



South Carolina
Revolutionary Era Biographies

James McCall

by
Wayne Lynch

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American Revolution

JAMES MCCALL

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In the spring of 1780, the American Revolution raged in the southern theater. British troops came close to controlling all of Georgia and South Carolina. The last organized regiment of Continentals was defeated, and all seemed lost. But a small group of resolute individuals committed to the cause continued to resist. Though few and little known, these men organized themselves and faced the British occupation. Without their efforts, the American Revolution may have come to a very different conclusion. Among the most active and successful of these partisans was James McCall.

This publication is a reintroduction of James McCall to the American public. His role in the American Revolution has been almost forgotten by popular history for the past 200 years. Beginning with a brief family background, the article attempts to trace McCall from early in the revolution to his death prior to the ultimate victory. Major sources for the article include the *History of Georgia*, which was written by his son, Hugh McCall. Much of what we know comes from Hugh, although there are also strong tidbits from various pension applications later written by veterans of his company, regiment, or horse troop.

Before the Revolution

Not surprisingly, James M. McCall Jr. was the son of James Mitchell McCall Sr. James Sr. was born in Ireland around 1721. His father (Joshua “John” McCall) died before James Sr. was born, and his mother (Julianna Truby) died shortly after his birth. At that time, he had four older siblings: a five-year-old girl named Elizabeth and three brothers named Francis, Thomas, and William. At 11 years old, Francis was the oldest.¹

Francis McCall turned 21 in 1730 and joined the wave of Scotch-Irish immigrants to the colonies. He brought the younger siblings along and settled along the Conococheague Creek in western Pennsylvania. Francis got married within a year or two, but Elizabeth remained single until much later. Perhaps she was busy with the younger boys. On the other hand, James Sr. married Jane Harris

¹ See the family history of Joshua “John” McCall in “Joshua John McCall,” Ancestry.com, accessed June 2023, <https://www.ancestry.com/family-tree/person/tree/17118594/person/19691619716/facts>. See also the foreword, written by Otis Ashmore of Savannah, to the 1909 reprint edition of Hugh McCall, *The History of Georgia: Containing Brief Sketches of the Most Remarkable Events, Up to the Present Day* (1811 and 1816; reprint, Atlanta: A. B. Caldwell, 1909) [hereinafter McCall, *History of Georgia* (1909 reprint edition)], v–viii. Ashmore quotes a “sketch of the McCall Family” written in 1829 by Thomas McCall, a son of James McCall and the brother of Georgia’s Hugh McCall (the state’s first historian). Thomas McCall settled in Laurens County, Georgia, in 1818.

in 1738 at Lancaster while quite young. He was only 17 at the time, but she was a year older. The first of nine children, James Jr., was born three years later in 1741.²

As the McCall family grew, more land was needed. Sometime before 1746, the brothers all moved down the Shenandoah Valley to the New River Settlement in Botetourt County, Virginia. James Sr. brought his five children and made his home along Reed Creek.³ Unfortunately, the French and Indian War exposed the community to raids and caused many of the Scotch Irish population to move further south. James McCall Sr. took his even larger family further south to Mecklenburg County, North Carolina. In 1766, he served in Captain Adam Alexander's militia company and later, according to the DAR, "served as a soldier" in the American Revolution.⁴ James Sr. resided at Mint Hill (a few miles east of Charlotte) until his death in 1794.

James McCall Jr. came to North Carolina as a teenager, at about age 14. He finished growing up during the French and Indian War, and was about 20 years old when the first Cherokee War broke out. There is no known record of his service at that time, but James must have learned his fighting skills somewhere because he was a respected captain of militia by the time of the Revolution. In 1763, James married Elizabeth McCall, who was the daughter of Thomas McCall. She was actually a second cousin to James.⁵ The couple started having children right away, with Thomas born in 1764 and Hugh in 1767. Thomas saw action in the Revolution, and both boys served in the War of 1812. Hugh went on to write the earliest history of Georgia, which is a major source of information for this publication.

In 1771, James and Elizabeth gathered their four children—two boys and two girls—and moved further south to the Long Cane District of South Carolina.

Campaign Against the Tories

The spring of 1775 brought more political upheaval to the southern colonies. In May, the news from Lexington and Concord reached South Carolina. The Provincial Congress met a month later and created two regiments of infantry and one of cavalry. They also appointed a 13-member Council of Safety that would assume all the executive power of the colony. Of course their authority covered all state militia and military affairs,

"And to them was delegated the authority of granting commissions, suspending officers,

2 McCall, *History of Georgia* (1909 reprint edition), v–vi.

3 Lewis Preston Summers, *History of Southwest Virginia, 1746–1786, Washington County, 1777–1870* (1903; reprint, Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1995), 49.

4 Ron Crawley, "Military Exploits of James McCall," *South Carolina History Net*, 2008, <https://www.schistory.net/3CLD/Articles/exploits.html>; Ron Crawley, "James McCall, Sr. and Sons in the American Revolution," *South Carolina History Net*, 2008, <https://www.schistory.net/3CLD/Articles/mccall%20family.html>. See also Ettie Tidwell McCall, *McCall-Tidwell and Allied Families* (Atlanta: Ettie Tidwell McCall, 1931), 585–86, 591–94.

5 McCall, *History of Georgia* (1909 reprint edition), vi.

ordering courts-martial, directing, regulating, maintaining, and ordering the army, and all military establishments: and, of drawing on the Treasury, for all purposes of public service.”⁶

Prominent members of the Council of Safety included Henry Laurens, Arthur Middleton, Charles Pinckney, and the unbending William Henry Drayton.

In addition to creating the Council of Safety, the Provincial Congress passed Articles of Association that supported the Patriot cause and declared anyone refusing to sign was “inimical to the liberties of the colonies.”⁷ The public got its first taste of what it meant to be inimical on July 15, when the “Secret Committee” ordered a tarring and feathering for two Loyalists who dared to speak out against the Association.⁸ The same thing occurred in the backcountry, as Thomas Brown found himself permanently scarred by a mob in Augusta. Being declared inimical was serious business.

By late July, it became obvious that many of the people in the backcountry districts around Ninety Six would not be signing the Association without a more forceful approach. The various militia colonels had been instructed to have their regiments sign the Articles, but on July 24, 1775, Thomas Fletchall reported that “I don’t remember that one man offered to sign it, which was out of my power to compel them too; but that it was agreed” by the people to sign their own resolutions in support of the Crown. Furthermore, “I must inform you sir, I am resolved , and do utterly refuse to take up arms against my king.”⁹

In August, William Henry Drayton and Reverend William Tennent traveled to the backcountry to explain the disputes between Britain and the Colonies and “to endeavor to settle all political disputes between the people—to quiet their minds, and to enforce the necessity of a general union, in order to preserve themselves and their children from slavery.”¹⁰ In order to attain those goals, particularly where they might need to “enforce” the general union, Drayton was separately given authority to call out the militia regiments for support.¹¹

The first stop for the Drayton/Tennent Commission was the Congaree Store in the district referred to as the Dutch Forks. The people there were mostly German, and “not one German appeared, but one or two of our friends” who organized the meeting.¹² The Commissioners responded by calling a muster of the local militia regiments with threats that if any officers dared to “disobey, they should

6 John Drayton, *Memoirs of the American Revolution: From Its Commencement to the Year 1776*, 2 vols. (Charleston: A. E. Miller, 1821), 1:255.

7 Drayton, *Memoirs of the American Revolution*, 1:254.

8 The “Secret Committee” was a very private committee of five men that included William Henry Drayton and Charles Pinckney. They dealt with the ugly and confidential side of running a revolution.

9 “Thomas Fletchall to President of Council of Safety,” July 24, 1775, R. W. Gibbes, *Documentary History of the American Revolution: 1764–1776* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1855), 123.

10 “South Carolina: In the Council of Safety. July 23d 1775,” Drayton, *Memoirs of the American Revolution*, 351.

11 “South Carolina: In the Council of Safety. July 23d 1775,” Drayton, *Memoirs of the American Revolution*, 1:352.

12 “From Drayton and Tennent” to the Council of Safety, August 7, 1775, Gibbes, *Documentary History of the American Revolution: 1764–1776*, 128.

be broken.” They also made it known that any person who refused to subscribe to the Association Articles was barred from trading at the Congarees Store or at Charlestown.¹³ The nonsubscribers would not be able to export their grain.

In spite of Drayton’s heavy tactics, only a few people signed the agreements. The militia preferred to disband, and local Loyalist leaders like John Adam Summers and Evan McLaurin convinced the people not to sign the Association. After a frustrating week in the Dutch Fork, the Commission split up with Drayton moving on to the district above the Lower Enoree River, to a spot along King’s Creek. This area was home to a number of influential loyalists, including the Cunningham brothers, Robert and Patrick.

Drayton spoke to the local residents on the 15th of August and was “received with apparent satisfaction.” Unfortunately, once again, local Loyalist leaders showed up and put a stop to anyone signing the Association. This time it was Cunningham¹⁴ and Thomas Brown of Augusta who showed up with an address received from Lord William Campbell, the new governor of South Carolina.¹⁵

While Drayton tried to reason with the Loyalists, Rev. Tennent traveled to the Scotch-Irish settlements above Camden between the Broad and Catawba Rivers. The people there were friendly to the cause, and Tennent quickly organized a Ranger troop from the militia regiment that would ride south and support Drayton in the clashes with Loyalist leaders. Once that task was complete, Tennent moved all the way across the backcountry to the Long Cane District, where more Scotch-Irish settlements existed, to include men sympathetic to liberty like Major Terry, Captain Andrew Pickens, and, of course, Captain James McCall.¹⁶

While Drayton raised an army to support his mission, the Loyalist leaders proceeded with a similar plan. Moses Kirkland tried to organize a large following between Ninety Six and Augusta. He reported as many as 5,000 Loyalists ready to fight but no powder or ammunition available to arm them.¹⁷ As a result, Kirkland’s men disbanded while he ran off to seek support from the British. Drayton now joined Major Williamson in a march across the backcountry that was intended as a show of force.

Once the regiment stopped at Abbeville Court House, they looked onward toward Ninety Six. There were no major battles fought on the march, but a few minor skirmishes may have flared up here and there. One of McCall’s troopers reported that, “During the time of service they had several attacks by

¹³ Drayton, *Memoirs of the American Revolution*, 1:326.

¹⁴ This was probably Patrick Cunningham, but could also be Robert. Both were influential Loyalist leaders in the district.

¹⁵ Drayton, *Memoirs of the American Revolution*, 1:365–67.

¹⁶ Drayton, *Memoirs of the American Revolution*, 1:385.

¹⁷ Mary Bondurant Warren, *British Georgia Loyalists’ Claims* (Athens, GA: Heritage Papers, 2014), 845.

the Tories under the command of a Robert Cunningham.”¹⁸

Upon his arrival at Ninety Six, Drayton ordered fortifications built around the jail and added two swivel guns for artillery. The display of force proved too much for Thomas Fletchall, who came in for a meeting only to get drunk and sign off on a treaty agreeing to be “bound, neither by word or action, to censure or oppose proceedings of Congress, &c.” His actions infuriated most of the other Tories, including the Cunningham brothers, Patrick and Robert.¹⁹

After signing the treaty with Fletchall, Drayton returned to Charleston but left Major Andrew Williamson in control of the garrison at Ninety Six. Captain McCall led the largest company in the command with some 54 men.²⁰ Their conflict with the local Loyalists continued with scattered skirmishes, and Williamson eventually found himself outnumbered and under siege at Ninety Six.

The Loyalist army took control of the jail and settlement while Williamson and the much smaller Patriot force holed up in makeshift fortifications called Fort Williamson. They now had three mounted swivel guns and 523 men facing off against over 1,500 Loyalists.²¹

The siege lasted three days. Loyalist attacks were driven off with fire from the swivel guns. At one point, with his forces cut off from water supplies, Williamson ordered the digging of a well to resupply the fort. On Tuesday afternoon, Loyalist commanders Joseph Robinson and Patrick Cunningham, sent word to Williamson for a meeting the following morning. Their timing could not have been better for the Patriots caught in their fort. Supplies of powder were running low, and Williamson had decided to devise a last-ditch plan to break out of the siege. There would be an attack by three columns, one of which would be led by James McCall.

As things played out the next morning, there was no need for the attack. Williamson worked out an arrangement with the Loyalists to cease hostilities for a 20-day period so that each side could receive instructions from Charleston. According to Major James Mayson, the Patriots killed “at least twenty-seven men, and have as many wounded” in the fighting around Ninety Six. They lost only one man, James Birmingham, thought to be the first southern Patriot to die in the revolution, and 11 Patriots were wounded.²²

18 David Kerr, “Pension Application of David Kerr R5890,” transcribed by Will Graves, Southern Campaigns American Revolution Pension Statements and Rosters, <https://www.revwarapps.org/r5890.pdf>.

19 “Mr. Drayton to the Council of Safety,” September 17, 1775, Gibbes, *Documentary History of the American Revolution: 1764–1776*, 187–89.

20 Andrew Williamson, “A Report of the Militia and Volunteers on Duty in the Fortified Camp at Ninety-Six on Sunday the Nineteenth November, 1775, Under the Command of Major Andrew Williamson, by Order of the Honorable the Provincial Congress,” Gibbes, *Documentary History of the American Revolution: 1764–1776*, 221.

21 “Maj. Williamson to Mr. Drayton, Giving an Account of the Siege, Action, and Treaty at Ninety-Six,” November 25, 1775, Gibbes, *Documentary History of the American Revolution: 1764–1776*, 216–19.

22 “Major Mayson to Col. Thomson,” November 24, 1775, Gibbes, *Documentary History of the American Revolution, 1764–1776*, 215–16. See also Patrick O’Kelley, *Nothing but Blood and Slaughter: The Revolutionary War in the Carolinas, Volume One, 1771–1779* (Trenton, GA: Booklocker.com, 2004), 63.

With the ceasefire in place and Williamson's garrison no longer in danger, Drayton and the Council of Safety sent a large militia force into the district. They ignored the Treaty of Ninety Six and the terms of the ceasefire by immediately arresting the Loyalist leadership. Thomas Fletchall was caught hiding near Fair Forest Creek but Patrick Cunningham escaped into the swamps. By January 1776, 132 Loyalist prisoners had been marched to Charleston.²³

James McCall and the Cherokee Campaign

In June 1776, the backcountry teemed with rumors of Indian trouble. A year had passed since the Patriots in Savannah reviewed the papers of British Indian agent John Stuart. They discovered correspondence with Alexander Cameron that tended to confirm stories of British plots to use the Cherokee against the frontier settlements. Upon that discovery, Cameron had fled into Cherokee Country and refused to come back. Now a British fleet menaced Charleston (until 1783, spelled "Charlestown" or "Charles Town") and the continuing threat of a Cherokee uprising became of immediate concern. The Council of Safety sent instructions to Major Williamson of the Ninety Six District to take action.

Williamson chose James McCall for a secret mission. Williamson publicly instructed McCall to lead a 33-man expedition into the Lower Villages of the Cherokee for the purpose of negotiating the return of property taken in recent raids. With that known, Williamson also gave McCall a sealed packet of orders to be opened after the expedition crossed into Cherokee Country.

McCall crossed the Savannah at Cherokee Ford on June 20 to begin marching into the villages. Cane Creek marked the beginning of Cherokee Country, and McCall broke the seal on his orders. They were looking for Alexander Cameron and, if located, should attempt to capture him for a mandatory return to South Carolina.²⁴ The men were unanimously determined to push forward without a single voice of dissent.

