

Williams, Otho Holland

1822 "A Narrative of the Campaign of 1780. *Sketches of the Life and Correspondence of Nathanael Greene*, Volume I, pp 485- 510. A. E. Miller, Charleston, South Carolina.

486: Gates aide de camp was Major ? Armstrong

486: Armand's Legion had "about sixty cavalry, and as many infantry"

486: "Lieutenant Colonel Carrington's detachment of three companies of artillery"

487: men had knapsacks

488: "3d day of August the little army crossed Pee Dee River, in batteaus, at Mask's Ferry, and were met on the southern bank by Lieutenant Colonel Porterfield, an officer of merit, who, after the disaster at Charleston, retired with a small detachment and found means of subsisting himself and his men in Carolina until the present time."

488: "Colonel Marion, a gentleman of South Carolina, had been with the army a few days, attended by a very few followers, distinguished by small black leather caps and the wretchedness of their attire; their number did not exceed twenty men and boys, some white, some black, and all mounted, but most of them miserably equipped; their appearance was in fact so burlesque, that it was with much difficulty the diversion of the regular soldiery was restrained by the officers; and the general himself was glad of an opportunity of detaching Colonel Marion, at his own instance, towards the interior of South Carolina, with orders to watch the motions of the enemy, and furnish intelligence."

490: On the 17th [sic] of August, the wished for junction took place at the Cross Roads, about fifteen miles east of the enemy's post, on Lynch's Creek.

Baron De Kalb commanded the right wing of the army, composed of the regular troops, and General Caswell the left, of militia.

491: General Gates was in his neighborhood with a brigade of regular troops, and two brigades of militia, besides some small corps of artillery and cavalry -- that Brigadier General Stevens was on the same route, with a brigade of Virginia militia -- that Colonel Marion, below, and Colonel Sumpter above Camden, were stimulating their countrymen to re-assume their arms; and that, in short, the whole country were ready to revolt from the allegiance which had been extorted from them but a few weeks before. He [Rawdon], therefore, permitted General Gates to march

unmolested to Clermont, (where the Americans encamped on the 13th,) and employed his men in strengthening his post for defence. until reinforcements might arrive from Charleston, where Lord Cornwallis was left in command; Sir Henry Clinton having returned to New York soon after the reduction of the former city.

Brigadier General Stevens arrived with his Virginians, at Clermont, on the 14th, and encamped with the rest of the army. On the same day, (or the 15th,) an inhabitant of Camden came, as if by accident, into the American encampment, and was conducted to head quarters. He affected ignorance of the approach of the Americans--pretended very great friendship for his countrymen, the Marylanders, and promised the general to be out again in a few days with all the information the general wished to obtain. The information which he then gave was the truth, but not all the truth, which, events afterwards revealed; yet, so plausible was his manner, that General Gates dismissed him, with many promises, if he would faithfully observe his engagements.

492: Colonel Sumpster of the South Carolina militia, had intelligence that an escort with clothing, ammunition and other stores, for the troops at Camden, was on the road from Charleston, by way of M'Cord's Ferry on the Congaree; and that it would necessarily pass the Wateree at a ferry about a mile from the town, under cover of a small redoubt on the opposite side of the river. This intelligence he communicated to the general, requesting a small re-enforcement of infantry, and two small pieces of artillery to join his volunteers, promising to intercept the convoy. The colonel's accurate knowledge of the geography of the country, and the qualities of the men who were his followers, favoured the execution of this enterprise. The general ordered a detachment of one hundred regular infantry, and a party of artillery, with two brass field-pieces, under Lieutenant Colonel Woolford, to join Colonel Sumpster, and act under his command.

...
On the 15th of August, 1780, General Gates issued the following:--

After General Orders--"The sick, the extra artillery stores, the heavy baggage, and such quartermaster's stores, as are not immediately wanted, to march this evening, under a guard, to Waxaws.

"To this order the general requests the brigadier generals, to see that those under their command, pay the most exact and scrupulous obedience.

