

Southern Campaigns of the American Revolution The JOURNAL

SEPTEMBER 2026 | VOL. 26 NO. 9

BONUS:

Robert Jeffers: Free
Man of Color



INSIDE:

Light Horse Harry
Lee's Hacking Match
C. Leon Harris and Jeffrey Kline



The Journal

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Richard C. Meehan, Jr.

Contributors

C. Leon Harris
Richard C. Meehan, Jr.
Olivia Hipp
Effie Copeland
Rev. Dr. Paul Wood
E. Wayne Wilson
Jeffrey Kline

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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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SCART, Inc.
P. O. Box 2552
Camden, S.C. 29020
<https://sc-art.org>
<https://southern-campaigns.org>

Physical Address:
The Robert Mills Courthouse
607 South Broad Street
Camden, S.C. 29020

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From the Editor

We all know the old saw, “You can’t stand in the way of progress.” For the most part, this is true, particularly when progress involves money. Our South Carolina land is being bought and built upon so quickly that no one seems to consider what may be buried beneath all that new concrete. This is because we have been “discovered” as one of the greatest places to live, work, and raise a family. Those making money from this growth will not stop until the market dries up. If not for the efforts of preservationists like those who publish this ezine, many of our Colonial and Revolutionary War sites would already be gone. Every day, unprotected sites face outright destruction amid this sudden growth.

My hometown of Spartanburg is progressing so rapidly that we now have major traffic and infrastructure problems. Of course, this also means higher taxes and a rising cost of living. Other towns and cities throughout South Carolina are in the same situation. Don’t get the idea that I am griping about growth, although I do wish it were better controlled so the necessary infrastructure could be put in place to accommodate it. No, what I am griping about is how our heritage is being ignored and destroyed—much of it on the sly.

For example, the expensive signage marking one of our local significant historic sites, the Battle of the Peach Trees, fought by the Spartan Regiment, “disappeared” so gasoline tanker trucks would have a place to turn around on Dogwood Club Road. Now, a new mega-data center is being built on the battle site. What happened to conducting archaeology and recovering any artifacts before they are buried?

Another instance occurred when handmade brick foundations and a chimney were discovered on land near Walnut Grove Plantation. The property owner was contacted for permission to remove and preserve the bricks, but that very night the foundations and chimney “disappeared.” Today, a new townhome community sits on the site.

I was asked to locate Revolutionary War sites and cemeteries in Cherokee County. Using GPS coordinates, I went in search of one cemetery and found that it was simply gone. Twenty-five years ago, it existed and was maintained. Under South Carolina Code §§ 27-43-10 through 27-43-40, removing graves from an abandoned cemetery requires approval from the appropriate county or municipal governing body, notice to known relatives—or public notice when no relatives are known—and proper supervision of the removal. What one doesn’t know can’t hurt them, right? What I do know is that these were the remains of our Revolutionary War ancestors.

Speaking of which, I recently heard two stories directly



Richard C. Meehan, Jr.

from descendants of Spartan Regiment soldiers. Both have been denied access to ancestral burial grounds by new property owners who apparently do not know the law—South Carolina Code § 27-43-310, “Access to Cemeteries on Private Property.” This law requires private property owners to allow reasonable access to cemetery plot owners, people lawfully participating in a burial, qualifying genealogical researchers, and family members and descendants of those buried there.

An authorized person seeking to visit such a burial ground must provide written notice to the landowner and request reasonable conditions for access. The landowner then has 30 days to respond with proposed times, routes, and other reasonable conditions. If suitable access arrangements are not offered or accepted, either party may file a proceeding in magistrate’s court. It is time for descendants who have been denied reasonable access to push back and use this law.

What I have ranted about here is the tension between private property rights and our cultural heritage and familial burial rights. These laws are on the books to protect that heritage, and with proper recourse on both sides, matters can be put right—but not after a heritage site has been destroyed.

No, you can’t stand in the way of progress, but you can make sure our laws are followed as that progress takes place.

If you feel strongly about preserving as much of South Carolina’s Revolutionary War heritage as possible, please consider the advertisement opposite, or support your local preservation efforts.

Sincerely,

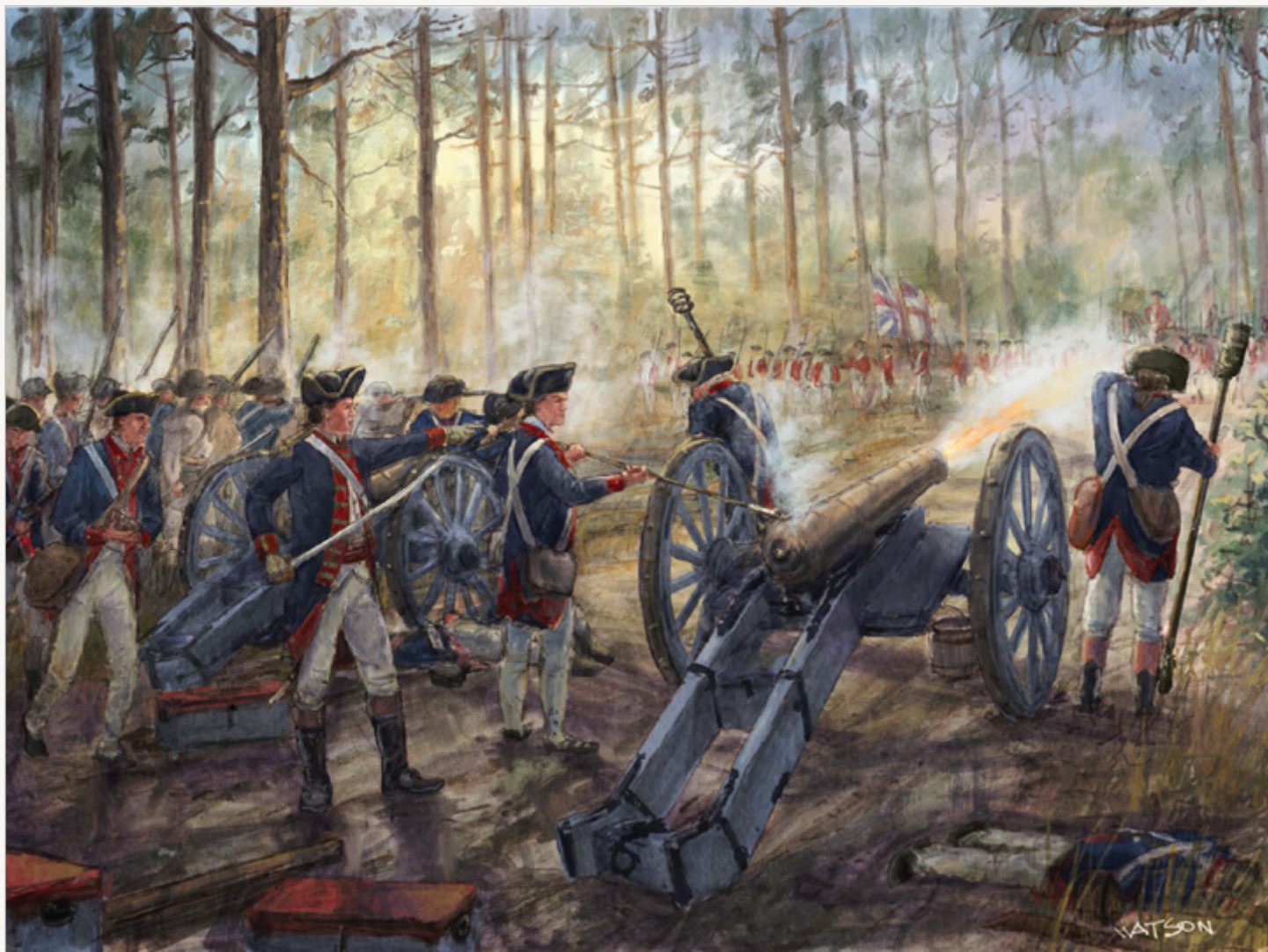
Richard C. Meehan, Jr.

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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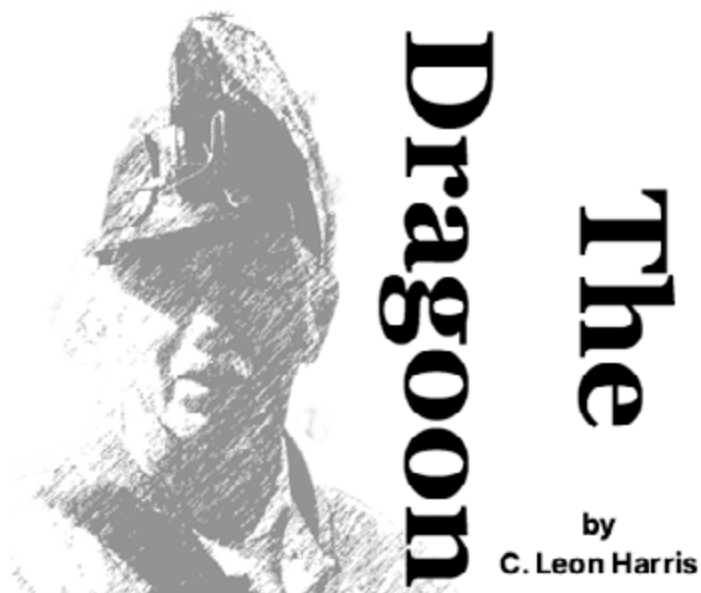
John Allison (left), David Reuwer (right)

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





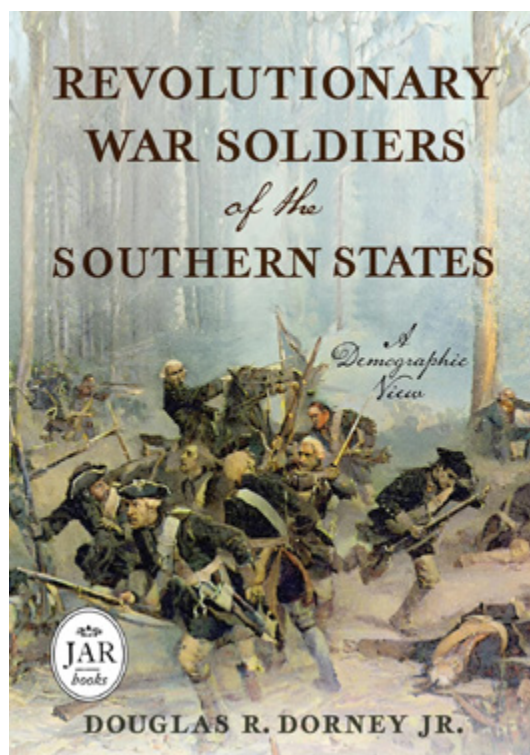
might have had second thoughts about becoming a hero. Prospects improved on the following June 28 when Americans fought the British to a tie at Monmouth, the last significant battle in the North. The British then focused on the South. After Charleston fell to the British on May 12, 1780, General Horatio Gates became the commander of a hastily formed new southern army consisting of Continentals mainly from Maryland and Delaware and militiamen from Virginia and North Carolina. Gates failed to account for their basic needs, and by the time they reached South Carolina they were eating unripe corn and peaches. Late in the evening of August 15 they were given a last meal of molasses, with consequences best left to the imagination. At 10 PM Pumphrey and the others marched southward, and about four hours later, 8 miles north of Camden, their advanced guard collided with the British under Cornwallis. At dawn Gates's four thousand men formed a line to battle a little over half that number of British.

The militias quickly fled, and Gates with them, leaving the Continentals greatly outnumbered. If John Pumphrey wasn't already a hero he became one that morning. Two hundred and forty-two years later his remains and those of four other Americans emerged from a shallow grave near the fiercest fighting. On April 22, 2023 Pumphrey was finally laid to rest with well deserved military honors. Thirteen others lie nearby. If you would like to be a part of discovering their names, donations are welcome at <https://givebutter.com/Battle-of-Camden-Continental-9B>.

If you have ever raised a child, or been one, you know they fantasize about becoming heroes. Like many of you, I made a cape from a towel, expecting to fly off to rescue people in distress. That approach to fighting for Truth, Justice and the American Way never quite got off the ground, but the Revolutionary War gave hundreds of youngsters a way to fulfill their heroic dreams. Many now lie in unmarked graves on battlefields. John Pumphrey was one of them for almost 246 years, until his identity was revealed by a remarkable combination of DNA analysis and traditional genealogy by FHD Forensics, as described by its founder and president, Allison Peacock.¹

Pumphrey's bones showed that he died a teenager. When he first enlisted in the Seventh Maryland Continental Regiment on January 5, 1777 he would have been no older than 15. Besides any heroic ambitions he may have had, he also had practical reasons for enlisting. His family in Anne Arundel County, Maryland, had been relatively prosperous, but John's father died in 1771, and administration of his estate fell to a cousin, who was evidently not overly generous. Pumphrey was denied even a basic education, signing his enlistment with an X.

Pumphrey's regiment was soon engaged in two major battles in Pennsylvania—Brandywine on September 11, 1777 and Germantown on the following October 4. Both were defeats, with more than a thousand Americans killed, wounded or captured at each one. Pumphrey



¹ <https://familyhistorydetectives.com/americas-oldest-john-doe-private-john-pumphrey-of-the-7th-maryland-regiment/>



Oscar Marion in the “Sweet Potato Dinner Painting”



Olivia Hipp
SCART Intern

In 1899, Octavius A. White presented his father’s painting *General Marion Inviting a British Officer to Share His Meal* to the U.S. Senate. John Blake White is, as far as we know, the only person to have painted Francis Marion who knew him personally—Marion’s plantation neighbored that of White’s father. Over 50 years earlier, artist John Sartain replicated the painting in a mezzotint print for the Apollo Association, which was distributed to 646 subscribers in 1841.¹ One such print is in the South Carolina American Revolution Trust (SCART) collection, and is one of our most interesting pieces.

Francis Marion is the focus of the painting, standing just off-center, gesturing to a pile of sweet potatoes sitting upon a table seemingly constructed out of sticks and bark. On Marion’s other side is a British officer, reaching for the potatoes to partake in the meal. Scattered behind them and off to the side are some of Marion’s soldiers, a motley crew of nameless men. Behind the table,

opposite Francis Marion, is the only individual in the foreground who is not standing, and the only man who is identifiably Black. This man is kneeling in bright but tattered clothing, preparing the officers’ sweet potato dinner.² He is simultaneously auxiliary and central—the meal is dependent upon his labor, but he is not an equal participant. As he looks up toward Francis Marion and the British officer, their gazes all sit above him.

Many debates and conversations have been had about this scene—where it happened, with whom, or if

1 Kloss, William and Diane K. Skvarla. *United States Senate Catalogue of Fine Art*. Edited by Jane R. McGoldrick. U.S. Government Printing Office, 2002.; The Met. “General Marion in His Swamp Encampment Inviting a British Officer to Dinner.” 41 1840. <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/894656>.

2 Tradition has it that this scene depicts a dinner; however, the pension application of Samuel Weaver W8993 states: “During the time he was with Genl. Marion, a British officer as he was told came into camp, but for what he does not know, he was roasting & baking sweet potatoes on the coles – Genl. Marion stepped up with the British officer and remarked he believed he would take up Breakfast, he felt proud of the request, puled out his potatoes, wiped the ashes off with a dirty handkerchief, placed them on a pine log (which was all the provision they had) and Genl. Marion and the British Officer partook of them. He has been told by some that this has been recorded in the life of the Genl. as dinner but this was a breakfast.” Regardless, it was an interesting meal.

it even occurred in the first place. To me, the most interesting component of this story is the identification of the kneeling man as Oscar Marion, a man enslaved by Francis Marion.

Genealogist and president of the American Historical Interpretation Foundation Tina C. Jones, a cousin of Oscar Marion, was the one to identify him in the painting. Jones' research and advocacy led to a ceremony at the Capitol in 2006 at which Oscar was recognized as an "African American Patriot" by then-President Bush.³

As with many enslaved people, we know very little about Oscar Marion's life.⁴ He is described by some biographers as a "faithful Negro servant," a title which obscures his enslaved status.⁵ We do know that he was enslaved in the Marion family from a young age, growing up with Francis Marion and accompanying him throughout his life. We also know that Francis Marion did not emancipate Oscar in his will.⁶

When I began cataloging SCART's library, I thought there was an excess of literature on Francis Marion. Looking at what little we know of Oscar Marion and how historians have depicted the relationship between him and Francis Marion, I see that is not true. The information we can access, the way we read the past, and the things we take away change as we do. I am excited to see what historians will write in the coming years about the Marions, especially with the publication of the Francis Marion papers, and if we will learn more (or learn we know less than we think) about Oscar Marion.



General Marion Inviting a British Officer to Share His Meal by John Blake White, 1889 ~ Public Domain

3 Johnson, Darragh. "Researcher's Work Restores Forgotten Man's Story." *The Washington Post*, February 15, 2007. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/2007/02/15/researchers-work-restores-forgotten-mans-story-span-classbankheadother-historic-paintings-may-show-generals-slavespan/6864f578-7a3c-4345-928f-893d983c4219/>.

4 Even Oscar's name is contested. In *Traditions of the Swamp Fox*, biographer William Boddie contends that Oscar's real name was "Buddy."

5 Bass, Robert D. *Swamp Fox: The Life and Campaigns of General Francis Marion*. Sandlapper Publishing Co., 1974.

6 Oller, Johnson. *The Swamp Fox: How Francis Marion Saved the American Revolution*. Da Capo Press, 2016.

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LIGHT HORSE HARRY LEE'S HACKING MATCH

Pyle's Defeat Word Search

Find the 23 terms from C. Leon Harris and Jeffrey Kline's article. Words may run forward, backward, horizontally, vertically, or diagonally.

Y	X	B	X	T	L	Q	H	I	C	M	B	L	L	D	H	R	F
G	Z	L	E	G	I	O	N	Z	L	A	S	W	A	H	X	A	W
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V	O	U	H	A	H	P	E	S	F	H	T	A	P	E	C	A	R
X	T	Y	I	C	X	X	K	B	I	W	A	R	W	X	Z	A	O
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Z	L	L	F	O	E	A	S	N	O	O	G	A	R	D	A	I	M
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HAW RIVER

LOSSING

PLYE

WAXHAWS

CROSSROAD

EGGLESTON

HILLSBOROUGH

MASSACRE

RACE PATH

Based on C. Leon Harris and Jeffrey Kline, "Light Horse Harry Lee's Hacking Match: Pyle's Defeat."

The Power of Verse in the Revolutionary South

The music or verse of a time period or geographical area is among the most telling evidence historians use to discern the history and culture of a people group. This phenomenon is evident in every era. Homer's epic poems were meant to be sung rather than spoken. The Psalmist sang of Biblical events. Medieval bards and troubadours recounted tales of heroes and kings who came before. If a name was remembered, it was likely first immortalized in verse. The American Revolution was no different. The revolutionary bards of the American South told of the war effort and of the diverse array of cultures, ideologies, and people that made up the Southern Campaign. They are still telling us the story today. Through examination of the music and spoken verse of the period, much can be understood about the cultural context surrounding the actions taken by revolutionary groups and individuals.

