A STRATEGY GONE SOUTH: THE BRITISH, THE BACKCOUNTRY, AND VIOLENCE IN REVOLUTIONARY SOUTH CAROLINA

by

ASHLEY DEE ALLRED

(Under the Direction of Peter Charles Hoffer)

ABSTRACT

British officers based their Southern strategy on their ability to retain loyalist support. Sectional hostility between the lowcountry and backcountry colonists that had been festering since the 1760s prompted British officials to believe that the piedmont loyalists would take up arms when the war moved south. While the lowcountry elite demanded independence, the backcountry colonists had compelling reasons to remain loyal to the Crown. They might have remained so but for the policies and tactics employed by General Henry Clinton, General Charles Cornwallis, and their subordinate officers in the South Carolina backcountry. Despite the strong loyalist presence in the backcountry and the collapse of patriot military and civil power in 1780, the British would retreat from South Carolina. This thesis focuses on how the policies and tactics employed by British military officers alienated the loyalists and infuriated the neutrals in the South Carolina backcountry.

INDEX WORDS: American Revolution, Southern Strategy, South Carolina, Backcountry Studies, British Army, Violence, Military History, General Henry Clinton, General Charles Cornwallis, Loyalists, Neutrality, Allegiance, Leadership

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ASHLEY DEE ALLRED

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ASHLEY DEE ALLRED

Major Professor:	Peter Charles Hoffer
Committee:	Allan Kulikoff
	Claudio Saunt

Electronic Version Approved:

Julie Coffield
Interim Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
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DEDICATION

To my family whose love and encouragement allowed me to accomplish this goal

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INTRODUCTION

On the morning of December 14, 1782, British ships anchored in Charlestown harbor awaited a tide that would carry them over the sand bars and into the Atlantic Ocean. Throngs of people crowded the decks. The murmurs of hundreds of voices drowned out the sound of the waves lapping against the wooden hulls. The passengers, white and black, discussed the events that had led them to this point. British officials had based their Southern strategy on the belief that a relatively small force of regular soldiers, aided by a loyalist militia, would be able to subdue the rebels in the South. Once one colony was secure, then British regulars would move on to the next and repeat the process. The Southern strategy failed. General Charles Cornwallis had surrendered at Yorktown, Virginia, and the King's troops were returning home to England. Although fighting continued until the signing of the Treaty of Paris of 1783, the British withdrawal from South Carolina had begun. In the South Carolina backcountry, colonists scattered throughout the region pondered the meaning of the British defeat. Like their counterparts on the evacuating ships, many white backcountry folk had once been loyal to the crown prior to the commencement of the Southern campaign. However, British actions in the period between the fall of Charlestown in 1780 and their defeat at Cowpens in 1781 caused the British army to lose support of loyalists and infuriated neutrals.

The British high command had certainly not expected the Southern strategy to fail. British military officials believed that loyalists, who chafed under the rule of the provincial assembly, would enlist as militia and enable their army to defeat the rebels. Moreover, initial victories on the battlefield indicated that the Southern strategy was succeeding. The fall of

Charlestown in May 1780 delivered a crushing blow to the patriots. British commander General Henry Clinton became the master of the crown jewel of the Southern colonies. His forces captured 7 Continental Army Generals, 2,571 regular soldiers, about 800 militiamen, 3 battalions of artillery, 4 frigates, several armed boats, 5,000 stands of arms, a vast quantity of gunpowder, and naval stores.[1] It was the largest loss sustained by the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War and paved the way for Britain's initial domination of South Carolina.[2] Organized patriot military activity collapsed, and continued opposition in South Carolina depended on a partisan militia. In the spring of 1780, the British tightened the noose when Cornwallis deployed his army into the South Carolina backcountry.[3] Approximately 46,000 white colonists of Scots-Irish, Welsh, and German stock and 35,000 blacks inhabited the area.[4]

The white backcountry colonists had long believed that Great Britain was best able to support and defend the region's interest. The tyrant, according to the piedmont populace, resided not across the Atlantic, but in the coastal city of Charlestown. Without adequate representation in the colonial assembly, backcountry colonists proclaimed that it was the lowcountry elite, not Parliament, who violated their rights. In addition, they had been unable to secure Charlestown's aid to defend the region against Native American attacks. Therefore, backcountry colonists relied on Great Britain to repulse Native American raids, preserve their land grants, and protect

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[1] Henry Clinton, *The American Rebellion*, ed. William Willcox (New Haven: Yale UP, 1954), 171.
[2] Eminent historian of South Carolina Walter Edgar confirms the magnitude of the loss in Edgar, *Partisans and Redcoats: The Southern Conflict that Turned the Tide of the American Revolution* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), 50-52.
[3] The aftermath of the Battle of Charlestown and its affect on the patriots and loyalists in the backcountry is further described in John Gordon, *South Carolina and the American Revolution: A Battlefield History* (Columbia: USC Press, 2003), 81, Edgar, *Partisans and Redcoats*, 50-54, Robert Calhoon, *The Loyalists in Revolutionary America, 1760-1781* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973), 484-486, and David Wilson, *The Southern Strategy: Britain's Conquest of South Carolina and Georgia:1775-1780* (Columbia: USC Press, 2005), 233-241.
[4] This figure is taken from Edgar, *Partisans and Redcoats*, xiii.

them from the abuses of the lowcountry assembly. While lowcountry whites clamored for independence, backcountry whites had compelling reasons to remain loyal to the crown.[5]

The British Southern strategy presumed that this loyalist support would enable them to defeat the rebels and restore royal authority. If loyalist sentiment in the backcountry proved to be as great as anticipated, the British could raise a Tory militia and draw supplies from willing farmers, reducing their dependence on materiel from England. Without having to rely on English convoys, the threat of the French navy and American privateers would be less significant. Thus, the pacification of the South Carolina backcountry was a high-stakes game that could affect the strategic balance of the war. A usually cautious Clinton expressed great pleasure at the general disposition of the backcountry people and moved to reestablish control of the colony. Despite a promising start, the British effort failed.[6]

In the aftermath of defeat, British leaders devoted little effort to analyzing their unsuccessful Southern operations, focusing instead on deflecting criticism by blaming their political opponents. Historians, however, have since sought to explain the botched British efforts to regain control of South Carolina. The historiographical debate has centered on whether or not the British correctly estimated the strength and number of Southern loyalists. Traditional historiography on the Southern Campaign attributes the British defeat to a fundamental error in planning: officials in London grossly overestimated the number of loyalists in the South.[7] This

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[5] See Calhoon's Chapter "Lowcountry Unity and Backcountry Civil War," in Calhoon, *The Loyalists*, 448-457. See also John Buchanan's Chapter "Hearts and Minds: Rice Kings as Revolutionaries" that describes some of the grievances between the lowcountry and backcountry residents. Buchanan makes the argument that the lowcountry Rice Kings were radical Whigs who wanted to retain their privileges and secure their financial success to the detriment of the backcountry settlers. The Rice Kings believed that independence would allow them to gain sole control over the colony's affairs. Buchanan, *The Road to Guilford Courthouse: The American Revolution in the Carolinas* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1997), 90-103.

[6] John Gordon, *South Carolina and the American Revolution: A Battlefield History* (Columbia: USC Press, 2003), 96-99, and Wilson, *The Southern Strategy*, 262-264.

[7] There are basically two historiographical views regarding loyalists in South Carolina. The first is championed by Don Higginbotham in *Daniel Morgan: Revolutionary Rifleman* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1961), 98-105.

analysis has provided the longstanding explanation for British failure: too few loyalists with the will to fight. When applied to the South Carolina backcountry, this interpretation oversimplifies a complex matter. Other scholars support the notion that British officials accurately appraised loyalist strength in the South, maintaining that royalists comprised a large proportion of the population in South Carolina and Georgia.[8] Evidence suggests that British officials based their strategy to restore royal authority to South Carolina on accurate information. When war came south, the loyalists came forward to assist the British army.

Historians who accept the latter argument have sought alternative explanations for the British failure in South Carolina. Recent studies on the war in the backcountry suggest that the character of British officers greatly influenced the course of the war. Character weaknesses, like arrogance and carelessness, and strengths, such as courage and determination, of high ranking officers influenced how the British army conducted the war in the backcountry. This emphasis

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Higginbotham argues that General Clinton decided to undertake the Southern Campaign because the royal governors reported the inaccurate information that the South Carolina backcountry was a loyalist stronghold, creating the illusion that there was overwhelming support for the Crown in the South. Higginbotham's interpretation advances the idea that British leaders in America simply ignored evidence that contradicted the supposition that the majority of Southerners were loyalists. This view has been supported by eminent British historian Piers Mackesy in *War for America, 1775-1783* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964), 32-37 and 404-407. Mackesy held that the British miscalculated the number of loyalists in the South and maintains that the small number who did support the British lacked the will to fight. For similar interpretations, see Calhoon, *The Loyalists*, 487-490, John Pancake, *This Destructive War: The British Campaign in the Carolinas, 1780-1782* (Tuscaloosa: Alabama UP, 2003), 25-30, and David Wilson, *The Southern Strategy: Britain's Conquest of South Carolina and Georgia, 1775-1780* (Columbia: USC Press, 2005), xiii-4.

[8] A second group of scholars support the notion that the British officials based their strategy on accurate information regarding the strength and number of loyalists. John Alden maintained that the Southern loyalists were numerous, dangerous, and spoiling for a fight against their lowcountry neighbors in his *The South in the Revolution, 1763-1789* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1957), 324-325. John Gordon also pointed to the large body of internal loyalist sentiment as the impetus for the bloody partisan war in 1780, noting South Carolina's division between backcountry settlers and lowcountry planters. He argues that the Scots-Irish backwoodsmen relied more on the British than they did on the lowcountry gentlemen in *South Carolina and the American Revolution*, 15-19. Jim Piecuch wrote one of the most recent studies on loyalism in South Carolina. He reexamined evidence comparing British assessments of loyalist strength in the South with those made by their American counterparts and found that their reports are virtually identical. British officials in London and Americans in the South held similar opinions regarding the number and military potential of the loyalists. See Jim Piecuch, *Three Peoples, One King: Loyalists, Indians, and Slaves in the Revolutionary South, 1775-1782* (Columbia: USC Press, 2008), 6-7. See also North Callahan, *Royal Raiders: The Tories of the American Revolution* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1963), 35-40, and Henry Lumpkin, *From Savannah to Yorktown: The American Revolution in the South* (New York: Paragon House, 1981), 7-10.

on personality shows the human dimensions of the war and hints at a possible explanation for Britain's inept policies and tactics in the backcountry. By examining British correspondence concerning the South Carolina campaign, these scholars conclude that Clinton was a competent field commander, but a poor Commander-in Chief.[9] Clinton was extremely paranoid and often regarded the suggestions of his subordinates and other military leaders as personal slights regarding his ability to command the Southern campaign. On the other hand, these historians argue that Cornwallis was a courageous and hard-driving general, but had no aptitude for strategy.[10] He remained unconcerned with the tactics employed by his subordinates. Cornwallis's relationship with his young officer corps often undermined his efforts to pacify the backcountry. He indulged his men for the sake of good will and unity and failed to discipline them for their plundering and other crimes committed against the backcountry civilian population. Indeed, a major factor in Great Britain's defeat was the high command's failure to prevent unnecessary brutality.

Scholars have missed an opportunity to detail how British policies and tactics affected the allegiance of the backcountry populace. The Southern campaign should be viewed as a contest to win the support of the white piedmont populace. Within this framework, it is necessary to examine the reasons why backcountry whites depended on Great Britain prior to the commencement of the Southern campaign. In addition, historians have not adequately assessed the strategic implications that the slave population had on the backcountry whites' allegiance. Slavery was an integral part of the South Carolina economy. Blacks were in the majority in the lowcountry, and backcountry whites desired slaves. Retaining the institution was one of the few

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[9] For a thorough analysis of various British officers' personalities and backgrounds, see John Buchanan, *The Road to Guilford Courthouse*, 29-33 and 73-80, and Andrew Jackson O'Shaughnessy, *The Men Who Lost America: British Leadership, the American Revolution, and the Fate of the Empire* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2013), 229-241 and 247-259.

[10] *Ibid*.

issues on which white Carolinians, loyalist or rebel, backcountry and lowcountry colonists, could agree. British policy on slavery was ambiguous, attempting to reward loyalists with slaves while retaining control over enough laborers to produce food for the army. The high command could not free the slaves without losing backcountry whites' support. Moreover, the British army's need to preserve logistical support and raise a loyalist militia was critical, affecting the allegiance of the backcountry populace.

This thesis argues that the Southern strategy failed, not because the loyalists were too few or too passive, but because British officers did not provide adequate protection and support for the white backcountry populace. Prior to the commencement of the Southern campaign, there were a significant number of white backcountry colonists who were loyal. They were unsympathetic to the patriot cause until the British army ventured into their territory. Historians must understand that how the British conducted the war mattered. Clinton, Cornwallis, and their subordinate officers never fully comprehended what their army needed to accomplish to retain the support of the loyalists. The policies, methods, and tactics employed by British military officers to restore royal authority to South Carolina infuriated the backcountry populace who had been willing to remain neutral, if not loyal, to the crown. It was the missteps of Clinton, Cornwallis, and their subordinate officers that stirred the revolutionary spirit in the hearts and minds of the backcountry colonists.

Chapter One, "The Faithful Frontier," examines the reasons that motivated backcountry colonists to support the Crown prior to the commencement of the Southern campaign. When studying Native American raids during the Cherokee War and the beginning of the Regulator Movement, it becomes clear that the piedmont colonists' cries for aid had been ignored by the lowcountry assembly. Although some lowcountry residents remained loyal to the crown, they

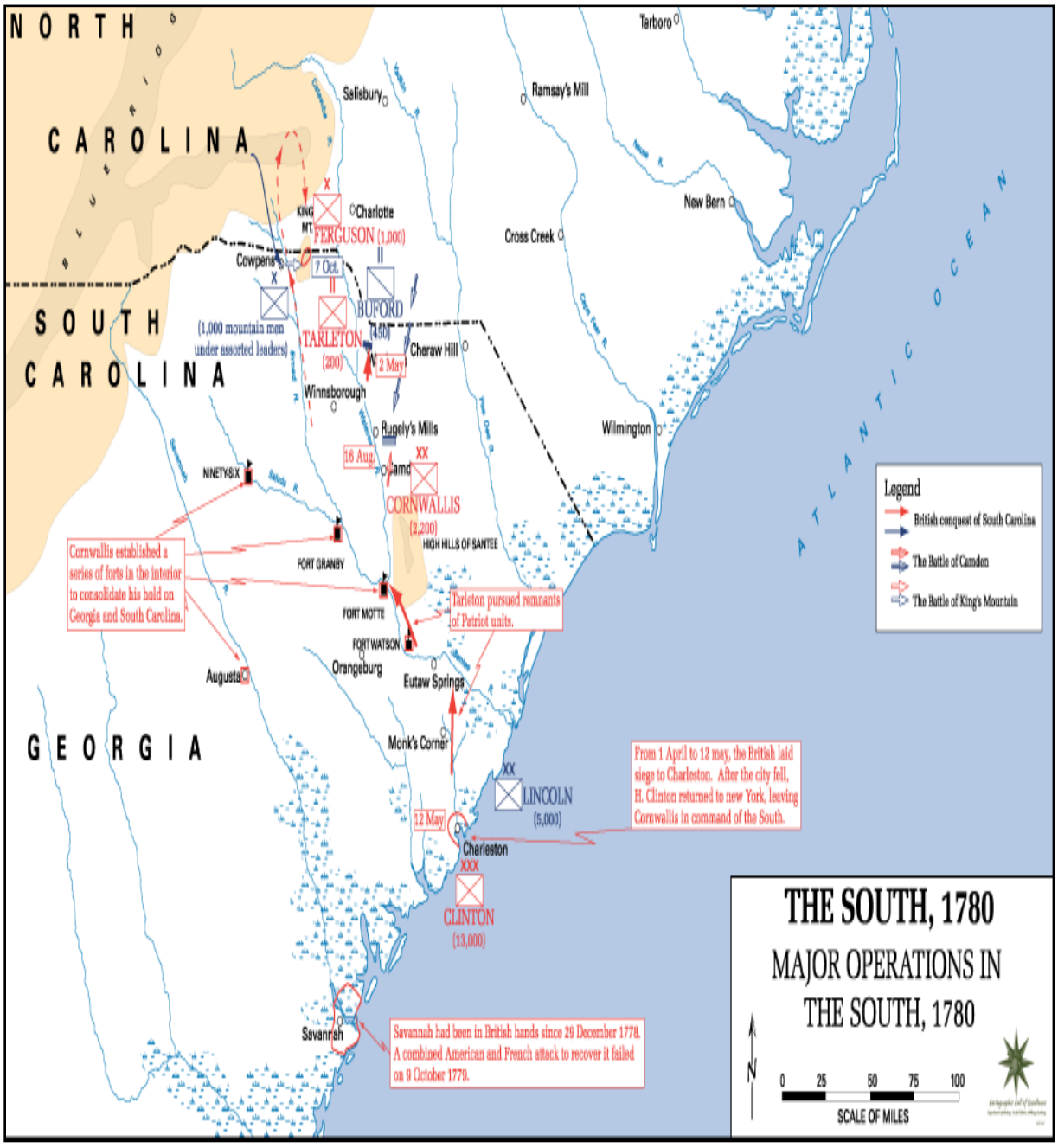
had been silenced by the powerful Whig assembly, allowing a pronounced bitterness between the regions to fester. When shots were fired at Lexington and Concord in 1775, the backcountry colonists signed the Counter-Association as a means to continue trade with Great Britain in opposition to the lowcountry. Moreover, they refused to consider the appeals of the Drayton Commission to join the revolt. Instead, the piedmont colonists took up arms for the crown in the Snow Campaign of 1775. It was this sectional hostility that prompted piedmont whites to remain loyal to Great Britain. Chapter One maintains that, when the British embarked on their Southern Campaign, there were compelling reasons to believe that backcountry loyalists would come forward to aid the crown.

Chapter Two, "Bloodshed in the Backcountry," examines the military policies and tactics employed by General Clinton and General Cornwallis from the fall of Charlestown in May 1780 to the British defeat at Kings Mountain in October 1780. Four primary British actions are analyzed: 1) Clinton's Proclamations of May and June 1780, 2) British policy regarding backcountry slaves, 3) the British scorched earth strategy, and 4) the controversial tactics of three of Lord Cornwallis's principle subordinates – Lieutenant Colonel Banastre Tarleton, Major James Wemyss, and Major Patrick Ferguson. These military policies and tactics demonstrate the British high command's focus on victory on the battlefield, rather than assuaging the concerns of the local population in an attempt to maintain their support. Examining the war in the backcountry in 1780, Chapter Two explains that the conduct of subordinate officers, the limitations of British manpower, and the propensity for violence in the piedmont undermined the high command's effectiveness to recruit and defend loyalists, thus igniting a guerilla conflict.

Chapter Three, "Disorder and Retreat," further describes the Southern campaign and its effect on the allegiance of backcountry whites during the period after Ferguson's rout at Kings

Mountain in October 1780 to Tarleton's defeat at the Battle of Cowpens in January 1781. This chapter discusses five British actions and their effect on the backcountry loyalists and neutrals: 1) the struggle to recruit loyalist militia, 2) the battle of Fish Dam Ford, 3) the debacle at Rugeley's Mill, 4) the arrival of a third American army, and 5) the battle of Cowpens. Kings Mountain was a serious setback to British plans for a successful invasion of North Carolina in the fall of 1780. It forced General Cornwallis to retire to Winnsboro, South Carolina, for a period of relative inactivity. The British now struggled to retain loyalist support even in the Tory stronghold of Ninety-Six District. Ferguson's death at Kings Mountain meant that the British had to appoint a new loyalist militia commander, a task that vexed Cornwallis. Moreover, by December 1780, the British faced a reorganized American field army in the backcountry, commanded by the brilliant tactician Major General Nathanael Greene. Chapter Three demonstrates that by early 1781, the backcountry loyalist zeal for the British cause had so eroded that Cornwallis could no longer hold South Carolina and was forced to abandon the interior to the rebels.

The thesis concludes with a discussion on the importance of how an army prosecutes a war. It considers the implications of waging a war against a population that the conquering army relied on for support and sought to reconcile with after achieving victory. Certainly, the British approach during the Southern campaign failed to maintain the loyalty of the backcountry population and, therefore, caused the debacle that led to their ultimate surrender at Yorktown.



The South Carolina Campaign, 1780-1781

CHAPTER ONE

THE FAITHFUL FRONTIER: LOYALTY IN THE SOUTH CAROLINA BACKCOUNTRY

"We are *Free-Men* – British subjects – Not Born *Slaves* – We contribute our Proportion in all Public Taxations, and discharge our Duty to the Public, equally with our Fellow Provincials, yet We do not participate with them in the Rights and Benefits which they Enjoy," wrote Reverend Charles Woodmason to the South Carolina Commons House of Assembly, describing one of the grievances of backcountry colonists.[11] On the eve of the American Revolution, South Carolina was the wealthiest British colony in North America, dominated by elite, coastal lowcountry planters who prospered from rice exports. The political, economic, and social capital of South Carolina, Charlestown, was a major port city from which the lowcountry colonists governed. Planters, merchants, and lawyers controlled the Commons House and one central court, implementing policies that accommodated their economic interests and assured political control.[12]

The South Carolina backcountry began about fifty miles inland and stretched to the Appalachian Mountains. The Cherokee and Catawba people had populated the backcountry until Scots-Irish, Welsh, and German settlers migrated into the interior. Plagued by Native American raiders, horse thieves, and squatters, the backcountry men regarded the lowcountry-dominated Commons House as an elitist institution that continually refused to address their grievances.[13] It

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[11] The Remonstrance in Charles Woodmason, *The Carolina Backcountry on the Eve of the Revolution: The Journal of and Other Writings of Charles Woodmason, Anglican Itinerant* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina UP, 1953), 215.
[12] The prosperity of Charlestown and descriptions of the wealthy planters who dominate its government can be found in Robert Lambert, *South Carolina Loyalists* (Columbia: USC Press, 1987), 13-15. See also John Buchanan's chapter "The Rice Kings" in Buchanan, *The Road to Guilford Courthouse*, 17-24.
[13] For more information on backcountry colonists' resentment of their lowcountry neighbors see Richard Brown, *The South Carolina Regulators* (Cambridge: Belknap, 1963), 13-21.

was clear that the backcountry residents' requests for developmental assistance and proportionate representation had been ignored by the lowcountry assembly, fomenting hostility between the two regions. Consequently, the backcountry increasingly relied on Great Britain for support. It was this conflict of interests that caused the two regions to regard the crisis with Great Britain differently, motivating many piedmont residents to remain loyal to the Crown during the American Revolution. The British command sought to exploit this animosity when devising the Southern strategy.

To comprehend the dynamics of the South Carolina backcountry, it is necessary to recall that prior to 1730 very few Europeans resided in the region. It was Indian territory, populated predominantly by the Cherokee and Catawba. In fact, the backcountry settlements owed their existence, in part, to the lowcountry planters' fear of Indian raids and the potential for slave revolts. In 1731, Royal Governor Robert Johnson, acting under his authority as a representative of the British Crown and hoping to attract white immigrants, issued a proclamation that offered one hundred acres of land to the head of a family, an additional fifty acres to each relative and servant over the age of twelve, and a tax deferment for ten years if settlers established fortified townships in the backcountry.[14] The purpose of settling the region was to provide the lowcountry with a buffer against Indian attacks. Additionally, if a slave uprising occurred on the coast, then the piedmont settlers could be utilized to help quell the revolt.[15]

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[14] One of the best accounts of the social and economic development of the backcountry is George Johnson, *The Frontier in the Colonial South: South Carolina Backcountry, 1736-1800, (*Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997), 17-19.

[15] These initial settlers focused on developing the backcountry economy. As historian George Johnson maintains, "an older view that characterized the pre-cotton backcountry as isolated, poor, and squalid, in the eighteenth century is just not true." Although the region was not as highly developed as the lowcountry, these settlers kept large herds of cattle and hogs and produced surpluses of indigo, flour, hemp, tobacco, and tallow – products traded in Pennsylvania and Virginia or exported to Great Britain. The economy prospered because backcountry residents utilized the Charlestown port and trade routes to the markets of the northern colonies, especially the Great Wagon Road. Johnson also asserts that this economic system "enabled small farmers and planters who were self-sufficient in providing for their homesteads to become involved in commercial farming," developing a trade network that the

The initial group to settle the backcountry consisted of mostly Scots-Irish farmers. Although religious intolerance was one of the reasons that motivated the Presbyterian Scots-Irish to immigrate to the colonies, economic concerns and the desire to own land were also major considerations. The linen industry, the economic base of Ulster, Ireland, had fallen on hard times. Absentee landlords began to raise rents and shorten leases. With little hope of prospering in Ulster, the Scots-Irish immigrated to Pennsylvania, but quickly ran afoul of the pacifist Quaker government in Philadelphia when they began to settle frontier land that belonged to Native Americans.[16] Upon learning of Johnson's proclamation, the Scots-Irish migrated to the backcountry. They established settlements in the Waxhaws, along the Catawba River, near South Carolina's northern border, and in Long Canes, along the Saluda River to the west. However, Scots-Irish culture and religion differed greatly with those of their Anglican lowcountry neighbors, creating friction.[17] The Scots-Irish were of a highly independent ilk, reluctant to be governed by outside entities in the colonies as they had been in Europe. The Scots-Irish backcountry settlements existed beyond the pale of lowcountry rule. They had a semblance of independence that they wanted to maintain and believed that a revolution would threaten their autonomy. As historian Ben Rubin claims, the Scots-Irish "were, by and large, no more interested in being governed from Charleston…than they were in being governed from

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backcountry was reluctant to surrender. See Johnson's chapter "The Local Economy" in Johnson, *The Frontier in the Colonial South*, 39-60.

