BATTLES

OF THE

AMERICAN REVOLUTION.

1775—1781.

HISTORICAL AND MILITARY CRITICISM,

WITH

TOPOGRAPHICAL ILLUSTRATION.

JUSTITIA ET PRÆTEREA NIL.

BY

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CHAPTER LXV.

BATTLE OF CAMDEN. KING'S MOUNTAIN. POSITION OF SOUTHERN ARMIES.

THE battle of Camden, or Sander's Creek, was one of the most suggestive of the war. The force of discipline, exact appreciation of the adversary, quick seizure of opportunity, and the delivery of incessant blows upon every exposed point in turn, were illustrated in the conduct of Lord Cornwallis. Webster, Rawdon and Tarleton recognized the controlling will of the general commanding, and obeyed orders implicitly, confidently, and at all hazards. The British regulars only did their duty as usual. It was characteristic of their general conduct during the whole war.

Lord Cornwallis hesitated, as he states, whether to risk an action against the American army, or to retire to Charleston. His scouts were constantly on the alert, and he formed so correct an estimate of the character of General Gates, and the composition and disposition of the American army, as to risk an attack, although he knew that it was superior in numbers to his own, and occupying a good position at Rugely's Mills. General Gates was thoroughly "sure of victory, and of the dispersion of the British army." It has been seen that he participated actively in no part of the operations near Saratoga until the morning of August eleventh, 1777. Confiding in numbers, and neglecting reconnoissance, he then imperiled his army by forcing several brigades across Fishkill creek, while remaining in the rear himself.

He brought his worn-out, sick and hungry army to Rugely's Mills despite of advice and prudence, and intended at once to attack a strong post and veteran troops, as if the prestige of the Burgoyne campaign was a formidable part of his aggressive force, instead of an element to incite Cornwallis to a more determined resistance. He

shock of the enemy's horse, but to *rout* them; and to consider the order, to stand the attacks of the enemy's cavalry, be their numbers what they may, as positive." Between two and three o'clock in the morning the advance guard of the British army, consisting of twenty Legion cavalry and as many mounted infantry, confronted, hotly attacked and routed Armand's detachment. Colonel Porterfield faithfully executed his orders and was mortally wounded in the skirmish; but the prompt arrival of the light infantry, the Twenty-third and Thirty-third British regiments in support of their advance guard, compelled him to retire. The retreat of Armand's cavalry threw the First Maryland brigade into confusion; and both armies, well satisfied with their experience of a night attack, awaited the morning and formed their lines for action. It was still within the power of General Gates to fall back to a strong position; but he lacked nerve and decision for such an hour. A prisoner who fell into the hands of the Americans reported the British force to be three thousand strong, under the immediate command of Lord Cornwallis. This fact was reported to General Gates. Adjutant-general Williams says, "General Gates called the general officers together in the rear, asking—"what is to be done. "All were mute for a few moments, when the gallant Stevens exclaimed," "Gentlemen, is it not too late *now* to do anything but fight." "When the Adjutant-general went to call the Baron De Kalb to council, he said, "and has the General given you orders to retreat the army," thus indicating his opinion of the proper action required. "The Baron did not however oppose the suggestion of General Stevens; and every measure that ensued was preparatory for action." Adjutant-general Williams says "that the General seemed disposed to await events—*he gave no orders.*" "Upon his suggesting a brisk attack by Stevens' brigade upon the British right, he answered, "Sir, that's right; let it be done." "This was the last order the deputy Adjutant-general received." Reference is made to map "Battle of Camden." This battle, as far as it was a battle, on the part of the Americans, and not a rout, was confined to the right wing where the gallant De Kalb fought his small command admirably. He did not know that the rest of the army had fled, until, surrounded by overwhelming numbers, he learned the fate of the day.

