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## THE VIRGINIA EXPEDITION AGAINST THE OVERHILL CHEROKEE, 1776

By JAMES H. O'DONNELL

In the second year of the War for American Independence, British attempts to quell the rebellious colonies focused at two points on the Atlantic seaboard. The northerly one was at New York, where General William Howe led his troops in pushing George Washington and the Americans off Long Island. To the south had gone Sir Henry Clinton to cooperate with a fleet under Sir Peter Parker in seizing a British foothold below the Chesapeake. The Parker-Clinton attempt to take Charleston failed and the fleet sailed north to rejoin Howe.

Shortly after "Bold Clinton by land, Did quietly stand," while Parker made a "thundering clatter,"<sup>1</sup> the Cherokee Indians attacked the frontiers of the colonies from Georgia to Virginia. Motivated in the main by constant encroachment on their lands by the whites, the Cherokee chose the early summer of 1776 as the proper time to turn back the unwanted settlers.

It has long been charged that the British incited the attacks, but there is no substantial evidence to support these allegations. To those familiar with two articles published by Philip M. Hamer in the early 1930's, it may seem that such a statement is unnecessary.<sup>2</sup> Yet there are studies of the frontier published within the last ten years which still describe the Cherokee attacks as British sponsored.<sup>3</sup>

John Stuart, the British Indian superintendent in the South, as a result of orders received from General Thomas Gage, did plan to use the Southern Indians against the Patriots in some way, but only in con-

<sup>1</sup> Bruce I. Granger, *Political Satire in the American Revolution, 1763-1783* (Ithaca, N. Y., 1960), 164. This is from a "supposed paraphrase" in verse of Parker's report from a British paper.

<sup>2</sup> Philip M. Hamer, "John Stuart's Indian Policy During the Early Months of the American Revolution" (with accompanying edited "Correspondence of Henry Stuart and Alexander Cameron with the Wataugans"), *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XVII (December, 1930), 351-66, 451-59; and "The Wataugans and the Cherokee Indians in 1776," *East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications*, No. 3 (1931), 108-26.

<sup>3</sup> Robert E. Riegel and Robert G. Athearn, *America Moves West* (New York, 1964), 20-21; Thomas D. Clark, *Frontier America* (New York, 1959), 111.

junction with white troops.<sup>4</sup> His policy in 1776 was designed toward keeping the red men loyal but peaceful. His deputy for the Cherokee, Alexander Cameron, and his brother, Henry Stuart, therefore worked hard in early 1776 to restrain the Indians, and they wrote to the settlers on May 7 warning them of their danger and offering them land in West Florida. Once it became apparent that they could not control the red men, Cameron permitted a Tory trader to accompany the Indians on their raids in order to warn Loyalists and to prevent barbarities;<sup>5</sup> but he and Stuart left the Overhill country early in July after they had instructed the Cherokee to refrain from crossing the boundary line, attacking Loyalists, or murdering women and children. Cameron gave similar instructions to the Middle and Lower Cherokee, whose expeditions he seems to have joined.<sup>6</sup>

Because of the geographical locations of their towns, the Cherokee would strike in two directions.<sup>7</sup> The Overhills would go north toward Virginia, half their fighting men led by the Great Warrior (old Abram) raiding the Watauga-Nolichucky settlements and the other half under the Dragging Canoe attacking the Carter's Valley and Holston outposts (near the present Kingsport). The Lower and Middle Cherokee would advance their fighting men toward the settlements in western North Carolina, upper South Carolina, and Georgia. If they struck with rapidity and force they might be able to destroy the settlements and push the survivors back across the mountains or the boundary line. Success in this enterprise might embolden them to raid the farms and outposts within the boundaries of the provinces, although Cameron and his assistants would try to prevent that from happening.

<sup>4</sup> James H. O'Donnell, "The Southern Indians in the War for American Independence," (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 1963), chapters 1 & 2; Hamer, "Stuart's Indian Policy," 351-62.

<sup>5</sup> Hamer (ed.), "Correspondence," 451-59; John Stuart to Lord George Germain, August 23, 1776, British Public Record Office, London, Colonial Office, Series 5, vol. 77 (microfilm from the Library of Congress), 126-29. Hereinafter cited as CO5/, page.