Before the first shots of the Revolution rang out, poets were calling for independence through thinly veiled political verse. John Trumbull and Mercy Otis Warren were among the many writers of the era who used verse to criticize British rule and further the sentiment of rebellion.¹ Today, these words are evidence of long-standing anti-British attitudes among many colonists. However, they also illustrate differences in class and culture. While Trumbull and Warren had the luxury of waxing philosophically about independence as an isolated ideology, others, like Phyllis Wheatley, examined independence as a complex and contradictory concept.² As highlighted in her work and in African American spirituals, enslaved peoples had a very different experience from that of their white, free counterparts. Their music and verse call not only for independence but also for freedom and equality.³ It is evident, then, that some answered this call by fighting against Britain in the hope that their service would make them equal in the eyes of Whites,

1 Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967), 7-8.

2 Woody Holton, *Black Americans in the Revolutionary Era* (Beford/St. Martin's, 2009), 1-16.

3 Holton, *Black Americans in the Revolutionary Era*, 1-16.



Effie Copeland
SCART Intern

while others fled to British lines seeking emancipation. The perspectives and motives of the Scotch-Irish of the Carolina backcountry can also be examined through their musical traditions. In preserving hymns, historians know that many belonged to the Protestant Presbyterian denomination. These were people with both individuality and a lack of loyalty to place.⁴ They were not quick to show loyalty to a distant country that attempted to stifle that individuality. Instead, they were among the fiercest of those opposing British rule. Like the Scotch-Irish, the music of the various Indigenous peoples in the South offers historians a glimpse into their cultures and ideologies. Their differing ways of life, worldviews, and relationships with colonists, as evidenced in their music, were the catalysts for their decisions to fight alongside either the Continental or British forces.⁵

Music, specifically battlefield music, also gives historians insight into the communication methods of Revolutionary Era armies. Fifes, drums, and whistles

4 James G. Leyburn, *The Scotch Irish: A Social History* (The University of North Carolina Press, 1962), 47-55, 273.

5 John E. Kicza, *Resilient Cultures: America's Native Peoples Confront European Colonization* (Prentice Hall, 2003), 125-145.

were used to convey orders over the noise of battle by playing distinct musical sequences. Additionally, different tunes would have been played for victories and defeats.⁶ In both British and Continental armies, music and bawdy tunes would have been used to recount victories and stories to boost the morale of weary soldiers as well.⁷

Music and verse in the Revolutionary era were not merely for the listener's enjoyment. They conveyed commands, cultural ideologies, and political advocacy. In the modern era, preserved words and tunes offer historians a window into the positions, motives, and experiences of a Revolutionary people. Some surviving songs from the period featuring South Carolina are compiled in *Songs of the American Revolution* by Frank Moore, found in the Charles Baxley Collection at the South Carolina American Revolution Trust. The *Burning of Charlestown*, *A New War Song*, *A Song About Charleston*, and *Battle of Kings Mountain* are among those that tell the story of Revolutionary South Carolina through verse.⁸

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6 American Battlefield Trust, "Fife and Drum: Instruments of the Revolution," April 5, 2023, YouTube video, 2:15, https://youtu.be/p0eN_XIFVJk?si=5FhU7b4l_p7m-38m

7 Frank Moore, *Songs and Ballads of the American Revolution: With Notes and Illustrations* (Hurst & Company, 1905), 80, 108, 217, 247.

8 Moore, *Songs and Ballads of the American Revolution: With Notes and Illustrations*, 80, 108, 217, 247.

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by
Paul Wood



A Warrior and Champion of Loyalism: Joseph Robinson

Last month's Loyalist column presented the flash-in-the-pan Loyalism of Col. Thomas Fletchall. Before violence erupted in South Carolina, Fletchall spoke forcefully and persuasively in opposition to the rebellion. South Carolina's Provincial Congress was right to fear him. The body ordered Col. Richard Richardson to apprehend Fletchall during what came to be known as the Snow Campaign. Fletchall remained in confinement in Charleston for seven months and was allowed to return home in July 1776. Both before his capture and after his return to Union County, Fletchall never participated in the fighting. He resided peaceably at home until his Patriot neighbors threatened him after the Battle of Kings Mountain (October 7, 1780.) He led his family to refuge in Charleston and joined the Loyalist exodus from Charleston two years later. The Fletchall family settled in Jamaica where Thomas died in 1789.

In contrast to the non-violent Fletchall stood hundreds of men and their families who sacrificed much to defeat the rebellion. One was Joseph Robinson, probably a Virginian by birth, who lived with his wife and children in present-day Chester County, South Carolina. In 1775, Fletchall chose the well-educated Robinson to write the pledge of "Counter-Association." While thousands of South Carolinians signed the Articles of Association, pledging support for the rebellion, many others signed Robinson's document and chose the more dangerous path of resistance to the revolt.

The first exchange of gunfire between South Carolina Loyalists and Whigs occurred in November 1775 at Ninety Six. With Fletchall ensconced safely at home, Major Robinson led the assault of 1,300 Loyalists on Fort Williamson. After a three-day clash, the protagonists ceased fire and agreed to "An Agreement for the Cessation of Arms." The document was drafted and signed by Joseph Robinson. Unlike Fletchall, the brothers Robert and Patrick Cunningham, Richard Pearis, and other well-known supporters of the king, Robinson escaped capture. His home was burned and later confiscated by the Patriot government, but the Robinson family had already taken refuge in East Florida.

Far from home, Joseph Robinson was made a Lieutenant Colonel with command of the South Carolina Royalist Regiment. Like Thomas Brown's East Florida Rangers, Robinson fought Patriots in northern Florida and along the coasts of Georgia and South Carolina. When Henry Clinton captured Charleston on May 12, 1780, Robinson and his Royalists entered the city. On June 27, Lt. Col. Robinson penned an open letter to his "Friends, in the frontiers of Province of South Carolina." One sees in Robinson assurance and joy that his home province had survived enormous hardship and finally been returned to its rightful place in the British Empire. He writes as a sympathetic leader who has sacrificed far from home to beat down the revolution.

Todd Braisted provides Robinson's letter at royalprovincial.com. It testifies to Robinson's adept writing skills, sympathy for his fellow Loyalists, and sense of himself as a leader. The following lines clearly reveal Robinson's attributes:

I beg leave to congratulate you upon the pleasing prospect of a reestablishment of civil Government, with the full enjoyment of all those Rights and Privileges which formerly so much conduced to your happiness & prosperity; Gentlemen, that you are now fully able from experience, to discriminate the great difference between a regular system of Government, & that of a rebellious anarchy, does not cost me a moments hesitation. (Accessed August 29, 2026, at <https://royalprovincial.com/military/rhist/scroyal/scrlet1.htm>.)

A year-and-a-half later, Cornwallis surrendered his army at Yorktown. Eventually, the Parliament and King George III conceded their thirteen North American colonies. The optimistic joy which Robinson expressed in his June 1780 missive proved premature and misled. But he had served with honor and proved himself a competent leader. In the many "what-ifs" of the American Revolution, one wonders what position of leadership Joseph Robinson might have achieved had his home province been re-turned to King George's fold. Commander of all militia? Member of the Royal Assembly? Royal Governor? One can only speculate.

In reality, Robinson and his family had to evacuate Charleston in November 1783. Establishing a new home proved taxing. He first led his loved ones to the familiar environs of East Florida. But they were forced to leave when the Treaty of Paris placed all of Florida in Spanish hands. The Robinsons relocated to Jamaica (where Thomas Fletchall resided) but stayed in the tropics for only a few months. The British Navy transported the family to Nova Scotia, but eventually the Robinsons made their home on what is now Prince Edward Island. Joseph Robinson died there in 1807.

THE LIBERTY TRAIL—SOUTH CAROLINA

Discover The Liberty Trail South Carolina

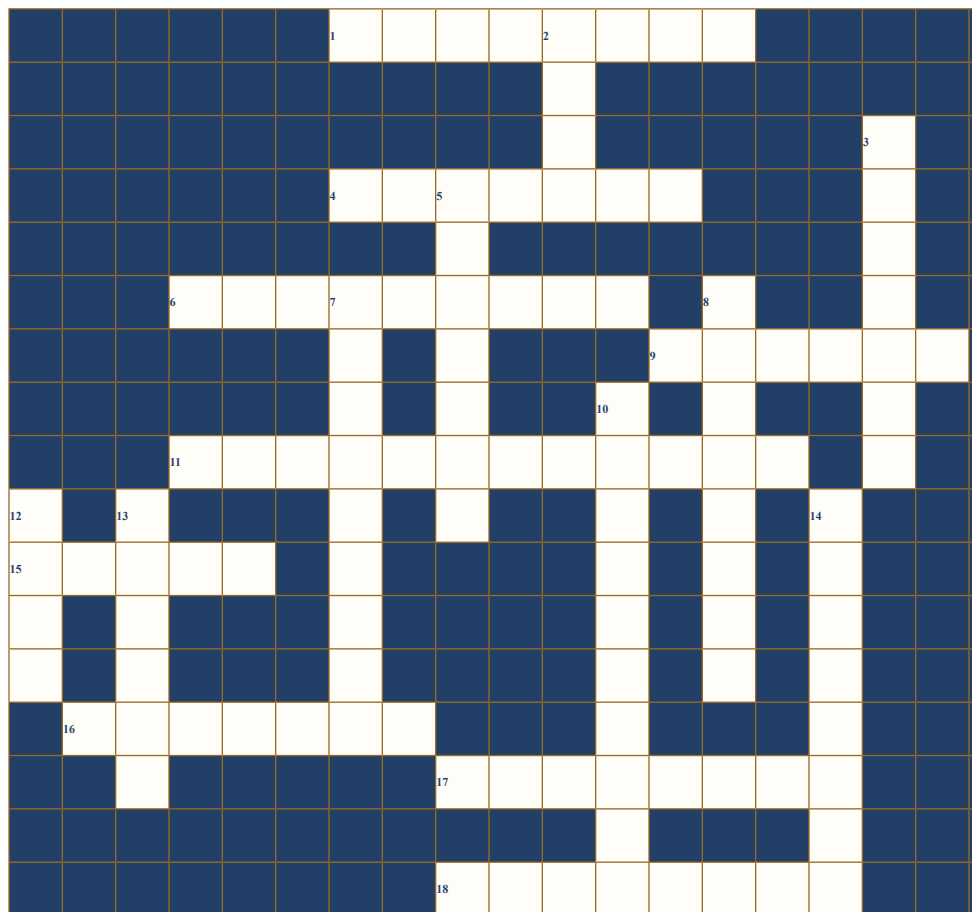
America's independence was secured in South Carolina across its swamps, fields, woods and mountains. These events of 1779-1782 directly led to victory in the Revolutionary War. We call this history The Liberty Trail.



LIGHT HORSE HARRY LEE'S HACKING MATCH

Pyle's Defeat Crossword Puzzle

Use the clues and the article to complete the puzzle. Ignore spaces and punctuation in answers.



ACROSS

1. Landmark named by several pension applicants as the battle location.
4. Militia general who accompanied Lee on February 25, 1781.
6. Tactic that caused Pyle's men to mistake Lee's force for British troops.
9. Militia participant whose later narrative is repeatedly examined in the article.
11. North Carolina town Tarleton was trying to reach.
15. Patriot colonel whose plantation became Tarleton's destination.
16. Nineteenth-century historian who published the sketch of Pyle's pond.
17. British Legion commander Lee and Pickens were pursuing.
18. Controversial historical label evaluated in the article's final section.

DOWN

2. Quaker physician who raised the Loyalist militia column.
3. Earlier slaughter invoked by Americans during the attack.
5. Native allies accompanying Lee's infantry on the campaign.
7. Legion officer whose confrontation may have triggered the fighting.
8. Mounted soldiers who rode beside Pyle's column before the attack.
10. British commander who sent Tarleton to support Loyalist militia.
12. Surname attached to the disputed plantation where Lee expected to find Tarleton.
13. Name of Lee's mixed cavalry and infantry command.
14. County and creek name central to the competing site theories.

Based on "Light Horse Harry Lee's Hacking Match: Pyle's Defeat" by C. Leon Harris and Jeffrey Kline.

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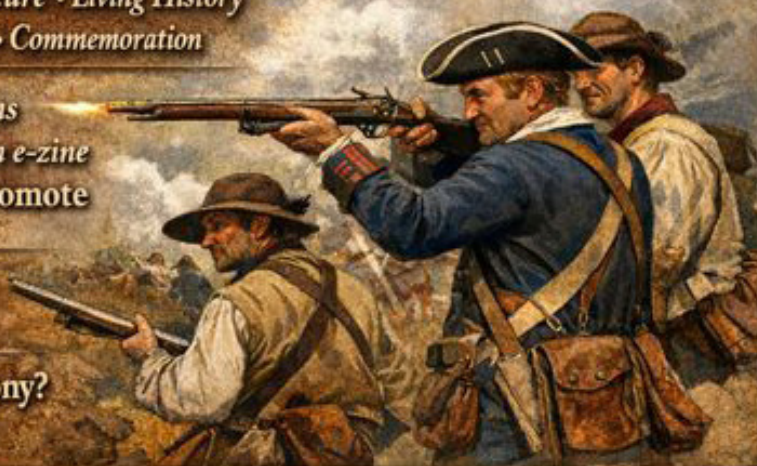
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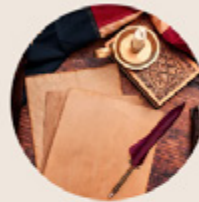
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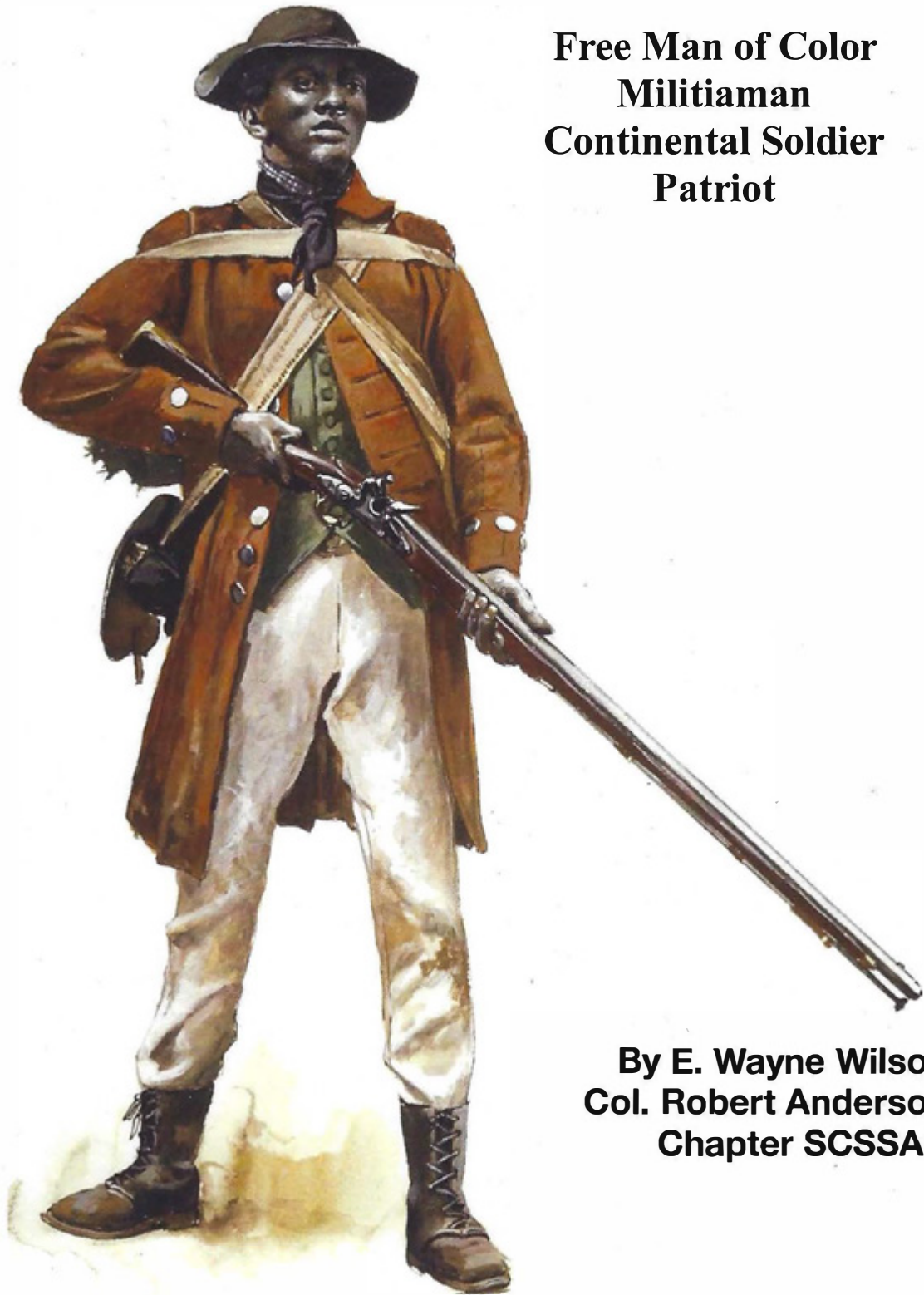


TRACE YOUR ROOTS

Explore SC250's genealogy tools to uncover ancestors, family stories, and connections that

Allen Jeffers

**Free Man of Color
Militiaman
Continental Soldier
Patriot**



**By E. Wayne Wilson
Col. Robert Anderson
Chapter SCSSAR**

On December 22, 2025, we will observe the 250th Anniversary of the Battle of the Great Cane Brake, part of the Snow Campaign. This is said by some to be the First Land Battle of the American Revolution in South Carolina, and it was one of the few engagements fought in Greenville County.¹ The question comes up from time to time, to what extent did Black men fight for American Independence in such engagements? Such was the case here. Our inquiry was inspired by of all things a toy soldier. W.Britain is a well-known vendor of toy soldiers. Don Troiani is a respected military artist and historian. In 1993 W.Britain and Troiani partnered. One of their offerings is a “Black Militiaman of the Spartanburg, S.C. Militia.” W.Britain’s website states:

As early as 1775 the Spartanburg [Spartan] Regiment was organized. While research into service of men of color during the American Revolution is ongoing ... we do know that in South Carolina 41 served in Continental regiments, 21 in militias, and nine in the navy. Of these 48 were freemen at the time of their Revolutionary War service. Our figure represents a member of the Spartanburg [Spartan] Militia as he might have appeared during the Battle of Cowpens on 17 January 1781.

