

NORTH CAROLINA REVOLUTIONARIES IN ARMS:
THE BATTLE OF KING'S MOUNTAIN

A Thesis

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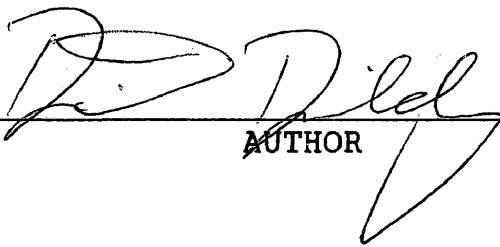
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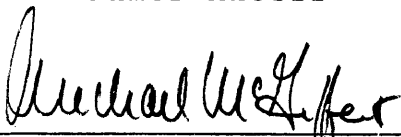
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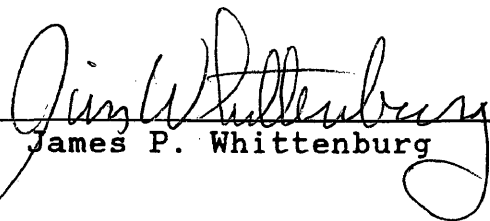
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ABSTRACT

This study details the accomplishments of the whig gentry of backcountry North Carolina during the American Revolution. During this time the backcountry was the scene of a savage civil war between whigs and tories. The region's whig leadership strove both to defeat the tories in a grueling guerilla war and at the same time to create a government that was capable of imposing order and stability on the area.

This study uses land claims, tax records, and census results that attest to the wealth and affluence of the whig leadership. Local court records demonstrate their political power and show the type of government they created in backcountry. Accounts of the war in backcountry North Carolina used in this study include those of participants and of neutral groups such as the Moravians. Letters and accounts by British officers attest to the effect of the whig victory on British strategy in the southern theater. Additionally, many secondary accounts of both backcountry life and the military struggle are drawn upon.

The whigs were victorious because their leaders were effective military men who successfully prevented the creation of any tory force capable of challenging their authority. They were also successful in establishing a government that offered war-weary backcountry citizens the promise of peace and stability. Their crowning achievement was their successful defence of the backcountry order they had created when they defeated Major Patrick

Ferguson at King's Mountain in 1780. This whig victory not only solidified their control over their own area, but forged the first link in a chain of events that would see the British driven out of the Carolinas to defeat at Yorktown.

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Introduction

Scholars of the American Revolution have long recognized the victory of frontier whigs at King's Mountain in 1780 as an important step toward the defeat of the British in the South. Encouraged by Frederick Jackson Turner's popular thesis of Americanization occurring along the fringes of civilization, scholars attributed the victory to the individualistic backwoodsman who bested redcoats fighting with European tactics in the wilderness. Accounts of the battle emphasized the fact the frontier-wise whigs "hid behind rocks and trees" and fought in the same manner as Indians.¹ Any contribution the "Over the Mountain Men" made to ultimate whig victory beyond their defeat of Ferguson went largely untold. Accounts told of "stalwart and hardy riflemen" who "crossed the wooded and precipitous defiles...to help their brethren on the plains" and then went back over the mountains, disappearing from the eyes of both enemies and historians.¹

In more recent accounts, historians have been less romantic and have instead concentrated on placing the battle in its strategic context. Most note that the defeat represented the initial setback in a series of disasters that befell Cornwallis's army, culminating at Yorktown. But when the modern scholar concludes his account of the Battle of King's Mountain, the victors vanish once more behind the mountains and are not heard from again.³

Both old and more recent scholarship offer a less-than-

complete picture of both the importance of the battle and the men who fought it. The victorious whigs were not new entrants to the war in 1780. They had been fighting and winning a savage, backcountry, guerilla war since the war began. Their success in that struggle was instrumental in dampening loyalist enthusiasm in the North Carolina and Virginia Backcountry. So low were tory spirits that British Major Patrick Ferguson's expedition, which had recruitment as one of its key goals, rallied but a handful of men and was a failure long before his force was destroyed at King's Mountain.

There is no doubt that the victory at King's Mountain stopped a series of whig reverses and shifted momentum in the contest for the South in favor of the whigs. What has been overlooked is how the outcome at King's Mountain destroyed the last, best chance that existed for loyalist victory in the Backcountry. Loyalist support was critical to the British strategy in the colonies. Thus, King's Mountain represented more than just a shift of momentum: Ferguson's defeat effectively ended British hopes for significant aid from the king's friends in the South, and thus dealt a crippling blow to Cornwallis' grand southern strategy.

Central to whig success in both the long-running struggle in the backcountry and the more dramatic battle at King's Mountain were the whig gentry along the frontier. They organized efforts to suppress tories, ran local governments, recruited men and raised money for the standing army and

provided a much-needed element of stability in the volatile backcountry. This thesis aims to explore the nature of the frontier gentry who comprised the whig leadership and to demonstrate their importance to the guerilla war along the frontier and the climactic victory of the backcountry whigs at King's Mountain.

The first chapter of this thesis is devoted to showing who the frontier gentry were and how they accomplished their goals. The second moves from an examination of the whigs as a group to a closer examination of two of their most prominent leaders, Benjamin Cleveland and William Campbell. Cleveland's and Campbell's careers vividly illustrate the nature of whig leadership in Revolutionary backcountry. The chapter concludes with an account of the crisis caused by Ferguson's invasion and the whig response.

Chapter I

The Frontier Gentry and the Revolution
in the North Carolina Backcountry

The spring and summer of 1780 were high times for the king's friends in the South but bleak times for the whigs. The patriot cause, which had seemed so vital in the war's early days, now had about it the air of despair and defeat. The whigs had been sent reeling by a pair of devastating blows that had cost them their largest port and shattered their only standing army.

In February, British forces under the command of Major General Henry Clinton landed near Charleston, South Carolina. Clinton's goal was to gain a base of operations from which to launch a great campaign to pacify the South. His opponent, General Benjamin Lincoln, racked by doubts about the virtues of fighting or retreating, did neither. In May, Lincoln paid the price for his indecision when he was forced to surrender both the city, its port, and its irreplaceable 5,000-man garrison with hardly a struggle. Scarcely a month later, Clinton's replacement, Lord Charles Cornwallis, crushed the South's only standing army when the overconfident Horatio Gates attacked him at Camden, South Carolina. Having thus suffered two calamitous defeats, the stunned whigs could do little but harry Cornwallis's patrols and strike at his outposts. While the tattered remnants of Gates's command attempted to recover at a safe distance, Cornwallis could turn

his attention to eradicating the whigs from the southern colonies with confidence that his foes could do little to hinder him. As the year lengthened and summer turned to autumn, there appeared to be little the almost prostrate whigs could do to halt, let alone reverse, the string of British successes.

In order to complete his subjugation of the South's rebels, Cornwallis ordered Major Patrick Ferguson and a force of approximately 1,000 men--mostly South Carolina loyalists along with a few New Yorkers--to march into western North Carolina "with directions to our friends there to take arms and assemble immediately, and to seize the most Violent People and all military Stores . . . and to intercept stragglers from the routed [American] army."⁴ Ferguson undertook his mission with zeal. Although his efforts to recruit loyalists met with little success, he nonetheless drove easily through the North Carolina piedmont, scattering token whig resistance and leaving a trail of burned farms in his wake. As he approached the mountains, Ferguson, warmed by his effortless march but frustrated by the lack of tory response, issued a proclamation to the settlers whose homes lay beyond the Blue Ridge: surrender immediately or your homesteads will be destroyed "with fire and sword."⁵ The proclamation elicited a response, but not the one Ferguson had hoped.

The "Over the Mountain Men"--Benjamin Cleveland, William Campbell, Isaac Shelby, John Sevier, the McDowell brothers and

other local leaders--had heard of Ferguson's destructive tactics and took his threat seriously. They quickly gathered a force of over 1,500 men and rode through the mountain passes to destroy his army before it reached their homes. They ran Ferguson's force to ground at King's Mountain, one of a small group of peaks along North Carolina's southern border. There the whigs killed or captured almost the entire loyalist force. In one blow, they gained for the patriot cause a much-needed victory and cast the first link in a chain of events that ensured the failure of Cornwallis's southern campaign.

King's Mountain was the crowning achievement of the "Over the Mountain Men," but it was by no means the first of their contributions to whig success. Years before Ferguson began his expedition, the backcountry whigs of North Carolina laid the foundation for their later victory by actively suppressing backcountry Tories and winning over a large portion of the neutral population through their efforts to maintain public order.

Their theater of operations consisted mostly of North Carolina's Morgan District, comprising Burke, Lincoln, Rutherford, and Wilkes counties. The area's central feature is the Blue Ridge chain that cut through the counties from northeast to southwest. The mountains were formidable obstacles. Moravian Bishop August Spangenberg aptly described the size and power of the Blue Ridge as "mountain to right and to left, before us and behind us, many hundreds of mountains,

rising like great waves in storm."⁶ The lower slopes were thickly covered with chestnut, oak, and hickory trees. Vegetation along the crests varied: some of the mountains were covered with "rhododendron hells," dense tangles of flowering plants that formed naturally impenetrable hedges, while others were "balds" that grew little but grass.

If such terrain was not an likely home for the weak or timid, the region's climate offered some compensations. There were some 200 frost-free days a year, with average temperatures of 58 to 60 degrees fahrenheit. Precipitation averaged between 48 and 50 inches a year. The combination of temperature and precipitation created conditions that, though not as conducive to farming as those of the tidewater, were nonetheless favorable to agriculture. In addition, the surrounding forests offered good hunting and large amounts of timber.⁷

Waterways are the second dominant geographical feature of the region. The Yadkin River flows eastward through the piedmont, while the Watauga, Nolachucky, and French Broad rivers flow to the west and feed into the Holston, which runs through what is now eastern Tennessee and follows a course roughly parallel to the mountains. Along these waterways, on both the eastern and western slopes of the mountains, North Carolina's backcountry settlers built their homes.

The settlers themselves were chiefly of English, Scots-Irish, or German descent. Most of them moved to the

backcountry because of the steeply rising price of land in settled areas to the east.⁸ The Scots-Irish settlers began to arrive from northern colonies, especially Pennsylvania, around 1750. Many German settlers also moved to North Carolina after first living in other colonies. Their chief route into the backcountry was the Great Wagon Road that extended from Philadelphia to the German Moravian community of Wachovia in eastern Surry County. From there, the road splintered into several smaller branches that led deeper into the backcountry.⁹

By the time the Seven Years' War began, the steady stream of migration, supplemented by direct immigration from Scotland and Ireland, turned into a flood of people moving into North Carolina's hinterland. Between 1750 and 1770, the colony's population tripled, with most of the growth occurring along the western frontiers.¹⁰ Benjamin Franklin estimated that 40,000 Pennsylvanians alone, drawn by the lure of available land, migrated to North Carolina in the years immediately before the Seven Years' War, while the Connecticut Courant found the "rapid and sudden increase of inhabitants" in the North Carolina backcountry "surprising and astonishing."¹¹

Life for the settlers was hard. In contrast to the large estates that dotted the Chesapeake and the tidewater, the most backcountry residents lived on small farms. Their houses were constructed of green logs chinked with clay and had clapboards roofs. Some were not even fully enclosed but had three walls

and roof with one side open to the elements. Furniture and utensils were crude--wooden bowls and cups, tables fashioned of split slabs, three-legged stools for seating, and straw mattresses for beds--and were lent a degree of permanence only by the presence of a piece or two of iron cookware and perhaps a few pewter spoons.¹²

Though some settlers led a hand-to-mouth existence by subsistence farming, many were able to grow food for sale and to supplement their incomes by hunting and trapping. Most owned a few head of cattle and perhaps a horse or a mule, but their cattle holdings paled beside those of tidewater inhabitants.¹³ Backcountry North Carolinians were able to export deerskins, foodstuffs, hemp, and herbs to the coastal region, which in turn shipped manufactured goods--especially cloth--as well as rum, sugar, and salt to the frontier.¹⁴ Many of these trade goods were exported through the Moravian community at Salem, where during the 1760s it was common for wagons bearing between two and four tons of deerskins to lumber off toward Charleston and its distant markets.¹⁵

The deerskin-laden wagons were doubtless watched by the area's original inhabitants, the Cherokees, with more than a little resentment. They determined not to let their hunting grounds--the purportedly unoccupied land that had drawn the tide of settlers--go uncontested. Indian agent John Stuart had foreseen trouble when settlers originally pushed westward "as far back as the Mountains and deprived the Indians of the

Lower Cherokee Towns of the most valuable part of their hunting grounds." The Crown had spent far beyond its means to cleanse eastern North America of the French in the Seven Years' War and had little stomach for the bill in blood or gold that war with France's former Indian allies would surely create. The settlers, however, had no such forebodings, and before the ink was dry on the Proclamation of 1763, its articles prohibiting settlement in Indian lands west of the crest of the Blue Ridge were essentially dead letters. In defiance of both the royal ban and the menace posed by the area's Indian inhabitants, land-hungry colonists pushed over the mountains and began to settle along the rivers that ran down the western slopes.

