

Otho Holland Williams and the  
Southern Campaign of 1780-1782

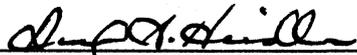
Arnold W. Kalmanson

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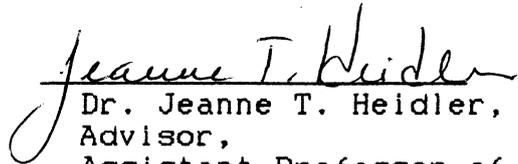
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### Vita

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Thesis Abstract

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Directed by Jeanne T. Heldler

Of the many patriots called to arms in the Revolution, Otho Holland Williams of Maryland is one of the least remembered of those who held major command. Williams played an important role as an advisor, counselor and subordinate commander to both Horatio Gates and Nathanael Greene. Whenever a task had to be done both expeditiously and exactly as Greene wanted it, he gave the job to Williams. Yet Williams has been largely ignored by historians while the activities of many of his subordinates and superiors have been heavily documented. Although his part in the Revolution has been recognized by most of the major biographers of Nathanael Greene, this documentation shows Williams as merely an adjunct to

Greene's military career. However, an examination of available primary and secondary resources shows that Williams was in fact a significant figure in his own right.

Williams' military career spanned the entire Revolutionary War, with continuous service from the siege of Boston to the evacuation of Charleston. He commanded the Light Corps on the last portion of the retreat to the Dan river in the winter of 1780. His brilliant disengagements saved the Southern army. His expertise in using light troops effectively screened Greene's force from Cornwallis both on the retreat and when Greene recrossed into North Carolina. Williams' effective command of the Maryland Brigade at the battles of Gullford Courthouse, Hobkirk's Hill and Eutaw Springs show that he was a skilled commander of regular line soldiers as well as a brilliant leader of light troops. His utter fearlessness in battle was recognized by the Continental Congress with a promotion to brigadier general after Eutaw Springs. Williams was universally respected and liked within the Continental Army. Such well known figures as George Washington, Horatio Gates, Nathanael Greene and Henry Lee all spoke highly of not only Williams' prowess on the battlefield, but also his gentlemanly demeanor and fine mind.

After the war, Williams returned to Baltimore and civilian life where he made a modest fortune in business, and founded the town of Williamsport, Maryland. The fact that he died young, before he had time to write his memoirs, contributed to his relative obscurity. Nevertheless, Williams deserves to be remembered for his valuable contribution to the Southern campaign of the Revolutionary War.

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## I. Introduction

Of the many patriots who pledged their "lives, fortunes and sacred honor" to the cause of American Independence, Otho Holland Williams of Maryland is one of the least remembered of those officers who held major commands. Williams served in all of the major theaters of the war from the siege of Boston in 1775 through the evacuation of Charleston, South Carolina, in 1782. He had command of units from company to brigade level and played a significant role in the war in the Southern Department of the Continental Army during the campaigns of 1780-1782.

Williams was one of the most popular officers in the Continental Army. He was well liked by both his subordinates and superiors. Williams had a reputation as a stern but fair disciplinarian, able both to give and take orders. He involved himself little in the politics of the army while not ignoring his own advancement. He was by all accounts a good businessman, a loving family

man, officer and a gentleman at a time when the same could not be said about many of his contemporaries.<sup>1</sup>

An excellent description of Williams was written by William Johnson. He praises Williams in terms that seem almost too fulsome, until one researches this interesting man and then one sees that Johnson's praise is no more than just. He said of Williams:

Before I entered upon this undertaking, I was almost ignorant of Colonel Williams's character, but I have met with no one in the course of my investigations, that has interested me more. He did not survive the revolution long enough to have his merits engraven on our recollection by the association of memory. He retired not from the service while the tug of war lasted, but as soon as the enemy were driven into Charleston, he obtained a furlough to attend to the care of a constitution broken down by wounds and hard service. From this time, he rather lingered than lived, until at length, he sunk under the most racking of diseases [tuberculosis]. But the country he had done honour to, was grateful; and his latter days were passed in all the honours and comforts that his state of health admitted of.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Accounts of Williams' life appear in the biographies of Nathanael Greene written by William Johnson, Sketches of the Life and Correspondence of Nathanael Greene, 2 vols. (Charleston, South Carolina: A.E. Miller, 1822; reprint edition, New York: De Capo Press), 1:viii, Charles Caldwell, Memoirs of the Life and Campaigns of the Hon. Nathaniel [sic] Greene (Philadelphia: Robert Desilver, 1819), 176-80, Francis V. Greene General Greene, (New York, D. Appleton & Co. 1893; reprint edition, Kennicut Press, New York, 1970), and George Washington Greene, The Life of Nathanael Greene, 3 vols. New York: Hurd & Houghton, 1871, 3:106-9, and Henry Lee, Memoirs of the War in the Southern Department of the United States (Philadelphia: University Publishing Co. Bradford and Inskeep, Publishers; 1812 reprint, New York: Bart Franklin, 1970), 1:410-14. All of these sketches of Williams' life give laudatory accounts of his military achievements, personal attributes, and social skills.

<sup>2</sup> William Johnson, Sketches of the Life and Correspondence of Nathanael Greene, 2 vols. 1:viii,

Johnson did not overstate his case in 1822 nor did time rectify the lack of information on Williams. He has indeed been overlooked by historians for far too long. The only secondary account of his life other than a study of his papers for a Master's Degree Thesis by John J. Tierney in 1944 was a small pamphlet written by Osmond Tiffany in 1851. His significant role in the revolution has been ignored or relegated to a secondary place in works on the lives of other more famous figures in the Southern Campaign.

## II. Family Background and Service in the Northern Army

Although prominent after the war, little is known about Williams or his family prior to the Revolution because few records of Williams' early life have survived. However, among the facts that are known, are that Williams was born in Prince George's County, Maryland, in March 1749, to Joseph and Prudence (Holland) Williams and that his parents or his grandparents had emigrated from Wales to the colony of Maryland, in the early 1700's. Not long after Williams' birth his father moved the family to Conococheague Creek, in what was then Frederick County, Maryland, and bought a large plot of land.<sup>1</sup> Otho was the second of the eight Williams children and the eldest son. In 1762, when Otho was about thirteen years old, his father died. Prudence Williams probably died at the same time or some time before her husband as she is not mentioned in any records after the death of Joseph Williams. As the eldest son, Otho was made the legal guardian of his younger brothers and sisters. But since

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<sup>1</sup> Osmond Tiffany, A Sketch of the Life and Services of Gen. Otho Holland Williams (Baltimore: John Murphy & Co. 1851), 3.

Williams was little more than a boy himself, the actual responsibility for the welfare of the family went to his married older sister, Marcy (Williams) Ross, who was married to George Ross, the Clerk of Frederick County.

Joseph Williams had not been a rich man and left only a small estate, the income of which was insufficient to support the seven of his eight children still too young to leave home. However, the Ross family's wealth and influence in western Maryland allowed Marcy to help her younger siblings. In an attempt to ease the plight of the family, Marcy suggested that Otho be apprenticed to her husband. The job would teach Williams a respectable trade, provide him with room and board, and ease the drain on Joseph Williams' small estate.

Williams worked as a clerk in the Frederick County office until the death of George Ross. After the death of her husband, Marcy married Colonel John Stull, a politically powerful man in western Maryland and the colonial capital Annapolis. The Williams family was one of good standing in society notwithstanding their lack of property. Marcy's marriages and the excellent education evident in Otho's letters and in the letters of his younger brother Elie, point to a privileged, if not wealthy, station in colonial society. Their legible

handwriting, the references to the classics that were common literary devices in 18th century writing among the upper classes, and the literacy of their letters are in contrast to the nearly unreadable handwriting and poor grammar of some of their contemporaries.<sup>2</sup>

By the time Ross died, Williams had completed his training as a county clerk and had no difficulty securing another position with the colonial government. By 1767 Williams, then eighteen years old, was employed as one of the clerks of Baltimore County, a position he held until 1774.<sup>3</sup>

In 1774 Williams returned to Frederick to enter private business, where he enjoyed a moderate if shortlived success. Less than a year later in 1775 the struggle in the colonies against the ministry of Lord North and the King's party moved out of the political arena and into one of armed conflict. After the Battles of Lexington and Concord, Williams was offered a lieutenancy in Captain Thomas Price's Rifle Company. Commissions in the militia were usually given only to members of the upper classes of the colonies. Williams

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<sup>2</sup> John J. Tierney, "The Life and Letters of Otho Holland Williams, 1775- 1783," Master's Thesis (Washington, D. C.: Catholic University, 1944), 6.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 3.

might have owed his commission and his easy acceptance in Annapolis to the influence of the Stull family. For whatever reason it was offered, Williams gladly accepted the commission and marched off to Boston with Michael Cresap's and Price's two rifle companies sent by western Maryland. 4

Williams saw duty in the summer of 1775 at the siege of Boston. During his service there, Williams was promoted to captain and was given command of Price's company of riflemen. Perhaps the promotion was given because Price was wounded or promoted, but no records survive.<sup>5</sup> Williams next served as a major in the Maryland Rifle Regiment, a position he was promoted to in June 1776.<sup>6</sup> During the New York campaign of the summer and fall of 1776, Williams found himself sharing in the reverses suffered by the patriots in their attempt to defend New York from a massive British invasion. Williams fought at the Battle of Long Island and in the retreat across Manhattan. From the siege of Boston until the

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4 Muster roll of Captain Price's Company, July-September 1775; Otho Holland Williams Papers in the Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore, Maryland, MS 908:1.

5 Elizabeth Merritt, introduction to the Calendar of the Otho Holland Williams Papers, Maryland Historical Society (Baltimore: Maryland Historical Records Survey Project, 1940), 3.

6 Commission, 27 June 1776; Archives of Maryland (Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 1887-1931), 18:77.

battles around New York in 1776, no specific record of Williams' service exist. It is known that he knew or met General Horatio Gates in Boston. At the behest of a mutual friend, Williams passed on news of Gates' family to the general.<sup>7</sup>

Upon the retreat of the main army after the Battle of Harlem Heights, only Fort Washington on the west bank of the Hudson River was left in American hands. An approximately four thousand man garrison, including four hundred Maryland soldiers of Colonel Moses Rawling's Regiment, which included Williams' two hundred Riflemen, were left to defend this fort against the inevitable siege. Williams distinguished himself at the siege when his riflemen drove back a Hessian charge and held a point on the outer works for over two hours. The Marylanders retreated only after the withdrawal of units on both their right and left flanks. Williams was seriously wounded in the groin, but as he later had five sons, he obviously recovered fully from this wound.<sup>8</sup> Williams and most of

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<sup>7</sup> John Carey to O. H. Williams, 12 October 1775, Williams Papers, MS 908:1.

<sup>8</sup> John J. Tierney, "The Life and Letters of Otho Holland Williams," 15-16; Henry B. Carrington, Battles of the American Revolution 1775-1781 (New York: A. S. Barnes & Co. 1877), 249-50; and Charles Bracelen Flood, Rise, and Fight Again: Perilous Times Along the Road to Independence (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1976), 127-133.

the garrison of the fort were made prisoners when the commander of the garrison, Colonel Robert Magraw of Pennsylvania, was forced to surrender to the British.<sup>9</sup>

Williams was a prisoner from November 1776 until January 1778. At first his situation was not a harsh one; as a wounded officer Williams was granted parole under the supervision of an officer of equal rank, Major John Duck, Lord Ackland. In spite of the differences in class and country, the two officers became close friends and were seen together in New York at many social functions. Williams was a frequent guest in the home of Lord Ackland and his wife Lady Harriet Ackland.<sup>10</sup> In September 1777 Ackland was transferred to the Canadian campaign, and without a protector, Williams ran afoul of the infamous Joshua Loring, the Loyalist Commissary of Prisoners, whose wife was the mistress of Lieutenant General, Sir William Howe. Williams was arrested for supposed parole violations and was held in New York's Provost Prison for the remainder of his captivity. The prison was run by the brutal and corrupt Provost Marshal, Captain William Cunningham. This stay in close confinement, in a prison that was already infamous for its unhealthy conditions,

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<sup>9</sup> Flood, Rise, and Fight Again, 127-133.

<sup>10</sup> Osmond Tiffany, A Sketch of the Life and Services of Gen. Otho Holland Williams, 6-7.

ruined Williams' health. It was there he might have developed the tuberculosis that eventually killed him.<sup>11</sup>

With the victory at Saratoga in October 1777, the American Army came into possession of a large number of high ranking British and Hessian prisoners. Gates proved his friendship for Williams by stipulating that Williams would be one of the prisoners to be exchanged. Coincidentally Williams was exchanged for Lord Ackland, the same officer who was both his guard and friend in the early days of Williams' captivity. Ackland was wounded at the Battle of Bemis Heights and captured at Saratoga with the defeated army of Major General John Burgoyne. Because of the large numbers of American prisoners in British hands, most of the field grade British officers spent little time in an American prison.<sup>12</sup>

Upon his exchange for Ackland, Williams returned to the service. With the rapid expansion of the Continental forces, experienced officers were in demand, and Williams was immediately promoted to lieutenant colonel in the Continental forces and commissioned colonel in the Maryland state forces.<sup>13</sup> Clearly Williams had not been

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 8-9.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 6-9.

<sup>13</sup> John Hanson to O.H. Williams, 16 January 1777, Williams Papers, MS 908:1.

forgotten by the army or by Maryland. He served in the Northern Department of the Continental Army from the time of his release from captivity until 1780. Colonel Williams was given command of the Sixth Maryland Regiment of the Line, and made Inspector General of the Maryland Line. The Sixth was a newly formed Continental regiment which Williams transformed into one of the best in the Maryland Line. During his period of command, Williams fought in the Battle of Monmouth, New Jersey in June 1778. This battle was the last major engagement in the central campaign of the Revolution.<sup>14</sup> He wrote his good friend Dr. Phillip Thomas about the American Army's pursuit of the British Army after the evacuation of Philadelphia. The Sixth Maryland, with Williams in command, saw action and suffered casualties. However, Williams did not disclose his part in the battle but spoke only of the other units of the army. He wrote that:

other detachments under [Generals Charles] Lee, [Charles] Scott, [Anthony] Wayne taking the field and being covered by the whole army the flight was continued till about 5 in the evening leav'g us masters of the field of Battle where I now sit hearing volleys that are discharged over the gallant Dead. We had not anything like a general action, the

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<sup>14</sup> This campaign extends from the Battle of Long Island in 1776 to the Battle of Monmouth in 1778. Only a few minor actions were fought in the North after 1778, and only a few of these occurred after 1780, leaving the future principle actions to be fought in the South.

Enemy had retired with their main army and baggage leaving only three thousand of their best troops divested of every thing but their fighting Tools.<sup>15</sup>

Williams spoke of the debilitating heat, the gallantry of the troops and of the heroism of General George Washington who led a charge against the British and rallied the faltering troops. He also spoke of Maryland's Colonel Nathaniel Ramsey's part in the rearguard which played a key role in preventing the withdrawal of the American force from becoming a rout. He also wrote of the casualties in his Sixth Regiment.<sup>16</sup>

After the Battle of Monmouth, Washington's army followed the British Army in its retreat to New York. Throughout the rest of 1778 Williams was in garrison with his unit around New York City. He was involved in only one minor action during this period which occurred when General Washington ordered the Sixth Maryland to relieve another unit and take over the patrols of roads from King's Ferry and Fort Montgomery in Bronx and Westchester counties, New York.<sup>17</sup> The unit operated against Tory

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<sup>15</sup> Otho H. Williams to Doctor Phillip Thomas, 29 June 1778, Williams Papers, MS 908.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> This area was known as the neutral ground and was as lawless as the most hotly contested areas of the South. Benson J. Lossing, The Pictorial Field-Book of the Revolution; or, Illustrations, by Pen and Pencil, of the History, Biography, Scenery, Relics, and Traditions of the War for Independence (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1859-60), 1:753.

and Whig Irregulars who called themselves by the colorful names of Cowboys and Skinners and under the guise of partisan warfare were little better than bandits. These irregular forces changed sides at will and had made Westchester county a lawless battleground.<sup>18</sup>

The winter of 1779 was a bleak one for the American forces in revolt against King George III. The war in the North, based principally around the main armies in New York, had settled down into a stalemate with the British bottled up in New York and the Continental Army headquartered in winter quarters at Morristown, New Jersey. The army under Washington had faced the worst winter since Valley Forge; the Pennsylvania Line had mutinied in protest over poor conditions and lack of pay. For Williams the winter was just as bleak and boring. While the army was in winter quarters, Williams spent his time training his troops and trying to avoid the political intrigue of a garrison force. His letters to and from his good friend and fellow Marylander, Colonel Samuel Smith, showed the intense competition for rank, command, and privilege engaged in by the officers of both the state and Continental forces. Williams, although well aware of the

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<sup>18</sup> Instructions from Headquarters, George Washington, 9 June 1779, Williams papers, MS 908:1.

intrigue, seems to have kept himself above the politics. The only break from the duty around New York came when Williams went home for a short time to recruit in western Maryland and had some time at home to recover his health after his imprisonment.<sup>19</sup>

This phase of Williams' career raised him from relative obscurity in civilian life to a position of high command in the Continental forces. This professional advancement was offset in part by the hardships of long captivity which caused permanent damage to his health. In many ways Williams' service in General Washington's army would serve him well for the rest of his life. In the Northern Army Williams received his training as a commander and from observing Washington, he learned to give and accept orders without question. He also met many influential people who would remain his lifelong friends and mentors. In fact, his most significant military commands would come under two of these friends, Major Generals Horatio Gates and Nathanael Greene.

