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Outfoxed – Marion’s Forces Dispersed by a Genius:

Wambaw Bridge and Tidyman’s Plantation February 24-25, 1782

Charles B. Baxley, David Neilan, and C. Leon Harris © 2016

After Cornwallis’s surrender at Yorktown, the Treaty of Paris in 1783 seemed a foregone conclusion, but the war was not yet over in South Carolina. Before the British finally left on December 14, 1782 the state would witness numerous skirmishes of American Continentals and militiamen against British regular troops and Loyalists. Two such engagements are particularly noteworthy, because they were defeats of the American forces of Gen. Francis Marion by Lt. Col. Benjamin Thompson, a military novice. Marion earned enduring fame as the celebrated “Swamp Fox,” while Thompson later earned international acclaim as Count Rumford, the scientist.



Unlikely adversaries: Gen. Francis Marion and Lt. Col. Benjamin Thompson. In 1782 troops under Marion, the seasoned veteran, dispersed by those under Thompson, who had never commanded troops in battle before. Posthumous portrait of Marion by Poindexter Page Carter (1851-1921) in the South Carolina State House. Portrait of Thompson by artist Thomas Gainsborough, 1783.

In the month following the surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown on October 19, 1781, Gen. Alexander Leslie arrived in Charlestown, SC to take command of the British Southern Department.¹ The complexion of the American Revolution had drastically changed. The War had become a world war, with Britain's traditional enemies joined in the fight looking for spoils, especially in the Caribbean and Gibraltar. Anti-government riots had sprung up in London,² and because of the defeat at Yorktown, Lord North's government was teetering towards its fall in 1782.³ In South Carolina, British Lt. Col. Alexander Stewart was fought to an untenable position at Eutaw Springs by the Americans under Gen. Nathanael Greene.

Marion's and Thompson's paths crossed because Marion had been assigned to contain the British and Loyalists between Ashley River and the Atlantic Ocean, while Gen. Nathanael Greene's Continentals and South Carolina militia controlled the Lowcountry south of Charlestown. The British had withdrawn from Wilmington, NC in the fall of 1781, leaving no British troops from the Pee Dee area of South Carolina north to New York.⁴ The British still strongly occupied Charlestown and nearby coastal islands, as well as Savannah and the lower Savannah River and East Florida, and they largely controlled the Atlantic sea lanes.

Gen. Leslie had drawn in his widely dispersed troops and strengthened Charlestown's defenses in response to orders from his superior, Sir Henry

Clinton, to hold Charlestown. Leslie recalled the garrison from Wappataw Meeting House closer to the City, reposting them probably around Christ Church.⁵ (See map on p. 8 for the Wappataw Meeting House and other places mentioned here.) The British withdrew towards Charlestown from their posts at Dorchester and Monck's Corner/Fairlawn Barony. Leslie ordered extensive defensive works at the Quarter House Tavern – from the Ashley to the Cooper



Maj. Gen. Alexander Leslie. Painting by Thomas Gainsborough ca. 1783-1787.

¹ With Lt. Gen. Charles, Earl Cornwallis an American prisoner of war, Maj. Gen. Alexander Leslie arrived in Charleston and relieved B. Gen. Paston Gould on about Nov. 8, 1781 as the British commander in the South. Dennis M. Conrad, ed., *The Papers of General Nathanael Greene (PNG)* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1997), IX:557 n1, 579, 605n2; but see Patrick O'Kelley, *Nothing but Blood and Slaughter (NBBS)* (Lillington, NC: Blue House Tavern Press, 2005) 3:549n700.

² The Gordon Riots in London during the summer of 1780 were in response to Parliament's softening Britain's anti-Catholic acts to recruit more Catholics into the British Army. The British needed the manpower. Andrew O'Shaughnessy, *The Men Who Lost America* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 2013), pp. 39, 74, 176, 338, and 344.

³ Frederick, Lord North, the British Prime Minister of the Tory Party, resigned in March 1782.

⁴ British Maj. James Henry Craig withdrew the last regular British troops from Wilmington, NC about Nov. 18, 1781 leaving several bands of Loyalist militias to continue the civil war in North Carolina. The British withdrew their garrison from Georgetown, SC on May 28, 1781. O'Kelley, *NBBS* 3:395, 267

⁵ Marion to Greene, Dec. 1, 1781, *PNG*, IX:646; Greene to Gov. Rutledge, Dec. 3, 1781, *PNG*, X:5n4, X:45n2. Leslie to Lord George Germain, 3 January 1782. British National Archives, Public Records Office, Kew, UK) (PRO) 30/55 # 4035. The Wappataw Meeting House was near the head of navigation of the Wando River; its extant cemetery is on 15 Mile Landing Road (S-10-584).

Rivers – to control access to the Charlestown Neck.⁶ Leslie not only had to defend the city, an army, navy, as well as many Loyalist refugees and their slaves, but he also had to feed them. Johns Island, to the southwest of Charlestown, was a critical part of the British food supply, providing pasture for cattle that had been driven from the area between the Ashley and Edisto rivers. The British repaired two redoubts at Stono Ferry and positioned two armed galleys in the Stono River to defend the crossing onto Johns Island,⁷ and they strongly garrisoned the island under the tenacious defender of the British post at Ninety Six, Lt. Col. John Harris Cruger.⁸

Gen. Nathanael Greene, by a rapid move from the South Carolina Backcountry, captured the colonial town of Dorchester as its garrison withdrew on December 1st. He soon moved his headquarters west of the Ashley and Edisto Rivers to Round O.⁹ To throttle commerce and communications by Loyalists (and opportunists) with Charlestown, Gen. Greene envisioned a “flying army” to cover the 20 miles between the Ashley and Edisto Rivers.¹⁰ However, he lacked adequate forces and logistics to lay a tight siege to Charlestown, and the

Americans did not control the sea lanes. Greene, as regional commander, also needed to put a force in Georgia to pressure the British to concede territory there and steel-up resistance from Georgia’s Americans.

To help contain the British to the Charlestown area and to pressure their support in South Carolina, Greene assigned Lt. Col. Henry “Light Horse Harry” Lee’s Legion, reinforced with the 3^d Continental Light Dragoons and some light infantry, to gather intelligence on the British and to interdict communications and supplies headed to Charlestown between the Ashley and Edisto Rivers.¹¹ As an additional part of this strategy, Gen. Francis Marion in late November 1781 moved his headquarters ten miles south from St. Stephens to Huger’s Bridge on the upper East Branch of the Cooper River to patrol the approaches to Charlestown from the Ashley River to the Atlantic Ocean northeast of the City. After Greene received intelligence that the British would move on the Stono River in force, Marion on December 21 temporarily moved from Huger’s Bridge to Wassamassaw, seven miles southwest of Monck’s Corner, to reinforce his control of the area

⁶ Marion to Greene, Nov. 30, 1781, *PNG*, IX:642n4; IX:649. The Quarter House Tavern was on the main road from Orangeburg, via Dorchester, into Charleston about 7 miles north of the City’s Revolutionary War era gates at Marion Square. The Quarter House Tavern was near the modern Charleston International Airport.

<http://gaz.jrshelby.com/quarterhouse.htm>

⁷ Greene to Gov. Rutledge, Dec. 3, 1781 *PNG*, X:5n7, 18, 123. <http://gaz.jrshelby.com/stonoferry.htm>. These redoubts (small earthen forts) protected both the mainland and island side landings of the Stono Ferry. The original redoubts that had guarded the rear elements of British Gen. Augustine Prévost’s withdrawing army after their aborted siege of Charlestown, were attacked unsuccessfully by American troops on June 20, 1779.

⁸ John Harris Cruger was a Loyalist provincial officer from New York in DeLancey’s Brigade. He obstinately defended the fortified town of Ninety Six in June 1781 from Gen. Greene’s 38-day siege and several direct assaults. James and Johns Islands held many Loyalist refugees and their slaves. Maj. James Henry Craig arrived in Charlestown from Wilmington, NC in late November 1781 and was detailed to relieve Lt. Col. Cruger on Johns Island. Gov. Martin to Greene, Nov. 28, 1781, *PNG*, IX:635n9; X:84; O’Kelley, *NBBS*, 3:395; Ian Saberton, *The Cornwallis Papers* (East

Sussex, UK: Naval and Military Press, 2010) VI:179. Some sources report the British evacuation of Wilmington as Nov. 14, 1781. Marion to Greene, Nov. 30, 1781, *PNG*, IX:642n3. Craig brought 1,000 Loyalist and slaves with him from Wilmington, NC compounding Leslie’s logistical problems in Charlestown.

⁹ Greene to Williams, Dec. 2, 1781, *PNG*, IX:649, X:3. The colonial village site and extant 1760’s tabby fort at colonial Dorchester are located near the head of navigation of the Ashley River. Greene left his camp at Fort Motte with his mounted troops and light infantry and attacked Dorchester’s garrison on Dec. 1, 1781. After a sharp skirmish, the British and Loyalist manning this outpost, facing Greene personally, withdrew during the night after destroying their cannon and stores. The site is preserved as the Colonial Dorchester State Historic Site on SC Hwy 642 in Summerville, SC. For security, Greene often camped with two rivers between him and the British.

¹⁰ Greene to Sumter, Dec. 2, 1781, *PNG*: IX: 648, X:4

¹¹ Henry Lee, *The Revolutionary War Memoirs of General Henry Lee*, Robert E. Lee, ed., (New York: DaCapo Press reprint, 1998), p. 525. Lee’s Legion camped at John McQueen’s Plantation, located south of Horse Savannah (an extension of Stono Swamp) about four miles northwest of the Rantowles Bridge.

between the Ashley and Cooper Rivers.¹² By early in 1782 Marion had moved his headquarters eastward between the East and West Branches of the Cooper.¹³

Marion continued to patrol that area until January 5, 1782, when a scarcity of food, fuel, and fodder forced him to withdraw his main camp east to Wambaw Creek.¹⁴ This location about 25 miles southwest of Georgetown was near the junction of the road from Jamestown to Echaw and south with the road from Charlestown to Georgetown near the ferry across the Santee River. Marion's missions were to maintain basic law and order, to enforce the embargo on the British in Charlestown, to suppress the Loyalists and support Whig friends, collect intelligence, gather forage, and to suppress British raiders and foragers from Charlestown. Marion still moved from time to time to keep the British off guard and to obtain food and forage.

