

Carlyle House

DOCENT DISPATCH

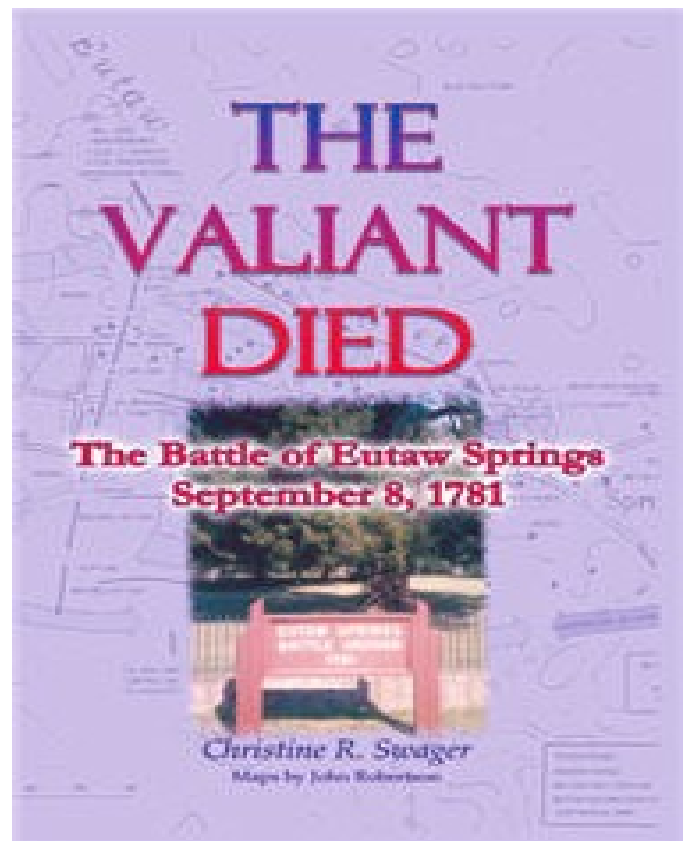
Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority 

September 2007

The Valiant Died: the Battle of Eutaw Springs, September 8, 1781, A Book Review

by Mark Hill

The title of this book—“*The Valiant Died*”—is a fitting description of the Revolutionary War experience of George William Carlyle, the only son of Col. John Carlyle. Two hundred and twenty-six years ago this month, George William met his untimely end during the Battle of Eutaw Springs. The battle was the last major military engagement before the Patriot victory at Yorktown, which effectively “sealed the deal” for the thirteen colonies to become independent from Britain. At the time of the Battle of Eutaw Springs, George William Carlyle was only fifteen years old, had within the prior year inherited most of his father’s wealth and was likely to continue along a path of wealth and social prominence similar to that of his father’s. As the Revolutionary War disrupted any chance of an education in England (such education was expected of a young man of his social stature), he answered the call to arms by volunteering as a cadet in the American forces fighting in the Carolinas and Georgia (i.e., the “Southern Campaign”) led by General Nathanael Greene, George Washington’s hand-picked commander for forces in this theater. In joining the ranks of the American forces, George William traveled from Virginia to South Carolina with important papers for General Greene from military leaders fighting in Virginia, including the Marquis de Lafayette. Young Mr. Carlyle was only with the Southern Campaign forces for a month and a half. In what was to be his first and last battle, he was killed at Eutaw Springs most likely when charging a British stronghold as a cavalryman with the 3rd Continental Light Dragoons commanded by Lt. Col. William Washington. (For a more in-depth view into George William Carlyle and his role in the



Revolutionary War/Battle of Eutaw Springs, please see the July/August 2004 Docent Dispatch and the Spring-Summer 2006 Carlyle Connection newsletter.)

