Gen. Nathanael Greene’s Moves to Force the British into the Charlestown Area, to Capture Dorchester, Johns Island and to Protect the Jacksonborough Assembly

November 1781 - February 1782

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Fall 1781 – South Carolina

The British Southern strategy was unraveling. Lt. Gen. Charles, Lord Cornwallis surrendered at Yorktown, Virginia in October 1781. The British army of occupation in North and South Carolina and Georgia could hold selected posts and travel en masse at will, but could not control the countryside where rebel militias and state troops patrolled. Their southern strongholds were within 35 miles of their supply ports: Charlestown, Savannah and Wilmington, NC. In South Carolina the British withdrew from their advanced bases at Camden, Ninety Six, Augusta, and Georgetown, and only held posts arcing around Charlestown in the aftermath of the bloody battle at Eutaw Springs in September. Defending Charlestown, the British had major forward posts at Fair Lawn Barony (in modern Moncks Corner) at the head of navigation of the west branch of the Cooper River; at the colonial town of Dorchester at the head of navigation on the Ashley River; at the Wappataw Meeting House on the headwaters of the Wando River; and at Stono Ferry to control mainland access across the Stono River to Johns Island. The parishes north of Charlestown were contested ground. British cavalry rode at will to the south side of the Santee River and as far upstream as Pres. Henry Laurens’s plantation.¹ These mounted raiders were based at Wantoot Plantation, seven miles north of Moncks Corner. They collected food, slaves, women, and children.² In western South Carolina Loyalist militia mounted a murderous raid of retribution inland to the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains.³

¹ Henry Laurens, a wealthy South Carolina merchant and planter, twice served as President of the Continental Congress. He had several plantations including one in the modern Santee State Park, just northwest of I-95 near Santee, SC.
³
Maj. Gen. Nathanael Greene, commander of the Southern Department of the Continental Army, moved to Richardson’s Plantation in the High Hills of the Santee to camp after his Eutaw Springs campaign. Having lost many key officers, Greene needed to rest his troops, care for his wounded, reorganize the units, and wait for reinforcements and supplies. Here Greene learned of the Franco-American victory over Lord Cornwallis at Yorktown. This would free up men and supplies to again trickle south to the support of his operations in the Southern Department. Greene was elated at Washington’s victory and his army and the state militias’ performance at Eutaw Springs. Greene, overly optimistically, reported that British Lt. Col. Alexander Stewart’s flight from Eutaw Springs after the battle there convinced the British to burn their stores and abandon their forward bases at both Fair Lawn and Dorchester.6

As Greene withdrew north towards his camp of repose after chasing the British as far south as Ferguson Swamp, he assigned Lt. Col. Hezekiah Maham’s cavalry and Col. Isaac Shelby’s and Col. John Sevier’s over-mountain militia to reinforce B. Gen. Francis Marion who was patrolling the lower Santee River and the area northeast of Charlestown.6 Marion established his command post at Cantey’s Plantation on the north side of the Santee River to gather intelligence and contest the redcoats’ actions in the parishes north of Charlestown. Lt. Col. Peter Horry continued his command at Georgetown, SC.

New British Command

The new British commander in Charlestown, Maj. Gen. Alexander Leslie, arrived on November 8, 1781.7 His orders from Lt. Gen., Sir Henry Clinton were, “that you will endeavor to preserve such of the Posts in that Province in actual Possession of the Kings Troops, as you judge will be conducive to H M. Interest. Always regarding the Safety of Charlestown as the Principal Object of your Attention, to which every other Consideration must of course give way. Wherefore if the Post at Wilmington is not already called in, it may become an Object of Consideration whether under our present Circumstances it will not be proper to withdraw it.”8 Leslie learned of B. Gen. Griffith Rutherford’s North Carolina army moving near Wilmington, NC, and French warships cruising near Cape Fear. Fearing that the British occupation force at Wilmington might be

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3 Marion to Greene, Nov. 14, 1781, PNG, IX: 573. South Carolina Loyalist militia Col. Hezekiah Williams and Maj. William “Bloody Bill” Cunningham were principal South Carolina backcountry raiders in the fall of 1781, conducting the infamous “Bloody Scout” raid.
4 Greene to Gov. Rutledge, Sept. 9, 1781 and Greene to Thomas McKean, Sept. 11, 1781. PNG, IX: 308, 328-333;
5 Greene to Pres. McKean, Sept. 11, 1781. PNG, IX: 332 The British actually continued to occupy these posts until raids by the Americans in Nov. and Dec. 1781. Colleton’s Fair Lawn Barony or Plantation is at Moncks Corner, SC.
6 Maham’s cavalry was at Eutaw Springs and joined Lee’s Legion cavalry just after Eutaw Springs in shadowing the British withdrawal to Moncks Corner and in an attempt to intercept some American prisoners. Sevier’s and Shelby’s militia were en route but did not arrive in South Carolina’s Lowcountry until Oct. 24 and Nov. 2, 1781, respectively, too late for the battle. Greene to Sevier, Sept. 1, 1781, PNG, IX: 277 n3, 341-342
7 With British Southern Department commander, Lord Cornwallis, an American prisoner after Yorktown, Maj. Gen. Alexander Leslie arrived in Charleston and relieved Gen. Paston Gould on Nov. 8, 1781 as the commander in the British Southern Department. Marion to Greene, Nov. 10, 1781, PNG, IX: 557 fn 1, 579 and 605 fn 2; Patrick O’Kelley, Nothing but Blood and Slaughter (NBBS), 3:549, fn 700.
cut off by the arrival of fresh troops released by the Franco-American victory over Lord Cornwallis at Yorktown, he ordered Maj. James H. Craig’s detachment evacuated from Wilmington; they returned to Charlestown by ship. These were the last British regular troops in North Carolina; however, Loyalist partisan troops under militia Col. David Fanning continued to raid and terrorize the central North Carolina countryside. With the surrender of Lord Cornwallis’s army at Yorktown in October, and Craig back in Charlestown in late November, North Carolina and Virginia returned to complete Whig control. The British still controlled Savannah and lower Georgia, East Florida, the area around Charlestown, Canada, and their rich Caribbean colonies. Their war had escalated into a full world war with France, Holland and Spain fighting to even old scores and to obtain British colonies. The Royal Navy’s dominance of the sea was challenged.

Greene determined to establish a post at the colonial town of Orangeburgh to control the flow of supplies from western South Carolina’s backcountry Tories into Charlestown and to quell Tory sentiments in the area. Orangeburgh, situated on the North Fork of the Edisto River, controlled the main roads from the Cherokee lands, Ninety Six, and Granby to Charlestown. It, as many South Carolina Backcountry districts, was deeply divided between Whigs and Tories. When the British troops arrived in Orangeburgh in the summer of 1780, they appointed John Fisher as colonel of the local Loyalist militia and he handily raised 12 companies for Crown service. In early November 1781, Greene suggested that South Carolina militia and State Troops under Gen. Thomas Sumter with Lt. Col. Wade Hampton’s cavalry base their forces there. Greene had also received reports of a South Carolina Loyalist militia raid from Charlestown into western South Carolina. Lead by SC Loyalist militia Gen. Robert Cunningham, Col. Hezekiah Williams, Lt. Cols. John Lawrence and Baily Chaney, and Maj. William “Bloody Bill” Cunningham formed corps of mounted independent troops of Loyalist militias with British license to raid deep into South Carolina’s backcountry. Gen. Sumter’s troops at Orangeburgh soon skirmished with the


10 O’Kelley, NBBs, 3: 401-402, 405-406, and 409-410

11 Lambert, SC Loyalists, p. 104-105; Ferguson to Cornwallis, June 14, 1780, CP, I: 106.

12 Greene to Sumter, Nov. 2, 1781, PNG, IX: 517-518 and 570. Wade Hampton (I)

13 South Carolina Loyalist militia Maj. William “Bloody Bill” Cunningham served as a company commander in Maj. Patrick Cunningham’s Loyalist militia regiment in 1780. Loyalist officer John Lawrence, who commanded groups of “light horse,” was from the Stevens Creek area of South Carolina; Baily Chaney was from the Big Creek area (north of modern Saluda, SC); and Hezekiah Williams was also from the Stevens Creek area (in modern McCormick and Edgefield Counties), near the Savannah River. All three served as company commanders in Col. John Cotton’s Stevens Creek Regiment of Loyalist militia in 1780; Cheney, Williams and William Cunningham organized separate regiments in 1781 in Gen. Robert Cunningham’s Ninety Six Loyalist militia brigade. Robert Cunningham was appointed brigadier of the Ninety Six District Loyalist militia on Nov. 22, 1780. Murtie June Clark, Loyalists in the Southern Campaign of the Revolutionary War, Vol. 1 (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1981), CP, I:117 n 9 It appears that Gen. Cunningham and John Lawrence returned to Charlestown while Williams, Cunningham and Cheney continued on their infamous “Bloody Scout” raid. No copy of the British orders for this raid have been located, but they all eventually returned to British controlled Charlestown and this author believes the raid was at minimum informally sanctioned.
infamous “Bloody Scout” raid into South Carolina’s western backcountry.\textsuperscript{15} The Edisto swamps hid many groups of Loyalists, some of which supported the Bloody Scout raids; they were finally rooted out by Gens. Andrew Pickens and Sumter in December 1781.\textsuperscript{16}

Lt. Col. Henry “Light Horse Harry” Lee, controversial young scion of a prominent Virginia family, was given permission by Congress to raise a legion, a mixed unit of cavalry and light infantry, after his brave and aggressive campaigning in the northern theatre. Lee and his Legion were detached by Gen. Washington to reinforce Gen. Greene in the Southern Department where he successfully participated with Greene and the South Carolina partisans in reducing six British posts.\textsuperscript{17} Lee’s Legion fought at Eutaw Springs with Greene’s main army. After the Battle of Eutaw Springs, Lee was detailed to ride to Yorktown where he arrived in time for Lord Cornwallis’s surrender on October 19, though without his Legion. Lee was to brief Gen. George Washington, French Gen. Rochambeau and the French fleet commander, Adm. de Grasse, on Greene’s situation in hopes to induce the French to lend naval support to Greene in recapturing South Carolina and Georgia.\textsuperscript{18} This hoped for Allied cooperation failed to materialize; however, Gen. Washington set in play a plan to reinforce Greene in the Southern Department with the brigades of Gens. “Mad” Anthony Wayne of Pennsylvania and Mordecai Gist of Maryland, both commanded by another Pennsylvanian, Maj. Gen. Arthur St. Clair.\textsuperscript{19} Lee returned to South Carolina in late November 1781 and reported to Greene the details of the events at Yorktown along with Washington’s promise of

\textsuperscript{14} Orangeburgh, SC, (now Orangeburg) was taken from its Loyalist garrison on May 11, 1781 by Gen. Thomas Sumter. Sumter to Greene, May 1, 1781, PNG, VIII: 244. It was strongly defended by a brick jail and earthen redoubt built around the court house (\textit{CP}, I: 107); however, Orangeburg was soon reoccupied by Lt. Cols. Francis, Lord Rawdon, John Harris Cruger and Alexander Stewart in early July 1781. Greene concentrated his army and moved to Turkey Hill, only four miles northeast of Orangeburg on July 11, 1781, but the British did not sally forth from fortified Orangeburg nor did Greene choose to attack their fixed position. Greene then withdrew to his camp of repose in the High Hills of the Santee.

