

## **WILLIAM RICHARDSON DAVIE**

General William R. Davie was born in Egremont, near White Haven, in England, on the 20th of June, 1756. When he was only five years of age, he emigrated, with his father, Archibald Davie, to America, and was adopted by his maternal uncle, Rev. William Richardson, who resided on the Catawba river, in South Carolina. After due preparation at "Queen's Museum" in Charlotte, he entered Princeton College, where, by his close application, he soon acquired the reputation of an excellent student. But the din of arms disturbed his collegiate studies, so auspiciously commenced, and he forthwith exchanged the gown for the sword. The studies of the College were closed, and Davie volunteered his services in the army of the north in 1776. The campaign being ended, he returned to College, and graduated in the Fall of that year with the first honors of the Institution.

He returned to North Carolina, and commenced the study of the law in Salisbury, but the struggle for life and liberty then going on, did not allow his chivalric spirit to repose in quietude while his country was in danger. Actuated by urgent patriotic motives, he induced William Barnett, of Mecklenburg county, to raise, with as little delay as possible, a troop of horsemen. Over this company, William Barnett was elected Captain, and Davie, Lieutenant. The commission of the latter is signed by Governor Caswell, and is dated the 5th of April, 1779. This company joined the southern army, and became attached to Pulaski's Legion. Davie's gallantry and activity were so conspicuous, that he soon rose to the rank of Major.

At the battle of Stono, near Charleston, he experienced his first serious conflict in arms, and was severely wounded in the thigh, which laid him up for some time in the hospital in that city. In this engagement, Major Davie also received a wound from a heavy cavalry charge of the enemy, which caused him to fall from his horse. He still held the bridle, but was so severely wounded that, after repeated efforts, he could not remount. The enemy was now close upon him and in a moment more he would have been made a prisoner. Just at this time, a private, whose horse had been killed, and who was retreating, saw the imminent danger of his gallant officer, and returned at the risk of his life to save him. With great composure he raised Major Davie on his horse, and safely led him from the bloody field. "An action of courage worthy of Rome in her palmyest days." In the haste and confusion of the retreat, this brave soldier disappeared. Major Davie made frequent inquiries for his preserver, to evince his gratitude to him and his family, for his timely and heroic aid; but in vain.

At the siege of Ninety-Six, when Davie was acting as Commissary-General of the Southern army, on the morning of the attack, a soldier came to his tent, and made himself known as the man who had assisted him in mounting his horse at Stono. The soldier promised to call again, but, alas! he fell soon after in battle, which deprived Major Davie of the pleasure of bestowing upon him substantial tokens of his lasting gratitude.

After his recovery, Major Davie returned to Salisbury, and resumed the study of law. In 1780, he obtained his license to practice, and soon became distinguished in his profession. But the camp rather than the Court-house,

still demanded his services. In the winter of 1780, he obtained authority from the General Assembly of North Carolina to raise a troop of cavalry, and two companies of mounted infantry. But the authority only was granted. The State being too poor to provide the means, Major Davie, with a patriotism worthy of perpetual remembrance, disposed of the estate acquired from his uncle, and thus raised funds to equip the troops. With this force, he proceeded to the southwestern portion of the State and protected it from the predatory incursions of the British and Tories. Charleston having surrendered on the 12th of May, 1780, and Tarleton's butchery of Colonel Buford's regiment, in the Waxhaws, on the 29th, induced General Rutherford to order out the militia in mass, to oppose the advance of the conquerors. On the 3rd of June, nine hundred men assembled at Charlotte, ready to defend their country. The militia were reviewed by General Rutherford, and, after being addressed in strong, patriotic language by Dr. Whorter, President of the College in Charlotte, were dismissed, with directions to hold themselves in readiness at a moment's warning.

Lord Rawdon having advanced with the British army to Waxhaw Creek, General Rutherford issued, on the 10th of June, his orders for the militia to rendezvous at McKee's plantation, eighteen miles north-east of Charlotte. The orders were obeyed, and on the 12th eight hundred men were in arms on the ground. On the 14th the troops were organized. The cavalry, under Major Davie, was formed into two troops under Captains Lemmonds and Martin; a battalion of three hundred light infantry was placed under Colonel William Davidson, a regular officer, and the remainder under the immediate command of General Rutherford.