23 "Mr. [Richard] Richardson to the Council of Safety," January 2, 1776, Gibbes, *Documentary History of the American Revolution: 1764–1776*, 249, containing a list of prisoners sent to Charleston, including Fletchall, Benjamin Wofford, Richard Pearis, Mathew Floyd, William Hunt, George Zuber, and Jacob Fry. Several of those arrested were identified as Scopolite captains. See "Prisoners Sent to Charles Town by Col. Richardson," Gibbes, *Documentary History of the American Revolution: 1764–1776*, 249–53.

24 Charles Holland, "Pension Application of Charles Holland S7027," transcribed and annotated by Will Graves, *Southern Campaigns American Revolution Pension Statements and Rosters*, <https://revwarapps.org/s7027.pdf>. Holland confirms that "Captain McCall & a part of his company, including this relator, were detailed to go into the Indian Nation in the Northern part of the State of Georgia, after some Tories who had retreated there, when the Indians made an attack upon said detachment, killed several men & wounded several others, and took Captain McCall & another prisoners."

Alexander Cameron²⁵

A native of Scotland, Alexander Cameron immigrated to Georgia with James Oglethorpe in 1738. Cameron was a private in the 42nd Regiment of Highlanders and served until the unit disbanded in 1749. At that point, Cameron wished to remain in the military and volunteered for service in a volunteer company in South Carolina, receiving an ensign's commission in February 1761. After three years, part of which was spent commanding at Fort Prince George during the Cherokee War, Cameron moved to civil service under the new British Superintendent of Indian Affairs for the Southern District of North America, John Stuart. Stuart endorsed his new deputy, writing that "This Gentleman was some years upon Command at Fort Prince George where he acquired considerable influence among the Indians. . . . I confide much in his discretion and abilities."²⁶ Over the next several years, Cameron negotiated a number of small cessions of land from the Cherokee including his own 2,000-acre plantation called Lochaber. Cameron married a Cherokee woman named Molly and became accepted into Cherokee life. Chief Ouconnostotah explained about the 2,000 acres: "He [Cameron] has lived among us as a beloved man. He has done us justice. He has told us the truth. We all love and regard him, and hope he will not be taken from us. When a good man comes amongst us we are sorry to part with him."²⁷

Over the next several years, Cameron settled into family life in the backcountry. He was well-respected and, even though "agreeable and liberal," Cameron sometimes displayed a dry sense of humor. He liked to socialize with friends Andrew Williamson and John Lewis Gervais and is known, in 1774, to have gotten intoxicated to the point of signing a document demanding that Parliament not tax or bind the colonists in any way. Cameron explained to his superior that, after sharing a hundred bottles of port with fellow grand jurors, he could neither remember debating the bill nor signing it. It has been said that by the time of the Revolution, Alexander Cameron was more Cherokee than white man.

Over the next several days, McCall's party traveled to a number of Cherokee villages. At each stop, McCall met local leaders and attempted to negotiate the return of property previously taken in raids. McCall continuously expressed his peaceful intentions and encouraged the tribal leaders to

25 The material on Alexander Cameron in the paragraphs below comes from John L. Nichols, "Alexander Cameron, British Agent among the Cherokee, 1764–1781," *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 97, no. 2 (April 1996): 94–114.

26 John Stuart to Thomas Gage, April 11, 1764, Thomas Gage Papers, American Series, Vol. 17, William L. Clements Library, Ann Arbor, MI, quoted in Nichols, "Alexander Cameron," 96.

27 Ouconnostotah to John Stuart, October 13–17, 1769, CO 1435, Colonial Office, National Archives, Kew, UK, quoted in Nichols, "Alexander Cameron," 100.

reciprocate his goodwill gestures. Everything progressed smoothly until the party reached the larger Cherokee town of Seneca on June 26. Unknown to Captain McCall, a militant faction of Cherokees under Dragging Canoe, son of Attakullakulla, angered by land encroachment and bad treatment from the colonists, were already set to attack the frontier from Georgia to Virginia in just four days. Stuart and Cameron had been working to prevent the Cherokee from taking action at this time.

Before moving into Seneca, McCall located a suitable camp outside the town and instructed his men to get set up. At that point, “Indians came out to meet them, spoke friendly to them, and invited the captain, lieutenant, and another man, to sup with them.”²⁸ There was no indication of ill feeling, and McCall joined the chiefs and old men at a meeting that lasted deep into the night.

Everything seemed to go smoothly, and McCall felt at ease, when suddenly a large number of warriors rushed into the circle. McCall quickly found himself a prisoner.

Back at camp, the lack of activity caused some of the men to turn in for the evening. As a result, when the Indians attacked the sentries and drove them into the camp, most of the men were already sleeping. Hugh McCall described what happened next:

“The Indians rushed into the camp with guns, knives, and hatchets, and for a few minutes the contest was of the most sanguinary kind. So closely were they engaged, that James Little of Georgia killed two Indians with his knife. Ensign Calhoun was wounded in the first onset, and the detachment overpowered by numbers, with the disadvantage of surprise, fled in disorder, cutting their way through the ranks of the enemy.”²⁹

The lieutenant in charge and three other men were killed, but the remainder straggled back to the settlements about two weeks later.

On the night of June 30, 1776, all hell broke loose along the southern frontier. Across northwest Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, and some western counties in Virginia, small parties of Indians “fell upon single families at a fixed period. They murdered the weak and helpless, and made prisoners of a few” who could make the quick march back to their villages. It was time for the wheat harvest, and the Indians opened all the fences, allowing cattle and hogs free access to destroy the crops. While the people watched helplessly from their small forts and stockades, “the promising appearances of a plentiful harvest, exhibited a mass of desolation and destruction.”³⁰

28 “Francis Salvador to Hon. Chief Justice [William Henry] Drayton,” July 18, 1776, R. W. Gibbes, *Documentary History of the American Revolution: 1776–1782* (New York: D. Appleton, 1857), 26.

29 Hugh McCall, *The History of Georgia: Containing Brief Sketches of the Most Remarkable Events, Up to the Present Day*, 2 vols. (Savannah: Seymour & Williams, 1811; William T. Williams, 1816), 2:79, notes that the detachment broke into three- or four-man groups and made their way back to the settlements, arriving around July 10.

30 McCall, *History of Georgia*, 2:82.

While confusion and panic ruled the frontier, McCall remained a captive. The Cherokee kept him in an Overhill village deep in the heart of the mountains. He remained there for several weeks while the Indians continued to debate his ultimate fate. McCall witnessed a number of executions among the other captives and recalled that the Indians seemed to enjoy putting him in great mental distress. On a number of occasions, they held meetings for the purpose of deciding his fate, making McCall alternate between pleading for his life and reminding the Indians that he was a protected emissary who would probably be needed in future negotiations.

McCall once described the torture of a young boy. Warriors suspended the lad between two poles while they tossed burning darts into his body. Whenever a dart stuck in the boy's flesh without extinguishing its fire, the audience would whoop and cheer. The scene continued for some two hours before the boy finally died.

During his time with the Cherokee, McCall made several attempts to contact or meet with Alexander Cameron. He used a sympathetic Indian woman as a messenger but Cameron steadfastly refused to meet with McCall or even communicate in any way. Cameron's refusal led to later speculation that his old friend, Andrew Williamson, had tipped off the Loyalists to prevent his capture. The speculation took on an even nastier tone several years later, when Williamson gave parole and returned his loyalty to the Crown.³¹

By September, McCall noticed his guards becoming distracted, and he found opportunity to escape. As it turned out, the same Cherokee woman who tried to help him meet Cameron now provided a horse and a few ears of corn. Riding without a saddle, McCall managed to travel 300 miles through a "mountainous desert" in only nine days.³²

Captain McCall met up with a column of men from Virginia under the command of Colonel William Christian. He soon learned the reason his guards became distracted was that a three-pronged invasion of Cherokee Country had been mounted for the purpose of punishing them for the frontier raids. Strong columns of men from South Carolina under Williamson and North Carolina under General Griffith Rutherford had already swept away Cameron's resistance and decimated the Lower and Middle villages. Only the Overhill villages remained untouched by the retribution and Colonel Christian was leading his men toward that very goal.

McCall's first act upon meeting with Christian was to send word to his family. He posted an item in the Virginia Gazette on November 1, 1776: "Capt. James M'Call, of South-Carolina, who was taken prisoner the 1st of July last by the Cherokees, was then with col. Christian in his camp, in good

³¹ McCall, *History of Georgia*, 2:81.

³² McCall, *History of Georgia*, 2:81.

health; and desires this piece of intelligence to be made publick, for the satisfaction of his family.”³³

McCall remained frustrated at having failed to catch Alexander Cameron and approached Colonel Christian with an idea. McCall wanted to select a “few expert, active woodsmen, to proceed a few days march in front of the enemy.” Still hoping to catch the elusive British Indian agent, “McCall with four others, painted, and in Indian dress, entered the town in which Cameron resided, in the dusk of the evening, two days march in front of the army.” Unfortunately, what they discovered was that Cameron had already “taken his departure for Mobile the preceding morning.”³⁴

Even though his attempt to catch Cameron was a failure, Captain McCall stayed with Christian for the duration of the campaign. When they reached the village of Chote, McCall recognized the hut of the woman who helped him escape. She saved his life, and McCall returned the favor by seeing that her home was spared from the general destruction of the village.³⁵

Kettle Creek

After the Cherokee Campaign, it appears that McCall returned home and lived quietly for the next two years. If he was with Williamson as a participant in the abortive East Florida invasion in the summer of 1778, a careful search reveals that neither primary nor secondary sources make any mention of it. McCall is not listed as a participant at Alligator Creek Bridge, for example. In any case, from late 1776 to late 1778, McCall does not appear to have seen combat.

After the British captured Savannah in late 1778, their commander, Lieutenant Colonel Archibald Campbell, organized a large column to march on Augusta. A major purpose of the expedition was to assess Loyalist sentiment in the backcountry. The British were taking their first steps toward implementation of the Southern Strategy, and much depended upon their ability to organize loyalist support. Toward that goal, Loyalist colonel James Boyd had gone ahead to recruit in North and South Carolina.³⁶ He now marched for a rendezvous with Campbell at Augusta.

As Boyd moved across South Carolina’s backcountry, he took a route to the northwest because Andrew Williamson had his militia brigade stationed across the Savannah River from Augusta. The more westerly route meant crossing at the Cherokee Ford and then turning southeast to

33 “WILLIAMSBURG, November 1,” *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie), November 1, 1776, *Virginia Gazettes*, Rockefeller Library, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, VA, https://research.colonialwilliamsburg.org/CWDLImages/VA_GAZET/Images/P/1776/0236hi.jpg.

34 McCall, *History of Georgia*, 2:82.

35 McCall, *History of Georgia*, 2:83.

36 Archibald Campbell, *Journal of an Expedition Against the Rebels of Georgia in North America Under the Orders of Archibald Campbell, Esquire, Lieut. Colol. of His Majesty’s 71st Regimt., 1778*, edited by Colin Campbell (Darien, GA: Ashantilly, 1981), 57–58, cited in O’Kelley, *Nothing but Blood and Slaughter . . .*, Volume One, 1771–1779, 422, notes that “Col Boyd was a Gentleman who came as a Volunteer with me from New York; and who on account of his influence among the Back Woods men of North and South Carolina was dispatched to these Districts on my taking the town of Savannah.”

join Campbell at Augusta. The route also meant passing dangerously close to the Patriot militia regiments commanded by Andrew Pickens, Elijah Clarke, and John Dooly. Furthermore, Boyd was unaware that Campbell was in the process of evacuating Augusta.

Patriot scouts had already alerted the trio of militia leaders, and they made immediate preparations to cut Boyd's loyalists off from their planned rendezvous. The first skirmish happened at a river crossing about five miles upriver from Cherokee Ford. In that engagement, Captain Robert Anderson's troop of 80 men met Boyd as the Loyalists swam their horses across the river. With over 800 men of his own, Boyd crossed the river into Georgia, but it cost him about 100 men, most of whom simply went home.

Now in Georgia, Boyd turned southeast toward Augusta. After proceeding a few miles into the Ceded Lands, Boyd camped near Kettle Creek.

The Patriot army under Pickens, Dooly, and Clarke marched across the Ceded Lands from Carr's Fort on a direct line to Kettle Creek. Pickens sent McCall forward to scout the enemy's position. According to Hugh McCall,

“Captain McCall had been ordered in front to examine the enemy's situation and condition, and to report it; he reported the situation of the encampment, the nature of the adjacent ground, and that the enemy were apparently, unsuspecting of danger; having passed the flank within musket shot, in full view. Satisfied upon these points, the Americans advanced to the attack.”³⁷

Once the Patriots discovered Boyd was unprepared, they immediately advanced to attack. Trying to respond, Boyd assembled his men behind a fence and some downed timber with their backs to the creek. Pickens attacked straight on, with Dooly on the right and Elijah Clarke on the left. Captain McCall's company formed the advance guard of Pickens's regiment. The Loyalists held on for a short time, but then Col. Boyd was struck by two musket balls. Hit in the thigh and torso, Boyd ordered a general retreat.

While the fighting was going on, Clarke noticed high ground across the creek and behind Boyd's men. He fought his way through a cane brake and reached the position before the Loyalists could retreat, effectively cutting off their escape.

With Boyd mortally wounded on the field and Patriot forces moving into position behind them, the Loyalists made a brief attempt against Clarke, but it soon fell apart. At that point, Boyd's men fled in all directions. They had 70 men killed and another 150 taken prisoner. About 210 men simply

³⁷ McCall, *History of Georgia*, 2:199

went home in the confusion. Within a month, over 70 of the prisoners were tried for treason, and 5 of them were hanged. As always, the Loyalist newspapers looked to the bright side by noting that “about 300 of the remainder . . . found means to make their way good in a body to the . . . nearest British posts.”³⁸

Even though some 300 of Boyd’s men eventually joined with the British column retreating from Augusta, the battle at Kettle Creek was a horrendous loss for the Loyalists. Historian David Ramsay concluded that Kettle Creek

“damped the spirit of the tories. Their plans were ill laid, and worse executed. They had no men of ability capable of giving union to their force. They were disappointed in their expectations of aid from the royal army, and had the mortification to see a few of their ringleaders executed for treason and rebellion against the State.”³⁹

The Rising

Once Archibald Campbell’s column retreated from Augusta, the backcountry enjoyed a year free from direct attack. The British controlled the area around Savannah up to Ebenezer, while Patriot forces watched from the South Carolina side of the Savannah River. In the fall of 1779, French forces under Count d’Estaing came to Georgia by ship and, with Gen. Benjamin Lincoln’s Continental and militia troops, laid siege to the British at Savannah. Unfortunately, that venture ended in disaster, and by the end of the year, the British were ready to make their push into Georgia and South Carolina.

In January 1780, Sir Henry Clinton brought his army south from New York for an assault on Charleston. As the battle developed, Major General Lincoln, who commanded the Patriot forces, chose not to retreat out of the city, and the defenders found themselves under siege by 11,000 British troops. By March, the situation had become serious and backcountry militia regiments were called out to assist.

Unfortunately for the Continental troops caught in Charleston, the backcountry militia regiments proved hesitant to answer the call. Militia regiments often did not perform well outside their home districts, and, to make the situation worse, a smallpox outbreak was reported. Most of the regiments assembled but, for one reason or another, never marched south to Charleston.

In the Ninety Six District, Andrew Williamson was now a brigadier general in command of regiments all around the area. In March of 1780 he “gave orders to Colonel Pickens to turn out and March With two divisions of militia to its [Charleston’s] relief, the Colonel finding the militia backward in turning

38 The Annual Register . . . 1780 (London: J. Dodsley, 1781), 179–80.

39 David Ramsay, *Ramsay’s History of South Carolina, from Its First Settlement in 1670 to the Year 1808* (Newberry, SC: W. J. Duffie, 1809), 170.