To complete Greene's loose siege of Charlestown, SC militia Gen. Thomas Sumter's troops remained posted in Orangeburg and at Four Holes Bridge,

though Sumter, like Marion, and many top militia officers, joined the South Carolina General Assembly in January in Jacksonborough, SC.¹⁵

The British situation appeared hopeless, but it was important for them to maintain the strongest possible position for the inevitable negotiations to come. They still rode out of Charlestown in force at will to forage, gather intelligence, and keep the Americans at bay. To the north and east of Charlestown, the British held Daniel, Sullivans, and Long Islands (Isle of Palms), and Mt. Pleasant, and they patrolled the Cooper and Wando Rivers by galley. The British also still controlled the coastal islands and waterways and used boats to ship bulk forage and firewood to supply Charlestown. In early January 1782, Maj. William Brereton led a contingent of the British Army northeast from Daniel Island, crossed Beresford Creek and raided Brabant's Plantation. On January 3, 1782, Brereton successfully defended an attack at Videau's Bridge by the militia of Col. Richard Richardson, Jr., whom Marion had posted at Cainhoy on Wando River to keep an eye on the

¹² Greene's Orders, Dec. 16, 1781, PNG, X:63-64, 70, 73, 75, and 94. This intelligence proved false. At the same time, Marion detached SC Lt. Cols. Peter Horry's and Hezekiah Maham's cavalry to take a post near Wappetaw Meeting House and SC militia Lt. Col. Screven to Cainhoy to watch the British movements in the area. It is not clear whether this was Thomas or Benjamin Screven, but it was probably Thomas. See Patrick O'Kelley, *Unwaried Patience and Fortitude, Francis Marion's Orderly Book*, (West Conshohocken, PA: Infinity Publishing Co., 2006), p. 565. According to Bobby G. Moss, Thomas Screven served as a colonel (or lieutenant colonel) during 1775, but there is no mention of him afterwards. Benjamin served as a captain of militia during 1775 and a dragoon captain in 1779. There is no mention of him afterwards. Biographies of Francis Marion, dating back to Robert Bass (*Swamp Fox*, p. 230), identify Col. Screven as Benjamin, but neither of the biographies by Peter Horry and Mason Locke Weems, William D. James, nor William G. Simms include a first name. In the pension application of Thomas Jackson, however, Lt. Col. Thomas Screven implied as being in command of a militia regiment as late as mid-1780. Benjamin Screven is not mentioned in any pension applications. Bobby Gilmer Moss, *Roster of SC Patriots in the American Revolution* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1983), p. 852; Robert D. Bass, *Swamp Fox*, (republished by

Orangeburg, SC: Sandlapper Publishing Co., 1974), p. 270; Peter Horry and Mason Locke Weems, *The Life of General Francis Marion* (Philadelphia: M. Carey, 1809); William Dobein James, *A Sketch of the Life of Brig. Gen. Francis Marion ...* (1821. Reprint. Kessinger Publishing, 2004) which is also available online at

<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/923/923-h/923-h.htm>;

William Gilmore Simms, *The Life of Francis Marion* (New York: George F. Cooledge & Brother, 1844); and Thomas Jackson, S5608, Federal Pension Application, transcribed by Will Graves, <http://revwarapps.org/s5608.pdf>.

¹³ Marion to Capt. John Carraway Smith, Dec. 28, 1781, (New York Public Library), Hezekiah Maham *Orderly Book*. Probably at Robert Quash's Plantation about two miles east of Huger's Bridge, east of modern Huger, SC crossroads. On December 30, 1781 Marion was at Strawberry Ferry. Marion to Greene, Dec. 30, 1781, PNG, X:137. On Jan. 2, 1782 Marion was at Elias Ball, III's plantation, Comingtee, at the confluence of the East and West Branches of the Cooper River. Marion to Smith, 2 Jan. 1782, (New York Public Library); Hezekiah Maham *Orderly Book*. Comingtee Plantation is now a part of the State of South Carolina's Bonneau Ferry Wildlife Management Area at Childsbury.

¹⁴ On Jan. 5, 1782 Marion wrote to Greene from Wambaw. PNG, X:161-162.

¹⁵ Greene to Marion, March 1, 1782, PNG, X:427

British on Daniel Island and the river.¹⁶ Brereton continued his foraging expedition uninterrupted as far northeast as Quinby Bridge on the upper East Branch of the Cooper River, around which Marion had encamped December 30, a few days earlier.¹⁷

To keep pressure on the British food-supply center on Johns Island, Lt. Cols. John Laurens and Henry “Light Horse Harry” Lee planned, executed and failed at a night, cross-water invasion of Johns Island. Gen. Greene moved his army east to St. Paul’s Stono Church, near the Stono Ferry, to support Laurens’ and Lee’s abortive invasion of Johns Island on January 13-14, 1782.¹⁸

By mid-January 1782, following December 1781 elections, the South Carolina General Assembly had a quorum of both houses, thus reestablishing the constitutional legislature of the state. Their meeting on the west side of the Edisto River at the village of Jacksonborough (now Jacksonboro) was important in global politics to show a functioning rebel civil government in South Carolina.¹⁹ Gen. Greene moved his army in between Charlestown and Jacksonborough to protect the General

Assembly. Greene established his headquarters at Col. William Skirving’s Oak Lawn plantation about four miles east of the Edisto River on the main Jacksonborough-to-Charlestown Road. The legislature elected new constitutional officers, debated how to deal with the Loyalists left in the State, and how to fund their military’s operations.²⁰ Many of the state’s top Continental, state, and militia officers were elected to serve in the General Assembly, including Generals Isaac Huger, Christopher Gadsden, Thomas Sumter, Andrew Pickens, and Francis Marion. Some elected to the legislature were key commanders in Marion’s Brigade, including Cols. William Harden, Richard Richardson, Jr., Lemuel Benton, Alexander Moultrie, William Stafford, as well as Lt. Cols. Hezekiah Maham, and Peter Horry. Other important militia leaders elected to the Assembly were Lt. Col. Hugh Horry, Majors John James, William Benison, and Tristram Thomas, as well as Cpts. William McCottry and James Postell.²¹

Gen. Marion’s troops were still active, but as the Senator from St. Johns, Berkeley, Marion was compelled to help maintain a quorum.²² In his

¹⁶ Cainhoy - Wando are on the north side of the Wando River where modern SC Hwy 41 crosses. Videau’s Bridge was over the French Quarter Creek at Cainhoy Road (sometimes called Clements Ferry Road) (S-8-98).

¹⁷ Marion to Greene, Jan. 5, 1782, *PNG*, X:161-163; O’Kelley, *NBBS*, 4:22-24. Quinby Bridge over Quinby Creek, near modern Huger, SC crossroads, is one of the headwater tributaries of the East Branch of the Cooper River and is at the head of its navigation. It was the site of the summer 1781 attack by forces under Gen. Thomas Sumter’s troops, including Gen. Francis Marion’s Brigade and Lee’s Legion, against British Lt. Col. James Coates and the 19th Regiment redcoats at Shubrick’s Plantation. Quinby Creek is near Marion’s camp at Robert Quash’s Plantation. Marion had last been in this area at Huger’s Bridge on Dec. 29 or 30, 1781. Marion to Greene, Dec. 30, 1781, *PNG*, X:137

¹⁸ Marion to Greene, Jan. 5, 1782, *PNG*, X:183, 192, 207n2. Baxley, C. B. “An Enterprise Upon Johns Island.” *Army History*. (Winter 2016), pp 30-52. The original St. Paul’s Stono Parish church (c. 1706) was located on what is now called Dixie Plantation. St. Paul’s Parrish was established in 1706 and a church was built on a bluff near Church Flats in 1708. Indians burned the church in 1715 and it was rebuilt. The original St. Paul’s Stono sanctuary was abandoned in 1756 and rebuilt elsewhere. South Carolina roadside historic marker on SC 162 between Towles and Dixie Plantation and Bryan Roads.

¹⁹ *PNG*, IX:646n1 and A. S. Salley, Jr., ed., the *Journal of House of Representatives of South Carolina*, (Columbia, SC: The State Co., 1916), p. 5, accessed at <http://archive.org/stream/journalhouserep01sallgoog#page/n4/mode/2up> on July 25, 2013. The SC House of Representatives had a quorum on Jan. 17, 1782 and the Senate had a quorum on the next day.

²⁰ Greene’s Orders, Jan. 16, 1782, *PNG*, X:201. William Skirving’s Oak Lawn Plantation is now the site of the 19th c. Gonzales House on Old Jacksonboro Road, about 4.3 miles east of the Edisto River.

²¹ *Journal of the House of Representatives of South Carolina*, Jan. 8, 1782 – Feb. 26, 1782, A. S. Salley, Jr., ed., pp. 130-134. *Journal of the Senate of South Carolina*, Jan. 8 - Feb. 26, 1782, A. S. Salley, Jr., ed., accessed at <http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.b3001844;view=1up;seq=6> on July 5, 2013. Only a small portion of Marion’s brigade was called out to active duty. In Jan. 1782, Marion commanded eight militia regiments covering all of the Pee Dee area of South Carolina and Charlestown and three regiments of State Troops. Most South Carolina militia regiments alternated companies on duty and had, in effect, duplicate command staffs. The militias also had duties of peacekeeping in their home districts.

²² Marion to Horry, Feb. 10, 1782, “[T]here are three laws now on the carpet,” he wrote, “which they insist I should stay until finished. If I leave the House the business will be over,

absence, he appointed Col. Archibald McDonald of the Kingstree militia in overall command of his troops at Wambaw Creek.²³

Morale in his brigade was low due to Marion's absence, bickering between Marion's key leaders, Lt. Cols. Hezekiah Maham and Peter Horry, the enlistments of former Tories, and the menial duties of camp life.²⁴ Lt. Col. Maham was also at the Jacksonborough Assembly, leaving Capt. John Carraway Smith in command of his cavalry regiment.²⁵ There was also a detachment from the Cheraws District militia under Col. Lemuel Benton camped at Wambaw.²⁶ No doubt intelligence of their location made its way to the British in Charlestown.

Lt. Col. Benjamin Thompson Arrives on the Scene.

