

# Lieutenant Colonel Robert Mebane

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*Revolutionary War Continental Army Officer,  
Commander of North Carolina Third Regiment,  
Military Timeline Notes*

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## Lieutenant Colonel Robert Mebane

### Introduction

Robert Mebane, 1745–1781, was a distinguished high-ranking military officer during the American Revolution. He was son of Alexander Mebane I, 1716–1793, who settled his family in Hawfields, North Carolina, about 1748.

In 1775, Captain Robert Mebane was an active member of Orange County militia. He participated against the Tory Highlander uprising in early 1776. He participated against the Cherokee uprising during September 1776. In November 1776, he was appointed lieutenant colonel and second-in-command of the newly created North Carolina Seventh Regiment of the Continental Army.

In 1777, Mebane may have participated in the battle at Brandywine Creek, Pennsylvania. He probably participated in the battle at Germantown, Pennsylvania. He certainly spent the following winter at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania. He was in the Army division commanded by Major General Marquis de Lafayette. In May 1778, he was reassigned to North Carolina First Regiment. He participated in the battle at Monmouth Courthouse, New Jersey. Soon afterwards, he presided over a court martial of prisoners. In late 1778, he commanded 200 Continental soldiers at strategically important King's Ferry, New York, on the Hudson River. In April 1779, General George Washington recommended Mebane to commander of North Carolina Third Regiment and ordered it southward to oppose the British attack on Georgia and South Carolina.

Mebane commanded North Carolina Third Regiment of the Continental Army during the 1780 Siege of Charlestown, South Carolina. In this defense, less than 2000 Continental soldiers plus about 4000 militia held off 14,000 professional British soldiers and sailors for 42 days.

After the May 1780 Charlestown surrender, Robert Mebane was held prisoner-of-war until June 1781 when he was exchanged and sent to Virginia. He soon returned to Hawfields and helped organize the local militia. In September, he participated in the battle of Lindley's Mill and the skirmish at Brown Marsh. Robert Mebane was killed by a Tory within days of the 19 October Yorktown victory that ended significant Revolutionary War fighting. He died at age 36 with no descendants. Although he was well known among his contemporaries, no one has written a

comprehensive history of his military career. This document compiles details from many historical sources.

### 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.

## 1776–1781, Timeline

### Robert Mebane Military Career Timeline

Robert Mebane's military career timeline appears below. It reflects best known evidence. It will be refined as new evidence is discovered.

**Robert Mebane Military Career Timeline**

Time	Personal Location	Activity	Source Documents
Jan–Feb 1776	Cross Creek region, NC	Militia captain of riflemen. Suppressed Highlander uprising.	(Hunter 1877, 125)
27 Feb 1776	Moore's Creek Bridge or Smith's Ferry, NC	Possible participation. Certain concurrent support.	(Rankin 1971, 50) (Mebane, John, pension application 1833)

<b>Time</b>	<b>Personal Location</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Source Documents</b>
Apr 1776	Wilmington, NC	Supported NC regiments recruitment.	(Hunter 1877, 125) (NCSR 1895, XI:830)
May 1776	Norfolk, VA	Town defense.	(NCSR 1895, XXII:114)
Sep 1776	Catawba River from Charlotte to Quaker Meadows, NC. "Seven-Mile Mountain."	Participant in Cherokee suppression.	(Hunter 1877, 91,125)
24 Nov 1776		Fifth Provincial Congress created Seventh Regiment.	
27 Nov 1776		Fifth Provincial Congress commissioned lieutenant colonel in Seventh Regiment.	(NCSR 1895, X:940)
Nov 1776–May 1777	Halifax, NC	Recruiting and training Seventh Regiment.	
May 1777	Halifax, NC	Continued recruiting in Halifax while most NC Continentals go north.	
17 Jul 1777	Quankey Creek, Halifax, NC	Mebane to Governor Caswell about recruiting. Requested to go Northward.	(NCSR 1895, XI:521)
11 Sep 1777	Brandywine, PA	Possible participation, including Greene's maneuver.	(Battle of Brandywine 2002)
4 Oct 1777	Germantown, PA	Probable participation. His superior Colonel Hogun participated.	(Rankin 1971, 168)
Dec 1777–Jun 1778	Valley Forge, PA	In Major General Lafayette's division.	(Bill 1952)
3 Feb 1778	Valley Forge, PA	Signed Congress oath of allegiance after this date.	(Barrie 1890)
20 May 1778	Barren Hill, PA	Probable participation.	(Stedman 1794, 1:376–379)
1 Jun 1778		Assigned to First Regiment.	(NCSR 1895, XIII:476) (Heitman 1914, 45)
28 Jun 1778	Monmouth, NJ	Almost certain participation.	
12–19 Jul 1778	Paramus, NJ	Presided over court martial of prisoners.	(NCSR 1895, XII:501)
Aug 1778	Hudson River highlands, NY	Encirclement of New York City begins.	

<b>Time</b>	<b>Personal Location</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Source Documents</b>
8 Sep 1778		Company commander. Members listed.	(NCSR 1895, XV:724)
4 Dec 1778	Hudson River at King's Ferry, NY	Commanded 200 NC Continentals from First Regiment.	(Rankin 1971, 166) (Fitzpatrick 1932, 13:377)
9 Feb 1779		Status "Coll." Possible promotion.	(NCSR 1895, XVI:1113)
4 April 1779	Middlebrook, NJ, near Washington's headquarters	Commanded Third Regiment.	(Fitzpatrick 1932, 14:331)
17 Apr 1779		Ordered to return Third Regiment to NC and join Southern Army.	(NCSR 1895, XIV:70, 292)
10 May 1779	Halifax, NC	Mebane to Governor Caswell about officer dissatisfaction.	(NCSR 1895, XIV:80)
30 Jun 1779	Hillsborough, NC	Mebane to Governor Caswell about poor health. Offers resignation.	(NCSR 1895, XIV:136)
23 Oct 1779	NC	Third Regiment strength report.	(Lincoln 1779–1780)
Oct 1779–May 1780	Charlestown, SC	Defended Charlestown. Commander Third Regiment.	
27 Oct 1779	Charlestown, SC	Third Regiment weapons report.	(Lincoln 1779–1780)
8 Nov 1779	Charlestown, SC	Presided over court martial of prisoners.	(Lincoln 1779–1780)
27 Nov 1779	Charlestown, SC	Joined investigation into shortage of wood and forage.	(Grimke 1779–1780)
17 Dec 1779	Charlestown, SC	Ordered settlement of officer rank in Third Regiment.	(Lincoln 1779–1780)
1 Jan 1780	Charlestown, SC	Abstract of muster roll of Third Regiment	(Lincoln 1779–1780)
8 Jan 1780	Charlestown, SC	Major General Lincoln to Governor Caswell about NC Continental deserters.	(NCSR 1895, XV:316)
14–18 Jan 1780	Charlestown, SC	Drew forage for 4 horses.	(Lincoln 1779–1780)
6 Feb 1780	Charlestown, SC	Commanded fatigue party for military engineer.	(Grimke 1779–1780)
11 Feb 1780	North Edisto River, SC	British Army disembarked on Simmon's Island.	

<b>Time</b>	<b>Personal Location</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Source Documents</b>
15 Feb 1780	Charlestown, SC	Guard Officer-of-the-Day.	(Grimke 1779–1780)
24 Feb 1780	Charlestown, SC	Guard Officer-of-the-Day.	(Grimke 1779–1780)
25 Feb 1780	Charlestown, SC	Assemble 175 men and march to Ashley River Ferry.	(Grimke 1779–1780)
6 Mar 1780	Charlestown, SC	Rejoined newly arrived NC Brigade.	(Grimke 1779–1780)
8 Mar 1780	Charlestown, SC	Guard Officer-of-the-Day.	(Grimke 1779–1780)
22 Mar 1780	Charlestown, SC	Guard Officer-of-the-Day.	(Grimke 1779–1780)
1 Apr 1780	Charlestown, SC	Siege began.	
14 Apr 1780	Charlestown, SC	NC and VA brigades began duty rotation.	(Grimke 1779–1780)
29 Apr 1780	Charlestown, SC	Guard Officer-of-the-Day.	(Grimke 1779–1780)
8 May 1780	Charlestown, SC	Guard Officer-of-the-Day during Lincoln-Clinton negotiations. At council of officers, voted to accept terms.	(Grimke 1779–1780) (Lincoln 1779–1780)
11 a.m. 12 May 1780	Charlestown hornwork	American surrender ceremony.	(NCSR 1895, XIV:816)
15 May 1780	Haddrell's Point, SC	Prisoner-of-war.	
Jun 1781	Haddrell's Point, SC	Sea transport to Virginia for exchange and release.	
10 Aug 1781	Richmond, VA	Mebane to Lafayette about prisoner-of-war treatment.	(Clark 1981, 480) (Ranlet 2000)
21 Aug 1781	Granville County, NC	Mebane to Governor Burke. Requests to return to field.	(NCSR 1895, XV:612)
28 Aug 1781	Hillsborough, NC	Andrew Armstrong to Governor Burke about Tory uprising.	(NCSR 1895, XXII:1048)
13 Sep 1781	Lindley's Mill, NC	Participant and leader.	(Caruthers 1854, 212, 214) (Newlin 1975)
Oct 1781	Brown Marsh, NC	Participant and leader.	(Caruthers 1854, 369) (Pass, Holloway, pension application 1836)
Oct 1781	Williams Township, Chatham County, NC	Killed by Tory Henry Hightower.	(Caruthers 1854, 361) (Smith, William C., pension application 1833)

The remainder of this document contains details of Robert Mebane's career. These include his verbatim letters and reports. Also included are a few notes about his brothers and Holt-family individuals during the American Revolution.

### **1775–1783, American Revolution**

Conditions that induced the American Revolution developed over many years. Beginning 7 September 1774, the First Continental Congress convened in Philadelphia to deliberate relations with Great Britain. Reconciliation was the first objective. But after the 19 April 1775 British raid on Lexington and Concord, Massachusetts, many Americans were outraged. The Second Continental Congress convened on 10 May 1775.

Continental Congress directed each state to establish, equip, and train a number of regiments proportional to its population. These professional soldier units complemented the citizen-soldier militia system. In the Continental Army, the words regiment and battalion were equivalent. By design, each regiment was to have 728 men, but during the war, most regiments were not at full strength, and could function with as few as 150. Each regiment had a chaplain, surgeon, and musicians, especially drummers. By law, each soldier's ration included 1 pound of beef per day. Each private was paid 6 2/3 dollars per month. Reference (Peterson 1968) displays relics of Continental soldier muskets, rifles, bayonets, swords, cannons, fortification tools, tents, medical tools, music instruments, saddles, and other horse equipment. Reference (Martin 1830) is a well-written diary of an ordinary Continental soldier.

Of all groups, Scotch-Irish were the strongest supporters of the American Revolution. In some respects, the war was a continuation of anti-government tension between Scotland and England. Even nicknames *Whig* and *Tory* transferred. Originally, Whig meant a Presbyterian guerrilla fighter, and Tory meant an Irish bandit, or worse, king supporter.

It is convenient to separate American Revolutionary War into North and South because of the 1778 shift in Britain's strategy. At first, Britain attempted to suppress rebellion in the North by controlling the Hudson River and thereby divide the colonies. But after that strategy resulted in a stalemate, Britain tried to reestablish loyalist governments in the South.

### **January–February 1776, Moore's Creek Bridge**

Since the summer of 1775, North Carolina colonial governor Josiah Martin planned the recapture of North Carolina. He persuaded British military planners to send a large invasion force to the Cape Fear River. On 10 January 1776, he ordered loyalist militia to march to Wilmington to meet the expected British Army arriving on ships. Scotland's heroine Flora Macdonald used her social prestige and Gaelic public speaking skills to actively recruit Highland Scot immigrants for the British military. Flora's husband Captain Alan Macdonald was a prominent loyalist militia officer. Only 500 of the 1600 Highlanders had firearms, a residual effect of Scotland's 1746 Act of Proscription. In response, Whig militias assembled to suppress the loyalists. Colonel Thomas Polk led the Mecklenburg County militia to Cross Creek. On

27 February, Whigs from the coastal counties blocked the loyalist's march at Moore's Creek Bridge. During the preceding night, Whigs removed approximately half the bridge flooring and greased the remaining with soap and tallow. Without many firearms, Highlanders planned to attack using double-edged broadswords. This ancient tactic failed miserably against muskets and small artillery. The battle was over in 3 minutes.



Reconstructed Moore's Creek Bridge  
Near Wilmington, North Carolina

After the battle, escaping Highlanders proceeded towards their homes near Cross Creek, North Carolina, present-day Fayetteville. But in their absence, piedmont Whigs, led by Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Martin and Colonel James Thackston, occupied that town. As many as 500 Highlanders then marched northward along the Cape Fear River eastside. At Black Mingo Creek they were surrounded by mounted Whig militiamen and surrendered. These captives were marched to nearby Smith's Ferry on Cape Fear River. There even more Whigs arrived. All Highlanders were disarmed. Ordinary soldiers took an oath of neutrality and got paroles. Officers, including Captain Alan Macdonald, were arrested and confined at Halifax. For the next two weeks, Whig bands rounded up suspected Highlander loyalists (Hatch 1969, 44–45).

Although Moore's Creek Bridge battle was small and short, it and its aftermath intimidated loyalists throughout both Carolinas. It allowed Whigs to consolidate control of local and state governments. Unchallenged for the next four years, Whigs were strong enough to resist the British Army when it returned in 1780. On 1 April, when General George Washington learned of this battle, he wrote, "the old proverb, of the first blow being half the Battle cannot better apply than in these Instances the Spirits of the vanquish'd being depresse'd in proportion as the Victors get elated." (Washington 1776 in PGWRWS 1985, 4:10)

Captain Robert Mebane led a militia company of riflemen to Cross Creek and then to Wilmington. Mebane's company was under militia Lieutenant Colonel John Williams of Hillsborough. This unit may have been in Colonel James Thackston's command. Robert Mebane may have participated in capturing escaping Tories at Smith's Ferry where his brother John

Mebane was at that time. A John Williams, but not necessarily the same person, was on Colonel Richard Caswell's list of participants at Moore's Creek (Hunter 1877, 125).