\textsuperscript{15} Sumter to Greene, Nov. 14, 1781, PNG, IX: 575 and 615. Maj. William “Bloody Bill” Cunningham, one of South Carolina’s most infamous Loyalist militia officers, formed a troop and led them on his “Bloody Scout” Campaign of terror, murder and revenge, from Charleston in the fall of 1781. Hezekiah Williams, appointed a Loyalist militia colonel in 1780, recruited men mostly from south of the Saluda River and joined in Cunningham’s raid. Lambert, \textit{SC Loyalists}, p. 175 and 206. One of Sumter’s patrols, led by Maj. William Buford, bumped into one of Cunningham’s patrols at Col. Christopher Rowe’s Plantation about one mile south of Orangeburg on Nov. 13, 1781. Soon thereafter the remaining South Carolina State troops in the Orangeburg area, led by Maj. John Moore, clashed with Cunningham’s corps.

\textsuperscript{16} Sumter to Greene, Dec. 22, 1781, PNG, X: 89-90

\textsuperscript{17} Lee operated with Gen. Francis Marion to raid Georgetown, SC, and to capture Forts Watson and Motte; he worked with Sumter’s brigade to capture Fort Granby; his Legion captured Fort Galphin/Dreadnaught; he worked with Gen. Andrew Pickens and Col. Elijah Clarke to capture the two forts in Augusta; and rejoined Greene for the assault on Ninety Six.


\textsuperscript{19} Gen. Mordecai Gist fought under Gen. Horatio Gates at his defeat in the Battle of Camden in August 1780. He commanded the Maryland 3\textsuperscript{rd} and 4\textsuperscript{th} Regiments at Yorktown. The Maryland 1\textsuperscript{st} and 2\textsuperscript{nd} Regiments were with Gates and Greene, hard fought veterans of the southern campaigns. Robert K. Wright, Jr., \textit{The Continental Army}, p. 277-279.
reinforcements by land. Lee, after a brief illness, resumed command of his Legion along with the balance of Greene’s Continental cavalry on December 7.\textsuperscript{20}

In western South Carolina militia Gen. Andrew Pickens patrolled the Indian frontier and watched the local Loyalists.

With the threat of Lord Cornwallis’s army abated and inland South Carolina starting to recover from a year of British and Loyalist domination, Greene could turn his attention south, and the global \textit{politic real} of the American Revolution, which had exploded into a global war. Possession of territory and the establishment of a functional civil government in South Carolina and Georgia became paramount. North Carolina’s Whig government never lost control of much of its territory and continued with a fully functional civil government throughout the war despite the British army’s invasions and even the capture of their sitting governor. Greene knew that a functioning civil government was necessary to work out the thorny questions of raising men to fight and paying for the war and government, reestablishing law enforcement and courts, and resolving questions of loyalty and retribution against the Loyalists. Greene did not have the military manpower to rule states by force and knew that reestablishing government by free consent of the governed was fundamental to the Whig cause. He also knew that to strongly claim territory in European peace treaty negotiations, it needed to be both occupied and controlled by American civil authority.

With Georgia’s capital and principal city, Savannah, still in British control, it became paramount to encourage the reestablishment of a functional civil government in Georgia. Greene supported the Whig political leaders of Georgia in their attempt to jumpstart the reestablishment of American civil government in Georgia.\textsuperscript{21} He would detach troops in that direction as soon as he was reinforced.

South Carolina’s General Assembly had dissolved when Charlestown fell in 1780, and Gov. John Rutledge had escaped with three councilors to conduct a saddlebag government in exile.\textsuperscript{22} He was given extraordinary powers to conduct the South Carolina government without a legislature. The Whig cause espoused representative government, so Greene and Rutledge began discussing a call for new elections and when and where to reconvene South Carolina’s General Assembly.\textsuperscript{23}

Greene gathered intelligence on the British deployments and patrol patterns. Gen. Marion, posted at Cantey’s Plantation on the north side of the Santee River, reported on November 2 that the British were still strongly posted at Daniel Ravenel’s Wantoot Plantation and raided north to Simons Plantation at Eutaw Springs and that Lt. Col. Hezekiah Maham’s cavalry toured as far south as Cainhoy. Marion reported on November 8 that the British had two regiments posted at Wappataw Meeting House, and on November 10 that Gen. Leslie had just landed in Charlestown, that 200


\textsuperscript{21} Greene to Ga. Delegates, Aug. 25, 1781, \textit{PNG}, IX: 238-239


\textsuperscript{23} Greene to Sumter, Sept. 10, 1781, \textit{PNG}, IX: 325 n 3; 578 n 2; and 647 n 5; Rutledge and Greene first discussed calling for the General Assembly to meet in Camden, but later decided on Jacksonborough when Greene was reinforced and Leslie was not. \textit{PNG}, X: 51, 101, 118, and 139
British cavalry raided Laurens’s Ferry and a large British party was at St. Stephens.\textsuperscript{24} Lt. Col. Wade Hampton was posted at the Congarees and Col. William Harden was at Pocotaligo.\textsuperscript{25} Col. John Sevier arrived with his militia from over the Blue Ridge Mountains at Marion’s camp on the Santee in late October and was soon followed by Col. Isaac Shelby and his Sullivan County (NC) Regiment of Militia. They were detached by Marion to augment Lt. Col. Hezekiah Maham’s cavalry regiment. Greene learned of Loyalist Maj. William “Bloody Bill” Cunningham’s attack on Sumter’s detachment near Orangeburg on November 14.\textsuperscript{26} The same day, Maj. Joseph Eggleston with Lee’s Legion infantry took up a post near Murray’s Ferry.\textsuperscript{27}

Marion moved south of Santee, about one-half way between Murray’s and Lenud’s Ferry to camp on Peyre’s Plantation on November 14. From this camp he could better track the British raids from their post at Wantoot. Marion reported that the British cavalry came within two miles of his position and 200 men went to Nelson’s Ferry as the British patrolled from Sinkler’s Plantation near Eutaw Springs to Laurens’s Plantation daily.\textsuperscript{28} From this base Marion directed Maham, Shelby and Sevier to attack the British at their posts around Moncks Corner: Biggin Bridge, the Colleton Mansion, Stony Landing, and a redoubt nearby. This raid attacked the British garrison and hospital located in the Colleton mansion on November 17, 1781; the mansion burned resulting in a controversy over who started the fire and the Americans’ raid on a hospital.\textsuperscript{29} The garrison troops retreated into their strong redoubt on the property while the Americans liberated the camp of supplies and captured 82 convalescing British soldiers and three hospital orderlies.\textsuperscript{30} This bold stroke was behind the British front line; posted only seven miles away at Wantoot Col. Stewart had more than 1,000 battle-hardened soldiers. Marion’s men next planned to attack the British outpost at the Wappataw Meeting House; however, the British withdrew before the Americans arrived to fight.\textsuperscript{31}

Gen. Leslie was redeploying his troops, pulling them in towards Charlestown and strengthening the earthworks crossing the neck of Charlestown’s peninsula, built around the Quarter House Tavern. His orders from his superior, Sir Henry Clinton, were to hold Charlestown and not risk aggressive

\textsuperscript{24} Marion to Greene, Nov. 2, 1781, PNG, IX: 521, 549, 557, and 573. Marion reported that the British regiments posted at Wappataw were the 63\textsuperscript{rd} and Volunteers of New York provincials.

\textsuperscript{25} Wade Hampton to Greene, Nov. 3, 1781 and Harden to Greene, Nov. 7, 1781, PNG, IX: 524, 543 and 546. Pocotaligo, site of the British Fort Balfour which was captured by Harden on April 13, 1781, controlled the main overland route from Savannah to Charlestown.

\textsuperscript{26} Sevier to Greene, Nov. 9, 1781, PNG IX: 552 and 575 Col. John Sevier commanded the Washington County, NC, Regiment of Militia, now eastern Tennessee, part of the so called “overnountain men.”

\textsuperscript{27} Eggleston to Greene, Nov. 14, 1781, PNG IX: 572, 582 Murray’s Ferry crossed the Santee River north of modern Pineville, SC, near US Hwy 52’s bridge over the Santee.

\textsuperscript{28} Marion to Greene, Nov. 14, 1781, PNG IX: 573 Henry Laurens owned a plantation on the south side of the Santee River in the modern Santee State Park, near Santee, SC.


\textsuperscript{31} Marion to Greene, Nov. 10, 1781, PNG, IX: 557, 631. Wappataw Meeting House was located on 15 Mile Landing Road (S-10-584) near US Highway 17 North of Charleston; its graveyard is extant. http://gaz.jrshelby.com/wappetawbr.htm From Wappataw the British could support their forward control points for the roads into the Mount Pleasant area at Awendaw Creek and Miller’s Bridge over the upper Wando River. Gen. Leslie had given orders to his furthest posts to withdraw if attacked in force.
offensive actions. After the Americans’ bold raid on the Colleton Mansion hospital near Monck’s Corner on November 17, Leslie withdrew Stewart’s advanced post from Wantoot Plantation to Goose Creek, abandoning Fairlawn. He also withdrew the British troops from Wappataw Meeting House, Miller Bridge and Awendaw Creek, probably having them dig in around Christ Church, nine miles closer to Charleston. Unknown to Gen. Greene, Leslie gave orders for the mainland defenses of the Stono Ferry to withdraw across the Stono River onto Johns Island if the mainland ferry landing was attacked in force, as he did the forward post at Dorchester to withdraw to Quarter House Tavern. The British maintained their post at Haddrell’s Point to control Mt. Pleasant, Daniel Island and to raid north. In addition to the local provincial troops, Leslie also had hundreds of Loyalist militia soldiers who had withdrawn from the South Carolina Backcountry and had ended up in Charleston. To bolster his defenses and to occupy these refugees, most of these Loyalist militiamen were assigned to supplement the British regulars manpower various posts guarding Charleston.

From his camp of repose at the High Hills of the Santee Gen. Greene arranged care for the many wounded from the Battle of Eutaw Springs, again reorganized his battered army which lost many key officers at Eutaw Springs, and refined his plan to return to the offensive to push the British into Charleston. Greene marched north from his High Hills camp on November 18, 1781, crossed the Wateree River at Simmon’s Upper Ferry near Stateburg, marched south down the McCord’s Ferry Road and crossed the Congaree River at McCord’s Ferry. Greene camped his army on Col. William “Old Danger” Thomson’s Belleville Plantation, just south of McCord’s Ferry over the Congaree on November 21. This area is called Buckhead Creek.

Greene’s veteran command, greatly reduced by their campaigns in the South, consisted of the Continentals of two greatly depleted Maryland regiments and Capt. Robert Kirkwood’s Delaware company; two Virginia regiments; the North Carolina brigade; a detachment of field artillery; the remnants of Pulaski’s cavalry and the 1st and 3rd Continental Light Dragoons; and Lee’s Legion. Cooperating with Greene were regiments of Gen. Sumter’s South Carolina State Troops and militia brigade; regiments from Gen. Marion’s South Carolina State Troops and militia brigade with Cols.