<sup>6</sup> Henry Stuart's Report to the Superintendent on his travels in the Indian country, August 25, 1776, *ibid.*, 283, also in William L. Saunders et al. (eds.), *The Colonial and State Records of North Carolina*, 26 vols. (Raleigh, 1886-1914), X, 763-85. Hereinafter cited as NCCR. See also Hamer, "The Wataugans and the Cherokee," 118-26, for evidence of the forgery and widespread circulation of an alleged threatening letter from Henry Stuart which became the chief basis for the charge of British incitement. The Wataugans, advised by the Virginians to move off the Indians' land, were attempting to show that their danger was due solely to their Patriot stand and they were therefore entitled to aid from the Revolutionists.

<sup>7</sup> William Russell to William Preston, July 17, 1776, Lyman C. Draper Collections, Virginia Papers (Wisconsin State Historical Society, Madison, Wis., microfilm from the University of North Carolina Library), II, 51,

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If the Cherokee had hoped to capitalize on the element of surprise, in this instance they were disappointed. The correspondence of Henry Stuart and Cameron with the Watauga and Nolichucky settlers and the settlers' appeals to Virginia and North Carolina for help had already supplied a warning, and the overmountain settlers and provincial officials alike took steps to defend against the onslaught. Also, just before the raids began in July, Isaac Thomas and other pro-American traders fled the towns to bring the settlers details of the battle plans given to them secretly, according to tradition, by the famous Indian woman, Nancy Ward.<sup>8</sup> On the Nolichucky and Watauga rivers and at Eaton's Station, east of the Long Island of the Holston (site of Kingsport) the people had hastily erected stockade forts into which they would crowd themselves and hope to drive away the red men.<sup>9</sup> Fear that they might be betrayed to the Indians by the supporters of the King's cause had prompted militia captains James Robertson and John Shelby some time before the Indian attacks occurred to use their Watauga troops to force seventy suspected Loyalists on the Nolichucky to swear allegiance to the Patriot cause.<sup>10</sup>

Since the Virginia-North Carolina boundary line was temporarily considered as following the course of the South Fork of the Holston River, there was no certainty as to which state would be responsible for the transmontane settlers. Natural transportation routes tied them to southwestern Virginia and it was from that province that some support came. Militia detachments were sent from Fincastle County, and six companies of Virginia frontier militia commanded by Colonel William Russell were mustered in as rangers to patrol the outlying district.<sup>11</sup> Stopping the Cherokee south of Wolf Hills (Abingdon) was

<sup>8</sup> Gilbert Christian to William Preston, May 16, 1776, Draper Collections, William Preston Papers (microfilm from Duke University), I, 23; Samuel C. Williams, *Tennessee During the Revolutionary War* (Nashville, 1944), 35-36. Christian's statement in May that Thomas had fled from the Indian towns was the result of misinformation from the Wataugans. He was sent by Stuart and Cameron with their letters of warning to the settlers, and he returned to the towns with their replies. Hamer (ed.), "Correspondence," *passim*. In July he and the other traders were supposed to guide the Tory, Nathaniel Gist, who wished to warn the Loyalists on the Nolichucky, but the traders slipped away and warned the Patriots instead.

<sup>9</sup> Williams, *Tenn. in Rev.*, 28-29.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 32; William Preston to Edmund Pendleton, June 15, 1776, Draper Collections, Preston Papers, IV, 50.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* For Russell's commission of July 3, 1776, see H. R. McIlwaine (ed.), *Journal of the Council of State of Virginia*, 2 vols. (Richmond, 1931), I, 59. Hereinafter cited as *JCSVa*. In connection with frontier defense see also: William Fleming to Thomas Jefferson, June 15, 1776, in Julian P. Boyd (ed.), *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 19 vols. to date (Princeton, 1950--), I, 386; William Fleming to the Council

almost a necessity; not only would it keep the savages from penetrating the western counties but also it would protect the important Chiswell's lead mines.<sup>12</sup>

In North Carolina the commander of the frontier military district was ordered to keep his troops ready "to repel any Hostilities which may be Commenced against us by any of the Indian Nations—" <sup>13</sup> He was not to take offensive action until the Cherokee attacked the settlements within the boundary line; nor was he to allow the frontiersmen to draw the Indians into a war.<sup>14</sup>

