

Southern Campaigns of the American Revolution The **JOURNAL**

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BONUS:

Blind Reuben Lacey-
Hero or Dupe?

INSIDE:
The Evolution of
Backcountry Tactics

Robert Ford



The Journal

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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

Most readers see *The Journal* after the work is done. They see the articles, maps, illustrations, captions, and footnotes arranged on the page. That is as it should be. The editor should never stand between the reader and the story. Still, much happens before an issue is ready to publish.

My first duty is to find good history and bring it into the light. The Southern Campaigns are filled with stories hidden in pension applications, family papers, military records, archaeological reports, and forgotten places. An article may begin with a newly discovered document or a question raised while walking across a battlefield. Whatever its origin, the story must add something useful to our understanding of the Revolution in the South.

Once a manuscript arrives, the work begins. I first determine what the author wants to say. Every writer has a voice, and an editor should not replace it with his own. My responsibility is to help the writer tell the story clearly, accurately, and as strongly as possible. That means correcting English and improving organization, but also knowing when to leave a well-turned phrase alone.

Facts must be checked. Dates must agree. Names, ranks, units, and locations must be correct. Quotations must match the sources. Footnotes must take readers to the evidence, not merely suggest scholarship. Maps must show the right ground, and captions must explain why an image matters. If accounts disagree, we should say so. If the evidence does not provide an answer, we should not manufacture one. There is no shame in admitting history has left us uncertain.

The editor also serves the reader. An article can be well researched and difficult to follow. Our subject is complicated. The war in the South involved British regulars, Continental soldiers, Loyalists, militia, Native nations, enslaved people, civilians, and families trying to survive while armies moved through their communities. Readers need enough explanation to understand the action without having the history simplified beyond recognition. Finding that balance is an important part of the job.

There are less glamorous duties. Emails must be answered. Articles scheduled. Image permissions secured. Page numbers, links, typefaces, headings, captions, and footnotes must be checked and checked again. Deadlines arrive. Even after I believe an issue



Richard C. Meehan, Jr.

is finished, a broken link, missing word, or misplaced comma seems to wave at me from the page. An editor soon learns humility.

Above all, the editor is a steward. *The Journal* is not published merely to fill pages or meet a deadline. Its purpose is to preserve research, encourage new work, and connect people who care about the Southern Campaigns. Scholars, local historians, archaeologists, preservationists, reenactors, descendants, and readers have something to contribute. Much of the history we publish survives because someone saved a letter, recorded a memory, protected a battlefield, or asked one more question.

I remain grateful to the writers who trust me with their work, the peer reviewers who take their time to offer opinions to help improve articles, and to the readers who study, question, correct, and share what we publish. Editing *The Journal* is a responsibility, but it is also a privilege. My duty is simple to state, even when it is difficult to perform: serve the evidence, respect the writers and peer reviewers, remember the reader, and never forget the people whose stories we have been entrusted to tell with honesty and care.

If you believe you have discovered an error that needs correction, I welcome suggestions and rebuttal submissions. Send your comments to me using the form [here](https://southern-campaigns.org/contact/) (<https://southern-campaigns.org/contact/>).

Sincerely,

Richard C. Meehan, Jr.

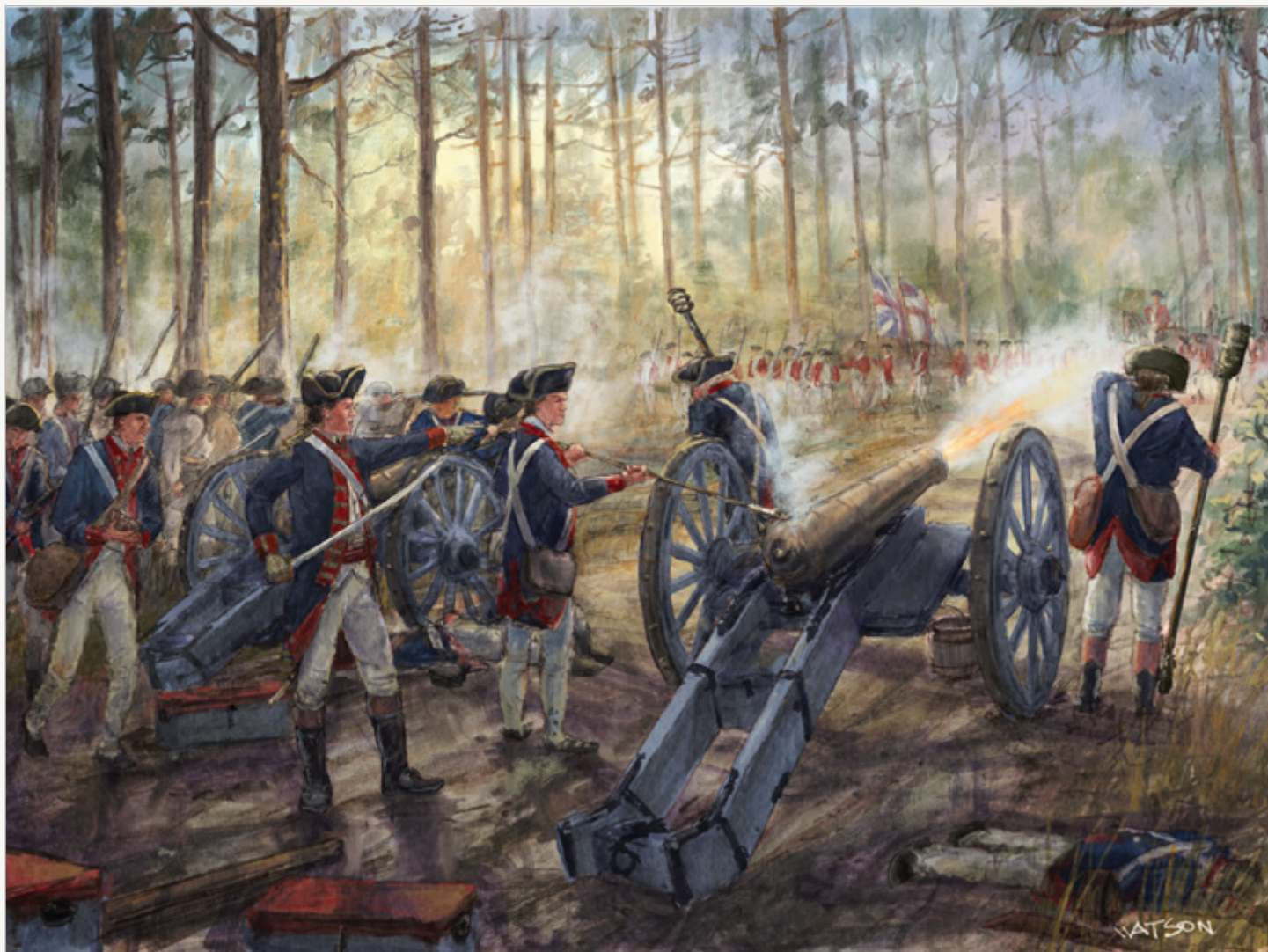
THE CAMDEN FOURTEEN

Help Us Identify Camden 11A

DNA can restore a name - and a story - to a fallen American Patriot.

FHD Forensics recently announced the identification of Camden 9B as **Private John Pumphrey of the 7th Maryland Regiment**, the first of the Camden Fourteen to be identified through DNA. Inspired by this breakthrough, we are now conducting a genetic investigation of the fallen Patriot known as Camden 11A. Thanks to a generous grant from SCIAA's Archaeological Research Trust, we are **halfway to our funding goal** for this second case.

Your tax-deductible donation will help us learn everything we can about this second American hero. Like John Pumphrey's, his story should be told.



Painting: Dale Watson, Courtesy South Carolina Battleground Preservation Trust



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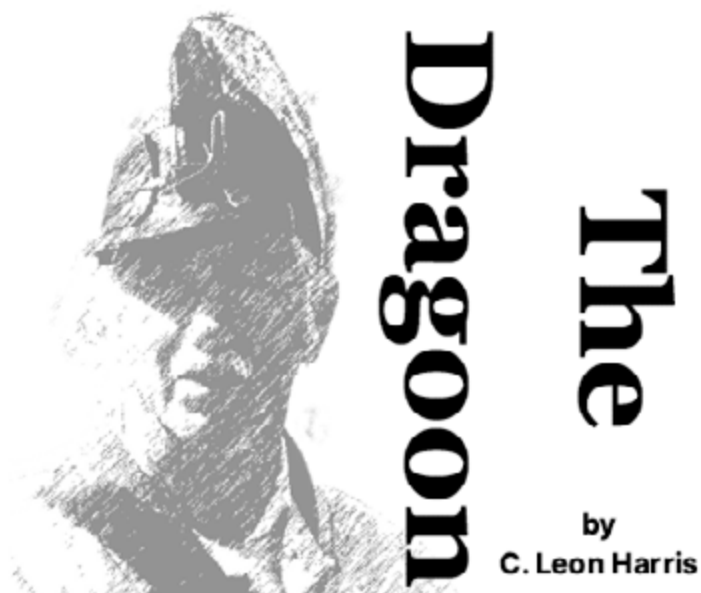
John Allison (left), David Reuwer (right)

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





Readers of this Journal are enjoying a bounty of books on the Revolutionary War in the South. But perhaps “enjoying” is not the right word unless your idea of enjoyment is trying to drink water from a fire hose. Twenty years ago, we had John Buchanan’s *The Road to Guilford Courthouse*, Patrick O’Kelley’s *Nothing But Blood and Slaughter*, and a few other well-researched books. Now there is a deluge of excellent books, with no end in sight. It is hard to know which to read, so I thought I would devote this month’s column to one that I think should be on the shelf of every serious student of the war in the South. Rick Meehan and I hope that some of you will also submit reviews of books you have found especially useful or enjoyable.

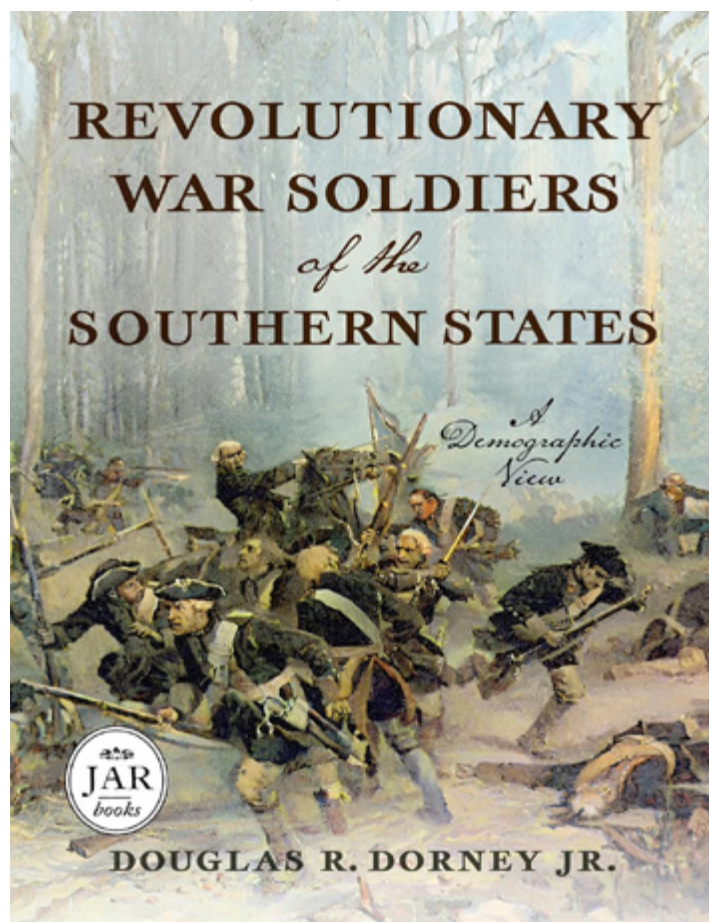
My choice is Douglas R. Dorney, Jr.’s *Revolutionary War Soldiers of the Southern States: A Demographic View*, recently published by Westholme Publishing under the Journal of the American Revolution Books imprint. This book examines the characteristics of soldiers from Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia – where and when they were born, whether they served in the Continental, state, or militia troops, their occupations, the battles they fought in, and much more. This may sound like dry statistics, but such details help us understand how these men managed to defeat the strongest army in the world. And the writing is far from dry. Every time I look up a detail in the excellent index, I find myself reading entire sections and chapters. Dorney also spices the demographics with interesting accounts of individual soldiers.

Dorney’s database consists of pension applications from revwarapps.org, transcribed mainly

by Will Graves and (full disclosure) me. Over four years, Dorney compiled data from more than six thousand applications. Only about one out of every six soldiers applied for pensions, but this is an impressive and statistically significant sample.

As Dorney notes, any database has inherent biases. Congress waited until 1818 to pass the first major pension act for Continental soldiers and until 1832 to provide for militiamen. By then, many veterans, especially older ones, had died, so the pensioners’ average age at first enlistment, 19.8 to 21.9 years, may be low. Another possible discrepancy is the low percentage of people of color who applied for pensions. Only 2% of pension applicants from Virginia were identified as people of color (page 125), yet two size rolls of Virginians enlisted in the Continental Line indicate that 5.8% and 9.5% had some African ancestry (<https://revwarapps.org/b69.pdf> and <https://revwarapps.org/b81.pdf>). Like any good book, Dorney’s raises issues like this that could inspire further research. Reading his book has given me several ideas for future columns and saved me weeks of searching through the pension applications.

Dorney’s book is a valuable addition to the literature on the Revolutionary War in the South. Even if you don’t have time to read all 277 pages now, you will probably want to keep a copy handy for reference.





Olivia Hipp

SCART Intern

of Mrs. Thomas and her daughters will compare favorably with the brightest of that bright galaxy that adorns the history of the State.”

There are two documented cases of Thomas aiding the Revolutionary cause. The first occurred on Kelsey Creek on February 6th, 1779. Earlier in the war, South Carolina governor John Rutledge sent arms, gunpowder, and lead to the home of Colonel John Thomas Sr., Jane Black Thomas’s husband, for safekeeping in case of war. Col. Thomas learned that a large Tory force was en route to attack his home, so he took as many of Rutledge’s provisions as he could and fled. He left his son-in-law, Josiah Culbertson, at the home with the women and children, including Jane Black Thomas. When the Tories arrived, they demanded the powder, but Thomas refused. The Tories opened fire on the house but did little damage. Culbertson returned fire from the upper story as Thomas, her daughters, and her son William loaded his guns. The Tories retreated, and the gunpowder was safe.

The second instance of Jane Thomas’s contributions to the war effort was her role in the Battle of Cedar Springs, which took place the following year on July 12, 1780.

The Battle of Cedar Springs

Jane Black Thomas was visiting Col. John Thomas Sr. at Fort Ninety Six when she overheard some of the wives of Tory soldiers discussing their plans to attack the First Spartan Regiment at Cedar Springs the following night. Her son, Col. John Thomas Jr., was made commander of that regiment when John Sr. was imprisoned. Fearing for her son’s life, she rode 60 miles south on horseback to reach the Spartan encampment to warn them before the attack.¹ Jane Black Thomas returned to her home, and the Spartans prepared.² They left their campfires burning, maintaining the illusion that the soldiers were in

This year, the Battle of Cedar Springs Reenactment was held on Saturday, July 18th, at Cedar Springs Baptist Church. Over 200 attendees braved the heat, many in period-appropriate dress, to commemorate the 246th anniversary of a Patriot victory, accompanied by bagpipes, colonial instruments, and (blank) gunfire. A variety of sponsors greeted guests with swag and information, including the South Carolina American Revolution Trust, the Spartanburg County Public Library, the Daughters of the American Revolution, and the Palmetto Trail. I was most excited to talk to Debbie Sammons, owner of Silver Bee Apothecary, who spoke with Effie (a fellow SCART intern) and me about colonial-era plant medicine, using samples from her own garden. With a gathering of people all excited to learn or share what they knew about the Revolution or the Battle of Cedar Springs itself, it is important to assess exactly what we were there to remember.

Jane Black Thomas

Perhaps the most frequently mentioned name at the reenactment was Jane Black Thomas, and for good reason. In 1847, Rev. James Hodge Saye wrote: “The ladies of South Carolina were proverbial for being true to the cause of independence, but the zeal and fidelity

- 1 Parker, John C., Jr. *Parker’s Guide to the Revolutionary War in South Carolina*. Fifth Edition. Harrelson Press. P. 403-5. O’Kelley, Patrick. *Nothing but Blood and Slaughter: The Revolutionary War in the Carolinas*. Vol. II. Blue House Tavern Press, 2004. p. 197-8.
- 2 Hope, Wes. *The Spartanburg Area in the American Revolution*. 2nd ed. Wes Hope, 2003. p. 38.

camp and unaware of the attack, and hid themselves in the rear of the camp. When about 150 loyalist provincials charged into the camp, the 60-or-so Spartans fired into their ranks, killing some and scattering the rest. The loyalists fled to Gowen's Fort, and the Spartans enjoyed their victory.³ This marked the first violent resistance



Reenactors playing Tories sneak into the Spartan camp

against Tory partisans in the Upcountry, which, along with the Battle of Huck's Defeat, marked a turn in the tide of the Revolution in South Carolina.⁴

Except that might not be the exact story. The version above is what is most commonly told from what I've heard and read, and is consistent with the story as told by John C. Parker in Parker's *Guide to the Revolutionary War in South Carolina*. Parker cites Patrick O'Kelley, author of *Nothing but Blood and Slaughter: the Revolutionary War in the Carolinas*, in his account of the Battle of Cedar Springs, but O'Kelley himself casts doubt about some crucial details of this story.