Out called on Captain James McCall to raise a Company of Volunteers” to ride to Charleston.⁴⁰

McCall mustered his company at White Hall (Williamson’s residence) but, by the time they finally started for Charleston, the “City had been surrendered to the enemy” on May 12, 1780.

McCall and his men returned to White Hall to wait for further orders. The backcountry was in a state of turmoil for several weeks before the British columns made their way to the Ninety Six District. During that time, McCall and his company “remained at this place [White Hall] to Guard the Stores until the enemy had taken possession of the surrounding Settlement.”⁴¹

While waiting on the British army, debate raged about whether to surrender or continue the fight. General Williamson “remained in his camp, apparently undetermined as to future operations, until the British detachments had marched to the frontier.”⁴² At that point, he “called his officers together, and after expressing an opinion that further resistance would be vain and ineffectual, recommended to them to return to their homes, accept the proffered protection, and yield obedience to the British government.”⁴³

Colonel Pickens and the men from Long Canes were not in Williamson’s initial meeting to determine whether to accept parole. After that decision was made, Williamson rode to Pickens’s camp. Then,

“General Williamson had a short consultation with Colonel Pickens—his troops were drawn up in a square, all mounted—the general addressed them in spirited terms, stating that with his command alone, he could drive all the British force then in their district before him, without difficulty, and then caused the convention of Charleston to be read to them.”⁴⁴

After hearing the terms taken in Charleston and realizing they stood nearly alone and without a safe avenue of retreat, most of the men ignored Williamson’s pleas and voted for capitulation. Only “Captain McCall and Captain McLidle, with three or four privates, held up their hands; all else stood as they were.”⁴⁵

40 James McCleskey, “Pension Application of James McCleskey S16475,” transcribed by Nancy Lindroth, Southern Campaigns American Revolution Pension Statements and Rosters, <https://revwarapps.org/s16475.pdf>.

41 McCleskey, “Pension Application of James McCleskey S16475,” transcribed by Nancy Lindroth. See also John Harris, “Pension Application of John Harris S2180,” transcribed and annotated by C. Leon Harris, Southern Campaigns American Revolution Pension Statements and Rosters, <https://revwarapps.org/s21808.pdf>, who indicated they remained at “Abbeville Court House to guard the public Arms. This time of service was at least one month & I believe much longer.”

42 McCall, *History of Georgia*, 2:305.

43 McCall, *History of Georgia*, 2:305. At that point in time, Williamson and Pickens gave parole. The record is unclear as to how strongly either of them advocated accepting parole. Williamson never returned to the cause and was ostracized as the “Benedict Arnold of the South.” Hugh McCall believes Williamson was already aligned with the British and ready to accept a colonel’s commission. It is possible Williamson simply retired from fighting and then felt honor-bound not to return to the field. There are references in Cornwallis’s papers to unsuccessful attempts to recruit Williamson for a Loyalist regiment. After the war, Nathanael Greene vouched for Williamson as having assisted him with information about British troop movements in Charleston.

44 Samuel Hammond, “Colonel Samuel Hammond’s Notes,” Joseph Johnson, *Traditions and Reminiscences, Chiefly of the American Revolution in the South* (Charleston, SC: Walker & James, 1851), 151.

45 Hammond, “Colonel Samuel Hammond’s Notes,” Johnson, *Traditions and Reminiscences*, 152.

After watching the vote go for surrender, Pickens gave in to the majority of his officers and accepted parole. One pensioner later recalled that Pickens “did everything he could to [rally the] men but found it was out of his power. It was at last concluded to [ground] their arms to the Tories, which was done but there was a Capt. James McCall” who refused to submit and “took the wilderness betwixt the whites & Indians.”⁴⁶

McCall’s refusal to surrender must have been inspiring since several pensioners mention the event in their application narratives. Even so, the majority of men from the Ninety Six District felt “all hope of the state lost” and followed Williamson and the other officers.⁴⁷ They left McCall’s original volunteer company with only 25 men. Being so small, the company “marched through the Indian Lands to North Carolina” and joined some groups from Georgia under command of Elijah Clarke. At that point, “each had a company of what was called Refugees.”⁴⁸

Musgrove’s Mill

The union of Clarke and McCall proved fortunate for the Patriot cause. Elijah Clarke proved himself a dynamic leader immediately in a small battle at Wofford’s Iron Works. On the evening of August 10, Loyalist forces under Captain James Dunlap attacked Clarke’s camp only to find themselves caught in a carefully laid ambush. There was a brief but fierce fight in which Clarke received two saber wounds and found himself captured by two Loyalists. Never one to give in easily, Clarke summoned the strength to knock both men down and escape. His wounds proved relatively minor, but Clarke’s position as commander of the Refugees stood on solid ground. McCall and his company remained with Clarke throughout the crucial fall campaigns of 1780.

By mid-August, the Continental Army had returned to South Carolina, bringing great hope for defeating the British in open battle. On the 16th, that dream shattered with Gates’s defeat at Camden. Things got even worse two days later at Fishing Creek, when Colonel Thomas Sumter suffered humiliation at the hands of Lieutenant Colonel Banastre Tarleton’s dragoons. However, not all was lost in those twin disasters. In the backcountry of the Ninety Six District, Colonel Alexander Innes and his South Carolina Royalists were about to run up against Elijah Clarke and James McCall with their Refugees. This time, the Patriots had help.

While the Continentals had moved toward Camden, two groups of volunteer militia had joined

46 Alexander Young, “Pension Application of Alexander Young S35755,” transcribed by Will Graves, Southern Campaigns American Revolution Pension Statements and Rosters, <https://revwarapps.org/s35755.pdf>.

47 Kerr, “Pension Application of David Kerr R5890,” transcribed by Will Graves.

48 A number of pension applications report service with McCall after Charleston: James McCleskey (S16475); Alexander Young (S35755); William Liddell (W3835); Charles Holland (S7027), who remembered McCall’s company had 40 men; and David Kerr (R5890), who said the number of men in the original company was 26. The transcribed pension statements of each of these men can be found in Southern Campaigns American Revolution Pension Statements and Rosters, <https://revwarapps.org>, and are cited in the bibliography.

Clarke and McCall. First, before the Fishing Creek rout, Colonels James Williams and Thomas Brandon chose to leave Sumter's force and join the Refugees in the Ninety Six District, which was their home. Second, Clarke also had the good fortune to join with Colonel Isaac Shelby, who was leading a regiment of Overmountain Men from Watauga (present-day East Tennessee). This combined force meant that Clarke enjoyed "numbers to an equality with" Innes.⁴⁹

Clarke once again used classic frontier tactics. He marched to a plantation about four miles from Musgrove's Mill, where he found favorable ground.

"He advanced with one hundred men; himself on the right, and major McCall on the left; forming in the edge of the thick wood across the road, and extending his flanks near the fence. Williams and Brandon were ordered to form close in the rear of the flanks, and Shelby to cover the centre, as a reserve corps, and to throw his force wherever circumstances might require."⁵⁰

With the lines in place, Clarke sent Captain Shadrick Inman with 16 men to ride out and expose themselves to the British before riding back to the Patriot lines. The ruse worked, as Innes grabbed the bait with both hands. "The enemy were drawn out. They came flushed with the hope of an easy victory, in full trot," wrote Samuel Hammond.⁵¹

Once drawn into the ambush area, Innes brought his men to a point 150 yards from the Patriot lines, at which time "they displayed and gave us a fire, which was not returned but from our flanking parties." Innes drew the wrong conclusion and advanced his men forward to a point "within forty yards, when the signal was given, and their ranks thinned" by a withering fire from the Overmountain Men and Refugees in the center of the Patriot line.⁵²

The British troops fell back momentarily but were able to reform before a second fire, and then they started to advance again. "On the second fire, they fell back in confusion," Hammond reported. "The fire then became brisk, and was kept up on our side. The Tories saw the regulars fall back in disorder, and they also gave ground in confusion, and in fact without any thing like pressure on our part."⁵³

At that point in the battle, Williams and Brandon "advanced and formed upon the right and left, and Shelby to the support of the centre, and the contest became close and sanguinary." The Patriot fire quickly unnerved the Loyalist militia causing confusion among their ranks. Soon the Tory militia

49 McCall, *History of Georgia*, 2:315–17, including the battle of Musgrove's Mill.

50 McCall, *History of Georgia*, 2:315–16.

51 Samuel Hammond, "Colonel Samuel Hammond's Account of the Battle of Musgrove's Mill on the Enoree, 19th August, 1780," in Johnson, *Traditions and Reminiscences*, 519–22.

52 Hammond, "Colonel Samuel Hammond's Account of the Battle of Musgrove's Mill," in Johnson, *Traditions and Reminiscences*, 520.

53 Hammond, "Colonel Samuel Hammond's Account of the Battle of Musgrove's Mill," in Johnson, *Traditions and Reminiscences*, 521.

were “flying from the field in the utmost disorder.”⁵⁴

“Our troops [Patriots], encouraged by this disorder, rushed on with more boldness than prudence. The mounted riflemen on both flanks charged into the ranks of the retreating foe, and they fled and re-crossed the river,” Hammond recalled.⁵⁵

Innes and the regulars continued their attempts to reform, but “in this confused state, exposed to a galling fire from the American Riflemen, they remained but a few minutes before seven British officers out of nine, were either killed or wounded; and the men tumbled down in heaps, without the power of resistance.” Innes was among the wounded.⁵⁶ His second-in-command ordered a retreat, and retreated over four miles with Patriots nipping at their heels.

During the battle at Musgrove’s Mill, the British had 63 killed and 160 wounded and captured. Patriot losses were 4 killed and 9 wounded, but the real impact was even greater than the disparity of casualties. At the same time Cornwallis declared it “impossible there can be any enemy openly in arms near the frontier after the total rout of Gates and Sumpter,”⁵⁷ one of his highest-ranking Loyalist officers lay badly wounded with his regiment in tatters. As if that wasn’t bad enough, the Patriot victory, according to Samuel Hammond, “did much good in the general depression of that period. Our numbers continued to increase from that time, and all seemed to have more confidence in themselves.”⁵⁸

Move on Augusta

Immediately following the victory at Musgrove’s Mill, word arrived on the scene that both Gates and Sumter had been defeated. The Patriots held a quick conference in which it was decided to secure the prisoners and beat a hasty retreat. The Refugees made for their regular camp near Wofford’s Iron Works while the other participants marched for North Carolina.

Major Patrick Ferguson was the British Inspector of Militia in South Carolina. Knowing that his newly formed militia performed so miserably in the battle, Ferguson was both embarrassed and frustrated. He arrived on the field only a short time after the battle and faced the unhappy task of reporting the failure while Cornwallis celebrated the twin victories over Gates and Sumter.

Ferguson responded to his discipline problems with some additional rules meant to strengthen

54 McCall, *History of Georgia*, 2:316.

55 Hammond, “Colonel Samuel Hammond’s Account of the Battle of Musgrove’s Mill,” in Johnson, *Traditions and Reminiscences*, 521.

56 McCall, *History of Georgia*, 2:316.

57 Charles Cornwallis to John Harris Cruger, August 24, 1780, Charles Cornwallis, *The Cornwallis Papers: The Campaigns of 1780 and 1781 in the Southern Theatre of the American Revolutionary War* [hereinafter cited as *Cornwallis Papers*], edited by Ian Saberton, 6 vols. (East Sussex: Naval & Military Press, Ltd., 2010), 2:169.

58 Hammond, “Colonel Samuel Hammond’s Account of the Battle of Musgrove’s Mill,” in Johnson, *Traditions and Reminiscences*, 522.

bonds and impose stronger discipline on the backcountry men. He circulated additional resolutions requiring all men turn out for militia duty in the new Loyalist regiments. One of Ferguson's Resolutions stated that "every man who does not assemble when required in defence of his country . . . exposes his comrades to unnecessary danger, abandons the loyal cause, and acts a treacherous part to the society in which he lives."⁵⁹

At the same time he required militia service as a requirement to avoid being plundered, Ferguson also gave some of his local militia commanders authority to deny militia service to prior rebels they felt might cause trouble. His instructions were to deny militia service to "those men who have taken an active and willing part with the rebels."⁶⁰ The ability to deny service also came with the authority to inventory property and seize it for use by the army or to satisfy claims from Loyalists who had been previously plundered. The colonels could even arrest anyone who may have been "particularly cruel and tyrannical."⁶¹

Across the backcountry, conversation turned to Ferguson's new resolutions. When Charlestown fell, the rebels were granted parole and promised to remain quiet in their homes. A month later, as Clinton felt confident in his conquest of South Carolina, everyone except the military men captured at Charles Town had been released from those paroles. The Patriots had understood from these earlier proclamations of Henry Clinton that they could return to their civilian status, and that included militia duty. Now, Cornwallis and his Inspector of Militia had granted authority to their hated rivals to deny militia service, have them arrested, and have their property taken. It was, after all, "the duty of every officer of militia" to "procure satisfaction to the Loyalists from those who have injured them in person or property."⁶²

As if the militia resolutions weren't cause enough for a return to the cause, over at Augusta, Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Brown commanded the provincial troops in addition to his status as British Indian Agent to the Creeks and Cherokees. A particularly bitter man,⁶³ Brown quickly acted on authority granted by Lord Cornwallis and hanged five men. Elijah Clarke and James McCall were infuriated but also saw opportunity. They set their eyes on Augusta.⁶⁴

Clarke and McCall believed the new resolutions and subsequent crackdown on Whigs at Augusta would "rouse the resentment and bring into the field all those" interested in the American cause.

59 "Resolutions of certain royal militia regiments," August 13, 1780, Cornwallis Papers, 2:143.

60 Patrick Ferguson, "Directions and arrangements for forming the Royal Militia," undated document included with letter of July 11, 1780, Cornwallis Papers, 1:288.

61 Ferguson, "Directions and arrangements for forming the Royal Militia," Cornwallis Papers, 1:289.

62 Patrick Ferguson to the officers commanding militia regiments, Cornwallis Papers, 1:298.

63 Brown had been tarred and feathered in 1775, an incident that earned him the nickname "Burntfoot Brown."

64 McCall, *History of Georgia*, 2:320–21.

They decided to split up for a week or more to try and raise 1,000 men for an attempt at Augusta. McCall had just received a commission as a lieutenant colonel after reports of the victory at Musgrove's Mill reached Governor John Rutledge.⁶⁵

As things turned out, neither man was able to raise his quota. When the two men joined back at Soap Creek, Clarke had raised about 350 men, but McCall did even worse. He met with Andrew Pickens, but all of McCall's arguments fell flat. Pickens felt "the stipulations in their protections had not yet been violated, and they considered themselves bound, by conscience and honor, not to break their engagement until an infringement was made upon its conditions." As a result, "instead of five hundred men, which had been confidently calculated upon from Carolina, McCall's persuasions could only induce 80 to accompany him on the expedition." Discouraged but not deterred, the two commanders saw something close to 450 men and decided it was "too late to relinquish a project which he [Clarke] so anxiously wished to accomplish." Regardless of the odds, their attack on Augusta would move forward.⁶⁶

While they brought the combined Refugee force toward Augusta, Clarke divided the men into three divisions for the approach to town. They managed to approach "unobserved and found them [British] unprepared for an attack." McCall's command approached Augusta on the right flank, which meant circling around to come from the south.⁶⁷

Clarke and McCall struck the town of Augusta without warning and "took possession of the forts without resistance. Seventy prisoners, and all the Indian presents, were put under charge of a guard and Clarke marched" to the north end of town to see what happened to the third column under Clarke's second-in-command, Major Samuel Taylor.⁶⁸

While Clarke and McCall achieved surprise and had an easy time, Major Taylor had not been so lucky. It turned out that the Creek and Cherokee warriors were in town to collect their supplies and camped on the north side of town. As Taylor approached, they spotted him and began "a desultory fire" as they retreated toward a fort/trading post a mile north of Augusta called the White House. Taylor pressed hard to reach the White House, but a company of the King's Rangers got there first and helped the Indians hold the Refugees at the White House.⁶⁹

By the time all the Loyalists rushed in, the White House held close to 250 soldiers, and there was no room for the Indians. They "took shelter under the banks [of the Savannah River], which furnished

65 McCall, *History of Georgia*, 2:320; Harris, "Pension Application of John Harris S2180," transcribed and annotated by C. Leon Harris.

