**Robert Patterson (1763 to 1848)**

**Soldier of the American Revolution & Frontier Indian Wars, Pioneer and First Citizen of Hamilton County Tennessee**

**Robert Patterson was born 1764, Mecklenburg, North Carolina. At age 15 he enroll in the Mecklenburg militia as part of the Salisbury District Brigade in 1779. Robert was soon on the march under the command of** Brig. Gen. Griffith Rutherford the commander of the Salisbury District Brigade of Militia. BG Rutherford marched with his brigade to the Savannah River, in Georgia to aid Maj. Gen. Benjamin Lincoln’s effort to expel the British from Georgia.

Later, North Carolina records note that Robert Patterson, of the Mecklenburg County Regiment was serving as a Lieutenant under Capt. William Gardner in 1781.

SO….what was Robert doing from 1779 to 1781? And how does a teenager become a county militia Lieutenant?

The Lieutenant of many militia companies at this time in the war was often a younger man who had real experience in action or campaigning. Often the older men of a company would have elected him to the position; they would all know him and most likely have been his neighbors. Robert had probably served in Capt. William Gardner’s company from the day he enrolled as was the custom at the time. Captain William Gardner’s company served as part of the North Carolina Light Dragoon Regiment under Col. François De Malmedy and later as part of Major William Richardson Davie’s Independent Corps of Light Horse.

The “Light Dragoons” were mostly mounted militiamen who mostly fought on foot. After the war, Major George Hanger an officer in Cornwallis’ command described this type of fighting in an address to the Army, he wrote: "The crackers and militia in those parts of America are all mounted on horseback, which renders it totally impossible to force them to an engagement with infantry only. When they chuse to fight, they dismount and fasten their horses to fences and rails, but if not very confident in the superiority of their numbers, they remain on horseback, give their fire, and retreat, which renders it useless to attack them without cavalry; for though you repulse them and drive them from the field, you can never improve the advantage, or do them material detriment."

While part of the NC Light Dragoons Robert probably participated in the Battle of Stono Ferry, SC on 20 JUN 1779, then his command was detached from the garrison of Charleston to guard the lines of communications between Charleston and other key areas such as the Waxhaws where many of the men of the unit would have been from. This mission allowed most of the unit to escape capture at the fall of Chaleston. **The Siege of Charleston 28 March to 12 May 1780**.

After the fall of Charlestown, Major William Richardson Davie was given command of his own Independent Corps of Light Horse with the mission to harass British communications between their posts at Hanging Rock and Camden. Captain William Gardner’s company with Robert Patterson would serve as part of Major William Richardson Davie’s Independent Corps of Light Horse.

Davie’s command was soon in action at: **FLAT ROCK, SC 20 JUL 1780 and Beaver Creek Ford, SC 20 JUL 1780**. **The command returned to their Waxhaws camp after these actions.** On July 28th, Col. Sumter broke camp and headed towards Major William Richardson Davie's (NC) camp in the Waxhaws. The Waxhaw Meeting House had become a hospital for the eighty (80) wounded survivors of Buford's Massacre. Since it was located between the two opposing armies it was unable to get any proper medical support and survived due to the assistance of the Patriots. Col. Sumter asked Major William Richardson Davie to join his forces and asked him to stage a diversionary attack on Hanging Rock while Sumter would be attacking Rocky Mount. On July 29th, Col. Sumter's army received "double rations and a suitable supply of ammunition" and began their march south to Rocky Mount. Major Davie's North Carolina militia marched down the east side of the Catawba River "to place himself between the British posts at Hanging Rock and Rocky Mount."

**Hanging Rock, SC 30 JUL 1780 & 06 AUG 1780**.

**On July 30th**, Major William Richardson Davie and his North Carolina Patriot force ambushed three companies of Col. Samuel Bryan's North Carolina Royalists. The ambush was located within sight of the strong British post at Hanging Rock. Most of the Loyalists were killed or wounded. After capturing all of the weapons and horses of the Loyalists, Major Davie withdrew with his force. The British garrison at Hanging Rock was too startled by the sudden attack to intervene on behalf of the Loyalists.