One British officer in Charlestown who was interested in the location of Marion's troops was Lt. Col. Benjamin Thompson. Thompson, born in Massachusetts in 1753, had been married at age 19 to a wealthy widow with a large estate in Rumford (now Concord), New Hampshire. He was commissioned a major in the militia, but as a Royalist he was soon forced to leave his wife and child (forever, as it turned out) to find safety in British controlled Boston. While there Thompson

recruited other Royalists, gathered intelligence for the British, and conducted research on gunpowder. When Boston fell in 1776, Thompson fled to England where he continued his research. He impressed Lord George Germain, Secretary of State for the American Department. Germain made him Undersecretary of State and arranged a commission for him as lieutenant colonel of the King's American Dragoons of New York.

Upon being commissioned a lieutenant colonel, Thompson decided to command his troops in person in New York, but weather forced his ship to land in Charlestown near the end of 1781. With no choice but to winter in Charlestown, Thompson volunteered his services to Gen. Leslie, who appointed him commander of cavalry, which was then in a state of disarray. On January 11, 1782, Thompson wrote that his corps consisted of five weak Troops of British cavalry, which would soon be augmented by a troop of South Carolinians. By January 29, however, Leslie was able to write, "The several detached corps of cavalry have been incorporated into distinct ones under Lt. Col. Thompson; from the unwearied attention and diligent efforts of that officer they are become respectable." Thompson also commanded "Two strong Troops of Mounted Militia, and a Seapoy Troop (*Gens de Couleurs*)" that would act with him occasionally.²⁷

as many men will go with me, and they will not be able to make a House; our material business is the three laws above hinted at." Peter Force Transcripts: Digital Library of Congress (DLC).

²³ Peter Horry to Marion, Feb. 20, 1782, written from Wambaw, p. 26 below. Although Gen. Marion also held a commission as Lieutenant Colonel Commandant in the Continental Line, he did not have a Continental regiment under his command.

²⁴ Former Tories were promised amnesty by the rebel government if they swore allegiance and served 6 months of active militia duty under Gov. John Rutledge's proclamation of September 27, 1781. This plan did not always sit well with the long-term Americans. Robert S. Lambert, *South Carolina Loyalists in the American Revolution*, (Columbia: USC Press, 1987), p. 223.

²⁵ Capt. John Carraway Smith was in the SC 2^d Continental Regiment, captured in Charlestown, exchanged and joined Lt. Col. Maham's Light Dragoons as a troop commander. <http://revwarapps.org/w4890.pdf>

²⁶ One pension affidavit mentioned that Lt. Col. Baxter was there also. Pension application of Isaac Lefever (Lefevre) (Lefaver) S13726, <http://revwarapps.org/s13726.pdf>. Both Jacob Baxter and John Baxter were from the Williamsburg district and served as field grade officers in the 1782 "Upper Craven" or later called the Pee Dee Regiment militia. Moss, *SC Patriots*, p. 53. John Baxter was wounded at Shubrick's Plantation in July 1781. Col. Jacob Baxter commanded the Pee Dee Regiment of South Carolina militia from the summer of 1780 to the end of the Revolution and John Baxter was its lieutenant colonel. See also J.D. Lewis' South Carolina Military Organization charts, Nov. 15, 1781, at http://www.carolana.com/SC/Revolution/revolution_sc_troops_1781_11_15.html, accessed on July 31, 2016.

²⁷ The quotation is from Gen. Alexander Leslie to Gen. Henry Clinton, Jan. 29, 1782. *Report on American Manuscripts in the Royal Institution of Great Britain*. Vol. II. (Boston, MA: Gregg Press, 1972). Available on Google Books: search for exact phrase. Benjamin Thompson to Germain, Jan. 11, 1782, Germain Papers, Vol. 15. Jim Picuch, "Black Dragoons",

Thompson drilled his new corps daily and decided to test them with a 40 mile circuit from Charlestown to Dorchester and back on January 23, 1782. On this trip, Thompson reported that they surprised a small American detachment, killed two, captured three and returned victorious with a quantity of needed forage and livestock.²⁸

Thompson's February 20 Raid

Thompson's brigade lost no time in sallying forth from Charlestown north into Marion's sector of defense. Thompson was seeking fresh meat and vegetables to feed the city, as well as action against Marion's brigade if the opportunity arose.²⁹ From their gathering point near Goose Creek, Lt. Col. Thompson and his mounted troops rode up the West Branch of the Cooper River and Biggin Creek, crossing its head of navigation at Moncks Corner via Biggin Bridge. (See map, next page.) From the ruined St. Johns Berkeley Parish Church, "Biggin Church," he turned south and rode down the east side of Biggin Creek, across Wadboo Creek and down the West Branch of the Cooper River to Childsbury, the eastern terminus of the

Strawberry Ferry, thus securing this ferry across the Cooper River. (See map, next page.) That evening Thompson wrote to Leslie that he had arrived at Daniel Island after taking 140 head of cattle in addition to hogs, sheep, and goats, but had not encountered Marion's troops.

I have the honor to acquaint you that I arrived here with the Cavalry at Six o'clock this evening, after Marching from Goose-Creek, by Monk's Corner, and Huger's Bridge, and through S^t. Thomas's Parish, without being so fortunate as to meet with the Enemy we came in search of. We surprised a Guard of Four Officer & Twelve men at Strawberry ferry, but the main body of the Rebels which had been in that Country had quitted it some days before, so it is said, in consequence of intelligence they received of our Intentions to attack them.³⁰

Horry reported, "The enemy Yesterday Came Round Watbo wth their Cavalry & am afraid took a Lieut & 6 Men at Strawberry w^c I had Posted there." Capt. Thomas Brown discovered another

Carologue, Vol. 23, No. 2 (Summer 2007), pp. 12-15. The term "Seapoy" was British military colloquialism for a native infantryman in British service, especially in India; here it meant the infamous Black Dragoons.

There are several biographies of Benjamin Thompson, but few elaborate on his military career. The present account is based partly on interviews by Marc-Auguste Pictet in 1801: *Voyage de Trois Mois in Angleterre, en Ecosse, et en Irlande pendant l'Eté de l'an IX (1801 v.st.)*, available on Google Books. See also Jim Piecuch, "Francis Marion Meets His Match: Benjamin Thompson Defeats the 'Swamp Fox'," *Journal of the American Revolution*, April 29, 2014, <http://www.allthingsliberty.com>, accessed on May 11, 2014, and C. Harrison Dwight, "Count Rumford: His Majesty's Colonel in Carolina," *South Carolina Historical Magazine*, Vol. 57, No. 1, (Jan. 1956), pp. 23-24.

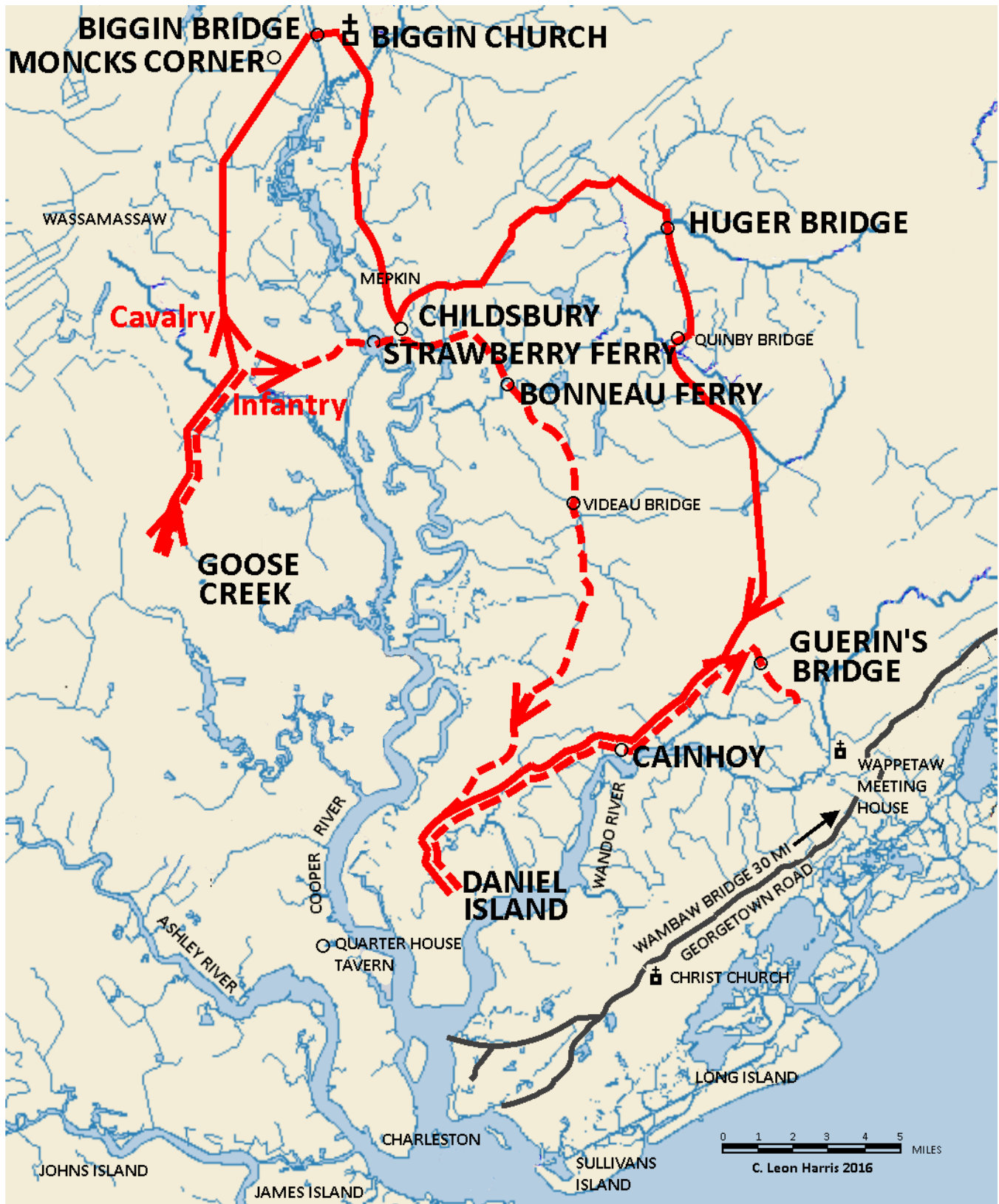
After the war Thompson lived in Bavaria where he was head of the army and continued research in a wide range of fields, for which he earned international fame and honors, including the title Count Rumford, and membership in the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Count Rumford's most important contribution to science was his observation

that the heat generated in the boring of cannon barrels was inexhaustible, from which he deduced that heat was a form of motion and not of matter, as had been believed. This idea was fundamental to the principle of conservation of energy. Later in life, he married the widow of another even more famous scientist, Antoine Lavoisier, who lost his head in Revolutionary Paris. Thompson died in 1814.