32 Marion to Greene, Nov. 30, 1781, PNG, IX: 642-643 and fn 4; IX: 649. The Quarter House Tavern was near the junction of the main roads from Dorchester and Goose Creek into the City, about 6 miles north, near the Charleston International Airport. http://gaz.jrshelby.com/quarterhouse.htm
33 Marion to Greene, Nov. 30, 1781, PNG, IX: 642 fn 4 and 650 fn 2;
34 Marion to Greene, Dec. 1, 1781, PNG, IX: 646; PNG, X: 5 fn 4, and X: 45 fn 2. Leslie to Lord George Germain, Jan. 3, 1782. PRO 30/55 # 4035
35 Greene’s army crossed the Wateree River at Simmon’s Upper Ferry, later called Garner’s Ferry, now US 378 over the Wateree River. Then Greene marched south to McCord’s Ferry and crossed the Congaree River to Belleville Plantation and nearby Fort Motte which were located just south of the Great Loop of the Congaree River on Buckhead Creek, just west of where US Highway 601 crosses the Congaree River today in Calhoun County, SC. PNG, IX: 586, 591 and 594.
37 On paper in 1781 a fully-staffed Continental infantry regiment of one battalion had 717 officers and men, usually arranged in 9 companies, of which 8 were regular infantrymen and 1 light infantryman. Rarely did the Continentals ever achieve or maintain this level of manpower, and this late in the war, regiments which started with 700 men were down to less than 200 after consolidations. Robert K. Wright, Jr., The Continental Army, 158-167
Shelby’s and Sevier’s western North Carolina militia regiments; Gen. Andrew Pickens’s State Troops and militia brigade; and Col. William Harden’s South Carolina militia brigade.\textsuperscript{38}

At his new headquarters on Buckhead Creek, Greene continued to receive updated intelligence reports. Maj. Joseph Eggleston of Lee’s Legion reported that Lt. Col. James Coates and his 19\textsuperscript{th} Regiment “Green Howards” had taken the field after their brush with Gen. Sumter’s troops in August – at Biggin Church, Quinby Bridge and Shubrick’s Plantation – and his flank companies’ fight for their lives at Eutaw Springs. Greene learned the details of Maham, Sevier and Shelby’s raid on the Colleton Mansion and received a protest from the British field commander, Col. Stewart. Most importantly, Greene learned that Stewart had pulled back from his advanced post at Wantoot Plantation, Moncks Corner and Fairlawn and went “downwards,” that is south of Goose Creek.\textsuperscript{39}

Gen. Leslie explained these withdrawals in his letter to his commander, Gen. Henry Clinton.\textsuperscript{40} Marion also reported on November 27 informing Greene that Wappataw Meeting House was evacuated.\textsuperscript{41} Before Greene’s next move south, he certainly knew the British were drawing in outposts and consolidating their positions around Charlestown, but it is unknown if he had learned of Craig’s withdrawal from Wilmington, NC.

\textsuperscript{38} PNG, IX: 625; Lee, p. 524. Cols. Sevier and Shelby commanded the so called “over mountain” men, North Carolina militia from the area now part of eastern Tennessee. South Carolina militia and State Troops also reinforced Greene. Sumter’s troops, under his second-in-command, Col. William Henderson, and Gen. Pickens’s and Marion’s forces fought with Greene in September at Eutaw Springs. Thereafter these militia commanders dispersed; Sumter operated in South Carolina’s Midlands; Marion operated in Georgetown and the lower Santee and Pee Dee area of South Carolina; and Pickens operated in the western area of South Carolina; Gen. John Barnwell assumed command of the Lowcountry militia and Col. William Harden continued his operations in the South Carolina Lowcountry.

\textsuperscript{39} Marion to Greene, Nov. 21, 1781, PNG, IX: 606, but see Sumter’s letter with opposite (probably older) intelligence, Nov. 24, 1781, PNG, IX: 622 … more from Marion on the British withdrawal from Moncks Corner, see his report to Greene on 25 Nov. PNG, IX: 628

\textsuperscript{40} Leslie to Clinton, Nov. 30, 1781 in PNG; IX: 628 fn 2; PRO 30/55

\textsuperscript{41} Marion to Greene, Nov. 30, 1781, PNG, IX: 641-2
Back on the Offensive

At Belleville, Greene focused his sights on moving the frontline to South Carolina’s Lowcountry, putting about 70 more miles of South Carolina clearly in the Americans’ sector. His first goal was the reduction of the British fortified outpost at Dorchester. Dorchester was a colonial village strategically located near the head of navigation on the Ashley River. It commanded the land traffic to and from the Charlestown peninsula and the area between the Ashley and Edisto Rivers. Leaving the main army behind, to form his “Flying Army” Greene took 200 of his light troops of the Maryland and Virginia Line and 200 cavalry including the remnants of the 3rd Continental Light Dragoons (3d CLD), Lee’s Legion cavalry (and possibly infantry), and Lt. Col. Wade Hampton’s South Carolina State cavalry. These troops were optimal for Greene as many of the 3d CLD had been stationed in the Dorchester area in May of 1780, and Lee’s Legion cavalry had successfully raided and briefly taken Dorchester on July 15 during Gen. Sumter’s Dog Days of Summer campaign. The horsemen knew the lay of the land. Greene furtively dashed 65 miles to Dorchester, leaving Thomson’s on November 28, 1781.

Greene to George Washington, Nov. 21, 1781, PNG, IX: 605 “we are on our march to 4 holes.”

Greene to Pres. McKean, Dec. 9, 1781, PNG, X: 17. Colonial Dorchester is now a state park located on SC Hwy 642 just south of Summerville, SC, with its extant colonial-era tabby fort and brick church steeple base ruins. It is located at the head of navigation on the east bank of the Ashley River. http://gaz.jrshelby.com/fortdorchester.htm
had every reason to believe that he could achieve tactical surprise of the Dorchester garrison as he had done moving his whole army from Ft. Motte to within three miles of the British camp at Eutaw Springs only three months earlier without detection by the British commander, Lt. Col. Alexander Stewart. Greene took every precaution along the way south, detaining possible Tories and avoiding settlements. Lee was ill and did not make the initial march with Greene towards Dorchester. Col. Otho H. Williams, in command of Greene’s regular infantry, supplies and baggage marched for Orangeburgh where they met Sumter’s garrison.

Fort Dorchester – December 1, 1781

Greene moved south, slogging over byways, about 50 miles to the Four Hole Swamp Bridge where he detached Capt. Robert Kirkwood’s Delaware Continentals to hold the bridge until relieved by Gen. Sumter’s troops from Orangeburgh. Greene approached Dorchester via byways and ultimately the Four Hole Swamp Bridge Road. After crossing the Four Hole Swamp Bridge, Greene continued south, mucking through 15 miles of flooded paths, again traveling the byways in an attempt to effect a surprise on the Dorchester garrison on December 1. But Greene’s approach was discovered by the British defenders at Dorchester so the garrison commander concentrated his forces to make a stand.

The British post in the village of Dorchester was defended by a tabby French & Indian War-era fortress which was built near the Ashley River and in the shadow of the massive brick steeple of the 1720 St. George’s Parish Church. These old structures and a newly-constructed redoubt guarded the village, and both were garrisoned by 400 infantry and some loyal militia; 150 South Carolina Royalists provincials, mounted as dragoons, were posted at a nearby plantation to support the Dorchester garrison.

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44 Stewart, defending himself from potential criticism of the failure of his intelligence, reported to Lord Cornwallis that his spies had failed to give him warning of Greene’s approach prior to the Battle of Eutaw Springs. Private letter of Stewart to Cornwallis, 26 Sept. 1781, CP, VI: 168-170. O’Kelly reports British Maj. John Doyle as the Moncks Corner – Fair Lawn local commander and Stewart commanding the redcoats’ advanced post at Wantoot Plantation. O’Kelley, NBBS, 3:402
45 Greene to Williams, Dec. 2, 1781, PNG, IX: 649 fn 6; Morris to Greene, Dec. 4, 1781, X: 6-7; and X: 5 fn 1; O’Kelley, NBBS 3: 402-403 reports that Lee’s Legion infantry was with Greene. Kirkwood’s Journal (p. 26) reports that on Nov. 28 Kirkwood marched with the army to Brown’s Mill, 10 miles; on Nov. 29 marched to Orangeburgh, 16 miles; Dec. 1 marched to Young’s Farm, 14 miles; and on Dec. 3 marched to “4 hole bridge, 26 miles.” A highly-regarded infantry company commander, Capt. Robert Kirkwood was sick and did not travel with Greene to Dorchester, but his company secured and held the Four Hole Swamp Bridge and causeway until relieved two weeks later. At this location on the north side of the swamp, road construction crews uncovered an 18th c. 6# iron cannon from the Four Hole Swamp in the 1920s. The cannon is on display at a roadside park at the intersection of US Hwys 78 and 178.
46 Greene to Sumter, Dec. 2, 1781, PNG, IX: 648; X: 11 and 15
47 This road is modern US Hwy 178 and merges into US Hwy 78 and continues south towards Summerville.
48 Greene to Rutledge, Dec. 3, 1781, PNG, X: 4
49 Lee, p. 523-524; O’Kelley, NBBS 3: 402-403; PNG, IX: 623 and 649. Sumter reported that about 80 Hessians erected some works near Dorchester, probably the redoubt between Dorchester and Eagle Creeks on the map above.
The British redoubt was about ½ mile northeast of the colonial town, covering the intersection of the road towards Charlestown and the road east to Goose Creek and Moncks Corner. It was surrounded by abatis. The South Carolina Royalists, led by Maj. Thomas Fraser, was still recovering from their defeat at Parker’s Ferry. They had been augmented by a few cavalrmen from the Queen’s Rangers and other smaller units. They were posted at Georgia Royal Gov. Sir James Wright’s Plantation, about two miles from Dorchester towards Charlestown.

Lt. Col. Wade Hampton’s cavalry in the American van approached Dorchester and spotted some
British troops outside their defensive earthworks; Hampton immediately charged across a bridge and the Americans killed eight or ten, wounded 15 to 20 more and took several prisoners.\textsuperscript{54} 

Excerpt from USGS topographic map of the colonial Dorchester area, showing the author’s conjecture of Greene’s approach, occupying the village and holding the British troops in the old tabby fort while Lt. Col. Wade Hampton made his charge on the British outside of their redoubt. The second phase of the skirmish was the SC Royalists Dragoons who approached from Gov. James Wright’s Plantation, about two miles southeast of Dorchester, and set-up their failed ambush.

Shortly after the initial engagement the South Carolina Royalists dragoons sallied out of their post and there was a brief cavalry skirmish resulting in the retreat of the redcoats into their fort. From Loyalist trooper Lt. Stephen Jarvis’s diary (below), the British cavalry set up a classic ambush but the American cavalrymen did not take the bait. The skirmish with the British cavalry may have been a mile from the village, probably on the road southeast towards Charlestown. Greene arrived in Dorchester late in the afternoon and soon cut to pieces such of the enemy who were outside of their works.\textsuperscript{55} Greene wrote to Sumter, “Hampton charged a party of Tories at Dorchester, drawing out

\textsuperscript{54} This probably refers to the old bridge over Dorchester Creek, about 1,200 feet east of the colonial town site, (not the modern Dorchester Road/SC 642 bridge) indicating a charge was on the “English Fort” redoubt site since you do not cross Dorchester Creek when approaching the colonial Dorchester village from Four Hole Swamp Bridge.

\textsuperscript{55} Greene to Williams, Dec. 2, 1781, PNG, IX: 649; X: 17-18. Greene withdrew to “Vandomeres (Vanderouses) Plantation” after the battle and then 7 miles to “Warrings Plantation” the next day; there is a “Waring” on the Faden map,
the ‘British Horse,’ which, in turn, were ‘driven in with such precipitation as produced an evacuation of the place that night.’”

Map excerpt from William Henry Johnson, Scrapbook, Vol. 1, p. 116, SCHS, Lowcountry Digital Library. Note “English Fort” on map northeast of Old Dorchester on Eagle’s Plantation. Map untitled, unattributed and undated, thought to have been compiled by Johnson c. 1930s. Besides the bridge over the Ashley River, there were bridges at the time over Dorchester Creek and Eagle Creek.


Unfortunately, we do not know the exact location of these skirmishes; the initial skirmish was probably on the main road northeast towards Goose Creek near the newly constructed redoubt and “under the cover” of the cannon at the British fort.

