

NORTH CAROLINA'S BLACK PATRIOTS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

by

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This thesis explores the service of an estimated 468 black men who fought for the American cause during the Revolutionary War. Specifically, it examines those who resided in North Carolina or fought under the forces of this state. While the war largely did not fulfill its egalitarian potential for free and enslaved people of color, the armed service of these men—and their later status as veterans—brought them a mixed array of benefits. This study reveals why these men served, how they affected the war, and how their participation in the military impacted them, their families, and the larger community of people of color within North Carolina. It will show the geographic, economic, and social factors that influenced their enlistment into the Continental and militia forces of the state, as well as the ways their varied service fostered camaraderie and connections with other soldiers. It juxtaposes the ways the war failed veterans—black and white—economically with the tenuous but appreciable social gains made by North Carolina's black veterans: gains that ultimately receded as the living legacy of these soldiers disappeared.

Examining these unique soldiers of North Carolina is particularly important as article and even monograph-length treatments of black soldiers in other states exist. This scholarship, specifically focusing on black Patriot soldiers in a Southern state and employing rudimentary quantitative assessments, fills a historiographical void and provides greater understanding of the plight of free people of color within early North Carolina society. Using primarily federal

pension applications, troop returns, and rosters of black servicemen in the American Revolution, this thesis attempts to answer these and other questions surrounding North Carolina's black Patriots, and to provide a portrait of their thoughts and actions.

NORTH CAROLINA'S BLACK PATRIOTS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

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by

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Introduction

On an early October day in 1819, an old Revolutionary War veteran made his way before a Gates County, North Carolina, court to fight one more battle. Impoverished and unable to provide adequately for himself, he sought a federal pension for his service. Benjamin Reed, a free black man in his early sixties, had been fighting for most of his life. Born in 1758, he grew up in the poor border region between North Carolina and Virginia, but carried an extra weight throughout his life with his tenuous status as a free black man amid an increasingly racialized society.¹ When the American Revolution presented a need for soldiers, he enlisted in North Carolina's Second Regiment, and later claimed service at the battles of Brandywine, Monmouth Courthouse, and Eutaw Springs. He received a crippling wound in his right arm during the last battle, but apparently served until the end of the war. He "performed all the duties of a faithful soldier and underwent...all the privations that those of his station had to encounter." For his actions, he lived to see the birth of a free nation, but also the tightening of bondage for African Americans as slavery and racism surpassed the egalitarianism the Revolution seemed to promise citizens of the new country. He lived in the same county his entire life "in extreme poverty destitute of the common necessities of life dependent on the cold hand of charity for a bare subsistence, whilst others of his fellow citizens who never knew the price of our glorious independence have been enjoying every luxury that could be desired."² He was not alone.

For many marginalized individuals, the American Revolution presented several separate revolutions within the greater conflict. The radical period of change, imbued with ideologies of

¹ Bobby G. Moss and Michael Scoggins, *African-American Patriots in the Southern Campaign of the American Revolution* (Blacksburg, SC: Scotia-Hibernia Press, 2004), 199.

² Federal Pension Application (Hereafter FPA), Benjamin Reed, S41976, Transcribed by Will Graves, <http://revwarapps.org/s41976.pdf>.

liberty, freedom, and representation, seemed to promise the opportunity of improving one's plight. If the rebellion succeeded, those faithful to its victory may have expected more equal treatment and status or at least opportunity under the nation's laws. Those opposed to the Revolution likely also expected a manner of economic or social reward for their loyalty or service to the monarchy.

For African Americans and people of color in particular, the Revolution presented dozens of possible choices to effect such change.³ Historians studying them, regardless of the sources, period, or biases of the authors, agree on one theme whether overtly or by allusion almost without exception: during the American Revolution, African Americans hoped for freedom and many fought for it directly. For them, freedom could embody multiple meanings, from the idealistic break from foreign control, to the immediate release from bondage at home. To achieve these ends, they could fight for one side or the other, serve in non-combatant roles, flee plantations under the cover of war, or resist their enslaved status in subversive ways, with numerous variations in these options depending on the time and place amid the conflict. The remarkable range of their actions reveals the possibilities of this tumultuous period.

During the conflict, over 20,000 black men, women, and children in various states of bondage or freedom seized their opportunity and joined, served, or fled to the British forces. From 1775, when Lord Dunmore promised freedom via a proclamation to free black men or slaves of rebels capable of bearing arms, until the war's end when the British sailed away from Charleston, the majority of African American slaves in the rebelling colonies came to associate the Crown forces with their best chance at freedom. While individual British commanders

³ This thesis uses "black" or "people of color" rather than "African American" in discussions of race as these terms encapsulate the varied and often inexact ancestries of people seen as non-white in early North Carolina. These terms often incorporate people with mixed African, Native American, and white lineages. Because of the direct importation of African peoples as slaves, African American is used to denote known groups of the enslaved.

infrequently declared this condition explicitly, a great many African Americans appear to have tenuously assumed the empire would mercifully deliver them from bondage and oppression.

In much smaller numbers, people of color in various conditions of liberty or bondage, mostly from the Northern states, served, by choice or coercion, American forces who also presented some versions of freedom. These ideas were both abstract and practical, found in the egalitarian rhetoric of rebellious leaders and the nation's chartering documents, in the promise of acquiring western lands and bounties as free-holding citizens, and in the scattered enticements to serve the army in exchange for manumission from their masters. Nearly two and a half centuries after the American Revolution, these Patriots, some vital contributors to American independence, are routinely overlooked or underexamined. Largely unheralded in the public eye, an estimated 5,000 black or multiracial men fought under or aided American forces during the conflict, including at least 468 who hailed from or fought for North Carolina. The state's black soldiers, free and enslaved, African American and mulatto, served in both the Continental line as well as local militia units throughout the war.

North Carolina's black soldiers hailed from a unique borderland between Virginia and South Carolina. Each of these states contained substantially higher ratios of African American and black people to whites in the late colonial era compared to North Carolina. South Carolina's more Draconian slave codes influenced North Carolina's legislation in the post-Stono Rebellion era, yet North Carolina allowed far greater numbers of African Americans to bear arms during the Revolutionary War compared to their southern neighbor that actively sought to prevent their enlistment.⁴ Meanwhile, Virginia, with greater numbers of free and enslaved black men, and more lenient attitudes toward their military service, seems to have utilized proportionately fewer

⁴ South Carolina's Stono slave rebellion in 1739 is characterized by several historians as a turning point in racial relations in the colonial South.

black soldiers than North Carolina. Black or mixed-race soldiers filled arguably a more pressing need in North Carolina than in Virginia and stood to affect greater societal change than in South Carolina. Therefore, examining these veterans before, during, and after the conflict, offers insight into a seldom-understood aspect of racial relations in revolutionary-era and early antebellum early North Carolina.

This thesis addresses primarily those black soldiers who resided in North Carolina at the time of their enlistment. To a lesser extent, it also includes North Carolina men who enlisted in other states, such as those enticed by recruitment bounties in South Carolina or Virginia at various times. Almost all these black soldiers are known only by their names in various lists and rosters, with little biographical or contextual information attached. This work probes and interprets their varied experiences within the war, examining their known details, including enlistment dates, unit movements, pensions or bounties, and status of freedom, in order to identify common patterns. It postulates the extents to which black soldiers' services were voluntary or coerced and whether they enjoyed any fruits of hard-fought liberty.

It differs from existing works in its specific focus on North Carolina's black soldiers and its quantitative measures of their lives and legacies. It compares the socioeconomic status of as many veterans as possible, before and after their service, to show the change they engendered, and relies on their words (and their backgrounds) to deduce their reasons for enlistment. Ideological sentiments of common African Americans and people of color during this period are seldom expressed in writing or source material. Even still, pension language must be understood and weighed as potentially biased because of the power and racial dynamics at play, the applicant's needs, and the limits of memory. Aside from the select pensions which emphatically detail personal thoughts, circumstances and actions must be examined in lieu of more explicit

evidence. Lastly, while it is not the primary objective of this study, this research has revealed a handful of confirmed or likely black men among North Carolina's Patriots not listed in any compiled roster or academic work. These new stories, considerations, and analyses ultimately promise a greater understanding of the relationship between people of color and military service in North Carolina and within the early United States.

While the war largely failed to uplift people of color, these soldiers, in North Carolina at least, earned a tenuous elevation in their immediate social standing through their service and subsequent status as veterans. Most of North Carolina's black and mulatto soldiers enlisted with their own agency as free men, seeking economic and societal rewards that their limited socioeconomic status otherwise denied them. Many evidently believed in their own ability to improve their plights as they made the exceedingly less-popular choice to fight for the Americans, espousing ideas of equality, rather than the British, offering more immediate gains to African Americans.

Their service vitally aided the American cause, but also their own families and communities. Their experiences during the war ran the gamut from typical to exceptional compared to their white counterparts, but they fought, built, supplied, defended, bled, and died all the same. Most were mixed-race men from the North Carolina-Virginia border region who were impoverished before the conflict. Many, if not the majority, remained poor or decrepit after the war, as did many white veterans. Conversely, some achieved mobility and higher status, acquiring land bounties and migrating elsewhere. Nevertheless, for a brief period, they all cast their lives, fortunes, and sacred honor into the army, making inroads into white hegemony through armed service and providing future generations with a cause to continue pursuing.

Chapter 1: Historiography

This thesis fits within a growing body of historical scholarship surrounding people of color in the Revolution. With differing focuses, many historians have cast the black experience as a revolution within a revolution. Portrayals of this topic over time have been shaped by and reflect the position of African Americans in American society and the many changes within black history. The first scholarship in this area began in the 1850s, but this field grew tremendously in the early to mid-1900s. After the 1960s Civil Rights era, and the resulting changes in the larger African American historiography, authors of diverse specializations have contributed articles and monographs further contextualizing and offering fresh insights into black experiences in the formative war. Recent academics, using sources in new manners while building upon the contributions of their predecessors, have produced intriguing interpretations of the varied lives and legacies of African Americans in and after the American Revolution, yet a few gaps remain.

The earliest handful of scholarly works dealing with people of color in the Revolutionary War display a distinguishable American nationalism or focus almost exclusively on those black men who served the American cause. William C. Nell published *The Colored Patriots of the American Revolution* in 1855, during the acutely polarized period before the Civil War.¹ Setting the precedent for many subsequent writers, Nell employed the stories of several revered black martyrs of American independence. He also identified a few dozen lesser known black soldiers, relying mostly on obituary notices and other sparsely cited sources to infer their service and color. He portrayed African Americans as worthy of citizenship by demonstrating their service

¹ William C. Nell, *The Colored Patriots of the American Revolution* (Boston: Robert F. Wallcut Publishers, 1855).

and devotion, even a willingness to die, avoiding acknowledgement of those who chose to do so for the British. Of those who joined the American forces during the war, Nell assumed that many were placed in subordinate roles, a contention several historians have since challenged and revised.

Shortly after Nell, George H. Moore contributed *Historical Notes on the Employment of Negroes in the American Army of the Revolution* in 1862.² Moore portrayed many of these black soldiers as enslaved people fighting for their freedom. Like Nell, Moore largely omitted discussing the 25,000 African Americans he estimated went to the British from South Carolina alone. Nevertheless, his excellent research into legislation in various states during the conflict laid the groundwork for understanding prohibitions of, and alternately, the occasional military enticements toward, black service in the American forces during the Revolutionary War. Despite the obstacles black men faced in order to serve, Moore contended that unspecified numbers of both enslaved and free people of color likely served in the army from most states, scattered throughout their respective Continental units.

During the years after the Civil War, through the decades of Reconstruction and Jim Crow segregation, many black orators alluded to Revolutionary War veterans, but few if any academic studies furthered knowledge of these individuals.³ The next scholar devoting serious attention to black Revolutionary War history was the Marxist Herbert Aptheker, who authored *The Negro in the American Revolution* in 1940.⁴ Aptheker, in a biased effort, depicted most African Americans during the Revolution as flocking to the forces fighting against British

² George H. Moore, *Historical Notes on the Employment of Negroes in the American Army of the Revolution* (New York: C.T. Evans, 1862).

³ The only work of note was David E. Phillips, "Negroes in the American Revolution: Slaves Who Stood on the Battle-Line as Soldiers in the Cause of Liberty When the American Republic Was Born." *The Journal of American History* 5, no. 1 (1911): 143-146. In what amounted to a four-page epitaph to Peter Salem, Phillips' only pertinent conclusion was that most able-bodied Massachusetts men fought during the war.

⁴ Herbert Aptheker, *The Negro in the American Revolution* (New York: International, 1940).

tyranny. He echoed Nell's appraisal that the war failed African Americans, stating that the vast majority met disappointment in the end. Aptheker offered the first specific evidence that black men served in Southern states' forces, positively identifying a handful of black soldiers from Georgia and South Carolina who fought against the British. He also provided the often-repeated estimate that 5,000 black soldiers served the American side in the war.

While Aptheker's work embodied a more generalized focus on the experience of black people in the Revolution, the period of civil rights struggle in the United States birthed a deluge of scholarship in kind. This broadening of the field to include soldiers, enslaved people, noncombatants, and those supporting the British or Americans alike marked a discernible shift in the historiography. Subsequent historians looked more critically at the black American experience in new ways, often focusing within individual states, and further portrayed those who served the British during the war. In 1959, Benjamin Quarles published one of the only works yet specifically focusing on black manpower and colonial militias.⁵ He offered that among the thirteen American states, a homogenous militia system did not exist, save for the default policy of excluding African Americans from service except for non-combat roles or during unusual emergencies. Quarles devoted great attention to black militia participation in various conflicts in the colonial period, showing that legal statutes hardened over time to exclude black men from this service and were supplemented by laws to keep weapons out of their hands. In South Carolina he noted that the 1739 Stono Rebellion caused a lasting damper upon black enlistments, inciting the state's reluctance to repeat previous experiments during the American Revolution.

⁵ Benjamin Quarles, "The Colonial Militia and Negro Manpower." *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 45, no. 4 (March, 1959). See also Robert Gough, "Black Men and the Early New Jersey Militia," *New Jersey History* 88, no. 4 (Winter, 1970): 227-238.

In 1961, Quarles published his seminal monograph *The Negro in the American Revolution*.⁶ Surveying the entirety of black experiences in the war, he emphatically demonstrated that African Americans resisted subordination to whites and acted with agency, aligning with whichever side better promoted liberty. Quarles utilized an exacting methodology to further locate black soldiers within various war records, only counting individuals as such if sources noted their color or race. He deduced that many enslaved black men were enlisted as substitutes for their masters, with nothing more than a verbal promise of freedom to entice them. Quarles explained that white leaders in Maryland and Virginia became more permissive of black service due to American manpower shortages and, occasionally, by the same ideological impulses that engendered the Revolution. Quarles positively appraised the war's results for black Americans, arguing that while independence from Britain did not answer the hopes of all African Americans, it did hearten them that they were on the eventual path to real freedom.

Writing after the Civil Rights movement brought new freedoms for African Americans, Sidney and Emma Kaplan published *The Black Presence in the Era of the American Revolution* in 1973.⁷ The Kaplans, like Quarles, also demonstrated black resistance to white dominance during the war, though they placed this struggle in a larger societal context. The Kaplans' work primarily presented celebratory vignettes of specific individuals in military and civilian roles, but uniquely offered that the heroism of such African Americans was largely forgotten by whites in all forms of media after the war. Their mission to bring these individuals back to life fostered a robust proliferation of new articles and monographs.

⁶ Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro in the American Revolution* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1961). See also Sylvia Frey's later monograph which similarly looked at the broad range of African American experiences during the Revolution. Sylvia R. Frey, *Water From the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

⁷ Sidney Kaplan and Emma Nogrady Kaplan, *The Black Presence in the Era of the American Revolution* (New York: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1973). The Kaplans published a revised edition in 1989 as well with a more-substantial introduction but little difference in their interpretation.

Most subsequent works further portrayed the entirety of black wartime experiences and depicted them as assertive and active resisters of their own oppressed status. Ira Berlin, in *Slavery and Freedom in the Age of the American Revolution*, added a much more nuanced conception of the Revolutionary War's effects upon African Americans and the institution of slavery.⁸ He argued that it was one of the six pivotal periods in African American history because it allowed many African Americans "to secure their freedom and to identify their liberty with the establishment of American nationality" while ironically solidifying and even expanding slavery in the American South.⁹ Berlin also spoke to the modern usefulness of studying these individuals, claiming that their examination gives a more complete understanding of black history and race relations within contemporary American society.

In 1984, Robert Greene published, with the Daughters of the American Revolution, a surprisingly adroit study of black American veterans, systematically consulting fifty pension applications to the American government.¹⁰ Greene's additional appendices, also derived from other military primary sources, delineated unit assignments of many additional African Americans besides those whose pensions were consulted. The author found that many black soldiers surprisingly served in the South, including North Carolina's forces. The author also concluded that despite their apparently small numbers, black soldiers contributed vitally to the Continental units in which they served. In an army beset with high rates of turnover, they provided a consistent presence for they typically enlisted for much longer stints than whites.

⁸ Ira Berlin and Ronald Hoffman, eds., *Slavery and Freedom in the Age of the American Revolution* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1983).

⁹ Berlin and Hoffman, *Slavery and Freedom*, xv.

¹⁰ Robert Ewell Greene, *Black Courage 1775-1783: Documentation of Black Participation in the American Revolution* (Washington, D.C.: Daughters of the American Revolution, 1984); Greene's use of American pensions follows the methodology of Jeffrey Crow who surveyed numerous Loyalist claims to the British. See Jeffrey J. Crow, *The Black Experience in Revolutionary North Carolina* (Raleigh: North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, 1977).

Finally, Greene provided a tremendously useful insight into the limits of the pension sources, noting that the intricacies and requirements of applying for them, along with the absence of substantiating documentation for service, probably caused black men or their survivors to apply for these pensions later and in fewer numbers proportionally than their white compatriots. These restrictions undoubtedly omitted some black veterans from the record.

Aside from attempting to better quantify black soldier's experiences, several recent scholars have also offered reappraisals of their legacies. Douglas Egerton recently authored a stinging depiction of the Revolution's failure to deliver on its promises to African Americans.¹¹ He disagrees emphatically with Benjamin Quarles and other historians who conceived of a progressive social upheaval or an inevitable abolitionist crusade stemming from the war, offering instead that the Revolution should be judged by its meaning to several archetypical examples of black men who found no freedom or equality under the hypocritical Patriots. Alan Gilbert subsequently offered a different type of criticism of the war, examining it through a Marxist lens within the wider and lengthier struggle for freedom throughout the Atlantic world.¹² Crucially, he contends that the war spurred British efforts at abolition and other revolts of enslaved people, while it failed to grant many African Americans freedom. He also argues that British actions in the war, specifically Dunmore's 1775 proclamation, inspired both sides to rely on greater numbers of African Americans and black people in various roles, though he devotes substantial focus to prohibitions against black service and freedom in the South.

Judith Van Buskirk offers a more affirming analysis of the war's results with her 2017 monograph *Standing in Their Own Light*, which focuses specifically on African American

¹¹ Douglas, R. Egerton, *Death or Liberty: African Americans and Revolutionary America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

¹² Alan Gilbert, *Black Patriots and Loyalists: Fighting for Emancipation in the War for Independence* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

Patriots in the Revolution.¹³ Most of her coverage centers on black service in Mid-Atlantic or Northern states as she alludes that fewer served in the South. She draws primarily from a body of five hundred pension applications, along with corroborating primary and secondary sources to identify and interpret the plights of black individuals in a variety of service roles in the American forces. While acknowledging the unique challenges and different motivations of black soldiers compared to their white counterparts, she argues that such black men engendered change during the war. In her assessment, the Revolutionary War generation of African Americans was unique in that “these men had absorbed the rhetoric of freedom and finally had the means to realize their liberation or that of their family members through service to the cause.”¹⁴ She also presents illuminating insights into camaraderie during and changes in relations after the war between blacks and whites, critically identifying a possible tacit appreciation between the veterans of different races, but sadly demonstrates the larger regression in societal views on race occurring between the first and second round of the pensions she consults. While she asserts that even black soldiers had reason for optimism about their status at war’s end amid many positive legal changes after the conflict, she concludes that for those in the South, the profit motive reared its head and subsequent laws made re-enslavement possible. Despite the failure of the Revolution to live up to its rhetoric for many African Americans, Van Buskirk concludes that dismissing the war leaves a large gap between 1775 and the Thirteenth Amendment, during which time the war service and idealism of the conflict was utilized by abolitionists.

¹³ Judith L. Van Buskirk, *Standing in Their Own Light: African American Patriots in the American Revolution* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2017).

¹⁴ Van Buskirk, *Standing in Their Own Light*, 66.

Most recently, John U. Rees published a concise work on African American Continental soldiers, which includes short chapters on each of the states in the Revolution.¹⁵ Following the model established by several predecessors, he heavily utilized pension records to elucidate a few trends of African American and black soldiers in each state. Critically, he noted the importance of understanding each state's Continental regiments as they changed throughout the war, in order to fully grasp the effects on black soldiers. He also covered the post-war legacies of these black soldiers, including several North Carolinians, finding that their pensions illustrate changing societal attitudes of whites towards black Americans, particularly soldiers.

Focus on States and the South

Tracing back to the scholarship of Luther P. Jackson, numerous historians have followed a discernable trend, providing insights into black experience within several individual states during the Revolution.¹⁶ In 1942, Jackson published an article on black Virginia soldiers and sailors of the Revolution in the *Journal of Negro History* that focused on quantitative and categorical analysis of black Virginians serving under the American standard.¹⁷ He concluded that land troops fought in integrated units as Moore had previously supposed, though he also

¹⁵ John U. Rees, "They Were Good Soldiers:" African-Americans Serving in the Continental Army, 1775-1783 (Warwick, England: Helion and Company, 2019).

¹⁶ State-centric examinations include: David O. White, *Connecticut's Black Soldiers, 1775-1783* (Chester, CT: Pequot Press, 1973); Glenn A. Knoblock, "Strong and Brave Fellows:" *New Hampshire's Black Soldiers and Sailors of the American Revolution, 1775-1784* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., Publishers, 2003); Andrew C. Lannen, "Liberty and Slavery in Colonial America: The Case of Georgia, 1732 – 1770." *Historian* 79, no. 1 (2017); and Foster M. Farley, "The South Carolina Negro in the American Revolution, 1775-1783." *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* 79, no. 2 (1978): 75-86. Farley's short piece offered small insights into pay rates for impressed African Americans, but the author also presented a picture of these individuals as passive victims in the Revolution. This conclusion was largely rebuffed by previous and subsequent scholarship. See also Jim Piecuch's 2009 monograph which follows the Southern-focused vein of previous authors in an examination of Loyalist whites, Native Americans, and slaves, who fought for the British. Jim Piecuch, *Three Peoples, One King: Loyalists, Indians, and Slaves in the Revolutionary South, 1775 – 1782*. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2008).

¹⁷ Luther P. Jackson, "Virginia Negro Soldiers and Seamen in the American Revolution." *The Journal of Negro History* 27, no. 3 (1942): 247-287.

speculated that black soldiers faced occasional discrimination. Along with demographic information on those serving in the Revolution, Jackson also presented a revealing breakdown of black soldiers' pension rates and land bounties after the war, for which he argued those in Virginia at least were substantially rewarded.

Jeffrey Crow's 1977 work *The Black Experience in Revolutionary North Carolina*, presented two separate wars of liberation among white Patriots and predominantly enslaved African Americans who found divergent means to their goals just as often as they meshed.¹⁸ He convincingly explained the motivations of black North Carolinians for fleeing to the British, but also postulated upon the choice of those fighting for the American forces. Observing that most who did so were already free, despite some enslaved substitutes within the North Carolina Continental Line, he contended that free black men joined this force to uphold their tenuous status. He did not, however, explain how they effected this change or how successful they were. Like many recent historians, Crow also identified the many failings of the war to secure freedom or uphold its promises to African Americans in North Carolina, arguing the conflict bore tension, unrest, and a strengthened institution of slavery.¹⁹

Historians Bobby Moss and Michael Scoggins resumed a focus on identifying individual participants, in line with Greene, in their 2004 roster of African American Patriots in the Revolutionary South.²⁰ The two cite numerous pensions, state and local genealogies, unit

¹⁸ Jeffrey J. Crow, *The Black Experience in Revolutionary North Carolina* (Raleigh: North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, 1977).

¹⁹ See also Peter H. Wood, "'Taking Care of Business' in Revolutionary South Carolina: Republicanism and the Slave Society." In *The Southern Experience in the American Revolution*, Jeffrey J. Crow and Larry E. Tise, eds., (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978). Wood offers unique insights into other black resistance methods in the Southern states during the war aside from joining the army, controlling the economy in subtle ways as barge pilots, waggoneers, and enslaved people on plantations. Wood also criticized previous history, which he admonished as white people's relation to black America, rather than a portrayal of black lives and aspirations.

²⁰ Moss and Scoggins, *African American Patriots*.

records, and land grants to present a list of identifiable black men serving in various capacities for the American forces in the southern states and colonies, from Maryland to Florida. The authors uniquely conclude that most black American veterans in the Southern Campaign hailed from Virginia and North Carolina and served in Continental units, though men of color served in militias of every southern state. They explain that militia recruitment was less formal and restrictive compared to the explicit prescriptions against allowing African American service in many southern Continental units. Several authors including Quarles previously alluded to rare black men serving in these militia units, but the authors definitively conclude a surprising number did just that. Their alphabetical roster, however, makes it harder to deduce the accurate number of black men in that category.

Furthermore, a few historians have produced scholarship specifically on free people of color in North Carolina that include discussion of black soldiers in the Revolution and their post-war lives. John Hope Franklin's 1943 *The Free Negro in North Carolina* depicted the marginalized character of free people of color within North Carolina, and their growth in numbers during and after the Revolution.²¹ He portrayed the increasingly prohibitive legal restrictions on the free people before and after the conflict and contended most notably that large numbers of black soldiers never served during the war. His conclusions are challenged to a degree by Warren E. Milteer's 2013 dissertation.²² He argues that free people of color in North Carolina enjoyed a status closer to that of whites from the Revolution until the decades before the Civil War. While he does not make the specific connection between veteran status and

²¹ John Hope Franklin, *The Free Negro in North Carolina: 1790-1860* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1943).

²² Warren E. Milteer Jr., "The Complications of Liberty: Free People of Color in North Carolina From the Colonial Period Through Reconstruction," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of North Carolina, 2013.

increased standing for free black men, he posits that white citizens judged free people of color largely by their individual merit, industry, and talents.

Despite this bevy of scholarship, several questions still abound about North Carolina's black Patriot soldiers of the Revolution. How many were free men and how voluntary were their services? Are there unidentified patterns in their backgrounds and pre-enlistment existences? Did they join exclusively to protect their status or can the occasionally patriotic language in their pensions be trusted? What effect did they have on the state's military forces and how were they treated? How do they compare quantitatively to their white compatriots? And, crucially, did their service and status as veterans effect change in their lives after the war?

Historians have extolled the proportionally larger numbers of black soldiers from the northern states in particular or illustrated select stories of Southern black men who served. Yet the understanding of North Carolina's soldiers of color, ripe for further study, remains incomplete.

Outline

This thesis explores these questions in four main chapters. The first chapter probes the pre-war lives of North Carolina's black soldiers by examining the status of free people of color in the colonial period. It explains their presence and legal and social status as it developed over time. It also illustrates the history of black military service during rebellions, the Regulator War, and the French and Indian War. Furthermore, it identifies the geographic areas within the colony where they dispersed and provides statistics as to the specific counties or regions where black Revolutionary War soldiers resided at the time of their enlistment. Critically, it analyzes the prevalence of poverty among them and evaluates the frequency of those enlisting voluntarily versus those under obligation or compulsion. Cumulatively, these considerations provide a point

for understanding the likely reasons black men chose to enlist under the American forces. Lastly, it traces a few common patterns among the black enlisters of North Carolina's forces as the war began.

The next two chapters cover the range of military experiences among these soldiers. The first of these chapters postulates the "typical" as well as the unique experiences of North Carolina's black Continental soldiers, often using the comparatively well-documented records of the Third North Carolina Continental Regiment as cases in point. By demonstrating the changing army conditions, enlistment practices, campaigns, and missions, this chapter reveals varying reasons for initial enlistment and sustaining motivations of black troops over the course of the war. Additionally, it explores the battles, encampments, and periods of captivity where North Carolina's black soldiers fostered camaraderie with their compatriots and commanders, illustrating the larger effects of their service on the war. Conversely, this chapter tallies the casualties among North Carolina's black soldiers, demonstrating the ways the conflict altered their lives, and setting the tone for later exploration of their post-war years and status as veterans or as heralded individuals.

The third chapter contrasts the unique services of black men in North Carolina's militia system during the war with those of their Continental line. It posits that these short-term black enlistees joined for similar reasons as those within the Continental ranks but showcases an even greater diffusion of roles within the militia forces. These men often served their local communities more directly and alongside their neighbors, upholding their civic duties and the status that accompanied their unheralded efforts, while struggling for compensation to a higher degree than their Continental counterparts. Aside from voluntary enlistees, this chapter also illuminates the frequency of black men enlisted through the militia draft system. With fewer

surviving rosters and official documentation, this chapter makes use of pension accounts and family genealogies to a greater degree in exploring the various experiences of black militiamen.

The penultimate chapter probes the effects of the war on the black soldiers, as well as the inroads they made into white-dominated society, evaluating the degree of change in their lives compared to their initial conditions when they entered service. Their socioeconomic status and identities, predominantly as free black men, shaped the reasons for enlistment and manners of service for these soldiers during the war, but after the conflict, they shared the marginalized identity of “veteran” alongside their white counterparts. This chapter evinces descriptions of these black soldiers from witnesses in their pensions to demonstrate the camaraderie they achieved with white compatriots and neighbors, as well as quantitative measures of payments, land bounties, and property acquired as a result of their service to evaluate the change their service wrought for them.

Finally, the concluding chapter surveys the commemorative efforts and legacies of black servicemen of the Revolution, both in North Carolina and the larger national scale.

