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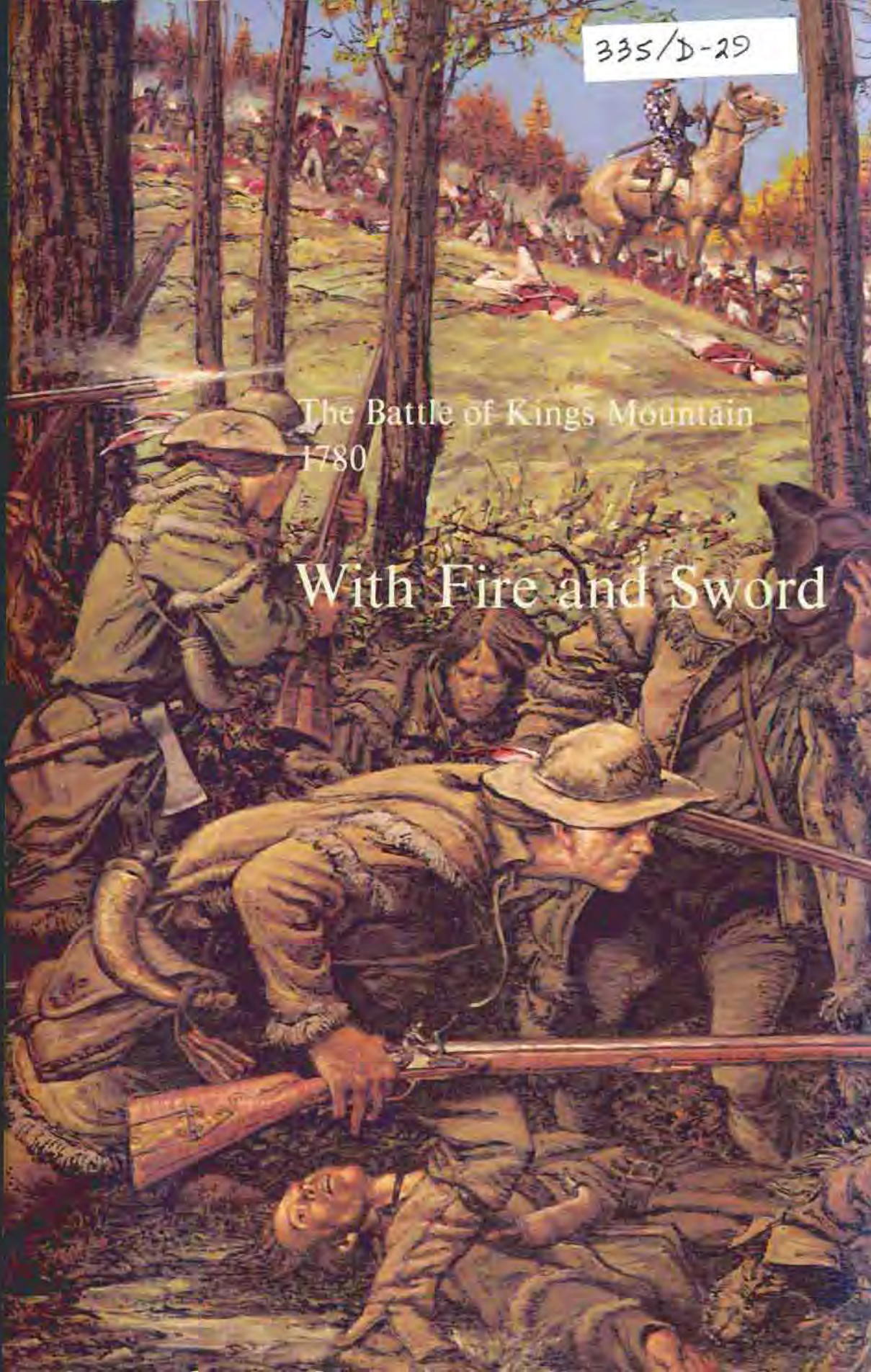

The Battle of Kings Mountain
1780

With Fire and Sword

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The Battle of Kings Mountain
1780

With Fire and Sword

by Wilma Dykeman

Illustrated by Louis S. Glanzman

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Wilma Dykeman is a novelist, historian, and chronicler of the southeastern mountain country. Among her books are *The French Broad* (in the Rivers of America Series), *The Border States,* and *Tennessee: A Bicentennial History,* all dealing with the land and the people for which the Battle of Kings Mountain was fought.

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October in the Southern highlands is a time of leaves turning hillsides into Persian carpets of color; of chilly moon-washed nights and hot drowsy noondays; of ripeness and harvest. Corn, the succulent maize adopted by pioneers from their Indian neighbors, is gathered in bin and shock. Tobacco cures to a golden pungence. Pumpkins splash the fields with color, and orchard bees suck the sweet juices of apples that have fallen to the ground. Seeds sowed in the spring past, roots planted in long-ago decades, bring forth their yield.

In just such an October in 1780, another, quite different but no less inevitable harvest was gathered in an unlikely corner of the Southern theater of the American Revolutionary War. The place was called Kings Mountain, although it wasn't royal (named for an early settler rather than the distant resident of Windsor Castle) and, indeed, at the negligible height of only a few hundred feet above the surrounding countryside, not even much of a mountain. But there, on an early October afternoon 5 years after the beginning of the Revolution, King George and his ministers' misunderstanding of the nature and needs of their faraway rebellious colonies, and the British command's misconceptions of the American character, ripened into a confrontation that marked a turning point in the war.

If events influenced by the patriot victory at Kings Mountain reached far beyond that brief time and place, so, too, did events initiating the struggle at Kings Mountain reach far back in time and place.

The battle of Kings Mountain did not begin when a brilliant, proud young British major named

Patrick Ferguson sent a message across the wilderness barriers of the Blue Ridge to sturdy frontier mountain folk, warning that if they did not leave off opposition to British authority he would "march his army over the mountains, hang their leaders, and lay their country waste with fire and sword."

Kings Mountain did not begin when a spontaneous army of hunters, farmers, and settlers, tough as hickory, weather-beaten by sun and wind and bitten by cold, dodged from tree to tree up that rocky ridge, taking deadly aim with long squirrel rifles at their loyalist enemies.

Kings Mountain did not begin with the first shrill staccato of Patrick Ferguson's silver whistle as he spurred his horse along the crest of the ridge, rallying his men to wage the battle bravely.

The engagement at Kings Mountain began far away–in London–in the fears of a harassed Secretary of State for the Colonies named Lord George Germain, who needed to believe that there were numerous and devoted loyalists in the American colonies and that they would eventually rise and turn the tide of victory for the king.

It began long before, in the raw winter mists and grinding poverty of Ulster villages where the people who would be known in America as the Scotch-Irish nurtured fierce ideas of personal independence and property; in similar communities of French Huguenots and German Palatines; and elsewhere in Europe wherever people abandoned hopelessness and pushed their way to America.

It began with symbols, such as a royal governor's extravagant palace that became the hated token of a burdensome taxation, and with protests, peaceful and otherwise, to regulate the power and privilege of those governors and secure some semblance of law and order for the neglected western frontiers.

Kings Mountain began in the hearts and minds of people–of a king and his makers of policy, of generals, and of "rabble" who had no policy but some very firm beliefs. For the British, the message of Kings Mountain was a bitter harvest of mistaken judgment and misplaced hopes. To the Americans, it was a revelation of possible ultimate victory.

After Kings Mountain no one would claim again that there was

an untapped reserve of loyalist sentiment out there in the hinterlands waiting to be gathered into the royal ranks.

After Kings Mountain no one would fail to take seriously the tenacious determination and practical democracy of the people of the western waters. They were pushing back frontiers, opening the dark and bloody ground of Kentucky, planting the seeds of permanence in the distant Cumberland settlements, reaching ever westward.

In America, in the rich interior expanses of meadow and canebrake, forest and wilderness, they had found land. Land was security such as landless people had never known; land was commitment, a sense of purpose, a sense of permanence; land was freedom such as the dispossessed had never experienced: the freedom to change, to grow, to discover alternatives and make one's own choices. Their land and their freedom had been restricted and burdened and threatened long enough by distant authority. At Kings Mountain they were ready to settle the matter once and for all.

It is necessary to remember that at the battle of Kings Mountain every participant but one was an American. Only Maj. Patrick Ferguson of His Majesty's 71st Highlanders was a professional British soldier from the British Isles. All others were either loyalist and patriot volunteers or–and this was the vast majority–militia mustered by local governments.

Compulsory militia service had become a tradition in all the American colonies. Many a town and county seat had its "muster field" where citizen soldiers assembled at designated times to train and discharge their duties of preparedness. Muster days were serious events that frequently culminated in celebrations and free-for-alls involving hard cider and fisticuffs. The people of these colonies were hard-working and hard-playing. When necessary many could be hard fighters.

The quality of the various militia units varied widely, and many historians now agree that the militia's contribution to America's Revolutionary War has probably been underrated. At Kings Mountain the militia's unique features were brought into full use and translated into assets for the patriots. Among these were minimum organization with maximum individual responsibility; ability to attack from ambush; quick maneuverability; and capability for swift, decisive action. In other circumstances, over a lengthier period, the militia's "excessive turnover, lax discipline, and an urge to question why" could play havoc with military effectiveness; but there were occasions when these were not drawbacks but conditions which made men more determined and dauntless. No engagement demonstrated this more dramatically than Kings Mountain.

Who were these men of Kings Mountain? Except for 100 British soldiers picked from the King's American Regiment, the Queen's Rangers, and the New Jersey Volunteers, they came from the Carolinas, Virginia, Georgia, and present East Tennessee. Most of those in the loyalist forces were from the lowlands and Piedmont areas, while many of the patriots were from the upcountry, with a highly fierce and visible nucleus from the remotest corners of Virginia and North Carolina–the region known as the over-mountain country.

Geography, national origins, economics, religion, and culture shaped the primary differences within these Southern colonies and these differences impelled each person to choose his side when war with Great Britain erupted. East-West sectionalism remained the most enduring divisive reality in North Carolina and to a somewhat lesser extent in South Carolina.

Geography gave the coastal regions of these colonies certain riches: a fertile tidewater in Virginia; naval stores such as tar, pitch, turpentine, and timber in the Carolinas; and acres adaptable to indigo and rice along the South Carolina coast. Inland the country stretched westward across sand and clay, pine and palmetto, a gently rising Piedmont, and finally crested on the windswept pinnacles of the highest mountains in the Appalachian chain. This diverse landscape was pocked with swamps in the lowlands and laced with rivers from mountains to sea. Its fertility varied as widely as its accessibility.

In the east, settlement was predominantly English; along the North Carolina coast and extending inland there were significant numbers of Scottish Highlanders as well. The society established by these and other less numerous groups of Europeans was essentially aristocratic, a plantation economy based on slave labor and trade with Great Britain, Europe, and the West Indies. It favored the Anglican Church. To the west, there were Germans–most of them from the Palatine in southwestern Germany, fleeing devastating wars, religious persecution, and heavy taxes–and Swiss, English, Welsh, Irish, French Huguenots, and, above all, the Scotch-Irish. Their society of small farms, free labor, and a religious diversity that included Presbyterians, Lutherans, Dunkards, Moravians, Baptists, and Quakers, was ardently democratic, at least in its ideals.

The over-mountain people lived in rugged little settlements carved out of the virgin land with their own hands.

During the two decades prior to the Revolutionary War, the western country was opened by increasing numbers of permanent settlers. With the defeat of the Cherokee Indians in 1761, the South Carolina backcountry saw an influx of settlers. In North Carolina, the hamlet of Salisbury claimed that in 1764 alone more than a thousand wagons of families immigrating to the western borders of the colony had passed through its streets. By the time of the Revolution, South Carolina's upcountry claimed 79 percent of the white inhabitants of the colony, amounting to 50 percent of its total population.

Increase of population did not increase mutual affection between the regions, however. "Those from the westward," wrote a North Carolinian some years later, "look upon the people in any of the commercial towns, as little better than swindlers; while those of the east consider the westerners as a pack of savages." The main point of contention was the fact that despite their growing numbers and their payment of inequitable taxes which favored the large landholders in the east, the westerners had little political influence. In South Carolina the people of the upcountry felt that they had too little access to government; in North Carolina they felt that the government had too much access to them, reaching into their pockets ever more deeply. But in both cases the coastal regions of the provinces dominated all branches of government.

In 1770, when North Carolina's royal governor, William Tryon, completed his palatial residence (considered by many as the finest "government house" in British America), the backcountry people were infuriated at this "visible and permanent symbol of eastern rule." And since the colonial treasury was on the brink of bankruptcy, new taxes would have to be levied to pay for the handsome brick edifices and its elegant furnishings.

One of these taxes was a poll tax, which always bore more heavily on the small farmer of the west than on the large planter in the east. Tryon, who had been given the name Great Wolf by the Indians, was increasingly seen by the citizens in the west as meriting the title in all too realistic a sense. "We want no such House, nor will we pay for it," they protested.

Such attitudes of defiance had been growing throughout South Carolina and North Carolina since the 1761 victory over the Cherokees. With law-abiding settlers and farmers, lawless adventurers and renegades, and all manner of new arrivals mingling along the western borders, the primary challenge became one of establishing an orderly society and viable government in the backcountry. In South Carolina the upcountry people felt that with all the power centralized in Charleston the formal institutions of local militia, weak justices of the peace, and small churches merely "moderated the disorder." When a wave of crime erupted along this frontier in the summer and fall of 1767, the citizens grew desperate. They formed into a group known as the Regulators and, lacking official protectors, took it upon themselves to "scourge the land of the criminal and the shiftless."

Stolen horses, abducted blacks, and kidnapped women and children were retrieved from criminal terrorists. The Regulators–who may have numbered between 5,000 and 6,000 at their peak of popularity– sealed off their region from Charleston. Organized to suppress outlaws, they acted outside the law themselves and soon encountered the ancient dilemma of their own uncontrolled power. Arson and whippings became weapons of control in the upcountry. When the South Carolina Assembly, with agreement of the Crown, finally established proper western courts, Regulator activity diminished and was finally abandoned.

While the South Carolina upcountry was seeking to correct the lack of local courts and sheriffs, the North Carolina backcountry began its own Regulator movement for exactly the opposite reason: to correct too much interference by unjust courts and venal sheriffs in local affairs. In the spring of 1768 the Regulators vowed to have officers "under a better and honester regulation."

Accusations multiplied, riots broke out, panic threatened. Governor Tryon called out the militia, marched to a creek named Alamance, and there, on May 14, 1771, after warning an assemblage of some 2,000 Regulators, only half of whom were armed, that they were "in a state of rebellion against your King, your country, and your laws," defeated and scattered them. It was a crushing blow, and Tryon, already appointed governor of New York at the time of Ala-

mance, soon departed North Carolina for his new post. Many of the Regulators departed too, for the farthest land they knew of that was open for settlement–the area that was soon to become the Watauga country. Within a year a Baptist minister estimated that since Alamance 1,500 families, despairing of seeing better times, had left North Carolina. Most of them were of Scotch-Irish stock.

The region to which many of them removed was the overmountain country–sparse, rugged, beleaguered little settlements along the Holston, Watauga, and Nolichucky Rivers, and in Carter's Valley and dozens of other beckoning sites.

When the Wataugans, already uneasy because they were possibly encroaching on Indian land, realized that they were beyond the protection of either North Carolina or Virginia, they grew fearful that their settlement (in the region destined to become East Tennessee) would become a haven for criminals and outlaws. Displaying a clear notion of precisely what they wanted to achieve, these Wataugans adopted written articles of agreement dealing with debtors, the recording of deeds and wills, and similar "public business."

Lord Dunmore, royal governor of Virginia, called this Watauga Association "a dangerous example" and an encouragement "to the people of America of forming governments distinct from and independent of His Majesty's Authority." In a few years, many Americans would be part of a larger struggle to become "independent of His Majesty's authority," and it is significant that an initial impetus had come from a predominantly Scotch-Irish segment of the Southern frontier. For of all the national characters represented at Kings Mountain, none was more distinctive than that of the Scotch-Irish.