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<sup>19</sup> Samuel Smith to O. H. Williams, 29 Nov. 1778 & 16 Jan. 1779, and O.H. Williams to Smith, 26 Jan. 1779, Williams Papers, MS 908:1.

### III. The Campaign of 1780

If the situation in the North was bad, the patriot cause in the South was no better; the Southern Department of the United States was under the command of Major General Benjamin Lincoln of Massachusetts, who at Charleston, South Carolina, in one long and bloody siege lost a battle, his army and the one major city in the Deep South. In April 1780, the main British force moved from New York under General Sir Henry Clinton to begin siege operations against Charleston. The plan to divide the New England colonies from the middle colonies died with the surrender of Burgoyne. The British now planned to win the war by reconquering first the Southern colonies, and with a divided and partially conquered America behind them, march north to secure the rest of the colonies.

On 16 April 1780, in an attempt to salvage the situation in the Carolinas, General Washington sent fourteen hundred troops of the Maryland, Delaware, and Virginia regiments south under Major General Baron Johann De Kalb to reinforce Lincoln and if possible to save Charleston from capture. Williams, with the Sixth Maryland Regiment, was part of this force. The primary mission of saving Charleston was not possible; news of the

surrender of the besieged army in Charleston reached De Kalb when he arrived at Head of Elk, Maryland, in June 1780. The reinforcements had arrived too late to do anything but start rebuilding resistance in the Carolinas.<sup>1</sup>

De Kalb found the situation in North Carolina to be almost untenable. The state government had made no provision to feed and supply the Continental troops and was unable to properly supply even the state militia, as the majority of the state's population was disaffected or actively hostile to the patriot cause. De Kalb held a council on the best course of action with his principal officers, Brigadier General William Smallwood, Brigadier General Mordecai Gist, and Colonel Otho Williams of Maryland, and Brigadier General Edward Stevens of Virginia. The only solution seen by these officers was to go into defensive positions until enough supplies were collected and enough additional troops could be raised to begin reconquest of the South. The Baron began to reorganize the army in the face of the tasks now before them. To fill a vacancy, De Kalb named Williams as Acting Deputy Adjutant General of the Southern Army, on 9 July.

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<sup>1</sup> Otho Holland Williams, "A Narrative of the Campaign of 1780" in Appendix A, W. Gilmore Simms, The Life of Nathanael Greene Major General in the Army of the Revolution (New York: Derby & Jackson, 1873), 360.

De Kalb wrote both to the state governments of the Southern States and to Congress for supplies and troops to start offensive actions.<sup>2</sup>

De Kalb's letters were to no avail as there were neither troops nor supplies to spare for the South. In addition, Major General Richard Caswell, the senior officer of the North Carolina Militia, steadfastly refused to give up the freedom of an independent command and report with the North Carolina Militia to the main army. De Kalb, although a gallant and resourceful officer, was a foreigner clearly not able to handle the political aspects of his command.<sup>3</sup> De Kalb was intended to be commander of the Maryland Division and second-in-command under Major General Benjamin Lincoln, not to command the entire Southern Department.<sup>4</sup>

General Washington wanted a more senior and a better known officer to take command of the campaign and recommended that Major General Nathanael Greene be appointed to the command of the Southern Department.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 359-60.

<sup>3</sup> Christopher Ward, The War of the Revolution, ed. John R. Alden (New York: Macmillan Co., 1952), 715.

<sup>4</sup> George Washington Greene, The Life of Nathanael Greene, 3 vol. (New York: Hurd & Houghton 1871), 3:15-17.

<sup>5</sup> H. L. Landers, The Battle of Camden, South Carolina: August 16, 1780 (Washington D.C.: U.S. Army War College, Government Printing Office, 1927), 4-7.

Unfortunately, Congress, responding to pressure from supporters of the "Hero of Saratoga," appointed Major General Horatio Gates to that command. Gates arrived on 25 July 1780, and Baron De Kalb thankfully handed over command of the army to him. Gates paid De Kalb the compliment of endorsing all of the Baron's standing orders as well as appointing De Kalb his second-in-command. On 3 August Gates replaced Williams as Acting Deputy Adjutant General of the Southern army, replacing him with the new commander's friend and Aide-de-Camp, Major Robert Armstrong. However, just two days later Williams was again given the post of Acting Deputy Adjutant General by Gates to replace the ailing Armstrong.<sup>6</sup> This duty was in addition to his duties as commanding officer of the Sixth Maryland Regiment and senior Colonel in Smallwood's Second Brigade.<sup>7</sup> His background as a county clerk along with his knowledge of military command made Williams well suited for the position of Adjutant General. His competence in this position was such that Williams was to keep both the Adjutant General post and the command of a line unit for the rest of the war.

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<sup>6</sup> O. H. Williams, "A Narrative of the Campaign," 361.

<sup>7</sup> H. L. Landers The Battle of Camden, 11.

Gates ordered a march south from the army's headquarters in Hillsborough, North Carolina into South Carolina. This move was over the objections of both De Kalb and Williams, both of whom stated their concern over the logistical situation that they said was so bad as to make any offensive operation by the regular force too risky. Williams wrote that Gates acted

as if actuated by a spirit of great activity and enterprise, ordered the troops to hold themselves in readiness to march at a moment's warning. The latter order was a matter of great astonishment to those who knew the real situation of the troops. But all difficulties were removed by the general's assurances that plentiful supplies of rum and rations were on the route and would overtake them in a day or two. . . . Colonel Williams, presuming on the friendship of the general, ventured to expostulate with him upon the seeming precipitate and inconsiderate step he was taking.<sup>8</sup>

Since Gates had just arrived from the North, he must have known that no supplies were on the way. Instead of listening to the advice of his regular officers, Gates relied upon the optimistic opinions of Thomas Pinckney, who was the representative to the army of South Carolina Governor Edward Rutledge, and upon the advice of the North Carolina militia officers who urged that the army march by the most direct route to Camden. Thus Gates, acting upon the advice of these militia officers, ordered the army to

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<sup>8</sup> O. H. Williams, "A Narrative of the Campaign," 368-70.

march by the easterly route towards Camden. On the morning of 27 July 1780, the small army started offensive operations against the British forces in the South under the command of Lieutenant General Charles, Lord Cornwallis.<sup>9</sup>

Gates planned to attack the main British outpost at Camden, South Carolina, commanded by Brigadier General Francis Rawdon Hastings, Lord Rawdon. Unable to convince Gates of the inadvisability of marching with the army in such a poor state, Williams stated that the line of march that Gates had proposed to march was through barren, sandy plains, lacking supplies and forage and was in the hands of people hostile to the American cause. Williams took advantage of his long standing friendship with Gates to urge a more westerly route through the hill country. De Kalb and most of the regular officers favored the westerly route because, although longer, it was in friendly hands and abounded in supplies and gave the option of passing through either Salisbury or Charlotte, North Carolina. Either town could be used to recruit additional militia, would be useful as a base for the storage of baggage and heavy supplies, and serve as a haven for the women, children, sick, wounded and other noncombatants with the army. In spite of this advice, Gates insisted on the most

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 370.

direct route toward the main British outpost at Camden, South Carolina. The general was of the opinion that the best chance of surprising the British under Rawdon was to take the shortest route.<sup>10</sup> Williams was proved correct as to both the condition of the army and the country through which Gates chose to march.

Almost as soon as the army began its march south, the lack of food and other vital supplies resulted in slow progress. The lack of food caused the troops to pick unripened corn and peaches from the farmers' fields as the army marched past. The well-known effect of unripened fruit on the digestive system made itself felt almost immediately in the disorder of the ranks and the number of stragglers. The force's lack of sufficient numbers of wagons and draft animals caused needed supplies to be left behind. The shortage of both horses and forage to feed the few they had caused some of the American army's few mounted infantry and cavalry to be detached to guard heavy baggage and stores and the remainder to be used as flankers close to the main force. <sup>11</sup>

Gates underestimated the possible value of the mounted troops who made up the bulk of the partisan

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 368-70.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

militia in the Southern states. Cavalry did not play a large role in the dense forests of New York State nor could cavalry be used to best advantage in the semi-siege operations around New York City. As mounted Infantry was virtually unknown in the Northern campaign, Gates, having little experience and less regard for this arm of the service, did not use his mounted infantry militia<sup>12</sup> or his cavalry to their full effectiveness in the South, a part of the country ideally suited to a light mobile force. On 15 August, in spite of repeated pleas from Williams and most of his other subordinate unit commanders, Gates issued the following orders:

After General Orders.- The sick, the extra artillery stores, the heavy baggage, and such quartermaster's stores as are not immediately wanted, to march this evening, under a guard to Waxhaws.

To this order the general requests the brigadier-generals to see that those under their command pay the most exact and scrupulous obedience.

Lieutenant-Colonel Edmonds, with the remaining guns of the park, will take post and march with the Virginia brigade under General Stevens; he will direct, as any deficiency happens in the artillery park affixed to the other brigades, to supply it immediately; his military staff and a proportion of his officers, with forty of his men, are to attend him and await his orders.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Militia in the Southern states was usually mounted infantry who rode to the battle and fought on foot. Greene stated in a letter to Lee that, "It would be next to impossible to get the militia to send away their horses. They are so attached to this mode of carrying on the war that they will not listen to any other." Henry Lee, Memiors, 1:360.

<sup>13</sup> O. H. Williams, "A Narrative of the Campaign," 370.

In this order for the army to march Gates left no doubt about his intentions by stating that:

The troops will be ready to march precisely at ten o'clock, in the following order, viz.:-  
Colonel [Charles] Armand's advance: cavalry commanded by Colonel Armand: Colonel Porterfield's light infantry upon the right flank of Colonel Armand, in indian file, [single file] two hundred yards from the road; Major Armstrong's light infantry in the same order as Colonel Porterfield,s upon the left flank. Advance guard of foot, composed of the advanced pickets, first brigade of Maryland, second brigade of Maryland, division of North Carolina, Virginia division; rear-guard, volunteer cavalry, upon the flank of the baggage, equally divided.<sup>14</sup>

Gates had every detail of the march planned and published in the orders. This management of every part of the march was to prove just how badly Gates misunderstood the militia forces that made up the largest part of his force. He instructed the cavalry and light infantry at the vanguard and on the flanks to protect against attack.

In case of attack by the enemy's cavalry in front, the light infantry upon each flank will instantly move up, and give and continue the most galling fire upon the enemy's horse. This will enable Colonel Armand not only to support the shock of the enemy's charge, but finally to rout them; the colonel will therefore consider the order to stand the attack of the enemy's cavalry, be their numbers what they may, as positive.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

Armand took offense at the specific orders given to him as to when and how he should attack. He felt that Gates was doubting either his competence or his courage. Gates in his enthusiasm for his plan ignored the possibility that his raw militia might panic under a surprise attack, nor did he think that if surprised, his light troops should do other than stand the charge. He ordered that the light troops under Stevens would be reinforced and act as flankers on the right. General Caswell would hold a similar position on the left. Colonel Armand and his undermanned and untried cavalry would be in the vanguard. Gates showed his total misunderstanding of the situation with the paragraph in the march order dealing with silence on the march, ordering a death sentence to any soldier who fired without orders. The militia officers were still elected in many units and could not or would not enforce this order even if there had been any hope of the offender being arrested.<sup>16</sup>

After this order was written and given to Williams to issue as Adjutant General, he took it upon himself to call upon the unit commanders to conduct a field return of the number of troops present, equipped, and fit for duty. Gates had expressed the belief that the number in his

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<sup>16</sup> Francis V. Greene, General Greene, 172.

command was close to seven thousand. Williams believed the number to be far less; this was the case as the unit returns which Williams was able to deliver to Gates showed the actual number of soldiers fit for duty was only 3052.<sup>17</sup> This number was less than half of the soldiers Gates had thought he commanded. In spite of these lower numbers, Gates published the orders, and the army marched toward Camden and the expected battle with Lord Rawdon's force. Gates, in part because of his lack of effective reconnaissance, held the mistaken belief that the British had only the six hundred men under Lord Rawdon at Camden. However, Cornwallis upon hearing of the American move into South Carolina, marched to join Rawdon.<sup>18</sup> At dawn on 16 August the small, underfed, and ill-equipped army met the British at Sanders Creek just outside of Camden.

The battle itself was both unexpected and badly managed by Gates. He met not only Lord Rawdon's detachment but Cornwallis who had completed his march to reinforce the Camden garrison. As Gates was maneuvering into position to attack the town of Camden, the information was brought to him that Lord Cornwallis's main force was only a few miles away. Gates called a council of war. The issue was not whether to fight but how.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 171-73.

<sup>18</sup> H. L. Landers, The Battle of Camden, 13.

General Stevens said, "Gentlemen, it is too late to do anything but fight."<sup>19</sup> The close proximity of the British and their superior supply and transportation systems made a retreat an impossibility. Gates had the battle he was seeking, but not against a smaller force under a second rate commander; he now faced the main British force in the South under its best general.

Gates attempted to fight a set battle. He ordered most of the Maryland and Delaware Continentals under the command of De Kalb into line on the right facing the British left. He then placed the artillery in the center of the line along with the North Carolina Militia under Caswell. Stevens' Virginia Militia was on the left with Smallwood's Brigade in reserve. Williams sighted the first of the British advance and called on Captain Anthony Singleton, the artillery commander, to open fire at 200 yards. Williams, after giving the order to open fire, rode to join Gates in the rear of the second line with the staff. Williams thought he saw a disorder in the ranks of one of Lieutenant Colonel James Webster's Guard Regiments which was forming on the right, and brought this to the attention of Gates. Williams suggested that the Virginians attack the British before the Guards brigade could form into line and Gates said to Williams, "That's

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<sup>19</sup> O. H. Williams, "A Narrative of the Campaign," 368-70.

right, sir. Let it be done."<sup>20</sup> Williams immediately rode to Stevens to relay the order to attack, and stayed to charge with the Virginia troops. If there was ever any disorder, it was quickly resolved. The British, seeing the militia advance, formed for a counterattack.

Williams, knowing that the militia would become unnerved by the advancing British, took fifty volunteers to skirmish ahead of the main force. This gallant effort was doomed to failure as Stevens' troops ran at the first sight of a British bayonet.<sup>21</sup> However, this was only the first of the many disasters of the battle.

Cornwallis ordered a general attack on the left of the line. The Virginia militia, already stung, ran, and the North Carolina troops seeing the rout, panicked immediately upon seeing the British advance in their direction. Most of the militia never even fired a shot before they ran. Only Colonel Henry Dixon's one regiment of North Carolina Militia stood their ground for a short time on the left flank of the Marylanders. Williams wrote later that "at least two thirds of the Army fled without firing a shot."<sup>22</sup> Only the Maryland and

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 369.

<sup>21</sup> H. L. Landers, The Battle of Camden, 44-7.

<sup>22</sup> O.H. Williams, "A Narrative of the Campaign," 369.

