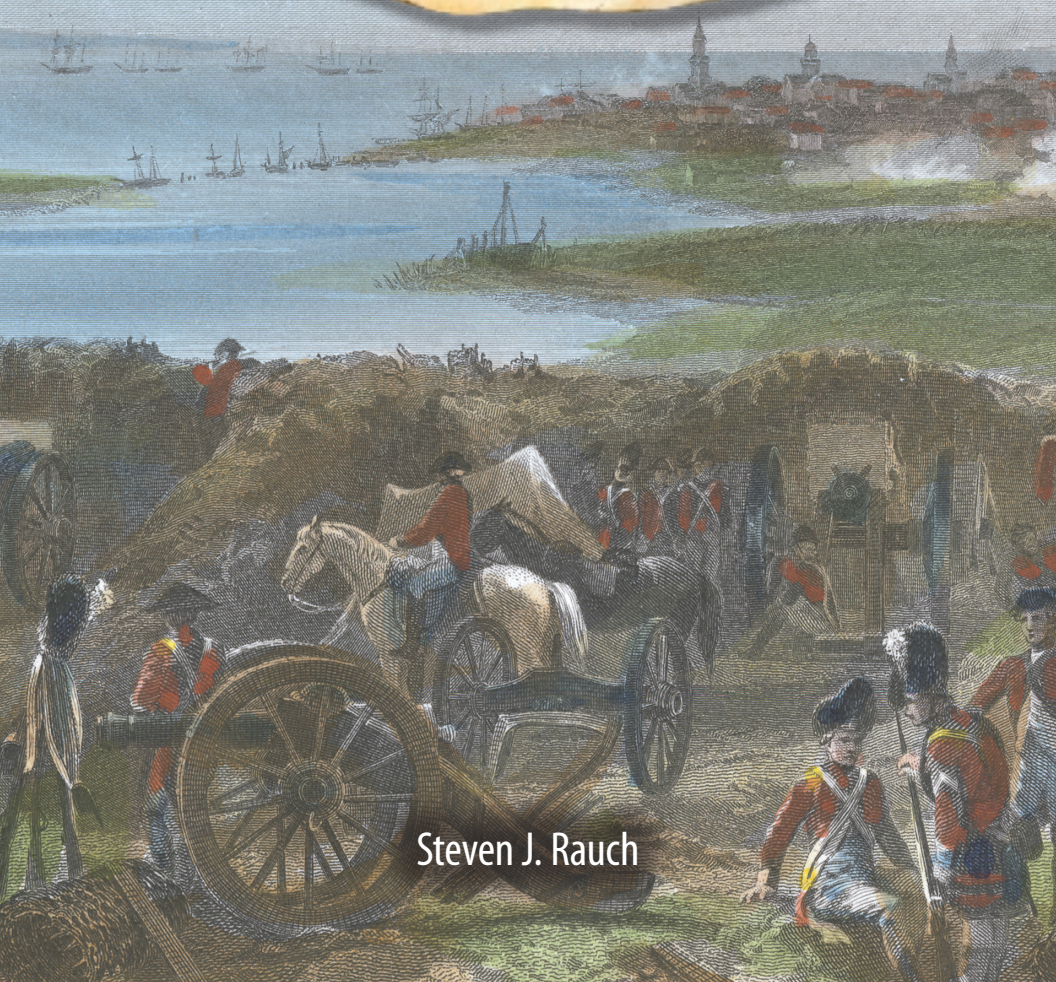




# THE WAR IN THE SOUTH

1778–1780



Steven J. Rauch

# The U.S. Army Campaigns of the Revolutionary War

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**The U.S. Army Campaigns of the Revolutionary War**

**THE WAR IN THE SOUTH,  
1778–1780**

by  
Steven J. Rauch



Center of Military History  
United States Army  
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# INTRODUCTION



As America celebrates the 250th anniversary of the Revolutionary War, it is a perfect time to reflect on the revolutionary generation. In the two-and-a-half centuries since the war, the United States has grappled with the complexities and paradoxes of its revolution. How could a nation be born from the idea that all men are created equal, and yet deny much of that freedom to many of its citizens? How should a central federal government balance power with state governments? Could those thirteen fractious colonies merge into one nation? The seeds of what would become our country's future political and military conflicts lie in these complexities, as do some of our greatest national accomplishments.

This milestone anniversary is also an appropriate time to reflect on the history of the United States Army. The Army stands as our first truly national institution, having been established by the Continental Congress on 14 June 1775. General George Washington's ability to meld the soldiers of the various colonies together into one national force provided an example to the rest of the country that national unity was possible. If the Army failed to overcome the regional sectionalism prevalent at the time, it would fall to superior British resources and organization. If the Army failed, the nation would fail. Washington gave us the precedent of military subordination to the civil authority, one of the core tenets of our political tradition and way of life. At the end of the war, he resigned his commission and voluntarily gave up all his power to return to civil life. His example has inspired us as a model of military and political leadership for generations.

The Massachusetts militiamen who fired the first shots of the war on 19 April 1775 had no blueprint for creating a nation—nor did many think that the conflict would result in a drive for independence. Deep-seated colonial resentments over their rights as English citizens had been simmering since before the 1750s. As the British Parliament enacted even more restrictive laws, peaceful protests turned to military organization, and finally open violence. As New England formed its Army of Observation in the wake of the battles of Lexington and Concord, the Continental Congress saw the need for a national army.

For eight long years, the Continental Army maintained itself in the field, despite fighting superior odds, starvation, diminished resources, and divided leadership. Setbacks in the New York Campaign of 1776 nearly destroyed Washington's army as the British drove it into Pennsylvania. Yet as 1777 opened, Washington changed the operational situation by seizing the initiative in a series of tactical victories at Trenton and Princeton, New Jersey. That fall, a British invasion into northern New York met with failure and capture at the hands of the Northern Army and militia at Saratoga, ultimately bringing France into war on the side of the United States. At the same time, Washington kept a British army penned up in Philadelphia while he instituted a training regimen for his army at their encampment in Valley Forge that winter. Trained under the tutelage of German-born Frederick von Steuben, the Continentals harried the British out of Philadelphia and back to New York City, fighting like regulars at Monmouth in 1778.

General Washington faced the challenge of countering British victories at Charleston, South Carolina, and Savannah, Georgia, when the British shifted the war south in 1778, while also containing powerful British forces in Canada and New York City. Relying on skilled subordinates such as Anthony Wayne, Nathanael Greene, and the Marquis de Lafayette—all of whom in turn worked closely with state militia—Washington was able to hold the delicate balance of power in both the northern and southern theaters. Seizing the opportunity presented by his French allies, Washington quickly shifted a large portion of his army from New York City to Yorktown,

Virginia. There, the allies laid siege to another British army, forcing it to capitulate in the fall of 1781. Although this victory sounded the death knell for British control of the American colonies, peace talks would last for two more years. During this time, Washington kept an army in the field, maintained the supremacy of civil authority over the military, and presented a credible threat to the remaining British garrisons. When the peace came, the true architects of the revolution's success were the Continental Army, state troops, and the militia.

The Revolutionary War created the model for our modern Army. It set the stage for what eventually would become a three-component force, with the Continentals and militia operating in complementary roles. Today, thirty-four National Guard units can trace their lineage to the Revolutionary War, which is a testament to their role in the formation of this country. Eight army branches also have their beginnings in the revolution. The U.S. Army's very motto, "This We'll Defend," is rooted in the "self-evident" truths enunciated in the Declaration of Independence and American interpretations of Enlightenment traditions, which came together in the seal for the Board of War and Ordnance and became the Department of the Army seal in the twentieth century. Unfortunately, it also would take until the twentieth century for the U.S. Army to be as racially integrated as its Continental Army forebears.

The traditions begun and precedents set by Washington and his soldiers continue to influence the U.S. Army and causes around the world. The seeds of hope shown at Trenton and Princeton have inspired leaders in other dark times, such as Bull Run, Shiloh, and Kasserine Pass. The revolutionary generation taught us that the true strength of our Army is our people; from the frontline soldiers to the camp followers who sustained the regiments. And it is to these individuals, who forged ahead through privation and misery to final victory and who rarely received any greater recognition in their own lifetimes than the simple epitaph "A Soldier of the Revolution," that these volumes are humbly dedicated.

CHARLES R. BOWERY JR.  
Executive Director





# THE WAR IN THE SOUTH, 1778–1780

By mid-1778, the United States' war against Great Britain had produced some successes. A British army of more than 5,000 had surrendered at Saratoga, New York, on 17 October 1777. Following this resounding victory, on 15 November 1777 the Continental Congress adopted the Articles of Confederation of "The United States of America"—although it took until 1 March 1781 for the last state to ratify the compact and enable its implementation. The most significant development was the decision by France to enter into a formal military alliance with the Americans in March 1778. This alliance promised financial, materiel, and manpower aid to the United States, especially the capabilities of a greatly improved French navy. The Franco-American alliance changed the war from an internal colonial conflict into an international conflict, which meant the British had to reallocate military resources from North America to defend more valuable areas such as the West Indies as well as Britain itself.

Compounding the British challenge was a less-noticed development at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania. There, the Continental

Army had not only survived the harsh winter of 1777–1778 but also used the time to train its soldiers and units into a more skilled and disciplined force. These improvements were evident during the Battle of Monmouth, New Jersey, on 28 June 1778, when American regiments maneuvered effectively, displayed discipline upon receiving fire, and illustrated proficiency with bayonets, all of which contributed to deny the British a clear tactical victory on the battlefield. The emergence of a competent and resilient Continental Army by mid-1778 was another sign that the British chances of suppressing the rebellion were declining the longer the war continued.

British leaders were not willing to admit defeat even as their enemies grew in quality and quantity. Instead, they decided to pursue a new strategy based on assumptions that the economic, social, and political conditions in the southern colonies, especially Georgia and South Carolina, were more favorable to Britain than in the north. However, the British were about to enter a vast geographic region where new American state governments had established firm control over the south.

## STRATEGIC SETTING

### **The War in the South through 1778**

The southern colonies had not been devoid of activity from 1775 to 1778. In a series of relatively bloodless coups d'état, the Americans successfully overthrew the royal governments of Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina in 1775 and Georgia in 1776. The

political rebellion soon transformed into a civil war between factions who supported the rebellion, generally known as Americans, and those who wished to continue living within the British colonial system, generally known as loyalists. Several small battles occurred between the two factions early in the war. In South Carolina, American victories at Ninety Six and the Great Cane Break in late 1775 ended most loyalist resistance in that state until 1780. In Virginia, the battle of Great Bridge near Norfolk in December 1775 resulted in defeat of a small British regular and loyalist force. The most dramatic event occurred in North Carolina when Americans defeated the loyalists at Moore's Creek Bridge in February 1776. These victories, achieved by American militia, influenced many people to conclude it was in their best interest to declare support for the rebellion.

The only significant military operation in the south occurred in 1776 when a British fleet carrying several thousand troops threatened Charleston, South Carolina, whose only defense was an incomplete fortification of earth and sponge-like palmetto logs at the south end of Sullivan's Island. On 28 June 1776, British ships fired more than 7,000 projectiles at the fort, though the bombardment had negligible effect because the palmetto and earth walls absorbed the impact of the cannonballs. In contrast, American artillery inflicted terrible damage to several ships and the British withdrew. The Americans celebrated the victory as a testament to their courage and military capabilities just days before the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

Having defeated the internal threat from loyalists and the British from the sea, the Americans faced yet another challenge on the frontier when warfare broke out between the Cherokee and backcountry settlers in July 1776. The Cherokee were the most populous indigenous nation along the western frontier of the southern colonies, and they sought to strike against White settlements while the Americans were focused on threats along the coast. Backcountry militia leaders effectively mustered their men to fight, and by the end of summer the local White population had destroyed most Cherokee settlements east of the Blue Ridge mountains. In July 1777, a Cherokee delegation signed treaties with Virginia, North Carolina,

South Carolina, and Georgia, in which they agreed to cede more than 5 million acres of land from their nation. The defeat of the Cherokee also discouraged other nations, such as the Creek, from supporting Britain for the next several years.

An enduring security concern for both loyalist and patriot slaveholders was the constant attention needed to prevent slave insurrections in the low country. Enslaved people formed about 60 percent of South Carolina's population and 37 percent in Georgia, and almost 90 percent of these people worked on the rice plantations along the Atlantic coast. It was important for both sides of the conflict to discourage enslaved people from taking advantage of the disruptive atmosphere of rebellion to seek freedom or go a step further and bear arms in battle against White men. As such, even casual talk or rumors of proposals to arm enslaved people produced an uproar that united slaveholders of all allegiances. Instead, leaders such as William Bull, the loyalist lieutenant governor of South Carolina who later went into exile, authorized increases in strength of nightly patrols to prevent potential slave uprisings.

Following the American victories over the loyalists, British, and native peoples, the southern states experienced almost two and a half years of relative peace. The Americans used this interregnum to solidify their control over militia organizations, the economy, and legislative assemblies formed by the new state constitutions. These governments also used this time to purge loyalists from their states. Those who wished to remain loyal could flee their homes for other parts of the empire, adapt and accept the new government, or take up arms against their neighbors. These repressive tactics all but ensured many of the strongest British supporters had evacuated the southern colonies by the end of 1778.

The purge of loyalists from the Carolinas and Georgia unexpectedly created a new threat from East Florida, where thousands of loyalist families sought refuge. The influx of displaced people triggered a refugee crisis requiring food, shelter, and other aid. Many of the loyalist refugees banded together, intending to fight to regain their homelands, and formed regiments such as the *South Carolina Royalists* and *King's Rangers*. East Florida's governor, Patrick Tonyn,

accepted the service of these loyalist regiments and directed them to raid into Georgia to obtain food, especially livestock, to help feed the increased population. To repel and discourage these raids, the Americans organized several military expeditions, but insufficient supplies, sickness, and poor cooperation among their commanders made these efforts fruitless.

By the end of 1778, the threat to American control of the southern states from loyalists, Indians, and the British appeared to be minimal. That changed in December 1778 when the British implemented a new strategy to regain control of that region and decide the fate of the war.

## **British Strategy in 1778**

What had begun as a struggle to subdue a colonial rebellion had changed in character by 1778 following the surrender of British Maj. Gen. John Burgoyne at Saratoga, New York, and the French alliance with the Americans. For the British, suppressing the rebellion now became secondary to countering the French in North America, the West Indies, the Indian Ocean, and European waters. Every British move had to consider the movements of the French navy along with potential sea engagements. Some British leaders believed the strategy they had followed until this point in the war had been focused on the wrong end of the continent—the north, where most of the rebellious people lived—and instead should have aimed at securing the less-populous southern colonies. Given these growing challenges, King George III; Prime Minister Frederick, Lord North; and Lord George Germain, Secretary of State for the American Department, decided to pivot away from the northern colonies toward Georgia and South Carolina, which appeared ripe for the taking.

British leaders believed that most people in the south were loyal and would embrace the opportunity to overthrow the illegal American governments if British military forces appeared. Deposed colonial officials, especially former royal governors, emphatically argued that Georgia and the Carolinas were hot beds of loyalty. That may have been true upon their departures from office in 1775, but

the situation had changed dramatically by late 1778, as demonstrated by the loyalist refugee migration to East Florida. On 8 March 1778, Germain wrote, “the conquest of these provinces is considered by the King as an object of great importance in the scale of the war, as their possession might be easily maintained, . . . [and], it might not be too much to expect that all America to the south of the Susquehanna would return to their allegiance.”

The British designed a strategy based on the premise that they could train, equip, and organize the southern loyalists into security forces to help reestablish loyal governments and ensure public safety. Therefore, a large contingent of British forces would not be necessary for southern operations. In addition, military forces operating in the south would be closer to the West Indies and the Gulf Coast, where other British naval and land forces guarded against any French, and potentially Spanish, threat that might occur. In general, the British envisioned a two-phased approach to recover the south. The first was to destroy, disarm, or capture American military units and remove their leaders from power and influence. In the second and more complex phase, they would restore peace by reinstating the royal governments.

Though the strategy for leveraging loyalist manpower and support seemed clear, the roles of the native tribes and enslaved people in British plans was not. As mentioned earlier, the British were determined to prevent enslaved people from exploiting the conditions of civil disorder to escape or to rebel against slaveholders. On the question of Britain’s relationship with the native nations, several factors had to be considered. First, the British risked alienating the loyalist population, most of whom lived on the frontier, if they openly tried to seek alliances with the native nations against the Americans. Second, even if the native nations could be brought into the war, their geographic dispersion as well as dissention between and among the various tribal nations would make it difficult to integrate them into an organized military campaign. Finally, the British also assumed the natives would comply readily with British demands, and ignored the fact that tribal leadership naturally would pursue their own interests and goals in spite of British intentions.

Some Creek settlements, for instance, supported the Americans and some supported the British. Many other Creek, however, opted to remain neutral—as many of their White counterparts did—or were more concerned with their ongoing conflict with the Choctaw nation than with the fighting among the Europeans. The complex considerations in employing people of color as allies proved too much for British ministers and generals to address, and so they decided instead to rely on the loyalists as the foundation of their quest to liberate the southern states.

## **The British Army in 1778**

Having been at war in North America for almost four years, British soldiers had gained experience and adapted to the environment in which they conducted warfare. In March 1778, the British army, excluding troops in Canada and the Floridas, had a strength of 26,600 rank and file fit for duty, with 8,400 at New York, 3,500 at Rhode Island, and 14,700 in Philadelphia. These numbers, however, do not reflect the diversity of that army, of which only about one-third of the soldiers and units were from the regular army establishment—the well-known “redcoats” of the British army.

Another contingent was composed of German soldiers—about 30,000 during the war—obtained through treaties with the rulers of several German states who rented out their professional armies for profit. The suddenness of the war caught Britain with insufficient trained soldiers and no time to raise additional forces. Acquiring foreign troops was the king’s solution to the shortage. Most were ethnically German, though Hesse-Kassel and Hesse-Hanau supplied the majority, and so they all collectively came to be known as Hessians. Troops supplied under these contracts had similar training, equipment, weapons, and tactical doctrine to their British army counterparts. They also included special units such as the jaeger corps, who were armed with rifles and proved valuable for scouting and skirmishing in difficult terrain.

Another augmentation was the Provincial units. These units of loyalist Americans were trained, armed, equipped, and uniformed—

including the distinctive red coat—in the same manner as their regular army counterparts. Britain encouraged recruitment by giving Provincial officers rank status equal to their regular army counterparts as well as eligibility for a half-pay pension if their unit demonstrated effective service. Many junior British officers and noncommissioned officers sought positions in Provincial regiments to acquire more senior rank, which in turn provided military expertise to those organizations. Provincial soldiers served full time and anywhere they were needed, which meant that many units raised in the north were sent to the south, where they demonstrated remarkable effectiveness during the battles in that theater. By the end of 1778, there were about 7,500 loyalists serving with the British army in units such as the *British Legion*, the *New York Volunteers*, and *New Jersey Volunteers*.

The final component and linchpin of the British southern strategy were the loyalist militia. Like their American counterparts, many members of the loyalist militia had training and experience from prewar militia service, especially those living on the frontier. However, because members of these units needed to maintain their farms and other occupations in the local economy, they usually served for short periods and near their homes, limiting their use for extended operations. When they did serve, they often foraged for supplies, helped with transportation on local waterways, and provided intelligence through scouting and knowledge of the local area where they lived. The sizes of the loyalist militia fluctuated depending on who controlled a region, often declining when the Americans were dominant and growing whenever a strong British force was present.

The efficiency of an army is often reflected by a nation's ability to supply the army effectively. During the French and Indian War, British forces had been able to obtain most of their food, forage, and auxiliary support from the colonies, but in the current circumstances they could no longer do so. They would have to overcome 3,000 miles of ocean to provide their soldiers with adequate amounts of ammunition, tentage, uniforms, artillery, food, and forage. Transport ships were in short supply, and storms compounded

the hardships of a two- to four-month voyage and caused the loss of troops and supplies. There was also the ever-present danger of American privateers seizing British ships and, by 1778, French threats to shipping. The British still had to acquire some resources in North America, such as wagons for transporting supplies on a campaign, and draft animals, which had trouble surviving the long ocean voyage. British army supply lines therefore were tethered to Atlantic ports and limited as to how far they could project forces inland. Additionally, British supply lines were subject to attack by American partisans, forcing the military to dedicate forces to protecting those lines. Foraging excursions for food and supplies took even more British troops away from operations, and the foraging parties themselves needed protection. The political environment also demanded sensitivity—which most British soldiers did not have—in knowing if the supplies they were taking belonged to a loyalist or revolutionary. These actions affected the inhabitants' attitudes toward the British forces, depending, for instance, on whether the soldiers provided receipts for what they took or simply seized the goods without paying for them.

## **Clinton Takes Command**

On 4 February 1778, Germain wrote a letter to Lt. Gen. Sir Henry Clinton, designating him the new commander in chief in North America. Clinton was replacing Lt. Gen. Sir William Howe, who had resigned after the Saratoga campaign. The 48-year-old Clinton was the son of naval officer George Clinton, who had moved his family to New York colony in 1743. Henry Clinton had spent part of his youth in the Long Island area, and the experience afforded him intimate knowledge about the geography, topography, and the people who lived there. In 1749, he went to England, where he sought assignment to the most elite British army regiments. He took part in many campaigns in Europe, gaining military experience and eventual promotion to major general in 1772. Clinton thoroughly studied his profession and kept detailed notes about his military reading. He developed a good understanding of warfare and preferred to avoid

costly frontal assaults by using maneuver against an opposing army. Unfortunately, his personality, described as hypersensitive, irascible, and hostile to any criticism, overshadowed his military qualities. As a subordinate, Clinton freely offered advice that was often sound and proper; however, he complained if others ignored his advice. Despite his personality traits, he clearly grasped the political, geographic, and military context of the war, understanding that force alone would not regain the hearts and minds of rebellious Americans.