These were Scots, chiefly Lowlanders, who had been part of the "plantation" James I of England established in northern Ireland, chiefly in the province of Ulster. Scottish by heritage, Irish by geography, these energetic people had prospered until their woolen trade began to compete with that of Britain. Gradually but decisively their woolen industry was crippled by discriminatory laws and their Presbyterian religion was curtailed by prohibitions on worship and education. Adding to their plight was a series of crop failures. Choked by the tightening noose of poverty and religious antagonism, the Scotch-

Irish began their great migrations to America. From Pennsylvania they poured southwest into the Piedmont and down the valley of Virginia into the harsh and demanding backcountry.

No more numerous than the English, no more industrious than the Germans, no more freedom-loving than the Huguenots, the Scotch-Irish were nonetheless the group that left their image stamped indelibly on this frontier. Many of their characteristics came to be considered specific hallmarks of the American character, too. The Scotch-Irish have been described as restless and self-reliant with a love of adventure, great physical endurance, and the capacity to adapt to their surroundings. They have been called grasping, contentious, and so set in their ways that they could pray, "Lord, grant that I may always be right, for Thou knowest that I am hard to turn."

Above all, the Scotch-Irish person seems to have been paradoxical. He has been described as both "venturesome and cautious, taciturn to a fault, but speaking his mind freely when aroused." Essentially serious, he could nevertheless display a sense of humor; fondness for sports revealed his sociability. Friend and foe alike were objects of his steadfast attention and "his nature rebelled against anything that savored of injustice or deceit, nor did he take kindly to restraint of any kind."

This Scotch-Irish character–prompt to resent an affront, unrelenting to foes–was to leave an imprint on the history of the Revolutionary War at Kings Mountain.

The homegrown Tories, those loyalists who accompanied Patrick Ferguson on his marches across the Carolinas, came from a variety of backgrounds. Curiously enough, North Carolina, the first State to authorize its delegates to the Second Continental Congress to vote for independence, was one of the two States (New York being the other) considered most heavily loyalist during the war.

Among the reasons for this were the presence of large numbers of Highland Scots who had recently sworn allegiance to the king; the Regulators who still hated the Assembly so strongly that when that body urged a revolutionary cause they automatically rallied to the king; and the natural Tory sympathies of those devoted Anglicans who were fearful of the backwoods religions and whose economic and

social ties bound them to London rather than to their native America.

These, then, were some of the people who played out the drama of Kings Mountain. They were neighbors and enemies, Highlanders and Lowlanders, king's men and democrats, natural leaders and reluctant followers. They were used to fighting. They had fought back in their native land at such places as Culloden. They had fought the Indians. In the summer and autumn of 1776 alone, Georgia, North and South Carolina, and Virginia sent more than 5,000 militiamen into the Cherokee country to meet Indian attacks encouraged by the larger war taking place along the coasts, and there were almost monthly forays and skirmishes between the Indians and the settlers pushing ever deeper into their domain. They had fought each other, in scattered violent episodes of the Regulator movement. So far, most of them had been preoccupied with meeting daily local challenges of survival; they had not yet taken a full-fledged role in the Revolution riving the rest of the country that would soon be called these United States of America.

But as the year 1780 approached, the country staggered under the burdens that seemed insupportable and the South reeled under defeats that seemed irreversible. It was to be an eventful, decisive year.

On a bitterly cold December 15, 1779, in Morristown, N.J., George Washington sent a report as commander in chief of the army to the Continental Congress: "Our prospects," he wrote, "are infinitely worse than they have been at any period of the War, and unless some expedient can instantly be adopted a dissolution of the Army for want of subsistence is unavoidable–A part of it has been again several days without Bread–and for the rest we have not either on the spot or within reach a supply sufficient for four days."

Valley Forge and the cruel winter of 1777-78 are fixed in the popular imagination as the season of suffering for the patriot forces under their dauntless leader; less appreciated is the agony the army experienced at Morristown in the winter of 1779-80. Snow was 4- to 6-feet deep before the rude winter huts could be built, and many soldiers slept under a single blanket on a thin bedding of straw, without shoes or adequate clothing. Half frozen and half starved they staggered from one day to the next.

Not only bread was lacking but bullets, too. Again, General Washington tried to impress the message that this crisis arose not from transportation problems or accidental circumstances such as had occurred in the past, "but from the absolute emptiness of our magazines everywhere and the total want of money or credit to replenish them."

The money Washington and his patriot forces needed was simply non-existent. Or, just the opposite, it was in too great an existence. One of the greatest failures of the Congress was in the realm of finance, where both imagination (ideas fostering fiscal responsibility) and courage (to implement this responsibility) were lacking. After print-

ing 242 million paper dollars, Congress decided to stop the printing presses. By March 1780, the paper dollar was worth a fourth of a cent in gold. The saying "not worth a continental" came into use to reflect the ravages of inflation on citizens and soldiers alike. The United States, as James Madison observed years later, had tried to survive by pumping instead of patching the leaks.

Minus coordination and sometimes the will, groping for some effective system of organization and support, the colonies let the Continental Army sink toward starvation. On St. Patrick's Day in 1780, Washington complained that he had only enough grain to make bread for 5 days and pickled meat to last for 40 days. By late summer the commander in chief was reduced to feeding his army "by marching it from temporary camp to temporary camp, exhausting the food supply of the neighborhood instead of more properly drawing on the country as a whole. If this kept up the Army would become a horde of plunderers."

The condition of the private soldier was thus more desperate in 1780 than at any time during the whole war. Washington stated that the Army would have "dissolved long before except for patriotism, and the Congress could not rely on this cement forever."

In the South, circumstances of war and geography had wrought a situation in which the fierceness of combat was not confined to opposing armies. In the Carolinas and Georgia every crossroads and household became a potential battleground. The Revolution was not so much a struggle between British regulars in their scarlet coats and close formation opposed by patriot soldiers with such uniforms and weapons as they could muster as it was a fitful, miserable civil conflict. Guerrilla fighting raged, and both sides were afflicted with the violent passions that nullified all compassion. The number of skirmishes which took place in the interior of the lower South has been estimated as "dozens, possibly hundreds."

As accounts of lootings, burnings, and killings circulated through the countryside, fears and hatreds intensified with each embellished version. Vengeance became a way of life. When Nathanael Greene arrived in North Carolina late in 1780 to lead the patriot forces in the South, he found that "not a day passes but there are

more or less who fall a sacrifice to this savage disposition. The Whigs seem determined to extirpate the Tories, and the Tories the Whigs." Greene, a Quaker who may have recoiled with more than normal dismay at the daily horrors compounded by such internecine warfare, warned: "If a stop cannot be put to these massacres, the country will be depopulated . . . as neither Whig nor Tory can live."

Hot tar and feathers became one of the rituals of punishment inflicted by vigilante groups on those suspected of Tory sympathies or accused of aiding the British forces invading the countryside. Painful as this searing public shame may have been, it was perhaps no more dreaded nor resisted than the confiscation of property which left a loyalist impoverished and homeless.

Among the most sinister and despised of all the participants in this warfare, however, were those who came to be known as "outliers," a term that would carry over into the American Civil War of 1861-65, when it would assume even larger and more dreaded connotations in the upcountry fighting of the Southern States. Outliers were simply those people who refused to support either side of the conflict. They rode and raided, often indiscriminately, and for their own profit. Much of the fear and turmoil that tore families and communities asunder during the war was a result of these plunderers for private gain and greed, who struck and disappeared and were all too seldom caught or punished by either side.

If 1780 was the nadir for the patriot cause, with colonial finances in shambles, Washington's army neglected and dispirited, and the Southern theater deteriorating into a cannibalistic kind of fury, there was still no reason for the British to indulge in self-satisfaction. Their fortunes, too, were at a low ebb. By 1779 the expense of war in America plus the burden of war with France and Spain had placed a heavy strain on King George's coffers and his subjects' patience. British agents sought new loans in Europe, despite high interest rates, to add to a national debt that already stood at £200 million sterling. Unemployment fostered deep unrest. John Wesley, the father of Methodism, in his travels across the British Isles saw the suffering firsthand and warned that thousands of idle, starving workmen gave portent of rebellion.

The war in America received a full share of blame for Britain's bankrupt conditions, and in mass meetings the freeholders of county after county denounced further pursuit of that conflict. Thus in the turbulent spring of 1780, the American Revolution might have been ended, or at least modified, by the frustrations and needs of a public outraged against king and Parliament–except for a strange occurrence which suddenly seized London.

A half-mad Scottish peer named Lord George Gordon, capitalizing on the unrest that prevailed throughout the land, indulged in the ages-old rabble-rousing device of blaming complex political and economic troubles on the wiles of a racial or religious minority. For three terrible days in June the city of London was at the mercy of a mob. Newgate Prison was set afire, the Bank of England was attacked, Catholic chapels were destroyed, and the House of Commons was threatened. Before the arson and pillage were brought under control, some 450 people had been killed or wounded and thousands had been terrorized.

Such a display of anarchy was sobering to those who had been leading legitimate protests against governmental policies. The episode stilled, for the moment, the questions and dissatisfactions that had been welling up across the British Isles. The time had long since arrived for a strategic reappraisal of the war in the American colonies, but the king and his ministers were no more willing to undertake the task now than they had been 2 years earlier when George III, pouring over maps of America, had devised the 1778 Southern campaign in which each side had failed–the British in their attempt to take Charleston and South Carolina, the Americans in their attempt to oust the British from Savannah and Georgia.

By late 1779, the British were turning South again, staking their fortunes on a choice that would be pursued to its ultimate perimeters in the crucial year of 1780. For the basis of that choice involved the fundamental error on which much British strategy had been constructed. Every step Britain made suggested belief in the myth of a dissident minority which would arise to become active loyalists "constituting one of Britain's most important potential resources."

Reliance, even in fantasy, on such tenuous support, had fostered a lack of decisiveness that frequently undermined the results of any British victory. Desultory operations that "neither completely destroyed the enemy nor restored peace to the conquered territory" simply served to keep opposition alive and led to the vicious situation which existed in the South throughout 1780.

Thus, on the drizzly, rainy day in March 1780, when Sir Henry Clinton, with a force of 8,500 soldiers (plus 5,000 seamen mustered from the fleet behind him), began a 30-mile march from John's Island toward Charleston, launching the final great British campaign in the South, he was following once again the strategy devised by King George and Lord Germain. According to that strategy, South Carolina was to be reestablished as a royal colony, after which it would be a relatively simple task to tramp through North Carolina, which was "but the road to Virginia," and then on to the Chesapeake Bay area where British forces could reassert their strength and control of the seaboard. Along the way it was expected–at least by those planning the maneuver on paper–that "large numbers of the inhabitants would flock to the King's standard."

Dependence on the loyalists was even more crucial to this campaign than to the earlier attempt to subdue the South. Now there was an aroused British public clamoring for an end to a war they believed Britain would not win; there were even those in high places who believed Britain could not win. After the British defeat at Saratoga and France's formal entry into the conflict on the patriots' side, Lord North himself had recognized that "the best we can make of the war is to get out of the dispute as soon as possible." But the King would not consider Lord North's resignation nor the war's unsatisfactory conclusion. His persistence and that of his Secretary for Colonial Affairs was reenforced by one vocal group in London: the loyalist exiles who had fled from America to spend the duration of the war in Britain. They were loud and positive in asserting that they represented a large, though muffled, body of opinion in the American colonies. Germain seized on their testimony to support beliefs he had long propounded, and finally he found himself locked into a position of using the loyalists as a cause for continuing the war. Military reali-

ties were being distorted or overridden by political considerations. The blunt and definitive action at Kings Mountain would do much to point out the fatal consequences of such distortion.

In this atmosphere of unreality, of feverish grasping for expedients, the potential of loyalist support in the Southern backcountry became primary "evidence" in arguments for continued prosecution of the war. Dissidents in the House of Commons who could not be persuaded by such arguments were now appealed to on the basis of honor. It was proclaimed that those who had remained stalwart loyalists were owed a debt of honor by Great Britain and efforts to defeat the American rebels must continue. Germain, in many ways an able and curious personality who bore much calumny and opposition throughout his life, had staked his career and the future of one segment of the proud and powerful British Empire on marshalling effective loyalist support in the South. His hope never materialized.

There was no alternative now. Britain, rent by internal division and increasing weakness of its far-flung external resources, increasingly dependent upon a surge of Southern loyalists to win its war, launched the Southern offensive of 1780.

As for the patriot cause, lacking the basic necessities to wage effective combat, it turned to the Southern theater and all the debilitating civil conflict there, depending upon Southern patriots to determine its future.

Thus, each side acutely needed the allegiance of that vast, neglected, enigmatic interior known as the backcountry–reaching from the lowlands and Piedmont up into the rugged mountains of southwestern Virginia, western North Carolina, and the area that would become East Tennessee. But the people of those landlocked coves and valleys had shown only sporadic interest in the war raging along the coast. They were preoccupied with their own dangers, one of which was continuing conflict–or threat of conflict–with the Indians, who tended, on the whole, to side with the British more than the patriots in this war. The over-mountain people were a buffer, protecting the Southern colonies from attack through their back door, either by hostile Indians or foreign powers. Beyond that, they had not thrown the full weight of their commitment to either side.

Nature did not welcome the British expedition of Sir Henry Clinton as it sailed along the fearful North Carolina coast in January 1780, en route from New York to South Carolina. Violent storms scattered transports and escort vessels, sank a shipload of cannon, and forced destruction of the fine cavalry horses that were to be essential to the Southern campaign.

But the British general remained confident. His assurance was matched only by the negligence of those tending the garrison in Charleston, Clinton's immediate objective. Mrs. St. Julien Ravenel, writing later about the dallying and delay displayed by Charlestonians toward their fortifications, remembered that a fort which was ordered in January to be built with "all expedition" was not half done when news of the coming of the British fleet was received. "At once all was bustle and activity. . . . The approach of the fleet had done more in one week to unite the people than the acts of the ministers or the eloquence of Gadsden had effected in months."

The bustle and activity came too late. On May 12, following a methodical month-long British siege, solid but ill-fated Gen. Benjamin Lincoln surrendered America's fourth largest city and the commercial capital of the South. It was the most severe defeat suffered by patriot forces during the entire war. The only patriot army in the South, 18 Continental regiments in all, including the entire South Carolina and Virginia Lines and one-third of the North Carolina Line, was lost. The British claimed 5,500 troops captured, including seven generals and 290 other Continental officers. It represented the largest total of patriot prisoners captured at any one time during the Revolution.

Precious quantities of muskets, ammunition, powder, and ordnance matériel were also lost. Most important, British hopes were momentarily revived. News of the victory at Charleston served as a welcome antidote to mounting Parliamentary opposition. And patriot spirits were plunged into ever deeper despair.

Rumors abounded that Washington was prepared to foresake the Southern colonies. Dejected patriots began to wonder if further resistance was justified or even possible. As they acknowledged their defenselessness they began to admit, reluctantly, the possibility of the return of royal government.

At this moment, official Britain's misunderstanding of the American character proved decisive to the future course of the war. Clinton had won a battle but he failed to win the peace. Soon after the fall of Charleston, he offered lenient paroles to any of the American rebels who would return to the royal fold and thenceforth remain peaceably at home. Thousands flocked in to receive such paroles. It appeared that the countryside might soon be pacified. Then, abruptly, on June 3, Sir Henry did an about-face and proposed a hard line in dealing with rebel Carolinians. By these new terms anyone who had taken the parole and withdrawn from conflict was now ordered to swear an oath of allegiance and take "an active part in settling and securing His Majesty's government."

From quiescence the Carolinians were aroused once more to resistance. They felt that their good faith had been violated. What had appeared to be initial clemency was now revised to involve an unwelcome kind of collaboration. Forced to choose sides once more, some of them openly took up arms with the patriots, while others subscribed to the oath but considered their pledge given under duress "and consequently felt no obligation to honor it."

