



"An archaeological excavation in 1967, cosponsored by the Bergen County Board of Chosen Freeholders and the Bergen County Historical Society discovered the burial site of [the 3rd] Continental Dragoons. They were slain Sept. 28, 1778 and then buried in tanning vats." This picture and more can be found at: <http://www.bergencountyhistory.org/Pages/baylormassacre.html>

THE WOEFUL FATES OF THE CAVALRY

Light horsemen have traditionally acted as the eyes and ears of an army; it being among their duties and tasks to safe-guard and protect the forces to which they were attached from being snuck up on or taken unawares. It is no little remarkable then to learn that the cavalry of the Continental army itself had a somewhat embarrassing, and in some instances tragic, record; even to the point of two outright (at least in result if not in premeditated intention) massacres, as a result of being caught by surprise; demonstrating in an indirect yet most graphic manner the adage (mistakenly ascribed to Edmund Burke) that "the price of liberty is eternal vigilance." We witness such undoing of the American horsemen in the following actions:

* Sept. 28, 1778: Baylor's Massacre or Old Tappan (presently "Vale"), N.J.

Beware of a general whom others call "No flint" Grey; who in September by preconcerted ruse and subterfuge surprised Baylor's 3rd Continental Light Dragoons, catching the men asleep, and bayoneting and otherwise slaying most all of them -- some in their beds!¹

* Oct. 4-5, 1778 (also given, probably mistakenly, as 15 Oct.): Little Egg Harbor, or Little Neck, or Mincock, Isld., N.J.

In an amphibious night attack carried out against them, an entire infantry company of Pulaski's Legion was summarily slaughtered -- with fifty Continentals claimed and admitted by the British to have been killed -- after being caught off guard by a combined battalion of 250-300 of the 70th Regt. and New Jersey Volunteers, led by Capt. Patrick Ferguson (of the N.J. Vol. and *not* P.F. of King's Mountain.) Pulaski did, even so, later arrive in time with his cavalry and some additional Pulaski's Legion infantry to force Ferguson's retreat and inflict some losses on the British. (See Ward p. 617 and Boatner, 3rd ed., p. 638.)

* July 2, 1779: Pound Ridge, N.Y.

Although Sheldon's Connecticut light horse (i.e., the 2nd Continental Light Dragoons) had enough advance notice to evade the wily Tarleton; they are ignominiously lifted of some gear and equipment, including

¹ For an at length examination of this affair, see <http://www.bergencountyhistory.org/Pages/baylormassacre.html> ; with as well William Maurer's *Dragoon Diary: The History of the Third Continental Light Dragoons*, and "A Tale of Two Tappans: Desertion, Evasion, and Ill Will" by Todd Braisted in *Patriots of the Revolution Magazine*, May-June 2012, vol. 5, iss. 3.

their standard -- and which was with fanfare re-introduced to the world upon its auction by Tarleton's heirs only a few years ago in our time. It was perhaps also owing to the foreknowledge of Providence that the unit was spared the much and far worse that had befallen Baylor's and Pulaski's corps.

* April 13, 1780: Monck's Corner, S.C.

Bland's (the 1st C.L.D.) and Baylor's Corps, this time under Colonels Anthony Walton White and William Washington respectively, as a result of some poor placement of night pickets, are among those routed by a raid carried on at Monck's Corner by Ferguson, Tarleton and the 17th Light Dragoons; the American cavalry alone incurring upwards of 30 cavalymen killed and 70 taken prisoner; plus the loss of 83 dragoon horses.

* May 6, 1780: Lenud's Ferry, S.C.

Deaf to William Washington's earnest remonstrances to continue the crossing of the Santee with their remaining men, Anthony Walton White opted for a rest, and in a matter of time, without warning, they were overcome by Tarleton on a forced march. What Americans weren't captured were compelled to swim the great river to escape.

Although no unit of British army dragoons was ever ambushed during the war, there were at least two notable instances where Provincial cavalry were.

* July 12, 1780: Huck's Defeat or Williamson's Plantation, S.C.

Partisan colonels Richard Winn and Edward Lacey surround a British Legion detachment under Capt. Christian Huik and kill or capture most of them, including Huik himself who is felled by musket and rifle balls.

* July 3, 1781: Armstrong's Capture or Congaree Creek, S.C.

A contingent of Lee's Legion cavalry under Capt. James Armstrong lays a trap and succeeds in taking prisoner some 47 (ostensibly) South Carolina Royalist cavalry, including 2 officers, that had been out foraging.

Aside from the incident at the Spread Eagle tavern in Philadelphia (20 Jan. 1778), but from which they actually emerged victorious, Lee's Legion itself was never found disconcerted, and lost very few men from ambushes in the course of the war (instances in which they did occur in 1782 in South Carolina); for their commander understood well the importance of constant readiness and continual intelligence. Marion, of course, was among the greatest of all at eluding surprise, and what he knew about forestalling raids and staving off ambuscades he reportedly picked up from Indian fighting; and that is to punctually change one's camp location as frequently as possible; while making sure to constantly keep on disciplined watch *alert* and active sentinels.



One Continental mounted regiment that also was NOT taken by surprise was the 4th Continental Light Dragoons under Col. Stephen Moylan. This photo comes from the website of the re-enacting unit that bears its name; both can be found at: <http://fourthdragoons.com/>

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