

INVETERATE REBELS: NATHANAEL GREENE'S
NORTH CAROLINA CAMPAIGN, 1780-1781

by

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B.A., Middlebury College, 1960

A MASTER'S THESIS

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of History

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

1975

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"[I was] amongst timid friends, and
adjoining inveterate rebels . . ."

Earl Cornwallis to Lord George Germaine,
17 March 1781

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I owe a sincere debt of gratitude to my faculty committee for their assistance in preparing this thesis. Professor Donald J. Mrozek and Professor Burton I. Kaufman, Kansas State University, recommended additional research sources and made critical suggestions on the thesis draft that were of immeasurable benefit to me. I am particularly indebted to my major professor, Clyde R. Ferguson, Kansas State University, for his guidance and help. His understanding of the vital role that the militia played in the war in the South, and his own outstanding scholarship on the subject, enabled me to approach my thesis with a far broader perspective than I would otherwise have had. Professor Ferguson's insistence on the highest standards of scholarship and his genuine personal interest in my work made my studies at Kansas State University all the more rewarding.

My work would not have been possible without the support, understanding, and encouragement that I received from my wife, Mary Cashwell Frasché. The burden of my studies fell equally on her, and she weathered the inconvenience and disruption to our family life like a trooper. To her, this thesis is dedicated.

PREFACE

The Patriot cause in the American Revolution reached its nadir during the twelve months between the Springs of 1780 and 1781. The Continental treasury was empty, its currency worthless, and the Congress was bankrupt. A series of mutinies rocked the Continental Army. The Connecticut Line rebelled in May, and in January, in the midst of one more terrible winter, the Pennsylvania and New Jersey Lines mutinied. The latter had to be put down by armed force, and its ringleaders were summarily executed. The Revolution was shaken to its roots by the treason of the Army's finest combat commander and by the loss in the South of two states and the capture or destruction of two Southern Armies. In the North, Washington's army and the British were at a stalemate. The brightest hope, the arrival in July 1780 of a French expeditionary force at Newport, Rhode Island, was dashed when the Royal Navy successfully blockaded the port and rendered the French ineffective for eleven months. French-American relations suffered through a series of misunderstandings, and only Washington's leadership prevented a serious rift. To the British, time at last seemed to be on their side.

Hard times make hard men; and in the South, now the decisive theater of operations, one of the most remarkable figures in American military history was literally reversing the course of the war during its darkest days. Nathanael Greene's whirlwind campaign in the Carolinas lasted only nine months. With his small army, and assisted by some

equally remarkable and tough subordinates, he recaptured the two southern states and in the process destroyed the finest army in the British Empire.

The critical phase of Greene's campaign occurred during his initial months of command, when British strength in the South appeared overwhelming and their success seemed inevitable. Greene's task looked impossible. It was to take the remains of a shattered army and somehow stop the British juggernaut which had swept through Georgia and South Carolina and was now poised to resume its advance. The decisive battle in the campaign, perhaps in the war, would be fought in North Carolina.

This paper concentrates on two aspects of those first critical months. First, the theater of operations. Warfare in the South was far different from what either Greene or his principal opponent, Charles, Earl Cornwallis, had experienced in the North. Several factors were responsible. Settlement patterns and social and political relationships between groups prior to the war created a divisiveness in the population that both sides exploited. An early, blundering campaign by the British exacerbated local conditions by exposing Loyalists and alarming Whigs into a vigorous defense of their frontiers and coasts and a severe repression of internal dissent.

The second British campaign occupied Georgia and South Carolina and employed a new strategy that deliberately set American against American. The strategy was based on false estimates of Loyalist strength, and the British were opposed by a powerful resistance movement organized around a militia system ideally suited to its task. These conditions resulted in a vicious civil war that dominated all other aspects of the campaign.

Finally, the terrain in the South was different from that in the North. Scattered and sparse settlement, poorly developed lines of communications, and numerous rivers, all conspired to impede movement and hamper logistical support. Depending on whether it was used properly, the terrain could be a significant benefit or a major hindrance to either army.

This study's major area of concentration is on the way the two commanders in the South fought the war there. Both men were extremely capable soldiers, clearly more talented than the typical officer in either army of the day. But each man reacted differently to the peculiarities of warfare in the South. One adjusted his strategy to the conditions and resources he found, and the other did not. In that fact, more than in any other, lay the reason for the American victory.

Cornwallis' continual search for a conventional military solution to the problem led him to reject the Loyalists and to take greater risks with his army. He thought he had reached a solution at Guilford Court House, but his army had been pushed too far and was crippled beyond use. By the time the army reached Wilmington, Cornwallis himself had been defeated psychologically by a process he did not understand.

The leadership and perseverance of Nathanael Greene dominated the war after November 1780, and it is not stretching the point to call the recovery of the South from this point on his campaign. At the time he was sent south, Greene had strong biases and preconceived ideas as to how the war would be conducted. His adjustment to the conditions he found was remarkable, and the moment he took command marked the beginning of the end for the British. His initial strategy envisioned conventional operations between regular forces, but when he realized that his strength would come

primarily from militia forces, he was compelled to revise his strategy and take an increasingly sophisticated approach to his campaign.

During his retreat to the Dan River, Greene decided on a strategy of attrition against the British and planned for the militia to assume a crucial role in its execution. By the time he returned to South Carolina, Greene was conducting a classic war of movement employing his Continentals and partisan militia in a fully coordinated campaign against the British and Loyalists. His actions were governed as much by political and psychological considerations as by tactics. In the end he triumphed, having subjected the British army and its commanders to a form of warfare with which they could not cope.

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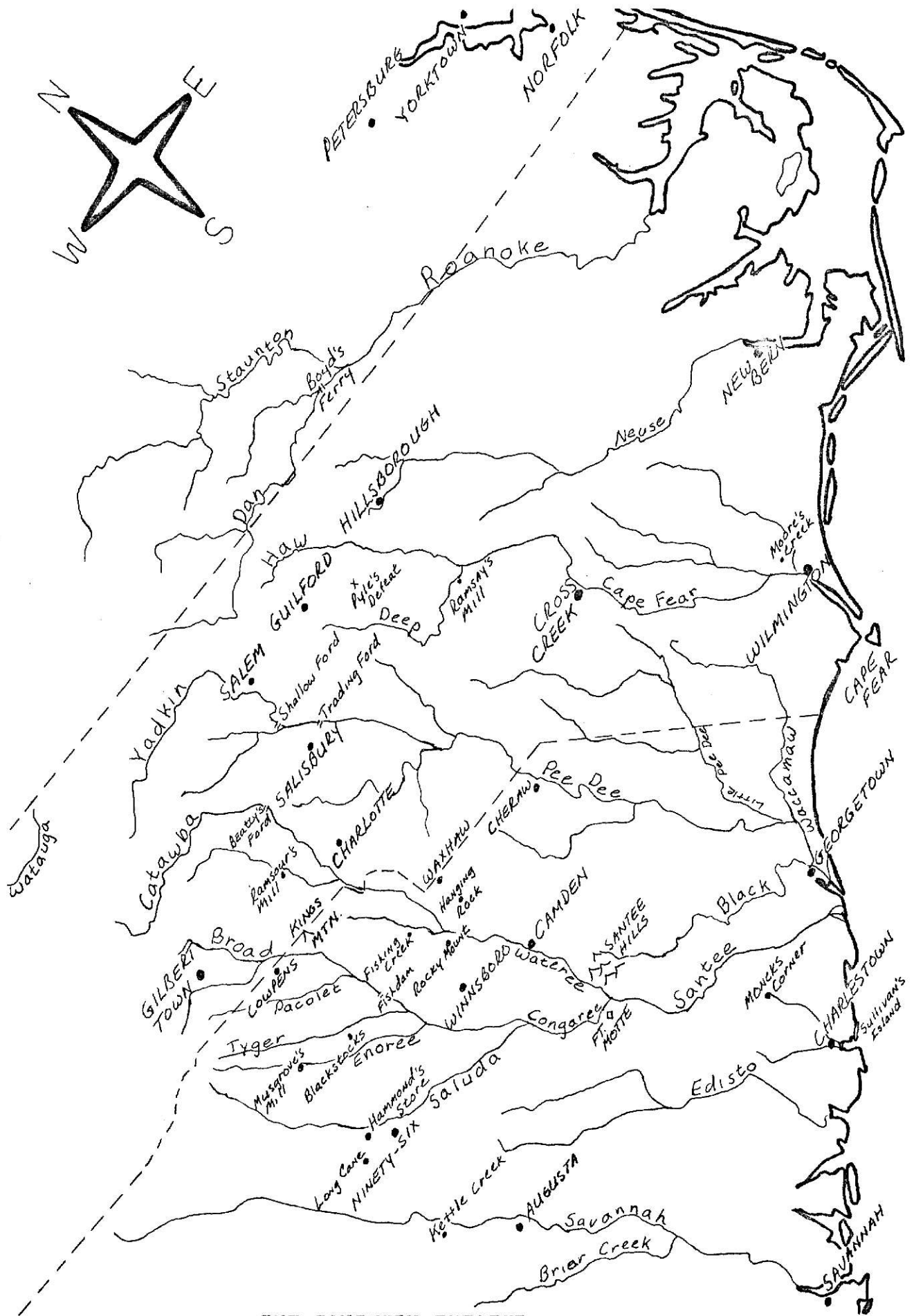
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THE SOUTHERN THEATER

CHAPTER 1

THE BRITISH ATTACK

"The reduction of the whole Province of South Carolina," wrote Lord George Germaine on 3 August 1780, "and the concurrence of all our accounts from the provinces in rebellion of the distress of the inhabitants and their anxious desire to return to the King's obedience, together with the reduced state of Mr. Washington's force, the decay of the power of Congress, and to [sic] total failure of their paper money, open a flattering prospect of a speedy and happy termination of the American war. . . ." ¹ This sanguine appraisal by King George III's Secretary of State for the Colonies, the Cabinet officer directly responsible for British prosecution of the war effort, appeared to be fully justified by past events. After five years of frustration in the northern United States, the British army had at last scored a series of impressive victories that seemed destined to end the American rebellion in the new major theater of operations, the South. The British triumph, and hopes for total victory, soon proved to be illusory, for the British had failed to profit from an earlier attempt to subdue the South.

DRESS REHEARSAL

Although the locus of British operations in America from 1775 to 1778 had been in the northern states, Prime Minister Lord North and his Cabinet (Germaine in particular) had never lost interest in the South.

Pacification of Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia had been the object of a disastrous British expedition in 1775-1776. Despite the fact that by the beginning of 1776 all four Southern governors would have fled to the safety of British warships, their glowing accounts of Patriot weakness and Loyalist strength in their colonies had been instrumental in forming the government officials' perceptions of the rebellion.² In response to their requests, the British had dispatched an expedition under General Henry Clinton to secure the four southern colonies. This critical operation, conceived with the highest expectations, had failed for the same reasons that would hamper subsequent British operations in the South. In fact, it had created some of the conditions that would lead to the failure of the final British campaign of the war.

Dictated in London, Clinton's mission reflected his government's fundamental lack of understanding of the situation in the colonies. He was instructed to rendezvous off Cape Fear, North Carolina, in February 1776, with an amphibious force from Cork, Ireland, and then "leave each colony, as it should be reduced to obedience, to the support and protection of the well affected provincials that might take up arms in the King's cause." He was then to return north with all of the regular troops to join General Lord Howe in time for the invasion of Long Island in July.³ The entire operation was characterized by poor coordination, tactical blunders and inter-service squabbling. Of far greater importance as a cause for its failure were the invalid strategic assumptions upon which the expedition was based.

It was the persistent belief of the British government that the majority of colonists were loyal to the Crown and that these "King's Friends," once established in power, were strong enough to maintain

control over the rebellious minority. Originating chiefly with the royal governors, these assumptions were based on more than just wishful thinking.

During the twenty years prior to the outbreak of the Revolution, the colonies of Virginia, North and South Carolina, and Georgia were the scene of rapid economic growth and population expansion whose settlement patterns led to explosive social conditions. Especially after 1763, the majority of new settlers came south through the Valley of Virginia into the Carolina and Georgia back country where they carved out farms and ranches. Primarily of non-English stock, these yeomen and freed indentured servants had little in common with the largely Anglican merchants and slave-owning landed gentry on the coast.⁴ The lack of economic, religious,⁵ and social commonality, and the distances separating the diverse groups, led to distrust and hostility. Social tensions were exacerbated by political factors, for the coastal planters and merchants continued to control the colonial assemblies and treasuries, with little or no representation from, or redress for, the back country.⁶

By 1769, conditions had become intolerable in North and South Carolina, where two unrelated protest associations, called Regulators, were organized. In South Carolina, Regulators protested the lack of government, courts and financial support. After unsuccessful attempts by the South Carolina assembly to correct the situation, the Regulators formed vigilante groups to police the back country; at the outbreak of the Revolution, their grievances had only been partially redressed.⁷

In North Carolina, the grievances were corrupt local government, unfair taxation, extortion, and land seizure. Petitions to the assembly failed, and after little concrete action was taken, Regulators ransacked the Crown's Court at Hillsborough. Governor William Tryon called out the

colony's militia and defeated an army of 2000 Regulators on 16 May 1771, at the Alamance River. Surviving Regulators were offered clemency, and by 4 July some 6000 had taken an oath of allegiance to the Crown. Bitter and disgusted, many Regulators moved west into the mountain settlements; others remained, harboring an intense hatred against the tidewater establishment.⁸

These and other social conflicts, like the animosity between Virginia planters and the largely Scottish-born merchant class,⁹ were primarily between inhabitants of the colonies and the native American power groups which dominated the Colonial Assemblies. It was this feature of domestic tension that led many Britons, particularly the southern royal governors, to the sanguine belief that when the eastern seaboard opted for rebellion and independence, the western counties would resist and remain loyal to the Crown.¹⁰ In addition, the British counted heavily on recently emigrated settlers from the British Isles, and on the thousands of merchants and farmers who had close economic ties with Britain, for continued loyalty to the mother country. For a variety of reasons, the British insisted that the majority of colonials were, in fact, loyal to the Crown.

British assumptions concerning Loyalism were correct only to a degree. Evidence points to the conclusion that Loyalism was largely an immigrant phenomenon.¹¹ In the South it was strongest in groups of English, Scottish, and Scots-Irish extraction who had emigrated to the colonies during the ten years prior to the war. By occupation, Loyalism seems to have been strongest among the merchants, artisans, craftsmen, and professional men in the cities and towns. However, in the Carolinas and Georgia, Loyalist farmers and landowners, primarily those of some wealth, probably equalled the town-based groups in number. British assumptions

about Loyalist strength in the back country and among the western farmers, with the exception of three counties in the Carolinas, proved to be false. Even the Regulator influence does not appear to have been instrumental in swinging people to the Loyalist side. To the contrary, evidence leads to the conclusion that a greater proportion of ex-Regulators supported independence than rallied to the Crown.¹²

Although no historian has as yet been able to determine accurately the strength of the "King's Friends" in America, one fact is irrefutable: British assumptions to the contrary, they were not strong enough. The British cannot, of course, be faulted for lacking the prescience to see that their assumptions were incorrect. They can, however, be criticized for refusing to discard them when they were shown to be invalid. Yet, the lack of Tory strength and staying power would be continually demonstrated, and the British would persistently refuse to believe it.

Despite the fact that their Southern strategy was predicated on assumptions of support from a Loyalist majority, the British were, from the beginning, shockingly obtuse in their handling of the situation. Lord Dunmore, Governor of Virginia, was both victim and cause of the initial British failure in the South. Forced to flee to a British warship in June 1775, Dunmore returned in October at the request of the strongly Loyalist Scottish merchants of Norfolk that he take possession of the city. In November, encouraged by the number of oaths of allegiance he had received, Dunmore made the first of three disastrous mistakes. He granted slaves belonging to rebels their freedom and attempted to raise a regiment of blacks. The effect on the colony was electrifying. If Dunmore had deliberately set out to destroy any chance for British success, he could not have done a better job. As Richard Henry Lee stated, Dunmore's

" . . . unparalleled conduct . . . has, a few Scotch excepted, united every man" ¹³

The Colony's reaction was swift. A militia regiment under the veteran Colonel William Woodford marched on Norfolk and defeated Dunmore's forces on 11 December at Great Bridge. The Virginians, now augmented by troops from North Carolina, drove the Tories before them through Norfolk and onto British warships in the harbor. Here, the governor made his second great error.

Bottled up on his ships and refusing to leave the harbor, Dunmore became enraged when rebels refused to allow his foraging parties to go ashore. On New Year's Day, 1776, he ordered the town shelled with hot shot. Although the British deliberately started the fires that destroyed the city, Patriot riflemen made certain that the job was completed. Thankful for the opportunity to destroy the Tory base, they actually destroyed more of the city than did the British. ¹⁴ Because the American activities in Norfolk did not become general knowledge for some time, Dunmore received the blame for burning the city. ¹⁵

To add to the Crown's woes, John Connolly, Dunmore's secret agent, was arrested by the Patriots. Captured with him were letters of instruction from Dunmore and General Thomas Gage, British theater commander, for Connolly to raise a force of Indians and Loyalists to attack the western settlements. This, the first attempt by the British to loose the Indians on the colonists, earned for Dunmore and the Crown the undying hatred of the majority of Virginians. ¹⁶ Thus, within six months after he had first been forced aboard a warship, Dunmore had caused the destruction of the center of Loyalist strength in the colony and had unified Virginians solidly behind the Revolution.

Further south, British activity also seemed to be motivated by a perverse desire to thwart any chance for recovery of the Carolinas. Instead of waiting until Clinton's expedition had arrived off Cape Fear, Governor Josiah Martin of North Carolina called for a Loyalist uprising in January. He counted most heavily on support from two groups, the Scottish Highlanders settled around Cross Creek and Cumberland County, and the Regulators from the west central counties of the colony. Martin was optimistic enough to believe that a force of 20,000 would take up arms for the King.¹⁷

Brigadier General Donald MacDonald had been sent south by General Gage to command the Loyalist force, and he was partially successful in rallying the clans. Although estimates vary as to the total number of Loyalists actually engaged at Cross Creek, approximately 1500 actually began the trek towards Wilmington and Cape Fear on 18 February. The force was composed primarily of Highlanders; only 130 Regulators marched with MacDonald.¹⁸ Unquestionably, many more Loyalists had traveled to Cross Creek but had departed for home after they had seen the small size of the "army" and the absence of British troops whom many had understood would be there. Many other Loyalists had been stopped by Whigs, now out in force, and had been turned back or arrested. MacDonald's army was small, but the threat that it represented to the Revolution was grave indeed. Although Governor Martin's predictions of a great uprising had proven to be false, the force of Highlanders and Tories that marched towards Wilmington was the largest organized body of Loyalists ever to bear arms against the Revolution in the South. No one realized it at the time, but more was riding on MacDonald's shoulders than the mission to link-up with the British at Cape Fear.

By now, the countryside was in arms, and three Patriot forces were converging on the Tories. Colonel James Moore's First Regiment, Colonel Richard Caswell's regiment from New Bern, and Colonel Alexander Lillington's battalion of minutemen from Wilmington finally blocked the Highlanders at Moore's Creek Bridge on 27 February. After a sharp engagement which totally dispersed the Tory army, MacDonald and about 850 of his men were taken prisoner.¹⁹ Although the mood of the country soon changed, the Loyalist survivors were treated with a restraint which by comparison with later years was remarkable. Most of those captured were paroled to their homes, but their officers were incarcerated.

The Battle of Moore's Creek Bridge was a crippling blow from which the Loyalist movement in the South never recovered. Not only were substantial numbers of Loyalists killed or captured, but MacDonald's muster lists were captured with him.²⁰ Patriots thus identified many of those Loyalists who felt strongly enough to take up arms against them. The immediate Patriot response to the untimely Loyalist uprising, the ease with which the meagre Tory army was defeated, and the thoroughness of the subsequent Tory roundup, were object lessons that did not escape those of Loyalist persuasion. Had Clinton's expeditionary force been in a position to support MacDonald, the results might have been different, but the British army was not there. Contemporary newspapers were wrong when they predicted that the Moore's Creek battle would put a stop to Toryism in North Carolina.²¹ Never again, however, would the state face a Loyalist threat comparable to that posed by the Highlanders.

In South Carolina, Loyalists had been equally premature in showing their colors. In secret communication with Governor Lord William Campbell, back country Loyalists in November and December 1775 seized the fort at

the town of Ninety-Six and also captured a wagon train taking gunpowder, as part of a treaty arrangement, to the Cherokees. Tory bands went on a rampage in Ninety-Six District and terrorized the countryside. A force of approximately 5000 South and North Carolina militia and Continentals combined under the command of Colonel Richard Richardson and quickly crushed the uprising.²² The Patriots, learning of Governor Campbell's role in the uprising, seized his property in Charleston and offered it for sale at auction.²³

General Clinton arrived late off Cape Fear on 12 March with a portion of the expedition that was to have cooperated with the Loyalists in North Carolina. He found that the fleet from Ireland had not arrived and that all four southern governors had been forced to seek safety aboard British men-of-war.²⁴ Everywhere, the Loyalists had been defeated. Governor Martin tried to minimize the importance of the Loyalist defeat at Moore's Creek, but Clinton disagreed. He had come to the realization that the Loyalists would never be able to establish themselves or hold power without substantial backing by British regulars. Further, ". . . to bring those poor people forward before that were the case would have only exposed them to the resentment and malice of their enemies."²⁵ But, after making this accurate appraisal, General Clinton proceeded to turn the unfortunate operation, which thus far had been rendered a fiasco by British civil authorities, into a military disaster.

Having been delayed by weather, the main amphibious force under Admiral Sir Peter Parker did not close off Cape Fear until 3 May, almost three months after its planned rendezvous. Clinton had already decided, given the situation ashore and the time constraint on his mission, that inland operations in the Carolinas were no longer a practical option.

Although he wanted to establish a beachhead in Virginia, he acquiesced to guidance from General William Howe, now the theater commander, and to the desires of Parker and decided to attack Charleston instead. The objective of the attack was Sullivan's Island, which commanded the entrance to Charleston Harbor, and which Clinton intended to establish as a Loyalist stronghold.²⁶

Faulty reconnaissance, poor planning and coordination between Clinton and Parker, and a courageous and skillful defense by the Patriots combined to give the British attack a bloody repulse. On 28 June, while Clinton's army stood ineffectually by, Parker's fleet was shredded by the guns of Fort Sullivan (later renamed Fort Moultrie, after its commander). Parker broke off the attack after losing one frigate and suffering 205 casualties.²⁷ As the battered British expedition sailed north, the British Southern campaign was suffering one final frustration.

In July, the Cherokees fell on the western settlements from Virginia to Georgia. Alarmed at the encroachment of American settlers into their lands, the Indians took the opportunity to strike while the colonists were occupied further to the east. The British cabinet had called for the employment of Indians, but British Southern superintendent John Stuart resisted and tried to restrain the Cherokees. Stuart was blamed for the uprising because Loyalists had encouraged the Indians to strike, and many Loyalists joined the Indians in attacking Patriot settlements and stockades.²⁸ The initial assaults were devastating. In their zeal to get at whites, however, the Indians became indiscriminate in their attacks and forced many Loyalists to make common defense with the Whigs.²⁹ Reaction by the colonies was swift and merciless. With a degree of cooperation born of desperation, four strong columns, one from each

colony, moved against the Indian settlements, crushing the Cherokees and breaking their power for two years.³⁰

Most damaging to the British cause was the tremendous boost the attacks gave to the Patriot effort. In addition to forcing many Loyalists into the Whig camp for protection, the raids served to stimulate the widely separated settlements throughout the South to cooperate in defense against a common enemy. For the British, always so optimistic about the strength of Loyalism in the back country, the decision to use the Indian tribes as a weapon doomed any chance they had for success. Indian raids did prevent many Patriot riflemen and militia units from leaving their settlements to join the more decisive operations further to the east; but in identifying themselves with the Indian effort, the British united the majority of the back countrymen against the Crown.

With the end of the first British offensive in the South, the four colonies settled down to consolidate internal control. A bitter and savage campaign began against Loyalist elements, and those Tories who were able to responded in kind. After the sweeping Patriot victories of the past year, however, the Loyalist cause was so weak that most individuals were forced into silence and inactivity. Many were cowed, or felt themselves too weak to dare oppose the Whigs. James Simpson, former Attorney-General of South Carolina, stated before the British Claims Commission what was probably the feeling of all too many Loyalists: ". . . the [British] Government of this Country had lost its energy, and the system adopted by the Americans was introduced with such sudden violence, it would have been fatal as well as ineffectual to have opposed it, many well disposed people were obliged to go down with the Stream. . . ." ³¹ Others, still loyal to the King, had believed strongly in the rights of colonial self-government

and freedom from external taxation. These Loyalists had actively assisted the Whigs in 1775 in the first critical seizure and consolidation of power. When the issue became one of complete independence from Great Britain, however, they now tried to change sides. By this time, it was too late.

