

# *Southern Campaigns of the American Revolution* The JOURNAL

JULY 2026 | VOL. 26 NO. 7

**EXTRA! EXTRA!**

**Southern Round Table  
Postponed**

*Read all about it!*

**INSIDE:**

**Thomas Sumter at Rocky  
Mount and Hanging Rock**

C. Leon Harris

*A publication of*





# The Journal

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*Some editorial illustrations in this issue were created with generative AI and subsequently altered through extensive digital editing. These images are intended to evoke historical settings and should not be interpreted as exact visual reconstructions.*

## About Us

### For the People

SCART is on a mission to preserve, protect and promote (in perpetuity) the stories, artifacts and history of South Carolina's role in the American Revolution. South Carolina changed the world. The Trust's collections highlight the pivotal times, places and people that helped us win our independence and catalyze over 250 years of change.

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# From the Editor

## *Bringing the Revolution Home*

\* \* \*

This summer, the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the American Revolution is being commemorated through ceremonies, lectures, battlefield programs, living-history demonstrations, and reenactments across South Carolina. These events remind us that the Revolution was not confined to Boston, Philadelphia, Yorktown, or the other familiar places found in our schoolbooks. The struggle for American independence also came directly into the Carolina Backcountry, where neighbors chose sides, families were divided, and ordinary men and women were called upon to perform extraordinary deeds.

Two upcoming events will help bring that history to life in the very communities where they happened.

On Saturday, July 18, the Battle of Cedar Springs Reenactment will be held from 10:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m. at Cedar Spring Baptist Church, 140 Cedar Springs Place in Spartanburg. This free, rain-or-shine program invites visitors to “Free Your Inner Spartan” while learning about the Revolutionary War events that gave Spartanburg its name.

The Cedar Springs program will feature a reenactment of the battle, rifle and musket demonstrations, period music, living-history displays, and opportunities to meet the militia. A mounted portrayal of Jane Black Thomas will recall her courageous warning ride, while interpreters will explain the role of the Spartan Regiment and place Cedar Springs within the larger struggle for control of the South Carolina Backcountry. Visitors will not simply hear names and dates. They will see the clothing, weapons, equipment, and tactics of the period and encounter the personal stories of the people who lived through the conflict.

One week later, on Saturday, July 25, Liberation Day will be observed at Fort Thicketty from 10:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m. at 184 Goucher Creek Road near Gaffney. The program commemorates the Patriot capture of the Loyalist stronghold in July 1780—one of the most remarkable episodes of the Southern Campaign.

At dawn on July 26, 1780, approximately six hundred Patriot militiamen under Colonel Isaac Shelby surrounded the fortified Loyalist position. Captain William Cocks approached beneath a white flag and demanded its surrender. The fort’s commander, Patrick Moore, eventually capitulated without a shot being fired. The Patriots captured the garrison, its weapons, and its



*Richard C. Meehan, Jr.*

supplies without suffering the bloodshed that so often accompanied the bitter civil war in the Backcountry.

Liberation Day allows visitors to walk the historic ground, see the reconstructed fortification, meet interpreters in period clothing, and learn how Fort Thicketty formed part of the chain of events leading toward Kings Mountain and Cowpens. Like Cedar Springs, the program places local people and local places within the larger story of American independence.

These gatherings are celebrations, but they serve a purpose far greater than entertainment.

History disappears when it is separated from the places where it happened. A battlefield becomes an empty field. A fort becomes a collection of weathered logs. A name such as Cedar Springs, Thicketty, Shelby, Thomas, or McJunkin becomes little more than a line in a book. Living-history events restore the human dimension. They allow a child to hear the crack of a flintlock, watch a rider gallop in with an urgent warning, speak with a militiaman, or stand before a fort and imagine what it meant to face an enemy from the other side of the palisade.

That experience can awaken a curiosity that no textbook alone can provide.

Reenactments and commemorations also create communities of preservation. They bring together historians, museums, churches, patriotic organizations, reenactors, musicians, volunteers, donors, and families. Each contributes something different, but all share the understanding that our heritage will survive only when people consider it worth protecting.

The 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary gives us a rare opportunity.



For several years, public attention will be focused on the founding of the United States and the people who struggled to create it. We must use that opportunity not merely to remember the famous figures of the Revolution, but also to recover the stories of the farmers, tradesmen, women, children, Native Americans, enslaved people, Loyalists, Patriots, soldiers, and civilians whose lives were transformed by the war.

Here in the Backcountry, the Revolution was intensely personal. It arrived at church doors, family farms, river crossings, ironworks, and neighborhood forts. Men who had hunted, worshipped, traded, and worked together sometimes found themselves facing one another across a battlefield. Women maintained farms and families, carried intelligence, protected property, and occasionally risked their lives to warn the militia. The consequences of every victory and defeat were felt in nearby homes.

Cedar Springs and Fort Thicketty preserve two chapters of that larger story. By attending these events, bringing children and grandchildren, supporting the sponsoring organizations, and sharing what we learn, we help ensure that these places and their stories will

not be forgotten after the anniversary has passed.

The 250<sup>th</sup> commemoration should be more than a birthday celebration. It should be a renewed commitment to stewardship. Our responsibility is not simply to honor the past, but to preserve the evidence of that past and pass its meaning to those who will come after us.

I hope our readers will join us at Cedar Springs on July 18 and at Fort Thicketty on July 25. Come walk the historic ground. Meet the interpreters and reenactors. Listen to the stories. Bring your family. Most importantly, remember that the history of the American Revolution is not something distant from us.

It happened here.

Richard C. Meehan, Jr.  
Editor



# 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.

**Wesley O. Herndon**

Executive Director

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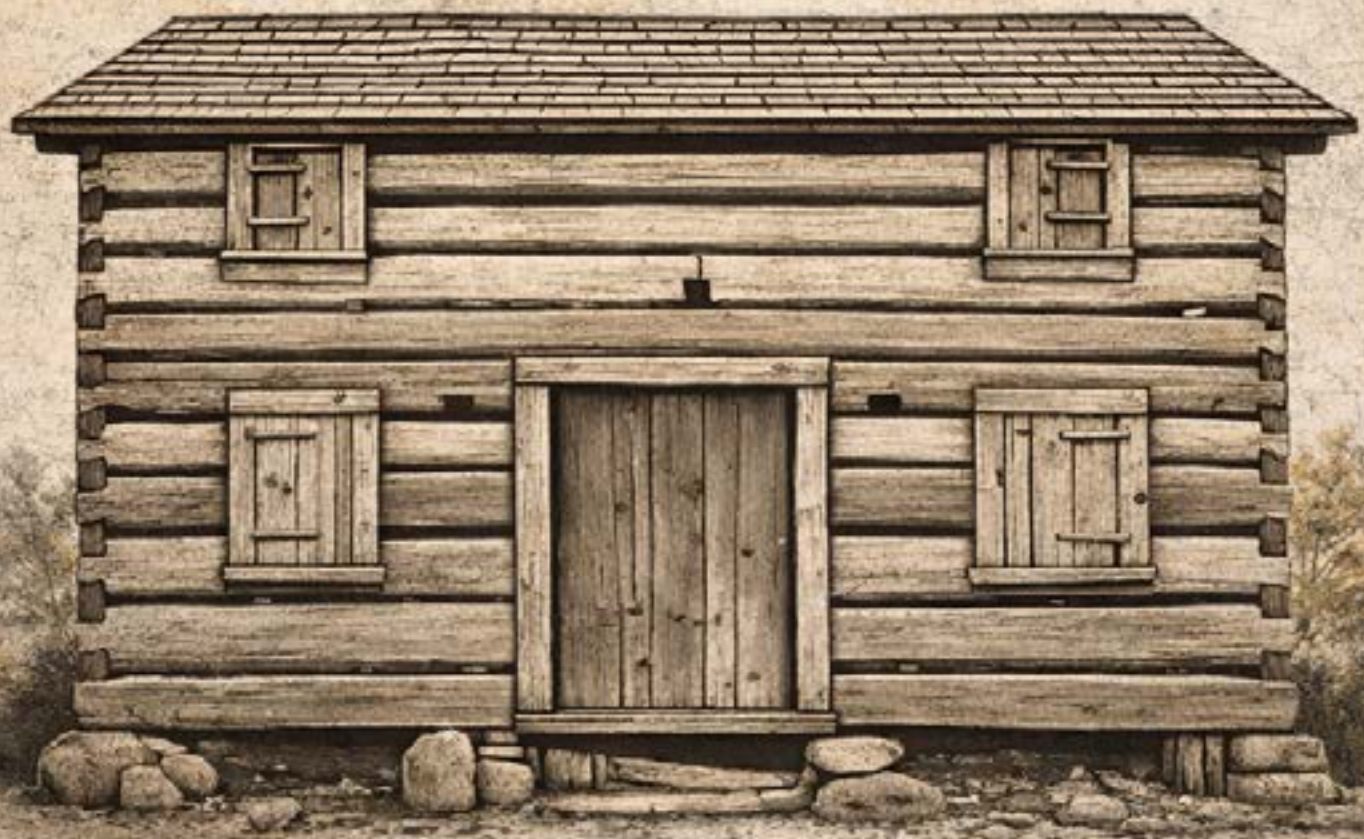
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# LIBERATION DAY AT FORT THICKETTY

184 Goucher Creek Road • Gaffney, SC 29340

July 25 • 10:00 AM – 2:00 PM



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The past few days witnessed many celebrations of the Declaration of Independence, and few Americans would now question the wisdom embodied in that document. Its chief author, Thomas Jefferson, however, must have worried about how it would be received. South Carolina's Congressional delegates opposed it even as British warships bore down upon Charleston. A committee had deleted Jefferson's condemnation of the King for imposing slavery ("a cruel war against human nature itself"), but it allowed "all men are created equal" to remain in the declaration. Would those words from a slave-owner elicit disbelief or even ridicule when read in public? Would frontiersmen laugh at the notion that even Indians had the "unalienable" right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness? The response of soldiers in the field was especially crucial. Jefferson hoped his words would invigorate the fight against tyranny, but there was a chance they might instead convince the troops that the revolution was merely the dream of moonstruck idealists.

Express riders rushed copies of the Declaration of Independence to troops in the field, and in late July one reached the northwest corner of South Carolina. Colonel Andrew Williamson with more than a thousand militiamen were there destroying the towns and crops of Cherokees who had allied themselves with the British. Williamson was illiterate, so he had Col. Edward Lacey read the Declaration to him and other officers. They welcomed the news that the provinces had declared themselves independent of Great Britain, but would the rank-and-file be as enthusiastic? Would Williamson's men in the July heat be in the mood

to accept the opinions of an ivory-tower intellectual and wealthy aristocrats enjoying the amenities of Philadelphia? Williamson had his men gather around to hear Lacey read the document. Seventy-one years later Robert Wilson recalled the event in his pension application, misremembering it as having occurred at Altamaha River in Georgia, but capturing the feeling of the moment.

*We passed the Altimahaw about the last of July 1776 I distinctly recollect that on reaching the far Bank of that river, a horseman made his appearance on the bank and manifested a wish to reach us. Suposing him to be an express he was sent for and on reaching the army he deliverd to Gen'l Williamson dispatches containing the Declaration of Independance Gen'l. Williamson called upon Capt Lacey to open the dispatches, who done so and on discovering the contents Capt Lacey raised up both hand and exclaimed Thank God for this. He then read the Declaration to the officers who were about him. Gen'l. Williamson wished it read to the army to effect which the Army was formed in a Hollow Square, and to give Capt Lacey a better chance to be heard by the whole Army Gen'l Twiggs [Col. John Twiggs] brought up a gentle horse and held the same while Capt Lacey stood up on the saddle and read the Declaration of Independance to the whole army at the conclusion of which there was much firing of arms and rejoicing.<sup>1</sup>*



1 Transcribed by Will Graves at <https://revwarapps.org/w2302.pdf>.



# Huzzah! Huzzah!



John Allison (left), David Reuwer (right)

## Bad news and good news from Southern Campaigns of the American Revolution.

- ★ John Allison has been ill for several weeks and is currently recovering.
- ★ The bad news is that we will postpone the SCAR Roundtable on August 1st to early September.
- ★ Stand by for a rescheduled SCAR Roundtable.
- ★ God bless this fine country! We will prevail. July 4th was only a beginning!

~ John Allison and David Reuwer





# NEW SCART INTERNS TO HELP WITH THE

## Olivia Hipp



Olivia Hipp was born and raised in Rock Hill, South Carolina. She discovered her love of history during her junior year of high school after taking IB U.S. History with Mr. Young, when the class shifted from memorization to research, discovery, and writing. She decided to make history her career in college and received her B.A. in History and Global Studies, with a minor in Mass Communications, from the University of South Carolina Honors College in 2024. During her undergraduate studies, she served on the Carolina Judicial Council for four years. She also specialized in historical GIS, working as a research assistant on Dr. S. Wright Kennedy's research. For this project, she transcribed and mapped early 20th-century fire logs from New Orleans. Olivia continues to work with historical GIS and is currently engaged in a project exploring the lumber industry in Sumter, South Carolina.

After undergrad, she interned with the National Council for Preservation Education and the National Park Service in Charleston, where she researched the Women's Army Corps regiment stationed at Fort

Moultrie during World War II. She also worked as an interpreter at Drayton Hall, a plantation site in Charleston, leading tours of the site's history. These experiences strengthened her resolve to enter the public history field.

Now, Olivia is pursuing her M.A. in Public History at the University of South Carolina and plans to graduate in May 2027. This past November, she began an internship with the South Carolina American Revolution Trust (SCART). The Trust's mission is to preserve, protect, and promote (into perpetuity) the stories, artifacts, and history of South Carolina's role in the American Revolution. While at SCART, Olivia has served as an ambassador, assisted with events, set up the organization's collection management software, and begun cataloging SCART's library collections. She is also an intern at the Orange County Regional History Center, where she creates audio logs for oral history interviews that document the history of Central Florida. Olivia is excited to partner with the SCAR Journal to tell important stories from the American Revolution and to highlight SCART's growing collections!



# THE MUSEUM'S GROWING COLLECTIONS



## Effie Copeland

Effie Copeland hails from the tiny town of Lamar, South Carolina. In sixth grade, thanks to Mrs. Hamilton, she saw history come alive and realized that ordinary people have always been interesting. She firmly believes that once others realize this, they will love history, too. Effie earned a B.A. in History with a minor in Social Science from Southern Wesleyan University in 2024. While there, she was inducted into the Alpha Chi National Honor Society during her junior year. Currently, Effie is pursuing a Master of Library and Information Science at the University of South Carolina, with plans to graduate in December 2026. She is also a member of the Library and Information Science Student Association (LISSA).