In 1832, [Richard Allen testified](#) in his pension application:

On the 13th day of February following, they set out upon their march to Cross Creek or Fayetteville, having understood that the Scotch Tories were committing great depredations in the country round about that place. On their way, they were joined by Col Martin Armstrong with the Surry militia at a place called old Richmond. After joining Col Armstrong, they continued their march until they reached Randolph County where they were joined by Col Alexander Martin of the Continental line, with a small body of troops under his command from thence they pursued their march direct to Cross Creek or Fayetteville. The day before their arrival at that place, a battle had been fought between the Tories under Genl McDonald and the Whig militia under Genl Moore, in which the former were defeated with considerable loss and a great number taken prisoners. The prisoners taken in this engagement were delivered over to Captain Jesse Walton; and his company who were ordered as a guard to convey them to Hillsborough. They immediately set out with the prisoners for that place, but before they reached it, they were met by two companies of Light Horse under the command of Captains Mebane & Shepherd, who took charge of the prisoners, when Captain Walton and his company were discharged and returned home, where they arrived about the 29th of March, having been gone near two months. (Allen, Richard, pension application 1832)

Private John Mebane, Robert's younger brother, was also in John Williams's unit. His 30 March 1833 [pension application](#) (Mebane, John, pension application 1833) indicates that this unit intercepted Tories at Smith's Ferry as they escaped from Moore's Creek. About 300 Tories were captured. Smith's Ferry was on the Cape Fear River just downstream of where Lower Little River joins. Today, Linden, Cumberland County, North Carolina, is the nearest town. Smith's Ferry was later named Dawson's Ferry.

Michael Holt II organized loyalist militiamen in Orange County to support Governor Martin. He was leading these men to Wilmington at the time of Moore's Creek Bridge Battle. Afterwards, he was arrested and held in Halifax. In May 1777, he and about 30 principal Tories were sent to a Philadelphia prison. Holt contrived to make interest with Congress. He was released along with most native-born Americans (Symth in Hatch 1969, 86). By 1780, Holt was home again and cooperated with local Whigs (Troxler and Vincent 1999, 86).

### **May 1776, Norfolk**

In May 1776, Captain Robert Mebane was in Norfolk defending it from British naval attack (NCSR 1895, XXII:114) (Russell 2000, 62–77).



### July–October 1776, Campaign against Cherokees

In July 1776, Cherokees, who were encouraged by the British and led by Dragging Canoe, raided throughout western Carolinas, including present-day Tennessee, killing at least 44 settlers (Preyer 1987, 117). In retaliation, each of the four southern states organized an expeditionary army. Colonel Griffith Rutherford organized a 2000-man army of North Carolinians. At that time, William Graham was commissioned colonel in command of Tryon County militia. His commission was granted by the North Carolina Provincial Congress.

North Carolina, Hillsboro. In Congress September 9, 1776  
this may certify that William Graham Esq. is appointed by  
act of Congress Colonel of the militia in the County of  
Tryon by order of Samuel Johnston, President  
Andrew Knox, secretary. (Graham, William, pension application 1832)

Corporal Samuel Espey was typical of many Tryon County militiamen. He volunteered as a ranger against the Cherokees. Beginning 10 July 1776, for about one month, he remained at McFadden's Fort on Mountain Creek just west of present-day Rutherfordton. On 19 August, at Moses Moore's home 6 miles from present-day Lincolnton, he joined Captain Peter Carpenter's company in Colonel William Graham's regiment. Moore's home was near where present-day Shoal Road crosses Indian Creek (Dellinger 2006–2011). From there he marched to Pleasant Gardens, on the Catawba River headwaters, and joined Colonel Rutherford's expedition. It crossed the French Broad River and advanced as far as the Little Tennessee River and then returned. Espey was discharged on 6 October (Espey, Samuel, pension application 1832).

British support of this Indian uprising alienated many Tryon County German-speaking settlers who otherwise would have been loyalists. Jacob Plunk II was typical among this group. He served as a militia private starting about June 1776 in Captain Robert Alexander's company (Plunk, Jacob, pension application 1832). That company marched to Monfort's Cove (Hunter 1877, 297) in present-day Rutherford County, North Carolina. From there, his company joined Rutherford's campaign.

Rutherford's army used no wagons; all provisions were carried by packhorse (Hunter 1877, 177). During September 1776, it destroyed the Cherokee Middle Towns with their crops. That location was between the present-day towns of Cherokee and Murphy, North Carolina. Most Cherokees fled the attack. Some who were captured were sold into slavery (Hatley 1995, 194–197). In early 1777, Cherokees attacked again, but by May, their resistance collapsed. In a 20 July 1777 treaty, Cherokees relinquished most of their lands in the Carolinas.

Captain Robert Mebane participated in the Rutherford campaign. He led a company from Charlotte to Quaker Meadows, present-day Morganton, North Carolina (Hunter 1877, 91, 125, 280). Reference (USNC n.d., 74) (Mebane 1999, 124) records his pay.

In 1833, [James Jack testified](#) in his pension application:

on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of next June — that in the spring of the year 1776 he entered the service of the United States at the town of Charlotte, Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, under Captain Robert Mebane [spelled throughout as “Mabin”], commander of a troop of light horse attached to a regiment commanded by Colonel Thomas Polk [spelled throughout as “Poke”] (that Mebane he believes was the son of Colonel Mebane of Hillsboro North Carolina) and came to Charlotte for volunteers; that he with 63 others turned out in one day; that they each found their own horse, saddle and bridle — that from Charlotte, Captain Mebane marched his company and crossed the Catawba [River] and joined six or 700 men at Dutchman’s Creek in South Carolina under the command of Major Sumter [spelled “Sumpter” throughout]; that from thence we crossed Board River at Tuckaseegee Ford and from thence we marched to the Golden Grove, where we had an engagement with the Tories and probably some Cherokee Indians. In this engagement we succeeded under the command of Sumter. Immediately after this engagement we marched to the Chalk Bluff on the Savannah River where we remained until the British landed at Savannah. (Jack, James, pension application 1833).

Hezekiah Alexander was a commissary officer during the Cherokee campaign (Preyer 1987, 118). Joel Baldwin, a Mecklenburg County resident, may have participated in this campaign. He died on 21 October 1776 at age 26 and was buried in the Charlotte Burying Ground, now known as Settlers’ Cemetery. His grave is the oldest known grave there.

### **November–December 1776, North Carolina Fifth Provincial Congress**

On 24 November 1776, the North Carolina *Fifth Provincial Congress* in Halifax established three new Continental regiments.

On 27 November 1776, Robert Mebane was commissioned lieutenant colonel in the newly created North Carolina Seventh Regiment (NCSR 1895, X:941) (Heitman 1914, 46). He was second in command under Colonel James Hogun. Reference (Rankin 1971, 87) indicates his rank was major, but does not provide a source.

The North Carolina Provincial Congress also established the Brigade of Volunteers to aid South Carolina resist an expected British invasion. The brigade was commanded by Brigadier General Allen Jones. It included two battalions. The Second Battalion was commanded by Colonel Francis Locke. Its officers included local leaders Captain James Jack and Captain Joseph Dickson. This brigade of volunteers was stationed in Camden, South Carolina, until the threat of invasion passed in April 1777.

On 18 December 1776, the Fifth Provincial Congress adopted the first *North Carolina Constitution*. This ended the Provincial Congress and emergency Provincial Council along with all county committees of safety. The new constitution created a bicameral legislature, the office of Governor, Council of State, and judiciary. The lower house was called *House of Commons*, a

name that mistakenly suggests pre-Revolution to modern readers. The constitution included a *Bill-of-Rights*. Every free man, who was a resident for at least one year and paid taxes, was entitled to vote. This constitution was not revised until 1835 (Rankin 1959, 23). Section 41 provided “that a School or Schools shall be established by the Legislature for the convenient Instruction of Youth, with such Salaries to the Masters paid by the Public, as may enable them to instruct at low Prices; and all useful Learning shall be duly encouraged and promoted in one or more Universities.” Actual establishment occurred later during 1789–1794.

It took considerable courage to participate in creating a new government in December 1776 when the war’s outcome was uncertain. At that time, a federal government was not contemplated. So, creating an independent state government was a final irreversible affront against Britain authority. Creators of the government realized every part of their family’s future was at risk.

Alexander Mebane II, a was an Orange County delegate in the Fifth Provincial Congress. Due to a voting irregularity in Orange County, he did not acquire the seat until 16 December (NCSR 1895, X:970–971). Presumably, on 17–18 December, he voted for the bill-of-rights and new constitution (NCSR 1895, X:973–974). Mebane was an Orange County justice of the peace. In 1777, he was Orange County sheriff, the same office his father held in 1752. During the Revolutionary War, he was Hillsborough District militia commissary officer.



Alexander Mebane II and wife Mary Armstrong

Photographs of original portraits, Holmes Papers #4587, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Used with permission.

Images provided by Robert M. Mebane (Mebane 1999).

### **Spring-Summer 1777, Quankey Creek**

During spring 1777, North Carolina Continental soldiers gathered near Halifax along Quankey Creek. In May, Brigadier General Francis Nash marched most soldiers northward to join George

Washington's army (Rankin 1971, 90). On 21 May, at Alexandria, Virginia, all soldiers who had not had smallpox were inoculated (Rankin 1971, 91). This treatment transferred pus from a nearly recovered smallpox victim onto a healthy person's skin. This procedure gave the recipient a mild case of smallpox that lasted 3–4 weeks, and afterwards, lifetime immunity. The regiments then marched to Philadelphia where they were assigned to Major General Nathanael Greene's division. From there, they were assigned to various camps in New York, New Jersey, Delaware, and Pennsylvania. Some officers continued recruiting new soldiers at Quanky Creek during the summer under command of Colonel John Williams (Davidson 1951, 43).

Lieutenant Colonel Robert Mebane, second-in-command of North Carolina Seventh Regiment, continued recruitment at Quanky Creek during the summer. On 17 July 1777, he wrote a letter to North Carolina Governor Richard Caswell. As might be expected in a letter to a superior, it describes problems and possible solutions.

HALIFAX, July 17<sup>th</sup> 1777

SIR:—

A return of the success of the 7th Battalion your Excellency will have in the General return from the Commanding Officer, the chief reason given by most of the officers upon the recruiting service for their bad success is want of money, in which I am persuaded there may be some justice. We have numbers of deserters, who I think it will be impossible ever to have brought in, unless officers are sent on purpose after them; as they generally live too obscure for proclamations or any other offered clemency to reach them, even if we could suppose they were determined to return to their duty. I have, (with the leave of the commanding officer) sent several officers from the 7th Battalion in quest of them. As some officers had not discharged their duty, and in some measure disobeyed orders upon hearing the instructions given by your Excellency (to the Commanding Officer) they beg leave to resign; this indulgence I think may be granted them without any injury to the service. I should be glad, in making future appointments in this Battalion, if agreeable to your Excellency, that Commissions may be granted conditionally, according to the number they recruit. I should also be glad that I may be ordered to march with the first that goes from this place.

I am, Sir, with all possible deference and respect

Your very h<sup>ble</sup>. serv't.,

ROBT. MEBANE.

His Excellency Governor Caswell. (Mebane 1777 in NCSR 1895, XI:521).

In April 1777, Gilbert du Motier Marquis de Lafayette, age 19, wrote his wife Adrienne, "The happiness of America is intimately connected with the happiness of all mankind; she is destined

to become the safe and venerable asylum of virtue, of honesty, of tolerance, and quality and of peaceful liberty.” He and Baron Johann DeKalb sailed to America on the warship *Victoire*. The destination was Charlestown, but its harbor was blockaded by British warships. Consequently, on 13 June 1777, they disembarked on North Island off the coast of Georgetown, near present-day Pawley’s Island. After returning to Charlestown, on 19 June, Lafayette wrote to his wife:

I shall now speak to you, my love, about the country and its inhabitants, who are as agreeable as my enthusiasm had led me to imagine. Simplicity of manner, kindness of heart, love of country and of liberty, and a delightful state of equality, are met with universally. The richest and the poorest man are completely on a level; and although there are some immense fortunes in this country, I may challenge any one to point out the slightest difference in their respective manner towards each other. I first saw and judged of a country life at Major Hughes’s house: I am at present in the city, where everything somewhat resembles the English customs, except that you find more simplicity here than you would do in England. Charlestown is one of the best built, handsomest, and most agreeable cities that I have ever seen. The American women are very pretty, and have great simplicity of character; and the extreme neatness of their appearance is truly delightful: cleanliness is everywhere even more studiously attended to here than in England. What gives me most pleasure is to see how completely the citizens are all brethren of one family. In America there are none poor, and none even that can be called peasants. Each citizen has some property, and all citizens have the same rights as the richest individual, or landed proprietor, in the country. The inns are very different from those of Europe; the host and hostess sit at table with you, and do the honours of a comfortable meal; and when you depart, you pay your bill without being obliged to tax it. If you should dislike going to inns, you may always find country houses in which you will be received, as a good American, with the same attention that you might expect in a friend’s house in Europe. (Lafayette 1777 in Lafayette 1837).

After a month long trip, he arrived at Philadelphia on 27 July.

