are aware of the battles fought here during the Southern Campaign. The date in the center of the design represents the year the Declaration of Independence was signed - July 4, 1776 - the first time the colonies came together as a united front. While there were many skirmishes in Georgia, seven locations were pivotal to the course of the American Revolution. The stars on the design represent those seven places in Georgia. From north to south, they are:

- The Battle of Cherokee Ford/Van(n)'s Creek in Elbert County, Georgia
- The Battle of Kettle Creek in Washington, Georgia
- The First and Second Sieges of Augusta in Augusta, Georgia
- The Battle of Brier Creek in Sylvania, Georgia
- The Battle of the Rice Boats, the Capture of Savannah, and the Siege of Savannah in Savannah, Georgia
- Frederica Naval Action at St. Simons Island, Georgia

The tag is available now through 2030 as one of the default tags for the state of Georgia. Georgians can replace their current tag with the commemorative plate at no cost during their renewal period. If it is not currently their renewal period, it will cost $20 to replace the tag. I have started a blog to share news and information about my tag design. I'll be adding posts about my visits to historical markers, commemorations, and America 250 events at those locations. It is truly an honor to have been recognized for my design and to be a part of Georgia's 250th Anniversary of the U.S.A. celebrations, and to bring awareness to Georgia's role in the American Revolution.

Press Release Link

Eden's Blog Link

THE LOYALIST

by
Paul Wood

In 2025, I finished writing the first-ever biography of Loyalist William "Bloody Bill" Cunningham. The SC250 Commission will publish it this spring and will initially release the book online at SC250.com. Cunningham earned the moniker "Bloody Bill" in a six-week period at year's-end 1781 when he led 150 to 200 men into the Ninety Six District. Their objective: to seek mortal revenge on Patriots.

Cornwallis' surrender at Yorktown did not end the fighting, but Loyalists could readily conclude that their allegiance to King George III left them on the losing side. Horrific violence unrelated to the Revolution itself, including murders and destruction of homes and farms, had gone both ways between Patriots and Loyalists. But South Carolinians who stood with the Crown knew they had to either make peace with their neighbors or bid a permanent farewell to the new state. Cunningham's Bloody Scout brought about the murders of at least 59 unarmed Patriots and about 31 armed men. It was by far the worst string of homicides in the state's history.

I am frequently asked where the miscreant was born. At least two respected historians erred with their answers. Wilbur H. Siebert and Robert Stansbury Lambert contended he was born in Ireland. They based their conclusions on a claim put before members of the British Loyalist Claims Commission on February 18, 1786, in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

A Loyalist named William Cunningham who resided in Rawdon, Nova Scotia, testified that as a young man he left his native Ireland and moved to the Ninety Six District of South Carolina. By farming he accumulated significant wealth and then relocated to present-day Dorchester County where his assets further increased. He requested compensation for the properties he lost when he took refuge in Charleston. Like Bloody Bill this man was first a Patriot and then a Loyalist. And like Bloody Bill he had no choice but to leave the state after the war. He settled on land granted to him by the Crown in a Nova Scotia community named for Francis Lord Rawdon.

The royal commissioners deemed the application fraudulent and refused the claimant any compensation. Cunningham's neighbors in Nova Scotia served as witnesses but failed to satisfy the

commissioners that they knew him before their own arrivals in Nova Scotia. The commissioners probably also doubted that anyone could have accumulated the substantial wealth the applicant said he gained and subsequently lost on account of his loyalty to King George. Might a mass murderer have also prevaricated on an application? Much of what we know for certain about Bloody Bill supports the conclusion that he was the man who stood before the commissioners on February 18, 1786.

But in fact, Bloody Bill was in Nassau in the Bahamas. Six days later, on February 24, Bloody Bill went to the quarters of the military governor of the Bahamas, Brigadier General Archibald McArthur. He requested and received a memorial to support his application for a military pension at the rank of major. By early March, Bloody Bill and his relative Brigadier General Robert Cunningham were sailing for London to request military pensions and compensation for properties they had lost in East Florida and South Carolina.

Another primary source proves Bloody Bill was not the Nova Scotia applicant. He resided in East Florida when the province changed hands. The British, according to terms of the Treaty of Paris, relinquished ownership to Spain on July 1, 1784. One of the first official acts of Governor Vincent Manuel de Zéspedes y Velasco was to call for a census. When the census taker approached "Cunningham, Guillermo," he learned the man was born in Virginia, was single, and held possession of seven enslaved people and four horses.

In 1845, Ann Pamela Cunningham, a granddaughter of Robert's brother Patrick, penned brief biographies of the brothers and their relative William. She reported that Robert Cunningham led family members from their homes in Augusta County, Virginia. They arrived in the Ninety Six District in late 1769 and early 1770. Ms. Cunningham lived her entire life on her grandfather's estate and had access to the family's records. Though much of what Ms. Cunningham wrote about William is tinged by a desire to redeem the family's reputation, I find no reason to doubt her words that the clan moved south from Augusta County.

So, where was William "Bloody Bill" Cunningham born? Undoubtedly Virginia. Where he died is another frequent query. A brief obituary appeared in the January 30, 1787, edition of Charleston's Morning Post and Daily Advertiser. It read simply: "NASSAU-Jan. 20, 1787. Thursday last [January 18], died here Major William Cunningham, formerly of the S.C. Royal Militia."

Major Cunningham died about two months after he and Robert returned from their mission to London. With no additional information, a logical follow-up question is "how did he die?" My book provides an educated guess. I will let my readers ponder the question. They will find my guess in chapter 13 of the biography.

Brigadier General Robert Cunningham: Distinguished Loyalist (1741-1813)

by

The Rev. Dr. Paul Wood, Jr.

Bloody Bill Cunningham: Life and Times of a Revolutionary War Villain should be available this spring. See "The Loyalist" column in this month's *The Journal*. As I researched the biography, I learned much about Bloody Bill's relatives, the brothers Robert and Patrick Cunningham.[1] This month, I focus on the older brother, Brigadier General Robert Cunningham. Look for a later article on Patrick. Among the foremost primary sources shedding light on Robert and William (Bloody Bill) is Todd Braisted's Online Institute for Advanced Loyalist Studies. Murtie June Clark worked through hundreds or thousands of British records, and her 1981 text, *Loyalists in the Southern Campaign of the Revolutionary War*, also provides excellent source material.[2]

It is unclear whether Robert's forebears were Scottish or Scots-Irish emigrants, but by the 1760s, Robert was residing in Augusta County, Virginia. In 1767, he was granted and/or purchased land in South Carolina's Ninety Six District, and in 1769, he led family members to fertile land along the Saluda River. Only months before Robert's arrival, South Carolina's Circuit Court Act was implemented. Surprisingly, by the end of 1769, Robert had been appointed the magistrate of the Ninety-Six District.