Greene withdrew from Dorchester before the early December nightfall to a more easily defended position at Vandomere’s Plantation. While the author has not definitively located this plantation, it was probably near or across a crossing of the Cypress Swamp and a route for speedy withdrawal up the Orangeburg Road or across Bacon’s Bridge, west of the upper Ashley River. In either location, if attacked in force, he could make a stand at a natural choke point while his main army came to him. Greene was informed that Stewart and much of the British field army, though still smarting from losses at the Battle of Eutaw Springs, was still an effective fighting force and was posted only 8 miles away from Dorchester at Goose Creek.

Dorchester was a crossroads: one road coming from Charlestown by the Quarter House Tavern northwest to Dorchester-Orangeburg-Ninety Six to Fort Prince George, the gateway to the Cherokee

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57 Sumter to Greene, Nov. 24, 1781, PNG, IX: 623, Sumter’s dated intelligence was that 2,000 British were posted at Daniel Ravenel’s Wantoot Plantation.
Nation. Another road traveled northeast from Dorchester to Goose Creek and Moncks Corner and another road crossed the Ashley River to the west and into the South Carolina Lowcountry. Greene’s specific attack plan on Dorchester and its satellite camps is not presently known, though his approach was probably just down the road from Orangeburgh, crossing Dorchester Creek and to attack the newly-constructed earthen redoubt. The tabby fort was virtually impenetrable with 18th-century cannon and would have required a siege to take it from a determined defense.

Faced with Greene personally, the British believed he had with him the whole Southern Department army. That night, Col. Stewart arrived (probably without more than a fast escort) and the British quickly destroyed their stores, forage and defensive works, and threw their cannon in the Ashley River before falling back 10 miles to the Quarter House Tavern fortifications on the Charlestown Neck, only seven miles from the city. Upon learning of Greene’s appearance at Dorchester, the British posted at Goose Creek also withdrew closer to Charlestown preparing to defend the city from a direct attack by Greene.58

Loyalist Stephen Jarvis, a trooper serving with the South Carolina Royalists cavalry, left his impression of Gen. Greene’s attack on Dorchester in his journal:59

The Americans, after the British retired from the field of battle [Eutaw Springs, September 8, 1781], came and buried their dead and then retired to invest one other outpost [maybe Fairlawn or Wappataw], but our people had abandoned it, and joined the Army, which became so reduced that we were obliged to retreat, and in moving from Monks’ Corner and crossing Goose Creek we took the route to Dorchester, and encamped at Sir James Wright’s Plantation, a few miles this side of Dorchester.60 We had a few Militia quartered in Dorchester. We had hardly taken up our ground before some of our Militia from Dorchester came running into Camp, some of them much wounded. A large body of the enemy had charged into Dorchester and surprised the Militia and retired again some miles from Dorchester.

The Cavalry was ordered to march, and we proceeded to Dorchester. I was ordered with two Dragoons and a few Militia forward in order to decoy the enemy, and bring them on, whilst Major Fraser, with the Cavalry well disposed for an attack, kept some distance in my rear.61 The Americans, who were ignorant of our Army being in that neighborhood, had the same design with myself, and made several feint charges, and then retired until they had drawn me a sufficient distance to make a successful charge. They had a body of Infantry in their rear. They at last charged me in earnest. I retreated and made the signal to Major Fraser.62 He advanced and met the enemy, who pulled up their horses within a very short distance, when Major Fraser gave the word and we dashed in among them, and slashing work we made great havoc amongst them, cutting them down and taking many prisoners — an Officer in his retreat took a foot-path that foot-passengers use in that hot

58 Marion to Greene, Nov. 25, 1781, PNG, IX: 628 fn 2, 631, 649; Greene to Rutledge, Dec. 3, 1781, X: 3-5, and 16-20. Lee, p. 523-524
60 Sir James Wright was the last Royal Governor of Georgia; additionally, he was an attorney, major planter and landowner. “This side of Dorchester” likely means the Charlestown side of the old colonial town. The precise location of Wright’s Dorchester area plantation is unknown to this author, but I believe it was on SC Hwy 642, two miles towards Charlestown from Dorchester, or about where the Lowe’s is now.
61 Loyalist Maj. Thomas Fraser was the acting field commander of the South Carolina Royalists provincial regiment.
62 Evidently Lt. Jarvis was the bait in a classic “chase me” into the ambush deployment.
country, and there is a row of trees between that and the main road. I pursued this Officer and had got so near as to touch his horse with the point of my sword. I saw their Infantry with trailed arms endeavoring to flank us. I wheeled about and called to Major Fraser, giving him this information, who ordered the Troops to retire, which we did with the loss of only one man, he, poor fellow, was hung the next morning as a deserter from their Army. As we had no Infantry to support us, we were obliged to retire, which we did with a good many prisoners — how many we killed is uncertain — certainly several.

The next day the [British] Army retired below the Quarter House, and this was our outpost.

The British commander, Gen. Leslie, remarked in his report that he lacked sufficient “real” cavalry and had to use inexperienced mounted infantry who were no match for trained cavalry.\(^{63}\) Greene’s subordinates and friends congratulated him on his easy victory; implying that the British respected Greene as a foe which undoubtedly factored into their decision to precipitously abandon Dorchester.\(^{64}\) Leslie had given orders to abandon Dorchester if attacked in force. Leslie knew of Greene’s move to Dorchester in time to append it to his letter of December 1 to Gen. Clinton.\(^{65}\)

Greene remained in the Dorchester area only one day and recovered two iron cannon. He moved from Vandomere’s Plantation to Warring’s Plantation on December 2 and then started his move 22 miles west, crossing the Edisto River at Parker’s Ferry, to his new camp at Round O. Greene does not explain why he did not occupy Dorchester; he likely wanted to keep his mobility, did not have the manpower to detach and garrison the town and planned to let the local South Carolina Whigs control the territory. This was Greene’s typical pattern as he did not attempt to garrison the villages of Camden, Ninety Six, or Augusta, or the British forts – Motte, Dreadnaught/Galphin, Watson, Granby – after they fell to American control. He generally ordered the destruction of the British fortifications. Greene was also extremely short of ammunition and basic supplies, and unable to mount an offensive operation directly against Charlestown.\(^{66}\) Greene’s attack on Dorchester was only 19 miles from Charlestown.

Leslie reported to Clinton several days later, “Green came to Dorchester the 30\(^{\text{th}}\). Ultmo. with four Hundred Cavalry and light troops – his Army reported to be in his rear, a skirmish ensued with the Lt Dragoons, the Enimy retired, and during the night Colonel Stuart withdrew the post there, and fell back to the Quarter House. The Enemy’s Cavalry have crossed the Eddisto, I cannot fix where their Army is, but hope to give you a certain account before I close this. the reinforcement from Virginia is crossing the Santee. From the superiority of their Cavalry, and the mounted Militia it is difficult to get any certain intelligence. in short the whole country is in Arms, and I fancy Georgia will be their Object.”\(^{67}\) No document has placed Lt. Col. Stewart at the initial skirmish at Dorchester, but rather he arrived during the cover of night and hastily withdrew the garrison to the works at Quarter House Tavern.

From Belleville, the main Southern Continental army, commanded by Col. Otho Holland Williams, with its heavy baggage marched for Orangeburg, and then south to Riddlespurger’s Plantation on

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\(^{63}\) Greene to Pres. McKean, Dec. 9, 1781, PNG, X: 19 fn 2

\(^{64}\) Rochambeau to Greene, Jan. 10, 1782, PNG, X: 179. Gen. Leslie suffered from an eye malady while in Charlestown which sometimes kept him confined to a dark room.

\(^{65}\) Gen. Alexander Leslie to Sir Henry Clinton, Dec. 1, 1781, BHQP, CO 5/104/284

\(^{66}\) Greene to Marion, Dec. 12, 1781, PNG, X: 38-39 fn 2, 46 fn 3, 51, 59, 64, and 74

\(^{67}\) Leslie to Clinton, Dec. 4, 1781, BHQP, Vol. 34, Dec. 1 - 30, 1781, p. 3926
December 3. Williams then moved the army west to Ferguson’s Mills where they crossed the Edisto River on December 5. They marched south into Greene’s camp at Round O and rejoined Greene who had established his headquarters on Col. Roger Parker Saunders’s plantation. This camp site was selected by Col. Thaddeus Kosciuszko, chief engineer of the Southern Army.

Excerpt from William Faden’s map of 1780 of South Carolina’s Lowcountry. The plantation of Col. Roger Parker Saunders, Greene’s camp, is about one mile due east of the Round O Savannah on this map. Notes: Jacksonborough is called Ponpon; Round O is depicted as a geographic feature, a savannah, as is Godfrey’s Savannah and Horse-shoe Savannah. The blue arrows show Gen. Greene’s probable route of march from Dorchester to Round O.

In the fall of 1781 the world strategic position changed. Greene had forced the British to abandon most of the interior of South Carolina, the French fleet had defeated the Royal Navy at the mouth of the Chesapeake, Washington and Rochambeau had defeated Lord Cornwallis’s army at Yorktown.

68 Williams to Greene, Dec. 2, 1781, PNG, IX: 655; X: 3. Col. Otho Holland Williams acted as Greene’s adjutant during Greene’s southern campaigns; he was an officer of the Maryland line. Riddlespurger’s Plantation was on the west side of Four Hole Swamp near the colonial road from Orangeburg to Four Hole Swamp Bridge (approximately US Hwy 178), as shown on the 1773 James Cook map of South Carolina. It was near the intersection of I-26 and US Hwy 15.

69 Williams to Greene, Dec. 6, 1781, PNG, X: 10-11, fn 2. Cannon/Ferguson’s saw and grist mills on the Edisto River were located about 2.5 miles northwest (upstream) from the modern Givhans Ferry State Park. “In 1767 [Daniel] Cannon began to combine his [Charleston] area building activities with commercial lumber production. He entered into partnership with five other men to erect saw mills on the Edisto River, a partnership which was terminated in 1779, twelve years later, when Thomas Ferguson bought the property from the others for £250,000 South Carolina currency. At the time of sale the property was described as consisting of several tracts of land, mill houses, dams, grist and saw mills, saws and timber.” Rosemary Niner Estes, “Daniel Cannon: A Revolutionary ”Mechanick” in Charleston,” Journal of Early Southern Decorative Arts, MESDA, Vol. IX, No. 1 (June 1983). PNG, X: 11 fn 2 The damming of the Edisto River was controversial with upstream residents because it interrupted the normal migration of fish, but the problem soon resolved by nature as the dam was washed out in a post-Revolution freshet.

70 Marion to Greene, Nov. 25, 1781, PNG, IX: 628; Williams to Greene, Dec. 6, 1781, PNG, X: 10 and 11 fn 3. http://gaz.jrshelby.com/roundo.htm Polish engineer, Col. Thaddeus Kosciuszko, was commissioned into the Continental Army and served Greene as chief engineer of the Southern Department Army.
several Caribbean colonies changed hands, India was engulfed in war, and Lord North’s government 
foundered. Greene’s push into the South Carolina Lowcountry and Leslie’s conservative orders to 
hold Charlestown coincided to dramatically change the political geography of South Carolina and 
both sides’ strategy. Greene began the year-long loose siege of the main Southern British base, 
Charlestown; however, the sea lanes remained open to resupply Charlestown, and the British could 
come out of Charlestown in force by land to forage at will.

