

= Battle of Torrence 's Tavern =

The Battle of Torrence 's Tavern (also referred to as the Skirmish at Torrence 's Tavern or the Battle at Tarrant 's Tavern) was a minor engagement of the American Revolutionary War that took place in what was the western portion of Rowan County , North Carolina , approximately 10 miles (16 km) east of the Catawba River near modern @-@ day Mooresville in Iredell County . Torrence 's Tavern was a part of the larger Southern campaign of the American Revolution , which , by 1780 ? 1781 involved a series of clashes between the British Army and Loyalist milita and the Continental Army and Patriot militia in the Piedmont region of North and South Carolina .

The engagement took place on either February 1 or February 2 , 1781 immediately following the Battle of Cowan 's Ford , and resulted in a victory for British cavalry units under the command of Colonel Banastre Tarleton . The British victory served to demoralize Patriot supporters in western North Carolina , and forced General Nathanael Greene , commander of the Continental Army in the southern theater , to withdraw his forces further east . This withdrawal allowed Greene to unite his army with several detached Patriot forces in the Piedmont prior to the Battle of Guilford Courthouse . After the conclusion of the war , the site of Torrence 's Tavern was commemorated by two state and local historical markers .

= = Prelude = =

Throughout the winter of 1780 @-@ 1781 , the British Army in the Carolinas , under the command of General Charles Cornwallis , pursued the southern Continental Army , commanded by Nathanael Greene , from central South Carolina to North Carolina . At the Battle of Cowpens on January 17 , 1781 , the Continental Army scored a victory against a force , detached from the main British Army , commanded by Tarleton . After the defeat , Cornwallis set out to pursue Greene into nearby North Carolina . The victor of Cowpens , Daniel Morgan , had requested that Greene relieve him of his command of the Patriot militia due to a flare @-@ up of sciatica , but Greene refused . Morgan then set about establishing defenses on the Catawba River , which Cornwallis ' army would be forced to cross in order to drive into central and eastern North Carolina . Defensive positions were established at every ford on the river in that state in expectation of the British assault . By January 30 , Morgan had received word that the British were indeed preparing to cross the river .

On January 31 , 1781 , Greene and Morgan left the Catawba River defenses in the hands of militia General William Lee Davidson , and rode towards Salisbury to establish a rallying point . The Continental force crossed the Catawba River ahead of Cornwallis ' army , and followed Davidson and Morgan to the rallying point . At Cowan 's Ford on February 1 , 1781 , a force of Patriot militia commanded directly by Davidson held back the British Army for a period of time , and slowed their crossing of the Catawba River . Davidson 's militia inflicted numerous casualties before withdrawing towards the rally point . Davidson was killed in the battle at the ford , leaving the surviving militia temporarily without effective strategic command .

= = Battle and aftermath = =

= = = Date of the engagement = = =

Confusion exists over the exact date of the Battle of Torrence 's Tavern ; official North Carolina historical sources often cite February 2 as the date , but Tarleton 's memoirs indicate that the engagement occurred at two o 'clock in the afternoon of February 1 , after the early @-@ morning confrontation at Cowan 's Ford .

= = = Tarleton 's pursuit of the militia = = =

Cornwallis , whose army took a longer amount of time to cross the Catawba , wanted to prevent

Greene 's forces from withdrawing quickly and being able to regroup , and so he ordered Colonel Tarleton , the commander of the British Legion , to pursue the militia formerly commanded by Davidson . After the engagement at Cowan 's Ford , citizens between the Catawba and Yadkin rivers who were sympathetic to the Patriots became panicked , and many fled their homes with whatever valuables they could pack in a short period of time .

