

Cornwallis's Retreat from Charlotte

12–21 October 1780, including the Great Hurricane of 1780

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Cornwallis's Retreat from Charlotte

Synopsis

During late September 1780, Lieutenant General Charles Lord Cornwallis's British Army invaded North Carolina. It occupied Charlotte. However, within two weeks, Patriots defeated the western British Army at Kings Mountain, just 30 miles west of Charlotte. That unexpected event caused Cornwallis to reassess. Fearing that South Carolina was vulnerable to attack, he retreated from Charlotte back to South Carolina. Important facts and sequence of events are:

- In early October 1780, Cornwallis was preparing to advance the British Army north of Charlotte.
- On 10 October, rumors of Major Patrick Ferguson's defeat at Kings Mountain reached Charlotte. Cornwallis ordered Lieutenant Colonel Banastre Tarleton with the British Legion and light infantry to the Catawba River. Tarleton confirmed the defeat. He crossed the river to protect loyalists and pursue Brigadier General Thomas Sumter's men. A 1787 map indicates that Tarleton proceeded as far as present-day York, South Carolina.
- Cornwallis believed the Patriot forces at Kings Mountain threatened Ninety Six and South Carolina in general. He hastily decided to retreat, and on the early evening of 12 October, withdrew from Charlotte marching towards the Catawba River.
- The British Army was misguided down a wrong road. While attempting to find the correct road, it lost about 20 wagons of supplies and equipment.
- American forces quickly followed the retreating British Army.
- On the afternoon of 14 October, the British Army arrived at Nation Ford on Catawba River.
- Rain began during the evening of 14 October. It became extremely heavy rain on 15 October and probably continued through 16 October. Although this heavy rain was recorded by Davie, Sumner, Davidson, Taylor, Tarleton, Stedman, Johnson, and Allaire, it was not then or later associated the *Great Hurricane of 1780*. Only recent recognition of the coincidence of dates implies this association. This hurricane was the most deadly hurricane in recorded history.
- Probably on 15 October, Tarleton's British Legion and light infantry crossed Catawba River at Nation Ford, west to east, to rejoin the main army.
- A 1787 map indicates that the British Army backtracked from Nation Ford.
- The British Army, while camped near present-day Fort Mill, South Carolina, was in serious condition. Cornwallis was sick. American commanders recognized the British vulnerability, but could not concentrate enough forces to take full advantage.
- Probably late in the day on 16 October, the British Army crossed flooded Sugar Creek probably near the Steele Creek confluence.
- A 1787 map indicates that the British Army marched along the Camden-Charlotte wagon road.
- On 19 October, the British Army camped on Waxhaw Creek.
- On 21 October, the British Army crossed Catawba River at Land's Ford.
- Many notable officers participated in these events. They included: Lieutenant General Charles Lord Cornwallis, Lieutenant Colonel Francis Lord Rawdon, Lieutenant Colonel Banastre Tarleton, Brigadier General William Lee Davidson, and Colonel William Richardson Davie.
- Troop movements of both sides are shown on world wide web interactive map <http://www.elehistory.com/amrev/SitesEventsTroopMovements.htm?start=1780-10-12>.

Acknowledgement

For many years, John Allison considered and collected documentation about events covered in this report. He investigated many sites. His generous contributions are sincerely appreciated.

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. For these reasons, a citation is more informative than an indirect footnote. Overall, embedded citations efficiently guide the researcher to the best information available with a minimum of effort. A bibliography 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 2008a). 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, Brigadier 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 1895, 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 Brigadier 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 1895, 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.

Cornwallis's Retreat from Charlotte

October 1780, British evacuate Charlotte, Great Hurricane of 1780

When Cornwallis's army was in Charlotte, Major General Horatio Gates expected it to advance further into North Carolina. He planned to defend Trading Ford on the Yadkin River. On 13 October, he wrote the Continental Congress that he intended to move his army from Hillsborough and set up a strong defense on the east side of the Yadkin River fords. Gates wanted to be within striking distance from Charlestown as he was advised that the French fleet might arrive momentarily (Nelson 1976, 248). Unfortunately, this French fleet was lost in the Great Hurricane of 1780. During 10–14 October, it killed at least 22,000 individuals in the West Indies. It sank 40 French transport ships off Martinique with 4000 French soldiers headed for North America. It destroyed 8 British ships in St Lucia. It remains the deadliest hurricane in recorded history (US National Weather Service, National Hurricane Center 1996).

In Charlotte, British Lieutenant John Money recorded the first intimation of the results of Kings Mountain. On 10 October 1780, he wrote to Major James Wemyss, "We have a report of Ferguson being routed and killed." (Money 1780 in CPS 2010, II:224) (Allison 2009–2016) Nonetheless, Cornwallis was not certain of Ferguson's predicament. Having a few days earlier sent an order to Ferguson to march to Armour's Ford on the Catawba River (Cornwallis 1780 in CPS 2010, II:161), on 10 October, Cornwallis sent Tarleton's British Legion and light infantry to that ford. On arrival, Tarleton confirmed the defeat. He later wrote:

On the 10th [October], Earl Cornwallis gave orders to Lieutenant-colonel Tarleton, to march with the light infantry, the British legion, and a three pounder, to assist Major Ferguson, no certain intelligence having arrived of his defeat : It was rumoured with great confidence by the Americans in the neighbourhood of Charlotte town, and the probability of the circumstance gave weight to the report. Tarleton's instructions directed him to reinforce Ferguson wherever he could find him, and to draw his corps to the Catawba, if after the junction, advantage could not be obtained over the mountaineers; or, upon the certainty of his defeat, at all events to oppose the entrance of the victorious Americans into South Carolina : Accordingly, Tarleton marched to Smith's ford [should be Armour's ford, since Smith's ford was on Broad River], below the forks of the Catawba, where he received certain information of the melancholy fate of Major Ferguson. This mortifying intelligence was forwarded to Charlotte town [corrected errata], and the light troops crossed the river, to give protection to the fugitives, and to attend the operations of the enemy. (Tarleton 1787, 165–166).

