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James McCall's Broadsword Rangers and the Battle of the Cowpens

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James McCall's Broadsword Rangers

This article is dedicated to Charles Baxley, a lost friend who held a knowledge and drive for history that will be sorely missed by all who knew him.

Much has been written on the American victory at the Battle of the Cowpens. Fought on January 17, 1781, this battle is famous for the innovative use of troops, terrain, and tactics employed by Brig. Gen. Daniel Morgan in the South Carolina backcountry. The Cowpens also saw the American cavalry under Lt. Col. William Washington completely dominate their British counterparts. A significant contribution to this mounted American onslaught came from an intrepid force of little-known but hard-hitting South Carolina rangers.

The origin of these men is far from linear and begins in the rugged frontier districts of South Carolina. Prior to the American War for Independence, these wilderness districts saw an influx of European settlers purchasing small tracts of land and pushing into the Savannah, Catawba, Pee Dee, and Broad River drainages. Remote settlements like these existed under the persistent threat of native attacks, as well as the ongoing thefts and assaults from rogue outlaws prowling the frontier.[1] To combat these threats, the settlers formed bands of rangers to patrol their respective districts and hunt down perpetrators.

Rangers first appeared on the American frontier in the late 17th century, where skilled woodsmen in Massachusetts would "range" forward to gather intelligence against enemy native tribes. These early rangers were led by Benjamin Church, a private citizen who blended European firearm techniques with scouting skills learned from friendly Wampanoag warriors.[2] Church's rangers proved highly adept at stalking, raiding the enemy, and setting ambuscades against rival native tribes and French adversaries in King William's War (1688-1697).

Similar tactics were used during the French & Indian War and again employed by civilians in the backcountry frontier of North and South Carolina. Here, the rangers needed to cover more territory than Church's New Englanders, and they relied on a ready supply of saddle horses for speed and mobility to screen, engage, and track down threats as required.[3] This new style of horse-borne rangers spread across the southern colonies from Georgia to Virginia, where men carried hunting rifles and smoothbore fowlers and acted as quick-strike teams who would stalk the enemy on horseback,

dismount, and fight on foot in the role of mounted infantry. Increasing clashes with Native Americans and the internecine Regulator-Moderator conflict in North Carolina in the 1760s, each amplified the role of these mounted rangers in their own way. These escalating events spawned flashes of violence across the southern frontier and pitted rival ranger companies against one another in skirmishes and rencounters that soon spilled down into the South Carolina frontier.[4]

Concurrent with these actions, the seeds of revolution were taking hold in the American colonies, and, in 1775, the First Provisional Congress met and formed a series of new election districts across the South Carolina backcountry. The bitter feud lines established in the Regulator movement now crystallized, with former Regulators favoring the Whig Party that promoted independence from England, while the former Moderators tended to favor the Tory Party and continued loyalty to the King of England.[5] As Whig militias began to form in the backcountry, one company of South Carolina horse rangers took shape that would have a direct effect on many future engagements in the American Revolution.

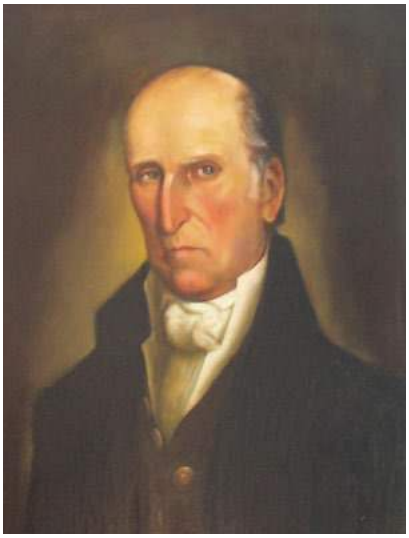
That unit was Capt. James McCall's company from South Carolina's Long Canes Settlements.[6] Captain McCall's first major action in the Revolution occurred in November of 1775 when he arrived with a command of 54 men in the township of Ninety Six. The horse rangers assembled at the courthouse, rode to Col. John Savage's plantation, and fortified his buildings with fence rails to guard against a large party of advancing Tories who laid siege and called for their surrender. A "warm engagement ensued, which continued with very little intermission." The Tories attacked over open ground and lost an unknown number of men. After three days, the Tories asked for a truce and a parley. The Whigs had one man killed and 11 wounded. The Tories reported similar losses at the parley, but other sources reported that 20 Loyalists died in the three-day fight. Both parties signed a twenty-day truce, and the antagonists separated, with most returning to their homes.[7]

The following year, Captain McCall was selected to perform a clandestine mission against a British Indian agent named Alexander Cameron, whom the South Carolina Committee of Safety deemed a threat and wanted removed. The Committee feared Cameron would incite the Cherokee to attack the white settlements along the frontier, and they selected McCall to act as their hidden agent, infiltrate the Cherokee villages at Seneca, and try to disrupt a potential British-Cherokee proxy war before it evolved.[8] After making some successful inroads, the Cherokee suddenly attacked McCall's party of rangers, and several of his men were killed. The remainder escaped, and McCall was taken prisoner

and forced to watch the torture and executions of several captives while the Cherokee decided his fate. Over time, the Cherokees' interest in McCall waned as they launched a series of lethal attacks on frontier Whig settlements from Virginia to Georgia, and McCall managed to steal a horse and make his escape during this time. Instead of moving south to his home, McCall rode north into Virginia, where he fell in with Col. William Christian of the Virginia Militia and had the following printed in a local gazette:[9]

> Captain James McCall, 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 health; and desires this piece of intelligence to be made publick for the satisfaction of his family.[10]

One atrocity will often incite another, and a series of punitive expeditions soon boiled forth against the Cherokee as punishment for their recent raids against Whig families on the frontier. Perhaps driven by revenge for those who were killed in his former party or a desire to complete his mission and find the British agent Cameron, McCall stayed with Christian's Virginians as they entered the Cherokee Nation and burned their way through a series of townships.[11] Other Whig expeditions followed, driving agent Cameron south into the Florida territory.[12] McCall then made his way back to his family in South Carolina.


Col. Andrew Pickens

McCall and his company of rangers next served alongside Col. Andrew Pickens, a neighbor and the regimental militia commander from the Long Canes settlements, in a successful campaign against Tory forces at Kettle Creek, Georgia, in February 1779.[13] Things remained somewhat calm following the Whig victory at Kettle Creek until the British laid siege to Charlestown, South Carolina. The city fell to the British in May 1780, and the repercussions of this Patriot defeat spread throughout South Carolina and wrought havoc across the state's frontier settlements. As Whig and Tory militias assembled, British forces advanced for Ninety Six, and considerable alarm began to grow among the Whig inhabitants, who feared harsh reprisals from Tory landowners in the impending British occupation. The British Army offered simple terms. Former Whigs could swear out a parole pronouncing fealty to the king, and they could keep their land and property. Those who refused the parole would be outlawed and risk arrest and confiscation of all they possessed.