In addition to this official reversal, which many citizens considered in fact a betrayal, there were also bloody British raids and depredations launched across the countryside. Following the fall of Charleston, Clinton thought it necessary to dispatch efficient, quick-striking bodies of soldiers into the hinterlands so that the populace would be convinced of British supremacy. Thus, patriots would be intimidated or dissuaded from their allegiance, and loyalists would

be emboldened to rally and become the unified force of long-time British expectations.

Intimidation was not a wise weapon to use in seeking the fidelity of Carolinians, however. It was especially unwise when put in the hands of an officer such as Col. Banastre Tarleton, the dashing but ruthless commander of Clinton's light cavalry. Tarleton became to the South during the Revolutionary War what William Tecumseh Sherman was to the South during the Civil War: a symbol of all that was brutal in war, his name a rallying cry for retaliation.

A short, stocky redhead, Banastre Tarleton at 26 years of age was a graduate of Oxford, a hard-riding, high-living dragoon officer who bragged about his triumphal subjugation of sundry women and the victorious conquests of his Legion. When all the horses for his cavalry perished on the voyage South he vowed "to put his men on good horseflesh and to make his mark on the Southern rebels."

One of those indelible marks was struck on May 29, 1780, in the Waxhaws country near the North Carolina line where Tarleton, after a ride of 54 hours covering a distance of 105 miles, overtook a column of retreating Virginia Continentals and a detachment of William Washington's cavalry under Col. Abraham Buford. Exaggerating his force of 200 by claiming 700 men, Tarleton demanded Buford's surrender and when the latter refused, Tarleton attacked. The result was a slaughter. Dr. Robert Brownfield, a surgeon with the Continental forces, later recalled the encounter as it was to be recorded in the memory of Americans: "Not a man escaped. Poor Pearson [a lieutenant in the patriot rear guard] was inhumanely mangled on the face, as he lay on his back. . . . The demand for quarter, seldom refused to a vanquished foe, was at once found to be in vain. Not a man was spared, and it was the concurrent testimony of all the survivors that for fifteen minutes after every man was prostrate, they [the British] went over the ground, plunging their bayonets into everyone that exhibited any signs of life, and in some instances, where several had fallen one over the other, these monsters were seen to throw off on the point of the bayonet the uppermost, to come at those beneath."

In all, 113 patriots were killed and another 150 so badly maimed

that they were left to die on the field. Tarleton lost five men killed and 12 wounded. With this skirmish the British had "eliminated the last organized military force in the three southern provinces" and the call to remember "Tarleton's Quarter" entered the American lexicon. The cry of "Bloody Tarleton" became part of the psychological ammunition of the Americans. Tarleton's brutality would be repaid, with interest, to future British forces.

Objective historians may or may not have decided that the brash, fierce Tarleton was a butcher. But, more important, partisans of the time believed it. Francis Marion, the "Swamp Fox," told of finding Tarleton's victims, "Women & Children," who were "Sitting in the open Air round a fire without a blanket or any Cloathing but what they had on." And the effect of such reports was what mattered in arousing public sentiment. In the Waxhaws, an influential citizen named William Hill decided, following Tarleton's victory there, that the time had come for him to join the war. A group of followers went with him and they volunteered their services to Thomas ("The Gamecock") Sumter, who was fighting his own rearguard battles in upper South Carolina. There were many similar instances of those who stirred out of their non-alliance and marched to oppose Bloody Tarleton.

These operations seemed to Sir Henry Clinton merely peripheral, however. The city of Charleston was secure. No sustained resistance seemed to be gathering in North Carolina. Grumbling about his final severe edict on loyalty oaths would subside. Triumphant and confident, Clinton prepared to return to New York. On June 8, with a substantial part of his army, he departed for the north, leaving his second in command, the able, aggressive, and controversial Charles, Earl Cornwallis, to subdue any lingering resistance and launch a successful march across North Carolina and Virginia.

Two years earlier, Cornwallis had left America because of the illness of his wife in England. In 1779 he returned because her death "had made England unendurable to him." He wished to rejoin his friends on active service. Cornwallis firmly believed that the only way to protect South Carolina was to advance northward and defeat the Continental regulars around whom hordes of militiamen rallied

during every engagement. The advance on Virginia and dispersal of American regular troops thus became central to Cornwallis' plans for victory in the South.

In the summer of 1780, with 8,345 men to hold and extend British control in the South, Cornwallis found himself in a rapidly deteriorating situation. Pacification was not proceeding as planned. A series of strategic posts had been fortified across the backcountry, from Augusta on the Savannah through Camden to Georgetown on the coast. But these were not sufficient to hold the loyalists' support while civil war was intensifying. By early August Cornwallis admitted that "the whole country between Peedee and Santee" had flared into "an absolute state of rebellion." It was a terrible summer of civil war, "marked by bitterness, violence, and malevolence such as only civil wars can engender."

Patriot partisans, operating out of the tangled swamps of the Carolinas, used their knowledge of terrain, their adaptability to the weather, and their familiarity with the region's inhabitants to gain impressive advantages. Their exploits became legendary, their names gathered a mythical aura: Francis Marion, Thomas Sumter, Andrew Pickens–hardy, daring men who could assemble a small loyal band of followers and strike an enemy with the deadly speed and force of lightning.

In addition to the lowland guerrilla leaders there were three partisans who commanded other special patriot forces. One of these, Col. Charles McDowell, led North Carolina militia. With the fall of Charleston and the British forays into the countryside, McDowell notified the over-mountain men to send him all the riflemen they could spare. Col. Isaac Shelby had been in the Kentucky area surveying his claims to lands there when news of the fall of Charleston reached him. He hastened home, he said, "determined to enter the service of the Country, until her independence was secured." He responded to McDowell's call by leading 200 mounted riflemen from Sullivan County to join McDowell on Broad River. Uniting with these was Col. Elijah Clarke, a native North Carolinian who had moved to Georgia and led Georgia militia in the skirmishes that took place from the last of June until the battle on Kings Mountain.

The three major encounters of these troops took place at Thicketty Fort on July 30, at Cedar Spring on August 8, and at Musgrove's Mill on August 18. At Thicketty, one of the British posts in the South Carolina interior along the headwaters of the Pacolet River, Shelby and Clarke achieved the surrender of the fort without firing a shot. It was a heady victory. A few days later they were ordered out again to cut off foragers for the large British forces under command of Maj. Patrick Ferguson. The patriots and Tories met at Cedar Spring. The encounter concluded with a chase through the forest, which was to the liking of the mountain men who knew how to fight "Indian fashion." The British won the field but were unable to recapture prisoners the patriots had taken at the beginning of the fight. Here, for the first time, Ferguson encountered that bold and tenacious breed of men from the western waters.

At Musgrove's Mill, on the Enoree River, Shelby, Clarke, and Col. James Williams attempted a surprise attack on the provincials and Tory militia. The surprise failed, but their sharpshooting did not. The result was 63 dead, 90 wounded, and 70 prisoners among the British forces, with only 4 patriots killed and 8 wounded.

Elated by this victory the leaders turned their thoughts toward a larger goal: the post at Ninety-Six, where Major Ferguson was enjoying remarkable success raising his loyalist militia and securing public support. The officers had mounted their horses to lead the way toward Ninety-Six when they were diverted. "At that moment," Colonel Shelby remembered later, "an express [messenger] came up from McDowell in great haste with a short letter in his hand." That letter told of a major battle 2 days before the skirmish at Musgrove's Mill, a disastrous rout near Camden.

In the early morning darkness of August 16, 7 miles north of the village of Camden, S.C., the patriots under Gen. Horatio Gates, recently appointed commander of the small, newly formed Southern Army, stumbled into a British column led by Cornwallis, who was seeking to determine the whereabouts and the strength of this patriot force. Both armies fired a few shots and recoiled from the sudden confrontation until dawn could help them discover each other's location. The patriot general was at a special disadvantage. Cornwallis

had long since won the devotion of his officers and men. Lord Germain's nephew had reported that the Earl was "deservedly the favourite of every person of every rank under his command." But Horatio Gates was largely unknown to the men following him across the sweltering Carolina land that night in deep summer.

Upon assuming command of what he insisted on calling "the grand army," Gates, the hero of Saratoga, had been warned by his old friend, Charles Lee: "Take care lest your Northern laurels turn to Southern willows." Gates came south after his appointment and found in the encampment at Coxe's Mill, N.C., "an army without strength, a military chest without money, a department apparently deficient in public spirit and a climate that increases despondency instead of animating the soldier's arm." Under temporary command of the remarkable Bavarian, self-styled "Baron" Johann de Kalb, the meager, largely untrained army carried its baggage on its back and foraged for its own food as it marched. There were long fasts broken by occasional summertime feasts of green apples and peaches, which played havoc with digestive systems.

Promptly upon joining this haggard, ill-supplied army Gates issued the astounding order to make ready to march. They would attack Camden. Choosing, against the advice of the shrewd and able Kalb, an unlikely route through desolate pine barrens and Tory country, Gates led his hungry men past fields of new corn. A diet of green corn, hastily wrenched from its stalks in the fields, combined with peaches scavenged along the way and "poor fresh beef without salt," increased the painful digestive disorders. Diarrhea sent men fairly reeling into the woods and slowed the march.

As they approached the vicinity of Camden, Gates decided to make a night march. When they heard his announcement, his subordinates were too confounded to protest, although one officer later wrote, "it could not be conceived that an army consisting of more than two-thirds militia, and which had never been once exercised in arms together, could form columns and perform other maneuvers in the night and in the face of the enemy." To complete the comedy, or tragedy, of errors, when Gates discovered that there was no rum available for the customary extra allowance of "spirits" which was

provided before a military engagement, he ordered molasses to be dispensed as an "acceptable" substitute. Gates' adjutant general remembered afterwards that the "hasty meal of quick baked bread and fresh beef, with a dessert of molasses . . . operated so cathartically as to disorder very many of the men, who were breaking the ranks all night and were certainly much debilitated."

Suddenly, at 2 o'clock on that moonless, sultry night, the advance guards of the two armies slammed into each other–to their mutual astonishment. After some sharp firing, each withdrew and preparations were made for an engagement to begin at dawn.

That engagement was short and catastrophic for the patriot forces. Gates placed his untrained, untested militia opposite Cornwallis' regulars, some of whom belonged to such crack outfits as the 71st (Frazer's) Highlanders and the 23d Regiment of Foot (Royal Welsh Fusiliers). As the battle began, the weakened, inexperienced militiamen were suddenly confronted with firing, huzzaing redcoats descending upon them–and they broke and ran. They had bayonets, but these had been issued only the previous day and few of the militia knew how to handle them. They threw down their bayonets and their loaded muskets and fled across the fields. The Continental soldiers fought, but they were hopelessly outnumbered.

Dauntless 60-year-old Kalb led attack and counterattack. The horse on which he rode was killed and he received a saber slash on his head. Still he fought, his great frame taking cruel punishment. When at last he fell, he was bleeding from 11 wounds. He had refused to retreat until he received orders from his general. But Gates was not around to give any orders. Swept from the field in the first stampede of the militia, the general was covering the ground, "astride a charger sired by a famous racer named Fearnought," from Camden to Hillsborough, N.C. He made the 200 miles in 3½ days.

Patriot dismay at the Camden fiasco was summarized in the cutting sarcasm of Alexander Hamilton who remarked on Gates's flight: "Was there ever such an instance of a general running away . . . from his whole army? And was there ever so precipitous flight . . .? It does admirable credit to the activity of a man at his time of life." Laurels had indeed become willows.

Fellow soldiers were more tolerant of the general. The man who would become his successor, Nathanael Greene, subsequently looked at the battlefield and considered Gates's hastily assembled, inexperienced army, and decided that Gates was "unfortunate but not blameable." Wherever the blame might lie, the patriot situation in the South had been rendered even more desperate. Another army had been routed. The historian George Otto Trevelyan described the patriots' situation at this point as "a morass of trouble which seemed to have neither shore nor bottom."

As for the partisan leaders, the Camden defeat forced Shelby and Clarke to abandon their plans to attack Ninety-Six and head toward the hills. Maj. Patrick Ferguson pursued them closely.

Ferguson was halted in his pursuit near Fair Forest by a message from Cornwallis summoning him to Camden. At the Earl's temporary headquarters, Ferguson learned of the general strategy for the next stage of the Southern campaign. Cornwallis was uneasy. He would have liked to move out across North Carolina at once except for two considerations. One was the weather. The intense heat of late summer in the South increased the miserable illness of malaria and yellow fever among his men. The other deterrent was the number of rebel bands still roaming the countryside. Cornwallis had finally decided to launch a three-pronged thrust: his right wing, to the east, would secure the coast and insure a stream of supplies. He himself would command the main army in the center, driving straight up through North Carolina. His left wing would make a wide western sweep, subduing that troublesome, unknown country along the frontier.

This important left wing was placed under command of Major Ferguson. McDowell and Shelby and all the mountain militia who had been harassing the British army, along with Sevier and Campbell and Cleveland and all the backcountry men who would soon be involved in thwarting these British plans, could consider it something of a tribute that Cornwallis sent this particular officer against them. For Patrick Ferguson was one of the best that Cornwallis had.*

* In accounts of Kings Mountain, Ferguson is sometimes referred to as "major," sometimes as "lieutenant colonel." This is because word of his long-expected promotion to the latter rank did not arrive until after the battle and Ferguson's death.

The dynamic that defined Patrick Ferguson's life and character most consistently was the fact that he was a professional soldier in the best possible tradition of that term. He fought for patriotism (loyalty to his own country) and honor (loyalty to his own code of manhood), and he followed the recognized rules of war. Where his compatriot, Banastre Tarleton, killed with a relish that suggested pleasure as well as necessity, Ferguson balanced diplomacy with battle and seemed to wage war only from necessity as he evaluated a given situation.

"You must no longer look upon him as your son," Ann Ferguson's brother wrote to her from Quebec in August 1762. "He is the son of Mars and will be unworthy of his father if he does not give proofs of contempt of pain and danger." The son from whom this Scottish woman was supposed to disengage her motherhood was then 18 years old–not as tall as he would like to be, but intelligent and as personable as any mother could wish. Already he had been in the military service for 3 years. He would live up to his uncle's challenge to display only contempt for pain and danger.

Perhaps his less than commanding height–5 feet 8 inches–and an unprepossessing appearance (ordinary, dark straight hair framing a serious countenance and even, chiseled features) caused Ferguson to intensify those qualities of character which emphasized leadership. Those who knew him spoke of the intelligence, as well as the impulsiveness, of the man. In addition, he was gifted with that rare magnetism which wins the affection and loyalty of followers.

The world in which Patrick Ferguson spent his youth was that of the landed gentry of the Scottish Highlands. On his father's, Lord Pitfour's,

family estate in Aberdeenshire, he and five brothers and sisters grew up in an atmosphere of physical comfort and intellectual culture. Spirited horses, riding to hounds, and the exuberance of exertion in a natural world at once harsh and beautiful was balanced with respect for education and surroundings that included the exhilaration of great books, paintings, and lively conversation. His inclination, however, was to fulfill the meaning of his Gaelic name, "Feargachus"–bold–and he chose the active life of a soldier over the contemplative life of the scholar.

When he was 15 years old a commission was purchased for him and he entered the army as a cornet in the Royal North British Dragoons. At 16 he was serving in the wars of Flanders and Germany, and in an incident at the Battle of Minden in 1760 he exhibited that coolness which would characterize him throughout his life. When his horse jumped a ditch and his pistol fell from its holster, he turned and galloped back under fire to face enemy hussars and calmly retrieved the weapon. His dragoons were later commended for "prodigies of valor" performed at that battle. Such a brilliant, ambitious teenager must have been deeply disappointed when contaminated drinking water brought on an illness so serious that he was sent home in 1762. He remained in Scotland and England for the next 4 years. This interval provided him with an experience singularly useful for his subsequent role of leadership in America. As a participant in the debate over extension of English militia laws to Scotland, Ferguson gained firsthand knowledge of some of the problems and potential of the role he would later fill as His Majesty's Inspector of Militia in the Carolinas.