Stuart had his hands full preventing Cherokee retaliation. He had, he wrote, experienced "much trouble by the imprudent behaviour of our back Settlers behind this and other provinces."¹⁶ In spite of his best efforts, he was unable to prevent clashes between the opposing sides. An unforeseen consequence of the bitter frontier warfare was the emergence of a new, frontier elite who, having first won their spurs against the region's original inhabitants, went on to lead local whigs against their tory neighbors.

Power in eighteenth-century British America was based largely on social status and was maintained through political structures such as courts, legal strictures on voting, and by the deference of the populace, who more or less expected to be

led by their betters.¹⁷ Some frontier gentry were members of leading tidewater families and had acquired frontier lands for agriculture or for future speculation. Joseph Winston, a native Virginian and cousin to Patrick Henry, was one of these. Another was Joseph McDowell, who was born in Winchester, Virginia, and moved to the backcountry when his father purchased a large section of land at Quaker Meadows.¹⁸ The respect the populace showed men like Winston and McDowell arose first from their wealth and position. Their political connections to the governor and the colonial assembly allowed them to gain control of the local courts, which in turn allowed them to secure appointment to important local offices for themselves or their allies.¹⁹ The excesses some of these local officials committed contributed to the rise of the Regulator movement, a backcountry insurrection that climaxed in 1771 with the Battle of Alamance Creek and the complete defeat of the Regulators.²⁰

The new gentry's origins were very different. Though backcountry political structures in North Carolina were similar to those on the coast, frontier notions of deference could differ sharply. Hunters and, to a lesser extent, surveyors, for example, could sometimes earn the respect and deference of the backcountry populace necessary to propel them into positions of leadership. Their trades, which often took them far beyond even the most outlying farmsteads, were fraught with danger from Indians and the elements. The

increased status that was granted to the successful hunter or surveyor could, if he met legal office-holding requirements, propel him into the frontier gentry class. Both Daniel Boone and Benjamin Cleveland, though later proved to be prodigious Indian fighters, first won acclaim on the frontier for their prowess as hunters. William Lenoir, Cleveland's chief lieutenant, turned to surveying after he found that his meager teacher's salary was insufficient to support his family.¹¹ In addition to a good living by frontier standards, both trades offered the opportunity to view unsettled land long before other settlers could do so.

However much the backcountry settlers admired skillful hunters and surveyors, their constant dread of attack caused them to reserve their greatest respect for Indian fighters. Because of their skill as militia leaders, men of simple birth like Cleveland, Lenoir, Isaac Shelby, and John Sevier "invariably" came to hold the "highest civil and military offices of the western counties."¹²

The authority of the new gentry was not based on their leadership abilities alone. Strict property requirements for holding office applied to them just as to office holders elsewhere in the colony. The property requirements, whose centuries-old purpose was to keep political power concentrated in the hands of a small elite, did not prove an effective barrier to the emerging frontier gentry. Indeed, they usually acquired more than enough property to participate in local

government soon after their arrival in the mountains.

The new gentry's military prowess, in addition to winning deference from the populace, could lead directly to the acquisition of the land necessary for their new status. Following the defeat of the Cherokees in 1776, in which frontier gentry such as John Sevier, William Campbell, and Benjamin Cleveland were instrumental,²³ the Watauga settlements were annexed by North Carolina and organized as the Washington District. Cleveland was awarded almost 1,000 acres in the new district by the legislature--a sizable addition to his previous 1,300-acre holdings.²⁴ Other leaders also profited in land through their involvement in repulsing the Cherokees: Campbell got a total of 354 acres in two Washington District tracts, while Sevier received almost 1,000.²⁵ These additional lands served to increase the gentry's prestige and helped assure their continued viability within the political system in times of peace.

During the Revolution, the land holdings of prominent backcountry whigs grew at an astonishing pace. Cleveland added over 3,200 acres in Wilkes County to his holdings, while his younger brother Robert's property swelled by a more-than-respectable 666. At roughly the same time Holston whig leader Campbell laid claim to over 1,200 acres in both Hawkins County, Virginia and the new Washington District, Joseph McDowell busily added almost 2,000 in Burke County. Yet even the substantial holdings of the Clevelands and Campbell were

dwarfed by Charles McDowell's addition of 4,200 acres in Burke County¹⁶ and John Sevier's acquisition of 6,200 acres that ranged from Sullivan County deep into what is now Tennessee.¹⁷ These addition to their previous holdings propelled the new whig leaders solidly into the gentry class.

Most of the land gained by the whig leaders was choice real estate situated along rivers and streams. Isaac Shelby acquired 400 acres "on the North side of the Holston River" in Hawkins County in 1779, almost one year after Cleveland established his homestead "on the North side of the Yadkin river and call'd by the name of the great Roundabout." Sevier's 1779 land claim in Sullivan County lay along the "North side of the Holston River," and the 640 acres he claimed in Green County in 1780 lay along the "South side of the French Broad River." Sevier later acquired a huge 3,000-acre tract "on the south side of the Nolachucky river" in the same county.¹⁸ Possession of property along waterways gave the new gentry access to the richest soil, simplified logistical problems created by their ever-growing herds of cattle, and afforded their owners easier transportation of goods to market.

Subsistence farming did not require slaves, and most settlers were far too poor to buy any. The presence of so many German Moravians at nearby Salem, who believed slavery to be immoral, also dampened the growth of slavery in the region.¹⁹ The backcountry gentry who comprised the whig

leadership were not as scrupulous as their Moravian neighbors. They did not have enough laborers in their families to work their holdings and were therefore obliged to purchase at least some slaves. Cleveland's 6,800 acres in 1782 were almost certainly not all cleared, but enough were to enable him to employ thirteen slaves under the age of fifty to work the land and to tend his large (by backcountry standards) herds of fifteen horses and mules and one hundred cattle.³⁰

In most cases, the pace of land acquisition far exceeded the ability of the owners to get the land cleared and indicates that most whigs accumulated land for purposes of patrimony, resale, or clearing at a later date, rather than for any immediate economic benefit. William Lenoir had acquired over 11,000 acres by 1782, but possessed only five slaves to work the land, three of whom were under the age seven. Wilkes County justice Benjamin Herndon owned almost 13,000 acres but only twelve slaves, five of whom were under seven or over fifty years old and were therefore not much help in the backbreaking work of clearing virgin land.³¹

The legal power of North Carolina's backcountry whigs resided most visibly in the county courts. Though the court met only four times a year, it wielded a great deal of power over the everyday lives of backcountry citizens. The court registered bills of sale for land, recorded livestock brands, granted business licenses, appointed officers to collect taxes, probated wills, set the maximum rates businesses could

charge for goods and services, saw to the care of orphans, and organized the upkeep of roads.³¹

The legislature named the court's justices on the recommendation of the county's elected representatives. The justices in turn appointed sheriffs, clerks, coroners, registers, and constables. To prevent abuse and corruption, state law forbade holding more than one "lucrative office" at any time.³²

North Carolina's county courts multiplied as the number of western counties swelled along with the backcountry's population during the third quarter of the eighteenth century. In the fall of 1777, Cleveland headed a delegation that appealed to the state legislature on behalf of the citizens of the western portion of Surry County. The petitioners pled that the "grievous and burthensome" journey to the county seat was too much to expect of loyal citizens and asked that a new county be created out of Surry's western districts.³⁴ Their petition was granted and Wilkes County--named after the famous anti-war member of the British Parliament--was formed. As a reward for his lobbying efforts, Cleveland was appointed head of the county court and made a colonel in the county militia.³⁵

Cleveland and the other justices on the Wilkes County Court acted to protect whig interests and to foster order and stability in the increasingly volatile backcountry. The ideological leanings of the first Wilkes County Court are

evident in its composition: Cleveland and his fellow justices--Charles Gordon, Benjamin Herndon, and Elisha Isaacs--not only had sat on the Surry County Court in the same capacity but had served on the county's fervently pro-whig Committee of Public Safety.³⁶

At the court's first meeting in 1778, the members immediately acted to assure the ideological purity of the county officers and to protect their own interests by appointing themselves, their kin, and their allies to fill the various county positions. The court appointed Justices Herndon and Gordon to the posts of entry taker and coroner, picked Herndon's brother Joseph to be county surveyor, and selected local Whig leader John Brown to fill the posts of register and ranger. Cleveland got into the act by securing the appointment of his right-hand-man William Lenoir as court clerk.³⁷ The prohibition against holding more than one office at the same time did not always apply as Cleveland himself held the offices of, at one time or another, bondsman, commissioner for seizing confiscated estates, superintendent of elections, and county ranger. He additionally sat as the court's presiding judge from 1778 until he left the county for South Carolina in 1785.³⁸ The court and its appointed officers carried out the day-to-day business of running the county in an remarkably orderly manner. While guerilla fighting between loyalists and whigs raged in and around Wilkes County, there is no indication that the routine

business of county governance was ever interrupted. In addition to taxes for constructing a courthouse and prison for the new county, the court ordered a special levy to help support the Continental army in the Southern Department. Those who were unable to pay due to infirmity or poverty were granted a reprieve, as were those engaged in regular military service.³⁹ In the midst of the war, the court established a committee to determine the best route for a proposed road to link the county's settlements, and also appointed an overseer to ensure that all eligible males did their share of the work in its construction.⁴⁰

Taxation was not the only area in which the court affected the county's economy. The court fixed currency standards and ordered that all bills be paid "in specie or in North Carolina currency" at a rate of "900 to one."⁴¹ To prevent price gouging, the court fixed prices of certain commodities in 1778 and adjusted them from time to time as circumstances warranted. Among the items that were regulated were wine, rum, whiskey, beer, "Good warm lodging," "Warm breakfast, warm boiled or roast meat, etc.," corn, and "Pasturage or stableage, 24 hrs."⁴²

Regulating just rates for room and board and maintaining order in the midst of what amounted to a civil war were two very different things. The fighting that raged in and around Wilkes County forced the justices and their whig allies to take active, sometimes harsh, measures to ensure stability and

to uphold the whig cause.

