

Tarleton, Banastre 1967 *A History of the Campaigns of 1780 and 1781 in the Southern Provinces of North America*. Reprint Company, Spartanburg, South Carolina (originally published by T Cadell, London, 1787).

Transcribed by Larry Babits, author of *Devil of a Whipping*

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On the 13<sup>th</sup>, General Gates moved the American army to Rugeley's mills: The Maryland brigades, the Delawar [sic] regiment, the cannon, the cavalry, the baggage, and the militia, were posted on the north side of Granney- quarter's creek: and Colonel Porterfield and Major Armstrong's corps of light infantry were advanced over the creek, on the road leading to Camden. On the same day the four companies of light infantry arrived from Ninety Six, and in the night Earl Cornwallis crossed the Wateree ferry, and joined the British army. The arrival of the noble earl and of the light infantry were fortunate events: A reinforcement of seven hundred Virginia militia, under the command of General Stevens, which reached Rugeley's on the morning of the 14<sup>th</sup>, prompted the American commander in chief to make an addition of one hundred continentals, three hundred militia, and two pieces of cannon, to the corps under Colonel Sumpter, who was immediately directed to interrupt the communications between Charles town, Ninety Six, and Camden. Colonel Sumpter appeared on the morning of the 15<sup>th</sup> on the western back of the Wateree, and captured some waggons with rum and stores below Camden, several waggons loaded with sick and tired light infantry soldiers on the road from Ninety Six, and the escorts of loyal militia and regulars attending each convoy.

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Lord Cornwallis, upon his arrival with the army, adopted the most likely measures to obtain intelligence of the enemy's force and position; he likewise directed his attention to strengthen the British regiments and provincial corps, by mustering the ablest convalescents; and he was not unmindful of his cavalry. Upon application from Lieutenant-colonel Tarleton, he ordered all the horses of the army, belonging both to regiments and departments, to be assembled: the best were selected for the service of the cavalry, and, upon the proprietors receiving payment, they were delivered up to the British legion. These active preparations diffused animation and vigour throughout the army. On the 15<sup>th</sup> the principal part of the King's troops had orders to be in readiness to march: In the afternoon Earl Cornwallis desired Lieutenant-colonel Tarleton to gain circumstantial intelligence, by intercepting a patrole, or carrying off some prisoners, from an American picket: About ten miles from Camden, on the road to Rugeley's mills, the advanced guard of the legion, in the evening, secured three American soldiers: The prisoners reported, that they came from Lynche's creek, where they had been left in a convalescent state, and that they were directed to join the American army, on the high road, that night, as General gates had given orders for his troops to move from Rugeley's mills to attack the British camp next morning near Camden. The information received from these men induced Tarleton to countermarch before he was discovered by any patrole from the enemy's outpost: The three prisoners were mounted behind dragoons, and conveyed with speed to the British army: When examined by Early Cornwallis, their story appeared credible, and confirmed all the other intelligence of the day. Orders were immediately circulated for the regiments and corps, designed for a forward move, to stand to their arms. The town, the magazine, the hospital, and the prisoners,

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were committed to the care of Major M'Arthur with a small body of provincials and militia, and the weakest convalescents of the army: A part of the 63<sup>d</sup> regiment, who had been supplied with horses at Charles town, were expected to join this detachment in the night, by the Nelson's-ferry road, for the security of Camden.

At ten o'clock the King's troops moved from their ground, and formed their order of march on the main road to Rugeley's mills: Lieutenant-colonel Webster commanded the front division of the army: He composed his advanced guard of twenty legion cavalry, and as many mounted infantry, supported by four companies of light infantry, and followed by the 23<sup>d</sup> and 33<sup>d</sup> regiments of foot. The center of the line of march was formed of Lord Rawdon's division, which consisted of the volunteers of Ireland, the legion infantry, Hamist<sup>th</sup> regiment, which composed the reserve, followed the second division. Four pieces of cannon marched with the divisions, and two with the reserve: A few waggons preceded the dragoons of the legion, who composed the rear guard.

About twelve o'clock the line of march was somewhat broken, in passing Saunders' creek, five miles from Camden. A short halt remedied this inconvenience, and the royal army proceeded in a compact state with most profound silence. A little after two the advanced guard of the British charged the head of the American column: The weight of the enemy's fire made the detachment of the legion give way after their officer was wounded, and occasioned the light infantry, the 23<sup>d</sup> and the 33<sup>d</sup> regiments, to form across the road.

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Musketry continued on both sides near a quarter of an hour, when the two armies, finding themselves opposed to each other, as if actuated by the same present feelings and future intentions, ceased firing. On examining the guides, and the people of the country, Earl Cornwallis discovered that the ground the British army now occupied was remarkably favourable to abide the event of a general action against the superior numbers of the enemy: The fortunate situation of two swamps, which narrowed the position, so that the English army could not be outflanked, instantly determined the British general to halt the troops upon this ground, and order them to lie down to wait the approach of day: These commands were executed as soon as a few small pickets were placed in the front: A by-way, beyond the morass upon the left, which led to Camden, gave Earl Cornwallis for a short time some uneasiness, lest the enemy should pass his flank; but the vigilance of a small party in that quarter, and the recollection of the hazard incurred by such an attempt, soon dissipated his jealousy. Except a few occasional shots from the advanced sentries of each army, a silent expectation ushered in the morning.