### **August–October 1777, Philadelphia, Brandywine, Georgetown**

In June 1777, British commander General William Howe invaded New Jersey in an attempt to draw Washington’s army out of Morristown. Washington refused to engage, holding his army as a block on the land route to Philadelphia. On 28 June, this military strategy was articulated by 21 year old Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Hamilton:

I know the comments some people will make on our Fabian conduct. It will be imputed either to cowardice, or to weakness. But the more discerning, I trust, will not find it difficult to conceive that it proceeds from the truest policy, and is an argument neither of one nor the other ... Our business then is to avoid a

general engagement, and to waste the enemy away by constantly goading their sides in a desultory, teasing way. (Hamilton 1776 in Muir 1977, 27)

On 22 August when British intentions to attack Philadelphia became clear, Continentals were again united in that city. On 24 August, 16,000 paraded through the city. The next day, they moved to Wilmington, Delaware, to block the British disembarking from the Chesapeake Bay (Rankin 1971, 92–99). The American Army built a defensive position north of Brandywine Creek, Pennsylvania, and met the British Army there on 11 September. The North Carolina Brigade, commanded by Brigadier General Francis Nash, was just upstream of Chadd's Ford. It formed a reserve behind Nathanael Greene's division. During the morning hours, Washington expected the British to attack across Chadd's Ford. But in the afternoon, he discovered the surprising British flanking maneuver occurred on the opposite end. To meet this threat, Washington ordered Nathanael Greene's division to reposition 4 miles away. That maneuver was executed in 45 minutes (Battle of Brandywine 2002). The North Carolina Brigade participated in this maneuver, and met the enemy. However, (Rankin 1971, 105) indicates that it did not participate in direct fighting. The American Army retreated to north of Philadelphia.

On 1 September, from Quakertown near Halifax, all remaining Continental officers and soldiers, including Lieutenant Colonel Robert Mebane, began to march north. They joined George Washington's army after Brandywine (Davidson 1951, 44).

In late September, as British forces advanced on Philadelphia, a detachment of Mecklenburg Continental soldiers was assigned the task of transporting the heavy baggage out of town.

Col. Polk was assigned to remove the heavy baggage from Philadelphia. This amounted to 200 men and 700 wagons containing also all of the brass bells of Philadelphia (to keep the British from melting them down for cannon balls). Among these, of course was the State House Bell, later known as the Liberty Bell. He carried the baggage first to Trenton and then to Bethlehem Pa. The arrival is recorded in the Moravian church records of Sept 23, 1777. The wagon with the State House Bell broke down in the middle of the street and they had to unload the bell. Highland prisoners [those captured after Moore's Creek Bridge] were moved out – further west – and their quarters were turned into a hospital. The wagons were unloaded and sent back to Philadelphia. (Polk 1912) (Williams 2010)

George Washington withdrew to a camp northwest of Philadelphia. Continental Congress moved to York, Pennsylvania. On 26 September, British occupied the city, and built its main camp at Germantown. George Washington devised a plan to attack this camp with four independent troop columns that were to converge simultaneously at daybreak 4 October. At first, success appeared likely. But foggy conditions prevented the four American columns from seeing each other. About 120 British soldiers took shelter in a fortress-like stone house. Washington decided to subdue the house rather than bypass it. That wasted valuable time. The

delay caused other American officers to believe they were surrounded, and they ordered a withdrawal. Soon all Americans withdrew. Nathanael Greene wrote, Americans “fled from Victory.” Nonetheless, British suffered high losses and withdrew from Germantown. Charles Stedman, British commissary officer and later historian, wrote:

It was the general opinion of the officers of both armies, that, had the Americans advanced immediately, instead of attacking the fortieth regiment, the total defeat of the British must have ensued. But the delay occasioned by the several attempts to reduce Chew’s House afforded time for the British line to get under arms; and that circumstance was justly considered as the salvation of the royal army. (Stedman 1794, 1:300).

At Germantown, the North Carolina Brigade was in a central attacking column, following Generals Sullivan and Wayne’s soldiers (Commager and Morris 1975, 626). It saw heavy fighting when Americans withdrew. Brigade commander Brigadier General Francis Nash was mortally wounded. Later, Georgia Brigadier General Lachlan McIntosh assumed temporary command until replaced by North Carolinian Colonel Thomas Clark.

No specifics about Robert Mebane’s participation are known. His immediate superior, Colonel James Hogun, “behaved with distinguished intrepidity.” (Rankin 1971, 168). That evidence helped promote Hogun to brigadier general and brigade commander on 9 January 1779.

During the winter of 1777–1778, American soldiers camped at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania (Rankin 1971, 90–123). Soldier privations and suffering were astonishing. For example, in late December 1777, of the 1051 North Carolina Continentals, 327 were sick and 164 were unfit for duty for want of clothing (Rankin 1971, 138). As wintertime conditions worsened, the Scotch-Irish soldiers remained steadfast. Washington declared, “If defeated everywhere else, I will make my last stand for liberty among the Scotch-Irish of my native Virginia.” While at Valley Forge, Washington requested the Continental Congress appoint Marquis de Lafayette, age 20, commander of a division with the rank of major general. Because of Lafayette’s heroism at Brandywine and his exemplary character, his appointment was popular among American officers and men. Lafayette was likewise impressed with his Continentals at Valley Forge. He wrote, “The patient fortitude of the officers and soldiers was a continual miracle that each moment renewed.” More Valley Forge details appear in (Bill 1952).



Major General Gilbert du Motier Marquis de Lafayette  
Engraved by George E. Perine.

During December 1777–May 1778, the North Carolina Brigade was at Valley Forge under the American division commanded by Lafayette. Its camp was close to Washington's headquarters. Since Robert Mebane's responsibilities were two levels below division level, he did not take orders directly from Lafayette or Washington. But during his long service, he likely interacted with most principal military leaders.

#### **January–May 1778, Oath of Allegiance, French Alliance, Barren Hill**

On 3 February 1778, the Continental Congress, having taken into consideration the report of the special committee appointed to devise effectual means to prevent persons disaffected to the interest of the United States from being employed in any of the important offices thereof, resolved, That every officer who held or should thereafter hold a commission or office from Congress, should subscribe the oath or affirmation of allegiance. These oaths or affirmations the commander-in-chief or any major or brigadier-general was authorized and directed to administer to all officers of the army or of any of the departments thereof. (Barrie 1890). Washington delayed administering this oath until Congress clarified long-term pay commitments to his officers.

On 6 February 1778, France signed a treaty of alliance with United States.

On 28 March 1778, the South Carolina General Assembly passes an oath of allegiance law for all residents. Many loyalists fled to British Florida.

On 6 May 1778, a *Grand Review* parade at Valley Forge celebrated the new alliance with France. The French ambassador attended.

After France entered the war, Philadelphia became vulnerable to the French Navy blockading the Delaware River. During May 1778, British intentions to evacuate Philadelphia became clear. Before or on 19 May, Washington ordered Lafayette to move about 3000 troops towards



Philadelphia. Lafayette crossed Schuylkill River at Matson's Ford and set up a position on Barren Hill. During the night of 19–20 May, 5000 British soldiers marched by a circuitous route to the rear of the Americans, blocking the road. At the same time, another strong British detachment under General Charles Grey marched more directly towards Barren Hill and took control of a downstream Schuylkill ford. When the Americans realized their severe predicament, they hurriedly withdrew directly to Matson's Ford avoiding the road. General Washington, who was a few miles away, thought Lafayette's position was hopeless. It was reported that Washington was so alarmed that he destroyed an intervening bridge to save his remaining troops. The British had sufficient time to control Matson's Ford, and if they had, Barren Hill would be known as a significant British victory. Fortunately, Lafayette's troops did cross at Matson's Ford and stabilized the situation by quickly securing high ground on the opposite bank. (Stedman 1794, 1:376–379).

Since Lieutenant Colonel Robert Mebane's unit was in Major General Lafayette's division, he likely participated in these events near Barren Hill and Matson's Ford.

In late May, while at Valley Forge, all [officers pledged their allegiance](#) by signing individual certificates (PNG 1980, II:398).

Lieutenant Colonel Robert Mebane signed an oath of allegiance certificate. He indicated that he was still in Seventh Regiment. (PNG 1980, II:398).

### **May–July 1778, Regiment consolidation, Monmouth Courthouse**

On 27 May 1778, Congress, with General Washington's consultation, reorganized the Continental Army. The number of regiments was reduced from 88 to 80 with South Carolina, North Carolina and Virginia supplying 6, 6 and 11 respectively. Each new regiment was to add a new company of light infantry drawn from the other 8 companies. No officer was to be promoted to colonel, instead a lieutenant colonel must advance directly to brigadier general. Each regimental field officer was to command a company in addition to his regimental duties (Peterson 1968, 258). The 9 North Carolina regiments in the North were consolidated into 3 regiments. This created an excess of officers. These so-called supernumerary officers returned to North Carolina (Rankin 1971, 147).

On 1 June, Lieutenant Colonel Robert Mebane was reassigned as a company commander in First Regiment. Its 8 September muster roll was recorded (NCSR 1895, XV:724).

On 26 June, Colonel Thomas Polk wrote to General Washington from Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, resigning his commission:

May it please your Excellency:

From the earliest Commencement of the present War, I have been actively engaged in the services of my country. I embarked in it at so early a season as rendered me not a little obnoxious to a vast majority of the Province in which I

lived. The timid, the Friends of the established Government, & the moderate, as they were called, at that Period composed the bulk of the Inhabitants—by them was my forward zeal universally condemned. Thro' innumerable difficulties, from opposition, & inconveniences to my private interest, in the militia and regular service, I continued my efforts for the public good, and doubted not, as I had done more of this kind for the defence of the State than any other member of it, that I had deserved well of my Country; but as soon as an opening for promotion was made by the unhappy fall of Gen'l Nash, the power of a party, overlooking the merit of these services, procured a recommendation in favour of a Junior Officer. Such a flagrant demonstration of partiality and injurious preference, without alledging a single article of disqualification against me, has determined me no longer to serve my ungratefull country in so painful and so hazardous a capacity.

I rejoice in the prosperity of my country, and am willing, on every occasion, to aid the advancement of its Interests, but choose not to obtrude my services.

For these reasons I am constrained to offer your Excellency my Commission in the Army, and humbly beg that you would kindly condescend to accept it.

I am, may it please your Excellency,  
with the profoundest respect,  
Your Excellency's most humble,  
most obedient, and most devoted Servant,  
THOMAS POLK.

Mecklenburg County, in the State of N. Carolina,  
June 26, 1778.

His Excellency Gen'l Washington, Commander  
in Chief of the Armies of the United States. (Polk 1778 in NCSR 1895, XIII:451)  
(Williams 2010)

Until October 1778, North Carolina Continental soldiers wore personal hunting coats, although most officers probably purchased uniforms.



Private North Carolina Third Regiment in 1778.  
Painted by Charles M. Lefferts. (Lefferts 1926).

On 18 June 1778, British Army evacuated Philadelphia and moved by land towards New York City. General Washington ordered his army to follow the British column. On 24 June, the entire region witnessed a predicted solar eclipse. On 28 June, at Monmouth Courthouse, New Jersey, Washington ordered an attack. The initial attack was led by Lafayette, Wayne, and Scott. Both Wayne and Scott believed they near “obtained a most glorious and decisive victory.” But Major General Charles Lee ordered a withdrawal. Shortly afterwards, Washington countermanded the withdrawal. Fighting lasted from sunup to sundown in extremely hot weather. After suffering heavy losses, British pulled away during the night (Rankin 1971, 154).

From about 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m., 24 June 1778, Carolina residents experienced a total solar eclipse. Its track ran along the Carolina Piedmont about 25 miles south of and parallel to present-day highway 185. Totality was experienced within 50 miles on both sides of that track.



Total Solar Eclipse, Zone of Totality, 24 June 1778 (NASA 2012)

A Moravian, probably at Bethabara or Bethania settlement, recorded:

Beginning shortly before 9 o'clock in the morning there was an almost total eclipse of the sun. At the peak of the eclipse the sun was under a cloud, and for some minutes it was necessary to light the candles, stars peeped out here and there, and no one can remember to have seen the like before. The reapers returned from the field about 9 o'clock, and did not go out again until afternoon. (RMNC 1922, III:1237) (Bumgarner 2014)

On 26 June 1778, the *North Carolina Gazette*, in New Bern, published:

On Wednesday last, the great eclipse of the sun, as calculated by astronomers in the almanacks, and said to happen in this latitude, and be visible here, was observed with great attention, and some surprise to the ignorant, the weather being tolerably clear, and the moon's passage over the sun's disk being distinctly seen during the whole immersion. This was the greatest eclipse of the sun ever seen here by the eldest people now living among us, and exhibited a scene truly awful. The gradual obscurity of the sun, the decrease of her light, the sickly face of nature, and at last the total darkness which ensued, the stars appearing as at midnight, and the fowls seeking for their nightly shelter, caused a solemnity truly great, and, tho' proceeding from a natural cause, the moon's passing between the sun and our earth, which she must necessarily do in certain periods in different latitudes, was beheld with astonishment and gratitude to the supreme Ruler of the universe, by whose almighty power the motions of such vast bodies are regular and uniform, and the delightful system of the world kept entire and complete. (NCSR 1895, XIII:450) (Poteet 2009–2017)

North Carolina First Regiment participated at Monmouth Courthouse. It may have participated in the initial attack under command of General Scott. During the late afternoon hours, the North Carolina Brigade again moved to the front (Rankin 1971, 158). During 12–19 July, George

Washington's headquarters ordered Robert Mebane to preside over a court martial of prisoners (NCSR 1895, XII:501). That typically included trials of all American soldiers currently in prison accused of petty crimes, neglect of duty, and desertion.

### **October 1778–July 1779, Encirclement of New York City, King's Ferry**

With the British back in New York City, Washington began to encircle it. In October 1778, new Continental uniforms arrived from France. North Carolina Continentals were given blue coats faced in blue (Rankin 1971, 163).

Robert Mebane may have commanded First Regiment in late 1778 when Colonel Thomas Clark assumed temporary command of the North Carolina Brigade. For certain, Mebane commanded 200 North Carolina Continental soldiers at King's Ferry along the major north-south road. King's Ferry crosses the Hudson River between Stony Point and Verplanck's Point. This defense protected American commerce as well as prevented British use of the upper Hudson River as a supply line into occupied New York City (Rankin 1971, 166).



King's Ferry across Hudson River  
Revolutionary War era map  
From Stony Point Park, New York, web site.

On 4 and 7 December 1778, George Washington issued the following orders to Colonel Thomas Clark, commander of the North Carolina Brigade. The second order refers to the first. Both orders were combined and dispatched to Clark on 7 December.