Why did the colony's leaders select a newcomer? Perhaps because he brought significant wealth to South Carolina, or because he was not tainted by participation in the recently concluded Regulator Movement. The editors of the Francis Marion Papers say of Robert: "He was "a back country planter before the war. He ran a ferry over the Saluda River, was a Justice of the Peace, taught school, served as a deputy surveyor, and was a member of the 'American Association' committee.'"[3]

Further evidence that Robert had the trust of the residents of the Ninety Six District is that in early 1775 they elected him to the first South Carolina Provincial Assembly. When elections were

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[1] Though Bloody Bill is commonly called a cousin of the two brothers, no one knows their exact familial relationship. I prefer words such as *relative* and *kinsman*.

[2] Find Braisted's work at royalprovincial.com; Murtie June Clark, *Loyalists in the Southern Campaign of the Revolutionary War: Official Rolls of Loyalists Recruited from North Carolina and South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Mississippi, and Louisiana*, vol. 1. Genealogical Publishing Co., 1981.

[3] extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://southcarolina250.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Francis-Marion-Papers-Volume-One.pdf.

held that summer for a second Assembly, Robert chose not to run. The Patriots had established control of the province's governmental functions, and Robert had become an outspoken Loyalist.

The first Provincial Assembly prepared for war by creating three militia regiments and a Council of Safety. This smaller body was tasked with providing day-to-day leadership for the rebellion. Patriot vs. Loyalist tensions steadily rose in 1775, so the Council of Safety made a final attempt at reconciliation by sending a delegation led by William Henry Drayton into the Backcountry.[4]

The six-week Drayton mission began on July 31 and met with some success among German emigrants in the Orangeburg District but had almost no success in the Ninety Six District. In August, Robert Cunningham confronted Drayton at the Fairforest Creek home of Loyalist leader Thomas Fletchall. Loyalists Thomas "Burnfoot" Brown and Fletchall joined Robert as they hurled verbal barbs at Drayton. Drayton wrote to the Council of Safety: "This man's looks are utterly against him. Much venom appears in Cunningham's countenance and conversation. Neither of these men say much; but Brown is the spokesman, and his bitterness and violence are intolerable."[5]

Upon Drayton's return to Charleston, the Council of Safety ordered Robert's arrest. He was confined in Charleston on November 1, the same day the Second Provincial Assembly convened. In January, 130 Loyalists captured at the December 22 Battle of the Great Cane Brake joined Robert in jail. Patrick had commanded the Loyalists at the Great Cane Brake and escaped. However, he was apprehended a few weeks later and joined Robert and other Loyalists in confinement. The Cunningham brothers were released that summer. Like many other Loyalists following the defeat at the Great Cane Brake, the brothers lived peaceably in their homes until the British claimed Charleston in May 1780.[6]

In 1778, Robert Cunningham ran to represent the Little River District in the state's first Senate. His wide-margin victory attested to the strength of Loyalism in the Ninety Six District. During the campaign, he interrupted a speech by his opponent, Col. James Williams. General Joseph Johnson later wrote that their argument quickly escalated into a fistfight. The struggle ended "in Cunningham's favor."[7] Despite his twin victories over James Williams, Robert Cunningham chose not to serve in the Patriot-dominated Senate.

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[4] "South Carolina-In the Council of Safety," July 23, 1775, in Robert W. Gibbes, ed., *Documentary History of the American Revolution, Consisting of Letters and Papers Relating to the Contest for Liberty, Chiefly in South Carolina, from Originals in the Possession of the Editor, and Other Sources, 1764-1776* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1855), 106; Edward McCrady, *The History of South Carolina in the Revolution*, 2 vols., New York: Macmillan Company, 1902, 1:41-43.

[5] Gibbes, 1:151. Brown steadfastly refused to sign the Articles of Association. On August 2, following a blow to the head, the Sons of Liberty tarred and feathered Brown. Still unwilling to sign, his tormentors tied him to a tree with his feet above the ground. They permanently maimed him by setting a fire beneath his feet. The treatment transformed him into a menace for the Patriots.

[6] Jim Piecuch, *South Carolina Provincials*: *Loyalists in British Service during the American Revolution,* Westholme Publishing, 2023, 34; Jim Piecuch, *Three Peoples, One King: Loyalists, Indians, and Slaves in the Revolutionary South, 1775-1782,* University of South Carolina Press, 2008, 54.

[7] William T. Graves, *Backcountry Revolutionary: James Williams (1740-1780)*, Lugoff, SC: Southern Campaigns of the American Revolution Press, 2012.

Figure 1: Depiction of Fort Williams based on historical references. This image was generated and manipulated by AI, and heavily adjusted in Adobe Photoshop. It in no way is meant to be a rendition of the actual site, only an approximation.

When Charles Lord Cornwallis took command of British forces in the South in June 1780, he appointed Robert Cunningham a colonel in charge of the Ninety Six Brigade, despite Robert's apparent lack of experience as a military officer. Following the devastating defeat at Kings Mountain in October, Cornwallis had to reorganize his officer corps. As a result, Robert was promoted to brigadier general, the highest-ranking South Carolinian in the Loyalist militia. Though I have not thoroughly researched Robert's roles in the war, I suspect he was not given significant duties by his British superiors. It is known that Robert commanded a garrison of 150 militiamen at Fort Williams [Fig. 1], the former home of Colonel James Williams. The fortified house served as an outpost of the larger post at Ninety Six. On December 12, 1780, Robert was present at the British/Loyalist victory at the Battle of the Long Cane but played a minor role. Two weeks later, the survivors of the near-massacre at Hammond's Store made a furious ride to Fort Williams. Patriot militia and Continentals led by Colonel Joseph Hayes pursued the Hammond's Store survivors to the fort, and a battle occurred there the morning of December 31. Several Loyalists were killed, and twenty were taken prisoner. Brigadier General Cunningham led the survivors to the safety of Ninety Six.[8]

The retreat to Ninety Six was one of many episodes in the Patriot resurgence that followed the British takeover. Only fourteen months after the British took control of the entire state, all British forces in South Carolina and several thousand Loyalists had been forced to reside in the vicinity

[8] Andrew Waters, "Hammond's Store: The 'Dirty War's' Prelude to Cowpens," *Journal of the American Revolution*, December 10, 2018.

of Charleston.[9] With one exception, I know nothing of Robert's activities until he departed Charleston during the December 1782 exodus.

