

Ranger James, Park Staff, Distinguished Guests, and Compatriots:

We gather to remember an event that occurred on August 19, 1780 and originated at the Rocky Ford on Enoree River. I would like to reflect on what was happening in this area just before the events here, on that date.

Savannah fell on 29 December 1778 and the British controlled Georgia. 1780 marched in as the darkest period for the Patriots in the Revolutionary War. From the mountains to the seaboard, a gloom seemed to rest on the country. For five years the colonies had been battling for freedom against fearful odds. The Country was overrun. Its treasury was empty. Its soldiers were hungry, unpaid, and in need of clothing.

Charleston fell on 12 May 1780. Two months later, in July, British Major, Patrick Ferguson arrived in the Ninety-Six District. His command consisted of one hundred choice regulars. The Loyalists in the area flocked to his command with more than a thousand soon joining him. The British spread its forces occupying the strategic areas of Georgia and South Carolina.

After the fall of Charleston, the British made what turned out to be several strategic errors igniting the ire of the Freedom Seeking Scots-Irish as well as those of French-Huguenot heritage. Of the later, Francis Marion remained a thorn for the British until their departure from the state. Another Huguenot, Thomas Sumter, revoked his pardon after his home was burned and gathered Patriots to harass the British in the Waxhaw region.

Until Ferguson made his appearance in the Ninety-Six District, James Williams remained active in the patriot cause throughout the district. Williams then prudently sought action near the North Carolina – South Carolina border.

Ferguson was ordered to take possession of all the fortifications in the district, enroll and discipline militia, do everything in his power to strengthen the royal cause and in doing so, crush the spirits of the Patriots.

On 8 August 1780 Col. Elijah Clark of Georgia and Col. Isaac Shelby of North Carolina were detached with 600 mounted men by Col. Charles McDowell to shadow Ferguson and his growing Loyalist army. Clark and Shelby were attacked by Loyalist Major James Dunlap who was driven off and the arrival of Ferguson's force resulted in a Patriot retreat to the Pacolet River.

By mid-month the American Army of the North was weak and the British had a strong force in the region. With the fall of Charleston, the Southern Army was decimated. Its commander, General Benjamin Lincoln, was on parole. General George Washington, determined to assist the Southern Army, ordered Major General Jean (Baron) DeKalb to move South with 1,400 men. The Continental Congress was determined to place a man of greater fame than DeKalb in command and in their wisdom, General Horatio Gates was chosen. Gates' fame at Saratoga was in-large-part, due to the generalship of Benedict Arnold and Daniel Morgan. Gates gathered additional forces and although they were poorly provisioned, pushed toward Camden against the advice of his staff. Bad food, green corn and green peaches led to personal discomfort. Gates sent word to Sumter to carry out raids against the British supply lines. Sumter did this by capturing 44 wagons with supplies and 300 British soldiers. On the 17th Gates failed in his efforts when Lord Cornwallis completely routed him and the Southern Army at the Battle of Camden.

The next day, not resting on his laurels, Cornwallis sent Col. Bannister Tarleton and 350 men in pursuit of Sumter. Tarleton caught up and completely surprised Sumter's camp. Sumter himself, asleep beneath a wagon, avoided the initial charge, mounted a horse bareback and escaped.

Colonels Clark and Shelby, while at the headquarters of Col. McDowell near the Broad River, were joined on the 18th by Col. James Williams and his band of Little River Regiment Men and recruits from North Carolina. Scouts reported an encampment of 200 Tories on the Enoree River at Musgrove's Mill. Colonels Clarke, Shelby and Williams relished the task of removing the Tories. At sundown that evening, the group of some 200 Patriot Militia set out through the wood to make a 40 mile march in the night. Excellent guides evaded Ferguson's Army and led the group to the neighborhood of Musgrove's Mill just as dawn was breaking. The element of surprise was lost when a Tory patrol discovered them. A skirmish of short duration occurred with the Tories retreating across the river. A Patriot from the community came to the group and reported a reinforcement of the Tories, consisting of Col. Alexander Innes and his Queen's American Regiment from New York and Major Thomas Fraser along with his British trained Loyalist troops. The Patriots now faced a most formidable enemy. After a Hasty consultation, the decision was made to stand and fight. Co-leadership was determined with Williams in the center with Clarke and Shelby on the Flanks.

Captain Shadrach Inman of Georgia, with sixteen men, was sent forward to skirmish and draw the enemy toward the established defense. After riding all night with a short supper, no breakfast and fatigued... win-or-die was the expressed attitude of the Patriots.

In the resulting battle, all of the regular British officers were killed or wounded. Sixty-three Privates and one Tory Captain were killed. The recorded number of British prisoners taken varies from 90 to 160. Of the handful of Patriots killed, the highest ranking was the brave Captain Inman.

Flushed with victory, the decision was made to go to ninety-Six, about 30 miles distant, rather than risking a chance meeting with Ferguson on a return to the Broad River area. As they mounted to leave, a courier sent by Col. McDowell arrived with a message from Governor Caswell of North Carolina informing of Gate's defeat at Camden.

Shelby headed for the mountains, Clarke returned to the Western frontier of South Carolina and Williams followed the prisoners to Hillsboro, North Carolina where South Carolina Governor Rutledge promoted him to Brigadier General.

The Battle of Musgrove's Mill, although in modern times might be considered a small skirmish, was, in Revolutionary War times, considered a grand affair. As a result of the successful stand by Militia Troops in face-to-face combat with trained British Troops, this battle set the stage for a reunion of Shelby and Williams with other commanders at a place called Kings Mountain where General James Williams gave his life for the Patriot cause. It also gave General Daniel Morgan confidence in some of the same participants who were with him at a place called Cowpens. The same can be said for General Nathanael Greene in his success at Guilford Courthouse.

Thank you!