Clinton arrived in Boston in 1775 along with then Maj. Gen. William Howe and Maj. Gen. John Burgoyne. Howe eventually became commander of British forces and Clinton served as one of his key commanders. Their relationship became strained after Clinton criticized Howe for having allowed Washington's army to escape after the battles for New York in 1776. That fall, Clinton returned to England intending to resign but King George III awarded him a knighthood in April 1777 and ordered him to return to New York to serve as Howe's second-in-command. Clinton was consumed with dread when he learned of his appointment as commander in chief, a position fraught with enormous risk, during a war in which victory seemed more elusive each passing day.

On 9 May 1778, Clinton arrived in Philadelphia and read Germain's extremely specific orders about how he was to prosecute the war. Conflict with France meant he should expect no recruits, replacements, or new regiments. He was to withdraw the main army from Philadelphia and return to New York City. His ensuing march overland resulted in the Battle of Monmouth. The most distressing aspect of his orders was the reduction of the army by significant numbers to serve in other higher priority areas. The most heartbreaking step for Clinton was the detachment of more than 5,100 British regulars for an expedition to the West Indies to seize St. Lucia from the French. The Rhode Island garrison received an additional 2,000 soldiers, 650 went to Halifax, and another 1,100 went to West Florida. Finally, 3,000 were to be sent to East Florida. In October, he began to redeploy his forces, after which 17,452 effective troops remained with him at New

York. To Clinton, it seemed as if his army—now reduced to two-thirds of that commanded by Howe—had dissolved before his eyes.

On 10 October, Clinton received another letter from Germain, ordering him to begin operations in the southern colonies at the earliest opportunity. To follow that directive, Clinton decided to send the contingent of 3,000 troops originally bound for East Florida to Georgia instead. He also directed Brig. Gen. Augustine Prévost to move his forces north from St. Augustine into Georgia and join with the New York expedition to capture Savannah. British regulars would then move to seize key settlements, such as Augusta, and establish contact with loyalists to help defeat the remaining American opposition.

## **American Strategy in 1778**

Until this point in the war, American strategy was primarily defensive and shaped by reaction to British moves. The uncertain supply, financial, and manpower situation made it challenging to develop a consistent plan or seize the initiative. Lacking strategic mobility on the sea to match that of the British, American forces could not undertake strategic offensives. Even so, by 1778 the Americans' defensive strategy had proved effective, as Washington and his commanders successfully foiled British operations that already had been constrained by the limits of Britain's logistical capability. A paramount foundation of American strategy was to ensure the survival of the Continental Army, either by avoiding battle or by engaging the enemy only when they could achieve tactical superiority.

The entrance of France into the war as an ally in 1778 changed the Americans' strategic options dramatically, mainly because of the capabilities provided by the French navy. After suffering a humiliating defeat in the Seven Years' War the French had resolved to expand and modernize their navy. A greater than 600 percent increase in naval expenditures had given them more than eighty ships of the line by 1778. In addition, the French promised to provide supplemental infantry regiments, as well as artillery and engineering

capabilities, for conducting land operations with the Americans. The arrival of French military support encouraged Washington to become more audacious and assume greater risk in operations, as any losses sustained by the Continental Army would not necessarily be fatal to the American war effort.

For a brief period in 1778, the strategic initiative passed from British hands to the allies when V. Adm. Jean-Baptiste Charles Henri Hector Theodat, comte d'Estaing, appeared off the Delaware River on 8 July, leading a French naval squadron of eleven ships of the line and transports carrying 4,000 troops. The French fleet was more powerful than any the British could concentrate in American waters. After consulting with Washington, d'Estaing decided to attack the British at Newport, Rhode Island. However, coordination challenges and clashing personalities of French and American leaders threw the operation into disarray. When a British fleet appeared, d'Estaing put out to sea to engage them in battle, but a violent storm scattered and damaged ships of both navies. The British returned to New York to repair their ships. After completing similar repairs in Boston, d'Estaing departed to address more pressing concerns in the West Indies, signaling that the French had their own national interests that took priority over those of the Americans.

This disappointing end to the initial operations with the French ended Washington's hopes for more decisive results. He moved his army to White Plains, New York, where he determined to wait for the next opportunity to strike a decisive blow against the British. There, he would wait several years for his next opportunity, because the British once again seized the initiative with their Southern Campaign.

## **The Continental Army in 1778**

The Continental Congress established the period of service, number of troops, and organization of the Continental Army. Congress issued quotas to each state to recruit a specific number of regiments for Continental service based on their male population. States were responsible for organizing and equipping the regiments and

appointing officers through the rank of colonel. Each state met their quotas differently, but all generally used bounties and other incentives to entice recruits. If those did not work, they drafted from the militia. Because Georgia had only about 3,000 military-aged men, Congress allowed that state to recruit outside its borders, as far away as Virginia, to fulfill its quota. An outcome of this method of recruiting was that the regiments reflected the diverse ethnic, racial, and cultural background of the state. By 1778, the Continental Congress allowed both free and enslaved Black men to serve in Continental units, thus making it the first racially integrated American army. All the states, except South Carolina and Georgia, allowed Black men to enlist for Continental service. A report in August 1778 revealed that within the brigades provided by the states south of Pennsylvania, 4.4 percent of the rank and file of Continental soldiers were Black. As the war in the deep south consumed Continental regiments, they would be replaced by those from North Carolina, Virginia, Maryland, and Delaware, all of which included Black soldiers.

During the war, the composition and structure of the Continental Army adapted to changing needs, financial resources, and manpower. On 27 May 1778, Congress directed a series of organizational changes based on recruiting, the strength of the regiments on hand, and their geographical location. These changes took about a year to implement, but within the southern states Virginia was to supply eleven regiments, North Carolina, and South Carolina six each, and Georgia one.

Another challenge to Continental recruiting came from states raising their own state troops for full-time, dedicated service within their state. The states raised these troops in addition to their own state militias, which played an enormous role in the struggle, especially in the southern campaigns against the loyalists, Native Americans, and British. The militia system enabled many able-bodied men to perform part-time, often emergency, service and remain in the labor force to keep the economy going. Local community leaders raised militia units, which were composed of relatives, friends, and neighbors with strong bonds of religion, ethnicity, or kinship. Many

had strong, charismatic, and influential leaders who could instill discipline and motivation on the individuals within their ranks. Though many Continental officers had come to disparage American militia, those from the southern backcountry made exceptionally good fighters. Unlike men living along the coast and plains, the backcountry militia were motivated highly, led ably, and possessed military skills that were a natural part of their daily lives. However, militia units serving in campaigns with the Continental Army often ran into problems, such as the expectation that the Continental Army would supply both the militia members and their horses with food. If American forces captured a large quantity of enemy supplies, the militia and the Continental Army often disagreed over who would claim them. The militia felt that they should receive a portion of the seized supplies as spoils of war.

A major challenge facing Continental commanders was that some states, such as South Carolina, did not regard their state troops, militia, and even their Continental quotas as being available for service outside of the state. Southern military and political state leaders were reluctant to transfer full control of their troops and supplies, especially to an unknown commander from a different state or region. Continental commanders thus had to continually engage in negotiations with state officials any time they wanted to conduct operations, especially outside the state borders. These tangled lines of authority plagued Continental commanders, who pursued national goals rather than local priorities.

The economy of the nascent United States was not self-sufficient enough to supply the essential materials needed to wage war. It essentially was a collection of thirteen separate agricultural communities who, until the war, had exchanged their agricultural surplus for British manufactured goods and West Indian products. British colonial and domestic protectionist policies had discouraged or outright forbidden colonies from developing their own manufacturing capacity, and so colonists generally had to obtain manufactured goods from overseas. The war provided an urgent incentive to produce goods domestically, but the manufacturing infrastructure in North America was still inadequate for the task.

The Americans instead had to rely on supplies captured from the British as well as imports from friendly European nations, especially clothing and weapons. Moreover, although the country produced food and forage in ample quantity, it was difficult to transport supplies from one area to another. Rivers were the fastest and most economical means of transportation, particularly for heavy or large quantities of goods. There was always a shortage of wagons, boats, and other means of transportation. Under these circumstances, it was far easier to support local militia for a few days or weeks rather than a large, continuously operating Continental Army in the field.

The central weakness of American logistics lay in the lack of money to pay for supplies and services. The decentralized nature of the Articles of Confederation did not provide the Continental Congress with the means to finance the war by raising taxes. Although Congress did issue paper money and negotiated foreign loans to purchase goods as well as pay the troops, the lack of a solid financial foundation eventually resulted in devalued currency and inflation, further adding to the strains of conducting war. It therefore fell upon the states to provide supplies and services to the army. However, state military and political leaders had their own priorities and believed their first responsibility was to the soldiers from their state.

## **The Southern Department**

In February 1776, Congress organized the military establishment into six geographic departments. Congress, rather than Washington, named their commanders and communicated directly with them. Although Washington was commander in chief of the Continental Army, the department commanders exercised a considerable measure of independence owing to the great distances between regions and the slow nature of communications in this era. A major general commanded each department, and had several brigadier generals as subordinate leaders as well as staff specialists for quartermaster, transportation, and military engineering. The Southern Department included Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia, extending from the

Potomac River south to the St. Mary's River at the Georgia-Florida border, and from the Atlantic Coast to the Mississippi River.

The first commander of the Southern Department appointed by Congress on 21 March 1776 was Maj. Gen. Charles Lee. In addition, John Armstrong from Pennsylvania, Andrew Lewis from Virginia, and North Carolinians James Moore and Robert Howe served as brigadier generals. Lee commanded the department during the British attack on Charleston, and he took much credit for the victory though he received orders in August 1776 to join the main Continental Army at New York.

Upon Lee's departure, Congress appointed Robert Howe to major general and commander of the Southern Department. In the relatively quiet period from the summer of 1776 until December 1778, Howe's main challenge was defending against British raids from Florida into Georgia. During his tenure, Howe had to deal with unclear lines of authority, questions about his competency, and personality conflicts with and interference from state civil and military officials. For instance, while Howe was preparing an expedition to Florida, Georgia Governor John Houstoun insisted that he, not Howe, was the only one who could give orders to the militia. Friction reached a head in August 1778 when Howe fought a duel with South Carolina's Christopher Gadsden over matters of authority in that state. Though Congress attempted to clarify the Continental commander's authority over troops and resources provided by the states, by the end of the year it was clear that a different commander—one with a proven record of success at planning, organizing, and administering myriad issues—as well as an ability to understand and lead militia forces, was needed in the Southern Department.

On 3 October 1778, Maj. Gen. Benjamin Lincoln received notice from Congress of his appointment to command the Southern Department. The 45-year-old Lincoln, a native of Massachusetts, had gained a reputation as a competent commander during the Saratoga campaign, but he had been wounded severely in his leg and would never recover completely. Described as reliable, courageous, and respected by his fellow officers, Lincoln also had an advantage that as a New Englander, he was free from regional and local rivalries.



*Benjamin Lincoln, Charles Willson Peale, 1781–1783 (Independence National Historic Park)*

Lincoln's orders were to defend Georgia and South Carolina against British invasion. If an attack did not materialize, he was to take the offensive against the British in East Florida to prevent further depredations against Georgia. In November while he was in Georgia opposing a British raid from St. Augustine toward Savannah, Howe learned that Lincoln was on his way to relieve him.

Lincoln, after traveling from 30 to 40 miles a day, reached Charleston on 4 December 1778. There, he found an appalling situa-

tion at his new command, particularly a lack of supplies, ordnance stores, and artillery. He was preparing to move to Georgia to meet Howe when he learned that a British fleet had arrived off Tybee Island near Savannah. Unbeknownst to American leaders, the new British southern strategy was unfolding before them.

## **Operational Environment**

The Southern Department was divided geographically into the upper south and lower south. The upper south included Virginia and North Carolina, both vast regions stretching from the coast to the mountains and beyond. The lower south included South Carolina and Georgia. The topography of the lower south had influenced the economic, social, and political developments in the years before the conflict. The land gently rose from the Atlantic coast to the Blue Ridge Mountains. The lower parts of those states had fall lines—

points from which the rivers become navigable to the coast. A fall line served as a general demarcation between the backcountry and the low country, which was characterized by soft sand, pine forests, and swamps. The many rivers running from the mountains to the coast divided the region into strips of land across which movement required ferries or fords.

The climate in the lower south permitted almost year-round agriculture, but in the hot and humid summers strenuous physical activity had to be done in the early morning or late evening to avoid the oppressive heat of mid- to late afternoon. The semitropical environment was also a haven for mosquitoes and gnats, which often formed clouds that filled one's mouth, ears, and eyes. These insects also helped transmit vector-borne diseases such as malaria, which could incapacitate a person for weeks. The higher elevation backcountry was very moist and had an abundance of water from mountain streams and springs. The region experienced moderately cold late fall and winter temperatures, including snow, usually of a short duration.

By 1775, South Carolina had a population of around 150,000, of which 60,000 were White and around 90,000 were Black, the majority of the latter enslaved. By contrast, Georgia, the most recently established colony within the rebellion, had a White population of around 35,000 and a minority of around 13,000 enslaved people, making it a third of the size of its neighbor north of the Savannah River.

The low country land along the coast from the St. Mary's River to Georgetown, South Carolina, was the center of wealth for Georgia and South Carolina. It was the home of the "rice kings" who owned large and lucrative rice and indigo plantations and where most of the enslaved population lived. The port towns of Savannah and Charleston served as both the economic and political centers of those colonies, linked through maritime trade to their northern neighbors, the West Indies, and Great Britain. The coastal planter class assumed the leadership role in politics but engendered little affection from independent farmers and tradespeople, particularly those living farthest away from the government institutions, such as courts. The

low country was also home to a diverse population where Highland Scots occupied the southern Georgia coast, Austrian Lutherans settled along the Savannah River, and New England Puritans settled near Charleston and Savannah. Both Savannah and Charleston also had significant Jewish populations.

The backcountry experienced an increase in population after 1763 when it became a home to almost three-quarters of the White inhabitants of the lower south. Many had come from the border regions of northern England, Scotland, and Northern Ireland, bringing with them a family structure centered on the clan, which had been adapted for living in a violent and insecure world. The settlers consisted of groups of related families who lived near one another; shared a common identity, such as the same surname and common ancestors; and effectively banded together when danger threatened, particularly from their Creek and Cherokee neighbors. The harsh reality of backcountry life encouraged a powerful sense of loyalty and obligation to relatives beyond the immediate family. Any offense inflicted upon one meant disrespect to all, often resulting in feuds that lasted generations. The economy centered on subsistence farming rather than cash crop plantations, which meant that fewer than 10 percent of the enslaved people in the south lived in the backcountry in the years before the revolution. The daily fight to exist resulted in a culture with few churches, schools, or other institutions, which led the low country planter elites to view the backcountry people as warlike savages. That attitude fostered resentment toward the low country planter elite who dominated colonial politics, and gave rise to the prewar Regulator movement in which local leaders from the backcountry sought to gain more representation from their communities within the colonial governments. Many in the backcountry were not overly hostile to the British, but their allegiance to government depended upon how much support that government provided them during disputes with the native populations.



## OPERATIONS



### **The British Invasion and Occupation of Georgia, December 1778–March 1779**

On 8 November 1778, Lt. Col. Archibald Campbell received orders from Clinton to lead the expedition to Georgia and “by a rapid movement” capture Savannah. Campbell had joined the British army in 1758 and saw service in the West Indies during the Seven Years’ War. He became lieutenant colonel of the second battalion, the *71st Foot (Fraser’s Highlanders)*, in November 1775, and he sailed to America with the regiment in May 1776. Unfortunately for him, the Americans captured his ship and Campbell subsequently spent two years in a jail cell in Concord, Massachusetts, until the Americans exchanged him for Ethan Allen in May 1778. Because of his bitter experience, Campbell embraced his mission and expressed his “hope of being the first British Officer to rend a Stripe and Star from the Flag of Congress.”

Campbell’s army included 3,041 rank-and-file infantry composed of the *1st and 2d Battalions, 71st Foot*; a Hessian contingent with the *Regiments von Wollworth and von Wiessenbach*; and four Provincial regiments including the *New York Volunteers*, two battalions of *Delancey’s Brigade* and the *3d Battalion, New Jersey Volunteers*. He had no cavalry and only a “miserable proportion” of artillery of eight field pieces. Clinton informed Campbell that General Prévost would move his force from St. Augustine, join him at Savannah, and then assume command of the southern British army. The British flotilla led by Commodore Hyde Parker set sail on 26 November 1778.

During the monthlong journey south, the fleet was hindered by storms and accidents, but on 23 December the expedition arrived at Tybee Island, about 15 miles from Savannah near the mouth of its namesake river.

At Savannah, Robert Howe and his officers collectively decided to try to hold the town as long as possible. The Americans had about 850 soldiers, mostly Continentals, fit for duty. Col. Isaac Huger commanded the South Carolina brigade and Col. Samuel Elbert commanded the Georgia brigade. In addition, Georgia Col. George Walton commanded about 100 militia. The Americans had several options for a defense. Elbert urged Howe to flood the rice fields at Girardeau's Plantation near Brewton's Hill, a mile south of Savannah, to channel the enemy toward the American position. Other officers argued against that plan because the British could easily outflank the hill. Howe agreed with the latter line of thinking and posted only fifty Continentals on Brewton's Hill as a picket. He set up his main defense at Fair Lawn plantation a half mile east of Savannah. The general positioned his troops across the Savannah Road with Huger's brigade of about 450 soldiers on the right, extending from the road to the edge of a wooded swamp. Although Walton had alerted Howe to the existence of a path in the woods that the enemy could use to get behind the American line, Howe disregarded the warning. Elbert's brigade of about 200 soldiers took position to the left of the road with its flank also resting on a swamp. In addition, Howe emplaced two artillery pieces in the center of the road and Walton, with his militia, took position in some plantation buildings.

The many rivers and swamps near Savannah proved a challenge to Campbell in selecting a suitable place to land his army. A patrol led by Capt. Sir James Baird captured an enslaved person who recommended Girardeau's Plantation as the best landing site. On 29 December, Campbell supervised the landing of an 850-strong force that included the *1st Battalion*, *71st Foot*, a light infantry company, and the *New York Volunteers*. At daylight, he formed his troops into a line which quickly dispersed the American picket on Brewton's Hill, but not before the Continentals managed to kill several British soldiers. After his scouts found Howe's army, Campbell advanced

with his forces and halted less than 1,000 yards from the American line. He climbed a tree to get a better look at Howe's positions and decide his course of action. At this point, an enslaved man named Quamino Dolly, from royal Governor James Wright's household, told Campbell about the woods trail that emerged behind the American right flank. Campbell ordered the light infantry and loyalists to follow Dolly to get behind the Americans. He deployed the Highlanders and distracted the Americans with an artillery bombardment until his light infantry appeared from the woods and attacked the rear of the Continentals. Campbell then led the attack against the American line, which soon broke and fled in confusion. Cut off from retreat, many Americans tried to evade capture by fleeing into the swamps. American casualties were 83 killed, 11 wounded, and 453 captured. The British lost seven killed and seventeen wounded. After the battle, the remnants of Howe's army retreated west to Cherokee Hill and then into South Carolina.

Campbell occupied Savannah, which would remain under British control until July 1782. On 2 January, the British sent several regiments 20 miles northwest to a Lutheran religious community named Ebenezer, where they set up a large operations and supply base. Then, on 4 January, Campbell and Parker issued a proclamation, which declared that they had come to Georgia to protect loyal subjects. Those who would swear an oath of loyalty to the king and renounce the Continental Congress would be forgiven, but any who refused could expect severe treatment.

