

CORNWALLIS IN THIS AREA

The fall of Charles Town in May 1780 drove the South Carolina provincial government to North Carolina in an effort to escape their sure execution as plotters against the Mother Country.

Lord Cornwallis, head of the British army, had little opposition in the low country except for the forays of Francis Marion, the "Swampfox," and his men. In spite of his military brilliance, however, Marion could not prevent Cornwallis from moving his troops into the inland town of Camden. In mid-August, an American army under General Horatio Gates launched an assault on the British with disastrous results for the Americans.

But Cornwallis had two major problems. First, a considerable portion of his army, including officers, were struck with fevers that incapacitated them for weeks. Second, the Scotch-Irish of the upcountry stubbornly refused to bow to the British. Cornwallis, at first, dismissed the untrained militia of the upcountry as a minor annoyance, nothing more.

To facilitate his plan to crush George Washington's Continental army, Cornwallis sent a message to his post commanders that included the orders that any men who had taken up arms against the King were to be punished "with the greatest rigour." That "every militiaman who has borne arms with us and afterwards joined the enemy shall be immediately hanged." If any refused to bear arms for the King, then they "may be imprisoned and their whole property taken from them or destroyed."

This order galvanized opposition. Men flocked to join the various patriot leaders of their neighborhoods. In turn, most of their officers followed the leadership of General Thomas Sumter. Others, especially if they owned a horse, enlisted in Maj. William Richard Davie's cavalry unit.

Davie was to the upcountry what Francis Marion was to the low country—a daring leader who preferred attacks that required speed and surprise. On July 31, Major Davie, a native of the Waxhaws of Lancaster, who knew the countryside well, swept down on a British garrison at Hanging Rock and thoroughly defeated them.

Meantime, Gen. William Lee Davidson of North Carolina was raising troops to defend that colony and Davie joined his forces with Davidson. Cornwallis' troops swept into the Waxhaws, swept it clean of foodstuffs and animals before moving on toward Charlotte. Going up the Steel Creek road which served as the boundary line between North and South Carolina, Cornwallis' forces entered the village of Charlotte from the southeast on September 26, 1780.

Patriot militiamen fiercely defended the tiny courthouse but were vastly outnumbered and had to surrender. Cornwallis settled in Charlotte to consolidate his forces and allow his foragers to cover the countryside in search of food for the troops and for the horses. Also he waited for re-enforcements. His re-enforcements were slaughtered at Kings Mountain. The battle of Kings Mountain is considered the turning point of the war.

And then Cornwallis' most effective officer, Banastre Tarleton was defeated by Sumter at Blackstock's.

There was another factor at work—Davie's cavalry and Davidson's mounted men, not exceeding 400 in number, were so effective at harassing the British that the troops

over-estimated the size of the Patriot forces. Headquarters calculated that, instead of 3-400 enemy troops that there were 5,000.

Cornwallis withdrew from Charlotte and headed for Wainnsboro by way of the Nation Ford Road. Then word came that Tarleton was again defeated. This time it was at Cowpens.

The British panicked and headed for Virginia where they would surrender, after six years of warfare, to the Americans at Yorktown, Virginia.