Firstly, O'Kelley suggests that it is more likely that Thomas was visiting her sons in prison, not her husband. In his notes, he writes: "I am unable to determine why John Thomas, Sr. would have been arrested after he took parole. [Major Joseph] McJunkin wrote that Mrs. Thomas was visiting her sons, William and Abraham, who were prisoners at Ninety-Six, and not her husband."⁵

Maj. McJunkin was Col. Thomas Sr.'s son-in-law.⁶

Retellings also differ on whether Thomas overheard from "A Tory" (Parker) or "Tory wives" (O'Kelley) about the planned attack on her son's camp—which would further illustrate women's involvement in the Revolutionary cause. While not explicitly argued, O'Kelley also stated that two of Thomas's sons were encamped at Cedar Springs, a detail omitted in some other versions.

Finally, the date of the encounter itself is disputed. In *The Spartanburg Area in the American Revolution*, Wes Hope says that accounts differ between the 12th and the 13th, likely because this battle occurred late at night.⁷ Hope uses the 12th as the date of the battle in his main text, a date that other works seem to follow.

When writing the history of an event, historians have not only an ability but a responsibility to discuss their sources and account for discrepancies. A reenactment, however, is not just about telling the history but about the story.

The Value of Reenactments

With the release of Christopher Nolan's *The Odyssey*, I've been thinking a lot recently about the choices we make when retelling historical stories for a modern audience. The farther removed the audience is from the story—temporally, geographically, and culturally—the more work the reteller must do to contextualize it. The reteller must decide what their priorities are, whether those be historical accuracy, entertainment, or the values of the story itself. Inevitably, the storyteller will insert themselves into the narrative. Now, obviously, there is a huge difference between *The Odyssey*, a fictional story, and the Battle of Cedar Creek, a real conflict in American history, but I think many of the choices the retellers make – be they actors or reenactors – are similar.

6 Saye, p. 9. It is worth noting that this source which is based off of McJunkin's own manuscript differs from what O'Kelley says about his account. Saye provides an account of Mrs. Thomas's actions both at her Kelsey Creek home and at Cedar Springs that is not consistent with any other version I have mentioned. It is from Saye's account that I pulled the very flowery language about Jane Black Thomas quoted earlier in this text.

7 Hope, p. 114.

3 O'Kelley, p. 197-8.

4 Hope, p. 40.

5 O'Kelley, p. 514.



A reenactor distributes blank paper cartridges to simulate gunfire.

Unlike sources such as Parker's Guide that reenactors draw on, reenacting is a blend of entertainment and history. The acting, the clothing, the set—all of the elements in a reenactment create an immersive experience that better contextualizes the event for onlookers and reenactors alike. However, the medium forces some compromises. For many reasons, it is impractical to hold a reenactment at night, and it is probably not the best idea to have and then abandon an active campfire in the middle of the set. The reenactors at the Battle of Cedar Springs may not have been able to recreate the exact conditions, but they still told that story by unfurling their bedrolls to create the illusion of sleeping soldiers in camp before sneaking off to the tree line. When the Tory reenactors arrived, one contributed to the scene by stabbing his bayonet into the empty bedroll just before receiving (blank) fire from the hidden Spartans.

In this way, something is gained, and something is lost in each retelling, especially with a story as disputed as this one, but we tell them anyway. We tell them not just because we like history, but because we're interested in what it says about us. Reenactments, particularly on grand anniversaries like the 250th*, are perhaps even more revealing about our present than our past. What do we value as individuals, as South Carolinians, as Americans, in 2026? I am pleased to report that, from the speakers I heard, it seems this year we value examining the participation of individuals from marginalized groups in the American Revolution. It also seems the community hopes to highlight other stories from the war that have gone largely unexamined—such as the perspectives of Loyalists. The Battle of Cedar Springs Reenactment was one of what I hope will be many events this year that help widen the lens to document a more complete picture of the American Revolution.

Information about Jane Black Thomas and the Battle of Cedar Springs was taken entirely from sources in the South Carolina American Revolution Trust (SCART)'s collection.

FROM WOFFORD'S IRON WORKS TO COWPENS

Southern Campaigns Word Search

Find the 23 terms from Robert Ford's article. Words may run forward, backward, horizontally, vertically, or diagonally.

L	L	F	W	C	T	E	N	O	Y	A	B	E	A	R	D	A	M
L	E	O	A	L	N	E	S	E	F	R	L	R	A	O	E	D	O
W	T	L	D	A	L	Y	S	P	E	Q	A	M	E	R	A	M	T
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R	H	S	L	N	V	E	Z	C	E	M	T	H	L	E	N	R	N

WORD BANK

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PATRIOTS	PICKENS	RIFLEMEN	SHELBY
SUMTER	TARLETON	WOFFORD	

Based on Robert Ford, "From Wofford's Iron Works to Cowpens: The Evolution of Backcountry Tactics."

The “Lab” of Black Powder Mary: Mary McKeehan Patton’s Black Powder Production Method



Effie Copeland
SCART Intern

Black powder, at the time of the American Revolution was heavily restricted by Britain. While much was, after the severance from the former mother country, imported from elsewhere, it was also made at home in the colonies. Mary McKeehan Patton learned the black powder trade from her father and carried the knowledge to her settlement in what would become known as Tennessee.¹ When the Overmountain Men descended on Sycamore Shoals in need of the scarce black powder, Patton made and supplied approximately five-hundred pounds, a contribution credited as critical to their victory at Kings Mountain.² Her process likely went something akin to this.

Potassium Nitrate or saltpeter was a crucial ingredient in 18th century gunpowder production. Largely, it was created using feces of some sort. Patton would have utilized bat guano gathered from Tennessee’s caves. It was available in abundance and contains potassium rather than the sodium found in human feces, making it a better base for black powder. To test the quality, Patton would have stepped on the guano to make a foot imprint, then checked on the mark two days later. If the footprint was gone, the guano was rich in potassium nitrate.³ She would have then poured water through the guano and strained it in a straw-lined hopper, collected the water, and repeated the process. When “an egg would float” in the water, she would know the process was complete.⁴

The same process would be undertaken with hardwood ash. Patton would have then boiled the two together in equal parts repeatedly until pure saltpeter crystals began to form, as they made better powder.⁵

To create charcoal, Patton would place pine timber in a mound, cover it with earth, create a vent hole, and place in it live coals. She would then burn and monitor the mound for days until charcoal formed.⁶ The pine was soft, so it did not overproduce ash which would dirty a gun barrel, requiring cleaning between shots.⁷ Patton, in her Overmountain home, also had abundant access to secret sulfur stores.⁸ She would take these three main ingredients, once ground separately so as to not cause a reaction, wet them, and mix them using 75% saltpeter, 15% charcoal, and 10% sulfur. The ingredients would

1 Randell Jones, *Before They Were Heroes at King’s Mountain* (Daniel Boone Footsteps, 2011), 386-388.

2 Jones, 386-388.

3 Ned Jilton, II, “Meet Mary Patton – gunpowder maker for the Overmountain Men,” *Johnson City Press*, May 23, 2026, par. 11. <https://johnsoncitypress.com/news/374184/meet-mary-patton-gunpowder-maker-for-the-overmountain-men/>

4 Jilton, par. 12.

5 Michael Carver, “Making Gunpowder,” *Colonial Brewer*, January 18, 2023, par.

5. <https://colonialbrewer.com/2023/01/18/making-gunpowder/>

6 Carole Summers, “2024 F. Marion Symp. 5th Marti Mongiello: Rev. Rose the Riveter: Mary Patton. Oct 18 01H33M PM T1,” YouTube, February 13, 2025, video, 40:40. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fFIMB2OZQeM>

7 Jilton, par. 16.

8 Summers, “2024 F. Marion Symp. 5th Marti Mongiello.”

be mixed in a stamp mill and then left to dry in the sun or an oven.⁹

Packaged in one-pound increments, Patton would load the black powder into her wagon and travel throughout the South to sell to buyers for one dollar per pound. Over the course of her albeit dangerous business, Patton had no recorded major accidents. It was through this process and prudence that Patton saved King's Mountain and supplied the South in powder throughout the war. Patton's story and others' can be found in *Before They Were Heroes at King's Mountain* by Randell Jones, located in Bill Davies' library collection at the South Carolina American Revolution Trust and Marti Mongiello's *Women in War: Revolutionary Rosie the Riveter: An American Shero: Mary Patton, "Black-powder Mary"* presentation at the Francis Marion Symposium.

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Gunpowder factory

⁹ Summers, "2024 F. Marion Symp. 5th Marti Mongiello."

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L O Y A L I S T

THE



by
Paul Wood



OUR SURVEY OF SOUTH CAROLINA LOYALISTS CONTINUES THIS MONTH.

This month, we focus on the tragic life of Loyalist Thomas Fletchall. In South Carolina's 350-year history, 1775 was a year like no other. Events presented life-altering, unavoidable decisions. Those who were not enslaved and therefore had some control over their destinies were forced to choose between allegiance to or rebellion against Great Britain. The choice of neutrality quickly proved untenable. No one was safe, and several thousand South Carolinians would die over the next eight years. Some four thousand Tories who survived the war were forced out of the state and left with no choice but to start anew in unfamiliar locales.

In the South Carolina Backcountry in 1775, several powerful men had choices to make that would influence many neighbors and, therefore, the course of the conflict. South Carolina's executive body, the Council of Safety, regarded Col. Thomas Fletchall as a grave threat to the nascent independence movement. The transplanted Maryland native, born around 1725, had moved to the Ninety Six District in the early 1770s. The royal government had granted him approximately six hundred acres on Fairforest Creek near the present-day town of Union. As a wealthy and influential resident (he was both a coroner and justice of the peace), Fletchall received a commission as a colonel and was given command of the 1,500-man Upper Saluda Militia Regiment.

Fletchall proved himself a strident and vocal supporter of King George III. The clearest sign of his influence came in the summer of 1775. On July 13, as requested by the Council of Safety, he mustered his regiment and distributed copies of the rebel government's Articles of Allegiance. His captains read it to their militiamen and gave them the opportunity to sign it. Of all those gathered that day, not a single one did so.¹

While the Council of Safety sought signatures from around the state for the Articles, Loyalist Major Joseph Robinson penned a document of Counter-Association. He and Fletchall gained 172 signatures.² The Low Country

1 Alexander Garden, *Anecdotes of the Revolutionary War in America*, Charleston, 1822, 67; Keith Krawczynski, *William Henry Drayton: South Carolina Revolutionary Patriot*, Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press., 2001, 157.

2 Garden, 68; Krawczynski, 157.

Digital Library provides an image of the original and summarizes it as such: “[Fletchall] and the others associated with him declare themselves Loyalists, but offer to *live in peace* (emphasis added) with the Patriots around them. They also declare their willingness to help defend the province and help ‘suppress the intrusions of Indians, insurrections of Negroes, or any other enemy which may or shall invade this province.’”³ Though the Council of Safety feared his influence, Fletchall’s desire to “live in peace” marked his actions throughout the impending Revolutionary War.⁴

The Council of Safety employed another method to turn the tide of resistance in the Backcountry. The Council dispatched a five-man delegation led by Henry Drayton. They were accompanied by a hundred or more militia. Their aim was to win hearts, minds, and signatures and to avoid bloodshed. Drayton’s mission met with limited success. The disappointing results proved to the Council that Loyalists equaled or possibly outnumbered Whigs in some parts of the Amelia and Orangeburg districts and the expansive, highly populated Ninety Six District. Thomas Fletchall appeared at several of the delegation’s public gatherings and argued vigorously against the rebellion. Drayton reported to the Council of Safety that three men challenged him at Fletchall’s home. They were Robert Cunningham, Thomas Brown (recently tortured by some Liberty Boys near Augusta), and the host, Thomas Fletchall.⁵

Drayton eventually made his way to the district’s center of government, Ninety Six, where he was protected by as many as 1,200 militia. He faced an even larger contingent of Loyalist militia led by the outspoken regimental commander Robert Cunningham. The opposing parties avoided violence, and the confrontation concluded with an agreement signed on September 16. Drayton and Fletchall were the most notable signatories. Demonstrating once again his yearning for a resolution unmarred by violence, Fletchall reported the two sides agreed to “remain peaceable.” As an indicator of forthcoming events, Robert Cunningham and his brother Patrick steadfastly refused to sign the document.⁶

The Patriots continued to hold Ninety Six, and both they and the King’s Men remained ready for battle. For the impending violence, reports provide varying numbers for both contingents. The rebels had somewhere between 560 and 2,000 men at Ninety Six. Fletchall garnered between 2,400 and 4,000 men to rendezvous there and take possession of it from the rebels.

Contemporaries described Thomas Fletchall as weighing as much as 300 pounds. As a result, he was unable to lead men in battle. Fletchall gave orders to Major Robinson and, tellingly, returned home to Fairforest. Patriot majors Andrew Williamson and James Mayson held the fort. The Tories commenced a siege on November 18. The three-day event brought about South Carolina’s first Revolutionary War battle deaths. With both sides exhausting their ammunition, the combatants agreed to forego hostilities for twenty days. The treaty’s signatories were Williamson and Mayson for the rebels and five Tory captains, including Patrick Cunningham.⁷

The Council of Safety had learned two weeks earlier that open warfare appeared imminent. The Council dispatched Col. Richard Richardson to the Backcountry. The French and Indian War veteran was assigned to aid in the defense of Ninety Six and to apprehend Loyalist leaders. When Richardson arrived at Fort Granby at the

3 “Copy of Col. Fletchall’s Resolution,” <https://digital.tcl.sc.edu/digital/collection/amerrevsc/id/6516>.

4 George Kotlik, “Thomas Fletchall’s Association: A Loyalist Proclamation in the South Carolina Backcountry,” *Journal of the American Revolution*, June 24, 2019. <https://allthingsliberty.com/2019/06/thomas-fletchalls-association-a-loyalist-proclamation-in-the-south-carolina-backcountry> (accessed August 1, 2026).

5 R. W. Gibbes, *Documentary History of the American Revolution*, New York: D. Appleton & Co. 1855, Letter of Richard Richardson to Henry Laurens, January 2, 1776, 246-48.

6 Rebecca Nathan Brannon, “Reconciling the Revolution: Resolving Conflict and Rebuilding Community in the Wake of the Civil War in South Carolina, 1775-1860,” PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2007, 20-21, <https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/handle/2027.42/57715>. Accessed July 2, 2024; Garden, 69.

7 Michael Cecere, *March to Independence: The Revolutionary War in the Southern Colonies, 1775-1776*, Westholme: Yardley, PA, 2001, 83; “The Journal of Alexander Chesney, A Loyalist in the Revolution and After,” ed. E. Alfred Jones, “The Ohio State University Bulletin,” October 30, 1921, 66-72; Gibbes, 214-216.

junction of the Saluda and Broad rivers, he learned a siege had unfolded at Ninety Six and concluded with a treaty. Richardson decided he would not recognize the treaty.

Richardson's numbers increased dramatically as he made his way deep into the Ninety Six District. His force of between 4,000 and 5,000 captured the Cunningham brothers and Fletchall. During the expedition, later dubbed the Snow Camps or the Snow Campaign, the colonel apprehended and sent to confinement in Charleston more than a hundred deemed to be leaders of the Loyalist movement.⁸

Thomas Fletchall was jailed in Charleston for six months, returned home, and did not participate in the war. But his rebel neighbors were energized by the Patriot victory at Kings Mountain on October 7, 1780, and sent him threatening messages. He, his wife, and their five children relocated to Charleston and resided there for two years as refugees. About 4,200 white Loyalists chose not to live in the newly independent nation. Sailing on British ships, the Loyalists emigrated to the British Caribbean, East Florida, England, and the Canadian Maritimes. The Fletchalls received a royal land grant and settled in Cornwall County, Jamaica.⁹

Sadly, in February 1782, the General Assembly assigned Fletchall to Class V on its confiscation lists. This class was "Those who have borne commissions, civil or military, under the British Government, since the conquest of this Province." The Fletchalls lost all of their property. On the other hand, the British government gave Loyalists the opportunity to apply for compensation for their losses. Fletchall applied for £ 2,181 and received £ 1,000. He also sought to apply for a military pension, but illness prevented him from sailing to England to do so.¹⁰

Some men whose property had been confiscated were able to successfully petition the Assembly for reconsideration. One example is Patrick Cunningham. He paid a 12 percent amercement and eventually became the wealthiest resident of Laurens County. Given Cunningham's active participation in the war and Fletchall's low level of involvement, Fletchall certainly would have been allowed to return to South Carolina. But unlike Cunningham, for reasons unknown, he did not seek a reversal. The arch-nemesis of 1775 had drifted into Caribbean obscurity. Fletchall died in his sixty-fourth year, 1789, most likely from a tropical disease. Except for the monetary compensation and the Jamaican property, the Fletchall family was left bereft.¹¹

"The arch-nemesis of 1775 had drifted into Caribbean obscurity."



8 Paul A. Wood, Jr., "Bloody Bill Cunningham: Life and Times of a Revolutionary War Villain," <https://southcarolina250.com/publication/bloody-bill-cunningham>.

9 "Loyalists," South Carolina Encyclopedia, <https://www.scencyclopedia.org/sce/entries/loyalists/> (accessed August 1, 2026.)

10 "Estate Confiscation Lists," *Royal Gazette* (Charleston), March 20, 1782;

11 "Saint James Parish, Jamaica Explained," https://everything.explained.today/Saint_James_Parish_Jamaica/ (accessed August 8, 2026.)

