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## Moses Kirkland and the Southern Strategy

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During the Revolutionary War, the British developed what came to be known as the Southern Strategy. The idea was for British regiments to invade Georgia and South Carolina with a plan to defeat the Continental Army. Once those states were free of opposition, the colonists who remained loyal to the Crown could rise up and regain control over the southern colonies. At the heart of this plan lay an assumption that a majority of the residents would prefer British rule to independence. Various politicians (especially the deposed Royal Governors of Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina and Virginia) and other interested individuals wrote letters and argued in favor of the strategy but no provincial was more active or energetic toward the development and execution of a Southern Strategy than Moses Kirkland.

Raised in South Carolina, Moses Kirkland was already a mature adult over the age of 45 when the war broke out. He had traded with Indians, invested in saw mills and engaged in a number of land deals (some of which may

have been fraudulent) along the way and became a man of “considerable fortune and held in high esteem.”<sup>1</sup> Elected to represent the Ninety Six District in the First Provincial Congress of South Carolina of January 1775, Kirkland spoke “warmly against”

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<sup>1</sup> Moses Kirkland was a planter on Turkey Creek in the Ninety Six District of South Carolina. His claim for losses from the American Revolutionary War is found in *British Georgia Loyalist Claims*, Mary Bondurant Warren (Athens, Ga: Heritage Papers, 2014) 844-863. This article is largely an analysis of the claim Kirkland filed with the British Government for compensation of his losses in North America in 1783. Kirkland’s wealth may be gauged from the extent of his award of £4,000 from his claim of £12,160 for the loss of his property in South Carolina (Audit Office 12/109). This property was seized and sold by the State of South Carolina and realized £1,972. (Audit Office 13/36; Audit Office 12/92, *South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine*, Vol. XVIII, No. 2, Jan. 1917, p. 69-71.) His original claims and supporting statements are filed in the British Public Records Office in Kew, Surrey, UK, and microfilm copies are in the David Library of the American Revolution, the Southern Revolutionary War Institute and other repositories. Kirkland was a partner in Cannon’s (later Ferguson’s) Saw and Grist Mills on the Edisto River. Ron McCall. See also Ian Saberton, *The Cornwallis Papers*, (Naval & Military Press, East Sussex, 2010), 1:236n3.

nonimportation and withdrew from the proceedings in protest when the vote went against him.<sup>2</sup> Even with his opposition to the nonimportation association, Kirkland was not yet considered disloyal to the state and accepted a commission as Captain of Rangers in the 2<sup>d</sup> Regiment of South Carolina’s state troops authorized by the Assembly in June 1775.<sup>3</sup>

The Rangers drew their first assignment on the 12<sup>th</sup> of July when the Council of Safety ordered them to take possession of Fort Charlotte on the Savannah River.<sup>4</sup>

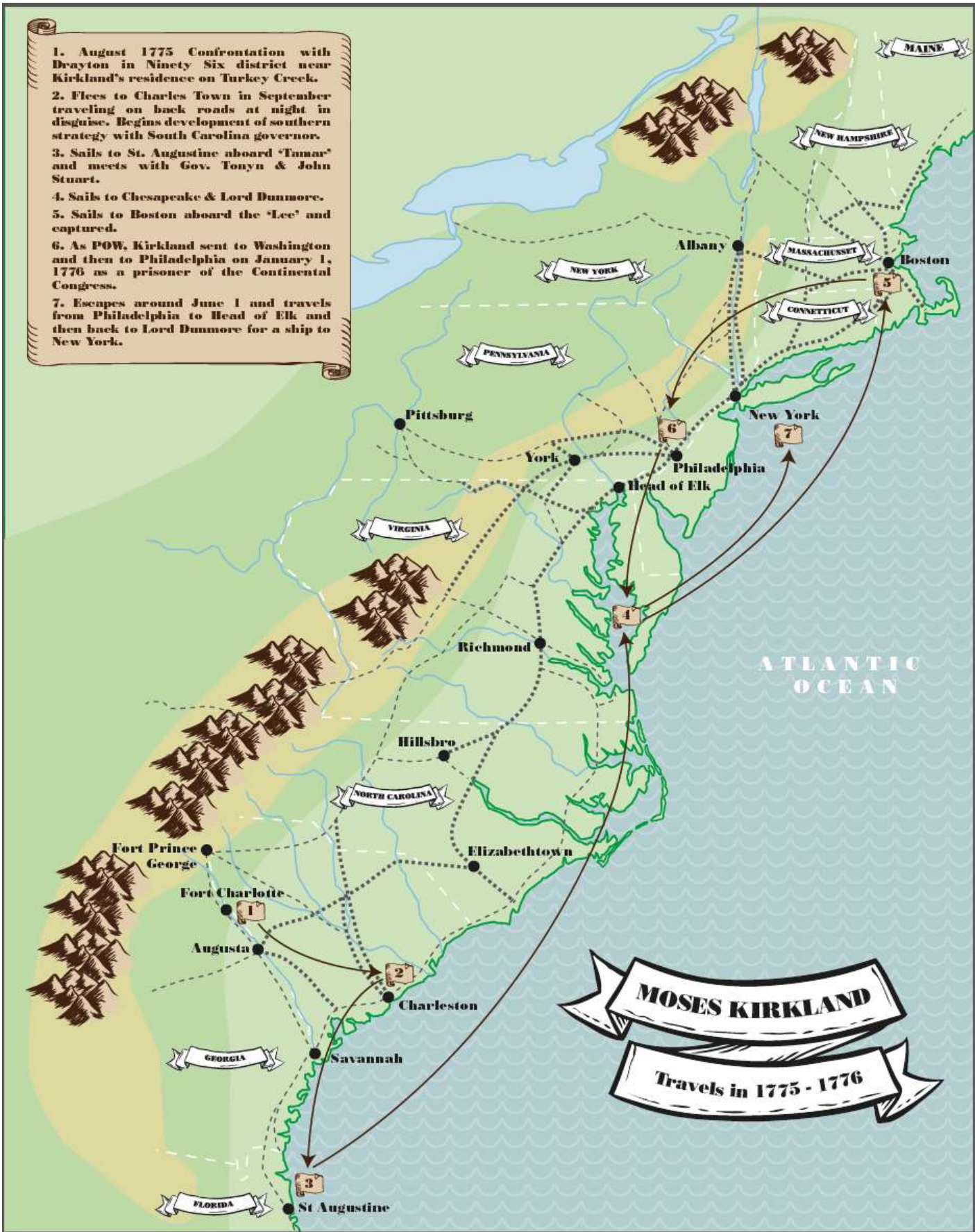
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<sup>2</sup> Warren, *Kirkland claim*, 844.

