Southern Campaigns of the American Revolution
The JOURNAL

JULY 2025 | VOL. 25 NO. 4

# Royal Stew

## Loyalist Captain Alexander Chesney of Grindal Shoals

INSIDE:



A publication of
SOUTH CAROLINA AMERICAN REVOLUTION trust

# The Journal

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## IN THIS ISSUE

Richard C. Meehan, Jr.

# Letter from the Editor

Dear Readers,

It is with immense pleasure that I write to you today—not only as the editor of The Journal, but as a student of our American Revolutionary heritage. This month marks a deeply meaningful milestone for me personally and for all who cherish the untold stories of Liberty's struggle: the official addition of Fort Thicketty, South Carolina, to the Liberty Trail on July 26.

When I was first asked to assist in researching the significance of Fort Thicketty, I was honored—though I must admit, I never imagined the impact that work would have. Tucked away in the rolling upcountry, Fort Thicketty has long stood as a forgotten sentinel of American courage. But in dusty archives, pension records, and the memories passed down through local families, there was a story too powerful to be lost.

In July 1780, at a time when British control seemed unshakable in the South, a combined force of Overmountain Men and local Spartan Regiment militiamen led by Colonel Isaac Shelby, surprised and captured the Loyalist-held Fort Thicketty without a single shot fired. It was a turning point—small in scale, yet large in symbolism—for the Southern Campaign. It was proof that Backcountry resistance was alive, coordinated, and effective. [If you missed the June article about Thicketty and want to know more, click here.]

To see that story now enshrined along the Liberty Trail, where thousands can walk the ground and feel the echoes of defiance, is nothing short of humbling. I am grateful to Cherokee Historical and Preservation Society, Pam Cazel, Billy Pennington, the American Battlefield Trust, South Carolina Battleground Preservation Trust, historians, descendants, and fellow preservationists who believed in the value of this site and who trusted me to help tell its story accurately and with the reverence it deserves.

This moment reminds us that history is not just a collection of facts to memorize but a testiment to our ancestors' passionate fight for freedom. This is our legacy secured by their sacrifices. Thank you for continuing this journey with me!

In Liberty,
Richard C. Meehan, Jr.
Editor, **THE JOURNAL**



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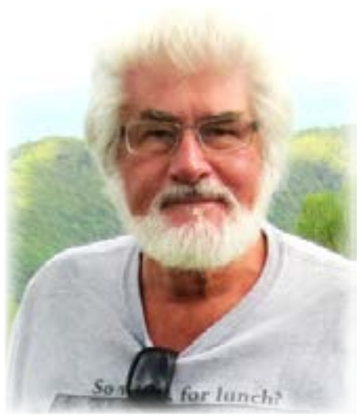


# The Dragoon

by
C. Leon Harris

I hope your Fourth of July was enjoyable and included some inspiring speeches about those who won our independence and liberty. The only thing better would be speeches from the old soldiers themselves. I expected to see a lot of them when I began transcribing pension applications almost twenty years ago, but it seems that having walked-the-walk, they did not need to talk-the-talk. And perhaps the reasons for the war were still fresh enough in memory that they felt no need to repeat them. As Garret Tunison said, "I was not an Idle & inefficient member of that army which Rescued our Dear bought liberties, from the grasp of Tyranny, but I am advised that such a statement is not Deemed proper or necessecary." (https://revwarapps.org/w1099.pdf)

A few pension applicants, however, did apparently feel the need to remind posterity of what the Revolutionary War was about. It was not the tax on tea or even the effect of the Stamp Act on the price of playing cards. It was about resisting a tyrannical government responsive only to a privi-leged few. Their statements are not often eloquent or even grammatically correct, but they are nev-ertheless inspiring. Here are a few of them.

James Daniel: "That at a time, which is justly and emphatically called a time that tried Mens Souls, in the years 1780, 1781 & 1782 your petitioner was called out by a sense of justice, and his hatred of tiranny to defend the rights of his invaded country." (https://revwarapps.org/sc1772.pdf)

John Thompson Green: "Your petitioner was a prisoner on parole, when General Marion came into this State with a few men, your petitioner as soon as he heard it broke his parole took his life in his hands, and join'd the General, knowing at the same time if ever he was taken a prisoner that death would Inevitably be his Lott—but that did not intimidate him from turning oute, to assist in resque-ing his beloved Country from Tyranny, Bondage and Slavery." (https://revwarapps.org/sc8.pdf)

Thomas Hay: "Remained with the army one month longer by the persuasions of the Commanding Officers and others to stay and fight for the glorious cause of liberty and to rid the american people of the British Tyranny and oppression." (https://revwarapps.org/s31096.pdf)

John Nicoll: "In the year 1775, When British tyranny had encroached on our rights & liberties, & our country compelled to appeal to the GoD of battles, he was amongst the first Citizens of Spartan Regiment (then commanded by Col. John Thomas) who raised the standard of Independence." (https://revwarapps.org/sc2423.pdf)

William Ramblin Withers: "Should I not succeed in my Claim on the Government I shall die poor, but glory in the deed which Set my beloved Country free from British Tyranny." (https://revwarapps.org/w18351.pdf)

## Loyalist Captain Alexander Chesney of Grindal Shoals

by

Richard C. Meehan, Jr.

The American Revolutionary War was not just a fight between armies but also a civil war that tore communities apart, especially in the Southern backcountry. This split was most clear in South Carolina, where neighbors, friends, and even family often found themselves on opposite sides.[1] The Southern Campaign was more than a straightforward struggle for independence; it was an ongoing civil conflict driven by personal loyalties, divided communities, and shifting power, rather than clear ideological lines. Captain Alexander

[1] Patrick J. Bell, The Struggle for the South Carolina Backcountry, 1775–1776 (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2007).

Chesney's story gives a vivid picture of the Loyalists' experiences.[2] He was a notable figure from Grindal Shoals on the Pacolet River, whose journal and military service provide valuable insights into the Loyalist cause and the brutal realities of war in the South. His hesitant service with the Patriot militia, later commands under British Major Patrick Ferguson and Colonel Banastre Tarleton, and his exile after Cowpens all show a Loyalist's way of surviving in one of the Revolution's most unforgiving regions—the South Carolina Backcountry. No one understood this better than Loyalist Captain Alexander Chesney, related by marriage to Whigs at Grindall's Ford, South Carolina. His experiences at the hands of the Patriots strengthened his loyalty to the king. Between the ages of nineteen and twenty-four, Chesney fought for Britain on American soil at a high personal cost.

Alexander was born to Robert John and Elizabeth Purdy McChesney on Sunday, September 12, 1756, in Dunclug near Ballymena in Antrim, Ireland.[3] Robert was a farmer ambitious enough to move his wife and eight children to South Carolina in search of land and prosperity. They sailed on the vessel *James and Mary* on August 25, 1772, with other families from the Ulster Scots Reformed Presbyterian Church, guided by Covenanter minister Reverend William Martin. On October 28, they arrived in Charleston, the seaport and capital of South Carolina Province.[4] Alexander's eight-month-old sister, Peggy, died of smallpox during the seven-week voyage.[5] Upon reaching Charleston harbor, the state governor's surgeon quarantined the passengers and crew of the vessel in a hospital on Sullivan's Island for an additional seven weeks.

