

Once upon a time, many centuries ago lived a king. He ruled a mighty kingdom. This kingdom was immense with many lands and peoples both near and far. The king had a vast army of soldiers and many trusted officials to help govern these numerous lands of the kingdom, particularly those that were far away.

In one such far away corner of the kingdom lived a territorial governor by the name of Tryon. Governor Tryon was certainly a trustworthy enough servant to the king to make sure that he had laws in place and that he sent all of the goods and taxes back to the king as expected. However, his trust stopped there. He had personally handpicked most of the sheriffs in the territory, and they would work in collusion with Tryon to over-charge and over-tax the hard working peasants. If they owed 10% of their crops for taxes, he would have the sheriffs collect 20%. Money was very scarce in the far away colonies of the kingdom. If the peasants had goods to sell or trade for money, he would always get the better of them. At the time the legal charge for a marriage license was one farthing. Gov. Tryon charged the colonists fifteen farthings.

The colonists and peasants of this territory were getting very tired of the way things were. The problem was that they felt they had no voice. They couldn't send word to the King and the capital because the Governor would intercept and read all letters.

Many of the towns and villages that were far away from the governor decided to stand up to the crooked sheriffs, and would stand their ground, run the sheriff out of town, often with a bit a mistreatment. The governor received news of this and put out an edict for citizens to cease and desist, and be lawful and pay the legal taxes. Quite the audacity of the governor when he never collected just collected the 'legal' taxes.

The people of the territory heard of this and started forming rebel militias. They would not be robbed of what was rightfully theirs anymore. They received news that the governor was gathering troops to put a stop to this treasonous behavior. The people had formed about 10 rebel companies from the different areas of the country. The four closest companies grouped together and set out to meet and stop the governor and the King's soldiers. They met in a field along the river Alamance. Only half of the militia men had weapons and only half of those were muskets or guns. After a large handful of men were killed, they surrendered and a cease fire was ordered.

During this time some of the other companies heard the news, broke up and returned to their homes. Two companies did not hear the news until they were nearly to the river Alamance. The captains and lieutenants of those two companies and the original four companies were arrested and all others sent home.

Governor Tryon had a lot to think about. As far as a war went these colonists rebels had not done any significant damage. But he must put a stop to any type of free thinking and independence. He ordered the chief magistrate to hold a trial for the twelve prisoners. Let me share a portion from the official court transcript.

Quoting Colonial Records, vol 8, pp 643-3;65-56: *The Supreme Court of Oyer & Terminer, for the Trial of the Regulators in the back country, began at Hillsborough, 30 May, and continued to 20 June, 1771; during which twelve were tried and condemned for High Treason. The governor was pleased to suspend the execution of six, till His Majesty's pleasure be known; for the other six were executed on Wed. 19 June at Hillsborough. Among the last, the most distinguished was the Capt. Of the Militia in Rowan County. When the Chief Justice passed sentence he concluded in the following manner: 'I must now close my afflicting duty, by pronouncing upon you the awful sentence of the law; which is, that you, Captain Benjamin Merrill and the other prisoners, be carried to the place from whence you came, that you be drawn from thence to the place of execution, where you are to be hanged by the neck; that you be cut down while still alive, that your bowels be taken out and burned before your face, that your head be cut off, your body divided into four quarters, and this be at His Majesty's disposal; and the Lord have Mercy on your souls.'*

In this crucial situation Capt. Merrill gave his friends evidence that he was prepared to die, for he not only professed his faith in Christ, his hope of Heaven, and his willingness to go, but sang a Psalm very devoutly, and died like a Christian Soldier. On being permitted to speak just before the execution, Capt. Merrill said that fifteen years previously he had been converted, but he had back-slidden, yet now felt that he was freely forgiven and that he would not change places with anyone on the grounds. In concluding he referred to his wife and eight children. He is quoted as saying, "In a few minutes I shall leave a widow and eight children. I entreat that no reflection be cast on them on my account, and, if possible, I shall deem it a bounty, should you gentlemen petition the Governor and Council that some part of my estate may be spared to the widowed and fatherless.

Gov. Tryon later said, "Benjamin Merrill, a Capt. of the militia, left it in charge of some of his former officers to solicit me to grant his plantation and estate to his wife and eight children. I have felt it to oblige."

-Wm. Tryon 20 Jun. Hillsborough, North Carolina

The End

Post Script – The militias were known and recorded as the Regulators of North Carolina, true martyrs and heroes of the pre-revolutionary effort in America.

Hillsborough is approximately 40 miles northwest of present day Raleigh, North Carolina. The Battle of Alamance took place 20 miles west of Hillsborough.