[16] Walter Edgar describes the Scots-Irish as "having little patience with governments with which they disagreed." See Edgar, *Partisans and Redcoats*, 8.

[17] Ben Rubin argues that the cultural and religious differences that had plagued Scots-Irish and English relations in the Old World carried over into the colonies. The Scots-Irish, however, were as reluctant to be governed by the Charlestown Assembly as they had been by the English in Europe, desiring to maintain a semblance of independence. For more on the Scots-Irish and their relationship with the lowcountry see Rubin, "Planters and Presbyterians: South Carolina from Atlantic Microcosm to the Eve of the American Revolution," *Journal of Backcountry Studies* 87, no. 2 (2010), 2-8.

England."[18] The defiant spirit of the Scots-Irish Presbyterians proved to be an obstacle when the Charlestown Whigs attempted to win them over.[19]

The Welsh Baptists from Pennsylvania and Delaware were the next group to settle the backcountry. By 1736, natural population increases and a conflict over owning slaves forced the Welsh Baptists to relocate to the South Carolina frontier. These Welsh migrants wanted to keep their slaves, obtain property, and construct grist mills. They viewed Johnson's promise as an opportunity to make their fortune. Securing a royal land grant to a ten thousand acre region, the Welsh settled along the Pee Dee River to the east in an area that became known as Cheraw. Finally, declining opportunities for farm ownership in Central Europe and religious persecution prompted German settlers to immigrate to the backcountry. Eager to obtain land, the Germans settled Saxe Gotha along the Broad River in the center of the colony on a tract granted to them by the royal governor in 1733. It was the descendents of these migrants who continued to rely on the royal land grants that Charles Woodmason and the Drayton Commission met when they traveled the backcountry.[20]

Native Raids, British Aid: The Cherokee War

By the late 1750s, the royal government's vision of an orderly plan to settle the region became impossible to execute effectively. As migrants flooded the backcountry and began to establish trade networks, they settled in regions that belonged to the Cherokees, instead of

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[18] Rubin, "Planters and Presbyterians," 8.

[19] Peter Moore maintains that, by the time of the Revolution, the Scots-Irish settlements in the Waxhaws had evolved from small, isolated settlements to a growing community that had commercial links to Charlestown with wheat as a main cash crop. However, war halted the development, forcing the yeomen households back into a subsistence mode of production. See Peter Moore, *World of Toil and Strife: Community Transformation in Backcountry South Carolina, 1750-1805* (Columbia: USC Press, 2007), 36-40 and 44-59. Walter Edgar would disagree with Moore, insisting that the Waxhaws was more of an anomaly than the norm. The Waxhaws was one of the largest settlements, situated on the Great Wagon Road, an ideal location for economic development. Other backcountry settlements were not as lucky. In fact, Edgar maintains that "it would not be unfair to say that the backcountry was close to being a state of nature." The only institution that provided these settlements some form of organization was the church. See Edgar, *Partisans and Redcoats*, 7-9.

[20] Lewis Jones, *The South Carolina Civil War of 1775*, (Lexington, SC: Sandlapper, 1975), 22-34.

forming fortified townships designed to protect Charlestown. As colonists began to encroach on Native American land, the Cherokee raided settlements established beyond what they understood to be the border of South Carolina. These volatile dynamics sparked the Cherokee War in 1759.[21] At the time, the Royal Governor was William Lyttelton who reacted by prohibiting all shipments of gunpowder to the Cherokees. He also attempted to raise a lowcountry militia to defend the frontier, but had little success recruiting Charlestown planters.

When Lyttleton called the lowcountry planters to arms, he could only muster a small force of militiamen, consisting mostly of small farm owners who resided along the Congaree River, bordering the backcountry.[22] The governor requested at least 700 men to be raised for a provincial regiment, but the Commons House granted only 300.[23] Lyttleton complained to the Board of Trade that the Commons House had sent men and supplies "exceedingly short of what the service really requires."[24] The coastal lowcountry planters had no desire to either join the governor's militia or provide the necessary manpower and equipment to defend the backcountry.[25] In addition, an outbreak of smallpox had ravaged Charlestown. While the backcountry folk looked to their governor to provide defense, medical doctor and historian of the Revolution in South Carolina David Ramsay noted that few of the lowcountry planters could be

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[21] John Oliphant labels the Cherokee War as "Lyttleton's Folly." He persuasively argues that Governor Lyttleton did not recognize the Cherokee law of clan vengeance, considering it too barbaric. When a Cherokee delegation arrived in Charlestown seeking peace before war began, Lyttleton "did not regard the Cherokees as a free and independent people with a right to negotiate as equals." Lyttleton used the backcountry whites' fear of the Cherokees as an excuse to wage war and take native land. See John Oliphant, *Peace and War on the Anglo-Cherokee Frontier, 1759-1763* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 2001), 70-72, and Tom Hatley, *The Dividing Paths: Cherokees and South Carolinians through the Era of Revolution* (New York: Oxford UP, 1993), 113-115.
[22] William Henry Lyttleton to The Right Honorable Lord Commissioners of Trade, October 1759, Great Britain Secretary of State, Public Records of Great Britain regarding Indian Affairs, South Carolina Department of Archives and History. Hereafter, SCDAH.
[23] Oliphant, *Peace and War*, 101.
[24] William Henry Lyttleton to The Right Honorable Lord Commissioners of Trade, October 1759.
[25] Oliphant confirms this assertion about Lyttleton's militia stating, "underfunded, undermanned, undersupplied, and eventually ravaged by smallpox and desertion, it failed to bring the Cherokees to action." See Oliphant, *Peace and War*, 69.

"prevailed on to leave their distressed families."[26] As far as the coastal elites were concerned, the backcountry settlements did precisely what they had been formed to do – act as a buffer against Native American attacks.

Even though they were desperate for ammunition, the Cherokees continued to raid piedmont settlements. The attacks prompted 250 Scots-Irish settlers from the Long Canes to seek refuge in the lowcountry. Unfortunately, their wagons got mired in a bog, and, while they were trying to get out, a Cherokee raiding party attacked and killed most of the colonists.[27] The bodies, including 40 women and children, were mutilated beyond recognition. The colonists who escaped suffered another Cherokee raiding party attack two days later. The result was another massacre. Only nine children survived, having been scalped and left for dead.[28] When news of the Long Canes Massacre reached Lyttleton, he appealed to General Jeffrey Amherst, the British commander in North America, to aid the backcountry. As Cherokee raids increased, the settlers looked to Great Britain to provide the troops that the lowcountry would not raise. As an indication of the lack of support, one colonist from the Waxhaws wrote a letter to the royal government stating, "if I was to give one hundred Guineas to a person to Cross the Country…I could not get any person to undertake it."[29]

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[26] David Ramsay, *History of South Carolina: From its First Settlement in 1670 to the Year 1808* (Newberry, SC: W. J. Duffie, 1858), 100.

[27] Quoting Cherokee leaders, including Attakullakulla and Occonostota, Ramsay maintains that the Indians destroyed backcountry settlements because "the spirits of their murdered brothers were hovering around them and calling out vengeance on their enemies." Settlers who escaped the scalping knife were made prisoners. According to Ramsay, vengeance served as the primary motivating factor for native attacks against backcountry settlers. See Ramsay, *History*, 96-100.

[28] Richard Brown confirms Ramsay's description of the Long Canes Massacre, though Brown adds that there were several massacres that occurred over a period of a few days in Long Canes. "For days thereafter," Brown asserts, "dazed and wounded children who had escaped the carnage were found walking in the woods." The nine scalped children were discovered by other colonists who transported them to the lowcountry. The children, however, died of their wounds shortly thereafter. See Brown, *The South Carolina Regulators*, 4-5.

[29] Letter from the Waxhaws, 1760, Great Britain Secretary of State, Public Records of Great Britain regarding Indian Affairs, SCDAH.

Responding to the crisis, Parliament allowed the royal government to increase the bounty on Cherokee scalps in an attempt to entice lowcountry South Carolinians to defend the frontier.[30] In April 1760, a British warship and six cargo vessels arrived in Charlestown harbor with 1,200 soldiers commanded by Colonel Archibald Montgomery. Describing the relief felt by the backcountry settlers, Ramsay noted, "great was the joy of the province upon the arrival of this gallant officer...[who]…had orders to strike a sudden blow for the relief of Carolina."[31] However, as Montgomery deployed to the backcountry, the Cherokees regrouped and counterattacked, forcing his command to retreat to Charlestown.[32] Some backcountry settlers refused to yield. Instead, they rebuilt their stockades and demanded reinforcements, funds, and swivel guns from the Commons House of Assembly. Again, the Commons House did not raise the requisite force or funds. Lieutenant Governor William Bull, encamped at a backcountry fort, wrote to the Board of Trade, "For God's sake, tell me, what are they about? Have they no compassion for us, for themselves, or for their posterity? Shall a scarce 2,000 savages now give law to Carolina?"[33]

It was the British who again responded to the backcountry colonists' plea for aid. In 1761, Lieutenant Colonel James Grant and a detachment of British regulars joined Colonel Montgomery to initiate what turned out to be the final campaign of the Cherokee War. Grant's force burned Cherokee towns and retook the backcountry forts. With the aid of British regulars, the backcountry men defused the Cherokee threat. As more British soldiers arrived in the backcountry and established a defensive line, the Cherokees sued for peace. The Treaty of

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[30] London ordered the Commons House to raise the bounty on Cherokee scalps from 25 to 35 colonial pounds.
[31] Ramsay, *History*, 100.
[32] For more information on the failure of Montgomery's expedition to the backcountry, see Hatley, *The Dividing Paths*, 129-132. Some of the problems included poor communication, smallpox, and bureaucratic red tape.
[33] Lieutenant Governor Bull to the Board, 21 October 1760, Great Britain Secretary of State Papers, Original South Carolina Correspondence from the Governors and Others, SCDAH.

Charlestown, signed in December 1761, ended most of the fighting. It pushed the Cherokees farther westward, proclaiming a new western border for South Carolina, and prohibited settlements in Native American territory.[34]

Following the end of the French and Indian War, Parliament passed the Proclamation of 1763, prohibiting colonial settlements from expanding west of the Appalachian Mountains. The Proclamation prohibited private purchase of Native American territories and required that all future land sales be "offered to the King by the general consent of the nation and at a public assembly held by the British Governors."[35] To the Northern colonists, who had their eyes on the Ohio territory, the proclamation suggested that the Crown blamed them, not the Indians, for the wars. South Carolinians, on the other hand, saw the proclamation as an opportunity to protect the backcountry and thereby attract new immigrants. As historian Tom Hatley notes, "the safety factor" of the invisible line "appealed directly to backcountry communities stung by war where the Cherokees themselves were never out of mind."[36] Since many new migrants arrived to settle the piedmont after the Cherokee War, Ramsay asserts that "[t]he result in some degree justified their expectations."[37] Piedmont settlements still had more room for expansion, having yet to encroach on the invisible line. Further, many Carolinians anticipated that the crown would eventually rescind the line, and the piedmont folk "promised themselves" to obey now "for the future great tranquility and happiness."[38] Nevertheless, the war and its accompanying breakdown of law and order demoralized the piedmont colonists. The Charlestown assembly

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[34] For more information on James Grant's expedition and the resulting peace treaty, see Hatley, *The Dividing Paths*, 138-140, and Edgar, *Partisans and Redcoats*, 12-13.
[35] *Ibid.*
[36] Hatley, *The Dividing Paths*, 180.
[37] Ramsay, *History*, 111. Hatley agrees with Ramsay's assessment, further noting that the Proclamation of 1763 was enthusiastically accepted by the South Carolinians. The invisible line made the backcountry appear safe enough to attract white immigrants in an attempt to counterbalance the growing black population. In addition, the Carolinians regarded the line as an attempt to shut off the western escape root for slaves. See Hatley, *The Dividing Paths*, 182-183.
[38] Ramsay, *History*, 110.

continued to ignore the backcountry grievances and, instead, focused its efforts on a new conflict with Parliament.

The Help of a Reverend: Charles Woodmason in the Backcountry

As Parliament took measures to assert its sovereignty over the colonies during the Imperial Crisis, South Carolinians held opposing views of these actions. Safeguarding their right to govern their internal affairs, lowcountry Whigs actively opposed British policies. When Parliament passed the Stamp Act in 1765, Charles Woodmason, a wealthy Charlestown planter and merchant, applied for the post of stamp distributor. Since the lowcountry Whigs believed that the law encroached on the provincial assembly's sole right to lay internal taxes, Woodmason quickly fell out of favor with the Charlestown elite.[39] Demonstrating their disapproval of the act, lowcountry residents burned effigies of local stamp agents.[40] Woodmason recognized that he had become a reviled symbol of Parliamentary intrusion asserting, "I was deem'd (and am still) a private Spy and Correspondent of the Ministry – a faithless fellow – one that is a betrayer of the Country, and of the Rights and Privileges of America."[41] Unable to carry out his duties as stamp distributor, Woodmason returned to England and became an ordained minister; the Church of England subsequently assigned him to the backcountry in hopes of converting the inhabitants to Anglicanism and thereby secure the region's support for the crown. A perceptive chronicler, Reverend Woodmason described the resentment the backcountry colonists felt towards the Charlestown elite.[42]

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[39] The First Remonstrance from South Carolina against the Stamp Act, 4 September 1764, in Robert Gibbes, *Documentary History of the American Revolution: Consisting of Letters and Papers Relating to the Contests for Liberty, Chiefly in South Carolina, from Originals in the Possession of the Editor, and Other Sources*, vol.1, (New York: Appleton, 1855) 3.
[40] *Ibid*., 4.
[41] Charles Woodmason, *The Carolina Backcountry on the Eve of the Revolution: The Journal of and Other Writings of Charles Woodmason, Anglican Itinerant* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina UP, 1953), 193.
[42] Woodmason did not undertake his work in the backcountry as an unsophisticated youth. He had many experiences living in Charlestown and England that formed his initial reaction to the piedmont. At times, he was

When travelling through the backcountry, Woodmason noted that its residents still struggled to recover from the Cherokee War and rebuild social and civil institutions. He was especially appalled at the state of the children. He asserted, "the Great Number of Orphan and Neglected Children scatter'd over these Back Countries…live expos'd in a State of Nature… [and] were oblig'd to associate with Villains and Vagabonds for Subsistence."[43] Initially repulsed by the piedmont populace, Woodmason declared, "I have not yet met with one literate or travel'd person," finding instead only "indolence and laziness."[44] He hated the food complaining, "I hav[e] not made what could be called a Meal for some days….No Butter, Rice, or Milk – As for Tea and Coffee, they know it not."[45] Their clothing was no better. As Woodmason proclaimed, "young women have a most uncommon practi[c]e, which I cannot break them off. They draw their shifts as tight as possible to the Body…to shew the roundness of the breasts and slender Waists."[46]

Although his comments are exaggerated, the reverend's attitude towards these colonists shifted as he perceived that the lack of developmental assistance from the lowcountry contributed to their debased condition. If the coastal elites wanted the backcountry farmers' support in challenging Great Britain, they needed to aid them in establishing schoolhouses and

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prone to exaggeration especially where his Anglican prejudices were involved. However, most historians who use Woodmason's journal regard it as a reliable source, so long as it is handled with care. Woodmason sometimes overemphasized the poor conditions of the backcountry and the supposed immorality of its residents. One must remember that he was comparing the backcountry to the lowcountry and found the piedmont to be not as developed as its coastal neighbor. Historian Richard Hooker, who wrote the introduction to Woodmason's published journal, maintains that "in general, Woodmason's writings maintain a high level of consistency in statements of fact when, at different times, for different purposes, and for different audiences, he repeats himself." See Woodmason, *The Carolina Backcountry*, xxxiv-xxxv. Other historians who agree with the general reliability of Woodmason's account include Moore, *World of Toil and Strife*, 32-33, Brown, *The South Carolina Regulators*, 20-21, and Edgar, *Partisans and Redcoats*, 2-7. Moreover, this elite, Anglican minister, perhaps, had more in common with the Charlestown planters than the piedmont farmers, making his sympathy for the backcountry residents all the more compelling. His support for the Regulator movement suggests that the lowcountry assembly's refusal to aid the backcountry colonists was indeed a major problem.

[43] Woodmason, *The Carolina Backcountry*, 120.
[44] *Ibid*., 38.
[45] *Ibid*., 34.
[46] *Ibid*., 61.

building proper dwellings. While the lowcountry Carolinians denounced what they considered oppressive British policies, their backcountry neighbors were unsympathetic. In fact, they raised similar complaints about the treatment they received from the Commons House of Assembly.

Woodmason began to write letters to the Charlestown elite to convince them to address backcountry grievances. He denounced the members of the Commons House of Assembly as "overgrown Planters who wallow in Luxury, Ease, and Plenty."[47] For the coastal elite who cried out against English infringements of their rights, his scorn knew no limits: "Lo! Such are the Men who bounce and make such Noise about Liberty! Liberty! Freedom! Property! Rights! Privileges! And what not; and at the same time keep half their fellow Subjects in a State of Slavery."[48] Woodmason's observations were perceptive; he and the backcountry colonists recognized that the Charlestown elite viewed themselves as superior and, therefore, more capable of governing the colony. The Commons House continued to ignore the backcountry's request to establish local courthouses and other civil institutions. As Woodmason reiterated, "all we wish is, that You had better Hearts than we can boast; But what hinders that We be not your Equals in ev'ry Respect? Nothing but Your Pride, Vanity, Selfishness, and Mean-spiritedness."[49] Although the reverend probably wanted only Anglican piedmont representatives in the colonial assembly, his statements make clear that the lowcountry assembly was more concerned in safeguarding its rights than in addressing piedmont grievances.

The Rise of the Regulators

As a consequence of the Cherokee War and the lack of civil institutions, the South Carolina backcountry attracted lawless individuals from northern colonies who terrorized the settlers. When an outburst of violent crime rocked the region in 1767 and no aid was

[47] *Ibid*., 121.
[48] *Ibid*., 262.
[49] *Ibid*., 273.

forthcoming from Charlestown, many of the piedmont men formed vigilante militias known as the Regulators.[50] They attempted to establish law and order. Consisting of middling storekeepers, farmers, and landowners, the Regulators meted out punishment to criminals while pressuring Charlestown officials for the right to vote and the establishment of courts and jails.[51] In November 1767, Woodmason, who firmly supported the Regulators, presented a long, detailed, and eloquent protest to the Commons House of Assembly in the name of four thousand backcountry inhabitants.[52] Woodmason argued that the lowcountry-dominated assembly owed the piedmont colonists a say in the colonial government and support to bring law and order to the region. When his words fell on deaf ears, the reverend noted that the backcountry's only support would be the crown:

> You were without Representation in Assembly, Your Cries could not be heard there – for all Ears were stopp'd. Then You nobly resolved to carry Your Complaints home, and lay them at the feet of Majesty. The Sound of this awaken'd and affrighted Your Oppressors. They shook and trembled….The Crown approv'd all Your Proceedings.[53]

Obtaining royal approval for their actions motivated the backcountry to continue their support of the Mother Country.

By 1769, the Regulators finally forced the Charlestown establishment to address the issue of lawlessness. The Commons House passed the Circuit Court Act, creating seven judicial districts; four, Camden, Cheraw, Ninety-Six, and Orangeburg, were in the backcountry and had their own sheriff, court, and jail.[54] It is important to note that the Act did not establish country courts staffed by local backcountry residents; rather, the circuit courts were dominated by

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[50] For information on who the Regulators were and their objectives see Brown's chapter "The Regulation" in Brown, *The South Carolina Regulators*, 38-52.
[51] Woodmason listed the backcountry grievances in a letter written to the Commons House of Assembly in November 1767. The letter, known as The Remonstrance, is reprinted in Woodmason, *The Carolina Backcountry*, 213.
[52] *Ibid*.
[53] The Regulators Praised in Woodmason, *The Carolina Backcountry*, 287.
[54] The Circuit Court Act of 1769, Appendix B, in Brown, *The South Carolina Regulators*, 148-158.

lowcountry lawyers, guaranteeing Charlestown's continued control of the justice system. The Act was only a partial solution. It did not level the playing field, and the rivalry between the coastal elites and the piedmont colonists persisted. This inequity fomented backcountry resentment towards its coastal neighbor, perpetuating the belief that Charlestown, not Great Britain, was more oppressive.[55]

Who are the Loyalists?

The backcountry colonists owed the British a debt of gratitude for their support and refused to risk the loss of royal protection. They had relied on the crown to maintain their grants and to preserve the peaceful settlement that the British government had negotiated with the Native Americans. They knew what to expect from Britain and were inclined to avoid any actions that might revoke their land contracts or disturb the peace. As Woodmason traveled the backcountry, he noted that the Scots-Irish, Welsh, and German settlers valued their isolation in the western hills and would fight to protect their liberty as independent farmers.[56] When he arrived at one Scots-Irish settlement, Woodmason noted that the inhabitants "looked on me as a Wolf strayed into Christ's fold to devour the Lambs."[57] The Presbyterian desire to be left alone suggests that many backcountry settlers preferred to avoid becoming embroiled in the revolutionary struggle, content to leave Great Britain in charge because they were familiar with its rule. Moreover, Woodmason argued that "[w]ithout Laws or Government Churches Schools or Ministers – No Police established – all Property [is] quite insecure."[58] The backcountry settlers were not willing to oppose British authority.

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[55] Brown, *The South Carolina Regulators*, 98-102.
[56] Woodmason, *The Carolina Backcountry*, 34.
[57] *Ibid*.
[58] *Ibid*., 27.

Ramsay echoed this notion, stating "There were among them [backcountry migrants] a considerable number who had settled on lands granted by the bounty of government. These had brought from Europe the monarchical ideas of their holding possession at the King's pleasure."[59] These settlers believed that the immediate loss of their freeholds would be the consequence of an attempted revolution. Germans in Saxe Gotha, unmoved by arguments on the rights of Englishmen and fearful that the coastal elite would retract all royal land grants, remained firm supporters of the crown. Citing the Dutch and German settlers in Orangeburg, Ramsay noted that "among a people who had so many reasons to love and fear this King, and who were happy under his government, it was no difficult matter" for Great Britain to retain their support.[60]

However, not all backcountry inhabitants agreed that they owed the British allegiance. The Scots-Irish in the Waxhaws attempted to remain neutral. They refused to engage in the revolutionary struggle or take up arms for the British until the Southern Campaign began.[61] Again, the insightful Woodmason provided one of the most convincing reasons why many frontier settlers remained faithful to Great Britain. He argued that the lowcountry Whigs "would fetter and chain the back inhabitants, could they get them in their clutches. And deprive them equally of their civil concerns as they do spiritual – these are the Sons of Liberty."[62] The backcountry settlers had much greater grievances – malapportionment, the lack of social and civil institutions, and the concern about the possible loss of their land – with the lowcountry Whigs than with the British Parliament.

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[59] Ramsay, *History*, 143. It is also important to note that there was the Hanoverian link between the German provinces and England.
[60] *Ibid*., 143.
[61] Historian Peter Moore goes as far as saying that "no loyalist leadership" developed in the Waxhaws and there was "only scattered support for the British." Nevertheless, this lack of loyalist sentiment did not mean that settlers in the Waxhaws rendered aid to the patriots. More concedes that most Waxhaws colonists remained "quietly at home, unengaged if not neutral" in the struggle until 1780. For more information on this argument see Moore, *World of Toil and Strife*, 60-65.
[62] Woodmason, *The Carolina Backcountry*, 262.

When the royal government in South Carolina collapsed in 1771, the backcountry lost its greatest source of support. Over the next four years, a number of extralegal organizations coalesced into the independent government of South Carolina, and its first Provincial Congress held its inaugural session in 1775. The apportionment of seats in this new representative body clearly indicated that, while the lowcountry wanted the backcountry's support to challenge the British, it had no intention of sharing power with the frontiersmen. The backcountry contained 60% of the white population, yet was allotted only 55 of 187 seats in the Provincial Congress, a mere 30%. Moreover, high property qualifications for holding offices – £1000 for the lower house, £2000 for the senate – perpetuated the lowcountry elite's domination of the Provincial Congress.[63] Although the backcountry repeatedly demanded proportional representation, this malapportionment guaranteed that the coastal parishes would remain unchallenged. With a revolt against Great Britain on the horizon, the backcountry colonists considered the lowcountry Whigs' demand for autonomy and a respect for its rights hypocritical, refusing to sacrifice for the revolutionary cause.