In late October 1781, Colonel Nisbet Balfour, in command in Charleston, authorized an expedition into the Backcountry. Approximately 300 men, all South Carolina Loyalist militia, were assigned to rustle cattle for the hungry residents of Charleston. Robert led the expedition only a few miles before returning to the city. Colonel Hezekiah Williams and Robert's relative, Major William Cunningham, continued inland. They rustled cattle in the Mount Willing Community in present-day Saluda County. After the Cloud's Creek Massacre, members of the party delivered the cattle to Charleston.

Williams parted ways with William Cunningham and led his Stephens Creek Militia to the place where they had once lived near the Savannah River. As Williams rode west, William Cunningham's men hurried through Saluda, Newberry, Laurens, Union, and Spartanburg counties. They turned the foraging mission into a bloodbath of unarmed Patriots. The expedition, initially commanded by Robert Cunningham and intended for foraging, became the infamous Bloody Scout.

Figure 2: William Henry Drayton

Robert had steadfastly opposed the Patriot cause since his August 1775 confrontation with William Henry Drayton. [Fig. 2] The South Carolina General Assembly finally reconvened in Jacksonborough in early 1782. To no one's surprise, the body confiscated all of Robert's property and banished him from the state.[10]

In December 1782, Robert and his family boarded a ship bound for British-held East Florida. The Cunninghams received land on the St. Mary's River. Sadly, they soon had to pack up again. According to the Treaty of Paris, the Spanish regained control of East Florida on July 1, 1784, so Robert and all other British citizens had to find new homes in the British Empire. He chose Nassau on the island of New Providence, where he was granted land. By December 1784, he was serving on a roads commission.[11] The following December, William Cunningham arrived in the Bahamas, and Robert probably welcomed him into his home. In March or April 1786, the two men set sail for London. There, they applied for pensions and for compensation for their losses.[12]

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[9] Most the Loyalists lived in Rawdon Town, a refugee camp outside the gates of the city.

[10] List published in the March 20, 1782, edition of the Royal Gazette. http://sc_tories.tripod.com/royal_gazette_lists.htm

[11] "jim," (initials of) a staff member of the Bahamas Society of Archives and History, email to the author, April 11, 2022

[12] For the primary materials on this journey, the applications, and the results of Robert and Williams' efforts, see royalprovincial.com.

Figure 3: Nassau's Western Cemetery. Image taken by the author.

The British generously rewarded Robert with 1,080 pounds sterling ($140,000 in today's dollars) to cover his losses in South Carolina and East Florida. He received hundreds of acres on the islands of New Providence and Grand Caicos.[13] Robert was also granted a half-pay pension as a brigadier general. He lived comfortably on New Providence and died in Nassau in 1813. I have concluded that Robert Cunningham was an astute farmer, businessman, and public servant. He had integrity of character. He lacked the military skills the British needed. In summary, he was a good man. In 2022, I met with two Bahamian historians who led me to Nassau's Western Cemetery [Fig. 3] and the burial plot of Robert, his wife Margaret, and other family members. My new friends told me that among both white and black residents of the Bahamas, Cunningham is a common surname.

[13] Robert received three land grant, one of which now includes a golf course; ""jim," a staff member of the Bahamas Historical Society, April 11, 2002, email to the author; https://www.carolana.com/SC/Revolution/loyalist_leaders_sc_robert_cunningham.html (accessed July 11, 2024).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The Rev. Dr. Paul A. Wood, Jr.

The Rev. Dr. Paul A. Wood, Jr., a retired United Methodist minister, served churches throughout South Carolina from 1980 to 2017. He and his wife, the Rev. Kay Wood, live in Camden, SC, his hometown. Upon his retirement, Dr. Wood became a historian of the American Revolution in South Carolina.

His academic article on South Carolina Revolutionary heroine Dicey Langston Springfield is available at southcarolina250.com. His first biography of William "Bloody Bill" Cunningham will be published this spring by South Carolina's Sestercentennial (SC250) Commission. Paul writes the monthly "The Loyalist" column for the SCAR Journal and serves on the Kershaw County SC250 Committee. He is available for presentations on the following:

- Dicey Langston Springfield.
- Ann Pamela Cunningham, defender of the Cunningham family and founder of the Mount Vernon Ladies Association.
- William "Bloody Bill" Cunningham.
- The Snow Campaign, November – December 1775.
- The civil war that embroiled South Carolina during the Revolution.

Contact Dr. Wood at woodtz1955@gmail.com.

1776 TAVERN

Dinner

Thursday, April 23 at 6:00 pm

Walnut Grove Plantation

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TICKETS ON SALE 3/12

Foundations of Revolutionary Mounted Troops

European Cavalry Doctrine in the Eighteenth Century

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

Dr. Lee F. McGee

Editor's Note: This opening article in our series on cavalry in the American Revolution focuses on eighteenth-century European doctrine that greatly influenced the mounted forces in North America. As in today's Army, "transformation in contact" was an essential element in formulating doctrine and tactics. Throughout a series of conflicts in the eighteenth century, culminating in the Seven Years' War (1756-1763), European military leaders adapted to their enemies' actions, instituted new battlefield methods of their own, and refined ideas in the crucible of combat experience, and thereby developed the cavalry arm into a potent force.

Jim Piecuch, Editor
MG J. Burns, US Cavalry, (R)

Introduction

A dynamic transformation in the use of cavalry occurred in Europe during the eighteenth century that would greatly influence cavalry operations in the American Revolution. Traditionally, cavalry charges were made by large men on large horses – and were slow and deliberate. The rise in Eastern Europe of the hussar, a light mobile horseman, caused tacticians to rethink the role of mounted soldiers. First brought to prominence by the Polish, Hungarians, and Austrians, hussars were adopted by Frederick the Great's Prussian army in the Seven Years' War as part of a new way of thinking about cavalry tactics. Frederick emphasized speed, mobility, and versatility. The Prussian cavalry became the model for Europe and influenced the British army in a profound way on the eve of the American Revolution. Cavalry during the Revolution, both American and British, reflected this transformation.