Most of the militia forces were solidly in Whig hands, and early defeats of the few organized Loyalist forces that attempted to assert themselves were instrumental in suppressing Loyalist activities throughout the colonies. Laws of varying severity were passed against treason in general and Toryism in particular; legal redress was denied, and property was confiscated and sold; Loyalist leaders were either jailed, sent to other colonies for "safekeeping," or were hounded out of the colonies.³²

Physical intimidation was commonplace; so was murder. Thus, from the beginning, Patriots denied the Tories the necessary leadership and the opportunity to organize and coordinate their actions effectively against their now solidly-entrenched enemies.

The consequences of Dunmore's rash activities, and Martin and Campbell's precipitate Loyalist uprisings had been the same: defeat and irrevocable damage to the Loyalist cause and a corresponding increase in Patriot strength. Clinton and Parker's repulse at Sullivan's Island had multiplied the effects of previous British reverses, and the Cherokee uprising had served primarily to unite the western settlers on the Patriot side. The British setbacks had produced a cumulative and reinforcing effect; each one had elicited a more coordinated response by the colonies to the next threat. The basic Patriot strength and Loyalist weakness had been repeatedly demonstrated, but the British refused to understand what they had just experienced.

Surprisingly, the repulse of the British southern expedition did not change official perceptions about Loyalist strength. To the contrary, the unsuccessful risings in the Carolinas were seen as proof of widespread support for the Crown. Governor Martin, especially, was encouraged over the rising of the Highlanders at Cross Creek, and officials concluded that only a solid operation by the army was necessary to enable the Loyalists to triumph.³³ The significance of the Patriot defense at Charlestown was somehow lost in an acrimonious public debate between Clinton and Parker as to whether the army or the navy was at fault for the repulse at Sullivan's Island.³⁴ Ignored was the warning by the Annual Register that the ability of southerners to mobilize 10,000 armed men to subdue an internal threat must seriously hinder any future Loyalist uprising.³⁵ Since it had always been an article of faith with the King and his Ministry that the rebellion in America was the work of a minority, the British saw only what confirmed this view. As far as the Crown was concerned, nothing had taken place to refute the assumptions upon which the southern expedition had been based.

FINAL ATTACK

In 1778, after continual frustration in the North, the British began to look South again, this time for a solution to the rebellion. Faced with a world war after France entered the conflict, the British were forced to revise their strategy and redeploy their forces. Defense requirements of the Home Islands and the West Indies relegated the American theater to a poor third priority for resources.³⁶ In consequence, the new theater commander, Lieutenant General Clinton (now Sir Henry), was ordered to confine his operations to attacks on rebel ports and shipping and to relinquish the thought of a land war against the rebels. However,

he was to invade Georgia with a small force in October and subdue that province. He was then to capture South Carolina by an amphibious attack on Charleston and an overland invasion from Georgia. A raiding force in the Chesapeake would prevent Washington from dispatching reinforcements southward. The Loyalists (the supposed majority of southern colonists) would assist in the operation and would be enlisted in the regular forces or organized into militia units.³⁷

Clinton's orders were changed several times during the year, and he was required to withdraw from Philadelphia to New York and dispatch a considerable part of his strength to the West Indies and Florida. Nonetheless, he was strongly encouraged again by Germaine to launch the Georgia operation. With considerable misgivings about the dispersion of his army (which he believed to be inadequate to begin with), Clinton dispatched Lieutenant Colonel Sir Archibald Campbell and 3000 troops in November to take Savannah.³⁸

On the surface, Campbell's conquest of Georgia was ridiculously easy. Landing on 23 December he moved on Savannah. He found the defense to be disorganized, and he was able to outflank the Patriots and capture the town on 29 December. After linking up with Brigadier General Augustine Prevost's column which had moved up from East Florida, Campbell struck out for the interior. He captured Augusta in late January, without meeting resistance.

Campbell then committed an error made all too often by British commanders. After administering oaths of allegiance and forming the Loyalists into militia companies, he found that he could not maintain his position at Augusta. Harassment by Patriot militia increased daily, and Campbell feared that he would be cut off from the coast. As he began his

retreat, he learned that Colonel Andrew Pickens had intercepted a larger force of North Carolina Loyalists en route to join the British and had routed them on 14 February at Kettle Creek. After picking up 300 of the survivors, Campbell continued his withdrawal to Savannah, abandoning the back country Loyalists to their fate. Campbell regarded the loss of Augusta as only temporary. In a military sense, he was correct; but his desertion of the King's Friends made a lasting impression on the back country.³⁹

Campbell returned to England in the Spring, leaving Prevost in sole command. That officer conducted a series of probes into South Carolina and fought off a disorganized attack on Savannah in September by French Admiral Comte d'Estaing and General Benjamin Lincoln, American commander in the South. Although these events were of little military consequence, their timing was critical to decisions being made in London.

By the summer of 1779, George III and his Ministry were under considerable pressure. Spain had entered the war against Britain, and the threat of invasion by a combined French-Spanish force was grave. The British were in the midst of a naval crisis, and defense requirements of Britain's world-wide empire (in addition to the Home Islands) increased. In Britain, internal problems such as the Gordon Riots, mutinies in two Scottish regiments, and the Irish question exacerbated the crisis.⁴⁰ Opposition in Parliament was increasing and reached new heights during the sensational inquiry into the conduct of Generals William Howe and John Burgoyne in America. It was at this point that the Ministry brought to bear its most telling argument for not only continuing the American war, but bringing it to a successful conclusion.

Reports from the deposed southern governors had continued to describe the overwhelming loyalty of the majority of Americans in the South. The report of the King's abortive Peace Commission had echoed this belief.⁴¹ Early in 1779, the Ministry had determined that its strategy in America would be based primarily on restoring the Loyalists to control.⁴² Campbell's and Prevost's successes (and their glowing reports⁴³) convinced the government that the best chance for success lay in the southern colonies.⁴⁴ In the face of a direct challenge by Howe that the Americans were unanimously behind the Revolution, the Ministry countered with a statement that more than two-thirds of the Americans desired peace with the mother country. By the end of June, the Ministry had won the debate, and the British government was publicly committed to a strategy based on harnessing the support of a Loyalist majority in America.⁴⁵

A vacillating Clinton, protesting the detachments he was required to make from his understrength force, nonetheless believed that he must do something to exploit the situation in Georgia and save it from mounting pressure from South Carolina.⁴⁶ He withdrew his men and ships from Rhode Island, and on December 26, 1779, he set sail from New York with a task force, bound for Charleston.

Through the first seven months of 1780, the Ministry's strategy and assumptions appeared to be valid. The immediate cause of Germaine's optimistic 3 August message was the capture of Charleston, on 12 May, by Clinton and Vice Admiral Marriot Arbuthnot, commander of the Royal Navy's American Squadron. The loss of the key port city was the greatest military disaster suffered by the Patriots during the war. With it was captured Major General Benjamin Lincoln, six other general officers, the Lieutenant Governor of the state, and six thousand troops,⁴⁷ over half of

them regulars, including the entire Continental Lines of Georgia and North and South Carolina.⁴⁸

By the end of June, British columns had overrun the state and had garrisoned population centers along its major river systems. Clinton instituted a liberal system of parole for those Americans who would lay down their weapons and return to their homes. British garrisons offered sufficient protection and incentive for Loyalists to enlist in a number of royal militia units as part of a comprehensive program directed by Major Patrick Ferguson.⁴⁹ South Carolina was thus the second American state to fall under British domination. When Clinton departed in June for his headquarters in New York, leaving Lieutenant General Charles, second Earl Cornwallis in command of all forces in the South, intelligence indicated that large parties of North Carolina Loyalists were ready to assist the British in the subjugation of that state as well.⁵⁰

The American cause suffered another major blow in August. A second Southern Army, with a nucleus of 1400 Maryland and Delaware Continentals under Major General the Baron de Kalb, had formed in North Carolina. Over General George Washington's objection,⁵¹ Congress had appointed the hero of Saratoga, Major General Horatio Gates, to succeed Lincoln as commander of the Southern Department. When Gates arrived in July to assume command of his army, he found it in sorry condition--poorly disciplined, ill-equipped, and near starvation.⁵² Despite the army's rather desperate situation, Gates immediately advanced into South Carolina. At Camden on the night of 15-16 August, he collided with Cornwallis' force of 3000 British regulars that had moved north to intercept him.

For the Americans, the battle of Camden and its aftermath was a debacle. Gates' dispositions were faulty, the bulk of the militia fled without firing a shot, and the Continentals, after a desperate but hopeless struggle, were overwhelmed. The defeat turned into a disgraceful rout, and Gates' actions were so suspect that Congress called for his immediate relief from command and for an official inquiry into his conduct. Alexander Hamilton's reaction to news of the disaster was a typical one. On hearing of Gates' precipitous flight back to Hillsborough, North Carolina, Hamilton acidly wrote, "One hundred and eighty miles in three days and a half. It does admirable credit to the activity of a man at his time of life. But it disgraces the General and the Soldiers."⁵³ De Kalb had been killed, and only 700 Continentals eventually made their way back to Hillsborough.⁵⁴ The Southern Army had been destroyed for the second time in three months. To make matters worse, South Carolina partisan Thomas Sumter's mixed 700-man force of Continentals and militia, the largest in the state, was surprised at Fishing Creek two days after Camden and was dispersed after suffering 450 casualties.⁵⁵

The American cause in the South had been dealt a near-mortal blow, and Cornwallis made immediate preparations to follow up his advantage by invading North Carolina. He dispatched messengers to the King's Friends in that state, and as Charles Stedman, Civilian Commissary of Cornwallis' army, states, ". . . the reduction of the province of North Carolina was . . . confidently looked for."⁵⁶ But, while Lord Germaine also had been ". . . sanguine enough to expect the recovery of the whole of the southern provinces in the course of the campaign . . . ,"⁵⁷ Cornwallis was confronting a new problem that was growing in severity and would soon become insurmountable, partisan warfare.

CHAPTER 1

END NOTES

1. Germaine to His Majesty's Commissioners, August 3, 1780. Reprinted in Sir Henry Clinton, The American Rebellion, Sir Henry's Narrative of His Campaign, 1775-1782, with an Appendix of Original Documents, ed. William B. Willcox (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), p. 448.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 23, 24 n. 10; Willard M. Wallace, Appeal to Arms (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1951), pp. 88-89.
4. Wallace Brown, The King's Friends (Providence: Brown University Press, 1965), pp. 202, 213, 246.
5. For instance, North Carolina laws refused to validate marriages performed by other than an Anglican minister, and only Anglicans were allowed to teach school. North Callahan, Royal Raiders; The Tories of the American Revolution (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1963), p. 128.
6. The best general treatment of the social and political tension between east and west, and the best analysis of the Regulator movements that resulted, is John R. Alden, The South in the Revolution, 1763-1789 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1957), pp. 143-163.
7. Lawrence H. Gipson, The Coming of the Revolution, 1763-1775 (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1954), pp. 148-149.
8. Brown, The King's Friends, pp. 205-207.
9. Gipson, Revolution, p. 139; Brown, The King's Friends, p. 180.
10. Clinton, American Rebellion, p. 23. When Governor Josiah Martin of North Carolina called for an uprising of those loyal to the Crown to support Clinton's expedition to Cape Fear in 1776, he appealed primarily to Highlanders from Cross Creek (now Fayetteville) and to the western Regulators. Brown, The King's Friends, pp. 202-203; Callahan, Royal Raiders, pp. 15-16.
11. Except where indicated, facts contained in this paragraph are derived primarily from Wallace Brown, The King's Friends, pp. 179-283.

This thoroughly researched study of American Loyalism is based on an analysis of the testimony and findings of the British Claims Commission after the war.

12. Ibid.; Don Higginbotham, The War of American Independence; Military Attitudes, Policies, and Practice, 1763-1789 (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1971), p. 286 n. 46; Alden, South, pp. 152, 162.
13. Brown, The King's Friends, p. 190.
14. Wallace, Appeal to Arms, p. 90.
15. Allen French, The First Year of the Revolution (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1934), p. 643.
16. Ibid., pp. 579-580.
17. Brown, The King's Friends, pp. 195, 203, 206.
18. The best treatment of the Highlander uprising is Hugh F. Rankin, The North Carolina Continentals (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1971), pp. 28-54. Other fairly close estimates of the size of MacDonald's army are found in Brown, The King's Friends, p. 195; and Callahan, Royal Raiders, pp. 16-17.
19. Moore arrived with his unit after the battle but was responsible for directing the roundup of MacDonald and the bulk of his force. Rankin, Continentals, pp. 49-50.
20. Callahan, Royal Raiders, p. 23.
21. Frank Moore, Diary of the American Revolution, From Newspapers and Original Documents, vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scribner, 1858; reprint ed., New York: The New York Times & Arno Press, 1969), p. 210.
22. Robert W. Gibbes, Documentary History of the American Revolution, 2 vols. (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1855; reprint ed., New York: The New York Times & Arno Press, 1971), vol. 1, pp. 225, 247-248.
23. Ibid., p. 239.
24. Governor Wright of Georgia was arrested in January 1776, but escaped and boarded a warship in Savannah harbor. French, First Year, p. 642.
25. Clinton, American Rebellion, p. 27.
26. Ibid., pp. 26-27. The convolutions of British strategy are analyzed by Paul H. Smith, Loyalists and Redcoats; a Study in British Revolutionary Policy (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1964), pp. 18-31.

27. The attack on Sullivan's Island is described in Clinton's and Parker's contradictory dispatches, printed in Clinton, American Rebellion, pp. 373-378. The defense of the island is covered by its commander, William Moultrie, Memoirs of the American Revolution (New York: David Longworth, 1802; reprint ed., New York: The New York Times & Arno Press, 1968), pp. 166-184.

28. John Stuart, British Indian superintendent in the South, had warned against making any offensive use of Indians. He correctly anticipated the indiscriminate nature of their attacks and the impetus they would give to drive Loyalists into the Patriot camp for protection. He also anticipated a propaganda victory for the Patriots if the British loosed savages on the frontier. Stuart to Gage, 15 September and 3 October 1775. "Intercepted Letters, 1775-1781, Volume I," Papers of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789. Records of the Continental Congress and the Constitutional Convention, Record Group 360 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives Microfilm Publications, Microcopy 247, 1958), Item 51, Roll 65. Hereafter cited as "Intercepted Letters," PCC. For Tory activities and British command pressure on Stuart, see Alden, South, 269-271.

29. See James Cresswell's letter from Ninety-Six ". . . the savages killed the disaffected in common, without distinction of party. That greatly alarmed them, changed their countenance and tone, and made them look out for their families." Gibbes, Documentary History, 2, p. 31.

30. Two contemporary documents describe the Patriot expedition against the Cherokees. "Diary of [General] Andrew Williamson's Cherokee Expedition--1776," and a second journal, author unknown (but probably Arthur Fairies, a member of Clinton's company in Neel's regiment). Both are in the Thomas Sumter Manuscripts, Lyman C. Draper Collection (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin), Volume 3, pp. 152-158, 162-175. Hereafter cited as Draper MSS 3 VV 152-158, 162-175. The Patriot victory resulted in the Treaties of De Witt's Corner and Long Island (May 20 and July 20, 1777), in which the Cherokees ceded all lands east of the Blue Ridge and conceded all claims north of the Nolichucky River. Alden, South, p. 273.

31. Brown, The King's Friends, pp. 239-240.

32. As an example, Donald MacDonald and other Highland officers captured at Moore's Creek Bridge were sent to Philadelphia to guard against "their future Machinations." Burke to Hancock, 22 April 1776. "North and South Carolina State Papers, 1776-1788," PCC, Item 72, Roll 86. Hereafter cited as "NC State Papers," PCC. For other punitive acts against Loyalists, see Higginbotham, American Independence, pp. 268-270.

33. Smith, Loyalists, pp. 29-30.

34. See note 27.

35. Rankin, Continental, p. 53.

36. The strategic priority is established in two letters from George III to Lord North, January 31, and February 9, 1778. Sir John Fortescue, The Correspondence of George the Third, from 1760 to 1783, Vol. 4 (London: Macmillan and Company, Ltd., 1928), pp. 30-31, 36.

37. Smith, Loyalists, pp. 83-85. William B. Willcox refers to this plan as part of "a collection of strategic fossils." Yet it was in fact the plan eventually adopted to bring the war to a close. "British Strategy in America, 1778," The Journal of Modern History, XIX (June 1947), p. 104.

38. Smith, Loyalists, pp. 92-94.

39. "Our eyes are now opened, . . . [the British] have at this crisis given convincing proofs, that no faith should or ought to be placed in their most solemn assurances, and severe examples must certainly be made for the benefit of the State and a terror to others." Andrew Williamson [to ?], February 16, 1779. Draper MSS, 3 VV 236. So saying, the Patriots tried seventy of the Tories for treason and actually hung five, thus reinforcing the lesson. It is ironic that Williamson made the statement quoted above. When the British overran South Carolina in 1780, Williamson took a loyalty oath and became a Loyalist.

40. Sir John Fortescue, A History of the British Army, Vol. 3 (London: Macmillan and Company, Ltd., 1902), pp. 287-295.

41. Smith, Loyalists, pp. 88-89, 113-114.

42. See two influential documents "Proposal for Covering and Reducing the Country as the British Army Shall Pass Through It" by Joseph Galloway, and Lord Amherst's and General Robertson's endorsement, all dated January 1779. Fortescue, Correspondence, 4, pp. 245-253. As Paul H. Smith points out, the reliance on Loyalists had always been a fundamental, but unstated, basis for British strategy. In 1779, especially after the Howe inquiry, it became a well-formulated and publicized Ministerial policy. Smith, Loyalists, p. 121.

43. The reports are recorded by Hessian Adjutant General Major Carl Baurmeister, Revolution in America. Confidential Letters and Journals, 1776-1874. . . , Trans. and edited by Bernhard A. Uhlenhof (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1957), pp. 226, 261.

44. Alexander Innes reported to General Clinton that news of the Georgia victories had "an astonishing effect" in England. The news had arrived "on the eve of the opening of the Budget, and of the arrangement of measures, and impeachment of men." Reported in Smith, Loyalists, pp. 116-117.

45. Ibid., pp. 117-125. Lord George Germaine's perceptions about the Loyalists are contained in several messages to Clinton, January 23, August 5, and September 27, 1779. Extracts printed in Clinton, American Rebellion, pp. 397-399, 415-416, 423-424.

46. Smith, Loyalists, pp. 111-112. Clinton's protests over the size of his army and his requirement to make detachments from it are found in several dispatches, Clinton to Germaine, Oct. 8, 1778, May 22 and August 20, 1779. Extracts printed in American Rebellion, pp. 152-155, 392-393, 407-408, 417-418.

47. Clinton, American Rebellion, p. 171.

48. M. F. Treacy, Prelude to Yorktown, The Southern Campaign of Nathanael Greene 1780-1781 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1963), p. 13.

49. The militia were divided into two categories. One group made up of older married men was to function locally as a kind of home guard. The second category was made up of young men and could be called for service up to six months at a time anywhere in Georgia or the Carolinas. Cornwallis to Clinton, June 30, 1780. Charles Cornwallis, Correspondence of Charles, First Marquis Cornwallis, Vol. 1, ed. Charles Ross, 2d ed. (London: John Murray, 1859; reprint ed. Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1967), p. 499.

50. Ibid., pp. 501-502.

51. Higginbotham, American Independence, p. 359.

52. Gates to Jefferson, July 19, 1780. "Letters from Major General Horatio Gates, 1775-1782," PCC. Hereafter cited as "Gates Letters," PCC.

53. Hamilton to James Duane, September 6, 1780. Alexander Hamilton, The Papers of Alexander Hamilton, Vol. 2, ed. Harold C. Syrett (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), p. 421.

54. Gates to Washington, August 30, 1780. Reprinted in Lieutenant Colonel Tarleton, A History of the Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, in the Southern Provinces of North America (London: Printed for T. Cadell in The Strand, 1787; reprint ed., New York: The New York Times & Arno Press, 1968), p. 153.

55. A variety of contemporary sources, most of which are in agreement, describe the battle of Camden and Sumter's defeat at Fishing Creek. For the British view, see Cornwallis to Germaine, Aug. 21, 1780, printed in Clinton, American Rebellion, pp. 452-454; Tarleton, Campaigns, pp. 103-116; Charles Stedman, The History of the Origin, Progress, and Termination of the American War, Vol. 2 (London: 1794; reprint ed., New York: The New York Times & Arno Press, 1969), pp. 207-213. For the American account, see Gates to the President of Congress, August 20, 1780, "Gates Letters," PCC; Governor Nash to the Delegates of North Carolina, August 23, 1780. "NC State Papers," PCC; Otho Holland Williams' narrative in William Johnson, Sketches of the Life and Correspondence of Nathanael Greene, Major General of the Armies of the United States, in the War of the Revolution, 2 vols. (Charleston: A. E. Miller, 1822; reprint ed., Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, Inc., 1966), Vol. 1, Appendix B.

56. Steadman, History, 2, p. 215.

57. Germaine to Clinton, July 14, 1780. Extract printed in Clinton, American Rebellion, p. 442.

CHAPTER 2

PARTISANS AND MILITIA

As early as 14 July, Cornwallis had informed Clinton that the situation was "not so peaceable as when I wrote last," and that a large partisan force was operating near the Catawba River. He stressed the necessity for invading North Carolina to crush rebel power (the Continental Army) and thereby reduce pressure on South Carolina and Georgia. Three weeks later, Cornwallis called for a diversion in the Chesapeake Bay to support his operations.¹ Not only had the Crown overestimated Loyalist sympathy and underestimated Patriot resolve, but through their actions the British were in no small measure responsible for the growing resistance movement that was plaguing both military operations and the pacification effort.

The capture of the three southern states' Continental Lines at Charleston, Clinton's liberal parole policy for the remaining militia, and rapid British occupation of the principal population centers throughout Georgia and South Carolina exerted a temporary stabilizing influence on the two states. However, British atrocities soon reversed the effect. Lieutenant Colonel Banastre Tarleton's massacre of a force of Virginia Continentals at the Waxhaws, and Major James Wemyss' pillaging of Presbyterian churches in the belief that they supported dissidents, were typical acts. With the tables now turned, Loyalist militia and bands of unregulated Tories, often with British acquiescence if not encouragement,

began to exact retribution on their fellow citizens for past grievances. British patrols began to confiscate or destroy property belonging to Patriot leaders.² Ironically, it was General Clinton himself who unwittingly set the final spark to the powder keg.

In an attempt to reinforce the effect of the Patriot collapse, and to speed up the return of the colonists to the Crowns' allegiance, Clinton began to modify the terms of the paroles that had been granted. On 1 June, he issued a proclamation promising a full and free pardon to all prisoners on parole and all persons who had taken part in the rebellion (excepting those who had occupied leadership positions or who had shed the blood of their fellow citizens). The full pardon provision caused an outcry among Loyalists. They argued that their tormentors would now be no worse off than they; by simply taking an oath (whether they meant it or not), rebels would escape punishment and be accorded the same status and privileges as a loyal subject who had suffered for years for maintaining his allegiance.

Overreacting to Loyalist objections, Clinton reversed himself on 3 June and issued what one British commander lamented as "That unfortunate proclamation [which] had very unfavorable consequences."³ With it, Clinton abrogated all paroles previously issued. By the 20th of June, all prisoners on parole would be restored to all rights, privileges and responsibilities of citizens. All who refused to take an oath of allegiance after that date would be considered rebels and treated accordingly. Since the "citizen's responsibility" that the British had foremost in mind was service in the Loyal militia, Americans on parole were offered the alternative of taking up arms against their fellow Patriots or being declared enemies of the Crown. Having had the terms of their parole changed without their consent, a significant number of Patriots took the

latter course and began to embody back into their old militia units to wage an irregular war against the British and Loyalists.⁴

Although Cornwallis complained bitterly about both proclamations,⁵ he added to the confusion by arbitrarily voiding pardons that had already been issued and establishing his own criteria for pardon: only those who demonstrated sufficient loyalty to be enlisted in the provincial militia would now qualify.⁶ The Patriots furthered the chaos with some skillful propaganda when they intercepted one of Cornwallis' dispatches after the battle of Camden. Adding a forged passage indicating that the British commander had ordered the imprisonment of all Americans who had refused to take up arms for the Crown, the Patriots published the correspondence in the press.⁷ The confusing and unrealistic British policies thus angered the Loyalists, offered no incentive for the Patriot leadership (the segment of the population most likely to influence the actions of others) to acquiesce, and drove many Patriots back into arms against the Crown.

Initial British action in South Carolina and Georgia can be understood only in light of the strategic assumptions that sent the redcoats south in the first place.⁸ Walter Millis has rightly observed that the only policy that offered the British any hope for success was one of counter-revolution.⁹ Yet British strategy and local policy was based on belief in a Loyalist majority existing in the South. Thus, counter-revolution was never implemented as a policy simply because it was not necessary. The majority of Americans had always remained loyal, the British believed, and recovering the colonies was simply a matter of placing the Loyalist majority back in control. Thus, Clinton defended his 3 June proclamation as one requiring every man to declare his true allegiance, thereby giving the Loyalists the opportunity of "chasing from among them [their] dangerous

neighbors."¹⁰ The underlying assumption, of course, was that the "dangerous neighbors" were in the minority.¹¹ This assumption also led the British to be less circumspect than they should have been in their actions towards the civil populace and paroled Patriot militia. Plundering of the supposed minority faction by British and Tory units was convincing proof to many that the protection of the Crown meant nothing. To the British, especially those at lower levels of command, the problem was of no consequence.