The defeat of North Carolina's first, large-scale loyalist movement at Moore's Creek Bridge in 1776 temporarily prevented any more colony-wide uprisings. Since neither side possessed a standing army, the struggle in the backcountry degenerated into a guerilla war characterized by ambushes, the murder of isolated travelers, looting, and revenge. Some violence was devoid of partisan motivation: a whig officer recorded that one roving band was not "connected with any party" but had apparently formed as "an independent company for the Special purpose of stealing and plundering."⁴³

The reputations of both sides were damaged by the fact that most of the killing and looting was carried out by those who were, at least ostensibly, either tories or whigs. The militias of both sides "earned a notorious reputation for plundering."⁴⁴ One Moravian called the Revolution "a most remarkable period, in which each morning we were glad to see each other again, and to know that no one has suffered injury to his person, and that neither the town nor any part of it has been burned [these things] did not take place by order of those in authority nor of the army officers, but by mob violence of a released hungry militia."⁴⁵ After surveying the devastation that Carolina marauders left in their wake, Nathanael Greene wrote that

the whigs and tories pursue one another with the most relentless fury killing and destroying each other whenever they meet. Indeed, a great part of this country is already laid waste and in the

utmost danger of becoming a desert. The great bodies of militia that have been in service this year employed against the enemy and in quelling the Tories have almost laid waste the country and so corrupted the principles of the people that they think of nothing but plundering one another....With the militia, everybody is a general and the powers of government are so feeble that it is with the utmost difficulty you⁴⁶ can restrain them from plundering one another.

Caught in the midst of this carnage, backcountry residents bombarded the legislature with pleas for help. The inhabitants of Surry County reported that "we are yet not within the Protection of the laws of the State," while Salisbury County residents applied their own situation to the state at large by complaining that "There is Scarce the Shadow of civil government exercised in the State."⁴⁷

The legislature responded by passing several laws designed to enhance whig control, encourage support for the government, and punish loyalists. The first statute, passed in March 1776, required county courts to administer the following oath of loyalty to all citizens:

I do solemnly and sincerely swear . . . that during the present unhappy contest between Great Britain and America, I will not under any pretence whatever oppose or take up Arms to oppose the Measures of the Continental or provincial congresses . . . nor will I . . . advise or give Intelligence to any of his Majesty's Governors, General Officers, Soldiers . . . I will not by example, opinion, advice or persuasion, endeavour to prejudice the people or any of them in favour of Parliamentary Measures or against those recommended by⁴⁸ the General and provisional Congresses

In May 1776, the assembly moved to strengthen the power of local officials by ordering that local Councils of Safety

"be vested with full power and authority to do and execute all acts and things necessary for the defence and protection of the people of this colony." Later that month, the assembly moved to discourage loyalism by ordering that "any person . . . who shall take up arms against America . . . or shall give intelligence or aid to the enemies thereof . . . shall forfeit all his goods, and chattels, lands, and tenements . . . and moreover be considered (when taken) as a prisoner of war."⁴⁹

Given such legal justification, Cleveland--in his roles as chairman of the Safety Committee, Wilkes County Court justice, and militia colonel--needed little encouragement to start hounding the region's tory population from pillar to post.⁵⁰ He and his men assembled quickly and struck hard whenever they received word of a hostile gathering. They soon became known among loyalists as "Cleveland's Devils." Any tories unfortunate enough to fall into their hands were usually given a chance to recant. If they refused, they were hanged.

So zealous were Cleveland and his men in their pursuit of loyalists that he and fellow county official Benjamin Herndon were indicted for the murders of Lemuel Jones and William Coyle in an adjacent county. On November 6, 1779, the upper house of the legislature entertained a motion "that his excellency the Governor, be requested to grant a Pardon to Colonel Benjamin Cleveland, Capt. Benjamin Herndon of Wilkes County and others concern[ed] in Killing Lemuel Jones and

William Coyle two known Traitors, Murderers, Robbers, and Horse Thieves, and for beating James Harvil who had harboured the same." The assembly denied the request, but the governor later used his own authority to pardon both of the whig officers.⁵¹

Whether most of Cleveland's victims were really "Traitors, Murderers, Robbers, and Horse Thieves" or simply people who had the misfortune to be in the wrong place at the wrong time is impossible to say. Some historians have argued that whig leaders, prompted by an excess of zeal or simply by greed, waged "campaign[s] of terror" that "transformed neutrals into loyalists and deepened the resentments of the disaffected."⁵²

It is certain that some of Cleveland's behavior went beyond the pale of even guerilla warfare and contributed to the sense of lawlessness that plagued the backcountry.⁵³ The Moravians, who were as neutral as anyone in the region, heard "reports of the bad behaviour of the Liberty Men, especially those from Wilkes County."⁵⁴ Despite the reputation for violence of some whig militias, there is little evidence that their depredations led to a sizable increase in the number of loyalists. The shattered tory ranks remained thin after Moore's Creek Bridge because of a combination of localism and expediency that was unique to the backcountry.

Isolated as they were from events along the coast, settlers tended to be more concerned with local affairs, such

as militia musters and county court proceedings, than with events occurring at the distant statehouses.⁵⁵ This tendency grew stronger as circumstances around them degenerated and violence became the rule of the day. By the time of its establishment in 1778, Wilkes County's citizens, who demonstrated little concern for ideological purity in the first place, had experienced enough of the war's disorder, and like other North Carolinians, "a majority of settlers were inclined to support whichever side could ensure a modicum of stability."⁵⁶ As time went on, the frontier whigs success at governance led more and more of the populace to view them as the group that could bring the local order the settlers sought.

The loyalist alternative held little attraction for the wavering. Despite their recent successes, the British army had a poor record in the South. Bungled attempts to take Charleston early in the war and the failure to prevent the slaughter of the tories at Moore's Creek Bridge had done little to enhance the Crown's reputation along the frontier as a reliable ally. Charleston's fall and the whig debacle at Camden, while welcome news, did nothing to directly help the beleaguered frontier loyalists. Even the king's staunchest supporters must have noticed that the scarlet tunics of His Majesty's soldiers were still absent from the frontier, recent British triumphs on the coast notwithstanding.

Stories of British victories at Charleston and Camden

were in stark contrast to the wretched condition of tories in the mountains. Backcountry tories suffered not only from a dearth of leadership but, more importantly, from lack of protection from provincial and local whig authorities. By the time the tide turned against the whigs at Charleston and Camden, North Carolina's backcountry loyalists had been suffering relentless harassment for almost four years. British triumphs on the coast and in the piedmont did nothing to relieve beleaguered tories on the frontier, who continued to face the fury of Cleveland and his cohorts alone. In contrast, whigs were running the provincial and local governments, constructing roads and public buildings, and, more important, demonstrating the ability to enforce their laws and exact revenge on their enemies.

Despite their successes, the whigs were never able to wholly eradicate the tory presence in the backcountry. There was always a portion of the population who remained loyal to the king out of a sense of duty. The whigs inadvertently added to this by their own heavy-handed and indiscriminate treatment of those they even suspected were opposed to them. Hangings and burning homesteads created resentment among victims, their families, and friends. But whig governance was sufficiently stable, and the threat of whig retaliation so severe, that the neutral community generally chose to take the oath of loyalty to the state, pay their taxes, and mouth pro-whig platitudes to avoid confrontations with local

authorities.

When Major Ferguson arrived at the edge of the mountains and sent his threatening proclamation over their crests, it was perhaps more a sign of frustration than an indication of his true intentions. His efforts to rally Tories to the royal banner had been frustrated by the hesitation of the populace to openly declare against the local Whig leaders. In the course of his march, Ferguson managed to bring in only about five hundred volunteers.⁵⁷ Although there may have been more enlistments that were not recorded, their number was not significant, and Ferguson's new recruits quickly melted away once he began to retreat. When he was finally run to ground at King's Mountain, Ferguson commanded virtually the same force with which he had entered North Carolina.⁵⁸

The victory at King's Mountain proved the deathblow to any hopes of large-scale loyalist activity in the North Carolina backcountry and was a triumph for the "Over the Mountain Men" in more ways than one. The destruction of Ferguson's force was the crowning act in a process in which the frontier gentry had earned positions of influence in the backcountry and had come to control its institutions of power. Their quick response in defense of those institutions against both internal and external enemies served to solidify their control.

Chapter II

Whigs Triumphant:
Benjamin Cleveland, William Campbell, and the Revolution
in Backcountry North Carolina

The contest between whigs and tories for control of the North Carolina and Virginia backcountry began in earnest when loyalist Donald McDonald raised the royal standard on February 1, 1776. The initial response was enthusiastic--some 1,500 loyalists rallied to the king's flag. Somewhat less encouraging was the fact that among them were only some 600 firearms, including relatively worthless fowling pieces and shotguns.⁵⁹ Not one to be easily discouraged, McDonald marched for the coast, planning to rendezvous with British regulars who were to land and reinforce him, but his plans miscarried when his force was intercepted about thirty miles from the provincial capital at Wilmington by a thousand-man force of whigs under Richard Caswell. Caswell's men occupied a strong defensive position. They had ripped up the planking on the single bridge that spanned the creek to their front and then greased the remaining framework with tallow. On February 27, the loyalists, most of whom went into battle brandishing traditional highland weapons such as broadswords, claymores, and pikes and obligingly charged the front of the whig position. The attack was shattered and the loyalists were cut down in droves. McDonald died leading the attack, and what was left of his force was scattered.⁶⁰ Whig partisans hounded the routed loyalists as they stumbled toward their homes in

the wake of the battle.

Crushing though the defeat was, it did not bring a halt to loyalist resistance. Having extinguished the great loyalist threat, the whig leaders now found themselves faced with seemingly innumerable bands of tory raiders, who sprung up seemingly underfoot and raided all over the state. The whigs responded in kind, and answered the loyalists raid for raid and murder for murder. Both whigs and tories soon were locked in a spiral of small-scale but vicious guerilla fighting. Though many whig leaders arose who were adept at this kind of warfare, two of the most effective partisans were Benjamin Cleveland and William Campbell.

Campbell and Cleveland in many ways epitomize the leaders of the "Over the Mountain Men." Though they came from different backgrounds, they were similar in a number of ways. Both were prosperous farmers, active in local politics, and relentless in their efforts to convert or destroy loyalists. Besides playing key roles in securing the area around the Yadkin, Watauga, and Holston rivers for the whigs, Campbell and Cleveland were both major contributors to the American victory at the key battle of King's Mountain.

Benjamin Cleveland was born in Prince William County, Virginia, on May 26, 1738. He, his parents, and grandparents resettled in an Orange County frontier community on the Blue Run near Albermarle while he was still an infant. The origins of his parents, John and Martha Cleveland, are uncertain, but

it is thought that they probably came from Yorkshire and emigrated to America sometime in the early eighteenth century along with Cleveland's paternal grandparents.⁶¹

Cleveland's family was large--he had "numerous" siblings--and Benjamin received little formal education.⁶² But like most children on the frontier, he did learn how to take care of himself at an early age. When he was still a child, some drunken rowdies broke into the cabin when his parents were out and began to destroy the family's meager possessions and knock holes in the walls. The twelve-year-old Benjamin seized his father's rifle and forced the intruders out at gunpoint.⁶³

If the drunkards found young Benjamin to be more than they could handle, they were not alone. As an adult, Cleveland was almost six feet in height and weighed 180 pounds when young, though his girth increased throughout his life. He possessed a "thunderous" voice and became known as a "stranger to fear."⁶⁴ He and his brothers soon earned notoriety for such pastimes as frequenting racetracks, drinking, and gambling. Benjamin in particular gained a reputation for being "dexterous" at cards. If, in spite of his dexterity, Cleveland found himself losing a game, he would accuse his opponent of cheating, bowl him over, and "sweep the stakes and put them into his pocket." It was no wonder that the Cleveland boys were thought to be "very immoral."⁶⁵

In spite of his questionable reputation, Cleveland surprised the local wags by persuading Mary Graves--the

daughter of William Graves, a successful local planter--to marry him. His pursuit of pleasure had left him little money, and since Cleveland owned no property, he and his wife moved in with his father-in-law.