On the 15th of June General Rutherford marched within two miles of Charlotte. Here he learned that Lord Rawdon had retrograded from the Waxhaws to Camden. He then resolved to advance on the Tories, who, it was well known, had assembled in strong force at Ramsour's Mill, near the present town of Lincolnton. Having issued orders on the 14th to Colonel Francis Locke, Captains Falls and Brandon, of Rowan, and to Major David Wilson, of Mecklenburg, and to other officers, to raise men and attack this body of Tories, he marched on the 18th eleven miles, to Tuckasege Ford, on the Catawba River. He sent an express on the same day to Colonel Locke to meet him with his forces three miles north-west of the river, at Colonel Dickson's plantation. The express, for some unknown reason, never reached Colonel Locke. This officer, failing to secure the co-operative aid of General Rutherford, marched from Mountain Creek late on the evening of the 19th of June, and early on the morning of the 20th attacked and routed the Tories before the arrival of General Rutherford's forces.

After the battle of Ramsour's Mill, General Rutherford marched against the Tories assembled under Colonel Bryan in the forks of Yadkin River, while Major Davie was ordered to move with his mounted force and take position near the South Carolina line, to protect this exposed frontier from the incursions of the British and the Tories. He accordingly took position on the north side of Waxhaw Creek, where he was joined by Major Crawford, with a few South Carolina troops and thirty-five Indian warriors of the Catawba tribe, under their chief, New River, and the Mecklenburg militia under Colonel Hagins.

On the 20th of July Major Davie surprised and captured at Flat Rock, a convoy of provisions, spirits and clothing, guarded by some dragoons and volunteers, on their way to the post at Hanging Rock, about four and a half miles distant. The capture was effected without loss; the spirits, provisions and wagons were destroyed, and the prisoners, mounted on the captured horses and guarded by dragoons under Captain William Polk, at dark commenced their retreat. On Beaver Creek, about midnight, they were attacked by the enemy in ambuscade, concealed under the fence in a field of standing corn. The rear guard had entered the lane when Captain Petit, the officer in advance, hailed the British in their place of concealment. A second challenge was answered by a volley of musketry from the enemy, which commenced on the right, and passed by a running fire to the rear of the detachment. Major Davie rode rapidly forward and ordered the men to push through the lane; but, under surprise, his troops turned back, and upon the loaded arms of the enemy. He was thus compelled to repass the ambuscade under a heavy fire, and overtook his men retreating by the same road they had advanced. The detachment was finally rallied and halted upon a hill, but so discomfited at this unexpected attack that no effort could induce them to charge upon the enemy.

A judicious retreat was the only course left to avoid a similar disaster, which was effected; and Major Davie, having passed the enemy's patrols, regained his camp early on the next day without further accident. In this attack, the fire of the enemy fell chiefly upon those in the lane, who were prisoners (confined two on a horse with the guard). These were nearly all killed, or severely wounded. Of the Whigs, Lieutenant Elliott was killed, and Captain Petit, who had been sent in advance by Major Davie to examine the lane, the ford of the creek and the houses, and failing to do so, as carefully as was proper, paid the penalty of neglect of duty by being wounded with two of his men. Major Davie, who was noted for his vigilance, anticipated some attempt by the British and Tories to recover the prisoners, and had taken, as he believed, all necessary precautions to prevent a surprise or ambuscade.

Major Davie, in a manuscript account of this affair, now on file in the archives of the Historical Society at Chapel Hill, leaves this judicious advice:

"It furnishes a lesson to officers of partisan corps, that every officer of a detachment may, at some time, have its safety and reputation committed to him, and that the slightest neglect of duty is generally severely punished by an enemy."