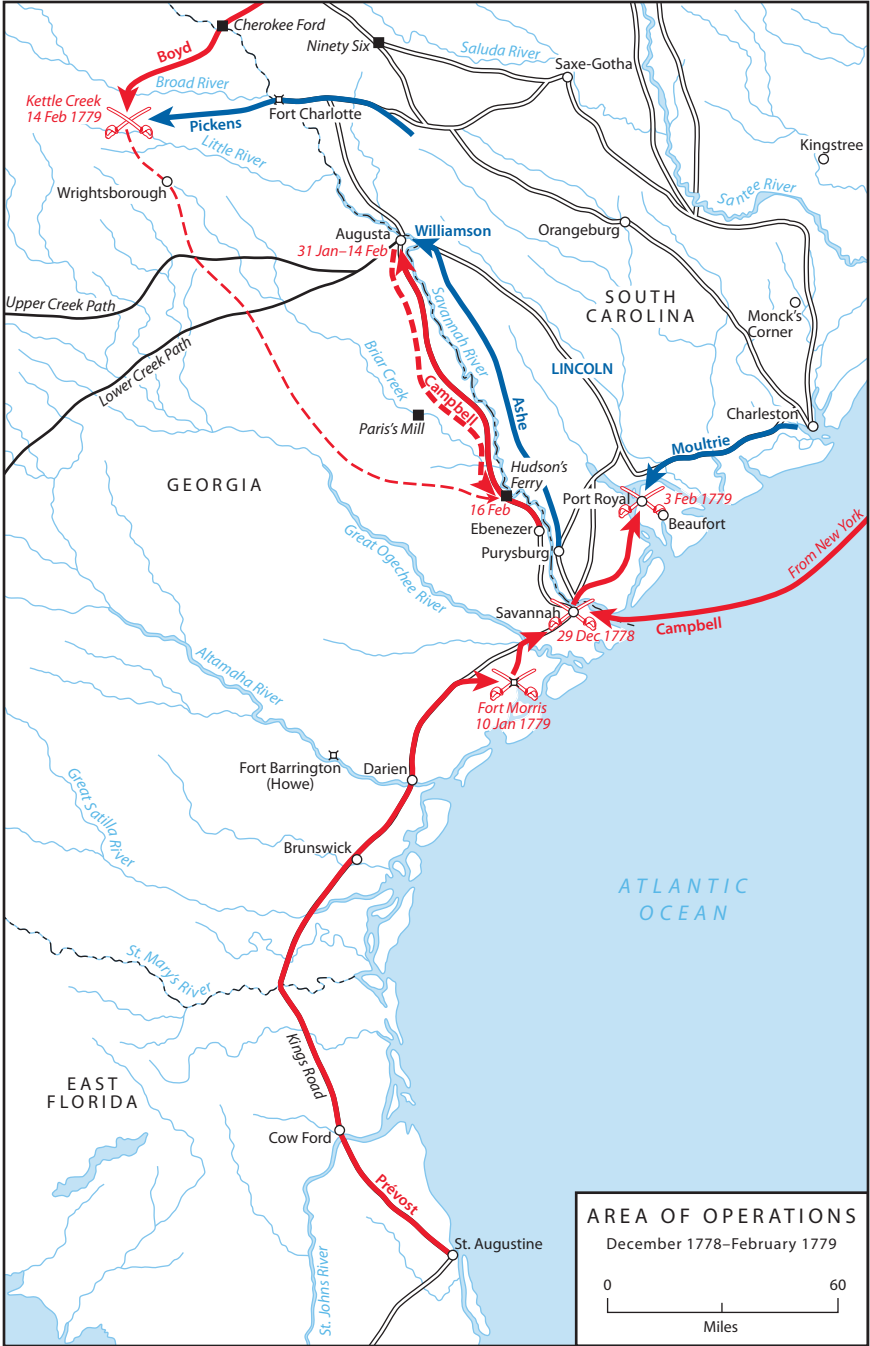
Following Clinton's instructions, Prévost advanced north from St. Augustine with about 900 soldiers to join Campbell. Prévost was from a unique family of Swiss soldiers who served in the British Army's *60th Foot (Royal American)* regiment. He was an experienced soldier and had been critically wounded at Québec in 1759. He returned to duty and served in the West Indies. Prévost received the appointment as commander of all British forces in Florida in 1775. The troops he took to Savannah included a detachment of the *16th Foot*; all of the *60th Foot*; some *Royal Artillery*; and several units of loyalist refugees, including the *South Carolina Royalists*, the *East Florida Rangers* (later known as the *King's Rangers*), and the



***Maj. Gen. Augustine Prevost, colonel of the 60th foot, Max Rosenthal, 1885 (Library of Congress)***

*East Florida Volunteers*. As Prévost advanced, he captured several American coastal defenses, including Fort Morris at Sunbury, 40 miles south of Savannah. Prévost and his army reached Savannah and joined Campbell on 17 January. The British now controlled the entire Georgia seacoast from St. Mary's River to the Savannah River. Savannah became the center for British communications and supply, a haven for loyalists, and a base for future expeditions into the backcountry or toward Charleston (*Map 1*).

For Benjamin Lincoln, the Southern Department had transformed overnight from a frustrating challenge into a full-blown crisis for the American cause. He had written to Washington, saying,



Map 1

“I have met with almost every disappointment since I came into this department.” In addition, his wound, which had nearly healed when he left for the south, had reopened and worsened. As the British were securing their gains, Lincoln desperately tried to gather troops and supplies. On 3 January 1779, he joined the remnants of Howe’s army on the north bank of the Savannah River at Purysburg, South Carolina, 20 miles northwest of Savannah. Despite the situation, he showed energy and purpose, spending his time throughout January doing those things he had seen Washington do, such as reorganizing the supply system and encouraging political leaders and soldiers. Like Howe, Lincoln was constantly plagued by the issue of state versus congressional control of money, supplies, and soldiers. He even sent the South Carolina Continental officers to persuade the state legislature to pass an ordinance to give him the needed authority, but even then, state authorities continued to challenge him about use of the troops.

The British began to expand their control and sent several recruiting parties into the Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina backcountry to inform the loyalists the British had returned. One recruiter was Col. James Boyd, who had lived near the North and South Carolina border until he fled to New York to escape persecution from the patriots. Expecting success of the recruiting missions, Campbell organized a detachment of 1,000 British and Provincial troops at Ebenezer to move to Augusta and set up a rallying point there for the loyalists. Augusta also was the main location for trading with the Creek tribe, who, British Indian Agent John Stuart assured Campbell, would cooperate with the British forces. Campbell’s expedition left Ebenezer on 24 January and arrived at Augusta on 31 January, having encountered little resistance on the way. At first, they saw no sign of the loyalists, but within a brief time almost 1,100 arrived to take an oath to the king. Campbell then organized them into twenty companies as envisioned by the British strategy of using loyalist citizens to assume the work of restoring civil functions.

During this time, local American leaders began to gather small, highly mobile groups of militia to oppose the British invasion.

These backcountry fighters included Brig. Gen. Andrew Williamson and Col. Andrew Pickens of South Carolina. Georgia militia commanders Col. John Twiggs, Col. John Dooly, and Lt. Col. Elijah Clarke also took the initiative to oppose the British incursion into the Augusta and Ninety Six region. Lincoln encouraged these local leaders to suppress loyalist efforts to join the British, hold back any Indian incursions from the foothills, and supply aid to those who supported the rebellion. Lincoln received some cheerful news when 1,100 North Carolina militia under the command of Brig. Gen. John Ashe arrived in his camp at Purysburg on 30 January. Lincoln ordered Ashe to move along the north bank of the Savannah River to Augusta and guard the fords to prevent the British from crossing into South Carolina. Lincoln decided to hold Brig. Gen. William Moultrie's Continentals as a reserve or, if the opportunity arose, send them into Georgia to cut Campbell's line of communications to Savannah. When Ashe arrived on the north bank of the Savannah River opposite Augusta on 13 February, he joined with Williamson's militia and the remnants of Elbert's Continentals to muster a force of 1,900 to 2,000 to threaten the British.

While Campbell was at Augusta, Prévost decided to send an expedition into South Carolina to seize Port Royal Island, between Charleston and Savannah, to threaten Lincoln's line of communications and divert his attention from Augusta. Lincoln ordered Moultrie to alert the low-country militia and meet the threat. Moultrie had arrived at Port Royal on 1 February with a mixed force of about 300 militia and three pieces of artillery. The boats of the British expedition carried a detachment of light infantry and artillery commanded by Maj. William Gardner of the *60th Foot*. Two small warships escorted them. When the British landed on Port Royal on 3 February, they discovered Moultrie had deployed his troops in a line on Grey's Hill. After the Americans refused Gardner's demand for surrender, he ordered his troops to attack. The battle was short but intense, with both sides unsuccessfully trying to flank the other. After forty-five minutes, both sides had exhausted their ammunition and disengaged. During the battle the Americans lost eight killed

and twenty-two wounded whereas the British lost forty killed, seven taken prisoner, and an unknown number of wounded.

Because of the growing threat to his position at Augusta and the lack of any substantial reinforcement from loyalists or Indians, Campbell felt vulnerable at the end of a lengthy line of communications to Savannah. He decided to leave Augusta on the morning of 14 February and move his army south to Hudson's Ferry, 24 miles north of Ebenezer. Unaware that Campbell's army had departed, Boyd, who had managed to recruit only 700 to 800 loyalists from the backcountry of South and North Carolina, was moving south toward an expected rendezvous at Augusta. Meanwhile Pickens, with a force of about 200, and Dooly and Clarke, with about 160 under their command, had joined forces to attack loyalist posts in Georgia. Boyd crossed the Savannah River into Georgia 40 miles north of Augusta and moved west to present-day Washington, Georgia, from where he intended to move toward Augusta.

About midmorning on Sunday, 14 February, Boyd halted his loyalists near a stream called Kettle Creek. They turned their horses out to graze and then slaughtered some cattle, unaware that Pickens had picked up their trail. Although outnumbered by more than two to one, Pickens hoped to surprise the loyalist camp. An advance guard, however, attracted Boyd's pickets, who signaled the alarm. Boyd ordered Maj. William Spurgen to gather as many of his loyalists as he could and retreat south of the creek while he led a counterattack north against Pickens. While doing so, several rifle bullets struck Boyd and he fell, mortally wounded. Spurgen rallied several hundred from his contingent on a hill south of Kettle Creek, where they continued fighting for about another hour. About 270 loyalists were able to escape and eventually would join Campbell near Hudson's Ferry on 16 February. The loyalists lost about 70 killed or wounded and 150 captured. The Americans reported nine killed and twenty-three wounded or missing.

Pickens's victory at Kettle Creek, Campbell's retreat from Augusta, and Moultrie's victory at Port Royal encouraged Lincoln to plan a countermove against the British. On 16 February, he ordered

Ashe to take his militia and Elbert's Continentals and pursue the British "with all the force you can muster and as quickly as you can." The British had crossed Briar Creek, 50 miles south of Augusta, and burned the bridge that carried the road through a 3-mile wide swamp. There the terrain formed a triangular pocket with one flank on Briar Creek and the other on the Savannah River. Believing he had gained the initiative over the British, Lincoln held a council of war on 1 March with Ashe, Moultrie, and Rutherford to decide how to exploit their success. The commanders determined that Briar Creek provided a strong position to block any British attempt to return to Augusta while Lincoln's main army maneuvered to get behind them before they reached Ebenezer.

At Hudson's Ferry, Campbell, who had received instructions to return to Great Britain, relinquished his command to Lt. Col. James Mark Prévost, a younger brother of Augustine Prévost. James Prévost had extensive experience fighting in Pennsylvania during Pontiac's War from 1763 to 1766. By 1777, he was a lieutenant colonel and served in Florida with the *60th Foot*. Before his departure, Campbell saw an opportunity to strike the Americans near Briar Creek, and he ordered Prévost to take a 900-strong force with artillery and march northwest for 50 miles to Paris's Mill. There, they could cross Briar Creek and turn southeast to attack Ashe's army from the rear. To hold Ashe in the trap, a smaller contingent would make a diversion 3 miles south of the American camp. On the night of 2 March, the British columns conducted a forced march and at dawn reached Paris's Mill. After crossing Briar Creek, they resumed their advance. Prévost deployed his troops into three columns, with six soldiers per row in each column. The light infantry under Baird formed the right column. Lt. Col. John Maitland led the middle column with the *2d Battalion, 71st Foot*, and the loyalists were on the left. Each column also had artillery for support.

At 1500 Prévost's skirmishers engaged Ashe's pickets about 450 yards from the camp. Ashe ordered drums to call the soldiers to arms, and his battle lines formed with much confusion because most of his troops were inexperienced militia. The New Bern militia faced north with their left against Briar Creek. Elbert with his

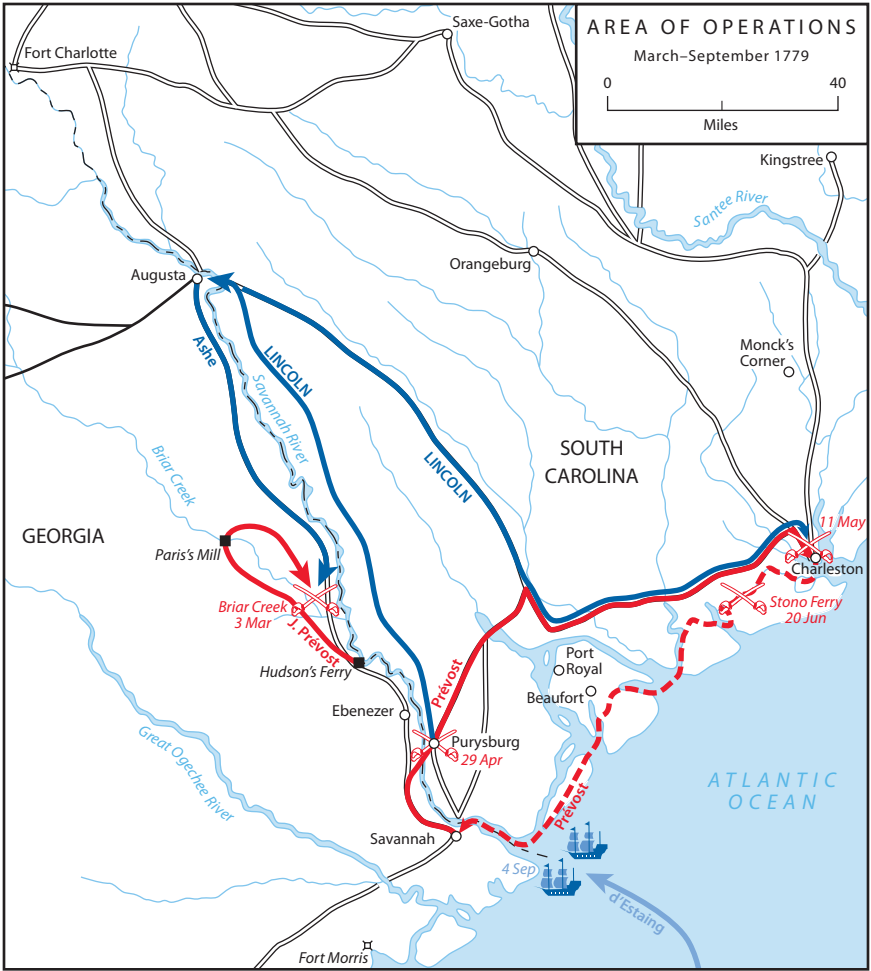
seventy Georgia Continentals was in the center and the Edenton militia was on the right with their flank about a half mile from the Savannah River. Seventy yards behind this line were the Halifax and Wilmington militia.

When the British artillery fired into the American center, Ashe ordered Elbert to advance toward the Highlanders. However, as they moved, the Georgians drifted to the left and blocked the fire of the New Bern militia. Then the Edenton militia advanced, drifting to the right, thereby opening a gap in the center of Ashe's line. Seeing this, Prévost ordered the light infantry and Highlanders to attack into the gap, immediately causing the militia to break and run. Though abandoned by their comrades, Elbert's continentals stood their ground for about 10 to 15 minutes until they all were killed or wounded. Ashe tried to rally his retreating troops, most of whom threw away their weapons and tried to swim across the Savannah River, where many of them drowned. The Americans suffered about 150 killed, an unknown number of wounded, and 227 captured. The British suffered five killed and eleven wounded.

The debacle at Briar Creek ended Lincoln's plans to take the offensive. During the rest of March, he tried to reconstitute his army, gather supplies, and prepare for future action. At Black Swamp, he had about 1,800 Continentals fit for duty to oppose about 3,500 British soldiers. In addition, his health was troubling him, and his wound was getting worse. On 12 April he wrote Congress telling them the climate was affecting his health and requested they find another officer to replace him.

## **Low Country Raids and Counterraids, April–June 1779**

The American situation began to improve by mid-April. North Carolina governor Richard Caswell and South Carolina governor John Rutledge both made energetic efforts to help Lincoln raise troops. Other assistance included a shipment of weapons and ammunition that arrived in Charleston, courtesy of the Dutch. Soon, Lincoln's army consisted of 3,262 soldiers present and fit for



Map 2

duty, most of whom were South Carolina militia. The moderate April weather, healthy condition of his troops, and the fact that the British had not received any reinforcements offered an opportunity for Lincoln to seize the initiative and take some action before the summer heat halted operations (*Map 2*).

Lincoln developed a plan to leave the Black Swamp camp around 20 April with a force of 2,500, march north along the Savannah River and then cross the river at Augusta. Lincoln assigned Moultrie a few

hundred Continentals and 1,000 militia to defend the Savannah River crossing points and block any British incursions into South Carolina. Several hundred of Lincoln's troops remained at Purysburg to alert Moultrie if the British crossed the river there. Lincoln believed the many rivers and swamps between Savannah and Charleston, along with Moultrie's force, would be effective obstacles to an enemy advance toward Charleston. He also hoped the Continental presence at Augusta would suppress further loyalist appearances in the backcountry. Lincoln then planned to move south along the Savannah Road and attack British outposts in succession until he reached Savannah. He then intended to contain the enemy in the town and prevent any excursions toward Augusta or Charleston. It was a risky plan that required quick implementation lest the British try to strike toward Charleston.

When Prévost discovered Lincoln was moving toward Augusta, it was the opportunity he had been seeking. He already was contemplating a move toward Charleston for an entirely different reason: his 3,500-strong army was hungry. Since January, the British had foraged the countryside between St. Augustine and Savannah to exhaustion. In addition, American privateers had captured an expected supply convoy from England. Across the Savannah River beckoned the plantations rich with vast quantities of rice and livestock. Prévost was planning a risky operation in which he would send the bulk of his army to scour lower South Carolina for food and supplies. The foragers would not only have to gather the food and fodder, but also protect the convoys of wagons carrying the bounty back to Savannah. Prévost's plan left a minimal force behind to defend Savannah, but feeding his army was a greater priority.

On 29 April, a British advance guard attacked the Continentals at Purysburg and were followed by more than 2,000 British troops crossing the Savannah River. It took two days to ferry over the horses, wagons, and artillery, which gave Moultrie time to set up blocking positions at the Coosawhatchie River. From there, he sent Lincoln an urgent message that he was facing more than 3,000 enemy troops, but Lincoln assured him Prévost only was conducting a feint. On 2 May, Moultrie told Lincoln his militia were deserting to return

home to protect their own families. As Moultrie's slowly dissolving force fell back toward Charleston, the British followed close behind, burning homes and churches and terrifying people without regard to their allegiance. Upon reaching Charleston on 9 May, Moultrie found the town in a panic. He sent Lincoln a letter the next day, urging him to move quickly so to catch Prévost between Charleston and his army.

Opportunity, rather than design, had turned Prévost's foraging operation into a full-scale offensive. Because the Americans had not destroyed the boats at Ashley Ferry 7 miles north of the town, on 11 May Prévost was able to convey a force of 900, led by his brother Colonel Prévost, onto Charleston Neck. He left 1,200 troops with Lt. Col. John Maitland on the right bank of the Ashley River to guard against Lincoln from the west. Even though the British did not have artillery or siege equipment, it appeared they were going to attack Charleston.

A recently arrived Continental officer now made his appearance in the drama. The Polish noble Brig. Gen. Casimir Pulaski was a soldier of fortune recruited by Benjamin Franklin in Paris in 1777. Pulaski met Washington just before the battle of Brandywine, where he served as an aide. Washington recommended his promotion to brigadier general and intended to have him command the Continental cavalry forces. Pulaski asked Congress for permission to form a legion, a unique unit with both cavalry and infantry capable of independent operations. Congress approved the unit, which became known informally as Pulaski's Legion. However, Pulaski chose to recruit its members from the ranks of Hessian deserters, British prisoners of war, and other Europeans, making George Washington rather suspicious of it. On 2 February 1779, Pulaski received orders to deploy to the Southern Department, where he and his 120 troops arrived on 8 May just in time to help defend Charleston.

On 11 May, a British engineer, Capt. James Moncrief, accompanied by dragoons led by Capt. Thomas Tawse, assessed the American defenses near an abandoned horse-racing track. Observing this, Pulaski decided to attack the British and led his legion to engage Tawse's dragoons. During the short fight, the British dragoons

severely mauled Pulaski's infantry, who were forced to retreat to Charleston, having lost fourteen killed and forty-two captured.

The American fortifications protecting the town were in good enough condition to defend against an enemy assault. Moultrie had about 3,000 troops with which to hold until Lincoln arrived. Moultrie was out checking the defenses when Governor Rutledge, convinced the British could capture the city, confronted him and insisted he contact the enemy about terms for surrendering Charleston. Deferring to civilian authority, Moultrie reluctantly sent that message to Prévost. On 12 May, Prévost replied that anyone who took an oath of allegiance to Great Britain would receive a pardon, but if they refused, they would become a prisoner of war. Rutledge gathered the Privy Council and the Continental officers, including Moultrie, Pulaski, and Lt. Col. John Laurens, who all rejected the demand. However, Rutledge and the council voted 5 to 3 to "propose a neutrality, during the war between Great Britain and America, and the question, whether the state shall belong to Great Britain, or remain one of the United States," be determined at the peace table. It was a stunning offer that called into question South Carolina's dedication to the rebellion by putting self-preservation ahead of the political agreements with the other states. Prévost rejected the proposal, saying the British army would not discuss political terms. Moultrie then decided the Continentals would fight for the town even without civilian support. However, that would not be necessary, because the British had intercepted a message that Lincoln's army was approaching behind them.

General Prévost decided to return to Georgia, having done what he had set out to do—gather food and fodder. To increase their haul, the British took a different route back, so they could forage untouched plantations. In addition, Prévost's army had accumulated almost 3,000 enslaved people, who left the plantations hoping to obtain their freedom. When the British reached John's Island, 18 miles from Charleston, they built redoubts to protect the crossing at Stono River Ferry. On 16 June, Prévost left Colonel Maitland with a force to guard the position while the slower-moving convoy made its way toward Savannah. Maitland had about 550 soldiers from the *71st*

*Foot* and the Hessian *Regiment von Trumbach*, as well as the *North Carolina Volunteers*, many of whom had escaped from Kettle Creek months earlier. In addition to some artillery, he had fire support from the row galley *Thunder* on the Stono River.

In the middle of these operations, Lincoln received an answer from Congress, accepting his request for recall and appointing Moultrie to succeed him in command. This news came at the time Lincoln was receiving criticism for enabling the British to ravage plantations and threaten Charleston. Lincoln informed Moultrie he was leaving on 9 June, but Moultrie begged him to reconsider. Rutledge also wanted Lincoln to stay, and wrote to tell Lincoln that his “experience in the Art of War are such, and the publick has so much Confidence in you, that your remaining here will ensure great good to this, and the Neighboring state.” Given this support and a rumor that a French fleet from the West Indies might sail north later that summer, Lincoln agreed to continue as commander. He felt he needed to take some action to restore the confidence and morale of the people after narrowly having avoided disaster at Charleston. In addition, the onset of summer would soon make it too hot for operations. By mid-June, Lincoln had 2,918 soldiers fit for duty and his supplies were in fair shape, but the Americans were tired of marching or living in camp and were eager for some kind of action. Lincoln therefore determined to attack the British position at Stono Ferry.