Although tradition has it that Mary eventually managed to curb Cleveland's participation in questionable pastimes, her early efforts met with little success.⁶⁶ An example of one of Mary's early failures occurred when her prodding and the realization of his new responsibilities prompted Cleveland to go into a partnership with neighbor Joseph Martin to raise wheat along the Pig River in 1767. In spite of their lackluster efforts, the fields produced "something of a crop." As was customary, they invited some friends to help them get the crop in. They also invited a fiddler and brought along a large store of liquor to lighten the work. Their attempt at a harvest degenerated into a wild debauch and the wheat remained untouched in the fields.⁶⁷

Fortunately for Cleveland, his father-in-law's work ethic and business sense exceeded his own. Graves's success was not without its costs, for as his wealth and pool of slave laborers grew, his land began to give out under the strain of annual tobacco production. Cleveland urged his father-in-law to move to the west and get fresh land and Graves finally agreed. In 1769, Cleveland, Graves, and Cleveland's brother Robert moved to Rowan County, North Carolina and settled along the Roaring River tributary of the Yadkin.⁶⁸ There, among the

fertile coves that were nestled among the eastern slopes of the Blue Ridge, Cleveland finally began to assert himself as a provider as he and Graves's slaves worked to establish a new farm and raise livestock.

In addition to his work on the farm, Cleveland almost immediately began to hunt in the wilderness around his new home. As life on the farm grew more settled, he spent an increasing amount of time in the forests. Cleveland proved to be an accomplished woodsman and amassed a large sum of money, with little apparent effort, from the sale of pelts and furs in Salem and Salisbury.⁶⁹ Besides netting him a handsome income, his hunting expeditions allowed him to familiarize himself with the Yadkin area and to select some choice property for himself. Sometime between 1769 and 1772, Cleveland acquired a tract of at least 1,300 acres in western Surry County situated along a great, yawning bend in the Yadkin. The farm's location prompted nearby settlers to give it the nickname "Roundabout," a sobriquet that Cleveland soon came to share because of his expanding waistline.⁷⁰

The acquisition of a farm of his own did not suffice to keep the restless Cleveland at home. He continued to hunt extensively, and in 1772, drawn by rumors of rich game, he and four companions set out over the Cumberland Gap to try their luck in Kentucky. Perhaps because they realized that they were deep in Cherokee territory--land on which, according to the Proclamation of 1763, they were forbidden--Cleveland and

his partners worked quickly. Their fears of trouble with the Cherokees were allayed after several Cherokee hunting parties stopped at their camp and seemed unbothered by the white men's presence.

It was thus a rude shock when, on the morning of their planned departure, a large band of heavily armed warriors appeared at their camp. The alarm of Cleveland and his party grew when their usual gifts of food failed to placate their hosts. In the midst of this tense atmosphere, the leader of the Indians squatted down, made a mark in the dust with his finger and pointed back toward the Cumberland Gap and the white settlements. He then made another mark on the ground and followed it with a gesture that encompassed their present location and the mountains around them, indicating Cherokee lands. Then, having let Cleveland and his friends do their hunting for them, the Cherokees took every one of the intruders' hard earned pelts, along with their horses, guns, and "even their hats and shoes."⁷¹ In answer to the white men's protests, the laughing Indians gave them a worn-out shotgun with enough powder for two shots and signaled for them to be off. Furious and humiliated, Cleveland and his companions gingerly began their journey back to the Yadkin. Though they had to endure the added humiliation of being forced to eat their hunting dog on the way, Cleveland and his footsore companions made the trek of over two hundred miles back to Roundabout in safety, if not comfort.⁷² W h e n

tidings of the clash between colonists and British forces in Massachusetts reached the Yadkin in 1775, Cleveland immediately voiced his support for the insurgents. As North Carolina began to organize regiments for the conflict with Britain, Cleveland received a commission as an ensign in the regiment of Robert Howe.⁷³ He refused the appointment and instead raised a militia company which he marched westward over the mountains to the Sycamore Shoals area to scout the frontier and guard against Indian attacks. They saw little action and in the fall Cleveland disbanded his company so that the men could return to their homes and harvest their crops. When McDonald called for backcountry loyalists to rally at Cross Creek in early February 1776, Cleveland once again organized a company and marched quickly to join Caswell's forces in their attempt to block tory access to Wilmington and the coast. According to tradition, he and his company arrived in the midst of the battle at Moore's Creek Bridge and then aided in the pursuit of the shattered tory force after the battle.⁷⁴

Although the defeat at Moore's Creek Bridge may have dashed the grand plans of loyalists for cooperative operations with British regulars, small bands of tories soon took up the struggle. Throughout the backcountry, isolated whig farms were struck by roving bands of loyalists. The attacks were accompanied by much killing and looting, for the loyalists, remembering the recent hounding they had been subjected to,

were eager to respond in kind. To help put down this threat to whig life and property, Cleveland and his company began to aggressively patrol the area around present-day Wake Forest, hunting down suspected tories and hanging several. So sudden and violent was Cleveland's response to any hint of tory activity that the cause of the king in one part of North Carolina never fully recovered. "I don't recollect," said one whig leader, "after Cleveland had done with them to have heard much more from those wretches during the war."⁷⁵

Just as whig leaders had begun to respond to the tory attacks, tensions with the Cherokees to the south and west began to increase alarmingly. Although they had at first been mystified by the quarreling of the white invaders among themselves, the avarice of the settlers made the choice of allies an easy one for the Cherokees: they promptly sided with the British. The young warriors, led by Dragging Canoe, were justifiably resentful of the illegal settlements over the 1763 boundary line--including the homesteads in the Holston and Watauga areas--and were especially eager to take up the hatchet. In the spring of 1776, a delegation of Iroquois, Shawnee, and Delaware leaders arrived at the towns of the Overhill Cherokees and made an alliance that they hoped would allow them to drive the white interlopers back all along the frontier.

The British Indian commissioner for the Southern District, John Stuart, was reluctant to lend royal endorsement

to the warriors' plans. He disapproved of the Indians' brutal form of warfare and feared that the warriors, once on the warpath, might roam over the boundary line and prey on loyal subjects.⁷⁶ Turning a deaf ear to the pleas and protests of the area's hard-pressed loyalists, Stuart used his influence to diplomatically isolate the Cherokees and convinced the Creeks and Choctaws--who between them had almost 9,000 warriors⁷⁷--to refrain from entering the war until they received word from him. . Stuart's intervention forced the Cherokees to fight the southern settlers on their own and may well have saved the backcountry settlements.⁷⁸

In July 1776, large bands of Cherokee raiders struck the backcountry settlements from Virginia to Georgia. The settlers, who had been forewarned by friendly Indians, packed what possessions they could and fled to the stockades. Though the attackers devastated isolated farms and killed stragglers who had delayed seeking refuge, they were unable to destroy any large settlements. But as the Indians withdrew, they left many farms and small settlements in smoking ruins.

The outraged settlers retaliated by organizing a force of over six thousand men and invading the Cherokee homeland in three massive columns. Cleveland remembered his earlier humiliation at Cherokee hands and needed no encouragement to enlist. He quickly gathered his Surry County men and joined the 2,500-man central column of Griffith Rutherford who marched against the Middle Cherokees. The outnumbered Indians

fell back grudgingly, skirmishing frequently but denying the larger force a chance to destroy them in a general engagement. The lot of their pursuers was not a pleasant one, as most of the militia, Cleveland and the other officers included, were "often destitute of provisions, without tents, [and] with but few blankets."⁷⁹ In spite of their logistical difficulties, all three columns drove deeply into the Cherokee homeland before withdrawing. The vengeful settlers razed the principal Cherokee towns, burned the Indians' corn fields, and wrecked whatever small villages they could find.

Upon its return, the army disbanded. Cleveland's company returned to the Yadkin, where he reorganized it and replenished its supplies. Cleveland then hurried his men back to the Watauga area in order to parry the anticipated Cherokee retaliatory raids.⁸⁰ They need not have bothered, for in May 1777, the Cherokees, their will to resist broken by the destruction of their towns and crops, sued for peace. The treaty ending the conflict was formalized at Long Island on the Holston river in July. In the agreement, the defeated Cherokees ceded to Virginia and North Carolina all claims to lands east of the Blue Ridge Mountains and North of the Nolichucky River.⁸¹

After participating in the effort to put down the first great loyalist threat and then helping to repulse and punish the Cherokees, the whigs of the western part of Surry County began to press for more political power in the state

legislature. In the fall of 1777, Cleveland journeyed to the legislature and lobbied for the creation of a new county in Surry County's western half. His efforts were successful, and when Wilkes County was officially recognized in March 1778, he received his reward in the form of an appointment to the county court and a commission as colonel in the county militia.⁸² Cleveland's vigor in executing his duties, which in his eyes consisted chiefly of hunting down loyalists, made him popular with the whig population in Wilkes County and popularity led to more political rewards. In 1778, he won a seat in the lower house of the legislature and in 1779 Wilkes County's citizens sent Cleveland to the state senate.⁸³

Cleveland was by no means a great legislator, a fact that his whig constituents did not seem to greatly mind. His electoral victories were in effect a reward for his almost constant partisan warfare with the Yadkin's loyalists as a "most vigilant, active, and persevering partisan officer...being increasingly engaged in ferretting out, harassing and hanging the discontented and troublesome Tories."⁸⁴

Much of the violence was perpetrated by those who lacked any political motive and were motivated by greed or a desire to settle old scores. Others acted from deep beliefs in the rights of the colonists or notions of duty toward their king. The third, and largest, segment of the population was politically ambivalent and wished to halt the violence that

was an increasingly large part of their lives.⁸⁵ By quickly crushing any nascent loyalist movement growing within their reach, Cleveland and his associates instilled fear in the king's supporters. Cleveland's hanging of looters and thieves appealed to the even larger segment of the population that wanted order.

Cleveland's actions as a partisan could only be described as harsh. His men were notorious looters and pillagers, and he apparently made little effort to discipline them. A Moravian chronicler described them as "very wild" and noted the "reports of the bad behavior of the Liberty Men, especially those from Wilkes County."⁸⁶

Cleveland hated loyalists and routinely hanged them without trial as soon as they fell into his hands. The attitude of Cleveland and his men toward intransigent tories is perhaps best illustrated by his response to the pleas of a thirteen-year-old boy that he spare a wounded Loyalist from the noose. "Jimmie, my son," replied Cleveland, "he is a bad man; we must hang all such dangerous tories and get them out of their miseries."⁸⁷

At times, Cleveland's passions caused him to forgo even the formality of a hanging. He once became so enraged at prisoners James Cowles and John Browne that he drew his sword intending to personally dispatch them for their "violation of the laws of God and man." Unfortunately for Cleveland, his violent thrust struck a button on Cowles's coat, which snapped

the blade. Angry but undeterred, Cleveland simply had both men hanged.⁸⁸ On another occasion Cleveland captured two tories, hanged the first, and gave the second a painful choice: join his companion at the end of a rope or cut off his own ears, leave the area, and never return. The tory asked for a whetstone to sharpen Cleveland's proffered knife and ruefully chose the latter, painful option.⁸⁹

Local loyalists hated the leader of "Cleveland's Devils" and tried to kill him on more than one occasion. Raiders struck Roundabout when Cleveland was absent and left burning ruins, scattered stock, and the body of Cleveland's overseer John Doss swinging from a rope as tokens of tory vengeance.⁹⁰ Loyalists spotted Cleveland's brother Larkin and, mistaking him for his brother, ambushed him and left him for dead. Friends found him lying in his blood in the midst of the road, barely alive.⁹¹ Such attacks only deepened Cleveland's hatred of loyalists and led him to step up his attacks against them.

