

## THE MOORE'S CREEK BRIDGE CAMPAIGN, 1776

BY HUGH F. RANKIN

Violence and civil strife were characteristics of the early days of the American Revolution. In North Carolina the struggle for political and physical control was particularly bitter, for this colony probably contained a greater number of loyalists in proportion to its population than any other.<sup>1</sup> The Whigs, or rebels, began early to take the initiative, and as they grew in political stature one loyalist lady recorded a doleful lament in her journal: "Oh Britannia, what are you doing, while your true obedient sons are thus insulted by their unlawful brethren; are they also forgot by their natural parents?"<sup>2</sup> But these "true obedient sons" grew weary of passively turning the other cheek and they too began to organize themselves into small opposition groups.

The logical leader for these loyalist groups was Josiah Martin, royal governor of the colony, but he was also having difficulty in performing his duties. Martin was young, energetic and a strong supporter of the prerogatives of the King, but he had a penchant for overenthusiasm and his approach to political problems was not always tactful or cautious. The decline in his fortunes had begun with his attempts to prevent the meeting of the Provincial Congress of 1774, and since that time he had seen his authority gradually melt away as the Provincial Congress gained political domination over the colony through the committees of safety.

But Josiah Martin was a persistent man and valiantly attempted the protection of the interests of his royal master. In a speech to the Assembly on April 4, 1775, he urged that body to resist "the monster, sedition" who had "dared to raise his impious head in America."<sup>3</sup> Despite this vigorous declamation Martin apparently felt that his efforts were in vain, for three days later in a dispatch to Lord Dartmouth, Secretary of State for Colonies, he wrote that "Government is here as absolutely prostrate as impotent, and nothing but the shadow of it is left,"

<sup>1</sup> Robert O. Demond, *The Loyalists in North Carolina during the Revolution* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1940), vii.

<sup>2</sup> Evangeline Walker Andrews and Charles McLean Andrews (eds.), *Journal of a Lady of Quality* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1939), 192.

<sup>3</sup> Legislative Journals, William R. Sanders (ed.), *The Colonial Records of North Carolina* (10 vols. Raleigh, Goldsboro, etc., 1886-1898), IX, 1194. Hereafter cited as C. R.

and he concluded his report with the prophetic warning that "unless effectual measures such as British Spirit may dictate are speedily taken, there will not long remain a trace of Britain's dominion over these colonies."<sup>4</sup>

These efforts by the governor had not gone unnoticed. He was under the constant surveillance of the New Bern Committee of Safety. As a means of discouraging the use of force by Governor Martin, militia companies were embodied in the town and surrounding countryside which had the avowed purpose of opposition to royal authority. Alarmed at these warlike preparations, Martin sent his wife, "big with child,"<sup>5</sup> and his children off to the comparative safety of New York on the same vessels by which dispatches were sent to General Thomas Gage.<sup>6</sup>

The voices of anger and discontent increased in volume as the governor dismounted the palace cannon, and were raised in genuine alarm at the persistent rumor that the Negroes were going to rise in revolt and after being armed by the British would fall upon their former masters.<sup>7</sup> Although these rumors were denied by Martin,<sup>8</sup> a number of Negroes were accused and punished, and armed bands of runaway slaves were discovered hiding in the swamps and forests along the coast.<sup>9</sup>

The mounting wave of resistance to royal authority forecast violence and upheaval, and the governor began to fear for his life. With the aid of a few faithful servants he spiked the palace cannon and then buried his ammunition in the cellar and beneath the cabbage bed in the palace garden.<sup>10</sup> Then, loudly proclaiming that he was going to visit Chief Justice Hand, he fled to the relative safety of Fort Johnston on the Cape Fear, arriving there on June 2.<sup>11</sup>

Fort Johnston offered little more protection than the Governor's Palace, but there was the added security of the *Cruizer*, a sloop of war of the Royal Navy, anchored offshore in the river. The fort was normally manned by a housekeeping force of

<sup>4</sup> Martin to Dartmouth, April 7, 1775, *C. R.*, IX, 1214-1215.

<sup>5</sup> Andrews and Andrews, *Journal of a Lady of Quality*, 99.

<sup>6</sup> Martin to Dartmouth, June 30, 1775, *C. R.*, X, 43.

<sup>7</sup> John Stuart to Dartmouth, June 30, 1775, *C. R.*, X, 118.

<sup>8</sup> Martin to Dartmouth, June 30, 1775, *C. R.*, X, 43.

<sup>9</sup> John Simpson to Richard Cogdell, July 15, 1775, *C. R.*, X, 94; Andrews and Andrews, *Journal of a Lady of Quality*, 99.

<sup>10</sup> J. Almon (compiler), *The Remembrancer; or, Impartial Repository of Public Events for the Year 1776* (London: J. Almon, 1776), Part 1, 114.

<sup>11</sup> Martin to Dartmouth, June 30, 1775, *C. R.*, X, 44.

twenty-five men, but desertions had reduced that number to less than half. The supply of powder was so low that the commandant assured Martin that the supply on hand was not sufficient for the fort to defend its own artillery. Despite this depressing information, the governor decided upon an aggressive course of action. The majority of his council had deserted him in April, but he called a meeting of the remaining loyal members. This skeleton council, meeting within the confines of the fort on June 25, authorized Governor Martin to issue militia commissions, recruit replacements for the garrison, and petition General Gage for funds with which to repair the fort.<sup>12</sup>

These activities of the governor were a source of alarm for the nearby Wilmington Committee of Safety. To them the fort represented a permanent bridgehead offering protection in the event of a landing by British reinforcements. Orders were issued forbidding anyone to communicate with the fort without first obtaining the permission of the committee. As a means of removing the source of their apprehension, they dispatched a call for men throughout the neighboring counties, preparatory to an attack on Fort Johnston.<sup>13</sup>

This force of militia and minute men was united under the command of Colonel Robert Howe, and on July 15 it left the town of Brunswick for the attack on the governor's stronghold. There was no attempt at secrecy on the part of this attacking force. They sent a letter to the governor, informing him that they were on their way to remove the guns from the fort.<sup>14</sup> Martin had earlier expressed the opinion that the fort in its present condition was indefensible against a force of any size<sup>15</sup> and now, declaring it to be "a most contemptible thing, fit neither for a place of Arms, or an Asylum for the friends of Government," he dismounted the cannon, removed all provisions, and took refuge aboard the *Cruizer*.<sup>16</sup> On July 18, from the protection of the sloop's guns, the governor watched a "savagely and audacious mob," under the leadership of Howe, John Ashe, and Cornelius Harnett, burn the fort and the surrounding buildings.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Council Journal, June 25, 1775, *C. R.*, X, 38-40.

<sup>13</sup> Proceedings of the Wilmington Committee of Safety, *C. R.*, X, 87-92.

<sup>14</sup> "The People" to Martin, July 16, 1775, *C. R.*, X, 103.

<sup>15</sup> Martin to Gage, March 16, 1775, *C. R.*, IX, 1167.

<sup>16</sup> Martin to Dartmouth, July 16, 1775, *C. R.*, X, 96-97.

<sup>17</sup> Martin to Dartmouth, July 20, 1775, *C. R.*, X, 108-109.

Gubernatorial proclamations were issued decrying these depredations, but he soon found that, compared to gunpowder, words and paper were poor ammunition with which to put down an insurrection. In view of his previous military experience and his present political position, Martin felt that he was the natural leader for any attempt to return the province to royal authority. Shortly after his arrival at Fort Johnston he had written his business representative in New York instructing him to send a royal standard, bed and bedding, and a tent "of the size of the Colonel's tent in the army."<sup>18</sup>

Then with his imagination running rampant, Martin devised a grandiose scheme of conquest. Forwarding it to Lord Dartmouth, he expressed the desire that it be presented to the Crown for consideration. This strategy was not limited to the subjugation of North Carolina, but was a scheme for the restoration of the entire South to royal jurisdiction. A note of confidence was evident as the governor revealed his plan. The first and basic phase would necessitate arms and ammunition from General Gage. With these he could embody and arm at least 3,000 of the settlers from the Scotch highlands, and then with this group offering protection, he felt that at least 20,000 of the province's estimated 30,000 fighting men would repair to the King's standard. The existence of such a sizeable force would hold Virginia "in such awe" that no reinforcements would be sent from that colony to aid the Carolina Whigs, and the remaining southern colonies could be subjugated with little effort. In addition to 10,000 stand of arms, six brass six-pounders, and all other supplies necessary for an army in the field, Martin also asked for the restoration of his commission as lieutenant-colonel,<sup>19</sup> which he had sold in 1769 because of ill health.

As additional insurance for this plan's adoption Alexander Schaw, a planter of the Cape Fear region and brother of the "Lady of Quality," was persuaded to go to London and lay before Lord Dartmouth his extensive knowledge of the country.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Martin to Henry White, June 13, 1775, *C. R.*, X, 16.

<sup>19</sup> Martin to Dartmouth, June 30, 1775, *C. R.*, X, 45-47. This elaborate scheme of conquest was not unknown to the patriots. When received by Dartmouth this letter bore the notation, "Opened by the Committee of Inspection at Charles Town. G. Roupell." *C. R.*, X, 69-70.

<sup>20</sup> Schaw to Dartmouth, October 31, 1775, Dartmouth Manuscripts, 1720-1783 (transcriptions), North Carolina Department of Archives and History, Raleigh; Martin to Dartmouth, July 6, 1775, *C. R.*, X, 71. Schaw was paid £100 for expenses incurred on this mission. Declaration of the Account of Josiah Martin, Esq., English Records: Audit Office, 1779 (transcriptions), North Carolina Department of Archives and History.

On the whole, this plan of the governor's made sense to British government officials. In England, it was generally felt that North Carolina was, with the exception of Georgia, the weakest colony in America.<sup>21</sup> Letters from loyalist reporters in the colonies contained encouraging information. According to them, the chief opposition in North Carolina would be found in the coastal areas. The settlers from Scotland's Highlands would certainly take up arms for the government, and the ex-Regulators, or "back-Settlers" would at least remain neutral if they did not join the forces of the King.<sup>22</sup> This was in itself a reassuring report for the ministry, for it was the general impression in England that the people of North Carolina "stood in perpetual awe of the regulators."<sup>23</sup> John Stuart, Indian Agent for the Southern Department, reported that the majority of the frontiersmen were loyalist in sentiment and would support the King's cause. He also suggested the possibility of Indian uprisings in conjunction with any action on the coast.<sup>24</sup> As an indication of the low esteem which the other colonies held of the resistance powers of North Carolina, a Pennsylvania loyalist wrote:

North Carolina is in general the poorest country on the Continent, Nova Scotia excepted, and one of the Floridas. With a few very honourable exceptions, much of the same character must be given of the people. The bulk of them are renegades from the other Colonies.<sup>25</sup>

These accounts of the weakness of North Carolina aroused enthusiasm among certain officials and there was some agitation for the King to order immediately a battalion of troops from Boston to support Governor Martin in his activities.<sup>26</sup> The ministry, however, refused to act hastily, as the dispatches of other southern governors were equally as enthusiastic as those of

<sup>21</sup> *Annual Register for the Year 1776* (London), XIX, 156.

<sup>22</sup> Lord Townshend to Dartmouth, July 21, 1775, Dartmouth Manuscripts. Apparently it was unknown to both Governor Martin and British officials that many leaders of the Regulation were signing oaths of allegiance to the patriot cause. *C. R.*, X, 243.

<sup>23</sup> John Andrews, *History of the War with America, France, Spain, and Holland; Commencing in 1775 and Ending in 1783* (London: John Feilding and John Jarvis, 1785), II, 171.