What is the basis for this claim? Who is the Black militiaman depicted? Are there others? Did any serve during the Great Cane Break and Snow Campaign? Troiani and historian John Rees released “a comprehensive, authoritative, and well-researched study” of Black fighting men, *Don Troiani’s Black Soldiers in America’s Wars 1754-1865*. This work provided several leads. One was Allen Jeffers. The DAR’s *Forgotten Patriots* was consulted. The South Carolina section cautions that “most Revolutionary War records do not indicate race or color.” Jeffers is found on the list of “Forgotten Patriots.” He was an African American [S.1770].² A 2016 *Draft Resolution for Consideration by the South Carolina General Assembly Honoring South Carolina’s Revolutionary War Patriots* notes that at least 121 African Americans served in the Revolutionary War on the American side. Jeffers was one of those Patriots listed. And then there is the *African American Revolutionary Soldiers Honor Project*®, “South Carolina Free Men of Color in the American Revolution.” Jeffers is found there as well. We have found our Great Cane Brake and Snow Campaign African American Patriot. He is Allen Jeffers!

On October 2, 1832, seventy-seven year old Allen Jeffers appeared in the Court of Special and Common Pleas of Richland District. After being duly sworn he made on his oath a declaration to obtain benefits of the Act of Congress passed June 7, 1832. Jeffers stated he was born in North Carolina but was brought to South Carolina as a child. He had no recollection as to where in North Carolina, but from family “hearsay” his birthplace was on the Pamlico River. Although he stated he had no record of his age, a date of birth, December 19, 1754, was subsequently used. Jeffers lived near the Fork of the Congaree and Wateree Rivers when drafted and resided there after the war in what was then part of Richland District. The Santee River is formed by the convergence of the two rivers.

No doubt the old soldier's mind was filled with memories and emotions as he recalled clashes won and lost, friends killed and wounded, and days as a British prisoner. His story began when he was drafted in 1775 as a young man. He recalled serving in the "Snow Camps," a term of his generation for the Snow Campaign late that year. We are told no more specifics of his first tour, but Jeffers statement that he was drafted and that Col. William Thomson commanded Rangers before taking command of the Third Continental Regiment is consistent with what we know from other sources. Alexander S. Salley Jr.'s *The History of Orangeburg County South Carolina From Its First Settlement to the Close of the Revolutionary War*³ helps with our understanding of his declaration.

South Carolina had a militia from early times as there were Spanish and Indians threats. Additional duties were added over time but the militia changed little other than in size. All able bodied men were required to register and serve. Militias were organized into geographical areas called beats. Most men served in line companies as infantry as opposed to elite volunteer companies. Free White men provided their own longarm and accoutrements. Free Black men and slaves served as laborers, cooks, and musicians. Around 1776 there were twelve line regiments in South Carolina. The largest were Camden and Orangeburg in the midlands.⁴ Jeffers statement that he was drafted in 1775 is consistent with what we know of that time. If too few volunteers came forward to meet a need, there was a draft and it existed throughout the war. For example, in a letter dated September 2, 1775, Colonel Thomson instructs subordinates to "meet me on Saturday next the Instr. at the Ridge, with two hundred Men (sic) well armed, out of our Regimt. of Foot,⁵ if you cant (sic) raise them as Volunteers, You (sic) must draft them, & assure them that they will receive Pay (sic) as the other Provincials in this Province from the day they leave home to they (sic) day they return." When troops were first called in 1775, a draft was ordered in sections of the colony including the Orangeburg District.⁶

Jeffers mention of the Fork of the Congaree and Wateree places him in a known location. Colonel Thomson's plantation Belleville's location is equally known. It was on a ridge south of the Congaree River between Fort Motte and present day US 601. Although Thomson was an indigo planter and Jeffers a free Black man, they lived in the same area. Jeffers mention of Colonel Thomson more than once suggests a measure of respect. It is likely Jeffers was drafted into Colonel Thomson's Orangeburg Regiment of Foot. This might explain his joining the Third Regiment Rangers, commanded by Thomson, in 1778.

But let us not get ahead of ourselves. This inquiry began with our interest in the Battle of the Great Cane Brake⁷ and The Snow Campaign in late 1775. The battle was fought about four miles beyond the Cherokee Boundary line on the Reedy River in present day Greenville County. The location, a large cane brake on the Reedy, lent its name to the clash. This begs the question, what is a cane brake? Accord to *NCpedia*, a cane brake was a large tract of river cane plants (*Arundinaria gigantea*) that grew in large expanses along rivers and creeks in the colonial southeastern United States. The evergreen plant can reach a height of twenty feet. It grows in thick patches with a root system that chokes out all else. Just after the clash there with the Tories, a snow storm of epic proportions, upwards of two feet, descended on the area, hence The Snow Campaign designation.

The year 1775 was a pivotable year in South Carolina. Unrest had been fo-

menting since the French and Indian War. Carolinians as well as other Americans were becoming more independent in governance of local matters. This was more a concern of Low County elites than of backcountry settlers concerned with carving out a life on the frontier.⁸ Although there was opposition to a break with Britain in the Low Country, it was more united in its defiance of Britain. The backcountry was a different matter altogether. It was divided, some areas evenly split between those loyal to the King and those inclined towards revolution. But to many, the commotion was a Charleston problem. They had rather not be bothered. However, the backcountry's support was needed by Low Country Elites for a successful rebellion. They sent a delegation to the backcountry to garner support for the Patriot cause. The machinations of this effort are beyond the scope of this paper.

Directly leading to the Battle of the Great Cane Brake was the seizure of wagons bearing one thousand pounds of gunpowder and two thousand pounds of lead. This was a gift to the Cherokee as their hunting season approached. The deal, brokered by William Henry Drayton,⁹ was in exchange for the Cherokee promise not to attack settlements on the frontier. Patrick Cunningham and a band of some 60 Tories, at odds with the Provincial Congress and jockeying for favor with the Cherokee, carried out the seizure on October 31, 1775, about "18 miles below Ninety-six." When word of this seizure reached the Provincial Assembly on November 7, orders went out to "Col. Richardson¹⁰ forthwith to assemble six companies of rangers, Captain Ezekiel Polk's¹¹ company of volunteers, draughts of militia from Richardson's, Thomson's, Savage's, Neel's and Thomas's regiments, and with such troops pursue such instructions as should, from time to time, by order of the Congress, or the Council of Safety for the time being, be signified [shown] to him by the President."

In late November Col. Richard Richardson and Lt. Col. William Thomson marched some 2,500 troops into the upcountry in pursuit of militant Loyalists and to bring a semblance of peace to the troubled area. Patriots from both Carolinas joined. On December 8, Richardson ordered Patrick Cunningham and his band of Loyalists to surrender and turn over the stolen munitions. Several Loyalist leaders were captured and other groups disbanded, but the party led by Cunningham fled west into Cherokee territory where they camped on the Reedy River. Colonel Richardson sent Thomson and some 1,300 rangers and supporting militia in pursuit. Richardson tells the story of what happened in two letters. On December 22 he wrote Henry Laurens from Camp Raborn's Cree[k], Hollingsworth's Mill:

I thought to let you hear from us ... as we have got to the very extremity of the roads north-westward, take the liberty to inform you, that on Saturday last, the 16th instant, we were joined by Col. Rutherford, of Rowan, and Col. Graham, of Tryon counties, in North Carolina, with about five hundred men.... On Wednesday, the 20th inst., I was joined by Maj. Andrew Williamson, Capt. Hammond, and a small party of Col. Bull's regiment, amounting in the whole to about eight hundred, so that our army is now formidable, between four and five thousand, a number most desirable to view, though we have had no occasion for more than my own regiment to have done the business. Notwithstanding, the number has a good effect, strikes terror, and shows what can be done on occasion, and, upon the whole, it may prove a happy event, we have been successful in

disarming most of this unhappy people; they are coming in with fear and trembling, giving up their arms, with a sensible contrition for the errors they have been guilty of.... There is still a camp we cannot yet come up with, consisting of the principal aggressors, which were, by best information, camped on the Cherokee land. I detached yesterday about thirteen hundred horse and foot, about an equal number, under the command of Cols. Thomson, Martin, Rutherford, Neel, Polk, Lyles, Major Williamson, and others, commanding all volunteers.... We have all at times got small parts of the ammunition they got, and delivered with their arms; and yesterday two barrels, say fifty pounds, and have a slight information of some more.... I shall, therefore, crave your permission to discharge the North Carolinians, ... and Cols. Neel and Thomson ... to their different quarters.... The spirit of discord will so far subside, that they will hardly raise any more commotions.

Richardson's letter ended with a post script:

P.S. This minute since, or while I was writing my name, a messenger from Col. Thomson and the detachments arrived with the *agreeable account* [emphasis added], that they had surprised and taken the camp of Cunningham, & c., and taken the greatest part prisoners, with all their ammunition, guns, wagons, and utensils. P. Cunningham had escaped, and some principals, but the most are taken, & c.

Fortunately, we have a firsthand narrative of that agreeable account. On January 2nd, 1776, Col. Richardson sent, from the Congarees, to Henry Laurens the following report:

Sir: In my last I informed you of the detachments I had sent out, and in a postscript, of my intelligence of success. Our people surrounded their camp by daylight in the morning after a long march of near twenty-five miles, and lying on their arms till day [December 22], they then attacked and took about one hundred and thirty prisoners, with baggage, arms, ammunition, & c., which completed the conquest of that flying party which had till then kept out of reach. They were encamped at a convenient place called the Brake of Canes on the Cherokee land; Patrick Cunningham escaped on a horse bare backed (and they say without breeches) telling every man to shift for himself. None of our men were killed or wounded, except the son of Col. T. Polk, a fine youth, was shot through the shoulder, and was in great danger.¹⁴ Some five or six of the other party, I am told, were killed; happily the men were restrained or every man had died.¹⁵ The next day they returned to camp, the snow set in, and continued for thirty hours without intermission, which, with the hardship and fatigue the men had suffered before made them very uneasy, and seeing no more could be done they grew so uneasy it was out of my power to keep the troops together any longer. I, therefore, on Christmas-day dismissed the North Carolina troops, ... [and] the same day Colonels Neel and Thomas, and Major Williamson.... I then as I found the service pretty well done and no possibility of detaining the men longer, the

snow then lying on the earth in the smoothest places at least fifteen inches deep (most say two feet) I (sic) marched in the best manner we could downward. Eight days we never set foot on the earth or had a place to lie down, til [sic] we had spaded or grabbed away the snow, from which circumstance, many are frost bitten, some very badly; and on the third day a heavy cold rain fell, together with sleet; and melted the snow and filled every creek and river with a deluge of water; but with all these difficulties we reached this place [the Congarees] yesterday with the prisoners.... About ten Captains and a hundred and twenty of the most mischievous men...; all the powder; Ninety-six and New Camp men. We retook seven kegs of gun-powder, six of which I delivered to Maj. Williamson to be sent to Mr. Wilkinson for the Cherokees; many arms have been delivered up, and I caused the men to sign an instrument of writing, which they did willingly with fear and trembling, by which they forfeit their estates, real and personal, if they ever take up arms against, or disquiet the peace and tranquility of the good people of this colony again, and to assist them if they are ever called upon.

Thus ended the Snow Campaign. Backcountry Loyalists, in the words of Prof. John W. Gordon, were “crushed and overawed by this loss.” They either laid low or fled the area. The campaign was a win for the Provincial Congress, demonstrating it had the will and wherewithal to suppress Loyalist and trouble makers. Patriots now controlled the backcountry and the frontier was reasonably quiet until the fall of Charleston in May 1780.¹⁶

Following his first tour, Allen Jeffers enlisted for three years on May 12, 1778, with Capt. Richard Brown’s company of Col. William Thomson’s Third Regiment of Continentals. The application notes that “Col. Thomson had commanded the 3rd Regiment of Rangers before” assuming command of the Third Regiment of Continentals. Upon enlistment he set off for Charleston immediately, “joined the corps and lay around Charleston for nearly a year.” He recalled his Regiment marching out of Charleston to Savannah, captured by the British in the final days of 1778. By fall of 1779, Americans had decided to take back Savannah but re-alized they would need French assistance. Jeffers recalled September 11, 1779, when his unit was involved in what he described as a “brush” before the first Battle of Savannah on October 9, 1779. He had seen Casimir Pulaski¹⁷ many times before Pulaski received a mortal wound. By this time, he had been placed under Capt. George Liddle who commanded his company for “a while” before it was placed under the command of Felix Warley. The company was marched up the Savannah River to Purysburgh where they “lay ... awhile” until marching to Charleston where they remained till the fall and surrender on May 12, 1780. Jeffers became a prisoner of war, was released, and received a discharge from a Colonel Henderson.¹⁸ He stated this discharge had been “worn out or lost long ago.” On August 13, 1782, Jeffers enlisted with the First South Carolina Company commanded by Col. C. Pinckney¹⁹ for a period of one year. With the war winding down, it appears he served only 10 months. The last roll and muster he appears on is for the period March 1 to May 1, 1783. During his time of service, he stated he was never a substitute. Thus ended the distinguished military career of Allen Jeffers.

Jeffers’ pension application was witnessed by Gideon Griffin [W.8877] and

Morgan Griffin [S.18844], who being duly sworn, stated they knew the applicant, Allen Jeffers and knew he served three years during the Revolution under Col. William Thomson in Captain Brown's Company. In fact, Gideon and Morgan had enlisted and served with him. Furthermore, they knew that Jeffers enlisted with the State Troops for ten months following his second tour. In their words, Jeffers was "an honest good old man of veracity." Jeffers was granted a pension of \$40 per month. These were not the only neighbors and kin Allen Jeffers served with. Records indicate Osborne Jeffers, Berry Jeffers [W.10145], George Jeffers, Benjamin Holly [W.8931], Drury Harris [SC.2077], Edward Harris [R.4649], and Benjamin Carter [SC.1224] served the Patriot cause with Allen from the same neighborhood. Osborne and Berry Jeffers were brothers, possibly cousins of Jeffers.

Census records show that Jeffers remained in Richland District after the war. Some sources indicate he received a bounty of four hundred acres from the state on May 2, 1785, and July 5, 1790. In 1835, Jeffers moved to Rhea County, Tennessee with his son-in-law. He applied to have his pension paid in Tennessee. Jeffers' wife had died in South Carolina and not having any kin in his home state "that would take charge of him," he lived with his son-in-law till he died May 11, 1839. Currently, his final resting place is known but to God. Rest in peace, PATRIOT ALLEN JEFFERS, and thank you for your service.

Endnotes

¹ The late Dr. Bobby Gilmer Moss, South Carolina professor and historian, made this claim. Others point to the action near Ninety Six on November 19-21, 1775, just prior to the Great Cane Brake and Snow Campaign.

² An Alpha.Numeric designation in brackets [A.NNNN] denotes a Revolutionary War Pension Application reference number.

³ This paper makes extensive use of Salley's *History*. Quotes, unless otherwise stated, come from *History*. Salley, Alexander Samuel, John Ulrick Giesssendanner, John Giessendanner, Woodrow Wilson Collection, and South Carolina Infantry. 3D Regt. *The History of Orangeburg County, South Carolina*. Orangeburg, S.C., R.L. Berry, printer, 1898. Pdf. < <https://www.loc.gov/item/01010828/> > (Accessed July 7, 2025).

⁴ Stauffer, Michael E. *South Carolina's antebellum militia*. South Carolina Department of Archives & History, 1991.

⁵ This was the regiment of provincial militia Colonel Thomson commanded before being selected to command a regiment of regulars. At the time Col. Thomson was made Lieutenant Colonel of the Rangers, he commanded the militia regiment of Orangeburgh District. Salley. *History*. 430.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 503.

⁷ Some accounts refer to the clash as "the expedition against the Tories on Reedy River."

⁸ At this time the “backcountry” was everything more than fifty miles or so west of the Atlantic coastline.

⁹ According to the National Park Service “Drayton’s views made him one of the most popular Whigs in the colony. He won a seat in the Provincial Congress in January 1775 and soon after sat on all important revolutionary committees. Drayton used his powers to lead raids against the city’s royal post office and armories, thereby obtaining important information regarding the intentions of the British and arms for the patriot forces. During the summer of 1775, Drayton led a five-man commission on a six-week tour of the backcountry to suppress the large number of loyalists in the region. In the face of great odds, Drayton managed to procure a treaty of neutrality from loyalist leaders at a conference in the town of Ninety Six.” < <https://www.nps.gov/people/william-henry-drayton.htm> > (Accessed July 5, 2025).

¹⁰ Richard Richardson (1704-1780) immigrated from Virginia in the 1730s and settled on the upper Santee River. A planter, legislator, and soldier, he became a leading spokesman of the backcountry. *Find a Grave*, Richard Richardson, Memorial Number 37274052. Dabney, Kendra. *South Carolina Encyclopedia*, Richardson, Richard. 2016, updated 2022 < <https://www.sccyclopedia.org/sce/entries/richardson-richard/> > (Accessed July 23, 2025).

¹¹ Ezekiel Polk (1747-1824) was a sibling of Gen. Thomas Polk (1730-1794) and likewise a great uncle of President James K. Polk. *Find a Grave*, Memorial Number 9190.

¹² Salley. *History*, 307-308.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 324-327.

¹⁴ The young man was William Polk (1758-1834), son of Thomas Polk (1730-1794). His wound left him unfit for service for 8-11 months. William was the father of CSA General and Right Reverend Leonidas Polk (1806-1864) killed during Sherman’s Atlanta Campaign. William’s father, Thomas Polk, was a great uncle of the 11th US President James K. Polk. William’s Revolutionary War Pension Records are found at S.3706. *Find a Grave*, Memorial # 9190, 14009891. *NCpedia*, Mcfarland, Daniel M. “Polk, William,” 1994. Revised by SLNC Government & Heritage Library, February 2023. < <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/polk-william> > (Accessed June 29, 2025).

¹⁵ Moss notes that “had Colonel Thomson not intervened, the two hundred Loyalist in the camp would have been slaughtered by the wrought-up Patriots. Moss, *The Snow Campaign*, 19.

¹⁶ Gordon, John W. *South Carolina and the American Revolution*, 32. Moss, B.G. *The Snow Campaign*, 19-20.

¹⁷ Casimir Pulaski (1745-1779) was born in Poland. The “Soldier of Liberty” is remembered for fighting for freedom on two continents. “The Father of the American Cavalry,” he gave the Americans their first true legion on horseback. National Park Service, *Casimir Pulaski*, < <https://www.nps.gov/people/casimir-pulaski.htm> > (Accessed August 2, 2025).

¹⁸ Likely William Henderson (1748-1788) who commanded the South Carolina 6th Regiment until it was disbanded in February 1780 due to

low enlistments. He was transferred to the South Carolina 3rd Regiment (Rangers) under Col. William Thomson. Henderson was taken prisoner at the Fall of Charleston on May 12, 1780, and exchanged in November 1780. This suggests that Jeffers was also a prisoner of war during this period. Lewis, J.D. *The American Revolution in South Carolina, Brigadier General William Henderson*. 2008. < https://www.carolana.com/SC/Revolution/patriot_leaders_sc_william_henderson.html > (Accessed July 22, 2025).

