

Statement

Representative John Spratt (SC-05)

Before the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands

Thursday, July 19, 2007

Chairman Grijalva, Ranking Member Bishop, and members of the subcommittee, thank you very much for considering H.R. 1674, the Battle of Camden Study Act. This bill would authorize a feasibility study for the Battle of Camden site.

The Battle of Camden, fought on August 16, 1780, was a crushing defeat for the American forces, and is considered by some to the high water mark of British power in southern colonies. Although it has been a National Historic Landmark since 1962, this battlefield still does not enjoy the support and protection offered by being a unit of the National Park System.

I introduced the Battle of Camden Study Act in the 108th Congress, and I am thankful that the subcommittee is finally considering the bill in the 110th Congress. I would like to thank the subcommittee for hearing the testimony of George Fields, Military Heritage Program Director for the Palmetto Conservation, and Joanna Craig, Executive Director of Historic Camden.

The Battle of Camden, fought on August 16, 1780, was a significant defeat for the

Americans in the Revolutionary War. The British used Camden as a logistical base for the invasion of North Carolina and as a key recruitment and organizing point for the loyalists in South Carolina. The Americans viewed Camden as the key to retaking all of South Carolina.

General Horatio Gates, hero of Saratoga, had taken command of the troops in the South from Baron Johann de Kalb only six weeks before the battle, and had been tasked with stopping British penetration into the Carolinas, following the fall of Charleston on May 12, 1780.

De Kalb urged Gates to take a longer route into South Carolina by way of Charlotte, 75 miles north of Camden, where his weary troops could take advantage of friends and foraging, but Gates preferred the eastern route. He ordered his troops to keep marching on August 13, 1780 to a point on Sanders Creek about seven miles from Camden. They arrived at Colonel Rugeley's tavern and mill some thirteen miles north of Camden two days later. Gates's troop count included 4,100 rank and file troops. The troops were weakened by wear and tear and by long, difficult marches, and sickness and desertion. They included 900 Maryland and Delaware Continentals; Armand's horse and foot, 120 strong; Porterfield's Virginia light infantry, 100 strong; and the Virginia and North Carolina militia of Stevens and Caswell, consisting of nearly 2,800 troops. They also included Colonel Harrison's three companies of artillery, 100 men and 6 guns, and about 70 volunteer horsemen. In all, the rank and file numbered 4,100, but only 3,052 were fit to fight.

Against all suggestions, Gates ordered his men to begin marching towards Camden at ten o'clock on the night of August 15. The march was dreary and bewildering. The air was sultry and humid. Starlight made the road dimly visible to the main column; but the way of the flanking parties, through pine woods and swamp two hundred yards from the road, was obscured by trees. For more than four long hours, they trudged through the sand, swamp, and scrub pine, to nobody knew what.

Hastened by Gates' movement to Camden, Cornwallis marched from Charleston with 2,329 troops. The battle hardened group included 17 men of the Royal Artillery, three companies of the 23rd Regiment (Royal Welch Fusiliers), numbering 282, the 33rd (West Riding) Regiment, with 283 men, five companies of the 71st (Fraser's Highlanders), containing 237 men, Tarleton's British of Legion, horse and foot, with 289 men, the Royal North Carolina Regiment, 247 men, the Volunteers of Ireland, composed entirely of Irish deserters from the American Army, 287 men, a company of 26 Pioneers, and more than 300 volunteer militiamen. The rank and file numbered 1,944, the total of all ranks was 2,239.

The battle began in the dark of night at 2:30 o'clock when the Continental soldiers led by General Gates and the battle hardened forces led by Lord Cornwallis inadvertently collided. The silence of the night was shattered by the rattle of musketry ahead. By an extraordinary coincidence, Cornwallis and Rawdon, intent on surprising Gates, had marched from Camden at exactly the same hour that Gates had chosen for his advance from Rugeley's Mill. To the astonishment of both, they had met.