During a council of war on 19 June, the Americans assessed that the British position was held by a force of less than 500, so they decided to attack the next day. The plan was for Moultrie to take some troops and land on James Island so to divert the British main force at John’s Island. Lincoln’s troops began marching early in the morning on 20 June and he formed their lines about three-quarters of a mile from the British entrenchments. Brig. Gen. Jethro Sumner commanded the right flank with the North and South Carolina militia. Brig. Gen. Isaac Huger commanded the left wing of Continental troops. Normally, a commander placed his best troops in the position of honor on the right flank. However, Lincoln reasoned the British would follow that tradition, so he insightfully

placed his veteran Continentals on the left where they would confront the best of the enemy. Light infantry commanded by Col. François Lellorquis, marquis de Malmédy, covered the right flank, and a similar unit under Lt. Col. John Henderson held the left flank. Col. David Mason's Virginia militia brigade and Lt. Col. Daniel Horry's South Carolina troop of Light Dragoons remained as the reserve. In addition, Lincoln had eight pieces of artillery to support the attack.

The battle began about 0700 when Henderson's troops met two companies of Highlanders conducting counter-reconnaissance in the woods. Although outnumbered, the British held their ground and engaged in desperate hand-to-hand fighting using bayonets. The fighting ended with less than a dozen Highlanders still standing. On the American right flank, Malmédy's infantry got around the British at the river and began pushing the Hessians back toward the ferry road. When Maitland saw his left flank collapsing, he shifted several companies of the Highlanders to rally the Hessians. Meanwhile, marshy ground in front of the 71st redoubts hindered Huger's advance. Rather than risk getting bogged down and exposed to fire from them, Huger decided to pour musket fire into the enemy. At one point Lincoln ordered the Continentals to fix bayonets and attack, but they refused to move forward. As soon as a British relief column appeared on the causeway from John's Island, Lincoln decided to break off the action. Maitland decided to pursue them, but Mason's militia and Horry's dragoons effectively covered the American withdrawal. Both sides suffered heavy casualties during the hour-long battle. The Americans had 34 killed, 112 wounded, and 9 missing for a total of 155 casualties. The British lost 26 killed, 103 wounded, and 1 missing, for 130 out of 900. Three days after the battle, Maitland retreated to Port Royal, while Prévost's forces continued to Savannah.

Lincoln and the Americans enjoyed some satisfaction at having inflicted heavy losses on the British, especially the veteran Highlanders, weakening the enemy. That success alone would not be a path to victory, but Stono Ferry did supply the Americans much-needed combat experience. Lincoln said, "Our men now see that little is to be feared either from musquetry or field pieces; they are

full of spirit & are sure they can beat the enemy on equal grounds at any time.”

## **French Intervention and Siege of Savannah, June–November 1779**

By mid-summer 1779, the war in Georgia and South Carolina had devolved into a stalemate. Both Lincoln and Prévost had enough troops, supplies, and equipment to hold their respective areas, but each needed reinforcements to conduct even minor offensive operations against the other. Although British forces had suffered some attrition in the battles since January, Prévost was able to defend Savannah and several smaller coastal garrisons. Notably absent from Prévost’s army, however, were the substantial number of loyalists that experts had promised would turn out to help the limited regular forces to sustain royal control. On 14 July 1779, the royal governor of Georgia, Sir James Wright, arrived at Savannah to resume his office. Wright was appalled at the conditions he found. Seeing how the Americans freely operated in the backcountry, Wright estimated he needed 5,000 troops to hunt down rebel leaders and ensure successful restoration of royal government effectively. The likelihood of Wright receiving this added support diminished even further as the international aspect of the conflict expanded again, when Spain declared war against Great Britain on 21 June 1779.

Lincoln faced his own challenges of increasing and providing for his army, encamped near Beaufort. By late July, his force consisted mainly of Continental troops because the Georgia and South Carolina militia had returned to their homes. Lincoln reported a total of 1,386 soldiers present and fit for duty, and was frustrated with Congress’s lack of response to his letters asking for money and troops. Lincoln received some help when Brig. Gen. Lachlan McIntosh, a Georgia Continental officer who had been serving on the western Pennsylvania frontier, returned to the Southern Department. Lincoln ordered McIntosh to Augusta with the mission to impose organization on the militia and keep the “Indians in awe, restrain the disaffected & prevent their supplying our Enemy.”

Prévost's greatest fear became reality on 4 September 1779 when French ships from the West Indies arrived off the coast near Savannah, led by Admiral d'Estaing. He had captured the British colonies of St. Vincent and Grenada earlier that summer. Even though d'Estaing had a low opinion of his American allies owing to the earlier failure at Newport in 1778, the potential for another victory over the British led him to heed messages from American and French diplomats who urged him to bring his fleet north, join with Lincoln, and liberate Savannah. D'Estaing's fleet included fifty-four warships and carried about 4,000 troops. This robust force gave Lincoln hope that the allies could eject the British from Savannah and regain Georgia. However, time was critical, because the French informed the Americans that the fleet would stay only briefly so to avoid the hurricanes that formed that time of year.

When Lincoln heard about d'Estaing's arrival, he ordered McIntosh to gather all available troops and meet him at Ebenezer on 11 September. At Beaufort, Lincoln directed 1,000 of his best Continentals to march to Zuley's Ferry, where they crossed into Georgia on 12 September. Meanwhile, Lincoln sent several messages to d'Estaing to further coordinate action, but he did not receive a reply.

Reacting to this development, Prévost recalled his detachments to join the main army in Savannah. His chief engineer, Captain Moncrieff, already had designed extensive fortifications to defend the town. Beginning on 9 September, Moncrieff employed civilians, soldiers, and enslaved people to build trenches and redoubts that formed a 1,200-foot-long half-circle with each flank anchored by swamps and marshy ground. They built a large redoubt on Spring Hill at the far right of the British line, overlooking the road leading to Augusta.

On 10 September, the French anchored near Tybee Island and, two days later, began to disembark troops about 14 miles from Savannah. A storm slowed the landing but by 14 September, about 3,300 French troops had come ashore. D'Estaing decided to begin operations before the Americans arrived and on 16 September demanded Prévost surrender Savannah to him, the representative



*Charles Henri Cte. D'Estaing, chevalier des ordres du Roy, lieutenant général de ses armées, vice admiral de France, né le 24 Novembre 1719, engraved by Coulet after a painting by Abbé de Haisne, 1782 (Brown University Library)*

of the French king. Prévost requested twenty-four hours to consider the terms, and d'Estaing agreed. The truce gave Prévost additional time to strengthen his defenses, but most importantly, gained time for Maitland and his troops to arrive from Beaufort, which they did about noon that day. By then, Lincoln had arrived, and during his first encounter with d'Estaing he exchanged heated words with the admiral about the propriety of granting a truce. D'Estaing, feeling that the enemy had outwitted him, accused Prévost of using deceitful negotiations to enable reinforcement of his defense. Prévost now had about 4,800 troops and eighty-four pieces of artillery to repel

an expected allied assault. He then rejected d’Estaing’s demand for surrender.

The allied army included an eclectic mixture of nationalities, ethnicities, and degrees of military ability. D’Estaing’s army consisted of French infantry regiments, four colonial infantry regiments, an Irish expatriate regiment, naval infantry, and dismounted dragoons. Included in his force was a unique contingent from Saint-Domingue, present-day Haiti, that consisted of more than 500 free men of color called the Chasseurs-Volontaires de Saint-Domingue and about 150 White colonists named the Grenadiers Volontaires. The French force was well seasoned, having survived combat, disease, and life aboard ships in the Caribbean, making them well suited to the environment of Georgia. The Continental contingent included Pulaski’s Legion, the Virginia Light Dragoons, the South Carolina Light Dragoons, and the light infantry commanded by Lt. Col. John Laurens. The 1st Brigade, led by McIntosh, included three regiments of South Carolina Continentals and the Georgia militia. The 2d Brigade, led by Huger, included three regiments of South Carolina Continentals and the South Carolina militia. The Allied army amounted to 3,200 Americans and 4,500 French for a total of 7,700 and 45 pieces of artillery.

During the eighteenth century, armies employed rigid and time-consuming siege methods to pry an opponent from forts, towns, and other strong defenses. Once an army surrounded an enemy position and cut it off from help, artillery was brought to within 600 yards of the defenses to batter the fortifications with heavy fire. Behind the guns, a trench parallel to the enemy defense was dug to protect the gunners and assault troops. Then, perpendicular approach trenches were dug forward about 200 yards from the first parallel using a zigzag method to protect sappers from enemy fire. Upon reaching the prescribed distance, a second parallel trench was constructed. As each parallel was completed, infantry and artillery moved forward. The process was repeated with a third parallel trench, or they were at the outer wall of the defense. From this point, cannons could batter a breach in the main wall, and the infantry would storm through the breach into the fortress. However, before that happened, the

besieger usually demanded the fortress surrender. As a matter of pride and ritual, the request was usually rejected, but a subsequent request often resulted in capitulation so to avoid further bloodshed. This process could last weeks or months, and when concluded was signified by an elaborate surrender ceremony with bands playing their opponents music and to recognize the bravery of both besieger and besieged.

Because of concerns about hurricanes, d'Estaing did not intend to follow that time-consuming process. He hoped instead to get enough artillery in position for a massive bombardment of the British lines to induce surrender. By 3 October, the Allies had set up twenty-eight cannons and nine mortar positions from which they bombarded the town over the next several days, inflicting terrible damage and killing about forty civilians. Prévost tried to disrupt that effort by sending out sorties to attack the working parties. One sortie generated so much confusion that the French and Americans fired upon each other, killing and wounding several of their own.

After French engineers informed d'Estaing they needed ten more days to penetrate the enemy works, the admiral told Lincoln that he would need to withdraw the fleet, which left no other alternative but to try to take Savannah by storm. The attack was to begin before dawn on 9 October. Four strong columns of infantry, two French and two American, were to move to their attack positions at 0400 hours. D'Estaing chose the Spring Hill redoubt on the British right as the main objective and decided to lead the French column himself. While the French attacked the right of the redoubt, the Americans would storm the left. Once a breakthrough occurred, Pulaski's cavalry was to ride through the breach and attack the British rear. Huger was to make a supporting attack on the British left, and a French column was to attack the extreme British right. In addition, the *Volontaires de Saint-Domingue* were to conduct a feint toward the center.

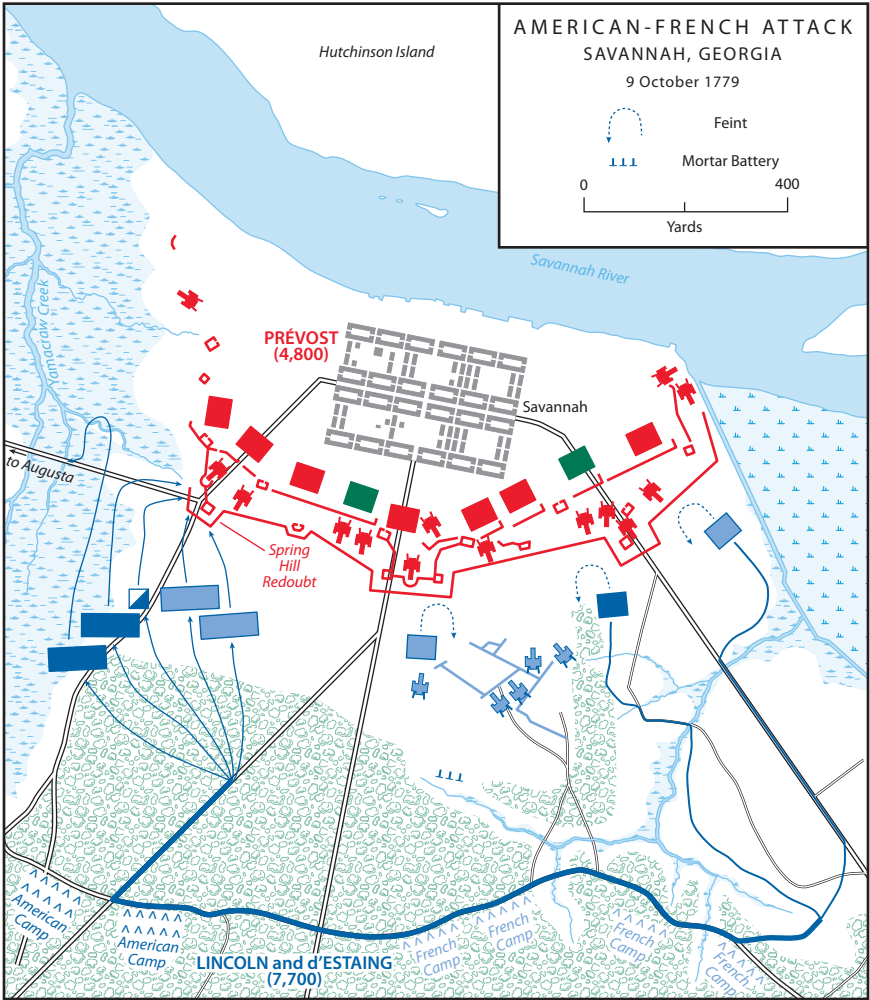
The British right flank consisted of a cluster of redoubts garrisoned by various contingents of Provincials and loyalist militia. Captain Tawes held Spring Hill redoubt with a force of 110 from the *South Carolina Royalists* and the *60th Foot*. Several naval artillery

batteries worked by sailors and marines supported them. On the British left, Lt. Col. John Harris Cruger commanded several redoubts constructed of palmetto logs that mounted several heavy guns. The middle of Prévost's line was held by the Highlanders, the Hessian grenadiers, and the light infantry.

As dawn approached on 9 October, the French and American forces had not yet arrived at their starting positions, but the 4,000 attackers made so much noise the British opened fire into the darkness (*Map 3*). Their firing added smoke to the low-lying fog, causing further confusion and disorganization among the attackers. At that point, d'Estaing decided to attack and advanced at the head of the French column, quickly suffering three wounds. Hundreds of French soldiers attacked the redoubt and were repulsed, and the ditch surrounding the position quickly filled with dead and wounded. Pulaski's cavalry anxiously waited for the signal that the redoubt had been breached; when he thought he saw an opening, Pulaski ordered his troops into the fight. The charging horsemen soon found themselves caught in a crossfire that inflicted heavy casualties upon them—including Pulaski, who was hit in the groin by a canister shot and fell from his horse, mortally wounded. Seeing Pulaski's death, the cavalry ceased their attack and returned to their lines.

The American column led by Laurens was supposed to assault to the left of the French, but instead the aggressive young commander led his infantry into the fight at Spring Hill, where South Carolinian fought South Carolinian in hand-to-hand combat. Laurens's soldiers were soon joined by Lt. Col. Francis Marion's 2d South Carolina regiment. The British also suffered losses, and Tawes was killed, but his troops rallied and held their position. D'Estaing ordered McIntosh's brigade to try to get behind the enemy, but the column soon foundered in the Yamacraw Swamp, where they came under fire from British ships in the river and the sailor's battery. McIntosh then ordered his unit to retreat into some woods and they advanced no further.

After about forty-five minutes, the allies broke off the attack, having suffered enormous casualties during the poorly executed



**Map 3**

assault. D’Estaing’s decision to ignore or abbreviate the steps for a siege proved costly to the outcome of allied operations. The French lost 63 killed and 639 wounded, whereas the Americans lost 58 killed and 181 wounded. The British suffered sixteen killed and thirty-nine wounded for a total of fifty-five casualties. A few days later, the French sailed for the West Indies, leaving Lincoln and the American army bloodied and in no better position than when they arrived.

On 18 October, Lincoln moved his defeated army to Ebenezer and crossed into South Carolina the next day.

Plagued by mismanagement, the French and American attack had proved to be a disaster. If successful, it might have convinced the British that victory in the south was just as unattainable as in the north. Without a base at Savannah, any future attempt to invade South Carolina or capture Charleston would have been futile. Lincoln had worked diligently during 1779 to defeat the enemy and regain Savannah, only to find himself standing at the same point where he began a year earlier. For the British, Prévost's victory seemed to confirm the southern strategy despite the absence of any significant loyalist and Native American support. The Georgia star had been torn from the American flag as Campbell promised, and in December 1779 Clinton hoped to remove another as he prepared to sail from New York with a sizable part of his army to capture Charleston.

## **The Capture of Charleston, December 1779–May 1780**

In March 1779, before the results of Campbell's operation had been fully assessed, Germain had ordered Clinton to exploit success in Georgia with a decisive operation to regain South Carolina. To obtain intelligence for the operation, Germain ordered James Simpson, former royal attorney general for South Carolina, to return to the colony and report on conditions there. On 28 August, Simpson replied to Germain, "wherever the King's Troops move to Carolina they will be assisted by very considerable numbers of the inhabitants." In a sense, that was true. The experience in Georgia confirmed that if British troops stayed in an area, the loyalists felt safe to show support for the crown. The decision to seize Charleston was finalized when Prévost's report of victory at Savannah reached New York on 10 December 1779. Led by Clinton and V. Adm. Marriot Arbuthnot, the expedition left New York for Charleston on 26 December with 8,708 soldiers aboard ninety transports, accompanied by fourteen warships.



**Lt. Col. Tarleton, J. Walker, 1 April 1782**  
(Library of Congress)

Accompanying Clinton were several men whose legacies are forever associated with the southern campaign. The most prominent was Clinton's second in command, Lt. Gen. Charles, 2nd Earl Cornwallis, a British aristocrat who had extensive military experience in the Seven Years' War and became a major general in 1775. He arrived in America in 1776 and commanded troops in the field during the capture of New York and the pursuit of Washington and his army through New Jersey, culminating in the battles of Trenton and Princeton. In 1777, Cornwallis contributed significantly to the success of the Philadelphia campaign, including the battles

of Brandywine and Germantown. He had proved to be a fearless and decisive officer who was particularly skilled leading units in battle. During a visit home to England in 1778, he briefly resigned from the army, but after his wife Jemima died in 1779 he asked the king to restore him to office so he could return to America. The king did and appointed him a lieutenant general and second in command to Clinton.

Another prominent member of the army was the energetic and ambitious 26-year-old Lt. Col. Banastre Tarleton, who had purchased a commission in 1775, sailed to America, and distinguished himself as an effective cavalry commander. By 1778, he was appointed as the field commander of the *British Legion*, a Provincial organization, which combined both infantry and cavalry units of about 300 loyalists from New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. More commonly identified

as *Tarleton's Legion*, it was augmented with a cavalry troop from the British *17th Light Dragoons*. With these elite horsemen, Tarleton hoped to continue to acquire fame, recognition and notoriety, once he set foot in the southern colonies.

Important for the mission of recruiting, organizing, and training the loyalists was 36-year-old Maj. Patrick Ferguson. He had attained notoriety, including recognition from the king, for having patented in 1776 an effective breech-loading rifle capable of firing seven shots a minute from any position. Ferguson organized *Major Patrick Ferguson's Corps* armed with his new rifle for the Philadelphia Campaign. During the Battle of Brandywine in 1777, a bullet shattered his arm and disabled him, but he overcame his handicap and learned to shoot and use a sword with his left hand. While convalescing, he raised and organized a Provincial unit called the *American Volunteers*, also known as *Ferguson's Corps*.

In the Southern Department, Lincoln spent the fall and early winter pleading for recruits and materiel from all sources. His pleas, as well as South Carolina's surprising willingness to secede from the still-incomplete union, sparked Congress into action. They ordered a squadron of three Continental frigates and a sloop of war commanded by Commodore Abraham Whipple south to defend Charleston from the sea. Congress also directed Washington to send all the North Carolina and Virginia Continental regiments, about 3,300 troops, to Lincoln. Those experienced regiments had trained at Valley Forge, but it would take several months for them to arrive at Charleston. To provide Lincoln with mobile forces, the commander in chief ordered the 3rd Regiment of Continental Light Dragoons (*Baylor's Horse*) commanded by his second cousin Lt. Col. William Washington to deploy south as well. William Washington had combat experience and had been wounded during the battle of Trenton. Congress also directed a shipment of equipment for building fortifications, including 1,000 fascine hatchets, seventy-two pickaxes, 300 mortar shells, and two traveling forges. For expertise establishing proper fortifications to defend the town, Washington ordered his chief of engineers, Brig. Gen. Antoine-Jean-Louis Le Bègue de Presle Duportail, to Charleston to assist Lincoln with that important task.

On 10 January, Lincoln received information that a British fleet had left New York for South Carolina. He had about 1,400 Continentals and 1,000 North Carolina militia available until reinforcements arrived. This situation spurred new discussions about arming enslaved people to increase the numbers for service. Lincoln supported the idea and saw it as a test of South Carolina's resolve to support the rebellion and accept the realities of war. A strong advocate for this measure was the prominent South Carolinian Colonel Laurens, who endorsed a plan by Congress to reimburse slave owners up to \$1,000 for every enslaved man who enlisted. They would not receive pay, but should they survive the war they would be granted freedom. However private economic interests and the fear that armed Black men would try to free those remaining enslaved defeated this idea.

