Black Men, Red Coats: The Carolina Corps, Race, and Society in the Revolutionary British Atlantic

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Black Men, Red Coats:
The Carolina Corps, Race, and Society in the Revolutionary British Atlantic

by

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Bachelor of Arts
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Master of Arts
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Dedication

To the strong women in my life: Mum, Emma, Alyssa, and Darcy. Without your support, none of this would have been possible.
Acknowledgements

Three years and four countries after beginning research for this dissertation, it is finally completed and I would be remiss not to thank some of the multitude of people that have helped to make it possible. Firstly, I would like to thank my committee for challenging me to explore the fascinating story of the Carolina Corps to a much greater extent, truly ensuring that the remarkable story of these men could be given full justice. In particular, Woody Holton has helped me to develop my scholarship in a more meaningful way than anyone ever has. It has been an honor to work with him, and I am truly in his debt. Similarly, I began this project as an Americanist, with no precedent for studying the history of the broader Atlantic world. I therefore wish to thank Matt Childs, not only for his friendship but also for his patience in introducing me to the vast scholarship on Caribbean history.

As I have alluded, the research for this project has led me to repositories in four countries, and this would not have been possible without the financial and scholarly assistance of certain groups and individuals. From the University of South Carolina, this included grants from the Office of the Vice President of Research (SPARC Grant), and from the Institute for African American Research. While these grants allowed me to visit Britain and Barbados, individual grants from the Clements Library in Ann Arbor, and the Society of the Cincinnati Library in Washington, DC, allowed me to research this topic in much
greater depth. Indeed, I am deeply indebted to the staff at all of the repositories I visited, without whom this dissertation would have been a shell of its current form.

Three years is an awfully long time to work on a project, and through it all I have been surrounded by brilliant minds and friendly faces that have helped me to not only formulate ideas, but also dealt with a myriad of different types of griping. I would therefore like to thank: Alyssa Constad, Lewis Eliot, Bob Karachuk, Anthony Keane-Dawes, Andrew Kettler, Freddie Laughton, Ellen Robertson, Mary Sherrer, Connie Schulz, Blake and Dana Sox, Katherine Wakely Laughton, Cane West, Caleb Wittum, my colleagues on the staff of both the *Papers of the Revolutionary Era Pinckney Statesmen* in Columbia, and *Papers of Thomas Jefferson: Retirement Series* at Monticello, and all of my friends back in England who have spiritually joined me on this journey. For her technical expertise, Susan Spengler deserves extra recognition. In addition, the brilliant advice of the Atlantic History Reading Group at the University of South Carolina helped form at least two of the chapters contained herein. The love and strength given to me from my family on both sides of the Atlantic have helped me to complete this project, and to you all I am eternally grateful. This is particularly true of my patient and wonderful wife Alyssa, and our little girl Darcy. Both of you have kept me focused even at the hardest of moments in this process, and have filled my non-working hours with a joy that gave impetus to the completion of this work. I simply could not have done it without you.

Final acknowledgements must of course be given to the men who form the focus of this project. Three years ago, I, like most scholars, had no true understanding of what
the Carolina Corps was or the tremendous impact it had on British imperial history. It has been truly humbling to embark on this journey to discover the important, yet often tragic, history of the men of the unit. It has been my honor to learn of their lives, and this work is truly dedicated to them.
Abstract

The Carolina Corps were both a product and driver of British military zeal during the Age of Revolution. Created in South Carolina in the final years of the American Revolutionary War, the unit was the only black fighting force that survived the conflict on the British side. Evacuated at the end of the conflict as free men, the Carolina Corps straddled the boundaries of military–civil society in the highly racialized eighteenth century British Caribbean. Although former slaves, the men of the Corps were nonetheless crucial to the defense of the region. This gave the men opportunities and legal standing that was unattainable to most other blacks in the British West Indies. The Carolina Corps leveraged their position to ensure they achieved the greatest possible level of social advancement. In addition, these black troops helped to change the racial perceptions of many white commanders, laying the groundwork for the later expansion of black units within the British Caribbean.

This dissertation looks at the career of this revolutionary regiment, from its initial inception to its incorporation in the brand new West India Regiments in 1797. The study looks at the ways that the Carolina Corps interacted with the diverse populations they encountered, and dealt with complex societal issues such as ethnicity and nationalism. It will also show how the unit was successful in using a unique set of temporal circumstances and their own understanding of their military worth to attain a unique, liminal situation in the British Caribbean. White attitudes and perceptions towards the soldiers will also be
assessed. Overall, this dissertation will show how a relatively-unstudied group of 300 former slaves were critical to the evolution of the British military establishment in the West Indies during the final decades of the eighteenth century.
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Introduction

On December 14, 1782, the British Army evacuated their final major post in South Carolina. The flotilla of ships that tacked their way to sea from Charlestown Harbor that December day contained the flotsam and jetsam of the losing side in the American Revolutionary War. British regulars and Hessian mercenaries stood on decks of ships next to loyalist refugees, all trying to find a safe port in the shrinking territory of British North America. Below decks, thousands of loyalist-owned slaves fled Charlestown the same way so many had arrived, in the dank, crowded hold of a ship, their status in bondage much more certain than the futures of their owners.

Aboard the *HMS Symmetry*, a unique group of men watched as the South Carolina mainland faded into the distance. The men of the Black Pioneers had earned their freedom from bondage during the Revolutionary War and now stood on the deck of the ship as provincial soldiers in the British Army.\(^1\) It must have been with supreme irony that the freemen watched the shadow of Sullivan’s Island, the “Ellis Island of African

\(^1\) The *HMS Symmetry*, a 333-ton Royal Navy supply ship, was the largest of five British ships bound for the island of Saint Lucia. Most the Charlestown evacuation fleet sailed to either East Florida or Jamaica. Only military personnel of the Carolina Corps, and parts of the 19th and 30th Regiments, along with their equipage, sailed for Saint Lucia. No Loyalists from South Carolina evacuated to that island. List of Ships bound to St Lucia, under Convoy of the Hornet, ca. 12 December 1782, WO 36-2, National Archives.
Americans,” fade into the distant twilight.² The men of the pioneer unit, and of the famous Black Dragoons, were bound to continue service in the British Caribbean. Indeed, the horses of the dragoons sailed from Charlestown in the same naval convoy as their riders. Upon Saint Lucia, the island where the *Symmetry* was sailing, the men would form part of a unique black unit in the British Caribbean. Their geographical heritage meant that this revolutionary British regiment would become known as the Carolina Corps.

The men of the Carolina Corps hold a unique position in the history of the British Caribbean. While black troops were a colonial fixture throughout the Atlantic during times of war, the Carolina Corps became the first free all-black peacetime unit in the British Army.³ As such, the unit recorded many historic firsts for black troops in the British military. The soldiers of the Carolina Corps became the first black troops in the British military to receive regular pensions upon their retirement, starting in 1793. As well as this, the unit supplied some of the original companies of the First West India Regiment in 1798.

² The term “Ellis Island of African-Americans,” coined by Peter H. Wood, is on the South Carolina historical marker presently located on Sullivan’s Island. It is estimated that 40 percent of African Americans today can trace their lineage through the island, which acted as a quarantine facility for slaves imported into the port of Charlestown from Africa. At least 89,000 slaves spent time in quarantine at Sullivan’s Island during colonial British rule in South Carolina. Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1975), xiv; Peter McCandless, *Slavery, Disease and Suffering in the Southern Lowcountry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 6.

³ As early as the 1770s, the British had used a force of some 1000 men, known as the “King’s Negroes,” in the Caribbean. This fatigue unit, unlike the Carolina Corps, were slaves owned by the Crown, and thus remained in bondage throughout their service. The unit was officially freed, and disbanded, in 1831 – some 24 years after the slaves of the West India Regiments were freed. Roger N. Buckley, “The British Army’s African Recruitment Policy, 1790-1807,” *Contributions in Slave Studies* 5 (September 2008): 6.
Despite their unique position in the history of the British Caribbean, the Carolina Corps have mostly fallen through the pages of history.⁴

The Carolina Corps were not the first black unit that the British employed in a military capacity, but their position was nonetheless unique. While the British had employed slaves as soldiers in the siege of Havana during the Seven Years War, and in various other conflicts, none of these units were considered a true part of the military establishment, considered auxiliary troops that were utilized at times of need. The British had also dealt with the maroons on Jamaica, giving them land in exchange for loyalty and peace at the end of the First Maroon War in 1739.⁵ However, all of these relationships were made in an exclusionary imperial context, as none of the black troops previously used were considered truly British subjects with all the rights that this concept entailed.

The Carolina Corps, as free men and troops in the British Army, came to be considered British subjects and encountered a shift in thinking regarding blacks in the wake of the Revolutionary War. The moral and structural changes wrought by this conflict among both military and political figures within the British Empire meant that the men of the unit were among the first to benefit from a more inclusive imperial model. Before the war, the British only used black troops in times of desperation, often treating those it

⁴Despite many passing references in works relating to the British military in the Post-Revolutionary War Caribbean, only one published work has been dedicated to the Carolina Corps as a unit. George F. Tyson, Jr., “The Carolina Black Corps: Legacy of Revolution, 1782-1798,” Revista/Review Interamericana 5 (Winter 1975/76): 648-64.

freed from slavery or those members of black autonomous groups they encountered as outside of the imperial model. Throughout the pre-Revolutionary War period, the slave trade continued largely unchallenged, and groups such as the Maroons on Jamaica and the Caribs on Saint Vincent were dealt with as separate entities, rather than within the imperial British model. The Revolutionary War created a schism in feelings towards the slave trade, with moral arguments being used against it in ever increasing numbers. As well as this, slaves freed during the war became British subjects, both in Nova Scotia and, in the case of the Carolina Corps, in other parts of the British Empire. This new inclusion of blacks within the imperial fold was not simply socio-political, but also military, as shown by the Carolina Corps’ retention in the decade of peace that followed the Treaty of Paris. This change in imperial thinking between the end of the Revolutionary War in 1783 and the creation of the West India Regiments, beginning in 1795, underrides this entire dissertation, and the Carolina Corps were one of the transformative groups that provide an insight into this major imperial moment in British history.

There have been excellent books written on the British military establishment in the West Indies in the past several decades, and it is these works that this study adds to. These previous works have often looked in detail at specific regiments in the British Caribbean, particularly the West India Regiments.6 While this makes sense, as the units

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6 The most detailed histories of the British military in the West Indies were both written by Roger Norman Buckley. His first work on the region focused exclusively on the West India Regiments during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. The second, more recent work focuses on the wider British military in the region, including the black soldiers of the West India Regiments. The Carolina Corps are referred to in passing in both works. Buckley, Slaves in Red Coats: The British West India Regiments, 1795-1815 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979) and The British Army in the West Indies: Society and the Military in the Revolutionary Age (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1998).
are much better known and lasted longer, a focus on the West India Regiments exclusively leaves a broad gap in British military historiography when it comes to the recruitment of black soldiers. In *Slaves in Red Coats*, one of the few books to look exclusively at the black regiments in the British Caribbean during the Revolutionary Era, Roger Buckley comments on the Carolina Corps that “The importance of this contingent, which was under the command of regular army officers, was recognized all over the West Indies.”\(^7\) Despite this, Buckley simply uses the Carolina Corps as a foundation block upon which to rest his subsequent study of the West India Regiments. In a chapter of *Arming Slaves*, a compilation of essays that looks at the arming of enslaved persons throughout history, David Geggus explains of the British recruitment of blacks during the Revolutionary era: “Given the numbers involved and the survival of at least the Carolina Corps, transferred in 1783 to the West Indies, they constitute another step forward in the developing use of slaves as soldiers.”\(^8\) It seems that while many historians use the unit as a touchstone, there remain a lack of detailed studies of the men of the Carolina Corps and their position within the British Caribbean.

There is good reason for this neglect of the Carolina Corps in some modern histories of the British Atlantic. Firstly, while critics could be dismissive of Buckley, Geggus, et al. for their casual mentions of the unit in their wider works, this should certainly not

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\(^7\) Buckley, *Slaves in Red Coats*, 6.

be the case. Indeed, it is testament to the scholarship of these historians that, while working on broader projects with different chronological and geographic focuses, they have discovered the unit and used the Corps as an example to mention. The archival situation in Grenada, the headquarters of the Carolina Corps during their tenure in the West Indies, has meant that many rich sources regarding the unit were lost to historians in recent years. This has encouraged scholars to turn their attention to other military units, and race relations within the wider Caribbean region. While this study is indebted to these works, which have created a historiographical space in which to situate it, certain regions of the British Caribbean have suffered neglect at a time when others are thriving.

Unfortunately, as with many of the works on the British Caribbean, those that mention the soon-to-be Carolina Corps only do so in passing, and often these references are sloppy. In his otherwise excellent book, *Death or Liberty*, Douglas Egerton suggests the black pioneers in New York and those in South Carolina, the latter becoming the

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9 Various hurricanes, flooding, and a lack of funds have meant that many documents in the Grenadian National Archives have been destroyed or are inaccessible to historians. This includes all the governor’s messages, and those of the Grenada Assembly.


11 Barbados and Jamaica, due to their wealth of easily accessible archival sources, are the main points of focus for studies of the British Caribbean during the Colonial and Revolutionary Eras.
largest part of the Carolina Corps, were one and the same unit. This simply is not the case. Likewise, Todd Braisted suggests erroneously that “The Black Dragoons, a part of the South Carolina militia establishment, would soon pass into history, disbanded along with all Loyalist militia in the province upon its evacuation.” While it may seem pedantic to bring up these small points in what are larger works, it is this jigsaw of misconceptions in these larger publications that have resulted in so many misconceptions about some of the black units in the Revolutionary War. “Black Men, Red Coats” intends to correct some of these fallacies relating to the units that would later comprise the Carolina Corps.

This study uses the history of the Carolina Corps in both North America and the West Indies as a prism through which to analyze the intersection of race, society and the military in the Revolutionary Era British Atlantic world. It will show that Grenada, Dominica, Saint Vincent and the other Windward Islands were the center of British civil-military interactions based on race but are often overshadowed by the revolutions in the American colonies and Haiti that bookend the era. Such analysis allows for an insight into the ways that the men of the Carolina Corps, as the only black provincial unit in the British

12 Douglas R. Egerton suggests that Harry Washington, a slave of the famous general, fought in South Carolina against Francis Marion after the black pioneers from New York who went south in 1780, and that he was evacuated from Charleston in 1782. This is not true, as it was the locally-raised black dragoons who fought Marion in South Carolina, and it was from New York City that Washington sailed to Nova Scotia. Such errors are not solely Egerton’s but pervade works that reference the men of the Carolina Corps during their initial service with the British in North America. Egerton, Death or Liberty: African Americans and Revolutionary America (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 195.

13 Of course, this was not the case, with the entire unit and their horses evacuating to Saint Lucia and becoming a part of the Carolina Corps after the fall of Charleston in 1782. Todd W. Braisted, “The Black Pioneers and Others: The Military Role of Black Loyalists in the American War for Independence,” in Moving On: Black Loyalists in the Afro-Atlantic World, John W. Pulis, ed. (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1999), 23.
Caribbean military during the peacetime, advanced their position within a highly racialized society. This study seeks to place the experiences of the Carolina Corps alongside those of more oft-written about units in the Atlantic region, to give a more holistic view of the role of black troops in civil-military relations in the West Indies during the Revolutionary Era. It shows that the Carolina Corps were more than simply a black unit within the West Indies. The unit was fundamental to the wider British use of black troops during the French Revolutionary Wars and later, a conclusion that both expands and better explains the current historiography on the British military in the Caribbean region.

Unlike many works on Latin American nations, which focus heavily on society, most studies that focus on civil-military relations in the British Caribbean adopt a traditional military history style. This style, heavy on military jargon, troop movements, maps, and battles, is a top-down approach that often misses the experience of individual soldiers on the ground. While “Black Men, Red Coats” is indebted to Norman Buckley, whose work on the West Indian Regiments is heavily cited hereafter, his approach borrows heavily from the traditional military history approach. The present work forms part of the “new military history,” using a methodology that focuses less on the tactical movements and deployments of the Carolina Corps, although these will still be included.

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14 Peter Voelz’s unpublished dissertation is another fantastic source of information, but, like Buckley, Voelz uses the traditional approach regularly adopted by military historians in the years before the cultural turn in History. Therefore, while containing interesting information regarding the units within it, there is scant analysis of civil-military relations. Peter Michael Voelz, “Slave and Soldier: The Military Impact of Blacks in the Colonial Americas” (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1978).
where necessary, and more on the socio-cultural impact of the unit. In this way, “Black Men, Red Coats” is not simply a unit history in the traditional sense, but a work that uses a unique regiment to give insight into the intersection between the military, race, and society that is currently lacking for the British Windward Islands.

Three main arguments will be advanced throughout the course of the study, while each chapter will also have its own arguments dealing with the Carolina Corps and its effect on the British Atlantic world. The first major argument chain seeks to understand the impact that the Corps had on white attitudes towards the arming of the blacks throughout their service in the Revolutionary era. This study will show how the men of the unit substantially changed the perspective of many whites in the British military through their interactions with officers. This change in perception is best seen in the evolving positive arguments of whites towards the unit, which was one of the reasons that the Corps survived for such a long time. It will also show that the white men they interacted with, particularly their officers, felt honor-bound and compelled by paternalistic racism to protect the unit, while ironically driving it to the brink of

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destruction due to their biological misconceptions regarding black bodies. Ultimately, however, the influence of the Corps on their white commanders helped to change the entire makeup of the British Army in the Caribbean.

The second major argument looks at how the men of the Corps interacted with the people of the West Indies. The unique status enjoyed by the Corps meant that they negotiated relationships with not only whites in the British Caribbean, but also blacks, both free and enslaved. This study will show that through their actions and behavior, the men of the Corps were adept at portraying Britishness in order to advance in white society. Through their understanding and cultural flexibility, the soldiers also formed intimate relationships with blacks from various groups throughout the Caribbean region. Also, it will show how the men of the Corps used their positions within the British Army to enhance their own social position, and to gain whatever spoils they could from the establishment for their service, including pensions and enhanced legal standing. Due to the fluidity of identity within the Caribbean, the men of the unit carved a unique niche for themselves that allowed them to keep a foot in both black and white society, flourishing in both as far as their race and status would allow. This position was exceptional in the British controlled areas of the region prior to the creation of the West India Regiments.

The final argumentative thread looks at the specific impact that the Corps had on the British military establishment, and particularly their role in the creation of the West India Regiments. The first two arguments, looking at the attitudes of whites and the negotiation of identity, converge here, with both combining to create a prevailing attitude towards the further arming of blacks. The perceived loyalty of the Corps during their long
service, and the change in attitudes of whites, meant the creation of a strong faction advocating the arming of blacks occurred at precisely the time that the British needed men in the Caribbean region during the French Revolutionary Wars. This study will show that the Corps were critical to convincing the British high command in London to recruit further black troops, and that without the unit the creation of the West India Regiments would have been delayed or might never have taken place. Overall, this study will show that despite their limited appearance in Caribbean historiography, the men of the Carolina Corps played a pivotal role as the foundational black unit in a new era of multiracial soldiering in the British Caribbean.

The component parts that would create the Carolina Corps are frequently characters in the extensive works on black Loyalists in the American Revolutionary War released in recent years. While more prevalent in works that focus explicitly on South Carolina during the war, especially Jim Piecuch’s *Three Peoples, One King*, the men evacuated to the Caribbean as the Carolina Corps also make passing appearances in many other works on the wider black experience in the Revolutionary War.16 As with many similar works that cover vast topics, the contributions of the various black units are often amalgamated into a larger synthesis of the black struggle for freedom during the conflict. By specifically looking at the single regiment that survived the war as a fighting force on

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the British side, this work seeks to show how the war affected black emancipation on a more individualized level.\textsuperscript{17}

Arguments rage throughout the historiography of black participation in the American Revolution about the reasons why the British emancipated slaves during the Revolutionary War. Some argue that blacks manipulated British commanders to gain their freedom, speaking with their feet by fleeing to British lines and forcing the situation on otherwise unwilling British officers. Other historians have seen the recruitment of blacks as being born out of basic military expediency, the blacks obviously providing the British with much-needed manpower during the war.\textsuperscript{18} Both are likely true in different situations during the Revolutionary War, and certainly affected the history of the Carolina Corps.

The Carolina Corps existed in a truly liminal position within the British Caribbean. Being the first black peacetime unit in the British Army made them essential for the

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\textsuperscript{17} While the personal histories unearthed by Cassandra Pybus and Maya Jasanoff are amazing to read, it is important to note that neither track the men of the Corps or the reverse black diaspora that led free people of color into the Caribbean. Instead, most of their black migrant subjects travel to Sierra Leone, Nova Scotia, and Great Britain. Jasanoff, \textit{Liberty’s Exiles, American Loyalists in the Revolutionary World} (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012); Pybus, \textit{Epic Journeys of Freedom: Runaway Slaves of the American Revolution and Their Global Quest for Liberty} (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2006).

\textsuperscript{18} The different perspectives are largely born out of the individual focus of historians. The largest proponents of the theory that slaves used the Revolutionary War as a mass slave rebellion and thus manipulated their own freedom are Gary Nash and Sylvia Frey, who specifically looked at the conflict from the black viewpoint. Andrew Jackson O’Shaughnessy and Philip D. Morgan in their essay in \textit{Arming Slaves} look at the situation from the British standpoint and thus see the recruitment as a purely military move born out of desperation. Nash, \textit{The Forgotten Fifth: African Americans in the Age of Revolutions} (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); O’Shaughnessy and Morgan, “Arming Slaves in the American Revolution,” in Brown and Morgan, eds., \textit{Arming Slaves}; Edward Countryman, \textit{Enjoy the Same Liberty: Black Americans and the Revolutionary War} (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2012); Simon Schama, \textit{Rough Crossings: Britain, the Slaves and the American Revolution} (London: BBC Books, 2005).
defense of the Windward Islands from enemies, both foreign and domestic.\textsuperscript{19} This role gave them an elevated position within black society in the eyes of whites, but it also created levels of difference between the unit and their fellow black islanders. Such a societal position could only exist in the unique conditions provided by the hybridity of cultures caused by the geographic isolation of the region from the metropole. Put bluntly, while the white population needed them for protection in the Caribbean, the same unit would not have survived in any other regions within the British Atlantic. The Carolina Corps helped ingratiate themselves with white colonists by performing acts of Britishness, while simultaneously using African survivals to keep from entirely alienating the much larger black populations on the island. It was also the unique timing of the arrival of the Carolina Corps, as the first peacetime black unit, before the creation of the much larger West India Regiments, and during the first major Parliamentary debates on abolition, that allowed this unique position to occur. Richard White argues that his concept of a “Middle Ground” could only occur in the pays d’en haut for a short period in the eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{20} This study will show that the unique form of social liminality experienced by

\textsuperscript{19} Victor Turner, \textit{The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure} (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1969). Turner argued that there were three liminal periods: the first stage (separation) requires a group to break from an earlier fixed point in a social structure. In the case of the Carolina Corps, this break came after their emancipation from their previous position in bondage. The second stage (liminality), is the one that is the focus of this project. In this position, the group becomes ambiguous, “passing through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state.” It was this position which the men of the Carolina Corps found themselves in upon their arrival in the British Caribbean, differentiated from their fellow blacks, but not yet viewed as true members of British society. This admission into British society represents the third phase of Turner’s theory (reincorporation), wherein readmission to society, albeit at a different level, occurs.

\textsuperscript{20} In \textit{The Middle Ground}, Richard White argues that there was a relatively brief period of time during the seventeenth century when a system of mutual accommodation existed between the Indians of the region and the French settlers, both living side-by-side with neither powerful enough to assert total dominance. In White’s work, the system is destroyed by the encroachment of the land-hungry British settlers after the Seven Year’s War. While a totally different scenario, a similar process occurred when the Carolina Corps
the Carolina Corps could only exist in the Windward Islands during the limited period that the unit existed, based on conditions created by their own entrance into the West Indies. This unique position could only exist because of the white colonists need for protection, which trumped their racial biases when judging the men of the Corps. Also, the limited size of the Corps (roughly 300 men) meant that they were easily hidden from sight by the British authorities when this was required. Their race, however, did limit their inclusion into British society, hence creating a liminal space which they were forced to occupy. The same was also true with the black inhabitants on the various islands. This temporal period was ended in 1795, when the creation of the West India Regiments meant thousands of black soldiers entered the British Army. This forced white colonists, and the British authorities, to make a space for this group of men in society, an accommodation they did not necessarily need to make previously for the much smaller Carolina Corps.

Due to the lack of sources available in Grenada, this analysis of the Carolina Corps is largely told using documents written by military officers and the staff of the Colonial Office at Whitehall. Reading against the grain of the sources, however, allows for an analysis of the men of the unit itself as many of these official government documents provide insights into the life and times of the men of the Carolina Corps. Consequently, while using top-down sources, this work will incorporate the methodologies of most current cultural histories to view the Carolina Corps from the bottom up. Thus, while few

entered the British Caribbean. Thus, while over a much shorter period, the Carolina Corps found themselves in a liminal position based on a series of unique factors just as geographically unique societal factors allowed for the creation of White’s “middle ground.” White, The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
words put on paper by members of the Corps survive, those who observed the men, including their officers, produced more than sufficient documentation to allow for a deep analysis of the actions and interactions of the men. As well as this, there has been a real focus on the men of the West India Regiments, with several books written on these units. While later than the Carolina Corps, it is possible to use some of the experiences of the West India troops to better understand those of the Corps by using an anthropological technique known as “upstreaming,” which allows historians to use better documented periods to cast light on those more difficult to access.21 In this case, the well-documented history of the West India Regiments will be used to analyze the earlier, but superficially similar, experiences of the Carolina Corps.

While recent historiographies bring long-neglected subalterns into academic focus, it is critical to remember that the agency of whites, particularly white men, is also important. As in this study, it is often only through the writings of these men that the stories of subalterns may be told. However, they are also often important members of the story in their own right. This study analyzes the intersection of race by looking at the

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21 “Upstreaming” can be used to assess the ways in which the lives of the later West India Regiments reflected those of the Carolina Corps. As the regiments were in many ways the cultural survivals of the Corps, and have a much wider literature about them, it is useful to use the later units as a lens through which to fill in some of the gaps present in the historical record regarding the Carolina Corps. The technique, coined by William N. Fenton, has been used extensively by anthropologists to study less-documented groups in history, including many American Indian and African groups. While broadly conceived as using the present to understand the past, and thus working in the opposite direction to most historians, this study uses the concepts of “upstreaming,” when used, more narrowly by starting at the West India Regiment era and working backwards into the Carolina Corps period. A selection of the many studies that use “upstreaming,” include: William N. Fenton, *American Indian and White Relations to 1830: Needs and Opportunities for Study* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1957); John K. Chance, “Mesoamerica’s Ethnographic Past,” *Ethnohistory* 43, no. 3 (Summer 1996): 379-403; Kathryn M. de Luna, Jeffrey B. Fleisher and Susan Keech McIntosh, “Thinking Across the African Past: Interdisciplinarity and Early History,” *African Archaeological Review* 29, no. 2,3 (Sept. 2012): 75-94.
ways that both races interacted with each other, thus not neglecting the agency of either party. In this way, this project will emulate John Shy’s *A People Numerous and Armed*, which was one of the first works on the Revolutionary War to look at the conflict from a social, cultural and political angle.\(^\text{22}\) This dissertation will emulate Shy’s focus on the entangled societies that the Carolina Corps entered and influenced, revealing the impact that this unique unit had on a wide swathe of the British Atlantic world.

This dissertation will also draw on the impressive scholarship of Julius S. Scott, whose dissertation identified the ways that cultural ideas spread throughout the enslaved spaces of the Caribbean.\(^\text{23}\) Using Scott, this study will show how the men of the Carolina Corps were both the facilitators and receivers of ideas regarding British society in the Revolutionary Caribbean. The Corps used these ideas to develop complex understandings of their unique situation and to navigate their existence in the region.

Throughout this study, I will be referring to the main regiment studied as the Carolina Corps. Edward Mathew, Commander in Chief of the Windward Islands, designated the unit as such several years after their arrival in the Caribbean, in the early 1790s. It was not, however, the only moniker attached to the unit by other officers, or the politicians in London. As such, the historical record refers to the same unit interchangeably as the Black Corps, the American Negroes, the Carolina Black Corps, the Carolina Negroes, in addition to the Carolina Corps. Before the unit’s evacuation to the

\(^{22}\) John Shy, *A People Numerous and Armed*.

Caribbean from Charlestown and their amalgamation into a single regiment, they were known as the American Dragoons and the Black Pioneers. These were two separate units, and their treatment in chapters looking at the Revolutionary War in South Carolina reflects this. However, in later chapters, the nom de guerre Carolina Corps refers to the Caribbean unit, as it was the one most frequently used by General Mathew and because it shows the more liminal racialized status that the group achieved during its service in the region.

Additionally, some other terms in “Black Men, Red Coats” also warrant definition. In certain sections, particularly when discussing ethnicity, both the terms whiteness and blackness will be used. In this context, whiteness is a catch-all term for the societal norms normally reserved for white people in colonial society. While the lines between racial groups in the British Caribbean were often ambiguous, as will be seen throughout this work, there were certain cultural and societal positions, particularly legal ones, which were largely reserved for the white population. For this essay, it is these positions that will fall under the umbrella of whiteness, or being white. This is different, however, from the definition of Britishness, found at the beginning of chapter two, as there was a large white population in the British Caribbean who were non-British. Like whiteness, blackness in this case refers to the cultural and societal positions held by the black populations of the Greater British Caribbean, inclusive of South Carolina. Many African survivals continued to flourish in the region. Creolization, the mixing of these two cultures, is featured throughout “Black Men, Red Coats”.
This dissertation is organized chronologically, with two clear chronological bookends in 1782 and 1798. The first chapter looks at the creation of the units that would become the Carolina Corps during the Revolutionary War. Particularly, it will look at the unique factors at play in the final years of the conflict in South Carolina that led to the creation of the units. This chapter will show that it was pure desperation on the part of the British commanders that led to the arming of black troops. It will also contend that a combination of foresight on the part of the British, and excellent military performance on the part of the black troops, was equally responsible for the evacuation of the black units from Charlestown. This chapter also shows how disease, or at least British perceptions of disease, both helped and hindered the unit throughout its years of service. Smallpox in South Carolina during the Revolutionary War almost destroyed the unit before its formation. Finally, this chapter will reveal how concepts of honor on the part of certain British leaders helped save the troops from a return to bondage.

The second chapter looks in greater detail at the men of the Corps, their ethnic background, and how they interacted with the local black population. The African retentions and creolization displayed by the soldiers of the unit will be analyzed to see how these factors impacted their relationships with other black islanders, both enslaved and free. The analysis in this chapter includes an exploration of the dynamic relationships between the men of the Corps and the Black Caribs on Saint Vincent. This chapter will show that the ethnicity of the Corps, as well as their role as soldiers in a peaceful period, placed the group in a position between racial groups during their Caribbean service.
The third chapter focuses on how the men of the Carolina Corps, once amalgamated into a single unit in the Caribbean, knowingly performed acts of Britishness to advance in British colonial society. Using the British legal and political systems, the men of the Carolina Corps leveraged their unique position in colonial society to attain a position that was normally out of reach for blacks in the region. It also argues that in choosing to remain in the British military, and in the case of certain troops their willingness to join the service, the men of the Corps showed considerable agency in their choice of master. This chapter also looks at the perceptions of the white colonists and military officers towards the Carolina Corps, particularly in the case of loyalty to the British Crown. This chapter will show that irrespective of personal loyalty to the British cause, the unit was loyal, and this imbued the local white population, both civil and military, with a sense of faith in the unit’s abilities and worth.

The final chapter, the chronological bookend of this piece, shows how the Carolina Corps were instrumental to the forming of the West India Regiments in 1795. The significance of the unit on the future incorporation of the blacks within the British military was its most enduring imperial legacy. Not only were members of the Corps among the first troops in these later units, but the unit’s excellent performance in the Caribbean provided the very basis for the West India Regiments. This chapter also challenges the current historiography of the West India Regiments, which suggests almost universally that the unit was a product of the French Revolutionary Wars, by showing that Edward Mathew attempted to enlarge the Carolina Corps into a full regiment before that conflict even began. With the Haitian Revolution in full flow by 1795, it is highly unlikely the British
would have adopted the wholesale arming of black units if it was not for the example set by earlier units, including the Carolina Corps.

The Carolina Corps were a groundbreaking unit in the British military during a revolutionary era in Atlantic History. This project reveals the complex intersection between race, the military, and society encapsulated within the experience of the unit. It will show how the unit helped to completely change British attitudes towards the arming of blacks in the Atlantic world. Also, “Black Men, Red Coats” shows the astute ways that the men of the Corps used their military status in the Caribbean to advance societally. In short, it will show how important 300 ex-slaves were to the armed forces of an entire empire.
Chapter 1

“It is surprising the proficiency they have already made”:

The Creation of the Carolina Corps

On June 11, 1782, Alexander Leslie received orders from Sir Guy Carleton, the British commander in chief in America, to evacuate the coastal enclaves that he still controlled in the southern mainland provinces of that continent. The American forces under Nathanael Greene had slowly but surely pushed the British from the colonial heartland to the port cities, where the most powerful navy in the world provided their only protection against the Patriot onslaught. Into the coastal safe havens poured a menagerie of British imperial subjects; red coated regulars, Hessian mercenaries, white Loyalists of every age and gender, and tens of thousands of runaway slaves who had risked everything for the chance of freedom offered by the British. Now, with the fall of Charlestown and Savannah imminent, the race to find safety on a British transport began.

24 Piecuch, Three Peoples, One King, 287.

25 Henry Clinton’s Phillipsburg Proclamation in 1779 had been met with enthusiasm by the slave majorities present in the coastal areas which fell under British control during the southern campaign. Gary Sellick, “‘Undistinguished Destruction’: The Effects of Smallpox on British Emancipation Policy in the Revolutionary War,” Journal of American Studies 51, no. 3 (August 2017): 865-85.
The story of the final months of the Southern Campaign of the American Revolution is one of American success and British defeat. It is also one of new beginnings, not only for the tens of thousands of white Loyalists who sought new homes within a vastly diminished British Empire, but also for thousands of slaves. While many bondsmen confronted the possibility of transportation as the property of white Loyalists, to remain in perpetual bondage, thousands of others would find freedom in an evolving imperial experiment. Thousands more faced abandonment by their would-be saviors and re-enslavement by their Patriot former masters. It was also this crucible of desperate humanity that led to the formation of the Carolina Corps.

Even more than a narrative of success, victory and new beginnings, however, the final months of the Southern Campaign is a survival story. This is particularly true for the runaway slaves, whose entire future seemed to depend on British success, now relied on the white officers’ sense of justice to survive. Despite their actions for the British cause in the preceding years, the plight of the formerly enslaved individuals at Charlestown depended entirely on whether the British would honor their wartime contract with them. Simply put, the British controlled the ships and in the grand hierarchy of evacuation, the runaways formed the bottom tier. In these critical months a shift in British policy, reinforced by the actions of armed slaves, helped change British perceptions towards the plight of some of the slaves within their enclaves. While thousands of fugitive slaves

26 Five to Six thousand loyalist-owned slaves were evacuated from Charleston in December 1782. A much smaller number of newly free men also sailed, the majority headed to Nova Scotia or Great Britain. Frey, Water from the Rock, 179.
would still face desertion by the royal army in December 1782, this shift allowed for some who served in the military to escape.\(^27\) This chapter will tell the story of this evolution, and how certain slaves managed to negotiate it successfully.

In his book, *Moral Capital*, Christopher Leslie Brown argues that, “For too long, the antislavery movement in Britain has been described as the consequence of shifts in moral perception, as if the mere recognition of a moral duty must have led men and women to act.”\(^28\) Brown sees an evolution in the minds of whites towards morality regarding abolition in the aftermath of the Revolutionary War, yet it was precisely this process that developed during the conflict itself, particularly in the final stages of the British evacuation from Charlestown. White British officers, some of them plantation owners with large slave holdings, argued for the moral imperative to evacuate at least some of the slaves to freedom. One focus in this chapter will therefore be the white British commanders in Charlestown who, in the midst of organizing one of the largest evacuations in British history, began to have a shift in perception towards the evacuation of slaves. It is important to make clear from the outset that while this chapter will argue that certain British commanders began to feel morally compelled through a sense of contractualism and honor to evacuate slaves, other motives, particularly military

\(^{27}\) In October 1782, Leslie ordered that all Patriot-owned slaves who had not served the British military were to be abandoned and returned to their former masters. This meant that nearly all of the slaves who had earned their freedom within the British lines by this late stage in the conflict would be returned to bondage, with only loyalist slaves and the small number of actively serving blacks in the military, including the Carolina Corps, being evacuated. Jasanoff, *Liberty’s Exiles*, 75; Piecuch, *Three Peoples, One King*, 321.

expediency and their own paternal, egotistical worldview, also drove them. These were military men whose main goal was martial success, with humanitarianism a distant second relative to the plight of slaves, yet these enslaved individuals managed to exploit this area to ensure their survival after the end of the war.