Delaware Continentals in the center and right under De Kalb held their position. Smallwood ordered his brigade forward to the aid of De Kalb. He and the Delaware troops attacked Webster and for a time gained ground and even took prisoners. This effort was also to be in vain, for without the militia the Continentals were vastly outnumbered. Williams, with De Kalb and the First Brigade, succeeded in rejoining his own regiment by riding, under heavy fire, across the two hundred yard gap between the American brigades. He stood the final attack of the British with the Smallwood's Second Brigade, calling on his Sixth Regiment to hold. However, the situation was growing desperate, and the Marylanders could not withstand the British charges indefinitely. Lieutenant Colonel Benjamin Ford said, "They have done all that can be expected of them; we are outnumbered and outflanked. See the enemy charge with bayonets."<sup>23</sup>

With the militia routed, Cornwallis attacked De Kalb on his open left flank, and Lieutenant Colonel Banastre Tarleton's British Legion attacked the fleeing troops from the right flank. The Baron suffered eleven saber, bayonet

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 372-4.

and gunshot wounds and was captured; he died of his wounds three days after the battle.<sup>24</sup>

After De Kalb fell, the Maryland troops were forced back by the weight of the British attack. Williams, unable to find any general officer of either the Continental or militia, was forced to order the retreat and withdrew his forces as best he could. This relatively orderly retreat in the midst of an otherwise total rout was one of the reasons why Williams, one of the last senior American officers on the field not seriously wounded or captured, was one of the few surviving officers who came out of the battle with an undamaged reputation.<sup>25</sup> Lee said of Williams' part in the action: "Colonel Williams, adjutant general, was conspicuous throughout the action; cheerfully risking his valuable life out of his station, performing his assumed duties with precision and effect, and volunteering his person wherever danger called."<sup>26</sup>

Gates withdrew rapidly, riding from Camden to Hillsborough, North Carolina, a distance of approximately three hundred miles, in just three days, outdistancing the

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 375.

<sup>25</sup> G. W. Greene, The Life of Nathanael Greene, 3:32-3.

<sup>26</sup> Lee, Memoirs of the War, 1:185

rest of the army by at least two days.<sup>27</sup> The remainder of the survivors straggled in to Charlotte, North Carolina over the next few weeks. Williams later told of how senior officers came in with an aide or two and a few troops and how many of the surviving Continentals and militia were plundered by troops claiming to be American militia coming to join Gates. These troops, upon being informed of the outcome of the battle, simply changed sides and robbed the unarmed or outnumbered soldiers and returned home.<sup>28</sup>

In the weeks which followed the disaster at Camden, Smallwood moved the remains of the army from the nearly indefensible village of Charlotte to Salisbury, North Carolina. Gates, still at Hillsborough, ordered Smallwood to march the army to join him there. Williams, still the Acting Deputy Adjutant General of the Southern army, had moved to Hillsborough to join Gates and the rest of the surviving staff as soon as Smallwood had marched the troops into Salisbury. Both Gates, and Williams, in his capacity as Acting Deputy Adjutant General of the Southern army and Inspector General of the Maryland Line, needed to know the total of the troops of Maryland under the command

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<sup>27</sup> Lossing, The Pictorial Field-Book of the Revolution, 2:468.

<sup>28</sup> O.H. Williams, "A Narrative of the Campaign," 372-5.

of General Smallwood. Gates ordered Smallwood to join him in Hillsborough, and the rest of the army soon assembled there.<sup>29</sup>

Once in Hillsborough, the army was reorganized. Williams as the Inspector General of the Maryland Line mustered the Maryland troops. His returns of the Maryland Division, including what was left of the Delaware regiment, showed that after battle losses, the division had 102 officers of all ranks, 85 noncommissioned officers and 781 enlisted men present and fit for duty by 29 August 1780, and that 46 officers, 63 noncommissioned officers and 747 enlisted men were listed as killed, missing or captured since the last muster of the Maryland division. Approximately forty percent of the Continentals were lost at Camden. No estimate of the militia losses was possible as most of these troops ran in every direction after the battle and most seem to have gone home after they stopped running.<sup>30</sup>

After the totals were gathered, Smallwood pointed out that the existing Maryland troops could be formed into a single brigade which he, being the senior officer of that state, would command. Soon afterward the ambitious Smallwood learned that Congress had promoted him to the

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 385-6.

<sup>30</sup> Charles Bracelen Flood, Rise, and Fight Again, 338.

rank of major general effective September 1780; he now wanted command of the Southern army, as he felt a brigade was too small a unit for a major general. However, Gates still commanded.<sup>31</sup>

Gates put Smallwood in command of the militia and ordered him to Providence, fourteen miles south of Charlotte. Smallwood was not satisfied with this situation and complained to both his supporters in the Maryland assembly and to his friends in Congress. The infighting over command caused Smallwood to return to Maryland in order to recruit additional troops.<sup>32</sup> General Greene stated in a letter to Alexander Hamilton that:

General Smallwood and he [Gates] were not on good terms, the former suspected the latter of having an intention to supplant him, but many think without reason. Others again are of opinion his suspicions were well founded; and that Smallwood was not a little mortified at my being appointed to this department; and got outrageous when he heard Baron Steuben was coming also. How the matter was I know not, certain it is he is gone home having refus'd to act under Baron Steuben.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> O.H. Williams, "A Narrative of the Campaign," 384-90,

<sup>32</sup> O.H. Williams, "A Narrative of the Campaign," 384-90, and Henry Lee, Memoirs of the War, 1:261;

<sup>33</sup> Letter from Greene to Hamilton, 10 January 1781, The Papers of Alexander Hamilton, 1779-81, Harold C Syrett, ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 2:531.

It was also at this time that Gates was joined by Colonel Daniel Morgan of Virginia, one of the best partisans leaders in the army and the hero of the Battle of Freeman's Farm. That Morgan joined any army commanded by Gates, who had failed to even mention Morgan's contributions to the victory at Saratoga in his report to Congress, was a triumph of patriotism over self-interest. Morgan was given the light troops, and Williams was given command of the Maryland Brigade. 34

During his service with the Southern Army in 1780, Williams always acted in the best interests of both Gates and of the army. Before as well as after the Battle of Camden his advice was generally prudent and correct; his loyalty was to his commander even in defeat. The battle of Camden proved Williams both a gallant leader and an advisor who could be trusted. The aftermath of the battle proved that he was a fine staff officer. All of these talents would be needed in the upcoming campaign.

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34 O.H. Williams, "A Narrative of the Campaign," 384-90; and Ward, The War of the Revolution, 734-6.

#### IV. The Winter Campaign of 1780-81

The situation in the South was no better now than it had been after Charleston fell. At Camden, Gates lost the battle, his army and the reputation he had earned at Saratoga. The fallen De Kalb was lionized by the country as the hero he was. Gates was relieved of command by General George Washington, who on 22 October 1780 gave Major General Nathanael Greene the command of Continental forces in the Southern Department of the United States.<sup>1</sup> Greene was given the nearly impossible task of defeating a victorious and numerically superior British army commanded by the able Cornwallis. He was to accomplish this task with an army consisting only of the survivors of the disastrous battle of Camden and whatever militia he could raise. Washington could not spare many troops for Greene. However, he did grant Greene the authority to raise regular troops and reorganize the Southern army, which now existed mostly on paper. Washington also detached to Greene as his second-in-command Major General Friedrich Wilhelm, Baron Von Steuben along with approximately three hundred soldiers of the Virginia (Lee's) Legion, a mixed force of light infantry

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<sup>1</sup> O.H. Williams, "A Narrative of the Campaign," 388-9.

and cavalry under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Henry Lee.<sup>2</sup>

Greene left Von Steuben in Virginia to defend that state against the British forces under Brigadier General Alexander Leslie who had landed at the mouth of the James River in November 1780. Von Steuben was also to recruit and train replacements and reinforcements for the main force as well as to establish supply bases. Greene then joined the Continental army encamped in Charlotte, North Carolina on 2 December 1780 and formally took command. Greene treated General Gates with a generosity that was neither expected nor deserved. Gates had in the past frequently conspired against Greene whom he considered to be Washington's lackey.<sup>3</sup>

Greene found himself in command of a small and ineffective force. The returns which Williams provided Greene showed the strength of the Southern army to be weak and those present to be starving. Greene wrote of the condition of the army to Major General Gilbert Mottier, Marquis de Lafayette on 29 December 1781:

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<sup>2</sup> Lee, Memoirs of the War, 1:231; and Johnson, Sketches of the Life and Correspondence of Nathanael Greene, 1:326-29, 335-44.

<sup>3</sup> Lee, Memoirs of the War, 1:234-6.

Were you to arrive you would find a few ragged, half starved troops in the wilderness, destitute of every thing necessary for either comfort or convenience of the soldiers. . . . I assure you our whole force fit for duty that are properly clothed and equipped, does not amount to eight hundred men.<sup>4</sup>

The army's strength on paper was 2307, of whom 1482 were present, and of the 800 fit men most were regulars, surviving Continentals of the Maryland and Delaware regiments sent South under Baron De Kalb. The remainder, as Greene wrote to Governor Jefferson and General Washington, were "literally naked, . . . starving with cold and hunger, without tents and equipage." The majority of the American force consisted mostly of militia which came and went seemingly at will and had a history of running at the first sound of gunfire.<sup>5</sup>

Williams continued to serve as the Deputy Adjutant General and became to Greene as trusted an advisor as Greene had been to Washington, the one officer Greene entrusted with tasks that had to be done with dispatch and precision. Williams had all of the qualifications of a good staff officer and all of the qualifications of a first-rate field commander. In addition he lacked the vanity, and

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<sup>4</sup> Johnson, Sketches of the Life and Correspondence of Nathanael Greene, 1:326-8.

<sup>5</sup> G. W. Greene, The Life of Nathanael Greene, 3:32-3.

back-biting nature that was all too prevalent in some of his fellow officers.<sup>6</sup>

With De Kalb's death and Smallwood and Gist's return to Maryland, and because no new brigadier general had been sent from Maryland, Williams was the senior officer from that state and was therefore kept in command of all of the surviving Maryland troops. However, seniority did not mean automatic command; Williams remained in command of the Maryland troops because Greene knew and trusted him. These soldiers were reorganized as the First Maryland Regiment. The few surviving soldiers of the Delaware Regiment of Continentals were put under the senior captain, Robert Kirkwood and were organized as an understrength battalion in the Maryland Regiment.<sup>7</sup>

Faced with the continuing problem of feeding the army in an impoverished state with few roads and in an area exhausted of supplies by many earlier foraging parties, Greene split his forces into three parts. Lee's Legion was sent into South Carolina to join Brigadier General Francis Marion of the South Carolina Militia who was operating against the British lines of communication and supply. Morgan, with the light corps of the army, was sent 150 miles

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<sup>6</sup> Johnson, Sketches of the Life and Correspondence of Nathanael Greene, 1:330-40.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 340.

to the west to draw the light troops of the British away from the main army. This move forced Cornwallis to further divide his army, which removed some of the danger of a major offensive against Greene and the main army and eased the supply situation for the American forces.<sup>8</sup> Cornwallis' decision was to have great consequences for the country, the Southern army, and for Otho Williams. Williams detached part of the Maryland forces under his command to Morgan and he, as a staff officer as well as a troop commander, stayed with the main force.<sup>9</sup>

Morgan's forces did draw off the left flank of Cornwallis' army, and the two forces met in battle at a place known as Hannah's Cowpens on the banks of the Broad River in South Carolina. On the morning of 17 January 1781 Brigadier General Daniel Morgan gambled on the ability of a mixed force of militia and Continentals to defeat the light troops of the British forces in the South under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Banastre Tarleton. Greene's plan to draw off forces from the British main force worked almost too well, as Cornwallis detached a strong and well-equipped force to trap the militia and Continentals under Morgan.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Hugh F. Rankin, Francis Marion: Swamp Fox (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1973), 141-155.

<sup>9</sup> Johnson, Sketches of the Life and Correspondence of Nathanael Greene, 346-7.

<sup>10</sup> F. V. Greene, General Greene, 172.

Tarleton had under his command his own unit, the British Legion consisting of 550 light infantrymen and cavalry troopers, plus 200 soldiers of the 71st Highland Regiment, 200 infantrymen from the 7th Regiment of Foot and 50 troopers of the 17th Light Dragoons. In addition, he had two small artillery pieces, three pounders, known as grasshoppers and the gunners to man them. His total force consisted of about 1,150 men plus baggage train.<sup>11</sup>

Tarleton estimated Morgan's forces at 1,000 militia, 500 regulars, 300 riflemen, and 120 cavalry.<sup>12</sup> A letter from Francis Marion to General Greene dated 23 January 1781 gave Morgan's troop strength to be 250 Continental infantry, 80 cavalry, 80 militia, and 45 additional mounted infantry troops from Georgia under Major James McCall who were used as cavalry.<sup>13</sup>

Morgan was fortunate in both his militia and Continental commanders. Colonel Andrew Pickens, who commanded the South Carolina militia troops, was both steady and experienced, as were Lieutenant Colonel William A. Washington of Virginia, commanding the Continental dragoons

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 133-4.

<sup>13</sup> Francis Marion, "Francis Marion's Correspondence with General Nathanael Greene," Publications of the Southern History Association (9) 2 March 1907, 191.

and Colonel James McCall commanding the militia cavalry. Lieutenant Colonel John Edger Howard commanded the Continentals of the Maryland and Delaware lines and was an officer of long experience and proven valor. The riflemen were under the command of Majors John McDowell of North Carolina, a veteran of the battle of Kings Mountain, and John Cunningham of Georgia. Both officers were adept riflemen and Indian fighters.<sup>14</sup>

Morgan won a smashing victory at Cowpens and, after some of the normal chaos which follows most battles, found himself with 850 prisoners, the two small artillery pieces<sup>15</sup> and the remains of Tarleton's baggage train. The battle has been called one of the best uses of militia by a regular general in the Revolution.<sup>16</sup> Morgan's deployment of militia as a front line with a clearly defined and limited mission would be used by Greene at the Battle of Guilford Court House to less effect. The loss of such a large number of his light troops at the battle of Cowpens was one of the

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<sup>14</sup> Lossing, The Pictorial Field-Book of the Revolution, 2:468.

<sup>15</sup> These grasshoppers changed hands frequently. Captured at Saratoga by the Americans, they were lost by Sumter at Fishing Creek to Tarleton. He lost them to Morgan and Greene lost them at Guilford Courthouse only to recapture one of them at Eutaw Springs and the other after Charleston was evacuated. Charles Bracelen Flood, Rise, and Fight Again, 375.

<sup>16</sup> Jackson Weller, "Irregular but Effective", Military Affairs, 1957, 21 (3), 129.

principal reasons for the fallure of Cornwallis' invasion of North Carolina.<sup>17</sup>

This victory by the American forces, coming as it did after the defeat of two Continental armies, one under Lincoln at Charleston and the other under Gates at Camden, made this military triumph more important politically in the pivotal regions of the Carolinas than it was militarily. However, as the battle ended, Morgan was still 150 miles from the main army under General Greene. He now had to rejoin the main army before Cornwallis could place himself between the two parts of the American army and destroy each in detail.<sup>18</sup>

Eight hours after the fighting ended, Morgan was moving both the army, the prisoners and the baggage across the Broad River. Greene was informed of the action on 23 January 1781, as soon as a dispatch rider could reach him. Cornwallis was informed of the defeat as soon as Tarleton rode into camp with the survivors to rejoin the main British force. Cornwallis immediately ordered his whole force to march in an attempt to capture Morgan. The same day as

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<sup>17</sup> Henry Lumpkin, From Savannah to Yorktown: The American Revolution in the South (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1981), 133-4.

<sup>18</sup> Banastre Tarleton, A History of the Campaigns of 1780 and 1781 in the Southern Provinces of North America (London: T. Cadell, in the Strand, 1787; reprint edition, New York: Arno Press, 1968), 217.

Greene was informed of Morgan's victory, Cornwallis reached Ramsour's Mill on the south fork of the Catawba River in North Carolina. Cornwallis was aware that since the light corps of his army had been destroyed at Cowpens, his remaining force of slow moving infantry with its heavy baggage train could catch neither the main American army under Greene nor the light corps under Morgan. Cornwallis knew he would have to burn his personal equipment and most of the army's heavy baggage and supplies in order to speed the pursuit. However, he would need the destroyed supplies and transport later in the campaign. In the face of heavy partisan activity and the long supply lines from the North and a 3,000 mile sea voyage from England, he would not be able to replace the supplies easily.<sup>19</sup> General Cornwallis replaced the troops lost at Cowpens by a reinforcement of 1,530 soldiers under Brigadier General Alexander Leslie's command which had joined him from Virginia. Included in this force was the elite brigade of the Kings Own Guards under Brigadier General Charles O'Hara. The British army, thus converted into a light force, started moving toward Morgan's corps.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Robert C. Pugh, "The Revolutionary Militia in the Southern Campaign, 1780-1781," William and Mary Quarterly, 2 Series, 14 (1957), 169.

