

Camp New Providence

Large encampment of Southern Continental Army and militia on Providence Road at Six Mile Creek, October–December 1780.

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Camp New Providence

Synopsis

Camp New Providence was a large Revolutionary War Continental Army and militia encampment located on Providence Road, highway NC16, where it crosses Six Mile Creek. Its importance is evident from facts:

- It was where American troops advanced after Cornwallis's army evacuated Charlotte, North Carolina.
- It was the most forward fixed American military base opposing the British Army encampment at Winnsboro, South Carolina, during October–December 1780.
- At least 1300 soldiers encamped there for 2 months. These included Brigadier General William Davidson's North Carolina Western (Salisbury) District Militia, Colonel John Paisley's Guilford County Militia, Brigadier General Daniel Morgan's Virginia riflemen and Continental Army Light Infantry companies, and Lieutenant Colonel William Washington's 3rd Continental Light Cavalry, all under Major General William Smallwood. For 5 days, the camp had as many as 2600 soldiers. Of these, about 1400 were Maryland, Delaware, and Virginia Continental soldiers. About 1200 were North Carolina and Virginia militiamen. During those 5 days, Camp New Providence was headquarters of the Continental Army Southern Department. It always had more soldiers than at Charlotte. These troop strengths are computed in this document using a detailed troop deployment, movement, and strength timeline.
- Many general officers were present at this camp. They included: Horatio Gates, William Smallwood, Isaac Huger, Daniel Morgan, William Davidson, Edward Stevens, and John Butler. For two weeks, Nathanael Greene commanded from nearby Charlotte. Other high-ranking or notable officers at the camp included: Abraham Buford, Otho Holland Williams, John Eager Howard, William Richardson Davie, Thaddeus Kosciuszko, William Washington, Anthony White, Charles Armand, and Robert Kirkwood.
- Its position:
 - was close to rich farms in the Waxhaws that provided forage supplies and desperately needed provisions.
 - was close to South Carolina, and thus allowed Americans to project several strong military excursions into South Carolina including the well-known raid that captured Rugeley's Fort using a pine log disguised as a cannon, the so-called "Quaker cannon."
 - was linked to Charlotte where supplies were stored and a hospital existed.
 - supported and raised the spirits of local Mecklenburg Whigs who assembled in large numbers to resist the strong British Army.
 - is evident from at least 5 contemporaneous officer papers and at least 8 soldier pension applications. An 1872 map marks its location as seen and remembered by a resident's mother. That map shows a burial ground that is now obliterated.
 - was a candidate for Continental Army winter camp, but rejected in favor of Charlotte.
- Contemporaneous sources describe soldier hardships and wretched privations that were suffered with fortitude. Many soldiers were barefooted.
- In a 25 November 1780 meeting, American high-ranking officers formulated the creative, and ultimately successful, divided-army strategic response to Cornwallis's threat to overrun both Carolinas.

- The camp's duration spanned the time between two significant battles. It began as a result of Kings Mountain and ended with the strategic redeployment that resulted in Cowpens.
- Despite this camp's large size, duration, and cast of distinguished officers, its history has been overlooked by published history. This omission is both curious and unfortunate.
- Troop movements to and from Camp New Providence are shown on world wide web interactive map <http://www.elehistory.com/amrev/SitesEventsTroopMovements.htm?start=1780-10-20>.
- In 2009, an application for a North Carolina historical marker was submitted and approved.

Timeline Format and Citations

This document follows a strict timeline. That format describes the circumstance when a leader made an important decision or took decisive action. The reader can appreciate the drama of unfolding events and a leader's courage.

History is best appreciated when expressed by actual participants. This document frequently quotes these participants. To assist further research, citations are embedded in the text and appear in the form (author year written, series:volume:page) or some appropriate variation. For example, a quote within a reference is cited as (person quoted year quoted in author year published, series:volume:page). This technique helps evaluate authenticity and, with careful text analysis, often uncovers precise time and place information. A list of all sources, articles, and books appears at the end. Place names and an individual's military rank are specified contemporaneous with the event described. For example, Charlestown was the contemporaneous name of present-day Charleston.

This timeline format with embedded citations creates a working document from which conjectured scenarios can be tested and into which new evidence can be inserted.

Veteran Pension Applications

On 7 June 1832, United States Congress passed a law awarding pensions to all living Revolutionary War veterans. Each applying veteran testified in court about his service, including details about time, place, battles, officers, units, commissions, and discharges. Collaborating witnesses testified. Excerpts from these applications appear throughout this document.

Late summer 1780, Cornwallis's army, American response

In 1780, the American Revolutionary War was over 5 years old. Since 1775, in the South, patriots, called Whigs, had controlled the governments in almost all towns and state governments. They required all residents to sign oaths of allegiance. New state government constitutions were in effect. State legislatures and governors held office. Those residents who wish to remain loyal to the British royal government could not hold public office or expect the Whig governments to protect them. Deep resentments simmered for 5 years and exploded when the British Army invaded the South. In 1778, the British captured Savannah, Georgia. On 12 May 1780, after a 6-week siege, they captured Charlestown, South Carolina. All North Carolina and South Carolina Continental Army regiments were captured and removed from the war. The British Army, under the command of Lieutenant General Charles Lord Cornwallis, immediately extended its control into the Carolina upcountry, establishing strong forts at Augusta, Ninety Six, Camden, and Georgetown. The British strategy was to encourage local loyalists to rise up, fight the Whigs, and reestablish loyal governments.



Lieutenant General Charles Cornwallis
Painted by Thomas Gainsborough, 1783,
National Portrait Gallery, London.

To counter the advancing British Army, the Americans sent a large army under Major General Horatio Gates towards Camden. Unfortunately for the Americans, Cornwallis defeated this large army on 16 August.



Major General Horatio Gates
Painted by Charles Willson Peale, 1782.

Those American soldiers who escaped death or capture reassembled at Hillsborough, North Carolina. Those included Gates with about 800 Continental soldiers plus at least 72 American prisoners recaptured by Marion and Horry (Seymour 1780 in Seymour 1883, 289). At Hillsborough, Gates attempted to reestablish a respectable army by recruitment and reorganization. Three light infantry companies were formed by selecting the most swift and agile young men from the regular units. Captain Brooks commanded the Maryland company, Captain Robert Kirkwood, the Delaware company, and Captain Bruin, the Virginia company (Seymour 1780 in Seymour 1883, 290). Lieutenant Colonel John Eager Howard took command of this light infantry regiment.

Late September, Cornwallis in Charlotte

In September, Cornwallis advanced towards Charlotte, North Carolina, capturing it on 26 September (W. L. Anderson 2008). The American militiamen withdrew as the British advanced. About 500 militiamen of the

Salisbury District militia under Brigadier General William Davidson were posted at Rocky River on Salisbury Road, present-day highway US29 near Lowes Motor Speedway. On 27 September, Major General Jethro Sumner with about 800 Hillsborough District militiamen were in Salisbury. From these men, Colonel John Taylor's regiment from Granville County was detached to Colonel William Richardson Davie, who with 300 cavalymen moved back towards Charlotte (Davie 1810 in Robinson 1976, 26). The next day, Sumner forded Yadkin River at Trading Ford and encamped on the east side. On 30 September, Major General Horatio Gates in Hillsborough ordered Sumner to prevent a British advance beyond the Yadkin River (Gates 1780 in NCSR 1896, XIV:778).



William Richardson Davie

Patriot Officer. North Carolina Governor 1798–1799. Special envoy to France 1799–1800.

Buried in Waxhaw Presbyterian Church cemetery.

Painted by John VanderLyn in Paris, France, 1800.

Early October, Davidson at Rocky River

On 2 October, Gates ordered Major General William Smallwood to rush reinforcements to Major General Jethro Sumner at Trading Ford (Nelson 1976, 246).

Colonel Thomas Sumter had been at Hillsborough conferring with South Carolina Governor John Rutledge. On 6 October, Rutledge promoted Sumter to brigadier general.

In early October, Cornwallis planned an attack further into North Carolina. Tarleton later wrote:

In the beginning of October it was intended to send a corps from Charlotte town, under the orders of Lieutenant-colonel Webster, to attack a party of Americans, commanded by General Sumner, at Alexander's mill, on a branch of Rocky river. (Tarleton 1787, 165).



Lieutenant Colonel Banastre Tarleton

Painted by John Raphael Smith and Joshua Reynolds, 1782.

On 8 October, Davidson learned that Cornwallis ordered his army in Charlotte to draw two days' provisions for a march. Davidson presumed that Cornwallis planned to attack his position at Rocky River. Davidson wrote, "I find he is determined to surprise me & I am as determined to disappoint him." (Davidson 1780 in Davidson 1951, 83). After weeks of stressful fighting, Davie became sick, but remain active (Davie 1810 in Robinson 1976, 26). Davidson reported his concern to Sumner (Davidson 1951, 83). Davie's subordinates Captain Joseph Dickson and Captain Rutledge patrolled Charlotte's perimeter (Davidson 1780 in NCSR 1896, XIV:784).

On 8 October, Gates ordered Colonel Daniel Morgan with his 404 Virginia riflemen, Lieutenant Colonel John Eager Howard's three companies of selected Continental light infantry, and Lieutenant Colonel William Washington's cavalymen to march from Hillsborough to reinforce Sumner at Trading Ford. (Kirkwood 1780, 216) (T. L. Anderson 1780, 2).



Brigadier General Daniel Morgan

Painted by Charles Willson Peale, 1794.

7 October, Kings Mountain

In the foothills west of Charlotte, Major Patrick Ferguson led the western detachment of Cornwallis's army comprised of about 1100 loyalists and provincial troops. On 6 October 1780, they camped on a hilltop near

Kings Mountain, about 30 miles west of Charlotte. The next day, 910 American backwoods militiamen appeared unexpectedly and decisively defeated this force. This American victory was significant because, as a consequence, Cornwallis decided to retreat from Charlotte back to South Carolina.