Rocky Mount is on the west bank of the Wateree River (as the Catawba is called after its junction with Wateree Creek), thirty miles from Camden, and was garrisoned by Colonel Turnbull with one hundred and fifty New York volunteers and some militia. Its defences consisted of two log-houses, a loop-holed building and an abattis.[J]

On the 30th of July, 1780, General Sumter and Colonel Neal, from South

Carolina, and Colonel Irwin, with three hundred Mecklenburg militia, joined Major Davie. A council was held, and it was determined that simultaneous attacks should be made upon the British posts at Rocky Mount and Hanging Rock. General Sumter was accompanied by Colonels Neal, Irwin and Lacy, and Captain McLure, and some of his kinsmen, the Gastons. Having; crossed the Catawba at Blair's Ford, he arrived early on the next day, and made vigorous attacks against the fort, but failed in capturing it, mainly for the want of artillery. The attack elicited the praise of even the enemy. Early in the action, the gallant Colonel Neal was killed, with five whites and one Catawba Indian, and many were severely wounded. The British loss was ten killed, and the same number wounded. General Sumter ordered a retreat, which was effected without further annoyance or loss.

Major Davie, with about forty mounted riflemen, and the same number of dragoons, and some Mecklenburg militia, under Colonel Hagins, approached Hanging Rock on the same day. While he was reconnoitering the ground, previous to making the attack, he was informed that three companies of Bryan's Tory regiment, returning from a foraging expedition, were encamped at a farmhouse near the post.

Major Davie, with his brave associates, immediately fell upon them with vigor, both in front and rear, and all but a few of them were either killed or wounded. No time could be spared to take prisoners, as the engagement at the farm-house was in full view of the British post at Hanging Rock. The fruits of this victory were sixty valuable horses, and one hundred muskets and rifles. The whole camp of the enemy instantly beat to arms, but this brilliant affair was ended, and Davie out of reach before the enemy's forces were in motion, or their consternation subsided from this daring and successful attack. Major Davie reached his camp safely without the loss of a single man.

General Sumter was thoroughly convinced that the ardent patriots of which his command consisted must be kept constantly employed, and that the minds of such men are greatly influenced by dashing exploits. He, therefore, resolved to unite with Major Davie and other officers, and make a vigorous attack against the post of Hanging Rock. This post derives its name from a huge conglomerate boulder of granite, twenty-five or thirty feet in diameter, lying upon the eastern bank of Hanging Rock Creek, with a concavity sufficiently large to shelter fifty men from the rain, Near this natural curiosity Lord Rawdon, then commanding the British and Tories in that section, had established a post, garrisoned by Tarleton's Legion of infantry, a part of Brown's Corps of South Carolina and Georgia Provincials, and Colonel Bryan's North Carolina Loyalists, the whole under the command of Major Carden.

#### BATTLE OF THE HANGING ROCK.

"Catawba's waters smiled again  
To see her Sumter's soul in arms!  
And issuing from each glade and glen,  
Rekindled by war's fierce alarms,  
Thronged hundreds through the solitude

Of the wild forests, to the call  
Of him whose spirit, unsubdued,  
Fresh impulse gave to each, to all."

On the 5th of August, 1780, the detachments of the patriots met again at Land's Ford, on the Catawba. Major Davie had not lost a single man in his last dashing exploit. The North Carolina militia, under Colonel Irwin and Major Davie, numbered about five hundred men, officers and privates; and about three hundred South Carolinians under Colonels Sumter, Lacey and Hill. The chief command was conferred upon Colonel Sumter, as being the senior officer. Early in the morning, Colonel Sumter marched cautiously, and approached the British camp in three divisions, with the intention of falling upon the main body stationed at Cole's Old Field. The right was composed of Major Davie's corps, and some volunteers, under Major Bryan; the center, of the Mecklenburg militia, under Colonel Irwin; and the left, of South Carolina refugees, under Colonel Hill. General Sumter proposed that the detachments should approach in their divisions, march directly to the centre encampments, then dismount, and each division attack its camp. This plan was approved by all except Major Davie, who insisted on leaving their horses at their present position, and march to the attack on foot. He urged, as an objection against the former plan, the confusion always consequent upon dismounting under fire, and the certainty of losing the effect of a sudden and vigorous attack. He was, however, over-ruled, but the sequel proved he was right in his opinion. Through the error of his guides, Sumter came first upon Bryan's corps, on the western bank of the creek, half a mile from the British camp. Colonel Irwin's Mecklenburg militia, commenced the attack. The Tories soon yielded, and fled toward the main body, many of them throwing away their arms without discharging them. These the patriots secured; and, pursuing this advantage, Sumter next fell upon Brown's corps, which, by being concealed in a wood, poured in a heavy fire upon the Americans. The latter also quickly availed themselves of the trees and bushes, and returned the British fire with deadly effect. The American riflemen, taking deliberate aim, soon cut off all of Brown's officers and many of his soldiers; and at length, after a fierce conflict, his corps yielded, and dispersed in confusion. The arms and ammunition procured from the enemy were of great service, for when the action commenced, Sumter's men had not two rounds each.