<sup>20</sup> George W. Kyte, "Victory in the South: An Appraisal of General Greene's Strategy in the Carolinas," The North Carolina Historical Review, 3rd ser., 37 (July 1960), 328-9.

Greene had not been idle. Upon receiving word of the victory at Cowpens, Greene started to consolidate his forces. Orders were dispatched to Lieutenant Colonel Henry Lee to rejoin the main army and to Brigadier General Francis Marion to continue his harassment of British outposts and lines of communication. Greene then started his force toward the Catawba River to meet Morgan. He started out ahead of the main force with only a small mounted party, and on 30 January 1781 rode into Morgan's camp. Brigadier General Isaac Huger had been left in command of the Virginia forces, and Williams remained in command of the Maryland Brigade, with orders to follow as quickly as possible. As ordered, the main army started toward the Catawba as soon as Greene left to join Morgan.<sup>21</sup>

Cornwallis was moving toward the fords of the Catawba. Greene, not wanting to delay the light corps, used the local militia of Brigadier General William Davidson to oppose Cornwallis at Mc'Cowen's Ford. Davidson's militia succeeded in slowing the British crossing. However, in the defense Davidson was killed, and the leaderless militia retreated. Even so, the crossing was hotly contested, and the British

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<sup>21</sup> Burke Davis, The Cowpens-Guilford Court House Campaign (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1962), 110-11.

lost Lieutenant Colonel Hall of the Guards Regiment along with thirty others killed and thirty-six wounded.<sup>22</sup>

Morgan now had a thirty mile lead on Cornwallis by the time the crossing was forced, and on 6 February 1781 the commands of Huger, Williams and Morgan had united at Guilford Court House, North Carolina. The meeting of the forces did not alleviate Greene's problems. Morgan, suffering from sciatica, rheumatism, and other painful ailments brought on by years of rough campaigning, finally gave in to the pain and was forced to return to his home in Virginia. Morgan's departure was not the only serious loss Greene had to endure. The three month terms of service of his Virginia militia had expired, and these veteran militiamen returned home, leaving the American forces with fewer troops than before Morgan and Huger reunited. According to Williams' returns the American army now consisted of 2,360 of which 1,426 were Continentals.<sup>23</sup> Without large numbers of reliable militia, the American army was forced to retreat north toward its supply points in Virginia. Greene hoped he could receive supplies and equipment for his ragged and ill-fed troops as well as fresh Continental reinforcements from Major General Von Steuben in Virginia. Greene had also requested new drafts of Virginia

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<sup>22</sup> Banastre Tarleton, A History, 259-260.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 259-260.

militia from Governor Thomas Jefferson. Greene wrote to any and all militia leaders in the South to come out with as many of their troops as possible and join him in Virginia. Greene needed Virginia troops as well as militia from North and South Carolina if he intended to retake the South.<sup>24</sup>

The Southern Campaign of 1780, which started on the bleak note of Lincoln's surrender of Charleston, was coming to a conclusion on the high note of Morgan's defeat of Tarleton. Williams' part in this campaign was that of regimental commander, staff officer and adviser to both Gates and Greene. His role was significant but not yet vital. He remained a loyal and competent officer but was not yet regarded as a brilliant one.<sup>25</sup> The retreat of the Light corps from the Catawba to the Dan would change that assessment.

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<sup>24</sup> Burke Davis, The Cowpens-Guilford Court House Campaign, 110-11.

<sup>25</sup> Colonel Alexander Scammell to O. H. Williams, 25 February 1781, Williams Papers, MS 908:1.

V. Williams's retreat from  
Guilford Court House to the Dan

The retreat to Virginia started from Guilford Court House on 10 February 1781 with the formation of a strong mobile force under Williams. This screening force consisted of 250 cavalry under William Washington, 280 Continentals from Maryland and Delaware under Lieutenant Colonel John Edger Howard and 100 Legion cavalry and infantry under Henry Lee, and a force of back-country riflemen under Colonel William Campbell of Virginia. Lieutenant Colonel Edward Carrington, the Quartermaster of the American forces in the South, although normally a staff officer, was given command of the left of Williams' force.<sup>1</sup> The mission of the light corps was to cover the movements of the main army from Cornwallis and allow Greene and his slower moving infantry and baggage trains to cross the Dan River, the border between North Carolina and Virginia.<sup>2</sup> The light corps was put to the test right from the start of the retreat.

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<sup>1</sup> Burke Davis, The Cowpens-Guilford Court House Campaign, 93.

<sup>2</sup> Report of General Nathanael Greene to Congress, Guilford Court House, 9 February 1781, Papers of the Continental Congress, Letters of Nathanael Greene, 1781-82, National Archives, roll 175, vol. 1, item 155.

On the same day outside the town of Salem, North Carolina, Williams opposed the British passage on the main road out of town. The riflemen sniped at the British vanguard while the cavalry and Continental infantry made themselves conspicuously visible. Cornwallis, not knowing whether Greene's main force was present or whether he was facing just a delaying force, massed his regiments in column for an advance against possibly strong opposition. As the British force advanced north from Salem, Williams pulled back to the next roadblock and repeated the scenario played out near Salem. In this way Cornwallis was delayed most of the day, which allowed Greene to move his main force far enough ahead of the British to keep a safe lead.<sup>3</sup>

As Greene moved north toward the Dan and the Virginia border, the weather, which had been wet, turned even more so. The roads, where there were roads, had become nearly impassable due to the mud; the rivers, which had been rising since the rains started in mid-December 1780, rose to a point which made crossings at the fords all but impossible. Thus the weather favored the lighter and faster American forces. However, the weather also restricted the number of crossing points on the lower Dan available to Greene's forces; the best of them were Dix's

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<sup>3</sup> Burke Davis, The Cowpens-Guilford Court House Campaign, 108-09.

Ferry, a normally shallow water crossing, and a deep water crossing at Irwin's Ferry six miles down stream. In preparation for the crossing, Carrington had been collecting all available boats on the river, and Greene's chief engineering officer, Colonel Thaddeus Kosciuszko, had been sent to Irwin's Ferry to prepare the defenses on the far side of the river.<sup>4</sup>

Williams' mission as commander of the screening force was to lead Cornwallis to believe that the American army was headed for the upper Dan and the shallow fords, when in fact Irwin's Ferry, fifty miles to the southeast was to be the crossing point. Because much of the heavy baggage and supplies were slowly being moved north from Hillsborough on the right flank, Cornwallis had to be kept on the left flank of the army. Thus, Williams had the dual duty of guarding the supply route of the army as well as screening the movements of the main force under Greene.<sup>5</sup>

The Dan River had been stripped of boats by Carrington for use by the American Army even before the retreat started. With all available boats on the south bank of the river in American hands, Greene would be safe from further pursuit if he could cross the river ahead of

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<sup>4</sup> William Johnson, Sketches of the Life and Correspondences of Nathanael Greene, 1:426.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:432-7, 445-6.

Cornwallis. If this feat could be accomplished, Cornwallis would be left 150 miles from his nearest supply points in the middle of a poorly settled and hostile country where supplies for his army were nearly impossible to secure.<sup>6</sup>

Williams used his light corps, particularly the cavalry of Washington and Lee, on the flanks so effectively that Cornwallis was unaware that Carrington had gathered boats on the Dan. The British commander did not see any way for the American army to cross the deep fords. This lack of correct and timely intelligence led the British to believe that Williams' force was the rear guard, not the flank of the American army.<sup>7</sup>

Cornwallis' vanguard, the British light force, was commanded by General Charles O'Hara. It was made up of the effective and well trained remnant of Tarleton's dragoons, the light infantry of the Guards Brigade, and volunteer mounted infantryman from the Thirty-third Regiment of Foot. Because of the threat of a night attack from these forces, Williams assigned half of the horsemen of the light corps night duty every other night. This meant that these troops slept only six out of every

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<sup>6</sup> Charles Caldwell, Memoirs of the Life and Campaigns of the Hon. Nathaniel [sic] Greene, 210-11.

<sup>7</sup> William Johnson, Sketches of the Life and Correspondences of Nathanael Greene, 1:422-5.

forty-eight hours. Only one day after the start of the retreat, on 11 February 1781, the British having guessed Greene's intentions of a crossing by one of the lower fords, changed the direction of their march toward the lower Dan. For the next two days the vanguard of the British forces fought Williams' rearguard almost constantly. The troops barely slept or ate during the last stages of the retreat. The only meal that Williams' troops stopped to eat each day was breakfast; the rest of the day and often most of the night was spent skirmishing with the British or retreating from them. One observer stated that the rearguard of Williams' force and the vanguard of O'Hara's were so close that they looked like parts of the same army marching together rather than enemies. Only Williams' brilliant disengagement and retreats saved the small unit from being forced to fight a major battle which they were certain to lose.<sup>8</sup>

One of the more notable of the many small skirmishes that occurred during the retreat took place on a road to Dix's Ferry on 13 February. The use of this road by the Light Corps was one more of many decoys used by Williams to keep the British away from the crossing at Irwin's Ferry. Lee was on the road when a farmer rode up on an old plow horse and told Lee that Tarleton's dragoons were

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

less than four miles behind him. Lee sent back his bugler, a twelve year old boy named Gillies, to investigate the situation. As the bugler rode up on the British, Tarleton's dragoons killed the boy. Upon hearing musket fire, Lee rode at the head of his troops to rescue or revenge the boy. Although too late to rescue Gillies, Lee did revenge him. The killing of this unarmed boy caused Lee to call for no quarter to be given. This was one of the few times Lee lost his temper in battle. Of the twenty dragoons of Tarleton's British Legion who were caught by Lee in the skirmish, eighteen were killed outright. Lee ordered the two survivors to be hanged. Williams, who upon hearing the firing rushed to the front, stopped the execution and sent the prisoners to the rear.<sup>9</sup>

In the five days of pursuit and retreat, Williams skirmished with and delayed the vanguard of the British but could not stop the advance of the main force. Cornwallis knew that he must catch Greene before the Americans reached the Dan if the British winter campaign in the South was to meet with success. Cornwallis also knew that his army was too weak to invade Virginia without heavy support from the main army in New York. On the

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<sup>9</sup> Lossing, The Pictorial Field-Book of the Revolution, 396-8.

<sup>10</sup> Tarleton, A History, 265.

morning of 14 February, Cornwallis ordered a twenty-five mile march to close the gap between his forces and the main American army under Greene.<sup>10</sup>

Williams used Lee's Legion, both cavalry and infantry, as the rear guard of the Light Corps. These troops skirmished all day and into the night of the fourteenth against Cornwallis' vanguard consisting of the British Legion of Banastre Tarleton and volunteer mounted infantry from the Guards brigade.<sup>11</sup> Cornwallis was still under the impression that the Light Corps was the rear of Greene's force rather than the flank. This mistake led him to believe that Dix's Ferry was the crossing point for the American army. At 3:00 A.M. on 15 February Greene sent a message to Williams that he was at Irwin's Ferry and to join the main body of the army immediately. Williams marched his force to the ford just ahead of the British. When the Light Corps arrived at the river, they found camp fires burning. At first the troops thought that Greene's army was trapped and a battle would be fought in the morning, but it was soon discovered that the camp was empty and the fires had been left burning as a deception. The army was across the Dan River and safe in Virginia. All the boats on the river, except for those left for Williams' corps, were on the north bank or

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

destroyed. The Light Corps took these boats and swam their horses across to rejoin General Greene and the main army.<sup>12</sup>

The retreat was brilliantly conducted; even Lieutenant Colonel Banastre Tarleton stated that:

Owing to an excellent disposition, which was attended with some fortunate contingencies, General Greene passed the whole army over the Dan. . . . Every measure of the Americans, during their march from the Catawba to Virginia, was judiciously designed and vigorously executed.<sup>13</sup>

The Light Corps commanded by Williams had the most hazardous assignment in the withdrawal. Therefore having born a great share of the hardships and danger of the march, it is only natural that Williams should also receive some of the credit for the successful retreat. Williams described some of the hardships of the march in a letter to his brother Elle stating that:

The retreat of the Southern army before an enemy vastly superior in numbers, upwards of two hundred miles, thro' a country intersected with rivers and small creeks, often render'd impassible by one night's rain, and very difficult at all time. Incumber'd as we were with heavy baggage and military stores - deficient of means of transportation and destitute of shoes and clothing. The retreat I say

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<sup>12</sup> Davis, The Cowpens-Guilford Court House Campaign, 114-6.

<sup>13</sup> Tarleton, A History, 229.

under these circumstances does honor to our very able General and has been affected with great difficulty.<sup>14</sup>

However, in spite of the praise and the glory heaped upon the American forces for the heroic retreat, North and South Carolina had again been abandoned to the British.<sup>15</sup> The only United States forces in the Carolinas were the militia under the command of Brigadier Generals Thomas Sumter, Francis Marion, Andrew Pickens and other partisan leaders. These forces could disrupt supply lines, destroy lightly held outposts and make life difficult for foraging parties and Tory militia, but they could rarely stand against the well trained and equipped regulars of the British army.<sup>16</sup>

The retreat from Guilford Courthouse to the Dan took five days. It was five days of grueling, brutal campaigning. That the retreat was conducted brilliantly has been expressed by military historians in studies of the campaign to this day. Williams' part in the retreat was significant and equally brilliant. If he is known

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<sup>14</sup> O.H. Williams to Elie Williams, Camp east side of the Dan River Irwin's Ferry, 21 February 1781, Williams Papers, MS 908:1.

<sup>15</sup> Tarleton, A History, 229.

<sup>16</sup> John S. Pancake, This Destructive War: The British Campaign in the Carolinas 1780-1782 (Montgomery: University of Alabama Press, 1985), 172-73.

today for anything it is not for his seven years of service but for those five days, the most significant of his career. Williams went on to command the Light Corps in the advance as he had in the retreat. For now Greene, not content to abandon North Carolina to Cornwallis, was prepared upon reinforcement and resupply from Virginia, to again cross the river and reconquer the South.

## VI. Greene Recrosses the Dan.

North Carolina did not remain abandoned for long; Greene was soon joined by the reinforcements he had marched north to find and did not have to remain long in Virginia. On 18 February Williams' Light Corps, with Lee's Legion, and the mounted militia of Pickens in the vanguard recrossed the river to harass foraging parties and break up Loyalist militia musters. Greene recrossed the river with his main force on 23 February. On 25 February, Pickens in command of his mounted infantry militia, two companies of Maryland Continentals and Lee's cavalry troops, were marching as the vanguard of the Light Corps commanded by Williams. They met and slaughtered a Loyalist militia unit under Colonel John Pyle, a prominent Tory doctor from the Hillsborough, North Carolina area. The Loyalist militia mistook the green coated dragoons of Lee for the green coated dragoons of Tarleton, and let them pass on the road. When Lee's horsemen had totally flanked the unit, the Tories discovered the error, and someone in the Loyalist force opened fire, an action which cost Pyle his life and between two and three hundred of his men killed, wounded or captured. This seemingly minor

local action was important because Pyle's unit was the first large local force of Loyalist militia which attempted to join Cornwallis since Greene's retreat into Virginia. Pyle's fate caused many others to rethink any decisions they may have made about coming out with other Loyalist units.<sup>1</sup>

Williams led his troops in many of the delaying actions and militia skirmishes which took place in northern North Carolina. He held his corps in a position between the main British force and the main American army in order to protect Greene's force and the supply route from Virginia which ran through Hillsborough. Williams' force engaged Loyalist militia units, and small detachments of the British army, and harassed foraging parties. Soon Cornwallis could not send out small detachments for fear of running afoul of Williams' strong Light Corps and could not send out large detachments without weakening his main force to the point where it was vulnerable to attack by Greene.<sup>2</sup> This skirmishing continued until mid-March, when Greene felt that enough Continental replacements and new militia units had arrived to allow offensive action against Cornwallis.

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<sup>1</sup> Pancake, This Destructive War, 172-73.

<sup>2</sup> G. W. Greene, The Life of Nathanael Greene, 3:186-8.