¹⁹ Likely Charles Cotesworth Pinckney (1746-1825). Reorganized in 1782 following the surrender of Charleston, the First South Carolina was furloughed in May 1783 at Charleston and disbanded in November. Lewis, J.D. *The American Revolution in South Carolina, SC First Regiment (Infantry)*. < https://www.carolana.com/SC/Revolution/revolution_sc_first_regiment.html > (Accessed July 25, 2025).

Thanks to Joseph Glavitsch, President of the Col. Robert Anderson Chapter, and Wayne Roberts for the idea for this monograph and their input and encouragement to the final endeavor.

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America 250 - Fall 2026

Light Horse Harry Lee's Hacking Match: Pyle's Defeat

by C. Leon Harris and Jeffrey Kline



*Fortune, which sways so imperiously the affairs of war, demonstrated throughout the operation its supreme control... the capricious goddess gave us Pyle and saved Tarleton.*¹

Henry “Light Horse Harry” Lee

Two of the best-known and most consequential events of the Revolutionary War were the battles at Cowpens in South Carolina on January 17, 1781, and at Guilford Courthouse in North Carolina on the following March 15. In between those two engagements was one that is less known but nevertheless consequential—Pyle’s Defeat, in which troops under Lieutenant Colonel Henry Lee “cut to pieces” Loyalist militiamen under Col. John Pyle. Pyle’s Defeat, also known as Pyle’s Hacking Match and Pyle’s Massacre, is controversial. Historians disagree about even the date and location. The most serious question is whether Lee’s forces were guilty of a massacre.

Pyle’s Defeat was one of several smaller engagements stemming from the Battle of Cowpens, where Continental Gen. Daniel Morgan and volunteer militiamen under Gen. Andrew Pickens routed Lt. Col. Banastre Tarleton and took about 600 prisoners. Tarleton’s British Legion had been among the most effective troops under Lord Cornwallis, largely because of the fear it instilled after slaughtering Col. Abraham Buford’s surrendering troops at the Battle of Waxhaws. Cornwallis could ill afford to lose 600 men, and two days after the Battle of Cowpens, together with Tarleton and his remaining troops, he set out in pursuit of Morgan, Pickens, and the prisoners. (Figure 1) Morgan and Pickens sent the prisoners northward into Virginia and turned eastward, with Cornwallis in pursuit. On January 28, Gen. Nathanael Greene, commander of the Southern Army, left his winter camp near Cheraw in South Carolina to join Morgan, and two days later he ordered his army to follow, including Lt. Col. Lee, who had been cooperating with Gen. Francis Marion in an unsuccessful attack on the British stronghold at Georgetown. On February 1, at Cowan’s Ford on the Catawba River, Cornwallis caught up with retreating Patriot forces, marking the beginning of what is often termed the Race to the Dan. Greene retreated northeastward, crossing rivers as they swelled just before they became impassable to Cornwallis. On February 14, with Cornwallis just hours behind, Greene ferried his troops across the Dan River in Virginia, taking all the boats to prevent Cornwallis from following.

Lee caught up with Greene at Guilford Courthouse, and on February 10, about 6 miles northwest, there was a skirmish with Tarleton’s troops in which Lee’s teenage bugler, James Gillies, was slaughtered—an event foreshadowing Lee’s actions at Pyle’s Defeat. Years later Lee described the event as follows:

*[Lee] soon saw the enemy’s near approach to his defenceless bugler, who was immediately unhorsed, and sabred several times while prostrate on the ground.... Gaining the road, the lieutenant-colonel [Lee] rushed forward in quick charge, and fell upon the troop of Tarleton soon after it had reached his bugler.... The enemy was crushed on the first charge: most of them were killed or prostrated; and the residue, with their captain, attempted to escape. They were pursued by Lieutenant Lewis, who was commanded by Lee to give no quarters. This sanguinary mandate, so contrary to the American character, proceeded from a view of the bugler—a beardless, unarmed youth, who had vainly implored quarter, and in the agonies of death presented a spectacle resistless in its appeal for vengeance.*²

¹ Henry Lee, *The Revolutionary War Memoirs of General Henry Lee* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1998; reprint of the 1869 edition), 263. Henry Lee wrote much of his *Memoirs* in 1809 and 1810 while in debtor’s prison. Lee, *Memoirs*, iii.

² Lee, *Memoirs*, 241. Bruce L. Peterson, “The Importance of a Small Skirmish during the Race to the Dan,” *Journal of the American Revolution* (September 1, 2021). <https://allthingsliberty.com/2021/09/the-importance-of-a-small-skirmish-during-the-race-to-the-dan/#:~:text=Wright%20objected%20to%20going%20on,riding%20east%20to%20rejoin%20Williams>.

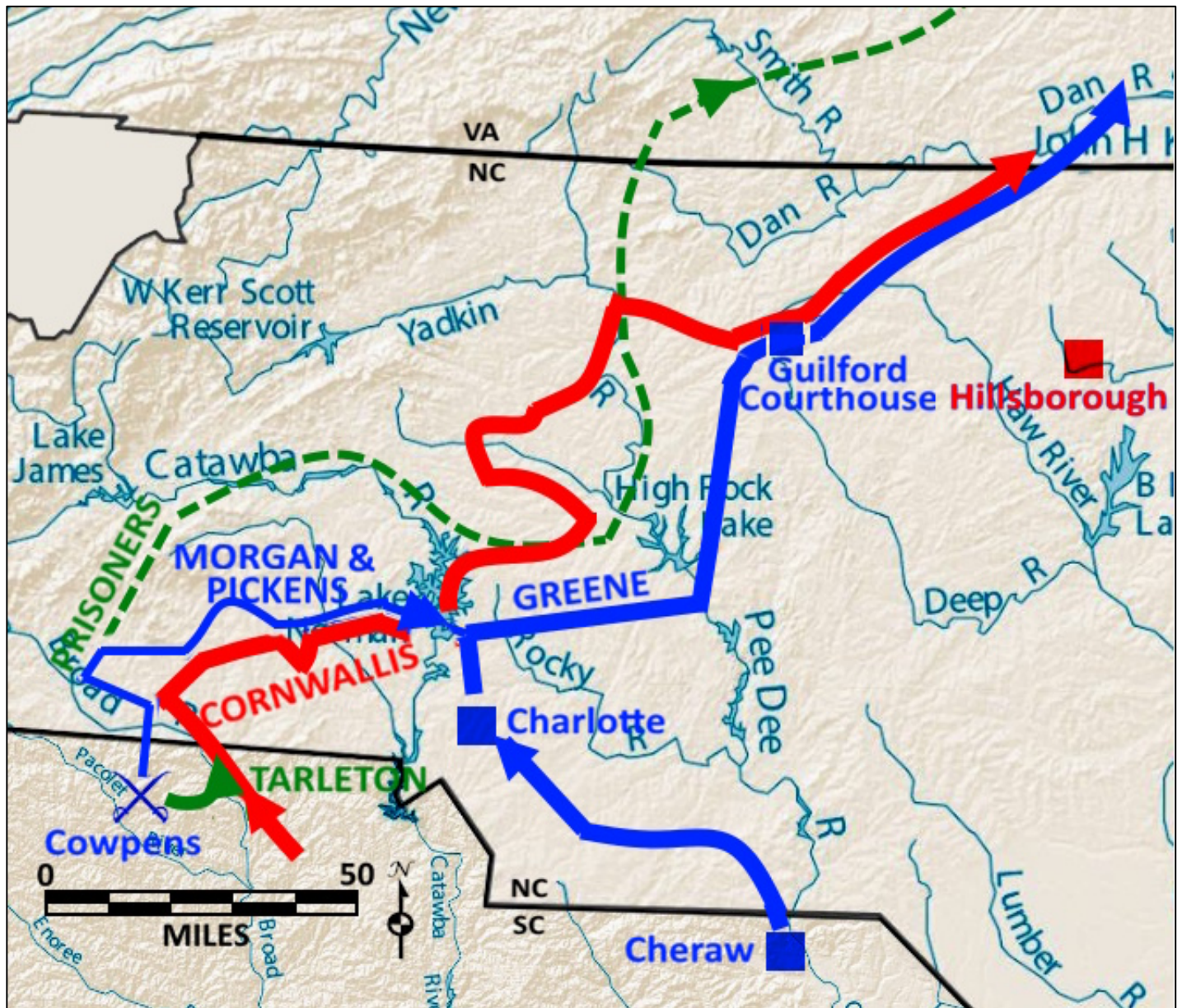


Figure 1: Approximate routes of Tarleton, Cornwallis, Morgan, Pickens and Greene after the Battle of Cowpens.

Two days after failing to cross the Dan, Cornwallis turned south, camping at the plantation of Hugh Dobbins until February 18, when he continued to Hillsborough.³ (Figure 2) Greene rested on the north side of the Dan River until February 22, as militiamen from Virginia and North Carolina swelled his ranks. In the meantime, he sent Pickens and Lee to keep an eye on Cornwallis. On February 17, Pickens was at Back (or Stony) Creek, 12 to 15 miles west of Hillsborough, when he sent a party under Col. James McCall of Georgia, with forty volunteers, to scout Cornwallis's position. Early the next morning at Hart's Mill, McCall's party killed or severely wounded eight and took ten British and several Loyalist prisoners without a single man being hurt.⁴ As an example

³ William Faden, map of "The Marches of Lord Cornwallis in the Southern Provinces," 1787. E. W. Caruthers, *Interesting Revolutionary Incidents: and Sketches of Character, Chiefly in the 'Old North State'* (Philadelphia: Hayes & Zell, 1856), 412. D. N. Conrad and R. N. Parks, eds., *Papers of Nathanael Greene*, (hereafter PNG) Vol. 7 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1994), 313 note 2.

⁴ Pickens to Greene, February 23, 1781, PNG 7:341.

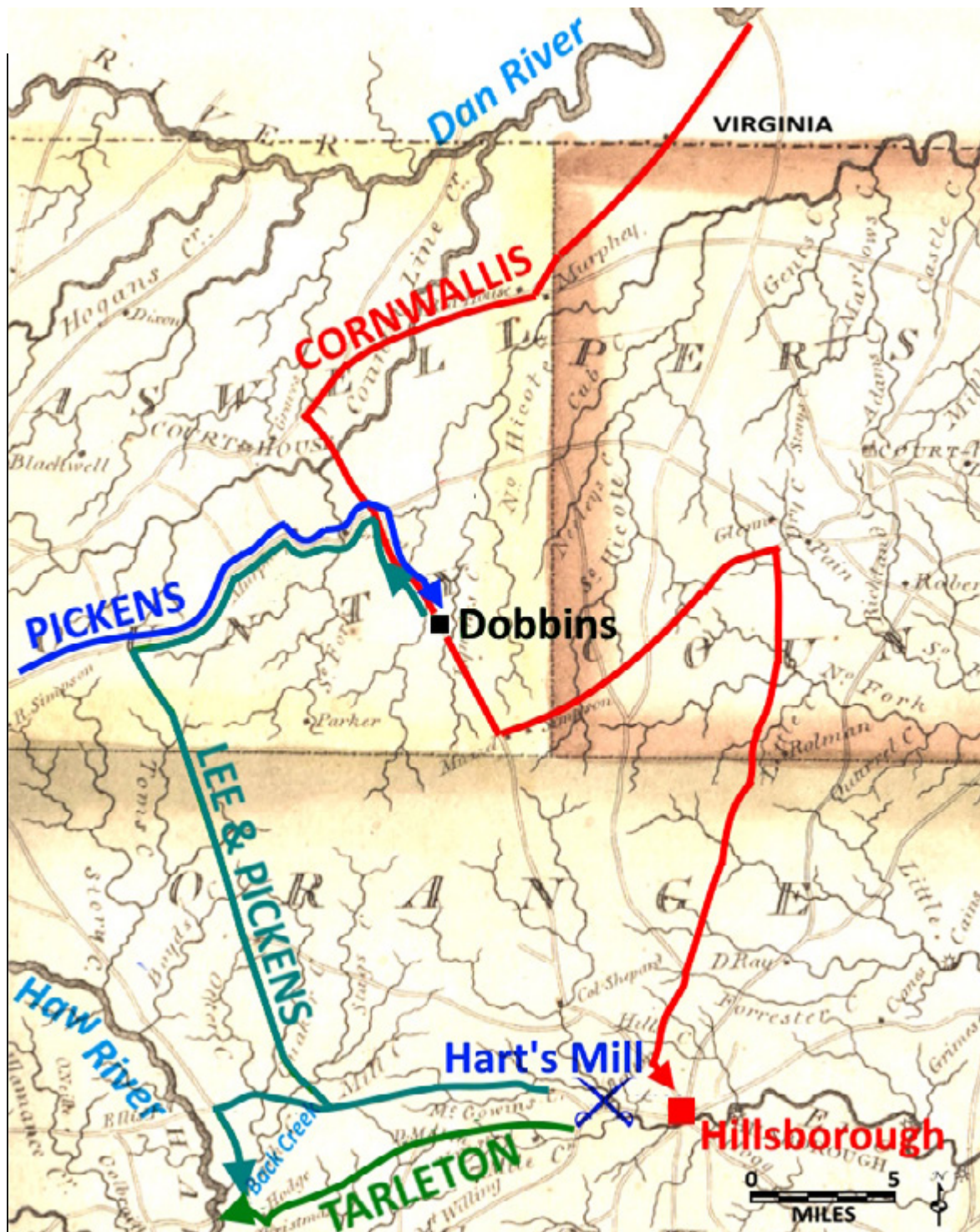


Figure 2: Possible routes of Cornwallis, Tarleton, Lee and Pickens on roads depicted on the 1808 Price-Strother map.

of the conflicting accounts of this period, Capt. Joseph Graham stated in 1821 that he, rather than McCall, was in charge of the American party at Hart's Mill. According to Graham, "our prisoners were one Lieutenant and sixteen

privates, regulars, and two tories.... There were left on the ground, killed or wounded, one sergeant, and eight privates.”⁵

On February 19, Lee’s Legion with two companies of Maryland Continentals and thirteen Catawba Indians recrossed into North Carolina to Dobbins’s Plantation, collecting militia reinforcements and waiting for Pickens to join him.⁶ Pickens joined Lee on February 23, and on the following day they headed toward Hillsborough to interfere with Cornwallis’s foraging.⁷ After camping one night, they went to David Mebane’s farm 8 or 9 miles west of Hillsborough,⁸ where they were told that a foraging party was heading toward the plantation of Patriot militia general John Butler. “It was presumable that we should come up with them at Gen Butlers farm which was said to be their object. We gained this point about 4 in the afternoon, where we discovered that their numbers were respectable, their objects extensive, & their commander Lt Col Tarleton.”⁹ This was no foraging party, but 200 of Tarleton’s cavalry with 150 men from Col. James Webster’s Brigade of British infantry and 100 German *Jägers* (riflemen).

At Butler’s on February 25, Lee and Pickens learned that Tarleton had crossed Haw River at a nearby ford on the previous evening.¹⁰ They initially decided to separate, with Lee going after Tarleton while Pickens went 7 miles to the north to Trollinger’s Ferry on Haw River to await reinforcement from Col. Francis Locke, who was marching eastward from Guilford Courthouse.¹¹ There was evidently a change in plans, and Pickens joined Lee in pursuit of Tarleton.

Tarleton had been sent by Cornwallis to support Loyalist militiamen under Col. John Pyle, Sr.¹² Pyle was born to Quaker parents in Chester County, Pennsylvania on April 8, 1723.¹³ He was a physician, and, unusual for the time, he actually had an MD degree, earned at Oxfordshire in England. In the 1760s Pyle moved to Cane Creek in the part of Chatham County near present Sutphin in Alamance County, 15 miles south of Burlington. Pyle had been a leader in the Regulator movement, which climaxed at the Battle of Alamance in 1771. In 1776 he was commissioned a captain in the Loyalist militia and ordered to “erect the King’s standard” and to recruit and arm Loyalists.¹⁴ In the following year, he and his son, John Pyle, Jr. and others were arrested by Patriots and imprisoned at Halifax.¹⁵ Perhaps as a condition of release, Pyle swore allegiance to the Patriot cause. He switched back to the Loyalists only after Cornwallis arrived in the area and promised protection.¹⁶ By then he was a fifty-six-year-old colonel of militia. According to a pension applicant, Pyle “raised a band of men and made violent threats what he would do to the republicks if they came in his way.”¹⁷

⁵ Joseph Graham, “Narrative,” in William Henry Hoyt, ed. *The Papers of Archibald D. Murphey* Vol. 2 (Raleigh NC: E. M. Uzzell, 1914), 271.

⁶ Lee to Greene, February 20, 1781, PNG 7:324. In his *Memoirs*, page 253, Lee erroneously stated that he crossed the Dan with Pickens on February 18. The number of Indians is from the bounty-land application of Robert Kirkwood (BLWt1102-300).

⁷ Lee to Greene, February 23, 1781, PNG 7:336; Pickens to Greene, February 23, 1781, PNG 7:341.

⁸ Pickens to Greene, February 26, 1781, PNG 7:355. A. D. Murphey, “The Tory Massacre, Pyle’s Defeat, 1781,” *Fayetteville Semi-Weekly Observer*, November 25, 1857, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/63393659>.

⁹ Lee to Greene, February 25, 1781, PNG 7:347. Pickens to Greene, February 26, 1781, PNG 7:355. Butler’s plantation is now believed to have been near present Swepsonville. Jeffrey Bright and Stewart Dunaway, *Pyle’s Defeat--The Most Comprehensive Guide: Case Closed* (Lulu, 2011), 155.

¹⁰ William Reed W5673. This and other pension applications cited in this paper are transcribed mainly by Will Graves at revwarapps.org.

¹¹ Richard Allen S6490; Alexander Gilreath S8564; John Love S8852; Elijah Vicks (Vicks, Vicker) W4368; Jacob Wall S7836. Trollinger’s Ferry was near the present railroad bridge east of Burlington. Bright and Dunaway, *Pyle’s Defeat*, 122; Carole Watterson Troxler and William Murray Vincent, *Shuttle & Plow: A History of Alamance County, North Carolina* (Alamance County Historical Association, 1999), 354.

¹² Banastre Tarleton, *A History of the Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, in the Southern Provinces of North America* (Dublin: Colles, 1787), 238.

¹³ U.S., Quaker Meeting Records, 1681-1935, Chester Co, PA, Kennett Monthly Meeting, Marriages, 1718-1821, 14, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/49930593/john-pyle#view-photo=306767976>.

¹⁴ Hartford (Connecticut) *Courant*, April 15, 1776, 1-2. <https://www.newspapers.com/image/1106313799/>.

¹⁵ Joseph Hackney, S6973. Saberton, CP 4:15 note 6. Bright and Dunaway, *Pyle’s Defeat*, 145-152.

¹⁶ Tarleton, *History*, 238.

¹⁷ Daniel Smith S7550.

Tarleton forded the Haw on February 24 and rode westward to join Pyle and escort his militiamen to Cornwallis at Hillsborough. After fording the river, Tarleton skirmished with some Patriot militiamen who informed him of the approach of Continental troops. Tarleton then learned that they were Lee's troops, who he was told were intending to join forces with Col. William Preston's militiamen from Montgomery County, Virginia. Tarleton urged Pyle to hasten his junction with him, as he later explained.

