

Life of
General Edward Lacey



By
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DR. MAURICE MOORE

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of Spartanburg District, S.C.

1859

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Edward Lacey, father of Gen. Edward Lacey, emigrated from England, a farmer, and settled first on the Chesapeake Bay; afterwards he removed to Shippen Township, Cumberland County, Pennsylvania, where the subject of this memoir was born September, 1742.

Nothing more is known of the farmer's boy until 1755, when a call was made on the province of Pennsylvania for a Regiment to oppose the French and Indians on the Ohio. Young Lacey, seeing the soldiers parading the streets for the expedition against Fort Du Quesne, was seized with a love for military life, ran away from his father at the tender age of thirteen and joined General Braddock's unfortunate campaign. However, they considered him too young to bear arms, but employed him in the commissary department as a pack-horse rider and driver. He was at Braddock's defeat and continued in the army for two years, at which time his father, having discovered where he was, went in pursuit of him; found and took him home where he remained nearly one year.

At the age of sixteen, he again ran away from his father and emigrated to Chester District, South Carolina, with William Adair (the father of Gov. John Adair, of Kentucky), to whom he had bound himself an apprentice to the brick-laying business, and from whom he received a good English education. At the age of twenty-one, Edward Lacey was five feet, eleven inches high; weighing about 170 pounds, with perfect symmetry of form and commanding aspect; he excelled in all the athletic exercises, which were the fashion of his day. His hair was black, his eyes dark; and an uncommonly handsome face, with fine address; he was a man of strong native intellect, fond of pleasure, entirely devoted to his friends; generous to a fault; "and every inch a soldier."

When about twenty-four years old, he married Miss Jane Harper, of Chester District, and settled on the head-waters of Sandy River (in Chester District, S.C.), six miles west of Chester C.H. By her he had ten children; four of which were born before the Revolutionary war.

At the commencement of the Revolution, Lacey took sides with the Whigs and soon became an active partisan leader. His military education in Braddock's war was now of great importance and gave him a decided ascendancy over others. His first military service was in the year 1776.* About this time, the Tories and Seminole Indians of Florida made frequent incursions upon the thinly inhabited settlements of Georgia. Gen. Williamson† was sent by South Carolina, with nearly one thousand men, to chastise the marauders and attack the British post at St. Augustine. The Regiment had just crossed the Altamaha when a man was seen on the opposite bank, waving a white handkerchief; it proved to be an express from Congress. Gen. Williamson had his command formed into a hollow square and two large horses held in the centre; he called on Capt. Edward Lacey (who commanded a company) to mount and stand upon the backs of the horses and read the Declaration of Independence to his Regiment: for he had the most musical, clear, distinct voice and articulation of any officer under his command. Having finished, Lacey cries out, "Thank, God! We can now act on the offensive, as well as the defensive!" which was followed by three deafening cheers. From bad management of the commanders, the expedition was a failure. Lacey was four months and twenty days in this campaign.

Lacey was a man of very popular manners and a great favorite of the people; this fact influenced a British officer to offer him (through his father who was a Tory) a large amount of gold to abandon the Rebels and join the Loyalists. Although poor, Lacey indignantly spurned the offer; he scorned to acquire wealth by the sacrifice of his country: this noble act of self-denial gave him no pain: he continued boldly to fight for liberty and his country's cause! He organized now and then companies and battalions, as the fortunes of war demanded, and after the manner of partisan leaders; with which he annoyed the Tories greatly, taking many of them prisoners. Of these there were a few in his neighborhood, but not among the Irish. To their eternal honor be it spoken, none of

* Taken from old Robert Wilson's declaration, of York.

† In the Spring of 1780, Williamson turns traitor and goes over to the enemy.

the York or Chester Irish were Tories! and but few of them took British protection.

Upon one occasion Lacey learned, by some means, that a party of Tories had assembled at the house of a Royalist by the name of Lamb, a few miles from his residence. Lacey knew before he could get his men collected together, in all likelihood, they would be all gone to some other point. So he boldly went to the house alone and demanded a surrender: the Tories refused; Lacey retired to the woods, about one hundred yards off, and rather behind a hill, but still kept in view of the house, and as soon as any of the Tories would open the door and show themselves, he would fire on them. After continuing his fight in this way, for some time, Lacey went again to the house hurriedly and advised them to surrender immediately, otherwise his men would murder every one of them in spite of all his exertions to the contrary, and that he did not believe he could keep them back any longer. After a short consultation, the Tories agreed to capitulate and laid down their arms in one place. He ordered them to march twenty paces and halt; after securing and rendering their guns useless, Lacey took up his own piece and to their great chagrin and mortification, ordered them to march: that he was entirely alone. Lacey sent them with a flag to Cornwallis where they were exchanged for some of his own men who had been unfortunately taken by Col. Tarleton's dragoons a short time before.

Lacey received a Colonel's commission in 1780; organized and commanded a Regiment of Infantry which continued in active service to the end of the war, mostly under General Sumter's command. He was nearly two years, at one time, from home; while he was away the Tories took and destroyed all his property: not leaving his wife even a cow to milk for her children. The only horse he owned at the close of the war was a fine little black charger that had belonged to Col. Ferguson and on which he was killed at the Battle of King's Mountain.

Capt. Christian Huck, or Hook as he was more generally called, a Tory, and a Philadelphia lawyer, who commanded two hundred British Regulars, one hundred Dragoons, and one hundred mounted Infantry, with about five hundred Tories, had been for some time lying with his army at White's Mills on Fishing Creek in Chester District, South Carolina,¹ where he was desolating the country and had committed many outrages on the unoffending inhabitants. About this time a party of his men, on a plundering expedition, killed an inoffensive and good young man (by the name of Strong)²

while he was reading his Bible on Sunday morning. They burned down Parson Simpson's dwelling-house,³ also Mrs. McLure's, and had, a short time previously, burned down Col. Wm. Hill's Iron Works⁴ (for he was casting ordnance and cannon ball for the Patriots), which was a great calamity to the Whigs and a general misfortune to the farmers for forty or fifty miles around; many of them expected that they would have to return to the wooden plough.*

Huck's conduct so incensed the people that Lacey, Bratton, McLure, and others beat up for volunteers and got together nearly all the fighting men in the neighborhood, amounting to nearly four hundred. About the same time, Cols. Hill and Neil,⁵ with one hundred and thirty-three men, left Sumter at Clem's Branch, crossed over the Catawba into York with a view of raising more men for Sumter's camp. Hearing of the intended assault upon Huck's corps, they joined the Patriots. Their force being now augmented to more than five hundred men, they determined to drive Huck from the Mills and out of the settlement.