**December 7, 1781 – Greene’s Round O Headquarters**

Gen. Greene established his new camp one mile south of modern Round O crossroads on December 
7, 1781, 20 miles west of Dorchester. This camp, bisected by Round O Road (S-15-45), is on high 
ground, now called Davis Hill on some maps, just north of the confluence of the Chessey and Fuller 
Swamp Creeks. It was surrounded by swamps, had potable water, and its approaches were readily 
defensible. The Continentals moved their camp to the second site in the area on December 21, 1781, 
and remain camped here until January 12, 1782. From Round O roads led southeast to Parker’s 
Ferry across the Edisto River, and north towards Ferguson’s Mills on the Edisto River.

This new camp added over 60 miles to Greene’s logistical chain into North Carolina and Virginia, 
but it gave him easier access to support action against the British strongholds in coastal Georgia, to 
move against food, supplies and information flowing into Charlestown, and to control the South 
Carolina Lowcountry. To help control commerce and communications with Charlestown, Greene 
envisioned a “flying army” to cover the 20 miles between the Ashley and Edisto Rivers. Greene 
assigned Lee’s Legion, with the 3rd Continental Light Dragoons and some light infantry, who camped 
at John McQueen’s Plantation south of the Ashley River, to gather intelligence on the British 
positions and to interdict communications and supplies headed to Charlestown via the roads between 
the Ashley and Edisto Rivers.

Further, to control the land from the Ashley River to the east, including the branches of the upper 
Cooper River to the sea, Gen. Francis Marion was assigned this area. Marion’s militia was 
reinforced with South Carolina State Cavalry troops under Cols. Henry Hampton, Peter Horry and 
Hezekiah Maham. Marion moved his headquarters ten miles south from St. Stephens to Huger’s 
Bridge on the upper East Branch of the Cooper River and his troops patrolled the approaches from 
the Ashley River to the Atlantic Ocean northeast of the city.

Greene also had to be mindful of the British post at Savannah. While the sea lanes were open to the 
British, strong British armies had marched out of Savannah overland to Charlestown in 1779 and 
1780. The main Charlestown to Savannah overland routes went through Jacksonborough, about 14 
Miles south of Greene’s Round O camp. Gen. John Barnwell’s SC militia guarded this area of the 
South Carolina Lowcountry.

The British drove the cattle in the area between the Ashley and Edisto Rivers to Johns Island, and 
repaired two redoubts at Stono Ferry and positioned two armed galleys in the waterway to help

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71 Greene to Sumter, Dec. 2, 1781, PNG: IX: 648, X: 4
72 Lee, p. 525. John McQueen’s Plantation was located south of Horse Savannah (an extension of Stono Swamp) about 4 
miles northwest of the Rantowles Bridge. See map PNG, X: 204-205.
73 Marion to Greene, Nov. 21, 1781, PNG, IX: 606
74 John Barnwell was appointed brigadier of the 4th SC Militia Brigade in the SC Lowcountry by Gov. Rutledge in Sept. 
1781. This was a controversial appointment as Col. William Harden of Marion’s brigade had successfully commanded 
the militia in the area.
protect that crossing onto British-held Johns Island.\textsuperscript{75} Johns Island was strongly garrisoned and commanded by the tenacious defender of the British post at Ninety Six, Lt. Col. John Harris Cruger.\textsuperscript{76} Leslie still had a city, army and many Loyalist refugees with their slaves to feed and defend.

In mid-December Greene believed that the British intended to attack his advanced parties near Stono Ferry or up the Charlestown peninsula. The British did mount a raid to Dorchester, but immediately withdrew towards Charlestown. Marion moved from the East Branch of the Cooper River to the Dorchester area by December 23 to reinforce Lee to control the area between the Ashley and Cooper Rivers.\textsuperscript{77} Gen. Sumter’s troops, after chasing Cunningham’s and Williams’s Tory raiders, returned to the Orangeburg area. On December 13 a detachment of 60 men under Maj. John Moore took control of the Four Hole Swamp Bridge on the road southeast from Orangeburg, through Dorchester, and on to Charlestown. The bridge had been held by Capt. Robert Kirkwood who then marched his veteran Delaware Continentals to Greene’s camp at Round O.\textsuperscript{78}

![A miniature of Lt. Col. John Laurens, c. 1780, by artist Charles Willson Peale.](image)

**Planning the Next American Offensive**

Lt. Col. John Laurens, former aide-de-camp to Gen. George Washington and son of President of Congress Henry Laurens of South Carolina, had joined one group of light infantry in their successful assault of Redoubt #10 at Yorktown. He then participated in negotiating the terms of surrender with Lord Cornwallis, and departed for South Carolina on November 5, 1781.\textsuperscript{79} Laurens arrived at Thomson’s Belleville Plantation on the Congaree River in South Carolina on November 28 just after Greene’s rapid departure for Dorchester; he caught up with Greene at Round O and was appointed to command Greene’s light infantry.\textsuperscript{80} Greene detached Lee’s Legion to the east of his Round O camp and the Edisto River to watch the British-held ferry from the

\textsuperscript{75} Greene to Rutledge, Dec. 3, 1781, \textit{PNG}, X: 5 fn 7, 18, and 123. [http://gaz.jrshelby.com/stonoferry.htm](http://gaz.jrshelby.com/stonoferry.htm). These redoubts (small earthen forts) probably protected both the mainland and island side landings of the Stono Ferry and were rebuilt on the site of British Gen. Augustine Prévost’s 1779 redoubts.

\textsuperscript{76} John Harris Cruger was a loyalist provincial from New York in DeLancey’s Brigade. He obstinately defended the fortified town of Ninety Six in May and June 1781 from Gen. Greene’s 38 day siege and several assaults.

\textsuperscript{77} Greene’s Orders, \textit{PNG}, X: 63-64, 70, 73, 75, and 94. Marion detached SC American militia Lt. Col. Benjamin Screven to Cainhoy, and Cols. Peter Horry’s and Hezekiah Maham’s cavalry near Wappataw Meeting House to watch the British movements in the area north of Charleston. \textit{PNG}, IX: 631, X: 137

\textsuperscript{78} Intersection of modern US Hwy 78 and US Hwy 178 about 2.5 miles east of modern Dorchester, SC (not the colonial town). Williams to Greene, Dec. 6, 1781, \textit{PNG}, X: 11 fn 5, 35 fn 8, and 49. The \textit{Journal and Order Book of Captain Robert Kirkwood}, p. 27

\textsuperscript{79} In an interesting twist of fate, Henry Laurens had been captured at sea by the Royal Navy while sailing to France to assume the role as the Continental Congress’s minister to Holland. John Laurens became a commissioner of the British prisoners captured at Yorktown, including Lord Cornwallis, who held the title of Constable of the Tower of London where the Crown held his father, Henry Laurens, as a political prisoner. Cornwallis, as a military prisoner, was paroled to New York, while Henry Laurens was closely held as a high-value political prisoner.

\textsuperscript{80} Morris to Greene, Dec. 2, 1781, \textit{PNG}, IX: 653, 654 fn 1; Greene’s Orders, Dec. 19, 1781, X: 74; Massey, \textit{Laurens}, p. 201-202
mainland to Johns Island – Stono Ferry – on December 7, 1781. Lee established his camp at Col. William Skirving’s Oak Lawn plantation on the Jacksonborough to Charlestown Road. On December 12, Lee moved 6 miles east to Sandy Hill and made a quick trip north to Bacon’s Bridge to investigate intelligence of a British raid to Dorchester. He then relocated his camp to McGuire’s Plantation, about 4 miles northwest of Stono Ferry. Lee then moved to Ferguson’s Plantation (formerly Dr. Haig’s).

In mid-December 1781, Greene, with Lt. Cols. Lee and Laurens, began planning to capture Johns Island. The British had gathered and driven cattle to Johns Island. Greene needed the British-held beef to feed his army and to deny the enemy food. Beefsteak would be a perfect addition at the anticipated meeting of the South Carolina General Assembly in January and his reinforcements coming from Virginia. While Greene militarily outranked and was senior in age to these junior commanders, both Laurens and Lee socially outranked their commander and both had superb political connections. Both young American commanders, Laurens and Lee, were American scions.

Laurens, a consummate diplomat, already had earned the reputation for foolhardiness on the battlefield, and Lee needed to atone for his performance at the Battle of Eutaw Springs where he could not be located at the end of the battle to lead his cavalry to deliver the coup de grace to the British rear. Greene cautioned Lee, “I am afraid you are too confident of your strength, and have too much contempt for the enemies. … I hate islands for military operations where we have not command of the water.” In this planning, Greene asked Lee to consider that they did not command the water; timing of the tides would govern movement onto and off of the island; and that Greene could not support the effort by land until additional supplies of ammunition arrived. Undoubtedly being pushed by his subordinates to approve the across water attack on Johns Island and considering the benefits of a victory, Greene relented to Lee’s and Laurens’s zeal, and gave them his consent for the operation and offered whatever assistance that was “within his power.”

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81 Sandy Hill Plantation was the main seat of Jane Riley Elliott who married Lt. Col. William Washington after his capture at Eutaw Springs. Sandy Hill was south of modern US Hwy 17 between Ravenel and Jericho, SC.
82 Bacon’s Bridge is over the upper Ashley River about 2 miles upstream from the colonial village of Dorchester.
83 The 1780 William Faden map shows three Fergusons in the area just east of the Edisto River and the 1773 Cook map shows five Fergusons in the area. The one on the main Jacksonborough to Charleston Road makes the most sense in this case.
84 Lee to Greene, Dec. 12, 1781, et seq., PNG, X: 44, 54, 59, 84, and 123
85 John Laurens, age 27, was the first son of Henry Laurens, a wealthy South Carolina merchant and planter and President of the Continental Congress. Henry Lee, age 25, was the son of Henry Lee of the wealthy and powerful tidewater Virginia family.
86 Both men were brave and battle-proven soldiers. Laurens joined the “forlorn hope” of the successful attack on British Redoubt #10 at Yorktown. After Laurens’s death in August 1782 near the Combahee River, George Washington defended his character, “In a word, he had not a fault, that I could discover, unless intrepidity bordering upon rashness could come under that denomination; and to this he was excited by the purest motives.” The True George Washington, Paul Leicester Ford, (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1896), 223. Gen. William Moultrie wrote, “Col. Laurens was a young man of great merit, and a brave soldier, but an imprudent officer; he was too rash and impetuous.” William Moultrie, Memoirs of the American Revolution, I: 404. Lee’s Legion briefly captured a British outpost at Paulus Hook, NJ in 1779. Lee’s Legion cavalry flanked to the south the British final strong position in the brick house at Eutaw Springs; however, Lee could not be located with his troops when Greene wanted Lee to lead an assault to relieve his troops tangled in the British camp under the fire from the brick house. R. W. Gibbes, M.D., ed., Documentary History of the American Revolution, Vol. 3 (Columbia, SC: Banner Steam-Power Press, 1853) “Eutaw Springs” by Otho Holland Williams, et al., p. 154; and Samuel Hammond, cited in Massey and Piecuch, Gen. Nathanael Greene and the American Revolution in the South (Columbia, SC: USC Press, 2012) n 57, p. 237; Piecuch and Beakes, Lee, p. 205-209. Lee would eventually resign his command over his feelings of being slighted in Greene’s official report on Eutaw Springs and the ribbing he got from fellow officers.
87 Greene to Lee, Dec. 21, 1781, PNG, X:85 Both Greene and Lee had experience with the tenacious Loyalist commander Lt. Col. John Harris Cruger, who successfully defended the fortified village of Ninety Six until relieved.
88 Greene to Lee, Dec. 21, 1781, PNG, X: 85 Not much was within Greene’s power at that point.
In anticipation of the raid onto Johns Island, Lee moved his troops to McQueen’s Plantation on the main Jacksonborough to Charlestown Road. Greene was unable to move the main army; he was very low on ammunition, and the Virginia Continentals were scheduled to leave before Pennsylvania reinforcements arrived.