Brown recognized the moral bind that many British officers felt at the end of the war towards the slaves they promised freedom too, but he solely casts his focus to Guy Carleton and the Black Loyalists in Nova Scotia. This chapter will show that while Carleton’s long shadow spread as far as South Carolina, the officers in the province faced similar moral dilemmas regarding black Loyalists. Brown argues persuasively that “once they (Britain) cast themselves as liberators, they became less willing to compromise self-imposed commitments.” In this way, Brown shows how British emancipation policy during the Revolutionary War moved the ministry in London closer to abolitionism, an argument supported by several other scholars. However, by looking almost exclusively at the actions of the white officers and politicians, the close actions of the black population is largely hidden from view. This chapter therefore seeks to add to the excellent scholarship on black Loyalists in the American Revolution by showing how their actions, in addition to the moral compasses of their white commanders, ensured their perpetual freedom at the war’s end.

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29 Brown, Moral Capital, 311.

30 In addition to Brown, the foundations of British abolitionism being rooted in the Revolutionary War is supported by other scholars, including; Schama, Rough Crossings; David Brion Davis, The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution (Cornell, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975).
Juxtaposed to the changing abolitionist perceptions of the British were the steadfast beliefs of the American conquerors. On the verge of gaining independence and retaking the colonies that had been under British military control for years, the Patriots in the south wanted their enslaved property returned to them. Their plan, above all else, was to retake as many of the slaves who had found refuge within British lines as possible. Therefore, amid the combat in the final weeks and months of the Southern Campaign, the focus of the Americans switched from their inevitable military victory, to the perpetuation of slavery in the new republic.

The final group that will be the focus of this chapter are the most important for this project, the slaves who would become the Carolina Corps. Caught between an ocean and a host of vengeful masters, the men relied on a thin red line of British troops to stand between them and oblivion. However, at this desperate stage of the conflict, as British defeat seemed unavoidable, the men who would become the Carolina Corps put their lives on the line to fight for a lost cause. This chapter, then, is truly the story of these men, their families, and their struggle to survive against ever increasing odds. It was the military actions of these men who changed the minds of many British commanders towards their evacuation, and in this mental evolution these formerly enslaved men were sowing the seeds that would grow into a new era of British military policy in the Greater Caribbean region.

In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon suggested that once a black man entered the white colonial world outside of slavery, as the slaves who escaped to the British lines
did, “He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness.”31 While this entire project disagrees with Fanon’s premise that black people renounced their traditions to partake in white society, it does support the notion that this was how whites perceived them. Particularly in the slaveholding regions of the southern colonies, and later Caribbean, the men who made up the Carolina Corps began to appear less traditionally “black” by their very actions. As the war turned increasingly against them, the white Loyalists from South Carolina and Georgia were militarily desperate, and thus willing to overlook race when it came to those permitted to serve in the military. Indeed, with traditional plantation slavery impossible to continue for most loyalist planters in the final year of the Revolutionary War in South Carolina, the population intermingled with former slaves in a much more visible way than before the conflict. No longer was the separation between the house and field possible. All lived together, all trying to survive in the most trying of situations. In such a condition both groups could conform to certain racial models at different times to survive the extreme social situation they found themselves in. White Loyalists could overlook armed blacks because the fear of slave rebellion was much less real than the imminent threat of Patriot victory to their property and safety, while blacks could partake in white culture while still practicing their traditional beliefs out of the view of their white neighbors. The creolized nature of the southern lowcountry by 1782 would also have aided in this process. Out of the chaos of Charlestown, the black men who would

form the Carolina Corps got their first taste of the social liminality that they would use to negotiate their unique positions in the post-Revolutionary War British Caribbean.

This chapter will explore the chain of events that began in 1781, ultimately leading to the creation of the Carolina Corps. To keep the narrative focused on the men of the Carolina Corps, this chapter will look entirely at the events of the final year of the war in the final British bastions in South Carolina and Georgia, around the cities of Charlestown and Savannah. Thus, while there are references to the Phillipsburg Proclamation and Dunmore's creation of the Ethiopian Regiment in 1775, these are narratives that require their own telling, and that would take away from the important story of the creation of the Carolina Corps.

In this narrative, these white voices will show how opinion changed within the British ranks towards how officers viewed black soldiery, contrasting with the solidifying effect that occurred within the Patriot leadership. This narrative shows change over time, with the change very much driven by the actions of the black troops within the British lines. By their very actions during the final years of the war, these black men in red coats increased their odds of survival and convinced the British high command to create a new black military unit that would contribute significantly to the evolution of British military policy long after the final British ship had left Charlestown Harbor in 1782.

Following the chronology that allowed for the creation of the Carolina Corps, this chapter will begin by analyzing the creation of the Black Dragoons, a unit that was unique in British service during the Revolutionary War. It will also examine the Black Pioneers,
the name given to the unit of black laborers who fell under the command of the Royal Engineers during the war. Interspersed, the opinions, ideals and long-term goals of white men, on both sides of the conflict will show the mix of emotions that these units generated in the highly racialized society of the British Empire. These racialized concepts included ideas of disease, which will be discussed herein to show how important British understanding of black bodies and ailments played a pivotal role in the creation of the Carolina Corps. The chapter will end by detailing how and why the idea for the Corps came into existence.

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South Carolina was the last place that Benjamin Thompson was meant to end up. Until the disastrous Yorktown campaign, Thompson was working as an aide to Lord George Germain, Secretary for the American Department in Whitehall. With the British facing defeat, Germain had decided to send Thompson back to the colonies from whence he had come as a loyalist in 1776. Granting him a commission as a Lieutenant Colonel of provincial troops, Germain ordered Thompson to New York to help in the defense of that British bastion in the northern colonies. Unfortunately, bad weather forced his ship into Charlestown, where Alexander Leslie capitalized on the situation, ordering Thompson to take command of the loyalist dragoons in the province. Thus it was that in December

1781, Thompson took command of the hodgepodge unit, which counted amongst its number a unit that would come to be known as the “Black Dragoons.”

By December 1781, the British cavalry were the only mobile force of any size left in South Carolina. Nathanael Greene’s relentless assaults throughout the previous year had forced the British army from the interior of the colony, and into the defenses around Charlestown. Now, the cavalry almost exclusively struck out from Charlestown on raiding sorties to gain supplies or plunder for the Loyalists who sought refuge in the city. The unit that Thompson inherited was a mixed bag, which he described to Germain as; “Two strong Troops of Mounted Militia and a Sepoy Troop (Gens de Couleurs) that will act with us occasionally.”

The “Black Dragoons” were raised by Leslie at a time when fighting men were in short supply. In contrast to Charles Cornwallis, who did everything in his power to keep weapons out of the hands of runaway slaves, Leslie was a man who was willing to throw caution to the wind. Despite white loyalist opposition to the arming of blacks, he decided it was necessary to make use of the manpower that he had left to defend Charlestown.

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33 Thompson’s use of foreign idioms is interesting here. Sepoy troops had been common in India for decades before the American Revolutionary War, and traditionally were native troops in India under British command (OED). In this case, it seems Thompson was using a broader usage to mean local troops, in this case black slaves, who were under British arms. Also, the use of the term “gens de couleurs” is very interesting. The term emanated from the French West Indian Colonies, where free blacks were known as “gens de couleurs libres,” but whose title was often shortened to simply “gens de couleurs.” This implies that Thompson recognized the dragoons as free men of color during his service with them. Benjamin Thompson to George Germain, 11 January 1781, G.S Clinton, Vol. 15, Clements Library; Jennifer M. Spear, Race, Sex and Social Order in Early New Orleans (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 108, 183.

34 One example of opposition to the arming of blacks came from Georgia where, despite being serious outmanned and trapped in Savannah, the loyalist population still feared arming blacks. Writing to the royal
The unit was made up largely of South Carolinian slaves who knew the lowcountry region over which they rode. There is a possibility that some of the men had experience as horsemen in the colony, although some were likely to be novice equestrians at best.\textsuperscript{35} Still, their apparent skill as horsemen, whether newly acquired or not, was quickly apparent to Thompson; “We are out twice a day for Exercise (when we are not obliged to be out in good earnest) and it is surprising the proficiency they have already made in Manoeuvring.”\textsuperscript{36}

The men of the black dragoons were soon raiding the lowcountry properties owned by Patriots both with the larger cavalry force and independently. Many members of the unit specifically chose to return to their previous plantation homes to take vengeance on the masters at whose hands they had previously suffered so cruelly. While led superficially by a white officer, the unit was not a regular one, and thus often rode into the field with its own black leadership. The freedom felt by the men of the dragoons must have been euphoric, and within this euphoria the troops sometimes used their new position to exact revenge on those who had wronged them, or the British cause, in the past. For example, soon after their formation, in January 1782, the unit was led by another governor, James Wright, they complained about the conduct of black troops who had been raised. Piecuch, \textit{Three Peoples, One King}, 324.

\textsuperscript{35} The enslaved population in South Carolina had a long history in the colony as horsemen. Some of the first slaves brought to the colony were used by whites as cattlemen, due to their experience doing the same job in Africa. While the age of black cowboys in South Carolina had largely passed by 1775 due to the onset of plantation agriculture, other occupations such as farrier, groom and coachman would have kept certain slaves close to horses. Walter Edgar, \textit{South Carolina: A History} (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), 133-34.

\textsuperscript{36} Thompson to Germain, 15 January 1781, Germain Papers, Vol. 15.
runaway slave to the home of a known Patriot named William Mathews. Mathews lived on his plantation just outside of Charlestown, where they surrounded the building and threatened to take the life of the occupant. Realizing Mathews to be an invalid and thus no threat, they decided to let the man live, instead plundering his house for food and drink before returning to the British lines.  

As a part of the larger detachment under Thompson, the Black Dragoons often took part in the sorties that marked this stage of the conflict in South Carolina. While alone, as a troop of between 30 and 50 horsemen, the black dragoons were simply a large raiding party, as part of Thompson’s larger command they were a formidable foe to the Continental cavalry and Patriot partisans who roamed the lowcountry. In late January, Thompson took his force on a circuitous 40-mile raid that reached as far inland as the town of Dorchester. Coming across a Patriot outpost of five men, the British forces quickly overpowered them, killing or capturing the entire force without loss. During the raid, the Black Dragoons formed the rear-guard of Thompson’s force, one of the most important positions in the cavalry formation, showing the trust that he had already placed in the former slaves. It is also important to note that during the incursion into Patriot territory, Captain Smart, a white officer, took command of the Black Dragoons. It was Smart who often commanded the unit during their official maneuvers. The January raid was a

37 Piecuch, *Three Peoples, One King*, 317.

38 By the end of January, Thompson’s meagre force received reinforcement to the strength of 200 men, each armed with a rifle and a sword. This included the men of the Black Dragoons. Thompson to Germain, 21 January 1782, Germain Papers, Vol. 15.

complete success for Thompson, who returned to Charlestown with forage and livestock for the undersupplied Loyalists. The expedition also proved the worthiness of the black dragoons as soldiers, as well as giving the unit invaluable combat experience within a month of their initial formation.

The men of the Black Dragoons had attained a position higher than any other black unit achieved in South Carolina during the entire Revolutionary War. By day, the men of the unit had worked as part of a larger cavalry force, ably demonstrating their ability as traditional horse soldiers. In the evenings, often without the consent of their white officers, but still well within the remit of their formation, the same men became a terrorist guerrilla force. No other unit of black men had been so well armed, trained and prepared for combat as the dragoons were under Thompson. When he left for New York in late February, however, the men of the Black Dragoons found even more freedom than they had previously. Well trained and armed, the former slaves gained a fearsome reputation as an irregular unit.40

If there was one thing that white Americans feared more than a redcoated soldier, it was an armed black man. The repugnance felt by Patriots to the possibility of the British

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40 Horses held a strong cultural symbolism in Colonial America, and so it may have been no coincidence that Leslie decided to place his new black unit on horseback. Colonial Americans, especially in the southern mainland colonies, prized horses and considered them both a status symbol, and “an extension of its owner.” Thus, by putting the black troops on horseback, Leslie was both utilizing the military practicalities of his dire situation, while also driving an insult into the very heart of the South Carolina gentry. It is likely the men of the unit knew the significance of their elevated status, as the rebellious slaves in Gabriel’s Rebellion in Virginia did two decades later. James Sidbury, Ploughshares into Swords: Race, Rebellion and Identity in Gabriel’s Virginia, 1730-1810 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 64-66; T. H. Breen, Puritans and Adventurers: Change and Persistence in Early America (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 156.
arming runaway slaves had brought a hornet’s nest down upon Lord Dunmore in Virginia at the very start of the Revolutionary War.\textsuperscript{41} The same outrage was felt by the white planters of South Carolina as the Black Dragoons conducted raids on plantations throughout the lowcountry around Charlestown, where many of the wealthiest Patriots had homes. By summer, the unit had become such a threat to the property of white Patriots that Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, a planter and Continental Army officer, wrote of them: “The black Dragoons which Leslie has around, are daily committing the most horrible depredations and murders in the defenseless parts of our Country.”\textsuperscript{42} For William Mathews, who had first-hand experience dealing with the unit, the fear of them returning was always at the back of his mind, so much so that he remarked that “I cannot think myself safe a single night.”\textsuperscript{43} Indeed, the unit must have had a seemingly immortal feel to it, for like Xerxes’s unit during the Greco-Persian Wars two millennia earlier, the Black Dragoons had a seemingly inexhaustible pool from where to replace their losses. By the time of their first official return in the Caribbean in 1784, the company of Black Dragoons

\textsuperscript{41} John Murray, Lord Dunmore, had attempted to regain control of Virginia in 1775 by forming the “Ethiopian Regiment” from runaway slaves who had fled to his lines following his proclamation, which offered freedom to any who fought for Britain. While the project failed, largely due to an outbreak of smallpox that decimated the unit, it caused consternation among whites throughout the rebelling colonies, many of whom united against the threat. Benjamin Quarles, \textit{The Negro in the American Revolution} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1961), 19-32; Elizabeth Fenn, \textit{Pox Americana: The Great Smallpox Epidemic of 1775-82} (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001), 55-62; Hoock, \textit{Scars of Independence}, 99-103; Alan Taylor, \textit{The Internal Enemy: Slavery and War in Virginia, 1772-1832} (New York: W.W Norton and Co., 2013), 23-27; Frey, \textit{Water from The Rock}, 63.


\textsuperscript{43} William Mathews to Gideon White, 26 April 1782, White Collection, no. 130, Public Archive of Nova Scotia, Halifax.
in the Carolina Corps numbered 45 men.\textsuperscript{44} Given that all of the men in the company had come from South Carolina and that attrition due to the alien climate of the West Indies killed on average one trooper a month, the return shows how large the unit was when it left Charlestown despite its wartime losses.

For the Patriot armed forces throughout the South Carolina, the destruction of the Black Dragoons, one of the few British units still active in combat operations by mid-1782, became a priority. The famed Patriot militia commander Francis Marion had frequent brushes with the Black Dragoons throughout the summer and fall of that year. In one engagement, Marion’s forces came upon a detachment of 26 Black Dragoons and cut them to pieces.\textsuperscript{45}

Running afoul of Patriot blades was not the only thing that the men of the Black Dragoons had to be fearful of when it came to confrontation with Marion. In October, the “Swamp Fox” surprised another detachment of the unit and took several of them prisoners. It was clear from his response to the capture that Marion, himself a plantation owner whose slaves had fled to the British lines, saw the skin color of the men first, and their military rights as a distant second. Instead of treating the black prisoners as legitimate soldiers, he wrote to the Patriot governor of South Carolina, John Mathews,

\textsuperscript{44} Return of Troops on Grenada, 1 September 1784, CO 101-31, National Archives.

\textsuperscript{45} Piecuch, \textit{Three Peoples, One King}, 317.
and asked him what he should do with them. Mathews replied that as the men had been taken under arms “they must be tried by negro law; and if found guilty executed.”

Despite the risks, the men of the Black Dragoons continued to venture away from the safety of the Charlestown defenses on a regular basis. In fact, their numbers grew in the months after their initial training, with presumably untrained men joining the ranks as replacements. While many joined to get a share of retribution against former masters, or at least the institution that had enabled their forced servitude, others joined for more practical reasons. Being part of the Black Dragoons elevated the position of the troopers within the black population in Charlestown, meaning a steady supply of food and shelter that most runaways within the enclave simply lacked. The British offer of freedom was solely that, and the slaves had to find their own ways to survive once within the redcoat lines. Many resorted to renewed servitude, this time to redcoats in need of certain services. It was freedom, however, which led most of the men of the Dragoons first to the British lines, and then onto a horse’s back.

As the Patriots tightened the noose around Charlestown, Leslie began to reduce the number of raids to limit British casualties. The one unit that continued to raid Patriot

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47 Runaway slaves within the British lines took up a range of professions. Those who had a trade, such as coopers, carpenters, and pilots, continued these for the British or Loyalists in the city. Many women became cooks, laundresses, or prostitutes. Other men took on more active roles, joining the British as pioneers or sailors, with a select few joining the dragoons. Still more, including the famous Boston King, became man servants for soldiers, particularly British or Hessian officers. Boston King, “Memoirs of the Life of Boston King, A Black Preacher,” The Methodist Magazine 21 (March 1798): 107.
plantations until the very moment of evacuation were the Black Dragoons. The men of the unit found their raids becoming increasingly perilous as summer turned to autumn in 1782. The dragoons continued to raid despite the threats that they faced from the increasing numbers of Patriot troops near Charlestown, and it was likely that the unit was following Leslie’s orders to capture rebel-owned slaves when ambushed by Marion’s men in October.\footnote{While there is no definitive evidence that the Black Dragoons were partaking in the capturing of rebel-owned slaves who were going to be used by Leslie as compensation for his white Loyalists, there is a good chance they were involved. The British had been conducting such a policy throughout the Southern Campaign, and so it unlikely that the Black Dragoons would not have been caught up in the practice once they were formed. Piecuch, Three Peoples, One King, 267-68, 320-21.} It is unknown whether the men of the dragoons knew what would become of the slaves who they took to the British lines. Many who had found their own freedom by joining British raiding parties like their own perhaps believed they were harbingers of emancipation. On the other hand, as the evacuation got closer, and their own prospects of withdrawal from South Carolina diminished, they must have realized the British already had all the troops they needed to defend Charlestown and that any newcomers were part of an ulterior plan by the British. Even so, the men of the dragoons knew their best chance of survival rested on their usefulness for the British cause, and thus the raiding continued, whatever moral conflicts may have arisen within the unit.

As the final months of the British occupation of Charlestown neared, the men of the dragoons found that their targets also began to shift. The evacuation was one of the biggest that the British had ever attempted, and if it failed hundreds, if not thousands were in danger. While Loyalists, slaves, and British regulars had very little hope but for a
successful departure, one group of British troops felt a better option lay with joining the victorious American side. The Hessian mercenaries who had formed part of the British force in South Carolina since the start of the Southern Campaign began deserting in increasing numbers as fall turned into winter. To stop this exodus, which threatened to sap the morale of all those remaining in Charlestown, Leslie ordered the Black Dragoons to capture any Hessians who left the British enclave. Leslie’s resolve was such that he paid the men of the dragoons two guineas for any deserter they returned to the lines, dead or alive.49 The success of the dragoons was immediate, with the flow of deserters almost stopping by the end of October 1782 due to their vigilant, and supposedly ruthless, behavior. Thanks to the actions of the Black Dragoons, the remaining Hessians would see the chaotic end of the British occupation of Charlestown first hand.

Unfortunately, regardless of the best efforts of the Black Dragoons, the British were fighting a losing battle against Greene’s ever tightening noose around Charlestown throughout the summer of 1782. By the fall, the dragoons rarely ventured more than a few miles outside of the city, and even then, they ran afoul of Marion’s partisans in October. The signs were now all pointing to a British withdrawal, and the Black Dragoons found themselves in a perilous situation: to their front, the men of an army that had already proved merciless towards them, and to their rear the Atlantic Ocean. Any elevated position the Dragoons had achieved among their fellow slaves now diminished

49 Piecuch, Three Peoples, One King, 318.
as they dissolved into a black population desperately seeking to prolong their brief
glimpse of freedom.

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Formed even before the Black dragoons, the Black Pioneers were the first runaway
slaves who the British incorporated into their military machine during the Southern
Campaign. The commander throughout the entire period was the chief engineer attached
to the British Army at Charlestown, Colonel James Moncrief. From a bystander’s
viewpoint, James Moncrief would have seemed to be the last person to have championed
the rights of black troops. Before the war, Moncrief resided in British East Florida, where
he had settled after the end of the Seven Years War as chief engineer of the newly-
acquired post at Saint Augustine. While employed in Florida, Moncrief acquired a large
plantation and slaves worth £10,000 in 1776.\textsuperscript{50} Yet, despite his interwar occupation as a
plantation owner, Moncrief became the most vocal advocate for the evacuation of
fugitive slaves within British service at the end of the Revolutionary War.

Moncrief’s experience commanding a large corps of black pioneers raised from
the large number of slaves who had fled to the British lines during the early stages of the
Southern Campaign in South Carolina and Georgia shaped his opinions. While this may
superficially be similar to the experience of Alexander Leslie, who had also campaigned

\textsuperscript{50} While Moncrief does not give a specific number of acres or slaves owned, the fact that it amounted to
£10,000 would have made his estate considerable. The valuation may be subjective, however, as it was part
of a compensation claim after the Revolutionary War. An estate of anywhere near this valuation would have
made him one of the larger planters in East Florida during the interwar years. Moncrief, Memorial, ca. 1783,
Moncrief Papers, box 4, Letterbook, Clements Library.
for black evacuation due to his experience with armed blacks during the conflict, a deeper analysis proves this is not the case. Unlike Leslie, whose service in the Revolutionary War was his first active command and thus provided his first view of blacks as soldiers, Moncrief had used black troops before. During the British siege of Havana in 1762, Moncrief served as an engineer at a time when both the Spanish and British used slaves in a military capacity. However, at the end of that action, there was no major call by Moncrief or any of his fellow officers to free the Caribbean slaves who had fought on their side.

It is also important to remember that Moncrief met with the black Loyalists in the southern colonies in a totally different context from those he had met in Cuba. In Cuba, the composition of the men that the British used were mainly Spanish slaves, to whom they did not promise freedom. This differed from the slaves who fled to the British during the Revolutionary War, who the British promised emancipation in return for leaving their rebellious masters. Moncrief therefore began to feel a deep moral obligation towards his corps of Black Pioneers who, “naturally look up to me for every protection and Support.”

51 Moncrief, Memorial ca. 1783, Moncrief Papers, box 4, Letterbook.

52 The Phillipsburg Proclamation in 1779, written by Henry Clinton in New York, promised not only freedom to slaves but also the opportunity to “follow within these Lines, any occupation which he shall think proper.” The result was a flood of runaway slaves to the British lines, with few of these refugees taking up arms for the British. However, it was only Patriot owned slaves who were granted asylum by the British, with many loyalist-owned slaves either turned out of the British lines, or re-enslaved within them. Clinton, Phillipsburg Proclamation, 30 June 1779, Henry Clinton Papers, Clements Library.

53 Moncrief to Alexander Leslie, 27 September 1782, James Moncrief Papers, box 4, Letterbook.
him was one he shared with most British officers with similar commands, and may have been honed on his Florida plantation even before the war began.

Also unlike Leslie, Moncrief had actively pursued the enslavement of blacks in the years after his service alongside members of the race at Havana. Therefore, his actions at the end of the Revolutionary War seem even more at odds with his previous character than those of Leslie.\(^{54}\) Leslie’s actions were prompted by a combination of moral convictions, based on contractualism, and military expediency in the wake of Carleton’s order to create a black unit for Caribbean service. There is no evidence Moncrief experienced any similar orders that led him to alter his views, and thus it was his experience with his black troops alone that shaped his actions as the evacuation approached.

One of the major differences between Moncrief’s experience with black troops in Cuba and later during the Revolutionary War was the length of time that he served with them during each conflict. In Cuba, Moncrief’s experience with black troops lasted only the few months that the siege of Havana took. In the Revolutionary War, Moncrief’s exposure to black troops through his biracial engineering units was much more extensive. After serving in the northern colonies at the start of the conflict, where the slave

\(^{54}\) At the close of the war, Patriot commander William Moultrie accused Moncrief of selling more than 800 runaway slaves to the Caribbean and keeping the profits for himself. While this may be true, Moultrie is the only source that insinuates Moncrief’s culpability in such a scheme. However, Moncrief was part of an earlier commission, in 1780, which captured Patriot-owned slaves and put them to work for the British. The commission captured hundreds of such slaves, many of whom would have died, re-enslaved by loyalists, or even joined the Carolina Corps. Thus, most would have vanished from Patriot eyes by the end of the war and, with Moncrief in charge of the enterprise, it is understandable why Moultrie would conflate the events. Piecuch, *Three Peoples, One King*, 216; 323.
population was relatively small, Moncrief was among the first officers sent to Georgia after the commencement of the Southern Campaign in 1778, becoming the chief engineer at Savannah. Here, he quickly enlisted blacks to bolster his forces. He recounted this to Leslie in 1782, remembering the “Negroes who have followed me on every service since the first period of my Arrival in the Province of Georgia.”55 As Moncrief described in his appeal to Leslie in September 1782, fugitive slaves became laborers for the engineering department of the army as soon as the British had arrived in Savannah. Indeed, during the famous siege of that city in the fall of 1779, the outnumbered British placed muskets in the hands of these pioneers to help repel the Franco-American assault.56 Despite their success as infantrymen, the pioneers soon found their muskets replaced by their standard laborers tools. Regardless of their lack of arms, however, the pioneers often found themselves on the front lines during the British campaign. For example, during the siege of Charlestown in 1780, some 154 blacks were members of the Royal Artillery.57 Most of these pioneers worked on the front lines, constructing the batteries from where the British heavy artillery could pound the city into submission, and thus often faced the fire of the Patriot defenders.

55 Moncrief to Leslie, 27 September 1782, Moncrief Papers, box 4, Letterbook.

56 The allied assault against the British forces at Savannah contained a detachment of black enslaved troops from the French colony of Saint Domingue. In a rare engagement during the Revolution, two black units fought against each other at Savannah. It is also known that some of the black French troops used the battle to defect to the British after hearing about their offers of freedom to slaves owned by enemies of the British crown. Piecuch, Three Peoples, One King, 169.

The British used the Black Pioneers in such important roles for two main reasons: necessity and their perceived natural attributes. The necessity to use black laborers came about due to the shortage of men that the British always seemed to have during the Southern Campaign. Using the Black Pioneers, particularly to perform fatigue duties such as the hauling of supplies or the construction of fortifications, freed up white troops for use on the battlefield or in the many inland garrisons the British established throughout the southern colonies. In addition to this, the British often found that the black men who joined them were more likely to survive the humid climate of the colonies due to their past lives in bondage in the region. This helped to prove British ideas of climatological racism, namely that blacks survived better in warmer climates than whites, especially when doing manual labor. Moncrief laid out this point of view in his post-war memorial: “it was absolutely necessary for the success of the War and for the preservation of the Lives of the Soldiers in that Climate, to employ a number of Slaves in the different Works necessary for the Operations and defence of the Army.”

This idea of black bodies being different than white ones was not unique to the British, with slaveholders globally using racism based on emerging sciences to explain their subjection of the race at a time when moral arguments against slavery were beginning to surface.

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58 Moncrief, Memorial, ca. 1783, Moncrief Papers, box 4, Letterbook.

59 One of the most famous American example of this use of science to justify slavery was Thomas Jefferson’s Notes on the State of Virginia, which was written during the Revolutionary War and shortly thereafter. Jefferson, Notes on the State of Virginia (London: John Stockdale, 1787); Wood, Black Majority, 63-94; McCandless, Slavery, Disease and Suffering.
The British Army’s racialization of disease almost destroyed the Carolina Corps before its formation, ironically later becoming the unit’s salvation. Smallpox stalked not only the men of the future Carolina Corps in South Carolina and Georgia, but all runaway slaves who sought protection with the British. Killing thousands, the malady seriously disrupted British policy towards slaves particularly during 1780 to 1781, the crucial moment when the southern colonies were at their most susceptible to British control. Indeed, to certain British commanders, smallpox threw the entire slave policy into doubt. Later, it was the British belief in the immunity of black bodies to both fatigue and mosquito-borne ailments that led to the creation of the Carolina Corps for post-war service in the tropics.

Unlike the British military, who had faced exposure to smallpox prior to their arrival in the Americas, the slaves who ran to their lines at Charlestown and Savannah had no such immunity to the disease. As such, many of those who ran to the British in search of freedom soon found themselves battling an invisible foe. David George, one of the few fugitive slaves to leave a written account of his ordeal, explained he “caught the smallpox in the fall of the year and thought I should have died,” shortly after his arrival in Savannah in 1780. The British did not know how to respond to the epidemic among the slaves, which Charles Cornwallis, the commander of the Royal army, feared would spread among the vulnerable white Loyalists who made up a sizeable portion of his military force. To

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60 George was lucky enough to survive his encounter with the pox and continued his life as a butcher within the British lines, before being evacuated first to New York and then Nova Scotia. George, “An Account of the Life of Mr. David George from Sierra Leone in Africa given by himself in a conversation with Brother Rippon of London, and Brother Pearce of Birmingham,” Baptist Annual Register 1, (1790-93): 474-77.
maintain a semblance of order in Charlestown, Cornwallis directed the runaways who made it to the British lines to a camp on the outskirts of the city. With no fresh water or adequate shelter, the conditions in the camp soon became squalid. To make matters worse, as more fugitives arrived, the confined conditions of the slave camp became even more cramped and pox-ridden. Soon the dead became too many to bury, and so corpses were moved into the nearby woods and left to nature’s disposition.61 The white inhabitants of the city, afraid to approach the camp for fear of contagion, watched and commented on the suffering of the blacks. Plantation mistress Eliza Lucas Pinckney lamented that “As the smallpox was in the British camp thousands of Negroes dyed miserably of it.”62

It was into this maelstrom of disease and fear that the men of the future Carolina Corps entered during the chaotic first years of the Southern Campaign. Boston King, another slave who fled to the British lines and left a written testimony, provides an account of how black Loyalists who attached themselves to the army were treated upon encountering smallpox: “I was seized with the small-pox, and suffered great hardships; for all the Blacks affected with that disease, were ordered to be carried a mile from the camp, lest the (white) soldiers should be infected, and disabled from marching...We lay sometimes a whole day without any thing to eat or drink.”63 This was the kind of

61 David Ramsay, History of South Carolina: From its First Settlement in 1670 to the Year 1808 (Charlestown, SC: Walker, Evans and Co., 1858), 190.


treatment that befell the afflicted of the Black Pioneers, due to the value differences placed upon white and black lives by the officers of the British Army. It is important, however, to mention that King survived due to the benevolence of a white officer whom he had impressed in his short term of service at Charlestown.

It is almost certain that men from the future Carolina Corps contracted smallpox at Charlestown. During the siege of the city in 1780, some of the pioneers found themselves attached to the Royal Artillery. A total of 154 blacks were placed into the Royal Artillery, yet by late April, less than a month into the siege, fewer than 100 remained fit for duty. Of these, thirty, or one-fifth of the total number, were suffering from smallpox specifically.\textsuperscript{64} It is hard to estimate how many slaves died within British lines due to smallpox during the southern campaign of the Revolutionary War, but Elizabeth Fenn suggests that at least 2000 black Loyalists succumbed around Charlestown alone.\textsuperscript{65}

The arrival of smallpox amongst the slaves threw the very policy of sheltering blacks within British lines into doubt due to the threats it posed to the white Loyalist population. Henry Clinton wrote Cornwallis a letter on the slave situation, assuring his subordinate that he would “leave such orders as I hope will prevent the Confusion that would arise from a further desertion of them to us, and I will consider of some Scheme

\textsuperscript{64} A Return of Negroes for the Royal Artillery Dept., Lenings Landing, 28 April 1780, Clinton Papers, Vol. 261.

\textsuperscript{65} Fenn does not give the number of slaves who died of the disease at Savannah, though it can be surmised that they died on a similar scale to those at Charlestown, likely being totaled in the hundreds. Fenn, \textit{Pox Americana}, 274.
for placing those we have on Abandoned Plantations, on which they may subsist.”

Clinton’s negative attitude towards black refugees increased as more reached his lines. He even advised Cornwallis to “make such Arrangements as will discourage their joining us.” Going against his own Phillipsburg proclamation, which was less than a year old, Clinton now advocated a policy of dissuading slaves from escaping to the British lines.

Cornwallis was just as clinical as Clinton when it came to removing the threat of smallpox from the white population. In addition to his quarantine procedure at Charlestown, during the Yorktown Campaign in Virginia, after thousands more slaves had attached themselves to his army, he engaged in a sinister exchange of letters with General Charles O’Hara. Encouraging his friend O’Hara to desert a group of several hundred blacks suffering from smallpox, Cornwallis told him that “we cannot bring a number of sick & useless ones to this place; some flour must be left for them & some person of the County appointed to take charge of them.” O’Hara protested but was chided by an angry Cornwallis who described the black Loyalists as “an Evil which not only destroys a great quantity of Provisions, but will certainly produce some fatal distemper in the Army.”

It is highly unlikely that the formation of the Carolina Corps would have occurred had Cornwallis remained in Charlestown, but fate would deliver Alexander Leslie to the

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68 Cornwallis to Charles O’Hara, 7 August 1781, Cornwallis Papers, Reel RW3150, Volume 89, Doc. 6.

69 Cornwallis to O’Hara, 10 August 1781, Cornwallis Papers, Reel RW3150, Volume 70, Doc. 10.
city. Cornwallis’ early military successes meant that he did not believe he needed black men to fight, while Leslie later needed as many men as possible to help defend his ever-shrinking perimeter at Charlestown. Leslie and his subordinates was not only more willing to use black Loyalists in a military capacity, but rather than see black bodies as a conduit for disease, as Cornwallis did, they saw black troops as vessels of immunity. Most of the arguments that surrounded the formation of the Carolina Corps in 1782 related to black immunity to malarial disease and ability to work in tropical climates. Moncrief, a veteran of Caribbean warfare, wrote to a fellow engineer that “Should any service be going forward, in America or the W. Indies, which may require the labour of those people, they will certainly prove a valuable acquisition to Government, by saving the (white) Troops.”

This statement reveals that Moncrief was not unbiased in his views of race and, while he felt a moral contractual obligation to the men under his command, he would much rather spare white lives at the expense of black ones if necessary. Indeed, mirroring Moncrief’s beliefs, the entire concept of the Corps had been formed in New York after Carleton received a letter from General Edward Mathew in the West Indies asking for a unit of black troops to engage in fatigue duties in the region to reduce mortality among white troops.

White officers based their ideas of the British Army on the scientific doctrine of the time. Dr. William Fergusson, the inspector-general of British hospitals and a veteran of campaigns in the West Indies, underlines basic British racial understanding towards

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70 Moncrief to Robert Morse, 10 September 1782. Moncrief Papers, box 4.

71 Tyson, “Carolina Black Corps,” 650.
climatology and disease at the turn of the nineteenth century. He wrote of black soldiers serving in the Caribbean: “he is a child of the sun, the climate is his own, and he is capable of exertions in it of which we seem as yet to have had but little adequate idea.” In his memoir, published in 1846, well after his service in the West Indies, Fergusson makes the tacit acknowledgment that medicine had yet to determine a clinical difference between black and white bodies. It was, however, this racialized idea of disease and climatology that formed the basis for the creation of the Carolina Corps. Thus, British understanding of disease played a pivotal role in the early military careers of the men of the Black Pioneers and Dragoons who would later form the Carolina Corps.

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While the British paid the men of the Black Pioneers for their service, the fact is that there were not enough men in the unit to satisfy the full demands of the British engineering department at Charlestown. While hundreds did join the unit, thousands of other runaway slaves took up Clinton’s offer and followed whatever employment they wished within the British lines. This forced Moncrief to rent slaves from Loyalists in the enclave, likewise employing white overseers from this group, to ensure the construction of the extensive system of defensive works around Charlestown and their maintenance.73


73 In June 1781, for example, as the tide of war turned against the British in South Carolina, Moncrief paid the loyalist James Robertson £710 for the hire of slaves to work in the engineering department. Moncrief paid similar bills beginning as early as June 1780. Moncrief, Bill for hire of slaves, Moncrief Papers, box 1, folder 22.
The choices made by the black Loyalists under Moncrief’s command were critical to their commander’s decision making and show the power dynamic did not flow in a single direction at this stage of the war. The men who decided to take up arms for the British, or picks and shovels in the case of Moncrief, did so of their own choosing. The terms of the Phillipsburg Proclamation made it clear that slaves who made it to the British lines could perform any occupation they chose. It is likely that many benefitted from joining the unit as they were guaranteed clothing, food and a better quality of life than many of their fugitive counterparts. Self-emancipation was an incredibly dangerous, albeit courageous, decision even during a conflict where one side offered freedom. Talking with their feet, the men of the Black Pioneers joined thousands of others in what was the greatest slave rebellion in eighteenth-century North American history.