<sup>24</sup> Stuart to Gage, October 3, 1775, Peter Force (compiler), *American Archives*, 4th series (Washington: M. St. Clair Clarke and Peter Force, 1837-1846), IV, 317.

<sup>25</sup> Jonathan Boucher to [?], November 27, 1775, Historical Manuscripts Commission (eds.), *Report on the Manuscripts of Mrs. Stopford-Sackville of Drayton House, Northamptonshire*, (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1904), II, 18. Hereafter cited as *Stopford-Sackville MSS*.

<sup>26</sup> Thomas Pownall to George III, September 12, 1775, Sir John Fortescue (ed.), *The Correspondence of King George the Third from 1760 to December 1783* (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1928), III, 260.

Martin<sup>27</sup> and the prevailing opinion was that any of the southern colonies would be quick to avail themselves of any aid sent to that region.<sup>28</sup>

A southern campaign, with troops from England acting in conjunction with detachments from Boston, was discussed in council. A proposal was made that the first attempt be made on Charleston. The capture of this city would provide an excellent port—a necessity as a base of operations in any campaign. It was then that Alexander Schaw, Martin's personal emissary, proved his worth. He ably argued the cause for North Carolina. He pointed out that if North Carolina were returned to royal control, the reduction of Charleston would prove an easier task, as a route to the "well-affected people" in the back settlements of South Carolina would be opened. The campaign in North Carolina would delay the expedition for only a short period, and once the loyalists were placed in control of the province, it would remain secure for the Crown for the remainder of the insurrection and "I wish one could be sure of the same thing in South Carolina."<sup>29</sup>

Schaw's arguments apparently were convincing, for a strike at North Carolina was included in the basic plan for the expedition. The necessary troops were to be conveyed by a fleet under the command of Sir Peter Parker. There was an interesting development in the selection of a commander for the army forces. Lord Charles Cornwallis, then stationed with his regiment in Ireland, had requested that he be allowed to accompany the expedition. This was a pleasing innovation, and in forwarding this application to the King, Lord North pointed out: "The Ardor of the Nation in this cause has not hitherto arisen to the pitch one could wish, & it certainly should be encouraged whenever it appears."<sup>30</sup> As a reward for his patriotism, Lord Cornwallis was placed in command of the troops sailing from England and Ireland.

The approved draught of the expedition was communicated to General Howe, who had replaced General Gage as commander of British troops in America, and Governor Martin by Lord Dart-

<sup>27</sup> Lord North to George III, October 15, 1775, Fortesque, *The Correspondence of King George the Third*, III, 266-267.

<sup>28</sup> William Eden to Lord George Germain, October 3, 1775, *Stopford-Sackville MSS*, II 10-11.

<sup>29</sup> Schaw to Dartmouth, November 8, 1775, Dartmouth Manuscripts.

<sup>30</sup> Lord North to George III, November 26, 1775, Fortescue, *The Correspondence of King George the Third*, III, 294-295.

mouth. Howe was instructed to dispatch a detachment from New York to the Cape Fear, there to make a junction with the seven regiments under Cornwallis and the fleet commanded by Parker, the two forces to act jointly under the command of an officer to be selected by Howe. Dartmouth was dubious as to the success they would meet in North Carolina, as the larger vessels of the fleet would find it impossible to cross the bar in the mouth of the Cape Fear, and thus could not adequately support the operations of the land forces. Nevertheless, the commanding officer was to be instructed to confer with Governor Martin as a means of determining the practicability of landing troops in the province. If this proved feasible, the required number of the military would be set ashore, the remainder to continue toward the primary objective of the operation—the reduction of Charleston.<sup>31</sup> On December 23, Lord George Germain, who had succeeded Dartmouth in office, notified Martin that the troops were ready for embarkation, and were to be convoyed by nine warships of the Royal Navy.<sup>32</sup>

Dartmouth's dispatches outlining the proposed expedition had reached the governor on January 3,<sup>33</sup> and Martin immediately initiated the local phase of the operation. On January 10 he issued a proclamation declaring the Royal Standard to be raised in North Carolina, and calling upon all loyal subjects to unite and suppress the rebellion in the province.<sup>34</sup> On the same day loyalist leaders in the counties of Anson, Cumberland, Chatham, Guilford, Mecklenburg, Rowan, Surry, and Bute were issued the necessary powers and authority to recruit militia, commission officers, seize the arms of the rebels, and to impress all necessary provisions and transportation. A place of rendezvous was to be selected and after they were united, they were to march in a body to Brunswick, so timing their progress as to arrive no later than February 15.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Dartmouth to Howe, November 8, 1775, *C. R.*, X, 313. Sir Henry Clinton was selected to command this expedition. John Wesley, then in England, had in mind a more passive method for the restoration of the colonies which was based on "Love and tender Measures." He suggested to a missionary that the people of North and South Carolina would be more susceptible to the "Gospel of Peace" as they were further removed from the din of war. John Wesley to Thomas Rankin, October 20, 1775, English Records: Colonial Office, 1773-1775 (transcriptions), North Carolina Department of Archives and History, Raleigh.

<sup>32</sup> Germain to Martin, December 23, 1775, *C. R.*, X, 364.

<sup>33</sup> Martin to Dartmouth, January 12, 1776, *C. R.*, X, 406.

<sup>34</sup> Martin's Proclamation, January 10, 1776, *C. R.*, X, 397.

<sup>35</sup> Order for raising the King's Standard in North Carolina, January 10, 1776, *C. R.*, X, 441-442.

The Tories of Bladen, Surry, Anson, and Guilford counties had for some time been formed into militia companies by their local officers.<sup>36</sup> Thomas Rutherford, a former member of the provincial legislature and Colonel of the Cumberland County militia, issued a call for a general muster of the Cumberland County loyalists to be held at Cross Creek on February 12.<sup>37</sup>

The key to Martin's plan of mobilization was the embodiment of the Scotch Highlanders of Cumberland County. As late as November, 1775, a ship loaded with immigrants had arrived in the Cape Fear from Scotland. They had been granted lands by Governor Martin, after a renewal of their oaths of allegiance to the Crown.<sup>38</sup> These Highlanders had long been famed for their fighting qualities. The British considered them to be "naturally warlike,"<sup>39</sup> and the Continental Congress had early recognized their worth as military men. In November, 1775, the Congress had directed that two ministers be selected to go among these people and explain the nature of the conflict with Great Britain.<sup>40</sup> An unofficial function of their mission was to combat the royalist tendencies of one John McLeod, the Presbyterian minister among the Highlanders.<sup>41</sup> This scheme of the Congress, although well intentioned, met with little success because of the inability of the envoys to speak Gælic.<sup>42</sup>

The older and more established Highlanders in the community entertained neutral sentiments, and it was the later arrivals who favored the cause of the Crown. The wily Martin had forced this latter group to renew their allegiance and swear to "their readiness to lay down their lives in the defence of his Majesty's government" before he would grant lands to them.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Report of the Committee to Inquire into the Conduct of Insurgents and other Suspected Persons to the Halifax Congress, April 10, 1776, *C. R.*, X, 594-601.

<sup>37</sup> Rutherford's Manifesto, January 13, 1776, *C. R.*, X, 452.

<sup>38</sup> Martin to Dartmouth, November 12, 1775, *C. R.*, X, 327.

<sup>39</sup> Anonymous, *Impartial History of the War in America between Great Britain and Her Colonies, from Its Commencement to the End of the Year 1779* (London: R. Foulder and J. Milliken, 1780), 307.

<sup>40</sup> Worthington C. Ford and others (eds.), *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1905), III, 388. These ministers were to be paid forty dollars a month for their efforts and were to be selected by the North Carolina delegates. Elihu Spencer and Alexander McWhorter were selected for the mission. Joseph Hewes to Samuel Johnston, January 4, 1776, Edmund C. Burnett (ed.), *Letters of Members of the Continental Congress* (Washington: Carnegie Institute of Washington, 1921), I, 296.

<sup>41</sup> Journal of the Provincial Congress, *C. R.*, X, 577.

<sup>42</sup> J. P. MacLean, *An Historical Account of the Settlement of Scotch Highlanders in America Prior to the Peace of 1783 together with Notices of Highland Regiments and Biographical Sketches* (Cleveland: Helman-Taylor Co., 1900), 116. Hereafter cited as MacLean, *Scotch Highlanders in America*.

<sup>43</sup> Martin to Dartmouth, November 12, 1775, *C. R.*, X, 324.

Although Martin had flaunted the loyalty of the Highlanders, he entertained certain doubts as to their fidelity. In 1766 they had demonstrated rebellious tendencies in the *North Carolina Gazette* by protesting the passage of the Stamp Act.<sup>44</sup> In October, 1775, he had been horrified at the information that they had declared themselves to be neutral, a result of the activity of a committee from the Provincial Congress of North Carolina which included Farquard Campbell. Martin had relied upon Campbell for support and, at the reports of his defection, now condemned him as "an ignorant man."<sup>45</sup> But less than a month later the governor was again declaring that the Highlanders were almost "without exception staunch to government."<sup>46</sup>

This temporary attachment to neutrality may have been the result of increasing commercial regulations imposed by the Committee of Safety. One such order specified that no salt could be sold at the "landing places" unless the purchaser was able to produce a certificate from the Committee certifying him as a good "Liberty Man." This restriction appeared to be only temporary insofar as the Cross Creek merchants were concerned, and they were soon selling again without discrimination to all those who could afford their inflated prices.<sup>47</sup>

Commerce alone, however, was not the only activity in the Highlanders' settlements, and notwithstanding the rumors of neutrality, many of their number were openly espousing the King's cause. As early as July 3, 1775, Allan MacDonald, a person of influence among his countrymen and husband of the renowned Flora, had journeyed to Fort Johnston and proposed to Governor Martin that he raise a battalion of "the good and faithful Highlanders" from among the recently settled MacDonalds and McLeods.<sup>48</sup>

The governor's dispatches had described the loyalty of these people in such glowing terms that they were considered a valuable source of recruits for the British Army. Agents of General Gage had earlier attempted to enlist 800 of the Highlanders in

<sup>44</sup> MacLean, *Scotch Highlanders in America*, 110.

<sup>45</sup> Martin to Dartmouth, October 16, 1775, *C. R.*, X, 266. Farquard Campbell was a man of great influence among the Highlanders, and Campbell Town had been so named to honor him.

<sup>46</sup> Martin to Dartmouth, November 12, 1775, *C. R.*, X, 325.

<sup>47</sup> Adelaide L. Fries (ed.), *Records of the Moravians in North Carolina* (7 vols. Raleigh, 1922-1947), II, 861. Hereafter cited as *Moravian Records*.

<sup>48</sup> MacLean, *Scotch Highlanders in America*, 115.

the service of the King. The required number were found among the more recent arrivals to America, but the activities of the local patriots prevented these agents' execution of their orders. Disregarding this reversal, Gage had, in July, 1775, ordered two Scotch officers, Lieutenant-Colonel Donald MacDonald and Captain Donald McLeod, to North Carolina to recruit men for a battalion of the Royal Highland Emigrant Regiment.<sup>49</sup> To facilitate their task, they were given letters from Lord Dartmouth, to be presented to Governor Martin, soliciting his aid in enlisting troops for the King.<sup>50</sup>

MacDonald and McLeod landed at New Bern and the Committee of Safety there was immediately warned, "There is reason to suspect their errand of a base nature."<sup>51</sup> The two strangers were ordered to appear before the Committee and in the course of the investigation they declared themselves to be officers who had been wounded at Bunker Hill, but they were no longer in the army and had come to North Carolina to seek out friends and relatives and possibly settle among them. Their stories convinced the Committee that they were bent on no evil, and they were released with a warning against the activities of the King's supporters.<sup>52</sup>

Meanwhile, Governor Martin had his individual dream of personal military glory punctured in a communication from Lord Dartmouth. Dartmouth flatly refused to restore his commission, asserting his power and authority as governor was sufficient to execute all measures expected of him. To restore his commission as lieutenant-colonel which he had sold in 1769 would be an injustice to other officers who held that rank.<sup>53</sup> Martin did not allow this frustrating development to thwart his plans, but continued to increase his machinations in an attempt to defeat the insurrection against his sovereign.