The roads taken were probably present-day York Road, highway US49, and Shopton Road. Armour's Ford was near the South Fork River confluence (I. Price 1796). Joseph Graham provided more detail that he must have learned from resident Matthew Knox.

On the day he received the express [from Ferguson], Cornwallis ordered Tarleton's cavalry to go with the bearers, who were to serve as guides, to Ferguson's aid. The ford at which they had crossed was Armour's, near the mouth of the South Fork of the Catawba; it was deep and somewhat difficult to find, which being represented to Colonel Tarleton, he sent for Matthew Knox, an old man nearly seventy residing hard by, to show them the way over. They arrived at the ford a little before sunset; the water had risen considerably since the express had passed. The old man knew this, but said nothing about it, only giving them directions how the ford ran. The advance, about twenty in number, went in, but before they had gone twenty steps, they were swimming; after much difficulty they

got out, on the same shore; some nearly drowned. They were much enraged with Mr. Knox, threatening to “cut the old rebel to pieces,” but the commander protected him. They repaired to a neighboring farm and encamped until morning, by which time the river had fallen so as to be passable, and they were about to go over when they met two men who had been in the battle of King’s Mountain, and gave Tarleton information of the destruction of Ferguson’s army, ... (Graham 1827 in W. A. Graham 1904b, 268–269)

Although William Faden’s 1787 map (Faden 1787) suggests that Tarleton crossed the Catawba River at Bigger’s Ferry, the above evidence for Armour’s Ford is stronger. That is where Cornwallis ordered Ferguson to go and thus where Tarleton would expect to meet him.

When Cornwallis learned of Ferguson’s defeat at Kings Mountain, he was concerned of immediate rebel attack against Charlotte or the British fort at Ninety Six. Lieutenant Colonel Francis Lord Rawdon was second-in-command and privy to Cornwallis’s decision making. Soon afterwards, on 21 October, Rawdon wrote to Lieutenant Colonel Nesbit Balfour:

The inveteracy of the inhabitants in Mecklenburg County was so great that during the latter part of our stay there we were totally ignorant of the situation of many of our posts, all our expresses being way laid and many of them murder’d on the road. We had obtained accounts of Major Ferguson’s misfortune but we cou’d procure no intelligence of its consequences. We had, however, reason to fear that they might be fatal to the Ninety Six District and from thence might eventually extend yet farther. This consideration, added to our incertitude of co-operation from the northward, made Lord Cornwallis determine to pass the Catawba and put this country in a proper state of security before he proceeded so far as to be out of reach of being called to its assistance should circumstances require it. (Rawdon 1780 in CPS 2010, II:126)

The reference to cooperation from the northward was about Major General Alexander Leslie’s 2500 soldiers which were to disembark in Portsmouth, Virginia, as a diversion in the American rear. This force did not reach Portsmouth until 22 October. Historical evidence reveals that Cornwallis’s risk was not as severe as he presumed. Had Kings Mountain not occurred on 7 October, Cornwallis’s army would have likely advanced further into North Carolina.

During the afternoon of 12 October, the British Army pulled out of Charlotte, ending its 16-day occupation (Davidson 1780 in NCSR 1895, XIV:694–695). Graham indicated this evacuation occurred on 9 October (Graham 1827 in W. A. Graham 1904b, 270) (McLeary, Michael, pension application 1832). Tarleton indicated this event occurred on 14 October (Tarleton 1787, 167). Stedman (Stedman 1794, 224) repeated that date, as did Davie (Davie 1810 in B. P. Robinson 1976, 27). However, Davidson and Sumner’s contemporaneously dated correspondence (Davidson 1780 in NCSR 1895, XIV:694–695) (Davidson 1780 in Davidson 1951, 90) (Sumner 1780 in NCSR 1895, XIV:693), shown below, indicate that this event occurred during the early evening of 12 October. Consistent with 12 October is the 10:00 a.m. correspondence of Lieutenant John Money in Charlottetown to Lieutenant Colonel George Turnbull in Camden (Money 1780 in CPS 2010, II:252) (Allison 2009–2016). Turnbull acknowledged the 12 October date in his 20 October reply to Rawdon:

Lord Cornwallis’s groom and a corporal of the Legion who left Charlotte express the 12th instant for this place [Camden] — the groom arrived here next morning before day. He met an officer with twelve dragoons carrying Load Cornwallis’s dispatches from New York and turn’d him back, saying that it was his orders to turn every thing back and that we shou’d send nothing forward untill we shou’d hear from his Lordship. The corporal was killed at Sugar Creek. (Turnbull 1780 in CPS 2010, II:257)

The corporal was likely killed where Camden-Charlotte Road crossed Little Sugar Creek. That is near present-day President James K. Polk Birthplace State Historic Site. Private Michael McLeary was probably among the Americans who intercepted this express. In 1832, he testified:

your Declarant was also want [one] of a small Detachment who captured an express from Lord Cornwallis to Col. Turnbull Commander of his Majesty's forces in Camden South Carolina (McLeary, Michael, pension application 1832)

As the British Army evacuated Charlotte, it burnt the Liberty Hall Academy buildings (Polk in Hoyt 1914, II:401) (Foote 1846, 516). The army included many regiments: 23rd, 33rd, Volunteers of Ireland, and 1st Battalion of the 71st, in total over 2000 soldiers. The entire entourage was about 4100 individuals (Stedman 1794, 2:216–217). There were approximately 100 wagons (Davidson 1780 in NCSR 1895, XIV:678). The British marched to “Barnets Creek 5 Miles below Town, on the Road to Armours Ford.” (Davidson 1780 in B. P. Robinson 1957, 80) Its name in 1780 may have been Park's Mill, later renamed Barnett's Mill (Graham 1827 in W. A. Graham 1904b, 270). This was where present-day South Tryon Street crosses Big Sugar Creek.



Possible Park's Mill, later Barnett's Mill, site on Big Sugar Creek near present-day South Tryon Street

Immediately south of this crossing was the John McDowell home where present-day South Tryon Street intersects Beam Road. After the British passed her house, Jane Parks McDowell quickly mounted a horse and rode 10 miles to alert the Americans (I. B. Williams 1927) (Crosland 1934) (Hastings 1955, 48–49) (Blythe and Brockmann 1961, 89) (R. Blackwelder 1973).



