

South Carolina
Revolutionary Era Biographies



*John Harrison and
The South Carolina
Rangers*

*by
Jim Piecuch*

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JOHN HARRISON AND THE SOUTH CAROLINA RANGERS

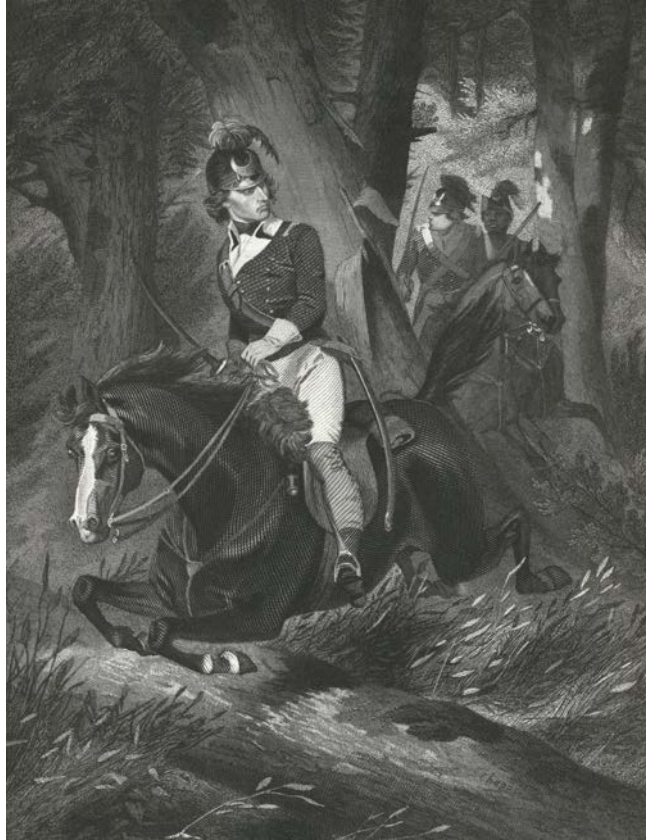
by Jim Piecuch

Few military units of the American Revolution have received less attention from historians than Major John Harrison's South Carolina Rangers, a provincial regiment organized in June 1780. The handful of accounts that do mention Harrison and his troops have generally portrayed them in an unfavorable light, describing Harrison and his brothers as robbers and the Rangers as plunderers and murderers.

In one of the earliest histories of the Revolution, Lieutenant Colonel Banastre Tarleton, commander of the British Legion, asserted that Harrison and Robert Cunningham were "men of fortune and influence in their respective districts," an indication that he regarded them favorably.¹ The word of a British officer, however, had little influence on writers in the United States. William Dobein James, who had served under Francis Marion and composed a history of the general and his brigade published in 1821, laid the foundation for Americans' perceptions of Harrison and the Rangers. He directly addressed Tarleton's work, writing that the perpetrators of many atrocities in northeastern South Carolina "were headed by the two Harrisons, one afterwards a colonel, the other a major in the British service; whom Tarleton calls men of fortune." On the contrary, James asserted, "they were in fact two of the greatest banditti that ever infested the country. Before the fall of Charleston they lived in a wretched log hut, by the road, near M'Callum's, in which there was no bedcovering but the skins of wild beasts." James claimed that the major was killed during the war, but at the end of the conflict "the colonel retired to Jamaica, with much wealth, acquired by depredation."² Nearly everything James had stated was wrong, from the ranks of John and Robert Harrison to their living conditions to Robert's supposed death in action.

1 Banastre Tarleton, *A History of the Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, in the Southern Provinces of North America* (London: T. Cadell, 1787), 90.

2 William Dobein James, *A Sketch of the Life of Brig. Gen. Francis Marion and a History of His Brigade from Its Rise in June 1780 until Disbanded in December 1782*, reprint (Marietta, GA: Continental Book Co., 1948), 44-45.



Francis Marion, the “Swamp Fox.” Harrison’s Rangers participated in several unsuccessful British operations to defeat Marion and his partisans.

Other historians who took notice of Harrison and the Rangers followed James’s lead. In 1867, Episcopal bishop and South Carolina native Alexander Gregg published a history of the Cheraw region, in which he repeated almost verbatim James’s description of the Harrisons, adding only, and incorrectly, that John Harrison’s “proposed plan of a provincial corps was never carried out.”³ Edward McCrady relied heavily upon James and Gregg in his 1901 History of South Carolina in the Revolution, writing that John Harrison “was one of two brothers of bad character, – in fact it is said, two of the worst banditti that ever infested a country.” He remarked that “it was of such material that the British made officers for their purposes.” McCrady further declared that “the Tories headed by these men committed many murders and depredations.”⁴

3 Alexander Gregg, *History of the Old Cheraws, Containing an Account of the Aborigines of the Pee Dee, the First White Settlements, Their Subsequent Progress, Civil Changes, the Struggle of the Revolution, and Growth of the Country Afterward, Extending from About 1730 to 1810, with Notices of Families and Sketches of Individuals*, reprint (Columbia, SC: The State Company, 1905), 308.

4 Edward McCrady, *The History of South Carolina in the Revolution, 1775-1780*, reprint (New York: Russell & Russell, 1969), 642-643.

In 1976, Robert D. Bass, who had mentioned the Rangers in his 1959 biography of Marion, presented a paper on the Rangers at a meeting of the South Carolina Historical Association, which was published the following year. Bass stated that James had provided the “best information about the Harrisons, but his hatred of them makes him a biased witness.” The brief account of the Rangers that Bass produced is notable for its fair treatment of these Loyalists⁵. Robert Stansbury Lambert’s 1987 work on South Carolina Loyalists devoted a considerable amount of space to Harrison and the Rangers, delivering a mixed verdict on the unit and its commander. Lambert described Harrison as “a notorious loyalist partisan” and noted that “British officers were ambivalent about the value of ‘Harrison’s Corps’ to the army and among the populace, finding their actions useful and even heroic on occasion, but noting that, like militia, they were prone to ‘go off’ when the mood seized them. A more serious criticism was that many of the Rangers seemed more anxious for ‘plunder’ than for regular service under discipline, and the Harrisons were more than once involved in acts of vengeance against rebel partisans.”⁶ Harry M. Ward’s brief reference to the Rangers was less favorable. To support his claim that “some Loyalist military units sanctioned by the British command were viewed more as banditti than as soldiers,” Ward put forth the Rangers as an example, quoting James along with a British officer who criticized them for plundering.⁷

While an examination of the sources indicates that the Rangers did occasionally plunder their enemies, there is far less evidence to support other allegations of criminal behavior. The Harrisons were committed Loyalists who did their utmost to support British operations in South Carolina, and the Rangers, as Lambert observed, often fought effectively. Despite an apparent lack of formal training, the Rangers proved to be an important asset to the British in South Carolina, though at times they did perform poorly in battle.

John Harrison was born in Virginia about 1751, and by 1775 had settled on Lynches Creek (present-day Lynches River) in Camden District, where he prospered as a planter. At the start of the Revolution, he owned 200 acres on the creek “with Buildings, Orchards, and otherwise well improved” where he lived with his wife and children. He owned an additional 400 acres elsewhere on Lynches Creek, of which 50 were cleared and planted with indigo. Harrison had also acquired two town lots in Camden and 500 acres in St. David’s Parish (the present Cheraw/Darlington/Chesterfield area), and cultivated 40 acres there. His other holdings included seven slaves, 150 head of cattle, 200 hogs, seven horses and an “Eighty-Gallon Still” for producing liquor from corn, the whole worth an estimated £1770 sterling (\$414,000 present value). In 1775, Harrison signed the

5 Robert D. Bass, “The South Carolina Rangers: A Forgotten Loyalist Regiment,” *Proceedings of the South Carolina Historical Association*, 1977, 66. The entire essay is only eight pages in length (64-71).

6 Robert Stansbury Lambert, *South Carolina Loyalists in the American Revolution* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1987), 85, 115.

7 Harry M. Ward, *Between the Lines: Banditti of the American Revolution* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002), 232.

Continental Association, believing “it was for nothing more than to establish a Correspondence” with Britain for repealing the tax acts. He served in the Revolutionary militia though he “was never with any party in Opposition to the King’s Troops.” After independence was declared, he refused to take the oath of allegiance to the state government, whereupon “he was obliged to quit his Plantation and secret himself” to avoid persecution.⁸

With the British capture of Savannah, Georgia, on December 29, 1778, Harrison seized the opportunity to join the royal army. He made the dangerous trek across South Carolina and reached Savannah sometime in January 1779, where he reported to Lt. Col. Archibald Campbell. After “a few days,” Brig. Gen. Augustine Prevost, who had superseded Campbell as commander in Georgia, assigned Harrison “to carry Intelligence to the Loyalists in the Country and to hold himself in readiness to join the King’s Army.” Harrison was away on one such mission when French and American forces besieged Savannah in September and October 1779. He returned “immediately after the Siege of Savannah,” when he met Lt. Col. John Hamilton, commander of the Royal North Carolina Regiment. According to Hamilton, Harrison arrived “with Intelligence to Genl. Prevost.” Nicholas Welsh met Harrison at about the same time and described him as a “very useful and a very loyal man.” Harrison apparently continued his intelligence gathering duties until early 1780, when the British troops in Georgia advanced to join General Sir Henry Clinton’s invasion force near Charleston.⁹

Harrison accompanied the British troops on their march to Charleston and at some point, perhaps after the city’s garrison surrendered on May 12, he returned to his home and family on Lynches Creek. On June 4, he visited Lt. Gen. Charles, Earl Cornwallis in Camden and offered to raise a provincial regiment in the region east of the town. Harrison later explained that he “took up arms in defence of the Royal Cause” because he was “actuated by Principles of Loyalty and attachment to His Majesty’s Person and Government, and of abhorrence to the unnatural Rebellion.”¹⁰ Cornwallis was impressed, writing that Harrison “was the first person who offered to raise a Corps in South Carolina after the taking of Charlestown.”¹¹ The earl approved the plan and commissioned Harrison major commandant of the regiment of South Carolina Rangers. The new major quickly went back to his home and began recruiting. His brothers, Robert and Samuel, enlisted on June 6, and he commissioned them captains, and Samuel McConnell, who also enlisted that day, received a

8 John Harrison, Loyalist Claim, Oct. 3, 1783, <https://sites.rootsweb.com/~harrisonrep/harrbios/captjohnharrisonSC.html> (accessed May 8, 2008).

9 Archibald Campbell, *Journal of an Expedition against the Rebels of Georgia in North America under the Orders of Archibald Campbell Esquire Lieut. Colo. Of His Majesty's 71st Regimt. 1778*, Ed. Colin Campbell (Darien, GA: Ashantilly Press, 1981), 40; Harrison, Claim, Oct. 3, 1783. In his claim, Harrison incorrectly identified the British general as Brigadier General James Paterson, who was not in Georgia at the time, though Harrison probably met Paterson upon his arrival at Savannah in 1780.

10 John Harrison, Loyalist Claim, United Kingdom Public Records Office, Audit Office Papers (AO) 13/119/472.

11 Harrison, Claim, AO 13/119/472.

lieutenant's commission. Joel Hudson was commissioned a lieutenant on June 8, by which time the Rangers, in addition to their five officers, included four sergeants, three corporals, and 58 privates.¹²



Lt. Gen. Charles, Earl Cornwallis, approved the creation of the Rangers in June 1780. After the war, he testified to Maj. John Harrison's efforts to form the regiment.

Provincial regiments were organized, trained, and disciplined in the same manner as regular British army regiments, except that the enlisted men, and usually most of the officers, were Americans. Most provincial units were infantry regiments, but in a few cases the British had formed Ranger units, such as John Graves Simcoe's Queen's American Rangers and Thomas Brown's East Florida or King's Rangers. These regiments comprised both foot soldiers and mounted troops who "scouted and skirmished in support of regular troops, but also could be counted on to garrison outposts and maintain contact between such places and the main army." Mounted Rangers also helped to offset the British army's lack of cavalry, and it was likely that Cornwallis envisioned Harrison's troops fulfilling these varied roles.¹³

¹² Bass, "South Carolina Rangers," 65.

¹³ Lambert, *South Carolina Loyalists*, 115.