Indeed, the ease with which the British had apparently subjugated South Carolina led to a dangerous (and temporary) euphoria. On 30 June, Cornwallis wrote Clinton, "I think that with the force under my command . . . I can leave South Carolina in security, and march . . . into the back part of North Carolina, with the greatest probability of reducing that Province . . . [it] could be kept, with the assistance of our friends there, with as few troops as would be wanted on the borders of this province, if North Carolina should remain in the hands of our enemies"¹² He then offered to dispatch any of his troops Sir Henry thought necessary for an expedition into the Chesapeake. One month later, Cornwallis had to report that the situation had deteriorated so rapidly that he could not afford to send troops, and that he required a diversion by Clinton into the Chesapeake to assist him.¹³

The British commander in the South was concerned over three alarming developments. Despite his orders to Loyalists in North Carolina to do nothing until the British Army was in position to support them, two groups took up arms prematurely. The first, 1300 men under a Colonel Moore, assembled at Ramsour's Mill "without concert, plan, or proper leaders" and was immediately crushed by North Carolina militia. The survivors

fled into South Carolina, alarming Loyalists there. A second group of 800 men rallied under a Colonel Bryan to escape "the most barbarous persecution" and fled south to the nearest British garrison.¹⁴

The second development was the appearance of De Kalb's Maryland and Delaware Continentals in North Carolina. With the fall of Charleston, it had been rumored that the deep South had been abandoned by the rest of the country. The presence of a new Continental Army was the first tangible proof that the states had not been given up for lost.¹⁵ As it had in the North, and would again in the South, the Continental Army "in being" acted as a powerful rallying symbol for the Patriots and a deterrent to Loyalist activity.¹⁶ On learning of the Continentals, the supposedly Loyal militia at Cheraw on the Pee Dee River overcame their officers and took prisoner 100 sick Highlanders from the 71st Regiment who were being evacuated by boat, and carried the lot into North Carolina. A second "Loyalist" militia battalion, from the western Tyger River area, had previously risen en masse under a Lieutenant Colonel Lisle and joined Colonel Thomas Sumter's partisans. And Sumter had launched a series of major attacks on British posts at Williamson's, Rocky Mount, and Hanging Rock. Cornwallis' third problem was that the growing resistance movement had acquired leadership.¹⁷

With the South Carolina state government and regular military establishment captured at Charleston, four remarkable men emerged to assume the leadership of an irregular war against the British and their Loyalist supporters. Francis Marion, a lieutenant colonel in the South Carolina Continental Line, had been injured and was recuperating at his home on the Santee River when Charleston fell. As soon as he was able, he organized a small unit and joined De Kalb in North Carolina. When Gates arrived to

take command of the Southern Army, he sent Marion back into the Santee area shortly before the Camden battle to raid and to gather intelligence.

Thomas Sumter, who had resigned his Continental commission in 1778, was moved to action after Charleston was taken, when his home near Statesburgh was burned during one of Tarleton's forays. His small force increased after Clinton's 20 June loyalty oath deadline, and by mid-July he was attacking British units with alarming regularity, prompting Cornwallis' concern about the state of rebellion in the supposedly subdued colony.

The third officer, Colonel Elijah Clarke of Georgia, assembled his militia regiment after Georgia and South Carolina had been occupied and became the most prominent military figure in the back country in those two states during the summer of 1780. Picking up North and South Carolina militia units, he inflicted a major defeat on a British and Loyalist force at Musgrove's Mill in western South Carolina on the day after Camden. Throughout that summer and fall Clarke's militia plagued the British, attacking Augusta, fighting with Sumter at Fishdam Ford and Blackstocks, and harassing the post at Ninety-Six. Clarke was seriously wounded in early December at Long Cane, near Ninety-Six, and was out of action until March 1781. Fortunately, another leader emerged to assume control of the partisan war in the west.

Andrew Pickens, a South Carolina militia colonel, had accepted the British parole in good faith only to see his plantation plundered in November by a British unit. Few mistakes made by the British would prove to be so damaging to their chances for success in the South as their destruction of the homes of Sumter and Pickens. The latter, a devoutly religious man, considered his solemn contract with the Crown violated and

his obligation ended. He already enjoyed an excellent military reputation as a result of his 1779 victory over a Loyalist force at Kettle Creek, Georgia, and because of his participation in campaigns against the Indians. Pickens began to assemble his old militia regiment in early December.¹⁸

Collectively, the stubborn resistance of these and numerous lesser-known figures jolted the state out of the stupor induced by the suddenness of the British victory and fanned the spirit of revolt in the occupied areas. They began a relentless and savage war against British and Tory, who responded in kind. Fed by animosities intensified by years of repression and reprisal, and aggravated by the brutality of the British occupation, the struggle between Patriot and Loyalist exploded into a civil war that erased class, region and family distinction. It was a war without quarter, and the intensity and violence with which it was waged stunned outsiders.¹⁹ Because of a superiority in leadership and organization and because of the sentiments of a majority of the population, the Patriots were able to mount an internal threat to British control which the Tories by themselves were incapable of challenging.

Governor John Rutledge, one of the few South Carolina officials to have escaped capture at Charleston, eventually appointed Sumter, Marion and Pickens to brigadier general rank in the state militia.²⁰ Rutledge was determined to continue the state government in absentia, and he assumed civil authority over military operations in Georgia as well, appointing Sumter the senior militia officer to command both South Carolina and Georgia militia forces.²¹ Working closely with the commander of the Southern Department (initially Gates, then Greene), Rutledge divided military authority in South Carolina into two brigade sectors. Marion commanded all the militia regiments east of the Santee-Wateree-Catawba

River line, and Sumter all the regiments to the west.²² Later, when he was detached from Greene's Army in March 1781 to return to South Carolina, Pickens assumed command of a third brigade sector and operated primarily between Ninety-Six and Augusta.²³

Despite Rutledge's (and, later, Greene's) best efforts, command relationships between the three partisans were loose indeed, and although Sumter was officially in command of all militia forces, his authority over the other two brigades was nominal. The fiercely independent spirit that made the three such effective partisan leaders also lessened their desire to coordinate their operations with each other, much less subordinate themselves to anyone else. Pickens proved to be the most cooperative in working with the Continental Army, and Marion eventually responded to the central direction that evolved in the Southern Department. But Thomas Sumter never fully subordinated his operations to any control save his own.²⁴

Nonetheless, within their own areas the three leaders were formidable. Their principal strength lay in the fact that their commands were composed of virtually the same units and people that had made up the brigades since the beginning of the Revolution; Rutledge merely reconstituted the militia structure that had existed for years.²⁵ In most cases when the Patriots embodied they did so under their old officers and into their old units. Thus Pickens commanded a brigade in which he had previously served as a regimental commander. The militia units in Williamsburg District above Georgetown desired a Continental officer, preferably Francis Marion whom many of them knew, to command them.²⁶ Not only was the military organization a familiar and viable one, it was also ideally suited to the task ahead.

Whatever else may be the shortcomings of militia forces, in the South lack of military experience was not one of them. The Southern regiments, especially those from the western districts, had been active in every campaign fought against the Cherokees and Creeks. Marion and Pickens, for example, had seen heavy fighting as infantry lieutenants in British Colonel James Grant's Cherokee expedition in 1761.²⁷ Since the beginning of the Revolution, all militia units had been engaged in suppressing Tories and maintaining internal political control. In the critical year 1775-1776, militia units, sometimes in conjunction with Continentals, crushed every Loyalist uprising. Overwhelming victories at Moore's Creek Bridge in North Carolina and in the campaign against the South Carolina Tories (and in their continual suppression afterwards) effectively destroyed any chance for Loyalist success in the South. From 1779 on, militia units were increasingly used to combat the British invasions of Georgia and South Carolina. The Williamson Brigade's harassment of Archibald Campbell, and Pickens' key victory over the Loyalists at Kettle Creek, caused the evacuation of upper Georgia early in 1779. Although the British re-occupied Augusta, they were never able to establish effective control over the area.

In short, the southern militia had been trained in a hard school; it had learned to fight by fighting. It was experienced and well-led, and while it could not be expected to stand against regulars in the open, the militia was extremely successful with the partisan tactics it adopted against the British. And it was even more successful in its effort to suppress the Loyalists. Although some Loyalist militia units rendered valuable service to the Crown, the majority of the population did not support them. Tory leadership and direction comparable to that provided

by Marion, Sumter and Pickens never materialized, and the British quickly found themselves in control only of those areas that were garrisoned by regulars.

Thus in early September, while Cornwallis prepared to invade North Carolina, secure in the belief that he had destroyed rebel resistance with his victories over Gates' and Sumter's forces at Camden and Fishing Creek,²⁸ he received the news that Marion had raided a British column and freed 160 prisoners captured at Camden. He no sooner began his move towards North Carolina than he learned that Georgia militia under Colonel Elijah Clarke had attacked Augusta and had nearly carried the post, and he had to report to Clinton that "the indefatigable Sumter" was again in the field.²⁹

Despite the obvious fact that severe problems still existed in South Carolina, Cornwallis was determined to push his offensive operation into North Carolina, hoping to link up with Loyalists in the central part of the state. He was convinced that the subjugation of North Carolina was necessary for the security of South Carolina and Georgia, since the state offered both sanctuary and encouragement for the rebellion to the southward. Further, the assurances Cornwallis received from the Loyalists indicated that their strength was such that it would take no longer than a month to subdue the state.³⁰ After dispatching the infamous Major Wemyss with part of the 63d Regiment to Marion's area to "disarm in the most rigid manner, the country between the Santee and Pedee,"³¹ Cornwallis confidently resumed his move towards Charlotte on 7 September. But, as Commissary Stedman was to lament, "to confound human wisdom," an invisible hand stood poised to "derange the best concerted schemes [of men]."³²

Cornwallis' invasion of North Carolina was a disaster. His first disappointment came with the King's Friends. The day after Camden, he had at last called for the Loyalists to rise. But even before the British began their march north, it was obvious that the Loyalists were going to wait until the regulars were in North Carolina before they made any moves. Inured to years of Patriot oppression and British neglect, and with vivid memories of their defeats at Moore's Creek and Ramsour's Mill, the Loyalists this time were taking no chances on false promises. They wanted the British Army physically within supporting distance before they risked their lives again. Yet, even after he had penetrated the state, Cornwallis saw no uprising, and he began to realize that their strength had been vastly overrated. "Not a single man," wrote Lord Rawdon, ". . . attempted to improve the favourable moment, or obeyed that summons for which they had been so impatient."³³ Rawdon was mistaken. Numerous Loyalists had taken up arms, but despite the confusion they caused, the North Carolina militia again proved equal to the task of subduing them.

The Loyalist uprising was met by a combination of forces: those militia who remained home to protect their families, those who disobeyed orders to assemble and went hunting for local Tory units, and those units which were dispatched to meet a specific threat.³⁴ Especially active was Colonel William R. Davie and his cavalry, which had been raiding into South Carolina since the beginning of the British occupation. In a two-day period Davie found and attacked two large bands of Loyalists (one in the rear of the British Army) and scattered them after inflicting heavy casualties.³⁵ From a purely military standpoint, the anti-Loyalist operation was a disorganized ad hoc affair, as one might expect in a state that had simultaneously to repel an invasion and subdue an insurrection. But

the flexibility of the militia as an institution, and its sheer mass, enabled it to accomplish both tasks in rather convincing fashion. Cornwallis did not know about the Loyalists because he found himself effectively cut off from outside contact.

The British move from Camden to Charlotte was a frustrating one. The remnants of Gates' shattered army further north at Hillsborough posed no threat, but Cornwallis was under continual harassment from the North Carolina militia under Generals Jethro Sumner and William Davidson. Davie was pulled in from his forays against the Loyalists and sent to delay the British advance, and Cornwallis was able to occupy Charlotte only after a stiff fight. Once there, he found the situation even worse. Tarleton well described the hazards of the occupation in the middle of the two counties

. . . more hostile to England than any others in America. The vigilance and animosity of these surrounding districts checked the exertions of the well affected, and totally destroyed all communication between the King's troops and the Loyalists in the other part of the province. . . . The foraging parties were every day harrassed by the inhabitants, who . . . fired from covert places, to annoy the British detachments. Ineffectual attempts were made upon convoys coming from Camden, and the intermediate post at Blair's mill; but individuals with expresses were frequently murdered. . . . Notwithstanding the . . . losses sustained by the militia . . . they continued their hostilities with unwearied perseverance; and the British troops were so effectually blockaded . . . that very few out of a great number of messengers could reach Charlotte town . . . to give intelligence of Ferguson's situation.³⁶

It was Ferguson's situation that Stedman had attributed to the ominous workings of "an invisible hand."

Tasked with screening Cornwallis' left flank and moving into the settlements west of the Catawba to ". . . keep alive the spirits of the King's friends in North Carolina . . . ,"³⁷ Ferguson's force consisted of approximately 1100 Loyalist militia and provincial troops. Now a brevet

lieutenant colonel (although news of the promotion had not yet reached him), Ferguson had accomplished much since his appointment by Clinton as the British inspector of militia. Proceeding methodically, he had recruited and trained several battalions of Loyalists, primarily from South Carolina's central and western districts.³⁸ An outstanding leader and an expert rifleman, Ferguson was an experienced commander who might have been one of Cornwallis' best officers. Unfortunately for the British, his first independent operation in the South was also his last.

Ferguson moved through the western North Carolina settlements into the foothills of the Appalachians as far north as Gilbert Town (near present day Rutherfordton), hoping to cut off Elijah Clarke's retreat northward from the repulsed attack on Augusta. To "keep up the spirits of the King's friends" and to otherwise cow the local inhabitants, Ferguson sent an insulting and highly inflammatory ultimatum to the mountain settlements, threatening to burn and plunder the area.³⁹ From his dealings with Americans, Ferguson should have known better, and the ultimatum was a fatal mistake. Patriot militia regiments were already joining to oppose him. Responding generally to the British invasion of the state and to Ferguson's threat in particular, a force of some 3000 "over mountain" men rallied at Sycamore Flats on the Watauga River. Selecting only their best-mounted men, they came boiling out of the mountains after Ferguson. They were reinforced by other North Carolinians and by back country militia from Virginia and South Carolina. Then numbering about 1300 men,⁴⁰ the combined Patriot force overtook the Loyalists at Kings Mountain on October 7. In one of the key battles of the Revolution, in which only one Britisher took part, Ferguson was killed and approximately 1000 of his men were either killed or captured.⁴¹

The effects of Ferguson's defeat were immediate and far-reaching. Cornwallis, under continual attack at Charlotte, was stunned by the loss of his flank column and alarmed at the threat now posed to British posts in western South Carolina, especially Ninety-Six, by the sudden and unexpected appearance of the back country riflemen. Disgusted at his lack of success, he decided to withdraw into South Carolina. Still harassed by rebel militia, his army began its withdrawal to the Catawba fords on 14 October with a haste that bordered on the precipitous.⁴² The Loyalists who had risen were left to their fate.

As is usually the case in a revolution, the political and psychological effects of a battle have a far greater impact than its purely military results. The temporary abandonment of North Carolina was less significant than the effect of Ferguson's demise on American sentiment throughout the South. The loss of so promising an officer, and the totality of the defeat of his Loyalist army, was a blow from which the Loyalist movement never recovered. As Sir Henry Clinton bitterly stated, the defeat ". . . overset in a moment all the happy effects of our successes at Charleston and . . . Camden, and so encouraged that spirit of rebellion in both Carolinas that it never could be afterward humbled. For no sooner had the news of it spread through the country than multitudes of disaffected flew to arms from all parts" ⁴³ Lieutenant Colonel John Cruger, commander of the key post at Ninety-Six, from whose district Ferguson had drawn his greatest strength, informed Cornwallis that the inhabitants of that Loyalist stronghold were so dispirited by the defeat that they would probably surrender to the first rebel force that appeared.⁴⁴

The situation was even more alarming because during the absence of the British main force from South Carolina, the rebel militia there had not been idle. Francis Marion had created such havoc in the eastern part of the state that Cornwallis now regarded the situation there to be more serious than in the back country.⁴⁵ After capturing the prisoner-of-war column on its way back from Camden, Marion completely dispersed the Loyalist militia battalion that formed in Williamsburg District. In quick succession, from the end of September to the end of October, Marion defeated a Loyalist battalion from Georgetown, launched a successful raid on that British port (Cornwallis considered it to have been captured), inflicted heavy casualties on the Loyalist militia of the Santee Hills, and captured their commander. "Colonel Marion," Cornwallis informed Clinton, "had so wrought on the minds of the people, partly by the terror of his threats and cruelty of his punishments, . . . that there was scarce an inhabitant between the Santee and Pedee that was not in arms against us."⁴⁶

Cornwallis' solution to the problem was to send regulars and provincial battalions⁴⁷ after the partisans. When they could not find Marion and Sumter, British counter-guerrilla operations, particularly under Wemyss and Tarleton, quickly turned into punitive expeditions against the inhabitants. The British repression, although partially effective,⁴⁸ kept a steady stream of replacements riding into partisan camps.

Patriot suppression of the Loyalists was just as severe,⁴⁹ the difference being that while British regulars made punitive forays, the Patriot militia remained in an area to contest it. The population that was exposed to only occasional British punishment had to worry about continual Patriot reprisal. Thus, while the partisans were never strong

enough to exclude British regulars from a region, they could convincingly demonstrate that the Crown could neither govern the area nor protect its inhabitants. Loyalist strength, except in a few areas, was never equal to what the Patriots could muster, and in using regulars to combat the partisans, Cornwallis neglected the only force that could have really been effective, the Loyalist militia.

It is easy to exaggerate the impact of Kings Mountain and partisan operations on the Revolution in the South. Yet they produced a decisive shift in the way Cornwallis intended to fight the war. British strategy had been based on using the army as a mobile force to subdue disaffected areas, and securing them with Loyalist forces. With limited regular army support, the Loyalist militia would retain social and political control and free the army to repeat the process in other colonies. Cornwallis had created a militia system after South Carolina was overrun, but he never gave it a chance to work.

The British commander's dissatisfaction with the Loyalist militia was almost immediate. It stemmed from the opportunity which Clinton's conflicting proclamations gave to rebels to take up the King's arms and then immediately desert with them.⁵⁰ The more carefully selected battalions Ferguson raised in Ninety-Six district satisfied Cornwallis to a degree, but he complained that the other battalions raised to cover the frontier between the Cheraws and the Broad River were ". . . in general weak, or not much to be relied on for their fidelity."⁵¹ The desertion of Lieutenant Colonel Lisle with his entire battalion and the rebellion of the Cheraw units demonstrated the futility of trusting the militia.⁵² By mid-July Cornwallis believed that because of ". . . the want of subordination and confidence of our militia in themselves," a large regular force

would be required for the security of South Carolina.⁵³ In part, he blamed the situation on the sanctuary and encouragement that North Carolina offered to the rebellion further south. But his elitist prejudices against militia in general, and Americans in particular, were also responsible for the growing contempt with which he held the local units.⁵⁴ It was in this atmosphere that the impact of Kings Mountain and its aftermath fell like a hammer blow.

Cornwallis had never been in favor of the western flank guard column using militia, but Ferguson and Tarleton convinced him that they would be effective. It is important to note that Cornwallis objected to Ferguson's militia (the best the British had) both on the basis of their reliability as well as their competency.⁵⁵ Ferguson's destruction and Cruger's report concerning the totally demoralized state of the militia remaining in Ninety-Six district merely confirmed their uselessness in Cornwallis' eyes. When Marion's raids disrupted the militia organizations to the east, captured Georgetown "from our militia," and so terrorized the country that the Santee militia refused to take the field,⁵⁶ Cornwallis became convinced that his militia were not competent even for their primary mission of local defense. His dispatches now began to bemoan "our dastardly and pusillanimous friends," and he lashed out: "if those who say they are our friends will not stir, I cannot defend every man's house I must say that when I see a whole settlement running away from twenty or thirty robbers, I think they deserve to be robbed."⁵⁷

Literally giving up on his militia, Cornwallis began using his regulars for internal defense. With grave misgivings, he saw no choice but to attempt again the subjugation of North Carolina, for as long as that sanctuary remained in rebel hands, the revolution in South Carolina

could not be shut down. To invade North Carolina again, he would require substantial reinforcement to make up the invasion force and to secure his rear; he trusted neither the South Carolinians nor the Loyalists in North Carolina to provide the necessary help. He therefore directed General Alexander Leslie and his 2500 regulars to move south from the Chesapeake, where Clinton had sent them to support the first North Carolina invasion, to Cape Fear.⁵⁸ Thus, by the end of October 1780, Cornwallis had rejected the central premise of British southern strategy because of his disillusionment with the military force upon which it was based.⁵⁹ With the benefit of hindsight, and with very little exaggeration, Clinton observed that the battle of Kings Mountain ". . . proved the first link in a chain of evils that followed each other in regular succession until they at last ended in the total loss of America."⁶⁰

CHAPTER 2

END NOTES

1. Cornwallis to Clinton, July 14 and August 6, 1780. Cornwallis, Correspondence, 1, pp. 51, 54.

2. For conflicting views on the massacre of Buford's Virginians at the Waxhaws, see Tarlton, Campaigns, pp. 28-32; Henry Lee, Jr., Memoirs of the War in the Southern Department of the United States, 3d ed., ed. Robert E. Lee (New York: University Publishing Company, 1869; reprint ed., New York: The New York Times & Arno Press, 1969), pp. 164-167. British raids on churches are discussed in Callahan, Royal Raiders, p. 224.

3. Rawdon, to Cornwallis, July 7, 1780. Extract in Smith, Loyalists, pp. 132-133.

4. For the controversy surrounding Clinton's proclamation, see Stedman, History, 2, pp. 198-199; Clinton, American Rebellion, pp. 181-182; and Smith, Loyalists, pp. 130-133. Clinton, characteristically, blamed Cornwallis for the proclamation's ill effects.

5. ". . . I assure you that the Proclamation of the Commissioners of the 1st, and . . . the 3d, did not at all contribute to the success of my operations. Nothing can in my opinion be so prejudicial to the affairs of Great Britain as a want of discrimination." Cornwallis to Vice Admiral Arbuthnot, June 29, 1780. Cornwallis, Correspondence, 1, p. 48.

6. Cornwallis to Clinton, June 30, 1780; Cornwallis to Pattison, June 10, 1780; Cornwallis to Balfour, June 11, 1780. *Ibid.*, pp. 500, 46.

7. See, for example, The Maryland Journal, October 10, 1780. Draper MSS, 5 VV 314-316. That the Patriot propaganda was effective can be shown by Cornwallis' protests over the forgery to General Greene. Cornwallis to Greene, December 27, 1780, Incl. 3 to Greene to Huntington, January 23, 1781. "Greene Letters," PCC.

8. See especially Smith, Loyalists, pp. 141-142.

9. Walter Millis, Arms and Men (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1956; Mentor Books, 1956), p. 30.

10. Clinton, American Rebellion, p. 181.

11. British commanders in the outlying districts, however, quickly came to a different conclusion. Lord Rawdon wrote to Cornwallis on 7 July, "The majority of the inhabitants in the Frontier Districts, tho ill disposed to us, from circumstances were not actually in arms against us. [After the 3 June Proclamation] nine out of ten of them are now embodied on the part of the rebels . . ." (emphasis mine). Extract in Smith, Loyalists, pp. 131-132.

12. Emphasis mine. Cornwallis, Correspondence, 1, pp. 499-502.

13. Cornwallis to Clinton, August 6, 1780. Ibid., pp. 50-52.

14. Ibid.; Cornwallis to Germaine, August 20, 1780. Ibid., pp. 502-505.

15. Apparently the rumor was widely believed and was in part responsible for the rapid collapse of resistance in South Carolina. The Continental Congress considered the rumor serious enough to issue a public repudiation. Hugh F. Rankin, Francis Marion: The Swamp Fox (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1973), p. 49.

16. As Lord Rawdon stated, "The appearance of General Gates' army unveiled to us a fund of disaffection in this province of which we could have formed no idea; and even the dispersion of that force [at Camden] did not extinguish the ferment which the hope of its support had raised." Rawdon to Leslie, October 24, 1780. Cornwallis, Correspondence, 1, p. 509.

17. Cornwallis to Clinton, August 6, 1780. Ibid., pp. 52-54. For Sumter's account of his attacks in July, 1780, see Sumter to De Kalb, 17 July 1780, and Sumter to Pinckney, 9 August 1780, Draper MSS, 7 VV 16-18, and 5 VV 159-161.