Major Davie's mounted riflemen, who came from the same background as the Loyalists, were dressed roughly the same, so he sent them casually toward the house. They rode unchallenged past the Loyalist sentinels, dismounted in a lane near the buildings, and opened fire.

The Loyalists fled toward the other end of the lane, but Major Davie had sent his dragoons on a circular path through the woods in anticipation. Cut off at both ends, the Loyalists tried the middle, but Major Davie also predicted that move and sent a small number of dragoons to close that escape route.

The Loyalists were cut to pieces within sight of their companions in the main camp. Before relief could be organized, Major Davie's troops remounted and withdrew from the scene. Loyalist casualties are not recorded. Major Davie did not lose a man.

**On August 5**, the Wading Rock - a directional marker the Catawbas had taught to the settlers - was visible in the Catawba River shoals.

With the water down, the 600 Patriot soldiers made plans to attack British soldiers again at Hanging Rock. They marched to the encampment about two miles south of Heath Springs near the battle site along Hanging Rock Creek. The British troops were surprised and overrun in about four hours. Many did not survive and losses were estimated at 350 men. Others were wounded, captured and taken prisoner.

The Americans were successful in making the British abandon the Hanging Rock outpost and took many supplies, but it's seen as an indecisive victory because Sumter, Davie, and their men withdrew.

Lyman C. Draper wrote, "Cornwallis was heard to say that no battle fell heavier on the British, condsidering the numbers engaged, the battle of Bunker Hill excepted." The Prince of Wales Regiment was no longer considered an effective fighting force, having been virtually wiped out. The British Legion had sixty-two of their men killed and wounded. Many of the Loyalists militia simply fled from the field.

The British prisoners and wounded were taken to Charlotte to keep them out of striking distance of the British Regulars.

**Camden 16 AUG 1780**.

Brig. Gen. Griffith Rutherford led the Salisbury District Brigade of Militia in the Battle of Camden. Maj. Davies’ command is not listed as part of the Brigade’s units fighting at Camden and most likely had been given the duty of escorting the Prisoners to Charlotte; however, Captain Gardner’s company is given credit for being at Camden indicating the ability of the Light Dragoons to quickly task organize on the move between operations. After the defeat at the battle of Camden, Charlotte became the rendezvous point for the survivors and many refugees from South Carolina. Officers quickly attempted to mold what was left of the army into units then began a march to Salisbury.

The Mecklenburg County Militia units stayed behind to reorganize and harass the British.

**“Wahab’s” (Wauchope) Plantation, SC 21 SEP 1780**

On September 21, 1780, Col. William Richardson Davie led nine known companies of the recently-created NC State Cavalry-Western Division in a pre-emptive attack on about 350 enemy comprised of the British Legion Cavalry and the 71st Regiment of Foot (Fraser's Highlanders) at Wahab's Plantation very near the border between North Carolina and South Carolina.

Col. Davie surprised and routed them, though he cannot follow this up as it being too risky. At one point in the fighting some of the Loyalists were surrounded, Col. Davie's cavalry cut them down, being unable to take prisoners due to the proximity of the 71st Regiment under Lt. Col. Alexander McDonald. Col. Davie did, however, capture some arms (120 stand), and 96 horses, and with the new horses all of Col. Davie's men were now mounted.

Charlotte turned out to be a royal pain for Lt. General Charles, Lord Cornwallis. His army, as any at the time, required sustenance for their horses, and small foraging parties began sweeping the countryside in ever-widening circles, stripping it of all grain and grasses. Col. William Richardson Davie with considerable support from local Militia units constantly harassed the British occupiers, with an intense focus on these foraging parties. Riflemen also hid on the outskirts of Charlotte and took every target of opportunity that came their way.

Robert Patterson at this point in the war would have been considered one of the more active militiamen of the county’s regiment. He could have easily been detached to one of the six known companies to respond to the alarm and march on King’s Mountain.