Like Cornwallis, Hamilton believed that the efforts of Harrison and other Loyalists would greatly benefit the British. Hamilton wrote that Harrison was “a Man of very good Character” who “had a great influence with the People” in the Lynches River area, and that he “brot. about 200 Men to Camden to the Army in June 1780.” Hamilton credited Harrison with having been “useful keeping the Country quiet” in the early weeks of summer.¹⁴

Tarleton generally concurred. “The militia made a promising appearance,” he observed, and “Cunningham and Harrison ... obtained Lord Cornwallis’s leave to convert their levies of friends and adherents into regiments of provincials.” However, circumstances arose that impeded the attempts to form new provincial units and organize the Loyalist militia. Reports that the Continental Congress, in concert with North Carolina and Virginia, was taking steps to send forces to South Carolina, including a Continental Army detachment already on its way southward, “gave a turn to the minds of the inhabitants” that encouraged renewed resistance among many who had submitted to British authority, Tarleton noted. He later concluded that subsequent events in South Carolina “strongly proved the mistake committed by the British, in placing confidence in the inhabitants of the country when acting apart from the army. The only probable way to reap advantage from the levies made in Carolina,” he believed, “would have been to incorporate the young men as they were raised in the established provincial corps, where they could be properly trained and formed under officers of experience.” Had this been done, Tarleton asserted, “the King’s troops in general would have been augmented, and considerable service might have been derived from their additional numbers.”¹⁵ This was certainly a problem with Harrison’s Rangers; there is no record that they received any formal training. John Harrison may have picked up some elements of military practice during his time in the militia and with the British in Georgia, but he lacked both command experience and sufficient knowledge to train his troops adequately. The Rangers were simply thrust into action almost immediately after the first recruits had assembled, so it is not surprising that their effectiveness was sometimes limited.

By June 8, when Harrison’s regiment had been in existence less than a week, the Rangers were thrust into action. Major Archibald McArthur had been ordered to establish a post at Cheraw Hill with both battalions of the 71st Regiment.¹⁶ The Rangers joined him on his march, and he ordered them, along with some British dragoons, to forge ahead of his detachment upon receiving intelligence, later proved false, “that some publick stores here were removing and nobody in arms.” As McArthur approached Cheraw Hill on June 9, he learned that the Rangers and dragoons, “whom

¹⁴ Harrison, Claim, Oct. 3, 1783.

¹⁵ Tarleton, *History*, 90-91, 98.

¹⁶ Lambert, *South Carolina Loyalists*, 116.

I detached the night before,” had already occupied the position.¹⁷ The Rangers enlisted five men on June 12, and the next day they left Cheraw for Camden to deliver McArthur’s dispatches and recruit additional men.¹⁸

During the journey to Camden, Ranger private Angus McFrail was badly wounded by the Revolutionaries, probably an individual or small party firing from the woods as the Rangers passed. McFrail was brought to the army hospital at Camden. On the march back to Cheraw, Harrison retaliated “by scourging the Presbyterian community around Salem” and other American sympathizers in the Black River area.¹⁹ James recalled that people in the vicinity of Georgetown and Williamsburg had learned that Continental troops were approaching South Carolina and began organizing themselves into military units to resist the British. At that time, James wrote, “the Tories on Lynch’s creek, in the neighbourhood of M’Callum’s ferry, had already begun their murders and depredations.” He claimed that Matthew and Thomas Bradley and John Roberts, all “respectable citizens, who had then joined neither party, and also, some others, were killed by them, in their own houses.” James identified the perpetrators as a group “headed by the two Harrisons.” Fearing that he might be their next target, Presbyterian minister and Revolutionary supporter Dr. Thomas Reese “closed the church, dismissed the students in his academy, and retired to Charlotte.”²⁰ The Rangers were back at Cheraw on June 18, when McArthur, having learned of “a quantity of salt and rum” that had been concealed in a swamp, ordered Harrison to find and retrieve it, which the Rangers accomplished. McArthur noted that the goods had been the property of Thomas Wade, a Revolutionary leader who resided in Anson County, North Carolina.²¹ On June 24, John Jenkins, Deputy Muster Master for Provincial Forces, inspected the Rangers “near Camden” (one historian put the location near Radcliffe’s Bridge on Lynches River). Jenkins recorded that in addition to the six officers and seven noncommissioned officers, there were 80 privates in the regiment.²²

Cornwallis informed Clinton of his actions at the end of June. In addition to organizing the Loyalist militia and ordering the “notoriously disaffected ... to be disarmed and to remain at home on their parole,” the earl had “readily agreed to a proposal made by a Mr. Harrison to raise a Provincial corps of 500 men with the rank of major to be composed of the natives of the country between the Pee Dee and Wateree [rivers], and in which it is at present extremely probable that he will succeed.”

17 Maj. Archibald McArthur to Lt. Gen. Charles, Earl Cornwallis, June 13, 1780, June 14, 1780, and June 18, 1780, in Ian Saberton, ed., *The Cornwallis Papers: The Campaigns of 1780 and 1781 in the Southern Theatre of the American Revolutionary War* (CP), 6 vols. (Uckfield, UK: Naval & Military Press, 2010), 1:132, 133, 137.

18 Bass, “South Carolina Rangers,” 65.

19 Bass, “South Carolina Rangers,” 65.

20 James, *Life of Marion*, 44-45.

21 McArthur to Cornwallis, June 18, 1780, CP, 1:136.

22 Bass, “South Carolina Rangers,” 66.

Cornwallis noted that McArthur's position at Cheraw would "cover the raising of Major Harrison's corps" and help organize militia units in that area.²³

These plans were disrupted by the advance of American forces toward South Carolina, which caused concern among the British commanders. Lt. Col. Francis, Lord Rawdon, commanding the important post at Camden, received intelligence on July 12 that Maj. Gen. Johann de Kalb and his Continental troops had left Hillsborough, North Carolina, and were marching toward Deep River. Rawdon therefore ordered McArthur, unless the latter had "strong reasons to the contrary," to withdraw from Cheraw to Black River to stay out of danger in the event the Americans should "steal one day's march upon you." Once McArthur had fallen back, Rawdon suggested that "Harrison's corps and the mounted militia might hover about the Pee Dee without much risque as they might retreat down the river if anything stronger than themselves shou'd advance upon them." Cornwallis, on the contrary, preferred that McArthur should remain at Cheraw as long as possible, though he did give Rawdon permission to withdraw the 71st Regiment from that post "whenever you think him at all exposed."²⁴

McArthur noticed that the American forces' approach reinvigorated the Revolutionaries. On July 20, he wrote to Col. William Henry Mills, who he had recently appointed to command the Cheraws District militia, to report that Col. James Cassells of the Georgetown militia had sent news that a "Refractory Disposition begins to shew itself in some parts of his District." Cassells asked that troops to be sent to bolster his militia. Because McArthur did not want to send his regulars so far from Cheraw, especially when he expected to move soon, he advised Mills to choose 40 or 50 men whose loyalty was certain and send them to assist Cassells, and to command them in person if his health permitted. McArthur added that he expected "some of Harrison's People this Day or tomorrow, if they come mounted I shall send A Party of them to you. I think it would be worth your while to Send an Express to Major Harrison & you are welcome to make use of my Name if you think it Necessary."²⁵ There is no record, however, of any Rangers being sent on this duty.

Harrison met with Rawdon at Camden in late July and reported that "he has collected 400 men, who are to be mustered before me on the 5th of August." Before the muster could take place, the Rangers lost the support of the 71st Regiment. The men, Rawdon wrote, "fell sick so fast at Cheraw Hill" that he ordered them to move to Lynches Creek, a supposedly healthier location, and when illnesses, chiefly malaria, persisted, Rawdon brought the regiment to Camden. This left the Rangers without support from regular troops and thus more vulnerable to the increasing activity of American guerrillas. On July 29, Cornwallis suggested that Rawdon could strengthen his garrison

23 Cornwallis to Gen. Sir Henry Clinton, June 30, 1780, CP, 1:160-161.

24 Lt. Col. Francis, Lord Rawdon to McArthur, July 12, 1780, Cornwallis to Rawdon, July 20, 1780, CP, 1:204, 209.

25 William Henry Mills, Loyalist Claim, AO 13/102/1302.

against the approaching Continental force by ordering the Rangers to the town. “I wish you could get Harrison’s corps to Camden as early in the month as possible, whether perfectly complete or not,” the earl wrote, “and tell them that cloathing, arms and money will be sent thither for them.”²⁶

Like Col. Mills, Major James Wemyss, commanding the 63rd Regiment at Georgetown, worried about increased partisan activity in the surrounding region and sent Cornwallis reports that caused the earl “very great concern.” He urged Wemyss to advance toward Black River in hopes of surprising and defeating the Revolutionaries. Only one day after telling Rawdon he wanted the Rangers at Camden, Cornwallis reversed himself and ordered Rawdon to send some provincial troops to meet Wemyss at the High Hills of Santee, and that Harrison’s Rangers would be sent as an additional reinforcement. That regiment, Cornwallis told Wemyss, “is reported to me to be nearly complete. They have been in the country about Linches Creek and, I should apprehend, must have kept the militia quiet in those parts. They are ordered to Camden to receive arms and cloathing, but I do not believe they are moved yet,” so they were well situated to march to Wemyss’s assistance.²⁷

Cornwallis admitted to Rawdon that he was “frightened about the situation of the country between the lower part of Pee Dee and Santee.” The earl was bringing more troops forward; Tarleton was marching inland with his Legion, but heavy rains and swollen rivers had delayed him, and he had not yet been able to cross the Santee River at Lenud’s Ferry, while muddy roads had slowed the “great convoy of artillery, stores and arms,” which “has not yet reached the Wateree” River. Parties of rebels had taken advantage of McArthur’s evacuation of Cheraw to inflict “terrors and great distress” on Loyalists in the area, Cornwallis remarked. “It is absolutely necessary to inflict some exemplary punishment” on the rebels in “that part of the country,” he urged, or when the army advanced “we shall find an enemy in our rear.” He again changed the Rangers’ mission, suggesting that they, with Col. Samuel Bryan’s North Carolina militia and “a small regular force to support them” might be able to restore order in the area, and “with the word discrimination strongly impressed on their mind, might be trusted to punish the guilty by securing those whom they could catch and by burning and destroying the plantations of those who have fled.” Since Rawdon was well acquainted with “the situation of these corps,” he could “best judge how adequate they are to this service,” but if something were not done, the lines of communication between Charleston and British posts in the interior would be endangered and the army, Cornwallis declared, could not advance.²⁸

It is not clear which, if any, of these assignments the Rangers undertook in early August. The regiment was mustered at Camden on August 13, and its strength was nowhere near the 400 men

²⁶ Rawdon to Cornwallis, July 24 and 27, 1780, Cornwallis to Rawdon, July 29, 1780, CP, 1:215, 218, 219.

²⁷ Cornwallis to Major James Wemyss, July 30, 1780, CP, 1:321.

²⁸ Cornwallis to Rawdon, Aug. 4, 1780, CP, 1:226.

that Harrison had claimed. A return prepared that day showed the Rangers with eight sergeants and sixty-four privates fit for duty, and another 20 privates without arms.²⁹

Despite the numerous threats to the British position in South Carolina, Cornwallis intended to take the offensive and invade North Carolina as soon as practicable. On August 6, he informed Clinton of his plans, noting that he intended to take four regiments of British regulars and four of provincials, including “Harrison’s new raised” Rangers, with him when he marched north.³⁰

Before setting out for North Carolina, Cornwallis sent Lord George Germain, Secretary of State for the American Department, a report on the status of the provincial units. “I took every measure in my power to raise some Provincial corps and to establish a militia, as well for the defence as for the internal government of South Carolina,” the earl wrote. “One Provincial corps to consist of 500 men was put in commission to be raised between the Pee Dee and Wateree to be commanded by Mr. Harrison with the rank of major, and another of the same number was ordered to be raised in the District of Ninety Six to be commanded by Mr. Cunningham.” Cornwallis asserted that “there appeared to be great reason to expect that both these corps would be soon completed.” He added that he had posted Major McArthur and the 71st Regiment at Cheraw Hill “to protect the raising of Harrison’s corps and to awe a large tract of disaffected country between the Pee Dee and Black River.” Writing to Clinton on August 23, Cornwallis’s tone was less optimistic. “I am sorry to say that I fear Major Harrison will totally fail in his attempt to raise a corps,” he remarked. Cornwallis said much the same to Lt. Col. Nisbet Balfour ten days later, complaining that “the raising corps does not succeed in this province. Harrison has totally failed.”³¹

Although few in numbers, the Rangers nonetheless had a significant part in Cornwallis’s plan to pacify the Pee Dee region. The earl, angered at the uprising that the approach of the Continental Army had helped to ignite in that area, assigned Major Wemyss to lead a counter-insurgency effort and ordered him to take harsh measures against the Revolutionaries. “As soon as you conveniently can,” the earl instructed, Wemyss was to set out with part of his 63rd Regiment, 100 men from Hamilton’s Royal North Carolina Regiment, Bryan’s North Carolinians, and Harrison’s Rangers. The force should unite at Kingstree Bridge on Black River, Cornwallis said, and then sweep the area from there “to Pee Dee and returning by the Cheraws. I would have you disarm in the most rigid manner all persons who cannot be depended on and punish the concealment of arms and ammunition with a total destruction of the plantation.” Those who had enrolled in the Loyalist militia and “afterwards joined the rebels must be instantly hanged.” Anyone who had submitted to British authority “and have

29 “Return of the Troops at Camden,” Aug. 13, 1780, CP, 1:234.