Many residents of Brunswick County came aboard the *Cruizer*, complaining bitterly of the treatment they were receiving from

<sup>49</sup> Alexander McDonald to Lord Amherst, August, 1777, "Letter Book of Captain Alexander McDonald of the Royal Highland Emigrants, 1775-1779," *Collections of the New-York Historical Society for the Year 1882* (New York: Printed for the Society, 1893), XV, 356.

<sup>50</sup> Certificate by Colonel MacDonald, English Records: Foreign Office, 1783-1794 (transcriptions), North Carolina Department of Archives and History, Raleigh.

<sup>51</sup> Samuel Johnston to the Committee at Wilmington, July 21, 1775, *C. R.*, X, 117.

<sup>52</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine* (London), XLVI (June, 1776), 281-282; *Remembrancer* (1776), Part II, 74; *C. R.*, X, 325. MacDonald and McLeod had fought at Bunker Hill and it is a probability that the former had been wounded there. MacDonald, by many years the older of the two, had also fought in the Battle of Culloden.

<sup>53</sup> Dartmouth to Martin, September 15, 1776, *C. R.*, X, 248.

their former friends and neighbors. They assured the governor that at the proper time they could embody between 2,000 and 3,000 troops. Reports indicating that the rebels were low on arms and ammunition suggested the time for action was near. With this in mind Martin determined to draw upon that vast manpower pool that he felt existed in the interior of the province—the Highlanders and the ex-Regulators. He planned to unite this group with the coastal loyalists and then stand off the rebels until the arrival of the fleet. To acquaint the loyalist chieftains of the interior with these developments, he selected one of the men of Brunswick as courier. This messenger proved untrustworthy and promptly handed over his information to the Whigs.<sup>54</sup>

For a representative on whom he could rely, the governor sent for a Highlander, one Alexander McLean. McLean's orders were to contact the local leaders and determine "with certainty" the number of men each could bring to the royal standard. These men were to be instructed to have their troops on the coast no later than February 15. Upon reaching Cross Creek, McLean called the loyalist leaders together in a council and, after swearing them to secrecy, disclosed the governor's plans. These men were cautious in their estimates. Their conclusion was that they could enlist 3,000 men, but could secure no more than 1,000 stand of arms.<sup>55</sup> McLean's report to Martin stated that the loyalists were in "high spirits and very fast collecting" and his personal estimate of the size of the army was 6,000 men, well equipped with horses and wagons. It had been decided, however, that the entire force would not march for the coast. One thousand of their number were to remain at Cross Creek to protect the families and property of those engaging in the expedition. The main body of troops expected to be in possession of Wilmington as early as February 20, and certainly no later than February 25.<sup>56</sup>

This encouraging information led Martin, on January 10, 1776, to issue commissions to the Scotch and other loyalist leaders,

<sup>54</sup> Martin to Germain, March 21, 1776, *C. R.*, X, 486-490.

<sup>55</sup> A Narrative of the Proceedings of a Body of Loyalists in North Carolina. In Genl. Howe's Letter of the 25th April 1776. English Records: Colonial Office, 1776 (transcriptions), North Carolina Department of Archives and History, Raleigh. Hereafter cited as Loyalist Narrative. Alexander McLean was one of the authors of this narrative, written as a report after the rout of the loyalists at Moore's Creek Bridge. The shortage of firearms among the Highlanders was possibly due to English orders disarming the Scots after the battle of Culloden.

<sup>56</sup> Martin to Germain, March 21, 1776, *C. R.*, X, 487.

empowering them to embody troops and appoint officers.<sup>57</sup> McLean, after consulting the Highlanders, sent a circular letter to the other loyalist leaders in the province, calling them to a meeting in Cross Creek on February 5.<sup>58</sup>

The meeting was stormy. All of the Highland leaders were present, but only four came from the other sections of the province. The Scots were of the opinion that they should wait at least until March 1 before assembling the troops unless the British fleet arrived before that date. The Regulators and other loyalist leaders would not hear of a delay and called for immediate action. As these men supposedly controlled the greater number of troops, the Highlanders assented to their demands, but declared that they could only be held responsible for raising 700 men. The militants shrugged this aside with the assertion that instead of the 3,000 men they had previously promised, they would bring at least 5,000 into the field. Why even now, they boasted, they had collected 500 men who were ready to march at a moment's notice. The council then agreed that Captain McLeod, as a regular officer of the British army, should return with the loyalist leaders and conduct this group to Cross Creek.<sup>59</sup>

Donald MacDonald had been appointed brigadier-general of militia "for the time being" by Governor Martin and had been given the command of the loyalist forces.<sup>60</sup> McLeod was made lieutenant-colonel and given the post of second in command. The remaining officers were to be selected by the council.<sup>61</sup> The 300 recruits which MacDonald had collected for the Royal Highland Emigrant Regiment were to be added to the expedition.<sup>62</sup> As commanding officer he issued a manifesto on the same day of the meeting at Cross Creek. All loyal subjects were called upon to repair to the royal standard, and they were assured that no harm would come to their women, children, or private property. All provisions taken by the King's troops were to be paid for, and retaliation was promised to all those who harmed the families of the loyalists while they were away.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Orders from Governor Martin, etc., January 10, 1776, *C. R.*, X, 441-442; *Loyalist Narrative*.

<sup>58</sup> *Loyalist Narrative*.

<sup>59</sup> *Loyalist Narrative*.

<sup>60</sup> MacDonald's Manifesto, February 5, 1776, *C. R.*, X, 443.

<sup>61</sup> C. Stedman, *The History of the Origin, Progress, and Termination of the American War* (London: Printed for the Author, 1794), I, 179.

<sup>62</sup> Certificate of Donald MacDonald, English Records: Foreign Office, 1783-1794.

<sup>63</sup> MacDonald's Manifesto, February 5, 1776, *C. R.*, X, 443.

In the back country, despite MacDonald's promises, the loyalists were finding it difficult to organize. In the Yadkin Valley many of those who voiced an affection for George III were driven from their homes and were forced to conceal themselves in the forests, thus gaining for themselves the sobriquet of "Outlyers." Only when they were informed that the loyalists were rallying at Cross Creek did they come out of hiding, and then only in small groups, cautiously making their way to the Cape Fear.<sup>64</sup> The Tories of Surry County had speedily been dispersed, and the Guilford group, led by the four Fields brothers, had been opposed by a hastily organized company under Captain William Dent. In the ensuing skirmish Dent had been killed, thus becoming the first casualty of the campaign.<sup>65</sup> Although these Tories pushed resolutely on, others in the Regulator country concealed their political views, indicating there was a scarcity of armament among them and that they would rise when the Highlanders returned from the coast.<sup>66</sup> These people also suffered from the lack of leadership. There was not a man of property or political influence among them upon whom they could call for direction.<sup>67</sup>

The 500 men that Donald McLeod was to escort to Cross Creek were a rough and raucous group. The young officer was not impressed by their appearance and the men disliked the idea of a foreign officer in command. To placate injured feelings a hog-head of rum was brought out, "which most of them visited industriously." A rumor spread through the group of celebrants that a large body of Whigs were marching against them,<sup>68</sup> and the 500 loyalists vanished even more rapidly than had the hog-head of rum. McLeod, alone in a strange country, was unable to persuade anyone to act as his guide back to Cross Creek. An uncomfortable situation was avoided when he was joined by four Highland officers. Messages were dispatched to the confident back-country men who sat in the council at Cross Creek, but they were not to be found. The messenger was informed by their neighbors that "they were Sculking & hiding themselves through

<sup>64</sup> *Moravian Records*, III, 1026.

<sup>65</sup> Report of Committee to enquire into the conduct of insurgents and suspected persons, *C. R.*, X, 599.

<sup>66</sup> Andrews, *History of the War with America, France, Spain and Holland*, II, 171. The Regulators had been forced to surrender their arms to Governor Tryon after their unsuccessful attempt at insurrection in 1771.

<sup>67</sup> Samuel Johnston to Joseph Hewes, March 10, 1776, Hayes Collection (transcriptions), North Carolina Department of Archives and History, Raleigh.

<sup>68</sup> *Moravian Records*, III, 1026.

Swamps & such concealed places." The disappointed McLeod and his officers returned to Cross Hill, the place which had been designated as a rendezvous.<sup>69</sup>

Cross Hill was alive with activity. The British had offered many inducements for enlistment, and the thrifty Scots were taking full advantage of their opportunities. There was a standing offer of 200 acres of land to all Highlanders in America who joined the service of the Crown.<sup>70</sup> In addition, Dartmouth had instructed Martin to promise that they would be issued arms, receive the same pay as regular troops, would be liberally compensated for any equipment used such as horses and wagons, and they would not be required to fight beyond the boundaries of the colony. As a bonus, all arrears in quitrents were to be remitted and a quit-rent exemption for twenty years would be granted.<sup>71</sup> Many joined because they had recently renewed the oath of allegiance to the King and they had not been in the new country long enough to have formed an attachment for the cause of the rebels. Most of the older settlers among the Scots refused to commit themselves. On the whole, the Tory army was composed of late arrivals to the colony and the poor. With the exception of the leaders, there was not one man among them who owned property to the extent of £100.<sup>72</sup> Possibly the most outstanding of the native organizers was Thomas Rutherford, formerly a member of the provincial legislature, but now classed as a "poor Creature" by his former associates.<sup>73</sup> Other loyalist leaders of prominence were Samuel Williams, James Cotton, John Colson, and Dr. John Pyle.<sup>74</sup>

There were about 500 Highlanders gathered at Cross Hill, and Rutherford had promised MacDonald he would join him at Cross Creek with an additional 500 loyalists. The Tory general decided to unite these two groups immediately in order to present as formidable a body as possible.<sup>75</sup>

Arriving at Cross Creek on February 12, MacDonald's hopes fell far short of expectation. There was no sign of the Regulators

<sup>69</sup> Loyalist Narrative. Cross Hill was near the site of present-day Carthage in Moore County.

<sup>70</sup> Alexander McDonald to General Howe, September 30, 1775, "Letter Book of Captain Alexander McDonald. . . ." 222.

<sup>71</sup> Dartmouth to Martin, November 7, 1776, *C. R.*, X, 308.

<sup>72</sup> Johnston to Hewes, March 10, 1776, Hayes Collection.

<sup>73</sup> Johnston to Hewes, March 10, 1776, Hayes Collection.

<sup>74</sup> This was the same John Pyle who was involved in the so-called "Pyle's Massacre," February 23, 1781. His group was annihilated by members of Henry Lee's Legion and Andrew Pickens' militia. The site of this battle was about three miles southwest of the present-day site of Graham, in Alamance County.