Colonel Pickens called all his men from the Long Canes settlement to a meeting to discuss the looming British arrival. All arrived mounted and under arms. Pickens reported that the rest of South Carolina had largely capitulated, and most of those who assembled supported signing paroles with the British, despite the fact that Whig militias in Georgia, North Carolina, and Virginia continued to fight against the crown. A vote was called; any man wishing to take the king's parole would ground their arms. Those opposed would not. Everyone present grounded their arms—except McCall and a handful of rangers.[14] Emanuel McConnell, one of the rangers who sided with McCall, remembered, "We dispersed with [Colonel Pickens's] blessings and God's mercies – to meet again ere long." The small party rode out of the assembly with their rifles pointed at the sky:

> This applicant together with about thirty or forty of his neighbors determined not to Submit to the indignity offered them – formed themselves into a Company of Cavalry under the command of the noble and gallant Capt. James McCall and under him constituted a small but efficient body of flying troops.[15]

With Moses Liddle acting as his lieutenant, Captain McCall and this lone company of rangers departed for North Carolina to continue the fight from the saddle.[16]

The remainder of 1780 was a bloody affair for McCall's company as the Carolina frontier exploded in a series of hit-and-run attacks and pitched engagements, mostly pitting Whig and Tory militias against one another. Like many of his men, McCall's own farm was attacked by British loyalists who threatened his wife and children; McCall refused to bend and stayed in the field.[17] By this point in the war, there had been so many atrocities committed by both Tory and Whig militias that the fighting often resembled a blood feud where quarter was neither given nor asked for and surrendering to the wrong enemy could result in a death sentence. Most every backcountry commander of note had blood on his hands, and McCall was no exception. Though a written commission for James McCall has never been found, he is reported to have received an appointment from John Rutledge, the exiled governor of South Carolina, to raise a regiment of South Carolina State Dragoons in 1780.[18]

Unfortunately, there were no stores available for now Lieutenant Colonel McCall's would-be dragoons to draw broadswords—the 18th century term referred to the broad cross-section of these heavy horsemen's blades designed for cleaving the enemy from the saddle. Without broadswords, McCall's rangers could only gallop into range, rein to a stop, and fire a rifle volley. Having broadswords would allow the rangers

to act as true cavalry and drive their horses into the midst of the enemy, break their ranks apart, and cut their opponents to the ground. However, broadswords were hard to come by on the frontier, forcing McCall and his men to acquire the weapons primarily through captured enemy arms. Over the next several months, McCall and his dragoon company grew in experience and reputation, with McCall and his command fighting at no fewer than five significant engagements in the latter half of 1780, including Musgrove's Mill, Augusta, Fishdam Ford, Blackstock's Plantation and Long Canes. By December 1780, Lieutenant Colonel McCall commanded a sizeable force including a small company of broadsword rangers under his dragoon commander, Captain Liddle, plus an additional 100-man battalion of mounted rangers equipped with the standard long arms and brush knives. It was this mixed force of mounted Patriots that McCall brought into Brig. Gen. Daniel Morgan's camp of Continentals on the Pacolet River in the final weeks of 1780.[19]

Gen. Daniel Morgan

Detached from the main Continental Army, Morgan received orders from Maj. Gen. Nathanael Greene to move west from Charlotte, North Carolina, threaten the British left flank in the South Carolina backcountry, and try and raise the Whig militia against the occupying British forces.[20] Morgan eagerly welcomed McCall's men into his ranks, and McCall soon met with Lt. Col. William Washington, the commander of the Continental 3rd Light Dragoons.[21] A distant cousin of Gen. George Washington, the younger Washington was a veteran light dragoon officer, having served in the saddle at Brandywine, Germantown, and the Monmouth Courthouse campaign, as well as Rantowles Bridge and Moncks Corner outside Charlestown.[22] Washington had seen war visited upon civilians in the past; however, the hardships he witnessed in the South Carolina backcountry had a marked effect on the veteran light horseman, causing him to call for revenge against the crimes he saw taking place. "The distress of the women and children stripped of everything by plundering Villains cries aloud for redress."[23] These base acts by the Tories served as a sharp deterrent to Daniel Morgan's attempts to raise the local Whigs, especially the actions

Lt. Col. William Washington

of Col. Thomas Waters's Tories. Based in Georgia, Waters's command of some 250 mounted gunmen was actively burning barns, stealing livestock, and abusing the local Whigs to the point that few able-bodied men would risk leaving their homes to join the fight against the British, for fear of suffering a brutal attack on their homesteads.[24]

When word reached Daniel Morgan that Waters's Georgians had been spotted within 20 miles, he tasked Washington and his Continental light dragoons with chasing down the Tories. Washington's command consisted of three companies of 3rd Light Dragoons and one company of 1st Light Dragoons, totaling some 80 privates in the saddle. These Continentals did not carry shoulder arms, as military carbines were even rarer to come by than broadswords in 1780 America. Instead, his light dragoons were only equipped for close-range saddle combat with pistols, broadswords, and swift horses. Washington saw that the addition of McCall's rangers would give his light dragoons a much-needed element of mobile firepower to accompany his planned strike against the Georgians and promptly issued McCall enough broadswords to increase Moses Liddle's dragoon company to 45 men.[25] Other rangers volunteered to ride with Washington, including men from Lt. Col. Thomas Brandon's Lower Spartan Regiment of South Carolina's Fair Forest District. Like McCall, Brandon had a small mounted company armed with broadswords and, as word spread through Morgan's camp, additional rifle-bearing rangers from the Little River and Ninety Six Districts on fast horses volunteered to join Washington's force.[26] This gave Washington a combined command of three hundred dragoons and rangers, and they departed Morgan's camp at Grindal Shoals early on the morning of December 29.[27]

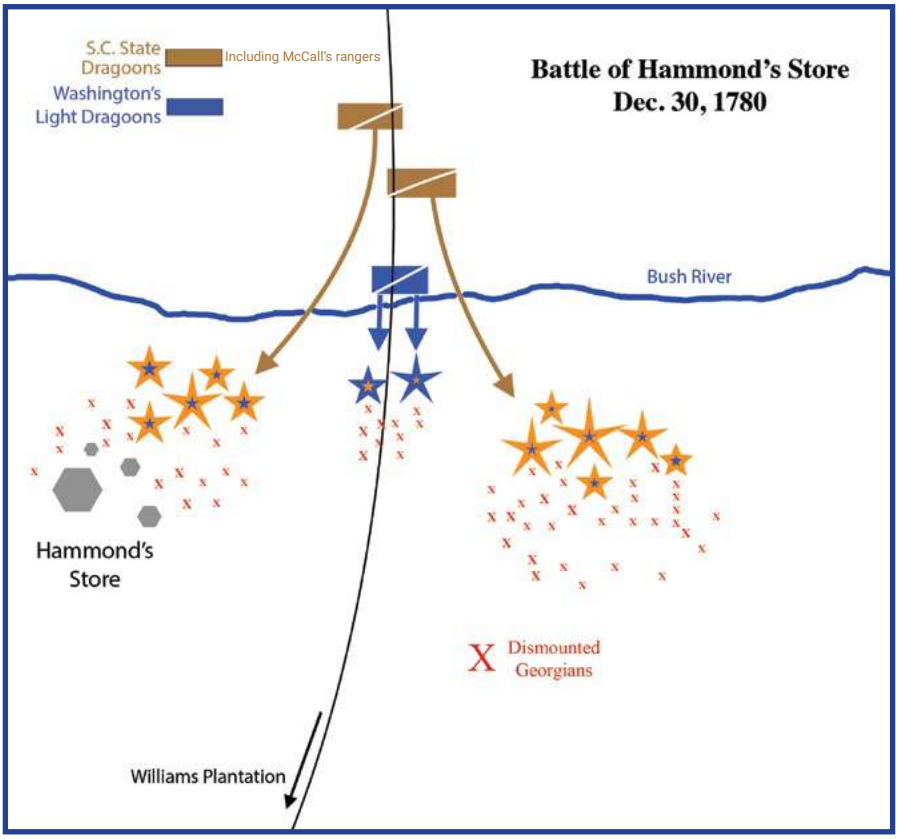
The party took off with a vengeance, pounding down clay roads and crossing a series of high-water creeks and rivers. Waters's Georgians retreated some twenty miles in an effort to evade contact, but Washington kept coming, covering 40 miles in 30 hours before spotting the Tory camp on the Bush River at a frontier trading post called Hammond's Store.[28] Thomas Young, a broadsword ranger from Brandon's dragoon company, described the moment Waters's gunmen were spotted across the river:

> When we came in sight, we perceived that the tories had formed in line on the brow of the hill opposite to us. We had a long hill to descend and another to rise. Col. Washington and his dragoons gave a shout, drew swords, and charged down the hill like madmen. The tories fled in every direction without firing a gun.[29]

Dismounted at the moment of the attack, Waters's men broke to the rear as Washington's light dragoons charged across the river. The South Carolina dragoons and horse rangers then came barreling

in on the Georgians' flanks, and all pursued the Tories up onto the bluffs, cutting down those in reach and shooting the rest with their long arms.