On the 24th the British detachment passed the Haw, and dispersed a party of American militia, who had united to counteract the intentions of the loyalists. Tarleton was told by the prisoners, that a continental force was expected in the neighbourhood, which intelligence induced him to send to the Pyles to join him without delay. In the course of the day particular and authentic information was obtained of Colonel Lee's cavalry having passed Haw river to meet a corps of mountaineers under Colonel Preston, for the purpose of intimidating or dispersing the King's friends. This report made Tarleton repeat his orders to the Pyles for an instant junction of the numbers already assembled, that he might proceed against either Lee or Preston before they united.... Colonel Pyle, and two hundred of his followers, being all equally ignorant of the customs of war, had not complied with the orders they received, and though forewarned of their danger, thought fit to pay visits to their kindred and acquaintance before they repaired to the British camp: Inspired by whiskey and the novelty of their situation, they unfortunately prolonged their excursions.¹⁸

Lee's Report to Greene

In the confusion of battle, memories of the participants understandably differ, and that is especially the case with Pyle's defeat, in which men at the front of Lee's column might not know what was happening hundreds of yards away in the rear. It is reasonable to think that the most reliable account would be the report Lee wrote to Gen. Greene a few hours after the event, but even parts of that are doubtful. Lee's report to Greene is as follows:

12 O'clock Saturday

Dear Genl night 25th Feb^y 81

About 12 O'clock Col Pickens & myself in our march towards Hilsborough were Joined by Col [William] Moore, from whom we learnt that a body of the enemy were advanced to the Haw Fields. Every inteligence of their numbers & conduct indicated them to be a foraging party. We immediately drove across to the Salsbury road in the rear of the enemy. It was presumable that we should come up with them at Gen Butlers farm which was said to be their object. We gained this point about 4 in the afternoon, where we discovered that their numbers were respectable, their objects extensive, & their commander Lt Col Tarleton. We also found that they had crossed the Haw River, & were told they were to encamp for the night at a Mr Holts 4 miles on the western side of the river where they were to be joined during the night by large body^s of enlisted Carolinians. Solicitous to prevent by a timely stroke this junction & having a reason to beleive we should find them in two divisions seperated at some distance, we crossed in pursuit altho very inferior in number.

On this decision I dispatched a courier to order on the Legion Infantry to secure our retreat in case of disaster, & advised Col. Williams [Otho Williams of the Maryland Continentals] of the prospects before us.

We reached Holts about five O'clock where we were again disappointed, Col Tarleton being then four miles to our right at Major Oneals plantation. The troops continued their motion with increased celerity, it being our wish to decid the contest that evening. After a march of three miles we came up with a party of Col. Hamiltons regt & some N^o Carolinian associates 350 in number. The Legion cavalry passed them

¹⁸ Tarleton, *History*, 238-239. Cornwallis reported, apparently erroneously, that Tarleton crossed the Haw on February 23. Cornwallis to Lord George Germain, March 17, 1781, in Ian Saberton, *The Cornwallis Papers* (hereafter CP), Vol. 4 (Uckfield, England: Naval & Military Press, 2010), 4:15-16.

agreeable to order, as if British troops. I did this, that no time might be lost in reaching Col Tarleton. The enemy discovered their mistake on the near approach of our militia & commenced action. The rear cavalry were instantly order to charge by Capt [Joseph] Eggleston & in ten minutes the whole body of the enemy were routed, the greatest part of them were left on the field dead & wounded. Among the former were Col Piles & several other officers. The night came on & we necessarily deferred farther operation.

We are now in a position on the country side of Col. Tarleton, within three miles of his camp & have received a considerable reinforcement of militia. It is highly probable that in the course of tomorrow events very important may result. Yours most respectfully/ Henry Lee Jr¹⁹

Although Lee was writing while the events were fresh in memory, he had been in the saddle for perhaps nineteen hours and was writing in haste late at night. Every sentence should be scrutinized and compared with what he wrote almost thirty years later in his *Memoirs*, while in debtor's prison with more time to reflect, and with the accounts by other participants. One obvious error is the date of Lee's report. Saturday was actually February 24, which has led some historians to believe that Pyle's Defeat occurred on that date. Tarleton stated that he crossed Haw River on the evening of February 24, and Lee and Pickens followed upon learning of it the next day. Lee was also incorrect in thinking that Pyle was with Col. John Hamilton's Royal North Carolina Regiment.

Another detail worth examining is Lee's statement that his own force was "very inferior in number" to the combined forces of Tarleton and Pyle. Lee is estimated to have had perhaps 120 Legion cavalry, and Pickens may have had about 500 North Carolina militiamen.²⁰ (See the list of officers in the Appendix to this paper.) As noted previously, Tarleton had 450 men, and he and an unnamed officer who had apparently been with Pyle gave Pyle's number as 200.²¹ If these numbers are correct, then Lee had about 620 men compared with a total of 650 under Tarleton and Pyle. Each side tended to exaggerate the enemy's strength. Lee stated that Pyle's "N^o Carolinian associates [were] 350 in number," but in his *Memoirs* he stated that Pyle had "four hundred loyalists."²² Graham stated that "the tories were over two to one to our actual Cavalry."²³ Pickens estimated two to three hundred,²⁴ and eleven pension applicants estimated from 250 to more than 500, with the average being close to the 350 Lee reported. Even if this number were correct, during the actual engagement Pyle's men were greatly outnumbered by the combined force of Lee and Pickens.

Lee reported to Greene that the Legion cavalry passed Pyle's Loyalists "as if British troops... that no time might be lost in reaching Col Tarleton." This statement must have puzzled Greene. Did Lee really intend to have Pyle's force in his rear while he attacked Tarleton? In his *Memoirs* Lee explained that he "had concluded to make known to the colonel [Pyle] his real character as soon as he should confront him, with a solemn assurance of his and his associates perfect exemption from injury, and with the choice of returning to their homes, or of taking a more generous part, by uniting with the defenders of their common country against the common foe."²⁵ It is incredible that Lee would have been naive enough to think that all of Pyle's men would simply go home or join him, and none would ride ahead to warn Tarleton.

The following statement in Lee's report is also questionable: "The enemy discovered their mistake on the near approach of our militia & commenced action. The rear cavalry were instantly order [sic] to charge by Capt

¹⁹ Lee to Greene, February 25, 1781, PNG 7:347-348.

²⁰ These estimates are based on Patrick O'Kelley, *Nothing but Blood and Slaughter* Vol. 3 (Blue House Tavern Press, 2005), 96. O'Kelley states that Lee had three troops of cavalry and three companies of infantry with a total of 240 men.

²¹ An Officer, "Lord Cornwallis Defended," *The Scots Magazine* 44 (May 1782), 239, https://ia802807.us.archive.org/29/items/sim_edinburgh-magazine-and-literary-miscellany_1782-05_44/sim_edinburgh-magazine-and-literary-miscellany_1782-05_44.pdf. 239; Tarleton, *History*, 239.

²² Lee's *Memoirs*, 256

²³ Graham, "Narrative," 274.

²⁴ Pickens to Greene, February 23, 1781, PNG 7:341.

²⁵ Lee, *Memoirs*, 257.

Eggleston.” In his *Memoirs*, Lee repeated the claim that the Loyalists started the fight. “Lee was in the act of consummating his plan, when the enemy's left, discovering Pickens's militia, not sufficiently concealed, began to fire upon the rear of the cavalry commanded by Captain Eggleston. This officer instantly turned upon the foe, as did immediately after the whole column.”²⁶ Capt. Joseph Graham, while agreeing with Lee's account up to this point, had a different version of who struck the first blow, stating that “the disposition for attack” had already been made and the troops were waiting for a signal to begin.

*Lee states... that Pyles' men, on seeing the militia, in the rear of his Cavalry, recognized and fired on them. The true statement is this: Major [Joseph] Dickson, of Lincoln, who commanded the column on our right, (when the disposition for attack, had been made at the last farm,) had been thrown out, of his proper order of march, by the fences and a branch, and when Pyles' men were first seen, by the Militia they were thought to be the party under Dickson, which had come round the plantation, and gotten in the road before them. On coming within twenty steps of them, Capt. Graham riding alongside of Capt. Eggleston who commanded the rear of Lee's horse, remarked to him, “That company is Tories—what is the reason they have their arms?” Capt. Eggleston addressing a good looking man at the end of the line, supposed to be an officer, inquired, “To whom do you belong?” The man promptly answered, “A friend of his Majesty.” Whereupon Capt. Eggleston struck him over the head. The militia looking on, and waiting for orders, on this example being set, rushed on them like lightning and cut away. The noise in the rear, attracted the notice of Lee's men, and they turned their horses short to the right about five steps and in less than a minute, the attack was made along the whole line.*²⁷

Manual McConnell (S2773), one of Pickens's militiamen, also stated that “the signal for a charge was then given, we broke upon them, to their great astonishment and put them to death & rout.” Moses Hall also stated that the Americans started the fighting, but his account differs from that of Graham and McConnell, perhaps because Hall was in Lee's vanguard while Graham and McConnell were farther back. According to Hall, the signal to attack was given by Lee's bugler.

*I recollect that (our) (my) Captain [Hugh] Hall perceiving they were Tories and thinking that Colonel Lee did not know it, & was imposed upon by their cries of friendship & misunderstood them to be our friends instead of the British, he called to Colonel Lee across the Tories line and told him “Colonel Lee they are every blood of them Tories” Colonel Lee gave him a sign to proceed on with the execution of the command which was to march on until a different command was given. In a few minutes or less time and at the instance they the Tories were completely covered by our lines upon both flanks or front and rear as the case may have been, the bugle sounded to attack and the slaughter began.*²⁸

Also questionable is Lee's statement that the skirmish occurred “after a march of three miles” from Holt's. This statement is crucial in determining where Pyle's Defeat occurred, and it will be examined in the next section.

Locating Pyle's Defeat

Around noon on February 25 after fording Haw River, Lee and Pickens were within three miles of Holt's. Expecting to find Tarleton there, “a disposition for attack was immediately made.”²⁹ Lee and Pickens “reached Holts about five O'clock [and] were again disappointed, Col Tarleton being then four miles to our right at Major

²⁶ Lee, *Memoirs*, 258.

²⁷ Graham, “Narrative,” 273-274. In 1827 Graham wrote a slightly different account: “Joseph Graham to A. Murphey, December 20, 1927, North Carolina Archives Digital Collections, <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/Documents/Detail/joseph-graham-papers-american-revolution-letter-from-joseph-graham-to-a.-murphey/426923>. A published transcription is at <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.hx4tmw&seq=9>.

²⁸ Moses Hall W10105.

²⁹ Lee, *Memoirs*, 255, 262.

Oneals plantation.”³⁰ Perhaps fearing he would be caught between Preston and Lee, Tarleton had urged Pyle to hurry northward to join him, but before Pyle arrived Tarleton decamped from Holt’s and rode toward the plantation of Patriot Col. William O’Neal. Tarleton probably sent an express to inform Pyle that he was at O’Neal’s, and Pyle continued after him, thereby placing his troops between those of Lee and Tarleton. Lee and Pickens, guided by local resident Samuel Findley,³¹ arrived at Holt’s later. Not finding Tarleton there, they hurried toward O’Neal’s after Tarleton, but instead encountered Pyle. Pyle’s Defeat ensued.

Determining the location of Pyle’s Defeat should be straightforward if the distances in Lee’s report are correct. According to the report, Tarleton was to camp “at a Mr Holts 4 miles on the western side of the river,” but he had proceeded from there to a position “four miles to our right at Major Oneals plantation.” Lee stated that they continued their pursuit of Tarleton from Holt’s and came up with “Hamiltons regt” (Pyle’s party) “after a march of three miles.” If correct, then Lee marched westerly 4 miles from Haw River to Holt’s, then in a northerly direction 3 miles to where Pyle’s Defeat occurred. The key to finding the site of Pyle’s Defeat is locating the plantations of O’Neal and Holt.

“Major Oneals plantation” was the farm of William O’Neal, who was taken prisoner by the British. O’Neal owned a thousand acres in what is now Burlington on both sides of the great road from Hillsborough to Guilford Courthouse.³² The 1808 map of North Carolina by Jonathan Price and John Strother shows “ONeille” on the north side of this road in a fork of Little Alamance Creek. That location would be near the present intersection of O’Neal Street and US 70. This location is consistent with Pickens’s statement to Greene that O’Neal’s was 7 miles from the Haw River ford.³³

Two Holt’s plantations are shown on the John Collet map of 1770. One of them is “M Holts” near the headwaters of Little Alamance Creek, indicated in red in the top center of Figure 3. M. Holt was probably Michael Holt II (1723-1799), who, like his brother John Holt (1721-1802), was captured at Pyle’s Defeat and later freed in an exchange for O’Neal.³⁴ A visitor to Michael Holt just before the war gave a different location from the one on Collet’s map, stating that Holt lived on the north side of Alamance Creek near where it flows into Haw River.³⁵ Bright and Dunaway proposed yet another location where Michael Holt is buried, 2 miles south of the Collet location, 3 miles west of Haw River, and 3 miles southeast of O’Neal’s.³⁶ (Figure 4) None of the three proposed locations of Michael Holt’s agrees with the distances stated by Lee, but a location near his grave is closest and also near the Salisbury Road that Tarleton and Lee may have used to get to Holt’s.

Another Holt’s on Collet’s map is “I Holts” on the south side of the Salisbury Road and north of Big Alamance Creek.³⁷ The Henry Mouzon map of 1775, which is apparently based on Collet’s map, shows “Holts” where the Collet map has “I. Holts.” It is about 4 miles west of where Lee crossed Haw River and about 4 miles south of O’Neal’s, consistent with the distances stated by Lee. Figure 5 shows the same area as in Figure 3 with an overlay of the 1808 map by Price and Strother, which might show the roads more accurately. If the locations of Holt’s and O’Neal’s are as shown in Figure 3, and if Lee encountered Pyle after marching 3 miles from Holt’s toward O’Neal’s, then Pyle’s Defeat would have occurred roughly where indicated by the upper blue crossed swords. This would have been about a mile from Tarleton’s camp at O’Neal’s, a distance also supported by one of Lee’s dragoons who wrote that Tarleton was “within less than a mile from the scene.”³⁸ If, however, Holt’s was

³⁰ Lee to Greene, February 25, 1781, *PNG* 7:347.

³¹ Samuel Findley, R14183. Joseph McAdams (S33081) also stated that he was a pilot for Lee at the time.

³² Carole Watterson Troxler, *Pyle’s Defeat: Deception at the Racepath* (Graham NC: Alamance County Historical Association, 2003), 26-27.

³³ Pickens to Greene, February 26, 1781, *PNG* 7:355.

³⁴ John Reeves S7381. Capt. Nathanael Pendleton to Mrs. William O’Neal, March 3, 1781, *PNG* 7:383. Pendleton to Capt. Henry Weitzel, March 6, 1781, *PNG* 7:403-404.

³⁵ “After a long, but pleasant, ride down the eastern side of the Allamance Creek, I arrived at night at the house of a Mr. Michael Holt, a Dutchman [German], whose plantation was adjoining the creek, near the place where it enters the Haw River.” John Ferdinand Dalziel Smyth, *A Tour in the United States of America* Vol. 1 (Dublin: G. Ferrin, 1784), 147.

³⁶ Bright and Dunaway, *Pyle’s Defeat*, 91.

³⁷ I. Holt could not be identified positively, but the 1810 federal census lists an Israel Holt older than forty-five.

³⁸ William McDonald in the bounty-land application of Robert Kirkwood BLWt1102-300.

near the grave of Michael Holt, and if Lee was correct in saying that the skirmish occurred 3 miles from there, then Pyle's Defeat would have been right at O'Neal's.

Like much of Lee's report, the distance of 3 miles from Holt's is questionable. Several participants stated that Pyle's Defeat occurred about 3 miles from O'Neal's, which would be about a mile from Holt's rather than the 3 miles stated by Lee, as shown by the lower crossed swords in Figure 5. The unnamed officer who had

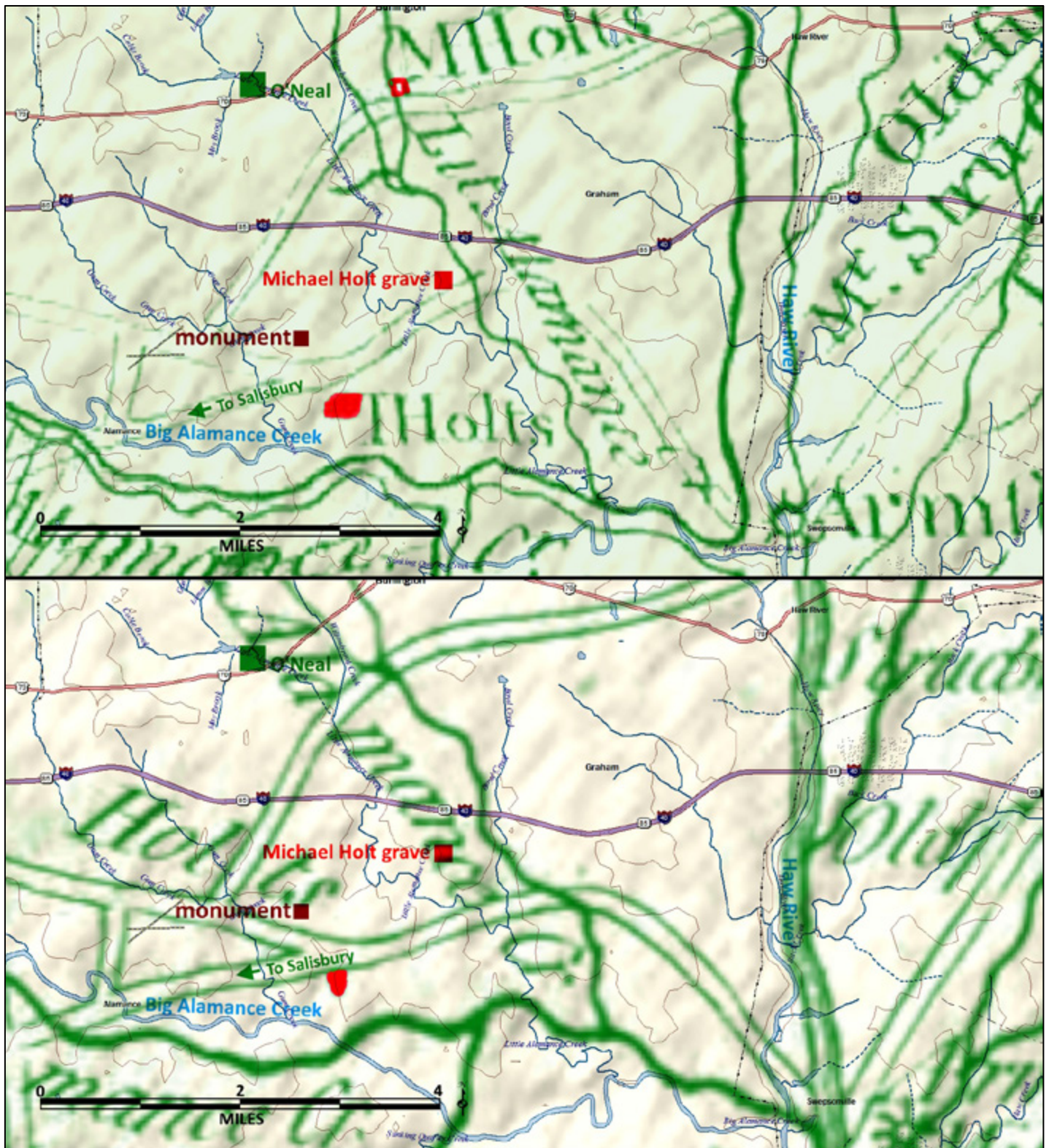


Figure 3: Two early maps overlaid on a modern map at the same scale and recolored green to show approximate locations of Holt's (red). (Top) The Colver map of 1770. (Bottom) The Moulton map of 1773. Also shown are O'Neal's plantation, the location of the present monument commemorating Pyle's Defeat, and the location of Michael Holt's grave.

