

Brattonsville tactical skirmish October 2018 AAR from the British side

By Chris Bopp

This is an attempt at a first person view of the fighting. Some of the events had to be changed so they would make sense such as the Saturday afternoon fight at Brattonsville followed by the evening battle. The afternoon fight in Brattonsville would have been the end of the British and the evening fight would have been the end of the Americans due to their dispersed elements being defeated in detail. This narrative has not been put together to say one side defeated the other but to try and make a somewhat sensible and cohesive story of the weekend's events. The worst part of the event to me was having to be separated from the rest of our Dragoons but it also meant that we were facing quality opponents! I'm also only writing about the events of Saturday since something strange happened that night and the British didn't really want to continue on Sunday morning. That gets into modern politics and dealing with the leaders' decisions but that is too much like my actual job so I stayed away from it and from the gossip! I enjoyed this event as a Private who was blissfully unaware of what was happening outside of his own powers of observation.

Having done a lot of these types of "tactical" events, I have plenty of ideas on how to improve a blank fire fight with no real winners or losers. Working on objectives for the sides, real time communication between opposing commanders, and some type of judges or rules for how long casualties are out of the fight would greatly improve the scenarios and allow each contact to make more sense. Face to face I would be happy to expound upon those but for now let it suffice to say that I still really enjoyed the event. Here is my account below:

Having arrived in vicinity of Bratton's Village late on the night of 5 October, we were ordered to rest. Some discussion was had with Lieutenant Carter concerning dispositions for the morning, the horses were watered, arms inspected, and then we were laid down to rest.

During the night, some wayward infantrymen straggled into camp and as complete a force as could be had was present for duty in the morning. After a breakfast of bread and cold beef, the command was assembled for drill, inspection, and the issuing of orders. Once complete, the Dragoons began a scout down a network of trails behind the plantation on which we had encamped. We initially went to the right and found a vantage point into an open field and after observing no activity for a period of time, went back to the network to overtake the column of infantry.

Once past the infantry, we led through an area of wooded trails that was best known for the size of its spiders and their webs strategically placed at the height of a Dragoon's face while riding. Most of the morning we scouted ahead, stopped to listen for enemy, allowed the column to catch up, and then we would continue to move. Our horses were full of spirit and wanted to move out briskly and did not like to stand still at any time during the march. We encountered a small stream with a small open field on the opposite side, a thin line of trees beyond that, and then a large open field beyond the trees. This small field with its relative cover and stream for water made an excellent point to rest the column. It proved to be fortunate for me since after stopping my horse shook and all the staples put in my saddle to hold equipment popped out. Apparently, the saddler who tried to convert a civilian riding saddle to a military configuration did a poor job. He must have had rebel

sympathies and was hoping this would happen after we were too far away to take action upon him for shoddy work! It was here that I put my sleeping blanket under my saddle and put the nose bag with brush and picket rope around me like wearing a second haversack.

We set out again but this time we left the wooded trails and skirted the edge of the large field. As I looked behind me, the column looked splendid with Jaegers in front followed by the Legion infantry and then the Fusiliers behind. Fortunately, we crossed the open area without incident and then were directed into a wood on our right. Once again we followed a trail and came to a small ridgeline that led into a creek bottom and back up to another higher ridgeline. Beyond the ridge we could see an open field when suddenly a militiaman fled up the ridgeline crying out, "HORSE!" Silently, our advance party turned and raced back to the column. Once there, the Jaegers were thrown forward in a skirmish line, the Legion moved to their right, and then the main British force followed in the center. I lost track of what happened to the infantry as we were placed on the far right of the line moving up the high ridge. Then, white coated Dragoons came down the ridge on a trail towards us, Bert fired his pistol at them and instantly both of our horses stopped fidgeting and became ready for action. That pistol shot also sparked the Jaegers to fire on the Dragoons and the battle began.

The Continental Dragoons withdrew along the trail they had entered and then militia entered the woods. Bert and I raced to the top of the ridge with pistols in hand to break into the open on the British right to then race along the wood line to our left to find the Dragoons that had withdrawn in that direction. Once we entered the field, wordlessly we returned pistols and drew our sabers. We rounded a corner of trees that jutted out to see one Dragoon 40 yards away. We instantly dashed upon him and cut him down before we saw two more Dragoons about 80 yards away come out of the woods. It was a hot fight back and forth before the Continentals withdrew. Bert and I entered the woods again to find our infantry and found a confusing swirl of forces. Bert moved down the hill to flank Americans on a trail while the Legion infantry held me up to point out militia moving in behind us from the open field. I heard Bert charge the Americans on the trail who had unloaded muskets and then I dashed into the open after the militia. True to militiamen, they turned tail like rabbits to flee. I cut three of them down before the last two dashed into the woods. My blood was up and I followed to finish them. However, as soon as I entered the woods I noticed blue coated Continentals so I quickly turned around to return to the field and find a way back to our forces. Once I made my way back, the fighting seemed to die off. It was a confusing swirl and difficult to tell who had bested whom. However, we had taken the ridge where the first Continental had been found so some might say we held the field.