The British army had passed Sander's creek and entered upon a narrow belt of solid land, bordered on each side by an impassable swamp. The American army was flanked by the same swamps; but the interval rapidly widened in the direction of Rugely's Mills, so

that their flanks, the left especially, became exposed in case the engagement was pressed and they failed to hold their original ground. The artillery was then placed in the centre of the front line; and Major Armstrong's light infantry, which had retreated at the first encounter, was ordered to cover a small interval between the left wing and the swamp in that quarter. Frequent skirmishes during the night disclosed the relative positions of the armies; and the British army advanced at dawn of day.

"Lieutenant-colonel Webster commanded the right wing, consisting of three companies of light infantry, the Twenty-third and Thirty-third British regiments. Lord Rawdon commanded the left, consisting of the volunteers of Ireland, the Legion Infantry, Hamilton's corps and Bryan's refugees. Two six pounders and two three pounders, were to the left of the road, under Lieutenant McLeod. The two battalions of the Seventy-first regiment, with two six pounders, formed the second line. 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 Seventy-first regiment, with orders to act as opportunity offered, or necessity required."

The Second Maryland brigade, General Gist commanding, with the Delaware troops under Baron De Kalb, formed the American right; the North Carolina militia formed the centre, under General Caswell; and the equally untried Virginia militia, under Stevens, were on the left. The First Maryland brigade formed the second line, and the artillery under the direction of Captain Singleton, was so posted as to command the road.

The morning was calm and hazy; and the smoke settled so near the earth, that "it was difficult," says Cornwallis, "to see the effect of a very heavy and well supported fire on both sides." He says, "Observing a movement on the American left which I supposed to be with an intention to make some alterations in their order, I directed Lieutenant-colonel Webster to begin the attack." The movement referred to, was an attempt on the part of Adjutant-general Williams to force the brigade of Stevens to charge upon the British right wing before it could fully deploy; and to give time for their advance, he threw a small party of skirmishers forward, with orders "to take to single trees and thus annoy the enemy as much as possible." The British right wing however was too quick and spirited for this movement of untried militia, who did not know how to use the

bayonet just received. They came on with a steady front and loud cheers, instantly carrying everything before them.

The Virginia militia threw down their loaded arms and fled. The North Carolina militia, with the exception of a small detachment under General Gregory who made a short pause, and of a part of Dixon's regiment who were next in line to the second Maryland brigade, fled also. The power of example is illustrated by Dixon's conduct in view of his position. "At least two-thirds of the army," according to Adjutant-general Williams, "fled without firing a shot." The First Maryland brigade two hundred yards in the rear, repeatedly resisted the attack upon their left, until the British right wing overwhelmed them by numbers and forced them to retire. It was just then that the British legion, which had pursued the militia until they were started to the rear, joined Lieutenant-colonel Webster, and made the decisive charge upon the First Maryland brigade. The Second Maryland brigade did not flinch; but after repulsing Lord Rawdon twice, charged bayonet under Baron De Kalb, broke through the British left, wheeled upon its centre, and fought alone until the whole British army enveloped them in fire. Baron De Kalb fell, wounded in eleven places, and could hardly be convinced that the Americans were not the victors, so faithfully had he executed his orders, in the assurance of equal good conduct on the part of the other divisions. The rout was utter. General Gates was carried away with the militia, which he calls "a torrent," and knew nothing of the resistance so stubbornly maintained by the right wing of his army.

Adjutant-general Williams says, "If in this affair the militia fled too soon, the regulars may be thought as blamable for remaining too long on the field; especially after all hope of victory must have been despaired of." General Gates hurried with General Caswell to Charlotte, sixty miles from the field of battle, and by the twentieth safely reached Hillsborough, one hundred and eighty miles from Camden, without gathering a sufficient force of the fugitives to form even an escort.

The North Carolina militia fled to their homes, or wherever they could find refuge. General Stevens followed the Virginians to Hillsborough, and back over the route they came, to attempt to rally them, but their term of service was short and he soon discharged them.