Chapter 2: Before They Were Soldiers

Understanding North Carolina's black soldiers of the Revolutionary War first requires an explanation of the society they emerged from as well as their individual backgrounds. Their lives varied, though many recurring patterns are evident among them. Some came from comparatively affluent mixed families, while the majority were poor even before enlisting.¹ Some were purely African American, while many, probably most, were sons of families mixed with Native Americans or whites. They almost exclusively were free people of color at enlistment, but this did not necessarily mean they could freely do as they wished due to prohibitive legislation and social norms. Some were married and had children already, while the majority of all soldiers were single and young.² Several of them, if not their fathers or grandfathers, had already served in North Carolina's militia forces during various colonial conflicts. These factors, and many others, depict North Carolina's black soldiers as unique individuals, with a variety of motivating factors and personalities. Yet they all shared one common feature: a demarcation as an "other" within North Carolina's legal and social systems. They assumed this unique and often degraded status before they bore arms, and it undoubtedly influenced their service as well as their post-war lives. In order to trace their varying rationales for serving at arms, and to measure the gains they made with their soldiering, their socioeconomic and legal standing preceding entrance into the army must be explored.

African Americans first came to North Carolina as slaves in the late seventeenth century, primarily taken by planters into the northeastern portion of the colony. Small numbers of free

¹ Some historians have argued that the militia often comprised the local land-owning class while the Continental army filled its ranks with the unpropertied. See James K. Martin and Mark E. Lender, *A Respectable Army: The Military Origins of the Republic, 1763-1789*, Third ed. (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2015), 16-19.

² It is probable that some free black soldiers were married in legally unrecognized or recorded unions.

black and mixed-race people also populated the region by the early eighteenth century. Most of these free people of color descended from white women who had children with enslaved men. Many also came from the intermingling of Native American and African American cultures. These people of color, denoted as “black” for the purpose of this study, included the Chavis, Cumbo, and Gowen families, ancestors of numerous black Revolutionary War soldiers. As genealogist Paul Heinegg contends, unlike their enslaved relatives, these free black people of Virginia and North Carolina were often accepted by their white neighbors. Living in the swampy frontier area on the border of Virginia and North Carolina, neighbors depended on one another and this harsh existence likely proved more extenuating than the color of one’s skin. Land ownership, and the relative lack of enslaved people in counties such as Halifax, Granville, Bertie, and Hertford, may have also bolstered the status of these mixed-race individuals.³

The Chavis family members were among the most remarkable and prosperous free black people in this region along North Carolina’s northern border. They originated from African Americans mixing with Siouan Indians and one of their patriarchs Gibrea Chavis received thousands of acres of land from Lord Granville in the early eighteenth century. They, along with the Harris family, were the first black or mulatto individuals recognized as free in the Granville region. Additionally, the Carter family, including Revolutionary War soldier Solomon Carter, owned and frequently purchased land in and around Dobbs County before the war, often deeding

³ Franklin, *The Free Negro in North Carolina*, 8-9; Paul Heinegg, “Free African Americans of Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina.” http://www.freeafricanamericans.com/Virginia_NC.htm, Introduction. Heinegg’s work will be cited henceforth in its website format as this version presents several updates from the fifth edition of Paul Heinegg, *Free African Americans of Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina From the Colonial Period to About 1820*, 5th Edition (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 2005).

substantial tracts to their children in wills. Other large multiracial families in the region included the Going/Gowen family, the Bass family, and the Locus/Lucas kingroup.⁴

Most free black inhabitants of early North Carolina migrated into the border region below Virginia, for various reasons, and many families maintained relatives on both sides of the dividing line throughout the colonial period. In the mid-1600s, Virginia began replacing white indentured servants with African slaves in large numbers. With racial prejudice slowly increasing, many free black families, many apparently light-skinned, migrated into this border region where the pitiful land was cheap enough for even former servants to purchase.⁵ A 1766 list of North Carolina inhabitants reveals that black and mulatto people comprised 45 and 47 percent of the taxable populations in Bute (now Warren) and Granville Counties, and over 60 percent in Chowan and Perquimans Counties respectively. By this point, large numbers of African Americans and mulatto people also inhabited areas with sizeable ports, including Craven, New Hanover, and Brunswick Counties.⁶

Though a few of them owned substantial tracts of land or achieved notoriety, most free black residents of North Carolina lived in the same, if not worse, poverty and labored subsistence as their white neighbors. They received and transmitted little inheritance and were frequently unable to support themselves. Ezekial Graves, for instance, was sued for debt in Virginia before his service in North Carolina's forces during the Revolution, as was Nelson Donathan. Allen Sweat exemplified another trend among the free black community as he, a poor young man, lived and presumably served as a laborer on the self-described plantation of Exum Scott, a free

⁴ Helen C. Othow, *John Chavis: African American Patriot, Preacher, Teacher, and Mentor, 1763-1838* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Co., 2001), 15-17, 29; See Edward and Solomon Carter in Heinegg, http://www.freeafricanamericans.com/Virginia_NC.htm, Campbell-Charity, Introduction.

⁵ Heinegg, http://www.freeafricanamericans.com/Virginia_NC.htm, Introduction.

⁶ Walter Clark, ed., *The State Records of North Carolina*, vol. 7 (Raleigh: Josephus Daniels, 1890), 288-289. It should be noted in these statistical measures that for whites, only males were enumerated as taxable.

black man of better means. Even after the war, he lived and farmed on rented land, possessing only a meager estate of cookware and livestock of his own. Furthermore, at least one known soldier, Robert Cook, was the son of a free black man and an enslaved mother who was not manumitted until after the war.⁷ These plights, illustrating just a few of the common challenges that free people of color faced in the pre-war period, demonstrate why many young black men may have sought to better the economic standing of themselves or their families through service in the American Revolution.

Social and Legal Standing

While their economic status changed little during the pre-war years, the social standing of North Carolina's free people of color varied throughout the colonial period. As historian Warren Milteer contends, their status was closer to that of whites than the enslaved, and they apparently formed little alliance with the latter group. During the pre and post-Revolutionary War eras, many whites judged free people of color by their personal merit and individual actions, and they allied with white residents in their communities around ties of culture, faith, economic concerns, and even kinship. John Hope Franklin argued that North Carolina free people of color, more rural and isolated and also less numerous than their counterparts in Virginia and Maryland, experienced different treatment and attitudes than those in other Southern colonies. Furthermore, as Ira Berlin noted, free people of color in the southern colonies were becoming lighter in complexion after multiple generations of marriage, bringing nominally higher status to them.⁸

⁷ Ira Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974), 6-7; See Robert Cook, Nelson Donathan, and Ezekial Graves in Heinegg, http://www.freeafricanamericans.com/Virginia_NC.htm, Church-Contach, Davis-Drew, Grace-Hamlin; RWP, Allen Swett, W16, Transcribed by Will Graves, <http://revwarapps.org/w16.pdf>.

⁸ For the comparative statuses of white and black North Carolinians see Milteer Jr., "The Complications of Liberty," 2-9; Franklin, *The Free Negro in North Carolina*, 6-7; Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters*, 3-6.

The legal statutes governing free and enslaved people of color also varied throughout the period. In the colony's early years, leaders saw both free and enslaved black people as a permanent part of North Carolina's population, but its 1669 constitution established lasting control over the first group. Their legal standing remained in limbo until 1715 when North Carolina began distinguishing between free and enslaved black people, bringing their laws closer to that of neighboring Virginia with legislation specifically addressing the free colored people.⁹ To the chagrin of some legislators, various black men voted in North Carolina's 1703 election for the General Assembly. They continued to do so in the next decade, but in 1715, North Carolina passed legislation specifically limiting black voting to free black men at least twenty years old who paid taxes in the year before the election. In the same year, with *An Act Concerning Servants and Slaves*, the colonial government imposed fines on white men or women who had children by black or mulatto men and tacked the same £50 penalty on clergy who married these interracial couples. It also declared the children of these mixed unions liable to be bound out or apprenticed until they reached the age of thirty-one.¹⁰

From 1715 onward, local courts apprenticed children not only to care for and educate orphans, but also to intervene in the undesired increase in mulatto youth. The practice underwent some change over time, but continually affected poor families. In 1760, the General Assembly lessened the term of apprenticeship for males from thirty-one to twenty-one years, and lowered female servitude to their eighteenth birthday, or the twenty-first for mulatto women. After much debate over the practice during the French and Indian War, a 1762 act further modified

⁹ Franklin, *The Free Negro in North Carolina*, 7; Milteer Jr., "The Complications of Liberty," 83-84.

¹⁰ William L. Saunders, ed., *The Colonial Records of North Carolina*, vol. 1 (Raleigh: P.M. Hale, 1886), 639; 1715 voting act in William L. Saunders, ed., *The Colonial Records of North Carolina*, vol. 2 (Raleigh: P.M. Hale, 1886), 214-215; Act regarding servants and slaves in Walter Clark, ed., *The State Records of North Carolina*, vol. 23 (Goldsboro, NC: Nash Brothers, 1904), 62-66.

apprenticeships, enabling county courts to apprentice all females from mulatto families regardless of the father's status, though male children were not necessarily consigned to this fate. The colonial government enacted these apprenticeships almost exclusively against the will of the parents as demonstrated by Karin Zipf's findings that less than two percent of families voluntarily sought to relinquish control over their children. Unlike indentured servants who signed contracts with their masters, apprenticed North Carolina youth and their families had no say in the matter, as the contracts were agreements between their masters and the county courts. While the legislature and courts provided some protections to them, rehomeing them if they were found to be mistreated, their primary duty was to work uncompensated. Zipf also contends that apprenticeship in the Southern colonies was harsher than the version practiced in the North. Unlike apprentices in Philadelphia or other comparatively urban regions with large populations of artisans and skilled masters, apprentices in North Carolina were more often bound to lives of hard labor in agricultural production. They did not necessarily acquire a full range of practical skills from their time of service as evidenced by John Weaver, who apprenticed as a shoemaker, and later became a cooper, though he remained "unlettered" even in his old age.¹¹

The apprenticing of children had a large effect on the future free black soldiers of the Revolution. At least 35 of them are known to have been bound by county courts in their youth to learn skills or trades with better-situated families. Of these, at least 10 were twenty-one years of age or younger at their time of enlistment in the army or militia forces, indicating they were still apprenticed. They included Jeremiah James, Daniel Mills, Joseph Moore, and Zacharia Winn,

¹¹ 1760 act in Walter Clark, ed., *The State Records of North Carolina*, vol. 25 (Goldsboro, NC: Nash Brothers, 1906), 419-420; Karin L. Zipf, *Labor of Innocents: Forced Apprenticeship in North Carolina, 1715-1919* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), 2-16; RWP, John Weaver, S42061, Transcribed by C. Leon Harris, <http://revwarapps.org/s42061.pdf>; For his childhood apprenticeship see John Weaver in Heinegg, http://www.freeafricanamericans.com/Virginia_NC.htm, Walden-Webster.

who enlisted at or close to age twenty-one, while others such as Aaron Hathcock and Simon Spellman joined the fighting forces in their mid-teens.¹² Some, such as Winn, were drafted at or near the end of their apprenticeship, though others may have persuaded or been encouraged by their masters to enlist. A neighbor who knew Lemon (or Lamond) Land claimed that he had enlisted in 1777 specifically “to clear the serving out his time” with Colonel Sam Weldon. If any others weighed the choices between military service and continued apprenticeship, they may not have found their decision agreeable. Even for those bound to work as apprentices on farms, life in the military may not have provided substantially better happiness, as evidenced by seventeen-year-old Nathaniel Revell who deserted only four months into his 1779 term in the Continental Line.¹³ Enlisting black soldiers would also have to consider the possibility than any children they had faced the risk of forced apprenticeship if they did not return from the war.

In addition to the apprenticeship laws affecting its future black soldiers, North Carolina continually passed legislation taxing free black residents in this late colonial era. Following the 1715 act, North Carolina imposed an additional tax on free people of color in 1723, citing complaints by free holders “of great Numbers of Free Negroes, Mulatoes, and other Persons of mixt Blood, that have lately removed themselves into this Government,” and intermarried with white residents. The Assembly passed similar acts in 1731 and in 1741. These acts may indicate a lack of success in enforcing the laws, but they also demonstrate legislators’ concerns over rising numbers of intermarriages. 1749 brought increasing taxation on mixed-race individuals, up to the third generation from the original ancestor, and in 1754, the Assembly passed the first law explicitly privileging all whites over all free people of color. Until this point, they could testify in

¹² Statistics compiled by this author. See list of Indentured or Apprenticed Black Soldiers in Appendix A.

¹³ RWP, Zacharia Winn, S18286, Transcribed by Will Graves, <http://revwarapps.org/s18286.pdf>; RWP, Lamond Land, W20401, Transcribed by Will Graves, <http://revwarapps.org/w20401.pdf>; Nathaniel Revell in Heinegg, http://www.freeafricanamericans.com/Virginia_NC.htm, Pettiford-Riley.

court cases relating to white citizens, but the new law allowed their testimony only in cases pertaining to other free people of color.¹⁴

While the elite and monied worried about the increase of these inhabitants, many of their neighbors, and even a few legislators, acknowledged these individuals were indeed citizens and faced undue burdens. White citizens and assemblymen voiced complaints in 1733 about numerous free black residents bound as apprentices by local justices of the peace against their will. The lower and upper Assembly both expressed the illegality of this practice and resolved to bring justice to the issue, lest the slighted individuals desert the colony. Also, during this time, local white citizens of Granville, Edgecombe, and Northampton Counties voiced their concerns for their free black neighbors, petitioning the General Assembly in 1762 to repeal the 1723 tax burdening free mixed-race individuals. They unsuccessfully lobbied for the same redress in 1771, suggesting the concern certain white neighbors felt for specific black men and women during this period.¹⁵

A History of Military Service

Interestingly, as John Hope Franklin acknowledged, this late colonial era saw an increasingly liberal attitude in North Carolina toward free people of color. It correlated in time with but was not necessarily caused by the end of the French and Indian War.¹⁶ The services of black men in this war, however, potentially influenced some of these more permissive outlooks. Many North Carolina black men had fought in this and other previous colonial conflicts, and

¹⁴ Complaint quoted in Clark, *The State Records of North Carolina*, vol. 23, 106; William L. Saunders, ed., *The Colonial Records of North Carolina*, vol. 3 (Raleigh: P.M. Hale, 1886), 192; Milteer Jr., "The Complications of Liberty," 86-87.

¹⁵ Saunders, *The Colonial Records of North Carolina*, vol. 3, 556-567, 585, 593; Milteer Jr., "The Complications of Liberty," 101-102.

¹⁶ Franklin, *The Free Negro in North Carolina*, 10.

many of their children or grandchildren carried this tradition of military service into the American Revolution. While several laws limited the equality of free people of color in the colonial period, their contributions, if not duties, as citizens at arms in defense of the colony were expected and largely necessary. However, the tradition of black men at arms, and the specific legislation pertaining to their services warrants further explanation.

In neighboring Virginia, prohibitions against black military service began in the mid-1600s. Despite the restrictions of the legal government, a large portion of Nathaniel Bacon's 1676 rebels were enslaved or free black men, including 80 of the last 100 holdouts. Promised freedom in exchange for military service, their role in the unsuccessful revolt led to revenge and re-enslavement at the conclusion of the rebellion. As Judith Van Buskirk contends, however, the memories of bearing arms during Bacon's Rebellion were largely non-existent within the black community by the time of the Revolutionary War. Free black and mulatto Virginians, meanwhile, remained eligible for militia drafts from 1705 until the mid-1700s, when they were relegated to serving as drummers or pioneers.¹⁷ Elsewhere, South Carolina authorized the arming of slaves in the first decade of the eighteenth century, due to threats of conflict and invasion. This colony actually employed black men as soldiers during their 1715 Yamasee War, but fears of insurrection, particularly after the 1739 Stono Rebellion, barred their military enlistments until the Revolution. Even then, South Carolina reluctantly impressed almost exclusively enslaved black men as laborers and sailors during this conflict.¹⁸

¹⁷ Benjamin Quarles, "The Colonial Militia," 644; Stephen Saunders Webb, *1676: The End of American Independence* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1995), 6; Van Buskirk, *Standing in Their Own Light*, 32; Jackson, "Virginia Negro Soldiers and Seamen," 251.

¹⁸ Farley, "The South Carolina Negro in the American Revolution," 75-80; Quarles, "The Colonial Militia," 648-650.

Between these two neighbors, North Carolina, like many colonies with slaves, sought to keep weapons out of black hands during the 1700s, but shortages of men often superseded the caution engendered by threat of revolt. Furthermore, fears and official policies often failed to stem the actual practices of enlistment officers during these periods of conflict. In 1746, North Carolina passed a law mandating that every free man and servant between the ages of sixteen and sixty be listed as eligible for militia conscription while also specifying those disabled in service would receive a black slave as compensation. A decade later, North Carolina, along with Virginia and New York, utilized black soldiers in growing numbers during the French and Indian War. Approximately 50 or more black or mulatto men served in North Carolina militia regiments during this conflict or the years immediately afterward, including a few who later served in the American Revolution.¹⁹ They joined the regiments of various counties, though many, if not most, performed their duties alongside several other black and mulatto men from their neighborhoods.

One Granville County militia roster from 1754 explicitly lists at least nine black or mulatto men in its ranks, just slightly higher than one percent of the entire 784-man force. Among them were future Revolutionary War soldier William Chavis Jr. and his father, as well as Michael and Edward Gowen. It is unclear whether these last two men also served in the Revolutionary War or if their sons continued their lineage. Also among the troops were undesignated mulatto men Sherwood Harris, Joseph Hawley, Lewis Anderson, and George and Lawrence Pettiford, the first two of whom served again during the Revolution.²⁰ Another

¹⁹ See the 1746 law in Clark, *The State Records of North Carolina*, vol. 23, 244-246; Quarles, "The Colonial Militia," 647-648, 651-652; Heinegg, *List of Free African Americans in the Revolution: Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Maryland and Delaware (Followed by French and Indian Wars and Colonial Militias)*, <http://www.freeafricanamericans.com/revolution.htm>.

²⁰ "Granville County: Muster Roll of Colonel William Eaton's Regiment," October 8, 1754, Troop Returns, North Carolina Digital Collections, <http://digital.ncdcr.gov/cdm/compoundobject/collection/p16062coll26/id/146/rec/32>; Moss and Scoggins, *African-American Patriots*, 100-102, 118, 187; Heinegg, *List of Free African Americans in the Revolution*, <http://www.freeafricanamericans.com/revolution.htm>; RWP, Sherwood Harris, W3984,

undated Northampton County militia roll from this period contains the names of twenty men noted as black, a full 16 percent of the unit. They were listed separately on the back of the roster, however, though it is unclear if this separate delineation indicated a unique role for them. Revolutionary War soldiers in this roster include Phillip Byrd, John Demery, Benjamin Tann, as well as Boothe, Moses, and James Newsome.²¹ Several other rosters also contain black men, including more not identified as such or who did not serve as conventional soldiers. They include Jacob Johnson, the only confirmed black man among a 1754 Onslow County militia regiment's four pioneers.²²

While a sizeable number of free black men served during the French and Indian War, they participated in the subsequent Regulator Rebellion in much smaller proportions. From the late 1760s, until they were defeated in the 1777 Battle of Alamance, the Regulators' aims of stopping egregious taxation and the corruption of North Carolina's government through extralegal means theoretically could have appealed to free black families as well.²³ While it is not known how many, if any, black men joined their backcountry neighbors in rebelling against Governor Tryon, a handful, including John Gibson and Benjamin James, served in militias formed to suppress this uprising. By the time of the eventual military clash, however, many

Transcribed by C. Leon Harris, <http://revwarapps.org/w3984.pdf>. Another possible black man, Solomon Blackman is also among those mustered.

²¹ "Northampton County: Roster of Captain James Faison's Company (Undated)," Troop Returns, North Carolina Digital Collections, <http://digital.ncdcr.gov/cdm/compoundobject/collection/p16062coll26/id/14/rec/1>; Byrd listed in "Northampton County: List of Men," March 15, 1780, Troop Returns, North Carolina Digital Collections, <http://digital.ncdcr.gov/cdm/compoundobject/collection/p16062coll26/id/945/rec/272>; The Revolutionary War service of Demery, Tann, as well as Boothe, Moses, and James Newsome described in Heinegg, http://www.freeafricanamericans.com/Virginia_NC.htm, Davis-Drew, Tann-Viers, Nash-Peters.

²² "Onslow County: Muster Roll of Forces Retaken," October 25, 1754, Troop Returns, North Carolina Digital Collections, <http://digital.ncdcr.gov/cdm/compoundobject/collection/p16062coll26/id/171/rec/40>; Jacob Johnson in Heinegg, "Free African Americans," http://www.freeafricanamericans.com/Virginia_NC.htm, Jeffrey-Johnson.

²³ For a better explanation of Regulator aims see Marjoleine Kars, *Breaking Loose Together: The Regulator Rebellion in Pre-Revolutionary North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

eastern militia units were hesitant to fight against the Regulators, and it is not known if any black soldiers actually engaged in the Battle of Alamance.²⁴

The Outbreak of War

While the Regulator crisis came and went, North Carolinians grew closer to outright rebellion against the British Crown. Citizens of the colony increasingly agitated and organized in associations and committees of safety, and many white signatories eventually signed compacts and resolves declaring preparedness and desire for independence. Little is known about the opinions and actions of free people of color in North Carolina on the eve of the American Revolution, but as frequent participants in militias and the social circles of their communities, it is presumable that several held opinions similar to those of their white neighbors. As historian Judith Van Buskirk argues, black men faced unique challenges and pressing concerns, but they exhibited many of the same motivations as their white counterparts.²⁵ In the following years, these allegiances, beliefs, and obligations were put to the ultimate test.

North Carolina's residents of color, impacted by the debate between New England and Southern states over arming black men, faced objections and hindrances to their enlistments at various points during the conflict. They experienced this reality in their own unique ways, however, as North Carolina seemingly allowed free people of color to enlist or be drafted with little hesitation. In fact, despite the debate surrounding them, North Carolina never explicitly barred free black men from military service. Despite the *de jure* and *de facto* racial restrictions present in the larger colonial South, North Carolina's need to fulfill quotas of Continental troops

²⁴ Walter Clark, ed., *The State Records of North Carolina*, vol. 22 (Goldsboro, NC: Nash Brothers, 1907), 451, 453; Kars, *Breaking Loose Together*, 193;

²⁵ Van Buskirk, *Standing in Their Own Light*, 21-2.

encouraged officers to enlist many African American or mulatto men in one of the state's ten regiments.²⁶ Similar pressures likely compelled militia officers to practice the same allowances.

Motivations

For a small contingent of North Carolina's black servicemen, soldiering was thrust upon them. At least nine are believed to have been enslaved at some point in their lives.²⁷ They included two sailors, Jack and Keto, the first of whom was freed after the war and the latter of whom became the first black marine before his death aboard a sinking ship. Another enslaved man, Edward or Ned Griffin, served in order to gain his freedom but struggled against the broken promises of his master to legally gain this status. Unknown numbers of other black people in various states of freedom were impressed into auxiliary roles within North Carolina's military forces during the war, including those who Quartermaster Nicholas Long indicated were suited for crafting gun stocks, as well as sawing and carpentry.²⁸ They also counted 36 confiscated enslaved people belonging to Currituck County Loyalist Thomas McKnight who were taken to the Chatham ironworks, near modern Fayetteville to produce wagons and gun carriages in 1776.²⁹

When the choice presented itself, enslaved African Americans and several apprenticed youths may have seen service to the American side as their best chance at freedom or bettering their plight in some instances, but other types of unfree men also found themselves in service to a

²⁶ Van Buskirk, *Standing in Their Own Light*, 61; Quarles, *The Negro in the American Revolution*, 71.

²⁷ Statistics compiled by this author. See list of Enslaved or Formerly Enslaved Soldiers in Appendix A.

²⁸ Moss and Scoggins, *African-American Patriots*, 104-105, 133, 145; Nicholas Long to Jethro Sumner, June 9 1781, Folder 6, in the Jethro Sumner Papers, #705, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

²⁹ Walter Clark, ed., *The State Records of North Carolina*, vol. 12 (Winston, NC: M.I. and J.C. Stewart, 1895), 629; Treasurers and Comptrollers Papers, Military Papers, 1747-1779, Box 1, Folder: 1776, State Archives of North Carolina; Dr. Lawrence Babits, email message to author, March 15, 2020.

lesser degree. Sherwood Chavers and Joseph Locklear landed in a Salisbury jail in 1779 and volunteered to join the Continental forces to escape confinement. Meanwhile, Bartlet Tyler's case presents the possibility that some black or mulatto men were coerced to join the military, as he alleged that Granville County courts falsely charged him with vagrancy before making him serve.³⁰

In another category of men falling somewhere between voluntary enlistees and conscripts, an estimated 25 or more of North Carolina's black troops entered service as substitutes.³¹ While the motivations of Arthur Toney, enlisting for his brother, John, are more apparent, the relationships between other substitutes and the men they replaced are not always explanatory. Benjamin Wilkins, after his possible service in a Continental regiment, substituted twice in militia units, once for John Glover, a Virginian, and again, after returning home, for Samuel Foreman. In both cases he explicitly noted his employer's names and that he was hired. Jeffery Garnes, a Granville County man, enlisted in 1777 into the Seventh North Carolina Regiment for three years, but in 1778, Captain Richard Taylor's Granville militia company lists him, a black man, as a substitute for William Edwards Cock. Their relationship or arrangement is unknown.³²

Aside from these instances, the overwhelming majority of North Carolina's black soldiers apparently entered service of their own volition as free men. Many, an unidentified number, were drafted, but free people of color shared this same burden alongside their white neighbors for multiple generations by this point as citizens of the state.³³ Furthermore, many draftees also

³⁰ The Chavers and Locklear case reproduced in Walter Clark, ed., *The State Records of North Carolina*, vol. 14 (Winston, NC: M.I. and J.C. Stewart, 1896), 287; See Bartlet Tyler in Heinegg, http://www.freeafricanamericans.com/Virginia_NC.htm, Tann-Viers.

³¹ Statistics compiled by this author. See list of Known Substitutes in Appendix A.

³² RWP, Benjamin Wilkins, R11545; Moss and Scoggins, *African-American Patriots*, 93; "Size Roll Taken by Captain Ralph Williams of Men Enrolled In Granville County May 25th 1778 to Fill the North Carolina Quota of Continental Soldiers," Transcribed by Will Graves, <http://revwarapps.org/b250.pdf>.

³³ See list of known draftees in Appendix A.

served terms as volunteers at various points. Elisha Parker, for example, was drafted into a militia unit, but served several tours thereafter as a substitute, presumably for payment. Drury Walden likewise soldiered as a draftee, substitute, and volunteer. Draft orders were not always well-received, however, as exemplified by Exum Scott, a married Halifax County resident with several children, who entered the Continental forces in mid-1781 as a draftee when the British came marching through from Wilmington. Neighbors who traded war stories with Scott in his later years testified that he expressed distress over leaving his family and home to join the conflict.³⁴

Conversely, rather than leaving their families, a substantial number of North Carolina's black soldiers enlisted alongside relatives. Over the course of the war, many relatives served tours at differing times as well. Brothers, fathers, cousins, and extended kin possibly exuded pressure to join the cause and their previous or concurrent service likely encouraged many young men to sign a recruiter's roll. Several relatives in the Bass family of free people of color served in the Third Regiment, while members of the Carter, Chavers, Gibson, Harris, James, Martin, Newson, Overton, Pettiford, Reed, Scott, and Taburn families also bore arms, among many others.³⁵

While most of their motivations can only be inferred, a few of North Carolina's volunteer black soldiers enunciated rationales and reasons for their service in their pensions. Mark Murray presented perhaps the most explicit motivations for his specific enlistment, claiming that his neighbors invited him to muster into a regiment together as volunteers, hoping that they would

³⁴ RWP, Elisha Parker, S11211, Transcribed by C. Leon Harris, <http://revwarapps.org/s11211.pdf>; RWP, Drury Walden, R11014, Transcribed by C. Leon Harris, <http://revwarapps.org/r11014.pdf>; RWP, Exum Scott, W5994, Transcribed by C. Leon Harris, <http://revwarapps.org/w5994.pdf>.

³⁵ See the members of these respective families in Moss and Scoggins, *African-American Patriots*; and Heinegg, "Free African Americans, <http://www.freeafricanamericans.com/>.

all mess or bivouac together. He also noted that his father, a mixed man like himself, told the twenty-four-year-old Mark after Charleston fell to the British, “you must go fight for your country.” Upon returning home and presenting his discharge to his father after his term expired, his father was reportedly pleased with his “good and dutiful son.” While Murray’s case seems an aberration, a few others also expressed patriotic sentiments as factors in their enlistment. Samuel Bell heeded the call to “Join General Greene’s army” in South Carolina, as he “went to the Court house voluntarily & had his name enrolled as a Soldier for twelve months.” He testified that he enlisted voluntarily “because he believed it to be his duty to assist his Countrymen in arms in the achievement of *their* [italics mine] Independence.”³⁶

Micajah Hicks also expressed patriotic sentiments in his pension application, repeatedly referencing “his Country” and reporting he was late in filing for assistance as he “was unwilling to live on the bounty of his Country” as long as he could provide for himself. He enlisted for the duration of the war and received a certificate for an \$80 bounty at the time. The monetary incentive likely also contributed to his enlistment, as he noted in 1830 that he remained “very poor.”³⁷ It is worth considering that for these and many other black soldiers who expressed a modicum of patriotic sentiment in their testimonies, pragmatism and the need for financial compensation likely also factored in their thinking at the time of their pension applications as well as their initial enlistment.

If the motivations of these soldiers’ first enlistments varied along complex considerations, their reasons for reenlisting (or failing to do so) exhibited less overt diversity. It is easily plausible that the harsh reality of warfare dissuaded many soldiers from rejoining the army when their obligations expired. However, the bounties offered to North Carolina’s

³⁶ RWP, Mark Murray, R7523; RWP, Samuel Bell, S6598.

³⁷ RWP, Micajah Hicks, W7738.

Continental soldiers, along with real camaraderie and patriotic sentiments, likely explain the reenlistments of many, black and white alike. Surveys of black soldiers in other states also reveal that many draftees returned to serve again on their own accord.³⁸ North Carolina's Cato Copeland plausibly reenlisted for a combination of these factors. Recruited initially for three years, he reenlisted in the same regiment in 1780 for an additional stint, receiving a \$100 bounty. Perhaps others such as Valentine Lucas, a rare black soldier who married at some point during his service, were attracted more by the company of their families than the messes and files of the army and chose not to serve another term.³⁹

More remarkably, several black soldiers imprisoned at Charleston also enlisted for a second round of service in 1781. Jonathan Overton gained a parole at some point but apparently broke it and joined Captain Samuel Jones' company in the Third Regiment in November 1781 for one year. After eventually escaping British captivity, Martin Black returned to New Bern and reenlisted again for eighteen months at some point in 1781. William Foster, a private of the Third Regiment while in Charleston, enlisted (possibly as a corporal) in a company of the First Regiment in May 1781, and again in August 1782. Israel Pearce claimed that he was present and serving as a Continental under Lieutenant Colonel Robert Mebane at the siege of Charleston as well as "Gates' defeat [Camden], at the Hanging Rock & and also at Polasksis [sic] defeat at Savannah." While it appears far-fetched that Pearce served in two battles shortly after Charleston when almost every Continental soldier was imprisoned, it is not impossible he escaped or gained parole. Later evidence shows he re-enlisted in May 1781.⁴⁰

³⁸ Van Buskirk, *Standing in Their Own Light*, 19.