In her professional career, Effie has worked across all library sectors. During undergrad, she worked in the Claude R. Rickman Library at Southern Wesleyan and assisted in the Faith Clayton Genealogy Room. Before graduation, she completed an internship at the Camden Archives and Museum, where she led a project to catalog a previously backlogged photograph collection. During the Spring 2026 semester, Effie worked as a graduate assistant at the University of South Carolina's

McKissick Museum, assisting with the safe transfer and preservation of the museum's entire collection. Throughout these experiences, Effie has continued to serve at her local public library. She finds great joy in interacting directly with her community and building her skill set in the public-facing facet of her career. Most recently, Effie began an internship with the South Carolina American Revolution Trust. At SCART, she has worked on cataloging collections, assisted with the development and execution of events, and serves as an ambassador to preserve, protect, promote, and perpetuate South Carolina's American Revolution history.

Effie is also working on a comprehensive history of a local church. During this process, she has compiled oral history interviews, church documents, and archival materials to create a chronological narrative of the congregation's history. It is her proudest achievement to date, but she is extremely excited to further hone her research and writing skills in her work with The Journal!



# BATTLE OF CEDAR SPRINGS

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RAIN OR SHINE



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# L O Y A L I S T THE



by  
Paul Wood



## The Second-Most Reviled Southern Loyalist

I watch too many “best of” YouTube videos. “Best rock guitar solos,” “best-ever rock drummers,” “most overlooked rock bands of the 60s.” You get the picture. Before you say, “Get a life, Paul,” let’s turn our attention much further back in time to the most-hated southern Loyalists. Not Brits such as Tarleton, but homegrown southerners who fought for King George III. South Carolina’s William Bloody Bill Cunningham belongs at the top, hands down, no debate. Though many rank David Fanning second, I do not. I offer Daniel McGirt for the number two spot.<sup>1</sup>

July 1, 1784, was a bittersweet day for East Florida Governor Patrick Tonyn. Under the Treaty of Paris, Great Britain was required to return East Florida to Spain. Tonyn had governed the province since 1774 and had welcomed several thousand Tory refugees, mainly from the Carolinas. Now, Tonyn and his citizens had to leave. On July 5, he cautioned his successor, Spanish Governor Vincent Manuel de Zéspedes y Velasco, that two of his citizens, McGirt and John Linder, Jr., were “murderers and assassins.” Probably wanting to start on a conciliatory note, Zéspedes chose not to arrest them.

Six months later, news of marauding prompted Zéspedes to dispatch troops to apprehend McGirt, Cunningham, Stephen Mayfield, Daniel Cargill, and two other men. They were looting silver and other valuables from residents of St. John’s Bluff.<sup>2</sup> In his claim for compensation for losses while living in East Florida, former provincial Chief Justice James Hume stated that in 1784 he lost “Two Coach Horses” to men commanded by McGirt. Former Georgia rice planter and Loyalist refugee Francis Levett sought compensation for several horses stolen by McGirt and Daniel Cargill.<sup>3</sup>

Forty-seven residents of northeast Florida penned a January 1785 letter to their new governor, thanking him for

---

1 His surname was variously spelled McGirtt, McGeart, MacGirth, and McGearth. Today, the name McGuirt is common in Kershaw County, SC, McGirt’s home.

2 Robert Stansbury Lambert, *South Carolina Loyalists in the American Revolution*, 2nd edition, Clemson University Digital Press, 189.

3 Wilbur Henry Siebert, “Loyalists in East Florida 1774 to 1785: The Most Important Documents Pertaining Thereto,” 2, 329; Deland: Florida State Historical Society, 1929.



“Having Secured the Persons of” McGirt and the others, “Who in Defiance of Law have for these many years past, Disturbed this Province, Plundered many of its Inhabitants and Had our Lives and Property instantly at their Mercy, which Rendered our Abode unsafe and Precarious.” The next month, Zéspedes informed his superior, the Viceroy of Spanish America, that McGirt and his fellow prisoners were “desperate men capable of all kinds of wickedness.” Zéspedes described McGirt as the “ostensible chief of the highwaymen.” In every case, contemporary reporters of the banditti’s behavior began their list with McGirt’s name, not Cunningham’s. Both governors contended McGirt and Cunningham were guilty of “capital offenses.” The atrocities the two bandits committed against rebel families during the war continued in East Florida against Loyalist refugees. Whatever integrity McGirt displayed during the war evaporated at war’s end. He no longer demonstrated allegiance to the Loyalist cause, to his fellow Loyalists, or to the laws of the Empire for which he had fought.<sup>4</sup>

McGirt’s criminal ways did not start after the Revolution ended. They commenced no later than 1778.<sup>5</sup> The Camden District resident initially followed his father, James, in service to the rebellion and was a scout. Circumstances unclear to historians convinced the younger man to turn his coat. He traveled to East Florida where Patrick Tonyn commissioned him as a lieutenant colonel in charge of an independent company of rangers.<sup>6</sup> McGirt led assaults on Georgia patriots’ farms and participated in General Augustine Prevost’s 1779 surge to the gates of Charleston. McGirt possessed a flawed reputation before the expedition took him back into his home state. The *South Carolina Gazette’s* July 7, 1779, edition ran a commentary by Dr. E. M. Boykin concerning Prevost’s invaders. “A large body of the most infamous banditti and horse thieves that perhaps ever were collected together anywhere, under the direction of McGirt, a corps of Indians, with Negro and white savages disguised like them, and about 1,500 of the most savage disaffected poor people, seduced from the back settlements of this State and North Carolina.” In their history of Camden, Kirkland and Kennedy wrote that the homegrown McGirt was known for savagery and stealing, especially horses, and was considered an outlaw and bandit.<sup>7</sup>

In 1769, Virginia native Tarleton Brown accompanied his father William and other Brown kin to present-day Allendale County, SC. William Brown acquired property and built a homestead. Having sided with the Whigs, British Redcoats and Provincials posed an immediate threat to the Brown family after the fall of Charleston. Tarleton Brown and several, but not all, family members hurriedly departed. In the relative safety of Virginia, Tarleton learned of “depredations and outrages” committed against the family members who remained behind. Men under Daniel McGirt forded the Savannah River, “taking the course of the river, and killing every man he met who had not sworn allegiance to the King.” McGirt claimed the lives of seventeen rebels, including Tarleton Brown’s father. His mother and sisters fled into the woods.<sup>8</sup>

These narratives prove that McGirt was a remarkably malicious man, and we do well to revile him. Wilbur Henry Siebert provides several accounts of McGirt’s actions as a soldier. In Georgia and South Carolina, he led hundreds of men and fought effectively. But modern list-makers must consider his actions beyond his military duties. Though Bloody Bill’s approximately seventy murders, committed during the 1781 Bloody Scout raid, put him at the top of the most-hated list, McGirt’s behavior in Georgia and South Carolina during the war and in East Florida after the war warrants a number two ranking.

And what of their relationship? Lieutenant Colonel McGirt befriended Major Cunningham when Bloody Bill

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4 For background and references, see my book *Bloody Bill Cunningham: Life and Times of a Revolutionary War Villain*, available for free download at SC250.com.

5 Thomas J. Kirkland and Robert M. Kennedy, *Historic Camden, Colonial and Revolutionary*, Columbia, SC, 1905, 115 and 300, report that McGirt fought as a Tory at the Battle of the Great Cane Brake, December 22, 1775. He avoided capture and “reappeared as a lieutenant colonel of the Florida Rangers.” This seems doubtful as McGirt was known to have started the war on the Patriot side.

6 Jim Piecuch has determined that McGirt did not serve with Col. Thomas Brown. One wonders why Tonyn did not force McGirt to serve under Brown who was developing a reputation as a fierce and effective fighter.

7 Kirkland and Kennedy, 237-305.

8 Captain Tarleton Brown’s memoirs first appeared in 1843. Charles Baxley surmises that Brown’s recollections were “either written by or heavily edited by his grandson Charles Colcock Hay.” Charles B. Baxley, “Memoirs of Tarleton Brown,” *Southern Campaigns of the American Revolution Journal*, November 23, 2020, 1-120.



arrived in East Florida in late 1782. The men had much in common, including their decision to leave the rebel cause. McGirt might have become Cunningham's truest friend. After reading Governor Zéspedes' 1785 description of McGirt and Cunningham, the Spanish viceroy banished them from Spanish territory and had them put aboard a ship bound for Nassau in the Bahamas. Interestingly, the partners in crime convinced the ship's captain to return them to East Florida. Once recaptured and successfully taken to Nassau, they settled among some of the people they had afflicted in East Florida. Cunningham's will corroborates the allegiance between the two. McGirt witnessed the document. At her death, Cunningham's widow, Mary Collins Cunningham, split her possessions among three people. One was an aunt, Mary McGrill. The transcriber of the will offers McGirt as an alternative spelling. It would seem Bloody Bill married a member of Daniel McGirt's family.



*Daniel McGirt and mounted Loyalist raiders at a backcountry homestead. Editorial illustration created with generative AI and digitally edited. It is not an exact reconstruction.*

Southern Campaigns *of the*  
**AMERICAN  
REVOLUTION**

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by  
Kim Stacy

## Unusual Deaths Amongst Us

### Suicide Interrupts

Yesterday morning the following remarkable and unhappy circumstance of suicide happened. Captain E\_\_\_\_\_ of Holles Street, Cavendish Square, (as is supposed in a fit of insanity) drew a pair of pistols from his pocket, and shot himself in the head, but finding he did not instantly expire, he drew his sword and fell upon it, which struck against a bone and broke. His groans alarmed his footman, who in vain attempted to force open the door of the room, but was obliged to get in at the window and alarm the house; a surgeon who lived next door was sent for, who drew the part of the broken sword from the wound, dressed him, and put him to bed, and left him in a seeming composure; but as soon as he found himself alone, he took a large knife and stabbed himself, and, strange as it appears, the blade of the knife broke; the surgeon again dresses those wounds, and after a time he was left as before. He then got to his pocket, took out a pen knife, cut his throat,

and died. The above gentleman was lately married to an amiable young lady with a large fortune and had an estate of 3000 Pounds per annum. No reason is assigned for the above rash act.

London.

Nova-Scotia Gazette and the Weekly Chronicle,  
Tuesday, August 10, 1779

### Death by Ramrod

A Brief narrative of the ravages of the British and Hessians at Princeton in 1776-1777; a contemporary account of the battles of Trenton and Princeton, edited by Varnum Lansing Collins ... Princeton, N.J., The University Library, 1906. <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc2.ark:/13960/t0wp9v536>

On the first day of January 1777 some Regular Soldiers came along the main road from over Stoney Brook one of them was very Strangely Wounded for he was shot with an Iron Gun rammer in Stead of a bullet, Which entered under his chin and came out again at his nose near his eyes one end of it, and the other end lapt round his thigh (as it is said) Whether he was a Horsman or not I Know not, but it is very likely he was, and riding up to his Enemy before he done charging, and perceiving that he was like to be shot with the Rammer, leand back on his horse to avoid it, and so received his wound in that manner, as to the Other end lapping round his thigh, one end being Stopped, and the other end being heavy would continue its force until it met with something to stop it, and happened to meet with his thigh. He Languished a few days and Dyed. I Remember when we first had the news which was the same day it was said That the Regulars said that the Rebels were so Dam'd cowardly that they shot their gun Sticks at them, and run away.





# Huzzah! Huzzah!



## Bad news and good news from Southern Campaigns of the American Revolution.

- ★ John Allison has been ill for several weeks and is currently recovering.
- ★ The bad news is that we will postpone the **SCAR Roundtable on August 1st to early September.**
- ★ Stand by for a rescheduled SCAR Roundtable.
- ★ God bless this fine country! We will prevail. July 4th was only a beginning!

*~ John Allison and David Rewer*





# General Thomas Sumter at Rocky Mount and Hanging Rock, South Carolina: A Great Victory Rarely Recognized

by

C. Leon Harris

For South Carolina Patriots the hottest days of 1780 were also the darkest. The British had captured Charleston on May 12, along with virtually the entire Continental Army of the South. Most Patriot militiamen had been sent home on parole — a pledge not to interfere in British operations, violation of which was punishable by a noose. A chain of British outposts also formed a noose around the entire state, preventing any further attempts at rebellion — or so the British thought. On July 31, 1780, five hundred Carolinians led by Thomas Sumter attempted to capture the British post on Rocky Mount, while Major William Richardson Davie led a diversionary attack on the outpost in the area called Hanging Rock. (Fig. 1) One week later, Sumter successfully attacked the



Figure 1. Hanging Rock, for which the surrounding area was named. The monument reads, “Here was fought the Battle of the Hanging Rock,” but the battle was actually fought more than half a mile west.