The Association and the Counter-Association

In the spring of 1775, reports of the shots fired at Lexington and Concord convinced the lowcountry planters that Great Britain would invade. Therefore, the Provincial Congress raised "a body of regular troops" that had orders "to do all such matters and things, relative to strengthening, securing, and defending the colony, as shall by them be judged and deemed expedient."[64] The backcountry colonists, on the other hand, remained unconvinced that such

[63] These figures are taken from Walter Edgar, *Partisans and Redcoats*, 29 and Ronald Hoffman, "The 'Disaffected' in the Revolutionary South" in *The American Revolution: Explorations in the History of American Radicalism*, ed. Alfred Young (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois UP, 1976), 291.
[64] A Circular Letter to the Committees in the Several Districts and Parishes of South Carolina, 30 June 1775 in Gibbes, *Documentary History*, vol. 1, 110-111.

action was necessary and refused to take up arms against their longtime British protectors. As Ramsay asserted:

> When it was determined to raise troops, the inhabitants of that part of the country could not be persuaded….Feeling themselves happy and free from present oppression[,] they were averse from believing that any designs, inimical to American liberty, had been adopted by the British government.[65]

Raising regiments to defend South Carolina from a British invasion would be much more expensive than paying the small taxes imposed by Parliament. The new Congress then proclaimed "an Association" of South Carolinians "to solemnly engage their lives and fortunes" in the defense of independence.[66] The Provincial Congress declared all who refused to sign the Association as "enemies to the liberty of America" and released their names to the public.[67] Although faced with public exposure as loyalists and the accompanying threats on their lives and property, many backcountry settlers still refused to sign the Association.[68]

In an effort to reestablish Parliamentary authority, the British appointed William Campbell as Royal Governor in July 1775. Campbell quickly found allies in the backcountry. "The intolerable tyranny and oppression" exercised by the Whigs "has stirred up such a spirit in the back part of this country…that I hope it will be attended with the best effects," he informed the British Secretary of State for the Colonies, Lord Dartmouth.[69] Campbell attempted to convince backcountry residents to remain loyal to the crown asserting that "the whole dispute was about a trifling tax on tea, which, as they were not in the general habit of using, could not to

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[65] Ramsay, *History*, 144.
[66] A Circular Letter to the Committees in the Several Districts and Parishes of South Carolina, 110.
[67] *Ibid*.
[68] Historian Lewis Jones maintains that, although faced with public exposure as loyalists and the accompanying threat on their lives and property, many backcountry residents refused to sign the Association. However, the loyalists in Charlestown, confronted with the wrath of the Provincial Congress, succumbed to the public pressure to sign the document. Jones, *The South Carolina Civil War*, 27.
[69] William Campbell to Lord Dartmouth, 19 and 20 July 1775, in K..G. Davies, *Documentary History of the American Revolution 1770-1783 (Colonial Office Series)*, vol. 11 (Dublin: Irish University Press, 1976-1981), 50.

them be interesting."[70] He insinuated that, in order to obtain their tea free from tax, the lowcountry elite were adopting measures to deprive the backcountry of imported necessities. Emissaries from Ninety-Six and Camden attested to the region's support for the crown, affirming that thousands of residents in those districts "would Appear in Arms for the King if called upon."[71] When loyalist leader Moses Kirkland made his way to Charlestown from the backcountry, he confirmed that he had recruited four thousand men "for the service of government whenever a force appears on this coast."[72] According to Kirkland, these loyalists only required arms and a "few experienced officers" to cooperate with British regulars.[73]

These reports convinced the royal governor that if the loyalists received aid from a small military force, he could reestablish royal authority in South Carolina. Campbell also argued that military aid was a necessity since loyalist morale appeared to be wavering in the face of Whig persecution. Therefore, Campbell and backcountry loyalist Joseph Robinson quickly drafted a Counter-Association. It asserted that the king and Parliament had not acted inconsistently with the principles of the British constitution and swore to continue trade with Great Britain.[74] The only laws that the Counter-Association acknowledged were those approved by Parliament and Campbell. Moreover, Campbell promised the backcountry settlers who signed the Counter-Association or took up arms for the crown protection and rewards "as soon as it [was] in [his] power to do so."[75] Confirming Kirkland's earlier assessment, backcountry residents from Camden, Orangeburg, and Ninety-Six signed the Counter-Association. They were convinced that Great Britain, not the Provincial Congress, was best able to defend their interests. William

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[70] Ramsay, *History*, 143.
[71] Thomas Fletchall to William Campbell, 19 August 1775, quoted in Piecuch, *Three People, One King*, 38.
[72] Governor William Campbell quotes Moses Kirkland in a letter to Lord Dartmouth, 19 September 1775, in Davies, *Documentary History*, vol. 11, 118.
[73] William Campbell to Lord Dartmouth, 19 and 20 July 1775.
[74] Campbell writes about the Counter-Association in his letters to Lord Dartmouth. *Ibid*.
[75] *Ibid*.

Henry Drayton, a staunch rebel and member of the Council of Safety, acknowledged that the Counter-Association had a major impact. He conceded that, if Campbell had promptly travelled to the backcountry and rallied those colonists, "the whole proceedings of the Provincial Congress would have been overthrown."[76]

Although the governor did not travel to the backcountry, he maintained clandestine communications with Colonel Thomas Fletchall, an influential piedmont planter from Fair Forest. Fletchall was one of the key loyalist leaders in the region. The Charlestown Whigs believed that if they could convert Fletchall to their cause, it might negate piedmont support for Great Britain. The Provincial Congress gave Fletchall an opportunity to disassociate himself from the loyalists when they ordered him to muster the residents in his community and secure their signatures to the Association. Fletchall claimed that he read the Association to the Fair Forest colonists, but "not one man offered to sign it."[77] Instead, they signed the loyalist Counter-Association. Indicative of the extent of loyalist support in the backcountry, Fletchall noted that the Counter-Association was widely circulated and signed by "several thousand" residents from settlements along the Savannah River, the Broad River, the Saluda River, and in the Ninety-Six District.[78] Determined not to take up arms against the Crown, Fletchall alluded to the signers' sentiments towards the Charlestown Whigs stating, "we never had any representatives, not one man in fifty ever gave any vote for any such thing."[79] Again, the inadequate representation in the Provincial Assembly motivated backcountry residents to sign the Counter-Association and provided justification to refuse to recognize any laws passed by the lowcountry.

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[76] John Drayton, *Memoirs of the American Revolution From its Commencement to the Year 1777, Inclusive as Relating to the State of South Carolina and Occasionally Referring to the States of North Carolina and Georgia*, vol. 1 (Charleston: A.E. Miller, 1821), 323.
[77] Thomas Fletchall to President of Council of Safety, 24 July 1775, in Gibbes, *Documentary History*, vol. 1, 123.
[78] *Ibid*., 124.
[79] *Ibid*.

People living along the Pacolet River composed a statement expressing their "utmost abhorrence and detestation" of "the daring proceedings of those infatuated people who call themselv[e]s committee men or Liberty boys."[80] It is estimated that in the course of the Southern Campaign approximately 16,000 adult white males expressed their loyalty to the crown, the majority from the backcountry.[81] This figure represents a sizable force from which the British hoped to recruit a strong militia. To counter Whig actions, the backcountry loyalists promised to "embody at the shortest notice" a militia "to support the rights of the crown."[82] They were convinced that the king alone was the region's sovereign.

The Drayton Commission

Reports of the backcountry Counter-Association caused the revolutionary leaders in Charlestown great uneasiness since they believed that, if the Revolution were to be viable, they would need piedmont support. In late July 1775, the Provincial Congress dispatched the Drayton Commission to the backcountry to win converts to the patriot cause. Congress attached great importance to this mission by assigning influential personnel to complete the task. The commission consisted of William Henry Drayton, a member of the Council of Safety, Oliver Hart, a Baptist clergyman, William Tennent, a Presbyterian minister, and two of the most prominent Whig supporters in the backcountry – Joseph Kershaw of Camden and Richard Richardson of the High Hills. Drayton, who represented the Provincial Congress and the lowcountry elite, led the commission. The inclusion of two clergymen, whose denominations were most representative of the backcountry religions, was an attempt to make the group more acceptable to the piedmont populace. Moreover, the addition of Kershaw and Richardson gave

[80] Resolution of Loyalists on Pacolet River in Alexander Chesney, *The Journal of Alexander Chesney, a South Carolina Loyalist in the Revolution and After*, edited by E. Alfred Jones (Columbus: Ohio State Press, 1981), 144-145.
[81] Lambert, *The South Carolina Loyalists*, 321.
[82] Resolution of Loyalists on Pacolet River.

the impression that the lowcountry elite were willing to deal on equal terms with some of the backcountry men. The exigencies of war prompted the planter elite to finally recognize their country cousins. This welcoming hand was, perhaps, self-serving, but at least it finally had been offered. For many piedmont residents, it was simply too little too late.[83]

The Commission's task was a formidable one. During the years that followed the Stamp Act of 1765, the backcountry settlers considered themselves to be gripped in a struggle against lowcountry tyranny. Consequently, they were unconcerned with the issues that propelled the inhabitants of Charlestown towards war. The Drayton Commission had been called upon to arouse within the backcountry populace, in just a few months, a hatred and fear of the Mother Country that had been festering for ten years in the lowcountry. The backcountry expedition did not receive the reception hoped for by the Charlestown Whigs. William Tennent reported that many in the backcountry believed "that no man from Charlestown can speak the truth and that the papers are full of lies."[84] Tennent complained that the leading loyalists along the Broad and Saluda Rivers "blind the people and fill them with bitterness against the gentlemen of the coast."[85] Several crowds in the backcountry were openly hostile. When the backcountry inhabitants learned that a British man-of-war had been sent to apprehend the Charlestown Whigs "if they would not submit to the stamp act and all other acts," these frontier residents "all seemed to be much pleased."[86]

At a settlement on the Enoree River, ardent loyalist Thomas Brown interrupted Drayton's oration to a large audience by reading John Dalyrymple's *Address of the People of Great Britain to the Inhabitants of America*. Dalyrymple's words provided a convincing argument for many

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[83] The Drayton Commission is further described in Jones, *The South Carolina Civil War*, 37-40, and Lambert, *The South Carolina Loyalists*, 37-39.
[84] A Fragment of the Journal Kept by Rev. William Tennent in Gibbes, *Documentary History*, vol. 1, 228.
[85] *Ibid*.
[86] Affidavit of Edward Morrow of Fair Forest, 9 September 1775, in Gibbes, *Documentary History*, vol. 1, 168.

backcountry settlers. The *Address* claimed: 1) the suspension of commerce with Great Britain would damage American trade, 2) America could not win an outright war against British wealth and power, and 3) the disputes between the colonies and Parliament could be easily resolved.[87] Moreover, the backcountry colonists were convinced that armed resistance against the superior might of the Mother Country was futile. Exploiting the backcountry residents' suspicions of the lowcountry elite, the *Address* further declared that "it is hard that the charge of [Britain's] intending to enslave you should come oftenest from the mouths of those lawyers who…have long made you slaves to themselves."[88] No one in the audience signed the Association.

A week later, the commission made another presentation at a German church on the Saluda River. Exasperated with his inability to garner support, Drayton wrote, "I here gave a discourse to the congregation consisting entirely of Germans….To my great surprise, only one of the congregation subscribed to the Association."[89] Like many other inhabitants, the Germans were suspicious of the Provincial Congress, fearing that if the Whigs controlled the colony, they would revoke their royal land grants. The piedmont colonists refused to support a revolution that, if successful, would place the lowcountry elite in a position to dominate South Carolina.

When words did not persuade the backcountry populace, the Drayton Commission threatened to use force. Drayton decided to lead a patriot militia into Fletchall's Fair Forest community, but his campaign so aroused the inhabitants that loyalist leader Robert Cunningham was able to muster 1,200 men to defend the region from patriot intrusion. Exercising caution, Drayton tried to dissuade the loyalists from fighting stating, "We abhor the idea of compelling any person to associate with us….We only with sorrow declare that any who will not associate

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[87] William Henry Drayton explains that he tried to refute this argument in Mr. Drayton to the Council of Safety, 16 August 1775, in Gibbes, *Documentary History*, vol. 1, 142-143. Dalyrymple's *Address* is in *American Archives*.
[88] Dalyrymple's *Address*.
[89] Mr. Drayton to the Council of Safety, 16 August 1775, 141.

with us…cannot…be considered…friendly."[90] Exhibiting a degree of deceitfulness, Drayton circulated rumors that patriot reinforcements were on their way to attack and burn loyalist homes. The ploy worked, and the frontiersmen declined to fight in favor of negotiating with the Charlestown Whigs.

The result of these negotiations was the Treaty of Ninety-Six, signed on 16 September 1775. The treaty forbade the backcountry loyalists from aiding the British army and warned them not to "oppose the proceedings of the Congress of this colony or its authorities derived therefore."[91] The only concession that the Provincial Congress made was a vague guarantee that non-signers of the Whig Association would no longer be disturbed by Charlestown rebels.[92] As historian Walter Edgar notes, some leading backcountry loyalists refused to support the treaty, but a large number were willing to accept neutrality to avoid a civil war.[93] The treaty also met Campbell's desire to resist open fighting until British forces arrived. The Drayton Commission returned to Charlestown, having pacified the backcountry for the moment. However, loyalist leaders, Robert and Patrick Cunningham, were rightly convinced that the Whigs would never address backcountry grievances. When the time was right, the Whigs would silence the backcountry's opposition, regardless of any agreement.

In short order, the Charlestown Whigs violated the Treaty of Ninety-Six, lending credence to the backcountry's suspicions. In a calculated effort to smoke out the loyalist leader, Drayton craftily used the Treaty of Ninety-Six as a weapon to isolate Robert Cunningham, inquiring whether or not there was truth to the rumors that the latter did not feel bound to the terms of the accord. Falling into the trap, Cunningham replied that he did "not hold that peace

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[90] Mr. Drayton to the Council of Safety, 17 September 1775, in Gibbes, *Documentary History*, vol. 1, 187.
[91] The Treaty of Ninety-Six in Gibbes, *Documentary History*, vol. 1, 185.
[92] *Ibid*., 186.
[93] Edgar, *Partisans and Redcoats*, 36.

because you [Drayton] had all the bargain making to yourself and had taken advantage of men half scared out of their senses at the sight of liberty caps and the sound of cannon."[94] With his incriminating statement as evidence, the Provincial Congress arrested Cunningham and jailed him in Charlestown. In retaliation, Cunningham's brother Patrick led an uprising on November 3, 1775, capturing a shipment of gunpowder that the Charlestown Whigs had sent to the Cherokee as a gesture of goodwill. At the same time, to the surprise of the Provincial Congress, Richard Pearis, the lowcountry's diplomatic agent to the Cherokees, published an affidavit that charged the Whigs with the intent to supply the Native Americans gunpowder to use against backcountry loyalists.[95] The hijacking of gunpowder and Pearis's assertion about its intended use brought the hostility between the regions to a head, prompting the backcountry colonists to resolve that they needed Great Britain to defend the region against Whig tricks and Native American attacks.[96]

A Civil War Erupts: The Snow Campaign

Finally, in November 1775, a civil war between the lowcountry Whigs and backcountry loyalists erupted at a trading post in the Ninety-Six District. Whig Major Andrew Williamson marched into Ninety-Six to "retake that ammunition and bring those people to justice."[97] Claiming that the Whigs had broken the treaty and skillfully playing up the rumors of an imminent Indian attack, loyalist Patrick Cunningham, in turn, raised a force of 2,000 men. On 19 November 1775, the loyalists attacked Williamson's position; the revolutionaries hastily retreated to a fortified position on the Saluda River. However, Cunningham's forces surrounded

[94] Captain Robert Cunningham's Answer to the Honorable William Henry Drayton, 5 October 1775, in Gibbes, *Documentary History*, vol. 1, 200.
[95] Lambert, *The South Carolina Loyalists*, 51.
[96] For more information on the coming of the civil war and the problems associated with the gunpowder for the Cherokees, see Lambert, *The South Carolina Loyalists*, 42-54.
[97] Andrew Williamson to the Council of Safety, 16 October 1775, in Gibbes, *Documentary History*, vol. 1, 206.

the rebels, demanding Williamson's men lay down their arms. When Williamson refused to surrender, fighting resumed until both sides agreed to negotiate. On the face of it, the agreement reached between the backcountry loyalists and the Charlestown Whigs was a triumph for the frontiersmen. The rebel militia was to surrender its guns, destroy its camp, and return to the lowcountry.[98] Although the backcountry loyalists upheld the agreement, Colonel Richard Richardson arrived to relieve Williamson and decided that the cessation of fighting did not apply to his reinforcements.[99] Richardson ordered the Ninety-Six residents to surrender Patrick Cunningham and to return the powder. His announcement was met with determined silence.

Ramsay noted, "The royalists, irritated by the capture of [Robert] Cunningham, and flushed with the success in seizing the powder, were at this time more numerous than at any prior period."[100] The backcountry loyalists refused to surrender Patrick Cunningham. However, on 22 December 1775, a detachment of Richardson's army surprised the loyalists at their camp at Great Cane Brake on Reedy River, initiating a battle pitting loyalist against rebel. The Snow Campaign, so called since it was fought during a thirty inch snow fall, was a patriot rout. The Whigs captured the defeated loyalists and forced them to pledge that they would not take up arms against their lowcountry neighbors on pain of losing their property. Richardson's Snow Campaign was a serious setback for the backcountry loyalists, momentarily leaving the Provincial Congress in control. On 26 March 1776, South Carolina became the second colony to adopt a state constitution. Belying the bitterness of the recent fighting in the backcountry, the new constitution continued the malapportionment of the General Assembly in favor of the coastal districts; once again, the lowcountry would dominate the colonial government. The backcountry loyalists would not have an opportunity to counter the Charlestown Whigs until the

[98] Agreement for the Cessation of Arms in Gibbes, *Documentary History*, vol. 1, 214-215.
[99] Col. Richardson to Mr. Drayton, 30 November 1775, in Gibbes, *Documentary History*, vol. 1, 223.
[100] Ramsay, *History*, *145*.

British mounted the Southern Campaign. The Whig victory, however, was nothing more than a respite; the Crown's supporters remained a potent force.[101]

Conclusion

When the British embarked on their Southern campaign, they hoped to take advantage of a perceived willingness of the backcountry loyalists to fight. Commanders of the Southern campaign, Generals Henry Clinton and Charles Cornwallis, along with officials in London, estimated that if the numbers of backcountry residents who signed the Counter-Association and turned out in 1775 to protest the Drayton Commission were reasonably accurate, then they could expect to enlist a large loyalist militia to conduct operations in the piedmont. The events that transpired in the backcountry prior to 1775 certainly gave the British high command compelling reasons to believe that the majority of backcountry residents were loyal. Reports from the piedmont were equally encouraging. Major John Andre, Clinton's aide-de-camp, reported to Major Patrick Ferguson that there was "no reason to doubt that the inhabitants are very well disposed to take an active part" in aiding the British army.[102] British Lieutenant Colonel Nisbet Balfour noted that the backcountry colonists seemed willing to reinstitute royal authority.[103] Robert Gray, a Tory from Cheraw, estimated that loyalists comprised "one third of the whole" in his district, while the rest remained neutral.[104] He further noted that well over half the Ninety-Six District remained loyal, while the people of Orangeburg District were "almost unanimous" and ready to take "up arms to maintain the British government."[105]

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[101] For more information on the Snow Campaign and South Carolina's new constitution adopted afterwards, see Robert Bass, *Ninety-Six: The Struggle for the South Carolina Backcountry* (Lexington, SC: Sandlapper, 1978), 117-131.
[102] Andre's information is quoted in Patrick Ferguson to Cornwallis, 30 May 1780, The Cornwallis Papers, SCDAH.
[103] Nisbet Balfour to Cornwallis, 1780, The Cornwallis Papers, SCDAH.
[104] Robert Gray, "Colonel Robert Gray's Observations on the War in South Carolina," *South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine*, 11 (July 1910), 141.
[105] Gray, "Observations," 141.

With the fall of Charlestown in May 1780, the British regained control of South Carolina, allowing many committed loyalists to come forward and sign the oath of allegiance to the Crown.[106] Cornwallis then moved his troops to the backcountry. With aid from British regulars, the loyalists quickly retook Ninety-Six, securing it as a base of operations in June 1780. The British high command overlooked one crucial detail. In the absence of British authority from 1775 to 1780, the Provincial Congress had made life difficult for the backcountry loyalists, jailing some and stripping others of their property. Moreover, local battles had brutalized the civilian backcountry populace, and everyday violence had become a fact of life. The piedmont residents, who chafed under the colonial government, sought British protection. As loyalist Robert Gray explained, white backcountry folk aided the British "because they fondly hoped that they would enjoy a respite from the Calamities of war."[107] Instead, Clinton and Cornwallis demanded the loyalists enlist in their militias. Although some committed loyalists from the backcountry willingly enlisted, it quickly became evident that others joined out of expediency.

South Carolina was anything but united in its opposition to Great Britain. A conflict of interests had spiraled into a war between backcountry and lowcountry residents, propelling the piedmont colonists to either support the crown or remain neutral. The task fell to Clinton and Cornwallis to protect these colonists in one of the Revolution's bloodiest battlegrounds. Unfortunately, they did not understand the task.

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[106] There are a total of 1,557 signed loyalty oaths from 1780 in the Records of the Board of Police. Forty additional unsigned loyalty oaths are also contained in the collection. In addition, 396 oaths of allegiance were signed in 1781, bringing the total to 1,953. Many of these oaths were signed by backcountry residents who arrived in Charleston shortly after its fall to welcome Clinton. However, British letters and estimates indicate that there were more loyalty oaths signed than what has survived. The loyalty oaths can be found in Great Britain, Records of the Board of Police, SCDAH.

[107] Gray, "Observations," 148.

CHAPTER TWO

BLOODSHED IN THE BACKCOUNTRY: BRITISH MILITARY POLICIES AND TACTICS, MAY 1780-OCTOBER 1780

In January 1780, the British ordnance ship *Russia Merchant* floundered in the rough waters of the Atlantic Ocean while on a mission to supply General Sir Henry Clinton, the newly appointed commander of the British army in North America, and his forces in Charlestown, South Carolina. Several other cargo vessels in the fleet lost their masts in the driving rain, hail, and snow. The *Russia Merchant* carried all of the British siege artillery, horses, about 4,000 pounds of ammunition, and other supplies meant to sustain General Clinton's army during the Southern campaign. The cavalry and artillery horses, stabled below deck, were frightened by the gale and suffered broken legs trying to break out of their stalls. It must have been a horrifying scene: men struggling on pitching decks, horses kicking and bucking to escape their fate, and both man and beast screaming as the *Russia Merchant* sank. "Permit me to hope," wrote Admiral Marriot Arbuthnot, Commander of the British Royal Navy in North America, to Clinton, "that stores of such consequence were not trusted, at the season we set out for this place, in a ship which the master protested was unfit for sea."[108] At the outset of the Southern campaign, the wreck of the *Russia Merchant* was a dark omen for the British. The lack of supplies and transportation would plague the British throughout their incursion into the Carolina backcountry.

[108] The wreck of the *Russian Merchant* and its cargo holds are described in Admiral Marriot Arbuthnot to General Sir Henry Clinton, 5 March 1780, in Clinton, *The American Rebellion*, 439.

Nonetheless, Clinton's force of about 9,000 men defeated the Continental Army at the Battle of Charlestown in May 1780, forcing the Whigs to rely on militia to continue the fight. While the revolutionaries struggled to regroup, backcountry residents rejoiced at the arrival of the British army. They believed that Clinton and his principle subordinate and successor General Charles Cornwallis would protect them from the rebels. Clinton's and Cornwallis's objectives were to seize control of a region rich in resources, restore royal authority, and prosecute a campaign that took advantage of a perceived willingness of backcountry loyalists to fight.[109]

The British did not respond to the backcountry populace's plea for aid, failing to provide adequate protection and support. Neither Clinton nor Cornwallis could control their subordinate officers. They did not discipline them for their inveterate plundering, ignoring the ransacking of homes and the theft of horses, cattle, and other equipment regardless of the owners' allegiance. Their violent actions jeopardized loyalist support and enraged the neutrals. The policies, methods, and tactics employed by British military officers in 1780 in an effort to restore royal authority to South Carolina lost the support of the backcountry populace who had been willing to remain either neutral or loyal.

The Proclamations of 1780

The events that took place immediately after the British victory at Charlestown demonstrated that the British expectation of loyalist support was correct. Two hundred inhabitants of Charlestown signed a congratulatory address to Clinton and Arbuthnot. By late May, almost 1,600 white South Carolinian males had taken the oath of allegiance. In addition, between 17 June and 31 July 1780, another 1,866 men appeared before Crown officials in

[109] The fall of Charlestown and the immediate reactions by the backcountry populace, along with Clinton and Cornwallis's objectives, is further described in Pancake, *This Destructive War*, 68-70. See also Wilson, *The Southern Strategy*, 233-238.

