

## Battle at Lindley's Mill

### Prelude

When Thomas Burke was elected to be Governor, one of his first tasks included responding to mail that was addressed to former Gov Abner Nash. One letter was a heated argument over how "friends of the King" were being treated by Caswell, which was written by Major Craig who was the British officer in charge of Wilmington. Gov Burke wrote him back and had a very heated exchange over who was in control and had authority in North Carolina.

In the mean time, David Fanning and his men, Tories extrodinare, were making mahem out of the back country of N.C., mainly in the south and south east, as his source of munitions and supplies came from Major Craig. This band of men were very dangerous and many citizens were asking the Governor for better protection from them. In the mean time, a war was going on, and Congress was asking for states to supply food, clothing, weapons and men, so you can imagine the plate was full with nothing but trouble.

### Hillsborough Gets Attacked

David Fanning stated that he wrote Major Craig and asked if he would approve of his capture of Gov Burke. This is key, as some historians allude to that Fanning happened on the Governor, as his primary target was General Butler and his men, and since he couldn't find them, he entered into Hillsborough, which isnt true. Gov. Burke was in route to Salisbury, to visit this area of the state (probably to visit Col James C. Mountflorencce – State Quartermaster in Salisbury dist.), but was planning on a short visit in his home town, Hillsborough. He rented a house in town, as opposed to going to his plantation north of town.

In a letter from Jesse Benton's to Thomas Hart (Sep. 29, 1781) he states this – *"The last stroke they made was the 12<sup>th</sup> of this month when they came into Hillsborough at 7 O'Clock in the morning with 500 Tories killed five or six of the guard, took the Governor, several gentlemen inhabitants of the Town, Continentals & Militia troops, amounting in the whole to 140 odd men; made a general Jail delivery by setting at liberty about 40, Criminal, Deserters & Delinquents, whom they armed with our public muskets, & have since carried the prisoners safe into Wilmington, all except about a dozen who got paroled & escaped on the way."* Here is a local citizen's documentation within a few weeks of the event, describing what had occurred.