As was common among Irish immigrants, the McChesneys shortened their name to Chesney.[6] When released from quarantine, Robert hired a wagon to transport the family to Wynnsborough (Winnsboro), where they temporarily stayed in John Minor Winn II's old house. Although Robert Chesney planned to build a farm on 100 acres in Winnsboro, his Aunt Sarah "Widow" Cooke convinced him to move again. The widow and her extended family had settled further north in the Pacolet River Valley at Grindall's Ford (near Jonesville, S.C.). She suggested that the Chesneys relocate there, as it was good land for farming and they could be near their relatives. So, Robert sent Alexander, now sixteen, to find the Widow Cooke and gather help from cousins to move from Winnsboro to Grindall's.

Alexander made the sixty-mile wilderness trek to his great aunt's farm without a compass or map, relying only on verbal directions. He acquired a 400-acre plot adjacent to Widow Cooke's for his father. A few years later, Alexander obtained another 100 acres next to his father and registered the properties in Charles Town with the king's land purveyors. In his journal, Alexander mentioned that the family settled the land by building a cabin and starting "the usual farming occupations increasing stock and clearing additional land." For three years, the Chesneys lived in peace.[7]

In June 1775, the Whig-controlled Provincial Congress of South Carolina and the Council of Safety sent three representatives into the Backcountry (lands more than 50 miles west of the coast) to persuade settlers to sign resolutions (also called the Association) supporting the Patriot cause as war with Britain was looming. These representatives were William Henry Drayton, a judge and politician; Reverend Oliver Hart, a Baptist minister; and Reverend William Tennent of the Independent Presbyterian Church in Charles Town.[8] Alexander stated that the "resolutions were presented at the Meeting-house." He, his father, and some of his relatives refused to sign the resolutions, which placed them at odds with their Whig neighbors and brought them under scrutiny by the Council of Safety.

[2] E. A. Jones, The Journal of Alexander Chesney, Vol. 26: A South Carolina Loyalist in the Revolution and After (London: Forgotten Books, 2015).

[3] "Alexander Chesney (1755–1843)," Find a Grave, accessed July 22, 2025, https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/192496425/alexander-chesney.

[4] "Ulster Covenanters Migration to America," Discover Ulster-Scots, accessed July 22, 2025, https://discoverulsterscots.com/emigration-influence/america/ulster-covenanters-migration-america.

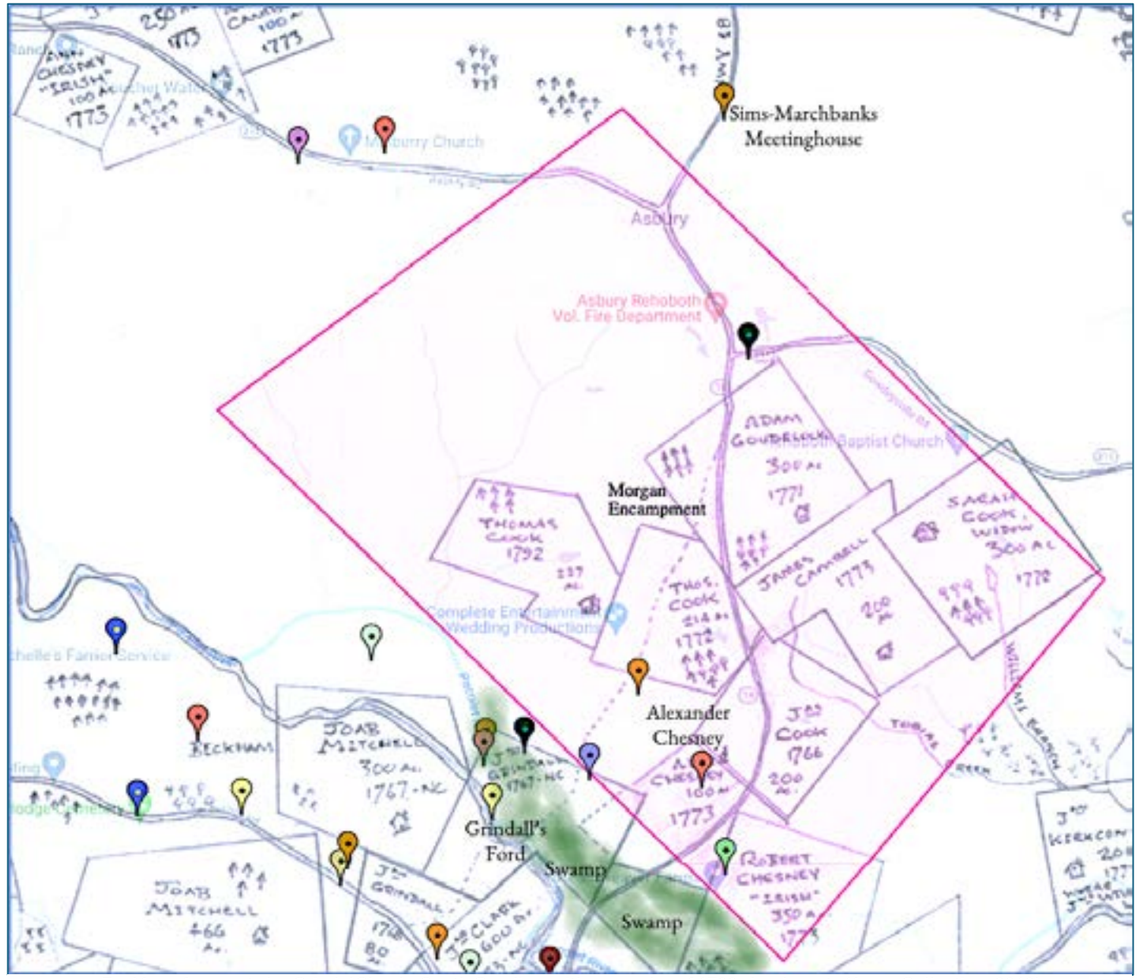
[5] Jones, Journal of Alexander Chesney.

[6] Kimberly, "How Often Did Immigrants Change Their Names?" *Genealogy Pals*, accessed July 22, 2025, https://genealogypals.com/how-often-did-immigrants-change-their-names.

[7] Jones, Journal of Alexander Chesney.

[8] Bell, Struggle for the South Carolina Backcountry.






*ZeeMap of present-day Grindal Shoals, South Carolina, with an overlay of 1700s land grants (Amos Collection, 2018)*

The only church known in the 1770s at Grindall's Ford was the Sims-Marchbanks Meetinghouse (see ZeeMap above, with an orange pin located north of Asbury). This church was convenient for the Chesney and Cook families and was shared by Presbyterians (Salem), Baptists (Thicketty), and Methodists (Asbury).[9] It likely served parishioners from at least a five-mile radius each Sabbath, including both Whigs and Tories. Meetinghouses at that time also hosted various events, including dances, feasts, and social gatherings. One can only imagine the tension building between the opposing families as they sat together in pews and tried to worship the Lord.