"Lieutenant Colonel Edmonds, with the remaining guns of the park, will take post and march with the Virginia brigade, under General Stevens; he will direct, as any deficiency happens in the artillery affixed to the other brigades, to supply it immediately; his military staff, and a proportion of his officers, with forty of his men, are to attend him and await his orders.

"The troops will be ready to march precisely at ten

o'clock, in the following order, viz:--

"Colonel Armand's advance; cavalry, commanded by Colonel Armand; Colonel Porterfield's light infantry upon the right flank of Colonel Armand, in indian file, two hundred yards from the road; Major Armstrong's light infantry in the same order as Colonel Porterfield's, upon the left flank of the legion.

"Advance guard of foot, composed of the advance pickets, first brigade of Maryland, second brigade of Maryland, division of North Carolina, Virginia division; rear guard, volunteer cavalry, upon the flank of the baggage, equally divided.

"In this order, the troops will proceed on their march this night.

"In the case of an attack by the enemy's cavalry in front, the light infantry upon each flank will instantly move up and give, and continue, the most galling fire upon the enemy's horse. This will enable Colonel Armand, not only to support the shock of the enemy's charge, but finally to rout them; the colonel will therefore consider the order to stand the attack of the enemy's cavalry, be their numbers what they may, as positive.

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"General Stevens will immediately order one captain, two lieutenants, one ensign, three sergeants, one drum, and sixty rank and file to join Colonel Porterfield's infantry; these are to be taken from the most experienced woodsmen, and men every way the fittest for the service.

"General Caswell will likewise complete Major Armstrong's light infantry to their original number. These must be immediately marched to the advanced posts of the army.

"The troops will observe the profoundest silence upon the march; and any soldier who offers to fire without the command of his officer, must be instantly put to death.

"When the ground will admit of it, and the near approach of the enemy renders it necessary, the army will (when ordered) march in columns.

"The artillery at the head of their respective brigades, and the baggage in the rear.

"The guard of the heavy baggage will be composed of the remaining officers and soldiers of the artillery, one captain, two subalterns, four sergeants, one drum, and sixty rank and file; and no person whatever is to presume to send any other soldier upon that service.

"All bat men, waiters, &c. who are soldiers taken from the line, are forthwith to join their regiments, and act with their masters while they are upon duty.

"The tents of the whole army are to be struck atattoo."

After writing this order, the general communicated it to the deputy adjutant general, showing him, at the same time, a rough estimate of the forces under his command, making them upwards of seven thousand. That this calculation was exaggerated, the deputy adjutant general could not but suspect,

from his own observation. He, therefore, availed himself of the general's orders, to call all the general officers in the army, to a council, to be held in Rugley's Barn--to call also upon the commanding officers of corps for a field return; in making which, they were to be as exact as possible; and, as he was not required to attend the council, he busied himself in collecting these returns and forming an abstract for the general's better information. This abstract was presented to the general just as the council broke up, and immediately upon his coming out of the door. He cast his eyes upon the numbers of rank and file present fit for duty, which was exactly three thousand and fifty-two. He said there were no less than thirteen general officers in council; and intimated something about the disproportion between the numbers of officers and privates. It was replied, "Sir, the number of the latter are certainly much below the estimate formed this morning; but," said the general, "these are enough for our purpose." What that was, was not communicated to the deputy adjutant general. The general only added--"there was no dissenting voice in the council where the orders have just been read"-- and then gave them to be published to the army.

Although there had been no dissenting voice in the council, the orders were no sooner promulgated than they became the subject of animadversion. Even those who had been dumb in council, said that there had been no consultation--that the orders were read to them, and all opinion seemed suppressed by the very positive and decisive terms in which they were expressed. Others could not imagine how it could be conceived, that an army, consisting of more than two-thirds militia, and which had never been once exercised in arms together, could form columns, and perform other manoeuvres in the night, and in the face of an enemy. But, of all the officers, Colonel Armand took the greatest exception. He seemed to think the positive orders respecting himself, implied a doubt of his courage--declared that cavalry had never before been put in the front of a line of battle in the dark--and that the disposition, as it respected his corps, proceeded from resentment in the general, on account of a previous altercation between them about horses, which the general had ordered to be taken from the officers of the army, to expedite the movement of the artillery through the wilderness. A great deal was said upon the occasion; but, the time was short, and the officers and soldiers, generally, not knowing, or believing any more than the general, that any considerable

494: body of the enemy were to be met with out of Camden, acquiesced with their usual cheerfulness, and were ready to march at the hour appointed.