66 McCall, *History of Georgia*, 2:320–22.

67 McCall, *History of Georgia*, 2:322.

68 McCall, *History of Georgia*, 2:322.

69 McCall, *History of Georgia*, 2:322.

them with a good breast work; while they were secured by the thick wood between the bank and the waters edge.” Clarke tried an immediate assault when he came up from taking the forts in Augusta. A direct attack failed, so he moved some men into a string of small houses on the east side of the White House. Unfortunately, the houses were flimsy and provided little cover from the Indian positions firing from the riverbank. At that point, “a desultory fire was continued from eleven o’clock until night, but it was found that the enemy could not be dislodged without artillery.”⁷⁰ Both sides prepared for a siege.

Brown and his Loyalists worked on their defenses deep into the night. They filled crevices in the walls with dirt “to make it proof against musketry” and boarded up the windows. Floorboards were removed, and loopholes were cut to be able to fire through. In short, the defense was “rendered as formidable as the materials at command would admit.”⁷¹

To his credit, Clarke also tried to cover up his weaknesses. On the morning of September 15, the Patriots brought two captured cannons to bear on White Hall. They now had four- and six-pound artillery pieces at their disposal. Unfortunately, the carriages were fixed for duty on the wall rather than in the field. To make the problem even worse, Captain William Martin was the only man with any artillery experience, and the Loyalists killed him soon after the pieces were set. Patriot rifle fire continued throughout the day, but “without much prospect of compelling the enemy either to abandon the house or surrender.”⁷²

A reinforcement of fifty Cherokee Indians crossed the river late that night to reinforce Brown but he was unable to take any advantage of the situation. When morning came on the 16th, Clarke and McCall drove the Indians from their positions on the riverbank, thereby cutting the Loyalists in White Hall off from their water source. Brown had neglected to stock enough water to make it through the day, and the September sun quickly heated up. A number of wounded men, including Lieutenant Colonel Brown lay around the house suffering for lack of water. They “were often heard calling for water and medical aid.” To make things even more unbearable, the unburied dead men and horses began to stink so badly that it was assumed that “the nauseous smell of animal putrefication” would soon cause Brown to surrender.⁷³

Despite the water shortages, the Loyalists in White Hall managed to hold out through the afternoon and night until morning on September 17. At that time, Clarke and McCall got word of British troops marching hard for Augusta to relieve Brown. Unfortunately, the Refugees were not known for their

70 McCall, *History of Georgia*, 2:323.

71 McCall, *History of Georgia*, 2:323.

72 McCall, *History of Georgia*, 2:324.

73 McCall, *History of Georgia*, 2:324.

discipline, and many of the men had slipped away to visit family and friends in the area. They were loaded with Indian supplies captured in Augusta and wanted to secure and share their newfound wealth. Clarke was left without sufficient manpower to stand up to a large column of British soldiers.

By the time Lieutenant Colonel John Harris Cruger's column arrived from Ninety Six on the 18th, Clarke and McCall had abandoned Augusta, leaving some 29 wounded men at the mercy of the enemy. It turned out to be a death sentence for them all. Writing a few years after the war, Hugh McCall described their fate:

“Captain Asby, an officer noted for his bravery and humanity . . . fell into the hands of the enemy and was disposed of, under the sanguinary order of Lord Cornwallis, in the following manner: Captain Asby and twelve of the wounded prisoners, were hanged on the staircase of the White House, where Brown was lying wounded, so that he might have the satisfaction of seeing the victims of his vengeance expire.”

The other prisoners were “delivered to the Indians to glut their vengeance for the loss they had sustained in the action and siege.”⁷⁴

To be fair, the British accounts only admit to hanging one man on the initial relief of Brown, and, as to the Indians, Cruger admitted they took a few scalps but claimed it was during the fighting near the riverbank where they were sheltered.⁷⁵ Another Loyalist letter of September 22, 1780, found in Savannah, confirmed the one hanging but promised “several more are in a fair way of being executed. This mode of treating them is absolutely required by every consideration of sound policy and justice.”⁷⁶ According to accounts from both sides, there would be more hangings and retribution.

The Exodus

When Clarke and McCall retreated from Augusta, they moved north into the Ceded Lands (Wilkes County) where most of the Georgia Refugees came from. They were followed by a British column led by Cruger and supported by loyal militia units under the command of Colonel James Grierson, a prominent Loyalist from Augusta who commanded the new local militia. Cruger found the

74 McCall, *History of Georgia*, 2:326.

75 John Harris Cruger to Charles Cornwallis, September 19, 1780, *Cornwallis Papers*, 2:190.

76 “Extract of a letter from Savannah, dated 22d September [1780],” *South Carolina & American General Gazette*, September 27, 1780, quoted in Mary Bondurant Warren, *Georgia Governor and Council Journals 1780: Civil War in the Ceded Lands* (Athens, GA: Heritage Papers, 2009), 256–57. The same Loyalist newspaper of September 27, 1780, ran an “account of the defeat of the rebels at Augusta.” It included the news that a “final resolution was adopted of immediately executing all those who in contempt of the laws of war, and such obligations as mankind has ever held sacred, shall be found to have violated their paroles.” *South Carolina & American General Gazette*, September 27, 1780, Warren, *Georgia Governor and Council Journals* 1780, 256.

“inhabitants of the country on both sides of the river, being yet amazingly disaffect’d” and saw the necessity of marching “through Long Canes to the Ceded Lands” to punish the Whigs.⁷⁷

And punish the Whigs they did. “The country was searched, and those whose relations were engaged in the American cause, were arrested and crowded into prisons: others who were suspected of having intercourse with any of Clarke’s command, were hanged without the forms of trial,” according to Hugh McCall. Old men were taken as hostages to be held in Augusta to insure good behavior from the Whigs. James Alexander, a 79-year-old man, was arrested by Colonel Grierson, chained to a cart, and marched 42 miles in two days before being held in “close confinement.”⁷⁸

Brown’s Indian allies had also taken casualties at Augusta and felt the need for further vengeance. Not satisfied by the murder of wounded prisoners given to them after the battle, “a body of Tories and Indians followed us into the upper settlements of Georgia,” Colonel Elijah Clarke wrote in a letter to Colonel Arthur Campbell,

“and finding us out of their reach, fell upon our sick and wounded, together with old men, women and children of the families of those that adhered to, or retreated with me; also several Tory families, I suppose through mistake of the Indians, were all murdered in the most cruel manner, women and children stripped, scalped, and suffered to welter in their gore unassisted, until they expired with hunger and pain; lads obliged to dance naked between two large fires until they were scorched to death; men tripped, dismembered, and scalped, afterwards hung up.”⁷⁹

In his report to London, Lord Cornwallis failed to mention the episodes of torture but did acknowledge that “the Indians pursued and scalped several of them.”⁸⁰

Blame started to fall on Elijah Clarke and James McCall. The pair stood accused of lying to their followers by “giving a high colouring to prospects” of victory and enticing unsuspecting people from their ‘peaceful abodes’ without any concern for their wellbeing. In short, critics felt the expedition was “an ill-timed and a premature insurrection.”⁸¹

No doubt stinging from such chastisement, Clarke and McCall prepared to leave the Ceded Lands. While the rest of the men scattered to their homes to gather families and see to their safety, McCall

77 John Harris Cruger to Charles Cornwallis, September 19, 1780, Cornwallis Papers, 2:190.

78 McCall, *History of Georgia*, 2:329–30.

79 Elijah Clarke to Arthur Campbell, November 5, 1780, Warren, *Georgia Governor and Council Journals 1780*, 277.

80 Charles Cornwallis to Lord George Germain, September 23, 1780, Cornwallis Papers, 2:40.

81 McCall, *History of Georgia*, 2:331.

recovered from a wound received during the battle.⁸² The Refugees gathered late in September to begin their march. Disagreement between the South Carolina and Georgia Refugees led to a split between McCall and Clarke before they left. Clarke took the Georgia Refugees and their families to Watauga, but the South Carolina men preferred to remain in the field. “Being deserted by the Georgians, McCall retreated up the Saluda River [and] spent two weeks in the mountains on the border of North Carolina,” according to pensioner John Harris.⁸³

Fish Dam Ford and Blackstock’s Plantation

While Clarke and McCall retreated from the Ceded Lands, the landscape changed quite a bit. The Overmountain Men (with help from militia from the Carolinas) defeated Ferguson at King’s Mountain on October 7, and Loyalist militia regiments were collapsing in the backcountry. Good leadership had proven difficult to find for the Loyalist militia, and most of their respected officers were either dead or captured by the Patriots. Lord Cornwallis had no choice but to abandon his invasion of North Carolina and return to the south, where his dragoon officers took the field in an attempt to bring the partisans back under control.

Thomas Sumter returned to action in late October to rebuild his strength. Once his own regiment was up to about 400 men, he set up camp at the Fish Dam Ford on the Broad River and sent out messages for men to join him. Most of the Georgia men were already in camp when Lieutenant Colonel McCall arrived with his Long Cane refugees on the evening of November 8.⁸⁴

Aware of Sumter’s activities, Lord Cornwallis had dispatched Major James Wemyss with a column of 135 mounted infantry and 30 dragoons from the British Legion to “cross Broad River to protect the mills.”⁸⁵ A few days later, Wemyss got word of Sumter’s move to the Fish Dam Ford and marched directly for the Patriot camp.⁸⁶

As night came on November 8, McCall and several other officers “took the precaution to order his [their] men to sleep on their arms, and to keep up good fires during the night, and to sleep in the rear of their fires; and pointed out the ground on which they were to form, in case of attack.”⁸⁷ Well aware of the disaster at Fishing Creek back in August, the officers were determined not to be caught unprepared.

82 Lockridge, James. “Pension Application of James Lochridge (Lockridge) W472,” transcribed by Will Graves, Southern Campaigns American Revolution Pension Statements and Rosters, <https://revwarapps.org/w472.pdf>.

83 Harris, “Pension Application of John Harris S2180,” transcribed and annotated by C. Leon Harris.

84 Richard Winn, “General Richard Winn’s Notes—1780 SCX2,” transcribed by Will Graves, Southern Campaigns American Revolution Pension Statements and Rosters, <https://revwarapps.org/scx2.pdf>.

85 John Money to James Wemyss, November 1, 1780, Cornwallis Papers, 3:306.

86 Henry Stark to Charles Cornwallis, November 9, 1780, Cornwallis Papers, 3:307.

87 McCall, *History of Georgia*, 2:340.

At about one o'clock in the morning of November 9, Wemyss arrived outside of Sumter's camp. The guards were not caught sleeping and fired warning shots at the first approach of the British.⁸⁸ At the first shot, the dragoons "advanced in full charge into the camp. When the dragoons advanced to the fires, before [Richard] Winn's command, they came to a halt, and paused." The British could not see past the firelight, and as they adjusted to the brightness, Colonel Winn's men of Sumter's brigade "took a steady aim and fired; the dragoons" immediately turned and retreated. At that point, the infantry dismounted and began to advance toward the fires.⁸⁹

The British infantry had formed on low ground and, as they advanced into view from the campfires, found that Patriot defenders were now pouring a brisk fire into them from behind a fence. Colonels Winn, John Twiggs (of Georgia), and McCall had formed their men and held the line. The British returned fire and then "charged with the bayonet." The Patriots held fast and used the fence to their advantage. When the British infantry paused to cross over, "they received a close fire from the Americans, and commenced a retreat." The action only lasted 20 minutes before the British remounted and left in retreat. In the thick of the battle as usual, McCall's regiment suffered the only mortal wound: Captain Samuel Carr.⁹⁰

When daylight came, the Patriots found Major Wemyss lying in a nearby house after "having received two wounds, in his knee and arm." The fast-moving British column had no ambulance and left their commander on the field with 20 dead, a surgeon, and a flag of truce.⁹¹

After the victory at Fish Dam Ford, the now combined Georgia and South Carolina militia forces marched toward the Ninety Six District and took a new position at Blackstock's Plantation on the Tyger River. The Blackstock house was set just to the right side of the road leading to the river crossing a few hundred yards behind the house. The long and narrow house sat on elevated ground above the river but below some elevated hillsides along the other side of the road. General Sumter included McCall's regiment (now known also as the Long Canes regiment) in his personal command on some high ground in the center of the line, right across from Blackstock's house, with the road directly between. The Georgia men occupied the house and the low ground below it toward the river. For this battle, Colonel Twiggs had taken command of the Georgia militia since he outranked Elijah Clarke.

Naturally, Lord Cornwallis did not allow the disaster at Fish Dam Ford to go unanswered. He ordered Banastre Tarleton to break off from his chase of Francis Marion in the low country and bring the Legion dragoons to the backcountry against Sumter. Cornwallis told Tarleton that Sumter was on

88 Henry Stark to Charles Cornwallis, November 9, 1780, Cornwallis Papers, 3:307.

89 McCall, *History of Georgia*, 2:341.

90 McCall, *History of Georgia*, 2:341.

91 Henry Stark to Charles Cornwallis, November 9, 1780, Cornwallis Papers, 3:307.

the “Tyger River with what he calls a thousand men, bragging much of his victory. Our friends are all in the utmost terror and running down to the Congarees as fast as possible.”⁹²

As usual with Tarleton, he pushed his troops hard and arrived at Blackstock’s on the afternoon of November 21. Also in keeping with his regular battle plan, on arrival, Tarleton had his men attack immediately upon seeing Sumter’s positions. Unfortunately for Tarleton, the Patriots were well aware of his procedures and devised a plan to lure him into a trap.

Sumter’s plan at Blackstock’s was really just a variation of that same tried and true formula used on the frontier by and against Indians. Elijah Clarke and his Refugees (now known also as the Wilkes County Militia) moved forward in positions along a creek in the low areas below Blackstock’s house. Clarke had orders to bring on the attack, wear down the advance, and cause an assault against the higher ground where it would be met with greater firepower.

Tarleton fell right in line with Sumter’s plan, sending his 63rd Infantry Regiment against Clarke’s position in the low areas. The 63rd fought through the advanced positions but then floundered on open ground against the main line of Georgia militia positioned in and around Blackstock’s house.

Seeing his infantry in trouble, Tarleton ordered the Legion dragoons to charge down the road into Sumter’s center, which they did. The cavalry charge came straight at McCall’s regiment, under the direct control of Sumter. Consistent with frontier tactics, Sumter had chosen ground that forced Tarleton’s cavalry on a route that exposed them to fire from the flanks, which came from the South Carolina militia under Colonel Edward Lacey. Between Lacey’s rifle fire and McCall’s defense, the charge faltered and pulled up short. Not only had Tarleton’s legion dragoons been stopped, they “wheeled Right About” and raced from the field.⁹³ One of the Georgia officers, Major James Jackson, pursued Tarleton and captured over 30 horses.⁹⁴

After Tarleton retreated from the battlefield, the Patriot leaders decided to move across the river away from the British. General Sumter was badly wounded, and they believed Tarleton might return with reinforcements. Perhaps it was better not to tempt fate and enjoy the fruits of their victory. Sumter’s shoulder was operated on, and they carried him off to a safe haven for recovery.