The Tories suffered 160 killed and wounded—and 40 captured. Colonel Waters and the remaining Georgians escaped into the woods. Neither Washington's light dragoons nor the rangers with him suffered any notable casualties. Such lopsided returns generally indicate a war crime, and whether Washington viewed Waters's men as outlaws or combatants is unknown. General Morgan defined the Georgia gunmen as "insulting" and "plundering" innocent civilians, and Washington's recent comments of "women and children stripped" by backcountry "Villains" may hold the key to Washington's opinion. Archaeological studies of the battlefield reveal an encounter that rolled over the river quickly and ended in a high volume of gunfire on the bluffs above. This would be consistent with a leading charge of broadswords followed by rapid volleys of buckshot and rifle balls fired into fleeing Tories on the bluffs.[30]



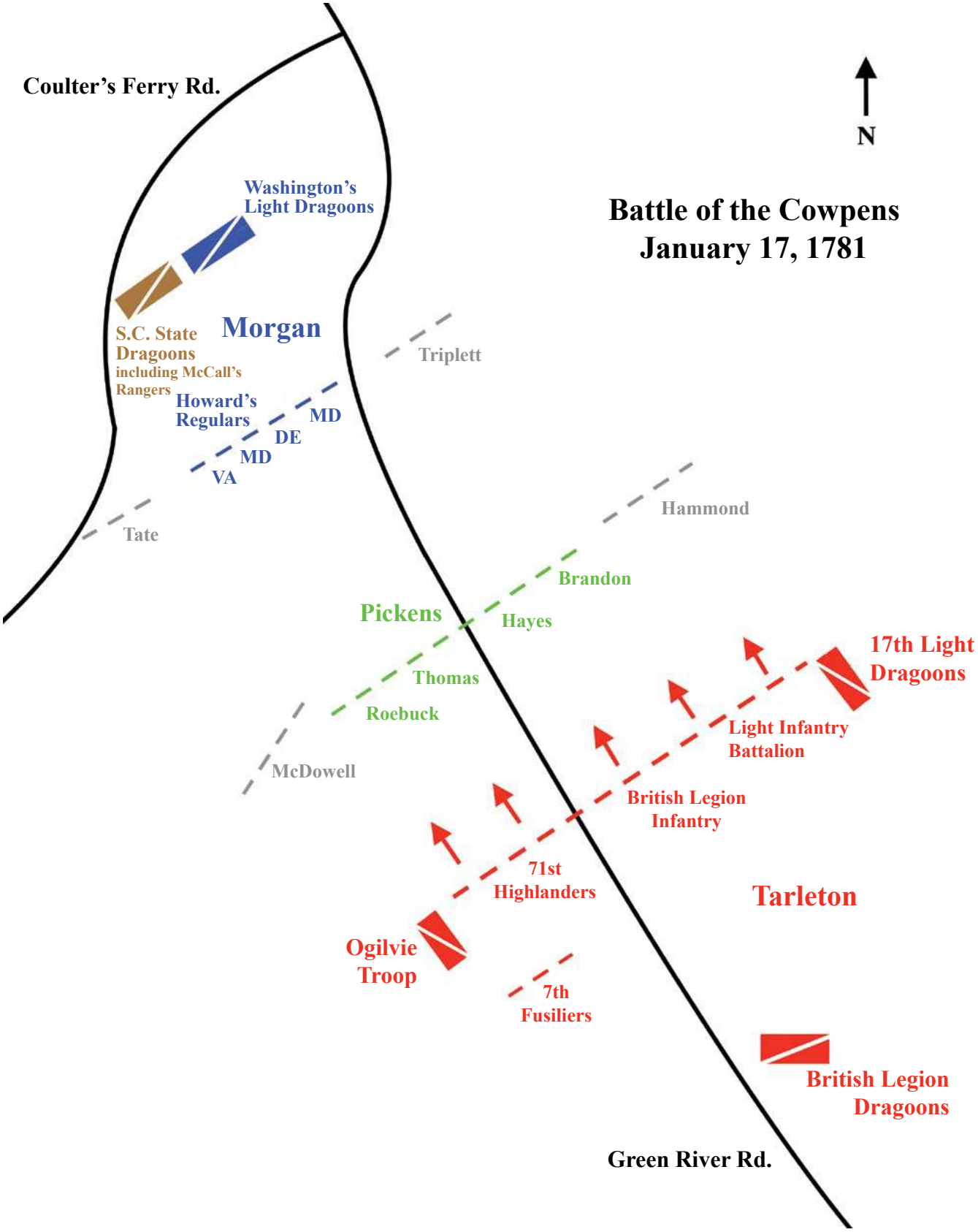
Battle of Hammond's Store. *Map by Dan Murphy.*

Regardless of the intent, the outcome at Hammond's Store eradicated a dangerous threat to the local Whigs, and General Morgan soon saw an increase in the number of backcountry militia coming into his camp.[31]

As Morgan's numbers continued to grow, he attracted British attention, and a hand-picked force of fast-moving British dragoons, light infantry, and horse-drawn artillery soon headed into the backcountry to deal his troops a blow.[32] The force was commanded by Lt. Col. Banastre Tarleton, a wealthy English-born officer whose British Legion dragoons performed extremely well under Tarleton after the fall of Charlestown. However, Tarleton could be overly bold and reckless; he lost a hard fight at Blackstock's Farm against Whig Gen. Thomas Sumter, and many of the men who helped Sumter defeat Tarleton were now in Morgan's camp—including backcountry battalion commanders James McCall and Thomas Brandon. Upon interviewing many of the veterans who had fought Tarleton before, Morgan began developing a plan of his own and soon picked his ground to meet Tarleton. At dawn on the morning of January 17, 1781, he arrayed his men across an open drover's field known as the Cowpens by local farmers.

Bisected by the Green River Road, the open field sat on gently rolling ground bordered on either side by heavy woods, boggy springs, and muddy ravines. A forward line of picked riflemen would fire at distant targets of opportunity when the British first advanced. Morgan's second line consisted of dismounted ranger and militia battalions, armed largely with slow-loading rifles.[33] Per Morgan's plan, these mixed battalions would each deliver two volleys into the expected British attack, then fall back through planned openings in Morgan's third line. Once in the rear, the battalions would reform and rejoin the fight on the American right. Morgan's third line contained five companies of trained Continental infantry, all under the direct command of Lt. Col. John Howard. Morgan wanted Howard's trained Continentals, who were capable of a higher rate of fire than the militia, to stun the British assault with their firepower and buy the necessary time for the militia rifle battalions to circle right and rejoin the fight.[34] To ensure Howard held this crucial position, Morgan placed veteran riflemen on either flank of Howard's regulars.