Charleston to swear their allegiance.[110] The Southern strategy seemed to be vindicated. As promising as the situation appeared for the British, pacifying the South Carolina backcountry required careful management because those who had professed their loyalty did so for a variety of reasons and could be easily alienated. "The greater part of that rural population of this part of America are, I believe, favorable inclined toward peace, *for they gain nothing by this war*," observed a Hessian captain.[111]

Unfortunately, Arbuthnot and Clinton jointly held the title of Commissioner for Restoring Civil Government in South Carolina and could not agree on how to proceed. Arbuthnot advocated for the quick restoration of civil government with a representative assembly, but Clinton adamantly opposed this notion. He feared that elected assemblies might obstruct military operations. Therefore, no attempt was made to establish civil authority in South Carolina.[112] Furthermore, Arbuthnot and Clinton wrangled over the distribution of plunder seized from Charlestown. Describing Arbuthnot as "false as hell," Clinton seethed that the Admiral would not surrender an equitable division of the loot, believing that his share "did not amount to a third."[113] The public breach between the two leaders prevented them from performing joint operations to promote stability, and Clinton began to issue proclamations to placate the colony's rebellious spirit. His decrees were mistakes, communicating an inconsistent message about British allegiance policy that alienated loyal backwoodsmen.

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[110] Oaths of Allegiance, May 1780-July 1780.
[111] Quoted in Piecuch, *Three Peoples, One King*, 182.
[112] The argument between Clinton and Arbuthnot over the restoration of civil government is further detailed in Piecuch, *Three Peoples, One King*, 183, and Mackesy, *War for America*, 341-342. Piecuch attributes the failure to restore civil government to Clinton's desire to quickly return to New York. Clinton feared that the task would delay him. According to Piecuch, Clinton also believed that the establishment of civil government in Charlestown would not have enough influence on the "wavering and indifferent" inhabitants of the town. Mackesy, on the other hand, attributes the failure to restore civil government to a personal vendetta between Clinton and Arbuthnot. The two leaders loathed each other, and Clinton often took Arbuthnot's suggestions to Lord Germain on how to wage the war as a personal slight.
[113] Clinton, *The American Rebellion*, 180.

Clinton called on the loyalists to rally behind the King's standard and assist his troops in reestablishing peace in South Carolina. Encouraging neutral and loyal South Carolinians to aid the British, Clinton issued a proclamation on 22 May 1780 pardoning "for their past offenses; all those[,] his deluded and infatuated subjects, who should return to their duty."[114] To ensure that a newly restored loyal legislature would not interfere in his military operations, Clinton explicitly noted that South Carolinians "shall meet with effectual Countenance, Protection, and Support…whenever the Situation of the Country will permit of the Restoration of Civil Government and Peace."[115] Defeating the revolutionaries and regaining military control over South Carolina took precedence over establishing a stable government.

Clinton recognized that convincing the interior to assist the Crown would be a difficult undertaking. The lowcountry Whigs had relentlessly abused, imprisoned, and intimidated backcountry neutrals and loyalists, attempting to prevent them from supporting the Crown. As his 22 May Proclamation stated: "wicked and desperate men…under Pretence of Authority derived from the late usurped Legislatures, are attempting by enormous Fines, grievous Imprisonments, and Sanguinary Punishments to compel his Majesty's faithful and unwilling subjects to take up Arms against his Authority and Government."[116] His statement confirms the British belief that the Carolina backcountry was fundamentally loyal.

Hoping to take advantage of Clinton's pardon and offer of parole, rebel militiamen arrived in Charlestown to swear allegiance. Clinton reported that "they confess their dread of the back-country people, who, they say, are all up to join [the British] in North Carolina as in South," another indication of the extent of loyalist support in the Carolina interior.[117] The 22

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[114] Clinton, Proclamation, 22 May 1780.
[115] Clinton, Proclamation, 22 May 1780.
[116] *Ibid.*
[117] Clinton to Robert Eden, 30 May 1780, in Clinton, *The American Rebellion*, 175.

May Proclamation, therefore, attempted to take advantage of the backcountry whites' perceived willingness to fight for the British. Moreover, the Proclamation promised protection and support for the "King's faithful and peaceable subjects" and threatened to sequester the property of anyone who encouraged or participated in armed rebellion against the crown.[118] By including this provision in his decree, Clinton recognized that the backcountry loyalists required British protection from Whig abuses. In addition, the confiscated patriot property would be used to supply British soldiers and loyalists. In a letter to Robert Eden, former Royal Governor of Maryland, Clinton explained his reasoning for the 22 May Proclamation: the backcountry's "jealousy of their late government, their hopes of a better under us, and their conviction that the rebels can never recover this country" compelled him to provide protection to the loyalists and neutrals.[119] Clinton hoped to aid the backcountry populace whose "hearts, poor fellows, are British, though their language is not the most correct."[120]

On 1 June, Clinton and Arbuthnot issued a joint proclamation offering full pardon to South Carolinians who swore allegiance to the king. Unlike the 22 May Proclamation, the new decree required South Carolinians to demonstrate their allegiance, but it did not elucidate how. The new proclamation stated that anyone who declared loyalty to Great Britain "will still be received with Mercy and Forgiveness….and upon a due Experience of the Sincerity of their Professions, a full and free Pardon will be granted for the treasonable."[121] Clinton hoped that this generous peace offering would return South Carolina to the imperial fold. The 1 June Proclamation provided the defeated South Carolinians a sense of relief, assuring them that the British sought to reconcile the state with Great Britain, not punish its inhabitants. Confident that

[118] Clinton, Proclamation, 22 May 1780.
[119] Clinton to Eden, 30 May 1780.
[120] *Ibid.*
[121] Clinton, Proclamation, 1 June 1780.

the South Carolina populace would support the British, Clinton asserted that the rebels were in a "hopeless Situation."[122] He noted that the Whig desire "to keep alive the Flame of Rebellion in the Province" contributed to the "Miseries of the People."[123] He hoped that war weary South Carolinians might aid the king's troops to bring an end to the rebellion. This pardon did not extend to "those who are polluted of the blood of their fellow Citizens, most wantonly and inhumanly shed under the mock Forms of Justice because they refused Submission to an Usurpation."[124] Those who had executed loyalists would not be pardoned or shown mercy.[125]

Clinton further guaranteed that those who complied with the Proclamation "will be reinstated in the Possession of all those Rights and Immunities which they heretofore enjoyed under a free British Government, exempt from Taxation, except by their own Legislature."[126] He believed that this powerful incentive would obviate the root cause of the rebellion. However, exempting the colonies from taxation had already proved to be a failed strategy when employed by the Carlisle Commission in an attempt to restore peace between the colonies and Great Britain.[127] The offer was simply too little, too late. Nevertheless, Clinton's 1 June Proclamation guaranteed that loyal subjects would receive the benefits of British citizenship and the rebels would be punished.

Clinton was confident that the two proclamations guaranteed British control over South Carolina. British Lieutenant Colonel Banastre Tarleton expressed similar satisfaction with the decrees, asserting that "the proclamations…produced great effect in South Carolina. In most of

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[122] *Ibid.*
[123] *Ibid.*
[124] *Ibid.*
[125] Clinton deported 29 South Carolinian Whigs, accused of harassing and killing loyalists, and imprisoned them at Saint Augustine, Florida.
[126] *Ibid.*
[127] Further information on the Carlisle Commission and what its offers meant for South Carolina can be found in Pancake, *This Destructive War*, 4-12 and 67. Ultimately, Pancake claims that it was still unclear by the time that Charlestown fell whether or not the concessions made by the Commission were to apply directly to the individual colonies.

the districts adjoining to Charlestown great numbers offered to stand forth in defense of the British government, and many did voluntarily take up arms."[128] Clinton, however, could not leave well enough alone. Suddenly, on 3 June, just two days before returning to New York and having just appointed Cornwallis as his replacement, Clinton issued a third proclamation that contradicted the generous spirit of his prior announcements. The 3 June Proclamation required all prisoners on parole, except those who had been in Fort Moultrie or Charlestown during its capitulation, to sign an oath of allegiance to the crown within seventeen days or be "considered as Enemies and Rebels to the same and treated accordingly."[129] Moreover, the oath made parolees liable for service in the British military, effectively making neutrality impossible. Clinton designed the decree to force the hand of those who did not take advantage of his original offers. For backcountry residents, the Proclamation was particularly ill timed. Clinton forced the backwoodsmen to decide their allegiance on the heels of one of the most infamous incidents of the American Revolution, the British massacre of Continental soldiers at the Waxhaws.[130]

Writing after the war, Clinton justified his 3 June Proclamation as a "most prudent measure" for ferreting out "inveterate rebels" in order to provide the loyalists with "an opportunity of detecting and chasing from among them such dangerous neighbors, which they could not with any propriety have attempted as long as those paroles continued in force."[131] However, the loyalists had already learned through bitter experiences who their enemies were, and they wanted the rebels punished, not pardoned. Paroled Whigs, on the other hand, regarded the proclamation as a violation of their terms of surrender. Moreover, the proclamation made the task of pacifying the backcountry more difficult. It was evident that many former rebels found it

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[128] Banastre Tarleton, *A History of the Campaigns of 1780 and 1781 in the Southern Provinces of North America* (New York: Arno Press, 1968), 25.
[129] Clinton, Proclamation, 3 June 1780.
[130] The Battle of the Waxhaws will be discussed later in this chapter.
[131] Clinton, *American Rebellion*, 181.

expedient to enlist in the loyal militia where they proved unreliable and prone to desert. Some who took the loyalty oath felt no moral compunction to obey.[132]

Within a month of Clinton's proclamations, an experienced British officer, Lord Francis Rawdon, reported from the backcountry Ninety-Six District that the "unfortunate proclamation of the third of June has had very unfavorable consequences."[133] He claimed that "the majority of the inhabitants in the frontier districts…were not actually in arms against us," but after Clinton's decree, "nine out of ten of them are now embodied on the part of the Rebels."[134] For example, when the British captured backcountry resident John Lisle and his forces along the Enoree River, they readily took advantage of the 3 June Proclamation. Lisle and his militia pledged allegiance to Britain, and Clinton permitted them to return home where they would have been content to remain as "good citizens."[135] However, Clinton then assigned Lisle and his men to serve in Tory Matthew Floyd's militia battalion. They were tasked with supplying the British arms and ammunition. Angered by the requirement to serve, Lisle denounced the proclamation and convinced his former militiamen plus many of Floyd's own soldiers to take up arms against the crown. This incident suggests that the backcountry residents would have remained out of the revolutionary conflict, if they had not been forced to serve in the British military.[136]

Although Clinton claimed that his decrees would expose enemies and help backcountry loyalists expel them from the interior, the inconsistent proclamations instead chased British allies into the rebel camp. Clinton returned to New York on 5 June before witnessing the impact of his policies. Remembering his three Proclamations after the war, Clinton eschewed responsibility

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[132] Lambert, *The South Carolina Loyalists*, 97-99. Lambert argues that Lord Cornwallis was not pleased with Clinton's decree because it offered sneaky rebels the opportunity to enlist in the loyalist militia. One could argue that the 3 June Proclamation was the start of a long list of problems that Lord Cornwallis and his subordinates would face with the loyalist militia.
[133] Lord Rawdon to Clinton, June 1780, British Headquarters Papers, SCDAH.
[134] Lord Rawdon to Clinton, June 1780.
[135] Tarleton describes the incident in Tarleton, *A History of the Campaigns*, 93.
[136] *Ibid.*

for their "evil consequences…since, as from the powers I gave Lord Cornwallis I cannot think myself responsible."[137]

British Military Policy on Slaves

Before leaving Charlestown, Clinton also had to devise a policy regarding South Carolina's majority black population. By 1780, there were 104,000 black and only 70,000 white inhabitants living in the colony. The disparity was greatest in the lowcountry where enslaved people, approximately 69,000, outnumbered whites by a ratio of almost three to one. The demographics of the backcountry were different; whites were in the majority, numbering approximately 46,000, compared with about 35,000 blacks.[138] As a prelude to the Southern campaign, Clinton had issued the Philipsburg Proclamation on 30 June 1779, at British headquarters in Philipsburg, New York. The Proclamation declared that "any Negro the property of a Rebel, who may take refuge with any part of this army" would not be sold or released to any claimant.[139] Clinton further promised that any slave who deserted the revolutionaries to serve in the British army would receive "full security to follow within these Lines" and could pursue "any Occupation which he shall think proper."[140] The Philipsburg Proclamation was a military strategy, designed to defeat the rebels by depriving them of their labor force. On paper, the decree did not alter the legal status of slaves, but many Carolinians, black and white, believed it raised the specter of emancipation. Since slavery was the backbone of the South Carolina lowcountry economy, white colonists regarded the declaration as an attack on their social order, livelihood, and property. Clinton, on the other hand, believed that control of the slave population

[137] Clinton, *American Rebellion*, 181.
[138] These figures are approximations taken from Sylvia Frey, *Water from the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1991), 10, and Walter Edgar, *Partisans and Redcoats*, xiii. Many of these blacks arrived in the backcountry because the British sequestered estate scheme brought them into the region.
[139] Henry Clinton, Philipsburg Proclamation, 30 June 1779.
[140] *Ibid.*

was his trump card. However, he misplayed his hand. Clinton and Cornwallis did not consider the slaves as actors. Therefore, they failed to formulate a military policy that supported the British army and preserved backcountry loyalty.

The fall of Charlestown prompted slaves to seek freedom with the British. Encouraged by the Philipsburg Proclamation, thousands of slaves rushed to the British line.[141] Although some slaves finally attained their freedom, others found themselves back in bondage under new masters. Hoping to emulate wealthy lowcountry gentlemen by growing staple crops, white backcountry farmers desired the fugitive slaves to develop their own plantations. The rebel historian Ramsay dismissed the backcountry loyalists as weak and too reliant on slavery. He noted that "the mischievous effects of negro slavery were…abundantly apparent. Several who had lived in ease and affluence from the produce of their lands, cultivated by the labor of slaves, had not fortitude enough to dare to be poor."[142] Believing that Great Britain owed them a debt of gratitude for their loyalty, white piedmont farmers pressured Clinton to bestow fugitive slaves to any loyalist, regardless of ownership.

Not all blacks raced to the British lines voluntarily. British officers repeatedly sent out detachments to collect slaves. Many of these slaves had been left behind by their masters, sometimes under supervision, but more often without any white oversight. White South Carolinians regarded the British army's seizure of slaves from lowcountry and backcountry plantations as a hostile act. As a Hessian officer, who took part in these operations, wrote, they "hated us because we carried off their Negroes and livestock."[143] Loyalists as well as rebels

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[141] Sylvia Frey maintains that the surrender of Charlestown was a "liberating moment" for South Carolinian slaves who chose to interpret the Philipsburg Proclamation as an offer of freedom to those who arrived to aid the British. See Frey, *Water from the Rock*, 117-20.

[142] Ramsay, *History*, 197. The rebel Ramsay would obviously dismiss the backcountry desires to own slaves. He often regarded that the backcountry residents had control over enough slaves already. Perhaps, he did not want the piedmont colonists to build up their plantations so they could rival the lowcountry elite.

[143] Quoted and translated by Piecuch, *Three Peoples, One King*, 215.

detested the British confiscation of their property. British officers, on the other hand, were unsure of how to manage the growing number of slaves. The slaves could become a useful labor pool for the army and, simultaneously, reduce the rebels' labor force. However, the British had far more slaves than the army could possibly employ, and fugitives had to be fed and clothed.[144]

Clinton worried that his efforts to employ the slaves would alienate loyalists and make it harder to persuade the neutrals to rally to the King's standard. Anxious to placate loyalist concerns, Clinton announced another policy to differentiate between royalist and rebel slaveholding. Clinton recommended the immediate return of slaves to loyal backcountry farms based on the masters' pledge not to punish blacks for fleeing.[145] The slaves of rebel owners, on the other hand, belonged to "the publick," and after serving the British army, they would "be entitled to their Freedom."[146]

To carry out his orders, Clinton appointed three prominent loyalist militiamen, Robert Power, William Carson, and Robert Ballingall, as Commissioners of Claims for Slave Property. They were responsible for supervising the delivery of runaways to claimants capable of certifying ownership and loyalty to the Crown. Immediately after Clinton established the Commission, loyalists began to petition for slave labor. As an example, backcountry Scots-Irishman M. James McDonald described himself as "one of His Majesty's faithful subjects" and

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[144] There is a historiographical argument between Frey and Piecuch over the British employment of slaves. Frey maintains that the "South Carolina pacification program broke down primarily because British attempts to use slaves as weapons against their masters." See Frey, *Water from the Rock,* 113. Her argument is a bit of an overstatement since the British tried to avoid altering the plantation system because they recognized that it would threaten their white support. Piecuch argues that the "British reluctance to draw on the support of African Americans to the fullest possible extent hurt the royal cause by depriving the British of a valuable resource." See Piecuch, *Three Peoples, One King,* 10. Once again, if the British had employed the slaves to the fullest measure, they would have lost white support entirely. Moreover, the British were reluctant to train slaves as soldiers.

[145] Clinton to the Commandant of Charlestown and Lord Cornwallis, 3 June 1780, British Headquarters Papers, SCDAH.

[146] Clinton to the Commandant of Charlestown and Lord Cornwallis, 3 June 1780.

"thought proper to represent his case in a petition to [Ballingall]…for a Negro."[147] To fulfill the steady stream of loyalist requests, the commissioners ordered the British army to turn over fugitive slaves to their custody. Power, Carson, and Ballingall assigned slaves to backcountry masters "who by a public avowal of their Loyalty and Attachment to His Majesty's Government have a Right to them."[148] Beyond a public declaration of support for the crown, there were no clear instructions for how to determine loyalty, leaving the door wide open for abuses. Any devious white South Carolinian, loyalist, rebel, or neutral, could undermine British policy by lying to the commissioners in order to acquire slaves. Although Clinton recognized the value of slave labor to the British army, he remained ambivalent, conceding that the slavery issue was so complex that it was "impossible to settle anything positive."[149]

After departing for New York, Clinton left Cornwallis to devise his own policy regarding blacks. There were no further instructions other than an expressed desire for slaves to remain quietly at their masters' plantations.[150] Writing after the war, Clinton simply noted that "it appeared unnecessary to say more."[151] In fact, Clinton only mentioned blacks once in his memoir, indicating that slaves were not a major concern and remained on the periphery of his strategic thinking. Cornwallis, on the other hand, struggled to find a strategy that would provide backcountry loyalists with slaves, while retaining control over enough laborers to supply the British army with food. With the sinking of the *Russia Merchant* at the start of the campaign, the British army was short of the food stocks necessary to prosecute the war, making backcountry farmers' support and slave labor crucial. The British army could not be fed unless slaves tended

[147] M. James McDonald to Robert Ballingall and Henry Clinton, May 1780, British Headquarters Papers, SCDAH.
[148] *Royal South-Carolina Gazette*, 6 July, 1780.
[149] Clinton to the Commandant of Charlestown and Lord Cornwallis, 3 June 1780.
[150] Clinton, *The American Rebellion*, 174.
[151] *Ibid*.

the crops, but slaves had little interest in working for an army that would not guarantee their freedom. Moreover, Cornwallis could not spare the soldiers necessary to oversee plantations.

No one more accurately assessed Cornwallis's dilemma than Tarleton. The son of a merchant who had amassed a fortune in the slave trade, Tarleton understood Cornwallis's problem. "All negroes, men, women, and children, upon the approach of any detachment of the King's troops, thought themselves absolved from all respect to their American masters and entirely released from servitude," wrote Tarleton.[152] He recognized that slaves believed that the British army would free them as a military necessity. Tarleton also understood that slaves fleeing backcountry farms threatened to undermine loyalist support. He noted that their "behavior caused neglect of cultivation that proved detrimental to the King's troops and occasioned disputes about property."[153] While keeping blacks enslaved placated white backcountry men, Cornwallis could not stop freedom-seeking slaves from rushing to the British line. It was a fatal flaw in strategy that the British never overcame.

As slaves fled the plantations, Cornwallis made more concessions to the loyalists. He increasingly relied on two Tory merchants, Thomas Inglis and John Cruden, to solve the slave problem. Tarleton noted that Cornwallis hoped to "conciliate the minds of the wavering and unsteady" by repaying them for their loss of property.[154] Inglis replaced Power on the Commission of Claims for Slave Property and set about returning fugitives to their loyalist masters. He promised that the backcountry slaveholders would be compensated for British use of their property. Inglis guaranteed that the loyalists would be reimbursed the full price of any slave who died in service to the British, a price estimated at £60 sterling per slave.[155] Cruden

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[152] Tarleton, *A History of the Campaigns*, 89.
[153] *Ibid*., 89-90.
[154] *Ibid*., 90.
[155] Important Claims and Awards of Some South Carolina Loyalists in Chesney, *The Journal*, 120.

served as the Commissioner of Sequestered Estates, responsible for supplying the British army with food and livestock. The British seized rebel plantations and placed them under Cruden's control. In addition to supporting the British army, Cruden had a mandate to make these plantations profitable "for the benefit of suffering loyalists, who have so fair and so just a claim on it for immediate support and future indemnification."[156] As historian Sylvia Frey asserts, the sequestered estates "would punish the Crown's active enemies and provide a way to compensate its friends."[157] Cruden's administration of the plantations would also release backcountry loyalists to fight. Under the watchful eye of Cruden and his subordinates, the slaves maintained the plantations in the loyalists' absence. Tarleton believed that Cornwallis's solution was working, noting that "in a short time the attention of the commissioners produced arrangements equally useful to the military and the inhabitants."[158] However, the scheme quickly unraveled.

Cruden had his share of problems. He was responsible for managing some one hundred sequestered estates and more than five thousand slaves assigned to put these lands into production to support the army.[159] He had more slaves than he and his subordinates could effectively supervise and hired out the excesses to the various army departments. Lieutenant Colonel Evan McLaurin, a backcountry Scotsman who ran a sequestered estate in Spring Hill near the Saluda River, however, complained that there were not enough blacks to work his plantation. He argued that the loyalists, who had acquired slaves from the British army, were "encouraged to keep them by Persons now in Authority" and refused to provide laborers to work on the estates for fear the British would be unable to control them.[160] This discrepancy between

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[156] Frey, *Water from the Rock*, 125.
[157] *Ibid*.
[158] Tarleton, *A History of the Campaigns*, 90.
[159] In a letter to Balfour, Cruden provides the number of sequestered estates and slaves he had working by 1781 and the problems associated with them. Cruden to Balfour, 28 May 1781, British Headquarters Papers, SCDAH.
[160] McLaurin to Balfour, 7 August 1780, British Headquarters Papers, SCDAH. For more information on the sequestered estates, who ran them, and other associated problems see Chesney, *The Journal*, 100-101.

Cruden and McLaurin suggests that there were great inefficiencies in the sequestered estate scheme, and coordination between all entities was lacking. Moreover, McLaurin requested that Lieutenant Colonel Nisbet Balfour persuade Cornwallis to issue a proclamation that would "enable us [sequestered estate managers] to discharge our Duty…without Infuriating those friends who are…fond of Negroes."[161] McLaurin petitioned Balfour for money to purchase clothing for the slaves. Unless the slaves' basic needs were met, McLaurin feared "they may be so neglected that they run away."[162] However, no response came from the British army. Moreover, there appeared to be no proper allocation of resources to maximize plantation output and provide for the slaves themselves, thereby impacting support for the British army. Without cooperation, Cornwallis's policy to reward loyalists and maintain the sequestered plantations failed to satisfy competing interests.

While Cornwallis accepted the use of slaves to work on the plantations, he was not inclined to train blacks to serve as soldiers. Perhaps, Cornwallis rightly understood that white backcountry farmers would regard armed black soldiers as a threat. Despite the deep divide between backcountry and lowcountry white Carolinians, there was near unanimity on the issue of slavery. Outnumbered, the lowcountry white population lived in fear of a slave revolt. Maintaining sequestered estates in the piedmont brought more slaves into the region, increasing the potential for an insurrection which the region's white inhabitants dreaded. Although the backcountry loyalists welcomed the additional slaves, they lacked confidence in the British officers' ability to control the enslaved population on the sequestered estates. Cornwallis's

[161] No evidence exists that Balfour ever informed Cornwallis or took McLaurin's suggestion seriously. McLaurin to Balfour, 7 August 1780.
[162] *Ibid.*

policy did not satisfy the loyalists; instead, it created an anxious population.[163] This situation did not bode well for Britain's ability to retain loyalist support or control South Carolina.

Things Fall Apart: The Battle of the Waxhaws

The wreck of the *Russia Merchant* and the failure of the sequestered estate scheme placed Cornwallis's army in the precarious position of being short on supplies, jeopardizing his campaign in the backcountry. There was yet another episode that sobered British high spirits just two days after Charlestown's surrender. As the Continentals relinquished their arms in Charlestown, British soldiers stored them in the city's powder magazine. Although American officers warned that some of the weapons were loaded, the British threw the guns into the magazine. Suddenly, one of the weapons fired accidently, igniting the powder and blowing up the building. A witness described "carcasses, legs, and arms were seen in the air and scattered over several parts of the town."[164] The explosion and ensuing fire destroyed several buildings, ammunition stores, and approximately 3,000 weapons. One hundred people, including 70 British soldiers, lost their lives.[165] This accident caused delays in delivering arms to loyal backcountry militiamen, undermining their confidence in the crown.