²⁸ Benjamin Thompson to Lord George Germain, Jan. 24, 1782, Germain Papers, Vol. 15. William L. Clements Library, Ann Arbor, MI. O'Kelley, *NBBS*, 4:30 has Loyalist Maj. John Coffin and his NY Volunteers provincials capturing 7 troopers of the 3^d Continental Light Dragoons and Lt. John Kely at Dorchester on January 14, 1782.

²⁹ Horry to Greene, Feb. 28, 1782, *PNG*, X:419n3

³⁰ Thompson to Leslie, 20 Feb. 1782, PRO, 30/55, #4150, copy at the David Library of the American Revolution, p. 25 below. See also *Report on American Manuscripts in the Royal Institution of Great Britain*. Vol. II. As revealed in Lt. Col. Peter Horry's report to Marion of 20 Feb. 1782 (p. 26 below), Horry knew of the British incursion as early as 19 February.



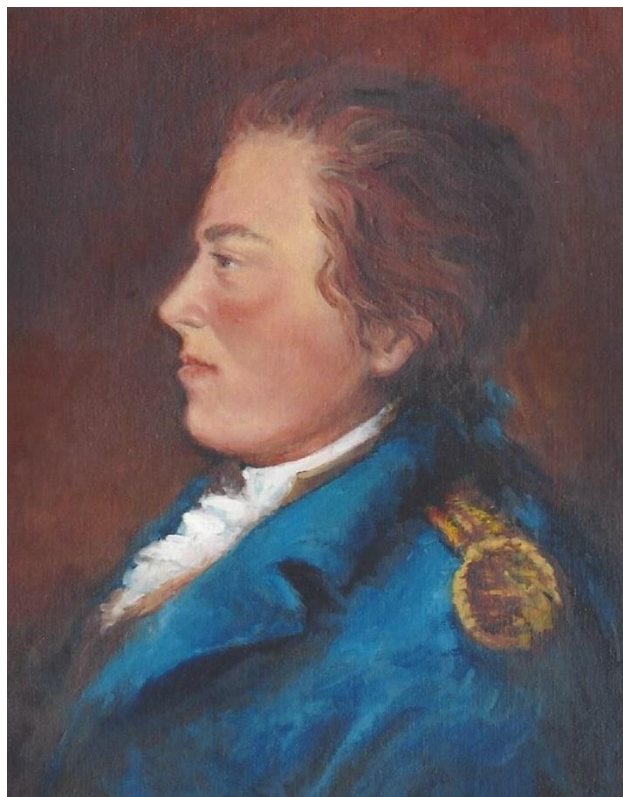
This map shows the routes of Lt. Col. Benjamin Thompson's February 20, 1782 preliminary raid into St. James Berkeley, St. Stephens, and St. Thomas Parishes. Since Thompson met no American resistance on this raid, this served as a test of American defense and encouraged his follow on raid to the Santee. The infantry's probable route is depicted as a dashed red line, and the cavalry's route is depicted as a solid red line. Base map TopoUSA.

British contingent; he was posted by the Americans' commander 13 miles southeast of the Strawberry Ferry at Cainhoy on the north bank of the Wando River.³¹ In the same report Horry also suggested that Loyalist infantry crossed at Strawberry Ferry to the Childsbury community: "at the Same time a Number of their Infantry appeared on the other Side of Strawberry & I Suppose Crossed over Last night—also ab^t. fifty Cavalry & 300 Infantry yesterday Evening was at Guerins Bridge, it appears to be their Intention to make a junction & to [pushing?] Major Sabs Party in near S^d. Bridge, & Capt. Brown Commands on Cainhoy ...³²

Gen. Marion, together with Lt. Col. Hezekiah Maham, were in the General Assembly when they got word of Thompson's incursion into Marion's sector. Maham related the event in a letter to Gen. Greene dated 1 March: "When I was attending the assembly, an Express Arrvd that the Enemy was advancing towards Gen^l Marians brig^d, the Gen^l & my Self Emeadiately tok off[f] to Join our Commands. When we got Near them we was informed that the Enemy had Returnd."³³

Intelligence of Thompson's raid prompted Peter Horry to move his regiment from Strawberry Ferry 32 miles east to the supposed safety of Marion's

brigade camped near Wambaw Creek.³⁴ Horry then went to his plantation due to illness, leaving Maj. William Benison in command of his cavalry.³⁵



Lt. Col. Hezekiah Maham by artist Gingi Martin ©2013, courtesy of Keith Gourdin.

³¹ Peter Horry to Marion, Feb. 20, 1782, p. 26 below. Cainhoy, on the Wando River, is 13 air miles southeast of Strawberry Ferry at Childsbury and south of the East Branch of the Cooper River. It is likely that Thompson passed Cainhoy after crossing Huger's Bridge around the headwaters of the East Branch of the Cooper River.

³² Guerin Bridge is over Guerin Creek, about 5 miles northeast of Cainhoy. It is possible that Thompson's infantry marched from Goose Creek, crossed the East Branch of the Cooper River at Strawberry Ferry, and headed directly south for Cainhoy via Bonneau's Ferry and Guerin's Bridge. SC militia Maj. Thomas Sabb of the Orangeburg Regiment was posted nearby, but the historical record is silent at this point as to any skirmish there.

³³ Maham to Greene, March 1, 1782, PNG, X:429-431 February 20 is the last date on which Marion's name appears on the Senate minutes. Salley, *Journal of SC Senate, 1782*, p. 106.

<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.b3001844;view=1up;seq=110>

³⁴ It is often stated that Marion's troops camped at Durant's Plantation near Wambaw Bridge. This idea apparently

originated with William Dobein James's *Life of Marion*. We have found no period source for the claim. William Dobein James had served under Marion, his father, Major John James, was at the engagement at Wambaw Bridge, and he claimed to have access to letters and other original papers of Marion, so it was reasonable to think he was a reliable source. James wrote decades after the events, however, and it is not clear what his sources were for each detail. We have found several discrepancies in his account, as noted later, and have therefore elected to give preference to the accounts by Marion, Thompson, and other eyewitnesses.

³⁵ Maj. William Benison's surname was often misspelled "Benson." He was identified by Terry Lipscomb from the South Carolina Audited Account of William Benison (AA440). Lipscomb, T. *Names in South Carolina*, XXVII, (Winter 1980), p. 16. "South Carolina Revolutionary War Battles," Part Eight. English Dept., Univ. of South Carolina, n17. Both Peter Horry and William Benison were elected to the SC House of Representatives but did not take their seats at the General Assembly meeting in Jacksonborough because of their military duties.

Thompson Engages Marion's Troops February 24 and 25, 1782

Safety at Wambaw Creek proved elusive. On February 24 at 2 AM at Daniel Island Thompson again marched to the northeast with his brigade, said to comprise “two hundred horse (but very Ordinary) & 500 Infantry & two field pieces.”³⁶ The newspaper report of Thompson's brigade included the British regulars from the 30th Regiment of Foot, Lt. Col. William “Bloody Bill” Cunningham's and Maj. William Young's South Carolina mounted Loyalist militia units, the Yägers, Volunteers of Ireland provincials, and one three-pounder cannon.³⁷ It is believed that Capt. March and a troop of Black Dragoons were also with Thompson.

At Cainhoj Thompson found the road cut up by a large number of horses. Along the way, slaves told

Thompson that some 500 troops had come from Santee and returned on the previous day. Thompson continued another 25 miles to Drake's Plantation along the Georgetown Road where he left his exhausted infantry. Thompson's detachment caught up with seven Americans – perhaps advanced videttes – and killed them all. From Drake's he rode another eight miles with his mounted troops to the Americans' encampment.³⁸ (See map on following page.) There he initiated the Battle of Wambaw Bridge.³⁹ That evening Thompson returned to Drake's Plantation and left the next morning to approach the Americans' camp at Wambaw Bridge from the opposite direction. On the way he discovered Marion's troops at Tidyman's Plantation where they again battled.⁴⁰ That evening Thompson rejoined his infantry and camped at Douxsaint's plantation.⁴¹

³⁶ Marion to Greene, March 1, 1782, *PNG*, X:427-428; p. 31 below.

³⁷ R. Wells & Son, *Royal Gazette*, Charleston, SC February 27-March 2, 1782, p. 37 below.

³⁸ The *Royal Gazette* article reported the Americans' camp was nine miles from Drake's Plantation. Drake's was apparently the 1,500-acre property of John Drake, but it is not shown on early maps. “During the American Revolution, Drake participated on the committee which sought to enforce the Continental Association in St. James Santee (1775) and supplied slave labor and provisions for public and militia use (1779, 1782). He was twice elected to the General Assembly from St. James Santee. John Drake died in St. Stephen's Parish in 1784.” N. Louise Bailey and Elizabeth Ivey Cooper, *Biographical Directory of the South Carolina House of Representatives*. (Columbia: USC Press, 1989), 194-195. The Old Georgetown Road (S-10-913 and 1335) on which British troops approached Wambaw Creek still has unpaved but usable sections, one of which passes the extant colonial St. James Santee Parish Church.

³⁹ Wambaw Bridge is misspelled as “Mamhaw” bridge on Cooks map (<http://www.davidrumsey.com/maps4112.html>) of 1773 and Mouzon's map of 1775. (<https://www.loc.gov/resource/g3900.ar139404>).