<sup>75</sup> Loyalist Narrative.

or back-country loyalists. The Guilford County contingent, one of the stronger units expected at the rendezvous, had met with adversity. Seven of their leaders had been arrested and clapped into the gaol at Halifax, whereupon their followers turned back and made their way home.<sup>76</sup> Other groups of the Regulator faction had arrived at Cross Creek, expecting to find Governor Martin and at least 1,000 British regulars there, as had been promised by their leaders. Angered at this duplicity, they returned to their homes.<sup>77</sup> A council of officers resolved to send Donald McLeod and Alexander McLean to contact the back-country loyalists in an attempt to revive the earlier enthusiasm of these people. About thirty-five miles out of Cross Creek the two officers met Dr. John Pyle with about forty men on their way to the rendezvous. After escorting these newcomers back to camp, it was decided that these two officers should remain with the army, for the situation had grown tense and feelings were running high throughout the province. Messengers familiar with the country were dispatched to the back country. As a result of this action, an additional ninety men arrived, bringing the total number from the Regulator country to 130.<sup>78</sup>

The activity in the Highland settlements and groups of armed men marching toward Cross Creek had alarmed the Whigs of North Carolina. The governor's ambitions for the restoration of the colony to the Crown were well known. As early as July, 1775, the opinion had been that "he intends kindling the flames of a Civil war," and county committees of safety had been warned to keep a "strict look out" for signs of an uprising.<sup>79</sup>

At the signs of increasing activity among the Tories, a desperate plea was sent to neighboring provinces for aid in relieving the dire shortage of ammunition. In answer, the Provincial Council of Virginia lent North Carolina 500 pounds of gunpowder and 100 pounds of lead,<sup>80</sup> while South Carolina replied with an offer of 1,000 pounds of gunpowder.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>76</sup> Johnston to Hewes, March 10, 1776, Hayes Collection; *American Archives*, 4th series, IV, 1488; *C. R.*, XI, 282-283.

<sup>77</sup> Martin to Germain, March 21, 1776, *C. R.*, X, 491-492.

<sup>78</sup> Loyalist Narrative.

<sup>79</sup> Proceedings of Safety Committee at Wilmington, July 1, 1775, *C. R.*, X, 124.

<sup>80</sup> Edmund Pendleton to the North Carolina Council of Safety, February 17, 1776, *C. R.*, XI, 273.

<sup>81</sup> Journal of Council of Safety of South Carolina, January 30, 1776, *C. R.*, XI, 271, 272.

The western part of the province, being far removed from the seat of action, was a hotbed of rumors. In early December, 1775, a report had been circulated that Governor Tryon of New York, ex-governor of North Carolina, had landed on the coast with a detachment of 700 Highlanders and had been joined by Governor Martin with an additional 700 Highlanders from the Cape Fear region. Even now, ran the report, this force was marching on Rowan and Mecklenburg counties.<sup>82</sup> No sooner had this gossip been disproven than a rumor based on more reliable information was circulated that Captain Fields of Guilford County had received orders from the east directing him to hold his loyalist militia in readiness for immediate action.<sup>83</sup> The people of the upper Yadkin, supposedly neutral, had been angered by reports that the Cross Creek merchants refused to buy surplus produce or sell iron, sugar, and salt unless the vendor or purchaser agreed to take an oath of allegiance to the King.<sup>84</sup>

These anger-provoking reports had led to the gradual organization of local minute men and militia units, and when word came of the embodiment of the loyalists, many units were ready to march with little preparation. Although orders were issued requiring each unit to bring six weeks' provisions with them,<sup>85</sup> many groups chose to march unencumbered. Several of these groups, marching through the Moravian towns, seized all available lead and commandeered other provisions from the stores. They promised payment at a later date, but the gentle Moravians were of the opinion that they would receive no compensation.<sup>86</sup>

In the low country along the coast, mobilization was conducted with more precision. In this section two regiments of the Continental Line were in the process of being organized: the first regiment under Colonel James Moore, the second under the command of Colonel Robert Howe.<sup>87</sup> Of the two men, Moore was the

<sup>82</sup> *Moravian Records*, II, 891.

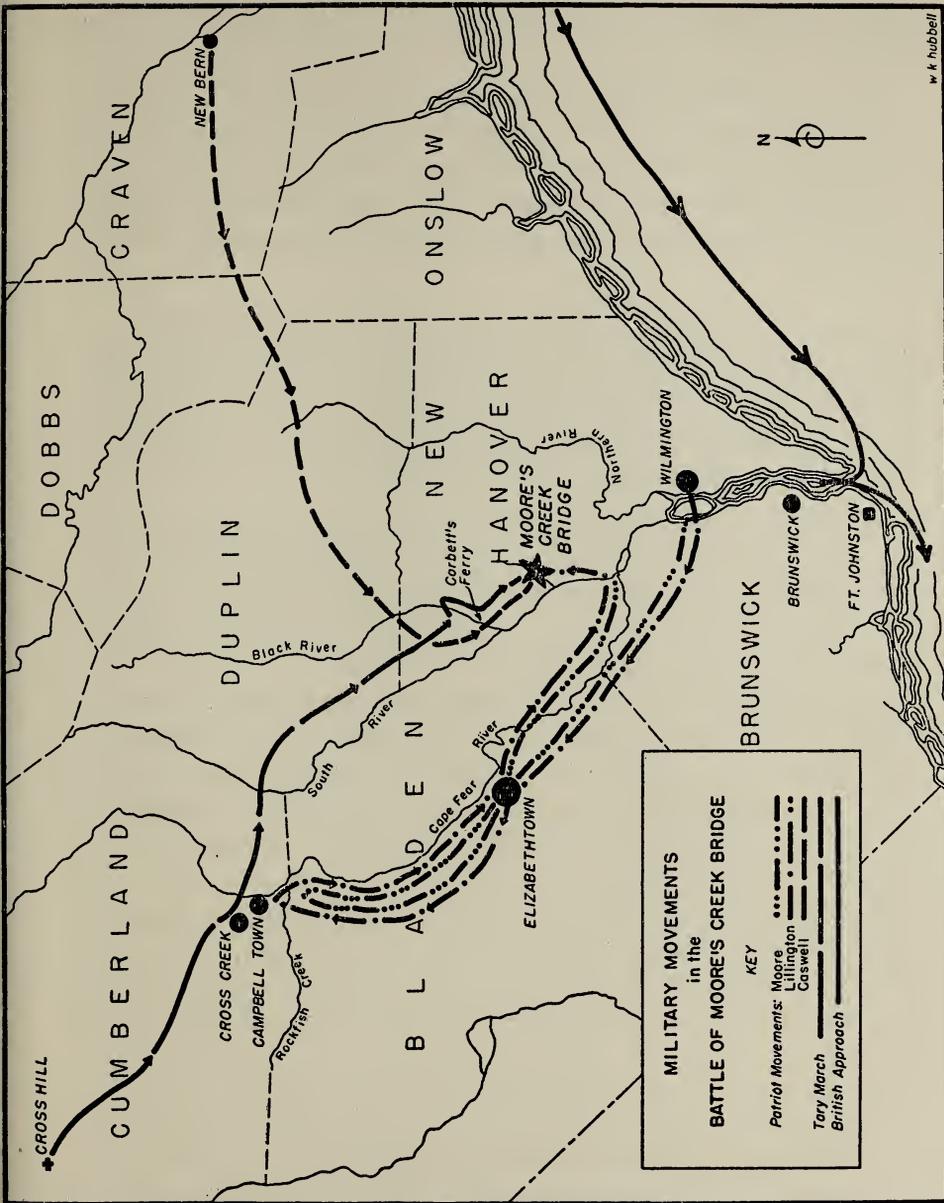
<sup>83</sup> *Moravian Records*, II, 892.

<sup>84</sup> Lyman C. Draper, *King's Mountain and Its Heroes: History of the Battle of King's Mountain, October 7th, 1780 and the Events Which Led to It* (Cincinnati: Peter G. Thompson, 1881), 432.

<sup>85</sup> Thomas Polk to Ely Kershaw, February 23, 1776, Miscellaneous Papers, 1697-1912, North Carolina Department of Archives and History, Raleigh.

<sup>86</sup> *Moravian Records*, IV, 1877.

<sup>87</sup> Journals of the Provincial Congress, *C. R.*, X, 187, 243. Just two days after the engagement at Moore's Creek Bridge, March 1, 1776, both Moore and Howe were promoted to the rank of brigadier-general in the Continental establishment. Moore was to remain in North Carolina, while Howe was to be stationed in Virginia. Hewes to Johnston, March 1, 1776, *C. R.*, X, 482-483. On April 15, 1777, Moore died of an attack of "gout in the stomach." Samuel A'Court Ashe, *History of North Carolina* (Greensboro: Charles L. Van Noppen, 1925), I, 571.



MARCHES—MOORE'S CREEK BRIDGE

more popular among the Whigs, but Howe was preferred by the Tories as an opponent. To the loyalists, Moore was a dangerous adversary and they felt "Compelled at once to dread and esteem" him.<sup>88</sup>

Home defense units of militia and minute men were also popular in the eastern section of North Carolina. The personnel of these troops was ragged and motley in appearance, and rum was a necessary item at their musters, but their ludicrous display carried a veiled threat of terrible efficiency as reported by one observer:

I must really laugh while I recollect their figures: 2000 men in their shirts and trousers, preceded by a very ill-beat drum and a fiddler, who was also in his shirt with a long sword and a cue at his hair, who played with all his might. They indeed made a most unmartial appearance, But the worst figure there can shoot from behind a bush and kill even a general Wolfe.<sup>89</sup>

It was these men who answered the call to arms on February 10, when the lower Cape Fear was alerted to the danger then fermenting at Cross Creek. Colonel Alexander Lillington, militia commander for the Wilmington district, was the commanding officer of this particular group.<sup>90</sup>

The New Bern Committee of Safety ordered out the district's militia and minute men under Colonel Richard Caswell. This unit was equipped with artillery, and Caswell was empowered to purchase necessary provisions and wagons along his line of march. The military contingents of Dobbs, Johnston, Pitt, and Craven counties were instructed to join Caswell.<sup>91</sup>

The town of Wilmington suddenly retired behind hastily thrown up breastworks. These defensive preparations had been initiated by a report that the *Cruizer* was on the way upriver for an attack on the town. Martial law was in effect, and all those who refused to take an oath to support the patriot cause were forced to work on the fortifications. Twenty professed Tories were taken into custody. Guns were mounted on the parapets; fire rafts were prepared; stores removed; and the women and children were sent to safety outside the town.<sup>92</sup>

<sup>88</sup> Andrews and Andrews, *Journal of a Lady of Quality*, 167.

<sup>89</sup> Andrews and Andrews, *Journal of a Lady of Quality*, 190.

<sup>90</sup> *American Archives*, 4th series, IV, 1129.

<sup>91</sup> Proceedings of Safety Committee at New Bern, February 10, 1776, *C. R.*, X, 444-445.

<sup>92</sup> William Purviance to the Provincial Council, February 23, 1776, *C. R.*, X, 465-467.

These frenzied preparations soon proved their worth. The *Cruizer* approached the town but was frightened away by its formidable appearance. As the primary objective of this voyage was aid to the loyalists upstream, an attempt was made to by-pass Wilmington by sailing up the channel on the west side of Grand Island which lay opposite the town. The sloop was forced back by shallow water. After a small skirmish in which a raiding party was forced back to the ship, the *Cruizer* dropped downstream to Brunswick, harassed by rifle fire from each side of the river.<sup>93</sup>

There was also activity on the upper Cape Fear. At Cross Creek MacDonald was industriously applying his talents to the organization of the loyalist army. On February 15 an order was issued directing the officers to make a return of their men. Approximately 1,400 men were present, but only 520 of them possessed firearms. A detachment of light cavalry was hastily formed and sent out on a raid through the surrounding countryside. This unit returned with an additional 130 stand of arms which they had seized from the Whigs. Powder which had been stored with the Cumberland County Committee of Safety for safekeeping was confiscated<sup>94</sup> and was in turn augmented by purchases from local merchants. Provisions and other necessary supplies were also procured locally.<sup>95</sup> Items such as British colors, not carried in stock by the local merchants, were made from "camp equipage" by the more skilled members of the army.<sup>96</sup>

Time was fast running out for MacDonald and his loyalists. Not only was the estimated date for the arrival of the British fleet near, but the Whigs were gradually drawing in a tight circle of men around Cross Creek. Colonel James Moore and a reported 2,000 men were within seven miles of the town and had fortified the bridge over Rockfish Creek, blocking the most direct route to the sea.