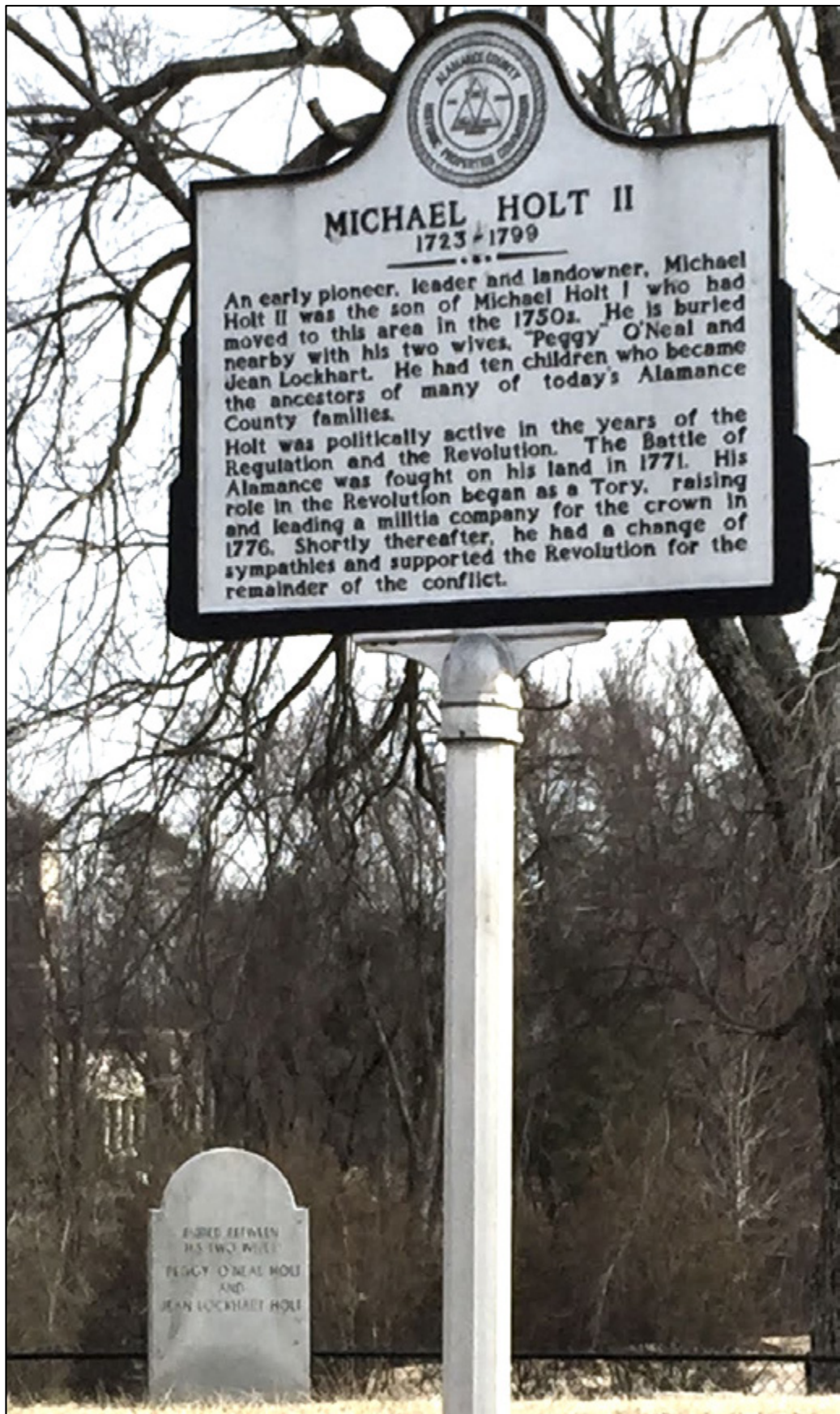


Figure 4: The grave of Michael Holt II. The historical marker is incorrect; Holt was a Loyalist throughout the war. Jeffrey Kline.

Lt-Col. Tarleton had been sent with a detachment over the Haw river, to protect those friends that had promised to assemble, and had taken post after his march at the plantation of a Maj. O'Neil. Our party of

road, about three miles from Col. Tarleton. Our friends mistook the rebels for the legion, and by that means fell an easy prey to the enemy, who massacred many of them in a most barbarous manner, and in so short a time, that Col. Tarleton's assistance came too late.³⁹

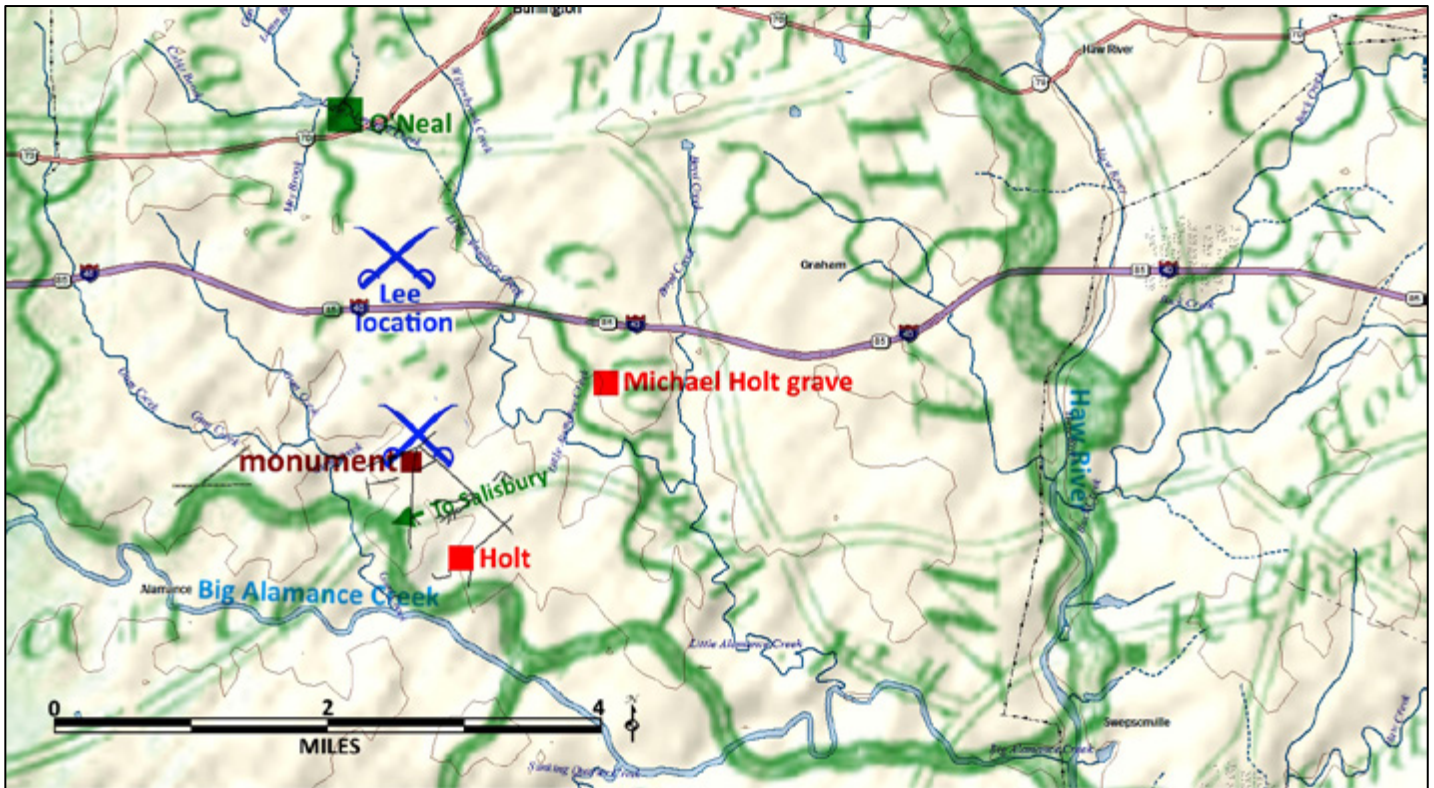


Figure 5: Overlay of the 1808 Price-Strother map recolored green, with the location of Pyle's Defeat according to Lee if Holt's was as shown in Figure 3, and the location if Pyle's Defeat occurred about 3 miles from O'Neal's.

In 1821, Joseph Graham also stated that "Tarlton [was] only 2 or 3 miles off."⁴⁰ In 1833, pension applicant Mathew Vandiver stated: "They were engaged in this pursuit when they met a band of Tories at a place called the Race paths under the command of Colonel Piles.... Tarltons corps at the time of this affair were stationed at Oneals about three miles from the Race Paths."⁴¹ Moses Hall stated that "Tarlton at this time was in a few miles of us."⁴² The preponderance of evidence therefore suggests that Pyle's Defeat occurred near the lower crossed swords in Figure 5.

With either location for Holt's, it is apparent that Lee encountered Pyle's rear as they were both riding from the south toward Tarleton at O'Neal's. A roadbed from the south toward O'Neal's is still visible on the ground⁴³ and in aerial photographs and lidar-based images just north of the junction of Anthony Road, Old Trail Road, and Whites Kennel Road. (Figure 6) It apparently extended from Old Trail Road, which crossed Big Alamance Creek from the south.⁴⁴ It is likely that Pyle forded the Big Alamance Creek there and proceeded northward on Old Trail Road on his way to O'Neal's.

Further clues to the location of Pyle's Defeat might be found in landmarks mentioned by participants. Like Vandiver quoted above, many other pension applicants stated that Pyle's Defeat occurred at a place called the

³⁹ An Officer, "Lord Cornwallis Defended," 239.

⁴⁰ Graham, "Narrative," 273.

⁴¹ Mathew Vandiver S9500.

⁴² Moses Hall W10105.

⁴³ Troxler, *Pyle's Defeat*, 68.

⁴⁴ Troxler, *Pyle's Defeat*, 44-45.



Figure 6: 1939 aerial photo (top) and lidar-based (3DEP) image showing an old road north from Old Trail Road.

Race Path.⁴⁵ Six pension applicants called them Holt's Race Paths,⁴⁶ two stated they were Powell's Race Paths,⁴⁷ and one called them "Wm Oneals race pathes."⁴⁸ One applicant stated that it was a pair of race paths, and another

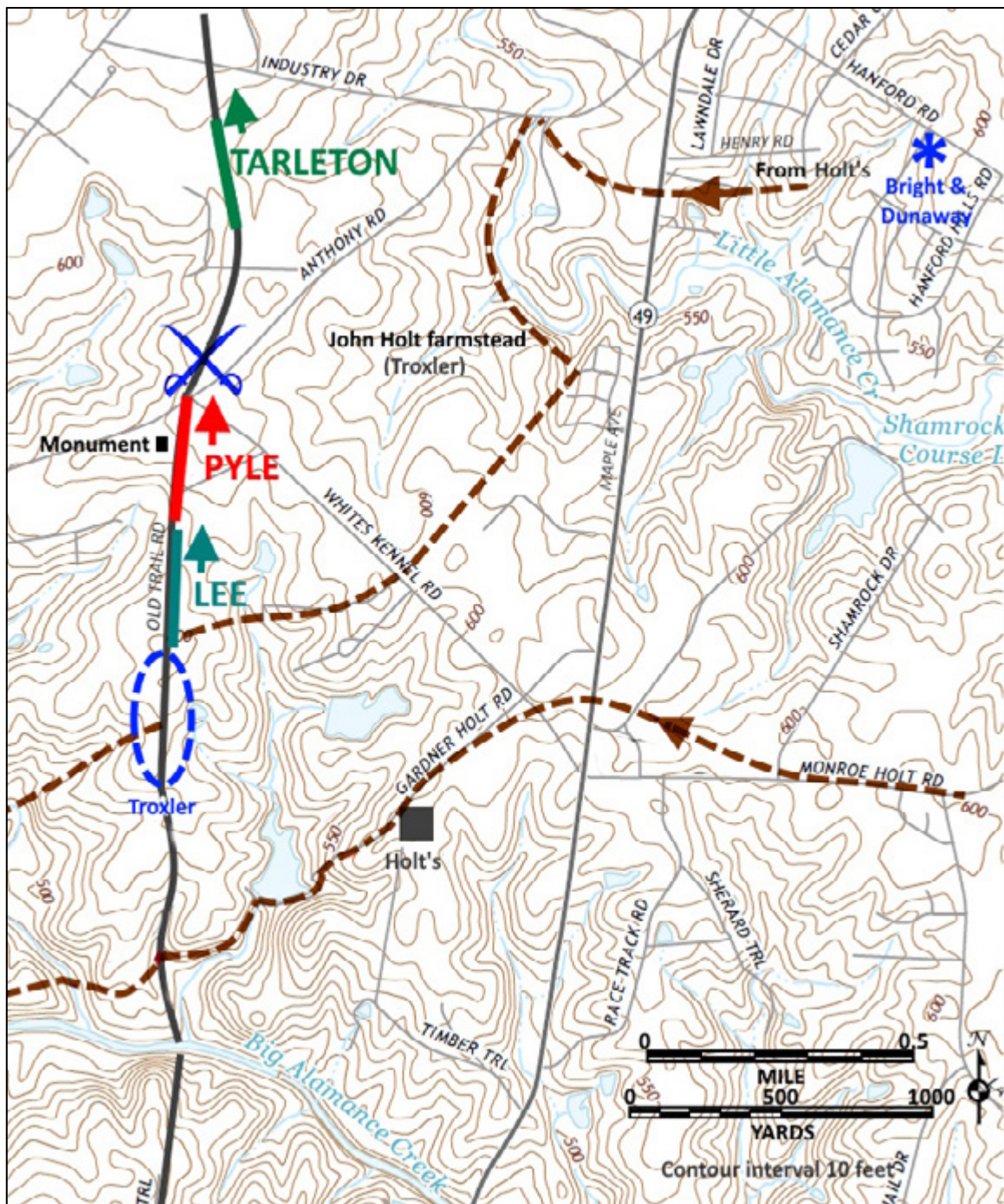


Figure 7: Proposed movements of Tarleton, Pyle and Lee before the skirmish at the proposed location indicated by crossed swords. Also shown are the locations of Pyle's Defeat proposed by Troxler and by Bright and Dunaway. Dashed lines indicate alternative routes taken by Lee, depending on the location of Holt's. Current USGS map, Burlington quadrangle.

stated it was “on an old quarter race track—we took the other track.”⁴⁹ Another applicant stated that it was at a racetrack or crossroad, and, as noted above, an unnamed officer with Pyle also stated that it was at a crossroad.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Jesse Evans S15826; Moses Hall W10105; John McLaughlin (McGlothlin) W7436; John Merrell (Merrill) S7223; Mathew Vandiver S9500; William Wilkerson S32602.

⁴⁶ William Aldredge S16308; Robert Burnside S17304; Samuel Findley R14183; James Graham S8623; Joseph McAdams S33081; Solomon Geren (Gearen, Geron) W80.

⁴⁷ David Barker S6560; William Reed W5673.

⁴⁸ Solomon Mitchell S4222.

⁴⁹ John Summers S31999; Manual (Manuel) McConnell S2773.

⁵⁰ William T. Gaulden (Gaulding) W7509; Officer, “Lord Cornwallis Defended,” 239.

Local historian Stewart Dunaway made a thorough search of old property records but found no reference to a race path.⁵¹ A race path would have been on level ground, and an oval race track near Hillsborough occupied an area about 360 by 110 yards, so Pyle's Defeat probably occurred on a level area of about that size.⁵² Another clue to the location is the statement by the pension applicant and the unnamed officer cited above that the fighting occurred at a crossroad, as well as a statement by Lee's guide, Samuel Findley, and another pension applicant that it occurred in a lane.⁵³ "Lane" suggests a private road that would not have appeared on a map. Another clue may be Capt. Graham's statement that "Major Dickson, of Lincoln, who commanded the column on our right, (when the disposition for attack, had been made at the last farm,) had been thrown out, of his proper order of march, by the fences and a branch."⁵⁴ This indicates that there was a stream to the right of the road from Holt's. The above evidence points to a site of Pyle's Defeat depicted in Figure 7, with two possible routes taken by Lee, depending on the location of Holt's. Also shown for comparison are the locations of Pyle's Defeat proposed by Bright and Dunaway⁵⁵ and by Troxler, who depicted Pyle and Lee as marching southwestward from John Holt's farmstead.⁵⁶

If Holt's was near the grave of Michael Holt, as proposed by Bright and Dunaway, and if Lee did not take a direct course to O'Neal's, he might have followed the upper route shown in Figure 7. Part of that route may still be seen as a deeply eroded roadbed. (Fig.

9) If Holt's was in the location shown as I. Holt's on the Collet map and as Holt's on the Mouzon map, then Lee might have followed present Gardner Holt Road and an old roadbed visible on lidar (possibly the old Salisbury Road). The lane where the battle is said to have occurred would have been the northern extension of present Old Trail Road. The race paths might have been on the relatively level area to the right of the road in which the fighting is proposed to have occurred.

The location of the skirmish proposed here is close to the monument commemorating the event and is supported by local tradition. Benson J. Lossing was told in 1849 that "the place of conflict is about half a mile north of the old Salisbury highway, upon a 'plantation road,' two miles east of the Allamance" and about a quarter of a mile northwest of a pond.⁵⁷ Lossing was told that after the skirmish the wounded Col. Pyle hid in this pond. His sketch of it appears to show a small, shallow pond consistent with a present pond about a quarter of a mile southeast of the proposed location. (Fig. 9) It is said that a mass grave is just east of the proposed location.⁵⁸ An 1893 map of Alamance County by William L. Spoon shows "BATTLE GROUND Between Pyle and Henry Lee February 25, 1781" near the location. The site of Pyle's Defeat might be determined by archaeology, but unfortunately much of the area, including the site proposed here, has been developed. The Alamance County Historical Museum has an object described as a "Halberd, ca. 1781, found at site of Pyle's Defeat,"⁵⁹ but the exact location is not stated, and halberds were rarely used in the Revolutionary War.