On 10 October, Major George Tate brought news of the Kings Mountain victory to Davidson at Rocky River. Brigadier General Thomas Sumter, who was returning from Hillsborough, got the same message. Sumter proceeded on and rejoined his men at Bullocks Creek where they had gathered after the battle.

12 October, British evacuate Charlotte

Cornwallis's retreat from Charlotte was caused by the American victory at Kings Mountain. It began in the early evening of 12 October 1780. The British Army was guided along the road to Bigger's Ferry, but moved cross country to Nations Ford Road, losing 20 wagons of equipment and supplies. During the afternoon of 14 October, the British arrived at Nation Ford on Catawba River. Heavy rain, probably caused by the Great Hurricane of 1780, induced many problems. The British Army was extremely vulnerable. American forces quickly followed the British but could not take full advantage. Late on 16 October, the British Army crossed Sugar Creek and proceeded to Land's Ford on Catawba River. (W. L. Anderson 2011)

Camp New Providence

Mid October, American advance, Camp New Providence

On 18 October, Morgan with his Virginia riflemen, Continental light infantry, and Washington's cavalymen marched from Salisbury to Colonel Locke's Farm and the following day to Phifer's Mill (Kirkwood 1780, 216) (T. L. Anderson 1780, 2). Following behind Morgan, Smallwood reached Salisbury on 20 October (Smallwood 1780 in NCSR 1896, XIV:703). Sumner had a long career in the North Carolina Continental Line. He was disappointed that Smallwood, a Marylander, was given command of North Carolina brigade. On 20 October, he submitted his resignation to Smallwood. "I feel myself distressed to signify my declining any further Command of the Line of Militia." (Rankin 1971, 257). His command included militiamen under Colonel John Paisley, Guilford County, and Brigadier General John Butler, Hillsborough District militia.



Major General William Smallwood
Maryland Continental Officer
Assigned command of North Carolina militia.
Painted by Charles Willson Peale, 1782.

While on the march towards Charlotte, Smallwood devised a tentative plan to attack the British. On 20 October, he wrote Gates that Davidson was to command both the North Carolina and Virginia

militiamen. Sumter was to command the South Carolina and Georgia militia. Morgan was to command the Continental light infantry. (Davidson 1951, 93).

On 20 October, Davidson advanced to where Providence Road crossed Six Mile Creek. There horses could water and graze (Davie 1810 in Robinson 1976, 21) (Graham 1827 in Graham 1904, 284) (McLeary, Michael, pension application 1832) (Vernon 1832 in Draper 1873, VV:10:169, 178). The camp was 14 miles from Charlotte and, at that time, entirely within Mecklenburg County. Today, Six Mile Creek forms the boundary between Mecklenburg and Union Counties.

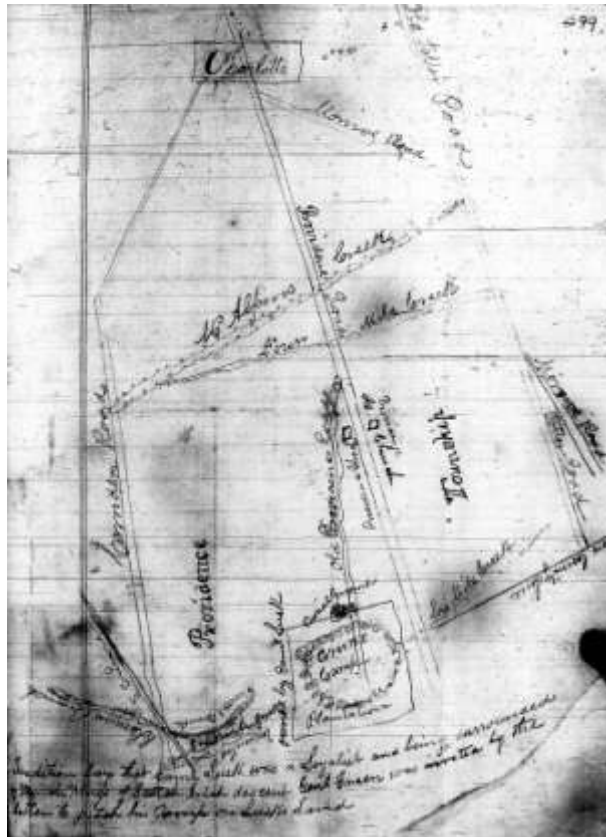
Davidson passed his previous McAlpine Creek campsite used before 25 September. This time he was on the offensive. By camping seven miles further south, he expected better access to provisions. He was closer to South Carolina. Six Mile Creek banks have gentle slopes, suitable for a large camp. Stream headwaters with constant flow were valued for campsites due to their relatively clean water.



Six Mile Creek, site of Camp New Providence

Davidson established Camp New Providence only 8 days after Cornwallis evacuated Charlotte and 1 day before Cornwallis crossed Catawba River east to west. This new camp asserted American control of the east side of Catawba River as far south as the Waxhaws.

On 17 April 1872, Samuel Ellison Belk, a Charlotte resident, wrote a letter responding to questions from professional historian Lyman Draper. Belk wrote that acquaintance Jas H. Morrison's mother, as a young girl, remembered passing through the camp and seeing soldiers washing their shirts in Six Mile Creek. This acquaintance was probably James Houston Morrison, born 1792, died 1875, whose mother was Mary Susannah Houston, born 1771, died 1823. Belk labeled the camp "Green's Camp." He sketched a map of the camp in relation to Providence Road and other landmarks. He reported that the camp was on the plantation of loyalist Samuel Lusk (Belk 1872 in Draper 1873, VV:6:297–299) (Poteet 2009). Today, that location is within the *Providence Crossing* and *HighGate* housing developments.



Samuel Ellison Belk map of Camp New Providence. Shown as “Green’s Camp.”
Burial ground shown on north side. (Belk 1872 in Draper 1873, VV:6:299)

On 30 August 1832, [George Findley testified](#) in a Lawrence County, Tennessee, court:

... he turned out volunteer for three months in all Mecklinburg County, North Carolina in the latter part of the summer 1780 shortly after Gates Defeat under Captain James Rees in Col. Francis Locks Regiment commanded by General Dawson [Davidson] of Mecklinburg at six mile Creek ... (Findley, George, pension application 1832)

On 13 January 1834, Shared Gray, a former resident of Mecklenburg County, [testified](#):

The militia of North Carolina assembled in a large body in Mecklenburg County near a Meeting-house called New Providence. At this place a large body of the Regular Continental Army was also encamped. Thinks that Generals Gates and the Greene were both at this place sometime during the stay of the troops there, but does not recollect distinctly which was in command of the Army. General Morgan & Colonel Washington with their respective commands, were also at this place. (Gray, Shared, pension application 1834)

On 14 May 1833, Doctor James Rankin Alexander, son of Hezekiah Alexander, [testified](#), that he was:

appointed surgeon to a Regiment of Militia raised in Mecklenburg County (N. C.) commanded by Colonel William L. Davidson. His Regiment was first for a while stationed at Rocky River in company with a Col. William R. Davy of Militia Cavalry — thence they both moved to Six Mile Creek between Charlotte & Camden where they joined Generals Smallwood & Morgan with their forces. (Alexander, James Rankin, pension application 1833)

22 October, Continental light infantry arrives at Camp New Providence

On 21 October, Smallwood, Paisley, Morgan, and Washington's units marched to "two miles below Esq^r [Hezekiah] Alexanders" home (T. L. Anderson 1780, 2) (Kirkwood 1780, 216). That site was probably along Edwards Branch. Today, that location is in the back of Evergreen Cemetery on an abandoned road segment that connected present-day Kilborne Drive and Sharon Amity Road (Barden 2010). On 22 October, they joined Davidson at Six Mile Creek bring the total strength to 1300 men (Kirkwood 1780, 216) (T. L. Anderson 1780, 2). They called the location *Camp New Providence*. This location had several advantages:

- It raised the spirits of Mecklenburg Whigs.
- It projected American forces 14 miles south of Charlotte. It asserted American control east of Catawba River.
- It provided a base for foraging the farms in the Waxhaw region of both Carolinas.
- It recaptured assets centered near Charlotte including many gristmills, a hospital, civic leaders, and skilled craftsmen like blacksmiths.
- It provided control of roads leading south from Charlotte. Those were: Providence Road, Camden Road, and Nation Ford Road and their east-west connecting roads.
- It had relatively clean water since it was near the source of Six Mile Creek.

On 22 October, British Major General Alexander Leslie disembarked 2500 soldiers at Portsmouth, Virginia. This force was designed to support Cornwallis as a diversion in the American rear. It was ineffective because Cornwallis was already on the defensive. Soon, Leslie soldiers re-boarded ship and sailed to Charlestown.

When Smallwood learned that Cornwallis had crossed the Catawba River at Land's Ford, he decided not to attack (Davidson 1951, 94). Colonel Davie established an advanced post with 300 cavalymen near Land's Ford (Davie 1810 in Robinson 1976, 28).

On 21 May 1833, [Daniel Apple testified](#) in a Guilford County, North Carolina, court:

That in August 1780 in the County of Guilford N Carolina he volunteered as a private militiaman was under Capt Jacob Clapp of the regiment commanded by Col John Paisley. That immediately thereafter he was marched under the said Captain to the South passing through Salisbury to Charlotte in Mecklenburg County: a few miles beyond which these troops were met by the British under Cornwallis when we retreated repassing Salisbury and the Yadkin River being pursued by the enemy, where our troops were encamped for something like a week, where upon the British returning South our forces were again marched after them and the main army went as far as what was called the Six Mile Creek where it encamped and this applicant was detached page 3: as one of a scout of reconnoitering party that they pursued the enemy as far as the Catawba River upon the border of So Carolina upon reaching the main army we remained there encamped until he was discharged by direction of his Col the said John Paisley. (Apple, Daniel, pension application 1833).