Types and Classifications of Cavalry

Typical cavalry of the early eighteenth century was considered "heavy," reflected in the size of both men and horses. Its primary role was "delivering shocks in the open field." The most common forms were cuirassiers and dragoons. Cuirassiers wore an iron chest plate, a holdover from medieval armor, and "inherited the role of the medieval knights as the dealers of hammer blows on the battlefield, where they clashed with the enemy cavalry, and exploited favourable opportunities to crush the enemy infantry." The cuirass, weighing about thirty-two pounds, required a strong man to wear one, and hindered movement, having a direct effect on mobility. In addition, some cavalry wore hats reinforced with iron bars to guard against cuts to the head.[1]

Dragoons were originally considered mounted infantry and were meant to travel by horseback and fight dismounted with a firearm. The New Model Army of the English Civil War (1642-1646) began to make this distinction, recognizing that the functions of "skirmishing, reconnaissance, patrolling and pursuit" were just as important as the charge in battle, and began to divide the cavalry into "'horse,' trained and equipped for shock action in the charge, and … 'dragoons,' formed as mounted infantrymen, who could skirmish, reconnoiter and pursue." During the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1714), the Duke of Marlborough began to use them with cuirassiers in the charge so that "by 1713 any idea of British dragoons regiments acting differently from the horse had virtually disappeared."[2] Nonetheless, in the 1750s both Prussian and British dragoons still drilled dismounted, with the British Standing Orders of 1755 stating "Dragoon Officers are to remember they are still Dragoons, and not horse, that they are to march, and attack on foot."[3]

Prussian Ruler Frederick the Great, whose innovations in the use of cavalry had a major influence on British and American cavalry in the War for Independence. *(Colorized engraving, artist unknown.)*

Early eighteenth-century light cavalry was typified by the Hungarian hussars, whose methods were further developed in the Polish and Austrian armies as a response to the more open fighting style of the Ottoman Empire's forces. Hussars were expected to take on a quicker, more mobile role. This included reconnoitering, intelligence gathering, protecting the army on the march, forming the rear guard and protecting the baggage, harassing the enemy, preventing desertion, and guarding foraging parties. The speed and mobility of hussars fit well with the military reforms of Frederick the Great in Prussia and they were often used in set-piece battles.[4]

The Austrian army also raised light horse called Chevaux Legers, based on a Saxon model, who could fight alongside heavy cavalry but also perform the duties of light units. British adoption of light cavalry came comparatively late but grew

out of a perceived need for the original "dragoon" concept as mobile infantry. Thus, rather than hussar regiments, "light dragoon" regiments were formed. Artillery attached to cavalry units also developed, originating in Russia in 1729. Frederick the Great and the Austrians later adopted these units of horse artillery.[5]

Cavalry Tactics

Cavalry tactics in battle, as noted above, were centered around the shock of the charge. This was usually a much slower affair than might be imagined. Cavalry was used to charge infantry or other cavalry, but was most effective against a defeated, disordered enemy. Heavy cavalry was traditionally thought to be the arm for this role, but gradually light cavalry – hussars or light dragoons – would be used to charge in battle. The operational unit of cavalry was the squadron, made up of two or three troops, each consisting of 50-100 men. Cavalry could charge in line (which was less common), with the squadrons staggered, alternating between a first line and a second line, like a checkerboard ("en echiquier"), or with squadrons staggered back progressively to one flank of the lead squadron ("en echelon"). In many cases, when cavalry charged cavalry, the actual "shock" effect did not happen. One side would give way, but the desired effect of disorder would still be achieved.[6]

The sixteenth century saw an increase in the use of firearms by cavalry, but by the mid-eighteenth century, it was thought that cavalry should rely on swords. Firearms tended to be unreliable, and stopping to fire subjected the cavalry to the fire of infantry. The gradual increase in the speed of the charge paralleled the move away from the use of firearms, and the rapid charge with cold steel became the preferred method of attack, exemplified by the Prussian cavalry of the Seven Years' War. However, drilling with carbines continued into the latter half of the eighteenth century in both the Prussian and British armies.[7]

The use of the lance waned at the end of the seventeenth century, when it had been used to great effect by the Polish Winged Hussars. There were some attempts to reinstitute it in the Prussian and French armies, but it would not regain prominence until the early nineteenth century, after Napoleon Bonaparte witnessed Polish lancers in action. He reestablished lancers as part of the French cavalry, and Britain and the major Continental powers followed suit.[8]

Prussian general Friedrich Wilhelm von Seydlitz leading cuirassiers at the Battle of Rossbach, Nov. 5, 1757. *(Painting by Anton von Werner.)*

Swords could be straight or curved, with light troops tending to use a curved blade, best for slashing during rapid action. In the British cavalry, the shape of the sword was often dictated by the regimental colonels, who were sometimes required to obtain swords for their own regiments. The debate of using the edge of the sword versus the point was ongoing during the eighteenth century. Actual skill in the use of the sword was another story. While there may have been fencing instruction for officers, training in formal swordsmanship for troopers was lacking in the British army. Prussian general Friedrich Wilhelm von Seydlitz emphasized swordsmanship, but in general, proper attention was not given to individual skill until the nineteenth century.[9]

Austrian Decline and the Rise of the Prussian Cavalry

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, Austrian cavalry was the most effective in Europe. This was in large part because of the Hungarian Hussar. During the Turkish War (1737-1739) and

the First Silesian War (1740-1742), Austrian cavalry was superior to their opponents, including the Prussians. Gradually, however, the Austrian cavalry began to decline, with a noted decrease in morale. There was a resistance to change, and the practice of scattering the cavalry in detachments in peacetime affected the cavalry's ability to operate in a large, coordinated way. A lack of effective leadership worsened these deficiencies. Occasionally, the Austrian Hussars could still be the most effective light force, as in the raid of General Andras Hadik on Berlin in 1757, but the Prussians were rapidly improving, especially in the light cavalry realm.[10]

On coming to the Prussian throne in 1740, Frederick the Great assessed the quality of the cavalry he inherited as poor. The hussar arm was not strong, and the heavy cavalry was full of big men on big horses who could not properly maneuver. To be sure, the rise of cavalry officers such as Hans Joachim von Zieten and Seydlitz was a major reason for the success of the Prussian army during the Seven Years' War. However, it was Frederick who emphasized increasing the speed of the charge, and who insisted that his cavalry always attack and never be attacked themselves. The emphasis on the shock action of cavalry extended to a prohibition on using firearms. Cross-training of officers among the branches increased versatility, and hussars were expected to be able to serve in the role of heavy cavalry.[11] The Prussian cavalry in peacetime were trained in large formations, which added to their ability to maintain order.