30 Cornwallis to Clinton, Aug. 6, 1780, CP, 1:177-178.

31 Cornwallis to Lord George Germain, Aug. 20, 1780, Rawdon to Cornwallis, July 27, 1780, Cornwallis to Clinton, Aug. 23, 1780, and Cornwallis to Lt. Col. Nisbet Balfour, Sept. 3, 1780, CP, 1:218, 2:8, 16-17, 72.

since joined in this second revolt, must have their property entirely taken from them or destroy'd and themselves be taken as prisoners of war." After the campaign was completed, Cornwallis told Wemyss to "inspect what Harrison has got by way of corps. If he has 150 good men, I would have them formed into three companies and sent to Monck's Corner to be provided with necessities and clothing. The Deputy Inspector of Provincials shall receive orders for that purpose." Wemyss, who was at the High Hills of Santee, replied that he would "execute with the greatest pleasure every part of your Lordship's commands," though it would take at least four or five days to prepare his force.³²

Francis Marion, whose force numbered some 150 men, was camped at Britton's Neck on September 7 when he learned that Wemyss was in the vicinity of Kingstree with the 63rd Regiment and Harrison's Rangers, burning the homes of Marion's followers. Marion promptly sent Major John James and a few men to procure intelligence of Wemyss's strength and movements, and summoned Col. Peter Horry to join him. Leaving 50 men to guard his camp, Marion set out after James with the remaining 100, intending to fight the British if he had a prospect of success. Marion advanced as far as Indiantown where James rejoined him. The major had concealed his party along Wemyss's line of march and took advantage of bright moonlight to get a fairly accurate count of the troops when they passed. As the rear guard moved in front of the partisans, James sortied out, captured a Loyalist, and brought him to Marion. The prisoner claimed that Wemyss was assembling 400 regulars and Loyalists at Kingstree, only 20 miles from Marion's location. Other reports indicated that two hundred regulars had reinforced the British garrison at Georgetown. Marion and James engaged in a "long and animated" discussion, and an hour before dawn on September 8, Marion ordered a retreat. At Britton's Ferry, Marion received more unfavorable intelligence. Wemyss had crossed Lynches Creek at Witherspoon's Ferry and was only a short distance away to the west, while Loyalist militia under Colonels John Coming Ball and John Wigfall had left Georgetown, crossed Black River, and were approaching from the south. Major Micajah Gainey's militia, who Marion had attacked and dispersed a few days earlier, were regrouping east of Marion's position. Given these dangerous circumstances, in the evening Marion ordered a retreat to North Carolina. Most of his men, worried about the safety of their homes and families, refused to accompany him, so only sixty privates remained, though most of the officers stayed. After reaching safety at Amy's Mill on Drowning Creek in North Carolina, Marion sent Major James back to observe the British and attempt to spur the militia into action. William Dobein James described Marion's retreat as "prudent," given his situation, yet noted that "a bitter cup had now been mingled for the people of Williamsburgh and Pee Dee; and they were doomed to drain it to the dregs."³³

³² Cornwallis to Wemyss, Aug. 28, 1780, and Wemyss to Cornwallis, Aug. 28, 1780, CP, 2:208-209.

³³ James, *Life of Marion*, 55-57; John Oller, *The Swamp Fox: How Francis Marion Saved the American Revolution* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2016), 61, 62.

Wemyss made a brief effort to pursue Marion, then focused on his assigned task. His troops burned the Presbyterian church in Indiantown and, over the next several days, destroyed some 50 homes along with facilities such as mills and blacksmiths' shops that might be useful to the Revolutionaries. Major James soon returned to inform Marion that "the country through which Wemyss had marched" with his regiment, the Rangers, and militia, "for 70 miles in length, and at places for 15 miles in width, exhibited one continued scene of desolation. On most of the plantations every house was burnt to the ground, the negroes were carried off, the inhabitants plundered, the stock, especially sheep, wantonly killed; and all the provisions, which could not be come at, destroyed." Some of Marion's followers, including Lt. Col. John Ervin and Capt. Maurice Murphy, retaliated by burning the homes of Loyalists in the area.³⁴

Harrison's assistance was especially important to Wemyss because the British officer was unfamiliar with the country, whereas the Rangers "knew the roads, rivers, creeks, ferries, fords, and they were invaluable as guides, scouts and couriers. They also knew the other Loyalists and could lead the British to the homes of the Rebels." One of the homes they visited was that of Major James; Wemyss allegedly confined Mrs. James and the children for two days in their home, hoping to induce Major James to come to their assistance. He did not, and Wemyss burned the house before continuing his operations. After Wemyss concluded his march, the Rangers returned to their camp at Radcliffe's Bridge. They were later assigned to patrol the area between the Pee Dee and Santee rivers to keep the partisans in check.³⁵

Wemyss reported to Cornwallis from Cheraw Court House on September 20, stating that when he arrived at Kingstree, he "was joined by the detachment of Colonel Hamilton's corps, Harrison's of 50, and about 50 militia." They set out after Marion but "never could come up with them, yet I pushed them so hard as in a great measure to break them up. The few that still continue together have retreated over the Little Pee Dee." Wemyss complained of the strong Revolutionary sentiment in the area, remarking that "every inhabitant has been or is concerned in the rebellion, and most of them very deeply." Everywhere he went, he found the men had left their homes, taking their slaves and personal effects. He managed to take "about 20 prisoners" and planned to hang "a notorious villain," Adam Cusack, the next day. His troops, Wemyss observed, were "very healthy" and "pretty well mounted," so that on the previous day they had "marched 56 miles without halting" in an unsuccessful effort "to surprise a party of rebels." During their foray, Wemyss stated, his force had "burnt and laid waste about 50 houses and plantations mostly belonging to people who have either broke their paroles or oath of allegiance and are now in arms against us." Having actively

34 James, *Life of Marion*, 57; Oller, *Swamp Fox*, 63, 64.

35 Bass, "South Carolina Rangers," 67-68.

participated in this destruction, it is not surprising that Harrison later remarked that his actions in support of the British “rendered him obnoxious to the Rebels.”³⁶

Cornwallis replied that he was happy to hear that Wemyss’s troops were healthy, though “in other respects your accounts are not so agreeable.” He instructed Wemyss to proceed to Camden with the 63rd Regiment and Hamilton’s North Carolinians, leaving “Harrison and the militia to keep some kind of hold of the country.” The earl stated that “I will order Major [Thomas] Fraser” of Col. Alexander Innes’s South Carolina Royalists, another provincial regiment, “to mount 50 men on some of the horses you bring back and to go and join Harrison and try to form some militia, or some independent companies if he can get only 100 or even 50 men.” On receipt of the order, Wemyss found it necessary to disobey, telling Cornwallis on September 30 that he would march to Camden the next morning with his entire detachment, including the Rangers. “In regard to Harrison’s corps,” Wemyss observed, they too would come to Camden, “being convinced, were they to be left here, that they would disperse in two or three days. They are if possible worse than militia,” Wemyss declared, “their whole desire being to plunder and steal and, when they have got as much as their horses will carry, to run home.” He noted that under present circumstances the Pee Dee region “cannot be kept by militia, although assisted by a small detachment of Innes’s or Harrison’s corps.” The Revolutionaries were “burning houses and distressing the well affected in a most severe manner,” he wrote.³⁷

Lt. Col. Robert Gray of the Loyalist militia confirmed Wemyss’s assessment; however, he believed that with a sufficient force the area could be secured. Until the army extended its control to the Cape Fear River in North Carolina, Gray remarked, it would not be possible to protect the loyal inhabitants of the Pee Dee region. Meanwhile, Gray urged Cornwallis to post a force at Cheraw consisting at a minimum of “a hundred regular troops well mounted with three hundred well affected militia from some other part of the province including Harrison’s corps. With this number,” Gray believed, “a force might be spared to scour the frontiers occasionally and to secure the different ferries on Peedee betwixt this and the George Town District.” This, wrote Gray, “would effectually cover and overawe Williamsburg Township and King’s Tree,” creating an opportunity to restore “the publick peace.”³⁸

Cornwallis preferred Gray’s suggestion to Wemyss’s pessimistic outlook and chose to follow the militia officer’s advice. “I have directed Lt Colonel [George] Turnbull to send Major Frazer with 80 mounted men, old soldiers, and Harrison’s and the best militia he can get, and hope he will be able

36 Wemyss to Cornwallis, Sept. 20, 1780, CP, 2:214-215; Harrison, Claim, Oct. 3, 1783.

37 Cornwallis to Wemyss, Sept. 26, 1780, and Wemyss to Cornwallis, Sept. 30, 1780, CP, 2:216-217.

38 Lt. Col. Robert Gray to Cornwallis, Sept. 30, 1780, CP, 2:218.

with the help of the militia in the lower districts to secure the country tolerably well,” Cornwallis told Gray, until the army’s advance from Charlotte forced the rebels to abandon the area between the Pee Dee River and Cross Creek, North Carolina. Gray, at his discretion, could assist the “suffering inhabitants” – Loyalists whose homes had been burned by the Revolutionaries – by putting them “into possession of those [houses] belonging to the rebels.”³⁹

The earl had already sent his instructions to Turnbull, who was temporarily commanding the Camden garrison, on September 27. When Wemyss arrived at Camden, Cornwallis wrote, “you will order Major Frazer with 50 of the eldest soldiers of Innes’s corps to be mounted on some of the horses which Wemyss’s detachment or the 7th Regiment may bring in, but not on any that would do for the Legion; to march into that country and to get Harrison to join him with what he can collect; and to endeavour to form either a militia under Lt Colonel Grey, who was in [Colonel William] Mills’s regiment, or to raise two or three independent companys under Harrison, or in short by any means to get two or three hundred men in arms to cooperate with Colonel [James] Cassels and with the militia which Colonel Balfour has ordered on both sides of the Santee.”⁴⁰

While the Rangers were collaborating with Wemyss in the Pee Dee region, uniforms and equipment for the unit arrived at Camden. The shipment included 25 coats for officers, a case of 132 “Russia drill jackets” and a hogshead containing an unspecified number of the jackets for the enlisted men, 280 pairs of overalls, 720 pairs of shoes, 309 canteens, and 8 casks containing “400 setts” of “accoutrements,” probably belts, cartridge boxes, and other items. The quantities were far more than the Rangers required.⁴¹

By late September, though Cornwallis still believed he could derive some benefit from the Rangers, he admitted to Germain that his plans to organize provincial units in South Carolina had failed. “I omitted mentioning” in a previous letter, “that Major Harrison had failed in his attempt to raise a Provincial corps,” Cornwallis wrote, “and ... I was obliged to put a stop to Lt Colonel Cunningham, who was more likely to succeed, on finding that all the principal officers of Ninety Six were entering into it, by which means I should have been totally deprived of the use of that militia for the present.”⁴²

Cornwallis wanted Fraser to collaborate with Harrison, perhaps hoping that the Royalists’ veterans could help train the Rangers, but the earl was also dissatisfied with the condition of Innes’s regiment. On September 17, Cornwallis expressed dismay that the Royalists had yet to reach Camden, observing that they had left Ninety Six several days earlier “and must consequently be at

39 Cornwallis to Gray, Oct. 2, 1780, CP, 2:219.

40 Cornwallis to Lt. Col. George Turnbull, Sept. 27, 1780, CP, 2:240.

41 Robert England to Cornwallis, Sept. 14, 1780, and enclosed invoices, CP, 2:269-270.

42 Cornwallis to Germain, Sept. 21, 1780, CP, 2:39.

or very near Camden.” He also told Major Robert England that “I do not believe that Harrison has got 50 men and had directed Major Wemyss, when his expedition was over, if Harrison had collected men enough to form two or three companys, to send them to Monck’s Corner to be equipp’d,” and asked England to write to Wemyss to “revoke that order.”⁴³

