

Primary Source
Guilford Courthouse

REBEL LEWIS MORRIS RECOUNTS THE RETREAT AFTER GUILFORD COURTHOUSE



FEBRUARY 19, 1781

You can be no stranger to the weakness and embarrassments of this army...You will hear of Tarleton's fortunate defeat, and perhaps conclude...that the destruction of the British army must follow. (However) before this can reach you' you will hear of Lord Cornwallis' rapid movement and of our retreat through North Carolina. This will be very alarming to those at a distance, and no doubt (criticized) as an unmilitary step; but the man who is to defend tile liberties of his country, and is

charged with the command of an army, ought not to regard the popular prejudice or the criticisms...of the ignorant...I am convinced it was ordered by necessity...

The army was...the (target) of the enemy, and (if) we can keep that together the country never can be conquered—disperse it, and the people are (defeated)...The General was well aware of the consequences...and he was closely pressed by a much superior army and (burdened) with an immense deal of baggage and stores. The retreat was performed without any loss—not even a broken wagon to show that we were hurried and, what makes it the more brilliant, the enemy had burned all their baggage and pursued us perfectly light.

The militia in Carolina gave us no assistance. They were more intent upon saving their property by flight than by embodying to protect it.

The enemy are encamped on the other side of Dan River and are collecting provisions for a ten days' march. It is the general opinion that they will not pursue us any farther, but file off for Halifax and Newbern in Carolina. If so we shall re-cross the Dan and press upon their rear. The army has recovered from its fatigue, and the militia of Virginia are turning out in great numbers. We shall move as light as they are, and may engage them partially without risking a general action. We have a superior body of cavalry, and the militia may go on without any apprehension, and if we can but turn the tide against them I am confident a very considerable part of the soldiers will desert.