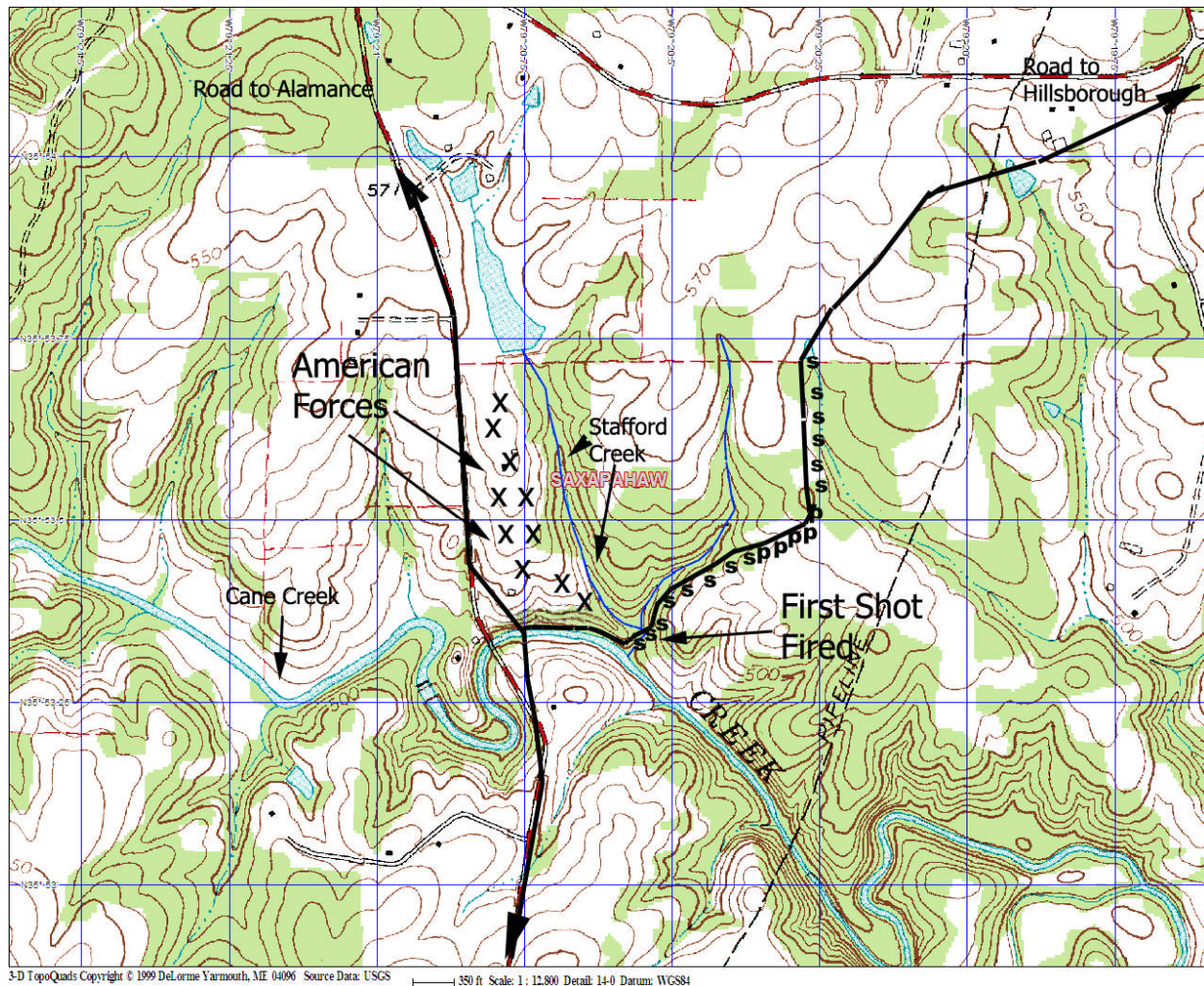
There was a group of men just outside of Hillsborough who heard the shooting and assisted in the battle. In a pension, Jacob Rich (#W26380) stated that his men were encamped about one mile away from town and heard the battle and *"...marched hastily to the relief of the place and then became engaged with the enemy who had a superior force. Our company was all killed or taken prisoners except five. I was wounded in the hip, having received two balls in the right hip..."* He then continues, *"I fortunately was able to get to my horse and was aided in making my escape by my friend and brother soldier Joseph M. Adams."* Here is the only known record of any effort by patriot forces, (in Hillsborough) and I firmly believe it was this group of men that are listed in the 15 people killed (In Fanning's diary) and *not* civilians in their home. Jacob said that he was a Lieutenant in the militia and that he was under the command of Capt John McClennen. He said that McClennen was recently taken a prisoner (Eutaw Springs), put on parole and he broke parole and gathered a group of volunteers, of which Jacob was a member.

Quickly, David Fanning and his band of men, along with his prisoners, left Hillsborough on their way to Wilmington, and since I-40 was not built, the road to Wilmington first went southwest towards Lindley Mill on Cane Creek, before turning east to Wilmington. David Fanning states, *"About 12o'clock, I left Hillsboro; and proceeded Eighteen Miles that night towards Coxe's Mill*

*; in the morning I pursued my march about Eight miles further, to Lindley's Mill on Cane Creek ; where Gen Butler and a party of rebels had concealed themselves."*