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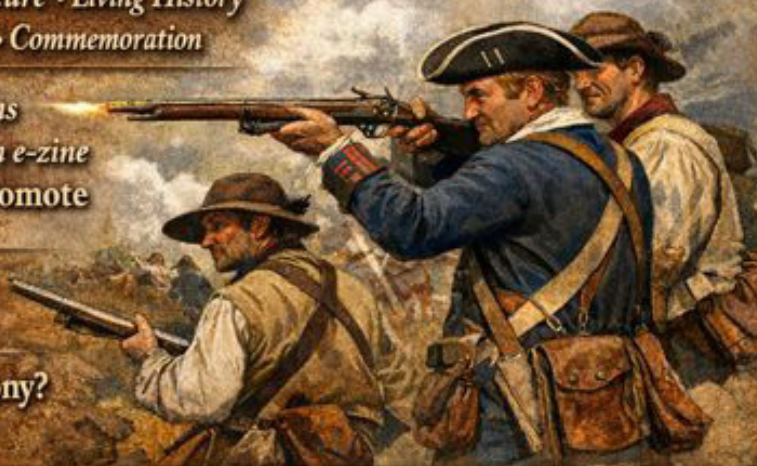
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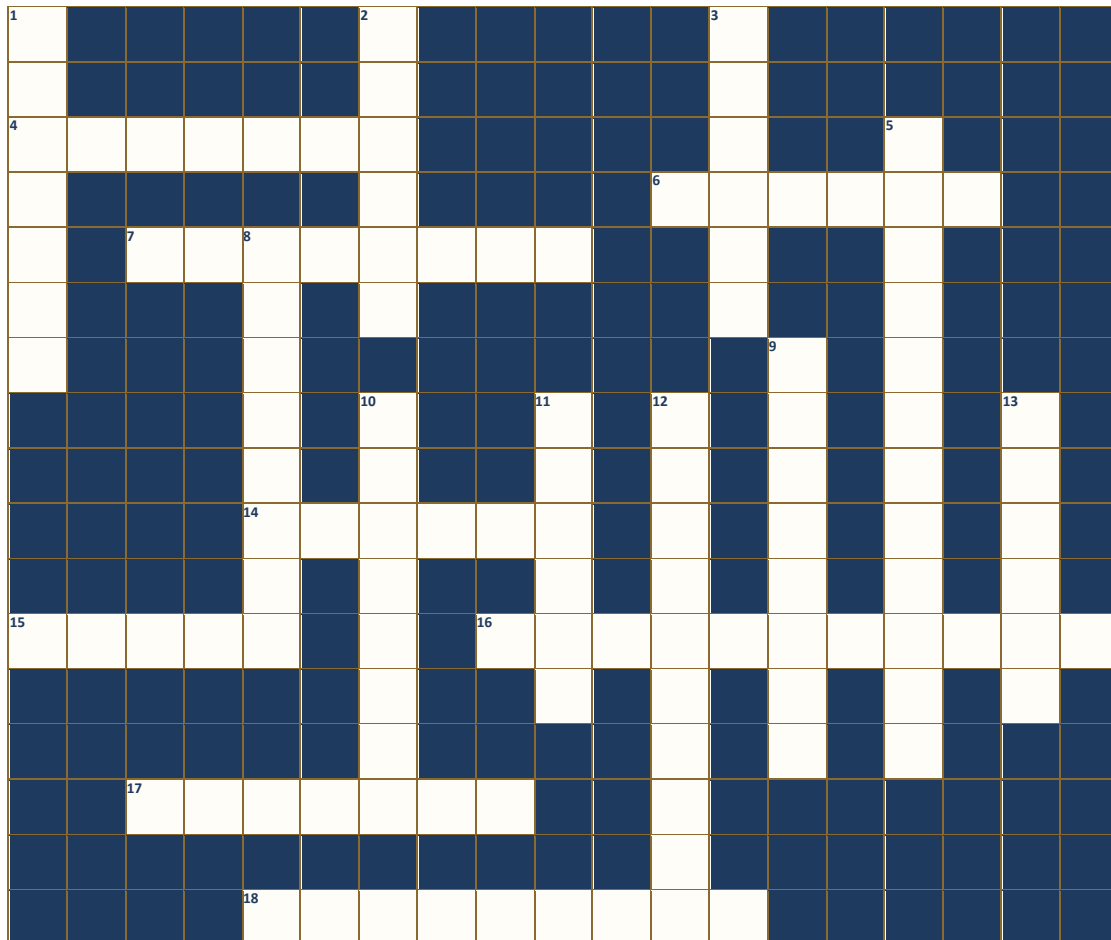


Revolutionary **SOUTH CAROLINA**

FROM WOFFORD'S IRON WORKS TO COWPENS

Crossword Puzzle

Use the clues and Robert Ford's article to complete the puzzle. Ignore spaces and punctuation in answers.



ACROSS

4. January 1781 battle where Morgan brought the evolving tactics to maturity.
6. Patriot commander who held the hilltop at Blackstock's Farm.
7. British cavalryman whose winning streak ended at Blackstock's Farm.
14. General who massed four rifle regiments on his front line.
15. Georgia captain used as bait at Musgrove's Mill.
16. Region whose frontier experience supplied the tactics traced through all four battles.
17. Attachment the long rifle could not accommodate.
18. Industrial site that anchored the 8 August 1780 engagement.

DOWN

1. South Carolina militia commander on Morgan's left at Cowpens.
2. Smoothbore weapon whose battlefield value lay in rapid, massed volleys.
3. Tactical device that reversed the European preference for open-ground formations.
5. Place-name completing the alternative title "Second Battle of ____."
8. Specialists whose aimed fire disproportionately removed enemy leaders.
9. Mill on the Enoree where Patriots lured a larger Loyalist force into attack.
10. Inspector of Militia whose backcountry activity helped provoke the first engagement.
11. Provincial officer whose detachment rushed into the waiting camp at Wofford's.
12. Farm where buildings, fences, and high ground strengthened Sumter's position.
13. Continental subordinate who ordered the decisive charge after a volley.

Based on "From Wofford's Iron Works to Cowpens: The Evolution of Backcountry Tactics" by Robert Ford.



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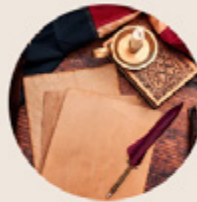
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From
**Wofford's
Iron Works**
to
Cowpens

*The Evolution of
Backcountry Tactics*

By Robert Ford

From Wofford's Iron Works to Cowpens: The Evolution of Backcountry Tactics

Eighteenth-century warfare expected neat lines of infantry marching against each other in open fields. The geometry of straight lines was paramount, as was the use of the smoothbore musket. The musket, with a bayonet, was the dominant infantry weapon of the day.¹ In contrast, many battles in the Southern Campaign defied eighteenth-century tactics. These were battles fought in the backcountry, using stratagems drawn from frontier experience. Soldiers from the backcountry, unschooled in the formalities of the standard military manuals, employed tactics alien to European armies. Many of these gambits proved wildly successful. Using the battles of Wofford's Iron Works, Musgrove's Mill, Blackstock's Farm, and Cowpens, this article will examine two aspects of backcountry tactical innovation that proved decisive. The first was rifle fire, shunned by Europeans but embraced by Americans in the backcountry, where the rifle was a common hunting weapon. The second was ambush, the doctrinal opposite of the European model of infantry in straight lines meeting in the open. Men from the frontier perfected techniques of cover, concealment, and surprise, confounding conventionally trained British and Loyalist Provincial officers.

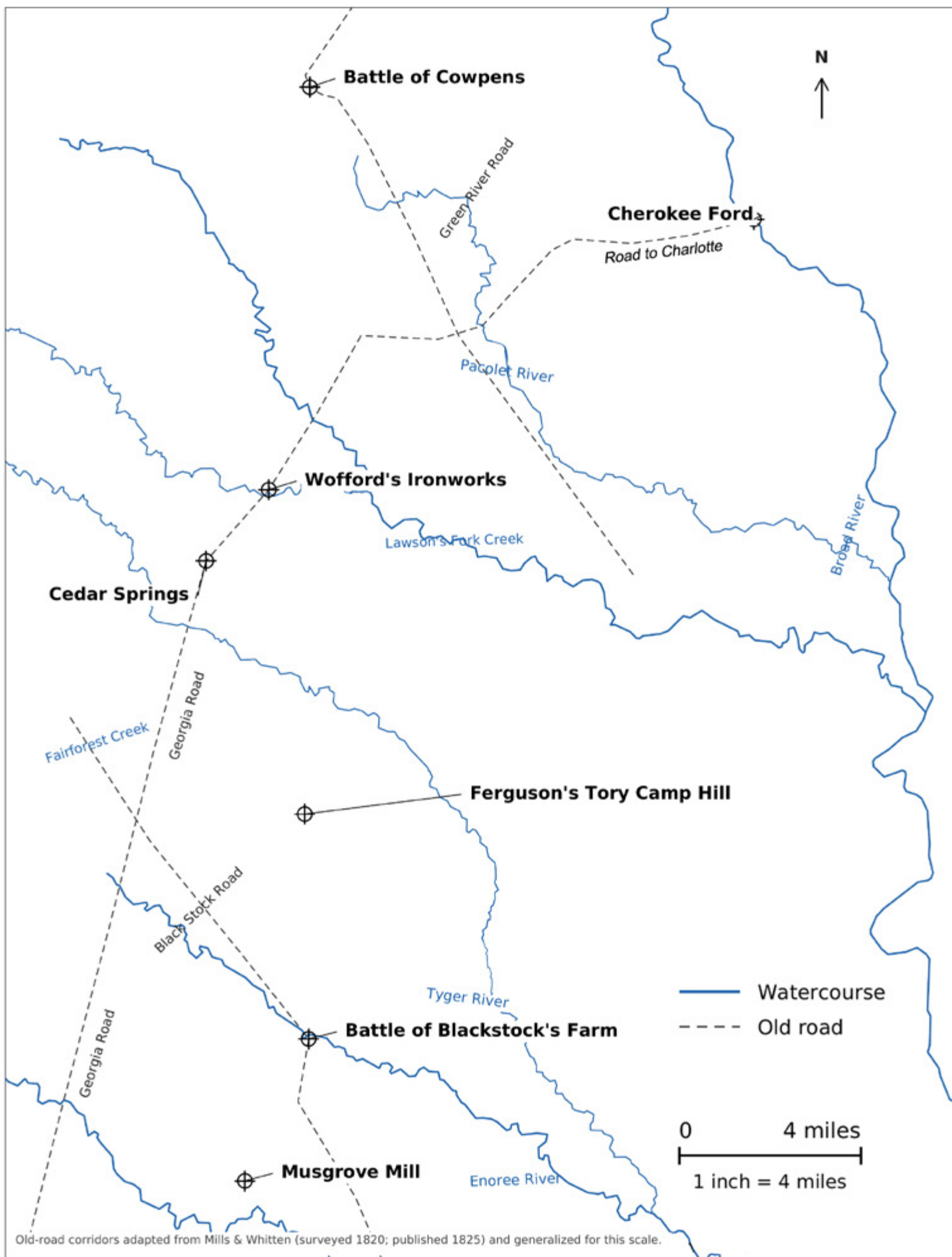
Wofford's Iron Works

The Battle of Wofford's Iron Works was fought on 8 August 1780. The battle, also known as the Second Battle of Cedar Springs, was a product of the Whig reaction to the activity of Maj. Patrick Ferguson in the South Carolina backcountry. Ferguson, the Inspector of Militia for South Carolina, was also the commander of a force of 125 Provincial soldiers, around which he formed a much larger unit of as many as 1,000 Tory militiamen.² Ferguson was feared throughout the backcountry. One measure of his presence was the fact that Col. Isaac Shelby, who fought Ferguson relentlessly, credited him with commanding more than 3,000 men.³

Col. Charles McDowell, a militia commander from present-day Burke County, North Carolina, concerned that Ferguson intended a foray into western North Carolina, assembled a strong Patriot militia to resist any Loyalist incursion. In late July, he camped at Cherokee Ford on the Broad River in South Carolina. His force included the regiments led by Shelby from western North Carolina and by Col. Elijah Clarke, a Georgia militia officer.

In early August, McDowell tasked Shelby and Clarke with monitoring Ferguson and interdicting his foraging parties. The number of men involved was small. Shelby described the Loyalist force as "about the strength of his own party."⁴ Anthony Allaire, an officer in Ferguson's command, recorded the Loyalist strength as 145 men, and we take this as the size of the Patriot force, as well.⁵

- 1 John W. Wright, "The Rifle in the American Revolution," *The American Historical Review* 29, no. 2 (Jan. 1924), 294. The point was emphasized by Lachlan MacIntosh, who lamented the need to create a rifle company in his battalion of Continentals, noting "I doubt not but we will be obliged to arm more with such guns, for want of others, which are very scarce," MacIntosh to George Washington, 16 February 1776, in Peter Force, *American Archives: Consisting of a Collection of Authentick Records, State Papers, Debates, and Letters and Other Notices of Publick Affairs*, 4th series, vol. 4 (Washington, DC, 1843), 1160.
- 2 William Campbell, Isaac Shelby, and Benjamin Cleveland, "A State of the Proceedings of the Western Army, from the 25th of September, 1780, to the Reduction of Major Ferguson, and the Army Under His Command," in Lyman C. Draper, *King's Mountain and Its Heroes* (New York: Dauber & Pine Bookshops, 1929), 523.
- 3 Shelby to William Hill, 26 August 1814, in J. de Roulhac Hamilton, ed., "King's Mountain: Letters of Colonel Isaac Shelby," *The Journal of Southern History* 4, no. 3 (August 1938), 371.
- 4 Ibid., although Shelby insisted the Whigs mustered 700 to 800 men for the mission.
- 5 Anthony Allaire, "Diary of Lieut. Anthony Allaire," in Draper, *King's Mountain*, 503.



The Whigs followed Ferguson for several days.⁶ On 8 August, the Loyalists learned that the Patriots were encamped at Cedar Springs, three miles in front of the Tory position. An advance party of riflemen under Capt. James Dunlap was deployed, not to destroy the enemy force, but simply to seize their wagons.⁷ The nature of Dunlap's mission spoke volumes about the overconfidence that permeated every description of Ferguson's character.⁸ Ferguson foresaw no real difficulties in Dunlap's riding into the Whigs' camp and taking whatever property he wanted. Circumstances would prove Ferguson wrong, not for the last time.

Dunlap commanded a detachment of fourteen Provincial dragoons and 130 mounted militiamen. On the way forward, they encountered three Whig militiamen. Two were captured; the third escaped to sound the alarm of the approaching Tories.⁹ Lyman Copeland Draper, the author of the seminal work on the Battle of King's Mountain, told the story a little differently. Draper loved stories and wrung the backcountry for them. As he related events, a young Patriot sharpshooter named Josiah Culbertson (son-in-law of Col. John Thomas, Sr. of the Spartan Regiment) rode into the Loyalist camp by mistake. Culbertson brazened his way out of danger, taking mental notes on everything he observed. Once free of the Tories, he sped to the Whig position to warn his fellows that the enemy was on the way.¹⁰

Either way, the Patriots knew Dunlap was en route. They wisely prepared for the upcoming battle at the ironworks. Hugh McCall, an enthusiastic partisan of Georgia's war efforts, included a narrative of Wofford's Iron Works in his history of Clarke's service. McCall wrote that the Whigs chose their ground and awaited the Tory attack. The Patriot position had been "chosen with great judgment."¹¹

The Tories drew their tactics directly from the conventional manual. They made every effort to draw the Patriots out of their position and into the open. The Whig commander knew better: "he guarded against being drawn into battle upon equal ground, while he was out-numbered in the ranks of the enemy."¹²

Allaire, writing from the Loyalist side, related a story of overconfidence gone terribly wrong. Dunlap and his detachment "rushed into the centre of the Rebel camp," an unaccountable act for a commander who knew the enemy was waiting for him.¹³ And waiting they were: "they lay in ambush." In this, one sees the seed of the Patriot tactical innovations taking root. The Provincials, schooled in the European tactical manual and disciplined as regulars, trained to meet opposing forces on open ground in neat, orderly ranks. They disdained irregulars who fought from behind cover and concealment. Yet, their disdain notwithstanding, they proved utterly at sea when confronted with a force using natural defenses against small arms fire.

6 Shelby to Hill, 26 August 1814, in Hamilton, "Shelby Letters," 371.

7 Allaire, "Diary of Lieut. Anthony Allaire," in Draper, *King's Mountain*, 503. To the British, Dunlap was "an active, gallant officer," Charles Cornwallis to Nisbet Balfour, 4 November 1780, in Ian Saberton, ed., *The Cornwallis Papers: The Campaigns of 1780 and 1781 in the Southern Theatre*, 6 vols. (Uckfield, UK: The Naval & Military Press Ltd, 2010), 3:60. To the Americans, Dunlap was "a vicious and brutal man with a reputation for indiscriminate slaughter," Wayne Lynch, "Major James Dunlap: Was He Murdered Twice?" *Journal of the American Revolution*, 14 January 2016, https://allthingsliberty.com/2016/01/major-james-dunlap-murdered-twice/#_ednref1. This article is not the venue to resolve the debate.

8 See Wayne Lynch, "A Fresh Look at Major Patrick Ferguson," *Journal of the American Revolution*, 11 September 2017, <https://allthingsliberty.com/2017/09/fresh-look-major-patrick-ferguson/>.

9 Allaire, "Diary of Lieut. Anthony Allaire," in Draper, *King's Mountain*, 503.

10 Draper, *King's Mountain*, 91–92.

11 Hugh McCall, *The History of Georgia, Containing Brief Sketches of the Most Remarkable Events Up to the Present Day (1784)*, 2 vols. (Savannah, 1811 and 1816, reprint, Atlanta: A.B. Caldwell, 1909), 477.

12 Ibid.

13 Allaire, "Diary of Lieut. Anthony Allaire," in Draper, *King's Mountain*, 503.



Plan of the engagement at Wofford's Iron Works.

The Loyalist losses were profound. They lost twenty or thirty men, a tremendous reduction from a force of only 145 soldiers.¹⁴ Dunlap was wounded, but only slightly, and he apparently remained in command. The Americans were exuberant in their descriptions: McCall wrote of a “distant fire” which “continued until near night,” while Shelby described “an action severe and bloody” which lasted “for near an hour.”¹⁵

The stratagem of the ambush was only part of the story of Wofford's Iron Works. The content of the ambush was also important. In the eighteenth century, the musket dominated the battlefield.¹⁶ The Provincials, outfitted and trained as regulars, bore muskets. The militia of both sides, however, reported for duty with whatever weapon they had at home. There has been no tally of muskets versus rifles in the Southern Campaign. In general, rifles were popular in Pennsylvania and on the southern frontier.¹⁷ Throughout much of the Southern War, there

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ McCall, *History of Georgia*, 477; Shelby to Hill, 26 August 1814, in Hamilton, “Shelby Letters,” 371.