<sup>3</sup> In his own account, Kirkland claimed to have refused the commission but this would seem to conflict with his participation in the events related to Fort Charlotte. Warren, *Kirkland claim*, 844. William Moultrie, *Memories of the American Revolution*, (NY: David Longworth, 1802) 1:72 n reports that Kirkland accepted the commission but resigned it over those appointed over him.

<sup>4</sup> Fort Charlotte was built of stone by SC in 1765-1767 and located about 60 miles upstream from Augusta, Ga. on the Savannah River.

1. August 1775 Confrontation with Drayton in Ninety Six district near Kirkland's residence on Turkey Creek.
2. Flees to Charles Town in September traveling on back roads at night in disguise. Begins development of southern strategy with South Carolina governor.
3. Sails to St. Augustine aboard 'Tamar' and meets with Gov. Tonyn & John Stuart.
4. Sails to Chesapeake & Lord Dummore.
5. Sails to Boston aboard the 'Lee' and captured.
6. As POW, Kirkland sent to Washington and then to Philadelphia on January 1, 1776 as a prisoner of the Continental Congress.
7. Escapes around June 1 and travels from Philadelphia to Head of Elk and then back to Lord Dummore for a ship to New York.



Realizing the fort was lightly defended but contained very valuable artillery pieces along with a ton of gunpowder and iron shot, the Rangers moved quickly to take advantage of surprise. As they moved in, the Rangers discovered the garrison out on patrols and the fort commander, George Whitefield, alone in the fort with his family. Whitefield surrendered without resistance. Maj. James Mayson left Capt. John Caldwell to hold the fort while he and Capt. Kirkland rode to Ninety Six along with “250 pounds weight of powder and 500 pounds of lead.”<sup>5</sup>

Along the way Kirkland became aware that Mayson intended to have the Rangers “force him, and every other person in the backcountry, to sign the Association” thereby joining the American cause against the King. Kirkland had previously held the rank of lieutenant colonel in the South Carolina colonial militia and held an old grudge against Maj. Mayson. Instead of following along with the plan, Kirkland reacted by arguing strongly against signing any agreement to support the actions of the Continental Congress. He was so persuasive that, within a few

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<sup>5</sup> John Drayton, *Memoirs of the American Revolution*, (A E Miller, Charleston, SC, 1821), 1:317. John Drayton was the son of William Henry Drayton. Drayton, 1:vii. See also Keith Krawczynski, *William Henry Drayton: South Carolina Revolutionary Patriot*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001).

hours, his troops “withdrew to a man.”<sup>6</sup>

At that point, Kirkland joined his men with Col. Thomas Fletchall, also of the Ninety Six District and probably the single most respected Loyalist in the area. Once together, they decided on two courses of action. First, Fletchall had his own Counter Association papers drawn up for everyone to sign and declare their intention to “act in favor of the King, it was offered to the men for signature, and the people very generally subscribed to it.”<sup>7</sup> In addition to the subscription agreement, Kirkland (along with Cunningham and Maj. Joseph Robinson of Fletchall’s regiment) returned to Ninety Six on July 17, 1775 and recovered the ammunition that had been removed from Fort Charlotte. They held Maj. Mayson in the jail for a few hours before setting up a hearing so he might answer to the charge of having robbed the King’s fort. At that point, “Captain Kirkland put the seal to his treachery, in joining Fletchall’s party openly; in addition to which act of perfidy, he also induced Captain P\*\*\* and his troop of the same regiment to quit the service.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Drayton, 1:321.

<sup>7</sup> Drayton, 1:322.

<sup>8</sup> Drayton, 1:323. Capt. P\*\*\* is SC Loyalist Richard Pearis. Jim Piecuch, “Richard Pearis and the Mobilization of South Carolina’s Backcountry Loyalists,” *Journal of the American Revolution*, Oct. 27, 2014.

Greatly disturbed by what they heard from the Fort Charlotte episode, the newly appointed members of the Secret Committee of the Council of Safety decided to send William Henry Drayton, Rev. Oliver Hart and Rev. William Tennent into the region. Dubbed as ‘Commissioners,’ the three men traveled into various districts with orders to convince the people to join the Nonimportation Association or, to the contrary, to “enforce the necessity of a general union.”<sup>9</sup> There was an election for Representatives to the (2<sup>nd</sup>) Provincial Congress coming up in early August and the Council considered victory essential to advancing the cause. They had already ordered tar and feathers for a number of Charleston Tories in an effort to prevent them from organizing. Naming the Committee President, William Henry Drayton, as one of the commissioners only underscored the importance of winning over the backcountry residents.

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<sup>9</sup> Henry Laurens, Proclamation of the Council of Safety, 23 July 1775, reprinted in Drayton, 1:351. William Tennent, III, (1740 - 1777) was a highly-regarded Presbyterian minister. Drayton was a young lawyer, politician and fire-brand American. Baptist minister, Rev. Oliver Hart, backcountry businessman and politician, Joseph Kershaw, and backcountry planter, politician and militia leader, Richard Richardson, joined the commissioners. Both Hart’s and Tennent’s journals survive and chronicle this political mission to the SC Backcountry.

Moses Kirkland responded to Drayton's visit by traveling to Charlestown for a visit with South Carolina's Royal Governor, Lord William Campbell. While there, he received a number of "commissions, papers, and offers of encouragement, to Colonel Fletchall; and through him, to all" the Loyalists in the upper parts of the Colony.<sup>10</sup>

The Commissioners reacted quickly to Kirkland's actions by issuing orders to have him apprehended "on his return: hoping to possess themselves, thereby, of papers from the Governor. They also advised the Council of his approach" toward Charlestown in case they could get their hands on him. Drayton described Kirkland as "very active in poisoning the minds of the people, he will greatly interrupt our proceedings."<sup>11</sup>

In fact, Kirkland did indeed interrupt Mr. Drayton's plans. The election of representatives to the Second Provincial Congress

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<sup>10</sup> Drayton, 1:330. Lord William Campbell was South Carolina's last Royal Governor. When he arrived in South Carolina on June 17, 1775, the colonial government had largely been subsumed by Whigs. Campbell was soon forced to retreat to the HMS *Tamar*, a marginally seaworthy Royal Navy 5<sup>th</sup> rate ship of the line, at anchor in Charlestown's Harbor. William R. Ryan, *The World of Thomas Jeremiah: Charles Town on the Eve of the American Revolution* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>11</sup> Tennent and Drayton to Council of Safety, 7 Aug. 1775, R. W. Gibbes, MD, *Documentary History of the American Revolution* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1855) 1:128-133.

was set for August 23, 1775, but when Drayton showed up at the meeting place expecting about 1,500 eligible voters, he found a handful of men led by Fletchall, Kirkland, Cunningham, and Thomas Brown of Augusta who was still unable to walk on his feet recently burned in his own tar and feathering party.<sup>12</sup> The Loyalist leaders told Drayton they had already informed the people not to show up if they were "satisfied with their present opinions."<sup>13</sup>

At that point, Kirkland confronted Drayton<sup>14</sup> and "treated the Congress, the Committee, the Council, and ourselves, with the highest insolence. Nay, he was on the point of assaulting Mr. Drayton; and, in all probability would have done it, which would have brought on bloodshed; but that the pressure of the people about Mr. Drayton, gave him to understand, that an attack made by him, would be premature." Kirkland continued his rant against the Whigs and accused Drayton of wanting to suppress the Loyalists. "Imagine every indecency of language, every misrepresentation, every ungenerous and unjust charge against the American politics."<sup>15</sup>

Drayton postponed the election for another two weeks and

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<sup>12</sup> The contemporary sources only report Cunningham, probably either Robert or more likely Patrick, both brothers were active Loyalist of the district.