In 1818, [Charity Anderson, an Anderson-related 1st cousin 6 generations removed, married Preston Paisley, nephew of Colonel John Paisley.](#)

On 23 October, in Philadelphia, the Continental Congress appointed Major General Nathanael Greene to succeed Gates. Greene immediately conferred with General George Washington and began his trip south. When news of this transfer reached the Southern Army in early November, commanders began to postpone major decisions.

On 24 October, a correspondent for the *Pennsylvania Packet* reported from Camp New Providence:

General Davidson and colonel Davie possess the entire confidence of their troops, and discipline is better than formerly, when it was more lax. It would give you pleasure to see

the order our camp is in at present, and [we] are much pleased with general Smallwood's arrival [day before] yesterday to take command. (Davidson 1951, 94).

During the British occupation of Charlotte, several of Davidson's men had been captured. Davidson persuaded Smallwood to send an overture to Cornwallis on 24 October to arrange an exchange of these men (Davidson 1951, 94).

On 25 October, the Continental light infantry repositioned ahead of the militia to better defend the camp (Kirkwood 1780, 216). Seymour wrote that the newly arrived units, "moved our encampment further to the right, and in a more regular form." (Seymour 1780 in Seymour 1883, 290). He wrote that "At this place Col. Washington with a detachment of First and Third Light Dragoons, joined us, which, together with the Light Infantry and three companies of Riflemen, formed the Flying Army." (Seymour 1780 in Seymour 1883, 290). At this time, Morgan learned of his 13 October commission of brigadier general from the Continental Congress (T. L. Anderson 1780, 2).



Lieutenant Colonel William Washington
Painted by Charles Willson Peale, 1781–1782.
Washington re-enactor Daniel Murphy, 3rd Continental Light Dragoons

On 26 October 1832, [Richard Vernon testified](#) in a Davidson County, Tennessee, court:

... The British having retreated to Waynesborough [Winnsboro] South Carolina. Gen. Davidson marched us down about the Waxhaw Settlement and took up Winter Quarters at a place called New Providence when Col. Morgan joined us also Col. Howard commanding the Maryland Continental troops while we remained here. Col. Morgan was promoted to Gen, and Col. Howard's Battalion was attached to his Brigade. We remained here until my men's term of service expired. ... (Vernon, Richard, pension application 1832)

On 25 October, in South Carolina, Colonel Francis Marion with 150 men emerged from their hidden camp at Snow Island and crossed the Pee Dee River. The next morning, they attacked a detachment of British soldiers at Tearcoat Swamp (Buchanan 1997, 245).



Colonel Francis Marion crossing Pee Dee River by Ferry
Painted by William Ranney, 1850.

On 27 October, Smallwood wrote Gates that he believed Cornwallis would retreat to Charlestown. Smallwood encouraged Gates to march the remaining Continentals to Camp New Providence to “change the aspects.” (Davidson 1951, 94).

Late October, Cornwallis requests reinforcements, Americans need supplies

On 29 October, the British Army encamped at Winnsboro, South Carolina, a town equally distant from Camden and Ninety Six forts (Stedman 1794, 2:226). They used Mount Zion Academy grounds.



British Army Winnsboro Encampment

Cornwallis immediately requested reinforcements from General Henry Clinton.

The success of the Americans at King’s mountain, and the distance of Earl Cornwallis’ army, prompted many of the disaffected inhabitants of South Carolina again to violate their paroles, and to unite under a leader in the eastern part of the province. Mr. [Francis] Marion, by his zeal and abilities, shewed himself capable of this trust committed to his charge. He collected his adherents at the shortest notice, in the neighbourhood of Black river, and, after making incursions into the friendly districts, or threatening the communications, to avoid pursuit, he disbanded his followers. The alarms occasioned by these insurrections frequently retarded supplies on their way to the army; and a late report

of Marion's strength delayed the junction of the recruits, who had arrived from New York for the corps in the country. The 64th regiment of infantry was ordered to Nelson's ferry from Charles town, and directions were given to Lieutenant-colonel Tarleton to pass the Wateree to awe the insurgents. (Tarleton 1787, 171).

When Sumter learned that Cornwallis established new headquarters at Winnsboro, he recalled his men and encamped west of Catawba River at Hill's Iron Works in upper New Acquisition District, present-day York County, South Carolina (Bass 1961, 94).

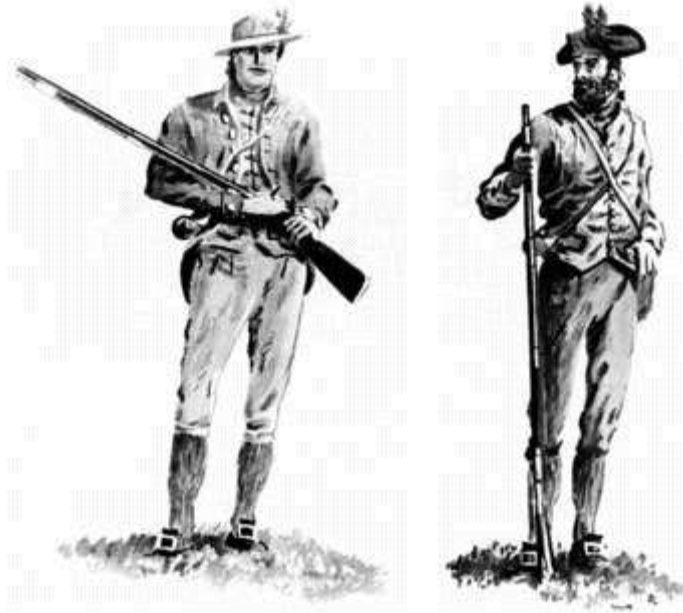
At Camp New Providence, despite expectations, scarcities soon arose. On 31 October, Smallwood wrote Maryland Governor Thomas Lee:

Sir Since my Last Nothing material has occurred except a Great Scarcity of Provisions. Col^o Polk has not even supplied the Regular Troops. Our principal Subsistence has been brought in by Detachments, which they took from the Disaffected who have gone over to the Enemy, and I have now not less than Two Hundred Men employ'd on that Duty which is the only prospect of supplying the Troops till the Late Provision Act for collecting the specific Tax in Provision is more effectually carried into Execution, which I fear at last will not afford an ample Supply; in addition to what Purchases can be made. Forage is also much exhausted, and cannot long be procured for any considerable Force, Plundering prevails to an amazing Degree by Persons who go under the denomination of Volunteers. ... (Smallwood 1780, 45:167) (Smallwood 1780 in Davidson 1951, 95).

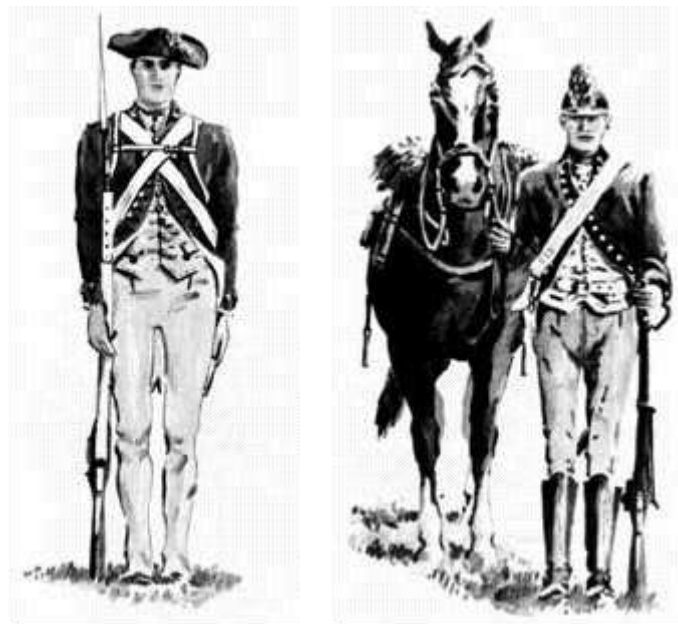
Smallwood ended his letter, "Axes and intrenching Tools are much Wanting." This meant that Smallwood intended to remain at that location and had ordered his soldiers to construct defensive fortifications against British cavalry attack. No doubt, Washington remembered the disasters he suffered being unprotected at Lenud's Ferry and Monck's Corner from Tarleton's British Legion.

Camp New Providence physical description

Camp New Providence was large. Although there is no known written description of its appearance, it can be inferred from historical knowledge of how such camps were equipped, organized, and operated (Peterson 1968). It probably had about 400 tents pitched on the high ground on both sides of Six Mile Creek. Tents were mostly white in color, about 6 feet tall with steeply inclined sides. They were called common or wedge tents. Each tent as assigned to as many as 8 privates (Risch 1981, 148). But because of guard and extra duties, the average use was about 5 privates. Horses grazed along the creek banks. There were hundreds of smoky campfires where soldiers typically ate two meals a day, breakfast and supper. Meals were prepared in small groups of 4 or 5 individuals. While in camp, soldiers drilled under the guidance of a sergeant. They also repaired their uniforms, shoes, saddles, and harnesses. Militiamen wore hunting shirts and linen trousers. Continental soldiers wore buff-colored trousers and blue jackets laced with colors indicating their home state. Washington's cavalymen wore white jackets, white leather trousers, and leather helmets.



North Carolina and Virginia militiamen
 From National Park Service, Guilford Courthouse, web site.



Delaware and Maryland Infantry, Continental Line. William Washington's Cavalry.
 From National Park Service, Guilford Courthouse, web site.