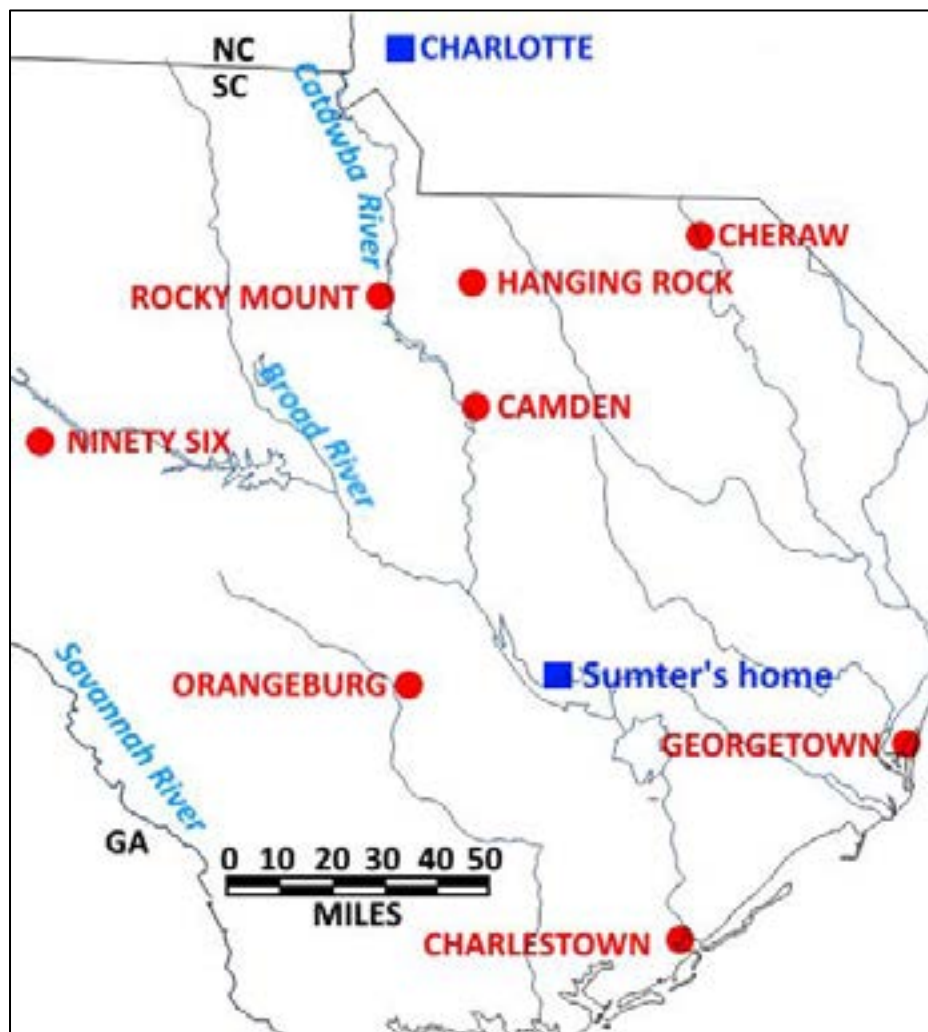


Hanging Rock post. Sumter's victory was soon overshadowed by British victories, but it proved that the British posts were not impregnable.<sup>1</sup>

### Cornwallis's Tenuous Grip on South Carolina

The British outpost at Hanging Rock was one of several established soon after Gen. Sir Henry Clinton's successful siege of Charleston.<sup>2</sup> (Fig. 2) Clinton was so confident that these outposts would secure the British grip on South Carolina that he soon returned to New York, leaving Gen. Charles, Lord Cornwallis in charge.

The outposts were too far apart for mutual support and depended on supply lines exposed to attack, but they might have been sufficient if not for two fatal flaws in British tactics. The first was a confusing proclamation



**Figure 2. British posts in South Carolina in the summer of 1780. In this and other maps in this paper, north is toward the top.**

<sup>1</sup> This paper is adapted from one published previously. C. Leon Harris, "Thomas Sumter at Rocky Mount and Hanging Rock, South Carolina: 'A Great Victory Scarcely Ever Heard Of'" (academia.edu, 2024), [https://www.academia.edu/116805346/Thomas\\_Sumter\\_at\\_Rocky\\_Mount\\_and\\_Hanging\\_Rock\\_South\\_Carolina\\_A\\_Great\\_Victory\\_Sc](https://www.academia.edu/116805346/Thomas_Sumter_at_Rocky_Mount_and_Hanging_Rock_South_Carolina_A_Great_Victory_Scarcely_Ever_Heard_Of)

<sup>2</sup> For concise descriptions of the surrender of Charleston and other actions mentioned in this paper, see the following: Patrick O'Kelley, *Nothing but Blood and Slaughter* Vols. 2 and 3. (Lillington, NC: Booklocker.com, 2004, 2005); John C. Parker, Jr., *Parker's Guide to the Revolutionary War in South Carolina*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Columbia, SC: Harrelson Press, 2022); and J. D. Lewis, carolana.com. [https://www.carolana.com/SC/Revolution/SC\\_Revolutionary\\_War\\_Known\\_Battles\\_Skirmishes.htm](https://www.carolana.com/SC/Revolution/SC_Revolutionary_War_Known_Battles_Skirmishes.htm). There are two 20<sup>th</sup> century standard biographies of Sumter: Anne King Gregorie, *Thomas Sumter* (Columbia, SC: R. L. Bryan Co., 1931), and Robert D. Bass, *Gamecock: The Life and Campaigns of Thomas Sumter* (Orangeburg, SC: Sandlapper, 1961).



by Clinton on June 3, 1780, that was interpreted by both sides as revoking paroles and compelling militiamen to fight on the side of the British against their former comrades. Many chose instead to return to the Patriot cause. In the words of British Lieutenant Colonel Francis, Lord Rawdon

*That unfortunate proclamation of the 3rd of June has had very unfavorable consequences. The majority of the inhabitants in the frontier districts, tho' ill disposed to us, from circumstances were not actually in arms against us. They were therefore freed from the paroles [by Clinton's proclamation] ... and nine out of ten of them are now embodied on the part of the rebels.*<sup>3</sup>

The second flaw was brutal treatment of Patriots by their Loyalist neighbors, militias, and provincial troops (Americans trained and equipped like British regulars). Among the provincials was the British Legion under Lt. Col. Banastre Tarleton. On May 29, 1780, at Waxhaws, nine miles north of Hanging Rock, they “cut to pieces” Virginia Continental soldiers under Col. Abraham Buford who were surrendering. The massacre at Waxhaws moved many Patriots to respond in kind with the rallying cry, “Buford’s play!”

A few days after the massacre at Waxhaws, forty-six-year-old Sumter returned to active military duty after being retired for two years. Sumter had previously had a respectable but not extraordinary service as aide-de-camp in the Snow Campaign of December 1775 and colonel of a rifle regiment in the Cherokee campaign of 1776. His regiment became part of the Continental Line in 1776, but by then there was little fighting to be done in South Carolina for the next three years. He was elected to the Provincial Congress, which later became the General Assembly. In 1778 he resigned his commission as colonel in order to attend to private affairs, and he took no part in the defense of Charleston in the spring of 1780.

By late spring of 1780, Sumter was at Tuckasegee Ford on the Catawba River 10 miles west of Charlotte, where he joined many other refugees from South Carolina. Although referred to as militiamen, they were not ordered into service, and they did not expect to be paid except by plunder. They used their own arms and horses and dressed in hunting clothes rather than uniforms. These volunteers were soon joined by North Carolina militiamen fresh from a victory at Ramsour’s Mill on June 20. Sumter moved his headquarters to Clems Branch 14 miles south of Charlotte on land of Catawba Indian allies. There the volunteers elected him “general,”<sup>4</sup> but he was not formally commissioned a general of South Carolina militia until two months later.

On June 30, Cornwallis boasted to Clinton that “a detachment of dragoons and militia from Lt Colonel Turnbull put an end to all resistance in South Carolina.”<sup>5</sup> It did not take long for Sumter and others to prove Cornwallis wrong. On July 15 Cornwallis had to inform Clinton that three days earlier Lt. Col. George Turnbull had sent a detachment of Tarleton’s Legion and militia under Capt. Christian Huck to drive off some “violent rebels,” but that Huck had been defeated and killed by some of Sumter’s troops under Col. Andrew Neel.<sup>6</sup> Huck’s defeat was soon followed by several skirmishes in upper South Carolina with troops under North Carolina Col. Charles McDowell.<sup>7</sup> Encouraged by these successes, Sumter’s ranks grew to about 500 men.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ian Saberton, ed. *The Cornwallis Papers* (hereafter *CP*), Vol. 1 (East Sussex, UK: Naval & Military Press, 2010), 193.

<sup>44</sup> Pension applications of William Clark <http://revwarapps.org/w8610.pdf> and James Clinton <http://revwarapps.org/s2437.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Cornwallis to Clinton, June 30, 1780, *CP* 1:161.

<sup>6</sup> Cornwallis to Clinton, July 15, 1780, *CP* 1:170.

<sup>7</sup> C. Leon Harris and Conner Runyan, “Prelude to Kings Mountain: Colonel Charles McDowell’s Campaign in the South Carolina Backcountry,” [https://www.academia.edu/108514124/Prelude\\_to\\_Kings\\_Mountain\\_Colonel\\_Charles\\_McDowells\\_Campaign\\_in\\_the\\_South\\_Carolina\\_Backcountry](https://www.academia.edu/108514124/Prelude_to_Kings_Mountain_Colonel_Charles_McDowells_Campaign_in_the_South_Carolina_Backcountry).

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Sumter to Maj. Thomas Pinckney (Aide-de-Camp to Gen. Horatio Gates), August 9, 1780, Colonial and State Records of North Carolina, Vol. 14, 540. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/csr/index.php/document/csr14-0437>. Also John Adair <http://revwarapps.org/w2895.pdf>; James McConnell <http://revwarapps.org/s11047>; Robert Wilson <http://revwarapps.org/w2302>

## Rocky Mount, July 30, 1780

On July 29 Sumter led his mounted riflemen from Clem's Branch south to attack Turnbull's outpost at Rocky Mount. (Fig. 3) They passed by Waxhaws Presbyterian Meeting House, where they would have seen victims of the Waxhaws massacre with arms hacked off and heads split open.<sup>9</sup> At sundown they rode across Catawba River at Lands Ford to continue southward to Rocky Mount in the moonless night.<sup>10</sup> "After crossing the River, orders were given that no man speak above his breath as it was our object to surprise the place."<sup>11</sup> According

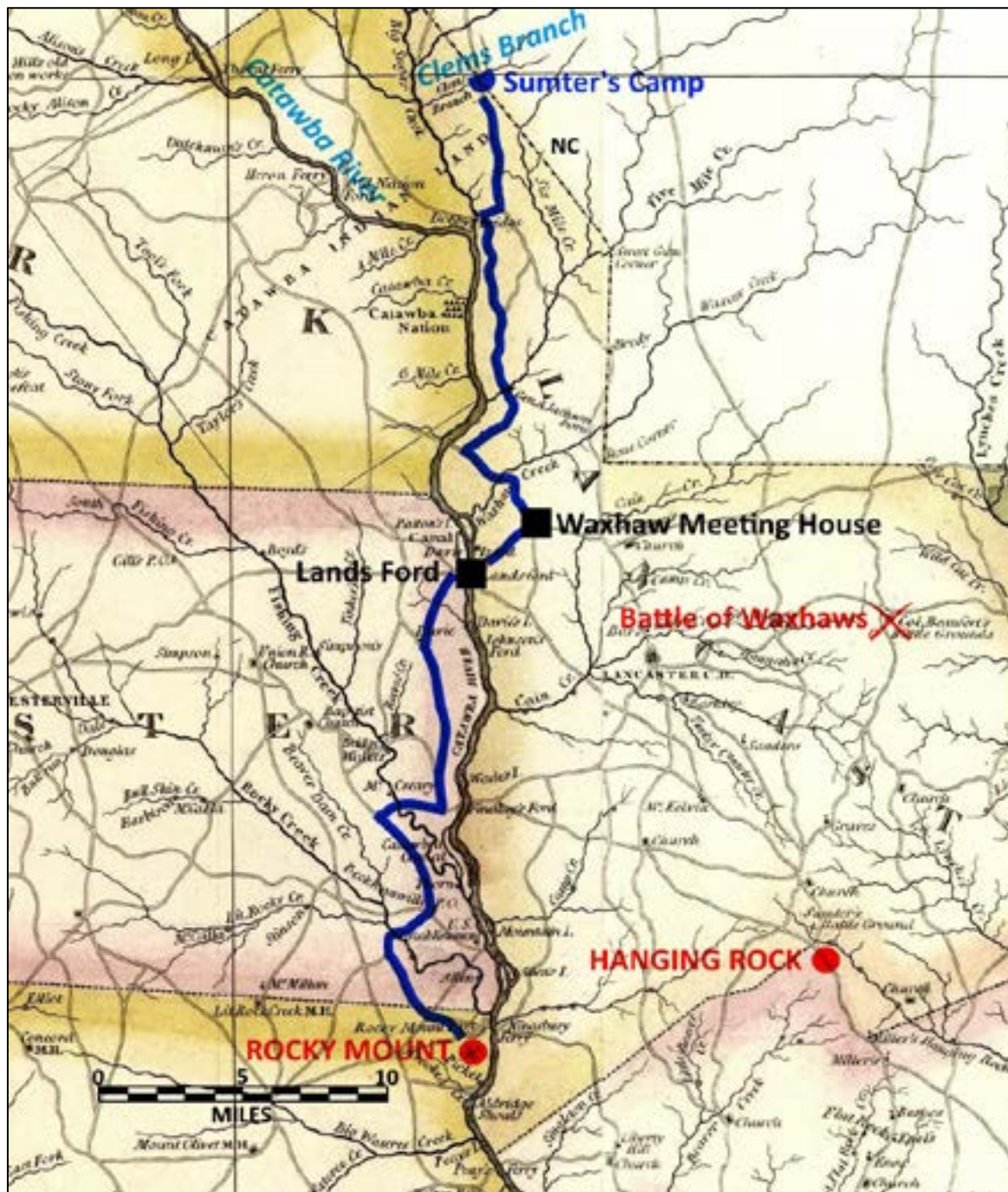


Figure 3. Excerpt from the John Wilson map of 1822 showing a possible route of Sumter's troops from Clem's Branch along Catawba River to Rocky Mount 34 miles south.

<sup>9</sup> William Clark <http://revwarapps.org/w8610>; James Clinton <http://revwarapps.org/s2437>.

<sup>10</sup> <http://astropixels.com/ephemeris/phasescat/phases1701.html>.

<sup>11</sup> James Clinton <http://revwarapps.org/s2437>.



to an undated memoir by Colonel (later General) Richard Winn (1750 – 1818), surprise was foiled by an encounter with Tories camped outside the fortification.<sup>12</sup>

Col. Turnbull commanded about 300 men and was posted in a “Strong Block House two Stories high” and surrounded by abattis (trees with sharpened limbs pointed outward), as Winn was informed by a captured Loyalist officer.<sup>13</sup> Others described it as “a large frame house stockaded round,” “a large wooden house,” “a large log house,” or “some log houses.”<sup>14</sup> Tarleton, who wasn’t present at the time, gave the following description in 1787: “The defences of Rocky mount consisted of two log houses, a loop-holed building, and an abbatis, placed upon an eminence, which commanded a view of the neighbouring country.”<sup>15</sup> This description roughly matches what is shown in Figure 4.