<sup>13</sup> Drayton, 1:378.

<sup>14</sup> A very bold and perhaps foolhardy act considering Drayton's reputation as a zealot and ruthless enemy.

<sup>15</sup> Drayton, 1:378.

reported the incident back to the committee. "Kirkland and the Cunninghams, appeared here with arms, sword, and pistol. Their intention did not appear good; and the very small audience clearly manifests, that the sentiments of the party, continue inimical." The Commissioner believed Kirkland highly influential and a dangerous man to allow free in the back country. "If Kirkland shall be seized, without a doubt a commotion will follow; and, if he goes off with impunity and without question, it will be fatal to the discipline of the army – especially the Rangers. But this is not all. Vigorous measures are absolutely necessary."<sup>16</sup>

After the confrontation with Drayton, Kirkland started moving about the Ninety Six District toward Augusta speaking with people and arguing against the Whigs. He later claimed to have "actually assembled and got together upwards of 5,000 of the inhabitants who signed an instrument of writing resolving to support his Majesty's government as far as in them lay." With the document signed, Kirkland told the people there "that they had no expectation of immediate support from Government or getting any supply of Arms and Ammunition, and the Enemy having it in their power to bring troops from the adjoining Provinces and having possession of all magazines," that everyone should "retire to their respective homes" and wait while Kirkland himself traveled to

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<sup>16</sup> Drayton, 1:375, 379.

Boston to meet with the British North American commander, Gen. Thomas Gage.<sup>17</sup>

Before Kirkland could make arrangements and leave the area, Commissioner Drayton issued a proclamation condemning him. "Whereas, one Moses Kirkland having, without lawful authority, assembled men in arms, in the district aforesaid, it is but too evident, that, to his treachery against this colony, he means to add crimes of a deeper dye, and by force of arms, to violate the public peace." The Proclamation also condemned any who joined Kirkland as "public enemies, to be suppressed by the sword."<sup>18</sup>

A very severe man not to be taken lightly, Commissioner Drayton was also the President of the Secret Committee and the Council of Safety. Moses Kirkland took his threats seriously and tried to arrange for a quick surrender, "on promise of pardon." Unfortunately, "Mr. Drayton well knowing his demerits, demanded his surrender at discretion."<sup>19</sup> To make the situation even worse, Drayton "offered a reward of two thousand pounds sterling to any one who would apprehend him."<sup>20</sup>

Drayton's Proclamation "so terrified Kirkland's followers" that he was forced into hiding. As Drayton himself said, "He is now invisible – is never two hours in a

place, and never sleeps in a house."<sup>21</sup> In order to escape, Kirkland "traveled in disguise<sup>22</sup> with his only son [Moses Kirkland, Jr.] a youth of about 12 years of age, through the woods to Charles Town where he got in the night to the House of Lord William Campbell, the Governor of Charles Town, who assisted him" by arranging passage on the sloop, *Tamar*. Once the Secret Committee discovered Campbell's complicity in Kirkland's escape, "they obliged his Lordship to leave the town and take refuge on board the same ship which he did three days" later.<sup>23</sup>

On board ship Kirkland told his story. Even though "the back settlers are two to one in number, more than the rebel party; they got some powder, but when it came to be divided, they had only two rounds per man." With such a shortage of ammunition, Kirkland had no choice but to discharge his followers and seek assistance in Charlestown. Once there, the Loyalist leaders arranged for him to begin the journey toward Boston where he might meet with Gen. Gage. After all, Kirkland had "an honest, open countenance, good natural understanding, and may be of infinite use, when troops are sent

to Charlestown."<sup>24</sup> Kirkland was to be the Loyalist emissary from the South Carolina backcountry in promoting the Southern Strategy.

### **Selling the Southern Strategy**

Kirkland's journey to meet with British officials concerning the state of affairs in South Carolina's backcountry proved long and full of delay at each stop. In late September of 1775 he traveled first to St. Augustine in the colony of East Florida. He met with Royal Gov. Patrick Tonyn and also John Stuart who was the British Indian Superintendent for all of the southern colonies. They told him about an army of 6,000 men from England, "2000 of which were destined for New York, 2000 for Virginia, and 2000 for Charles Town." Kirkland also wrote to Lord Dartmouth "acquainting him with the true State of the Province [South Carolina] & what might be done with the assistance of a few troops and supplies of Arms and Ammunition."<sup>25</sup>

Kirkland departed St. Augustine with a packet of letters from Tonyn and Stuart some of which were for the Royal Governor of Virginia, Lord Dunmore, while others would go to Boston and Gen. Gage. First arriving in the Chesapeake Bay, Kirkland discovered Dunmore "confined to his ship" with little hope of any

<sup>17</sup> Warren, *Kirkland claim*, 845.

<sup>18</sup> Drayton, 1:381.

<sup>19</sup> Drayton, 1:382.

<sup>20</sup> Mulcaster to Grant, 29 Sept. 1775, Gibbes, 1:197.

