

MANEUVERS OF GENERAL GREENE'S ARMY IN FAIRFIELD COUNTY IN 1781

By Richard H. McMaster

Lord Cornwallis' occupation of Winnsborough and the movements of his army in adjacent territory are fairly well known, but the operations of General Nathaniel Greene's army in the same territory are not a matter of general knowledge.

It is only of comparatively recent years that the letters passing between General Greene and General Sumter have been brought to light and published.

This correspondence shows that after the battle of Hobkirk's Hill, General Greene passed over the Wateree River at Graves Ford, near the mouth of Sawney's Creek, and camped first on 25 mile Creek, and then on the north bank of Sawney's Creek.

Sawney's Creek flows through the south-eastern part of Fairfield and the western part of Kershaw, into the Wateree River.

By May 9, 1781, Greene had moved up into Fairfield County and was in camp on Colonel's Creek in the Harrison neighborhood. On this date he wrote to "Light Horse Harry" Lee as follows:

"We moved our camp night before last, from twenty-five mile creek to Sandy (Sawney's) Creek, five miles higher up the river. Lord Rawdon came out yesterday morning, as I expected he would, and I suppose with an expectation of finding us at the old encampment."

"I did not like our new position to risk an action in, and ordered the troops to take a position at this place, four miles higher up the River, leaving on the ground the horse, the pickets, and the light infantry. The enemy came up in front of our encampment, and drew up in order of battle, but did not dare to attempt to cross the creek, and after waiting an hour or two, retired suddenly towards Camden."

At this time General Greene's fortunes were at a low ebb, and arrangements were in process to retire up the Catawba River toward Charlotte, when late on the evening of May 10th he was informed of Lord Rawdon's evacuation of Camden.

He immediately sent the following letter to Sumter.

"Headquarters Colonel's Creek,
May 10th, 1781, 11 o'clock P. M.

Public Service

The Honorable.

Brigadaire General Sumter,

Sir:

General Greene has this moment received information that the enemy has evacuated Camden. They moved out this morning, very early. After destroying the mill, the goal, and all their stores, together with many private houses.

What may have induced this unexpected and precipitate movement is uncertain; but the General is of opinion that the same motives which have induced General Rawdon to this step, will also induce the evacuation of all the outposts, which the enemy have at Ninety-six, Augusta, and on the Congaree.

The General begs that you will take such measures, if possible, as will prevent Maxwell's escaping.

The army was to move towards Friday's Ferry tomorrow morning. It will move that way still, but perhaps by a different route, and more slowly.

Yr. Mo. Obed. Serv.

Nath. Pendleton,

Aid de Camp.

Greene's army then moved down through Richland County toward Fort Grenby on the Congaree.

A. S. Salley's History states:

"The day after the taking of Granby, General Greene proceeded with his main force to Ninety-Six, before which he arrived on the 21st of May, 1781, and immediately began his approaches. The siege was continued

until June 18th, when the approach of Lord Rawdon from Charleston, with re-inforcements, compelled him to retreat across the Saluda and Broad Rivers to a point near Winnsboro. The subsequent movements of the two armies are best described in the following letter written by Adjutant General Otho H. Williams to Major Pendleton, Aide-de-Camp to General Greene:

Dear Pendleton:

After you left us at Ninety-Six, we were obliged to retrograde as far as the Cross Roads above Winnsboro. Lord Rawdon's return over the Saluda induced the General to halt the army,

and wait for intelligence respecting his further manoeuvres, and hearing a few days after that his Lordship was on his march to Fort Granby, our army was ordered to march toward that place by way of Winnsborough."

General Greene, in his retreat, crossed Broad River at Fish Dam Ford on June 25th, and until July 3rd held his army in the region north of Winnsborough.

Johnson, in his Life of Greene, states that the General came to Tim's Ordinary, 11 miles east of Lyle's Ford, and gave his army two days' rest "at the Big Spring on Rocky Creek, in the present District of Fairfield."

During this period General Greene wrote two letters to Sumter, as given below, one of them being dated from Cockrell's, which is the present village of White Oak.

Headquarters near Winnsborough,
July 3rd, 1781.

General Sumter,

Dear Sir:

Your letter of yesterday overtook me on the march for the Congaree. I doubt not many advantages will result from your visiting the upper regiments; but I fear the opportunity for striking the posts at Monck's Corner, and in the neighborhood, is past.

Lord Rawdon is moving down toward the Congaree, and it is said, to take the posts at Friday's Ferry. He has about 1200 men besides the force that I mentioned in my former letter, coming up through Orangeburg, which I suppose has formed a junction with him, as he was at Juniper Springs last Saturday.

Colonel Cruger and Major Doyle are left at Ninety-Six with about 1200 or 1400 men. From the present disposition which the army are making, it appears that they intend to hold 96 and re-establish themselves at Augusta and Congaree. It is of the greatest importance that you prevent it if possible.

For this purpose I wish to draw all our force together at or near Friday's Ferry, and oblige the enemy to give up the post, fight us in detachments, or collect their forces to a point. If our force is separated we can expect nothing. If it is collected, we can oblige the enemy to keep theirs collected; and that will prevent their establishing their posts again; a matter highly interesting to these states, as I shall inform you when we meet, from the peculiar circumstances of foreign affairs.

Having given you a state of matters, I beg you will form a junction with us as soon as possible. I have already directed General Marion to meet us at Friday's Ferry without loss of time.

The militia of Salisbury Districts have orders to march to Camden, and from thence they will join us. General Pickens is on the march to form a junction with us, and I hope it will be effected today or tomorrow.

This is an important crisis in the affairs of this country; and I am hazarding everything to give them a favorable turn; and with your immediate aid I am in hopes to affect it.

If we could get the enemy from 96 and the Congaree into the lower country, it would be gaining a great point. With esteem and regard, I am Sir, your humble servant,

Nath Greene.