³⁹ Moss and Scoggins, *African-American Patriots*, 38; RWP, Valentine Locus, W20497, Transcribed by C. Leon Harris, <http://revwarapps.org/w20497.pdf>.

⁴⁰ RWP, Martin Black, S41441; RWP, Israel Pearce, S3660, Transcribed by C. Leon Harris, <http://revwarapps.org/s3660.pdf>; Moss and Scoggins, *African-American Patriots*, 88, 177, 181-182.

Finally, while great numbers of African Americans and black people fled to the British army during the Revolution, a puzzling few deserted or switched from British service into North Carolina's Continental forces. Of these, Job Lott, a former British waggoneer, may be the only one who made the choice of his own volition. Another black veteran, Charles Hood, reported that Lott, "a waggoner to the British army, came over to West Point & brought a load of flour which he sold to the Americans and enlisted in service of the Continental Line." Whether he found British service unfavorable, or American rewards more appealing, Lott enlisted for a two-and-a-half-year term in the Fifth North Carolina Regiment. He never lived to see his land bounty administered as he died within the year, in June 1777. The most unusual North Carolina soldiers, however, were the two men, Benajah Bogey and Simon Moore, who were forgiven by a local court for having joined the British upon agreement to serve in the Continental line.⁴¹

Surprisingly, whether by the preference of enlisting officers or their own level of support for the cause, free black men did not rush to arms during the early stages of the war to the degree that they served in its middle and later years. Nevertheless, Titus Overton of Bladen County enlisted in a local militia regiment in either 1775 or 1776 and Moses Newsom of Northampton County, a colonial militia veteran, entered the North Carolina Continental line at the same time. Valentine Lucas enlisted for two and a half years in the Third Regiment of the North Carolina Continental line and William Lomack, who claimed he served in the Battle of Trenton in 1776, may have joined during the early months of the conflict as well. At least one man, Richard Roberts, apparently served with North Carolina militia forces at the December 1775 Battle of

⁴¹. Hood quoted in Crow, *The Black Experience*, 101; Lloyd D. Bockstruck, *Revolutionary War Bounty Land Grants: Awarded by State Governments* (Baltimore, MD: Genealogical Pub. Co, 1996), 322; Moss and Scoggins, *African-American Patriots*, 29-30, 152, 164.

Great Bridge just outside Norfolk, Virginia.⁴² Interestingly, this force was dispatched in response to Lord Dunmore's raising of the "Ethiopian Regiment" of runaway slaves, and to ensure that North Carolina black inhabitants did not rush to the British lines. Closer to home, at least six black soldiers likely served in the early 1776 Battle of Moore's Creek Bridge in southeastern North Carolina.⁴³

All told, at least 26 black or mulatto men appear to have enlisted in North Carolina's Continental or militia forces before the end of 1776, but their numbers only swelled as manpower became more critical and bounties or other enticements more alluring over the course of the war.⁴⁴ In contrast, many white landowners, resembling a middle class, enlisted during the *rage militaire* in the early portion of the war. As military and recruiting failures struck the national army by the end of 1776, however, General Washington agitated Congress to increase land bounties and enlistment bonuses, hoping to recruit self-interested and likely poorer citizens to serve for longer durations.⁴⁵ Thus began the military service of the overwhelming majority of North Carolina's soldiers of color.

Conclusions

North Carolina's black soldiers of the American Revolution emerged from a society that increasingly wrestled with their status and freedoms. Amid the crisis of war, however, North Carolina's varying societal and political opinions of its black inhabitants coalesced into

⁴² Moss and Scoggins, *African-American Patriots*, 153, 170, 179; RWP, William Lomack, S41783; RWP, Richard Roberts, S38339, Transcribed by Will Graves, <http://revwarapps.org/s38339.pdf>. There is reason to doubt Lomack's service at Trenton, as he later claimed he enlisted in 1777. He likely confused this with another battle.

⁴³ Crow, *The Black Experience*, 61; The deserters are described in the diary of Hugh McDonald, Clark, *The State Records of North Carolina*, vol. 11 (Winston, NC: M.I. and J.C. Stewart, 1895), 834; See also Solomon Carter in Heinegg, http://www.freeafricanamericans.com/Virginia_NC.htm, Campbell-Charity; and RWP, William Loughry, W8263, Transcribed by Will Graves, <http://revwarapps.org/w8263.pdf>.

⁴⁴ Statistics compiled by this author. See Figure 3 in Appendix B.

⁴⁵ Martin and Edward, *A Respectable Army*, 70-77.

legislation that further limited their freedoms and rights. The Wilmington Committee of Safety ordered black men, presumably the enslaved, disarmed in 1775 and established curfews for them as well. Such committees also required citizens to take oaths of allegiance and prevented masters from blocking the enlistments of their apprentices and servants. Legislators and citizens greatly feared that the enslaved population would revolt or align with the British, but North Carolina and other upper South states allowed the arming or enlistment of slaves to a much higher degree than their Southern neighbors.⁴⁶ By 1777 though, amid mounting emancipatory voices of its Quaker population, North Carolina passed *An Act to prevent domestic Insurrections* which prohibited the freeing of slaves except for meritorious service, and even then, only with the consent of a court.⁴⁷ Thus the state deprived itself of a potentially large source of manpower during the midst of the war and moved closer to inalterably codifying and accepting chattel slavery.

Unsurprisingly, the vast majority of the state's black soldiers were poor free people of color, residing in the border region below Virginia before they joined or were drafted into the military. Of the 368 soldiers whose pre-war residences are known, 225, or 61 percent, lived in the region that included Caswell, Person, Granville, Franklin, Warren, Halifax, Northampton, Hertford, Gates, Currituck, Pasquotank, Perquimans, Chowan, Bertie, Edgecombe, Nash, and the former Bute County. Twenty-two percent of these men hailed from Halifax and Granville Counties alone. Meanwhile, substantial numbers lived in the Cross Creek (modern Fayetteville), New Bern, and Wilmington riverine or coastal regions. Even fewer resided in the backcountry Piedmont area of former Regulator sentiment, and a smaller handful of black men lived in Virginia or South Carolina but joined North Carolina's military forces.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Jeffrey J. Crow, *The Black Experience*, 56-64.

⁴⁷ Walter Clark, ed., *The State Records of North Carolina*, vol. 24 (Goldsboro, NC: Nash Brothers, 1905), 14-15.

⁴⁸ Statistics compiled by this author. See Figure 1 in Appendix B.

These unique revolutionaries also had a lengthy cultural history, often personally, of soldiering prior to their enlistments. They were, like their white counterparts, often young and unmarried. In fact, among the 191 whose enlistment ages are well evidenced, 82 were between the ages of 17-21, while another 42 were between 22-26 years of age.⁴⁹ The legal prohibitions and inordinate burdens on them, along with the occasional defenses of their neighbors almost certainly impacted their decisions to fight for the American cause. As Jeffrey Crow argued, free black men in North Carolina often joined the Patriot forces to defend the tenuous and unusual status of their pre-war lives.⁵⁰ Those who voluntarily enlisted may have seen military service as a means to elevate themselves or their families socially and economically, even if for a short time. Even draftees likely recognized the potential effects of their service on the opinions and attitudes of legislators and citizens alike. They went to war in a variety of manners and circumstances, but all certainly hoped their service to the fledgling American cause would reward them or their families in some manner. To effect change, however, they would have to bear arms and accoutrements in the state's Continental or militia forces. In this period, their motivations and hopes for post-war betterment rested on what they were able to accomplish in their time under arms, should they even live to see its end.

⁴⁹ Statistics compiled by this author. See Figure 2 in Appendix B.

⁵⁰ Crow, *The Black Experience*, 66.

Chapter 3: Bivouacs and Battles - Service in the Continental Line

Of the 468 or more black soldiers in North Carolina's forces during the American Revolution, the majority served in the state's Continental regiments at some time.¹ More professionalized, equipped, and better trained than their militia counterparts, they fulfilled much longer stints in locales farther from home, seeing combat in most theatres of the war. They often fought alongside troops from other states in combined battle lines and went toe to toe with British forces in some of the war's bloodiest battles. They also endured brutal army encampments, the horrors of diseases, and the threat of confinement as prisoners of war. Black North Carolina Continentals performed numerous duties; many demonstrated outlying and exceptional experiences, possibly on account of their racial status. Many of these soldiers also entered service in surprising locations and capacities.

This chapter examines not only how and why they served but demonstrates the ways their performance affected the war and their compatriots or commanders. Most Continental infantry soldiers came from the poorer populations within the colonial society, but their service made them eligible for larger bounties, including land grants. Black soldiers bore the same challenges and strove for the same rewards alongside their white compatriots throughout the course of the war, but their existing status within society shaped the reasons they enlisted, their treatment by fellow soldiers and officers, and their recognition after winning the lengthy and grueling conflict. Conversely, their proficiency as soldiers, the dire need for their services, and the shared ordeals they bore alongside their comrades, fostered no exact equality, but also ensured no wholesale discrimination against them. Like black soldiers from other states, their service also affected the

¹ This number derives from the combination of men listed in Moss and Scoggins, *African-American Patriots*; and Heinegg, "List of Free African Americans in the Revolution: Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Maryland and Delaware (Followed by French and Indian Wars and Colonial Militias)," Updated 6/23/2018, <http://www.freeafricanamericans.com/revolution.htm>.

larger war effort as well as the opinions of common soldiers and commanders around them. Lastly, their service likely inspired officers to enlist and entrust more black men, allowing greater numbers of free people of color to enjoy a more-respected position as veterans after the war.

Interpreting the experiences of these Continental soldiers often proves challenging. Some left behind particularly insightful pension applications, while many others are known only as names on rosters. Documentation, including muster rolls, is frequently lacking for many units at various times during the conflict, as many units amalgamated or were essentially disbanded due to enlistment turnover or capture at Charleston in 1780. Among the Continental forces, the paperwork of the Third North Carolina Regiment remains in the fullest state of completion and it often offers the most representative model for interpreting the services of black soldiers when other records are lacking. The regiment's recruiting territory in the northeastern area of the state also means that substantial proportions of North Carolina's black troops joined this unit. As such, this examination relies heavily on the experiences of the men and officers of the Third when necessary.

Patterns

The black men in North Carolina's Continental ranks performed a variety of roles, sometimes as non-combatants, but most often in the ranks and battle lines. They occasionally switched duties within their units, and in exceedingly rare instances, transferred between military branches. The variances in their experiences indicate their full integration and participation within the American forces. Among those in auxiliary roles, Rueben Bird was one of several young black males enlisted as officers' servants, a duty and occasional privilege shared by white

teenagers as well.² The subservient duties of these young men occasionally changed though when they reached fighting age, as exemplified by the young Joel Taburn, who initially acted as an officers' servant but eventually "was put into the ranks, in which he afterwards continued" during the Southern Campaign of the war.³ Some, such as Council Bass, performed the vital functions of drummers or fifers, directing soldiers by relaying commands during the heat of battle. Meanwhile Boothe Newsome exemplified another common duty for black men in the Continental army, serving as a pioneer, somewhere between a laborer and rudimentary engineer—a role that required rigorous exertion, exceptional skill, and frequent bravery. Furthermore, one North Carolina Continental, Lewis Boon, joined initially as a foot soldier but reenlisted for a third term on horseback as a dragoon under Lieutenant Colonel William Washington, and participated in several major battles.⁴ In at least one unique case, a black serviceman not only switched duties, but entire branches of the military. Israel Pearce, a self-described "unlettered" black man, served first in the North Carolina state navy on the ship *Caswell* for about twelve months before he received a discharge and quickly joined a Continental unit.⁵ Though there is no documentary evidence of the reasons for the transfers of most of these men, the consolidation of army commands, shortages of manpower in certain regiments, or increased enlistment bounties may have ushered or enticed these and other North Carolinians into new units, mostly willingly.

² RWP, Reuben Bird, S37776, Transcribed by C. Leon Harris, <http://revwarapps.org/s37776.pdf>.

³ RWP, Joel Taburn, S42037, Transcribed by Will Graves, <http://revwarapps.org/s42037.pdf>.

⁴ Bass and Newsome both listed in Clark, *The State Records of North Carolina*, vol. 14, 294; RWP, Lewis Boon, S41455, Transcribed by Will Graves, <http://revwarapps.org/s41455.pdf>.

⁵ RWP, Israel Pearce, S3660; "Muster Roll of Capt. Kedar Ballard's Company in the 3rd No. Carolina Regt. In the Service of the United States of North America Commanded by Col. Robert Mebane Taken [1780?]." Transcribed by Will Graves. <http://revwarapps.org/b365.pdf>.

Enlistment

North Carolina's black Continental troops noticeably hailed from common areas along the Virginia border and around coastal or riverine ports. Certain regiments, especially the Third, contained higher numbers of black soldiers, and the concentrations of these men in certain regiments reflects a unit's recruiting efforts in particular towns, notably Halifax, New Bern, and Wilmington where large numbers of free black residents lived. Continental officers may have preferred not to recruit in the Virginia border region, however. North Carolina's Governor Richard Caswell wrote to Third Regiment commander Colonel Jethro Sumner that "the people of Granville & other counties are very different beings from those who you proposed making machines of to answer the public exigencies."⁶ It is not clear if they purposely sought to avoid enlisting free black men, but they found their way into the army, nevertheless.

Some of these men travelled one or more counties to join a regiment, but the majority likely enlisted at their own local courthouse. Cato Copeland, for example, resided in Halifax County, where he enlisted "about the first day of October in the year 1777," under Colonel Hardy Murfee of the Second Regiment. Arthur Toney, another Halifax County resident, entered the army in early 1779, taking the place of John Toney, his brother, at Bacon's Bridge in South Carolina as the army encamped there. He recalled marching from Halifax to South Carolina under the command of an army lieutenant. Mark Murray, living in Halifax County, volunteered in April 1780 at "Hogstown" near modern Hamilton in Martin County. He described an eight day wait before the enlisted men of his regiment met at Halifax to draw arms, followed shortly after by a march to the Chatham County courthouse where General Jethro Sumner was headquartered while raising new Continentals. Benjamin Wilkins, also a Halifax County resident, recalled

⁶ Richard Caswell to Jethro Sumner, June 13, 1778, Folder 1, in the Jethro Sumner Papers, #705, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

militia Colonel John Branch recruiting men in the town of Halifax for the Second Regiment, at which time he agreed to serve eighteen months. Meanwhile, John Weaver, from Hertford (another border county), enlisted in mid-1777 into the Tenth Regiment for three years or the war's duration, though he likely served his term in the Second Regiment.⁷

Though many black North Carolina Continentals resided in counties bordering Virginia, a smaller contingent enlisted near the coast, and fewer still took arms in the central part of the state. In the port city of New Bern, local resident Martin Black volunteered for three years when the Tenth Regiment officers began recruiting there in 1777. In the interior of the state, Samuel Bell, a late-war enlistee, resided in Sampson County when he proceeded to the county courthouse in February 1782 to enlist under Lieutenant Hardy Holmes, recruiting for the First Regiment. Even further inland, probable black men Demsey Ransom, Hezekiah Hargrave, and Ephraim Elsmore, Burke and Lincoln County residents, also enlisted in the First Regiment under Captain Alexander Brevard in 1782.⁸ These latter men especially, and a small number of others, lived in areas with substantially fewer free people of color and their experiences within the army probably echoed their relative isolation and unique status in civilian life.

Based on the locations where certain regiments recruited enlistees, the proportions of black men in individual units varied considerably. Higher concentrations of black soldiers in a given regiment may have provided comfort and familiarity for them, but conceivably also

⁷ Moss and Scoggins, *African-American Patriots*, 245; RWP, Cato Copeland, W17665, Transcribed by Will Graves, <http://revwarapps.org/w17665.pdf>; RWP, Arthur Toney, W4835, Transcribed by Will Graves, <http://revwarapps.org/w4835.pdf>; RWP, Mark Murray, R7523; RWP, Benjamin Wilkins, R11545; RWP, John Weaver, S42061; See an explanation of Tenth Regiment enlistments in Stephen A. Ralls, "A Case Study of the Tenth Regiment, North Carolina Continental Line," *The North Carolina Genealogical Society Journal* vol. 14, no. 2 (May, 1992): 66-70.

⁸ RWP, Martin Black, S41441, Transcribed by C. Leon Harris, <http://revwarapps.org/s41441.pdf>; RWP, Samuel Bell, S6598; The regimental assignments of Holmes and Brevard listed in Lawrence E. Babits and Joshua B. Howard, *Fortitude and Fortbearance: The North Carolina Continental Line in the Revolutionary War, 1775-1783* (Raleigh: Office of Archives and History, N.C. Dept. of Cultural Resources, 2004), 17, 28; "A Descriptive List of Men Raised from Morgan District," (1782?), Alexander Brevard Papers, State Archives of North Carolina.

fostered greater mingling and interdependence between themselves and their white counterparts. A few entirely or mostly black companies existed in the Continental lines of Northern states, though most black Continentals, including those in North Carolina, were integrated into close proximity with predominantly white soldiers.⁹ The roster of Lieutenant Colonel Davidson's Company of the Third from April 23, 1779, reveals one of the highest rates of integration with numerous confirmed men of color, and also a few more likely names, within its ranks. Bird Cornett or Cornett Bird, Sothey Manly, Uriah and Council Bass, Lemon Land, and Booth Newsom were all present in addition to the sick and deceased men left behind in hospitals. All told, the 62-man company contained 10 confirmed black men along with possibly three additional mixed-race individuals: roughly 21 percent of the unit.¹⁰ This ratio contrasts drastically with other companies that contained few or no black men, despite operating in the same North Carolina regiment.¹¹

While most North Carolina black troops mustered within their own state, a few curious individuals found service elsewhere during the Revolution. North Carolina's governor had the displeasure to inform the state's Board of War in 1778 of the large number of soldiers sent to aid South Carolina but "suffered to leave their respective regiments and enlist in the states of South Carolina and Georgia." Such turnover not only cost North Carolina the pointless bounties paid to these men, but also valuable and needed soldiers. Whether enticed by ample enlistment bounties

⁹ Van Buskirk, *Standing in Their Own Light*, 68-69.

¹⁰ Clark, *The State Records of North Carolina*, vol. 14, 294; William Hathcock, and Lemon Land listed in Heinegg, http://www.freeafricanamericans.com/Virginia_NC.htm, Hammond-Hawley, Joiner-Lee. William Scott, Isham Jones, Thomas Wiggins, and Solomon DeBerry may have been black or mulatto men based on the commonality of their names among black families.

¹¹ "Roll of Captain John Sumner's Company of the 1st No. Carolina Battalion, Commanded by Colonel Thomas Clark Sept 8th 1778," Transcribed by Will Graves, <http://revwarapps.org/b67.pdf>; "Roll of Lt. Colonel Mebane's Company - 1st No. Carolina Battalion, Commanded by Colonel Thomas Clark Sept 8th 1778," Transcribed by Will Graves, <http://revwarapps.org/b63.pdf>. This latter unit contained just four known black men while Sumner's company had none.

or the persuasion of individual commanders, these men enlisted for varying terms under unfamiliar officers, but typically returned to North Carolina afterward. Their experiences, however, varied considerably and illustrate the unique individuality of many of these men at arms.¹²

Inexplicably, Micajah Hicks enlisted in Franklin County but when his unit arrived in South Carolina, sometime before the capture of Charleston in 1780, he suspiciously claimed that he was placed in Maryland's First Regiment, in which he fulfilled the balance of his term. Similarly, Daniel Strother, a man with shallow roots, was born in South Carolina, raised in Anson County, North Carolina, but joined the Continental line of Virginia as a waggoneer. Joseph Locklear served in Continental regiments of both North and South Carolina while his relative Robert Locklear went from a South Carolina Continental to a Loyalist regiment in the same state. Dempsey Stewart, exemplifying the mobility of residents along the Virginia border, lived in Virginia's Northampton County but entered a North Carolina regiment in 1782. While in South Carolina in late December that same year, he transferred into a regiment of that state, but received his discharge in Wilmington in 1783.¹³ Conversely, Evan or Evans Archer was born in North Carolina's Hertford County circa 1716, but enlisted into the Virginia line as a Norfolk, Virginia resident at Chesterfield Courthouse in late 1780. After his service, he resided briefly in Norfolk County, Virginia, before ultimately settling in Hertford County, where he filed for a

¹² A Court Held at Kingston, Dec 1, 1778, Folder 1, in the Jethro Sumner Papers, #705, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

¹³ RWP, Micajah Hicks, W7738; Dr. Lawrence Babits, email message to author, March 15, 2020; Hicks' claim raises suspicions as he could not recall any Maryland officers, though he knew his captain and colonel from a later term in a North Carolina Regiment. The Marylanders also did not arrive until after the fall of Charleston and no records show him in a Maryland regiment. RWP, Daniel Strother, R10275, Transcribed by C. Leon Harris, <http://revwarapps.org/r10275.pdf>; RWP, Dempsey Stewart, W3734, Transcribed by C. Leon Harris, <http://revwarapps.org/w3734.pdf>; See Joseph and Robert Locklear in Heinegg, http://www.freeafricanamericans.com/Virginia_NC.htm, Lemon-Lytle; Moss and Scoggins, 220-221.

federal pension.¹⁴ While these men sought and travelled to the army, at least one black serviceman, the young Reuben Bird, took the opportunity to join a Virginia detachment of militia passing through Hillsborough on its way to rendezvous with Horatio Gate's Continentals at Camden, South Carolina. He enlisted "for and during the war," and ultimately received his discharge many miles from home in Culpepper County, northern Virginia.¹⁵

Like the largely unrecorded enlistment motivations for North Carolina's black soldiers, interpreting the reasons behind their occasional desertions from the army requires some postulation. They likely paralleled the rationales of other deserting soldiers, though black or mixed-race men appear less frequently on muster rolls as deserters than their white counterparts. Only a few, perhaps 15, are known to have left service before completing their enlistment.¹⁶ Desertions began early in the war as three black men and a handful of their white counterparts absconded from the First North Carolina Regiment shortly after the Patriot victory at Moore's Creek in early 1776. Billy, George, and Jack Gears departed in the night with their fellow deserters, apparently because of ungranted discharges. Their service appears lengthy compared to that of Allen Taburn, whose signature had barely dried when he deserted Captain Baker's Company of the Seventh Regiment after only three days, in July 1778, for reasons unknown.¹⁷

¹⁴ RWP, Evans Archer, S41415, Transcribed by Will Graves, <http://revwarapps.org/s41415.pdf>; *The Chesterfield Size Roll: Soldiers Who Entered the Continental Line of Virginia at Chesterfield Courthouse After 1 September 1780*. Transcribed by C. Leon Harris. 2014. <http://revwarapps.org/b69.pdf>; See Evans Archer in Heinegg, http://www.freeafricanamericans.com/Virginia_NC.htm, Archer-Avery.

¹⁵ RWP, Reuben Bird, S37776; As Virginia's Continental line was essentially lost at Charleston, only militia groups came to aid Gates at Camden. See Charles Baxley, "New Order of Battle based upon Battle of Camden Pension Statements," <https://www.battleofcamden.org/amercdrs.htm>.

¹⁶ Statistics compiled by this author. See list of Accused of Confirmed Deserters in Appendix A.

¹⁷ The Moore's Creek deserters are described in Walter Clark, ed., *The State Records of North Carolina*, vol. 11 (Winston, NC: M.I. and J. C. Stewart, 1895), 834. It is possible the men were related and had the last name of "Gears," based on the wording of the diary account. Their fate remains unknown; Walter Clark, ed., *The State Records of North Carolina*, vol. 16 (Goldsboro, NC: Nash Brothers, 1899), 1173; Moss and Scoggins, *African-American Patriots*, 224.

While these men left the army early in the war, more black soldiers fled as the Revolution neared its Southern nadir. At the infamous Valley Forge encampment in 1777-1778, North Carolinians had the fewest absconders of any state. There, they were a great distance from their own residences, but as the war returned close to home, desertion was certainly easier and likely more pressing for many soldiers, both black and white. Not all cases of desertion were clear-cut, however. Arthur Allen (or Allens) joined Lytle's Company in the First North Carolina Regiment in April 1781 for twelve months, but deserted in July 1782, three months after his term expired. This official designation possibly resulted from miscommunication as other men of the same enlistment and company are recorded having deserted or left the army at the same time. This assumption is bolstered by Allen living as a free black in 1790 Northampton County, rather than moving elsewhere.¹⁸ Similarly, William Stewart, a free-born black man, enlisted in June 1777 in the Second Regiment for three years. He filed for a pension later in his life, claiming he served until discharged in June 1780. The pension office rejected his application, however, alleging he deserted in January 1780. It appears unlikely he would have knowingly deserted, especially so close to his expected discharge, and then applied for a pension later, though it remains a scant possibility. Another possible black deserter, John Sullivan, was convicted of deserting from General Nathanael Greene's Army at the High Hills of Santee in summer 1781 but the military court merely extended his service as they found his master had detained his return from furlough. The last of the accused black deserters, Isaac Carter, apparently left his unit in mid-1783 after the British had long since sailed away.¹⁹

¹⁸ Rankin, *The North Carolina Continentals*, 141; Clark, *The State Records of North Carolina*. vol. 16, 1007; Moss and Scoggins, *African-American Patriots*, 5. Soldiers often had weeks or occasionally months from their enlistment until any official muster for the army, explaining the duration of Allen's associated dates.

¹⁹ RWP, William Stewart, R10173, Transcribed by Will Graves, <http://revwarapps.org/r10173.pdf>; "General Greene's Orders, High Hills of the Santee, S.C., Aug 5, 1781," in *The Papers of General Nathanael Greene*, vol. 9 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 131; Moss and Scoggins, *African-American Patriots*, 45.

Chronology of Service

Over the course of the war, the experiences of North Carolina's black Continentals, along with their white compatriots, varied considerably and saw periods of fluctuating morale, fervor, and success. Fully understanding the effects of their service requires examining their plights within the context of the larger conflict as well as the military system they joined. North Carolina first authorized two Continental regiments in June 1775. They were intended to serve in North Carolina's military districts at Wilmington, Salisbury, Edenton, and New Bern. In April 1776, the North Carolina Provincial Congress met in Halifax and authorized two new Continental regiments, but soon raised four instead, bringing the total to six. With the short-term enlistments of the first two regiments dwindling, the officers of the regiments began recruiting privates for thirty months and required a full complement to achieve their rank. By November 1776, the state legislature authorized an additional three regiments despite the under-filled ranks of those already in the field. The following spring, they created the tenth and final state regiment for the Continental Army under Colonel Abraham Sheppard, who assured them he had enlistees arranged and would be ready for action by July. The ideal recruits sought in this early period were, "able-bodied men, fit for service, capable of marching well, and such where attachment to American liberties they have no cause to suspect; young, hearty, robust men." Commanders received further instructions not to enlist "any imported servant, nor, without the leave of his master, any apprentice."²⁰

A comparatively minute number of black men bore arms in the first two regiments authorized early in the war. Of the 265 black soldiers, Continentals and militia, whose

²⁰ Hugh F. Rankin, *The North Carolina Continentals*, 2nd ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 16-17, 61-63, 87-88.

enlistments are documented, just 26 joined the army during the first two years of the conflict.²¹ At the highest levels of government, debate ensued in these crucial years over whether black soldiers, even free men, should be allowed in the army. George Washington initially opposed black soldiers but, by December 1775, he unsuccessfully pressed for Congress to allow free black recruits. A few men likely entered North Carolina's line anyway, but in February 1776, Congress acquiesced and formally allowed all free black men to enlist, save for those limited by age.²² Relatives William and Joel Taburn both enrolled into the army, presumably in the spring of 1776, as did John Ellis. William estimated he was twenty-one years old and recalled enrolling for two and a half years, while Joel, "being very young and a person of color," apparently signed on for the duration of the war, initially as an officer's servant. William owned a "pretty good" wagon and horse team, which the army needed greatly, and his officers propositioned him to rent their services in exchange for a quick discharge. He later performed two additional terms in militia regiments as a draftee. Meanwhile, Joel marched north with North Carolina's Continentals, under Colonel James Hogun, to White Plains, New York. John Ellis, around age twenty-two, enlisted in Wake County in April 1776, fulfilled his two-and-a-half-year term, and then re-enlisted. These sparse early black recruits were followed in much greater numbers when the North Carolina legislature authorized six other Continental regiments in April 1776.²³

The black enlistees in these new regiments, including Valentine Locus, were quickly put to the test of action. Early after his April muster, his regiment passed through Wilmington while marching south to Charleston to repel a British invasion attempt in June 1776. John Butler

²¹ Statistics compiled by this author. See Figure 3 in Appendix B.

²² Van Buskirk, *Standing in Their Own Light*, 53.

²³ See William and Joel Taburn in Heinegg, http://www.freeafricanamericans.com/Virginia_NC.htm, Stringer-Talbot; RWP, William Taburn, W18115, Transcribed by Will Graves, <http://revwarapps.org/w18115.pdf>; RWP, Joel Taburn, S42037; RWP, John Ellis, S32233, Transcribed by Will Graves, <http://revwarapps.org/s32233.pdf>; Babits and Howard, *Fortitude and Forbearance*, 46.

enrolled in nearby Bertie County into the North Carolina Fourth Regiment and was one of several black men who possibly accompanied Locus. Men from the Third, detachments of the First, Second, and Fourth North Carolina regiments, and several Virginia regiments, about 700 men in total, helped successfully defend Sullivan's Island guarding Charleston in one of the first engagements for the Continental Line. It is not clear if Locus took part in this first combat or remained in Wilmington, but in either case, he likely suffered in a "wretched condition...for want of cloaths[sic]" as General Charles Lee described his North Carolinian compatriots. Finally, after a late 1776 expedition by several states' forces to Georgia as part of an intended invasion of Florida, North Carolina's Continentals returned home in 1777 to fill their ranks.²⁴

In April 1777, several regiments, including the Third, returned to Halifax with considerably fewer men as several deserted to enlist in South Carolina and Georgia. With a sense of urgency, North Carolina commanders scrambled to replace those drawn away by higher enlistment bonuses offered by their Southern neighbors. They even faced competition from militia commanders paying cash incentives in order to keep their commissions with full regiments.²⁵ In this void, and in the context of the mounting war effort, larger numbers of black soldiers entered the state's Continental forces from 1777 onward.