Normally, each Continental Army regiment included a chaplain, a surgeon, drummers, and fifers. The typical rank-and-file soldier was illiterate. High-ranking officers probably had marquee tents with vertical walls, oval in shape, and the size of a small room. In these tents were a few chests of professional and personal baggage and portable folding wooden chairs and table. Compared to today's US Army, officers were aloof. They typically conferred among themselves about strategic concerns. Officers at Camp New Providence were capable men. Some were highly educated and articulate in their letters and written orders. Wealthy officers often traveled with a personal servant. During leisure time, officers socialized with local prominent families. Dancing was a favorite pastime. However, such socializing may not have been an option at Camp New Providence since historic documents mention no nearby farmhouses or other

structures closer than the Presbyterian church, 2.5 miles away. In a 24 November letter, Lieutenant Colonel Otho Holland Williams mentioned that he hunted deer on three or four consecutive mornings. There were probably 50 wagons carrying gunpowder, tents, officer baggage, or barrels of rum. The camp was a busy place. Every few hours, express riders arrived and departed carrying written status reports, strength returns, and the latest news. During the day, local farmers arrived with cattle, chickens, and wagons of produce hoping to sell for currency. Camp New Providence was occupied during the autumn foliage change and the beginning of cold weather. Sickness was common. Unmarked soldier graves may be located at Camp New Providence.

Occasionally, soldiers were ordered to pre-cook their meals for a four to six day march. In the 1700s, walking 20 miles a day was common. No one recorded it as extraordinary. Each soldier carried his musket with cartridges, and food provisions. Shoes wore out quickly, sometimes requiring a soldier to march barefoot. In the late 1700s, shoe technology was surprisingly primitive. The concept of separate left and right shoes had not evolved. Also, shoe repair consumed considerable time and concern. Boots were very expensive and thus seldom used.

Early November, Main army leaves Hillsborough, Incursions into South Carolina

On 2 November, Gates ordered his adjutant general, Lieutenant Colonel Otho Holland Williams, to march the remaining main army towards Salisbury. They included about 700 Maryland, Delaware, and Virginia Continentals along with 2 artillery cannons. Gates followed a few days later with 130 mounted Continentals. (Rankin 1971, 258). These two troops of cavalymen were commanded by Colonel Charles Armand and Lieutenant Colonel Anthony White.



Lieutenant Colonel Otho Holland Williams
Delaware Continental Officer
Adjutant General of Southern Army
Promoted brigadier general in 1782.
Painted by Charles Willson Peale, 1784.

From Camp New Providence, the American Army projected deep incursions into South Carolina. On 3 November, Smallwood issued the following order to Morgan:

Camp New Providence, 3d November, 1780

Dear Sir:

Having understood that the disaffected Inhabitants in the settlements of Lynch Creek, and Waxhaw, since the retreat of the British from Charlotte, have meditated the removal of their property to Camden, I was induced to order Colo. Davie with a detachment down

into that quarter, to intercept all such property, which he might apprehend was about to be removed, and to draw what supplies of forage, and Provisions, could otherwise be procured, exclusive of the stock necessary for consumption of the remaining Inhabitants.

I have this day received intelligence that a party of four hundred British & Tories, have advanced up to the Hanging Rock, to cover the disaffected who are actually removing not only their own effects, but the property of such Whigs as they fall in with, and apprehending the detachment under Colo. Davie will be annoyed in the Execution of their Duty, — You will therefore proceed down with the Cavalry, Light Infantry, and Rifle men below the Range of his duty, to cover them in the discharge thereof. — March with all imaginable secrecy and dispatch, and if possible give the enemy a stroke at the Hanging Rock, should they still be there, and no powerful reasons against it.

In accomplishing your views should it be necessary you will call to your aid any part of Davie's detachment, but otherwise, I would not wish their duty to be obstructed —

It will be unnecessary to caution you to guard against a surprise, and to restrain the soldiery from distressing such of the Inhabitants as may merit your attention. Your own Judgment and vigilance in the first instance, and your Humanity and discretion in the latter, will govern —

It is not improbable but you may fall in with part of our Tents, Waggons, and Baggage plundered by the Tories after General Gates's defeat. Whatever you fall in with under that description secure and forward to camp —

You will give me the earliest, and frequent Intelligence of your transactions, and as speedy as possible accomplishing the views comprised in your Instructions, return to camp — distribute the orders prohibition plundering, copies of which are Enclosed and it may not be amiss to give assurances of Lenity to such Tories, who may return and submit to the mercy of their country, intimating that proclamations to that purpose will be issued. — Wishing you success and a pleasant tour, I am, with sincere —

Your obdt. Humble servt.

W. Smallwood (Smallwood 1780 in Hunt 1892, 6–8)

Beginning 4 November, Morgan's Continental light infantry and Washington's cavalry advanced towards Camden. They stopped at Hanging Rock, near present-day Heath Springs, South Carolina (Seymour 1780 in Seymour 1883, 290). This incursion caused a British reaction.

Earl Cornwallis was impressed with an idea that the Americans had a design upon Camden : The report of the advance of General Morgan towards the head of Lynche's creek, with Colonel Washington's cavalry, and a body of continental infantry, together with the exaggerated accounts of Marion's force, gave plausibility to the supposition. The situation and importance of the magazine [Camden] caused early jealousy and immediate attention. The light troops, however, on their arrival at Camden, found no reason to expect an attack from General Morgan, and Lieutenant-colonel Tarleton thought the opportunity favorable to commence an expedition against Marion. (Tarleton 1787, 171).

On 6 November, Smallwood sent the following vague order to Morgan:

Camp 6th November, 1780

Dear Sir:

I have just recd. Advice from Genl. Sumter, that a favourable opportunity of effecting something to our advantage offers on the other side the Catawba; you will therefore view the expediency of dispatching your tour below as soon as possible that we may avail

ourselves. — We have had no news since you left us, neither of the British in Virginia nor of Genl. Gates's coming on or forwarding the Continental Troops. I expect the Augusta [Virginia] Rifle men here to-morrow, one Hundred and Six in number, these I shall detain here unless you should require them below, as I imagine their service with you at this time will not be wanting —

I am with Sincere regard
Your Obed. Hble Servt.
W. Smallwood

P. S. The Enemy are still in Winsborough, Sumter informs me are likely to remain there for some time — and continue to make detachments some distance from their camp — after Provisions & Plunder. (Smallwood 1780 in Hunt 1892, 10–11)

On 7 November, Smallwood sent an order to Morgan:

Camp N. Providence, 7th Nov. 1780

Dear Sir:

I have just recd an intimation to be depended on that Tarleton's Legion to the amount of five hundred Cavalry and Infantry mounted, was three days ago at the ferry opposite Camden; this hint I think necessary to give, to guard you against a surprise, or any excursion they may have in view to attack you in a divided state, or intercept any of your parties — you will therefore avail yourself of the Hint, and keep a watchful eye on their motions, should they approach upward

I am
with great regard
your obed Hble servt
W. Smallwood.

N. B. (This information comes from Genl Sumpter) — Since writing the above I have it from good authority that Tarleton had crossed to Camden and had moved from there before Day. On Sunday morning, [5 November] he gave out he was going up the Hanging Rock road, but I rather think he took the road to the High Hills of Santee against Marion, otherwise you must have fallen in with him; he is Four Hundred Strong. I would therefore recommend that you move up & draw your and the principal part of Davies force to a point, covering such detachments as it may be necessary to make; by this means you will be more than sufficient to cope with him should he approach upwards. I shall send a detachment down to join you in the morning, and could wish our force would admit of a strong one. Give me the earliest intimation of occurrences, and your opinion of moving a large force to you. I am persuaded you will be vigilant and cautious and then you will have nothing to dread. Adieu. (Smallwood 1780 in Hunt 1892, 11–13)

Morgan and Washington returned to Camp New Providence, arriving 9 November (Seymour 1780 in Seymour 1883, 290).

On 6 November, Major General Gates arrived at Guilford Courthouse with his entourage of cavalry. There he met Virginia Brigadier General Edward Stevens with his 300 militiamen. They were ill equipped to continue. So Gates send them back to Hillsborough, "to be Arm'd and Accoutred, and in some Degree equip'd before they can March from thence." (Nelson 1976, 249).

On 7 November, the North Carolina Board of War informed Davidson that it had intended to send him a "Horseman's Tent," but because it was mis-packed, he would be sent a "Marquee." (Davidson 1951, 95).

On 10 November, Cornwallis wrote a favorable reply to Smallwood's prisoner-exchange offer (Davidson 1951, 95).

On 11 November, Gates arrived at Salisbury. There he ordered Stevens to march his newly equipped militiamen to Salisbury.

On 13 November, Gates wrote Morgan:

I hear by report that I am to be recalled, and that Greene is to succeed to the command of the Southern department. But of this I have not the smallest intimation from Congress, which, I conceive, would have been the case, had the business been finally settled. I think exactly as you do in regard to the command, and am impatient for the arrival of General Greene. (Gates 1780 in Hunt 1892, 9)

On 14 November, a British messenger, carrying a white flag, approached Camp New Providence along Providence Road. Smallwood believed its purpose was to spy on the American encampment, and so sent it back without a reply (Seymour 1780 in Seymour 1883, 291). Smallwood's suspicion may have been justified, since on 3 December, Cornwallis reported to his superior General Henry Clinton:

Smallwood has been encamped from the beginning of last month with about thirteen hundred Militia, a Corps of 250 Continentals under Morgan and 70 Dragoons Commanded by Washington, about 12 miles on this side of Charlotte Town, his front guarded by Davie and other irregular Corps, who have committed the most shocking cruelties and the most horrid Murders on those suspected of being our friends that I ever heard of ... (Robinson 1957, 88)

On 15 November, the American general officers at Salisbury met and decided to encamp the American army at Charlotte while Cornwallis remained encamped at Winnsboro (Nelson 1976, 249). The existing Charlotte hospital may have been a consideration.

