VOL. IV JUNE, 1904 No. 2

THE NORTH CAROLINA BOOKLET

GREAT EVENTS IN NORTH CAROLINA HISTORY

THE BATTLE OF RAMSAUR'S MILL,

BY

MAJ. WILLIAM A. GRAHAM.

PRICE, 10 CENTS $1 THE YEAR

THE NORTH CAROLINA BOOKLET.

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VOL. IV.

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MISS MARY HILLIARD HINTON. MRS. E. E. MOFFITT.

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"CAROLINA! CAROLINA! HEAVEN'S BLESSINGS ATTEND HER!
WHILE WE LIVE WE WILL CHERISH, PROTECT AND DEFEND HER."

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PREFACE.

The object of the North Carolina Booklet is to erect a suitable memorial to the patriotic women who composed the "Edenton Tea Party."

These stout-hearted women are every way worthy of admiration. On October 25, 1774, seven months before the defiant farmers of Mecklenburg had been aroused to the point of signing their Declaration of Independence, nearly twenty months before the declaration made by the gentlemen composing the Vestry of St. Paul's Church, Edenton, nearly two years before Jefferson penned the immortal National Declaration, these daring women solemnly subscribed to a document affirming that they would use no article taxed by England. Their example fostered in the whole State a determination to die, or to be free.

In beginning this new series, the Daughters of the Revolution desire to express their most cordial thanks to the former competent and untiringly faithful Editors, and to ask for the new management the hearty support of all who are interested in the brave deeds, high thought, and lofty lives of the North Carolina of the olden days.

Mrs. D. H. Hill.

CONTENTS VOLUME IV.

THE BATTLE OF RAMSAUR'S MILL.

JUNE 20, 1780.

BY WILLIAM A. GRAHAM,

(Major on Staff of Adjutant General of North Carolina).

Sir Henry Clinton, after the surrender of Charleston in May, 1780, regarded the Royal authority as restored in Georgia and South Carolina, and, leaving Lord Cornwallis in command with a force, which was regarded, with the anticipated re-inforcements from friends in upper South Carolina and North Carolina, as sufficient to subdue North Carolina, sailed with his main army to New York.

Lord Cornwallis' plan of campaign was to move with the main body of Regulars by a central route through Charlotte and Salisbury, and to send a small force under a competent commander to his right to organize his friends in the upper Cape Fear section, and another force to his left to embody the adherents of Britain in upper South Carolina and in Tryon County; to re-inforce his main army and also to protect his outposts from the attacks of McDowell, Cleavland and others aided by the "over the mountain men," as those beyond the Blue Ridge were called. The crops of the previous year being consumed, he delayed his movement until that of 1780 could be harvested and threshed. The section around Ramsaur's Mill was then, as it is now, very fine for wheat. He sent

Colonel John Moore into this country to inform the people that he was coming and would reward and protect the loyal, but would inflict dire punishment upon his opponents; for them to secure the wheat crop and be in readiness, but to make no organization until he should direct.

THE TORIES.

Moore had gone from this section and joined the British army some time previous and had been made Lieutenant-Colonel of Hamilton's Tory regiment. He had been an active Tory and committed many depredations upon the Whigs before his departure, and is especially named with others in Laws of 1779, chapter 2, and of 1782, chapter 6, as one whose property was to be confiscated. In those days there were no post-offices or country stores for the congregating of the people. The flouring mills were the points of assembling, and the roads usually named for the mills to which they led.

Derick Ramsaur, who was among the first German (generally called Dutch) emigrants to Tryon County, erected his mill prior to 1770 on the west bank of Clark's Creek, where the Morganton road bridge at Lincolnton now spans the stream.