¹⁶ Wright, “The Rifle in the American Revolution,” 294; Mark Maloy, “Small Arms of the Revolution,” American Battlefield Trust, <https://www.battlefields.org/learn/articles/small-arms-revolution>.

¹⁷ Wright, “The Rifle in the American Revolution,” 294.

were references to companies, or regiments, composed entirely of riflemen.¹⁸ In August 1780, a militia regiment deployed men armed with the weapons they brought. Joseph Graham, a militia captain in 1780 and later a major general, asserted that of the men reporting for militia duty from the backcountry, half carried rifles.¹⁹ While he was speaking casually, his estimate provided a fair, if rough, calculus of the split of rifles and muskets in a backcountry militia formation.

In discussing Wofford's Iron Works, we accept Graham's rough estimate that half the men were armed with rifles and half with muskets. Each weapon brought unique advantages and disadvantages. Ultimately, each would command different tactics. Muskets were useful for massed fire. The tactical manual called for volleys beginning at a distance of 150 yards.²⁰ The regular infantry was trained to reload quickly, up to three times per minute.²¹ The problem was accuracy. The standard musket of the day provided accuracy with aimed shots at a distance of 40 yards.²² Given this disability, commanders relied on volleys to deliver massed fire. At 100 yards, an aimed musket shot was unreliable, but a volley could put enough lead in the air to do substantial damage to the enemy line.²³ The standard tactical manual envisioned a bayonet charge at the conclusion of the infantry advance.

The rifle was the perfect foil to the musket. Its advantage was accuracy. A man-sized target was easily hit at 300 yards with a rifle in the hands of an experienced rifleman.²⁴ Its disability was speed. It took the same rifleman one to two minutes to reload his weapon, making the rifle unable to produce a mass of fire.²⁵ The rifles of the day could

18 There were rifle companies forming part of Continental regiments early in the war, but none survived the surrender of Charleston, Lucian Lamar Knight, *Georgia's Roster of the Revolution, Containing a List of the State's Defenders; Officers and Men; Soldiers and Sailors; Partisans and Regulars; Whether Enlisted from Georgia or Settled in Georgia After the Close of Hostilities* (Atlanta: Index Printing Co., 1920), 10; Robert K. Wright, Jr., *The Continental Army* (Washington, D.C.: United States Army Center of Military History, 1983), 305–309, 313. The records for militia units were less meticulous, but rifle units appeared in the reports of the Battles of Musgrove's Mill and Cowpens, discussed below.

19 Joseph Graham to William R. Davie, 19 December 1808, in William A. Graham, *General Joseph Graham and His Papers on North Carolina Revolutionary History* (Raleigh: Edwards & Broughton, 1904), 134–135. Virginia experienced the same split, with half the Continentals using their rifles before the state could afford muskets, Patrick Hannum, "Virginia's Regular Company-Level Military Force Structure," *Journal of the American Revolution*, 15 September 2022, <https://allthingsliberty.com/2022/09/virginias-1775-regular-company-level-military-force-structure/>.

20 Wright, *Continental Army*, 4; Jeremy Black, *Warfare in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Cassell, 1999), 158.

21 Wright, *Continental Army*, 4.

22 Lawrence E. Babits and Joshua B. Howard asserted that the "killing range" of the Brown Bess musket was 40 yards, *Long, Obstinate, and Bloody: the Battle of Guilford Courthouse* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 102.

23 At 100 yards, an experienced infantryman could expect to hit a man-sized target only forty percent of the time, Charles Winthrop Sawyer, *Firearms in American History* (Boston: Plimpton Press, 1910), 102–103.

24 Wright, "The Rifle in the American Revolution," 294. The same soldier could expect to hit a target the size of a man's head reliably at 200 yards, T.F. Fremantle, *The Book of the Rifle* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1901), 29–30.

25 Maloy, "Small Arms of the Revolution;" As a rule of thumb, a soldier could reload and fire a musket three times in the time it took to reload and fire a rifle once, Fremantle, *Book of the Rifle*, 24.

not accommodate a bayonet, and riflemen were useless in the face of a bayonet charge.²⁶

The militia that lay in ambush for the Tories at Wofford's Iron Works carried rifles in substantial numbers. The men with rifles and muskets were deployed together without distinction, forming a unified force armed with the weapons they had brought to duty. The same was true of the Tory militia. There is no detailed account of the fighting at Wofford's Iron Works, so we have no precise reckoning of the distances between the two forces during the long battle. Allaire painted a picture in which the Loyalists rode into the middle of a trap set by the Patriots, telling a story of a hard fight at close range. In these tight circumstances, the rifle's advantage in long-range accuracy was unavailing, and its inability to support a bayonet was a liability.

Once the Tories rode into the Whig position, the fighting became hand-to-hand, a brutal slugfest that prefigured, if briefly, the trench warfare of the First World War. A pension applicant described the brutality of the fight, marked by broadsword wounds to many, including Col. Clarke at Wofford's Iron Works. Ferguson agreed, reporting to Cornwallis that a Tory officer was captured "fighting in the heart of a crowd of rebels"²⁷ at Cedar Spring.

Allaire tried, unsuccessfully, to depict the engagement at Cedar Spring as a simple skirmish, a picture defied by the substantial Loyalist casualties. There was no count of Whig losses. Shelby, who believed there were 1,500 men on the field, asserted there were twenty Whig casualties, but twice that in Tories, as well as fifty taken prisoner.²⁸ In light of the successful ambush of Loyalists, a casualty count double that of the Whigs made sense, and perhaps this rough estimate is the best one can make. So, twenty to thirty Loyalists and ten to fifteen Patriots killed and wounded, plus a large number of Tory prisoners.

The question of who won drew controversy. McCall insisted the two sides fought each other to a draw, then withdrew as darkness fell, a view shared by a few others. Ultimately, the Patriots were forced to yield the field to the Loyalists. The Loyalists, however, had help in the form of Ferguson's advancing main army. Had Ferguson stayed put, the fight would have ended in a Whig victory. Pension applicant Abraham Toney made the point clear: the Loyalists attacked and "were driven back until they met Ferguson's whole army." William Graham was as direct, recalling that "Ferguson came in sight of us," after which "we had to leave the place in a hurry."²⁹ A pursuit followed, which the Patriots, moving quickly on horseback, easily evaded.³⁰

At Wofford's Iron Works, we see the beginnings of many of the tactics that will follow. The rifle was present on both sides, but the tactics for using it advantageously had not yet emerged. The idea of the ambush, where the Patriots waited for the enemy behind cover and concealment rather than meeting them in the open, dominated the battle. The Patriots successfully used the natural terrain features to defeat the better-trained and disciplined force of Provincials.

The use of the rifle was a natural outgrowth of its popularity on the frontier. Where did the idea of the ambush

26 Gen. Anthony Wayne bemoaned the fact that riflemen were "defenseless" against a British bayonet charge, and stated he "would almost as soon face an Enemy with a good musket and bayonet without ammunition," Anthony Wayne to Richard Peters, 8 February 1778, in Charles J. Stille, *Major-General Anthony Wayne and the Pennsylvania Line in the Continental Army* (Philadelphia, 1893), 118. British Lt. Col. John Graves Simcoe similarly demeaned riflemen, writing there was "little danger" from troops "without bayonets, and whose object it was to fire a single shot," *Simcoe's Military Journal: A History of the Operations of a Partisan Corps, Called the Queen's Rangers* (New York, 1844), 229.

27 Draper, *King's Mountain*, 93; Ferguson to Cornwallis, 9 August 1780, in Saberton, *Cornwallis Papers*, 1:301; Pension Application of Ebenezer Fain, transcribed by Will Graves, Southern Campaigns Revolutionary War Pension Statements & Rosters, R3421, <https://revwarapps.org/r3421.pdf>.

28 Shelby to Hill, 26 August 1814, in Hamilton, "Shelby Letters," 371.

29 McCall, *History of Georgia*, 477; Allaire, "Diary of Lieut. Anthony Allaire," in Draper, *King's Mountain*, 503; Shelby to Hill, 26 August 1814, in Hamilton, "Shelby Letters," 371; Ferguson to Cornwallis, 9 August 1780, in Saberton, *Cornwallis Papers*, 1:301, 303; Pension application of Abraham Toney, transcribed by Will Graves, Southern Campaigns Revolutionary War Pension Statements & Rosters, S10642, <https://revwarapps.org/r10642.pdf>; Pension Application of William Graham, transcribed by Will Graves, Southern Campaigns Revolutionary War Pension Statements & Rosters, S8624, <https://revwarapps.org/s8624.pdf>.

30 Allaire, "Diary of Lieut. Anthony Allaire," in Draper, *King's Mountain*, 503.

originate? Historian William T. Graves traced it to the experience of settlers on the frontier fighting Native Americans.³¹ While Graves's position makes a great deal of sense, it is also true that seeking cover and concealment is a natural response to the dangers of combat. The backcountry militiamen, untrained in the formalities of war in straight lines out in the open, naturally sought to fight their enemies while secure behind rocks and trees.

Going forward, we will see both these stratagems developing. More importantly, they will evolve together, the use of the rifle complementing the use of the ambush, both together driving Patriot victories in the backcountry that ultimately served to turn the tide in the southern war.

Musgrove's Mill

The Battle of Musgrove's Mill followed closely after Wofford's Iron Works. On 19 August 1780, one sees the backcountry tactics maturing. The rifle, of little use in the close combat of 8 August, came into its own in a much larger battle fought at longer distances. The ambush, used to great advantage at Wofford's Iron Works, showed a new level of development and proved equally deadly to a much more dangerous enemy.

The Patriots, aware of Ferguson's presence in the South Carolina backcountry and fearing the magnitude of his force, looked for ways to resist the Loyalist incursion. McDowell once again dispatched Shelby and Clarke, this time joined by South Carolina militia commander Col. James Williams, to strike at a Tory militia outpost at Musgrove's Mill, on the Enoree River.³² At the time, the site was used as a temporary encampment for Loyalist forces en route to join Ferguson.³³

The Patriots departed late on 18 August, arriving at the objective early on 19 August.³⁴ The Whigs encountered a Tory patrol shortly before reaching the objective, which destroyed the advantage of surprise.³⁵ On arrival, they learned that the night before, the Tory militia had been reinforced with a large contingent of Provincial troops under Lt. Col. Alexander Innes.³⁶

The reported sizes of the forces in play varied greatly. Samuel Hammond, a militia captain during the battle, much later in life penned a memoir in which he asserted there were 200 Whig soldiers.³⁷ Williams wrote an official report on the battle, in which he counted 200 Tory militia and 300 Provincials.³⁸ Historians have generally credited

31 William T. Graves, *Backcountry Revolutionary: James Williams (1740–1780) with Source Documents* (Lugoff, SC: Southern Campaigns of the American Revolution Press, 2012), 116.

32 Shelby to Hill, 26 August 1814, in Hamilton, "Shelby Letters," 371.

33 John Hiatt, *Musgrove's Mill State Historic Site: Historic Resource Study*, 2 vols. (Columbia: South Carolina State Park Service, 2000), 1:22.

34 The original sources were ambiguous on the dates. Secondary sources date the engagement between 18 and 20 August. See Will Graves, "Battle of Musgrove's Mill, 19 August 1780," in *Journal of the Southern Campaigns of the American Revolution* 3, no. 1 (January 2006), <https://southern-campaigns.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/v3n1.pdf>, 28; Wayne Lynch, "Saving South Carolina at Musgrove's Mill," *Journal of the American Revolution* 24 January 2014, <https://allthingsliberty.com/2014/01/saving-south-carolina-james-williams-musgroves-mill/>. This article is not the venue to resolve the debate; 19 August has garnered the greatest support.

35 Samuel Hammond, "Colonel Samuel Hammond's Account of the Battle of Musgrove's Mills, on the Enoree, 19th August, 1780," in Joseph Johnson, *Traditions and Reminiscences, Chiefly of the American Revolution in the South: Including Biographical Sketches, Incidents, and Anecdotes, Few of Which Have Been Published, Particularly of Residents in the Upper Country* (Charleston, 1851), 520.

36 Shelby recalled that a citizen volunteered the news, Shelby to Hill, 26 August 1814, in Hamilton, "Shelby Letters," 372, while Hammond believed a Whig scouting party had produced the information, Hammond, "Hammond's Account," 520.

37 Hammond, "Hammond's Account," 519.

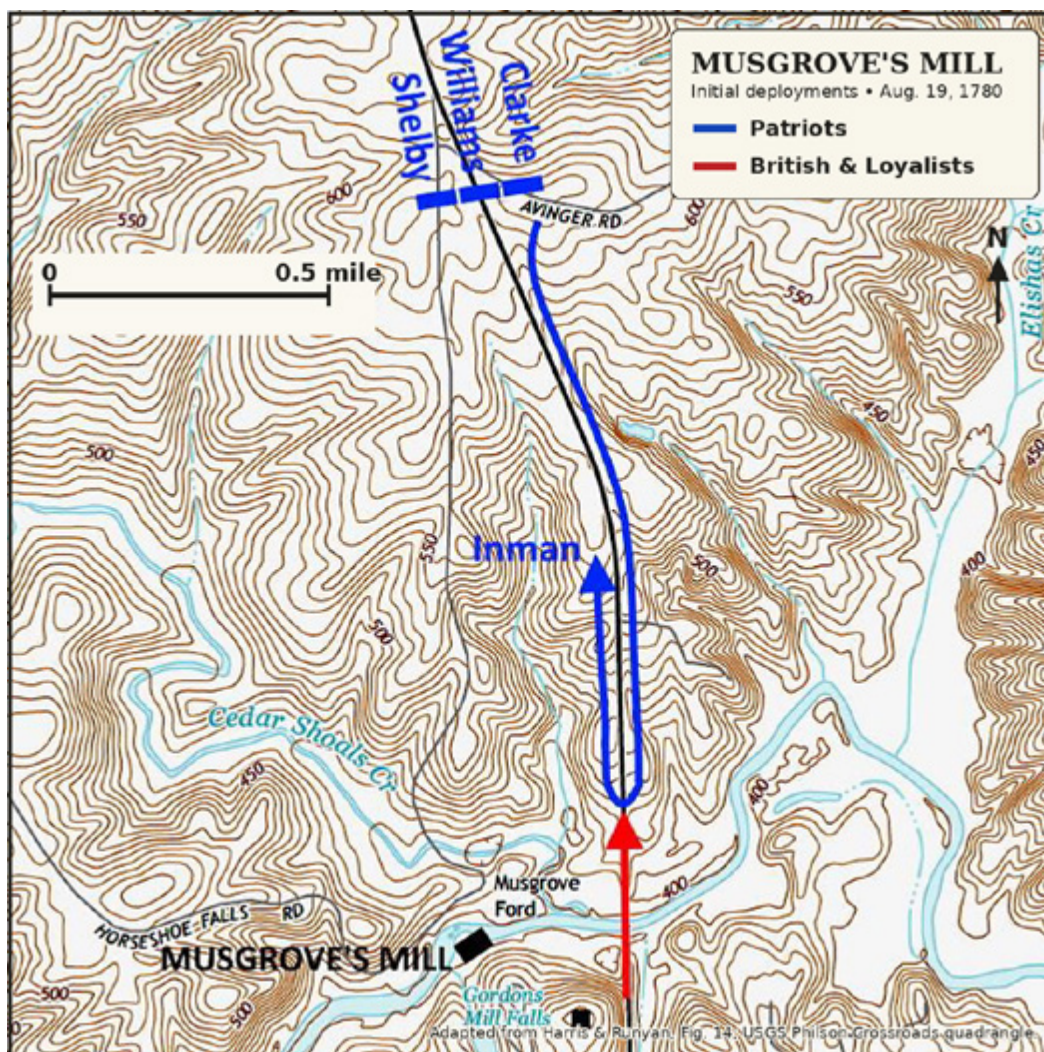
38 James Williams, "Williams' Report on the Battle of Musgrove Mill," in Graves, *Backcountry Revolutionary*, 197.

their numbers.

The mill sat on the south bank of the Enoree River with the Musgrove home and outbuildings. The Patriot army approached the site from the north. The Patriots understood they stood no chance in the open against the huge Loyalist force, in particular, against a unit of Provincials much larger than the Whig detachment. Shelby and Clarke, fresh from Wofford's Iron Works, had returned with an idea. They would not meet the enemy's expectations and advance in straight lines across an open field. Instead, the Loyalists needed to attack, replaying Dunlap's mistake.

In this calculation, we see the next refinement in ambush tactics. At Wofford's Iron Works, Dunlap, already on the move, simply kept going, directly into the Patriot line. At Musgrove's Mill, the Loyalists were hundreds of yards away, safely behind the Enoree River. The problem was getting them to move forward. The solution the Whig commanders reached was elegant. They sent Capt. Shadrach Inman, a Georgia officer, forward with skirmishers, with the mission of luring the Loyalists out of safety and into the line of fire.³⁹

Inman was entirely successful. Innes, in a word, took the bait. The Patriots lined for battle in a loose formation 300 yards long, with the men directed to use logs and trees for cover and concealment.⁴⁰ They deployed on the forward slope of a hilltop, a location providing optimal fields of fire downhill. Inman advanced directly into the



Map based on Harris, C. Leon, Conner Runyan. "Prelude to Kings Mountain: Colonel Charles McDowell's Campaign in the South Carolina Backcountry," 2023.