About this time, enlistments of Davidson and Davie's men began to expire. Davidson was relatively lenient in issuing discharges. On 15 November, Davie complained to Smallwood that he needed the men that Davidson was discharging. He wrote:

The torments of the damned are scarcely equal to the torture of my feelings there five of six days past, from the rage of the militia for returning home. Most of them deserted before the last evening. (Davidson 1951, 96).

Davie abandoned his advanced post at Land's Ford, South Carolina (Davie 1820 in Robinson 1976, 38) (Robinson 1957, 88). Davie planned to raise a legion of mounted infantrymen attached to Brigadier General Morgan's force (Davie 1820 in Robinson 1976, 39). In Salisbury, on 23 November, he appealed for authority from the North Carolina Board of War, but his application was not considered (Hamilton and Battle 1907, 8).

On 20 November, Gates arrived in Charlotte with the 700 Continentals and 400 North Carolina and Virginia militiamen. About this time, Gates learned that his 22-year-old son Robert had died of illness (Nelson 1976, 250). Williams wrote his wife that he was, "sorry for the good Old man." (O. H. Williams 1780, 70).

On 20 November, Sumter defeated Tarleton at Blackstocks, but was seriously injured. On 22 November, Davidson wrote Sumter:

My anxiety for you (least your Wound be fatal) is such that I have scarcely spirit to congratulate you on your glorious victory. I sincerely wish you a speedy recovery, and in the meantime regret the Want of your services in the field, at this critical and important Juncture. Gen'l Gates with the Continental Troops will be at Charlotte tomorrow, We lie at the old post a dead weight on the Publick. I think I am possessed of all the patience

necessary to my profession but I assure you it is nearly exhausted. (Davidson 1780 in Davidson 1951, 97).

Mid November, Main army marches to Camp New Providence, Officer meeting

On 22 November, Major General Horatio Gates along with the newly arrived 700 Continental regular infantry and 400 militiamen marched from Charlotte to Camp New Providence. The new Continentals camped a mile further down Providence Road (Seymour 1780 in Seymour 1883, 291), probably near present-day Weddington. That raised the total camp strength to approximately 2600 soldiers.

On 29 October 1832, [William Neel testified](#) in a Giles County, Virginia, court:

In the year 1780 (as he thinks) he went as a volunteer from Augusta County, Virginia with a company under the command of Capt. Buchanan in company with two other companies commanded by Captain Tate and Gilmore from the state of North Carolina and joined General Morgan at Six Mile Creek. (Neel, William, pension application 1832).

At the camp, on 25 November, Gates conducted an important meeting, designated a “Council of War,” to discuss provision shortages, the prospect of attacking the British, soldier sickness, and camp suitability. In attendance were Major General William Smallwood, Brigadier General Daniel Morgan, Brigadier General William Lee Davidson, Brigadier General Isaac Huger [pronounced Hū-gāy], Colonel Tadeusz Kosciuszko [pronounced Tha-dāy-ūse Kosh-chūs-kō], Colonel Abraham Buford, Lieutenant Colonel William Washington, and Lieutenant Colonel John Eager Howard. These were all the principal officers of the Southern Continental Army except for Lieutenant Colonel Otho Holland Williams who was in Charlotte. Davie was in Salisbury planning to establish a “legion” force to replace militiamen discharged a few days before. Gates contemplated making Camp New Providence the winter camp of the Army Southern Department. However, during this meeting, the officers decided to relocate to Charlotte (Davidson 1951, 97).

At a Council of War held at the Camp at New Providence, in the State of North Carolina, the 25th November, 1780, Consisting of
The Commander in Chief.
Major General Smallwood.
Brigadier General Huger.
Brigadier General Morgan.
Brigadier General Davidson.
Colonel Kosciusko, Chief Engineer.
Colonel Buford.
Lt. Colonel Howard.
Lt. Colonel Washington.

The Council being assembled, the Commander in Chief acquainted them

That—The want of Provisions and Forage in this Camp—The advanced Season of the Year—The almost total Failure of the Herbage—The entire want of a Magazine of Salted Meat and the Uncertainty of providing it—The increasing Sickness and the unwholesome Situation of the Camp—The want of any proper accommodation for the sick—The want of Hospital Stores and proper Comforts necessary for sick and deceased Soldiers—The probability of a Reinforcement being sent from the Enemy at New York—The Invasion of Virginia, and the apparent Prospect of Sir Harry Clinton's supporting that Invasion and Commanding a Co-operation with Lord Cornwallis—The State and Strength of this army compared with that of the Enemy, and the Expectancy of Reinforcements coming to our Army, are the motives which induced him to assemble the Council of War and to request their Opinion of the Movements and the Position the Army ought to take in the present circumstances.

The Council having fully deliberated upon the matter before them—And the question being put, What Position the Troops ought to take? Whether at or near Charlotte, or at the

Waxhaws, or in that Neighborhood, The Junior Member, Lieut. Colonel Washington, gave it as his Opinion—That at or near Charlotte should be the present Position of the Army, to which every other member of the Council assented but General Smallwood, who was for the Army's moving to the Waxhaws, taking post there for three weeks, and then returning to Charlotte.

Sign'd
HORATIO GATES.
W. SMALLWOOD.
ISAAC HUGER.
DANIEL MORGAN.
WM. DAVIDSON.
THAD. KOSCIUSZKO.
N. BUFORD.
J. E. HOWARD.
WM. WASHINGTON.

True Copy. Chrisr. Richmond, Secy. to Genl. Gates. (NCSR 1896, XV:160–161)

No officer was prepared to take decisive action knowing that Major General Nathanael Greene would soon take command. Young Brigadier General William Lee Davidson was sorely disappointed that no action was planned at the 25 November meeting. He proposed an innovative plan to divide the American Army, but it was rejected. On 27 November, he submitted the plan to Colonel Alexander Martin on the North Carolina Board of War, hoping to gain its support.

Sir—

By this time you may be acquainted with the position the Army is to take for the present. In the meantime it appears to me that a proper Exertion of the Militia of my District might greatly Injure, if not totally Ruin, the British Army. I have been deliberating on this Matter some time; and submit my plan to your Consideration and hope that you will endeavor to promote it or something that may be more Eligible. My Scheme is to send Genl. Morgan to the Westward with his light Troops & Rifle men, 1000 voluntier Militia which I can raise in 20 days & the Refugees from South Carolina and Georgia, to join which will make a formidable Body of Desperadoes the whole to be under Morgan's Direction and proceed immediately to 96 and possess ourselves of the western parts of South Carolina, at the Same time the main Army to move down to the Waxhaws which will oblige the Enemy to divide (which will put them quite in our power) or vacate the present Posts & collect to one point in which Case we can command the Country cut off their supplies and force them to retreat & fight the Militia in their own way. The Messenger waits I have neither time nor Room to make farther observations. I think the Scheme practicable and certain of success unless the Enemy be reinforced. Favor me with your Opinion on this Matter and believe me, Dr. Sir.

Your very Obdt.
& Hbl. Servt.
Wm. L. Davidson

N. B. this comes to you in a private Capacity.
(Davidson 1780 in Davidson 1951, 98).

This letter shows that Davidson originated the imaginative idea to divide the American Army, an insight historians have attributed to Major General Nathanael Greene when he ordered it into effect on 16 December.

On 25 November, Gates submitted to the Continental Congress his army's strength return. It consisted of 1053 Continentals, mostly Marylanders, 1147 militiamen, plus Morgan's 404 riflemen. (Nelson 1976, 251).

Another source indicates that the army had 1187 Continentals, 1283 militiamen, plus Morgan's 476 riflemen, a total of 2946. Of these, 743, 873, and 430, respectively, a total of 2046, were fit for duty (Lesser 1976, 189). Not mentioned in these strength returns were an additional 300 Virginia militiamen led by Brigadier General Edward Stevens.

A Field Return of the Southern Army Under Command of Major General Gates, Camp New Providence, North Carolina,
25th November, 1780.

BRIGADES.	FIELD		COMMISSION'D.					STAFF OFFICERS.					NOS COR'D R. AND F. FIT FOR DUTY.											
	Colonels. Lt. Colonels. Majors.	Capitains.	Capt. Lieutenants.	Lieutenants.	Ensigns.	Adjutants.	Pay Masters.	Qr. Masters.	Surgeons.	Mates.	Serjt. Majors.	Q. M. Sergeants.	Drum Majors.	Pike Majors.	Sergeants.	Drum's & Fifers.	Rk & File for Duty	Sick Present.	Sick Absent.	On Command.	On Extra Service.	On Furlough.	Total Rank & File.	
Continental Brigade	1	0	10	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1000
General Morgan's Brigade	1	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	404
Gen'l Davidson's Brigade, Militia	0	0	20	0	16	19	4	0	1	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1147
Grand Total.	1	1	34	0	16	19	4	0	1	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2604

N. B. Colo. Penseley's Regiment of Militia, Consisting of four Captains, 3 Subalterns, 8 Sergeants and two hundred Privates, will be Discharged by the 27th Instant, and the Term of Service of the Militia in General will Expire by the 5th of December next.
JOHN DAVIDSON, B. M.

Strength Return of 25 November 1780 at Camp New Providence, not original

Tarleton later described the British assessment during late November:

About this time, the American force in North Carolina assumed a tolerable appearance. General Gates had advanced from Hillsborough in the middle of November, to reinforce the detachments on the Yadkin; and on the 25th, he again moved forwards with the continentals and militia, to Six-mile run, where he was soon joined by Colonels White, Washington, and Armand, with two hundred cavalry, and two pieces of cannon. This position was not far distant from the frontier of South Carolina, and was adopted in order to give spirit and vigour to the militia. The American commander published reports, that he would advance to the Tuckaseege ford, to protect the detachments which invaded Ninety Six; and that General Smallwood would remain with a powerful corps at Six-mile run, which, in case of any movement of Lord Cornwallis across Broad river, would incline towards the head of Black creek, to give strength and influence to Marion, who, in consequence of such assistance, might be able to destroy the communications between Camden and Charles town. (Tarleton 1787, 181).