By the summer of 1777, Congress reassigned these units and sent them to join George Washington's forces in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. Most North Carolinians served in Colonel Francis Nash's Brigade, though many Third Regiment Continentals fell under the command of General Nathanael Greene's Division in August. The amalgamated American forces paraded through Philadelphia on August 24 and, to protect the city from British capture, fought at

²⁴ RWP, Valentine Locus, W20497; RWP, John Butler, S41463, Transcribed by C. Leon Harris, <http://revwarapps.org/s41463.pdf>; Moss and Scoggins, *African-American Patriots*, 153; Lee quoted in Rankin, *The North Carolina Continentals*, 66-76, 89.

²⁵ Rankin, *The North Carolina Continentals*, 80-89, 131.

Brandywine and Germantown in September and October. The army then moved and encamped at Valley Forge. The North Carolina ranks depleted over the winter at Valley Forge and the nine incomplete regiments consolidated into the First, Second, and Third regiments by June 1778. The pitiful remnants of the Tenth Regiment, hastily and desperately enrolled, marched northward, straggling into camp in the late winter where they were amalgamated as well. The Tenth Regiment suffered a disproportionate share of absconding as nearly three quarters of its men were listed as deserters on the march to Valley Forge; only two of those are known black or mulatto men. Finally, in the early months of 1778, many officers were ordered back to North Carolina to recruit new men as many soldiers, including the black Valentine Locus, returned home after completing their service.²⁶

The 1778 recruiting efforts drove the largest influx of black servicemen into North Carolina's militia and Continental line of any year during the war. Out of the 265 men whose enlistment dates are known, over 25 percent began their service during 1778.²⁷ Most of these soldiers, black and white, joined for nine-month stints. They largely joined the Fourth and Fifth North Carolina Regiments, raised in haste to address the British threat to Georgia and South Carolina. Some were part of a Congressional effort to draft militia soldiers into Continental lines for that specified duration, after which they were exempted from military duty for three years. Voluntary recruits in North Carolina were slated to receive a \$100 bonus, though draftees received only \$50 and were selected by militia officers from each county, supposedly from the least valuable and most easily spared members of their communities.²⁸ Amid this system of

²⁶ Rankin, *The North Carolina Continentals*, 83-114, 135-136; "Return of the Men Absent from the Tenth North Carolina Battalion Commanded by Col. Abraham Sheppard in Camp in Hanover County, Virginia – February 16, 1778," Transcribed by Will Graves, <http://revwarapps.org/b342.pdf>. The two black men noted as deserters were William Barnett or Burnett and Matthew Wiggins; RWP Valentine Locus W20497.

²⁷ Statistics compiled by this author. See Figure 3 in Appendix B.

²⁸ Rankin, *The North Carolina Continentals*, 135; Babits and Howard, *Fortitude and Forbearance*, 60, 69.

compulsion and reward, a large cadre of black or mixed-race men entered North Carolina's Continental Line. In Granville County, militia officers were forced to draft nearly 70 men to fulfill their quota of Continental recruits; at least 14 were noted as black or mulatto. Only four, Jeffery Garnes, James Beaver, John Martin, and John Hopkins, were listed as substitutes, presumably for white men. Meanwhile in Bute (Warren) County, the quota was filled with only two known black men.²⁹

Likely owing to the prevalent marginalized status of free people of color within North Carolina society, both socially and economically, many black enlistees joined or were drafted alongside brothers and other relatives. Charles Gibson and Asa Spelmore both paved the way for relatives to enlist later in the war, but others entered the army at the same time, including Benjamin and Moses Blango of Beaufort County who entered the same company in July.³⁰ Many of the summer's black recruits were placed in different companies, however, as seen in the rosters of the Third Regiment. Charles Gibson, a free black man from Northampton County, and Jesse Harris both enlisted in late July 1778 into Captain Gee Bradley's Company. Asa Spelmore, Solomon Chavers, Henry Hawkins, John Moore, and George Sweat also entered the regiment between July and August in other companies.³¹ It is not clear if such dispersion was intentional or to what degree draftees could influence their assignments, but a few North Carolina regiments

²⁹ "Size Roll taken by Capt. Ralph Williams of Men enrolled in Granville County May 25th 1778 to fill the North Carolina quota of Continental Soldiers," Transcribed by Will Graves, <http://revwarapps.org/b250.pdf>; Ransom McBride, "Continental Soldiers for Nine Months from Bute County, NC, 1779," *North Carolina Genealogical Society Journal* 15, no. 2 (May, 1989), 108-110; The two men, Edward Going and Edmond Bibby, are listed in Moss and Scoggins, *African-American Patriots*, 23, 100.

³⁰ Moss and Scoggins, *African-American Patriots*, 28, 95-97, 217-218; See Benjamin and Moses Blango in Heinegg, http://www.freeafricanamericans.com/Virginia_NC.htm, Beverly-Brogdon.

³¹ RWP, Charles Gibson, S41575, Transcribed by C. Leon Harris, <http://revwarapps.org/s41575.pdf>; RWP, Asa Spelmore, S42022, Transcribed by C. Leon Harris, <http://revwarapps.org/s42022.pdf>; Moss and Scoggins, *African-American Patriots*, 55, 112-113, 118, 163-164, 218, 224.

and companies contained noticeably higher contingents of black men within their ranks. Most served in nominally close proximity overall, however, in the combined North Carolina brigade.

Back in Pennsylvania, the remaining black soldiers of the North Carolina line witnessed more change in the early months of the year. In April 1778, several understaffed regiments merged, bringing the surviving campaign-toughened men into new commands and circles of camaraderie. More importantly, Congress had sent Freiderich, Baron von Steuben to the beleaguered Continental camp to drill soldiers and instill discipline in the Prussian manner during the winter. Von Steuben instituted reforms among soldiers but also among the officers, teaching them to spend time with the common men, devote attention to cleanliness and food preparation, participate in drills, and march in better order. The military advisor, communicating with broken-English expletives, assuredly bettered the experiences of North Carolina's standing troops in a short amount of time.³²

After their training in early 1778, the North Carolina brigade participated admirably at the indecisive Battle of Monmouth Courthouse, New Jersey in the scorching June heat. In September, the brigade went with Baron De Kalb north to New York and, around the same time, Lieutenant Varrier of the Third stood trial for cruelly beating a fife major of the same regiment, possibly a newly-enlisted free black man Council Bass. Back in North Carolina's Carteret County, John Brayboy, a "free mulatto," mustered in Captain Ballard's company of the Third Regiment for three years alongside Obid Norwood and relative Theophilus Norwood. North Carolina experienced such issues competing with militia recruiting that the legislature ordered Continental officers to draft militia-eligible men for three years or the war. They also promised furloughs to the nine-month Continentals still in ranks if they would reenlist for the same

³² Rankin, *The North Carolina Continentals*, 147; John Ferling, *Whirlwind: The American Revolution and the War That Won It* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2015), 214.

duration.³³ Nevertheless, many black men remained in service as the North Carolina brigade counted fifty-eight total “Negroe” troops in August, with forty-two present, ten sick or absent, and six on command somewhere.³⁴ In October, the North Carolina brigade received much needed clothing, including blue regimental coats faced in red, and likely achieved a degree of uniformity for the first time. The men of the North Carolina line ended 1778 split in different locations as the Seventh guarded Philadelphia, the Third rendezvoused with George Washington’s command at Middlebrook, New Jersey, and the rest wintered elsewhere in the Garden State.³⁵

After their second winter in the field, the small remaining cadre of the Third Regiment withdrew to North Carolina in April as the Continental Board of War ordered Mebane to return and use his group as the core for recruiting others. The Board also ordered them to proceed immediately south and act under General Benjamin Lincoln once the regiment reached full strength. April 1779 marked a pivotal moment for soldiers both black and white in several regiments as the numerous nine-month enlistments from the previous summer expired. Desperate to retain the trained soldiers in their ranks, commanders in the First and Second Regiments paid re-enlistees a hefty bounty averaging \$121. Nevertheless, Jesse Harris, Asa Spelmore, Council Bass, Booth Newsome, Solomon Chavers, and numerous other black or mixed servicemen from the Third Regiment completed their duty and returned home with hopes of land bounties and

³³ Rankin, *The North Carolina Continentals*, 148-162, 183-184; Moss and Scoggins, *African-American Patriots*, 33, 175; “Size Roll Taken at Carteret County September 2, 1778 of Men Who Enlisted in the NC Continental Line or During the War,” Transcribed by Will Graves, <http://revwarapps.org/b253.pdf>; “Size Roll taken at Carteret County September 3, 1778 of men who enlisted in the NC Continental Line for Nine Months,” Transcribed by Will Graves, <http://revwarapps.org/b251.pdf>.

³⁴ Alexander Scammel, “Report on Negroes in the Continental Army, August 24, 1778,” Manuscript/Mixed Material. Library of Congress, George Washington Papers, Series 4, General Correspondence: <https://www.loc.gov/item/mgw451463/>.

³⁵ Rankin, *The North Carolina Continentals*, 163-167; Moss and Scoggins, *African-American Patriots*, 33, 175.

final payment. These veterans also undoubtedly brought home stories and experiences, if not a possible camaraderie and sense of pride. Several did not return, however, including at least one black man of the Third, Peter Valentine, who died in a Philadelphia field hospital alongside nearly two-dozen of his compatriots. His regiment also left Charles Gibson, one of the summer enlistees, in a hospital, presumably in the same vicinity.³⁶

1779 brought an additional crop of new black recruits to the Continental line, as well as marching order after counterorder. In early summer 1779, North Carolina ordered the Third, Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth regiments to Charleston to expiring nine-month Continental enlistments. The pension of Third Regiment soldier Charles Roe provides invaluable insight into this period of constant activity. He reported that he was drafted into the Bute County militia, joined the force commanded by General Hogun in Halifax, and that half of the regiment went north while his contingent headed south. His companions travelled to Wilmington, then to Georgetown and Charleston, South Carolina, before finally crossing the Savannah River into Georgia where he was placed into either the Fourth or Fifth North Carolina. His unit moved north to Augusta, Georgia, then toward Charleston once again, crossing the Savannah River at Stono Ferry, site of the namesake battle.³⁷

As these troops proved their mettle in South Carolina's Lowcountry, North Carolina's State Council authorized enrolling Continentals for eighteen months, and to fill their quotas, each enlistee exempted his county from providing ten militia men. Despite North Carolina's struggle to fill their ranks, they gave no consideration to a controversial suggestion by Congress and some Northern military leaders to form "Negro battalions." However, free black men, including Daniel

³⁶ Clark, *The State Records of North Carolina*, vol. 14, 292-294; Rankin, *The North Carolina Continentals*, 167; Moss and Scoggins, *African-American Patriots*, 19, 55, 113-114, 169, 218.

³⁷ Rankin, *The North Carolina Continentals*, 207; RWP, Charles Roe, S7416, Transcribed by C. Leon Harris, <http://revwarapps.org/s7416.pdf>; Moss and Scoggins, *African-American Patriots*, 48-49.

Valentine, continued to volunteer or be drafted into the Third and other regiments. Valentine undoubtedly received the news of his brother Peter's death in April before he subsequently joined Captain Bradley's Company of the same regiment in Halifax.³⁸ Several others also followed the footsteps of family members including Ethelred and Robert Newsom, relatives of Third Regiment pioneer Booth Newsom. Simon Spellman, likely a free black man and relative of Asa and Aaron, also enlisted in Craven County in June 1779 for the war's duration. By this point, black or mixed-race men did not form a majority in any company of the Third but contributed a substantial presence.³⁹

In August 1779, the majority of North Carolina's Continentals remained in the New York area under George Washington. Sensing the impending British threat in the South, Washington eventually ordered the ragged North Carolinians to march toward General Benjamin Lincoln's aid in South Carolina in November. Several of the North Carolina Continentals, Northern veterans and emergency recruits alike, refused to march and commanders ordered Sergeant Samuel Glover of the Second Regiment shot as an example. The Third Regiment arrived in Charleston in late December or early January 1780; a reportedly large number deserted and returned home by January 8. John Brayboy beat several of these men to the punch, reportedly deserting from Ballard's Company of the Third in October 1779. By the time the unit arrived in

³⁸ Rankin, *The North Carolina Continentals*, 207-208; Moss and Scoggins, 239-240; RWP, Daniel Valentine, R10820, Transcribed by Will Graves, <http://revwarapps.org/r10820.pdf>.

³⁹ Moss and Scoggins, 171; Robert Newsom listed in "A Report of the New Recruits Received From the Counties of Dobbs, Craven, Jones and other Counties By Lieutenant John McNees in 3rd N.C. Regt, July 3rd, 1779." Transcribed by Will Graves. <http://revwarapps.org/b316.pdf>; "Muster Roll of Capt. Campbells Company of Foot in the 3rd No. Carolina Regiment Now in the Service of the United States of America Commanded by Colo. Robert Mebane Taken to the 1st March 1780." Transcribed by Will Graves. <http://revwarapps.org/b290.pdf>; Clark, *The State Records of North Carolina*, vol. 16, 1126, 1161; See Simon, Asa, and Aaron Spellmore in Heinegg, http://www.freeafricanamericans.com/Virginia_NC.htm, Slaxton-Stephens.

Charleston, Lieutenant Colonel Robert Mebane commanded a regiment counting only 162 men, including 130 privates.⁴⁰

By that point the British already held Savannah, taken in December 1778, and Continental commanders expected them to soon target Charleston, the most important city and port in the South, again. General Henry Clinton's forces arrived off the South Carolina coast in early 1780 and laid siege to the American forces trapped on the peninsular city from March until mid-May. With no hope of reinforcement, General Benjamin Lincoln surrendered over 5,000 troops, including all 162 members of Mebane's Third Regiment, in the greatest Patriot defeat of the war. In a cruel twist of irony, black men from North Carolina fought and died, endured a brutal siege, and subsequent confinement on disease-ridden prison ships in Charleston harbor, defending a state too cowardly or indolent to offer freedom to its ample enslaved population in exchange for armed service during its time of greatest need.⁴¹

After taking Charleston, the British swept across the South Carolina interior and won a number of battles such as Camden and Waxhaws. For the rest of 1780 and the first few months of the next year, Northern Continentals, state troops, and militia struggled valiantly to turn the tide of the war while most Southern Continental soldiers remained imprisoned. In December 1780, Congress appointed Nathanael Greene as commander of the Southern Continental Army, and he urged North Carolina's paroled officers and the Board of War to reform their regiments, as he did Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia. In March 1781, as Greene desperately kept ahead of the pursuing forces of British General Cornwallis through the flooded rivers of the North Carolina Piedmont, he implored Governor Abner Nash to raise Continental regiments instead of

⁴⁰ Rankin, *The North Carolina Continentals*, 175-176, 218-220; Clark, *The State Records of North Carolina*, vol. 16, 1020.

⁴¹ Van Buskirk, *Standing in Their Own Light*, 156-164; Rankin, *The North Carolina Continentals*, 231-232.

the short-term militia units defending the state at the time. He argued, “Nothing can or will do but a regular Army, and nothing out [sic] to be left undone that can possibly effect the raising of one.”⁴²

For Greene and the North Carolina Assembly, desperate times meant not only enrolling black men into the ranks, but also enticing recruits with “one prime slave, or the value thereof, and six hundred and forty acres of land.” Virginia similarly promised large bounties, slaves, and land to fill their quotas as well. North Carolina previously approved a similar bill in April 1780 specifying Continental soldiers who served for three years or the duration of the war would receive “one prime slave between the age of fifteen and thirty years,” in addition to two-hundred acres and yearly pay of \$500. Greene himself approved of this hypocritical action, and wrote to the South Carolina partisan General Francis Marion, who opposed it, that the plan, “upon the whole...will have its advantages and I find that great care is taken not to apply any Negroe property but such as can admit of no dispute.”⁴³ Whether drafted or enticed by substantial bounties, North Carolina free men of color were not identifiably dissuaded by the treatment of enslaved African Americans, and entered into military service with similar frequency as they had in 1777-1778. Of 265 identified initial North Carolina black soldier enlistments, 49 joined in 1781 after their numbers plummeted during 1780.⁴⁴ Absolom Bibby, Absalom Martin, Patrick Mason, Hill Scipio, and Isham Scott, enlistees in the Third Regiment, were part of the force recruited during the period immediately after Greene’s disappointing loss at the March 15 Battle

⁴² Rankin, *The North Carolina Continentals*, 269; “Greene to Governor Abner Nash of North Carolina, March 6, 1781,” in Richard K. Showman, Margaret Cobb, and Robert E. McCarthy eds., *The Papers of General Nathanael Greene*, vol. 7 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 402.

⁴³ See the legislative acts in Clark, *The State Records of North Carolina*, vol. 24, 338, 369; Virginia’s actions detailed in Van Buskirk, *Standing in Their Own Light*, 64; “General Thomas Sumpter to Greene, 7 April, 1781,” and “Greene to General Francis Marion, May 17, 1781,” in *The Papers of General Nathanael Greene*, vol. 9, 66, 277.

⁴⁴ Statistics compiled by this author. See Figure 3 in Appendix B.

of Guilford Courthouse. Martin testified that he enrolled in Carteret County as the “fourteenth man which was to be furnished in each county” while Patrick Mason, a man that “never [had] owned any land” even by 1828, likely saw an opportunity to earn property or money.⁴⁵

However voluntary these men’s enlistments were, for John Toney, likely of mixed African American and Indian ancestry, his service in the Continental line was thrust upon him. In Toney’s posthumous pension application another veteran recalled knowing him before the Battle of Camden while a neighbor testified, he “well recollects that John Toney was at Guilford Cort [sic] House and ran home and was taken and made to serve to the end of the war.” The veteran militiaman may have fled at the battle, but he was joined by approximately 500 other North Carolina militiamen, forcibly drafted as default Continentals, after Greene forced Cornwallis into a pyrrhic victory. Because Greene blamed the militia for the disappointing performance, North Carolina passed legislation placing the disgraced scapegoats into Continental ranks for one year. Many non-voluntary soldiers such as Toney, forced into Captain Edward Yarborough’s Company of the Third Regiment, later fought gallantly at the September 8 Battle of Eutaw Springs in a brigade led by General Jethro Sumner.⁴⁶

The Continentals reforming in the spring of 1781 faced not only the danger of Cornwallis’ beleaguered but still capable force, withdrawn to Wilmington, but also the fearsome smallpox outbreaks ravaging men in close proximity at Halifax and Hillsborough. Charles Gibson, left at a Philadelphia hospital in 1779, suffered from pox there. Though he recovered, he later testified it greatly diminished his strength, leaving him impaired and “much less able to

⁴⁵ RWP, Absalom Martin, S41800, Transcribed by C. Leon Harris, <http://revwarapps.org/s41800.pdf>; RWP, Patrick Mason, S41810, Transcribed by C. Leon Harris, <http://revwarapps.org/s41810.pdf>; Moss and Scoggins, *African-American Patriots*, 23, 210-211.

⁴⁶ RWP, John Toney, W9859, Transcribed by C. Leon Harris, <http://revwarapps.org/w9859.pdf>; Ralls, “A Case Study of the Tenth Regiment,” 66-68; Clark, *The State Records of North Carolina*, vol. 16, 1174. Toney was omitted from the service rosters in April of 1781, but his pension suggests he continued in service at Halifax at least through the fall, though as a Guilford militia-man it is likely he was forced to serve until summer of 1782.

labour than formerly.” Soldiers like Isham Scott contended with both dangers while in Halifax, where he “principally opposed to Lord Cornwallis army on the passage through North Carolina till the last of March or first of April of the following year.” Scott served as a waiter for Major Hogg “for part of the time of service” but also took part in a skirmish at Halifax as Cornwallis moved through in May. John Toney likely joined Scott during this time in the enlistment and logistical garrison center. The recruiting cadre of the Third at Halifax also witnessed a rash of new enlistees, mostly punished militia deserters, during late 1781, including a noticeable contingent identified as black or dark in complexion, or that bore common last names of free North Carolina black families, such as Manly, Orange, or Bass. While the racial identity of these men remains unconfirmed, at least one “captive slave,” Jacob or Jacobus Ferguson, is listed without context on the back of a roster compiled by Lieutenant John McNeese.⁴⁷

As a small Third Regiment contingent remained in Halifax, most newly recruited or conscripted black troops marched with Lieutenant Colonel John Ashe for the High Hills of Santee in central South Carolina. Three of North Carolina’s four authorized Continental regiments marched once again to the aid of their Southern neighbor. After mustering in the hilly region, well removed from the malaria-carrying mosquitos of the Lowcountry, they were intensively drilled over the mid-summer months. Shortly after, nearly 350 North Carolinians fought under General Sumner at Eutaw Springs in September. Greene commended the new Continentals from North Carolina who fought commendably well against a British force trying to block any advance on Charleston as the war turned against them.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Rankin, *The North Carolina Continentals*, 342; RWP, Charles Gibson, S41575; RWP, Isham Scott, S42004, Transcribed by C. Leon Harris, <http://revwarapps.org/s42004.pdf>; RWP, John Toney, W9859; “A Descriptive Roll of the Drafts Deser[paper torn]ents Rec’d by Lieut. John McNeese of the 3d North Carolina Regiment at Halifax (Undated).” Transcribed by Will Graves, <http://revwarapps.org/b287.pdf>.

⁴⁸ Rankin, *The North Carolina Continentals*, 345-353.

Eutaw Springs was the last major battle for North Carolina's Third Regiment; Soldiers were absorbed into the First and Second Regiments as the Third and Fourth North Carolina became regiments without men in early 1782. In October 1781, Cornwallis surrendered at Yorktown, Virginia, but British regiments still held Charleston and Savannah; Loyalists still abounded throughout the Southern states. North Carolina's Continental regiments struggled to recruit men, both black and white, after Yorktown and throughout 1782 as twelve-month enlistments expired. Many believed victory was secured and Nathanael Greene furloughed all but one North Carolina battalion. The war did not end for several more months, however, and black soldiers Moses Manly and brothers Arthur and Matthew Wiggins enrolled for eighteen months into Captain Bailey's First Regiment company during the summer of 1782. Manly likely agreed first to serve twelve months in 1781 but declared he "continued until [sic] peace was proclaimed & he was discharged at Charleston." Charles Burnett additionally served until the end of the war per the terms of his enlistment.⁴⁹ Eventually in 1782, the British evacuated the Southern states and the last few Continentals were free to return home.

Fostering Camaraderie and Shared Experiences

Alongside their white counterparts, North Carolina's black Continental soldiers endured several events that likely fostered camaraderie between the men at ranks, as well as with their commanders. The hardships of battles, confinement, bitter encampments, and severe want of necessities presumably generated a rudimentary empathy among the soldiers and officers in various ways. Critically, any connections or favorable impressions they created during their time

⁴⁹ Babits and Howard, *Fortitude and Forbearance*, 10, 54, 63; RWP, Moses Manly, S41796, Transcribed by C. Leon Harris, <http://revwarapps.org/s41796.pdf>; RWP, Arthur Wiggins, S7952, Transcribed by C. Leon Harris, <http://revwarapps.org/s7952.pdf>; Moss and Scoggins, *African-American Patriots*, 38, 154-155, 247-248; Clark, *The State Records of North Carolina*, vol. 16, 1019.

in service likely aided them both during and after the war, especially as they fought for compensation and pensions in subsequent years.

Famously, while the Philadelphia campaign of 1777 proved the capabilities of the improved Continental Army, their experience in winter quarters at Valley Forge tested their resolve. A survey just days after the Battle of Germantown found the North Carolina Brigade in desperate need of 415 coats, 461 waistcoats, 752 pairs of breeches, and 456 pairs of shoes, among other supplies. Relief for the wanting troops never arrived as Washington decided to pull the Continental forces into a strategic position in Valley Forge for an unfortunately cold and icy winter. Sickness and exposure to the elements wreaked havoc as the 1,384 North Carolinians at one point counted 353 of their own sick and 164 unfit for duty because of their lack of clothing. At least two Third Regiment black soldiers, Jackson Hull and Kitchen Roberts, died that winter. They were among 50 North Carolinians who perished in the brigade that Washington described as the most destitute in the encampment. As the men of all states and skin colors erected tiny log shelters for warmth and survived in close proximity for an entire season, perhaps the struggle for survival trumped racial bounds much as it did in the northeastern North Carolina border region. During this bleak episode when enlistments of many Continental troops expired, the idea of arming and utilizing slaves in Rhode Island gained emergency approval of officers such as Washington and Nathanael Greene, and reportedly met the applause of many in camp who saw its merits. It is logical to assume the plan to enroll persons of color found the ears of North Carolina officers, already low on troops, and witnessing the persistence of the steadfast black men already in their ranks.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Rankin, *The North Carolina Continentals*, 119-122, 140; Moss and Scoggins, *African-American Patriots*, 126, 203; Van Buskirk, *Standing in Their Own Light*, 96; Clark, *The State Records of North Carolina*, vol. 16, 1073, 1143. Hull enlisted for three years apparently at some point in 1777 according to the compiled roster.

North Carolina's black troops experienced other moments where they possibly fostered camaraderie with their counterparts, including during period of confinement as prisoners of war. In the aftermath of Charleston's capitulation in 1780, the British crammed most of the low-ranking officers and privates of the North Carolina line into floating prison hulks, or occasionally in onshore barracks. Joseph Case, serving as a waiter to Captain Bradley, "was made a prisoner at the surrender" for fourteen months along with his captain, and "he & Capt. Bradley was both exchanged at the same time." William Foster, Charles Burnett, Edward Nickens, Daniel Valentine, along with brothers Arthur and Matthew Wiggins all faced the same hardships in captivity in close quarters with their units. Arthur provided a detailed pension application revealing that he also braved incarceration alongside Captain Bradley and believed his brother was also present.⁵¹ John Womble's case illustrates the rare ways some prisoners were able to better their conditions. Confined to Haddrell's Point as a prisoner, in "circumstances that will never be effaced from his memory," he took advantage of paroles granted to officers and their servants, declaring himself to "Doctor Lumus" of the Third Regiment in order to "avoid going on board the prison ships." Amid the terrible conditions, it is no surprise that nearly 375 men accepted the British offer to serve in the West Indies, including at least 32 North Carolinians. Among the latter group was Charles Peters, an unusual person of color from the East Indies who was formerly enslaved. After joining, deserting, and rejoining Continental regiments, he was captured at Charleston and apparently reluctantly served with the British in the West Indies. It is not clear whether any black soldiers made this bargain, however; only a couple bore the common names of free black families within the state. Whether owing to loyalty, fear of reprisal, or a

⁵¹ Moss and Scoggins, *African-American Patriots*, 88, 171,239; Clark, *The State Records of North Carolina*, vol. 16, 1019; RWP, Joseph Case, S41472, Transcribed by C. Leon Harris, <http://revwarapps.org/s41472.pdf>; RWP, Arthur Wiggins, S7952.

British lack of interest in their service as professional soldiers, North Carolina's captive black troops bore a tremendous burden until they were paroled, exchanged, or escaped.⁵²

These periods of relative inactivity aside, North Carolina's black Continentals experienced perhaps no opportunity to prove their mettle more than in battle. Major events such as a battle increased the dependency between white and black soldiers, and also served as the basis for discussions and storytelling between veterans after the war. Though many black troops acted as auxiliaries and emphasized that they did not engage in direct fighting, throughout the duration of the war, just as many of these soldiers filled the fighting lines alongside their regimental counterparts. In several pension applications, black Continentals described many victories, defeats, and minor skirmishes. Several mentioned Stony Point, Guilford Courthouse, or the fall of Charleston, but a handful of battles stand out as particularly important to this group of soldiers. Likely due to the fierceness of the fighting, as well as their central location within it, North Carolina's black pensioners seemed to recall with noticeable regularity Monmouth Courthouse and Eutaw Springs.

After enduring the harsh winter of 1777-1778 at Valley Forge, and the subsequent drilling and molding by Baron Von Steuben, the Battle of Monmouth Courthouse in New Jersey provided the first real opportunity for North Carolina's troops and the Continental Army to prove themselves. Several North Carolina black soldiers took part in the June battle, including Martin Black. He described being *at* the storming of Stony Point, New York, and the capture of West Point, but noted he was *in* the Monmouth battle. Cato Copeland, serving in the Second Regiment

⁵² RWP, John Womble, S42083, Transcribed by C. Leon Harris, <http://revwarapps.org/s42083.pdf>; Babits and Howard, *Fortitude and Forbearance*, 47; Ransom McBride, "American Continental POW's Captured at Charleston and Camden Who Enlisted in the British Army," *North Carolina Genealogical Society Journal* 9, no. 3 (August 1983): 168-172; Peters described in Babits and Howard, *Fortitude and Forbearance*, 65; and Dr. Lawrence Babits, email message to author, March 15, 2020.

with Black, and a witness to Stony Point, conversely reported his presence *at* rather than *in* the Monmouth battle. John Weaver, also in the regiment, recalled “[fighting] the battles of his country when she was struggling for her independence,” and at Monmouth, he claimed he did just that. Meanwhile, Benjamin Reed, a veteran of Brandywine in 1777, and the 1781 Battle of Eutaw Springs, also fought in the Battle of Monmouth Courthouse. Though he did not specify the battle, he incurred a debilitating arm wound in one of these pitched engagements, attesting to the fact he was a participant. Additionally, Anthony Garns, another battle-toughened black veteran of Brandywine, testified he also fought with the First North Carolina Regiment in the Battle of Monmouth. Whether owing to the severity of the fight, the prominent generals and commanders involved, or the pride and possible *esprit de corps* developed by this point in the war, Monmouth remained in the minds of many black North Carolinians.⁵³

If Monmouth was the most recalled northern engagement, the Battle of Eutaw Springs, aside from the fall of Charleston, marked the zenith of the war in the South for North Carolina’s black soldiers. Regardless of their regiments or the reasons for their presence at Eutaw Springs, the black soldiers of North Carolina’s Continental Line, along with their white counterparts, performed admirably in likely the most brutal engagement of their service. In the orderly North Carolina Brigade, well-drilled soldiers counterattacked and stopped the onrushing British left wing, incurring grievous wounds and casualties in the process as the fighting turned hand to hand. Previous historians have characterized this battle as the “finest hour” of North Carolina’s Continental Line.⁵⁴

⁵³ RWP, Martin Black, S41441; RWP, Cato Copeland, W17665; RWP, John Weaver, S42061; RWP, Benjamin Reed, S41976; RWP, Anthony Garns, S38723, Transcribed by C. Leon Harris, <http://revwarapps.org/s38723.pdf>; “Muster Roll of Clement Hall’s 2nd Regiment of North Carolina Forces in Service of the United States Commanded by John Patten Esqr. Col. For Novr. & Decr. 1779 & Jany & February 1780,” Transcribed by Will Graves, <http://revwarapps.org/b351.pdf>.