Curiously, at the end of this fight, we were reinforced by a band of loyal militia. It was definitely noted that they did not join us before the action or even during, but waited until it was over before making their presence known and joining our force. After burying the dead and caring for the wounded as best we could, the column was reorganized and commenced movement to Bratton's Village. Our horses had now settled into the routine and were performing splendidly! It seemed that the action helped focus them as it did us. The movement to the village was uneventful as was our dispersal and movement to take the village. The local inhabitants were not overly friendly nor were they hostile to our presence. They merely seemed to tolerate our presence.

Partaking of some of their cooked food probably did not help our reception but it definitely helped us to regain some strength!

We took a brief rest to remove tack, rub down the horses, give them some water, and allow them to graze. Following that, I saddled my horse again while Bert's horse gave him a few problems. This delay on Bert's part kept him on foot for the next part of the action. Just as I was finishing adjusting my surcingle, I heard a shot and one of our militiamen came racing back into the village. I quickly mounted and waited to see if Bert would be ready to join me when Continentals came pouring into the village from the woods. Our infantry took up defensive positions in the house while the Jaegers were in the woods between the village and the school house. Not wanting to be left in the open against infantry, I joined the Jaegers in the woods. Once there, I noticed three American Dragoons moving around to join the attack on the village. With my blood boiling, I charged their flank but they saw me before I arrived. As they changed course to come at me, I slipped to my left before closing the ground which cause their two lead horses to bump each other and gave me free access to hit the trooper on their right. I continued around them and hit their last man from behind while the remaining trooper tried to join the attack on the village. I also rode him down from behind but only caught his back with a glancing blow before turning away because I was being drawn into the enemy infantry. After returning to the Jaegers, the fight seemed to die down. We cautiously advanced on the village to discover that our forces had held the main house and the Continentals had withdrawn. [Editor's note: I don't really know what happened in the village but I believe the Americans soundly defeated the British forces there before a break in the action was called so everyone could rest for a few hours. We got to enjoy spending some time with the rest of the Dragoons before both sides moved out for the evening fight. This narrative picks up in a way so that the entire story makes sense as though the British were not defeated.]

We departed the village in an attempt to discover from whence the Americans had come. After marching down a trail and over a causeway between a pond and the woods we halted at an intersection of trails. Bert and I were sent on a scout and had an enjoyable ride across challenging terrain. We skirted the pond, crossed ditches and thick woods before jumping a log to come out near Bratton's village. Once near the village we spotted the Continentals in the distance and we returned by a circuitous route to our force. Once there, we were held in an open field in the center of the British position as a mobile reserve to whatever part of the line was threatened. Initially we were sent to our right flank to be recalled to face Dragoons that were charging our center by coming across the causeway. The Jaegers were in position to empty several of their saddles and we dispatched the rider who made it through. Next, the memory is blurred by the number of times we raced from one flank to another to repel charges from small bands of Dragoons and to chase away small groups of infantry who seemed deathly afraid of Dragoons. At one point while we were on our right flank, one of our infantrymen pointed out Dragoons who were across a field riding away from us. We remained hidden in the trees watching them go over a rise before we cantered across the field in their tracks. Using the ground and limited foliage as cover, we maneuvered to where we thought they went and crested the rise. As soon as we came over, we spotted three Dragoons in single file riding away from where we were. Silently, we increased our pace and rode to the left side of their file. Once upon them, we slashed for all we were worth and dispatched the three before they even realized we were there! I almost took pity upon them as they didn't even have time to draw their swords before being cut down from behind. Now, with our blood at a boil, we returned

to our lines. It was here that we were sent to our doom. We were ordered to charge what was thought to be one or two men at the end of the causeway. Bert and I jumped our horses over the obstacle that had been placed on the causeway to go after the infantry. Unfortunately, my saddle slipped and rotated right after we landed the jump and I also lost my left stirrup. It took all my might to rein in my mount who was intent on completing our charge. As I did, I heard the sound of several muskets being fired at Bert. He turned and raced back to me while slumped over in his saddle. By this time, I had straightened out my saddle but still did not have my foot back in the stirrup. I got alongside Bert and we galloped back to our position. While side by side, we once again jumped the obstacle and got back into the center of our forces. It was here that I dismounted to fix my tack while our surgeon attended to Bert's wounds. Fortunately, both sides seemed to have culminated in their ability to attack at this point and the battle came to a close. [Editor's note: We had one more attempt by the American Dragoons to draw Bert and I into an ambush which we recognized in time to turn away and race back to our lines before getting close enough to the infantry for them to execute properly. After that, there was a strange clash in the open but neither of those actions allow the narrative to make sense so I left them out. This was also the time that the battle was called for the day.]

Following this clash and due to the time of day, our force was ordered back into Bratton's village to care for our wounded and seek shelter for the night. It really felt good to lie down for the night. I hope the next days are not as eventful to allow time to fully recover from all of the action and that Bert will be able to recover from being shot while attacking across the causeway...

This event was fun as it was and has a lot of potential to be even better. This is a great event for Dragoons and should be one for us to have maximum participation since we actually get to operate as Dragoons! It was very enjoyable and if it is done again, every member of our unit should make every effort to attend. The biggest disappointment to me was that we were forced to split our forces but it also gave extra emphasis on not being bested by our own friends! My many thanks are extended to Ed and Bert for commanding the Dragoons on each side and allowing me to participate. I had a great time and was thrilled with the performance of my horse. He just got better as the event went on and took challenging terrain in stride to include jumping obstacles without any hesitation (something I have not done much of in the past). I am excited to see what other events have in store for this unit.