One of the delaying actions, the skirmish at Wetzell's Mills on the Reedy Fork Creek, was recounted by Williams, Lee and Tarleton. Though the three men were not consistent on all points. Williams, in a report to Greene dated 7 March 1781, the day after the encounter, wrote that his force engaged Webster's Brigade and Tarleton's Legion in a rearguard action while crossing Reedy Fork on the way to the Haw River. He stated that he was informed by "one of my reconnoitering officers, that the enemy had decamped early in the morning"<sup>3</sup> and was approaching the Light Corps' encampment. Williams ordered his Light Corps to retreat across Reedy Fork to Wetzell's Mills. Williams, concerned for the safety of the troops as they crossed the creek, dispatched rifleman under Colonel William Campbell and the cavalry commanded by Lieutenant Colonel William A. Washington to cover the retreat of the infantry. Lee's cavalry supported Washington in this task. Williams further stated that the riflemen gave a good account of themselves and that the British, "being awed by our cavalry," declined to continue the pursuit. The Light Corps retired in good order to the Haw River and took up a position on the northeast bank of that river. Williams

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<sup>3</sup> Johnson, Sketches of the Life and Correspondences of Nathanael Greene, 1:463.

reported the American losses in this action as inconsiderable.<sup>4</sup>

In Lee's account of the same skirmish, some of the details were remembered differently. Lee wrote that Williams was surprised by the British advance and that it was the Legion that delayed the British long enough for Williams to post his riflemen. Lee also stated that he, not Washington, commanded the cavalry and that Colonel Clarke, not Colonel Campbell, commanded the riflemen. He also reported that British losses were considerable, due mostly to the superiority of the American cavalry,<sup>5</sup> while Williams said the riflemen inflicted most of the British losses.<sup>6</sup>

In Tarleton's record of the skirmish at Wetzell's Mills he wrote that his British Legion discovered the camp of the Light Corps and having ascertained that the force was too powerful for his troops to attack unsupported, called on Cornwallis for aid. Colonel Webster's brigade, with Tarleton's Legion in support, was ordered to attack the American Light Corps. Tarleton further stated that the British purpose in attacking Williams was to drive a

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Lee, Memoirs of the War 1:308-13.

<sup>6</sup> Johnson, Sketches of the Life and Correspondences of Nathanael Greene, 1:463.

wedge between the light troops and the reinforcements marching to join Greene from Virginia; he also stated that the British "dislodged and dispersed a corps of eight hundred men, composed of Lee's Legion, Washington's dragoons, and Preston's backwoodsmen." He also reported that the British lost about thirty men killed, wounded or taken, and wrote that the Americans lost "upwards of one hundred men killed, wounded or taken."<sup>7</sup> Since Williams was writing an official report of the action to General Greene and this report was written the day after the action, when the facts were still fresh in his mind, one tends to place more weight on his account than on the accounts that were written at a much latter date by Tarleton in his History of the Campaign in 1787, and by Lee in his Memoirs of the War which were published in 1812. Greene himself wrote on the skirmish in a General Order dated 8 March 1781: "The general returns his thanks to Colonel Williams commanding the light troops for the judicious manner in which he conducted the retreat on the 6th and is happy to hear of the good order and regularity which prevaded upon the occasion." Greene thanked Colonels Campbell and Preston and Captain John Randolph of Lee's Cavalry, "who were reported to have behaved

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<sup>7</sup> Banastre Tarleton, A History, 235.

gallantly upon the occasion." and said that "the enemy suffered considerably." <sup>8</sup>

The importance of this skirmish should not be discounted either because of the small number of troops involved or because of the inconclusive outcome. If Williams had allowed his corps to be pushed aside or trapped into an engagement with the superior British main force, then Cornwallis might have been able to move the British army between Greene and his reinforcements and the British could have destroyed each force in detail. Williams did not allow this to happen and the reinforcements under Brigadier General Lawson of the Virginia militia as well as a body of North Carolina militia under the command of Brigadier Generals John Butler and Thomas Eaton joined the main army.<sup>9</sup>

On 14 March 1781, with his army of about 4,900 soldiers, Greene advanced to Guilford Court House to offer Cornwallis the battle the British leader had wanted since Tarleton's defeat at Cowpens. After detaching 200 men as a baggage guard, Cornwallis had only 1,950 officers and men. Nevertheless, Cornwallis' numbers were not as great a disadvantage as it might seem. The majority of Greene's

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<sup>8</sup> O. H. Williams to Dr. David Ramsey, Pon Pon, South Carolina, 20 February 1782, Williams Papers, MS 908:2.

<sup>9</sup> Johnson, Sketches of the Life and Correspondences of Nathanael Greene, 1:464-5.

force was made up of militia and newly recruited Continentals. Of Greene's total force of 4,900 men, far less than half were veteran soldiers. The major reinforcement to join Greene's army were the newly recruited Second Maryland Continentals, and a large number of untrained militia. Only Williams' First Maryland Regiment, the Delaware troops, Campbell's riflemen, and the cavalry of both William Washington and Henry Lee, were veteran soldiers.<sup>10</sup>

It was in this battle that Williams, commanding his Maryland Continentals again, showed his merits as a field commander. Williams commanded the left side of the critical third line composed of the Maryland brigade. Greene's deployment of the army was similar to the three line deployment used at Cowpens. The first line was made up of the North Carolina militia, with Lieutenant Colonel William A. Washington's cavalry, Colonel Charles Lynch's riflemen and Captain Robert Kirkwood's small force of Delaware Continentals on their right and Colonel William Campbell's riflemen and Lee's Legion on their left. Greene hoped these veteran units on the flanks would stiffen the militia; they did not.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Tarleton, A History, 234-7.

<sup>11</sup> Report of General Nathanael Greene to Congress, [Speedwell's] Iron Works 10 miles from Guilford Court House, 16 March 1781, Papers of the Continental Congress, roll 191, vol. 2, items 1-5.

The British attack started with Colonel James Webster's brigade of the Guards advancing on the North Carolina militia. However, the raw recruits of the North Carolina militia did not fight as well as the militia had under Morgan at Cowpens. The militia had been ordered to deliver two aimed volleys and to retreat and reform with the second line, which consisted of Brigadier Generals Steven's and Lawson's veteran Virginia militia, but the sight of the British bayonets proved too much for the untried militiamen. With the exception of a small part of Brigadier General Eaton's North Carolina militia brigade, which held for a few moments until they too succumbed to the general panic, the militia ran. Most of the militia never fired before they ran. Only a small number of Eaton's soldiers fell back on Lee and Campbell; few if any of the other militiamen reformed with the veteran Virginia militia in the second line. Greene stated that General Eaton and his officers "did all they could to induce the men to stand their ground, but neither the advantages of the position or any other consideration could induce them to stay."<sup>12</sup> After the battle, the British found thirteen hundred muskets, many still loaded, which had been

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

discarded on the field by the militia.<sup>13</sup> However, the veteran units on the flank withdrew to the second line where the Virginia militia, with its hard core of veterans and Continentals, stood firm and fought the British to a standstill. The pressure on the second line from Webster's brigade increased, and the Virginia militia was forced to move back.<sup>14</sup>

The second line retreated as ordered to the third line, which was composed of mostly the Continentals commanded by Williams, the First and Second Maryland Infantry Regiments, and Huger's Virginia troops. Washington and Kirkwood, with Colonel Lynch's riflemen withdrew to the right flank forming what Tarleton called "a corps of observation for the security of the right flank."<sup>15</sup> Campbell and Lee then fell back onto a small wooded hill on the left flank taking up similar positions. Campbell's riflemen supported, at first by Lee's cavalry, held off the First Guards Battalion and the Bose Regiment of Hessians for nearly two hours until Lee withdrew his horsemen to join the general engagement. Tarleton's

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<sup>13</sup> Burke Davis, The Cowpens-Guilford Court House Campaign, 174.

<sup>14</sup> Report of General Nathanael Greene to Congress, [Speedwell's] Iron Works 10 miles from Guilford Court House, 16 March 1781, Papers of the Continental Congress, roll 191, vol. 2, items 1-5.

<sup>15</sup> Tarleton, A History, 229, 265.

cavalry was sent to reinforce the Germans of the Bose Regiment on the left flank. Still Campbell continued to hold his position and retreated only after Greene ordered a general retreat.<sup>16</sup>

The third line now held the best troops Greene had, the Maryland Continentals under Williams plus the Virginia Continentals and veteran militia under Huger. The first attack on third line began and was repulsed with heavy loss. Webster's 33d Regiment of Foot found itself ahead of the rest of the British line and attacked Gunby's First Maryland troops. This assault was also broken on the solid line of the Continental's bayonets. Webster was forced to withdraw his unit to regroup.<sup>17</sup>

The flank units and most of the regiments which made up the third line were veterans, but the Second Maryland Continental Regiment was a newly recruited regiment, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Benjamin Ford, a veteran officer and close friend of Williams. This unit was attacked by the Second Guards Battalion under Lieutenant

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<sup>16</sup> Johnson, Sketches of the Life and Correspondences of Nathanael Greene, 2:14.

<sup>17</sup> Report of General Nathanael Greene to Congress, [Speedwell's] Iron Works 10 miles from Guilford Court House, 16 March 1781, Papers of the Continental Congress, roll 191, vol. 2, items 1-5; Lee, Memoirs of the War, 1:308-13; and Johnson, Sketches of the Life and Correspondences of Nathanael Greene, 2:9-11.

Colonel Duncan Stuart. Williams rode behind these troops urging them to repulse the attack. He was about to give orders to Gunby to close on the Second Maryland and form a solid line when the Second Regiment panicked and fell back almost without resistance. Williams personally attempted to rally these troops but failed to halt the frightened soldiers. He then ordered Colonel John Gunby to counterattack. Stuart moved into the break in the American third line, but instead of gaining an advantage from this break in the line he was attacked on both flanks. Gunby, who with Webster's retreat was free of any resistance in his front, also had seen the Second Maryland Regiment break and run and anticipating Williams' orders, had moved his First Regiment to close the gap. Williams charged alongside the troops of the First Maryland. Stuart was thus attacked on his left flank by Gunby's troops. Gunby was wounded in the assault, and command of the regiment went to Lieutenant Colonel John Edger Howard, an officer more than able to carry on the assault. William Washington also noticed the open flank and led his dragoons into the battle against Stuart from the opposite flank.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Report of General Nathanael Greene to Congress, [Speedwell's] Iron Works 10 miles from Guilford Court House, 16 March 1781, Papers of the Continental Congress, roll 191, vol. 2, items 1-5.

The Guards Battalion was about to be destroyed. Both its flanks were turned and then isolated from the main body. It was during Washington's attack that Stuart was killed by a Maryland officer; his death only added to the plight of the British unit. Greene in his report to Congress said of the assault on Stuart that:

About this time Lieutenant Colonel Washington made a charge with the horse upon a part of the brigade of guards; and the First Regiment of Marylanders, . . . followed the horse with bayonets; near the whole of the party fell a sacrifice.<sup>19</sup>

Webster's troops, now reformed, moved to support the Guards but were also caught up in the hand-to-hand fighting. With most of the right of the line engaged in this confused melee, and Webster mortally wounded, Cornwallis had to disengage and reform before the confusion and lack of support forced a rout. He ordered Lieutenant Alexander McLeod's artillery to open fire on the combatants. The grape shot struck both British and Americans, but forced the disengagement Cornwallis needed. This cannonade was the last major action on the right. Campbell was still fighting on the left flank with the Hessians of the Bose Regiment. The Welsh Fusileers and the 71st Highlanders had renewed the attack on the First

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

Maryland, and the issue was still in doubt.<sup>20</sup> Both Williams and Lee urged Greene to commit Lee's dragoons who were relatively fresh. However, Greene rather than risk the destruction of the American army, ordered a general retreat.<sup>21</sup> Huger retreated with the Virginians, and Williams ordered the Maryland troops to withdraw. The American army marched off the battlefield in good order, and since the retreat was covered by the strong and effective cavalry of Lee and Washington, the American force was not followed by Cornwallis. The battle of Guilford Court House ended with the British in possession of the field.<sup>22</sup>

Greene moved his force to Speedwell's Ironworks on Troublesome Creek, about ten miles from the battlefield, to tend his wounded, reform his army, resupply and begin the pursuit of his crippled adversary. The cost to Greene's army was heavy; Williams collected the field returns from the major units engaged and reported that the

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<sup>20</sup> Report of General Nathanael Greene to Congress, [Speedwell's] Iron Works 10 miles from Gullford Court House, 16 March 1781, Papers of the Continental Congress, Returns of the Army by O. H. Williams, roll 191, vol. 2, items 101-4.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., item 98.

<sup>22</sup> Tarleton, A History, 272.

Continental had lost 290 men killed and wounded. There were 361 killed, wounded and missing from the Virginia militia and ninety percent missing from the North Carolina militia. Most of the North Carolina militiamen simply went home after the battle.<sup>23</sup>

However, Cornwallis did not enjoy his victory. The British retreated to Hillsborough to count the high cost of the Battle of Guilford Court House. Cornwallis reported 93 officers and men killed, 413 officers and men wounded and 26 men missing, twenty-five percent of the nearly 2,000 British soldiers engaged.<sup>24</sup>

Williams in a letter to his brother Elie said of the engagement that:

the Southern army has once more come off Second best in a General action. General Greene being reinforced with a few small detachments of New Levies which gave the regular Battallions a respectable appearance and a sufficient number of militia to make his force apparently superior to the British army, made the best possible arrangement of his troops and for many reasons which render'd it almost absolutely necessary, came to a resolution of attacking Lord Cornwallis at the first opportunity -- when both parties are disposed for action all objects are soon overcome. The armies met at Guilford Court House yesterday about twelve o'Clock -- Our army was well posted. The action was commenced by the advanc'd parties of Infantry and Cavalry, it not being favorable in our front, our army kept its position

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<sup>23</sup> Report of General Nathanael Greene, 16 March 1781, Papers of the Continental Congress, roll 191, vol. 2, items 1-5.

<sup>24</sup> O.H. Williams to Elie Williams, Camp Speedwell Furnace 10 miles from Guilford Court House, 16 March 1781, Williams Papers, MS 908.

and waited the attack of the British Army --They were opposed wherever they appeared. The Militia of North Carolina behaved as usual but those of Virginia distinguished themselves by uncommon bravery. The regular Troops were the last that came into action and generally behaved well but as these were the most Inconsiderable in number, the General chose to retire than risk a Defeat.<sup>25</sup>

Cornwallis now found himself in the middle of a hostile country with few supplies and almost no heavy transport, and no way of acquiring any. The British troops needed rest, resupply, and reinforcements. The nearest major bases held by the British were Wilmington, North Carolina, 150 miles to the east on the coast and Camden, South Carolina, 200 miles to the south. Cornwallis requested supplies be sent to his force at Hillsborough from Wilmington. This movement of supplies was not possible as the number of men present at these bases was only sufficient to hold them against the partisan militia. Without a large number of additional troops, Loyalist or regulars, the British could not maintain a position in the interior of North Carolina. Since these additional troops were not forthcoming, Cornwallis decided to march toward Wilmington. He had been informed by the Royal Governor Josiah Martin that the population of the country along the route of march was loyal to the Crown; this did not prove to be the case. The population was either actively hostile

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

or apathetic. Cornwallis' retreat action virtually abandoned North Carolina to the American forces.<sup>26</sup>

In the Winter of 1780, Williams demonstrated his competency as both commander of light troops and a commander of regulars. On the retreat from Guilford Court House to the Dan River, where a single misstep could have caused disaster, Williams conducted the operation flawlessly. His retreat and later advance before Cornwallis' vastly superior force showed a thorough understanding of enemy troop movements. The consummate skill and good judgment that Williams showed in handling the officers and men under his command and his utter fearlessness in battle enhanced his reputation throughout the army. More importantly, it caused Greene to rely more heavily on his judgment and services. After the battle of Guilford Court House, the time for defensive action on the part of the Americans had just about ended, and Williams' next task was to help Greene retake the deep South.

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<sup>26</sup> Tarleton, A History, 322-7.