⁵⁴ Robert M. Dunkerly and Irene B. Boland, *Eutaw Springs: The Final Battle of the American Revolution’s Southern Campaign* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2017), 52-54, 112; Hugh F. Rankin, *The North*

Black soldiers were scattered throughout the ranks at Eutaw Springs and they experienced the battle in noticeably different manners. William Lomack and Isaac Hammonds “were together at the battle of Eutaw” under the same captain in the Second Regiment, but likely had varying perceptions of the fight as Hammonds was a fifer and Lomack an infantryman. Lomack “was in the heat of the Battles” of Trenton, Charleston, and Stono Ferry, but Eutaw Springs proved even hotter for him. He incurred two wounds, “one in his Thigh and one wound in his side under his arm, that inhibited him for years to come.” Others memorably witnessed comrades and commanders fall, including Israel Pearce, who testified that he “fought at the Battle of Eutaw Spring, in which Battle his Captain was killed.” While many black soldiers actively fought in the North Carolina Line, a noteworthy contingent were also relegated to non-combatant status at Eutaw Springs. Solomon Bibby, present at other large battles at Camden and Guilford Courthouse, never saw combat, but instead protected baggage wagons. It is unknown whether his brother Absalom Bibby joined him in this duty or engaged in the pitched battle in the South Carolina lowcountry. Likewise, Drewry Jeffrey, a regular soldier in the First Regiment, “engaged in no battels [sic]” and guarded wagons during the Battle of Eutaw Springs.⁵⁵

For Absalom Martin, like many others, Eutaw Springs was a pivotal moment as it was the only battle in which he recalled serving. Meanwhile, John Artis, in the North Carolina Brigade’s Second Regiment with Lomack, did not even mention the battle in his pension testimony. Joel Taburn, having enlisted first in 1776, and again at least once, likely participated in the Battle of

Carolina Continental Line in the American Revolution (Raleigh: North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, Division of Archives and History, 1977), vii.

⁵⁵ RWP, Isaac Hammonds, W7654, Transcribed by C. Leon Harris, <http://revwarapps.org/w7654.pdf>; RWP, William Lomack, S41783, Transcribed by Will Graves, <http://revwarapps.org/s41783.pdf>; RWP, Israel Pearce, S3660; RWP, Solomon Bibby, S6644, Transcribed by C. Leon Harris, <http://revwarapps.org/s6644.pdf>; RWP, Drewry Jeffrey, S7067, Transcribed by C. Leon Harris, <http://revwarapps.org/s7067.pdf>; See Taburn in Moss and Scoggins, *African-American Patriots*, 225-226.

Eutaw Springs as North Carolina's most seasoned black soldier. Like Lomack and Artis, he served in the ranks of the Second Regiment, but under Captain Thomas Donoho. He listed the battle matter-of-factly in his pension, however, along with several other engagements of the Southern Campaign. Likewise, many newly-minted black soldiers, including Charles Hood, simply recalled participation in the battle.⁵⁶ North Carolina's black veterans of Eutaw Springs typically fell somewhere between these variations.

A number of the North Carolina soldiers fighting at Eutaw Springs, black and white alike, entered the army in the spring of 1781 for twelve-month stints. Jeremiah James served as a North Carolina Continental beginning in May of 1781 and David King, a Granville County man, enlisted at the same time and duration as James. Malachi Nickens enlisted during May 1781 in Hertford County for twelve months and likely fought at Eutaw Springs. Meanwhile Aaron Spellman fought in Captain Anthony Sharpe's Company under the same terms of enlistment. These common experiences were not by coincidence. North Carolina's assembly passed legislation after the March Battle of Guilford Courthouse drafting many militia soldiers into Continental ranks for twelve months after Nathanael Greene lambasted their performance in that major engagement. None of these aforementioned black veterans mentioned Guilford Courthouse, or militia service in any testimony, however, so their terms of service appear to coincide with, but not result from the punitive enlistments. Regardless, North Carolina's Continental Line occupied a vital portion of Nathanael Greene's 2,300-man army at Eutaw Springs and as a unit, under the command of the experienced General Jethro Sumner, they

⁵⁶ RWP, Absalom Martin, S41800; RWP, John Artis, S41416, Transcribed by Will Graves, <http://revwarapps.org/s41416.pdf>; RWP, Joel Taburn, S42037; RWP, Charles Hood, S61459, Transcribed by C. Leon Harris, <http://revwarapps.org/s41659.pdf>; Ralls, "A Case Study," 70.

earned Greene's high praise.⁵⁷ The numerous black men in ranks and in supporting roles at Eutaw Springs clearly bore their share of the burden and deserve the same credit.

Aside from these two large battles, many, if not most, North Carolina black Continental troops also served during numerous smaller engagements and lesser-known skirmishes. Some black or mixed-race men, like Primus Jacobs, noted they only participated in "skirmishes," though these affairs still bore danger and often proved memorable, even in their old age. Jesse Martin, a nine-month Continental in the Fourth Regiment, bore arms in one of the Southern Campaign's earlier skirmishes at Stono Ferry, outside Charleston, in 1779, as did Charles Roe and Joseph Case. Conversely, Zacharia Jacobs, already a militia veteran of skirmishes at Briar Creek in Georgia, and Guilford Courthouse, fought in the North Carolina Continental Brigade in some of the last actions of the war. In particular, he described one 1782 "skirmish near Dorchester in S.C....an attack on a Row galley in Ashley River," likely the action on the Combahee River where Lieutenant Colonel John Laurens was killed. Jacobs and the Americans took the men on board a galley prisoner and he apparently marched with them as an escort to Wilmington before dutifully returning to South Carolina to fulfill the remainder of his term.⁵⁸

A noticeable contingent of the black "twelve-month" Continentals described earlier also noted participation in the prolonged siege at Ninety-Six in the South Carolina backcountry. Fresh recruits Aaron Spellman and Malachi Nickens were joined by seasoned veteran Joel Taburn in

⁵⁷ RWP, Jeremiah James, W467, Transcribed by C. Leon Harris, <http://revwarapps.org/w467.pdf>; RWP, David King, W20347, Transcribed by C. Leon Harris, <http://www.revwarapps.org/w20347.pdf>; RWP, Malachi Nickens, S41925, Transcribed by Will Graves, <http://revwarapps.org/s41925.pdf>; RWP, Aaron Spellmore, S42023, Transcribed by C. Leon Harris, <http://revwarapps.org/s42023.pdf>; Ralls, "A Case Study," 66-70.

⁵⁸ RWP, Charles Roe, S7416; RWP, Joseph Case, S41472; RWP, Primus Jacobs, S41688, Transcribed by Will Graves, <http://revwarapps.org/s41688.pdf>; Jesse Martin, R6949, Transcribed by C. Leon Harris, <http://revwarapps.org/r6949.pdf>; RWP, Zacharia Jacobs, W5304, Transcribed by C. Leon Harris, <http://revwarapps.org/w5304.pdf>; Gregory D. Massey, *John Laurens and the American Revolution* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2016), 225-228; Babits and Howard, *Fortitude and Forbearance*, 127. Babits and Howard show Colonel James Armstrong, explicitly mentioned by Jesse Martin, in command of nine-month Continentals at Stono Ferry.

this period of tension and frustration as Greene's army unsuccessfully attempted breaching British defenses.⁵⁹ Though such actions had smaller strategic importance, their intensity and outcomes still potentially impacted the soldiers present to noteworthy degrees.

Effects on the Soldiers

North Carolina's black Continental soldiers clearly affected the outcome of the war, but the fierce battles, not to mention the tribulations of army life, affected them as well. Benjamin Reed summarily expressed this reality in his pension, declaring that he "underwent not only all the privations that those of his station had to encounter but also received a wound from the enemy in his right arm which hath rendered it stiff and useless for many years." His words describe the plight of several fellow black soldiers wounded during their service. Samuel Overton, for example, "received two wounds" at the 1777 Battle of Germantown, Pennsylvania, where Benjamin Robinson was wounded in the back. Some black soldiers were notably maimed including Elisha Hunt, who specifically noted losing an arm during the defense of Charleston in 1780, and Charles Roe who lost an eye at Stono Ferry, South Carolina, presumably in combat. It is not conclusively known whether black casualties received the same care as their white counterparts, though the few accounts of their treatment suggest no such distinction. The pox-ridden Exum Scott, for example, was attended by an army doctor while wounded militiaman Andrew Ferguson recalled the names of both doctors who attended him for a lengthy period as he recovered from a lingering head wound. At Guilford Courthouse, former Continental soldier Zacharia Jacobs served in the militia and, after receiving a leg injury, was "carried to the hospital

⁵⁹ RWP, Aaron Spellmore, S42023; RWP, Malachi Nickens, S41925; RWP, Joel Taburn, S42037; RWP, David King, W20347.

and remained until somewhat recovered.” Their care likely typified the experience of wounded soldiers, black and white.⁶⁰

Despite the care given to them, many North Carolina black Continentals died in action or as result of their wounds. Thomas Dring, of the Second Regiment, likely died at the Battle of Brandywine as a roster records his death on September 11, 1777, the battle’s date. Most soldiers, however, died as a result of disease and the privations associated with armed service. Both Charles Gibson and Exum Scott contracted the potentially lethal smallpox but survived. Many others were not so fortunate. Brothers Charles and Ambrose Franklin, black veterans of the Third North Carolina Regiment, both died during the war of unspecified causes, plausibly as a result of illness, as did Nathanael Hall, a musician in service for only three weeks. Meanwhile, Job Lott, the freshly-enlisted former British wagoner, died in June 1777 while serving in the Fifth Regiment, presumably as the army moved about the Northern theatre.⁶¹ These instances aside, perhaps no period proved more lethal for North Carolina’s black Continentals than the brutal conditions of Valley Forge over the winter of 1777-1778. David Burnett, of the Fifth Regiment, presumably died from exposure, sickness, inadequate sanitation, or other struggles at the Pennsylvania encampment along with Jeffery Garnes of the Seventh Regiment and a drummer of the Second Regiment known only as Frederick. Brutus Johnston, in service for no more than a few months, died alongside them at Valley Forge, further attesting to the harsh realities of a

⁶⁰ RWP, Benjamin Reed, S41976; RWP Samuel Overton, S41928, Transcribed by C. Leon Harris, <http://revwarapps.org/s41928.pdf>; RWP, Benjamin Robinson, S41996, Transcribed by Will Graves, <http://revwarapps.org/s41996.pdf>; RWP, Elisha Hunt, S13486, Transcribed by C. Leon Harris, <http://revwarapps.org/s13486.pdf>; RWP, Charles Roe, S7416; RWP, Exum Scott, W5994; RWP, Andrew Ferguson, S32243, Transcribed by Will Graves, <http://revwarapps.org/s32243.pdf>; RWP, Zacharia Jacobs, W5304.

⁶¹ Dring’s death noted in Clark, *The State Records of North Carolina*, vol. 16, 1040; RWP, Charles Gibson, S41575; RWP, Exum Scott, W5994; Moss and Scoggins, *African-American Patriots*, 80, 90, 152; See Nathanael Hall in Heinegg, http://www.freeafricanamericans.com/Virginia_NC.htm, Grace-Hamlin; The Franklin brothers served in Captain James Bradley’s company of the Third Regiment. See Bradley in Babits and Howard, *Fortitude and Forbearance*, 48.

starving army in winter quarters. John Day, of the Second Regiment, perished that winter, reportedly after “taking a dose of physic” and heavily drinking spirits.⁶²

Conclusions

The black soldiers of North Carolina’s Continental Line do not always stand out in the rosters and service records. They were, at once, unique members of a marginalized stratum of society, motivated to enlist for slightly differing reasons, but also capable and dedicated soldiers whose performances and dedication were equal to if not more impressive than their white counterparts in some regards. They fulfilled the same wide range of duties within the army, enlisted for lengthy terms, deserted in smaller proportions, and bore the scars and ultimate costs of battles and service as their comrades. They also contributed vital manpower and continuity through periods of change and turnover within the Continental establishment. They endured or may have even enjoyed several occasions proving their mettle and fostering camaraderie or inter-reliance within their messes, files, and platoons. Ultimately, they drew no wholesale disapproval or praise from their commanders or compatriots, but that relatively homogenized anonymity as soldiers may have been their greatest victory.

⁶² Moss and Scoggins, *African-American Patriots*, 39, 75, 90; Clark, *The State Records of North Carolina*, vol. 16, 1066, 1092; The quote regarding Day reproduced in Crow, *The Black Experience*, 99.

Chapter 4: Militia Service

While the majority of North Carolina's black soldiers served in the Continental Army at some point, a substantial portion additionally or exclusively performed tours of duty in the state's militia forces. With less formal bureaucratic record keeping and sparse surviving rosters characterizing these units, it is virtually impossible to accurately posit precise numbers of black militiamen. Regardless, their presence was widespread and crucial to the performance of these companies and regiments. In smaller, and more locally filled ranks, black militia soldiers filled a variety of roles alongside their white counterparts. Compared to fellow black Continental soldiers, their motivations for serving differed perceptibly, often exhibiting more localized impetuses. They also developed closer camaraderie with white soldiers and officers, despite the short terms of their enlistments, and demonstrated much greater autonomy and agency. Compared to Continental soldiers, a much greater percentage entered service as draftees, including many conscripted by the militia for Continental forces, yet this plight was shared by all free men of the state. Furthermore, while black militiamen certainly affected their units, the war had a smaller physical toll on them as substantially fewer were injured or killed compared to Continentals.

North Carolina's militia, like that of most colonies, preceded the Revolutionary War by more than a century. The militia systems of these various colonies underwent change through the colonial period, and their acceptance or disallowance of black enlistees, free or enslaved, changed frequently in response to slave uprisings or other tumultuous episodes. Virginia began limiting the ways black men could serve in the local militias as early as 1639, and South Carolina almost entirely barred their enlistment after the 1739 Stono Rebellion. Meanwhile, Georgia voted to arm slaves if necessary, just three years before the American Revolution. North Carolina's

militia system resembled that of other colonies on the eve of the Revolution, and even allowed its companies to cooperate with Virginia and South Carolina militias during times of crisis. Unlike these neighbors, however, it had required both servants and all free men of age to enlist for possible militia duty since 1746 and did not distinguish its militia based on color during the Revolution.¹ Unsurprisingly, though the exigencies of war meant some North Carolina enslaved males performed occasional service or labor in a militia unit, like their Continental cousins, the overwhelming majority of black militia troops were already free men of color.

Differing Motivations

While North Carolina's black militiamen largely exhibited the same background as those in the Continental forces, their motivations and avenues into service differed in several ways. Some enlistees professed larger civic responsibility or dedication; new recruits in Dobbs County swore "a true sense of the present Situation of our country" in addition to promising "upon the Sacred ties of Honor, Virtue & Love of our Country" to serve as militia for three months. More often, the reasons expressed by black militiamen for their service reflected local or personal concerns. For example, as frontier residents in the northwestern portion of North Carolina, brothers David and Harden Denham volunteered for multiple excursions against the Cherokee, constant adversaries of many backcountry squatters. David specifically "marched with the intention of being in the expected battle of the British at King's Mountain" after Patrick Ferguson threatened these inhabitants in 1780. Harden also exhibited a personal motivation for one tour as he substituted for his brother on an expedition to South Carolina, for unspecified

¹ Quarles, "The Colonial Militia and Negro Manpower," 643-651; Milton Wheeler, "The Role of the North Carolina Militia in the Beginning of the American Revolution," Ph.D. Dissertation, Tulane University, 1969; Rees, *They Were Good Soldiers*, 33.

reasons. Thomas Gibson, meanwhile, like many other militiamen, was spurred to action on numerous occasions by threats or actual bloodshed of nearby Tories in the internecine warfare of the backcountry. Along with enemies or threats, however, another key consideration for militiamen, most of whom were planters, was tending their fields. The white militiaman James Haskins revealed the seasonal nature of his militia duty as he substituted for another man between “the fall of the year, after I had laid my crops of corn” and the “good season” when he returned to harvest.²

Conversely, while most North Carolina black militiamen enlisted amid local concerns, at least a few hailed from outside the state, presenting puzzling or unknown motivations for serving. Elisha Parker indicated that he lived in Nansemond City, Virginia, close to North Carolina’s border, when he joined a North Carolina militia regiment in 1779, but curiously noted he was drafted. Perhaps his first term was owing to unclear local boundaries; however, he substituted for North Carolina men during three additional tours before settling back in Virginia in his later life. Furthermore, Cornelius Rouse served as a waiter to an officer in a South Carolina Continental regiment, likely before he performed a short tour in a North Carolina militia company. Some may have also followed the transient path similar to Francis Coley, a native of Virginia, who enlisted in Virginia militia companies for several terms but served once in a Halifax County, North Carolina, unit during a brief residence there.³ Black and white non-

² “Oaths for Three Months Service in the Dobbs County Militia February 14, 1781,” B326, Transcribed by Will Graves, <http://revwarapps.org/b326.pdf>; RWP, David Denham, W27540, Transcribed by Nancy Poquette, <http://revwarapps.org/w27540.pdf>; RWP, Harden Denham, S30985, Transcribed by Nancy Poquette, <http://revwarapps.org/s30985.pdf>; RWP, Thomas Gibson, S8560, Transcribed by C. Leon Harris, <http://revwarapps.org/s8560.pdf>; RWP, James Haskins, W19732, Transcribed by Will Graves, <http://revwarapps.org/w19732.pdf>.

³ RWP, Elisha Parker, S11211; RWP, Francis Coley, S3197, Transcribed by C. Leon Harris, <http://revwarapps.org/s3197.pdf>; See Cornelius Rouse in Heinegg, http://www.freeafricanamericans.com/Virginia_NC.htm, Roberts-Sawyer; “Pay Roll of Capt Joseph Harley’s company of the third South Carolina Continental Troops Commanded by Col William Thomson on the 1 August 1779,” NARA, M246, Roll 0089, Folder 3, Image 140.

residents may have occasionally enlisted in North Carolina militia forces as they marched through their regions or during other opportune circumstances; however, these instances were more farcical than typical.

Among the most often cited reasons for militia service, North Carolina's veterans mentioned Tories or their deeds. The most critical militia duty centered around controlling, disheartening, and even revenging neighbors and other residents loyal to the Crown.⁴ Just as explicitly as their white neighbors, North Carolina's black militiamen often expressed contempt for Tories, especially their infamous leader David Fanning. Andrew Ferguson, a free black Virginian, joined the army under Nathanael Greene after Tories captured him and his father and whipped them both. He later participated in the militia action at Kings Mountain where he saw another villainous Tory, Bill Cunningham, kill a compatriot close by before riding away. Similarly, North Carolina relatives John, Thomas, and Wilbourne Gibson all expressed contempt about Tories in their pensions, especially David Fanning. The Gibsons served occasionally as draftees, but often volunteered in service against Tories. Thomas decried these enemies were "very numerous & dangerous" and felt it his duty to guard against "their depredations, burnings & murders." His company specifically went after Fanning "who had become notorious for his many outrages, cruelties & murders." Likewise, Wilbourne recalled that Fanning "was the Tory that we were after most of the time, as he was constantly destroying of property burning of houses [etc.]." Fanning even destroyed the homes of his company and regimental commanders. Such brutal actions between partisans certainly inspired many black militiamen to bear arms, but it also thwarted or delayed the enlistments of others, as John Gibson recalled a commander

⁴ John M. Holden, "Revolutionary War Patriot Militiamen of Southeastern North Carolina," Masters Thesis, University of North Carolina, 1989.

advising him that a return to his regiment was dangerous and unsafe because of rising Tory sentiments in his area.⁵

With these localized and often fleeting concerns driving many militia expeditions, North Carolina's black militiamen found themselves performing much shorter tours than their Continental counterparts. Black men such as David Denham, who partook in numerous militia excursions, experienced both short stints of two or three months as well as some that stretched for three quarters of a year. Likewise, Thomas Stewart served tours of six and ten months as well as some of forty or as few as twenty days. Three-month duties appear to have been the most commonplace, however, as Wilbourne Gibson and Holiday Hathcock performed them respectively as draftees and volunteers.⁶

The brief duration of these tours overall meant that North Carolina black militiamen spent less time encamped or in action than those in Continental units, yet they still experienced chances to develop a close camaraderie with fellow soldiers or commanders. They often compensated for the brevity of their terms by enlisting, albeit not always voluntarily, numerous times in small militia companies. Francis Coley volunteered four times for various militia duties beginning in 1776 and ending in late 1781. Meanwhile Nicholas Manuel and Thomas Mason both served at least three tours and David Denham fulfilled six stints in the militia. Nearly constant service was not exclusively a hallmark of black soldiers, however, as the presumably white Jacob Black performed nine tours as a militiaman in North and South Carolina as well as

⁵ RWP, Andrew Ferguson, S32243; RWP, John Gibson, S3395, Transcribed by Will Graves, <http://revwarapps.org/s3395.pdf>; RWP, Thomas Gibson, S8560; RWP, Wilbourne Gibson, R4000, Transcribed by C. Leon Harris, <http://revwarapps.org/r4000.pdf>.

⁶ RWP, David Denham, W27540; RWP, Thomas Stewart, S31998, Transcribed by C. Leon Harris, <http://revwarapps.org/s31998.pdf>; RWP, Wilbourne Gibson, R400; RWP, Holiday Hethcock, R4812, Transcribed by Will Graves and C. Leon Harris, <http://revwarapps.org/r4812.pdf>.

Virginia, including seven as a volunteer.⁷ These and many other militiamen, black and white, appear to have enjoyed or found some value in militia service as they heeded its call frequently for substantial periods of time.

The value they found was likely social and personal, though pay and enlistment bounties assuredly also factored into their decision making. The militia-eligible men of various counties were known to volunteer more readily when enlistment bounties were offered, and this became a common practice before and during the Revolutionary War. Duplin County militiamen hired John Edward Carter, “a man of color,” to serve for a year as Continental for an unspecified amount, thereby freeing him from a possible draft. Meanwhile the free black man Caesar Chavis earned a bonus of 150 North Carolina dollars for his 1780 service in a Bertie County militia regiment. By comparison, Dobbs County militia volunteers in 1778, presumably for service in the Continental ranks, each received \$100, but draftees only \$50. Aside from bounties, between 1774 through 1781, the daily militia pay rates for privates rose, albeit with great inflation, from 2 shillings per day to 13 shillings in North Carolina currency.⁸ Despite these incentives, a 1756 act ended the practice of compensating wounded or injured militia veterans, meaning they assumed a calculated risk at enlistment.⁹

⁷ RWP, Francis Coley, S3197; RWP, Nicholas Manuel, R6887, Transcribed by C. Leon Harris, <http://revwarapps.org/r6887.pdf>; RWP, Thomas Mason, R6993, Transcribed by C. Leon Harris, <http://revwarapps.org/r6993.pdf>; RWP David Denham, W27540; RWP, Jacob Black, S9281, Transcribed by Will Graves, <http://revwarapps.org/s9281.pdf>.

⁸ Milton E. Wheeler, “Development and Organization of the North Carolina Militia,” *The North Carolina Historical Review* 41, no. 3 (1964), 318-319, 323; John Carter described in RWP, Robert Southerland, R10316, Transcribed by C. Leon Harris, <http://revwarapps.org/r10316.pdf>; Caesar Chavis in “A List of Militia Belonging to Bertie County,” April 8, 1780, Troop Returns, North Carolina Digital Collections, <http://www.digital.ncdcr.gov/cdm/compoundobject/collection/p16062coll26/id/1086/rec/1>; “Accot of Sundry Persons Volunteers & Draughts from the Dobbs Regiment who have received their Bounty from Richard Caswell,” May 19, 1778, Troop Returns, North Carolina Digital Collections, <http://digital.ncdcr.gov/cdm/compoundobject/collection/p16062coll26/id/657/rec/159>.

⁹ Wheeler, “The Role of the North Carolina Militia,” 22.

In actual practice, North Carolina militiamen entered service in three ways: as draftees, as volunteers, and often as voluntary substitutes. It is impossible to ascertain which route most black enlistees took, though a white soldier, William Bryan, noted that free black men and mulattoes “were equally liable to draft” as white men, but that they also “frequently volunteered in the public service. Despite his summation, it is apparent that large numbers of black militiamen, and whites as well, entered service involuntarily as draftees, including many drafted from the militia into the Continental ranks. Free black residents were undoubtedly used to this possibility as they had been eligible for militia duty for several decades by the eve of the Revolution. At least on paper, all men between sixteen and sixty years of age were still liable for the draft.¹⁰

The egalitarian nature of militia service was bolstered by legislation in 1778 that limited draft exemptions only to political leaders and a few religious sects. However, it was tempered by imposed quotas for raising Continental soldiers from the militia as well as the proclivity of local companies selecting members they felt were least valuable to their community. This practice meant that free mulatto men such as Wilbourne Gibson entered militia duty with little choice, exclusively as draftees, though many whites such as James Haskins did as well. Further, even previous Continental veterans such as William Taburn could be drafted numerous times after returning from their lengthier service. The practice also meant frequent militia re-enlisters like John Gibson first received a push into service, whether he needed it or not. Based on the sentiments expressed in their pension applications regarding Native Americans and Tories,

¹⁰ William Bryan’s testimony in RWP, Holiday Hethcock, R4812; Wheeler, “The Role of the North Carolina Militia,” 17, 103.

however, there is no guarantee these and other drafted black men would not have joined voluntarily at one time or another.¹¹

Apart from draftees, many of North Carolina's black militiamen were induced by combinations of factors to enlist voluntarily at various points, despite the comparatively smaller economic rewards available to them. Several, such as Holiday Hathcock, Mark Murray, and Christopher Manuel, enlisted voluntarily for each tour they served. Meanwhile, others like James Hathcock volunteered for subsequent service after initially entering the militia as a draftee.¹² With even greater nuance to their volunteerism, a sizeable portion of North Carolina's black militiamen entered service as substitutes. To escape militia service, draftees were allowed to contract substitutes, with only a few groups excepted, or to pay a sizeable fine of 10 pounds. At least one enslaved man, Ishmael Titus, explicitly recalled substituting for his master in exchange for freedom. His is the only such known case, however, as everyone else apparently entered with their freedom already established. Free black men, typically marginalized within society, made prime targets for those seeking to hire substitutes. Under these hired arrangements, black men such as Elisha Boon, already a seasoned Continental and a veteran of Eutaw Springs, served in the stead of others with whom they likely had some familiarity. Some cases, such as Harden Denham, substituting for his brother, were conceivably motivated by altruism or social ties, but serial substitutes like Elisha Parker, who listed the names of the three men he replaced on

¹¹ Wheeler, "Development and Organization," 319; Holden, 35; RWP, James Haskins, W19732; RWP, Wilbourne Gibson, R4000; RWP, William Taburn, W18115; RWP, John Gibson, S3395.

¹² RWP, Holiday Hethcock, R4812; RWP, Mark Murray, R7523; RWP, Christopher Manuel, S7182, Transcribed by Will Graves, <http://revwarapps.org/s7182.pdf>; RWP, James Heathcock, S2613, Transcribed by C. Leon Harris, <http://revwarapps.org/s2613.pdf>.

different tours, likely followed more economical incentives.¹³ Aside from the Denham brothers, it is not known if any black draftees ever hired or persuaded others to substitute for them.

Though these men served in the militia, they were also often connected to the Continental regiments in various ways. Despite the marked differences between the professional and localized troops, Continental and militia regiments sometimes served alongside each other, with clear authority given to the Continental commander in such occurrences. James Harris recalled one such instance as a militia draftee who served in a force overseen by Continental commander Archibald Lytle at Sullivan's Island and around Charleston in 1776. Many of North Carolina's black soldiers also served in both forces in distinct periods at different points. Battle-tested Continental veterans like Isaac Perkins and Edward Going conceivably aided the performance of their later militia companies as experienced model soldiers.¹⁴

The greatest connection between the different forces, however, stemmed from the militia's frequent role as a pipeline to fill the Continental regiments with desperately needed recruits. In 1778, every county drafted men or offered enticing, though not always paid, bounties to men willing to serve nine months in the Continental line. Sometimes the militias drafted idle or legally troubled men, while some units also reportedly sent men they knew were unfit for duty. William Brown, one such black soldier, was drafted from Captain Sharpe's Company of Hertford County militia in 1778 for nine months in the Continental service, albeit as the only known man of color among nearly 70 listed conscripts from that county. Meanwhile, on the

¹³ Wheeler, "Development and Organization," 320; RWP, Ishmael Titus, R10623, Transcribed by Will Graves, <http://revwarapps.org/r10623.pdf>; RWP, Elisha Boon, S35196, Transcribed by Will Graves, <http://revwarapps.org/s35196.pdf>; RWP, Harden Denham, S30985; RWP, Elisha Parker, S11211.

¹⁴ Wheeler, "Development and Organization," 320; RWP, James Harris, W11223, Transcribed by C. Leon Harris, <http://revwarapps.org/w11223.pdf>; RWP, Isaac Perkins, S41953, Transcribed by C. Leon Harris, <http://revwarapps.org/s41953.pdf>; RWP, Edward Going, S6899, Transcribed by Tracy Hutchinson, <http://revwarapps.org/s6899.pdf>.

opposite end of the spectrum, Granville County militia companies drafted or raised possibly eighteen black or mulatto soldiers from their ranks for the Continental army in the same year.¹⁵

Like their Continental counterparts, a few black militiamen either failed to report for duty, or possibly deserted at various times. In early 1780, with the British pressuring the South Carolina Lowcountry, officers compiled for General Jethro Sumner a list of militia soldiers who “failed to march agreeable to orders.” This particular roster of twenty names included James Harris, John Ellis, and David King, three black veterans who apparently were delinquent in reporting for militia service in one of the last two drafts. Only King mentioned a draft during that time frame in his pension, however, and none of the three had any issue drawing witnesses on their behalf as they applied for aid, suggesting such delays or absenteeism within the militia ranks were common and judged not particularly serious by soldier or community. Even so, militia units were occasionally tasked with collecting and returning delinquents and deserters from their own communities.¹⁶ It is not known how many, if any, black militiamen deserted from active service during the war.