The German population in North Carolina, who mostly came here from Pennsylvania, were, during the Revolutionary war, generally favorable to Great Britain. Some have attributed this to the fact that the "reigning" family (Brunswick) was German and that George was King of Hanover as well as of Great Britain. However this may have been

in the Revolution, it does not seem to have been in evidence during the Regulation troubles. After the battle of Alamance, Governor Tryon wrote the Secretary of State that the counties of Mecklenburg, Tryon and western Rowan beyond Yadkin were contemplating hostilities and that he had sent General Wadell with the militia of those counties and some other troops to require the inhabitants to take the oath of allegiance. One of the points at which they were assembled for this purpose was Ramsaur's Mill. This would hardly have been the case if the people of this region had not been in sympathy with the Regulators. Having taken the oath of allegiance to King George, it was not strange that they should have felt inclined to regard its obligations, especially when those who were urging them to take up arms against the King were the very men who had administered the oath to them. General Rutherford, Colonel Neal, Captains Alexander, Shaw and others were at that time officers of the militia. They had sympathized with the Regulators on account of common wrongs and oppressions which they suffered, and knew what the evils were which they wished remedied. Now the cause of action is taxation, about which they had little interest and perhaps less knowledge. The Germans, as a race, are a confiding, trusting people to those in whom they have confidence and who act candidly with them, but they seldom live long enough to forgive any one who deceives them or who acts so as to forfeit their confidence. At this time the cause of America was in a depressed state, and many loyal hearts lost hope. It is not improbable that

at least some of these people anticipated with pleasure the time they should behold Griffith Rutherford and his comrades with bared heads and uplifted hands affirming their loyalty to King George and repeating the *role* they had compelled them to act in 1771; at any rate, they were not inclined at their behest to violate the oath they had forced them to swear. The friends of Britain in Tryon County were not confined to the Germans; there were probably as large a per cent. of the English Tories. Neither Moore nor Welch were German. Colonel Moore returned to the vicinity and appointed a meeting for June 10th at his father's (Moses Moore) residence on Indian Creek, seven miles from Ramsaur's. The place of the "Tory Camp" is still pointed out, and is on the Gaston side of the county line on the plantation which was owned by the late Captain John H. Roberts. Forty men met him on that day. He delivered Lord Cornwallis' message, but before they dispersed a messenger informed them that Major Joseph McDowell (who was one of the most ubiquitous officers of the North Carolina militia during the Revolution) was in the neighborhood endeavoring to capture some of the men who were present. Moore, having a force double in number to that of McDowell, sought him and followed him to South Mountains, but did not overtake him. He then dismissed the men with directions to meet at Ramsaur's Mill on the 13th of the month. About two hundred assembled. Nicholas Welch, who had lived just above Moore on Indian Creek, went from this vicinity eighteen months prior to this and joined the British army. He appeared dressed in a new uniform

and exhibiting a considerable quantity of gold coins, representing himself as Major of Hamilton's Regiment. He urged the men to embody at once, telling of the fall of Charleston, Buford's defeat and the bad condition of affairs for the Americans everywhere. By his narratives and judicious use of his guineas he prevailed over Moore and it was determined to organize at once. Eleven hundred men had assembled at Ramsaur's, to which Captains Murray and Whitson of Lower Creek, Burke (Caldwell) County, added two hundred on the 18th. Colonel Moore, although the embodying was contrary to his advice, assumed command. He led a force to capture Colonel Hugh Brevard and Major Jo. McDowell, who came into the vicinity with a small company of Whigs, but they evaded him. On the 19th, with his command of thirteen hundred men, he occupied a ridge three hundred yards east of the mill and which extended east from the road leading from Tuckasegee Ford to Ramsaur's Mill, where it joined the road from Sherrill's Ford, and placed his outposts and pickets in advance, the pickets being six hundred yards from the main force, and upon the Tuskasegee Road. The ridge had a gentle slope and was open, except a few trees, for two hundred yards; its foot was bounded by a glade, the side of which was covered with bushes. The glade was between the Tuckasegee and Sherrill's Ford Roads.

THE WHIGS.

General Rutherford, learning of the advance of Lord Rawdon to Waxhaw Creek, ordered a portion of his command, the militia of the Salisbury District, Rowan, Mecklenburg and