Sumter began his assault at sunup (about 5 AM local solar time) after dividing his troops into three units to attack from different directions at the same time.<sup>16</sup> Two units under colonels Thomas Brandon and William Bratton were “protected by the woods and the huge rocks situated near the log house.”<sup>17</sup> The unit under Col. Andrew Neel, who had led Huck’s Defeat, charged through an open field almost to the abattis under heavy fire,<sup>18</sup> but with fatal consequences for Neel. In the words of James Clinton: “Colonel Neal was killed, not 5 feet from where I stood. I saw him fall & heard, and do now remember, his last words: ‘I have received a mortal wound – God have mercy on my soul’ and instantly died.”<sup>19</sup>

Seeing that this first attack was failing, Sumter moved all his men to the side behind the large rocks.<sup>20</sup> From there he was able to get within 50 yards of the fortification – close enough that his riflemen could shoot any of the enemy who dared to appear at a loop hole to shoot back.<sup>21</sup> Sumter then directed Col. Winn to send Col. Turnbull the following demand:

*Summons/ 31 July 1780*

*Sir/ I am directed by Genl. Sumter to Demand a Surrender of Rocky Mount, therefore you will Surrender this place with the Men &c under your Command which will be considered as prisoner of war. R. Winn*

Turnbull requested an hour to consider,<sup>22</sup> then sent the following:

*Sir/ I have considered your Summons & return for Answer that duty and Inclination induces me to defend this place to the last extremity.*

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<sup>12</sup> General Richard Winn's Notes, transcribed by Will Graves <http://revwarapps.org/scx2.pdf>. Turnbull reported that “his dragoons, having been saddled all night, were soon after day-break ordered out to grass, but they had scarcely passed an abbatis, which surrounds the post, when they fell in with three large columns of the rebels, by whom they were fired upon and dispersed.” Rawdon to Cornwallis, July 31, 1780, *CP* 1:223. According to pension applicant John L. Davies, however, “As several were found killed without their clothes upon them, the presumption was that they were taken by surprise.” <http://revwarapps.org/s2496.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> Winn's Notes <http://revwarapps.org/scx2.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> James McConnel (McConnell) <http://revwarapps.org/s11047>; David McCance <http://revwarapps.org/s16464>; Thomas Regin <http://revwarapps.org/w9244>; Rawdon to Cornwallis, July 31, 1780, *CP* 1:223.

<sup>15</sup> Banastre Tarleton, *A History of the Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, in the Southern Provinces of North America* (Dublin: Colles, et al., 1787), 94.

<sup>16</sup> William Clark <http://revwarapps.org/w8610>; James Clinton <http://revwarapps.org/s2437>; Arthur Travis <http://revwarapps.org/s1262>.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas Regin <http://revwarapps.org/w9244>. Blackwell P. Robinson, “The Revolutionary War Sketches of William R. Davie,” (hereafter Davie, Sketches), North Carolina in the American Revolution, North Carolina Bicentennial Pamphlet Series (Raleigh: North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, Division of Archives and History, 1976), 11.

<sup>18</sup> Winn's Notes <http://revwarapps.org/scx2.pdf>.

<sup>19</sup> James Clinton <http://revwarapps.org/s2437>.

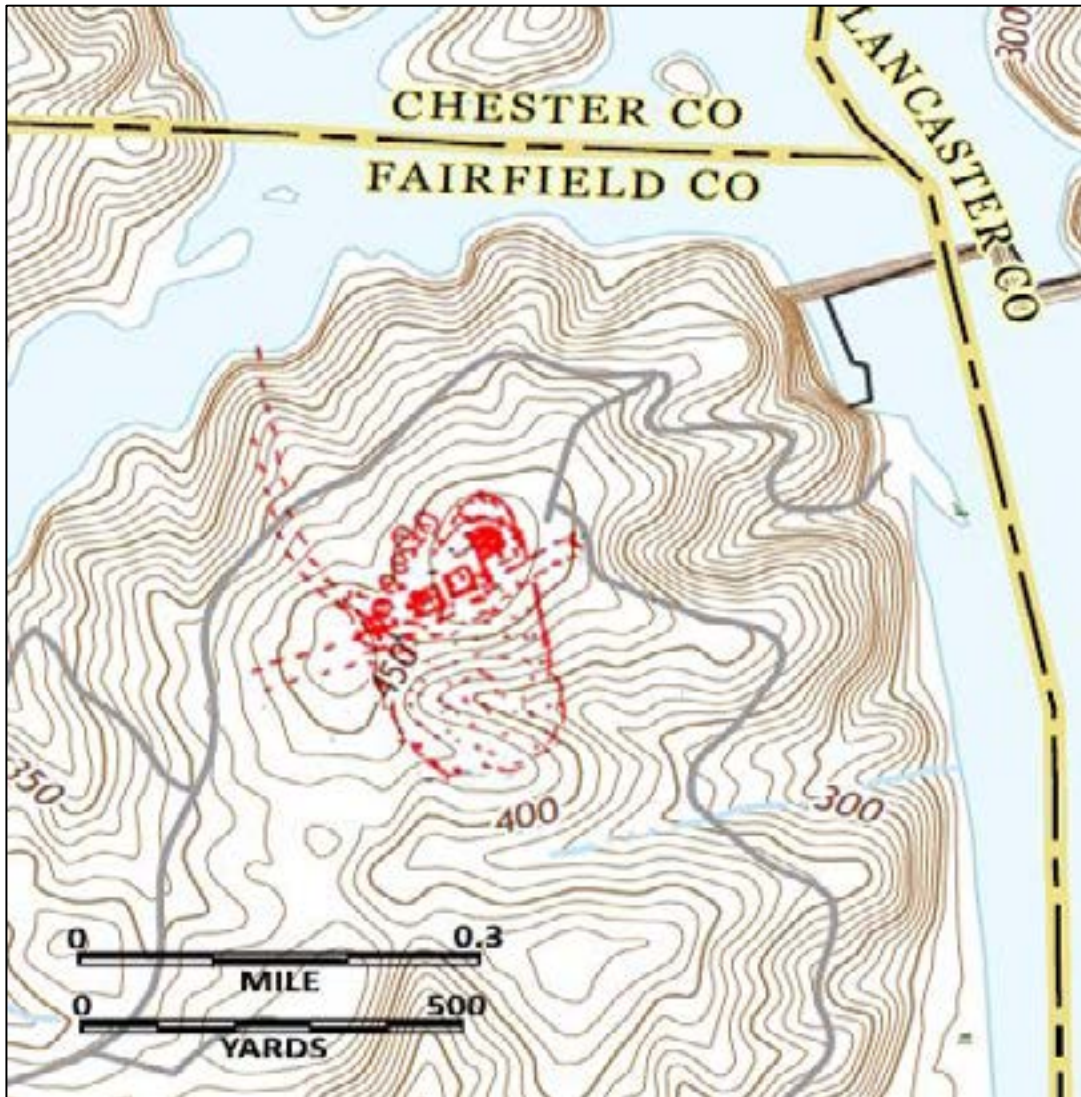
<sup>20</sup> According to Rawdon to Cornwallis, July 31, 1780, *CP* 1:223, Sumter also “kept possession of the redoubt, from which and the cover of rocks, trees etc. they continued to fire for a long time.

<sup>21</sup> Winn's Notes <http://revwarapps.org/scx2.pdf>.

<sup>22</sup> Turnbull was allowed only ten minutes according to Rawdon to Cornwallis, July 31, 1780, *CP* 1:223.

“Sumter Commenced a heavy fire on the House,”<sup>23</sup> but lead was running low and little could be done with rifle fire. Sumter therefore tried actual fire. “I Made an attempt to fire [the works] in the evening, and should have Succeeded, if the afternoon had Not proved excessively wet. My led being exhausted, I withdrew a small distance.” According to Winn, “The House could have been Easily Set on fire had it not been for the powerful rains that fell one after Another.” Pension applicant Robert Fleming recalled that “a shower of rain commenced falling in a short time which with the exertions of the enemy within extinguished the fire and we failed to drive them out.”<sup>24</sup>

The attack lasted ten hours according to Sumter, and Turnbull agreed that it lasted until 3 PM.<sup>25</sup> Richard Winn and James Clinton, however, remembered it as lasting until late evening,<sup>26</sup> and other Americans remembered



**Figure 4. Part of an 1871 sketch by local historian Daniel G. Stinson (recolored red), positioned onto the current USGS topo map (Great Falls quadrangle) for best fit of the buildings on top of Rocky Mount. Stinson’s sketch shows one large building to the north**

<sup>23</sup> Winn's Notes <http://revwarapps.org/scx2.pdf>. Also James Clinton: “After the first assault, Sumter sent in a flag and demanded a surrender which was refused, and immediately the second assault was made.” <http://revwarapps.org/s2437>.

<sup>24</sup> Sumter to Pinckney, August 9, 1780, 540. Winn’s Notes. Robert Fleming <http://revwarapps.org/w7283>. Also James Clinton: “as a last resort, we attempted to set fire to the works but a rain fell and prevented its success.” <http://revwarapps.org/s2437>.

<sup>25</sup> Sumter, speech in House of Representatives, May 8, 1798, Annals of Congress, House of Representatives, 5th Congress, 2nd Session, 1669

<https://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=llac&fileName=008/llac008.db&recNum=226>; Sumter to Pinckney, August 9, 1780, 540: “the action continued upwards of Eight hours.” Rawdon to Cornwallis, July 31, 1780, CP 1:223.

<sup>26</sup> Winn’s Notes <http://revwarapps.org/scx2.pdf>. James Clinton <http://revwarapps.org/s2437>.



a shorter attempt: four hours, or “till near 11 oclock in the fore noon.”<sup>27</sup> Recollections of American losses also varied. Sumter wrote, “My Loss, Kild and wounded did not exceed twenty; that of the enemy more than three times as great, together with several prisoners, a Great Number of excellent horses, Saddles, Guns, &c.”<sup>28</sup> According to James Clinton, “Our loss at Rocky Mount was not great in numbers, but the loss of Neal [Col. Neel] was severely felt.”<sup>29</sup> Others recalled “some loss”<sup>30</sup> and others “considerable loss.”<sup>31</sup> The British officially acknowledged eight killed and 31 wounded.<sup>32</sup>

### **Maj. William Richardson Davie’s Skirmish at Hanging Rock, July 30, 1780**

While Sumter was engaged at Rocky Mount, he sent Maj. Davie with 80 men to distract enemy troops at Hanging Rock 12 miles away. By his own admission, Davie’s actions resulted in a slaughter, so it is of some interest to see what kind of person he was.<sup>33</sup> (Fig. 5) Davie was of Scottish parents but born in England in 1756. In 1764 his family moved to the Waxhaws settlement. After graduating from what is now Princeton University in 1776, he began studying law but soon gave it up for a commission as lieutenant in Gen. Kazimierz Pulaski’s legion. At the Battle of Stono Ferry in South Carolina on June 20, 1779, Davie was seriously wounded in the thigh. While recovering in North Carolina, he resumed his legal studies and became a licensed lawyer in the following November.



**Figure 5. William Richardson Davie (1756 – 1820) by Charles Willson Peale.**

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<sup>27</sup> Robert Patteson <http://revwarapps.org/s3654>; Thomas Regin <http://revwarapps.org/w9244>.

<sup>28</sup> Sumter to Pinckney, August 9, 1780, 540.

<sup>29</sup> James Clinton <http://revwarapps.org/s2437>. Also William Clark: “Our loss was not great.” <http://revwarapps.org/w8610>.

<sup>30</sup> Robert Fleming <http://revwarapps.org/w7283>; Arthur Travis <http://revwarapps.org/s1262>.

<sup>31</sup> Robert Guthrie <http://revwarapps.org/w293.pdf>; George Neely <http://revwarapps.org/s4613>.

<sup>32</sup> Jim Picuch, “British Casualty Reports Shed Light on Sumter’s Early Partisan Actions,” *Southern Campaigns of the American Revolution* Vol. 20, No. 3.0 (August 20, 2023), 3 [https://www.southern-campaigns.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/British\\_Returns-v-3.0-Picuch.pdf](https://www.southern-campaigns.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/British_Returns-v-3.0-Picuch.pdf)

<sup>33</sup> Davie, Sketches, viii – xi. Scoggins, *Relentless Fury*, 11. J. D. Lewis, “William Richardson Davie,” [https://www.carolana.com/NC/Revolution/patriot\\_leaders\\_nc\\_william\\_richardson\\_davie.html](https://www.carolana.com/NC/Revolution/patriot_leaders_nc_william_richardson_davie.html).

In 1780 Davie returned to service as major of the Independent Corps of Light Horse. One of its first actions on July 21 was to exploit the vulnerability of the 25-mile supply line from Camden to Hanging Rock, ambushing a convoy at Flat Rock about five miles south of the Hanging Rock post. (Bottom right of Fig. 3.) Davie's corps destroyed the provisions and captured the escorts and wagoners. At nightfall under a gibbous moon they mounted the prisoners on captured horses for the return to camp. One of Davie's men had deserted and was expected to inform the enemy of their whereabouts, so Davie retreated by an unfrequented path west of Hanging Rock. In spite of this precaution, Davie was ambushed on the main branch of Beaver Creek. One of his lieutenants was killed, and a captain and two men wounded. The prisoners, evidently mistaken for Davie's men, "were all killed or wounded except three or four," according to Davie, but "the slaughter of the prisoners could not be considered a loss."<sup>34</sup>

Most of Davie's corps made it back to Sumter's camp, and on July 30 at Hanging Rock they attacked North Carolina Loyalists under Col. Samuel Bryan, as will be described shortly. On August 6 Davie played a major role in the Battle of Hanging Rock, again attacking Bryan's Loyalists. Davie was soon after promoted to colonel. In early February 1781 he led troops who delayed Cornwallis's push through Charlotte during the pursuit of the southern army under Gen. Nathanael Greene. Greene then persuaded Davie to become the commissary general responsible for provisioning his troops. In March 1782 Davie served as a lawyer in the treason trial of Col. Samuel Bryan, the very man whose troops he had defeated at both engagements at Hanging Rock. In one of the strangest twists in the war, Davie was a lawyer for Bryan's defense. Bryan was convicted and sentenced to hang, but the efforts of Davie and others succeeded in sparing the life of his former enemy, to the great exasperation of locals who had assembled to watch Bryan hang.<sup>35</sup>

After the war Davie was a delegate to the 1787 Constitutional Convention, state legislator, and briefly Governor of North Carolina. He was instrumental in founding the University of North Carolina. Like most prominent Carolinians, he was a slave owner. He retired to his estate near Sumter's old campground on the west side of Lands Ford, where he died in 1820, and was buried at Waxhaw Presbyterian Church.