For the moment the attention of the South Carolinians was focused on the sails of Sir Peter Parker's fleet.<sup>15</sup> The Georgians were absorbed with the general problems of defending a province which lay exposed to attack from any or all of three sides.<sup>16</sup>

The first hostilities were committed in late June by the Lower Cherokee against the settlements of upper South Carolina and Georgia. Property was destroyed, settlers killed, and prisoners taken.<sup>17</sup> In the first two weeks of July, Cherokee bands attacked the North Carolina settlers along the Catawba River and killed thirty-seven persons.<sup>18</sup> Within another week the Overhills were advancing against the frontiersmen west of the mountains.<sup>19</sup>

of Virginia, August 2, 1776, Draper Collections, Virginia Papers, II, 77-78; Journal of the Committee of Safety of Virginia, June 20, 1776, in William P. Palmer *et al.* (eds.), *Calendar of Virginia State Papers*, 11 vols. (Richmond, 1875-1883), VIII, 213. Herein-after cited as *CVSP*.

<sup>12</sup> Russell to Preston, July 17, 1776. Discovered in 1756 by John Chiswell, these mines came to play an important part not only in defense of the frontier but also in that of the state and the region. In connection with these mines and their defense during the Revolution see Thomas P. Abernethy, *Western Lands and the American Revolution* (reprinted, New York, 1959), 79; William Russell to William Fleming, July 23, 1776, Draper Collections, Virginia Papers, II, 8; William Preston to the President of the Council, August 2, 1776, Draper Collections, Preston Papers, IV, 64.

<sup>13</sup> Cornelius Harnett, President, North Carolina Council of Safety, to Griffith Rutherford, June 24, 1776, *NCCR*, XI, 303.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* There were rumors current that certain land hungry frontiersmen planned to involve the Cherokee in a conflict with the state, which they hoped would result in the acquisition of more land for settlement. To thwart such plots the council planned to adjourn to Salisbury, but the attacks of the red men made this extra session unnecessary. See North Carolina Council of Safety to Samuel Johnston, July 22, 1776, *NCCR*, XI, 319-21; same to the North Carolina delegates in Congress, June 24, 1776, *ibid.*, 301.

<sup>15</sup> William B. Willcox, *Portrait of a General: Sir Henry Clinton in the War of Independence* (New York, 1964), 85-88.

<sup>16</sup> Kenneth K. Coleman, *The American Revolution in Georgia, 1763-1789* (Athens, 1958), chapters 5 and 6, *passim*.

<sup>17</sup> Deposition of David Shettroe, June 30, 1776, Peter Force, *American Archives*, Fourth Series, 6 vols. (Washington 1837-53), VI, 1229.

<sup>18</sup> Griffith Rutherford to the North Carolina Council of Safety, July 12, 1776, *NCCR*, X, 662; same to same, July 14, 1776, *Ibid.*, 669; *Virginia Gazette* (Dixon and Hunter), August 24, 1776, p. 7.

<sup>19</sup> Russell to Preston, July 17, 1776.

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On July 19 the warriors under the Dragging Canoe were near Eaton's Station. The militiamen within the walls of the stockade found themselves in a quandary; on the one hand, they did not know if they had men sufficient to meet the Indians in battle, and yet on the other, if they did not stop the Cherokee, the Indians would bypass the fort and move into the settlements of the area and then north into Virginia. They decided to take the offensive; on July 20 one hundred and seventy men started out to meet the enemy. The frontiersmen had marched only five miles when the advance guard returned with reports of defeating a party of about twenty Cherokee. Perhaps the Patriots thought that they had checked the savages, for they turned back toward the fort. They had retreated less than a mile when the main body of the Indians attacked them from the rear. After some moments of confusion, the militiamen stood their ground and after a brief engagement forced the red men to retreat. The Cherokee left fourteen dead on the field; the number of wounded was unknown, although it was reported that the Dragging Canoe was struck in both legs. American losses were light: none dead and four wounded.<sup>20</sup>