Elizabeth Town, December 4, 1778.

Sir: As the Convention Troops [British captives being marched to a Virginia prison] will have passed above you by the time this reaches you, the object of your Station at the [Smith's] Clove will have been effected. You will therefore be pleased to move down to Paramus with the [North] Carolina Brigade and quarter your Men in as compact a manner as the situation of the Buildings will permit. You shall, upon my arrival at Middle Brook receive more particular

instructions. I would recommend it to you, as soon as you have taken post, to make yourself acquainted with the Roads leading to the North [Hudson] River and have pickets established upon them at proper distances from you. You are in no danger from any other quarter. Should the Enemy move up the River in any considerable force, you are immediately to fall back to your former position at Sufferan's and send your Baggage to Pompton. Colo. Morgan furnished Mr. Erskine at Ringwood Iron Works with a guard of a serjeant and 12. be pleased to send the like number to relieve them. They are to remain there during the Winter, as Mr. Erskine will be completing some valuable surveys for the public.

Be pleased to make use of all means to cut off the intercourse between the Country and New York [City]. You are upon no account to permit any inhabitant of the States of New York or New Jersey to pass to New York [City] without permissions under the hands of their respective Governors. Upon your arrival at Paramus you are to send the inclosed to Colo. Febiger at Hackinsack. It directs him to join his Brigade, as soon as you have taken post. I am &ca.

Paramus Decemr. 7.

The Enemy having gone down the [Hudson] River, you will immediately proceed to put the foregoing into execution. Be pleased to let the 200 Men under Colo. Mabane, if they are not already withdrawn, remain near Kings ferry until they are relieved by a party, which will be sent over by Genl. McDougal. I must beg you to be particularly careful to prevent the Soldiers from burning the fences of the farmers and committing other disorderly acts. I am etc.

[P.S.] If Colo. Mabane should have been withdrawn from Kings ferry, be pleased to leave an officer and 50 Men at Kakiate until you receive further orders. (Fitzpatrick 1932, 13:377).

On 9 January 1779, Colonel James Hogun was promoted to brigadier general and commander of the North Carolina Brigade. Thomas Clark resumed his former position as commander of First Regiment. Mebane remained in First Regiment. Reference (NCSR 1895, XVI:1113) states that on 9 February 1779, Robert Mebane's status was "Coll.". It is not certain if this was a promotion. Beginning March 1779, North Carolina Third Regiment strength dropped due to enlistment expirations (Rankin 1971, 167). In the February 1779 Continental Army strength return (Lesser 1976, 104), these expirations may be indicated as sick absent.

#### February 1779 North Carolina Regiments Strength Return

		First	Second	Third
Fit for Duty	Commissioned Officers	18	12	16
	Noncommissioned Officers	38	39	15

Sick & Furlough	Staff Officers	4	5	4
	Rank & File	302	223	35
	Total	362	279	70
	Sick Present	28	44	62
	Sick Absent	35	16	263
	On Command, Extra Service	125	127	64
Grand Total Alterations	On Furlough	1	7	
		551	473	459
	Deaths		10	24
	Deserted	2	3	
	Joined, Enlisted, Recruited	3	3	

On 4 April 1779, in a report to Continental Board of War, George Washington recommended that Robert Mebane assume command of Third Regiment, exchanging responsibilities with Lieutenant Colonel William Lee Davidson.

... If Lieutenant Colo. Mebane was the Oldest Lieutenant Colonel in the North Carolina line when Colo. Hogan [Hogun] was promoted to the rank of a Brigadier, he unquestionably, according to the principles of rank recomd. should be appointed Lieutenant Colonel Commandant, and Lt. Colo. Davidson should remove to the Regiment in which the former served. ... (Fitzpatrick 1932, 14:331).

On 17 April 1779, Continental Board of War ordered Robert Mebane to return Third Regiment to North Carolina for recruitment and to counter the growing British threat from Savannah, Georgia. The Board of War Office informed North Carolina Governor Richard Caswell.

WAR OFFICE, April 17th, 1779

SIR:

The time of service of the non-commissioned officers and privates of the Third North Carolina Regiment being expired, all the officers belonging to it are to return home to the State, as they may do service in the Southern Army, if furnished with men. We have given orders to Lieut. Col. Mebane, who has the command of the Regiment, to apply to the Government of your State to form a Regiment, to be employed at the Southward during the continuance of the Enemy in that quarter, the Regiment to be raised in such manner as the Government shall think fit, only, if engaged on the continental establishment, the Regiment must, of course, be liable to serve where the exigency of the States shall call them. Of this matter we judged it expedient to inform your Excellency, and to request that as those officers continue in pay they may be furnished with the means of serving the United States.

We have the honor to be,  
Very respectfully, your Mo. Ob. Servt.,  
TIM PICKERING.

By order of the Board.

Gov. Caswell. (Pickering 1779 in NCSR 1895, XIV:70)

Reference (Heitman 1914, 46) states Mebane transferred to Third Regiment on 7 June, but that maybe an administrative delay. As a regimental commander, Mebane was directly answerable to North Carolina Governor Caswell. In a 10 May letter, he wrote about recruitment problems and officer discontent.

HALIFAX, May 10th, 1779

SIR:

The enclosed is a return of the Regiment which marched from this place under the command of Genl. Hogun, which, I think, is sufficient to convince the Assembly of the impropriety of raising Troops for so short a time, and the necessity of having them supplied with clothing and other necessities when raised.

I have dismissed the officers with orders to meet agreeable to your orders, which Major Hogg (the bearer of this) waits on your Excellency for, but am almost convinced if the Assembly does not do something for the support of the officers they will not all meet. There has been several applications made to me already, and from I think, the best of my officers, to receive their commissions, but have prevailed on them to keep them until the Assembly rises. The officers to the Northward are much dissatisfied with the treatment they have received from the State. Capt. McRee, came from the Brigade a few days before I left Philadelphia, says that the officers were then met in order to inform the State if there was not something done immediately for them they would resign to a man; from what I heard before I left there am convinced they will.

My bad state of health will not permit my waiting (agreeable to orders) on the Governor and council, wish the Major to receive the orders respecting the Regiment.

I am, with esteem,  
Your Ob. humb. Servt.,  
ROBERT MEBANE (Mebane 1779 in NCSR 1895, XIV:80)



In response, North Carolina General Assembly resolved that Continental officers who did not resign should receive half pay for life after the war, and such pay was transferable to their wives if they died in service (Davidson 1951, 55).

The famous Stony Point Battle occurred the night of 15–16 July 1779. Selected North Carolina Continentals participated. They probably included men in Mebane's previous regiment. At that time, Mebane had already departed with Third Regiment for North Carolina.

### **Late 1778, Southern Strategy**

At the end of 1778, the British Army was back in New York City, in essentially the same strategic position held in 1776. Thus, war in northern states reached a stalemate. In addition, Britain was at war with France and needed relocate troops to secure all its colonies, especially in the West Indies. This manpower shortage caused Britain to change its strategy by focusing on southern states where it believed loyalist militia, such as Highland immigrants, could be recruited. Former royal North Carolina Governor Josiah Martin made such optimistic projections. Britain's planners mistakenly assumed that most backcountry men were loyalists. They did not consider likely Scotch-Irish reaction. The regular British Army objective was to suppress rebellion enough to reinstate loyalist control of local governments. If successful, the American Army would be proven ineffective in supporting rebel local governments. So, the British Army searched for ways to engage rebel forces while the American Army countered this goal by merely maintaining a respectable force.

### **April–June 1779, Prevost's attack on Charlestown, Stono Ferry**

In April 1779, Major General Benjamin Lincoln and Colonel Griffith Rutherford were heroes among the Whigs. Both were containing British forces within Savannah, Georgia. In North Carolina, the local Tryon County Whig government split and renamed their new counties Lincoln and Rutherford. Beginning on 3 May, Lincoln County citizens signed a petition to the General Assembly for appointment of their militia field officers (Broad River Genealogy Society, *Eswau Huppeday*, 1998, XVIII:2:175–178).

The recommended Lincoln County leader was Colonel William Graham who on 12 May, received a new commission. Its text was typical of all officer commissions.

State of North Carolina: to William Graham Esq.,

Greetings, we, reposing special trust and confidence in your Valor, Conduct and Fidelity do by these presents Constitute and appoint you to be Col of the Lincoln [County] Regiment of Militia of this State. You [illegible words] carefully and diligently to discharge the duties of a Colonel by exercising and well disciplining the Officers and Soldiers under your Command and by doing and performing all manner of things thereunto belonging and we do Strictly Charge and require all Officers and Soldiers under your Command to be Obedient to your Orders as Colonel and you are to Observe and follow such Orders and Directions from

time to time as you shall receive from your Superior Officers according to the Rules and Directions of Military Discipline and the law of this State.

Witness: Richard Caswell, Esq., Governor Captain General and Commander in Chief of the said State under his hand and the Great Seal of this State at Smithfield the 12th day of May Anno Dom 1779 and in the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of our independence.

By his Excellency commanded: [signed] J. Glasgow, Sec.

[signed] Richard Caswell (Graham, William, pension application 1832)

Beginning 23 April 1779, American commander Major General Benjamin Lincoln invaded Georgia to dislodge the British. In a daring countermove, British Brigadier General Augustine Prevost with 2400 men invaded South Carolina and advanced to the gates of Charlestown. Prevost negotiated with South Carolina Governor John Rutledge, and foolishly rejected the Governor's offer of South Carolina neutrality for the remainder of the war. A few days later, the approach of Lincoln's 4000-man army forced Prevost to withdraw to John's Island. Lincoln was harshly criticized for leaving Charlestown exposed. On 20 June, Lincoln challenged and lost the battle at Stono Ferry.



Major General Benjamin Lincoln  
Painted by Charles Willson Peale, 1781–1783.

Major William Richardson Davie was wounded in Stono Ferry battle.

Because of the growing British threat on Savannah, Lieutenant Colonel Robert Mebane marched North Carolina Third Regiment from New Jersey back to North Carolina during late April through early May 1779. He and his officers recruited to bring the regiment to full strength. In a 30 June letter to Governor Richard Caswell, he said poor health would prevent him from performing his duties.

HILLSBOROUGH, June 30th, 1779

SIR:

As opportunity offers I think it my duty to inform you that I am in a very low state of health; without an alteration must of consequence leave the service. I am sorry to inform you that there are but few Soldiers raised in this District. I have not as yet heard what they are doing in the District of Salisbury. Genl. M. Ramsey informs me that he is to write to you this day; therefore I only inform you that there is not one Continental officer in this district or the district of Salisbury as I know of.

I am, with due esteem,

Your Excellency's ob. humb. Serv't.,

ROBT. MEBANE. (Mebane 1779 in NCSR 1895, XIV:136)

Either Mebane's resignation request was refused or his illness was temporary. No doubt, recruitment continued. In August 1779, Third Regiment had 171 soldiers (Rankin 1971, 167).

5<sup>th</sup> great-granduncle

### **September–October 1779, Siege of Savannah**

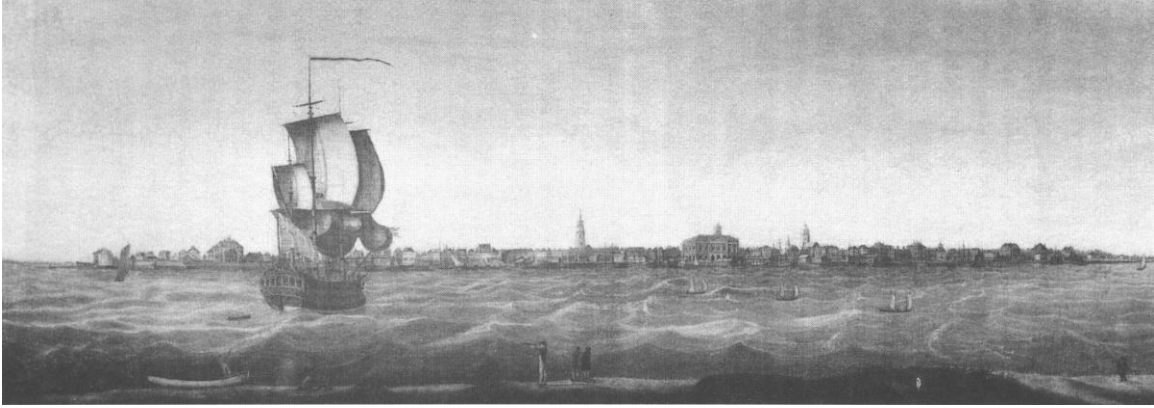
During September 1779, a joint American and French force assembled to dislodge the British from Savannah. The French were led by Vice Admiral Henri Le Comte d'Estaing. A 800-man British force at Port Royal Island rapidly moved to reinforce Savannah. Using small boats, they found a little-known waterway called Wall's Cut that evaded French warships anchored off the Savannah River mouth. A portion of their path can be viewed today from the Hilton Head Harbour Town lighthouse. On 9 October, the British successfully defended Savannah.

A strength report on 23 October indicates that Third Regiment was in Charlestown under acting command of Major Thomas Hogg. It also indicates that Colonel Mebane was on duty in North Carolina (Lincoln 1779–1780). On 27 October, Mebane was in Charlestown when he signed a weapons report. He signed his rank as colonel (Lincoln 1779–1780). On 8 November, Mebane was ordered to preside over a court martial of prisoners. However, apparently he was relieved of this duty since on 12 November, Colonel Peter Horry presided (Grimke 1779–1780).

### **October 1779–February 1780, Charlestown**

On 19 November, George Washington ordered all other North Carolina regiments at West Point, New York, and Philadelphia to march south. Frustrated by weather and many delays, they did not arrive in Charlestown until 3 March 1780 (Davidson 1951, 57).

In November 1779, a limited smallpox epidemic erupted in Charlestown, South Carolina. Rumors of its continuance lasted for several months and dissuaded many South Carolina militiamen from entering the town.



View of Charles Town

Painted by Thomas Leitch, 1774.