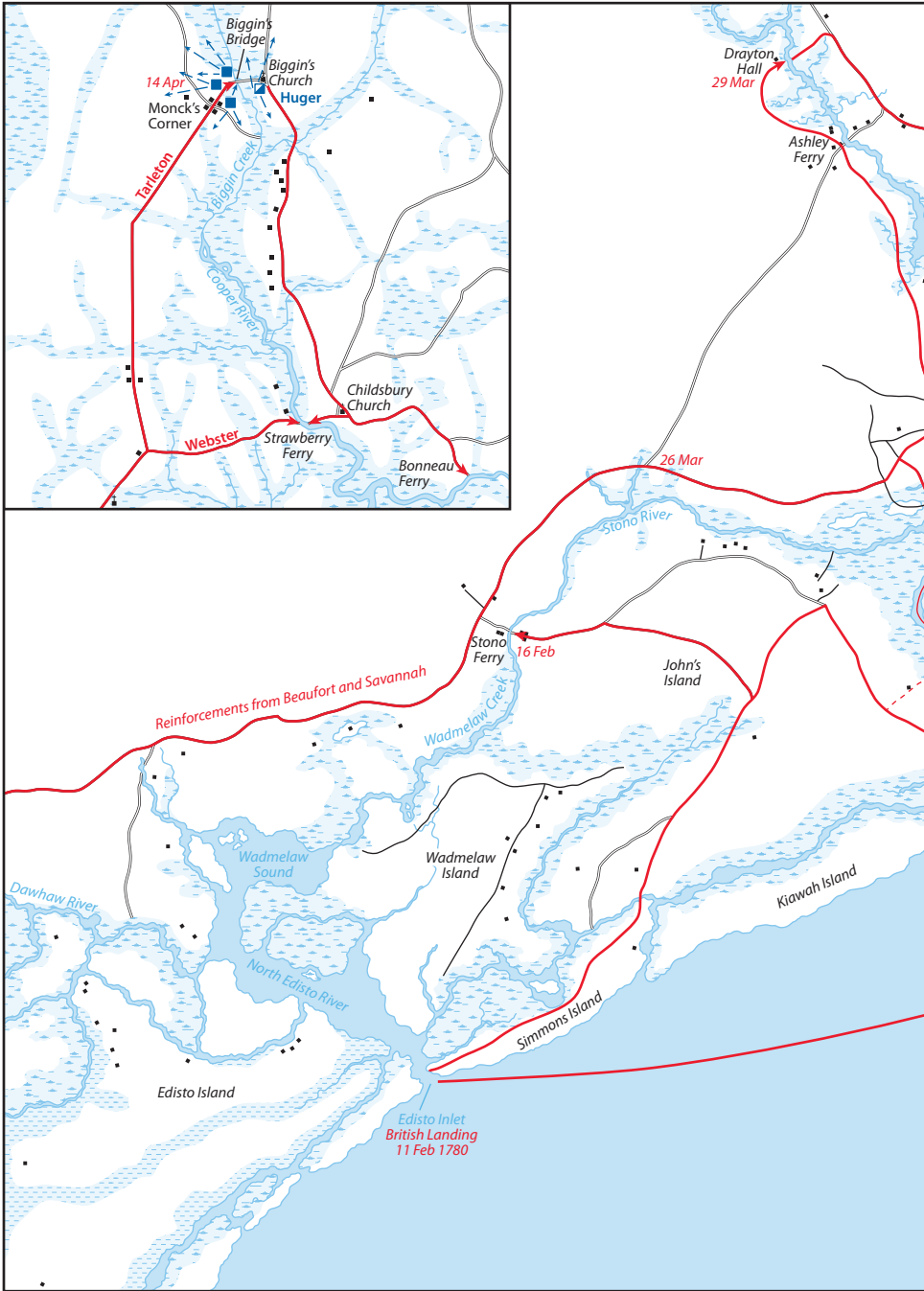
As the British invasion loomed, Lincoln considered an alternative to defending Charleston by evacuating the army into the countryside. There it could maneuver, draw supplies, and fight, thereby avoiding becoming trapped in the town. Most of his Continental officers believed their troops were too valuable to commit to a static defense and possible capture. As part of the deliberations, Lincoln consulted Rutledge, who replied, "nothing but an invincible and extreme necessity will induce a determination to withdraw the continental troops from its defence." Rutledge's answer, along with persistent criticism for having exposed Charleston to attack from the enemy the previous year, convinced Lincoln that he could not risk the defense of Charleston a second time.

The British expedition endured a harrowing five-week-long winter voyage, as storms off Cape Hatteras scattered the fleet in all directions and sank several ships carrying heavy artillery and ammunition. The 400 cavalry horses suffered injuries or starved from lack of food and were thrown overboard. The ships finally reassembled off Tybee Island in early February 1780. After disembarking the cavalry units at Savannah so they could replace their horses, the fleet sailed north to Simmons Island, now Seabrook Island, about 25 miles south of Charleston, where the troops began disembarking on 11–12 February.

For the next few weeks, the British army made its way through the swamps, marshlands, and sea islands toward Charleston (*Map 4*). The navy provided flatboats and galleys to carry baggage and supplies into, over, and through the various creeks and swamps. By 24 February, Clinton's army had moved onto James Island, occupied Fort Johnson at the southern entrance to Charleston Harbor and placed an artillery battery within range of the town. On 13 March, the British encamped at the confluence of the Ashley River and Wappoo Creek, on the west bank of the Ashley River at Drayton Hall, about 12 miles northwest of Charleston.

Rutledge used his power granted by the Assembly to force plantation owners to supply enslaved people as a labor force to build fortifications stretching from the Ashley to the Cooper River. In front of this line of defenses were two lines of abatis separated by a ditch 6 feet deep and 12 feet across. Ahead of the barriers was a shallow, 18-foot-wide canal, filled with water from tidal creeks. A strong point to control movement, known as a horn-work, sat astride the main road leading into town. Constructed of tabby—a mixture of shells, sand, and lime—its walls were between 10 and 20 feet high, and 600 or 700 feet long and formed a defense Clinton later characterized as “in no means contemptible.” As for the waterways, Lincoln hoped Whipple could defend the harbor channel and prevent the enemy fleet from crossing over the sandbar. However, Whipple did not do so, and on 20 March Arbuthnot moved eight frigates over the bar, having lightened the ships by removing their heavy cannons. Once over the bar, the cannons were reinstalled and the British ships anchored, blocking the entrance to Charleston harbor. Whipple then moved his ships into the Cooper River east of Charleston, where they were bottled up and used no further for the defense of the town.

On the morning of 29 March, the British army crossed the Ashley River onto Charleston Neck. By late afternoon, the whole army had assembled without meeting any American resistance. The next day, the British advance guard, accompanied by Clinton and Cornwallis, moved to within 2 miles of Charleston. There they met minor opposition from Laurens and his Continental light infantry,



Map 4



to Monk's  
 Comer  
 Webster/  
 Tarleton  
 12 Apr

Webster  
 Cainhoy  
 23 Apr

12 Apr

26 Apr

28 Apr

1 Apr

8 Apr

11 Mar

28 Feb

24 Feb

20 Mar

18 Apr

Reinforcements from New York

Supply Barges

**BRITISH OPERATIONAL MOVEMENTS**

11 February–28 April 1780



Miles

who wounded one of Clinton's aides. Unlike d'Estaing at Savannah, Clinton decided to conduct a siege of Charleston using the accepted time-consuming methods. On 1 April, the British broke ground for the first parallel about 1,000 yards from the American defenses. The Americans had become trapped between two rivers to the east and west, the harbor to the south, and the British army to the north of town. Clinton was determined to cut all lines of communications and isolate the Americans. Each army raced against time to get their troops and supplies into—or keep the same out of—Charleston (*Map 5*).

Before the British could cut off the town, Lincoln received the Continental regiments released earlier by Washington. Brig. Gen. James Hogun's North Carolina Continental brigade of about 700 troops had arrived after their long march, and on 7 April the 900-strong Virginia brigade, led by Brig. Gen. William Woodford, joined them. In addition, Virginia formed three Continental detachments intended to reinforce Brig. Gen. Charles Scott's brigade. Two of the detachments made it to Charleston. The third, commanded by Col. Abraham Buford and composed of approximately 350 soldiers along with many supply wagons, left Petersburg, Virginia, in late March and would not arrive before the end of the siege. The reinforcements brought the American force to almost 6,000 and included all the Continental regiments from South Carolina, North Carolina, and Virginia—almost a third of the Continental Army. Within Lincoln's army for the first time were about 120 Black Continental soldiers in the Virginia and North Carolina regiments. Their presence, about 4 to 5 percent of those units, showed that some southern states had no reservation about having Black men serve, although not all may have been present or fit for duty.

The British advanced their siege lines and completed a five-gun battery on 10 April. That evening, Clinton summoned Lincoln to surrender. He promised "mild & compassionate" treatment for the Americans; however, he informed Lincoln, if he refused this magnanimous offer, it would not be repeated. Lincoln refused, saying that duty demanded he defend the city to the last extremity. At 0900 on 13 April, the British artillery opened fire on Charleston.



Map 5

Clinton also sent troops into the countryside to seize key road crossings, bridges, and other access points. He ordered Lt. Col. James Webster to cross the Cooper River with a force of 1,400 and cut off American communications north of Charleston. Webster's command included Tarleton's *Legion* and Ferguson's *Corps*. To counter this effort, Lincoln sent Huger with militia and Colonel Washington's dragoons to guard Biggin's Bridge crossing at Monck's Corner.

On 14 April at 0300, Tarleton and his dragoons surprised Huger's camp, attacked the militia with bayonets, and sent them running. Completely surprised, the Americans, including Washington and his troops, escaped through the swamps. Tarleton's force killed fifteen, wounded eighteen, and took sixty-three prisoners. Most importantly, they acquired almost 400 horses, which they used to replace those lost on the voyage south.

The British began the second parallel of the siege process and moved their artillery closer to the American lines on 13 April. Clinton again demanded Lincoln surrender the city. Lincoln held a council of war to discuss options. Provisions were running low, and McIntosh and Moultrie suggested evacuating the army so it could fight another day. Lincoln replied to Clinton on 22 April, agreeing to capitulate if his army and Whipple's ships could leave unmolested. Clinton and Arbuthnot refused that proposal and ordered another artillery bombardment on 24 April. Two days later, Lincoln called another council of war, where he suggested the Continentals break out of the town. Gadsden objected and other political leaders even threatened to turn the civilians against the Continental Army if they tried to leave.

By then, the British had begun the third and final parallel trench, which they completed on 6 May. Also on that day, Tarleton destroyed the remaining contingent of American mounted troops at Lenud's Ferry on the Santee River, 55 miles northeast of Charlestown. There, he inflicted more than a hundred casualties and captured another hundred horses of the 1st Continental Light Dragoons commanded by Lt. Col. Anthony White, along with the remnants of Washington's regiment. This effectively eliminated the remaining mounted troops under Lincoln's command.

The American situation was now dire. Clinton was agitated that the siege had lasted so long but did not want to waste his troops in an unnecessary and costly assault. He therefore ordered the most intense bombardment on the town, hoping Lincoln would give in. Lincoln called another council of war, and after considering the appeals of the civilian population for an end to the carnage, he informed Clinton he would accept the terms for capitulation. However, it was too late.

Frustrated that his army had to expend unnecessary efforts, Clinton intended to humiliate Lincoln by refusing the Americans the honors of war customary at the end of a siege. Instead, they were to march out and ground their weapons and could not play any music nor fly their colors, as befit a humiliated army.

Lincoln surrendered Charleston and his army on 12 May. About 6,000 soldiers and seamen, including 3,465 Continentals from Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina, became prisoners of war. The materiel losses included 391 artillery pieces, 6,000 muskets, and three frigates of the Continental Navy. Total British casualties among the army and naval forces were 99 killed and 217 wounded. The Americans lost 89 killed and 138 wounded, mostly Continental forces. It was the worst American defeat of the Revolutionary War. In addition to Lincoln, the British bagged a quarter of the Continental Army's brigadier generals: Louis Duportail, James Hogun, Lachlan McIntosh, William Moultrie, Charles Scott, and William Woodford. Most would be paroled and exchanged, including Lincoln, but Woodford and Hogun would die in captivity from illness and disease about six months later. The soldiers of the Continental rank and file became prisoners, with many of them confined in filthy prison ships in Charleston Harbor where, over time, hundreds perished to disease and starvation.

Having avoided capture at Charleston, Colonel Buford and his Virginia detachment retreated toward North Carolina, and by 26 May had reached Camden. Meanwhile, Cornwallis arrived at Nelson's Ferry on 27 May with 2,500 troops and was soon joined by Tarleton, whom he ordered to pursue Buford. Tarleton's force included all his 170 mounted troops and 100 infantrymen, who rode tandem with the horsemen, giving him a combined force of 270. During the next few days, the *British Legion* moved more than 100 miles in fifty-four hours. On the way, some of Tarleton's troops stopped to raid and burn the home of local militia leader Thomas Sumter. Upon reaching Camden, Tarleton gave his soldiers a short rest. At 0200 he resumed the pursuit, and by midmorning on 29 May they were only 20 miles south of Buford's column. Tarleton pushed his troops and by early afternoon sighted Buford's convoy. He sent

Buford a demand for surrender, warning him if refused then, “the Blood be upon your head.” Buford rejected the demand. The British then deployed for battle about 300 yards from the Americans, who numbered about 350 strong. At 1530, the British dragoons charged into the American line, making pass after pass with their sabers, which turned the encounter into chaos. During the melee, Buford offered to surrender, but some of the Americans continued to fight. About that time, Tarleton’s horse was shot down and pinned him beneath it. Some of Tarleton’s soldiers thought he had been killed, which only increased their ardor for violence. By the time Tarleton regained his senses and control over his unit, the battle was over. The Americans suffered 113 dead, 150 wounded, and 53 made prisoner. Tarleton’s force suffered seventeen casualties.

The British, however, lost much more than a few soldiers at the Battle of Waxhaws. A cavalry against infantry fight was by nature a short, confusing, and violent event that often resulted in extreme outcomes characteristic of this battle. The number of American deaths led many Americans, most without firsthand knowledge, to claim Tarleton had killed soldiers who looked to surrender in disregard of the rules of war. Whether that claim was true or not did not matter because the image of brutality produced an emotional impact that could not be undone by evidence. From that day, Tarleton forever would be known as “Bloody Ban” who had perpetrated “Buford’s Massacre” or the “Waxhaws Massacre.” These rallying cries influenced public opinion to believe that the British would resort to any means to crush the rebellion.

## **Insurgents versus Occupiers, June–July 1780**

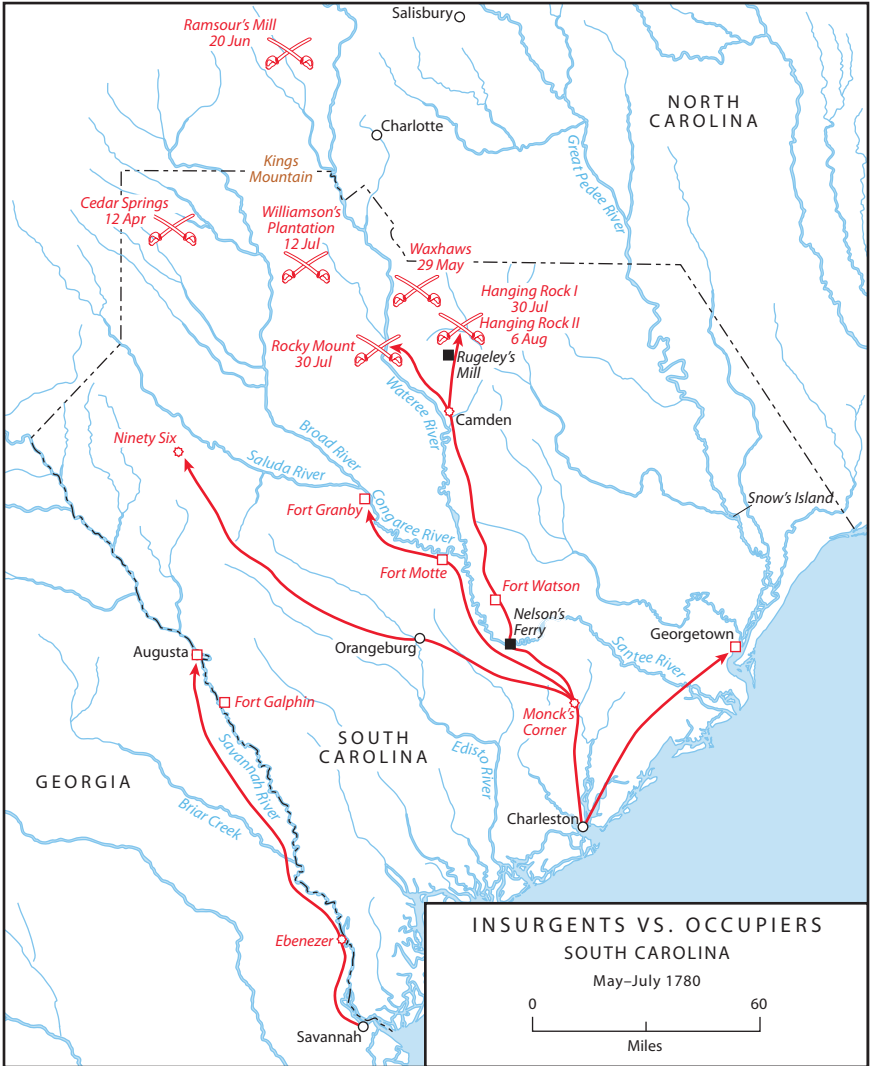
The defeat of the Continental Army, the capture of Charleston, and the Battle of Waxhaws sent a psychological shock wave through supporters of the rebellion, electrified the loyalists, and caused those who wanted to remain neutral to rethink their position. The loss of almost 3,500 Continental soldiers, along with significant quantities of weapons and ordnance, appeared to be the mortal blow the British had sought for so long. It seemed all that remained were minor

operations to deal with small numbers of fanatical American leaders and their followers. However, the British soon found themselves struggling to hold their bases, fight insurgents, and coexist with a populace where friend was indistinguishable from foe.

Having achieved their campaign objective, the British needed to carry out several tasks to fulfill their strategy. First, they had to extend their control of Georgia and South Carolina from Savannah and Charleston into the backcountry. Second, and perhaps the most challenging task, was to develop policies dealing with those who had supported the rebellion to return their allegiance to Britain and for those who continued to resist. Because the linchpin of the southern strategy was loyalist support, the British needed to recruit, organize, arm, and train loyalist militia to assume the tasks of internal defense, pacification, and domestic security.

To accomplish the first task, British forces fanned out in tentacle-like columns from the coast and along the Savannah River into the backcountry to establish a logistics and communications network of interconnected posts throughout South Carolina and Georgia (*Map 6*). The posts began at Savannah, Charleston, and Georgetown, extended through Camden, Rocky Mount, and Hanging Rock, and from Ebenezer to Augusta, then to Ninety Six. On 1 June, Cornwallis arrived in Camden after marching from Nelson's Ferry. Lt. Col. Nesbit Balfour led another column toward Orangeburg and then to Ninety Six to secure the backcountry. On 18 June, Lt. Col. Thomas Brown and his Provincial regiment occupied Augusta, thereby securing the British left flank along the Savannah River.

To implement the second task, on 1 June, Clinton issued a full pardon to former rebels for most treasonable offenses, except murder. However, that policy aggravated the loyalists, who saw their former oppressors restored to full citizenship without any penalty for having inflicted suffering over the past several years on loyalists' families. Considering their point, Clinton issued a revised proclamation on 3 June that stated, "who shall afterwards neglect to return to their allegiance to His Majesty's government, will be considered as Enemies and Rebels . . . and treated accordingly." The revised proclamation meant that a person could not be neutral and would be either for



**Map 6**

or against the Crown. Anyone identified as unredeemable was arrested and sent to prison in Charleston or St. Augustine, Florida. Having backed those who hoped to remain neutral into a corner and forced them to choose sides, Clinton returned to New York on 5 June leaving Cornwallis to deal with the consequences of this policy. Cornwallis modified Clinton's proclamations to ensure more severe

punishment for those who still opposed the king: “every militia man who has borne arms with us and afterward joined the enemy, shall be immediately hanged.”

Many American leaders were convinced the rebellion in the south was over. In Wilkes County, Georgia loyalist William Manson accepted the surrender of Col. John Dooly’s Georgia militia regiment. In the Ninety Six area, Brig. Gen. Andrew Williamson surrendered, along with Col. Andrew Pickens, and accepted parole, promising that his soldiers would return peacefully to their homes. However, others, such as Elijah Clarke of Georgia and James McCall of South Carolina, determined to continue to resist British authority in the backcountry.

The responsibility for keeping order now rested upon Cornwallis, who had about 6,369 regular and Provincial troops for the task. To implement the task of recruiting and organizing loyalists into a capable security force, Clinton had appointed Major Ferguson as Inspector of Militia on 22 May. Clinton intended for the loyalist militia to help keep the Americans in check and to provide additional troops when needed to support the regular army. He told Ferguson, “without loss of time, to form into Corps all the Young or unmarried Men of the Provinces of Georgia and the two Carolina’s” into companies of 50 to 100 soldiers for no more than six months of service. Ferguson approached his task with diligence and his recruitment of loyalist units was remarkably successful in the backcountry Ninety Six district, especially because many Florida refugees had returned to their homes. His only complaint about his recruits was that many of them became homesick and simply left the training camps. At Orangeburg, another loyalist commander organized twelve militia companies. Colonel Balfour reported to Cornwallis on 27 June that, “when returns will be made, I should think, of five thousand men ready to assemble up a short notice” from all the districts.

This recruitment effort was not without its challenges. When some loyalists tried to gather recruits near Ramsour’s Mill in the North Carolina backcountry, well beyond support from the British army, the North Carolina militia soundly defeated them on 20 June. In addition, many loyalist militia units showed a weak commitment

to assuming their responsibilities. In some cases, they simply could not be trusted. Before the surrender of Charleston, many recruits who came from the area between the Enoree and Tyger Rivers had served under American commander Col. Andrew Neel. When loyalist Col. Mathew Floyd organized a regiment in the same region, he accepted many of Neel's former troops, including second in command Lt. Col. John Lisle, who took the oath of allegiance to the king. However, as soon as the British finished issuing arms and ammunition to Floyd's regiment, Lisle absconded with a battalion and joined Thomas Sumter's command. After Floyd captured and hanged two deserters on Cornwallis's order, the rest of his regiment deserted and joined Sumter as well.