Colonel Charles Armand Tuffin, cavalryman
Marquis de la Rouerie from Brittany, France

For 5 days, Camp New Providence was headquarters of the Continental Army Southern Department. On 27 November, Gates with his 700 regular Continentals returned to Charlotte and started constructing winter huts (Rankin 1971, 261). Each hut was probably constructed like the 12-man log huts used at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, and Morristown, New Jersey.

Late November–Early December, Rugeley's Fort

Smallwood was to follow Gates to Charlotte on 28 November, but intelligence of a supply of corn and forage in the Waxhaws changed his plans. Morgan argued strenuously that horses needed the forage. Such an incursion would require that Smallwood remain at Camp New Providence for support. (Higginbotham 1961, 113). Although Smallwood argued against the plan, on 28 November, Gates ordered Morgan with his light troops on a foraging expedition towards Camden (Rankin 1976, 9). Only the sick and barefoot men remained in camp (Seymour 1780 in Seymour 1883, 291). Washington's cavalrymen with some Continentals advanced to Rugeley's [pronounced Rūg·lē] Fort on Grannies Quarter Creek, about 14 miles north of Camden (Seymour 1780 in Seymour 1883, 291). There, on 1 December, he tricked the loyalist defenders into a bloodless surrender using a "Quaker cannon," a pine log disguised as an artillery piece. Sergeant Major William Seymour of the Delaware Continentals wrote:

On the 28th our Horse and Infantry marched for Rugeley's mill, leaving our tents standing, and the sick and barefoot men left as a guard. We came before Rugeley's on the first December where Col. Rugely lay, with his Regiment of Tories, in number about two hundred, strongly fortified. Col. Washington with the light Horse being sent to draw them out, who ordered a party of them to dismount and represent Infantry, they getting a large pine knot, hauling along which served for a piece of cannon, and had the same effect as if it was the best piece in Christendom. The great piece of ordinance was drawn up in full view of the Tories. Col. Washington at the same time sent in a sergeant with a flag demanding the Tories to surrender, upon which Col. Rugely demanded some time to consider, but the sergeant who bore the flag made answer and told him that we had cannon and would put them all to immediate death if they did not give up, upon which the Tories marched out and gave up their fortifications, without so much as firing a single shot, and surrendered themselves up as prisoners of war. On the 2^d December we returned towards camp, which we reached on the 4th — one hundred miles. Next day the prisoners were sent to Hillsborough, being escorted by a detachment of Col. [Dempsey] Moore's militia of North Carolina. (Seymour 1780 in Seymour 1883, 291)

Tarleton later described this event.

In the beginning of December, General Morgan and Colonel Washington, with some continental light infantry and cavalry, advanced through the Wacsaws to Hanging rock; from which place they detached a threatening summons to Colonel Rugeley, who commanded the militia of the Camden district, and was posted with one hundred men at his own house, where some defences had been erected. Rugeley being intimidated by the summons, and the appearance of the Americans, who placed the resemblance of a cannon opposite his house, surrendered to the light dragoons, without firing a shot. The continental infantry had not advanced within three miles of the post, when this irresolute commander laid down his arms. General Morgan retreated with his prisoners to the main army, ... (Tarleton 1787, 182).

Even Cornwallis was dismayed. On 4 December, he wrote Tarleton from Winnsboro:

Rugeley will not be made a brigadier. He surrendered without firing a shot, himself and one hundred and three rank and file, to the cavalry only : A deserter of Morgan's assures us that the infantry never came within three miles of the house. (Cornwallis 1780 in Tarleton 1787, 205).

On 11 January 1836, [Private Holloway Pass testified](#) in a Caswell County, North Carolina, court that, as a guard, he escorted the Rugeley prisoners to Salisbury

... that on the 15th day of September 1780, this declarant volunteered under Captain James Wilson in the County of Caswell and State of North Carolina and was march[ed] on the same day to Caswell old Court House (now Seaburg) and there joined themselves to the Regiment under the command of Col. William Moore, and was thence marched to Hillsborough, North Carolina and there continued some two or three days (perhaps a week); from there we march[ed] to Bells Mill on Deep River and was there stationed some few week[s], during which time of the stay of the troops at Bells Mill, James Rainey, Esq. (Who is now the Chairman of our County Court &) and who was one of the volunteers of the same company was taken sick & this affiant was appointed to wait and attend upon him. From Bells Mill on Deep River this declarant with the Regiment commanded by Col. William Moore as aforesaid was march[ed] to the Yadkin River near Salisbury N. C. and there stationed some two or three weeks. At this place, Dempsey Moore was appointed Major of the Regiment. From this place this Declarant with the Regiment was marched through Salisbury and Charlotte N.C. to the neighbourhood of the War Saw [Waxhaw] Settlement to a place called the Six Mile Creeks or the Three Mile Creeks and was there again stationed, watching the enemy and cutting off their supplies. At this place we met with Col. Washington who commanded a company of Horse [illegible]. Whilst we were here also Genl Morgan joined us with his infantry. Whilst at this place and in the neighbourhood, this Declarant, with the company to which he belonged, went with Col. Washington to a place called Rugeleys Fort and there lay a stratagem. Captured all the Tories and enemy of the place and took the fort. This Declarant was thence ordered as one of the guards which brought the prisoners to Salisbury and confined them; ... (Pass, Holloway, pension application 1836).

Early December, Greene arrives in Charlotte

Congress appointed Major General Greene head of the American Southern Army. He had been traveling south since 23 October. During his trip south, he left his second-in-command Major General Friedrich Baron von Steuben in Richmond, Virginia, to command the Virginia Continentals opposing British forces in Chesapeake Bay (Rankin 1971, 260). While in Hillsborough, Greene asked Major General Jethro Sumner, who had resigned on 20 October, to reestablish the North Carolina Continental Line by pardoning deserters if necessary (Rankin 1971, 260). Greene sent artilleryman Lieutenant Colonel Edward Carrington and engineer Colonel Tadeusz Kosciuszko to thoroughly scout the Dan, Yadkin, and Catawba Rivers to note the military significance of each ford and to inventory boats at each ferry.



Major General Nathanael Greene
Painted by Charles Willson Peale, 1783.

On 2 December 1780, Major General Nathanael Greene arrived in Charlotte. He spent the first night with Thomas Polk assessing all conditions. Later, Polk's commented, "By the following morning Greene better understood the resources of the country than Gates had during the whole period of his command." (W. M. Polk 1915, 27).



Major General Nathanael Greene arrives at Charlotte, 2 December 1780.
Painted by Howard Pyle, 1903, Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington, Delaware.



North Carolina historical marker, 1987.

In 2010, moved to site of historical event on North Tryon Street.

Formal change of command occurred the next day. About 40 years later, Judge William Johnson wrote:

A manly resignation marked the conduct of General Gates on the arrival of his successor, whom he received at head quarters with that liberal and gentlemanly air which was habitual with him. General Greene observed a plain, candid, respectful manner, neither betraying compassion nor the want of it—nothing like the pride of official consequence even *seemed*. In short, the officers who were present, had an elegant lesson of propriety exhibited on a most delicate and interesting occasion. General Greene was announced to the army as commanding officer, by General Gates; and the same day General Greene addressed the army, in which address, he paid General Gates the compliment of confirming all his standing orders. (Johnson 1822, 1:510)

Earlier Greene was ordered to conduct a court of inquiry into Gate's conduct during the 16 August Camden battle. Gates wanted to clear his name. Nonetheless, after conferring with all field officers, Greene decided other army concerns made a court impossible (Nelson 1976, 252). Gates left Charlotte on 8 December.

Army strength was 2307 infantrymen, 60 artillerists, and 90 cavalrymen. Of these, only about 800 were completely uniformed and equipped (Rankin 1971, 262) (Buchanan 1997, 288) (Robinson 1957, 94). In a letter to Joseph Reed of Pennsylvania, Greene wrote:

I overtook the army at Charlotte, to which place General Gates had advanced. The appearance of the troops was wretched beyond description, and their distress, on account of provisions, was little less than their sufferings for want of clothing and other necessities. (Greene 1780 in Commager and Morris 1975, 1152)

Greene sent all sheeting and osnaburg, a burlap-like cloth, in Charlotte to Salisbury to be sewn into shirts and trousers by the women of Rowan County. He offered to pay the seamstresses in salt (Rankin 1976, 12). For administrative continuity, Greene re-appointed Lieutenant Colonel Otho Williams as adjutant general (Rankin 1976, 14).

On 5 December, the terms of enlistment for all remaining Davidson militiamen expired. All were discharged and returned home, leaving Davidson without troops to command. On 16 April 1833, [James Bradford testified](#) in a Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, court:

... He further sayeth that in the same year [1780], the month not recollected, he entered the service as a substitute for Joseph I. [unknown] under Captain James Reep and Colonel Phifer. Served the Whole of the three months in the County of Mecklenburg, N.C. frequently on scouting parties but the main [unknown] on Six Mile Creek in said county, and at the end of this three months was discharged by [unknown] and released with others. (Bradford, James, pension application 1833).

On 8 December, Greene and South Carolina Governor John Rutledge ventured out of Charlotte to Price's stone house near Armour's Ford (I. Price 1796) to confer with Brigadier General Thomas Sumter who was

recovering from a serious shoulder wound received at Blackstocks. Sumter attempted to persuade Greene to attack Cornwallis at Winnsboro before he was reinforced. But Greene followed the defensive strategy he learned from years with General George Washington. Greene was not about to risk his army against Cornwallis's 2500 professional troops (Morrill 1993, 121).