The plan of the Whigs was to steal a march upon the Royalists and make an attack by night; accordingly, they were directed to assemble near the Mills at sundown on July 11th, A.D., 1780. Having tied their horses in the woods a quarter of a mile from the Mills and formed themselves into platoons of six,[†] they marched towards the Mills in perfect order. However, before reaching the Mills, they met Capt. McLure and his party, who had been sent to reconnoitre; they told Lacey, who was in the front platoon, that Huck had that day taken up the line of march and had removed his whole army to Bratton's in the lower edge of York District, a distance of about twelve miles. After a short consultation, the word was given — "march to your horses," but before the command had passed half way back through the platoons, it was changed to "run to your horses:" which caused great confusion and excitement.

*This reminds the writer of John Miller, of Rutherford County, North Carolina, a true Hibernian Whig, who was noted for his originality and fervor; being called on by one of his brother elders to pray, said: — "Good Lord, our God, that art in Heaven, we have great reason to thank thee for the many favors we have received at thy hands, the many battles we have won. There is the great and glorious Battle of King's Mountain, where we *kilt* the great *General* Ferguson, and took his whole army; and the great battles at Ram-sour's and at Williamson's; and the *ever-memorable* and glorious Battle of the *Coopens* (Cowpens), where we made the proud *General Tarleton* run *doon* (down) the road *helter-skelter*, and good Lord, if ye had na suffered the cruel Tories to burn *Belly Hell's* (Billy Hill's) Iron Works, we would na have asked *ony mair* favors at thy hands. Amen."

†A distinguished gentleman, a soldier of the Revolution, who was present, informed the writer that there was no commander, and that on this occasion, the men seemed to act "more by instinct, than by any order or command."

About one hundred and fifty men mounted their horses and never stopped till they reached Charlotte, North Carolina, a distance of forty miles. A second consultation was held; it being left to a vote, they unanimously resolved to pursue Huck and surprise him before day with what men were left; being now about three hundred and fifty. The Whigs mounted their horses and took the trail of the British army; on their way they passed old Mr. William Adair's, a wealthy man of that day and a bountiful liver. Here they halted to get some refreshments; the old man informed them that Huck had passed that evening and had taken away *every eatable* from him; that he had "not meal enough to make himself a hoe-cake." Col. Lacey said to him, "By the Lord! uncle, we will make them pay for all this before sunrise." The old man replied, "Ned, you are a hot-headed fool,* what can three hundred and fifty raw militia do with nearly one thousand British soldiers?" The old gentleman had two sons, James and John Adair, then in the ranks under Lacey (his son, William, was in the continental service). About one mile farther on lived the father of Col. Edward Lacey who had removed to South Carolina not long before the commencement of the war and was an uncompromised Tory; Col. Edward Lacey detailed four men to guard him all night and tie him, if necessary, so as to prevent him from going to the enemy and giving them notice of the intended surprise. Old Lacey, by some artifice, eluded the guard and started for Huck's camp, only two miles from his residence; fortunately, before he had gone two hundred yards, he was overtaken, brought back, and absolutely tied in his bed till morning.

The Whigs, having arrived near where they supposed the British were encamped, tied their horses in the woods and counted their men again; ninety had dropped off while they were on Huck's trail. Although they now had not more than two hundred and sixty men left, they still determined to attack the Royalists before daylight. While they were here, they found out that Huck was not at Bratton's, but had encamped at Williamson's,† about one quarter of a mile further off and down nearer to a creek. In consultation,

*Col. Lacey was not related to old Mr. Adair. He had served his apprenticeship to him; hence, the great familiarity, and easy intercourse between them.

†The tradition of the country is, that it was known that "blind Reuben Lacey" (a Tory) was that evening along with Huck's army, as it passed up towards Bratton's; Col. Lacey being acquainted with the habits of his brother, knew that he would return home before day. He therefore took with him Capt. John Mills (father of the late Col. Robert Mills), of Chester District, and laid in wait, about twenty paces from the main road, not far below Bratton's; and as the story goes, Reuben Lacey was blind of an eye, his horse blind of an eye, and his dog also blind of an eye. After midnight, here the blind all came;

it was agreed that the men should be divided in two parties; one detachment to go up the road, led on by Cols. Neil and Bratton, the other division, led on by Col. Edward Lacey, down the road, so as to meet simultaneously at Williamson's house. Part of the road down to Williamson's, by which Lacey's detachment had to march, was on the low-grounds of a creek-swamp. It was dark and the leader, not being familiar with the way, called out to know if any one was present that knew the road; Maj. James Moore† stepped forward and said that he knew the track perfectly and led Lacey and his men to where they shot down the sentinel; he (it has always been supposed) was asleep on his post, for they were in twenty-five steps of him when he was killed.††

The British and Tories were encamped round about Williamson's house, which was enclosed by a fence, forming a right angle about seventy-five paces from their encampment, and a road outside corresponding with the fence by which the Whigs were enabled to commence their attack on two sides -- North and East. The Whig divisions, having met just as the day began to dawn, were rapidly formed in the lane and began to fire at the same time, about seventy-five paces from where the British were lying; the lane fence formed a kind of breast-work and gave the Whigs some little protection against the enemy's musketry and afforded them a good rest for their rifles with which they took unerring and deadly aim. The British platoons, under the command of Maj.

they hailed him with assumed voices.

"Who comes there?"

"A friend."

"A friend to whom?"

"A friend to -- to the -- the King."

"So are we, but have unluckily straggled off in the rear of the army; where are you from?"

"From Huck's camp."

"Where is the encampment?"

"About Williamson's house."

"Where are the sentinels posted? for we must pass them, and get in before Reveille."