Jane Parks McDowell monument
Erected in 1927 by Daughters of the American Revolution

During the night, the British learned they were not on the road to Catawba-Nation Ford. Charlotte resident William McCafferty guided the British Army. He stated that he would find the correct road, but abandoned the British. Unwilling to backtrack, the British traveled cross-country during that night attempting to locate the road to Nation Ford. British soldiers became confused, separated, and lost. Their route was along or near present-day Westinghouse Road (Faden 1787). Tarleton later wrote:

The British rear guard destroyed, or left behind, near twenty wagons, loaded with supplies for the army, a printing press, and other stores belonging to public departments, and the knapsacks of the light infantry and [British] legion. (Tarleton 1787, 167)

In 1787, Lieutenant Roderick MacKenzie wrote in a criticism of Tarleton's book:

The cause, however, was known by every individual in that army. The guide at this time employed was a Doctor M [McCafferty], a Presbyterian fanatic from Glasgow, the ambiguity of whose faith did not escape the discernment of the General. Under this distrust he was given in charge to a corporal and two dragoons of Lieutenant Colonel Tarleton's corps. The Doctor was too shrewd for his guards, and finding that they had no suspicion of his real design, he led the army, in a dark and rainy night, through thick woods, briars, deep ravines, marshes, and creeks scarcely fordable. After such a progress of six hours, the General grew impatient, the alarmed guide eluded the vigilance of the dragoons, and escaped unobserved. Left in such a situation, any army, where not one of the individuals which composed it knew where they were, might be well contented to come off with a loss so trifling as that of a few wagons. (MacKenzie 1787, 49)

At this time, Tarleton was west of the Catawba River and was approaching Brigadier General Thomas Sumter's men on Bullock's Creek. He wrote:

The situation of Colonel Sumpter's detachment on Bullock's creek attracted Tarleton's attention, and he was adopting measures to dislodge the Americans when the expresses from the royal army prevented his design, by requiring his instant return to the Catawba. (Tarleton 1787, 166–167)

Meanwhile, at Rocky River, 16 miles north of Charlotte, Davidson received reports of British Army movement. In the early morning, he reported to Sumner.

Camp Rocky River, October 13th, 1780 [before the next report at 7:00 a.m.]

Sir:

Yesterday I received intelligence of a party of the Enemy marching out of Charlotte towards Bigger's ferry on Catawba, consisting of 800, with one field-piece. I have waited till this morning to have this account officially confirmed, but am not fully convinced of the truth of it yet. We have a Report from a Man of Veracity just arrived from within 6 Miles of Charlotte that the Enemy have evacuated Charlotte & that last Night at 10 O'Clock the Rear of the Army passed Barnet's Creek 5 Miles below Charlotte on the Road to Bigger's Ferry. This account agrees with a piece of intelligence received about midnight, by 5 Tories who deserted in the evening, that the Enemy were just ready to march at that time. Colo. Davie was yesterday evening in the neighbourhood of Charlotte with a sufficient force to gall the Enemy in the Rear. I cannot account for Colo. Davie's not sending me accounts, unless he is so busily engaged on their Rear as to neglect this.

I am, Sir, &c., &c.,

Wm Davidson (Davidson 1780 in NCSR 1895, XIV:694-695) (Davidson 1780 in Davidson 1951, 90)

McCafferty raced to Davidson's camp at Rocky River, arriving the next morning. He disclosed the British predicament. (Graham 1827 in W. A. Graham 1904b, 270). Davidson sent an express report to Sumner:

Camp Rocky River, October 13th, 1780, 7 o'Clock A. M.

Sir:

This morning Mr. McCafferty is come to me & informs me that the Rear of the Enemy left Charlotte at 4 o'Clock last Evening; that he went with them to Barnet's Creek, five Miles below Town, on the road to Armour's ford. His conjecture is that their design is to go in quest of our Western Army, as they were particular in inquiring the nearest ford on Catawba river. You will be pleased to accept as an Apology for my not sending a reinforcement of Horse to the forks of the Yadkin the accounts of 90 horsemen imbodyed there last Wednesday as per Express, my orders of yesterday to Co'o [John] Brandon to imbody all the Minute men he could to join them, & Colo. Davie being now out with 140 Horse. I am now preparing to march to Charlotte. Mr. McCafferty is sent with this under guard; his late conduct is to me a demonstration that he is not a friend to his Country.

I have the honour to be, &c., &c.,

Wm Davidson (Davidson 1780 in NCSR 1895, XIV:695)

Sumner relayed this report to Gates who was in Hillsborough.

Camp Yadkin Ford, October the 13th, 1780
IX, Ock. Even'g

Sir:

About an hour ago I receiv'd the inclosed Express from Genl. Davidson of the Enemy's Retreat from Charlotte towards Beggar's Fery on Catawba River. I shall, Sir, recross the [Yadkin] river to Morrow, or Early next morning, with all the troops at this place. (the sick and convalescents, with great part of the baggage, I shall leave proper Officers to take charge of, &c., &c., &c.) and March after the enemy, so as to annoy as much as possible, preventing a general Action. Colo. Morgan Arrived in Camp about two Ock. this after Noon with his Troops.

I am, Sir, Yr.

Very Hble. Servt.,

Jethro Sumner

P.S. The fourth part of the Troops here are without Cartridge Boxes, and flints are likely to be very scarce. (Sumner 1780 in NCSR 1895, XIV:693)

On 13 October, Davidson marched his militiamen towards Charlotte (Davidson 1780 in NCSR 1895, XIV:788). In route, he ordered his infantry to camp at John McKnitt Alexander's plantation. With the remaining 317 cavalymen, Davidson entered Charlotte (Davidson 1780 in NCSR 1895, XIV:788) (Davidson 1951, 90). Davie continued trailing the British column (Graham 1827 in W. A. Graham 1904b, 271).