**King’s Mountain 07 OCT 1780**. Mecklenburg County Regiment of Militia (NC) (probably attached to Lt. Col. Matthew Brandon) detachment of six (6) known companies, led by: Capt. Conrad Hise, Capt. James Ligert (aka Tigert), Capt. Magrath, Capt. James Reese, Capt. Thomas Shelby and Capt. Zaccheus Wilson (Captains are not listed as NC Light Dragoon Regiment company commanders).

The NC Light Dragoons participated in several actions during the campaign referred to as the “Race to the Dan”. Capt. Graham the regimental adjutant is most often noted as the commander of NC Light Dragoons in the following actions: **Trading Ford 03-04 FEB 1781. “Race to the Dan; Shallow Fords of the Yadkin 07 FEB 1781; Hart's Mill 17 FEB 1781; Clapp's Mill #1 04 March 1781; Clapp's Mill #2 05 March 1781 and The Battle of Whitesell's Mill 06 March 1781.** It is possible that Robert Patterson participated in most or all of these actions.

Brig. Gen. Griffith Rutherford who had been captured at Camden was exchanged in July of 1781. Upon his return home, he retook the reins of the Salisbury District Brigade of Militia and assembled a large Militia army to go force the British out of Wilmington, North Carolina. One of the subordinate commanders was Col. Robert Irwin whose command was part of the Wilmington campaign.

A Captain Patterson commanded a company under Col. Irwin. The records do not indicate a first name for Captain Patterson, but with Robert’s past experience as a Lt. it is most likely it is him. Additionally, No other Patterson is noted as being an officer at this time.

On October 15th, the Loyalists decided to make a stand on a hill near the Raft Swamp in what is present-day Robeson County (Cumberland at the time). This hill overlooked a causeway that emerged from the swamp. To slow down the Patriot cavalry, they removed the planks of the bridge. While they were preparing their defenses, Maj. Joseph Graham's dragoons surprised them and rode right into the swamp, not bothering to even use the bridge.

After the battle at Raft Swamp, Brigadier General Griffith Rutherford moved his growing army down the northeast side of the Cape Fear River towards Wilmington.

On November 15th, the divided Patriot army reunited not far from the British post just opposite Wilmington, known as the Brick House. This post consisted of a house, abatis, and about fifty (50) British soldiers. Many of Brigadier Genereal Rutherford's officers did not want to attack the "fort" but after traveling all that distance, most of the rank and file soldiers certainly did. The officers decided to attack against their better judgement.

In mid-November, Lt. Col. Henry "Light Horse Harry" Lee (of Virginia) arrived at Brigadier General Griffith Rutherford's camp and told him about the surrender of Lt. General Charles, Lord Cornwallis at Yorktown. Rutherford's camp erupted into joyous celebration and the men fired their guns into the air. On that same day, November 17th, the camp received more good news-the British under Maj. James H. Craig were evacuating Wilmington, after a ten-month occupation

As the troopships were just leaving the Cape Fear River, Brigadier General Griffith Rutherford marched his shrinking army into the town.

**In 1792, BG Griffith Rutherford moved to Sumner County, Tennessee; many of the men who had served under him followed him to Tennessee. Robert Patterson is noted in payroll records as an Ensign of the Knox County Regiment, Hamilton District Militia from 1792 to 1794. The Frontier was not settled and relations with the Cherokee flared into open warfare in 1793. It is possible that Robert Patterson participated in the Gen. Sevier’s 1793 Etowah campaign which resulted in the Battle of Hightower (also called Battle of Etowah Cliffs) part of the Cherokee–American wars. This particular battle took place at the Cherokee village of High Town (Itawayi), overlooking Downtown Rome, GA in the modern Floyd County, Georgia.**

**In 1794 Robert Patterson married Rhoda Witt in Knox County.**

**In 1798 Robert Patterson moved from Knox County to Rhea County.**

**In 1807 the Patterson’s moved to the Sale Creek area of what is now Hamilton County. He secured special permission from the Government and Cherokee Nation to live where he settled. He developed a mill which helped the Cherokee and built a small school which served the area white settler children. The school later doubled as one of the first churches in the area.**