39 Williams, "Williams' Report," 197; Shelby to Hill, 26 August 1814, in Hamilton, "Shelby Letters," 372.

40 Williams, "Williams' Report," 197. Shelby insisted the men prepared breastworks of logs, Shelby to Hill, 26 August 1814, in Hamilton, "Shelby Letters," 372. Shelby's version has gained little traction with historians, largely because it failed to find confirmation from any other eyewitness. To this, we add the problem that there was neither time nor opportunity to prepare defensive works.

face of the Loyalist position and, receiving fire, retreated. The target proved too tempting to resist. The Loyalists filed across the river and onto the battlefield, lining up with the Provincials in the center, militia on either side.⁴¹

The Provincials, trained and equipped as regulars, bore the regulation Brown Bess musket. The Tory militia, like the Patriot militia, carried the weapons they brought from home, generally in a roughly equal mix of muskets and rifles. The Loyalists made no effort to segregate rifles from muskets, and we see the Tories mustered into a single line, carrying a mix of weapons. At 150 yards from the Patriot line, they fired a volley.⁴² The Patriots, safe behind cover, were largely unaffected. The Loyalists then proceeded in their line uphill toward the Whig position.

On the Patriot side, the tactics related to the choice of weapons had evolved to the next level. Hammond wrote of riflemen organized into separate units and stationed on the Patriot flanks.⁴³ These men, he wrote, did not fire in step with the men on the main line. Carrying rifles, they had the advantage of aimed shots at long distances. At 150 yards, the Loyalists were far outside musket range, but well within rifle range. The only disability for the flanking troops was the rifle's reloading time. Given the distance the Loyalists needed to move, there was no time for the Patriot riflemen to reload. The riflemen on the flanks could fire the single round they had loaded before lining for battle, so each man knew he needed to make his shot count.

On the Patriot main line, by prearrangement, Shelby would wait for the enemy to advance to a distance of forty yards, then discharge a shot, the signal for a volley.⁴⁴ Forty yards put the Loyalists within the range at which a musket could deliver an accurate aimed shot.

The Patriot volley at forty yards was devastating. The Provincials, disdainful of the Whig militia, were shocked at its sudden violence as well as its effectiveness. A general melee followed.⁴⁵ The Provincials held their position only briefly; Williams insisted the whole battle, from start to finish, lasted only fifteen minutes.⁴⁶

The problem encountered by the Loyalists was a combination of the two backcountry tactical gambits. The ambush, now refined to draw the enemy in, even with his eyes wide open to the waiting Patriots, provided a field in which the natural advantages of cover and concealment proved deadly and decisive. The superior training and discipline of the Provincials, essential in set-piece battles fought in straight lines, were useless against the tactics of the frontier.

The ambush synergized with the use of the rifle. At Musgrove's Mill, the Patriots mustered rifle fire effectively against selected enemy targets. Enemy officers and noncommissioned officers were readily identifiable, intentionally so, from their uniforms and accouterments. As such, they made ideal targets for riflemen.

And, of course, targets they were. The Provincials, as expected, led the Tory effort, placing the Provincial officers at center stage. Five of the seven Provincial officers in the formation quickly became casualties.⁴⁷ The wounded included Innes, who was incapacitated and no longer able to lead. The loss of officers, in particular the commander, proved the undoing of the Tory effort, which collapsed.⁴⁸

41 Hammond, "Hammond's Account," 520.

42 Hammond, "Hammond's Account," 520–521.

43 Hammond, "Hammond's Account," 521.

44 Hammond, "Hammond's Account," 520. Williams took credit for the volley, asserting he had given orders for the men to wait until the enemy was eighty yards away, then fire, "Williams' Report," 197. Williams overemphasized his role, to the exclusion of common sense. There was no way barely trained militiamen strung along a line 300 yards long could all have estimated equally well a distance of eighty yards and fired a uniform volley.

45 Shelby to Hill, 26 August 1814, in Hamilton, "Shelby Letters," 372.

46 Williams, "Williams' Report," 197. Cf. Shelby, who asserted, erroneously, that the battle lasted one and one-half hours.

47 Ferguson to Alexander Ross, 19 July (August) 1780, in Saberton, *Cornwallis Papers*, 2:145; Roderick Mackenzie, *Strictures on Lt. Col. Tarleton's History of the Campaigns of 1780 and 1781 in the Southern Provinces of North America* (London, 1787), 25.

48 Hiatt asserted the loss of Inman triggered the Loyalist collapse, *Historic Resource Study*, 1:iii. The original sources placed more emphasis on the loss of enemy officers overall; see Hammond, "Hammond's Account," 521, and Shelby to Hill, 26 August 1814, in Hamilton, "Shelby Letters," 372.

The preferential toll of enemy officers showed the deadly work of the rifle. The riflemen held the Loyalist officers in range for the duration of the engagement. While the Tory casualties were large, the officer casualties were higher, out of proportion to those among the rank and file.⁴⁹ A musket volley will hit the enemy equally across the line, but aimed rifle shots will take out the enemy leadership. This principle, now proven at Musgrove's Mill, would guide tactical thinking in the backcountry as the use of the rifle developed and matured further.

The Loyalists, their attack an utter failure, withdrew. The Patriots saw opportunity and pursued them across the battlefield. What followed was devastation, where "dead men lay thick on the ground."⁵⁰ The pursuit was deadly and the battle entirely one-sided, with a half-dozen Patriot losses across the entire affair.⁵¹

The battle ended at the banks of the Enoree River. The Tories crossed, reaching safety. While paused on the riverbank in preparation for crossing, the Patriots received a message informing them of the terrible loss at the Battle of Camden three days earlier.⁵² The Whigs, fearing Ferguson and believing him near, left the field for the safety of McDowell's encampment.

Musgrove's Mill was an important step in the development of the tactics of the backcountry. The deployment of the rifle on the battlefield proved immensely valuable. The use of separate rifle units was very effective, as was allowing the riflemen to shoot outside the regular volleys ordered for the men on the main battle line.

The effective use of the rifle complemented the maturation of the ambush. Innes was not ambushed in any real sense. He saw the Patriot line and knew exactly the size and location of his enemy. He chose to follow Inman's lead, expecting his troops' superior training and discipline to carry the day. Instead, he found tough soldiers protected from musket volleys by natural cover. The Loyalist ranks, depleted of leaders by accurate rifle shots, proved unable to respond to this novel situation, and withdrew, defeated. Innes's miscalculation presaged similar decisions by other British officers in the months to come.

Blackstock's Farm

The Battle of Blackstock's Farm provided a change of officers. Clarke was the only senior commander who fought at Musgrove's Mill and Blackstock's Farm. Ferguson was killed at King's Mountain on 7 October, as was Williams. Shelby, who fought at King's Mountain, returned home. The Patriot effort at Blackstock's Farm was led by Brig. Gen. Thomas Sumter, a South Carolina militia commander who had gained stature after the loss of Charleston with his assaults on Rocky Mount and Hanging Rock. Sumter, like McDowell before him, collected a large number of militia regiments to his side. Also like McDowell, Sumter was destined to fight the incursions of a British officer leading a unit of Loyalists. In his case, the enemy was Lt. Col. Banastre Tarleton, the most feared and hated British officer in America. Hated and feared, certainly, but with reason. Tarleton enjoyed an unbroken winning streak of overwhelming victories against Continentals and Patriot militia, marred only by the allegations of atrocities during the engagement against Col. Abraham Buford at the Waxhaws on 29 May.⁵³ Blackstock's Farm took place on 20 November 1780, three months after Musgrove's Mill and in plenty of time for news of the battle

49 Williams estimated enemy losses as sixty killed, seventy prisoners, and an uncounted number of wounded, "Williams' Report," 197. Within these overall figures, the Provincials lost fifty men killed, wounded, and captured, Cornwallis to Henry Clinton, 23 August 1780, in Saberton, *Cornwallis Papers*, 2:15. This amounted to total Provincial losses of seventeen percent in the face of officer losses of seventy-one percent.

50 Shelby to Hill, 26 August 1814, in Hamilton, "Shelby Letters," 372.

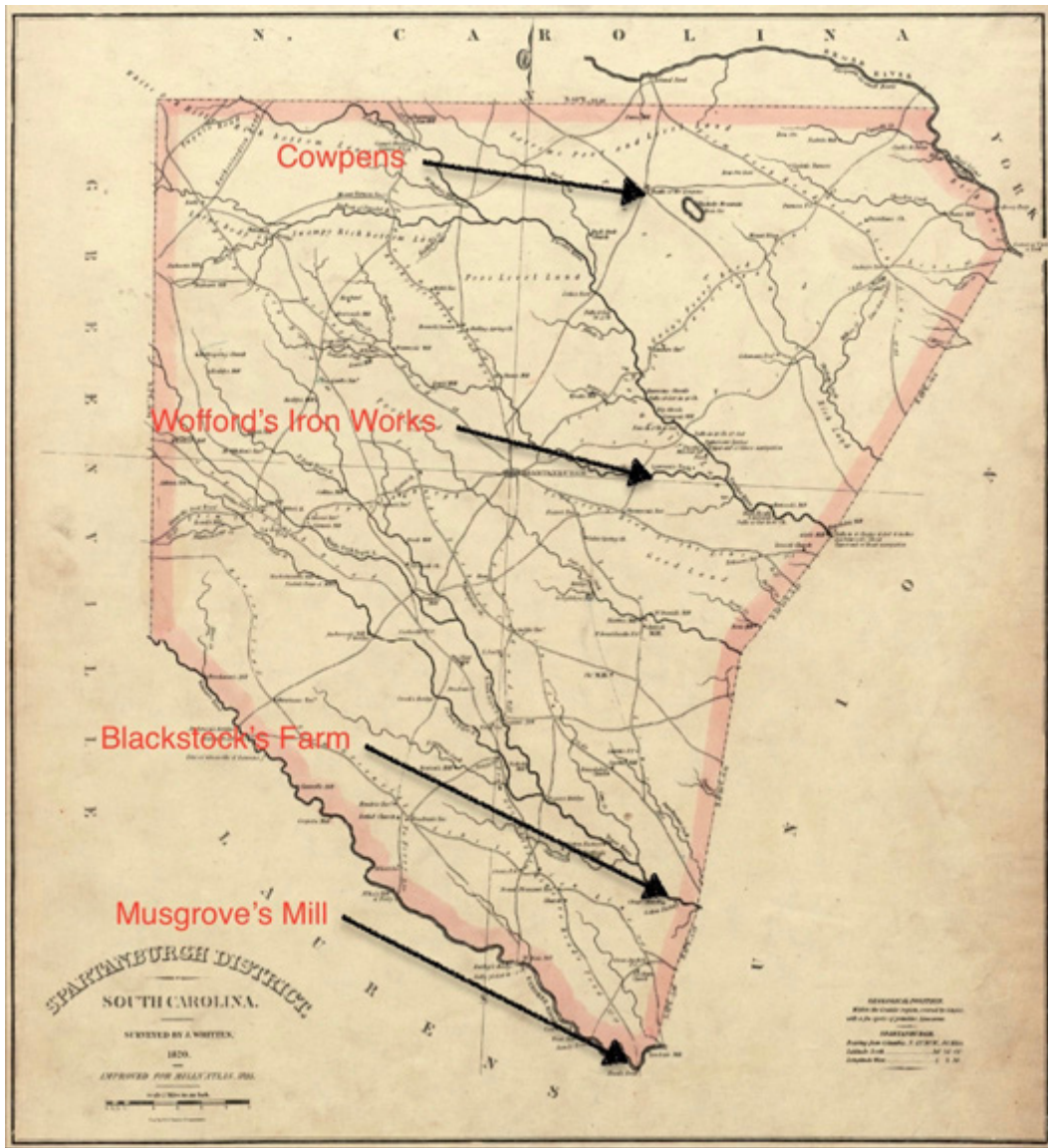
51 The estimates of Whig losses were all minimal. The reference in the text is from the British best-case scenario, stated in Ferguson to Alexander Ross, 19 July (August) 1780, in Saberton, *Cornwallis Papers*, 2:145.

52 Shelby to Hill, 26 August 1814, in Hamilton, "Shelby Letters," 373.

53 Robert Ford, "Tarleton at the Waxhaws: A Proposal for Reconciliation," *Journal of the American Revolution*, 7 August 2025, <https://allthingsliberty.com/2025/08/tarleton-at-the-waxhaws-a-proposal-for-reconciliation/>.

and its winning tactics to percolate through the backcountry.

The story of Blackstock's Farm began on 9 November 1780 at the Battle of Fishdam Ford. Cornwallis had sent Maj. James Wemyss to find Sumter and finally put an end to his ability to antagonize the British occupation.⁵⁴ At the time, Tarleton was on a similar mission against Col. Francis Marion. At Fishdam Ford, Sumter's men wounded Wemyss and thoroughly defeated his detachment, a humiliating setback to the British. Cornwallis recalled Tarleton, and told him to forget Marion. His new mission was to remove Sumter from the board.⁵⁵



Sites of the battles at Wofford's Iron Works, Musgrove's Mill, Blackstock's Farm, and Cowpens, overlaid on map from Robert Mills, *Atlas of the State of South Carolina*, from the South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

Tarleton assembled a detachment, the core of which was a force of 170 dragoons from his unit of Loyalists, the British Legion. He added 80 mounted infantrymen from the 63rd Regiment, a total of

54 Wemyss was a historical character worthy of study but is unfortunately outside the scope of this article. See Randy A. Purvis, "Major James Wemyss: Second Most Hated British Officer in the South," *Journal of the American Revolution*, 27 November 2018, <https://allthingsliberty.com/2018/11/major-james-wemyss-second-most-hated-british-officer-in-the-south/>.

55 Banastre Tarleton, *History of the Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, in the Southern Provinces of North America* (Dublin, 1787), 176–178.

250 men.⁵⁶ He added two units of unmounted infantry, starting with his own from the Legion. He later added the 1st battalion of the 71st Regiment under Maj. Archibald McArthur. There are no reliable accounts of the sizes of the two unmounted infantry units. The Legion infantry numbered 250 men, but there is no way to know whether Tarleton brought them all.⁵⁷ Estimates of McArthur's battalion have varied widely, from 250 to 400 men.⁵⁸ McArthur's unit included two artillery pieces. Ultimately, the numbers in the unmounted infantry and artillery are academic. Tarleton left these men beside the road and fought the battle only with his 250 mounted soldiers. By any calculus, Tarleton abandoned more men than he brought into battle.

Sumter amassed a large force organized as a brigade, composed of militiamen in many regiments. The best sources estimated his strength at 500 men.⁵⁹ Although numerically superior, the Patriots were at a significant disadvantage. In a conventional battle in the open, the superior training and discipline of the British would overpower the citizen-soldiers staffing the militia regiments. If the Patriots intended a rematch of Musgrove's Mill using ambush tactics under cover, the British artillery could blast the Whigs from their positions. At the outset, things looked grim for the Patriots.

Tarleton's force, Loyalists and British regulars, carried the regulation Brown Bess musket. Sumter's men, all militia drawn mostly from the backcountry, carried the usual mix of rifles and muskets. Archaeology at the site has confirmed that both rifles and muskets were in the hands of the Patriots.⁶⁰

On 14 November, Tarleton started his pursuit of Sumter. Tarleton rode his men and their horses to exhaustion. Scouts located Sumter on the evening of 18 November. Tarleton pushed his units forward the next day, and on the morning of 20 November had Sumter almost within his grasp. Unfortunately for Tarleton, a British soldier had deserted from the 63rd Regiment the previous day, stolen a horse, and found the Whigs. He spilled everything he knew to Sumter: Tarleton's location, his mission, and the size of his army.⁶¹

Sumter had been south of the Enoree River, moving toward the plantation of Whig militia Col. James Williams, near the Tory-fortified outpost of Ninety-Six. Tarleton had maintained security in his pursuit, and the deserter's intelligence on the evening of 19 November was Sumter's first notice that he, not Marion, was Tarleton's target.⁶² Sumter immediately responded by withdrawing north over the

56 Mackenzie, *Strictures*, 75; C. Stedman, *History of the Origin, Progress, and Termination of the American War*, 2 vols. (London, 1794), 2:229.

57 On 13 August 1780, the Legion mustered 494 men of all ranks, with 237 infantry and 257 cavalry, Saberton, *Cornwallis Papers*, 1:233, 3:11. The Legion headcount showed 451 rank and file on 15 January 1781, equating to 530 men of all ranks, with no accounting of the division between infantry and cavalry, Saberton, *Cornwallis Papers*, 3:11, 4:62.

58 The estimate of 400 is from the official report of the battle, Charles S. Myddleton to Camp, 20 November 1780, in Richard K. Showman, Dennis M. Conrad, Roger N. Parks, and Elizabeth C. Stevens, eds., *The Papers of General Nathanael Greene, vol. 6: 1 June 1780–25 December 1780*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 6:499. The smaller estimate is from John Buchanan, *The Road to Guilford Courthouse* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2019), 251.

59 McCall, *History of Georgia*, 498; Myddleton to Camp, 20 November 1780, in Showman et al., *Greene*, 6:498; A. S. Salley, Jr., ed., *Col. William Hill's Memoirs of the Revolution* (Columbia, SC: The State Company, 1921), 14.

60 Steven D. Smith, "Research at Blackstock's Battlefield," University of South Carolina Scholar Commons, Department of Anthropology Faculty Publications, 30 May 2006, 3, 6, 8–12, 13, https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1051&context=anth_facpub. The British army musket used .75 caliber ammunition, the Americans preferring .69 caliber balls.

61 Tarleton, *Campaigns*, 179.

62 Tarleton, *Campaigns*, 179; Anne King Gregorie, *Thomas Sumter* (Columbia, SC: The R. L. Bryan Company, 1931, Reprint, Sumter, SC: Gamecock City Printing, Inc., 2002), 118–119.

Enoree River. He detached a scouting party at the ford and continued north toward the Tyger River.⁶³

Sumter's thinking was largely a black box, and later writers have offered wildly varying opinions on his planning.⁶⁴ The most credible voice in the debate was William Hill, a dedicated Sumter partisan. Hill left a memoir highly supportive of Sumter's actions. He asserted that Sumter moved across the Enoree, and continued northward, intending to cross the Tyger and evade Tarleton entirely. He got as far as Blackstock's Farm, which backed onto the Tyger. Here, "the Americans having been pursued for 2 days and nights took this ground under the firm determination to defend it & not to retreat further."⁶⁵ It seems logical that Sumter wanted to avoid an action with Tarleton on the latter's terms. It does not seem a stretch to infer Sumter, across the Enoree, also wanted to cross the Tyger and be free of Tarleton's reach altogether. However, he could not survive a half measure. Rather than be caught halfway across the river and vulnerable, he stopped short of the river and decided his best option was to fight it out.