Prominent Saint Michael's Anglican Church steeple and Exchange Building stand today.  
Collection of Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts, Winston-Salem, North Carolina

On 27 November 1779, Colonel Mebane was ordered to sit on a court of inquiry into the "Cause of the Deficiency in the Supply of Wood & Forage at Fort Moultrie & in Town." On 1 December, this court was ordered to investigate a complaint that "Sick and wounded were neglected on their passage from Savannah to Charles Town." On 7 December, this court reported its findings. (Grimke 1779–1780).

On 7 December, a court martial found Thomas Wilson, a private in North Carolina Third Regiment, guilty of desertion and sentenced him to "receive 100 Lashes on the bareback with a Cat o'nine Tails, but from his former good Character & behavior & this being his first offence, they recommend him to the General to have it mitigated or omitted." However, Lincoln ordered, "The Gen<sup>l</sup>. approved the Sentence & directs it to be executed tomorrow Morning at Guard mounting, as the reason assigned by the Court would not in his Opinion justify a Remission or mitigation of the Sentence." (Grimke 1779–1780).

On 17 December, Colonel Mebane ordered a board of officers to settle the ranks of all officers in Third Regiment (Lincoln 1779–1780).

On 1 January 1780, an abstract of Lieutenant Colonel Robert Mebane's Third Regiment muster roll was submitted to Major General Lincoln. It reports 5 companies with a total strength of 202 men (Lincoln 1779–1780). A report of horse forage consumption indicates that Mebane drew forage for 4 horses during 14–18 January (Lincoln 1779–1780).

Charlestown defense depended on Fort Moultrie control of the harbor entrance and a massive fortification against land assault. The latter extended across a peninsula neck between tidal creeks of the Ashley River and Cooper River. Today, this neck is unrecognizable due to land fill, but since the 1750s a fortification wall extended for about a mile from present-day Smith Street along Vanderhorst Street, across King Street and Marion Square, along Charlotte Street, turning northward towards Chapel Street (Borick 2003, 42). During 1779–1780, the fortification was

strengthened under the direction of French engineers Colonel Laumoy and Lieutenant Colonel Cambray-Digny. The major earthen wall, or *parapet*, average height was 10 feet. In front of the wall were two lines of *abatis*, cut treetops planted with sharpened branches facing outward that functioned like present-day barbed wire. Deep holes, called “wolf-traps,” were hidden in the abatis (Rankin 1971, 222) (Borick 2003, 116). In front of the abatis was a groundwater *canal*, 12 feet wide and 6 feet deep. Centralized behind the parapet was a hardened fort, called *hornwork*, erected earlier during 1758–1759. It was made with *tabby*: a lime, oyster-shell, and sand cement. It had two bastions connected by a curtain-wall that included a double gate where it crossed King Street. Today, a curtain-wall segment remains at Marion Square (Butler 2014). During the defense, several temporary mini-forts, called *redoubts* and *redans*, were built.



Hornwork curtain wall remnant in front of 1842 Citadel.  
Marion Square, Charleston

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**Note: Tabby**

Tabby is a construction material and process well suited to the coast of southeastern North America where its raw materials were readily available. It was first used by Spanish colonists. The process began by burning a large quantity of oyster shells, reducing them to white powder lime and ash. The results were mixed with sand, ordinary seashells, and water. The resulting mortar was poured into a wooden mold and allowed to harden over a few days. A high wall was made in layers. The outer surface was often covered with stucco. Tabby use ended with the introduction of Portland cement.

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Lieutenant Colonel Robert Mebane’s regiment probably assisted in strengthening the fortification. On 6 February 1780, Mebane commanded a fatigue party to support the military engineers (Grimke 1779–1780).

### February–May 1780, British Landing, Siege of Charlestown

On 11 February 1780, the British Army disembarked from North Edisto River inlet onto Simmons Island, present-day Seabrook Island. They advanced across Johns and James Islands. During February, Americans defended Ashley River Ferry, 13 miles upstream of Charlestown near Drayton Hall and also Bacon Bridge, the closest Ashley River bridge, near present-day Summerville, South Carolina. The South Carolina General Assembly adjourned after granting Governor John Rutledge the “power to do everything necessary for the publick good, except the taking away the life of a citizen without a legal trial.” (Borick 2003, 46). He was a virtual dictator.

American Major General Benjamin Lincoln’s daily orders were recorded and posted by staff member Lieutenant Colonel John Faucher and Grimke (Grimke 1779–1780). These orders assigned alarm posts to all units. They also specified guard Officers-of-the-Day. Such guard duty superseded ordinary duties and lasted 24 hours beginning and ending in the morning. An Officer-of-the-Day was required to check all sentry positions, conduct special patrols, as well as visit the hospital and prison. Lincoln’s daily orders also assigned soldiers to special fatigue or guard duty. On 14 February, the one North Carolina regiment was ordered to join the Virginia Brigade under Colonel Richard Parker (Grimke 1779–1780).

On 15 February, Lieutenant Colonel Robert Mebane was a guard Officer-of-the-Day. On 24 February, Mebane was a guard Officer-of-the-Day. He was ordered to assemble 175 men with 4-days provisions. The next day, these men were transferred to Lieutenant Colonel John Laurens (Grimke 1779–1780) and probably marched to Ashley River Ferry.

On 3 March, Brigadier General James Hogun arrived in Charlestown with North Carolina First and Second Regiments. On 6 March, Mebane’s Third Regiment was ordered to rejoin the North Carolina Brigade (Grimke 1779–1780). On 8 March, Mebane was a guard Officer-of-the-Day (Grimke 1779–1780). On 9 March, Private George McCartey, in Mebane’s regiment, was judged guilty of desertion and sentenced to “100 lashes on his bare back with switches.” Despite the serious offense, court martial officers and Major General Lincoln remitted his sentence (Grimke 1779–1780). On 22 March, Mebane was a guard Officer-of-the-Day (Grimke 1779–1780).

At 4:00 a.m. 10 March, the British Army crossed Wappoo Cut onto the mainland. Artillery batteries were quickly built to exclude American ships from the Ashley River, prevent a waterborne counterattack, and threaten the town with canon fire. Lincoln considered challenging the British west of the Ashley, but was unwilling to risk losing soldiers needed inside the fortifications (Borick 2003, 66–68).

On 20 March, during a spring tide and with an east wind, 7 British Navy warships, under Vice Admiral Marriot Arbuthnot, crossed the most significant sandbar barrier into Five Fathom Hole, a deep-water holding area off Morris Island. This action greatly weakened American strategic defense since the British Navy could support land operations and inevitably force Americans to defend the entire Charlestown perimeter. American warships became useless and many were scuttled in the Cooper River to support a chain and log boom. (Borick 2003, 71–85)

On 21 March, North Carolina Brigade was posted on the right, or Cooper River, side of the fortification line (McIntosh 1780, 99) (Moultrie 1802, II:72). Its camp was probably near present-day Charleston County Public Library on Calhoun Street. As an officer, Mebane probably roomed in a nearby house. On 22 March, Mebane was guard Officer-of-the-Day (Grimke 1779–1780).

Lincoln ordered measures to protect against a sudden attack. On 28 March, he ordered Saint Michael's Church bell rung every quarter hour throughout each night. Immediately after the ring, each sentry was to call aloud "All's well," beginning at the hornwork and proceeding to the right (Grimke 1779–1780).

During the night of 28–29 March, British sailors rowed flatboats 13 miles upstream to Drayton Hall. There, they rendezvoused with the British Army. Beginning at dawn, using the flatboats, the army crossed the river and quickly advanced along Dorchester Road towards Charlestown. By late 30 March, they secured Gibbes' Landing only 2 miles from the American fortifications and immediately north of present-day Citadel campus. At that crossing, heavy cannons and equipment were transported to the peninsula.

On 31 March, Lincoln ordered that at each daybreak, an Officer-of-the-Day conduct a patrol 300 to 400 yards towards the enemy (Grimke 1779–1780).

During 1 April–12 May 1780, the British Army applied a classic siege on the Charlestown fortification. That included digging approach trenches, called *saps*, and three successively closer parallel trenches. Combat engineers called *sappers* and 1500 workmen dug these trenches continuously, day and night (Borick 2003, 121). Sapper duty was so hazardous they were traditionally paid in advance. Hessian riflemen called *jaegers* protected them (Uhlendorf 1938). Military engineers recalculated the best positions for cannons, transported them, built platforms, and redoubts. The British first parallel lay along present-day Spring Street (Borick 2003, 280). American artillery bombarded these works in progress. British had 14,000 professional soldiers and sailors. American defenders continued to grow, but were at most 2000 Continentals plus 4000 militia.

On 7 April, Virginia Continental reinforcements arrived after a long march from the North (Borick 2003, 129).

On 8 April, 11 British Navy warships passed by Fort Moultrie's firing guns and entered Charlestown harbor (Borick 2003, 133). 27 British sailors were killed.

After completion of the first parallel on 10 April, British commander Major General Henry Clinton opened negotiations with American Major General Benjamin Lincoln. These negotiations followed formal 1700s diplomatic rules understood by all commanders. First, Clinton sent a *summons* pointing out the futility of defense and honorable terms of surrender, and warned that continued defense could result in a *storm* attack with unrestrained "effusion of blood" among both soldiers and civilians. The summons read:

Sir Henry Clinton K. B. General and Commander in Chief of His Majesty's forces in the Colonies lying on the Atlantic from Nova Scotia to [Florida] and Vice Admiral Arbuthnot[,] Commander in Chief of his Majesty's Ships in North America[,] regretting the effusion of Blood and distress which must now commence[,] deem it conformant to humanity to warn the Town and Garrison of Charlestown of the havock and devastation with which they are threatened from the formidable force surrounding them by Sea and Land.

An alternative is offered at this hour of saving their Lives and Property contained in the Town or of abiding by the fatal consequences of a cannonade and Storm.

Should the place in a fallacious Security or its Commander in a wanton indifference to the fate of its Inhabitants delay a Surrender or should the public Stores or Shipping be destroyed[,] the resentment of an exasperated Soldier may intervene[,] but the same mild and compassionate Offer can never be renewed. The respective Commanders who hereby summon the Town do not apprehend so rash a [path] as farther resistance will be taken, but rather that the Gates will be opened and themselves received with a degree of Confidence which will forebode further reconciliations. (Borick 2003, 136).



Sir Henry Clinton  
British Commander in Chief. Directed Charlestown Siege.  
Engraved by A. H. Ritchie, 1777.

Lincoln replied:

Gentlemen, I received your Summons of this date. Sixty days have passed since it has been known that your Intentions against this Town were hostile in which time has been afforded to abandon it, but Duty and Inclination point to the propriety of supporting it to the last extremity. (Borick 2003, 138).



On the morning of 13 April, Lincoln convened a council of general officers to discuss the prospects of their defense (Borick 2003, 138). During that meeting, at about 10:00 a.m., British artillery began bombarding the American fortification.

On 13 April, Lieutenant Colonel Robert Mebane was a guard Officer-of-the-Day (Grimke 1779–1780).

Before daybreak 14 April, British cavalry and infantry surprised and dispersed the American cavalry at Biggin's Bridge over the West Cooper River. That location was just south of present-day highway US52 bridge over Tail Race Canal below Lake Moultrie dam. That loss exposed the land area east of the Cooper River that was vital to American re-supply and possible escape.

Beginning 14 April, the North Carolina and Virginia brigades rotated 3 days on and 3 days off duty along the main defensive wall (Grimke 1779–1780).

On 15 April, British hauled gunboats from Ashley River to Town Creek, a Cooper River branch. Two boats with brass cannons fired on American ships *Ranger* and *Adventure* (McIntosh 1780, 101).

On 16 April, the British completed their second parallel approximately along present-day Morris and Mary Streets (Borick 2003, 288). That same day, the right arm of William Pitt's statue was clipped by a British cannon ball fired from James Island. Years later, further damage occurred during relocation.



Britain's Secretary of State William Pitt  
Erected after 1766 Stamp Act repeal.  
Partially damaged during 1780 Charlestown siege.  
Charleston Museum

On 22 April, because of shortages, Lincoln ordered meat rations reduced to 3/4 pound per soldier (Grimke 1779–1780).

By 23 April, British completed their third parallel in two unconnected segments approximately along present-day Radcliffe, Ann, and Judith Streets (Borick 2003, 291). From there a sap was dug towards the canal. At daybreak 24 April, about 300 Continentals silently sallied forth surprising the British and killing about 20 (Borick 2003, 177). Because of the worsening strategic position, Lincoln and almost all subordinate officers advised evacuation of Continental soldiers, but civilian authorities pleaded for continued defense (Moultrie 1802, II:77).



Siege of Charlestown, view from British line

Painting by Alonzo Chappel, 1862.

Anne S. K. Brown Military Collection, Brown University Library, Providence, Rhode Island.

Shows American fortification across peninsula and sunken boom blocking Cooper River.

On 27 April, American troops evacuated their redoubt at Lampriers Point, east of Cooper River (Borick 2003, 189). That severed all outside communication. The Americans were surrounded. Lincoln planned to protect his army in the event of a British storm by enclosing the hornwork into a *citadel*. To build this, he ordered every soldier to collect as many as 15 fence pickets or wood panels from private property in Charlestown (Grimke 1779–1780).

Beginning the night of 28 April, Lincoln ordered the Officer-of-the-Day responsible to ignite turpentine barrels to illuminate the ground between the lines to discourage a British attack (Grimke 1779–1780).

On 29 April, Lincoln ordered all soldiers to remain at their posts and not enter town. He further ordered officers “without the most pointed necessity” to remain in camp with their men (Grimke 1779–1780). The bombardment ordeal affected soldiers and civilians. General William Moultrie wrote, “The fatigue in that advance redoubt, was so great, from want of sleep, that many faces were so swelled they could scarcely see out of their eyes.” (Moultrie 1802, II:83).

On 29 April, Robert Mebane was a guard Officer-of-the-Day (Grimke 1779–1780).

