

CLOUD'S CREEK MASSACRE

NOVEMBER 17, 1781

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(** Note: Taken from articles from the LEXINGTON GENEALOGICAL EXCHANGE written by Clayton B. Kleckley in 1987 issues, and the COLONIAL AND REVOLUTIONARY HISTORY OF UPPER SOUTH CAROLINA by Dr. J. B. O. Landrum. ** HRC)

On March 13, 1781, Major John Moore was scouting with General Thomas Sumter's advance parties in an advance on Orangeburg, S. C., in a move the General was making to direct Patriot's operation in the area. The advancing parties unexpectedly encountered a Major William Cunningham and his body of Tories troops at Rowe's Plantation, a short distance south of the town of Orangeburg. Moore's troops were thrown into disorder by heavy fire from the Tories. The Patriots were defeated and scattered.

Captain Bill Cunningham, known as "Bloody Bill Cunningham", left a record of bloody deeds and atrocities in South Carolina. He was born not far from Ninety-Six, an area of South Carolina now in the present County of Abbeville. He had been a man of some promise and influence, and at the beginning of the Revolution had enlisted in a military unit made up of men from the region of Saluda, Little River and Mudlick Creek. He deserted the American cause in 1776, and became an active partisan leader on the British side. As the leader of a band of Loyalist he soon embarked on his campaign of terror.

Late in the war, Major William Cunningham launched a raid into the back country, crossed the Edisto River and made his way from the Edisto to the Saluda River with his various detachments. Two of his parties, under a Captain Williams and Radcliffe, begin plundering local settler around an area six miles east of the town of Saluda.

A small band of patriots assembled and started in pursuit of Captain Ratcliffe and his party of Tories. These patriots were drawn from Captain Sterling Turner's militia. Smallwood Smith, Matthew Jones, James Butler Jr.,

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and others were in the group. At the Saluda River, young nineteen year old Butler swam the stream and brought over a canoe from the opposite side. The group used this to cross the river and pursued the Tories into what is now Newberry County. There were twenty-one men in the small body of Whigs under the command of Captain Sterling Turner. Upon catching up with Radcliffe's band they successfully made a surprise attack. Ratcliffe and several of his party were killed. The rest were scattered. Young James Butler Jr. must have had sometime to do with the death of Radcliffe as later events proved.

Next Captain Turner undertook to deal with Captain Hezekiah Williams, who was still lurking in the area. Captain James Butler Sr., was requested to head the small band, but declined in favor of Captain Turner. Butler did offer his service as a volunteer. Butler Sr. had only recently been released by the British after serving eighteen months imprisonment in Charlestown.

Turner's command caught up with Captain Williams and his unit at Tarrar's Spring, about one mile east of the site where the Lexington County Court House was later built. Tarrar Springs is located near the old home of Senator S. P. Wingard on U.S. Highway No. 1. The well known and celebrated spring is located on the south side of a Old Rock Quarry on the property of a Rob Corley. At the time, 1781, the site was in a dense forest. Williams and his band of Tories were camping or resting at Tarrar's Spring on November 16, 1781. The bold attack by Turner and his small band, ending in a negotiated settlement. Captain Turner left the scene with the cattle that the Tory unit had stolen. Captain Williams and his men were released.

Returning, Captain Turner and his group stopped at Cloud's Creek for a little rest and refreshments. They visited a tavern near the present town of Leesville run by a man also by the name of Turner. The men were tired, but jubilant and wanted to celebrate their victory at Tarrar's Spring. Against the advice of Captain James Butler, they failed to take some necessary precautions. "Bloody Bill" Cunninghams was on their trail, not with a small band, but with a sizable 1781 fighting unit of three hundred men.

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Captain Sterling Turner's party of Whigs spent the night of the Sixteenth resting and celebrating. They killed a beef and apparently had no worries. At dawn the next day, November 17, 1781, they found themselves surrounded and at the mercy of the enemy. It was then evident that the band of Tories attacked the previous day at Tarrar's Spring was part of Cunningham's command. Cunningham had caught the Whigs off guard. Turner's command consisted of only twenty-one men in addition to himself. Apparently there were some local "citizens" that had joined in the night of "refreshments" and celebration. One of these probably was Benjamin Hughes who was not on any official roster of the unit, but who certainly appears to have been one of those surrounded by Cunninghams' men.