CARLYLE HOUSE

Mary Ruth Coleman, Director
Jim Bartlinski, Curator



The author of *The Valiant Died*, Christine Swager, has written several books on military matters taking place in the Carolinas during the Revolutionary War. She has done an excellent job in presenting basic information that sets the stage for the Battle of Eutaw Springs and the military engagements that transpired in the Southern Campaign leading up to this Battle. It is a short book (about 160 pages, including 35 pages of maps) and is really well-tailored for those who may not be too familiar with the Revolutionary War, particularly the Southern Campaign of 1780-81. The author starts from the beginning of the North American colonial conflict with a brief summary of the Revolutionary War engagements (and underlying American and British governmental strategies) that took place in the North (1775-1778). Swager then launches into a more detailed summary of the British plan and American counter-plan with respect to the Southern Campaign, as well as the major military engagements that were fought in the South leading up to Eutaw Springs, e.g., King's Mountain (October 1780), Cowpens (January 1781), Race to the Dan (February 1781), Guilford Courthouse (March 1781), Hobkirk's Hill (April 1781), Ninety-Six (June 1781), and various partisan attacks on British forts and outposts led by 'Light Horse Harry' Lee (father of Robert E. Lee) and Francis Marion (the "Swamp Fox"). The book includes several maps providing the reader a good collection of reference points related to these battles of the Southern Campaign. Swager also provides significant discussion on the preparation General Greene makes immediately before the Battle, including his attempts to increase his troop numbers, as well as resting and revitalizing his forces given the prior months' grueling campaigns that took place during the South Carolina summer.

In addition to her discussion of events preceding Eutaw Springs, Swager provides a comprehensive description of the military regiments of both sides, American and British, as well as their commanders. Such description is very helpful, especially to the reader who has little knowledge of Revolutionary War-era military regiments. The author provides a straightforward, but ample, description of each unit that was engaged in the Battle of Eutaw Springs, as

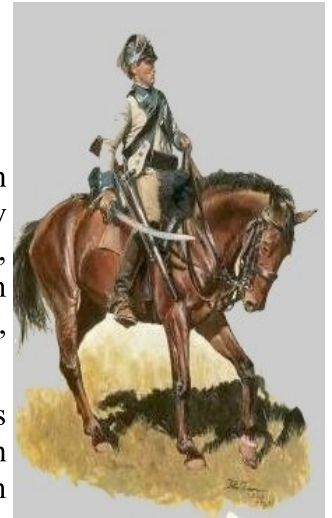
*3rd Continental Light
Dragoons,
Don Troiani. 2005*

well as basic information on the categories of military regiments involved (e.g., Continental Army, British Regulars, Patriot Militia, Loyalist Regiments).

Swager also addresses the impact of the Battle on both the British forces in Charleston and the American forces in the Carolinas. She observantly sets forth the key outcome of the Battle—the British would never again venture out of Charles Town (what we know today as Charleston, SC) for any significant military maneuvers. Eutaw Springs basically provided the “final nail” quelling any designs or plans of the British to succeed in retaining the southern colonies of Georgia and North and South Carolina.

Notwithstanding the very positive aspects of this book, there are some gaps that could have been filled. By nature of the book's title—*The Valiant Died: The Battle of Eutaw Springs*, one would expect a thorough and detailed account of the actual Battle; however, only a few pages are devoted to such description. While other parts of the book do describe the army units involved for both sides (as noted above) and provide a fairly detailed account of events, including troop movements, leading up to the Battle, the amount of material specific to the course of this engagement is a bit light, especially given that this book is presented as a book on the Battle of Eutaw Springs. There are several subject areas that could have been expounded within this book, including:

- ◆ the ill-fated charge of William Washington's 3rd Continental Light Dragoons (through which George William was killed);
- ◆ the hand-to-hand combat that took place in several instances of the Battle;
- ◆ how the British beat back the American charge toward the end of the Battle, thus effectively securing at least a draw on the field of





Engraving of the British experience at Eutaw Springs. From the original Chappel painting by Johnson, Frey & Co., New York. 1859.

engagement. Such expansion would serve to emphasize the *valiant* efforts of those who fought this Battle (and, for some, those who *died*).

Another item that was not discussed in this book (as well as several other books on the Southern Campaign) pertains to the potential role of deserters, both American and British, in this Battle. Both General Greene and his adjutant-general, Otho Williams, in their post-Battle writings, make reference to men on both sides having previously fought for the other side before this Battle. This is an area that requires further research as it is unclear to what extent did deserters (from both sides) populate the ranks of the military units that participated in this Battle. In addition, the author should have emphasized how bloody this Battle was—with a 25% casualty rate (killed or wounded) for both sides, this was the bloodiest in the Southern Campaign.