While the king's backcountry subjects may have been obliged to keep their heads down, the British army was not. Fresh from his victory over Gates's army at Camden, Cornwallis marched toward North Carolina. As he moved north, Cornwallis detached a force composed mostly of South Carolina tories under Major Patrick Ferguson and ordered it west to recruit loyalists and to suppress the whigs who were raiding British outposts and ambushing patrols. Ferguson began his march on September 1, 1780 with a force of around 1,000 men. He moved

quickly westward, burning whig farms and scattering any partisans he encountered. To his chagrin, however, he discovered that the victories of British arms did little to bring region's cowed loyalists to their sovereign's flag. Volunteers were scarce. By September 7, Ferguson had reached Gilbert Town at the base of the Blue Ridge, where he made a fateful decision. Hoping to intimidate the whigs and embolden the king's brow-beaten friends, the frustrated Ferguson sent a message over the mountains to the Watauga settlers threatening that "if they did not desist from their opposition to the British arms, he would march his army over the mountains, hang their leaders, and lay their country waste with fire and sword."⁹² He resumed his drive westward into the edge of the Blue Ridge, though more slowly, as if he wanted to gauge the effect of his threat.

That threat, far from intimidating the whigs into paralysis, had the same effect as giving a vigorous shake to a hornet's nest. When Ferguson's letter arrived in the settlements, it produced a flurry of messages among the region's whig leaders. With Ferguson's force poised threateningly only two days' march from their hearths, Isaac Shelby, John Sevier, Charles McDowell, and William Campbell gathered as many men as they could and announced a general rendezvous at Sycamore Shoals.⁹³ There, on September 25, the combination of their forces with those who had reached the shoals on their own brought the total number of men present to

over 1,000.

The next day, Presbyterian minister Samuel Doak mounted a stump and delivered a lengthy prayer on behalf of the assembled army. Doak reminded the Lord of the iniquitous behavior of their enemies and enjoined his aid in the coming battle. He compared the looming struggle against Ferguson's army to the biblical contest between Gideon's three hundred Israelites and the hordes of Midianite invaders. Doak quoted Gideon:

When I blow with a trumpet, I and all that are with me, then blow yet the trumpets also on every side of all the camp and say, 'The sword of the Lord and Gideon.'

As the people responded with a loud "Amen," Doak repeated Gideon's command, then, still more loudly, he cried, "Let that be your battle cry: The sword of the Lord and of Gideon." "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon" rolled back from the assembly in response.⁹⁴ The men, many of whom had brought their families, now said their goodbyes and mounted their horses. The thousand-man force turned east toward the mountains, and, confident that God was on their side, started through the passes to destroy Ferguson's army.

Ferguson received word of their coming from two whig deserters and brought his westward movement to an abrupt halt. He reversed direction and fell back toward Gilbert Town. As he retreated, Ferguson tried to turn the whig advance into a recruiting ploy. In a last attempt at rousing the region's lethargic loyalists, Ferguson issued another, less bombastic

proclamation, warning the reluctant tories that "the Back Water men have crossed the mountains" and then added that "if you wish or deserve to live, and to bear the name of men to grasp your arms in a moment and run to camp."⁹⁵

Cleveland, too, was aware that "the Backwater Men have crossed the mountains" and was heading for Ferguson's camp as quickly as he could. The timing of Ferguson's threat and the whig response had found Cleveland with about 350 men from Surry and Wilkes Counties already in hand. His force had originally been raised for the purpose of yet another tory-hunting expedition. The enemy had heard of Cleveland's approach and scattered. Left thus with no target, Cleveland was on the verge of disbanding his men and sending them home when word of Ferguson's threat and the response of the Watauga settlers reached him. He hurried his men south, skirting the eastern slope of the Blue Ridge, while the other pursuers were still toiling over the passes, and managed to reach Quaker Meadows on the Catawba River by October 1. There his men rendezvoused with the larger whig force from Sycamore Shoals.

Meanwhile, Ferguson was continuing to retreat toward Cornwallis and the British main body. He continued south as far as Gilbert Town and then swung to the east. Moving with no great haste, Ferguson finally brought his retrograde movement to a halt and pitched camp on King's Mountain.

King's Mountain was an imposing sight, rising some 800 feet above the surrounding terrain with thickly wooded sides.

The mountain's top formed a relatively clear plateau that was seventy yards wide at its southwest end and broadened to 200 yards at its northeast corner. There, Ferguson made his main camp.⁹⁶ The plateau made for a comfortable campsite, but its lack of cover was in stark contrast with the covered approaches the mountain's wooded flanks offered any attacking force.

Ferguson's lethargic withdrawal to so poor a defensive position may at first seem puzzling. King's Mountain was not a particularly good place to fight the kind of battle that Ferguson planned. Tactically speaking, the taller peaks to the west offered better ground for defense than King's Mountain's relatively gentle slopes. On the other hand, Ferguson, as the first official British presence in the region for years, could not very well run pell mell for the protection of the British main body at the first gleam of a whig rifle barrel. Perhaps he reasoned that a slow retreat and then a firm stand in the face of roughly equal numbers would stiffen the spines of the region's hesistant tories.

Another reason for his withdrawal is revealed in his correspondence with Cornwallis. Having drawn the whigs over the mountains, Ferguson hoped to combine with reinforcements and destroy them. Upon arriving at King's Mountain, he dashed off a dispatch asking Cornwallis for reinforcements. The message contained a plea for "Three or four hundred good soldiers, part dragoons," that Ferguson felt "would finish the

business," but it was intercepted and never reached the British commander.⁹⁷

Unaware of Ferguson's plans for their destruction, the united whig force came after him, but their pursuit was slowed. The men were traveling light--"each had a blanket, a cup, a wallet of provisions (parched corn meal mostly, mixed with maple syrup or sugar)"--but the race to the rendezvous at Sycamore Shoals and the rapid march over the mountains had worn out many of the horses.⁹⁸ In an effort to conserve the strength of both man and beast, the pace of the pursuit was reduced. The addition of Cleveland's men had swelled the pursuers' ranks to almost 1,500 men, but had also further complicated the question of who was to command the expedition. There were six colonels present but no generals, and the ranking officers met on October 4 to decide who was to be in overall command. They decided to send a message to General Gates who, even in the flotsam and jetsam after Camden, was still the titular head of the Southern Department, informing him of their need for a commander. In the meantime, they chose Colonel William Campbell, a planter from the Holston, to act as executive officer of the day until Gates replied.

Campbell had been born in 1745 in Augusta County, Virginia. His father, Charles Campbell, was a prosperous farmer and had been able to give young William what by frontier standards was an extensive education.⁹⁹ The elder Campbell turned to drink in the 1760s and died in 1767,

leaving William, at age twenty-two, in charge of the household.

Campbell promptly packed up his mother and four sisters and moved to the Abingdon, Virginia, area on the north fork of the Holston River and acquired some land. By 1773, Campbell had enough influence to be appointed a justice of Fincastle County, which embraced much of southwestern Virginia and all of Kentucky. The following year he accepted a commission as captain in the county militia. This appointment, which was the beginning of Campbell's official military career, coincided with the beginning of Lord Dunmore's War with the Shawnees.

The fighting was touched off by Virginia governor Dunmore's attempts to claim lands reserved for the Shawnees by the Fort Stanwix Treaty of 1768. Dunmore's land grab really had more to do with blocking Pennsylvania's claims to the same territory than the quarrels Dunmore fabricated with the region's Indians. He hoped that by seizing the land from its unoffending inhabitants before Pennsylvania beat him to it, he could cement Virginia's claim to the territory.

Two invading columns, one commanded by Dunmore, the other by Colonel Andrew Lewis, advanced toward the Ohio River in September 1774 with the intention of rendezvousing at Point Pleasant and then driving together into the Shawnee heartland. Lewis arrived at Point Pleasant only to discover that Dunmore had unilaterally changed the rendezvous point and that his

force would have to cross the Ohio unsupported. While the chagrined Lewis was still contemplating this unpleasant turn of affairs, the Shawnees struck. On October 10, 700 Shawnee warriors under the leadership of Cornstalk attacked Lewis's fortified camp at Point Pleasant and were repulsed only after a bloody battle that cost Lewis almost a third of his command.¹⁰⁰

Campbell had raised a company from the Abingdon area that was placed under the command of a colonel named Christian. They did not arrive in time to march with Lewis's column and were forced to hurry after him. After a grueling march, they arrived during the waning moments of the battle. Although too late to aid in the battle, they did help pursue the retreating Indians across the Ohio.¹⁰¹

With Lewis's victory and the Indians' retreat, Dunmore considered his aims achieved and wanted to halt the campaign. Before he could stop the fighting, he first had to restrain the militia--he was forced to personally stop Lewis at sword point--who were eager to press on after the defeated Indians. Cornstalk, on the other hand, still thought the interlopers could be beaten and wanted another crack at them. His people, however, had had enough and were anxious to sue for peace. Campbell and his footsore company were present at the Sciota River on October 26, 1774, when Dunmore and Cornstalk agreed to a truce that pleased no one but the Virginia governor.¹⁰²

The growing tensions between Britain and the colonies

were felt in the backcountry as well as along the coast. No sooner had Campbell arrived home in Abingdon than whig leaders in the Holston area drafted a message of solidarity for the Continental Congress. The message, which Campbell endorsed, was dated January 20, 1775, and declared to the Congress that if

our enemies attempt to dragoon us out of those inestimable privileges which we are entitled to as subjects...we declare that we are deliberately and resolutely determined never to surrender them to any power upon earth but at the expense of our lives.¹⁰³

Campbell immediately reformed his company and led it to Williamsburg, where it was placed in the First Virginia Regiment under the command of Patrick Henry. Campbell apparently got along well with Henry and even better with Henry's sister Elizabeth, whom he married in 1776.¹⁰⁴

Henry longed for glory on the battlefield to match his oratorical triumphs in the House of Burgesses and was eager to see action. Wiser heads, however, realized that Henry's abilities as a soldier were limited and kept the First Virginia well away from the enemy until Henry resigned in disgust. The regiment was then placed under the command of General Andrew Lewis and was part of the force that drove Dunmore from his toehold on Gwynn's Island to the safety of a British frigate in July 1776.¹⁰⁵

When word of the looming troubles with the Cherokees reached the tidewater, Campbell tried in vain to wring permission from his superiors to return to the Holston to help

defend his mother and sisters. Despite his best efforts to obtain a release, he was not able to resign until October. So while the Cherokee tide crested in the mountains, then receded, a worried Campbell languished near the coast.¹⁰⁶ He finally reached Abingdon but was too late to take part in the retaliatory campaign against the Cherokees.