In rallying Whig support against the royal government, the Council used economic and physical threats against Backcountry residents. The humble farmers in the Backcountry were not willing to side with the wealthy plantation owners of the coastal regions. However, due to constant attacks by Indians and roaming thieves, support

[9] "Grindal Shoals Gazette," accessed July 22, 2025, https://grindalshoalsgazette.com/.

for the Council's resolutions grew. The settlers wanted protection, but the British were not providing any, while the Provincial Congress offered defense in exchange for support.[10]

From then until April 1776, Alexander helped Tory evacuees driven from their homes by hostile Cherokees or Whigs find safer places. His father also supported refugees; therefore, the elderly Robert Chesney was threatened with ruin if his son did not join the Patriot Army. Colonel Richard Richardson of the South Carolina Militia arrested Alexander and gave him a choice: stand trial or watch his family suffer or join the 6th South Carolina Regiment led by Lt. Col. Thomas Sumter. Alexander served in a unit commanded by his Whig neighbor, Captain Zachariah Bullock of Grindall's Ford. However, he only acted to protect his family from further Whig abuse, remaining loyal to the British Crown deep down.[11]

Alexander fought in brutal campaigns against the Creek and Cherokee Indians from 1776 until the summer of 1779. British emissaries had pressured the tribes into fighting the Backcountry Whigs by supplying them with goods, ammunition, and coin in exchange for their support. In response, and to avoid being surrounded by hostile forces on all sides, Patriot troops were sent into the western foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains to destroy Native American villages, including some of the Cherokee's oldest towns. Left impoverished, with many of their best young warriors dead, the Cherokees could no longer sustain war. Tribal leaders were forced to surrender nearly all their South Carolina lands, much of which was prime hunting ground, to the Provincial government.[12]

To view this from the perspective of the Backcountry Whigs, the British had arranged for Tory marauders to team up with the Native Americans along the Indian Line, which stretched diagonally from northeast to southwest in the upper part of the state – the Foothills. Their orders were to push the Whig families eastward toward Charles Town. The Cherokees and Tories carried out the task without mercy, slaughtering Whig men, women, and children. To prevent raiding parties from accidentally destroying Tory families while on the warpath, the Loyalists removed the bark from saplings to make white poles, tied white strips of cloth at the top, and planted the flagpoles in front of their cabins. The Tories referred to this action as "the Passover." Their strategy worked well, with only a few Tory families unintentionally killed.

Major Joseph Caldwell McJunkin, of the Spartan Regiment of Militia under Colonel John Thomas, Sr., was among those tasked with Patriot retaliation. His memoir describes the unthinkable horror inflicted on the Whigs. One detail he mentions is that in some of the destroyed Cherokee villages, Tories dressed as Native Americans were among the dead. He recorded, "The British, though normally Christian and the representatives of a great and Christian Nation, so far forgot the better principles of humanity as to engage in their service the tomahawk and scalping knife ... to retain within the sway of their illegal exaction a brave and generous people. Here, the intelligent and conscientious Loyalist in South Carolina ought to have seen his error."[13]

Alexander Chesney witnessed the displacement of the Cherokees while being forced to fight in the Patriot Army. This was the first action of the war in South Carolina. It became known as the Snow Campaign after an unusual snowstorm caused hardships for the unprepared Patriot troops as they returned home. The state receives little snow each year.

On January 3, 1780, Alexander married his cousin Margaret Anne Hodge, the daughter of Aunt Mary Cooke (child of Widow Cooke) and Whig Uncle William Hodge II.[14] Two years later, in March 1782, Chesney's sister Jane married Daniel McJunkin, Joseph's younger brother.[15] Of course, the marriage made Chesney and Joseph McJunkin brothers-in-law. These two men lived about ten miles apart, with McJunkin on the Fair Forest and Chesney on the Pacolet River. Whether related by marriage or not, they were enemies.

[10] Bell, Struggle for the South Carolina Backcountry; "Cherokee Indians – Part 4: Revolutionary War, Cherokee Defeat and Additional Land Cessions," NCPedia, accessed July 22, 2025, https://www.ncpedia.org/cherokee/revolutionarywar.

[11] B. G. Moss, Roster of South Carolina Patriots in the American Revolution (Columbia: South Carolina Department of Archives and History, 1983).

[12] "Cherokee Indians – Part 4," NCPedia.

[13] J. White, Memoirs of Major Joseph McJunkin (Spartanburg, SC: South Carolina Militia Press, 2014), 45–47.

[14] "Alexander Chesney JP (1756–1843)," WikiTree, accessed July 22, 2025, https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Chesney-357.

[15] "The Loyalist Leaders in South Carolina – Captain Alexander Chesney," Carolana, accessed July 22, 2025, https://www.carolana.com/SC/Revolution/loyalist_leaders_sc_alexander_chesney.html.



When the British bombarded and captured Charles Town on May 12, 1780, Alexander fled to the Loyalist forces, took "the oath of king and crown," and was made a lieutenant. On June 25 of that year, he joined Major Patrick Ferguson, the inventor of the breechloading Ferguson Rifle and commander of Fort Ninety Six (Star Fort). Chesney served as a guide. On August 9, he was promoted to the rank of captain. Exactly two months later, at the Battle of King's Mountain, he witnessed Ferguson's defeat and death at the hands of the Patriot militia called the Overmountain Men. Loyalist forces surrendered. Chesney, with a wounded knee, was captured, stripped of his clothes, brutally beaten, and sentenced to death. His captors forced-marched him along with two cousins, John and Hugh Cook (sons of Widow Cook), to the jail in Gilbert Town (Lexington County), about 40 miles southeast of Grindall's Ford.[16]

*Major Patrick Fergusson*

*Photo Credit: Clan Fergusson Society of North America website.*

The three men managed to escape their jailors and return to Grindall's on October 31, 1780. Alexander's wife had birthed his only American child, William Alexander Chesney, eleven days earlier.[17] Over the next three weeks, Alexander and the cousins alternated between hiding in a cave on his property or his father-in-law's house about two miles distant to avoid being recaptured by Patriot scouting parties. Legend has it that their wives tended to them by bringing food and updates about the war.

Being familiar with Chesney's property at Grindall's Ford, this author suggests that the cave was near the Pacolet River, as there is a forty-foot drop from the farmland into the river basin, almost like a cliff, with trees along the ridge. Erosion has undercut parts of the drop-off, making it easy for someone to dig into a depression in the red mud wall. Between the river and the base of the cliff is a quarter-mile-long, two-hundred-yard-wide swamp. Whig scouting parties that might find the cave would likely be discouraged from attacking directly, as they would be exposed to possible gunfire while wading through the swamp. The rest of the property consists of rolling fields surrounded by pine forests, making it an unlikely place for a cave.

When Colonel "Bloody Ban" Tarleton of the British Legion defeated Patriot General Thomas Sumter at the Battle of Blackstock's Farm near Unionsville (Union, S.C.) on November 20, 1780, Alexander must have felt inspired to come out of hiding. He raised a new company and joined the Little River Loyalist Militia under General Robert Cunningham. The general put him in charge of the militia and the jail at Fort Ninety Six. Early in January 1781, Tarleton's Legion entered the Ninety Six district searching for Patriot General Daniel Morgan's forces. Chesney provided scouts who knew Morgan's encampment was "convenient to my house on Pacholet." He joined Tarleton and marched to Fair Forest (Jonesville, S.C.), just a few miles from his home. On January 16, Tarleton ordered him to "get intelligence on Morgan's situation…and to make the mills grind for the Army."[18]

Grindall's Ford was a small settlement with two competing grist mills, one owned by a Tory captain and the other by a Whig merchant. A "lukewarm" Tory, Christopher Coleman, ran a well-known tavern called Christie's. Besides large farms, Grindall's also had a fishery and a track for horse racing.[19] When Morgan's forces arrived at the end of December 1780, they were starving. They stayed put for three weeks until the night of January 16, 1781, at the request of the Whig residents and to the dismay of the local Tories.

