

The Battle of King's Mountain

Essential Question: What was the significance of the Battle of King's Mountain?

Only one month after the historic Transylvania and Watauga Purchases in 1775, the “shot heard ‘round the world” at Lexington signaled the start of the American Revolution. The people of the Washington District quickly recognized that they faced a serious potential threat from the Cherokee who are allied with the British. As a result in 1776, the Washingtonians sent the Watauga Petition to North Carolina asking to be annexed. They also began to construct two forts.

In July of 1776, the Cherokee attacked. The settlers, who had been warned of the coming attack by traders, were able to hold off the Cherokee until reinforcements from the Virginia militia arrived. The settlers then launched their own attack on Cherokee villages which resulted in an estimated two thousand Cherokee deaths. As a result, the Cherokee surrendered in 1777.

By 1780 the British had turned their attention to the southern colonies, in part because of the large number of loyalists, or Tories who lived there. The British won an impressive victory over the Patriot force at Camden in August of 1780. Cornwallis, the British commander, then sent **Major Patrick Ferguson** to suppress rebellion in the backcountry. Ferguson selected a prisoner to carry a message back to the rebels across the mountains, “If you do not desist from your opposition to the British arms, I will march over the mountains, hang your leaders, and lay waste to your country with fire and sword.”

Upon hearing of Ferguson's threat, **Isaac Shelby**, leader of the North Carolina mountain militia, immediately consulted with **John Sevier** at Sycamore Shoals. Shelby and Sevier decided to combine their forces and take the battle across the mountains to Ferguson. The men agreed to meet at Sycamore Shoals on September 25, 1780. Eventually over 1,000 militia or Overmountain men, including some from Virginia gathered at Sycamore Shoals. Before leaving, the men heard an inspirational sermon from Presbyterian minister and educator **Samuel Doak**. Doak reminded the men of the biblical story of Gideon whose small force defeated the larger Midianite army. Armed with inspiration from Doak and five hundred pounds of gunpowder made by **Mary Patton**, the men began the difficult march across the mountains. Two defector's from Sevier's command warned Ferguson of the approaching force. Ferguson ordered his 1,100 men, who were part of the Tory militia, to march to King's Mountain, just south of the North Carolina South Carolina border. Upon arriving Ferguson reportedly said, “I am on King's Mountain, I am king of that mountain, and God Almighty could not drive me from it.”

The Overmountain men reached King's Mountain on October 7, 1780. The force encircled the mountain and began to fight their way up using the trees for cover and giving their

war cry as they advanced. Both these tactics had been learned from years of bitter warfare with the Cherokee. Ferguson's men fired as the Patriots advanced, but because they were aiming downhill, most of the shots went over their heads.

Patriot sharpshooters methodically decimated the British forces with their deadly accurate long rifles. Within an hour, the Patriots reached the top of the mountain. Knowing defeat was inevitable; Ferguson mounted his horse in an attempt to fight his way through the lines and escape. He was shot down by several men, though **Essius Bowman**, a free African-American from Virginia, is most often credited with the fatal shot. The remainder of Ferguson's forces surrendered. The Overmountain men had won a resounding and important victory. Following the battle, 30 of the prisoners were tried for atrocities committed prior to the battle and nine were hanged before Shelby stopped the proceedings.

The victory at King's Mountain had two important effects. First, news of the victory reenergized the Patriot spirit throughout the colonies. Years later Thomas Jefferson referred to it as the "joyful annunciation of that turn of the tide of success which terminated the Revolutionary War, with the seal of independence." Secondly, it caused Cornwallis to reevaluate his strategy and retreat to South Carolina and ultimately to Yorktown. British general Sir Henry Clinton later called the Battle of King's Mountain, "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."

Works Cited:

Biggers, Jeff. *The United States of Appalachia: How Southern Mountaineers Brought Independence, Culture, and Enlightenment to America*. Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2006. Print.

Jones, Randall. "The Overmountain Men and the Battle of Kings Mountain." LEARN NC. UNC School of Education, n.d. Web. 24 June 2014. <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-revolution/4272>

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Use the information in the text to complete the graphic organizer below.

List 3 people who played an important role in the Battle of King's Mountain and explain why each is important.



- A. _____

- B. _____

- C. _____

Describe the 2 groups who fought at the Battle of King's Mountain including their reasons for fighting.



- A. _____

- B. _____

Write a 1 sentence summary that explains the significance of the Battle of King's Mountain



- A. _____