In 1768, when he was 24, he became a captain and was sent to the West Indies to quell an insurrection among the Caribs. There he learned something about the fierceness of partisan fighting on the part of brave marksmen defending their homeland. The West Indies, Nova Scotia, and back to England–all this before the spring of 1777 when he was sent to America where he joined Sir Henry Clinton's army and was placed at the head of a corps of riflemen. At the battle of Brandywine in September, his "meritorious conduct was acknowledged by the whole British army."

During that same fight his conduct might have won the appreciation of the patriots had they known of a strange episode that took place on the battlefield. Captain Ferguson later wrote about it to a relative in Scotland. As he and his riflemen lay at the edge of a wood in the forefront of one of the British divisions, "a Rebel officer, remarkable by a hussar dress, passed towards our army, within a hundred yards of my right flank, not perceiving us. He was followed by another, dressed in dark green and blue, mounted on a bay horse, with a remarkably high cocked hat. I ordered three good shots to steal near to and fire at them; but the idea disgusting me, I recalled the order."

Then Ferguson continues:

> The hussar, in returning, made a circuit, but the other passed within a hundred yards of us, upon which I advanced from the wood towards him. Upon my calling, he stopped; but after looking at me, he proceeded. I again drew his attention, and made signs to him to stop, levelling my piece at him; but he slowly cantered away. As I was within that distance, at which, at the quickest firing, I could have lodged half a dozen balls in or about him, before he was out of my reach, I had only to determine; but it was not pleasant to fire at the back of an unoffending individual, who was acquitting himself very coolly of his duty–so I let him alone.

Next day, Ferguson wrote, he was telling some wounded officers about his little encounter when one of the surgeons came in. The doctor had been informed that General Washington spent that morning with the light troops, attended only by a French officer in hussar dress. Descriptions of Washington's clothing and mount coincided with that of the officer Ferguson had spared. "I am not sorry that I did not know at the time who it was," Ferguson concluded.

Of course, neither he nor anyone else ever really "knew." The interesting aspect of this anecdote is Ferguson's attitude toward his most renowned enemy.

While he was still in England, Ferguson had heard of the "boasted skill of the American marksmen." As inventor of the first breechloading rifle used in the British army, he was an authority on firearms. His rifle improved on the old flintlock in a number of ways: it was loaded at the breech, without using a ramrod, which increased its rate of fire; its aim was more precise; and it proved more depend-

able in wet weather. Exhibition of this rifle in action impressed Great Britain's highest military dignitaries and King George himself, and Ferguson was issued patents for his rifle and improvements. The 100 select soldiers he brought to America with him were painstakingly trained by Ferguson in the use of his breechloader.

But the military, ever chary of innovations, decided against using Ferguson's rifle. This decision was made by Gen. William Howe after the battle of Brandywine, while Ferguson was incapacitated by a wound that had shattered his right elbow and permanently crippled his arm. General Howe took advantage of Ferguson's absence from the army during his painful recuperation to disband the special corps Ferguson had trained so patiently and successfully (but without Howe's personal approval) and to store the rifles Ferguson was using to such advantage (but without Howe's personal permission).

Without the use of his right arm, without his special corps of marksmen, without use of his efficient new rifle, Ferguson returned to the field. Persistent practice with his left hand led to increased skill with the sword. At Monmouth, Little Egg Harbor, N.J., and finally in the siege of Charleston he continued to win the respect of British and Americans alike for his "valor and enterprise." No wonder his fellow officers called him the "Bull Dog." He was promoted to the rank of major and finally (although he would never learn of it) to the temporary rank of lieutenant colonel. When a bayonet was thrust through his left arm during one of the skirmishes outside Charleston, a fellow officer wrote: "The whole army felt for the gallant Ferguson." Three weeks later, the tenacious Bull Dog was fully recovered, however, at least in one arm.

This was a proud, bitter, brilliant, frustrated officer who came under the command of Lord Cornwallis after the fall of Charleston. Toward each other, Cornwallis and Ferguson were correct but not cordial. At the age of 36, the latter was 10 years older and immensely more experienced than either Tarleton or Francis, Lord Rawdon, commander of the loyalist regiment known as the Volunteers of Ireland, but Cornwallis gave these two favored treatment. One reason for the distance between Cornwallis and Ferguson was Ferguson's belief that an effective loyalist militia could be formed.

Ferguson's Tory army enters Gilbert Town, where he issued the ultimatum that set the patriots on the road to Kings Mountain.

As he set forth on his forays, Ferguson was mindful of the Southern summer heat which played havoc with soldiers unaccustomed to its extremes. He led the marches of his Provincial Corps (some 150 to 200 men) in the cool of the mornings. As Inspector of Militia in the Southern Provinces, Ferguson's duty seemed to Cornwallis "more that of a Justice of the Peace than a soldier." His remarkable achievement, however, was to raise about 4,000 loyalist militia and put a force of some 1,000 of these into the field. His success in this difficult task was especially apparent when contrasted with the failure of many similar efforts.

Ferguson's attitude was not that of Tarleton, whose "no quarter" repelled Ferguson and caused him to demand the execution of those dragoons who had butchered a surrendering enemy. His tactics were not those of Cornwallis, who had given orders "that all the inhabitants of this province, who have subscribed and taken part in this revolt, should be punished with the greatest rigor, and their whole property taken away from them or destroyed," and "that every militia-man, who has borne arms with us, and afterwards joined the enemy, shall be immediately hanged." Ferguson chose to pacify rather than to terrorize.

Historian Lyman C. Draper, who spent a lifetime documenting the personalities and events surrounding the battle of Kings Mountain, tells us that Ferguson would "sit down for hours, and converse with the country people on the state of public affairs, and point out to them, from his view, the ruinous effects of the disloyalty of the ring-leaders of the rebellion–erroneously supposing that it was the leaders only who gave impulse to the popular uprising throughout the Colonies. He was as indefatigable in training them to his way of thinking, as he was in instructing them in military exercises. This condescension on his part was regarded as wonderful in a King's officer, and very naturally went far to secure the respect and obedience of all who came within the sphere of his almost magic influence." He appealed to patriot wives and mothers to persuade the men in their families who were "outliers" to return home and renew allegiance to the King.

As he began his marches across the interior of the Carolinas,

Ferguson announced, "We come not to make war on women and children, but to relieve their distresses." Some households which were not sympathetic to the British cause nevertheless found a certain drama in some of their encounters with the urbane Major Ferguson. There was irony in the fact that this soldier could be less bloody and harsh in his relations with civilians than the Tory and patriot civilians were in their attacks on each other. As he sought to win their allegiance, Ferguson brought a measure of unaccustomed subtlety, even diversion, into many rude, routine lives.

Despite Ferguson's personal attitudes, many of those who joined his ranks were loyalists who had become part of the ferocious antagonism tearing the region apart during that summer and autumn of 1780, and British progress through the countryside inflicted excesses and sufferings on numbers of patriot citizens. There was plundering of "cattle, horses, beds, wearing apparel, bee-gums, and vegetables of all kinds–even wresting the rings from the fingers of the females."

Foraging parties rounded up the people's cattle and soldiers' horses were turned loose in fields of grain. Partisan leaders led attacks and counterattacks against these invasions. Colonels Charles McDowell and Isaac Shelby harassed Ferguson in engagements already described. Then, following Cornwallis' victory at Camden in August, Ferguson's Tory militia and his Provincial Corps of American loyalists joined ranks to secure the backcountry and protect Cornwallis' rear and western flank as he marched across South Carolina and into North Carolina.

There was one vast area that remained an unknown factor, however. That was the country to the west, across the Blue Ridge. From his headquarters at Gilbert Town, Ferguson now issued an ultimatum to the people and their leaders in this wild mountain country. He paroled one of his prisoners, Samuel Phillips, who had been captured at the Musgrove's Mill engagement, and sent him to Col. Isaac Shelby with a message. Shelby and his fellow mountain men were to "desist from their opposition to the British arms, and take protection under his standard," and if they did not Ferguson would "march his army over the mountains, hang their leaders, and

lay their country waste with fire and sword."

No strategy could have been better devised to unify the patriots scattered along the frontier and set them on the long march across the mountains. Maj. Patrick Ferguson had made the first of two mistakes disastrous to his campaign: he misjudged the men he would face in forthcoming battle, as he would soon misjudge the place where he chose to wage that battle.

Britain's Lord Rawdon wrote in his report of Kings Mountain that "A numerous Army now appeared on the Frontiers drawn from Nolachucki and other Settlements beyond the mountains whose very names had been unknown to us." Not only the very names but the essential history and character of the men who made up this army were unknown to the British leaders.

An accepted attitude was probably reflected in an estimate written by Maj. George Hanger, a swashbuckling soldier briefly attached to Ferguson's Legion, with which he was more compatible. "This distinguished race of men," he sarcastically observed of the dwellers in the backcountry, "are more savage than the Indians, and possess every one of their vices, but not one of their virtues. I have known one of these fellows [to] travel two hundred miles through the woods never keeping any road or path, guided by the sun by day, and the stars by night, to kill a particular person belonging to the opposite party. He would shoot him before his own door, and ride away to boast of what he had done on his return."

Hanger made the mistake that many observers of mountain civilization would repeat during coming generations, enlarging–perhaps exaggerating–a single instance into a stereotype by which to describe a large and varied group of people. The men who received and responded to Ferguson's ultimatum were not savages. They might more accurately have been likened to members of Scottish clans, momentarily subjecting their cherished individuality to demands of the common good–in fact, their common survival. Their leaders exemplified much of the natural authority, unhesitating

militancy, and tactical skill shown by ancient chieftains.

The first of these leaders, sought out at Ferguson's command by his distant kinsman and neighbor, Samuel Phillips, was Isaac Shelby who lived on the lower settlements of the Holston River. A large man whose size belied his agility, Isaac resembled his father, Evan Shelby, who had emigrated from Wales at the age of 15 and become a community leader in Maryland and then in the Holston settlements, "a man of commanding appearance, stout and stern."

Young Isaac had been a cattle herder in the mountains, an Indian fighter, and, during Lord Dunmore's war, a soldier who distinguished himself at the battle of Point Pleasant in western Virginia in October 1774. When the Transylvania Company was formed with a vast acreage embracing much of the country that would become Middle Tennessee and the State of Kentucky, he served with several surveying parties in the vast new domain. Although he became captain of a company of Virginia minutemen in 1776, and helped supply various frontier garrisons, he was not deeply engaged in the Revolution until July 1780, when Col. Charles McDowell called upon him for help in resisting Ferguson's thrusts toward the western waters. Isaac Shelby left off surveying lands to which he had laid claim on earlier expeditions and returned to take part in encounters at Thicketty Fort and elsewhere, until Gates' defeat at Camden had driven the patriots back across the mountains.

When they had returned home the latter part of August, Shelby's men were suffering from exhaustion and malnutrition. Their terms of enlistment were ready to expire. And now Isaac Shelby received this threat borne by Samuel Phillips from the arrogant Ferguson. He saddled his horse and rode some 40 miles to talk with the fiery commander of the Washington County militia, embracing the Watauga and Nolichucky settlements. His name was John Sevier.

No man on that frontier was more popular or widely known than this descendant of French Huguenots. It was typical that Shelby should find Sevier and his family and friends enjoying a "jollification" complete with horse-racing and barbecue. The contrast between the two friends was apparent in their response to each other. Shelby was deeply disturbed by the message he carried and the apparently care-

free merriment by which he found himself surrounded on Sevier's place seemed inappropriate. He spoke abruptly to his friend, saying that it was no time for fun-making. When Shelby explained his plans for a campaign, Sevier was as enthusiastic as he had been a moment before in the frolic. John Sevier's love of pleasure provided welcome relief in a border country where daily life was laborious and relentless. Sevier could dance all night or fight all day, pursuing each with equal skill and enthusiasm.

As Shelby and Sevier talked during that day and the next, considering every aspect of their situation and that of their communities, isolated on the westernmost boundaries of States that took little interest in their welfare and provided scant protection, the two militia leaders resolved that their only defense must be an immediate offense.

No other decision could have been expected of John Sevier. He had not yet won the reputation of being a scourge of the Indians, and he was only at the beginning of a career of leadership for his district and, in the future, his new State. But the qualities described by his biographer, Carl Driver, were already plain: "All characteristics of the pioneers blended in the personality of John Sevier. He was settler and speculator, adventurer and trader, Indian fighter and law-maker." He married his first wife, Sarah Hawkins, when he was 17 years old. They had 10 children. His second wife, "Bonny Kate" Sherrill, bore him eight children. This, too, was typical of the pioneer.

Physically, Sevier and Ferguson may have been the shortest of the leaders engaged at Kings Mountain; Sevier, too, was some 3 or 4 inches under 6 feet in height. Also like Ferguson, he was well-proportioned, hard-muscled, and lithe. He could assume the manners of a cavalier as well as the authority of a militia leader, and his fellow Westerners liked the reputation that "he could out-ride and outshoot–and, it is said, outswear–the best and the worst of the men who followed him."

John Sevier, soon to be popularly known as "Chucky Jack," after his home on the Nolichucky River, would lead no more men and fight no more steadfastly than a number of other participants in the battle of Kings Mountain, yet more than any other he would become the legendary hero and personification of that victory. One

reason for this lies perhaps in another particular quality he shared with his opponent, Patrick Ferguson: his charisma as a leader. It posed no small challenge to be a leader of frontiersmen, many of whom had sought out their place and way of life precisely because they wished to be free of all authority. But Sevier followed the course that could prove successful in welding prickly individualists into an effective single force: "He gave his commands as to equals, and, because these orders appealed to his men as being wise and practical, they gave unquestioned obedience. This loyalty of his friends formed one of the outstanding features of his success throughout his whole career."

The jollification at Sevier's farm was ended as he and the judicious Isaac Shelby laid their plans to surprise Ferguson and his Tories. Neighbors hurried to their own homes to await a call to action. There were several pressing needs to be met.

The first was for men. Quickly, without delay, an effective force must be assembled and marched across the mountains to answer the British threat of invasion. Sevier and Shelby needed the help of Col. William Campbell of the Virginia settlements on the Clinch River and Col. Charles McDowell's troops from North Carolina's Burke County, and they sent communications to these two leaders. Disappointed by Campbell's initial response–he thought it better to keep their positions on the frontier strong and let Ferguson come to them, increasing Ferguson's distance from Cornwallis–Shelby wrote a second urgent message, pointing out that without Campbell and his men there could be no force sufficient to undertake the task of challenging the British provincials and militia. The Virginian reconsidered and agreed to join his friends, as did McDowell. A call was issued for a general rendezvous at the Sycamore Shoals on the Watauga River near the present Elizabethton, Tenn., on the 25th of September.

McDowell and his North Carolina refugees from the skirmishes with Ferguson's troops were already encamped at or near Sycamore Shoals. The accounts these refugees told of Tory atrocities in the Piedmont and lowcountry had stoked the anger of the over-mountain people and assured their resistance to any threat of invasion.

The second necessity for such an expedition was funds. An early

historian of the Tennessee country, J. G. M. Ramsey, has left us an account of how this problem was met:

> Colonel Sevier tried to borrow money on his own responsibility, to fit out and furnish the expedition. But every inhabitant had expended the last dollar in taking up his land, and all the money of the country was thus in the hands of the Entry-taker. Sevier waited upon that officer and represented to him that the want of means was likely to retard, and in some measure to frustrate, his exertions, to carry out the expedition, and suggested to him the use of the public money in his hands.
>
> John Adair, Esq., late of Knox County, was the Entry-taker, and his reply was worthy of the times and worthy of the man. 'Col. Sevier, I have no authority by law to make that disposition of this money. It belongs to the impoverished treasury of North Carolina, and I dare not appropriate a cent of it to any purpose. But, if the country is overrun by the British, liberty is gone. Let the money go, too. Take it. If the enemy, by its use, is driven from the country, I can trust that country to justify and vindicate my conduct. Take it.'

