

S.C. - King's Mountain, Battle of

British Are Defeated At King's Mountain

'Raw' Americans Win Big Victory In Battle

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KING'S MOUNTAIN, S. C.,

Oct. 8, 1780—The British invasion of North Carolina was jolted to a standstill yesterday when 910 American riflemen, spearheaded by frontiersmen from Northwest North Carolina and Virginia, surprised Major Patrick Ferguson at his camp on King's Mountain and annihilated his force of 1,125 men.

Major Ferguson and 223 British regulars and Tory militia were killed in the explosive engagement which lasted just over one hour. Another 163 men of the British force were wounded, and the remainder, estimated at more than 700 men, surrendered.

The attacking American militia suffered 88 casualties—26 dead and 62 wounded. Of the Wilkes and Surry County men who fought, only two were killed and fewer than 15 were wounded.

Yesterday's battle brought to an end a series of American disasters.

On May 12 the city of Charleston was surrendered to Sir Henry Clinton, British commander in America. General Benjamin Lincoln and his army of 5,300 men were captured. The entire North Carolina line of Continental regulars was lost.

Three months later a second American Army, this one commanded by General Horatio Gates, was shattered by Lord Cornwallis at Camden, S. C. The Continental regulars of Maryland and Delaware were virtually destroyed.

Raw, Poorly Equipped Militia
When Lord Cornwallis launched his invasion of North Carolina early last month he was opposed only by raw and poorly equipped militia led by such men as William Lee Davidson and William R. Davis. No regular army remained in the South.

Cornwallis reached Charlotte on Sept. 26. To the west the left flank of his invading army, commanded by Major Patrick Ferguson, occupied Gilbert Town, seat of Washington County.

ening to come after them, hang their leaders and lay waste their land if they persisted in their rebellion against British authority.

Dispatches from Jonesboro, seat of Washington County, N. C., reveal that the mountain men, aroused by this threat, gathered at Sycamore Shoals on the Watauga on Sept. 25. The following day Colonels William Campbell, Isaac Shelby, John Sevier and Charles McDowell led more than 1,000 frontiersmen from the Watauga and Holston settlements onto the path that yesterday ended at King's Mountain.

This tomahawk army was reinforced by 350 Wilkes and Surry County men commanded by Colonel Benjamin Cleveland and Major Joseph Winston. Later, at the Cowpens on the Broad River, Colonel James Williams and some 400 of Thomas Sumter's partisans joined the chase.

At the Cowpens, hunchback Josie Kerr, a Whig spy, reported that on Oct. 6 Major Ferguson had marched from the Cherokee Ford on the Broad to a camp on King's Mountain.

Night March Ordered

That same evening Colonel Campbell the Virginian who had been elected commander of the American Army, screen his men. Selecting 910 of the best mounted, he ordered a night march. Some 170 Wilkes and Surry men were included in this picked force.

At dawn on Oct. 7 Colonel Campbell's men crossed the Broad and followed the trail of the British Army 12 miles to Kings Mountain. Shortly before 1 p. m. yesterday, after a 16-hour ride in a chilling rain, the frontiersmen silently went into position around the ridge on which Major Ferguson had camped. This ridge, a spur of King's Mountain, lies one and one half miles south of the North Carolina line.

The American force was arranged so that it virtually surrounded the low ridge on which the British had made their stand.

The attack came as a complete surprise. Masked by rock outcrops and advancing from tree to tree in the fashion of Indians, the Ameri-

can riflemen drove in Ferguson's pickets before their presence was suspected.

"In most places we could not see them till we were within 20 yards of them," Colonel Shelby said after the battle.

Major Ferguson, using his shill silver whistle as a bugle, hastily threw his men into line in time to meet the men of Campbell's and Shelby's command as they came whooping up the ridge.

Initial Attack Repulsed

The British threw back the initial American attack with a bayonet-tipped counter thrust that drove the American center almost to the bottom of the slope. But the militia in the center did not break.

As Ferguson withdrew his men to meet the advance of the American right and left flanks, the men holding the center again advanced.

Within 15 minutes following the first shots the entire American force was engaged. Time and again Major Ferguson used his bayonets to drive back the elusive riflemen.

Each time the British were successful up to a point and then, hammered by fire pouring in on their flanks, they were compelled to withdraw. As they gave ground the lines about them tightened and the deadly rifle fire cut through their ranks like a scythe in hay.

Major Ferguson recognizing that his army was lost, made a desperate effort to break through the Americans lines with his remaining cavalry.

He was recognized—marked by his checked hunting shirt—and the men of Sevier's corps blasted him out of his saddle with their rifles. Robert Young, a Wataugan, generally is credited with dropping Ferguson with his rifle. The British commander, however, was struck at least six times during the action.

At that time Ferguson fell some of the British troops were beginning to hoist white flags on their musket barrels. These flags of surrender were ignored and the Americans, recalling how Sir Banastre Tarleton butchered Colonel Buford's men in the Waxhaw's last May, gave them "Tarleton's quarters."

Captain Abraham DePeyster, the British officer who succeeded Ferguson, said today that he twice sent out white flags. The first

was ignored. The firing died out after the second flag was displayed.

According to Colonel Campbell, the victorious American commander, the action lasted 65 minutes.

High Casualty Rate

Casualties among both American and British officers were exceedingly high. The American losses included Colonel James Williams, Major Chronicle of Lincoln County and Captain Robert Sevier.

Yesterday's battle, like the defeat of the British at Bennington, N. Y., in 1777, was an action in which raw militia met and whipped a British army. Bennington laid the basis for General Burgoyne's surrender at Saratoga. There are those here today that believe that King's Mountain marks the turn of the tide against Lord Cornwallis.

The American leaders here are not so optimistic. They are con-

fident, however, that yesterday's battle will blast any hopes the British may have about rallying North Carolina Tories to their standards.

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