18. Brief but excellent background sketches on Marion, Sumter, and Pickens are found in Lee, Memoirs, pp. 174-175, 584-585, 594-595. For an excellent treatment of Elijah Clarke's early partisan activities, see Hugh McCall, The History of Georgia . . ., Vol. 2 (Savannah: William T. Williams, 1816; reprint ed., Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1967), pp. 307-353. Attempts to convince Pickens to break his parole, and the events that finally forced him to it, are discussed by McCall in the above citation; see especially pp. 321 and 351-353. See also Edward McCrady, The History of South Carolina in the Revolution, 1780-1783 (New York: Russell and Russell, 1902; reissued 1969), pp. 20-23.

19. For example, Colonel Elijah Clarke had to intercede for five Loyalists captured at Kings Mountain. Two of the Loyalists were "near relatives," and the other three were friends. He believed that all five would enlist in his Patriot militia. Clarke to Smallwood, 4 November 1780. Draper MSS, 7 VV 71. On the savagery of the civil war, see Greene's comment to Congress ". . . The whole country is in danger of being laid waste by the Whigs and Tories, who pursue each other with as much relentless fury as beasts of prey." Greene to Huntington, Dec. 28, 1780, "Letters from Major General Nathanael Greene, 1776-1785," PCC, Item 155, Roll 175. Hereafter cited as "Greene Letters."

20. Sumter in October 1780; Marion in December; Pickens in January 1781, after Cowpens.

21. Rutledge to Sumter, October 6, 1780; and Clarke to Sumter, 29 October 1780, Draper MSS, 7 VV 105-106, and 111-112.

22. Rutledge to Sumter, January (no date, but prior to Cowpens) 1781. Ibid., 7 VV 176-179.

23. Greene to Sumter, March 6, 1781, and Rutledge to Sumter, March 8, 1781. Ibid., 7 VV 210, 213-219. This was Col. Williamson's old Brigade in which Pickens had been a regimental commander prior to the British subjugation of the state.

24. See Chapter 4.

25. Except where otherwise noted, I am principally indebted to Clyde R. Ferguson for this and the next paragraph. See especially his "Carolina and Georgia Patriot and Loyalist Militia in Action, 1778-1783," presented at the North Carolina Bicentennial Symposium, Raleigh, North Carolina, on October 2, 1975.

26. Rankin, Marion, p. 55.

27. Ibid., pp. 5-6; Alice N. Waring, The Fighting Elder; Andrew Pickens (1739-1817) (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1962), p. 4.

28. "The rebel forces being at present dispersed, the internal commotions and insurrections in the province will now subside." Cornwallis to Germaine, August 21, 1780. Cornwallis, Correspondence, 1, p. 508.

29. Cornwallis to Clinton, August 29, 1780. Cornwallis, Correspondence, 1, pp. 58-59.

30. Cornwallis' rationale and his plans for invading North Carolina are contained in several messages to Clinton: June 30, August 6, August 23, and August 29, 1780. Cornwallis, Correspondence, 1, pp. 501-502, 54, 57-58, and 58-59.

31. Cornwallis to Clinton, August 29, 1780. Ibid., p. 58.

32. Stedman, History, 2, p. 215.

33. Rawdon to Clinton, October 29, 1780. Cornwallis, Correspondence, 1, p. 63.

34. Rankin, Continentals, p. 248.

35. Davidson to Gates, 24 September 1780, and Sumner to Gates, same date. Draper MSS, 7 VV 35-36, and 63-64.

36. Tarleton, Campaigns, pp. 160-161.

37. Clinton, American Rebellion, p. 226.

38. Specifically, he had recruited seven battalions of militia, and it was estimated that they could provide up to 1500 men on short notice for defense of the frontier. Cornwallis to Germaine, August 20, 1780. Cornwallis, Correspondence, 1, p. 503.

39. Ferguson's message is printed in Callahan, Royal Raiders, p. 205.

40. Western North Carolina regiments were directed by Davidson to combine to oppose Ferguson. The force that eventually rendezvoused at Gilbert Town (all the over-mountain regiments, plus Campbell's Virginians and the other western North Carolina regiments) numbered around 1500. Davidson to Gates, 24 September 1780, and Cleveland et al. to Gates, October 4, 1780, Draper MSS, 7 VV 35-36, 66. According to Isaac Shelby, one of the over-mountain regimental commanders, only 910 men from this force moved south after Ferguson. At the Cowpens, the Patriots were joined by 400 South Carolinians under Colonel John Williams (who was later killed in the battle). Thus, the Patriot force only slightly outnumbered Ferguson's Loyalists. George F. Scheer and Hugh F. Rankin, Rebels and Redcoats (New York: World Publishing Company, 1957; Mentor Books, 1957), p. 481.

41. Davidson to Sumner, Oct. 10, 1780. Reprinted in Tarleton, Campaigns, pp. 195-196. American dispatches reported British regulars in Ferguson's column, but they had incorrectly identified Ferguson's American Volunteers. Ibid., p. 156; Cornwallis to Clinton, December 3, 1780. Cornwallis, Correspondence, 1, p. 511; Philip R. N. Katcher, Encyclopedia of British, Provincial, and German Army Units, 1775-1783 (Harrisburg: Stackpole Books, 1973), p. 82. One of the more bizarre aspects of the battle was that the Patriot force did not have a commander. At the Gilbert Town rendezvous, the regimental commanders had petitioned Gates to send a general officer to take command, preferably Davidson or Daniel Morgan, or some other ". . . gentleman of address, . . . able to keep up proper discipline without disgusting the soldiery." (Cleveland et al. to Gates, October 4, 1780. Draper MSS, 7 VV 66.) As Ferguson was moving away from them, there was no time to wait for a senior officer. In a typically American (and militia) solution, the regimental commanders voted an Officer of the Day to execute the plans agreed upon by all the commanders (Scheer and Rankin, Rebels, pp. 480-481). The overwhelming victory at Kings Mountain was thus a uniquely cooperative effort.

42. Clinton, American Rebellion, p. 228; Tarleton, Campaigns, p. 167.

43. Clinton, American Rebellion, p. 228.

44. Rawdon to Clinton, October 29, 1780. Cornwallis, Correspondence, 1, p. 63.

45. Cornwallis to Clinton, December 3, 1780. Ibid., p. 512.

46. Ibid. For Marion's operations, see Marion to Gates, 15 September, 4 October, 15 October, and 4 November 1780, Draper MSS, 7 VV 38-39, 67-68, 40-41, 83-84.

47. Provincial battalions were composed of Americans but led by British Officers. They were trained as regulars and were considered as regular regiments on the American Establishment. There were several provincial regiments in the British southern army: Lord Rawdon's Volunteers of Ireland (recruited in the Philadelphia area from among recent immigrants from Ireland), Banastre Tarleton's British Legion, Cruger's (DeLancey's) Volunteers, Patrick Ferguson's American Volunteers, Thomas Brown's Florida Rangers, Turnbull's New York Volunteers, among others. Katcher, Encyclopedia, pp. 82-102.

48. Marion, for example, constantly had problems keeping men in the field when the British sent expeditions against him. His men wanted to return home and look after their families. Marion to Gates, 15 September 1780. Draper MSS, 7 VV 38-39.

49. There were Patriots who treated noncombatants as ruthlessly as did the British. See Marion's complaint to Gates about two such officers. "I am sorry to inform you that Col. Erwin has adopted the burning of houses and Capt. Murphy still pursues it--I think it will be the greatest hurt to our interest." Marion to Gates, 15 October 1780. Ibid., 7 VV 40. Yet, Marion had to admit ". . . the Tories are so affrighted, with my little excursions, that many are moving to Georgia with their effects, others are run into swamps. . . ." Marion to Gates, 4 October 1780. Ibid., 7 VV 68.

50. It was primarily for this reason that Cornwallis changed the criteria for receiving pardons. See page 27.

51. He complained that even Ferguson's battalions could not be used for distant service because they refused to go anywhere unless mounted. Cornwallis to Germaine, August 20, 1780. Cornwallis, Correspondence, 1, p. 503.

52. Tarleton, Campaigns, p. 98.

53. Cornwallis to Clinton, July 19, 1780. Cornwallis, Correspondence, 1, p. 52.

54. For example, Cornwallis reminded Wemyss before dispatching him on his first expedition against Marion, "You have only Militia to oppose you, who are often daring and troublesome in attack, always timid and panick struck when attacked." Rankin, Marion, p. 73. Ill treatment of militia by British officers in the field is described by Stedman, History, 2, p. 225.

55. "Ferguson is to move into Tryon County with some militia, whom he says he is sure he can depend upon for doing their duty and fighting well; but I am sorry to say that his own experience, as well as that of every other officer, is totally against him." Cornwallis to Clinton, August 20, 1780. Cornwallis, Correspondence, 1, p. 59.

56. Rawdon to Clinton, October 29, 1780. Ibid., p. 63.

57. Cornwallis to Leslie, November 12, 1780, and Cornwallis to Moses Kirkland, November 13, 1780. Ibid., pp. 69, 70.

58. Rawdon's (writing for the ill Cornwallis) and Cornwallis' communications to Leslie reveal the deteriorating situation in South Carolina, the British commander's need for regulars and his basic distrust of the Loyalists. Although he stated that he was determined to give the North Carolina Loyalists one more chance, it is clear from the pessimistic tone of his letters that Cornwallis was not expecting much support from them. Rawdon to Leslie, October 24 and 31, 1780, and Cornwallis to Leslie, November 12, 1780. Ibid., pp. 509-511, 64-65, 69.

59. Paul H. Smith presents a strong case for Cornwallis' abandoning the central British strategy when he withdrew to Wilmington, N. C., after the battle of Guilford Court House in March 1781. It is my contention that Cornwallis abandoned it considerably earlier, with his rejection of the force he most needed to contest the rebels on their own ground. See Smith, Loyalists, pp. 154-157.

60. Clinton, American Rebellion, p. 226.

CHAPTER 3

NEW DIRECTION

If one accepts Clinton's simple chain-link analogy, then the anchor for the chain was forged on 3 December 1780, when Major General Nathanael Greene of Rhode Island relieved Horatio Gates as commander of the Southern Department.¹ A self-taught strategist, Greene had risen from relative obscurity at the beginning of the war as the junior Brigadier in the Continental Army to a position of military power and responsibility second only to Washington. For the thirty-eight year old Quaker, the rise was no accident, but the path to his new command had not been a smooth one.

Greene had been raised in a strict Quaker environment by his disciplinarian father. Hard work in the family's anchor forge and mill was broken only by reading the Bible and by rudimentary instruction in writing. When Greene was a teenager, a chance encounter and friendship with a college student exposed the Quaker to the world of education. From that time on Greene was an avid student and read every book he could find. Trips to Newport brought him into contact with Ezra Stiles, later president of Yale College, and with Lindley Murray, author of a popular text on grammar. Both men further encouraged Greene's educational pursuits. By his early twenties, the Quaker was seriously studying law. His father objected to his son's quest for knowledge outside the faith, but he allowed Nathanael to represent him legally in several lawsuits. Greene's

court appearances led to political contacts, and he became acquainted with several members of the Colony's Assembly. When his father placed him in charge of a new mill and forge operation in Coventry, near New Providence, Greene became a prominent figure in his community; in 1770 he was elected to the Rhode Island Assembly.²

As relations between Britain and her American colonies deteriorated, Greene assumed an increasingly activist stance in the Assembly. Without practical military experience in 1775, he was nevertheless an avid student of military science and tactics. His studies had shifted from law and politics to the works of Marshalls de Saxe and Turenne and Sharp's Military Guide. Greene's increasing concentration on military affairs, and his activity in the colony's militia organization, led to an irreconcilable break with the Rhode Island Quaker hierarchy. An ardent nationalist, Greene felt his religion to be no impediment to military service. After the war he was to reflect that though he was averse to it, "war was ever a business of necessity." Pacifism was a noble but impractical ideal given the kind of world he lived in, and war was the only course open for the preservation of America's constitutional liberties.³

As New England began to prepare for war, Greene applied for a commission in his colony's most elite militia company, the Kentish Guards. He had the knowledge and leadership ability to fill the post, but he was rejected. The powerfully built Quaker walked with a slight limp as a result of an accident in the forge, and an infection from a small-pox inoculation had left a permanent cast in one eye. The exclusivist Guards apparently did not feel that Greene fit the physical image of an officer. He good naturedly shrugged off the rebuff and volunteered as a private soldier.

Greene soon demonstrated his talent and affinity for things military. On his own initiative, he journeyed to Boston and returned with a new musket for himself and with a British deserter to train the Guards. It was soon obvious that Greene possessed military knowledge superior to anyone else in the company. However, it was in the Rhode Island Assembly that Greene's knowledge and common sense made their greatest impression. Membership on several key military committees, including one to coordinate defense measures with Connecticut, gave him an opportunity to demonstrate his leadership and organizational ability. His grasp of Rhode Island's military requirements and his pragmatic recommendations marked Greene as the man to whom the Assembly should turn for advice on military affairs. When the legislature directed the formation of the Rhode Island Brigade to join the Army of Observation surrounding Boston, the choice of commander for the brigade seemed obvious. Significantly, the officers and men of the Kentish Guards approved of their thirty-three year old private's promotion to brigadier general. Several of the Guards' officers were to serve with distinction under Greene, chief among them Colonels Christopher Greene and (later General) James Varnum.⁴

Greene arrived at Boston, Henry Knox later observed, ". . . the rawest, the most untutored being I ever met with, but, in less than twelve months, he was equal, in military knowledge, to any General officer in the army, and very superior to most of them."⁵ The quality of the Rhode Island brigade and Greene's leadership ability, common sense, and intuitive feel for the military problem facing the colonists impressed Washington immediately. Illustrative of Greene's understanding was his reaction to the battle of Breed's and Bunker Hills. Most Americans considered the battle a Patriot defeat because they had been driven off the positions.

Greene, recognizing the severity of the British losses, wrote: ". . . I think we have little reason to complain. . . . I wish we could sell them another hill, at the same price."⁶

By the summer of the following year, Washington had enough confidence in Greene to place him in command of the Long Island defenses (Greene was absent during the battle because of illness). Through the years that followed, as Greene gained experience, Washington came to rely on him more than any other officer in the army. He played a major part in all of the campaigns in the North and exerted considerable influence on the conduct of Washington's Fabian strategy. Though relatively weak, the Continental Army "in being" remained a constant threat to the British and a continuing symbol of resistance for the United States.

Washington's strategy, of course, was the object of much congressional complaint. Since Greene's influence with the commander-in-chief was recognized, the Rhode Islander received his share of criticism as well. Greene matched Washington in his independence of mind, conviction of purpose, and gritty determination to prevail. Each had an inner strength that made their brand of leadership triumph over the adversities they faced and enabled their army to survive. In his relations with Congress, Washington learned to temper his convictions with a degree of political realism; Greene did not. Supremely confident in the correctness of his ideas, Greene had an unfortunate habit of bombarding Congress with advice and comment, some of it quite blunt, on virtually every aspect concerning the war's management. He eventually learned to soften his criticisms, but not until they earned him additional enemies in the Congress.⁷

Friction with the legislature came to a head during Greene's tenure as Quartermaster General of the Army. In 1778, Washington had insisted he take the position and attempt to solve the desperate supply problems plaguing the army. Greene made considerable improvement in the situation over the next two years, but the problems of funds, transportation, and management were overwhelming. Finally, in July 1780, frustrated by what he considered to be Congressional meddling and lack of support, and anxious to return to a field command, Greene submitted his resignation in a letter whose tone infuriated the Congress. Amidst the furor were heard cries for Greene's dismissal from the Service for alleged profiteering and mismanagement.⁸ Washington entered the fray to save his best general and quietly warned the Congress that Greene's abrupt dismissal without a trial would probably cause the entire officer corps to resign in protest.⁹ Both Congress and Greene softened their positions, thus ending a potential crisis.

A real crisis was soon at hand with the arrival of news that Gates was defeated and Cornwallis was invading North Carolina. Having chosen the last three unsuccessful commanders in the South, the Congress on 5 October finally turned to Washington to name Gates' successor, knowing full well who it would be.¹⁰ Washington responded on the 15th, recommending that Greene assume command of the Southern Department and hold a formal inquiry into Gates' conduct at Camden.¹¹ On 22 October, Washington asked Congress to appoint General the Baron von Steuben as Greene's second in command, adding that Steuben's talents would be needed to create a new army in the South.¹² Putting the Quartermaster General incident behind it, Congress formally approved Washington's recommendations on 30 October, and granted Greene broad powers of military command, authority to

coordinate with state governments, and power to negotiate with British commanders concerning prisoner exchange. Nathanael Greene was now in charge of the military fortunes of the United States from Delaware to Georgia.¹³

Greene had no illusions about the task ahead. He knew from personal experience the state of the country's finances and the limits of Congress' ability to compel the states to take any action to support his army. He knew that the army he was to command was shattered in body and spirit¹⁴ and that the resources of North Carolina had been so depleted by war that the state's ability to support military operations was questionable. Yet he also knew that logistical support was his army's most immediate requirement. It was therefore not surprising that Greene's first letter of substance asked Congress to pressure the merchants of Philadelphia to provide 5000 sets of clothing for the Southern Army.¹⁵ This call for support Greene would echo again and again to state governors and legislatures as he made his way southward from Philadelphia.¹⁶ Unfortunately, he received little more than promises of help.¹⁷

Greene's second letter of substance to the Congress outlined the broad military strategy he intended to follow. He understood well the disparity of forces in the South. While he recognized the importance of the victory at Kings Mountain, he also knew that Clinton had increased British forces in the area by dispatching General Alexander Leslie with 2500 men to the Chesapeake in October. Greene proposed to compensate for his lack of strength by an increase in mobility and an expansion of operations into the occupied areas.

As it must be some time before the Southern Army can be collected and equiped in sufficient force to contend with the Enemy in that quarter upon equal ground, it will be my first object to endeavour

to form a flying army to consist of Infantry and horse. It appears to me that Cavalry and Partizan Corps are best adapted to the make of the country and the State of the war in that quarter, both for heading and encouraging the militia as well as protecting the persons and property of the Inhabitants . . . it will be necessary to enlarge and promote such corps as promise to be most extensively useful as an example to encourage the exertions and enterprise of our own people as well as check and restrain the depredations of the Enemy.¹⁸

At first glance, it appears that Greene was proposing a strategy revolutionary for the times, guerrilla warfare. Continuing the letter, however, Greene recommended the promotion of Major Henry ("Light Horse Harry") Lee, Jr., and discussed the use of Lee's Legion with that of Colonel Charles Armand.¹⁹ It is apparent that Greene was advocating raiding operations by highly mobile regular units, rather than guerrilla warfare. Greene realized that offensive operations were essential to check the British and to keep the spirit of resistance alive among the militia and the civil populace. The militia would operate with, and under the leadership of, the regular units. Most important, these raiding operations were envisioned as a temporary expedient to buy time until the Continentals were strong enough to contend with the British regulars on an equal footing.

Greene had suffered with Washington through the traumatic winters of 1775 and 1776 when the Continental army had to be twice recreated because the "shoals of militia" departed for home as soon as their enlistments were up. He did not have a high opinion of militia troops in general and believed them incapable of opposing regulars.²⁰ The northern states' reliance on short-term militia call-ups to fulfill military requirements had been a continual source of frustration for Greene. He was a staunch advocate of drafts and long-term enlistments to create a respectable American regular army.²¹ His opinions, though politically unrealistic,

were nonetheless strongly held, and there is no doubt that Greene intended to create a strong Continental army to be the decisive instrument in his campaign in the South. It is to his everlasting credit that Greene possessed the flexibility of mind and the courage to change when he found his plan to be impractical. For he soon discovered that his strategy would be dictated less by his personal desires than by the peculiarities of warfare in the South and the sheer necessity of the moment.

As Greene moved southward through Virginia, he became more disturbed about the logistical situation in the theater. Leslie had suddenly departed from the Chesapeake, and in the wake of his destructive raid he had left a financially distressed State. Greene was satisfied by Virginia's efforts to fill her Continental battalions. "I have but little doubt on my mind with respect to Men," he wrote. "My greatest fears are on account of provisions, clothing, arms, and ammunition."²² The state had established no system of magazines (supply depots). In addition, Greene found the transportation system to be so deficient that supplies, even had they existed, could not be moved.²³

Greene took a big step towards solving the problems with a technique he would use often during his command. He appointed the best man he could find to the most critical job at hand. He could manage further south without a second in command, but his army could not survive without men and supplies. Leaving Steuben in Virginia to organize the depots, a replacement and training system, and to take command of operations should the British return to the Chesapeake, Greene hurried toward Charlotte where Gates had moved the army.

The meeting between the two generals was cordial. Greene was convinced that Gates was guilty of nothing more than bad luck at Camden, and

the Rhode Islander had a great deal of sympathy for the other general's predicament. The designated president of the court of inquiry, Steuben, was not available, and a Council of War concurred in Greene's decision to postpone indefinitely the court of inquiry into the Camden affair.²⁴ Gates departed Charlotte on 7 December for his home in Virginia.

Greene turned again to his greatest and most immediate problem, logistics. His examination of the terrain on his journey to Charlotte and his initial inspection of the town and camp convinced him that the problem was even worse than he had expected.²⁵ His troops were naked, undernourished and ill-equipped; their foraging had so denuded the territory around Charlotte that they had become a burden on the populace. Greene was truly alarmed that the state had kept such great numbers of militia in the field, for they had so ravaged the country that it was nearly incapable of subsisting his army.²⁶

In a flurry of activity, Greene put his organizational talents to work, created a logistics system that could support him from Virginia through North Carolina, and found the men who could manage it. He sent reconnaissance parties up the Dan, Yadkin, and Catawba rivers to determine their suitability for logistics traffic, to mark crossing sites and fords, and to determine conditions of roads and locations of settlements.²⁷ He directed the North Carolina Board of War to establish a system of magazines throughout the state and to establish a main prisoner-of-war stockade and a hospital.²⁸ To manage his most critical departments, Quartermaster and Commissary, he found two outstanding young officers, Lieutenant Colonel Edward Carrington of the Virginia Line and the redoubtable Colonel William R. Davie. In short, as Light Horse Harry Lee stated, he turned confusion into order.²⁹

Concurrently, Greene began to pressure North Carolina Governor Abner Nash and the Board of War to re-establish the state's Continental Line, which had been captured at Charleston. General Leslie's force had appeared in Charleston harbor, and Greene expected that the British would soon resume their offensive into North Carolina.³⁰ In stressing the seriousness of the situation, Greene voiced what would become a familiar argument:

The small force which we have in the field is very incompetent to give protection to this state; nor would a large body of militia remedy the evil, as our difficulties in the articles of forage and provision are not less than the want of men It requires more than double the number of militia to be kept in the field, attended with infinitely more waste and expense than would be necessary to give full security to the country with a regular and permanent army. Add to this, the obstructions to business and the distress [the militia's foraging] spreads to the inhabitants at large, and no one who has the true interest of his county at heart can hesitate about the propriety of filling the continental battalions. . . .³¹

Greene erred in thinking that the state would see the necessity of raising its Continental Line. Their victories at Moore's Creek, Ramsour's Mill, and Kings Mountain had placed the militia in high esteem with the Board of War and, in fact, with most North Carolinians. Despite the overwhelming financial burden that the large numbers of militia placed on the state, the legislature had little inclination to push for long term enlistments. There was even less incentive for citizens of the state to enlist, when their experience indicated that the militia was more than adequate to meet any British threat.³²

Greene, of course, was not arguing against militia per se. Because of his pleas for regulars, he was often accused of despising militia forces.³³ Nothing could be further from the truth. Greene was aware of militia capabilities and limitations. Militiamen were absolutely vital to

suppress the Loyalists and the Indians, but they could not be expected to stand alone against British regulars. Militia were difficult to concentrate and next to impossible to maintain for an extended period. The crux of the problem was that Greene needed both militia and Continentals.³⁴ As long as the British army reigned supreme, the South could not be recovered. Militia were not capable of accomplishing this vital task, Greene believed; only a Continental army could drive the British out. Greene's desire for the classic confrontation between regular forces would ever remain a dream. As he began better to understand the situation, and discovered what support he could and could not get, Greene realized that he had to find another way to accomplish his mission.

Although his army was small, numbering less than 2000 men,³⁵ Greene knew that it could not continue to forage off the Charlotte population. After a reconnaissance by his Polish engineer Colonel Thaddeus Kosciuszko, Greene decided on a move that was to have a profound effect on the course of the war. He put the army on marching orders to advance into South Carolina to the site chosen by Kosciuszko at Hick's Creek on the east bank of the Pee Dee River, opposite Cheraw. However, before making his move on 20 December, he detached a large portion of his army on an independent operation.

Brigadier General Daniel Morgan with a highly mobile force of 600 men, including all of the Continental light infantry and cavalry and 200 veteran Virginia militia, moved west across the Catawba into the area between the Broad and Saluda Rivers. Greene ordered Morgan to link-up with militia from Sumter's force and with North Carolina militia under General Davidson. Morgan would command in the area and was to act ". . . either offensively or defensively, as your own prudence and discretion may

direct--acting with caution and avoiding surprises . . . [your object] is to give protection to that part of the country and spirit up the people--to annoy the enemy in that quarter--to collect the provisions and forage out of their way--[and form] a number of small magazines in the rear of the position you may think proper to take."³⁶

Few aspects of Greene's campaign in the South have received as much attention from historians and tacticians as has the controversial maneuver that began it. Reaction to the move has usually gone to extremes; it has been roundly condemned because it violated tactical doctrine and exposed Greene to defeat in detail, and it has been applauded primarily because, though risky, the strategy was successful.³⁷ Greene's maneuver has been examined almost exclusively from a tactical viewpoint. Too little attention has been paid to why Greene split his force, or to what, in fact, he actually did.