In the meantime, the band of Overhills led by the Great Warrior found that most of the settlers had sought refuge in the stockades, and that Fort Lee on the Nolichucky had been evacuated. Their leader chose, therefore, to commit his band to invest Fort Caswell on the Watauga.<sup>21</sup> Early on the morning of July 21 the Indians struck, driving in the women who had gone out to milk. The Cherokee then kept the post under such steady fire that six days passed before the defenders could send a request for aid to the Holston militia.<sup>22</sup> When the relief expedition under the command of Colonel William Russell arrived, the red men slipped away. Russell found that there were more than five

<sup>20</sup> Williams, *Tenn. in Rev.*, 37-38; "Account by militia captains of battle fought near Eaton's Station, July 20, 1776," *Virginia Gazette* (Dixon and Hunter), August 3, 1776, p. 2; same account in Peter Force, *American Archives*, Fifth Series, 3 vols. (Washington, 1848-53), I, 464. Other detachments went into Virginia as far as Abingdon. J. G. M. Ramsey, *The Annals of Tennessee . . .* (reprinted Chattanooga, 1926), 159.

<sup>21</sup> Williams, *Tenn. in Rev.*, 28-29, 38; *Virginia Gazette* (Dixon and Hunter), August 10, 1776, p. 6. The post on the Nolichucky was named after General Charles Lee, commander of Continental forces in the South in 1776; the larger one on the Watauga, after Governor-elect Richard Caswell of North Carolina. See also John R. Alden, *General Charles Lee: Traitor or Patriot?* (Baton Rouge, 1951), 109.

<sup>22</sup> *Virginia Gazette* (Dixon and Hunter), August 10, 1776, p. 6.

hundred persons in the post, men, women, and children, who had lived almost entirely on parched corn during the fortnight's siege. Nevertheless, the only losses sustained were four or five men who had ventured out to bring in the stock.<sup>23</sup>

Although the Overhills had failed at both Eaton's Station and Fort Caswell, this did not mean that the war was over. The whole southern frontier was alarmed by the burning of cabins and crops, the destruction of stock, and the killing of inhabitants of isolated cabins or those who did not get the warning. Such pillage terrorized the settlers and caused many of them to return to more peaceful areas.<sup>24</sup> The stories which the frontier folk told were circulated widely and gave the inhabitants of the southern provinces much cause for alarm, particularly since there was the possibility that the Creeks might join the Cherokee.

To those experienced in frontier warfare, it was evident that the only way to keep the Indians from persisting in their war would be a cooperative venture by the southern states powerful enough to punish the Cherokee severely. Since no threat of invasion by the British against the seacoast was then imminent, it would be possible to deliver a heavy blow against the Cherokee which would remove the danger from that quarter; if a British fleet did appear in the winter or spring the Southern Patriots could then concentrate on coastal defense.

General Charles Lee, commander of the Continental forces in the South, had received warning of the hostile intentions of the Cherokee late in May.<sup>25</sup> Shortly after the first attacks, which Lee regarded as a "capital and favourite part of a plan laid down by his most excellent and clement majesty, George the third, to lay waste the provinces, burn the habitations, and mix men, women, and children, in one common carnage, by the hand of the Indians," the General wrote to the officials in the South and called upon them to cooperate in chastising the

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, August 17, 1776, p. 2.

<sup>24</sup> Archibald Cary offered two thousand acres in Bedford County as a temporary location for refugees. See Cary to William Preston, July 31, 1776, Draper Collections, Preston Papers, IV, 162.

<sup>25</sup> General Andrew Lewis to General Charles Lee, May 27, 1776, "Lee Papers," in New York Historical Society Collections, 82 vols. (New York, 1868-1949), V, 43.

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Indians.<sup>26</sup> Also, he sent talks to the Creek Indians urging them to stay out of the fray.<sup>27</sup>

Prompted by General Lee, and further motivated by their own awareness of the necessity of frontier defense, the officials of the Carolinas and Virginia soon had begun to correspond about a joint campaign.<sup>28</sup> The general procedure subsequently agreed upon was that the South Carolina troops should destroy the Lower towns and then move northwest to join the North Carolinians in crushing the Middle and Valley towns. The responsibility for defeating the Overhills was left to a force from Virginia.<sup>29</sup>

After some weeks of hasty preparations, the expeditions from the Carolinas entered the Lower and Middle towns of the Cherokee, dispersing inhabitants, burning houses, and destroying crops. By the end of September, the Cherokee east of the mountains were beginning to regret having gone to war. Yet the campaign against the Cherokee was not completed; the towns of the Overhills, the most influential part of the nation, and the area which had given refuge to many Indians fleeing from the towns already devastated, lay untouched. No punitive campaign could be called successful until those towns had been forced to terms by the expedition from Virginia.