Periods of Service

Compared to their Continental counterparts, North Carolina’s black militiamen did not see as many large battles, bleak winter encampments, or the prolonged periods of service

¹⁵ Rankin, *The North Carolina Continentals*, 179; RWP, William Brown, R1349, Transcribed by Will Graves, <http://revwarapps.org/r1349.pdf>; “A True List of the Draft made out of the Regiment of Hertford County in the State of North Carolina November 5th 1778,” Troop Returns, North Carolina Digital Collections, <http://digital.ncdcr.gov/cdm/compoundobject/collection/p16062coll26/id/696/rec/1>; “Size Roll taken by Capt. Ralph Williams of Men enrolled in Granville County May 25th 1778 to fill the North Carolina quota of Continental Soldiers,” Transcribed by Will Graves, <http://revwarapps.org/b250.pdf>.

¹⁶ “A List of such Militia soldiers as have failed to march agreeable to orders,” February 10, 1780, Troop Returns, North Carolina Digital Collections, <http://digital.ncdcr.gov/cdm/compoundobject/collection/p16062coll26/id/968/rec/36>; RWP, James Harris, W11223; RWP, John Ellis, S32233; RWP, David King, W20347; “A Payroll Captain Vernons Company of Militia Light Horse Ordered By Colo. Jams Martin to Colect Delinquents Disarters &...,” August 20, 1781, Transcribed by Will Graves, <http://revwarapps.org/b38.pdf>.

alongside professionalized and tested comrades and commanders. They did, however, perform critical and surprisingly unique tasks alongside men they likely knew or grew to know and in places both familiar and foreign to them. Like the Continental army, their enlistments and experiences were often tempered or affected by large strategic and political happenings. Throughout the war, their enlistments ebbed and waxed in regard to legislation, military emergencies, and social crises.

A few black men entered militia units early in the conflict, including Richard Roberts, who fought in the 1775 action at Great Bridge outside Norfolk, Virginia. Substantially more black men were in service at various points toward the end of the war, including William Taburn who received news of Cornwallis' surrender at Yorktown while on a tour in North Carolina. A few even served in the relatively quiet two years afterward including Thomas Gibson, who volunteered for a mounted militia tour in late 1782, and Samuel Bell, who claimed his unit was close enough to Charleston to hear the bells ringing as the British sailed away.¹⁷ The majority, however, appear to have served during the critical period between 1778 and 1781, as North Carolina turned increasingly toward the draft and the British campaigned in the South.

During this period of peak conflict, North Carolina's militia, including sizeable numbers of black troops, served in several large battles, as well as numerous skirmishes. One such fight, in which numerous black militiamen recalled participation, occurred in early 1779 at Brier Creek near Augusta, Georgia. Many freshly drafted men and volunteers were marched under General John Ashe through the South Carolina and Georgia backcountry guarding several key outposts

¹⁷ Robert L. Ganyard, "Threat From the West: North Carolina and the Cherokee, 1776-1778," *The North Carolina Historical Review* 45, no. 1 (1968), 47-66; RWP, Richard Roberts, S38339, Transcribed by Will Graves, <http://revwarapps.org/s38339.pdf>; RWP, William Taburn, W18115; RWP, Thomas Gibson, S8560; RWP, Samuel Bell, S6598. It is unclear if Bell was in the Continental Line as the Secretary of State certified, or in the militia as he claimed.

and skirmishing victoriously at Kettle Creek before they were routed in a desperate fight in early March. This stinging defeat of American militia and Continental forces proved particularly memorable for black militiamen such as Francis Coley, Drury Walden, and William Taburn, the latter of whom described a “route” from which the Americans were forced to retreat, with his officer apparently faster than himself.¹⁸

Other black men participated in numerous small and scattered skirmishes, sometimes several of them during their service. Thomas Gibson, pursuing North Carolina Tories under David Fanning in 1781, frequently “fell in with” the enemy and exchanged shots at river crossings and fords. His brother Wilbourne, serving in the same company, described attempting to rescue prisoners from Fanning as well as a “skirmage at Menden halls mill.” Cristopher Manuel took part in at least three engagements with Tories near Duplin County. They included the 1781 Battle at Rockfish Creek where a British Provincial force of 200 men and a few cannon dispersed a militia force more than twice their size. Likewise, William Taburn also fought two desperate engagements at river crossings near Cowan’s Ford in early 1781 where better-trained British Regulars and Provincials led by feared commander Banastre Tarleton routed local militiamen.¹⁹

Aside from fighting Tories and the better equipped British Provincials, black militiamen also took part in expeditions against the Cherokees early in the war. Designed to scorch the earth and eradicate opposition by Cherokee fighting against white encroachment on their mountainous settlements, militiamen under Griffith Rutherford destroyed food, shelter, and entire villages in

¹⁸ “Brier Creek,” American Battlefield Trust, September 3, 2019, <https://www.battlefields.org/learn/articles/brier-creek>; RWP, Francis Coley, S3197; RWP, Drury Walden, R11014; RWP, William Taburn, W18115.

¹⁹ RWP, Thomas Gibson, S8560; RWP, Wilbourne Gibson, R4000; RWP, Christopher Manuel, S7182; RWP, William Taburn, W18115; The Battle of Rockfish Creek described in Robert M. Dunkerly, *Redcoats on the River: Southeastern North Carolina in the Revolutionary War* (Wilmington, NC: Dram Tree Books, 2008), 199.

western North Carolina before winter arrived in 1776. At various points, Drewry Jeffrey, as well as David and Harden Denham took part in similar campaigns against the Cherokees. David alone described engaging in one such skirmish or slaughter in 1779 in which 30 Cherokee were killed and another 20 taken prisoner.²⁰

Of course, black militiamen also engaged in some large and more famous battles which tested their mettle and affected the outcome of the war to a greater degree. James Harris took part in the confused retreat during the 1780 Battle of Camden in South Carolina. Elisha Boon, a Continental veteran, claimed he was in one of the bloodiest battles of the late war at Eutaw Springs. Ishmael Titus, the Virginian Andrew Ferguson, and a “colored free man” known only as “Bowman” all served in the famous Battle of Kings Mountain, where one legend holds that Bowman may have killed British Major Patrick Ferguson. David Denham had marched with the intention of fighting alongside them against the British but related that he was kicked by a horse the day before the pivotal Patriot victory.²¹

Even more critical and contested than Kings Mountain, however, several black militiamen fought Cornwallis and his British Regulars at Guilford Courthouse in March 1781. Most of General Nathanael Greene’s North Carolina forces in the fight were militia, a majority of them short-term draftees, augmenting the scarce Continental soldiers left in the South after the fall of Charleston in 1780. North Carolina militiamen were joined, however, by newly recruited Virginia Continentals composed of up to 12 percent black soldiers. In this rag-tag assemblage, James Cotten, a white man, related that his unit of militia acted as a reserve for most of the

²⁰ Ganyard, "Threat From the West," 47-61; RWP, Drewry Jeffrey, S7067; RWP, David Denham, W27540; RWP, Harden Denham, S30985.

²¹ RWP, James Harris, W11223; RWP, Elisha Boon, S35196; RWP, Ishmael Titus, R10623; RWP, Andrew Ferguson, S32243; RWP, David Denham, W27540; Bowman described in “H.L. Claiborne to Lyman Draper,” December 18, 1880, Lyman C. Draper Manuscript Collection [Microfilm], MSS 14DD45, Southern Revolutionary War Institute, York, South Carolina.

lengthy battle but toward the end they were “led before the enemy to cover the retreat,” firing only a few rounds before they withdrew with the regular soldiers. He was joined by black counterparts including Francis Coley, Andrew Ferguson, John Toney, and Continental veteran Edward Going, the latter of whom described a far less orderly retreat than Cotten. Despite costing Cornwallis an irreplaceable portion of his army and altering the strategy of the war, Greene severely chided the militia’s performance and their perceived cowardice in the battle. For their efforts, the militia, including John Toney, said by neighbors to have ran home from the battle, were rewarded with a North Carolina law drafting most of them into the Continental service for twelve months.²²

With black militiamen serving and fighting in frequent and often fierce engagements, it is no surprise that some incurred serious wounds. David Denham’s horse injury aside, most suffered lasting afflictions from the enemy. They included Andrew Ferguson, whose leg and head wounds received at Camden and Guilford Courthouse had disabled him by the 1840s, and Thomas Gibson, grazed in the head by a musket ball in a 1781 skirmish with Tories. Militia also faced a great danger from disease and sickness, especially smallpox, for which the Continental army inoculated recruits. It is not known if any black militiamen acquired such illnesses, though William Taburn noted that he was “attacked by sickness” and unable to rejoin his unit for one brief period.²³ It is also unclear just how many black men in the militia were injured or killed as their inability to file federal pensions until 1832 created a dearth of information expressed in the statements of their Continental comrades. Regardless, these collective experiences in battles

²² Lawrence E. Babits and Joshua B. Howard, *Long, Obstinate, and Bloody: The Battle of Guilford Courthouse* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), xi, 48-49, 75; Cotten quoted in RWP, James Cotten, W6942, Transcribed by C. Leon Harris, <http://revwarapps.org/w6942.pdf>; RWP, Francis Coley, S3197; RWP, Andrew Ferguson, S32243; RWP, Edward Going, S6899; RWP, John Toney, W9859; Ralls, “A Case Study,” 66-68.

²³ RWP, David Denham, W27540; RWP, Andrew Ferguson, S32243; RWP, Thomas Gibson, S8560; RWP, William Taburn, W18115; Rankin, *The North Carolina Continentals*, 90-91, 342.

small and large demonstrate that militia service, while less formalized, was no light or forgettable matter.

A discussion of militia service remains incomplete, however, without exploring some of the unique roles black men played within the system aside from strictly privates in combat. William Brown, a draftee, was sent to destroy small river-going flat boats and ferries to thwart Cornwallis' movement out of Wilmington in 1781. Harden Denham became a rifleman commanded by Francis Marion in South Carolina. A few black men who owned reliable horses, such as John and Thomas Gibson or Thomas Mason, became cavalry or mounted infantry troops and even cattle drovers. Some black men also occasionally acted in positions of service for militia officers, though these were not always subservient in nature. Thomas Gibson, for example, also acted as a guide for a Captain Hodge near the Haw River but William Taburn claimed General John Butler personally selected him as a cook in his last tour. Most black militiamen performed unique duties sporadically, in addition to tours of normal responsibility. Drury Walden, however, exclusively performed auxiliary roles, drafted as a musician before serving stints as a cannon and barracks maker, as well as a guard for the Halifax jail containing Tory prisoners.²⁴ Some duties surely brought esteem, while others possibly resulted from the denigrated status of black men, but all reveal the vital ways this group contributed to the war effort.

Camaraderie and Agency

Like their Continental counterparts, North Carolina's black militiamen, through their

²⁴ RWP, William Brown, R1349; RWP, Harden Denham, S30985; RWP, John Gibson, S3395; RWP, Thomas Gibson, S8560; RWP, Thomas Mason, R6993; RWP, William Taburn, W18115; RWP, Drury Walden, R11014.

service, fostered a degree of camaraderie and familiarity with other soldiers. The dangers of combat, the discomforts of constant marching, and their common missions of fighting Tories or Native Americans served to unify them to an extent. As militiamen, however, their chances for engendering connections with white compatriots and neighbors were tempered by the short terms of their enlistments and small sizes of their units, though they were from the same locality. Conversely, the less-regimented nature of militia duty also gave some black men chances to act with greater autonomy or agency than they would have in the Continental ranks or even in their normal lives.

While some militia expeditions lasted for lengthier durations, they rarely compared to Continental service terms, the shortest of which ran for nine months. Meanwhile, some militia duty lasted as little as ten days. Militia companies, or county-wide regiments, also typically comprised fewer men and did not frequently operate in large regiments or combined brigades, although battles required such assembly. A Bertie County militia roster from 1780, for example, shows just 32 privates and officers, with only one black soldier, Casear Chavis.²⁵ Such small units may have increased the interdependence and fraternity between black and white militiamen in their close quarters, while paradoxically limiting the implications of black service and their networks of familiarity within the larger veteran community. White militiamen undoubtedly were aware of numerous free black men in service with them, though they may have only grown to know a few individuals personally, and for short durations.²⁶ The limits of these interactions and connections bore further effects for veterans in the post-war era.

²⁵ “A List of men that Served after Fanning under Colo Paceley Ten days 1781,” Transcribed by Will Graves, <http://revwarapps.org/b36.pdf>; “A List of Militia Belonging to Bertie County,” April 8, 1780, Troop Returns, North Carolina Digital Collections, <http://digital.ncdcr.gov/cdm/compoundobject/collection/p16062coll26/id/1086/rec/3>.

²⁶ See the example in Holiday Hathcock’s pension of the white man William Bryan who knew of large numbers of black troops in the militia but recalled only one in particular—Archibald Artis—from his company. RWP, Holiday Hethcock, R4812.

Some black militiamen remained in high regard and close proximity with their compatriots even after brief tours together. William Taburn, for instance, was listed by James Haskins and Zacharia Hester as one of their “brother” soldiers. Meanwhile Fowler Jones, one of the others in Haskins’ circle, described the sad plight he and Taburn shared in their later years together as inmates of the Granville poor house. Taburn apparently earned the affection of his comrades by carrying one of the short and young members of the company on his shoulders across rivers and streams after “taking a liking to him.” Other black men, such as Edward Going, recalled messmates from their time in service, suggesting this extra shared burden of cooking, eating, and sheltering together likely brought them particularly close with a few white comrades. Mark Murray, in fact, entered militia service at the invitation of several white neighbors after “they agreed all for to mess together and volunteer.”²⁷

Several black militiamen also noted particular interactions with their officers that reveal a degree of assertiveness, affection, as well as agency on their parts. Mark Murray described one particularly overbearing ensign who “treated him badly because he would not wait on him” and refused to provide him a discharge. Murray and his messmates, however, together went before a higher-ranking officer and secured this exemption for the mixed-race man. William Taburn exhibited even further assertiveness, as well as misjudgment, when Colonel Archibald Lytle, a regimental commander, “had me put under guard for a whole day for getting drunk and cursing him.” He felt a great deal more respect for militia General William Davidson though, and described remorsefully the fight where a shot “put a period to the life of the ablest, kindest & best officer that ever commanded an army” at Cowan’s Ford. Similarly, a wounded Thomas Gibson carried his more seriously injured captain to the home of Gibson’s father to recover after

²⁷ RWP, James Haskins, W19732; RWP, Fowler Jones, R5701; RWP, William Taburn, W18115; RWP, Edward Going, S6899; RWP, Mark Murray, R7523.

a skirmish. Impressively, William Taburn connected well enough with a captain that the officer gifted Taburn his rifle after a discharge²⁸ These varied instances may illustrate just some of the patterns of actions and relationships between the sparsely documented black militiamen, their compatriots, and the system they served.

Conclusions

The remarkable nature of black service in North Carolina's militia forces is that it varied so much over time and place and around individuals. There were likely no exact duplicate experiences among these soldiers, though some common patterns are evident. The service of black men was often non-voluntary, but alongside their white neighbors, they bore such responsibility as public citizens, receiving comparatively less pay or monetary incentive than Continental soldiers. Though they ventured at times to Georgia, South Carolina, and Virginia, they most often fought quite literally for hearth and home, as Tories, and occasionally Native Americans, posed threats to their communities if not them personally. There is no evidence they fought any better or worse than the rest of the militia units, and though their skirmishes and actions were often small, they faced real and often critical dangers. They filled a litany of auxiliary roles, some of them highly skilled, if not prestigious, and others subservient to a degree. Nevertheless, most appear to have acted as equals on par with their white counterparts, with whom many established appreciable familiarity and camaraderie within the small messes, ranks, and regiments they joined. Like their fellow black Continental soldiers, these connections proved invaluable as time passed after the war ended.

²⁸ RWP, Mark Murray, R7523; RWP, William Taburn, W18115; RWP, Thomas Gibson, S8560.

Chapter 5: Swords into Plowshares - The Post-War Lives of Black Veterans

With the American Revolutionary War's end in September 1783, North Carolina's remaining black soldiers returned to their civilian lives. Over 468 had proved their mettle in combat and army life throughout the conflict. Most of them returned to familiar settings and occupations after tours of varying lengths. Some came home maimed and debilitated, and many others, maybe forty-eight or more, did not return at all.¹ They received pay certificates and, often, deeds to land west of the Appalachians. However, they often did not reap the financial benefits of these rewards. A select few even continued fighting for the emancipation of themselves or their families.² Little is known about their actual reintegration into their communities, but in the subsequent decades pay accounts, pension applications, and court proceedings reveal surprising insights into their experiences within North Carolina's increasingly racialized society. It appears that their service in the war fostered camaraderie among themselves and other Revolutionary War soldiers, and their subsequent status as veterans transcended, to a degree, the increasing racial divide between free black and white North Carolinians. Ultimately, however, North Carolina's legal and social attitudes changed, particularly in wake of its 1835 revised constitution, and the gains of these black soldiers largely vanished.

Migration and Stagnation

With bountiful lands open to settlement in the new American nation, Revolutionary War veterans frequently migrated westward. Research by Theodore Crackel reveals that more than 50

¹ Statistics compiled by this author. See list of Soldiers Believed to Have Died During the War in Appendix A.

² Lemuel Overton, for instance, witnessed the General Assembly free his wife Rose and his two sons after his service, albeit not until 1798. See William L. Byrd, *In Full Force and Virtue: North Carolina Emancipation Records, 1713-1860* (Bowie, MD: Heritage Books, 1999), 298.

percent of Revolutionary War veterans left the state they resided in after returning from their service. Additionally, most apparently moved during the first decade after the war, and most changed residences more than once. This pattern did not apply as equally for black veterans though, as Judith Van Buskirk suggests 75 percent of those in her study remained in their home state of enlistment.³ In North Carolina, of 328 black veterans with identified post-war residences, a full 87 percent remained in the state, and nearly 67 percent among them resided in the same or a neighboring county as when they enlisted. Of those who emigrated elsewhere, at least twelve made their homes in Tennessee, likely owing to the federal bounty land grants in that territory. Virginia and South Carolina also saw several North Carolina black veterans settle in their boundaries, presumably as several of them resided in those respective states before their enlistment. Meanwhile, a few veterans found their way to Illinois, Alabama, Massachusetts, Kentucky, Indiana, Georgia, and Pennsylvania.⁴

While many migrating veterans remained in the geographic South, a few found their way to the frontier states or territories. Harden Denham especially embodied this mobility along the frontier, serving with the militia in various campaigns in the mountains before moving to Kentucky, Indiana, Tennessee, and finally back to Kentucky, where he found the opportunity to purchase land. Surprisingly, only one of North Carolina's black veterans migrated to the Northeast. Ishmael Titus, after completing his terms in the North Carolina militia, moved to New York, then Vermont, before settling in the Berkshire region of Massachusetts for several years. While Titus likely knew not a person in his new residence, most North Carolina expatriate black soldiers situated themselves near other free people of color, if not veterans. Daniel Strother, a

³ Theodore J. Crackel, "Revolutionary War Pension Records and Patterns of American Mobility, 1780-1830," *Prologue* 16, no 3. (Fall, 1984). <https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/1984/fall/pension-mobility.html>; Van Buskirk, *Standing in Their Own Light*, 192.

⁴ Statistics compiled by this author. See Figure 1 in Appendix C.

pensioner in Indiana, lived near enough to the white veteran Peter McAnnally and black Virginia soldier Andrew Ferguson in his post-war life so that both testified on his behalf in his later years.⁵ Such connections ensured the legacies and positive gains made by black soldiers did not simply disintegrate among a transient populous.

Unsurprisingly, most North Carolina black veterans settled back into the northeastern counties along the Virginia border, especially in Halifax, Granville, and Northampton Counties. They resided among large and growing populations of other free people of color, especially in Halifax and Northampton Counties, each of which had over 500 free black residents by 1800. That same year, North Carolina had grown to include over 7,000 free black people in its borders, most of whom lived in small, rural towns, often among other people of color.⁶ Undoubtedly, the former servicemen's close association with other free people of color defined their status and sense of community within post-war North Carolina but, as will be seen, their status as veterans of the Revolution also denoted them as a special group.

As these veterans returned to a civil life, they entered a range of occupations. Many, including several formerly indentured children, assumed the occupations they learned in their youth or employed skills they likely acquired during their pre-war lives. Solomon Bibby, identified as an "inmate" of Colonel Aaron Devany's family in 1788, became a blacksmith in Franklin County afterward. David James also became a blacksmith, and the Bertie County court bound a child to him to learn this occupation in 1783. John Weaver, once bound to a shoemaker, later became a cooper, as did Asa Spelman and John Carter. John Womble became a carpenter, Reuben Bird a bricklayer, and William Redman a mill keeper. Meanwhile, Saul Bowers reflected the greatest degree of specialization as he possibly worked as a tailor in New Bern. In the most

⁵ RWP, Harden Denham, S30985; RWP, Ishmael Titus, R10623; RWP, Daniel Strother, R10275.

⁶ Franklin, *The Free Negro In North Carolina*, 14-15.

unusual case, Drury Walden apparently became a preacher in his adulthood, albeit in Indiana. Though these skilled occupations brought a degree of respect to their practitioners, most assumed rather mundane roles akin to Francis Jones, a humble ditcher in his civilian life.⁷

Though select veterans performed important jobs, albeit not always lucratively, most survived as subsistence farmers or laborers. They reflected the common occupations of the majority of North Carolinians at the time, though several black veterans lived on rented land, and reported only possessing tools of their labor, if that. Benjamin Reed, for instance, the veteran who waxed poetically about struggling for the liberty his countrymen freely enjoyed, lived on rented land as a farmer, with only clothes, bedding, and a small cache of corn. Limited by his wounds incurred in battle, he and his wife lived their later years on the charity of the citizens in his county. Absalom Martin, another subsistence-level veteran, eked out a living on 140 acres of “barren pine land” with a few hogs, one mare, and rough farming implements, presumably just like many of his white neighbors. A comparative sampling of several North Carolina black and white pensioners under the act of 1818 shows that both groups experienced comparable levels of poverty.⁸

Not all farmers lived in as abject a state as these men, however. Reuben Evans added in his pension deposition that he waited to apply for assistance until he was unable to provide for the wants and needs of his family. By that point, the farmer had a comparatively modest estate valued at \$116, including a cow and calf, one mare, and hogs. This inventory, however, and

⁷ RWP, Solomon Bibby, S6644, Transcribed by C. Leon Harris, <http://revwarapps.org/s6644.pdf>; RWP, John Weaver, S42061; RWP, Asa Spelmore, S42022; RWP, John Carter, R1749, Transcribed by C. Leon Harris, <http://revwarapps.org/r1749.pdf>; RWP, John Womble, S42083; RWP, Reuben Bird, S37776; RWP, William Redman, R8645, Transcribed by Will Graves, <http://revwarapps.org/r8645.pdf>; RWP, Drury Walden, R11014; RWP, Francis Jones, S36653, Transcribed by Will Graves, <http://revwarapps.org/s36653.pdf>; David James and Saul Bowers in Heinegg, http://www.freeafricanamericans.com/Virginia_NC.htm, Ivey-Jasper, Beverly-Brogdon.

⁸ RWP, Benjamin Reed, S41976; RWP, Absalom Martin, S41800; See Property Values of Black and White Veterans under 1818 Act in Appendix C.

those of other pensioners, may not reveal the full extent of their holdings during the majority of their lives. Similarly, Benjamin James' case suggests both his rise in status as well as the continuing poverty for many free families of color. He was bound to learn husbandry as a child, though in his later years, the Northampton County court bound Thomas Dempsey, a mixed child to him and his family. Furthermore, Exum Scott's case reveals the ways many free black North Carolinians, veterans included, helped others, as the impoverished Allen Sweat, known to him since childhood, lived on Scott's rather modest plantation after the war.⁹

Many black veterans also experienced societal indignities as a result of their impoverishment, including lawsuits for indebtedness, or having their children bound out to other families. William James' case illustrates the vulnerability poor, especially free black, families experienced should their patriarch perish. In 1788, the Bertie County court bound out the children of James, himself a former apprentice, when he died, leaving them without a father to provide for their needs. This case also reveals the real risk black fathers and their families assumed during the war should their patriarchs fail to return. Even among the survivors, Hezekiah Stringer and James Bowser saw their children removed in the post-war while they were still living, and John Womble likely struggled against this possibility with eleven children dependent upon his labor. Reuben Bass also bore a burden in his older years, as his two grandchildren were bound to him.¹⁰ Edward Griffin experienced perhaps the greatest indignity of all as the man he substituted for during the conflict reneged on his promise to free Griffin, and quickly re-enslaved him after his 1782 discharge. Fortunately for Griffin, Colonel James

⁹ RWP, Reuben Evans, S41524, Transcribed by Will Graves, <http://revwarapps.org/s41524.pdf>; Benjamin James in Heinegg, http://www.freeafricanamericans.com/Virginia_NC.htm, Ivey-Jasper; RWP, Allen Swett, W16, Transcribed by Will Graves, <http://revwarapps.org/w16.pdf>.

¹⁰ William James, Hezekiah Stringer, James Bowser, John Womble, and Reuben Bass in Heinegg, http://www.freeafricanamericans.com/Virginia_NC.htm, Bailey-Berry, Beverly-Brogdon, Ivey-Jasper, Stringer-Talbot, Weeks-Young.

Armstrong backed his petition to the North Carolina General Assembly, and in 1784 he earned his legal freedom. The newly manumitted man also received £40 and a 640-acre land grant for his service.¹¹

An unknown number of these veterans faced lawsuits over debts or encountered pauper status. Aaron Peters found himself as the defendant in numerous Halifax County lawsuits over debts in the 1830s. Furthermore, some, such as Evans Archer, were forced to live with their children in their later years, or became inmates of county poor houses, as in William Taburn's case. In a few instances, these former soldiers or their children were also ordered by local courts to work on public infrastructure, such as building roads or clearing rivers.¹² These plights were not exclusive to free people of color, or veterans, but they do illustrate that soldiering itself was no particularly lucrative endeavor, nor did it exempt them from further public service.¹³

Lack of Economic Reward

As suggested by the subsistence-level livelihoods of most North Carolina black veterans in their post-war lives, the monetary rewards from their military service could have enabled them economically. Many received pay bounties during the war, and theoretically, all their accounts should have been settled with promissory notes at the end of the conflict. Circumstances often

¹¹ General Assembly Records as reprinted in Byrd, *In Full Force and Virtue*, 137-139; *Pierces's Register: Register of the Certificates Issued by John Pierce, Esquire, Paymaster General and Commissioner of Army Accounts for the United States, to Officers and Soldiers of the Continental Army Under Act of July 4, 1783*. First published as Senate Documents, Vol. 9, No. 988, 63d Congress, 3d Session, Washington, D.C., 1915. Reprint. (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., Inc., 1984), 217; Moss and Scoggins, *African-American Patriots*, 104-105.

¹² RWP, Evans Archer, S41415; RWP, William Taburn, W18115; For Aaron Peters and those bound to work including Cannon Cumbo's children, Johnson Demsey, Benjamin Harden, and Nathaniel Revell, see Heinegg, http://www.freeafricanamericans.com/Virginia_NC.htm, Nash-Peters, Cousins-Davenport, Davis-Drew, Hammonds-Hawley, Pettiford-Riley.

¹³ The early colonial and state records contain numerous examples of residents in certain regions being made liable to work on public infrastructure. A 1764 law empowered local courts and overseers to summon residents for these purposes. See Clark, *The State Records of North Carolina*, vol. 24, 607-609.

denied them full use of their payments and bounties, however. Some likely were too poor even to afford the lawyers or representatives who could assist them in applying for the needed aid, as was the case of John Hammond. Furthermore, the land bounties only applied to Continental soldiers in service for at least two years, and did not count militia duty, even if performed under Continental officers.¹⁴

Countless Continental soldiers, black and white, sold their pay vouchers and land warrants to speculators and hucksters, often for pennies on the dollar. Solomon Bibby, for example, sold his bounty land to the son of Brigadier General Jethro Sumner, in exchange for a horse. The younger Sumner apparently felt he got the deed for cheap and quipped that Bibby would have simply “fooled away” the land. Mark Murray also sold his wage certificates for two tours of duty to a speculator for only one dollar; a local sheriff agreed to pay Murray’s taxes for one year in exchange for another certificate.¹⁵ It is unclear how many of North Carolina’s black veterans fell prey to this reality, but several cases illustrate its commonality. Moses Carter, whose estate was valued at a meager \$57 in 1820, received a note for £76.6 in 1783, and a land warrant deed to 228 acres in 1797. It appears he likely sold or simply never claimed the land, however, as he continued residing in North Carolina. Benjamin Flood also received the same pay amount, but obtained a 640-acre land warrant, the rate for 84 month’s service. He sold his land deed in a confirmed transaction in 1795.¹⁶ Numerous other veterans who also received land bounties in Tennessee presumably did the same, as they lived their lives in their home state.

¹⁴ RWP, John Hammond, S8654, Transcribed by Sam West, <http://revwarapps.org/s8654.pdf>; Lloyd Dewitt Bockstruck, *Revolutionary War Bounty Land Grants Awarded by State Governments* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1996), xviii.

¹⁵ RWP, Solomon Bibby, S6644; RWP, Mark Murray, R7523.

¹⁶ RWP, Moses Carter, S41470, Transcribed by C. Leon Harris, <http://revwarapps.org/s41470.pdf>; *Pierces’s Register*, 90, 180; Moss and Scoggins, *African-American Patriots*, 47; See Benjamin Flood in Heinegg, http://www.freeafricanamericans.com/Virginia_NC.htm, Fagan-George.

Many bounties and payments aided the families of North Carolina's black veterans to some degree, however, especially those that died in service. The loss of productive fathers, husbands, and sons may have been offset somewhat by the tenuous financial compensation. Other surviving veterans likely also used their surplus revenue to improve the lives of their families, including purchasing land, tools, or even enslaved relatives. The land bounties of Jesse and Dempsey Archer, both likely deceased during the war, went to their relative Baker Archer. Likewise, Martha Franklin, mother of brothers Charles and Ambrose, both deceased during the conflict, received their respective 640-acre grants. In her old, widowed state, the second wife of Jesse Harris even managed to obtain a 160-acre land grant for his service, but not until 1855. Many bounty land grants were never touched by veterans or their families, however, including those of Gabriel Garnes and Jacob Norton. While most such lands were traded or deeded to private individuals, their grants went to the trustees of the early University of North Carolina.¹⁷

While many, if not most, land grants were traded or never claimed, the discharge settlements and bounties received during the war may have enabled these soldiers to purchase land and subtly improve their homesteads. Hezekiah Jacobs, for instance, registered his £80 discharge certificate in 1788, and began buying and selling land holdings in Brunswick County shortly after 1800.¹⁸ He, and many other black veterans who bought land likely utilized their discharges, if not hard specie, to purchase the most valuable commodity. Additionally, a small number of North Carolina's black soldiers who returned home maimed received invalid pensions shortly after the war. William Kersey applied for this relief in 1784 with an unspecified wound

¹⁷ See Jesse and Dempsey Archer, Charles and Ambrose Franklin, Gabriel Garnes, and Jacob Norton in Heinegg, http://www.freeafricanamericans.com/Virginia_NC.htm, Archer-Avery, Fagan-George, Nash-Peters; Moss and Scoggins, *African-American Patriots*, 114.