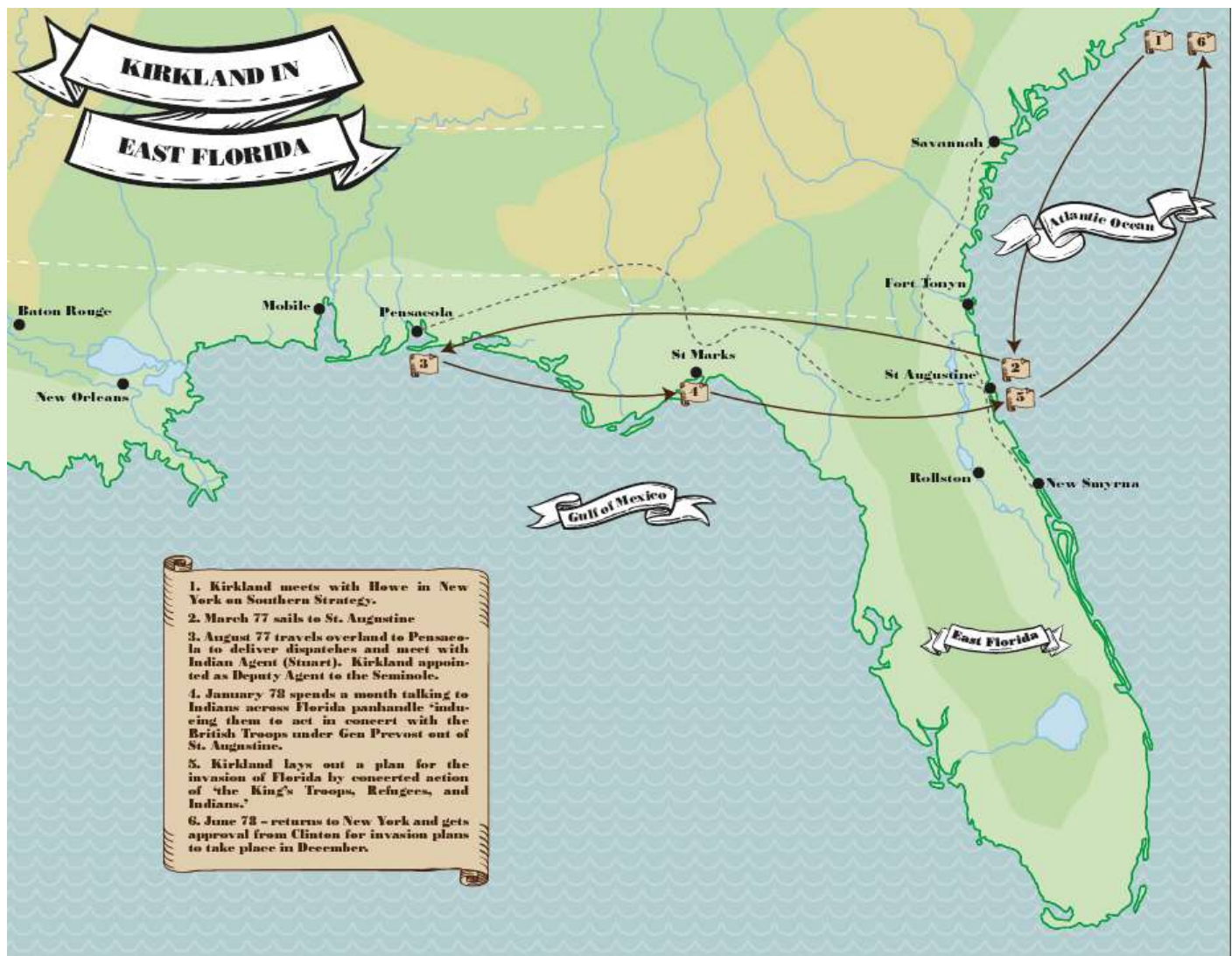
<sup>21</sup> Drayton to Council of Safety, 11 Sept. 1775, Gibbes, 1:173.

<sup>22</sup> Apparently Kirkland dressed as a 'Cracker' and Moses Kirkland, Jr. dressed like a girl.

<sup>23</sup> Warren, *Kirkland claim*, 845.

<sup>24</sup> Mulcaster to Grant, 29 Sept. 1775, Gibbes, 1:197.

<sup>25</sup> Warren, *Kirkland claim*, 845. Lord Dartmouth, William Legge, was the British government's Secretary of State for the American Colonies.



troops coming to America until the following year.

For the time being, Kirkland could remain in Virginia where he assisted Dunmore in taking Norfolk before sailing on for Boston in late November.<sup>26</sup>

Before Kirkland's ship could land, it "was unfortunately taken in Boston Bay by Capt. Manly commanding the *Lee*, a schooner

<sup>26</sup> Warren, *Kirkland claim*. Lord Dunmore, John Murray, was the last Royal Governor of Virginia. He was defeated at the Battle of Great Bridge in Dec. 1775 and eventually forced from Virginia.

in Congress service." When they discovered the packet of letters, Kirkland was sent "to General Washington's headquarters at Cambridge where he was confined to a room under a strong guard until the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 1776 and then removed under a captain's guard to Philadelphia where the Continental Congress was setting, who ordered him to be confined in Gaol in the closest manner."<sup>27</sup> Washington included the packet of letters from Stuart which he considered confirmation

<sup>27</sup> Warren, *Kirkland claim*, 846.

of "the Ministry's Intentions to engage the savages against us."<sup>28</sup>

A little over a week after his arrival in Philadelphia, Kirkland tried sending a request to Henry Laurens apologizing for his hasty departure from South Carolina and asking for permission to give parole and return in peace. "I am willing to give all the security in power for my good behavior."<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Washington to Schuyler, 24 Dec. 1775, Papers of George Washington, digital edition.

<sup>29</sup> Henry Laurens was President of South Carolina. Kirkland to Council of Safety, 11 Jan. 1776, Gibbes, 1:254-255;

Laurens presented Kirkland's petition to the South Carolina Provincial Congress along with information taken in the packet of letters concerning the use of Indian raids in the backcountry. The Assembly declined to offer Kirkland any clemency.<sup>30</sup>

Without help from the Provincial Congress, Kirkland languished in confinement until the first of June. At that time he got assistance from local Loyalists and "made his escape." Kirkland traveled at night in disguise but managed to work his way south through New Jersey and Maryland to Virginia where he found refuge on board Lord Dunmore's ships in the Chesapeake Bay. Dunmore "expressed singular satisfaction in seeing your Memorialist [Kirkland] again, having heard the Enemy had put him to death, gave him money and such other necessities as he stood in need of."<sup>31</sup>

Almost a year after his departure from the South Carolina backcountry, Kirkland finally sailed to the British general. By that time, Gage was long gone and Kirkland actually met with the new British North American military commander, Gen. Sir William Howe in New York. His meeting went well as the general listened politely and then provided Kirkland with "such necessaries for his support as he

stood in need of and a promise that he should want for nothing" while with Howe in New York. He remained with Howe throughout the campaign, witnessing the battles of Long Island, New York, White Plains, Kings Bridge, and Fort Washington.<sup>32</sup>

In March of 1777, Gen. Howe came to Kirkland with a request that he travel to St. Augustine and then overland to Pensacola in West Florida with some dispatches for the Indian Superintendent, John Stuart. Among the letters were instructions that Stuart make Kirkland his Deputy Superintendent to the Seminole Indians. He made it to St. Augustine around the 1<sup>st</sup> of May and then traveled for three weeks across the Florida panhandle to Pensacola where John Stuart conducted his operations with the southern tribes.<sup>33</sup>

Kirkland remained in Pensacola the rest of the year "consulting with Mr. Stuart." In December they decided it was time for him to make a trek back across Florida and meet with the tribes. At the end of January 1778, "he set out with goods to make presents and to hold converse with them in order to attach them to Government & induce them to act in concert with the British troops under the command of General (Augustine) Prevost."<sup>34</sup> After a

month of meetings Kirkland arrived back in St. Augustine with some of the head Indians and reported "good success with the Indians and delivered" letters from Stuart to Gov. Tonyn.