As there were no spirits yet arrived in camp; and as, until lately, it was unusual for the troops to make a forced march, or prepare to meet an enemy without some extraordinary allowance, it was unluckily conceived that molasses, would, for once, be an acceptable substitute; accordingly the hospital stores were broached, and one gill of molasses per man, and a full ration of corn meal and meat, were issued to the army previous to their

march, which commenced, according to orders, at about ten o'clock at night of the 15th. . . . The troops of general Gates' army, had frequently felt the bad consequences of eating bad provisions; but, at this time, a hasty meal of quick baked bread and fresh beef, with a desert of molasses, mixed with mush, or dumplings, operated so cathartically, as to disorder very many of the men, who were breaking the ranks all night, and were certainly much debilitated before the action commenced in the morning.

. . . Both armies, ignorant of each other's intentions, moved about the same hour of the same night, and approaching each other, met about half way between their respective encampments, at midnight.

The first revelation of this new and unexpected scene, was occasioned by a smart, mutual salutation of small arms between the advanced guards. Some of the cavalry of Armand's legion were wounded, retreated, and threw the whole corps into disorder; which, recoiling suddenly on the front of the column of infantry, disordered the first Maryland brigade, and occasioned a general consternation through the whole line of the army. The light infantry under Porterfield, however, executed their orders gallantly; and the enemy, no less astonished than ourselves, seemed to acquiesce in a sudden suspension of hostilities. Some prisoners were taken on both sides; from one of these, the deputy adjutant general of the American army, extorted information respecting the situation and numbers of the enemy. He informed, that Lord Cornwallis commanded in person about three thousand regular British troops, which were, in line of march, about five or six hundred yards in front. Order was soon restored in the corps of infantry in the American army, and the officers were employed in forming a front line of battle, when the deputy adjutant general communicated to General Gates the information which he had from the prisoner. The general's astonishment could not be concealed. He ordered the deputy adjutant general to call another council of war. All the general officers immediately assembled in the rear of the line: the unwelcome news was communicated to them. General Gates said, "Gentlemen, what is best to be done?"

495: All were mute for a few moments--when the gallant Stevens exclaimed, "Gentlemen, is it not too late now to do any thing but fight?" No other advice was offered, and the general desired the gentlemen would repair to their respective commands.

The Baron De Kalb's opinion may be inferred from the following fact: When the deputy adjutant general went to call him to council, he first told him what had been discovered. "Well," said the baron, "and has the general given you orders to retreat the army?" The baron, however, did not oppose the suggestion of General Stevens; and every measure that ensued, was preparatory for action.

Lieutenant Colonel Porterfield, in whose bravery and judicious conduct great dependence was placed, received, in the first rencontre, a mortal wound, (as it long afterwards proved,)

and was obliged to retire. His infantry bravely kept the ground in front; and the American army were formed in the following order: The Maryland division, including the Delawares, on the right-- the North Carolina militia in the center--and the Virginia militia on the left. It happened, that each flank was covered by a marsh, so near as to admit the removing of the first Maryland brigade to form a second line, about two hundred yards in the rear of the first. The artillery was removed from the center of the brigades, and placed in the center of the front line; and the North Carolina militia (light infantry) under Major Armstrong, which had retreated at the first rencontre, was ordered to cover a small interval between the left wing and the swampy grounds in that quarter.

Frequent skirmishes happened during the night, between the advanced parties--which served to discover the relative situations of the two armies--and as a prelude to what was to take place in the morning.

At dawn of day (on the morning of the 16th of August) the enemy appeared in front, advancing in column. Captain Singleton, who commanded some pieces of artillery, observed to Colonel Williams, that he plainly perceived the ground of the British uniform at about two hundred yards in front. The deputy adjutant general immediately ordered Captain Singleton to open his battery; and then rode to the general, who was in the rear of the second line, and informed him of the cause of the firing which he heard. He also observed to the general, that the enemy seemed to be displaying their column by the right; the nature of the ground favored this conjecture, for yet nothing was clear.

