

“A Flash in the Pan – Battle of Lansdowne”

An article by **Bob Stevens**

In 1643 at the Battle of Lansdowne, near Bath, during the English Civil War an incident occurred which killed a number of senior Royalist Officers and men and badly injured many others. A Black Powder wagon exploded!

This was not directly attributable to enemy action and was likely caused by carelessness by those involved with it.

“It made a very great noise”, (Richard Atkins recorded) “and darkened the air for a time and the hurt men made lamentable screeches. As soon as the air was clear I went to see what the matter was; there I found his Lordship (Sir Ralph Hopton) miserably burnt, his horse singed like parched leather and (Major) Thomas Shelton – that was a horse lengths further from the blast – complaining that the fire was got within his breeches, which I tore off as soon as I could. And from as long a flaxen head of hair as I ever saw, his head was like a blackamoor. His horse was hurt and run away like mad, so that I put him on my horse and got two troopers to hold him up on both sides and bring him to the headquarters (Where) there was nothing but a cart provided for him and soon as he was put in there he immediately died”.

Hopton, already shot through the arm was temporarily blinded by the blast and badly burned. His face covered by bandages “having hardly so much life as not to be numbered with the dead” was taken to Devises.

Dangerous stuff, this Black Powder, take care!

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