"One is placed North, up the road, near the branch; one West, half way towards Bratton's; one South, down the road, one hundred yards from Williamson's, and one East, towards the creek."

After getting all the information they wanted, from blind Reuben, "Pass on, friend," said they, still with counterfeit voices. Col. Lacey and Capt. Mills immediately returned to their comrades, and gave them the very important information that Huck was encamped in the enclosure round Williamson's house.

†This gallant officer left two sons, Philander and James Moore,* now residing in York District, S.C.

††The tradition of the neighborhood is, that Mr. Samuel Williamson, of York District, shot down the sentinel. I know, Mr. John Craig says in his narrative, that Col. Neil shot the sentinel.

*Since dead.

Ferguson,⁶ charged bayonets three times, but from the galling and destructive fire of the American rifles, were forced to fall back. At last Huck, who had at first considered the attack a small matter, hurriedly arose from his bed, mounted his horse* without his coat, and while riding backwards and forwards, trying to rally his men for another charge, was shot and fell dead; with that, the word "Boys, take the fence and every man his own commander!" was passed along the Whig ranks; no sooner said, than done, the Whigs leaped the fence and rushed upon the enemy,⁷ who, after a feeble resistance, threw down their arms and fled in great confusion. A few on their knees begged for quarters; the Patriots refused this to Maj. Ferguson (a Tory) and put him to the sword; for report said he commanded the squad that killed young Strong. The Patriots soon mounted their horses and pursued the flying Royalists for thirteen or fourteen miles wreaking their vengeance and retaliating very heavily on the retreating foe; teaching them a lesson that their wanton and barbarous depredations were not to be perpetrated with perfect impunity. The battle lasted about one hour; the Whigs had one man killed,⁸ the British between thirty and forty killed, and about fifty wounded, who were mostly billeted upon a few Tory families in the neighborhood and attended by a Dr. Turner, who resided near the battleground. However, many of the wounded Tories escaped into the woods and were afterwards found dead.

Lacey's predictions to old Mr. Adair were thus verified. Before sunrise Huck was killed and his army scattered to the four winds.†

The battle at Williamson's has been barely noticed by historical writers and called a little affair; nevertheless, it will compare favorably with any action of the American Revolution. It was valiantly fought and won by a handful of men (all as true as steel) against a much superior force — more than three to one. It was productive of very great and important consequences. The entire overthrow of Huck's army was the first repulse the British arms had met with in South Carolina, after she was by many considered a subdued province and proved that the British bayonet was not invincible. It greatly revived the drooping spirits of the Patriots

*A fine English stallion, named Blanch, of which he had robbed Mr. Daniel Williams, of York, together with a negro man (weaver George) whom he kept as a body servant.

†When the Whigs went to release old "Gum Log Moore," Thos. Clendennen and Charles Curry, who had been taken prisoners the evening before, and put in an old corn-crib, guarded by a British soldier, they found the tables turned: for the old men were so inspired by the sight of the battle and success of the Whigs, that they had seized the musket belonging to the guard and held him a prisoner.

and, no doubt, contributed much to the victory on King's Mountain, which happened little more than two months afterwards only twenty miles from Williamson's. (Note 1, 2 and 3.)

Soon after Huck's defeat, Col. Lacey collected most of his Regiment and joined Sumter ten miles East of the Nation Ford at Clem's Branch where the latter had recently formed a camp. The North Carolinians had generously let Sumter have (for that purpose) horses, wagons and camp equipage, taken from the Tories at the battle of Ramsour's Mills.

Lacey was with Sumter at the battle of Rocky Mount, which took place July 30th, 1780.⁹ This post was commanded by Lieut. Col. Turnbull with a garrison of about three hundred men, mostly New York Tories. After three vigorous assaults, the garrison was driven into their log houses, which they held as a fort from which they could not be dislodged for the want of artillery. Gen. Sumter called out for two men, as a forlorn hope; Colonel William Hill and Adjutant Jemmy Johnson* volunteered to run one hundred yards, directly in face of the portholes and guns of the fort, to a large rock within the abatis,† each carrying with him an armful of rich lightwood; whilst behind the rock, they were safe. Johnson ignited the lightwood, threw the burning faggots upon the top of the house and set it on fire, which communicated with the fort, while Hill watched the enemy. As soon as the garrison saw the flames, a detail

NOTE 1. — The evening after the battle at Williamson's, some old ladies came in to administer to the sick and wounded. Among them was old Mrs. William Adair, who seeing a British officer (Capt. Anderson) lying wounded, said to him, "Captain, on yesterday evening when you passed my house, you ordered me to bring in my Rebel sons: here, sir, are two of them." He, greatly ashamed and somewhat chagrined, only replied, "Yes, madam, I see them."

2. The writer recollects a fine English grey mare which his father received as his share of the spoils. Gen. John Adair told him that he, on the same occasion, came in possession of a fine silver-mounted gun, and a roan horse.

3. Some thirty years ago, the author saw old Thos. Carroll on his black horse, with Huck's sword buckled around him; he was then about ninety-three years old, and entirely in his second childhood. The old man drew the sword as soon as I rode up, and made some flourishes with it; I, of course, drew back; his two sons, John and Joe Carroll, were on foot, walking along before him. After our laugh was over, the sons told me that their father, at the commencement of the battle at Williamson's (which was just as day began to peep), saw Huck mount his horse in his shirt, and noticed him riding backwards and forwards several times. "Now," said Carroll to his comrades, "I take fair aim at that fellow on horseback, in the white shirt"; he fired, and Huck fell. "If I killed him," said Carroll, "there are two bullet holes close together, for I had two in my rifle." After the battle was over, Huck was examined, and there were two balls through his head, one about half an inch above the other. So Carroll took Huck's sword, and kept it as a trophy.

I know the tradition of that part of the country is, that John, Carroll, a brother, killed Huck.

*An uncle to Chancellor Job Johnston.

†Tarleton's Southern Campaigns, page 94.

sallied forth from the fort with fixed bayonets and drove them from the rock. They ran back under the fire, not only of the port-holes, but also of the detachment. Although the clothes of Hill and Johnson were riddled with bullets and locks of their hair absolutely cut off from their heads, still they providentially escaped unhurt. Unfortunately for the Patriots, a heavy rain fell and extinguished the flames. Sumter ordered the firing to cease and withdrew his army to Landsford.