On 8 December, Governor John Rutledge accounted for the deployment and strength of American troops in the Carolinas. He wrote that "Ab^t 1000 Cont^{ls} of Maryland, Delaware, & Virgⁿ Cont^{ls} at Charlotte & wth Gen^l Smallwood 16 miles below it." (Barnwell April 1917).

Since the previous May, both British and American armies had exhausted supplies in Mecklenburg and Waxhaw regions (Davie 1820 in Robinson 1976, 38). On 8 December, Greene ordered Colonel Tadeusz Kosciuszko to locate an alternate camp location.

You will go with Major Polke [William Polk] and examine the Country from the Mouth of Little River twenty or thirty Miles down the Peedee and search for a good position for the army. You will report the make of the Country, the nature of the soil, the quality of the water, the quantity of Produce, number of Mills and the water transportation that may be had up and down the River. You will also Enquire respecting the creeks in the Rear of the fords and the difficulty of passing them, all of which you will report as soon as possible. (Greene 1780 in Buchanan 1997, 291).



Colonel Tadeusz Kosciuszko
Painted by Julian Rys, 1897.

Discipline was a serious problem. On 8 December, Greene wrote Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Hamilton, George Washington's chief of staff, "The Officers have got such a habit of negligence, and the soldiers so loose and disorderly, that it is next to impossible to give it a military complexion." (Buchanan 1997, 290) Greene ordered a deserter hung in the town square. An observant soldier remarked, "It is new Lords, new laws." (Rankin 1971, 263).

The commissary general, Colonel Thomas Polk, could not secure sufficient provisions and asked to be relieved on 10 December. Polk made a final delivery of 500 head of cattle and 1000 bushels of corn (J. H. Williams 2010). Greene assigned this office to Colonel Davie despite Davie's wish to remain in the field. On 11 December, Greene wrote Davie:

Your character and standing in the Country lead me to believe you are the most suitable person to succeed him. It is a place of great consequence to the Army; and all our future operations depend upon it. As you are a single man, and have health, education, and activity to manage the business, it is my wish you should accept the appointment;

especially as you have an extensive influence among the Inhabitants, and are upon a good footing and much respected in the Army. (Greene 1780 in Buchanan 1997, 293) (Greene 1780 in Robinson 1957, 97) (Greene 1780 in Davie 1810 in Robinson 1976, 64)

Major Joseph Dickson probably assumed Davie's former cavalry command. But it had to wait for new reenlistments to reach full strength.

Beginning 13 December, William Washington with light horse made an incursion towards Hanging Rock (Seymour 1780 in Seymour 1883, 292).

On 13 December, British Major General Alexander Leslie arrived in Charlestown harbor with reinforcements for Cornwallis (Tarleton 1787, 242).

17 December, Camp New Providence abandoned

There is no evidence that Greene personally inspected his troops at Camp New Providence. On 16 December, Greene ordered Morgan with his 400 Virginia riflemen, 300 Continentals, and Washington's 70 cavalymen to cross the Catawba (Higginbotham 1961, 122). Greene's order to William Washington was:

Washington and his regiment are to join Gen. Daniel Morgan's detachment. He should follow Morgan's orders concerning the "the time and place for joining." Those of his men who are still at New Providence will accompany Morgan; those from Colonel [Anthony] White's regiment who are with Washington should proceed to Anson Courthouse on the Pee Dee River and wait there for Nathanael Greene's orders. (Greene 1780 in PNG 1997, VI:590)

Greene ordered Davidson to unite whatever new militiamen he could recruit with Morgan. At that time, about 100 militia volunteers had embodied at Ramsour's Mill.

On 17 December, Camp New Providence was abandoned. All remaining Continentals marched to Charlotte. Sergeant Major William Seymour, of the Delaware Continentals, wrote:

We lay on this ground from the 22^d November [Seymour arrived with the Continental light infantry on 22 October] till the 17th December, and marched to Charlotte, fifteen miles. Same day [relieved] General Smallwood set out on his march for Maryland. At this time the troops were in a most shocking condition for the want of clothing, especially shoes, and we having kept open campaign all winter the troops were taking sick fast. Here the manly fortitude of the troop of the Maryland Line was very great, being obliged to march and do duty barefoot, being all the winter the chief part of them wanting coats and shoes, which they bore with the greatest patience imaginable, for which their praise should never be forgotten; and indeed in all the hardships which they had undergone they never seemed to frown. (Seymour 1780 in Seymour 1883, 292)

They left behind dead soldiers whose graves that today have been obliterated. As late as 1872, the burial ground's existence was known and sketched on a rough map (Belk 1872 in Draper 1873, VV:6:299). Camp New Providence was a principal Southern Continental Army and militia camp from 20 October to 17 December 1780.

In many ways Camp New Providence was similar to Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, during the winter of 1777–1778, albeit much smaller.

- It occurred while the Continental Army was being reorganized.
- It asserted control of countryside against garrisoned British troops.
- It occurred during cool weather.
- Foraging was a primary concern.
- Soldier hardships were severe.
- Plans were laid for future actions.

In December 2009, a North Carolina historical marker for Camp New Providence was approved by the North Carolina Office of Archives and History (W. L. Anderson 2010).



North Carolina historical marker, erected 2 November 2010.

Late December, Charlotte

Major General William Smallwood asked Greene to make him second-in-command of the southern army. Greene refused. Disappointed, Smallwood asked to be reassigned. He departed Charlotte on 19 December. In his place, Greene appointed Davidson head of all North Carolina militia, subject to approval of the North Carolina General Assembly (Rankin 1971, 265).

On 19 December, Leslie marched about 1530 British troops out of Charlestown towards Winnsboro (Tarleton 1787, 243).

On 20 December, Greene implemented Davidson's imaginative idea to divide the American Southern Army as part of his strategic plan to counter the British goal of sweeping through North Carolina and Virginia. His strategy was defensive and reflected policies of General George Washington under whom Greene had served for several years. The principal objective was to avoid a decisive defeat, like Camden, and simultaneously to maximize British costs. So, Greene tried to entice the British Army as far from its Charlestown base as possible, threaten its supply lines to Charlestown, and always maintain an escape route for his main army. He created a more mobile army by adding cavalry units. He characterized his objective as a "flying army." The eastern army went to Cheraw Hills near Cheraw, South Carolina.

On 16 July 1833, [John Helms testified](#) in a Lincoln County, North Carolina, court:

That he moved from Botetourt County State of Virginia into Rowan County North Carolina in the year 1780 and that he volunteered in August or September of said year and joined the American army at the Six Mile Creek in Rowan [Mecklenburg] County North Carolina under Captain Smith. Marched from there to Charlotte, Mecklenburg County, N. Carolina from thence to Rocky River, from there he was marched to near the place now called Cheraw Hills, South Carolina, ... (Helms, John, pension application 1833)

The western army under Brigadier General Daniel Morgan left Charlotte and on 22 December crossed the Catawba River at Bigger's Ferry. That ferry was located downstream of Crowder's Creek and upstream of Big Allison Creek. Bigger's Ferry was later named Mason's Ferry. Today, it is submerged under Lake Wylie. The western access road to Bigger's Ferry is present-day South Carolina road SR46-1099.

Lieutenant Colonel John Eager Howard commanded the 300 Continental light infantry in Morgan's army.



Lieutenant Colonel John Eager Howard
Maryland Continental Officer
Name in lyrics of state song *Maryland, My Maryland*.
Painted by Charles Willson Peale, 1784.

Morgan positioned his army so as to threaten Ninety Six. Greene's decision was an unexpected and apparent risky action that invited attack on either part. But it was well reasoned, as he explained later.

It makes the most of my inferior force, for it compels my adversary to divide his, and holds him in doubt as to his line of conduct. He cannot leave Morgan behind him to come at me, or his posts at Ninety Six and Augusta would be exposed. And he cannot chase Morgan far, or prosecute his views upon Virginia while I can have the whole country open before me. I am as near to Charlestown as he is, and as near Hillsborough as I was at Charlotte; so I am in no danger of being cut off from my reinforcements. (Morrill 1993, 123).

When Davidson reached his volunteers at Ramsour's Mill, he found less than 90. Most had been drawn away by a Cherokee attack encouraged by the British. On 24 December, Davidson wrote Morgan:

The Expedition against the Overhill Cherokee Towns, & the Murder committed in Rutherford & Burke Counties have intirely drawn the attention of the people who were to compose my Command. I suspect it to be a Stratagem as Tories were undoubtedly concerned in the Murder. (Davidson 1780 in Davidson 1951, 103).

Davidson said he would wait until 26 December, and then, "I shall move to Join you be my force what it may." (Davidson 1780 in Davidson 1951, 103). At the direction of North Carolina Governor Abner Nash, Davidson sent orders to all Salisbury District colonels to complete their drafts and assemble their men in Charlotte on 10 January 1781. Because Davie was no longer available, Davidson ordered Captain Joseph Graham to raise a cavalry troop. By this time, Graham had recovered from his severe wounds of 26 September. Within 3 weeks, Graham had about 50 men equipped with serviceable weapons (Graham 1832 in Graham 1904, 49–50).

On 25 December, Morgan encamped at Grindal Shoals on the Pacolet River. During the following week, Davidson delivered only 120 militiamen to Morgan, and returned to Charlotte to raise more (Davidson 1951, 104).

Apparently, Greene's actions surprised Cornwallis. On Tuesday, 26 December, Cornwallis wrote Tarleton:

A man came this morning from Charlotte town; his fidelity is, however, very doubtful; he says, that Greene marched on Wednesday last [20 December] towards the Cheraws, to

join General Caswall, and that Morgan, with his infantry and one hundred and twenty-four of Washington's light horse, crossed Biggar's ferry, on Thursday and Friday last, to join Lacey. I expect more certain intelligence before night, when you shall hear again from me. (Cornwallis 1780 in Tarleton 1787, 243).