The Hanging Rock camp is sometimes said to have been at the Hanging Rock shown in Figure 1, but that area is too rocky to have been either a camp or a battlefield. The actual location is shown on an 1871 sketch by local historian Daniel G. Stinson (Fig. 6) and described by Capt. James McJunkin as follows: "the British [sic: provincials] were about 400 strong encamped in Camden road, about 200 yards from the Tory camp, who were to the South of Hanging Rock creek, on a hill forming something like a half moon or a workman's square."<sup>36</sup>

Davie described the attack on Hanging Rock as follows:

*Major Davie's detachment consisted of 40 mounted rifle-men and about that number of Dragoons, and considering himself obliged to alarm the enemy in their camp at all events the same day, he approached the Hanging Rock about 1 O'clock, and fortunately while he was reconnoitering their position to fix upon the point of attack, He received information that three companies of their mounted Infantry returning from some excursion, had halted at a farmers house, situated in full view of the camp. The House was placed in the point of a right angle made by a lane of staked & ridered fence; the one end of which opened to the enemy's encampment, the other terminated in the woods, the Major advanced on that next to the woods, and as the riflemen were not distinguishable from the Loyalists, they were sent round to the other end of the lane with orders on gaining it, to rush forward & fire on the enemy. [Fig. 6] The dragoons were divided so that one half could occupy the lane while the other half entered the field. This disposition was made with such promptitude that the attention or suspicion of the enemy was never excited, the rifle company under Cap't*

<sup>34</sup> Davie, Sketches, 10.

<sup>35</sup> Douglas R. Dorney, Jr., "The Odyssey of Loyalist Colonel Samuel Bryan," *Journal of the American Revolution* (July 28 2021). Andrew Carnahan <http://revwarapps.org/w8577.pdf>.

<sup>36</sup> Will Graves, "McJunkin's Narrative: Draper MSS, Sumter Papers 23VV153-203," (hereafter McJunkin's Narrative) *Southern Campaigns of the American Revolution* Vol. 2 No. 11.1 (November 2005), 37-47. Also Davie, Sketches, 13: "a Creek with a deep ravine covered the whole front of the Tory camp."



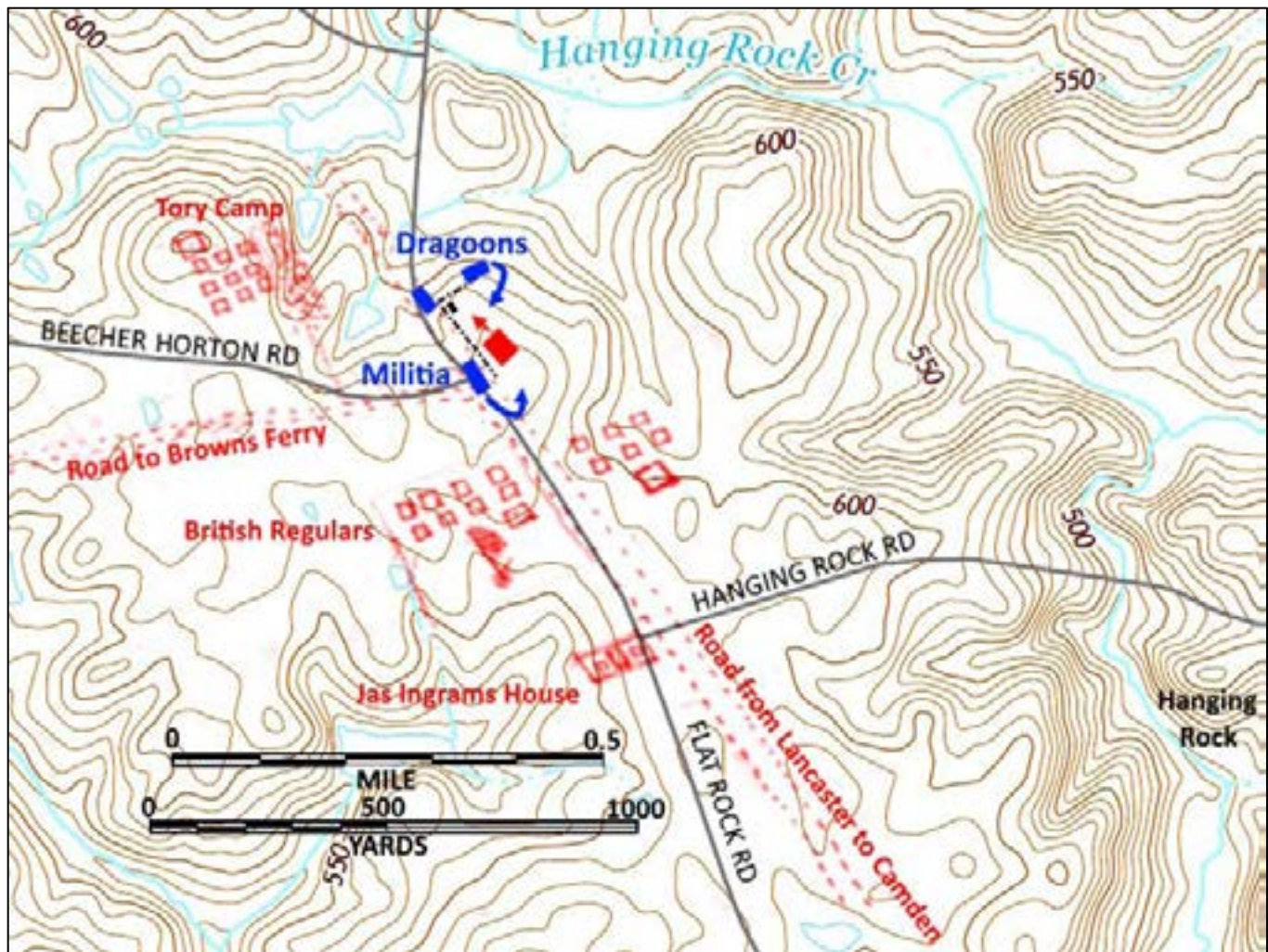


Figure 6. An interpretation of Davie's account of his attack at the Hanging Rock post mapped on the current USGS topo map (Heath Springs quadrangle). The approximate location of the camp of "British Regulars" (sic: provincials) is shown on an 1871 sketch by Stinson (traced in red), scaled and oriented for best fit of the roads to the ridges. Davie's militia and dragoons (blue rectangles) are assumed to have come from the north on the Great Waxhaws Road from Lancaster. The fence and house (black) and the attacked Loyalists (red rectangle) are assumed to have been along that road.

*Flenniken*<sup>37</sup> passed the camp sentries without being challenged, dismounted in the lane and gave the enemy a well directed fire. The astonished Loyalists fled instantly the other way, and were immediately charged by the dragoons in full gallop and driven back in great confusion; on meeting again the fire of the infantry they all rushed impetuously against the angle of the fence where in a moment they were surrounded by the dragoons who had entered the field and literally cut to pieces: as this was done under the eye of the whole British camp no prisoners could be safely taken which may apologize for the slaughter that took place on this occasion ("and attached to this party the appellation of the bloody corps"). They took sixty valuable Horses with their furniture and one hundred muskets and rifles; the whole camp beat to arms but the business was done, and the Detachment out of their reach before they recovered from their consternation.<sup>38</sup>

After the attacks on Rocky Mount and Hanging Rock, Sumter's men retreated back to Lands Ford. A pension applicant recalled that they "encamped near a field of green corn — which afforded us the first provisions we had to eat." Winn, however, wrote that they also had unripe peaches. After a few days of such fare, Sumter

<sup>37</sup> Samuel Flennikan (or Flanagan). See David Flenniken <http://revwarapps.org/s10154.pdf>.

<sup>38</sup> Davie, Sketches, 11-12.

sent men to collect beef cattle.<sup>39</sup> Turnbull, thinking they retreated only seven miles to Fishing Creek, set out to trap them against the swollen Catawba River but was disappointed.<sup>40</sup>

### Battle of Hanging Rock, August 6, 1780

Three hundred men of the Prince of Wales' American Regiment (PWAR) had been sent from the Hanging Rock post to reinforce the post at Rocky Mount,<sup>41</sup> and Sumter decided to take advantage of their absence to attack Hanging Rock as soon as Catawba River had receded enough to cross at Land's Ford. He "began to pass the river on Saturday evening. The Rapidity of the current was So Great [he] was not only much delayed, but Met with Considerable Loss; however, proceeded on."<sup>42</sup>

On the same evening the PWAR detachment decided to return to Hanging Rock, as Sumter learned from two captured Tories.<sup>43</sup> These 300 men, together with reinforcements from Camden, brought the total number of Loyalist provincial and volunteer troops to about 1100. Sumter and other field officers discussed whether to go ahead with the attack. Some were for and others against, but in the end they decided to continue, "as no Officer was willing to be Outdone by the Other in Bravery."<sup>44</sup> As Sumter later explained, "I had Six hundred brave men upon Whom I Could Depend, therefore Resolved to proceed."<sup>45</sup> Sumter's volunteers, "whose approbation in those times was absolutely necessary," according to Davie, "entered into the project with great spirit & cheerfulness."<sup>46</sup> The 600 men included those who had attacked at Rocky Mount, as well as Davie's troops who had been in the

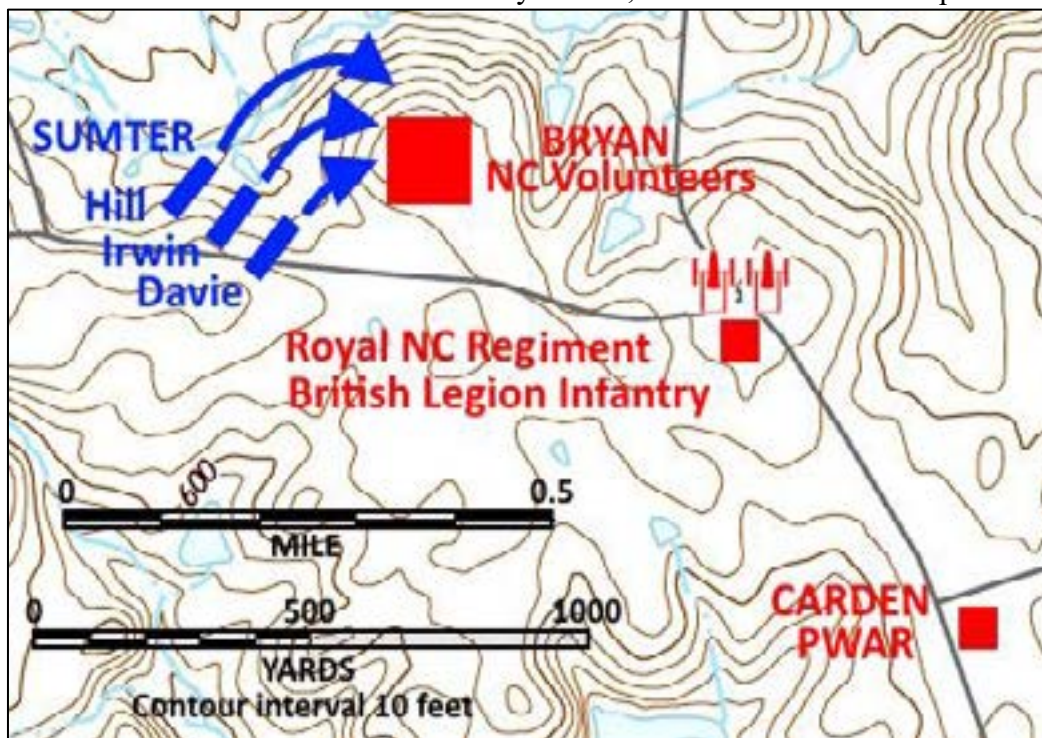


Figure 7. The three camps of militia and provincials at Hanging Rock, and the three divisions of Sumter's forces just before the battle.

<sup>39</sup> John L. Davies <http://revwarapps.org/s2496>. Winn's Notes <http://revwarapps.org/scx2.pdf>. George Neely <http://revwarapps.org/s4613.pdf>.

<sup>40</sup> Rawdon to Cornwallis, August 3, 1780, *CP* 1:229.

<sup>41</sup> Sumter to Pinckney, 540. Todd Braisted, "A History of the Prince of Wales' American Regiment – Part 4 of 7: Hanging Rock" <https://www.royalprovincial.com/military/rhist/pwar/pwarhist4.htm#pwarintro>.

<sup>42</sup> Sumter to Pinckney, 541.

<sup>43</sup> Winn's Notes <http://revwarapps.org/scx2.pdf>.

<sup>44</sup> Winn's Notes <http://revwarapps.org/scx2.pdf>.

<sup>45</sup> Sumter to Pinckney, 541.

<sup>46</sup> Davie, Sketches, 13.



action at Hanging Rock a week before. Two hundred of the men lacked arms and were expected stay back with the horses until they could collect guns from defeated enemy soldiers.<sup>47</sup>

The 1100 Loyalists posted at Hanging Rock were in three distinct camps from north to south on the high ridge along the Great Waxhaws Road (now Flat Rock Road).<sup>48</sup> (Figs. 6 and 7). Although almost all were Americans, Davie and others referred to them as “the British.” The great majority — about 800 — were volunteer refugees from North Carolina commanded by Col. Samuel Bryan.<sup>49</sup> Like Sumter’s men, they lacked uniforms and provided their own arms.

Several hundred yards away in an open field and separated from Bryan’s camp by a swamp and “a skirt of wood” were two bodies of provincial troops: the Royal North Carolina Regiment and a detachment of infantry from Tarleton’s British Legion.<sup>50</sup> (Tarleton himself, with another part of his British Legion and Loyalist militia, was more than a hundred miles to the south busy with “disturbers of the peace,” giving them no quarter and bringing “fire and destruction” to their property.)<sup>51</sup> Also at this camp were artillerymen with two field cannons, probably “three-pounders,” so-named for the weight of the cannon balls they could fire. In this battle, however, they were employed more like huge shotguns, firing canisters of iron balls, each about an inch in diameter.<sup>52</sup> The third and southernmost camp was manned by the Prince of Wales’ American Regiment composed of Loyalists from Connecticut.<sup>53</sup> Maj. John Carden had recently been given its command after Rawdon made a surprise inspection and found the former commander drunk.<sup>54</sup>

Davie described Bryan’s camp as being on the left and Carden’s on the right, so Sumter’s troops apparently approached from the west.<sup>55</sup> At around midnight they arrived within two miles of the Hanging Rock post and held a council of war, during which, according to Davie, “the general command was conferred on Col<sup>o</sup> Sumpter as the Senior Officer.” Davie noted, however, that “it is an invariable trait in the character of Militia that they will only obey their own officers in the line of action.”<sup>56</sup>

Sumter proposed that they divide into three columns. According to Davie, Col. William Hill on the left commanded his own regiment of light dragoons and other South Carolina refugees. The center column consisted of the Mecklenburg County NC militia under the command of Col. Robert Irwin. Maj. Davie led the column on the right, consisting of his own Independent Corps of Light Horse, Maj. Richard Winn’s Fairfield SC regiment, and some detached companies of South Carolina refugees.<sup>57</sup>

Again according to Davie, Sumter proposed that they

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<sup>47</sup> Winn’s Notes <http://revwarapps.org/scx2.pdf>.