The British failure to secure northeastern South Carolina continued to trouble Cornwallis, since he disliked having hostile territory in his rear as he advanced. He described the area as “so troublesome and fatal to us,” though he still held a shred of hope that Harrison might help restore the situation. “Harrison most certainly will never be able to raise a corps,” Cornwallis told Balfour, but “I think, if he has not lost all weight and influence in that country, he must be able to collect some people to defend their own country and property.”⁴⁴

The earl continued to press Turnbull to send some of the Royalists to reinforce Harrison, and Turnbull, despite his misgivings concerning the condition of the Royalists, attempted to comply with Cornwallis’s orders. After receiving Cornwallis’s September 27 letter, Turnbull replied that Fraser was “still very ill of his wound” and could not lead the detachment; however, he promised that “50 men of Innes’s shall be sent with Harrison’s corps” as Cornwallis had instructed.⁴⁵

When September came to an end without any sign of reinforcements being sent to Harrison, Cornwallis again demanded that the Royalists and Rangers be detached to the Pee Dee region. On October 1, he insisted that Turnbull “lose no time in sending out the detachment under Major Frazer ... after the arrival of Major Wemyss. If Major Frazer should be sick or unable to go, you will choose some other officer,” Cornwallis said.⁴⁶

The next day, having received a dispatch from Wemyss, the earl revised his instructions. He worried that the Loyalist militia under Colonels John Coming Ball, Joseph Wigfall, and James Cassells might “meet with some serious disaster,” so he told Turnbull to add thirty men from the New York Volunteers to the 50 under Fraser and “order Harrison and some of the best militia you can get to go with him.” Fraser’s “object must be to prevent the enemy from undertaking any thing against our militia posts,” Cornwallis noted, “for which purpose he should keep constantly moving, spare no pains or expence to get intelligence of the enemy, and always give them a blow when he can do it with advantage.” He suggested that Fraser consult with Wemyss and Gray to “get a better idea of the country” and that he assist Gray in embodying militia when Gray returned from Charleston. Cornwallis ordered that Fraser’s troops be furnished with horses and reiterated “that no time be lost

43 Cornwallis to Maj. Robert England, Sept. 17, 1780, CP, 2:271.

44 Cornwallis to Balfour, Sept. 27, 1780, CP, 2:99.

45 Turnbull to Cornwallis, Oct. 1, 1780, CP, 2:245-246.

46 Cornwallis to Turnbull, Oct. 1, 1780, CP, 2:243-244.

in their moving.” He added that having “heard a very good character of Major Fraser, I have no doubt of his acquitting himself well in this difficult command.”⁴⁷

On October 2, Turnbull updated Cornwallis on his preparations for the Pee Dee expedition. “When Harrison’s corps comes in” to Camden, he wrote, “we shall try to fit them out as well as we can, and Major Fraser is getting much better. I hope in a few weeks he will be able to take that command.” The Royalists were “expecting a large number of men daily to join them,” but many of those at Camden were suffering from smallpox, leaving “only 91 fit for duty.”⁴⁸

Upon learning that Fraser was “too ill to undertake the service I intended for him,” Cornwallis recommended that Capt. John Coffin of the New York Volunteers “may be a proper person to command the party” if he was at Camden. If not, Cornwallis left the choice of a commander to Turnbull, with the reminder that the “chief object” of the detachment was “to prevent any affront or misfortune happening to our militia on the east of Santee.”⁴⁹

Two days later, Turnbull sent Cornwallis another dispatch implying further delay in detaching the force Cornwallis had ordered to the Pee Dee. “Harrison’s corps, Wemyss says, are not worth any thing,” Turnbull declared. “There is but 50 of them, irregular and plunderers, and are all dispersed. He is gone now to assemble them, and in a week, I suppose, we may see him.” Fraser was not yet recovered, said Turnbull, and Coffin had gone to Charleston to procure clothing for the New York Volunteers. In short, Turnbull did not think the Pee Dee effort was worth attempting. “When Major Wemyss cou’d not establish a militia when he was there with a force, I don’t know what 80 Provincials would do,” Turnbull observed. “I should look upon myself as highly culpable at present were I to send out any small detachment to be sacrificed; therefore shall wait your Lordship’s further orders,” Turnbull wrote, neatly shifting responsibility for whatever might happen to the detachment to Cornwallis’s shoulders.⁵⁰

While Turnbull lamented the shortage of troops at Camden, one of his officers was attempting to strengthen the New York Volunteers by taking men from the Rangers. Capt. Frederick De Peyster wrote to Cornwallis in early October, claiming that “Major Harrison, who I believe has your Lordship’s permission to raise men, informs me he has more than his compl[e]ment, and if I can obtain your Lordship’s approbation, he will permit [me] to have 25 for my company.” There is no record of Cornwallis’s reply; the earl was certainly aware that Harrison had no men to spare, and it is doubtful that Harrison had actually consented to De Peyster’s proposal. In any case, the Rangers never made

47 Cornwallis to Turnbull, Oct. 2, 1780, CP, 2:244-245.

48 Turnbull to Cornwallis, Oct. 2, 1780, CP, 2:247; Tarleton, *History*, 169.

49 Cornwallis to Turnbull, Oct. 3, 1780, CP, 2:246.

50 Turnbull to Cornwallis, Oct. 4, 1780, CP, 2:249-250.

the planned foray to the Pee Dee region. On October 7, Revolutionary militia attacked and almost annihilated Major Patrick Ferguson's provincials and militia at King's Mountain. The disaster ended Cornwallis's invasion of North Carolina, which was stalled at Charlotte, and Gray wrote that "the unfortunate defeat of Major Ferguson ... occasioned the [Pee Dee] expedition to be set aside."⁵¹

The demise of the Pee Dee expedition left Marion free to operate, and he took advantage of the situation. In late September, he dispersed Col. John Coming Ball's Loyalist militia at Black Mingo Creek. The victory caused volunteers to join him, and Maj. Gen. Horatio Gates urged Marion to remain active, thereby distracting the British from the Continental Army that Gates was rebuilding at Charlotte in the aftermath of the disastrous defeat at Camden on August 16. Marion marched to Williamsburg, gathering reinforcements as he went, with the intent "to chastise Harrison, on Lynch's creek." Marion was moving toward McCallum's Ferry on Lynches Creek, where Harrison was frequently based, when he learned that Col. Samuel Tynes had assembled two hundred Loyalist militiamen at Tearcoat Swamp and decided to target them instead. Some of the partisans did act against Harrison in October, striking his home and family rather than the Rangers. They burned his house, leaving his wife and children homeless, plundered his property, and carried off some of his slaves. Capt. Robert Harrison, John's brother, was killed in an action against the partisans on October 14.⁵²

Turnbull ordered the Rangers to come to Camden in late October, though he knew that the British situation in the Black River and Cheraw area remained unfavorable. He informed Rawdon on October 23 that Harrison and his men were camped six miles from Camden, and that he and Major England "intend taking a ride tomorrow to look at them." Turnbull apparently never made the trip, and perhaps forgot that he had already told Rawdon of the Rangers' presence, as six days later he again wrote that "I have brought Major Harrison with his people within a few miles of Camden." He said that England had visited their camp and would "report their state and condition." The muster, conducted on October 24, listed four officers, eight noncommissioned officers, and 89 privates, of whom one was a prisoner in American custody, two were sick, and four were new recruits enlisted in September.⁵³

51 Frederick De Peyster to Cornwallis, [c. Oct. 4, 1780], CP, 2:221; Robert Gray, Loyalist Claim, AO 13/98/238.

52 James, *Life of Marion*, 60; Oller, *Swamp Fox*, 78; Harrison, Memorial, Oct. 3, 1783; Muster, Major John Harrison's Corps, Oct. 24, 1780, in Murtie June Clark, *Loyalists in the Southern Campaign of the Revolutionary War*, Vol. 1 (Baltimore, MD: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1981), 101.

53 Turnbull to Rawdon, Oct. 23, 1780, and Oct. 29, 1780, CP, 2:260, 263; Clark, *Loyalists in the Southern Campaign*, 1:101-102.



Lt. Col. Francis, Lord Rawdon, frequently supervised the Rangers' operations from his Camden headquarters.

Balfour still wished to secure the Pee Dee region and believed that task could best be accomplished by establishing “an intermediate post betwixt Camden and George Town.” He preferred Cheraw despite it being so far north as to be exposed to danger but thought that Kingstree Bridge was an acceptable alternative. Cornwallis discussed the idea with Lt. Col. Banastre Tarleton, who told the earl that at least three or 400 infantry and cavalry would be needed to hold a post there; a smaller force risked defeat or starvation if cut off by the numerous partisans in the region. Cornwallis therefore expressed reluctance to establish a new post there. Having not yet received Cornwallis’s letter, Balfour moved ahead with plans for the Kingstree position. He proposed that the 64th Regiment be employed to fortify the post, after which “all Innes’s corps, with Frazer to command, joined by the [New] York Volunteers” and two troops of horsemen the British planned to raise should hold the works, with the cavalry moving occasionally between there and Georgetown. Balfour noted that he had sent his ideas regarding the Kingstree post to Rawdon, “and if he thinks it too much to spare all the York Volunteers, Coffin’s company

might be sent with Frazer and Harrison's," although he urged that the 64th Regiment should stay at the post until it was fully prepared.⁵⁴

Cornwallis preferred offensive action to defensive measures, as did Tarleton, and the two found "the opportunity favourable to commence an expedition against Marion." Tarleton marched his British Legion down the east bank of the Wateree River to Camden, then turned east to Lynches Creek. He moved rapidly, keeping his force concentrated "lest the Americans should gain any advantage over patrols or detachments." As he advanced, Tarleton tried to ascertain the position and strength of the Americans, having received intelligence that "General Marion's numbers were hourly increasing." Upon his arrival in the Lynches Creek area on November 3, Tarleton informed Cornwallis that "I shall see Major Harrison or some intelligent part of his people tomorrow morning" and would move "at a moment's warning" if he learned of an enemy force within striking distance. Harrison's Rangers joined Tarleton by November 5, bringing the strength of the combined force to about 400.⁵⁵

Tarleton, with the Rangers serving as guides, marched that day to Singleton's Mills in the High Hills of Santee, where Marion was said to be, but Marion with his two hundred men had on the same day moved to Nelson's Ferry on the Santee River. The British and Loyalists then moved to the plantation of the late Revolutionary militia brigadier general Richard Richardson, arriving on November 7. There, a slave informed Tarleton that Marion was at Nelson's Ferry, sixteen miles away. Tarleton believed that Marion would have attacked him at Richardson's during the night had the American commander not been warned "by some treacherous women," though in fact Marion expected Tarleton to come to the ferry and prepared to ambush his force when it was crossing the river. On the morning of November 8, a British prisoner who had escaped from Marion reported that the partisans were moving "in confusion." Based on this information, Tarleton marched in a different direction, which foiled Marion's planned ambush. Marion chose to follow Tarleton and advanced to within three miles of the British and Loyalist position, hoping to make a surprise attack. Tarleton was likewise preparing to lure Marion into a trap.⁵⁶

Having learned that the partisan force was far smaller than initially reported and believing that Marion's refusal to stand and fight confirmed his weakness, Tarleton "divided his corps into several small parties, publishing intelligence that each was a patrol, and that the main body of the King's troops had countermarched to Camden." To avoid being beaten in detail, Tarleton "took care that no detachment should be out of the reach of assistance; and that the whole formed, after dusk every evening, a solid and vigilant corps." He attempted to make the deception as realistic as possible by

54 Balfour to Rawdon, Oct. 26, 1780, Cornwallis to Balfour, Nov. 16, 1780, and Balfour to Cornwallis, Nov. 17, 1780, CP, 2:132, 3:73, 84-85.

55 Tarleton, *History*, 171-172; Lt. Col. Banastre Tarleton to Cornwallis, Nov. 3, 1780, CP, 3:333; Oller, *Swamp Fox*, 85-86.