In summary, the book is a very good basic read for those with an interest in how the British were defeated in the South during the Revolutionary War; but it could have incorporated more detail about the Battle for which it is named. Some resources as “gap-fillers” for the book include:

- ◆ The account of Eutaw Springs furnished by Col. Otho Williams (adjutant to General

Greene) shortly after the Battle. This account provides much detail on the movements of the regiments during the course of this military engagement, including those of William Washington’s cavalry (George William Carlyle’s regiment). *Documentary History of the American Revolution*, R.W. Gibbes, M.D., 1853, p. 144-158.

- ◆ The account of Eutaw Springs furnished by General Greene shortly after the Battle. *Documentary History of the American Revolution*, R.W. Gibbes, M.D., 1853, p. 141-144.
- ◆ The account of the Battle of Eutaw Springs provided by ‘Light Horse Harry’ Lee in 1812, as edited by his son, Robert E. Lee, in 1869. Similar to Col. Otho Williams’ account, Lee provides much detail on the movements of the regiments during the course of this military engagement, including those of William Washington’s cavalry. *The Revolutionary War Memoirs of General Henry Lee*, Henry Lee, edited by R. E. Lee, 1869, p. 462-478.
- ◆ Although not as detailed as the accounts provided by the above participants of the Battle of Eutaw Springs, Henry Lumpkin’s piece on Eutaw Springs succinctly addresses most of the activity that took place during the Battle. *From Savannah to Yorktown: The American Revolution in the South*, Henry Lumpkin, 1981, p. 212-221.

The Staff would like to thank Mark Hill for his many hours of research dedicated to George William Carlyle’s military service. For other articles he has written about Eutaw Springs, refer to the Docent Dispatch for April 2005 and June 2006.

Troiani’s interpretation of the Continental Dragoons’ experience. 2007





The author of *The Valiant Died* took the title from a poem penned by Philip Freneau, a renowned Revolutionary War Poet. It reads, in part:



At Eutaw Springs the valiant died;
Their limbs with dust are covered o'er—
Weep on, ye Springs, your tearful tide;
How many heroes are no more!

If, in this wreck of ruin, they
Can yet be thought to claim the tear,
Oh, smite your gentle breast, and say,
The friends of freedom slumber here!

Now rest in peace, our patriot band;
Though far from Nature's limits thrown,
We trust they find a happier land,
A brighter sunshine of their own.

Additional Resources about the Battle of Eutaw Springs

- ◆ The National Park Service's website features several on-line exhibitions. The title is "National Park Service Museum Collections: American Revolutionary War." <http://www.nps.gov/history/museum/exhibits/revwar/inde/indeoverview.html>
- ◆ The website "Revolutionary War in the News" is an edited compilation of contemporary news articles related to the War. There is a section devoted to the French & Indian War, as well as military reenacting. <http://revolutionarywar.cloudworth.com/reenactment.php>
- ◆ The "Online Library of the Southern Campaign". <http://lib.jrshelby.com/>

Coming in October...

Building on Mark's review of *The Valiant Died: the Battle of Eutaw Springs*, Ann Calanni will review *Great Commanders: General Greene* for the October newsletter. It will be interesting to explore the approaches these two books—written over 100 years apart—take when describing the same battle from different perspectives. Both books are available in the Docent Library and the Museum Shop.

The Backsword: A Symbol of Duty

By Jim Bartlinski

Inventoried among Colonel John Carlyle's possessions in November 1780 are four styles of blades; a small sword, cuteaux, mourning sword, and backsword. The backsword may have been a relic from Carlyle's military service and he would have been very familiar with its use. The backsword was so named because it has only one cutting edge. The non-cutting edge (the back of the blade) is much thicker than the cutting edge thus creating a "wedge" type shape which is said to increase the weapons strength.

By the end of the 18th-century the skill of the backsword was considered the accepted fencing art in England and Scotland. In 1747 Captain John Godfrey of London published his work, *A Treatise Upon The Useful Science of Defence*. It can be concluded from Captain Godfrey's work that he held the backsword in high esteem. Godfrey was under the opinion that all British subjects should maintain the skill in the use of the backsword, as well as boxing, as these were the skills that developed "national character."