The number of Black Pioneers attached to the British army measured in the hundreds almost from the beginning of the Southern Campaign. While the name of the unit may suggest that the sole purpose of the men was to only perform labor intensive pioneer duties, the knowledge and skills of some of the former slaves meant their white commanders began to use them to perform different tasks. The men who received this elevation formed a separate artificer unit with the Black Pioneers. As the commander of the Black Pioneers, one of Moncrief’s major responsibilities was to supply the unit throughout their service in Charlestown. From his meticulous records, it is clear that the artificer unit of the Black Pioneers numbered as many as seventy-eight men in the final

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74 The slaves of North America heard about the proclamation through a variety of methods, from merchant sailors, to British soldiers, and from their fellow slaves. Scott, “Common Wind.”
months of the British occupation of Charlestown. Extrapolating from the numbers of men in the later Carolina Corps, this means that the number of laborers in the Black Pioneers numbered at least 250 by the evacuation of Charlestown.

Moncrief’s ledger is also revealing for another reason. It notes within its audited columns not only men, but also women and children. For example, at the start of December the ledger shows that Moncrief ordered rations given to 11 women and 9 children who were attached in some way to the Engineering department. While Moncrief does not list the occupations that these women and children had within the department it can be assumed that they served in support roles, perhaps as cooks, servants and laundresses for the rest of the unit. It is also important to note that unlike the black men in the artificer corps, the women and children served varying lengths of time with the engineering department. This possibly indicates that the women, children

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75 The first records, from the summer of 1780, shortly after the fall of Charlestown, show the number of black artificers at 40, indicating that the British understood the use of such a unit quickly and then almost doubled its size during their occupation of the city. Moncrief, Ledger of rations for Black Artificers, August-December 1782, Moncrief Papers, box 4.

76 It is hard to judge the exact number as it is likely that some of the Black Pioneers were either not evacuated from Charlestown or died in the Caribbean before the creation of the first return of the Carolina Corps in autumn 1784. Moncrief also did not list the numbers of the overall Black Pioneer unit numbers as he did the separate artificers, although the laborer numbers would have been considerably higher than those of the Pioneers.

77 Moncrief, Ledger of rations for slaves attached to the Engineering Department, July-December 1782, Moncrief Papers, box 4.

78 White camp followers during the Revolutionary War performed similar duties for white regiments, and thus provide a good example for the kind of work which the black women and children were doing for the Pioneers. White camp followers received half rations by the army, a similar subsistence to those shown in Moncrief’s ledger for their black counterparts. Carol Berkin, Revolutionary Mothers: Women in the Struggle for America’s Independence (New York: Random House, 2005), 52-53; Holly A. Mayer, Belonging to the Army: Camp Followers and Community during the American Revolution (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996), 17, 68.
and men listed in this ledger were slaves who were hired by the Engineering department from local Loyalists. Otherwise, these part-time workers may simply have gained employment for short-term, specific jobs from the hordes of runaway slaves, and given subsistence rations rather than wages for their labor. Due to the lack of information given, it is impossible to tell whether there were any kinship ties either between the women and children, or with the men who served in the Black Pioneers. Whoever these women and children were, however, one thing is clear, none boarded the ships for evacuation to the Caribbean with the rest of the Black Pioneers when the British abandoned Charlestown in December 1782.79

The presence of women on the ration list brings into focus the kinship and familial ties that the men of the Black Dragoons and the Black Pioneers had before the Revolutionary War. While it is not possible to track the routes and circumstances of the specific men of these units to the British lines, it is known that slaves often fled their plantations in family groups. For example, David George escaped to the British lines at Savannah, Georgia with his entire family in tow.80 It would have been possible for those

79 While it is impossible to prove who the black camp followers due to lack of documentation, it is likely that many were family members of the men in the unit. As Mayer notes, there were so many family members attached to both British and American army units during the war that rules were created especially for them and rations provided. As subsistence within the British lines was hard to come by, it would hardly have been surprising if family members of the soldiers attached themselves to the pioneers, and their inclusion in the official army returns suggests that rations were provided to these camp followers. It is unknown what became of the group after December 1782. While it is most likely that they were returned to slavery alongside the thousands of other runaways who were recaptured when the city fell, it is possible some may have found a place on a ship and were simply not put on the official British register. Mayer, Camp Followers, 128.

80 George and his family were lucky enough to gain passage on a British ship before Savannah fell. He eventually made it to Nova Scotia, where he became a Baptist preacher and one of the leading black figures in the later Sierra Leone colony. George, “An Account of the Life,” 473-84.
runaways who joined the British military around Charlestown to have continued familial relationships within the city, with the black troops having free time, especially in the evenings, to spend with their loved ones. This possibility makes the omission of women from the manifests of the ships carrying the troops to the Caribbean, and from any documentation of the later Carolina Corps even more tragic. It may very well have been the case that in finding freedom for themselves in the Caribbean, the men of the Carolina Corps had to leave behind their families to the risk of re-enslavement.

Moncrief’s meticulously kept ledgers provide a rich insight into the lives of the black units he commanded at Charlestown during their active service for the crown. In December 1781, the men of the Black Pioneers received new blankets, shoes and clothing from Moncrief, which he paid local Charlestown merchants to furnish.\(^{81}\) The ledger reveals that the men of the unit received the same sorts of subsistence materials as white troops in the city, albeit without any uniforms or weapons. By calculating from the numbers of supplies bought, particularly new pairs of shoes (320), it is possible to estimate the size of the unit, including its artificer corps. However, while the Black Pioneers did not receive a formal British Army uniform, the ledger does show that Moncrief purchased 126 yards of red stroud cloth, along with the coarse material oznaburgs and welsh plains wool more often associated with slave clothing at the

\(^{81}\) Moncrief paid £930 to the merchants for the various clothing and associated items. Presumably Moncrief made such purchases every six months, as there is a similar bill for the clothing of laborers in June 1781. Moncrief, Account of expenses for clothing of Black Laborers, 31 December 1781, Moncrief Papers, box 1, folder 30.
period. This means that the men likely wore the same color tunics as their white counterparts, even if they were designed differently and made of far inferior material. Simply by wearing a form of the red uniform of the British Army, the men of the Black Pioneers would have been visibly different than the thousands of other slaves in the Charlestown enclave, thus giving them a higher standing as evacuation neared (see Fig. 1.1). The black soldiers of the unit wearing red coats thus began a continuous tradition that would continue in the British Army for over a century.

In addition to the subsistence supplies that the men of the Black Pioneers gained, the men of the unit also received wages as free men for the first time in their lives. Depending on the employment that the men had within the unit, the pay that they received was often similar to that of white laborers within the British lines. For example, Moncrief noted that the five black waggoneers within the unit received the exact same pay as the sole white worker within the same employment. Of course, such parity in

82 Moncrief, Account of expenses for clothing of Black Laborers, 31 December 1781, Moncrief Papers, box 1, folder 30.

83 Slave clothing varied between the various slave regions within the British Empire. All of the clothing, however, was designed in the European style, which would have been foreign to slaves recently arrived from Africa. These items were normally made of cheap materials, such as oznaburges, which were sufficient to clothe the slaves without hitting the planter's pocketbook too harshly. The British views on morality meant that clothing slaves was a necessity. During the Revolutionary War, the uniforms of the British Army, with their famous red coats, would have become increasingly familiar to the runaways, who would have known the importance of receiving such an article of clothing. Linda Baumgarten, "'Clothes for the People': Slave Clothing in Early Virginia," *Journal of Early Southern Decorative Arts* 14, no. 2 (November 1988): 27–61; David Waldstreicher, "Reading the Runaways: Self-Fashioning, Print Culture, and Confidence in Slavery in the Eighteenth-Century Mid-Atlantic." *William and Mary Quarterly* Third Ser. 56, no. 2 (April 1999): 243–72; Shane White and Graham White, "Slave Clothing and African-American Culture in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," *Past and Present* 148 (August 1995): 149–86.

84 Both the black waggoneers; named Tom, Peter, Mingo, Glasgow and Cudjo, and the single white worker, Thomas Jones, received £18, 8s for six months employment. Incidentally, due to their illiteracy, Jones signed
Fig. 1.1) A page from the ledger of James Moncrief. Note the ordering of oznaburgs, (Welsh) plains, and red stroud cloth. The former items were both usual items used to make slave clothing, but the latter was not. From these well-kept ledgers it is possible to understand much about the provisioning men of Black Pioneers with while in Charlestown.

the ledger for all the waggoneers. Moncrief, Ledger for pay of Waggoneers, 31 December 1781, Moncrief Papers, box 1, folder 29.
wages was absent in most occupations, including the most critical, within the enclave. A prime example of this is the black boatmen and pilots who were crucial to safe navigation within the oft treacherous Charlestown Harbor, a haven notorious for its shifting sandbars. While the waggoneers received a wage equivalent to their white counterparts, white harbor pilots received more than black boatmen for doing the exact same job.\(^85\)

Even with pay discrepancies, during their term of service, the men of the Black Pioneers used their commander to leverage their position within the British lines at Charlestown. By ably performing their duty, and by showing loyalty to the British cause, the Pioneers showed Moncrief the worthiness of the unit. Moncrief became so enamored of his men that in early 1782 he wrote Sir Henry Clinton that “great advantages may be gained by Embodying a Brigade of Negros in this Country.”\(^86\)

At this stage, while he had raised the Black Dragoons, Leslie still had not told Clinton that he had armed the black Loyalists, and it was still several months before Carleton’s forward-thinking proposal reached South Carolina. While Carleton based his assessment on climatological racism, however, there is no hint in Moncrief’s suggestion to Clinton of arming the men for American service for any reason other than their worthiness as soldiers.

While there is no doubt that paternalistic ideas of race were influential to Moncrief, his close association with the men meant he felt the same sorts of moral

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\(^{85}\) The white coxswain received £0.87 per day, compared to the £0.85 per day which his black counterparts earned. While this sum was comparable, it is important to note that in the pre-decimal British system, this equaled several shillings more per day. Also of note, like the waggoneers, the white boatman collected the wages of the whole. Moncrief, Ledger for pay of Waggoneers, 31 December 1781, Moncrief Papers, box 1, folder 29.

\(^{86}\) Moncrief to Clinton, 13 March 1782, Moncrief Papers, box 4, Letterbook.
obligations towards them that Leslie felt by the beginning of the evacuation.\textsuperscript{87} However, it was the actions of the men that most swayed his thinking, as he explained after the conflict ended: “At the close of the War it was intended to have restored the slaves to their former owners; but your Memorialist…had been a Witness to the exertions made by them in forwarding and Assisting the Operations of the Army, and…on that Account could not but object.”\textsuperscript{88} Further proof of Moncrief’s attachment to his unit is found in the fact that while he actively petitioned both Clinton and Leslie to evacuate them, he made no such remonstrations on behalf of the thousands of other black Loyalists who were soon to find themselves re-enslaved.\textsuperscript{89}

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As soon as Leslie had received the orders to prepare for the evacuation of Charlestown, he began putting the complicated maneuver into motion. However, while his priority was the evacuation of his troops and the white loyalist population in the city, he was unable to escape the daily visuals that reminded him of the plight of the thousands

\textsuperscript{87} The language that Moncrief used in his letters show both his paternalism and moral emotions towards his black troops. In his letter to Clinton, he showed both as he explained; “The Number of Slaves, who have attached themselves to the Engineer Department, since my Arrival in this part of the Country, and who look up to me for protection, has been for some time past a Matter of serious concern.” Moncrief to Clinton, 13 March 1782, Moncrief Papers, box 4, Letterbook.

\textsuperscript{88} Moncrief, Memorial, ca. 1783, Moncrief Papers, box 4, Letterbook.

\textsuperscript{89} During the Charlestown evacuation, only those blacks attached to the units who would later form the Carolina Corps were listed as being evacuated by the British. While some other runaway slaves did escape the Charlestown enclave, most famously Boston King, most did so via New York City and were thus evacuated to Nova Scotia. Carleton, in New York, allowed many more family units to escape, while in South Carolina, Leslie faced a much tougher evacuation and thus focused exclusively on the saving of those blacks who had fought for him previously. Some other newly freed blacks may have evacuated on non-naval vessels, and some did enlist in the Royal Navy, but these specific cases are not noted in the final British evacuation records for Charlestown. List of Ships Bound for Saint Lucia, December 1782, WO 36-3.
of runaway slaves within his lines. He wrote back to Guy Carleton within a month of receiving the orders to abandon Charlestown asking what should happen to the slaves that the British had offered to emancipate. Leslie certainly felt like he had some degree of moral obligation to the blacks within the Charlestown perimeter, and yet he still prioritized the white loyalist refugees within the enclave, even when considering the runaways.

As big a concern for the Loyalists as finding a place on a British ship to escape South Carolina, was the need to safeguard their property, a fact they made crystal clear to Leslie. Despite the best efforts of the British authorities in Charlestown to capture and re-enslave any loyalist-owned slaves that they found seeking freedom within their lines, this was a forlorn hope. As a result, slaves with owners on both sides of the conflict sought freedom in the city. Some Loyalists took it into their own hands to regain their property, sometimes stealing slaves from their fellow Loyalists. Leslie felt the pressure so much over this situation that he ordered all those who claimed to own slaves to submit lists of them to the British authorities, who would then resolve disputes among Loyalists. That Leslie was forced to issue such an order shows the sheer chaos that reigned within the British lines as the evacuation date approached.

Leslie’s attempts to appease his loyal subjects regarding slave property did not stop with the slaves within his own lines. As the Patriots advanced on Charlestown, they

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90 Piecuch, *Three Peoples, One King*, 320.

91 Piecuch, *Three Peoples, One King*, 320.
seized all loyalist property, both static and moveable, including slaves. Leslie felt it was his within his mandated powers to get some of this property back for the refugee planters within Charlestown. Throughout 1782, he sent raiding parties out of the British perimeter to seize slaves to use as compensation for Loyalists.\textsuperscript{92} Francis Marion saw first-hand what the British were doing, and on March 29 he wrote that the British had been “taking all the negroes” from plantations throughout the lowcountry around Charlestown.\textsuperscript{93}

The one factor that dominated the mind of Alexander Leslie at this stage of the conflict was the evacuation of his troops, white loyalist refugees and as much of their property as possible. Still, the free blacks already within his lines did occupy a central position in Leslie’s mind. He wrote to Carleton in August that he felt a moral obligation to protect at least some of the runaway slaves who had taken up arms, and could not leave them “to the merciless resentment of their former masters.”\textsuperscript{94} The statement to Carleton shows both that Leslie had begun to desire the evacuation of at least some of the blacks within the British lines by the later summer of 1782, but also that he was prioritizing those who had joined the British military.

\textsuperscript{92} At this stage in the war, with the British contemplating abandoning Charlestown, it is unlikely that Leslie was still attempting to free slaves, which he would then have to consider evacuating. Thus, while this is still a possibility, the much more likely scenario is that the slaves which Marion saw being taken from Patriot plantations were being given to Loyalists who had lost their own as the British retreated.

\textsuperscript{93} Francis Marion to Nathanael Greene, 29 March 1782, in \textit{The Papers of Nathanael Greene}, Vol. 10, Dennis Conrad et al., eds. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 561.

\textsuperscript{94} Alexander Leslie to Guy Carleton, 10 August 1782, Alexander Leslie Letterbook, New York Public Library.
Leslie’s prioritization of those armed blacks over the countless thousands of others who were laboring for the British in Charlestown is unsurprising. He would have heard reports about the atrocities that the Patriots were committing against his troops, including his Black Dragoons, and would therefore have been aware that a similar fate would likely befall all similarly armed blacks whom the Patriots recaptured. As well as this, the armed units were the ones that Leslie had had the most personal experience with, and thus he was more inclined to look favorably on their evacuation than the hundreds of nameless runaways who he saw daily.95

On the opposite side of the field of battle, the men of the Patriot forces closing in on Charlestown retained their racial feelings towards black slaves. Despite the experiments in the northern theatre of the war, where regiments openly recruited black troops, the southern theatre had no such biracial units. This was despite the open pleading of some officers, most famously John Laurens, who argued that blacks could serve in exchange for freedom to bring the conflict to a speedy resolution.96 Blacks did

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95 It is unknown whether Leslie had any personal black servants working for him in Charlestown, but it is highly likely that he did. Most officers within Charlestown had at least one runaway working as a servant for them. Leslie himself admitted to Carleton that, “officers long in this country look on negroes as their property.” Leslie does not write of any slaves he had personally commandeered, and so it cannot be judged with certainty as to whether any such were evacuated in December 1782. Leslie to Carleton, 18 October 1782, Alexander Leslie Letterbook.

96 Laurens came from one of the wealthiest slaveholding families in South Carolina. Nathanael Greene was also a believer in the use of black troops and on several occasions attempted to persuade South Carolinian elites to support the measure. John Rutledge, the Patriot governor of Carolina rebuffed the move, with the support by his legislature. Often, these opponents to black enlistment often used the atrocities committed by black Loyalists on the British side to justify their stances. Gilbert, Black Patriots and Loyalists, 160-62.
serve in the Patriot forces during the southern campaign, but their limited number never came close to matching those of their loyalist counterparts.

With racism still trumping military expediency in the minds of most white Patriot planters throughout the southern colonies and victory seemingly imminent, the American military started to focus on how best to secure the institution of slavery in the region. Outraged by what they viewed as the theft of Patriot-owned slaves by the British forces, including the Black Dragoons, the Patriots began their own campaign to seize loyalist property. This was an easy task for the Patriots, who controlled almost all of the colony outside of the Charlestown enclave, and so could easily confiscate any loyalist property, human or other, from the region. Indeed, the number of slaves collected was such that by 1782 the Patriot legislatures of both Georgia and South Carolina offered new recruits a bounty paid not in cash, but in slaves.97

In the final months of the British occupation of Charlestown, the main objective of the Patriot governments of South Carolina and Georgia became the re-enslavement of all the slaves who had run to the British lines. While the Patriots were oblivious to the details of the British evacuation plan, they were aware that shipments of Patriot-owned slaves were leaving the harbor, either in British naval service or as compensation to loyalist slaveholders who had lost property through confiscation. The two sides began to treat with each other during the fall of 1782, and by October they had come to a tentative agreement on the issue of Patriot-owned slaves within the enclave. The British agreed to

97 Piecuch, *Three Peoples, One King*, 325.
return all the Patriot-owned slaves who had not served them in a military capacity, under the agreement that no harm would come to them for escaping. The Patriots allowed the vanquished loyalists to leave the colony with any property they had in the enclave, including chattel, and to collect American debts still owed to them after the conclusion of the war.\(^98\) Nowhere did Leslie attempt to deal with the thousands of non-military runaway slaves to whom the British had promised freedom.\(^99\) The unfortunates in this group were forgotten by their would-be saviors, and forced to endure the horror of seeing their fragile freedom stripped away once the final British vessels left Charlestown Harbor at the end of 1782.

In the final weeks before the evacuation, conditions in Charlestown became even more frantic. This prompted further pleas from James Moncrief to Alexander Leslie relating to the troops under his command. On 27 September, Moncrief wrote to Leslie that, “I must beg leave to mention, how anxious I am to know the fate of the Unfortunate Negroes.”\(^100\) It is safe to assume Moncrief, as one of the senior British commanders in South Carolina, had heard about the ongoing negotiations between the British and the Patriot politicians regarding the fate of the slaves in Charlestown. As such, he specifically

\(^{98}\) Piecuch, *Three Peoples, One King*, 321.

\(^{99}\) The treaty failed almost immediately, as the British began to refuse Patriot requests to identify and then re-enslave certain slaves. However, the document is still important as it codifies the beliefs of both the British high command, and the desires of the Patriot high command in South Carolina. From a British standpoint, the document explains why no women were evacuated from the enclave with the men of the Carolina Corps, as well as the ways in which the men who served with the British had advanced their position in the preceding three years of war.

\(^{100}\) Moncrief to Leslie, 27 September 1782, Moncrief Papers, box 4, Letterbook.
laid out his concerns by explaining, “Their present situation would not have given me so much uneasiness, had I not been Authorised...to offer them every Assurance of not being obliged to return to their former Masters and that they might depend upon me for a fulfilment of the promises that were made to them.”\textsuperscript{101} Only a matter of days later, Leslie stipulated that no slaves who had served the British in any military capacity during the war would be exempt from any agreement that would have resulted in their re-enslavement.

Now that the men of the Black Pioneers were safe from the Patriots as the evacuation began, Moncrief actively began looking for ways to ensure that his men were the ones on the ships scheduled to leave Charlestown. In early October, he wrote to his subordinate, Lieutenant John Wilson, whom he had commanded while at Savannah. In his letter he specifically asked after the small unit of black pioneers who had been present in the city during its final evacuation by the British in July 1782. Moncrief enquired about reports that “a Considerable number of Negros have been sent away from Georgia, to East Florida at the Evacuation of Savannah, who were employed in the Engineer department,” before asking Wilson to “Enquire into this matter, and send an exact list of their number, names, and owners.”\textsuperscript{102} While Alexander Leslie may have used the list in his negotiations with the Patriots over compensation claims, it is also likely that Moncrief

\textsuperscript{101} Moncrief to Leslie, 27 September 1782, Moncrief Papers, box 4, Letterbook.

\textsuperscript{102} The list is not among Moncrief’s extant papers, and it is also unknown what became of these members of the Black Pioneers. They did not become members of the Carolina Corps, and while they may have achieved their freedom in East Florida, it is also possible that they were re-enslaved. Moncrief to John Wilson, 7 October 1782, Moncrief Papers, box 4, Letterbook.
was seeing if the reports on black evacuations were true to judge their feasibility for his men in Charlestown. In his memorial, written after the evacuation, he makes it clear that he considered his actions pivotal for the evacuation of the men.103

Whether or not Moncrief was vital to saving the Pioneers, their eventual evacuation and the subsequent creation of the Carolina Corps is attributable to one man: Guy Carleton. Carleton recommended in his September letter that Leslie raise a black regiment in South Carolina and send it to the British Caribbean at the end of the war. For this purpose, he asked Leslie to establish a unit of at least 200 men who were to serve in the British West Indies for an undefined period.104 Furthermore, he suggested in the letter that the men of the new unit would receive six pence a day, only slightly less than the pay of white regulars in the British West Indies.105 Carleton wanted such a unit due to the unforgiving climate of the region on white bodies, and because he had personally seen the usefulness of black laborers while commanding in New York. By authorizing Leslie to prioritize men capable of military service he saved a minute number of all those blacks in

103 In his Memorial of 1783, Moncrief proudly mentions that “it was Chiefly thro’ his influence that 400 of these Slaves were sent to the West Indies to be employed in His Majesty’s Service.” While Moncrief overestimates the number of slaves sent to the West Indies, the number was closer to 300, and neglects to mention the important roles of either Leslie or Carleton, the document shows that Moncrief considered the achievement important. Moncrief, Memorial, ca. 1783, Moncrief Papers, box 4, Letterbook.

104 Carleton to Leslie, 10 September 1782, Carleton Papers, Vol. 49.

105 British regulars in the West Indies earned eight pence a day in 1782. In 1793, the rate of pay for white soldiers increased to a shilling a day, although it is unknown if the Carolina Corps saw any similar pay rise in the same period. Buckley, British Army in the West Indies, 57.
Charlestown, while condemning the majority to continued servitude. By issuing his order, Carleton also laid the foundations for the creation of the Carolina Corps.

Alexander Leslie faced a difficult situation by the end of November, with the final evacuation of Charlestown imminent. While ships had been spiriting away Loyalists, troops, slaves, and animals from Charlestown for several weeks, he had not tried to remove his black troops to the Caribbean, as per Carleton’s order. Part of the issue was logistical; the black soldiers were not his main priority, and so space on ships was allocated to other people, particularly white Loyalist refugees. The other issue was that, when combined, the men of the Black Dragoons and the Black Pioneers, including their artificer arm, numbered well above the 200 men that Carleton authorized for evacuation.

A final problem that faced Leslie was to keep his perimeter defended while the Loyalists and his white troops evacuated Charlestown. In the event, the Patriots were happy to sit back and have the British leave the city without further violence, but Leslie

106 Unlike in New York, where Carleton personally oversaw the evacuation of over 3000 black Loyalists to Nova Scotia and Britain at the end of the conflict, very few blacks from Charlestown achieved freedom. While several hundred black Loyalists, including David George, reached New York and then Nova Scotia, thousands were simply abandoned to re-enslavement. Outside of the Carolina Corps, the number of slaves who found freedom through Charlestown certainly numbered no more than 500. The Book of Negroes, Carleton Papers; Schama, Rough Crossings; Jasanoff, Liberty’s Exiles.

107 Combined, the men of these units numbered a little over 300 men at the time of evacuation. This number is based on both the memorial of James Moncrief, and the first return of troops of the Carolina Corps in the Caribbean. A return of troops, made in December 1784, nearly two years after the evacuation puts the unit strength in Grenada at 233 men. In addition to this, 29 further troops were present on Saint Vincent, with an untold number in the various other island posts throughout the Windward Islands. When considering natural decrease, particularly in the alien tropical climate of the West Indies, it is likely that Moncrief’s assertions were slightly over an over-estimation of the number of troops evacuated from Charlestown. Return of Troops on Grenada, 1 September 1784, CO 101-31; Return of Troops on Saint Vincent, 18 August 1784, CO 260-7.
wished to remove the risk of the Patriots striking the British mid-embarkation. He therefore placed guns in the hands of the Black Pioneers and had these troops provide the final defense of the city.\textsuperscript{108} The move to use these men in combat roles could be viewed as cynical by some, as Leslie may be seen to be using black lives to save white ones. However, the move also underscores Leslie’s trust in the martial abilities of his black troops, as their placement and steadfastness was crucial to the success of the evacuation.

The black dragoons and pioneers completed their evacuation in December 1782. From the list of ships created by the British during this final phase of evacuation, it is possible to detail some of the movements of the black units as they left Charlestown for the last time. The men of the Black Pioneers and the Black Dragoons found themselves combined for the first time as a cohesive unit and embarked to Saint Lucia on the \textit{HMS Symmetry}, the second largest ship in the convoy.\textsuperscript{109} Even given the size of the vessel, the men lacked much space for a journey that would have taken weeks especially in the harsh heart of winter. Testament to the rough passage of the troops to their new home in the British West Indies is the fact that the mounts for the Black Dragoons, on a separate ship, were all killed or too injured upon their arrival in the Caribbean to be used by the unit.\textsuperscript{110} Still, the first return of the troops taken after their arrival in Saint Lucia gave the number

\textsuperscript{108} Piecuch, \textit{Three Peoples, One King}, 318.

\textsuperscript{109} The size of the \textit{HMS Symmetry}, at 333 tons, shows the size of the evacuated contingent of black troops. The fact that there are no other large items listed as cargo on the vessel, suggests its exclusive use for the future Carolina Corps. List of Ships Bound for Saint Lucia, December 1782, WO 36-3.

\textsuperscript{110} The Black Dragoon’s horses embarked on the much smaller ship \textit{Jackson}, 150 tons. Because of this loss of horses, and the dearth of replacements to be found on the islands, the Black Dragoons became a largely infantry unit after their arrival. List of Ships Bound for Saint Lucia, December 1782, WO 36-3.
of troops who disembarked as 240 Black Pioneers and 70 Black Dragoons. Some 56 women and 20 children also appear on the return, although there is no evidence they were evacuated from Charlestown, and they fade from the subsequent documentary record of the unit. It is therefore likely that these were camp followers who attached themselves to the unit during their one year stay on Saint Lucia.

What the documentary record does not reveal is the emotions that the men of the Carolina Corps felt as they left South Carolina, for most of them the only home they had ever known. The lack of documentation makes it difficult to imagine the scenes of the night before the evacuation, or the fleeting farewells as the men left their friends and families knowing full well that the odds of ever seeing them again were next to none. It does not allow us to understand how the men must have felt as they stood aboard the Symmetry as it passed Sullivan’s Island, the so-called Ellis Island of African Americans, where their ancestors, and even some of the troops, had arrived in America in chains. The Carolina Corps may have had its foundations in American slavery, but its members would make their greatest societal and military contributions as free men.

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By reliably performing their duty, the blacks who took up arms for the King during the final two years of the Revolutionary War did much more than gain freedom at the war’s conclusion. Throughout their period of service, the men of these units displayed so much martial skill that the commanders of the British Army sought for the continuation

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111 Edward Mathew to Lord Sydney, 18 September 1783, CO 318-10.
of such units after the evacuation of Charlestown. From a grander military perspective, men like Carleton certainly saw such men as resources for use in the British Imperial machine, making plans to create a regiment without ever seeing the men involved in realizing such a plan. However, on the more intimate level experienced by the British officers in South Carolina and Georgia, who had daily interactions with such men, there was a perceptible shift in the way they viewed them. Indeed, by the end of the conflict, it was these white men who ensured that the troops of the Black Pioneers and Dragoons survived.

The men of the black units were not simply pawns in the British strategy in the southern colonies, however. Their critical usefulness to the British, particularly as the number of white troops and Loyalists dwindled, made the black troops crucial cogs in the redcoat machine in the final year of the Revolutionary War in South Carolina. The black Loyalists made use of this, both negotiating their eventual freedom while also advancing their position in British colonial society during the conflict. Their negotiation of the societal space that they carved for themselves in the slave regimes of South Carolina and Georgia, even during the crises of the final months in these British bastions, proved crucial to their success in the Caribbean when they formed the Carolina Corps. Just as in their future careers in the West Indies, the black troops in South Carolina saw how to manipulate their usefulness to a desperate white population to outweigh the fear that this group had towards armed black men, and their natural position in colonial slave society. The men of the Carolina Corps applied their previous experience in South Carolina to advance in the highly racialized society of the British West Indies.
Throughout their short history, the men of the Carolina Corps had been both helped and hindered by the British Military’s understanding of disease. Smallpox had almost destroyed the unit before it had been created, ravaging the runaway slaves who reached the British lines around Savannah and Charlestown during the Revolutionary War. However, as British anxiety towards the disease abated, however, so British military policy towards slaves shifted. It was ironically disease, or at least the British understanding of it, which led to the creation of the Carolina Corps. Without the racial biases regarding tropical diseases and black bodies that pervaded British medical thought throughout the Revolutionary era, it is doubtful that the men of the Corps would ever have been evacuated to the Caribbean in 1782.

Ironically, just as the British high command were starting to toy with the idea of arming black units, even after the cessation of hostilities, the American forces were drifting even further in the opposite direction. The American political leadership in the southern colonies tried desperately to avoid schemes that upset the racial order of their slave regimes, including the arming of slaves and the British plans to grant freedom to those within their lines. Simultaneously, the armed forces and civilian population saw the supposed outrages committed by black Loyalists as proof of the vindictive nature of the race when weaponized, solidifying their own opinions on the future of the race. Indeed, while their martial prowess saved the black Loyalists who served the British cause, these exact same actions served to also condemn the majority who the British deserted at the end of the war to the ever-stricter confines of a racially conservative regime.
Many studies on the experience of slaves during the Revolutionary War focus on specific aspects of the conflict and on how African Americans navigated it. This approach allows for greater depth of analysis on certain aspects, and is not a negative way to approach the topic. Nonetheless, by failing to see how these various topics align with each other, and how these effected blacks who sought their independence with the British, groups such as the Carolina Corps have been largely side-lined in Revolutionary War historiography. The Revolutionary War was both a slave insurrection and a conflict that forced the British to adopt measures towards arming blacks that they had seldom used before. These two concepts were not mutually exclusive; blacks both forced the hands of the white commanders, who in turn used the new resource they had to try and turn the tables on the revolting colonists. The black troops in South Carolina exemplify this situation perfectly, utilizing the unique position that the war created to ensure their survival.

The situation in South Carolina, especially in the final months of the Revolutionary War, remains one of the most under-developed areas of study relating to the conflict. Even those historians who have focused on this region, such as Jim Piecuch, stop their studies as the British troops sailed from Charlestown. This is understandable; most want to culminate their works within the confines of the war itself, or to follow the extensive paper trail left by the black Loyalists who made their way to Nova Scotia and beyond. However, by neglecting to look at the creation of the Carolina Corps, these scholars not fully explored how critical the southern campaign of the war was for the survival of the men who sailed south rather than north at war’s end. It is highly likely that without their
experiences in South Carolina, the men of the Carolina Corps would not have flourished as they did in the West Indies.

Likewise, it is easy to neglect the effects that these men had on the white population around them, in particular their commanders. While some argue that the results of the Revolutionary War led to the gradual British move towards the abolition of the slave trade, the planting of the seeds of the movement occurred within the conflict itself. Men such as Moncrief and Leslie were certainly not abolitionists, but their changing opinions towards the worth of black men as soldiers reveals an ideological shift in their perceptions of race, even if only on a small scale. Furthermore, their advocacy for the further integration of black troops within the British military certainly impacted abolition as greatly as revolutionary rhetoric and increasing religious opposition to slavery. Although it was white officers who experienced this evolution in thought, it was the words and actions of their black troops who guided it. This changing perception of whites towards blacks because of the arming of black troops did not end in South Carolina in 1782, but continued throughout the tenure of the Carolina Corps in the British West Indies. This changing perception would ensure the survival of the men of the unit, and help lay the foundation for British abolitionism in the later decades of the eighteenth century.
Chapter 2

“They are particularly formidable to the Charibs and Slaves”: Racial Fluidity and the Carolina Corps

In 1791, the British Governor of the Caribbean island of Dominica, Sir John Orde, wrote a desperate note to Edward Mathew, the Governor of Grenada and Commander in Chief of the British forces in the Windward Isles. In it, he warned that a slave insurrection could begin at any time and appealed for reinforcements to quell any such rebellion. Mathew received this letter and responded, both to Orde and to the Colonial Office in London. Orde no doubt expected to receive reinforcements from one of the white garrisons in the Windward Islands, yet Edward Mathew chose to send him a detachment of the Carolina Corps.

In detailing his decision to Lord William Grenville in Whitehall, Mathew explained the logic of sending the Carolina Corps to Orde’s aid. “In case of an insurrection there or on any of the Islands, I should rely much on their services, as they are particularly formidable to the Charibs and Slaves, and much better qualified than Europeans for the fatiguing duty of searching out the fugitives.”¹¹² Edward Mathew was very aware of the skills that the Carolina Corps had for hunting down runaway slaves as, by 1791, they had

¹¹² Mathew to Grenville, 27 January 1791, CO 101-31.
been performing the role for the preceding eight years. At a time when slave revolts were occurring all over the Caribbean and the largest, in Saint Domingue, was only months from breaking out, it is telling that Mathew had such faith in the Corps that he would make it his first choice to deal with a slave uprising.

The Caribs that Mathew referred to were also the descendants of African slaves. He dispatched a group of the Carolina Corps from Grenada to the island of Saint Vincent to compel the Caribs, the indigenous group who had given the region its name, to obey British rule. Unlike the rest of the Caribs found in the Windward Islands of the Caribbean, those in Saint Vincent were a mixed-race group descended from relationships between the local indigenous population and African slaves stretching back for over a century. The “Black Caribs,” as they were known by the British, were a formidable adversary and partook in numerous rebellions against European rule, often using imperial wars to leverage their position with European powers.

Mathew, who insisted that the Carolina Corps “are more inveterate against people of their colour, than any other troops,” celebrated the zeal and success that the unit showed in their adherence to duties such as hunting runaway slaves and policing

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113 Townshend to Mathew, 6 May 1784, CO 101-25.

114 During the American Revolutionary War, for example, the Caribs on Saint Vincent joined with the French and succeeded in capturing the colony for them. After the war was over, and the island returned to British control, the threat of the Caribs meant that the British government on Saint Vincent refused to compel them to follow British rule until they reinforced the garrison, to prevent rebellion. Townshend to Mathew, 6 May 1784, CO 101-25; Hilary McDonald Beckles, “Kalinago (Carib) Resistance to European Colonisation of the Caribbean,” *Caribbean Quarterly* 38, no. 2,3 (Summer 1992), 1-14, 123-24; Bernard Marshall, “The Black Caribs — Native Resistance to British Penetration of the Windward Side of St. Vincent, 1763-1773,” *Caribbean Quarterly* 19, no. 4 (December 1973), 4-19; Christopher Taylor, *The Black Carib Wars: Freedom, Survival, and the Making of Garifuna* (Oxford, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 2016).
plantations to dissuade slaves from rebelling.\textsuperscript{115} Of course, further research, and some common sense reveal that the differences in culture between slaves rendered the men of the Carolina Corps as distinct from most Caribbean slaves as the British were from their colonial French adversaries.

