

Battle of Kings Mountain

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The **Battle of Kings Mountain**, October 07, 1780, was an important Patriot victory in the Southern campaign of the American Revolutionary War. Frontier militia loyal to the United States overwhelmed the Loyalist American militia led by British Major Patrick Ferguson of the 71st Foot. In *The Winning of the West*, Theodore Roosevelt wrote of Kings Mountain, "This brilliant victory marked the turning point of the American Revolution."

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Overview

American settlers of largely Scotch-Irish descent settled west of, or "over," the Appalachians, and were thus known as the "Overmountain Men." They united into a semi-autonomous government called the Watauga Association in 1772, about four years before the United States Declaration of Independence.

These Scotch-Irish Patriots (Whigs) were entirely volunteer forces who fought under men that they chose to follow: William Campbell, John Sevier, Frederick Hambright, Joseph McDowell, Benjamin Cleveland, James Williams, John McKissack, Isaac Shelby and James Johnston (Colonel) who was in command of the rear guard, led their militia units as Colonels, while Captain Joseph Winston and Edward Lacey commanded the other mostly autonomous units. Captain Espey, and Captain John Mattocks were both killed during the battle while leading their units. Also Major William Chronicle was also killed leading his men, during hand to hand combat.

After the defeat of Horatio Gates's army at the Battle of Camden, British General Cornwallis was convinced that Georgia and South Carolina were under British control, and he began plans to move into North Carolina. However, a brutal civil war between colonists continued to rage in South Carolina. The Whig frontiersmen, led by a group of self-proclaimed colonels of the rebellion—Isaac Shelby, Elijah Clarke, and Charles McDowell—conducted hit-and-run raids on Loyalist outposts. To protect his western flank, Cornwallis gave Major Patrick Ferguson command of the Loyalist militia.

Battle of Kings Mountain

Part of the American Revolutionary War

Date	October 7, 1780
Location	near Blacksburg, South Carolina Kings Mountain, North Carolina
Result	Decisive American victory ^[1]

Belligerents

 United States	 Loyalist militia
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Commanders

James Johnston (Colonel), William Campbell, John Sevier, Frederick Hambright, Joseph McDowell, Benjamin Cleveland, James Williams†, Isaac Shelby	Patrick Ferguson†
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Strength

900 (+500 nearby)	1,100 (+200 nearby)
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Casualties and losses

29 killed 58 wounded ^[2]	290 killed 163 wounded 668 captured ^[2]
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Cornwallis invaded North Carolina on September 9, 1780, and reached Charlotte on September 26. Ferguson followed and established a base camp at Gilbertown and issued a challenge to the Patriot leaders to lay down their arms or he would, "Lay waste to their country with fire and sword." The words outraged the Appalachian frontiersmen who rallied at Sycamore Shoals and acted to bring the battle to Ferguson rather than wait for him to come to them.

Having learned of the Colonial approach from a captured deserter, Ferguson withdrew eastwards towards Cornwallis's main body at Charlotte, but at King's Mountain, he turned to face his pursuers. King's Mountain was one of many rocky forested hills in the upper Piedmont near the border between North and South Carolina. It is shaped like a footprint with the highest point at the heel, a narrow instep, and a broad rounded toe.

Forces

With the exception of Major Ferguson all of the participants of the battle were Colonists, as the forces under his command were composed entirely of Loyalists. Ferguson commanded over 1,000 Loyalist militia. The Patriot militia force, about 900 strong, were under the command of Patriot colonels.

Unlike most British officers, Ferguson was convinced that Loyalist militia could be trained to be as effective as British regulars. Years earlier, Ferguson personally invented, patented, and successfully field-tested a breech-loading musket which he called 'the Ferguson Rifle' which could fire faster and with greater accuracy than the British Brown Bess muzzle-loading musket. More importantly, it could be loaded and fired while the soldier was lying down on the ground and not standing up, being exposed to enemy fire. Ferguson commanded an 80-man loyalist unit earlier at the Battle of Brandywine where his men were armed with the Ferguson Rifle, and took advantage of it to contain Patriot sorties and attacks. But despite its obvious utility, the British hierarchy saw that it threatened the traditional, time-tested way of warfare and refused to sanction its use. Disappointed by this endeavor, Ferguson became determined to prove his other theory. He drilled his men and produced a tightly knit and well-disciplined unit which he was eager to test against the Revolutionary militia.