The combination of aggressiveness, speed and cohesion was unstoppable. According to Christopher Duffy: "Possibly only the Prussian cavalry at its best was capable of attacking in good order at anything like the prescribed velocity." All these factors, combined with the decline of their main adversary, the Austrians, brought the Prussian cavalry to the pinnacle during the eighteenth century. British lancer Captain John Cecil Russell wrote of Frederick that "Under him the cavalry service reached the zenith of its power and reputation, and during the course of his campaigns we are struck by the incessant progress which was made in the methods of employing that arm, both on the field of battle and in the general operations of a campaign."[12]

British Cavalry

By the 1770s, British cavalry, and particularly their light cavalry, was considered to have evolved to a high level by no less an authority than former Prussian cavalry general Charles Emmanuel von Warnery.[13] This evolution was based on the Prussian cavalry model and has been acknowledged by both contemporary authors and by modern historians.

British cavalry at the start of the eighteenth century consisted of heavy cavalry only. This included the Household cavalry (Guards) and the regiments of Horse and Dragoons. In the 1740s, some Horse regiments were converted to Dragoons and became Dragoon Guards. The British adoption of light cavalry was late but rapidly became effective. In 1777, Robert Hinde of the 21st Light Dragoons wrote that the original light horse regiment raised in 1745 was based "upon an entire new plan, to imitate the Hussars in foreign service," and George Elliott, colonel of the 15th Hussars, always praised Warnery's ideas. The *London Evening Post* of March 15, 1759, reported: "We hear that the Prussian Hussar officer and three privates, that are here, are come over in order to discipline a regiment of Light Horse going to be raised."[14]

George Paget, the Marquess of Anglesey, in his history of the British cavalry, wrote "the Prussian Cavalry, under Seydlitz and Zieten, and especially Zieten's incomparable 'Death's Head' Hussars, soon became the model of the world" and that "the men and horses thus raised were trained and equipped to perform the sort of duties which were later carried out by every regiment, but which till then, had been the preserve of irregular horse, modeled upon the Hungarian Hussars." John Fortescue described the first British light horse as an "imitation of the Hussars of foreign countries."[15]

One light cavalry regiment was introduced during the Jacobite Rebellion in 1745, then disbanded, but reformed for the War of Austrian Succession, only to be disbanded again. In 1759, during the Seven Years' War, one light troop was added to each heavy regiment, and these served together as a brigade, but shortly after, seven regiments of light dragoons were formed. Only the 15th and 16th Light Dragoons saw actual service during the Seven Years' War. At the Battle of Emsdorf in 1760, the 15th Light Dragoons routed the French in their first real action. Their success was so complete and admired that all the other light dragoon regiments emulated their tactics in their training, to the detriment of the original "dragoon" or light cavalry roles.[16]

Other Nations

France

French cavalry was not considered to

Cavalry in Action at the Battle of Zorndorf, where the Prussians defeated the Russians, Aug. 25, 1758. *(Painting by Emil Husten, 1858)*

be effective for a variety of reasons. French cavalry tended to charge slowly, often with the infantry, to protect it from being exploited. There was also risk aversion among French officers. While the speed of the French cavalry gradually increased throughout the Seven Years' War, it was hampered by ineffective reconnaissance and scouting. France's hussars were not particularly effective, and there was no central cavalry doctrine, with each regimental colonel responsible for training as he saw fit. Warnery felt that France was not a fertile ground for experience with cavalry based partly on the fact that they relied heavily on other countries for the supply of horses.[17]

The French employed legions, a mixed force of cavalry and light infantry intended to operate independently. The practice was not original; such units existed as far back as the Roman legion and were advocated by tactical expert Marshal Maurice de Saxe in *Mes Reveries* in 1732. In Saxe's model, light infantry troops and cavalry would act together to provide a flexible force that could carry out any assignment. Light infantry would add speed and an increased rate of fire, with cavalry available to pursue a defeated enemy. Other countries followed the French example. Mihaly Lajos Jeney, a Hungarian who held the rank of general in the Holy Roman Empire's Reichsarmee and authored an influential work on partisan operations, also suggested grouping cavalry with infantry to be employed in light actions, including capturing posts and performing ambuscades. Cavalry in these formations were also useful to cover retreats. During the Seven Years' War, Prussia employed "freikorps" with varying degrees of success. Most notable was the Free Corps Kleist, formed under Friedrich Wilhelm von Kleist, a hussar general. This unit grew around an initial squadron of hussars commanded by Michael Kovats and grew to include infantry and mounted artillery. The Corps conducted raids and manned outposts. Austrian hussar general Andras Hadik credited Frederick the Great's superiority in the number of and use of these light troops for providing a significant advantage later in the war. George Washington, who was familiar with both Saxe and Jeney, saw the advantage in using legions, not the least of which was added security for the cavalry when detached from the army.[18] Revolutionary-era legions were the forebears of today's combined arms forces.

Hussars Attacking a Baggage Wagon. One function of these light cavalry units was to harass the enemy's rear and supply lines. *(Painting by David Morier, c. 1755-1770)*

Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth

Polish cavalry of the seventeenth century was dominated by the Winged Hussars, who functioned as heavy cavalry, and were equipped with lances. However, by the early eighteenth century, most observers felt that the Polish Hussars were only good for the charge, and in fact, through the eighteenth century the quality of these hussars diminished. While they fought in the Great Northern War from 1700 to 1721, they did not see action again until the First Partition of Poland in 1772.[19]

Russia and the Holy Roman Empire

Cavalry forces of Russia and the Holy Roman Empire confronted the Prussians in the Seven Years' War, and while the superiority of Frederick's cavalry in doctrine, training, and equipment was proven, these two opponents influenced Prussian thinking and thus helped shape cavalry doctrine in the Revolutionary War. Prior to mid-eighteenth-century reforms, Russian cavalry consisted mostly of dragoons, thought to be most effective for the terrain and adversaries that the Russians faced in Eastern Europe. Russian cavalry relied heavily on firepower, but the value of cuirassiers was eventually realized, and a more rapid charge was adopted. Hussar regiments were gradually introduced, though the Russians relied heavily on Cossack horse, irregular light cavalry from the Russian border with the Ottoman Empire, to perform light duties. Cossacks were difficult to control, but the enemy's fear of Cossacks could be an effective propaganda tool. Like their European counterparts, Russian hussars were expected to perform heavy cavalry tactics.[20] Although defeated by the Prussians at Zorndorf in 1758, a year later a Russian-Austrian force defeated Frederick in the Battle of Kunersdorf in large measure because of the improvement in their cavalry.