Sevier and Shelby personally pledged repayment of the $12,000 or $13,000 received for ammunition and supplies to outfit the gathering troops.

In response to the need for supplies, there was a surge of activity throughout the mountains. At the grist mill near Matthew Talbot's home in the Watauga settlement, corn fresh from the autumn harvest was ground into meal for an army's bread. On a little branch of Buffalo Creek, a woman named Mary Patton was in charge of a small powder mill which supplied some of the needs of the riflemen. In a mineral-rich cove of the hills near John Sevier's home, lead was mined for balls to add to the ammunition supply. And on almost every farm beeves and horses were rounded up for the march. At every household clothing was prepared for the marchers.

Word of the call to arms spread like a leaf-fire among the settlements. On September 25th the flats at the Sycamore Shoals began to fill with rough-skinned, sharp-eyed, resolute men accompanied by women whose hands were calloused and whose courage was likewise evident. Six years before, there had been another historic gathering at this site. At that time, some 1,200 Cherokee Indians and their chiefs had treated with Judge Richard Henderson of North Carolina and several hundred eager white settlers for purchase of approximately 20 million acres of land that would become the State of Kentucky

and part of Tennessee. It was at that time and place that the dissident chief, Dragging Canoe, had leaped into the circle of treaty makers and warned the white men that they had purchased a fair land but in its settlement it would be a dark and bloody ground.

For all the grimness of their purpose, an air of excitement bordering on revival fervor animated this crowd. They dwelt in rude little forts and isolated cabins huddled among virgin forests of towering trees and trackless mountain ranges. Loneliness and hard labor were their daily fare. Any event that drew them together provided an opportunity to exchange news, to savor the fellowship of those enduring challenges similar to their own, to relish exchanges of wit and humor, sympathy and grief. As they assembled–more than 1,000 strong, the largest gathering of settlers that had ever been seen in that part of the country–they built their campfires, smelled the bitter pungence of wood smoke in the evening air and the welcome aromas of food, watched their horses picking at grassy patches in the meadows, and tended the beeves they were taking along for a ready food supply. The men talked and planned and prepared. And the women cooked, made last-minute patchings or polishings on clothing or equipment, and they talked and worried over the dangers of the battlefield and made plans to meet the dangers of their scantily protected homefront.

They were an army without uniforms. Many of their hunting shirts were of fringed buckskin while others were of homespun linsey-woolsey, "clumsily made, blouse fashion, reaching to the knees and, gathered up, tied around the waist. In the fulth [fullness] was often carried heavy burdens, as much as a bushel of corn at one time." Their breeches and gaiters were of rough, home-dyed cloth. Long hair was tied back in a queue beneath their wide-brimmed hats.

They were an army little encumbered with baggage, unaccompanied by any supply train. Each man had a blanket, a cup, and "a wallet of provisions, the latter principally of parched corn meal, mixed, as it generally was, with maple sugar." There was an occasional skillet in which to stir up the meal in hot water or cook whatever game they might find along the way.

The pride of many a participant was his long rifle. Remarkable

for the precision and distance of its shot, this weapon was also known as the Deckard or Dickert rifle, after its maker in Lancaster, Pa. The owner of one of these long, heavy rifles "rejoiced in its possession." Powder was carried in the powderhorns the men wore slung around their necks. Some of the horns bore carvings which their owners had whittled out during long winter nights, just as most of the rifles bore names given them by owners who had found them to be their nearest companions in the endless search for food, safety, entertainment–and now freedom.

They were an army without staff or quartermaster, without commissary or surgeon or chaplain. In fact, all they had to offer was themselves and their fierce determination to render Ferguson's ultimatum futile.

On the broad open spaces by the swift-flowing Watauga, surrounded by distant mountains where the headwaters of the river were born in dozens of hidden springs and clear rivulets, the people of the western waters assembled. John Sevier brought 240 men from Washington County (then North Carolina, later Tennessee). Isaac Shelby commanded a like number from Sullivan County. And the initially reluctant William Campbell caused rejoicing as he led 400 Virginians into the camp. Charles McDowell's 160 Burke and Rutherford County patriots, who had already fought Ferguson's forces, swelled the numbers at Sycamore Shoals. As they left this rendezvous and moved across the mountains they would be joined by other leaders and their militia. Like smaller streams feeding into a swelling river, Benjamin Cleveland and Joseph Winston would join with 350 men from Wilkes and Surry Counties, James Williams would bring 400 South Carolinians. Swiftly and surely they became an army. In the final count, the over-mountain men made up less than half of the total patriot force that finally faced Ferguson at Kings Mountain.

Actually this army would be properly described as "composed of patriot riflemen of the farmer, hunter, and Indian fighting class from the frontiers of the two Carolinas and Virginia." But it was the over-mountain leaders who had kindled the spirit, initiated the plans, and raised the funds for the march against Ferguson. Their image would dominate the popular memory of that western response that

began with the assembly at Sycamore Shoals.

In the dewy autumn dawn of September 26th, the camp was an anthill of activity as horses were saddled, cattle were rounded up, and families made ready for parting. The horses were precious; many had been lost in Indian raids. Amidst the tumult of humans and animals, shouts and tears, military orders and whispered farewells, there was an interval of quiet. Doughty Scotch-Irish clergyman Samuel Doak–graduate of the institution that would become Princeton University, founder of the first regular school west of the Alleghenies, who had brought the first books into the Tennessee country on his horse's back, while he walked–was ready to pronounce a prayer for the expedition. Leaning on their rifles, the mountain men listened to the preacher's rhetoric as he likened their cause to that of Gideon's people, in the Bible, opposing the Midianites. Doak prayed for the victory he confidently predicted, and then in an upswelling confidence he offered the little army its battle cry:

"The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!" he thundered.

They echoed the words. "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!"

Then they swung into their saddles and began the long ride to find Ferguson and confront the British threat to their freedom.

Their cattle delayed the mountain men's progress during the first day of their march. Their way was also made difficult because the route followed obscure Indian trails and the terrain was as rugged as that in any part of eastern America. That Tuesday, September 26th, they ate their first midday meal at Matthew Talbot's Mill, only 3 miles from Sycamore Shoals where they had started. Then they followed Gap Creek to its head, crossed Little Doe River, and made camp for the night at a landmark known as the Shelving Rock, on Big Doe River. They had covered 20 miles. Near their encampment they found a blacksmith named Miller who shod several of their horses.

The next day there was more trouble with the cattle. After a small stampede, the impatient men butchered several beeves for a temporary supply of meat and left the rest behind as they hurried on their way, relieved to be no longer encumbered with a drove of livestock. They followed Bright's Trace, named ironically enough for a rogue who was reputedly sympathetic to the Tories and whose wife was one of the first persons to be convicted of stealing in that part of North Carolina. Later, there were those who preferred to call it Yellow Mountain Road for the route that led through the gap between Yellow and Roan mountains.

As they left the fertile Crab Orchard Valley behind, the marchers encountered snow "shoe-mouth deep" on the mountain slopes. Despite this early calling-card of winter in the high altitudes, the country was stunningly beautiful. On the summit of the mountain there was a great grassy bald which would pose a continuing puzzle for later generations of botanists. Natural gardens of rhododendron suggested the blanket of rose and pur-

ple that would cover these heights in early summer. On this tableland, watered by an abundant clear spring, the army encamped, paraded, and made a disturbing discovery. Two of John Sevier's men had deserted, and he suspected that they had gone to warn Ferguson of the over-mountain men's approach.

According to one account, "Two problems now confronted the mountaineers. They must increase the speed of their march, so that Ferguson should not have time to get reinforcements from Cornwallis; and they must make that extra speed by another trail than they had intended taking so that they themselves could not be intercepted before they had picked up the Back Country militia under Colonels Cleveland, Hambright, Chronicle, and Williams, who were moving to join them. We are not told who took the lead when they left the known trail, but we may suppose it was Sevier and his Wataugans, for the making of new warpaths and wild riding were two of the things that distinguished Nolichucky Jack's leadership. Down the steep side of the mountain, finding their way as they plunged, went the over-hill men. They crossed the Blue Ridge at Gillespie's Gap and pushed on to Quaker Meadow."

It had been a hard 5 days' march to the McDowells' plantation at Quaker Meadows, near the present Morganton, N.C. But there they were so welcome that Maj. Joseph McDowell exceeded all bounds of hospitality by inviting the army to use his fencerails for the campfires!

North and South Carolina reinforcements swelled the ranks of the patriot army to just under 1,400 men. They were now within striking distance of Ferguson. The fair weather which had marked the days of their marches through the mountains took a turn for the worse, however. After a half-day's march from Quaker Meadows, the men were marooned in camp by rains that began on Sunday afternoon, the first of October, and continued through the following day. Unaccustomed to discipline and restraint, the volunteers grew uneasy and irascible. Their leaders would now be put to the test.

And who were these leaders? In addition to the Welshman, Isaac Shelby, and the French Huguenot, John Sevier, there was William Campbell, the quintessential Scotch-Irishman, ruddy-complexioned, a veritable giant of a man standing 6 feet 6 inches tall. His physical

strength and endurance, his quick temper and impeccable honor were known to all. His wife was a sister of Patrick Henry. Campbell had been a militia leader since Lord Dunmore's War of 1774, and he had served in the Virginia House of Delegates.

Other leaders gathered on this venture were Joseph McDowell, a Virginian who had foresaken the easy life to move to the Carolina Piedmont, and Benjamin Cleveland, another Virginian, who had moved west and built his reputation as an Indian fighter. These would soon be joined by other outstanding fighters: James Williams, a longtime Tory hater who had served as a delegate to the provincial legislature of South Carolina; William Chronicle, a veteran of the 1780 skirmishes and a resident of the south fork of the Catawba; Joseph Winston, a leather-tough frontiersman who had been fighting Indians since he was 17; and Edward Lacey, a onetime Pennsylvanian who, at the age of 13, had served with Edward Braddock's army in the Indian campaigns.

Now, however, the leaders needed a leader. They sent Charles McDowell, the senior officer among them, to ask General Gates–still in command of the Southern forces despite the Camden debacle–to assign them a general. They closed their request with this sentence: "All our Troops being Militia and but little acquainted with discipline, we could wish him [the general officer] to be a Gentleman of address, and able to keep up a proper discipline without disgusting the soldiery."

Gates did not respond. The colonels were in no mood to wait for anything less than a prompt reply. Shelby, rejecting any proposal of delay, suggested that Campbell was the only officer not from North Carolina and could therefore serve without arousing any jealousy. Thus William Campbell became commander of the combined forces.

They took up the march again and on October 2 camped 16 miles north of Gilbert Town, where they looked forward to finding Ferguson and his army. As they broke camp the next morning Cleveland requested the troops to form a circle so that he could "tell them the news."

A blunt, corpulent man weighing at least 250 pounds, Cleveland in all his rudeness knew how to appeal to frontiersmen. He used

that knowledge now. "The enemy is at hand," he said, "and we must up and at them. Now is the time for every man of you to do his country a priceless service–such as shall lead your children to exult in the fact that their fathers were the conquerors of Ferguson."

Cleveland made an offer, and Shelby repeated it, that anyone who wished to "back out" should take advantage of this opportunity and "step three paces in the rear." They could then part company with their companions and return to the safety of home–and, it was implied, permanent ignominy. No one moved.

There was a murmur of approval. And then Shelby issued a directive which summarized the spirit and the reality of the entire Kings Mountain engagement. The nugget of his message was contained in these two sentences: "When we encounter the enemy, don't wait for the word of command. Let each one of you be your own officer, and do the very best you can, taking every care you can of yourselves, and availing yourselves of every advantage that chance may throw in your way." At Kings Mountain every man in the patriot force was, in a very real sense, his own officer. Leaders and followers meshed their efforts in a kind of concentrated fury as they searched for Patrick Ferguson.

Ferguson was not in Gilbert Town when the patriots arrived there. He had left several days before. On the first day of October, he was encamped at Denard's Ford on Broad River. He had sent a message of some urgency to Col. J. H. Cruger, commander of the British post at Ninety-Six, requesting 100 men as reinforcements. He received the brief reply that such help was out of the question–the garrison at Ninety-Six totaled only half that number. He had directed an appeal for assistance to Cornwallis but he had received no answer. (Cornwallis, in fact, did not receive the message until the morning of the battle of Kings Mountain.) Deserters from the patriot forces brought news of the approach of the over-mountain men and their swelling ranks.

Ferguson's natural confidence was being eroded by a sense of growing unease. He longed to engage these backcountry rebels in a fair fight, but he needed some assurance of more support than he now enjoyed. Aware of his past successes in winning people of the

The patriot army of farmers, hunters, and frontiersmen crosses the mountains to find Ferguson.

countryside to the king's cause, he issued a new proclamation. Its exaggeration and bravado suggested a mounting desperation.

Denard's Ford, Broad River,
Tyron County, October 1, 1780.

Gentlemen: Unless you wish to be eat up by an inundation of barbarians, who have begun by murdering an unarmed son before his aged father, and afterwards lopped off his arms, and who by their shocking cruelties and irregularities, give the best proof of their cowardice and want of discipline; I say, if you want to be pinioned, robbed, and murdered, and see your wives and daughters, in four days, abused by the dregs of mankind–in short, if you wish to deserve to live, and bear the name of men, grasp your arms in a moment and run to camp.

The Back Water men have crossed the mountains; McDowell, Hampton, Shelby, and Cleveland are at their head, so that you know what you have to depend upon. If you choose to be degraded forever and ever by a set of mongrels, say so at once, and let your women turn their backs upon you, and look out for real men to protect them.

Pat Ferguson,
Major 71st Regiment.

Ferguson's actions during the next 5 days appear erratic and puzzling. He was awaiting the return of furloughed loyalists who had been called back into the ranks. In addition, he did not know at what point along any road or river he might meet an enemy detachment. Elijah Clarke and his Georgia patriots were supposed to be marching to join the over-mountain men and Ferguson had been ordered to intercept them. So far his searches had proved fruitless. He had also been informed by Cornwallis that patriot cavalry was riding from the east and might attack him.

There was more than uncertainty of enemy locations behind Ferguson's dallying, however. His almost aimless marches, his casual frittering away of precious time, suggest that a number of contradictory impulses and conflicting hopes were at war within him. As a shrewd and experienced soldier he knew that only these 100 Rangers of his Provincial Corps, chosen from the King's American Regiment, the Queen's Rangers, and the New Jersey Volunteers, could be absolutely depended upon when the fighting grew fierce.

However, as a self-confident and enthusiastic recruiter of his force of some 1,000 Tory militia, many of whom he had patiently trained and drilled, he anticipated an opportunity to prove his superior, Cornwallis, wrong in the latter's disdain for the militia.

As an able tactician who realized the danger of facing superior numbers on unfamiliar terrain without any promise of reinforcements, Ferguson finally directed his route toward Cornwallis' headquarters. But as a proud man whose vanity had been wounded by dismissal of his excellent rifle without a fair trial and by Cornwallis' coolness and favored treatment of the brutal Tarleton, Ferguson longed to lead this force under his command to a glorious victory. Only 3 months earlier, in mid-summer, he had considered resigning from the army; the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Lord Germain himself, had written to Sir Henry Clinton asking that Ferguson be dissuaded from quitting.

Burning with ambitious hopes, nagged by logistical realities, Ferguson did not leave Denard's Ford until 4 o'clock Monday afternoon, the 2d of October, and then he marched only 4 miles. His army slept in the open that night, their arms at the ready.