As ordered, Chesney rode from Fair Forest to the Pacolet River, swam his horse across a private ford, "not likely to be guarded," and found Morgan's camp deserted. The breakfast fires were still burning. Since this was

[16] "The Loyalist Leaders in South Carolina – Captain Alexander Chesney," Carolana, accessed July 22, 2025, https://www.carolana.com/SC/Revolution/loyalist_leaders_sc_alexander_chesney.html.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Jones, Journal of Alexander Chesney.

[19] J. D. Bailey, History of Grindal Shoals (Spartanburg: Southern Historical Press, 1981).

literally in the captain's backyard, he stopped long enough for his wife to tell him how the Whig army had taken all his fenceposts for firewood, cooked his livestock, destroyed his crops, and stolen all the family's belongings. He wrote, "…there was nothing left…not even a blanket to keep off inclement weather."[20] Chesney immediately headed back to Tarleton's camp, only to find they were already chasing after Morgan toward the Cow Pens (Cowpens, S.C.), twenty-four miles to the northwest. Chesney caught up to Tarleton at about 10 a.m. on January 17, 1781, and saw the British Legion's loss at the Battle of Cowpens. He described, "…we suffered a total defeat by some dreadful bad management."[21] This battle turned the tide of the war in the Americans' favor.

Robert McWhorter, Chesney's comrade and former neighbor on the Pacolet, also owned a plantation on the Edisto River near Charles Town. Chesney gathered his two remaining horses and whatever rags he had left to dress his wife and child, then moved them to McWhorter's coastal farm. Once settled, he left them there and took part in several victories against the Patriots, including the Battle of Musgrove's Mill and Wahab's Plantation. He engaged in multiple clashes with Patriot forces near the Edisto River and other locations. His last service in America was under Lord Rawdon's command.

*Packolette Manor, Kilkeel, County Down, Ireland, locally called "The White House."*

*Photo Credit: Lisa McCuan Guyselman, Chesney's 4x great-granddaughter, and Marion Needham Russell, the current owner. Note the columns of Palmetto trees in the foreground. This is the state tree of South Carolina, USA.*

On November 28, 1781, Alexander's first wife, Margaret Anne Hodge, died. Alexander fell ill, which may have led him to send his thirteen-month-old son to live with his grandfather. William Chesney stayed with the Hodge family while Alexander was away until most of the fighting ended in late 1782.[22] Facing the risk of losing his property, persecution by the victorious Patriots, and the fear of arrest, he fled to Ireland, leaving William with his in-laws. After enduring the hardships of sea travel and losing his baby sister to smallpox on the original journey, it is understandable that he would make such a difficult choice, especially since his health was poor.

[20] Jones, Journal of Alexander Chesney.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid.



Upon returning to Ireland, Chesney petitioned for compensation for his losses incurred while serving the Crown. He received payment and a land grant in Cheltenham, England, where he built a manor house named Packolette, after his beloved Pacolet River plantation in America (see photo above).[23] He married Jane Wilson, another woman from Antrim, Ireland, and they had a dozen children. Alexander became a Customs officer, and his career was long and eventful. Passing away in 1843 at the age of 85, he had made provisions for all his children, including William, who still lived in America. Although Alexander wished to see his firstborn, William's financial stability was more important, as shown by the last line of Chesney's journal: "My son William has been authorized to draw on Mr. Crafer, I mean to give him a child's portion of what I have, and it is obviously better that he should receive this and turn it to good use where he is rather than spend the money coming here, where most things would be unsuitable." Whether he was an enemy of America or not, one must admire Chesney's final thoughts as a father.

Captain Alexander Chesney sacrificed much to serve his king and country. He endured violence, imprisonment, exile, punishment, and poverty. His life as a Loyalist exemplifies the struggles many others faced during the Revolutionary War on both sides. Chesney wrote his journal from memory in 1819, expressing the unapologetic viewpoint of a man who fought for what he believed was right. His experiences should serve as a warning to future generations that civil war destroys one's home, family, friends, and neighbors. The blood of many Patriots and Loyalists waters the soil of the original thirteen colonies in America, but none more so than South Carolina. There were more battles, skirmishes, and murders in South Carolina than in all the other colonies combined— a harsh truth and the price of liberty.[24]

**[For more information about Grindall's Ford, read the historically accurate account in Ford the Pacholet by Richard C. Meehan, Jr., available everywhere.]**

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[23] Jones, Journal of Alexander Chesney.

[24] Terry Lipscomb, Battles, Skirmishes, and Actions of the American Revolution in South Carolina (Columbia: South Carolina Department of Archives and History, 1991), 1–2.

## Did Sumter Abandon Greene at Ninety-Six?

Major General Nathanael Greene, the Continental Army commander in the Southern Theater, indulged a stormy relationship with Brigadier General Thomas Sumter, the ranking officer in the South Carolina militia. Much of the history of the Southern Campaign can be traced back to the dealings between these two senior officers. They arrived at a crisis point in June 1781, as Greene worked his way through the siege of the British fortress at Ninety-Six. Greene, desperate to finish his work and facing the imminent arrival of a British relief column, counted on Sumter to delay the enemy and buy him time to complete his efforts. Sumter, for reasons that have confounded observers and historians, failed to act. An exploration of his reasons provides a means to understand this important aspect of the Southern War, as well as insight into these two men whose dealings drove much of the Southern campaign.

### The Commanders

Greene had spent several years as a Continental staff officer before his arrival in Charlotte on 3 December 1780 to take command of the tattered, frequently defeated Southern Army. Still feeling his way in the intricacies of high command, he brought one significant piece of baggage with him: a dislike and distrust of the militias. After the Battle of Long Island in August 1776, outraged at the militia's performance, Greene assailed "the policy of Congress" that favored militias over a professional army, stating, "A military force established under such

principles defeats itself."[1] Greene never lost his intense dislike of militias. After the Battle of Cowpens, which provided solid proof of the militia's value, Greene, unmoved, wrote, "It is the greatest folly in the world, to trust the liberties of a people to the militia."[2]

Greene's biographer, Theodore Thayer, described him as a proud man with an aptitude for strategy, but also with an extraordinary sensitivity to criticism. Greene's touchiness and dislike of the militia clashed directly with the figure of Thomas Sumter, a true hero of the Backcountry. Sumter took charge of the rebellion during the dark days following Charleston's fall in May 1780. At a time when the Continentals were losing Charleston and Camden, Sumter kept the fire of revolution burning in places like Hanging Rock and Rocky Mount.

Sumter's character has posed challenges for historians trying to describe his career. John Buchanan described Sumter as "prickly," a fitting word that implied much. Sumter's biographer, Anne King Gregorie, portrayed him as intensely proud and dedicated to fighting the Loyalists and their British overlords, yet flawed, most notably, driven by a desire for profit. For example, Sumter left the war in early August 1781 to go to North Carolina. Gregorie noted that his presence there was necessary to distribute a large store of loot he had recently captured: "he always secured his share of the spoils." Gregorie quoted Colonel William Henderson, who lamented that the pursuit of profit pervaded Sumter's command: "the thirst after plunder that seems to prevail among the soldiery, makes the command almost intolerable." Without naming names, Henderson lamented that this attitude "seems to be countenanced by too many officers."