Moore, with a much smaller force than reported, had arrived at Rockfish on February 15. His force was supported by five artillery pieces, and with this decided advantage he determined to prepare for defensive action at the bridge in an effort to gain the

<sup>93</sup> Purviance to the Provincial Council, February 24, 1776, *C. R.*, X, 467-468.

<sup>94</sup> Loyalist Narrative.

<sup>95</sup> Declaration of the Account of Josiah Martin, Esq., English Records: Audit Office, 1779.

<sup>96</sup> Memorial of Donald McDougall, English Records: American Loyalist Claims, 1775-1789, North Carolina Department of Archives and History, Raleigh.

necessary time for reinforcements to arrive.<sup>97</sup> Intelligence with reference to MacDonald's movements was gained from the nearly sixty residents of the vicinity of Cross Creek who had made their way to the Whig camp and offered their services to Moore.<sup>98</sup> By February 19, his force had been increased to a total of approximately 1,100 men by the addition of a number of small militia and minute man units. The loyalist army was estimated to contain about 1,500 fighting men.<sup>99</sup> Outnumbered, Moore's best chance for victory still lay in defensive action.

On February 18, MacDonald made his first move. The loyalist army marched out of Cross Creek and that night lay encamped within four miles of Moore's position. The following morning the troops were paraded; their gear was inspected and other preparations for battle were completed.<sup>100</sup>

Despite these militant preparations, MacDonald was in no mood for battle. As an officer of the British army, his primary objective was to deliver the recruits for the Royal Highland Emigrant Regiment to the coast, and thence to New York by sea. His command of the loyalist militia was of secondary importance. With a view toward the avoidance of violence, a messenger was sent to the Whig camp under a flag of truce. Inclosed in a letter to Moore was a copy of Martin's proclamation and MacDonald's manifesto. In his message MacDonald stated that Moore was apparently not familiar with these two documents, or he would have enlisted in the service of the King. He warned that unless the Whigs had joined the royal standard by noon of the following day, it would be necessary to consider them as enemies, and "the necessary steps for the support of regal authority" would be taken.<sup>101</sup>

Moore still played for time. His reply was couched in evasive terms and was noncommittal as to his future course of action. He assured MacDonald that insofar as he was concerned, neither his inclinations nor his duty would permit him to accept the terms offered. He declared, however, that before any definite reply could be composed the other officers in the vicinity must be con-

<sup>97</sup> James Moore to Cornelius Harnett, March 2, 1776, *C. R.*, XI, 283.

<sup>98</sup> Robert Rowan to Caswell, September 18, 1777, *C. R.*, I, 628.

<sup>99</sup> Moore to Harnett, March 2, 1776, *C. R.*, X, 283.

<sup>100</sup> Loyalist Narrative.

<sup>101</sup> MacDonald to Moore, February 19, 1776, *C. R.*, XI, 276-77.

sulted. A final decision was promised by noon of the following day.<sup>102</sup>

The Highland general possibly suspected that his opponent was procrastinating. Moore's reply had indicated that the ultimate decision of the Whigs would be a rejection of the proposed terms. Any plan of immediate action was forestalled, as both commanders has designated noon of the twentieth as an hour of ultimatum. A council of officers was called, at the conclusion of which was announced the possibility of a battle the following day. With this proclamation, two companies of Colonel Cotton's Anson County Regiment, led by a Captain Snead, immediately picked up their arms and returned home.<sup>103</sup> This sudden defection in the loyalists' ranks decreased their strength in both manpower and armament, with the latter shortage the more serious.

Farquard Campbell, now back in favor with the Tories, and on parole from the Whigs, entered the loyalist camp with the information that Colonel Caswell with a force of 600 men was marching in support of Moore.<sup>104</sup> In the face of the recent loss in men and arms, this intelligence was disturbing and suggested an alteration in strategy. The younger officers insisted upon immediate action, but cooler heads prevailed and a motion for evasive action was adopted. Again Campbell came forward with advice. He proposed that the loyalist army retreat to Cross Creek, cross the Cape Fear at Campbell Town, and then strike for Negro Head Point on the coast before the Whigs could reorganize their forces to block their progress. He also promised to report all future developments initiated by Moore's group.<sup>105</sup> The propriety of this suggestion was recognized and the army was placed under marching orders for the following day.

Promptly at noon on February 20, Moore's reply was delivered to MacDonald. He reported that his officers unanimously agreed with his own sentiments and he referred to their great cause, "the defense of the liberties of mankind." He included for MacDonald a copy of the test oath which had been advocated by the Continental Congress. In conclusion, MacDonald was chided for

<sup>102</sup> Moore to MacDonald, February 19, 1776, *C. R.*, XI, 277.

<sup>103</sup> Loyalist Narrative.

<sup>104</sup> Loyalist Narrative; *C. R.*, X, 595.

<sup>105</sup> Loyalist Narrative; James Moore to Chairman of the Committee of Wilmington, February 28, 1776, F. M. Hubbard, "Who Commanded at Moore's Creek Bridge?" *North Carolina University Magazine*, VII (November, 1857), 139; *C. R.*, X, 595.

his perjury during his investigation by the New Bern Committee of Safety.<sup>106</sup>

MacDonald replied, but the message contained no comment as to his future course of action, other than to remind his adversary that as an officer of the King it was his "duty to conquer" and "extricate this country from anarchy and licentiousness."<sup>107</sup>

With military formalities and niceties behind him, the Tory general made his preparations for the march. Drawing up his men in formation he addressed them in stirring tones, declaring them to be the instrument by which the country was to be retrieved, and ridiculing "those base Rascals" who had deserted the night before. In conclusion he dramatically called upon all those who were so faint-hearted as not to want to conquer or die to make their decision now. With this alternative of glory or death, twenty men stepped from the ranks of Colonel Cotton's regiment and, declaring "their Courage was not Warproof," laid down their arms and quietly disappeared into the surrounding forest. But among the remainder of his forces MacDonald had fanned the flames of patriotism and a general "huza" rang across the field as the army marched off.<sup>108</sup>

Moore's intelligence failed. Expecting an attack and drawn up within his fortifications, he did not learn of the departure of the loyalists until the following day. Anticipating their objective, he dispatched messengers to all commanders in the field, shifting their troops to block all routes to the sea. An express to Colonel Caswell directed that officer to take possession of Corbett's Ferry on the Black River. Colonels James Martin and James Thackston were ordered to occupy Cross Creek, thus eliminating the last refuge for the Tories. Colonels Alexander Lillington and James Ashe were sent as reinforcements to Caswell, and if a junction could not be effected they were to secure Moore's Creek Bridge. Moore marched his own troops to Elizabeth Town in the expectation of intercepting MacDonald on the march for Corbett's Ferry. If he failed in this he planned to fall in behind the loyalist army and harass them until they could be brought to battle, at which time he could close in on their rear in an enveloping action.<sup>109</sup> By

<sup>106</sup> Moore to MacDonald, February 20, 1776, *C. R.*, XI, 277-278.

<sup>107</sup> MacDonald to Moore, n. d., *C. R.*, XI, 278-279.

<sup>108</sup> Loyalist Narrative.

<sup>109</sup> Moore to Harnett, March 2, 1776, *C. R.*, XI, 284.

these skillfully executed maneuvers, Moore slammed the gateways to the sea in MacDonald's face.

Caswell, after receiving his orders, moved in on Corbett's Ferry and deployed his troops. "Old Mother Covington and her daughter," as the two light artillery pieces were affectionately termed,<sup>110</sup> were placed to cover the approaches to the crossing. Riders were sent through the countryside, instructing the inhabitants to destroy the bridges in the path of the enemy. To prevent the use of the river for transportation of or aid sent to the Tories, the narrow points along the Cape Fear were secured and a boom was thrown across the stream above Wilmington by Colonel William Purviance, commanding the defenses of that town.<sup>111</sup>

The loyalists, unaware of these moves to check their progress, crossed the Cape Fear at Campbell Town. In an effort to discourage pursuit, their boats were destroyed. As the troops were formed on the northern bank of the stream, Donald McLeod was ordered to form a cavalry troop of 100 Highlanders, whose mission was to scout and secure bridges in advance of the main body of troops.<sup>112</sup>

MacDonald's army moved forward at a sluggish pace. A number of bridges required strengthening before the wagons could cross safely. Information that Caswell had changed his line of march was obtained through the capture of one of the riders who had been sent to alert the countryside.<sup>113</sup> This knowledge further slowed the rate of march as MacDonald, fearing ambush, moved with extreme caution.

As the Black River was neared on February 23, word was sent back from the vanguard that Caswell was encamped at Corbett's Ferry, only four miles ahead. A halt was called and the army was drawn up in battle formation. All broadswords or claymores, the traditional hand weapon of the Scots, were collected and reissued to a company of volunteers under the command of Captain John Campbell. The function of this unit was of the nature of shock

<sup>110</sup> E. W. Caruthers, *Interesting Revolutionary Incidents: And Sketches of Character, Chiefly in the "Old North State"* (Philadelphia: Hayes & Zell, 1854). 92.

<sup>111</sup> William Purviance to the Provincial Council, February 24, 1776, *C. R.*, X, 467-468. The country people only partially destroyed the bridges, but held themselves in readiness to demolish them upon the approach of the enemy. *C. R.*, X, 467-468. Bridges were a luxury in 1776.

<sup>112</sup> Loyalist Narrative.

<sup>113</sup> Loyalist Narrative. This rider, classed as a "Spy" by the Tories, apparently did not reveal the ultimate destination of Caswell's forces, as demonstrated by subsequent events.

troops, and its battle position was in the center of the formation. With this detail of reorganization complete, MacDonald marched his army to battle. A five-man patrol of the enemy was captured and interrogation of the prisoners revealed that Caswell had entrenched himself on the far side of the river. The army was ordered into camp while measures to counteract this new development were being considered.<sup>114</sup>

McLeod's mounted troops were dispatched on a scouting expedition. Four miles above the ferry they discovered a Negro who reported that he knew of a flat sunk on the far side of the river which could be raised with little trouble. This man was employed to raise the boat and a message was dispatched to MacDonald informing him of this development. McLeod remained to guard his find and inaugurate the construction of a bridge.<sup>115</sup>

Before marching his troops to this site, MacDonald detached a small group "to amuse Casswell" and cover his own movements. This unit stationed themselves across the river from Caswell's entrenchments, moving noisily through the woods, playing bagpipes, beating drums, and interspersing this bedlam with occasional rifle shots in an attempt to keep Whig heads down.<sup>116</sup>

As the main body marched in and took over construction of the bridge McLeod and his horsemen crossed to the other shore and resumed their scouting operations. Three miles beyond the river a supply train destined for Caswell was captured. This unexpected prize consisted of twenty-one bullocks and two wagons loaded with meal. Twenty men and two officers were taken prisoner. From them it was learned that Caswell was expecting reinforcements.<sup>117</sup>

Construction of the bridge was completed, and by eight o'clock on Monday, February 26, the passage of the stream was achieved. The detachments were called in and once again the march to the sea began. The unopposed river crossing had inflated the spirit of the men, and the general feeling among them was that Caswell should be attacked at the first opportunity, "the Army being in Motion for that Purpose."<sup>118</sup>

<sup>114</sup> Loyalist Narrative.