The general seemed disposed to wait events--he gave no orders. The deputy adjutant general observed, that if the enemy, in the act of displaying, were briskly attacked by General Stevens' brigade, which was already in line of battle, the effect might be fortunate, and first impressions were important. "Sir," said the general, "that's right--let it be done." This was the last order that the deputy adjutant general received. He hastened to General Stevens, who instantly advanced with his brigade, apparently in fine spirits. The right wing of the enemy was soon discovered in line--it was too late to attack them displaying; nevertheless, the business of the day could no longer be deferred. The deputy adjutant general requested General Stevens to let him have forty or fifty privates, volunteers, who would run forward of the brigade, and commence the attack. They were led forward, within forty or fifty yards of the enemy, and ordered to take trees, and keep up as brisk a fire as possible. The desired effect of this expedient, to extort the enemy's fire at some distance, in order to the rendering it less terrible to the militia, was not gained. General Stevens, observing the enemy to rush on, put his men in mind of their bayonets but, the impetuosity with which they advanced, firing and huzzaing, threw the whole body of the militia into such a panic, that they general threw down their loaded arms and fled, in the utmost consternation. The unworthy example of the Virginians was almost instantly followed by the

North Carolinians; only a small part of the brigade, commanded by Brigadier General Gregory, made a short pause.

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"A part of Dixon's regiment, of that brigade, next in the line to the second Maryland brigade, fired two or three rounds of cartridge. But, a great majority of the militia, (at least two-thirds of the army) fled without firing a shot. The writer avers it of his own knowledge, having seen and observed every part of the army, from left to right, during the action. He who has never seen the effect of a panic upon a multitude, can have but an imperfect idea of such a thing. The best disciplined troops have been enervated, and made cowards by it. Armies have been routed by it, even where no enemy appeared to furnish an excuse. Like electricity, it operates instantaneously--Like sympathy, it is irresistible [sic] where it touches. but, in the present instance, its action was not universal. The regular troops, who had the keen edge of sensibility rubbed off by strict discipline and hard service, saw the confusion with but little emotion. They engaged seriously in the affair; and, notwithstanding some irregularity, which was created by the militia breaking, pell mell, through the second line, order was restored there--time enough to give the enemy a severe check, which abated the fury of their assault, and obliged them to assume a more deliberate manner of acting. The second Maryland brigade, including the battalion of Delawares, on the right, were engaged with the enemy's left, which they opposed with very great firmness. They even advanced upon them, and had taken a number of prisoners, when their companions of the first brigade (which formed the second line) being greatly outflanked, and charged by superior numbers, were obliged to give ground. At this critical moment, the regimental officers of the latter brigade, reluctant to leave the field without orders, inquired for their commanding officer, (Brigadier General Smallwood) who, however, was not to be found; notwithstanding, Colonel Gunby, Major Anderson, and a number of other brave officers, assisted by the deputy adjutant general, and Major Jones, one of Smallwood's aids, rallied the brigade, and renewed the contest. Again they were obliged to give way--and were again rallied--the second brigade were still warmly engaged--the distance between the two brigades did not exceed two hundred yards--their opposite flanks being nearly upon a line perpendicular to their front. At this eventful juncture, the deputy adjutant general, anxious that the communication between them should be preserved, and wishing that, in the almost certain event of a retreat, some order might be sustained by them, hastened from the first to the second brigade, which he found precisely in the same circumstances. He called upon his own regiment, (the 6th Maryland) not to fly, and was answered by the Lieutenant Colonel, Ford, who said--"They had done all that can be expected of them--we are outnumbered and outflanked--see the enemy charge with bayonets." The enemy having collected their corps, and directing their whole force against these two devoted brigades,