Cornwallis also had to deal with those who wanted to bring the native population into the conflict. Thomas Brown, who had been appointed by the Indian Department as superintendent for the Creek and Cherokee, hoped to reopen trade with those nations from his post at Augusta. Brown sent a proposal to Cornwallis requesting approval to gather a large Indian force to attack rebel settlements in the Watauga region of the western Carolinas, present day Tennessee. On 28 June, Brown wrote again, requesting money to help 700 destitute Indian families and informed him that up to 1,200 Indians, including women and children, were on their way to Augusta. Cornwallis replied to Brown on 17 July, agreeing he should distribute presents and supplies, "but I would on no account employ them in any operations of war. . . . As it is not the intention of the Commander in Chief to make any military use of the Indians." Bringing the Indians into the conflict, something the Americans had done with the Catawba Nation earlier, would jeopardize Cornwallis's plan to win the hearts and minds of the backcountry people.

Another issue that persistently vexed Cornwallis was ensuring his army had enough supplies. He intended to meet that challenge in several ways. He could purchase some articles from loyalists using hard currency or receipts for future payment. He also could confiscate supplies from rebellious Americans, who would not receive payment. Another method was to leverage the one hundred

or so large plantations with their large enslaved populations that had been confiscated from rebels between Savannah and Charleston. Under the management of the Commissary of Sequestered Estates directed by loyalist John Cruden, more than 4,000 of the enslaved were kept in servitude to grow needed food or raise livestock to feed the British army. The Commissary appointed special overseers and issued regulations that confined the enslaved to the plantations. However, Cornwallis still had the challenge of shipping supplies from the coast to the interior posts using convoys following rivers and poor roads. These supply columns would be subject to attack by partisans during their entire journey.

In the absence of Continental Army leadership, several prominent local figures took charge of those willing to continue fighting as partisans or insurgents. These men exhibited influence grounded in local social affiliations, genealogical relationships, and strong personalities that inspired others to follow them. The measure of success for these leaders was their ability to attract others to the ranks by appealing to their patriotism, greed, vanity, or need for survival. One of these key individuals was Lt. Col. Francis Marion, a descendant from Huguenot settlers and a resident of Berkeley Parish near Eutaw Springs, South Carolina. In 1776, Marion received his commission in the Continental Army and led the 2d South Carolina regiment. He managed to escape from Charleston about a week before the surrender and gathered a partisan force that lived in the swamps north of Charleston and east of the Wateree–Santee–Catawba River line. South Carolina issued Marion a militia commission as a brigadier general, and he began building his legend as the “Swamp Fox,” interdicting the British supply lines from Charleston to the backcountry and gathering intelligence. Another partisan leader was Thomas Sumter, who had resigned from the Continental Army in 1778 and retired to his plantation. He rejoined the rebellion after Tarleton’s *Legion* plundered and burned his estate during the pursuit of Buford. Known as the “Gamecock,” Sumter assumed command over the remaining South Carolina militia, which he employed in persistent operations to disrupt British efforts in the middle and backcountry regions in the state.



*Marion Crossing the Pedee*, color engraving by Charles Kennedy Burt after a painting by William Tylee Ranney, 1852 (Brown University Library)

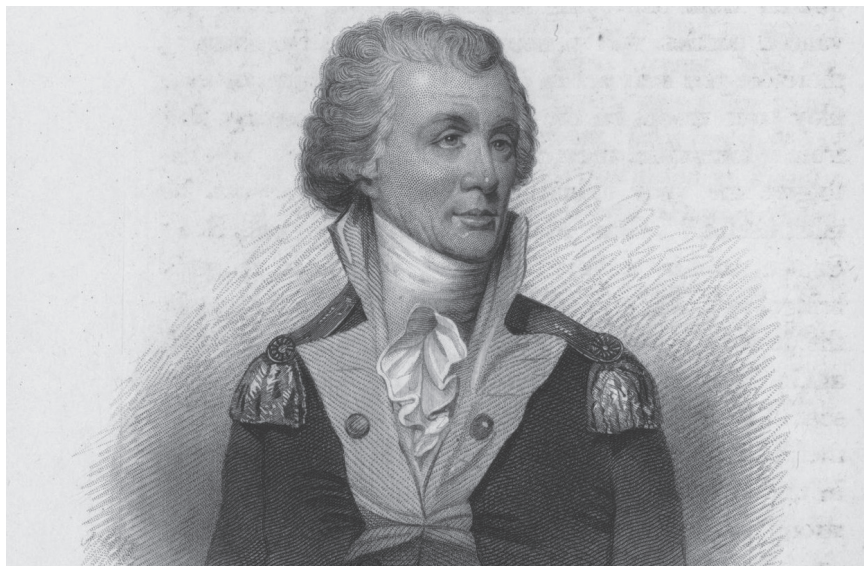
During July 1780, a civil war erupted, crossing religious, economic, and social boundaries and marking a new challenge for British leaders. Every success or defeat affected the psychology of participants on both sides and either encouraged or depressed their support. One of the earliest clashes occurred when one of Tarleton's cavalry officers, a New York loyalist named Capt. Christian Huck, led a patrol of eighty-five *Legion* dragoons and loyalist militia into modern York County, South Carolina, where they burned several farms and destroyed William Hill's ironworks before encamping at Williamson's Plantation. On 12 July, 500 of Sumter's militia surprised Huck, killing him and 35 of his loyalists. For the first time, local American militia had defeated a small but experienced force of the *British Legion*.

Women also played a role in deciding the outcome of operations. On the day of Huck's defeat, American Col. John Thomas Jr. had encamped with sixty militia at Cedar Springs, near modern Spartanburg, South Carolina. His father had been imprisoned by the British at Ninety Six, and during a visit to him there, his mother Jane

heard some loyalist women talking about a planned surprise attack on the American camp at Cedar Springs. Early the next morning, Jane Thomas saddled a horse and rode into the dark, and after galloping 60 miles reached her son's camp and warned him about the impending British attack. Leaving the camp intact to deceive the enemy, Thomas concealed his small force in the surrounding woods. When the loyalists attacked the American camp, they instead ran into an ambush and lost about thirty killed. Fighting continued the next day near Gowen's Old Fort where Col. John Jones, leading Georgia militia, attacked the loyalists retreating from Cedar Springs. Without any centralized direction, three different American militia units, each acting independently, engaged and defeated separate loyalist forces. In three days of fighting, the Americans had killed or wounded more than 175 loyalists and suffered about 60 casualties.

The partisan attacks continued into the next month. Sumter attacked the British post at Rocky Mount on 30 July. When the loyalists refused to surrender, Sumter assaulted the fort, but his effort failed and he lost about fifteen of his troops. That same day, Maj. William R. Davie and his North Carolina militia ambushed several companies of North Carolina loyalists near Hanging Rock, South Carolina. A week later, on 6 August, Sumter joined Davie, and, with a force of more than 800 they conducted another attack on the British garrison of 1,400 at Hanging Rock. The second battle of Hanging Rock lasted more than four hours, with heavy casualties on both sides.

By the first week of August, Cornwallis's army had faced more than a dozen attacks by Americans, and lost nearly 500 killed or wounded. Although the British had established a widespread presence with dozens of posts throughout the region, that presence did not translate into control. In fact, they had moved into areas where American support was the strongest. On 7 August, Cruger, who had replaced Balfour at Ninety Six, reported to Cornwallis that Elijah Clarke was raising a force of several hundred in Georgia and begged him to send reinforcements to Brown at Augusta. However, Cornwallis had other matters to handle because a new Southern Department commander, Maj. Gen. Horatio Gates, made his appearance in South Carolina with a reconstituted southern army.



*Maj. Gen. Thomas Sumter*, engraving by Henry Bryan Hall after a painting by Charles Willson Peale, undated (*New York Public Library*)

## **Disaster at Camden and Expanding Civil War, August–September 1780**

As the partisans harassed the British at every opportunity, Congress and Washington tried to cope with the loss of the entire Continental establishment of the southern states. It was imperative for Congress to send another army to South Carolina to show those fighting the British that they were not forgotten. The nucleus for a new southern army was already in position at Petersburg, Virginia. On 3 April, Washington had ordered Maj. Gen. Johann, Baron de Kalb, to take soldiers from Maryland and Delaware, organized into the 1st and 2d Maryland Brigades, to reinforce Lincoln. De Kalb, a 59-year-old Bavarian, had served in the French army for twenty-three years. Silas Deane recruited him to bring military experience to the Continental Army. He turned out to be an excellent choice and was commissioned as a major general on 15 November 1777. Upon reaching Petersburg on 6 June, de Kalb learned about the disaster at Charleston and his new position as temporary commander of the Southern Department. He marched his army south and encamped

at Cox's Mill on the Deep River in North Carolina on 22 June. There he began to collect and organize soldiers who had evaded capture at Charleston.

Congress also needed to appoint a new commander for the Southern Department. They wanted someone with a record of success, and on 13 June, without consulting Washington, they selected Horatio Gates, the "Hero of Saratoga." Gates was popular with Congress but not highly regarded by Washington, who thought Gates had maneuvered to replace him as the commander in chief. The 52-year-old Gates had been born in England and served in the British army during the French and Indian War. He later moved to America and embraced the revolutionary struggle. Gates received his commission as a brigadier general in the Continental Army on 17 June 1775 and served as the first adjutant general. He commanded the Northern Department in 1777 and led the Continental forces during the Saratoga campaign, where he achieved acclaim for the victory and British surrender on 17 October 1777. Gates arrived at Cox's Mill on 25 July with 1,400 Virginia militia. He assigned de Kalb command of the Continental infantry and Lt. Col. Charles Armand Tuffin's Legion composed of 60 dragoons and 60 infantrymen. The lack of cavalry was a concern because horsemen were necessary to gather intelligence, guard key bridges, and provide shock effect in combat. The Continental cavalry had been decimated during the Charleston campaign, and since then Virginia had spent almost \$700,000 to rebuild Washington and White's Continental dragoon regiments. Unfortunately, White informed Gates on 4 August the cavalry were still not ready so the army would have to do without horsemen.

The logistics situation for the army was terrible, as they had subsisted in the same area for about three weeks. Gates decided the army had to move to obtain food; as one officer said, "we may as well march on & starve, as starve lying here." The question about which direction to move was a topic of debate. The army could move west toward Charlotte and Salisbury or south toward Camden. After weighing the options, and against advice from his officers, Gates decided on the direct route toward Camden through the

sand hills and pine barrens. He was also concerned that Maj. Gen. Richard Caswell, who had ignored requests to join Gates's army, would lead his North Carolina militia into a premature fight with the British at Camden. The Southern Army began its march on 27 July and discovered that the only available food was green corn and unripe peaches, which caused cramps and diarrhea among the hungry troops.

Gates also began to establish relationships with the partisan leaders who had been on their own since June. He was soon joined by Francis Marion and his coterie of partisans, of whom an officer stated were, "distinguished by their small black leather caps and the wretchedness of their attire; their number did not exceed twenty men and boys, some white, some black, but most of them miserably equipped." On 7 August, Caswell, with an additional 2,100 North Carolina militiamen, rendezvoused with the army at Lynches Creek. Gates then moved to Rugeley's Mill, about 15 miles north of Camden, where he encamped on 13 August and waited for Brig. Gen. Edward Stevens, who arrived with 800 Virginia militia the next day. Gates asked his adjutant, Col. Otho Holland Williams to provide an account of the army's strength. This last reinforcement brought Gates's strength to more than 5,000, but only about 3,052 were fit for service.

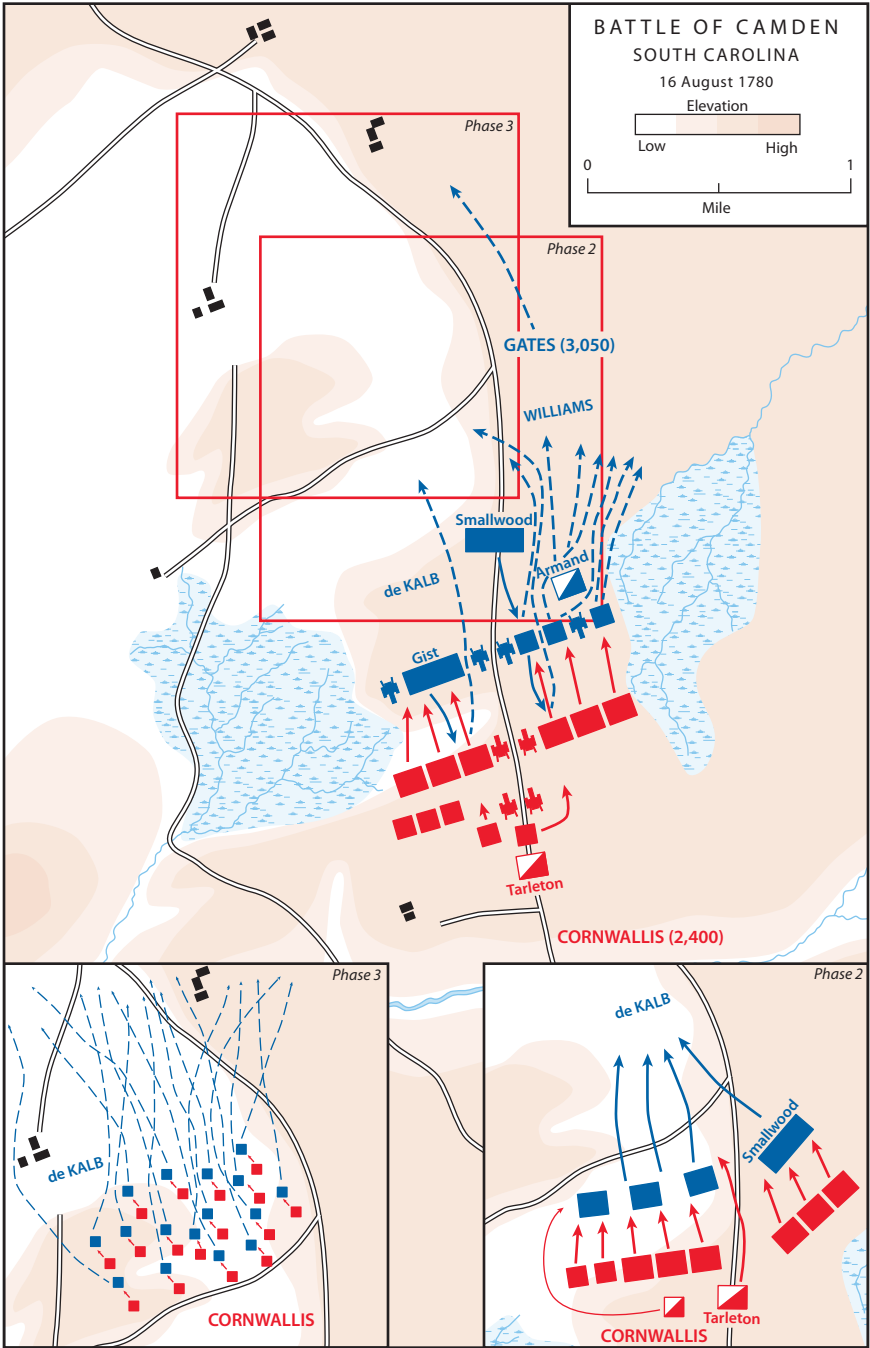
Gates also used the time during the march to gain an understanding of the situation, particularly the terrain and geography of South Carolina. He talked with those who intimately knew the region, such as Marion and his aide de camp, Maj. Thomas Pinckney. Gates began to develop a general outline for his army and those of the partisan commanders to take positions whereby Camden would become untenable for the British to hold and they would have to retreat back to Charleston. The main army troops who, according to Gates, were "sufficient for our purpose," would establish a defensive position to draw the attention of the enemy. On 14 August, American engineers selected a suitable position about 6 miles south of Rugeley's Mill near Sanders Creek, where the terrain formed a natural defense and could be strengthened with abatis and redoubts. Meanwhile, Gates provided Sumter with 100 Continentals,

300 North Carolina militia, and an artillery piece for operations west of the Wateree River. Sumter used this force to capture Cary's Fort, including two companies of the *71st Foot*, along with horses, wagons, and cattle. Col. W. H. Harrington was sent to the upper part of the Peedee River to encourage the militia and obtain provisions, while denying the same to the enemy. Marion operated on the lower Santee and Wateree Rivers, where he obstructed roads and destroyed bridges to hinder enemy movements.

Unbeknownst to Gates, Cornwallis had arrived in Camden, where he assumed command of British forces from Lt. Col. Francis, Lord Rawdon on 14 August. More than 800 soldiers were sick, leaving him with about 2,400 available for service. When informed that Gates was at Rugeley's, Cornwallis declared, "Seeing little to lose by a defeat and much to gain by a Victory, I resolved to take the first good opportunity to Attack the Rebel Army." He decided to march his army north during the night of 15 August and to be in position to attack the American camp at dawn. Coincidentally, Gates had ordered his army to conduct a night march to the position at Sanders Creek to the south. Unfortunately, his troops had consumed rations of molasses in place of rum, which had an additional laxative effect when combined with the green corn and peaches, causing further distress among the Americans.

The advance guards of each army stumbled into each other about 0230 on 16 August. The battlefield was a sandy, mile-wide open field bordered by swampy ground east and west of the road. The British line formed facing north with the light infantry, the *23d Foot*, and the *33d Foot* extending from the road to a swamp on the right flank. The *Volunteers of Ireland* deployed to the left of the road. Next to them was the *British Legion* infantry and the *Royal North Carolina Regiment*. Colonel Bryan's loyalist *North Carolina Regiment of Volunteers* was behind the legion infantry. Lt. Col. James Webster commanded the right wing and Rawdon the left. The *71st Foot* was in reserve, as were Tarleton's dragoons.

After discussion with his officers, who agreed it was more dangerous to retreat than fight, Gates deployed his army into a line of battle (*Map 7*). Brig. Gen. Mordecai Gist's 2d Maryland Brigade



Map 7

was on the right flank between the road and the western swamp. Gates stationed the North Carolina and Virginia militia on the left flank extending to the eastern swamp. Unfortunately, this put the American militia opposite the best British troops. The 1st Maryland Brigade commanded by Brig. Gen. William Smallwood took position behind the center in reserve. Gates had six pieces of artillery supporting his line, and Armand's Legion was behind the Virginia militia. Gates placed himself about 600 yards behind his army, from where he could see and issue orders.

As dawn broke, the battle began. The fog shrouded field was further obscured by the artillery smoke of both armies. Cornwallis ordered his regulars on the right flank to advance and attack the American militia. The redcoats drove through the fog, and when the Virginians saw the enemy surging toward them with fixed bayonets, they were seized by panic, threw down their weapons, and ran into the swamp. The panic spread to the North Carolina militia, who, after firing only two or three volleys, also retreated. The American left flank had vanished before the British assault. Cornwallis ordered his right flank to swing west toward the road and engage the 1st Maryland Brigade, while the Provincial units on the left engaged the 2d Maryland Brigade. For about a half hour the fight was violent and bloody, with de Kalb and his Continentals left to fight the entire British army. When Cornwallis saw a gap open between the American brigades, he ordered Tarleton's dragoons into the opening, breaking the American line. The 2d Maryland Brigade and de Kalb were now isolated on a small hill on the American right. De Kalb continued to lead his soldiers until he was disabled by eleven bullets and several bayonet wounds. Captured by the British, he died from his wounds three days later. Gates and his officers tried to rally the army but were caught in a "torrent of militia" fleeing north. Fortunately, the 1st Maryland Brigade and Armand's legion extricated themselves from the melee and escaped toward Rugeley's Mill. Gates then rode to Charlotte to find more troops to send to Camden but found none. He then decided to ride to Hillsborough, arriving there three days after the battle. The Americans had suffered another devastating loss



***Battle of Camden - Death of De Kalb, Francis Heppenheimer and Louis Maurer, 1875 (Brown University Library)***

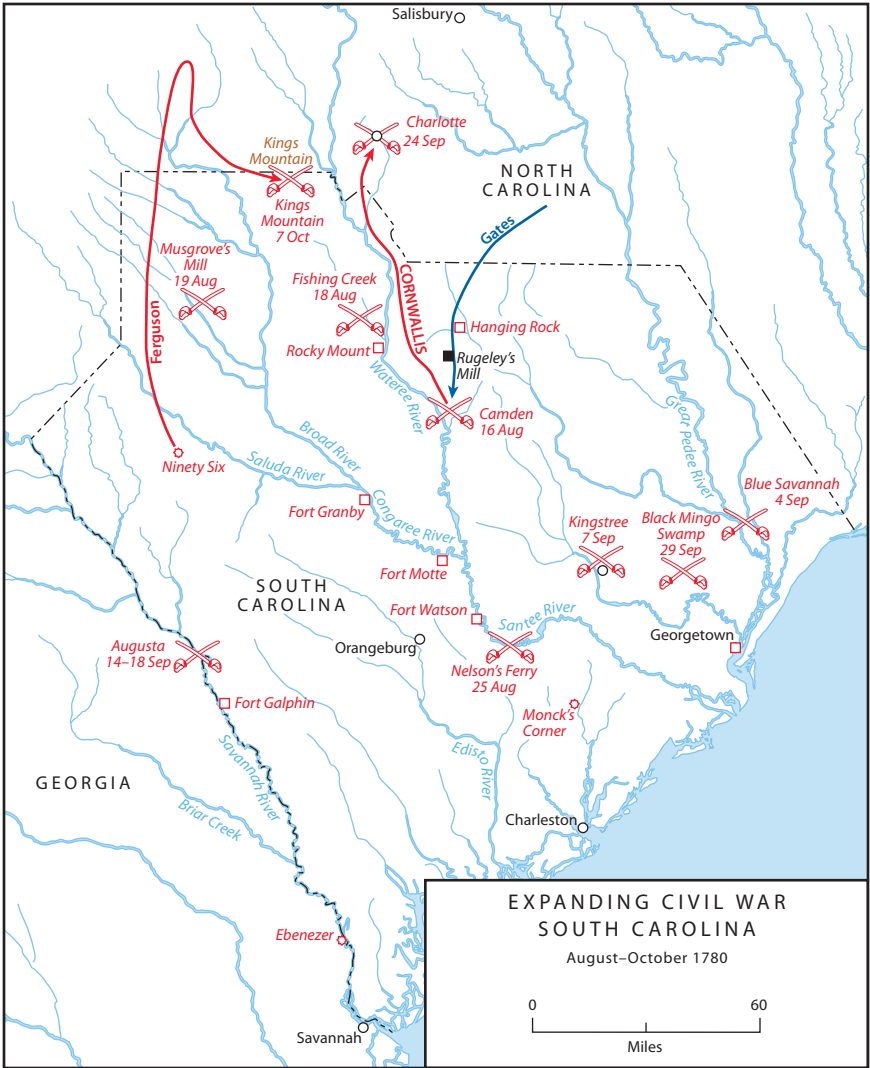
with about 1,800 to 2,000 killed, wounded, and captured. The British had 324 casualties, many of whom were skilled veterans.