Lieutenant Colonel Washington would command all cavalry on the field and take a reserve position on the high ground behind the third line.[35] Washington had fought Lieutenant Colonel Tarleton before and began making his preparations the evening before the battle. To increase his odds for the coming engagement, he issued 40 broadswords from General Morgan's wagons to picked men from the commands of James McCall and Thomas Brandon. These two battalions already contained a company each of broadsword rangers, and both companies were known quantities to Washington following the previous action at Hammond's Store. McCall would command his company of dragoons under Moses Liddle, and Benjamin Jolly would lead the dragoons from Thomas Brandon's Fair Forest District.[36] "Two companies of volunteers were called for," wrote Thomas Young. "One was raised by Major Jolly of Union District, and the other, I think, by Major McCall. I attached myself to Major Jolly's company."[37] By augmenting


Coulter's Ferry Rd.
N
Battle of the Cowpens
January 17, 1781
Washington's
Light Dragoons
Morgan
S.C. State
Dragoons
including McCall's
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Howard's
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MD
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Brandon
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Hayes
Thomas
Roebuck
McDowell
17th Light
Dragoons
Light Infantry
Battalion
British Legion
Infantry
71st
Highlanders
Tarleton
Ogilvie
Troop
7th
Fusiliers
British Legion
Dragoons
Green River Rd.

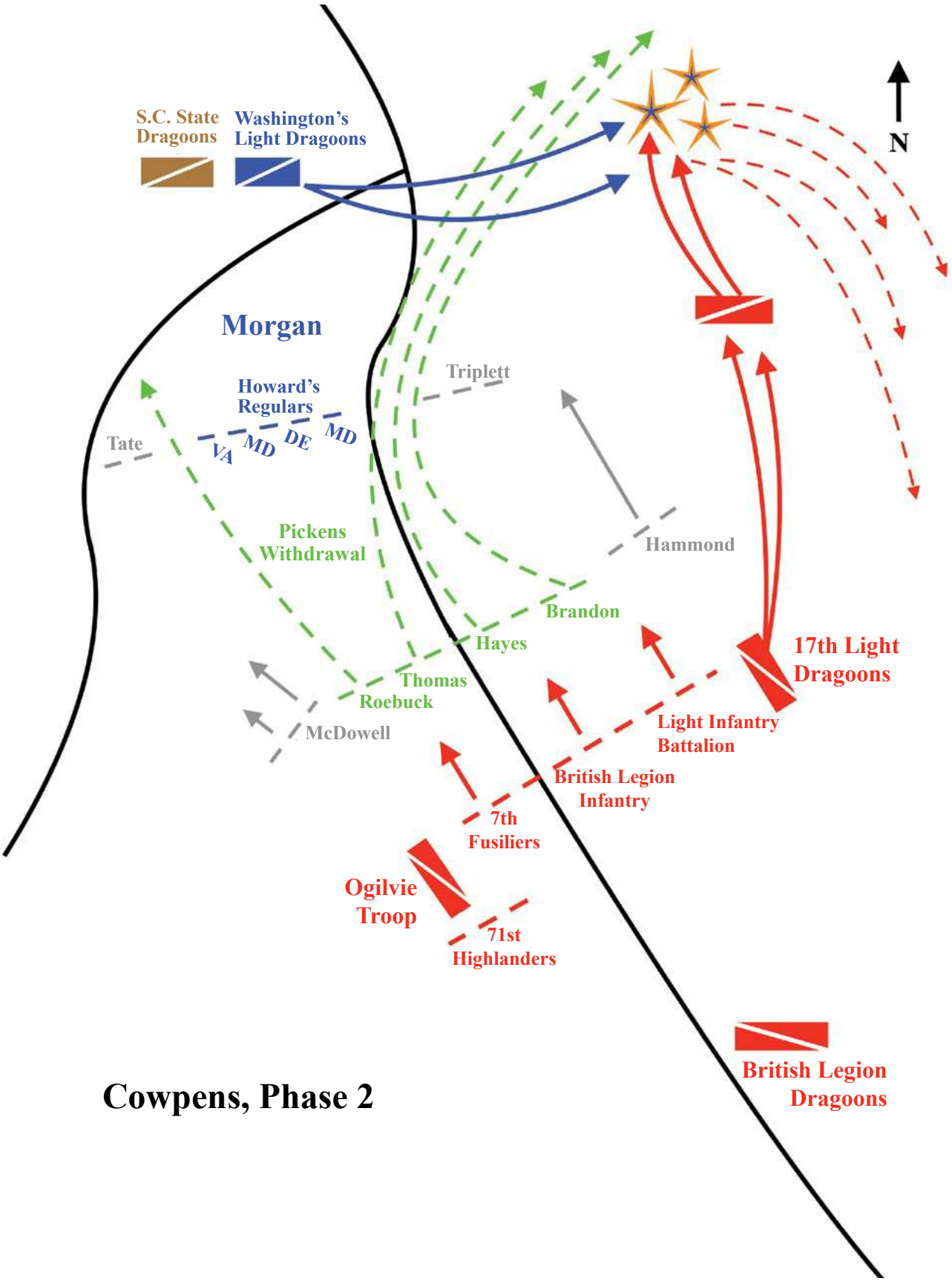
the two existing broadsword companies with the spare stock of swords, Washington effectively created an entire second squadron of state dragoons from South Carolina that could act independently of his own squadron of Continentals. This forethought would prove immensely beneficial the following morning.

Morgan's men were up before dawn and quickly in position. At first light, a rash of rifle fire cracked across the field, marking the arrival of Tarleton's Legion Dragoons. The enemy horsemen fell back, and Lieutenant Colonel Tarleton edged forward as the sun rose to study Morgan's position.[38] He saw multiple lines of militia riflemen in a field, all formed for a fight and completely in the open without a fence or stone wall in sight. Tarleton ordered an attack straight away.

The British infantry dropped their packs and formed ranks. Tarleton posted the Light Infantry Battalion on the British right, then his British Legion Infantry in the center straddling the Green River Road, and the 7th Fusiliers south of the road.[39] He next put a 40-man company of the 17th Light Dragoons on his right flank and placed a full company of his own British Legion dragoons on his left. A section of two 3-pound guns would move with his infantry for mobile fire support, with the drivers of the horse teams trailing north of the road to maneuver the guns as needed.[40] Tarleton kept the 71st Highland infantry in reserve, along with a separate mounted reserve of 200 troopers from his British Legion dragoons. When all was set, his infantry gave a yell and started off at a trot.[41]

The front line of picked riflemen opened fire, stunning the British infantry and then falling back to reload their rifles on the second line.[42] The British pressed ahead only to suffer a series of stiff rolling fires from the four battalions of dismounted rangers.[43] These volleys took a substantial toll on Tarleton's ranks, but the British pressed ahead with the bayonet in an effort to close with the rifle-bearing battalions before they could manage a reload. "We gave the enemy one fire, when they charged us with their bayonets," recalled James Collins of Joseph Hayes's Little River Rifle Battalion. "We gave way and retreated for our horses." The British closed, forcing a retreat before the majority could deliver a second fire; still, the men filed off in order as planned and began making their way to the rear to rally and reload behind Howard's line of regulars per Morgan's battle plan.[44] When Tarleton saw the Whig militia retiring, he ordered his 17th Light Dragoons to charge the retiring enemy.[45]

The 17th Light Dragoons moved forward quickly with a view of enemy infantry retreating with empty guns on firm, open ground—a cavalryman's dream. They pounced on the riflemen at a gallop, spurring and slashing their way through the foot-bound troops. Caught among them was John Whelchel, who recalled he was "attacked by Tarleton's horse" and received "severe wounds on his head



Cowpens, Phase 2

and two on his shoulders." [46] Also in this mix was James Collins, who thought he was done for. "Now my hide is in the loft," recalled Collins as the 17th surged ahead, their broadswords cutting left and right.[47] Captain Caldwell, commanding a rifle company of Joseph Hayes's regiment, fell with a mortal wound, and a panic began to take hold, causing the others to begin sprinting for their horses tied far in the American rear.[48]

Lieutenant Colonel Washington sat watching from a rise behind General Morgan's lines. He knew that if the dismounted militia grabbed their horses and fled the field, the battle was lost. Washington acted in an instant, spurring his light dragoons forward while holding the South Carolina squadron in reserve. By now, the British 17th had spread in their pursuit of the running militia, and their left rear flank was hanging wide open when Washington struck.

