

A Possible Resolution to the Mystery of Col. John Dooly's Death

Legends say that Col. John Dooly was killed at his home by Tory soldiers and witnessed by his wife and son John Mitchell Dooly. He was buried by Col. Elijah Clarke and his wife near his house near Dooly Spring. Then Nancy Hart captured six of the Loyalists that murdered Dooly and shot to death one of them and then hung the rest near Tory Pond.

Ascertaining the truth about Doolys' death may be impossible, but the facts presented here about the people involved with his death should clarify many improbable conclusions about his death.

Three Revolutionary War pensioners mentioned Col. John Dooly's death.

- John Watkins (R11190) "Col. Dooly was killed by one of his men upon which his regiment disbanded and the declarant received no discharge". Gordon Smith in *Moringstrars of Liberty Vol. I page 200*, mentions this Parole, "on June 5, 1780 Col. Dooly and 400 militia troops surrendered to William Manson (representing British Col. Thomas Brown of Augusta) on a ridge near Washington GA. They took an oath of loyalty to the British Crown and surrendered their arms."
- John Smith (R9769) states "the British took the state of Georgia again; duly [Dooly] sent to the British commander Colonel Thomas Brown (who took possession of Augusta) soon after for a Parole for himself and as many of his regiments as choose to take it, I being one the family I was included in the Parole: the Tories Captain Wilder with a company came and killed him Colonel Dooly in his own house notwithstanding his Parole and I narrowly escaped I took to the woods and lay out, during which time I was taken by the Tories and confined two weeks".
- John Smith (S31976) states: "he was at Col. Dooly Senior when he returned from the Siege of Savannah. He was put on the minute roll of the militia in George Dooly's Company—about this time James (John) Dooly was killed by the Tories and Deponent heard and informed the Colonel that his life was threatened and advised him to be on his guard and he was killed in a day or two".

The possible killers of Col John Dooly were:

- Tory Captain William Wilder was both a Whig from Wilkes County in 1777 (*Georgia Citizens and Soldiers of the American Revolution* by Robert S. Davis pg. 25) and a Tory Captain in Sept. 8, 1780 (*Georgia History Colonial Records 1774-1775* pg. 212), he would be the man described by John Smith (R9769) as the man who killed Col. Dooly. He would fit the qualities described by John Smith (S319760 and John Watkins (R11190). He died in fighting near Wrightsborough GA in 1781.
- Robert Davis Jr. states that the first biographer of John Dooly (1828) has his murderer as a McCorkle of South Carolina. This is possible because Bobby Moss in *Roster of South Carolina Patriots in the American Revolution* page 607, lists William McCorkle as being killed on November 20, 1780. Blackstock's Farm battle in South Carolina occurred on November 20, 1780 and 60 mounted men of Col. William Candler's Refugees were present along with Col. Elijah Clarke and John Twiggs. Col. William Candler's Refugees were formed from Loyalists captured by Elijah Clark at Fort Cornwallis and Fort Grierson on Sept, 14-18, 1780. They included 10 officers and 65 privates. Capt. William McCorkle surely could have been one of them. Adiel Sherwood (*A Gazetteer of the State of Georgia* 1829 pg. 198) states Capt. William McCorkle killed John Dooly and George Dooly in turn killed Capt. McCorkle. Lt. George Dooly was probably with Col. Elijah Clarke at the battle of Blackstock's Farm, SC and killed Capt. William McCorkle there.
- Historian Hugh McCall stated that Samuel Beckham stated that a Capt. William Corker had killed Col. John Dooly. Capt. Corker survived the War and asked to be taken off the list of banishments. John Mitchell Dooly, John's son who witnessed the murder of his father was in the legislature when the bill was put up but not voted upon. Thus it is unlikely Capt. William Corker was his father's murderer or John Mitchell Dooly would have intervened.

Some legends have Elijah Clarke and his wife burying John Dooly. This probably did not happen because Elijah Clarke was fighting in South Carolina. On July 11, 1780 he was fighting at Freemans Fort, July 12, 1780 at Gowan's Fort, July 30, 1780 at Thicketty Fort, August 11, 1780 at Wofford Iron Works, Sept. 14-18 at

First Siege of Augusta GA so he probably wasn't at home in Georgia. Edward J. Cashin (*The Story of Augusta 1980 pg.33*) said "Col. Clark returned from the mountains and sent out a summons to the militia to join him at Soap creek on a certain day in September or he would shoot them." Loyalist Col. Harris Cruger wrote a letter from Dooly's home on September 23, 1789 and Dooly was not present. Dooly's death was therefore sometime after August 6th when he wrote a letter from his home to Loyalists in Augusta GA and before the First Siege of Augusta on Sept 14, 1780. Thus Elijah Clarke was probably not at home during the time frame that John Dooly was killed (probably August 6-Sept.3, 1780).

Thus it is most probable that Capt. Joseph Wilder was the person who killed Col. John Dooly (witnessed by John Smith R9769). Capt. William McCorkle and Capt. William Corker were probably in the Tory Company of soldiers that came to Dooly's house the day he was killed.

Judge John Mitchell Dooly died in 1827 in Lincolnton GA and is buried in the "Dooly Family Plot" behind his home (the White House). Since he had no living children, the house was sold to the Sims's. It is possible that Judge John Mitchell Dooly who saw his father killed, moved the body to the burial plot behind his home before he died. Nobody knows the location Col. John Dooly's home and it probably is under the Clarke Hill Lake. Judge John Mitchell Dooly's home is under Clarke Hill Lake. A recent search near Dooly's Spring found no burial (Human Remains Search dogs) or foundation stones. Finding the burial place of Col. John Dooly is now the only mystery left to solve.