This chapter will look at the cultural and ethnic makeup of the Carolina Corps, as well as the slave populations with whom they most commonly interacted: in South Carolina, Grenada and Saint Vincent. While individual identities of the men of the Carolina Corps have mostly disappeared into history, this chapter will show how it is possible to make deductions about the cultural backgrounds of the men based on well-known data from the colonies. This will help to explain the complicated position the men of the Carolina Corps had within British Caribbean society, and how they interacted with different racial and cultural groups within this society.

While creolization may have occurred to the men of the Carolina Corps in North America, the unit remained distinct from the creolized societies with whom they interacted in the Caribbean. Instead, the Corps performed an act of double consciousness: maintaining their African (or creole) heritage while simultaneously performing Britishness for their new masters. The Carolina Corps were a great example of the fluidity of identity that was present in the British Caribbean during this period. Accordingly, their creolization occurred in a much different way than those of their fellow black West Indians. As such,

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{115} Anon, Of the Carolina, or Black Corps, serving in the Leeward Islands, ca. December 1791, CO 101-31.
\end{quote}
they existed beyond the boundaries of the differing creolized cultures of the British Caribbean, holding a unique position in the British societies in which they resided.

The first part of the chapter will focus on the ethnic makeup of the men of the Carolina Corps. While their individual identities remain allusive to scholars, an analysis of the demographic work of certain historians of the American colonies, including Daniel Littlefield, Judith Carney, and Peter H. Wood, allows for the making of fact-based assumptions on the ethnic makeup of this group. A comparison of the known demographic nature of the British Caribbean will show how the Carolina Corps would have entered a quite alien world when arriving in the region. This section will thus examine whether it was the origin or destination that determined the cultural outlook of the unit.

Exploring the interactions between the Carolina Corps and their enslaved neighbors on Grenada, their main garrison, shows how the British establishment attempted to disrupt any interaction between the soldiers of the unit and the plantation slaves on the island. While this method of interaction control worked to breed animosity and resentment between the enslaved men of the island and the Corps, it had little effect in relation to enslaved women. The cultural sensibilities of the free people of color on Grenada, the majority of whom had migrated to the island from French possessions, largely kept the Carolina Corps separate from them. Still held outside of white society, the Carolina Corps thus became truly liminal on Grenada, fitting neatly into none of the legal or cultural frameworks of British society. While alienating in certain ways, liminality was not necessarily a bad thing for the soldiers, however, as it allowed them to move between
the rigid racial and societal structures that existed throughout the British Caribbean in this era.

The chapter ends by looking at the interactions between the black Caribs of Saint Vincent and detachment of the Carolina Corps sent there to police them. Within this dynamic, the Carolina Corps found one of the most similar groups of people to themselves that the men encountered in the Windward Islands. The Caribs were legally autonomous, martial, and black. Ethnic mistrust suffused the complex interactions between the Caribs, the British colonial government on Saint Vincent, and the Carolina Corps. Many of the later actions of the Carolina Corps drew inspiration from the political maneuvering they witnessed on Saint Vincent, demonstrating the influence of the Caribs on the unit.

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South Carolina was the most Caribbean of the mainland American colonies. Not only was the geography of the colony like that of the Caribbean, but its first permanent British settlers had arrived from Barbados. The influence of Barbados on South Carolina was present throughout the early years of the colony’s development.\footnote{Ironically, while many of the leading founders of South Carolinian had either land or other financial ties to Barbados, most European settlers in the colony had nothing to do with the island. Still, the influence of the wealthy founders meant that a Barbadian-esque society quickly developed in South Carolina. Edgar, \textit{South Carolina}, 48.} Nowhere was this more evident than in the adoption of its Barbadian economic model, including the
Barbadian slave code. The rice and indigo plantations that flourished in pre-Revolutionary South Carolina meant that very quickly the colony had a black majority.117

Evidence suggests that during the colonial era, South Carolina planters were adept at understanding the ethnicities of the Africans they were purchasing and the skills that these slaves would possess. Daniel Littlefield was one of the first historians to look in detail at how South Carolinian planters and thus slave merchants privileged certain ethnicities of Africans over others. As such, Littlefield noted that certain regions of Africa were more desirable for slave merchants and their clients than others, based upon perceptions of passiveness to bondage and physical prowess among others. Littlefield argued that planters specifically sought slaves familiar with the Carolina staple crops, as they were eager to increase their yields by using experienced workers. Slaves imported from Senegambia and the Windward Coast of Africa were the most prized, in both regions the cultivation of rice was prevalent and performed by those recently enslaved individuals purchased by merchants for the Carolina market.118

It is thus unsurprising that the largest number of slaves transported from Africa to South Carolina and Georgia in the twenty years before the start of the Revolutionary War were from Senegambia, followed by Sierra Leone, with the Windward Coast third on the list. In fact, almost a third of the slaves imported to these colonies came from Senegambia

117Edgar, South Carolina; Wood, Black Majority. Wood also suggested in this work (P. 34-62) that the familiarity of slaves in South Carolina with the crop was likely the reason that rice became a staple plantation product in the colony.

(see Table 2.1). While merchants captured many slaves in the African hinterland, the high percentage shipped from one region suggests that a large proportion of the cultural practices retained by the slaves in South Carolina and Georgia would have developed from a single African region.\textsuperscript{119}

The retention of African culture occurred on the plantations of South Carolina and Georgia was throughout this period. It is clear from the various regions in which they originated in Africa that the cultures of enslaved people made them diverse.\textsuperscript{120} Prior to 1740, most of South Carolinian blacks were African born, and between 1750 and 1775 colonial slave traders imported a further 125,098 slaves into the South Carolina and its southern neighbor, Georgia.\textsuperscript{121} While Planters in South Carolina and Georgia, while predisposed to purchase slaves from specific rice-growing regions of Africa, often could not wait for ships from these regions to arrive to meet their immediate manpower needs, and thus transshipped slaves from any colony they could. In many cases, this meant that

\textsuperscript{119} Transshipment of slaves between British colonies was commonplace, as Gregory E. O’Malley points out. Planters in South Carolina and Georgia, while predisposed to purchase slaves from specific rice-growing regions of Africa, often could not wait for ships from these regions to arrive to meet their manpower needs. meant that many of the slaves that were transshipped to the southern mainland colonies due to manpower shortages often found themselves on plantations where dominant. Gregory O’Malley, \textit{Final Passages: The Intercolonial Slave Trade of British America, 1619-1807} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

\textsuperscript{120} Littlefield, \textit{Rice and Slaves}, 115. Ira Berlin argued that slaves in the Americas during the Revolutionary Era were cosmopolitan Atlantic creoles, which he described as people with “linguistic dexterity, cultural plasticity, and social agility.” The men of the Carolina Corps, as well as many plantation slaves, fit Berlin’s model for cosmopolitanism in the Atlantic world. Ira Berlin, \textit{Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America} (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 24; Jane G. Landers, \textit{Atlantic Creoles in the Age of Revolutions} (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 1-4.

\textsuperscript{121} The 125,098 slaves imported into South Carolina and Georgia from 1750-1775 far exceeded the numbers imported into any other mainland North American colony. For example, Virginia, the next biggest slave importer, imported only 78,984 slaves during the same period. “The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database,” Emory University, accessed: 05/22/2017, http://www.slavevoyages.org.
individual or small groups of transshipped slaves found themselves on lowcountry plantations dominated by a predominate culture practiced by slaves from a single region of Africa. This led to “social alienation for many captives,” but also led to a more diverse and, eventually, creolized slave population on certain plantations.\textsuperscript{122}

Table 2.1) Slave ships arriving in South Carolina and Georgia from 1750 to 1775, and their region of origin in Africa. Data from: slavevoyages.org

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region of Embarkation</th>
<th>Number of Slave Ships</th>
<th>Percentage of Total Slave Imports</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Senegambia</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>32.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sierra Leone</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>16.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windward Coast</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gold Coast</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Central Africa</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bight of Biafra</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bight of Benin</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Eastern Africa</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{122} O’Malley, \textit{Final Passages}, 8.
The methods of creating and running of South Carolina plantations by planters aided in the creation of new cultures, based on African ones. Most planters subdivided their vast land holdings, particularly away from the immediate vicinity of urban areas along the coast. On these smaller lots, worked by smaller groups, slaves could practice their culture away from the prying eyes of whites.123 The development of the task system on rice plantations in the colony also meant that slaves had time to not only grow their own crops but also to practice their cultures in ways that gang worked slaves in other colonies did not.124 Many slaves, once confined to their subdivision, would very seldom have interactions with whites, with the odd overseer likely the only one they would see with any frequency. Most planters lived on larger plantations closer to urban areas and so the slaves in these areas, with more frequent contact with whites, would experience a more creolized atmosphere than those away from the coast. Incidentally, it is in Lowcountry regions along the coast that South Carolina’s famed creole Gullah culture continues to thrive.

In addition to this, even on larger plantations on which planters themselves resided, slaves would have little direct contact with whites. This was particularly true during certain times of the year when planters would escape the sickly climes of their swampy plantations for the cities of Charlestown or Savannah.125 In these periods, only a

123 Edgar, *South Carolina*, 70.


125 McCandless, *Slavery, Disease, and Suffering*, 250.
skeleton crew of whites, normally confined to the overseer and his family, would run the plantation.

Whites in Southern colonies both feared and nurtured the cultures practiced by slaves upon plantations. The use of African herbal remedies to cure common ailments was widespread on plantations. In the early years of the colony, African slaves knew much more about herbal medicine than their white counterparts. Consequently, many planters turned to their slaves for such remedies when contagions spread through their households. Even early white medical practitioners used African botanical knowledge in their own practice. Alexander Garden, the most well-known physician in South Carolina, criticized his fellow doctors in 1753 for learning all they knew of the colony’s plant-based cures from “negro strollers and old women.” Despite this, planters were constantly fearful that their slaves would use their knowledge of botanicals to do them harm. Slave poisoning was one of the biggest fears of planters and the wider population. Thus, a paradox faced planters: they needed African knowledge of botanicals, yet the same knowledge could either heal or kill them. Other aspects of slave identity were also subject to similar suspicion by the white population of the southern colonies.

With the highest proportion of slaves imported from Senegambia in the pre-revolution years, it is hardly surprising that this region of Africa produced most runaway

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126 Alexander Garden to Charles Alston, 28 January 1753, Laing MSS 3, Reel 375: 42-45, University of Edinburgh, Special Collections.

127 McCandless, Slavery, Disease and Suffering, 175.
slaves in South Carolina.\textsuperscript{128} As most of the rice plantations were in the Lowcountry of South Carolina and Georgia, and this is was the destination for the vast majority of slaves of Senegambian heritage due to their knowledge of the crop, it is highly likely a large number escaped to the British, who occupied the region between 1778 and 1782. Thus, it is also likely that slaves either from Senegambia or the Windward Coast (including Sierra Leone), or descended from these cultural groups, made up many of the men of the Carolina Corps.

As many of the Carolina Corps likely descended from either Senegambia or the Windward Coast, it is equally likely that most were from the Mande ethnic group. Of this group, the largest proportion found in South Carolina and Georgia were the Mandinka.\textsuperscript{129} The Mandinka, though controlling a vast territory in Western Africa, were a divided people on the issue of religion. Large numbers of those in the eastern areas of the empire, around modern-day Mali, had converted to Islam from their traditional religions. Muslim Mandinka tribes frequently raided those who lived in the west of the empire and maintained their traditional beliefs. Thus, it was these western Mandinka who often found themselves bound in chains for the New World.\textsuperscript{130} While creolization certainly occurred between African ethnic groups upon arrival in South Carolina, Mandinka (and

\textsuperscript{128} Littlefield, \textit{Rice and Slaves}, 127.

\textsuperscript{129} Littlefield, \textit{Rice and Slaves}, 132.

\textsuperscript{130} Walter Hawthorne, \textit{From Africa to Brazil: Culture, Identity, and an Atlantic Slave Trade, 1600-1830} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 67-71.
more broadly Mande) culture would have been very visible in the colony, and the same was likely true within the ranks of the Carolina Corps.

In Africa, certain areas of Senegambia were known for their militaristic societies, and it is thus likely that some of the soldiers of the Carolina Corps had military experience before the American Revolution. Due to enhanced trade with Europeans, some of these Mandinka may have even used guns before being enslaved. The actions of the slaves taking up arms in rebellion against their former masters during the Revolution may be explained, or at least better understood, when it is taken into consideration that Senegambia had the largest incidence of slave rebellion of all the regions of West Africa. It is probable, therefore, that the ranks of the Carolina Corps may have provided a familiar military setting for some of the former slaves who were well-versed in military tactics and proficiencies before they even left Africa.

Whether largely Mandinka or more creolized, the men of the Carolina Corps were culturally distinct from the slaves and free blacks they interacted with in the British Caribbean. The men of the Carolina Corps no doubt received the moniker not only because of their geographical origins into the British military system, but also because the unit of men were markedly different from the black peoples of the Caribbean. British

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131 By the mid-1700s, some guns had made their way into Mande warfare, although traditional weapons were still commonplace in warfare in Senegambia. John Thornton, *Warfare in Atlantic Africa, 1500-1800* (London: UCL Press, 1999), 45.


officers noted this cultural difference early after their arrival to the West Indies. In June 1784, after eighteen months of service in the Caribbean, Major William Chester on Saint Vincent still referred to the unit as the “American Negroes.”

The slave importation system of South Carolina and Georgia also contributed to the ethnic distinctions between the Carolina Corps and those blacks in the Caribbean. The southern American colonies were part of the intercolonial slave trade between British possessions within the Greater Caribbean region. This trade encouraged the transshipment of large numbers of slaves from Caribbean islands to South Carolina and Georgia, along with an even greater number of directly imported Africans. The result was that, while many Caribbean slaves did arrive in these areas, their numbers were never great enough to effect changes in the already established slave cultures of the mainland colonies into which they integrated. This was particularly true because Lowcountry planters often purchased Caribbean slaves in small numbers. However, for the Carolina Corps, the continued transshipment of slaves between British possessions does provide an intriguing concept: for a few, service in the Windward Islands meant they were returning home.

134 William Chester to Mathew, 20 June 1784, CO 101-25.

135 O’Malley, Final Passages, 266.

136 Due to the rapid inland expansion of plantation holdings in the South Carolina and Georgia upcountry after the Seven Years War, most large African shipments arrived in these regions. This left the smaller transshipped Caribbean slaves to supplant numbers on Lowcountry plantations. O’Malley, Final Passages, 282.
Most of the men of the Corps had not entered the mainland colonies from the Caribbean, however, and this meant they were linguistically distinct from the slaves and freed blacks of the West Indian islands. While few of the men and women transported to South Carolina and Georgia would have had a knowledge of the English language when they arrived, necessity to speak a common language would have led to its quick adoption by most slaves. However, the various ways that Africans retained their identities on plantations meant that enslaved individuals continued to speak certain African dialects. The overall result was a linguistic creolization and the creation of the Gullah (South Carolina) and Geechee (Georgia) dialects. This creole language did not appear overnight, instead evolving slowly out of the cosmopolitan languages that existed throughout the region.\(^{137}\) Slaves arriving in the colonies would have learned their first English words in the form of these pidgin languages. Thus, regardless of whether the men of the Corps had been born in Africa or within the colonies, most would have had contact with Gullah or Geechee, and would have had some familiarity with it linguistically.

The speaking of a form of pidgin continued in every British slave colony during the eighteenth century, but each of the dialects spoken was distinct.\(^ {138}\) Even in British slave trading posts in Africa, the local slave traders developed their own form of English to communicate effectively with whites. The variation in pidgin languages came from several factors, not least the regional origins of the slaves of certain colonies. The languages were constantly evolving also, changing as the demographics of their geographical regions did


likewise. The result was that Gullah and Geechee, although linguistically like the pidgin dialects spoken on the various Windward Islands, was unique to the Carolina Corps in the region.

The linguistic differences between the Carolina Corps and the other creole peoples of the Caribbean islands on which they served would no doubt have been an obstacle to communication with people who were ostensibly like themselves. In the Caribbean, the Carolina Corps, though based in Grenada, were frequently detached to various other Windward Islands for short assignments as their services became necessary. This meant that Corps members would probably have had to learn various regional dialects in a short amount of time to communicate on a basic level with the black communities on the islands upon which they were serving. The Carolina Corps did adapt linguistically, especially on their home base of Grenada, but the group still encountered difficulties due to the diverse cultural makeup of the Windward Islands (see Table 2.2).

Even having English as a lingua franca would not have solved the communication issues between the blacks of the Windward Islands and the Carolina Corps. The common language of the British Empire would certainly mean the two groups, as well as the many whites who they encountered in day-to-day tasks, would have had a method of communication. This would have been particularly true in urban areas where more formal English prevailed; however, on the many plantations of the Windward Islands, where pidgin dialects thrived, the linguistic barrier would remain. As Table 2.2 illustrates, the largest importation of slaves to the British Windward Islands came from the Bight of Biafra, which was itself a linguistically interesting place. In Biafra, Igbo became the
Table 2.2) Numbers of slave ships arriving in the three main stations in the Windward Islands where the Carolina Corps served from 1750 to 1783, and their region of origin in Africa. The “Other” category is given for ships that did not list their region of origin. Slavevoyages.org.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Windward Island</th>
<th>Region of Slave Embarkation</th>
<th>Number of Ships</th>
<th>Percentage of Total Slave Imports</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grenada</strong></td>
<td>Bight of Biafra</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>23.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gold Coast</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>17.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Windward Coast</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Senegambia</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>11.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sierra Leone</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>West Central Africa</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bight of Benin</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>21.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Barbados</strong></td>
<td>Bight of Biafra</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gold Coast</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>17.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Senegambia</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Windward Coast</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sierra Leone</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>West Central Africa</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bight of Benin</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East Africa</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Saint Vincent</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bight of Biafra</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>32.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senegambia</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windward Coast</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13.2</td>
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<td>Sierra Leone</td>
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<td>13.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gold Coast</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10.3</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Central Africa</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bight of Benin</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

predominant lingua franca despite the fact that the region had no predominant centralized empire. Much of the present day Bajan creole language of Barbados has its origins in the Igbo language, and so it appears that the African dialect remained the dominant language in at least some West Indian colonies. This differed from the mainland North American colonies, where creolized languages such as Gullah which was much
more English-based, were more common.\textsuperscript{139} This differentiation in localized pidgin dialects caused the communication problems the Carolina Corps likely faced upon their arrival in the West Indies.

Without one or two major African cultures dominating West India plantations, the slave population was easier to creolize then in South Carolina and Georgia, where such prevalent cultures persisted into the seventeenth century. As Hilary Beckles notes, “During the eighteenth century, these groups (incl. Ashanti, Ibo, Fanti and Yoruba) rapidly intermixed, and ethnic divisions quickly became muted.”\textsuperscript{140} While the Pidgin English spoken in the islands was like their own Gullah or Geechee dialects, and though they had likely met Africans from all the regions represented in the Windwards before, the overall culture was distinct from that of the southern mainland colonies.

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The Carolina Corps occupied a socially liminal position in the Caribbean because neither the white nor enslaved populations considered them the same as slaves, but they obviously were not white. The black troops, entering the Caribbean as freemen and soldiers, occupied a more intermediary position in the Windwards than they had in the mainland colonies. On Barbados, the English planters’ decision to use large numbers of indentured servants during the early periods of colonization aided the creolization of that island’s population. The English particularly used Irish Catholics as servants, claiming that


\textsuperscript{140} Hilary McDonald Beckles, \textit{A History of Barbados: From Amerindian Settlement to Nation-State} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 33.
such backbreaking work as creating a cultivated landscape on a tropical island was all such people were good for. Soon, African slaves became the preferred source of labor on the island, where they worked alongside poor whites before racial slavery dominated. The result was the widespread interaction, even cohabitation and marriage between poor whites and black slaves during the foundation era in Barbadian history. Even by the eighteenth century, poor whites often found themselves living near Barbadian plantations. Thus, creolization due to direct contact between large numbers of whites and blacks was greater on Barbados than in either South Carolina or Georgia.

The interactions between the men of the Carolina Corps and the white population in the West Indies was also considerably different than it had been in the mainland colonies. The sheer size of South Carolina compared to the Windward Islands, such as Barbados, meant there could be geographical barriers to socializing between races, with most poor whites living in urban and upcountry areas rather than near plantations. Outside of these urban centers, higher property prices driven by the need for plantation land forced poorer whites out of the rural lowcountry. Colonial charitable organizations gave the poor whites of South Carolina much greater relief, driven by wealthy elites who wanted to create a clear socio-economic buffer between the group and slaves. In

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142 This is not to say that similar organizations did not exist in the slave societies of the British Caribbean, as they certainly did. However, the organizations in South Carolina gave a greater amount of aid to poor whites than in other colonies. Church groups ran most of these societies, particularly the wealthy Anglican Church in South Carolina. Tim Lockley, “Rural Poor Relief in Colonial South Carolina,” The Historical Journal 48, no. 4 (2005): 956.
addition, indentured servitude was not particularly long-lived in South Carolina, while it thrived for decades on Barbados. For those who did sign indentures to immigrate to South Carolina, its size meant those who survived could receive fifty acres of land to sustain them economically at the end of their contract.\textsuperscript{143} This was not the case on Barbados, where many servants on the island found themselves jobless and needing relief at the end of their indenture period, a position they would pass on to their descendants throughout the colonial period.\textsuperscript{144}

During his tenure in the West Indies, army surgeon Dr. George Pinckard wrote of the plight of poor whites on Barbados: “They are descended from European settlers, but from misfortune, or misconduct, in some of the race, they are reduced to a state far removed from independence; often, indeed, little superior to the condition of free negroes.”\textsuperscript{145} The white elites in South Carolina were more wary of racial integration and also had the means to avoid it, and thus they kept certain whites poor but separate from the enslaved population by using their wealth to make race a cultural boundary. Race was also used as a way of creating social divides between poor whites and blacks in the Caribbean, although the pocketbooks of the wealthy were wielded much more rarely than in South Carolina.\textsuperscript{146}

\textsuperscript{143} Edgar, \textit{South Carolina: A History}, 55.

\textsuperscript{144} Beckles, \textit{History of Barbados}, 47.

\textsuperscript{145} George Pinckard, \textit{Notes on the West Indies: Written During the Expedition Under the Command of the Late General Sir Ralph Abercromby}, Vol. 2 (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1808), 132.

\textsuperscript{146} Jenny Shaw looks at the construction of race on Barbados and found that the wealthy used racial signifiers to create racial identities to the poor and enslaved on the island. Shaw, \textit{Everyday Life in the British Caribbean}, 2-3.
The muddled racial and ethnic societies of the Caribbean, which allowed the Carolina Corps to occupy a unique collective space in the region, also created a complicated dynamic when it came to the unit’s interactions with the free black population. On Grenada, the Carolina Corps found themselves linguistically and culturally distinct from this free black population, providing another societal barrier for them to traverse. While there was a small, well-established free black population on Grenada when the Carolina Corps arrived in 1784, most of these were of French descent. These free people of color and their former masters made up a large population of Francophone speakers on the island, which had changed hands between France and Britain three times in the previous two decades. Few if any of the Carolina Corps had the ability to speak French before their arrival on the island, and therefore the cultural background of most of the free people of color on Grenada would have provided a barrier to the unit’s integration with this group on the island.

The British system of slavery on Grenada freed far fewer slaves than the French had. Indeed, under British governance from 1783 to 1787, the number of free people of color on the island fell. In 1777, two years before the French captured the island, there were only 210 free colored inhabitants in Grenada, yet by 1783, when the British regained

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147 In 1783, the year before the Carolina Corps arrived on Grenada, 940 of the 1125 free people of color on the island were of French descent. There were over 25,000 slaves on the island at the time. State of Grenada, in Mathew to Sydney, 12 April 1788, CO 101-25

148 This was no doubt due to natural decrease in the four years between when the censuses were taken. The free black population fell from 1125 in 1783 to 1115 in 1787. Mathew to Sydney, 12 April 1788, CO 101-25.
control, there were five times this number. Therefore, the 300 or so men of the Carolina Corps, made up almost one-fifth of Grenada’s free black population.

Another barrier to interaction between the free blacks on Grenada was the property holding status of many of its Francophone members, an economic position unattainable to most in the Carolina Corps. Grenada was also nearly unique regarding the positions of authority that free people of color could hold under British rule. An illustration of the power retained by the group is the conversation that Edward Mathew had with “Louis La Grenade, a Mulatto of this Colony, of considerable property.” In this instance, Mathew approached La Grenade, a free black, Francophone plantation owner in order to employ him as an agent for the crown to recruit his fellow free blacks on Grenada into the Carolina Corps. Mathew specifically chose La Grenade for the task as “he has great influence, from his character, property and situation as Captain of a Colored Company attached to the Saint George’s Regiment.” 149 Despite British wariness of free blacks, by 1790, the military situation had become such that army officers in the Caribbean were willing not only to arm them, but also to incorporate them into white militia regiments.

The Haitian Revolution changed the way the white British population viewed free people of color on Grenada, but it had very little effect on how they saw the Carolina Corps. Only eighteen months after Mathew conducted his unsuccessful recruiting mission with the help of Louis La Grenade, the Grenada Assembly passed “An Act to prevent the

149 Mathew to Lord Grenville, 28 November 1790, CO 101-31.
sudden increase of Free Negroes and Mulattoes,” which regulated the free people of color on the island while also making it much harder to manumit slaves. The scrutiny of free blacks on Grenada became so intense in the wake of the violence on Saint Domingue that in January 1792, the leaders of this group wrote to Edward Mathew to promise their adherence to the British crown, probably fearing re-enslavement. This was not unique to free people of color on Grenada, but was witnessed throughout the Caribbean in the wake of the Haitian revolt. Despite this crackdown on free people of color, the Carolina Corps escaped what could have been a disastrous situation resulting in their disbandment. Rather, Mathew expanded the size of the unit in the wake of the Haitian revolt and recommended making it a full regiment. Part of this could have been due to self-preservation on the part of Mathew, who may have feared that the Corps would have revolted upon hearing they were to be disbanded. Nonetheless, The loyal military service performed by the unit differentiated the men of the Corps in the eyes of its commanders and the white British population from other free people of color in the region.

Regardless of their communication issues when they first arrived in the Caribbean, interactions between the free black soldiers of the Corps and the enslaved populace were frequent. It was also the case that the initial alienation of the Corps due to language and culture would only have lasted if the men of the unit did not adapt. No doubt after several years of service in the region, the men of the Corps would have spoken the same pidgin dialects as the slaves they policed. The frequent encounters of the Corps with enslaved individuals, both on plantations and in the urban areas of the island, necessitated this adaptation. It was also common for black men in the service of the military to form
relationships, both sexual and otherwise, with enslaved women on the islands on which they served.\textsuperscript{150}

The Carolina Corps had close interactions with enslaved individuals due to the roles they played in the British military in the Windward Islands, often with mixed results. Despite the presence of the Carolina Corps’ 300-man strong pioneer and artificer companies, the derelict state of the fortifications in the Windward Islands meant the British also rented local slaves to supplement their black labor force. In 1787, acting governor William Lucas, writing to Whitehall of the need to repair the works above the principal Grenadian settlement at Saint George, requested “an additional supply of Negroes if they should be required” to help complete the work.\textsuperscript{151} The same British Army engineers who had command over the Carolina Corps would have overseen these hired slaves, and thus close interaction between the two groups would have been common. It is also likely that the slaves, whose owners would require compensation in case of injury or death, received different treatment to the members of the Carolina Corps.\textsuperscript{152} It would not be at all surprising if the slaves resented the status of the Carolina Corps troops and the variations in the working conditions that existed between the two groups.

\textsuperscript{150} While there is no written evidence of the Carolina Corps members having relationships with women, later documents show that the men within the ranks of the later West India Regiments, which the Corps later became, entered such relationships. Members of the Carolina Corps, particularly on Grenada and Barbados, the islands on which they served most often, likely entered such relationships frequently. Buckley, Slaves in Red Coats, 125.

\textsuperscript{151} Lucas to Townshend, 27 August 1787, CO 101-27.

\textsuperscript{152} It is likely that the British while performing fatigue duties overworked many of the Carolina Corps members who died in service in the Windward Islands. The lack of petitions for compensation from slave owners likewise suggests that the British did not work rented slaves in the same way.
The British commanders actively fostered resentment between the Corps and enslaved laborers, using it as a tool to keep the two groups from engaging as much as possible. The easiest way they could do this was to distribute different quantities of rations and supplies to the two workforces. On Dominica, in 1790, the Adjutant General of Grenada wrote to his Commissary counterpart on Dominica on this very issue. Upon hearing that the engineers on Dominica fed the rented slaves the same as the Carolina Corps, he wrote that Mathew “does not feel himself authorized to shew such evident partiality to the Colony Negroes of Dominica, as to allow them, and them only, the same Rations as the Carolina Pioneers, who are to every intent and purpose Soldiers.” Mathew ordered the reduction of rations for the hired slaves. Mathew’s orders show the extent to which Mathew considered the men of the Corps to be British soldiers, differing entirely from the slaves of the Windward Islands.

The greatest cause of resentment between the Carolina Corps and their enslaved counterparts was the freedom that the soldiers of the unit had. While being an enlisted man in the British Army meant an adherence to rules, hard labor, violent discipline for indiscretions, and the monotony of routine, it was not slavery. At the end of the day, when hired slaves returned to their plantations or hastily constructed huts near the site where they worked, the men of the Carolina Corps had leisure time and the money needed to enjoy it.

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153 Adjutant General on Grenada to Commissary General on Dominica, in James Bruce to Grenville, 15 April 1790, CO 71-16.
When Guy Carleton originally envisioned the unit in 1782, the men of the Carolina Corps were to be paid sixpence a day.\textsuperscript{154} The British increased this base salary during the tenure of the unit in the Caribbean and allowed its supplementation through the performance of extra fatigue duty. The men of the Carolina Corps had some freedom of movement at the end of a workday, were given more rations, and received pay for doing the same work that hired slaves were coerced to do.

As with Mathew’s attempts to keep a noticeable distinction between the men of the Corps and the general slave population of the Windward Islands, other commanders tried their best to separate the two groups. The British commanders attempted to separate the men of the Corps from slaves most frequently by attempting to instill a sense of pride in the members of the Corps that would induce them to a sense of superiority over the slaves around them.\textsuperscript{155} If freedom was not alone a badge of honor, the fact that the men of the Corps wore the red coats of the British military and carried muskets must have been a point of pride for them. However, the symbols of their elevated status may have been a point of honor for the freemen of the Carolina Corps, but they were symbols of oppression for the plantation slaves that they superintended.

The one group that the British military establishment could not keep the men of the Carolina Corps from was enslaved women. For all the talk of honor and superiority that could keep the men of the Corps separate from male slaves, natural feelings overrode even the strictest orders from commanders. Men from the Corps, living close to a number

\textsuperscript{154} Piecuch, \textit{Three Peoples, One King}, 320.

\textsuperscript{155} Buckley, \textit{Slaves in Red Coats}, 124.
of enslaved women in any of their posts, often sought to form relationships with members of the opposite sex. Unlike in white British units, where wives of soldiers acted as camp followers, the British permitted no women to attach themselves to the Carolina Corps once they arrived in Grenada. Thus, any carnal or romantic relationship between the enslaved women and the men of the Corps had to be conducted illicitly. In his 1807 account of life in the West Indies, planter Sir William Young was largely dismissive of concerns regarding the West Indian Regiments, successor to the Carolina Corps. However, recounting his personal experience, he did suggest “there being no women attached to these corps, the negro soldiers often intrude upon the plantations.” Indeed, it became a common complaint that the men of the Carolina Corps and later West Indian Regiments often caused disruption on plantations by impregnating enslaved women or encouraging them to run away.

The British were not blind to the fact that the armed blacks in their ranks were involved with enslaved women. In 1796, a colonel of one of the newly formed West Indian Regiments suggested the importation of women from Africa to marry to the soldiers “ultimately as a means of economy, their children being trained in the service.” It is clear from such ideas that exposure to the concepts of West Indian plantation slavery meant British officers began to incorporate them into their understanding of how to

156 Sir William Young became the governor of Tobago in 1807. Prior to this, in 1788, he had inherited sugar plantations on Antigua, Saint Vincent and Tobago. He, therefore, would have had experiences with both the Carolina Corps and the later West Indian Regiments. It is likely his comments on black troops refer to various encounters with the men of both units. William Young, The West-India Common Place Book (London: Richard Phillips, 1807), 214.

effectively run black military units. Members of the Corps also solicited the services of the many black prostitutes who frequented the camps of the British Army. Indeed, the numbers of prostitutes visiting black units had become so great by 1799 that the President of the Saint Vincent Assembly suggested the permanent employment of such women in the camps of the black troops.\footnote{158}{Buckley, \textit{Slaves in Red Coats}, 125.} While the attempts of the British to control the sexual freedom of their black troops were ongoing, the men continued to form relationships that were more permanent with enslaved women on plantations.

The relationships between black soldiers and enslaved women on plantations, although officially condemned by the British military, were both a blessing and a curse for white British society in the Caribbean. On the one hand, the children of enslaved women, even if they were the product of a liaison with a free-black soldier of the Carolina Corps, were the property of the plantation owner. Therefore, planters gained more earning potential through the sexual relationships of their slaves and black soldiers. It may also have been that free people of color, several of whom owned large plantations on the islands served by the Carolina Corps, viewed black soldiers more sympathetically. There was also a predictable benefit for the British military to the intrusion of their black troops onto plantations. As explained by Sir William Young, the visits of black troops to enslaved women caused “a growing animosity between them and the [male] slaves.”\footnote{159}{Young, \textit{Common Place Book}, 214.} For the British, attempting to alienate the slave population from their black troops, soldier-slave liaisons and relationships must have seemed a blessing. However, this did not allay the
fears of the planters who saw the dangers of having armed men in close contact with their male slaves. These planters also feared that “a rising generation of children, born and remaining slaves, with relation to a soldier-father, might at some time awaken feelings, and create consequences, endangering the entire colonial system.” This stemmed from the fact that planters feared that armed blacks may spread ideas of freedom and violence to a slave population that they wished to keep passive. Despite the threats of recrimination, the black troops of the British Army continued to visit plantations and to create relationships with the female workers.

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As socially accepted as the men of the Carolina Corps were, the fact remained that the British still viewed the men of the unit as anatomically different due to their race. This difference was not only obvious due to the color of their skin, but also due to the perceptions that white officers had towards the resilience of black bodies in tropical climates. As stated in chapter 1, this racial understanding of medicine was critical to the formation of the Carolina Corps. However, the very biases that gave the men their freedom would have a catastrophic effect on the unit once it arrived in the Caribbean.

The British lacked basic understanding of the two major tropical diseases that caused white mortality in the West Indies, the mosquito-borne ailments of malaria and yellow fever. They understood that black bodies were more resistant to such diseases but lacked the science to explain the phenomenon. Modern medicine has proven that some

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160 Young, Common Place Book, 214.
West Africans are born with sickle-cell trait, a condition that gives a person a stronger resistance to malaria.\textsuperscript{161} While disease immunity was certainly a racially stigmatizing factor in British colonial society, the numbers do suggest that black soldiers were much less likely to die from tropical diseases than their white counterparts. This was the case with the Carolina Corps once they arrived in the Windward Islands after the Revolutionary War (Table 2.3). This was in spite of the British forcing them to work longer hours, and more strenuously than their white counterparts.

When looking at the numbers of fatalities within the peacetime garrisons of the Windward Islands it is important to understand the differences between the units that were present there. The mainstay of the British Caribbean garrisons were the units of Royal Artillery who manned the coastal fortifications of the various islands. These units, though numerically small, were stationed in the Caribbean for long stretches of time. As a result, most underwent the “seasoning” process when first arriving in the region, and thus had a much lower mortality rate from mosquito-borne diseases than other white units.\textsuperscript{162} Also, they were the smallest unit on Grenada, never numbering more than seventy men.


