

THE CAROLINAS DURING THE REVOLUTION.

From the Southern Literary Messenger. A Sketch of the Military Services Performed by General Dumour, then of the Town of Halifax, North Carolina, during the Revolutionary War.

On the morning of the 16th, whilst Gates and Lord Cornwallis were engaged in the desperate strife that terminated in the overthrow of our army; neither of the contending Generals at that time knowing of the fate of the British army. As soon as Sumpter had accomplished his object, he hastened his retreat up the country with his wagons and prisoners; and avoiding the British post at Little river on that side of the Wateree, 20 miles above Camden, and commanded by Colonel Turnbull, he began to feel himself safe, and slackened his retreat in order to favor his exhausted troops, who had taken no repose for three days and nights. Pushing on, however, to Rocky Mount, he encamped there for the night, and next day marched ten miles further up to Fishing Creek, which he crossed about noon on the 18th and halted his troops, entirely overcome by fatigue and the excessive heat of the weather.

Lord Cornwallis, receiving intelligence on the field of battle in the course of that day, (the 16th) of the loss of his convoy, immediately turned his attention to its recovery, and as soon as the duties he was then engaged in would permit, ordered Colonel Tarleton to be in readiness early the next morning, (the 17th) with his horse and some foot to pursue, retake the convoy and prisoners, and break up Sumpter's force. Tarleton, in obedience to orders, put his troops in motion early next morning, and with his accustomed velocity, dashed up on the Eastern side of the river and crossing at Rocky Mount ford, soon found himself in the vicinity of Sumpter's rear. The General had permitted his troops to repose themselves in any manner their fancy inclined. Many had thrown themselves on the ground under the wagons in the road, to shield themselves from the burning rays of a vertical sun; others were lying about under bushes, near the margins of the road, most of them asleep, whilst the rest were recruiting themselves by bathing in the river. Thus situated, with slender out-guards, which the enemy in some degree eluded, Tarleton rushed upon them almost entirely defenceless and soon made an easy conquest, retook the convoy and prisoners, and destroyed nearly half Sumpter's force, estimated, including continentals, at 600. It was to this force directing its course towards Charlotte, that every one, after the fatal disaster of the 16th, influenced by one common impulse or sentiment, looked for safety to North Carolina; considering that it would be the rallying point for the militia and volunteers of the strong and patriotic counties of Mecklenburg, Rowan, &c., as well as the remnant of continental troops, that might be saved after the dreadful slaughter of the 18th, who, it was presumed, would rally there, and some of whom had actually arrived. Fatal reverse, fatal and heart-rending disappointment! It was to the recital of this horrid story that Major Davie and the rest of the group already mentioned, were so attentively listening with downcast looks and almost bursting hearts, when my companions and myself entered the room.

[Here the narrative breaks off.]

LETTERS ACCOMPANYING THE NARRATIVE.

The North Carolina Militia, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Dudley, having served a tour of duty, agreeable to an Act of the Legislature, is hereby discharged from the Southern Army.

Given in camp near Camden, this 11th May, 1781. By order of Major Gen. Green. O. H. WILLIAMS, D. A. Gen.

MOUNT PLEASANT, 3rd June, 1781.

