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Military Sites Program Follows in the Footsteps of Lieutenant Anthony Allaire

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By Steven D. Smith

Anthony Allaire was a lieutenant in the Loyal American Regiment and attached to Major Patrick Ferguson's Corps during the American Revolution. Allaire kept a diary of his march with the Corps through South Carolina to Kings Mountain, where Ferguson was killed and Allaire was captured. Through a series of unrelated contracts and grants in 2004, James Legg and myself of the Institute's Military Sites Program have found ourselves along following Allaire's route, conducting archaeological research into Revolutionary War battlefields and camps.

Ferguson's Corps marched out of Savannah on Sunday, March 5, 1780. On Monday, the 13th, Allaire wrote that "We took up our ground at dusk, at Coosawhatchie Bridge, where the Rebels opposed our troops last May and got defeated." In the fall of 2004, the Lowcountry Council of Governments (LCOG), Yemassee, South Carolina, provided funds to the Military Sites Program for locating the Coosawhatchie battlefield, at Coosawhatchie, and Revolutionary War Fort Balfour at Pocataligo. This effort was in support of the LCOG's on-going development of a "Lowcountry Revolutionary War Trail," a 22.5 mile scenic and historic trail through Beaufort, Colleton, Hampton, and Jasper counties, highlighting events and sites associated with the American Revolution. The specific goal of the project was to conduct an archaeological survey to locate artifacts or features that were associated with the two sites, thereby confirming their precise physical location.

The Battle of Cooswahatchie was fought on May 3, 1779. With the continuing stalemate in the north, the British decided to turn to the southern colonies in hopes that loyalists there would support the effort to suppress the revolution. In December 1778, the British entered Georgia and fought a number of battles there. In early 1779, the Americans under General Benjamin Lincoln advanced against Augusta, leaving British Major General Augustine Prevost an opening to move against Charleston by crossing the Savannah River. Opposing him was General William Moultrie with two Continental Regiments. Moultrie was camped at Tullifinny Hill in present day Jasper County, with Colonel John Laurens at Coosawhatchie—the same location as modern day Coosawhatchie. Laurens, against orders, crossed the river and skirmished with the advancing British, numbering some 2,400 men. He was quickly forced back across the river and back to Tullifiny Hill. After the battle, morale was so low General Moultrie decided to retreat toward Charleston.

Our efforts to find the battlefield were not successful. Several days of metal detecting determined that development of the town after the battle and fill along the banks have obliterated the battlefield. The closest the team came to finding anything was at a two-acre field along a ridge line in the town that was the likely location of the initial British skirmish line. Civil War artifacts and a 19th century house site were found, but nothing from the Revolutionary War.

The effort to find Fort Balfour was more successful. The exact construction date of Fort Balfour has not been determined, but it was probably after British Lord Balfour became commandant at Charleston in the fall of 1780. In April of 1781, Colonel William Harden was detached by Francis Marion with about 70 or 80 men to operate against the British south of Charleston. They captured a post at Red Hill near the present day Saltketcher Bridge on Highway 17. They then proceeded south to the bridge where they skirmished against British cavalry. On April 14, they pressed south along or near present day U.S. 17 to Pocataligo, where Fort Balfour was located. Harden was able to convince the fort's occupants that he had enough men to take the fort, and loyalists inside the fort surrendered. Two British officers had been captured at a nearby tavern a short time before.

Primary sources and maps related to Fort Balfour narrowed the search region to the one square-mile area around the modern location known as Pocataligo. This area can be defined as from Pocataligo Creek Bridge east to the intersection of U.S. 21 and U.S. 17, and on both sides of that road. Today, the road is a four lane highway, and it is obvious that this modern road has taken out many historic features. Based on the

historic accounts, the location with the greatest potential was near the Pocataligo River. There the fort could have covered the river, the road, and the intersection. A Family Worship Center is located there today. However, beside the center was a wooded area of about one acre. This area has had not only modern disturbances, including abandoned cars, but was also greatly disturbed by Civil War activities. The Confederate Army constructed an extensive network of batteries and lines in the area to protect the Charleston to Savannah Railroad. Today, remnants of these lines still exist on both sides of the modern highway. As a result of a thorough metal detecting survey, a number of Civil War period minie balls and other artifacts were recovered. The Civil War military artifacts were quite interesting to the survey team, but were not the goal of the project. However, the team also found two unfired musket balls used in the British Brown Bess musket, two smaller balls (one unfired, one fired) either for an 18th century pistol or rifle, a carved musket ball of unknown caliber, and an English King George (either II or III) half-penny. While the recovery of these Revolutionary War artifacts is not 100% proof that we have found Fort Balfour, the combined historical, map, and archaeological evidence strongly points to this area being the location of the fort. The musket balls and English half penny were very likely to have been lost or fired during the fort's occupation by the British. Most likely, the exact location of the fort is the church property or underneath the modern four-lane highway. If so, it must be said that modern development cannot be totally blamed for the fort's loss, as the extensive Confederate earthworks probably destroyed the archaeological remains of the fort long before modern construction.