Placed under Laurens’s command were Kirkwood’s Delaware infantry with some Virginia Continentals who moved across the Edisto River at Parker’s Ferry and southeast to camp at Ferguson’s by December 20. Laurens initially posted his light infantry at Skirving’s Plantation on the Jacksonborough to Charlestown Road in anticipation of operating against the British at the Stono Ferry. Laurens moved his light infantry a few miles east to Ferguson’s Plantation by December 27 to join in the joint venture with Lee’s Legion camped at McQueen’s.

Lee accurately estimated the British strength on Johns Island at 550 on December 11. When Lt. Col. James H. Craig took command of Johns Island in mid-December, his 82nd Regiment of Foot likely accompanied him there along with remnants of various other regiments no longer posted in the Charlestown area. Leslie wrote to Lord George Germain, “Major Craig with six hundred Men hold John and James Island, which form the left of our position.” The main access to Johns Island from the mainland was to cross the Stono River at Stono Ferry. The mainland-side ferry landing, fortified

89 Lee to Greene, Dec. 10, 1781, PNG, X: 31 fn 2, 34-35, and 74
90 Greene to Rutledge, Jan. 16, 1782, PNG, X: 207-208. Lt. Col. Henry “Light Horse Harry” Lee formed a Legion of light cavalry and infantry, in Virginia and after successes in the Middle States, he was dispatched to work with the Southern Department, commanded by Gen. Greene.
91 Lee to Greene, Dec. 11, 1781, PNG, X: 34-35 and 35 fn 2
by the retreating British in 1779, was the site of the June 20, 1779 attack by the Americans on British Gen. Augustine Prévost’s rear-guard as he slowly withdrew back to Savannah across the South Carolina coastal islands.  

Lee’s Legion cavalry continued its patrols between the Edisto River and as far east as the Cooper River. They captured several British soldiers and their leader, Capt. Ludwig Kienien on December 19. The Legion’s cavalry tangled with Loyalist cavalry at Dr. Alexander Garden’s plantation on Goose Creek the next day and lost several troopers including Capt. James Armstrong.  

December 29-30, 1781 – The Aborted Attack

Lee moved his Legion to John McQueen’s plantation near Stono Ferry by December 27, 1781, to watch the British guarding the mainland-side landing of this ferry to Johns Island. Laurens, in command of the joint mission because of his senior date of rank, also moved up his light infantry and camped at Ferguson’s (formally Dr. Haig’s) plantation as he and Lee planned to attack the British post at the island side Stono Ferry landing during the night of December 29-30. Laurens and Lee decided to postpone their attack because of the presence of additional British forces on Johns Island near the Stono Ferry landing and that Greene could not immediately support their assault from his Round O camp, some 25 miles away. The British withdrew from their redoubts on the mainland side of Stono Ferry on December 31, 1781. Thus, Greene, Laurens and Lee returned to their planning to attack the British garrison and coveted supplies across the Stono River on Johns Island.

Unfortunately Greene, Laurens and Lee did not know the British thinking. Maj. Craig, with

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### Colonial Era Intracoastal Navigation South of Charleston

The New Cut is one of several improvements to coastal navigation made in South Carolina in colonial times. Development of plantations along the coastal plain rivers was one of the sources of wealth through trade for the fledgling colony. Getting goods to and from market, especially bulk goods, was most efficiently done by small river craft, inappropriate for travel on the ocean. Unfortunately, South Carolina’s rivers do not all flow to Charleston but there are barrier islands along much of South Carolina’s coast and navigation of the tidewater marshes, creeks and rivers was an obvious possibility, especially if they were linked and marked for navigation. Starting by legislation as early as 1712, the improvement of intracoastal navigation was a colony matter. Going south from the Charleston harbor was a narrow isthmus separating the harbor from the Stono River crossed by a meandering Wappoo Creek. By digging a short canal from the Stono to intercept the shallows of the Wappoo Creek small craft navigation across the isthmus between the Stono and Charleston Harbor were soon joined. This initial improvement to the western end of the Wappoo Creek was called Elliott’s Cut; later dredging and straightening of the natural watercourse became known as the Wappoo Cut.

Proceeding up the Stono River to its headwaters there was a shared tidal marsh called Church Flats, separating the headwaters of the Stono from the headwaters of the Wadmalaw River. The New Cut opened small craft navigation by connecting these headwaters. Moving further down the South Carolina tidal zone towards Beaufort, small craft navigation on the upper Dawho River, a tributary of the North Edisto and Stono Rivers, was opened to the South Edisto River by Watt’s Cut in 1741.

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93 The mainland-side (north) Stono Ferry landing is now a beautiful town of Hollywood, SC, park, now called Wide Awake Plantation Park. Unfortunately, the Revolutionary War actions there are not presently interpreted.
94 O’Kelley, NBBS, 3: 406-408. Capts. Ludwig Kienien of the South Carolina Royalists and James Armstrong of Lee’s Legion were later exchanged. Dr. Alexander Garden, a physician and noted botanist (namesake of the gardenia), was a Loyalist; his 18th c. plantation house, Otranto (thought named for a castle in Italy featured in Horace Walpole’s novel The Castle of Otranto), is extant at 18 Basilica Avenue, Hanahan, SC.
95 John McQueen’s Plantation – on the road from Jacksonborough to Wallace Bridge, Map 2, PNG, X: 204-205.
96 Ferguson’s Plantation (formerly of Dr. Haig) was located just south of Caw Caw Savannah about 5 miles east of the Edisto River and about two miles north of the main road from Jacksonborough to the Wallace Bridge. PNG, X: 126
97 Lee to Greene, Dec. 27, 1781, PNG, X: 122-123, 126, and 135
98 Greene to Rutledge, Dec. 3, 1781, PNG, X: 5 fn 7, 142, and 144
experienced British regulars, had orders to withdraw from the mainland side of Stono Ferry on to Johns Island if faced with the Americans in force. Leslie wrote to Clinton on December 27, 1781, “Major Craig is on John’s Island, and occupies Two Redoubts at Stono on the Main, with the remains of Lord Cornwallis’s Army about 500 Men (including General Browne’s Provincial Regiment) and 100 Cavalry; it is a ticklish post, but it commands the water Communication; he has orders to withdraw it to the Island if the Enemy come in force.”

January 1782 – No, the War Is Not Over, Yet – the Jacksonborough Assembly

The South Carolina General Assembly dissolved during the British siege of Charlestown in April 1780 and had not met since then. South Carolina’s governor, John Rutledge, was given extraordinary war powers to operate the government in exile; he called for general elections during December 1781 and for the General Assembly to reconstitute its democratically-elected representative government in South Carolina. After discussions between Gov. Rutledge and Greene, and sorting-out the false intelligence of reinforcements coming to the British in Charlestown, the decision was finally made to reconvene the South Carolina General Assembly at Jacksonborough in January 1782. As many of the enlistments of the Virginia Continentals expired, Greene dismissed the Virginians from his camp at Round O on January 1, 1782, but he knew that reinforcements from Yorktown, Virginia were already in South Carolina moving towards his camp. Greene, Lee and Laurens again moved forward with their plan to attack the British across the Stono River on Johns Island and to capture its invaluable livestock.

The British still rode out of Charlestown in force at will to forage, gather intelligence and keep the Americans at bay. To the north of Charlestown, the British held Daniel, Sullivans, and Long Islands (Isle of Palms), and Mt. Pleasant, and patrolled the Wando and Stono Rivers by galley. Marion posted Col. Richard Richardson, Jr.’s South Carolina militia at Cainhoy on the Wando River to monitor the British activities on Daniel Island and on that river. British Maj. William Brereton, moving northeast from Daniel Island, crossed Beresford Creek in force, raided Barbant’s Plantation; and successfully defended an attack by Richardson’s troops at Videau’s Bridge on January 3, NC Gov. Thomas Burke was captured in September 1781, taken to Wilmington, and then taken to Charlestown when Maj. James H. Craig evacuated Wilmington. He was a prisoner on parole on James Island, and felt his life threatened. He escaped on January 16, 1782 – right after the raid on Johns Island – and he found his way to Greene’s camp by January 20th. They chatted for a considerable length of time before he went on home to NC. As soon as he made it to Greene’s camp, Gov. Burke requested a Court of Inquiry to determine if his course of action was proper. Led by Maj. Gen. Arthur St. Clair, the Court reportedly agreed that Gov. Burke was justified in breaking his parole. But, this was not the end of it. British commander, Leslie, insisted that Burke be returned unconditionally, while the governor, a political prisoner, insisted that he be exchanged just like any other paroled officer. So severe was the criticism from his political enemies back at home, Gov. Burke later wrote to Greene that the British “unfortunately place a higher value on me than my own country did.” The criticism slowed as Burke resumed his executive duties, but he made it very clear – he did not want to be re-elected as governor. So, this “drama” unfolded in Greene’s camp just as the SC government was in session for the first time in years. J.D. Lewis

100 Greene to Rutledge, Dec. 14, 1781, PNG, X: 51 and 101
101 Greene to Marion, Dec. 31, 1781, PNG, X: 138 Greene was momentarily expecting the arrival of Pennsylvania Continental reinforcements released by Gen. Washington from Yorktown, Va.
102 Cainhoy - Wando is where SC Hwy 41 crosses to the north side of the Wando River.
Brereton continued his foraging expedition uninterrupted as far northeast as Quinby Bridge on the headwaters of the East Branch of the Cooper River. Leslie reported this raid to Clinton, “Having received such information of General Mariano’s situation on the north side of the Cooper, as to induce me to detach against him; a Party under the command of Major Brereton, consisting of the Cavalry, Falk Corps & Volunteers of Ireland, was crossed to Daniels Island, and moved from thence: a Small Corps under Capt: Roberts of the 63d Regt: marched also from Haddrels Point, the whole to form a junction & proceed against the Enemy; but they having got intelligence of our design, and it being apprehended they would in consequence retire, it was thought adviseable to send on the Cavalry. they were Accordingly pushed forward & found the Enemy, to the number of 400 drawn up on Horse-back to receive them, seventy of the Cavalry under Major Coffin charged with great Gallantry, cut to pieces and took near 100 of the Rebels. The whole returned to their different stations the proceeding day, with the loss of Capt: Campbell of the South Carolina Regt. Killed, and Capt: Campbel of the same Regt: & two privates Wounded.”

Greene was reinforced by the arrival of Gen. Arthur St. Clair and a detachment of Pennsylvania, Maryland and Delaware Continentals on January 4, 1782. Greene immediately detached 100 Pennsylvania and Delaware Continentals, commanded by Maj. James Hamilton, to reinforce Laurens’s light infantry for the assault on Johns Island. With St. Clair’s reinforcements in camp, Greene also detached units of the Continental Light Dragoons and artillery and SC State Troops under Gen. Anthony Wayne on January 9, 1782, to assume command in Georgia to begin the re-capture of that state.