Some doubt exists as to whose plan it really was. Sumter claimed that he urged Greene to send a force across the Catawba.³⁸ General Davidson submitted in writing a plan that was remarkably similar to the one Greene finally adopted.³⁹ Whoever it was that suggested the plan, Greene had his own reasons for dividing his army.

The tactical considerations that influenced Greene are obvious. Aware that the British were being reinforced and would probably attack North Carolina, Greene had to stall them. He desperately needed time to get his ragged army in shape to fight and to give North Carolina and Virginia time to get replacements and reinforcements to him. From a tactical standpoint, the move was designed primarily to check Cornwallis, whose army was then at Winnsboro, midway between the two American columns. Greene's force blocked any advance the British might make towards the

Loyalist stronghold at Cross Creek. If Cornwallis went after Greene, Morgan would be free to descend on Ninety-Six and Augusta; if he tried for Morgan, Greene and Marion could move against Charleston. To reinforce this impression, Greene dispatched Lieutenant Colonel "Light Horse Harry" Lee and his elite 280-man Legion to reinforce Marion. If Cornwallis did nothing, Greene and Morgan would grow stronger and harass him from both flanks. In order to cope with either threat, Cornwallis, it was hoped, would have to divide his force.⁴⁰ The British also saw Greene's move as a strategic maneuver intended to buy time and to threaten the eastern and western posts; they also recognized that in splitting his force in the face of a superior enemy, Greene had taken a terrible risk.⁴¹

The American commander was more aware of the danger than anyone, and he took every precaution against the possibility of his army being defeated in detail. He was not concerned about Morgan, whose force was composed solely of light infantry, cavalry, and mounted militia. His great mobility offered him the luxury of deciding when to attack and when to retreat. Morgan, in fact, had orders to move eastward immediately should Greene be attacked.⁴²

The main army's security was enhanced by a major water obstacle, the Pee Dee River, which lay between it and the British. Expecting that Cornwallis would move against him, Greene sent patrols to strip the country west of the Pee Dee of provisions, making it more difficult for an attacking army to subsist. He planned to withdraw northward if attacked, and his reconnaissance parties had confirmed a prior warning given him by Washington that the numerous rivers in the Carolinas could severely impede his movements. In a far sighted move, typical of Greene's thoroughness in

planning, he tasked Kosciuszko and Carrington with building transportable boats and placing others at key fords in upper North Carolina.⁴³

Greene's final, and best, measure of security for both forces was an early warning system. To this end, on the day after he took command he wrote to Marion "I have not the honor of your acquaintance, but I am no stranger to your character and merit. . . . It is of the highest importance that I get the earliest intelligence of any reinforcement which may arrive at Charleston."⁴⁴ In his meeting with Sumter shortly after taking command, and in subsequent communications, Greene stressed this critical intelligence gathering mission.⁴⁵

On closer examination, despite all the tactical reasons for making his move, it is apparent that Greene's maneuver was prompted by considerations other than tactics. In reality, the American army posed little tactical threat to the British. Greene stated that he had no intention of actually attacking Charleston, even though he was in a position to threaten the city. His army was much too weak to engage the British.⁴⁶ Further, if Cornwallis attacked, Greene planned to withdraw northward. He stated quite clearly his situation: "In this command I am obliged to put everything to hazard, and, contrary to all military propriety, am obliged to make detachments that nothing but absolute necessity could authorize, or even justify."⁴⁷ If tactical considerations did not constitute "absolute necessity," then what did?

". . . The success of the war here depends much upon opinion and appearances," Greene wrote immediately after taking command, "[such are] the divisions of sentiment among the people."⁴⁸ Virtually every one of Greene's early messages describing the situation in the Southern Department show that "appearances" were pretty grim. In addition to the ruined

condition of the army, the countryside, and the economy, he found the Whigs and Tories determined to depopulate the region through their internecine war.⁴⁹ Greene was facing a major British invasion, and the one force he had to rely on besides his regulars, the partisan militia, required immediate assistance.⁵⁰

Greene recognized the differences between partisans and other categories of militia. "Ten of their [North Carolina] militia drawn out in classes are not worth one of your men, whose all depend upon their own bravery," he told Thomas Sumter. "What gives safety to one brings ruin to the other. If your militia do not fight, their families are exposed. If the others run away, their persons are safe."⁵¹ Now, both Sumter and Marion were in trouble. Sumter had fought two savage battles in November, one against Wemyss at Fish Dam Ford and the second against Tarleton at Blackstocks. Both sides claimed victory, but casualties were equally heavy.⁵² Sumter narrowly escaped capture by Wemyss but was severely, almost mortally, wounded in the second battle. His brigade, depleted by combat, was now deprived of his dynamic leadership. Marion, the "Swamp Fox," was faced with a serious morale problem because of the continued inactivity of the army under Gates. Many of his militia, convinced that no military assistance was coming from the North, were deserting to the British.⁵³

These circumstances combined to create the "absolute necessity" that induced Greene to make his move, not for tactical reasons but to create a psychological advantage. And the necessity to conduct a psychological operation was so great that Greene was willing to accept the tactical risks involved in his dangerous maneuver. The only means at his

disposal that could be used to raise Patriot morale and intimidate the British was the Continental army.

For the benefit of the populace, it was necessary to create the impression of an advance, and the two-pronged thrust into South Carolina had that effect. The mission of Morgan's combined Continental-partisan force in Patrick Ferguson's old stronghold was clearly anti-Loyalist in intent. Greene's religious upbringing and his basic humanity led him to rail against the barbarism of the Whig-Tory civil war, yet he did not hesitate to employ a military force that, no matter how well controlled, would bring terror and physical intimidation to the Tories.⁵⁴

In dividing his army, Greene believed it imperative that his forces move to positions where they could shore up both partisan brigades. The exact wording of Morgan's orders is revealing. ". . . You will be joined by a body of volunteer militia under the command of General Davidson of this state, and by militia lately under command of General Sumter. . . . For the present, I give you the entire command in that quarter. . . ." ⁵⁵ Greene obviously felt that Sumter, the senior officer, was not yet able to command and that his area required (at least temporarily) new leadership and direction.⁵⁶ Similarly, Lee's Legion was sent to Marion to help solve the morale problem the Swamp Fox had described to Gates. Marion quickly cleared up any doubts that he would retain command of that combined force.⁵⁷ As was the case with Morgan's force, Greene had shrewdly "lent out" a highly mobile unit that could be recalled quickly should the need arise.

Most important, Greene's advance was carefully calculated to affect his own army. He was dismayed at its low morale, shoddy discipline and poor training. He not only had to raise the technical competence of

his men, but he had to prepare them physically and psychologically as well for the task ahead. His greatest problem was to build the confidence of the army in itself and in him. In a letter to his friend, Alexander Hamilton, Greene stated the primary reason for his daring and unorthodox move. "If I cannot inspire the Army with confidence and respect by an independent conduct," he wrote, "I foresee it will be impossible to instill discipline and order among the troops."⁵⁸

Greene's actions were generally in accord with the plan he had presented to Congress on November 2. He was conducting a "Partizan War" using regular troops assisted by militia. Because of his resources he could wage little more than a "fugitive war," and he cautioned Sumter, "[the] salvation of this country don't depend on little strokes; nor should the great business of establishing a permanent army be neglected to pursue them. . . . It is not a war of posts, but a contest for States, dependant [sic] upon opinion."⁵⁹ He had not abandoned his quest for a regular army, but he had begun to make a more sophisticated appraisal of the militia.

His small army at Cheraw, still destitute of equipment, was well into a vigorous training program when Greene began to receive disturbing intelligence. The Cherokees were attacking the frontier settlements and were engaging the western militia. Turncoat General Benedict Arnold had appeared in the Chesapeake and had landed in Virginia with a raiding force. And the British were on the move after Morgan.⁶⁰ Whatever the arguments concerning the wisdom of Greene's dispositions, his unorthodox strategy had the expected effect on Cornwallis. "The noble Earl," as Clinton was beginning to refer to him, had decided to clear Morgan from the invasion route into North Carolina. To do so he split the British Southern Army, not into two parts as Greene had hoped, but into three.

CHAPTER 3

END NOTES

1. General Orders by Major General Gates, Headquarters, Charlotte, 3 December 1780, "Gates Letters," PCC.
2. The best source on Greene's early life is Johnson, Sketches, 1, pp. 1-26.
3. Johnson, Sketches, 2, pp. 451-452.
4. Theodore Thayer, Nathanael Greene, Strategist of the American Revolution (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1960), pp. 24, 44-46, 50-51; Johnson, Sketches, 1, pp. 21-25.
5. Thayer, Greene, p. 67.
6. Greene to Jacob Greene, June 28, 1775. Printed in Johnson, Sketches, 1, p. 32.
7. Thayer, Greene, p. 184.
8. Ibid., p. 276.
9. Treacy, Prelude, pp. 31-33.
10. Greene was the unanimous choice of the delegates from Georgia, South Carolina, and Virginia. Ibid., p. 38; Thayer, Greene, p. 279. Alexander Hamilton had written to a friend in Congress, "Will [Gates] be changed or not? If he is changed for God's sake overcome prejudice, and send Greene." Hamilton to Duane, September 6, 1780. Hamilton, Papers, 2, p. 421.
11. Washington to Huntington, October 15, 1780. "Letters from General George Washington, Commander in Chief of the Army, 1775-1784," PCC, Item 152, Roll 171. Hereafter cited as "Washington Letters."
12. Washington to Huntington, October 22, 1780, "Washington Letters," PCC.
13. Huntington to Greene, October 31, 1780. Reprinted in Treacy, Prelude, pp. 28-29.

14. Williams to Hamilton, 30 August 1780. Hamilton, Papers, 2, p. 385.

15. Greene to Huntington, Nov. 1, 1780. "Greene Letters," PCC.

16. Greene to Huntington, Nov. 19, 1780. Ibid.

17. Greene to Hamilton, Jan. 10, 1781. Hamilton, Papers, 2, p. 530.

18. Greene to Huntington, November 2, 1780. "Greene Letters," PCC.

19. A Legion (often referred to as a "Partizan Legion") was an elite unit of varying size composed of cavalry and mounted infantry, or dragoons. Lee's Legion was approximately 280 strong and was made up of equal numbers of cavalry and dragoons. Washington detached Lee's Legion from the Northern Army and assigned it to the Southern Department as soon as Greene was nominated for the command. Washington to Huntington, October 22, 1780. "Washington Letters," PCC.

20. See, for instance, Greene's comments on the capture of Fort Washington by the British in 1776 ". . . there were men enough to have defended themselves against all the army had they not been struck with a panic; but being most of them irregular troops, they lost all their confidence when the danger [grew] pressing; and so fell prey to their own fears." Greene to John Browne, Sept. 11, 1778, printed in Johnson, Sketches, 1, pp. 118-124; see also Greene to (?), Morristown, April 20, 1777 ". . . Lord Cornwallis . . . made an attempt to surprize General Lincoln at Bounbrook. They in part effected it, owing to the valorous conduct of the militia, who . . . deserted their post without giving the general the least notice." Printed *ibid.*, pp. 96-97.

21. "I wish that America could see her true interest, and raise an army for the war. These short enlistments are ruinous in every point of view. We are always dreaming of peace and adopting temporary expedients. The country is oppressed and discouraged, and the Army distressed and disgusted." Greene to Governor Greene (of Rhode Island), undated, but written in August 1780. Printed *ibid.*, pp. 180-182.

22. Greene to Huntington, November 19, 1780. "Greene Letters," PCC.

23. Ibid.

24. Greene to Huntington, Dec. 7, 1780, Ibid. For Greene's sentiments on Gates' conduct, see Greene to Hamilton, Jan. 10, 1781. Hamilton, Papers, 2, pp. 531-532.

25. "What shall I say respecting this department? To tell you the truth, I dare not; nor would you believe me if I should." Greene to Peabody, December 8, 1780. Draper MSS, 5 VV 131.

26. Greene to Cox, January 9, 1781. Printed in Johnson, Sketches, 1, p. 341.

27. Greene to Huntington, Dec. 7, 1780. "Greene Letters," PCC.

28. Thayer, Greene, pp. 293-294.

29. Lee, Memoirs, p. 220.

30. Greene knew by 16 December that a large fleet transporting troops was entering Charleston harbor. Rutledge to Sumter, 16 December 1780. Draper MSS, 7 VV 144. Greene had received warning from Congress (based on local intelligence and information from Europe) that the British intended a winter-spring offensive against both North Carolina and Virginia. Greene to Sumter, December 15, 1780. Ibid., 7 VV 142.

31. Greene to Governor Nash (undated, but probably between 15 and 20 December, 1780). Extract in Johnson, Sketches, 1, p. 344.

32. Rankin, Continentalists, p. 266.

33. Governor Read warned Greene that his comments about militia were angering the Congress and cautioned him to tone down his criticism. Johnson, Sketches, 2, p. 447.

34. Greene to Jefferson, undated (but November 1780). Extract in Johnson, Sketches, 1, p. 334. See also Greene's reply to Governor Read's warning. Greene to Read, August 6, 1781. Extract in Johnson, Sketches, 2, pp. 447-448: "When I am obliged to speak of men and things, I must speak of them as I find them."

35. Estimates vary slightly, depending on the source. See Lee, Memoirs, p. 220; Thayer, Greene, p. 291; Treacy, Prelude, pp. 60-61. Gate's Return (Morning Report), dated 25 November 1780, one week before Greene took command, reflects 2604 rank & file assigned. But there is a notation stating that the term of service for the militia (1147 total) would expire on 5 December. An indication of the army's condition can be gathered from the fact that of the original figure, only 1704 are carried present for duty. "Gates Papers," PCC. After the move to the Cheraws, Greene wrote Lafayette that not more than 800 of his men were properly equipped and fit for duty. Greene to Lafayette, December 29, 1780. Extract in Johnson, Sketches, 1, p. 340.

36. Greene to Morgan, December 16, 1780. Printed ibid., pp. 346-347.

37. For contrasting tactical interpretations, con: R. Ernest Dupuy and Trevor N. Dupuy, The Compact History of the Revolutionary War (New York: Hawthorne Books, 1963), app. 5; pro: Fortescue, History, 3, p. 359.

38. Sumter's comments on a letter from Greene: "Speaks of a detachment preparing to act on the west of Catawba which Gen'l Sumter had proposed." Greene to Sumter, December 15, 1780. Draper MSS, 7 VV 143.

39. Davidson [to Gates?], November 27, 1780. Ibid., 7 VV 76.

40. Greene to Huntington, Dec. 28, 1780. "Greene Letters," PCC; Johnson, Sketches, 1, pp. 350-352.

41. Tarleton, Campaigns, pp. 207-208.

42. Greene to Huntington, December 28, 1780. "Greene Letters," PCC; Greene to Morgan, December 16, 1780. Printed in Johnson, Sketches, 1, pp. 346-347.

43. Ibid., pp. 336, 351.

44. Greene to Marion, December 3, 1780. Printed ibid., pp. 356-357.

45. For instance, Greene to Sumter, January 9, 1781. Draper MSS, 7 VV 159.

46. Johnson, Sketches, 1, p. 351.

47. Greene to Varnum, undated (but shortly after Cowpens; therefore probably written in late January or early February, 1781). Extract ibid., p. 397.

48. Greene to Huntington, December 7, 1780. "Greene Letters," PCC.

49. "The Whigs and Tories too pursue each other in this country with little less than savage fury, and such a spirit for plundering prevails as threaten the depopulation of the whole country." Greene to Coxe, January 9, 1781. Extract in Johnson, Sketches, 1, p. 341.

50. Greene to Huntington, December 7, 1780. "Greene Letters," PCC.

51. Greene to Sumter, January 8, 1781. Draper MSS, 7 VV 162. See also Greene's comments to Alexander Hamilton. "There is a great spirit of enterprise among the back people; and those that come out as volunteers are not a little formidable to the enemy. There are also some particular Corps under Sumpter [sic] Marion and Clarke that are bold and daring; the rest of the Militia are better calculated to destroy provisions than oppose the Enemy." Greene to Hamilton, January 10, 1781. Hamilton, Papers, 2, p. 530.

52. For contrasting official reports on Fish Dam Ford, see Sumter to Smallwood, 9 November 1780. Draper MSS, 5 VV 136; and Cornwallis to Clinton, December 3, 1780. Cornwallis, Correspondence, 1, p. 511. For

reports on Blackstocks, see *ibid.*, and Colonel Middleton's Report, Enclosure 6 to Greene to Huntington, December 7, 1780. "Greene Letters," PCC.

53. Marion to Gates, 21 November 1780. Draper MSS, 7 VV 73. "Many of my people are left me & gone over to the Enemy; for they think that we have no army coming on, & have been deceived, as we hear nothing from you [in] a great while. I hope to have a line from you in what manner to act & some assurance to the people of support."

54. Morgan was warned to maintain tight control of his force and prevent plundering. Greene to Morgan, December 16, 1780. Johnson, Sketches, 1, p. 347.

55. *Ibid.*, emphasis mine.

56. The prickly Sumter obviously did not agree and refused to cooperate with Morgan. See Chapter 4.

57. Marion told Greene in no uncertain terms "I expect to command, not from the Militia Commission I hold, but from an elder Continental Commission." Rankin, Marion, p. 152.

58. Greene to Hamilton, January 10, 1781. Hamilton, Papers, 2, p. 532.

59. Greene to Sumter, January 8, 1781. Draper MSS, 7 VV 159-162. Sumter's comment written on the bottom of this message is revealing. "It was necessarily a war of posts, and the general [Greene] was soon convinced of this fact and changed his plan. The Continental Gen'l [Washington?] could not give him regulars enough to make it otherwise; and if they could, a larger army could not be subsisted in the State."

60. By 28 December, Greene knew of the Cherokee uprising and that Leslie had moved as far inland as Monck's Corner. Greene to Huntington, December 28, 1780. "Greene Letters," PCC. Sumter informed Greene on 11 January that Cornwallis was on the move. Sumter to Greene, 11 January 1781. Draper MSS, 7 VV 64. By 15 January, Greene knew of the British force in the Chesapeake, although he erred, thinking Phillips was in command. Greene to Sumter (11-15) January, 1781. *Ibid.*, 7 VV 170.

CHAPTER 4

RACE TO THE DAN

The day Greene took command of the Southern Army, Cornwallis was impatiently awaiting Leslie's arrival. Alarmed at the upsurge in insurgency and the increasing scope and boldness of the Americans' partisan operation since Ferguson's defeat, Cornwallis had directed Leslie to move closer with his force, from the Chesapeake to Cape Fear. His intention was for Leslie to establish a post at Wilmington and proceed with his main body to Cross Creek. With this disposition, the two armies could coordinate operations to subdue North Carolina and "give our friends a fair trial."¹

However, the partisan threat increased, culminating in November with Sumter's bloody engagements with Wemyss and Tarleton and Marion's demoralization of the Loyalist militia in the Santee region. Cornwallis became convinced that before he could do anything in the North State, he had to have additional regular forces to secure South Carolina. Consequently, he placed American prisoners-of-war on prison ships, which freed the 64th Regiment to assume an internal security mission, and he ordered Leslie to proceed with his entire force to Charleston.²

Clinton, growing increasingly irritated at the deteriorating situation in South Carolina and angered by Cornwallis' decision to move Leslie to Charleston, nevertheless approved the plan.³ Part of his irritation stemmed from the necessity to replace Leslie in the Chesapeake with

another detachment from his already depleted army. He decided to use Brigadier General Benedict Arnold, late of the Continental Army, for the mission.⁴

Cornwallis had probably already decided to invade North Carolina by way of the back country when he discovered that Greene had split his force. He knew that movement would be easier above the fall line where fording sites made the numerous rivers less of an obstacle. Despite the Ministry's fond belief that the back country in the South was a stronghold of Loyalist sentiment, Cornwallis from practical experience knew better. Yet this was precisely the region that had to be secured. Because it dominated the frontier country from Augusta to the North Carolina border, Cornwallis had long regarded Ninety-Six District as the most important province in South Carolina;⁵ now it was the most threatened. In North Carolina, the back country had to be conquered because it was from this region that the "constant incursions of refugees, North Carolinians, and Back Mountain men" occurred.⁶ If the British planning had only been tentative, Greene's maneuver made up Cornwallis' mind for him.

He told his second-in-command, Lieutenant Colonel Francis, Lord Rawdon, that Greene's force was too weak to affect the British,⁷ but Cornwallis rejected the idea of an offensive through the Cheraws toward Cross Creek because of the American's presence.⁸ To guard against Greene and Marion, Cornwallis directed Leslie to leave almost 1000 of his men in Charleston, and he ordered Rawdon to remain at Camden with six regiments to watch the Cheraw camp.⁹

It was Morgan's force that influenced the British the most. Here was a new menace to Ninety-Six. The seriousness of the threat was graphically demonstrated when American cavalry and mounted militia under

Lieutenant Colonel William Washington literally massacred a force of 250 Tories at Hammond's Store, near Ninety-Six, on 30 December.¹⁰ Before he could invade North Carolina, Cornwallis had to protect his western posts and get rid of Morgan. He would then swing up the Catawba, cross the Yadkin in Greene's rear and destroy him.¹¹

To prevent the western militia from interfering, Cornwallis ordered his Indian agent to incite the Cherokees to attack the overmountain settlements.¹² The problem of supply in the interior would be taken care of by Major James Craig, who would sail from Charleston with 450 men and capture Wilmington. Craig would establish a sea line of communication and forward supplies up the Cape Fear River to Cross Creek.¹³ Other than the comment made earlier to Leslie about giving the Loyalists another chance, Cornwallis did not mention them, and made no plans for their involvement. He planned a purely military operation from beginning to end. Its rather impromptu character was summed up by his message to Clinton, "Events alone can decide the future steps."¹⁴

Leslie was still en route overland, but Morgan's activities made it imperative that Cornwallis move against the Americans immediately. On 2 January 1781, he sent Tarleton after Morgan with 1100 men. Cornwallis followed more slowly with his main body to enable Leslie, still on the march, to catch up with him. By 7 January, a total of 3500 men in three columns were moving westward towards the American force. The specific plan of operations was devised by Banastre Tarleton. Accompanied by all the light troops in the army, he intended to overtake Morgan, push him against the Broad River, and defeat him. Once Leslie had joined the main body, Cornwallis intended to move north of the area to the vicinity of Kings Mountain and block the escape of any survivors.¹⁵ It was a good

plan, but it did not adequately reckon on the capabilities of Daniel Morgan.¹⁶

Morgan, called the "Old Waggoner" from his days as a teamster, expert rifleman, hero of Quebec and Saratoga, and combat leader par excellence, had been having problems, not with the British, but with the Gamecock, Thomas Sumter. The prickly Sumter had been so rankled by Greene's sending another officer to assume command in his area that he had directed his men to obey no order unless it first came through him. The rough-and-tumble Morgan was not a man to back down, and he wrote Greene advising that his mission be changed or, by inference, that Sumter be ordered to cooperate.¹⁷

Greene handled the situation diplomatically, trying to smother quickly a personality clash that would hurt the Army's unity of effort, without embarrassing either officer. Sumter ". . . is a man of great pride and considerable merit," he wrote Morgan, "and should not be neglected." To Sumter he wrote a polite but chiding letter, "I cannot suppose that you could give an improper order or that you have the most distant wish to embarrass the public affairs. . . . It is the mark of a great mind to rise superior to little injuries, and our object should be the good of our country, and not personal glory." Rutledge assisted by informing Sumter that the Gamecock would naturally command all militia not actually with Morgan.¹⁸ It was Greene's first experience with the problems that the jealousy, pride, and independence of his partisan officers could pose. It would not be the last.¹⁹

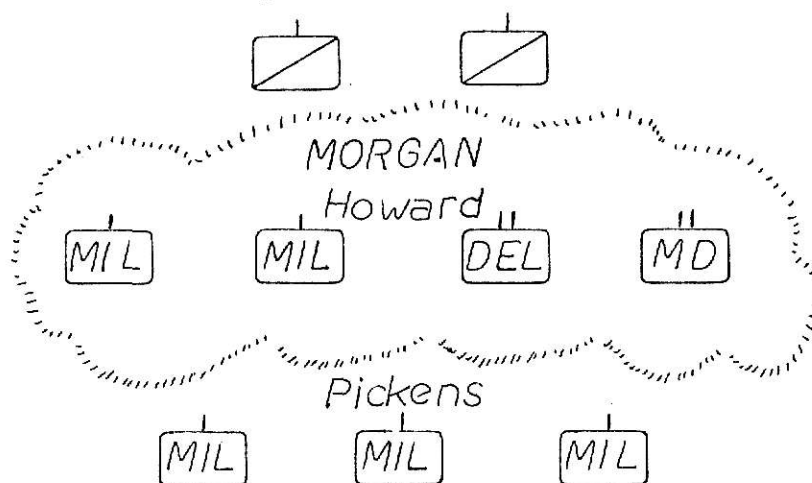
Although the incident was not forgotten, Morgan now had more pressing problems. By 14 January, he knew that Tarleton was in the area, and he guessed that "we are his object."²⁰ Morgan began to withdraw north

along the west side of the Broad River, slowly at first, then more rapidly under pressure from Tarleton's relentless pursuit. Bands of militia, which had scattered throughout the area for ease of foraging, joined Morgan piecemeal as he moved. On the evening of the 16th, Morgan reached an old cattle roundup area called Hannah's Cowpens, six miles from the Broad River, and he decided to stop running. The last units to arrive in his camp were brought in by Andrew Pickens, raising Morgan's strength to about 1100.²¹

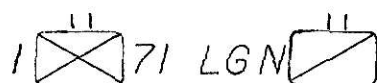
Tarleton, "Bloody Tarleton" of Waxhaws notoriety, was driving his force hard, bent on catching his prey before Morgan could escape across the Broad. Unfortunately for the British, Cornwallis was still waiting for Leslie and had halted on the east bank of the Broad, not in his blocking position but some twenty-five miles short of Cowpens. Unfortunately also for the British, Tarleton caught up with Morgan at the Cowpens, after an all-night march (Map 2).