"Colonel Washington's cavalry was among them like a whirlwind," wrote Collins. "The shock was so sudden and violent they couldn't stand it, and immediately betook themselves to flight."[49] Washington's light dragoons chopped through the British 17th at a gallop, driving the enemy back about and clearing 18 British saddles in the process.[50] "They wore a uniform of Red and Buff," recalled a cornet from the 3rd Light Dragoons. "[Our] first charge was made on the enemies cavalry (who were cutting down our Militia,) and whom, after a smart Action, [were] instantly defeated." Washington and his men spurred after the fleeing enemy, swept over the artillery horses and drivers of the British guns, and when the drivers refused to surrender, shot them down with their pistols, effectively stranding the two British guns on the field.[51] The Continentals then rallied and returned to the rise behind Morgan's third line, reposting beside the South Carolina squadron.

Keeping a poised reserve at hand when launching a charge against opposing cavalry was a basic tenet of period light cavalry tactics, whereby commanders would keep a reserve on hand rather than engage the enemy with their entire force; doctrine called for committing the whole force only once the enemy fell into disorder.[52] Like many horse soldiers, Washington acted as much on instinct as he did on doctrine, however, Washington employed similar tactics against Tarleton at the prior battle of Rantowles Bridge, and this would explain why the South Carolina squadron remained in reserve as Washington charged the British 17th.[53] Thomas Young, serving under Benjamin Jolly in the South Carolina squadron, clearly described Washington's squadron of Continental light dragoons as "the cavalry" in their separate attack on the 17th Light Dragoons. "After the first fire, the militia retreated, and *the cavalry* covered their retreat...In this, I can hardly be mistaken."[54]

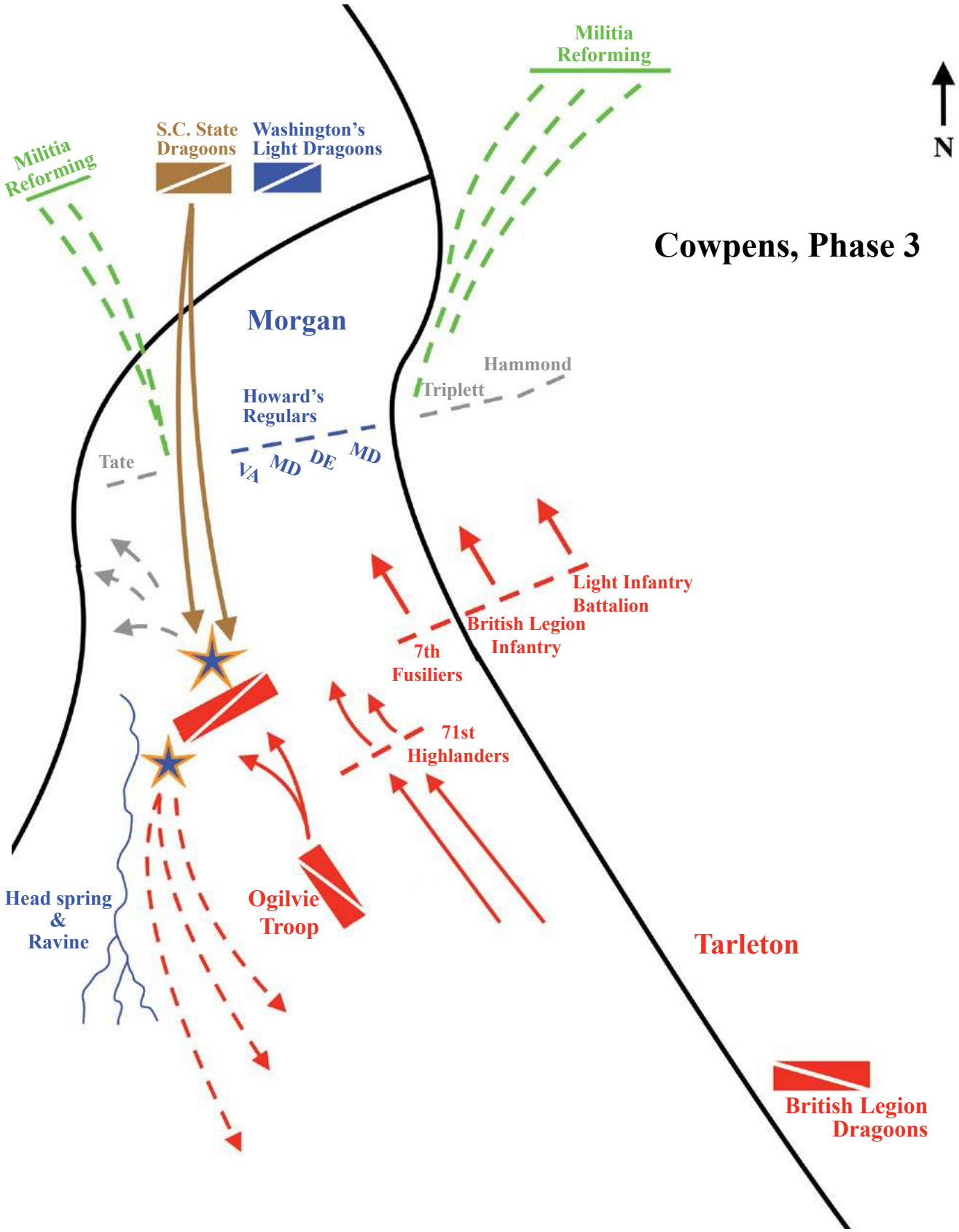
Following Washington's attack, the dismounted rangers and riflemen rallied and began to reform in the right rear under the direction of General Morgan and other officers.[55] Elsewhere, the battle continued unabated as Tarleton pressed his rapidly thinning infantry back into the fray against Howard's third line of Continental regulars. Thomas Young recalled the moment the regulars opened fire: "[W]hen the regulars fired, it seemed like one sheet of flame from right to left. Oh! it was beautiful!" There's little doubt this fire had an entirely different effect on the minds of the British. Just moments before, Tarleton watched his infantry and dragoons chase the American militia from the field with the "the most promising assurances of success."[56] Then his 17th Light Dragoons came streaming back in tatters, and his infantry began suffering stiff, rapid volleys of smoothbore musketry from Lieutenant Colonel Howard's trained Maryland and Delaware Continentals.

Tarleton doubled down and gamely poured in more troops.

> As the contest between the British infantry … and the [C]ontinentals seemed equally balanced … [I] thought the advance of the 71st … and a movement of the cavalry in reserve to threaten the enemy's right flank would put a victorious period to the action.[57]

The 71st Highlanders drove forward to flank the right of Howard's line, screened by a well-timed charge of Capt. David Ogilvie's company of green-clad British Legion Dragoons.[58] Ogilvie's men slashed through McDowell's North Carolina riflemen on the far American right; Joseph James was "struck on the head … and left on the ground for dead," William Meade "had a leg badly wounded by the stroke of a Cutlass from a British Light horseman," and John Fields suffered "a blow on the head … which felled him to the ground. [59] The British dragoons scattered McDowell's line and continued on for the American right rear.