## VII. The Last of Cornwallis

The battle at Guilford Court House, though touted as a victory by both Cornwallis and the King's Party in London, was seen as a defeat by the local Loyalists.<sup>1</sup> The hollowness of this victory was shown to the locals when on 18 March, the same day Cornwallis proclaimed his victory at Guilford Court House, he abandoned seventy of his own wounded soldiers and all of his wounded American prisoners.<sup>2</sup>

In London the victory was naturally greeted with glee by the Tories but with distain by the Whigs. Charles Fox, the Whig leader in Parliament, said that:

another such victory will ruin the British army. . . . In the disproportion between the two armies, a victory was highly to the honor of our troops; but had our army been vanquished, what course could they have taken? Certainly they would have abandoned the field of action, and flown for refuge to the seaside - precisely the measures the victorious army was obliged to adopt.<sup>3</sup>

And Horace Walpole another prominent Whig said, "Lord Cornwallis has conquered his troops out of shoes and

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<sup>1</sup> Tarleton, A History, 309.

<sup>2</sup> Davis, The Cowpens-Guilford Court House Campaign, 164-5.

<sup>3</sup> Francis V. Greene, General Greene, 225-26.

provision, and himself out of troops."<sup>4</sup> Although the Tories in the government hailed the battle as a first step in reconquering the South, in fact it was the first step in its total loss to the Americans.

During the days after the battle, General Greene was not idle. On 18 March the defeated American army set off in pursuit of the victorious British, Williams back in command of the Light Corps. Cornwallis stopped his exhausted army to rest at Cross Creek, (Fayetteville) North Carolina, placing his force in a defensible position. The American army was less than a day's march behind him, but Greene could not follow up on the Battle of Guilford Court House as the term of service of the Virginia militia was nearly completed. These troops marched home leaving Greene with only his Continentals, as the vast majority of the North Carolina militia had not returned to the army after the battle. Thus, more than half of his remaining force marched home before Cornwallis' weakened army could be brought to battle. The British were able to continue their march to Wilmington, and from there they were transported by sea to Virginia to

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<sup>4</sup> Davis, The Cowpens-Guilford Court House Campaign, 164-5.

act in support of Brigadier General Benedict Arnold's operations on the James River.<sup>5</sup>

South Carolina was still in the hands of the British forces, and Georgia was almost fully restored to Royal control. Major towns and bases were held by British and Tory garrisons. Charleston was still the main base of British and Loyalist activity in the South. Since their capture at the fall of Charleston, most of the civil officers of the state of South Carolina were in the hands of the British. There was almost no effective American military or civil government anywhere in the states of South Carolina or Georgia, and since the British only controlled areas garrisoned by their troops, local government was almost nonexistent in the interior of South Carolina and Georgia.<sup>6</sup> Williams described the state of near anarchy in these areas, and the robbery and wanton murder committed daily by bandits who in the guise of Whig or Tory partisan troops pillaged their neighbors in the name of patriotism. He stated that "there are a few virtuous good men in this State and Georgia, but a great majority of the people is composed of the most unprincipled, abandoned, vicious vagrants that ever

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<sup>5</sup> Johnson, Sketches of the Life and Correspondences of Nathanael Greene, 2:38-9, 43-5.

<sup>6</sup> Johnson, Sketches of the Life and Correspondence of Nathanael Greene, 1:341-3.

inhabited the earth."<sup>7</sup> The sole surviving American military forces in the deep South were the partisan militia units. These troops had survived Camden or served with Marion, Sumter or other militia leaders. However, the quality of the militia varied greatly and the leaders could not rely on having sufficient numbers of dependable men to carry out actions from week to week. Unsupported, the partisan militia could only than disrupt communications and resupply routes without a regular force to fall back on.<sup>8</sup>

On 6 April 1781 Greene moved his army South to retake South Carolina. Lee's mounted troops moved first with the rest of the army following the next day.<sup>9</sup> This invasion of South Carolina was partly an attempt to deter Cornwallis from his planned invasion of Virginia. Greene fully expected that Cornwallis would follow him south to protect his threatened bases in South Carolina. Lee stated that Greene weighed the options opened to the American forces carefully and came to the conclusion that if Cornwallis returned to South Carolina and joined forces

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<sup>7</sup> O. H. Williams to Elie Williams, 12 June 1781; Williams Papers, MS 908:2.

<sup>8</sup> "Francis Marion's Correspondence with General Nathanael Greene," 198-201.

<sup>9</sup> Report of General Nathanael Greene to Congress Camp at Buffaloe Creek, 23 March 1781, Papers of the Continental Congress, roll 191, vol. 2, items 13-14.

with Lord Rawdon, the American army would be able, with reinforcement from Marion, Pickens, Sumter, and other militia leaders, to outnumber the combined British army. If Cornwallis did not follow the American army and continued his move into Virginia, the reconquest of the Southern states was almost certain.<sup>10</sup>

Greene marched his army south to Rugely's Mills, about twelve miles from Camden, where he established a base of operations to begin to retake South Carolina. This campaign began with Marion and Lee being ordered to operate against Lord Rawdon's lines of supply and communications to Charleston.<sup>11</sup>

Williams was still in command of the Continentals of the Maryland Brigade, and now as the army moved to retake the major British outposts and strong points in the interior of South Carolina, the discipline and dependability of these troops would be essential to the success of the campaign.<sup>12</sup> Williams was to excel in his role as commander of the Continentals in the battles that Greene fought against the British army under Lord Rawdon.

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<sup>10</sup> Lee, Memoirs of the War, 2:32-8.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 50-2.

<sup>12</sup> Tierney, "The Life and Letters of Otho Holland Williams," 81.

Greene once more divided his small army; he sent Marion and Lee against Fort Watson. It was the first in the chain of British outposts on the supply route which ran from Camden to the coast.<sup>13</sup> He then took the main American force against Lord Rawdon's army at Camden. Even though Greene was not strong enough to attack the British in their works at Camden, he had to prevent the British from reinforcing the outposts until Marion and Lee could conquer them. To accomplish this goal Greene laid siege to Camden hoping to pin down Rawdon. Greene established a camp at Hobkirk's Hill, a small hill between two swamps just north of Camden and awaited the fall of Fort Watson, which in fact fell to the American forces on 23 April.<sup>14</sup>

Greene was waiting for the return of his artillery, which he had sent to support Marion and Lee as well as the return of Marion and Lee's troops, before beginning operations against Rawdon. Greene did not rely on Rawdon to wait for the American reinforcements to arrive before attacking. The ever-cautious American commander encamped his army in line of battle with the Continentals in the front line of the camp. The Americans bivouacked on the high ground astride the main road from Salisbury, thus

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<sup>13</sup> Lee, Memoirs of the War, 2:50-6.

<sup>14</sup> "Francis Marion's Correspondence with General Nathanael Greene," 196-7.

securing a safe line of retreat if necessary. With flanks secured by the Pine Tree Creek swamp on the east and on the west by the Miry Branch Creek swamp, the position was deemed defensible by Greene even against superior numbers.<sup>15</sup>

On the night of 24 April, Rawdon was informed by an American deserter of the weakness of the besieging American force and that Greene expected reinforcements shortly. Fortunately, unknown to the deserter, some additional American reinforcements and artillery had arrived that night.<sup>16</sup>

Rawdon moved quickly out of his fortified position in Camden in an attempt to steal a march on Greene. The battle was fought on the morning of 25 April 1781. The British attacked the American encampment at about 10 a.m. The pickets, light infantry from the Maryland and Delaware regiments, were driven in by Rawdon's vanguard, but they fought with the professionalism displayed by these troops throughout the campaign. These pickets retreated to videttes dug for the defense of the camp and fought the British advance until ordered to retreat on the main force. The time that the pickets gained for Greene allowed the army to form a battle line across the

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<sup>15</sup> Lossing, Pictorial Field-Book of the Revolution, 2:472.

<sup>16</sup> G. W. Greene, The Life of Nathanael Greene, 3:243-4.

Salisbury road. Williams commanded the Maryland troops on the east of the road, and Huger the Virginians on the west. Greene placed his best troops in the center closest to the road. On the left side was Gunby's First Maryland regiment, and on the right side of the road the Second Virginia under Lieutenant Colonel Samuel Hawes with the newly arrived artillery under Colonel Harrison supporting him. Washington's dragoons with about 250 North Carolina militia troops made up the reserve in the rear. Greene was badly outnumbered and somewhat surprised by the attack.<sup>17</sup>

Rawdon attacked the center of the American line and was at first repulsed by the fire of the Continentals and their unexpected artillery support. Gunby's first Maryland and Hawes' Virginians, the center of the Americans line, counterattacked against the British force. Greene had given orders to advance using only the bayonet. Accordingly, Gunby's First Maryland advanced against Rawdon but could not maintain this counterattack. Gunby's troops continued advancing until the enemy's fire grew too heavy. Then two companies on Gunby's right, disregarding Greene's order to use only their bayonets, returned fire. The time it took to stop, kneel, aim and fire disordered

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<sup>17</sup> Report of General Nathanael Greene to Congress: Camp at Sander's Creek, 27 April 1781, Papers of the Continental Congress, roll 191, vol. 2, items 128-31.

the line. Nevertheless, these troops still continued to advance, but at this crucial moment in the battle, Captain William Beatty, a well liked and effective young officer, was shot through the heart and dropped dead at the head of his company.<sup>18</sup> The company, now lacking a leader, stopped to recover the body of its fallen captain and became confused. This confusion slowed its advance and the disorder quickly spread to the rest of the right side of the line.<sup>19</sup>

The other companies in the regiment were still advancing and some of the regiment was still coming up from the rear and was being pressed forward at quick time. The forward movement of the attack might have been preserved, and the battle still won, but instead of pressing the attack, Gunby ordered the regiment to fall back and reform. The order was fatal to the Americans. Once the Marylanders had been ordered to retreat, they panicked and ran. "Williams, Gunby, Howard honored and revered as they were, could do nothing to allay the disorder. . . . before they could be rallied again, the day was lost."<sup>20</sup> The Maryland regiments had lost all

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<sup>18</sup> O. H. Williams to Elie Williams, 23 June 1781, Williams Papers, MS908:2.

<sup>19</sup> G. W. Greene, The Life of Nathanael Greene, 3:247.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 3:247-9.

discipline, broke and ran, leaving the Virginians with their left flank in the air. Hawes was forced to withdraw back up Hobkirk's Hill. Williams attempted to rally the Maryland troops using his other regiment, but when their commander, Lieutenant Colonel Benjamin Ford was mortally wounded, the Second Maryland, now leaderless, also withdrew.<sup>21</sup>

Greene, trying to pull victory from defeat, ordered Washington's dragoons forward to support Hawes' Virginians, the only unit in the center of the line to hold. Greene personally led the charge of Washington's cavalry and the remainder of the reserves and managed to save the artillery. Washington's dragoons were then ordered to attack the British rear. He led his troops through the woods toward the rear of the British line but could not get all the way around their right flank. As the British advanced, a hole opened on the right, allowing Washington to lead his dragoons through it and into the rear as far as Log Town, a half mile from Camden, taking about fifty prisoners and holding the British cavalry in check. Unfortunately by the time they could return to the battle, it was over. Williams, Gunby and Howard managed

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

to collect part of the Marylanders and reform in the rear. These troops returned to the battle also too late to do anything but to conduct an orderly retreat.<sup>22</sup>

The American cavalry did much better than the infantry at Hobkirk's Hill. The superiority in both the quality of the American mounts and in the number of well trained dragoons prevented the British from following up the victory. Tarleton stated that, "the enemy's cavalry being superior to the British, their dragoons could not risk much; and Lord Rawdon duly considering his inferiority in number, would not suffer the infantry to break their order."<sup>23</sup> Thus Rawdon returned to Camden and Greene retreated to Rugely's Mills, ending the battle of Hobkirk's Hill. The British and American casualties in the battle were about equal. However, Lord Rawdon's losses were 258 soldiers; a quarter of his force fell either killed, wounded, or missing, far more than the depleted British Army in the South could afford.<sup>24</sup> Greene's army suffered approximately 271 casualties.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Report of General Nathanael Greene to Congress, 27 April 1781, roll 191, vol. 2, items 128-31.

<sup>23</sup> Tarleton, A History, 464.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Report of General Nathanael Greene to Congress, Camp at Sander's Creek, 27 April 1781, Field Returns of the Southern Army, O. H. Williams, Papers of the Congress, roll 191, vol. 2 items 132-33.

Greene had again lost a battle and won his objective. Because of the high British losses at Hobkirk's Hill, Lord Rawdon was no longer able to safely maintain his force in the interior of the state, and on 9 May, after being joined by five hundred reinforcements under Colonel Watson, was forced to retreat to Monck's Corner near Charleston. Marion and Lee were again detached to move against the British outposts in the interior of South Carolina. They attacked outposts at Orangeburg, Fort Motte, Nelson's Ferry and Fort Granby. On 27 April Greene sent Marion a single six pound cannon for artillery support. Orangeburg fell to Sumter's partisans on 11 May. Marion's troops captured Fort Motte on 12 May and Nelson's Ferry on 14 May, and the following day, Fort Granby surrendered to Lee. The artillery support was inadequate, as a six pounder could not reduce the heavy brick walls which surrounded most of the plantations occupied by the British, and did not have the range to do more than harass the British within their works.<sup>26</sup> Greene then ordered Lee to join with General Pickens' command and attack Fort Grierson and Fort Cornwallis near Augusta, Georgia.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ward, The War of the Revolution, 812-15; and Lee, Memoirs of the War, 2:77-9.

<sup>27</sup> Lee, Memoirs of the War, 2:87.

These forts and the city of Augusta fell to Pickens and Lee on 21 May. Fort Galphin surrendered to Sumter. Because Ninety-six was the next objective of the Southern army, Sumter was ordered to disrupt the communications between Ninety-six and Lord Rawdon's army. He delayed his move toward Ninety-six only long enough to complete his mission of reducing the British outposts in the interior of South Carolina.<sup>28</sup>

Greene moved his main force against Fort Ninety-Six, one of the strongest British forts in South Carolina. This fort was manned by Lieutenant Colonel John Cruger, a New York Loyalist, who had under his command 550 Tory troops, 350 of them from regular Loyalist regiments raised in New York and New Jersey, and 200 South Carolina loyalist militia of indifferent quality. Cruger, when informed of the approach of the American army, strengthened his works.<sup>29</sup> When Greene arrived on 22 May, the Southern Army found a strongly held fortification with a star redoubt, and numerous block houses surrounding the village of Ninety-six. The Southern army lacked siege artillery.

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<sup>28</sup> Accounts of this campaign differ as to the reasons that the principal parties acted as they did. See Johnson, Sketches of the Life and Correspondences of Nathanael Greene, 2:102-103, 119-20; Lee, Memoirs of the War, 2:72-98; and Lossing, Pictorial Field-Book of the Revolution, 2:476-84.

<sup>29</sup> Lee, Memoirs of the War, 2:88; and Lumpkin, From Savannah to Yorktown, 192-5.

Thus the only hope of taking Ninety-six, short of starving the garrison, was by storming the works. With this end in mind, Williams' Maryland Brigade started the siege by digging a parallel trench east of the star fort as ordered by Greene's chief engineering officer, Colonel Thaddeus Kosciuszko.<sup>30</sup>

The siege continued through May and into June, while two more parallels were dug. Lee reinforced Greene after the fall of Fort Cornwallis, and with the addition of his legion, Ninety-six's position was almost hopeless unless Lord Rawdon could lift the siege by reinforcing Cruger or relieving the garrison. Fortunately for the British in June, Lord Rawdon received three regiments of reinforcements from Britain and with these additional soldiers he was able to brush aside Sumter and Marion's militia troops who were holding him at Monck's Corner. Greene rushed Washington's cavalry and Pickens' Brigade to reinforce the partisan generals, but even with these additional troops, the militia forces were insufficient to stop Rawdon from advancing to the aid of the garrison at Ninety-six. On 18 June, as a last resort before being compelled to raise the siege, Colonel Williams and Lieutenant Colonel Richard Campbell commanded a mixed

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<sup>30</sup> Lossing, Pictorial Field-Book of the Revolution, 2:484-5.

force of Virginia and Maryland troops in an attempt to take the fort by storm. Lieutenant Colonels Lee and John Greene of Virginia as well as Captain Kirkwood of Delaware led their units in the attack on the star fort. Lieutenants Isaac Duval of Maryland and Samuel Selden of Virginia led the forlorn hope.<sup>31</sup> The American troops were able to penetrate the works but were unable to hold the star fort in the face of a British counterattack. Both of the lieutenants commanding the advance party were wounded in the repulse of the attack. This failure to take and hold the star redoubt ended the siege of Ninety-six.<sup>32</sup> Greene retreated on 20 June, after a twenty-seven day siege. American losses during the entire siege were one officer and 58 men killed, 3 officers and 69 men wounded, 4 officers and 20 men captured or missing, or approximately 145 total casualties.<sup>33</sup> The militia losses were not reported. On the evening of the same day Lord Rawdon marched into Ninety-six, and a week later he

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<sup>31</sup> The forlorn hope is the name of the advanced party that leads the assault in the initial storming of the breach in a besieged fortification. These troops must capture and hold the breach until additional soldiers can advance to reinforce them. Because of the dangerous nature of this assignment, the unit was traditionally composed of volunteers only.