Anxious to return to New York, Clinton could not be bothered with the explosion and the ensuing demand for arms from the backcountry. Instead, he prepared for his departure, drafting instructions that gave Cornwallis independent command in the Southern colonies and outlined his general military objectives. Clinton ordered Cornwallis to complete the pacification of South Carolina and then "make a solid move into North Carolina, upon condition it could at the time be

[163] The white colonists' fear of slave revolts and black soldiers is detailed in Frey, *Water from the Rock*, 138-142.
[164] W. Croghan to Mr. Michael Gratz, 18 May 1780, in Gibbes, *Documentary History*, vol. 2 (New York: Appleton, 1855), 133.
[165] W. Croghan to Mr. Michael Gratz, 18 May 1780.

made without risking the safety of the posts committed to his charge."[166] From the outset, there were severe limitations that hindered Cornwallis in achieving this goal. Clinton took over 4,500 men, slightly more than half of British forces in South Carolina, and over 500 slaves back to New York, hoping to initiate a new campaign against General George Washington's weakened army. Clinton left Cornwallis with at most 3,000 soldiers to conduct offensive operations.[167] Except for Tarleton's British Legion, an elite loyalist corps that had been raised in New York, Clinton left Cornwallis almost no cavalry and few horses. Mounted troops were essential to maneuver in the backcountry, overawe the rebels, and protect the loyalists.[168] Cornwallis intended that the horse shortage be made up from rebel estates. However, Tarleton and his Legion scoured the piedmont for supplies, impressing horses and livestock with little regard for the political sentiments of their owners. As backcountry loyalist Robert Gray noted, "the abuses of the British army in taking the people[']s Horses, Cattle, & provisions to make up for the shortages, in many cases without paying for them…disgusted the inhabitants."[169]

The horse shortage coupled with the limited number of troops would not stop Cornwallis from intercepting any additional Continentals who planned to reinforce South Carolina. Patriot Colonel Abraham Buford and 350 Virginia Continentals were on their way to Charlestown when news of the city's surrender to the British reached them. Knowing that the British would soon be moving to secure the backcountry, Buford and his force quickly halted their advance and began a forced retreat to North Carolina. Cornwallis was determined not to let the Continentals escape. He dispatched Tarleton and his British Legion to stop Buford. Even for well mounted legionnaires, it would be difficult to overtake the Americans. The Continentals had a substantial

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[166] Clinton, *The American Rebellion*, 186.
[167] The numbers are taken from Clinton, *The American Rebellion*, 191.
[168] For the importance of horses in the Southern campaign, see Pancake's brief description, "The Redcoats," in Pancake, *This Destructive War*, 38-44.
[169] Gray, "Observations," 148.

head start and outnumbered Tarleton's Legion. To compound the situation, the weather was unusually hot. Men and horses suffered under the sweltering sun. South Carolina, however, was good horse country. The roads were of find sand without stones, and the woods clear of underbrush. Tarleton was also the right man for the job. Ambitious to a fault, the young, ruthless Colonel took daring risks with little regard for his soldiers. If Tarleton could slow Buford's retreat, then Cornwallis could catch up and crush the remaining Continentals.[170]

Tarleton was relentless, confident that his men could catch Buford. He pushed the horses until many died beneath their riders, losses that Cornwallis's army could ill afford. Tarleton's men were exhausted and dropped out of the pursuit. Carcasses dotted the road that led the British Legion north, but Tarleton had no intention of giving up the chase. He made up his losses by stealing horses from backcountry farms to maintain his backbreaking pace. During its pursuit, the Legion galloped across the plantation of backcountry landowner and Revolutionary soldier Thomas Sumter, looted his house, and burned the buildings to the ground. The British even carried Sumter's wife, still sitting in her chair in front of the hearth, outside her home and forced her to watch the building burn. Tarleton then rested his forces at Camden, South Carolina, where he learned that Buford would be reinforced once he arrived in North Carolina. "This information strongly manifested that no time was to be lost," wrote Tarleton.[171] At two o'clock in the morning, Tarleton cracked his riding crop and resumed pursuit.

Meanwhile, Buford had stopped to rest at Waxhaw Creek on the North Carolina border. The Scots Irish had settled the Waxhaws and wished to remain neutral. Buford was blissfully unaware of the proximity of Tarleton's Legion, now only twenty miles away. When a young patriot warned Buford that the British were coming, the Continentals broke camp. They had

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[170] For a general overview of the British ride to catch Buford, see John Gordon, *South Carolina and the American Revolution: A Battlefield History*, (Columbia: USC Press, 2003), 86-88.
[171] Tarleton, *A History of the Campaigns*, 28.

barely gone two miles when British dragoon Captain David Kinlock approached. Tarleton had sent Kinlock to present Buford with terms for surrender. The cocky colonel believed his message would "intimidate Buford to submission, or at least delay him whilst he deliberated on an answer."[172] The terms called for the parole of the militia, while the regulars would be made prisoners of war and escorted to Charlestown. Tarleton ended his letter with a grisly note: "I expect an answer to these propositions as soon as possible; if they are accepted, you will order every person under your command to pile his arms….If you are rash enough to reject them, the blood be upon your head."[173] Buford refused to surrender.

By three o'clock in the afternoon on 29 May, Tarleton overtook Buford at the Waxhaws. He had driven his men an impressive 105 miles in 54 hours.[174] Without resting, Tarleton launched an attack. Buford then made a crucial mistake. He ordered his men to hold their fire until the British Legion was only ten yards away. Delivered too late, the patriot volley did not slow the dragoons' advance. Buford waved a white flag and demanded quarter. Tarleton disregarded the attempt to surrender, and the legionnaires slaughtered the rebels. No quarter was given. Legionnaires used their bayonets to untangle the bodies of dead patriots so they could stab and bludgeon the American wounded hiding beneath the corpses. Well over half of Buford's force had been decimated; 113 Continentals were killed, 150 wounded, and 53 taken prisoner.[175] Buford and the remnants of his command did not share the same fate, escaping by a "precipitate flight on horseback."[176] Tarleton lost 5 killed and 12 wounded.[177]

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[172] *Ibid*.
[173] Articles of Surrender, Lieutenant Colonel Banastre Tarleton to Colonel Abraham Buford, 29 May 1780, in Tarleton, *A History of the Campaigns*, 78.
[174] Lieutenant Colonel Tarleton to General Cornwallis, 30 May 1780, in Tarleton, *A History of the Campaigns*, 83.
[175] Return of Rebels Killed, Wounded, and Taken in the Affair at the Waxhaws in Tarleton, *A History of the Campaigns*, 84.
[176] Tarleton, *A History of the Campaigns*, 30.
[177] Return of the British Killed and Wounded in the Affair at Waxhaws in Tarleton, *A History of the Campaigns*, 84.

The Battle at the Waxhaws epitomized the British officers' fixation on tactical victory without regard for the implications of their actions. Whether or not Tarleton ordered the massacre, his reputation in the backcountry was forever tarnished.[178] He became known as Bloody Tarleton and Bloody Ban, and Tarleton's Quarter was the byword for British brutality. It was propaganda, fodder that fueled the ire of the patriots who now thirsted for vengeance. "This barbarous massacre gave a more sanguinary turn to the war…and in subsequent battles a spirit of revenge gave a keener edge to military resentments," wrote David Ramsay.[179] The Scots Irish, who had cleared the bodies off the field, began to reconsider their neutrality.[180] If the British would massacre surrendering troops, what would stop them from plundering the homes of nonaligned white backcountry folk? The British were now the unquestioned masters of South Carolina, but Tarleton's victory had cost Cornwallis valuable horses, supplies, and the neutrality of the Scots Irish. The massacre at the Waxhaws exposed the white backcountry farmers to a side of the British that they had not seen – brutality.

The Scorched Earth Strategy

In the summer of 1780, Cornwallis did not foresee that his army would pursue a scorched earth strategy in the backcountry, destroying anything that could prove useful to the rebels and devastating the countryside. Sumter's plantation had been burned. Joseph Kershaw, a leading backcountry merchant, found his mills and other property in Camden destroyed. To the north at the Waxhaws, the British tore down American Colonel William Hill's iron works, a prosperous foundry that employed many white backcountry colonists. Describing this incident, sixteen-year

[178] There is a historiographical debate on whether or not the Battle of the Waxhaws should in fact be labeled a massacre. See the varying positions in Wilson, *The Southern Strategy*, 258-260, Pancake, *This Destructive War*, 70-71, Moore, *World of Toil and Strife*, 60-61. One would argue that it does not matter what historians label what occurred at the Waxhaws. What matters is that the backcountry folk *believed* that the British massacred surrendering troops, prompting the Scots-Irish who buried the dead to reconsider their neutrality.
[179] Ramsay, *History*, 192.
[180] Peter Moore argues that the Waxhaws whites remained unengaged until the British brought the war to their doorstep. See Moore, *World of Toil and Strife*, 62.

old Scots-Irishman James Collins noted that the British "mustered their forces, charged on the ironworks, killed several men, set the works on fire, and reduced them to ashes."[181] Until this point, Collins and his father Daniel had been willing to remain out of the revolutionary conflict. After witnessing the destruction of the iron works, Daniel resolved, "I have come home determined to take my gun and when I lay it down, I lay down my life with it."[182] The Collins family became rebels. To the west, the notorious loyalist militia officer William "Bloody Bill" Cunningham, a cousin of Robert and Patrick Cunningham, raided settlements along the Saluda River. In predominantly German Saxe Gotha, a loyalist stronghold, Cunningham seized plantations without questioning the allegiance of their owners. Plundering accompanied destruction. What the British army did not demolish, it tried to carry off, and the loss of furniture, plate, silver, household items, and livestock cannot be estimated.

There were many reasons for British excesses. Short on rations and equipment, British soldiers simply could not resist taking what they saw and never questioned the property owners' sentiments. As historian Dan Morrill notes, "frequently, they would sell stolen goods to obtain fuel for cooking and heating or liquor."[183] According to one British officer, "drunkenness & means of purchasing Liquor…are the causes of most of the Disorders of which the soldiers are guilty."[184] The British alienated their loyalist allies when they stole property or were responsible for wanton destruction. Moreover, bandits associated themselves with the British, giving the rebels a moral advantage among the white backcountry colonists. Now the revolutionaries presented themselves as the protectors of piedmont farmers. Jason Williams, a rebel backcountry militiaman, wrote to his wife, "I can assure you and my friends that the English

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[181] James Collins, *Autobiography of a Revolutionary Soldier* (New York: New York Times Press, 1979), 25.
[182] Collins, *Autobiography*, 25.
[183] Dan Morrill, *Southern Campaigns of the American Revolution* (Baltimore: The Nautical and Aviation Publishing Company, 1993), 77.
[184] Quoted in Morrill, *Southern Campaigns*, 77.

have never been able to make a stand…for they are retreating….From this you will see, under the blessing of God that we will soon relieve our distressed family and friends."[185] David Ramsay pinpointed the British and loyalist dilemma. Referring to "horse thieves" and other "banditti" who attached themselves to the British army, Ramsay noted that "the necessity which their indiscriminate plundering imposed on all good men…did infinitely more damage to the royal cause than was compensated by all the advantages resulting from their friendship."[186]

For his part, Cornwallis initially condemned and forbade cruelty and plundering by British and loyalist forces, but he failed to enforce his will. In July 1780, Cornwallis issued a proclamation designed to curb the British army's seizure of backcountry property. Moreover, Cornwallis hoped to distance his forces from the bandits who seized loyalist estates. Describing the thieves as "licentious and evil-disposed persons," Cornwallis expressly forbade stealing the property of backcountry loyalists.[187] Cornwallis argued that the bandits who seized "plantations of several of the inhabitants in the province, the cattle which were upon the same falsely asserted that they were properly authorized to do so to great loss and injury of the proprietors."[188] Hoping to assuage the complaints of plundered white backcountry men, Cornwallis further guaranteed that pilferers "shall not only be compelled to make recompense and satisfaction to the owners…but shall be further punished in a manner that an offense of so great enormity and evil doth deserve."[189] Cornwallis also required his officers to punish soldiers caught plundering and give certificates or receipts for food, animals, or anything else taken from backcountry farms.

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[185] Mr. Williams to Mrs. Williams, 4 July 1780, in Gibbes, *Documentary History*, vol. 2, 136.
[186] Ramsay, *History*, 259. Historian Rachel Klein agrees with Ramsay's assessment. She maintains that the Whigs often escaped the stigma of being associated with bandits because their officers more consistently refused to sanction plundering raids. Moreover, the Whigs in Charlestown, who tried to establish a government and a semblance of law and order, issued proclamations to suppress banditry. See Rachel Klein, *Frontier Planters and the American Revolution*, in *An Uncivil War: The Southern Backcountry during the Revolution*, eds. Ronald Hoffman, Thad Tate, Peter Albert, (Charlottesville: Virginia UP, 1985), 64-65.
[187] General Charles Cornwallis, Proclamation, 27 July 1780, in Tarleton, *A History of the Campaigns*, 121.
[188] General Charles Cornwallis, Proclamation, 27 July 1780, 121.
[189] *Ibid*., 122.

He declared that whenever impressment was necessary to support the army "the field officers alone…will receive the proper orders…and no persons whatever…are…upon any pretence to interfere therein."[190] Cornwallis did not fulfill his promise to compensate white backcountry loyalists. His ungovernable subordinates, desperate for supplies and ready to cow the rebels into submission, did not obey their orders. They pursued a scorched earth strategy that perpetuated violence against the backcountry civilian population and, in turn, undermined loyalist support in the region.

On 16 August 1780, Cornwallis followed the British successes at Charlestown and the Waxhaws with a spectacular victory at Camden, defeating another Continental field army led by the hero of Saratoga, General Horatio Gates. With their defeat at Camden, the rebels increasingly relied on guerilla tactics. Shooting from behind trees, targeting British officers, and menacing supply lines, the rebel guerillas threatened Cornwallis's ability to support the backcountry loyalists. Believing the guerillas too dangerous, Cornwallis refused to employ the British army to protect his allies. Writing to Clinton, Lord Cornwallis noted the effect. He asserted that "our friends…do not seem inclined to rise until they see our army in motion. The severity of the rebels has so terrified and totally subdued the minds of the people that it is difficult to rouse them to any exertions."[191] Finding the white backcountry men increasingly reluctant to take up arms for the crown, Cornwallis consequently resorted to excessive methods of coercion. "I am of opinion," he wrote to loyalist Lieutenant Colonel John Cruger, "that in a civil war there is no admitting of neutral characters, and that those who are not clearly with us

[190] *Ibid.*
[191] General Cornwallis to General Clinton, 29 August 1780, in Charles Cornwallis, *Correspondence of Charles, First Marquis Cornwallis*, vol.1, edited by Charles Ross (London: J. Murray, 1859), 58.

can so far be considered against us as to be disarmed."[192] Intercepted and circulated by rebels, the letter was a firm indication to the backcountry folk that the time to remain neutral had ended.

Although Cornwallis complained about the effect of Clinton's proclamations, he gave orders that anyone who had taken the loyalty oath and had subsequently joined the rebels should be imprisoned and their property confiscated.[193] As for the loyalist militiamen who abandoned their posts, he ordered that they be "immediately hanged."[194] In another letter to Cruger, Cornwallis ordered "the most *vigorous* measures to *extinguish the rebellion*…in the strictest manner."[195] Rebels intercepted this letter, published copies, and dispersed them among the white backcountry populace. Cornwallis's coercive measures to rally the backcountry whites and his orders for severe reprimands infuriated the piedmont loyalists who had thought that the British would protect, not punish, them.

Three Subordinates

Loyalist sentiment further deteriorated when Lord Cornwallis unleashed his three principle subordinates, Tarleton, Major James Wemyss, and Major Patrick Ferguson, to secure the backcountry. Unlike their commander, these three officers desired to punish those who would not submit or chose to remain neutral. Moreover, Cornwallis's relationship with his young officer corps often undermined his efforts to pacify the backcountry. The General indulged his men as opposed to disciplining them for their plunder and crime, a proclivity that alienated British allies in the backcountry. The conduct of his subordinates, coupled with the limitations of British manpower, escalated the guerilla conflict.[196]

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[192] Lord Cornwallis to John Cruger quoted in Robert Calhoon, *The Loyalists*, 493.
[193] Earl Cornwallis to Lieutenant Colonel Cruger, 18 August 1780, in Cornwallis, *Correspondence*, vol.1, 56.
[194] *Ibid.*
[195] *Ibid*., 57.
[196] See Lambert's Chapter "Plans and Personnel" in Lambert, *The South Carolina Loyalists*, 94-101, and Pancake, *This Destructive War*, 83-90.

Tarleton thought Cornwallis too lenient towards the wavering backwoodsmen, claiming that the General's moderation "did not reconcile enemies…but discouraged friends."[197] Neutrals despised Tarleton and his command for imprisoning those who refused to take up arms. Regarding neutrals as "disturbers of the peace," Tarleton wrote, "if humanity obliges me to spare their lives, I shall carry them as prisoners to Camden."[198] Forced to take sides against the British who scorned their neutrality, backcountry whites joined guerilla bands, commanded by Sumter in Camden, Francis Marion in Georgetown, and Andrew Pickens in Ninety-Six, in increasing numbers. Adding to their notorious reputation, Tarleton and his Legion plundered and burned homes of noncombatants.[199] Moreover, they helped themselves to neutral and loyalist property and livestock. "It is not," wrote Tarleton in justification of his actions, "the wish of Britain to be cruel or to destroy, but Treachery, Perfidy, and Perjury will be punished with instant Fire and Sword."[200] The British did not recognize that their definition of treachery, the failure to take up arms for the crown, caused them to lose the support of the backcountry populace.

In August 1780, Tarleton and his Legion converged on Nelson's Ferry in Orangeburg with the sole intention to "strike terror into the inhabitants of that district."[201] His cruelty was the most blatant at the home of the late patriot Colonel Richard Richardson. The Colonel had commanded the rebel forces in the 1775 Snow Campaign against backcountry loyalists in the Ninety-Six District and later accepted Clinton's offer of parole. He remained quietly at his

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[197] Tarleton, *A History of the Campaigns*, 30.
[198] Tarleton's justification is printed in a proclamation issued on 11 November 1780, reproduced in its entirety in Robert Bass, *The Green Dragoon: The Lives of Banastre Tarleton and Mary Robinson* (Orangeburg, SC: Sandlapper, 1973), 111-112.
[199] The patriot guerilla commanders attempted to maintain discipline to prevent their men from raiding backcountry residents. When General Nathanael Greene arrived in December 1780, he enforced the death sentence for those who deserted and court-martialed soldiers caught plundering the homes of noncombatants. He further required his officers to check the knapsacks of all soldiers to determine if they had procured stolen goods. Greene's policies will be further discussed in Chapter Three. See Nathanael Greene, *The Papers of General Nathanael Greene*, vol. 7, edited by Dennis Conrad (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1994), 1-18.
[200] Banastre Tarleton, Proclamation, 11 November 1780, in Bass, *The Green Dragoon*, 111-112.
[201] Tarleton, quoted in Jerome Nadelhaft, *The Disorders of War: The Revolution in South Carolina* (Orono: University of Maine Press, 1981), 57.

plantation until his death from natural causes. Richardson was just six weeks dead when Tarleton unearthed his coffin and ripped open the lid just to "look upon the face of such a brave man."[202] Tarleton thought that Richardson had been buried with the family silver, metal that could be melted down to form ammunition balls for his Legion.[203] South Carolina Governor John Rutledge confirmed Tarleton's actions in a letter to the Provincial Congress that circulated throughout the colony. Rutledge further wrote:

> Tarleton, at the home of the widow of General Richardson, exceeded his usual barbarity; for having dined in her house, he not only burned it after plundering it of everything it contained, but having driven into the barns a number of cattle, hogs, poultry, he consumed them, together with the barn and the corn in it, in one general blaze.[204]

Tarleton's ghoulish behavior made him a liability, not an asset. His terror tactics struck fear into the hearts of the white backcountry folk, prompting them to oppose the Crown.

British Major Wemyss and his 63rd Regiment further alienated the backcountry populace, particularly the Scots-Irish, with their prejudice against Presbyterians. A devout Anglican, Wemyss associated religious dissent and nonconformity with rebellion. Cornwallis had ordered Wemyss to "disarm in the most rigid Manner the Country between the Santee & PeeDee and to punish severely all those who submitted" and then joined the revolutionaries.[205] However, General Cornwallis did not order military actions against the Presbyterians. With roughly 400 men under his command, Wemyss invaded the predominantly neutral Cheraw District, settled by the Welsh and Scots-Irish. He burned a path seventy miles long and in some parts fifteen miles wide from Cheraw into Georgetown, demolishing Presbyterian owned plantations, confiscating

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[202] Tarleton, quoted in Bass, *The Green Dragoon*, 111.
[203] *Ibid*.
[204] Governor John Rutledge to the Delegates of the Provincial Congress, 8 December 1780, Lyman C. Draper Collection, SCDAH.
[205] Earl Cornwallis to Sir Henry Clinton, 29 August 1780, in Cornwallis, *Correspondence*, 58.

their arms and ammunition, and stealing their horses.[206] Wemyss reported that he had "burnt and laid waste [to] about 50 houses and Plantations."[207] Moreover, Wemyss destroyed backcountry Presbyterian churches, arguing that these buildings were "sedition shops."[208] Wemyss also targeted the homes and property of Marion's men in an attempt to draw the Swamp Fox into battle. Marion instead moved his forces to a safe position near the North Carolina border. Unable to engage Marion, Wemyss continued to destroy homes, shops, mills, and churches in the Presbyterian settlement of Indiantown. The result was that white backcountry folk hated Wemyss only slightly less than Tarleton.

The outcome of Wemyss's destruction was predictable; many white backcountry colonists became rebels, joining patriot guerillas with increasing fervor. The brutal treatment shocked even loyalist leaders. Previously a backcountry loyalist leader, Francis Kinloch became a reluctant rebel after witnessing Wemyss's destruction. He noted, "Officers whom I could name would make you and every worthy Englishman blush for the degeneracy of the Nation."[209] Noting the undesirable effects of Wemyss's tactics on his piedmont support, Cornwallis claimed that "the whole country…has ever since been in an absolute state of rebellion, every friend of the Government has been carried off, and his plantation destroyed."[210] Believing that Wemyss had gone too far by burning churches, Cornwallis maintained that "this unfortunate business…will shake the confidence of our friends…and make our situation very uneasy."[211]

Major Patrick Ferguson was another unruly subordinate who undermined backcountry support. Describing Ferguson as a "very zealous, active, intelligent officer," Clinton had

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[206] Nadelhaft, *The Disorders of War*, 57.
[207] Major James Wemyss's number of destroyed homes and plantation, quoted in Nadelhaft, *The Disorders of War*, 61.
[208] Major James Wemyss, quoted in Andrew Jackson O'Shaughnessy, *The Men Who Lost America*, 259.
[209] Francis Kinloch to Thomas Boone, quoted in Nadelhaft, *The Disorders of War*, 58.
[210] Earl Cornwallis to Sir Henry Clinton, 6 August 1780, in Cornwallis, *Correspondence*, 54.
[211] *Ibid*.

appointed the young Scotsman as the inspector general of the loyalist militia.[212] Clinton instructed Ferguson to restrain his soldiers "from offering violence to innocent and inoffensive people, and by all means in your power protect the aged, infirm, the women, and the children."[213] Impulsive, haughty, and spoiling for a fight, Ferguson was ill-suited to the task. His only qualification was an admitted talent for recruiting royalists. Ferguson refused to be saddled with administrative duties in organizing and training loyalist regiments in South Carolina, leaving them largely undisciplined and allowing them to raid backcountry settlements at will. After energetically enlisting some 1,500 royalists to join his militia in the Ninety-Six District, he failed to organize units in Camden and Cheraw. Historian W.J. Wood noted that Ferguson's recruits became known for their plundering of "cattle, horses, beds, wearing apparel…and vegetables of all kinds – even wrestling the rings from the fingers of the females."[214] Moreover, it was common for these raiding parties to feed their horses on backcountry grain fields. No more than common thieves, Ferguson's men aroused the Carolinians' ire. He would pay for his actions.

The Battle of Kings Mountain

Cornwallis understood that Ferguson's undisciplined character posed a serious threat to what little support he had left in the backcountry. Moreover, Ferguson alienated the backcountry loyalists with his rhetoric, proclaiming "If you chose to be pissed upon forever and ever by a set of mongrels, say so at once and let your women turn their backs upon you, and look out for real men to protect them."[215] Harsh words from an officer who had refused to protect piedmont colonists and plundered their homes for several months prior. Nevertheless, Cornwallis dispatched Ferguson and 1,018 loyalist militiamen to secure the British western flank on the

[212] Clinton, *The American Rebellion*, 176.
[213] Instructions Given to Major Ferguson, 22 May 1780, in Clinton, *The American Rebellion*, 441.
[214] W.J. Wood, *Battles of the Revolutionary War: 1775-1781* (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 1990), 186.
[215] Major Patrick Ferguson's Proclamation, 1 October 1780, Lyman C. Draper Manuscript Collection, SCDAH.

border of North Carolina. "Between us," he confided to Balfour, "I am afraid of his getting to the frontier…and playing some cussed trick."[216] Riding northwest, neglecting to communicate his position to Cornwallis, and overextending his command, Ferguson became vulnerable to a superior rebel force. South Carolina backcountry men joined the Over the Mountain Men from the Blue Ridge Mountains of Tennessee, determined to exact revenge on the British for raiding their homes.