On 14 October, Davidson reported to Sumner about events on 13 October:

Last evening I marched to Charlotte with the remainder of the cavalry, and by the latest intelligence the enemy were on the way to Nation ford. Col. Davie is now in pursuit with all his cavalry. The enemy seem to have gone off with an alarm, but from what cause is uncertain. Deserters say they received accounts last Monday of Gen. Clinton's Defeat at West Point; others, that we were reinforced with 5,000. The inhabitants say they left their kettles on the fire, and 20 waggons, which they left 5 miles from town, with a quantity of valuable loading, have fallen into our hands. Express this moment arrived from Col. Davie informs that the main body of the enemy lay last night 11 miles from town. I propose to march downwards today. (Davidson 1780 in NCSR 1895, XIV:788)

The 11-mile distance from Charlotte placed the British camp approximately where Nations Ford Road crossed the state line and near its intersection with present-day highway NC51. Later, using evidence provided by others, Graham wrote:

Finding that no advantage could be taken of them [the British] in that manner, Davie turned to the left, where the road enters the Indian Lands (which at that time were woods and unsettled), passed up their left flank at a distance of three-fourths of a mile from the road (his spies viewing them at every favorable position), and marched for four miles, but the enemy's march was so condensed and in such perfect order that it was impossible to attack them without encountering at the same time their whole army. In the afternoon he returned to the settlements of Sugar Creek. (Graham 1827 in W. A. Graham 1904b, 272)

This description suggests that the British Army took the route of present-day highways SC51 and US21 and that Davie took present-day Flint Hill Road and its extension which no longer exists (C. Garrison 2014). The former route was more level and thus a better wagon road.

By tradition, while Cornwallis retreated from Charlotte, he and Tarleton allegedly stopped at the home of Robert Wilson, who was held prisoner elsewhere, and encountered his wife Eleanor Wilson. The Wilsons had seven sons, the older sons fighting with Brigadier General Thomas Sumter. Cornwallis offered to free Robert if Eleanor could persuade him to join the British. She replied:

I have seven sons who are now or have been bearing arms; indeed, my seventh son, Zaccheus, who is only fifteen years old, I yesterday assisted to get ready and go to join his brothers in Sumter's army. Now, sooner than see one of my family turn back from the glorious enterprise, I would take these boys (pointing to three or four small sons) and would myself enlist under Sumter's standard and show my husband and sons how to fight; and, if necessary, how to die for their country. (W. A. Graham 1904b, 84)

To this, Tarleton allegedly complained that the Charlotte region was a "hornets' nest" of rebellion (W. A. Graham 1904b, 84). However, at that time, Tarleton was on the opposite side of the Catawba River. The origin of the expression "Hornets' Nest" as applied to this region is not known. Its first known appearance in writing was in 1819 in correspondence of William Polk to historian Archibald DeBow Murphey (W. Polk 1819). Polk attributed the expression to an unnamed British officer who could have been Charles Stedman (Stedman 1794, 2:224). The expression appeared soon afterwards in reference (Johnson 1822, 308).

Probably on 15 October, Davie reported to Sumner describing events through 14 October:

After I wrote to you I hung on their flank till they arrived at the river. I found no opportunity of skirmishing, as they marched in close order, with large flanking parties, and the old Indian fields gave them great advantage. They discovered our trail early, and detached a large party in our rear, whom we discovered on our return. The men having no provisions for two days, and the evening rainy, obliged us to retreat. (Davie 1780 in NCSR 1895, XIV:789)

Probably late on 14 October, from Charlotte, Davidson also reported to Sumner, "The enemy were at Nation ford this afternoon, whether crossing or not I have not learned." (Davidson 1780 in NCSR 1895, XIV:788) Soon afterwards in another report, Davidson wrote:

There appears to me a high probability that the enemy's force will now be divided by the rising of the [Catawba] river, as by the best accounts the [British] legion crossed last Thursday, and no account of their return. Accounts are uniform that their wagons move with great difficulty on account of the poverty of their teams. (Davidson 1780 in NCSR 1895, XIV:788)



Nation Ford during high water

On 14 October, all Davidson's men joined him in Charlotte and encamped 2 miles west (Davidson 1951, 92), probably at or near Polk's Mill on Irwin Creek.

On 15 October, Davidson argued that Americans should attack (Davidson 1780 in Davidson 1951, 92). In a separate letter, Davidson notified Sumter who was camped west of Catawba River on Bullock's Creek of Broad River (Davidson 1951, 92).

On 15 October, with the intent of supporting Davidson, Morgan crossed Yadkin River at Trading Ford with his Virginia riflemen, Continental light infantry, and Washington's cavalymen (Sumner 1780 in NCSR 1895, XIV:789) (Davidson 1951, 92). Sumner wrote to Major General William Smallwood:

Gen. Morgan crossed the [Yadkin] river this morning. The rain set in very heavy before he effected his crossing; however, he has just got his corps over. The rain continuing, I deferred my recrossing under it. The troops are generally very bare of clothing, tents, etc., and cartridges are exposed to the weather, as almost three-fourths are without cartridge boxes. (Sumner 1780 in NCSR 1895, XIV:789)

The date of this report is consistent with William Seymour's journal that indicated Morgan's troops arrived in Salisbury on 15 October (Seymour 1883, 290).