The South Carolina squadron drew steel and spurred forward. "In a moment the command to charge was given," said Thomas Young. "We made a most furious charge, and cutting through the British cavalry, wheeled and charged them in the rear."[60] The charge ripped through Ogilvie's dragoons, breaking the British ranks apart and sending them scurrying for the rear. The South Carolinians wheeled about and hacked through the British cavalry with a second charge that emptied still more saddles and drove the enemy back at a furious gallop.[61] British Lt. Roderick McKenzie watched Ogilvie's dragoon troop make the charge. "Ogilvie, with his troop was ordered to charge the right flank of the enemy. He cut his way through their line, but … charged at the same time by the whole of Washington's dragoons, was compelled to retreat in confusion."[62] That Lieutenant McKenzie mistook the South Carolina squadron of dragoons for Washington's entire command is


Militia Reforming
Militia Reforming
S.C. State Dragoons
Washington's Light Dragoons
N
Cowpens, Phase 3
Morgan
Hammond
Triplett
Howard's Regulars
VA MD DE MD
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Light Infantry Battalion
British Legion Infantry
7th Fusiliers
71st Highlanders
Head spring & Ravine
Ogilvie Troop
Tarleton
British Legion Dragoons

noteworthy indeed and stands as a true testament to the speed, skill, and ferocity of the broadsword rangers riding under James McCall and Benjamin Jolly.

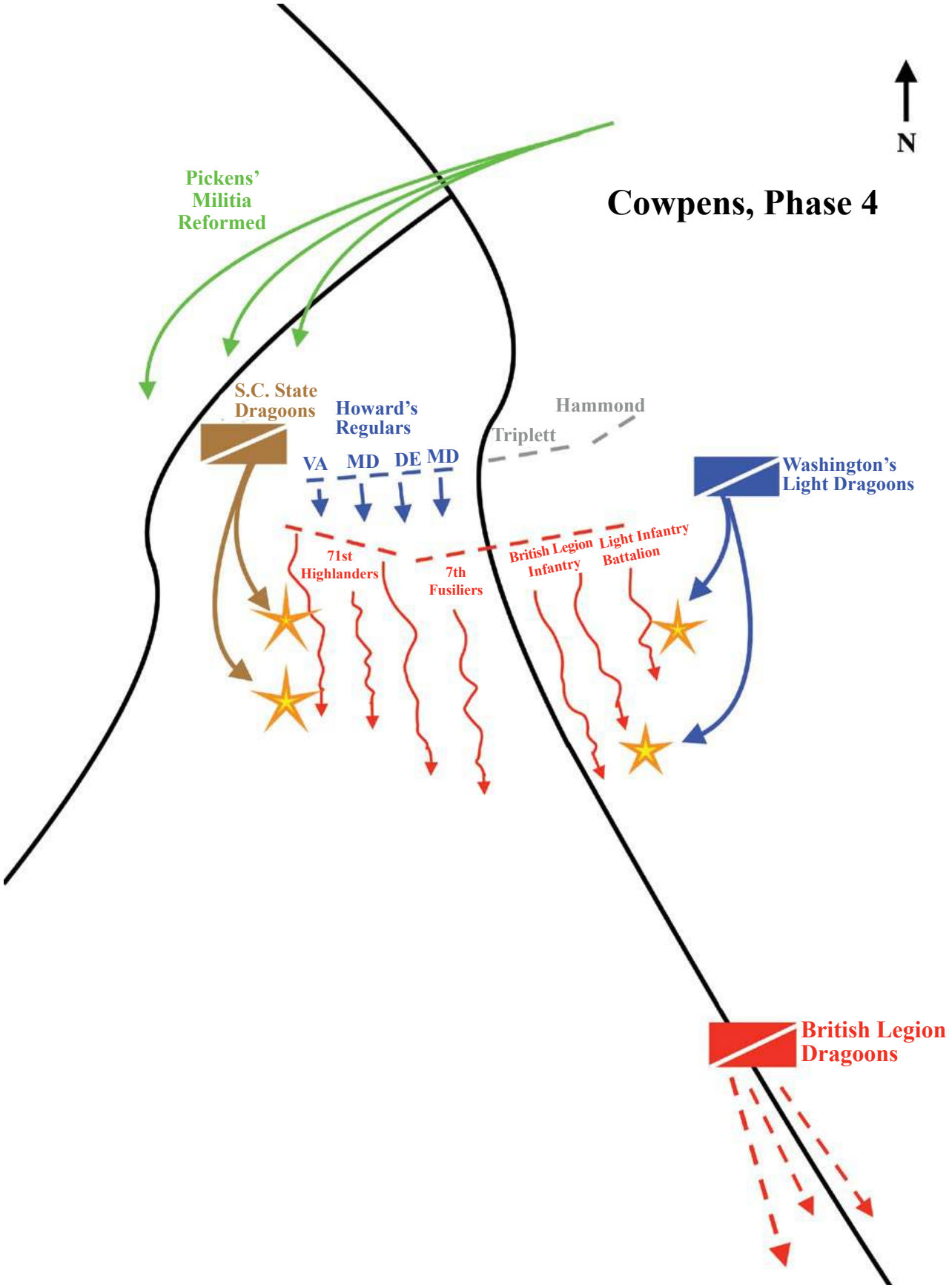
The rapid repulse of Ogilvie on the American right followed Washington's earlier charge on the left by mere minutes and kept Ogilvie from running rampant in Morgan's rear and chasing off the reforming riflemen and militia. This separate charge has been overlooked by some historians altogether, while others have conflated this action against Ogilvie with the actions of Washington's light dragoons. This confusion stems from the surrounding stream of rapid events, all occurring at nearly the same time, and requires a closer look to define the two separate actions of the American cavalry.

When the South Carolina squadron spurred forward, the 71st Highlanders were simultaneously swinging into the right flank of Howard's line of Continental regulars, which caused the right-hand company of regulars to make an error. A retrograde movement was the result.[63] To save his line, Howard ordered the rest of his regulars to retreat in kind. This rearward movement caused two events to occur in short order.

The first was a wild pursuit by the Highlanders, who, upon seeing Howard's regulars retreat, thought the day was won and broke ranks and surged forward like a mob. The second was a highly animated response from General Morgan, who rode up to Lieutenant Colonel Howard, demanding to know why the Continentals were retreating. Howard assured Morgan his men were not beaten and only needed a few yards of ground to re-square the ranks and turn about. Morgan looked to the rear and ordered Howard "to keep [marching] with the men until we came to the rising ground near Washington's horse."[64] The fact that Washington and his light dragoons were parked near the hill at this moment proves that the South Carolina squadron made the charge against Ogilvie on Howard's right independent of Washington. Further evidence comes from Cornet Simmons of the 3rd Light Dragoons, who details four separate charges made by Washington's light dragoons at Cowpens, none of which occurred on the right of the American line.[65]

Shortly after McCall and Jolly rolled forward, Howard halted his men near the rising ground before Washington. Lieutenant Thomas Anderson of the Delaware Regulars recalled the moment. "We let them come within ten or fifteen yards of us, then give them a full volley."[66] This close fire decimated the Highlanders, and the Continentals were soon among them with the bayonet, causing the Scots to take flight or suffer the thrust of American steel.