The British Legion cavalry dashed ahead to surprise and shock whatever might block their path. Armand's cavalry stood the charge for only a moment. The flanking columns of infantry, under Armstrong and Porterfield, were prompt to get into position, from which their fire took the Legion cavalry in the flank, causing it to retreat and wounding its commander. Meanwhile Colonel Webster was moving the British front division into position, and it was not long before the four companies of light infantry effectively held the ground in front, providing time for the various organizations in rear to establish their position. For fifteen minutes, both sides traded musket fire, and then, as if by agreement, both stopped shooting. Neither side wanted to fight in the dark.

That early morning skirmish led to a more substantial battle later in the day. The American line was formed before daybreak: Gist's 2nd Brigade, composed of one Delaware and three Maryland regiments, on the right; Caswell's North Carolina in the center; and Steven's Virginians on the left, with Armand's corps on its left flank. Smallwood's 1st Maryland Brigade was held in reserve in the rear. The Artillery was posted in front of the center. De Kalb, in command of the right wing took his post with it in the line. Gates and his staff took a position six hundred yards back of the line.

When the British line was formed, its left facing Gist's brigade and part of the American center, was composed of the Volunteers of Ireland, Tarleton's infantry, the Royal North Carolina Regiment and Colonel Bryan's North Carolina Tory Volunteers; Rawdon commanded the wing. The right wing comprised of the 33rd Regiment three companies of the 23rd, and a body of light

infantry, Lieutenant Colonel James Webster commanding. There was a second line composed of the Highlanders, with two 6-pounders. Tarleton's British Legion cavalry was held in column

behind the second line. Two 6-pounders and two 3's were in front of the British center. The flanks of both armies rested on the swamps.

A small band of forty or fifty men went forward to draw fire from the British, who had already formed its line and was advancing forward. The British came on steadily with no regard for the colonial troops. At this, the Americans went into disorder and, seeing this, Cornwallis ordered his troops to charge.

Overwhelmed by the approaching British, the Virginians turned and ran. The Virginians were soon followed by the North Carolina regiments. They threw down their arms and fled, many without firing a shot. General Gates would later join the retreating militia, as he himself retreated northward, never stopping until he reached Charlotte.

Meanwhile, the Delaware and Maryland regiments held more than their own afflicting heavy losses on the Volunteers of Ireland. After retreat of all the southern militias, the contest was supported by the two Maryland brigades, and the Delaware regiment, and the artillery. As the battle waged on, the British engaged the First Maryland Brigade until there were no more reserves, and the brigade was compelled to give ground. It fell back reluctantly, and then a moment later, under the rallying cry of its officers, bravely returned to the fray. It was forced to

give way a second time and again rallied and renewed the contest. Only after Cornwallis himself turned all of his regiments against the Maryland Brigades did they finally fall.

De Kalb, leader of the Maryland brigades, had his horse killed under him and continued to fight on foot with the Second Maryland brigade until he fell into the hands of the enemy mortally wounded, pierced with eight bayonet wounds and stricken with three musket balls.

At battle's end, the American losses were enormous, nearly 1,000 men killed and 1,000 captured, besides numerous supplies and ammunition captured by the British. The British lost less than 350 men.

Significance

The Battle of Camden has been described as the “most disastrous defeat ever inflicted on an American army.” In any event, this battle was a watershed in the American Revolution and is essential to understanding the entire Southern Campaign.

Camden was an essential point of control for both armies in the Southern Campaign. The British used Camden as a logistical base for the invasion for the invasion of North Carolina, and the Americans viewed Camden as a key to retaking South Carolina.

In addition, the Battle of Camden was one of the largest field battles for the Revolution with both armies using a combination of infantry, cavalry, and artillery units. Soldiers from eight of what became the original 13 states participated in the battle (South Carolina, Georgia, North Carolina, Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, New Jersey, and New York).

Above all, the lessons learned by the Americans at Camden were instrumental in the battles that followed—especially in the selection of general officers, with Greene replacing Gates.