Now was the moment to strike for decisive victory; it was lost by the criminal indulgence of Sumter's men in plundering the portion of the British camp already secured, and drinking too freely of the liquor found there. Sumter's ranks became disordered, and while endeavoring to bring order out of confusion, the enemy rallied. Of his six hundred men only about two hundred, with Major Davie's cavalry, could be brought into immediate action. Colonel Sumter, however, was not to be foiled. With his small number of patriots he rushed forward, with a shout, to the attack. The enemy had formed a hollow square, with the field pieces in front, and in this position received the charge. The Americans attacked them on three sides, and for a while the contest was severe. At length, just as the British line was yielding, a reinforcement under Captains Stewart and McDonald, of Tarleton's Legion, made their appearance, and their number being magnified,

Colonel Sumter deemed it prudent to retreat.

All this was done about mid-day, but the enemy had been so severely handled that they did not attempt a pursuit. A small party appeared upon the Camden road, but were soon dispersed by Davie's cavalry. Could Sumter have brought all of his forces into action in this last attack, the rout of the British would have been complete. As it was,

"He beat them back! beneath the flame  
Of valor quailing, or the shock!  
He carved, at last, a hero's name,  
Upon the glorious Hanging Rock!"

This engagement lasted about four hours, and was one of the best-fought battles between militia and British regulars during the war. Sumter's loss was twelve killed and forty-one wounded. Among the killed were the brave Colonel McLure (lately promoted to that rank), of South Carolina, and Captain Reid, of North Carolina; Colonel Hill, Captain Craighead, Major Winn, Lieutenants Crawford and Fletcher, and Ensign McLure were wounded.

Colonel McLure, being mortally wounded, was conveyed under the charge of Davie's cavalry to Charlotte. He lingered until the 18th of August, on which day he died in Liberty Hall Academy. "Of the many brave men," said General Davie, "with whom it was my fortune to become acquainted in the army, he was one of the bravest; and when he fell we looked upon his loss as incalculable."

The British loss was much greater than that of the Americans, sixty-two of Tarleton's Legion were killed and wounded. Bryan's regiment of Loyalists also suffered severely.

Major Davie's corps suffered much while tying their horses and forming into line under a heavy fire from the enemy, a measure which he had reprobated in the council when deciding on the mode of attack.

Having conveyed his wounded to a hospital in Charlotte, which his foresight had provided, Major Davie hastened to the general rendezvous at Rugely's Mill, under General Gates. On the 16th of August, while on his way to unite his forces with those of General Gates, he met a soldier in great speed, about ten miles from Camden. He arrested him as a deserter, but soon learned from him that Gates was signally defeated by the British on that day.

Major Davie then retraced his steps and took post at Charlotte. On the 5th of September, he was appointed by Governor Nash, Colonel Commandant of Cavalry, with instructions to raise a regiment. He succeeded in raising only a part, and with two small companies, commanded by Major George Davidson, he took post at Providence.

On the 21st day of September, Colonel Davie attacked a body of Tories at the plantation of Captain Wahab (now written Walkup), in the southwestern

corner of Union county (then a part of Mecklenburg), killed fifteen or twenty of their men, wounded about forty, and retreated in good order without any loss. In this dashing exploit, Davie brought off ninety-six horses, one hundred and twenty stands of arms, and reached his camp the same evening, after riding sixty miles in less than twenty-four hours.