Next day, Tuesday, brought an opposite experience, with the march beginning at 4 o'clock in the dark of the morning. After fording Second Broad River, Sandy Run, and Buffalo Creek, and after covering about 20 miles, they reached the plantation of a loyalist named Tate, 1 mile from Buffalo Creek. For two full days, Wednesday and Thursday, Ferguson and his men loitered in camp at Tate's, awaiting news on the whereabout of his pursuers, still hoping for reinforcements. He was also waiting for his wagon train, which had taken a different and less-exposed route from the camp near Denard's Ford.

Where was the dashing Tarleton, who pleasured in pursuit of the enemy? Where was George Hanger, Tarleton's second in command, who held such disdain for the backcountry men and enjoyed the gore and glory of combat? Where was Cornwallis, who realized the debilitating effect upon an army of such prolonged encounters in this interior country, draining away men and time whether they resulted in Pyrrhic victories or niggling defeats?

Oddly enough, the three who might have extended help to Ferguson were each brought low by the greatest enemies of all: the weather and illness. By the time Ferguson wrote Cornwallis his final appeal, Tarleton had been desperately ill with fever for 2 weeks.

Hanger had managed to bring the Legion into Charlotte before he succumbed to malaria, too. And a "feverish cold" was racking Cornwallis' portly frame.

Ferguson's unavailing plea, written on Thursday, the 5th, to his commander-in-chief, was brief, at once pointed and pathetic in its brevity: "I am on my march towards you, by a road leading from Cherokee Ford, north of King's Mountain. Three or four hundred good soldiers, part dragoons, would finish the business. *Something must be done soon.* This is their last push in this quarter and they are extremely desolate and [c]owed."

This dispatch suggests that Ferguson had decided to move directly to join Cornwallis. On Friday his army was on the march from Tate's plantation once more by 4 o'clock in the morning. They followed the old Cherokee Ford road between Buffalo and Kings creeks, crossed a branch of the latter creek near a mill site, continued along the ridge road, and turned into Battleground Road. They forded Kings Creek, went through Stony Gap, and approached a rocky ridge of upland which was a sort of spur of a larger range known as Kings Mountain. Instead of continuing on toward Charlotte and the security of Cornwallis' army only 35 miles away, the column was directed to climb the wooded slopes of the ridge toward its rocky summit. Patrick Ferguson had found the site where he would stand and turn and meet his pursuers.

Atop the ridge, in his command quarters, Ferguson wrote Cornwallis one final message: "I arrived today at King's Mountain & have taken a post where I do not think I can be forced by a stronger enemy than that against us." The site was bountifully supplied with water from a spring on the northwest side of the ridge; forage in the surrounding countryside was scant, but Ferguson's men had become adept at discovering whatever was available.

Capt. Abraham DePeyster of the King's American Regiment was second in command. Member of an old and influential New York family, he was an able leader who had encountered some of the patriot militia in earlier forays with Ferguson–from the siege of Charleston through Musgrove's Mill to the present situation. And Captain DePeyster was not happy with the choice of Kings Mountain

as a battleground. Loyalty to his commander-in-chief had led to the nickname "the Bull Dog's Pup," however, and this correct, aristocratic young officer would not carry his unease into an open dispute with Ferguson.

Other officers were from New Jersey as well as New York. One of these, Lt. Anthony Allaire, of Huguenot descent, was keeping a diary of the campaign in the Carolinas. His entry that Friday concluded with the arrival at "Little King's Mountain, where we took up our ground." Ferguson and his officers and men settled in to wait for the rebel army. They did not have to wait long.

After their disappointment in missing Ferguson at Gilbert Town, the patriot force engaged in a tracking exercise following the elusive loyalists. Baffled by the meandering, indecisive route, the patriots lost the trail, recovered it, and began to grow discouraged. Finally, on Thursday evening, the 5th, encamped at Alexander's Ford on Green River, Campbell and his colonels held a council and decided to select the best mounted riflemen among them to speed up the pursuit. At dawn the next morning, those who had good horses, some 700 in all, set out after Ferguson.

After covering 21 miles they reached The Cowpens on Friday evening. Here, several miles southwest of where the roads intersected, was a famous cattle range with a few pens for the livestock herded there; the owner, it was recalled years later, was a wealthy Tory named Hiram Saunders. When the weary riders found Saunders in bed, they hauled him out unceremoniously but were unsuccessful in their attempt to secure information about Ferguson and his men. Silas McBee, a patriot lad in that campaign, gave an account in his old age of the slaughter of several of Saunders' cattle to feed the hungry soldiers: "The bright camp fires were everywhere seen lighting up the gloomy surroundings, and strips of beef were quickly roasted upon the coals and embers; while fifty acres of corn found there were harvested in about ten minutes."

If farmer Saunders' spirits were downcast by the sudden destruction which had been visited upon him, the army's spirits at The Cowpens were gladdened by two developments. The first was the arrival of Col. James Williams with his 400 men. The second was the

report of a spy, a crippled man named Joseph Kerr, who had gained access to Ferguson's camp by pretending to seek protection for his lame condition. The Tories were at that time halted for their noon meal only 6 or 7 miles from Kings Mountain. Kerr learned of the plans to march up the ridge and encamp later that day.

The patriots made another selection of the fittest, fastest mounted men. These more than 900 horsemen were to be followed by about 85 foot soldiers. They set forth from The Cowpens about 9 o'clock on Friday night, the 6th, in their final push to confront Ferguson. The night was dark as tar from Carolina pines as they followed the route taken by Ferguson only the day before. The march along rough country roads was made more difficult by a steady drizzle of rain. Campbell's Virginians became separated from the main group and were not set on the right road and reunited until after daylight the next morning. Flintlocks of the long rifles were kept dry by being wrapped in knapsacks, blankets, and hunting shirts. All else was sacrificed to the well-being of those rifles.

About sunrise the marchers forded the deep rushing waters of Broad River. Now the officers rode at a slow gait ahead of their men, many of whom were growing weary of the pursuit. If they were going to fight a battle, they said between curses, they would just as soon fight it now and get it over with. During short halts they ate whatever their wallets and saddlebags provided, or pulled corn from the fields as they passed by. They cut some of the hard dry kernels from the cobs for their own nourishment and they fed some of the corn to their nearly exhausted horses.

Saturday morning's dawn was gray and gloomy. The drizzle had changed to rain. Colonels Campbell, Sevier, and Cleveland agreed that the weary men and beasts needed a rest. They rode up to Shelby to tell him of their decision. They met the full force of his tenacious determination. With an oath he informed them, "I will not stop until night, if I follow Ferguson into Cornwallis' lines."

The men rode on. They had gone only a mile when they learned from one Solomon Beason (who lived up to his name for balanced judgment and "was half-Whig, half-loyalist, as occasion required") that Ferguson was only 8 miles ahead of them. Five miles farther,

one of their scouts encountered a Tory girl who said that "she had been in Ferguson's camp that very morning, which was only about three miles away, and had carried the British commander some chickens; that he was posted on a ridge between two branches where some deer hunters had a camp the previous autumn."

As they came closer to the ridge, the patriots captured a boy named John Ponder who was carrying Ferguson's last message to Lord Cornwallis. They read the dispatch. Then they asked Ponder how they would recognize Ferguson when they saw him. From the boy they learned that "while that officer was the best uniformed man on the mountain, they could not see his military suit, as he wore a checked shirt, or duster over it." They would be alert for a checked shirt. They already knew that the right arm of that shirt would be dangling, useless, because of the wound suffered at the Brandywine.

By 3 o'clock on Saturday afternoon the patriot army was in the woods at the base of Kings Mountain. The rain had stopped. A shimmer of October's rich light spread over the brilliantly colored leaves and the drenched landscape.

Kings Mountain was a battle of ultimate simplicity.

Ferguson and his Tory militia, some of them arrayed in red coats and uniforms, intended to hold the crest of this mountain spur and by soundly defeating the patriot assailants break decisively any spirit of resistance that remained in the backcountry.

The ridge they had chosen was shaped roughly like a human footprint or the paddle of a canoe. It extended northeast some 600 yards and varied in width from 60 to 120 feet. Its heavily wooded slopes, seamed with occasional ravines, led to a rocky, almost treeless summit. The Scottish major obviously considered such rough, boulder-strewn terrain to be ideal fortifications, for he issued no orders for breastworks or redoubts to be constructed.

The patriot colonels and their men, on the other hand, intended to dislodge the defenders from this ridge and end forever the Tory threat to their homes and freedom. And like Bre'r Rabbit in the briar patch, they welcomed the rugged terrain. Trees and rocks could provide cover for their ascent. The open crest would expose their enemy to the deadly aim of the long rifles. Squirrel hunters, Indian fighters, marksmen of remarkable accuracy, they were at home among woods and ledges.

When they were about a mile from the ridge, the patriots halted, hitched their steaming horses and formed themselves into two lines of two columns each, led by Campbell, Sevier, Shelby, and Cleveland. Proceeding on foot, they were to encircle Ferguson's force by taking up preassigned positions around the ridge. At the right center was

Campbell and his Virginians, followed by Shelby. On the right flank were detachments under Sevier, McDowell, and Winston. The latter was to make a wide sweep to the south of Ferguson to cut off the possibility of retreat by this most likely route. The left flank detachments were led by Williams, Chronicle, and Cleveland, with their Carolinians.

Before his men marched, William Campbell made the rounds of each corps. His message was plain. Anyone who did not wish to fight should immediately head for home; as for himself, he would "fight the enemy a week, if need be, to gain the victory." It was agreed "that when the center columns were ready for the attack, they were to give the signal by raising a regular frontier war-whoop, after the Indian style, and rush forward, doing the enemy all the injury possible."

The frustration of the past few days had evaporated; the weariness and contentiousness of the long rainy night's and morning's march had disappeared. With nerves stretched taut as bow-strings, eyes and ears alert to every detail of the danger confronting them, the volunteers followed orders for every man to attend to his rifle: "throw the priming out of his pan, pick his touchhole, prime anew, examine bullets and see that everything was in readiness for battle." Within a few minutes, such details could mean the difference between a man's survival–or death. They adopted as their countersign the word "Buford," a reminder of the men Tarleton and his legion had slaughtered in vicious disregard of Buford's attempt to surrender and his call for quarter. As a final preparation, 16-year-old James Collins, in Chronicle's regiment, followed the example of the men around him and crammed "four or five balls in his mouth to prevent thirst, also to be in readiness to reload quick." Nervous and sweating, but less fearful of the enemy than of being called a coward, he faced toward the ridge.

Their approach was so rapid that Ferguson was caught by surprise. Country men were well aware that the best time to hunt squirrels was after a rain when the fallen autumn leaves would cushion all sounds and footfalls. Capt. Alexander Chesney, a South Carolina loyalist, had been on reconnaissance for Ferguson and was

just dismounting to report "that all was quiet and the pickets on the alert," when he heard sudden firing about a half-mile in the distance. He hastily called up his officers and men.

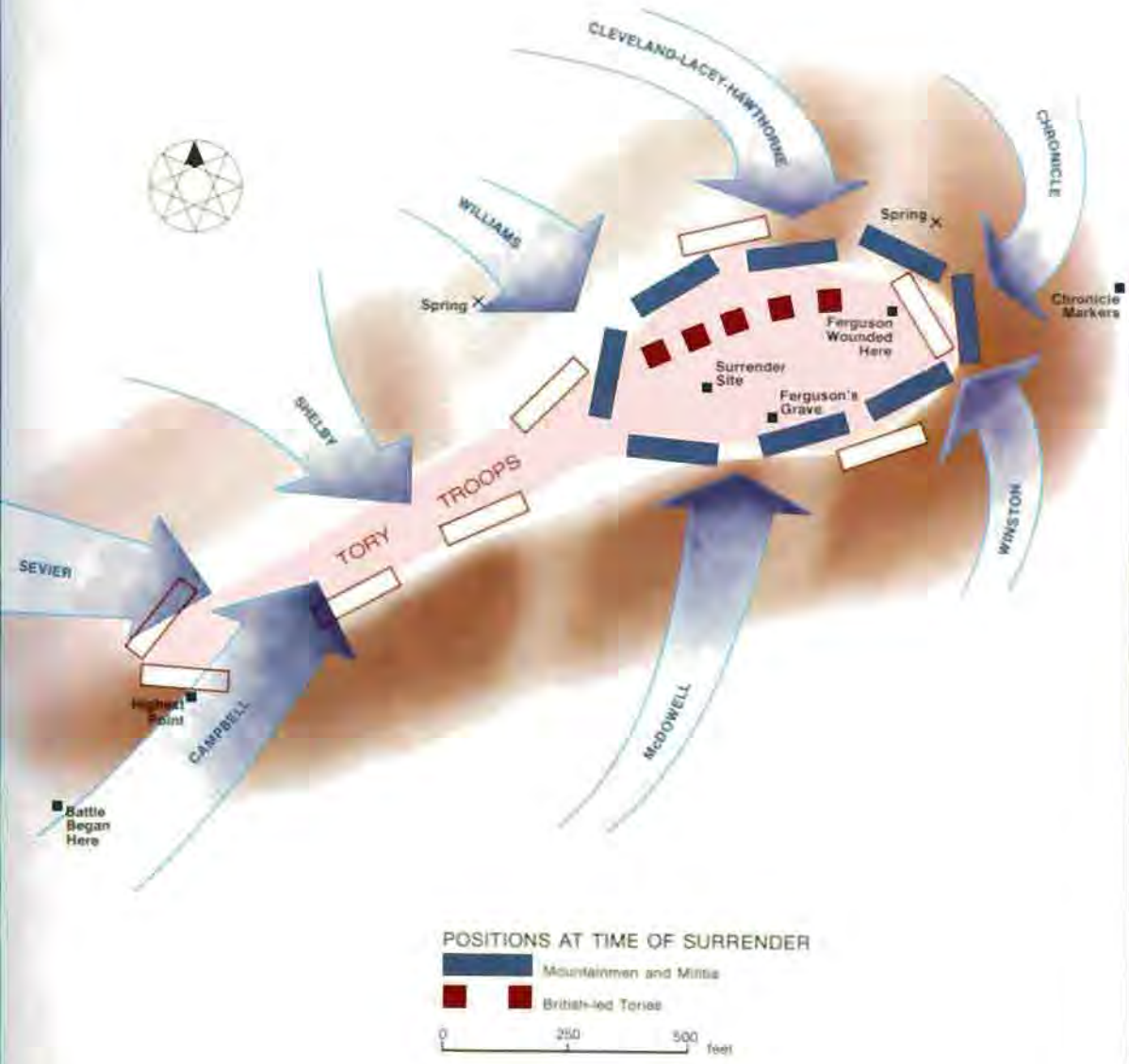
The first shots were fired by Tories who had sighted Shelby's approaching column. Shelby would not let his men immediately return the fire, however. He firmly answered their impatience: when they had reached their assigned position, their fire would not be in vain.

Shelby's men were not yet in place when Campbell stripped off his coat and called on his men to attack. He ordered them to *"shout like hell, and fight like devils!"* Their whoops were taken up by Shelby's corps and then by those along the other wings. Atop the ridge, Capt. Abraham DePeyster was reminded of his former encounter with Shelby and these frontiersmen at Musgrove's Mill. He warned Ferguson that these were "the damned yelling boys!"

To one of those boys "the mountain appeared volcanic; there flashed along its summit, and around its base, and up its sides, one long sulphurous blaze." The patriots' attack was being answered with a burst of trained volley firing. And above all the din and uproar there resounded the shrill staccato of Patrick Ferguson's famous silver whistle–ranging from the main camp at the northeastern end of the ridge along the rocky crest to the southwestern rim.

The forces of Campbell and Shelby advanced up the craggy slope, their men moving Indian fashion to take advantage of every tree or rock, shrub or log. It was their fire that brought Ferguson's first order for a bayonet charge. At close quarters the Virginians could not withstand such an attack and they broke and ran down the mountain. Ferguson's Lieutenant Allaire, on horseback, overtook a tall patriot officer on foot and felled him with a single blow of his sword.