56 Tarleton to Cornwallis, Nov. 11, 1780, CP, 3:337; Oller, *Swamp Fox*, 85; Bass, "South Carolina Rangers," 68.

falling back, showing “tokens of fear, by leaving camps abruptly and provisions cook’d,” to induce Marion to attack him. In the early morning hours of November 10, Marion nearly took the bait. He led his force cautiously toward Richardson’s plantation, where the British had lit bonfires to attract the Americans. The ambush may have succeeded had Richard Richardson Jr. not managed to leave the house and warn Marion, who quickly withdrew. Tarleton, aware that the partisans had been approaching but perplexed by their slow advance, dispatched scouts to learn the situation. Finding that Marion had retreated, the British and Loyalists set off in pursuit of the Americans, but after a march of “seven hours through swamps and defiles” that covered 26 miles, Tarleton called off the chase. He had temporarily checked Marion’s activities, and “a few prisoners were taken from the swamps by Harrison’s corps,” but the partisans had not been defeated.⁵⁷

During the return march to Camden, Tarleton burned Richardson’s plantation and about thirty others between Nelson’s Ferry and Camden, and destroyed the stored crops. Marion could do nothing to prevent it, as he was short of ammunition and many of his men were intimidated by Tarleton and refused to take the field. However, once it was clear that Tarleton had departed, William Dobein James noted that Marion quickly regained control of the area, so that “the people of that tract of country, on a line, stretching from Camden across to the mouth of Black creek, on Pee Dee, including generally both banks of the Wateree, Santee, and Pee Dee, down to the sea coast, were now (excepting Harrison’s party on Lynch’s creek) either ready or preparing to join Gen. Marion.” Harrison had evidently demonstrated the value of the Rangers to Tarleton, as Rawdon informed Cornwallis in mid-November that “I hear much of the prowess of Harrison’s Rangers, upon the Expedition with Tarleton: a valiant friend of government is a Prodigy of which the World talks.”⁵⁸

From Winnsboro, where he had camped after his withdrawal from Charlotte, Cornwallis assessed the military situation in South Carolina and considered what actions might best preserve British control. He worried about the security of Ninety Six, asserting that unless “immediate offensive measures” were taken there, “every thing will be lost and not easily recovered.” The other point needing prompt attention was Kingstree Bridge, where Cornwallis had finally decided to establish a post. He suggested “sending the weak light company” of the Prince of Wales American Regiment “to join [Maj. Andrew] Maxwell, and the New York Volunteers mounted and Major Fraser with 100 men of Innes’s,” to accomplish the task. Once the post was prepared, the earl hoped that Maxwell and his two companies “and perhaps 50 men of Innes’s” could hold it, assisted by militia “and Harrison’s two companies if we can make any thing of them, which is very uncertain.”⁵⁹

57 Tarleton to Cornwallis, Nov. 11, 1780, CP, 3:337; Oller, *Swamp Fox*, 86, 87; Tarleton, *History*, 172.

58 Oller, *Swamp Fox*, 88; James, *Life of Marion*, 64; Bass, “South Carolina Rangers,” 69.

59 Cornwallis to Balfour, Nov. 12, 1780, CP, 3:71.

Rawdon, after a lengthy discussion with Tarleton, offered his opinion on a post at Kingstree and mounting additional soldiers in a November 14 letter to Cornwallis. It would be several days, Rawdon wrote, before he could send a sufficiently strong detachment to Kingstree, though he would send a small party “in that direction” to persuade the Revolutionaries that there were British forces in the area. He would wait until Tarleton discussed the situation with Cornwallis and the earl made a final decision before sending the larger force, as Tarleton was “strongly against the undertaking.” Regarding mounted units, Rawdon noted that it would take time to prepare the New York Volunteers. Meanwhile, he would “employ Harrison’s as dragoons, and from what Lt Colonel Tarleton says of them I don’t know whether it will not be eligible to keep them mounted.”⁶⁰

A week later at Camden, Rawdon experienced unexpected difficulty with the Rangers. He was writing a letter to Cornwallis on November 21 when a “curious incident” arose that required his immediate attention. After dealing with the matter, Rawdon explained what had occurred in an underlined passage. “Harrison’s people have long been impatient for cloathing,” he wrote. “It arrived yesterday. Last night some of them started a notion that if they took cloathing they were liable to be drafted into regular regiments. In consequence three fourths of the corps have gone off. I have been talking to those who remain, but they don’t seem satisfied. They want to plunder and not to do regular duty. I hope I shall settle it without difficulty.” The young officer did so quickly, informing Cornwallis three days later that “Harrison’s people are all in good humor and most of the absentees have rejoined him.” The Rangers had evidently proved sufficiently reliable for Rawdon to send some of them with dispatches to Cornwallis at Winnsboro. They arrived on November 25, and Cornwallis shared his impression of them with his subordinate. “The officers did not look quite so smart as the men, who really make a very soldier like appearance,” the earl observed. He sent the Rangers back to Camden with his correspondence, retaining two men to carry additional letters later.⁶¹

Shortly afterward, Rawdon worried that the Rangers had marched into trouble. “I am under some apprehension that Harrison and his corps will get into a scrape,” Rawdon remarked to Cornwallis. “The day before yesterday [Nov. 27] Major England ordered Harrison to send a patrol to the first run on the Cheraws Road. Instead of that, Harrison marched with his whole force and has not yet returned. I should not be able to guess where he was, were it not that at least a dozen terrified militia men have been with me to swear that a thousand rebels in blue and red coats and three corner’d hats were scouring the whole country between the branches of Lynches Creek.” They had mistaken the newly uniformed Rangers, many of whom had been issued blue coats, for Continental soldiers. “I should be grieved on many accounts that any misfortune should happen to them,”

60 Rawdon to Cornwallis, Nov. 14, 1780, CP, 3:146.

61 Rawdon to Cornwallis, Nov. 21 and Nov 24, 1780, and Cornwallis to Rawdon, Nov. 25 and Nov. 26, 1780, CP, 3:164, 170-172.

Rawdon continued, “but they thoroughly merit a little chastisement. If they do not get themselves beaten or dispersed, they will probably soon return, and if the enemy has moved in that direction, they must bring me certain information of it.”⁶²

Rawdon’s concerns were partly allayed on November 30 when he received a dispatch from Harrison. The messengers informed Rawdon that “there was certainly no enemy yesterday upon Lynches Creek,” supplementing information he obtained from his own spies that no partisans were below Twelve Mile Creek, either. Rawdon ordered Harrison to return to Camden, “as I do not think him likely to do much service where he is and he might get into a scrape.” Cornwallis replied to Rawdon’s report with a rare show of dry wit. “As to Harrison, I shall be perfectly satisfied if he does not lose the good blue coats,” the earl quipped.⁶³

John Harrison’s troops managed to avoid trouble, but his brothers did not fare so well. During the night of December 4, two of his brothers lost their lives. The pair, who apparently did not serve in the Rangers, were in a house eight miles south of Camden, ill with smallpox, when “a scouting party of rebels burst into the house, shot both the sick men in their beds, tho’ they were incapable of making the least defence, and afterwards murdered the old man of the house in the same manner,” Rawdon told Cornwallis. He added that the next day a group of partisans, perhaps the same one, plundered a house where a woman and her children lived, destroyed everything they could not carry off, and “the woman was left standing in her shift, even her stockings and shoes having been pulled off of her, and her four children were stripped stark naked.” Rawdon denounced the hypocrisy of the Americans in accusing the British of atrocities, declaring that “these are the enemies who talk of the laws and usages of war.” Other Rangers who died in December were William and Stephen Parish, killed by Marion’s men on December 2, and Private Benjamin Payne, killed in action under unknown circumstances.⁶⁴

Rawdon received word on December 1 that Brigadier General Daniel Morgan with a mixed force of infantry and cavalry was in the vicinity of Rocky Mount. One of Rawdon’s informants reported that some American cavalry had camped “beyond Lynches Creek,” 25 miles from Camden, and that “Harrison’s people, upon hearing of this party, immediately went off down Lynches Creek,” apparently to avoid being attacked. Rawdon, however, believed that the American cavalry planned to attack the Loyalist militia at Rugeley’s Mill, a prediction that proved to be correct.⁶⁵

On December 5, Rawdon was able to inform Cornwallis that preparations for securing the Pee Dee

62 Rawdon to Cornwallis, Nov. 29, 1780, CP, 3:183-184.

63 Rawdon to Cornwallis, Nov. 30, 1780, and Cornwallis to Rawdon, Dec. 1, 1780, CP, 3:185.

64 Rawdon to Cornwallis, Dec. 5, 1780, CP, 3:196; Bass, “South Carolina Rangers,” 69.

65 Rawdon to Cornwallis, Dec. 1, 1780, CP, 3:187.

and Santee River region were moving forward; in mid-December, Rawdon dispatched the 64th Regiment under Capt. Dennis Kelly to the High Hills of Santee to oppose Marion. 50 mounted Rangers accompanied Kelly's troops, and Rawdon hoped this force and the garrison at Georgetown would keep Marion at bay and thus allow time for the Loyalist militia in the area to be organized properly.⁶⁶

The Rangers operated against Marion in mid-January 1781, though without success. On January 18, Marion reported to Maj. Gen. Nathanael Greene, who had succeeded Gates in command of the southern Continental Army in December, that Lt. Col. John Ervin had sent a party under Capt. Daniel Conyers to scout the British position at Wright's Bluff. The partisans encountered fourteen men from Harrison's Rangers and in the ensuing fight killed four Loyalists, captured two, and wounded several others. Marion also noted that his men captured five horses and four muskets in the skirmish, while suffering no casualties.⁶⁷

In the wake of the British defeat at Cowpens on January 17, 1781, Cornwallis set off across North Carolina in pursuit of Greene's Continentals, leaving Rawdon to exercise field command of all British and Loyalist forces in South Carolina. Rawdon's priority was to halt or reduce the operations of the partisans, and he intended to take advantage of the recent arrival of the Provincial Light Infantry battalion commanded by Lt. Col. John Watson of the Guards. The unit had been formed in New York by drawing troops from six different provincial regiments and battalions. Watson had taken command of the new battalion on September 12, 1780, and accompanied it to Virginia as part of Brig. Gen. Alexander Leslie's expedition. When Cornwallis summoned Leslie to South Carolina, the Provincial Light Infantry went with the rest of the detachment, arriving at Charleston in December with a strength of nearly 340 men.⁶⁸

Rawdon ordered Watson to act against Marion, and Watson in turn requested that cavalry be attached to his command. Rawdon sent him 20 mounted Rangers under Capt. Samuel Harrison, who guided Watson to an old Indian mound along the Santee River. To provide a secure base, Watson fortified the summit of the mound, which was located about ten miles northwest of the ferry, and bestowed his name on the fort. Capt. Harrison assigned Ensign Richard Lewis and twelve men to Fort Watson's garrison. Watson then asked Rawdon for either artillery or additional cavalry so that he could "act offensively with a prospect of success." Rawdon provided a three-pounder cannon along with instructions "to seek and fight" the partisans "wherever they were found." The partisans, however, more often found Watson, as high water levels in the Santee cut the supply line from

66 Rawdon to Cornwallis, Dec. 5, 1780, Dec. 16, 1780, and Dec. 17, 1780, CP, 3:197, 214, 215.

67 Brig. Gen. Francis Marion to Maj. Gen. Nathanael Greene, Jan. 18, 1781, in Richard K. Showman, ed., *The Papers of General Nathanael Greene* [hereafter PNG] (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), Vol. 7 (1994), 143.

68 Walter T. Dornfest, "John Watson Tadwell Watson and the Provincial Light Infantry, 1780-1781," *Southern Campaigns of the American Revolution*, Vol. 4, No. 2.1 (April-June 2007), 48.