Soon after his arrival in St. Augustine, Kirkland laid out a plan for invasion of Georgia "by the King's troops, Refugees, & Indians."<sup>35</sup> Gov. Tonyn approved but required additional approval from Gen. Howe before putting any part of it into effect. As a result, it was back again to Philadelphia for Moses Kirkland.

This time the city was in British hands but plans had already been made for its evacuation. Gen. Howe was on the way out and his replacement, Lt. Gen. Sir Henry Clinton, was already on hand. Kirkland met with the two of them in late June 1778. Both men approved of his plans and Kirkland remained with Clinton on the return to New York until such time as there would be ships and men headed south.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Moses Kirkland to Henry Clinton, Oct. 13, 1778 and Kirkland to His Majesty's Commissioners, Oct. 21, 1778 in "Backcountry Loyalist Plan", *South Carolina Historical Magazine*, Vol. 75, no. 4 (Oct. 1974) 207-214.

<sup>36</sup> Warren, *Kirkland claim*, 847. The military plan for the British invasion of Georgia was not solely Kirkland's. It was approved in London where numerous Crown officials, displaced Southern colonial governors, and refugees pushed the idea of the Southern Loyalists' strength and ability to rise and take control of the government with a little professional help from the British Army. David K. Wilson, *The Southern Strategy* (Columbia, SC: USC Press, 2005), Wilson largely credits North

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reprinted in Robert D. Bass, *Ninety Six*, (Sandlapper Publishing, Orangeburg, SC, 1978), 125-126.

<sup>30</sup> Bass, 128.

<sup>31</sup> Warren, *Kirkland claim*, 846.

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<sup>32</sup> Warren, *Kirkland claim*, 846.

<sup>33</sup> Warren, *Kirkland claim*, 846.

<sup>34</sup> Warren, *Kirkland claim*, 846-847.

## Testing the Southern Strategy

Kirkland remained in New York for several months before joining Lt. Col. Archibald Campbell's seaborne expedition from New York to Savannah in November 1778. After easily capturing the city in December 1778, Campbell promoted Kirkland to Assistant Deputy Quarter Master General at a rank of lieutenant colonel of militia.<sup>37</sup> The second British force marched overland from St. Augustine under the command of Maj. Gen. Augustine Prévost, taking control of coastal Georgia.

Early in 1779, Campbell led a column of troops deep into the Georgia backcountry to Augusta. Kirkland came along to rally the Loyalists. He was filled with "hopes and promises \* \* \* of being joined by great numbers of the disaffected from this state and North Carolina." Area citizens organized some Loyalist militias, but there was a large resistance from Georgia's "Ceded Lands" (Wilkes County) and South Carolina. Unfortunately for Kirkland, South Carolina militia Gen. Andrew Williamson had his troops on hand and prevented any display of loyalty from the South

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Carolina's deposed Royal Governor, Josiah Martin, as the chief salesman of the Southern Strategy in London.

<sup>37</sup> Archibald Campbell, *Journal of an Expedition against the Rebels of Georgia in North America Under the Orders of Archibald Campbell Esquire Lieut. Colol. of His Majesty's 71<sup>st</sup> Regiment, 1778*, (Richmond County Historical Society, Augusta, Ga., 1981), 82.

Carolina backcountry residents.<sup>38</sup> In fact, not only did Williamson have enough men to menace Campbell back to Savannah, a detachment of South Carolina militia acting with Georgia militia also managed to defeat a group of 700 Tories recruited from South Carolina under a Loyalist named Boyd who was killed at Kettle Creek.<sup>39</sup> The first British attempt to rally Georgia and South Carolina backcountry residents to the Crown had fallen well short of expectations.

Rebel militia units followed Campbell's column back down the Savannah River toward the city itself. Along the way, Campbell located an area where Briar Creek flowed into the Savannah River that he felt was ideal for trapping the rebels and handing them a surprise. Campbell himself continued on down the river and out of Georgia

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<sup>38</sup> Extract of a Letter, 25 Feb. 1779, Mary Bondurant Warren, *Georgia Governor and Council Journals 1779*, (Heritage Papers, Athens, Ga., 2007), 191.

<sup>39</sup> James or John Boyd probably sailed south in Dec. 1778 with British Lt. Col. Archibald Campbell and recruited Loyalists to become British soldiers in the South Carolina backcountry. His recruits were headed to August to join Campbell, but were forced to travel a circuitous route by the South Carolina militia opposing them. There were skirmishes with Boyd's 800 or so recruits at Fort Independence and Cherokee Ford/McGowan's Blockhouse in SC, and at Vann's Creek, Ga. before their defeat at the Battle of Kettle Creek on Feb. 14, 1779. Only 270 Tory recruits actually joined Campbell who withdrew from Augusta the same day. Christine R. Swager, *Heroes of Kettle Creek* (West Conshohocken, PA: Infinity Publishing, 2008).

but he left Lt. Col. Mark Prévost in command. Prévost knew the situation and executed it nicely. At that rout of the rebel militia under Gen. John Ashe of North Carolina at the Battle of Briar Creek, Kirkland "had the honor to command the Refugees and part of the Georgia Militia and was of so much service that Col. Provost who commanded that day returned him his thanks."<sup>40</sup>

The Americans struck back at Savannah in September 1779 when the French fleet arrived with troops under Gen. Comte D'Estaing. They laid siege to Savannah in a large ring that swung to the south of the city along the coast to the Ogeechee River inlet where a number of British ships had taken refuge from the invaders. There camped a British force of 100 troops under Capt. James French along with a few sailors and, as it turned out, Moses Kirkland. On the 9<sup>th</sup> of October the British detachment landed near the plantation of a man thought loyal but soon discovered rebels investing the area. Capt. French capitulated losing five vessels and 141 prisoners, two of whom were Kirkland and his son, Moses Jr.<sup>41</sup>

For the second time in the war, Moses Kirkland found himself a prisoner in the hands of the Americans. Just like the first

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<sup>40</sup> Warren, *Kirkland claim*, 847. The Battle of Briar Creek was a disaster for the Americans. It occurred on March 3, 1779. Wilson, 81-99.