In all of his planning, it had been an article of faith with Cornwallis that Tarleton would defeat Morgan's force when he found it. No other outcome was possible, or even considered. The aggressive, ruthless dragoon officer commanded a force of 1100 British regulars, which included his own Legion of dragoons and light infantry, the 7th Infantry Regiment, the 1st Battalion 71st Highlanders, and two cannon. It was a hand picked force of elite units, the most mobile in Cornwallis' army. After a long forced march, Tarleton broke out of the woods at 0800 on the 17th and saw the broad, open terrain of the Cowpens where Morgan was waiting. He attempted to drive in Morgan's skirmish line with cavalry to get a look at the American positions, but he was repulsed with heavy losses.²²

Washington and McCall



Skirmishers



TARLETON

MAP 2

COWPENS

Tarleton decided that the ground was favorable for attack; with customary aggressiveness, he confidently launched his assault.

From the standpoint of terrain, Morgan's selection of the Cowpens as a defensive position can be criticized;²³ but the disposition of his troops and his handling of the battle cannot. He knew his enemy and felt confident that Tarleton would make a frontal attack. Morgan placed his units accordingly. Fortunately, he could count on his subordinates to do what he wanted.

If there was one element of the Southern Army which should have given Greene a feeling of optimism, it was the officer corps; the force that now faced Tarleton's advance contained some of the best officers in the American army, and some of the best units as well. In addition to Morgan and Pickens, William Washington and his composite regiment of 1st and 3d Dragoons, Lieutenant Colonel John Eager Howard and his Maryland Continentals, and Captain Robert Kirkwood and his battalion of Delaware Continentals were all seasoned veterans and were to prove more than a match for the British in any engagement. The Maryland and Delaware Continentals, in fact, had fought in all of Washington's campaigns in the North (except Princeton) and had held the line at Camden until the last. By virtue of their training, experience and leadership, they were probably the best units in the Continental Army.²⁴ Among his militia, Morgan had two companies of Virginians, 170 men total, most of whom were ex-Continental, veterans whose terms had expired and had rejoined.

This militia and the Continentals formed the main line of defense under Howard's command and were positioned on the crest of a gently sloping hill at the north end of the open area. The militia detachments from Georgia, North and South Carolina were placed under Pickens' command and

formed a line 150 yards downslope, forward of the Continentals. About 150 yards forward of Pickens, Morgan placed a skirmish line composed of the best militia marksmen. Their instructions were simply, "mark the epaulette men."²⁵ Hidden behind the entire force was Washington's cavalry, reinforced with mounted militia under South Carolina Lieutenant Colonel James McCall.

As Tarleton advanced, the skirmishers fell back firing and joined Pickens' line. Morgan, knowing the strengths and weaknesses of militia forces, had instructed them not to try to stand against the British bayonets but to fire three volleys and then retire.²⁶ This they did and raced around Howard's left flank. Tarleton ordered part of his cavalry to pursue the militia, but the British were surprised by Washington's cavalry and were routed. Morgan and Pickens rallied the militia, and Pickens led them around the rear of the American positions towards the right of the line.

By this time Tarleton's exhausted troops, with their ranks considerably thinned of officers and non-commissioned officers, had reached Howard's line and were stopped by the heavy disciplined fire of the Continentals.²⁷ The British were suffering heavy casualties, and Tarleton ordered his reserve battalion, the Highlanders, into the fight. The Continentals, misinterpreting one of Howard's orders, began an orderly withdrawal, and the British, smelling success at last, broke formation and rushed after them. Morgan and Howard maintained control, and after moving about 50 paces, the Continentals whirled, fired a single crashing volley into the startled enemy and charged with bayonets. At the same time, Washington's cavalry struck the British right flank; and Andrew Pickens' militia, having completed their circuit, assaulted the British left.

The maneuver turned the battle into a miniature Cannae, and within minutes it was over. The British lost almost nine-tenths of their force, 300 killed and wounded and 629 captured.²⁸ Tarleton and much of his cavalry escaped, but his cannon, wagons, and equipment, including 100 horses and 800 stand of small arms, were all captured. The Americans lost 12 men killed and 60 wounded. In Morgan's words, he had gained ". . . a compleat victory." It was as complete a victory as has ever been gained by American arms.²⁹

While Washington's dragoons and mounted militia pursued Tarleton for about twenty miles, Morgan gathered his prisoners and his booty and quickly withdrew northward. He was aware of Cornwallis' location, and he knew how his enemy would react to news of Tarleton's defeat. Slowed by wagons and prisoners, he wanted to put as much distance and as many obstacles as possible between him and the British army. Leaving part of Pickens' militia with a flag of truce to care for the wounded who could not be moved,³⁰ Morgan pushed his force across the Broad River, heading northwest. Pickens caught up with him at Gilbert Town on the evening of the 18th, picked up the prisoners, and headed northward. On the 19th, Morgan paused to write his report of the battle to Greene and send it by messenger; he then moved due east. Four days later, he crossed the Catawba. He had pushed his troops hard over muddy and icy trails, moving 100 miles in less than six days.³¹ But he had not shaken Cornwallis.

The noble Earl was stunned when he learned of Tarleton's defeat. The British first invasion of North Carolina had failed with the disaster at Kings Mountain. Now Cornwallis' second attempt to subdue that state had begun not with an expected (and much needed) victory but with a crushing defeat, a disaster having far greater impact on the war effort than

had Ferguson's demise. The British force at the Cowpens had not been Loyalist militia but British regulars, and their commander had been the hated and much-feared Tarleton. The totality of the defeat was staggering. Cornwallis had lost over one-fourth of his entire invasion force. Worse, that one-fourth contained virtually all of his light infantry and some of his cavalry, precisely the kind of mobile forces he would now need to pursue Morgan and recapture the large body of prisoners with the American force.

There was no other realistic alternative for Cornwallis to follow. He had to catch Morgan, destroy him, and free the prisoners. The psychological impact on the British of Tarleton's defeat was tremendous; there could be no doubt of the emotional lift it would give to the Americans. As General Charles O'Hara of the Guards later stated, Cornwallis had to take action "however desperate" to try to overcome the Cowpens disaster, or the British cause in the South was lost.³²

Cornwallis wrote to Clinton on the 18th, blaming the disaster on panic by the troops. "It is impossible to foresee all the consequences that this unexpected and extraordinary event may produce," he concluded, "but your excellency may be assured that nothing but the most absolute necessity shall induce me to give up the important object of the winter's campaign."³³ The object of the winter's campaign, however, became more than the invasion of North Carolina; it now centered around the destruction of Morgan. Abandoning the rather leisurely pace that had characterized his movements, Cornwallis now went after the Old Waggoner with a vengeance.

Still slowed by their heavy equipment and baggage, the British arrived at Ramsour's Mill on 25 January, only to learn that Morgan was

safely across the Catawba. Realizing that the disparity in mobility between the two armies would never allow him to bring Morgan to bay, Cornwallis destroyed most of his heavy baggage, wagons and superfluous equipment and turned his army into a light corps.³⁴ He took two days to accomplish this bold, and in O'Hara's words "desperate," measure to increase his mobility, and in the process destroyed the provisions he needed to conduct a winter campaign. During those two days, an incessant, freezing rain raised the waters of the Catawba to flood stage. Morgan, for the time being, was safe.

Nathanael Greene put his army on standby orders on 23 January, when he learned of Morgan's victory. He was elated over the outcome of the battle but knew full well the danger Morgan was in. On the 27th, Greene received Morgan's dispatches indicating that Cornwallis was pursuing him into North Carolina and that Morgan's force, being too weak to stop the British, would have to withdraw to Salisbury to get closer to Greene's army.³⁵

The Rhode Islander was under the same kinds of pressures that affected his opposite in the British camp. The Southern Army was not strong enough to exploit Morgan's triumph, but Greene had to do everything in his power to prevent Morgan's destruction, which would surely happen if Cornwallis were to catch him. Like Cornwallis, Greene realized that a victory by the British would undo the results of Morgan's triumph. The Americans' best course of action would be to unite their two wings, fall back while gathering militia reinforcements, and possibly bring Cornwallis to a general engagement against a superior force.³⁶ Greene alerted his magazines in North Carolina to prepare to move northward, directed General Isaac Huger to move the army to Salisbury for a linkup with Morgan, and

set out cross-country with a small guard to join Morgan. He wanted to be in a position to direct the action in his most critical sector.

When Greene arrived at Morgan's camp on the Catawba he found that the prisoners and captured wagons and equipment had already been sent north under guard of the Virginia militia, whose term of service had expired and who were now returning home. This force had crossed the Yadkin safely and was out of danger.

Greene was especially encouraged to learn that Cornwallis had destroyed his wagons and baggage, and he became more determined to pull him further into North Carolina away from his supply base. ". . . I am not without hopes of ruining Lord Cornwallis, if he persists in his mad scheme of pushing through the country," he wrote Huger. "And it is my earnest desire to form a junction as soon as possible for this purpose."³⁷ He directed Huger to recall Lee, who with Marion had just conducted a raid on Georgetown,³⁸ for the march north.

With Continental reinforcements completely out of the question, Greene began to rely more heavily on his one attainable asset, the militia.³⁹ He sent instructions for Marion to move across the Santee to harass the British rear base.⁴⁰ To Sumter Greene wrote, "Me thinks if the militia could be generally brought out in aid of the Continental Army, [Cornwallis] might be ruined." Obviously thinking of using Sumter in this venture, he asked the Gamecock to come to Beatty's Ford on the Catawba to help plan the operation.⁴¹

But Greene found more bad news than good at the Catawba. The river was receding rapidly to a fordable stage, and despite General Davidson's best efforts, the North Carolina militia turnout had been disappointing. To make matters worse, Morgan was so afflicted with sciatica

that he was no longer able to command in the field. His rheumatic condition, contracted in a dank British prison in Canada, had been aggravated by the wet freezing weather and the physical strain he had undergone during the past two weeks. In addition, the unfortunate Morgan was so racked by pain from hemorrhoids that he could not sit on a horse.

Realizing that his position was untenable, Greene set his force in motion on the night of the 31st for the next major obstacle, the Yadkin River. A few hours later Cornwallis, in a well-conducted surprise attack, crossed the Catawba and broke through the militia screen set to impede him. General Davidson was killed, and Cornwallis was again on Greene's trail.⁴² Thus began a desperate contest between two equally determined enemies, across primitive lines of communication alternately frozen and axle deep in mud, impeded not only by the weather but by the numerous water obstacles in their path. The longer the race continued, the more Greene's superior organization, tactics, and leadership began to affect the outcome.

Nevertheless, Greene barely won the first leg of the race, escaping across the now flooded Yadkin on February 3, just as the British advance guard under O'Hara arrived on the near shore. O'Hara captured some wagons that were waiting to cross, but all the boats which Kosciuszko had stationed at the crossing site were now secure on the opposite bank with Greene's army. Frustrated, the British shelled the American camp, causing no casualties. Greene hurriedly dispatched messengers to Huger and Lee, instructing them to change their destination to Guilford Court House, where it was hoped, "From Lord Cornwallis' pushing disposition, and the contempt he has for our army, we may precipitate him into some capitol [sic] misfortune."⁴³

At the Yadkin, Greene had to take time from his other duties to smooth the ruffled feathers of the Gamecock. Still smarting over Morgan's being placed in command of his militia, Sumter was apparently also goaded by envy at Morgan's victory at Cowpens. In a remarkable letter that alternately charmed and chided, Greene chastised Sumter for his jealousy, raised the question of whether he was malingering, challenged him to raise his militia to disrupt the British in South Carolina, and assured Sumter that he would be placed in command of all militia forces "whether employed there or with the Continental army."⁴⁴

The waters of the Yadkin began to recede and Greene needed more time to affect his link-up with Huger. He ordered Pickens, still at Salisbury with a small force of South Carolina militia, to take command of the militia behind Cornwallis and harass the British rear.⁴⁵ In a move to throw Cornwallis temporarily off his track, Greene moved due north from Trading Ford on the Yadkin on 4 February, as if he were heading for the fords on the upper Dan River.⁴⁶ For one seeking to escape, the upper Dan was a logical destination. Fords were numerous, boats would not be required (Cornwallis had no knowledge of the extensive transportation system Greene had established), and the route was the shortest distance from Greene's camp on the Yadkin to the relative security of his support base in Virginia. Hoping to cut off Greene's retreat, Cornwallis rose to the bait and swung north along the Yadkin, crossed at Shallow Ford and headed for Salem; Greene then moved east to Guilford, arriving on 8 February.⁴⁷

Whatever hopes Greene had had of bringing Cornwallis to battle were dashed at Guilford. Huger and Lee arrived with the main army on 9 February, but the militia had again failed to turn out. Greene's anger

and disappointment with the militia system was tempered by his understanding of the plight of its members. "The people have been so harrassed for eight months past," he wrote, "and their domestick matters are in such distress that they will not leave home; and if they do it is for so short a time that they are of no use."⁴⁸ The Southern Army, though infused with high morale, was in wretched physical condition, and without substantial militia reinforcements it was no match for Cornwallis' regulars. Greene called one of his rare Councils of War, which unanimously affirmed the decision to continue the withdrawal.⁴⁹

Greene's withdrawal, which had been carefully conducted so as to lure Cornwallis further and further from his support base in South Carolina, now turned into a race for the Dan River. At Lieutenant Colonel Carrington's suggestion, Greene decided to cross the Dan by the lower fords at Irwin's or Boyd's Ferry, seventy miles northeast of Guilford. The enterprising Carrington had secured every boat available for miles along the river, and once across, the American army would be safe from pursuit. Carrington was charged with moving the magazines into Virginia and preparing the crossing sites.⁵⁰

If Greene could not stand and fight Cornwallis, he resolved to damage him as much as possible. He had already sent Pickens, now a Brigadier General, to embody the militia in Cornwallis' rear to harass the British and suppress the Tories. It was imperative that the British force be cut off from any support from South Carolina, and that as much pressure be placed on Cornwallis as possible. In addition, he did not want the psychological effects of Cowpens to wear off because of the withdrawal of the American army from South Carolina. To accomplish these objectives he requested Sumter to begin widespread offensive operations

with the militia brigades. Describing a recent success by Marion, perhaps to goad Sumter to action, Greene told him that these operations ". . . may serve to convince the enemy, that while they attempt new conquests they lose their old possessions."⁵¹ He followed up with instruction to Marion to "communicate and concert with [Sumter] your future operations. . . . Great activity is necessary to keep the spirits of the people from sinking as well as to alarm the enemy respecting the safety of their posts."⁵² Greene had made a definable shift to a strategy of attrition, and to conduct it he intended to use the militia. But first, he had to shake off Cornwallis.

To insure that the main body of the army could move quickly and without interruption, Greene detached a strong rear guard to hinder Cornwallis' advance. Morgan had left the army in convalescent status to return to Virginia, and command of this rear guard devolved to Greene's Adjutant General, Colonel Otho Williams of the Maryland Line. Williams' 700 man force was composed of the best light troops and cavalry in the Southern Army, Lee's Legion, Washington's cavalry, Howard's Continental light infantry, and a detachment of 60 Virginia riflemen.⁵³ As Greene departed northeast on 10 February with the main body, Williams moved northwest to intercept Cornwallis.

As was the case with so many of his officers, Greene had in Williams one of the very best in the Continental Army. Under his direction the rear guard conducted its mission with consummate skill and daring. Cornwallis was still intent on getting between Greene and the fords on the upper Dan, and when he made contact with Williams he urged his troops to greater efforts, convinced that Greene was at last within reach. Williams skillfully drew Cornwallis further north, and the American

counter-reconnaissance screen was so effective that it was not until 13 February, when Williams turned further east, that Cornwallis realized that Greene was heading for the lower fords.

Lee, in his Memoirs, presents a vivid account of the harrowing rear-guard operation.⁵⁴ Through freezing rain and often snow, day and night, the two forces sparred and clashed. The flow of movement was like that of an accordion, the forces crashing together as the British attempted by quick rushes to cut off the rear guard or decisively engage it, and drawing apart again as the Americans fended off the attacks by long range fires and cavalry sweeps.

Cornwallis, in a final effort to run down his quarry, detached a more mobile advance guard under General O'Hara, and the pressure on Williams increased. The two forces were seldom out of visual contact, and during the daytime the skirmishing was almost continual. Williams continued to move after the British halted at night, stopping only to eat and snatch a quick rest. The food was plain but nourishing, but few got any rest. Security requirements necessitated that the Americans maintain fifty per cent of their force on alert, and Lee estimated that no one got more than six hours sleep in every 48. At 0300, the struggle would begin anew. Despite their fatigue, morale in the rear guard was extraordinarily high. And when at noon on the 14th Williams received word that Greene had safely crossed the Dan at Irwin's Ferry, his troops exulted with a loud cheer; O'Hara, not far behind, heard and realized what it meant.⁵⁵

Williams left Lee and Washington to delay O'Hara and quickened his pace for Boyd's Ferry. When the cavalry arrived at the Dan at about 8 P.M. all the infantry in the rear guard had been taken across. The dragoons dismounted and turned their horses into the current to swim across, while

the troops rode in the boats. In the last craft to leave the enemy shore was Carrington, who had personally supervised the crossing of the entire army. Shortly after his boat touched the far shore, O'Hara's column broke out of the woods on the south bank of the river. He had pushed his men forty miles in the last twenty-four hours, but he had lost the race to the Dan. Cornwallis attributed Greene's escape to the weather and poor roads which retarded the British pursuit.⁵⁶ But Tarleton probably summed up the general feeling of the army: "Every measure of the Americans, during their march from the Catawba to Virginia, was judiciously designed and vigorously executed."⁵⁷

Cornwallis had chased Greene out of North Carolina, but the relative condition of the two armies had been drastically altered. Greene, with his army intact and its morale high, was now close to his support bases in Virginia and could count on considerable reinforcement from Steuben should the Southern Army be forced to retire further north.

Cornwallis had driven the British army at a killing pace for one month and 270 miles, only to see his quarry escape.⁵⁸ His closest reinforcement was Arnold, but Greene and Steuben blocked any possibility of link-up. He was without supplies, and his soldiers were exhausted and in rags. Although still numerically superior to Greene's army, the British had lost an additional 227 men during the grueling pursuit from the Catawba. Cornwallis was in no condition to cross the Dan.⁵⁹ He fell back to Hillsborough to plant the Royal Standard, and for the first time since he had entered the state, he called for the Loyalists to turn out.

CHAPTER 4

END NOTES

1. Rawdon to Leslie, October 31, 1780, and Cornwallis to Leslie, November 12, 1780. Cornwallis, Correspondence, 1, pp. 64-65, 69.
2. Cornwallis to Clinton, December 3, 1780. Ibid., pp. 511-514.
3. Clinton, American Rebellion, pp. 229-230, 258.
4. Clinton to Cornwallis, December 3, 1780. Ibid., pp. 481-482.
5. Cornwallis to Germaine, August 20, 1780. Cornwallis, Correspondence, 1, p. 503. Rawdon, left in command of forces in South Carolina, was cautioned, "You know the importance of Ninety-Six: let that place be your constant care." Cornwallis to Rawdon, February 4, 1781. Ibid., p. 85.
6. Cornwallis to Clinton, January 6, 1781. Ibid., p. 81.
7. Cornwallis to Rawdon, December 30, 1780. Ibid., p. 77.
8. Cornwallis to Germaine, March 17, 1781. Ibid., p. 516.
9. Leslie to Germaine, December 19, 1780. Extract in Tarleton, Campaigns, p. 242. Rawdon was left with 3 regular and 3 provincial regiments at Camden, 2 British and 3 German regiments in Charleston, and 2 regular and 7 provincial regiments to cover the other posts throughout South Carolina. Cornwallis to Clinton, January 6, 1780. Cornwallis, Correspondence, 1, p. 82.
10. Of the 250 Tories, 150 were killed or wounded, and only 40 taken prisoner. Morgan to Greene, December 31, 1780 and January 4, 1781. "Greene Letters," PCC.
11. Cornwallis to Germaine, March 17, 1781. Cornwallis, Correspondence, 1, p. 516.
12. Cornwallis to Clinton, December 29, 1780. Ibid., p. 76.
13. Rankin, Continentalists, p. 320. Craig landed on 27 January 1781, and captured Wilmington.

14. Cornwallis to Clinton, January 6, 1781. Cornwallis, Correspondence, 1, p. 82.

15. Cornwallis to Tarleton, Jan. 2 and 5, 1781; Tarleton to Cornwallis, Jan. 4, 1781; Cornwallis to Clinton, Jan. 18, 1781. Printed in Tarleton, Campaigns, pp. 244-246, 249-250.

16. When Greene learned of the British maneuver, he wrote Sumter ". . . they run some hazard in dividing their force. It will afford Morgan an opportunity to strike at one or the other of the divisions, which I have no doubt he will avail himself of. . . ." Greene to Sumter, January 15, 1781. Draper MSS, 7 VV 172.

17. The situation is described by Morgan in his letter to Greene, January 15, 1781. Printed in Johnson, Sketches, 1, pp. 370-371.

18. Greene to Morgan, January 17, 1781. Draper MSS, 6 VV 62; Greene to Sumter, January 19, 1781. *Ibid.*, 7 VV 183-185; Rutledge to Sumter, undated (but written between 15 and 24 January 1781). *Ibid.*, 7 VV 179.

19. Before Greene assumed command, Marion similarly had refused to serve under any officer other than the commander of the Southern Department himself. See Marion to Gates, 4 November and 21 November 1780. *Ibid.*, 7 VV 84, 73.

20. Morgan to Greene, January 19, 1781, enclosure to Greene to Washington, January 24, 1781. "Greene Letters," PCC; Morgan to Greene, January 15, 1781. Printed in Johnson, Sketches, 1, p. 371.

21. Except where otherwise noted, events describing the Cowpens action were taken from Morgan to Greene, Jan. 19, 1781. "Greene Letters," PCC; and from Tarleton, Campaigns, pp. 210-222. Pickens first joined Morgan on Christmas Day 1780. He began to retrieve the militia units from their scattered locations as soon as Tarleton appeared. McCrady, History, p. 23.

22. Johnson, Sketches, 1, pp. 379-380.

23. Lee says that Morgan's temper caused him to stop and fight. Lee, Memoirs, p. 226. Morgan (much later) said that he had carefully chosen the site because he knew that the open terrain would give the militia no alternative but to stand their ground. Don Higginbotham, Daniel Morgan, Revolutionary Rifleman (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1961), p. 132. Morgan also said that he had to stop because Tarleton's close pursuit gave him no choice. Higginbotham, War of Independence, pp. 366, 385 n. 27.

24. Lee, Memoirs, pp. 185, 587-589, 591-592; Christopher L. Ward, The Delaware Continentals, 1776-1783 (Wilmington: The Historical Society of Delaware, 1941), pp. 483-484.