\textsuperscript{162} The “seasoning” process was a name given by white settlers in the Caribbean to the period of acclimatization which both white and blacks went through upon arrival in the region. During this process, immigrants would face exposure to the diseases of the region, chiefly Yellow Fever and Malaria, with survivors gaining enhanced resistance to diseases.
Table 2.3) A list of the number of fatalities among troops stationed on Grenada: January 1785 to January 1786. To put the numbers into context, the Carolina Corps was of comparable to size to the combined white units on the island during this period.\textsuperscript{163}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month and Year</th>
<th>Royal Artillery (White)</th>
<th>2\textsuperscript{nd} Battalion, 60\textsuperscript{th} Regiment (white)</th>
<th>Carolina Corps (Black)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 1785</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 1785</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 1785</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 1785</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 1785</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 1785</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 1785</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 1785</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept. 1785</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 1785</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 1785</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 1785</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 1786</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>4</strong></td>
<td><strong>33</strong></td>
<td><strong>17</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{163} This table is based on the monthly returns of the Grenada Garrison by Mathew between January 1785 and 1786. CO 101-26.
Of all the British units on Grenada, the ones worst hit by disease were the regular infantrymen of the 60th Regiment. These men, the remnants of Royal American Regiment, had been raised in the mainland American colonies during the Revolutionary War, mostly in regions with lower instances of yellow fever or malaria. Thus, upon reaching the Caribbean without adequate time to be “seasoned,” they succumbed to tropical illnesses in droves. The same was true of their replacements, who came from throughout the British Empire and abroad. It is also important to note that the men of the 60th Regiment did not perform the same levels of hard labor on Grenada as the men of the Carolina Corps did. Therefore, it is likely that most of those who died on the island succumbed to tropical ailments rather than exhaustion.

The results of the Corps performing fatigue duties were not limited to simply saving the lives of white troops. Their mere presence, and loyal service, meant the British had to send fewer white troops to defend the islands. The British high command was no closer to understanding why, but through their blundering misunderstanding of racial climatology, they hit on a simple fact: white men did not die in the West Indies if they were not sent there to begin with. It was an easy equation for the men in London to explain to Parliament and would be a foundational tool in the creation of the later West India Regiments.

Whether immune to mosquito-borne diseases or not, the men of the newly formed Carolina Corps were not resistant to the hard labor and squalid living conditions they would be subjected to in the British West Indies. In a history of the unit for the Colonial office, an anonymous author explained the discrepancy in the work between the
white and black troops on Grenada. They explained that some of the men of the Carolina Corps had been attached to the white units in his command “to assist in doing the laborious duties” of the unit.\textsuperscript{164} This was not an unusual role for blacks in the British Army. Throughout the colonial period, the British military hired slaves on Caribbean islands to do such fatigue work on behalf of their white regular units.\textsuperscript{165} The rationale for having the Carolina Corps provide most of the hard labor for white units followed the standard British military doctrine of the time; the author explained the Carolina Corps were “better able to bear fatigue in that climate.”\textsuperscript{166} The officer, like Moncrief before him, was clearly influenced by the racial ideas of British climatological understanding of the time, and the Carolina Corps paid a heavy price because of it.

Environmental evidence from the South Carolina and Georgia regions between 1750 and 1770, when most of the slaves who would form the Carolina Corps were either born or arrived into the colony, shows hotter and wetter than usual spring seasons. Such a climate was the perfect breeding ground for malaria-carrying mosquitos.\textsuperscript{167} In addition, the swampy conditions found on the rice and indigo plantations of the southern lowcountry meant mosquitos were regularly present in the regions. Most slaves would therefore have been exposed to malaria and yellow fever carrying mosquitos long before

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{164} Anon, Of the Carolina, or Black Corps, ca. December 1791, CO 101-31.
\item \textsuperscript{165} Mathew, and his temporary replacements, made many petitions to the Grenadian Assembly for the use of slaves for such a purpose. Some examples include: William Lucas to Alexander Symson, 8 February 1786, CO 101-26; Mathew to Grenada Assembly, December 1790, CO 101-31; Grenada Assembly Resolution, 15-16 June 1791, CO 101-32; Voelz, \textit{Slave and Soldier}, 310; Buckley, \textit{British Army in the West Indies}, 132-33.
\item \textsuperscript{166} Anon, On the Carolina, or Black Corps, ca. December 1791, CO 101-31.
\item \textsuperscript{167} McNeill, \textit{Mosquito Empires}, 207.
\end{itemize}
their evacuation to the Caribbean. The majority of the deaths listed in the regiment were not the result of these tropical diseases, unlike for their white counterparts. It is more probable that the British military bias towards hard labor in a savage climate played a role in their deaths. The men of the Carolina Corps were simply being worked to death.

While Edward Mathew certainly subscribed to the idea that the bodies of his Carolina Corps were different from those of his white troops, he was pragmatic enough to know that human bodies can only take so much before total collapse. Like the rest of his units, the Carolina Corps was given its own surgeon to care for the sick among them. As well as this, the unit was sometimes removed from Grenada to garrison other islands, meaning their place as fatigue units was taken by hired slaves.\(^{168}\) Such assignments, while not periods of leave, would have given the men of the Carolina Corps a short respite from the torturous fatigue duties they were regularly employed in. Seeing the slow exhaustion of the men, and the irreplaceable attrition of the unit, Mathew decided to suggest a change of duty for the men of the Corps in 1790.

Writing to Lord Grenville in the Colonial Office, Mathew suggested he and the Grenadian Assembly lamented seeing the Corps “applied more to duties of Fatigue, and laborious Work, than exercised as soldiers.”\(^{169}\) From this point on, Mathew changed the way he used the men, slowly employing them in more soldierly pursuits, and began to petition Parliament through the Colonial Office to turn the unit into a full regular regiment. Part of this was purely utilitarian, as Mathew clearly believed he had the ability

\(^{168}\) Mathew to Grenada Assembly, December 1780, CO 101-31.

\(^{169}\) Mathew to William Grenville, 11 December 1780, CO 101-31.
to train black troops to perform as ably as white ones. Moreover, racism could only stretch so far in the mind of a military commander who daily saw the suffering of the men under his command. It seems that at this stage, Mathew, like Moncrief earlier, began to see the unit as human rather than simply laboring machines and decided to advocate on their behalf. Unfortunately, the reprieve did not come soon enough to save the nearly 100 men who died because of the inability of their British masters to separate race from science in the eighteenth century.

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In October 1790, an advertisement in the *New Grenada Gazette*, the main weekly publication in the colony, read: “Deserted from his Majesty’s Troop of Black Dragoons the 12th of July last, William Sawyer, a Private in the said Troop.” In its description of the deserter, the advert notes that Sawyer “speaks the French and English languages fluently.” Considering that the Carolina Corps had not received new recruits since its evacuation from Charlestown in 1782, this description provides an insight into the creolization of the troops. While it is possible that Sawyer knew French before the Revolutionary War, it is much more likely that he learned the language on Grenada (a colony so bilingual that the printing of the advertisement took place in both languages).

The desertion of William Sawyer should have been a simple mission for William Mackrill, the captain in charge of the Carolina Corps’ dragoon company, but it was not. Sawyer had developed a close connection to the French-speaking district of Grenada,

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known as Marquis. The dragoons were the smallest unit of the Carolina Corps, consisting of roughly forty men, and so Sawyer’s desertion was obvious to Mackrill. Mackrill knew Sawyer’s destination enough to publish it in the advert, perhaps because he personally knew the trooper’s affinity to the area, or because he used threats, bribes, or both to get the information from one of the other men under his command. Locating Sawyer was not an easy task, however, and despite the small size of Grenada, the trooper was still in hiding in October, three months after his original desertion.

Desertion was a rarity among black troops in the British Army, especially when compared with their white counterparts. While the West India Regiments constituted a third of the entire British West Indian garrison between 1796 and 1825, only 16 percent of desertions in the region were by black soldiers. The numbers were equally low in the Carolina Corps.\textsuperscript{171} Superficially, the reason so few men deserted was harsh punishment. Whipping was often a capital punishment in the British Army in the Caribbean, with sentences of up to 1500 lashes given to deserters, an amount of physical punishment no man could survive. Another reason may simply have been that the men of the Corps had once been slaves, and had elevated themselves to a higher position in British colonial society. Fear of having this freedom removed no doubt stayed many who contemplated deserting. Sawyer’s at least temporarily successful escape was testament to his previously cultivated relationships on the French-speaking plantations of Grenada. It would certainly seem that his assumption of safety at his destination facilitated his decision to run. Most

\textsuperscript{171} Throughout all my research, only two incidences of desertion from the Carolina Corps were documented, including that of Sawyer. The numbers of white desertions during this period was much higher. Buckley, \textit{British Army in the West Indies}, 226-27.
black soldiers did not follow Sawyer’s example, however, finding a degree of security and dignity in crown service that few wished to risk.

While trying, but failing, to stop the Carolina Corps’ immersion in Caribbean slave cultures, the British also attempted to physically isolate the Corps from white soldiers during its time in the Windward Islands. On Grenada, the British segregated the Corps from white troops as much as possible. In the 1792 return of annual expenses for the Grenada garrison, the military authorities allocated £20 to the “Barracks of Black Corps.”\(^{172}\) While the Corpsmen would mingle with white troops, the rigid segregation of races present in the British army of the Caribbean at the time helped limit these interactions during active duty.

Outside of the controlled confines of Grenada, however, this segregation failed. A return of the company of pioneers, the largest single body of the unit, showed that in January 1789, 122 of the 194 men of the Carolina Corps were serving outside of Grenada.\(^{173}\) The small detachments of Carolina Corps soldiers sent to the various islands outside of Grenada meant it was impractical for the men to have their own barracks. The British assigned most of these troops to work as pioneers and laborers for white regular units on the various British Windward Islands. As a result, most Carolina Corps soldiers shared barracks with their white counterparts on islands outside of Grenada, leading to widespread inter-racial communication.

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\(^{172}\) Return of Expenses for Grenada Garrison for 1792, 6 November 1791, CO 101-32.

The British military were not blind to racial interactions in the West Indies and used Christianity to try to indoctrinate their former slave soldiers into understanding their new position within colonial society. The British military sought to undermine the traditional religions of the men, and to “civilize” them with Anglican teachings. Another reason they encouraged Christianity was to create another tangible link between the black troops and the white men who led them. On Grenada, the Anglican Church baptized both slaves and free people of color, which was not necessarily the norm on all British Caribbean islands.

While the British Army certainly attempted to force the issue, many blacks throughout the post-American Revolution British Atlantic found Christianity independently of these authoritarian methods. Free blacks in the British Empire often used religion to advance themselves socially with many using Christian teachings to express their understanding of their new found liberty. For these blacks that came willingly to Christianity, living within British society helped to facilitate their practice of the religion. Both Boston King and David George became prominent preachers and civic

174 In later black regiments, including the West Indian Regiments, chaplains were assigned to each unit to promote Christianity within the ranks. In this way, the soldiers were sometimes given religious teachings which were not given to plantation slaves in some Caribbean societies, this is particularly true in Jamaica. It is not known whether the Carolina Corps had their own chaplain, but it is almost certain that the unit was preached to regularly. The unit itself had preachers among its ranks who may well have sermonized for their fellow troops. Buckley, Slaves in Red Coats, 127.

175 Alexander X. Byrd shows that black loyalists throughout the British Atlantic after the Revolutionary War came willingly to Christianity, many becoming much more religious after gaining freedom than previously by indoctrination. Byrd, Captives and Voyagers: Black Migrants Across the Eighteenth-Century British Atlantic World (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008), 137; 157; 160.
leaders in Nova Scotia, and later Sierra Leone. In the Carolina Corps, a soldier named Baker became a prominent Methodist preacher among Dominican slaves. Baker achieved such a level of conversion among the slaves of Dominica that these slaves, in turn, propagated Christianity on the plantations on which they resided. The reverse diaspora of black Loyalists into the Caribbean at the end of the American Revolutionary War helped spread Afro-Christianity into the region on a much greater scale than before.

The men of the Carolina Corps were not mere pawns of the British military system, and actively used such British machinations as enforced Christianity to raise their status in British colonial society. For the men, it would have been evident that religion was key to upward mobility in British society, especially to those soldiers previously exposed to Christianity on plantations in the mainland American colonies. The soldiers of the Corps, serving as the police force for plantations in the Windward Islands, may also have helped to enforce the surface-level crackdown on the practice of traditional African religions within Caribbean society and observed the distaste that the British superficially had for such beliefs. As a result, many would likely have kept their personal beliefs hidden to engage, at least publicly, in the practice of Christianity. They no doubt would have realized that their freedom only allowed them so much mobility and that more meaningful

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176 Men such as Olaudah Equiano, David George, and Boston King all former slave converts to Christianity were outspoken in their religious convictions, at least in part to get white British society to favor them. James Sidbury, *Becoming African in America: Race and Nation in the Early Black Atlantic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 8-9.

177 Tyson, “Carolina Black Corps,” 657.

178 This was particularly true of Baptists in Jamaica and Methodists throughout the West Indies. Andrew Jackson O'Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided: The American Revolution and the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), xii.
engagement with British society, including the practice of Christianity, would help them progress as far as white racial prejudice would allow them.

The long exposure to Christianity dictated by British military doctrine did not mean the religion always replaced the traditional beliefs of the soldiers of the Carolina Corps, who usually reconciled their former beliefs with new ones. This was not unique to blacks in the British West Indies but was a staple of slave religion throughout the Atlantic World. In fact, in slave societies, whites often interacted with these creolized religions, especially when it came to the use of traditional African medications and healing remedies. This cultural mixing created new religious systems, including Voodoo in Haiti and Shango in Trinidad.

In public, the practice of Obeah, the alleged traditional African religion of many of the Carolina Corps troops, was either frowned upon or condemned, but this did not stop their practicing it in private. The British military did not completely ban the traditional practices of Obeah, largely because the white officers understood the dangers of completely forcing the removal of all cultural traditions from their black soldiers. As a result, the black troops of the British Army practiced a creolized form of religion, based on their traditional Obeah and imposed Christian beliefs. The British reported that the Black Rangers, a unit raised only a few years after the Carolina Corps, had “the same superstition as the rebels, with regard to their amulets of obias making them

invulnerable." The same situations no doubt occurred with the Carolina Corps whenever they faced their fellow African descendants in the Windward Islands. While most creolized religions in the Caribbean formed under Catholic governance, similar religions also grew on the Anglican islands in the region. The creolization of religion was just one part of the balancing act that the Carolina Corps and the subsequent West Indian Regiments performed to maintain a transitional position between black and white Caribbean societies.

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While the Carolina Corps interacted with enslaved and free blacks across the Windward Islands, perhaps no more important encounter occurred within the unit than with the Black Caribs of Saint Vincent. The Black Caribs were a unique society. Descended from slaves who fled the islands surrounding Saint Vincent and the Indians native to the island, the Caribs were an astute group who were thoroughly aware of the European rivalries at play in the Caribbean region. During the American Revolutionary War, the Caribs “sent their Chief to Comte D’Estaing, then at Martinico, inviting him to an Attack of the Island.” The Caribs of Saint Vincent had been subjects of both French and British

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182 Edmund Lincoln to Lord North, 6 April 1783, CO 260-3.
rule, even fighting a prolonged war with the British in the years before the conflict began on the American mainland.\textsuperscript{183} The British remained understandably concerned by the autonomous creole population living on the windward side of Saint Vincent after the Revolutionary War concluded. The Caribs on Saint Vincent had only recently become a problem for the British, but the group had occupied the island for over a century before the British took possession of the island during the Seven Years War. In January 1789, James Seton, the Governor of Saint Vincent, sent a report to Home Secretary, Lord Sydney, in which he described the Caribs as “savage People” who were “so extremely jealous” of British society.\textsuperscript{184} The British were as afraid of their race and autonomy as they were ignorant of Carib culture, and thus felt the need to keep a watchful eye on the group.

The reason that the Carolina Corps were in such proximity to the Caribs was the competing land claims that the group and the British government had for parts of Saint Vincent. James Seton estimated that some 250 Caribs capable of taking up arms lived in the area in 1789.\textsuperscript{185} With the chances of war with France increasing during this period, Seton was particularly worried about the Caribs making a similar deal with the French as

\textsuperscript{183} The Carib War (1769-1773) began after the British took control of the island from the French following the Seven Years War. The Caribs resisted British attempts to expand into the Windward side of Saint Vincent, eventually leading to a British military expedition on the island. Defeated by the natural geography and stubborn defense of the Caribs, the British agreed to a peace treaty, ceding the Windward side of the island to Carib control. The British had been in conflict with the Caribs for much of the previous century, and even as far back as the seventeenth century. Beckles, “Kalinago (Carib) Resistance”; Marshall, “Black Caribs”; Taylor, \textit{Black Carib Wars}.

\textsuperscript{184} James Seton to Sydney, January 1789, CO 260-9.

\textsuperscript{185} Seton used the Byera River, the southern treaty line, as his northern border of the disputed land. If his estimate were correct, the overall number of Caribs in the disputed territory by 1789, including women and children, would have been between 500-1000. Seton to Sydney, January 1789, CO 260-9.
they had during the American Revolutionary War, supplying Britain’s colonial adversary with military aid in exchange for land and commodities. There was another reason why the British wanted to gain control of the disputed territory on the windward side of Saint Vincent. Parliament had quickly fixed upon the island as one of the destinations for the slaveholders of the white loyalist diaspora after the Revolutionary War. About land for these people, John Graham, the former royal lieutenant governor of Georgia, wrote to Edmund Lincoln, “I find there are none capable of cultivation, or that would answer the purpose proposed, excepting the Island of Saint Vincents only.”

He also made it clear that the removal of the Caribs would be highly beneficial for this purpose. It was for these reasons that the Carolina Corps occupied a post at Biabou throughout their tenure in Saint Vincent.

In asking for the dispatch of a detachment of the Carolina Corps to Saint Vincent, Lincoln explicitly differentiated the ethnicity of British troops based on physiology. He wrote to Lord Sydney, the British Home Secretary, that he wished “a considerable part of the Black Corps would be destined for the service of Saint Vincent, as being now inured to the climate, & more capable than European Troops of following the Charaibs into their woody mountains.” Unfortunately for him the small garrison he received in 1784 from Edward Mathew to rebuild the island’s crumbling defenses were hardly capable of

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186 Graham had a hard task ahead of him. Writing from East Florida, the destination for many southern Loyalists from Charlestown and Savannah after evacuation, he estimated he needed to find new lands for 4000 whites and more than 5000 slaves. This, he believed, would require 20,000 acres of land. John Graham to Lincoln, ca. 1782, CO 260-7.

187 Lincoln to Sydney, 8 March 1784, CO 260-7.
offensive action against the 3000 to 5000 Caribs who Lincoln estimated lived on the
Windward side of the island. 188 Instead, the Carolina Corps began work building a
fortification by the harbor at Biabou, on the border of the contested Carib territory. 189
This location meant the Carolina Corps were in frequent communication with the Caribs.
This communication would have a material effect on the men of the Carolina Corps
throughout the rest of its existence.

To modern eyes, it may seem counterintuitive that Edmund Lincoln sent the black
soldiers of the Carolina Corps, who only two years earlier had been slaves, to live near
one of the few fully recognized autonomous black society in the British Caribbean.
However, the racial lens that Lincoln and the entire British military establishment viewed
the Carolina Corps through meant they were the preferred unit to conduct any major
construction project in the Windward Islands. The construction of the key fort at Biabou,
designed to both protect British shipping in the harbor but also suppress any potential
Carib revolt was, therefore, the perfect employment for the Corps. There was another
reason why Lincoln specifically picked the Carolina Corps to be the British unit most
frequently in contact with the Caribs. Requesting a stronger garrison from Edward
Mathew, he specifically wrote that he wanted to counter the threat of the Caribs using
more men of the Carolina Corps “of whom I understand they are extremely afraid,

188 A detachment of 27 men of the Carolina Corps arrived on the island of Saint Vincent in 1784. A force of
a similar size remained on the island throughout their tenure in the British Caribbean. Lincoln to Sydney, 8
March 1784, CO 260-7.

189 Edmund Lincoln issued a general order for Lieutenant Bridges of the Royal Engineers to go to Biabou
with 40 of the Black Pioneers of the Carolina Corps to construct a fort at the site. Lincoln, General Order, 6
June 1784, CO 260-7.
knowing they can follow them into their woody mountains better than Regular troops.”

Thus, for Lincoln, the benefits of the Carolina Corps working on the fort at Biabou outweighed any disadvantages that could have come from it.

Living close to the Caribs, the men of the Carolina Corps would have had an opportunity to become familiar with their autonomous culture. A single chief ruled the Caribs of Saint Vincent, and the group lived in small villages where they worked the land as farmers. The treaty of 1773, which ceded the northern parts of Saint Vincent to the group, meant they were not under the direct authority of the British, simply sharing the island with them. The Carolina Corps would have seen this fully autonomous group and would have been part of their trading network, as British frontier posts so often were. This would have shown the soldiers that the Caribs were much more than the “insolent and restless” people described by Governor James Seton.191

The Caribs were more like the men of the Carolina Corps than their white officers were or could ever hope to be. In the racialized society of the British Caribbean, both the Caribs and the soldiers of the Carolina Corps operated in a strange space. Both groups were legally free, but both found constraints placed on this freedom based on their race and culture. The Caribs, many of whom had been born in Africa or were first generation descendants, spoke a strange linguistic mix of French and Arawak-Carib. Some also spoke English based on the proximity and trade relations the group had with the colonial power. More in line with the soldiers of the Corps, however, the Carib religion was a creolized

190 Lincoln to Mathew, 7 February 1784, CO 260-7.
191 Lincoln to Mathew, 7 February 1784, CO 260-7.
mix of French-imported Catholicism, indigenous Carib spirituality, and traditional African beliefs. Unlike the Corps, the Caribs were under no obligation to conform to the norms of British colonial society. Thus, some members of the Corps were likely viewed with the same envy, as the soldiers themselves were by the slaves they often labored alongside. The rotation of Carolina Corps troops to Saint Vincent exposed a large enough number to Carib culture to facilitate that society influencing the unit as a whole. At no time did the detachment of troops on Saint Vincent number less than thirty men, or roughly ten percent of the entire unit. As well as this, the number increased during periods of greater tension, or simply at times when the men were more required for labor on the island than on Grenada. The men also rotated between posts and islands by the British military to keep them from forming too close a connection to the enslaved people they lived beside. Ironically, this rotation system meant that every soldier of the Corps ended up having some contact with the Caribs on Saint Vincent, or served alongside someone who had. This contact soon began to have a detrimental impact on discipline in the Corps’ ranks.

Some members of the Carolina Corps began to desert to Carib territory within months of their arrival on Saint Vincent. This came as a complete shock to the British


193 The number of Carolina Corps troops fluctuated throughout their tenure in the Windward Islands until the Corps were entirely removed from Saint Vincent around 1792. In 1784, Mathew had sent a detachment of 30 pioneers from the unit to the island, as soon as it had arrived in the Windward Islands, yet by 1790, the number of men had increased to 42 men (40 pioneers, and 2 dragoons). The latter figure represents a much greater proportion of the overall troop number, due to the dwindling numbers of men in the unit by this time. The 1790 return suggests that between 15-20 percent of the effective force of the Corps were stationed on Saint Vincent. Lincoln to Sydney, 12 June 1784, CO 260-7; Return of Troops, Saint Vincent, 1 June 1790, CO 260-10.
officers who had thought the Corps completely loyal to the Crown. In August 1784, only seven months after the arrival of the detachment on the island, the first member of the Corps deserted to the Caribs.\(^{194}\) With the punishment for desertion to the Caribs almost certainly the death penalty, the soldier must have weighed up the risks and decided that life with the Caribs was better than staying with the Corps. This confounded the British leadership on the island, who believed that the Caribs hated other black groups, their evidence being a series of Carib raids on white plantations within the disputed territory. During these raids, the Caribs had destroyed property and killed several slaves. British officials spoke of the “ill blood thereby occasioned between them & the Negroes.”\(^{195}\) What the British mistook for racial malice against slaves was more likely a form of attrition warfare adopted by the Caribs, wherein they destroyed all British property to hasten the Withdrawal of whites from the territory.\(^{196}\) Also in contradiction to these British beliefs, the Caribs harbored runaway slaves from British plantations, often incorporating them

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\(^{194}\) The writer noted that the deserter of the Black Pioneers of the Carolina Corps had deserted from the post at Biabou, on the border of the disputed Carib land. The total number of Carolina Corps troops on Saint Vincent listed in the return was 26 (25 black pioneers and 3 black dragoons). Return of Troops, 18 August 1784, CO 260-7.

\(^{195}\) While misunderstanding the situation, Governor James Seton was one of the more rational voices in the Saint Vincent colonial government. Instead of removing the Caribs from the island completely, he believed that simply removing them to within the borders of the 1773 treaty would suffice. This was the plan of action adopted, although it was doubtful if it was ever fully successful. Seton to the Saint Vincent Assembly, 25 August 1787, CO 260-8.

\(^{196}\) The Caribs had conducted the same type of raids against British property, which included the killing of slaves, during the First Carib War. Robin F. A. Fabel, *Colonial Challenges: Britons, Native Americans, and Caribs* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), 179.
Fig. 2.1) A map of Saint Vincent, as the island appeared during the Carolina Corps’ service there. The black boundary lines mark the mountainous and cultivated lands ceded to the Caribs after the Carib War in 1773. The red line marks the uncultivated land contested by British settlers and the Caribs throughout the 1780s. The star marks the fort and port of Biabou, the garrison of the Carolina Corps. Lines and star added by the author. Byres, John, J. Bayly, and S. Hooper. Plan of the Island of Saint Vincent laid down by actual survey under the direction of the Honorable the Commissioners for the Sale of Lands in the Ceded Island. Map. London: S. Hooper, 1776.
into their own culture. This had been one of the causes of the First Carib War. It also clearly shows that the perception of plantation slaves as property was not unique to whites, but existed similarly within the minds of the Caribs who attacked them. Meanwhile the Caribs treated runaway slaves much more civilly.

The Carolina Corps did not suffer ill effects due to their close geographic proximity to the Caribs. No open conflict ever broke out between the various groups on Saint Vincent during the time when the Corps had a detachment there and some soldiers became enamored with the Carib culture. While only a very small group of Carolina Corps soldiers took the opportunity of joining the autonomous black community on Saint Vincent, the interaction of the unit with the Caribs had a profound effect on them and their service in the West Indies.

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The Carolina Corps were a truly unique group within British Caribbean society. They were obviously not white, but neither did they fall into most of the racial characteristics that the British used to define black society in the region. They were sometime members of each group, while being alienated from them at other times. The ethnic makeup of the men, being largely from a single region of Africa or from plantations influenced by this Rice Coast culture in South Carolina, meant they were ethnically different from the slaves that they encountered in the Caribbean. Linguistics and culture kept the Corps separate from the enslaved peoples of the islands where they were serving, at least when they first arrived. Even though the British tried their best to exacerbate this separation, the cultural familiarities between the Carolina Corps and their
enslaved neighbors often became too hard to control. This was especially the case with women, with whom the Corps created kinship groups. A misreading of the situation on Saint Vincent by the British in relation to the Caribs also meant that the Carolina Corps developed relationships with them also.

This chapter has explored the ways in which the Carolina Corps navigated through the complex racial environment of the British Caribbean. Some of these interactions are hard to unlock from surviving documents chronicling the unit and the wider British Caribbean. As a uniquely creolized group in the British Caribbean, the Carolina Corps retained African identities in certain ways, but also use their learned knowledge of white British society to progress also in that society. In this way, the Corps’ only major difference from the creolized slaves they co-existed with was their social standing. The identities of all groups within the Caribbean, white and black, had become too fluid to tie to any specific region.

Perhaps more than any other black group in the British Caribbean, the Carolina Corps were a pure product of a creolized Atlantic society. While the Caribs, obviously a product of creolization also, stood apart from the British in the Caribbean as an autonomous entity, the Carolina Corps were a group of creolized men who were actively engaged with a white society that had taken on aspects of creolization. On the most basic level, the arming of black men who were former slaves based on ideas of climatology and the issuing of guaranteed legal rights to them shows how British society in the Caribbean had begun an understandable shift from metropolitan to creolized thinking. The same can be seen in the food British people ate, the creolized languages spoken on the islands, and
the African religious practices used by whites on the islands. O’Shaughnessy writes about the British Caribbean during this time, “Whites in the British Caribbean were creoles...they possessed distinctive characteristics in their speech, diet, dress, architecture, values, and behavior that were peculiar to the Caribbean.”

The roles that the Corps performed in the West Indies enhanced their integration within British Caribbean society. As part of the military establishment, they not only protected the British territories in the region but also safeguarded the institution of slavery. These both brought them into contact and kept them isolated from the slave communities they encountered. It was only when they took off their red coats and laid down their muskets that the men of the Corps could have anything like a natural interaction with their fellow blacks on the Windward Islands. The very tools brought them closer to acceptance in white society that alienated them from the black one.

It is important to make clear that the Carolina Corps while performing African cultural rituals when among the enslaved people of the Windward Islands were likely performing whichever creolized belief existed in a certain locality. When with their white commanders and among white society, the men of the Corps reverted to a more British societal norm. This allowed for the cultural retention of religions such as Obeah, observed by numerous British officers, while also allowing the men to practice Christianity, at least publicly. The soldiers of the Carolina Corps were no longer truly African when they left Charlestown, but a product of Gullah and Geechee culture. Due to their unique position

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197 O’Shaughnessy, Empire Divided, 4.
in the West Indies, however, the Carolina Corps became culturally adaptive and so could easily step into the different creolized African cultures practiced by the enslaved peoples on the different islands where they served. Scholars have long argued about the retention of African identity within the Atlantic world, yet the Carolina Corps used these retentions within their creolized existence to flourish in the British Caribbean.
Chapter 3

“They may always be as much confided in”:

Social Mobility, Loyalty and the Perception of Nationalism; the Carolina Corps and British Society in the West Indies

On December 11, 1790, something happened in the British Army that had never occurred before in its illustrious history. That day, Edward Mathew sat down to write Lord Grenville, the British Secretary of State, regarding the state of the Carolina Corps. Grenville had asked in a previous letter for an update on the state of the unit, but what should have been a simple evaluation of the black troops was anything but. The unit had been declining in usefulness for some years, from “long service, from old age, and from disease [sic],” as Mathew put it. However, he resisted calls to dissolve the unit, and had a radical idea for those troops who had served so loyally, but who had reached the end of their useful lives as soldiers.\(^{198}\) As a quarter of the men were now unable to perform military service, rather than see them fall into destitution, Mathew suggested a radical

\(^{198}\) Mathew remarked in the letter that 300 men had entered the Caribbean from South Carolina in 1782, but that number had dropped significantly to some 240 ready for duty. He aired for the first time his desire to further recruit free blacks to the unit in the same letter. Mathew to Grenville, 11 December 1790, CO 101-31.
idea: “on More Mature deliberation, I shall propose some Invalid Establishment, with due attention to Economy.” With the simple suggestion that the men of the Carolina Corps should receive a pension upon retirement, Mathew elevated them to a financial position similar to white regular soldiers in the British Army.

Another surprising aspect of Mathew’s petition for a pension for the Carolina Corps was the fact that the Secretary of State did not immediately dismiss it. Rather, Lord Grenville wrote back that “Your ideas respecting the disposal of the Invalids belonging to this Corps will have due consideration, whenever they shall be communicated to me.”

It is worth noting that while Grenville’s letter contained numerous references to “blacks” and “negroes,” he did not attach such racial terms to the veterans of the Carolina Corps, calling them simply invalids, perhaps showing that Mathew’s view of the Corps had also pervaded the halls of Westminster. Overall, Grenville’s was a surprising response from a ministry as fiscally conservative as Britain’s in 1790. In the end, the men of the Corps received their pensions, becoming the first black unit in the British Army to do so and setting up a system that would continue among free black soldiers in Crown service in the Caribbean from that point forward.

The British military establishment, through both

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199 Mathew to Grenville, 11 December 1790, CO 101-31.

200 Grenville to Mathew, 8 March 1791, CO 101-31.

201 Tyson, “Carolina Black Corps,” 662. The Carolina Corps finally received its pension in 1793, in a sign of how slow British bureaucracy of the time worked. It is also important to note the obligations on the British government to give pensions to freed slaves, including the freemen of the Carolina Corps, to keep them from becoming a burden to the economy of the islands. The treatment of black retired soldiers was not as good as for white ones, they had no hospital or group retirement homes of the type created in Britain for veterans. Voelz, “Slave and Soldier,” 382-85. It is also important to note that while the Carolina Corps pension made the unit the first black one in the British Army to receive one, the practice was more widespread among the other European powers in the region. For example, as early as the 1770s, the
necessity and expediency, had begun to see the Carolina Corps as soldiers, rather than simply black men.

It is also worth noting that the men of the Corps received their pensions at a time when the British needed to ensure their loyalty. The Haitian Revolution had been raging for two years, and the British faced a stark choice; either disband the unit to ensure they did not partake in a wider Caribbean revolt, or give the men incentives to remain loyal. In choosing the latter, the British made the conscious choice to keep the unit intact as a fighting unit, but also recognized the needs to incentivize later black military service in some way. The British were forced to employ similar incentives on Cuba during the Seven Years War, being forced to grant freedom to some slaves to counter a similar offer made by the Spanish on the island for blacks performing military service.202 Just as the Carolina Corps needed a specific set of circumstances to be created, so outside circumstances aided in their achieving certain rights, including their pensions.

As significant as the story of how the Carolina Corps received its pension from the British military high command is, it is important to understand the actions of those in the ranks that drove it to fruition. Due to their dispersed location, Edward Mathew would have received most of his information regarding the Corps from its officers.203 In turn,

Spanish were giving free-black militiamen in Mexico access to a military pension plan, which they also paid into. Vinson, *Bearing Arms*, 80.


203 The centralization of the Carolina Corps in a single place did not occur until 1791, when Mathew ordered them to do so. The Corps were split between the Windward Islands until this time. Mathew would therefore
these officers would have received daily briefings about the rank and file of the unit from the numerous non-commissioned officers: mostly black soldiers who had risen through the ranks. As a result, it was largely the reports of black non-commissioned officers that informed the officers, and eventually Edward Mathew, of the plight of certain members of the unit. While this does not constitute a direct petition of assistance from the men of the Carolina Corps to the British military establishment, it does show a tremendous grasp of the intricacies of the service.

This chapter will explore the ways in which the Carolina Corps interacted with British society, both civil and military, within the Windward Islands. It will look particularly at the ways that the Carolina Corps perceived, and were perceived through, the nationalism of British subjects in the Caribbean. Explaining the power of nationalism, Benedict Anderson suggested that “regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail...the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship.”

There was perhaps no greater “imagined community” than the Windward Islands during the final two decades of the eighteenth century where, despite a diversity in culture and distance, the people of the British Caribbean clung fiercely to their national identity. The Carolina Corps certainly entered within this community, but the question is how much of a part of it did the unit become?

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have been able to see only part of the entire force and, due to their often-distant dispositions from population centers, these interactions would have been mostly sporadic.

While similarities existed between the lives of slaves and soldiers in the Carolina Corps, the rights given to the troops elevated their position well beyond what was attainable by most of those held in bondage. This chapter will argue that the British military perceived the Carolina Corps as being an integral part of the West Indian community, while civil leaders were happy to use the troops but never saw them as anything other than British subjects. These were not advances available to slaves, and thus while certain conditions between them and the men of the Corps were similar, their overall experience was very different. For the soldiers’ part, the men of the Carolina Corps used the systems and protections offered by military service to their full advantage. While the individual beliefs of the troops regarding their Britishness cannot be assessed using extant sources, the unit did what it needed to do in order to advance in British Caribbean society. What was true for colonial Africans in the twentieth century was just as true for the Carolina Corps in the eighteenth. This chapter will show how the British came to trust and, in some cases, even admire the men of the Corps due to their apparent adherence to British sovereign society during their service in the Caribbean. Through their loyal service, the troops also bolstered British understandings of a new form of imperialism, one in which subalterns could be used to defend imperial ideals. This would later involve the widespread recruitment of such groups, and remain the main military tactic of the British Empire for the rest of its existence.

The soldiers of the unit lived in a unique social positon in the West Indies and the men of the Corps held a similar station in relation to their national identity. The men wore the masks of Britishness when it benefitted them, especially through the military system
on the islands, but could just as easily take them off in private, especially in their interactions with their fellow black inhabitants. The white settlers of the Caribbean would have noticed this appropriation, yet still ostracized the unit due to their race. Being a British subject was different from being white, after all. Perhaps the most interesting group to analyze relating to this subject are the white officers of the Carolina Corps, who interacted with the men the most and saw them in their truest form. What they saw must not have offended or frightened the officers too badly, because almost universally they supported the retention and later expansion of the unit. By exploring these entanglements between the Carolina Corps and British Caribbean society, this chapter will assess the ways in which the unit were treated as, and perceived to be, British subjects by white elites in the West Indies.