On 15 October, a Rawdon order located the British Army on "Old Nation Ford Road" (Rawdon 1780 in CPS 2010, II:231) (Allison 2009–2016). Probably in the morning of 15 October, Tarleton's Legion recrossed the Catawba River, west to east, at Nation Ford (Tarleton 1787, 167) (Faden 1787). He wrote:

As soon as the British Legion, and the light infantry, arrived at the Catawba ford, they were ordered to cross the river, which they accomplished with some difficulty, on account of a great fall of rain. (Tarleton 1787, 167)

This exceptionally heavy rain may be due to the *Great Hurricane of 1780* whose center was moving northward off the Carolina coast (US National Weather Service, National Hurricane Center 1996). It was noted in many contemporaneous sources in the Carolinas:

- On 14 October, at Biggerstaff's Plantation, Doctor Uzal Johnson recorded a "Shed to keep out of the Rain." (Moss 2000, 77).
- On 15 October, near present-day Morganton, Lieutenant Anthony Allaire noted in his diary, "Marched all day through the rain — a very disagreeable road." (Allaire 1780, 511).
- British commissary officer Charles Stedman wrote: "it rained for several days without intermission" (Stedman 1794, 2:224).
- Tarleton wrote: "a great fall of rain" (Tarleton 1787, 167).
- On 15 October, "heavy rain" was noted in the *Records of the Moravians* at Salem, North Carolina.
- Davie wrote: "heaviest rain ever poor fellow lived through" (Davie 1780 in NCSR 1895, XIV:789–790).
- Colonel Philip Taylor wrote: "Such a rain, good God! ... the most powerful rain I ever saw" (Taylor 1780 in NCSR 1895, XIV:790).
- Sumner wrote: "rain set in very heavy" (Sumner 1780 in NCSR 1895, XIV:789).
- Graham wrote: "It was rainy weather, and the roads bad" (Graham 1827 in W. A. Graham 1904b, 272).

No known source, then or later, associated this rain with the Great Hurricane of 1780 probably because the characteristic northward movement of hurricanes was not understood. Only recent recognition of the coincidence of dates implies this association. In fact, there were three major storms during October 1780: *Savanna-la-Mar Hurricane*, 3–7 October; *Great Hurricane of 1780*, 10–20 October; and *Solano's Storm*, 16–21 October. The latter reached Pensacola, Florida, on 21 October and was thus too late to induce rain in the Carolinas on 15 October. The track of the Great Hurricane of 1780 is usually shown passing near Bermuda on 18 October (Garrison, et al. 1989, F-15), yet there is some evidence that its track could have been closer to the coast of North America. Josiah Smith made the following diary entry in Saint Augustine, Florida:

Thursday 19th October [1780]. The weather as mentioned on Saturday [14 October], growing worse, by Sunday evening it came on to Rain and blow excessive hard, and till the evening of yesterday was a mere Gale at about N. N. E. by which means the Sea came in very heavily upon the front of the Town and raised the Tide several feet higher than common, and which ran through some of the Lanes up to the Second Street, above 150 feet from the bay... (Smith 1780 in Smith 1932, 24)

On 16 October, Davie reported to Sumner describing events on 14–15 October and the great vulnerability of the British:

The enemy's baggage arrived at Nation ford almost 3 o'clock in the afternoon. The evening turned in rainy and my dependence alone upon the dryness of my powder, I was under the necessity of retreating and marching all night thro' the heaviest rain ever poor fellow lived through. Not a gun will fire in the corps, and the ammunition, for want of cartridge boxes, is principally lost. It will be three or four days before I can move again.

Col. Tarleton crossed the river [east to west on 10 October], two days before his lordship marched, with 200 dragoons and 400 of the infantry mounted. The Catawba was too high Saturday [14 October] evening for Cornwallis to cross over or Tarleton to return. [Actually, unknown to Davie, Tarleton did return probably on 15 October.] Gen. Sumter is somewhere near on the other side in quest of Tarleton, with 2,500 men. His lordship never was in such a pound—the river impassible in the West, and Sugar Creek in the same condition to the Southward of him, his lordship’s reason for retreating turned him on every quarter, without one mouthful of provisions or forage to be gotten within several miles. I am sure the convention of Saratoga has flew through his lordship’s head five hundred times these two days. A few troops would make him very uneasy. (Davie 1780 in NCSR 1895, XIV:789–790)

Davie’s Saratoga reference is to the 1777 surrender of British Major General John Burgoyne. The content of this message is remarkably insightful for a 24-year-old who had spent days in the field. Probably on 16 October, Colonel Philip Taylor, who’s Granville County mounted militia was assigned to Davie’s cavalry, reported to Sumner:

There’s not a man in my regiment saved his ammunition. Such a rain, good God! I never saw a better opportunity to confine British progress—had we our whole force so as to make a descent on them in six days. We suffered much for four days past during a pursuit, and afterwards in the most powerful rain I ever saw. We this moment received intelligence that the Legion (Tarleton’s) have recrossed the Catawba. They are d—d shy, depend on it. (Taylor 1780 in NCSR 1895, XIV:790)

Probably on 17 October, Sumner responded to Davie:

I wish I could join you, that we might by detachments annoy the enemy more effectually. By the retreat of Cornwallis great advantage might be made in our favor by a general action [battle], were we near him. I am now recrossing the [Yadkin] river with all possible diligence, and shall march forward to you without loss of time. In the mean while, by order, I dare not risk a general action [battle] before the army makes a junction. (Sumner 1780 in NCSR 1895, XIV:791)

After Tarleton crossed the Catawba River, reducing the risk on the west side, Sumter furloughed his men (Bass 1961, 92). British commissary officer Charles Stedman wrote:

In this retreat the King’s troops suffered much, encountering the greatest difficulties; the soldiers had no tents; it rained for several days without intermission; the roads were over their shoes in water and mud. At night, when the army took up its ground, it encamped in the woods, in the most unhealthy climate; for many days without rum. Sometimes the army had beef, and no bread; at other times bread, and no beef. For five days it was supported upon Indian corn, which was collected as it stood in the field, five ears of which were the allowance for two soldiers for twenty-four hours. (Stedman 1794, 2:224)

Torrential rains made Nation Ford on Catawba River impassable for wagons. Because of the British Army’s vulnerability near the river, it backtracked to a more defensible position near a farm with provisions. The William Faden 1787 map shows this backtracking (Faden 1787).



Cornwallis's advance on and retreat from Charlotte
William Faden 1787 map segment (Faden 1787)

Private Michael McLeary, who was with Davie, testified in his 1832 pension application:

Followed them to the old Nation Ford on the Catawba River, where the [they] encamped all night hanged one of their men and left him hanging. The River being high could not cross — marched back up the Road about 10 miles, ... (McLeary, Michael, pension application 1832)

The British Army may have camped on Thomas Spratt Junior's Plantation at the old 1760 Catawba Indian fort (Godey 1856) (Allison 2009–2016). Today, that fort's location is identified by a historical marker immediately south of present-day Fort Mill, South Carolina, on Brickyard Road. Or it may have camped where a crude fort was built earlier on Hagler's Hill near where Nation Ford Road crossed Steele Creek (Graham 1827 in W. A. Graham 1904b, 233) (Gregorie 1931, 84). That location is within present-day *Anne Springs Close Greenway Park*.