25. Johnson, Sketches, 1, p. 378.

26. Scheer and Rankin, Rebels, p. 495.
27. Militiaman Thomas Young later recalled, "The militia fired first. It was for a time, pop-pop-pop, and then a whole volley; but when the regulars fired, it seemed like one sheet of flame from right to left, Oh! it was beautiful!" Quoted *ibid.*, p. 496.
28. Morgan initially captured 529 on the battlefield, and his patrols later picked up 100 more. Greene to Huntington, Jan. 31, 1781. "Greene Letters," PCC.
29. Captain Robert Kirkwood, certainly the most reticent of all Revolutionary War diarists, wrote a cryptic entry,
 "Jan. 16th. Marched to the Cowpens.
 17th. Defeated Tarleton."
 Robert Kirkwood, The Journal and Order Book of Captain Robert Kirkwood of the Delaware Regiment of the Continental Line, ed. by Joseph B. Turner (1910; reprint ed., Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1970), p. 13.
30. Greene to Washington, January 24, 1781. "Greene Letters," PCC.
31. McCrady, History, pp. 91-92; Kirkwood, Journal, p. 13.
32. O'Hara to the Duke of Grafton, April 20, 1781. George C. Rogers, Jr., ed., "Letters of Charles O'Hara to the Duke of Grafton," South Carolina Historical Magazine, 65 (1964), p. 159. Stedman gives a good analysis of the tactical problems caused by the loss of the light troops, and he discusses the effect of the battle on British morale. Stedman, History, 2, pp. 324-325, 387.
33. Cornwallis to Clinton, Jan. 18, 1781. Reprinted in Tarleton, Campaigns, pp. 251-252. Tarleton blamed Cornwallis for allowing Morgan to escape. *Ibid.*, pp. 219-220, 252. As Stedman did, most British officers apparently placed the blame for the Cowpens debacle squarely on Tarleton. Stedman, History, pp. 324, 387.
34. Tarleton, Campaigns, p. 223.
35. Morgan to Greene, January 25, 1781. Extract in Johnson, Sketches, 1, p. 405.
36. Greene's strategy may be found in two letters: Greene to Huntington, Jan. 31, 1781, and Greene to Washington, Feb. 9, 1781. "Greene Letters," PCC.
37. Greene to Huger, January 30, 1781. Printed in Johnson, Sketches, 1, p. 404.
38. Lee to Greene (undated) enclosed in Greene to Huntington, Jan. 31, 1781. "Greene Letters," PCC.

39. Although he continued to lament this condition. Greene to Huntington. Ibid.

40. Greene to Huger, January 30, 1781. Printed in Johnson, Sketches, 1, p. 404.

41. Greene to Sumter, January 30, 1781. Draper MSS, 7 VV 190-191.

42. Greene to Huntington, January 30, 1781, and Greene to Washington, February 9, 1781. "Greene Letters," PCC.

43. Quoted in Treacy, Prelude, p. 143. On 1 February, while passing through Salisbury, Greene had written Huger to remain on the east bank of the Pee Dee and not to cross to Salisbury. Johnson, Sketches, 1, p. 422.

44. Greene to Sumter, February 3, 1781. Draper MSS, 7 VV 196-199.

45. Ibid.; Greene to Sumter, February 9, 1781. Ibid., 7 VV 200.

46. Treacy, Prelude, pp. 143-144.

47. Cornwallis to Germaine, March 17, 1781. Cornwallis, Correspondence, 1, pp. 518-519; Greene to Washington, February 9, 1781. "Greene Letters," PCC.

48. Greene to Huntington, January 31, 1781. Ibid.

49. Greene to Washington, February 9, 1781. Ibid. The high state of morale of the army can be seen by the fact that during the march from Cheraw to Guilford, despite appalling weather conditions, not a single man deserted. Johnson, Sketches, 1, p. 402. "The miserable situation of the troops for want of clothing, has rendered the march the most painful imaginable; many hundreds of the soldiers tracking the ground with their bloody feet." Greene to Washington, February 15, 1781. "Greene Letters," PCC.

50. Lee, Memoirs, p. 236.

51. Greene to Sumter, February 9, 1781. Draper MSS, 7 VV 200.

52. Greene to Marion, February 11, 1781. Ibid., 6 VV 4.

53. Greene to Washington, February 9, 1781. "Greene Letters," PCC.

54. Pp. 237-247.

55. Treacy, Prelude, p. 152; Thayer, Greene, p. 318.

56. Cornwallis to Germaine, March 17, 1781. Cornwallis, Correspondence, 1, p. 519.

57. Tarleton, Campaigns, p. 229.
58. Kirkwood's computations. Kirkwood, Journal, p. 13.
59. Cornwallis to Germaine, March 17, 1781. Cornwallis, Correspondence, 1, p. 519; Lee, Memoirs, pp. 250-251; Treacy, Prelude, p. 124.

CHAPTER 5

GUILFORD COURT HOUSE

North Carolina

By the right hon'ble Charles
Earl Cornwallis, Lt. Gen. of his
Majesty's forces, etc. etc.

A proclamation,

Whereas it has pleased the divine providence to prosper the operations of his Majesty's Arms in driving the rebel army out of this province, and whereas it is his Majesty's most gracious wish to rescue his faithful and loyal subjects from the cruel tyranny under which they have groaned for several years. I have thought it proper to issue this proclamation to invite all such loyal and faithful subjects to repair without loss of time with their arms and ten days provisions to the royal standard now erected at Hillsborough, where they will meet with the most friendly reception. . . .¹

Cornwallis was encouraged by the initial enthusiastic response by the Loyalists to the British presence, "many hundreds" having ridden in to Hillsborough to discuss the proclamation.² However, his old doubts about the strength of the North Carolina Loyalists were confirmed when he realized that he was receiving far more verbal support than personal commitment from the people. A bitter O'Hara, who was convinced that "England never had, or ever will have, a Single Friend in this Country," watched the people come in to gawk at the novelty of a British camp in the area and, their curiosity satisfied, return home.³ Cornwallis, who needed recruits to build up his fighting strength and had asked the Loyalists to come in ready to fight, was not satisfied with good wishes. He would soon

complain of being in the midst of "timid friends and adjoining inveterate rebels."⁴

In justice to the Loyalists, they saw little choice in the matter. After five years of neglect by the British and persecution by the Whigs, they were not about to take an open stand under conditions that many considered to be unfavorable. The condition of Cornwallis' army was not such as to inspire confidence. As Tarleton related, "[the Loyalists] acknowledged the continentals were chased out of the province; but they declared, they soon expected them to return, and the dread of violence and persecution prevented their taking a decided part in a cause which yet appeared dangerous."⁵ Cornwallis was experiencing again what had occurred earlier in South Carolina with the approach of Gate's army. The Continental Army "in being" posed a continual threat to the British and exerted a psychological influence disproportionate to its military strength over the American population. The Loyalists' worst fears were soon justified.

The Patriot militia in Cornwallis' path had "gone to ground" at his approach. After Davidson had been killed, most militiamen concerned themselves with getting their families to safety and trying to salvage what they could of their property. Now, under Andrew Pickens' leadership, they began to form again. Pickens' small force rapidly grew to over 700 as he moved towards Hillsborough.⁶ The British and the Loyalists were made aware of his presence on the night of 21-22 February, when Colonel James McCall's mounted militia hit one of the town's outposts, killing or capturing sixteen men and an officer.⁷

Loyalist enthusiasm received a bigger jolt on 24 February. Pickens and Lee (who had recrossed the Dan on the 18th) were stalking Tarleton between the Deep and Haw Rivers, when they bumped into Colonel John Pyle's

troop of 2-300 Loyalist cavalry that was en route to join the British. The Loyalists knew that Tarleton was in the area and mistook Lee's green-jacketed troops for the British Legion. As Pickens and Lee were after more important prey, they continued with the charade and attempted to bypass the Tories. Lee's men passed, but Pickens' mounted militia were recognized. Firing broke out, and in an absolutely furious assault that lasted only minutes and was reminiscent of the Waxhaws massacre, Pyle and over half of his men were shot and sabred to the ground.⁸ Pickens was angry, not at the slaughter, but at the gunfire which he was sure would alert Tarleton and allow him to escape.⁹ The psychological impact of the American victory was heightened by the fact that it had occurred within three miles of Tarleton's camp.¹⁰

When Pickens and Lee finally reached the British position they indeed found that Tarleton had gone. The dragoon officer had not heard the fighting but had been recalled hurriedly by Cornwallis for a more important reason. The day prior to Pyle's massacre, Greene and his entire army had recrossed the Dan back into North Carolina.¹¹ Loyalist enthusiasm disappeared entirely at Hillsborough.¹²

Greene, even though dissatisfied with the strength and condition of his army, had no intention of allowing the British to establish a foothold in North Carolina and offer encouragement to the Loyalists, whom Greene knew to be numerous. He understood the requirements for maintaining internal political control far better than did his Lordship. The American had lured Cornwallis far from his base, and he was determined to engage the Britisher before he could recruit replacements and acquire logistical support. As soon as the redcoats withdrew from the Dan towards Hillsborough, Greene began feeding detachments across the river to harass

Cornwallis and discourage the Loyalists. After Lee had crossed, Williams departed with the same light troops he had commanded in the rear guard.

Greene had been busy bombarding Governors Nash and Jefferson with requests for support, and he was encouraged by the news that the Cherokee uprising in the west had been crushed and that the frontier militia was embodying to join him. Steuben, with one eye fixed on Arnold, was doing his utmost to dispatch decently equipped troops to the southward. When Virginia militia General Edward Stevens rejoined Greene with 800 volunteers, the Rhode Islander decided that he could wait no longer, and the Southern Army moved across the Dan on 23 February, on the offensive at last.¹³

Faced with Greene's army again, and with diminishing provisions and Loyalist support at Hillsborough, Cornwallis evacuated that place on 26 February and moved across the Haw river to Allamance Creek, near the scene of the 1771 Regulator battle. Among other reasons, he made the move to support better the supposedly strong Loyalist contingent in the forks of the Haw.¹⁴ However, by abandoning the Tories in Hillsborough, and by appearing to retreat before Greene, he effectively destroyed whatever inclination was left for the Loyalists in that area to rally to the Crown.¹⁵ But Cornwallis was thinking primarily in military terms, not about raising Loyalists but about destroying Greene. With considerable justification, he felt that ". . . it would be impossible to succeed in that great object of our arduous campaign, the calling forth the numerous Loyalists of North Carolina, whilst a doubt remained on their minds of the superiority of our arms."¹⁶ One can doubt his sincerity concerning the Loyalists, but he was absolutely correct in his estimation of the

predicament he was in. The King's Friends had vanished, and Cornwallis found that he could not even get intelligence to keep track of Greene's movements.¹⁷

Greene spent the next three weeks skillfully maneuvering against the British army. He needed to gain time for reinforcements to arrive, and he wanted to harass the British and whittle away as much of their strength as possible. By now Greene was fully committed to a strategy of attrition. He would probably have liked nothing better than to destroy Cornwallis, but he knew that he lacked the resources to do it. Because of the ebb and flow of militia through his camp, he was unable to make definite plans until he received more substantial reinforcement.¹⁸ When that occurred, as he and Pickens discussed the situation, he would "break this fellow's leg."¹⁹ Cornwallis, in the meaning of the day, would be left crippled and exposed.

With its customary efficiency, Williams' light corps, considerably reinforced by militia, was screening the main body. Cornwallis was unable to interfere with Greene's army as it gathered strength. But in accomplishing its mission, the screening force accentuated a fundamental weakness in Greene's army that heightened the Rhode Islander's sense of urgency in bringing Cornwallis to a general action. The militia were having to stand against regulars, and they were deserting in droves.

On 2 March, Lee's Legion and militia units ambushed Tarleton at Clapp's Mill but had to retreat when counterattacked. On 6 March, Cornwallis attacked Williams, trying to cut him off and break through to Greene. Williams fought a sharp running engagement through Wetzell's Mill while Greene retired over the Haw.²⁰ In both engagements the militia

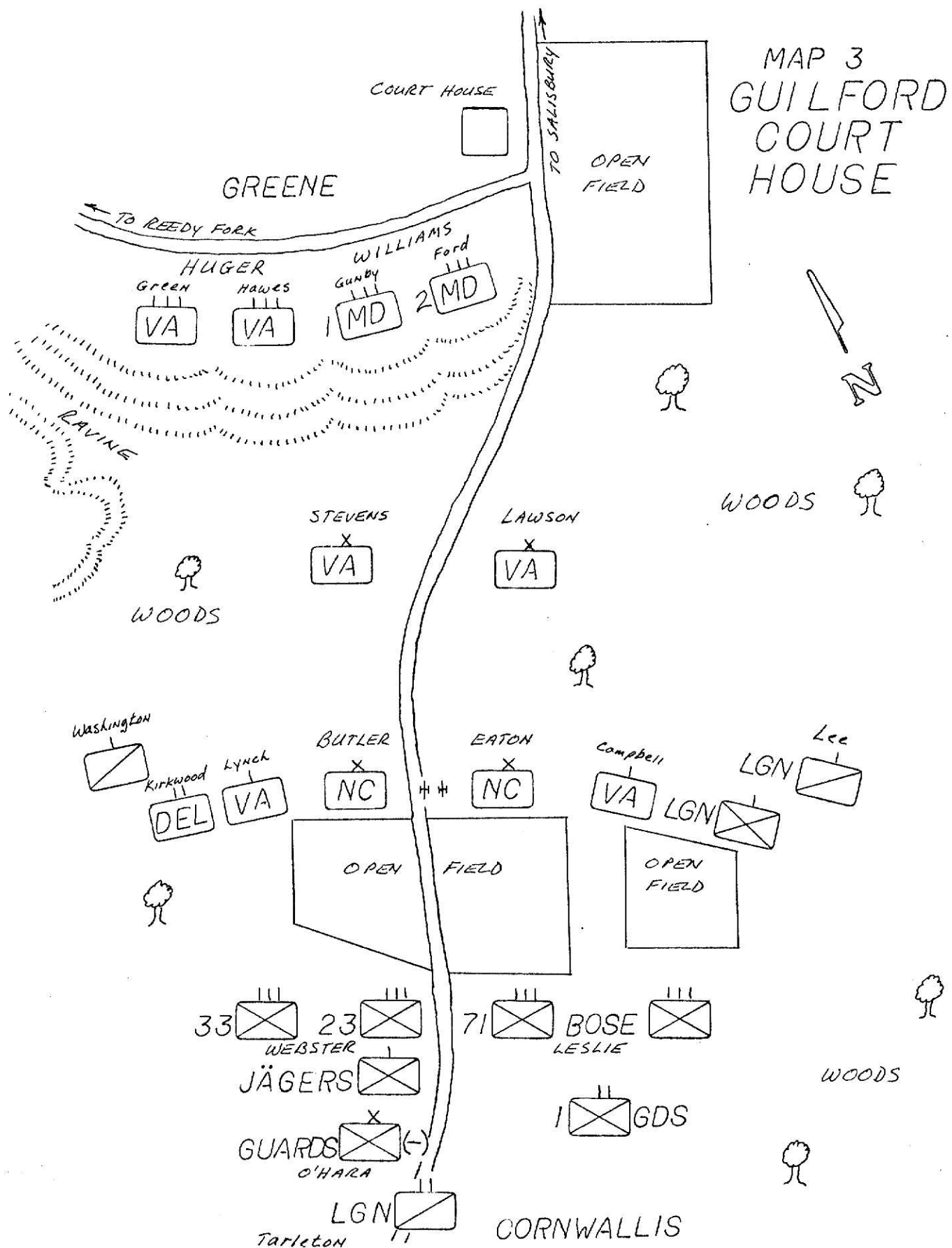
claimed that they had been needlessly exposed, and they objected to fighting as infantrymen.

The most serious loss to Greene's army was Pickens. The South Carolinians and Georgia militia who had fought under him since Cowpens demanded to return to their homes and fight their war there. When Pickens presented the problem to his commander, both Greene and Rutledge agreed that Pickens could accomplish more back in South Carolina.²¹ He was sent south with his troops to join Sumter and Marion as a brigade commander and to take charge of the region between the town of Ninety-Six and Augusta.²²

After his retreat across the Haw, Greene felt that he could delay no longer. Besides Stevens' Virginia militia which had joined him before he crossed the Dan, he had by now been reinforced by General Robert Lawson's Virginia militia brigade, a newly recruited regiment of Maryland Continentals, a regiment of Virginia Continentals, and two brigades of North Carolina militia, in addition to numbers of smaller militia units. On 12 March he began his move, and by the 14th his army had closed at the location he had selected and reconnoitered a month before for the battle, Guilford Court House.²³

Guilford Court House²⁴ sat at the intersection of the Salisbury and Reedy Fork roads atop a hill which sloped gently to the south. The Salisbury road was oriented northeast-southwest. Running north from the direction of the British approach, the road emerged from a wooded defile two miles south of the courthouse, traversed some cleared fields and then encountered heavily wooded and broken terrain for about a mile before it gained more cleared ground near the crest of the hill and the courthouse.

On Daniel Morgan's advice,²⁵ Greene positioned his units in a Cowpens-type defense of three lines (Map 3). The first line, on the



northern edge of the clearing closest the British, was made up of the North Carolina militia brigades, about 500 men each, under Generals Thomas Eaton and John Butler. To secure their flanks, Greene posted detachments of infantry and cavalry. On the left (east) flank, Lee's Legion of infantry and cavalry and Colonel William Campbell's Virginia and North Carolina riflemen made a total force of about 350. Securing the right (west) flank were Kirkwood's Delaware battalion, Washington's cavalry, and Colonel Charles Lynch's Virginia riflemen, totalling about 370 men.

Three hundred yards further north, uphill and in the woods, Greene's second line was composed of about 1200 Virginia volunteers and militia under Generals Stevens and Lawson. Stevens, who had watched the discipline of his troops disintegrate at Camden, was the only militia commander to heed Morgan's admonition to station reliable marksmen in the rear of the ranks to shoot the first man attempting to flee.

Atop the courthouse hill, about three hundred yards to the rear of the Virginians, Greene stationed his two brigades of Continentals, the Marylanders under Williams on the left and the Virginians under Huger on the right. Greene's total strength thus deployed was 4243 men, 1490 regulars and 2753 militia.²⁶

Greene would have preferred to have waited until he had more men before bringing Cornwallis to battle, but he realized that the force he had was all he could reasonably expect under the circumstances. If he delayed further, the only certainty was that his militia force would decrease. Greene was secure in the thought that if he could beat Cornwallis, the British cause in the South would be dealt a mortal blow. If Cornwallis were successful, on the other hand, it would only prove "a partial evil," as Greene could still withdraw and maintain his army in

being.²⁷ He could then recruit more strength and turn on his crippled enemy.

Cornwallis quickly seized the chance for open battle with Greene. He estimated the strength of the American force to be between five and seven thousand, but he knew that Greene had few Continentals. Cornwallis had ultimate faith in the ability of his regulars to overcome the disparity in numbers. In the final analysis, the British commander had little choice in the matter. The initiative in the campaign had passed to Greene at the Dan River (if not before, at Cowpens). The British Army had run out of food, equipment, friends, and time. As Tarleton succinctly stated, Cornwallis had but two choices: "commence his retreat, or prepare for a general action."²⁸

At dawn on the 15th, Cornwallis' 1900 regulars²⁹ moved north out of New Garden in approach march formation to cover the eight miles to Guilford. Shadowed on their march by Lee's Legion, the British began meeting resistance as they closed on the American positions. For the last four miles of this march, the advance guard deployed in combat order and fought a series of sharp skirmishes with the Legion and Campbell's riflemen, who eventually broke contact and fell back to their flank guard position on the first line. At about 1300 hours, as the British deployed from the defile, the Americans opened the battle for Guilford Court House with cannon fire from two six-pounders stationed on the road between the North Carolinians.³⁰

Cornwallis' artillery began its covering fire, and the British deployed rapidly, attacking with four regiments abreast. Orienting on the road, Colonel James Webster's brigade (23d and 33d Regiments) on the west was followed by the Hessian Jaegers and General O'Hara with the Brigade of

Guards (minus the 1st Battalion). To the east of the road, General Leslie's brigade (Hessian Regiment von Bose and 71st Highlanders)³¹ was followed by the 1st Battalion of the Guards, and Tarleton with the cavalry followed as Cornwallis' reserve.

In his letter of 20 February, Morgan told Greene that if the militia fought well, Cornwallis would be beaten; if they did not, Greene would lose. Events of the day proved Morgan correct. Webster's and Leslie's advance threw the North Carolina militia into a panic. Despite the efforts of their officers, most of the first line fled without firing a shot.³² The British were halted, however, by the heavy and accurate fire that poured in from the flank detachments. The two British flank regiments, the 33d and Regiment von Bose, had to swing out obliquely to confront the threat. Lee's Legion and Campbell's riflemen on the east flank stiffened, and von Bose was reinforced with the 1st Battalion of the Guards. Gradually, this fight moved east and became entirely separated from the rest of the battle. Cornwallis readjusted his formation, moving all of his units save Tarleton's on line.

The entire British force rammed into the Virginia militia, and was stopped by a wall of fire. The militia held the line stubbornly, inflicting heavy casualties until gradually forced back by repeated bayonet charges. The battle now raged through the woods and ravines and became fragmented into dozens of separate actions, as the Virginians attempted to move to the rear.

Kirkwood's flank guard made their way back to the third line just as Webster's brigade broke out of the woods and advanced on the Continentals. Unfortunately for Webster, the unit he picked to assault was the 1st Maryland Regiment. Supported by Kirkwood and Colonel Samuel Hawes'

Virginia Continentals, the Marylanders calmly waited the British advance. At close range, the Continentals delivered one crashing volley and tore into the British with the bayonet, throwing Webster's brigade into disorder and forcing him to break contact and withdraw. Greene observed the action and searched in vain for some cavalry to follow up the riposte.

The 1st Maryland returned to its position just as O'Hara and the Guards reached the hill and attacked the left of the Continental line. The recently recruited 2d Maryland Regiment broke under the assault, and the Guards captured their artillery. Williams launched a furious counter-attack with the 1st Maryland and the Delawares on the Guards' left flank. Washington had finished his flank guard mission when the last of the Virginians retreated, and he emerged from the wood line with his cavalry in time to witness the flight of the 2d Maryland. Without hesitation, he charged the Guards' rear just as the Marylanders slammed into their flank. There were perhaps eight hundred men now thrashing about in bloody hand-to-hand combat.

Both commanders realized that the battle, which had been raging for an hour-and-a-half, had reached its decisive moment. To break the deadlock and to reverse the momentum of the struggle which was beginning to turn Greene's way, Cornwallis decided on a desperate measure. Over the wounded O'Hara's protests, he directed volleys of grape shot into the melee, killing Briton and American alike. The two sides staggered apart. Greene, with his militia gone, was unwilling to risk his Continentals any further and ordered a withdrawal. Although Greene had to abandon his artillery, his retreat was orderly and well-executed. His army, covered by the Virginia Continentals, halted at the Iron Works, ten miles west of

the battle site. The Americans did not have to worry about British pursuit.

Cornwallis was master of the field. By the standards of classical Eighteenth Century warfare, he had at last defeated Greene in the engagement he had been seeking. His army had been magnificent. Exhausted, hungry, and ragged, it had attacked with the discipline and courage that was the hallmark of the British regular. "Their persevering intrepidity in action, their invincible patience," he wrote, were indicative of ". . . their zeal for the honour and interests of their Sovereign and their country."³³ They had met and had persevered against an army more than twice their size. Repulsed by the Virginia militia and twice broken by the Continentals--the Guards being absolutely shattered by Washington and Williams--they had rallied, formed and attacked again. The indomitable O'Hara marveled, ". . . their spirit and constancy never forsook them, and at length crowned their manly exertions with victory." But, "I wish it had produced one substantial benefit to Great Britain. . . ."³⁴

As his commanders' field returns began to come in, Cornwallis realized that almost one-third of that magnificent army was still lying on the battlefield. His casualties were staggering: 532 killed, wounded, and missing, by official account. Especially hard hit was his officer corps. Lieutenant Colonel Stuart of the Guards was dead, the gallant Webster was dying, Generals O'Hara and Howard were seriously wounded, and twenty-five other officers were dead, wounded, or dying.³⁵

Cornwallis had won a Pyrrhic victory. He was not only incapable of pursuing Greene's army, he probably could not defend himself should Greene turn and attack him. He was not fighting in a classical Eighteenth century war, and the British army now had a badly broken leg.

To the severely wounded O'Hara, and to many others, the aftermath was a nightmare. "I never did, and hope I never shall, experience two such days and nights, as those immediately after the Battle, we remained on the very ground on which it had been fought cover'd with Dead, with Dying and with Hundreds of Wounded, Rebels, as well as our own--a violent and constant Rain that lasted above Forty Hours made it equally impracticable to remove or administer the smallest comfort to many of the Wounded."³⁶ Without tents or shelter, fifty of the wounded died the first night from shock and exposure.³⁷

The army was in desperate straits, and Cornwallis needed to get help quickly. Two days after the battle, the British began to move slowly southward, dropping off seventy of their most seriously wounded at New Garden under a flag of truce. Continuing a fatal tradition, the day he left Guilford Cornwallis issued a victory proclamation and called for all those loyal to the Crown to turn out. Greene stated the obvious. "His sudden retreat must render the proclamation ridiculous."³⁸ The British then headed towards the Loyalist stronghold at Cross Creek where Cornwallis expected to obtain the desperately needed supplies from the stores Craig had shipped up the Cape Fear from Wilmington.