<sup>115</sup> Loyalist Narrative; Moore to Harnett, March 2, 1776, *C. R.*, XI, 284.

<sup>116</sup> Loyalist Narrative.

<sup>117</sup> Loyalist Narrative.

<sup>118</sup> Loyalist Narrative.

Caswell, in the meantime, had learned he had been duped by a few rifles, drums, and bagpipes, and the enemy had successfully effected a passage of the river. Colonel Moore was still at Elizabeth Town awaiting supplies for Caswell's troops. A message arrived from Caswell informing Moore that the loyalists had outmaneuvered him. The Whig commander moved fast. Caswell was ordered to march at once for Moore's Creek Bridge, and if this did not prove expedient, he was to close in on the rear of the Tory army in an harassing action. Moore loaded his troops aboard boats and floated sixty miles down river to Dollison's Landing, from whence he planned to march overland to Moore's Creek. He arrived at Dollison's late in the afternoon of February 26, and camped for the night. Dispatch riders, late that evening, brought the news that Caswell had made a junction with Lillington at Moore's Creek and had entrenched himself after destroying a portion of the bridge.<sup>119</sup>

Moore's Creek Bridge provided a perfect defensive situation, a narrow bridge in the midst of a swamp. The creek itself flows into the Black River about ten miles above that tributary's confluence with the Cape Fear. The creek at the bridge site is about fifty feet wide, with a water depth of five feet and a tidal variation of three feet. Here the creek crawls through the swamp in a series of twisting loops. Beneath the dark waters lay a bottom, miry with the accumulation of many years of swamp wastes. The bridge itself was located on a sand bar, the highest point in the area.

Colonel Alexander Lillington had earlier occupied this position with 150 men and had fortified a slightly elevated knoll on the east bank of the stream. Caswell, arriving at the scene with 800 men, assumed command, as Lillington's force consisted only of the Wilmington battalion of minute-men.<sup>120</sup> Soon after his arrival Caswell had his men cross the bridge and begin to throw up entrenchments on the west bank.

The Tories had examined Caswell's camp site at Corbett's Ferry after his departure, which had been executed with such haste that several footsore horses and some provisions had been left behind. MacDonald increased his march, but when his troops

<sup>119</sup> Moore to Harnett, March 2, 1776, *C. R.*, XI, 284.

<sup>120</sup> Caswell to Harnett, February 29, 1776, *C. R.*, X, 482; *American Archives*, 4th series, V, 62-63.

were within six miles of Moore's Creek, his scouts informed him that Caswell had won the race.<sup>121</sup>

MacDonald was an old man. He had long been active in the service of his King, but the forced marches and constant tension of the campaign had so exhausted him that he fell ill.<sup>122</sup>

As a means of securing information of Caswell's present position James Hepburn, MacDonald's secretary and a former member of the Provincial Congress, was sent as a messenger to the Whig camp under a flag of truce. In his message MacDonald urged Caswell to submit to British authority, and the pardon of the King was proffered if they would lay down their arms and take an oath of allegiance to the Crown. Stress was applied to these statements by the declaration that unless the rebels complied with these terms he would be forced to "take the necessary steps to Conquer and Subdue you." A copy of Governor Martin's proclamation and MacDonald's manifesto accompanied this ultimatum.<sup>123</sup>

Caswell flatly refused to consider the contents of the message, but its purpose was accomplished. Hepburn was very observant during his short stay in the camp of the rebels. When he returned he reported that Caswell was camped on the near side of the creek and, with this barrier at his back, it would be practicable to attack him.<sup>124</sup>

MacDonald followed his usual procedure and called a council of his officers. Sentiment was divided on the advisability of attacking the entrenched rebels.<sup>125</sup> MacDonald, according to his later statements, was not in favor of attacking Caswell, as he felt that he was outnumbered and half of his group were without firearms.<sup>126</sup>

<sup>121</sup> Loyalist Narrative.

<sup>122</sup> MacDonald's age is variously given in the range between fifty and eighty. A contemporary, Smyth, says that he was "near seventy years of age." J. F. D. Smyth, *A Tour in the United States of America* (London: G. Robinson, J. Robinson, and J. Sewall, 1784), I, 232.

<sup>123</sup> MacDonald to Caswell, February 26, 1776, Donald MacDonald Paper, North Carolina Department of Archives and History, Raleigh. This letter is in Hepburn's handwriting, but was signed by MacDonald. Although of minor importance, this letter establishes the correct spelling of MacDonald's surname. In most accounts he is usually referred to as McDonald or M'Donald.

<sup>124</sup> Loyalist Narrative.

<sup>125</sup> Smyth, *Tour in the United States of America*, I, 230; Thomas Jones, *History of New York during the Revolutionary War, and of the Leading Events in the Other Colonies at that Period*, edited by Edward Floyd de Lancey (New York: New-York Historical Society, 1879), I, 95. Jones was a prominent Tory, and a justice of the highest court in the Colony of New York. He apparently received his information of the battle from North Carolina loyalist refugees. His description of Moore's Creek Bridge was long considered the leading account of the battle from the Tory point of view.

<sup>126</sup> Certificate of Colonel MacDonald, English Records: Foreign Office, 1783-1794.

So persuasively did the more aggressive group argue that it was finally unanimously agreed to take the offensive the following morning. MacDonald, exhausted and ill, was in no condition to participate in the battle and Donald McLeod was appointed to lead the assault.<sup>127</sup>

The hour of attack had been set for daybreak. This decision called for immediate action, as the loyalists were still six miles from the battleground. The severe shortage in arms now became evident as only 500 men out of a total of approximately 1,600 were found to be equipped for combat.<sup>128</sup>

The approach march began at one o'clock in the morning. The loyalists, being unfamiliar with the terrain, were soon lost and floundering in the mire of the swamps. This so delayed their progress that it was only an hour before dawn when the dying flames of Caswell's campfires were sighted. To utilize the element of surprise, the force was divided into three columns and silently entered the enemy's camp, only to discover that Caswell had decamped during the night, leaving his fires burning to cover his movements.<sup>129</sup>

As it was still dark and the exact location of the bridge was not known, McLeod ordered his troops back into the cover of the trees while the three columns were reformed into a battle line. A rallying cry, so dear to the hearts of Highland warriors, was passed along the line. This was to be "King George and Broad Swords," and the signal for the attack was to be three cheers. As the line was being formed, rifle shots were heard near the spot where they thought the bridge to be. The impetuous McLeod decided to wait no longer. As the three cheers rang out, the drums began to roll and the shrill squeal of the bagpipes rent the cool morning air. The line moved forward, led by Campbell's broadswordsmen in the center of the formation.<sup>130</sup>

Alexander McLean, leading a patrol, had come upon the bridge quite unexpectedly. His movements were observed by the Whig sentries. To their challenge he answered that he was a friend.

<sup>127</sup> Loyalist Narrative.

<sup>128</sup> Loyalist Narrative.

<sup>129</sup> Loyalist Narrative; Thomas Burke to Caswell, January 22, 1777, Walter Clark (ed.), *The State Records of North Carolina* (20 vols. XI-XXX. Goldsboro, Winston, etc., 1895-1914), XI, 368. Hereafter cited as *S. R.*

<sup>130</sup> *S. R.*, XI, 368; "Journal of Hugh McDonald," Caruthers, *Interesting Revolutionary Incidents*, 190. The first part of this journal, covering the Battle of Moore's Creek, is printed only in Caruthers. The remainder of McDonald's journal is in *S. R.*, XI, 828ff.

"A friend to whom?" was the next query. At his reply of "to the King," the shapes on the opposite shore suddenly disappeared as the men fell to the ground in an effort to conceal themselves. McLean, believing them to be his own men who had managed to cross the bridge, issued a challenge in Gaelic. When he received no answer, he ordered his men to take cover and open fire at the opposite bank of the stream.<sup>131</sup>

McLeod, accompanied by Campbell's broadswordsmen, came up to determine the reason for the outburst of firing. The bridge was examined and it was discovered that approximately half of the flooring had been removed, and there were only two log sleepers on which to cross. To make the passage more difficult, Caswell had ordered that these girders be greased with soft soap and tallow.<sup>132</sup>

McLeod on one of the slippery logs, Campbell on the other, led the Highlanders on a foolhardy charge across the bridge. The broadswordsmen found they were able to retain their footing by thrusting the points of their weapons into the sleepers. As their leaders reached the opposite shore "old Mother Covington and her daughter" boomed their disapproval, accompanied by a burst of rifle fire.<sup>133</sup> With this "very proper reception," both McLeod and Campbell fell, mortally wounded. McLeod, an exceptionally brave man,<sup>134</sup> tried to regain his feet, shouting encouragement to his men, and waving his sword forward in the direction of the enemy until a hail of bullets ended his life. The first volley by the defenders had swept the bridge clean. Many of the Highlanders, wounded, fell into the creek and drowned. Others, thrown into the water by the shock of the sudden volley, were pulled below the surface by the weight of their heavy clothing. All of those who managed to cross the bridge were shot down, although McLeod's body lay within a few paces of the earthworks.<sup>135</sup>

<sup>131</sup> Loyalist Narrative.

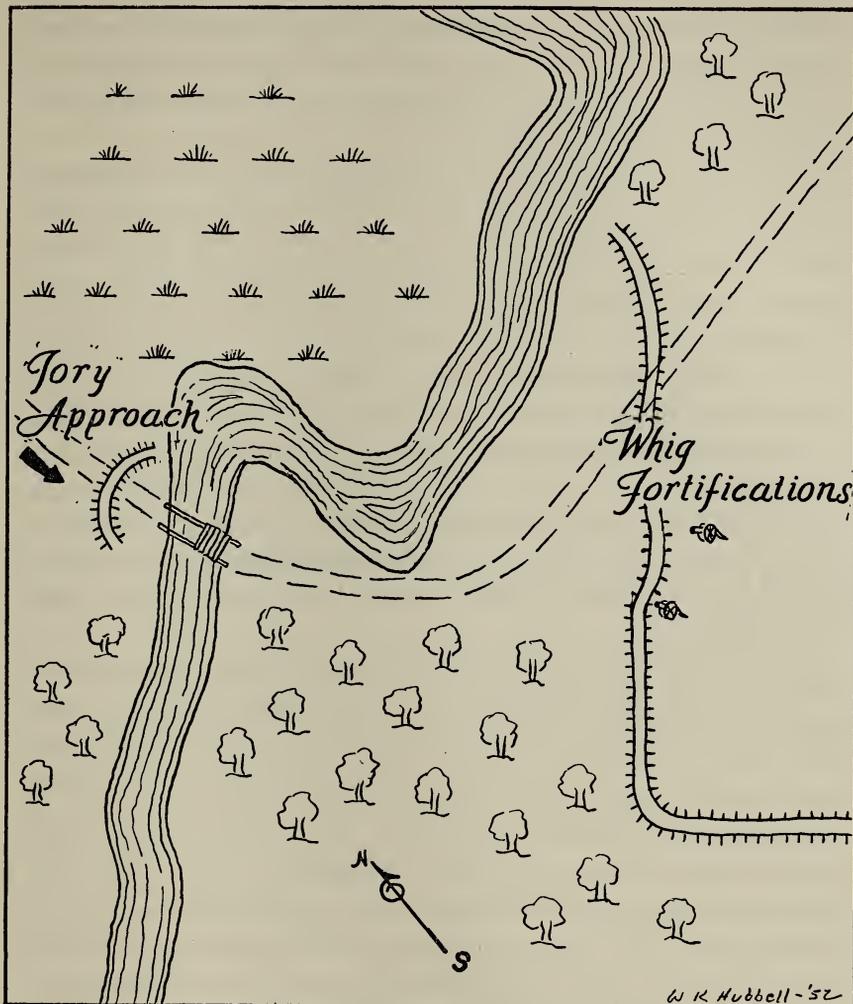
<sup>132</sup> Smyth, *Tour of the United States of America*, I, 231; Stedman, *The History of the American War*, I, 181; "Journal of Hugh McDonald," 84-85.