For the purposes of this chapter, being British, or performing Britishness, is the active engagement, real or perceived, of an individual or group, within British society. In the case of the Carolina Corps this assessment will include the engagement of the unit within British society on both a civil and military level. Likewise, this chapter will assess the Carolina Corps’ engagement with British society both from the point of view of the British, whose perceptions of the Corps as British was just as important as any actual affiliation the Corps had to the nation state, and that of the Corps itself. In this way, this chapter will be able to show both how the British perceived the unit and the actual ways that the Carolina Corps engaged actively with British society in the West Indies.

The chapter will begin by analyzing the ways that the men of the Carolina Corps interacted with three different groups of whites: planters, officers outside of the unit, and
white British regular troops. This began with the initial opposition that the unit faced. It will then show how certain members of colonial society and the British military used the unit as a foil to articulate larger grievances towards British administration. Queries and insults regarding the loyalty of the unit to the Crown often accompanied these attacks on its character. This section will also look at the legal position that the Corps occupied in British Caribbean society due to its unique military position in the region.

The focus of the chapter will then turn to how the soldiers of the Carolina Corps incorporated the ideals of British nationalism and loyalty, so favored by white settlers, into their public lives to advance within West Indian society. As with so much of the Corps’ existence in the British Caribbean, much of this was a matter of perception among whites rather than any true account of the units’ emotional attachment to the imperial cause. This perceived loyalty and nationalism was indicated by the choice of the men to remain serving in the Corps, or in the case of new recruits from Nova Scotia, to join the unit at all. The Corps’ integration into British society was facilitated by their increased interactions with whites, both in the enlisted ranks of the army and in wider West Indian society. These interactions with white soldiers and civilians will provide the conclusion for this section of the chapter.

The final section of the chapter shows the impact that the military service of the Carolina Corps, and the perception of loyalty that accompanied it, had on the British officers in the Windward Islands. This analysis will show that while calls for the disbanding of the unit was taking place, particularly in the aftermath of the outbreak of the Haitian Revolution, the officers of the Corps fought successfully to keep the unit intact. Indeed, it
will show that through their excellent record of service in the West Indies, the men of the Carolina Corps impressed their commanders sufficiently that the unit not only survived, but expanded in numbers even after the events on Saint Domingue. Overall, this chapter will show that the men of the Corps were aware of all the legal and social rights that being perceived as a loyal soldier in the King’s army gave them, and that they used these rights to their full advantage.

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From the very start of their service in the British military, the Carolina Corps faced ostracism. In South Carolina, while the military welcomed all recruits to their decimated ranks in the final year of the war, the main opposition to arming blacks came from loyalist plantation owners. William Bull, the slave-owning former lieutenant governor of the province, found the use of black dragoons by the British in 1782 horrifying, due to the “savage nature” that the black race possessed.205 Men like Bull refused to overlook race even as Patriot forces were pressing the British into smaller and smaller perimeters around Charlestown, even though the arming of large numbers of slaves could have been their salvation.206

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205 Piecuch, Three Peoples, One King, 317.

206 The arming of blacks went against the very foundations of British slave culture, which explains why there was so much opposition to the move during the Revolutionary War. As O’Shaughnessy and Morgan explain: “the slave was, in theory, a socially dead person, often a captive in warfare and a defeated enemy, many planters considered it anathema to convert slaves into warriors.” O’Shaughnessy and Morgan, “Arming Slaves,” in Brown and Morgan, eds., Arming Slaves, 182.
Racial opposition to the arming of blacks was not unique to the British colonies. In Spanish Mexico, where free colored men had served for decades in the colonial militia, black troops often faced worse punishments than their white counterparts and verbal abuse from the white colonial population.\textsuperscript{207} The biggest cultural split from this was in the French Caribbean during the Revolutionary Era, as the outnumbered French desperately raised as many troops as possible to defend their colonial possessions from their imperial European adversaries. Here, pure pragmatism led the French to abolish slavery to win over the rebelling slaves on Saint Domingue, with thousands joining the French colors.\textsuperscript{208} While the British were in just as desperate a situation in South Carolina during the Revolutionary War, white loyalist opposition meant that it took until late 1781 for the arming of blacks to begin on a large scale. The Americans facing them were even more steadfast in their racial convictions, never officially arming slaves south of the Potomac.

The British were very careful in the way they used the men of the Carolina Corps, often portraying the unit to local plantation owners as little more than government-owned slaves. Julius Scott described the fear some planters had towards any black who seemed to exist outside of slavery in the islands: “the persistence of labor mobility called forth an anguished response from the ruling class.”\textsuperscript{209} As such, the British kept the unit

\textsuperscript{207} The verbal abuse towards black militiamen came from both civil and military sources, and was particularly bad during times of racial tension within wider society. When black participation in the urban night watch began, the fear of having the group armed while the general population slept was a particularly contentious issue. Vinson, \textit{Bearing Arms}, 183-85.

\textsuperscript{208} Laurent Dubois, “Citizen Soldiers: Emancipation and Military Service in the Revolutionary French Caribbean,” in Brown and Morgan, eds., \textit{Arming Slaves}, 234-36.

\textsuperscript{209} Scott, “Common Wind,” 9.
on a tight leash for the benefit of these planters. This had begun in South Carolina, where most of the unit performed fatigue duties alongside loyalist owned slaves. The unit engaged in similar tasks after its evacuation to the Caribbean at the end of the Revolutionary War. This changed, of course, during times of crisis, when the people of the Greater Caribbean – like white Loyalists in South Carolina – had no problem arming the Corps. However, during the predominant periods of peace in which the Corps served, the men were more laborers than warriors.

While the civilian loyalist population may not have been in favor of arming slaves, the British officers who served in South Carolina saw it as the correct course of action. While visiting the colony in the winter of 1782, Lord Dunmore, whose plan to arm blacks in Virginia at the start of the Revolution was laid waste by the ravages of smallpox and racial animosity of the colony’s planters, argued in favor of the arming of slaves. Dunmore wanted a force of 10,000 slaves, planning to entice them with a bounty for enlistment and freedom upon the completion of their service.\(^{210}\) While most other British commanders were not so ambitious in their schemes to recruit slaves, the raising of the Carolina Corps occurred during the final years of the conflict.

In the Caribbean, the Carolina Corps faced consistent questioning about their usefulness and loyalty to the British crown by both white civilians and some remote members of the British military, many of whom had never seen the Corps in action. Often,\(^{210}\)

\(^{210}\) Dunmore’s plan for arming South Carolina slaves on such a large scale never did come to fruition. It was batted back and forth between London and New York, never being properly discussed before the British were forced to evacuate Charlestown. Piecuch, *Three Peoples, One King*, 315-16.
the criticism aimed towards the men of the Corps had nothing to do with the actions of the troops. On Dominica, where slave revolts orchestrated by the French planters or Caribs on the newly acquired British island were never far away, Governor John Orde had some very strong opinions about the Carolina Corps. In 1786, during a time of unrest on the island, Lord Sydney, the Secretary of State at the time, wrote to Mathew to suggest sending a detachment of the Corps to Dominica. Orde suggested he would have already asked Edward Mathew to send some of his troops to defend the island, “but added to their being in general lame, infirm ... they have lately manifested such a mutinous and disorderly disposition” so he had decided against the request. What is particularly curious about Orde’s attack on the Carolina Corps was that he had had no first-hand experience with the men of the unit, which at the time was based only on Grenada and Saint Vincent. Thus, his fears seem to emanate purely from personal grievances and underlying white fears of fielding a force of armed black men. Also, Orde is the only person to mention any form of major disorder within the ranks of the Corps, with neither Mathew on Grenada or Edmund Lincoln, governor of Saint Vincent, making any such reports. Finally, Orde’s suggestion that the men of the unit were already lame and infirm by 1786, within only two years of their arrival in the West Indies contradicts Mathew’s contemporaneous accounts of the high level of activity performed by the men of the unit.

The truth behind Orde’s open attack against the Carolina Corps had absolutely nothing to do with the unit itself. For years, Orde had been unhappy with the role that

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211 Orde suggested that far from being a useful force on Dominica, the Carolina Corps would actually do more harm than good. John Orde to Sydney, 16 April 1786, CO 71-10.
Edward Mathew played as commander in chief of British forces in the Windward Islands. Two years earlier the two men had a quarrel over who had command over the British military officers on Dominica. The dispute reached such a level that Orde felt it necessary to write Lord Sydney to assure him that no harm was done to the military establishment in the region by it.\textsuperscript{212} This may explain why Orde, who had no experience with the Carolina Corps, was so hostile to a unit that was really the pet-project of Mathew in the Windward Islands. It would not be the last time that the Carolina Corps became embroiled in a civil-military feud that was not of their making.\textsuperscript{213}

When attacking the Carolina Corps, John Orde decided to question their loyalty, rather than going after their race. While this may seem surprising it is not when Orde’s positive position towards the arming of his own slave units on Dominica is considered. Instead of insulting the unit in a way that might hinder his own schemes towards the arming of blacks, he decided to raise the specter of disloyalty and mutiny within the Corps. In addition, he attacked the fact that “as American Negroes” the members of the Corps were “little calculated to Run over this Rocky Country,” showing his bias in favor of Caribbean blacks over those from the mainland American colonies.\textsuperscript{214} Orde therefore

\textsuperscript{212} Orde wrote to Lord Sydney that “the difference of opinion, between General Mathew & myself, never occasioned any prejudice to His Majestys Service.” Orde to Sydney, 26 October 1784, CO 71-9.

\textsuperscript{213} In 1784, Edward Mathew had to decide a dispute which developed between Edmund Lincoln and Major William Chester, commander of British forces on Saint Vincent, over who had control of the Carolina Corps detachment sent to the island. The Corps was seen as both a military unit and a labor battalion, depending on the view of the men in charge. Mathew eventually sided with Chester in the dispute. William Chester to Mathew, 20 June 1784, CO 101-25; Lincoln, General Order, 6 June 1784, CO 101-25; William Chester, Garrison Order, 7 June 1784, CO 101-25.

\textsuperscript{214} Orde to Sydney, 16 April 1786, CO 71-10.
used the apparent disloyalty of the unit as a method to attack Mathew, and undermine the credibility of a unit that he had never dealt with first hand.

Ironically, when Orde was eager to get a chance to interact with the unit, Mathew denied him the opportunity. When a new slave uprising threatened Dominica in 1791, Orde wrote to the Secretary of State, Lord Grenville, that “I immediately communicated the News to General Mathew, and repeated the Information at two or three Periods, begging in each Letter that a Proportion of the Pioneers might be sent to assist the Troops as none of our Negroes could be depended on.”215 Regardless of whether Mathew received such pleas from Orde, he refused to dispatch the Carolina Corps to assist him. Regardless of the ongoing dispute, Orde’s opinion of the Carolina Corps had shifted entirely in the five years since he wrote his first letter attacking them. He no longer openly questioned the loyalty of the black troops to the British Crown. In fact, he trusted the Carolina Corps to remain loyal, asking them to put down a rebellion begun by members of their own race. Orde, as Mathew had much earlier, now differentiated between the unit and other blacks in the Windward Islands, and he trusted them to fulfil their soldierly duty. Perhaps to these officers, more than any other group in the Caribbean, the unit occupied that low place in British society alongside the white rank and file of the British Army.

215 Orde mentions in the same letter that Mathew had declined his request every time. Orde to Grenville, 3 June 1791, CO 71-20.
The geographically small areas where both white and black troops served in the Caribbean islands meant there was no way to keep the races completely separated. The British military realized this issue, and even confronted it by insisting that while the races could serve in a military context with each other, as often occurred when the Carolina Corps performed fatigue duties for regular white regiments, they were not to interact in social settings. The most obvious symbols of this strategy in the British Caribbean were segregated barracks. Nonetheless, the freedom granted to the Carolina Corps meant that their white officers could not completely prohibit the interaction of white and black soldiers in a social setting, and the most frequent setting for these interactions were the taverns of the various Caribbean islands.

Rum was both the bane and the salvation of the British Army in the West Indies. The British used the liquor as a ration, a medicine and a reward to the men of the army, both black and white, who served in the region. Rum was also the drink of choice of the servicemen in social settings due to its cheapness, a factor that often led to white troops becoming addicted to it. The men of the Carolina Corps were as British as any of the white troops in relation to their consumption of rum. The situation had become so bad by 1787 that Samuel Williams, who governed Grenada while Mathew took leave in England, wrote to Lord Sydney on the subject. “Your Lordship I am persuaded, will see the Expediency of keeping the Soldiers as much out of the Town as possible; and the Necessity of depriving

Ironically it was often the Carolina Corps that constructed the barracks which allowed for the segregation of the West Indian British Army. For example, in Grenada the Carolina Corps constructed a wooden barracks for a detachment of the Royal Artillery in 1792, just one of the many barracks which they built throughout the Windward Islands. Mathew to Dundas, 6 January 1792, CO 101-32.
them of every Opportunity of providing themselves with the new Rum of the Country.”

The fact that Williams took the step to limit the men of the Carolina Corps from Saint George, the largest town on Grenada, due to drunkenness shows how “British” the black soldiers had become regarding their leisure time. The same fears also swirled around the white troops, among whom alcoholism led to higher rates of mortality, although the idea of curtailing their freedom of movement was a lot more nuanced. One major difference between the races was that the white officers of the Corps believed their black troops had a higher tolerance for the liquor than their white counterparts. Roger Buckley explained the situation thus: “Although rum was served at the mess and canteens…the black soldier, unlike the white, was not addicted to it.” During their service, both black and white troops partook in each other’s company and the same intoxicating liquors during their social time. This also shows how the men of the Carolina Corps could use their perceived Britishness to interact with people of different races to partake in the most British of activities, drinking. As surreal as it would have seemed to an outsider, by performing such quintessentially British acts, the Carolina Corps inadvertently represented itself as British to the white Caribbean population.

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217 Immediately before this, Williams was discussing the Carolina Corps, so it is highly probable that he meant to ban only this unit, and not white ones, from visits to Saint George. “New Rum” was a highly alcoholic liquid created in the Caribbean which, due to its rapid distillation using lead, was often poisonous yet highly addictive to those who drank it. Samuel Williams to Sydney, 26 December 1787, CO 101-28.

218 Buckley, British Army in the West Indies, 281-82.

219 Historians have suggested this may have been due to a higher tolerance to the liquor, or simply because they did not drink rum in the same large quantities that white soldiers did. Buckley, Slaves in Red Coats, 104.
Unfortunately, not all interactions between the men of the Carolina Corps and their white counterparts were jovial. On Grenada in March 1785, four soldiers of the white 60th Regiment were court-martialed and found guilty of a capital offence and sentenced to death. At the very same court session a member of the Carolina Corps was condemned and suffered a similar fate.²²⁰ Whatever the affiliation between the condemned soldier of the Carolina Corps and the white troops he died next to, he received the same legal representation as they did. Legal recourse through military courts was another benefit that the men of the Carolina Corps had over the slaves on the islands where they served, and further tied them into the fabric of British society.

For all the benefits that came to the men of the Corps due to their military service, they were far more restrictive than those given to white troops. White regulars lived in better brick barracks, designed to stop the spread of miasmic diseases via ventilation, while the black troops lived in wooden structures they built themselves. Ironically, it was the black troops who built barracks in the West Indies, designing better accommodation for their white counterparts than they were entitled to use themselves.²²¹ In addition to better barracks, the white soldiers also earned better pay than black ones. Outside of regular privileges, white troops were free to live with women in these barracks, with families of certain soldiers regularly attaching themselves to white units.²²² This was

²²⁰ Mathew to Sydney, 19 March 1785, CO 101-26.

²²¹ Buckley, *British Army in the West Indies*, 327-28.

²²² Women often supplemented the wages of their soldier husbands by serving the larger regiment in some capacity. These wives, as well as other women attached to the army, were essential to British military functionality in the West Indies. Buckley, *British Army in the West Indies*, 145-46; 331.
something officially forbade for the Carolina Corps, although the men often circumnavigated the rules by engaging with the opposite sex on plantations, away from the prying eyes of their officers. Perhaps the greatest disadvantage the men of the Corps had in comparison to white troops was the manner of work that the men of the different races performed. The very reason for the creation of the Corps was to provide a fatigue unit so that white troops could be spared the most strenuous work in the tropical climate of the West Indies. As such, the men of the Corps performed much harder labor, much more frequently than their white counterparts did. When placed beside the inherent racism that pervaded British West Indian society, it is clear to understand why the men of the Carolina Corps were trapped in liminality during their service in the region.

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One of the most contentious debates that surrounded the men of the Carolina Corps was the legal system they fell under. As soldiers, the men of the Corps should have been subject to British military law. However, the soldiers were not British regulars, holding only a provincial status. Thus, while in the pay of, and supplied by, the British government, the Carolina Corps were not full-fledged members of the military establishment.\(^{223}\) Some colonial governors made the argument that the unit, consisting

\(^{223}\) The Carolina Corps were a regular unit in everything but name. The Corps’ survival after the cessation of the Revolutionary War on a long-term peacetime establishment, was unique among other black provincial units raised during previous conflicts. This made the unit unique in the British Caribbean, but also led to legal issues over their rights. The main reason for the British not disbanding the Corps after the Revolutionary War, as all other British provincial units were, was due to their status as former slaves. In addition to Carleton and Mathew arguing for a permanent black pioneer unit in the Caribbean, Lord Sydney stated that the British government felt a moral duty to maintain them. In a letter to Mathew, he explained that in the opinion of the Crown, “It would be neither generous or just in us to dispose of them as slaves.”
of former slaves, should instead be under the legally administrative regulations of the
colonial police, which in some instances were much stricter on blacks. The debate
between the two groups over the legal standing of black military units continued well
beyond the life-span of the Carolina Corps. The various colonial legislatures were
unsuccessful in gaining legal superiority over the Carolina Corps, as the men of the Corps
fell under the jurisdiction of military law throughout their tenure in the West Indies. The
situation was partially resolved in the 1792 mutiny act clarified that any conscript paid as
a soldier must be legally treated as such.

On Grenada, principal base of the Carolina Corps, the legal situation of the unit
had an easier resolution because Edward Mathew was both commander in chief and
governor of the colony. As such, all Carolina Corps legal incidents, whether judged military
or civil, went to Mathew for final adjudication. While it is unknown whether any Carolina
Corps members ever applied for clemency from Mathew, other slaves and their owners
certainly did. In a 1784 case, two members of the Grenadian legislature recommended

The British high command did not wish to return the men to slavery but were also determined to keep the
men in a service beneficial to them. Sydney to Mathew, 15 June 1783, CO 318-10.

224 According to Roger Buckley, between 1799 and 1801 there were no less than three rulings issued by
Crown officials in London about the legal jurisdiction of the West India Regiments, some of which would
still have contained Carolina Corps members at that time. Buckley, Slaves in Red Coats, 57.

225 The provision for black troops to receive the same legal protection as whites was revoked for West India
Regiment soldiers in 1801, with the British Law Lords determining that because slaves were not voluntarily
recruited, the law did not apply to them. This ruling did not affect the men of the Carolina Corps as the unit
no longer existed by this time, and because any Corps member still in service had enlisted willingly. Claudius
Fergus, “Emancipation and ‘military necessity’ during the Haitian Revolution: Challenging the Hegemonic
Paradigms of Slavery and Freedom,” in Amar Wahab and Cecily Jones, eds., Free at Last? Reflections on
Freedom and the Abolition of the British Transatlantic Slave Trade (Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars
clemency for a slave convicted of the murder of another enslaved individual, which Mathew quickly agreed with. In this case, as with all royal petitions for clemency, Mathew had to get final petitions approved by the Secretary of State. The fact that no such petitions, common in civil jurisdictions, ever made it to Whitehall suggests that military law largely governed the Carolina Corps.

As with slaves on plantations, the whip dominated the lives of soldiers in the British military, with the army creating horrific spectacles designed to terrify soldiers from breaking military codes of conduct. As Roger Buckley describes floggings, “They were prolonged and emotionally rich rituals of barbaric retribution and salutary terror.” Soldiers would march onto the parade ground, or similar open space, form into ranks and then watch the gory spectacle close-up. In a unit as small as the Carolina Corps, which never had more than 300 active members in any one place, every soldier would have known the unfortunate victim of the flogging. By the time of the Carolina Corps’ service in the Caribbean, the British government had theoretically limited the number of lashes a condemned man could face but in practice a court-martial could administer any punishment they saw fit. Sentences of a hundred lashes for trivial offences were common. Officers could order more, depending on the severity of the crime. The race of the Carolina Corps, combined with the heightened anxiety present towards blacks in the

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226 The case involved the murder of a slave named Peter by a slave from another plantation named Rorey. The petitioners appealed to Mathew for clemency citing Rorey’s willingness and ability to track runaways, something he had done in colonial service previously. In the end, clemency was extended to Rorey and the death sentence was commuted. Home & John Castles to Mathew, 24 June 1784, CO 101-25; Mathew to Sydney, 24 July 1784, CO 101-25; Sydney to Mathew, 5 October 1784, CO 101-25.

227 Buckley, British Army in the West Indies, 203.
British Caribbean, meant any indiscretion seen as insubordination led to excessive punishments.\textsuperscript{228} Thus, the cost of the paranoia of white British society in the West Indies was often the flesh of black troops.

As awful as the over-zealous flogging of their compatriots must have been to the men of the Carolina Corps, the British officers of black units found equally degrading ways to remind the soldiers of the lives in bondage that they had escaped. Some officers rued the use of violence against black troops, suggesting alternatives to violence when attempting to enforce British military rules upon the unit. Given that the soldiers of the Corps differentiated themselves from the slaves they policed in the West Indies by their military status, British officers often punished the black soldiers by treating those found guilty of committing indiscretions by removing soldierly privileges. By removing the weapons of the troops, lessening their rations, and making them perform fatigue duties like a slave, British officers found they could shame black troops into compliance.\textsuperscript{229} Of course, if such non-violent methods failed to achieve the correct result, the officers had no hesitation resorting to the whip, or even the noose.

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\textsuperscript{228} In one brutal example of British over-zealous punishment of black troops, ten deserters from the 4\textsuperscript{th} West India Regiment were sentenced to 1500 lashes each. It is hard to imagine any of them surviving this torture, and thus it simply became a gory sentence of death by flogging. Buckley, \textit{British Army in the West Indies}, 227.

\textsuperscript{229} This was the method employed most frequently by Lieutenant Colonel Hugh Carmichael who commanded the 2\textsuperscript{nd} West Indian Regiment for eleven years. Buckley, \textit{British Army in the West Indies}, 227.
While the excellent performance of the Carolina Corps may seem at odds with the constant threat of violence or dishonor that life within the British military brought, the soldiers made the choice to accept it. The choice of the runaway slaves from South Carolina brought with it many hardships, but none were as harsh as their lives under slavery had been. While the whip continued to dominate their lives, the men of the Carolina Corps made the conscious decision to choose who was holding it. For all the dangers and the hardships, the men of the Corps gained much from their service in the British military: money, a home, food, and that most prized possession of all, freedom. With their freedom, the men of the Corps could live dignified lives in the British Caribbean, even into their retirement with the assistance afforded by their pensions. While it is certainly true that the men of the unit lived lives that mirrored the slaves within the institution they helped to enforce, the freedom they gained from it gave them choices that those enslaved plantation workers never enjoyed. This freedom allowed them to pivot towards a British identity, and thus that of a freeman, in a way that slaves simply could not. Thus, while slaves may have held a position as British subjects, they could not access and engage with British society in the ways that the soldiers could because of their status as freed persons.

The Carolina Corps were perfectly aware of how their superiors viewed them and thus were very protective of their rights as soldiers. The men knew their rights to food, accommodation and above all pay, and they knew how to work the system to their advantage if the need arose. One such example of this was in 1785 when, after being in the region over a year, the Carolina Corps troops began to vocalize their disapproval at
their lack of regular pay. The matter became so pressing that Edward Mathew wrote to London for permission to appoint Hubert Von Hamel as paymaster for the unit to ensure that the soldiers were given their pay “with the same regularity as any other in His Majesty’s Service.” This incident may have been the basis for John Orde’s criticism of the unit’s discipline, although the affair never reached the level of severity that he suggested. After the appointment of Von Hamel the subject of ill-supply never reached the same heatedness as it did in 1785. By vocalizing their displeasure at their situation, the men of the Carolina Corps used their collective bargaining power to achieve positive change.

The men of the Carolina Corps had the opportunity to choose their master in a way that most blacks in the racialized world of the British Atlantic never did. Some, of course, wanted neither a planter nor an officer as a master and so chose to desert to the Maroon colonies or plantations near to their bases. However, most did not as the choice to join the military establishment gave them the ability to do things that would have been impossible to any enslaved person. The men had adopted the military life as

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230 Mathew wrote that the situation of not having an appointed paymaster had caused “much irregularity in their internal police” when referring to the Carolina Corps. Mathew to Sydney, 17 January 1785, CO 101-26. In 1802, the men of the 8th West India Regiment on Dominica went further than the Carolina Corps, descending into full-fledged mutiny in complaint against the discrimination which they suffered compared to white units. The mutiny again shows how black troops vocalized their displeasure against discriminatory practices in the military in the British Caribbean. Tyson, “Carolina Black Corps,” 658; Buckley, Slaves in Red Coats, 57.

231 It is worth remembering that those soldiers who deserted the army had little in the way of escape routes off of the islands where they served. Thus, most faced recapture, and often executed. Those who ran to plantations had to revert to their previous status as bondsmen, a high price to pay for a man who has tasted freedom. Buckley, British Army in the West Indies, 227.
much as they had adopted Britain per se, and in doing so had carved out a life that few
would have thought imaginable on their pre-Revolutionary War lowcountry plantations.

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Perhaps the greatest proof of the way that black men saw the Carolina Corps as
an avenue for social mobility in the British Atlantic took place far from the stifling humidity
of the Caribbean, along the rugged coast of Nova Scotia. By 1791, Edward Mathew
needed black troops to join the dwindling ranks of the Carolina Corps. The government
would not permit him to buy slaves for the purpose and the free black population, their
freedom and lifestyle already secured, also refused to join the unit in adequate numbers.
Therefore, Mathew came up with a novel plan to recruit more men for the Carolina Corps
by sending a party from the unit to find willing soldiers among the largest British free
black population outside of the West Indies, in Nova Scotia. To achieve this end, Mathew
sent a white subaltern and a small number of Carolina Corps soldiers on a recruiting
mission to the rugged British province. Mathew clearly believed that the sight of black
men wearing the King’s colors would convince some of the freemen of color in Nova
Scotia to join the unit. In doing so, Mathew may well have sent the first black soldiers ever
on a recruiting mission for the peacetime British Army.

There was a military reason why Mathew wanted to specifically recruit from the
free black population in Nova Scotia. In the same letter to Grenville, Mathew explained

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232 Mathew had originally wanted to send the official Army brig, the only ship he commanded in the West
Indies, but was dissuaded from doing so by Lord Grenville. Not perturbed, Mathew sent his mixed-race
party northward on a private vessel. Mathew to Dundas, 6 September 1791, CO 101-31.
that the province was home to “a great number of free Negroes, who had been employed as Pioneers to the Army serving in the southern States of America...at the close of the last war.” Mathew was incorrect in his geography, as most of the Black Pioneers in Nova Scotia had served in the middle or northern colonies during the war, he was correct that a large body of these men now lived in Nova Scotia. The appeal of recruiting men already trained in the work that the Carolina Corps undertook frequently in the West Indies was too much for Mathew who, without waiting for confirmation of his plan, sent the recruiting party north to Nova Scotia.

Upon arriving in Nova Scotia, the recruiting party found a free black population on the verge of collapse. At Birchtown, the largest free-black community of some 1400 people, the population suffered due to the racial animus transplanted to the region by white loyalist refugees from America. White planters, many of whom had brought their slaves with them to Nova Scotia, as well as the general white population, quickly understood how to take advantage of their black loyalist neighbors. Maya Jasanoff explains “as former slaves, relatively unused to wage labor, black Loyalists frequently ended up pressed into work at exceptionally low wages. Many Birchtown blacks became indentured to whites at Shelburne, working under conditions that replicated their former positions of slavery.” News of the sufferings of the free black population in Nova Scotia spread all over the British Atlantic. In London, British abolitionists began to devise a

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233 Mathew to Grenville, 1 March 1791, CO 101-31.

234 Jasanoff, Liberties Exiles, 174; Gilbert, Black Patriots and Loyalists; Pybus, Epic Journeys of Freedom; Byrd, Captives and Voyagers.
strategy to send the free blacks to Africa. In the Caribbean, Edward Mathew saw the suffering of the black Loyalists as a recruitment opportunity. As early as March 1791, Mathew wrote to Lord Grenville about his plan to raise black troops from the Canadian coast. In his letter, Mathew explained “I am informed they did not, in general apply themselves to the cultivation of their lands; that they are at present very needy; gaining a precarious subsistence as day laborers, and dissatisfied with the long winters of that climate.”

Mathew was facing some tough obstacles in his recruitment mission in Nova Scotia. The British Caribbean as a destination was not an appealing one to many of the free blacks, who would have known of the conditions of the region and its high mortality rates. Another nail in the coffin for the plan for widespread recruitment in Nova Scotia was that although Mathew only wanted experienced veteran pioneers from the Revolutionary War, aged between 25 and 35, he did not want to bring any family units down to the Caribbean. This stipulation seriously reduced the potential pool of men who the recruiting party could target, essentially eliminating married men, those with children, or those with any close-knit kinship networks. Given the difficulties surrounding the expedition to Nova Scotia, it is testament to the persuasiveness of the recruiting party that they managed to convince sixteen enlistees to join the ranks of the Carolina Corps.

While most black Loyalists in Nova Scotia rejected Mathew’s overtures to return to British service, the sixteen veterans who did join him clearly remembered the positives

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235 Mathew to Grenville, 1 March 1791, CO 101-31.
that came with British military service. These sparks of memories would have been reignited when the recruiting party arrived in Nova Scotia, offering them a return to a life they knew, and escape from the grim life they were currently living. It is also important to remember that life in the British Army promised a degree of security that the men lacked in Nova Scotia. Before their evacuation to the maritime provinces the British promised the men freedom and land, in truth most only received one partially and one not at all.\textsuperscript{236} The result was that most of the free black men in Nova Scotia owned little to no property in the region and struggled to survive. Life in the British Army, for all its ills, promised the men food, shelter, and a wage. By talking to the men of the Corps in the recruiting party, they would have also understood the social position of the unit in the Caribbean and the potential for advancement above what they could achieve in white-dominated Nova Scotia.

The men who enlisted in the Carolina Corps from Nova Scotia were between the ages of 24 and 32, meaning it is likely that most were veterans of the Revolutionary War, which had ended only eight years prior to their enlistment. Even those who had not actively served the British during the war would have had experience with the British military, which had granted them their freedom and evacuated them at the end of the conflict. The men were all from colonies where slavery had flourished, and two had even been born in Africa before falling victim to the horrors of the slave trade. After fleeing

\textsuperscript{236} At Birchtown, the main black loyalist settlement in Nova Scotia, only 28 percent of the black population received the land they had been promised upon their evacuation (184 out of 649 men), and even this lucky minority had to wait five years, until 1788, to receive their grants. Gilbert, \textit{Black Patriots and Loyalists}, 209.
bondage only to discover the latent racism that pervaded colonial British society upon their arrival in Nova Scotia, it is possible that their most dignified moments in the New World came when they earlier served the British Crown.

The reasons given for the failure of the recruitment expedition by Mathew were two-fold. Firstly, he blamed the season when the mission took place. He explained that “the lateness of the season did not allow the Party to try its success in New Brunswick, where I am informed, there was a probability of our obtaining much greater numbers.”

The second reason given by Mathew is much more telling, “The superior advantages offered to this Class of People by the Sierra Leone Company, prevented this attempt from being so successful as it would otherwise have been.” Unfortunately for Mathew and his recruiting party, they had arrived in Nova Scotia at the exact same time as the Sierra Leone Company was engaging members of the free black population to journey to Africa. A major problem for Mathew was that his recruiting party did not have the support of the leaders of the black community as the Sierra Leone recruiters did. Even more problematic was the fact that Mathew had very set standards of the type of men who he wanted to recruit into the unit, the men needed to be physically able, relatively

237 Mathew to Dundas, 14 January 1792, CO 101-32.

238 Mathew to Dundas, 14 January 1792, CO 101-32.

239 Each of the black emigrants to Sierra Leone was the recipient of a land grant: black leaders received nine acres, men six, women four and children two. John Clarkson received help in his abolitionist endeavors from the black leaders of Birchtown, Nova Scotia, including Boston King and David George. These men convinced some 1200 blacks in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick to immigrate back to Africa, roughly a third of the free population in these two provinces. Jasanoff, Liberty’s Exiles, 293-96.
Fig. 3.1) The Return of the Nova Scotian recruits to the Carolina Corps. This document gives a rare individualized glance into the men of the unit. Return of Nova Scotian Recruits, in Edward Mathew to Henry Dundas, 14 January 1792, CO 101-32.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Colour</th>
<th>Marked</th>
<th>Assigned</th>
<th>Where</th>
<th>When Sent</th>
<th>Where Born</th>
<th>Trade or Occupation</th>
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young, and preferably skilled in a trade. They also could not use the promise of freedom that had been so enticing to the first recruits to the unit during the Revolutionary War.

On January 14, 1792, Mathew wrote to Henry Dundas about the recruiting mission to Nova Scotia and its mixed results. Mathew was downbeat about the success of the mission. The sixteen men who had agreed to enlist in the Carolina Corps were barely enough to cover the loss of men that the unit had suffered over the previous two years, and certainly not enough to sufficiently expand the unit as he wished. Thus, from the point of view of Mathew, the mission was disappointing.

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The men of the Carolina Corps fostered a perception of loyalty that helped to ingratiate them within British society, and advanced their position with their white officers. Indeed, at a time of crisis in 1791, the loyalty that the British believed the Corps had to the crown, whether real or imagined, saved the unit from destruction. In that year, an anonymous officer (probably either Mathew or Lt. Col. Nicholls) sent a history of the Carolina Corps to London explaining the loyalty that the Corps had shown, even at a time of increased threats from black uprisings within the Caribbean basin. With the specter of Saint Domingue looming large over the entire region, the commanders of the unit sought to convince Whitehall that no similarities existed between the Carolina Corps and the rebellious blacks of that colony. “An objection may be made to the arming of blacks as

240 The return of the troops enlisted in Nova Scotia is the best evidence I have found regarding the details of individual soldiers who joined the Carolina Corps. The return gives the names, ages, height, date of enlistment, place of birth, and trades of the men.
soldiers, but it has no weight,” the report began before concluding that “they may always be as much confided in, if properly commanded, as any part of the army.” Indeed it is clear by the measures taken by Mathew in Nova Scotia, that he had complete faith in the loyalty of the Carolina Corps during his time as commander in chief in the Windward Islands.

The loyalty of the unit to the British crown was key to their absorption within British society. The men of the Carolina Corps were very careful in their insubordination, using their position to create tangible benefits, such as in the case of the paymaster, without ever mutinying. Despite the shortages in basic equipment, food and pay that dogged the unit throughout its Caribbean service, and despite their employment on many different missions, they never mutinied. This was not the case with their successors in the West India Regiments who openly mutinied in 1802 to try and secure their rights as British soldiers. The Corps were often the first unit deployed when a slave uprising seemed likely. Whenever a runaway slave needed tracking, the unit likewise obliged. Then there was the mundane but crucial role that the unit had in providing labor for the white units of the colonies, and the maintenance of fixed fortifications throughout the Windward Islands. In these roles, the Corps excelled and never questioned their orders. For the white supremacist planters of the islands, the claim that the Corps were “more inveterate

241 Anon, Of the Carolina, or Black Corps, ca. Dec. 1791, CO 101-31.

242 The men of the 8th WI Regiment mutinied on Dominica in 1802, within only six years of their founding. The cause of the rebellion was the lack of perceived rights that the men of the regiment had. Unlike the Carolina Corps, the 8th WIR recruited its rank and file almost completely from plantation slaves bought specifically for British military service. This meant that they were subject to much tighter restrictions than the free soldiers of the Carolina Corps. Tyson, “Carolina Black Corps,” 658; Buckley, Slaves in Red Coats, 57.
against people of their own Colour, than any other Troops,” certainly imbued them with confidence in the loyalty of the unit.\textsuperscript{243} The new imperial model that emerged after the American Revolution, as molded by abolitionists, featured new ideas of British civilization as a cornerstone.\textsuperscript{244} As such, the Carolina Corps, as former slaves and loyal subjects, became emblematic to West Indian planters and white officers of the new identity of Britishness emerging within the empire.