General Cornwallis reports his force at two thousand two hundred and thirty-nine men, and his casualties sixty-eight *killed*; two hundred and fifty-six wounded and missing. General Gates subsequently

reported the loss of General De Kalb and five officers killed, and thirty-four officers wounded, including Lieutenant-colonels Woodford, Vaughan, Porterfield, and Du Buson, most of whom had been taken prisoners; and that by the twenty-ninth seven hundred non-commissioned officers and soldiers of the Maryland division had rejoined the army. This is a remarkable statement, greatly to the credit of those troops. The Delaware regiment had been almost literally destroyed. The Maryland troops lost between three and four hundred in killed, wounded and prisoners, and the original force was hardly fourteen hundred strong.

General Gates undoubtedly, as stated by him, made all the effort within his power to check the flight; but he had *no power* in action, and there is not a redeeming fact during his connection with the Southern army to show his fitness to command troops. Generals Smallwood and Gist secured their escape, as did the greater portion of Armand's cavalry. The British came into the possession of seven pieces of artillery, two thousand muskets, the entire baggage train, and prisoners to the number of nearly one thousand, according to the report of Cornwallis, including Generals De Kalb, Gregory, and Rutherford.

Congress had assigned General Gates to the command of the Southern Department at a time when the Commander-in-chief had selected General Greene for the detail; and the battle of Camden was an impressive commentary upon their action. It is not to be lost sight of that the expedition of Colonel Sumter took four hundred men from the army at a critical hour, and that a reasonable resistance on the part of the militia who were clumsily posted in the most exposed part of the field would have given increased value to the good conduct of the American right.

On the day of Sumter's misfortunes at Fishing creek, a skirmish occurred at Musgrove's Mills, South Carolina, on the Ennoree River, in which the Americans successfully surprised Colonel Ennis, who was in command of a mixed force of regulars and royalists.

On the twenty-first a skirmish occurred at Wahab's plantation. The house was burned, but the Americans under Colonel Davis secured ninety-six horses, and one hundred and twenty stand of arms, inflicted a loss upon the legion, who quartered there, of sixty men, losing about thirty.

Early in September, Brigadier-general Patterson retired from Charleston on sick leave, and Lieutenant-colonel Balfour succeeded to the command of that post.

Lieutenant-colonel Brown was stationed at Augusta, Lieutenant-colonel Conger at Ninety-six, and Lieutenant-colonel Turnbull at Camden. General Cornwallis advanced on the twenty-second with the Seventh, Twenty-third, Thirty-third and Seventy-first regiments of infantry, the Volunteers of Ireland, Hamilton's corps, Bryan's Refugees, four pieces of cannon, and a detachment of cavalry, toward Charlotte, *via* Hanging Rock. In a skirmish near the Court House on the twenty-sixth, while entering the town, the British advance was actively resisted, being fired upon from behind stone fences and buildings. Colonel Tarleton reports "about thirty of the enemy were killed and taken; the king's troops did not come out of this skirmish unhurt. Major Huger and Captains Campbell and McDonald were wounded, and twelve non-commissioned officers and men were killed and wounded. The American report states their loss as "Colonel Francis Locke, (who fought at Ramsour's Mills) *killed*, Major Graham and twelve men wounded."

It was now the purpose of General Cornwallis to take active measures for the invasion of North Carolina; but the whole region, drained by the Pacolet, Tyger, Ennoree, and Saluda Rivers was a troublesome one to leave in his rear. Of the people of Mecklenburg County, around Charlotte, Colonel Tarleton thus gives his opinion, "It was evident that the counties of Mecklenburg and Rohan were more hostile to England than any others in America. The vigilance and animosity of these districts checked the exertions of the well-affected, and totally destroyed all communications between the king's troops and the loyalists in the other parts of the province. No British commander could obtain any information; the foraging parties were every day harassed by the inhabitants, who did not remain at home to receive payment for the products of their plantations, but generally fired from covert places to annoy the British detachments. Individuals, with expresses, were frequently murdered. Notwithstanding their checks and losses, they continued their hostilities with unwearied perseverance, and the British troops were so effectually blockaded, that very few out of a great number of messengers could reach Charlotte, in the beginning of October, to give intelligence of Ferguson's situation." These statements clearly indicate the fact that the British policy was developing an increased antagonism among the people, and that the conquest did not extend beyond garrison limits. This irregular warfare was bearing fruit.