Charleston, forcing the British “to make long marches in pursuit of provisions.” The Americans tried to interrupt these efforts by driving off cattle, firing at long range on Watson’s men, and attacking “by day the sentinels and piquets at night.” The British countered by mounting ambushes for the attackers. Watson praised the light infantry for its conduct in these operations and noted that the other troops demonstrated “courage and zeal ... to emulate the Light Infantry,” including the Rangers, who participated in the operations.⁶⁹

Having by these means reduced the number of attacks on his force, Watson left 40 men in the fort and “began in our turn to beat up Mr. Marion’s quarters.” Watson claimed that his effort was succeeding splendidly and that he had defeated Marion, “pressing him as far as Black River,” when he learned that on February 23, Brig. Gen. Thomas Sumter had captured the supply train bound for Camden. It is likely that some of the Rangers had been assigned to guard the train, as Donald McAlpine, a Scottish-born former captain in the British army, who had been assigned to the Rangers by Rawdon the previous October, was wounded and captured that day. Watson hastened to the banks of the Santee where he intercepted all the boats Sumter had employed to transport the captured supplies, with notable assistance from the pilot guiding the flotilla, who steered the vessels within range of the British. Sumter attempted to retake the goods on February 28, but his attack on the British detachment guarding the wagons failed when Watson rushed to relieve his small party and drove off the partisans, taking, he said, 38 prisoners and thirty horses. Watson noted that in these movements the infantry “were to follow mounted troops,” the Rangers, and this placed a strain on the foot soldiers who expended great effort to keep up with the horsemen. In his report of the battle, Rawdon provide a revised account of American losses, writing that “the enemy were forced to fly, leaving 18 dead on the field, several wounded, and about 40 horses,” compared to British casualties of one junior officer and seven privates wounded. Rawdon noted that “Harrison’s people, mounted and armed with swords, behaved very gallantly, routing the enemy’s cavalry regularly formed and thrice their number.” Sumter, however, managed to escape.⁷⁰

With Sumter forced to the sidelines, at least temporarily, Rawdon set in motion the next phase of his anti-partisan campaign, a strike against Marion. Rawdon reinforced Watson with the 64th Regiment and a second three-pounder cannon. These troops, along with Watson’s own Provincial Light Infantry, Capt. Samuel Harrison’s Ranger dragoons, and Lt. Col. Henry Richbourg’s 150 mounted Loyalist militiamen brought the detachment’s strength to about 500 men. Watson’s orders were to advance into the Pee Dee region, draw Marion’s attention, and defeat him if possible, while

69 Dornfest, “Watson and the Provincial Light Infantry,” 49; Bass, “South Carolina Rangers,” 69; Lt. Col. John Watson, “Narrative of John Watson Tadwell Watson, Lt. Colonel of the Provincial Light Infantry in South Carolina, 1780-1781,” *Southern Campaigns of the American Revolution*, Vol. 4, No. 2.1 (April-June 2007), 56.

70 Watson, “Narrative,” 57; Walter T. Dornfest, *Military Loyalists of the American Revolution: Offices and Regiments, 1775-1783* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2011), 211; Rawdon to Cornwallis, Mar. 7, 1781, CP, 4:47-48.

a second column struck Marion's base at Snow's Island on the Pee Dee River. Watson welcomed the opportunity to move against Marion, as the partisan leader, Watson asserted, had "continued his ravages upon those supposed to be well affected" and "forced those who were disposed to remain at home, out in arms, under pain of military execution."⁷¹

The detachment left Fort Watson on March 7 and marched to Blakely's plantation near Kingstree. Marion learned almost immediately of Watson's movement and marched his 400 men to Wiboo Swamp on March 8, planning to ambush the British when they tried to cross a causeway. Watson arrived there in late morning, and after a brief assessment of the situation, ordered Richbourg and his mounted militia to charge across the causeway. Marion's men fell back, with most of his troops taking a position in the woods, except a mounted party under Col. Peter Horry, "placed in advance at the swamp." When the Loyalists crossed the causeway and saw the partisans' position, they halted, and the Americans charged, driving Richbourg's militia back onto the causeway. Watson's two artillery pieces then opened fire with grapeshot. Marion's men retreated and Watson ordered the Rangers to pursue them. According to William Dobein James, Gavin James, "a private of gigantic size and spirit, mounted on a strong grey horse, and armed with a musket and bayonet threw himself in [the] way" of Harrison's dragoons, shooting one and cutting two others from their horses with his bayonet. Marion ordered a second charge, and a Ranger officer was said to have been killed by Capt. Conyers, though no Rangers are listed as having been killed, wounded, or captured on the muster rolls covering this period. Although the Rangers were driven back, the infantry advanced with bayonets, causing Marion to retreat. American accounts lauded Marion's achievement, while Watson dismissed the engagement as a minor skirmish that resulted in the dispersal of Marion's force.⁷²

The two forces clashed again at Mount Hope Swamp Bridge, probably on March 9 or 10, though Watson gave the date as March 13. The Americans had destroyed the bridge and Lt. Col. Hugh Horry's men were posted on the opposite side to resist a crossing; Watson forced the partisans back with artillery fire, rebuilt the bridge, and crossed unopposed. He then moved to Black River. Marion, however, anticipated the move and ordered Major John James to hasten to the Lower Bridge, destroy it, and guard the crossing until the rest of Marion's men arrived. As Marion had hoped, James reached the bridge before the British and took post in the brush on the east bank. Marion joined him with the rest of his brigade before Watson arrived. Watson approached from the west, where the ground was higher, and, seeing that the bridge was defended, he decided to cross at a ford below the bridge, which was also defended, again using his artillery to drive away the Americans. This time, however, the fire was ineffective because the pieces were on high ground and overshot their targets. The

⁷¹ Oller, *Swamp Fox*, 127; Watson, "Narrative," 57.

⁷² Oller, *Swamp Fox*, 127-131; Dornfest, "Watson and the Provincial Light Infantry," 49; James, *Life of Marion*, 99; Muster, Maj. John Harrison's Corps, 24 Feb.-24 Apr 1781, in Clark, *Loyalists in the Southern Campaign*, 1:105-106.

gunners tried to reposition the guns on lower ground closer to the river but were driven back by rifle fire. Watson then ordered his infantry to cross the ford, only to have the troops driven back by Marion's riflemen. The British broke off the action and withdrew about a mile to John Witherspoon's plantation, where the next day Marion sent riflemen to harass Watson's camp. Watson therefore moved again, to Blakeley's Plantation. British losses in the Black River skirmishes were between 15 and 20 men, while five of Marion's men were killed and eight wounded.⁷³

On March 18, with his troops tired and supplies running short, Watson turned to the southward. Marion followed and interposed his force between the British detachment and Fort Watson. Because Georgetown was only 40 miles from his position, the same distance as Fort Watson, and the road to the former appeared open, along with the fact that supplies for his troops were available in Georgetown, Watson decided to march there. Marion doggedly followed, sending Col. Peter Horry with mounted men and riflemen to strike at the British flanks. Watson reached the Sampit River, only nine miles from Georgetown, on March 20. Unfortunately for him, Marion's men had damaged the bridge and occupied the far bank. The British would have to force a crossing.⁷⁴

Watson described the Sampit River bridge as "rising in pyramid form, so that till upon it, you could not see that the boards had been taken up on the opposite side." He ordered a small party of light infantry to examine the bridge. They quickly came under fire from partisans concealed in thick brush and behind the rail fence of a nearby house. Nevertheless, they discovered the condition of the bridge, managed to cross despite the damage, and drove off the Americans on the far bank.⁷⁵

Marion had not yet run out of tactical surprises. While the light infantrymen were crossing the Sampit, other partisans on the same side of the river as the British attacked the 64th Regiment at the rear of the British column. The troops repulsed the assault with the help of the artillery, but the Americans fell back a short distance and continued firing. Watson ordered the 64th to charge the partisans, but as they advanced "a little knot of them, who from eagerness to run different ways, had got huddled," Watson wrote, "could not clear themselves" from the fire of some of Marion's persistent soldiers. Watson, who noted that he had equipped Harrison's men with "cutlasses and other sword like instruments," ordered the Rangers to charge and relieve the party of the 64th Regiment. The Rangers, however, were afflicted by what Watson called "one of those panics, which are never meant to be accounted for, in the very instant of charge," and while the Americans, anticipating the cavalry's attack, "were twisting how to avoid the stroke" of the Rangers' swords, "every individual man" of the Rangers "turned about, galloped off and would have rode over the

73 Oller, *Swamp Fox*, 134-136, 137; Dornfest, "Watson and the Provincial Light Infantry," 49.

74 Oller, *Swamp Fox*, 139; Dornfest, "Watson and the Provincial Light Infantry," 49.

75 Watson, "Narrative," 57.

64th Regiment, if Captain Kelly, who commanded it, had not ordered his men to present their arms and swore he would fire upon them.” Seeing the British in confusion, some of Marion’s men rallied and fired, hitting Watson’s horse. He was pinned beneath it and a partisan was preparing to fire at him when Watson’s “black servant” shot the American. The Rangers may have recovered their poise and driven off the partisans, or the 64th did. In any case, the action was swiftly concluded, and the British made their way to Georgetown without further opposition.⁷⁶

While Marion was occupied with Watson’s force, Lt. Col. Welbore Ellis Doyle marched from Camden with the New York Volunteers to carry out the second part of Rawdon’s plan and attack Snow’s Island. There is no mention of the Rangers participating in this expedition, though since only part of the unit was with Watson, and Harrison’s troops were familiar with the area, some Rangers probably served as guides. The provincials reached their objective in late March (sources disagree on the actual date) and easily defeated the handful of partisans there, killing seven and capturing 15. They also released 26 prisoners at a cost of two wounded. Marion’s stockpile of supplies was destroyed, some accounts say by the Americans to prevent them from falling into British hands, others attributing the destruction to the British. William Dobein James credited Rawdon with formulating a “well digested” plan of operations against Marion, and remarked that if Watson had been able to cooperate with Doyle in a timely manner, “their overwhelming force, assisted by Harrison and Ganey, with an equal, if not greater number of Tories; there can be little doubt, but Gen. Marion with his scanty means of defence, must either have fallen in the conflict or been driven out of the country.”⁷⁷

During Watson’s campaign against Marion, the issue of American mistreatment of captured Loyalists arose. Watson protested to Marion, who replied that he shared Watson’s abhorrence of unnecessary violence. Watson told Marion that he was glad they agreed in principle, but pointed out that he “must suppose you ignorant of numberless transactions of the people under your command” who were “daily doing what is not customary.” Watson cited several instances of cruelty toward Loyalists, including an incident on January 13, involving “John Stilwell of Hannon’s [Harrison’s] corps whose horse threw him; he got upon his legs and was desired to surrender, which he did; he was asked for his pistol, he delivered it up and was instantly shot through the body with it; he complained of this behaviour he was abused and ordered to deliver his sword, he did, and was cut through the skull in five or six places with his own sword.” Stilwell was discovered by some of his friends who carried him home, where they found that “his brains, that is part of them, were two inches issued from his head. He preserved his senses perfect for two days, and told regularly the

76 Watson, “Narrative,” 57; Oller, *Swamp Fox*, 139; Dornfest, “Watson and the Provincial Light Infantry,” 49.

77 James, *Life of Marion*, 98, 110-111; “Snow’s Island,” https://www.carolana.com/SC/Revolution/revolution_snows_island.html (accessed June 28, 2022).

same story, then died.”⁷⁸

Rawdon’s anti-partisan operations gave the British and Loyalists only a brief respite, because in April Nathanael Greene led his Continental Army back to South Carolina while Cornwallis, following his bloody and barren victory over Greene at Guilford Courthouse, North Carolina, withdrew to Wilmington. Greene detached Lt. Col. Henry “Light-Horse Harry” Lee and his Continental Legion to cooperate with Marion in a campaign against smaller British posts that Greene hoped would cut the supply line between Charleston and the important British positions at Camden and Ninety Six. On April 15, Lee and Marion with their combined force of 400 men besieged Fort Watson and its 114 defenders, including Ensign Richard Lewis and ten enlisted men of the Rangers. The garrison staunchly defended their post until the Americans’ constructed a log tower that allowed riflemen to fire into the fort, resulting in the post’s surrender on April 23. Ranger privates George Poleke and William David were killed during the fighting, and Lewis and the eight surviving Rangers, including Angus McFrail, who had survived the wound he had suffered the previous summer, were captured and released on parole.⁷⁹



In early 1781, some of the Rangers guided Lt. Col. John Watson and his Provincial Light Infantry to this Indian mound on the Santee River, where Watson built a fort he named for himself. Some Rangers participated in the defense of Fort Watson in April 1781.

78 Col. John Watson to Francis Marion, March 15, 1781, in Robert W. Gibbes, ed., *Documentary History of the American Revolution, Consisting of Letters and Papers Relating to the Contest for Liberty Chiefly in South Carolina, from Originals in the Possession of Gen. Francis Marion, by Gen Peter Horry of Marion's Brigade: Together with Others from the Collection of the Editor*, Vol. 3 (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1857), 39.

79 Jim Picuch and John Beakes, “Light Horse Harry” Lee in the War for Independence (Charleston, SC: Nautical & Aviation Publishing, 2013), 153, 156, 158-159; Muster, Maj. John Harrison’s Corps, 24 Feb.-24 Apr 1781, in Clark, *Loyalists in the Southern Campaign*, 1:105-106.