<sup>32</sup> O. H. Williams to Elie Williams, 23 June 1781; Williams Papers. MS 908:2.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

left. The British main force marched to Monck's Corner to await reinforcement from England. <sup>34</sup> .

Greene had again lost a battle and accomplished his goal. The activities of the partisans made resupply of bases in the interior too costly for them to be maintained without weakening the main army, and the presence of a regular American force made the maintenance of a strong British force necessary.

The American failure to reduce Ninety-six was costly to the army but not to the final issue of the campaign. Williams wrote to his brother Elie that in spite of the American failure to force the surrender of Ninety-six "[General Greene] has obliged the enemy to abandon all of their posts in South Carolina except Charleston and Ninety-six. "He lamented the loss of the only officer killed during the siege, Captain George Armstrong of Maryland who "fell in the trenches before Ninety-six." This loss was in addition to the death of another old friend, Lieutenant Colonel Benjamin Ford who had died of his wounds incurred at Hobkirk's Hill. He wrote that there were not enough veteran officers left to command "the small remnant of our veteran troops - but it is the

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<sup>34</sup> Tarleton, A History, 476.

fate of war, and the cause of our country must be maintained by such sacrifices."<sup>35</sup>

Lord Rawdon left Monck's Corner as soon as he felt that his force was strong enough to oppose the American army. He expected to meet his reinforcements under Colonel Alexander Stewart, but this force did not arrive until the army reached Orangeburg. Greene marched his army toward Orangeburg, hoping to attack the British before their reinforcements arrived but failed in this attempt. Since neither side was in any position to take offensive action, both armies repaired to bases of repose. Rawdon remained in Orangeburg and Greene retired to the High Hills of Santee.<sup>36</sup>

Williams' part in this phase of the campaign was that of the loyal and skillful commander of regular troops as well as continuing as adjutant general of the army. His conduct at Hobkirk's Hill and Eutaw Springs was admirable even if the result was less than optimum for the American cause. Williams was growing weary of the contest, but Greene depended on him to such an extent that he was loath to ask for furlough.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, his most daring exploit was yet to come.

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<sup>35</sup> O. H. Williams to Elie Williams, 23 June 1781; Williams Papers. MS 908:2.

<sup>36</sup> Lossing, Pictorial Field-Book of the Revolution, 2:490.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

### VIII. The Last of Rawdon and the End of the Southern Campaign

By July Lord Rawdon had moved his force to Orangeburg in order to cover the area of the Edisto River. There he awaited reinforcements to arrive under Stewart who marched from Charleston with about three hundred soldiers and a large supply convoy. Greene sent off his partisans under Sumter and Lee to attack the British Nineteenth Regiment stationed at Monck's Corner. This attack failed to do more than alert the British of Sumter's position and to take some prisoners. Meanwhile Greene hoped to attack the British outside of Orangeburg before they could be joined by Cruger's New York Loyalists. The British had abandoned Ninety-six, unable to hold it any longer because of the increase in partisan activity which made resupply nearly impossible. Upon his arrival at Orangeburg, Greene found that the British were in too strong a position for him to attack with the 1,600 troops in his small army, but he offered battle to Rawdon, an offer which the slightly outnumbered Rawdon prudently declined. The British were

soon joined by Cruger, and the combined force was too large for Greene's force.<sup>1</sup>

With all of the interior of South Carolina secured by the American forces, and the unhealthy summer season upon them, the Continentals went into "a camp of repose" in the High Hills district along the Santee River.<sup>2</sup> Not wanting to give the British any respite, General Greene sent his partisan militia under Sumter and Lee's Legion to attack the Nineteenth Regiment of Foot stationed at Monck's Corner. He sent General Marion's partisans to operate against the Loyalist troops that were still active in the southern part of the state.<sup>3</sup> This summer encampment gave Williams the first chance in months to rest and resupply his troops. The dedication of the Continental officers and men of the Southern army cannot be overstated.

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<sup>1</sup> O. H. Williams to Major Pendleton, 16 July 1781, in Lee, Memoirs of the War, 2:142-3.

<sup>2</sup> In the North the campaigning season was the same as in Europe, from April, when the roads dried out enough to hold wagons and artillery, until the winter rain and snow made the roads impassable. In the South the campaigning season was reversed. It was normally late fall through late spring. As there were few roads anyway and the weather was not as extreme as in the North, the key factor in determining the fighting season was the health of the troops. After the mosquitoes hatched in the low country, yellow fever killed more soldiers than battle did. So the armies, unless pressed by military necessity, went into camp on high ground in the summer.

<sup>3</sup> Troops that were native to the South were better able to resist the fevers and heat of the South Carolina summer.

Few had whole uniforms, and they went unpaid for months or, in some cases, years. Hospital supplies and medicine were always in short supply; food supplies were uncertain and in most cases barely edible when available at all.<sup>4</sup>

Greene, in a letter to his wife Kitty stated that during the six week retreat and reconquest of North Carolina he did not take off his uniform. It can be assumed that most of his senior officers were equally diligent in the pursuit of their duties.<sup>5</sup>

As all of North Carolina except Wilmington, all of South Carolina except the area around Charleston, and most of Georgia except Savannah were lost to the British cause, Lord Rawdon found that the climate no longer agreed with him. His Lordship gave up his command in South Carolina and returned to England for his health, leaving Colonel Alexander Stewart in command of the remnant of the British Army in South Carolina.<sup>6</sup> Stewart moved his troops to an

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<sup>4</sup> Johnson, Sketches of the Life and Correspondences of Nathanael Greene, 2:247-8.

<sup>5</sup> G. W. Greene, The Life of Nathanael Greene, 3:209.

<sup>6</sup> Rawdon had not seen the last of the United States. His ship fell in with the French fleet under Comte De Grasse, and he was carried with it as a prisoner to Yorktown. Lossing, Pictorial Field-Book of the Revolution, 2:474.

advanced position in Orangeburg and awaited the American army.<sup>7</sup>

The American army remained in bivouac through August 1781, and on 23 August, early in the season for the weather was still hot, left its "camp of repose" in the High Hills of the Santee to offer battle. Greene started his move against the British by marching the main army to Fort Motte on the Congaree River above Monck's Corner and started to consolidate his forces. Williams commanded the Maryland Brigade, Washington the cavalry, and Pickens the South Carolina Continentals. Greene called in Marion and Lee from their partisan activities and placed all of the South Carolina militia under Marion's command. A small brigade of North Carolina Continentals under Brigadier General Jethro Sumner came in to reinforce the few remaining militia from that state. Colonel William Henderson's South Carolina militia cavalry also joined with a force of horsemen. Upon gathering his forces, Greene could now field an army of about 2,400 men, approximately half of them militia.<sup>8</sup> Greene was of the opinion that this was a strong enough force to take control of the state of South Carolina. By 7 September Greene was in position at Burdell's plantation seven

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<sup>7</sup> Hugh F. Rankin, Francis Marion: The Swamp Fox, 224-5.

<sup>8</sup> Carrington, Battles of the American Revolution, 578-81.

miles from Eutaw Springs and ready to move against Stewart who had an army of approximately 2,000 men. Stewart had withdrawn his force forty miles to a strong position near the Santee River. It was a plantation on the banks of Eutaw Springs. The plantation compound consisted of a well built brick main house, backed by a walled garden and a number of outbuildings. This position guarded a key crossing of the Santee as well as the a main road from Camden to Charleston.<sup>9</sup>

On the morning of 8 September Stewart was aware that the American army was on the move toward his position, but he did not know how close to his works they were and sent out a rooting party of about 200 men to gather yams for the garrison. The rooting party met the dragoons of William Washington, and as they were unarmed almost all of them fell into American hands. However, the noise of the skirmish alerted Stewart in time to get his army in line of battle.<sup>10</sup> The British force consisted of the newly arrived Third Regiment of Foot (Irish Buffs), the veteran Sixty-Third and Sixty-Fourth Regiments of Foot, and Cruger's New York Loyalists.<sup>11</sup> The American army was

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<sup>9</sup> G. W. Greene, The Life of Nathanael Greene, 3:209.

<sup>10</sup> Report of Colonel Stewart to Lord Cornwallis, Eutaw Springs, 9 September 1781, Tarleton, A History, 510-13.

<sup>11</sup> Carrington, Battles of the American Revolution, 578-81.

drawn up in two lines astride the river road with the militia of Marion on the left of the first line and Pickens on the right. Lee was on the right flank with his dragoons, Lieutenant Colonel Henderson with the South Carolina militia cavalry on the right flank, and Washington's cavalry was in reserve in the rear. The second line, consisting of the Maryland Continentals under Williams, Howard, and Major Henry P. Hardman, were on the left directly behind Marion. Pickens, with his South Carolina State troops was stationed on the right. The North Carolina militia was in the center, and Sumner's Continentals with Campbell and the Legion infantry were behind them in the second line. About 4 a.m the Americans started their advance, having taken the routing party and driven in the British pickets.<sup>12</sup>

At the start of the battle all went well for the American forces. The militia attacked with a vigor not normally seen from them and drove in the veteran British regiments in their front. However, the British fire grew too heavy for the militia troops to handle and Pickens' militia gave way on the right and Sumner's North Carolina Continentals pressed forward. Greene then ordered Williams' and Campbell's troops, the center of his second

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

line, to charge the British with bayonet. The Marylanders precisely obeyed the orders. These troops went forward with the elan expected from veterans of many years service.<sup>13</sup> Campbell's troops went forward with just as much vigor but without the discipline of the Marylanders. Lee, whose infantry was ahead of the Virginians on the right flank, was endangered by the musketry. Lee rode to Campbell to find out the reason for the uncontrolled fire. Campbell stopped to speak with Lee, and at that moment Campbell was hit by a musket ball in the chest and mortally wounded, but his soldiers continued their charge.<sup>14</sup> The Americans gained the British camp. Unfortunately, the long starved and unpaid soldiers of the militia found themselves surrounded with supplies normally not seen in the American army. The soldiers stopped in their pursuit of the British in order to loot the camp.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> O. H. Williams to Major Edward Giles, 23 September 1781, Williams Papers, MS 908:2; and Report of General Nathanael Greene to Congress, Headquarters, Martin's Tavern near Ferguson's Swamp South Carolina, 11 September 1781, Papers of the Continental Congress, roll 175, vol. 2, item 145.

<sup>14</sup> Lee, Memoirs of the War, 2:291-2,

<sup>15</sup> Lee, Memoirs of the War, 2:289; O. H. Williams to Major Edward Giles, 23 September 1781, Williams Papers, MS 908:2, and Report of General Nathanael Greene to Congress, Headquarters, Martin's Tavern near Ferguson's Swamp South Carolina, 11 September 1781, Papers of the Continental Congress, roll 175, vol. 2, item 145.

On the left flank British Major John P. Majoribanks, commanding the flank companies,<sup>16</sup> took up a strong position in a thicket of black jack<sup>17</sup> on the left of the American line and kept a heavy and deadly fire on Williams' Continentals coming forward behind Marion's militia. Majoribanks' "galling fire" on the American flank forced Washington's Dragoons to try to dislodge them. When the dragoons failed, the task fell to Lieutenant Colonel Wade Hampton, now in command of the wounded Colonel Henderson's South Carolina militia cavalry, and to Kirkwood's Delaware Continentals. These troops pressed the attack and forced Majoribanks to retreat behind a palisade built into the plantation's garden wall. Washington was wounded and captured in an attempt to dislodge Majoribanks from his position in the thicket and about forty of his dragoons were captured.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> The flank companies of a British regiment are the light infantry and the grenadier companies. These are considered the elite troops of a regiment. On this and many other occasions, all of the flank companies of a force were combined into a single unit. Louis Birnbaum, Red Dawn at Lexington (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1976), 92-4.

<sup>17</sup> Black jack, Quercus marilandica, is a scrub black oak with crooked and intertwining branches which grows thickly as underbrush. This tangled underbrush is all but impassable to men on horseback. Elbert L. Little, The Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Trees: Eastern Region, (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1980), 397.

<sup>18</sup> Lee, Memoirs of the War, 2:291-2; and "Account furnished by Col. Otho Williams, with additions by Cols. W. Hampton, Polk, Howard, and Watts," Documentary History of the American Revolution, Robert W. Gibbes, ed. (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1853), 3:151-4.

Majoribanks was now in an even stronger position, from which all attempts to dislodge him failed. Still the personal gallantry of Williams and the officers and men of the Maryland line would drive the Irish Buffs and Sixty-Fourth Regiment from the field at bayonet point. John Edger Howard was wounded leading his First Maryland Regiment against the Buffs.<sup>19</sup> On the right flank, the Virginia Continentals were joined in the charge by Lee's Legion infantry who met the Sixty-Third. Stewart then retreated to his headquarters in the plantation's main house. It was a strongly build two story brick building with over thirty windows and had "all of the attributes of a citadel."<sup>20</sup> The British then directed a deadly fire on the Americans. Major Majoribanks chose this time to sortie out to capture the American artillery, which was lightly defended on the main road. The British succeeded in taking the two six pounders leaving the Americans with only two dismounted grasshoppers for artillery.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> The Irish Buffs where part of a detachment that had landed from Ireland on 3 September. These troops had not seen any action and were not yet recovered from the sea voyage nor were they acclimatized to the South Carolina summer. Yet they fought with an obstinacy usually seen only in veteran regiments. Lee, Memoirs of the War, 2:283.

<sup>20</sup> O. H. Williams to Edward Giles, 23 September 1781, Williams Papers, MS 908:2.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

Greene, having lost his heavy cannon and being unable to dislodge the British from their position with only small arms, saw no advantage in maintaining the fight for the brick house. He ordered a retreat; the American army pulled back as far as Burdell's Plantation, three miles from the battlefield, this being the nearest source of fresh water.<sup>22</sup>

The battle had lasted three hours and was one of the costliest of the war for the numbers engaged. The British lost at least one third of the 2000 men engaged. Stewart's returns showed 693 killed, wounded, and missing; included in this figure are 3 officers killed, 16 wounded and 10 missing.<sup>23</sup> The American returns showed 554 total casualties of which 408 were Continental casualties and 143 from the militia and state troops.<sup>24</sup> Of the six regimental commanders holding Continental commissions only Williams and Lee were unhurt. Campbell was dead; Howard and Henderson were wounded; and Washington was a wounded prisoner.<sup>25</sup> Johnson stated that the American army took

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Tarleton, A History, 513.

<sup>24</sup> Report of General Nathanael Greene to Congress, Headquarters, Martin's Tavern near Ferguson's Swamp South Carolina, 11 September 1781, Papers of the Continental Congress, roll 175, vol. 2, item 145.

<sup>25</sup> Lee, Memoirs of the War, 2:291-2.

approximately 500 prisoners. Many of these troops were loyalists and were not reflected in Stewart's returns.<sup>26</sup> Lee stated that the army had 600 wounded with it when Greene returned to the High Hills of Santee.<sup>27</sup> Although both sides claimed the victory, the fruits of the victory again went to Greene. Williams wrote in an account of the battle that:

the best criterion of victory is to be found in consequences; and here the evidence is altogether on the American side. For the enemy abandoned his position, relinquished the country it commanded, and although largely re-enforced, still retired, when the Americans advanced within five miles of him. . . .<sup>28</sup>

After the battle with Stewart, Greene returned to his camp in the High Hills on the Santee and was ready to move to finish the campaign in the South once the weather moderated, while Stewart retreated to Monck's Corner, a purely defensive base which guarded the approaches to Charleston.<sup>29</sup>

The Battle of Eutaw Springs was the closest Greene came to an undisputed victory in the Southern Campaign.

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<sup>26</sup> Johnson, Sketches of the Life and Correspondences of Nathanael Greene, 2:236.

<sup>27</sup> Lee, Memoirs of the War, 2:291-3.