Recognizing the significance of the battle, the National Park System's on-going study of Revolutionary War sites has identified the Camden Battlefield as being one of the most worthy of evaluation for inclusion in the National Park System.

According to Public Law 105-391, the following criteria are to be used in developing a list of resources for consideration for Special Resources Study, which the Battle of Camden Study Act would do: “(A) those areas that have the greatest potential to meet the established criteria of national significance, suitability, and feasibility; (B) themes, sites, and resources not already adequately represented in the National Park System; and (C) public petition and Congressional resolutions.” A 2003 reconnaissance study conducted under the authority of the National Park System (NPS) places the Camden Battlefield in the History and Prehistory of the National Park System and the National Historic Landmarks places the Camden Battlefield under Theme IV, the American Revolution and Subtheme D, war in the south. Given the unique role

the Battle of Camden played in the south and in the entire revolution, the battle of Camden battlefield site should be a made a unit of the National Park System

H.R. 1674, the Battle of Camden Study Act

To do so, I have introduced H.R. 1674, the Battle of Camden Study Act, to begin the process of making the Battle of Camden battlefield site a unit of the National Park System. As you know, before a site can be designated as a unit of the National Park System and enjoy the protection that goes along with this designation, the National Park System recommends conducting a suitability and feasibility study. The Department of the Interior, has already asserted that the “NPS should place a high priority on further evaluation of Camden Battlefield as a potential addition to the National Park System, considering alternatives for protection and linkages for interpretation with the broader story of the area including historic Camden.

Specifically, the bill would authorize the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a study of the site of the Battle of Camden fought in South Carolina on August 16, 1780, and the site of Historic Camden, which is currently a National Park System Affiliated area. The study shall evaluate the national significance of the sites and suitability and feasibility of designating the site as unite or as separate units of the National Park System.

The study shall determine the suitability and feasibility of designating the site as a unit or

as separate units of the National Park System; include cost estimates for any necessary acquisition, development, operation, and maintenance of the sites; and identify alternatives for management, administration, and protection of the area.

The Battle Site Today

Today, the original 1,380 acre battle site is divided into 30 parcels of land and owned by 19 different owners. The Palmetto Conservation Foundation, a member of the Battle of Camden Advisory Council, just acquired an additional 169 acres, and now owns a total of 480 acres and is negotiating to purchase additional acreage. Archeological studies conducted by the University of South Carolina suggest that the land owned by the Palmetto Conservation Foundation is where most of the fighting occurred.

The Battle of Camden site is zoned RD-2. According to Kershaw County, this designation recognizes the value of agriculture lands, woodlands, wetlands and other resources which characterize this district. These are important to clean water and air and many natural cycles. These lands provide much of the character that makes Kershaw County an attractive place in which to live. The intent of this designation, therefore, is to protect these area resources from development, which would needlessly alter their rural state and contribution to a balanced environment. As a result of this designation, a few intrusions to the site exist, including a state highway and two power lines. But the battlefield lies in the midst of a growing area. Most of the

additional land needed for the battlefield is owned by Crescent Resources, Inc., the land-holding subsidiary of Duke Energies, Inc.

Support for H.R. 1674, the Battle of Camden Study Act

The Battle of Camden Study Act has long enjoyed bi-partisan support. The entire South Carolina delegation, including one member of this subcommittee, Mr. Brown, have signed on as co-sponsors to the Battle of Camden Study Act.

The bill is supported in South Carolina as well. I have received numerous letters, which I would ask to be made a part of the record, in support of the Battle of Camden Study Act. Letters from the South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation & Tourism; the Kershaw County Historical Society; National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution; City of Camden; Kershaw County; State Senator Vincent Sheheen; State Representative Laurie Slade Funderburk; South Carolina Archives & History Center; the Sons of the American Revolution; and the Olde English District Commission all recognize the importance of making this site a unit of the National Park System.

I want to thank the subcommittee for considering this bill calling for the Battle of Camden Study Act, and on behalf of the South Carolina delegation, I urge you to report it favorably to the floor, once you have completed your consideration.