As news of the Haitian Revolution swept across the plantation islands of the Caribbean, the Carolina Corps managed to avoid the repercussions that affected most free people of color on British Caribbean islands. The racial animosity and fear stoked by the fires of Saint Domingue caused the free blacks of Grenada, most of whom shared the same French heritage as the revolutionaries, to write a petition to Edward Mathew in his capacity as governor of the province.\textsuperscript{245} Fearing potential re-enslavement, the petitioners insisted that they were writing “at this remarkable Era, to make a renewal of our most

\textsuperscript{243} The History of the Carolina Corps that this quote was taken from (see Appendix), was written for the benefit of the Home Office by one of the unit’s officers. In writing such an explosive comment, the writer was probably trying to win support for the unit in the wake of the Haitian revolt. Such a comment made the unit seem both loyal and useful against slave revolts. The officer, probably Mathew or Nicholls, was almost certainly writing the Home office to ensure that the unit survived the crisis and, given the period it was written, may also have been arguing for the expansion of the unit, as Mathew was petitioning for at the time. By arguing the Corps were the best-suited troops in the Caribbean for fighting against the black majority on the islands, the officer was showing the supreme usefulness of the unit. It is certainly not proven that this assessment was correct, but, given their use against runaway slaves (see chapter 2), it was likely a perception created due to their application in this frequent endeavor. Anon, Of the Carolina, or Black Corps, ca. Dec. 1791, CO 101-31.

\textsuperscript{244} Brown, \textit{Moral Capital}, 256.

\textsuperscript{245} The situation on Grenada was repeated throughout the Caribbean, as seeds of revolution and mistrust were sown throughout the Francophone world. Scott, “Common Wind”; Dubois, \textit{Avengers of the New World}. 
Solemn and unmutable pledge of Loyalty, to the best of Sovereigns.” The Carolina Corps never experienced any of the open hostility from the Grenadian population that their fellow free people of color did, at least none written that survives today. The excellent reputation the unit had established in the years prior to the Haitian Revolution, as well as the loyalty shown while completing all manner of tasks, served as a shield that protected the unit from racial repercussions caused by the uprisings in the French colonies. The situation in the early 1790s also made the British authorities in the Caribbean give concessions to their black troops to ensure their loyalty, including the pensions in 1793.

The most prominent example of how their loyalty to the crown aided the Carolina Corps is the fact that the unit survived as a single entity despite pressures from London, caused by the outbreak of violence on Saint Domingue, to disband it. Much of the pressure came from absentee planters, who feared their property in the Windward Islands was under threat by having an armed black unit patrolling it. The British high command in London had argued for the utility of splitting the unit while they performed labor duties throughout the Caribbean. Not only did splitting the unit mean that there were fewer black troops in any single specific area, reducing the risk of collective action by the unit, but it also meant they could simply cover more ground. Secretary of State

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246 Petition of the Free Blacks of Grenada to Edward Mathew, 10 January 1792, CO 101-32.

247 Absentee landlords, commonplace in the British Caribbean, had opposed the Carolina Corps from the moment of the unit’s creation due to their fears of arming blacks. Unlike the planters who lived in the region, these landlords never saw the benefits of the unit and so were steadfast in their opposition even after the Corps had loyally served for over a decade. Tyson, “Carolina Black Corps,” 654.
Lord Grenville, basing his view on racialized ideas of climatology and fear of the unit as a united force, argued that the Carolina Corps “should again be distributed to perform the laborious duties of the (white) Regiments serving in the several Islands.” This order arrived in the West Indies much to the chagrin of Edward Mathew, who at that moment was preparing for the potential outbreak of hostilities with Spain, France, or both. Indeed, Mathew, who had seen first-hand the usefulness of the Carolina Corps, objected to dispersing the unit. He believed that the threat of the Corps rebelling was essentially nil. After all, Mathew had seen the unit put down slave rebellions on the islands that he watched over for years to this point. Earlier in 1791, as the plan for the splitting of the Corps was being finalized in Whitehall, Mathew had written to Grenville that the Corps would be of more service united “than it could possibly be in it’s late scattered situation, devoted to the fatigue and servile duties of the Regiments in the different Islands.” Always convincing, Mathew implied that the division of the troops would be more likely to cause a slave rebellion than keeping the Corps united.

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248 The plan, as perceived by Grenville, called for detachments of ten men from the Carolina Corps to join each white battalion serving in the West Indies as a fatigue detail. While never implemented, largely due to the protests of Edward Mathew, the plan does show how the British high command viewed the future use of the unit. Grenville to Mathew, 9 May 1791, CO 101-31.

249 Mathew did eventually get the entire unit centralized on the island of Barbados, which the British had designated as their main military post in the Windward Islands. The unit was central to the early stages of the building of Garrison Savannah, the main military post on the island. Mathew to Grenville, 27 January 1791, CO 101-31.

250 Mathew wrote to Grenville that, “I shall very reluctantly see them again divided, which is highly injurious to their discipline.” Mathew to Grenville, 11 December 1790, CO 101-31.
As usual, Mathew got his way and the Carolina Corps remained as a single unit until their incorporation into the West India Regiments in 1797. In fact, not only did Mathew keep the unit together, but he got Parliament to endorse his plan to expand it. This was not an easy task, however, and it had taken Mathew’s several years and no less than five letters to Granville and Dundas to accomplish it.\footnote{The letters written covering this subject are as follows; Mathew to Grenville, 28 November 1790; 22 December 1790; 8 March 1791; 17 July 1791, CO 101-31; Mathew to Dundas, 14 January 1792, CO 101-32.} This expansion of the Corps, amid the Haitian Revolution, was quite extraordinary and would never have been possible without the perceived loyalty of the men of the Corps.

While their British officers argued about whether to keep the unit together or not, the men of the Carolina Corps continued to impress their officers with their martial prowess. In the same letter in which he appealed to Grenville to keep from disbanding the unit, Mathew lauded “The progress of the Corps in their military Exercises.”\footnote{Mathew to Grenville, 27 Jan. 1791, CO 101-31.} Mathew was not the only Caribbean-based British officer to hold a high opinion of the troops. In a memorial to Henry Dundas, Grenville’s replacement in Whitehall, Lieutenant Colonel Oliver Nicholls requested consideration as “a proper person, to command the Carolina black corps.”\footnote{Nicholls did receive the command of the unit from Dundas, although he was forced to do so with provincial rank and pay due to the non-regular status of the unit. Oliver Nicholls to Dundas, 26 November 1791, CO 101-31.} That a 45-year veteran of the British Army petitioned Whitehall for command of a black unit is telling. While Nicholls’ petition was no doubt induced by the lack of vacant military postings in the region, the fact that he specifically asked for
command of the Carolina Corps proves that there was no dramatic stigma associated with the unit based on their race.254 Another reason that white officers wanted a role in black units was the fact that some officers found black units easier to control, as these soldiers often complained much less than white soldiers about the behavior of their officers. Indeed, there is no proof that the men of the Corps ever lodged any complaints against their officers, at least none that made it as far as to a court-martial.

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The question asked by this chapter, namely how British were the Carolina Corps, creates a false dichotomy. Much like the question of the ethnicity of the Carolina Corps, the nationalism of the men of the unit was fluid, used strategically to achieve various goals relating to their integration within British colonial society. The lack of written documentation from the troops themselves makes an individualized analysis of this question almost impossible. However, from the wealth of sources generated by and about the unit, it is clear to see that the men of the Carolina Corps performed Britishness as a collective throughout their service in the Windward Islands.

Perhaps even more important than the nationalism that the men felt towards the Empire that had both enslaved and freed them, was the perception of white colonial

254 While the list is too long to recount in a single footnote, Nicholls was not the only white British officer to petition Edward Mathew or Whitehall for an officer’s commission in the Carolina Corps. Throughout the service of the unit in the West Indies, numerous white officers did so. Considering the high turnover of white officers in the Caribbean, where mosquitoes passed on deadly contagions regardless of rank, these men specifically chose the Carolina Corps over white regiments. While these reasons ranged from expediency to admiration of the Corps, collectively they show that the unit was not denigrated due to their race or service history. Rather, the men saw the Corps as a legitimate way to enter the British military establishment in the region.
society towards the unit in this regard. The perceived loyalty of the unit was especially clear in the writings of its white officers who saw their men as being as British as any of the white troops who served in the West Indies. The fact that the men were under the jurisdiction of military courts and could petition their officers for official dispensations reveals just how comparable their standing was to white troops in the eyes of their commanders. These official privileges that the men negotiated through their actions included the pensions they received after their retirement from service starting in 1793.

The overall fluidity of identity presented by British Caribbean society in the late eighteenth century meant that the men of the Carolina Corps could perform Britishness, and consider themselves British subjects, without abandoning any African retentions they may have had. The men themselves would have found it possible to be Afro-British, a category of difference that would have flourished in the racialized world of the British Caribbean. Such a designation would give whites leave to discriminate freely, while also accepting the advanced position of the men within black society. Such a position would also allow the soldiers to engage with society in a truly creolized way. Thus, the men of the Carolina Corps lived a unique existence in the British Caribbean, not only regarding their racial identity but their national one also.
Chapter 4

“A corps of one thousand Men, composed of blacks...would render more essential service in the Country, than treble the number of Europeans”:

The Carolina Corps and the Creation of the West India Regiments

In March 1795, disaster and liberation came to Grenada. On the night of the second, the Francophone blacks of the island, led by a free black planter named Julien Fédon, rose in rebellion against British rule. Fédon based his rebellion on the principles of the French Revolution, the flames of which licked at the entire Caribbean basin. Historians who have studied the revolt have tried to disentangle the facts surrounding it, in an attempt to discover whether it was at its heart a French revolutionary movement, or a slave rebellion.255 It was likely both, as by the end of the violence, over a year later, slaves from both Anglophone and Francophone communities on the island had taken part, with

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many falling victim to British retribution upon the island’s reconquest. Not disputed is that in the early days of the violence, the black rebels killed any white English planter they came across, including the acting governor of Grenada.  

While the maelstrom of violence swept up the families and kinship networks of the Carolina Corps on Grenada, the men of the unit escaped the bloodshed. Ironically, their absence, to join the British force intending to defend the islands of the Caribbean from French revolutionary incursions, helped to facilitate the uprising on Grenada. Fédon waited until the removal of the Corps and several other units, which seriously weakened the Grenada garrison, before setting his plans in motion. When the Corps returned to the island with the British forces to subdue the rebels in 1796, devastation reigned in Grenada and disrupted its complex social system. The extent of the disorder that affected slave family groups is unknown, but considering the violence of the previous year, it is likely that whole communities were destroyed in the conflagration.

Fédon’s rebellion on Grenada was both a result and one of the catalysts for the final demise of the Carolina Corps as a fighting force. However, out of the ashes of the unit came a new idea that changed the course of modern British military history, the creation of the West India Regiments. Like the rebellion itself, events thousands of miles away, on the continent of Europe, brought these units into existence. Rebellions such as Fédon’s, based on French revolutionary principles, erupted throughout the Caribbean,

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256 Kenneth F. MacKenzie to William Cavendish-Bentinck, 28 March 1795, CO 101-34.
highlighting Britain’s need for a new fighting force. Unwittingly, the Carolina Corps became the very foundation upon which the British wished to base these new units.

This chapter will show how the experience and example of the Carolina Corps was used by proponents of arming blacks to create the West India Regiments. Explored within this will be the arguments that raged in London, and throughout the Caribbean, both for and against the creation of such units. The Carolina Corps often made appearances in such arguments, used to counter the many apprehensions the racially biased white leadership in London had towards such a scheme. Analysis of these arguments, as well as original plans for the new units, will show how critical the Carolina Corps, as a uniquely situated black military unit in the region, was to the eventual adoption of the plan to create the regiments.

The importance of the Carolina Corps to the formation of the West India Regiments is not absent from previous scholarship. In Slaves in Red Coats (1979), a work about the new military units, Roger Norman Buckley recognized that “The Black Carolina Corps was a nearby reminder. The importance of this contingent, which was under the command of regular army officers, was recognized all over the West Indies.”257 Buckley did not go far enough in his assessment, however, for the Corps was more than a reminder

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257 A more substantial six-page section is devoted to the Corps in Slaves and Soldier, while Arming Slaves only features fleeting glimpses of the unit to contextualize larger points. Like Buckley, neither Voelz nor the numerous contributors in Arming Slaves spend much time on the Corps due to their focus on larger topics. The result is that the importance of the unit is lost in these seminal works on the British military in the Caribbean. Buckley, Slaves in Red Coats, 6; Voelz, “Slave and Soldier,” 248; David Geggus, “The Arming of Slaves,” in Brown and Morgan, eds., Arming Slaves, 211.
of the good service of black troops in the Caribbean, it provided the very model for the new units.

The scant scholarship that focuses on the Carolina Corps, as well as the larger corpus on the West India Regiment, has also neglected to explore the plight of the troops as they became unknowing participants in Britain’s new military enterprise. This chapter will insert the men of the Carolina Corps back into the narrative by showing how the move to create the West India Regiments, both geographical and temporal, disrupted the lives that the soldiers had spent the previous decade building. The creation of the new units disrupted the lives of the soldiers of the Carolina Corps, increasing their terms of service with very little tangible benefit. Their status as veteran soldiers becoming more indicative of their advanced age than of any additional military honors bestowed upon them. Upon their backs and through their sacrifices, however, the British created a new military system that would last over a century.

This chapter analyses to examine the several stages in the creation of the West India Regiments. This structure allows for a deep examination of the reasons for the creation of the new units, the arguments surrounding them, and the ways that the Carolina Corps influenced these matters. Of course, the focus of the chapter will be the role of the Corps in the creation of the West India Regiments and as such, even when not mentioned, the unit looms over this entire section. This approach will show the intertwined nature of the units by revealing how the demise of the Corps led directly to the rise of the later regiments.
The chapter begins by looking at the physical state of the Corps, and the ways that the British use of the unit effectively destroyed it in the initial phases of the French Revolutionary Wars. This section will show that while the British considered the Carolina Corps too old to function effectively by the start of the conflict, their need for men in the West Indies forced them to press the unit into service. This section also assesses the impact of the drastic changes that occurred within the Carolina Corps resulting from the new war footing. These changes included new white commanding officers, changes in location, and even the move towards active military action for the entire aging regiment. These changes tore the unit from the foundations they had laid since arriving in the region and yet, despite causing new hardships, their loyal service meant the unit survived the traumas created by the French Revolutionary War.

The second section builds off the first to show how the loyal performance of the Carolina Corps, and newly raised black units that were modelled on them, caused Parliament to allow for the formation of the new West India Regiments. The first part of the section looks at the roles that generals in London, particularly those who had seen the Corps and other black troops in action, pushed for the creation of these new all-black regiments. The second part looks at how the white officers of the Carolina Corps were instrumental in keeping the unit together and in pushing for the expansion of black units in the region. It will show that the Carolina Corps, through its loyal service and opinionated white officers, was instrumental in the creation of the West India Regiments.

The final section of this chapter discusses the creation of the West India Regiments and the Carolina Corps’ incorporation within them. The impact of free men working
alongside slaves will be discussed, as will the ways that the men of the unit were originally used upon the units’ creation. While the second section discusses the ways that the Corps influenced the creation of the West India Regiments, this section will assess their practical impact during their foundational stages. Overall, this chapter argues that the Carolina Corps was critical to the foundation of the West India Regiments.

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In 1793, the British faced a military crisis. On the European continent, the French had executed their King and embarked on a campaign of conquest that threatened the stability of the whole of Europe. When France declared war in February, Britain was in a precarious spot militarily. While it remained the most powerful naval force in the world, its army was extremely weak, numbering only 40,000 regulars, spread over three continents. With the very real threat of a French invasion of the British mainland, and a need to prop up their weaker allied nations in Europe, most British troops were retained on that continent. This meant a deprivation of British manpower from the islands of the British West Indies. The Colonial Office in London was soon awash with pleas from planters, both absentee and in the Caribbean, for greater military protection for the islands.

The threat of a French invasion of the British West Indies was one that sprung up whenever the two nations went to war. In such conflicts, the islands of the Caribbean

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258 By 1793, the British had established Imperial possessions in Europe, North America, and Asia. The army had always been the weakest of the British military forces, but had suffered from a lack of recruitment throughout the second half of the eighteenth century. Buckley, *Slaves in Red Coats*, 3.
changed hands at a dizzying rate, and this had certainly been the case during the last major struggle, the American Revolutionary War. This time, however, the added fear of slave insurrection breaking out on islands suffering from shortages of troops, was even more pressing due to the shadow cast by the massive uprising taking place on Saint Domingue.

Against this backdrop, the men of the Carolina Corps, now numbering some 200 troops under arms, were on the move. By the spring of 1792, Edward Mathew, the commander who had rated their martial prowess so highly, had returned to England to restore his health, never again returning to the West Indies. With Mathew’s departure, not only do historians lose their most valuable source on the progress of the Carolina Corps, but the unit itself lost its most powerful proponent.

The final returns of the unit from Grenada provide an insight into the aging soldiers’ duties as they prepared for their relocation. The main work of the pioneers remained the restoration and repair of the island’s crumbling fortifications. In November 1791, the work on fortifications engaged men from all three companies of the Carolina Corps, and almost half of the entire unit, but the men of the pioneers made up most of the black workforce. The British land strategy for the defense of the West Indies was

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259 The final return of the Carolina Corps was taken in December 1791, a year before the start of the Revolutionary Wars with France. This itemized return listed the men in the unit as; 48 dragoons, 34 artificers, and 125 pioneers, for a total of 207 men. Return of Black Pioneers, 3 December 1791; Return of Black Dragoons, 3 December 1791; Return of Black Artificers, 3 December 1791, CO 101-32.

260 For a six-day period in November, the average number of laborers working on the fortifications came from the following sub-units: 67 from the pioneers, 19 from the artificers, and 1 from the dragoons. Also,
contingent on the use of these fortifications. It would not be until after the fall of Napoleon that the British, realizing the cost and inadequacy of such defenses, would move away from their fixed defense plans in the region.

The returns made just prior to Mathew’s departure in 1792, also show the different employments of the skilled artificers of the Carolina Corps. The documents are unique as they are the only ones that break down the different employments of the unit during their entire service in the West Indies. The return shows that most tasks performed by the artificers differed little from those of the pioneers. During the same period that the pioneers were working on the fortifications, the men of the artificers did much of the labor-intensive work that made such construction activities possible. Many partook in the same restoration activities, while others took turns as guards of the supply depots, a role usually reserved for the dragoons.261

As well as displaying the utilitarian nature of the artificers, the skills that differentiated the unit from the Pioneers were also on display during the same period. Some artificers worked to construct sentry boxes, while several others served as waggoneers. It is also interesting to note that in addition to the white surgeon who served the unit, an artificer named Smart Lacy also worked as a “surgeryman” for the Carolina Corps. While this role was likely less skilled than that of the white surgeon, it implies that Lacy had picked up some anatomical skills, showing again how the men of the unit used

some 19 slaves from local plantations helped in the repairs on a daily basis. Report of Black Corps Employed on the Fortifications, 3 December 1791, CO 101-32.

261 Return of the Corps of Black Artificers, 3 December 1791, CO 101-32.
their military service to gain an education that would have been almost impossible to
achieve in their former lives as slaves.262

The final year that the Carolina Corps spent on Grenada was one filled with
sorrow. In October 1792, as the unit prepared to leave the island for the last time, the
veteran commander of the black dragoon company, Captain William Mackrill, died. The
loss of the white officer, only months after Mathew’s departure for England, severely
tested the leadership structure of the unit. The chance for career advancement also led
Mackrill’s subordinates to immediately apply to replace him after his death. One who did
was Lieutenant James Greene, himself a four-year veteran of the black dragoons.263
Greene was not the only officer to press his claim for the vacant leadership position within
the unit. So did James Haverkam, his fellow white lieutenant in the company.264

One of the main reasons why the white officers of the Carolina Corps were so
quick to seek senior leadership positions within the unit was that the colonial office often
passed them over for promotion. There was good reason for this from a British
standpoint, as such promotions from outside of a unit meant the avoidance of such
internal squabbles as that which began after Mackrill’s demise. Nonetheless, the officers
of the Corps, tired of being ignored for higher positions and perhaps nervous that serving
in the only black unit in the West Indies would restrict their wider opportunities in the

262 Return of the Corps of Black Artificers, 3 December 1791, CO 101-32.
263 James Greene to Dundas, 27 October 1782, CO 101-32.
264 James Haverkam to Dundas, 24 April 1793, CO 101-33.
service, had had enough. On May 12, they wrote a memorial to the colonial office in which they complained about the practice, stating they felt “much injured by every Vacancy in the Corps being filled up from the Line.”

In the memorial they made it clear they felt that the extra fatigue they had to endure at the head of pioneer units meant they were much more able to fulfill the necessary duties than their regular line infantry counterparts. Dismissing the petitioners, the colonial office continued their normal practice by promoting a lieutenant from the 67th Regiment of Foot to lead the dragoons. Such unified resentment of the military establishment among the small group of officers within the Carolina Corps likely united them in a similar way to the bonds of kinship that joined the black troops who they commanded.

When the time came for the Carolina Corps to depart Grenada for the last time, in mid-May 1793, the white population of the island did not want to see them leave. Not only was the island becoming short-handed of white regular troops, but the lieutenant governor complained about the effectiveness of the militia who remained on Grenada. It was these men who the Colonial Office expected to deal with most external threats, and certainly all internal conflicts. Nonetheless, Ninian Home, the lieutenant governor of the island, believed that if the militia on Grenada were to fight for any decent amount of time, it would “be productive of great inconvenience and discontent” amongst the citizen-soldiers. Thus, the white Anglophone planters of the island, as well its interim governor,

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265 Memorial of Black Corps officers to Dundas, 12 May 1793, CO 101-33.

266 Ninian Home to Dundas, 7 April 1793, CO 101-32.
protested the departure of the Carolina Corps. In almost a decade of service on the island, there had been no major slave revolts, and the men had performed admirably, earning the grudging respect (or at least tolerance) of the white population.

The British establishment on the island was particularly fearful of losing redcoat troops due to the influx of French refugees in the wake of the French Revolution. Adding to the already high Francophone population on the island, both white and black, the British quickly found themselves in a minority on the island. Ninian Home banned further French immigrants from entering Grenada, due to the fear of “many evil minded and ill-disposed persons, who publicly avow principles incompatible of allegiance to us.” Home was terrified the immigrants would start a revolution in favor of French republican government on the island. His fears came to fruition just over a year later, when Julien Fédon, a Francophone free black man, led a year-long rebellion against the British on Grenada.

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267 The influx of French refugees, and revolutionaries, from Saint Domingue and the other French islands was not just a problem in Grenada, but caused tensions in the slave societies located throughout the Caribbean. Most societies responded as Grenada did, by creating new laws to regulate slaves, or even denying entry to black refugees. Scott, “Common Wind,” particularly 233-95.

268 Home, Proclamation on Emigration of French refugees to Grenada, 29 January 1793, CO 101-32.

269 Fédon’s Rebellion (1795-96), is one of the most interesting and under-explored slave uprisings to occur in the British Caribbean. During the year-long uprising, Francophone free blacks, as well as many slaves on both sides of the language divide, conquered all the island except for the main town at St George. Early in the conflict, Ninian Home was executed by the revolutionaries, becoming one of the few colonial governors to be killed in a slave uprising in the Caribbean. Despite their extensive knowledge of the island, the Carolina Corps did not return to Grenada during the uprising. Similar issues arising from the French and Haitian Revolutions occurred throughout the Caribbean basin. For example, in Venezuela, only a few miles from the French island of Tobago, Spanish officials confronted similar revolutionary infiltration. Scott, “Common Wind,” 248-50; 261-62.
It is unlikely the presence of the Carolina Corps on Grenada would have prevented the outbreak of Fédon’s Rebellion, but their absence from the island facilitated its early success. The simple fact is that the number of effective defenders on the island dropped considerably with the departure of the Carolina Corps. Including the free-colored militia, of which there were 308, the overall militia numbers for the entire island numbered only 771 men after the departure of the Carolina Corps.270 This meant Home saw his non-regular defense forces fall by a fifth. More importantly, with the militia being a non-conventional, part-time fighting force, the loss of the Carolina Corps meant the loss of the main fatigue units on Grenada. It is no surprise, therefore, that the fortifications that were the prime responsibility of the Corps fell into disrepair after their removal from the island. In one of the several pleading letters Home wrote to Henry Dundas in the Colonial office, he described the situation thus: “The extent of the Fortifications on Richmond Hill appears to me to make two Regiments essentially necessary for their protection, and I believe the works were planned under the idea that this Garrison would be allotted to them. At present we have not above two hundred and sixty men fit for duty.”271 After the removal of the Carolina Corps from Grenada, Home simply did not have the manpower to complete his fortifications, or to guard them with adequately trained troops. The removal of the Corps thus undermined the entire British strategy for defense of the island.

270 Return of Grenada Militia, 7 August 1794, CO 101-33.

271 If Home is correct, he lost almost half of his full time military defense force on Grenada with the removal of the Carolina Corps. Home to Dundas, 12 July 1794, CO 101-33.
Outside of the military disruption caused to Grenada by the departure of the Carolina Corps in 1793, the effects of the move personally affected the men of the unit. While the historical record is unclear, it does seem that the small number of Carolina Corps troops receiving a pension, continued to reside on Grenada after the removal of the regiment. For the rest of the men, the move from Grenada would have been a painful reminder of their previous departure from Charlestown, an event that all but the few new recruits from Nova Scotia had lived through. In the previous decade, the men of the Corps had created new kinship and familial groups on the islands where they served, particularly on their main base of Grenada. Now the men of the unit had to endure a second round of forced separation from their families.

The destination of the Carolina Corps after their departure from Grenada was Barbados, the new headquarters island for the British military in West Indies. The island, the farthest east of the Caribbean islands and easiest to reach from the metropole, became the main garrison of the British Windward Islands in the late 1780s. As such, a large standing garrison were stationed there, with many new buildings built to protect the main settlement, Bridgetown, and to house the newly arrived troops. The men of

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272 Barbados was the only British Windward Island never to change hands after first colonization in 1627. As one of the largest sugar producing islands in the Caribbean, it was highly prized by the British. Due to its natural anchorages, and strategic position (both geographically distant from the islands of other European nations, and surrounded by currents which made sea voyages from Britain quick), the island was chosen in 1785 to become the main British base in the Windwards. Construction on the new garrison buildings began in 1789, but stalled by 1793 due to a lack of available funds. Nonetheless, with several key buildings already completed, the island became the main British staging point during the Revolutionary Wars with France. Construction began again by 1798, and today the site is the largest extant colonial military garrison in the British Commonwealth. Barbados Ministry of Community Development and Culture, UNESCO Historic Bridgetown and its Garrison: Nomination as World Heritage SiteNomination Document (Bridgetown, Barbados: 2010), 93-94. https://whc.unesco.org/uploads/nominations/1376.pdf.
the Carolina Corps were one of the first choices for the British commanders to work as pioneers on the garrison’s structures, which were completed by 1793 but needed constant upkeep.

In January 1793, Henry Dundas sent the official transfer orders to Barbados for the Carolina Corps and placed the unit under the command of Captain of Royal Engineers Robert Pringle, specifically “to be employed by him on such Works, and to be stationed on such Islands, as he shall think most proper.”\(^\text{273}\) In addition to this, the British were putting together an expeditionary force on the island for use against the French, led by Sir John Jarvis and Sir Charles Grey. Although many troops were at retirement age or were otherwise infirm, the standing of the Carolina Corps within the British Caribbean military establishment meant they were still considered an important enough unit to take part in this expedition in 1794.\(^\text{274}\)

The 1794 campaign against the French islands sounded the death knell of the Carolina Corps as an effective fighting unit. After participating in the British assaults on Guadeloupe and Martinique, the already weakened Corps was all but destroyed as a fighting force. The number of infirm, and later pensioned, troops had grown unsustainably, and not enough free blacks were willing to fill the void left, or at least not enough to make a substantial difference to the unit’s dwindling roll. A British attempt to

\(^{273}\) Considering how long it took for the order to first reach Barbados, and then to be forwarded to Grenada, the Corps leaving their home base in mid-1793 is the most likely conclusion. The timeline for this chapter is based on this deduction. Dundas to Cornelius Cuyler, 21 January 1793, CO 319-5.

\(^{274}\) Tyson, “Carolina Black Corps,” 661.
open the unit to recruitment from the free black French populations of these islands was as unsuccessful as the same attempt had been on Grenada, and so the numbers of the unit continued to decline throughout the expedition. The result was that by the start of 1795, when the expedition concluded and the Carolina Corps took up a new station on Saint Lucia, there were only eighty men fit for duty in the decimated unit.

Regardless of their lack of active troops, the men of the Carolina Corps continued to play a crucial role in the protection of the islands where they served. On Saint Lucia, the men of the Corps faced one of their toughest challenges yet. Outnumbered and not used to combat operations, excepting the dragoon company that regularly pursued runaway slaves, the entire Carolina Corps were called upon by the British leadership on Saint Lucia to defend the island. The engagement is one of the only ones written about in any detail by their white officers, and so deserves detailed analysis. The action was also one of the last that the men of the unit would ever fight together as members of the Carolina Corps.

In January 1795, there was a substantial slave revolt on Saint Lucia, and the Carolina Corps entered the fray to try and quell it. Whether the unit was on the island

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275 The British hoped that free blacks who opposed the Revolutions in France and Haiti would join the British Army to fight against Republican forces. Although a few did join the Carolina Corps, their numbers were too little to change the general attrition the unit experienced during the campaign to capture Martinique and Guadeloupe. The idea was first proposed and promoted by General Cornelius Cuyler even before the Carolina Corps arrived in Barbados. It was Cuyler who, in 1792, replaced Edward Mathew as Commander in Chief of the West Indies. Cuyler to Dundas, 5 March 1793, CO 319-5; Tyson, “Carolina Black Corps,” 662.

276 In the same letter, Vaughan explains that the Carolina Corps were short of basic supplies, particularly clothing. Vaughan to Dundas, 30 January 1793, CO 254-1.
specifically for this purpose, or whether their arrival on the island was purely serendipitous is unknown. For the first time since the final days of the Revolutionary War in South Carolina the entire unit took up arms. What is also clear is that the Carolina Corps, despite being better armed than the French-led republican slave rebels, failed to quell the rebellion. Vaughan described the action: “a spirited attempt made by the Black Carolina Corps to drive them from their station, having failed of success it became necessary to send Brigadier General Stewart with a strong detachment of His Majesty’s Troops” to end the uprising.\textsuperscript{277} The British forces eventually defeated the rebelling slaves in the mountainous interior of Saint Lucia, albeit without the further use of the Carolina Corps.

As in Saint Vincent, the men of the Carolina Corps faced the slave rebels on Saint Lucia because of the perceptions of white commanders of their value against other blacks. Unfortunately for the Corps, the unit was simply too weak to fight a determined enemy. The slaves were not afraid of the black unit, shown by the fact that they stood their ground and defeated the Carolina Corps before running in the face of the advance of white troops sent to relieve their beleaguered black allies. The Corps was also weakened by the fact that the majority of their number had little or no experience in handling offensive weaponry and thus, despite gallantly entering the fray, the men of the Pioneer and Artificer arms of the unit were ineffective. Even before the battle, Vaughan had remarked to Dundas that the unit was unfit for any service other than as pioneers.\textsuperscript{278} The

\textsuperscript{277} Vaughan to Dundas, 31 January 1795, CO 254-1.

\textsuperscript{278} Vaughan to Dundas, 24 November 1794, CO 254-1.
events on Saint Lucia confirmed his assessment and added to the deteriorating view of the unit as a useful fighting force in the West Indies.

The Carolina Corps had never come closer to dissolution than at that moment in early 1795, and the events on Saint Lucia could very well have destroyed it. However, events had already begun that would change the course of British military history forever, and that would provide a saving grace for the men of the Corps who were still able to endure a rigorous army lifestyle. Even as the Carolina Corps were engaging the French republican forces in Saint Lucia, two other black units inspired by their example had taken the field. These Black Ranger companies, led by two white officers named Malcolm and Soter, proved themselves very capable on the battlefield.²⁷⁹ Entering the arena on a path already blazed by the men of the Carolina Corps, the Black Rangers breathed new life into the recruitment of blacks by the British in the Caribbean.

The effects of the Carolina Corps on the recruitment of the Black Rangers were tremendous. While desperation helped to force the British commanders in the West Indies, particularly Vaughan, to recruit blacks, the step was much more palatable due to the excellent performance of the Carolina Corps over the preceding decade. The fact the unit survived disbanding, even in the face of their age and diminishing usefulness to the cause of the Crown, shows how valuable the British still deemed their service in the Caribbean. Structurally, the Corps also provided the British with an example of how a black unit could function. It is therefore hardly surprising that the Black Rangers, although

²⁷⁹ Tyson, “Carolina Black Corps,” 662.
lacking an artificer corps, looked remarkably like the Carolina Corps, particularly in its mix of black troops led by white British regular officers. Thus, even as the fighting value of the unit decreased, the foundations that they created had already begun to change British policy. The enormous impact that the Carolina Corps had on the British military establishment was not confined to the Caribbean basin, however, but also took hold in the imperial metropole. Indeed, events in Whitehall, influenced not only by present circumstances but also by the service of the unit, were now beginning to move rapidly, ensuring the writing of a new chapter for the men of Corps.

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A simple fact was evident to the British military strategists in Whitehall as the violence of the French Revolutionary Wars erupted throughout Europe: white men did not want to join the British Army. For the first time in generations, unemployment among the poor, the usual fodder for recruiters, was falling to new lows due to the Industrial Revolution in Britain.\(^\text{280}\) Similarly, the number of debtors, another previously invaluable source of military recruits, was also falling. Then there was the simple fact that service in the British Caribbean was incredibly undesirable to any white soldier who aspired to a life beyond service in the army. Even for those who did not succumb to the common ailments of yellow fever and malaria, these tropical maladies often crippled them for the rest of

\(^{280}\) Buckley, *Slaves in Red Coats*, 3.
their life. At a time when Britain desperately needed troops, the white male population were simply unwilling to serve.281

Additionally while the British lacked white manpower, the French Army in the Caribbean had begun to use blacks in large numbers by the time the fighting really began. For example, at Martinique, which General Charles Grey attacked in March 1794, the French employed a force that consisted of both white regulars and militia, but also a black regiment led by a black officer.282 In Grey’s force, only the diminished Carolina Corps served as soldiers of color for the attackers. In an attritional theatre of war, which prized numbers of healthy troops above all other considerations, the French got the jump on the British by tapping into a manpower resource that the British had only begun to toy with.

Even on islands that the British controlled, or seized control of, the revolutionary egalitarian ideals of the French, including the abolition of slavery, led many slaves to revolt against their British masters. On Saint Lucia, the men of the Carolina Corps faced such a rebellion personally, while Fédon’s Rebellion on Grenada was tearing their former island home asunder. Similar slave rebellions also occurred on Martinique and Guadeloupe, erasing the great gains that Grey had made at the start of his lightning campaign against the French West Indian Empire.

After replacing Charles Grey, Sir John Vaughan assessed the critical situation that the British Army in the West Indies found itself in and strove to find a quick solution.

281 Buckley, *Slaves in Red Coats*, 3.

Before 1794 had ended, Vaughan had written to the Duke of Portland, the British Home Secretary, to suggest that “a corps of one thousand Men, composed of blacks and Mulattoes, and commanded by British officers would render more essential service in the Country, than treble the number of Europeans.” Vaughan hoped to pattern this new force after the existing model of a British line infantry regiment, and he was sure such a force would swing the pendulum back in Britain’s favor in the Caribbean.

Superficially, Vaughan’s plan to raise a full-strength black regiment seems similar to Edward Mathew’s earlier schemes to expand the Carolina Corps, but they were very different in design. Mathew had very specific ideas about who he wanted to complete the expansion of the Carolina Corps to full regimental size: black freemen. This is evidenced both in his attempts to enlist the help of prominent free people of color on Grenada to help with recruitment, and in his mission to Nova Scotia. Vaughan, however, was much more practical. Aware of Mathew’s failure to secure enough free people of color to serve from his own experience in the Caribbean, Vaughan sought to use slaves to fill the ranks of his new unit. Vaughan wished to requisition slaves from each island using a quota system, with their owners compensated with land grants from newly acquired French possessions. Unlike the men of the Carolina Corps during the Revolutionary War in America, the slaves would remain enslaved as property of the British crown.


284 Vaughan to Dundas, 25 December 1794, CO 152-60.
Vaughan’s plan, like the earlier efforts of Mathew, ran into domestic opposition from a metropolitan government of white men who still could not understand the value of arming slaves. Despite this, the island governments in the British West Indies took measures into their own hands and quickly raised their own black units to defend themselves from attack. The success of these units in suppressing further slave revolts did lend some credence to Vaughan’s plan to raise a black regiment. However, Vaughan had avenues of support that Mathew did not possess. These avenues flowed from many directions, and a great deal emerged through the men of the Carolina Corps.