In spite of his heavy losses, Tarleton tried to claim victory at Blackstock’s Plantation. Not only did he claim to have killed both Sumter and Clarke, but he also claimed to have “cut Sumter’s rear guard to pieces.” Tarleton’s immediate report to Cornwallis claimed that “Sumter is defeated, his corps dispersed, and himself dangerously wounded.” There was also bad news, as Tarleton went

92 Charles Cornwallis to Banastre Tarleton, November 13, 1780, Cornwallis Papers, 3:339.

93 Winn, “General Richard Winn’s Notes—1780 SCX2,” transcribed by Will Graves.

94 McCall, *History of Georgia*, 2:341.

on to admit having “lost men—50 killed and wounded and officers which are losses to the public service.” One of Cornwallis’s personal favorites was Lieutenant John Money, whom Tarleton claimed was “wounded but not dangerously.” (He later died.) All in all, even if it was a victory, the results remained hollow. Within a day, Tarleton was already explaining that “I did not mean to attack Sumter, only to harass and lay close to him till I could bring up the rest of the corps.” He claimed the “63rd were attacked by the enemy, which brought on the affair.”⁹⁵ Hearing how his advance skirmishers were taken as an attack would likely have brought a smile to Sumter’s face.

Long Canes Rising

Hoping to take advantage of their victory over Tarleton at Blackstock’s Plantation, McCall joined Clarke and marched toward the Long Canes settlement for some much-needed recruiting. With Sumter out of action, the South Carolina militia desperately needed a new leader, and McCall believed the time had come for another visit with his old friend, Andrew Pickens. According to Samuel Hammond, “Major McCall was selected for this purpose, not only for his known prudence and fitness, but for his personal friendship with Colonel Pickens.”⁹⁶

While en route, the Patriot pair stopped off at Wofford’s Iron Works to rest and recover for a few days. While there, yet another Georgia militia colonel showed up with more refugees. Unfortunately, Benjamin Few outranked Elijah Clarke and took over command of the Georgia regiments.

Early in December, the combined Patriot force marched into the Long Canes settlement to begin recruiting. McCall visited with Pickens and convinced him that the British had violated the terms of parole and that the Long Canes men should consider themselves free to retake the field as Patriots. According to British sources, McCall “used both soothing and threatening arguments” to convince Pickens.⁹⁷ The noted historian Hugh McCall indicated that Pickens resisted the arguments from James McCall but was later convinced to renounce his parole, because “Captain Dunlop’s dragoons, united with parties of loyalists, made a general sweep over the country”⁹⁸ that included burning the plantations of both Andrew Pickens and James McCall. Unfortunately, in this instance, Hugh McCall seems to have a flaw in his timeline.

95 Banastre Tarleton to Charles Cornwallis, November 22, 1780, and November 24, 1780, Cornwallis Papers, 3:340–41.

96 Samuel Hammond, “Expedition to Long Canes and a Mission to Williamson and Pickens,” in Johnson, *Traditions and Reminiscences*, 530.

97 John Harris Cruger to Charles Cornwallis, December 9, 1780, Cornwallis Papers, 3:280. Cruger also states that “the inhabitants” acted like men of honor and refused to break their parole. However, evidence suggests that Pickens did break parole, even though Williamson and some others did not. Samuel Hammond (notes) indicates that McCall’s initial meeting with Pickens was unsuccessful, but on the 9th of December, Pickens was already signing his correspondence as “Colonel” Pickens and requesting the release of men he would need for the regiment.

98 McCall, *History of Georgia*, 2:351.

During the month of December, Captain Dunlop was in Charleston procuring equipment and supplies for his new dragoon troop.⁹⁹ He was to return within a “day or two” after December 4, but a later report from Cornwallis indicates January 7 before Dunlop began raising “his cavalry, which he has been wonderfully long in beginning.”¹⁰⁰ By that time, Cornwallis already had official news of Pickens’s return to the Patriot cause.¹⁰¹ He responded with instructions to seize all of Pickens’s property, after which “I desire that his houses may be burnt, and his plantations, as far as lies in your power, totally destroyed, and himself, if ever taken, instantly hanged.”¹⁰² When looking at the contemporary British record, Captain Dunlop could only lead dragoons on a “general sweep” of the Long Cane District after organizing his dragoon troop in January 1781, which follows right along with Lord Cornwallis’s orders that Pickens be burned out.

Regardless of whether Pickens waited until he was burned out or was simply loyal to the cause to the point of suffering later consequences, he joined Greene’s army in December. In fact, Pickens was already signing correspondence as “Colonel Pickens” by December 9, when the men signed a petition to the Continental Army’s Major General Nathanael Greene seeking the release of William Hutton from the stockade at Salisbury, North Carolina. Colonel Pickens considered Hutton a “sincere friend to the United States” who had only turned back to the crown so he could help the poor Whigs in the Ninety Six District.¹⁰³ The Patriot officers also kidnapped Andrew Williamson and tried to persuade him to break his parole and join them in the field. At that time, Williamson was also being strongly recruited by the British, who had become desperate to find a leader for their own Ninety Six militia brigade.¹⁰⁴ Williamson ended up refusing to serve with either army, instead attempting to remain neutral for the remainder of the war.¹⁰⁵

Not only did the British hear of McCall’s recruiting activities, they reacted with force. Still commanding in the Ninety Six District, Lieutenant Colonel Cruger reported that

“last Monday morning was the soonest I could get together any militia, when Brigadier General [Robert] Cunningham brought over with him about 160— Kirkland’s and King’s regiments furnished about 110—to which I added 150 rank and file of this garrison with one field piece under Colonel [Isaac] Allen and sent them off on Monday night at 11 o’clock in

99 James Dunlop to Charles Cornwallis, November 30, 1780, Cornwallis Papers, 3:294.

100 Nisbet Balfour to Charles Cornwallis, January 7, 1781, Cornwallis Papers, 3:131.

101 Henry Haldane to Isaac Allen, December 29, 1781, and Isaac Allen to Charles Cornwallis, December 29, 1781, Cornwallis Papers, 3:287–88.

102 Charles Cornwallis to John Harris Cruger or Isaac Allen, January 16, 1781, Cornwallis Papers, 3:292.

103 From Colonel Andrew Pickens and Others, December 9, 1780, Nathanael Greene, *The Papers of General Nathaniel Greene*, edited by Richard K. Showman et al., eds. [hereinafter cited as *Papers of General Nathanael Greene*], 13 vols. (Chapel Hill: Published for the Rhode Island Historical Society by the University of North Carolina Press, 1976–2005), 6:558.

104 John Harris Cruger to Charles Cornwallis, December 9, 1780, Cornwallis Papers, 3:280.

105 Williamson was referred to as the “Arnold of the South” even though he never took up arms against the Patriots and, according to Nathaniel Greene, provided valuable intelligence about British positions around Charleston in 1781 and 1782.

hopes of surprising the enemy.”¹⁰⁶

Unfortunately for Clarke and McCall, they were unaware of Allen’s approach to the Long Canes District until they were only three miles away. The British they found were actually a foraging patrol of loyal militia. Colonel Few, who still commanded the combined force, sent Clarke and McCall forward to meet the enemy with 100 men while he organized the rest of the men.¹⁰⁷

The Patriot advance engaged the Loyalist militia about two miles out. As Hugh McCall wrote, “The action was lively for a short time and Clarke sent an express to Few to hasten the march of the main body.” Within 10 or 15 minutes, the Loyalists gave way and retreated back to camp, where Colonel Allen had the regular troops formed and ready. Although brief, the action came with heavy cost as Elijah Clarke took a “wound in the shoulder, which was at first supposed to be mortal, and he was carried off the field.”¹⁰⁸

While ordering his militia to support the flanks, Allen brought on his regulars with their bayonets presented. As usual, the Patriot militia was generally equipped with rifles that were not capable of mounting or fighting with bayonets. “About this time, McCall was wounded in the arm, and his horse killed, and he was so entangled by the horse falling on him, that he narrowly escaped,” McCall’s son Hugh wrote.¹⁰⁹ The Patriot line faltered, and “a rout ensued and soon became general. Our militia avail’d themselves of this circumstance and pursued for two miles with spirit.”¹¹⁰ The British took 30 to 50 prisoners after killing 14 men. Only the Patriots who made it to their horses returned to camp.

When the remaining men from the advance party made it back to camp, “some harsh observations were made by some of the officers who had been engaged, relative to Few’s courage.” The men were generally willing to accept Few’s explanation that intelligence came in suggesting there were too many British to risk losing the regiment. However, his failure to send notice to Clarke that no reinforcements were coming was not so easily explained, and since the refugee regiments remained a volunteer association, Clarke’s men took their leave of Few. As Hugh McCall wrote, “Clarke was placed upon a bier, supported by two horses, and with great difficulty conveyed to a place of safety.” His men carried on under the command of Major John Cunningham while Clarke recovered.¹¹¹

Dragoon Officer

¹⁰⁶ John Harris Cruger to Charles Cornwallis, December 15, 1780, Cornwallis Papers, 3:282.

¹⁰⁷ McCall, *History of Georgia*, 2:349.

¹⁰⁸ McCall, *History of Georgia*, 2:350.

¹⁰⁹ McCall, *History of Georgia*, 2:350.

¹¹⁰ John Harris Cruger to Charles Cornwallis, December 15, 1780, Cornwallis Papers, 3:282.

¹¹¹ McCall, *History of Georgia*, 2:351.

Even though McCall and Clarke were routed at Long Canes, Colonel Pickens remained committed to rejoining the Whig cause. Because Williamson's refusal to rise left the position of brigadier general for the Ninety Six District open, Andrew Pickens stepped in as senior officer. He "directed the march of the troops toward Pacolate [Pacolet] River, and joined General Morgan at Grindal's ford."¹¹² While there, Lieutenant Colonel McCall selected his 40 best men to join a new dragoon troop to join Lieutenant Colonel William Washington's Continental cavalry. The men were chosen from both Georgia and South Carolina Refugee regiments and were "furnished with swords and other arms."¹¹³ In late December, Morgan sent Washington and McCall on an expedition into the Ninety Six District to "pay a party of British and Tories under the command of a Col. Walters at a place called Hammon's old Store a visit."¹¹⁴ In his after battle report to Greene, Daniel Morgan described the event:

"On the 27th I received Intelligence that a Body of Georgian Tories, about 250 in Number had advanced as far as Fair Forrest and were insulting and Plundering the good people in the neighbourhood. On the 29th I dispatched Lieut Col Washington with his own regiment and two hundred Militia Horse, who had just Joined me, to Attack them. Before the Cole could overtake them, they had retreated upwards of Twenty Miles. He came up with them next day About 12 oClock A.M. at Hammonds Store House About 40 Miles from our Camp. They were alarmed and flew to their Horses. Washington Extended his Mounted Riflemen on the Wings and charged them in Front with his own Regiment. They fled with the greatest Precipitation without making any Resistance. 150 were killed and wounded & About 40 Taken Prisoners. 150 were killed and wounded & About 40 Taken Prisoners."¹¹⁵

The Battle of Hammond's Old Store remains a little-known affair, even though its impact was large. There are few accounts to provide any details, but those that are available clearly point to a one-sided affair that involved the killing of men attempting to surrender. The Patriots left a few survivors, but "they were mostly wounded men" unable to travel and left to their fate. One pensioner summed up the engagement with the simple observation that "he [Washington] there met Waters and put him & his whole party to rout with a good deal of slaughter."¹¹⁶ The rout led to the resignation of newly appointed Brigadier General Robert Cunningham, who was Cornwallis's last hope of forming any type of meaningful Loyalist militia force in the Ninety Six District.

Washington, McCall, and the Refugees returned to Morgan's camp on the Pacolet. Morgan debated

¹¹² McCall, *History of Georgia*, 2:354.

¹¹³ Manuel McConnell, "Pension Application of Manual (Manuel) McConnell S2773," transcribed by Will Graves, *Southern Campaigns American Revolution Pension Statements & Rosters*, <https://revwarapps.org/s2773.pdf>.

¹¹⁴ McConnell, "Pension Application of Manual (Manuel) McConnell S2773," transcribed by Will Graves.

¹¹⁵ Daniel Morgan to Nathanael Greene, December 31, 1780, *Papers of General Nathaniel Greene*, 7:30.

¹¹⁶ McConnell, "Pension Application of Manual (Manuel) McConnell S2773," transcribed by Will Graves.

his next move through correspondence with General Greene. Food and forage were running low in the area, and Morgan felt he had “but one Alternative, Either to Retreat or move into Georgia.” He feared retreat would discourage the people and cause “The Militia who have already Joined [to] desert us.”¹¹⁷ Morgan also took the opportunity to pass on the request from Pickens and McCall to release a certain Loyalist prisoner who they thought was ready to return to Patriot service. He reported continuing success with recruiting efforts.

Greene rejected the idea of moving into Georgia, but he was not interested in a retreat either. Instead, he instructed Morgan to remain “some where between the Saluda and the north branch of the Broad River,” where he could continue “annoying the Enemy, intercepting their supplies, and harassing their rear if they should make a movement this way [toward North Carolina].”¹¹⁸ As to Washington and the cavalry, Greene instructed them to rest themselves and their horses. After all, Greene wrote, “the enemy and the tories both will try to bring you into disgrace” and “we may want a body of heavy cavalry.”¹¹⁹

General Greene’s instructions were nothing if not consistent. A few days later, he sent Morgan word that “Col. Tarleton is said to be on his way to pay you a visit.” He wanted Morgan to “hold your ground if possible” and prepare a “decent reception and proper dismissal” of young Banastre Tarleton.¹²⁰

While Morgan waited and McCall’s men rested with their horses, Lord Cornwallis had reached his breaking point. For weeks, he had received numerous reports of uprisings in the Long Canes settlement that upset his plans to bring stability to the Ninety Six District. It was time for action. On January 16, Cornwallis ordered Lieutenant Colonel Cruger to undertake a general crackdown on the Patriots and, specifically, to destroy the Long Canes Settlement. “You must now use your utmost exertion to prevent a renewal of the same kind of troubles and calamities which have so long oppressed the deserving inhabitants (Tories) of your district,” Cornwallis wrote. “If Colonel Pickens has left any Negroes, cattle or other property that may be useful to Mr. [John] Cruden or to the supply of the troops, I would have it seized and applied accordingly, and I desire that his houses may be burnt, and his plantations, as far as lies in your power, totally destroyed, and himself, if ever taken, instantly hanged.”¹²¹

The British threat against Long Canes was carried out by Major James Dunlap, who had recently

117 Daniel Morgan to Nathanael Greene, January 4, 1781, Papers of General Nathaniel Greene, 7:51.

118 Nathanael Greene to Daniel Morgan, January 8, 1781, Papers of General Nathaniel Greene, 7:73.

119 Nathanael Greene to Daniel Morgan, January 8, 1781, Papers of General Nathaniel Greene, 7:73.

120 Nathanael Greene to Daniel Morgan, January 13, 1781, Papers of General Nathaniel Greene, 7:106.

121 Charles Cornwallis to John Harris Cruger or Isaac Allen, January 16, 1781, Cornwallis Papers, 3:292.

returned from Charleston with a set of accoutrements for his newly formed dragoon unit. Dunlap made a “general sweep over the country. Pickens’s house was plundered of moveable property, and the remainder was wantonly destroyed. McCall’s family was left without a change of clothing or bedding, and a halter put round the neck of one of his sons, by order of Dunlap, with threats of execution, to extort secrets of which the youth was ignorant.”¹²²

Probably at the very time Dunlap was burning their homes, Pickens, McCall, Samuel Hammond,¹²³ and the other remaining South Carolina Refugees waited for Banastre Tarleton and the British Legion. He caught up to them at the Cowpens on the morning of January 18, where Morgan, after learning that Tarleton was in pursuit of his force, had decided to make a stand.