⁴⁰ Tidyman's Plantation, also known as Cedar Hill, is shown on the 1825 Mills Atlas and on a 1773 plat in the South Carolina Archives. Plat Collection of John McCrady, #4680. At the time of the battle the plantation was owned by Hester Rose Tidyman, the 27-year-old widow of Philip Tidyman. Philip Tidyman was born in England about 1742 and came to Charlestown in 1764, bringing silver, jewelry, and other luxury goods for sale. He thrived in business, bought several properties in Charlestown, including his primary residence at present Ladson Street, and a plantation on North Santee River

in addition to the one at Cedar Hill on Santee River. In 1772 Tidyman married Hester Rose (1755 - 1841), and they had three children. Hester Rose Tidyman (1773 - 1816) married John Drayton, who became Governor of South Carolina. Philip Tidyman, Jr. (1778 - 1850) earned medical degrees at prestigious universities in Scotland and Germany and became a prominent physician in Charlestown, owner of Tidyman Marsh Plantation near Georgetown, author, and politician. The third child was unnamed at the time of the death of Philip Tidyman, Sr. Suzanne Cameron Linder and Marta Leslie Thacker, *Historical Atlas of the Rice Plantations of Georgetown County and the Santee River*. (Columbia: South Carolina Department of Archives and History for the Historic Ricefields Association Inc., 2001), pp. 611-614. Unlike Drake, Douxsaint, and many others from the Santee district, Philip Tidyman, Sr. does not appear to have held any civil or military office. He died of causes unknown to us on April 27, 1780 during the period of the siege of Charlestown and he is buried at the ruins of Echaw Church about 6 miles northwest of Cedar Hill. See also David Doar, “The Inscriptions on the Tombstones at the Old Parish Church of St. James's near Echaw Creek” *South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine*, Vol. 12, (1911) which is available on Google Books.

⁴¹ The approximate location of Douxsaint's Plantation is shown on Cook's and Mouzon's maps (spelled Duxcent and Duxent, respectively). Douxsaint's Plantation was owned by Paul Douxsaint, son of Huguenot immigrants, who had been a tradesman. “He served in the Commons House, both Provincial Congresses and the 1st General Assembly, representing St. James, Santee.” *Journal of the General Assembly of South Carolina*, March 30, 1776, quoted at <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~scbchs/OldBerkJP.htm>.

February 24, 1782 – Wambaw Bridge

Flush with confidence from his lack of opposition to his February 20 raid, Col. Thompson set out from Daniel Island on February 24 with an estimated 700 troops in search of provisions and a fight with Marion's army.⁴³ Thompson's fast-moving force consisted of provincial cavalry, mounted militia, Hessian jägers, the Volunteers of Ireland provincial infantry, and a detachment of the British 30th Regiment of Foot, with a three-pound field piece.⁴⁴ Arriving at Cainhoy at first light Thompson saw tracks from a large body of troops, which he soon learned had come from the Santee River and returned the day before. Thompson followed the tracks past Drake's Plantation, where he left his weary infantry, and continued with some 200 cavalry about eight miles farther to Wambaw Bridge.

Emerging from a wooded section of the road Thompson's troops killed a vidette and spotted the rebel cavalry crossing Wambaw Creek on the causeway and bridge.⁴⁵ (See map, next page.) Not all the cavalry had time to cross before being captured or killed by the South Carolina Loyalist militia commanded by Majors William "Bloody Bill" Cunningham and William Young. Thompson estimated that about 300 did make it across and formed a line of defense 80 to 100 yards north of the causeway. Defending this position should have been straightforward as the British were forced to

cross the narrow causeway and bridge.⁴⁶ According to Thompson, however, the Americans allowed Thompson's militia to form their lines a mere 30 yards away. After pausing a moment, Thompson's militia charged. The Americans fired their pistols, then scattered.



View southward across the present bridge across Wambaw Creek toward the position from which Thompson's troops advanced. Photo by C. Leon Harris.

Thompson had been in the saddle for 19 hours, but at Drake's Plantation that night he could not wait to pen a lucid and detailed report to Leslie:

As soon as we came out of a Wood upon the left of their Encampment, where their advanced Vidette was posted (who was Killed upon the Spot) we discovered their Dragoons crossing in our front to the left

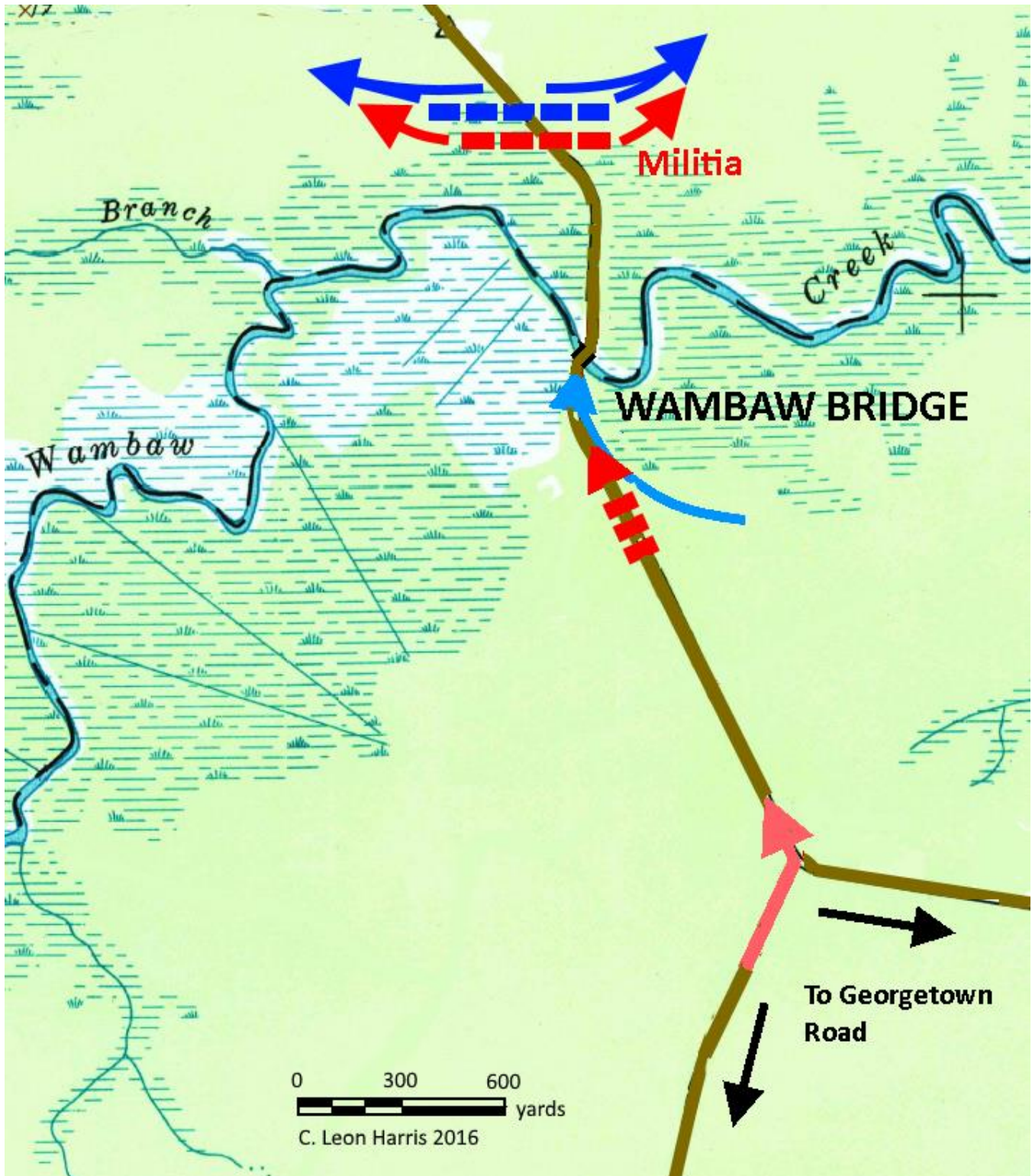
⁴³ The Hessian Gen. Hans von Knoblauch, discussing the purpose of Thompson's expedition, wrote, "Only the shortage of fresh meat and vegetables etc. due to the proximity of the enemy, only 10-12 Engl. Miles from us, has caused a great increase in prices, plus they are almost unavailable since the enemy now has posts on Johns and Daniels Islands, from where we used to get it. For this reason, Colonel Thompson was sent out on February 24 . . ." Horry to Greene, Feb. 28, 1782, *PNG*, X:419n3

⁴⁴ Thompson to Leslie, Feb. 24, 1782, PRO 30/55, #9952, copy at the David Library of the American Revolution, p. 24 below. See the order of battle, p. 21 below. The first part of Thompson's route was probably along the Clements Ferry Road.

⁴⁵ William Dobein James in his *Life Marion* states that Capt. Bennet had warned Benison and McDonald of the approaching British but was not believed, and that the "firing

commenced at Durant's" "about a mile above." Elias H. Durant owned a plantation on the south side of Tidyman's north of Wambaw Bridge, but Thompson does not mention any such firing. It appears Thompson approached Wambaw Bridge from the south.

⁴⁶ Wambaw Creek is a substantial tidally influenced creek, over 50 feet in width, with wide low grounds on each side. The low grounds along the creek may have been converted into rice fields prior to the Revolution, but that has not been documented. Even if dry, these grounds would have been unsuited for horse or infantry maneuvers, and the causeways on both sides of the bridge approach were natural choke points, easily defensible from the north side's relatively high grounds. This defense, known in naval terms as "crossing the T", concentrated all of the firepower on a very narrow front who cannot return proportionate fire.



Plan of the Skirmish at Wambaw Bridge. Movements of forces under Thompson (red) and of Marion's troops under McDonald (blue) are according to Thompson. Lighter colors show initial movements. Roads are approximately as shown on the 18th c. maps by Cook and Mouzon. From a study of period land surveys, it appears that the Wambaw Creek Bridge and its causeways have not materially changed their positions since colonial times. Base map USGS South Santee 7.5' quadrangle. Note: This site is a part of the Francis Marion National Forest and is open to the public; however, the use of a metal detector or removing any artifacts is strictly prohibited and carries serious legal ramifications.

over a causeway and bridge that lay between them and the militia. We instantly charged them, and some of the swiftest Horses of our Militia, who were in front, came up in time to cut off a few men in their rear, and immediately, without halting followed after their main body. As soon as the Enemy had got over this Bridge, and had gained the summit of a rising ground, eighty or one hundred yards from the end of the Causeway they came to the right about and formed in very good order.