Realizing the extent of his peril, Ferguson decided that the rocky pinnacle known as Kings Mountain provided an excellent defensive location from which his small force could engage the rebels. He was confident that he could hold the mountain. Discovering Ferguson's position from two captured loyalists, the rebels formed their battle lines, and their force swelled to over 900 men, many veteran soldiers. At three o'clock in the afternoon on 7 October, the Battle of Kings Mountain began. For all its apparent invincibility, Kings Mountain became an extremely difficult position to defend. The trees on the lower slopes provided good cover for the rebels, and their buckskin apparel blended with the fall foliage. The rocky slopes provided further protection because Ferguson's militia could not position their guns to fire downward at a sufficiently steep angle. Their shots went over the heads of the crouching rebel soldiers, terrifying but ineffective.[217]

Moreover, the Over the Mountain Men were expert shots. By positioning his troops at the top of the mountain, Ferguson made his men clear targets for the sharp shooters. Meanwhile, Ferguson, conspicuously clad in a brilliant red-checkered shirt and mounted on a great white horse, darted around the summit waving his sword, blowing his whistle, and encouraging his

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[216] Lord Cornwallis to Nisbet Balfour, September 1780, The Cornwallis Papers, SCDAH.
[217] This account of loyalists at King's Mountain is derived from Uzal Johnson, *Captured at King's Mountain: The Journal of Uzal Johnson, a Loyalist Surgeon*, edited by Wade Kolb and Robert Weir (Columbia: USC Press, 2011), 31. The rebel actions are detailed in Colonel William Campbell, Account of the Battle of King's Mountain, 20 October 1780, in Gibbes, *Documentary History*, vol. 2, 140-141.

men. When he realized he could not hold the mountain, he ordered a bayonet charge. Again, the apparent advantage of elevation proved illusory. As the loyalists charged down the mountain, they lost their footing and landed on rebel bayonets. As the rebel soldiers closed in from three sides, Ferguson desperately tried to rally his troops, cutting down three white flags until seven musket balls hit him simultaneously, killing the major instantly. The remaining loyalist survivors attempted to surrender. Amid shouts of "Give them Buford's Play" and "Tarleton's Quarter," the rebels disregarded the white flags, and the slaughter continued.[218] Finally, rebel commander Colonel William Campbell stopped the fighting, shouting, "For God's sake quit. It's murder to shoot any more."[219] Three hundred and twenty loyalists were dead or too badly wounded to be moved; 700 became prisoners, some marked for the gallows. Only 28 rebels were killed and 68 wounded.[220]

The backcountry men had long thirsted for vengeance against British cruelty, and they had tasted deeply of it. The news of the victory at King's Mountain spread like wildfire among the white backcountry populace who sensed that this was a turning point in the war. Their allegiance drastically shifted towards the rebel camp. To the British and their remaining piedmont loyalist allies, the impact of the defeat at Kings Mountain was as appalling as it was immediate. Imagine Cornwallis's reaction when the confirmation of Ferguson's disaster reached him. Ferguson had been killed, and his entire force wiped out in less than an hour. Moreover, the western frontier was now exposed to a rebel uprising. Kings Mountain disheartened the loyalists and elated the rebels. Rawdon, one of the commanders of loyalist forces at Ninety-Six, summed up the effect of the Kings Mountain defeat in a letter to Clinton, writing:

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[218] Calhoon, *The Loyalists*, 495.
[219] Colonel William Campbell, quoted in Calhoon, *The Loyalists*, 495.
[220] The figures are taken from Wood, *Battles of the Revolutionary War*, 205.

> The defeat of Major Ferguson had so dispirited this part of the country, and indeed the loyal subjects were so wearied by the long continuance of the campaign that…the whole district had determined to submit as soon as the Rebels should enter it.[221]

War weary and tired of being subjected to British cruelty, the white backcountry populace, even in the overwhelmingly Tory Ninety-Six District, were now willing to welcome and aid the rebels. No longer would these former loyalists take up arms for a crown that could not extinguish the flames of rebellion. Writing from a backcountry post after King's Mountain, Cornwallis observed that "if those who say they are our friends will not stir, I cannot defend every man's house from being plundered; and I must say that when I see a whole settlement running away from twenty or thirty robbers, I think they deserved to be robbed."[222] King's Mountain drove British friends into the open arms of the rebels, and Cornwallis no longer felt compelled to protect any remaining allies.

Conclusion

In planning the Southern campaign, the British believed that victory could be achieved by mobilizing backcountry loyalists. Initially, it appeared that the British foray into South Carolina would be successful, but battlefield victories at Charlestown, the Waxhaws, and Camden blinded the high command to deficiencies. The British pursued a scorched earth strategy to crush the opposition, instead of courting Carolina backcountry men. War disrupted the lives and changed the allegiances of the people in the Carolina piedmont, illustrating the uncompromising fact that the way war is waged does matter. The strategy, policies, and tactics that the British pursued had a profound effect on the piedmont's loyalty. Torn between policies of terrorizing and attracting the white backcountry population, the British were unable to make the most out of loyalist sympathies. Moreover, Kings Mountain served as effective patriot propaganda. Local

[221] Lord Rawdon to Sir Henry Clinton, 29 October 1780, in Cornwallis, *Correspondence*, 63.
[222] Cornwallis to Lieutenant Colonel Kirkland, 13 November 1780, in Cornwallis, *Correspondence*, 69.

revolutionaries spread stories of wild boar and wolves feeding on the remains of loyalist corpses left to rot in the sun at the mountain's peak.[223] The defeat sent an unmistakable warning to backcountry colonists about the ultimate fate of loyalists. Writing after the war, Clinton noted that Kings Mountain "proved the first link in a chain of evils that followed each other in regular succession until they at last ended in the total loss of America."[224] The backcountry now laid open to a brilliant rebel strategist who could capitalize on the British missteps. General Charles Cornwallis would meet his match in Major General Nathanael Greene.

[223] For descriptions of the aftermath of Kings Mountain, see Lambert, *The South Carolina Loyalists*, 144-146, and Morrill, *Southern Campaigns*, 110-112.
[224] Clinton, *The American Rebellion*, 226.

CHAPTER THREE

DISORDER AND RETREAT: BRITISH MILITARY POLICIES AND TACTICS, NOVEMBER 1780-JANUARY 1781

The defeat at Kings Mountain dealt a terrible blow to the British and their loyalist allies in the backcountry from which they would not recover. Although British operations did not cease, loyalist enthusiasm was considerably dampened. The patriot victory forced Lord Cornwallis to delay his plans to invade North Carolina. He retreated to Winnsboro, South Carolina, and there followed a period of inactivity. Some seventy miles south and slightly west of Charlotte, North Carolina, Winnsboro was a backcountry village of about twenty houses. There were no bridges across the Catawba River, and the roads through the red hills were miserable under the best of conditions. However, it was an easily defended area that allowed Cornwallis's forces to rest without being harassed by rebel militia.

To make matters worse, Cornwallis was stricken with a severe fever and had to be transported in a wagon, leaving Rawdon in command. There was a caravan of infirmary wagons. Major George Hanger, desperately ill with yellow fever, and five other officers, stricken with various diseases, occupied the other wagons. Conditions were miserable. It was cold, and heavy rains had soaked the straw beds, blankets, and clothing of the sick. Only Cornwallis and Hanger survived. Their five comrades died and were buried in forgotten graves dug hastily on the side of the road. Cornwallis's retreat was a bad dream.[225]

[225] For more information on the British retreat to Winnsboro, see Buchanan, *The Road to Guilford Courthouse*, 242-244, and Bass, *Ninety-Six*, 269-290.

On 14 October 1780, one week after Ferguson's death at Kings Mountain, Cornwallis's bad dream became a nightmare. Congress finally realized that military considerations should be paramount in choosing the man to lead patriot forces in the Southern theatre.[226] The delegates deferred to Washington's judgment. He recommended Major General Nathanael Greene to command the Continental Army in the South. Greene replaced Gates in the field on 3 December. Greene, a Rhode Island native who had never been farther south than Maryland, was an ingenious strategist and an easy conversationalist who gained the confidence of his officers. He was the right man for the job, sensitive to the backcountry residents' plight and willing to protect civilians.[227] Another stroke of luck for Greene was that, prior to being relieved, Gates requested his friend, expert sharpshooter Daniel Morgan, return to active duty to support the Continental Army. Promoted to the rank of Brigadier General, Morgan headed south. Morgan was a warrior, a veteran of the French and Indian War and the Revolutionary campaigns in the North, including Saratoga. Known as Old Waggoner, Morgan had received 499 lashes for striking a British officer during the French and Indian War, a punishment that caused him to hate the British. To rally his men, Morgan would retell the story, reminding his soldiers that the British owed him one more lash.[228] Together, Greene and Morgan were a formidable foe, possessing the skills and abilities to reverse American military fortunes in South Carolina.

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[226] Congress had no success in selecting commanders for the South. General Robert Howe lost Savannah. General Benjamin Lincoln surrendered Charlestown, and General Horatio Gates's army broke and ran in wild confusion at Camden. For a summary of each of the generals' defeats, see Wilson, *The Southern Strategy*, 170-176, Morrill, *Southern Campaigns*, 71-73 and 94-99.

[227] It is interesting to note that Greene never won a pitched battle against the British. He excelled at forcing the British to make long marches, exhausting men and supplies. Greene did have very able subordinates like the brilliant cavalry commanders William Washington and Henry Lee and infantry leader John Eager Howard. His militia commanders, Thomas Sumter, Francis Marion, and Andrew Pickens, were daring guerilla fighters who were ruthless in battle. For more on Greene's background, see Pancake, *This Destructive War*, 127-128, and Morrill, *Southern Campaigns*, 114-118, and Terry Golway's Chapter "The Quaker General" in Golway, *Washington's General: Nathanael Greene and the Triumph of the American Revolution* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2005), 1-11.

[228] For information on Daniel Morgan's return to the field, see North Callahan, *Daniel Morgan: Ranger of the Revolution*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1961), 25, and Don Higginbotham, *Daniel Morgan*, 119-122.

Greene understood that the demise of the loyalists who had served under Ferguson would discourage many Tories from taking up arms for the crown. Cornwallis would have to depend almost exclusively on regular troops to continue his Southern campaign. Moreover, Greene recognized that the tactics of Tarleton, Wemyss, and Ferguson had so incensed the backcountry neutrals that many were willing to ally with the revived Continental force. Attempting to rescue the reputation of his officers, Cornwallis wrote to Greene, "You have been greatly misinformed if you have ever been told that any Inhabitant of that part of the Country has been punished by us for Observing a Neutrality."[229] However, the die had been cast. After Kings Mountain, the only hope for the British was to crush Greene's army. With a dramatic victory, Cornwallis might persuade the loyalists and neutrals to rally to the British standard.[230] As Cornwallis's subordinates had so graphically demonstrated, the propensity of British soldiers to destroy private property without regards to their allegiance had already alienated backcountry Carolinians.

Unlike his opponents, Greene realized fully the dangers associated with unrestrained plundering and terror tactics. In the long run, Greene believed that only a disciplined regular army could win the backcountry residents' respect and allegiance. As Greene told partisan leader Sumter, "Partisan strokes in war are like the garnish of a table, they give splendor to the Army and reputation to the Officers, but they afford no substantial national security."[231] Moreover, Greene recognized that the battle for the South Carolina backcountry would be one for hearts and minds. "It is not a war for posts, but a contest for states dependent upon opinion,"

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[229] Lord Cornwallis to General Nathanael Greene, 27 December 1780, in Greene, *The Papers*, vol. 7, 5-6.
[230] Historian Robert Bass would agree. By early November, the British army had lost the initiative See Bass, *Ninety-Six*, 289-290.
[231] General Nathanael Greene to General Thomas Sumter, 8 January 1781, in Greene, *The Papers*, vol. 7, 74.

wrote Greene.[232] The British high command never comprehended fully this crucial fact. As long as Greene's army remained in the field, darting here and there like a pesky fly, the British could not create a climate that was conducive to persuading loyalists to take up arms for the crown and convince neutrals to remain quietly at home. Therefore, Cornwallis and his subordinates instituted increasingly harsh policies that further deteriorated the British position even in their two main interior bases at Ninety-Six and Camden. Backcountry loyalist zeal had eroded, and Cornwallis could no longer depend upon his allies.[233]

The Struggle to Recruit Loyalists

After Major Ferguson's death, Lord Cornwallis had to appoint a new loyalist militia commander, but had great difficulty persuading anyone to accept the job. Lieutenant Colonel Balfour recommended Robert and Patrick Cunningham, the same backcountry loyalist brothers who commanded Tory forces in the Snow Campaign of 1775. Balfour pointed out that because "Robert and his brother are people of very considerable influence" in the piedmont, "a great many men in this country…could be brought to enlist."[234] However, Robert Cunningham declined the offer, annoyed that he had been initially passed over for the position in favor of Ferguson. With Cornwallis ill at Winnsboro, Balfour recalled to Charlestown, and Cunningham refusing to take the job for which he was well-suited, the task fell to Lieutenant Colonel John Harris Cruger.

A New York native, Cruger replaced Balfour as the commander at Ninety-Six. He was a steadfast loyalist, a successful businessman, and had served on New York's provincial council, but he was an outsider, insensitive to the backcountry populace's plight. Simply put, Cruger was

[232] General Nathanael Greene to General Thomas Sumter, 8 January 1781, 75.
[233] For more information on the concerns of the British high command regarding the arrival of the Continental Army, see Hoffman, "The Disaffected," 309, and Bass, *Ninety-Six*, 296-303.
[234] Balfour to Cornwallis, 3 September 1780, The Cornwallis Papers, SCDAH.

not the right man to lead undisciplined backcountry militia. Recalling Cruger's occupation of Ninety-Six, a backcountry resident later wrote, "We were left like sheep among wolves, were obliged to give up to them our Arms & take their purtection [*sic*]. But no sooner we had yielded to them but they set to Rob us taking all our livings…until we were stript [*sic*] Naked."[235] Loyalists were not inclined to join a militia led by this outsider, especially when they considered that it would be part of the same army that had plundered their homes, been defeated by the rebels, and could not protect them.[236]

Cruger was alarmed at the conditions in the backcountry. His position was exposed to the partisans, and his post at Ninety-Six was vulnerable to attack. In the absence of direction from his superiors, Cruger relied on Moses Kirkland, the backcountry Tory who had convinced Governor Campbell that the loyalists would rally in 1775. After the Tory defeat in the Snow Campaign, Kirkland briefly served the patriots, though he was never entirely committed to their cause. He quickly switched back after the fall of Charlestown. Cruger authorized Kirkland to raise a loyalist militia for nine to twelve month's service. Kirkland was a poor choice to fill a loyalist leadership position. Although a successful planter who owned property in Camden and Ninety-Six, Kirkland was abrasive and had not made a favorable impression on the local inhabitants. As Cornwallis noted, "from the character I have always heard of him, I cannot consider him a proper person to be placed at the head of the militia."[237] Kirkland had no substantial following in the backcountry. Moreover, he was the jealous type. When he learned that the high command preferred Cunningham, a bitter Kirkland resigned from his post in late

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[235] George Park to Arthur Park, 23 July 1782, Great Britain Secretary of State Papers, Entry Book of Letters Concerning South Carolina, SCDAH.

[236] For more information on John Harris Cruger see Lambert, *The South Carolina Loyalists*, 100. It is important to note that Cruger never had much faith in loyalist militia even after the victory at Camden. Cruger caustically remarked that the loyalists had made "a very sorry appearance" at the battle. Cruger to Cornwallis, 23 August 1780, The Cornwallis Papers, SCDAH

[237] Cornwallis to Cruger, 11 November 1780, The Cornwallis Papers, SCDAH.

November 1780. Balfour again urged Cunningham to take command of the loyalist militia and invited him to Charlestown to confer on the subject. Finally, on 22 November 1780, after months of negotiations, Cornwallis reported that "Cunningham was here today full of zeal. I made him a brigadier general of militia with Colonel's full pay from the 24th of last June."[238] Cornwallis and Balfour had finally hired the best man for the job, but the British still struggled to raise loyalist recruits.[239]

Increased friction and a deteriorating relationship between British army officers and the militia had a deleterious effect on the task of recruiting backcountry loyalists. While the army was inactive at Winnsboro, the high command relied on the loyalists to hold the backcountry. Balfour assigned two loyalist regiments to guard the lines of communication from Charlestown to Camden. Although he considered the units' combined strength of about four hundred men to be inadequate, he wrote "we must do the best we can with them."[240] Moreover, since they lacked adequate leadership, Balfour doubted that these soldiers were capable of carrying out offensive operations against patriot partisans, but he thought that they would "surely be enough to guard the ferries, which is the most easy of all services."[241] The British army officers' disdain for the loyalist militia became obvious, and their frustrations would soon manifest into cruel treatment. As loyalist Robert Gray noted, "almost every British officer regarded with contempt and indifference the establishment of a militia among a people differing so much in customs and manners from themselves."[242]

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[238] Cornwallis to Balfour, 23 November 1780, The Cornwallis Papers, SCDAH.
[239] For more information on Moses Kirkland, see Lambert, *The South Carolina Loyalists*, 152-155, Piecuch, *Three Peoples, One King*, 233, and Bass, *Ninety-Six*, 286-287. Bass claims that one of the problems with Kirkland's command in the backcountry was that he complained more than he led. He was uncouth. He sent letter after letter to Cornwallis, complaining about his personal situation. The letters annoyed the general. In short, when Kirkland resigned, Cornwallis was happy to see him go.
[240] Piecuch, *Three Peoples, One King*, 229.
[241] *Ibid.*
[242] Gray, "Observations," 144.

Cornwallis was aware of the problem. He ordered his regulars to "treat with kindness all those who have sought protection in the British Army."[243] His orders went unheeded as British regulars considered the loyalist militia inept, unable to keep pace with the veterans and ineffective in countering the rebels. Lord Cornwallis's commissary, Charles Stedman, noted how the British regulars treated the loyalists. On at least one occasion, loyalist militiamen acted as beasts of burden carrying the regulars' equipment when marching to Winnsboro. Upon reaching Sugar Creek, near present-day Spartanburg, the horses were exhausted, unable to pull the wagons through the rushing water to the other bank. Then, the regulars unhitched the horses from their wagons and harnessed the loyalists in their stead, forcing them to wrench the wagon through the creek. Noting the effect on the backcountry loyalists, Stedman wrote that British abuses prompted "several of them" to leave "the army the next morning forever choosing to run the risque of meeting the resentments of their enemies rather than submit to the derision and abuse of those to whom they looked as friends."[244]

While British regulars abused the loyalists, Cunningham and Cruger attempted to recruit men in the Ninety-Six District. As Cornwallis noted, the Ninety-Six loyalists needed "considerable encouragement."[245] Cruger's and Cunningham's task was not an enviable one. There was much disaffection in the district, and their post was isolated from the main British army, subject to a potential rebel attack. With loyalists refusing to rally at Ninety-Six, Cunningham found it necessary to accept enlistments from a number of disaffected rebels from partisan bands in order to fill the ranks of the militia. At Long Canes, Cruger noted that "the Country lads will not enlist," and the loyalists were too easily "frightened" by the threat of

[243] Quoted in Buchanan, *The Road to Guilford Courthouse*, 243.
[244] *Ibid*., 244.
[245] Cornwallis to Balfour, 4 November 1780, The Cornwallis Papers, SCDAH.

patriot attacks and British regular abuses.[246] Frustrated with the inability of Cruden and Cunningham to rally the loyalists, Cornwallis confided to Balfour that "should the Militia of this Country absolutely refuse to Serve, the Consequences would indeed be fatal."[247] To attract royalists, Cornwallis ordered that three months back pay be given to those militiamen who "have been in constant service."[248] However, his offer had little effect.

The patriot partisan Sumter took advantage of the situation and attacked Tory outposts in the Ninety-Six District. With no aid forthcoming from British regulars, the loyalist militia was unable to repel the rebels. Their failure to repulse Sumter cost them Cornwallis's sympathy. "The Accounts I receive…of the Supineness and pusillanimity of our Militia takes off all My Compassion for their Sufferings," he wrote.[249] He further maintained that "if they allow themselves to be plundered & their families ruined by Banditti, not a third of their numbers, there is no possibility of our protecting them."[250] Cornwallis's words further alienated his loyalist allies. Without the confidence of the British high command and the aid of the regulars, the loyalists felt no moral obligation to join the militia. As Kirkland noted, when patriots attacked Ninety-Six, "the militia thought it needless [to] mak[e] any resistance, and the Greater part [were] inclined to hide in Swamps," while others intended to make peace with the rebels.[251]

Fish Dam Ford: The Fate of James Wemyss

Although he could no longer count on the loyalists to fight, Cornwallis was determined not to allow Sumter to escape. It was time to snare the Gamecock. He dispatched Major James Wemyss, the notorious destroyer of Presbyterian churches, to chase the partisan. To aid him in

[246] Cruger to Cornwallis, 1 September 1780, The Cornwallis Papers, SCDAH.
[247] Cornwallis to Balfour, 4 November 1780, The Cornwallis Papers, SCDAH.
[248] *Ibid.*
[249] Cornwallis to Cruger, 11 November 1780, in Cornwallis, *Correspondence*, vol.1, 67.
[250] *Ibid.*
[251] Moses Kirkland to Lord Cornwallis, 10 November 1780, The Cornwallis Papers, SCDAH.

his task, Wemyss selected 45 light dragoons from Tarleton's Legion and 100 regular infantrymen from his own 63rd Regiment.[252] Cornwallis gave Wemyss express orders not to place Tarleton's dragoons "in front nor to make use of them during the night," fearing that the rebels would target the veteran Legionnaires.[253] Wemyss's soldiers faced a superior rebel force of 300 to 400 partisans, but they were, after all, supremely self-confident regulars. To hasten the pursuit, Wemyss transformed his whole force into a mounted unit by confiscating the horses of the loyalist militia. His plan was to catch the rebels at first light at their reputed camp at Moore's Mill on the Broad River. Cornwallis later reported to Clinton that Wemyss "had accurate accounts of [Sumter's] position…and that he made no doubt of being able to surpri[s]e and rout him."[254] Wemyss had even selected five dragoons whose single mission was to capture or kill Sumter. With his mounted 63rd and Legion dragoons, Wemyss galloped along the Broad River determined to surprise Sumter at his camp. Unknown to the British, Sumter had advanced five miles to Fish Dam Ford and was encamped in the woods and gullies on both sides of the road. He had his rear protected by the river. There were no backcountry loyalists or neutrals who willingly came forward to inform Wemyss of Sumter's new position and prevent the British army from riding into a trap. Wemyss would pay for his attacks on the Presbyterians.[255]

When Wemyss arrived at the deserted camp at Moore's Mill, he decided to continue down the Broad River until he reached Fish Dam Ford. At about 1 A.M. on 9 November, Wemyss stumbled into Sumter's sentries who fired off five rounds to warn the rebels of the

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[252] Relying on Lieutenant Stark's recap of the battle, Lord Cornwallis's letter provides the best source of information as to what happened at Fish Dam Ford. Lord Cornwallis to Sir Henry Clinton, 3 December 1780, in Clinton, *The American Rebellion*, 476-477.
[253] *Ibid.*
[254] *Ibid.*
[255] For an overview of the ride and fight at Fish Dam Ford see Gordon, *South Carolina and the American Revolution*, 119-120, and Buchanan, *The Road to Guilford Courthouse*, 248-251. However, neither author has looked at Fish Dam Ford's impact on loyalist support. They merely describe it as another bloody battle in the ongoing struggle for control of South Carolina.

British approach. Wemyss was shot off his horse. With a broken arm and a shattered knee, he was out of the fight. Wemyss's second-in-command Lieutenant John Stark, "a very young officer," took over.[256] According to Cornwallis, Stark "neither knew the ground nor Major Wemyss's plan nor the strength of the enemy."[257] As a testament to Wemyss's poor leadership, the uninformed and ill-prepared, Stark gave the order to charge, and the British dragoons galloped into the darkness against an invisible enemy. To the rebels, however, the green-coated Legionnaires were quite visible when they rode into the light cast by Sumter's campfires. At length, Stark ordered his men to dismount and fight on foot. As the battle settled into a firefight, Sumter's forces gained the upper hand and pushed the British back.