This was a critical moment in the battle. The first repulse had been sharp and bloody. In their retreat the patriots had run not only to the bottom of the ridge but across a ravine and part-way up an adjoining slope. At the battle of Camden, such a repulse and such a moment had turned into a rout of the patriot forces. Now "everything depended upon successfully rallying the men when first driven down



OCTOBER 7, 1780

BATTLE OF KINGS MOUNTAIN

the mountain." And this was what red-haired, energetic William Campbell was able to do. He called upon his men to halt and return to the ridge and drive the enemy before them. They heard and turned and followed his orders–and his example–reloaded their rifles, and went back to charge up the mountainside again.

The battle had become dozens of smaller fights. Three times the patriot forces of Campbell and Shelby attacked and were driven back down the mountain. But it was becoming apparent that the volleys of Ferguson's muskets were ineffective; they passed over the heads of the attackers. And the fire from the patriots' rifles was reaping an ever deadlier toll. A similar situation existed all around the mountain where the rebel riflemen could shoot and dodge for cover while the Tories and provincials on the ridge were exposed to fire from both sides.

The consequences of the day's strangest and most ironic turn of events now became increasingly evident. The inventor of the Ferguson rifle, the man who was one of the finest marksmen in the British army, had no choice but to defend Kings Mountain with the bayonet rather than the musket! When Ferguson had ordered his sergeants to inspect arms on Friday evening and Saturday morning, he directed the men who did not have bayonets to whittle down the handles of their hunting knives so they could be fitted into the muzzles of their muskets. Considerable time and energy had already gone into training the loyalist militia in skillful use of the bayonet. But on this hillside, facing these frontiersmen, the bayonet was proving a disaster. In fact, the most succinct and familiar evaluation of the military confrontation at Kings Mountain would summarize this contest between blade and bullet: the light cavalryman, Henry "Lighthorse Harry" Lee (future father of Robert E. Lee), observed that Kings Mountain proved to be "more assailable by the rifle than defensible with the bayonet."

The contest was bloody. Thomas Young, a 16-year-old private who fought his way up the northwest slope with Colonel Williams, afterward recalled that "Ben Hollingworth and myself took right up the side of the mountain, and fought our way from tree to tree, up to the summit. I recollect I stood behind one tree and fired until the

bark was nearly all knocked off, and my eyes pretty well filled with it. One fellow shaved me pretty close, for his bullet took a piece out of my gun stock. Before I was aware of it, I found myself apparently between my own regiment and the enemy, as I judged from seeing the paper the Whigs wore in their hats, and the pine twigs the Tories wore in their, these being the badges of distinction."

Ferguson's men launched their third charge down among the boulders and trees where Campbell's and Shelby's sharpshooters took cover while they picked off their opponents outlined in clear relief along the brow of the hill. Flame and smoke increased as the very mountain reverberated with the clamor of battle. A South Carolina loyalist named Drury Mathis was severely wounded. As he lay flat against the rough slope the balls from the patriot rifles fell around him like hail while the shots from his fellow loyalists consistently passed above the heads of their targets. Playing possum, he hugged the ground while watching the mountaineers swarm up the ridge: men "not over-burdened with fat, but tall, raw-boned, and sinewy."

Then the loyalists discovered that they were under attack by other patriot detachments, those who had climbed the ridge along the northeastern slopes. Whirling to meet this menace from their rear, Ferguson's men left Campbell's, Shelby's, and Sevier's sharpshooters to reach and hold the crest of their segment of the ridge.

And the defenders' ground was dwindling. Each thrust by the "yelling boys" pushed the Tories and provincials into a narrower space along the ridge-top. They were shrinking toward that northeastern bulge of the ridge-top where the headquarters of the camp stood. On the slopes here were Williams and his South Carolinians, as well as Cleveland's men, who had been delayed briefly in taking up their position because of a swampy stretch of ground grown miry under the heavy rains and because their hefty leader had taken off afoot to lead them when his fine horse, "Roebuck," was wounded. There were William Chronicle and Frederick Hambright, who faced terrain more sharp and forbidding than Campbell's men had climbed. At the base of the ridge, the Carolina-born Chronicle rushed 10 paces ahead of his men and waved them on with his military hat, shouting, "Face to the hill!" The words died in his throat as he was struck by

a ball. At 25, the young major who had shown great promise and won wide popularity among his companions, was dead.

The battle raged on. German-born Colonel Hambright, severely wounded in his thigh, refused to dismount although his boot was filling with blood. "Huzza, my brave poys," his accent from the old country rang out, "fight on a few minutes more, and the battle will be over!"

Winston's and McDowell's men were among those tightening the noose at the end of the ridge. As the tide of patriot success swelled, however, Thomas Young saw his friend and leader, Col. James Williams, fall before the enemy's attack. Although Williams did not die until the following day, this "rough, rash and fearless" South Carolinian was already mourned by the youthful neighbor who had gone with him into the battle.

On top of the mountain [Young wrote] in the thickest of the fight, I saw Colonel Williams fall, and a braver or better man never died upon the field of battle. I had seen him fall but once before that day–it was in the beginning of the action, as he charged by me at full speed around the mountain. Toward the summit a ball struck his horse just under the jaw, when he commenced stamping as if he were in a nest of yellow jackets. Colonel Williams threw his reins over the animal's neck, sprang to the ground, and dashed onward.

The moment I heard the cry that Colonel Williams was shot, I ran to his assistance, for I loved him as a father, he had ever been so kind to me, almost always carrying a cake in his pocket for me and his little son, Joseph. They carried him into a tent, and sprinkled some water in his face. As he revived, his first words were, 'For God's sake, boys, don't give up the hill!' I left him in the arms of his son Daniel, and returned to the field to revenge his fall.

Suddenly word spread among Sevier's troops that the hated Tarleton and his dragoons had arrived to aid Ferguson and were even at that moment on the mountain. Sevier rode among his men, reassuring them: Bloody Tarleton was not there, "and if he were, they could make him, like Ferguson's Rangers, turn their backs and flee up the mountain." The over-mountain men readied another attack on their enemy.

The noise of rifles, the shouts, the crashing of men and horses through the brush and among the boulders, intensified as the struggle tightened. The threshing about of wounded animals and the groans of wounded men mingled with the general din. Sixteen-year-old

Robert Henry, of Chronicle's command, had an encounter with a Tory:

> I was preparing to fire when one of the British advancing, I stepped back and was in the act of cocking my gun when his bayonet was running along the barrel of my gun, and gave me a thrust through my hand and into my thigh. My antagonist and I both fell. The Fork boys retreated and loaded their guns. I was then lying under the smoke and it appeared that some of them were not more than a gun's length in front of the bayonets, and the farthest could not have been more than 20 feet in front when they discharged their rifles. It was said that every one dropped his man. The British then retreated in great haste, and were pursued by the Fork boys.
>
> William Caldwell saw my condition, and pulled the bayonet out of my thigh, but it hung to my hand; he gave my hand a kick and it went out. The thrust gave me much pain, but the pulling of it was much more severe. With my well hand I picked up my gun and found her discharged. I suppose that when the soldier made the thrust, I gripped the trigger and discharged her; the load must have passed through his bladder and cut a main artery at his back, as he bled profusely.

The patriots were closing in but Ferguson did not flinch. He seemed to be everywhere, attended by the high sustained call of his silver whistle rallying Tory militia to resist and give battle. White flags of surrender appeared among his forces; he slashed them down with sweeping strokes as he galloped to and fro. Two horses were shot down as he rode them. He cruelly spurred a third to carry him ever faster from one threatened area to another. Several of his officers suggested that it was useless to continue the fight. Captain DePeyster believed that they might all be slaughtered like "ducks in a coop." But their commander in chief was not to be persuaded. Never, he told them, would he yield "to such a damned banditti."

And he did not yield. Cutting and slashing with his weapon in a last desperate assault, Ferguson and a handful of his officers flung themselves forward in a final attempt to break through the rebel lines. His sword broke. He spurred his horse savagely and came to the place in front of Sevier's column. Along the mountainside shots rang out. Six or eight found their mark. One penetrated Ferguson's head. He slumped in the saddle, both arms broken, hat and clothing tattered by shot. Then he dropped from his horse, one foot yet caught in the stirrup. Four of his loyalists loosed the foot, laid him on a blanket,

and carried him out of the line of fire. As he lay propped up with rocks and blankets, his life ebbing away, soldiers from both sides came to gaze upon the dying chieftain whose inventions and adventures had become legendary.

DePeyster assumed command of the provincials and Tories, and the fierce combat continued for a brief interval as the patriots tightened their encirclement. But with Ferguson's whistle and encouragements silenced, the mountain's defenders panicked. White flags of surrender fluttered among the smoke and confusion. One of the soldiers on horseback waved a white handkerchief and was shot down by a grief-stricken patriot who had just learned that his brother was killed. A second man bearing a surrender token was also shot down. At last a third rider reached Maj. Evan Shelby, brother to Col. Isaac Shelby, and handed him the token of surrender.

But the battle had generated a momentum that was difficult to halt. The over-mountain men and the Piedmont patriots had sought this battle. They were not professional soldiers following military rules and protocol as much as aroused citizens following the instinct for survival. There were probably some–if not as many as later justification claimed–who did not recognize the meaning of the white handkerchiefs blossoming on muskets and ramrods.

Others knew the message well but ignored it. "Give them Buford's play!" was the shout, a reminder of Tarleton's lack of mercy to Colonel Buford and his men almost 5 months before. All the fierce hate and revenge of recent civil strife in the South seemed concentrated on that bloody battlefield at that moment. It was later recorded that "the slaughter continued until the Americans were weary of killing."

"Quarter! Quarter!" the provincials and Tories cried.

"Damn you, if you want quarter, throw down your arms!" Colonel Shelby ordered those before him.

Young Joseph Sevier, told that his father was killed in action, continued firing. Tears coursed down his cheeks as he loaded, fired, re-loaded. "The damned rascals have killed my father, and I'll keep loading and shooting till I kill every son of a bitch of them!" When John Sevier himself appeared presently, very much alive, on horse-

back, his son could lay aside the rifle.

A soldier of the Virginia regiment was startled to have his rifle knocked aside while he was taking aim. Colonel Campbell, striding among the various commands, pled, "For God's sake, don't shoot! It is murder to kill them now, for they have raised the flag."

Captain DePeyster, erect on his gray horse, informed Campbell what he thought of such behavior. "It's damned unfair, damned unfair." But Campbell did not pause for discussion. He ordered the men under DePeyster: "Officers, rank by yourselves; prisoners, take off your hats and sit down."

As the vanquished Tories collected in one dejected huddle on the brow of the ridge, they were surrounded by the victors who finally stood four deep around their quarry. At a cost of only 28 killed and 62 wounded, their victory was total. Ferguson's detachment of 1,100 men was annihilated; Cornwallis' left flank no longer existed.

Led by Campbell, the American patriots gave three loud *"huzzas for Liberty."*

In one brief hour the tide of war had shifted in the South. Never again would the British, boasting invincibility, be able to recruit an easy following of loyalists. Never again would the patriot Americans fear that their cause was hopeless. As imperceptibly and surely as the ocean's reversal from ebb to flow and vice versa, the morale and destiny of opponents engaging each other in the Southern theater had altered.

In the mellow light of late afternoon, surrounded by the bloody devastation they had wrought, the men of both sides turned from fighting to assessing their situation. Patrick Ferguson's corpse was wrapped in a raw beef hide and buried in a shallow ravine just below the crest of the ridge. A cairn would later be erected at this site.

Legends would also arise. The most persistent concerned two women attached to the loyalist camp. Virginia Sal and Virginia Paul were pretty enough to win the attention of the British officer, and Ferguson was charming enough to attract the allegiance of the young women. Virginia Sal was reputedly one of the first to be killed when the firing began; her red hair may have made her a special target. When Ferguson was buried, some recalled, they brought her body

to lie in the earth beside his.

Virginia Paul, on the other hand, seemed immune to attack. There were those who vowed they saw her coolly riding across the battlefield during the engagement, apparently oblivious to danger. After the battle, as the patriots discussed the disposition of their prisoners, Campbell argued that Virginia Paul should be paroled. His logic was a curious combination of chauvinism and chivalry: "She is only a woman," he explained to his weary, sweaty, jubilant crowd of men, "our mothers were women. We must let her go." And the pretty woman on horseback was probably sent with other prisoners to Burke Court House (present-day Morganton, N.C.) and from there to Cornwallis' army in Charlotte.

There was one quite remarkable surgeon present to treat the wounded on both sides. Dr. Uzal Johnson was not the only doctor present at Kings Mountain, but he was the one whose ministrations lived in the memories of patriots and loyalists alike. Johnson was a native of Newark, N.J., where he began practicing medicine at the age of 19, the same year he joined the New Jersey Volunteers. In 1780 he was 23 and serving with Ferguson's corps. At Kings Mountain he could not begin to meet the demands for his attention and skills.

The injured and the dying, sprawled along the slopes and ridge, were propped against trees and boulders. A lieutenant severely wounded in the abdomen was saved from death mainly by the fact that he had had so little to eat for 3 days that his stomach was practically empty. A dauntless Irishman whose windpipe was injured confiscated the rest of the rum with which his wound was being bathed and drank it, explaining: "A little *in* is as good as *out*."

Capt. Robert Sevier, John's brother, was among the most critically wounded, struck by buckshot near his kidney when he stooped to pick up his ramrod. Dr. Johnson tried unsuccessfully to remove the shot and ended finally by dressing the wound and warning that if Sevier undertook the long trip home before the shot could be removed, his kidneys would become fatally inflamed. But Robert Sevier shared the impatience of his fellow over-mountain men to be on their way, and by the time they broke camp the next day, he was

with them. The doctor's diagnosis proved correct, however, and at Bright's Place on Yellow Mountain, on his ninth day toward home and cared for by his nephew James, Capt. Robert Sevier died.

The countryside around Kings Mountain was poor, plundered, and sparsely settled, but noise of the battle had reverberated far and wide. Before nightfall men and women were making their way to the ridge to learn the outcome of the fight. Some of the women immediately turned to nursing the wounded. Some of the curiosity seekers scavenged for treasure on the dead bodies.

The prisoners–virtually an entire army by 18th-century standards–were placed under guard while food was being prepared for the hungry victors, who had scarcely rested or eaten for 24 hours. There were trophies to be divided, too, such as Ferguson's famous silver whistles–a large one and a small one, as it turned out–the former given to Shelby, the latter to a soldier named Elias Powell. Joseph McDowell received china dinner plates and a coffee cup and saucer from Ferguson's official table service, while Sevier took the silk sash and Captain DePeyster's sword. The white horse went to Cleveland, who had lost his mount, and Ferguson's correspondence became Campbell's property. Two of the men who were nearby when Ferguson fell had already appropriated his pistol and large silver watch, "as round as a turnip."

During the days to follow, someone searching the battle site reportedly found a necklace of glass beads. Quite commonplace beads they were. But whether they had belonged to Virginia Sal or Virginia Paul, the necklace was a memento of some sentiment or romance alien to this bloody battleground.

The morning after the battle, Sunday, dawned brightly. The autumn landscape became once more benign and warm with sunlight on brilliant foliage. The dead were hastily buried in shallow graves. The boy, James Collins, helped at the grisly task and later remembered:

> . . . the scene became really distressing. The wives and children of the poor Tories came in, in great numbers. Their husbands, fathers and brothers lay dead in heaps, while others lay wounded or dying, a melancholy sight indeed! . . .
>
> We proceeded to bury the dead, but it was badly done. They were thrown

into convenient piles and covered with old logs, the bark of old trees, and rocks, yet not so as to secure them from becoming a prey to the beasts of the forests, or the vultures of the air. And the wolves became so plenty, that it was dangerous for anyone to be out at night, for several miles around. The hogs in the neighborhood gathered into the place to devour the flesh of man, inasmuch as numbers chose to live on little meat rather than eat their hogs, though they were fat. Half the dogs in the country were said to be mad, and were put to death. . . .