When Greene and Sumter joined to fight their mutual enemy, sparks flew. Greene, scornful of militia officers and accustomed to Continental discipline, chafed at the lackadaisical practices of the backcountry militiamen. Sumter, for his part, had seen Continental generals come and go. He had fought the British before Greene arrived and planned to do so long after he left. Both men, proud and determined, resisted compromise. Their relationship, starting on the wrong foot, never righted itself.

## The Scene

In the spring of 1781, Sumter commanded a large militia formation that centered its operations in northwestern South Carolina. Greene had reentered the state in April after his tactical loss at the Battle of Guilford Courthouse on 15 March. Lieutenant General Charles Cornwallis, his opponent at Guilford Courthouse, retreated with the rump of his army to Wilmington. Greene, now unfettered, opted to march south. His first encounter with the British occupational forces occurred on 25 April at Hobkirk's Hill, very near the battlefield where Horatio Gates had met Cornwallis and suffered disaster the previous August.

At Hobkirk's Hill, Greene found himself dramatically short of manpower. The Continentals in his army, never thick on the ground, had been thinned by combat, illness, and expirations of enlistments.[3] The thousands of militiamen mustered for Guilford Courthouse had melted away. His forces at Hobkirk's Hill amounted to 967 regulars, including cavalry and artillery, and 254 militiamen.[4] Colonel Francis Rawdon, in command of the British garrison, famously armed "every thing that could carry a firelock" to create an army of 900 men.[5] Sumter promised "six or seven hundred men," a force that would overwhelm the British.[6]

[1] Greene to Jacob Greene, 28 September 1776, in Richard K. Showman, Margaret Cobb, and Robert E. McCarthy, eds., *The Papers of General Nathanael Greene, vol. 1: December 1766–December 1776* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1976), 1:303.
[2] Greene to James Varnum, 24 January 1781, in Richard K. Showman, Dennis M. Conrad, Roger N. Parks, and Elizabeth C. Stevens, eds., *The Papers of General Nathanael Greene*, *vol. 7: 26 December 1780–29 March 1781* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 7:188.
[3] Thinned, as well, by Greene's decision to detach Lee's Legion and Captain Edward Oldham's company to attack Ft. Watson, Henry Lee, *Memoirs of the War in the Southern Department of the United States* (Washington, DC, 1827), 213.
[4] William Johnson, the first historian with access to the records of the southern army as well as to Greene's personal papers, noted that the battlefield return for Hobkirk's Hill had disappeared from the records, and referred the reader to William Gordon's earlier work, Johnson, *Life of Greene,* 2:77–78. The numbers in the text are from Gordon, *The History of the Rise, Progress, and Establishment of the Independence of the United States of America,* 4 vols. (London, 1788), 4:81.
[5] Rawdon to Cornwallis, 26 April 1781, in Ian Saberton, ed., *The Cornwallis Papers: The Campaigns of 1780 and 1781 in the Southern Theatre,* 6 vols. (Uckfield, Sussex: The Navy and Military Press Ltd, 2010), 4:181.
[6] Sumter to Greene, 7 April 1781, in Dennis M. Conrad, Roger N. Parks, Martha J. King, and Richard K. Showman, eds., *The Papers of General Nathanael Greene*, *vol. 8: 30 March–10 July 1781* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 8:66.



Greene desperately wanted Sumter to bring his large militia force to bear at Hobkirk's Hill. Sumter asserted strongly, including the promise that "Nothing in the Summit of my Power Shall be Neglected that may in the least tend to further your operations against the Enemy." Throughout the day of the battle, Greene looked over his shoulder, expecting Sumter to appear with the promised militia juggernaut. The bottom line, however, was that Sumter chose not to attend. Greene, touchy at the best of times, was alternately crushed and furious. After the battle was lost, he vented his anger to his inner circle of confidants. Henry Lee later wrote that "Brigadier Sumter held off, much to the surprise, regret, and dissatisfaction of the American general, and very much to detriment of his plans and measures." William R. Davie recorded blunter language, writing that Greene railed against the South Carolinian: "Sumter refuses to obey my orders, and carries off with him all the active force of this unhappy State on rambling predatory expeditions." Hobkirk's Hill marked the first clash between Greene and Sumter, and it had not ended well for Greene. Sumter, proud and independent, took on the enemy as he saw fit, not as the Continental general ordered.

The question of Sumter's "rambling predatory expeditions" arose again in Greene's next engagement, the Siege of Ninety-Six. Greene arrived at the Backcountry redoubt, held by a strong Provincial force, on 21 May 1781. Greene fought hard at Ninety-Six, having his men dig siege trenches in the South Carolina red clay. After four weeks, Greene learned that Rawdon, having returned to the British stronghold in Charleston, had received reinforcements. One of Rawdon's options was an expedition to relieve the besieged Provincial garrison. The siege works were almost completed, and Greene needed only a few short days to bring endless weeks of toil to fruition. He was again short of manpower and lacked the strength to face Rawdon in open battle.

He decided to create delaying actions to buy time should Rawdon advance toward Ninety-Six. On 10 June 1781, with rumors of Rawdon circulating, Greene ordered Sumter to take charge of a delaying action: "Should the Enemy move out in force with a view of raising the Siege of this place, you will give them all the opposition in your power."[7] As the intelligence clarified Rawdon's capabilities and intentions over the next few days, Greene intensified his moves against a British relief effort. Four days later, Greene learned Rawdon, with almost 2,000 men, was in Orangeburg, eighty miles from Ninety-Six. Greene ordered Lieutenant Colonel William Washington, with all the regular cavalry, forward to cooperate with Sumter. Washington was to stand "between this post and the enemy" to allow the general to complete the siege.[8] He ordered militia commander Andrew Pickens, in Augusta following the Patriot victory, back to South Carolina to assist in the delaying action.[9]

Matters reached a peak on 17 June. Greene was days from completing the siege. He received a dispatch from Sumter, informing him that the plan to delay Rawdon had never coalesced.[10] Francis Marion, under orders to cooperate with Sumter, was still in the southeastern corner of the state.[11] Sumter had delayed moving into position, waiting for men to join his formation. Lee's cavalry, a large part of the mounted force Washington was to command, had failed to appear.[12] Although Sumter did not report on Pickens, Greene knew the latter was still in Augusta. Greene, desperation becoming real, wrote to Colonel Elijah Clarke, a Georgia militia commander who had participated in the Patriot victory at Augusta, and tried to induce him to join the action against Rawdon.[13] As with the rest of Greene's efforts, he was unsuccessful in trying to bring Clarke into the fight.

The actual effort mounted by all these men against Rawdon was disappointing. There was one engagement between the assembled Americans and the advancing British. Colonel Charles S. Myddleton, a Sumter subordinate leading a mounted force of state troops and militia, harassed foragers and guards on the fringes of

[7] Greene to Sumter, 10 June 1781, in Conrad et al., *Greene,* 8:375.
[8] Greene to William Washington, 14 June 1781, in Conrad et al., *Greene,* 8:389.
[9] Greene to Pickens, 14 June 1781, in Conrad et al., *Greene,* 8:388.
[10] Sumter to Greene, 16 June 1781, in Conrad et al., *Greene,* 8:403.
[11] Greene to Marion, 10 June 1781, in Conrad et al., *Greene,* 8:373. Sumter issued conflicting orders to Marion. On 13 June, he ordered Marion to Ninety-Six. On 14 June, he ordered him to halt. On 15 June, he relayed Greene's instructions for the militia to form a barrier against Rawdon. Sumter to Marion, 13 June 1781, in R.W. Gibbes, ed., *Documentary History of the American Revolution, Consisting of Letters and Papers Relating to the Contest for Liberty, Chiefly in South Carolina, in 1781 and 1782, from Originals in the Possession of the Editor and from Other Sources* (Columbia, SC, 1853), 95; Sumter to Marion, 14 June 1781, in Gibbes, *Documentary History,* 95; Sumter to Marion, 15 June 1781, in Gibbes, *Documentary History,* 96; Marion to Greene, 16 June 1781, in Conrad et al., *Greene,* 8:394.
[12] Captain John Rudolph, in command of the Legion cavalry, experienced "a mistake of his orders," Greene to Sumter, 17 June 1781, in Conrad et al., *Greene,* 8:404.
[13] Greene to Clarke, 17 June 1781, in Conrad et al., *Greene,* 8:404.