On 1 May, British sappers breached the American canal and began to drain it. On 4 May, Lincoln ordered meat rations reduced to 6 ounces of pork per soldier (Grimke 1779–1780).

RETURN of <i>The North Carolina</i>		Brigade of Foot, Commanded by <i>Brigadier General James M. Smith</i>																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																										
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### North Carolina Brigade Strength Return of 6 May 1780

Document found in Sir Henry Clinton Papers. Clements Library (Lesser 1976, 159).

Lieutenant Colonel Robert Mebane's regiment details on third row of numbers and under "Monthly Alterations." In his regiment during previous month, 10 soldiers died and on 6 May, 57 out of 147 were sick absent. In condensed form (Lesser 1976, 161):

### April 1780 North Carolina Regiments Strength Return

		First	Second	Third
Fit for Duty	Commissioned Officers	8	12	7
	Noncommissioned Officers	30	31	15
	Staff Officers	3	4	4
	Rank & File	153	196	60
	Total	194	243	86
Sick & Furlough	Sick Present	29	31	19
	Sick Absent	7	12	57
	On Command, Extra Service	72	22	11
	On Furlough	1	5	
Grand Total		303	313	173
Alterations	Deaths	7	2	10
	Deserted	2	6	

	Taken Prisoner	7		
	Discharged	19	4	
	Joined, Enlisted, Recruited	2	3	9

On 7 May, Americans surrendered Fort Moultrie. On 8 May, Clinton once again summoned Charlestown.

Circumstanced as I now am with respect to the place invested[,] Humanity only can induce me to lay within your reach the Terms I determined should never again be proffered.

The fall of Fort Sullivan [Moultrie,] The destruction on the 6<sup>th</sup> Instant of what remained of your Cavalry, the critical period to which our Approaches against the Town have brought us mark this as the term of your hopes of Succour (could you have framed any) and an hour beyond which resistance is temerity.

By this last Summons therefore I throw to your Charges whatever vindictive Severity exasperated Soldiers may inflict on the unhappy people whom you devote by persevering in a fruitless defence.

I shall expect your Answer untill 8 o'clock when hostilities will again commence unless the Town shall be surrendered. (Borick 2003, 207).

Under a cease-fire, Lincoln and Clinton negotiated surrender terms. Lincoln called a council of general and field officers. They met in the hornwork and voted 49 to 12 to accept terms of capitulation (Borick 2003, 209).

On 8 May, Robert Mebane was a guard Officer-of-the-Day (Grimke 1779–1780). He participated in this council and voted to accept terms (Lincoln 1779–1780).

### **May 1780, Surrender of Charlestown, Prisoners of War**

By 11 May, the inevitable defeat was clear to everyone. Lincoln accepted British terms. At 11:00 a.m. 12 May, Continental and militia soldiers filed out of the city gate and stacked their arms (Moultrie 1802, II:108). This location was probably west of King Street between present-day Vanderhorst and Warren Streets (Borick 2003, 300). Americans conducted a 42-day honorable defense against an overwhelming 14,000-man professional army and navy. Although only 1500–1600 Continentals participated in the surrender ceremony, a total of 3465 Continental officers and men were captured. That was virtually the entire Continental Army Southern Department.

Continental soldier prisoners were first held in barracks inside Charlestown. However, because their internment required hundreds of British guards, in October 1780, these prisoners were moved to prison ships in the harbor. Continental Army officers were held at Haddrell's Point in present-day Old Village in Mount Pleasant, South Carolina (Borick 2003, 287). They were

permitted “to go to the extent of six miles from the barracks, but to pass no river, creek, or arm of the sea.” (Moultrie 1802, II:105). They could receive visitors, and were allowed to grow small gardens and to fish for personal sustenance. Militiamen were released on parole, a promise that they would remain neutral for the remainder of the war. In the 1700s, such a promise was self-enforcing by a sense of personal honor as well as the threat of retaliation against fellow parolees. Nonetheless, some important militia leaders, like Colonel Andrew Pickens, believed Britain violated these terms on 3 June when General Clinton ordered militiamen to take up arms against rebels (Tarleton 1787, 73–74).

When Charlestown fell, Robert Mebane became a prisoner of war. From his Third Regiment, 162 Continental soldiers, excluding officers, became prisoners. He along with other Continental Army officers were held at Haddrell’s Point (Rankin 1971, 232). During the siege, one of Mebane’s associates was Colonel Francis Marion, commander of South Carolina Second Regiment. Marion avoided capture by being outside Charlestown recuperating from a debilitating ankle injury. During the following year, Marion became known as the *Swamp Fox*. Francis Marion details appear in (Rankin 1973). Similarly, Lieutenant Colonel William Lee Davidson avoided capture while on leave (Davidson 1951, 58).

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**Note: Why was Charlestown lost?**

Why did this tragic loss of Continental soldiers occur? Earlier in New York and Philadelphia, George Washington saved his Continentals by evacuation. Many officers at Charlestown had experience near these northern cities, and must have understood Washington’s strategic defense policy. Nonetheless, on 21 April 1780, these officers voted that it was too late to evacuate (Moultrie 1802, II:77). Americans might have inflicted higher British costs by contesting each natural barrier along the British route from its North Edisto River landing site. Those barriers are: Stono River, Wappoo Cut, and Ashley River. However, these barriers can be crossed at many locations, and thus, defenders would run the risk of being flanked and captured. But even such half-measures would have been a difficult political decision. Non-military authorities had the impression that Charlestown was defensible due to Fort Moultrie victory in June 1776 and withdrawal of Brigadier General Augustine Prevost in May 1779. To defend and withdraw from natural barriers outside the city appeared inconsistent with these earlier victories. Moreover, each of these defenses would have been perceived as a defeat with final loss of Charlestown. That result looks good only in hindsight when compared to something worse—what actually happened. The principal decision-maker was Major General Benjamin Lincoln, and he had had a bad year. On 3 March 1779, he allowed highly exposed North Carolina soldiers under Colonel John Ashe to be defeated at Brier Creek, Georgia. In 23 April 1779, when he invaded Georgia, Prevost embarrassed him with a flanking maneuver that nearly captured Charlestown. On 20 June 1779, he lost Stono Ferry battle. In October 1779, he failed to recapture Savannah even with assistance of 4000 French soldiers. He knew General Robert Howe was dismissed for losing Savannah in December 1778. Thus, Lincoln’s reputation could not afford another defeat. It was difficult to abandon months of planning and labor invested in the

fortification. Also, delay appeared justified since reinforcements were expected from Washington's Army, and possibly the French or Spanish Navy. Once the decision to defend Charlestown was made, Lincoln's problems increased. Technically, he did not command the South Carolina militia, many of whom did not report to duty because of a smallpox rumor. Lincoln had to consult with city and state civilian authorities in every decision. In short, Lincoln should have evacuated Continental soldiers from Charlestown to a safe place such as Round-O where Major General Nathanael Greene encamped a year later.

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Over a year later, in a 10 August 1781 letter (Clark 1981, I:480), Robert Mebane asserted, as an aside, that Charlestown fell because of exhausted provisions. Unfortunately, his complete insights are unknown.

#### **4 July 1780, Independence Day celebration at Haddrell's Point**

Continental Army officers at Haddrell's Point were housed in barracks. General William Moultrie later wrote:

The officers, prisoners at Haddrell's-point, were very ungovernable indeed and it was not much to be wondered at, when two hundred and fifty of them from different states, were huddled up together in the barracks, many of them of different dispositions, and some of them very uncouth gentlemen; it is not surprising that their should be continual disputes among them, and frequent duels. General M'Intosh who was the senior officer that resided constantly with them, complained to me of their disorderly conduct and uncivil behaviour to each other, ... (Moultrie 1802, II:119).

The prisoner's Fourth-of-July celebration induced the following complaint from a nearby British officer to his commander in Charlestown.

Sir,

I think it incumbent on me to acquaint you, for the information of the general, that the conduct of the rebels at the barracks at Haddrell's-point, during the course of this night, has been very irregular and improper. Not contented to celebrate this day, of their supposed Independence, with music, illuminations, &c. they have presumed to discharge a number of small arms; which, I imagine, it is thought they were not (nor indeed ought not to be, by the articles of capitulation) to be in possession of.

I am, &c.  
[signed] J. B. Roberts  
Captain of the sixty-fifth regiment;  
Commanding at Fort Arbuthnot. [Fort Moultrie]

Major Benson.

As a result, on 10 July, officer prisoners were forced to give up their light muskets, called *fuzees*, but kept their pistols.

### January 1781, Haddrell's Point

On 4 January 1781, at Haddrell's Point, the North Carolina Brigade commander Brigadier General James Hogun died of illness. He had been Lieutenant Colonel Robert Mebane's immediate superior officer on many occasions since establishment of North Carolina Seventh Regiment in November 1776.

### January 1781, Cowpens' Consequences

The 17 January 1781 British defeat at Cowpens had a profound effect. General William Moultrie later wrote:

This defeat of Colonel Tarleton's at the battle of the Cowpens, chagrined and disappointed the British officers and Tories in Charlestown exceedingly. I happened to be in Charlestown at the time when the news arrived. I saw them standing in the streets in small circles, talking over the affair with very grave faces. I knew the particulars as soon as they did. Governor Rutledge sent in a person on some pretence with a flag; but in fact, it was to inform the American prisoners of our success: the person informed me of the whole affair, which I communicated to the officers at Haddrell's-point, on my return in the evening. The news gave great joy, and put us all in high spirits. (Moultrie 1802, II:256)

In 1794, British historian Charles Stedman wrote:

Had Lord Cornwallis had with him at Guilford Court House the troops lost by Col. Tarleton at the Cowpens, it is not extravagant to suppose that the American colonies might have been re-united to the empire of Great Britain. (Stedman 1794, 2:325, 346)

Reverend John Miller of Bethany Presbyterian Church, 5 miles east of Kings Mountain battleground, is credited with the following prayer:

Good Lord, Our God that art in Heaven, we have great reason to thank Thee for the many battles we have won. There is the great and glorious battle of Kings Mountain, where we kilt the great General Ferguson and took his whole army; and the great battle at Ramsour's and Williamson's; and the ever memorable and glorious battle of the Cowpens, where we made the proud General Tarleton



run down the road healter-skelter, and Good Lord, if ye had not suffered the cruel Tories to burn Hill's ironworks, we would not have asked any more favors at Thy hands. Amen.

On 25 January, South Carolina Governor John Rutledge promoted Colonel Andrew Pickens to brigadier general.

### May–August 1781, Cartel

Since the fall of Savannah in 1778, British held American Continental soldier prisoners in deplorable conditions. Most were held on prison ships in Charlestown harbor. Reference (Ramsay 1785) states that 800 died from neglect and 375 enlisted in the British military to escape these ships. British authorities had little incentive to improve conditions since prisoners could be recruited for British military service in the West Indies fighting Spain. General William Moultrie complained to the Lieutenant Colonel Nisbet Balfour, British military commandant in Charlestown.

March 21st, 1781

Sir,

You cannot possibly be more tired with reading my letters than I am of writing them; yet I must intrude upon your multiplicity of business, and remonstrate against every violation of the capitulation, and represent every grievance which occurs to us, whether they are attended to or not. What I am now to remonstrate against, is a most violent and inhuman breach of the capitulation; which is the impressing the American soldiers from on board the prison-ships, taking them away by violence, and sending them on board the transports, to be carried from the continent of America; many of them leaving wives and young children, who may possibly perish for want of the common necessities of life; if I cannot prevail upon you to countermand this violation altogether, let me plead for those unhappy ones who have families to be exempted from this cruelty. I beg you will consider their situation and suffer your humanity to be partial in their favor.

I am, &c.

WILLIAM MOULTRIE (Moultrie 1802, II:193)

American Continental officers were treated better at Haddrell's Point. Nonetheless, in March 1781, Balfour threatened to send these officers to a West Indies island (Ramsay 1785, 462) (Moultrie 1802, II:171–172). However, on 3 May 1781 a general prisoner exchange agreement, called a *cartel*, was signed at Claudius Pegues' house, just north of present-day Cheraw, South Carolina. It exchanged Continental Army officers and soldiers, most of whom were captured a year earlier in Charlestown or at Gates' Defeat. Cartel text appears in (Moultrie 1802, II:198–200). Actual release may have occurred on 22 June, the official British proclamation date. Most

officers were transported to Virginia by ship (Moultrie 1802, II:200). Brigadier General Griffith Rutherford was exchanged and resumed command of Salisbury District militia.

While Robert Mebane was prisoner-of-war, he was second on the potential exchange list of lieutenant colonels (McIntosh 1780, 43). Nonetheless, he was not exchanged until after the cartel, sometime near 22 June 1781. On 7 August 1781, Robert Mebane and two other field officers took depositions in an investigation of British mistreatment of American prisoners. In a 10 August letter to Major General Lafayette, who headed the investigation, they urged retaliation to deter further abuses (Clark 1981, 1:480).

Richmond, Virginia  
10 Aug 1781

To Major General, The Marquis de la Fayette

Sir:

The moment we were permitted to act, it became our duty to represent some facts, which have given us infinite mortification and although this is signed only by the three field officers now with your Army, yet we are confident there is not one of those exchanged, but joins us in sentiment.

The uncandid conduct of the enemy commenced with their relation of the reduction of Charlestown. The breast of every American officer and soldier has felt indignation on hearing that six thousand American troops, in works, had surrendered to eight thousand British, when, by their own confession, the enemy's army amounted to upwards of 13,000 men, whilst the Continental Troops, after a siege of 42 days, were short of two thousand. We would add that in our opinion, nothing even then could have induced a surrender but the exhausted state of our provisions. The enemy, on their first discovery of the disproportion between our numbers and theirs, could not forbear expressing their astonishment.

We beg pardon, Sir, for taking up your time with what you must know. But your heart will experience the feelings of a soldier, whose captivity has been embittered by such a misrepresentation.

We will not enumerate the many breaches of a sacred capitulation. What we would principally beg leave to lay before you is the conduct of the enemy, in confining our soldiers, on board prison ships, and afterwards compelling them into their service; the latter of which facts is sufficiently confirmed by the annexed attestation.