Meanwhile, the dragoons sent to kill Sumter made their way to his tent. Sumter escaped, jumped a fence, and crawled to a riverbank where he remained until daylight. Finally, Stark wisely decided to withdraw from the field, leaving behind the wounded Wemyss and 22 sergeants and rank-and-file soldiers under a flag of truce.[258] Sumter emerged from his hideout the next day and imprisoned the British. Sumter probably saved Wemyss's life. Wemyss had a list of names of neutrals, loyalists, and patriots that he hanged and the buildings that he burned when travelling from Cheraw into Georgetown. Sumter read it, showed it no one, and promptly dropped the list into a campfire.[259] This act invites speculation. Did Sumter fear that he would be unable to control his men who would want to exact revenge? Could he have used the list as propaganda to persuade piedmont loyalists to rebuke the British? Would Wemyss's corpse hanging from a tree force Cornwallis to demand retribution? The questions, pure speculation, remain unanswered.

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[256] Lord Cornwallis to Sir Henry Clinton, 3 December 1780, 477.
[257] *Ibid.*, 478.
[258] *Ibid.*
[259] Pancake makes note of Sumter's destruction of the list in Pancake, *This Destructive War,* 126.

Wemyss's capture was another setback for British credibility. However, Cornwallis and his subordinates still tried to convince the backcountry loyalists that the British regulars could win. As Cornwallis wrote to Clinton, "the enemy on this event was allowed to cry victory, and that whole part of the country came in fast to Sumter."[260] Sumter resumed his attacks on the Tory militia, producing "the utmost horror" in the backcountry, so that "all the loyal Subjects instead of thinking of self defen[s]e are running as fast as possible."[261] In the Ninety-Six District, the loyalists' panic prompted Cruger to join the list of officers who lost confidence in the militia. "A few of the Inhabitants on Long Cane have been plundered[;] many more deserved it for their pusillanimous behavior," he wrote to Cornwallis, "and I think I shall never again look to the Militia for the least support."[262] Increasingly reluctant to turn out when called, the backcountry loyalists were a disappointment to the British.

The Debacle at Rugeley's Mill

There were other signs in late 1780 that the British did not have firm control of the South Carolina backcountry or the populace's support. After the Battle of Camden in August 1780, an additional 612 oaths of allegiances were signed. Again, loyalists pledged to be "true and faithful Subject[s] to His Majesty…and that whenever…required…will be ready to maintain and defend the same against all Persons whatever."[263] So long as Cornwallis's army remained at Winnsboro, the British base at Camden appeared secure. However, the approach of a reconstituted Continental Army under Greene's command and the embarrassment suffered by Wemyss placed the loyalist post in jeopardy. When the British army first arrived in Camden, it began to use backcountry loyalist Colonel Henry Rugeley's land and mill north of the town to

[260] *Ibid.*
[261] Cornwallis to Rawdon, 13 November 1780, The Cornwallis Papers, SCDAH.
[262] Cruger to Cornwallis, 23 November 1780, The Cornwallis Papers, SCDAH.
[263] Oaths of Allegiance, August 1780-September 1780.

grind and store grain. Since the sequestered estate scheme was failing to produce enough food to support the regulars, Cornwallis instructed his engineers to build fortifications around the property to prevent rebels and bandits from stealing the grain. In November 1780, Cornwallis further ordered his soldiers to erect a log house and an abatis around the barn and house to defend the mill.[264]

Rugeley commanded a small loyalist militia, tasked with defending the mill and reconnoitering the area to gather intelligence on the Continental Army. Rugeley was representative of the poor choices that the high command made when selecting backcountry loyalist leaders. Essentially a civilian who had no military experience, Rugeley had been commissioned a colonel because he owned property in Camden. Cornwallis believed that Rugeley would serve primarily as a "conservator of the peace," rather than lead and inspire the militia in the field.[265] When it became apparent that the reorganized Continental Army was approaching Camden in November 1780, Rugeley's ability to command was put to the test. Rugeley informed Cornwallis that Morgan with 600 infantry and Colonel William Washington's cavalry had converged above his mill. Believing that the rebels had no artillery, Rugeley promised to hold his ground. However, Washington mounted a pine log on a wagon, pointed it at the mill, and in the darkness tricked Rugeley into thinking that the contraption was a cannon. On 1 December, Rugeley surrendered to the rebels "without firing a shot."[266] He and over one hundred loyalist militiamen were taken prisoner.[267]

The debacle at Rugeley's Mill further demonstrated to Cornwallis that the loyalist militia could not be trusted. Although Rugeley's surrender "vexed" the general, he was "not surprised,"

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[264] A description of the fortifications at Rugeley's Mill can be found in Piecuch, *Three Peoples, One King*, 234.
[265] Cornwallis describes the defeat at Rugeley's Mill in a letter to Rawdon. Cornwallis to Rawdon, 3 December 1780, in Cornwallis, *Correspondence*, vol.1, 71.
[266] Cornwallis to Rawdon, 3 December 1780.
[267] This number is taken from Piecuch, *Three Peoples, One King*, 234.

but worried that the capitulation would further "damp the spirits of the militia."[268] Cornwallis concluded that Rugeley "must be a traitor" for surrendering to "cavalry only."[269] Moreover, Rugeley's defeat compelled Cornwallis to reject loyalist militiamen's requests for muskets and artillery. "I have lost so many Arms by the Militia that I am much afraid of trusting them," he wrote to explain his decision.[270] An exchange of prisoners for Rugeley and his militiamen was not made until late 1781, prompting many loyalists to believe that the British would not arrange for their release if captured. Further, Cornwallis maintained that the Camden royalists were not doing enough to aid the British army, complaining that the "friends hereabouts are so timid & so stupid that I can get no intelligence."[271] Without enough arms and with the imminent threat of a rebel attack, the Camden loyalists dropped out of the militia. By January 1781, the British forces at Camden had only 214 loyalist militiamen, a significant decline from the numbers who had signed the oath of allegiance and took up arms for the crown in August.[272]

The year 1780 ended on an unpleasant note for the British and their remaining loyalist allies. The problems inherent in the task Cornwallis and his subordinates had undertaken became apparent. Clinton and Cornwallis had destroyed two American armies, but a third had taken the field, and the work had to be done all over again. Moreover, the British were now on the defensive, reduced to fortifying the backcountry posts of Camden and Ninety-Six. The piedmont loyalists had lost all confidence in the British army's capability to protect them. Tory Robert Gray reported that if Greene's army was allowed to return to South Carolina, "it will be productive of the worst effects."[273] Noting the increasing frequency of loyalist executions by

[268] Cornwallis to Rawdon, 3 December 1780, 71-72.
[269] Cornwallis to Balfour, 5 December 1780, The Cornwallis Papers, SCDAH.
[270] Cornwallis to Cruger, 7 December 1780, in The Cornwallis Papers, SCDAH.
[271] Cornwallis to Tarleton, 18 December 1780, in Cornwallis, *Correspondence*, vol.1, 74.
[272] State of the Troops at Camden, 1 January 1781, The Cornwallis Papers, SCDAH.
[273] Gray to Cornwallis, 5 November 1780, The Cornwallis Papers, SCDAH.

Whig officers and Cornwallis's failure to secure their parole, Gray declared that the Tories "will lose all confidence if they find themselves doomed to the halter, whilst the rebels," received humane treatment when taken prisoner.[274] Gray noted that loyalists increasingly refused to aid the British army, forcing Cornwallis and his officers to rely on a militia of inferior quality and suspect allegiance.[275]

The Arrival of General Greene and the Third American Army

On 3 December 1780, Greene arrived in Charlotte, North Carolina, to replace Gates as commander of the Continental Army in the South. Greene's first priority was to establish a camp of repose in an area where there was enough food and forage to sustain the army until it was reequipped and ready to engage Cornwallis. Greene dispatched a patrol to reconnoiter the area and recommend a suitable campsite. His scouts selected Cheraw Hill, South Carolina, near the Pee Dee River Basin, some sixty miles southeast of Charlotte. Relocating his army to Cheraw, however, posed a significant problem. Rebels would view the army marching into South Carolina as possibly being in retreat at a time when Cornwallis was posed to invade North Carolina. In short, Greene's dilemma was to move his army to Cheraw while continuing to operate in a manner than would encourage his soldiers, frustrate the British, and convince the neutrals that the Continental Army would be available to protect them. However, the move to Cheraw Hill was necessary to sustain the army. As Greene's biographer Terry Golway notes, "morale and discipline fed nobody. And neither did the countryside around Charlotte. To eat and to survive meant moving the army."[276]

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[274] Gray to Cornwallis, 5 November 1780.
[275] *Ibid.*
[276] For more information on Greene's arrival in North Carolina and his decision to camp at Cheraw Hill, see Buchanan, *The Road to Guilford Courthouse*, 288-292, and Golway, *Washington's General*, 239-241.

Unlike Cornwallis, Greene recognized that military actions had an impact on popular opinion. He understood that the backcountry populace had grown war-weary. They had been harassed by rebels and bandits long before the fall of Charlestown. Well aware of the need to maintain public support, Greene insisted that his subordinates uphold strict discipline and protect the backcountry populace. While Cornwallis indulged his subordinate officers, Greene established his authority through tact and unambiguous instructions, exemplifying sound leadership skills. Early in his career Greene remarked, "some Captains, and many subordinate officers, neglect their duty through fear of offending their soldiers, some through laziness, and some through obstinacy….I am determined to break every one for the future."[277] To strengthen the chain of command, Greene invited the officers to his tent for meals where food was meager but conversation informative. As the officers came to know their commander, they trusted him and accepted that his rule was law.[278]

As for Greene's regulars and the militia, they soon understood that orders were to be obeyed, camps were to be policed, and uniforms and equipment were to be kept neat and clean. Further, Greene announced that desertions must cease, and he was prepared to make examples out of offenders. By the second week of December, Greene had executed two deserters and paraded his army and the militia in front of their hanging corpses. Moreover, Greene required his officers to provide receipts or compensation for any supplies taken from backcountry farms whether loyalist, neutral, or rebel. When impressment could not be avoided, Greene informed his soldiers "to treat the inhabitants with tenderness, to inform them of the urgency of this

[277] Nathanael Greene to General Washington, quoted in Pancake, *This Destructive War*, 44.
[278] Golway notes that Marion was immediately impressed by the general he had never met. Greene wrote to the Swamp Fox noting that he admired his work of frequently moving around the backcountry to prevent the British from pinpointing his location. Greene, therefore, requested that Marion keep tabs on Cornwallis. As Golway notes, "Marion was not used to such gracious treatment from Continental generals, and it left a strong impression: here was a general who respected the work of militia." See Golway, *Washington's General*, 239.

measure," for this "business must be conducted with the greatest delicacy."[279] He further demanded that officers check their soldiers' knapsack each night for plundered items. If supplies appeared to be stolen, then officers would court-martial the thief. As Greene wrote to militia Colonel Benjamin Few who had moved into Long Canes:

> Plundering is the bane of all business; and no less injurious to an army than to the Inhabitants. I hope therefore you will use every possible precaution to prevent this growing evil which has already laid waste the greater part of this Country. You must endeavor to convince your people if any such are with you, that it is an employment unworthy of the profession of Soldiers and disgraceful to people fighting in the sacred cause of liberty.[280]

No matter his fate on the field, Greene adhered to this policy. A champion of social order and a defender of private property, Greene attempted to stop his soldiers from plundering the piedmont, a feat that Cornwallis had been unable to accomplish.[281] Within a few weeks, Greene observed that some loyalists were "now coming in, in many parts; being tired of such a wretched life" and were willing to renounce their allegiance to the crown.[282]

While his force remained small, Greene knew that he could not directly confront Cornwallis's army and stop it from invading North Carolina. Greene developed a master strategy. The key was to make certain his Continentals avoided a major confrontation with the British; another disaster like Camden would irreparably damage the revolutionary cause in the

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[279] Nathanael Greene, quoted in Hoffman, "The Disaffected," 310.
[280] Nathanael Greene to Colonel Benjamin Few, 16 December 1780, in Greene, *The Papers*, vol. 6, 586.
[281] It must be understood that Greene was unable to stop plundering entirely. To survive, the patriot militia frequently plundered the homes of loyalists, but avoided the neutrals. At times, the patriots were as brutal as the British. The patriot militia often behaved in the same way as its loyalist counterpart, taking revenge on neighbors and stealing supplies. The key distinction is that Greene and his militia officers more consistently punished the rank and file caught plundering. Moreover, when the patriots restored civil government in South Carolina, laws were passed to prevent soldiers from destroying and plundering property, regardless of the allegiance of the owner. See Golway, *Washington's General*, 240-241, and Klein, "Frontier Planters and the American Revolution," 64-66.
[282] General Nathanael Greene to Samuel Huntington, President of the Continental Congress, 28 December 1780, in Greene, *The Papers*, vol. 7, 9. For more information on Greene's methods of discipline, see Pancake, *This Destructive War*, 44-50. Rachel Klein further notes that "it was the Whigs…who found themselves in a position to reestablish order." Klein would agree that Greene's ability to control his troops appeared to be a key in winning hearts and minds and defending the backcountry against plundering. See Klein, "Frontier Planters and the American Revolution," 64-65.

South. With that in mind, Greene depended on three partisan leaders, Sumter, Marion, and Andrew Pickens, to harass Cornwallis's supply lines and wear away at the British and loyalist resolve to continue the fight. However, Greene was reluctant to completely rely on militia due to their short enlistment terms and questionable mettle in combat. He knew how to play to the militia's strength and take advantage of their skills in relating to their fellow backcountry men. To this end, Greene violated one of the oldest maxims of warfare and divided his army in the face of a superior enemy. He sent Morgan with a small detachment to harass the British supply base at Ninety-Six, while the main army would position itself in the Pee Dee region and force Cornwallis to split his force.[283]

Greene envisioned Morgan's force as a thorn in Cornwallis's side, designed to harass the enemy and stir the backcountry colonists to support the rebel cause. However, Greene remained concerned about his formidable opponent and doubted that his gamble would pay off. As he wrote in his letter to Marquis de Lafayette, "I give [Morgan's forces] the name of Flying Army; and while its numbers are so small, and the enemy so much superior, it must be literally so: for they can make no opposition of consequence."[284] He feared that the Flying Army, composed of approximately 800 regulars and militiamen, would flee when British reinforcements arrived. However, Greene, adamant about winning the hearts and minds of the backcountry neutrals, tasked Morgan with the mission to "give protection to that part of the country and spirit up the people"[285] Morgan should be as concerned with protecting the neutrals as routing the British and

[283] For more information on Greene's strategy, see Morrill, *Southern Campaigns*, 118-119, and Buchanan, *The Road to Guilford Courthouse*, 292-295. Greene's decision to divide his force is detailed in Gerald Carbone, *Nathanael Greene: A Biography of the American Revolution* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 156-158. Carbone maintains that Greene's decision was not the "lucky mistake of a novice; he did it deliberately." If the British decided to pursue Greene, they would leave their forces in the backcountry vulnerable to Morgan. If Cornwallis chased after Morgan, Greene could move to attack Charlestown or other British strongholds. Splitting the force also reduced logistical pressure. It would be easier to outfit two smaller armies than one concentrated in a single camp.
[284] General Nathanael Greene to Marquis De Lafayette, 29 December 1780, in Greene, *The Papers*, vol. 7, 19.
[285] General Nathanael Greene to General Daniel Morgan, 16 December 1780, in Greene, *The Papers*, vol. 6, 589.

their remaining loyalist allies. James Collins, a young backcountry neutral turned rebel, rode with Morgan and confirmed that he obeyed his superior's orders stating, "[t]hose we called 'pet Tories' or neutrals, we never disturbed."[286]

Emboldened by the presence of Continental troops, the rebels moved quickly to suppress the remaining loyalist zealots in the backcountry, but did not harass the neutrals. A few miles south of the Enoree River, Major Archibald McArthur wrote to Cornwallis of 50 partisans attacking 25 backcountry loyalists, seriously wounding 4 and capturing 7 or 8.[287] McArthur was furious that British regulars had not come to their rescue. Greene's aid Lewis Morris described the violence that ensued: "the Tories, who after the defeat of General Gates had a full range, are chased from their homes, hunted thro' the wood and shot with as much indifference as you would a buck."[288] Realizing that it was better to ally with a revived Continental force, commanded by a more conciliatory general, than being subjected to partisan attacks and continued British abuses, many former loyalists revoked their allegiance and petitioned Greene for protection. It was the lesser of two evils.

Cornwallis was stunned, not only by the rebels' ruthlessness, but also by their insistence that British regulars were responsible for the violence in the backcountry. "The accounts of the cruelty of those rascals is really shocking," he wrote to Rawdon, "and it is capable of aggravation[,] their impudent accusation of us makes it the more provoking."[289] Cornwallis responded by threatening retaliation against Greene and his army if the partisans continued their ruthless behavior. Writing to Greene, Cornwallis pointed out that the rebels had intercepted and

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[286] Collins, *Autobiography*, 66. Throughout his autobiography, Collins referred to neutrals as "Pet Tories." Their refusal to take up arms for the rebels, in Collins's view, was like being a British lapdog. Nonetheless, Collins understood that his commanders wanted to win their support and, therefore, had to prevent the rebel rank and file from disturbing them.
[287] Archibald McArthur to Lord Cornwallis, 16 December 1780, The Cornwallis Papers, SCDAH.
[288] Quoted in Piecuch, *Three Peoples, One King*, 237-238.
[289] Cornwallis to Rawdon, 7 December 1780, The Cornwallis Papers, SCDAH.

altered his letters before circulating them to the backcountry populace, making it appear as if he endorsed brutality.[290] Rebel accusations were untrue, Cornwallis maintained, as "no man abhors Acts of Cruelty more than myself."[291] However, he warned, if the attacks continued, the British would respond in kind.

While war raged between the Tories and the Whigs with British regulars receiving the brunt of the blame for the atrocities, Cornwallis had been waiting impatiently for Major General Alexander Leslie's reinforcements to aid in the invasion of North Carolina.[292] Writing to Leslie, Cornwallis promised to "give our friends in North Carolina a fair trial. If they behave like men it may be of greatest advantage to the affairs of Britain. If they are as dastardly and pusillanimous as our friends to the southward, we must leave them to their fate, and secure what they have got."[293] Thus, in a few sentences, Cornwallis revealed extreme pessimism, even abhorrence, with the courage and abilities of the Carolina loyalists, the group that was the linchpin of the Southern strategy. As late as 6 January 1781, he described to Clinton his impossible situation in South Carolina:

> The constant incursions of refugees, North Carolinians, and Back-Mountain men, and the *perpetual risings in the different parts of this province*; the invariable successes of all these parties against our militia keep the whole country in continual alarm, and render the assistance of regular troops everywhere necessary.[294]

Believing that the spirit of rebellion was alive and well in South Carolina, Cornwallis knew that Morgan must be stopped. He feared that an attack on Ninety-Six would finish the loyalists in that district. Cornwallis therefore divided his force and dispatched Tarleton and his Legion to

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[290] Cornwallis to Greene, 27 December 1780, in Greene, *The Papers*, vol. 7, 5-6.
[291] *Ibid*., 6.
[292] Leslie had been slowed down by the heavy rains that had plagued the Carolinas for the past two months. The rivers had swollen, delaying Leslie's march into South Carolina. See Buchanan, *The Road to Guilford Courthouse*, 306-307.
[293] Earl Cornwallis to Major General Leslie, 12 November 1780, in Tarleton, *A History of the Campaigns*, 241.
[294] Lord Cornwallis to Sir Henry Clinton, 6 January 1781, in Clinton, *The American Rebellion*, 485.

chase Morgan. If Tarleton could annihilate Morgan's troops, he would then defend Ninety-Six and Cornwallis's left flank in the impending invasion of North Carolina.

The Chase through the Backcountry

Tarleton quickly determined that Ninety-Six was not under immediate threat, and he turned his attention to the task of catching Morgan. Tarleton proposed to Cornwallis that the main British army march up the east side of the Broad River towards Kings Mountain to cut off Morgan's line of retreat, while the Legion rode northward from Ninety-Six to intercept the Flying Army.[295] Emphasizing the seriousness of his purpose and desire to move fast, Tarleton sent orders "to bring up my baggage, but no women."[296] On 5 January, Cornwallis approved Tarleton's plan, telling his young compatriot, "You have done exactly what I wished you to do and understood my intentions exactly."[297] With his superior's approval, Tarleton once again cracked his riding crop. This time, he would chase down Morgan, a ride that would lead to the notorious lieutenant colonel's defeat.

Intelligence reports from backcountry loyalists had informed Tarleton and his Legion to ride west in search of Morgan's force. Determined to catch the rebels, Tarleton dispatched backcountry loyalist Alexander Chesney to scout ahead to determine the rebel whereabouts. "I joined Colonel Tarleton and marched to Fair Forest," wrote Chesney, "but I failed to get intelligence of Morgan's situation."[298] The reports were clearly in error. General Morgan was still at his camp at Grindall's Shoals on the Pacolet River well to the north of Fair Forest. Chesney then rode to the Pacolet River where he found the rebels' "fires burning, but no one there, on which I rode to my father's [house] who said Morgan was gone to the Old-fields about

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[295] Lieutenant Colonel Tarleton to Earl Cornwallis, 4 January 1781, in Tarleton, *A History of the Campaigns*, 245-246.
[296] *Ibid*., 246.
[297] Earl Cornwallis to Lieutenant Colonel Tarleton, 5 January 1781, in Tarleton, *A History of the Campaigns*, 246.
[298] Chesney, *The Journal*, 21.

an hour before."[299] Before Chesney had the opportunity to inform Tarleton of the rebels' location, Morgan abandoned his encampment and marched his men twelve miles north to a ford at Burr's Mill on Thicketty Creek, a tributary of the Broad River.

By 14 January 1781, Tarleton and his Legion, composed of approximately 1,100 cavalry and light infantry, was on Morgan's heels, less than a day's ride behind. Tarleton had, once again, made up an extraordinary amount of time by keeping up a backbreaking pace through the backcountry and refusing to rest his men. As an indication of the Legion's proximity, Morgan wrote, the British "took Possession of the Ground I had removed from in the Morning, distant from the Scene of Action about 12 miles."[300] The British arrived at the patriot campsite at Thicketty Creek only to discover that Morgan's soldiers had already abandoned it, leaving their half-cooked breakfast still on the fire. A confident Tarleton knew his prey was near. He noted, "[t]he British light troops were directed to occupy their position, because it yielded a good post and afforded plenty of provisions, which [the rebels] had left behind them, half cooked, in every part of their encampment."[301]

Annoyed by the pace of their retreat, the rebel ranks began to ridicule Morgan. Thomas Young, a fifteen-year old backcountry rebel, noted that "many a hearty curse had been vented against Morgan during that day's march."[302] Although the cold and wet weather aggravated Morgan's sciatica and the pain so wracked his body that he could not bear to trot his horse, he and his soldiers were in a race for their lives. Failure to outpace the British would be far more disastrous than retreat since Tarleton would not grant the American troops quarter. Fear and

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[299] *Ibid*.
[300] General Daniel Morgan to General Nathanael Greene, 19 January 1781, in Greene, *The Papers*, vol. 7, 153.
[301] Tarleton, *A History of the Campaigns*, 220.
[302] "The Memoirs of Thomas Young" in *Voices of the American Revolution in the Carolinas*, ed. Ed Southern (Winston-Salem, Blair Publisher, 2009), 181.

exhaustion plagued the men as they finally arrived at a flat pasture with scattered swamps, dotted with trees and devoid of undergrowth, known as the Cowpens on 16 January 1781.

General Morgan chose his ground well, selecting a known crossroads near the North Carolina border, enclosed by two rivers and a swollen creek. Making a stand at Cowpens was risky since it did not afford an opportunity to retreat, should it become necessary.[303] When scouts informed their leader that Tarleton had not given up his pursuit, Morgan ordered all nearby militia units to rendezvous at Cowpens. Militia commander Pickens, described by Morgan as "a valuable, discreet, and attentive officer, [having] the confidence of the militia," and his men arrived to reinforce the Flying Army.[304] Pickens, a stalwart Presbyterian from Long Canes, had originally accepted Clinton's offer of parole. He remained neutral until the British forces under Wemyss's command burned his plantation. Pickens was ready to exact revenge. Nevertheless, Morgan had some concerns about the militia given their propensity to cut and run when fighting started. As military historian W. J. Wood notes, "if [Morgan] positioned [the militia] near swamps to protect his flanks or rear from Tarleton's dragoons, he might as well wave them a goodbye."[305] The militia was attracted to swamps like moths to candles and could disappear into the safety of the murky reeds if overwhelmed by fear. However, Morgan had chosen Cowpens because the rivers enclosed the field, making retreat difficult. He believed his militia would be compelled to stand its ground. Tired of running, General Morgan knew that a victory would reignite his soldiers' spirits claiming, "on this ground I will defeat the British or lay my bones."[306]

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[303] Much has been said on why Morgan selected Cowpens as the location to confront Tarleton. For descriptions of the battlefield, see Lawrence Babits's Chapter "The Stage is Set" in Babits, *A Devil of a Whipping: The Battle of Cowpens* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 61-80. See also Pancake, *This Destructive War*, 133-136, and Morrill, *Southern Campaigns*, 126-127.
[304] General Daniel Morgan to General Nathanael Greene, 15 January 1781, 128.
[305] Wood, *Battles of the Revolutionary War*, 214.
[306] Quoted in Babits, *A Devil of a Whipping*, 54.