Marching up the road toward the open area known as the Cowpens, Tarleton’s men broke out into the open. According to Tarleton’s *History of the Campaigns of 1780 and 1781*,

“He discovered that the American commander had formed a front line of about one thousand militia, and had composed his second line and reserve of five hundred continental light infantry, one hundred and twenty of Washington’s cavalry, and three hundred back woodsmen.”¹²⁴

James McCall and his men were among the 120 held in reserve with Washington. Limited to the number of men he could mount and equip, McCall spent the night of the 16th impressing horses and choosing his men. He ended up with between 35 and 40 of the best men the Refugee regiments had to offer.¹²⁵

Tarleton had Washington’s cavalry outnumbered almost 300 to 120, but, for some reason, he held 200 in reserve and split the others into two groups, one to protect the left flank and the other to protect the right. Unfortunately for Tarleton, the disposition would allow Washington to engage twice during the battle and once in the chase afterwards without being outnumbered at any one time.¹²⁶

Tarleton employed a very simple and straightforward battle plan. He deployed the infantry across the center and supported them with artillery between the regiments and a troop of horse for each

122 McCall, *History of Georgia*, 2:352.

123 Major Samuel Hammond now commanded McCall’s regiment—other than the dragoons who joined with Washington along with Lieutenant Colonel McCall. In his pension application, Hammond indicated this as the time Major McCall was promoted “to the command of a Regiment of Cavalry authorized to be enrolled for six months.” Samuel Hammond, “Pension Application of Samuel Hammond S21807,” transcribed by Will Graves, *Southern Campaigns American Revolution Pension Statements and Rosters*, <https://revwarapps.org/s21807.pdf>.

124 Banastre Tarleton, *A History of the Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, in the Southern Provinces of North America* (Dublin: Colles, Exshaw, White, H. Whitestone, Burton, Byrne, Moore, Jones, and Dornin, 1787), 222.

125 Thomas Young, *The Memoir of Thomas Young*, reprinted in part in Ed Southern, *Voices of the American Revolution in the Carolinas* (Winston-Salem, NC: John F. Blair, 2009), 181.

126 Lawrence E. Babits, *A Devil of a Whipping: The Battle of Cowpens* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 124. See also Patrick O’Kelley, *Nothing but Blood and Slaughter: The Revolutionary War in the Carolinas, Volume Three, 1781* (Lillington, NC: Blue House Tavern Press, Booklocker.com, Inc., 2005), 26–31 for a detailed order of battle at the Cowpens. O’Kelley suggests 250 for the Legion with another 50 from the 17th Light Dragoons.

flank. As usual with Tarleton, he ordered the attack to begin immediately. In fact, recalled an officer who had served under Tarleton, the 71st Regiment had not even “disentangled themselves from the brushwood with which Thickelle Creek abounds” before forming to advance. (Because the field was so narrow, this unit was initially kept in reserve.)¹²⁷

As for Morgan, he planned a defense in depth that would wear down the British advance. He set up three lines across a long uphill slope, with cavalry held in reserve. The first line were skirmishers who would harass the infantry with rifle fire and, hopefully, trigger a premature assault. The militia formed a second line. Their job was to further weaken the British assault troops as the skirmishers retreated around them. Once the British worked through the men in the second line, who also planned to retreat after firing, their lines would come up on Morgan’s strength, the Continentals who made up the third line.

As the British started marching toward the militia, the thin forward line of skirmishers opened fire. They were hoping to cause disruption and bring the British assault forward at a rapid and disorganized pace. The men chosen for that duty had plenty of experience with these frontier tactics. At Blackstock’s Plantation, the Georgia Refugees had successfully brought on the battle in a similar manner. This time, they were supported by other backcountry men under Colonel Joseph McDowell of North Carolina on the right flank.

Since McCall was now with the dragoons and Clarke had not yet recovered from his shoulder wound, the refugee regiments were led by Major John Cunningham of Georgia and Major Samuel Hammond of South Carolina. They performed well before making an orderly retreat to the main militia line, where General Pickens commanded. “The American advanced corps, under Cunningham and McDowell, opened their fire and supported it with animation, under a brisk fire from the British, until the bayonet was presented, when they retired and took their posts in the intervals left for them.”¹²⁸

As soldier Thomas Young recalled in his memoir, with the first militia line in retreat, the British cavalry began moving forward to try and turn the retreat into a rout. They were thwarted as a portion of Washington’s cavalry made their first charge and “covered their retreat.”¹²⁹

The British infantry made it to Pickens’s second militia line but found themselves temporarily slowed when “Pickens received them with a firmness, with which they were unaccustomed” from militia.¹³⁰ Namely, they held briefly to fire an extra volley before starting an orderly retreat

127 Roderick Mackenzie, *Strictures on Lt.-Col. Tarleton’s History “of the Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, in the Southern Provinces of North America”* (London: R. Jameson, 1787), 97.

128 McCall, *History of Georgia*, 2:357.

129 Young, *The Memoir of Thomas Young*, *Southern, Voices of the American Revolution in the Carolinas*, 183.

130 McCall, *History of Georgia*, 2:357.

to a predetermined area behind the Continentals. As the militia started their retreat, the British dragoons again charged to rout and disrupt them. At that point, Washington's cavalry made their second charge. This time McCall's troop "made a most furious charge and cutting through the British cavalry, wheeled and charged them in the rear."¹³¹

While Washington's cavalry checked the British dragoons and kept them from reaching the Continentals, Tarleton sent the Highlanders to the left to outflank the Continentals, who misunderstood the order and began to retreat. The British broke ranks to pursue, and then Morgan rallied the Continentals, just as victory seemed within their grasp. At the last moment, Morgan rallied the Continentals who turned on the British with a close volley and bayonet charge of their own. The British line faltered and, itself, turned into a rout. Tarleton tried to save the day by having his reserve cavalry enter the fray, but they refused to charge. Their last experience charging in battle at Blackstock's Plantation had not gone well, and the 200-man cavalry reserve simply declined to advance against Washington and McCall.

Tarleton continued his attempts to rally the cavalry. All hope of victory was gone, but he still needed to cover their own retreat and save what men could be saved. "Lieutenant Colonel Tarleton, with no more than 50 horse" did not hesitate to "charge the whole of Washington's cavalry." In a desperate action, Tarleton managed to stop the Patriot pursuit long enough for his remaining forces to march away.¹³²

There is a persistent legend from Cowpens that, just as Tarleton was about to leave with the last of his men, Washington galloped forward and engaged him in personal combat. Historian Hugh McCall described what happened next:

"Tarleton with two of his officers, wheeled on him: Washington broke his sword, and was defending himself; the waiter drew a pistol and wounded one of them" while a sergeant-major rode up and "parried a cut which was made at him, and disabled the sword arm of the officer. Tarleton aimed a thrust at Washington, which was parried; upon which Tarleton wheeled and discharged a pistol at him, and wounded his horse."¹³³

As usual with battles in which they engaged, the Georgia Refugees were in the thick of the battle. They had at least five men killed, which represented an oversized share of the total Americans lost at Cowpens. Daniel Morgan mentioned them very favorably in his report to General Greene: "McDowell and Cunningham gave them a heavy & galling fire" before retreating to their places in the second line.¹³⁴ Between the addition of McCall's troop to Washington's cavalry and adopting the combined

¹³¹ Young, *The Memoir of Thomas Young, Southern, Voices of the American Revolution in the Carolinas*, 183.

¹³² Mackenzie, *Strictures on Lt.-Col. Tarleton's History*, 98.

¹³³ McCall, *History of Georgia*, 2:359.

¹³⁴ Daniel Morgan to Nathanael Greene, January 19, 1780, *Papers of General Nathaniel Greene*, 7:154.

refugees of Clarke and McCall on the initial skirmish line, the contributions of these backcountry volunteers seem worthy of greater mention than usually found in the history books.

North Carolina

After the battle of Cowpens, Morgan started moving across the backcountry toward North Carolina. He needed to avoid contact with Tarleton or Cornwallis in order to rejoin Greene, who was marching with the rest of the army from his camp at Cheraw, and deliver his prisoners to Salisbury. That Lord Cornwallis would be anxious to recover his captured troops was a given since most of them were light troops or from the 71st Highlanders. Their loss was a serious blow to British offensive capabilities in the South.

While Morgan “bent his course towards the upper part of Virginia for the purpose of evading the main body of British forces,” Cornwallis remained a close and formidable enemy, particularly “when encumbered with so many prisoners.” To protect his main column, Morgan kept Washington with his column but now McCall’s troop split off to remain with the militia forces under Pickens. They were ordered to “hang on the flank of Cornwallis’s Army to harass, distress, & retard, annoy them and, to retard their progress by every possible means.”¹³⁵

To accomplish their mission, McCall led his men on a forced march up the Catawba River to a crossing “above Beatties Ford and dropped down when Cornwallis reached the River and attempted to cross we to his great astonishment and discomfiture showed ourselves on the left bank ready to prevent his landing.” Recent rainfall swelled the river making any crossing hazardous but nearly impossible in the face of a determined enemy. Cornwallis backed up to look at alternatives.¹³⁶

During the night, Cornwallis turned his attention to a private ford several miles below Beattie’s called Cowan’s Ford. Normally a little deeper than Beattie’s, the river at Cowan’s Ford was about 400 yards wide with a variable depth and a rocky bottom. With the river swollen from rain, British infantry would be wading through rushing water over four feet deep.

Crossing the river was a nightmare for Cornwallis’s Brigade of Guards, who led the way. They could clearly see Patriot militia camps on the far side of the river. As the Guards approached the river’s midpoint, a continuous fire started from the Patriots. Chest deep in a fast current, British infantrymen clung to each other, trying to ignore the bullets striking the water around them. They struggled across in spite of “a very heavy fire upon us.” Sergeant Roger Lamb of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers (the second regiment to cross the river) described the crossing. The troops

¹³⁵ McConnell, “Pension Application of Manuel (Manuel) McConnell S2773,” transcribed by Will Graves.

¹³⁶ McConnell, “Pension Application of Manuel (Manuel) McConnell S2773,” transcribed by Will Graves.

“waded on, in a cool intrepid manner, to return their fire being impossible, as our cartouch boxes were all tied at the back of our necks. This urged us on with greater rapidity, till we gained the opposite shore, where we were obliged to scramble up a very high hill under, a heavy fire; several of our men were killed or wounded before we reached the summit. The American soldiers did all that brave men could do, to oppose our passage across the river, and I believe not one of them moved from his post till we mounted the hill, and used our bayonets; their general [actually Colonel William Lee Davidson] was the first man that received us sword in hand, and suffered himself to be cut to pieces sooner than retreat; after his death, his troops were soon defeated and dispersed.”¹³⁷

Forcing the swollen river with riflemen on the other side proved costly for Lord Cornwallis. In his reports, the general admitted to only four deaths, but his own troop strength reports from the month reflect about 125 losses from the lead regiments that can only be accounted for at Cowan’s Ford.¹³⁸ The higher losses are confirmed by at least one Patriot account that

“a great number of British dead were found on Thompson’s fish-dam, and in his trap, and numbers lodged on brush, and drifted to the banks; that the river stunk with dead carcasses; that the British could not have lost less than one hundred men on that occasion.”¹³⁹

Regardless of the total losses for Cornwallis, two other results were more important for the Patriots. First, Morgan and Greene escaped with the prisoners captured at Cowpens, and second, McCall and the South Carolina militia at Beattie’s Ford were outflanked and needed to beat a hasty retreat.

A few miles up the road to Salisbury lay Tarrant’s Tavern, where the retreating militia became entangled with a flood of refugees fleeing from Cornwallis. When Pickens and McCall arrived, the North Carolina militia,

“being wet, cold and hungry, they begin to drink spirits, carrying it out in pails full. The wagons of many of the movers with their property were in the Lane, the armed men all out of order, and mixed with the wagons and people, so that the Lane could scarcely be passed.”¹⁴⁰

Before the North Carolina men had a chance to become intoxicated and before McCall’s dragoons even got settled, “the sound of alarm was given from the west end of the lane, “Tarleton is Coming!”¹⁴¹ Sure

137 Roger Lamb, *An Original and Authentic Journal of Occurrences during the Late American War, from Its Commencement to the Year 1783* (Dublin: Wilkinson & Courtney, 1809), 344.

138 “State of the troops fit for duty, 15 January to 1 April 1781,” *Cornwallis Papers*, 4:61.

139 Robert Henry, *Narrative of the Battle of Cowan’s Ford, February 1st, 1781* (Greensboro: D. Schenck, Sr., 1891), 8–14, reprinted in *Southern, Voices of the American Revolution*, 198.

140 Joseph Graham, *General Joseph Graham’s Narrative of the Revolutionary War in North Carolina in 1780 and 1781*, reprinted in Archibald De Bow Murphey, *The Papers of Archibald D. Murphey*, edited by William Henry Hoyt, 2 vols. (Raleigh: E. M. Uzzell & Company, 1914), 2:263.

141 Graham, *General Joseph Graham’s Narrative*, reprinted in Murphey, *Papers of Archibald D. Murphey*, 2:263.

enough, according to soldier Manuel McConnell in his pension statement, before anyone could react with more than a quick volley, Tarleton had “rushed on them on the rear and put us completely to rout.”¹⁴²

Fortunately for the Patriots, instead of pressing to round up scattered militiamen, Tarleton’s legionnaires turned their attention to plundering the civilian wagons caught up in their charge. As North Carolina militia captain Joseph Graham later wrote, “They made great destruction of the property in the wagons of those who were moving; ripped up beds and strode the feathers, until the Lane was covered with them.”¹⁴³

Tarleton tried to claim stubborn resistance and 50 militiamen killed, but other British sources indicate his claim was overstated. Loyalist historian Charles Stedman later confirmed the Patriot report that 10 men were killed.¹⁴⁴

Rather than push forward, Tarleton returned to Cornwallis and the main army, leaving Pickens and McCall free to rally their troops at the tavern. Once completed, they returned to their mission of keeping an eye on the British army. McConnell said they “pretty much owned Cornwallis’s flank until we joined General Green near Hillsboro.”¹⁴⁵

The South Carolina militia marched north across the backcountry of North Carolina into the Upper Yadkin region near Salem. They stayed just ahead of the British and occasionally skirmished with them at the river fords.¹⁴⁶ On February 6, Pickens went on a forage patrol to Bethabara with “something over 20 wagons. Corn, hay, bread, and brandy were given to him upon his request. He kept good order among his men. His manner was fatherly and mild, and he voiced his belief that we [Moravians] would take no part in anything that was partisan.”¹⁴⁷

The description of Pickens’s behavior stood in stark contrast to other reports of bad behavior. The people of Salem complained of “renewed excess of some Georgia & South Carolina people traveling through here, the robberies committed in our Neighborhood,” and plundering from another group of local militia determined to replace their own earlier losses to the British and Tories.¹⁴⁸

By the time Lord Cornwallis pushed across the Shallow Ford on the 8th of February, Pickens had

142 McConnell, “Pension Application of Manual (Manuel) McConnell S2773,” transcribed by Will Graves.

143 Graham, General Joseph Graham’s Narrative, 2:263.

144 See analysis in Wayne Lynch, “Tarleton and the British Legion at Tarrant’s Tavern,” *Journal of the American Revolution*, April 11, 2013, <http://allthingsliberty.com/2013/04/tarleton-and-the-british-legion-at-tarrants-tavern/>.

145 McConnell, “Pension Application of Manual (Manuel) McConnell S2773,” transcribed by Will Graves.

146 Graham, General Joseph Graham’s Narrative, reprinted in Murphey, Papers of Archibald D. Murphey, 2:266.

147 Bethabara Diary, 1781 (February 6, 1781), Fries, Adelaide L., ed., *Records of the Moravians in North Carolina*, Volume 4: 1780–1783 (Raleigh: Edwards & Broughton Company, State Printers, 1930), 1741.

