



Sons of the American Revolution
California SAR



America250 “Minute”

Orange County
November 13, 2021

The **Battle of Alamance** took place on May 16, 1771 and was the final battle of the [Regulator Movement](#), a rebellion in [colonial North Carolina](#) over issues of taxation and local control, considered by some to be the opening salvo of the [American Revolution](#).

The Battle

On the evening of May 15, 1771, Royal Governor [William Tryon](#) received word that the Regulators were camped about six miles away. The next morning, Tryon's troops set out to a field about one-half mile from the camp of the Regulators.

Tryon sent one of his aides-de-camp, [Captain Philemon Hawkins II](#), and the Sheriff of Orange County with a proclamation to disband in the hour.

By midday the hour had expired. Tryon sent one final warning:

“Gentlemen and Regulators: Those of you who are not too far committed should desist and quietly return to your homes, those of you who have laid yourselves liable should submit without resistance. I and others promise to obtain for you the best possible terms. The Governor will grant you nothing. You are unprepared for war! You have no cannon! You have no military training! You have no commanding officers to lead you in battle. You have no ammunition. You will be defeated!”

At about this time, two men who had been attempting to negotiate a peace between the two sides left Tryon's camp: Reverend [David Caldwell](#) and Robert Thompson. Caldwell made it to the field between the two lines, but was warned by the Regulators, who saw that the Governor was about to open fire. Thompson was detained by Tryon as a prisoner. Tryon, in a moment of anger, took a musket from a militiaman and shot Thompson dead. Realizing what he had done, he sent a flag bearer named Donald Malcolm with a white flag in hopes of calming things quickly. The flag bearer was himself fired upon by the Regulators, who called out, "Fire and be damned".

The Regulators lacked the leadership, organization, and ammunition that Tryon had, but the early course of the battle went well for them. They employed what was referred to as "Indian style" fighting, hiding behind trees and avoiding structure and lines.

The Governor sent a second white flag, but the aide-de-camp was killed while regulator Patrick Muller called for his fellow insurgents to cease fire. Outraged at the disregard of a second white flag, the Governor rallied his troops against the insurgents, whose ammunition was running out. Many of the Regulators fled the field. Some of the Regulators remained behind to continue firing upon the militia. Tryon then ordered the woods to be set on fire.^[8]

Losses for both sides are disputed. Tryon reported nine dead and 61 wounded among the militia. Both sides counted nine dead among the Regulators and from dozens to approximately two-hundred wounded.^[10]

Following the battle, Tryon's militia army traveled through Regulator territory, where he had Regulators and Regulator sympathizers sign loyalty oaths and destroyed the properties of the most active Regulators. He also raised taxes to pay for his militia's defeat of the Regulators.^[6]

At the time of their defeat at Alamance, public opinion was decidedly against the Regulators. They were seen as "lawless desperadoes," and Governor Tryon was praised for his actions in stamping out the rebellion.^[9] As news articles spread the word of his victory, Tryon was branded a hero of the colonies for defeating the larger group of Regulators with his small, well prepared militia.

However, as the initial excitement over the battle died down, many newsmen, especially in the [Boston](#) area, began to question the reasons behind the rebellion and investigated further. Several reasons were found to regard the destruction of the Regulators as an act of an oppressive government. Most particularly admonished was the methods in which Tryon had used to win the battle. The use of a [riot act](#) and the execution of rebellion leaders after the battle was frowned upon. Reports also indicated that battlefield misconduct had taken place on the governor's side, including giving the farmers a two-hour warning period before the battle began, and subsequently breaking that agreement to bombard them with artillery fire.^[9]

Many surviving anti-Regulators changed allegiance as time went on: e.g. [William Hooper](#) (signer of the Declaration of Independence), [Alexander Martin](#) (NC Senator and Governor), [Francis Nash](#) (Brigadier General under George Washington died from wounds in battle), and [Samuel Johnston](#) (NC Senator and Governor) became patriots during the Revolution.^{[3][4]}

Source: Wikipedia