Tryon Counties, into service for a tour of three months. This force rendezvoused at Reese's plantation, eighteen miles northeast of Charlotte, June 12th. Learning that the British had returned to Hanging Rock, General Rutherford advanced ten miles to Mallard Creek, and on the 14th organized his forces for the campaign. This point on Mallard Creek is several times mentioned in Revolutionary papers as occupied by Whig forces. Hearing that the Tories were embodying in Tryon County, he ordered Colonel Francis Locke, of Rowan, and Major David Wilson, of Mecklenburg, to raise a force in northern Mecklenburg and west Rowan to disperse the Tories, as he did not think his present force could undertake this task until Lord Rawdon's intentions were developed. On the 18th Major Wilson, with sixty-five men, among whom were Captains Patrick Knox and William Smith, crossed the Catawba at Toole's Ford, about fourteen miles from Charlotte, near where Moore's Ferry was for many years and Allison's Ferry is now. The ford has been seldom used since 1865, and has been abandoned as a crossing for many years. It is three miles below Cowan's Ford. Taking the Beattie's Ford Road, he soon met Major Jo. McDowell with twenty-five men, among whom were Captain Daniel McKissick and John Bowman. Major McDowell, who had been moving about the country awaiting re-inforcements, probably informed him of the position occupied by the Tories. These troops, in order to unite with the forces being raised by Colonel Locke, kept the road up the river, passing Beattie's Ford, and three miles above, Captains Falls, Houston, Torrence,

Reid and Caldwell, who had crossed at McEwen's Ford with forty men, joined them. McEwen's Ford was near where McConnell's Ferry was, up to 1870, but both ford and ferry have long been abandoned.

Marching the road that is now the Newton Road, past Fleming's Cross Roads, they camped on Mountain Creek at a place called the "Glades," sixteen miles from Ramsaur's. Here, on the 19th, they received additional forces under Colonel Locke, amounting to two hundred and seventy men, among whom were Captains Brandon, Sharpe, William Alexander, Smith, Dobson, Sloan and Hardin. Colonel Locke had collected most of this force as he proceeded up the river and had crossed with them at Sherrill's Ford, which is used to this day, and where General Morgan crossed the following January. The whole force now amounted to about four hundred—McDowell's, Fall's and Brandon's men (perhaps one hundred) being mounted. A council of war was convened to determine plan for action. The proximity of the Tories and the small number of the Whigs made it necessary for quick movement, as the Tories would probably move against them as soon as they learned the true condition. Some proposed to cross the river at Sherrill's Ford, six miles in the rear, and to hold it against the Tories. It was replied to this that a retreat would embolden the Tories and that the re-inforcement to the Tories, who already outnumbered them three to one, would probably be greater than to them. Then it was suggested to move down the river to join Rutherford, who was about forty-five miles distant. It was objected to

this that nearly all the serviceable Whigs of this section were with them or Rutherford, and this would leave their families unprotected and exposed to pillage by the Tories; also the Tories might be in motion and they encounter them on the march. Then came the insinuation that these suggestions came from fear, or at least from unwillingness to meet the Tories, and a proposition to march during the night and attack the Tories early next morning, as they would be ignorant of their numbers and could be easily routed. This had the usual effect; not many soldiers or other people can stand an imputation of cowardice. So this plan was adopted. Colonel James Johnston, who lived in Tryon (Gaston) County near Toole's Ford, and who had joined Major Wilson when he crossed the river, was dispatched to inform General Rutherford of their action. Late in the evening they marched down the south side of Anderson's Mountain, and taking the "State" Road, stopped at the Mountain Spring to arrange a plan of battle. It was agreed that Brandon's, Fall's and McDowell's men, being mounted, should open the attack, the footmen to follow, and every man, without awaiting orders, govern himself as developments might make necessary as the fight proceeded. The British having retired to Camden, General Rutherford determined to give his attention to Colonel Moore, On the 18th of June he marched to Tuckasegee Ford, twelve miles from Charlotte and twenty miles from Ramsaur's. He dispatched a message to Colonel Locke, directing him to meet him with his command at General Joseph Dickson's, three miles from Tuckasegee (and where Mr. Ural M. Johnston,

a great grandson of James Johnston, now lives), on the evening of the 19th or morning of the 20th. That afternoon he moved to the Dickson place. The morning of the 19th was wet, and fearing the arms might be out of condition, at midday, when it cleared off, he ordered them to be discharged and examined. The firing was heard in the adjacent county; the people thinking that the enemy were endeavoring to cross the river, volunteers came to re-inforce the Whigs. At the Catawba, Colonel William Graham, with the Lincoln County Regiment, united with General Rutherford, whose command now numbered twelve hundred. Colonel Johnston reached General Rutherford about ten o'clock at night, who, thinking his courier had informed Colonel Locke, waited until early next morning before moving, when he marched for Ramsaur's.