148 Residents of Salem, North Carolina, to Nathanael Greene, February 8, 1781, Papers of General Nathanael Greene, 7:260. See also Graham, General Joseph Graham’s Narrative, reprinted in Murphey, Papers of Archibald D. Murphey, 2:269. Accounts do not mention if McCall was with Pickens, this group, or neither.

moved a few miles south, now behind the British Army. The various militia groups present with Pickens numbered a little over 600 men. Even though Pickens only had about 40 men from his home regiment, he was a brigadier general, and the officers chose him to command the whole force. The North Carolina mounted regiment with Colonel Graham followed Cornwallis across the river into the Moravian area, where the British took a turn at relieving the pacifists of their food and supplies.¹⁴⁹

While Cornwallis grabbed supplies, Greene held an officers conference at his camp, which was at the Guilford County Courthouse. The result was

“the unanimous opinion of a Council of War held this day, that it would be inevitable ruin to the army and no less ruinous to the American cause to hazard a general action; and therefore have advised to our crossing the Dan immediately; which will be carried into execution as soon as possible.”¹⁵⁰

Accordingly, and after a good bit of excitement at the chase, on February 14, Greene led his army across the Dan River and into Virginia, where they could be resupplied and reinforced. General Pickens and the militia did not go with the army into Virginia. Instead, they returned to the Moravian town for more supplies and a good night’s rest.

With Greene in Virginia and his own men unwilling to travel further north, Pickens began a campaign of harassment against Cornwallis.¹⁵¹ James McCall’s name is not mentioned in the accounts of that time, but he would likely have been quite active with his state dragoon troop.

The Patriots got a break around February 21. About two and a half miles from Hillsborough, Cornwallis had established a subaltern’s picket at Hart’s Mill.¹⁵² Pickens sent McCall with 40 volunteers to attack the small post.¹⁵³ The patrol attacked the post in a way “that would have done Honor to the most disciplined Troops.” They killed or seriously wounded 8 men while capturing another 10 regulars and some Loyalists. None of McCall’s men were killed or wounded.¹⁵⁴

Colonel Lee returned from Virginia ahead of Greene’s main army. He joined Pickens and the militia on the morning of February 23. Lee was particularly interested in “striking” Banastre Tarleton

149 Graham, General Joseph Graham’s Narrative, reprinted in Murphey, Papers of Archibald D. Murphey, 2:268–69; Bethabara Diary, 1781 (February 13, 14, 16, 17, 1781), Fries, Records of the Moravians in North Carolina, Volume 4, 1743.

150 Nathanael Greene to Abner Nash, February 9, 1781, Papers of General Nathanael Greene, 7:263.

151 Andrew Pickens to Nathanael Greene, February 19, 1781, Papers of General Nathanael Greene, 7:320. See also, Greene to Pickens, February 20, 1781, for reference to Pickens’s harassment campaign.

152 Subaltern’s picket is an advance outpost commanded by a junior officer and is usually used as a base for scouting enemy advance.

153 One of the volunteers was Samuel Hammond, whom Pickens referred to as “present and particularly active.” Andrew Pickens to Nathanael Greene, February 23, 1781, Papers of General Nathanael Greene, 7:341. According to Hammond’s pension application, he was then detached to Halifax with 26 prisoners taken in the action at Hart’s Mill and did not return until the 17th of March. He remained with Greene until they reached South Carolina. Hammond, “Pension Application of Samuel Hammond S21807,” transcribed by Will Graves.

154 Andrew Pickens to Nathanael Greene, February 23, 1781, Papers of General Nathaniel Greene, 7:341.

and his Legion dragoons. According to his sources, their horses were “exceedingly fatigued” from chasing after Lee the day before.¹⁵⁵ Perhaps armed with fresh intelligence from the raid at Hart’s Mill, Lee and Pickens discovered Tarleton’s trail and followed him for a full day before coming “to a place called Haw-fields, where we fell in with a party of Tories.”¹⁵⁶

As it turns out, the Tories were not with Tarleton yet but were marching toward a rendezvous with him about three miles further along the road. There were probably about 200 of them, led by a local Loyalist named Colonel John Pyle.¹⁵⁷ Two of Pyle’s officers riding ahead encountered Lee and mistook him for Tarleton. Lee took advantage of their error by pretending to be Tarleton.

Lee’s column came up from behind the Loyalists and signaled for them to pull off the road and allow Lee to pass them. Lee’s men moved alongside them in single file. The Loyalists rode double file in a line 100 men long. Because Lee only had about 70 dragoons in green uniform coats (similar to those worn by Tarleton’s Legion) and wearing the proper red feather in their cap which disguised them as Loyalists, he only just came close to the front of the Loyalist line when one of McCall’s men was recognized near the rear. At that point, “the enemy discovered their mistake on the near approach of our militia & commenced action.”¹⁵⁸

As a survivor of the battle, Manuel McConnell, later recalled in his pension application, at the moment of discovery, “the signal for a charge” was given, and the Patriots “broke upon them” with sabers hacking away at the Loyalist nearest to each one. The effect was devastating. Having been taken completely by surprise and likely armed only with rifles, the Loyalists immediately panicked. “To their great astonishment,” about half of Pyle’s men were immediately “put to death” and the remainder routed.¹⁵⁹ Lee said they killed or left on the field “the greatest part” of the Loyalist force, while Pickens said they killed “nigh one hundred and the greatest part of the others wounded.” Pickens indicated the victory was of “infinite service. It has knocked up Toryism altogether in this part” of the state of North Carolina.¹⁶⁰

One particularly detailed account from a Patriot source described the action:

“Lee’s movement was, as if he were going to pass them, five or six steps on the left of their line. When the alarm was given in the rear, as quickly as his men could turn their horses

155 Henry Lee III to Nathanael Greene, February 23, 1781, Papers of General Nathanael Greene, 7:336.

156 McConnell, “Pension Application of Manual (Manuel) McConnell S2773,” transcribed by Will Graves.

157 Jeffrey Bright and Stewart Dunaway, *Pyle’s Defeat—The Most Comprehensive Guide: Case Closed* (Morrisville, NC: Lulu, 2011), the authors provide a chart reflecting which accounts are available and how many Tories are indicated by each. Little is certain about Pyle’s Defeat other than its one-sided outcome in favor of the Patriots.

158 Henry Lee III to Nathanael Greene, February 25, 1781, Papers of General Nathaniel Greene, 7:348.

159 McConnell, “Pension Application of Manual (Manuel) McConnell S2773,” transcribed by Will Graves.

160 Henry Lee III to Nathanael Greene, February 25, 1781, and Andrew Pickens to Nathanael Greene, February 26, 1781, Papers of General Nathaniel Greene, 7:348 and 7:355.

they were engaged; and as the Tories were over two to one to our actual cavalry, by pressing forward they [Patriot cavalry] went through their [Loyalist] line, leaving a number behind them. The continual cry of the Tories was ‘You are killing your own men. I am a friend of his Majesty. Hurrah for King George.’”¹⁶¹

“Finding their professions of loyalty and all they could say were of no avail, and only the signal for their destruction,” a few of the Loyalists tried to resist. It was far too late, and those few were soon “charged upon on every side, by more than could get at them, and cut down in a group together.”¹⁶²

In that last action, Lee lost one horse that rolled over on its rider, who was slightly injured. Perhaps Nathanael Greene summarized the battle as well as anyone could in a letter to Baron Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben a few days later. He said that Lee and Pickens “fell in with about 300 Tories . . . which some circumstances made necessary to engage, & in one instant they made a dreadful carnage of the greater part of them.”¹⁶³

Historians have not been kind to Colonel Lee for his actions at Pyle’s Defeat. The deception and surprise was followed by a very intense and bloody hacking of the man beside each of Lee and McCall’s men. Lee felt the one-sided victory was simply the result of good tactics, but reports do seem to indicate a distinct lack of mercy by the patriots.¹⁶⁴

Rather than go into a detailed discussion of Lee’s actions, perhaps the purposes herein are better served by simply taking notice that McCall and his refugee troop played a major role in the two most infamous one-sided victories over the Loyalists in the southern campaigns. At Hammond’s Old Store, William Washington’s reputation took a beating, and at Pyle’s Defeat, Henry Lee took criticism for a lack of quarter shown to the Loyalists. Perhaps much of the brutality and bitterness evident on both fields of battle came from McCall’s refugees of South Carolina.

In any event, in planning for the fight that came to be known as Pyle’s Defeat, and Pyle’s Massacre, Lee had instructed his men to use sabers only so that Tarleton would not be alerted. Lee still hoped he might surprise Tarleton and attack without warning. Unfortunately, the militia “could not be kept from firing” and, now warned, Tarleton crossed the river to safety.¹⁶⁵ One of McCall’s men noted that “early next morning we came in sight of Haw river [where] we saw his rear guard passing over the hill on the other side.”¹⁶⁶ Rather than fight, Tarleton simply rode away.

161 Graham, General Joseph Graham’s Narrative, reprinted in Murphey, Papers of Archibald D. Murphey, 2:274.

162 Graham, General Joseph Graham’s Narrative, reprinted in Murphey, Papers of Archibald D. Murphey, 2:274.

163 Nathanael Greene to Baron Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben, February 29 [actually February 28], 1781, Papers of General Nathaniel Greene, 7:376.

164 For complete coverage, questions surrounding Pyle’s Defeat, and access to eyewitness accounts, see Bright and Dunaway, Pyle’s Defeat.

165 Andrew Pickens to Nathanael Greene, February 26, 1781, Papers of General Nathaniel Greene, 7:358.

166 McConnell, “Pension Application of Manuel (Manuel) McConnell S2773,” transcribed by Will Graves.

Trouble with Otho Williams

Once Tarleton crossed the river, Lee and Pickens considered their situation. They decided the horses were tired and the time had come for a return to General Greene. They brought the men in for a few days of rest. On the evening of March 1, Greene's second-in-command, Colonel Otho Holland Williams, obtained information that the British were camped "at Mr. Souther's farm three miles from where our line of infantry is now encamped on the south side of the creek [Alamance]." He developed a plan to surprise the British the following morning. But he needed Pickens and the militia to get organized quickly.¹⁶⁷

Williams sent some advance men to scout the British lines, led by a militia captain named Joseph Graham, who, even though from North Carolina, was operating under the command of Pickens. While in the field, Graham met Colonel Washington, who told him that it was unsafe to proceed. Believing his instructions allowed discretion, Graham returned to camp and reported to Pickens, who agreed with his decision.¹⁶⁸

Colonel Williams was quite displeased. Not only did his planned attack not happen, but a militia captain demonstrated the audacity to consider his orders discretionary. Refusing to be deterred from a plan of action, Williams sent Lieutenant Colonel Lee with his Legion to skirmish with the enemy and monitor their position. About a mile out, the British fired on his flank. Lee's men made "a handsome defence,"¹⁶⁹ but the militia under Captain Graham met up with the British in some heavy woods. Graham later wrote that they laid down heavy fire which caused bark and twigs to fly about "hitting the men on their cheeks and shoulders and kept them dodging," even to the point of not returning fire. Some Catawba Indians riding with Graham became unnerved and "ran off, like turkies."¹⁷⁰

After firing three rounds, the militia began to retreat out of the woods, and the British followed them. Colonel Williams tried to rally the retreating men so they could "form on an alignment on each flank of the regulars." He had no luck until Major Henry Dickson, a man famous for his cool behavior under fire at Camden, came around to explain that "you will never get these men to form here while the enemy are firing yonder. If you will direct them to form on the next rise beyond that hollow, one hundred yards back, they will do it." Williams complied with his advice, and the "line was thus restored." Seeing the rebel lines come to order, the British stopped firing and watched while the Patriots marched off the field.¹⁷¹

167 Otho Holland Williams to Nathanael Greene, March 1, 1781, 8 o'clock PM, Papers of General Nathaniel Greene, 7:378.

168 Graham, General Joseph Graham's Narrative, reprinted in Murphey, Papers of Archibald D. Murphey, 2:280.

169 Otho Holland Williams to Nathanael Greene, March 2, 1781, Papers of General Nathanael Greene, 7:381.

170 Graham, General Joseph Graham's Narrative, reprinted in Murphey, Papers of Archibald D. Murphey, 2:282.

171 Graham, General Joseph Graham's Narrative, reprinted in Murphey, Papers of Archibald D. Murphey, 2:283.

On the next morning, Pickens approached his men with a request to remain in the field. Enlistment terms for many of the North Carolina men expired on March 2 and the South Carolina militia needed to return home. In their absence, the British had raided the Long Canes Settlement and burned out many families, including that of James McCall. “McCall’s family was left without a change of clothing or bedding, and a halter put round the neck of one of his sons, by order of Dunlop, with threats of execution,” McCall’s son Hugh later wrote.¹⁷² At this first meeting, Pickens and his officers (presumably McCall included) prevailed upon the men “to stay a few days longer, for he thought in that time there might be a general engagement” and the experienced Refugees from the backcountry might be just what Greene needed to gain an advantage.¹⁷³

Unfortunately for Pickens and McCall, the next morning, Colonel Williams called a meeting of the militia officers. Williams had decided the militia should give up their mounts. To that end, he proposed to “send every third man home with their horses.” The officers unanimously rejected his proposal.¹⁷⁴ The militia would not be trapped in North Carolina, some 200 miles from home, without their horses.

Williams’s proposal further depressed the men. Hearing their commander voice such low opinions reinforced their conviction to return home. The North Carolina men with Graham started deserting in droves, and Pickens took the matter of his own return to South Carolina with the Refugees up with Greene.¹⁷⁵ Before he got a response, Colonel Williams made yet another decision affecting the militia. This time his relationship with them would come to an abrupt end.

If there was any thought of staying, Williams put an end to it that very day at Wetzel’s Mill on the Reedy Fork of the Haw River. On the 6th, Banastre Tarleton mobilized his troops early in the morning, hoping to surprise Williams. The Patriots got warning in time to start moving away from the advancing British toward the river. However, they were not quite fortunate enough, and Williams found himself trapped against the river without enough time to cross. Even though his force was superior, Williams was unaware of Tarleton’s strength and feared that, once engaged, Cornwallis would bring the full army forward to destroy his force. Given that he was compelled to retreat, Williams made a quick decision to sacrifice the militia in favor of rescuing his Continentals.¹⁷⁶ In the eyes of the militia, the decision was unfounded given that Tarleton was obviously cowed; as Graham wrote,

“Col. Tarlton and [the] corps were within one hundred yards of the front of their infantry, and tho’ so many opportunities offered, for attacking scattering parties of militia coming in,

172 McCall, *History of Georgia*, 2:352.

173 Graham, *General Joseph Graham’s Narrative*, reprinted in Murphey, *Papers of Archibald D. Murphey*, 2:288.

174 Graham, *General Joseph Graham’s Narrative*, reprinted in Murphey, *Papers of Archibald D. Murphey*, 2:283 and 2:283n.1.