Rawdon's mobile force. On 18 June, Major John Coffin led an ambush of Myddleton's detachment at Juniper Springs.[14] The engagement was a disaster for the Americans on many levels. Myddleton suffered heavy casualties. Greene learned that Rawdon was only 40 miles from Ninety-Six. At the pace he was moving, he would meet Greene in three days.

There was no question that the efforts to defeat or delay Rawdon failed. Myddleton's abortive fight at Juniper Springs was the only active combat on the route. Greene, out of time, attempted a premature assault on the redoubt. His last-ditch effort failed, and in defeat, he departed Ninety-Six on 20 June, the day before Rawdon arrived.

## The Question

Marion and Pickens were not positioned to form part of an action to delay Rawdon. Washington's ability to respond foundered on the failure of the Legion cavalry to appear as expected. Sumter was the only commander able to resist Rawdon's move to relieve Ninety-Six. Greene had told Sumter to be ready for Rawdon in his orders of 10 June, in plenty of time for the militia commander to prepare. However, at the moment of decision, Sumter was nowhere in sight. The question was unavoidable: What happened to Sumter?

Sumter never tried to justify his absence to Greene. Proud and independent, Sumter saw no reason to explain himself to the Continental general.[15] Instead, on 19 June, he tendered Greene some benign platitudes. He acknowledged the end of the siege was "a Disagreeable Circumstance," but "in my opinion Will not prove So disadvantageous as Some May think it."[16] Sumter's failure to delay Rawdon confirmed all Greene's dark suspicions about the value of the militia. History did not record Greene's response to Sumter's condescension. However, Pickens later wrote that in dealing with Sumter's failure to make any effort to halt Rawdon, Greene "was much irritated, and expressed himself, in a manner, I had not heard him before or after."[17]

One may read between the lines in much of Sumter's writings on the subject of Rawdon and Ninety-Six. On 14 June, he reported to Greene that his "whole force" amounted to 800 men.[18] This report proved more aspiration than reality, because two days later, he wrote that he was detained "for Some men to Join from below."[19] Apparently, the 800 men were the total under his command, assuming all were assembled. Sumter's actual numbers at the time resist computation. He later confessed to problems with desertions, and it is not a leap to infer these problems existed when he was assembling his formation to deal with Rawdon. On 19 June, he admitted that he had only 300 men under arms, with additional men in formations scattered due to Loyalist harassment.[20]

Historians traditionally accepted that Sumter, hamstrung by desertions and prevented from assembling his brigade, was unable to respond to Greene's orders. Anne King Gregorie presented a classic exoneration of Sumter: "With so many detachments in motion, his main body was now reduced by half, and even with every regiment in his brigade ordered out, Greene could count on him for no more than four hundred men at best as a reinforcement."[21]

The exoneration of Sumter received a mixed reaction. Robert Bass, writing a generation after Gregorie, admitted an unpleasant fact: "Sumter delayed carrying out Greene's orders. Instead of throwing his whole corps

[14] Rawdon to Cornwallis, 2 August 1781, in Saberton, *Cornwallis Papers,* 6:63.
[15] Robert Bass, a mid-twentieth century Sumter biographer, disagreed, and proposed that Sumter sent Colonel Thomas Polk to explain his failure to interdict Rawdon, Robert D. Bass, *Gamecock: The Life and Campaigns of General Thomas Sumter* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1961), 187. While there was no doubt Polk met with Greene, their discussion seemed to have turned on Sumter's continuing problems with desertions, Greene to Sumter, 23 June 1781, in Conrad et al., *Greene,* 8:449.
[16] Sumter to Greene, 19 June 1781, in Conrad et al., *Greene,* 8:417.
[17] Pickens to Lee, 25 November 1811, in C. Leon Harris and Conner Runyan, "How the Long Cane Skirmish Kept General Andrew Pickens From Becoming the Benedict Arnold of the South," (n.d.), 40, https://www.academia.edu/106533350/HOW_THE_LONG_CANE_SKIRMISH_KEPT_GENERAL_ANDREW_PICKENS_FROM_BECOMING_THE_BENEDICT_ARNOLD_OF_THE_SOUTH.
[18] Sumter to Greene, 14 June 1781, in Conrad et al., *Greene,* 8:390.
[19] Sumter to Greene, 17 June 1781, in Conrad et al., *Greene,* 8:403.
[20] Sumter to Greene, 19 June 1781, in Conrad et al., *Greene,* 8:417.
[21] Gregorie, *Sumter,* 165–166.

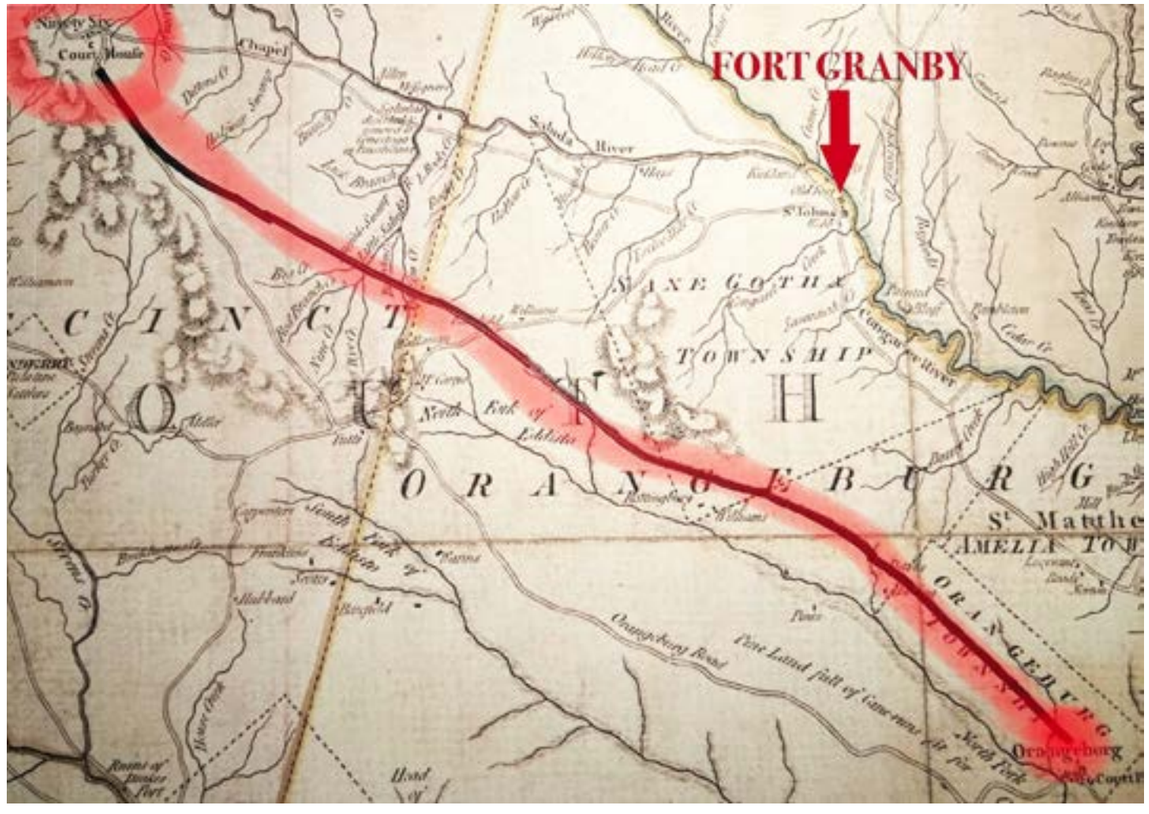


of militia and State Troops ahead of the enemy, skirmishing, checking, and delaying their advance, he remained on the Congaree until Rawdon had come abreast of him."[22]