<sup>133</sup> Tradition has it that several ineffectual efforts had been made to fire the cannon by the application of the match, and that just as the loyalists reached the shore, Caswell rode up and set them off by firing his pistols into the touch holes. A. O. Grady to E. W. Caruthers, October 29, 1853, quoted in Caruthers, *Interesting Revolutionary Incidents*, 118.

<sup>134</sup> James Moore said of him, "he was a brave soldier and would have done honor to a good cause." James Moore to . . . . ., February 28, 1776, Hubbard, "Who Commanded at Moore's Creek Bridge?" 139.

<sup>135</sup> Moore to Harnett, March 2, 1776, *C. R.*, XI, 285, Disposition of James Devane, *C. R.*, XV, 784-785.

On the opposite side of the creek the Highlanders had taken cover and returned the fire of the Whigs, but many of the Regulators and other loyalists fled the field of action. Rallying efforts



THE BATTLEFIELD AT MOORE'S CREEK BRIDGE

by the officers were to no avail, but on the whole, their attempts were feeble. Colonel Cotton fled at the first fire, and Thomas Rutherford "ran like a lusty fellow."<sup>136</sup> The fire of the High-

<sup>136</sup> *New York Packet*, March 28, 1776, and *Pennsylvania Evening Post*, March 23, 1776, quoted in Frank Moore (ed.), *Diary of the American Revolution from Newspapers and Original Documents* (New York: Charles T. Evans, 1863), I, 209-210; *American Archives*, 4th series, V, 170; *C. R.*, XI, 289-290.

landers was hasty and wild, most of their shots going high above the heads of Caswell's men.<sup>137</sup> Their aim was not improved by the precipitate flight of officers and men and they soon joined the flight. There was a general rush for the spot in which the supply wagons had been left. But wagons are no vehicles for headlong retreat; horses were cut loose from their harness, and with as many as three men mounted on one animal, they fled toward their camp of the previous night.<sup>138</sup>

The Whigs, with a shout of triumph, leaped over the parapets in pursuit. A few loyalists, not so fleet of foot as their companions, were captured. The victors, however, did not immediately follow up their advantage, but stopped to pillage the wagons and collect the wounded. Only two of their number were wounded and only one, John Grady of Anson County, seriously so.<sup>139</sup> It was impossible to determine the casualties suffered by the loyalists. There were at least thirty, but it was assumed that a number had fallen into the creek and drowned, or had died of their wounds in the swamps after fleeing from the field of action. Caswell's first estimate was later revised upward to seventy by Moore.<sup>140</sup> An examination of the body of McLeod revealed that he had been virtually riddled by nine bullets and twenty-four swan shot.<sup>141</sup>

Moore and his army arrived in Caswell's camp several hours after the battle. He immediately organized a pursuit. Scouts were sent out in an effort to determine the escape route of the loyalists, with orders to collect articles of value which had been thrown away by the enemy. Troops were dispatched to key points to discourage any further attempts to reach the coast.<sup>142</sup> Other parties were ordered out with instructions to apprehend all suspected persons and all Highlanders and Regulators were to be disarmed.<sup>143</sup> The garrison troops of Wilmington joined in the chase. At reports that the flight of the enemy was toward Cross Creek, Moore dispatched a rider to Colonel James Martin, com-

<sup>137</sup> Loyalist Narrative; Stedman, *The History of the . . . American War*, I, 181.

<sup>138</sup> Moore, *Diary of the American Revolution*, I, 210; *American Archives*, 4th series, V, 170.

<sup>139</sup> Grady died of his wounds four days after the battle. Ashe, *History of North Carolina*, I, 504.

<sup>140</sup> Caswell to Harnett, February 29, 1776, *C. R.*, X, 482; *American Archives*, 4th series, V, 63; Moore to Harnett, March 2, 1776, *C. R.*, XI, 285.

<sup>141</sup> Moore, *Diary of the American Revolution*, I, 209.

<sup>142</sup> Moore to . . . . ., February 28, 1776, Hubbard, "Who Commanded at Moore's Creek Bridge?" 140.

<sup>143</sup> *Virginia Gazette* (Williamsburg), March 23, 1776,

manding the occupation troops in that town, ordering him to close in on the Tories.<sup>144</sup>

The escaping loyalists had fled wildly through the swamps to their camp of the night before, and had there found General MacDonald peacefully sleeping in his tent,<sup>145</sup> unaware of the disaster which had overtaken his army. The officers were immediately called into council and a survey was conducted to determine the quantity of supplies still on hand. Only two barrels of flour remained to feed the defeated army. It was proposed that the army return to Cross Creek, fortify the town, and hold out until further instructions were received from Governor Martin. This suggestion was discarded when it was learned that the town had been occupied by the Whigs. The final decision was to divide the remaining ammunition among the survivors and then disband.<sup>146</sup> For protection, it was decided to march in a body to Smith's Ferry, about twenty-five miles above Cross Creek, where the men would be discharged and allowed to make their way home as best they could.<sup>147</sup>

MacDonald was too weak to travel and, remaining in his tent, he was soon captured. He was taken to the rebel camp, but he still retained enough of his military dignity to insist upon a formal surrender. He tendered his sword to Colonel Moore who, following the accepted practice of the day, returned it to him, assuring the prisoner that he would be well treated. After his baggage had been searched for papers, he was conducted to Halifax by way of New Bern.<sup>148</sup>

The loyalist army soon suffered the same fate as their general. They had proceeded only a few miles to Black Mingo Creek, where they were surrounded by a small group of mounted Whig militia, who demanded their surrender. To resist would have been futile, and the loyalists laid down their arms. They were marched to Smith's Ferry by their captors, who were joined there with 500 men under Colonel Nicholas Long.<sup>149</sup> The captives were searched, and their weapons, ammunition and wagons were seized. Nearly 850 rank and file were paroled and allowed to

<sup>144</sup> Purviance to the Provincial Council, February 29, 1776, *C. R.*, XI, 281.

<sup>145</sup> "Journal of Hugh McDonald," 91.

<sup>146</sup> Loyalist Narrative.

<sup>147</sup> "Journal of Hugh McDonald," 91.

<sup>148</sup> MacDonald's Report to the Continental Congress, May 29, 1776, *American Archives*, 4th series, VI, 613-614.

<sup>149</sup> Letter from an Unknown Source, March 10, 1776, *C. R.*, X, 486.

return to their homes on their oaths not to take up arms against the patriot cause in the future.<sup>150</sup> The officers, however, were incarcerated in the tiny gaol at Halifax, which was soon bulging with loyalist prisoners of war. In addition to Donald MacDonald, there were at least thirty other officers confined, among whom was Allen MacDonald, Flora's husband.<sup>151</sup>

In addition to the prisoners taken, much of material worth had been gained. Listed among the booty seized from the loyalists were: 350 gun and shot bags; nearly 150 dirks and swords; 1,500 rifles;<sup>152</sup> and two medicine chests which had just arrived from England, one of which was valued at £300. Thirteen wagons, complete with teams, were confiscated. In Cross Creek a Negro revealed the hiding place of a chest, buried beneath the floor of a stable, containing £15,000 sterling in gold coins.<sup>153</sup>

This was the official list of articles legally seized by the Province, but the Highlanders and loyalists suffered much more as a result of the deluge of troops which had descended upon the Cape Fear region. The large stock of merchandise in the stores of the Highland settlements were a source of great temptation to the poor back-country settlers. The militia groups occupying Cross Creek called a conference of their officers in which it was resolved that each member of the militia would be entitled to one bushel of salt if he would assume the responsibility of transporting it to his home.<sup>154</sup> The merchants of the community were also taken to Halifax and held for a short time, but they were soon released on bail and allowed to resume their business activities.<sup>155</sup> The inhabitants of the settlements suffered along with their merchants in the interval following the battle. As the Surry County militia returned to their homes by way of the Moravian town of Salem, it was noticed that many of their number were wearing "Scottish clothes."<sup>156</sup>

<sup>150</sup> Letter from an Unknown Source, March 10, 1776, *C. R.*, X, 486; "Journal of Hugh MacDonald," 108-109.

<sup>151</sup> Letter from an Unknown Source, March 10, 1776, *C. R.*, X, 485-486; Martin to Germain, September 15, 1777, *S. R.*, XI, 503.

<sup>152</sup> This figure obviously does not refer entirely to the number taken in combat, but also includes those taken from the Tories and Regulators in the disarmament operations following the battle. The greatest number of firearms listed in MacDonald's force at any one time was 650. Loyalist Narrative.

<sup>153</sup> *Virginia Gazette*, March 23, 1776; Letter from an Unknown Source, March 10, 1776, *C. R.*, X, 485-486.

<sup>154</sup> *Moravian Records*, III, 1029. This pillaging of the Scotch merchants did not completely exhaust the salt supply of the Highland settlements. In less than three months the Provincial Congress had requisitioned from the Cross Creek merchants. *C. R.*, X, 577. In July of the same year, 200 bushels of salt from Cross Creek were allotted to Wake and Granville counties to be distributed among the veterans of the Moore's Creek campaign. *C. R.*, X, 690.

<sup>155</sup> *Moravian Records*, III, 1058. Within a month after the battle all was "quiet and peaceful" in Cross Creek, and "goods were willingly and gladly sold." *Moravian Records*, III, 1058.

<sup>156</sup> *Moravian Records*, III, 1029.

Plundering, however, is not always a monopoly of the victors. Those Regulators who had sullenly left Cross Creek during the mobilization of the loyalists had organized themselves into groups, some including as many as 180 men, and had bettered themselves by raiding the farms of those professed Whigs who were so unfortunate as to lie on their homeward route.<sup>157</sup> The Whigs added to this temporary display of violence by retaliation in kind. As the militia of the upper Yadkin valley, under the command of Colonel Benjamin Cleveland, returned to their homes, they "scoured" the forests of Wake County, flushing out a number of Tories, one of whom they hanged.<sup>158</sup>

Josiah Martin, the person indirectly responsible for this outburst of turbulent passion, was still safe aboard the *Cruizer* and was still writing lengthy letters to England. He explained Moore's Creek Bridge as only a "little check the loyalists here have received" and insisted that the prospects of returning the colony to royal authority were as strong as ever. However, he did feel that any future expedition should be planned with the expectation of uniting with the loyalists in the interior, rather than on the coast.<sup>159</sup> To intimidate the local inhabitants, Martin used the threat of the *Cruizer's* guns in requisitioning supplies from the citizens of Wilmington. The townspeople called his bluff, refused his demands, and quietly strengthened their fortifications.<sup>160</sup> As an added precaution, Colonel Moore moved his regulars into the port town, but the militia and minute men were sent home, as were the irregulars who had been stationed with Colonel James Martin at Cross Creek.<sup>161</sup>

As these groups returned to their homes and the hysteria of combat subsided, rebellion once more became a mental rather than a physical process. Violence once again became a community affair. Despite their parole, many loyalists were not allowed by their neighbors to return to their homes. Many were forced to conceal themselves in the forests and remain in hiding until the

<sup>157</sup> John Johnston to James Iredell, March 17, 1776, Griffith J. McRee, *Life and Correspondence of James Iredell, One of the Associate Justices of the Supreme Court of the United States* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1853), I, 273.