<sup>48</sup> Sumter to Pinckney, 541. Davie, Sketches, 13. In a 1798 speech as Congressman, Sumter gave the number of enemy troops as 1200. Thomas Sumter, “Speech in the House of Representatives, May 8, 1798,” *Annals of Congress, House of Representatives, 5th Congress, 2nd Session, 1668-1671*.

<sup>49</sup> Dorney, *Odyssey of Samuel Bryan*. Davie (Sketches, 13) gave the number under Bryan as about 900.

<sup>50</sup> Winn’s Notes <http://revwarapps.org/scx2.pdf>. Sumter to Pinckney, 541. Davie, Sketches, 13. The distance between the two camps estimated by eyewitnesses ranges from 200 to 880 yards.

<sup>51</sup> Tarleton at Leneud’s Ferry on Santee River to Cornwallis, August 5, 1780, *CP* 1: 365-366.

<sup>52</sup> James Legg, “The Hanging Rock Battlefield Project: Part I,” *Legacy* Vol. 15, No. 2 (August 2011), 6.

<sup>53</sup> Todd Braisted, “A History of the Prince of Wales’ American Regiment – Part 1 of 7.”

<https://www.royalprovincial.com/military/rhist/pwar/pwarhist.htm>.

<sup>54</sup> Rawdon to Cornwallis, July 31, 1780, *CP* 1:222. Sumter in his August 9 letter to Pinckney stated that this third camp was commanded by a Col. Robinson. There was no known Col. Robinson at the battle. There was a Lt. Col. Joseph Robinson, but it appears that by June 1780 he had been sidelined. Jim Piecuch, *South Carolina Provincials: Loyalists in British Service During the American Revolution* (Yardley PA: Westholme, 2023), 216. Probably as a result of Sumter’s error, Bass (*Gamecock*, 69) shows a fourth camp south of Carden’s labeled as “Robinson’s.”

<sup>55</sup> Davie, Sketches, 13.

<sup>56</sup> Davie, Sketches, 14, 16.

<sup>57</sup> Davie, Sketches, 14. James McJunkin (“McJunkin’s Narrative”) also stated that there were three divisions, but commanded as follows: a Col Steen on the left, Irwin in the center, and Lt. Col. James Lisle and Col. Samuel Watson on the right. According to Maj. Winn the Americans were divided into five groups commanded by Hill, Col. Edward Lacey, Lt. Col. William Bratton, Lt. Col. James Hawthorn and/or an officer named Mofte, and Davie.

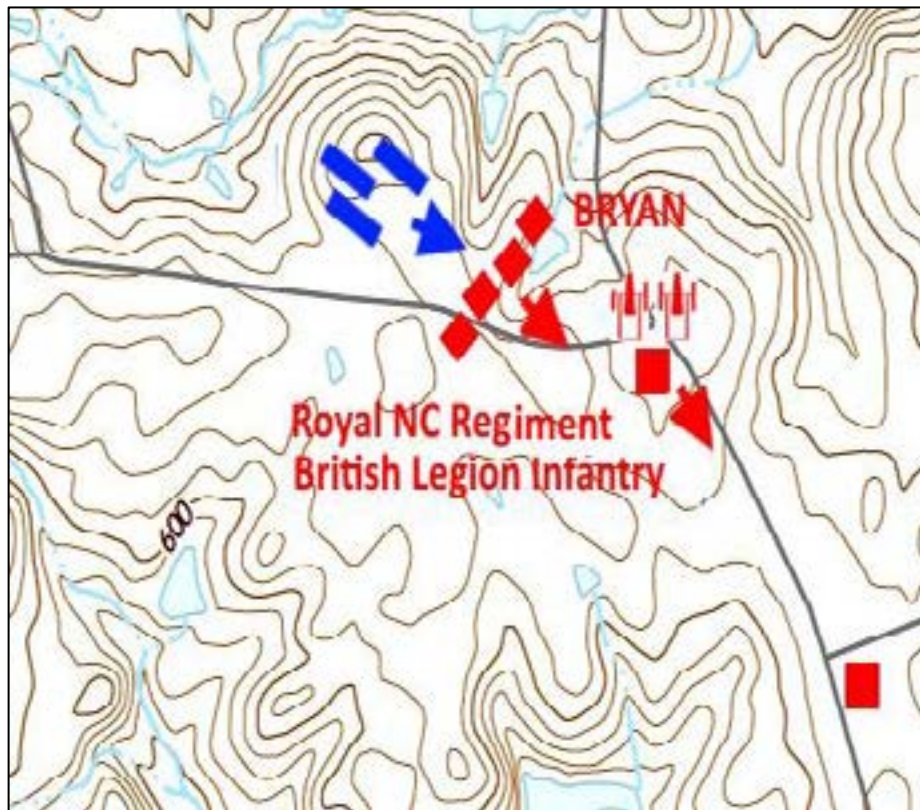
*march directly to the centre encampment, then dismount and each Division attack its camp, this plan was approved by all the officers except Major Davie, who insisted on the necessity of leaving the horses at that place, and marching to the attack on foot, urging the confusion always consequent on dismounting under a fire and the certainty of losing the effect of a sudden and vigorous attack; this objection was however over ruled.<sup>58</sup>*

Davie's Independent Corps of Light Horse remained on horseback during the battle. "As the day broke the march again commenced," Sumter wrote, and the charge began at about 6 AM.<sup>59</sup> According to Davie, who gave the clearest and most detailed account of the battle,

*the army turned to the left of the road to avoid the enemy's picquet and patrol, with intention to return to it under the cover of a defile near the camp but the guides through ignorance or timidity led them so far to the left, that the right and center divisions fell together with the left upon the Tory encampment: — these devoted people were briskly attacked both in front & flank and soon routed with great slaughter.<sup>60</sup>*

Richard Winn described this phase of the battle as follows:

*Genl. Sumter with the main body wheeled to the left Colo Winn with his Command to the Right to Attack the Prince [of] Whales [sic] Regt. but his pilot not Knowing where Colo. Brian Regt. was posted which composed of about 500 Men Winn with his party was within 30 Steps of them before they was discovered by Majr. Davie who was in front he was Ordered to move On to make room for the foot, here we Rec'd a Most tremendous fire from Brian. The Enemy being On the top of a big hill Over shot us and before they could*



**Figure 8.** After taking the Loyalist camp, some of Sumter's men continue the pursuit into the middle camp, where, after a brief resistance, the Royal NC Regiment and British Legion infantry join Bryan's men in flight.

<sup>58</sup> Davie, Sketches, 13-14.

<sup>59</sup> Sumter to Pinckney, 541.

<sup>60</sup> Davie, Sketches, 14.

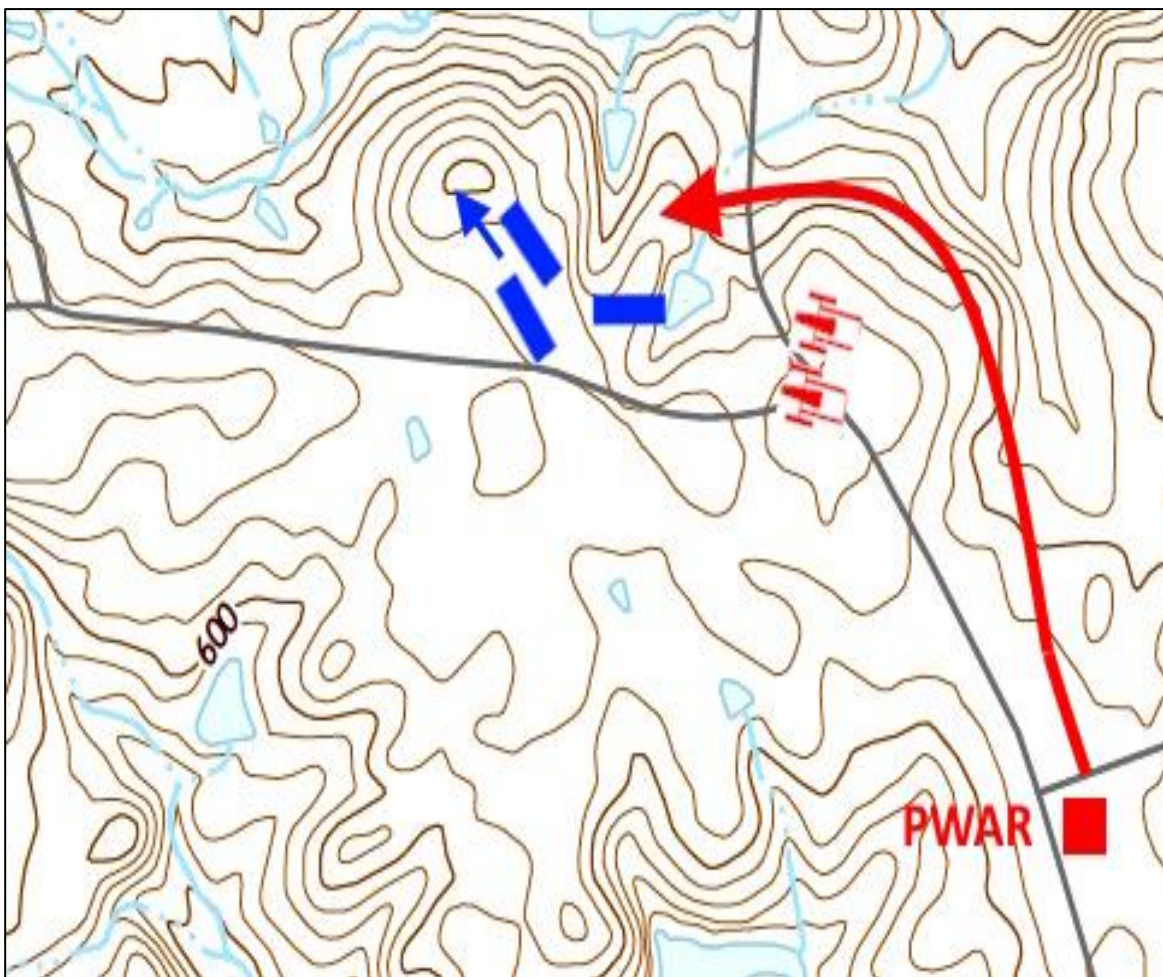


load Again Winn's party was Ordered to put up the Indian hollow & rush up the hill before they discharged their p[ieces].<sup>61</sup>

"Their attack was so impetuous that the Tories fled on the second fire," according to Capt. Joseph McJunkin.<sup>62</sup> Many of Sumter's men pursued the Tories into the center camp of Tarleton's Legion infantry and the Royal North Carolina Regiment (also known as Hamilton's Regiment).<sup>63</sup> (Fig. 8) According to Capt. Samuel Saxon, some of Bryan's men were mistaken for Sumter's and were shot by provincial troops in the center camp.<sup>64</sup>

In Davie's words,

*as the Americans pressed on in pursuit of the Tories who fled towards the center encampment they received a fire from 160 of the Legion Infantry and some companies of Hamilton's regiment posted behind a fence, but their impetuosity was not checked a moment by this unexpected discharge, they rushed forward, and the Legion Infantry immediately broke and mingled in the flight of the Loyalists, yielding their camp without another struggle to the Militia.*<sup>65</sup>



**Figure 9. As Sumter's men regroup from dispersing the enemy from the center camp, part of the Prince of Wales' American Regiment attack their right. Artillerists in the center camp prepare to fire.**

<sup>61</sup> Winn's Notes <http://revwarapps.org/scx2.pdf>.

<sup>62</sup> McJunkin's Narrative, 39.

<sup>63</sup> Lt. Col. John Hamilton commanded this regiment but was not at the battle.

<sup>64</sup> Samuel Saxon <http://revwarapps.org/r9400.pdf>.

<sup>65</sup> Davie, Sketches, 14.

In about half an hour Sumter had possession of Bryan's camp.<sup>66</sup> While this was happening, part of the Prince of Wales' American Regiment, also known as Browne's Regiment,<sup>67</sup> had maneuvered to their right to attack Sumter's men. According to Sumter, after crossing a swamp they "found means to turn my Right flank," which suggests that Sumter's men were returning to Bryan's former camp to regroup. (Figs. 9 and 10)

Davie described the action as follows.

*At this moment a part of Colo Browns regiment had nearly changed the fate of the day, they passed by a bold and skilful manuevre into the wood between the centre & Tory encampment, drew up unperceived, and poured a Heavy fire on the Militia forming, from the disorder of the pursuit, on the flank of the encampment; these brave men took instinctively to the trees and bush heaps and returned the fire with deadly effect, in a few minutes there was not a British officer standing, one half of the regiment had fallen, and others on being offered quarter threw down their arms.*<sup>68</sup>



**Figure 10. Eastern side of the hill at Bryan's camp, scene of the most intense fighting.**

The location and intensity of this fighting was confirmed by numerous lead balls found mainly on the eastern side of the hill by archaeologists John Allison and others. Two pieces of canister shot indicate that artillery from the center camp had also been brought into play.<sup>69</sup> According to Davie, "the remainder of the British line who had also made a movement to their right now retreated hastily towards their former position and drew up in

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<sup>66</sup> Sumter to Pinckney, 541.

