

Thomas Young at Kings Mountain

In 1843 Thomas Young wrote his memoirs, a large portion of which was spent on his participation in battles in upcountry SC during the Revolutionary War. In April 1780, when he was barely 16, he heard that his older brother John had been murdered by Adam Steedham, "as vile a tory as ever lived."

Thomas Young wrote that on the day he heard of John's death he swore that he would never rest until he had avenged the death. The next day he left home in his shirt sleeves to join with Col. Thomas Brandon's regiment.

"Subsequently a hundred tories felt the weight of my arm for the deed, and around Steedham's neck I fastened the rope as a reward for his cruelties."

The first engagement Young took part in was at Stallions on Fishing Creek in what would become York County. John Stallions was a Tory and he had fortified his house as a base for other supporters of the English. Stallions' wife, Sarah Love Stallions, was a Whig and a sister of Thomas Young's captain, Andrew Love.

Colonel Brandon sent out two parties to attack the Stallions house. When Mrs. Stallions saw the party of 16 led by her brother, she ran out and begged him not to set fire to her home. Love said that the Tories must surrender. She ran back and as she stepped in the open front door, the other party of Whigs sent by Colonel Brandon attacked at the back. A shot from that group went through the house and killed Sarah Love Stallions.

Considerable fighting followed with the Tories finally capitulating with a loss of 2 killed, 4 wounded and 28 prisoners who were sent to Charlotte. The Whigs had only one wounded, William Kennedy, a friend of Young.

Young wrote of the episode, "After the fight, Love and Stallions met and shed bitter tears; Stallions was dismissed on parole to bury his wife and arrange his affairs."

Thomas Young's next engagement was at the Battle of Kings Mountain on October 7, 1780. The evening before his company, led by Colonel Brandon, had met with Colonels Campbell, Shelby, Cleveland and Sevier at Cowpens to join forces against the British Major Ferguson who were somewhere on the Broad River. Moving in search of Ferguson they were fortunate to meet George Watkins, a Whig, who had been paroled to his home by the British. Watkins told them they were within a mile of Major Ferguson's men.

Ferguson had already dug in on the summit of Kings Mountain. Young said it looked impossible for them to dislodge him, but, "we were determined, one and all, to do it, or die trying."

Young wrote that he remembered exactly how he behaved. His good friend Ben Hollingsworth beside him, they took off up the side of the mountain and fought from tree to tree. "I recollect I stood behind one tree and fired until the bark was nearly all knocked off, and my eyes pretty well filled with it. One fellow shaved me pretty close, for his bullet took a piece out of my gun-stock."

Young could keep track of who was who by seeing that the Whigs all wore a piece of paper on their hats and the Tories (locals not uniformed British soldiers) wore pine knots in theirs ("these being the badges of distinction").

Young witnessed the death of Colonel Williams, whom he "loved like a father, he had ever been so kind to me, and almost always carried a cake in his pocket for me and his little son Joseph."

Colonel Williams died the day after the battle had ended. Young tallied the Whig losses at 25 killed and wounded. The enemy lost about 300, including Major Ferguson. The Whigs took 7 or 800 prisoners.

There were more battles to be fought but it was the battle of Kings Mountain that stood out for Young. He was very proud to have participated in the battle that later historians would call "the turning point of the American Revolution."