¹⁸ See Hezekiah Jacobs in Heinegg, http://www.freeafricanamericans.com/Virginia_NC.htm, Ivey-Jasper; *Pierce's Register*, 271.

and received \$60 in total by the time of his death. Elisha Hunt lost an arm during the siege of Charleston and received a surprising amount of financial assistance. His first invalid pension began in 1789 and disbursed \$60 annually, for a total of \$1,628. In 1816, he received a second pension, and received \$1,041 in total, substantial amounts for anyone, much less a free man of color. It appears that most of those wounded in conflict simply suffered through their maladies though, as no other black invalids appear on the 1835 Congressional report of pensioners.¹⁹

By this point, however, pension rates had increased for those not listed as invalids. The same report illustrates that most pensioners received \$96 per annum, totaling well over \$1,000 cumulatively for several of North Carolina's black pensioners. Militia veterans, meanwhile, typically received between \$20-60 annually following the 1832 act.²⁰ These numbers, however, reflect only those who applied for and received a pension, a group comprising less than 30 percent of those black veterans that survived the war.²¹ Additionally, as Judith Van Buskirk finds in her study of 500 black veterans throughout the United States, they remained typically poorer than even their impoverished white comrades petitioning for aid.²²

North Carolina's black veterans received limited financial compensation or reward, and many struggled in poverty, but they were not alone in this experience. As historian John Resch argues, public opinion in the immediate aftermath of the Revolution held that the war was won by virtuous citizens, rather than the maligned Continental army. Veterans felt betrayed until

¹⁹ Kersey's pay detailed in Moss and Scoggins, *African-American Patriots*, 144; RWP, Elisha Hunt, S13486; U.S. Congress, Senate, *Report From the Secretary of War in Obedience to Resolution of the Senate of the 5th and 30th June, 1834, and the 3rd of March, 1835, in Relation to the Pension Establishment of the United States*. 23rd Cong., 2nd sess., 1835. Senate Document 514, Vol. 3. No. 251. (Washington, DC: Duff Green, 1835), <https://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=llss&fileName=0200/0251/llss0251.db&recNum=0>, 10,18.

²⁰ U.S. Congress, Senate, *Report From the Secretary of War*.

²¹ Statistics compiled by this author based on the number of identified veterans, those that died during the war, and those that filed their own personal pensions. "Southern Campaigns Revolutionary War Pension Statements and Rosters," Will Graves ed., <http://revwarapps.org/>.

²² Van Buskirk, *Standing in Their Own Light*, 193.

1818, when changing political sentiment in the aftermath of the War of 1812 resulted in the first federal pension legislation for poor former Continentals. The “suffering soldier” stereotype, until then a shameful reality for its bearers, suddenly became a mark of pride, presumably for veterans of all colors, eventually earning them respect.²³ It is unclear precisely the effect this sentiment had on North Carolina’s black soldiers though, especially considering the considerable portion of them who served in both the militia and Continental forces. As people of color, however, they had their own peculiar stereotypes to overcome.

Changing Racial Attitudes

With their tenuous status already restricted in several ways before the Revolution, North Carolina’s black veterans also lived through further tightening of their freedoms and the solidification of a racially divided Southern society. John Hope Franklin argued that by 1790, North Carolina was enacting legislation for free people of color that more closely represented the popular opinion surrounding them. This opinion swayed negatively over time by his estimation, though the typically isolated and agricultural residences of free black families mostly protected them or kept them out of mind. During this early post-war period, North Carolina’s free people of color also witnessed legal prohibitions against activities they once participated in, including military service. Despite struggles to raise troops during the War of 1812, North Carolina enacted a law barring “any free Negro or Mulatto” enlistments in militia companies, except as musicians. Nevertheless, many militia companies in areas with high concentrations of free black people enlisted them in the year before the war. Black men also served in the regular army

²³ John Resch, *Suffering Soldiers: Revolutionary War Veterans, Moral Sentiment, and Political Culture in the Early Republic* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), x-10, 65.

during the conflict, including Jesse Harris and Drury Walden, both veterans of the Revolution.²⁴ Free people of color still participated as citizens in North Carolina's society, though their status proved vulnerable.

Of course, not all these veterans experienced as visible a marginalization. Some actually achieved accomplished status or prominence within their communities, including among whites. Many of them unsurprisingly hailed from free black families with names and holdings already established. Council Bass, part of the large Bass family from the northeastern part of the state, was eventually counted as "white" in the 1810 census and left 22 enslaved people to his heirs in his will. Solomon Carter likewise owned slaves and a plantation in Duplin County. He received land grants from his father before the war, and apparently only grew his finances after his military service, leaving over \$1,700 to be divided between his wife and children. James Robbins, a descendant of Chowan Indians, sold the last vestiges of their lands as an official representative.²⁵ Many also undoubtedly served as patriarchs of large families and communities of free black people, but a few even gained the admiration of their white neighbors. Mark Murray and his wife, for example, were noted as respected colored people, frequently attending religious meetings in Fishing Creek, Halifax County. With even greater esteem, Cumberland County citizens hailed Isaac Hammonds as a barber, as well as a talented fiddler at weddings and

²⁴ Franklin, *The Free Negro*, 6-7; "An Act to Amend the Militia Laws of This State," in North Carolina, General Assembly, *The State Laws of North Carolina, 1812* [Microfilm], (Raleigh: Arnett and Hodge, 1812), North Carolina Digital State Documents Collection, The State Archives of North Carolina, <http://digital.ncdcr.gov/cdm/ref/collection/p16062coll9/id/265570>; Milteer Jr., "The Complications of Liberty," 110-111; Moss and Scoggins, *African-American Patriots*, 114, 242.

²⁵ See Council Bass, Solomon Carter, and James Robbins in Heinegg, http://www.freeafricanamericans.com/Virginia_NC.htm, Bailey-Berry, Campbell-Charity, Roberts-Sawyer; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Third Census of the United States, 1810, North Carolina* [Microfilm] vol 5, Reel 42, National Archives and Records Administration, Digitized at Internet Archive, <https://archive.org/details/populationschedu0042unix/page/n111>, 715.

other merry events, including the barbecues he held to bring voters to the polls. He was buried with full military honors and the Fayetteville militia penned a poem for him in 1858.²⁶

These men aside, no black veteran in North Carolina achieved more notoriety than John Chavis. A native North Carolinian who served among Virginia's forces, Chavis hailed from the large and comparatively powerful Chavis family, residents along the Virginia/Carolina border. His extended family included large owners of both land and enslaved peoples and traced their wealth to a land grant from Lord Granville himself. After his military service, John became the first black preacher of a Presbyterian church, attended Princeton, and established a school for whites, though he also taught free black children. He undoubtedly achieved a high degree of esteem, but some pupils later described him as "black as coal," or noted that he displayed more intelligence than his skin color indicated, illustrating the racial considerations even an educated and revered black man fought.²⁷

Despite their economic maladies and devalued status in some respects, North Carolina free people of color after the Revolution enjoyed many of the same rights and opportunities as their white countrymen. In fact, Warren Milteer has argued their status was generally closer to that of whites than enslaved black people. Their standing varied across time, but depended largely on gender, class, reputation, and industry or occupation, more than simply skin color. From 1776 until 1835, they, like North Carolina whites, could vote if they held property, and they also won court cases and enjoyed property rights. While legislation barred them from certain freedoms, these exclusions did not reflect the feelings of all white North Carolinians

²⁶ Moss and Scoggins, *African-American Patriots*, 108; RWP, Mark Murray, R7523; RWP, Isaac Hammonds, W7654; Myron B. Pitts, "Barber Had Role in American Revolution, Local Politics; Was 'Revered' by Fellow Militia Men," *Fayetteville Observer*, February 28, 2017, <https://www.fayobserver.com/news/20170227/barber-had-role-in-american-revolution-local-politics-was-revered-by-fellow-militia-men>.

²⁷ Othow, *John Chavis*, 1-17.

toward them. Furthermore, relating to veterans specifically, many gained status through various means, including their patriotic service to their country and community. Their freedom did not translate to all black North Carolinians, however, as the slave trade grew, and sheriffs re-enslaved many manumitted black individuals freed during the Revolution. Fears of slave revolts in the late 1790s and early years of the nineteenth century also increased white unease and paranoia, potentially inculcating a suspicion of free black people as well.²⁸

Pensions and the Evidence of Esteem

In this tumultuous period, however, North Carolina's black veterans of the Revolution created a disturbance in the racial ordering of its society. Owing largely to the respect and connections they earned with their service, and a newfound societal appreciation for former Continental soldiers, they proved a unique group, often defended by white neighbors if not friends. As evidenced in the language and testimonies of witnesses in their pension applications, they, as veterans, achieved a modicum of respect, not necessarily applicable to all free people of color, but appreciated by themselves and their families. Pensions followed two rounds of legislative acts, first in 1818, then again in 1832. The first act granted federal assistance only to those Continental veterans that could demonstrate financial hardship, though the second round opened this assistance to all soldiers.²⁹ Both the language contained in the applications, as well as descriptions by petitioners of their decisions to apply for aid reveal insights into the status of North Carolina's black veterans.

Of the 126 pensions relating to North Carolina's black soldiers, 62 contain language or testimony that can be considered as either affirmative or derogatory towards the petitioner or

²⁸ Milteer Jr., "The Complications of Liberty," ii-12; Franklin, *The Free Negro*, 82-87.

²⁹ Crackel, "Revolutionary War Pension Applications."

people of color. Interestingly, only 26 of the pensions contain references to the color of the applicant, and occasionally their widow if they were the one applying for assistance. Some pensions include both positive and negative appraisals, though the vast majority of character depictions appear affirmative. For the purposes of this study, the testimony of other black veterans, whether detailed or merely confirming the applicant's service, is considered positive. Some of the applicant's own personal testimonies are also considered positive, as they frequently listed members of their communities they knew well who could vouch for their service or character, illustrating their perceived respectability. Furthermore, some pension applicants received special testimony or written affidavits from state representatives or high-ranking military officers, also indicating their unique connections and status. Together, these applications suggest a societal concern for ailing Revolutionary War veterans in North Carolina, regardless of skin color.³⁰

The positive testimony toward black veterans varied in its level of affirmation. John Artis, for instance, received supporting letters from Judge Archibald Murphey signifying he satisfactorily proved his service and need of assistance. He also drew supporting testimony before a judge from fellow black veteran William Lomack and testified on his behalf in turn. Lomack swore that he and Artis served in the same regiment, that Artis "did faithfully perform his duty, and received an honorable discharge. Furthermore, he was "personally acquainted with the indigent circumstances" of Artis in 1820. Artis elaborated in more detail when testifying for Lomack though, recalling their experience together in the Battle of Stono Ferry, as well as the faithfulness with which Lomack performed his duties. He also related frequently seeing Lomack's wound from the Battle of Eutaw Springs and his discharge papers that he

³⁰ Statistics compiled by this author. See Figure 2 in Appendix C.

unfortunately lost in a house fire. Both ultimately received federal pensions. Meanwhile, Jesse Harris, a laborer and farmer with only worn tools and kitchen utensils left to his name, received a supporting letter from a John DeLacy, most likely his lawyer, to the federal secretary of war on his behalf. DeLacy noted that the elderly and barely understandable Harris “is known to be so honest that every one is interested for him. Indeed the rage, the unconscionable rage for speculating on this interesting and deserving class of men is now carried to such a pitch as to excite the indignation of every well meaning man....” Amid this caring and positive description of Harris, no mention of his skin color was present in any part of his pension files, even though the 1840 census listed him as an 80-year old pensioner and free person of color. One lawyer even took it as a matter of charity to write the pension department on behalf of “A poor man of color,” Daniel Valentine, that he knew for years as the veteran found himself unable to pay for a legal representative.³¹

Aside from the affidavits of other black veterans or lawyers and representatives, several of North Carolina’s black pensioners received testimony or support from powerful political or military representatives. George Brasfield, a Wake County justice of the peace, testified that he knew John Ellis “(a man of colour) near forty years,” and that he “has ever supported the character of an industrious and honest man & one whose word, or oath may be depended on.” Later, in 1852, Ellis received even more impressive support. William Hill, North Carolina’s secretary of state for a good part of the pension years, typically approached his job with bureaucratic expediency, certifying the details of service for pension applicants with little extra

³¹ RWP, John Artis, S41416; RWP, William Lomack, S41783; RWP, Jesse Harris, W1277, Transcribed by C. Leon Harris, <http://revwarapps.org/w1277.pdf>; RWP, Daniel Valentine, R10820; The 1840 census lists Harris’ skin color and veteran status. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Sixth Census of the United States, 1840, North Carolina, Wayne, Wake County, and Yancey Counties* [Microfilm], vol 10. Roll 374, National Archives and Records Administration, Digitized at Internet Archive, <https://archive.org/details/populationsc18400374unit/page/n3/mode/2up>.

language. In the case of John Ellis, however, he wrote to Congressman Willis Allen, sending copies of land warrant and service evidence and imploring him to write if he could “assist the old soldier anymore.” Allen then swore in a deposition, presumably to the secretary of war, that he knew the then deceased Ellis well for many years and that he “had the reputation in the neighborhood where he resided of being an honest upright man and one who[se] statements his neighbors and those acquainted with him had the utmost confidence.” These statements, atypical as they may be, along with Ellis’ personal acknowledgement of several neighbors and community members familiar with his service and character, suggest the height of esteem that even veterans of color could attain.³²

Similarly to Ellis, Thomas Gibson received testimony on his behalf from state legislator Jacob Gaster, a compatriot of Gibson, along with statements from three other white veterans. William Redman also garnered a supporting affidavit from former militia officer and current North Carolina Congressman Felix Walker. While many black pension applicants sought the testimony of other white veterans, a few secured support from officers. George Pettiford’s pension, for example, contains a supporting statement from Major Thomas Donoho of the North Carolina Continental line. Though Donoho did not recall Pettiford specifically, he was satisfied “from a number of circumstances” of his service in the state line. Elisha Parker, meanwhile, received positive testimony presumably from a relative of the late Jethro Sumner, North Carolina’s most prominent Revolutionary War commander. The Sumner who provided an affidavit revealed the depth of his and Parker’s connection, noting Parker:

hath livd on my land nearley that time [20 years] and in consequence of his being an honest but poor Old Revolutionary I never have charg’d him any Rent for the Land on which he liv’d. and I further beleave the said Parker is an honest man and that I never

³² RWP, John Ellis, S32233.

have hird anything against His carectr in the smallest degree and that I do not beleave that He had any intentions to defraud government out of one cent.³³

The advocacy of powerful or influential white men undoubtedly aided the likelihood of receiving a pension. However, a few white men even utilized the testimony of the black veterans in their own applications. James Outlaw, a white Bertie County resident who testified for several black veterans, in turn received a supporting statement from John Butler, confirming simply that the two of them served together during the duration of Outlaw's term. James Harris, a North Carolina militia man, also testified on behalf of the widow Nancy Critz that he served as a cook for her husband, Virginia militia Captain Hamon Critz, during his stint in North Carolina in the fall of 1780. Additionally, even though they never provided sworn testimony on each other's behalf, James Haskins, a Granville County resident, described William Taburn and several white men as "brother soldiers," and noted Taburn's sad residence in the county poor house. In at least one instance, a black veteran even testified against the claims of a white pension applicant. John Gibson, providing an affidavit for Richard Vernon, confirmed Vernon's service but subtly countered the lengths of a few militia terms claimed by the applicant.³⁴

A few other pensions suggest interesting nuances among white neighbors in their attitudes toward North Carolina's black veterans. Mark Murray, a mulatto man, received several glowing appraisals from justices of the peace and neighbors from North Carolina and Tennessee. One neighbor who knew him in Halifax and his later residence in Tennessee described Murray and his wife as "very respectable for coloured people." Another Tennessee neighbor similarly

³³ RWP, Thomas Gibson, S8560; RWP, William Redman, R8645; RWP, George Pettiford, W9223, Transcribed by C. Leon Harris, <http://revwarapps.org/w9223.pdf>; RWP, Elisha Parker, S11211; Jethro Sumner died in 1785 so the affidavit signed by a Jethro Sumner was presumably from a descendent living in Nansemond County, Virginia in 1835. Dr. Lawrence Babits, email message to author, March 15, 2020.

³⁴ Butler was listed as white in numerous census counts. RWP, James Outlaw, S41929, Transcribed by Will Graves, <http://revwarapps.org/s41929.pdf>; RWP, Hamon Critz, W6755, Transcribed by C. Leon Harris, <http://revwarapps.org/w6755.pdf>; RWP, James Haskins, W19723; RWP, Richard Vernon, S1883, Transcribed by Will Graves, <http://revwarapps.org/s1883.pdf>.

revealed that “I have such confidence in the man that I would believe anything he would state upon any subject,” further adding that “He was a man of first rate character although a mixed coloured man.” Similarly, after questions arose in the pension office over land transactions by Isaac Perkins, his neighbors provided an affidavit testifying that though he was a colored man “we do believe him to be too honest in principal to practice anything like a frawd.”³⁵ These mixed sentiments, affirming the character of an individual to a high degree, while denigrating the larger group of black individuals, suggest the primacy of veteran status in establishing respect among whites.

As noted, however, most pension applications of North Carolina’s black veterans reveal positive relations and connections with other veterans, and among their communities. Arthur Toney’s application, and the testimony of at least twelve presumably white witnesses, reveal the esteem both he and his wife enjoyed within Caswell County society. Neighbors testified that Thomas Gibson had a reputation in his community for being both truthful and a veteran. John Womble’s reputation preceded him as two witnesses provided affidavits claiming they heard General Thomas Blount and Colonel John Ingles speak “in the highest terms of approbation of the Revolutionary services of John Womble.” Mark Murray, detailed earlier, was frequently known to talk and joke with several other veterans “about their campaign exploits,” and a witness noted of his character and honesty “I have never heard anyone impugn.” Gilbert Evans, himself the son of Revolutionary War veteran, swore he often heard Exum Scott talk with his father, among others, about his service and noted that Scott “always bore the character of a revolutionary soldier and [was] always treated as such.” Another Wake County resident also testified that he frequently heard his own father talk about Scott’s services, and at various times,

³⁵ RWP, Mark Murray, R7523; RWP, Isaac Perkins, S41953.

saw the two of them recall their tales in public places and at the courthouse. Furthermore, he added that both Scott and his wife were considered truthful and respectable.³⁶ These instances, and the sheer number of interested witnesses for several pensioners, suggest that North Carolina's black veterans, much like their white counterparts, achieved a degree of respect among many in the community.

Toward an Unfitting End

Despite the overall support for many veterans, a few of their pensions also reveal legal challenges they and their families faced in acquiring assistance. When Elizabeth Mason, the widow of Thomas Mason, applied for a pension in Virginia in the 1850s, her application warranted lengthy explanatory notes from attorneys clarifying the rights of free people of color to marry, hold property, and testify in such pension cases. Despite the testimony of both white and black witnesses, and the legal arguments of several bureaucrats, the government rejected Elizabeth in her appeal. Even earlier, James Harris' 1835 application in Virginia drew questions from a white neighbor, concerned if free black men were eligible for pensions, as he sought to "detect fraud." In response, a Virginia veteran and a judge swore that free men of color were compelled to serve and did so in North and South Carolina during the Revolution. A member of Congress, N.H. Claiborne, also examined North Carolina law books to prove black men in North Carolina served in the militia until 1814. Similarly, Andrew Ferguson, a black soldier from Virginia, testified that he hoped to apply for a pension after the Act of 1818, but "was told at that

³⁶ RWP, Arthur Toney, W4835; RWP, Thomas Gibson, S8560; RWP, John Womble, S42083; RWP, Mark Murray, R7523; RWP, Exum Scott, W5994.

time a Colored man could not get a pension” and he “never was undeceived” until some years later.³⁷

The remainder of the pensions reveal no such discriminatory admissions, except in the cases of John Ellis and Holiday Hathcock. Ellis wrote in 1832 that he did not apply for a pension under the previous act “because he was informed and believed he could not obtain a pension.” It is not clear if he simply faced uncertainty because of his length of service, his estate value, or because of some racial connotation. Holiday Hathcock’s pension contains a more explicit acknowledgement of racism factoring into his aid. An 1854 note from a concerned North Carolinian to the federal pension commissioner boldly critiques that even though Hathcock provided the necessary witnesses and documentation of service, “his case has been suspended merely because he was a free man of color.”³⁸ Though the majority of these cases relate to Virginia, and date from the mid to late Antebellum period when Southern society tightened its racialization, they suggest the possibility that other veterans residing in North Carolina may have also encountered racial obstacles and obfuscation applying for federal aid.

Though these latter cases challenge the idea that North Carolina’s black veterans achieved a high degree of respect or nominal equality, they may be understood as representing a shifting legal landscape over time. North Carolina passed several laws, including the aforementioned militia act in 1812, that restricted the rights of free black individuals to increasing degrees in the Antebellum period. During this era, slavery became solidified in the South along racial lines, and legislation limited both free and enslaved people of color alike. In

³⁷ Damani Davis, “The Rejection of Elizabeth Mason: The Case of a “Free Colored” Revolutionary Widow,” *Prologue* 43, no. 2 (Summer, 2011), <https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2011/summer/mason.html>; RWP, Thomas Mason, R6993; RWP, James Harris, W11223; RWP, Andrew Ferguson, S32243.

³⁸ RWP, John Ellis, S32233; RWP, Holiday Hethcock, R4812. Ellis was eligible for a pension as a Continental veteran.

1822, Hertford County's free black citizens were appalled by a new law allowing enslaved people to testify against them, and their petition for redress received the support of white petitioners as well. As Warren Milteer explains, many whites believed their free black neighbors fit their ideals of respectability and honesty and were thusly upset by their grouping closer to the status of enslaved people. They also apparently believed that free black residents, still allowed to bear arms, vote, and hold property, including slaves, were citizens of the state.³⁹

Whatever their internal feelings, free people of color, including black veterans, seldom displayed outward affinity or efforts to liberate or ease the burden upon the enslaved. Such moves or agitations undoubtedly would have risked their own liberty and status. At least three black veterans, Solomon Carter, Council Bass, and Cannon Cumbo, propagated the developing slave economy in North Carolina, acquiring and owning slaves themselves. This propertied status may explain Bass' changed designation between the 1790 and 1810 census, from an "other free" man to that of a white citizen. North Carolina's free black inhabitants, regardless of veteran status, largely staked their bets upon cooperation with white neighbors instead and had for some time. The assembly, however, feared a connection between free black and enslaved people. In 1826, North Carolina passed legislation preventing the migration of free people of color into the state, although officials only intermittently enforced its restrictions. Finally, in 1835, North Carolina, the last Southern state allowing free black property holders to vote, abolished this right with its revised constitution. White petitions against these and other restrictions, or for exemptions for certain individuals, suggest that the denigrated status of free black individuals was not wholly supported.⁴⁰

³⁹ See Bass, Carter, and Cumbo in Heinegg, http://www.freeafricanamericans.com/Virginia_NC.htm, Bailey-Berry, Campbell-Charity, Cousins-Davenport; Milteer Jr., "The Complications of Liberty," 108-115.

⁴⁰ Milteer Jr., "The Complications of Liberty," 106-109, 117-129.

The pension applications of North Carolina's black veterans subtly reflect this change in societal opinion. Of the 126 pensions surveyed, only 26 mention the applicant's (or widow's) color or status as a free black individual. Of these, 12 are from the first round of pensions, while 14 pertain to applicants under the 1832 act. In both pension periods, roughly 20 percent of applications mention color or free black status. However, of these 26, the six rejected applications all follow the second pension act of 1832.⁴¹ While the color of pension applicants was presumably equally apparent to judges and witnesses during both periods, it appears that it mattered more during the later years as the legal rights and status of free people of color receded. Judith Van Buskirk likewise finds that the overall rate of black pension denials increased from 3 to 13 percent in regard to the 1818 and 1832 acts. The white rejection rate moved from 8 to 13 percent over the same period. Though this later pension legislation was open to more veterans and their families, by this point fewer remained to claim compensation or provide witness to former comrades. John Hammond, applying for a pension in 1852 at age 98, was noted by several witnesses as one of the oldest citizens they knew. Though some men like Morris Evans reportedly lived to age 105, even the youngest of Revolutionary soldiers likely died before the Civil War tore the nation they fought for apart.⁴²

Conclusions

The post-war lives of North Carolina's black Revolutionary War soldiers saw a few indefinite and uneven changes, but also a large degree of continuity. Some of these soldiers

⁴¹ Statistics compiled by this author. See Figure 2 in Appendix C.

⁴² Van Buskirk, *Standing in Their Own Light*, 197, 209; RWP, John Hammond, S6854; Morris' age explained in *The Hillsborough Recorder* (Hillsborough, NC), September 10, 1832. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84026472/1834-09-10/ed-1/seq-3/>, 3.

moved elsewhere, but most remained in their home state, if not their original communities. They continued fighting for compensation and status in their post-war lives just as they had in service. That even Mark Murray, with a lengthy affidavit and glowing testimonies of friends, neighbors, and fellow veterans, was ultimately denied a pension reveals this fight was not always successful.⁴³ Several of these soldiers' families were touched by their loss or debilitating injuries, and many veterans themselves received little to no economic reward—plights not uncommon among white veterans as well. Yet the service of these particular black soldiers proved valuable in some manners. The tenuous camaraderie, connections, and esteem they garnered among other veterans, and possibly the larger white community, mattered both in economic and social terms. These gains did not lift the larger free black community into an equal standing with white citizens, but they muddied and complicated the increasingly strict racial boundaries for these veterans and their families as the state and larger nation they helped to establish reneged on the promises of the Revolution.

⁴³ Van Buskirk, *Standing in Their Own Light*, 220.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

At best, North Carolina's black Patriots of the American Revolution emerged from a demeaned and devalued position within society but fought and bettered their position to a meaningful degree. Primarily free men of color and active citizens of the colony, soon a state, they fought alongside white neighbors for many of the same reasons, but their disadvantaged economic and social status also enticed many to hedge their bets on the potential of the upstart nation to better their plights. This mix of self-interest, civic and community virtues, as well as the somewhat egalitarian draft balloting brought them into armed service where they bore the burdens of army life and duty as well as any of their compatriots, affecting the war while also feeling its weight upon themselves. Their dedication and proficiency fostered uneven but invaluable camaraderie and connections with their compatriots, connections that proved vital as they navigated the tenuous and imperfect society they helped to created.

North Carolina's black veterans of the Revolutionary War struggled alongside their white counterparts for compensation in the changing post-war world. The largely divergent statuses they assumed in the course of American history meant, however, that the black soldiers of the war were largely forgotten or unaddressed in both popular and public circles. North Carolina black soldiers shared this plight along with their counterparts from the other states. In recent decades, their descendants, politicians, and a largely unfamiliar public have struggled to acknowledge and commemorate their actions and legacies at both the state and national levels.

In 1980 controversy erupted among the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), a group that honors their documented ancestral Patriots of the war. The first African American woman gained membership three years earlier, but the second applicant, Lena Santos Ferguson, struggled to find the two required members of a local chapter to sponsor her acceptance into the

DAR. The parallels to the struggles of her forebearers to secure witnesses for their pension applications are more than ironic. The unclear legal status of black marriages in early American history thwarted many widow and child pension claims while its genealogical effects, along with outright racism, initially prevented their descendants from joining an organization celebrating their place in the national story.¹

Ferguson's fight, which ultimately led to her inclusion in a DAR chapter, with the support of several white members, also prompted the DAR and federal government to partake in serious efforts to research, identify, and commemorate black Patriots of the Revolution. After the lobbying of one Connecticut representative, President Ronald Reagan signed legislation in 1984 honoring black people who contributed to American independence during the Revolution. Maurice Barboza, an African American lobbyist, used this legislation to urge House and Senate representatives to sponsor a bill authorizing a monument in their honor. Reagan signed a further act in 1986 authorizing such a memorial to be built with non-federal funding. The Black Revolutionary War Patriots Foundation led this mission for more than a decade, attempting to raise funds and create a design for the monument. Ultimately, however, their efforts fell short of the authorized deadline in 2005.²

In 2014, President Barack Obama, possibly a descendant of the enslaved Virginian John Punch and North Carolina free black soldier Clement Bunch, signed into law an act authorizing the National Liberty Memorial, to be placed adjacent to the Department of Agriculture headquarters in Washington. The memorial aims to honor not only the soldiers and sailors, but also slaves who ran to freedom and miscellaneous people of color who aided the cause of

¹ Kristin A. Hass, *Sacrificing Soldiers on the National Mall* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 59-64.

² Hass, *Sacrificing Soldiers*, 65-77.

independence. With a fundraising deadline of 2019, however, efforts appear to have stalled once again in constructing this monument.³

Meanwhile, specific commemoration of North Carolina black soldiers, long dormant after the tributes to Isaac Hammond, have gained momentum in recent decades. Surprisingly, the Fayetteville Light Infantry erected a new monument to Hammond in 1964 in the middle of the civil rights struggle. In 2003 local historians, representatives from the American Legion, the Daughters of the American Revolution, as well as descendants of private Jonathan Overton attended a ceremony in Edenton, North Carolina, dedicating a grave marker to the black veteran. An African-American reenactor dressed in the attire of a Continental soldier fittingly stood watch over the ceremony. Furthermore, in 2016 the Isaac Carter Chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution (SAR) opened, becoming the first organizational chapter for descendants of a free man of color.⁴ These commemorations pale in comparison to the public monuments and celebrations of white soldiers, but they provide a basis for a long-overdue remembrance of North Carolinian and national soldiers of color who fought for the many meanings of freedom during the American Revolution.