The idea of a delay by Sumter gained considerable traction, even among historians who ordinarily supported him. Bass, for example, was a strong Sumter partisan. Edward McCrady asserted, at least "probably," that "Sumter's own inaction" explained his absence.[23]

All these explanations ran directly into the problem of Sumter's proven obsession with profit. Davie, never one to mince words, described Sumter as a "mere" panderer or freebooter, that is, a man with no interest in the Cause of Liberty beyond the profit he could derive from the conflict.[24] While Davie's view was extreme, it serves to illustrate the magnitude of the debate.

Hugh Rankin, a prominent historian of the colonial era, asserted that the problem with Sumter and Rawdon was not desertion or exhaustion, but profit. Rankin took a hard line against Sumter generally, describing a man preoccupied with making money amid armed conflict. For example, Sumter wrote an angry letter to Greene on 16 May 1781, resigning his commission.[25] Rankin insisted that Sumter was motivated by pure anger. He was incensed that Greene had allowed Lee to obtain all the spoils from the surrender of Fort Granby.[26] As Rankin saw him, Sumter preferred surrender to a revolution in which he could not turn a profit. Rankin's views on Sumter led to an alternative explanation for Sumter's failure to obstruct Rawdon.




[22] Bass, *Gamecock,* 185.
[23] Edward McCrady, *The History of South Carolina in the Revolution 1780–1783* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1902), 296. McCrady, protective of Sumter's legacy, was careful to base Sumter's exhaustion on the wound he received at Blackstock's Farm the previous November.
[24] Robinson, *Davie,* 44.
[25] Sumter to Greene, 16 May 1781, in Conrad et al., *Greene,* 8:274.
[26] Hugh F. Rankin, *Francis Marion: The Swamp Fox* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1973), 211.

The site of Fort Granby had a long history reaching deep into the roots of settlement of the South Carolina Midlands. The General Assembly ordered a garrison to the west bank of the Congaree River in 1717 to secure a trading station serving commerce with Native Americans.[27] The first fort was built the following year. European settlers, drawn to the fertile farmland by grants to entice immigration, began congregating at Friday's Ferry, a river crossing first licensed in 1754. Friday's Ferry provided the location for a trading post built in 1763. With the takeover of the Backcountry following the surrender of Charleston in 1780, the British seized the store and converted it into a stockade fort, naming it in honor of John Manners, marquess of Granby, a popular British general in the Seven Years' War. Wade Hampton, a wealthy plantation owner and merchant, operated a trading business in the area. Hampton supplied the British garrison and was suspected of tipping Sumter in early 1781 that supplies were low, and it was an opportune time for an attack. Sumter laid siege to Fort Granby on 19 February, but without artillery, his small arms failed against the stockade defenses. The militia general, of course, was not finished with Fort Granby.

After the British and Lee departed in May, Sumter took over the site of Fort Granby for use as an armory and storehouse.[28] The fort lay generally between Orangeburg and Ninety-Six, but a glance at a map reveals a quandary. Fort Granby was not in a direct line between the two cities, but rather a sizeable distance away, about 20 miles north of the direct route of march. If Sumter moved his men into Rawdon's path, he risked exposing his store of weapons and supplies. He did not have the manpower to comply with Greene's orders and protect his war booty.

Sumter moved out of Rawdon's way. John Buchanan, an eminent modern historian, gave space to the alternative explanation, noting that historians had asserted that Sumter was concerned that "Rawdon's real objective was Sumter's headquarters, supply depot, and armory at Fort Granby."[29] Perhaps the best exposition of the thesis is in the bound volumes of Greene's correspondence. Dennis Conrad, an eminent scholar of the period, joined with his associate editors in condemning Sumter's transgression: "Sumter feared that Rawdon intended to retake Fort Granby, where Sumter had established his headquarters, a supply depot, and an armory. He positioned himself to protect Fort Granby and was unable to gain Rawdon's front."[30]

Hugh Rankin offered substantial support for this perspective on Sumter's actions. Rankin, already convinced that Sumter succumbed to greed, depicted a man confronted with a tough decision. Sumter opted to protect Fort Granby and moved out of Rawdon's way.[31] Rawdon, twenty miles south of Fort Granby, avoided Sumter entirely and reached his objective free of harassment and delays.

This alternative thesis, if true, would paint a disturbing picture of Sumter. A significant issue was Rankin's reputation as a historian of the Revolutionary era. Now long gone, he had gained notable prominence in his time. He might have been mistaken, certainly, but one could just as easily say Lincoln misspoke in the Gettysburg Address.

Despite his standing as a historian, Rankin was wrong about Sumter. He was too quick to paint Sumter in purely negative terms. While it was true that Sumter kept a keen eye on his balance sheet, at bottom, Sumter was a complex figure who defied one-dimensional characterizations.

We start with Rankin's version of Sumter's resignation. On 15 May, Greene sent Sumter a letter. Greene's letter has vanished. Sumter's letter, written the next day, was a response: "I have been Honoured With your Letter of Yesterdays Date."[32] Without Greene's letter, there is no record of what he told Sumter. Historians have inferred that Greene gave Sumter his reasons for allowing Lee to command, and end, the attack on Fort Granby.[33]

There was no doubt that Sumter was furious about the circumstances of Fort Granby's surrender. He had begun the siege of Fort Granby on 2 May 1781 with no help from the Continentals.[34] With the garrison fully enclosed in his perimeter and no prospect for a British relief effort, Sumter believed he could take his time and achieve a complete reduction of the fort on his own schedule. Sumter left Colonel Thomas Taylor in charge and departed to lead the action against Orangeburg.[35]

Greene saw the siege differently, particularly in terms of its timing, and sent Lee to take charge of operations in orders dated 13 May.[36] Sumter objected immediately, reminding Greene that he had "been at great pains to reduce that post, I have it in my power to do it."[37] Greene, unpersuaded, left Lee in place. The fort surrendered to Lee on 15 May 1781. The surrender terms were, in a word, generous. Lee feared a British relief column and believed time was of the essence. A scout reported sighting Rawdon across the Santee River on 15 May.[38] Sumter reported seeing Rawdon's army moving northward toward Fort Granby the same day.[39] To induce a quick resolution, Lee allowed the British to keep all their spoils of war, their horses, and two artillery pieces. The commander was allowed two wagons, not inspected by the Americans, to carry his personal load of plunder. Lee provided an escort to protect the British and their property on the way to Charleston, where the soldiers, both regulars and militia, were allowed to march for retention as prisoners of war until exchanged.[40]

Sumter's militiamen were outraged. The spoils of war kept by the garrison were all items of property seized from the Whigs. Gregorie described a poignant scene. While seeing the British abscond with their belongings was bad, things became much worse "when they saw Lee's already handsomely equipped Legion paraded in new clothing, while they were still in rags."[41] Their sense of betrayal was complete, and they accused Lee of giving away the surrender to cut Sumter out of the glory as well as the tangible rewards of conquest.

