

Rockfish, Battle of ^[1]

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by Beverly Tetterton, 2006



Battle of Rockfish Historical Marker F-7. NC 11 south of Tin City. Image courtesy of the North Carolina Office of Archives & History.

^[2]The Revolutionary War ^[3] engagement called the Battle of Rockfish took place on 2 Aug. 1781 at Rockfish Creek ^[4], about one mile south of the present town of Wallace ^[5] in Duplin County ^[6]. Earlier that year, on 28 January, a British force led by Maj. James H. Craig had taken possession of the nearby port and town of Wilmington ^[7]. Under his command were 18 vessels with a full supply of provisions and munitions and 400 regular troops, artillery, and dragoons. Craig used Wilmington as a base from which to foray into the countryside, arresting Whigs ^[8] and enlisting Loyalists ^[9]. In the early summer, he issued a proclamation that all men in the surrounding counties were British subjects and must enroll as Loyalist militia. Those who did not do so by 1 August would be harassed and their property seized and sold. On the last day of grace, Craig began to march through the eastern counties.

At Rockfish Creek, he encountered a Whig militia that was ready to contest his passage. Craig advanced with approximately 500 troops and attacked. Sources tell conflicting stories of the battle, although clearly the British prevailed. Craig, with 60 horses and 2 infantry companies, probably was able to encircle the Patriots and surprise them. Half of the Patriots fled before they had a chance to fire their weapons, which apparently were in short supply. It was reported that approximately 30 or 40 Patriots were taken prisoner.

Although the victor at Rockfish, Craig was forced to retreat after 17 Oct. 1781, when Lord Charles Cornwallis ^[10] surrendered to Gen. George Washington at Yorktown, Va. Craig destroyed any guns, munitions, and supplies that he could not take with him and sailed with his troops to Charles Towne (Charleston, S.C.).

References:

Dan L. Morrill, *Southern Campaigns of the American Revolution* (1992).

John S. Pancake, *This Destructive War: The British Campaign in the Carolinas, 1780-1782* (1985).

Image Credit:

Battle of Rockfish, NC Historical Marker F-7. Image courtesy of the North Carolina Office of Archives & History. Available from <https://ncmarkers.com/Markers.aspx?MarkerId=F-7> ^[2] (accessed Mar. 6, 2024).

Subjects:

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Battles ^[12]

War ^[13]

Authors:

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Origin - location:

Duplin County ^[15]

From:

Encyclopedia of North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press. ^[16]

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