Sumter and his officers decided on what was becoming a tried-and-true battle tactic.⁶⁶ The Patriot force would judiciously select a piece of defensible terrain, hold it, and wait for the British to attack. Col. Thomas Brandon, a local resident, identified Blackstock's Farm as the best option in the area.⁶⁷

The terrain Sumter chose was nothing short of exceptional.⁶⁸ The farm stood among hills near the Tyger River. The Blackstock house, barn, and outbuildings sat on high ground facing the road. There were clear fields of fire from the buildings into the road and the hills on the opposite side, that is, in the direction of the expected British advance. Some of the outbuildings were built of unchinked logs, the spaces providing optimal firing ports for men seeking cover.

At the Enoree River, Tarleton skirmished with the detachment Sumter had left behind. When interrogated, the survivors told him that Sumter was on the move, thanks to the information from the British deserter. He had avoided Tarleton's intended thrust, and was moving quickly.⁶⁹ If unchecked, Sumter would cross the Tyger and escape. Tarleton, spurred by the intelligence from the Whig prisoners, believed he needed to move more quickly. He made a fateful decision that would cost him dearly. His mounted troops moved faster than the artillery or foot soldiers. He elected to jettison the slower troops and continue the chase only with his mounted men.⁷⁰

At this point, Tarleton asserted that he learned that a woman on horseback observed the British movements and reported to Sumter that Tarleton was too close, that escape was impossible, and that

63 Many later authors assumed these men were stationed at the river ford as part of Sumter's rear guard, e.g., Lee, *Memoirs*, 112–113. Actually, Sumter sent them out on a reconnaissance mission, Pension Application of Hugh Lavender, transcribed by Will Graves, Southern Campaigns Revolutionary War Pension Statements & Rosters, S10972, <https://revwarapps.org/s10972.pdf>. The commander was Patrick Carr, another historical character whose story is sadly outside the scope of this article; see Wayne Lynch, "Paddy Carr, 'A Honey of a Patriot,'" *Journal of the American Revolution*, 9 May 2016, <https://allthingsliberty.com/2016/05/paddy-carr-a-honey-of-a-patriot/>.

64 Compare Gregorie, *Sumter*, 119, with Buchanan, *Guilford Courthouse*, 253.

65 Salley, *Hill*, 14.

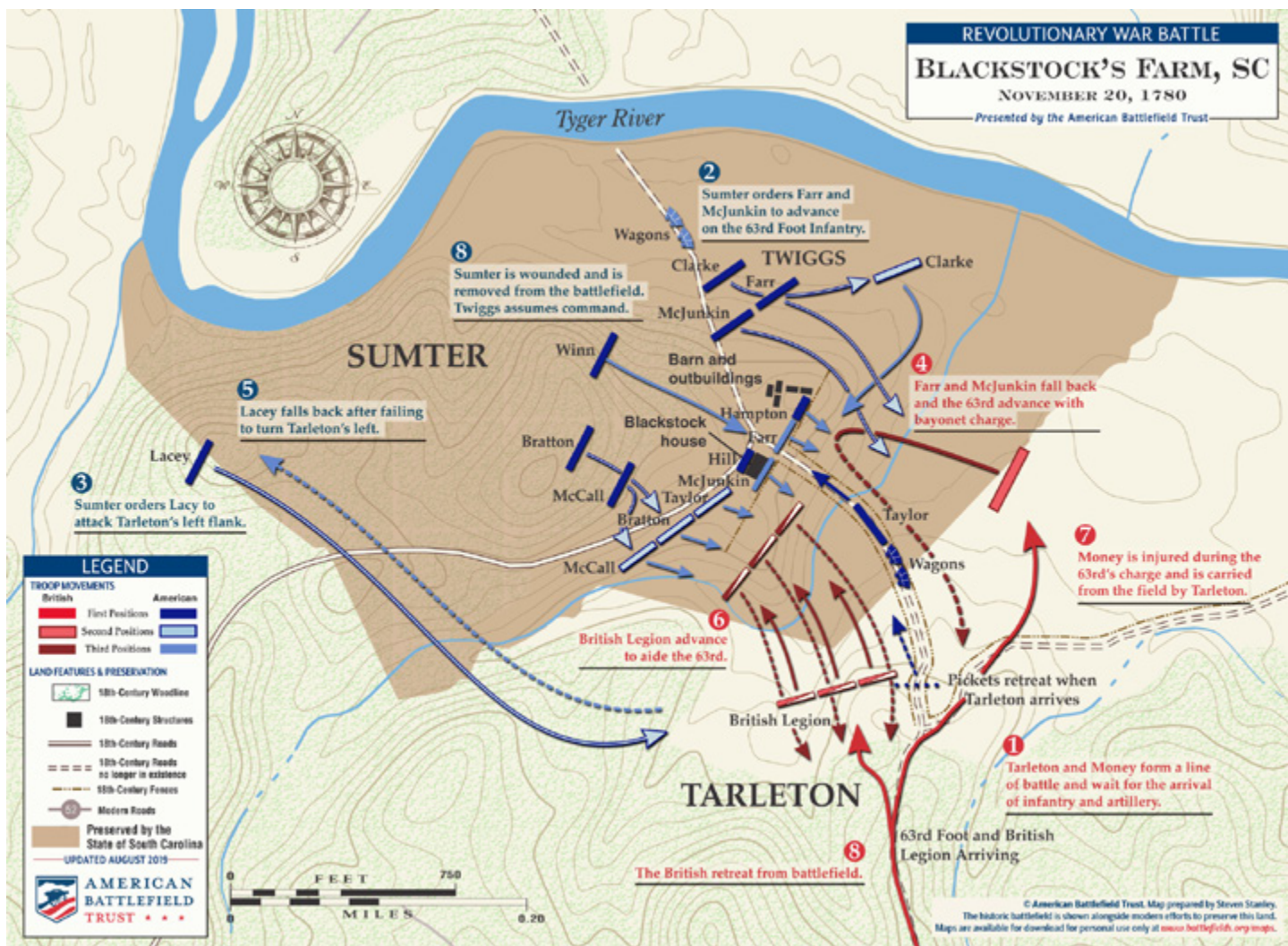
66 In addition to Clarke, several other field-grade officers fought at Musgrove's Mill and Blackstock's Farm, including Joseph McJunkin, James McCall, Thomas Brandon, and Samuel Hammond, promoted to major after the earlier battle.

67 Historians have disagreed on Brandon's role in the selection; compare Buchanan, *Guilford Courthouse*, 253, with Gregorie, *Sumter*, 121.

68 Later writers have praised the site selection, e.g., Gregorie, *Sumter*, 121; Lee, *Memoirs*, 113. The highest esteem came from British officer Roderick Mackenzie, who thought the place impregnable, Mackenzie, *Strictures*, 75–76.

69 Tarleton, *Campaigns*, 180.

70 When Tarleton linked with McArthur, he gained two artillery pieces, *Campaigns*, 179. By the time he jettisoned his unmounted infantry, he accounted for only one, *Campaigns*, 180. The reasons he abandoned the first piece are unclear and outside the scope of this article.



Modern topographic map showing locations of initial positions at Blackstock's Farm.

he needed to stop south of the Tyger. She also gave Sumter the most valuable piece of battlefield intelligence of all: Tarleton had jettisoned his artillery.⁷¹ If he stopped to fight at Blackstock's, the wooden buildings would not be blasted into splinters. From the Patriot standpoint, things had become much rosier.

Sumter established a single, strong line of soldiers across the breadth of the hilltop. The house, barn, and farm outbuildings were incorporated into the line, as were fences on the property. His dispositions reflected the hodgepodge of regiments that joined with Sumter. He placed South Carolina regiments in the reserve, the right flank, and in the main line. He deployed the Georgia units on the left. He kept personal command of the units on the main line.⁷²

Historians have strongly asserted that Sumter deployed separate, dedicated rifle units at Blackstock's

⁷¹ Tarleton, *Campaigns*, 181.

⁷² Many sources set out the traditional disposition of the militia forces, e.g., Gregorie, *Sumter*, 121; Buchanan, *Guilford Courthouse*, 253. The best rendition of the reserve is in Richard Winn, "General Richard Winn's Notes—1780," *Southern Campaigns Revolutionary War Pension Statements & Rosters*, <https://revwarapps.org/scx2.pdf>, 44. The availability of pension applications has expanded the list of confirmed regimental commanders, e.g., Pension Application of Benjamin Neighbors, S19000, transcribed by Will Graves, <https://revwarapps.org/s19000.pdf>; Pension Application of James Clark, transcribed by Will Graves, *Southern Campaigns Revolutionary War Pension Statements & Rosters*, S32181, <https://revwarapps.org/s32181.pdf>; Pension Application of Thomas Entrekin, transcribed by Will Graves, *Southern Campaigns Revolutionary War Pension Statements & Rosters*, W7112, <https://revwarapps.org/w7112.pdf>.

Farm.⁷³ This surge of agreement is not the same thing as evidence from eyewitnesses. The use of dedicated rifle units in the militia was confirmed at the Battle of Cowpens the following January. It would make sense that Blackstock's, in November, would see the pioneering efforts of the gambit, but proof has remained elusive. Even in the absence of such proof, one can readily assert that Sumter made creative, advantageous use of the rifle. Just how advantageous will be made clear very soon. With his regiments in position, Sumter took his post at the center of the main line. He was ready for Tarleton.

Tarleton had made the classic mistake of dividing his force in the presence of the enemy.⁷⁴ He proceeded rapidly with his mounted detachment, allowing the infantry and artillery "to march at their own pace."⁷⁵ When he caught up with Sumter, what he saw was shocking and unexpected. Rather than men strung out on the road and river crossing, easy pickings for the British cavalry, Sumter had the men lined for battle, waiting for Tarleton. With this new information, prudence dictated that Tarleton take a step back. But this was Tarleton, and prudence was not in the offering.

Tarleton drove in Sumter's pickets, posted by the highway, then took a position on a hilltop across the road and opposite the hill occupied by the Patriots. He "intended to remain quiet" until the rest of his force arrived.⁷⁶ He dismounted the 63rd Regiment and told part of the Legion cavalry to ease their horses.

Tarleton's move put Sumter into a quandary. Until this point, the smart money had been on Tarleton repeating Dunlap's mistake and moving directly from the road into the attack, *damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead*. Sumter now had the same problem as the Patriots at Musgrove's Mill: how to get the enemy to move forward into the ambush? Once more, the Whig formation was not an "ambush" in any real sense, and Tarleton had proven this fact by seeing the trap and failing to fall for it.

Sumter solved the dilemma by ordering the first assault of the day.⁷⁷ Sumter asked for volunteers for the frontal attack on the main British position, held by the 63rd Regiment.⁷⁸ He also ordered a flanking attack against the position held by the British Legion, a mission he assigned to Col. Edward Lacey.⁷⁹

The flanking attack was a moderate success, inflicting twenty casualties on the Legion and causing the loss of enemy horses before being forced to retreat.⁸⁰ The frontal assault on the 63rd Regiment triggered a stout response in the British. They fixed bayonets, effectively stopped the assault, then counterattacked. The men continued to move forward, directly into a wall of Patriot fire.⁸¹ This, at last, was Sumter's strategy bearing fruit.

Tarleton insisted he had not ordered his men forward; instead, "the ardour of the 63d carried them too far."⁸² In this, we accept Tarleton. He was trying to avoid a fight until the artillery and infantry arrived. The last thing he

73 E.g., Buchanan, *Guilford Courthouse*, 256; Robert D. Bass, *Gamecock: The Life and Campaigns of General Thomas Sumter* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1961), 106.

74 Although attributed to figures as diverse as Clausewitz and Napoleon, it actually dates to Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Lionel Giles (1910; Project Gutenberg, 2005), chap. 6, maxims 13–14.

75 Tarleton, *Campaigns*, 180.

76 Salley, *Hill*, 14; Tarleton, *Campaigns*, 181–182.

77 Tarleton, *Campaigns*, 182; Myddleton to Camp, 20 November 1780, in Showman et al., *Greene*, 6:498.

78 Joseph McJunkin, "McJunkin Narrative: Draper MSS, Sumter Papers, 23VV153-203," in Graves, *Backcountry Revolutionary*, 303.

79 Salley, *Hill*, 14. Hammond recalled a third prong, in which Sumter ordered Clarke, accompanied by Hammond, to attack Tarleton's rear with one hundred men. The men reached the objective but accomplished little beyond freeing some British horses, "The Battle of Blackstock's, November 20th, 1780," in Johnson, *Traditions and Reminiscences*, 525. A pension applicant confirmed Hammond's version of events, Pension Application of James Clinton, transcribed by Will Graves, Southern Campaigns Revolutionary War Pension Statements & Rosters, S2437, <https://revwarapps.org/s2437.pdf>.

80 Salley, *Hill*, 14.

81 Tarleton, *Campaigns*, 182.

82 Ibid.

wanted was his men moving directly into an obvious trap that he had seen. The soldiers, less concerned tactically, followed their instincts.

The 63rd advanced from a great distance.⁸³ As they progressed, they entered the killing zone of the riflemen. Hill noted “those men from the houses” killing British soldiers “at the distance of 200 yards.”⁸⁴ As the 63rd moved forward, they entered the range at which musket volleys produced mass casualties. In this light, Tarleton described “a considerable fire from the buildings and the mountain,” an apt picture of musket volleys.⁸⁵

Tarleton quickly saw the 63rd was in trouble. He ordered a cavalry charge to rescue the embattled infantry. The cavalry, like the infantry before it, foundered in the face of overwhelming fire from the Patriot positions.⁸⁶ Hammond left an unforgettable picture of the use of rifle fire synergizing with the ambush tactic: “The British advanced with their horses along the road, followed by their infantry . . . The riflemen, under cover of the hogpens, and those behind the fence, received them with becoming firmness, and fired with extraordinary activity and spirit. Sumter’s right extending along the ridge, advanced upon the flank of the British; they soon sounded a retreat.”⁸⁷ The British, their assault having failed and now back on the defensive, managed to extricate themselves from the cauldron of Patriot fire.

The most prominent British casualty, Lt. John Money, commander of the 63rd Regiment and an aide-de-camp to Cornwallis, was seriously wounded. Money was not the only British casualty. The 63rd lost four officers, a disproportionate loss in a unit of only eighty men. British losses overall were fifty-one killed and wounded, but the toll among officers in the 63rd, once more, told an important story of the value of aimed rifle shots.⁸⁸

As darkness fell, Sumter was wounded and was evacuated from the area. The British retired across the road, and the Patriots kept possession of the field, winners under the rules of the day. Col. John Twiggs, appointed by Sumter to command in his absence, decided it was time to leave. He ordered campfires to be kept burning to deceive the British, and the Patriots melted into the night, victorious.⁸⁹ Tarleton’s unbroken winning streak had ended.

Sumter’s use of the ambush tactic, now matured through several levels of evolution, once more proved its worth. The problem with the gambit was always the same: getting the rat to take the cheese, and different commanders solved it in different ways. Sumter followed Inman’s lead and taunted the enemy into a response. Once the 63rd moved forward, the result was essentially predetermined. The British, always confident in their superior training and experience, were powerless in the face of the backcountry tactics. The combination of drawing the enemy forward and beating him relentlessly with accurate rifle fire, was Tarleton’s undoing at Blackstock’s Farm as much as it had been Innes’s at Musgrove’s Mill. Sumter took this combined stratagem to the next level. Blackstock’s Farm was a much larger battle than its two predecessors and presented much higher stakes. Sumter added this quality—scope—to the evolving stratagem. Going forward, the next engagement would see a gifted tactician take matters to dizzying heights.

Cowpens

The Battle of Cowpens, fought on 17 January 1781, saw the maturation of the two tactical devices we have been tracing. Brig. Gen. Daniel Morgan, one of the great tactical minds born in America in any century, seized these tactics and used them to achieve results previously unimagined. Morgan, raised in the Virginia backcountry,

83 Myddleton placed the distance at 400 yards, Myddleton to Camp, 20 November 1780, in Showman et al., *Greene*, 6:498.

84 Salley, *Hill*, 14.

85 Tarleton, *Campaigns*, 182.

86 Winn, “General Winn’s Notes,” 46; Salley, *Hill*, 15; Pension Application of James Clinton. Tarleton asserted the cavalry charge was a complete success that smashed the American line, *Campaigns*, 182. Here, Buchanan was blunt: “Tarleton lied,” *Guilford Courthouse*, 256.

87 Hammond, “Battle of Blackstock’s,” in Johnson, *Traditions and Reminiscences*, 525.

88 Tarleton, *Campaigns*, 183. Money died from his wounds ten days after the battle.

89 Gregorie, *Sumter*, 123; Winn, “General Winn’s Notes,” 47.

began his military career in a rifle regiment and achieved fame as commander of another in the northern war. Of all the senior Continental officers in the field, Morgan had the most experience with the rifle, and the greatest understanding of its potential.

Morgan's signal innovation was the use of massed rifle units to deplete the enemy leadership. The rifle had proved its worth many times, but the southern war had intimated there were greater prizes on offer. Musgrove's Mill and Blackstock's Farm proved that rifles in large numbers, preferably in dedicated units, could be deadly. Morgan seized on this and added his experience from the conflict in the north. At Cowpens, for the first time, we see riflemen massed into regimental formations and placed on the front line with orders to target British officers and noncommissioned officers.