Back in March 1780, Lieut. Allaire and Ferguson's Corps left Coosawatchie and marched for Charleston. They marched to the

Fig. 1: James Legg drawing profile of Fort Motte ditch. (*SCIAA photo by Steven D. Smith)*

Saltketcher, and most likely passed by where Fort Balfour would be built. Once on the outskirts of Charleston they participated in its capture in May 1780. In early June, they started north into the backcountry. For four days they camped at Colonel William Thompson's plantation, called Belleville, near the strategic ferry crossing at McCord's Ferry on the Congaree. Thompson's Belleville plantation house was later fortified by the British and in February of 1781, Colonel Thomas Sumter, the Gamecock, attempted to capture the fort. He failed, but only a month later, the British abandoned Belleville and moved their post about a mile north to Rebecca Motte's house, and built Fort Motte.

The Military Sites Program has conducted investigations at both sites. In August of 2002, I conducted a site visit and documentation of Belleville for the American Battlefield Protection Program's (ABPP) Revolutionary War Study. The exact location of the fort is not known but two artifact scatters provide some evidence of its general location. Meanwhile, in the fall of 2004, James Legg and I conducted a metal detecting survey and excavations at Fort Motte, again funded by the ABPP.

Fort Motte was the plantation home of Mrs. Rebecca Motte, fortified by the British in the spring of 1781 after they abandoned Belleville. Forts Balfour, Belleville, and Motte were in fact, all plantation homes, fortified as British posts. Located on a high prominence overlooking the Congaree River, Fort Motte served, like Belleville, as a depot for British supply convoys between Charleston and Ninety Six or Camden. Fort Motte consisted of Mrs. Motte's home, surrounded by a deep ditch and parapet. Americans under the command of Brigadier General Francis Marion, the Swamp Fox, and Lieutenant Colonel Henry Lee lay siege to the fort from May 6, 1781 until May 12 when the fort was captured. The site is famous for its history and legends, including stories of the gallantry of Mrs. Motte, who supposedly provided the arrows to set fire to the house in order to get the British to surrender. The siege was significant as part of the summer of 1781 American offensive that broke the British hold on the backcountry.

The archaeological work included a systematic metal detector survey to locate the camps and plantation features. The survey discovered many musket and rifle balls indicating the firing positions of both sides. The entire fort was also found and recorded. A series of trenches were excavated across the fort site that revealed the seven-foot deep ditch that surrounded the house. James Legg excavated a 1.5 meter-wide trench across the ditch to draw a profile (Fig. 1). There were numerous other features inside the fort ditch that promise exciting future excavations. Beyond the fort, the metal detector survey discovered several sites that appear to be the firing positions of American soldiers and possibly Colonel Henry Lee's camp. The site is a treasure of information, and it is hoped that I will be able to return.

During those June days in 1780 when Ferguson's Corps camped at Belleville, no one knew that so much warfare would occur there only a year later. The Corps continued to march north up to Congaree Stores (West Columbia), and Ninety Six. Eventually, the Corps would march into North Carolina and camp at Gilbert Town (near Rutherfordton for several days in late September. While sending out patrols through the surrounding area, Major Ferguson proclaimed to the Overmountain men that if they did not come in to surrender, he would march over the mountains and hang them. This did not sit well with the Overmountain men, who gathered at Sycamore Shoals and, crossing the mountains themselves, came after Ferguson. Eventually, the Corps was surrounded at Kings Mountain, South Carolina, and suffered a major defeat; Patrick Ferguson was killed. Allaire was captured but, after being marched to Gilbert Town again, he later escaped to make his way to Charleston.

During the summer of 2004, the Military Sites Program was awarded another ABPP grant to assist Thomason and Associates, Inc. in an archaeological survey to prepare a National Register nomination for Gilbert town. With the help of a local relic collector, Mr. Dale Williams, the team was able to locate several archaeological sites associated with Gilbert Town including the probable site of the tavern, a cemetery, and several outbuildings. But certainly the most exciting site found was Ferguson's camp. The camp was not located where one would first believe. Interestingly, the camp was located on the hill side opposite hill to Gilbert Town, and on a fairly steep slope, reminiscent of the topography at Kings Mountain. It would appear that Ferguson chose hillsides as his campsite of choice, which may have offered protection from enemies and if we may be permitted, perhaps was reminiscent of his Scottish homeland. While there was no intention of following in the footsteps of Lieutenant Anthony Allaire over the last year, the Military Sites Program hopes that future opportunities will allow us to, again, cross his path.