⁵¹ Bright and Dunaway, *Pyle's Defeat*, 82.

⁵² C. J. Sauthier, "Plan of the Town of Hillsborough in Orange County North Carolina," 1768, <https://collections.leventhalmap.org/search/commonwealth:hx11z439g>.

⁵³ Samuel Findley R14183; Joel Lucas R6506. British Commissary and historian Charles Stedman was also told that the fighting occurred in a lane. C. Stedman, *The History of the Origin, Progress, and Termination of the American War* Vol. 2 (London, 1794), 333.

⁵⁴ Graham, "Narrative," 273.

⁵⁵ Bright and Dunaway, *Pyle's Defeat*, 55 has a map showing "Actual Battle Site on M. Holt II plantation." Elsewhere they wrote, "a location, which will never be exactly or precisely known," (pp 80-81); "Michael Holt II plantation was the general location of the battle," (p. 92); "We firmly believe the battle occurred on Michael Holt II's Plantation," (p 98).

⁵⁶ Troxler, *Pyle's Defeat*, 42-51. According to Bright and Dunaway (*Pyle's Defeat*, 89), the location of John Holt's land is unknown.

⁵⁷ Benson J. Lossing, *The Pictorial Field Book of the Revolution*, Vol 2 (New York: Harper Brothers, 1852). Not paginated in the version viewed online. "Two miles east of the Allamance" is interpreted to mean two miles east of where the old Salisbury highway crossed Big Alamance Creek at present Alamance, as shown in Figure 3.

⁵⁸ Troxler, *Pyle's Defeat*, 69-72.

⁵⁹ <https://www.alamancemuseum.org/Collections.aspx>.



Figure 8: Roadbed east of John Holt farmstead in Figure 7. Jeffrey Kline.

The Hacking Frolic⁶⁰

With all the conflicting evidence, it is difficult to give a coherent account of Pyles Defeat, but an attempt follows. Lee wrote in his *Memoirs* that after arriving at Holt's at about 5 o'clock in the afternoon:

the van of the horse galloping to the house brought off two of the enemy's staff, who had been delayed in settling for the subsistence of the detachment; and hearing from the family that Lieutenant-Colonel Tarleton would not advance above six miles further, Pickens and Lee instantly proceeded toward him, hoping that fortune would be more propitious upon the next occasion.... it was determined to pass as a re-enforcement sent from Hillsborough to Lieutenant-Colonel Tarleton; and the two prisoners being placed in the centre of

⁶⁰ Thomas Watkins (Wadkins) W6779 "was at what was called the 'hacking frolic.'"

the cavalry, were charged to conduct themselves so as to give currency to the deception: in default of which, the sergeant having the care of them was directed to put them to death instantly.... This stratagem could not fail of imposing on the country people, however well acquainted they might be with the appearance of British troops, so far as respected the Legion, inasmuch as both cavalry and infantry were dressed in short, green coats, with other distinctions exactly resembling some of the enemy's light corps.”⁶¹

The deception was so convincing that even after Lee's men had slaughtered most of Pyle's, one of the survivors addressed Lee as Tarleton, and another complained to Tarleton of the cruelty of his dragoons.⁶² Still anticipating an attack on Tarleton, Lee pushed forward “with the utmost hope,” and his approximately 120 Legion cavalry and Pickens's several hundred mounted militiamen were “in the highest spirits.”⁶³ According to Graham, “During the whole day's march, every man expected a battle and hard fighting. Men's countenances on such occasions indicate something which can be understood better than described in words. The countenances of the whole militia, throughout the day, never showed better.”⁶⁴

Lee sent a courier to order his Legion infantry and the Catawba Indians in the rear to catch up in order to secure a retreat “in case of disaster,” and he advised Col. Otho Williams of his plan.⁶⁵ Lee's vanguard was soon



Figure 9: Lossing's sketch of the pond in which Pyle was said to have hidden.

⁶¹ Lee, *Memoirs*, 256.

⁶² Graham, “Narrative,” 276; Tarleton, *History*, 239.

⁶³ Pickens to Greene, February 26, 1781, *PNG* 7:355.

⁶⁴ Graham, “Narrative,” 273.

⁶⁵ Lee to Greene, February 25, 1781, *PNG* 7:348. Thomas Boyd S17286.

“met by two well-mounted young countrymen... sent forward by Colonel Pyle for the purpose of ascertaining Tarleton's camp, to whom the colonel was repairing with four hundred loyalists.... they not only believed the troops they saw to be British, but overlooking what had been told them, took them to be Tarleton's, addressing the commandant [Lee] as that officer.”⁶⁶ Lee was disappointed to learn that Pyle's force stood between him and Tarleton, but seeing that the two young countrymen believed him to be Tarleton, he decided to continue his plan to attack Tarleton. He intended to ride quietly past Pyle, if his report and *Memoirs* are to be believed, or, more likely, he would attack Pyle's force.

Lee sent one of the young countrymen “back with two dragoons to his van, thence to proceed to Colonel Pyle with Lieutenant-Colonel Tarleton's gratulations, and his request that he would be so good as to draw out on the margin of the road, so as to give convenient room for his much fatigued troops to pass without delay to their night position.... Orders were at the same time dispatched to the van officer to halt as soon as he got in sight of

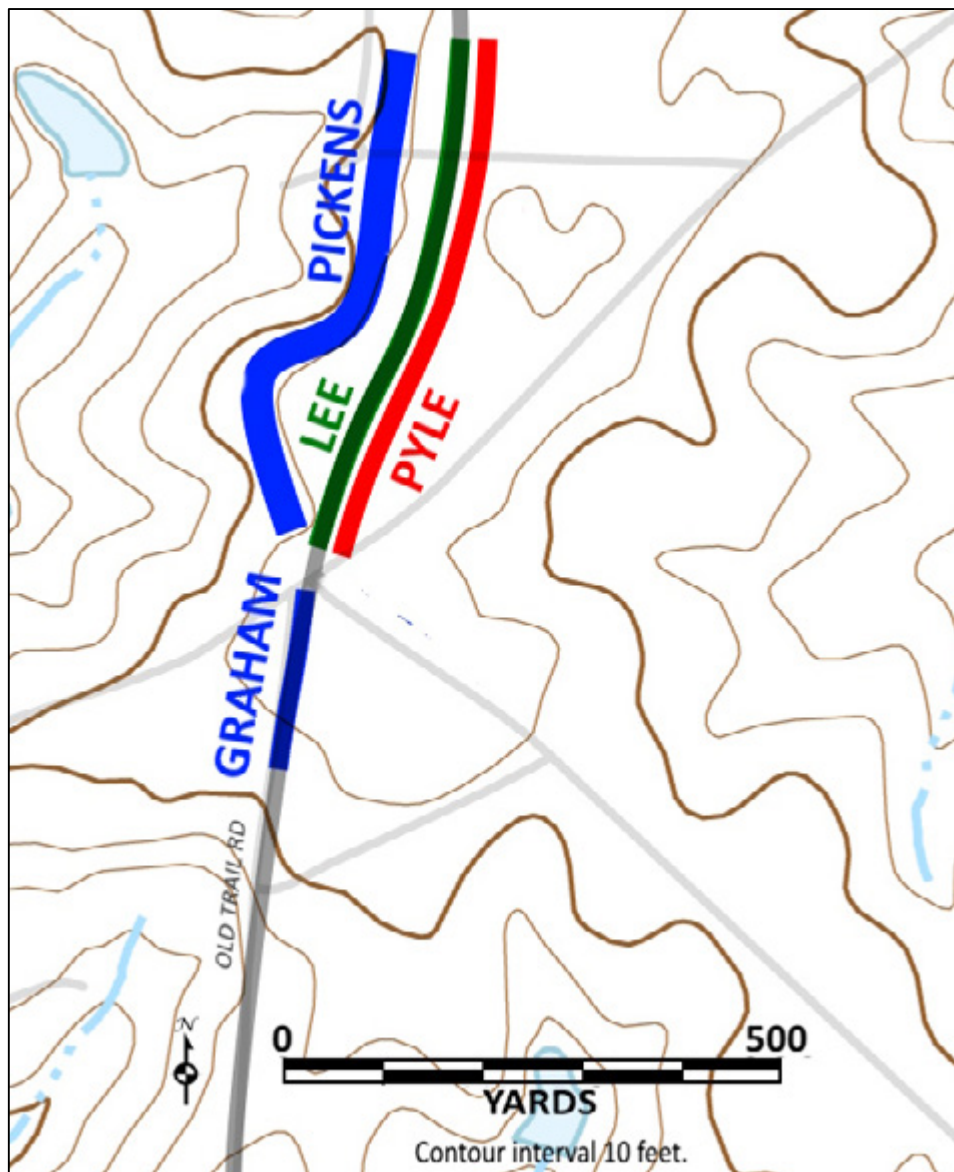


Figure 10: Possible positions of Lee's and Pyle's troops at the start of the engagement.

⁶⁶ Lee, *Memoirs*, 256, 257. Manual McConnell (S2773) made the unlikely claim that “Col. Lee's men were prepared with red (or Tory) plumes or feathers which they stuck in their caps.”

the loyalists.”⁶⁷ Lee requested Pickens “to place his riflemen (easily to be distinguished by the green twigs in their hats, the customary emblem of our militia in the South) on the left flank, out of sight; which was readily to be done, as we were then in a thick wood.”⁶⁸ Seventy of Pickens’s men were armed with swords like cavalymen, and they were placed under Capt. Joseph Graham behind Lee’s Legion cavalry.⁶⁹

After Lee caught up with his vanguard, they proceeded forward and found that Pyle had obligingly moved off to the right side of the road, facing in the same direction as Lee, probably expecting to fall in behind what he thought was Tarleton’s column. Lee found them “mounted like our militia, fitted like them to move on horseback, and to fight dismounted.” As Lee noted, it was fortunate for him that they chose to move to the right, since “their guns (rifles and fowling-pieces) were on their shoulders, the muzzles consequently in an opposite direction to the cavalry. In the event of discovery, they must have changed the direction before they could fire—a motion not to be performed, with a body of dragoons close in with their horses’ heads and their swords drawn.”⁷⁰ Lee’s cavalry continued forward “amidst shouts of long live King George from both parties.”⁷¹ Capt. Graham followed, “riding in front of the militia dragoons near Capt Egleson [Eggleston] who brought up the rear of Lee’s at the distance of 40 or 50 yards”⁷² According to Graham, “at the time the action commenced, Lee’s dragoons in the open order of march, extended about the same distance with Pyles’ men, who were in close order, and on horseback.” If they were in single file in the narrow lane, they and Pyle’s 200 or more mounted troops and Lee’s 120 dragoons must have formed a column of more than 600 yards, as shown in Figure 10. Cavalry re-enactor Daniel Murphy, however, suggests that it is more likely that both Lee and Pyle were in a column of two files, which would have extended for about half the distance.⁷³

According to Lee, the fighting began just as he reached Pyle at the head of his column.

*Lee passed along the line at the head of the column with a smiling countenance, dropping, occasionally, expressions complimentary to the good looks and commendable conduct of his loyal friends. At length he reached Colonel Pyle, when the customary civilities were promptly interchanged. Grasping Pyle by the hand, Lee was in the act of consummating his plan, when the enemy's left, discovering Pickens's militia, not sufficiently concealed, began to fire upon the rear of the cavalry commanded by Captain Eggleston. This officer instantly turned upon the foe, as did immediately after the whole column.*⁷⁴

As noted above, others stated that it was the Americans who began the attack after Eggleston discovered one of Pyle’s men was a Loyalist and struck him over the head.⁷⁵ Other accounts say that “the signal for a charge was then given,” perhaps when “the bugle sounded to attack.”⁷⁶ All of those signals might have occurred at about the same time. Lee’s troops “turned their horses short to the right about five steps and in less than a minute, the attack was made along the whole line.”⁷⁷ “By pressing forward they went through their [Pyle’s] line, leaving a number behind them. The continual cry by the Tories was ‘You are killing your own men. I am a friend to his Majesty. Hurrah for King George.’”⁷⁸ “Our troops drawing their swords attacked the Tories and cut them down...

⁶⁷ Lee, *Memoirs*, 257. Thomas Boyd (S17286): “our Col’s having sent a messenger in advance to Pyles informing him that Tarleton with his men was approaching in order to receive him and conduct him and his men to Lord Cornwallis (in this our Colonels represented themselves and their troops to be Colonel Tarleton & forces).”

⁶⁸ Lee, *Memoirs*, 256.

⁶⁹ Graham, “Narrative,” 273.

⁷⁰ Lee, *Memoirs*, 257-258. Moses Hall (W10105) stated improbably that Lee formed two lines with Pyle in between: “Colonel Lee and his Light Horse marching in one column or line, and Major or Colonel Dixon’s [Joseph Dickson’s] command in another, some interval apart, the Tories passed into this interval, between our lines, or perhaps which is the fact the Tories having halted our lines passed one on each side of them.”

⁷¹ Thomas Boyd S17286.

⁷² Graham to Murphey, December 20, 1827.

⁷³ Daniel Murphy email to Harris, February 16, 2026.

⁷⁴ Lee, *Memoirs*, 258.

⁷⁵ Graham, “Narrative,” 273-274.

⁷⁶ Manual McConnell S2773; Moses Hall W10105.

⁷⁷ Graham, “Narrative,” 274.

⁷⁸ Graham, “Narrative,” 274.

a great slaughter was made of the Tories whilst they were crying out that they were friends of King George.”⁷⁹ Others cried out “God save the King.”⁸⁰ Also heard from the Americans was the cry “remember Bluford” and the order to “give them Bluford’s play,” urging Lee’s men to slay even those who were surrendering, as Tarleton’s men had done to Buford’s at the Battle of Waxhaws.⁸¹

“Finding their professions of loyalty and all they could say were of no avail, and only the signal for their destruction, twelve or fifteen of those whom Lee’s men had gone through and who had thrown down their guns, now determining to sell their lives as dearly as possible, jumped to their arms, and began to fire in every direction, making the Cavalry give back a little. But as soon as their guns were empty, they were charged upon on every side, by more than could get at them, and cut down in a group together.”⁸² “All the harm done by their fire was that a dragoon’s horse was shot down. Falling very suddenly, and not moving afterwards the rider’s leg was caught under him, and by all his efforts, he could not extricate himself, until the action began to slacken; when two of his comrades dismounted and rolled the horse off him.”⁸³ This soldier may have been Col. William Moore of the Caswell County militia, who had his knee broken when his horse fell but was rescued with the help of Capt. Dudley Reynolds.⁸⁴

Pickens’s riflemen were probably not engaged at first because Lee’s cavalymen were in the way, but Pickens reported to Greene that “unfortunately the Dragoons got separated from us and our Militia could not be kept from firing.”⁸⁵ It is not clear why Pickens thought this was unfortunate, unless in the confusion they fired on their own men. According to Graham, however, no such mistakes occurred.

*Lee’s men had so recently come to the south that they did not understand the usual marks of distinction, between Whig and Tory, and after the first onset, when all became mixed, they inquired of each man, before they attacked him to whom he belonged. The enemy readily answered—“To King George.” To many of their own militia, they put the same question. Fortunately no mistakes occurred, though in some instances there was great danger of them.*⁸⁶

Also in danger were some Whig prisoners taken earlier by Pyle. “The prisoners & Tories being all in the same company the slaughter was indiscriminate. Several of the prisoners were killed.”⁸⁷ Some were rescued by Lee’s men, but not before at least one was wounded.⁸⁸

Decades later Thomas Lofton recalled that he “never before witnessed the works of death carried to such an extent in so short a time as was here; Pyles with his Tories being all either killed or wounded in about 10 minutes.”⁸⁹ Lee reported to Greene that “in ten minutes the whole body of the enemy were routed, the greatest part of them were left on the field dead & wounded.” Lee mistakenly added that “among the former were Col Piles & several other officers,” but in his *Memoirs* he corrected himself: “Pyle, falling under many wounds, was left on the field, as dying, and yet he survived.”⁹⁰ The killing did not immediately cease. After the majority of

⁷⁹ Thomas Boyd S17286.

⁸⁰ Robert Luckey S38157.

⁸¹ Moses Hall W10105; Samuel Eakin S3317.

⁸² Graham, “Narrative,” 274.

⁸³ Graham, “Narrative,” 274.

⁸⁴ William Moore S183; Thomas Miles R7168.

⁸⁵ Pickens to Greene, February 26, 1781, PNG 7:355.

⁸⁶ Graham, “Narrative,” 274-275.

⁸⁷ Philip Higdon S10839.

⁸⁸ Thomas Barnett S8041; Solomon Geren W80.

⁸⁹ Thomas Lofton S17114.

⁹⁰ Lee, *Memoirs*, 258. Thomas Boyd (S17286) also erroneously stated that “Col Pyles was killed on the spot.” Boyd, like several other applicants mistook Lt. Col. William Washington for Lee and stated that “Washington, himself cut out the eye of Pyles,” and that “a son of his who lost his eye in that surprise is now living in Illinois where I saw him a few years since.” Col. Pyle and his son, Capt. John Pyle, Jr., in fact remained in the area after the war, as shown by court records. Bright and Dunaway, *Pyle’s Defeat*, 149; Troxler and Vincent, *Shuttle & Plow*, 129. Pyle lived until 1804.

Pyle's men had been killed or wounded, Lee's Legion infantry and the Catawba Indians under Capt. Samuel Boykin arrived, and "to our disgrace it may be stated when the Indians came up they were suffered to kill 7 or 8 of the wounded with spears before they were made desist."⁹¹ According to William McDonald, "Serjeant Whelan & thirteen Indians being with us... dispatched them almost as fast as the Dragoons cut them down from their Horses."⁹² Lee stated in his *Memoirs* that "The conflict was quickly decided, and bloody on one side only. Ninety of the royalists were killed."⁹³ Graham stated that "the next day our militia counted ninety-three dead, and there was the appearance of many more being carried off by their friends."⁹⁴ Pension applicants estimated the total number of killed and wounded as between 200 and 400,⁹⁵ and Charles Stedman gave the number killed as 200 to 300.⁹⁶

Some of Pyle's men were able to escape either to Tarleton or elsewhere, and some were uninjured enough to be taken away as prisoners. One pension applicant estimated that the number of prisoners was thirty, and another estimated a hundred.⁹⁷ Fifty-four years later, Moses Hall was still haunted by what happened to some of the prisoners.