³ Tom Jackman, "Memorial for Black Revolutionary War Soldiers Finds Spot on Mall After 30 Years," *Washington Post*, October 16, 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/memorial-for-black-revolutionary-war-soldiers-finds-spot-on-mall-after-30-years/2014/10/16/e69e338a-54a0-11e4-809b-8cc0a295c773_story.html; Sheryl Gay Stolberg, "Obama Has Ties to Slavery Not by His Father But His Mother, Research Suggests," *The New York Times*, July 30, 2012, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/30/us/obamas-mother-had-african-forebear-study-suggests.html>; See Clement Bunch and the Bunch history in Heinegg, http://www.freeafricanamericans.com/Virginia_NC.htm, Brooks-Byrd; "Mission and Purpose," National Liberty Memorial, <http://libertyfunddc.com/mission-and-purpose>.

⁴ "Isaac Hammond Memorial, Fayetteville," *Commemorative Landscapes*, DocSouth, <https://docsouth.unc.edu/commland/monument/395/>; Frank Roberts, "Black Veteran of Revolution Honored," *The Virginian-Pilot*, February 20, 2003; "Patriot Isaac Carter Chapter," North Carolina Sons of the American Revolution, <https://www.ncssar.org/chapters/patriot-isaac-carter/>.

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APPENDIX A: COMPILED ROSTERS

Possible and Presumed Black Soldiers Identified by This Study

Isaac Bass – Listed in a 1777 roster of the Tenth Regiment, a black man named Isaac was among the large Bass family, though he was born in 1738, making him nearly forty years old during service if this is the same individual.

1

James Beaver – Beaver was listed a substitute in Granville County's militia draft in 1778 along with numerous other confirmed and possible black men. He was listed as having a "swarthy" complexion.²

Phillip Byrd – Bird was in a Northampton County militia regiment in 1780 and the head of a household of five free "others" in that county's 1790 census.³

James Davidson – He was described as black in complexion in a roster of the Third Regiment in 1781. He was also a drafted into service for twelve months.⁴

Richard Edwards – One of the many Granville County draftees, Edwards was described notably as "rather dark complected," though he was a blacksmith.⁵

Ephraim Elsmore – A 1782 substitute in Lincoln County, Elsmore was listed with a brown complexion, black hair, and brown eyes.⁶

Jacobus Ferguson – He was listed on the back of a Third Regiment roster as a captive slave. His role was unclear.⁷

¹ "A List of Capt Sheppard's Company," May 18, 1777, Troop Returns, North Carolina Digital Collections, <http://digital.ncdcr.gov/cdm/compoundobject/collection/p16062coll26/id/595/rec/15>; See Isaac Bass in Heinegg, http://www.freeafricanamericans.com/Virginia_NC.htm, Bailey-Berry.

² "Size Roll taken by Capt. Ralph Williams of Men enrolled in Granville County May 25th 1778 to fill the North Carolina quota of Continental Soldiers," Transcribed by Will Graves, <http://revwarapps.org/b250.pdf>.

³ "Northampton County: List of Men," March 15, 1780, Troop Returns, North Carolina Digital Collections, <http://digital.ncdcr.gov/cdm/compoundobject/collection/p16062coll26/id/945/rec/272>; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Third Census of the United States, 1790, North Carolina* [Microfilm], Vol 1, Reel 7, National Archives and Records Administration, Digitized at Internet Archive, <https://archive.org/details/populationsc17900007unit/page/n341/mode/2up>.

⁴ "A Descriptive Roll of the Drafts Deser[paper torn]ents Rec'd by Lieut. John McNees of the 3d North Carolina Regiment at Halifax (Undated)," Transcribed by Will Graves, <http://revwarapps.org/b287.pdf>.

⁵ "Size Roll taken by Capt. Ralph Williams of Men enrolled in Granville County May 25th 1778 to fill the North Carolina quota of Continental Soldiers," Transcribed by Will Graves, <http://revwarapps.org/b250.pdf>

⁶ "A Descriptive List of Men Raised from Morgan District," (1782?), Alexander Brevard Papers, State Archives of North Carolina.

⁷ "A Descriptive Roll of the Drafts Deser[paper torn]ents Rec'd by Lieut. John McNees of the 3d North Carolina Regiment at Halifax (Undated)," Transcribed by Will Graves, <http://revwarapps.org/b287.pdf>.

Hezekiah Hargrave – Like Elsmore, Hargrave was noted as having a brown complexion and other dark features in the same roster.⁸

Sherwood Harris – Harris served two and a half years in the Continental Line, likely in the Second Regiment. He was listed as head of a non-white household in the 1810 census of Granville County.⁹

Corbin Hickman – He was 18 when drafted in Granville County in 1778 and was noted as having a brown complexion.¹⁰

Jacob (Jesse) Holly – Holly served two years in the Continental line and headed a non-white household in Halifax County in 1810.¹¹

John Hopkins – Like Beaver, Hopkins was a “swarthy” substitute in Granville County.¹²

John McLane – McLane was listed among several Bladen County enlistees to the Continental army in 1782 and was described as having a black complexion.¹³

Dempsey Ransom – Along with Elsmore and Hargrave, Ransom was a black man enlisted in the Continental Line from the Morgan District in 1782.¹⁴

Benjamin Robinson – Robinson enlisted in 1776 for three years in the Continental Line. His discharge from 1780 describes his complexion as “black.”¹⁵

John Sullivan – Noted as a deserter from General Greene’s Army in summer 1781, he was described as “being detained by his Master, from joining agreeable to his Furlough.” He may have been the John Sullivan died in April 1783 or another who deserted in late 1783. No other information has been established surrounding his identity.¹⁶

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ RWP, Sherwood Harris, W3984, Transcribed by C. Leon Harris, <http://revwarapps.org/w3984.pdf>; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Third Census of the United States, 1810, North Carolina* [Microfilm], Vol 5, Reel 40, National Archives and Records Administration, Digitized at Internet Archive, <https://archive.org/details/populationschedu0040unix/page/n227/mode/2up>.

¹⁰ “Size Roll taken by Capt. Ralph Williams of Men enrolled in Granville County May 25th 1778 to fill the North Carolina quota of Continental Soldiers,” Transcribed by Will Graves, <http://revwarapps.org/b250.pdf>

¹¹ RWP, Jacob Holly, W21388, Transcribed by Will Graves, <http://revwarapps.org/w21388.pdf>; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Third Census of the United States, 1810, North Carolina* [Microfilm], Vol 5, Reel 38, National Archives and Records Administration, Digitized at Internet Archive, <https://archive.org/details/populationschedu0038unix/page/n183/mode/2up>.

¹² “Size Roll taken by Capt. Ralph Williams of Men enrolled in Granville County May 25th 1778 to fill the North Carolina quota of Continental Soldiers,” Transcribed by Will Graves, <http://revwarapps.org/b250.pdf>.

¹³ “Descriptive List of the Men of Bladen County: Delivered August 20, 1782,” Troop Returns, North Carolina Digital Collections, <http://digital.ncdcr.gov/cdm/compoundobject/collection/pl6062coll26/id/1017/rec/320>.

¹⁴ “A Descriptive List of Men Raised from Morgan District,” (1782?), Alexander Brevard Papers, State Archives of North Carolina.

¹⁵ RWP, Benjamin Robinson, S41996.

¹⁶ “General Greene’s Orders, High Hills of the Santee, S.C., Aug 5, 1781,” in *The Papers of General Nathanael Greene*, vol. 9, 131; Daughters of the American Revolution, *Roster of Soldiers From North Carolina in the American Revolution*, 2nd edition (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1967), 163, 167.

Thomas Wiggins – Listed in a company with exceptionally high numbers of black and mulatto men, Thomas Wiggins or “Wiggens” was plausibly a black man himself based on the commonality of that last name.¹⁷

Francis Wilkerson – He was just sixteen when drafted in Granville County. He was described as having “dark complexion dark Eyes and black short hair.”¹⁸

Yates, ? – A 1782 roster describes this man of “yellow” complexion as an eighteen-month substitute in Thomas Hogg’s regiment. His first name is illegible.¹⁹

¹⁷ See the Wiggins family in Heinegg, http://www.freeafricanamericans.com/Weeks_Young.htm, Weeks-Young.

¹⁸ “Size Roll taken by Capt. Ralph Williams of Men enrolled in Granville County May 25th 1778 to fill the North Carolina quota of Continental Soldiers,” Transcribed by Will Graves, <http://revwarapps.org/b250.pdf>

¹⁹ Clark, *The State Records of North Carolina*, vol. 14, 294; “Descriptive List of the drafts and substitutes from Edgecombe County Received by Major Thomas Hogg,” August 1, 1782, Troop Returns, North Carolina Digital Collections, <http://digital.ncdcr.gov/cdm/compoundobject/collection/p16062coll26/id/1020/rec/312>.

APPENDIX A

Enslaved or Formerly Enslaved Soldiers

Cotance, Jack – Cotance may have been enslaved in Princess Anne County Virginia before his service.¹

Davis, Richard – Enslaved earlier in his life, Davis enlisted in 1777 presumably in exchange for freedom. He, his wife, and his children were all eventually legally emancipated after the war.²

Ferguson, Jacobus – See Appendix A: Possible and Presumed Black Soldiers Identified by This Study

Griffen, Ed (Ned) – As an enslaved man substituting for someone in exchange for freedom, Griffen took the place of a militiaman who fled at the Battle of Guilford Courthouse and was drafted in the Continental Line for 12 months. Griffen served his term and endured a lengthy legal battle against his reneging master before the state legislature freed and compensated him.³

Hood, William – Hood ran away from enslavement as a child in Virginia before his capture in Halifax, North Carolina. He served in the North Carolina line plausibly in exchange for freedom.⁴

James – He was an enslaved sailor on several voyages who later gained freedom from the Perquimans County court.⁵

Keto (Aka John Martin) – An enslaved Wilmington man, he served and died as a marine aboard a ship that sank. He apparently did not secure permission to enlist from his master.⁶

Titus, Ishmael – Enslaved in Virginia, Titus accompanied his master during the French and Indian War. In the Revolution, he entered service in exchange for freedom and reenlisted for many subsequent terms.⁷

Sullivan, John – See Appendix A: Possible and Presumed Black Soldiers Identified by This Study

¹ See Jack Cotance in Heinegg, http://www.freeafricanamericans.com/Virginia_NC.htm, Church-Cotanch.

² Moss and Scoggins, *African-American Patriots*, 73-74.

³ *Ibid.*, 104.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 124.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 123.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 145.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 233-234.

APPENDIX A

Known Draftees¹

Beaver, James
Boon, Lewis
Bowser, James
Brewington, Joshua
Brown, William
Davidson, James
Edwards, Richard
Gibson, John
Gibson, Wilbourne
Gregory, John
Harris, James
Heathcock (Hathcock), James
Hickman, Corbin
Hopkins, John
Jacobs, Zacharia

* Drafted at some point during the war

Total: 29

¹ Statistics compiled by this author based on information from genealogical and pension sources. They are: "Southern Campaigns Revolutionary War Pension Statements and Rosters," Will Graves ed., <http://revwarapps.org/>; Troop Returns, North Carolina Digital Collections, State Archives of North Carolina <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/digital/custom/troop-returns>; Moss and Scoggins, *African-American Patriots*; and Heinegg, "Free African Americans," http://www.freeafricanamericans.com/Virginia_NC.htm. These men were documented as draftees at some point during their service, though many were volunteers at other points. The actual number of draftees was likely much higher and included those drafted from militia service into the Continental Line. However, identifying those who initially entered service as a draftee is virtually impossible.

APPENDIX A

Soldiers Believed to Have Died During the War¹

Archer, Jesse	Jack, Francis
Artis, Archibald	James, Edwin
Bass, Elijah	Johnston, Brutus*
Bibby, Edmund	Jones, Abraham
Bizzel, Enos	——, Keto
Boon, James	Lott, Job
Burnett, David*	Lucas, Billing
Chavis, Drury	——, Mingo
Cook, Robert	Moore, Cuffy
Cotance, Jack	Moore, Joseph
——, Cubbit	Moore, Lemuel
Day, John*	Norton, Jacob
Demsey, Squire*	Norton, William
Dring, Thomas	Overton, John
Evans, John	Portress, John
Franklin, Ambrose	Powell, Stephen Jr.
Franklin, Charles	Reed, Isaac Jr.
——, Frederick*	Reed, Jacob
Garnes, Gabriel	Roberts, Kitchen*
Garnes, Jeffrey	Scott, John
Garrick, Black	Scott, Nathaniel
Hall, Nathaniel	Tann, James
Hatchcock, Amos	Valentine, Peter
Hull, Jackson*	Wiggins, Henry

* Confirmed or likely death at Valley Forge

Total: 48

¹ Statistics compiled by this author based on information from genealogical and pension sources. They are: "Southern Campaigns Revolutionary War Pension Statements and Rosters," Will Graves ed., <http://revwarapps.org/>; Troop Returns, North Carolina Digital Collections, State Archives of North Carolina <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/digital/custom/troop-returns>; Moss and Scoggins, *African-American Patriots*; and Heinegg, "Free African Americans," http://www.freeafricanamericans.com/Virginia_NC.htm.

APPENDIX A

Accused or Confirmed Deserters¹

Name	Desertion Year
Allen, Arthur	1782
Billy	1776
Brayboy, John	1778
Burnett, William	1780
Carter, Isaac	1783
Cooley, Jeffrey	1778
Dempsey, William	1778
George	1776
Harden, David	1782
Harden, Solomon	1782
Jack	1776
Revell, Nathanael	1779
Stewart William	1780
Sullivan, John	1781
Taburn, Allen	1778

¹ Statistics compiled by this author based on information from genealogical and pension sources. They are: "Southern Campaigns Revolutionary War Pension Statements and Rosters," Will Graves ed., <http://revwarapps.org/>; Troop Returns, North Carolina Digital Collections, State Archives of North Carolina <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/digital/custom/troop-returns>; Moss and Scoggins, *African-American Patriots*; and Heinegg, "Free African Americans," http://www.freeafricanamericans.com/Virginia_NC.htm.

APPENDIX A

Indentured or Apprenticed Black Soldiers¹

Bibby, Edmund	Lucus, Thomas
Bibby, Edward	Mills, Daniel*
Bibby, Solomon	Moore, Joseph*
Burnett, Saunders	Moore, Lemuel
Carter, Moses	Overton, Jonathan
Chavers, Sherwood	Pugh, Arthur
Demsey, Squire	Pugh, David
Dunstan, William	Revell, Nathanael*
Hathcock, Aaron*	Scott, John
James, Benjamin	Spellman, Jacob
James, David	Spellman, Simon*
James, Frederick	Spellman, Tony*
James, Isaac	Tann, Benjamin
James, Jeremiah*	Tyler, Bartlet
James, Jesse	Weaver, John*
James, John	Wiggins, Michael*
James, William	Winn, Zacharia*
Land, Lemon*	

* Possibly still indentured at the time of enlistment based on age or documentation

Total: 35

¹ Statistics compiled by this author based on information from genealogical and pension sources. They are: "Southern Campaigns Revolutionary War Pension Statements and Rosters," Will Graves ed., <http://revwarapps.org/>; Moss and Scoggins, *African-American Patriots*; and Heinegg, "Free African Americans," http://www.freeafricanamericans.com/Virginia_NC.htm.

APPENDIX A

Known Substitutes¹

Bass, Elijah
Carter, John Edward
Denham, Harden
Freeman, Roger
Freeman, William
Garnes, Jeffrey
Griffen, Edward (Ned)
Harden, David
Harden, Solomon
Harris, Jesse
Morgan, Isaac
Overton, Jonathan
Parker, Elisha

* Substitute during one or more tours

Total: 25

¹ Statistics compiled by this author based on information from genealogical and pension sources. They are: "Southern Campaigns Revolutionary War Pension Statements and Rosters," Will Graves ed., <http://revwarapps.org/>; Troop Returns, North Carolina Digital Collections, State Archives of North Carolina <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/digital/custom/troop-returns>; Moss and Scoggins, *African-American Patriots*; and Heinegg, "Free African Americans," http://www.freeafricanamericans.com/Virginia_NC.htm.

APPENDIX B: INITIAL ENLISTMENTS

Figure 1. Known Pre-Enlistment Residences

Region	Number	Percent of Total
Virginia Border Bertie, Bute, Caswell, Chowan, Currituck, Edgecombe, Franklin, Gates, Granville, Halifax, Hertford, Nash, Northampton, Pasquotank, Perquimans, Person, Warren	225	61
Halifax and Granville Counties	80	22
Cross Creek/Cape Fear Region Bladen, Cumberland, Robeson, Sampson	38	10
New Bern Craven	22	6
Regulator Region Dobbs, Guilford, Orange, Randolph, Rowan, Wake	20	6
Wilmington Region Brunswick, New Hanover	9	2
Western (Morgan) District Burke, Lincoln, Rutherford	6	2
Elsewhere in North Carolina	37	10
Virginia	10	3
South Carolina	1	<1

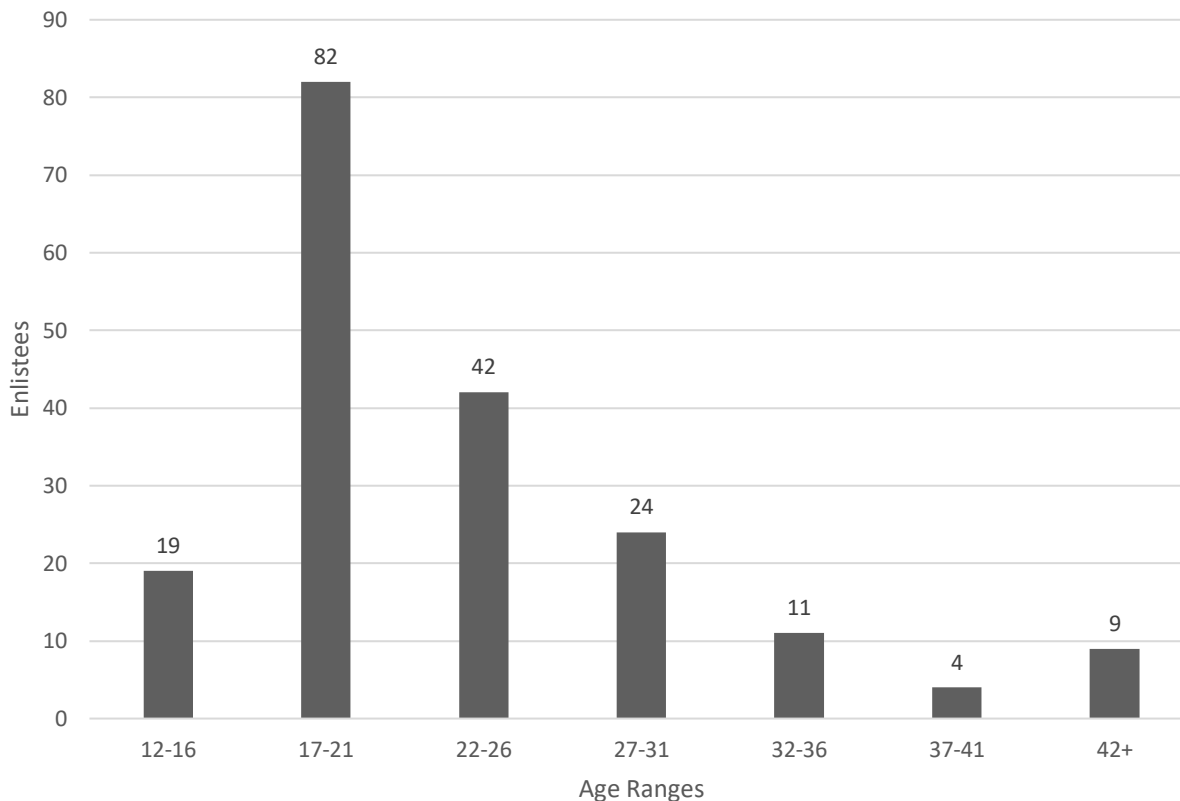
*All Percentages Approximate

Total: 368

Source: Statistics compiled by this author based on information from genealogical and pension sources. They are: "Southern Campaigns Revolutionary War Pension Statements and Rosters," Will Graves ed., <http://revwarapps.org/>; Troop Returns, North Carolina Digital Collections, State Archives of North Carolina <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/digital/custom/troop-returns>; Moss and Scoggins, *African-American Patriots*; and Heinegg, "Free African Americans," http://www.freeafricanamericans.com/Virginia_NC.htm.

APPENDIX B

Figure 2. Age at Initial Enlistment



Total: 191

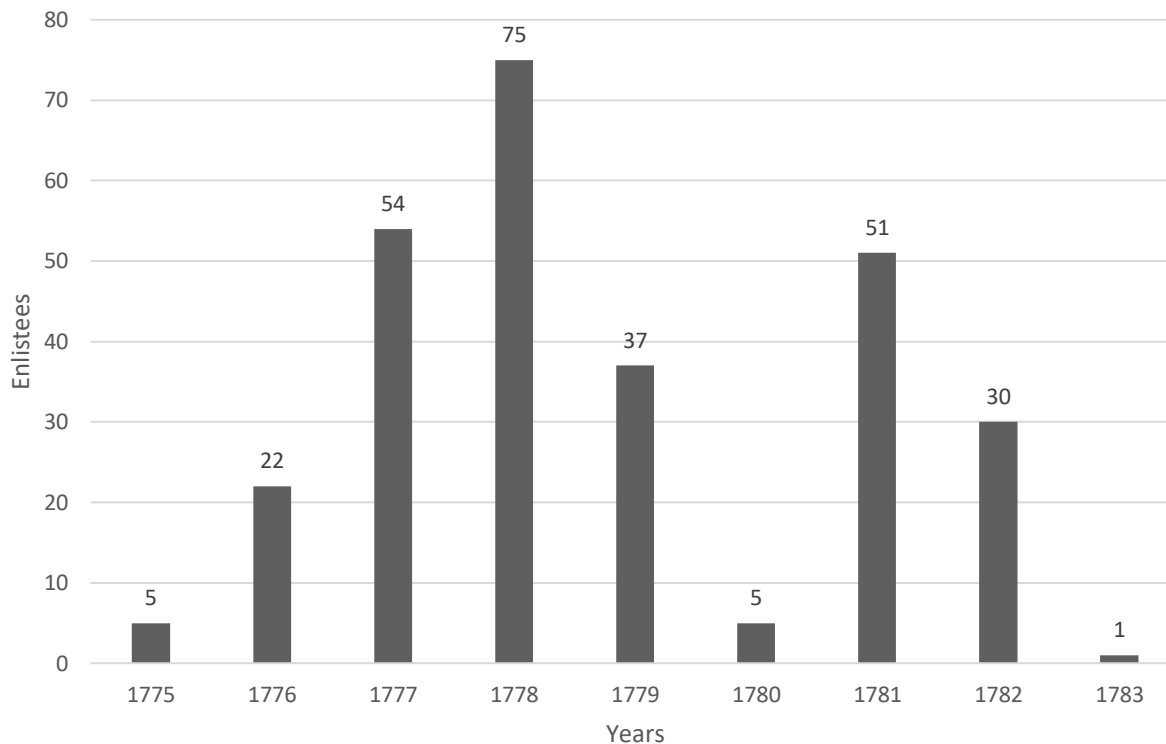
Average: 23.6

Mode: 22

Source: Statistics compiled by this author based on information from genealogical and pension sources. They are: "Southern Campaigns Revolutionary War Pension Statements and Rosters," Will Graves ed., <http://revwarapps.org/>; Troop Returns, North Carolina Digital Collections, State Archives of North Carolina <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/digital/custom/troop-returns>; Moss and Scoggins, *African-American Patriots*; and Heinegg, "Free African Americans," http://www.freeafricanamericans.com/Virginia_NC.htm.

APPENDIX B

Figure 3. Periods of Initial Enlistment



Total: 282

Source: Statistics compiled by this author based on information from genealogical and pension sources. They are: "Southern Campaigns Revolutionary War Pension Statements and Rosters," Will Graves ed., <http://revwarapps.org/>; Troop Returns, North Carolina Digital Collections, State Archives of North Carolina <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/digital/custom/troop-returns>; Moss and Scoggins, *African-American Patriots*; and Heinegg, "Free African Americans," http://www.freeafricanamericans.com/Virginia_NC.htm.

APPENDIX C: POST WAR STATISTICS

Figure 1. Known Post-War Residences

	Number	Percent of Total
Virginia Border Bertie, Caswell, Chowan, Currituck, Edgecombe, Franklin, Gates, Granville, Halifax, Hertford, Nash, Northampton, Pasquotank, Person, Warren	141	45
Halifax and Granville Counties	56	18
Cross Creek/Cape Fear Region Bladen, Cumberland, Robeson, Sampson	36	11
New Bern Craven	16	5
Regulator Region Dobbs, Guilford, Orange, Randolph, Rowan, Wake	19	6
Wilmington Region Brunswick, New Hanover	16	5
Western Region Buncombe, Burke, Lincoln, Rutherford, Wilkes	3	<1
Elsewhere in North Carolina Anson, Beaufort, Camden, Carteret, Chatham, Columbus, Duplin, Hyde, Johnston, Jones, Lenoir, Martin, Mecklenburg, Montgomery, Moore, Onslow, Pitt, Richmond, Surry, Tyrell, Wayne	42	13
Tennessee	12	4
Virginia	8	3
South Carolina	8	3
Indiana	4	1
Kentucky	3	<1
Georgia	3	<1
Alabama	1	<1
Massachusetts	1	<1
Pennsylvania	1	<1
Illinois	1	<1

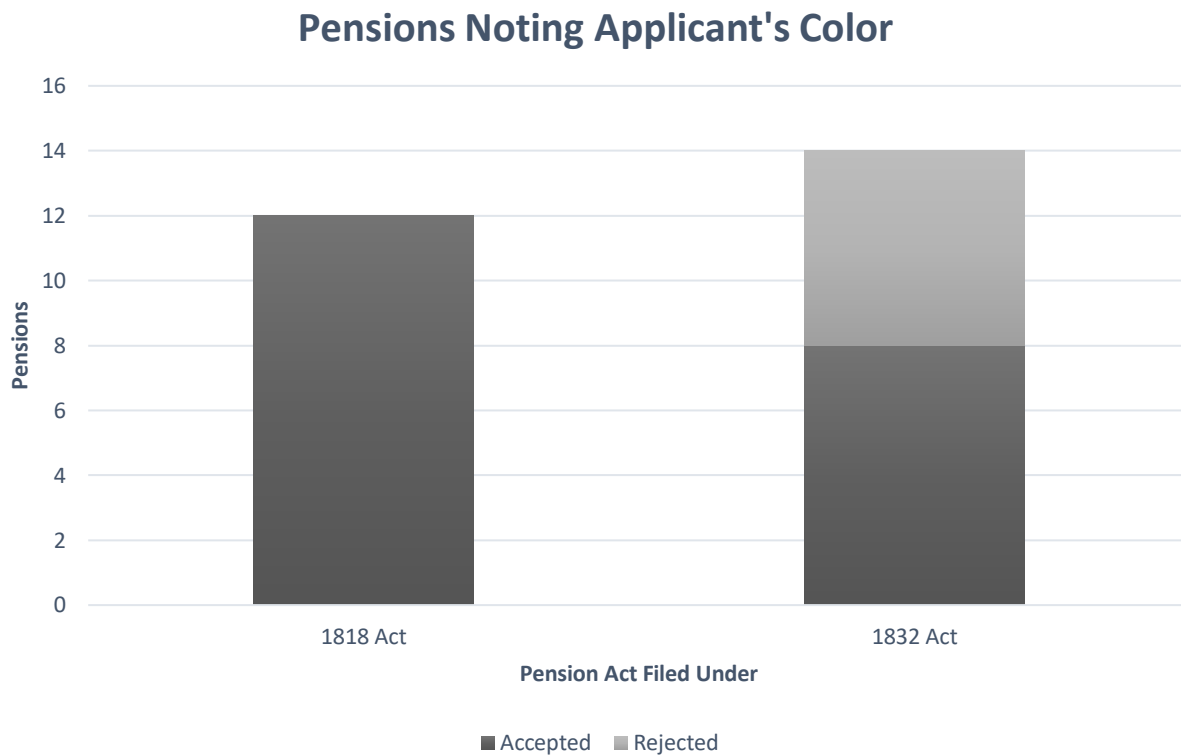
* All Percentages Approximate

Total: 315

Source: Statistics compiled by this author based on information from genealogical and pension sources. They are: "Southern Campaigns Revolutionary War Pension Statements and Rosters," Will Graves ed., <http://revwarapps.org/>; Troop Returns, North Carolina Digital Collections, State Archives of North Carolina <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/digital/custom/troop-returns>; Moss and Scoggins, *African-American Patriots*; and Heinegg, "Free African Americans," http://www.freeafricanamericans.com/Virginia_NC.htm.

APPENDIX C

Figure 2. Color and Rejection Rates in Pensions



Source: Statistics compiled by this author from pension applications: "Southern Campaigns Revolutionary War Pension Statements and Rosters," Will Graves ed., <http://revwarapps.org/>.

APPENDIX C

Property Values of Black and White Veterans under 1818 Act

Black and white veterans filing for a pension under the 1818 Act were supposed to demonstrate financial hardship, typically by providing an appraised listing of their property. Often the property contained miscellaneous items, livestock, bedding, clothing, and other property or land that may or may not have been appraised. Many men also did not list items, but only noted their poverty and need. It is difficult to measure the comparative levels of poverty for veterans of different races, though in this sample, aside from Samuel Overton's pre-disaster estate, white veterans typically had more valuable property by a small margin. Both groups included men claiming no personal property, however, or only the clothing on their back.

Note: Ten white veterans were randomly chosen by selecting alphabetically, based on last names, ten veterans who served or resided in North Carolina and filed their own personal pensions under the 1818 Act.

Note: Ten black North Carolina veterans were chosen by randomly drawing from those who filed an individual pension under the 1818 Act.

White Veterans			Black Veterans		
	Name	Value		Name	Value
	Abbot John	175.5		Archer Evans	n/a
	Bailey Manoaah	Clothing		Carter Moses	56.94
	Callahan Valentine	n/a		Hunt Elisha	n/a
	Dail John	0		Jones Hardy	n/a
	Earp Edward	20.6		Manuel Jesse	75
	Farewell James	42		Mason Patrick	27.25
	Gallop Isaac	misc, livestock		Overton Samuel	204+ *
	Hagins William	75		Perkins Isaac	77
	Jenkins Charles	28.5		Robinson Benjamin	7
	Keen William	94.97		Sweat David	0

* Lost most of possessions in fire afterward

Source: "Southern Campaigns Revolutionary War Pension Statements and Rosters." Will Graves, ed.
<http://revwarapps.org/>.