The Reichsarmee of the Holy Roman Empire was cobbled together from the Empire's many constituent stateConsequently, the army was inadequately trained, poorly coordinated, there was no requirement for standardization, and there were no joint drills. Some regiments from the larger member states functioned well, but many were assembled from soldiers from several smaller states. Even when entire regiments were supplied, there was no guarantee that they were the best of that member state's troops. Often, it was more profitable for the leader of a member state to hire the better troops out to the Austrians or French rather than contribute them to the Reichsarmee. The result was predictable. Duffy writes: "Many of the troopers had never ridden a horse before they went off to war, let alone undergone any military schooling, and the wonder is that they performed as well as they did." One observer remarked

that the courage of the troops was undermined by the poor quality of the Reichsarmee's cavalry officers, noting that "in the time it takes for one of their squadrons to form up the Prussians will have covered a league."[21] In 1757, the Empire's forces fought alongside the French at Rossbach and were badly defeated by the Prussians.

Dissemination of Knowledge and Experience

Eighteenth-Century Cavalry Literature and Doctrine

In addition to the military experience of some American officers in the French and Indian War, there was ample contemporary military literature in the eighteenth century for Revolutionary War leaders to draw from, including French and British sources. In most of these, only small sections directly referenced cavalry, and many were written by infantry officers without direct cavalry experience, so that in most cases they did not reflect Prussian changes in cavalry practice.[22]

The 1770s brought a wave of literature about cavalry. These included Augustin Mottin de la Balme's *Essais sur L'equitation, ou Principles Raisonnes sur L'art de Monter et de Dresser les Chevaux* from 1773, followed by his *Elements de Tactique pour la Cavalerie*, in 1776; Louis Drummond's Traite' sur la Cavalerie, also in 1776; *The Discipline of the Light Horse*, 1778, by Captain Robert Hinde; and *Remarques sur la Cavalerie* by the Polish (and ex-Prussian) cavalry general Charles Emmanuel von Warnery in 1781.

American generals George Washington and Nathanael Greene were familiar with the work of Frederick the Great. Washington owned the book Prussian Evolutions in Actual Engagements by Thomas Hanson from 1775, written for the Continental Army as an adaptation of the Prussian drill. The only specific cavalry text that Washington owned was Drummond's *Traite' sur la Cavalerie*; Drummond was a Scot who served in the French army, but neither Hanson nor Drummond were widely owned by British officers.

Another interesting text owned by Washington was the English translation of Jeney's The Partisan, written in 1760. Jeney, as stated above, advocated the use of independent forces consisting of cavalry, infantry and artillery combined, which strongly influenced Washington in his decision to create legionary corps like those used by the French.[23]

Given the influence of the Prussian cavalry on European cavalry doctrine, it is not surprising that the most significant Prussian source was the 1757 translation of the *Regulations for the Prussian Cavalry*. This was one of the books most widely owned by British officers and Hessian officer Johann Ewald wrote in his diary of the American War that among American prisoners "the *Instructions* of the great Frederick to his generals I have found more than one hundred times." Ewald also found many other standard texts among captured American officers, including Jeney.[24]

These books were widely owned and available, but did they influence practice? In his study of books owned by British officers at the time of the Revolution, Ira Gruber asserts that they definitely did.[25]

European Officers in North America

Several experienced European cavalry officers served with the American cavalry. Foremost among them was Casimir Pulaski of Poland. He commanded mixed cavalry and infantry during the War of the Bar Confederation (1768-1771) and came highly recommended by Benjamin Franklin and the Marquis de Lafayette. Appointed commander of the American cavalry, he drafted regulations (which have never been found) that were similar to the Prussian. He emphasized increased training and augmenting the officer corps with men who had prior cavalry experience. He also recommended using mounted militia infantry to fill the light cavalry role.[26] Pulaski suffered a mortal wound in the failed assault on Savannah, Georgia, in October 1779.

Hungarian hussar officer Michael Kovats de Fabricy, who had served in both the Austrian and Prussian armies, was appointed the "master of exercise" in the Continental cavalry for a brief period. He then joined Pulaski's independent legion and was killed in May 1779.

Former French officer Augustin Mottin de la Balme was appointed Inspector General of Continental cavalry in 1777, but his role was diminished upon the arrival of Pulaski. La Balme resigned out of resentment at having to serve under Pulaski, who he felt was much less experienced than himself. Other French officers include Charles Armand Tuffin (Marquis de la Rouerie), Francois-Louis Teissedre (Marquis de Fleury), and Pierre-Francois Vernier, all of whom served under Pulaski.

Several mid-eighteenth-century British cavalry officers served in the American Revolution. Generals William Erskine (15th Light Dragoons), William Harcourt and John Burgoyne (both of the 16th Light Dragoons) served with distinction in the American War. General George Preston of the 17th Light Dragoons had served in the British cavalry since the Seven Years' War. Finally, Banastre Tarleton, who first bought a commission in the 1st Dragoon Guards in 1775, became famous commanding cavalry and mixed forces during the Revolution.

Prussian Cavalry Charge at the Battle of Rossbach, Nov. 5, 1757. *(Artist unknown.)*

Conclusion

All the features of eighteenth-century cavalry were present to varying degrees throughout Europe. Heavy and light units were a feature of nearly every nation's army and cross pollination of ideas was the norm. Some of the best features were combined in new ways: the speed and maneuverability of the hussar was combined with an increasing speed of the charge resulting in much more effective shock action. The increasing dominance of the light dragoon model, which became pervasive in the Continental Army, would embody this combination, though perhaps not by design. Even with the increased use and efficiency of firearms, the cavalry of the eighteenth century held fast to the use of the sword. Many of these issues were worked out in real time on the battlefields of Europe and provided a wealth of experience and examples for the leaders of the Continental Army to draw upon.