THE BATTLE.

Leaving the mountain, Colonel Locke's force would follow the "State" Road until they came into what is now Buffalo Shoal Road, then into Sherrill's Ford Road as it ran to Ramsaur's Mill. A mile from the mill they were met by Adam Reep with a small company, perhaps twenty. Reep was a noted Whig, and although his neighbors generally were loyal to King George, he was leader of a few patriots who were always ready to answer his call to arms. The story which tradition tells of his acts would make a base for a fine narrative of Revolutionary times. He gave full account of the Tory position, and further arrangements were made as to plan of attack. There are two roads mentioned in General Gra-

ham's account of this battle in "General Joseph Graham and his Revolutionary Papers." He speaks of *the* road, *i. e.,* Tuckasegee Road, and *this* road, *i. e.,* the old or Sherrill's Ford Road, the track of which is still visible. They united at the western end of the ridge and just beyond the glade. The road at the right of the Tory position is now a cut eight feet or more deep; then it was on top of the ground. The Tories were on the right of the cavalry, who came the old road, and left of the infantry, who came the Tuckasegee Road—the center of the line being between the attacking parties. There seems to have been three attacking parties: First, mounted men, probably under McDowell, on the old road; second, mainly infantry, under Locke, on the Tuckasegee Road, upon which the Tory picket was placed, near where the Burton residence is now; third, Captain Hardin, who came over the hill where Lincolnton now stands, then through the ravine near McLoud's house and gained position on the right flank of the Tories.

The central party was formed, cavalry in front, infantry in two ranks in the rear—they moved by flank. The cavalry discovering the picket, chased them to camp. McDowell's men had pushed on and reached the enemy about the same time, and both parties, leaving the road, rode up within thirty steps of the enemy and opened fire. The enemy were considerably demoralized at first, but seeing so few (not over one hundred) in the attacking party, rallied and poured such a volley into them that they retired through the infantry, some of whom joined them and never returned. Most of the cavalry re-

formed and returned to the contest. Captain Bowman had been killed. Captain Falls, being mortally wounded, rode some two hundred yards and fell dead from his horse where the Sherrill's Ford Road turned down the hill. This spot is still noted. The infantry, nothing daunted, pushed forward, and, coming to the end of the glade, began to form by what is now called "by the right, front into line," and to open fire as each man came into position. The six hundred yards pursuit had much disorganized their line. The Tories advanced down the hill and endeavored to disperse them before they could form. As the Whigs came on they filled gaps and extended the line to their right and made it so hot that the enemy retreated to the top of the hill and a little beyond, so as to partly protect their bodies. The Whigs pursued them, but the fire was so deadly and their loss so heavy that they in turn retreated down the hill to the bushes at the edge of the glade.

The Tories again advanced half way down the ridge. In the midst of the fight at this time Captain Hardin arrived at his position behind the fence on the right flank of the Tories and opened fire. Captain Sharpe had extended the line until he turned the left of the enemy, and his company began firing from that direction (about where Mr. Roseman's barn now stands). The Tories, hard pressed in front, fell back to the top of the ridge, and, finding that they were still exposed to Hardin's fire on the right, as well as to that of Sharpe on the left, broke and fled down the hill and across the creek, many being shot as they ran.

When the Whigs gained the hill they saw quite a force of

the enemy over the creek near the mill and supposed the attack would be renewed. Forming line, they could only master eighty-six, and after earnest exertions only one hundred and ten could be paraded. Major Wilson and Captain William Alexander, of Rowan, were dispatched to hurry General Rutherford forward; they met his forces about where Salem Baptist Church now stands, six and a half miles from Lincolnton, on the old narrow-gauge railroad; Davie's Cavalry was started at a gallop and the infantry at quick-step. Within two miles they met men from the field, who told them the result. When the battle began the Tories who had no arms went across the creek. Captain Murray was killed early in the action; his and Whitson's men immediately followed. Colonel Moore made his headquarters behind a locust-tree near the road. Upon his right flank becoming exposed to the galling fire of Hardin, he did not wait to see the end, and was joined by Major Welch in his change of base.