In the evening, there was a distribution made of the plunder, and we were dismissed. My father and myself drew two fine horses, two guns, and some articles of clothing, with a share of powder and lead.

The troops claimed their own spoils as they had claimed their own responsibilities for the battle. No order of Congress or of their States had brought them here. "It was entirely a volunteer movement–no baggage-wagons, no commissaries, no pay, and no supplies." Swords were particularly sought after by poor militia officers who had never possessed one before. Other "plunder" was divided among the patriots.

Seventeen baggage wagons in Ferguson's camp were drawn across the campfires and burned. To have taken them would prove cumbersome–and the patriots were in a hurry. They expected Tarleton, who was still rumored to be on his way to reinforce Ferguson. The weary fighters were content with their present success; they did not anticipate another battle immediately.

The prisoners were lined up for the march toward North Carolina and were forced to carry their own arms. Lyman C. Draper has evoked that scene from manuscripts and memories shared by the participants:

The flints were taken from the locks; and, to the more strong and healthy Tories, two guns each were assigned for conveyance. When ready to start on the day's journey, the prisoners were marched, in single file, by the spot where the rifles and muskets were stacked, and each was directed to shoulder and carry the arms allotted to him. Colonel Shelby, with his sword drawn, stood by, among others, to see that the order was strictly obeyed. One old fellow came toddling by, and evinced a determination not to encumber himself with a gun. Shelby sternly ordered him to shoulder one without delay. The old man demurred, declaring he was not able to carry it. Shelby told him, with a curse, that he was able to bring one there, and he should carry one away; and, at the same time gave him a smart slap across his shoulders with the flat side of his sword-blade. The old fellow, discovering that he could not trifle with such a man as Shelby, jumped at the gun-pile, shouldered one, and marched away in double-quick time.

The wounded were transported on hastily improvised horse-litters made by "fastening two long poles on either side of two horses at tandem, leaving a space of six or eight feet between them, stretching tent-cloth or blankets between the poles, on which to place a disabled officer or soldier."

While some of the patriots and prisoners remained on the ridge to complete disposal of the corpses, the main army–with its more than 600 captives and its litters of wounded and dying–left the battle site. Departure began about 10 o'clock in the morning. They moved slowly. Early in the afternoon the wounded Colonel Williams died. The marchers had covered 12 miles when they made camp near the Broad River at the deserted plantation of a Tory whose dry rails fueled the evening campfires and whose sweet potato patch provided tasty provision for an army which had eaten little for 2 days and nights.

They marched sluggishly during the following days. Most of the October fields, long since stripped by raiders from both armies, offered scanty forage. Thomas Young feared that they were all near starvation. Green pumpkin, sliced and fried, came to be "about the sweetest eating" he had ever known. The prisoners' fare was even more meager: raw corn on the ear and pumpkins were thrown into their midst as if they were "farmer's swine." They devoured them greedily. Weakened by hunger, encumbered by the wounded and the captured, the Kings Mountain patriots, after a week on the road had covered only about 40 miles.

The going was rough in every way. Physical hardship rendered tempers raw and violent. Impatient to arrive home, citizen-soldiers chafed under the delays of military or legal procedures. By Wednesday, the fourth day after the battle, Colonel Campbell felt it necessary to include in his General Order a revealing statement: "I must request the officers of all ranks in the army to endeavor to restrain the disorderly manner of slaughtering and disturbing the prisoners."

On Saturday, the 14th, the smouldering hatreds flared into a final bloody epilogue to Kings Mountain. Encamped about 10 miles northeast of Gilbert Town at a site known as Bickerstaff's Old Fields–or Red Chimneys, marking the location of the crumbled

Enraged by stories of alleged Tory atrocities, the patriots tried and executed, three at a time, nine of Ferguson's captured loyalists.

plantation house–the patriots held a court to try a number of Tory prisoners in their custody. Recent memories of Cornwallis' orders following the patriot defeat at Camden, Tarleton's massacre, and individual Tory retaliations against patriot sympathizers in many communities, were recounted and circulated throughout the camp.

Citizens along the way had also added their stories of continuing hostilities. Shelby wrote that when he and others arrived at Gilbert Town "they were informed by a paroled officer that he had seen eleven patriots hung at Ninety Six a few days before, for being Rebels. Similar cruel and unjustifiable acts had been committed before. In the opinion of the patriots, it required retaliatory measures to put a stop to these atrocities. A copy of the law of North Carolina was obtained, which authorized two magistrates to summon a jury, and forthwith to try, and, if found guilty, to execute persons who had violated its precepts."

Since most of the North Carolina officers were also magistrates at home, it was no problem to find a jury of 12 who qualified under these regulations. Thirty-six of the prisoners were rounded up and brought before the grim court. They were accused, tried, and found guilty of "breaking open houses, killing the men, turning the women and children out of doors, and burning the houses." The sentence was death. Among those sitting in judgment, it appeared that "Colonel Cleveland was probably more active and determined than any other officer in bringing about these severe measures."

By the time a great old oak was found and preparations for the executions were completed, it was late at night. Pine-knot torches were lit as the over-mountain men and their companions gathered four deep around the condemned prisoners. Three at a time the Tories were swung from limbs of the giant oak. After the ninth hanging, a halt was called. Not all the patriots were ready to grant a reprieve. One bitter Tory-hater pointed to the limp bodies and voiced satisfaction: "Would to God every tree in the wilderness bore such fruit as that!"

But the next trio, already bound for execution, were untied. The remaining condemned men were pardoned. Those nine already dead were left dangling from the tree. They would serve as warning

to other loyalists in the vicinity. Throughout the region that tree became known as the Gallows Oak.

The patriots broke camp before daylight the following morning. It was Sunday, the 15th of October. A heavy rain fell all day. But Shelby had received a secret warning during the night that Tarleton was on his way and might even reach Gilbert Town that morning. The over-mountain men were anxious to put the swollen waters of the Catawba River between themselves and the hated Tarleton.

Ironically, while they were fleeing from Tarleton, he was also fleeing from them. Accompanying Cornwallis' main army on the retreat from Charlotte back into South Carolina, the loyalists were fearful of the 3,000 victorious mountaineers rumored to be in pursuit of them.

Throughout that soggy day the patriots with their prisoners pushed on. They covered some 32 miles. Ferguson's Lieutenant Allaire, a prisoner, later recalled that "several of the militia that were worn out with fatigue, and not being able to keep up, were cut down and trodden to death in the mire." Late that night they reached the familiar haven of Quaker Meadows, home of Major McDowell, where they had camped on their way to Kings Mountain. Once again, Joseph McDowell shared the hospitality of his home and farm, offering the chilled men, still wet from fording the Catawba river, free use of rails from his fences to build campfires and warm themselves. Several of the loyalist officers, including Lieutenant Allaire, were even taken into the house for lodging.

The patriot army began to disperse: Lacey and his men went back to South Carolina; Shelby and Sevier and the Virginia footmen headed across their mountains to the backcountry; and the mounted Virginians, Cleveland's and Winston's troops, with some of McDowell's and a few over-mountain boys who wished to stay with the army, escorted the prisoners northward under instructions from General Gates, still the American commander in the South. Eventually the prisoners were delivered to Hillsborough, N.C., where they were exchanged for patriot prisoners of war. So many had escaped along the way, however–100 during one day, that miserable rainy Sunday after the hangings–that only an estimated 130 captives, Tories and

provincials combined, remained at last to be exchanged. General Greene, when he arrived in the South to relieve Gates of the command in December, "lamented the loss of so many of the Kings Mountain prisoners."

The two forces which had faced each other atop the rocky ridge had swiftly disintegrated. The 100-odd provincials among whom Ferguson had aroused such loyalty, and the estimated 1,000 militia in whom he placed such high confidence, lay dead atop Kings Mountain or scattered like grain before the whirlwind across the ravaged countryside. The patriot army, an estimated 1,500 to 1,800 strong, which had welled up like a natural force at Sycamore Shoals and gathered tributaries from among the mountains and lowlands as it surged toward Kings Mountain, dissolved back into the countryside. Atop Kings Mountain the wild hogs scavenged, the predators gorged, and wolves became so numerous that hunters found the site a favorite place for their sport. Yet this place of death had made its significant contribution toward bringing a new nation to life.

News of Kings Mountain reached Cornwallis on Saturday, October 14th. Rumor could hardly magnify the defeat–Ferguson dead and his entire force killed or captured–but it enlarged the patriot army to 3,000 and placed it on the march toward British headquarters.

Cornwallis was appalled, and the effect on his plans was decisive. The thrust into North Carolina was abandoned and amid torrents of rain, on red clay roads churned to a heavy porridge, Cornwallis turned his army back toward South Carolina. About 20 wagons loaded with supplies were destroyed or abandoned in the wretched mud. The British commander in chief, sick with a bilious fever, riding in a jolting wagon, led his dispirited troops into Winnsboro and temporary encampment. The British offensive in the South was momentarily stalled. British Adj. Gen. Edward Harvey had long since warned that "Our army will be destroyed by damned driblets." Kings Mountain had been a driblet that released a flood.

Sir Henry Clinton, with the 20/20 vision of hindsight, later claimed: "The instant I heard of Major Ferguson's defeat, I foresaw most of the consequences likely to result from it. The check so encouraged the spirit of rebellion in the Carolinas that it could never afterward be humbled." And he pronounced it "the first link in a chain of evils that followed each other in regular succession until they at last ended in the total loss of America."

George Washington did not hear of Kings Mountain until October 26th, and then the report was garbled. But when the result was finally clear, he spoke in his General Orders of that "important object gained" as a "proof of the spirit and resources of the country."

On November 7, a full month after the battle, the Congress received a complete account of the engagement at Kings Mountain. Members expressed their approval of the spirited conduct which won "complete victory."

British headquarters in New York tried to dismiss the battle as one of little consequence and for a brief interval even denied that it had occurred at all. But British supporters in the Southern colonies had long since learned the battle's message, and strategists in New York and London would soon comprehend it, too: the anticipated number of loyalists waiting to enlist under Cornwallis had not and would not materialize. It was apparent that much of the Southern campaign had been founded on a delusion.

In addition, there had been a significant misunderstanding of the backcountry. Swaggering Tarleton had thought he could subdue it through terror. Proud Ferguson had believed he could win it by threat. Cornwallis had tried to impress it by force. Their force and threat and terror achieved what edicts and oratory, summonses and pleas, had not accomplished: unity among a group of tenacious individualists. If British strategists had wondered what the result might be if enough patriot bands united to form a small army, their answer came at Kings Mountain.

Kings Mountain was the greatest victory of the Southern militia. It has been considered a special achievement of the leaders, men who were able to mount an attack, coordinate it with skill, and inspire the participants to feats of courage and final victory. But more than leadership was involved in that success. When Isaac Shelby informed his men that each one of them was to consider himself an officer, he struck the keynote of the venture–from the zeal of its voluntary beginning to the excesses of its violent conclusion, both the best and the worst of the expedition grew out of the fact that each patriot considered himself leader and follower.

Between the crushing defeat of Horatio Gates by Cornwallis at Camden on August 16th and the rousing victory of Daniel Morgan over Tarleton at The Cowpens on January 17th looms Kings Mountain–a watershed of the Revolution. Cornwallis never regained the full momentum of initiative again. The patriots never completely lost

confidence in their strength again. Nathanael Greene, arriving in the Carolinas to replace Gates, announced he would "recover this country or die in the attempt." Cornwallis, ill and momentarily shaken, complained of refugees and uprisings which taxed his resources and called for "the assistance of regular troops everywhere." Increasingly those "damned driblets" took their toll.

Years later, Thomas Jefferson called "that memorable victory" at Kings Mountain "the joyful annunciation of that turn of the tide of success, which terminated the Revolutionary war with the seal of independence."

Of all the patriot leaders, none received more political benefit from participation in the battle than John Sevier. His biographer, Carl S. Driver, points out that "his place in the hearts of his neighbors had been definitely established before Kings Mountain, but his participation in this spectacular victory greatly enhanced his prestige as a frontier leader. . . . This engagement introduced him to the country at large and made him a respected character in all parts of the nation." Six times he would be elected governor of Tennessee, which did not come into existence until 16 years after Kings Mountain. Four times he would represent his State in Congress. His neighbors continued to remember that he and Isaac Shelby had issued the first summons to muster at Sycamore Shoals and turn back the British threat.

Isaac Shelby returned to his interest in the Kentucky lands following the Revolution, and made important contributions toward establishment of that State. He became its first governor.

William Campbell, following Kings Mountain, represented Washington County in the Virginia House of Delegates before being recalled to duty under General Lafayette. He died on August 22, 1781, the summer after Kings Mountain, before the final victory of the patriot forces to which he had given such memorable service.

Among the other leaders who figured prominently in the Kings Mountain action, Joseph McDowell participated in the subsequent victory at The Cowpens and went on to become influential in North Carolina politics. Benjamin Cleveland eventually served as a justice in North Carolina, but his chief claim to fame was the 450-pound

size he reputedly attained. Joseph Winston served in the North Carolina legislature and in the United States Congress, while Frederick Hambright bought a home in the vicinity of Kings Mountain, where he died at the age of 90.

And what happened to those loyalist leaders who were at Kings Mountain? Abraham DePeyster, whose life had been saved that day when a rifle ball was stopped by a dubloon in his vest pocket, retired following the British surrender at Yorktown and lived in New Brunswick, Canada. Others of the provincial soldiers–Capt. Samuel Ryerson and Lt. John Taylor, both from New Jersey, along with Lts. Anthony Allaire, William Stevens, and Duncan Fletcher–also found haven for retirement in Canada. Dr. Uzal Johnson, who served the wounded of patriot and loyalist forces with equal care after the battle, who endured insults during the wretched march following the battle, returned to his native Newark, N.J., where he continued practicing medicine until he died at the age of 70.

Perhaps Patrick Ferguson, writing from America early in his service there to his anxious mother in the British Isles, unwittingly provided the most concise and accurate memorial for those who died on the ridge at Kings Mountain on October 7, 1780: "The length of our lives is not at our command, however much the manner of them may be. If our Creator enable us to act the part of honour, and to conduct ourselves with spirit, probity, and humanity, the change to another world whether now or fifty years hence, will not be for the worse."

The battle in which he lost his life was a portent of another kind of change in worlds. An old world was being challenged; a new world was in birth. That birth, at Kings Mountain as elsewhere throughout the colonies, was bloody and dearly bought. It brought out the worst and best in the human beings involved. It also bore the pangs and satisfactions of that stretch toward freedom, toward fulfillment, which was part of a new people's self-discovery and self-government. Those new people would be called Americans.

For Further Reading. Except for the Draper volume, the following books are of general Revolutionary War history which include accounts of Kings Mountain or deal with specific aspects of the war (the loyalists, for example) having a bearing on the battle.

Robert M. Calhoon, *The Loyalists in Revolutionary America.* New York, 1965.

Lyman C. Draper, *King's Mountain and Its Heroes.* Cincinnati, 1881. Several reprint editions are available.

Don Higginbotham, *The War of American Independence.* New York, 1971.

Piers Mackesy, *The War for America, 1775–1783.* Cambridge, 1964.

Lynn Montross, *Rag, Tag and Bobtail: The Story of the Continental Army, 1775–1783.* New York, 1952.

Lynn Montross, *The Reluctant Rebels: The Story of the Continental Congress.* New York, 1950.

Hugh F. Rankin, *The American Revolution.* New York, 1964.

George F. Scheer and Hugh F. Rankin, *Rebels and Redcoats.* New York, 1957.

Paul H. Smith, *Loyalists and Redcoats.* Chapel Hill, 1964.

Jack M. Sosin, *The Revolutionary Frontier.* New York, 1967.

M. F. Treacy, *Prelude to Yorktown: The Southern Campaign of Nathanael Greene, 1780–1781.* Chapel Hill, 1963.

Dale Van Every, *Men of the Western Waters.* Boston, 1956.