**Attack on Johns Island – Night of January 12-13, 1782**

To support the planned attack on British-held Johns Island, Gen. Greene’s main army departed its camp at Round O on January 12, 1782, crossed the Edisto River at Parker’s Ferry and marched to camp at the old St. Paul’s Stono Parish Church. From this camp Greene could support Laurens’s and Lee’s movement onto Johns Island and block any British move from Stono Ferry to Laurens’s crossing point, at least on the mainland side. In advance of the main army Maj. Richard Call’s 3rd Continental Light Dragoons camped at the old St. Paul’s Stono Parish Church, near “Church Flats” and the “New Cut.” Greene halted the Maryland and North Carolina troops and artillery at “the burnt church” to reorder the march; he then sent the Pennsylvania brigade and artillery followed by

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103 Videau’s Bridge was over the French Quarter Creek at the Cainhoy Road (sometimes called Clements Ferry Road, S-8-98).
104 Marion to Greene, Jan. 5, 1782, PNG, X: 161-163; O’Kelley, NBBS, 4: 22-24. Quinby Bridge, near modern Huger, SC, is one of the headwater tributaries of the East Branch of the Cooper River and at the head of its navigation. It was the site of the summer 1781 battle between Gen. Thomas Sumter’s troops and Lt. Col. James Coates and the 19th Regiment redcoats at Shubrick’s Plantation on Quinby Creek.
107 Greene to Ga. Gov. Martin, Greene to Wayne, Jan. 9, 1782, PNG, X: 173 and 175
108 Greene’s Orders, Jan. 12, 1782, PNG, IX: 183-184 Some of Greene’s army possibly crossed the Edisto River at Jacksonboro.
the Maryland brigade to cross the Edisto River and on to his old St. Paul’s Stono Parish Church camp.  

Laurens and Lee planned to cross the Stono River at the New Cut ford just after midnight of Sunday, January 13, and then attack the British ferry guards posted on the island-side landing and scout Johns Island. As Laurens and Lee had no boats, they identified two places where men could ford the New

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109 Greene’s Orders, Jan. 12, 1782, Call to Greene, Jan 14, 1782, PNG, X: 183, 192 and 207 fn 2. The original St. Paul’s Stono Parish Church was located on what is now called Dixie Plantation. St. Paul’s Stono Parish was established in 1706 and a church was built on a bluff near Church Flats on the upper Stono River in 1708. Indians burned the church in 1715 and it was rebuilt. There are several graves at this site: Robert Seabrook (died 1710) and his wife and son; a Lowndes; and 20th c. owner, John Henry Dick. Dixie Plantation is owned today by the College of Charleston Foundation. In 1734, the parish was divided into the St. Paul’s Stono Parish and the St. John’s Colleton Parish. Around that time a St. Paul’s Stono Parish Chapel of Ease was built on Highway 165 out from Ravenel north of Highway 17. The foundation of this church can be seen on the west at the White Church Cemetery (cemetary on both sides of the road). The original St. Paul’s Stono sanctuary was abandoned in 1756 and relocated 9 miles northwest, near Delemar Crossroads on modern SC Hwy 165 near the Parker’s Ferry Road (now County Line Road). See South Carolina roadside historic marker on SC 162 between Towles and Dixie Plantation/Bryan Roads. Today the two extant St. Paul’s Stono Parish sanctuaries are located on Chapel Road (S-10-1160) two miles west of Hollywood. Greene’s “burnt church” landmark is interesting. Located on the colonial Parker’s Ferry road some 6 miles west of the Edisto River are the extant brick remains of the 1754 St. Bartholomew’s “Pon Pon” Chapel of Ease, reputedly burned in 1801 and widely known as the “burnt church,” but the author has been unable to find any other reference that it was burned in 1782. PNG, X: 184, fn 2.
Cut at dead low tide and have firm marsh ground on the Johns Island side (instead of pluff mud) to cross to make dry land on the island.\textsuperscript{110} A low-water ford with firm ground approaches on both sides was probably well-known to local residents who could avoid the ferry’s toll, schedule and extra travel distance if approaching from or departing to the south. Complete surprise crossing the open tidal marsh and frigid waterway, carefully guarded by two close-by British gunboats and a galley, at night, were key elements of this bold plan.

Laurens camped his light troops at Shubrick’s Plantation on January 11 and planned to move east to Col. William Skirving’s Plantation. Greene, to support the crossing and to prevent the British from blocking Laurens’s and Lee’s communications with Greene and the mainland (or their retreat back to the mainland) moved his army to old St. Paul’s Stono Parish Church, about two miles southwest of Stono Ferry, on January 13.\textsuperscript{111} To create a ruse, on Saturday afternoon, January 12, Laurens and Hamilton marched their men from camp towards Dorchester and watched Ashley Ferry for any British counter-moves.\textsuperscript{112} Laurens abruptly countermanded their march and headed for the rendezvous area one mile from the New Cut crossing point.

Excerpt of USGS topo map 1919 Wadmalaw Quad showing the New Cut, Goshen Point, likely site of the abortive low tide crossing. This is before the formal designation of the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway, but the New Cut was improved for inland navigation before the Revolutionary War. Annotations by author.


\textsuperscript{110} Lee, p. 528; Alexander Garden, Jr. (in Lee’s Legion), \textit{Anecdotes of the Revolutionary War in America}, p. 363-364. Pluff mud, shiny brown-gray, rich organic, thick and sticky is the bottom of many South Carolina tidal marshes. It is very difficult to walk for any distance in pluff mud.

\textsuperscript{111} PNG, X: 207 n 2

\textsuperscript{112} Somers is probably Capt. John Summer’s Plantation. PNG, X: 208 n 4.
Lee was no stranger to planning and executing cross-tidal marsh operations, at night and at low tide. At Paulus Hook, New Jersey, on August 18-19, 1779, Lee’s men crossed open marshlands and waist-deep canals (in the summer) at night with the critical timing of low tide, forded a moat and successfully surprised the British garrison and attacked several British gun emplacements and fortifications. They were unable to secure all of the fortifications or hold it for long, but he did embarrass the British and took prisoners. Lee was cited by Congress and awarded a gold medal for his success, but he was also court-martialed and acquitted for his risky leadership on this raid, and incurred the ire of his fellow officers.\(^{113}\)

The exact location of the fordable portion of the New Cut in the late 18\(^{th}\) century has not been located by this author; however, it appears that the Americans probably launched their attack from Goshen Point, to cross the marsh and waterway at the easiest place. This is about two miles southwest of the historic Stono Ferry, site of the 1779 battle of the same name. The New Cut has been bypassed by the modern Intracoastal Waterway, but is still navigable by small craft.\(^{114}\) There are still shallow places at low tide in the New Cut depicted on the modern NOAA navigation chart.\(^{115}\)

According to plan, Laurens and Lee joined their forces at their meeting point about one mile from the New Cut where Laurens addressed the troops. Local guides were to lead the columns in silence and darkness to the selected ford.\(^{116}\) Laurens and Lee divided their 450 men into two divisions, one to be personally led by Lee and his Legion officer, Maj. Michael Rudolph, and the other division by Maj. James Hamilton of the Pennsylvania Line.\(^{117}\)

At midnight as planned, Lee’s Legion infantry crossed over 3,000 feet of open ground, tidal flats, and waded across the New Cut canal at low tide. There was no moonlight that night.\(^{118}\) Hamilton’s division got lost by missing the turn onto the road to the ford, marched past the turnoff and failed to make the crossing. Despite guides being sent to locate Hamilton’s lost division, they did not arrive at the assembly point on the north side of the New Cut area until daylight, hours too late to make the crossing. With only one-half of the Americans present, Lee was forced to withdraw his division back across the river, at night, on a rising tide fighting the current, in breast-high January water, and across the open marshland as he was without sufficient forces for self-protection.\(^{119}\) Lee’s men suffered hypothermia as there were no fires to warm them on the island and they had to march a distance on their return through the water to again get dry and warm. The average January water

\(^{113}\) Piecuch and Beakes, Lee, p. 35-57.
\(^{114}\) The New Cut is depicted on modern topographic maps and meanders near Johns Island whereas the modern Intracoastal Waterway is a relatively straight canal on the mainland side of Church Flats. http://mapper.acme.com/?ll=32.71531,-80.16732
\(^{115}\) For a modern navigation chart of the Stono and North Edisto Rivers, see http://www.oceangrafix.com/o.g/Charts/chartViewer.html?viewRegion=Atlantic&viewChart=Stono-and-North-Edisto-Rivers
\(^{116}\) According to Alexander Garden, Jr. (in Lee’s Legion), p. 363-364, a local islander, Capt. Freer, led Lee’s division to the ford; probably Solomon Freer. The likely area of this crossing is best seen at the end of modern Towles Road, Goshen Point. Maj. Joseph Johnson led some SC Upper Granville Co. Regt. militia on the crossing.
\(^{117}\) Maj. Michael Rudolph (Rudolph) of Elkton, Maryland, came South with Lee’s Legion as an infantry commander. He was a hero of the raid on Paulus Hook, NJ. His skills as a commander put him in charge of independent reconnaissance missions to Georgetown, SC, and Wilmington, NC; to attack Fort Galphin (Ft. Dreadnaught) at Silver Bluff; leading Lee’s attack on the Stockade Fort at Ninety Six; and to command his Legion’s infantry at the Battle of Eutaw Springs. Rudolph served as sergeant major in Lee’s Legion before Paulus Hook, and acted mostly as an infantry officer in the South, while his brother John acted as a cavalry commander.
\(^{118}\) Moonlight calculator from NASA at http://eclipse.gsfc.nasa.gov/phase/phases1701.html. The new moon was on January 13, 1782.
\(^{119}\) Greene to Rutledge, Jan. 16, 1781, PNG, X: 206-208; Lee, p. 528-537
temperature was probably less than 50 degrees and the night January air averaged about 37 degrees. It is not known if Laurens’s plan to swim the cavalry and officers’ horses over the Stono was successful. Amazingly, the American operation was not discovered, and no men were lost in the aborted raid. Sgt. Maj. William Seymour of the Delaware Line recorded that:

Stono Ferry … which we reached on the twelfth of January, 1782, we having had detachments from the Pennsylvanians and Carolinians joined us, the whole amounting to four hundred men, which, together with Lee’s infantry and a detachment from the Maryland Line, amounting to about three hundred men, the whole amounting to about seven hundred men. We came before this place on Saturday, the twelfth [January 1782], at night, and thought to cross the river on Johns Island at low water, which we might have effected if we had not been too late, the tide making so fast that it was rendered impracticable. On Tuesday, the fifteenth, the infantry of the Delaware Regiment entered the Island, making several prisoners, refugees, the British Army having evacuated the Island. Sixteenth, we marched to Stono Church, thirteen miles. Seventeenth, moved our encampment about two miles towards Parker’s Ferry.

In clear hindsight, it appears that stopping the raid with no losses was a great blessing for the Americans. The operation achieved one of its tactical goals of convincing the British to evacuate the island although none of the prized cattle were captured. If Laurens and Lee had succeeded, they would have had about 450 very cold and wet infantrymen on an island of over 83 square miles, outside of any practical support from Greene, without artillery or cavalry, pitted against a stronger enemy, who was warm, dry and well-equipped with infantry, artillery and cavalry. In crossing chest-deep water, those men would have to hold their firelocks, as well as their cartridge boxes, over their heads. Walking that far, in the water, with a musket and gear over your head, would have been tiring and it is likely that more than one soldier dropped his weapon, or slid on the mud or fell in a hole. When that happens, ammunition is ruined, and that soldier is not going to be combat effective. Most of the British were posted on the eastern side of the island, over six miles from the Americans’ landing point on the New Cut. The time to traverse this distance would give the British officers time to organize a spirited defense. There were some similarities with this plan and Lee’s controversial raid on the British held fortifications at Paulus Hook, New Jersey. The complexity of the operational plan, the ultra-precise timing because of the requirement of an extraordinarily low, slack tide, moonless darkness, and the many variables which could lose the element of surprise all doomed this enterprise of these two ultra-aggressive officers. This assault was clearly “A Bridge Too Far.”