<sup>41</sup> *Virginia Gazette*, 6 Nov. 1779; Warren, *Kirkland claim*, 847.

time, they recognized his importance and quickly determined not to allow him any parole or exchange.<sup>42</sup> Fortunately for Kirkland, this time his incarceration was cut short. While “with his son confined in irons, put on Board of Rebel Galley to be sent to Charles Town, which was by distress forced to put into Tybee Harbor where his Majesty’s Galley, the *Comet* lay.” The rebel galley was no match for the *Comet* and Kirkland “again joined his Majesty’s troops at Savannah.”<sup>43</sup>

### Implementing the Southern Strategy

The Franco-American siege and attack on Savannah was broken and the French Fleet sailed while the Americans withdrew back to South Carolina.<sup>44</sup> The situation in Savannah remained relatively uneventful until late spring 1780 when Clinton defeated the Americans at Charlestown capturing most of the Southern Continental Army under Maj. Gen. Benjamin Lincoln.<sup>45</sup> When Lt. Col. Banastre Tarleton defeated Col. Abraham Buford at the Waxhaws in late May, there were no organized Continentals remaining in South Carolina or

Georgia.<sup>46</sup> The time for raising the backcountry Loyalists had come and Moses Kirkland joined the British column moving toward Ninety Six.<sup>47</sup> On July 6 he received a commission and set about the task of raising his regiment of militia.<sup>48</sup>

The occupation seemed to go well for the first few weeks. Almost all the men of Long Canes and Ninety Six gave parole upon the British arrival in the South Carolina backcountry. Since they were some of the most heavily populated areas of the South Carolina backcountry and represented the brigade of militia Gen. Andrew Williamson, the British had reason to feel secure in the district.<sup>49</sup> The original commander was Lt. Col. Nisbet Balfour. On the 17<sup>th</sup> of July, he reported to Lord Cornwallis that Loyalist recruits available were “fully more than I expected, and I apprehend that at least 1500 young and active men could be got from these eight battalions”

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<sup>46</sup> Jim Piecuch, “Massacre or Myth? Banastre Tarleton at the Waxhaws, May 29, 1780,” *Southern Campaigns of the American Revolution*, Vol. 1, No. 2, Oct. 2004), 4-19.

<sup>47</sup> British Lt. Col. Nisbet Balfour of the 23<sup>d</sup> Regiment, Royal Welsh Fusiliers, was appointed to command the garrison Ninety Six, a colonial village which controlled the main road from Charlestown to the British Cherokee allies and western South Carolina.

<sup>48</sup> Warren, *Kirkland claim*, 848.

<sup>49</sup> Pursuant to Gen. Henry Clinton’s proclamations, many SC militiamen surrendered and accepted parole and British protection including Ninety Six District militia commander, Gen. Andrew Williamson.

while still leaving plenty for defense.<sup>50</sup>

The situation began to deteriorate within a few weeks. A large party of rebels from the Ceded Lands in Georgia had refused parole and continued the fight from positions deep in the South Carolina backcountry west of Ninety Six. They had skirmished with Capt. James Dunlap more than once and were soon joined by volunteer partisans from North Carolina. In mid-August Lt. Col. John Harris Cruger (who succeeded Balfour at Ninety Six) sent Lt. Col. Isaac Allen with 200 regulars and 150 of Kirkland’s militia across the Savannah to try and “disarm every suspicious man” in the Ceded Lands.<sup>51</sup>

The mission to disarm rebels failed miserably. Instead, another idea turned up in correspondence to Gen. Cornwallis, namely the building of additional forts west of Ninety Six where the rebels were. According to Kirkland and passed along to Cornwallis, “that part of the country was, and will now more than ever be, a den of villains.”<sup>52</sup>

Kirkland’s reports proved prophetic as, only days later, the South Carolina Royalist provincial regiment, commanded by Col. Alexander Innes, along with local Loyalist militia, found themselves defeated by a North

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<sup>50</sup> Balfour to Cornwallis, 17 July 1780, Saberton, 1:252.

<sup>51</sup> Cruger to Cornwallis, 11 Aug. 1780, Saberton, 1:260.

<sup>52</sup> McLaurin to Balfour, 16 Aug. 1780, Warren, 150.

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<sup>42</sup> Walton to Lincoln, 13 Oct. 1779; Warren, *Kirkland claim*, 847.

<sup>43</sup> Warren, *Kirkland claim*, 847

<sup>44</sup> The Franco-American Siege of Savannah, Sept. 16 - Oct. 16, 1779 ended in the Allies defeat.

<sup>45</sup> Carl Borick, *A Gallant Defense: The Siege of Charleston, 1780* (Columbia, SC: USC Press, 2003).

Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia partisan cooperation. Lured into a classic frontier ambush, the combined forces of militia Cols. Isaac Shelby, Elijah Clarke, and James Williams wounded Innes and captured most of his regiment.<sup>53</sup> The British defeat at Musgrove Mill occurred right in the heart of the South Carolina backcountry and overshadowed Gen. Horatio Gates's far more significant loss of a Continental Army at Camden. An assessment made in the aftermath revealed problems within the new Loyalist militia.<sup>54</sup>

Colonel Cruger reported that, "I have made a pretty critical inspection into Kirkland's and King's regiments as I found myself liable to be vastly deceived by their reports or returns. Indeed they knew not themselves what men or arms they had for service. Kirkland has short of 100 men with (Maj. Patrick) Ferguson, and near 200 at home that he thinks would fight, tho' badly arm'd."<sup>55</sup>

Less than a week later Cruger provided an even more sobering assessment of Kirkland's regiment. "I am also clear in the opinion that a large majority of

Kirkland's regiment are still in their hearts rebels. He thinks 300 would serve with him. I do Not. I am induced to be thus particular on a subject I humbly conceive very momentous, as I have hitherto understood that the strength of the militia in this part of the province was much more considerable than what I find it."<sup>56</sup> In fact, at the first sign of adversity, the newly formed loyalist militia, such an important piece to the occupation and Southern Strategy, had showed itself weak and unwilling to stand up to its Whig counterpart.