<sup>158</sup> Draper, *King's Mountain and Its Heroes*, 432-433.

<sup>159</sup> Martin to Germain, March 21, 1776, *C. R.*, X, 492-493.

<sup>160</sup> Purviance to the Provincial Council, February 29, 1776, *C. R.*, XI, 279-281.

<sup>161</sup> Moore to Harnett, March 2, 1776, *C. R.*, XI, 285.

British invasion of North Carolina in 1781.<sup>162</sup> Others, although they returned to their farms, would scurry for the protection of the nearest swamp at the report of Whig militia in the neighborhood.<sup>163</sup>

The decline of British authority in the province had a salutary effect on what had been a major problem—the fear of a slave insurrection under British sponsorship. One planter wrote shortly after the battle: “The Negroes at Cape Fear were never known to behave so well as they have lately.”<sup>164</sup>

The solution of these problems gave rise to others, the more irritating of the later developments being the disposition of the prisoners of war. The problem was large in proportion to its importance, for this was a new experience for the inexperienced government and there were no precedents to guide them.

Donald MacDonald had proved himself to be a troublesome prisoner. Because of his ill health, the congestion of the Halifax gaol, and the efforts of Brigadier-General Robert Howe, he was allowed to give his parole, on the condition that he remain within the limits of the town of Halifax.<sup>165</sup> But MacDonald sulked and refused to leave his cell, declaring that he should be allowed to go to some “gentleman’s house” in the country.<sup>166</sup>

The behavior of the Tory General led to attempts to make an early disposition of the problem. On April 20 the Provincial Congress drew up a code by which to judge the accused loyalists. Prisoners were grouped under four classifications: prisoners who had served in Congress; prisoners who had signed test oaths; prisoners who had taken up arms, but who were not included in the first two categories; and a catch-all division entitled simply, “Prisoners under suspicious circumstances.”<sup>167</sup>

The anticipated visit by the British fleet indirectly aided in solving the prisoner problem. It was recommended that, in view of the expected invasion, twenty-six of the more influential

<sup>162</sup> English Records: American Loyalist Claims, 1775-1789. Although Cornwallis's stay in Cross Creek in 1781 was of short duration, 100 Highlanders joined his army. They were later organized into two companies and sent to reinforce the garrison at Charleston, South Carolina. Martin to the British Government, March 7, 1781, *S. R.*, XXII, 617.

<sup>163</sup> “Journal of Hugh McDonald,” *S. R.*, XI, 829.

<sup>164</sup> Letter from North-Carolina to Philadelphia, March 10, 1776, *American Archives*, 4th series, V, 170.

<sup>165</sup> MacDonald's Report to the Continental Congress, May 29, 1776, *American Archives*, 4th series, VI, 613-614.

<sup>166</sup> Samuel Johnston to James Iredell, April 5, 1776, McRee, *Life and Correspondence of James Iredell*, I, 275.

<sup>167</sup> Report of Committee appointed to enquire into the conduct of insurgents and suspected persons, April 20, 1776, *C. R.*, X, 594-595.

prisoners be sent to Philadelphia, there to become the responsibility of the Continental Congress. The less important prisoners were to be sent to western Maryland and Virginia.<sup>168</sup> In less than a week this resolution had been passed,<sup>169</sup> and the prisoners were marched, under escort, to Philadelphia.<sup>170</sup> After their departure, little thought was given to the prisoners other than the confiscation of their property.

In ridding themselves of the Tory prisoners, the Provincial Congress refused to concern itself with the families of the men sent away. These people, often in the midst of vindictive neighbors, lived in terror. Pillaging Whigs declared open season upon them, and they were often the victims of marauders masquerading as patriots. Even the Tories joined in the sport, cursing these people for Whig supporters while robbing them of their valuables.<sup>171</sup>

In some cases the excuse of loyalist control was employed as an instrument to gain political control. William Rand, appointed to inventory Tory property in Cross Creek, set himself up as a local dictator, seizing political power through the appointment of local justices. So harsh were his measures that from Whig and Tory alike arose the cry: "We have not the shadow of liberty among us."<sup>172</sup>

The Provincial Congress also sought to gain its share of the spoils. By November, 1776, an act confiscating loyalist property was passed,<sup>173</sup> and the following April a similar law was enacted but included the death penalty for certain crimes.<sup>174</sup> Many loyalists, especially those who had held office under the Crown, sailed for the British strongholds of New York and Nova Scotia on the first ships on which they could book passage.<sup>175</sup>

<sup>168</sup> Committee of Secrecy, War and Intelligence of North Carolina to John Hancock, April 22, 1776, *C. R.*, X, 293-295. The eventual places of confinement for the loyalists were Reading, Pennsylvania, Staunton, Virginia, and Frederick, Maryland. Ashe, *History of North Carolina*, I, 520n.

<sup>169</sup> Journal of the Provincial Congress, April 27, 1776, *C. R.*, X, 544.

<sup>170</sup> MacDonald, in the fall of 1776, was exchanged, along with General Prescott, for the American Generals Sullivan and Stirling. MacDonald to "The Secretary of War," September 6, 1776, *S. R.*, XV, 764-765.

<sup>171</sup> Memorial of James Green, English Records: American Loyalist Claims, 1775-1789.

<sup>172</sup> Robert Rowan to Caswell, September 18, 1777, *S. R.*, XI, 627-630.

<sup>173</sup> Journals of the Provincial Congress, *S. R.*, XXIII, 985-986.

<sup>174</sup> Journals of the Provincial Congress, *S. R.*, XXIV, 9-12. Later laws confiscating loyalist property were enacted in 1778, 1779, 1781, 1782, 1784, and 1787.

<sup>175</sup> Martin to Germain, September 15, 1777, *S. R.*, XI, 756-766. The case of Chief Justice Hand is of particular interest, for this marked the second time that he had lost all of his property as a result of insurrection. His first loss had occurred during the Stamp Act riots in Rhode Island. *S. R.*, XI, 756-766.

North Carolina only evaluated the immediate results of Moore's Creek Bridge and gave no thought to the future. The jubilation of the populace soon turned to complacency. The militia had been disbanded and had gone home by the middle of April,<sup>176</sup> and the Congress had fulfilled the obligations of the province by formally extending the thanks of that body to Caswell.<sup>177</sup>

In May their complacency exploded in the faces of the North Carolinians. The British fleet, after battling high winds and heavy seas for more than two months,<sup>178</sup> finally dropped anchor in the Cape Fear. Although this fleet subsequently sailed for Charleston and British activities consisted mostly of plundering and burning by raiding parties, the threat of their presence threw the province into a state of frantic preparation. Appeals for aid were sent to the Continental Congress<sup>179</sup> and neighboring colonies,<sup>180</sup> but before they could be answered the fleet weighed anchor and sailed south.

Although Cornwallis lamented the tardiness of the fleet, and was convinced that an earlier arrival would have produced "the most happy effects,"<sup>181</sup> the battle of Moore's Creek Bridge was generally disregarded or brushed aside without comment in England. The *London Gazette* completely ignored the engagement,<sup>182</sup> and the *Gentleman's Magazine* dismissed the incident by declaring it to be of little consequence, as "they only reduced a body of their own people, supported by no one company of regular troops."<sup>183</sup> Only the *Annual Register*, of the leading periodicals, saw the danger the battle portended, and warned that the loyalists could not be expected to rise so readily again. Attention was directed to the rapid manner in which the colony had raised approximately 10,000 men, but the magazine asserted that the most significant result was that "they had encountered Europeans (who were supposed to hold them in the most sovereign contempt, both as men and as soldiers) and had defeated them with an inferior force."<sup>184</sup>

<sup>176</sup> Proceedings of the Provincial Congress, April 15, 1776, *C. R.*, X, 515.

<sup>177</sup> Proceedings of the Provincial Congress, April 15, 1776, *C. R.*, X, 513.

<sup>178</sup> Cornwallis to Germain, May 7, 1776, Charles Ross (ed.), *Correspondence of Charles, First Marquis Cornwallis* (London: John Murray, 1859), I, 21.

<sup>179</sup> Harnett to John Hancock, June 24, 1776, *C. R.*, XI, 299-300.

<sup>180</sup> Burke to Charles Lee, May 6, 1776, *C. R.*, XI, 296-297.

<sup>181</sup> Cornwallis to Germain, May 16, 1776, Ross, I, 22. *Correspondence of Charles, First Marquis Cornwallis*, I, 22.

<sup>182</sup> *The Remembrancer, or Impartial Repository for the Year 1776*, Part II, 155.

<sup>183</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine*, XLVI (June, 1776), 281.

<sup>184</sup> *Annual Register for 1776*, 157-158.

The rapid embodiment of fighting men was also a source of pride to the Americans, and in North Carolina it was freely predicted that Governor Martin was gone for good and that any attempt to return by the British army would surely meet defeat.<sup>185</sup>

In the northern colonies this victory attained an importance out of all proportion. This was one of the first absolute decisions that had been won by the force of American arms and the abilities of the North Carolina colonels, even those who played minor roles, reached astronomical heights in northern eyes. Ezra Stiles, president of Yale College, reflected the general elation in his diary:

The Colonels *Moore, Martin, Caswell, Polk, Thackston, Lillington & Long*, have great Merit; any one of these Gent. in this Country would be an over match for a *Howe, Burgoyne*, or a *Clinton*. Their knowledge of the Country and necessary Modes of Attack would frustrate any Attempt fallen upon by the Characters last mentioned. The Whole Province in general consider Regulars in the Woods an easy Conquest.<sup>186</sup>

This victory, like all battles, eventually ended in controversy, although the dispute was of a local nature. The point of argument was—who had been in command at Moore's Creek—Lillington or Caswell? This controversy was long argued in the eastern part of North Carolina, and the Lillington adherents went so far as to set their protests to music:

Moore's Creek field, the bloody story,  
Where Lillington fought for Caswell's glory.<sup>187</sup>

From the available evidence there seems to be little doubt that Caswell was in command, but the point of question is of little consequence when the results are weighed.

The real hero of the campaign was James Moore, although he was not a participant in the ultimate battle. It was Moore who, with all the finesse of an experienced chess player, maneuvered his troops in such a manner as effectively to block the loyalists from their objective and forced them to do battle on ground of

<sup>185</sup> Extract of a Letter dated North Carolina, March 10, 1776, *C. R.*, XI, 287.

<sup>186</sup> Franklin Bowditch Dexter (ed.), *The Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles, D.D., LL.D., President of Yale College* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901), II, 6-7.

<sup>187</sup> McRee, *Life and Correspondence of James Iredell*, I, 272.

his own choosing. His early death robbed North Carolina of a native son who would certainly have ranked high among the military heroes of the American Revolution.

The Moore's Creek Bridge campaign, viewed from the perspective of 176 years, assumes greater importance than in 1776. If the loyalists had reached the sea on their fateful march, it is not improbable to suppose that their ranks would have been greatly increased by the Tories of the coastal region. If contact had been made with Governor Martin, and arms in sufficient number had been acquired, large numbers of additional Highlanders and Regulators would have flocked to the royal standard. But time, terrain, the sea, Richard Caswell, and James Moore all cooperated in defeating the Tory hopes.

One of the intangible results of the battle was of a negative nature. The success of the militia in this engagement so raised the estimates of the value of the occasional soldier that North Carolina constantly failed to fill her quota for the Continental Line throughout the remaining period of the Revolution.

The most positive immediate result of the victory was that it probably played an important role in North Carolina's decision, on April 12, 1776, to instruct her delegates to vote for independence.

The significance of the campaign lies in the fact that the story of Moore's Creek Bridge is the story of the disintegration of royal government in North Carolina.