Battle

The battle opened on October 7, 1780, when 900 Patriots (including John Crockett, the father of Davy Crockett), approached the steep base of King's Mountain at dawn. The rebels formed eight groups of 100 to 200 men. Two parties, led by Colonels John Sevier and William Campbell, assaulted the 'high heel' of the wooded mountain, the smallest area but highest point, while the other seven groups, led by Colonels Shelby, Williams, Lacey, Cleveland, Hambright, Winston and McDowell attacked the main Loyalist position by surrounding the 'ball' base beside the 'heel' crest of the mountain.[1] (<http://www.britishbattles.com/kings-mountain.htm>)

The Patriots crept up the hill and fired on the Loyalists from behind rocks and trees. Ferguson rallied his troops and launched a bayonet charge against Campbell and Sevier's men. With no bayonets of their own, the rebels retreated down the hill and into the woods. Campbell rallied his troops, returned to the base of the hill, and resumed firing. Ferguson launched two more bayonet charges during the course of the battle. During one of the charges, Colonel Williams was killed and Colonel McDowell wounded. However, after each charge the Patriots returned to the base of the hill and resumed firing. It was hard for the Loyalists to find a target because the Patriots were constantly moving using cover and concealment.

After several hours of combat, Loyalist casualties were heavy. Ferguson rode back and forth across the hill, blowing a silver whistle he used to signal charges. Growing desperate, he slipped on a plaid shirt to cover his officer's coat. A soldier on one side or the other saw this and alerted his comrades immediately. At the crest, as the Patriots overran the Loyalist position, Ferguson fell dead from his saddle with eight rifle balls in his body.

Seeing their leader fall, the Loyalists began to surrender. Eager to avenge defeats at the Waxhaw Massacre and elsewhere, the rebels did not initially want to take prisoners. Rebels continued firing and shouted, "Give 'em Tarleton's Quarter!" After a few more minutes of bloodletting, the Colonials asserted control and gave quarter to around 700 Loyalists.

Aftermath

The Battle of the King's Mountain lasted 65 minutes. The Loyalists suffered 244 killed, 163 wounded, and 668 taken prisoner. The Patriot militia suffered 29 killed and 58 wounded. Loyalist prisoners well enough to walk were herded to camps several miles from the battlefield. The dead and wounded were left on the field. Of the captured, the Patriots hanged as many as nine Loyalists who had changed sides. Other accounts say the Tories were tried before North Carolina judges for violation of the state's criminal laws for crimes (such as pillaging). The battle, evidencing fiercer than anticipated colonial resistance, made Cornwallis abandon his plan to take North Carolina. He retreated to the south.



After the battle, Joseph Greer of the Watauga Association at Sycamore Shoals (located at what is today the city of Elizabethton, Tennessee) set off on a 600 mile (950 km), month-long expedition to notify the Continental Congress of the British defeat at the battle. He arrived in Philadelphia on November 7, 1780.[2] (<http://tennessean.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20060704/NEWS01/607040352/-1/NLETTER01>) Greer's report of the American Patriot victory at Kings Mountain "re-energized a downtrodden Continental Congress." [3] (<http://tennessean.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20060704/NEWS01/607040352/-1/NLETTER01>)

In 1931, the Congress of the United States created the Kings Mountain National Military Park on the site of the battle. The park headquarters is in Blacksburg, South Carolina, and hosts hundreds of thousands of people each year.

References

- [^] The Magazine of American History with Notes and Queries p.402
- [^] ^a ^b Sava, Dameron p.270
 - Russell, C. P. (July 1940). "The American Rifle: At the Battle of Kings Mountain". *The Regional Review* (Richmond, Va: National Park Service, Region One) **V** (1): 15-21. http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/popular/12/ps12-2.htm.
 - Howard, Kate (July 4, 2006). "Kings Mountain Messenger' bravery remembered by few", *The Tennessean*.

See also

- Carter County, Tennessee
- Doe River
- Sycamore Shoals
- Watauga River
- Roan Mountain (Roan Highlands)

- Roan Mountain, Tennessee
- Roan Mountain State Park

External links

- National Park web pages (<http://www.nps.gov/kimo/index.htm>)
- Sycamore Shoals State Park - Tennessee Park Service. (<http://tennessee.gov/environment/parks/parks/SycamoreShoals/index.php?activity=Historic%20Park>)
- *The Wataugans* - The Official Outdoor Drama of the State of Tennessee (<http://www.thewataugans.org/>)
- Roan Mountain (Tennessee) Citizens Club - Overmountain Men Celebration (<http://www.roanmountain.com/club.htm>)
- Georgia Participants at Kings Mountain (offered by Georgia Society, Sons of the American Revolution) (<http://kingsmountain.gassar.org>)
- Family related history of the Campbell's, the Houston's, the Crockett's, the Finley's and others who fought at the Battle of Kings Mountain. (<http://www.smokymountainsphotogallery.com/abph.html>)
- Family history for David Graham, and descendants of, who fought at the Battle of Kings Mountain, including the capture and near execution of eldest son Andrew Graham (<http://www.anusha.com/pafg33.htm>) .

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