With the enemy in retreat, Washington ordered all cavalry forward and led his light dragoons around Howard's left.[67] On the right flank, Thomas Young and his broadsword rangers heard the call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Cowpens, Phase 4
Pickens' Militia Reformed
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71st Highlanders
7th Fusiliers
British Legion Infantry
Light Infantry Battalion
British Legion Dragoons

for the charge. "At this moment the bugle sounded. We, about half formed and making a sort of circuit at full speed, came up in rear of the British line, shouting and charging like madmen."[68]

McCall and Jolly struck on the American right, driving through fusiliers and highlanders alike as Washington cut into the British Legion infantry on the far side of the field.[69] These simultaneous charges created a rippling effect that knocked down waves of enemy infantry, shattered discipline, and impaired the British ability to form a line and return fire.[70] At the same time, the reformed rifle battalions of Morgan's second line pressed into the mix and began firing at targets of opportunity, all while Howard's regulars continued to storm forward with their bayonets.

Tarleton saw the battle slipping from his grasp and at once ordered his fresh reserve of over 200 British Legion Dragoons to charge forward and save the day with a massed countercharge. Instead, his four companies of fresh dragoons took one look at the surging American cavalry coursing across the field and fled at a gallop. "[A]ll attempts to restore order, recollection, or courage, proved fruitless," wrote Tarleton. "Above two hundred dragoons forsook their leader, and left the field of battle."[71] Tarleton next gathered a handful of forty men, launched a doomed attack to save face, and spurred after his retreating dragoons.[72]

Morgan's layered plan of deliberate riflemen, rapid firing regulars, and hard-charging horsemen led to a stunning victory unlike any other in the American Revolution. The battle of Cowpens gave the American army their greatest tactical victory of the war—and the victory was due in no small part to Lt. Col. James McCall, Capt. Moses Liddle, and two little-known companies of South Carolina broadsword rangers.

Following the battle of Cowpens, Lieutenant Colonel McCall and Captain Liddle joined General Greene's army in North Carolina, where they paired with Gen. Andrew Pickens from the Long Canes settlements in harassing and ranging the rear of Gen. Charles, Lord Cornwallis's British columns in what became known as the Race for the Dan.[73] In mid-February 1781, Greene tasked Pickens's men with attacking British forces in the area of Hillsborough, North Carolina, and McCall showed his veteran ability for command by leading a mixed force of mounted and dismounted rangers against a British outpost at Hart's Mill.

McCall launched the attack at dawn, sending a troop of mounted rangers in a screening charge that allowed the riflemen to close on the outpost and open a crossfire. The British fled under the coordinated attack, losing a sergeant and nine men killed—and one officer and 19 privates captured. The Americans

suffered no casualties. Pickens wrote the capture of the outpost "would have done honor to the most disciplined [regular] troops."[74]

In early March, Pickens, McCall, and their South Carolinians returned to their home state to be reprovisioned, and McCall soon fell in with an old ally, Col. Elijah Clarke of the Georgia State Militia. On March 23, Clarke and McCall, with a force of 180 men, swept through the Ninety Six District with hopes of tracking down Major John Dunlap, an ardent Loyalist officer of the Queen's Rangers from the British garrison at Ninety Six. Dunlap held a universally poor reputation among the local Whigs for stealing food and supplies from civilians, and he was now commanding a foraging party of 90 British dragoons and infantry targeting Whig farms and families. Clarke gained word of Dunlap's location on March 23, and divided his forces into two sections, "reserving out of them a small party to act as Dragoons…"

It's not clear who led this small party of American dragoons, although James McCall and his rangers were present and would have been the natural choice as Clarke cast his net to snare Dunlap and his party. After finding Dunlap, Clarke sent part of his force to secure a bridge in Dunlap's rear and then launched a broadsword charge straight at Dunlap's command.[75] "Our Militia Horse charged their regulars who fled with precipitation altho their number exceeded ours," wrote Pickens to General Greene.[76]

The trained British dragoons fled at the sight of the American cavalry, and the British infantry ran for a mill on Hogskin Creek as Clarke's riflemen dismounted and opened fire, forcing the enemy infantry into the millhouse and surrounding outbuildings. "The Infantry after the flight of their Horse retreated to some Houses and after some time surrendered." [77] British casualties mounted under the accurate rifle fire—Dunlap was wounded, 33 of his men were shot, and the remainder surrendered with Dunlap after expending their ammunition.[78] Dunlap was marched to Gilbert Town, North Carolina, and was murdered there by his guard on March 28.[79] Meanwhile, Clarke and McCall moved into Georgia, where they both caught smallpox in mid-April. Clarke stayed in Georgia and survived. McCall returned to South Carolina and died of the disease.[80]

To this day, no one has found the grave of James McCall, and his memory has largely slipped into obscurity. There are no statues or town squares dedicated to this often-overlooked individual. All that remains is an astonishing record of a volunteer soldier who served as a ranger, a spy, a dragoon officer, a battalion commander and, when needed, judge and jury.

But one thing is certain.

America was lucky to have James McCall.

Endnotes

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12. Daniel Murphy and Ron Crawley, "The Real Life Exploits of Lt. Col. James McCall," *Southern Campaigns of the American Revolution,* December, 2006, pp 19-23.
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16. Pension Application of Captain Moses Liddell W7698. Transcribed by Will Graves @ https://revwarapps.org/w7698.pdf; Emanuel McConnell S2773, transcribed by Will Graves @ https://revwarapps.org/s2773.pdf
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20. General Nathanael Greene to General Daniel Morgan, December 16, 1780, Richard K Showman, Ed., *The Papers of General Nathanael Greene,* Vol. VI, (Chapel Hill, N.C. University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 589-90; General Nathanael Greene to Samuel Huntington, December 28, 1780, Richard K Showman, Ed., *The Papers of General Nathanael Greene,* Vol. VII, (Chapel Hill, N.C. University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 7-9.
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22. William Washington also served as an infantry captain at the battles of Harlem Heights, White Plains, and Trenton.
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26. Thomas Young, "The Memoir of Major Thomas Young" *Orion Magazine,* October and November, 1843 @ https://sites.rootsweb.com/~eazier1/Young/Biography12.htm Pension Application of James Dillard S6797 Transcribed by Will Graves @ https://revwarapps.org/s6797.pdf; Pension Application of Thomas Entrekin W7112 Transcribed by Will Graves @ https://revwarapps.org/w7112.pdf ; Pension Application of Robert Long S7157 Transcribed by Will Graves @ https://revwarapps.org/s7157.pdf ; "Morgan to Greene, January 4,1781" Showman, Richard K Showman, Ed., *The Papers of General Nathanael Greene,* Vol. VII, (Chapel Hill, N.C. University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 50-51.
27. Daniel Morgan to Nathanael Greene, December 31, 1780. Richard K Showman, Ed., *The Papers of General Nathanael Greene,* Vol. VII, (Chapel Hill, N.C. University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 30. After years of backcountry service, McCall would have known many of these other men from neighboring settlements and prior campaigns, and may have aided Washington in selecting capable volunteers.
28. "Morgan to Greene," Showman, *Papers of Greene,* Vol. VII, 30.
29. Young, *Memoir.*
30. Author's personal visit to the battlefield with John Allison and the S.C.A.R. Archaeological Crew, who diligently found and cataloged hundreds of artifacts from the field. Future studies will hopefully reveal even more artifacts and information.
31. Morgan to Greene," Showman, *Papers of Greene,* Vol. VII, *Notes* 3, 4 & 5, p. 51-52.
32. General Daniel Morgan to General Nathanael Greene, January 15, 1781, Showman, *Greene Papers*, Vol. VII, 128.
33. General Daniel Morgan to General Nathanael Greene, January 19, 1781, Showman, *Greene Papers*, Vol. VII, 153.
34. Dr. Lawrence Babits, A Devil of a Whipping: The Battle of Cowpens, (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 71-79.
35. Morgan to Greene, January 19, 1781. Showman, *Greene Papers*, Vol. VII, 153. [Brackets by author]
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40. Pension Application of Lawrence Everhart, transcribed and annotated by C. Leon Harris, See sworn statement of James Simmons. @ https://revwarapps.org/s25068.pdf .
41. Banastre Tarleton, "Banastre Tarleton: 'The Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, (London, T. Cadell, 1788), 216.
42. Samuel Hammond was a senior captain in James McCall's battalion, and these dismounted men were rangers from McCall's battalion, who were not yet equipped with broadswords, and thus fought on foot at the Cowpens. See pension Application of Samuel Hammond https://revwarapps.org/s21807.pdf
43. Babits, *Devil of a Whipping,* 91.
44. One battalion of from Thomas Brandon's Regiment did manage to deliver a second fire.
45. Tarleton, *Campaigns*, 216.
46. Pension Application of James Whelchel W6498, transcribed by Will Graves @ https://revwarapps.org/w6498.pdf
47. Collins, *Autobiography,* 57.
48. Pension application of James Carlile (Carlisle) 1 W8583 Transcribed by Will Graves @ https://revwarapps.org/w8583.pdf;
49. Collins, *Autobiography,* 57. Bracketed words by author.
50. It is very likely that Washington's attack was aided by a timely volley from a portion of the riflemen who first reached their horses, and thus accounts for the relatively high number of casualties produced by a single sabre charge.
51. Pension Application of Lawrence Everhart, Simmons'supporting statement. @ https://revwarapps.org/s25068.pdf