In January 1777, three months after Campbell's return to Abingdon, Fincastle County was divided and Washington County was created as a result. Campbell accepted appointment as a justice in the new county's court as well as promotion to the rank of lieutenant colonel in the Washington County militia. He also undertook the responsibility of supervising the drawing of the new boundary line with the Cherokees. He was thus once again called away from his farm and family to supervise the surveying work for the better part of the year.¹⁰⁷

From 1778 until 1780, Campbell gained a respite from his travels since his duties did not call him to travel far from home. He was not idle during this time but gained a reputation as a "warm and most zealous Whig" who soon became "especially odious" to the area's loyalists.¹⁰⁸ While continuing to serve on the county court, he was very active as an officer in the militia. Campbell swept Washington county from one end to the other and much like Cleveland, sought to quickly quash any tory bands before they had a chance to grow.

But, in contrast to Cleveland, Campbell disciplined his

men and did not allow them to indiscriminately loot civilians. While among the pacifistic Moravians of Salem, Campbell and his men "behaved in an orderly manner" and paid fair prices for any supplies they took. Campbell not only kept a tight rein on his own men but gave an "emphatic warning" to a party of Wilkes County men to leave the Moravians in peace. He was, recorded a grateful Moravian chronicler, "solicitous that no harm should befall us."¹⁰⁹ Despite his zeal, Campbell does not seem to have been inordinately harsh in his position as judge, though he did dispense summary justice when he felt it necessary. In May 1779, he ordered a loyalist named Francis Hopkins to pay a heavy fine and sentenced him to six months in jail. Since the new county's prison was still under construction, Hopkins was released on his own recognizance with the understanding that he would report when it was finished. Hopkins emphasized the need for a jail by predictably failing to report. He was immediately suspected when placards began to appear around Campbell's property threatening Campbell and his family.

While returning home from church one Sunday, Campbell spotted a rider in the distance whom he believed to be Hopkins. He rode briskly toward the figure, who immediately wheeled his mount and fled. It was indeed Hopkins, and when he reached the Holston, he jumped his horse off a fifteen-foot embankment into the water. Campbell, who by that time was hard on his heels, followed him in. The two struggled

desperately in the water for some time before a group of Campbell's friends arrived. Together they dragged the gasping fugitive to the bank and immediately hanged him from one of the trees along the river.¹¹⁰

News of the pursuit and Hopkins' summary execution served notice that Campbell was not a man to be trifled with. His reputation for zeal in suppressing Tories soon spread throughout the state. Some of his activities prompted the Virginia legislature to pass a special act in October 1779 absolving Campbell and several others of responsibility for deeds they committed that, although justified by circumstances, were not "strictly warranted by law."¹¹¹

The year 1780, the most important in Campbell's life, began with his promotion to colonel in April. After serving briefly in the lower house of the legislature in Williamsburg, he asked for and received permission to join an expedition against the Chickamauga Indians in June.¹¹²

The Chickamaugas were stalwart Cherokees who had refused to accept the Long Island treaty of 1777. Rather than submit, they had moved south under the leadership of Dragging Canoe and settled around Chickamauga Creek off the Tennessee River. Acting in conjunction with militia units from the Carolinas, Campbell's Virginia contingent succeeded in burning eleven Chickamauga towns, though the elusive Indians once again refused to be drawn into a major battle. The elusive Dragging Canoe and his warriors, now burning with more hatred for the

whites than ever, slipped away to fight another day.¹¹³

Like Cleveland, Campbell frequently attacked and scattered newly forming concentrations of loyalists. One of his targets was a force allegedly gathering at Round Meadows. In a July 12 letter, he described his search for the tories, that, according to Campbell's informants, numbered some 200 men. As Campbell's men rode through the neighboring settlements, they found no one but women, children, leading Campbell to conclude that the force ahead of him was large and that it was mostly composed of men from these communities. Campbell's scouts located the enemy camp, but as the whigs advanced the loyalists scattered and vanished in a thick mountain fog. A chagrined Campbell wrote that he "had not the fortune to find any but one of them, who was immediately shot."¹¹⁴ Despite his failure to capture or kill more of the enemy, Campbell had succeeded in breaking them up and preventing them from taking any concerted action. When he returned home, he was once again called away, this time to command a regiment of Virginia continentals. The bone-weary Campbell respectfully declined, citing "the domestic affairs calling for my attention at this time, as I have entirely neglected them."¹¹⁵

One of the domestic affairs with which Campbell busied himself was gathering a force to meet Cornwallis' advance to the Virginia border. The loss of Charleston coupled with Gates's defeat at Camden had so shocked and demoralized the

area's whigs that Campbell began planning what he could do to help defend Virginia while Cornwallis was still in South Carolina. When Isaac Shelby sent word of Ferguson's threats and asked for assistance, Campbell at first declined, replying that he intended to await Cornwallis's advance in Virginia. Shelby was "much disappointed" and wrote Campbell again, citing "additional reasons for him to join us."¹¹⁶

Shelby may have reminded Campbell that without his Washington County men, there would not be enough troops both to deal with Ferguson and to protect the settlements from Dragging Canoe's warriors, who were doubtless bent on vengeance for their ruined crops and villages. And if Ferguson's force were eliminated, the possibility existed that Cornwallis might be forced to delay, or even cancel his invasion of Virginia.¹¹⁷ Whatever Shelby's arguments were, Campbell saw the wisdom in them and hurried to the rendezvous at Sycamore Shoals. He arrived on September 25 with 400 men, boosting the total strength of the whig force to over 1,000.

With the Reverend Doak's martial prayer still ringing in their ears, the army coiled southeast through Gillespie Gap and emerged onto the piedmont. After meeting and absorbing the hard-marching men under Cleveland at the forks of the Catawba, the army, now swelled to almost 1,500, picked up Ferguson's trail and swung south to Gilbert Town. There on October 4, Campbell was chosen to command the combined force. After a brief rest the army went into motion again, now

angling southeast toward Hannah's Cowpens.

As Campbell and the other leaders well knew, time was becoming increasingly important. As the days of the chase mounted, so did the chance that the retreating Ferguson would be reinforced--perhaps by the hated and feared British cavalry officer Banastre Tarleton and his Legion--and the pursuers would become the pursued. On October 6, after a brief pause to rest and feast on "liberated" tory cattle and corn, Campbell ordered both those on foot and those whose mounts had played out to remain behind at the Cowpens and follow along as best they could when they had recovered their strength.¹¹⁸

The approximately 900 remaining men pushed on throughout the night. Nature seemed to side with the Ferguson, for no sooner had the streamlined army left the Cowpens than the heavens opened and delivered a soaking downpour that forced the pursuers to remove their shirts and wrap them around their rifles to keep the flints dry.¹¹⁹ By the morning of October 7, Campbell decided to call a rest, for it was evident that the cold, barebacked men and tired horses could not keep going much longer. When informed of Campbell's decision, Isaac Shelby swore that though the rest of the army halt, he himself would "not stop until night, if I follow Ferguson into Cornwallis' lines."¹²⁰ Their resolve stiffened by Shelby's example, the exhausted men pressed on.

By noon of the 7th, the rain halted and the sun broke up the threatening clouds. As the sun's rays warmed the whigs'

cold and stiff bodies, their scouts returned with the welcome news that Ferguson was camped on King's Mountain, only eight miles ahead. Reinvigorated by the knowledge that their exhausting ordeal was almost over, the army surged forward. By mid-afternoon, they reached the mountain.

The whigs dismounted and left their horses under the care of a small force. While the men secured their loose equipment and reprimed their rifles for battle, Campbell quickly conferred with the other officers and divided the force into six roughly equal regiments, each under the command of one of the army's colonels. The regiments quietly surrounded the mountain--here they were aided by the rain-sodden ground that dampened the sound of their movement--and cautiously began to pick their way up its steep sides on foot.

As the whigs began their ascent, Ferguson's adjutant Alexander Chesney had just returned from an inspection of the sentries along the mountain's slopes. As he dismounted and reported to Ferguson that "all was quiet and the pickets on the alert," the quiet afternoon air was broken by the crash of musketry.¹²¹ The tories had finally spotted the mass of whigs as they moved through the trees. The startled sentries cried out an alarm, fired a scattered volley at their oncoming foes, and fled for the crest.

With the silence shattered and all hope of stealth gone, Campbell waved his coat over his head and led his division up the slope, yelling to his men to "shout like hell and fight

like devils."¹²² In response to the yells from Campbell's regiment, whig war whoops and cries of "Buford!" arose on all sides of Ferguson's suddenly beleaguered force.¹²³

If Ferguson considered a retreat, he quickly abandoned the idea as impractical. A withdrawal would mean the abandonment of the camp and its valuable supplies. The loyalists had no choice but to stand and fight. The rattle of drums from the crest answered the war cries of the oncoming whigs. Chesney "immediately paraded the men and posted the officers." Rising above the din of the drums and the whigs' battle cries was the shrill, piercing call of Ferguson's personal signal--a silver whistle.

Ferguson quickly deployed his men around the crest of the mountain, placing almost his entire strength along the tree line that bordered the plateau. The only exception was 100 green-coated provincials from New York that he planned to use as a mobile reserve. Because of a wound in his right hand, Ferguson gripped his saber in his left and brandished it as he galloped along the line, blowing on his whistle to encourage his men.

As the whigs worked their way up the mountain, the defenders commenced a heavy fire. It was then that the shortcomings of King's Mountain as a place for defense began to manifest themselves. Although Ferguson's position seemed strong, the mountain's slopes actually worked against the loyalists by causing many of them to aim high and overshoot

their targets. "The shot of the enemy," recalled whig James Collins, "soon began to pass over us like hail. Their great elevation above us had proved their ruin; they overshot us altogether."¹²⁴ The mountain's tree-covered slopes also bedeviled the tories' efforts to halt the whig advance by offering the attackers shelter from the repeated volleys fired by the frustrated defenders. Whig Thomas Young "stood behind one tree and fired until the bark was nearly all knocked off and my eyes pretty well filled with it."¹²⁵ Chesney later recalled with regret that the mountain's trees "sheltered the Americans and enabled them to fight in their favorite manner....They were able to advance in...perfect safety to the crest of the hill and opened an irregular but destructive fire from behind trees and other cover."¹²⁶

Ferguson had trained his force to fight in the accepted British manner. British military doctrine was based first on disciplined, massed volley-fire from troops deployed in a line of battle. That the fire be accurate was not greatly important--the word "aim" did not appear in the British manual of arms and the venerable Brown Bess musket lacked a rear sight.¹²⁷ When the crashing volleys had thoroughly shaken the enemy, the British infantry charged home with the bayonet, the real arbiter of the outcome. Most officers agreed with Sir John Burgoyne, who emphasized the importance of creating "in the men's minds a reliance on the bayonet. Men of half their bodily strength and even cowards may be their match in

firing; but the onset of bayonets in the hands of the valiant is irresistible."¹²⁸ Their ranks thinned and their morale shattered, the enemy could be expected to break and flee the field. At King's Mountain, however, the mountain's sloping sides and the natural cover they afforded the attackers combined to thwart both the musketry and bayonets of the loyalists.

The whigs, fighting in "Indian manner," sprinted from tree to tree and almost gained the crest. As they drew closer, their fire grew more galling. Their musketry having failed them, Ferguson's men fixed bayonets--including some wooden-handled "plug" bayonets that were mounted in the musket barrel itself--and hurled themselves down to force the whigs back by hand. The frontiersmen, who had no bayonets and were in a loose formation with little weight, could not stand before the tory counterattacks. The whig response to each loyalist charge was a hasty retreat down the slopes.

The force of each charge gradually dissipated as the loyalist line, hindered by trees and undergrowth, began to lose its cohesion and unravel. Ferguson's whistle sounded repeatedly above the din, and each time they heard it, the charging tories would scramble back to the mountain's crest. As they did so, Campbell and the other whig leaders rallied their men, who then subjected the loyalists to a withering fire as they retired to the tree line along the plateau. The whigs then resumed their advance up the mountain, sometimes

almost on the heels of the defenders.