At this instant all our force was in their sight. The Head of the Column (which was at full speed) was upon the causeway, and the Militia, which had halted within Thirty yards of their Line formed opposite to them, and invited them both by word and gestures to come on. I expected every instant when the Rebel Dragoons would have charged them, but after remaining in this critical situation about a quarter of a minute Major Doyle, who was in front of the whole, made the signal for his Militia to Charge.⁴⁷ They gave a shout and rushed on Sword in hand with the utmost intrepidity, and the Enemy [cavalry] fired their pistols and gave way in great confusion. We pursued them through the middle of their encampment and along the Causeway leading to Wambaw Bridge; but the Bridge breaking down just as we were crossing it prevented our following them any further in that direction. In the mean time several small parties that had attempted to get off by other Roads, and by taking to the Woods & Swamps had been pursued by our Militia and many of them had been destroyed.”

I imagine the Rebel Militia run off as soon as they heard of our advancing to Attack them, (which as I have since learnt was not more than half an hour before we arrived) as none of them made their appearance to oppose us.⁴⁸



Wambaw Creek and adjacent swamp.

Thompson reported that he had only one dragoon slightly wounded and found at least 30 Americans dead on the ground, not including 10 from patrols encountered on their march. Thompson supposed that many more must have perished in the swamps and river while trying to get away. According to an undated return in Marion’s *Orderly Book* (reproduced below, p. 28), Horry’s regiment lost four men killed, six wounded, and seven missing, as well as 24 horses missing. Below the return is a note that Major “Benson” (William Benison, who commanded Horry’s dragoons) and two volunteers were among the killed. In a February 28 letter to Greene (p. 30 below) Horry blamed Benison for the surprise: “Major Benison (by neglect of duty) was the Cause of the Enemies so near Approach Undiscovered.... The Militia am told Suffered no Loss of men, my Regiment am told Suffered most, tis Supposed I Lost 2 Officers, two Volunteers, & ab^t 10 Kill^d & a few Wounded.”⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Maj. John Doyle commanded the Volunteers of Ireland, which presumably were left at Drake’s Plantation with other infantry. Doyle may have had temporary command of mounted militia during the engagement, although Thompson referred to them as *his* (Doyle’s) Militia.

⁴⁸ William Dobein James stated that Americans removed the planks on Wambaw Bridge, opening a chasm “supposed to

be twenty feet in width,” which he claimed his father, Maj. John James leaped. James, *Life of Marion*, p. 161.

⁴⁹ Thompson to Leslie, Feb. 24, 1782, p. 27 below. Thompson thought all the killed and captured Americans were Continentals, but Horry’s dragoons were SC State Troops. Thompson’s and Horry’s reports agree that no militia were killed. Thompson concluded from this that the militia had absconded before the action began.

Marion's biographer, William Dobein James, says that Capt. Thomas Bennett raced into camp a few miles ahead of Thompson, found Col. McDonald having dinner, and gave him warning of the British approach, and then sped to Maj. William Benison's camp to spread the alarm.⁵⁰ At least it appears from this history adequate videttes were posted for the Wambaw camp and the alert system actually worked, though James seems to indicate McDonald met the alarm with disbelief or inaction, at least. This reaction seems unlikely as many there knew of Thompson's raid into St. Thomas and St. Johns Berkeley Parishes, as far east as Huger Bridge only four days before.⁵¹

February 25, 1782 – Tidyman's Plantation

According to a letter from Maham to Greene dated 1 March, Marion was 12 miles from Maham's plantation (on Santee River just north of modern Pineville) when he got word of the defeat at Wambaw Bridge: "Gen^l Marian Then agree^d with me to Stay & Rest ourselves And my Reg^t one day: as we had join'd up 12 Miles from My Plantation, I askd Leave of the Gen^l to go home to Make out my Returns & whould joine Him the Next day: before he March of[f]. In 5 hours after I left him, an Express arrvd to [him?] of Col^o Horrys Cavalry being Surprisd. The Gen^l Emeadiately March of[f] at 10 Oclock at night, without giving Me the First

notes [notice] not Even Left one of my dragoons To go down with me, he March down within Five miles of the Enemy."⁵²

Marion left at 10 PM, and the next day, February 25, he was at Tidyman's Plantation less than two miles from the defeat at Wambaw Bridge. (See map on the following page). Along the way Marion collected what he could of Horry's state troops and militia from the battle of the day before, as well as fresh troops, both infantry and cavalry. Among the latter were Maham's cavalry, then under the command of Capt. John Carraway Smith.⁵³

At 9 AM on the 25th Thompson left Drake's Plantation, marched his troops west to Douxsaint's Plantation, where he left his infantry, then continued north and east intending to approach Wambaw Bridge from the north.⁵⁴ Thompson's intelligence reported that Peter Horry was sick at home and that Maham's regiment was not far off. Less than two miles before reaching Wambaw Bridge, however, Thompson entered the lane to Tidyman's Plantation and immediately saw Marion's force "about Three Hundred yards distant, directly in front of us, drawn up in the area between the Negroes Hutts belonging to the plantation."⁵⁵ (See map next page.) The Ground was

⁵⁰ William Dobein James, *A Sketch of the Life of Brig. Gen. Francis Marion ...* (1821. Reprint. Kessinger Publishing, 2004) p. 161, also available online at <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/923/923-h/923-h.htm>

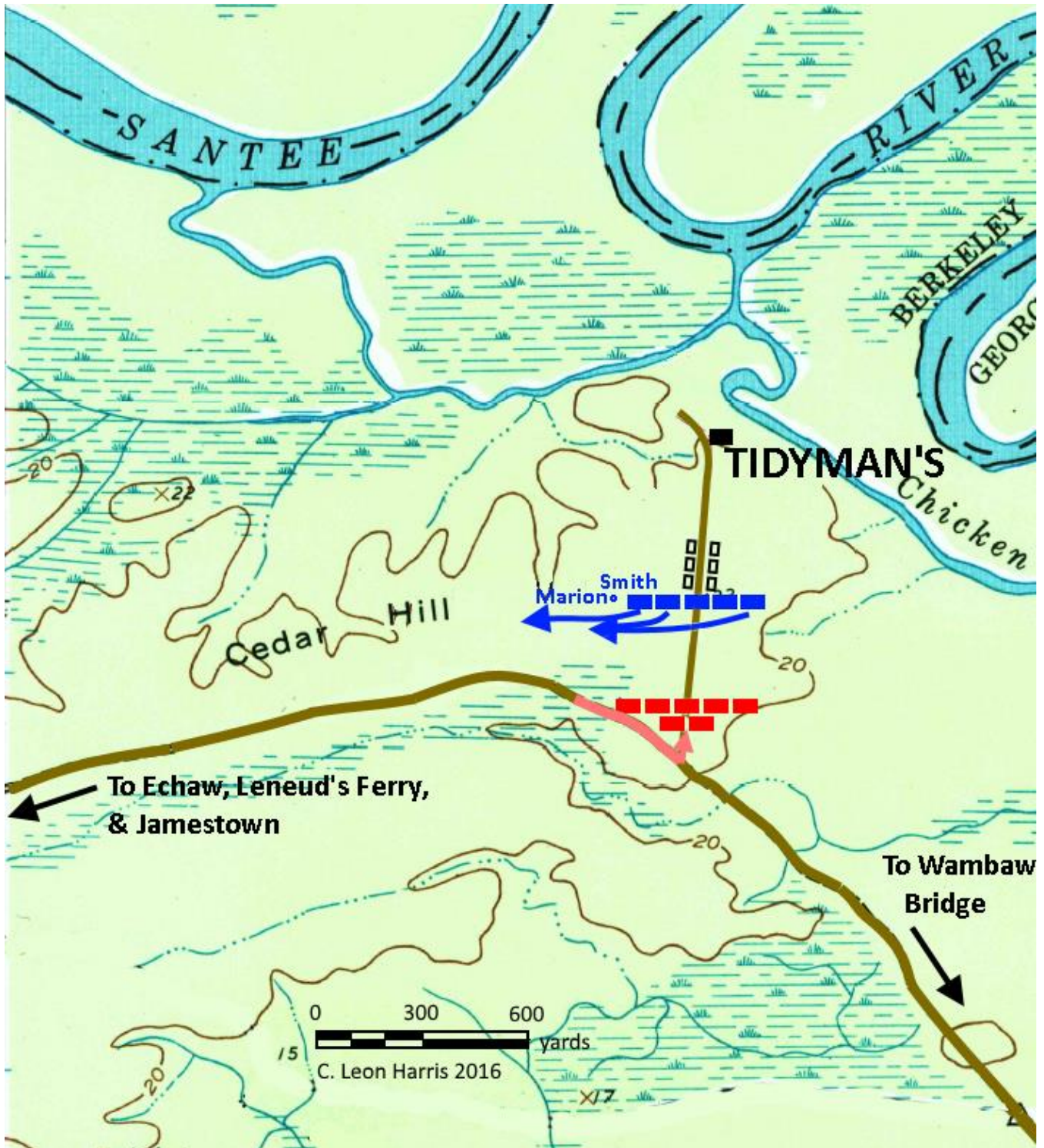
⁵¹ Because Marion, Horry, and Maham were absent, there appears to be no commander's report of this skirmish.

⁵² Maham to Greene, March 1, 1782, p. 31 below. As seen there, Maham was unhappy when he learned that Marion had left him behind. James's account differs from that of Maham, stating that Marion was already on his way to Wambaw Bridge when he got word of the defeat there, having picked up Maham's troops at Mepkin, about 25 miles south of Pineville. It is well known that Maham and Horry were at odds, and James stated that Marion had posted Maham at Mepkin and not Wambaw Bridge for that reason. "Maham having refused to cooperate with Horry, lay still at Mepkin; and Gen. Marion passing there on the 24th, took command of his corps and proceeded towards Wambaw; but the colonel was not present. On his way Gen. Marion was sorely vexed with the disagreeable news of the defeat of his brigade." Maham to Greene, March 1, 1782, PNG, X:429-431

⁵³ After the battle Thompson wrote to Leslie as follows: "I learn from the Prisoners that General Marions forces consisted of Mahams Regiments of Continental Dragoons; all the remains that could be collected Horry's Dragoons, and the Militia we routed Yesterday, (which amounted To no more than Twenty of the former, & Thirty or Forty of the latter) a detachment of Continental Infantry, and about Thirty Militia General Marion had brought him from the Southward, This force had been collected for the purpose of attacking us and General Marion had given positive orders for the Cavalry to Charge wherever they met with us. They had got intelligence of our having retired to Drakes Plantation and were just preparing to follow us when we came upon them."