While Marion and Lee dealt with Fort Watson, Greene targeted Camden. He initially attempted to draw Rawdon out of the fortifications by maneuvering, and when that failed, took position on the high ground of Hobkirk's Hill just north of the town. Rawdon sallied from his entrenchments on April 25 and attacked the Continentals, driving them from the hill after a hard-fought engagement. Because he was heavily outnumbered, Rawdon had combed the hospital before the battle to assemble a "Detachment of Convalescents" consisting of 50 men from various units who had recovered sufficiently from their wounds and illnesses to participate in the attack. Capt. Samuel Harrison of the Rangers was among them and was wounded in the battle; perhaps a few other Rangers also fought with the "Convalescents."⁸⁰

After his defeat at Hobkirk's Hill, Greene took a position behind Granny's Quarter Creek. Rawdon elected not to attempt an attack there, because the maneuver would have required "a very extensive circuit in order to head the creek, which would have presented to [Greene] the fairest opportunity of slipping by me to Camden." Instead, Rawdon awaited the arrival of Watson, who reached Camden on May 7 with his detachment, which had been "much reduced in number thro' casualties, sickness and a reinforcement" Watson had left for the Georgetown garrison. Watson also brought the unwelcome news that Marion and Lee had captured Fort Watson on April 23, severing the line of supply and communication between Charleston and Camden. Rawdon realized that under such circumstances he could no longer hold Camden but made a final try to restore the strategic situation by striking Greene. The American general had shifted position, crossed to the west side of the Wateree, and occupied ground behind 25 Mile Creek. During the night of May 7, Rawdon used the restored ferry to cross the Wateree River with his entire force, intending to circle past the American position and attack Greene's rear. Greene, however, learned that Watson had reached Camden and that same evening moved once again. Finding Greene's position behind Sawney's Creek "so strong that I could not hope to force it without suffering such loss as must have crippled my force," Rawdon attempted "to decoy the enemy into action" on May 8, but Greene declined to attack. Frustrated, Rawdon returned to Camden that afternoon. The next day, he decided to evacuate the town, destroyed the fortifications during the night, and left with the troops on the morning of May 10. By May 24, the British force was at Moncks Corner, some thirty miles outside Charleston. The Rangers joined Rawdon's troops during their retreat, leaving their homes behind to assist in holding the defensive lines outside Charleston. In addition to the Rangers, as many as three hundred men from the area east and southeast of Camden accompanied Harrison to Charleston, some bringing along their families and whatever property they could carry.⁸¹

80 Rawdon to Cornwallis, Apr. 25, 1781, and Apr. 26, 1781, CP, 4:179, 180-181; "Return of Killed, Wounded, and Missing ... in the Action on Hobkirk's Hill," Apr. 25, 1781" CP, 183.

81 Rawdon to Cornwallis, May 24, 1781, CP, 5:288-289; Ward, *Between the Lines*, 199; Bass, "South Carolina Rangers," 70; Robert W. Barnwell, "Loyalism in South Carolina, 1765-1785," Ph.D. Dissertation, Duke University, 1941, 640.

As Rawdon approached Charleston, the 19th Regiment under Lt. Col. James Coates and Capt. Archibald Campbell's provincial dragoons relieved the troops at Moncks Corner, who marched into the countryside to meet the troops and refugees returning from Ninety Six. Lt. Stephen Jarvis, a Connecticut Loyalist serving in Campbell's troop, noted that upon his arrival he was asked to assume the duty of commissary for the units at Moncks Corner. "In a few days," Jarvis remarked, "I found myself not only Commissary to the Forces at this Post but also Commanding Officer of all the Cavalry, for all the Officers of the Rangers were absent and also Captain Campbell my Commanding Officer."⁸²

Jarvis, the Rangers, and the rest of the cavalry did not remain idle. In addition to frequent forays along the road to the Santee River, Coates asked Jarvis if it was possible to undertake a foraging expedition, as "the Troops were in want of fresh provisions." Jarvis replied, "Nothing more easy," then demonstrated the truth of his observation by making a sortie into the countryside. Accompanied by guides "who knew the country," Jarvis and his dragoons set out at midnight and at dawn reached two adjacent plantations where they rounded up cattle, sheep, and hogs before returning to their lines at midafternoon.⁸³

After the troops from Ninety Six and the refugees united with Rawdon, who had been reinforced by a detachment under Lt. Col. Alexander Stewart, Greene fell back and crossed the Santee River with his infantry, sending most of his cavalry and some of what Balfour believed were mounted infantry toward Moncks Corner, where Coates with his regiment along with the Royalists and some provincial dragoons were still posted. The Rangers were probably there as well, since in his correspondence during this period, Balfour consistently referred to the mounted troops commanded by Royalist major Thomas Fraser as the "Rangers." The first American units arrived at Moncks Corner on July 14; Balfour believed the force consisted of the commands of Marion, Sumter, Lee, and Lt. Col. William Washington's Continental dragoons.⁸⁴

The next morning, a party of Sumter's men led by Col. Wade Hampton raided St. James's Church in Goose Creek, capturing the congregation during religious services and paroling most of these prisoners. At two o'clock that afternoon, Hampton's force "came within four Miles" of Charleston to strike near Dorchester and the Quarter House. Although Balfour dismissed the incident at the Quarter House as nothing more than the loss of "several Horses" belonging to the quartermaster's department along with "some Dragoon ones belonging to the South Carolina Rangers with a few Invalids of that Regt. who were left in Charge of them & Unable to Make their escape," the action was more serious. Hampton moved from the church to Goose Creek Bridge, where Lee had said

⁸² Stephen Jarvis, "Narrative of Colonel Stephen Jarvis," in James J. Talman, ed., *Loyalist Narratives from Upper Canada* (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1946), 204.

⁸³ Jarvis, "Narrative," 205.

⁸⁴ Balfour to Clinton, July 20, 1781, Alexander Leslie Letterbook, microfilm, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia.

he would meet him, and after “waiting there sometime” with no sign of Lee, Hampton marched toward the Quarter House, where he defeated Lt. David Waugh’s party of 18 Loyalist dragoons. Waugh, who was killed, was an officer in the Royalists, so it is possible that his troops, all of whom were convalescents, had been drawn from several units including the Rangers, or Balfour may have incorrectly identified the unit involved.⁸⁵

On July 16, Jarvis was ordered to undertake a scouting mission toward the Santee River. After riding several miles, he discovered “the tracks of a large body of Horse” on the road. Following the trail, he learned that the Americans “had left the main road in order to gain our right flank.” He hastened back with the news, but before he reached British lines, he learned that the Americans had driven in Coates’s pickets, destroyed the bridge on the road to Charleston and then “took a position in our front leading to the Santee.” Sumter, hoping to surround Coates and his force of between five and six hundred British infantry and Fraser’s 150 Loyalist cavalymen, consisting of the Royalists, Rangers, Campbell’s provincial dragoons under Jarvis, and some of the Queen’s Rangers, had ordered a party to wreck the bridge at Biggin Creek while Hampton blocked the main road to Charleston. Coates, “finding himself nearly Surrounded” and outnumbered, evacuated Moncks Corner, moving northeast to Biggin Church.⁸⁶

At 2 p.m., a slave arrived at the British camp and informed the officers “that the Enemy were at a Plantation about three miles in our front and that their Horses were loose running about the field.” In response, Coates ordered Fraser to take all the cavalry to strike them while he followed with the infantry. Jarvis’s troop led the column, preceded by an advance guard of an officer and six men. In a short time, they spotted some Americans moving on the road and Fraser ordered a charge. Unfortunately, the officer with the advance guard fell when his horse tumbled into a muddy depression, so Jarvis assumed command of the advance. He raced forward with his men, causing the Americans to leave the road and retreat into the woods on his left. He set off in pursuit, but soon heard loud shouting. Looking over his shoulder, Jarvis saw that he and the handful of men who had followed him were “in the Rear of the Right flank of the Enemy who were advancing” while the rest of the British force was retreating. The Americans, two hundred of Marion’s men under Col. Peter Horry and Lt. Col. Hezekiah Maham, had been “Resting, Cooking &c.” wrote Samuel Mathis, at a location about one-and-a-half miles from Biggin Church when “a party of the British Dragoons sally’d out and attack’d us in our Camp but were soon repuls’d and drove quite into their works without any loss on our side.” This was Fraser’s attack, made with the main body of the cavalry. Sumter provided a similar account, reporting that at 5 p.m., “the Enemy’s Cavalry under Major Fraser came out in force

85 Balfour to Clinton, July 20, 1781, Leslie Letterbook; *Royal Gazette*, Charleston, SC, July 14-18, 1781; Sumter to Greene, July 22, 1781, in Dennis M. Conrad, ed., PNG, Vol. 9 (1997), 62-64.

86 Jarvis, “Narrative,” 207; Oller, Swamp Fox, 171; Balfour to Clinton, July 20, 1781, Leslie Letterbook.

and full charge on Colo Horry; but fortunate for us they made a most confused dastardly Attempt.” Although the Americans “were taken somewhat unawares, they repulsed them immediately.” Coates, who had come up with the 19th Regiment, checked the American counterattack. Greene later reported Fraser’s casualties as two officers and ten men killed. Some of the Loyalist dragoons must have been wounded, though no casualty report for Fraser’s troops has been found, and there are no extant muster rolls for the Rangers for the period from June 25 to October 23, 1781, which usually listed casualties and the dates they were incurred.⁸⁷

During the night the British evacuated their position, burning the church and all the supplies they could not carry with them. Although Sumter had sent a party to destroy Wadboo Bridge and thereby block one of Coates’s possible escape routes, the Americans had not completely demolished the bridge before they withdrew, so that the British were able to repair it and cross the stream. At about 3 a.m. on July 17, American troops saw the flames from the burning church and discovered that the British had retreated. The cavalry of Lee’s Legion and Hampton’s militia led the pursuit. Upon reaching Wadboo Bridge, the Americans found that the British had destroyed it and had to move upstream, where there was a ford. They also learned that Coates had divided his force, sending Fraser and the cavalry to the southeast while the infantry marched eastward. Lee chose to follow the infantry while Hampton pursued Fraser, but the Loyalist cavalry crossed the Cooper River at Strawberry Ferry and thwarted Hampton by keeping the boats on the far bank so that the Americans could not cross.⁸⁸

Lee’s Legion and some of Marion’s men under Maham caught up with the rear of the British column at Quinby Bridge after a march of 18 miles. Coates’s troops had loosened the planks on the bridge but not removed them, as their baggage wagons had not yet crossed. The wagons were less than a quarter mile from the bridge when the Americans surged forward, seizing the wagons and capturing the guards. Some of Lee’s cavalry ignored the wagons and the approximately 100 soldiers they had just captured and charged across the bridge, driving off the crew of an artillery piece posted to cover the crossing. As the first Americans rode forward, however, they dislodged many of the loose planks on the bridge, preventing the troops behind them from crossing. Coates organized a counterattack that retook the cannon. He then withdrew a short distance to Shubrick’s Plantation, where Fraser rejoined him with the cavalry.⁸⁹

Coates posted his infantry in strong positions in the house, outbuildings, and behind fences, while

87 Jarvis, “Narrative,” 207-208; Samuel Mathis, “Diary of Samuel Mathis,” July 16, 1781, in Thomas J. Kirkland and Robert M. Kennedy, *Historic Camden, Part One: Colonial and Revolutionary* (Camden, SC: Kershaw County Historical Society, 1994), 403; Brig. Gen. Thomas Sumter to Greene, July 17, 1781, Greene to Thomas McKean, July 26, 1781, PNG, 9:51, 84.

88 “Headnote on the Dog Days Expedition,” in Conrad, ed., PNG, 9:13, 14; Jarvis, “Narrative,” 208-209; Oller, *Swamp Fox*, 172.