Tarleton 's British Legion was a force that contained infantry , cavalry , and artillery units , but Tarleton was forced to take only his mounted soldiers with him due to heavy rains in the area . Upon nearing the site of what Tarleton labelled " Tarrant 's Tavern " , the British commander gained information that led him to believe the militia ahead were unprepared for any engagement , and were waiting on reinforcements from Mecklenburg and Rowan county militias . At the time of the battle , Torrence 's Tavern sat on a roadway that ran from Beatty 's and Cowan 's fords on the Catawba directly to Salisbury . Additionally , the same rain that forced Tarleton to shed his foot @-@ soldiers had rendered much of the militia 's gunpowder supply useless . Refugees with Patriot sympathies who had fled in advance of Cornwallis ' army had also used Torrence 's Tavern as a rendezvous point , and a large number of both militiamen and refugees consumed alcohol from the tavern 's stores .

= = = Assault of the British Legion = = =

Despite lacking support from Cornwallis ' main army , Tarleton 's cavalry struck immediately upon arriving at the scene , charging into the militia 's makeshift camp . At the first sign of the British approach , the Patriots attempted to organize a defense under the ad hoc command of Captain Nathaniel M. Martin , who tried to rally the militia to a line behind a nearby rail fence . There is also evidence that Col. Thomas Farmer and some 300 militia were stationed at the tavern as a secondary defensive line . Tarleton claimed to have led the charge by reminding his cavalymen to " remember the Cowpens " . The British won in a quick and convincing fashion , dispersing the outnumbered militia units before they managed to complete their rally . Martin was captured in the first few moments of the battle , thereafter leaving the Patriots without any effective tactical command . With Patriot forces under the effects of such confusion , Tarleton divided his dragoons into smaller parties , ordering them to chase and further disburse the militia from the area .

While the battle was a minor engagement , the defense provided some additional time for Greene 's main army of regulars to cross the Yadkin River without harassment near Salisbury , which allowed that force to regroup and resupply . At the time of the skirmish , Greene was at a farm owned by David Carr (sometimes attributed as " Cain ") , approximately 6 miles (9 @.@ 7 km) from the tavern . Carr 's farm had been set as a secondary rendezvous point for the Patriot militia , but none of the expected units rallied to that location following the Torrence 's Tavern engagement . Upon reaching Salisbury after the loss , and finding nearly 1 @, @ 700 stands of muskets rusted and in useless condition , Greene reportedly exclaimed " These are the happy effects of defending the Country with Militia from which the good Lord deliver us ! " The tavern that stood at the location of the battle was burned to the ground the day after the engagement by the main British army , as it had been operated by the widow of a Patriot militiaman killed at the Battle of Ramsour 's Mill .

= = Legacy = =

The battle 's impact on the American Revolutionary War in the southern theater was minor , but the failure of Patriot militia to significantly stall Cornwallis at Cowan 's Ford and Torrence 's Tavern caused Greene to hasten his retreat towards his ultimate goal , Guilford Courthouse , where he determined to rendezvous with a detached force under the command of Isaac Huger . The total impact of Torrence 's Tavern alone , however , has been rated as especially minor , since the Continental Army force commanded by Greene managed to escape Cornwallis ' advance regardless of the short engagement 's outcome , and given the more substantial delay to the British caused by the defense at Cowan 's Ford the previous day .

John Buchanan , an American historian and archivist , postulated that at most , Torrence 's Tavern

discouraged further militia turnout among North Carolinians of fighting age , noting , however , that turnout had previously been very low in that state . Buchanan went so far as to state that " had Tarleton not lived to write his history of the campaign Torrence 's Tavern probably would have merited at most a footnote . " Cornwallis , however , wrote to George Germain , 1st Viscount Sackville about the engagements of February 1 ? 2 , 1781 , and stated that " this stroke , with our passage of the ford , so effectively dispirited the militia , that we met with no further opposition on our march to the Yadkin . "

A Daughters of the American Revolution stone marker was placed near the battle site in 1914 , marking the site of the tavern and commemorating the members of nearby Centre Presbyterian Church who had fought in the war . In 1939 , the State of North Carolina placed a Historical marker on the south @-@ bound shoulder of N.C. Highway 115 in Mount Mourne marking the approximate location of the battle .