52. Sir William Fawcett ed. *Regulations for the Prussian Cavalry*, "Regulations for the Prussian Hussars" Part 1, Chapter 3, Article 14, (London, J. Haberkorn, 1757), 128. *"The [light cavalry] are never to engage the enemy with their whole force, at first, but most always keep a large body in reserve; and as soon as they perceive the enemy fall in disorder, they are then to make the general attack with all their fury."* @ https://books.google.com.do/books?id=yUYIAAAAQAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&hl=es-419&pli=1#v=onepage&q&f=false
53. Washington employed a similar reserve at the battle of Battle of Rantowle's Bridge on March 28, 1780. See Murphy, *William Washington, American light Dragoon*, 50-51.
54. Young, *Memoir.*
55. Babits, *Devil of a Whipping*, 99.
56. Continental infantry frequently loaded their muskets with one bore sized ball and three pieces of .30 caliber buckshot, hence the term buck and ball. A trained Continental company could deliver the above load three times a minute or more in the stress of combat. Babits, *Devil of a Whipping*, 13.
57. Tarleton, *Campaigns,* 217. Bracketed text by author.
58. David Ogilvie held an ensign's commission in the 17th Light Dragoons dated 26 December, 1775. British Army, *A list of all the officers of the Army Viz.The General and Field officers,; the officers of the several troops, regiments, independent companies, and garrisons: With an alphabetical index of the whole, London 1781,* (London, British Army Register, 1781), @ https://archive.org/details/listofallofficer00grea/page/n59/mode/2up
59. Pension application of Joseph Rogers James S32340, transcribed by Will Graves @ https://revwarapps.org/s32340.pdf; Pension application of William Meade (Mead) S19394, transcribed by Will Graves @ https://revwarapps.org/s19394.pdf; Pension application of John Fields S8471, transcribed by Will Graves @ https://revwarapps.org/s8471.pdf;
60. Young, *Memoir.* It is worth noting that Young uses the 1st person descriptor *"we"* regarding the South Carolina Dragoons charge on the American right against Ogilvie's British Legion troop, but uses the 3rd person descriptor of "*the cavalry"* when describing the charge of the 3rd Light Dragoons on the American left.
61. Its highly likely that McCall's and Jolly's dragoons caught Ogilvie's men among the trees and bogggy ground along the far Amrican right. Pension application of Henry Connelly W8188, transcribed by Will Graves @ https://revwarapps.org/w8188.pdf
62. Roderick MacKinzie, *Strictures on Lt. Col. Tarleton's History "of the Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, in the Southern Provinces of North America,"* London, 1987*,* 98.
63. John Edgar Howard to John Marshall, 1804 Bayard Papers.
64. John Edgar Howard to John Marshall, 1804 Bayard Papers.
65. Pension Application of Lawrence Everhart, transcribed and annotated by C. Leon Harris, See sworn statement of James Simmons. @ https://revwarapps.org/s25068.pdf . 1). *"You will recollect that your first charge … you instantly defeated … their brave 17th Dragoons."* 2). *"In pursuit of their cavalry, you overtook their artillery, but the drivers of their horses … you could not make surrender… you were obliged to order to be Shot."* 3). *"Your third charge was made on the right wing of their Army, composed with their Legeonary [sic] Infantry."* 4). *"Your fourth charge was made in pursuit of their cavalry."*
66. Thomas Anderson, *The Journal of Thomas Anderson of the Delaware Regiment,178-1782* (New York, 1867), 12.
67. Pension of Lawrence Everhart, Simmon's statement
68. Young, *Memoir*.
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71. Tarleton, *Campaigns*, 218.
72. Murphy, *William Washington, American Light Dragoon,* 88-92
73. Pension Application of Emanuel McConnell S2773, transcribed by Will Graves @ https://revwarapps.org/s2773.pdf;
74. Gen, Andrew Pickens to Gen. Nathanael Greene, February 23, *The Papers of General Nathanael Greene*, edited by Richard K. Showman, Dennis M. Conrad, and Roger N. Parks, vol. 7 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 341; Graham, William A. *General Joseph Graham and his Papers on North Carolina Revolutionary History*, (Raiegh, Edwrds and Broughton, 1904), 315.

75. McCall, *History of Georgia*, 510.
76. Dennis M. Conrad, ed. "Pickens to Greene. 8 April, 1781", *The Papers of General Nathanael Greene* vol. 7 (Chapel Hill, NC., The University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 70-71; Document on file at SC Dept. Archives and History, Columbia, SC, Subject File: Battles – H-2-2, referenced by Terry Lipscomb. Maj. Andrew Maxwell was a Connecticut Loyalist in the Prince of Wales American Regiment provincials, assigned to command Fort Granby in modern Cayce, SC. Capt. Frederick DePeyster of the Kings American Regiment was the probable intended recipient of this letter.
77. An additional source of primary accounts for Dunlap's capture can be found through the *Southern Campaigns of the American Revolution* (S.C.A.R.) database of pension applications. 21 references were found where veterans made applications that denoted a battle ending in Dunlap's defeat or capture. The vast majority of these accounts, 12 out of 21, place the event as occurring at a mill. 8 of these veterans claimed the mill was on Hogskin Creek. https://revwarapps.org/ Pension Applications: S32405 Joseph McCormick; S32010 David H. Thurmond; S16972 Mordecai Millar (Miller); S7006 George Hillen; R7236 Thomas Millican; R9900 Christian Snider; R10672 Dennis Trammel; R10674 Peter Tramel; R11664 James Wilson; S31877 Reuben Nail; W25681 Henry Massengill (Masengill, Massengell, Massengale); R3125 John Duncan.
78. McCall, *History of Georgia*, 510.
79. Uzal Johnson, "Declaration respecting the murder of Capt. Dunlap Q^{s} Rangers, 28 March, '81" *Uzal Johnson, Loyalist Surgeon: A Revolutionary War Diary*, (Scotia Hibernia Press, 2000), 131-133.
80. McCall, *History of Georgia,* 510.

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