In Captain Godfrey's *Treatise*, he explained his preference for the backsword when he argued: "I must take notice of the superiority the Back-Sword has over the Small, in point of Use. Indeed as we cannot put a Stop to the natural Passions of Mankind, which, according to their Constitution and Temperament, more or less excite them to Mischief, [...] It is therefore requisite to learn the Small-Sword, in order to guard against the Attempts of that Man, with whose brutal Ferocity no Reason will prevail [...] It is therefore that the Small-Sword, in point of true Reason, is not necessary; it is only a subservient Instrument to our Passions. This is viewing it in the tenderest Light; but I fear it oftener proves, proportionably to its Practice, an Incentive and Encouragement to Mischief [...] But the Back-Sword, sure, must be distinguished from the other, because it is as necessary in the Army, as the other is mischievous in Quarrels, and deadly in Duels. The Small-Sword is the Call of Honour, the Back-Sword the Call of Duty."

The reproduction basket-hilt backsword that the museum has acquired is patterned after one from



about 1760 in the collection of the Royal Armouries in England. This particular backsword, now on display in the Colonel's study, has an unusual basket-hilt with twin engraved "horned beastie" plaques and a blade with twin fullers running most of its length. "Fullers" are rounded or beveled grooves on the flat side of a blade. Their purpose is to make a blade stronger and more durable at the core without reducing the strength or flexibility of the edges. Early Scottish highland swords customarily carried the double-edged broadsword blade, but by the time of the Battle of Culloden (1746) the single-edged backsword was at least equal in popularity. Although the blade of the original bears the "Andrea Ferara" name, it is unlikely that it was made by this renowned Spanish swordsmith, as many good quality blades of the period were so marked (in various spellings), irrespective of the actual maker.

The acquisition of this reproduction basket-hilt backsword brings the museum one step closer to completing Carlyle's 1780 inventory. The backsword will serve as an interpretive tool to provide visitors with a visual representation of Colonel John Carlyle's military service during both the French and Indian War and American Revolution.

Description: The grip is wire-wrapped rayskin and the basket liner is of felt-covered leather. Blade Length: 32 1/2", Handle Length: 6 1/2", Overall Length: 39". Weight: 2lbs. 9oz., Thickness: .210".

*Reproduction Basket-Hilt
Backsword, c. 1760*

Correction in Docent Manual

While investigating conflicting reports of John Carlyle Herbert's birth date, it was discovered that the reference to Sarah Carlyle's marriage in the Chronology of Carlyle's Life section of the docent manual is incorrect. Currently, it states that she and William Herbert married sometime prior to 1777, when their first child was born. After investigating Dr. Munson's references a little more closely, it is clear that Sarah Carlyle married William Herbert (b. 1745-1819) sometime prior to 1776, most likely in mid-1775. In a letter to a Miss Ramsay, dated December 30, 1775, Martha

Washington sends her compliments to several Alexandrians, including "Mrs. Herbert." Sarah and William's first child, John Carlyle Herbert, was born in August, 1776 (inconclusive evidence as to specific date). This information, according to Munson, can be inferred from a June 21, 1776 letter from George Johnston, Jr. to Betty Ramsay asking "Has my old friend Mrs. Herbert grandfathered the old Colonel?" Part of the confusion arises from a discrepancy between the family genealogy compiled by Donald Whyte and Beth Sundquist, which dates J.C. Herbert's birth in 1777, and a biography of members of the U.S. House of Representatives, which dates his birth as 1775. Please update your Docent Manuals and tours accordingly.

Fruits of Our Labors

Temple Hall Farm, a fellow property of the NVRPA, is a living farm museum that teaches visitors about the agricultural history of Loudoun County. They are expanding the impact of their programs by harvesting the fruits of their own farm and making them available to Northern Virginia's residents.



Currently, Temple Hall is home to a sizable flock of Shropshire sheep. The sheep's woolly coats have been sheared and spun into beautiful, spongy, warm yarn, perfect for knitting any variety of projects. Solitude Wool of Round Hill, Virginia is a small-batch artisan collaborative that supports local farming by paying a fair price for wool from local sheep. Each breed-specific yarn is designed to emphasize the type of wool from that breed of sheep. Shropshire is a down-type wool that has resilience and elasticity.

November 10, 2007

Muster Day-1781: George William Carlyle Joins the Fairfax County Militia
10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
\$Admission

New Event

To commemorate Veterans' Day, re-enactors from the 2nd Virginia Regiment will be portraying members of the *Fairfax County Militia*. The militia is camped on the grounds of the Carlyle House to muster into service the 14 year old son of the recently deceased John Carlyle. Visitors may enjoy weapons demonstrations and military drill.