The Patriots took refuge in an unfinished log house and attempted to parley with the Tories. Cunningham demanded an unconditional surrender. Cunningham and Captain Butler knew each other having served together in the Indian Wars. Cunningham agreed to talk and Butler sent a prisoner that had been taken and was being held to carry the message. This prisoner, by the name of Kuffman (later Caughmen), told Cunningham how the small unit had been the ones that killed Radcliffe party of British. Radcliffe had been a friend of Cunningham. Captain Butler's son, 'Jim' Butler, apparently had joined his father that morning upon hearing that Cunningham large force was in the area. Young Butler had apparently had a major part in the killing of Radcliffe, and when Cunningham learned that young Butler was in the party he declined to consider any further negotiation. Capt. Butler unselfish offered himself as hostage for his son, but without avail. Young Butlers decided to go down fighting and grabbing a rifle killed a leading Tory named Stewart, and the fight was on.

The only protection the brave band of Patriots was the shelter of the newly constructed log house, without doors or shutters on the windows. Young Butler was kill while he was reloading to fire again. With the death of Jim Butler, and realizing the hopelessness of their situation, and running out of ammunition the small band surrendered. The struggle had lasted an hour. Several had been killed, and those who had not were lined up and then heard Cunningham's orders to exterminate them. Capt. Butler then seized a pitch-

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fork and was using it effectively until his right hand was severed by a sabre stroke. They were all brutally murdered. Of the number engaged, twenty-eight were killed.

A few of the names of Turner's men have been forgotten, but we know the identities of most of them and the nature of their fate. James Butler Jr., Smallwood Smith, and Matthew Jones were killed before the battle actually started. Nathaniel (Nat) Corley was shot down while attempting to make a run for his horse after he was captured. Sterling Turner, James Butler Sr., Burdit Escridge, Benjamin Bell, William Scissom, John Bland, Gideon Nicholson, Peter Foy, Berryman Bledsoe and a man by the name of Sullivan were all apparently massacred by the Tories after the battle. Two men were reported spared through the intercession of friends in Cunningham's band. BENJAMIN HUGHES was the only man who successfully made his escape. It was told that he concealed himself among the cattle, gained the cover of a fallen tree and succeeded in escaping

The Draper Manuscripts contain a long letter written from Lexington by H. Arthur Fort on October 8, 1872. (** Note: There was a Dunn Fort named in the official list of the volunteers from the Edgefield District, S. C. in Capt. William Butler's Company. ** HRC) Fort said in his letter that Nathaniel (Nat) Corley mentioned as a member of Captain Turner's party was his mother's uncle. Fort said that he was a huge, strong man, and had not laid down his sword. He is reported to have drawn his sword, and cut his way through the line got nearly to his horse when a volley was fired at him and broke his thigh. He got to his horse though, and loosen the bridle and grabbing his horse by the tail and was letting it drag him away. Another volley was fired and this time killed him. "BENJAMIN HUGHES went through the line with Corley and jumped in a cowpen among a large gang of cattle. The cattle, probably the cattle taken from Ratcliffe, broke out of the pen and ran off. HUGHES ran with them till he got to a swamp and was there able to hide and escape. He was the only one who survived to tell the fate of the band of Patriots.

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A detachment of Cunningham's Tories was left to meet any party that might be sent to bury the victims. Also they wanted another son of Captain James Butler. William Butler, who was a Captain of rangers and was expected to come to the site of the massacre. Fortunately, William was too far from the scene to reach it in time.

Elizabeth Butler, age 15, the daughter of Captain James Butler, and the sister of Nancy Butler and William Butler, was at the family home nearby at the time the massacre took place. She stated she "heard the fight going on, and after the firing ceased, I got a horse and rode to the place after the fight, and none were breathing. Then as they held the torchlight, I found that I could render no assistance, and returned home."

"Mrs. Smith, the wife of Smallwood Smith and a sister of Captain James Butler, with other women, relatives of the fallen, buried the bodies, and were aided by their servants. It was said that Nancy Butler, daughter of Captain Butler, age seventeen, accompanied her aunt, Mrs. Smith, to the tragic scene and helped identify her father and brother, and to bury the dead."

An old negro, named Marmaduke, who belonged to Capt. Butler, helped to bury the dead. Old Marmaduke is mentioned in an account as having been compelled to stand by as a ragged Tory stripped his master and dressed in his bloodstained clothes. James Butler Sr. and Jr. were buried in separate graves, and the other victims in a large mass grave.

The site where the men of Cloud's Creek Massacre are buried has been identified by three markers. The oldest is badly weathered and the inscription was barely legible when the account was written in the Lexington Genealogical Exchange Magazine. The inscription reads, "Capt. James Butler and James Butler. Died in defense of their country - 1782". (The author, Clayton B. Kleckley added in his article that it should read '1781'.) This tombstone was erected many years after the massacre at the instigation of Judge Andrew Picken Butler, grandson of Captain James Butler.

