

Battle of Camden, SC, 11/2/18-11/4/18

Troopers in attendance, riding: Boles, Steve; Crawley, Ron; Harrelson, Edward; Harrelson, Eric; Poston, Nathan; Tarver, Jesse; Withers, Dean

Distaff: Puckett, Chris; Tarver, Tiffany (w/ two children)

Guests: Matthew Henry (w/ two sons)

Some of our members have attended Camden in recent years, however, I believe this is the first time in many years that we have fielded more than a section on the field. We had Mt. Harmon rescheduled from September due to a hurricane (Florence) and then it was rescheduled to the weekend before Camden. Then, due to torrential rains on that weekend, Mt. Harmon was ultimately canceled. Camden falls on the same weekend as a WWI event at Neuville, PA, so we knew to expect some attrition. I am pleased that we had a decent turnout. Ron reminded me that it was at Camden in about 2003 (or 04?) that he, Dan and I first came to a Rev War event together to start determining how we could move from a War Between the States impression to a Revolutionary War impression. So, Camden is really the birthplace of the modern IIIrd Dragoons, followed by the Cowpens the following year. So, happy anniversary!

While Camden itself is very much a horsey town, we were pretty much confined to the premises of Historic Camden. Some of our members arrived Friday night to find our proposed campsite commandeered by militia. They made due by finding another small clump of trees. We were crowded on the picket line, and I don't think we could have fit one more horse in that spot. But, it worked out for us. Ron, Eric and I arrived Saturday morning. We carried most of our gear on horseback from the parking lot and our unit essentially went to drill around eleven when Jesse and Steve returned from the officer's meeting. (Typical, the officers meeting to plan the half hour battle scenario took about an hour).

Our drill both days was good. It was better on Sunday, as is typical. We had a reasonably large flat area to drill at the trot and canter. No holes of any consequence. We had Steve Boles lead some of the drill both days to let him get some familiarity with the commands.

Saturday's battle, we portrayed British Legion. All 7 took the field. We were deployed early in the battle (curiously, in the center of the line with men supposed to fire from behind us on either side). Then we were to retire and await an opportunity to charge toward the end of the battle. Notwithstanding a great deal of discussion in the morning, the battle plan went to crap pretty early. The British were frustrated that the Continentals did not do what they expected. The British left (militia) were supposed to bayonet charge the Patriot militia and we were supposed to charge in support and drive them from the field. Never happened. The British militia never did charge and the Patriot militia, who were out of ammo, eventually just walked away. (Here, I probably should have charged, but I was not at the meeting. The organizer pointed out the following morning that this was supposed to be a recreation of a portion of the battle, and thus, it was more of a play than a tactical. So, I guess I'm glad I didn't do something to screw up their battle. But, it was pretty lame for our

guys, and I regret that.) Since we basically only stood around during the battle, I was pleased that our troops were up for a hard afternoon drill. We worked the horses at the trot and canter, performing wheels and operating in two ranks for the better part of an hour.

Camden put on a feed for us with a catered barbecue, sweet potato hash, collards, slaw and dessert. Chris had made a Cajun rice dish, but it was shared with everyone. I understand it was very good, but it was gone by the time I went through the line. We received a visit by Neill Rose, daughter Sallie, and wife Jennifer. Neill rode with the IIInd SC Cavalry from around 1991. His son, Thomas, rode with us for some of the SCETV filming. We also met Oscar Floyd, a 19 year old farrier from Bishopville, who might have some interest in joining our group. Evening by the fire was pleasant, if a bit subdued from our usual revelry. Some of us were operating on very little sleep, and we turned in around midnight.

Sunday we were treated to a Scotch egg brunch after our morning drill. We chose to get up pretty early, drill first, eat and then Jesse and I went to the officer's meeting. After, we had a relaxing morning until time for the battle at 1:30 pm. (I do like having battles early in the day!). The Sunday scenario had us portraying the IIIrd Dragoons in a fictional battle. The US forces held a redoubt. Some foragers were "attacked" by the British. Additional British troops come on to battlefield and engage the redoubt. US horse and infantry attack British from the rear. Mayhem ensues.

So, that was the plan. The person who thought this up wanted our seven dragoons to charge around a line of British infantry, roughly 60 men at arms in three companies, who would defend against us with bayonets. They had a gun on each side of their line. I don't know if this ex-military guy thought our cavalry was like modern armor or something, but I could not see how or why a small troop of cavalry would attack prepared infantry. We did as we were told, more or less, opting to circle the combined forces once and then focus on the exposed guns and their crews. That actually proved more effective. The gun crews to their credit responded by running away. They did come out and start working their gun again, and we charged them a second time, maneuvering out of their line of fire to hit them from the rear.

We did have some trouble with our formations on the second day. There was a lot going on and some of the horses were either pulling back away from the action or charging hell for leather ahead of the line. Maintaining our lines is an area we will continue to work on. Our drill both days improved our line, but nothing compares to the smoke and roar of a mock battle to give horses a scare. Actually, one other thing is pretty good at scaring horses: drone strikes. I was almost tossed a couple of times when someone operating a drone flew over us. They sound a lot like a swarm of bees and my mount was ready to bolt.

I think everyone got home safe. Ron had received a call Sunday morning that two of his daughters were involved in a car accident. The youngest, Jennifer, was cause for more concern, and she was admitted to the hospital for several CAT scans, etc. Ultimately, though bruised and concussed, both she and Hunter were OK, as was the driver of their car, one of Hunter's friends. We wish them a speedy and full recovery.

Edward Harrelson