Major George Hanger later wrote:

I caught the yellow fever at Charlotteburg. Tarleton was just recovering from it as I sickened. When the army marched from that town, myself and five officers, who had the same disorder, were put into waggons and carried with the army. They all died in the first week of our march, and were buried in the woods as the army moved on. (Hanger 1814, 408)

Three of these officers were Captain Peacocke, Captain Harrison, (Rawdon 1780 in CPS 2010, II:126) and Major Fraser (Godey 1856) (Allison 2009–2016). The latter could have been Lieutenant Alexander Fraser of the 71st Regiment 1st Battalion who was known to have died on 15 October 1780 (Baule and Gilbert 2004, 67) (Howard 2011).

Probably on 15 October, Cornwallis became ill. He delegated command to Lieutenant Colonel Francis Lord Rawdon.



Lieutenant Colonel Francis Lord Rawdon
Painted by Hugh Douglas Hamilton, 1801.

The British were exceedingly vulnerable at this location. But because of rain and distance, Americans could not concentrate enough force to take advantage. The British marched away at the first opportunity, probably 16 October. In 1851, Susannah Barnett Smart recalled in an interview by Daniel Green Stinson that the British Army occupied her maternal grandfather Thomas Spratt Junior's house. In 1856, her edited recollections were published.

The unbidden guests [British Army] took from Spratt over a hundred head of cattle, hogs, etc. When the time came for marching, the army formed a line before the [illegible] and then formed a hollow square, with their drums muffled. These played a mournful air; till at length the army deployed, and took up the line of march with a lively tune and a quick step. The cause of this ceremony was the punishment of one of their own soldiers, whose body hung from the limb of a tree, he having been executed for an alleged attempt to desert and join Davie's troops. (Godey 1856)

Tarleton later wrote:

The royal forces remained two days [probably afternoon 14 – afternoon 16 October] in an anxious and miserable situation in the Catawba settlement, owing to a dangerous fever, which suddenly attacked Earl Cornwallis, and to the want of forage and provisions. When the physicians declared his lordship's health would endure the motion of a wagon, Colonel Lord Rawdon, the second in command, directed the King's troops to cross Sugar creek, where some supplies might be obtained from the country. On this move, the Mecklenburg militia, supposing the cavalry still absent, attempted to harass the head of the column; when their want of intelligence proved fatal to the most enterprising of the party. (Tarleton 1787, 167)

After the rain subsided, on 16 October, the British Army marched to Steele Creek where Rawdon dispatched an order to Turnbull. It was marked "Dispatched from Steel Creek on the 16th [October] at eight at night." (Rawdon 1780 in CPS 2010, II:253–254) (Allison 2009–2016). Davie's 300 horsemen harassed the British rear and prevented foraging to the north. The next morning, Tuesday 17 October, Davie wrote Sumner:

[illegible] Miles from Charlotte
Tuesday, 7–8 O'clock

Dear Genl.:

I have just received Intelligence from one of my patrol parties that the Enemy moved yesterday at One O'clock in the Afternoon, and were taking the route by one Roush's, on Sugar Creek, leading to the Waxhaws.

Their Waggon Horses are so poor that they make very slow Marches. For want of provisions and ammunition, it will be out of my power to march before the Afternoon.

O! for a few Light Troops.

I am, Sir, with
Hum. Esteem, your &c., &c.,
William R. Davie
Col. Comd. Ma. Cavalry. (Davie 1780 in NCSR 1895, XV:111)

These two sources suggest that the British crossed Sugar Creek near Steele Creek. Since no known reference mentions crossing any creek other than Sugar Creek (Tarleton 1787, 167) (Stedman 1794, 2:225) (Davie 1780 in NCSR 1895, XV:111) (McLeary, Michael, pension application 1832), the crossing was probably downstream of the Steele Creek confluence, perhaps near the present-day highway SC160 bridge over Sugar Creek. Davie described the connecting road as "by one Roush's on Sugar Creek." This might have been Thomas Roach's plantation (L. Pettus 2005b), or possibly Ross's plantation which was located north of Doby Bridge (Mills 1825). William Faden's 1787 map suggests the crossing was further north (Faden 1787), but this map was not drawn with great precision. British commissary officer Charles Stedman wrote about the crossing:

The continual rains had swelled the rivers and creeks prodigiously, and rendered the roads almost impassable. The waggon and artillery horses were quite exhausted with fatigue by the time the army had reached Sugar Creek. This creek was very rapid, its banks nearly perpendicular, and the soil, being clay, as slippery as ice. The horses were taken out of some of the waggons, and the militia, harnessed in their stead, drew the waggons through the creek. We are sorry to say, that, in return for their exertions, the militia were maltreated, by abusive language, and even beaten by some of the quarter-master-general's department: In consequence of this ill usage, several of them left the army the next morning, for ever. (Stedman 1794, 2:225)

Later, Davie summarized these events:

Lord Cornwallis had intended to cross the Catawba river, at the old Nation ford, but a sudden swell of the river, obliged him to halt the army. After remaining here two days in a miserable situation without supplies, surrounded by Militia Cavalry who prevented all foraging, they marched precipitately down the river attended by the Detachment of Cavalry under Col. Davie who continued skirmishing with their rear. (Davie 1810 in B. P. Robinson 1976, 27)



Possible site where British Army crossed Sugar Creek
near present-day highway SC160 bridge