a tremendous fire of musketry was, for some time, kept up on both sides, with equal perseverance and obstinacy, until Lord Cornwallis, perceiving there was no cavalry opposed to him, pushed forward his dragoons--and his infantry charging, at the same moment, with fixed bayonets, put an end to the contest. His victory was complete. All the artillery, and a very great number of prisoners, fell into his hands--many fine fellows lay on the field--and the rout of the remainder was entire--not even a company retired in any order--every one escaped as he could. If, in this affair, the militia fled too soon, the regulars may be thought almost as blamable for remaining too long on the field; especially, after all hope of victory must have been despaired of. Let the commandants of the brigades answer for themselves. Allow the same privilege to the officers of the corps, comprising those brigades, and they will say, that they never received orders to retreat, nor any order from any general officers, from the commencement of the action, until it became desperate. The brave Major General, the Baron De Kalb, fought on foot, with the second brigade, and fell, mortally wounded, into the hands of the enemy, who stripped him even of his shirt; a fate which probably was avoided by other generals, only by an opportune retreat.

497: The torrent of unarmed militia, bore away with it, Generals Gates, Caswell, and a number of others, who soon saw that all was lost. General Gates, at first, conceived a hope that he might rally, at Clermont, a sufficient number to cover the retreat of the regulars; but, the farther they fled the more they were dispersed; and the generals soon found themselves abandoned by all but their aids. Lieutenant Colonel Senf, who had been on the expedition with Colonel Sumpter, returned, and overtaking General Gates, informed him of their complete success--that the enemy's redoubt, on Wateree, opposite to Camden, was first reduced, and the convoy of stores, &c. from Charleston, was decoyed, and became prize to the American party, almost without resistance. That upwards of one hundred prisoners, and forty loaded waggons, were in the hands of the party, who had sustained very little loss; but the general could avail himself nothing of this trifling advantage. The detachment under Sumpter was on the opposite side of the Wateree, marching off, as speedily as might be, to secure their booty--for the course of the firing in the morning, indicated unfavorable news from the army.

The militia, the general saw, were in air; and the regulars, he feared, were no more. The dreadful thunder of artillery and musketry had ceased, and none of his friends appeared. There was no existing corps with which the victorious detachment might unite; and the Americans had no post in the rear. He, therefore, sent orders to Sumpter to retire in the best manner he could; and proceeded himself with General Caswell towards Charlotte, an open village on a plain, about sixty miles from the fatal scene of action. The Virginians, who knew nothing of the country they were in, involuntarily reversed the route

they came, and fled, most of them, to Hillsborough. General Stevens pursued them, and halted there as many as were not sufficiently refreshed before his arrival, to pursue their way home. Their terms of service, however, being very short, and no prospect presenting itself to afford another proof of their courage, General Stevens soon afterwards discharged them.

The North Carolina militia fled different ways, as their hopes led, or their fears drove them. Most of them preferring [sic] the shortest way home, scattered through the wilderness which lies between Wateree and Pee Dee Rivers, and thence towards Roanoke. Whatever these might have suffered from the disaffected, they probably were not worse off than those who retired the way they came; wherein, they met many of their insidious friends, armed, and advancing to join the American army; but, learning its fate from the refugees, they acted decidedly in concert with the victors; and, captivating some, plundering others, and maltreating all the fugitives they met, returned, exultingly, home. They even added taunts to their perfidy; one of a party, who robbed Brigadier General Butler of his sword, consoled him by saying, "you'll have no further use for it."

The regular troops, it has been observed, were the last to quit the field. Every corps was broken and dispersed; even the boggs and brush, which in some measure served to screen them from their furious pursuers, separated them from one another. Major Anderson was the only officer who fortunately rallied, as he retreated, a few men of different companies; and whose prudence and firmness afforded protection to those who joined his party on the rout.

Colonel Gunby, Lieutenant Colonel Howard, Captain Kirkwood, and Captain Dobson, with a few other officers, and fifty or sixty men, formed a junction on the rout, and proceeded together.