Col. Lacey was in that desperate and hard-fought battle of the Hanging Rock, August 7th, 1780.¹⁰ This post was under the command of Col. (John) Carden, composed of eight hundred North Carolina Tories from the Yadkin under Col. Morgan Bryan, the Prince of Wales' Regiment and also a part of Tarleton's Light Infantry. The Royalists were severely handled and entirely dispersed; as for the Prince of Wales' Regiment, if I may be allowed to use a cant phrase, it was literally used up: out of two hundred and seventy-eight that went into the field, there were only nine men left. The Whigs had to lament the death of some brave Patriots; amongst those who fell was the gallant Captain John McLure¹¹ of Chester District.*

Col. Lacey was also with Gen. Sumter at the battle of the Wateree Ford, the 15th of August, 1780, where they intercepted an escort from Ninety-Six and took upwards of forty wagon loads of clothing and a number of prisoners. General Sumter started up the Catawba River for Charlotte, North Carolina, making forced marches, at the same time eluding Col. Turnbull at Rocky Mount. Hearing of Gates' defeat, he pushed on night and day but had to stop at the mouth of Fishing Creek on the evening of the 18th to give his wearied men a little repose. Col. Tarleton, that active but unprincipled officer, fell that night on the rear of Sumter's camp and routed the Patriots with great slaughter, taking about three hundred prisoners. Sumter and Lacey made their escape with a few men into Mecklenburg County, North Carolina. Here Lacey was ordered by Sumter to take what men he had, who had escaped with him, to go into York and Chester, collect his straggling sold-

*In this battle, John Rachford, of York District, was shot through the breast. He has often shown me where the bullet entered, just below the right nipple, and came out near the spine, and always wound up by telling me that my grandfather, William Erwin, was also in that battle, and in his mess, and made fine beef soup, which was all the Doctor allowed him, although he could sit up. Rachford would say, "How much soup does the Doctor allow me, Billy?" (Erwin.) "He did not say, John, but you shall have soup till it begins to run out of the bullet holes. I will then stop it."

iers, beat up for more men among the Irish and reorganize his Regiment into Mounted Infantry;† all of which he accomplished in a short time and rejoined Gen. Sumter, whose headquarters were at Clem's Branch. About this time, Colonel Williams¹² also arrived at the camp, bringing with him some seventy or eighty men from North Carolina. He had recently received from Gov.¹³ Rutledge a Brigadier General's commission and showed his authority for taking the command of all the South Carolina troops in that section of the State, but the Regiments under Sumter (notwithstanding his reverse at Fishing Creek) refused to give up their admired and beloved leader; besides, they had been offended with Williams a few months before, while he was acting as commissary for Sumter's Brigade. In the meantime, they learned by their scouts that Col. (Lord) Rawdon and Col. Tarleton, with a large force, were advancing upon them. Gen. Sumter moved on up the Catawba and crossed at Bigger's, now Mason's, Ferry (for their general welfare and safety, the Patriots had to march together, although they were wrangling about the command); here the officers attempted to settle the dispute, but Lord Rawdon's troops having arrived on the East side, the armies commenced firing across the river at each other, which broke up their deliberations. The Whigs moved some miles higher up and camped in a thick wood so as to be safe from the enemy's cavalry. At this place, the convention of officers was again called by Col. Wm. Hill, their chairman, to settle the controversy as to who should take the command. The council, after due deliberation, resolved to refer the whole matter to Gov. Rutledge, who had dictatorial power over South Carolina and was then at Hillsboro, North Carolina. The council appointed Col. Richard Winn, Col. Henry Hampton, Col. Thomas¹⁴ and Col. Middleton¹⁵ commissioners, who were sent to Gov. Rutledge to lay before him all the facts and return with his decree. Sumter was to withdraw from the army until the Governor's decision was known; and Lacey and Hill should, in the meantime, take command of all the troops, except the North Carolinians who were under Williams' command and a few men under Brandon.

Lacey and Hill marched the army up the Catawba River and crossed at the Tuckaseige Ford, with the view of uniting with Davidson's¹⁶ command, but their scouts brought them the intelligence that there was a considerable body of men from the West, as well as from the East side of the mountains, coming with the inten-

†Mounted Infantry were first used in the American Revolution. Since that period, all European nations have employed them with great success.

tion of fighting Col. Ferguson at Gilbert Town. The Patriots then recrossed the river at Beatie's Ford and resolved also to go in pursuit of Ferguson, who had been for some time, with the help of the Tories, putting the Whigs of the mountain region to fire and sword. Here Lacey and Hill were joined by Majors Graham and Hambright, with seventy or eighty men, and shortly afterwards by Colonels Hammond and Roebuck and Majors Chronicle and Hawthorne.

It is well known that Lord Cornwallis had sent out Col. Patrick Ferguson,* near and through the mountain region, to collect together and organize all the Royalists. Those who flocked to his standard were the most profligate and corrupt men in the country; however, he passed on through the upper part of the State and made a halt, first at Gilbert Town and lastly on King's Mountain.† From thence, he sent out his foraging parties who drove in large herds of cattle. The Patriots reasonably supposed from this that Ferguson intended to make a stand here: besides, an old gentleman of known veracity came into the camp and informed the Americans that he had been some days with Col. Ferguson as a pretended Royalist; that he (Ferguson) had pitched his camp on a spur of King's Mountain where he considered his position so advantageous and strong (as he impiously said), "that God Almighty and all the rebels out of hell could not drive him from his post." However, as an act of prudence, he had sent an express (Abram Collins) to Earl Cornwallis, then in Charlotte, North Carolina, for Tarleton's Dragoons, for the name of this cruel and unprincipled corps struck the inhabitants with terror and dismay. The Patriots knew that the forces under their several commands were not sufficient to attack Col. Ferguson's strong position successfully. They likewise knew that Colonels Campbell, Shelby, Sevier, McDowell, and Cleaveland, with the "mountain men," had recently arrived upon the Catawba River, in Burke County, N.C., and were anxious and expected to meet Ferguson: for he had threatened to march over the mountains, hang their leaders, and lay waste their country by fire and sword if they did not come and take British protection under his standard.