As whig pressure on the mountain's narrow southwestern end increased, the tory line there began to buckle dangerously. Ferguson rushed reinforcements from his reserve to strengthen his collapsing flank, but the whigs were by now so near the crest that the green-jacketed provincials were decimated while traversing the mountain's crest. Soon, the pressure became too great and the sagging tory line on the mountain's southwestern end collapsed completely. The fleeing defenders were followed within moments by the whooping men of Shelby, Campbell and John Sevier, who surged onto the mountain top and poured a devastating fire into the backs of the other defenders. They then began to push the hard-pressed loyalists back toward their camp on the mountain's northeast corner.

With his entire perimeter on the verge of disintegration, Ferguson saw that his only hope of avoiding an ignominious surrender was to break out. He ordered his men with horses to mount for an escape. A few tried, but the rest refused for "as quick as they were mounted they were taken [shot] down."¹²⁹ Ferguson managed to gather three or four men with horses and together they made a dash down the mountain's southeastern slope. Forsaking any attempt at a stealthy exit, Ferguson spurred off the plateau waving his sabre and blowing his whistle. He was--not surprisingly--recognized almost immediately, and cries of "There's Ferguson, shoot him!" arose on all sides. Flourishing his sword and still blowing on his

whistle, Ferguson went down in a crash of rifle fire after being hit at least eight times. With their commander's fall, the failing spirits of his men collapsed completely and white flags began to appear on halberds and muskets in the tory ranks.¹³⁰

Though the tories gradually ceased firing, the confusion of the battle and the hatred engendered in the past months' bitter warfare caused many whigs to keep firing into the milling tories. Cries for mercy were answered by shouts of "Tarleton's Quarter" and "Buford" and were punctuated by rifle shots from enraged whigs. As Isaac Shelby put it:

It was some time before a complete cessation of firing on our part could be effected. Our men, who had been scattered in the battle, were continually coming up [over the crest] and continued to fire without comprehending in the heat of the moment what had happened; and some who had heard that at Buford's defeat the British had refused quarter to many who asked it, were willing to follow that bad example.¹³¹

The horrified Campbell rushed along the front ranks of his men, knocking down rifles and crying, "Cease firing--for God's sake, cease firing!" Some of the tories decided that to die fighting would be preferable to being shot like fish in a barrel and picked up their arms to renew the struggle but were dissuaded by Isaac Shelby, who, thundering up on horseback almost into the ranks of the frightened loyalists, bellowed, "Damn you, if you want quarters, throw down your arms!"¹³² Shelby's intervention and Campbell's efforts to restrain his men caused the firing to die away. Soon the only sounds on

the mountain were the clatter of tory muskets falling to earth mingled with the moans of the wounded.

As the weary but exultant victors began to round up their prisoners, a small loyalist foraging party that had been observing the action from a distance was sighted at the mountain's base. Someone among the foragers or the body of prisoners opened fire on the celebrating whigs. Campbell feared that the foragers were the vanguard of a relief force from Cornwallis and ordered his men to open fire into the huddled mass of disarmed loyalists. The still-smoldering whigs willingly complied. By the time that he realized his mistake and managed once again to halt the shooting, more than one hundred loyalists had fallen. Deeply ashamed of his misjudgment, Campbell later confided to Isaac Shelby that "I can not account for my conduct in the latter part of the action."¹³³

Campbell soon found himself as busy after the fight as he had been during it. The dead were piled into hastily dug graves or covered with dead wood and rocks.¹³⁴ The wounded also had to be cared for, and some provision had to be made for the prisoners. The latter task was perhaps the most difficult. Scarcely had the firing died down for the last time when a group of South Carolina whigs spied among the prisoners some loyalists with whom they had a quarrel. They clamored for the lives of the prisoners as revenge for "Tory barbarity."¹³⁵ Campbell, by alternately cajoling and

threatening, managed to save the prisoners' lives, if not their personal belongings--"All our baggage taken, of course," complained Lieutenant Anthony Allaire in his diary.¹³⁶

Although he had won a great victory, Campbell feared to linger in the area lest the much-feared Tarleton descend upon his force while they were encumbered with prisoners. However great his concern, Campbell decided that the exhausted whigs could not march that day. Thus both victors and vanquished "passed the night on the spot...amidst the dead and the groans of the dying."¹³⁷ The whigs roused their prisoners early the following day and marched for the safety of the mountains as fast as their tired mounts and long train of captives allowed. As they toiled along, with many anxious looks over their shoulders for signs of pursuit, their mood darkened. Memories of real and imagined tory depredations began to turn in their minds, and they began to physically abuse, and in some cases kill, the prisoners. Campbell found himself doubling up and down the column in a vain effort to "restrain the disorderly manner of slaughtering and disturbing the prisoners." The infuriated Campbell threatened "such effectual punishment...as will put a stop to it."¹³⁸

Most of the whigs simply ignored Campbell's impotent threatenings, and the abuse of the prisoners continued unabated. In a desperate effort to halt the indiscriminate killing, Campbell convened a court martial at Gilbert Town to satiate the whigs' bloodthirst. Thirty-two loyalists were

tried and convicted of various crimes by what a tory observer called "an infamous mock jury."¹³⁹ Nine loyalist leaders were sentenced to be hanged. They met their deaths with defiant courage--"like Romans" according to tory lieutenant Allaire--and "with their latest breaths expressed their unutterable detestation of the Rebels... and extolled their King and British Government."¹⁴⁰ The hangings seemed to satisfy even the most bloodthirsty of the whigs, and the prisoners were molested little thereafter. Within a few days, the whig column was winding its way back over the mountain passes. As the end of the column entered the shelter of the hills, Campbell and the leaders could breathe easily: the danger of pursuit from Tarleton was gone.

As news of the whig victory spread, the backcountry was momentarily quiet as people heard and digested the news. "It seemed like a calm after a heavy storm," wrote sixteen-year-old James Collins, "and for a short time every man could visit his home, or his neighbor without being afraid."¹⁴¹

Epilogue

The military role of North Carolina's backcountry whigs after King's Mountain was comparatively minor. Some of their officers recrossed the mountains and fought with Greene, but never again did they campaign against the tories en masse as they had in 1780. After the defeat of the Cherokees and the victories over tory forces at Moore's Creek Bridge and King's Mountain, the major threats to whig authority in the North Carolina backcountry were eliminated. Yet the fighting in the backcountry continued. Whigs intent on solidifying their control were met by stubborn loyalists who refused to quit the struggle. Despite the tories' efforts, the initiative shifted irrevocably to the whigs. Years of fighting had simply worn North Carolina's tories down. They had suffered casualties and harassment, lost their property, and been hounded throughout the state. They had endured all this with scant help from the crown, a fact not lost on the region's neutral population. Although they enjoyed a number of small successes after King's Mountain, such as David Fanning's capture of Governor Burke, the region's tories lost whatever active support from North Carolina's large neutral population they had once enjoyed. By early 1781, tory fortunes had sunk so low that they never again posed a serious threat to whig authority.¹⁴²

The role of the whig gentry in defeating the tory threat in the backcountry was central. They organized the military

response both to Ferguson's raid and the numerous smaller tory raids that preceded it, and they provided effective leadership in the field. They also established and maintained local governmental institutions that created a modicum of order on the frontier, and offered the neutral population a viable alternative to government under the crown.

Although the whig gentry of the backcountry clearly won the military and political struggle to exert control over the region, their right to claim a moral victory is less certain. The citizens of North Carolina's backcountry had the misfortune to live through a conflict that was both a civil war and a guerilla war. Much of the fighting was sharp, brutish, and savage, leaving outsiders like Nathanael Greene appalled.¹⁴³ Both tories and whigs were guilty of atrocities, and, as is often the case in such conflicts, it is impossible to determine which side began the cycle of violence. The inability to affix initial fault, however, does not excuse the looting of property and murder of prisoners that frequently accompanied whig operations. If the backcountry gentry are to receive credit for their military victories, they must also receive censure for the manner in which many of their victories were won. The importance of the whig victory at King's Mountain went far beyond winning the struggle in the backcountry. The broader ramifications of Ferguson's annihilation were immediately apparent to Sir Henry Clinton in New York:

The instant I heard of Ferguson's defeat, I fore-saw most of the consequences of it....It so encouraged the spirit of rebellion in both Carolinas that it never could be afterwards humbled....[It] unhappily proved the first link in a chain of evils that followed each other in regular succession until they at last ended in the loss of America.¹⁴⁴

The eradication of his left wing at King's Mountain was a rude shock to Cornwallis. However, he still outnumbered Greene, who had only recently arrived to take command from Horatio Gates. Cornwallis's shock turned to glee when his already outnumbered foes violated conventional military wisdom by dividing their force into two wings, the second one under the command of General Daniel Morgan. His Lordship immediately ordered his formidable cavalry commander, Banastre Tarleton, to go after Morgan and "push him to the utmost."¹⁴⁵

Push him Tarleton did, and when he caught up with Morgan on January 17, 1781, at the same Cowpens at which Campbell's men had recently rested from their pursuit of Ferguson, he confidently ordered a frontal attack against Morgan's mixed force of militia and continental infantry. Morgan deployed his men with great skill and in his battle plan took care not to ask too much of the green militia. When the militia fired the three volleys that Morgan requested of them and withdrew, Tarleton believed that the Americans were retreating and ordered a general advance. His men surged forward headlong into the rock-solid ranks of the continentals. The militia re-formed behind the protective screen provided by the continentals' stand and, along with William Washington's

cavalry, fell on Tarleton's flanks. Almost the whole British force were killed or captured. Tarleton himself barely escaped with Washington's horsemen hard on his heels. King's Mountain had been bad enough, but the disaster at Cowpens prompted Cornwallis to confide to Lord Rawdon that "the late affair has almost broke my heart."¹⁴⁶

Badly in need of a victory to bolster sagging British fortunes, Cornwallis tried in vain to force a battle with Greene. Greene, however, refused to risk the existence of his army in a pitched battle and instead fought a brilliant campaign of maneuver. In desperation, Cornwallis burned his supply wagons in an effort to speed his march to corner his elusive foe. Having bled his army white in a fruitless pursuit, Cornwallis finally abandoned the chase in the Carolinas and moved to the Chesapeake to rest and refit his battered army. His immediate, and final, destination was a small Virginia port called Yorktown.