Two days later, Tarleton led 160 dragoons and light infantry to Fishing Creek where he surprised Sumter and his partisans, who were resting, eating, or bathing. Sumter barely escaped but lost about 150 killed or wounded. In addition, Tarleton liberated the British soldiers captured at Cary's Fort while taking 300 militia, 800 horses, two field guns, and forty-six wagons of supplies, including two full of ammunition.

The defeat of Gates and Sumter marked the zenith of British control over Georgia and South Carolina. The destruction of a second Continental army within three months and Tarleton's victory over Sumter's partisans appeared to have ended any remaining resistance in the South. However, while Cornwallis celebrated Tarleton's victory, a messenger arrived with unsettling news. On 19 August, backcountry militia had defeated a veteran Provincial force at Musgrove's Mill on the Enoree River in South Carolina.

Several American militia commanders had agreed to cooperate in a scheme to attack Provincial units encamped at Musgrove's Mill. Col. Isaac Shelby and his riflemen from the "Overmountain" Watauga settlements in the Blue Ridge mountains of modern Tennessee teamed with Clarke and his Georgians, along with Col. James Williams and his South Carolina militia. No one was in overall command, but all three leaders worked well together and established relationships that enabled them to vex British operations throughout the next year (*Map 8*). The loyalists, led by Lt. Col. Alexander Innes, were moving to join Ferguson, 50 miles to the north. Innes had about 200 loyalist militia and 150 veteran Provincials from the *South Carolina Royalists*, *New Jersey Volunteers*, and Delancey's *New York Regiment*. The Americans hoped to bait the loyalists to pursue a decoy, leading them to the main force protected by a breastwork on the crest of a ridge. Capt. George Inman from Clarke's militia volunteered to be the bait and provoked the loyalists to chase him north across the Enoree into the trap. When the loyalists were within 50 yards of the Americans, they were met by well-aimed fire, but the veteran Provincials organized a bayonet charge that dislodged Shelby's riflemen from their position. Clarke then led a small reserve that hit the British right flank. Innes fell wounded during the hand-to-hand combat with hatchets and knives. The loyalists fought well, but their retreat became a rout and ended with sixty-three killed, ninety wounded, and seventy-six captured during the fifteen-minute battle. The Americans lost only four killed and about ten wounded. After the battle, the Americans heard about the defeats at Camden and Fishing Creek, so they dispersed to safer areas closer to their homes.

Marion also kept the British occupied in the swamps near Charleston. On 25 August, he attacked a British column at Nelson's Ferry and freed 150 Americans captured at Camden, some of whom joined with Marion to continue resistance. Marion struck again on 4 September, ambushing a loyalist militia detachment near a topographical depression called Blue Savannah. These incidents prompted Cornwallis to send Maj. James Wemyss on a



**Map 8**

punitive raid to track down Marion. But by 8 September, Marion had moved into North Carolina, safely out of Wemyss's reach. Once the danger passed, Marion returned and attacked loyalist militia at Black Mingo Creek on 14 September. His tactic of striking remote groups of loyalists became Marion's signature method for repressing supporters of the British.

After Musgrove's Mill, Elijah Clarke returned to Georgia, intending to gather a thousand militia to attack the British post at Augusta. Maj. James McCall asked Pickens for help in recruiting militia members, but Pickens refused, arguing the paroles he and his former combatants had accepted in June were binding unless the British failed to honor them. As a result, McCall could persuade only about eighty others to join him. Clarke was more successful. Joshua Burnett remembered that Clarke "sent word to those who had surrendered, that if they did not meet him at a certain noted Spring, . . . he would put every one of them to death." Clarke's incentive brought about 350 troops back into the ranks, along with those McCall had gathered, for a force of about 430 for their planned attack on Augusta.

While Clarke gathered his partisans, Lt. Col. Thomas Brown was preparing to receive a large party of about 300 Creek who were traveling to Augusta to receive the gifts Cornwallis allowed him to distribute to "keep them in good humour." The presents were being stored at a trading complex known as Mackay's trading post about a mile northwest of the town. At Augusta, Brown had five companies of his Provincial *King's Rangers* and two brass artillery pieces. When the Creek arrived in the area around 12 September, they encamped near a spring on a hill above the trading post. Together with Brown's troops, the total British-allied cohort amounted to a force of about 500 in the Augusta area.

Early in the morning on 14 September, Clarke's force approached the unsuspecting enemy from several different directions. The battle began when the Americans attacked the Creek encampment. Hearing the sounds of battle, Brown assembled his troops and hurried them toward the fighting. As Brown's force was moving toward the battle, Clarke and McCall moved to capture the trading post and the gifts intended for the Creek. Upon reaching the Creek's position, the loyalists found themselves caught between two American columns, one coming down the hill and the other at the trading post, engaging the loyalist company stationed there. Brown's loyalists and the Creek eventually fought their way through the Americans and gained the safety of Mackay's trading post, where they began digging

earthworks. Clarke demanded the loyalists surrender, but Brown refused, as he had sent a messenger to Ninety Six asking for help. At Ninety Six, Lt. Col. John Harris Cruger received Brown's message and quickly organized a relief force of 300 that departed Ninety Six for Augusta the morning of 16 September. It took almost forty-eight hours for the loyalist column to reach Augusta, arriving there about 0800 on 18 September. When Clarke observed the arrival of 300 loyalists, he ordered his partisans to break off the engagement, having already lost about sixty killed and wounded. The loyalists had lost an unknown number killed and the Indians suffered about seventy killed during the battle. During the battle, the loyalists and Indians had captured about thirty Americans who, unfortunately, became further examples of enemy brutality. In accordance with Cornwallis's policy concerning those who broke their parole and took up arms, Cruger was compelled to immediately execute thirteen of the partisans and had them hanged from a staircase at the trading post.

Cruger decided to discourage another such insurrection by sending detachments in all directions to find the remaining partisans, their families, or any other sympathizers. In Wilkes County, the loyalists burned the homes of leading Americans, plundered their property, and drove off their livestock. By the time Cruger reached the Broad River, about 60 miles north of Augusta, he found no trace of Clarke or his troops, who had gathered their families and fled for refuge in North Carolina. Cruger reported the American's escape to Cornwallis, who directed Ferguson, operating in western South Carolina, to intercept Clarke. Ferguson set up a position west of Kings Mountain to watch for the Georgians and discourage rebellion in that area.

## **Defense of Charlotte and Victory at Kings Mountain, September–October 1780**

Cornwallis believed victory might be achieved if he moved his army through North Carolina and into Virginia. Apart from coastal engagements, those states had experienced little significant military

activity, and the supplies, horses, and recruits they provided were critical for the Continental Army in all departments, not just the south. Cornwallis considered several factors favoring such a plan. Gates's defeat encouraged support for the loyalist movement throughout the Carolinas. Sumter's and Clarke's partisans had been defeated, dispersed, and neutralized. It appeared the subjugation of South Carolina, like that of Georgia, was complete. However, an invasion of North Carolina was not without risk. It required relying on loyalist forces in South Carolina, so the British army could move on as envisioned in the southern strategy. Cornwallis left Rawdon in command at Camden, Balfour in charge of Charleston, and Cruger at Ninety Six to hold and defend South Carolina against any partisan activity. He assigned Ferguson to command the left wing of his army. Ferguson was to continue his recruiting mission, guard against any American activity from the Blue Ridge mountains, and protect the left flank of Cornwallis's main army as it advanced toward Charlotte.

Cornwallis began the campaign on 7 September, but within two days the advance ground to a halt because most of the soldiers had contracted an illness accompanied by a fever. By 9 September, two thirds of the *71st Foot* was sick, so Cornwallis ordered his troops to encamp in the Waxhaws region, hoping the environment and supplies there would restore their health. Whatever the illness was, it spread quickly, and it took almost two weeks for the British to get well. On 15 September, Cornwallis met with Tarleton to discuss tracking down Sumter, but by 18 September Tarleton was deathly ill. This turn of events further reduced Cornwallis's capability because Tarleton was so sick he could not be moved, and the *British Legion* had to "remain quite useless" to protect him from possible partisan attack.

While the British battled illness, Gates was at Hillsborough, North Carolina, trying to rebuild the southern army and salvage what he could of his tarnished reputation. He organized most of the 800 remaining troops into a single regiment, commanded by Col. Otho H. Williams. He also organized a light infantry battalion with three Continental companies each from Maryland, Delaware, and Virginia, commanded by Lt. Col. John Eager Howard. Bolstering his

force was William Washington, who finally arrived from Virginia with about eighty dragoons to provide some mounted capability. The unique capabilities of light troops also required a leader who understood how to employ them properly; for Gates, that leader was Daniel Morgan, who had led a similar contingent during the Saratoga campaign. Back in June, Gates had met with Morgan and asked him to serve with him in the Southern Department. The 48-year-old Morgan, having been refused promotion to brigadier general by Congress, had left the army and gone into retirement, in part to deal with health issues such as sciatica. Morgan agreed to return only if Congress would grant him a brigadier general commission. Gates pleaded with Congress to promote Morgan so he would return to service. Morgan eventually joined Gates's army at Hillsborough in late September and on 13 October 1780 Congress appointed him as a brigadier general in the Continental Army.

In general, Gates planned to deal with Cornwallis's advance by defending key locations. He ordered Brig. Gen Jethro Sumner and his North Carolina militia to hold the Yadkin River fords near Salisbury and sent Morgan with Continentals to support him. However, Gates's defensive mindset clashed with more aggressive North Carolina leaders, such as Col. William R. Davie, who wanted to attack the British south of Charlotte rather than wait for them. On 21 September, Davie and 150 militia surprised and routed several companies of loyalist militia at Wahab's Plantation, killing fifteen to twenty and wounding about forty with the loss of only one American.

On 24 September, the British were finally healthy enough to resume the advance to Charlotte. The 2,200-strong army included the *23d* and *33d Foot*, the *Volunteers of Ireland*, the *British Legion*, and the *North Carolina Provincials*. Cornwallis had to leave behind both the *63d* and *71st Foot* which were still unfit for operations. Tarleton was still sick but could be moved so Maj. George Hanger took charge of the *Legion* in his absence. When the British reached Charlotte, they found a crossroads of two wide streets with about twenty houses, a common, a courthouse, and places of worship. They also found Davie, waiting with 150 riflemen behind stone walls and buildings. Hanger ordered a cavalry charge that met with a hail

of rifle fire from the Americans. Luckily for Hanger, his infantry already had started to engage the Americans, and Davie decided it was best to withdraw.

Cornwallis had taken Charlotte, but far from being a prize it only added to the sick army's misery. The soldiers found little food, as the local farms were small, and the land was covered by thick woods crossed by narrow roads. The population was hostile and sought any opportunity to attack British foragers or messengers. Foraging parties required large numbers of troops to protect them, assuring that more food and forage was consumed in the process. More importantly, the British army had become so preoccupied with overcoming illness, foraging, and keeping communications open with other bases that no further progress was possible.

Ferguson, meanwhile, had concentrated his army at Gilbert Town, where he tried to recruit from among the local population. On September 9, he issued a declaration intended to enlighten the inhabitants as to how Congress, state, and local leaders had deceived them about British intentions and actions. The declaration stated that for anyone who had rebelled but returned to "his duty, an offer of the same free and happy government he formerly enjoy'd, with an exemption from taxation and pardon for all offences" would be given. However, that message, even if it was communicated as written, did not result in any outpouring of support in that region. On 23 September, Ferguson received a message from Cornwallis ordering him to intercept Clarke and the Georgia refugees before they reached the Watauga settlements. The Americans, however, managed to slip by him.

By late September, Ferguson had reached the foothills of the Blue Ridge mountains, which prompted Col. Isaac Shelby and Col. John Sevier to call for volunteers to oppose the British threat. They gathered at Sycamore Shoals, south of modern-day Elizabethton, Tennessee, and on 25 September Col. Charles McDowell's North Carolinians and Col. William Campbell's Virginians rendezvoused with Shelby's and Sevier's "over mountain men." From Sycamore Shoals, the mounted militia moved to Quaker Meadows and were joined by North Carolina militia, bringing their total numbers to about 1,300.

After crossing the mountains, they added another 200 recruits from the Carolinas and Georgia. By 2 October, the Americans were in Gilbert Town, where they chose Campbell as the commander of this loosely organized army. The ability of the Americans to form a force out of thin air illustrated the most vexing challenge the British faced in the south: the opposition by fiercely independent and clannish backcountry militia who nonetheless were willing to join others to confront a mutual enemy.

As Ferguson lingered near the North Carolina border, his scouts informed him about the approach of the Americans. He decided to move closer to Cornwallis's army, and, after crossing the Broad River, turned southeast toward a ridgeline about 40 miles west of Charlotte. On 6 October, Ferguson decided to encamp his army atop Kings Mountain, a footprint-shaped hill featuring a flat, 600-yard-long, 70- to 120-yard-wide crest extending from the northeast to the southwest. His army included 1,075 militiamen from six loyalist regiments raised in the Ninety Six district. His own *American Volunteers* numbered about 100. His second in command was New York loyalist Capt. Abraham DePeyster. Ferguson's soldiers were well trained with an emphasis on executing bayonet assaults.

When the Americans learned that Ferguson had marched east, they decided that only those riders who had the freshest horses would continue, and on 6 October they traveled 21 miles to Cowpens, South Carolina. There, scouts informed them that Ferguson had encamped on Kings Mountain. From Cowpens, Campbell led 910 horsemen through a rainstorm to find Ferguson before the latter moved again. When they arrived near Kings Mountain, Campbell split his force into two divisions (*Map 9*). The Left Division was to advance along the northwestern slope of hill while the Right Division did the same along the southeastern slope. The Left Division included elements of the Shelby's over mountain men, South Carolinians, Georgians, and North Carolinians, totaling about 440. The Right Division included Campbell's and Sevier's over mountain men and North Carolinians for a total of about 470.

At 1400 on 7 October, the Americans dismounted and approached the hill on foot. Within the hour, the loyalists detected them and



made another bayonet charge, but it did not slow the Americans, who began pushing loyalists from their positions along the crest.

The tide of battle had turned in favor of the Americans who, like a large vise, steadily crushed Ferguson's position from every side. However, it was not without cost. James Williams had his horse shot from under him, and he received a fatal wound. Facing the prospect of a humiliating surrender, Ferguson and a few of his officers tried to break out of the trap, but amid the smoke and confusion he was killed. Seeing no further hope, Captain DePeyster ordered his troops to surrender.

The battle of Kings Mountain lasted about an hour. At the end, 244 loyalists had been killed, 163 wounded, and more than 600 taken prisoner. American casualties were twenty-nine killed and fifty-eight wounded. These figures, however, do not tell the whole story about the nature of this battle. Militia units included many family members, and the cost for some families was high. Seventy-four sets of brothers and twenty-nine sets of fathers and sons fought in the battle. Sevier's brother was killed, and Shelby's brother was wounded. Some families had men fighting for both sides, such as the Goforth family which had five brothers, two American and three loyalists in the battle. Only one, an American, survived.

The Americans quickly left the battlefield and marched their prisoners to Gilbert Town, where they held a court-martial and sentenced thirty-six loyalists to death. However, only nine were executed; and the rest were sent to Gates's headquarters at Hillsborough. During the journey, many loyalists died of exhaustion and others quietly escaped. By the time the prisoners reached Hillsborough, only 130 remained.

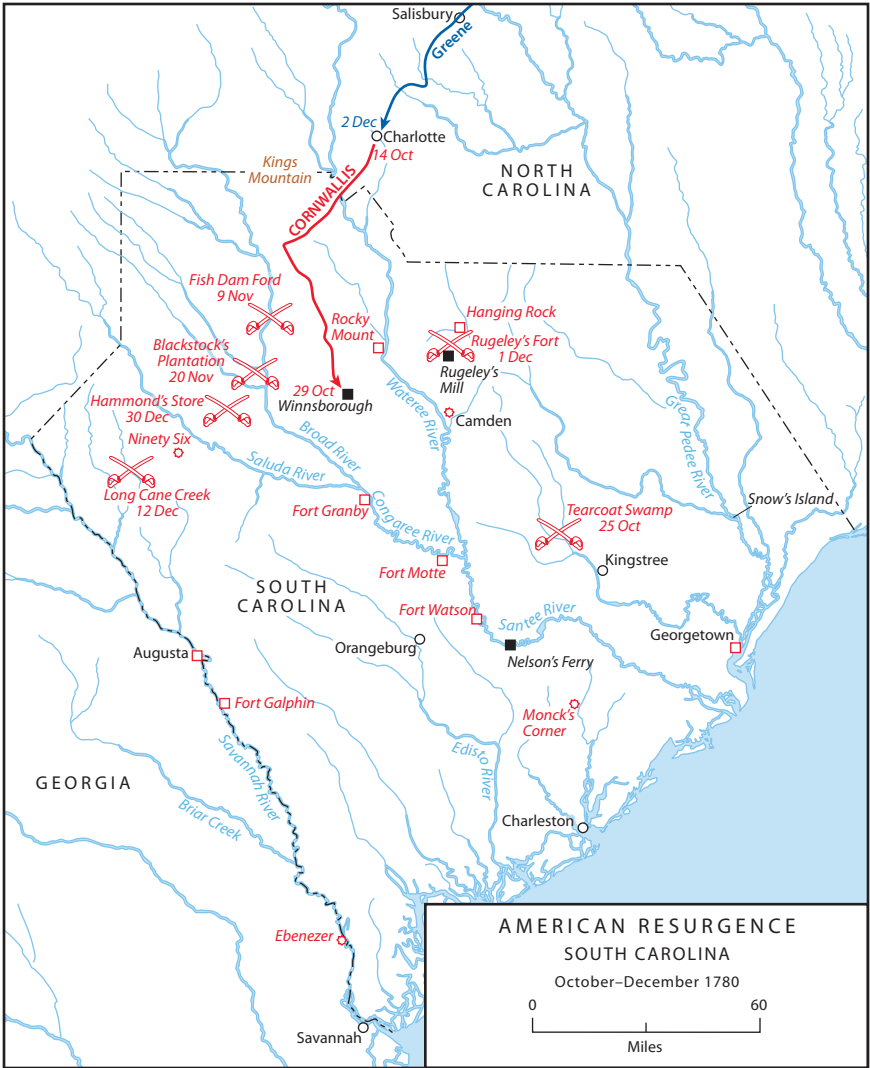
The decimation of Ferguson's army and the challenges at Charlotte convinced Cornwallis to move back into South Carolina and set up a winter camp at Winnsboro. As Cornwallis contemplated his next move, he concluded that the enormous efforts to raise, train, and organize loyalist units had all been for naught. He decided to cease efforts to raise loyalist militia, even though it was the cornerstone of the southern strategy, and he did not appoint a replacement for Ferguson. From this point, he would rely only on his ever-dwindling number of professional soldiers to carry on the

war. The battle of Kings Mountain had struck a death knell to the optimism the British had enjoyed for only a few months after the victory at Charleston. At the same time, the backcountry militia's victory over their loyalist neighbors revived support for the rebellion.

## **American Victories and Tarleton's Failures, October–December 1780**

Cornwallis's decision to retreat was influenced by other factors as well. At Charlotte, his army was some 200 miles away from Charleston, and his line of communications was under constant harassment from Francis Marion. Marion had been persistent in interdicting messengers and fighting the loyalists near the lower Santee River. There, the civil war raged with as much fury as in the backcountry and the tolls upon both factions were high. At one point, Marion's band had been reduced to about one hundred because so many had left to protect their families. When news about Kings Mountain reached him, Marion sought to exploit the turn of events and capture Georgetown, but his small force was not powerful enough to take the strong British fort there. He then went after loyalist militia encamped at Tearcoat Swamp between two forks of the Black River. On 25 October, Marion gathered about 150 patriots, scouted the enemy camp, and then attacked the loyalists during the night, killing six and wounding fourteen. He captured twenty-three prisoners, some of whom sought to change sides and join up with his partisans.

Marion's effectiveness led Cornwallis to order Tarleton to the low country to snuff out the partisans (*Map 10*). Tarleton set out after Marion, who prepared several ambushes for his pursuer. Both men were experts at that game, and neither could surprise the other. On 8 November, Tarleton led his troops on a 40-mile chase of Marion through swamps and dense forests, and encountered damaged bridges and ambush positions. Marion escaped into Ox Swamp, and at that point Tarleton gave up the chase, saying that "as for the old fox, the devil himself could not catch him." Tarleton did not have time to contemplate how to capture the "Swamp Fox," because he



**Map 10**

received orders from Cornwallis on 9 November to return north and deal with Thomas Sumter.