Before the mountain men arrived at Gilbert Town, where they expected certainly to meet Ferguson's army, they learned that he had made a retrograde movement; report said he was some

*Ferguson was a Major in the British service, and a Brigadier General in the Royal Militia of South Carolina.

†The tradition in that section has always been, that Col. Ferguson was five or six days encamped on King's Mountain before the battle.

fifty or sixty miles South of them. They also had later assurances from two men that Ferguson had gone to the British post at Ninety-Six, one hundred miles farther off; as their men had volunteered but for a short time, it was doubtful what course to pursue. The defences at that post (Ninety-Six) had been recently repaired, being strongly garrisoned with four hundred* Regulars and some Militia. The probability was that it would resist an assault, and having neither ordnance or camp equipage to carry on a siege, they began to think of returning over the mountains.

But to return to the Patriots near King's Mountain. In a consultation between Lacey, Hill, Williams, Brandon, Roebuck, Hammond, Hambright, Graham, Hawthorne, and Chronicle, it was agreed upon that an express should be sent to Colonels Campbell, Cleaveland, McDowell, Shelby, and Sevier, to let them know Col. Ferguson's whereabouts, position, force, &c.; inviting† them to come on, unite their forces and attack Ferguson on King's Mountain.

Most fortunately for the American cause, Col. Edward Lacey rode that express,†† sixty miles in one day; late at night, he entered the Whig camp and was taken prisoner and blindfolded; he begged the sentinel to conduct him immediately to the Colonels' quarters, where he introduced himself as Col. Lacey. They at first repulsed his advances and took him to be a Tory spy. However, he had the address at last to convince them he was no impostor; he told them where the Royal army was, their force, &c., and urged them, by all means, to come on immediately; if they would, the combined Whig forces could undoubtedly capture Ferguson and his whole army; delay might prove fatal to their success:** for Col. Ferguson had sent an express to Lord Cornwallis,*** who was at Charlotte, N.C., and requested reinforcements. Campbell had that night in council abandoned the chase and had determined to return over the mountains; but, upon the earnest and continued solicitations of Col. Lacey, they held a second council of war and recalled what they had that night done, and now resolved to pursue Ferguson as far as King's Mountain.

Lacey's jaded horse, having been well provided for, himself partaken of a frugal repast, and taking only a few hours' sleep, he

*Tarleton's Campaigns, page 204.

†See Annals of Newberry, page 314.

††See Col. Hill's MS.

**Lacey was one of the most active participators in the action on King's Mountain. Lossing, page 454.

***See Col. Hill's MS.

was dismissed before day carrying the pleasing intelligence to his comrades that the mountain men would be at the Cowpens about the 6th of October. So all the troops under their several commands were ready and waiting to cooperate effectually at that time. The South Carolinians arrived at the Cowpens on the 6th of October; a little before sundown the mountain men came up. The Patriot force now amounted to about three thousand strong.* Although raining and dark, they started — Lossing says with nine hundred men; Major Tate, who fought in Sumter's Brigade under Lacey, says there were one thousand six hundred picked men; Shelby says there were nine hundred and ten, well mounted, started from the Catawba, in Burke County, N.C., leaving the weak horses and footmen behind; and Col. Hill says there were nine hundred and thirty-three of the South Carolinians started from the Cowpens, well mounted, leaving about an equal number of foot and badly mounted in the camp, which would make one thousand eight hundred and forty-three that went in pursuit of Ferguson.

The officers† all met just before the battle began and elected Col. Campbell Commander-in-Chief (the youngest Colonel and the one who lived the farthest off). Previous to this (October 1st), Col. Campbell had been elected to the chief command of the forces under Shelby, Sevier, Cleaveland, and McDowell.

The tradition has always been that inasmuch as Col. Lacey rode the express, Col. Campbell gave to him the honor** of commencing the battle. He led on his men from the Western†† and most level side of the mountain, engaging the attention of the foe, while the Regiments and Battalions of Cleaveland, Shelby, Sevier, Campbell, McDowell, Williams, Brandon, Roebuck, Hammond, Hambright,*** Clark, Hill, Hawthorne, Graham, and Chronicle marched round its base so as completely to encircle Ferguson's army. At the first fire††† of the enemy, Col. Lacey's fine horse was shot

*See Tarleton's Southern Campaigns, page 195.

†See Memoir of Maj. Thos. Young, of Union, S.C.

**The friends of Campbell, Shelby, Roebuck, Sevier, and Winston have for each also claimed that honor.

††See Ramsey, page 359.

***Col. Hambright on that day received seven wounds, but bravely fought on till the close of the battle.

†††J — C — , as true a Patriot in principle as ever lived (but one who could not stand powder), always ran at the first fire. When going into the action at King's Mountain, his friends advised him to stay behind. "No," said he, "I am determined to stand my ground to-day, *live or die*." At the first fire, true to his instinct, he took to his heels. After the battle was over, he came back; his friends reproached him. He said: "From the first fire, I knew nothing till I was *gone* about one hundred and fifty yards; when I came to myself, recollecting my resolves, I tried to stop, but my *confounded legs* would carry me off."

dead under him. However, he was well repaid, independent of the victory, for he rode off the black English charger on which Col. Ferguson was killed. (Note 1 and 2.) It is known that Ferguson fell sword in hand. About three hundred and sixty of his men were killed and about eight hundred taken prisoners.