89 Oller, *Swamp Fox*, 172-173; Balfour to Clinton, July 20, 1781, Leslie Letterbook.

the cavalymen fed their horses. Jarvis noticed Fraser conferring with Coates; afterward, Fraser ordered the troops to mount, and he departed “with the whole Cavalry and left the 19th. to their fate,” Jarvis complained. Coates had in fact ordered Fraser to take the dragoons to Charleston because in Coates’s opinion, the British position did not allow Fraser to deploy cavalry effectively for defense. After the mounted troops withdrew, Sumter arrived and, against the advice of Marion and Lee, ordered an attack. Some of Sumter’s troops made the initial attack but were checked by a British countercharge. Marion moved to their assistance, halting the British but taking several casualties. The Americans held their ground until their ammunition ran out, when Sumter ordered a retreat. Jarvis, who never learned why the cavalry left Shubrick’s, believed his commanders had erred, writing that “it was wrong for the Cavalry to abandon General Coats for had we been with him we could have done great execution.”⁹⁰

The Rangers saw little action during the following months as British officers spent much of the time reorganizing and refitting the cavalry. That autumn the Rangers also underwent a major reorganization. Their numbers had dwindled significantly during the year. In February the regiment had five officers, seven noncommissioned officers, and 100 privates on the rolls, of whom three had been killed in action, ten had died of non-battle causes, and six had deserted. Five were prisoners, two were wounded, and two others were sick, leaving 72 privates fit for duty. By October 24, the Rangers mustered six officers, one of whom was a prisoner on parole, a surgeon, a quartermaster who had been captured, seven noncommissioned officers, and only sixty-nine privates. Of these latter, 23 were held by the Americans as prisoners, and two were hospitalized due to illness; only 46 privates were available for service. If Major Harrison hoped to enlist some of the refugees who had left their homes at the evacuation of Camden, he had not succeeded. About three-fourths of the three hundred male refugees had left British lines and returned home after hearing a rumor that they were to be drafted into existing regiments. Gen. Leslie, who had arrived in Charleston to assume command of British forces in the South after Cornwallis’s surrender at Yorktown in October, observing that “Harrison commanded a Corps of three Companies,” and that the general “found it expedient to reduce many of the Young Corps. Major Harrison’s three Companies I incorporated into a Troop of Dragoons, & joined it to the South Carolina Royalists.” Leslie gave Harrison the choice of commanding the troop or retiring on half-pay with the rank of major; Harrison chose to continue in service as a captain. “On every occasion during this Gentleman’s Services,” Leslie noted, “they were marked with Zeal, Activity & Spirit.” Harrison wrote that “his Men [of the Rangers] were drafted from him in Octr. 1781 into a Troop of Dragoons of which he had the Command – was given to him by Gl. Leslie,” and he served with them for the remainder of the war. The 56 Rangers who were not

90 Oller, *Swamp Fox*, 174-175; Jarvis, “Narrative,” 208-209.

assigned to Harrison's troop were drafted into the Royalists.⁹¹

The Rangers did acquire one recruit in the fall. Christopher Brown, a native of England, had come to America in 1772 and found work as an overseer on a South Carolina plantation. Brown joined the British during their 1779 incursion into South Carolina and remained with the army's pioneers until after the fall of Charleston. Finding that there was little work for the pioneers, Brown obtained a warrant to raise thirty men for the British Legion, with the promise of a lieutenant's commission upon completion of the assignment. Brown claimed that he had recruited the men and served occasionally with the Legion thereafter, "but was in Charles Town when Col: Tarleton was unfortunately taken Prisoner" at Yorktown. Brown then "Joined a Volunteer Regiment of Horse commanded by Col. Harrison," apparently the independent troop Harrison commanded after the Rangers were disbanded. He served with the unit "till within a short time of the Evacuation of Charles Town," when Leslie appointed him commander of the commissary general department's galley, *Revenge*, which he sailed to St. Augustine before traveling to England with his family.⁹²

Major Harrison also took steps that autumn to prepare for possible British defeat and the likelihood that he would then be forced to leave South Carolina. He had brought a number of slaves with him when he went to Charleston after the British evacuation of Camden, and since he was "without any employment for them," he decided to take advantage of East Florida royal governor Patrick Tonyn's offer of land grants to Loyalists who wished to settle in his province. Harrison arranged to send fourteen of his slaves "under the care of David Drenning [or Drennan]" and his family "to settle and improve a Farm" in East Florida. Upon his arrival at St. Augustine, Drenning applied for a land grant and was awarded two tracts on the north bank of the St. John's River, where the slaves built "temporary houses" and worked at "clearing & improving the ground" on one tract at Harrison's expense. It should be noted that Harrison owned seven slaves at the start of the war, and as he did not state that he sent all his slaves to East Florida, he probably owned more than fourteen at this time. He had probably seized the additional slaves from rebel owners as compensation for the expected loss of his property.⁹³

The Rangers were posted at the Quarter House in late December. Their numbers had been further depleted because many enlistments expired on December 24 and few men chose to reenlist. During the previous 18 months, 42 percent of the Rangers had been lost to death, wounds, capture, and desertion. Harrison commanded the company at his reduced rank of captain, with two lieutenants,

91 Muster, Maj. John Harrison's Corps, 24 Feb.-24 Apr 1781, and Muster, Maj. John Harrison's Corps, Oct. 24, 1781, in Clark, *Loyalists in the Southern Campaign*, 1:105-106; Barnwell, "Loyalism," 641; Harrison, Memorial, Oct. 3, 1783; Harrison, Loyalist Claim, AO 13/119/472.

92 Christopher Brown Loyalist Claim, 1784, AO 12/52/143, 13/125/645.

93 Memorial of John Harrison, Jan. 19, 1787, in Wilbur H. Siebert, *Loyalists in East Florida, 1774 to 1785: The Most Important Documents Pertaining Thereto Edited with an Accompanying Narrative*, Vol. 2 (Deland: Florida State Historical Society, 1929), 140; Lambert, *South Carolina Loyalists*, 261; Harrison, Claim, Oct. 3, 1783.

one of them his brother Samuel, who had also been reduced in rank, an ensign, four sergeants, 47 privates fit for duty, two privates sick, and 23 rank and file prisoners with the Americans.⁹⁴

Leslie reported the status of the cavalry to Clinton at the end of January 1782, observing that “the several detached Corps of Cavalry have been incorporated into distinct ones, under the command of Lieut. Colonel [Benjamin] Thompson [and] from the unwearied attention & diligent efforts of that officer; they are become respectable, and I have every thing to expect from their improvement.” Leslie also noted that all the soldiers were “now well Cloathed; & recovered from ... sickness.”⁹⁵ Thompson led the British cavalry to two victories over the Americans, the first on February 24 at Wambaw Bridge, and the second the next day at Tidyman’s Plantation. There is no mention of the Rangers in any accounts of these actions, so they evidently did not participate.

By June, the remaining troop of South Carolina Rangers had been attached to, or possibly incorporated into, the South Carolina Royalists. A request on May 15 to issue arms to Capt. Harrison’s company described that unit as part of the “1st South Carolina Regiment.” The provincial troops did not see significant action for the remainder of the war, except for one encounter between Fraser’s cavalry and Marion’s troops on August 29 at Fairlawn Plantation. The former Rangers may have been part of Fraser’s force, though there is no documentation of their presence at the engagement.⁹⁶

Some of Harrison’s followers in the Cheraw-Pee Dee region also continued to resist the Revolutionaries. Marion and Loyalist militia major Micajah Ganey had negotiated a neutrality treaty in June 1781. Alleging that some Loyalists had violated the agreement, in June 1782 Governor John Mathews sent Marion back to the Pee Dee region to suppress the Loyalists. This resulted in a new treaty signed that same month. Nevertheless, Loyalists who William Dobein James identified as Harrison’s supporters, most of them likely former Rangers, continued to resist. James noted that while “many had gone with him to the British; with those who remained a species of warfare was waged even after the peace with Great-Britain.”⁹⁷

With the war winding to a close, Leslie’s last act as commander in the South was to supervise the evacuation of Charleston. In October, the provincial troops, the cavalry units having been converted to infantry a few weeks earlier, sailed for East Florida with their families, arriving near the end of the month. Soon after debarking, Harrison learned that his advance planning for a new farm in that

94 “Return of the Strength and Distribution of His Majesty’s Provincial Forces on the Muster from 25th. October to 24th. December 1781,” Cortlandt Skinner Papers, Library of Congress; Bass, “South Carolina Rangers,” 71.

95 Leslie to Clinton, Jan. 29, 1782, Sir Guy Carleton Papers, microfilm, David Library of the American Revolution, Washington Crossing, PA, Vol. 35, No. 4085.

96 “Return of the strength and Distribution of His Majesty’s Provincial Forces on the Muster from the 25th. of April to the 24th. of June Inclusive,” Skinner Papers, Library of Congress; Order, May 15, 1782, for 26 stand of arms for Captain Harrison’s Company of the “1st South Carolina Regiment,” George Wray Papers, Vol. 9, William L. Clements Library, Ann Arbor, MI; “Wadboo Swamp,” https://www.carolana.com/SC/Revolution/revolution_wadboo_swamp.html (accessed Oct. 3, 2022).

97 James, *Life of Marion*, 166-167.

province had been in vain, as under the terms of the peace treaty the British government ceded East Florida to Spain. He had no desire to return to South Carolina, where the state government had, as he anticipated, confiscated his property. The remnants of the Rangers, having been remounted and reconstituted as the South Carolina Light Dragoons while in East Florida, were mustered for the last time on April 25, 1783, to be paid for the period from that date through June 24. Harrison and Lt. Richard Lewis were the only officers, and there were three sergeants, one of whom was on duty at Fort Matanzas, south of St. Augustine, and another on leave in Jamaica. In addition, there were a corporal, a drummer, and 24 privates, though one had been discharged and another transferred to the Royalists. Eight of the privates had enlisted on March 12, so were new to the unit, and one of these was “confined” for some unknown transgression. By October, Harrison was in New Providence in the Bahamas, where he filed his first claim with the British government for reimbursement for his losses. He later traveled to England, supporting his family on the half-pay he had been awarded, and where in 1786 he submitted additional material in support of his original claim. He also indicated his intention to return to the Bahamas. He died in 1795.⁹⁸

John Harrison’s brother and fellow Ranger, Capt. Samuel Harrison, was awarded half-pay in 1783 and probably emigrated from the United States in company with his brother. He died in 1816. Joel Hudson, a captain in the Rangers and then a lieutenant in the Royalists, was also granted half-pay and settled at Country Harbour, Nova Scotia, with five of his brothers and sisters, their parents having died.⁹⁹

Unlike the Americans who vilified John Harrison after the war, British commanders who had served with him praised his loyalty and his efforts on behalf of the crown. Cornwallis, writing on March 14, 1786, in support of Harrison’s Loyalist claim, asserted that “Major Harrison was the first person who offered to raise a Corps in South Carolina after the taking of Charlestown, & received a Commission from me as Major Commandant. He was most Zealous & active in the King’s Service, & I really believe, in the course of the war, raised near three hundred men. His conduct throughout was such as highly to merit the approbation of the Commanding Officers of His Majesty’s Troops.” Lord Rawdon contributed his own testimony on March 15, noting that as major of the Rangers, Harrison “was employed in that Rank, on many Detachments, by me. He behaved with great spirit on every occasion” and “Suffered severely” at the hands of the Revolutionaries both before and after the British occupied South Carolina in 1780.¹⁰⁰

98 John Harrison, Loyalist Claim, AO 13/119/472; Memorial of Harrison, Jan. 19, 1787, in Siebert, *Loyalists in East Florida*, 2:140; Harrison, Memorial, Oct. 3, 1783; Muster, Capt. John Harrison’s Company, South Carolina Light Dragoons, 25 April to 24 June, 1783, in Clark, *Loyalists in the Southern Campaign*, 93-94; Lambert, *South Carolina Loyalists*, 261; Bass, “South Carolina Rangers,” 71.

99 Bass, “South Carolina Rangers,” 71; Lambert, *South Carolina Loyalists*, 273; Dornfest, *Military Loyalists*, 152, 167.

100 John Harrison, Loyalist Claim, AO 13/119/472.

Cornwallis and Rawdon were capable, experienced officers well qualified to assess Harrison's abilities and contributions. Furthermore, they were both ambitious, and were therefore unlikely to have provided such testimony on Harrison's behalf if their statements might be later challenged and their reputations injured as a result. Despite a lack of formal military training for both officers and men, Harrison proved himself a competent commander, and the Rangers generally served effectively. If they plundered their enemies during operations in their home territory, the Rangers probably considered their actions justifiable retaliation after five years of poor treatment at the hands of their neighbors who supported the Revolution. Had the British been able to secure the region between Camden and Georgetown, Harrison may have succeeded in recruiting the 500 men he had expected, but Marion's activities undoubtedly convinced many Loyalists that it was safer to remain home, protect their families, and avoid harassment from rebel partisans. Harrison and his Rangers made valiant efforts on behalf of a cause they believed in, sacrificing much during the conflict, and suffering unmerited disparagement that began soon after the war and has since continued.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jim Piecuch earned B.A. and M.A. degrees at the University of New Hampshire and a Ph.D. in history from the College of William & Mary in Virginia. He is a former professor of history and the author of several books including *South Carolina Provincials: Loyalists in British Service during the American Revolution*, *Seven Myths of the American Revolution*, *The Battle of Camden; Three Peoples, One King: Loyalists, Indians, and Slaves in the Revolutionary South*; biographies of Revolutionary officers John Eager Howard and Henry Lee, and *Cavalry in the American Revolution*. He has also published numerous articles and book chapters on colonial and Revolutionary history and worked as an editor on several historical encyclopedias.

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