

Battle of Duncan's Creek: The Revenge of "Bloody Bill" Cunningham at Duncans Creek



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After Lord Cornwallis surrendered in Virginia, Major William "Bloody Bill" Cunningham and a large force of Loyalist militia attacked a group of patriot militia that were resting in the home of their commander, Colonel Joseph Hayes.

The Tories torched the home and the Patriots surrendered. However, "Bloody Bill" continued on, personally killing every prisoner in cold blood. Joseph Hayes owned a tavern adjacent to Edgehill Station, which was a stop along the local stage coach line.

As he and his men sat down to a meal, Captain John Owens rode up and informed the men that smoke was coming out of the nearby plantation house of the widow of the late Brigadier General James Williams. Colonel Hayes promptly followed Owens out of the tavern and up a small hill to meet at an old Cherokee War Block House.

From that vantage, they had a view of the home of the widow. But they found themselves surrounded by "Bloody Bill" and about 300 Loyalists.

Colonel Hayes and his men ran into the small block house, but it was soon torched, so they threw down their arms and surrendered.

But "Bloody Bill" forced them back inside the block house where their hands were tied behind them and attached to a long rope. However, as soon as the last man was attached to the long rope, Cunningham started hanging them, and then his men dismembered fourteen of them. Cunningham then rode off, leaving scattered body parts. James Tinsley had fought with Captain Hayes and General Sumter in 1780 and fought at Blackstocks and Ninety-Six. Originally, he volunteered in behalf of another soldier, but as the war wore on, was more active in soldiering. He was with Captain Hayes in November of 1781 at Edgehill Station (or Hayes Station) where he was taken prisoner.

That evening, before the massacre, he managed to escape and went on an expedition into Cherokee country. His brother was killed in the conflict, and Tinsley was promoted to captain. After the massacre at Hayes Station "Bloody Bill" Cunningham rode to the southern portion of what is now Union County to the house of John Boyce who had just returned home after ensuring the battles of King's Mountain, Cowpens and Eutaw Springs. As Boyce sat down to dinner he heard the approach of horses and rushed to the door and recognized "Bloody Bill" and his gang. Boyce knew that he had to escape, so running towards the Loyalists waved his hat to cause the horses to shy away.

And he kept on running. "Bloody Bill" pursued the chase, getting near enough to strike at Boyce with his sword, but Boyce warded off the blow with his hand, almost severing three fingers.

Then, running into the thick woods where Cunningham could not follow on horseback, observed Cunningham and his men ride off. Afterwards, Boyce mounted his horse and rode to the house of his militia commander, Capt. Christopher Casey who rounded up fifteen men to ride after the Loyalists.

They intercepted Cunningham at Duncan Creek on the Enoree River and captured a few stragglers. Capt. Casey took them to the intersection of Charlestown Road and Ninety-Six Road and hanged them from a hickory tree.

The Loyalists were buried at the foot of the tree. "Bloody Bill" Cunningham, however, continued his reign of terror and rode to the house of Lieutenant-Governor James Wood on Lawsons Fork of the Pacolet River. Wood was a prominent Patriot and the Commissioner of Sequestered Property.

Major Cunningham dragged Woods out of his house and shot him. As he lay there wounded his wife begged for the life of Wood. In response Cunningham and his men hanged Woods from a dogwood tree. The pension records are replete with interesting stories and tales. Actually, the pensions, combined with research from census and county records, assembles great stories to be passed down throughout the ages and remembered.