In the next article in this series, we will look at some early applications of European cavalry principles in North America during the French and Indian War. Ed.

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The Battle of Kunersdorf, Aug. 1, 1759, Where Russian Cavalry Played a Key Role in the Russian and Austrian Victory over Frederick's Prussians. *(Painting by Alexander von Kotzebue, 1848)*

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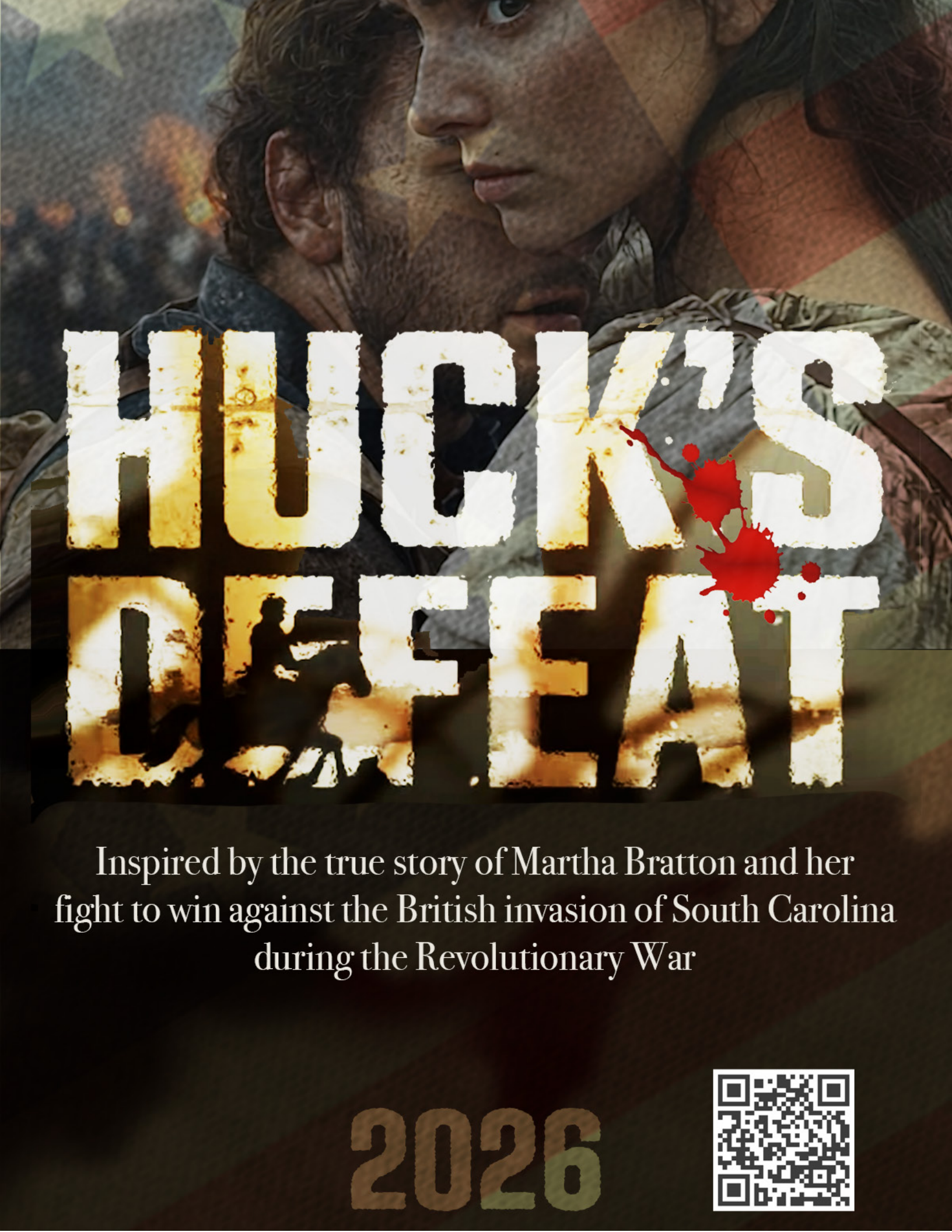

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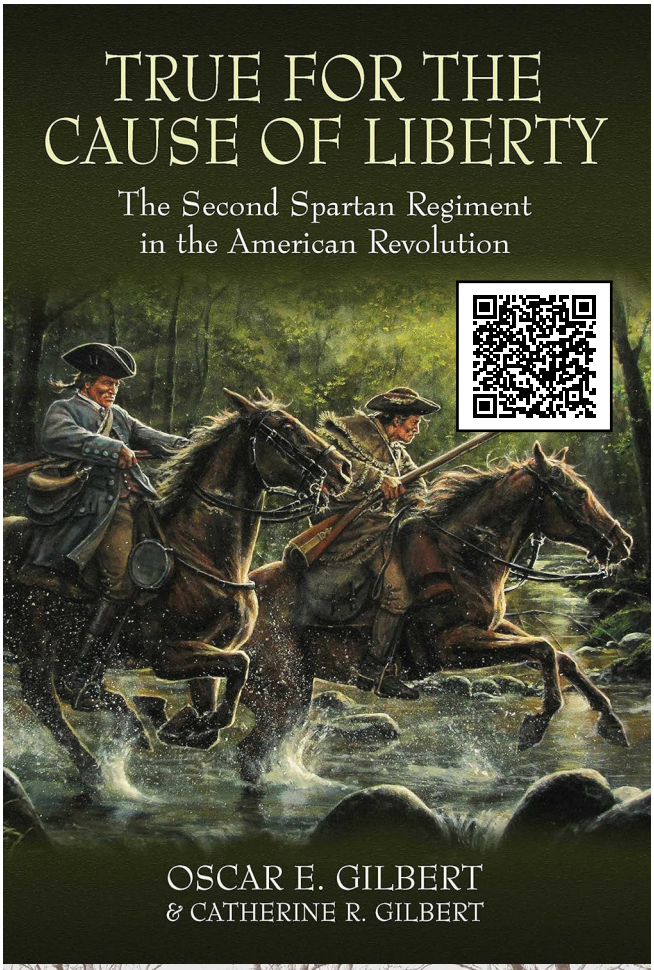