Sumter had recovered from his defeat at Fishing Creek and was commissioned by Governor Rutledge as a brigadier general of the South Carolina militia. He set up an encampment near Fish Dam Ford on the Broad River and was soon joined by hundreds of patriots

from South Carolina and Georgia, including Elijah Clarke, James McCall, and Benjamin Few. Cornwallis learned about Sumter's camp from loyalist spies and, because Tarleton had not returned from chasing Marion, he ordered Major Wemyss, commander of the *63d Foot*, to conduct a nighttime raid against Sumter. Part of this raid involved a special team whose mission was to either capture or kill Sumter. Wemyss mounted his infantry on horses, and Cornwallis provided him with a cavalry troop from the *British Legion*. With this force, Wemyss attacked Sumter at about 0100 on 9 November, but the Americans were on guard. Sumter luckily avoided capture by slipping out of his tent and hiding near the bank of the river. The Americans rallied after the first shock and then drove the British from the field. During the battle, Wemyss was shot from his horse and suffered several broken bones. The next day, when Sumter returned to bury the dead, he found Wemyss and took him prisoner.

Sumter then decided to threaten Ninety Six but was deterred when Tarleton returned to hunt him down. The British hoped to trap Sumter between Ninety Six and the Broad River. Quickly and without drawing attention, Tarleton crossed the Broad River and blocked the Enoree River fords that Sumter needed if he tried to retreat toward North Carolina. However, a British deserter warned Sumter about the danger. Sumter held a council of war, which decided that Blackstock's Plantation, south of the Tyger River, was an advantageous place to make a stand. By midafternoon on 20 November, Sumter had arrived at Blackstock's, and Tarleton was closing fast. The Americans had their backs to the Tyger River, but the terrain offered several advantages. A long ridge overlooked a small valley, forming a natural amphitheater into which the British would ride. Sumter gathered more than 1,000 militia from several contingents, including some who had fought at Kings Mountain. In addition, the South Carolinians were joined by Georgians, led by Colonels Twiggs, Clarke, and Few.

Tarleton's force included infantry and artillery along with his legion. When he learned how close he was to Sumter, he decided to allow the infantry and artillery to travel at their own pace, while he pushed ahead with his dragoons and mounted *63d Foot*, now led

by Lt. John Money. As Tarleton approached, he saw Sumter's line of militia and realized he was outnumbered. He dismounted his soldiers on a hill opposite the Americans and ordered Money to advance until he reached the field below. Instead of charging headlong into the Americans, Tarleton decided it was more prudent to wait until his infantry and artillery arrived to even the odds.

Sumter, however, chose not to give Tarleton time to gain strength. He ordered the Georgians to attack and get behind the *63d* to cut off reinforcements. While the Georgians and the *63d* skirmished, Sumter ordered Few to take his troops to support Twiggs. The Americans crossed the small valley and then ascended toward the British. Money ordered his soldiers to fire and then attacked with the bayonet, driving back the larger American force. However, Money led his men too far forward and Sumter's riflemen inflicted a devastating fire on the British. Money was wounded seriously, and a third of the *63d Foot* was out of action. Tarleton tried to save the *63d* by personally leading his dragoons into the thick of the fight, where he dismounted under fire, picked the injured Money up, and carried him off the field. Although the dragoons managed to extricate the *63d*, they suffered significant casualties. Meanwhile, Sumter had been riding near the center of his line when a bullet entered his shoulder from the back and lodged near his spine. He was taken from the field on a litter strung between horses. Twiggs took command of the Americans, but night had arrived, and both sides began to withdraw. The Americans lost three killed, four wounded, and fifty captured. The British losses were much higher, with ninety-two killed and seventy-six wounded. Sumter's injury would put him out of action for several months—so in one sense, the British had achieved a sliver of victory. Tarleton learned that pausing to await reinforcements surrendered the initiative to the enemy, and therefore he should attack aggressively, even if he were similarly outnumbered by militia, in the future.

Gates, meanwhile, had not been idle. He moved his army to New Providence, North Carolina, about 12 miles south of Charlotte. On 28 November, Gates ordered Morgan to take a “flying army” of about 450 light troops on a raid toward Camden to obtain forage and gather intelligence. Morgan's command included Washington's dragoons

and Howard's light infantry. In the Waxhaws area, Morgan learned that loyalist Col. Henry Rugeley had gathered a force of about 200 at his farm north of Camden. Morgan ordered Colonel Washington to ride ahead and try to take the loyalists by surprise. On 1 December, Washington found the loyalists well protected in a barn surrounded by a ditch with abatis. His dragoons dismounted and surrounded the enemy position. Washington had them cut a log and paint it black to look like a cannon, then he demanded the loyalists surrender or he would open fire. The ruse worked and the loyalists surrendered to the Continentals.

After Washington rejoined Morgan, they rode to Gates's camp and arrived just in time to meet the new commander of the Southern Department, Maj. Gen. Nathanael Greene. Congress, having realized it had made a mistake in not consulting General Washington previously, asked him to choose Gates's successor for command of the Southern Department and in October Washington had chosen his able and loyal assistant for the job. Greene arrived in Charlotte and took command of the Southern Department from Gates on 3 December 1780. A new phase of war was about to begin: the contest between Greene and Cornwallis in the Carolinas.

## CONCLUSION AND ANALYSIS



By early September 1780, the British southern strategy appeared to have succeeded. From December 1778 to that time, the British held the initiative over the Americans in the south, who could do little more than react to British moves. The expected opposition from the French navy never materialized and British naval expeditions carried troops and supplies from New York to Savannah and Charleston without facing any significant naval threat. Clinton's masterful capture of Charleston and Lincoln's army in May, along with Cornwallis's destruction of Gates's army at Camden in August, seemed to be fatal blows against the Americans, and vital to reestablishing royal dominance over the lower south. However, was occupying terrain and destroying Continental forces the true measure of success by which the British could declare victory in the South?

British commanders soon discovered that occupying Georgia and South Carolina was more complex and challenging than they anticipated. A year after invading Georgia, the enormous number of loyalists regional experts predicted had yet to appear to aid the meager regular forces. On more than one occasion, loyalists learned that the presence of a British force was usually temporary and to show loyalty was to expose oneself to retaliation when the army departed. In addition, the premise of loyalist support did not reflect how deeply the roots of rebellion had taken hold in the south as an outcome of British neglect of the region between 1776 and 1778.

During that time, the relationship between Americans and loyalists had fractured beyond any hope of reconciliation. To mend that rift would have required occupation policies designed to address the grievances of each side so that resentment did not descend into civil war. However, instead of policies to mitigate resentment, Clinton's June 1780 policies may be identified as a fundamental cause of the internecine war that followed that summer.

The defeat of a succession of southern Continental armies also never achieved the expected end of hostilities. In fact, they clearly demonstrated that the rebellion in the south was not dependent on an enduring Continental Army presence. The disappearance of a Continental force because of destruction or surrender actually may have increased the desire to resist British occupation, which in turn generated new waves of American militia, the embodiment of the people, who took the fight against the British into their own hands.

Another factor which stymied British success was their reliance on supplies that took months to reach the ports of Savannah and Charleston. With their logistics lines tethered to the coastal ports, British ability to project forces into the interior, especially the backcountry, was severely constrained. That limit occurred at the fall line, the location of British bases at Augusta, Ninety Six, Winnsboro, and Camden where supplies arrived via river and overland from the coast. However, elusive American partisans led by Marion, Sumter, Clarke, and others routinely interdicted these routes and captured or destroyed the badly needed supplies.

For the Americans, the southern campaign of 1778 to 1780 proved to be bitterly disappointing, especially for the Continental Army. Until December 1778, neither Georgia nor South Carolina really had been tested by the demands of war as had their neighbors to the north. That all changed when the British captured Savannah and unleashed the full brunt of the conflict on those states. Most worrisome was the fragile nature of the Articles of Confederation, which had been exposed in May 1779 when the South Carolina political leadership appeared willing to put the preservation of Charleston and their state ahead of the American union. That

political tremor prompted Congress to regenerate Continental forces to prove to Georgia and South Carolina they were still part of the United States, and their sister states of Virginia, Maryland, and Delaware were willing to send their troops to free them from British control. Still another point of contention was the Franco-American relationship: the French navy did not significantly hinder the British at sea, and American and French commanders did not always work well together, as demonstrated at Savannah.

As Southern Department commanders, both Benjamin Lincoln and Horatio Gates faced innumerable challenges during their tenures in that position. Those commanders toiled for months in the mundane but necessary matters of administration, supply, and recruitment, only to endure reputation-shattering defeats. One of their shared challenges was getting the needed support from Congress, who seemed to give the Southern Department a low priority, if any, and invested only enough resources to contain the British rather than conduct offensive operations.

Regarding Benjamin Lincoln, his leadership and organizational skills proved adequate to create the military capability needed to match, and sometimes exceed, that of Prévost. He rebuilt the army after the British captured Savannah and the defeat at Briar Creek. Then after a year of chess-like maneuvers by both armies, Lincoln finally managed to contain the British to Savannah. If Lincoln had a fault, it may have been his lack of a strong personality to influence other leaders to accept his ideas and vision. Instead, his deference to others, such as with d'Estaing at Savannah and the South Carolina leaders in Charleston, demonstrated acquiescence to those he saw as his superiors in military or political affairs.

In the case of Horatio Gates, he found himself in a completely unfamiliar environment but showed a quick grasp of the geography and the roles played by Marion, Sumter, and others to vex the British operations. The chance encounter of his and Cornwallis's armies at Camden forever stained his reputation as the "coward of Camden." Despite that blow, he soldiered on and attempted to recreate another army with the remnants left after Camden. Perhaps his greatest contribution, often overlooked, was his ability

to persuade Morgan to return to service and convince Congress to give Morgan a general's commission. His formation of a light corps, and assignment of leaders like Morgan and John Eager Howard to command that corps, proved providential for future operations. Gates in effect set up Greene for success by providing him with a small, but very experienced and capable, corps which he would use to achieve remarkable things the following year. For that alone, Gates deserves some credit.

Following Camden, the burden of resisting the British shifted to the American militia leaders, many of whom resided in the backcountry. Their determination inspired other patriots to fight a relentless war against the British and loyalists. After the fall of Charleston, a brutal civil war exploded between Americans and loyalists, characterized by extreme violence and bloodshed. In early fall 1780, the dynamics of the southern campaign changed dramatically when the American militia gained the upper hand over their loyalist neighbors at the Battle of Kings Mountain. Consequently, a frustrated and disappointed Cornwallis gave up any further effort to recruit loyalists and would limit himself to using his small regular forces, which grew scarcer through attrition in each battle. Clinton described Kings Mountain as “the worst consequences to the King's affairs in South Carolina, and unhappily 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.” More links were added to Clinton's chain that fall with the defeat of Wemyss at Fish Dam Ford and Tarleton at Blackstock's plantation, events which demonstrated that Americans' ability to merge small bands of militiamen into large temporary forces was not an anomaly, but the norm—and would prove decisive in future battles in the south.

Echoes from the southern campaign of 1778–1780 would linger into the next year. Gates's “flying army,” led by Morgan, Howard, and William Washington, awaited a commander with enough skill to wield it effectively against the enemy, and that commander would be Maj. Gen. Nathanael Greene. Clinton's humiliation of Lincoln and the Americans at Charleston also would not be forgotten soon.

Almost eighteen months later, the Americans and their French allies would repay that humiliation to the British by denying the British army the customary honors during their surrender—which would be accepted not by George Washington, but by Benjamin Lincoln—at Yorktown.



## APPENDIX



### **“Order, Regularity, & Discipline”: Waging War in the Eighteenth Century**

by Joseph A. Seymour

By 1775, armies in Europe and North America had developed into complex forces organized around the infantry regiment. Artillery provided fire support. Mounted units performed reconnaissance, screened attacks and retreats, and added shock. Engineers and pioneers built and demolished fortifications and other works. Artificers repaired and maintained weapons and ordnance. Surgeons treated the sick and wounded. Civilian commissaries made, procured, and transported supplies and rations. All of them supported the foot soldiers, who usually dominated the battlefield.

#### **Composition**

The Continental Army and state militia generally organized their infantry regiments using the British model, with a colonel in command, aided by a lieutenant colonel, major, and regimental staff. A regiment had ten companies, including one light and one grenadier company. The light company consisted of the best shots, the cleverest, and the most agile in the regiment. These soldiers specialized in screening, skirmishing, patrolling, and scouting. Congress dispensed early on with the grenadier company, with its brawny shock troops who often formed the vanguard of assaults, and usually authorized

nine companies. Each company carried equipment and additional ammunition in one or two wagons. When the situation called for the infantry to operate away from its baggage train, soldiers placed extra ammunition and essential items in their knapsacks. Most companies had a few women on their rolls. Although not officially in the army, they could draw rations, and sometimes pay, by performing various essential duties, including nursing the sick and wounded and laundering the soldiers' clothing. Captains and lieutenants directed the maneuver and fire of the platoons in their companies. Sergeants and corporals maintained unit cohesion in battle, assisted officers, and enforced discipline in the sections under their charge. Drummers, who ranked between corporals and sergeants, communicated orders in camp and battle.

## Equipment

A soldier's basic fighting equipment was known as a stand of arms, which commonly consisted of a musket; a bayonet; a cartridge box of wood, leather, or tin containing between twenty-three and twenty-nine paper cartridges; and cleaning tools. A standard firearm of the period was the British Land Pattern musket. It fired a powerful load consisting of a 1-ounce lead ball propelled by nearly a half ounce of gunpowder. Its oversized barrel of about 0.76- to 0.80-inch diameter made it easier to load. A ball fired from a musket of this type could reach massed troops out to 300 yards. At 100 yards, it was accurate enough to hit an individual and powerful enough to penetrate a two-inch elm plank. Continental, state, and militia forces augmented existing musket stores with locally made copies of the Land Pattern and imported French, German, Dutch, and Spanish arms of similar bore sizes and ballistics. Soldiers also shouldered sporting (nonmilitary issue) arms of different calibers, sometimes retrofitted to mount bayonets. The lack of serviceable arms slowed augmentation and the integration of reinforcements. Furthermore, companies equipped with a mix of arms could not easily sustain fire, let alone mount effective bayonet assaults.

Both armies also issued rifles to light troops or recruited experienced riflemen who brought their own. The rifles usually followed two patterns: the short-barreled, large-bore Germanic or *Jäger* (hunter) rifle, and the long-barreled, small-bore Pennsylvania rifle. Less powerful than muskets, both were accurate to about 300 yards and took about one minute to load. Neither could mount a bayonet. In 1777, British Maj. Patrick Ferguson fielded an innovative breech-loading rifle that mounted a bayonet, but it saw limited service.

## Tactics

The musket's capabilities shaped tactics. A trained soldier could fire three rounds per minute. After twenty-five shots, the piece became too hot to handle, and the accumulation of residual gunpowder (known as powder-fouling) required cleaning and slowed reloading. Regiments formed in line at close order, presenting a continuous front of muskets and bayonets to concentrate their fire and mass to maximum effect. Close ranks also enabled company commanders to keep their troops together and thus better control them. The soldiers easily could hear orders communicated by drumbeat and could support each other using linear tactics described in tactical publications such as the *Manual Exercise, As Ordered by His Majesty in 1764*. In 1778, the Continental Army introduced a system spelled out in the *Regulations for the Order and Discipline of the Troops of the United States*, nicknamed the Blue Book. Well-drilled companies could execute a variety of maneuvers to bring their firepower or bayonets to bear, unleashing simultaneous volleys with devastating effect, or firing alternately by platoon to sustain a running fire. Infantry usually closed to the optimal range of 40 yards for a killing volley before a bayonet assault. While battalions also could extend their intervals to optimize individual fire, volume rather than accuracy usually decided a battle's outcome.

Artillery on both sides organized as separate regiments and battalions but fought as detachments as needed. With a range

of several hundred yards, 3-, 4-, and 6-pounder guns supported battalions in battle. With their slightly longer range, 8- and 12-pounders supported brigades, while larger guns with greater range operated from fortifications. Mortars fired exploding shells in a high arc to get over walls or other obstacles. Howitzers fired shells either directly at troops or in an arc. Artillerists and wagon teams were valuable assets. Commanders therefore often ordered crews that were about to be overrun by the enemy to disable their guns with spikes and mallets and abandon the weapons to save themselves and their teams.

Both forces also employed light dragoons, a type of mounted infantry. The scarcity of large horse breeds in America, the cost of transporting such mounts, and the uneven topography challenged the use of cavalry. Organized as regiments or separate troops, dragoons fought both mounted and dismounted and were armed with sabers, carbines, and, occasionally, pistols. Depending on time and terrain, both armies frequently detached light infantry, riflemen, artillery, and dragoons into separate battalions or combined them into corps or legions.

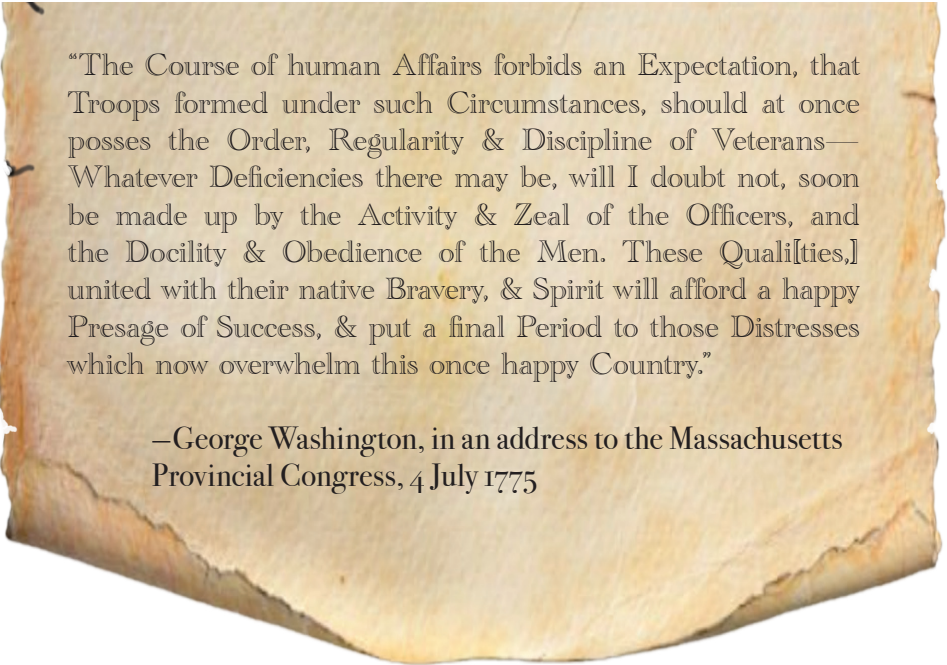
## **Fortifications**

European and colonial governments constructed dozens of forts before and during the war to defend important cities, towns, and key points. Field fortifications included fort-like redoubts, arrow-shaped flèches, and crescent-shaped lunettes. These structures were built of large wicker cylinders, called gabions, which were filled with soil or rubble, and then reinforced by bundles of sticks called fascines, covered with soil and sod, and surrounded by moats. As time permitted, soldiers erected palisades (walls of vertical wooden stakes), placed fraises (sharpened stakes) at a slant on the inner surface of the moat, and laid an abatis (a network of felled trees with sharpened branches) to slow infantry assaults. For a portable obstacle, artificers would use a cheval-de-frise, which typically consisted of sharpened stakes projecting from a log or beam. To fortify harbor defenses and block

rivers, engineers employed log booms connected with heavy chains and created the naval version of a cheval-de-frise by constructing rock-filled timber boxes bearing sharpened logs.



Technology dictated tactics, which in turn influenced formations. The contending forces frequently deviated from the standards prescribed by regulations or government allocations as they dealt with issues of personnel, materiel, and authority. Necessity and mission spurred the evolution of regulations, tactics, and equipment during the war. That was particularly the case for the new army of the United States. As the war progressed, American soldiers attained a high level of proficiency that earned the confidence of those they served and the respect of both allies and enemies.



“The Course of human Affairs forbids an Expectation, that Troops formed under such Circumstances, should at once possess the Order, Regularity & Discipline of Veterans— Whatever Deficiencies there may be, will I doubt not, soon be made up by the Activity & Zeal of the Officers, and the Docility & Obedience of the Men. These Qualities,] united with their native Bravery, & Spirit will afford a happy Presage of Success, & put a final Period to those Distresses which now overwhelm this once happy Country.”

—George Washington, in an address to the Massachusetts Provincial Congress, 4 July 1775

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# MAP SYMBOLS



Route of march/attack



Retreat



Fortifications/Redoubts



Boat Bridge



Battle/Engagement



Abatis

## MILITARY UNITS

American	French	British	German	
				Main Body
				Mounted Wing
				Division
				Division Cavalry
				Brigade
				Brigade Cavalry
				Regiment
				Regimental Cavalry
				Battalion
				Battalion Cavalry
				Company
				Company Cavalry
				Sharpshooter
				Artillery
				Warships



## THE AUTHOR



Steven J. Rauch served as the branch historian for the U.S. Army Signal Corps at Fort Gordon, Georgia, for twenty-three years until his retirement from that position on 14 June 2025. He received his bachelor's and master's degrees in history from Eastern Michigan University. He was commissioned as an ordnance officer and served in many logistics assignments until his retirement from the Army in 2002. During his military career, he was an assistant professor of military science at the University of Michigan and an assistant professor of history at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College. He has also been an adjunct professor of history at Augusta State University, now Augusta University.

He has written and presented his scholarship about the American Revolution through various forums, including *Army History*, the *Journal of Military History*, and the *Encyclopedia of the American Revolutionary War*, as well as academic conferences such as the Society for Military History, Georgia Association of Historians, and many state and local historical societies. As an army historian, he has led professional military education staff rides to many historic battlefields, including those of the American Revolution such as Cowpens, Ninety Six, and Yorktown. He serves as a promoter and adviser to revolutionary war battlefield preservation organizations including the Southern Campaigns of the American Revolution, South Carolina Battlefield Trust, and Georgia Battlefield Association.