Captain Sharpe's men, in deploying to the right, went beyond the crest of the ridge (below the present Roseman barn). Here, exposed to the deadly aim of the enemy's rifles, they advanced from tree to tree until they obtained a position enfilading the enemy, and with unerring aim picked off their boldest officers. Captain Sharpe's brother placed his gun against a tree to "draw a bead" on a Tory captain; his arm was broken by a shot from the enemy and his gun fell to the ground. A well-directed shot from the Captain felled the Tory captain and contributed much to the speedy termination of the battle. General Graham says that at this end of the

Tory line "one tree at the root of which two brothers lay dead was grazed by three balls on one side and two on the other." Colonel Moore, fearing pursuit, sent a flag of truce to propose suspension of hostilities to bury the dead and care for the wounded; but ordered all footmen and poorly-mounted men to leave for home at once. Colonel Locke, not wishing the enemy to discover the paucity of his forces, sent Major James Rutherford (a son of the General, and who was killed at Eutaw) to meet the flag. In answer to the request of Moore, he demanded surrender in ten minutes; the flag returned, when Moore and the fifty who remained with him immediately fled. Moore reached Cornwallis with about thirty followers, was put under arrest, threatened with court-martial for disobedience of orders, but was finally released.

In some instances this was a fight between neighbors and kindred, although there were not many Whigs in the Lincoln forces—the militia of the county being with Colonel Graham, who was with Rutherford.

In the thickest of the fight a Dutch Tory, seeing an acquaintance, said: "How do you do, Pilly? I have knowed you since you was a little poy, and never knew no harm of you except you was a rebel." Billy, who was out for business and not to renew acquaintance, as his gun was empty, clubbed it and made a pass at his friend's head, who dodged and said: "Stop! Stop! I am not going to stand still and be killed like a damn fool, needer," and immediately made a lick at Billy's head, which he dodged. A friend of Billy whose gun was loaded put it to the Dutchman's side and shot him dead.

Captain McKissick, who was shot through the shoulder early in the action, went over towards Lincolnton *en route* to a friend's. He met Abram Keener, a Tory captain, but personal friend, with ten companions, who had been to a neighboring farm, and were returning to camp. His companions would have treated Captain McKissick badly, probably killed him; but Keener took him prisoner and protected him. On reaching the camp, and seeing a good many strange faces with his acquaintances, who were prisoners, Keener said: "Hey, poys, you seem to have a good many prisoners." The Whigs, by his speech, knew he was a Tory, and were going to shoot him and his companions, but Captain McKissick interfered, and by earnest appeal saved their lives.

Adam Reep, as part of the history of the battle, was accustomed to tell that the Tories took all his cattle, including his bull, and drove them to their camp; that when the firing began the Tories soon began to pass his house, which was some three miles away, and it was not long before "old John" appeared in the procession bellowing: "Lib-er-ty! Lib-er-ty!! Lib-er-ty!!!"

There was no official report of the battle, consequently the exact number of casualties was never known. The badge of the Tories was a green pine twig in the hat. In the heat of battle some of these would fall out and others were thrown away, so that it could not be told to which side many belonged.

Fifty-six dead lay on the face of the ridge, up and down which the forces advanced and retreated. Thirteen of these

were of Captain Sharpe's Fourth Creek (Statesville) Company. Many bodies lay scattered over the hill. The killed were seventy or more, forty of whom were Whigs. The wounded were one hundred on each side, some of whom afterwards died from their wounds. Among the Whigs killed were Captains Dobson, Falls, Armstrong, Smith, Sloan and Bowman. Captains McKissick and Houston were wounded. Some of the Whigs wore a piece of white paper in their hats as a badge. Several of them were shot through the head. Many of the dead were buried on the field. Wives, mothers, daughters and other kindred of the contestants came that afternoon and next morning to inquire for their friends. As they discovered them among the dead and dying, there were heart-rending scenes of distress and grief. Mrs. Falls came twenty-five miles on horseback, accompanied by her negro cook. Finding her gallant husband dead, she obtained a quilt from Mrs. Reinhardt, whose husband lived near the battle-ground, and carried his body across Sherrill's Ford and buried it with his kindred.