Sumter's men were not the only ones disappointed in the surrender terms. As one example, historian Edward McCrady, a strong voice in favor of Sumter's legacy, asserted that Lee was wrong; "the facts of the situation will scarcely justify his precipitancy." William Johnson, Greene's first biographer and no friend of Lee, wrote that "there was, unquestionably, no pressing necessity for hurrying through the negotiation, from the approach of Rawdon."[42]

Rankin characterized Sumter as driven entirely by cupidity, and in this he was mistaken. Johnson and McCrady established that there were legitimate objections to the terms, utterly unrelated to greed. Rankin's portrait of Sumter was too facile and too one-dimensional. When Sumter arrived back at Fort Granby on 16 May, he felt his men's outrage and sense of betrayal. It has long been believed that the militiamen were so upset that they threatened to kill the British prisoners despite the Legion guards.[43] Sumter faced problems far larger than a distribution of the spoils of war, and his resignation, sent the same day, reflected a many-faceted problem.

An analysis of Sumter's failure to harass Rawdon leads to the same conclusion. Sumter had a complicated personality. While he made no secret of his interest in Profit, it was a mistake to discount him as a "mere" panderer or freebooter. Sumter had a deep commitment to the cause of liberty, and criticism in this vein was a disservice to a dedicated patriot.

Where was Sumter while Rawdon was marching to Ninety-Six? Sumter's bright optimism of a militia juggernaut foundered on desertions and on Loyalist interference with his ability to assemble his brigade. Counting on 800 men, he had no more than half this force as Rawdon traveled through his sector. All his men were militiamen and state troops, some experienced, but many new recruits. All Rawdon's force, more than 1,850 men, were regulars, most of them veterans of the southern war.[44] Sumter knew his token force stood no chance of

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[27] Kathryn F. Keenan, "In Search of Granby: A Colonial Village of South Carolina," (master's thesis, University of South Carolina, 2016), https://www.historysoft.com/granby/GRANBY%207_07_16.pdf.
[28] John Buchanan, *The Road to Charleston: Nathanael Greene and the American Revolution* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2019), 154; Conrad et al., *Greene,* 423n2; Sumter to Marion, 16 June 1781, in Gibbes, *Documentary History,* 97.
[29] Buchanan, *Charleston,* 154.
[30] Conrad et al., *Greene,* 423n2.
[31] Rankin, *Swamp Fox,* 217.
[32] Sumter to Greene, 16 May 1781, in Conrad et al., *Greene,* 8:274.
[33] E.g., Bass, *Gamecock,* 175; Gregorie, *Sumter,* 161; Conrad et al., *Greene,* 8:259n3.
[34] Sumter to Greene, 2 May 1781, in Conrad et al., *Greene,* 8:193; Sumter to Greene, 4 May 1781, in Conrad et al., *Greene,* 8:204.
[35] Sumter to Greene, 14 May 1781, in Conrad et al., *Greene,* 8:258. Sumter arrived at Orangeburg on 10 May, invested the garrison, and received the surrender the next day, Sumter to Greene, 11 May 1781, in Conrad et al., *Greene,* 8:244. He remained there until after the surrender of Ft. Granby was concluded.
[36] Greene to Lee, 13 May 1781, in Conrad et al., *Greene,* 8:249.
[37] Sumter to Greene, 14 May 1781, in Conrad et al., *Greene,* 8:259.
[38] Lee, *Memoirs,* 235.
[39] Sumter to Greene, 15 May 1781, in Conrad et al., *Greene,* 8:269.
[40] Lee, *Memoirs,* 235.
[41] Gregorie, *Sumter,* 160. McCrady related the incident in similar terms, *South Carolina in the Revolution,* 245.
[42] McCrady, *South Carolina in the Revolution,* 245; Johnson, *Life of Greene,* 2:122. McCrady and Johnson wrote with the advantage of hindsight. On the evening of 15 May, Rawdon halted his advance, withdrawing to Eutaw Springs the following day, Rawdon to Cornwallis, 24 May 1781, in Saberton, *Cornwallis Papers,* 5:289−290.
[43] Gregorie, *Sumter,* 160; Gordon, *Rise, Progress, and Establishment of the United States,* 4:90.
[44] Rawdon to Cornwallis, 2 August 1781, in Saberton, *Cornwallis Papers,* 6:63.

stopping or materially slowing Rawdon's advance. If he stood in Rawdon's way, he stood only to lose a large number of his already depleted force. He did what he needed to do: he got out of Rawdon's way.

Myddleton confirmed the wisdom of his move at Juniper Springs. The asymmetry of the result proved that a small force of militia had no chance against Rawdon's far superior numbers. Myddleton, leading a detachment of 200, lost three-quarters of it in the fighting.[45] Myddleton fought only a detachment of British soldiers, not the main army. Sumter's odds against the weight of Rawdon's entire force were negligible.

Sumter should have informed Greene of his movement away from Rawdon's route of march. Throughout the campaign, Sumter's reporting to Greene was inconsistent. Proud and independent, Sumter often demonstrated that he needed no commander and felt no need to report to one. While this attitude did not justify his silence, it served to explain it.

## Conclusion

Many have criticized Sumter's failure to intervene against Rawdon. Pickens was desperately critical of Sumter's decision. In a letter to Lee written long after the war, he decried it "inexcusable" that Sumter had allowed Rawdon to pass without "the least attempt" to delay him. We do not know whether Pickens was aware of the depletion of Sumter's forces. Either way, Pickens was a prominent militia commander in his own right, fully qualified to pass judgment on Sumter. Although blistering in his criticism, he made no suggestion of impropriety by Sumter. Pickens was proof that one might disagree with Sumter, but his decision to avoid Rawdon, right or wrong, was a legitimate exercise of his powers as a commander and no reflection of bad motives or improper conduct.

Sumter was a complex man who engendered both harsh criticism and intense loyalty. He will always have critics, just as he will always have partisans. His failure to take any action against Rawdon proved controversial and continues to generate strong opinions on both sides of the debate to this day. With all the facts on the table, Sumter was right in deciding to save his force and allow Rawdon to pass unhindered. The option of combat offered him no chance at a better result.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Robert Ford graduated from Washington and Lee University in 1977 and served as an officer in the U.S. Army. He then went back to graduate school and earned a J.D. from Wake Forest University. He practiced as a trial lawyer for more than thirty years, specializing in medical malpractice cases. Throughout his legal career, he published extensively on legal issues. Since retiring, he has pursued a lifelong interest in the history of the Revolutionary War. He is the author of "The Battle of Cowpens, Reexamined," scheduled for release in 2025 by Blackwater Press.

[45] Sumter to Greene, 17 June 1781, in Conrad et al., *Greene,* 8:408; Sumter to Greene, 19 June 1781, in Conrad et al., *Greene,* 8:418.



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