Benjamin Cleveland outlived all tory efforts to kill him. Not long after the war ended, he left the holdings at Old Roundabout for which he had fought so diligently and resettled in western South Carolina on the Tugalo River. He continued his career as a jurist and grew ever larger until at 450 pounds he was too fat to mount a horse. He died, fittingly, at the breakfast table in October 1806, in the sixty-ninth year of his life.¹⁴⁷

William Campbell was promoted to the rank of general and

served with Lafayette in Virginia. There he became ill and was taken to the home of his sister-in-law in Hanover County. On August 22, 1781, less than one year after he stood triumphantly on the crest of King's Mountain, William Campbell died at thirty-six.¹⁴⁸

1. H.A. Guerber, The Story of the Thirteen Colonies (New York, 1898), 312.
2. Theodore Roosevelt, The Winning of the West (New York, 1889), vol. I, 252; see also Lyman C. Draper, King's Mountain and Its Heroes: History of the Battle of King's Mountain, October 7th, 1780, and the Events Which Led to It (Cincinnati, 1881).
3. See Robert Leckie, George Washington's War: The Saga of the American Revolution (New York, 1992), 582-90; John Selby, The Road to Yorktown (New York, 1976), 174-76; Burke Davis, The Campaign That Won America: The Story of Yorktown (New York, 1970), 94-96; Robert Middlekauff, The Glorious Cause: The American Revolution, 1763-1789 (New York, 1982), 462-63. Barbara Tuchman, The First Salute: A View of the American Revolution (New York, 1988), 204-205.
4. Earl Cornwallis to Lord George Germain, in Walter Clark, ed., The State Records of North Carolina (Goldsboro, N. C., 1898), 80.
5. Hank Messink, King's Mountain: The Epic of the Blue Ridge "Over the Mountain Men" in the American Revolution (Boston, 1976), 80.
6. Ibid., 4.
7. Harry Roy Merrens, Colonial North Carolina in the Eighteenth Century: A Study in Historical Geography (Chapel Hill, 1964), 32-49.
8. Betty Linny Waugh, "The Upper Yadkin Valley in the American Revolution: Benjamin Cleveland, Symbol of Continuity" (unpub. Ph. D. diss. U. of New Mexico, 1971), 11.
9. Merrens, Colonial North Carolina, 66-67.
10. Ibid., 53-54.
11. Ibid., 53-55.
12. Waugh, "The Upper Yadkin," 13-14.
13. Merrens, Colonial North Carolina, 136-41.
14. Hugh T. Lefler and William S. Powell, Colonial North Carolina: A History (New York, 1973), 166.
15. Waugh, "The Upper Yadkin," 12.
16. Lefler, Colonial North Carolina, 110.

17. A North Carolina citizen had to meet a taxpaying qualification in order to vote in elections for the lower house and additionally possess at least a fifty-acre holding to vote for candidates for the upper house and the governor. Waugh, "The Upper Yadkin," 129.
18. Allen Johnson and Dumas Malone, eds., Dictionary of American Biography (New York, 1930), 6:33, 405; William S. Powell, ed., Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, 8: 143.
19. Waugh, "The Upper Yadkin", 24-25.
20. Interpretations on the precise motivations of the Regulators vary. For a sampling of these, see Marvin L. Michael Kay, "The North Carolina Regulation, 1766-1776: A Class Conflict" in Alfred F. Young, ed., The American Revolution: Explorations in the History of American Radicalism (DeKalb, Ill., 1976), 71-124; George R. Adams, "The North Carolina Regulators: A Note on Changing Interpretations" North Carolina Historical Review, XLIX, No. 4 (Oct., 1972), 345-52; James P. Whittenburg, "Planters, Merchants, and Lawyers: Social Change and the Origins of the North Carolina Regulation," William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd ser., XXXIV, (April 1977), 215-38.
21. Powell, North Carolina Dictionary of Biography, 7: 52-53.
22. Ibid., 43.
23. See Draper, King's Mountain, 378-479.
24. Waugh, "The Upper Yadkin," 43, and Draper, King's Mountain, 432.
25. Land Grant Files, filed by county and indexed alphabetically, North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh, North Carolina.
26. Another example of how the settlers viewed may be seen in their treatment of McDowell. Although McDowell held more property than Cleveland or Campbell, his reputation as a fighter was not as high. During the pursuit of Ferguson, McDowell was detached from the whig force to carry a dispatch to General Gates despite his being the ranking officer. See Messink, King's Mountain, pp. 107-11.
27. Land Grant Files, North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh, N. C.
28. Ibid.
29. See Merrens, Colonial North Carolina, 75-81, for a discussion of slavery in the North Carolina backcountry.
30. General Assembly Tax Lists, Wilkes County, 1782.
31. Ibid.

32. Waugh, "The Upper Yadkin," 126.
33. Ibid., 44, 117.
34. Ibid., 115.
35. Draper, King's Mountain, 434.
36. Ibid., 115.
37. Wilkes County Court Minute Book, 2-3.
38. Draper, King's Mountain, 435.
39. Wilkes County Court Minute Book, 27, 91, 52, 120.
40. Ibid., 13.
41. Ibid., 104.
42. Ibid., 17.
43. A. Roger Ekirch, "Whig Authority," in Ronald Hoffman, et al., eds., An Uncivil War: The Southern Backcountry during the American Revolution (Charlottesville, 1985), 108.
44. Ibid.
45. Adelaide L. Fries, ed., Records of the Moravians in North Carolina, 1780-1783 (Raleigh, 1930), vol. IV, 1910.
46. Ronald Hoffman, "The 'Disaffected' in the Revolutionary South," in Alfred F. Young, ed., The American Revolution: Explorations in the History of American Radicalism (DeKalb, Ill., 1976), 294-95.
47. Ekirch, "Whig Authority" in Hoffman, et al., eds., An Uncivil War, 112.
48. William L. Saunders, ed., The Colonial Records of North Carolina (New York, 1968), 476.
49. Ibid., 580-85.
50. Waugh, "The Upper Yadkin," 76.
51. North Carolina General Assembly Session Records, October-November, 1779; North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh, N. C.
52. Jeffrey J. Crow, "Liberty Men and Loyalists: Disorder and Disaffection in the North Carolina Backcountry," in Hoffman, et al., eds., An Uncivil War, 145.

53. See Draper, King's Mountain, 446-47.
54. Fries, Records of the Moravians, IV, 1645.
55. Albert H. Tillson, Jr., "The Militia and Popular Political Culture in the Upper Yadkin Valley of Virginia, 1740-1775," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, vol. 94, 1986, 285-306. See also Tillson, Gentry and Common Folk: Political Culture on a Virginia Frontier, 1740-1789 (Lexington, Ky, 1991).
56. Ekirch, "Whig Authority," in Hoffman, et al., eds., An Uncivil War, 128.
57. Anthony Allaire, "Diary of Lt. Anthony Allaire of Ferguson's Corps" reprinted in Draper's King's Mountain, 508.
58. Draper, King's Mountain, 200-201.
59. Burke, "The North Carolina Loyalists," 15.
60. Ibid., 16-22.
61. Johnson, Dictionary of American Biography, 4: 202.
62. Draper MSS, 5 DD 13, State Historical Society of Wisconsin.
63. Ibid.
64. Ibid.
65. Ibid.
66. Ibid.
67. Draper, King's Mountain, 428.
68. Draper MSS, 5 DD 13.
69. Ibid.
70. Draper MSS, 5 DD 9.
71. Draper, King's Mountain, 429.
72. Draper MSS, 5 DD 13.
73. Draper, King's Mountain, 432.
74. Ibid., 433.
75. Ibid.

76. John Richard Alden, The South in the Revolution, 1763-1789 (Baton Rouge, 1957), 270.
77. Jack M. Sosin, The Revolutionary Frontier, 1763-1783 (New York, 1967), 5.
78. Ibid., 90-91.
79. Draper, King's Mountain, 434.
80. Draper, King's Mountain, 433-35.
81. Alan Axelrod, Chronicle of the Indian Wars: From Colonial Times to Wounded Knee (New York, 1993), 119.
82. Draper, King's Mountain, 434-35.
83. Johnson, Dictionary of American Biography, 4: 202.
84. Draper MSS, 5 DD 13.
85. Ekirch, "Whig Authority," in Hoffman, et al., eds., An Uncivil War, 108-11.
86. Freis, Records of the Moravians, 4: 1780-83, 1644-45.
87. Draper, King's Mountain, 445.
88. Draper MSS, 5 DD 13.
89. Draper, King's Mountain, 446-47.
90. Ibid., 447.
91. Draper MSS, 5 DD 17.
92. Draper, King's Mountain, 169.
93. Pancake, This Destructive War, 117.
94. Messink, King's Mountain, 95-97.
95. Draper, King's Mountain, 204.
96. Pancake, This Destructive War, 118.
97. Draper, King's Mountain, 207-08.
98. Will T. Hale and Dixon L. Merritt, A History of Tennessee: The Leaders and Representative Men in Commerce, Development, and Commercial Activities (Chicago, 1913), 1: 110.

99. Draper, King's Mountain, 379.
100. Axelrod, Chronicles of the Indian Wars, 100.
101. Draper MSS, 10 DD 28.
102. Axelrod, Chronicle of the Indian Wars, 100.
103. Draper, King's Mountain, 381.
104. Dictionary of American Biography, 3: 465.
105. Draper, King's Mountain, 381.
106. Ibid., p. 383; Dictionary of American Biography, 3: 465.
107. Draper, King's Mountain, 384.
108. Draper MSS, 10 DD 43.
109. Fries, Records of the Moravians in North Carolina, 1562, 1684.
110. Draper MSS, 10 DD 43.
111. Draper, King's Mountain, 386.
112. Ibid., 387.
113. Sosin, Revolutionary Frontier, 125, 131.
114. Draper MSS, 8 DD 4.
115. Draper MSS, 8 DD 8.
116. Messick, King's Mountain, 91-93.
117. Ibid.; Draper, King's Mountain, 172.
118. Hale and Merritt, A History of Tennessee, 111.
119. Draper, King's Mountain, 228-29.
120. Ibid.
121. Alexander Chesney, "Memoirs," in Catherine S. Crary, ed., The Price of Loyalty: Tory Writings from the Revolutionary Era (New York, 1973), 282.
122. Draper, King's Mountain, 247.

123. "Buford" refers to Colonel Abraham Buford, the commander of a force of some 450 continental soldiers who were attacked and defeated at the Waxhaws in South Carolina by Banastre Tarleton and his British Legion. Some 120 men of the American force were killed and 150 wounded. The battle became known as the Waxhaws Massacre because of charges that Tarleton's men slaughtered defenseless Americans after they had laid down their arms. See Dan L. Morrill, Southern Campaigns of the American Revolution (Baltimore, 1993), 76-80.

124. Ibid., 109.

125. Milton Meltzer, The American Revolutionaries: A History in Their Own Words, 1750-1800 (New York, 1987), 149.

126. Chesney, "Memoirs" in Crary, ed., Price of Loyalty, 283.

127. Leckie, George Washington's War, 175.

128. Ibid.

129. Robert Campbell, "Battle of King's Mountain," reprinted in Draper, King's Mountain, 537-40.

130. For descriptions of the battle, see Draper, King's Mountain, 236-308; Messick, King's Mountain, 131-55; and Pancake, This Destructive War, 116-21.

131. Messink, King's Mountain, 146.

132. Draper, King's Mountain, 282-83.

133. Ibid., 566-67.

134. Leckie, The American Revolutionaries, 150.

135. Draper MSS, 8 DD 36.

136. Anthony Allaire, "Diary of Lieut. Anthony Allaire, of Ferguson's Corps: Memorandum of Occurrences during the Campaign of 1780," in Draper, King's Mountain, 510.

137. Chesney, "Memoirs" in Crary, Price of Loyalty, 283.

138. "General Order of Colonel Campbell, October 11, 1780," reprinted in Draper, King's Mountain, 531.

139. Anthony Allaire, "Diary of Lieut. Anthony Allaire," reprinted in Ibid., 510-11.

140. Ibid.; see also Draper, King's Mountain, 340.

141. Pancake, This Destructive War, 120.
142. William P. Burke, "The North Carolina Loyalists: Faulty Linchpin of a Failed Strategy" (unpub. MA Thesis, College of William and Mary, 1988), 79-82.
143. Hoffman, "The 'Disaffected,'" in Young, ed., The American Revolution, 294-95.
144. Waugh, "The Upper Yadkin," 112.
145. Messink, King's Mountain, 179.
146. Ibid., 182.
147. Draper, King's Mountain, 450-54.
148. Ibid., 396-99.

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