And now that we have given this account to one of our Generals and the Commander of the First American Army which after a long captivity we had the

pleasure to see, nothing remains for us, but to ask, in the name of every officer and soldier, for the adoption of some speedy and effectual mode of retaliation.

We have the honor to be most respectfully, Sir,  
Your obedient, humble servants,

[signed] Robert Mebane, Lieut Colonel  
Commanding Third NC Regiment

[signed] John Habersham, Major  
Georgia Regiment

[signed] David Stephenson, Major  
Sixth Virginia Regiment

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State of Virginia  
7 Aug 1781

Humphry Macumber, Sergeant in the Third Continental Regiment of North Carolina, being sworn on the Holy Evangelists of the Almighty God, deposeth and saith, that early in March last, he being then a prisoner of war on board the British prison ship, ESK, lying in Charlestown Harbour, a certain Sergeant Brown came on board said ship with a number of captains of transports, and immediately ordered the guard of the ship down between decks to drive up the prisoners, then centinels were placed over them and the captains proceeded to point out such men as suited their purpose; that the men were then ordered into the boats and such as disclosed any backwardness to go were beaten by the guard with their swords and the butts of their muskets, and also by the said Serjeant Brown and were finally driven by force into the boats.

[signed] Humphry Macumber

Sworn before me,  
David Stephenson, Major  
Sixth Virginia Regiment

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State of Virginia  
7 Aug 1781

Ransom Savage, a Serjeant in the Second Continental Regiment of North Carolina, being sworn on the Holy Evangelists of Almighty God, deposeth, and saith, that early in March last, he being then a prisoner of war on board the

prison ship, SUCCESS-INCREASE, lying in Charlestown harbour, a certain Serjeant Brown came on board said ship with a number of captains of transports and immediately ordered all the prisoners on deck; then said Brown desired the captains to make choice of such men as they liked, which they did; that on one of the men's refusing to go, the said Serjeant caned and kicked him very severely and forced him, with a number of others, into the boats; the prisoners were told by said Brown they must either enlist in Lord Charles Montagu's Corps going to Jamaica, or be impressed on board men-of-war.

[signed] Ransom Savage

Sworn before me,  
David Stephenson, Major  
Sixth Virginia Regiment

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State of Virginia  
7 Aug 1781

Thomas Duffey, a private soldier of the Second Continental Regiment of North Carolina, being sworn on the Holy Evangelists of Almighty God, deposeth and saith, that some time in March last, he being then a prisoner of war on board the British prison ship, SUCCESS-INCREASE, lying in Charlestown Harbour, Captain Cook, British Commissary of Prisoners, attended by a Serjeant Brown and four or five captains of transports, came on board the ship and asked the prisoners if any of them would go to London in the fleet, where they should all be set free; the prisoners declined his offer, upon which Captain Cook assured them if they did not go voluntarily, they would be forced on board; that the captains of transports then proceeded to make choice of the men, and upon their appearing very much averse to go into the boats, the above-mentioned Serjeant Brown beat and abused them in the most barbarous manner; particularly one of the men, whom he threw from the gunwhale on the ship into one of the boats; that the deponent was among those who were thus forced on board the boats and was sent on board a transport brigatine where he was kept five days with a few other prisoners (the impressed prisoners being distributed among different vessels) and then went to Charlestown on promising to enlist in the British Cavalry; that the deponent heard Captain Cook declare, previous to the above transaction, that if the prisoner did not enlist in thirteen days in the British service, they would all be sent to the West Indies, where they would be put on board ships-of-war.

X (his mark) Thomas Duffey

Sworn before me  
Nathaniel Welsh,  
Major

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State of Virginia  
7 Aug 1781

Thomas Woods, a private soldier of the Third Continental Regiment of South Carolina, being sworn on the Holy Evangelists of Almighty God, deposeth and saith, that some time in March last, he being then a prisoner of war on board the prison ship, PRINCE GEORGE, lying in Charlestown harbour, the Serjeant of the guard on board said ship informed the deponent that himself and twenty three more of the prisoners were to go on board some ships that wanted men; that upon the men refusing to go, a certain Serjeant Brown, then on board the ESK, another prison ship, commanded the serjeant of the guard to call to his assistance, the mate and crew, and tumble him, the deponent, neck and heel, into the boat alongside the ship; that upon hearing this, the deponent ran down into the hold, and thereby made his escape; that the deponent was informed one William Williams, another soldier, offered himself in his, the deponents, stead, and was accepted by the British Serjeant.

[signed] Thomas Woods

Sworn before me,  
Nathaniel Welsh,  
Major

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State of Virginia  
7 Aug 1781

Jesse Farrar, a private soldier of the Third Continental Regiment of South Carolina being sworn on the Holy Evangelists of Almighty God, deposeth and saith, that some time in March last, he being then a prisoner of war on board the British prison ship, PRINCE GEORGE, lying in Charlestown harbour, a certain Serjeant Brown came on board the ship and informed the prisoners that twenty four of them must immediately go on board some ships lying in the harbour; that upon three of the prisoners observing they thought it hard Congress should find sailors for the King, they were put under guard; that said Brown informed the prisoners that unless they would go on board the vessells voluntarily, they would be compelled to do it; in which case they would not be sent on board

merchant men, but ships-of-war, whereupon the number demanded, with great seeming reluctance, went on board the boats with the British Serjeant.

X (his mark) Jesse Farrar

Sworn before me,  
Nathaniel Welch,  
Major

Lafayette reported findings to the Continental Congress where it was entered into the record on 3 September (Ford 1912, 21:929–930) (PCC n.d., M247-176-156:238–245). To retaliate, Continental Congress ordered 500 British prisoners to Connecticut's Simsbury mine prison, but later prisoner exchanges probably nullified this order. This investigation became a basis for new international standards for prisoner-of-war treatment expressed in the 1786 treaty between the United States and Frederick the Great, King of Prussia (Miller 1931) (Ranlet 2000).

On 21 August 1781, while in Granville County, Lieutenant Colonel Robert Mebane wrote North Carolina Governor Thomas Burke:

I have the Honour of Se'ding you this by Colo. John Williams whose house I am just arrived at Where I expected to have had the pleasure of Seeing You. Should have waited on you at Halifax but the want of horses prevents it. There is about fifty Continental Soldiers properly officered on their march from James Town to Hillsborough. They are greatly distress'd for Cloathing, as I cannot as yet be informed where they can be Supplied I must beg you to inform me. I intend Remaining at Hillsborough for Your particular Instruction. If Troops can be got I wish to take the Field as Soon as possible. (Mebane 1781 in NCSR 1895, XV:612)

On 31 August 1781, Mebane discharged Charles Griggs after his three-year enlistment.

By Rob<sup>t</sup>. Mebane, Esq<sup>r</sup>. Lt. Col Comd<sup>r</sup>. of third N.C. Reg<sup>t</sup>.

This is to certify that the Bearer hereof Charles Griggs, a soldier in Cap<sup>t</sup>. McKees Company, of the 1<sup>st</sup> N. Carolina Reg<sup>t</sup>. has served honestly & faithfully in said Regt. and is discharged for the reason below mentioned, he having recv<sup>d</sup>. all his pay, arrears of pay, Clothing etc. except such as is Certified on the Back of this discharge, he is discharged having served the term for which he Inlisted, on the thirty first of May one thousand Seven hundred and seventy seven, being three Years and to prevent any Ill use being made of this discharge by its falling into the hands of any other person, here follows a discription of said Cha<sup>s</sup>. Griggs, aged twenty three Years, Black hair, black eyes and a dark Complexion about five feet ten Inches high, born in Maryland, by trade a farmer. Given under my hand this thirty first of Aug<sup>t</sup>. one thousand seven hundred & eighty one.

[signed] Tho<sup>s</sup>. Pasteur L<sup>t</sup>. 1<sup>st</sup> No. Carolina Regiment

[signed] Rob<sup>t</sup>. Mebane L<sup>t</sup>. Col. Com<sup>dr</sup>. 3<sup>d</sup> N.C. R<sup>gt</sup>.

I hereby Certify that there is due to Charles Griggs, late Soldier in the first N. Carolina Reg<sup>t</sup>. pay from the first day of Aug<sup>t</sup>. one thousand seven hundred & seventy nine, as a soldier, also one Years Clothing agreeable to the allowance for Soldiers by the Ru<sup>l</sup> of Congress.

[signed] Thos. Pasteur L<sup>t</sup>. 1<sup>st</sup> No. Carolina Regiment

[signed] Robt. Mebane L<sup>t</sup>. Col. Cm<sup>d</sup>. 3<sup>d</sup> N.C. Rg<sup>t</sup>.

I acknowledge to have recv<sup>d</sup>. all my pay arrears of Pay Clothing & (Except such as are mentioned in the above Certificate) [smudge] my Inlistment into the Continental Service, as Witness my hand this thirty first of Aug<sup>t</sup>. one thousand seven hundred and Eighty one.

[signed] Cha<sup>s</sup>. [his x mark] Griggs

Attest

Tho<sup>s</sup>. Pasteur Lt. (Griggs, Charles, pension application 1832)

### September–October 1781, Lindley's Mill, Brown Marsh

In areas the British Army vacated, a Whig versus Tory reign of terror ensued. Tory Colonel David Fanning led several hundred loyalist militiamen. But in addition to protecting loyalists, his men confiscated property from Whig militia and farms (Fanning 1786, 32).

On 15 August 1781, Colonel Hugh Tinnin was prisoner of war. At Halifax, North Carolina, he was exchanged and soon returned to Hillsborough where he immediately resumed his militia responsibilities (Conolly 2008). On 24 August 1781, North Carolina Governor Thomas Burke ordered up the entire Hillsborough District militia. On 28 August, Tinnin wrote the Governor: "Letter of the 24<sup>th</sup> to General Butler was handed to me and agreeable to your directions, I have ordered out all the Militia of this county ... likewise communicated your orders to the commanding Officers of Caswell, Randolph, Chatham and Wake Counties." (NCSR 1895, XXII:580–581)

At daybreak 12 September 1781, 600 Tories under Colonel David Fanning raided Hillsborough and captured North Carolina Governor Thomas Burke and other Whig leaders (Fanning 1786, 33). These captives were first thrown into the Hillsborough jail while Tories plundered the town. Later that afternoon, Tories began transporting captives to British-occupied Wilmington.

According to Governor Burke's daughter, Polly Burke, he was arrested at his house, called *Heartsease*, on Queens Street, now 115 East Queen Street (Barefoot 1998, 414). That is next door to the William Whitted Junior house built about 1810. This William Whitted is believed to be an Anderson-related 5<sup>th</sup> great-granduncle.

Private John Mebane was among these captive Whig leaders. When thrown in jail, he maintained high spirits. Fellow captive James Turner testified in 1832 that when John Mebane was “brought into the jail, he danced across the floor.” (Mebane, John, pension application 1833). John’s brother Alexander Mebane II barely escaped capture. Historian Eli Caruthers wrote:

Col. Alexander Mebane made his escape by leaving a very valuable horse to the care of the enemy, and taking it on foot through the high weeds which had grown up very densely in the cross streets. (Caruthers 1854, 207).

Alexander Mebane raced to Hawfields to alert other Whigs, including his brother Lieutenant Colonel Robert Mebane and Brigadier General John Butler.

The next day, about 10:00 a.m., approximately 350 Whigs ambushed the Tory column near Lindley’s Mill. They took advantage of a natural steep escarpment where the road takes a sharp turn. After the ambush, Fanning ordered the column front to retreat. Historian Algie Newlin deduced that a separate Whig group attempted to free captives by attacking the rear of the Tory column (Newlin 1975). Whigs were outnumbered two to one. After 4 hours of battle, Tories threatened to assassinate Governor Burke and other captives. Fighting stopped and Tories departed. Whigs lost 24 dead and 90 seriously wounded, an extraordinary high proportion. Tories lost 27 dead and 60 seriously wounded. Colonel Hector Macneil led the Tory column and was killed during the initial ambush. Colonel Fanning was badly wounded and hid in the forest for several days (Fanning 1786, 34).





Lindley's Mill Battleground Monuments  
1915 and 1998

Lieutenant Colonel Robert Mebane was under militia Brigadier General John Butler, but was certainly a more experienced profession officer. It is likely that Mebane organized the men and planned this ingenious two-pronged ambush (Stockard 1900, 74) (Fanning 1786, 33) (Newlin 1975). No doubt, he also hoped to rescue his brother John. Fanning first secured the captives and then led a counterattack. Historian Eli Caruthers wrote:

Probably, it was on seeing this havoc made of the Whigs by this maneuver of Fanning's, and viewing their situation as now desperate, considering the disparity of numbers, that General Butler ordered a retreat, and commenced it himself. The men, in obedience to orders, were following his example, when Col. Robert Mebane got before them, and by arguments and remonstrances, so far inspired them with his own heroic spirit that enough of them returned to renew the battle and keep the ground. (Caruthers 1854, 212).

Robert's persistence and leadership lengthened the battle's duration to 4 hours. Caruthers wrote:

A more bold and deliberate act of courage is hardly on record that was done by Col. Robert Mebane in the hottest of the battle. In the midst of the conflict with Fanning, when the Whigs must have been nearly between two files, as the Scotch were advancing up the hill, they got out of ammunition and Mebane

walked slowly along the line, carrying his hat full of powder, telling every man to take a handful, or just what he needed. (Caruthers 1854, 214).