Encouraged by their success at Musgrove Mill, Elijah Clarke and a smaller militia group from South Carolina under Lt. Col. James McCall marched across South Carolina to Georgia and laid siege to Augusta. Cruger was forced to march in relief thereby leaving Kirkland in command at Ninety Six in his absence. The trial run went fine as Kirkland handled his time in command without incident.<sup>57</sup>

Then came the British defeat at the Battle of Kings Mountain which left the Ninety Six District desperately short of Loyalist regiments for patrol and militia for protection at home.<sup>58</sup> In a

desperate attempt to rebuild his army, Lt. Col. Cruger "agreed and engaged with Colonel Kirkland to raise immediately from four to five hundred men to serve for twelve months in any part of South Carolina, at present to fortify and take post at Musgrove's Mill or the Iron Works." Cruger had authorized full pay for Kirkland as a lieutenant colonel and "British pay, provisions, and clothing" for the men.<sup>59</sup>

Unfortunately for Kirkland, Lt. Col. Cruger was overruled by Balfour who had already decided to give command of the new regiment to Capt. Andrew Maxwell who was a regular. Balfour felt that "if an officer, and an active one, is not at the head of the militia, nothing can be expected of them. Captain Maxwell with his Lieutenant and his company of Grenadiers may make them somewhat steady, but no militia officer unassisted ever will." Even though not excited to give Kirkland command, Balfour did allow for Kirkland to receive a lieutenant colonel's pay if he could recruit enough men.<sup>60</sup>

With his western flank now exposed, Lord Cornwallis immediately withdrew his army from Charlotte, NC, moving back to camp in central South Carolina at Winnsboro. Emboldened by

Mountain; many of these men captured, wounded or killed.

<sup>59</sup> Cruger to Balfour, 24 Oct. 1780, Saberton, 2:206.

<sup>60</sup> Balfour to Rawdon, 29 Oct. 1780, Saberton, 2:137.

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<sup>53</sup> William T. Graves, *Backcountry Revolutionary* (Lugoff, SC: Southern Campaigns of the American Revolution Press, 2012), 100-121.

<sup>54</sup> Lord Cornwallis never trusted the local Loyalist militias especially after the defection of Lt. Col. James Lisle and Col. William Henry Mills' militias. Cornwallis to Clinton, 6 Aug. 1780, and Saberton 1:175-179.

<sup>55</sup> Cruger to Cornwallis, 23 Aug. 1780, Saberton, 2:171.

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<sup>56</sup> Cruger to Cornwallis, 27 Aug. 1780, Saberton, 2:173.

<sup>57</sup> Cruger to Cornwallis, 23 Sept. 1780, Saberton, 2:193.

<sup>58</sup> British Maj. Patrick Ferguson was killed and many men of his command were killed, wounded or captured on Oct. 7, 1780. Men detached from 5 Loyalist militia regiments from the Ninety Six District were with Ferguson at Kings

the American victory at Kings Mountain, Gen. Thomas Sumter gathered militia and threatened Lord Cornwallis's camp. Sumter initially wanted to attack Ninety Six.

After a week of recruiting, Kirkland gathered his militia at Williams Fort in the backcountry.<sup>61</sup> He hoped to have 300 men within a day or two but he warned Cornwallis that another strong post was needed to bolster the militia and prevent the rebels from recruiting all the men in the area. "Unless sum amediate assistance is sent in order to astablish a post in the upper end of the fork between the Braud and Saludy River, you loose the hole support of the militia and it is feared the greatest part will revolt."<sup>62</sup> Kirkland also noted that rebel partisans under Lt. Col. Elijah Clarke were again active in the area.

Word got back to Kirkland that Balfour had denied his appointment as the commander of the new Loyalist regiment raised from the militia of the lower Ninety Six district. He was quite dispirited and "as a loss how to proceed" without a commission. He had already gathered about 200 or 300 men who seemed in good spirits. Kirkland felt that, if

he could just be given command of "all the militia in this district" and be allowed to continue drafting men, "I should soon be at the head of a very beautiful regiment."<sup>63</sup> Unfortunately for Kirkland, Cornwallis did not jump at the chance to overrule Balfour. Instead, he provided a very nice assurance that he held "the best opinion of your loyalty and zeal for his Majesty's service" and would continue to support the militia.<sup>64</sup>

Before Cornwallis answer reached Kirkland, on the 8<sup>th</sup> of November, he reported a complete reversal of fortune. Rumors around the backcountry described his men as "eaven afraid of staying with me in the fort for fear of being sieged. The spirit of the militia of this fork is sunk so low that no incuragement" will be effective until the rebels are given a "sudden check."<sup>65</sup> Down to only 115 men, Kirkland added a petition signed by them requesting a strong garrison to "shelter the suffering Loyalists from the shocking ravages of those Rascally Banditti whose greatest mercies are bloody cruelties." They requested that Moses Kirkland be given command over the entire district.<sup>66</sup>

Unfortunately for Kirkland, Balfour continued to scoff at the notion that he should be given command. "He is by no means a man of influence or reputation in the country." Instead, Balfour wanted Robert Cunningham for the command, calling him "the best man in the country to command the whole."<sup>67</sup>

While the command discussion continued, back at Williams Fort, the South Carolina backcountry continued to fall apart around Kirkland. He was down to only 100 men. Of the other Loyalists, "they think it needless making any reistance, and the greater part incline to be hiding in swamps, and many others appear to be making their peace with" the rebels. His reports took on a note of outright desperation.<sup>68</sup>

Unable or unwilling to help out due to his other troubles, Cornwallis showed frustration instead of sympathy for Kirkland's plight. "If our militia are so timid and supine to suffer themselves to be plundered by a force so much inferior to what they could raise, it is certainly their fault."<sup>69</sup> The debate raged for several days with Cornwallis even accusing Kirkland of

<sup>61</sup> This was probably a fortified barn at Col. James Williams's home near Mudlick Creek in the Ninety Six District.

<sup>62</sup> Kirkland to Cornwallis, 31 Oct. 1780, Saberton, 3:377. Note the sample writing of Moses Kirkland. Although his spelling and grammar were very poor, Kirkland did not hesitate to send out frequent letters to Lord Cornwallis.

<sup>63</sup> Kirkland to Cornwallis, 6 Nov. 1780, Saberton, 3:379.

<sup>64</sup> Cornwallis to Kirkland, 8 Nov. 1780, Saberton, 3:380.

<sup>65</sup> Kirkland to Cornwallis, 8 Nov. 1780, Saberton, 3:380-382.

<sup>66</sup> Loyalist Petition to Cornwallis, undated, Saberton, 3:396. Note also that the petition was signed by loyalist leaders of the area including Patrick

Cunningham, brother of Robert Cunningham who was about to become the rival for command of the Ninety Six District Loyalist militia.

<sup>67</sup> Balfour to Cornwallis, 8 Nov. 1780, Saberton, 3:65.

<sup>68</sup> Kirkland to Cornwallis, 10 Nov. 1780, Saberton, 3:382-383.