The day after the battle, Campbell, Shelby, Cleaveland, Sevier, Clark, Hammond, Brandon, Roebuck, &c., all left with the prisoners for the mountains in North Carolina "without following up their victory" (no doubt they had good reasons for doing so.)* Lacey and Hill, who still commanded Sumter's Brigade, remained in the neighborhood and pitched their camp on Bullock's Creek, within six or seven miles of the battleground, waiting the approach of Tarleton, for they had it from undoubted authority that his corps had been sent for some days before the battle of the 7th. Strange! it was not until the 10th of October that Lord Cornwallis ordered Col. Tarleton to march with his Light Infantry, the British Legion, and a three pounder, to go and assist Ferguson. When he crossed the Catawba, he received certain information of Ferguson's total defeat: he learned at the same time that the mountaineers and all the troops had gone off, except the command of Lacey and Hill, which immediately attracted the attention of Tarleton, who hurriedly moved on with a view of driving them from their post and out of the State. Notwithstanding the fear and dread in which the inhabitants held this formidable and blood-thirsty corps, Lacey and Hill boldly and triumphantly stood their ground, defying his British Legion, cannon and Infantry. Tarleton maneuvered about their camp two or three days without making an attack on them: says he was recalled the 16th to join Cornwallis (at the Nation Ford) on his precipitate retreat from Charlotte to Winnsboro. The British were pursued by Geo. Graham, Jack Barnet, "Big" George Alexander, and many other Whigs of Mecklenburg County, N.C. The Patriots took from them on their retreat a Printing Press, about twenty-five wagon loads of clothing, and a great many other articles of prime necessity.

NOTE 1. — A Whig by the name of Patterson, who resided in the neighborhood of King's Mountain, had been taken prisoner, and was lying under guard when the battle began. The guard was soon called into action, and Patterson seeing himself left alone, sprang to his feet and cut for his friends. He absolutely ran about one hundred and twenty paces, between the two fires, and reached Col. Shelby's division in safety, where he picked up a musket of a wounded soldier, and fought bravely on until victory was proclaimed.

2. The writer has frequently seen Col. Ferguson's Watch. It was a large silver one, and as round as a turnip. It traded for about forty-five or fifty dollars as a curiosity.

* Tarleton's Southern Campaigns, page 166.

Gen. Sumter arrived in November, 1780, and took command of the Brigade and went in pursuit of the British and Tories on the rivers Tyger, Enoree and Broad (Eswawpuddenah), harassing and driving them out of their stockade forts, which had been erected by the British to keep up a free and safe communication from Camden to Ninety-Six. While here he met Cols. Clark and Twiggs of Georgia, and an agreement was made to attack the British post at Ninety-Six in a short time, each party bringing a stipulated number of men into the field for that purpose. Gen. Sumter wanted one hundred and fifty men to make up his quota. He called on Col. Lacey (knowing him to be a dashing soldier of fine address and likewise knowing him to have the confidence of the York and Chester Irish), ordered him to recruit the requisite number of men, allowing him three days to bring them in. In the meantime Sumter would make a feint on or towards Camden, but would be on the west side of Broad River, encamped at the Fish Dam Ford by the 9th, where he would give his men a few days rest.

Lacey (leaving Major Charles Miles in charge of his regiment) took with him his facetious and witty Adjutant Jemmy Johnson,* the *bould* Capt. Paddy McGriff, the cautious Capt. Jem Martin, and the queer and droll Sargeant, Billy Wylie.† All from the "Emerald Isle" — a more brave and truer set of men never lived! So great was their influence that nearly every young man and boy of eighteen they met unyoked his horse from the plough, mounted him, taking whatever weapon chance threw in his way and gallantly followed their admired and chivalrous leaders "to deeds of glory and renown." In less than three days, Lacey came dashing into Sumter's camp with one hundred and fifty mounted men; but one event in their route had nearly happened them which might have proved sad in its consequences. The Latin adage was here truly verified — *fortuna favet fortibus*. It seems, after taking up the line of march with his new recruits, Lacey told them by way of comfort that at a grocery near "Mobley's" on their road, he knew of a barrel of whiskey and when he got there he would call a halt and give them a short time to refresh themselves: that he himself had scarcely slept or drank anything for two days and nights. When they arrived at the store, all dismounted; Lacey had the barrel of whiskey rolled out of the house, the heading knocked out; every old tea-cup, coffee-pot, &c., &c., were put in requisition so that the men might

*An uncle of Chancellor Job Johnston.

†Father of the late Judge Peter Wylie.

help themselves without any let, hindrance or formality as they had but a short time to stay. In half an hour, the word was given to mount; they were soon all in their saddles again, with an additional spur to their natural bravery. When they had marched two or three miles farther on to an eminence about one hundred and fifty yards from the main crossroads leading to the Fish Dam Ford and Sumter's camp, they came within full view of a very formidable scouting party of British Dragoons. Lacey halted and formed his men in the road. At this most critical juncture, the *creature comfort* taken at the store had so operated on the heads of the "boys," that it was with much ado that they could keep their saddles. Col. Lacey held a short consultation with his officers — concluded their men were not just then in trim to fight — (the men thought differently) — was about to order them to take the woods, two and two, and steer for Sumter's camp four miles off as best they could, but some one or two of the "boys" having made the discovery of the enemy, cried out "the redcoats"; this was enough, with one accord they exclaimed: "Is that the British? By Jasus! Col. Lacey, let's at them! We'll give them a clatter." (Seeing he could not restrain them, Lacey determined to share their fate.) A general rush ensued — helter-skelter, whooping and screaming at the top of their voices (which no doubt magnified their appearance), the enemy took to their heels and fled. When Lacey came to the crossroads he wheeled to the right, taking the opposite direction from the Dragoons, still telling his men the redcoats were just ahead. Their plough-nags were nearly run down by the time they arrived at Sumter's camp. Col. Lacey gave Gen. Sumter an account of their narrow escape, at which he laughed heartily, ordered the men full rations, but no more whiskey that night.

Next morning they were mustered into service, and that night, November 11th, 1780, Col. Wemyss made an assault on the camp. Sumter had an intimation of it and had ordered blazing camp fires to be kept up. Col. Taylor had all the horses ready saddled and equipped. After midnight, Wemyss made his attack; the Americans retreated (as they had been directed) to an eminence seventy-five yards from their camp from whence they could plainly see the British alight and commence plundering the tents; when the word was given the Patriots sent forth a well-directed and deadly fire. The enemy retreated, but were soon rallied for another charge. About this time a cart-load of cartridges placed in the back ground had got on fire, from whence *issued volleys* — the enemy could see no one, only hear the firing and see the smoke; supposing it to be

a platoon of Americans they made a furious charge upon the cart of ignited cartridges which continued its roar and undauntedly stood its ground. In this last *melee* the British were again exposed by the light of the camp fires, when the Americans gave them a second deadly volley, the enemy fled and were pursued by the Patriots, our new recruits mostly in the foremost ranks. Some of the tender-hearted Americans who, at the first alarm, retreated under the river bank were kept there three hours for it was that length of time before the cartridges ceased firing — during which time they thought the battle was raging.