The general order for moving off the heavy baggage, &c. to Waxaws, was not put in execution, as directed to be done, on the preceding evening. The whole of it, consequently, fell into the hands of the enemy; as well as all that which followed the army except the waggons of the General's Gates and De Kalb; which, being furnished with the stoutest horses, fortunately escaped, under the protection of a small quarter guard. Other waggons also had got out of danger from the enemy; but the cries of the women and the wounded in the rear, and the consternation of the flying

498: troops, so alarmed some of the waggoners, that they cut out their teams, and taking each a horse, left the rest for the next that should come. Others were obliged to give up their horses to assist in carrying off the wounded' and the whole road, for many miles, was strewed with signals of distress, confusion and dismay. What added, not a little to this calamitous scene, was the conduct of Armand's legion. They were principally foreigners, and some of them, probably, not unaccustomed to such scenes. Whether it was owing to the disgust of the colonel, at

general orders, or the cowardice of his men, is not with the writer to determine; but, certain it is, the legion did not take any part in the action of the 16th; they retired early, and in disorder, and were seen plundering the baggage of the army on their retreat. One of them cut Captain Lemar, of the Maryland infantry, over the hand, for attempting to reclaim his own portmanteau, which the fellow was taking out of the waggon. Captain Lemar was unarmed, having broke his word in action, and was obliged to submit, both to the loss and to the insult. The tent covers were thrown off the waggons, generally, and the baggage exposed, so that one might take what suited him to carry off. General Caswell's mess waggon afforded the best refreshment; very unexpectedly to the writer, he there found a pipe of good Madeira, broached, and surrounded by a number of soldiers, whose appearance led him to inquire what engaged their attention. He acknowledges, that in this instance, he shared in the booty, and took a draught of wine, which was the only refreshment he had received that day.

...

499: Involved, as he was in the necessity of fighting, the disposition which was made for battle, after the alarm, was, perhaps, unexceptionable, and as well adapted to the situation, as if the ground had been reconnoitered and chosen by the ablest officer in the army of the United States. (It was afterwards approved by the judicious and gallant General Greene, to whom the writer had the solemn pleasure of showing the field of battle; and with whom he had the additional mortification of participating the danger and disgrace of a repulse, near the same place, the very next campaign.)

...

Generals Gates and Caswell arrived at Charlotte on the night of the action. The ensuing morning presented nothing to them but an open village, with but few inhabitants, and the remains of a temporary hospital, containing a few maimed soldiers of Colonel Buford's unfortunate corps, which had been cut to pieces on the retreat, after the surrender of Charleston.

General Caswell was requested to remain there, to encourage the militia of the country, who were to rendezvous there in three days, (as it was first intended) to countenance the reassembling of the American army. ...

On the two days succeeding the fatal action, Brigadier General Gist, who commanded the second brigade of Maryland troops, previous to its misfortune at Charlotte [sic], arrived with only two or three attendants, who had fallen into his route. Several field officers, and many officers of the line also, arrived similarly circumstanced; and, although not more than about a dozen men of different corps arrived in irregular squads, from time to time, not less than one hundred infantry were collected in the village within that time; besides Armand's cavalry, which was very little reduced; and a small corps of mounted militia, which retired from the Waxsaw settlement, under the command of Major Davy, an enterprizing and gallant young man, who had been raising volunteer cavalry, to join the army.

500: ...

Brigadier General Smallwood, who had the honor of the second line, or corps de reserve, assigned him in the late action, deliberately came in on the morning, (or about noon) of the 18th, escorted by one of his aids de camp, and two or three other gentlemen, and about as many soldiers, all mounted. His route was by way of the Wateree.

The small squads assembled by Major Anderson, and the other officers already mentioned, were on the direct route. The latter were not yet arrived, but were hourly expected; and afforded, in addition to those already collected, and those with Colonel Sumpter, a prospect of forming such a body as might still encourage the militia to form, at least the semblance of any army, which might keep up some appearance of opposition, until the resource of the union could be called forth by Congress, or by the states most immediately interested.

An incident, which occasioned great distress the next day, must be here related. It has been observed, that many of the waggoners and retreating troops accelerated their flight, by taking horses from the waggons which were left on the route. In this way many wounded officers and soldiers made their escape, and bore with astonishing fortitude, the pains incident to their situation. They gave indeed, (some of them proofs of the uttermost pain and fatigue that the human constitution can bear--others such under their accumulated distresses. Those who arrived at Charlotte, were taken the best possible care of--the horses were turned out to graze in the adjacent fields, no forage being provided.