### **Battle at Lindley's Mill**

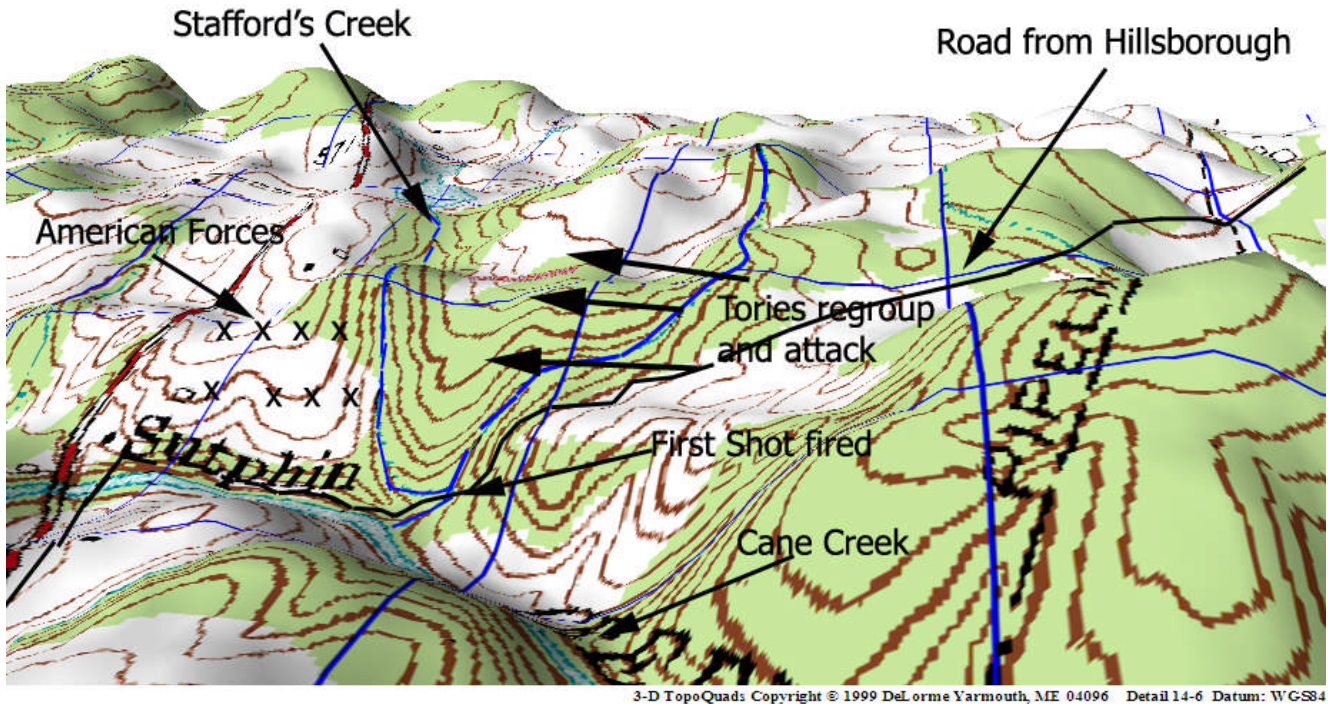
As this large group of men marched south, you have to picture how this occurred, in that we assume two columns (man side by side) with men in the front, prisoners in the middle, men in arrears. Spacing six feet between the men, and two columns, (950 men plus the 30 taken out of jail, let's call this 1000 Tories) 500 in front, 200 in the middle, 500 in the back, the line of men would stretch 3,600 feet in length, that's almost  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile long (.63 to be exact). The above map shows, to scale, the assumed position and length labeled as "S" and "P" for soldier and prisoner, as to their location, and more importantly, their length along the road. This played a significant role in the battle as the long column of men were meandering down the rolling hills of the Lindley Mill area, and then fording Cane Creek.



David Fanning states, *“Col’n McNeal, who had the advance guard, had neglected to take the necessary precautions for our safety, and by information of Capt. McLain, Cumberland County, Little River; and as soon as I had discovered the situation, we were in, and having so great a number of prisoners, I left my station, and pushed for the advance guard; on my coming up with Col’n McNeal, I inquired the reason of his neglect; and before he could answer, we*

*were fired upon by the rebels. They killed eight men, among them was Col'n McNeal, who received three balls through him and five through his horse."*

With all the Tories behind Col. McNeal, (now dead along with six other Tories), they regrouped, and Fanning describes this, *"I then ordered a retreat back to where we left the prisoners and after securing them, I made the necessary preparations to attack the enemy.."*



At Lindley Mill, it was documented that the conflict ended due to both sides running out of ammunition! In one pension it stated that they had – *"11 fires"* before running out of ammunition. How long does a battle take with 11 rounds of ammunition? In other pension applications they document the battle with varying durations (1 hour, 2 hours, and 3-4 hours). It is my opinion that the four hour duration was arrival to departure, and during this total duration, there were significant lulls. It was *not* four hours of shooting. A very high level view is - there was the first fire where Patriot forces surprised the Tories. Then the Tories (which were spread out in a long line) regrouped. The prisoners had to be guarded, guards had to be established, separate from those men to fight. With a battle strategy established, the Tories then attacked. In most pensions, it states that the attack by the Tories, which was a surprise, was the point at which most Patriots were wounded or killed. What was this duration between first fire and the Tories surprise attack? Why were the Patriots caught off guard or surprised? Possibly due to the lull as the Tories were regrouping.