<sup>28</sup> "Account furnished by Otho Williams," Documentary History of the American Revolution, 3:156.

<sup>29</sup> Lee, Memoirs of the War, 2:299-300.

For his gallant efforts Congress voted him a gold medal and some of his other officers honors such as silver medals and swords. General Greene extolled the gallantry of the Continental troops in his report to Congress, saying of their charge:

In this stage of the action, the Virginians under Lieutenant Colonel Campbell, and the Marylanders under Colonel Williams, were led on to a brisk charge, with trailed arms, through a heavy cannonade and a shower of musket balls. Nothing could exceed the gallantry and firmness of both officers and soldiers upon this occasion. They preserved their order, and pressed on with such unshaken resolution that they bore down all before them.<sup>30</sup>

Williams was among the officers singled out by Greene for particular praise. Greene said of him in the report to Congress:

I cannot help acknowledging my obligations to Colonel Williams for his great activity on this and many other occasions in forming the army, and his uncommon intrepidity in leading on the Maryland troops to the charge, which exceeded anything I have ever saw.<sup>31</sup>

For his part in the battle, Congress voted Williams a presentation sword "for his great military skill and uncommon exertions on this occasion."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Report of General Nathanael Greene to Congress, Headquarters, Martin's Tavern near Ferguson's Swamp South Carolina, 11 September 1781, Papers of the Continental Congress, roll 175, vol. 2, item 145.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Journals of the Continental Congress (Washington D.C.: Library of Congress, GPO, 1941), 21:1085.

## IX. Williams' Return to Maryland and the End of the Southern Campaign

By the end of autumn only New York in the North and Charleston and Savannah in the South were in British control. The last British field army under Cornwallis had surrendered to George Washington and Comte de Rochambeau on 19 October 1781. Shortly after news of Cornwallis' defeat reached them on 14 November, the British evacuated Wilmington.<sup>1</sup> Greene's intention was now to force the British out of both Charleston and Savannah and free all of the South.

To this end, on 18 November Williams was ordered to march the main army toward Charleston by way of Four Holes Creek, a tributary of the Edisto River, while the light troops under Greene marched by way of Dorchester where he hoped to surprise and take 400 hundred infantry and most of British cavalry which was stationed there. If this enterprise could be carried out and the horses taken, the ability of the British to launch offensive actions would be hampered by a lack of cavalry. The British detected Greene's approach in time for most of them to pull back to within 7 miles of Charleston. Greene withdrew his light

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<sup>1</sup> Johnson, Sketches of the Life and Correspondences of Nathanael Greene, 2:252.

troops to Four Holes and began a loose siege of Charleston.<sup>2</sup> The city had been reinforced by the addition of Lieutenant Colonel Craig's troops from the Wilmington garrison and Major General Leslie's corps, which had survived the Virginia campaign. While he cut off communication routes with the interior from the north and west, Greene ordered Marion and Lee to capture or destroy all British outposts south of the city.<sup>3</sup>

Lee, who was sent North to join in the siege of Yorktown, returned immediately after Cornwallis' surrender as the vanguard of long overdue reinforcements which were finally being sent South under Major General Arthur St. Clair. The bulk of these troops arrived in January and February 1782. They were soldiers of the Pennsylvania Line with Brigadier General (Mad) Anthony Wayne in command and a brigade of Marylanders under Mordicai Gist. With these additional troops at his disposal, Greene was now ready to begin the final stages of the Southern campaign.<sup>4</sup> As usual in the Southern army a reinforcement also meant a loss. The winter saw the

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<sup>2</sup> Lee, Memoirs of the War, 2:378-80.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Johnson, Sketches of the Life and Correspondences of Nathanael Greene, 2:276-7; and Tierney, "The Life and Letters of Otho Holland Williams," 89.

departure of the Virginia Continentals and Kirkwood with some of his officers. Kirkwood had served in thirty-two battles and in every major campaign since the battle of Trenton in 1776.<sup>5</sup> Greene next moved against Savannah. The soldiers under Wayne were given the task of investing the city, and this they did. Although no major battles were fought after Eutaw Springs, skirmishing continued between the armies until the British evacuation of Savannah on 11 July 1782 and Charleston on 14 December 1782.<sup>6</sup>

In June 1782 Gist was given command of the light corps made up of the one hundred infantry troops of his Maryland brigade and the surviving Delaware infantry under Kirkwood, all of the cavalry including Lee's Legion and the third and fourth regiments of dragoons.<sup>7</sup> With Gist's arrival, Williams was no longer the senior officer from Maryland. From that time on Williams' main task during the campaign was to carry out his duties as the Deputy Adjutant General of the Southern Army. This was far from a sinecure. Lieutenant Colonel Edward Carrington, the quartermaster, was in Virginia with the Northern army. The Maryland Line had not been paid in two years, and

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<sup>5</sup> Lee, Memoirs of the War 1:182-3.

<sup>6</sup> Lossing, Pictorial Field-Book of the Revolution, 2:534.

<sup>7</sup> Lee, Memoirs of the War, 2:426.

years, and supplies were always scarce. Captured British supplies were the most abundant source of arms and ammunition. As the chief administrator of the army, the Adjutant General was responsible for resolving all of these problems.<sup>8</sup>

In late February, soon after the arrival of the new Maryland Brigade, Williams asked for and was granted leave to return to Maryland. He arrived home some time in March 1782.<sup>9</sup> He was to serve another year on active duty but would not rejoin the Southern army nor would he again command troops.

The fight for promotion in the Continental Congress was one fought by the representatives of each state on behalf of the officers in their state's line. The representative from New Jersey demanded that his state's candidate, Colonel Elias Dayton, be promoted either with or instead of Williams. This political squabbling had cost Williams his chance for promotion a year earlier. However, on 11 May 1782, after glowing recommendations from Generals Washington and Greene and after a long political battle over who had precedence, Williams was promoted to Brigadier General in the Maryland Line; the

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<sup>8</sup> Johnson, Sketches of the Life and Correspondences of Nathanael Greene, 2:266-7; and Tierney, "The Life and Letters of Otho Holland Williams," 89-90.

<sup>9</sup> Tierney, "The Life and Letters of Otho Holland Williams," 90.

effective date of rank was 9 May 1782.<sup>10</sup> The bill that Congress passed in part read:

The United States in Congress.

General Greene, commanding the Army of the United States in the Southern department having represented to Congress that appointment of a Brigadier General to command a Brigade in the Maryland Line of the Army was rendered expedient by the proposed formation of the said Line into two brigades, and having recommended Col. Otho H. Williams as an officer whose distinguished talents and services give him just pretensions to such an appointment which recommendation is also supported by the Testimony of the Commander in Chief in Favor of said Officer. . . Resolved that in consideration of the distinguished talents and services of Colonel Otho H. Williams he be and hereby is appointed as Brigadier General in the Army of the United States.

Chas. Thomson, Jr. Secy.<sup>11</sup>

The orders were endorsed by John Hanson, President of Congress and Benjamin Lincoln, Secretary of War and sent to Williams now at home in Washington County, Maryland. Upon receiving the promotion orders, Williams sent the appropriate letters of thanks to both Washington and

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<sup>10</sup> Tierney, "The Life and Letters of Otho Holland Williams," 91-3.

<sup>11</sup> The United States Congress to O. H. Williams, 11 May 1782, Williams Papers, MS 908:2.

Greene, and went to Philadelphia to personally thank his friends in Congress and to lobby for a command.<sup>12</sup>

Williams spent the next year seeking a command. He wrote letters to Generals Washington and Von Steuben, and met with the Secretary of War, General Lincoln on his trip to Philadelphia.<sup>13</sup> Given his previous wish to return to Maryland, it became doubtful that Williams wanted a military career, but being an active man in his early thirties, he wanted employment. Because of the decrease in military action after the fall of Yorktown, the likelihood of a military command was doubtful. Maryland had too many brigadier generals and too few troops. Gist was in command of the Maryland Brigade in the South, and since the British Parliament had started peace negotiations, and the size of the Continental army was being reduced, there was no command in the Continental army for the newly promoted General Williams. Although he did not get a command in the army, he was far from idle. Williams was very concerned with the plight of the wounded Maryland soldiers struggling home from the South and addressed both the assembly and the governor in Annapolis on their situation. He called the government's attention

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<sup>12</sup> Tierney, "The Life and Letters of Otho Holland Williams," 100-2.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

to their poverty and called for the formation of an Invalid corps, similar to the British one in which soldiers unfit for duty in the field could be used to train fresh levies, garrison forts, and show by example that Maryland takes care of its soldiers in their hour of need.<sup>14</sup> Throughout 1782 and into 1783 Williams recruited in Western Maryland and attended to his private business affairs in which he was quite successful. Williams bought a large amount of real estate from the State of Maryland and was in the market for slaves.<sup>15</sup> He was a partner in several ships with Colonel Samuel Smith and seems to have had diverse commercial interests. A number of these letters between Williams and Smith are concerned with commercial transactions, many of them quite petty.<sup>16</sup>

On 15 January 1783 Williams resigned his commission in the Continental army and accepted the post of naval officer in charge of the Port of Baltimore, a position he would hold for the rest of his life. His responsibilities

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<sup>14</sup> O. H. Williams, "Address to the Assembly of Maryland to make provisions for Invalid Soldiers of Maryland," 3 June 1782, Tierney, "The Life and Letters of Otho Holland Williams," 102-4.

<sup>15</sup> Samuel Smith to O. H. Williams, 24 July 1782, 9 September 1782, Elie Williams to O. H. Williams, 26 October 1782, Williams Papers, MS908:2.

<sup>16</sup> Samuel Smith to O. H. Williams, 9 September 1782, Williams Papers, MS908:2.

included collecting customs duties as well as regulating the traffic and maintaining the defenses of the port. During this period his personal life changed for the better with his marriage. It was his lucrative position as collector of the port which enabled him to marry Mary Smith of Baltimore, the second daughter of a wealthy merchant, William Smith. In the next eight years, they had five sons, William Elie, Edward Greene, Henry Lee, Otho Holland and Robert. Robert died at 5 1/2 years old, but all of the other children lived to adulthood.<sup>17</sup> From 1783 until he married in 1785, Williams tended his business interests and his duties as commander of the Port of Baltimore. After his marriage, his family and home in western Maryland competed with his professional duties for his limited time. From 1786 until his death, Williams expanded his real estate interests in western Maryland. He improved the family farm, called Springfields, and founded the town of Williamsport.<sup>18</sup>

After the war, Williams became active in organizing the Society of the Cincinnati. As Williams was the third ranking officer in the state and the best suited by service and training for the post, he was elected as the

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<sup>17</sup> Tiffany, A Sketch of the Life and Services of Gen. Otho

secretary of the Maryland chapter, and at the first general convocation of the order in Philadelphia he was elected as the deputy to General Henry Knox who was elected as Secretary of the national order. As assistant to Knox, he corresponded regularly with General Washington and with many of his former comrades. He served in both the state and national offices from their founding until his death.<sup>19</sup> Williams embodied all of the qualities of the citizen soldier which Washington envisioned when he founded the society; he was a public spirited citizen, farmer, patriot, soldier, and businessman.

Williams' loyalty to Greene never wavered. After Greene's death in 1786, Sumter attacked Greene's military record and financial dealings during the Southern campaign. Williams, Lee, and Edward Carrington sprang to the defense of their former commander, as did Greene's old friend from the Northern Army, Alexander Hamilton. The controversy almost involved Hamilton in a duel with Aeneas Burke, a congressman from South Carolina. Williams, with Lee and Carrington, wrote a letter in defense of Greene's conduct in the Southern Campaign which they signed

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<sup>19</sup> Many of these letters are reprinted in General Washington's Correspondence Concerning the Society of Cincinnati, Edgar E. Hume, ed. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1941), 155, 212-14, 233-4, 308, 342.

"Vindicator" and sent to Hamilton for publication if it was needed. Hamilton decided against publication.<sup>20</sup>

Williams' continued devotion to duty is evident in his service as Collector of the Port. All through this period, in spite of his falling health, he maintained an almost daily correspondence, both official and personal, with Alexander Hamilton who was then Secretary of the Treasury. During Williams' years of service, the two men had developed a strong professional as well as personal relationship. They had met during Williams' service in the Northern Army and had corresponded infrequently during the war. Williams' last letter, dated 5 June 1794, a week before his death, was directed to Hamilton. In it Williams informed him of the poor state of his health and reported how he had enforced the Act of Embargo. He also stated that he had appointed a deputy to run the office during his illness.<sup>21</sup>

Williams' health, delicate since his imprisonment in 1776-7, had begun to fall after 1789. Frequent trips to take the waters of Sweet Springs in Bath, Virginia and one

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<sup>20</sup> Letters from Williams to Hamilton, 5 April 1792 and 20 June 1792, and from Hamilton to Williams, 9 June 1792, The Papers of Alexander Hamilton, 11:240-1, 500, 533-4.

<sup>21</sup> These letters are found throughout the most of the twenty-seven volumes of The Papers of Alexander Hamilton, the first is in volume 2:72 and the last is in 27:489.

trip to the West Indies for his health did nothing to help. On 16 July 1794, Williams died of the tuberculosis which he had contracted during the war. It was widely believed that he contracted the disease while a prisoner of war in New York after the fall of Fort Washington. He was forty-five years old and left a widow and four living sons. He is buried in Williamsport.<sup>22</sup>

It is fitting that Williams ended the war on a quiet note. After he left General Greene's army, he served as a half-pay officer recruiting in western Maryland. Later, having resigned his commission, he served his state equally well as a civilian. In everything he did Williams was hard-working, conscientious and ethical. The short twelve years of his life after the war reflected these characteristics as much as his valuable wartime service.

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<sup>22</sup> Elizabeth Merritt, "Introduction to the Calendar of the Otho Holland Williams Papers," 3.

## X. Conclusion

Otho Holland Williams, officer, patriot and gentleman, was a man who lived his ideals, who expected much from himself and gave it without reservation. That he demanded no less of others was only natural. He was known throughout his military career as a stern but fair disciplinarian. He was also known to be punctilious in his dealings with both his subordinate and superior officers when he felt that they were dealing unjustly with him or his men. In spite of this, he was well liked and almost universally respected. Even Henry Lee, well known for having strong opinions about the conduct and character of his fellow officers, spoke highly of Williams and considered him a good friend. Otho Williams deserved better from his country than the relative obscurity that history has accorded him.

From his gallant but futile stand in the works before Fort Mifflin in 1776 until the resignation of his commission at the end of the Revolutionary War, Otho Williams made important contributions to the patriot cause. His organizational ability helped reorganize the Continental Army after the debacle at Camden. As

commander of the light corps under Greene, he has been credited with saving the Southern Army from near-certain annihilation. Later, as commander of the Maryland Brigade at Guilford Courthouse, Hobkirk's Hill and, finally, at Eutaw Springs, he showed a resolution and gallantry that were recognized by both General Greene and the Continental Congress as exemplary. His promotion to brigadier general was one of the few given by Congress for merit. Most promotions were given because of seniority. As a civilian after the war, he was first collector of the Port of Baltimore under the Articles of Confederation and was reappointed by General Washington under the Constitution. His administrative abilities in this capacity evoked the admiration of his superior, Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton. Devotion to duty was always uppermost in his mind.

Otho Williams cared deeply about his country, his state, his family, and his comrades-in-arms. Speaking of the service of his fellow soldiers of the Maryland Brigade, Williams said it best:

It is known and acknowledged that the troops of this state ever since the commencement of the revolution have participated in the greatest fatigues and dangers of the War with the greatest firmness and perseverance. . . . It is also known that since the Maryland troops have served in the southern States which is now more than two years they have, upon the most arduous occasions, given the highest satisfaction to the Generals who have successively commanded the Southern Army, and particularly to the present enterprising commanding officer General

Greene under whom they have performed the most gallant services; and that they are the only troops who have constantly kept under every difficulty since the spring of 1780. . . . No distresses, no dangers have ever shook the firmness of their spirits, nor induced them to swerve from their duty.<sup>1</sup>

These words which Williams wrote about his comrades could just as easily have been written about him. He certainly gave the highest satisfaction to Greene and was gallant and enterprising in his service to his commander and to his country. Williams played a key supporting role in the Southern campaign. The campaign might have been won without his contributions but at a much higher cost in time, lives, and money.

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<sup>1</sup> O. H. Williams to Governor Thomas Lee, 7 July 1782, Williams Papers, MS 908:2.

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