175 Andrew Pickens to Nathanael Greene, March 5, 1781, *Papers of General Nathaniel Greene*, 7:399.

176 Otho Holland Williams to Nathanael Greene, March 7, 1781, *Papers of General Nathaniel Greene*, 7:407.

on the flanks, he ever attempted to charge or pursue them. The appearance of Washington and Lee before him, must have prevented him from improving such advantages as frequently offered in the course of the day.”¹⁷⁷

Once Williams crossed the river with the Continental regiments, the British came into view and noticed the weak force in front of them. Tarleton’s men “formed with their usual alacrity” and made a direct assault on the Patriot line. The militia were formed in the middle, with Lee and Washington on either side. Once the assault started, both cavalry units escaped along roads to places further upstream where the horses could cross. There was no escape for the militia, most of whom were commanded by Colonel William Preston of Virginia. Left to face Tarleton with their backs to the river, the militia scattered; many died. Tarleton indicated the “pursuit was restrained on account of the various roads by which the enemy’s cavalry could escape,” which resulted in a high casualty rate among the militia. “Though the continentals suffered little in this affair, numbers of the riflemen were killed and wounded; and being abandoned by their cavalry, the rest were totally dispersed,” Tarleton recalled.¹⁷⁸

In his report to Greene, Williams defended his decision to leave the militia by stating it was “absolutely necessary to leave a covering party.” Even though militia losses were twenty-five to thirty men, Williams described the casualties as “inconsiderable, very few were killed & most of our wounded were brought off.” It seems doubtful that Williams included the militia losses in his report.¹⁷⁹

When faced with later complaints from the militia officers, Williams and Lee tried to explain that some men had to be left behind and that the loss of 3 or 4 militia “whose term of service might expire in a week or two, was not as great as the loss of a regular, who was well trained and engaged to serve” for the duration of the war.¹⁸⁰

As might be expected, the militia were unimpressed by the logic put forth by Williams and Lee. Many of the militia, particularly the Refugees with McCall, had been in the field for nearly a year. During that time, they fought many battles, most of which were victories. British control of the backcountry was virtually nonexistent. Lord Cornwallis admitted as much in a letter to General Clinton on January 6, 1781, the eve of his departure to North Carolina, “the constant incursions of refugees, North Carolinians and Back Mountain men, and the perpetual risings in different parts of this province, the invariable successes of all these parties against our militia, keep the whole country in continual alarm and render the assistance of regular troops every where necessary,” and

177 Graham, General Joseph Graham’s Narrative, reprinted in Murphey, Papers of Archibald D. Murphey, 2:289–90. Italics added for emphasis by the author.

178 Tarleton, History of the Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, 238.

179 Otho Holland Williams to Nathanael Greene, March 7, 1781, Papers of General Nathaniel Greene, 7:408.

180 Graham, General Joseph Graham’s Narrative, reprinted in Murphey, Papers of Archibald D. Murphey, 2:292.

British regulars rarely traveled in groups smaller than 150 men. “I should advise,” unless Rawdon instructed otherwise, Cornwallis ordered, “that they should never be weaker than 150 men, and generally stronger, and that the greatest attention should be paid to the choice of proper officers to command them without any attention to roster.”¹⁸¹

After the defeat at Hammond’s Old Store (and Cowpens), the backcountry pretty much fell into disarray as plunderers like Leroy Hammond and James McKay took their turn at complete vengeance against the Tories. From the perspective of the militia, the Continental Army had failed to stand up to the British. They stood with Morgan at Cowpens and proudly whipped Tarleton, only to have Greene run to Virginia, leaving them to cover at each crossing. While many historians believe that Greene’s retreat across the Dan saved the Continentals, according to Graham, it had a demoralizing effect on the militia at the time, and it is certainly attested to by their high desertion rates. Now tired of covering a continual retreat and convinced that “a general engagement might not take place for several weeks,” McCall and Pickens pressed Greene for permission to depart.¹⁸²

When Henry Lee got word that the South Carolina men might be going home shortly, his first concern was trying to keep McCall and the dragoon troop. He requested that 100 mounted infantry from Pickens and “thirty dragoons under Col McCall would do this business well & perhaps can be better spared than your regular dragoons.” In a move indicative of McCall’s feelings toward Otho Williams, Lee requested that Greene bypass Williams and speak to McCall directly. “If you send McCall,” Lee wrote, “I recommend you give him written instructions, & pray his zealous executions.”¹⁸³

Lee’s requests fell on deaf ears as the Refugees were “determined to stay no longer.”¹⁸⁴ Greene provided permission for the Refugees to depart for South Carolina on March 9. Less than a week later, Greene’s army met Cornwallis at Guilford Courthouse, and a general engagement did occur. The results were extremely close as both sides suffered heavy losses. After the battle Cornwallis held the field, and Greene blamed the defeat on the North Carolina militia’s refusal to stand and fight, telling Governor Abner Nash “had your Militia stood by their officers it [victory] was certain.”¹⁸⁵

In truth, given Greene’s statement, it is hard to avoid speculation as to what might have happened if only Otho Holland Williams had handled the militia under his command with a modicum of competence. If the South Carolina militia had remained for one extra week and been available to repeat their performance at the Cowpens, perhaps the clear victory Greene sought would not have

181 Charles Cornwallis to John Harris Cruger or Isaac Allen, January 16, 1781, Cornwallis Papers, 3:292.

182 Graham, General Joseph Graham’s Narrative, reprinted in Murphey, Papers of Archibald D. Murphey, 2:293.

183 Henry Lee III to Nathanael Greene, March 6, 1781, Papers of General Nathaniel Greene, 7:405.

184 Andrew Pickens to Henry Lee III, 28 August 1811, Thomas Sumter Papers, Draper Manuscripts, Series no. VV, 24 vols. (State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, WI), 1:106–7.

185 Nathanael Greene to Abner Nash, March 18, 1781, Papers of General Nathaniel Greene, 7:448.

eluded him for so long. After all, the instructions given by Greene that the North Carolina militia failed to follow were basically the same as those the Refugees had executed so well against Tarleton.

Dunlap and Death

Once Pickens and McCall left North Carolina, as Manuel McConnell would later recall, they “made no particular stops until they reached Major Wilfong’s on the Dutch or South Fork of the Catawba.” They made camp nearby and stayed for “a few weeks” before marching on to Fishing Creek in Wilkes County, Georgia.¹⁸⁶ Along the way, Elijah Clarke rejoined them. Now recovered from his wounds, Clarke was ready to retake command of the Georgia Refugees.

On March 21, Clarke got information that Major James Dunlap had 75 dragoons away from Ninety Six on a foraging expedition. According to Hugh McCall, “Pickens detached Clarke and McCall, with a suitable force, to attack him.”¹⁸⁷ Their orders included instructions not to attack the Loyalists indiscriminately but “if they found any that needed killing not to spare them.”¹⁸⁸ Clarke and McCall came up with Dunlap at Beattie’s Mill on March 23 and attacked him “with vigour and resolution.”¹⁸⁹

As they approached Beattie’s Mill, Clarke sent McCall “to take possession of a bridge, over which [Dunlap] must pass in retreat.” Clarke then attacked with his main force and managed to catch Dunlap largely unawares. The British retreated into the mill and its outbuildings. Unfortunately for them, the buildings were flimsy and far “too open for defense” and Clarke’s men had an easy time picking them off from a distance.¹⁹⁰

Dunlap held out for several hours. Several men, including himself, were wounded in his retreat to the mill, and now Clarke and McCall had them trapped. It is very likely the Refugees taunted Dunlap, thereby allowing plenty of time to consider his fate. The Patriots considered Dunlap a fiend guilty of “outrageous conduct to the families and friends of those by whom he was attacked.” By the time Dunlap finally surrendered, some 34 of his men were either killed or seriously wounded.¹⁹¹

Once Dunlap had surrendered, Clarke and McCall started marching the prisoners toward Virginia. They only got to Gilbert Town, North Carolina, before Dunlap’s story ended. “We took him and the prisoners back to a little town in North Carolina called Gilbert, where Dunlap was confined for some time, in an upper room, where one of our men (as was said) privately shot him dead with a pistol,”

¹⁸⁶ McConnell, “Pension Application of Manual (Manuel) McConnell S2773,” transcribed by Will Graves.

¹⁸⁷ McCall, *History of Georgia*, 2:361.

¹⁸⁸ Thomas Lesly, “Pension Application of Thomas Lesly W381,” transcribed by Will Graves, *Southern Campaigns American Revolution Pension Statements and Rosters*, <https://www.revwarapps.org/w381.pdf>.

¹⁸⁹ Andrew Pickens to Nathanael Greene, April 8, 1781, *Papers of General Nathaniel Greene*, 8:70.

¹⁹⁰ McCall, *History of Georgia*, 2:361.

¹⁹¹ McCall, *History of Georgia*, 2:361.

Joshua Burnett, a soldier who served under Clarke, later recalled.¹⁹²

No evidence has come to light suggesting that either Clarke or McCall ordered or acquiesced in the shooting of Dunlap. However, at least one pensioner remembered Clarke hanging a couple of Dunlap's men.¹⁹³ The historian and antiquarian Lyman Draper believed it was a very real possibility that Dunlap was killed by his own guards, or with their assistance. In the official reports, Pickens said Dunlap was killed by "a set of men chiefly unknown," although one of them may have been an Overmountain Man named Cobb. These men "forced the Guard and shot him."¹⁹⁴ Pickens offered a reward, but no one stepped forward to identify the assassin. Regardless of who actually killed Major Dunlap, the man who led the raid against McCall and his men was dead, likely around March 28, 1781.

About the same time Dunlap died in Gilbert Town, word was spreading that Greene was coming to South Carolina with his Continental troops. Clarke took the opportunity for another attempt at Augusta and the Ceded Lands. He led the Refugees back to Georgia once again, and one more time, McCall accompanied him. They set up camp on Fishing Creek in the Ceded Lands above Augusta.¹⁹⁵

While in Georgia, McCall kept his troop busy "brushing the Tories out." Patriot volunteers were now invading the Georgia backcountry in several groups. The British commander at Augusta, Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Brown, was under a virtual siege from early April and an actual siege from May until the garrison surrendered. But James McCall was not to see the conclusion to their latest attempt on Augusta. Both Clarke and McCall fell deathly ill with smallpox around April 12.

"Here [Georgia] our beloved Col. McCall was taken with the small Pox—we then returned to" Long Canes so McCall could recover at the house of "Joseph Swearingen on Little River," Manuel McConnell remembered. McCall lingered for about a week before "we learned that a body of Tories were moving against us" and it became necessary to move McCall to a place of hiding near the river bottom. The move was too much for him and McCall "died the same night."¹⁹⁶

McConnell remembered McCall fondly: "He was beloved and respected by all who knew him, [and] was endeared to his soldiers."¹⁹⁷

Summary

192 Joshua Burnett, "Pension Application of Joshua Burnett S32154," transcribed by Will Graves, Southern Campaigns American Revolution Pension Statements and Rosters, <https://revwarapps.org/s32154.pdf>.

193 George Hillen, "Pension Application of George Hillen S7006," transcribed by Will Graves, Southern Campaigns American Revolution Pension Statements and Rosters, <https://revwarapps.org/s7006.pdf>.

194 Andrew Pickens to Nathanael Greene, April 8, 1781, Papers of General Nathaniel Greene, 8:70.

195 McCall, *History of Georgia*, 2:362.

196 McConnell, "Pension Application of Manuel (Manuel) McConnell S2773," transcribed by Will Graves.

197 McConnell, "Pension Application of Manuel (Manuel) McConnell S2773," transcribed by Will Graves.

From early 1775, McCall served almost continuously for the Patriot cause. Under Williamson against the Tories at Ninety Six and again against the Cherokee in the summer of 1776, McCall earned a reputation as a capable and resourceful officer. Later in the war, during his time as a partisan commander, McCall gave continuous, if not indispensable, service to the cause. He never signed a parole and took the field immediately when Charleston fell. McCall provided leadership in organizing and recruiting, as well as on the field of battle. Without help from McCall and his Long Canes men, victories at Musgrove's Mill and Cowpens may not have been possible.

By the time of James McCall's death in April 1781, the Southern Strategy had almost collapsed. The Loyalist militia system that Cornwallis organized showed no possibility of ever becoming an effective force against the Patriots, and the British regulars only ventured from their redoubts in large patrols. Perhaps, as he lay dying in the river bottom, hiding from the Tories, McCall was able to see that victory was close at hand. Certainly, he had done much to earn it.

Sadly, there is little in South Carolina today to help remember James McCall and his sacrifices for American Independence. Like so many others who died before the war ended, his burial place is unknown, and there are no historical markers or statues in his honor. It is important to bring men like James McCall to light before their contributions are forgotten.

APPENDIX A

Hugh McCall

Born in 1767, Hugh McCall was 13 years old at the time his father's struggle against the British peaked in the summer and fall of 1780. It is unclear whether or not he accompanied his father on the campaigns, but there is little doubt that he witnessed a lot of history. Hugh joined the military as a young man and served as an officer, attaining the brevet rank of major in 1812.¹⁹⁸

At some point, he began writing his *History of Georgia*, which became the first complete history of the state to document its early years. He used the scanty records available to him and conducted extensive interviews with actual participants in the Revolution, many of whom he knew well and who served alongside James McCall or Elijah Clarke. Hugh released the first volume in 1811 and the second in 1816; both were published in Savannah. In a later history, Edward McCrady mentioned that Hugh had access to his father's journal at the time of his books. Unfortunately, that document had already been lost by the end of the 19th century.¹⁹⁹

Hugh became disabled and wheelchair-bound and was mustered out of the service at the end of the War of 1812. It is unknown when he moved from South Carolina to Georgia, but he spent the rest of his life in Savannah. He died in 1824 and is buried in Savannah's Colonial Cemetery. In 1994, the Georgia Association of Historians honored Hugh McCall by creating an award in his honor. It is given every third year to a worthy historian "in recognition of scholarly attainment, excellence in teaching, and/or encouragement of the study of history."²⁰⁰

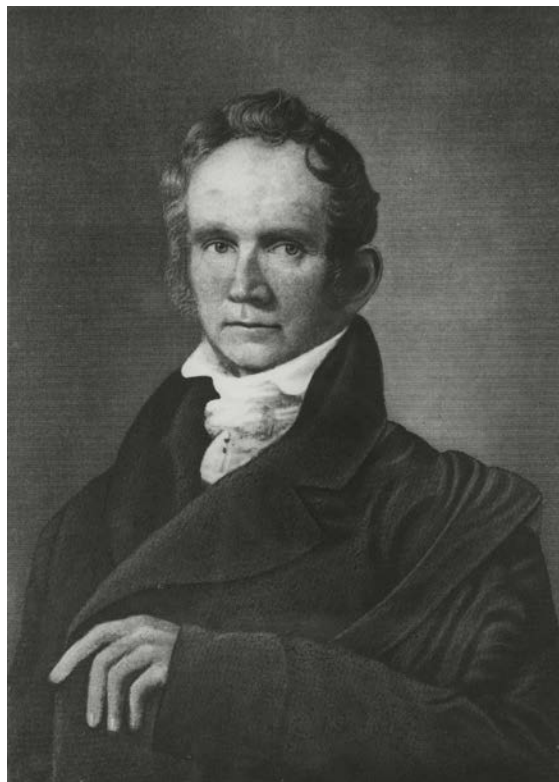


Fig 000. Hugh McCall. Courtesy of Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries.

¹⁹⁸ John Inscoe, "Hugh McCall," *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, April 20, 2017, <https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/hugh-mccall-1767-1824/>.

¹⁹⁹ Inscoe, "Hugh McCall."

²⁰⁰ Inscoe, "Hugh McCall."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Born in Sulfur, Louisiana, but raised in Dothan, Alabama, during the Civil Rights era, Wayne Lynch grew up with a love of history and deep respect for Constitution and Country. He joined the US Army in 1980 and served with nuclear artillery during the Cold War. After returning to university after the Army, Wayne became a CPA and later completed his formal education with a JD from South Texas College of Law in Houston. Most of his career was spent in Galveston County, Texas, where he continues to live and maintain a part-time tax practice. Following his mother's death in 2001, Wayne developed a serious interest in genealogy and early American history and a fascination with following the lives of his ancestors. This led him to the Southern Campaigns of the American Revolution, where his ancestors fought each other from both sides of the political spectrum. One great-grandfather was a loyalist with the New York Volunteers, while other family members served in Patriot militia regiments. Interest became obsession, and Wayne got “stuck” in time researching and learning about incidents and participants during the American Revolution. The work continues.

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