

MILITARY ACTIONS IN AIKEN COUNTY

Although it could be argued that there were more Revolutionary War actions fought in South Carolina than in any other state, the area that would become Aiken County was spared the major conflicts, though there were several significant skirmishes that took place along the Savannah River.

1. New Richmond August 2, 1775

Thomas Brown, a Loyalist supporter, was staying at New Richmond, home of John Gordon, close to the line that would become the border between Edgefield and Aiken Counties. A mob of Liberty Boys approached the house and called Brown out and attempted to have him sign Articles of Association in support of the Patriot cause. Brown refused, and after a brief scuffle he was knocked unconscious and carried to Augusta, where he was burned, partially scalped and tarred and feathered. With the help of a sympathetic guard he later escaped to the backcountry of South Carolina for asylum. He promptly aligned himself with the anti-revolutionary elements in that area, and later traveled to West Florida where he was eventually given command of the Kings Rangers.

2. Hammond's Mill April 3, 1781

Hammond's Mill on the Savannah River was the property of Samuel and LeRoy Hammond, and at the time of this confrontation was occupied by a group of Loyalists. Captain Thomas Key of Colonel LeRoy Hammond's militia, attacked and defeated the Loyalists, capturing many and commandeering the provisions stored there. Damage to the mill made it unusable for storage or protection.

3. Beech Island May 15, 1781

Patriot Colonel Elijah Clarke had sent his cavalry horses under guard to Beech Island for forage. They were attacked by a force of militia and Indians and the horses seized, but on the return journey they in turn were attacked by Captains Shelby and Carr and routed. The horses were recovered and nearly half of the Royalist detachment killed.

4. Fort Galphin May 19-21, 1781

George Galphin's fortified residence and trading center at Silver Bluff on the Savannah River was strategic to the

British plan to enlist the Indians as their allies against the Patriots. The fort had been captured by the British and was garrisoned by Captain Samuel Roworth and a detachment of King's Rangers, a company of New Jersey Volunteers, some Loyalist Militiamen and a group of armed slaves. Lt. Colonel "Light Horse Harry" Lee (father of General Robert E. Lee) was on his way to assist Colonel Elijah Clarke in Beech Island. He proceeded to Ft. Galphin where he was joined by a group of Militiamen under Colonel LeRoy Hammond. Lee turned command over to Major Michael Rudolph. Rudolph hid the bulk of his forces in the surrounding woods and feigned a frontal attack on the fort which then retreated, drawing the Loyalist forces out of the stockade and leaving the gates open. The Patriots then stormed the fort and took possession of it, capturing 180 of its defenders. The annual "Royal gifts" to the Indians, stored at Galphin's, were captured and the gifts of gunpowder, small arms, projectiles, blankets and rum were distributed to the patriot forces.

5. Beech Island May 24, 1781

Fort Grierson near Augusta, defended in part by a Loyalist company of South Carolina Militia had been captured by the Patriots. A group of the Militia deserted and made their way down the Savannah River, attempting to avoid contact with any Patriot forces. On May 24 they met a company of Patriot horse guard who were camped on the Carolina side of the river. The Patriots were unable to detain the fleeing Militiamen, who managed to escape across the river.

6. Dean's Swamp May 24, 1782

Revolutionaries had established a prison camp at Dean's swamp near the present town of Salley, SC. British Commander William Cunningham, determined to liberate these loyalists, marched on Dean's swamp and camped close by. In the ensuing attack his forces were routed by a detachment sent by Brigadier General Andrew Pickens and fled into the swamp. They were pursued in a surprise attack at sunset by the mounted militia of Captains Michael Watson and William Butler. The Loyalists fought fiercely, killing Captain Watson, but the Patriot forces' charge threw them into confusion so that many were killed by the swords of the cavalry.