On the evening of 16 January, Morgan did more than lay out his battle plan to his senior officers; he refused to rest until every soldier understood what part he would play in the battle. Knowledgeable troops enhanced the army's chance of victory. Thomas Young, who previously cursed Morgan, believed his general had finally proven himself stating, "[i]t was upon this occasion I was more perfectly convinced of Gen. Morgan's qualifications to command militia, than I had ever before been."[307] Keeping his men in good spirits, Morgan helped them fix their bayonets, joked with them about their sweethearts, and reassured them of victory. Young also recalled that Morgan told the men, "Just hold up your heads boys. Three fires and you are free, and then when you return to your homes, how the old folks will bless you, and the girls will kiss you, for your gallant conduct."[308] By noting the warm welcome his men would receive at home if they conducted themselves as brave soldiers, Morgan reminded his troops of their families, providing them reason to engage and defeat the British. Unlike his British counterparts, Morgan could relate to his backcountry militiamen in a very personal way.

Every soldier in his command knew exactly what Morgan expected. In addition, Morgan made certain that everyone had a decent supper, locating and butchering free-range cattle, belonging to local rebel herdsmen. He had corn cakes prepared for breakfast. He also ordered his officers to supply their troops with twenty-four rounds of shot per man and make certain that an additional sixteen rounds awaited the soldiers in wagons for when they ran out of powder and lead.[309] With battle imminent, Morgan knew that his men must be kept in good spirits for them to carry the day. His men were fed, rested, knew their orders, and had confidence in their commander. Tarleton's men, on the other hand, had been riding for days, exhausted and not at all ready to fight.

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[307] "Memoirs of Thomas Young," 181-182.
[308] *Ibid*.
[309] Babits, *A Devil of a Whipping*, 55.

The Battle of Cowpens

"Tarleton came on like a thunder storm, which soon put us to our best mettle," reported militiaman James Collins.[310] The British Legion had been on the road since 3:00 a.m., slugging through muck and mire and crossing swollen rivers as it headed towards Cowpens. The British had exhausted themselves before firing a single shot. With scouts bearing news of Tarleton's approach, Morgan went from tent to tent shouting, "Boys, get up! Benny's coming."[311] This wake-up call had to send a chill down the spines of the men who were well aware of the reputation Tarleton earned at the Battle of Waxhaws. Morgan, again, moved among his men to encourage them and rally their spirits as they prepared for battle. Thomas Young recounted how Morgan proposed a competition between the various militia units, asking who would prove to be the better shot.[312] These militiamen were crack shots, and if their compatriots saw them miss a redcoat, they would be ridiculed for months. Morgan shrewdly turned killing the British into a competitive sport. Young also reported that when Morgan spoke to Pickens's militia, he pounded his fist against his chest and made large sweeping gestures as he spoke.[313] Lastly, Morgan addressed the Continentals, some of whom had been at Camden in August. He asked these soldiers to remember that defeat and their harsh treatment, telling them that they had to exact revenge on Tarleton to defend liberty.[314] The men, in turn, cheered for Morgan and were ready for the impending battle.

Dawn at Cowpens on 17 January was clear and bitterly cold as Tarleton's red-coated infantry, accompanied by the dragoons, dressed in their green coats, marched onto the battlefield. James Collins stated, "[a]bout sunrise…the enemy came in full view. The sight, to me at least,

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[310] Collins, *Autobiography*, 56.
[311] "Memoirs of Major Young," 182.
[312] *Ibid*., 183.
[313] *Ibid*.
[314] *Ibid*.

seemed somewhat imposing; they halted for a short time, and then advanced rapidly, as if certain of victory."[315] Confident to the point of arrogance, Tarleton was spoiling for a fight and did not rest his troops. He instead pressed the attack head on, his line extending across the pasture. The dragoons charged, moving from a walk into a trot and then a gallop, calculated to break the rebel forward line. The sudden barrage of rifle fire from Morgan's sharpshooters, hidden behind trees, pulled the dragoons up short. The horsemen made an about-face, rushing to the safety of the British line with 15 saddles emptied.[316]

With the dragoons in retreat, the sharpshooters moved 150 yards back to join the second line, composed of Pickens's militia. Morgan used the militia well, asking them to fire three volleys before they retreated behind the third line of Continentals another 150 yards to the rear. However, the militia only fired a round, and panic overwhelmed them as the dragoons returned to the fray. As Collins, stationed in the second line, remembered, "We gave the enemy one fire, when they charged us with their bayonets; we gave way and retreated for our horses, Tarleton's cavalry pursued us…just as we got to our horses, they overtook us and began to make a few hacks at some."[317] Seeing the dragoons kill his fellow militiamen, Collins thought "now my hide is in the loft."[318] The rebel officers had to work fast to calm their men who were shooting wildly and wasting bullets while retreating. As Young recalled, "[e]very officer was crying, 'Don't fire!' for it was a hard matter to keep us from it."[319]

As the dragoons charged the militia lines, Morgan's cavalry, under the command of Colonel Washington, rushed the field from their hidden position on a high knoll. Surprised by the rebel cavalry's charge, the dragoons, "began to keel from their horses, without being able to

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[315] Collins, *Autobiography*, 56-57.
[316] *Ibid.*
[317] Collins, *Autobiography*, 57.
[318] *Ibid.*
[319] "Memoirs of Major Young," 183.

remount," recalled Collins.[320] "The shock was so sudden and violent, they could not stand it, and immediately betook themselves to flight," Collins further asserted.[321] As the dragoons fled the field, rebel infantry on both sides opened fire. Morgan now took the opportunity to rally his retreating militia. Riding to the front line, Morgan waved his sword crying, "Form, form, my brave fellows! [G]ive them one more fire and the day is ours. Old Morgan was never beaten!"[322] His words and position in the front line vulnerable to enemy fire stirred his men, prompting them to rush the field. As Collins recalled, "[w]e then advanced briskly….They [the British] began to throw down their arms, and surrender themselves [as] prisoners of war."[323]

Tarleton's 71st Highlanders, held in reserve, charged toward the Continental line; the wailing of their bagpipes added to the confusion. In the heat of battle, Continental Commander John Eager Howard ordered his right flank to face right and counter the Highlanders' charge. However, his soldiers misunderstood his command as a call to retreat. As other companies along the line followed suite, Morgan rode up to ask Howard if he were beaten.[324] As Howard pointed to the unbroken ranks and the orderly retreat, he claimed, "[d]o men who march like that look as though they were beaten?"[325] Morgan then ordered the retreating units to face about and fire. The firing took a heavy toll on the British who broke ranks when the militia unexpectedly returned to the field with a fierce bayonet charge. The rebel cavalry then reentered the battle leading to a double envelopment; both British flanks had been overlapped and broken, and Tarleton's Legion routed. Finally, Tarleton, himself, saw the futility of the situation and, with a handful of his men, fled the field. Tarleton, hated and feared by the backcountry populace, a

[320] Collins, *Autobiography*, 57.
[321] *Ibid.*
[322] Daniel Morgan quoted in Collins, *Autobiography*, 57.
[323] Collins, *Autobiography*, 57.
[324] Daniel Morgan quoted in Bass, *The Green Dragoon*, 157.
[325] John Eager Howard quoted in Bass, *The Green Dragoon*, 157.

hotspur who had galloped across South Carolina and time and again proved invincible, had been beaten. As Cornwallis summed up the defeat, "the affair has almost broke my heart."[326]

Tarleton's defeat at the Battle of Cowpens dealt Cornwallis a crippling blow. The once vaunted British Legion had been decimated. Tarleton had, in effect, lost his entire force: 110 killed, 229 wounded, and 600 captured or missing. He additionally lost 2 artillery pieces, 800 muskets, 35 baggage wagons, 60 slaves, 100 cavalry horses, and large stores of ammunition, wiping out the Legion as an effective fighting force.[327] In contrast, Morgan reported that "[o]ur Loss [was] inconsiderable," only 12 killed and 61 wounded.[328] In less than one hour, Tarleton had cost Cornwallis his fast moving, strike force. The British could not afford to lose the services of so many skilled, professional soldiers. Who would replace them? Not the loyalists of South Carolina. Tarleton had very few South Carolinian loyalists serving in his army at the battle. Indeed, the largest contingent of backcountry loyalists had remained with the British supply wagons a few miles away from the battlefield. They demonstrated their "devotion" to the crown by stealing the provisions they had been assigned to guard at the very moment the British regulars were fighting and dying.[329]

The Aftermath of Cowpens

The aftermath at Cowpens in no way resembled the bloody scene that had transpired atop Kings Mountain the previous October. Morgan silenced the cries of "Tarleton's Quarter," ordering his Continentals to protect the Legionnaires who had surrendered. As Morgan wrote:

It perhaps would be well to remark, for the Honour of the American Arms, that Altho'

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[326] Gordon, *South Carolina and the American Revolution*, 136. For descriptions of the Battle of Cowpens, see Babits, *A Devil of a Whipping*, 81-123, Morrill, *Southern Campaigns*, 127-131, and Gordon, *South Carolina and the American Revolution*, 129-134. It is interesting to note that Babits, the eminent scholar of Cowpens, only detailed the actions of the battle, not its aftermath, ending his narrative with the rebel's successful double envelopment and Tarleton's flight from the field.
[327] Tarleton. *A History of the Campaigns*, 218.
[328] General Daniel Morgan to General Nathanael Greene, 19 January 1781, in Greene, *The Papers*, vol. 7, 155.
[329] Tarleton. *A History of the Campaigns*, 217-218.

> the Progress of this Corps was marked with Burnings and Devastations & altho' they have waged the most cruel Warfare, not a man was killed, wounded or even insulted after he surrendered.[330]

When Tarleton and the remnants of his command returned to their baggage train, he discovered local backwoodsmen helping themselves to supplies – a fatal error. Tarleton and his dragoons drew their sabers and "cut to pieces" and "dispersed" these civilians.[331] Most of the backwoodsmen killed were the loyalist guides who had led Tarleton on the chase after Morgan. Thomas Young, the youthful rebel militiaman, had been captured by Tarleton when he tried to return home after the battle. There were two backcountry loyalists, Littlefield and Kelly, in Tarleton's command who knew Young "very well."[332] They were determined to make the rebel pay for his actions at Cowpens. Young lived to describe what happened next: "Littlefield cocked his gun and swore he would kill me. In a moment nearly twenty British soldiers drew their swords, and cursing him for a damned coward for wanting to kill a boy without arms and a prisoner, and ran them off."[333] Littlefield and Kelly had survived Cowpens only to be marked as cowards to be shot if they ever returned to their command.

There would also be no rest for backcountry loyalist Alexander Chesney. He had been trounced at Kings Mountain, and now he had watched the disaster at Cowpens "where we suffered a total defeat by some dreadful bad management."[334] Although Chesney once admired Tarleton for his boldness, he blamed him for the defeat. According to Chesney, Tarleton had behaved "imprudently," refusing to rest his exhausted forces before engaging the rebels.[335] Chesney noted that "the consequence was his force disper[s]ed in all directions[;] the guns and

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[330] *Ibid*., 153.
[331] Tarleton. *A History of the Campaigns*, 218.
[332] "Memoirs of Thomas Young," 185.
[333] *Ibid*.
[334] Chesney, *The Journal*, 22.
[335] *Ibid*.

many prisoners fell into the hands of the Americans."[336] Chesney avoided capture. "I proceeded towards home to bring off my wife and child on 17 January and found there was nothing left not even a blanket to keep off the inclement weather," wrote the backcountry loyalist.[337] Bandits had raided his home, "leaving a pleasant situation in a lamentable state."[338] Believing that the loyalist militia would capture the bandits and restore his belongings, Chesney appealed to Cunningham for aid, but "could not prevail on [him] to use any exertions."[339]

A distraught Chesney then made his way to Charlestown where he petitioned "Mr. Cruden, Commissioner of Sequestered Estates, to have me accomadated [*sic*] with my family."[340] Commissioner Cruden allotted Chesney "the use of only three negroes to attend [his] family" and assigned them to manage a small sequestered estate along the Pond-Pond River.[341] Cruden tasked Chesney with producing corn for the British army. It was not the reward Chesney had been expecting. When rebels moved into the area, Chesney rejoined the British army where he "expected to meet reinforcements from Charles-town and be joined by the light troops and Loyalists, but [was] disappointed in both."[342] Rebels surrounded the area and "pressed us so closely that we had nothing but 1 lb. of wheat left."[343] Even committed loyalists like the Chesney family could not rely on the British army or the loyalist militia to protect them.

After Tarleton's defeat, Cornwallis was an angry man. Stragglers from Cowpens brought the first reports of the disaster the night of the battle. The next day, the shattered remnants of Tarleton's troops arrived at Cornwallis's camp at Turkey Creek, southwest of Charlotte. Cornwallis stood with his dress sword thrust into the ground, his hands resting on its hilt, as he

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[336] *Ibid.*
[337] *Ibid.*
[338] *Ibid.*
[339] *Ibid.*
[340] *Ibid.*, 23.
[341] *Ibid.*
[342] *Ibid.*, 25.
[343] *Ibid.*

listened to Tarleton's report. By the time Tarleton concluded, Cornwallis was leaning forward fuming, his weight thrusting down on the blade with such pressure that his sword snapped. He swore he would free the regulars Morgan had taken prisoner no matter what the cost.[344] Allowing Cornwallis the opportunity to cool down, Tarleton then asked his superior to either give his "approbation of his proceedings [at Cowpens], or leave to retire till an inquiry could be constituted to investigate his conduct."[345] Cornwallis could not afford to lose Tarleton and replied, "You have forfeited no part of my esteem as an officer by the unfortunate event of the action of the 17th."[346] "The total misbehavior of the troops could alone have deprived you of the glory which was justly your due," asserted Cornwallis, perhaps unfairly attributing the defeat to the conduct of the British soldiers.[347] What was Tarleton responsible for if not the behavior of his troops, especially the veteran Legionnaires? Cornwallis ordered Tarleton back into the field.

Moreover, the defeat at Cowpens cowed many backcountry loyalists into inactivity. When news of Cowpens reached him, Balfour turned his attention to the Ninety-Six District, fearing that the backcountry loyalists would abandon their post. Writing to Cornwallis, Balfour requested reinforcements to be sent to the district immediately. With Cornwallis still insisting upon invading North Carolina, Balfour feared that the backcountry loyalists would consider the move a retreat at a time when the British position in the interior was precarious. Balfour advised Cornwallis that sending British regulars into Ninety-Six would allow Cruger and his militia to operate more effectively. As Balfour noted, Cruger's ability "to detach only two hundred men on an emergency…without the aid of troops…is of no sort use."[348] However, Cornwallis did not have regulars to spare if he was to invade North Carolina. Balfour understood that the

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[344] Tarleton, *A History of the Campaigns*, 220.
[345] Tarleton, *A History of the Campaigns*, 222.
[346] Cornwallis to Tarleton, 30 January 1781, in Tarleton, *A History of the Campaigns*, 252.
[347] Cornwallis to Tarleton, 30 January 1781.
[348] Balfour to Cornwallis, 2 February 1781, The Cornwallis Papers, SCDAH.

backcountry loyalists now considered theirs to be a "hopeless cause" after the Battle of Cowpens, and "many" joined the rebels.[349] A distressed Cornwallis wrote Rawdon, "Our friends must be so disheartened by the misfortune of the 17th that you will get little good from them. You know the importance of Ninety-Six; let that place be your constant care."[350] Instead of reinforcing Ninety-Six, Cornwallis decided to pursue Morgan in hopes of recovering the British prisoners. Morgan, who was already marching as fast as his troops could move, linked up with Greene's forces. The combined American army fled into North Carolina with Cornwallis in hot pursuit. Balfour was left in command of South Carolina, and Rawdon was to have control of the troops in the field.

Conclusion

After chasing Greene across the Dan River into Virginia, Cornwallis retreated to the backwoods of Hillsborough, North Carolina, to rest his force. "The fatigue of our troops and the hardships which they suffered were excessive," wrote Cornwallis, describing the race to the Dan River.[351] The exhausted British regulars needed food and equipment, and although Cornwallis no longer had any illusions about the steadfastness of the loyalists, the effort to recruit their support had to be made. The British commander, once again, tried to rally the North and South Carolina loyalists. Announcing his desire to "rescue" the crown's "faithful and loyal subjects from the cruel tyranny under which they have groaned for many years," Cornwallis planted the king's standard at Hillsborough and waited for the loyalists to rally.[352] On 20 February 1781, Cornwallis issued a proclamation inviting all loyalists in North and South Carolina to "repair,

[349] *Ibid*.
[350] Earl Cornwallis to Lord Rawdon, 4 February 1781, in Cornwallis, *Correspondence*, vol.1, 84.
[351] Earl Cornwallis to Lord Rawdon, 21 February 1781, in Cornwallis, *Correspondence*, vol.1, 84.
[352] Cornwallis, Proclamation, 20 February 1780, in Tarleton, *A History of the Campaigns*, 256.

without loss of time, with their arms…to the royal standard now erected at Hillsborough."[353] Moreover, Cornwallis declared that "I am ready to concur with them in effectual measures for suppressing the remains of rebellion in these provinces and for the reestablishment of good order and constitutional government."[354] It was a radically different position than what Clinton had held several months earlier at the fall of Charlestown. Unlike his commanding officer, Cornwallis finally realized the necessity of establishing a civil government in conjunction with the loyalists that would provide protection for the crown's allies in the interior. The realization of this requirement came too late.

Loyalist emissaries from Ninety-Six, Camden, and several backcountry outposts in North Carolina rode into the British camp to discuss Cornwallis's proclamation. However, the South Carolinians had no intention of aiding the British army. Instead, they were "desirous of peace," having suffered enough "violence and persecution" at the hands of British regulars, rebel soldiers, and bandits.[355] They were determined not to take "part in any cause which yet appeared dangerous."[356] Although some zealous Tories promised to raise regiments for the king's service, Tarleton noted that "their followers and dependents protested against the military," and the "numbers were never found to complete their establishments."[357] The "variety of calamities" suffered by the backcountry loyalists "had not only reduced their numbers and weakened their attachment" to the crown, wrote Tarleton, "but had confirmed the power and superiority of the adverse party."[358]

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[353] Cornwallis, Proclamation, 20 February 1780.
[354] *Ibid.*
[355] Tarleton describes the emissaries and their opinions of the 20 February Proclamation in Tarleton, *A History of the Campaigns*, 230-231.
[356] Tarleton, *A History of the Campaigns*, 230-231.
[357] *Ibid.*, 231.
[358] *Ibid.*

The rebels, under the command of Greene, had proven their strength and ability to win the hearts and minds of the backcountry colonists. British policies and tactics had indeed tapped the resources and destroyed the resolve of the backcountry loyalists and enraged the neutrals who now rallied to Greene. The backcountry roads that Cornwallis and his subordinate officers travelled through the Carolinas, to the battlefields of Kings Mountain and Cowpens, led symbolically, if not literally, to the final British surrender at Yorktown, Virginia.

CONCLUSION

War in the South Carolina backcountry brought an end to Great Britain's hopes of winning back the colonies. The South Carolina piedmont epitomized the notion that not everyone wanted independence; many in the backcountry were content with royal rule. The missteps of a conquering army created the desire to revolt in the hearts and minds of the backcountry folk, confirming the axiom that how war is waged matters. The Southern strategy depended on the British ability to mobilize the South Carolina loyalists. Although many Tories came forward and enlisted in the militia after the surrender of Charlestown, the British high command adopted policies and tactics that obviated this support. Moreover, Clinton, Cornwallis, and their subordinates failed to defend the backcountry populace. From Charlestown to Cowpens, loyalists learned the bitter lesson that British protection would never materialize.

South Carolina represented a very complex set of competing interests. A significant portion of the backcountry populace supported the crown or, at least, wanted to remain neutral. There were two high points of backcountry loyalist strength. Long before British troops established a foothold in South Carolina, backcountry loyalists took up arms to oppose the rebels. They depended on the British to defend them from Native American raids and protect them from Whig abuses. Moreover, the piedmont populace had more significant grievances with the lowcountry government than with Parliament. The fighting in South Carolina was a civil war before it became a revolution. In 1775, backcountry Tories turned out to oppose the organizing efforts of the Drayton Commission. The tensions between rebels and loyalists finally erupted into armed conflict in the Snow Campaign. Despite the loyalist defeat, the British believed that

the backcountry colonists were willing to fight and became convinced that a minimum commitment of British resources would restore South Carolina to the imperial fold.

The second high point of loyalist strength came in 1780 with the fall of Charlestown. Thousands of backcountry Carolinians joined the militia, acknowledging their allegiance to the crown. Given the presence of many loyalists in the backcountry and the swift collapse of patriot military and civil power, what happened next, in hindsight, seems incredulous. The British lost what they had gained in a matter of a single year. The blame lies with Clinton, Cornwallis, and their subordinates. Clinton suffered a paralysis of will. He owed his appointment as Commander-in-Chief to the fact that he was virtually the only candidate available. He never restored a civil government, leaving South Carolinians without a legal avenue to present grievances and challenge military policy. Moreover, he failed to implement a sound policy on protection and paroles. This failure, coupled with Clinton's inability to devise an adequate policy on slaves that would maintain loyalist support and provide for the British army, alienated a people who were otherwise inclined to live quietly under the king. Finally, Clinton returned to New York with half of the British force, leaving Cornwallis with too few regulars to prosecute the Southern campaign.

Cornwallis was at a disadvantage. The limited number of troops and materiel proved grossly inadequate to complete the task of regaining the southern colonies. Therefore, Cornwallis and his subordinates, notably Tarleton, Wemyss, and Ferguson, pursued a scorched earth strategy in the backcountry. They waged a war of terror and destruction against a population that the British army relied on for aid. British atrocities were extremely counterproductive. Impressing horses, indiscriminate plundering, and burning churches fueled backcountry resistance to British rule. Moreover, these practices provided local rebel leaders the

opportunity to demonstrate that the British were brutal, squashing the rebellion by whatever means necessary. The rebels helped fan the flames created by British atrocities, making certain that they had the maximum impact on the local population.

The assignment of Greene and Morgan to the Southern theatre was the beginning of the end for the British. Since his force remained small, Greene avoided a direct confrontation with the British army. To that end, he relied on partisan warfare, conducted by Sumter, Marion, and Pickens, to break the will of the British and their loyalist allies. However, Greene recognized that depending on partisan tactics was not enough; the regular army would have to protect the backcountry populace in order to win its support. A strict disciplinarian, Greene punished anyone who plundered or terrorized the population. In doing so, he accomplished what Cornwallis had not, gaining the support of the piedmont residents.

In the end, Clinton, Cornwallis, and their subordinates made two crucial military mistakes. Their failure to adequately protect the backcountry populace and secure their rear robbed them of the popular support they needed to regain the colonies and left their lines of communication in shambles. Moreover, Cornwallis and his subordinates never fully trusted the loyalist militia to garrison South Carolina. Consequently, the high command did not properly equip and train the loyalists. As the loyal militia was vital to British success, these actions remain paradoxical and are one of the self-induced failures the high command suffered. Backcountry support had evaporated by the time the British fought at Cowpens in January 1781. However, Cornwallis moved into North Carolina before pacifying South Carolina and, therefore, left his rear vulnerable to attack. He continued to Yorktown, Virginia, with only coastal North Carolina secure. Greene proved able to capitalize on the British missteps.

The Southern strategy has relevance for today's military planners and political leaders. It is a point of fact that how armies wage war matters. Clinton and Cornwallis wanted conventional, European style battles that provided unambiguous outcomes. Holding posts and winning hearts and minds were not part of their game plan. However, military leaders have a responsibility to adapt to local conditions and exercise caution to ensure that the means justify the ends. If the British established a civilian government in South Carolina, it might have provided the oversight necessary to temper military tactics to maintain popular support. Today's leaders, both military and civilian, must prepare their troops for the peculiarities of a particular theatre or campaign. Moreover, the high command is responsible for controlling their subordinates in the field. At the tactical level, professional soldiers must be prepared to adapt swiftly to local conditions. In the Southern campaign, Clinton, Cornwallis, and their subordinates did not understand these requirements.[359] The lesson to be learned is that a state with superior military might must take care when it decides to project its power to another part of the globe. Military tactics and policies have major impacts on a populace's allegiance. The superior force's pursuit of battlefield victories can overshadow the key tasks of providing security, promoting civil governance, and equipping and training local allies.

An ironclad rule of warfare is that people will only accept a government whose military forces can and will protect them.[360] This principle held true for the South Carolina backcountry. Capturing the hearts and minds of the backcountry populace was achieved by the side that could convince the people that it could protect them. The British might have had the superior army,

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[359] Gordon, *South Carolina and the American Revolution*, 181-182. The British tried to conduct war in the conventional, eighteenth century European style of battle between armies of regulars. Even in conventional pitched battles in South Carolina that conformed to the above notion, Gordon maintains that the war in the backcountry was different because of the presence of citizen-soldier militia. The high command failed to adapt.

[360] This principle of warfare is echoed in Pancake, *This Destructive War*, 240-244, and Calhoon, *The Loyalists*, 504-505.

but they could not guarantee life, liberty, and property. The battle for the South Carolina backcountry ignited the chain of events that ended with the British loss of the American colonies.

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