It is known that Wemyss was wounded in the arm and knee and made prisoner. Although he had in his pockets the evidence of his having in cold blood hung several of the Patriots, also a list of houses he had burned, nevertheless he was treated humanely by the conquerors.

Gen. Sumter, soon after his battle with Wemyss, crossed Broad River and between Tyger and Enoree, met Colonels Clark and Twiggs, of Georgia, where he took command of the whole force and started for Ninety Six with a view of carrying out their designs upon that post. He was on the point of attacking one hundred Loyalists at Williams', only fifteen miles from Ninety Six,* when a deserter from the British Infantry informed Sumter of the near approach of Tarleton. He immediately ordered a retreat and continued it for two days until he arrived at Blackstock's plantation on the west side of Tyger River on the 20th of November, 1780. Here Sumter determined to face his pursuers.

There was a large tobacco house and other smaller buildings in an open field near the river. Where the Patriots were encamped, about two hundred yards from the houses, there was a strong log fence, one notched upon another, which formed a lane where a strong picket was placed at its mouth. The fence served as a breastwork, and from their destructive volleys kept the British Dragoons from entering the lane for some time. The fire also from the log houses was sensibly felt by the enemy. In the meantime, Col. Lacey's mounted Infantry advanced to the west side through a thick wood, within seventy-five paces of the enemy, undiscovered, when they gave them a fire so well directed that twenty men fell and nearly as many horses. Many of his men dismounted and would creep up so near the foe that a shot was never wasted.

Tarleton's Cavalry was afraid to enter the thick woods, but strove to press forward through the lane where the British soldiers

*Tarleton's Southern Campaigns, page 204.

and horses fell so thick that their numbers, dying and dead, nearly blocked up the road. In the meantime the enemy's Infantry (Grenadiers) advanced near the houses where they received such a heavy fire from those in the log-barn, as well as from a number of the reserve that had got round to that quarter, that the enemy was forced to retreat and fled in great confusion, pursued by the Americans with loud shouts of victory. The battle lasted from one o'clock till near sundown; the enemy left on the field nearly two hundred killed and wounded.* The Patriots had two or three killed and five wounded, among the latter was Gen. Sumter. The Whigs soon after the battle crossed over to the east side of Tyger where Sumter disbanded a part of his army.

Col. Lacey kept the field with his mounted Infantry; his camp and headquarters† were at Liberty Hill on Turkey Creek in York District, S.C., at Williams' (now Wright's) Mill. Many of the Patriots flocked to his standard for safety and enrolled themselves under his banner. He greatly annoyed the enemy by cutting off their large foraging parties. On the 23d of November (1780), Cornwallis was forced to say, in a letter to Tarleton, "Sumter's corps has been our greatest plague in this State;"** and on the 18th December the Earl says to Tarleton, "You must dislodge Lacey from his camp on Turkey Creek so that I can move up on the left hand road."††

Lacey also kept the Tories in check: *none of the "Bloody Scout" ever ventured across Broad River*. It was a matter of great importance to the Patriots in that section to show that they still had a force in the field who were always ready to fight on anything like equal terms.

About the 25th of December (1780), before Gen. Greene left Charlotte, he ordered Gen. Morgan and Col. Washington to go and menace Ninety-Six. On their way they joined Col. Lacey† at Liberty Hill, who broke up his camp and marched with his Regiment under the command of Gen. Morgan until after the battle of the Cowpens, Jan. 17, 1781, where Col. Tarleton met with his worst and greatest defeat. His loss was upwards of eight hundred killed, wounded, and taken prisoners. The loss of the Patriots were comparatively light. Col. Lacey retreated with Morgan as far as the

*Col. Hill's MS.

†Capt. Joe Palmer was their Commissary while there.

**Tarleton's Southern Campaigns, page 203.

††Tarleton's Southern Campaigns, page 204.

***Ibid., 243.

Tuckaseige Ford on the Catawba,* where he was ordered to make a stand to prevent the enemy from crossing at that place.

Early in February (1781) Gen. Sumter had so far recovered from his wounds as to take the field again. When he ordered out the Militia of his part of the State, Col. Lacey immediately joined him with his Regiment and was with him at the assault on Friday's Fort, the 19th of February, 1781. After this Sumter crossed over to the High Hills of Sumter, and on the 6th of March he had a severe brush with Col. Fraser between Scape Hoar and Ratcliffe Bridge; here they made a draw game, neither party wishing to renew the fight.

About the 24th of April, Gen. Sumter (instead of joining Greene at Camden) conceived the idea of investing Fort Granby. His progress was sure, but slow for the want of artillery. In the meantime he took Col. Lacey's mounted Infantry with other light troops, leaving Col. Taylor¹⁷ with sufficient force to prosecute the siege, and by rapid marches arrived at Orangeburg on the 11th of May in time to capture the Garrison at that post. After two volleys they surrendered unconditionally.

The middle of May, Gen. Greene wrote to Sumter for as many of his soldiers as he could safely spare, as he intended to lay siege to Ninety-Six. Col. Lacey's Regiment, with three others, were sent immediately to Greene, where they remained till the 18th of June, when the Patriots were forced, by the approach of Lord Rawdon, to raise the siege. Col. Lacey again joined Sumter with his Regiment, and was with him at the battle of Quinby's Creek Bridge, near Biggin Church, on the 15th of August, 1781.¹⁸ The British forces were under the command of Col. Coates, who fell back from the bridge to a brick house belonging to Shubrick. — Gen. Sumter divided his force into three bodies, his own Brigade was led on by Colonels Middleton, Polk, Taylor and Lacey in front and under the shelter of some negro houses from whence they galled the enemy, but were not able to dislodge the foe.

On the 8th of September, 1781, Col. Lacey† was in that great battle of the Eutaw Springs, under the command of Lieut. Col. Wm. Henderson. The South Carolinians were more exposed on that day than any others in the field; they had to stand a cross-fire, and stood it like veteran soldiers: "never was the constancy of a party of men more severely tried." After the battle of the Eutaw, Gen. Sumter's headquarters were at Orangeburg; Col. Lacey's Regiment

* Ibid., page 261.