Finally the American forces retreated and Fanning threatened to have the prisoners killed if the Americans attempted to free them. Fanning stated *"...and after engaging them four hours they retreated. I lost twenty-seven men killed, and sixty so badly wounded, that they could not be moved ; besides thirty slightly, but so that they could keep up with the main body."*

Fanning was mortally wounded, and he states *"At the conclusion of this action, I received a shot in my left arm, which broke the bone in several pieces ; my lost blood was so great, that I was taken off my horse, and led to a secret place in the woods."* It is amazing that the American forces did not scour the woods, but the issue of not having any more ammunition, must of

prevented staying around. Fanning continued, *“I also desired that Major Rains return as soon as he could leave Col. McDugald ; as I thought he might be the means of saving me from the hands of the enemies. At the departure of the my little army, I was left with three men and in four days 17 more came to my assistance.”* He also learned later, more about the battle as he commented, *“The party we had engaged I found consisted of four hundred Continentals under the command of Col’o Maybin [Mebane] and Gen’l Butler. In twenty-four days I found myself able to set up and then dispatched four of my Captains...”*

The battle ended, leaving the wounded and dead in the field, creek, and elsewhere. Some residents came to doctor the remaining men, some wives traveled many miles to take care of their men, while others came to comfort the severely wounded till they died. The stories state that a mass grave was dug and 34 men were buried. Mr. Braxton said that he was told that the depressions on the edge of the field, near the spring, is this mass grave.

As with all battles, the (dead/wounded) count and amount varies, and the less that is documented *immediately* following the battle, the more the numbers can vary. Here is a table that gathers all the accounts I could find, and you can see the wounded and dead for both sides. We also have to take into consideration that in this time period, the gun shots are more of wounding and breaking bones, which leads to death later on, so not everyone was dead at the battle site. In fact, one pension said he was left for dead, but was nursed back to health (13 pieces of skull bone missing) and survived!

There are a number of stories about what happened to the dead. Some say they were buried in a mass grave, others infer that they were buried at the Quaker Meeting cemetery, others said they were taken home and buried there. One pension (S3011) stated; *“In counting the dead we*

	Fanning	Caruthers	Pension	Pension	Pension
			S3011	S9410	R1185
Patriot wounded	90	50	None stated	None stated	None stated
Patriot dead	24	16	50	17	A good many
Tory wounded	60		None stated	None stated	None stated
Tory dead	27		15	100	A good many
Patriot count	400	300	4-500	250	4-500
Tory count	705	600	6-800	700	900

*found we had lost fifty and had killed fifteen Tories we buried the dead on the creek side, putting all the Tories into one pit and marched back to the barracks at....”* Caruthers said that the neighbors came and took care of the wounded and buried 32 in one pit. Caruthers also states; *“A friend, in writing to me from the Scotch region, says,*

*that ‘including all of both side who were slain on the field, and all who died soon after in consequence of their wounds, the number could not be much under a hundred;’ and this estimate, which looks quite reasonable, taking everything into view, we suppose to be not far from the truth.”* Several of the pensions stated “a few”, “some”, and “a good many” as to the wounded and dead, the category being lumped together.

### Brown Marsh

There was an effort (second attempt) to free the prisoners at Brown Marsh, and this battle didn’t last very long, with another failure due to the overwhelming amount of men on the Tory side, as well as the British on their way to meet them. Never the less, there are a number of pension records documenting this battle.

### Postlude

All the prisoners were handed over to the British at Wilmington, and then we have this odd situation to deal with. The prisoners included three different category of men, we have the militia, the Continentals, and civilians. In the civilian side we also have the Governor and his aids. In the parole methodology of this war, like rank was swapped for like on the other side. However, there

wasn't a list of civilians for the British to swap. Several pensions mention the ugly time on the British prison ship Eske. Gov Burke could not be paroled. The British refused to establish if he was a POW or a prisoner of the State. Ultimately he escapes.