

The Battle of Blackstock on November 20, 1780 gave British commander "Bloody" Banastre Tarleton his first taste of defeat at the hands of the Americans. British Commander, Lord Charles Cornwallis had sent his feared commander after Patriot General Thomas Sumter following his defeat of Captain James Wemyss at Fish Dam Ford on November 9, 1780. Cornwallis feared for the safety of the British garrison at Ninety-Six due to the proximity of Sumter's band of rebels reported to be in the area. Tarleton began the chase after Sumter on November 14, 1780. Sumter unaware of Tarleton's pursuit was planning to attack a British post held by Tory militia at William's Plantation north of Ninety Six.

Tarleton's scouts located Sumter on November 19th camped at Hawkins Mill on the Tyger River, and Tarleton took up pursuit moving along the Enoree River. Luckily for Sumter, a British deserter from the 63rd Foot revealed Tarleton's location, strength, and mission during the early morning hours of November 20th. Sumter now faced the hard decision of retreating or fighting. Sumter had 1,000 men to Tarleton's 520 men. However, Tarleton's men were all regulars trained in the art of military combat, while Sumter's men were mostly backcountry militia.

Tarleton's fierce fighting reputation dissuaded Sumter from retreating only to find his forces caught in a vulnerable position crossing a river. Instead, Sumter took the advice of Colonel Thomas Brandon, who was familiar with the area, to take a strong defensive stance at the farm of Captain William Blackstock on the Tyger River. The decision made, Sumter rode north to Blackstock's farm to make his stand against the "Green Dragoon." Captain Patrick Carr remained behind at the Enoree River with a small group of militia to warn of Tarleton's approach.

Sumter quickly assembled his force and formed a defense at Blackstock's Plantation on the afternoon of November 20. The forces of Colonel Hampton were

placed in the Blackstock family barn and stables on the east ridge of the farm. Colonel Twiggs and his 100 Georgia riflemen were placed opposite Colonel Lacey and Colonel Hill on the left side of the road along the fence and in the upper part of the field in front of the house and outbuildings. Sumter positioned his regiment on the wooded ridge to the right of the house and along the road leading to the Tyger River, keeping the forces of McCall, Bratton, and Taylor with his regiment.

Sumter's reserves, commanded by Colonel Winn, were positioned between Sumter and the Blackstock house. Blackstock's Plantation gave Sumter the advantage of a strong defensive position. Moreover, Sumter's confidence was stirred by information from Mary Dillard, who lived on a farm six miles from Blackstock's Plantation. Dillard informed Sumter that Tarleton was coming toward him without infantry or artillery. Thus, Sumter theorized that Tarleton's reinforcements would not arrive before nightfall.

The Blackstock family watched as Sumter moved his men into place to fight Tarleton. Mrs. Mary Blackstock went to speak with Sumter as her husband was away with Colonel Roebuck's regiment. Displaying her tenacity, Mrs. Blackstock told Sumter, "General, I won't have any fighting around my house". However, her admonishment to Sumter was too late.

Tarleton had ordered Major John Money of the 63rd Regiment to take a stand at the lower end of Blackstock's field. The remainder of Tarleton's legion formed a flank against the wooded hill to the left of the road. Bayonets fixed, the 63rd Regiment under Money's command charged toward Twigg's Georgia riflemen, positioned in Blackstock's field. Sumter, watching the British, ordered an attack against Money by Colonel Few and Major McJunkin with 400 infantrymen, and the Battle of Blackstock's began.

Money and his men continued forward, brandishing their bayonets and scattering the Rebel militia under Twigg, Few, and McJunkin. However, Money's force was met with fire from Hampton's riflemen when Money went too far up the Blackstock field. "Hampton's Sharpshooters" scattered the 63rd Regiment, wounding Money, who was at the head of the line. Meanwhile, Sumter commanded Colonel Lacey to move through the woods to Tarleton's flank and surprise the British forces. Lacey took the British by surprise and "shot 20 troopers out of their saddles".

However, British Lieutenant Skinner managed to turn back Lacey's men that were threatening the British flank. Meanwhile on the opposite slope, the situation grew worse for the 63rd Foot, and Tarleton attempted to rescue the 63rd Regiment by leading a cavalry charge into the center line under fire from Hampton's riflemen. Tarleton did manage to rescue the 63rd Foot and personally rescued the seriously injured Lt. John Money although the price of his action was high. Reports of Tarleton's cavalry charge stated, "The road was full of men and horses, dead and wounded".

Following Tarleton's cavalry charge, disaster struck for the patriot forces. Sumter rode in for a closer look at Tarleton's retreat and was struck by shots fired from a platoon of the 63rd covering the British retreat. Six shots struck Sumter. The side of his chest took five shots, and the sixth shot hit his right shoulder and chipped his backbone. Twigg took over as Sumter was carried off the field on a raw bull's hide. Under Twigg's command, the patriot forces chased the retreating British and attended to wounded from both sides.

Nightfall halted the Battle of Blackstock's with both sides declaring victory. Tarleton claimed victory because he had clipped the wings of the "Gamecock" and had prevented Sumter's forces from pressing onto William's Plantation and Ninety-Six. Contrastingly, Sumter claimed victory for attacking regular British troops and inflicting losses of around 50 to 100 British regulars. The patriots kept

their forces intact with only three killed and four wounded. The real patriot victory dwelt in living to fight another day.

Today, the site is preserved as part of the South Carolina State Park Service. Located in Union County on the Tyger River off of Highway 49, the site features 2.5 miles of trails, including a portion of the Palmetto Trail. For more information, call 864-938-0100.
