

SCENE VI

(The light fades upon Jack's Tavern and comes up on the Narrator.)

NARRATOR

With the Americans defeated disastrously at Camden, the door to the Carolinas stood open for Cornwallis. It was his plan to move northward swiftly, end all organized opposition in the South, and quickly accomplish a British victory. To overrun the western areas of the Carolinas and recruit the Tories in that section of the South, Major Patrick Ferguson, a dashing and gallant Scotchman, swung northwestward, and headed toward the mountains. On his way northward Cornwallis had a brush with patriot forces at Colonel Wauchope's mill in the Waxhaws, but though he lost some men, he was not long delayed in his march toward little Charlottetown, the gate that would admit him to North Carolina. And at Charlottetown only a handful of Americans--militiamen led by a few officers who had served in the Continental army--sought to bar his way.

Cornwallis sensed an early victory and the welcoming plaudits of Britishers at home, and on the morning of September 26, 1780-- a day of tremendous significance in American history--his troops, led by the famous Tarleton's Dragoons, approached Charlottetown over the Nation's Ford Road. Colonel Tarleton was ill and in his place rode Colonel Hanger. Proudly the Redcoats pushed along the red road. Soon now the war against these rebellious Americans would be over, and they would sail home to Britain. In the nostrils even of their snorting horses was the smell of early victory. So they neared the small crossroads village.

(The light goes down on the Narrator and comes up on the full set of Charlottetown. A tall officer in the blue and buff uniform of the Continental Army is calmly directing the placement of militiamen about the square in front of the

courthouse. He is giving orders to several other young men, also in Continental Army uniforms. These men in turn are giving orders to noncommissioned officers. There is little formal army discipline evident in the dispositions being made of the men, but all are going about the business grimly. A number of men are placed beneath the court house, some behind the tavern porch toward the left, some move down the street to the right and get behind houses and other buildings. Farther down the street others can be seen taking their places behind Liberty Hall, the new name of Queen's Museum. In the midst of this stir, the window of an upstairs room of Jack's Tavern is thrown open and old Pat Jack, a muzzleloading rifle in his hands, sticks his head out and yells.)

PAT JACK

Let 'em come, dad-blast their ornery hides. By crackity, I'll give 'em a dose of good old southern hospitality!

(He rubs the barrel of his gun affectionately.)

Eh, Betsy?

(He leans out the window, looks down the street toward the south, shakes his fist.)

Come on, old man Cornwallis. I'll fix ye. Twon't never a Irishman what couldn't lick six Britishers.

(As he continues to shake his fist a horseman rounds the bend in the street at far right and comes racing toward the courthouse. His horse is foaming. The horseman, who is seen to be Jethro O'Flannagan, jumps off, runs over to Colonel Davie, who is standing near the court house steps, salutes.)

JETHRO

Colonel Davie, sir. they're just south of town, not a half mile away. I had to run desperate, sir, and then I mighty nigh got shot.

(He points.)

Coming up the Nation's Ford Road, sir. They can't be a far piece away. I had to run for it to keep ahead. I ----

(Suddenly the sharp clean call of a bugle off right is heard.)

That's them sir. That's old Cornwallis's crowd. And Tarleton's Dragoons is a leading 'em, but Tarleton himself he's sick and there's another colonel ridin' his horse.

COLONEL DAVIE

(Motioning, impatiently.)

Thanks, Jethro. Get back up Tryon street. Tie your horse; you'll maybe need him. And get over to Captain Barksdale's company under the court house.

(Jethro rides off right. Davie runs out into center of street.)

COLONEL DAVIE

Steady men! The British are here. Wait until they get into the street before you shoot. Listen to your company commanders for the orders to fire. Make every shot count. We've got to stop them and we might as well start right here. Keep calm. Stay under cover the best you can. And if we have to get out grab your horses and move on up the Salisbury road toward Sugar Creek Church. Steady now! Steady. Steady.

(Already the British dragoons in their redcoats with white cross belts are riding into Tryon Street from the left, Colonel Hanger, resplendently uniformed, in their lead. They advance as far as Liberty Hall, and then old Pat Jack, his muzzleloader extending from the window, carefully aims, fires, and Hanger trembles in his saddle, and slowly slides off, falls to the ground. And now from behind the houses along the length of the little street the firing becomes general. The Dragoons falter and then they reel back upon their own infantry advancing in steady cadence. But they rally, form their ranks, and come charging back up the street toward the court house. For a time there is general fighting, with the British infantry pushing slowly forward along the street. Then the infantrymen stop, an officer shouts a command, and the body of infantrymen separate into two files, which march off at right angles, right and left.

Colonel Davie runs out into the street in front

of the court house.

COLONEL DAVIE

Major Graham! Captain Barksdale. Report!

(Two young men in Continental army uniforms race to join him. The three talk. Graham and Barksdale start off. Davie calls to them.)

COLONEL DAVIE

They'll try to flank us here at the court house. We must prevent that. Understand?

(The two young officers nod their heads, run back to their positions. The British advance doggedly to the center and the fighting around the court house and tavern grows intense. Slowly the militiamen give way, backing stubbornly up the street and off the set. The sound of the firing grows less in volume, indicating the steady withdrawal of the militiamen. A British officer rides up from left, dismounts, as several soldiers run up to him. Two other officers dismount. One of the officers, saluting, speaks.)

BRITISH OFFICER

General Cornwallis, may I report, sir, that the village is clear of rebels. We'll soon clean them out completely. The Dragoons will cut the remainder to pieces before they're gone two miles.

CORNWALLIS

Yes, but we had to do some damnable fighting to drive them out of this contemptible village. It's a veritable nest of hornets we've run into. And we've lost a lot of men.

(He points.)

That schoolhouse down there. It will serve as a hospital. Get the wounded there quickly, and serve their needs as best you can. And see to Hanger. I hear he was shot as we came in. And look after Ban Tarleton. I fancy we shall need him, and soon.

(The officer salutes.)

OFFICER

Yes, sir, General, I shall see to it immediately.

(Cornwallis turns to the other officer.)

That house there--

(He points to Colonel Thomas Polk's home.)

I think that will serve as my headquarters. Take a detail and search it carefully to see that no rebel soldiers remain there. But if there are women and children, see that they are not disturbed and assure them that they will be protected.

OTHER BRITISH OFFICER

(Saluting.)

General, I shall do so at once.

(Slowly the light dies upon the scene and the sound of the shooting off left fades out.)