

Royal North Carolina Regiment ^[1]

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by Carole Watterson Troxler, 2006

The Royal North Carolina Regiment was the premier provincial corps of [Loyalist](#) ^[2] North Carolinians during the [Revolutionary War](#) ^[3]. Provincial corps were regiments that served with British forces; their organization and procedures mirrored those of the British regular troops, but their actual status was somewhere between the British regulars and the Loyalist [militia](#) ^[4]. In issues regarding rank, provincial officers were counted as one rank lower than their regular counterparts. This and other indications of a lesser, "colonial" status rankled provincial officers, particularly those of the Royal North Carolina Regiment, most of whom were Scots. Following the suppression of the 1745 Jacobite Revolt, Scotsmen had been encouraged to join the royal service, with the promise of honorable treatment and equal opportunity for advancement.

The regiment's origins lay in some of the commissions with which Governor [Josiah Martin](#) ^[5] prepared for the Loyalist uprising that met defeat at the [Battle of Moore's Creek Bridge](#) ^[6] in February 1776. Martin called his unit the [North Carolina Highland Regiment](#) ^[7]. The force that Martin coordinated consisted largely of [Scottish Highlanders](#) ^[8] in the Upper Cape Fear area and former [Regulators](#) ^[9] from deeper in the interior. They intended to assist British troops who were expected to land in the Cape Fear estuary early in 1776. The troops did not arrive as scheduled, and with the British rout at the Battle of Moore's Creek Bridge, many North Carolina Highlanders were captured or fled the area, making their way to British forces wherever they could reach them over the next four years.

Meanwhile, in 1777 North Carolina Loyalist John Hamilton refused the state oath of allegiance in [Halifax County](#) ^[10], where most of his property was located, before leaving for the British installation at New York. In New York, Hamilton offered his services and his armed brig *Britannia* for the imminent invasion of the South. The expedition commander, Lt. Col. Archibald Campbell, authorized a new provincial corps, the North Carolina Volunteers, with Hamilton as commander. About 30 men of the new corps, most or all of them officers, were aboard the *Britannia* when Campbell's forces landed in Georgia during the final days of 1778, thus opening the Southern campaign.

Hamilton's North Carolina Volunteers helped defend Savannah against Adm. Count Charles Hector d'Estaing's attack and then fought at Briar Creek, Kettle Creek, Stone Ferry, Moncks Corner, and [Guilford Courthouse](#) ^[11]. When Lord Charles Cornwallis left [Wilmington](#) ^[12], at least 114 of them accompanied him into Virginia and defeat at Yorktown, while others were transferred from Wilmington back to Charles Towne (present-day Charleston, S.C.) in November 1781.

When exchanged to the British in New York, the North Carolina Volunteers were grouped with a unit of the New York Volunteers and traveled with them to New Brunswick, Canada, where they settled. Allen Stewart was the spokesman for this group, which included a number of his relatives and some African Americans who had served in a company of Black Pioneers under Stewart's supervision. Thomas Peters, a former resident of the Cape Fear area and the leading spokesman for black Loyalist settlers in Nova Scotia, was a sergeant in this unit.

The North Carolina Highlanders were reactivated in 1781 during the Southern campaign, with recruiters going from the British-held areas of South Carolina to North Carolina and acting under Martin's 1776 commissions. In 1782 the companies that had remained in South Carolina were joined by the North Carolina Highlanders and John Hamilton's North Carolina Volunteers to constitute the Royal North Carolina Regiment. Hamilton, now a lieutenant colonel, was named commander of the consolidated corps, which embodied more than 1,100 men in the course of the war, with a peak strength of about 750 men. Its losses were heaviest at Hanging Rock and Camden.

After the British evacuated Charles Towne in the fall of 1782, the Royal North Carolina Regiment transferred to St. Mark's garrison fort in St. Augustine, Fla., along with the South Carolina Royalists and the King's Carolina Rangers (a largely Georgia corps). Hamilton led them as the senior provincial officer under the garrison commander, Gen. Archibald McArthur. In February there were rumbles of mutiny in outrage over the British cession of East Florida and West Florida to Spain, but Hamilton's decisive leadership thwarted it. In June 1783 the Royal North Carolina Regiment numbered 496 men in East Florida, with 156 men still listed as "prisoners with the enemy."

When the British pulled out of East Florida, they offered members of the Royal North Carolina Regiment transportation to Britain, the Bahamas, or Nova Scotia, but about one-quarter of the corpsmen did not go. About 30 officers of the regiment

went to Britain, and a few men accompanied McArthur to the Bahamas. Approximately 45 percent of the regiment went to Nova Scotia, along with smaller proportions of the King's Carolina Rangers and South Carolina royalists. They settled together at Country Harbour, about 100 miles east of Halifax. Some of the former corpsmen moved to other parts of Nova Scotia, to New Brunswick, to Scotland, to the Bahamas, and also back to North Carolina. Hamilton, after an unsuccessful bid for the governorship of the Bahamas, became British consul at Norfolk.

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Additional Resources:

"A History of The Royal North Carolina Regiment, Lt. Colonel John Hamilton's Corp, 1777-1784" The Recreated Royal North Carolina Regiment. <http://www.rncr.org/rncr/historymain.htm> ^[13]

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Braisted, Todd. "Index to Royal North Carolina Regiment History." The On-Line Institute for Advanced Loyalist Studies 2000. <http://www.royalprovincial.com/military/rhist/rncregt/rncrlst.htm> ^[15]

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Loyalist Arrival in St. Augustine, YouTube video, 8:28, posted by jtrncr, January 13, 2008. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jl48rPLYxiQ> ^[16] (accessed October 12, 2012).

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