

# Davie used intelligence to stymie British invaders

■ Former governor, founder of UNC-Chapel Hill played crucial role in helping to form fledgling nation.

**W**illiam Richardson Davie (1756-1820), nephew and namesake of the distinguished Presbyterian minister, William Richardson of the Waxhaws, Lancaster County, came to South Carolina from England at age 5.

Davie was educated by his uncle at the Waxhaw Academy and Queen's Museum in Charlotte, where he was prepared by the College of New Jersey, later Princeton. At Princeton he quickly displayed his high intelligence and leadership qualities. Before graduation, however, he joined Gen. Washington's army and participated in the Long Island campaign. When the campaign was over he returned to Princeton to finish his education and graduated with "first honors."

Returning to the South, Davie stopped in Salisbury, N.C. long enough to study law with Spruce Macay, the most well-known frontier lawyer of his time. Later, Macay taught law to Andrew Jackson, who like Davie, was from the Waxhaws.

Before Davie finished his law studies, the American Revolution had shifted to the southern arena. The 24-year-old Davie, itching to fight, persuaded an older friend, William Barnett, to raise a "troop of horse." Soon, Davie was in charge. He was severely wounded in the battle of Stono in June 1779.

While recovering from his battle wounds, Davie displayed his restless energy and a lifelong habit of responding to changing events by returning to Salisbury to finish his law studies. A biographer described him at that time as, "Tall, graceful, and strikingly handsome . . . (possessed with) elegant culture, thrilling eloquence, and a graciousness of manner."

As soon as he recovered his health, Davie sought another army post. His uncle, William Richardson, had committed suicide and left part of his estate, which was considerable by frontier standards, to Davie. The entire inheritance was spent raising an



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army corps for which he received a regular North Carolina commission.

Col. Davie sometimes fought alone, but most frequently he joined his troops with those of the partisan leaders, Thomas Sumter, Francis Marion, and Andrew Pickens. Davie is regarded as the most talented, and certainly best educated, of the lot.

It has been said that Davie's corps was "never surprised or dispersed," although he was forced into what one historian termed a "judicious retreat" at Hanging Rock. Even then, most of the casualties were British captives, riding double on horseback, who were fired upon by their British comrades.

Davie was particularly skilled at surrounding and trapping units larger than his own. His most brilliant exploits came when, in sight of a large British camp, he trapped a group of Loyalists and cut them to pieces, taking no prisoners. Before the nearby British army could respond, Davie was off with 60 horses and a hundred muskets. He lost not a single man.

Most of Davie's battles placed him between the enemy and his beloved Waxhaws. It was Davie, more than any other single officer, who gave the town of Charlotte the appellation, "a d---d hornet's nest," by Lord Cornwallis.

After the war Davie gained many honors. He was a North Carolina delegate to the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia. He founded the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He was governor of North Carolina (1798-99). In June 1799, President Adams appointed Davie as an envoy to France. Like Adams, Davie was a lifelong Federalist.

When slightly less than 50 years of age, Davie sold his North Carolina properties and moved to "Tivoli" in Chester County. He was elected president of the S.C. Agricultural Society. Highly respected by the citizens of both Carolinas, Davie served a number of years on the commission that finally settled the N.C.-S.C. boundary line dispute in 1813.

Davie died in 1820 and is buried in a handsome enclosure at the Old Waxhaw Cemetery not far from the simpler tombs of many of his old Revolutionary comrades-in-arms.

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