The troops engaged, except Reep of Lincoln, and Major Wilson, Captains Knox and Smith of Mecklenburg, were from (what to 1777 had been) Rowan County. The officers' surnames were found among the militia officers of the county in the proceedings of the "Committee of Safety," of which many of them were members. Captain John Hardin's beat was along Lord Granville's line from Silver Creek in Burke to South Fork, and from these two points to the Catawba River. Captain Joseph Dobson was within its bounds. Much

the largest portion of the troops was from what is now Iredell County. Captain John Sloan was from Fourth Creek. I do not think all who are mentioned as captains held that position at this time; some may have been prior to and some became so afterward. No account was written until forty years had elapsed. There seems to have been but few commands given in the engagement; officers and privates acted as occasion required, and both suffered severely.

This was a battle between the ancestors of the North Carolina Confederate soldier, and taking armament and surroundings into consideration, is about a sample of what would have been witnessed in North Carolina in 1861-'65 if those who believed the proper course to pursue for redress of wrongs was to "fight in the Union" had refused to fight outside, or if Pettigrew's and Cooke's forces had been pitted against Lane's and McRae's. Tradition says Locke's men got some liquor at "Dellinger's Tavern" as they were going into the fight. This tavern stood on the present Robinson block in Lincolnton. At that time Henry Dellinger kept a tavern seven miles from Lincolnton at a cross-road, where John B. Smith now lives. It was probably Rutherford's men *en route* to the battle-field who "took courage" at Dellinger's Tavern.

IMPORTANCE OF THE BATTLE.

This battle is but little known in history, yet is one of the most important in results and best fought of the Revolution. King's Mountain and Ramsaur's Mill at that time were both in Lincoln County, and not twenty miles apart. If Moore

had obeyed Lord Cornwallis, and delayed organization until Ferguson advanced, he could have re-inforced him with two thousand men. If the Whigs had been defeated matters would have been in even worse condition. Ramsaur's Mill was the first and most important "act" in King's Mountain. It destroyed Toryism in that section and caused Bryan, with his followers, to leave the "forks of the Yadkin" and not return until Cornwallis came. The Dutch, as they had kept the oath to King George, kept their "parole" to the American cause. Cornwallis marched through this country the following January and camped at Ramsaur's Mill. He lost more by desertion than he gained in recruits. When he was here, Morgan passed the present site of Maiden, nine miles distant, and for five days was not twenty miles from him. A messenger on any of these days would have enabled Cornwallis to place his army between Morgan and the Catawba River. I do not think, in killed and wounded, in proportion to numbers engaged, the battle is equalled in the Revolution. Forty killed and one hundred wounded, out of four hundred engaged, is high class, even in Confederate annals. The defeat and rout of three times their number is certainly worthy of note. No attempt has been made to preserve the features of this battle-ground; to-day it is tilled by the plow of the farmer, and but slight mementoes of the battle can be seen. On the highest point of the ridge is a head-stone marking three Tory graves. One at the foot of the hill marks another. A brick wall near where the severest fighting was done contains the remains of Captain Dobson where he fell;

also the remains of his daughter and her husband, Wallace Alexander, who were buried beside him some years after the Revolution. The battle-field is now within the corporate limits of Lincolnton.

AFTER THE BATTLE.

General Rutherford remained here two days, sending Davie's Cavalry and other troops through the country arresting Tories, who were nearly all "paroled"; a few who had committed serious depredations being sent to Salisbury jail to await trial at next term of court. Being informed that Colonel Bryan, the noted Tory, had organized his forces in the "forks of the Yadkin," he determined to give him attention. On mustering his troops, he found he had only two hundred men of the sixteen hundred present two days before. This is a fair sample of the conduct of the Mecklenburg and Rowan militia in the Revolution. They would answer all calls to fight, but when the battle was over, or while preparation was being made, they declined to undergo the wearisomeness of camp-life. General Rutherford did not, as would be done now, send details to bring the absentees back, but sent messengers ahead along the road he would march, and before he reached the vicinity of Bryan he had six hundred men. Bryan immediately fled, and most of Rutherford's men again sought their fire-sides—this time by his permission.

When these people accomplished the object for which they had been called into service, or when the cause for the call

disappeared, they regarded the purposes for which they were wanted as fulfilled, and went home ready to answer when again called for. General Graham, who was one of them, called General Davie's attention to this trait of character when General Davie was collecting a force to attack Rocky Mount.

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