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The second monument was erected by descendents of Captain Butler of Star Fort Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution. The inscription reads: "Capt. James Butler, Revolutionary Hero born 1738, massacred by Blood Bill Cunningham's Tories in Battle at Cloud's Creek 1781. This stone erected by his descendents of Star Fort Chapter DAR 1981".

The third stone marker marks the foot of the mass grave. A fourth marker was erected by the Lexington County Historical Society in 1964 near the site (Highway 7) of the Patriot's grave, and included the following inscription:

"BATTLE OF CLOUDS CREEK on November 17, 1781, in a house near Cloud's Creek one mile east of Captain Sterling Turner's Patriot Militia were surrounded by Tory Militia under Major William Cunningham. Among the more than twenty dead were Captain James Butler and his son, James, who were buried with the others at the site, and whose graves have been marked there. Erected by Lexington County Historical Society, 1964."

So far as history shows Cunningham was never captured and it is believed that he escaped after the war to Cuba. He is believed to have died there.

The most common name for this battle is the Cloud's Creek Massacre, but it is also referred to in some records and traditions as the Battle of Carter's House or Carter's Old Field. The unfinished log house on the land was the property of a Mr. Carter.

Sources for story: SOUTHERN MESSENGER AND REVIEW by William Gilmore Simms, September 1846; Article entitled "THIRTY MEN IN ONE GRAVE. STONE MARK SITE", by Mildred H. McLen (1946); "DR. W. T. BROOKER'S ACCOUNT", The Dispatch, June 1, 1901; DRAPER MANUSCRIPTS 6VV223-226; SOUTHERN LITERARY MESSENGER by John A. Chapman, September 1846; "HISTORICAL SKETCHES OF BATESBURY-LEESVILLE, SC" by Mrs. Bryan Watlington; "THE HISTORY OF SOUTH CAROLINA IN THE REVOLUTION" by Edward McGrady, 1780-1783; and a letter written by H. Arthur Fort, dated October 8, 1874. (the letter is in the Draper Manuscripts.)

HUGHES FAMILY HISTORY

(** Note: The following is part of the letters written by H. Arthur Fort to Draper dated October 8, 1874, describing the battle and his knowledge of the area and events. The Draper Manuscripts are available in many libraries, and the Fort letters can be found in manuscripts 6VV223-226. ** HRC)

"I had a letter written by Hughes to my father giving the same account that I have written to you - I could have sent the letter but that too was destroyed when Sherman burnt my Father's house and everthing we had. It is called the Massacre of Carter's Old Field. Their graves are to be seen. Butler had take his little son along, some 10 to 12 years old, to carry his horse back. He begged that they would spare his son but would not - his little grave is to be seen by the others."

H. Arthur Fort.

"Benjamin Hughes died in Georgia at the age of 101. I do not recollect where his letters was dated that he wrote to Pa telling about the Carter Old Field affair. I think perhaps Joseph Banks, P.O. Leesville or George Burks, P. O. Summit S.C. might tell where he died. I do not know Mrs. Brooks name who died in 1825 up or near Ninety Six. She told friends of mine about it at some meeting just as preaching was commencing and that stopped the conversation and it was not resumed - was a very old lady perhaps some kin to Brooks and Summers.

H. Arthur Fort.

One writer who knew Benjamin Hughes, and spoke to him about South Carolina, and is quoted in COWETA COUNTY CHRONICLES for ONE HUNDRED YEARS edited by Mary G. Jones and Lily Reynolds pub. 1928 is quoted. "Benjamin Hughes was another early settler (Coweta County) from South Carolina. When I learned from what part of the state he came, I asked him if he knew the Butler family, his answer, 'Yes, I knew him well, I was the only boy left when Bloody Bill Cunningham killed Captain Butler and his men; I sprang under a brushheap covered with gourd vines and saw them kill him in cold blood!'"

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(** Note: Apparently Benjamin Hughes was not a soldier as such. Surely his name would appear on pension list or as a living veteran on census records. Benjamin was 91 in the 1850 census of Coweta County. At this date, January 1989, I am not sure when he died. The age of 91 in 1850 means that he was born about 1759. That means that Benjamin was about 22 when the events took place at Cloud's Creek. When asked if he knew the Butler Family Benjamin referred to himself as "the only boy left". At twenty-two he would hardly be called a boy. Although no official records have been found at this time that Benjamin Hughes was a soldier in the Revolutionary War, he would certainly be considered a patriot. As to whether the evidence would be sufficient to qualify one for the DAR I don't know. Many members of the DAR are admitted because of an ancestor being a patriot. I would think that the chances are good that Benjamin Hughes would qualify. ** HRC)

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