121 Laurens to Greene, Jan. 11, 1782, PNG, X: 183; Lee, p. 388-389 reported that Maj. Joseph Eggleston of his Legion’s cavalry found a safe horse ford some distance below the galleys.
123 At Paulus Hook, Lee’s men crossed open marshlands and waist-deep canals (in the summer) at night with the critical timing of low tide, forded a moat and attacked several British gun emplacements and fortifications. They were unable to secure all of the fortifications or hold it for long, but he did embarrass the British and took prisoners. Lee was cited by Congress and awarded a gold medal for his success, but he was also court martialed and acquitted for his risky leadership on this raid. Piecuch and Beakes, Lee, p. 35-57.
124 Title of a motion picture about the failure of the Allies’ World War II bold Operation Market Garden which placed light troops (paratroopers) many miles behind Axis lines in occupied Holland. Gen. Leslie agreed with author’s assessment on the folly of the raid. PNG, X: 209 fn 5
British commander Gen. Leslie had learned of the Americans’ bold plan against Johns Island on January 12-13, but chose to order a withdrawal instead of mounting battle. Leslie later wrote to Gen. Clinton on January 29, 1782, “On the 13th: of December (?) I received intelligence of Mr: Green’s intentions of detaching a very strong Corps against Major Craig, (who was judiciously posted at William Gibbs’s on John’s Island) supported by his whole Army, which had crossed the Eddisto for that purpose, and moved towards Stono. notwithstanding their great superiority I am sensible they would not have succeeded in their attempt, which was hazardous, tho’ well concerted, yet very little was to be gained by their defeat, which must have been partial, and so many circumstances concurring to induce me to prevent the attempt, that I ordered the Island to be evacuated; Major Craig crossed that night and the following day to Perrineau’s on James Island, & took post there, near to the four Redoubts, Colonel Moncreif had previously directed to be constructed, for the more effectual security of that Island.” Greene did not control the coastal waterways and the British already had gunboats on station to contest the crossing. Greene had no boats to move artillery or supplies; he could possibly have pushed a few more men across the tidal flats but to what good outcome? Greene explained the mission’s failure in a report to South Carolina’s Governor John Rutledge and to John Hanson, President of the Continental Congress.

To Governor John Rutledge of South Carolina

Mr Ozborns Plantation [S.C.] January 16th 1781 [1782]

Dear Sir

We have long had in contemplation an enterprise upon Johns Island. On fryday last [11 January] the Troops were put in motion to carry it into execution. We were fortunate in the general movements both in point of time, and secrecy, as the Enemy had got no intelligence of our designs. On Saturday in the afternoon the Troops, which were to make the attack, began their march from this place for Newcut[,] commanded by Lt Col [John] Laurens and Lt Col [Henry] Lee and the whole army followed the same evening in order to support the enterprise.

The Light troops, arrivd in good order within three quarters of a mile of the crossing place, on to Johns Island about twelve oClock, and the disposition was soon made for crossing. The place where the troops were to cross is a fording place of Newcut, only passable at low water, and then only practicable with infantry and those with great difficulty. Between one and two at which time the tide served the troops moved to the crossing place[.] One column led by Lt Col Lee got over, but unfortunately the other Column led by Major Hambleton [Hamilton] from the darkness of the night and by not moving exactly at the same moment the first column did, got lost and tho they got out of the way but a small distance, yet it was so long before they were found that the tide had rizen so high as to be imposible and the other troops were obliged to recross. The enemy had a Galley and a couple of gun boats to guard the pass which prevented our passing in the day. Sunday Night [13 January] the enemy retreated from the Island.

On Monday we attempted to drive the galley from her position but the distance was too great to do her much injury, however that night she quitted her position and went up the river towards Edisto Island. Co[1] Laurens crossed on[to] the Island with a small party of Infantry and a few Cavalry at Stono Ferry by the help of a small boat which we carried down on a waggon. A few straggling prisoners were taken and the enemies baggage and stores on board a S[c]hooner very narrowly

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125 Laurens to Greene, Jan. 11, 1782, PNG, X: 183, and fn 3. It appears Gen. Leslie had learned of the Americans’ interest in Johns Island as early as Dec. 13, 1781; however, I suspect Leslie meant Jan. 13. Greene’s Orders, Jan. 16, 1782, PNG, X: 202 n 1 (PRO 30 / 55 #4088)
126 Leslie to Clinton, Camp near Charlestown, Jan. 29, 1782, BHQP, Vol. 35, Dec. 31, 1781 - Feb. 9, 1782, p. 4088
127 Greene to Rutledge, Jan. 16, 1782, PNG, X: 206; 242-244.
escaped. The Col attacked her very briskly with his infantry but for want of a field piece she effected her [return?]. A field piece was got over the river as soon as possible but she had got out of reach before its arrival.

We have got territory but we mist the great object of the enterprise, which is the more to be regreted as we find the plan would have succeeded equal to our most sanguine wishes, had it not been for the accident of the columns missing its way. I feel no less mortification upon the occasion from the chagrine and disappointment of the Officers who were to conduct the enterprise, than from the loss of so important an object, as three or four hundred prisoners from which many good consequences might have been expected. The design was happily conceivd and to the point of execution fortunately conducted and then blasted by one of those accidents which human foresight cannot guard against.

The Enemy retreated to James Island leaving some few stores behind them and destroying some others. I am with great [respect?] your Excellencys most obt humble

N GREENE

Greene went on to write to John Hanson, President of Congress, describing the mission and lamenting its failure: “Had it succeeded it would have been both important and splendid.”

Lee explained the mission’s failure in his book thirty years later. 128

How often do we find military operations frustrated by the unaccountable interposition of accident, when every exertion in the power of the commander has been made to prevent the very interruption which happens? No doubt these incidents generally spring from negligence or misconduct; and, therefore, might be considerably diminished, if not entirely arrested, by unceasing attention. When the van turned into the marsh, Lee, as has been mentioned, halted to give a minute or two for taking off boots and shoes, and did not move until lieutenant colonel Laurens, who had been sent for, came up and informed him that every section was in place. From this time Laurens continued with Lee, and in the very short space which occurred before the leading section of Laurens reached the point of turning into the marsh did the mistake occur which put an end to our much desired enterprise. Lieutenant colonel Lee believing the intervention of mistake impracticable, as the sections were all up, and as the march through the marsh would be slower than it had been before, did not direct one of his staff, as he had done heretofore, to halt at the point where the change in the course of the route occurred. This omission cannot be excused. This precaution, although now neglected in consequence of the official communication then received that the sections were all in place, and the short distance to the marsh, — the experience of this night proves that however satisfactorily the march may have been conducted, and however precisely in place the troops may be, yet that no preventive of mistake should be neglected. Had the practice been followed at the last change of course, which had uniformly taken place during the previous march, the fatal error would not have been committed, and this concluding triumph to our arms in the South would not have been lost.

New York Loyalist Maj. John Coffin, riding with 45 provincial dragoons out of their Quarter House post, clashed with the American detachment watching Dorchester, and captured its lieutenant, John Kelty, and six Continental Light Dragoons on January 14. Kelty’s Dorchester area patrol was quickly replaced by one led by Lt. Henry Bell. 129

The day after the aborted raid on Johns Island, Greene detached his artillery to fire on the British galleys guarding the low-tide ford. This artillery duel did not cause the British galleys to withdraw. 130

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128 Lee, p. 534-536. He personally accepted some of the blame for not posting an officer to direct the second column.
129 Call to Greene, Jan. 14, 1782, PNG, X: 192, 194-195 and 243; O’Kelley, NBBS, 4: 30
130 Greene to Rutledge, Jan. 16, 1782, PNG, X: 206
The next day, on January 15, Col. Laurens’s light troops with the Delaware Continentals crossed the New Cut again and found that the British rear guard departed Johns Island crossing to James Island where the British had erected additional redoubts to protect their crossing. The spoils collected were some stragglers captured and a small quantity of stores not removed or destroyed. Laurens’s men fired at the schooner ferrying their last men and cattle from Johns Island to James Island. Laurens sent for a cannon to attack the boat; however, the British got almost all of their men and supplies off the island without loss. Greene did not have the forces to occupy Johns Island nor did he want them trapped on an island, so Americans turned Johns Island into a no-man’s-land.

January 16, 1782 – To Guard the Assembly

Excerpt from USGS 7.5 minute topographic map. To protect the South Carolina General Assembly meeting at Jacksonborough from the British based at Charleston, Gen. Nathanael Greene moved his army 4 miles east of Jacksonborough on January 16, 1782 to “Col. Skirving’s.” This plantation was owned by SC Patriot militia Col. William Skirving and was used by Greene as his Head Quarters as shown above. It lies on the main Charlestown Road. Col. William Skirving was the colonel of the Colleton Patriot militia who fought at Port Royal Island under Gen. William Moultrie in 1779. Headquarters plantation is now called “Oak Lawn”, which was the home of Confederate Gen. Ambrosio José Gonzales’s family. It has a 1910 Spanish architecture house built on the old site where Union soldiers burned the antebellum house in 1865. Annotations by author.

131 Laurens to Greene, Jan. 15, 1782, PNG, X: 196; O’Kelley, NBBS, 4: 27-30
By January 18, 1782, the General Assembly had a quorum of both houses thus reestablishing the constitutional legislature of the Palmetto State. Gen. Greene marched southwest from St. Paul’s Stono Church 18 miles (as the crow flies) to camp at Col. William Skirving’s plantation to protect the South Carolina General Assembly gathered in Jacksonborough. Greene established his headquarters at Skirving’s Oak Lawn plantation on the main Charlestown Road while the legislature elected new constitutional officers, debated how to deal with the Loyalists left in the state, and how to fund their military’s operations. The British could not intimidate the South Carolina General Assembly gathering in Jacksonborough by land or water without fighting through Greene’s army. Many of the state’s top Continental and militia officers were elected to serve in the General Assembly, including Generals Huger, Gadsden, Sumter, Pickens, and Marion.

February 2, 1782

Excerpt from USGS 7.5 minute topographic map. The most likely Osborn camp is the area north of modern US 17, surrounded by swamps and the location of Osborn Church on (above Hyde Park Road) Spring Grove Road (S-10-635), not the 19th c. railroad stop also called Osborn.

Gen. Greene moved the army’s main camp again on February 2, 1782, about one mile further northeast to “Osborne’s” camp; both camps were called by Greene “Pon Pon, SC.” Greene’s Southern Army remained camped at Osborn’s Plantation until March 22, 1782, when Greene moved to his new camp just above the colonial town of Dorchester at Bacon’s Bridge over the upper Ashley River. Lee, frustrated over the gossip about his performance at Eutaw Springs, resigned and returned to Virginia.

133 Greene’s Orders, Jan. 16, PNG, X: 201
134 Greene’s Orders, Feb. 1 and 2, 1782, PNG, X: 291 and 303
135 Greene’s Orders, March 21, 1782, PNG, X: 529 and 535
The war would not end in South Carolina until the British evacuated Charlestown in December 1782. Although the British Parliament suspended offensive operations in February 1782 the British were forced to continue to make raids into the Lowcountry plantations for food for the garrison, citizens and refugees crowded into the Charlestown area. Loyalist Col. Benjamin Thompson, later called Count Rumford, led a successful raid out of Charlestown in late February into the lower Santee River area, scattering Marion's troops at Durant’s (Wambaw) and Tidyman’s Plantations while many of the senior American officers attended the General Assembly in Jacksonborough. In the British Army’s last major “rice raid” to the Port Royal - Combahee River area in August 1782, Col. John Laurens was tragically killed. In the three and one-half months since November, Greene’s tiny army with support of the South Carolina State Troops and Georgia partisans started their reconquest of Georgia, watched the British withdraw all Crown support from North Carolina and forced the British to withdraw even closer into Charlestown, from about a 35 mile radius to within about 8 miles of the city. This started Greene’s final phase of his Southern Campaign, the siege of Charlestown.

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