⁵⁴ The letter published in the *Royal Gazette*, p. 37 below, reported that Thompson and his mounted force left at 3:00 AM toward the Santee.

⁵⁵ The *Royal Gazette* article, p. 37 below, reported that Thompson's flankers came across two Continental soldiers armed with bayonets, posted as sentries, which led Thompson to believe that Marion had his infantry with his cavalry. These sentries gave Marion the alarm.



Plan of the Battle at Tidyman's Plantation. Positions and movements of troops are according to Thompson and Marion, with colors as in the preceding figure. The small black squares depict the slave quarters, but their exact locations are unknown. Upon attack by the British, some of Marion's men fled north towards Chicken Creek. Archaeologists have found 18th c. military artifacts to the east of the present lane where the slave quarters are depicted, as well as where the blue arrowhead on the right is shown. (Stephen Smith, personal communication.) Base map USGS South Santee 7.5' quadrangle. Note: This site is a part of the Francis Marion National Forest and is open to the public; however, the use of a metal detector or removing any artifacts is strictly prohibited and carries serious legal ramifications.

perfectly clear between us, and the Field extended at least two Hundred Yards to our right and to our left.” Thompson knew that the Santee River was “close upon the Enemy’s rear,” so there was no way for Marion’s troops to avoid an action if they had wanted to.⁵⁶

Thompson, though seeing that Marion had the advantage of having infantry, proceeded to rapidly form a line of battle “in less than two minutes” in spite of the plantation gate being so narrow that only two horses at a time could enter. Marion also quickly arranged his cavalry, and both Thompson and Marion ordered a charge. Instead of charging straight ahead, however, the cavalry under Smith veered to the right, and the rest of Marion’s cavalry followed, apparently thinking Marion had ordered a retreat. Thompson reported it thus: “As soon as the troops were formed I ordered a charge to be sounded, and the line moved forwards. The enemy also sounded a charge, but instead of coming out to meet us they were discovered going off by their right in the greatest hurry and confusion, and attempting to gain a swamp that was upon the banks of the river on that side. We immediately charged after them at full speed, and had the good fortune to come up in time to cut off a great part of their rear.” Some Americans, according to Thompson, “were killed in attempting to get into the River, [while] others were shot and drowned in attempting to swim to the opposite shore.”⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Thompson to Leslie, Feb. 25, 1782, p. 28 below, and in the *Report on American Manuscripts* 1906:405-407; William Johnson, *Sketches of the Life and Correspondence of Nathanael Greene*, (Charleston, SC: A. E. Miller, 1822) 2:307. In contrast to Thompson’s statement of the field being open, William Dobein James wrote that there was a pond and fences lining Tidyman’s lane. James, *Life of Marion*, p. 162. Thompson stated that, “I observed that the River was close upon the Enemy’s rear.” Actually, Chicken Creek – a substantial body of flowing water – was between Marion and the Santee River, and Thompson would not have been able to observe either one from the position where he first spotted Marion’s troops. Thompson undoubtedly knew the river was there, however.

⁵⁷ Thompson to Leslie, Feb. 25, 1782, p. 28 below.

⁵⁸ James stated that the cavalry were diverted by a pond, but neither Thompson nor Marion reported such a pond. The ground at Cedar Hill is sand over limestone, often too porous to hold a pond. John Carraway Smith is often said to have

In a letter to Peter Horry, dated March 2, Marion blamed Capt. John Carraway Smith for the debacle: “We lost a fine opportunity to Cut the Enemies horse to pieces, by Mayhams horse not Charging as it was Ordered; but I beleave it was principally Owing to Captⁿ Smith not telling his Officers & men what they were going about__ I Rallied a part of the Horse less than half a Mile & sent them to Cover the Scattered men. The Enemy never followed us out of the plantation.”⁵⁸



View northward on present Forest Service Road 204B at the position where Thompson is thought to have entered the gate to Tidyman’s lane. Photo by C. Leon Harris.

Maham (who was not there) blamed Marion rather than his cavalry: “Instead of ordering a charge Which was the only thing that could possibly of Savd our men, had the Enemy’s of done there, thay ware orderd to file of[f] to the Rite which struck the officers & men, that thay wast to Retret, which thay

been seized with panic at the battle and to have resigned the next day, but we have not been able to find any support for either of these statements. The earliest claim that Smith resigned the next day is by William Gilmore Simms, *Life of Marion*, p. 302.

<https://archive.org/stream/lifefrancismari00unkngoog#page/n334/mode/2up> In a letter to Greene dated March 1, 1782 PNG, X:429-431, Marion wrote that “Captn Smith was Down Yesterday at Mrs Tydeman’s,” which indicates that Smith was still a Captain. Smith does not appear to have been under a cloud since on April 12, 1782 he received a new replacement commission as Captain in the 2^d SC Continental Regiment to take effect on Sept. 16, 1776. According to Francis B. Heitman, *Historical Register of Officers of the Continental Army During the War of the Revolution*, (reprint Baltimore: Clearfield, 1997) Smith was promoted to major by brevet on Sept. 30, 1783. See the pension application by his widow, <http://revwarapps.org/w4890.pdf>.

did in the Gratest Confution.” In a letter to Greene, however, Marion stated, “I had no Idea of a retreat when they broke & was myself within four men of the Colum in front on their right flank.”⁵⁹



The swamp Marion’s troops entered at Tidyman’s Plantation. Photo by C. Leon Harris.

Thompson claimed that his troops suffered no casualty, but that a “very considerable” number of Americans had been killed and wounded in their flight, “though absolutely impossible to ascertain.” The Loyalist newspaper at Charlestown reported that Thompson found 10 dead Americans on the field and took 12 other prisoners.⁶⁰ On the next day Thompson wrote to Leslie from Wappetaw Meeting House that Marion had not been seen since the battle, which apparently led the Loyalist newspaper to conclude that Marion was among those who “must have shared their fate, as he was among those who took to the water, and from his age could not be supposed to get better off than his followers”.⁶¹ This newspaper report proved inaccurate: as Mark Twain would quip, “The report of my death was an exaggeration.”⁶² Thompson also reported the capture of forty horses, twenty muskets with bayonets, “great numbers of swords, Helmets &ca,” and baggage belonging to a number

of officers, including Marion. Marion’s “tent and his canteens full of liquor” were also among the prizes captured by the British. He also informed Leslie that after this encounter “we collected at our leisure all the Cattle from the Rebel Plantations in that Quarter, and have sent them down the Road with a proper escort. We shall follow as soon as the Troops are refreshed.”⁶³

Marion’s letter to Peter Horry raises the possibility that American losses were not as great as the British asserted, for he claimed to have rallied Maham’s dragoons almost immediately and to have sent them to cover the rest of his scattered command, so that “the enemy never followed us out of the plantation.” Although he did not have an exact count of American casualties in the engagement, Marion told Horry that he believed they consisted of no “more than Lieut. Smitzer [Jacob Smiser] and three men.”⁶⁴ Marion’s orderly book indicates Maham lost four infantry killed, one wounded and four missing, the cavalry lost two missing, and Lt. Smiser of Horry’s command drowned.⁶⁵ Marion’s militia losses were not ever accurately counted.

After the battle at Tidyman’s, Thompson retraced part of his route as far as Douxsaint’s Plantation, where once again he had the happy task of reporting to Leslie his success over the troops of the legendary Swamp Fox. Within two weeks he would be on a ship for New York to finally take command of the King’s American Dragoons, but he never again led men in battle. His military career had been brief and brilliant, but years later his exultation over leading men victoriously in battle had given way to more mature reflection. A visitor to Thompson in 1801 (by then the famous Count Rumford) recalled his eyes filling with tears as he recounted scenes of battle.⁶⁶

⁵⁹ Maham to Greene, March 1, 1782, *PNG*, X:429-431; Marion to Greene, March 1, 1782, *PNG*, X:431-432

⁶⁰ Charlestown, *SC Royal Gazette*, March 2, 1782

⁶¹ Charlestown, *SC Royal Gazette*, March 3, 1782

⁶² Mark Twain to Frank Marshall White, May 31, 1897

⁶³ Thompson to Leslie, Feb. 25, 1782, p. 28 below.

⁶⁴ Marion to Peter Horry, March 2, 1782, Robert W. Gibbes, MD, *Documentary History of the American Revolution ...*,

(Columbia, SC: Banner Steam-Power Press, 1853), 3:260-261

⁶⁵ O’Kelley, *Marion’s Orderly Book*, Return of Feb. 25, 1782, p. 565

⁶⁶ Pictet, Marc-Auguste. *Voyage de Trois Mois en Angleterre, en Ecosse, et en Irlande pendant l’Eté de l’an IX (1801 v.st.)*.

Implications - Discussion - Conclusions

It is interesting that the aggressive British commander, eager to prove himself as a battlefield commander, did not follow up on Marion's troops scattering. It is possible that Marion's infantry deterred Thompson's cavalry from getting within musket range. It would only be armchair speculation, but perhaps Thompson merely wanted to claim a victory without the inevitable bloodshed that would be encountered running down Marion's dragoons on unfamiliar swampy territory when Marion's horses were fresh and Thompson's tired from their morning ride. Perhaps Thompson thought he smelled a trap after Marion's dragoons just bolted or maybe the old Swamp Fox's troops merely disappeared into the swamps as legends would have it. In matters military, a fighting reputation can be everything.

Some of Thompson's men had grudges against Marion's men to square. Marion's men had ambushed and mauled the South Carolina Royalists at Parker's Ferry on August 30, 1781, where their commander, Maj. Thomas Fraser was unhorsed and almost trampled to death. Some of the British Legion had chased Marion into the swamps, as they evaded Tarleton himself. It was embarrassing. And many of Maj. John Coffin's cavalry had fought the Americans in hard combat at Hobkirk Hill and Eutaw Springs. It was personal against Marion and his brigade. Finally, it appears that SC Loyalist militia Maj. William "Bloody Bill" Cunningham was personally present after his "Bloody Scout" raid from Charlestown to the Spartanburg area, murdering over 50 Americans, some military and some civilians. It may have been personal to the Americans, too.