The Virginia Council of State had at first planned to send only nine hundred men against the Overhills, but since the armies from the Carolinas would drive the savages out of the other parts of the Nation

<sup>26</sup> Charles Lee to Edmund Pendleton, July 7, 1776, *ibid.*, 127ff; Charles Lee to the President of the Provincial Council of North Carolina, July 7, 1776, in Charles Lee Letterbook, July 2, 1776-August 27, 1776 (South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina); same to Archibald Bullock, July 7, 1776, *ibid.*; same to John Rutledge, July 23, 1776, "Lee Papers," 159; Cornelius Harnett to Charles Lee, July 16, 1776, Miscellaneous Papers, Series I (North Carolina Department of Archives and History, Raleigh).

<sup>27</sup> Funds paid Thomas Gray and his brother as "linguists" (interpreters) to the Creek Nation, for losses sustained by them. Commissioners of the Treasury Journal, 1778-1787 (South Carolina Archives, Columbia).

<sup>28</sup> John Rutledge to the President of the Virginia Convention, July 7, 1776, Papers of the Continental Congress (National Archives), No. 71, I, 41. Hereinafter cited as PCC. See also Charles Lee to the Virginia Convention, July 7, 1776, *ibid.*, 45-46; Harnett to Rutledge, July 16, 1776, NCCR, XI, 316; same to Charles Lee, July 16, 1776, *ibid.*; same to Patrick Henry, July 21, 1776, PCC, No. 71, I, 47-48.

<sup>29</sup> John Rutledge to the President of the Virginia Convention, July 7, 1776, PCC, No. 71, I, 41; Charles Lee to Edmund Pendleton, July 20, 1776, "Lee Papers," V, 127-28. In accordance with Rutledge's request, his message was forwarded to the Continental Congress, where it was read on July 30, 1776. Congress then recommended that the four southernmost states cooperate in their efforts against the Indians. See Worthington C. Ford (ed.), *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789*, 34 vols. (Washington, 1905-1937), V, 616-17. Hereinafter cited as JCC.



into those towns it was decided to increase the force to twelve hundred and ask North Carolina to send a detachment to augment it.<sup>30</sup>

On the first of August the Council appointed as "Colonel of the first battalion and Commander in Chief of all forces raised and to be raised to go on an expedition against the Cherokee Indians," Colonel William Christian of the first regiment of Virginia state troops.<sup>31</sup> A native of Staunton, William Christian had read law under Patrick Henry and later married Henry's sister Anne.<sup>32</sup> About 1770 the Christians and others from the Staunton area had moved southwest and settled near Ingle's Ferry on the New River, at a place commonly known as Dunkard's Bottom. The Christians, however, sometimes referred to it as Mahanaim, the Hebrew name given to it by some German pietists who had tried to start a religious community there in the late 1740s.<sup>33</sup> A land speculator and respected frontiersman, William Christian had served in the House of Burgesses since 1773.<sup>34</sup> Although he had been offered a commission in the continental service, Christian had declined it in favor of serving his state.<sup>35</sup> In May of 1776 he had been ordered to the coast to assist in the defense there.<sup>36</sup> The expedition against the Cherokee, however, needed an experienced westerner as its commander; so Christian was chosen. His appointment might satisfy those who expressed some doubts about sending "Men of the Minute service, who have been raised below the Mountains," to do service against the Cherokee.<sup>37</sup>

Colonel Christian was instructed by the Council to punish the red men severely; he was not to grant peace unless a sufficient number of hostages was given as a guaranty against further hostilities; all prisoners were to be released who wished to be; and those persons guilty of

<sup>30</sup> John Page to the North Carolina Council, July 26, 1776, H. R. McIlwaine, *Official Letters of the Governors of the State of Virginia*, 3 vols. (Richmond, 1926-29), I, 16; William Preston to John Page, July 30, 1776, Draper Collections, Preston Papers, IV, 61.