Cowpens saw another change in personnel. Tarleton remained on the British side. Sumter, wounded at Blackstock's Farm, was out of action. Morgan, the first Continental officer in the story, was a recent arrival in the southern theater. His principal subordinate commanders, Continental Lt. Col. John Eager Howard and South Carolina militia Col. Andrew Pickens, had experience in the southern war, Pickens more so than Howard. Even with the changes at the top, there were several regimental commanders from Blackstock's Farm who saw duty at Cowpens.⁹⁰

The background to the battle began with the arrival of Maj. Gen. Nathanael Greene to take command of the southern army on 3 December 1780. His first act as commander was to divide his army.⁹¹ Greene took one division to Cheraw, the other he sent west under Morgan. Morgan moved west, acquiring militia units almost by magnetism. Morgan was a dynamic leader, but equally important was the fact that his presence so far west was an unusual and welcome support for the backcountry Whigs. As Morgan proceeded west, he drew the attention of the British military command. Cornwallis feared that he intended an assault on the British fortress at Ninety-Six, a key point in the chain of outposts securing the occupation in the backcountry.⁹² His response: send Tarleton.

Tarleton had been less than candid to Cornwallis in his report on the result at Blackstock's Farm. He claimed a complete victory, but as John Buchanan plainly stated, "Tarleton lied."⁹³ Cornwallis, his confidence in Tarleton unblemished, sent the cavalryman to protect Ninety-Six, and ultimately, to deal with Morgan.

Tarleton pursued Morgan as relentlessly as he had Marion and Sumter. Early on the morning of 17 January, he caught up with Morgan. Tarleton led a force of a thousand men.⁹⁴ He led his British Legion, 500 men divided between infantry and cavalry. A detachment of the 17th Light Dragoons rode with the Legion cavalry. He had four companies of light infantry, the 1st battalion of the 71st Regiment, and the remnants of the 7th Regiment. He had two artillery pieces.⁹⁵

Morgan commanded about 300 Continental infantry, 80 Continental cavalry, and 600 militia infantry, 45 of

90 Notably James McCall, Thomas Brandon, Samuel Hammond, and Joseph Hays.

91 Historians have debated whether the decision was a strategic move or simply a recognition that two small armies could sustain themselves better than a single large one. Compare Theodore Thayer, *Nathanael Greene: Strategist of the American Revolution* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1960), 296–297, with Todd J. Johnson, "Nathanael Greene's Implementation of Compound Warfare During the Southern Campaign of the American Revolution" (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: School of Advanced Military Studies, United States Army Command and General Staff College, 2007), 23.

92 Tarleton, *Campaigns*, 216.

93 Buchanan, *Guilford Courthouse*, 256.

94 Stedman, *History*, 2:318. Other estimates abounded, ranging between 600 and 1,150 men; compare R. Lamb, *An Original and Authentic Journal of Occurrences During the Late American War, from its Commencement to the Year 1783* (Dublin, 1809), 342, with Ian Saberton, "Cornwallis and the Winter Campaign, January to April 1781," *Journal of the American Revolution*, 28 April 2020,

<https://allthingsliberty.com/2020/04/cornwallis-and-the-winter-campaign-january-to-april-1781/>.

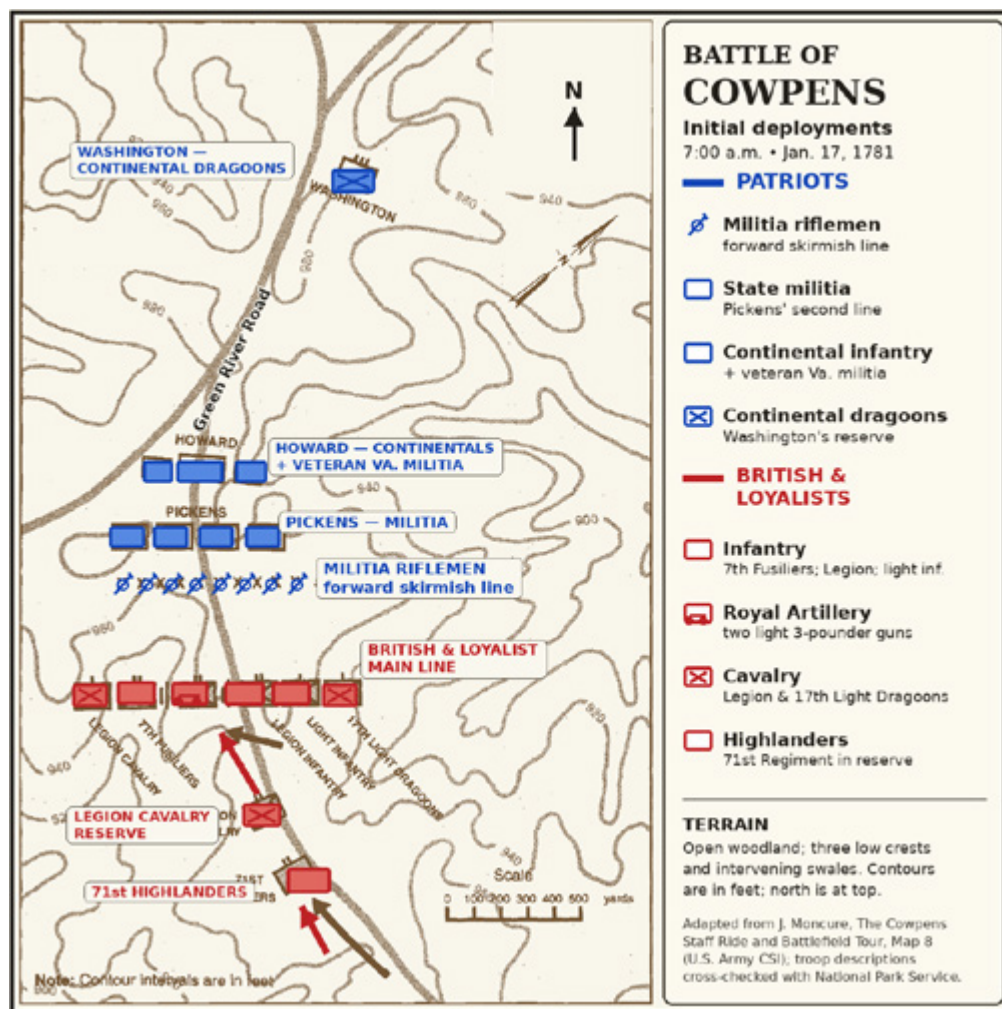
95 Stedman, *History*, 2:318; Tarleton, *Campaigns*, 217; Mackenzie, *Strictures*, 112. The 7th Regiment had been decimated by disease and numbered nine officers and 167 rank and file, J. P. Kelleher, "1781," *The 7th. Royal Fusiliers and Their Part in the American War of Independence 1775–1781 and New Orleans 1815* (n.d.), xvi, <https://www.fusiliermuseumlondon.org/download?id=12390>.

whom he assigned to the cavalry.⁹⁶ He had no artillery, so the numbers, although equal, belied an imbalance in favor of the British.

Morgan confronted an army four times larger than the enemy force at Blackstock's Farm. There was no way an "ambush" of any description could succeed against so large a force. Morgan's battle plan preserved the essentials of the backcountry ambush, but added new features designed to accommodate the changed circumstances.

The essential problem remained: how to get the rat into the trap. Morgan built on the experiences of the three earlier battles. Tarleton, a seething mass of aggression, might rush headlong into the American formation as Dunlap had at Wofford's Iron Works. If he hesitated, as he had at Blackstock's, Morgan had a strong line of riflemen posted in front of his main line, capable of serving as skirmishers and provoking the British.⁹⁷ Their position was a spin on Inman's role at Musgrove's Mill and a nod to Sumter's assault at Blackstock's Farm. One of these techniques would work, sending Tarleton directly into the American formation, exactly what Morgan wanted.

The next piece, however, demonstrated Morgan's brilliance as a tactical innovator. When Tarleton finally moved forward, he would encounter something never seen before. Morgan massed four regiments of riflemen on his front



Schematic of the troop deployments at Cowpens.

⁹⁶ James Graham, *The Life of General Daniel Morgan, of the Virginia Line of the Army of the United States, With Portions of His Correspondence, Compiled from Authentic Sources*. (New York, 1859), 295; William Johnson, *Sketches of the Life and Correspondence of Nathanael Greene*, 2 vols. (Charleston, 1822), 1:374-378.

⁹⁷ In fact, small parties of riflemen moved forward and acted as skirmishers, but this was not seen as a driver of the British attack, Morgan to Nathanael Greene, 19 January 1781, in Showman et al., *Greene*, 7:154.

line. He gave them orders to target British officers and noncommissioned officers.⁹⁸ The British army was rigidly hierarchical. If the leaders were removed, it would collapse into an inchoate mass. The men on the main line would then complete the task of destroying Tarleton's army.

The riflemen were handicapped by the slow reloading time of their weapon of choice. Once the British moved forward, there was time to reload, if at all, only once. The rifles would not accommodate a bayonet, and the riflemen had no ability to fight a disciplined British line wielding bayonets. Morgan, aware of the rifle's disabilities as well as its advantages, ordered the riflemen to fire, then withdraw behind the main line once the British got too close.⁹⁹

With the riflemen out of the way, the men on the main line came into action. The main line centered on the Continental infantry. As Continentals, all carried muskets. On the right flank, Morgan stationed Virginia militiamen, many of whom were former Continentals. There was one rifle unit among the Virginia units; otherwise, the men carried muskets.¹⁰⁰ On the left flank, he posted Pickens in command of a collection of militia units.¹⁰¹

The Continental army, trained in the European school, formed in multiple ranks, usually in a triple formation.¹⁰² The purpose, of course, was to maximize the mass of fire from their musket volleys. At Cowpens, there were too few Continentals. They still bunched together, but in a double rank.¹⁰³ Pickens's men massed in multiple lines, Continental-fashion. This way, these militiamen, also carrying muskets, could add to the volume of fire from the main line.¹⁰⁴

The militia on the main line had orders similar to those of the riflemen. Morgan knew the militiamen lacked the intense training and discipline needed to withstand a British bayonet attack.¹⁰⁵ Rather than have them desert their posts in the face of the expected British assault, as they had at Camden and would again at Guilford Courthouse,

98 Graham, *Morgan*, 297; Morgan to Greene, 19 January 1781, in Showman et al., *Greene*, 7:159n9; Don Higginbotham, *Daniel Morgan, Revolutionary Rifleman* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1961), 133–134.

99 Graham, *Morgan*, 297; Pension Application of John Thomas, transcribed by Will Graves, Southern Campaign American Revolution Pension Statements & Rosters, S16271, <https://revwarapps.org/s16271.pdf>.

100 Robert Ford, "What Weapons Did the Americans Carry at the Battle of Cowpens?" *Journal of the Southern Campaigns of the American Revolution*, December 23, 2025; <https://southern-campaigns.org/what-weapons-did-the-americans-carry-at-the-battle-of-cowpens/>; Robert A. Ford, *The Battle of Cowpens, Reexamined* (Charleston, WV: Blackwater Press, 2025), 116–124.

101 Most secondary sources assert Morgan deployed his forces into three lines, with Pickens occupying the middle line. Although a majority of historians follow this interpretation, it is contradicted by the original sources, e.g., Morgan to Greene, 19 January 1781, in Showman et al., *Greene*, 7:152; Samuel S. Hammond, "Battle of the Cowpens," in Johnson, *Traditions and Reminiscences*, 529–530; Pension Application of John Thomas; Pension Application of William Lorange (Lowrance), transcribed by Will Graves, Southern Campaign American Revolution Pension Statements & Rosters, S31217, <https://revwarapps.org/s31217.pdf>; Joseph Lee Boyle, "The Journal of Thomas Anderson, Delaware Regiment, Part 1, May 1780–March 1781," *Journal of the American Revolution*, 25 July 2023, <https://allthingsliberty.com/2023/07/the-journal-of-thomas-anderson-delaware-regiment-part-1-may-1780-march-1781/>; Alexander Chesney, a Loyalist officer, described riflemen in front of the main line with cavalry in reserve behind it, E. Alfred Jones, ed., "The Journal of Alexander Chesney, a South Carolina Loyalist in the Revolution and After," *The Ohio State University Bulletin* 26, no. 4 (30 October 1921), 22.

102 Wright, *Continental Army*, 4; Black, *Warfare in the Eighteenth Century*, 158.

103 Morgan to Greene, 19 November 1781, in Showman et al., *Greene*, 7:152; Hammond, "Battle of the Cowpens," 529–530.

104 Hammond, "Battle of the Cowpens," 529–530. Little has been written on the weapons at Cowpens. The sources cited above in note 100 are some of the few writings on the subject.

105 Lee said it was "murder" to deploy militia in the path of a British bayonet charge, *Memoirs*, 200n.

he ordered them to fire three rounds per man.¹⁰⁶ With this accomplished, they were to join the riflemen behind the Continentals.¹⁰⁷

When Tarleton finally reached the American position on the morning of 17 January, Morgan was waiting for him. The Americans were fully deployed in line of battle. Tarleton, not waiting for an assault as he had at Blackstock's, ordered his men forward immediately.¹⁰⁸

The riflemen on the front rank performed their deadly work. Morgan allowed them to disperse, as the militia had done at Musgrove's Mill, and take advantage of cover and concealment. At Cowpens, there was little enough of either, but even taking a prone position in lieu of standing offers the rifleman both substantial protection and a means to brace his weapon for aiming.¹⁰⁹

The riflemen had time to aim and fire the one round they had loaded before lining for battle. Some had time for a second shot.¹¹⁰ Their responsibilities fulfilled, they withdrew to the rear.

When the riflemen withdrew, the men on the main line had a clear field of fire. The British were no more than 150 yards from the main line, the usual distance for musket volleys to commence. The men with muskets in Pickens's formation followed their orders. They fired their volleys and retreated in good order, firing while they withdrew.¹¹¹

Morgan's plan to lure Tarleton into a trap was working perfectly. The next step proved the point. The British were accustomed to seeing American militia fleeing before a bayonet charge. As at Blackstock's, the redcoats at Cowpens pursued the retreating militia. They ran directly into the American main line, where the fighting immediately became "obstinate and bloody."¹¹²

At the time, the critical functions of the cavalry included plugging holes or reinforcing a wavering infantry line. In this light, Tarleton sent fifty dragoons into the American left, adding to the carnage with a forest of slashing sabers. He met unexpected resistance from the Continental infantry, but the attack ended with a powerful counterattack from the American cavalry.¹¹³

With the attack against the American left stalled, Tarleton called up his reserves, both infantry and cavalry, and ordered an attack on the American right.¹¹⁴ The British line, now augmented, extended beyond the American line, placing the latter at risk of being outflanked. Howard ordered a company on his far right to wheel backward, to face right in the event the British tried a flanking move.¹¹⁵

The fog of war was real and intense at this point. Howard's order became confused, and the whole Continental line withdrew. This was not a mass of soldiers fleeing the British bayonets. On the contrary, the Continentals moved rearward in good order. Morgan and Howard immediately got to work. The Continentals were ordered to halt after moving fifty yards to the rear.¹¹⁶

The British, seeing the Continentals moving to the rear, once more assumed the Americans were retreating

106 While there is agreement that Morgan wanted a limited number of rounds per militiaman, the precise number he wanted is controversial, and the debate is outside the scope of this article. The number in the text is from Thomas Young, in Johnson, *Traditions and Reminiscences*, 449.

107 Graham, *Morgan*, 297.

108 Tarleton's critics insist he moved forward too soon, before his troops were in position, e.g., Mackenzie, *Strictures*, 107–109; Stedman, *History*, 2:321.

109 British Maj. (later colonel) George Hanger, an admirer of American riflemen, noted they "always lie, to take a good shot at a long distance," Fremantle, *Book of the Rifle*, 30.

110 John Moncure, "The Cowpens Staff Ride and Battlefield Tour" (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: Combat Studies Institute, United States Army Command and General Staff College, 1996), 128.

111 Morgan to Greene, 19 January 1781, in Showman et al., *Greene*, 154.

112 Stedman, *History*, 2:321–322.

113 Tarleton, *Campaigns*, 223; Stedman, *History*, 2:321–322; Mackenzie, *Strictures*, 98.

114 Tarleton, *Campaigns*, 223.

115 Moncure, *Staff Ride*, 127.

116 Moncure, *Staff Ride*, 129; Morgan to Greene, 19 January 1781, in Showman et al., *Greene*, 7:154.

in deference to the British onslaught. They moved forward in pursuit. What happened next shook the world: the Continentals faced the British and fired a massive volley at close range.

Tarleton acknowledged that “an unexpected fire” halted his attack in its tracks. But it was Lee who seized the emotion of the moment:

*Considering this retrograde movement the precursor of flight, the British line rushed on with impetuosity and disorder; but as it drew near, Howard faced about, and gave it a close and murderous fire. Stunned by this unexpected shock, the most advanced of the enemy recoiled in confusion.*¹¹⁷

Howard was not finished. He ordered a bayonet charge into the writhing mass of British soldiers.¹¹⁸ The result of the one-two punch of musket volley and bayonet attack was unprecedented. The British effort ended on the spot. Tarleton admitted the worst possible news to Cornwallis: his army had collapsed. “Exertions to make them advance were useless. The part of the cavalry which had not been engaged fell likewise into disorder, and an unaccountable panic extended itself along the whole line.”¹¹⁹ This kind of thing never happened to the British, except at Cowpens, where the machinery of the army fell to the ground, utterly defeated.

The results of the Battle of Cowpens were completely one-sided. The British lost, in rounded numbers, 100 killed, 200 wounded, and 600 captured.¹²⁰ The Americans lost twenty-five killed and 125 wounded.¹²¹

The effect of rifle fire was the key feature of the battle. Roderick Mackenzie, a British officer who served at Cowpens, noted that before Howard’s volley, “not less than two-thirds of the British infantry officers had already fallen.”¹²² William Johnson, an early historian of the battle, quoted a Continental officer, who, pointing to the large numbers of British officers and noncommissioned officers killed by the riflemen, stated that this was where the battle was won.¹²³

Morgan’s use of dedicated rifle units to deplete the enemy leadership structure was decisive at Cowpens. As in the earlier battles, it synergized with the other stratagem taken from the backcountry. The loss of officers paid dividends when the British line collided with extreme resistance. At Cowpens, the Continentals put up a heroic fight, which the British, largely leaderless, proved unable to overcome. This result was the backcountry tactical scheme in full flower. The two techniques worked together to destroy a British army.