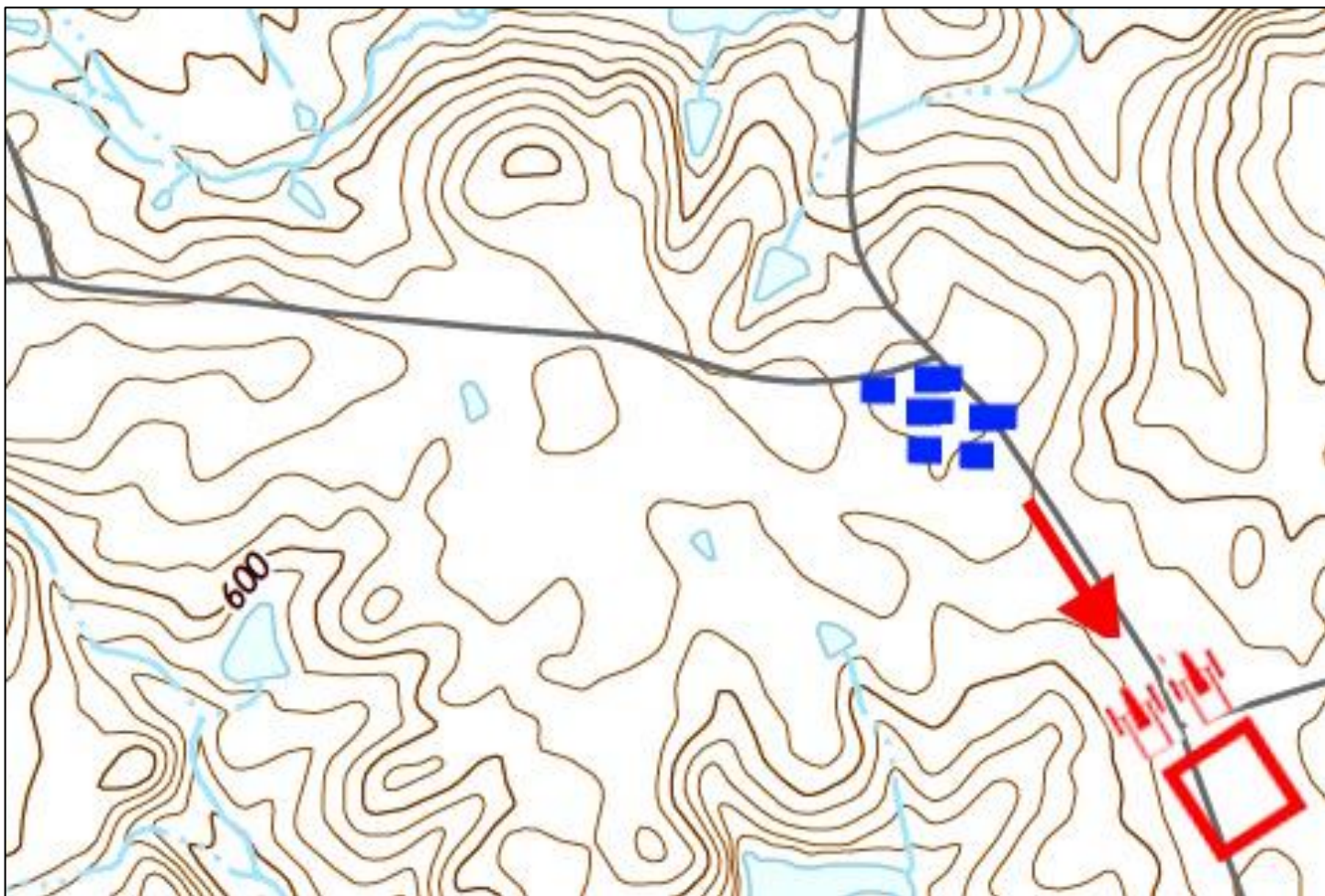
<sup>67</sup> British and provincial regiments were commonly named for the colonels who raised them, in this case Montfort Browne, Governor of New Providence Island, the Bahamas. Field command of a regiment was usually by a lieutenant colonel.

<sup>68</sup> Davie, Sketches, 14.

<sup>69</sup> John Allison, "Finding Hanging Rock Battlefield," privately published. Legg, Hanging Rock Battlefield Project, 6-7.



the center of the cleared grounds in the form of a Hollow Square.”<sup>70</sup> A hollow square was the standard defense of infantry against an expected attack by cavalry. (Figs. 11 and 12) They also managed to save the two cannons, which kept up a barrage with canister shot. One of Sumter’s men stated that it was the “Hottest day that I ever felt,” and “I thought I should have died for the want of water.”<sup>71</sup> Some began to plunder the enemy tents for something to drink, which was as likely to be rum as water.



**Figure 11. The remaining provincial troops retreat with the cannons and form a hollow-square defense. Sumter’s troops become disorganized while plundering the center camp.**

Sumter and other officers eventually got about 200 infantrymen and Davie’s cavalymen organized at the edge of a woods for an attack on the hollow square.

*The rout of these different corps the pursuit & the plunder of the camps had thrown the Americans into great confusion, the outmost exertions were made by Colo Sumpter & the other officers to carry the men on to attack the British square, about 200 Infantry with Davie's dragoons were collected and formed on the margin of the woods, and a heavy but ineffectual fire was commenced on the british troops.*<sup>72</sup>

Although by now greatly outnumbered by Sumter’s troops, three to four hundred of Bryan’s volunteers and remaining provincial forces rallied for a counterattack on the other side of the camp from where Davie’s horsemen and infantry had formed. Their possible positions are suggested in Figure 13, although not clear from the following description by Davie.

<sup>70</sup> Davie, Sketches, 14.

<sup>71</sup> John Walker <http://revwarapps.org/w9875.pdf>.

<sup>72</sup> Davie, Sketches, 14.



**Figure 12. View westward toward the center camp.**

*About 3 or 400 of the Enemy consisting of the Legion infantry Hamilton's regt with a large body of the Tories, were observed rallying & forming in the edge of the woods on the opposite side of the British camp, and least they might be induced to take the Americans in flank Major Davie passed round the camp under the cover of the trees, and charged them with his company of Dragoons, these people under the impressions of defeat were all routed and dispersed by this hand full of men.<sup>73</sup>*

Fighting then ended, according to Davie.

*The distance of the square from the woods and the constant fire of two pieces of field artillery prevented the militia from making any considerable impression on the British troops; so that upon Major Davie's return it was agreed to plunder the encampments and retire.<sup>74</sup>*

Sumter gave different reasons for retreating:

*Notwithstanding their opposition was but feeble, and I in possession of two-thirds of their camp also for More than Half an hour, yet was obliged to leave them from Several Causes, the action having Continued without Interruption for three hours, men fainting with heat and Droughth. Numbers Kild and Wounded; but the true Cause of my not totally defeating them was the want of Led, having been obliged to make use of arms and ammunition taken from the enemy.<sup>75</sup>*

<sup>73</sup> Davie, Sketches, 15.

<sup>74</sup> Davie, Sketches, 14-15.

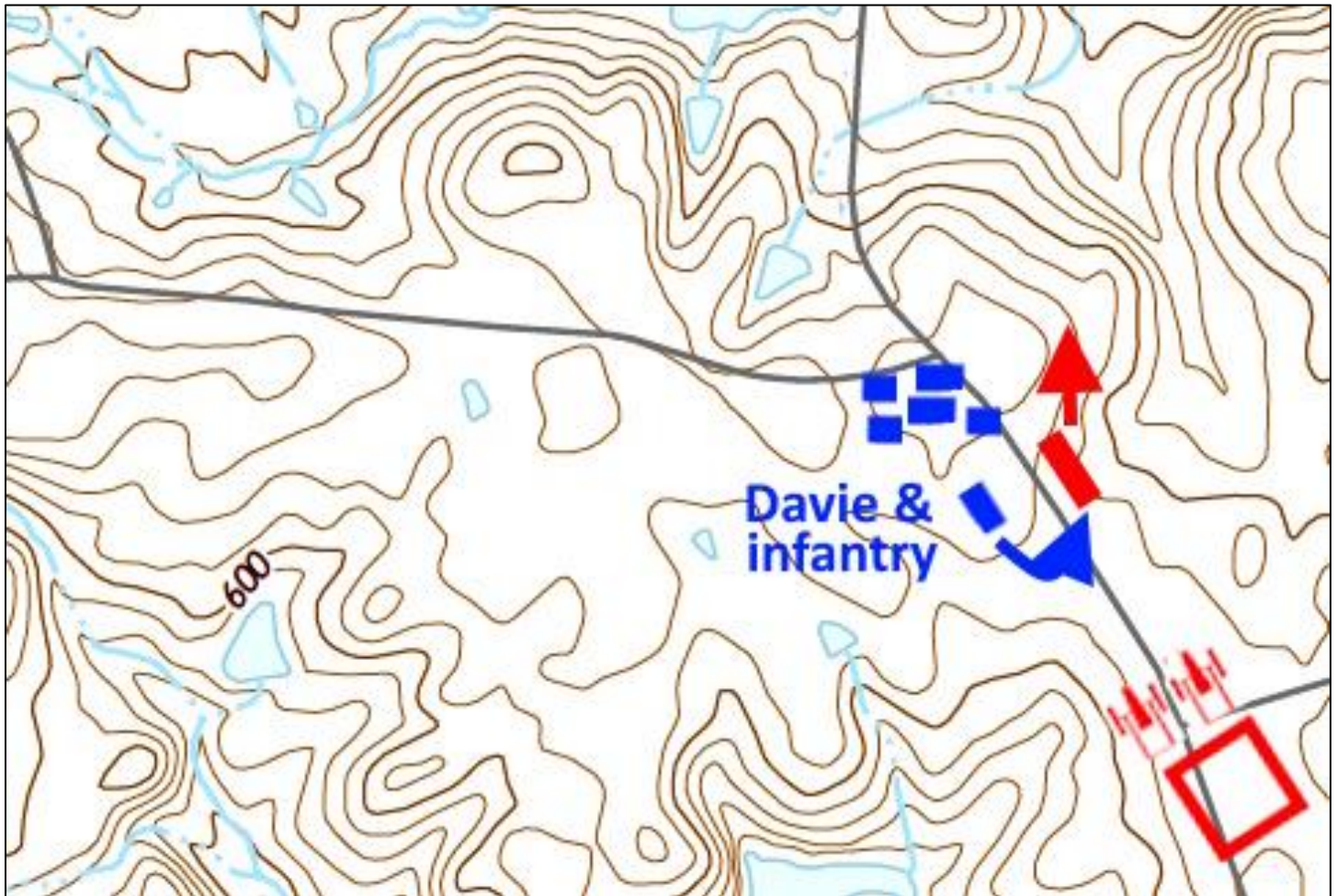
<sup>75</sup> Sumter to Pinckney, 541.



At about this time some of Tarleton's Legion arrived, as described by Davie: "some of the Legion Cavalry appeared drawn up on the Camden road, with a countenance as if they meant to keep their position but on being charged by the dragoons of Davie's corps they all took the woods in flight & one only was cut down."<sup>76</sup> (Fig. 14)

In Sumter's 1798 speech he described the event as follows: "Captain Kinlaw, with a squadron of Tarleton's legion, arrived from Rocky Mount, made a desperate charge on the militia, was repulsed by them, and fled to Camden, without attempting to renew the combat."<sup>77</sup>

Tarleton was apparently told that it was the arrival of some of these men that precipitated Sumter's retreat:



**Figure 13. Davie routs provincials and volunteers threatening his flank.**

*Colonel Sumpter still persevered in his attack, and very probably would have succeeded, if a stratagem employed by Captains Stewart and McDonald,<sup>78</sup> of the British legion, had not disconcerted his operations. These officers, with forty mounted infantry, were returning the same morning from Rocky mount, and on the route heard the cannon and musketry at Hanging rock; on a nearer approach to their post, they judiciously left the Rocky mount, and made a circuit to get into the main Camden road, to reinforce their companions: When they arrived in sight of the Americans, the bugle horn was directed to sound the charge, and the soldiers were ordered to extend their files, in order to look like a formidable detachment. This unexpected*

<sup>76</sup> Davie, Sketches, 15.

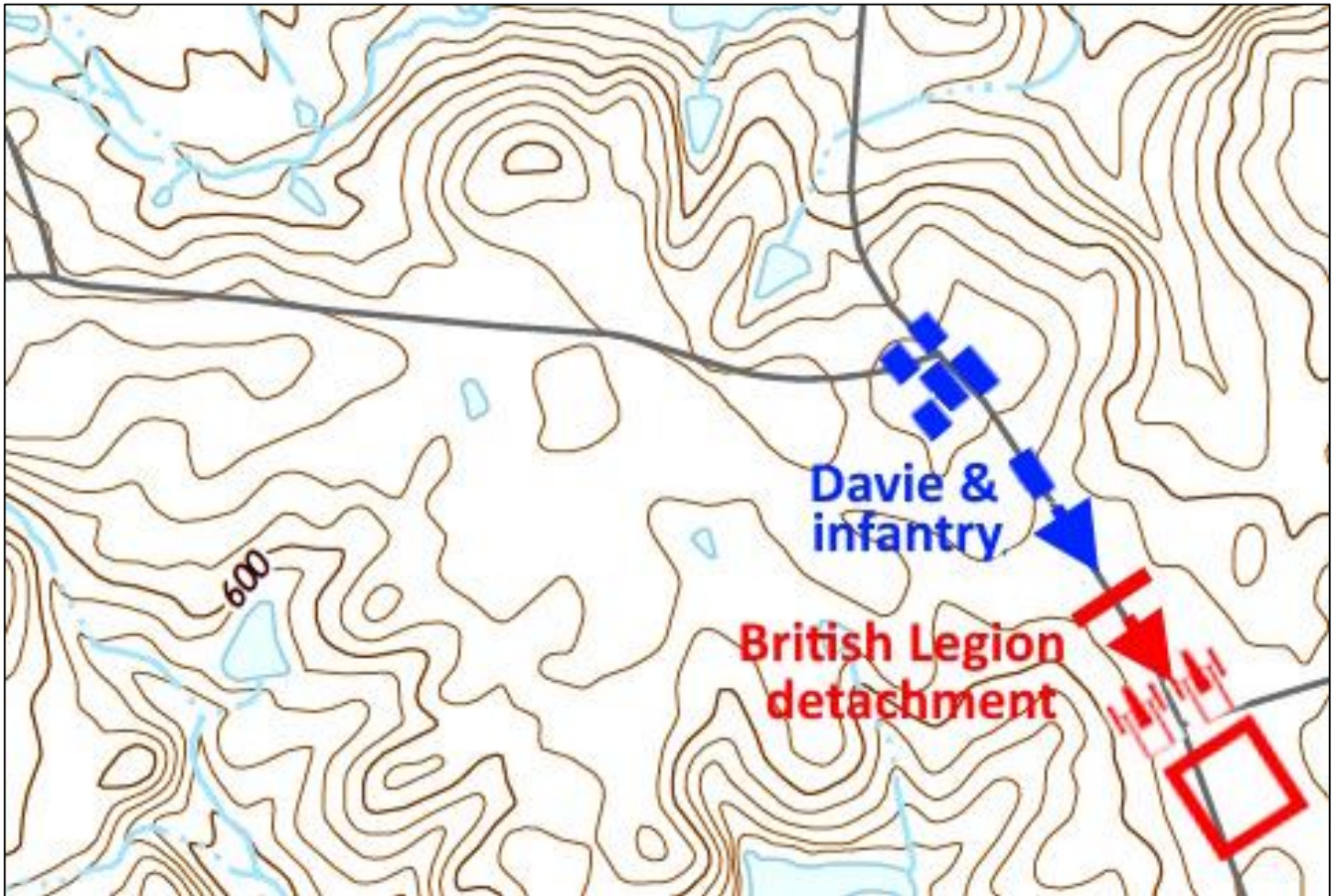
<sup>77</sup> "Kinlaw" probably refers to David Kinlock. "British Legion Biographical Sketches, Cavalry Officers," <https://www.royalprovincial.com/military/rhist/britlegn/blcav1.htm>.