† Tarleton's Southern Campaigns, page 512.

of mounted Infantry was stationed at the Four Holes, acting as a patrolling party, penetrating as far as Dorchester. Their duty was to stop all intercourse with Charleston, and especially to prevent the Tories from carrying supplies to the British.

About the last of February, 1782, Gen. Sumter sent in his resignation. Early in March, Lieut. Col. Wm. Henderson was appointed Brigadier General and took command of Sumter's Brigade. He sent Col. Lacey's Regiment with some others to Edisto Island. While here, Col. Lacey received intelligence that a company of plundering British soldiers had landed some eight or ten miles from his station; on that day he had but a few men left in camp to guard it. However, he started with fifteen or twenty men in pursuit of them, and captured all those soldiers which the British had left to guard the boats and sunk the latter in the river where their hulls are to be seen to this day. Col. Lacey remained at the Edisto Island till near about the time Charleston was abandoned by the British, which happened the 14th of December, 1782.

It is well known that many of the officers of Marion's Brigade never presented their claims for military services against the State of South Carolina for they all knew the State was greatly embarrassed at the heels of the Revolution in paying the poor soldiers. It seems that Col. Edward Lacey was also fired with the same patriotic feeling and laudable love of country. The writer is informed by Mr. J. Augustus Black (who is the greatest antiquarian in the State), that Col. Edward Lacey has never presented an account of Revolutionary services against the State, and of course, has never received any remuneration. But in the language of Samuel Farrow, "Time, or the Statute of Limitations, never ought to prevent the payment of the just claims of any Revolutionary soldier!"

Soon after the war, Col. Lacey was elected a Brigadier General and was appointed one of the first County Court Judges* in Chester District. He was sent by Chester to the General Assembly of South Carolina, where he served until 1793, when he declined reelection and retired from political life.

In very limited circumstances Gen. Lacey emigrated to the West, October, 1797, with all his children¹⁹ and first located in Montgomery County, Tennessee, where he remained two years. — Afterwards he settled permanently in Livingston County, Kentucky, near the Ohio River, where he was soon after made a County Court

*The day on which the Judges were sworn into office, viz: Brown and Gaston, Lacey would not be qualified; "for," he said, "I must whip a _____ Tory before I take the oath of office."

Judge, which post he filled with credit to himself and satisfaction to the country.

In the latter part of Gen. Lacey's life, he was subject to a *cataleptic* disease. He was most subject to it on horseback, and often would ride miles entirely insensible to everything around him. In one of these unfortunate fits of insensibility, he rode into Deer Creek (a large water course which was then flooded with back-waters from the Ohio), where he was drowned at the age of seventy-one, which happened March 20th, 1813.

In 1858 the only surviving children of Gen. Edward Lacey were Major Edward Lacey and Joshua Lacey, both far advanced in life and in very moderate circumstances.

Your author has thus humbly attempted to give a concise, plain and unadorned biographical sketch of Gen. Edward Lacey, who was one of our most active partisan leaders during the dark period of our Revolutionary struggle and who freely consecrated all his energy and means to the complete overthrow of British tyranny, and to the establishment of our American independence. Perhaps he was in more important battles than any other officer in the State, yet Historians have barely named him in three or four.

And here, in conclusion, let me in all candor add, that in keeping up the chain of events, I had now and then to put in a traditional link, but

“Nothing extenuate,
Nor set down aught in malice.”

FOOTNOTES

ANNOTATIONS BY MR. ELMER O. PARKER, COLUMBIA, SOUTH CAROLINA

¹ Recent research by Elmer Oris Parker, formerly of the National Archives, has disclosed that the mill owned by Hugh White, 1766-1797, and operated by him during the war was located on upper Fishing Creek in present York County. It was here that Lt. Col. Banastre Tarleton lay dangerously ill of fever September 9-23, 1780. Confusion as to its location occurred after White in 1784 bought another mill on lower Fishing Creek at present Lando in Chester County from Philip Walker who had operated it during the Revolution.

² William Strong. His father, Christopher Strong (1760-1850) claimed compensation for 19 days service by William in Capt. Jonathan Jones' company of militia in 1780. S.C. Archives, AA 7484.

³ The Rev. John Simpson's house was burned on June 11, 1780. Simpson Papers in South Caroliniana Library, Columbia.

⁴ Col. William Hill's Iron Works were burned on June 18, 1780. Cornwallis Papers, P.R.O. 30/11/2, No. 171.

⁵ Col. Andrew Neel (not Neil) was son of Col. Thomas Neel of the New Acquisition District (York County) militia who was killed at Stono Ferry on June 20, 1779.

⁶ Major James Ferguson of the Royal militia was a son of James and Agnes Ferguson of Chester County. He was survived by his wife Mary and son John.

⁷ The opening gun was fired by old Mr. George Gibson, uncle of the crippled spy Joseph Kerr of King's Mountain fame. Lyman C. Draper Papers, 2 DD 233.

⁸ Col. George Gill of Chester County said that the name of the individual was Campbell. Draper Papers, 13 DD 50a.

⁹ Col. Richard Winn's demand for surrender of Rocky Mount, and its commandant Col. George Turnbull's reply were both dated July 31, 1780.

¹⁰ August 5, 1780, according to records of annuities paid by the state. S.C. Archives, AA 5849A.

¹¹ The name is usually shown as John McClure.

¹² Col. James Williams.

¹³ Governor John Rutledge.

¹⁴ Col. John Thomas.

¹⁵ Col. Charles Starkey Myddleton.

¹⁶ Col. William Lee Davidson of North Carolina.

¹⁷ Col. Thomas Taylor.

¹⁸ July 17, 1781, according to letter from Gen. Thomas Sumter to Gen. Nathanael Greene. Charleston Yearbook, 1899, appendix, page 41.

¹⁹ General Lacey's children were: William, Edward, Samuel, James, Joshua, Robert, Jane, Elizabeth (married Vance Lusk), Annie, and Adelia (married Lowry Sandifer). Draper Papers, 14 VV 14.