We have traced the development of two backcountry tactical gambits that proved decisive in the Southern war. The use of the rifle, a common weapon on the southern frontier, delivered uncommon results in the hands of skilled tacticians. The ambush, with origins on the frontier, evolved into something very different and much grander over time. Together, in the right hands, these two stratagems proved unstoppable.

¹¹⁷ Tarleton, *Campaigns*, 223; Lee, *Memoirs*, 132.

¹¹⁸ Moncure, *Staff Ride*, 127.

¹¹⁹ Tarleton, *Campaigns*, 223; Mackenzie, *Strictures*, 100.

¹²⁰ There is a wide range of estimates on British casualties, see, e.g., Tarleton, *Campaigns*, 224; Lawrence E. Babits, *A Devil of a Whipping: The Battle of Cowpens* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 142; Ian Saberton, “Cornwallis and the Winter Campaign, January to April 1781,” *Journal of the American Revolution*, April 28, 2020, <https://allthingsliberty.com/2020/04/cornwallis-and-the-winter-campaign-january-to-april-1781/>.

¹²¹ The American casualties were also subject to a range of estimates, e.g., Morgan to Greene, 19 January 1781, in Showman et al., *Greene*, 7:155 and 161n15; Buchanan, *Guilford Courthouse*, 326.

¹²² Mackenzie, *Strictures*, 99.

¹²³ Johnson, *Life of Greene*, 1:380.



“Blind Reuben Lacey” and Huck’s Defeat: Unwitting Hero or . . . Dupe?¹

by

Brian R. Mahan

OP ED

Throughout history, things sometimes happen that, while seemingly insignificant at the time, can have a significant effect on future major events. Reuben Lacey’s role, tiny though it may have been, prior to the Battle of Williamson’s Plantation, also known as “Huck’s Defeat,” on July 12, 1780 may be one of these incidents.

Huck’s Defeat was a small but important battle during the Revolutionary War in South Carolina’s so-called Backcountry, the area beyond the coastal region of the state. It occurred after the British had recently captured Charleston and had also won a significant victory over Colonel Abraham Buford’s forces at the Battle of the Waxhaws. And, as a result, the British seemed unstoppable in their campaign to subdue the southern colonies.²

Before and during the Revolutionary War, the Backcountry of South Carolina was a tumultuous place. The area was without officially sanctioned courts of law for a number of years after initial settlement. To provide some semblance of security against rising lawlessness, the settlers began organizing themselves into vigilante groups to curtail such activity. Ultimately, to counteract the sometimes over-zealous vigilantes, called Regulators, the colonial government sanctioned the formation of Anti-Regulators, also known as Moderators.

Through the years, because of rising animosity and actual violence between these groups, people eventually became aligned for or against each other, and in some cases even against their own neighbors. By the time the Revolutionary War began, many Backcountry people found themselves among individuals with long-held, pent-up resentments. The Revolutionary War thus became a localized civil war in the Backcountry among these competing factions, now labeled Tories or Loyalists (loyal to the King of England) and Whigs

(so-called “Americans” or “Patriots”) as a result of those feelings.

During the conflict, militias of both sides roamed the countryside, looting, destroying, and burning each others’ homesteads and businesses (e.g., grist mills and iron works), and even committing murder as revenge because of an actual or perceived past slight, insult, or injustice. Reuben Lacey probably found himself in a particularly difficult and probably uncomfortable position at this time since his father, Edward Lacey, Sr. was a life-long and staunch Loyalist, while his brother, Colonel Edward Lacey, Jr. was a key Whig militia leader.

In 1775, Reuben served in his brother’s Whig militia — the Turkey Creek Volunteer Militia Company. During the course of the War, British leaders and their Tory counterparts in South Carolina tried to induce Whigs and “fence-sitters” to their side with threats of violence and/or with monetary rewards. Reuben Lacey was persuaded in some fashion to become a Tory or at the very least, to assist them at one point. How much, if any influence from his father, who lived nearby, played a role in his decision can only be guessed at, but probably was a factor.

On July 11, 1780, during the evening prior to Huck’s Defeat, Reuben was recorded as being with a strong force of British-trained Loyalists, plus Tory militia, led by Captain Christian Huck, that was searching for notable Whig leaders and other sympathizers. Dr. M.A. (Maurice) Moore, a biographer of Edward Lacey, Jr., wrote in 1859:

*“The [oral] tradition of the country is, that it was known that ‘blind Reuben Lacey’ (a Tory) was that evening along with Huck’s army, as it passed up towards [Col. William] Bratton’s [plantation]”.*³

Some historians view this as evidence of Reuben’s being an active member of the Tory militia that was part of Huck’s force. But, Dr. Moore’s description of that night continues:

“Col. Lacey being acquainted with the habits of his brother, knew that he [Reuben] would return home before day.”

Ultimately, Reuben did return home during the night, in fact, sometime “after midnight,” according to Moore (see below).

Col. Lacey correctly surmised that Reuben would be returning home before daybreak. This suggests that he knew Reuben was not actually a member of the Tory

militia. A member of the militia would have stayed with the rest of the force or, at the very least, would not have left so late at night, i.e., after midnight, just to sleep in his own bed or to go home to get food and supplies. Instead, it suggests that Col. Lacey knew that Reuben was serving as a guide for Capt. Huck due to his brother's familiarity of the area. It was not uncommon for both sides in the conflict to use local residents as guides when needed.

Col. Lacey and the other Whig militia leaders had learned previously that Huck's force was heading toward Col. Bratton's plantation. How did Col. Lacey find out that Reuben was guiding Huck's force? Perhaps from their father, Edward, Sr. when the Whig force stopped at the elder Lacey's home during their pursuit of Huck. Col. Lacey thus concluded that his brother would take Huck and his force to Col. Bratton's plantation where they would likely camp for the night. Col. Lacey also knew that Reuben would go home afterwards since it was only a couple miles away, even though it was very late at night.

Note that in the first citation above, Moore describes Reuben as "blind Reuben Lacey." This is because "as the story goes," per Dr. Moore, i.e., as the local legend has it, Reuben was blind in one eye. Supposedly, too, the horse he was riding was blind in one of its eyes and his dog was also blind in one eye. Quite the trio!

Because they were brothers, Col. Lacey obviously knew of Reuben's vision problem. He was also aware that darkness worsened the condition. In an attempt to learn the exact whereabouts of Capt. Huck and his force from Reuben, Col. Lacey and another man, Lieutenant John Mills (Capt. Mills, per Dr. Moore) set out ahead of the rest of the Whig militia. Sometime in the early hours of July 12, he and Lt. Mills laid in wait about 20 paces from the main road down which Reuben traveled on his way home from the Huck's camp. Moore described their late-night encounter with Reuben as follows:

"After midnight, here the blind [Reuben, his horse, and his dog] all came; they [Col. Lacey and Lt. Mills] hailed him with assumed voices. 'Who comes there?'

[Reuben] 'A friend.'

[Col. Lacey and Lt. Mills] 'A friend to whom?'

[Reuben] 'A friend to - to the - the King.'

[Col. Lacey and Lt. Mills] 'So are we, but have unluckily straggled off in the rear of the army; where are you from?'

[Reuben] 'From Huck's camp.'

[Col. Lacey and Lt. Mills] 'Where is the encampment?'

[Reuben] 'About [James] Williamson's house.'

[Col. Lacey and Lt. Mills] 'Where are the sentinels posted? for we must pass them, and get in before Reveille.'

[Reuben] 'One is placed North, up the road, one hundred yards from Williamson's [house], and one East, towards the creek.'

After getting all the information they wanted, from blind Reuben, 'Pass on, friend,' said they [Col. Lacey and Lt. Mills], still with counterfeit voices."

When Reuben was initially stopped by his brother and Lt. Mills that night, why did he say that he was a friend of the king, and apparently, based on Dr. Moore's description, did he do so rather hesitatingly? Maybe he thought that the men who stopped him were indeed Tories, and he felt it was safer to tell them he was one of them rather than take a chance and say that he was a not a friend of the king. Probably a good idea, under the circumstances.

Ultimately, the information provided by Reuben to Col. Lacey and Lt. Mills proved crucial to the Whigs because until then, their leaders thought Huck would likely be camped at Col. Bratton's plantation. And, learning where the sentries were posted allowed them to get their men into position around James Williamson's house. Thus informed, the Whig attack began at dawn of July 12th and lasted less than 30 minutes. During the brief battle, Capt. Huck was killed and his force defeated.

The importance of the battle lies in the fact that this was the first time Whig militiamen defeated British-trained, front-line provincial Loyalist troops and not merely local Tory militia. The impact of the victory was that Whigs throughout the South Carolina Backcountry and elsewhere were energized to keep up the fight at a time when their morale had ebbed greatly following the fall of Charleston the month before and then Buford's

defeat two weeks after that. Also, many individuals still neutral or who had been Tories joined the Whig cause. This combined increased enthusiasm and influx of men eventually led to other American victories over Tory and British forces in the south (not without some losses, however), and ultimately to Lord Cornwallis' surrender at Yorktown, Virginia in October 1781.

We will never know how deeply involved Reuben was with the British prior to Huck's Defeat. If he was a Tory, he was duped by his brother in providing important information to the Whigs. But, if he was merely serving as a guide at the behest of his staunch Tory father, Edward Lacey, Sr. and was truly a patriot, or at least, neutral at the time, he was an unwitting hero. Arguments on both sides can be made.

One thing we do know is that less than two weeks after Huck's Defeat, Reuben was again serving with the Whig militia forces in South Carolina. According to post-war state pay records, he was paid "twenty-five pounds sterling" in 1786 for a total of 175 days of militia duty starting July 24, 1780 and for additional service in 1781. Eventually, in the early 1800s, Reuben Lacey moved with his family to Randolph County, Illinois. He lived there for nearly 20 years until his death at approximately age 65 in 1820. Records found about him there give no indication that he had ever served in the South Carolina militia . . . on either side.

I have often wondered if while Reuben was still living in South Carolina after the Revolution, whether he and his brother, Col. Edward, Jr., ever talked about their encounter along the road late that night before Huck's Defeat. If so, they both probably had a good laugh, and perhaps Reuben felt a little embarrassed. I have also wondered how their father, Edward, Sr. felt after he heard about the encounter, especially considering the outcome of the battle . . . and of the war itself. He probably wasn't very happy about any of it.⁴

"Blind Reuben Lacey". . . was he a dupe or was he a hero? Who knows? The information he gave his brother, Col. Edward, Jr., albeit unwittingly, about Capt. Huck's whereabouts and disposition helped the Whigs win an important battle at a crucial time. Is Reuben's "contribution" to America winning its independence from Britain one of those insignificant incidents that have significant effects? Maybe . . . maybe not. It is, however, an interesting story during an important time in our history.

END NOTES

¹ Modified from my paper of the same title in *The Quarterly*, York County [South Carolina] Genealogical and Historical Society, 26 (Sept 2014): 8-11.

² Michael C. Scoggins: *The Day it Rained Militia* (The History Press, Charleston South Carolina, 2005)

³ Dr. M.A. Moore: *The Life of Gen. Edward Lacey* (Douglas, Evins & Co., Spartanburg South Carolina, 1859)

⁴ Their father-son relationship apparently already strained (Michael C. Scoggins, personal communication), Col. Edward Lacey's having his father, Edward Sr., tied to his bed to prevent him from warning Capt. Huck about the presence of the Whig militia probably did not help things.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Former teacher and retired wildlife biologist, Brian R. Mahan, lives in rural St. Clair County, Illinois. He has researched his ancestors for over 40 years and has written papers for several state and local genealogical societies. After learning Reuben Lacey, his 4th great-grandfather, may have been a Tory, Brian was intrigued. Dr. M.A. Moore's account of Reuben's and brother, Col. Edward Lacey's late-night encounter prior to

"Huck's Defeat," albeit anecdotal, is apparently from participants in the battle. The story and the circumstances surrounding it illustrate the thorny issue of family members being at odds during the Revolutionary War in the southern colonies.

FROM WOFFORD'S IRON WORKS TO COWPENS

Crossword Answer Key

Completed grid and numbered answers

P						M						A						
I						U						M						
C	O	W	P	E	N	S						B			C			
K						K					S	U	M	T	E	R		
E		T	A	R	L	E	T	O	N			S			D			
N				I		T						H			A			
S				F								M			R			
				L		F			D		B	U		S		H		
				E		E			U		L		S		P		O	
				M	O	R	G	A	N		A		G		R		W	
				E		G			L		C		R		I		A	
I	N	M	A	N		U		B	A	C	K	C	O	U	N	T	R	Y
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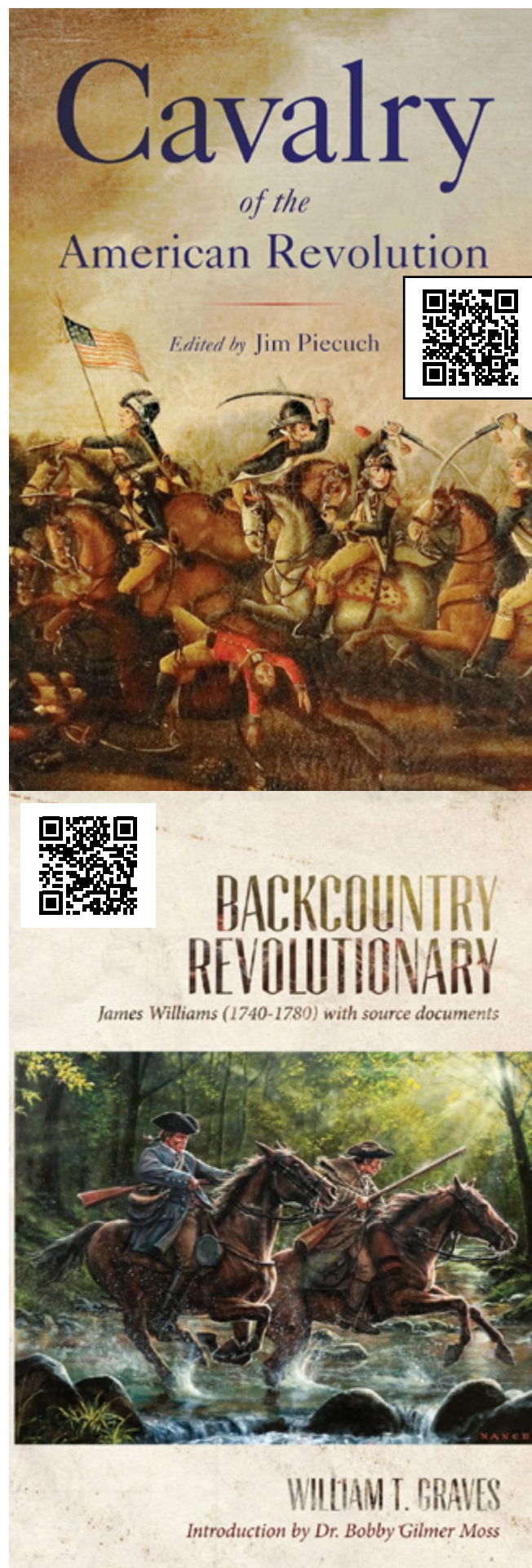
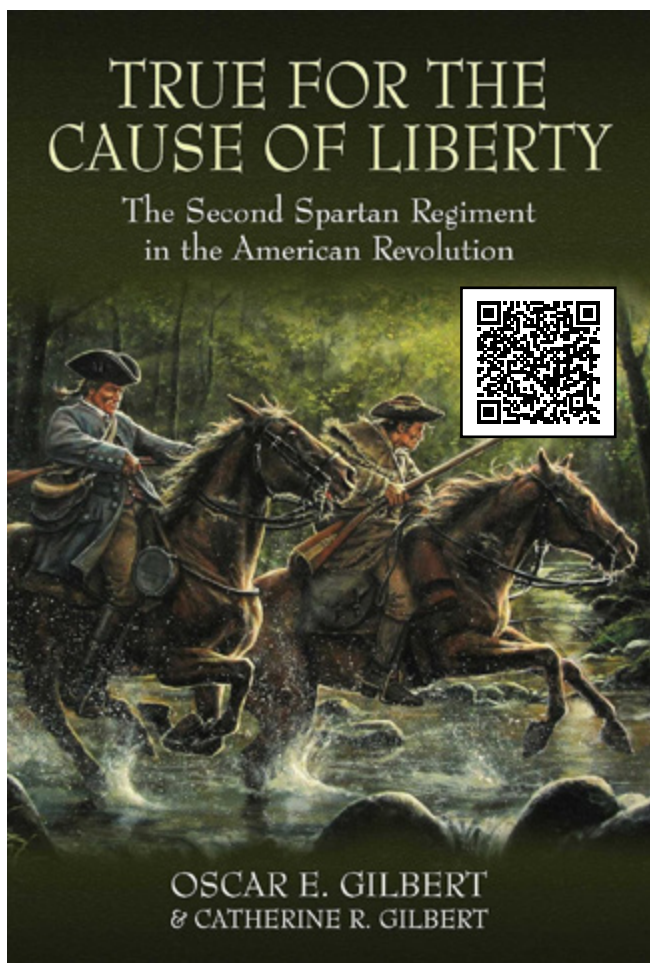
ACROSS

4. COWPENS
6. SUMTER
7. TARLETON
14. MORGAN
15. INMAN
16. BACKCOUNTRY
17. BAYONET
18. IRONWORKS

DOWN

1. PICKENS
2. MUSKET
3. AMBUSH
5. CEDARSPRINGS
8. RIFLEMEN
9. MUSGROVE
10. FERGUSON
11. DUNLAP
12. BLACKSTOCK
13. HOWARD

Answer key for the crossword based on Robert Ford's article.



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