At dawn the two commanders proceeded to make their respective arrangements for action. The light infantry, the 23<sup>d</sup> and 33<sup>d</sup> regiments, under Lieutenant-colonel Webster, formed the right division, in the front line, of the British army: The flank was covered by a swamp; the left extended to the road. The other division of the front line, consisting of the volunteers of Ireland, the legion infantry, Hamilton's corps, and Bryan's refugees, was commanded by Lord Rawdon: The flank was likewise protected by a morass, and the right communicated with Webster's division. Two six-pounders, and two

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three-pounders, were placed to the left of the road, under the orders of Lieutenant M'Leod. The 71<sup>st</sup> regiment, with two six-pounders, formed a second line; one battalion in the rear of Webster's, the other of Lord Rawdon's division. The legion cavalry remained in column, on account of the thickness of the woods, to the right of the main road, close to the first battalion of the 71<sup>st</sup>, with orders to act offensively against the enemy, or in defence of the British troops, as opportunity offered, or necessity required. The British, the provincials, and the militia of the royal army, officers and soldiers inclusive, amounted to something about two thousand men.

Before daybreak General Gates had made the following disposition of the American army, consisting of two thousand continentals, and four thousand state troops and militia. Three

regiments of the Maryland line, under Brigadier-general Gist, formed the right wing: The North-Carolina and Virginia militia, commanded by Generals Caswell and Stevens, composed the left wing and center. Colonel Porterfield's and Major Armstrong's light infantry were placed in the rear of the Virginia brigade of militia: Colonel Armand was ordered to support the left with his cavalry. The first Maryland brigade and the Delawar [sic] regiment, under Brigadier-general Smallwood, formed the second line and reserve. The principal part of the American artillery was posted to the left of their right wing of continentals: The remainder was placed in the road, under the protection of their reserve.

When the day broke, General Gates, not approving of the situation of Caswell's and Stevens' brigades, was proceeding to alter their position: The circumstance being observed by the British, was

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reported to Earl Cornwallis, who instantly, in person, commanded Webster's division to advance, and dispatched the same order, by an aid-de-camp, to Lord Rawdon on the left. The action became immediately general along the front, and was contested on the left and in the center with great firmness and bravery. General Gist preserved perfect order in his brigade, and, with his small arms and artillery, continued a heavy and well-directed fire upon the 33<sup>d</sup> regiment and the whole of the left division. The morning being hazy, the smoke hung over, and involved both armies in such a cloud, that it was difficult to see or estimate the destruction on either side. Notwithstanding the resistance, it was evident the British moved forwards: The light infantry and the 23<sup>d</sup> regiment being opposed only by militia, who were somewhat deranged by General Gates's intended alteration, first broke the enemy's front line, which advantage they judiciously followed, not by pursuing the fugitives, but by wheeling on the left flank of the continentals, who were abandoned by their militia. The contest was yet supported by the Maryland brigades and the Delawar [sic] regiment, when a part of the British cavalry, under Major Hanger, was ordered to charge their flank, whilst Lieutenant-colonel Tarleton, with the remainder of his regiment, completed their confusion. Baron de Kalbe, on the right of the Americans, being still ignorant of the flight of their left wing and center, owing to the thickness of the air, made a vigorous charge with a regiment of continental infantry through the left division of the British, and when wounded and taken, would scarcely believe that General Gates was defeated.

After this last effort of the continentals, rout and slaughter ensued in every quarter. Brigadier-general Gist moved off with about

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one hundred continentals in a body, by wading through the swamp on the right of the American position, where the British cavalry could not follow; this was the only party that retreated in a compact state from the field of battle. The continentals, the state troops, and the militia, abandoned their arms, their colours, and their cannon, to seek protection in flight, or to obtain it from the clemency of the conquerors. As soon as the route of the Americans became general, the legion dragoons advanced with great rapidity towards Rugeley's mills: On the road, General Rutherford, with many other officers and men, were made prisoners. The charge and pursuit having greatly dispersed the British, a halt was ordered on the south side of the creek, in order to collect a sufficient body to dislodge Colonel Armand and his corps, who, together with several officers, were employed in rallying the militia at that pass, and in sending off the American baggage. The quick junction of the scattered cavalry counteracted the designs of the enemy: Colonel Armand's dragoons and the militia displayed a good countenance, but were soon borne down by the rapid charge of the legion: The chase again commenced,

and did not terminate till the Americans were dispersed, and fatigue overpowered the exertions of the British. In a pursuit of twenty-two miles, many prisoners of all ranks, twenty ammunition waggons, one hundred and fifty carriages, containing the baggage, stores, and camp equipage of the American army, fell in the hands of the victors.

In the action near Camden, the killed, wounded, and missing of the King's troops, amounted to three hundred and twenty-four,

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officers included. The destruction fell principally upon the center, owing to the well-directed fire of the continentals, and the execution done by the American artillery. The Americans lost seventy officers, two thousand men, (killed, wounded, and prisoners) eight pieces of cannon, several colours, and all their carriages and waggons, containing the stores, ammunition, and baggage, of the whole army.