*The evening after our Battle with the Tories we having a considerable number of prisoners I recollect a scene which made a lasting impression upon my mind. I was invi [sic: invited?] by some of my comrades to go and see some of the prisoners. We went to where six were standing together. Some discussion taking place, I heard some of our men cry out "remember Bluford" and the prisoners were immediately hewed to pieces with broad swords. At first I bore the scene without any emotion, but, upon a moments reflection I felt such horror as I never did before nor have since, and returning to my quarters and throwing myself upon my blanket I contemplated the cruelties of war until overcome and unmanned by a distressing gloom.*⁹⁸

After what Lee referred to as "the discomfiture of Pyle," his troops were scattered and disorganized, and there was concern that Tarleton had heard the shooting and would descend upon them.⁹⁹ According to Graham, while reorganizing his troops, Lee ordered a sergeant to bring him a prisoner for questioning. "The Serjeant stayed but a short time until he returned with a midle aged man," either John Holt or Michael Holt, who had received a slight wound on the head and was bleeding freely. The sergeant apologised to his Col. because he could find none who were not wounded."

*Lee asked him several questions relative to the roads, farms, water courses, etc: how O'Neals plantation (where Tarlton then was) was situated: whether open woods hilly or level, etc... After answering the several questions, and after an interval of about a minute while Lee appeared to be meditating, the man addressed him, "Well, God bless your soul, Mr. Tarlton you have this day killed a parcel of as good subjects, as ever his Majesty had." Lee, who at this time was not in the humor for quizzing, interrupted him saying: "You d—d rascal if you call me Tarlton I will take off your head."*¹⁰⁰

Leaving the dead and dying on the battlefield, Lee and Pickens arrived at O'Neal's as the sun was setting and found that Tarleton had decamped in a hurry to a site 3 miles to the east on the main road to Hillsborough. Tarleton had received an express from Cornwallis ordering him to return to Hillsborough, and he had also received

⁹¹ Graham, "Narrative," 275.

⁹² William McDonald (W6806) in the bounty-land application of Robert Kirkwood BLWt1102-300.

⁹³ Lee, *Memoirs*, 258.

⁹⁴ Graham, "Narrative," 273.

⁹⁵ David Cockerham S17304; Samuel Eakin S3317; William Falls S6834; Moses Hall W10105; Manual McConnell S2773; Thomas McIntosh S1563.

⁹⁶ Stedman, *History*, 333-334.

⁹⁷ David Cockerham S17304; Samuel Eakin S3317. William Rutledge (S4171), however, stated that they "took no prisoners."

⁹⁸ Moses Hall W10105. Not all the prisoners were killed. As noted previously, Michael Holt and John Holt were eventually released in an exchange for William O'Neal.

⁹⁹ Lee, *Memoirs*, 259; Graham, "Narrative," 275.

¹⁰⁰ Graham, "Narrative," 275-276. Graham stated that this Holt lived "lived near that place," which makes it likely that he was John Holt, if the location of John Holt's as given by Troxler is correct.

information of the approach of Col. William Preston's Montgomery County militia.¹⁰¹ Reinforced by Preston's "three hundred hardy mountaineers,"¹⁰² Lee and Pickens considered continuing the pursuit with their now overwhelming force, but they decided instead to let their men rest for a few hours. Lee wrote to Greene at midnight, optimistic that on the next day he would at last corner Tarleton. "It is highly probable that in the course of tomorrow events very important may result." Before dawn Lee took out after Tarleton. As they came to his abandoned camp Moses Hall had a second shock that numbed somewhat the effect of the first one.

*Commencing our march next morning before day by moon light I came to Tarleton's Camp which he had just abandoned leaving lively rail fires. Being on the left of the road as we marched along I discovered lying upon the ground something like the appearance of a man. Upon approaching him he proved to be a youth about sixteen who having come up to view the British through curiosity for fear he might give information to our camps they had run him through with a bayonet & left him for dead, though able to speak he was mortally wounded. The sight of this unoffending boy butchered rather than be encumbered in the least on the march, as I assume, released me of my distress and feelings for the slaughter of the Tories and I desired nothing so much as the opportunity of participating in their destruction.*¹⁰³

Lee with his infantry led the way, following Tarleton's trail by the light of pine-knot torches, with Capt. Edward Oldham's Marylanders and Pickens's militia on his right and Preston on the left. Tarleton had at first marched eastward toward Trollinger's Ferry, making frequent diversions to throw Lee off the trail, and finally he turned southward to cross the Haw River at the ford that he and Lee had crossed before. Lee was within two miles of the ford at first light, and as the sun rose, he sent his cavalry and Pickens's mounted riflemen ahead to hold Tarleton until the infantrymen could catch up. Before sunrise Lee came up with Tarleton's rear guard descending the hill to the river, which most of Tarleton's men had just forded. With Tarleton's main force on the opposite bank of the river, Lee and Pickens decided it was too dangerous to attack. They considered going back to Trollinger's to cross and attack from the north, but they decided against it with Cornwallis's army so near at Hillsborough. They reluctantly gave up the pursuit of Tarleton and went to a nearby plantation to refresh themselves and the horses.¹⁰⁴

Was It a Massacre?

Not surprisingly, the British characterized Lee's defeat of Col. John Pyle as a massacre. An officer who survived the defeat wrote, "our friends mistook the rebels for the legion, and by that means fell an easy prey to the enemy, who massacred many of them in a most barbarous manner."¹⁰⁵ Charles Stedman, who served with Tarleton and may have heard first-hand accounts, wrote as follows:

*The loyalists, unfortunately mistaking the American cavalry for Tarleton's dragoons, allowed themselves to be surrounded before they discovered their error. When at last it became manifest, they called out for quarter; but no quarter was granted; and between two and three hundred of them were inhumanly butchered, while in the act of begging for mercy. Humanity shudders at the recital of so foul a massacre.*¹⁰⁶

Lee's soldiers gave Pyle's Defeat the grimly whimsical epithet "the hacking match," which suggests that they considered their actions out of the ordinary.¹⁰⁷ Lee, himself, apparently felt compelled to explain such a one-sided victory, essentially pleading self-defense: "In some parts of the line the cry of mercy was heard, coupled with assurance of being our best friends; but no expostulation could be admitted in a conjuncture so critical.

¹⁰¹ Tarleton, *History*, 239-240.

¹⁰² Lee, *Memoirs*, 260. Graham, "Narrative," 260; Pickens to Greene, February 26, 1781, *PNG* 7:358.

¹⁰³ Moses Hall W10105. Hall was mistaken in saying there was moon light. The waxing crescent moon would not have risen until after sunrise.

¹⁰⁴ Lee, *Memoirs*, 261-263. Pickens to Greene, February 26, 1781, *PNG*, 359. Graham ("Narrative," 276-277) stated that Lee did ford the river.

¹⁰⁵ An Officer, "Lord Cornwallis Defended," 239.

¹⁰⁶ Stedman, *History*, 333-334.

¹⁰⁷ Isaac Brewer R1185; Shadrick Elkins R3286; John Hughes R15282; George Oldham S21906.

Humanity even forbade it, as its first injunction is, to take care of your own safety, and our safety was not compatible with that of the supplicants, until disabled to offend.”¹⁰⁸

Most American historians now regard Pyle’s Defeat as a massacre,¹⁰⁹ but that is not as obvious as might appear. Using deception to surprise the enemy and kill as many of them as possible is not only condoned but encouraged, as long as the victims are armed and able to defend themselves. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary gives as the primary definition of massacre, “the act or an instance of killing a number of usually helpless or unresisting human beings under circumstances of atrocity or cruelty.” All battles are cruel, especially close combat with swords, so the criterion for determining whether Pyles Defeat was a massacre is whether a sufficient number were killed while they were helpless or unresisting. Lee stated that “only ninety of the loyalists were killed,”¹¹⁰ but that is certainly a sufficient number to qualify as a massacre. At what Americans generally call the Paoli Massacre, “only” 53 were bayoneted as they slept.¹¹¹

In any surprise attack the initial casualties will be unresisting, so at Pyles Defeat perhaps those slain in the first minute or so should not be considered victims of a massacre. The question then becomes how many unresisting Loyalists were killed after the initial surprise. Testimony indicates that many were unresisting while trying to convince their attackers that they were making a mistake, and they might reasonably be considered victims of a massacre. Added to that number would surely be those who were unresisting because they had grounded arms and were begging for quarter, as well as those who were helpless from having been wounded. From Graham’s narrative we know that the Catawba Indians “were suffered to kill 7 or 8 of the wounded with spears,” but we have no data on how many others were killed after being wounded or while trying to surrender. This lack of data contrasts with the Battle of Waxhaws, where a large proportion of pension applicants reported wounds by both swords and bayonets indicating attacks by Tarleton’s infantry on men who had already been struck down by cavalry, and wounds to arms and hands indicating they were attacked after dropping their guns to surrender.¹¹²

We can confidently say that at Pyles Defeat there were cries encouraging Lee’s men to avenge the massacre at Waxhaws, and the murder of prisoners after the fighting shows that some were inclined to commit atrocities. We can also say that after Lee’s bugler was killed he had set an example with his “sanguinary mandate, so contrary to the American character,” “to give no quarters.”¹¹³ We think it likely that enough unresisting men were killed to qualify Pyle’s Defeat as a massacre.

Even if Pyle’s Defeat was a massacre, “cold and unfeeling policy avows it as the most effectual means of intimidating the friends of royal government,” as Stedman stated.¹¹⁴ Lee also opined that Pyle’s Defeat “produced a very favorable result, by repressing thoroughly the loyal spirit just beginning to burst forth,” and Pickens stated that it had “knocked up Toryism altogether in this part.”¹¹⁵ As a result, Cornwallis did not get the outpouring of militia support he expected. Greene fought him to a draw at Guilford Courthouse and went on to liberate South Carolina, while Cornwallis went on to Yorktown. Without Pyle’s Defeat there might have been a different outcome.

APPENDIX

¹⁰⁸ Lee, *Memoirs*, 258.

¹⁰⁹ O’Kelley, *Nothing But Blood and Slaughter*, 3:96-99; Jim Piecuch, “‘Light Horse Harry’ Lee and Pyle’s Massacre,” *Journal of the American Revolution* (June 19, 2013), <https://allthingsliberty.com/2013/06/light-horse-harry-lee-and-pyles-massacre/>; Jim Piecuch and John Beakes, *“Light Horse Harry” Lee in the War for Independence* (Charleston SC: Nautical and Aviation Publishing Co. of America, 2013), 106-121..

¹¹⁰ Lee, *Memoirs*, 259.

¹¹¹ Mark M. Boatner, *Encyclopedia of the American Revolution* (Mechanicsburg PA: Stackpole Books, 1994), 334.

¹¹² C. Leon Harris, “Massacre at Waxhaws: The Wounds Bear Witness” (*academia.edu*, 2024).
https://www.academia.edu/118018911/Massacre_at_Waxhaws_the_Wounds_Bear_Witness

¹¹³ Lee, *Memoirs*, 241.

¹¹⁴ Stedman, *History*, 334.

¹¹⁵ Lee, *Memoirs*, 263; Pickens to Greene, February 26, 1781, *PNG* 7:358.

Officers named in pension applications and other primary sources as being at Pyle's Defeat. Others not named may also have been present.¹¹⁶

Lt. Col. Henry Lee

Lee's Legion Cavalry

Maj. Joseph Eggleston

Maj. Michael Rudolph

Lee's Legion Infantry

Capt. Edward Oldham of Maryland with Catawba Indians

Gen. Andrew Pickens, North Carolina Militia

Acting as cavalry

Capt. Joseph Graham (from Mecklenburg County)

Infantry

Caswell County: Col. William Moore, wounded in action

Capt. Thomas Alexander

Capt. William Douglas

Capt. David Grisham

Capt. Herndon Haralson

Capt. Arthur Loving

Capt. John McClary

Capt. George Moore

Capt. George Oldham

Capt. John Oldham

Capt. Dudley Reynolds

Chatham County

Capt. Nicholas Nall

Lincoln County: Maj. Joseph Dickson

Capt. Samuel Caldwell

Capt. Thomas Lofton

Mecklenburg County

Capt. James Reese

Orange County

Capt. James Lansdale

Capt. Archibald Lytle

Capt. William Rogers

Rowan County: Lt. Col. David Caldwell

Maj. Thomas McGuire

Capt. Hugh Hall

Capt. Samuel Reid

Capt. Richard Simmons

Surry County

Capt. Jesse Franklin

Capt. William Lenoir

Capt. Salathiel Martin

¹¹⁶ Compare the order of battle by O'Kelley, *Nothing but Blood and Slaughter* 3: 96-97 and J. D. Lewis, *carolana.com*, https://www.carolana.com/NC/Revolution/revolution_battle_of_haw_river.html.

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Jeffery Kline (left), C. Leon Harris (right)

About the Authors

C. Leon Harris earned a BS in physics from Virginia Tech and graduate degrees in biophysics from Penn State. He taught biology, wrote textbooks, and conducted neurobiology research at the State University of New York, Plattsburgh, for more than three decades. After retiring to Mount Pleasant, SC, and Adamant, VT, he was inspired by the late Charles B. Baxley to research the Revolutionary War in the South. He is a frequent contributor to *The Journal* and has helped Will Graves transcribe more than thirty thousand Revolutionary War pension and bounty-land applications, rosters, and other documents on revwarapps.org.

Jeffrey Kline is a retired pediatric gastroenterologist, hepatologist, and nutritionist who lives in Jacksonboro with his wife, Susan, five dogs, seven chickens, and seven ducks on 13 acres bordering Hope Plantation, dating to the 1700s. Jeff has studied Pyle's Defeat for more than 8 years. He is also researching the nearby battle of Parker's Ferry and the location of several hundred acres given to Gen. Nathanael Greene to protect Jacksonboro, the provisional capital of South Carolina in 1782. Greene's wife, Caty Greene, was a half-sister to one of his relatives.



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LIGHT HORSE HARRY LEE'S HACKING MATCH

Crossword Answer Key

Completed grid and numbered answers

						1R	A	C	E	2P	A	T	H					
										Y								
										L						3W		
						4P	I	5C	K	E	N	S				A		
								A								X		
			6D	E	C	7E	P	T	I	O	N		8D			H		
						G		A				9G	R	A	H	A	M	
						G		W			10C		A			W		
			11H	I	L	L	S	B	O	R	O	U	G	H		S		
12H		13L				E		A			R		O		14A			
15O	N	E	A	L		S					N		O		L			
L		G				T					W		N		A			
T		I				O					A		S		M			
	16L	O	S	S	I	N	G				L				A			
		N							17T	A	R	L	E	T	O	N		
												I				C		
									18M	A	S	S	A	C	R	E		

ACROSS

1. RACEPATH
4. PICKENS
6. DECEPTION
9. GRAHAM
11. HILLSBOROUGH
15. ONEAL
16. LOSSING
17. TARLETON
18. MASSACRE

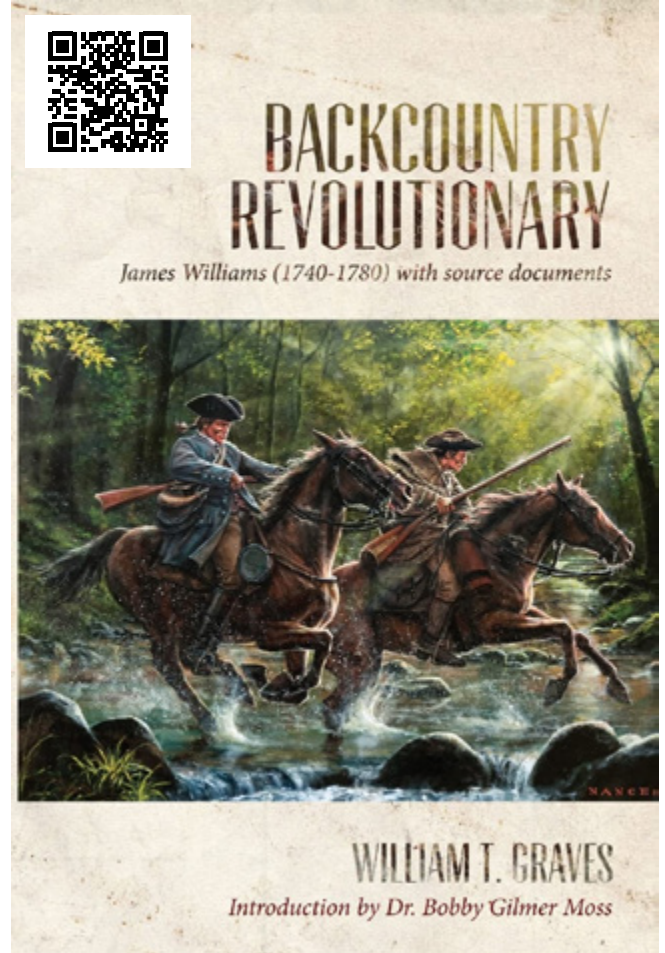
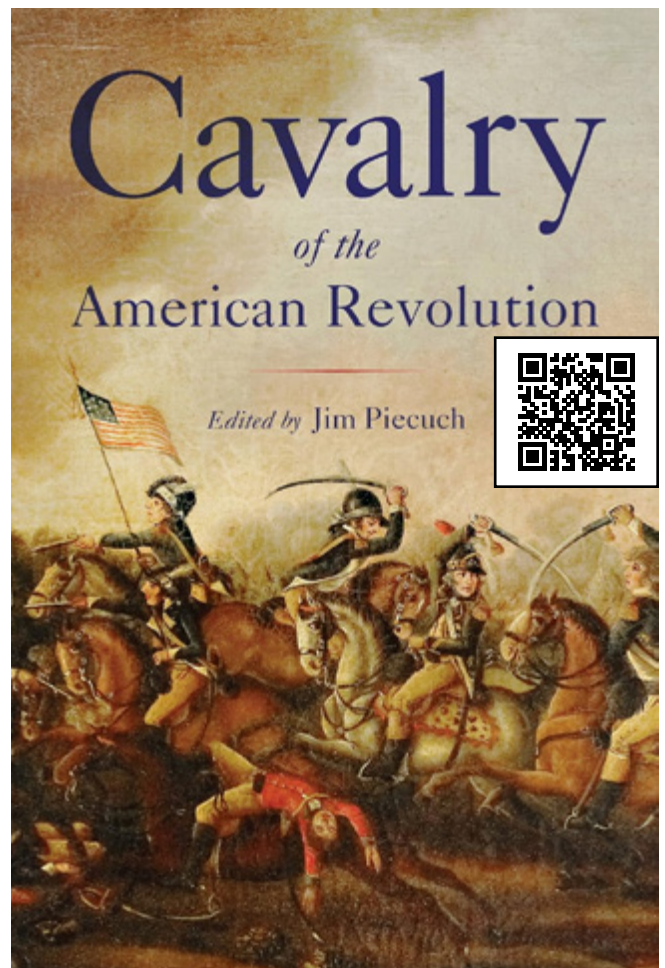
DOWN

2. PYLE
3. WAXHAWS
5. CATAWBA
7. EGGLESTON
8. DRAGOONS
10. CORNWALLIS
12. HOLT
13. LEGION
14. ALAMANCE

Answer key for the crossword based on the Pyle's Defeat article.



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