Colonel Clark threatened Augusta, and in two days inflicted con-

siderable loss upon the garrison, but was repulsed, Lieutenant-colonel Brown, the post commander, being wounded, and Captain Johnson killed. Colonel Tarleton says that the British loss fell principally upon their Indian auxiliaries. General Cornwallis states that the Indians pursued and scalped many of the Americans.

On the eighth of October the battle of King's Mountain entered into the operations of the campaign and did very much to offset the British victory at Camden. Tarleton and Ferguson operated along parallel belts separated by the Catawba and Broad Rivers as circumstances of pursuit or scouting determined, and the latter officer who had hoped to cut off Colonel Clark's detachment and other border partisan corps, before winter, found himself compelled to take refuge on King's Mountain on the sixth of October, closely pursued by a superior force. Colonel Isaac Shelby with a force from Sullivan County (now in Tennessee); Colonel William Campbell, with men from Washington County, Virginia; Colonel Benjamin Cleveland with men from Wilkes and Surrey Counties; Colonel Charles McDowell, with men from Wilkes and Rutherford Counties, North Carolina; Colonel John Sevier with men from Sullivan, reached the Cowpens, on Broad River on the sixth of October, and were joined the same evening by Colonel James Williams of South Carolina with a small force, the total command numbering nearly or quite sixteen hundred men, who had been selected for the purpose. It was an impromptu, unpaid army of volunteers, hastily combined for the purpose of ridding the country of Ferguson's corps.

King's Mountain, about a mile long and about a hundred feet above the surrounding country, is one of a series of rocky summits extending from the south-east to the north-west, and is just within the boundary line of North Carolina, as indicated on the map "Operations in Southern States."

Nine hundred men were selected to storm the hill in front and on the flanks. The detachment of the Seventy-first British regulars, fought with such spirit that in three bayonet charges they crowded their assailants to the foot of the hill. Major Ferguson was killed and the command devolved upon Captain Abraham De Peyster, of the King's American regiment. After an hour of desperate struggle the command surrendered.

The American casualties were Colonel Williams, Major Chromile, Captain Mattocks, two lieutenants, four ensigns and nineteen men

killed; one major, three captains, three lieutenants and fifty-three privates wounded.

The British casualties are characterized by a report which is so similar to those of Tarleton respecting "the wounded unable to march," that it confirms the generally accepted opinion that a deliberate slaughter was made of the so-called Tory troops. The casualties are reported as, "Two colonels, three captains and two hundred and one privates killed, one hundred and twenty-seven privates wounded, and *being unable to march*, left on the field; one colonel, twelve captains and with other officers and men, six hundred and forty-eight prisoners. The regulars lost, besides Major Ferguson, one captain, two lieutenants and fifteen privates killed; thirty-five wounded but *unable to march* and left on the ground; two captains and sixty-eight taken prisoners."

Fifteen hundred muskets and other arms, with the baggage, were captured. Tarleton thus briefly sums up his statement: "The action was disputed with great bravery near an hour, when the death of the gallant Ferguson threw his whole corps into total confusion. No effort was, made after this event, to resist the enemy's barbarity or revenge the fall of their leader."

Lossing and Dawson justly regard this action as one of the most obstinate of the war, and the associated skirmishes already briefly noticed, are but indicative of the intensely personal and destructive character of the campaign.

"It was now evident," says Tarleton, "beyond contradiction, that the British general had not adopted the most eligible plan for the invasion of North Carolina. Winnsborough was selected for the winter quarters of the army, and the sick were placed at Camden, where "redoubts were built, to make up for the badness of the position." Works were also erected at Nelson's Ferry, to secure the communications with Charleston, and also at Ninety-six.