Varying success and failure of each army exacerbated conflict between Whig and Tory neighbors. From Cheraw, Greene wrote Alexander Hamilton, "The division between people is much greater than I imagined; and the Whigs and Tories persecute each other with a savage fury. There is nothing but murder and devastation in every quarter." (Rankin 1976, 23).

Troop Deployment, Movement, and Strength Timeline

Why did knowledge of Camp New Providence fall into obscurity? Perhaps it was a combination of:

- Since the camp was located in the countryside and not in a town, there was no obvious name. Most officers called the site "Camp New Providence," but other participants used "Six Mile Creek" or "Six Mile Run." Others used "Providence" or "near Waxhaw settlement." Others did not name it, but referred only to its distance from Charlotte as 12, 14, or 15 miles.
- The American Army was being reorganized. The division and merging of units and their separate movements is difficult to follow. The troop deployment, movement, and strength timeline below reduces this complexity and measures the number of soldiers at Camp New Providence.
- No battle occurred there.
- Local farmers probably wanted to forget the event because of the destructive impact on their grain stores and livestock.
- Maryland and Delaware Continental officers were not motivated to precisely locate a place far from their home.
- After the Continental main army arrived on 22 November 1780, for 5 days, the camp was actually two camps separated by one mile.
- Davidson died on 1 February 1781. Had he lived longer, he could have better told the story. Davie could have clarified this, but he simply called it "Providence."
- In later years, the town of Charlotte attributed to itself events that happened at Camp New Providence.
- The story of Camp New Providence emerges only after reading many original source documents and making the only inference that is consistent with many partial pieces of information.

How many soldiers were at Camp New Providence during its existence from 20 October to 17 December 1780? Of course, exact precision is impossible. An army is like any other complicated dynamic social system. The number of persons engaged changes daily. Nonetheless, coarse strength figures are sufficient for comparing the relative strengths of adversaries. They are also sufficient for commissary procurement and can show trends or developing shortages. During the American Revolution, commanders were justifiably obsessed with this knowledge and demanded frequent strength returns from their subordinates.

The first step is to list important actors. Those were the high-ranking commanders. Each commanded a unit whose approximate strength is known from original sources. Units are operational command, not necessarily official command. For example, Lieutenant Colonel Howard officially commanded the Maryland Continentals, but operationally commanded the light infantry detached from Maryland, Delaware, and Virginia Continentals. Likewise, Lieutenant Colonel Williams officially commanded the Delaware Continentals, but for a short time, as directed by Gates, operationally commanded all regular Continentals.

Notation	Commander	Operational Command and Strength
g	MG Horatio Gates	sw
w	LCol Otho Williams	Army adjutant general
h	LCol John Howard	Maryland Continentals, 300
b	Col Abraham Buford	Virginia Continentals, 100
s	MG William Smallwood	MhWBPD
M	BG Daniel Morgan	Virginia riflemen, 400, h
W	LCol William Washington	Continental cavalry, 70

Notation	Commander	Operational Command and Strength
i	LCol Anthony White	Continental cavalry, 70
a	Col Charles Armand	Continental cavalry, 70
N	Cpt Anthony Singleton	Continental artillery, 2 field pieces, 60
S	MG Jethro Sumner	BP
B	BG John Butler	Hillsborough District NC militia, 300
P	Col John Paisley	Guilford militia, 300
D	BG William Davidson	Salisbury District NC militia, 500
d	Col William R. Davie	North Carolina militia cavalry, 300
V	BG Edward Stevens	Virginia militia, 300
G	MG Nathanael Greene	wMhW
C	LG Charles Lord Cornwallis	23 rd , 33 rd , 71 st , 2000, R
T	LCol Banastre Tarleton	British Legion, 500
R	LCol Francis Lord Rawdon	Volunteers of Ireland, 600
r	Col Henry Rugeley	Camden District loyalist militia, 100
e	MG Alexander Leslie	2500

However, these strengths were not fixed. From September–December 1780, the American Army was in transition. Officers joined and resigned. New units, both Continental and militia, joined. Entire militia units were discharged at the end of their tours of duty. Special units were created. For example, it was common practice to detach the youngest and most agile Continental soldiers from their regular regiments into companies of light infantry. Good horsemen might enter as infantry but be assigned to cavalry. By comparison, artillery units were static because of the high level of training and skill needed. The complexity is daunting, but probably no more than any other large social institution.

For purposes of determining the number of soldiers at Camp New Providence, a troop deployment, movement, and strength timeline is helpful. Estimated strengths are calculated by inclusion and exclusion using partial data from many original sources. Details affecting strength, like detachments, foraging, and hospitalization, are not known, and thus ignored. Despite the imprecision, these strengths provide a macro view. Locations are listed north to south to show troop flow. Troops on the march appear in italic typeface.

	24 Sep	25 Sep	26 Sep	27 Sep	30 Sep	2 Oct	3 Oct	7 Oct	10 Oct
Hillsborough	gwMia W1300	gwMia W1300	gwMia W1300	gwMia W1300	gwMia W1300	gwMia W1300	gwMia W1300	gwMia W1300	gwia830
Trading Ford					S500	S500	S500	S500	S500 MW470
Salisbury				SDd 1000	D200	D200			
Phifer's Mill			SD1000				D300	D500	
Rocky River		S800			<i>d300</i>	<i>d300</i>	<i>d300</i>	<i>d300</i>	D500 <i>d300</i>
Mallard Creek		D 200							
Charlotte		d150	d150 C1600	CTR 2500	CTR 2500	CTR 2500	CTR 2500	CTR 2500	CR2100
Armour's Ford									T400
Bigger's Ferry		R400	R400						
McAlpine Creek	SD800	C1600							
Clems Branch	<i>d150</i>								
Waxhaw Creek	C1600								
Land's Ford	T500	T500	T500						
Blair's Mill									

About 30 September, Davie took command of Colonel Philip Taylor's 150-man regiment from Granville County (Davie 1810 in Robinson 1976, 26). In early October, Gates assigned Morgan the additional command of Howard's light infantry. Movements of Kings Mountain participants are omitted for clarity.

	12 Oct	13 Oct	14 Oct	15 Oct	17 Oct	19 Oct	20 Oct	22 Oct	29 Oct
Hillsborough	gwia830	gwia830	gwia830	gwia830	gwia830	gwia830	gwia830	gwia830	gwia830
Surry County	P300	P300	P300	P300					
Trading Ford	S500 MW470	SMW 970	SMW 970	S500	SsP800	sB300	sB300	B300	B300
Salisbury				MW470					
Rocky River	D500				MW470	SP500 MW470	P500 MW470		
J. M. Alexander farm		D200							
Charlotte	d300	D300	D500	D500	D500	D500			
New Providence							D500	DMWsP 1300	DMWsP 1300
Nation Ford Spratt's farm	CT2500	d300 CT2500	d300 CT2500	d300 CT2500					
Land's Ford					d300 CT2500	d300 CT2500	d300	d300	d300
Winnsboro							CT2500	CT2500	CT2500

Smallwood assigned command of North Carolina militia. Sumner resigned 20 October.

	2 Nov	4 Nov	6 Nov	9 Nov	11 Nov	20 Nov	22 Nov	27 Nov
Hillsborough	gwia830	gia130		V300	V300			
Guilford CH		w700	giaV430 w700	gia130				
Trading Ford Salisbury	B300	B300	B300	wB1000	gwBia 1100	gwBia 1100		
Charlotte							gw700	
New Providence	DMWsP 1300	DMWsP 1300	DsP830	DMWsP 1300	DMWsP 1300	DMWsP 1300	DMWsP gwBVia 2600	DMWsP BVia 1900
Land's Ford	d300	d300	d300	d300	d300	d300		
Hanging Rock			MW470					
Camden	R600	RT1000	R600	R600	R600	R600	R600	R600
Sand Hills			T400	T400	T400			
Blackstocks						T400		
Winnsboro	CT2500	C2100	C2100	C2100	C2100	C2100	CT2500	CT2500

Davie's cavalymen were discharged about 20 November. On 22–25 November, Williams was sick in Salisbury while his command advanced. On 25 November, Gates submitted his army's strength return as 1053 Continentals, 1147 militiamen, plus Morgan's 404 riflemen. A total of 2604 soldiers (Nelson 1976, 251). Of these, 2046 were present fit for duty and 144 sick present (Lesser 1976, 189). In addition, 300 Virginia militiamen under Brigadier General Edward Stevens were present.

	1 Dec	4 Dec	13 Dec	17 Dec	20 Dec	22 Dec	26 Dec
Salisbury			BP600				
Charlotte	gws700	Gws700	GwsV 1000	GwV 1000	GwV 1000	GwV 1000	
New Providence	Via440	MWBP Via 1500	Mhia500	MhWia 870			
Hanging Rock	MBP 1000		W70				
Rugeley's Fort	r103 W70						
Bigger's Ferry					MhW 800		
Pacolet River						MhW 800	MhWD 920
Cheraw Hills					ia70	ia70	GwiaV 1100
Camden	R600	R600	R600	R600	R600	R600	R600
Winnsboro	CT2500	CT2500	CT2500	CT2500	CT2500 e1500	CTe 4000	CTe 4000
Charlestown			e2500	e2500	e1000	e1000	e1000

Davidson's militiamen were completely discharged by 5 December. On 2 December, Greene replaced Gates. Butler's militia escorted Rugeley Fort prisoners to Salisbury.

Conclusion

Camp New Providence was a large Southern Continental Army and militia encampment for two months. For 5 days, it was the headquarters of the Southern Department of the Continental Army. The camp asserted military control of upper South Carolina east of Catawba River after the British Army retired to winter quarters in Winnsboro, South Carolina. Soldier privations were severe. A North Carolina roadside historical marker commemorates this site.

Troop movements to and from Camp New Providence are shown on world wide web interactive map <http://www.elehistory.com/amrev/SitesEventsTroopMovements.htm?start=1780-10-20>.

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