<sup>69</sup> Cornwallis to Kirkland, 11 Nov. 1780, Saberton, 3:383.

exaggerating the problems with his men to “raise his own merit.”<sup>70</sup>

Kirkland’s urgent pleas continued for another week while Cornwallis grew less tolerant. “I cannot defend every man’s house from being plundered, and I must say that when I see a whole settlement running away from 20 or 30 robbers, I think they deserve to be robbed.”<sup>71</sup> In spite of his accusations of cowardice against the militia the general recalled Tarleton from his operation against Francis Marion and redirected him to command an expedition into the Ninety Six district to “alter the situation of affairs. \* \* \* Many who had been neutral and some pretended friends flocking to the enemy’s standard. Only one hundred militia embodied for us in that extensive and friendly district, and those commanded by Kirkland.”<sup>72</sup> There was no hint of a reason to think the statement concerning Kirkland was meant to instill confidence. Tarleton chased Sumter’s growing militia army which took a position west of the Tyger River on Blackstock’s Plantation. There late in the day of November 20, some of Tarleton’s men made a premature attack on the well-positioned American riflemen who outnumbered the British three to one. Tarleton’s men were picked off by the Americans before

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<sup>70</sup> Cornwallis to Cruger, 11 Nov. 1780, Saberton, 3:268-269.

<sup>71</sup> Cornwallis to Kirkland, 13 Nov. 1780, Saberton, 3:385.

<sup>72</sup> Cornwallis to Balfour, 17 Nov. 1780, Saberton, 3:75.

Tarleton could bring up his artillery and infantry. The fighting stopped at dusk and Sumter, one of the few Americans wounded, dispersed his men. Though the Americans planned attack against Williams Fort and Ninety Six was aborted, the victory was clearly the combined North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia militias cooperating. They had stopped Tarleton.<sup>73</sup>

Only two days later, Cornwallis met with Robert Cunningham on the subject of commanding the militia. He did not dismiss Kirkland but did promote Cunningham over him. “Cunningham was here today full of zeal. I made him a brigadier general of militia with Colonels full pay from the 24<sup>th</sup> of last June. I hope now we shall make something of the militia of that district, which never could have been the case under Kirkland.”<sup>74</sup>

Just like the resentments he felt back in summer of 1775, Moses Kirkland reacted quickly and badly. He sent in a request that Cornwallis allow him to “resign the command of the regiment of militia you have been pleased to honor me with.” His letter displayed clear bitterness in the decision. He pointed out that Cunningham had previously refused to serve while Kirkland had remained active and loyal at all times. “I expected your

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<sup>73</sup> Patrick O’Kelley, *Nothing but Blood and Slaughter*, (Lillington, NC: Blue House Tavern Press, 2004) 2:365-373

<sup>74</sup> Cornwallis to Balfour, 22 Nov. 1780, Saberton, 3:87.

Lordship wou’d have done me the honour” of commanding the district but, since he did not, Kirkland wanted to leave the area and move to Savannah where his business interests remained unsettled.<sup>75</sup>

When he got the request, Cornwallis gave Kirkland a polite thank you letter and allowed his resignation. He explained his action to Cruger, “I wrote a few civil lines to Kirkland, but he seems so dissatisfied that I think it will be better that he should go away.”<sup>76</sup>

Kirkland immediately pressed his claim for £208 in military expenses and for sales and rentals of wagons, horses and drivers.<sup>77</sup> However these sums were not immediately available for payment. He was in the Ninety Six District acting as a Loyalist militia regimental commander from June until December 13, 1780.<sup>78</sup> Kirkland’s second in command, Maj. John Hamilton, eventually commanded the “Lower Regiment of Ninety Six Militia” in 1782 though they were then confined to the Charlestown area.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Kirkland to Cornwallis, 25 Nov. 1780, Saberton, 3:386.

<sup>76</sup> Cornwallis to Cruger, 30 Nov. 1780, Saberton, 3:277.

<sup>77</sup> Fraser to Cornwallis, 12 Jan. 1781, Saberton, 3:387-391.

<sup>78</sup> Murtie June Clark, *Loyalists in the Southern Campaign of the Revolutionary War* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1981) 221.

<sup>79</sup> This John Hamilton is not to be confused with Lt. Col. John Hamilton of

At that point, Kirkland gathered up his property “with what few negroes he could find into Georgia” and settled briefly on some land near Ebenezer above Savannah. A few months later the rebels captured Augusta and all the Loyalists evacuated to Savannah. They remained for a year until the final evacuation of Savannah came in July 1782. At that point Kirkland sailed to Jamaica with the “small remains of his fortune.” He spent a few years there concentrating on his claims. In 1787 Kirkland died at sea while traveling to London trying to collect.

It is interesting to note that Gen. Robert Cunningham fared no better than Kirkland as commander of Loyalist militia in the Ninety Six District. In less than two weeks from his commission, Cunningham would be writing reports just as dismal and panicky as those previously coming from Kirkland.<sup>80</sup>

## Summary

Moses Kirkland’s entanglement with the Southern Strategy runs from the beginning to the end of his career as a soldier in the Revolution. Convinced by his ability to gather support in 1775, Kirkland spent four years planning and selling the concept to British officers. He met with governors and generals from East Florida to New York including

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North Carolina who commanded the NC Royalist provincial regiment.

<sup>80</sup> Cunningham to Cornwallis, 2 Dec. 1780, Saberton, 3:392-393.

Howe, Clinton and Cornwallis providing them with information regarding the extent of loyalism in the South Carolina Backcountry. Once the job of selling the strategy was complete, Kirkland joined the first expedition south to help put the strategy into implementation. Unfortunately, he did not realize the impact Whig leaders had on the population during the early war years and found enthusiasm for the Crown less than expected during the first expedition to Augusta in 1779. In spite of the early indications, British plans remained to use the southern states as a stage for reoccupation and reestablishment of Crown government.

Kirkland worked hard during the implementation phase but he was an older man and not viewed as a spirited officer. The British officers seemed insistent on blaming Kirkland for the repeated failure of the Loyalist militia but, in truth, almost all of the young and ‘spirited’ young men of the backcountry had long been serving with the rebels and were not available for service. Those that were compelled to serve in Cornwallis’ militia regiments rarely engaged an enemy and often showed themselves timid or otherwise unwilling to fight for the Crown. Kirkland was certainly not alone in the inability to create viable militia regiments. All of the other Loyalist leaders of the South Carolina Backcountry took a turn at similar failings.

Even so, to look at Kirkland’s experience is to view the failure

of the Southern Strategy in the context of a single key player. Southern Loyalists, displaced Royal governors and officials spent years in London and the colonies trying to lure British armies into the south with tales of loyal hordes just waiting for a chance to come out of hiding in the backcountry. When they finally succeeded, the promised hordes turned out to be long gone, either already evacuated or joined the rebels along the way. Those that remained were totally ineffective at creating any kind of military or civil force for helping reestablish British control. Kirkland himself provides an example of a man central to both the selling and the implementing of the famed Southern Strategy. And, of course, its equally famous failure to recapture the southern states.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Kirkland pursued his claims from the Crown and died in a shipwreck in 1788 going from Jamaica to London.