Sir: I received your favor of this morning, and am glad to hear that the Caswell company of horse are come, though they have been very slow. I wish you to march to Chatham immediately; and as to waiting for the company ordered to be raised there, I doubt will be needless, if you are not already raised; for the Colonel had orders before the Col. of Caswell, and if they are not ready at your arrival, it will appear that nothing is to be expected from that county. However, your movements after you reach Chatham, will depend on circumstances, at present unknown to me and you. If Fanning should be in, or near the county, and his numbers not superior to yours, you will attack him. If he should be gone to some considerable distance, and there is a probability of increasing your body by halting in Chatham a few days, I would advise you to wait; but in all these things you are to exercise your own judgment. You are not to expect any reinforcements from Granville or Randolph, until you reach that county. I beg you to make the defeating of Fanning your first and principal object, though you should be obliged to follow him to a considerable distance. Should that be the case, you will be joined by the Whigs in the counties through which you march, and the further he goes his numbers will decrease. When that pursuit is over, be pleased to return to Randolph county and give the militia to government a sufficient scourge. I have written to Col. Collier to strengthen you on your arrival: be pleased to assist him in mustering and turning out his quota of twelve month men. Your tour may be finished in that county, unless some capital object should call you some other way. As to compelling the abettors of Fanning to make good the damage he has done you and Col. Read, I think it is reasonable, and leave you at liberty therein; but hope in the meantime you will use every means in your power to prevent your men from plundering—writal, I would advise you never to be guilty of such exploits of the Major, one of the gallant associates of the noble, brave and persevering Sumpter, and therefore felt a strong desire to see him; which, having signified to my commander, we instantly departed to the house where I understood the Major was quartered. Here we found him, surrounded by a group of men leaning upon the back wall of the room, resting his left arm upon a pile of empty barrels, and with a serious, downcast countenance, listening to the recital of a man just then arrived, with apparent grief and horror. None of us, nor the inhabitants of the place, had, until that moment, heard the melancholy tidings of Gen. Sumpter's defeat on the West side of the Wateree. Sumpter, hovering about the country near Camden on that side of the river, with four hundred of his faithful associates, gained intelligence of the approach of a rich convoy of stores, consisting of 42 wagons with a proper escort coming from Ninety-Six to the army at Camden, and that they would soon reach the ferry one mile below. Conveying this intelligence immediately to General Gates, with a request that he would send him a reinforcement of continental troops, with two field-pieces to batter down the fort which covered the ferry, when he would be able to seize the rich prize then almost in his grasp. Gates was highly pleased with the information; and although he greatly weakened his most efficient force thereby, caused a detachment to be immediately selected, of four hundred Maryland troops, placed under Colonel Woodford, and two brass six pounders, on the 15th, and forthwith marched to Sumpter. The consequence was that Sumpter readily possessed himself of the

to frage with a friend. The people of Randolph are as very rebellious that light strokes will avail nothing.

I am your obedt servant, JOHN BUTLER.

To Col. Guilford Dudley, at Hillsborough.

CHATHAM, 4th June, 1781.

Dear Col.: Inclosed is a list of the names, some small times past, were plundering, &c. the good people in different parts of the country. I greatly wish if they should fall into your hands, that you would give them no quarter, but instead put them to death. I present myself great pleasure to be thought of, &c. of chastising the d--d villains, and fully intended riding with you a month at least; but my family, (whom I have not seen these four months past) obliger me to go after, and see about them; and the assembly also interfering, entirely prevents, and puts it out of my power at present being with you. However, pray make use of the most coercive measures against them, and burn and destroy every house, &c. belonging to the scoundrels, who have been plundering, &c. if you can have but good reasons only for having been guilty of such villainous practices, I will support you in your conduct at the general assembly. One Labrum, together with a number of others (on the list inclosed) stole from me a quantity of China: pray, good sir, if you can get hold of any of it, and will secure it, you will greatly oblige, Dear Col., Your most obedt servant, J. BUTLER.

P. S. Write me by every opportunity.

WAKE COURT HOUSE, 25th June, 1781.

Sir: Your letter of the 13th and 21st, are both come safe to hand, and I have now to inform you that a few days ago a party of the Cumberland and Bladen people, consisting of about 100, fell in with McNeil and his party of Tories, mostly militia, within ten or twelve miles of Cross Creek; an engagement ensued and our people were put to the rout, their numbers being inferior to McNeil's party. What loss we have sustained is not yet known here, but it is supposed to be considerable. This accident makes it necessary that you should march with your whole force directly to Cross Creek, and join such as may be in arms in that quarter and act against McNeil. Col. Alston will join you on your route down. This movement and the reasons ought to be kept as secret as possible. I am well aware of the great necessity you are under of returning home; but I feel that if you should, all would be in confusion and disorder, as was the case before you joined the regiment. I must therefore, my dear sir, endeavor to prevail on you to continue with the regiment during the sitting of the general assembly, which is not yet known here, but will be pleased to detach a Lieutenant and 12 or 15 men to the North side of Cape Fear river, into the neighborhood of Col. James Keon in Duplin county, or to such other place as Major Moulton, of said county, may advise, to whom you are to refer to the Lieutenant you send. This officer, when posted, is to keep watch over the movements of the enemy at Wilmington; and in case the enemy should move this way, notice thereof is to be sent immediately to me at this place, and also to you wherever you may be; and you are desired in that case to move this way also, as to fall in the enemy's front; but do not advise to enter into an engagement, unless you have the fairest prospect of success. If any thing comes to your knowledge which you think the general assembly ought to know, be pleased to give me the earliest notice. I am, Sir, your obedt servant, JOHN BUTLER.