"The success of the Americans at King's Mountain," says Tarleton, "and the distance of Cornwallis's army, prompted many of the disaffected inhabitants of South Carolina to break their parole, and to unite under a leader, 'Marion,' in the eastern part of the province." Sumter still operated on the banks of Broad River, cutting off foraging parties, and endangering the post at Ninety-six. Major Wemyss of the Sixty-third British regiment, and some cavalry of the legion, attempted to surprise him at Fish Dam Ford, on the ninth of November, lost twenty-five men as prisoners, and failed in the attempt. Later in the month, Colonel Sumter, strongly reinforced by Colonels

Thomas and Bratton, and Majors McCall and Hammond, of South Carolina, marched toward Ninety-six to attempt its capture, but was pursued by Colonel Tarleton, and a skirmish ensued, November twentieth, at Blackstock's plantations, on the Tiger River, which left Colonel Sumter in possession of the field.

The skirmish is given in order to indicate the extraordinary conflict in reports of this partisan warfare. American statement of their own loss, three killed, four wounded, among the latter General Sumter; of the enemy, ninety-two killed and one hundred wounded. Tarleton's statement, Americans killed and wounded, upwards of one hundred, and fifty made prisoners. British loss, Lieutenants Gibson and Cope killed, four officers and forty-five non-commissioned officers and men killed and wounded.

Stedman "takes the whole account of the action from Mackenzie's strictures on Tarleton's campaign," very justly reviewing inconsistencies in Tarleton's report, which disprove his statement of casualties, and adds, "The wounded of the British detachment were left to the mercy of the enemy; and it is but justice to General Sumter to declare that the strictest humanity took place upon the present occasion; they were supplied with every comfort in his power. Although Tarleton was repulsed at Blackstock's Hill, the immediate effects were nearly the same as a victory. General Sumter being disabled by his wound from keeping the field, his followers dispersed, after conveying him to a place of safety."

The summer and fall campaign in the Southern States had been one of constant activity, and as the year 1780 drew to its close there was no cessation of demands upon the vigilance of either army. The remnants of General Gates' army were being reorganized as rapidly as possible, and before the departure of that officer to answer before a Court of Inquiry ordered by Congress, as to the disaster at Camden, he had collected a nominal force of two thousand three hundred and seven men, more than half of whom were militia, and as afterwards stated by General Greene, "but eight hundred in the whole force were properly clothed and equipped."

The post commander at Charleston, Lieutenant-colonel Balfour, was taking extreme measures to terrify and intimidate the people; Marion had increased his partisan detachment to the strength of an efficient corps, and with no severity of climate such as impaired operations at the north, the campaign of 1781 practically began when General Nathaniel Greene arrived to take command of the Southern Department on the third of December, 1780.

Battle of Camden.

Americans
British.
One Mile.

Rugeley's Mills
Col. Armand
Retreat
Graney Quarter Creek.
Woods.
Dragoons 1st & 2nd Virginia
Woods.
Woods
Retreat
Gist.
American March
Retreat
Gen[l] Smallwood
1st Ma. Brig. Delaware Regt
2nd Brigade
3 Batt[ns] Ma
Gen[l] Gist
Left Wing
Right Wing
Hamilton
N.C. Vols.
Brig[r] Gen[l] Caswell
Col. Armand
Col. Williams
Col. Stevens
1st Legion
Irish Vols.
Infty of Brig[r] Gen[l] Caswell
33d Regt
2d Regt
Lt Infty
3 Cos
1st Batt[n] 2d
2d Batt[n] 2d
British Legion.
Tarleton.
Second Position.
Position when De Kalb fell & Americans fled
Change of Position when right began.
Continentals.
Militia
Tarleton.
Lt Infty
23d
33d
Hamilton
Bryan
De Kalb
1st
Lt Col Webster
Lord Rawdon
Saunders Creek
Woods.
WATEREE RIVER
Road From Chesnut Ford.
Woods.
British advance from Camden. 5 miles

Notes.

Lieut. Col. Webster commanded British Right wing extending from Swamp to road.
Lord Rawdon commanded British Left Wing extending from road to another swamp.
Second Position. Baron DeKalb breaks through the British Left Wing British turn American Right.

Compiled and Drawn by Col. Carrington.