At the Iron Works ten miles from Guilford, an exhausted Greene, having been under intense pressure with but little rest for four months, finally collapsed. As his scattered units began to arrive at the rallying point, his spirits picked up. His returns after the battle reflected over 1300 American casualties, but he knew that more than 1000 of these were listed as missing and, in the case of the militia, were not true casualties.³⁹ He knew that the British Army had been severely mauled, and he estimated that Cornwallis had taken over six hundred casualties.⁴⁰ His

greatest encouragement came from the morale of his army. His men were extraordinarily proud of what they had done; no one regarded the battle as a defeat.⁴¹ The day after the action he reported to Congress that the Continental Army, still intact, was "in good spirits and in perfect readiness for another field day."⁴² "Notwithstanding we were obliged to give up the ground," he wrote, "we had reaped the advantage of the action."⁴³ Greene immediately set out to try to follow it up.

As soon as he learned of Cornwallis' movement, Greene went after him. He knew that he had only a short time in which to bring the British to another action, for the Virginia militia's term of service was about to expire, and Greene knew that they would return home. Driving his men hard, he almost succeeded. Harassed on the march by Tories who drove in his reconnaissance parties, Greene nevertheless thought he was within striking distance of Cornwallis at Ramsay's Mill on Deep River. He dropped his baggage and pushed his light infantry forward to engage the British and hold them until the remainder of the army caught up. When the Americans arrived, however, they found that Cornwallis had just escaped across the river. The British had crossed in such haste that they had left their dead unburied on the ground.⁴⁴

Greene's army had reached the limit of its endurance. Many of his men had collapsed from hunger and exhaustion on the last push. The militia were tired, their time was up, and they wanted to go home. Greene had to stop and resupply his army. He could not forage locally, as the Whigs and Tories had completely ravaged the country. The time that would be lost would give Cornwallis a lead that Greene knew he could not make up. With the Virginia militia gone, his army would now be far too small to risk another engagement even if he could catch Cornwallis. "These are some of

the disagreeable effects of the temporary Army," he wrote the President of Congress, and he pleaded for more regulars. "The greatest advantages are often lost by the Troops disbanding at the most critical moment."⁴⁵ He was, however, grateful to the Virginians and even thanked the North Carolina militia before they departed.⁴⁶

Greene, like Washington, was a constant complainer when trying to get more support from governors or Congress. Although much of the pessimism and discouragement reflected in his official communications was genuine, Greene continually painted the grimmest possible picture in order to squeeze whatever assistance he could from meagre state and national resources. Immense though his problems were, Greene, again like Washington, never let them become insurmountable, never let them defeat him. If he could not catch Cornwallis and attack him, he would devise another way to destroy him. The same day that he wrote Congress about his dilemma at Ramsay's Mill, he outlined to Thomas Sumter his new, and final, plan for defeating the British in the South.

Greene believed that Cornwallis would probably have to travel as far as Wilmington before he could get adequate supplies and reinforcements. The Rhode Islander planned to make Cornwallis come after him.⁴⁷ The American army would move at once into South Carolina where it would be reinforced by the partisan militia brigades. Cornwallis would have to abandon North Carolina to come after Greene and protect South Carolina. The Continental army and the militia would then combine to beat him. If Cornwallis stayed in North Carolina, the British would lose South Carolina. The militia would tie down the countryside and destroy the smaller British positions while Greene's mobile regular force defeated their major posts in detail. "In either case," Greene wrote, "we shall reap an

advantage, and this is the only maneuver that promises any."⁴⁸ Sumter was directed to coordinate his, Marion's and Pickens' brigades in gathering provisions and preparing to invest the British posts and cut their lines of communications. Greene would send what cavalry, light infantry, and artillery he could spare to assist the militia effort.

This remarkable plan, a classic war of movement, was the logical culmination of the increasingly sophisticated approach Greene had taken to solve the problem of the British occupation of the South. Although he much preferred the conventional formal engagement between regular formations to decide a campaign, he did not have that luxury. Greene was a very unconventional thinker who realized that he had to use the one asset he could get, militia, to greatest advantage. His strategic plan had evolved into a strategy of attrition, and the role of the militia had changed from that of an auxiliary force to a fully coordinated and equal partnership with regular forces in a sophisticated war of movement.

Greene would successfully employ this strategy to recover South Carolina and Georgia. By September, after the Battle of Eutaw Springs, the British were confined to two small coastal enclaves, Charleston and Savannah, where they remained until the end of the war. Greene's struggle for victory was a long and frustrating one. Replacement and equipment shortages, an initially skillful defense by Lord Rawdon, and the vagaries of the militia and their proud and independent commanders were major obstacles that at various times threatened disaster. But Greene overcame them, as he had all the other problems before, and in the end he triumphed.

A different fate awaited Cornwallis. His little army, temporarily freed from pursuit at Ramsay's Mill, struggled on to Cross Creek. There, in the center of Loyalist strength in North Carolina, his advance guard

had to clear snipers to enter the town.⁴⁹ Cornwallis found neither food nor supplies. Craig had not been able to break through the militia screen between Wilmington and Cross Creek, and the Cape Fear could not be secured for water traffic. The army plodded on to Wilmington.⁵⁰

The morale of the Army, in a process which had begun at Cowpens, now disintegrated. Webster died, after days of agony, as did Captains Maynard and Shultz of the Guards, and Wilmouski and de Troff of the Hessians, and others. Exhausted, shoeless and in rags, the men survived on carrion and whatever else they could scavenge. Shattered in body and spirit, and pulling its grisly column of sick and wounded, the British Army was a walking advertisement of failure as it moved through the Carolina settlements.⁵¹ The message was not lost on the Patriots, or the Loyalists.

Shattered also in spirit was Cornwallis. He had won a battle, but his army was destroyed. Loyalist strength was a delusion, the rugged terrain made movement difficult and logistical support impossible, and his adversary was an even greater threat now. The answer to the problem must be in Virginia, which offered support and sanctuary to the rebellion in the South.⁵² He still did not understand what had happened to him.

When he learned of Greene's sudden thrust towards Camden, Cornwallis was stunned. As Tarleton related, "The wisdom and vigour of the American operations . . . deranged all the designs of Earl Cornwallis. . . ."⁵³ Just as important, they also deranged Cornwallis himself. Greene had "taken advantage" of him. Camden was too far away for him to reach in time to affect the outcome of Greene's attack. If he tried to move over land to relieve South Carolina, Greene would "hem me in against the great rivers." If he withdrew to South Carolina by sea it would be

"disgraceful." If he returned to South Carolina in any case he might suffer a "severe blow." Nothing he could do would make any difference in South Carolina.⁵⁴ So saying, the noble Earl turned his force north to Virginia, and Yorktown.

CHAPTER 5

END NOTES

1. Dated February 20, 1781. Enclosure to Greene to Washington, February 28, 1781. "Greene Letters," PCC.

2. Tarleton, Campaigns, p. 230.

3. O'Hara to Grafton, November 15, 1780 and April 20, 1781. Rogers, "O'Hara Letters," SCHM, pp. 169, 177.

4. Cornwallis to Germaine, March 17, 1781. Cornwallis, Correspondence, 1, p. 519. That Cornwallis badly needed reinforcements can be seen from his order to Rawdon to send him the three regiments expected to arrive momentarily from Ireland. Cornwallis to Rawdon, February 21, 1781. Ibid., p. 85.

5. Tarleton, Campaigns, pp. 230-231.

6. Johnson, Sketches, 1, p. 433.

7. Ibid., 449-450.

8. See conflicting accounts of Colonel Pyles' demise: Greene to Washington, Feb. 28, 1781. "Greene Letters," PCC; Lee, Memoirs, pp. 256-259; Tarleton, Campaigns, pp. 231-233. Although he was horrified at the loss of life, Stedman admits that the slaughter was a sound measure to cow the Loyalists. Stedman, History, 2, p. 334.

9. "Never was there a more glorious opportunity of cutting off a detachment [Tarleton] than this . . . our sanguine expectations were blasted by our falling in with a body of from two to three hundred Tories under the command of a Colonel Piles." Pickens to Greene. Quoted in Johnson, Sketches, 1, p. 453.

10. Tarleton aggravated the situation on 4 March when his dragoons cut down another party of Loyalists, thinking they were rebels. Johnson, Sketches, 1, p. 458.

11. Greene to Washington, February 28, 1781. "Greene Letters," PCC.

12. "The report of [Greene's] advance soon made the lukewarm friends abandon the British camp, . . ." Tarleton, Campaigns, p. 233.

13. Greene's situation and intentions are described in two messages to Washington, February 15 and 28, 1781. "Greene Letters," PCC.

14. Cornwallis to Germaine, March 17, 1781. Cornwallis, Correspondence, 1, p. 519.

15. Aggravating the situation further before he left Hillsborough, Cornwallis was forced to slaughter draft oxen belonging to Loyalists and even take provisions from the inhabitants to feed his army. Stedman, History, 2, p. 335.

16. Cornwallis to Germaine, March 17, 1781. Cornwallis, Correspondence, 1, p. 520.

17. Ibid., p. 519.

18. "Our militia had been upon such a loose and uncertain footing ever since we crossed the Dan, that I could attempt nothing with confidence." Greene to Washington, March 10, 1781. "Greene Letters," PCC.

19. Rankin, Continentials, p. 297.

20. Ibid., 293-294. Contrast Cornwallis' account of Wetzell's Mill with Otho Williams': Cornwallis to Germaine, March 17, 1781. Cornwallis, Correspondence, 1, pp. 519-520. Williams to Greene, 7 March 1781. Extract printed in Johnson, Sketches, 1, p. 463. Neither Lee's nor Tarleton's accounts in their memoirs are reliable.

21. Ferguson, "Patriot and Loyalist Militia," pp. 18-19.

22. See Greene to Sumter, February 3 and March 6, 1781; Rutledge to Sumter, March 8, 1781. Draper MSS, 7 VV 197, 210, 213.

23. Greene to Washington, March 10, 1781, and Greene to Huntington, March 16, 1781. "Greene Letters," PCC.

24. Terrain description is from Johnson, Sketches, 2, pp. 4-7.

25. Morgan to Greene, February 20, 1781. Extract ibid., pp. 6-7.

26. The figures are taken from the official returns quoted by Johnson. Ibid., pp. 2-3. Because of the constantly fluctuating strength of the militia, however, these figures must be regarded as approximate. Lee gives similar strength figures in his Memoirs, pp. 283-284.

27. Greene to Huntington, March 16, 1781. "Greene Letters," PCC. Clinton complimented Greene on his sound strategy. Clinton, American Rebellion, p. 266.

28. Tarleton, Campaigns, p. 270.

29. Again, this is an approximate figure. Cornwallis stated to Clinton that he had only 1560 regulars, a figure which Clinton refuted.

Clinton to Cornwallis, April 30, 1781. Extract in Clinton, American Rebellion, p. 517. Cornwallis wrote Germaine that he had 1924 regulars. Cornwallis, Correspondence, 1, p. 86. Fortescue, after some careful calculations, puts the British strength at 1900. History, 3, p. 368. Johnson, after some equally careful calculations, sets the figure at above 2000. Sketches, 2, pp. 3-4.

30. Sources used for a description of the battle are: Greene to Huntington, March 16, 1781. "Greene Letters," PCC; Cornwallis to Germaine, March 17, 1781, and Tarleton's personal account in Tarleton, Campaigns, pp. 270-279, 303-310; and Lee, Memoirs, pp. 270-286.

31. The 1st Battalion, 71st (Fraser's) Highlanders had been virtually destroyed at Cowpens. Katcher, Encyclopedia, p. 68.

32. Sgt. Roger Lamb, who attacked with the 23rd Regiment (The Royal Welsh Fusiliers), states that the American first line put up a stiff fight. Roger Lamb, An Original and Authentic Journal of Occurrences During the Late American War, From Its Commencement to the Year 1783 (Dublin: Wilkinson & Courtney, 1809; reprint ed., New York: The New York Times & Arno Press, 1968), p. 361. Undoubtedly, some of the North Carolina militia did fight, but their casualty figures speak for themselves: 6 killed, 5 wounded, 563 missing. Greene to Huntington, March 16, 1781. "Greene Letters," PCC.

33. Cornwallis to Germaine, March 17, 1781. Cornwallis, Correspondence, 1, pp. 522-523.

34. O'Hara to Grafton, April 20, 1778. Rogers, "O'Hara Letters," SCHM, p. 177.

35. Official return printed in Tarleton, Campaigns, pp. 310-312.

36. O'Hara to Grafton, April 20, 1781. Rogers, "O'Hara Letters," SCHM, pp. 177-178.

37. Stedman, History, 2, p. 346.

38. Greene to Huntington, March 30, 1781. "Greene Letters," PCC.

39. From official returns, March 16, 1781. "Most of the missing have gone home as is but too customary with the militia after an action." Greene to Huntington, March 16, 1781. "Greene Letters," PCC.

40. He later received information that the British had suffered 633 casualties. Greene to Huntington, March 30, 1781. Ibid.

41. Johnson, Sketches, 2, p. 23.

42. Greene to Huntington, March 16, 1781. "Greene Letters," PCC.

43. Greene to Huntington, March 23, 1781. Ibid.

44. Greene to Huntington, March 30, 1781. Ibid.
45. Ibid.
46. Johnson, Sketches, 2, p. 28.
47. Greene's strategy is fully outlined in two messages to Sumter, March 30 and April 7, 1781. Draper MSS, 7 VV 229-231, 237-238.
48. Greene to Sumter, April 7, 1781. Ibid.
49. O'Hara to Grafton, April 20, 1781. Rogers, "O'Hara Letters," SCHM, p. 177.
50. Cornwallis to Germaine, April 18, 1781. Cornwallis, Correspondence, 1, p. 92.
51. O'Hara, who was a member of the "grisly column," vividly describes the disintegration of the army. O'Hara to Grafton, April 20, 1781. Rogers, "O'Hara Letters," SCMH, pp. 177-178.
52. Cornwallis' thought processes can be seen in his letters to General Phillips, April 10, 1781, and to Lord George Germaine, April 18, 1781. Cornwallis, Correspondence, 1, pp. 88-89, 90-91.
53. Campaigns, p. 283.
54. Cornwallis to Germaine, April 23, 1781. Cornwallis, Correspondence, 1, pp. 94-95; Cornwallis to Phillips, April 24, 1781. Printed in Tarleton, Campaigns, pp. 328-329.

CONCLUSION

The British paved the way for their defeat in the South with their disastrous first campaign of 1775-1776. Based on ignorance, poorly planned and conducted, the operation ruined any real chance for Loyalist success. The British exposed the Loyalists and then failed to support them against their more numerous and far better organized enemies. At the same time, the bumbling campaign alarmed the Patriots sufficiently that they overcame the provincialism that had hampered intercolonial cooperation in the past. The Patriots coordinated their defenses to repulse British invasion attempts and to crush their internal enemies, the Loyalists and Indians. The Patriots were allowed a two-and-a-half year respite from British attack in which to consolidate their control. When the British finally returned to the South, they were too late to correct the damage that had been done to the essential element in their new strategy, the Loyalist.

Motivated in part by political necessity, and influenced by poor intelligence and wishful thinking, the British had misunderstood or ignored the lessons of the first campaign. Their new strategy was entirely dependent on the existence of a Loyalist majority in the South. That condition did not exist, and a minority faction was thus pitted against the Patriot majority. Short-sighted British command policies and British and Tory plundering jolted the occupied states out of the shock induced by the suddenness of the British takeover. The British quickly found themselves

faced with an insurrection that they did not understand and that neither they nor the Loyalists could handle.

The strength of the Patriot resistance lay with its organization and leadership. With the states' civil and military control structure temporarily gone, Sumter, Marion, and Pickens took command of a viable militia organization that had existed for years and was ideally suited for its task. As Clyde Ferguson has pointed out, under their able leadership the militia continued to perform the same critical missions it had had since 1775: maintaining internal political control, suppressing the Indians, and fighting the British. Their successes against the Loyalists and the victory by the western militia at Kings Mountain caused a fundamental shift in British strategy in the South.

Their reactions to the militia war highlight the differences in perception and capabilities between Greene and Cornwallis. British strategy was based not only on a Loyalist majority but on the ability of the Loyalist militia to control an area once it had been conquered by regulars. Cornwallis, who neither liked nor trusted militia, became totally discouraged at their defeats and gave up on them. In doing so, he also gave up on a fundamental tenet of British strategy. His substitution of regulars to maintain internal control was an impractical solution. The British never had and, in a world war, never could have sufficient regular forces to remain in an area and pacify it. The punitive forays by his regular and provincial battalions accomplished nothing of any permanence other than to drive people out of an area and to send volunteers to join the Americans.

His rigid, conventional approach led him to seek a military solution outside South Carolina. In doing so he ignored the success that some

Loyalist units had had. And in taking his army out of South Carolina, he not only left Rawdon to try to maintain control with 1000 fewer troops, but he removed a large portion of the psychological support for the Loyalists and made them even more vulnerable to Patriot reprisal. Cornwallis' failure to secure and pacify a region before attempting to move on cannot be attributed solely to him. He merely continued a fatal British tradition established during their initial campaign in 1775.

For a campaigner seeking a military solution by the subjugation of North Carolina, Cornwallis had a remarkably imprecise plan of operations. He would somehow conquer the state and somehow "give our friends another chance." He clearly did not anticipate much help from the King's Friends. "Events alone can decide the future steps," he said. How very different the outcome might have been had Loyalists been organized to tear up the bridges and block the fords on Greene's march to the Dan.

Nathanael Greene had made an adjustment in strategic approach completely opposite to that made by Cornwallis. Initially proposing an imaginative but highly conventional strategy, he quickly adjusted to the conditions he found in the South. He had no choice but to rely on militia forces. Although he continually bemoaned this fact, he employed them with great skill.

His initial estimate of the situation brought home the importance of the so-called "intangibles" of command: morale, confidence, psychology, leadership. His continual emphasis on the importance of having a regular army stemmed partially from his recognition of the psychological value of the army as a symbol of strength and support. His initial disposition of his army, while both daring and risky in a tactical sense, must be seen primarily in terms of these intangibles, of the psychological effect the

move would have on the British, the Loyalists, the Patriots, and his own men.

Cornwallis also saw the psychological value of the Continental Army. In fact, the American army exerted such influence on the Britisher that he thought of little else. Each commander was confronted with the physical and moral presence of the other's army. Cornwallis took a simple approach to the problem and destroyed his own army in trying to crush Greene. The American recognized that the British army was one part of a much larger problem, and he took a far more sophisticated approach in solving it.

Thomas Sumter disagreed when Greene told him that the war "don't depend on little strokes" and that it was a war of States and not of posts. Sumter's parochial views rarely allowed him to see beyond the border of South Carolina, if even outside his own local brigade area. Greene correctly saw the problem in terms of the whole South and of a total campaign. He had to protect Virginia and North Carolina and recover South Carolina and Georgia. His biggest problem in the prosecution of that campaign was the British army. Neither the militia nor the small Continental army by themselves could defeat Cornwallis' mobile force. And until it could be destroyed, nothing of any permanence could be accomplished.

Greene's strategy evolved into a war of attrition against Cornwallis and against the British occupation force. By necessity, the partisan militia had to accomplish the latter mission by themselves in South Carolina. In the North State, Greene was able to accomplish the first mission with militia and regulars. In both states, unrelenting pressure was applied on the British military establishment and on the

Loyalists to cripple the former and prevent its drawing strength from the latter.

Greene's great opportunity to destroy Cornwallis was given him by accident, at Cowpens. The battle had not been planned, but Greene made the most of the opportunity. His retreat to the Dan has been misnamed. It was a retreat only from Guilford north, when Greene realized that he was incapable of fighting a battle. Prior to that time, he had skillfully drawn Cornwallis after him, farther from the British support bases and reinforcements. He remained in sight of his enemy across the water obstacles to keep him there, withdrawing only when he had to, stalling for time, but pulling the harassed British after him. After he reached the safety of the Dan, he did not hesitate to recross the river, even though his army was not ready, in order to maintain that constant pressure on Cornwallis, to chip away at his army, and to deny him Loyalist support.

His handling of the battle at Guilford was masterful. He waited until he had amassed sufficient militia to compensate for his dearth of regulars, then offered battle in terms under which he could not lose. Greene has been criticized for not following up either Webster's or O'Hara's repulse by his Continentals and perhaps soundly defeating Cornwallis. The operative word here is "perhaps," and those who criticize his actions fail to appreciate Greene's understanding of the situation. His aim was to destroy the British army if he could, but cripple it regardless. He had maneuvered Cornwallis into a position where the British had to win every engagement, while Greene merely had to survive. The glue that held the entire American effort together in the ebb and flow of militia forces was his nucleus of Continentals. Only under conditions that offered certain, absolute victory would he risk their decisive engagement. The

battle was still in doubt when he had to make his decision; under the circumstances, he made the correct choice.

In spite of his complaints about "the shoals of militia," Greene quickly developed a sound understanding of their capabilities and limitations. Despite what must have been great temptation to do so, he never employed militia beyond their capabilities, or in a situation where they might be sacrificed. Aside from the special situation with the partisan leaders, Greene never employed militia unsupported by Continentals to stand against regular troops. Davidson and his militia were left facing the British at the Catawba, but they were protected by a major water obstacle, and their mission was only to delay. Even then, the militia were used because Greene had no alternative. The partisan militia and their leaders were a special case, and Greene fully recognized their unique character. His employment of the militia in South Carolina and under Pickens in North Carolina was indicative of his feel for the differences the intangibles that leadership and motivation can make in any force.

When Greene was forced to stop his pursuit of Cornwallis at Ramsay's Mill, he quickly modified his strategic plan. The war of movement he adopted for the recovery of South Carolina and Georgia placed the British again in an untenable position. They had to concentrate their forces against him and thus lose the countryside, or remain in their scattered posts and wait for defeat in detail. The plan was the logical culmination of Greene's increasingly more sophisticated understanding of militia, of his evolving strategy of attrition, and of his grasp of the special environment of the war in the South.

Because of its consequences, Nathanael Greene's North Carolina campaign must be considered one of the decisive campaigns of the

Revolution. He had brought leadership and direction to the war in the South. Recognizing that each victory or defeat there had a psychological impact far greater than the military results of the action, he had forced the British mobile force into decisive combat on terms unacceptable to the enemy. He had saved North Carolina and had reversed the tide of British conquest in the South. He was directly responsible for the withdrawal of Cornwallis' army into Virginia, with the concomitant weakening of the British military structure in the occupied states, opening them for rapid recovery.

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INVETERATE REBELS: NATHANAEL GREENE'S
NORTH CAROLINA CAMPAIGN, 1780-1781

by

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B. A., Middlebury College, 1960

AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S THESIS

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of History

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Manhattan, Kansas

1975

In 1778, faced with continual frustration in the North and with a world war after France entered the conflict, the British looked southward for a solution to the American Revolution. By August 1780, British forces had occupied the two most southern states and had captured or destroyed two Continental Armies. Time at last seemed to be on the British side.

During the Revolution's darkest hour, one of America's most remarkable military figures emerged to guide her fortunes in the decisive theater of the war. The most critical phase of Nathanael Greene's southern campaign occurred during his initial months of command, when British strength in the South appeared overwhelming and their success seemed inevitable. The decisive battle in the campaign, perhaps in the war, would be fought in North Carolina.

This paper concentrates on two aspects of those first critical months. First, the theater of operations. Warfare in the South was far different from what Greene or his principal opponent, Charles, Earl Cornwallis, had experienced in the North. Several factors were responsible. Settlement patterns and social and political relationships between groups prior to the war created a divisiveness that both sides exploited. An early, blundering campaign by the British exacerbated local conditions by exposing Loyalists and alarming Whigs into a vigorous defense of their frontiers and coasts and a severe repression of internal dissent.

The second British campaign occupied Georgia and South Carolina and employed a new strategy that deliberately set American against American. The strategy was based on false estimates of Loyalist strength,

and the British were opposed by a powerful resistance movement organized around a militia system ideally suited to its task. These conditions resulted in a vicious civil war that dominated all other aspects of the campaign.

This study's major area of concentration is on the way the two commanders in the South fought the war there. Each man reacted differently to the peculiarities of warfare in the South. One adjusted his strategy to the conditions and resources he found, and the other did not. In that fact, more than in any other, lay the reason for the American victory.

Cornwallis' continual search for a conventional military solution to the problem led him to reject the Loyalists and to take greater risks with his army. He thought he had reached a solution at Guilford Court House, but his army had been pushed too far and was crippled beyond use. By the time he reached Wilmington, Cornwallis himself had been defeated psychologically by a process he did not understand.

The leadership and perseverance of Nathanael Greene dominated the war after November 1780. His adjustment to the conditions he found in the South was remarkable, and the moment he took command marked the beginning of the end for the British. His initial strategy envisioned conventional operations between regular forces, but when he realized that his strength would come primarily from militia, he was compelled to revise his strategy and take an increasingly sophisticated approach to his campaign.

During his retreat to the Dan River, Greene decided on a strategy of attrition against the British and planned for the militia to assume a crucial role in its execution. By the time he returned to South Carolina, Greene was conducting a classic war of movement employing his Continentals and partisan militia in a fully coordinated campaign against

the British and Loyalists. His actions were governed as much by political and psychological considerations as by tactics. In the end he triumphed, having subjected the British army and its commanders to a form of warfare with which they could not cope.