Col. Dudley, By express.

P. S. Send one of your men with a return of your men, arms, and rounds of ammunition.

JOHN BUTLER.

Col. John Luttrell, of Chatham county, and a member of the Legislature. To the above letter no answer was returned, Col. D. wholly disapproving of some of the suggestions contained in it, and was entirely unqualified from principle and disposition, to comply with Lt. Col. L.'s wishes, so vehemently expressed. The Colonel's letter, however, illustrates the spirit of the times, and practices of the Tories, sometimes dignified with the epithet of loyalists, tho' in fact, with a very few exceptions, they were nothing less than marauders and murderers.

Col. Luttrell was a man of fiery courage, active, enterprising, and firmly attached to the cause of his country; and had suffered severely from the ravages of the Tories—his plantation having been ransacked, his property either destroyed or carried away—his family fled or sent to a place of safety, at a distance, and himself seeking refuge by flying from post to post to avoid the grasp of these demons; which would have been followed by instant death, had he unluckily fallen into their hands. Considerable allowance ought, therefore, to be made for the exasperation and violence of his letter. Lt. Col. Luttrell, however, it is his life in little more than three months afterwards, in a severe conflict which took place between Gen. Butler on one side, and the infamous Col. Fanning and Col. Hector McNeil, on the opposite part, where 2,500 men were engaged in favor of the Tories, was as 300 to 200. Major John Hall, of Chatham county, and a member of the Legislature also, was killed in this action, besides many others. On the part of the Tories, Col. Hector McNeil was killed, and many more, and Col. Fanning severely wounded. The latter, however, made good his retreat to Wilmington, with a great number of men, and afterwards fled to the Government of the State, and a number of continental officers and gentlemen of distinction, taken out of Hillsborough and the adjacent country. G. D.

The paragraph in the foregoing letter which personally applies to Col. D., was predicated on the following circumstances. On the very out-set of his march, Col. D. received advice from Halifax, while in camp, of the death of his father; and that the British, under the guidance of Lord Cornwallis, had plundered him of merchandise and other property to a considerable amount, in that town. But these misfortunes Col. D. kept concealed in his own breast, determined not to think of returning home until he should have defeated Fanning, according to the tenor of his instructions from Gen. Butler, or compelled him to abandon the country with his troops, or such of them as might choose to follow his fortunes. This latter event after various manœuvres on both sides, being happily accomplished, Col. D. believed he might be spared from being a prisoner, and accordingly he communicated his wish to Gen. Butler, promising, at the same time, to give his opinion as to the disposition of the troops into the several counties most in danger, and therefore most interested in the benefit of their aid, always to be in motion. This request on the part of Col. D., for leave of absence, produced the reply contained in the foregoing letter of Gen. Butler; when he made no hesitation about remaining with his regiment in compliance with the General's wish, so forcibly expressed. G. D.

The circumstances contained in the letter, truly depict the wretched and humiliating condition of the large State of North Carolina at this crisis. Without continental troops—without a regiment, or single company of militia in arms, except the regiment of volunteers commanded by Col. D. in one of the two upper districts of the State; and without arms; whilst Col. Fanning had been ranging through a large tract of country, plundering, burning, killing, or driving away the helpless and defenceless inhabitants, to avoid his murderous hands—when the General Assembly, by the Governor, the Council and all the other officers of government and the archives of the State were collected at Wake Court House, and Fanning, in the West and South, within striking distance on the one hand, and a garrison of veteran troops belonging to the enemy in Wilmington, on another hand, from whom a visit was daily expected; without any troops in the field to interpose, save the regiment of volunteers mentioned, who, although ordered away in another direction, could not be spared from the ground they occupied. The result of the present war, was far from being effectually subdued, as subsequent events fully demonstrated. G. D.