At least one year before Vaughan laid his plan before the Home Secretary, Lieutenant Colonel Charles Nicolls, seeking command of the Carolina Corps, was setting forth a similar scheme. Following the ideas set forth by Edward Mathew as early as 1790, Nicolls argued for the expansion of the Corps to full regimental size. Nicolls wrote to Henry Dundas describing, “the advantages that might be fairly expected from augmenting the Black Corps, serving in the Leeward Islands, and forming them, as a Reg.” In his letter, Nicolls explained that he had personally petitioned Dundas in London before his return to Grenada and that the Home Secretary had been “pleased to say there seemed to be no objection” to Nicolls taking control of the unit.

Like Vaughan, Nicolls used the war with France as a vehicle to create a full black infantry regiment in the Caribbean, and like Vaughan he faced initial opposition from the

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285 Charles Nicolls to Dundas, 29 January 1793, CO 101-33.
Home Secretary in London. Nevertheless, the persistent effect of high-ranking British officers extolling the virtues of black troops amongst the British political leadership certainly had an effect. From Nicolls’ letter, it is clear he was not only conducting a letter writing campaign to enlarge and then command the Carolina Corps, but was also visiting the governmental offices in London to interview the Home Secretary personally on the subject. In time the effect of this petitioning made the British political elite much more amenable to the concept of creating a black regiment, even if they were still reluctant to take concrete steps in practice.

While the written record does not say so, it is almost certain that Mathew also used his stay in London to promote his vision for an expanded Carolina Corps. Mathew made these attempts in London in addition to the several letters he had written to both Dundas and Granville from Grenada. When Mathew returned to Britain in 1792, he was not immediately relieved of command over the West Indies garrisons, and he also

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286 Nicolls finally became the commander of the Fourth West India Regiment when that unit formed in 1795. He never did command the Carolina Corps despite the best efforts of himself and Edward Mathew.

287 One of the biggest problems that the military commanders faced was the high turnover of politicians in the position of Home Secretary, and before that Secretary of State for the Colonies. Between 1790, when Mathew started his letter writing campaign, and 1794, when Vaughan commenced his, there were three different men in this role. Each came to the position with little understanding of the complex military situation in the Caribbean, and with their own inherent racial biases. It took time to win over each man, and by then they were often on the way out of the office. For example, in 1791, after Mathew had requested Nicolls appointment as commander of the Carolina Corps and the units’ expansion, Dundas replied that, “if the islands could be induced to make up this Corps to a large establishment...it would, I believe be both a salutary and economical measure.” Dundas seems to have reiterated the same to Nicolls after their meeting in 1792, according to his letter of January 1793, but Dundas had left office before any solid plan could be put into motion. Nicolls to Dundas (with Dundas’ reply), 21 December 1791, CO 101-31.
retained the governorship of Grenada.\textsuperscript{288} As such, fully expecting to return to Grenada once he regained his health, Mathew would have kept close ties to the island while also continuing to press his own agenda in the Palace of Westminster. Thus, with military commanders pushing for a black regiment both at home and abroad, they began to win support.

The major opposition to the creation of black regiments, as in the earlier case of the Carolina Corps, came from the powerful lobby of merchants and absentee planters. This lobby attacked any idea of creating a regiment that would undermine the racial hierarchy they needed to flourish. Ever since 1775, the planter lobby forcefully rejected plans to recruit from the black population. During the American Revolutionary War, the British raised a regiment of free blacks to defend Jamaica but, despite their good conduct, they were quickly disbanded due to pressure from the planter lobby.\textsuperscript{289} Stephen Fuller, a member of the Jamaican lobby, summarized the feeling of many whites towards arming blacks in the British Caribbean, when he explained that black troops: “are not to be trusted in a corps composed of themselves only, & the incorporating of them with the whites will not be endured.”\textsuperscript{290} This was the main opposition argument to the plans of Vaughan, Mathew, and Nicolls. However, by 1795, the example of the Carolina Corps had

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\textsuperscript{288} His subordinate, Ninian Home, remained Deputy Governor throughout this period while the Grenadians awaited the return of Mathew. Home was killed in the early stages of Fédon’s rebellion, in 1795.

\textsuperscript{289} O’Shaughnessy, \textit{Empire Divided}, 176-77.

\textsuperscript{290} O’Shaughnessy, \textit{Empire Divided}, 177.
undermined both arguments and military necessity was also eroding the complaints of
the planter lobby.

The use of so-called indigenous troops was not a new concept in the British Army
when the West India Regiments began to form in 1795. The British had used enslaved
black troops at times of crisis throughout the decades before the formation of the first
regular units. More importantly, the British experience with local sepoy troops in India
was a major catalyst in the British decision to create black regiments to defend their
Caribbean possessions. The East Indian Company had recruited so many sepoy troops in
their Indian enclaves that the indigenous troops outnumbered the combined forces of
both the British regular army units and the white ones raised by the company itself.291 In
1757, Calcutta had been captured by Sir Robert Clive with a force comprised of a majority
of sepoy troops, using similar units to those that had existed in the Indian subcontinent
for 250 years.292

The geographical rotation system of service for members of the British Army
during the eighteenth century meant that many of the officers serving in the Caribbean
in 1795 would have had previous experience commanding sepoy troops in India. Perhaps
more importantly, however, the British officials in London were apprised of every
movement in their nation’s Indian enterprise and so knew the worth of using native
troops to bolster their own ranks. It is thus likely that the history of the sepoy troops in

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291 Buckley, Slaves in Red Coats, 6.

292 James W. Hoover, “The Origins of the Sepoy Military System, 1498-1770” (Ph.D. diss., University of
Wisconsin, 1993), v.
India helped to sway their opinions when it came to creating the West India Regiments in 1795.

In January 1795, the French sent a large military force to prop up their failing colonial possessions in the Caribbean, and to try to counterattack the British forces. Again, Vaughan beseeched Dundas to let him raise black regiments and, in the face of the possible collapse of the British West Indian Empire, the latter finally relented. On April 17, Dundas gave Vaughan permission to raise two full, black infantry line regiments. Vaughan’s victory was a hollow one, however, for within a month of finding out that he had been successful, he succumbed to a fever and died. Ensuring his legacy, however, was the creation of the first two West India Regiments that had already begun recruiting as he lay dying.

While it was not the Carolina Corps alone who ensured the success of Vaughan’s plan, they were incredibly important to it. Had it not been for their excellent service, from which all proponents of the venture could draw a virtuous example, it is unlikely that Dundas would have permitted the creation of entire black regiments. For the British to have done this, without the previous service Carolina Corps to act as a model, would have been a massive leap into the dark. The Carolina Corps had showed the usefulness of black units, a usefulness that both complied with British racial ideas of climatology, and that degraded the strict racial divisions in the region. Men who held the same views as the Jamaican agent Fuller had their ideas on race destabilized by the ways the men of Corps

293 Buckley, *Slaves in Red Coats*, 19.
could ingratiate themselves within the fluid racial categories in West Indian society. At a time when the planters needed red coats, it did not matter the color of the skin of the men inside them, and their previous experience with the Carolina Corps made this mental transition easier.

There is no doubt that a mixture of paternalism and ego helped persuade the Mathew and his fellow officers of the Carolina Corps to keep the unit intact. They no doubt felt that if they could be so successful with one group, they could replicate their success on a wider scale. It would equally have been an insult to their abilities to disband a group they had spent so much time “molding” them into a military unit. After April 1795, the only query lingering in the minds of these officers was what was to become of them and their unit with the raising of the West India Regiments? It would not take long for them to find out.

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As soon as he received approval from London for the creation of the West Indian regiments, John Vaughan set to work to try and bring the plan to fruition. The main focus of opposition towards the regiments now shifted away from London, to the white minority populations on the British Caribbean islands. Where the West India lobby in Parliament failed, the white inhabitants of the West Indies determined to succeed. Thus, British military commanders spent much of the next year trying to win over the very planters who they needed support from, particularly in the appropriation of slaves to serve in the new units.
The first orders to the legislatures and governors of British islands to begin preparations for the raising of the West India Regiments arrived in the summer of 1795. One representative order, to the governor of Barbados, read: “One of the main points of these Instructions is the procuring...a sufficient number of Negroes to act as Pioneers, & to perform other duties of labour & fatigue in the important Command entrusted to Major General Abercromby.” After Vaughan’s sudden death in 1795, it was Ralph Abercromby who assumed command of the British forces in the West Indies, and thus the need to recruit black troops now fell to him.

The British planters in the Caribbean perceived a threat to their property from external, or internal enemies, and it was this fear that the British officers exploited when pleading the necessity of the new black units. Barbados, the British choice for the new main garrison in the Windward Islands, was one of the most critical regions to the new black units, as this was to be the base for many of the enslaved soldiers. John Knox, a British officer in garrison, used the strategic necessity argument for the units in a letter to the island’s governor, George Ricketts, in 1795. Arguing black attrition would be much lower than that of white British troops, he wrote that he hoped that he “cannot doubt of meeting every support from the Gentlemen of Barbados in carrying the measure recommended by the Secretary of State into execution.” Unfortunately, such appeals

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295 In the same letter, Knox further adds his concern that recent slave rebellions on Haiti and other islands made it imperative to increase the size of the British forces in the region. Therefore, he not only played the property card but also lent on the planters real fear of further slave insurrections taking place. John Knox to Ricketts, 18 October 1795, Barbados Royal Council Minutes, Vol. 31.
for common sense military reforms failed, with planters more willing to resort to base fears to guide them than the ideas of politicians thousands of miles distant.

The basest of all fears for planters was the threat of servile insurrection, a threat stoked by the rebellion led by Fédon on Grenada, and not alleviated by the British government’s new idea to place arms in the hands of slaves. John Alleyne, speaker of the Barbados House of Assembly, gave voice to the fears of many West Indians relating to the new push to create the West India Regiments, stating that instead of defending the islands the new units would “rather endanger the Lives and Fortunes of the Inhabitants, if not overturning the very Dominion of the Country into that of a foreign Power by the Event.”296 A similar fate had befallen Saint Vincent during the American Revolutionary War, when the Black Caribs worked with the French to overthrow British rule on the island. The assembly also worried about what enslaved individuals the planters of Barbados would be willing to sell for service within the regiments. They concluded that the best slaves, those hardest working and loyal, would be retained by planters, while those who would be sold for military service would, “be those of the worst characters, villains hardened in Acts of Plunder and such as are become reprobate, without hope of their being reformed to labour or a life of Honesty, and rife for any species or degree of mischief, which when formed into a regular Corps and disciplined with fire arms in their

296 In the same speech, Alleyne chastised the British Home Office for the move to arm slaves, believing Parliament ill-advised “from their being in Reality not sufficiently acquainted with the true nature of the Negro Slaves of our Colonies, so much better known by ourselves.” Sir John Gay Alleyne, speech to the House of Assembly, 17th January 1797, Minutes of the Barbados House of Assembly, HA3/21, Barbados National Archives.
Hands they can the more effectually perpetrate.” As well as their fear of armed blacks, unlike most British West Indian possessions, Barbados had never been captured by a foreign power and thus their ideas of necessary protection differed greatly from those populations on less fortunate islands.

The military officers in the region knew the fears of the planters towards black units but reasoned against them in letters to Whitehall. In 1796, an officer serving on Martinique observed, “I know the English Planters are averse to it, because, they say these Corps may turn against them, but I see no more reason for that, than for the Soldiers of England turning in favour of the Mob.” Such arguments, often written by men who had fought alongside black troops earlier, were frequently sent to the Home Office at this crucial stage in the development of the West India Regiments, providing a useful tool for the government to use against the prolonged resistance of the planters in the West Indies.

The Carolina Corps themselves became the major foil to white resistance to the plans to create the West India Regiments. Unlike most of the other islands in the Windwards, Barbados had very little experience with black troops during times of peace. Still facing strong opposition in 1797, two years after his plans were first approved,

\footnote{Resolution of the Barbados House of Assembly, 17 January 1797, Minutes of the Barbados House of Assembly, HA3/21.}
\footnote{Captain Rutherford to Colonel Brown, 8 October 1796, WO 1-82.}
Abercromby drew the attention of the dissident West Indian legislatures to “the conduct of the Black Corps serving at St. Lucia,” which he described as being “exemplary.”

By 1797, the formation of the units had begun to take place and white minds began to change towards support for the new units. The Carolina Corps were at the forefront of this shift. After serving on Saint Lucia, the unit removed to Barbados. As late as January, the Barbados Assembly had passed a resolution that forbade the support of any black troops stationed on the island. Such a move was a searing indictment against the entire West India Regiment enterprise, as the island was to be one of the chief bases for the new units. However, by April the legislature consented to the stationing of the black troops on the island.

There were many reasons why the Barbados assembly changed its opinion on the stationing of black troops on the island. The changing military situation was one, as was the greater impetus placed on the recruitment of blacks by Abercromby for his new units, which would have made the Barbadian’s resistance seem futile as their sister colonies began complying with the Home Office’s demands. Also, the pro-Parliament governor and his royal council had been open to the idea from the start, in direct opposition to the

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299 Ralph Abercromby, open letter to West Indian legislatures, 11 April 1797, Minutes of the Barbados House of Assembly, HA3/21.

300 The resolution stated: “that upon the Several serious Considerations before mentioned, this Committee cannot consent to give their sanction or support to the raising and establishing any Corps whatever of the Black Troops to be quartered in this Island.” Resolution of the Barbados House of Assembly, 17 January 1797, Minutes of the Barbados House of Assembly, HA3/21.

301 Minutes of Barbados Royal Council, 11 April 1797, Minutes of the Barbados Royal Council, Vol. 32.
assembly, and there is a chance that this political situation had become unsustainable by spring 1797.

The impact of the black troops initially stationed on Barbados also had a concerted effect in changing hearts and minds. In early 1796, when the first black troops arrived on the island, the legislature had considered creating a white unit to stand guard over them. Within only a few months the hostile assembly was reporting that it was “unnecessary to renew the Act of raising a body of men at the public expence for securing the tranquillity of the Inhabitants of this Island during the residence here of the Pioneers lately brought into this Island.” 302 Part of the reason why the assembly was so quick to change their mind was the influx of white regiments that also came to the Barbados garrison. The pioneers mentioned were likely a contingent from the Carolina Corps and also seemed to have made a good impression. The lack of negative news stories in local newspapers, the absence of any court-martial documents relating to these 1796 troops, and the lack of specificity in angry claims about black units on Barbados by the assembly suggest that the unit performed its role in a thoroughly unobtrusive way. Thus, the Carolina Corps not only proved a rhetorical weapon for Abercromby, but also served as a physical foil to the racial negativity espoused by the Barbados assembly during this period.

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By the time the West Indian Regiments were finally raised to something like full strength, in 1797, the Carolina Corps had ceased to exist as a functional unit.

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302 House of Assembly to Ricketts, 19 January 1796, Minutes of the Barbados Royal Council, Vol. 32.
Nevertheless, the tattered remains of the unit still contained some men of military age who were too young to receive a pension and healthy enough to remain in the British service. The commanders of the new units were eager to incorporate of these experienced troops into them to act as a veteran backbone in what would be a green regiment.\(^{303}\) The Carolina Corps, as the most veteran black unit then serving in the West Indies, became a base that the British constructed their new regiments upon.\(^{304}\)

The parallels between enslavement and service in the British Army are evident again based on the experience of the Corps at this late stage of their existence. While those deemed too old or infirm gained pensions from the military, it was of course their commanding officers who made that judgment call. A close reading of the unit rolls through the year’s show that many more members of the unit died in service than collected their pension. At this late stage, as the British desperately attempted to find experienced men to build their new black regiments around, the chances of older members of the Corps receiving a discharge and pension diminished once more. In this way, the army, like the planters in the West Indies, remained eager to squeeze every available service from the humans under their control, regardless of their physical condition.

\(^{303}\) In their initial plan to raise the West India Regiments, the British high command suggested that “it would be proper to send from the West Indies two or three companys of the best behaved and most orderly Black troops now in the West Indies” to provide an example for the new soldiers. Plan for the defense of West India Islands or other Offensive Operations, Ca. 1796, WO 1-82.

\(^{304}\) The black units formed during the French Revolutionary Wars, such as Malcolm’s Rangers, were also incorporated into the new regiments at this time to provide the same sort of veteran support which the Carolina Corps did.
The British government and military high command encountered a complex situation when it came to the Carolina Corps and their incorporation into the new regiments due to their unique position as free men. The British wish to use slave troops meant that they began purchasing slaves from West Indian planters and traders in Africa to such a great extent that by 1800, the government was the largest slaveholder in the British Caribbean. The Carolina Corps did not fit the slave-centered mold of the new regiments, and Abercromby worried about what the effects of mixing free black and enslaved soldiers would be. In November 1797, he recommended to Whitehall that the Carolina Corps “now serving in the Windward Islands, ought not to be broken, or incorporated during the War—Such a Measure would be highly prejudicial at present.”

Instead, the British high command came up with a simple solution that would keep the men of the Carolina Corps in service, but separated from the main body of new enslaved troops.

The few surviving members of the Corps who met the requirements of the new regiments as dictated by the Home Office joined the newly formed First West India Regiment. They were united in the new regiment with the men of several other veteran black companies from the region, including some of the ranger companies created on the

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305 Notes on West India Regiments by Ralph Abercromby for the Home Office, 10 November 1797, WO 1-82.

306 The British requirements for slaves to join the West India Regiments included an age limit of 35, the soldier to be of sound body, and his height to be no less than 5 feet, 5 inches. It is unknown whether the British adhered rigidly in these criteria when it came to the veteran troops of the Carolina Corps, and what became of the men who were not incorporated into the unit. It is likely that at least some of the men of the unit were mustered out of British service at this time. John Hope to John Murray, 6 April 1797, WO 1-82.
Carolina Corps model. With such experience within its ranks, it is no surprise that the unit was given numerical primacy over the rest of the new black British units. Many of the men in the unit were either free or had actively served alongside free men during their military careers, lowering the chance for resentment among the men of the regiment. At its creation, the First West India Regiment was the most “free” of all the new regiments. While the addition of some slaves was needed to boost the regimental rolls, the unit remained comprised mostly of free men throughout its early existence, making it unique among the new force.

While the British were finalizing plans for the First West India Regiment, the remaining ninety-five men of the Corps, referred to in British returns as the “Carolina Invalids,” gained a welcome reprieve. As part of Abercromby’s 1796 expedition to relieve Grenada after the brutal rebellion led by Fédon, the men of the unit returned to the island that they had called home for more than a decade. It is likely that the troops, many of whom were too old or infirm for strenuous military duties, would have had ample time to reacquaint themselves with the families they had left a few years before. The fact that their commanders now considered them “invalids,” yet retained them in the

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307 In his work, Buckley suggests that Malcolm’s Rangers, a unit raised from French slaves on Martinique in 1794, were part of the initial roll of the 1st WIR. This is disputed by Tyson, who suggests that the unit was not part of the WIR establishment until 1798, when it became a member of the 12th WIR. It is likely the confusion has arisen due to the fact that ranger units did get included in the 1st WIR, even if Malcolm’s unit was not one of them. Tyson, “Black Carolina Corps,” 663-64; Buckley, *Slaves in Red Coats*, 156.

308 It is clear the men of the Carolina Corps had not been incorporated into any of the West Indian Regiments by 1797, as in that year they were noted as being a separate unit within the British garrison on Grenada. The fact that they were known as the “Carolina Invalids” suggests they were too old or otherwise physically unable to perform most military duties by this time. Tyson, “Black Carolina Corps,” 663.
Grenada garrison shows again how desperate the British were to keep the veteran unit for their new military experiment. It also shows that service for members of the Corps, as for other British Army units, was often a lifelong agreement. By September 1797, still as an independent unit, the Corps, through death and retirement, had dropped in strength to only 79, losing 15 percent of their remaining strength in only a year.

In 1798, the Carolina Corps ceased to exist as a unit. After this date, the men of the Corps who continued to serve the British did so under the guise of the First West Indian Regiment, a unit that was based on their military example. It is unlikely that the men of the unit served in the new regiment for very long, and by 1805, none of the men of the Corps remained among its ranks. The troops served faithfully for over 15 years in the British Caribbean, and many for years before that during the Revolutionary War. Most were more Caribbean by the end of their service than they were Carolinian, yet the moniker stayed with them until the last, differentiating the men from those around them. After 1798, the men would experience a totally different type of military environment than they had previously had in the Caribbean. Their unique history and experience is what stood the men of the Carolina Corps apart from the rest of the British military units in the Caribbean, and it was this experience that its surviving members took into their next chapter of life, as foundational members of the First West India Regiment. The British recognized the vital contribution of the Carolina Corps to the creation of these later units by placing the Carolina laurel on the crest of the First West India Regiment. For over a century, the men of the regiment would only have to look at their arm patch or cap badge
to know the importance that a group of runaway slaves had had on the army of an empire.\textsuperscript{309}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image.png}
\caption{The crest of the First West India Regiment (left) and the later British West India Regiment. Both carry the Carolina laurel as a tribute to the Carolina Corps and its role in the creation of the West India Regiments.}
\end{figure}

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While it is highly likely that the British military would have followed their European rivals by employing black units in the West Indies, due to the military necessity to do so, the existence of the Carolina Corps hastened the process. Not only did the unit provide a practical example of how black troops could be utilized in the region, but they also provided a model for the leadership structure employed in the West India Regiment throughout its early existence.\textsuperscript{310} That structure, of white commissioned officers and

\textsuperscript{309} Voelz, “Slave and Soldier,” 283.

\textsuperscript{310} The Carolina Corps set such a good example of being a labor unit, one which not coincidentally fell into white British ideas regarding the use of blacks in a military context, which the West India Regiments became such upon their creation. It was only after the mutiny of black troops on Dominica in 1802 that the units
black NCOs, was unique in the peacetime Caribbean to anything other than militia units and thus was critically important to showing the British high command in London how a regular unit with a similar composition could function.

The Carolina Corps was more than just a model for the black units created in its wake. It paved the way also through their interactions with the white populations that they protected. It is noticeable that while planters on all the islands in the West Indies were loath to create the West Indian Regiments, there was less resistance on islands that had already had experience with black troops. Even on these islands, it was the idea of arming slaves, rather than free men, which caused the most resistance. On Barbados, one of the most politically powerful of the British territories in the Caribbean, resistance was especially strong because black troops had never been used there and because the island had a high number of absentee planters, who rallied against the arming of black troops. However, there was no such resistance on Grenada, Saint Vincent or Dominica, islands where the Carolina Corps had been a fixture of the military establishment for years.\(^{311}\) It is telling that these islanders were much more open to the arming of any blacks, including slaves, than those on Barbados.

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\(^{311}\) In fact, on these islands, the British governors began to create their own black units for defense during the period between the authorization for the WIR and the plan going into action. This was particularly true on Dominica, where the British commander Cochrane Johnstone created his own black corps from the existing slave population on the island. Cochrane Johnstone to Abercromby, 14 April 1796, WO 1-82.
While the impact of the Carolina Corps on the warming of planters towards the use of black troops was critical to the creation of the West India Regiments, their impact on the white officers of the British Army was no less important. Through a mixture of paternalism and ego, men like Edward Mathew could point with pride to the units that they felt were the products of their labor and discipline. Indeed, mentally removing the agency of the men themselves, their officers saw the excellent service of the units as mere reflections of their own military prowess. This did have the benefit, however, of ensuring that the officers of the Carolina Corps became some of the loudest proponents for the creation of the West India Regiments. Their fellow officers also had no problem using the unit to advance their cause, even if their only knowledge of the unit was through boasts and hearsay.

Many of the factors that led to the creation of the West India Regiments were the products of time and chance. If the British had not cut back so sharply on the number of white troops in the Caribbean after the American Revolutionary War, if the French Revolution had not occurred, or if the British had been able to recruit more soldiers from the British lower classes, there simply would not have been a need for the units. And when the situation warranted the creation of black regiments on a large scale, the Carolina Corps were critically important to their successful implementation. The Carolina Corps proved indispensable to the British high command, so much so that it’s remaining men, even as “invalids,” were mustered into one of the new units. It must have been with mixed feelings that those men partook in this new enterprise, a venture that secured their legacy in the annals of British history while also robbing them of their retirement.
Whatever their feelings, the new members of the West India Regiments had come a long way since their decision to run to the British lines during the Revolutionary War, a decision that by 1797 had changed their lives and the very structure of the British Army forever.
Epilogue

“I have always considered them as freemen.”

In 1807, the British Parliament passed the Slave Trade Act, ending more than 200 years of British trafficking in human beings. As momentous as this piece of legislation was, a second act had an equally powerful impact on the men in the British Atlantic already held in bondage. The British Parliament passed mutiny acts every year, to fund the Army, stipulate changes in policy and reevaluate the codes of conduct for those serving within its ranks. As such, most have disappeared from the pages of history. The Mutiny Act of 1807, however, ingrained itself in the history of the British military forever as it was the statute that freed the thousands of men serving in the nation’s West India Regiments.

The mutiny act emancipated all slaves who were currently fighting for the British, some 8000 men in 1807, solidifying their legal status as free men.\(^{312}\) The Act orchestrated by far the single biggest emancipation of black slaves in British history up to that point. As it had been for the men of the Carolina Corps during the Revolutionary War, fighting for the British Army now became a pathway to freedom for male blacks throughout the British Caribbean.

\(^{312}\) In August 1807, the West India Regiments contained some 7950 men in its effective fighting force. Buckley, *Slaves in Red Coats*, 130; Buckley, *British Army in the West Indies*, 123.
There were various reasons for the passage of the act, with many interconnected with the passage of the larger slave trade abolition bill. One of the biggest factors in the passage of the mutiny act was the fact that the slave trade, which provided the majority of slaves who constituted the fighting force of the West India Regiments, was being banned.\(^{313}\) It is important to note that the British government, while closing the slave trade, did allow the military to impress any slaves captured by the Royal Navy from illegal traders into military service.\(^{314}\) Also, while the act gave legal freedom to slaves serving in the regiments, the same document also maintained lifelong terms of service for black troops, compared to seven years of service mandated for new white recruits.\(^{315}\) Nonetheless, the act rang the death knell of the original conceptions of the West India Regiments, with the number of troops declining significantly in the ensuing years.

Some roots of the *Mutiny Act of 1807* are traceable to the service of the Carolina Corps, and thus the unit was at least partially responsible for gaining the freedom of their brethren a decade after the regiment ceased to exist. It was Lord Grenville, the very same man who Edward Mathew had convinced to allow the expansion of the Corps in 1791, who was Prime Minister when the new mutiny act passed through Parliament. In his own words regarding the troops of the West Indian Regiment, Grenville “always considered

\(^{313}\) Buckley, *Slaves in Red Coats*, 130.

\(^{314}\) It is estimated that some 1600 “liberated” Africans, being those slaves captured by the Royal Navy from traders off Africa, were placed in West India Regiments for lifetime service between 1808 and 1815. Buckley, *Slaves in Red Coats*, 131.

\(^{315}\) The same act also exempted the black troops from the Chelsea pension scheme, meaning there was no security for the men as they reached the end of their military careers. Claudius Fergus, “Emancipation and ‘military necessity’,” in *Free at Last*, 32.
them as freemen,” and these thoughts long predated the situation in 1807. Grenville had been the man who had approved the Corps for pensions. It is thus probable that the early exposure of Grenville to the use of black troops through the Carolina Corps, with whose history he had an intimate connection, affected his later opinions and helped sway his judgment when it came to the passage of the Mutiny Act.

Indeed, the freedoms granted to the men of the West India Regiment were similar to those that had been applied to the Carolina Corps previously. Except for the lack of pensions, few of which were ever issued, the basic structure of the emancipation of the West Indian soldiers was a carbon copy of that granted to the Carolina Corps. The newly freed men gained the same rights to pay, legal recourse through court-martial, and freedom of movement (albeit limited) that the men of the Corps received throughout their service in the West Indies. The two groups also shared many of the same restrictions based on their race, including harsher punishments, increased fatigue duty, and lifelong enlistments in the British Army.

The impact of the Carolina Corps on the history of the British military expands well beyond their limited term of service in British North America and West Indies. It also transcends the normal racial boundaries, showing the British Caribbean, often characterized as being racially rigid when compared to other European colonies in the Caribbean, to have shared the same cultural fluidity found in these settlements. Within this fluidity, the military status of the Carolina Corps allowed it to create a niche for itself.

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316 Claudius Fergus, “Emancipation and ‘military necessity’,” in Free at Last, 32.
in British society that would create cultural ripples for thousands of other blacks, both free and enslaved, in the West Indies.

Returning to the arguments laid out in the introduction, the impact of the Carolina Corps on whites in the British establishment is evident throughout their existence. In *Moral Capital*, Brown argues that “it was not difficult for British officers to think of blacks, in some contexts, as British subjects, as more than simply labor or the property of British colonists.” While this predisposition by some officers certainly helped the Carolina Corps to survive throughout many crisis points, the actions of the soldiers themselves also forced whites in the Caribbean to confront their rigid views on race. Men such as John Orde, the governor of Dominica, completely changed their stance on the use of the unit once they had seen its service to the crown. Meanwhile the population at large had grown so dependent on the Corps that the British high command used the regiment as an example to dampen criticism of the plan to create the West India Regiments between 1795 and 1797. Indeed, whatever feelings Lord Grenville had towards black soldiers before 1782, his experience with the Corps thereafter affected him so much that he helped to pass the *Mutiny Act of 1807* based on principles of freedom first tested through the Carolina Corps. In this regard, the interactions between white British officials and the Carolina Corps produced a positive reciprocal relationship for both sides.

The men in charge of the Carolina Corps, whether military or political, were products of their time, however, and thus the lens of race influenced all their interactions

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with the troops. In the history of the Carolina Corps, misunderstandings over the biology of black bodies, and ideas about climatology were both a blessing and a curse for the unit. In South Carolina, fears of smallpox almost destroyed the unit before climatological beliefs saved them as Charlestown fell. Mischaracterizations about slave cultures also meant that the Corps were used extensively to dissuade other black groups from revolt, events that created perceptions of loyalty in the minds of white officers. It is also important to note that the honor codes, paternalism and egotism that white officers in the West Indies showed towards black troops also colored the entirety of this group’s interactions with the Carolina Corps.

The Corps was fortunate to enter the British Atlantic at a moment when opposition to racial tropes was on the rise due to the push for abolition. At another place or another time, the unit might never have come into existence. White attitudes and the moment of imperial crisis that affected the British military during the Revolutionary era in the West Indies allowed for not only the creation of the unit, but also established the conditions needed for it to thrive. Within this unique period of British history, it was the actions of the men themselves that helped to further their own cause and undermine the rigid racial divides within the British military at the time.

Regarding the socio-cultural interactions with the people of the West Indies, the unique position of the men in West Indian society allowed for them to engage in complex interactions with members of every race. Being members of the British military establishment gave the men access to money and legal status, elevating them above most blacks in the regions where they served, including, after the outbreak of the Haitian
Revolution, free blacks. The freedom of movement, no matter how limited, allowed for interactions with members of the white community that other blacks could only engage with peripherally. This was especially true when it came to their interactions with white members of the British military. With blacks, particularly enslaved individuals, the position of the Carolina Corps in the army affected interactions with the group in disparate ways. Despite the negativity felt towards the group by some slaves after the Corps policed the enslaved population, the men of the unit formed kinship ties on plantations. Also, it was their position as soldiers that allowed the men of the Corps to form one of their most interesting relationships, with the Caribs of Saint Vincent. Thus, their exceptional status allowed the group to interact with the different groups of the British West Indies, partaking in unique contacts that reveal the ways the Corps used the fluidity of British Caribbean society to their own advantage.

Finally, the impact of the Carolina Corps on the overall British military establishment is plain to see throughout this study. At every juncture of their career in the British Army, the Corps were breaking new ground. In South Carolina, the units of black pioneers and dragoons became the first black land-based units employed in the region by the British during the Revolutionary War. They were the only black unit evacuated from the British mainland colonies at the end of the conflict that the army maintained as a military force, and thus became the first free all-black unit in the British Army in the West Indies. Throughout their service, they used their positions to create a blueprint for freedom that became widespread in 1807 with the passage of the mutiny act. The importance of the unit on the creation of the West India Regiments was
unquestioned, even by the officers of the British military who placed the Carolina Laurel on the regimental emblem of the First West India Regiment as a testament to the Corps’ influence. The Carolina Corps exist as not only one of the most under-studied black units in British military history, but also as one of the most important overall.

There were no parades for the men of the Carolina Corps. No tombstone survives to any individual soldier of the unit. Most Caribbean historians recognize the contribution of the unit in simple footnotes or passing remarks. Nevertheless, the shadow cast by the unit is long, and it survived in the form of the West India Regiments until their disbanding in the twentieth century. This study has attempted to place the unit back into the narrative of British military history, bringing the crucial contributions of the Carolina Corps to the fore in a way that has never been attempted before. Hopefully it will spur further projects that will shed more light on both the Corps and other forgotten units that were so fundamental to British policy and strategy during the Revolutionary era in the West Indies. If the contributions of Carolina Corps are forgotten, there must be countless more stories to be told. This study thus stands as a testament for 300 former slaves who changed the military of an empire forever.
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Appendix A

Anon, “Of the Carolina, or Black Corps, serving in the Leeward Islands,” ca. December 1791

“When His Majesty’s Army was in Carolina, a number of Negroes left their masters, and attached themselves to it. When the Army was evacuating that province, several of the Negroes were returned to their masters, but many of them, which had taken an active part, had made themselves so obnoxious to their former owners, that dreading the severest punishment, they prayed for protection, and to be permitted to follow the Army. Their prayer was granted, and some of them were sent to St. Lucia, where they were employed about the Troops, during the remainder of the war. At the peace, they were sent with our new garrison to Grenada, where the commander in chief employed them, some on the Kings works and buildings, some in the Quarter Master Generals department, a proportion was attached to each Regt. to assist in doing the laborious duties, and some were kept for Guards, for Orderly’s &c &c &c—they were taught the use of arms, and on many occasions employed, and in some instances found more useful, than the other Troops, from being better able to bear fatigue in that climate. Experience having shewn General Mathew, of what essential service a Corps of that kind could be made in the West Indies, either in peace or war, under proper regulations, has
proposed their being augmented, and put under one Officer, as a Reg't, and has thought fit to recommend Lieutenant Colonel Nicolls of the 45th: Reg't: as well qualified for that command.

The Black Corps at present consists of above Two hundred men, under Three Captains, with Subalterm & Non Com' officers in proportion. The augmenting of which, in time of peace, may at first sight appear extraordinary, but when it is considered, that some of the colonies will not give Negro labour, and others only in equal proportions with what government furnishes, and that so long as it is necessary to keep a military force in the West Indies, works and buildings must constantly be carrying on, and that Negroes, who are Soldiers, work at least as well, as any that can be hired, and at a much less expence; it is therefore presumed the measure on examination, will prove to be founded on principles of real utility and Economy. The price of a hired Negro labourer in Grenada is Three Shillings currency a day, which is about One Shilling and nine pence Stlg. and he is fed besides.

An objection may be made to the arming of blacks as soldiers, but it has no weight; as experience shews they are not only to be depended upon, but are more inveterate against people of their own colour, than any other Troops, and they may always be as much confided in, if properly commanded, as any part of the Army.

The loss of soldiers in the West Indies, by death, or rendered useless to the service by the climate, may be moderately Stated at Ten P C'. P. An: and the expence of one Recruit is nearly as follows.
Levy money | £3.13.6
---|---
Sub: taken on an average before he joins | 6.16.6
Passage | 10.0.0
---|---
**£20.10.0**

Every year there are members obliged to be sent home for the recovery of their health, whose passage home and back to their Regt. is Twenty pounds for each man, besides the loss of their Military service while absent for their duty; no such expence could occur for the black corps, and of any part of this waste of men could be prevented, by an increase of that establishment, it would seem to be, not only a measure of prudence, but of humanity, for which our government is so remarkable.

The loss of Seasoned Negroes is not estimated at Three P Cts. P. An: and they are known to be capable of doing more work for a continuance, than Europeans in that climate.

It is conceived that some Negroes could be Inlisted in Nova Scotia; their passage from thence to the West Indies, would be attended with a trifling expence, but employing one of the Island Government Brigs for that purpose. But admitting none could be raised in that way, and you paid Fifty pounds for each able and Seasoned Negro, for the purpose of augmenting the Black corps, to double its present member, the difference of saving between employing them & hiring Negroes to labour, would soon repay their first cost. And when the Advantage of the great increase of Military ^force from the black corps, if properly formed, is considered, either in peace or war, and that they are known to be more useful in many cases, than an equal number of any other species of Troops in the
West Indies, these reasons and their various uses taken together, would seem to out
weigh any objections that can be made to their being augmented, and put on a footing
that General Mathew recommends.”