Generals Sumner and Davidson, with their brigades of militia, reached his camp in Providence on the same evening. On the advance of the British army these officers retreated by way of Phifer's to Salisbury, ordering Colonel Davie, with about one hundred and fifty men, and some volunteers under Major Joseph Graham, to hover around the approaching enemy, annoy his foraging parties, and skirmish with his light troops.

On the night of the 25th of September, Colonel Davie entered the town of Charlotte, determined to give the British army, which lay a few miles from that place, a hornets-like reception. The brilliancy and patriotic spirit of that skirmish was ppropriately displayed on the very ground which, in May, 1775, was the birth-place American independence. (See "Skirmish at Charlotte.")

On the next day, Colonel Davie joined the army at Salisbury, where the men and officers to raise new recruits had assembled. Generals Davidson and Sumner continued their retreat beyond the Yadkin River, while Colonel Davie returned to Charlotte, around which place the activity of his movements, dashing adventures, and perfect knowledge of the country, rendered him extremely useful in checking the incursions of the enemy, repressing the Tories and encouraging the friends of liberty.

Lord Cornwallis sorely felt the difficulties with which his position at Charlotte was surrounded, and, on hearing of the defeat and death of Colonel Ferguson, one of his favorite officers, he left that town late on the evening of the 14th of October, in great precipitation, recrossed the Catawba at Land's Ford, and took position, for a few months, at Winnsboro, S.C.

The signal defeat of the British and Tories at King's Mountain--the conspicuous turning point of success in the American Revolution, and the retreat of Cornwallis, after his previous boast of soon having North Carolina under royal subjection, greatly revived the hopes of the patriots throughout the entire South.

General Smallwood, of Maryland, who had accompanied General Gates to the South, had his headquarters at Providence, and, in a short time, several thousand militia, under Generals Davidson, Sumner, and Jones, joined his camp. Colonel Davie, with three hundred mounted infantry, occupied an advanced post at Land's Ford.

When General Greene took command of the Southern Army in December, 1780, he and Colonel Davie met for the first time. The Commissary Department having become vacant by the resignation of Colonel Thomas Polk, General Greene prevailed upon Colonel Davie to accept this troublesome and important office. Although the duties of the office would prevent him from displaying that dashing patriotism so congenial to his chivalric spirit,

yet he agreed to enter upon its arduous and unthankful responsibilities.

Colonel Davie accompanied General Greene in his rapid retreat from the Catawba to the Dan River. He was present at the battle of Guilford, in March, 1781; at Hobkirk's Hill, in April; at the evacuation of Camden, in May; and at the siege of Ninety-six, in June.

The war, having ended, Colonel Davie retired to private life and his professional pursuits. He took his first circuit in February, 1783, and near this time he married Sarah, eldest daughter of General Allen Jones, of Northampton county, and located himself at Halifax Courthouse, where he soon rose to the highest eminence in his profession.

Colonel Davie was a member of the Convention which met at Philadelphia, in May, 1787, to form the Federal Constitution. The late Judge Murphy, in speaking of Colonel Davie, bears this honorable testimony to his abilities:

"I was present in the House of Commons, when Davie addressed that body (in 1789,) for a loan of money to erect the buildings of the University, and, although more than thirty years have elapsed, I have the most vivid recollections of the greatness of his manner and the power of his eloquence upon that occasion. In the House of Commons he had no rival, and on all questions before that body his eloquence was irresistible."

In December, 1798, he was elected Governor of the State. After fulfilling other important National and State trusts, and losing his estimable wife in 1803, Colonel Davie, under the increasing infirmities of old age, sought retirement. In 1805 he removed to Tivoli, his country seat, near Land's Ford, in South Carolina, where he died, in 1820, in the sixty-fourth year of his age. He had six children: 1. Hyder Ali, who married Elizabeth Jones, of Northampton county, N.C.; 2. Sarah Jones, who married William F. Desaussure, of Columbia, S.C.; 3. Mary Haynes; 4. Martha; 5. Rebecca; 6. Frederick William.

Source: Sketches of Western North Carolina, Historical and Biographical  
by Author: C. L. Hunter