WAKE COURT HOUSE, 27th June, 1781.

Sir: I received your favor of yesterday, and am very sorry to find that the gentlemen volunteers, of Hillsborough district, have refused to march to the neighborhood of Cross Creek, for no other reason, but because they are afraid of falling in with the enemy's camp, which they think they will be obliged to do. I beg leave to inform you, that I made no such threat with the men; neither are my orders to the Colonel tantamount to it. However, I have received orders from his Excellency, Thomas Burke, Esq., who is appointed Governor, to request of you to march your regiment to the South side of Cape Fear river, near to Cumberland county line, and remain there 'till further orders. As soon as you have taken post, let me hear from you. I am, sir, with unfeigned respect, Your obedt Huml Servant, JOHN BUTLER, R. G.

Col. Dudley.

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA, July 2nd, 1781.

Sir, I have considered your report relative to the Horse under the command of Col. Dudley, and am clearly of the opinion that your intimation, the Colonel of the battalion, as to the service for which the troops were wanted immediately, and in which they would probably be employed during their whole tour, does by no means amount to an engagement with them, so repugnant to all military service, as that, in no event, they should march out of the district. As I am determined to insist upon the most exact obedience to orders, as well as the most manly and liberal conduct towards the soldiers, nothing shall prevail with me to overlook an offence of either kind; and I shall insist that the orders given to Col. Dudley, for marching against the disaffected who were in arms in the neighborhood of Cross Creek, be carried into execution until I see fit to countermand them. You will therefore be pleased to order Col. Dudley to march with the Horse under his command, by the road on the South side of Cape Fear River to Cross Creek, and take post in the neighborhood thereof in such manner as best to avoid surprise and annoy the enemy. When we shall have sufficiently learned their strength and disposition, Col. Dudley will be so good as to send daily reports of his proceedings and of the enemy's motions in such manner as you will particularly direct him. I am with respect, Sir, Your very obedt servant, THOMAS BURKE.

P. S. I will not presume that these orders will be disobeyed; but if they should, Col. Dudley will immediately put in confinement any person who may be guilty or excite the mutiny, and if it be general, he will report them immediately to you. I will find means to punish.

Gen. Butler.

P. S. I will not presume that these orders will be disobeyed; but if they should, Col. Dudley will immediately put in confinement any person who may be guilty or excite the mutiny, and if it be general, he will report them immediately to you. I will find means to punish.

WAKE COURT HOUSE, 7th July, 1781.

Sir—Your letter of the 6th and the duplicate thereof, are both come to hand. I am truly sorry to find that the officers and soldiers under your command still persist in disobeying orders. The Governor has directed me to request of you to arrest all your officers and repair to this place with them, which I hope you will do. The men, as they are no longer useful, may be left to themselves to return home without discharges, except the one obedient soldier, whom you will be pleased to bring with you. I am with respect, Your obedient servant, JOHN BUTLER.

Col. Guilford Dudley, By express.

WAKE COURT HOUSE, 10th July, 1781.

Dear Sir—Since the officers and soldiers of your regiment have absolutely refused to march out of this district, and are returned home, your continuance as an officer cannot receive further service. Accept my thanks for the services you have done in this part of the country. If you wish to take command of the State troops, intended to be raised, either in the Horse or foot, I will give you my vote and interest. I am, Your obedt servant, JOHN BUTLER.

Col. Dudley.

HALIFAX, Sept. 2d, 1781.