On 17 October, the British Army may have foraged for provisions east of Sugar Creek. From this location, the army likely marched the short distance to the main commercial wagon road called the Camden-Charlotte Road which existed before the Revolutionary War (W. L. Anderson 2006). That was the same road the British Army previously used to advance on Charlotte during 24–25 September (Faden 1787). On 18 October, the army could have camped at Twelve Mile Creek, the first major water source. On 19 October, the army marched along the Camden-Charlotte Road that included the connected segments of present-day highway US521, Niven Road, Old Church Road, to the intersection of US521 and SC5. On that date, Rawdon wrote that he was at “Waxhaw” (Rawdon 1780 in CPS 2010, II:255). This site was likely Crawford’s Plantation on Waxhaw Creek where the British previously camped during 11–24 September 1780. Rawdon also wrote that he “plan to camp on Catawba” (Rawdon 1780 in CPS 2010, II:255). This implied he was not then on Catawba River (Allison 2009–2016). On 20 October, the army continued south on present-day US521, North Corner Road, across US521, Old Hickory Road, past Old Waxhaw Presbyterian Church, Industrial Park Road, and Landsford Road to the Catawba River (W. L. Anderson 2008a). On that date, Rawdon wrote that he was at Blair’s Mill which was on the river (Rawdon 1780 in CPS 2010, II:256) (Allison 2009–2016) (Joy, Stine and Clauser 2000).

On 21 October, the British Army crossed Catawba River at Land’s Ford (Rawdon 1780 in CPS 2010, II:126) (Davie 1810 in B. P. Robinson 1976, 27) (McLeary, Michael, pension application 1832) (Walkup, Samuel, pension application 1832). Later, Stedman wrote:

At length the [British] army reached the Catawba, which was forded by the troops. This river is six hundred yards wide, and three and a half feet deep. Two hundred rifle-men placed on the opposite bank must have destroyed many of our men before we could have gained the shore. (Stedman 1794, 2:226)



Land's Ford
Relatively wide and shallow Catawba River ford.

Later, Davie wrote:

on the 19th [of October] they [the British] completely evacuated the State [North Carolina] and crossed the Catawba river at Lands-Ford. (Davie 1810 in B. P. Robinson 1976, 27).

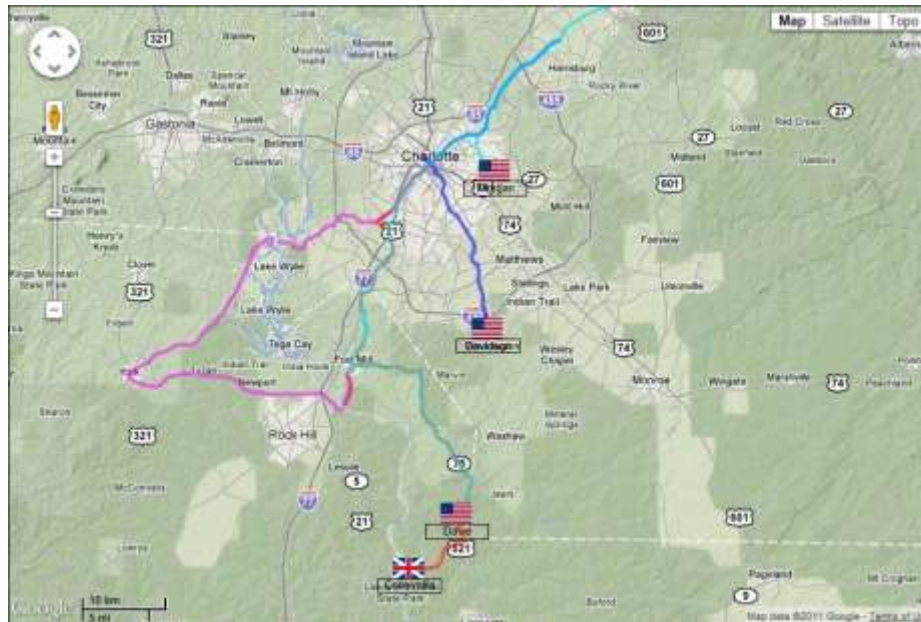
This quote reflects Davie's understanding of the unusual state line in 1780 (Davie 1810 in B. P. Robinson 1976, 21) (Salley 1929) (L. Pettus 1992) (W. L. Anderson 2008a). In 1832, Samuel Walkup testified:

when Rawdon was retreating from Charlotte Davis' [Davie] Company & others harassed him near the Waxhaw Creek we had a little skirmish & took one prisoner & five horses – and as Rawdon crossed the Catawba at Lands Ford – we came up just as he had crossed. Our numbers were too Small to think of attacking. (Walkup, Samuel, pension application 1832)

Tarleton wrote that the army crossed “near Twelve-mile creek” (Tarleton 1787, 167) which is 5 miles further north. This vague location is probably incorrect or possibly where the British Legion crossed first to secure the opposite embankment.

On 21 October, after passing Land's Ford, Rawdon described events in correspondence with Lieutenant Colonel Nesbit Balfour.

We attempted to pass at the [Nation] ford in the Indian lands but, the river being swollen, were disappointed, and rain coming on, our baggage embarrassed us so much in passing the creeks that we were detain'd for some days in that quarter, still ignorant of all that was passing in any other part of the province. We passed at Lands Ford this morning [21 October]. (Rawdon 1780 in CPS 2010, II:126)



Cornwallis's Retreat from Charlotte and American Response including Tarleton's raid west of Catawba River, 10–20 October 1780