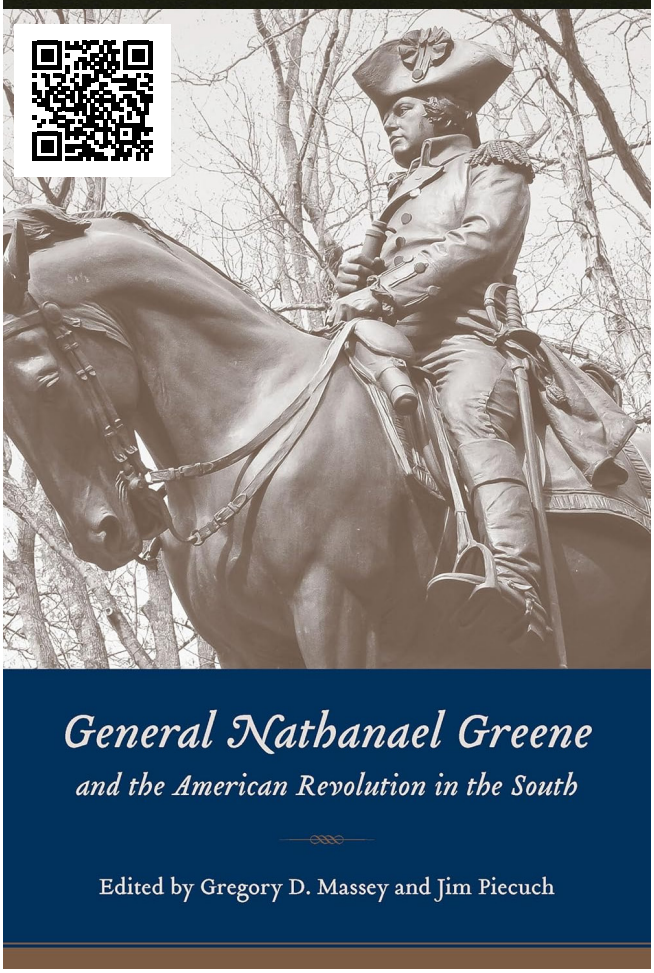

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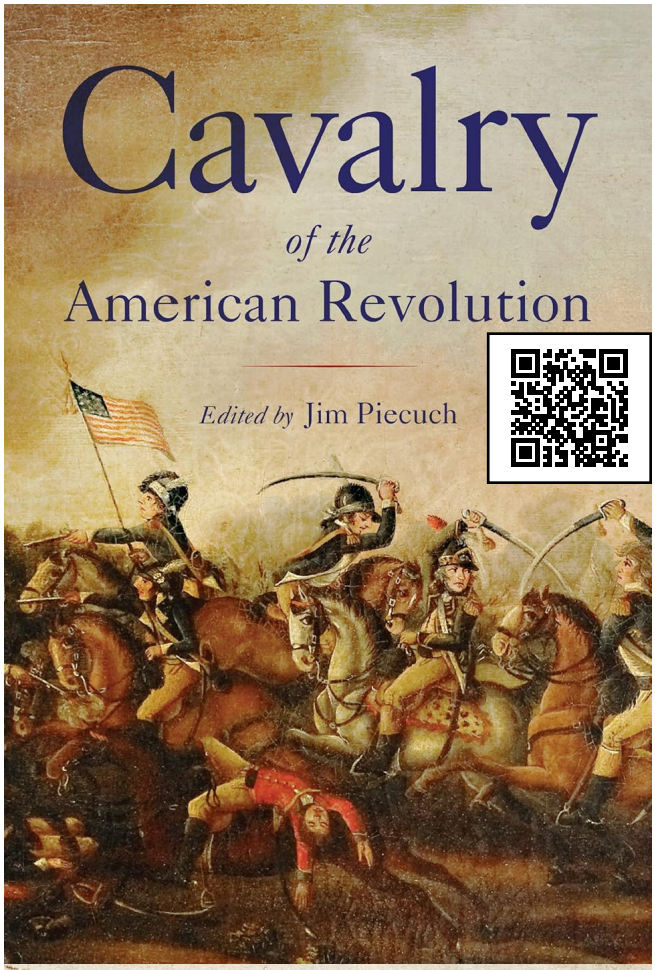

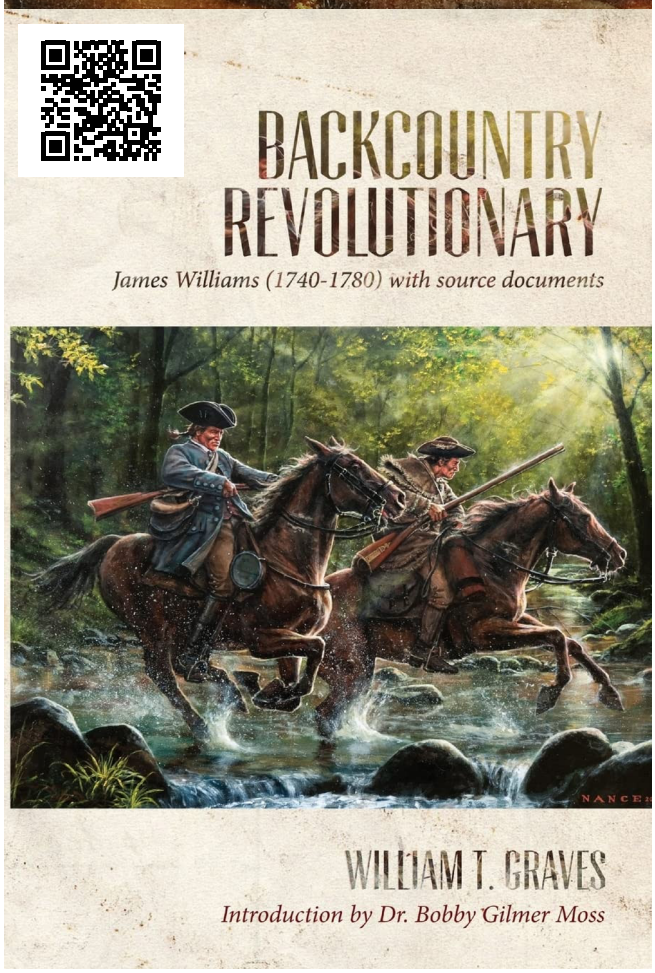

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