After the battle, Whigs followed the Tories hoping for an opportunity to free the captives. A skirmish was fought at Brown Marsh, near present-day Clarkton, North Carolina. Nonetheless, all captives were taken to Wilmington. Later, some, including Governor Burke, were taken to Charlestown. Holloway Pass, a soldier who participated in this chase, provides details in his 1836 [pension application](#). Portions of his application are:

...This Declarant remained at home until the fall of 1781 when the Tories came to Hillsboro and took our Whig Governor (Burke) prisoner and carried him off to Willmington. Upon the hapening of this event there was great excitement in our Country and particularly in our County (Caswell) and all the men of the County was called upon to take up arms; accordingly this Declarant volunteered under Captain Adam Sanders of Caswell County and was marched & reorganized(?) in the woods in Caswell County on County Line Creek where they were met by two other Volunteer Companies of the said County, all under the command of Col. William Moore (Our Col.) And Major Dudley Reynolds (Our Major). From there we were marched through a nigh heag, all on horseback, in great speed with a view to overtake the Tories before they got to Willmington ( & it should be borne in mind that our Officers promised us that if we would find our horses and start immediately (which we did) that we should be discharged at the end of two months and that the tour should be accounted to us as a tour of three months, which promise was not kept, and instead of two months we were kept out for three months and half starved at that). We were marched a strait course leavings Hillsboro to the left and went directly to Cross Creeks (now Fayetteville) and we got on the trail of the Tories at Lindleg s Mill(?) and we followed on down to in sight of Willmington expecting every Hour to overtake them. But they escaped into Willmington before we came up with them; before we reached Willmington we joined Gen I Butler with his company. From near Willmington we retreated back up the Cape Fear River. Some 18 or 20 miles out of Danger and there stayed for a little time until we heard of a collection of Tories at a place called the Brown Marsh to which place we immediately was marched. At this place we met the Tories and some Brittish and had a severe engagement and was defeated by the bad management of Gen I Butler - and if it had not been for old Col. Mebane of the Orange Regiment we would have been all taken prisoner. From this place (Brown Marsh) we retreated to Fayetteville (which was then Cross Creeks). At this place our horses were taken away from us and sent home, and the Volunteer Company to which this Declarant belonged was put under the command of Capt. Spillsby Coleman.

...This Declarant states that he Volunteered both times when he was called into service - That he cannot recollect all the Regular officers who were with the

troops where he served; but he remembers Col. [William] Washington, General Morgan, Col Henry Dixon, General Butler, & General Rutherford - But he is inclined to think that Butler & Rutherford were Militia officers - That he remembers the Orange Regiment Commanded by Col. Mebane & a brave officer he was - & the general circumstances of his service he has attempted to give above - That he received two discharges one from Col. Moore, & the other from Capt. Spillsby Coleman, as well as he can now recollect, both of which were burnt up some eight or nine years ago. ... (Pass, Holloway, pension application 1836)

In 1832, [Massey Medaris testified](#) in his pension application:

On account of the British army having passed through this country and during this time of their continuance in the country the Tories became very much insubordinate, and committed a great many outrages. This declarant at this time volunteered for the purpose [of] resisting the Tories and putting an end to their outrages. From Chatham Court house he was marched to Crow's ford on Haw River. The Tories but a short time before had taken the town of Hillsboro, from which place they retired to Lindley's mill on Cain [sic, Cane] Creek. About two hours before day, this declarant marched with two hundred & fifty volunteers with him from Crow's ford to attack the Tories on Cain Creek. In this engagement the Tories to the number of seven hundred were defeated with loss of one hundred men & completely dispersed. The loss of the Whigs being only Seventeen. The success of this attack was chiefly owing to the skill and good management of Col Mebane an officer of the Continental army, who had been previously taken prisoner by the British, and was about this time passing through that section of country to join Genl Greene's Southern army. Hearing of the intended expedition against the Tories, and being fond of the sport, he took command of this expedition which ended as above stated. (Medaris, Massey, pension application 1832)

In 1822, British Major General David Stewart wrote a history of Highland regiments (Stewart 1822). He recorded a British perspective of these events, reprinted in (Brander 1971, 168). Unfortunately, it contains several obvious errors, and some details are inconsistent with (Fanning 1786, 33) and (Pass, Holloway, pension application 1836). Interestingly, the use of British artillery may be what alarmed American Brigadier General John Butler as described in (Caruthers 1854, 230).

Among these settlers was a gentleman of the name of Macneil, who had been an officer in the Seven Year's War. He joined the army with several followers, but soon took his leave, having been rather sharply reprimanded for his treatment of a republican family. He was a man of tall stature and commanding aspect, and moved, when he walked among his followers, with all the dignity of

a chieftain of old. Retaining his loyalty, although offended with the reprimand, he offered to surprise the republican garrison, governor and council assembled at Willisborough. He had three hundred followers, one-half of them old country Highlanders, the other half born in America, and the offspring of Highlanders. The enterprise was conducted with address and the governor, council, and garrison, were secured without bloodshed, and immediately marched off for Wilmington, Macneil and his party travelling by night and concealing themselves in swamps and woods by day. However, the country was alarmed, and a hostile force collected. He proceeded in zig-zag directions, for he had a perfect knowledge of the country, but without any provisions except what chance threw in his way. When he had advanced two-thirds of the route, he found the enemy occupying a pass which he must open by the sword, or perish in the swamps for want of food. At this time he had more prisoners to guard than followers. 'He did not secure his prisoners by putting them to death'; but, leaving them under a guard of half his force on whom he could least depend, he charged with the others sword in hand through the pass and cleared it of the enemy, but was unfortunately killed from too great ardour in the pursuit. The enemy being dispersed, the party continued their march disconsolate for the loss of their leader; but their opponents again assembling in force, the party were obliged to take refuge in the swamps, still retaining their prisoners. The British Commander at Wilmington, hearing of Macneil's enterprise, marched out to his support, and kept firing cannon, in expectation the report would reach them in the swamps. The party heard the reports; and knowing that the Americans had no artillery, they ventured out of the swamps towards the quarter whence they heard the guns, and meeting with Major (afterwards Sir James) Craig, sent out the support to them, delivered over their prisoners, half famished with hunger, and lodged them safely in Wilmington. Such partisans as these are invaluable in active warfare. (Stewart 1822 in Brander 1971, 168).

A few weeks later, in October 1781, Robert Mebane was killed by Tory Henry Hightower. Historian Eli Caruthers wrote:

He was afterwards with his regiment on the waters of the Cape Fear, contending with the Tories; but being notified that his services were needed in the northern part of the State, he set out accompanied only by his servant. On the way, he came upon a noted Tory and horse thief, by the name of Henry Hightower and perhaps too fearless and regardless of the consequences, he pursued him and when within striking distance with his arm uplifted, Hightower wheeled and shot him. (Caruthers 1854, 361).

Private William C. Smith witnessed Mebane's death and helped bury him. In 1833, Smith testified in court:

After they were discharged and on their way home Col. Mabane his [Smith's] captain and several others were going on to Wake County where they all lived, they came across a tory in an old field who Col. Mabane knew and the Col. Swore he would take him or his life. He charge upon him and the tory broke and run and Col. Mabane after him on his horse through the old field, in the field there was a gully and some grape vines had grown over it. Col. Mabane went to charge the gully and his horse got entangled and in it & fell and threw him. The tory turned and shot Col. Mabane as he was getting up and killed him. We buried Col. Mabane and this applicant returned home to Wake County, North Carolina. (Smith 1833 in Draper 1873, VV:10:160–161) (Smith, William C., pension application 1833)

In 1832, [Joseph McAdams testified](#):

He declares that he volunteered again and was commanded by Captains Daniel Christmas, Hodge, and Guin and in the Regiment commanded by Colonel William O'Neale and Robert Mayben who was killed by Henry Hightower a Tory at a place ten miles from Hillsboro. (McAdams, Joseph, pension application 1832)

In 1832, [Jonathan Thomas testified](#):

About this time a Tory by the name of Hightower killed Col. Mabane of the Continental army and the company in which this declarant was then serving pursued the said Hightower & one of his brothers, but could not overtake either of them. (Thomas, Jonathan, pension application 1832)

One source mentions that Mebane died at Williams Township on 13 October. A section of northeastern Chatham County is known by that name. The author has attempted to find contemporaneous newspaper announcements of Mebane's death. But apparently, all North Carolina newspapers had suspended publication at that time.

On 19 November 1781, Major General Nathanael Greene, with the Southern Army in South Carolina, issued in his general orders, "The promotion of Thomas Donoho, who is entitled to a Majority by the death of Col<sup>o</sup> Meban, is announced." (Greene 1781 in PNG 1997, IX:591).

Mebane died at age 36 with no descendants. Ironically, he died within days of the Yorktown victory that ended significant Revolutionary War fighting. His death was not publicly announced because apparently no North Carolina newspapers were being published during late 1781. Robert Mebane's name occurs 25 times in the index of the Colonial and State Records of North Carolina (NCCR 1886) (NCSR 1895). Historian S. W. Stockard wrote:

Haw Fields [Presbyterian Church] was the intellectual centre of northern Alamance. It was not only the intellectual and religious, but also the political

centre. Its members were Whigs of the Revolution. After a victory they were accustomed to meet to give thanks for it. On one occasion an influential member arose and left the house during services. Being questioned, he replied he did not expect to stay anywhere and hear them give the Lord all the thanks and Robert Mebane none. (Stockard 1900, 81).

John Mebane was imprisoned at Wilmington. In his 30 March 1833 [pension application](#) (Mebane, John, pension application 1833) he testifies that he was held prisoner a few weeks on a British ship and then paroled to town. He understood that his brother Robert Mebane arranged his exchange for a Lieutenant McChain. Later, John married the widow of a fellow prisoner who died after release while returning home.

### **October–November 1781, South Carolina**

From Charlotte, Sumter arranged the re-embodiment of the regiments of Colonel Isaac Shelby and Colonel John Sevier. To inspect these affairs, Greene briefly revisited Charlotte. On this trip, Greene stopped at Ezekiel Polk's house to discuss military plans with Sumter (Bass 1961, 211). Soon afterwards, Shelby and Sevier probably marched through Charlotte on their way to join Brigadier General Marion in the South Carolina Lowcountry. (Bass 1961, 211)

About 28 October, Sumter assumed command again and was ordered to Orangeburg to pacify the remaining loyalists in the area (Bass 1961, 211). Major John Moore, one of Sumter's officers, engaged in a skirmish with loyalist Major William "Bloody Bill" Cunningham at nearby Rowe's Plantation. That event initiated Cunningham's murderous "Bloody Scout" campaign. Sumter created a post at Four-Hole Swamp Bridge (Bass 1961, 214).

### **October–November 1781, Wilmington, Yorktown**

At Yorktown, Virginia, Cornwallis's army of 9000 soldiers was surrounded by General Washington's army and a French Army under General Jean-Baptiste Count de Rochambeau. It was also blockaded by the French Navy. Cornwallis surrendered 19 October 1781. Claiming illness, Cornwallis did not participate in the surrender ceremony. So, British Brigadier General Charles O'Hara offered his sword to American second-in-command Major General Benjamin Lincoln (Johnston 1881) (Landers 1931).





British Surrender at Yorktown, Virginia, 19 October 1781  
Painted by John Trumbull, 1797.

In 1829, Daniel Mebane [testified](#) that his brother Robert Mebane was killed at Yorktown Siege on 16 October 1781. If this is true, it may be verifiable from original-source battle records. But this statement is more likely incorrect. In fact, there is no known relation whose name was Daniel Mebane.

Afterwards, Washington and his officers offered respectable dinners for their British counterparts, but deliberately excluded Tarleton. After Tarleton returned to England, he became a member of Parliament and remained a lifelong celebrity. He wrote a valuable history of the war (Tarleton 1787).

Yorktown did not terminate hostilities. For another year, during diplomatic negotiations, Nathanael Greene's Army and partisans pushed British forces in South Carolina back to Charlestown and Savannah. After a prisoner exchange, Brigadier General Griffith Rutherford returned and took command of the Western District militia. In September 1781, in Mecklenburg County, he called for Salisbury District militia volunteers for an expedition to Wilmington. They assembled and trained for two weeks. On 1 October, this army moved towards Wilmington. On the southwest side of the Cape Fear River, near the ferry to Wilmington, the British fortified a brick house (Graham 1827 in Graham 1904b, 354). Rutherford's forces skirmished there (Graham 1827 in Graham 1904b, 368). Wilmington was encircled and slowly constricted. During this campaign, Lieutenant Colonel Henry Lee's troops brought word of the Yorktown victory. On 18 November, Rutherford's troops entered Wilmington while British troops embarked on ships.

### 1782–1783, War Conclusion

For at least 5 months in 1782, Captain John Mebane served in a regiment under Colonel Joseph Lewis. This unit went to the aid of Brigadier General Francis Marion in South Carolina and then returned to North Carolina searching for Tories. It crossed Raft Swamp and built a stockade fort

at a house in Moore County. It was stationed at Brown's Mill in Chatham County and sometimes at Cane's Mill in Randolph County.

On 21 February 1791, United States awarded the estate of Robert Mebane Bounty Land Warrant No. 2578 or 1435-500 for 500 acres in Ohio. His oldest brother William Mebane inherited this property. On 14 March 1786, North Carolina awarded the estate of Robert Mebane 7200 acres on both sides of West Fork of the Harpeth River near present-day Nashville, Tennessee. William Mebane inherited this property, (NCSAMARS n.d.) (Bockstruck 1996) (Burgner 1990). On 14 November 1790, William Mebane sold a portion of this land to Alexander Anderson, who on 13 September 1797, sold 923 acres to William Whitted (Murray 1999). Reference (White 1990, 2318) indicates that brother Daniel Mebane made [affidavit](#) on 21 July 1829 in Spartanburg District, South Carolina. Nicholas Corry stated soldier's heir was Daniel Mebane.

During 1783–1784, Alexander Mebane II was Hillsborough district auditor. He was a member of the original board of trustees of the University of North Carolina. On 12 October 1793, he attended the cornerstone laying of Old East Building. On 15 January 1795, he attended the university's formal opening.

Post-war accomplishments of Mebane brothers include:

Name	Accomplishments
William Mebane	1788 US Constitution convention. NC Senate.
Alexander Mebane II	Hillsborough Auditor. UNC board of trustees. 1788 and 1789 US Constitution conventions. Militia brigadier general. US House.
James Mebane	NC Speaker of House.
John Mebane	Militia colonel. NC House.

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