**Cornwallis's Retreat from Charlotte Timeline.
Where was the British Army?**

10 Oct	Charlotte. Cornwallis ordered Tarleton's British Legion to Catawba River to find Ferguson (Tarleton 1787, 165–166).
12 Oct 10:00am	"Charlottetown", "Ten in the morning" (Money 1780 in CPS 2010, II:252)
12 Oct 4:00pm	British evacuated Charlotte. (Davidson 1780 in NCSR 1895, XIV:694–695)
12 Oct evening	British Army abandoned road to Bigger's Ferry. During night, moved cross-country to Nation Ford Road, lost 20 wagons. (Tarleton 1787, 167)
13 Oct	British camped 11 miles south of Charlotte (Davidson 1780 in NCSR 1895, XIV:788). That's near state line, west of present-day Pineville.
13 Oct	Tarleton at Ross's Plantation (Tarleton 1787, 166–167) (Faden 1787), present-day York, South Carolina
14 Oct 3:00pm	British at Nation Ford (Davie 1780 in NCSR 1895, XIV:789–790). Backtracked (Faden 1787) (McLeary, Michael, pension application 1832) to Spratt's (Godey 1856).
15 Oct morning	Tarleton crossed Nation Ford and rejoins Cornwallis (Tarleton 1787, 167) (Faden 1787).
15 Oct	heavy rain all day (Tarleton 1787, 167) (Davie 1780 in NCSR 1895, XIV:789) (Taylor 1780 in NCSR 1895, XIV:790) (Stedman 1794, 2:224)
15 Oct	Cornwallis became ill, delegated command to Rawdon (Rawdon 1780 in CPS 2010, II:126).
15 Oct	"Old Nations Ford Road" (Rawdon to Hamilton)
16 Oct 1:00pm	British moved towards Sugar Creek near Rouch's (Davie 1780 in NCSR 1895, XV:111).
16 Oct 8:00pm	"Steel Creek" [could be Sugar Creek], "eight at night" (Rawdon 1780 in CPS 2010, II:253–254)
16-17 Oct	Crossed Sugar Creek, gathered provisions (Stedman 1794, 2:225).
18 Oct	On Camden-Charlotte Road, maybe camped at first major water source, Twelve Mile Creek.
19 Oct	"Waxhaw" (Rawdon 1780 in CPS 2010, II:255), probably Crawford's on Waxhaw Creek.

20 Oct	“Blair’s Mill” (Rawdon 1780 in CPS 2010, II:256)
21 Oct	British crossed Catawba River at Land’s Ford. “Camp between Fishing Creek and the Catawba” (Rawdon 1780 in CPS 2010, II:126) (Davie 1810 in B. P. Robinson 1976, 27)
22 Oct	“Lands Ford on Catawba” (Rawdon 1780 to Balfour in CPS 2010, II:126)
23 Oct	“Smiths Plantation” (Rawdon to Tarleton)
24 Oct	“Camp near Indian Lands, West of Catawba River” (Rawdon 1780 to Leslie in CPS 2010, II:55–57)
26 Oct	“Rocky Creek” Requested rum be sent to Lee’s Mill on Rocky Creek (Rawdon 1780 to Cruger in CPS 2010, II:201)
26 Oct	“Brown’s House near Crossroads” (Rawdon 1780 to Tarleton in CPS 2010, II:285).
27 Oct	“McClarkin’s near Lee’s Mill” (Rawdon 1780 to Turnbull in CPS 2010, II:262)
28 Oct	“Camp Between Broad River and Catawba” (Rawdon 1780 to Clinton in CPS 2010, II:57-59)
29 Oct	Army arrived in “Wynnesborough” (Rawdon 1780 to Turnbull in CPS 2010, II:262) (Stedman 1794, 2:226)

Compiled by John Allison from *Cornwallis Papers* on microfiche at *South Carolina Archives* and from sources cited (Allison 2009–2016).

Beginning 15 October, Cornwallis was incapacitated by sickness but able to travel. On 21 October, Rawdon wrote to Turnbull, “I have the satisfaction to tell you that Lord Cornwallis is recovering fast.” (Rawdon 1780 in CPS 2010, II:258). Davie followed the British to Land’s Ford. In 1832, militiaman [John Taylor](#) from Granville County recalled passing Old Waxhaw Presbyterian meeting house:

At the Waxhaws I remember of being in company with General [then Colonel] Davie when the latter pointed out to me a meeting house and remarked that he was educated by his uncle to succeed him as the Pastor of that house. I particularly recollect of being much affected by the solemn spectacle of the tombstones in the surrounding churchyard.
(Taylor, John, pension application 1832)

Many years later, after a successful political career as North Carolina Governor and envoy to France, Davie built a home on the western side of Land’s Ford. In 1820, he was buried at Old Waxhaw Presbyterian Church (W. L. Anderson 2011d).

Conclusion

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. Afterwards, American forces advanced and established Camp New Providence, a large encampment of Continental Army soldiers and North Carolina militiamen on Providence Road at Six Mile Creek, 15 miles south of Charlotte (W. L. Anderson 2009b).

Troop movements associated with Cornwallis’s retreat are shown on world wide web interactive map <http://www.elehistory.com/amrev/SitesEventsTroopMovements.htm?start=1780-10-12>.

In American history, Lieutenant Colonel Banastre Tarleton is often maligned. But his book is balanced and perceptive. Only 7 years after these events, he wrote of the significance of the British invading Charlotte and Mecklenburg County:

It was now evident, beyond contradiction, that the British general [Cornwallis] had not adopted the most eligible plan for the invasion of North Carolina. The route by Charlotte

town, through the most hostile quarter of the province, on many accounts, was not advisable. Its distance likewise from Ferguson allowed the enemy to direct their attention and force against that officer, which ultimately proved his destruction. A movement on the west of the Catawba, towards Tryon county, would have been better calculated either to cover the frontier of South Carolina or to protect detachments from the army. Another operation might also have been attempted, which, in all probability, would have had a beneficial effect. Considering the force of the King's troops at this period, a march to Cross Creek [present-day Fayetteville] would have been the most rational manoeuvre that could have been adopted; where the inhabitants were acknowledged to be almost universally loyal: Upon this move Ferguson would have been undoubtedly ordered to retire, and to remain upon the defensive to the westward; and Earl Cornwallis would have had a favourable and convenient opportunity to try the fidelity of the King's friends, and to discover whether the water communication between that place and Wilmington could be opened; a point which should necessarily have been ascertained before the Royal army proceeded to the interior parts of North Carolina. (Tarleton 1787, 168)

Two months after these events, Colonel William Richardson Davie was appointed commissary officer of the Continental Army Southern Department. After the war, he had a very distinguished career in North Carolina politics. Davie retired to his *Tivoli* estate on the west side of Land's Ford. He died in 1820 and was buried in the Old Waxhaw Presbyterian Church cemetery (W. L. Anderson 2011d).

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