<sup>78</sup> Patrick Stewart and Charles McDonald, "British Legion Biographical Sketches, Infantry Officers," <https://www.royalprovincial.com/military/rhist/britlegn/blinfl1.htm>.

*appearance deranged the American commander, and threw his corps into a state of confusion, producing a general retreat.*<sup>79</sup>

No known witness to the battle supports Tarleton's statement that Sumter fled in confusion because of the arrival of 40 of the enemy.<sup>80</sup> At this point Sumter's force greatly outnumbered the enemy, so it seems unlikely 40 men would have made any difference. Tarleton may have been correct, however, in writing that Sumter's men withdrew in a state of confusion, although incorrect as to the cause. According to Davie,

*A retreat was by this time absolutely necessary — The commissary stores were taken in the center*



**Figure 14.** While most of Sumter's men plunder the center camp, Davie's men drive off a detachment of the British Legion. The exact location is unclear.

*encampment, and numbers of men already inebriated, the greatest part were loaded with plunder and those in condition to fight had exhausted their ammunition, about an Hour was employed in plundering the camp, taking the paroles of the British officers, and preparing litters for the wounded; all this was transacted in full view of the British army who in the mean time consoled themselves with some military music & an interlude of 3 cheers for King George, which was immediately answered by 3 cheers and [name deleted] the Hero of American Liberty; the militia at length got into the line of march in three columns, Davies corps covering the rear, but as they were loaded with plunder, encumbered with their wounded friends, and many of them intoxicated, it is easy to conceive that this retreat could not be performed according to the rules of*

<sup>79</sup> Banastre Tarleton, *A History of the Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, in the Southern Provinces of North America* (Dublin: Colles, et al., 1787), 97-98.

<sup>80</sup> Pension applicant Mark Jackson stated that it was the mere rumor that Tarleton's corps was arriving that caused Sumter to retreat. <http://revwarapps.org/s1675.pdf>.



*the most approved tacticks, However, under all these disadvantages they filed off unmolested along the front of the Enemy about 1 O'clock.*<sup>81</sup>

## The Outcome

By eighteenth-century standards, this Battle of Hanging Rock, as well as the actions at Hanging Rock and Rocky Mount the week earlier, were victories for the British, since they kept the field. In practical terms, however, it was a severe defeat for the British. There is no good record on how many of Bryan's North Carolina volunteers were killed, wounded or captured, but ten days later at the Battle of Camden they played only a minor role, and afterward they were relegated to gathering provisions and threshing wheat.<sup>82</sup> Official British returns show that the Prince of Wales' American Regiment suffered 93 killed, wounded and missing, and it was never afterwards an effective fighting unit.<sup>83</sup> The British Legion suffered 35 casualties, and the Royal North Carolina Regiment lost 50.<sup>84</sup> These numbers are fairly close to Sumter's estimate of a total "not less than one hundred and thirty," including 73 taken prisoners.<sup>85</sup>

In contrast to these losses, Sumter estimated that his troops had only 20 killed, 40 wounded, and ten missing.<sup>86</sup> He "brought off one hundred horses, two hundred & fifty Stand of arms, with other articles of Considerable value." Sumter claimed that "both British and Tories are pannick struck."<sup>87</sup> This may be an exaggeration, but the British soon abandoned the posts at Rocky Mount and Hanging Rock, putting the Patriots "in possession of the Country from a few miles above Camden to Charlotte."<sup>88</sup>

As he was retiring from the field, Sumter is reported to have stated, "we had got a great victory, but it will scarcely ever be heard of, because we are nothing but a handful of raw militia, but if we had been commanded by a Continental officer, it would have sounded loud to our honor."<sup>89</sup> Probably another reason why Sumter's actions at Rocky Mount and Hanging Rock are so little known is that, only 10 days later, the British at the Battle of Camden routed the entire southern army under Gen. Horatio Gates. Two days afterward, on August 18, 1780, Sumter himself was surprised and routed by Tarleton at Fishing Creek. Sumter was surprised again at Fishdam Ford on Broad River on November 9 but managed to emerge victorious. He continued toward the Ninety Six post, prompting Cornwallis to recall Tarleton from his pursuit of Gen. Francis Marion. Tarleton caught up with Sumter on November 20, 1780, at Blackstock's Plantation. There Sumter gave Tarleton his first defeat, but that was overshadowed two months later by Tarleton's defeat at the Battle of Cowpens.

At Blackstock's, Sumter was severely wounded in his right shoulder. Three days later Cornwallis wrote to Tarleton that he would "be very glad to hear that Sumpter is in a condition to give us no farther trouble; he certainly has been our greatest plague in this country."<sup>90</sup> In the following February, although still suffering from his wound, Sumter returned to the field in the campaign called Sumter's Rounds. In the following June and July he led the Dog Days Campaign. Each of these expeditions involved several skirmishes that disrupted the supply lines of the British, kept them off guard, and sustained the Patriot cause in South Carolina.

The name Thomas Sumter is well known, but his battles are still scarcely ever heard of compared with those at Kings Mountain, Cowpens and a few others in South Carolina. On the other hand, Sumter and the men who fought under him, as well as those who fought against him, would probably be pleasantly surprised to know

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<sup>81</sup> Davie, Sketches, 15. Winn ("Notes") stated that the battle lasted until 9 o'clock.

<sup>82</sup> Dorney, Odyssey of Loyalist Colonel Samuel Bryan.

<sup>83</sup> Piecuch, "British Casualty Reports," 6. Braisted, "History of the Prince Of Wales' American Regiment - Part 4 of 7: Hanging Rock."

<sup>84</sup> Piecuch, "British Casualty Reports," 6.

<sup>85</sup> Sumter to Pinckney, 541. In his 1798 speech to the House of Representatives, Sumter claimed the enemy lost more than 800 men.

<sup>86</sup> Winn ("Notes") stated that 40 were killed and wounded.

<sup>87</sup> Sumter to Pinckney, 541-542.

<sup>88</sup> Winn's Notes.

<sup>89</sup> McJunkin's Narrative, 39.

<sup>90</sup> Cornwallis to Tarleton, November 23, 1780, in Tarleton, *History*, 208-209.

that almost two and a half centuries later those battles are still recorded, and perhaps spoken of more than ever. Many of the places where they fought and some bled can now be easily accessed and interpreted on the Liberty Trail,<sup>91</sup> and many are preserved by the South Carolina Battlefield Preservation Trust.<sup>92</sup> The Hanging Rock Battlefield is one of those where visitors can walk in the steps of Sumter and his troops.

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<sup>91</sup> <https://www.scbattlegroundtrust.org/liberty-trail>.

<sup>92</sup> <https://www.scbattlegroundtrust.org/>.



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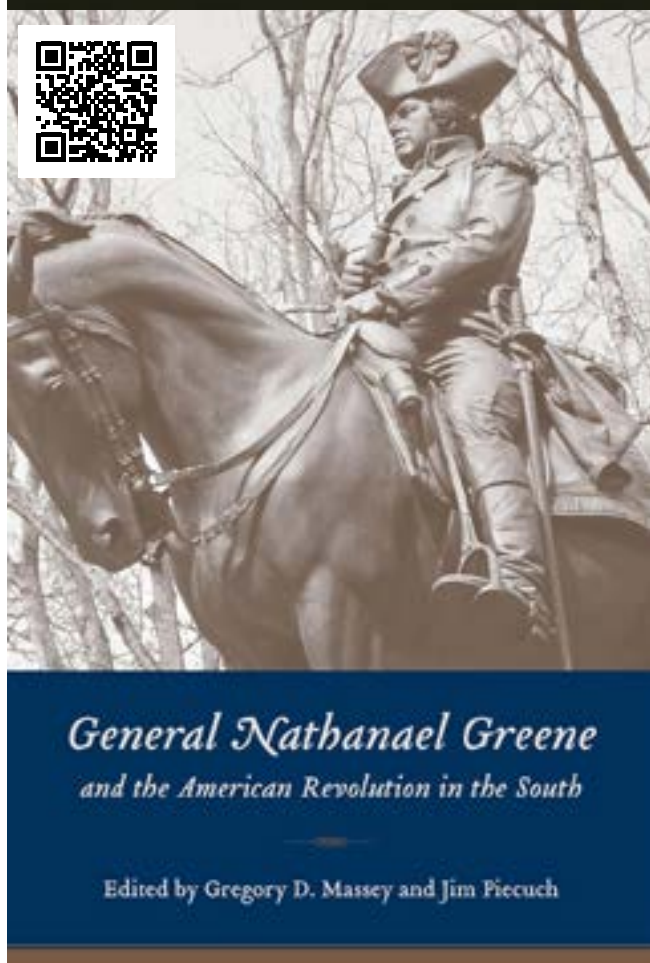
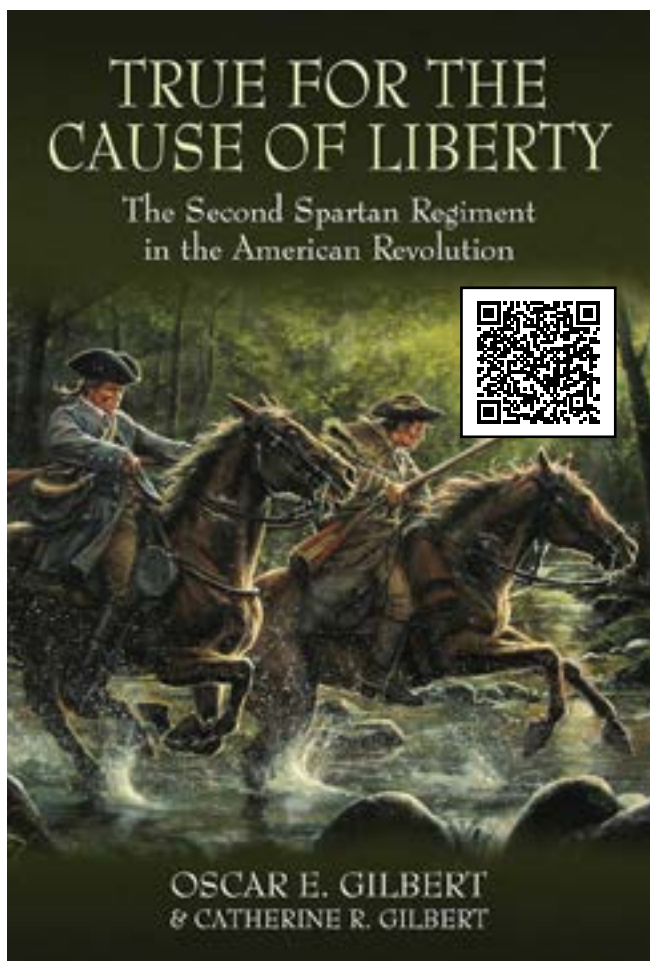
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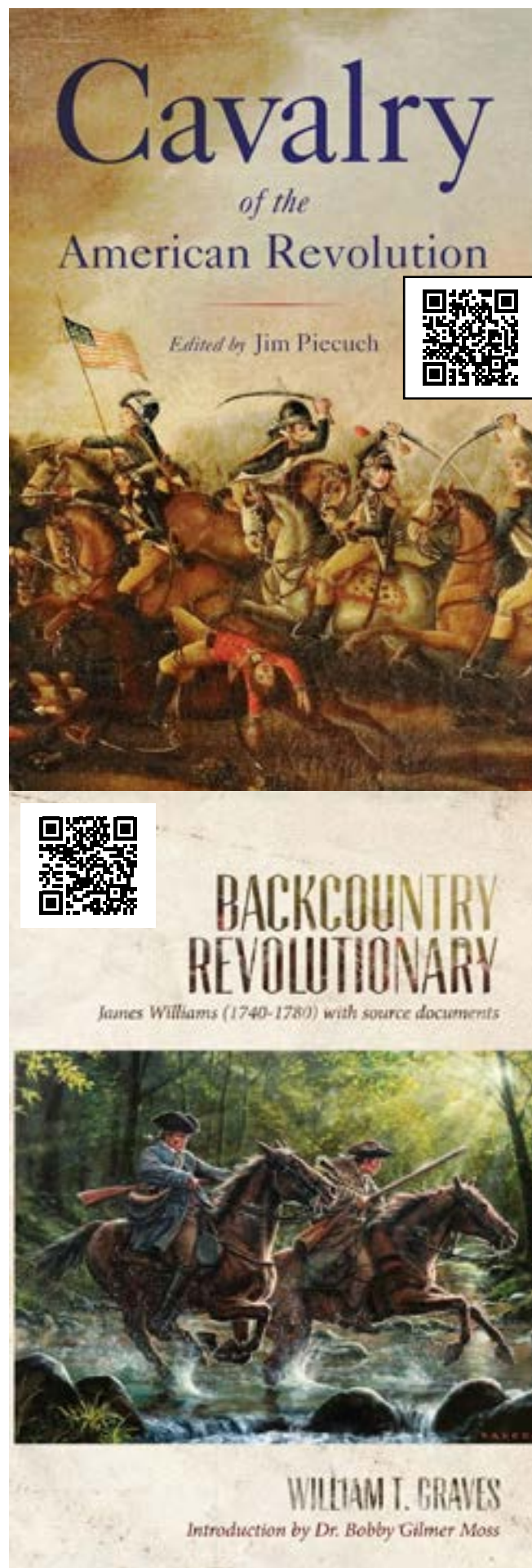
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# FORD THE PACHOLET

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