Sir: The bearer, Col. Guilford Dudley, an officer in whom I have much confidence, is dispatched for the purpose of procuring intelligence of the enemy's march and movements. I request you to give him every assistance you can, for the better effecting his object. I also request you to give me by every other means, the earliest notice of any circumstances, from whence may be derived any conclusive opinion of the march and movements of the enemy. When General Butler received orders from Gov. Nash to raise a regiment of light horse of the above description, the men were not only to equip themselves with arms, but to find their own horses, and therefore none but volunteers would answer the purpose for which this regiment was sent into the country—drafted militia, serving on foot, could not; acting against an artful enemy of superior strength, and well mounted too, ranging in every direction through a large extent of country and always in motion. It was therefore, that the Colonel in the counties comprising the district of Hillsboro' (unknown to Gen. Butler) entered into a sort of an engagement with the men, that they should not be marched out of their own district; for it was not only a busy season of the year with farmers, but they had their own fire-sides, their wives and children, and property to protect from an invading and unprincipled foe—in among them, and all around them in every direction but one. When, therefore, Col. D. received orders from Gen. Butler, in obedience to the Governor's directions, to march his regiment against the Tories, he was twenty, thirty, forty miles, as the case might happen, below Cross Creek, through a dreary, piney wood country, and impenetrable swamps, where neither forage for men, but especially forage for horses, could be obtained; and moreover, when they would have to turn their backs upon their own homes and everything that was dear to them exposed to the ravages of an incensed enemy;—both officers and men, for they were all in the same predicament, absolutely refused to obey orders; nor could all the persuasion of Col. D. bring them to alter their fixed resolution. The intimation of the General in the foregoing letter, expressed in the moment of irritation and disappointment, was unjust; for both officers and men were patriotic and brave, and would have freely shed their blood in the cause of their country and for the protection of their own property and liberties. G. D.

Thomas Burke, Esq., had been just elected chief magistrate of North Carolina. He was a man well calculated for the office, particularly in time of war, being possessed of vast talents, firm, energetic, decided and courageous, and withal a great patriot. He not only acted a conspicuous part in framing the constitution of North Carolina in 1776, but had also been a delegate from that State in the old Congress for several years, and was an eminent lawyer. G. D.

In pursuance of the above order, Col. D. had the unpleasant task to perform of arresting all his commissioned officers and repairing with them to Wake Court House; where they had an audience with Gen. Butler, and with they defended their conduct with much ability and propriety. The result was, that the General quietly dismissed them; the private and the staff of the regiment (the Adjutant, Quarter-master and Commissary) having been previously discharged on Cape Fear river. But the consequence of this impolitic measure was attended afterwards with the most distressing circumstances to the country and Gen. Butler, but particularly to Gov. Burke himself, whose decision could not be changed. G. D.

When this letter was written, Col. D. being then present, the Legislature of North Carolina was in session at Wake Court House, and about to raise a legion of horse and foot to consist of about 700 or 750 men, for a specified term, or during the war; to be called "the State troops." Gen. Butler being a prominent member of the Assembly, and possessed of great influence, was, as well as many other leading members, desirous that Col. D. should be appointed to a high command; and the honor of which, from his peculiar situation at that time, and the heavy misfortune and loss he had lately sustained, he was obliged to decline, and to return home, where he was appointed to fill all the different grades of office belonging to the legion. G. D.

route of the enemy and the points on our river at which they may attempt to pass; I hope to be prepared to give them some opposition, although our want of arms will not permit it to be as effectual as I could wish. I am sir, Your very obedt servant, THOMAS BURKE.

Gen. Muhlenberg.

Some time previous to the date of the above letter, and while Cornwallis was lying at Portsmouth, Va., Gen. Muhlenberg had been detached from the Marquis La Fayette's little army, from the North to the South side of James River, with a body of troops to watch the enemy's motions, and to annoy him as much as possible. But before Col. Dudley arrived on James river, Muhlenberg had been recalled, and was then with Gen. La Fayette, at Williamsburg; which was the reason why the above letter from Gov. Burke could not be delivered; it being impracticable to cross James river, 3 and 4 miles wide, for want of boats—all the river and bay craft that had been preserved, together with the boats belonging to the French fleet, having been dispatched to the head of Elk to break down the troops of the Northern army to the shores of action. Col. D. however, on his return to watch the enemy's motions, and to annoy him as much as possible. But before Col. 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