It will be discussed for years if Marion's cavalry was under orders to exit the battlefield to the west or they just ran. Marion's letter to Greene appears that he was mystified and did not order the move to the west.⁶⁷ Further, the question must arise whether Marion was surprised at Tidyman's. One of the contemporaneous sources indicate Marion's men

were warned of the impending attack more than Thompsons two minutes he used to get through the gate and form a charge line.⁶⁸ Marion had two videttes posted north on Echaw Road even though he was likely watching for another attack from the south. But the question remains of whether Marion had men out several miles to warn of Thompson's approach from the northwest. Nevertheless, it appears Marion's men were saddled, formed, and ready for battle as Thompson entered the gate. This could be because of a vidette's warning or could have been simply Marion was getting ready to march off.

South Carolina's Governor John Rutledge issued a proclamation that former Loyalists who took an oath and served in the American militia would be pardoned. Now that the British tide in South Carolina was waning, there were many six-month new recruits in Marion's militia. That may explain why many seemed to run at the first site of Thompson at Wambaw Bridge.

The most significant result of the two engagements was that Marion had to withdraw his forces and rebuild his strength, leaving the British free to forage in the area between the Cooper and Santee rivers for a few days. The Americans' loss of 31 cavalry horses in two days was devastating. Horses, especially "chargers," high quality cavalry horses, were irreplaceable. Both Maham's and Horry's cavalry regiments were very understrength both in men and horse. Marion decided to combine the two corps of the two rivals, Peter Horry and Hezekiah Maham, into a single cavalry regiment under Maham, leaving his old friend and loyal lieutenant, Horry, to command the post at Georgetown.⁶⁹ Marion never again left command of his Brigade to others. Marion's brigade, though tarnished, also lived to fight again.

Interestingly, Maham's command of the combined units did not last very long because he was captured at his home by a British raid in August 1782. Thereafter, command of Maham's unit devolved to Maj. Daniel Conyers and was soon called by many

⁶⁷ Marion to Greene, March 1, 1782, *PNG*, X:431 and n6 on 421

⁶⁸ Wells, Charleston, SC, *Royal Gazette*, March 2, 1782

⁶⁹ Marion to Peter Horry, March 13, 1782, Gibbes, *Documentary History*, 3:271

the SC State Legion since it now contained both cavalry and infantry.

Marion regrouped his militia brigade at Murray's Ferry and soon moved back to his old camp at St. Stephens to continue to patrol his sector.

Thompson's detachment was *ad hoc*, and command just returned to the various British units after his raids; however, most of these light and mounted troops were used again in the various rice raids including the August 5-9, 1782 raid on the Santee River plantations.⁷⁰ Maj. Thomas Frasier and his SC Royalists were detached to raid up to the Moncks Corner and Wadboo areas, probably as a diversion, while Greene was responding to the

larger Brereton raid to Combahee River, Port Royal, St. Helena, and Ladies Islands. Frasier's movement into St. Stephen's Parish set up Marion's last battle – the Avenue of the Cedars fight at Wadboo Barony.⁷¹

Although the engagements at Wambaw Bridge and Tidyman's Plantation were discouraging to Marion, Greene and the Americans, they did little to stave off the inevitable. Less than 10 months later, on December 14, 1782, the British evacuated Charlestown. The War was finally over in South Carolina, but Marion and the new government had the work to do to sort out what was to become of the remaining Loyalists.

⁷⁰ Marion to Greene, Aug. 5, 1782, *PNG*, XI:492, 511.

⁷¹ Marion to Greene, Aug. 30, 1782, *PNG*, XI:606-608, and Greene's reply at 611. Marion followed up with a letter to Greene, Sept. 2, 1782, *PNG*, XI:620-621.

Order of Battle at Wambaw Bridge⁷²

February 24, 1782

Americans - Col. Archibald McDonald - Commanding Officer in place of Col. Peter Horry

State Troops

SC 4th Regiment of Dragoons - Peter Horry (not personally present)

Maj. William Benison (killed in action)

Capt. Richard Gough

Capt. William Withers

Lt. Thomas Stevenson

Capt. Henry Leneud

Capt. William Fishburne

Capt. Joseph Hill

Lt. Matthew Singleton

Capt. John Malone

South Carolina Militia

Kingstree Regiment militia detachment - Col. Archibald McDonald

Maj. John James

Capt. Daniel Morrall

Lt. Bennett

Cheraws District Regiment militia detachment - Col. Lemuel Benton (wounded in action)

Capt. Thomas Ellerbe

Lt. George Strother

Sgt. Isaac Lefever (\$13726)

Adjutant Benjamin Huggins

⁷² There are few contemporaneous records from which Orders of Battle can be entirely deduced. Commander's reports, if extant, are often incomplete. The following Orders of Battle were compiled from letters and other period documents including pension affidavits given many years after the events. They can be misleading, since a whole unit was seldom present at a battle; nor does the mention of one or two soldiers from a specific unit necessarily mean that their whole unit was there. For the two Orders of Battle for the Americans' side, we are grateful for the pioneering work that Henry Lumpkin did in *From Savannah to Yorktown* (Columbia: USC Press, 1981). This work was followed by the comprehensive work of Patrick O'Kelley in his four volume series, *Nothing but Blood and Slaughter* and built upon by J.D. Lewis' Orders of Battles for many dozens of Southern Campaigns battles posted at his website, carolana.com. Todd Braisted has compiled many documents on the Loyalists forces from which their Orders of Battle are deduced. Based on the pension records below these Orders of Battle are certainly incomplete. Lewis, http://www.carolana.com/SC/Revolution/revolution_wambaw_bridge.html and see also O'Kelley, *NBBS*, IV:31. O'Kelley estimated the total number of American troops as 500. The number would have been less if the militia retreated at the start of the engagement, as Thompson believed, and as is consistent with the absence of casualties among the militia.

British - Lt. Col. Benjamin Thompson - Commanding Officer⁷³

British Regulars

Lt. Col. Benjamin Thompson
Lt. Jones, adjutant

Provincials

King's American Dragoons (several men who came with Lt. Col. Thompson)

British Legion

Capt. Sanford's Troop - Capt. Thomas Sanford - 25 men

South Carolina Royalists

Maj. Thomas Fraser
Capt. George Dawkins - 22 men

North Carolina Independent Dragoons

Capt. Robert Gillies

New York Volunteers

Maj. Coffin's Troop of Mounted Infantry - Maj. John Coffin - 40 men

South Carolina Loyalist Militia

Maj. Young's Mounted Militia (Rifle Hussars)

Maj. William Young - 45 men

Cunningham's Troop of Dragoons

Maj. William Cunningham – 45 men⁷⁴

Cpts. John Hood, William Helms, William Parker⁷⁵

Capt. John Doyle (from Volunteers of Ireland) commanding unknown militia

Black Dragoons -

Capt. March

⁷³ Compiled from information generously provided by Todd Braisted and O'Kelley, *NBBS*, IV:31. See also J. D. Lewis, http://www.carolana.com/SC/Revolution/revolution_wambaw_bridge.html. The following infantry units were on this expedition but were left at Drake's Plantation during the engagement: Volunteers of Ireland (unknown number), 30th Regiment of Foot (100 men), and Hesse-Kassel Feld Jäger Korps (60). Marion's letter to Greene dated March 1, 1782 stated that Thompson had about 500 infantry and 200 cavalry, which agrees with O'Kelley's estimate of a total of 700 British and Loyalist troops. If the 500 infantry were left at Drake's Plantation, then the actual number of British and Royalists engaged at Wambaw Bridge was about 200.

⁷⁴ Based on a payroll for 8 April - 8 July 1782. [Todd Braisted]

<http://www.royalprovincial.com/military/musters/scmilitia/scmcunn1.htm> This is one and the same as the infamous SC Loyalist militia Maj. William "Bloody Bill" Cunningham.

⁷⁵ Charleston, SC, *Royal Gazette*, March 2, 1782 and Murtie June Clark, *Loyalists in the Southern Campaigns of the Revolutionary War*, Vol. 1, (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co, 1981), p. 269

Order of Battle at Tidyman's Plantation⁷⁶

February 25, 1782

Americans - Brig. Gen. Francis Marion - Commanding Officer

Detachment of Infantry

State Troops

SC 3rd Regiment of State Dragoons⁷⁷ – Lt. Col. Hezekiah Maham (not present)
Capt. John Carraway Smith in command

SC 4th Regiment of State Dragoons⁷⁸ – Col. Peter Horry (not present) – 20 men
Capt. Joseph Hill
Lt. Matthew Singleton

South Carolina Militia

Kingstree Regiment militia detachment – Col. Archibald McDonald – 30 to 40 men
Lt. Jacob Smitzer (Smiser) (killed in action)

British - Lt. Col. Benjamin Thompson - Commanding Officer

Same as at Wambaw Bridge above.

⁷⁶ Based on pension records below and Thompson's statement in footnote 46 above. This record is certainly incomplete. See also J. D. Lewis, http://www.carolana.com/SC/Revolution/revolution_tidymans_plantation.html, and O'Kelley, *NBBS*, IV:31. If Thompson's statement in footnote 53 is correct, then Marion had only about 80 cavalry plus whatever number was in a detachment of infantry that Thompson believed was Continental. But note that at Wambaw Bridge Thompson had mistaken Horry's state troops for Continental soldiers. O'Kelley estimates the total number of American troops at 500, but it is difficult to account for so many. Marion apparently believed he could have defeated Thompson, so probably his numbers were comparable to those of Thompson's 200 cavalry. In a letter to Greene dated March 1, 1782 however, Maham (who was not there) stated that "the Enemy force was above double to that of our." From all of this a reasonable estimate of the number of troops under Marion would be 100 to 200.

⁷⁷ Lt. Col. Hezekiah Maham was traveling from his plantation.

⁷⁸ Lt. Col. Peter Horry was sick at home.

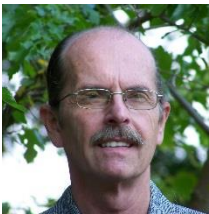
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