<sup>31</sup> CVSP, VIII, 100.

<sup>32</sup> R. D. Meade, *Patrick Henry: Patriot in the Making* (Philadelphia, 1957), 233-34.

<sup>33</sup> Abernethy, *Western Lands*, 79; Klaus G. Wust, "German Mystics and Sabbatarians in Virginia, 1700-1764," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, LXXII (July, 1964), 330-47.

<sup>34</sup> *Dictionary of American Biography*, 20 vols. (New York, 1928-1936), IV, 97.

<sup>35</sup> JCC, IV, 132; *ibid.*, V, 649; CVSP, VIII, 100.

<sup>36</sup> Annie Christian to Anne Fleming, n. d. [1776], Fleming-Christian Letters in the Hugh B. Grigsby Papers (Virginia Historical Society, Richmond).

<sup>37</sup> William Campbell to Arthur Campbell, August 1, 1776, Draper Collections, King's Mountain Papers, IX, 4.

aiding the savages in the war were to be delivered to the Americans.<sup>38</sup> Christian was urged to cooperate with the forces from the Carolinas in his efforts against the savages.<sup>39</sup>

By the time that William Christian was commissioned, two units of his army, the three hundred rangers commanded by Colonel William Russell and the Second Battalion of Virginia Continentals under Colonel Charles Lewis, were either on the frontier or approaching it.<sup>40</sup> The elements of the third, five hundred militia from the Virginia frontier counties and three hundred North Carolinians commanded by Colonel Joseph Williams, began moving toward the appointed rendezvous at the Long Island of the Holston River during the month of August.<sup>41</sup> Christian planned to join his men about September 20; if the army could march within one or two days, the commander hoped they could cover the 130 miles to the Overhill towns by the fifteenth of October.<sup>42</sup>

Regardless of Colonel William Christian's desires, the troops were so slow in coming in that he was still calling for men in the second week in September.<sup>43</sup> He was having to draw additional recruits out of the frontier militia because Colonel Lewis had been able to muster only three hundred out of the six hundred fifty he was supposed to have in his battalion of Continentals.<sup>44</sup> Although able to reach the Long Island by September 21, Christian could not lead his men toward the Indian country before the first of October.<sup>45</sup>

On that day the army began crossing the Holston River. Two hundred soldiers were left behind as a garrison at the stockade built

<sup>38</sup> Thomas Jefferson thought the Cherokee should be driven beyond the Mississippi. See Thomas Jefferson to John Page, August 5, 1776, Boyd (ed.), *Jefferson Papers*, I, 485-86.

<sup>39</sup> *JCSVa.*, I, 103.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 82; John Page to William Fleming, August, 1776, Draper Collections, Frontier Wars Series, I, 30.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* There would be fifty men each from Pittsylvania, Bedford, and Augusta counties, 150 from Botetourt, and 200 from Fincastle. See Page to Fleming, August, 1776. It should be noted that Fincastle County at that time included the north of the Holston settlements which are today in the northeastern part of Tennessee. Williams, *Tenn. in Rev.*, 16-17.

<sup>42</sup> "Virginia Legislative Papers," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, XVI (October, 1908), 170-73. Concerning the lack of supplies and other logistical problems see: William Christian to Arthur Campbell, August 18, 1776, Draper Collections, King's Mountain Papers, IX, 5; *Journal of the House of Delegates of Virginia*, 1776 (Richmond, 1828), *passim*; William Christian to William Fleming, September 12, 1776, Draper Collections, Frontier Wars Series, I, 36. Fleming was requested to get any man of "good reputation" who was willing to raise men to do so. Such persons would receive rank and pay according to the number recruited.

<sup>43</sup> Charles Lewis to Patrick Henry, October 15, 1776, Executive Papers (Virginia State Library, Richmond), Box EP-1.

<sup>44</sup> *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie's) October 18, 1776, p. 2.

<sup>45</sup> Williams, *Tenn. in the Rev.*, 52.

on the banks of the river and named Fort Patrick Henry in honor of the Virginia governor.<sup>46</sup> All the troops had not crossed the river, however, until October 3 and by nightfall had moved only six miles. During the night additional forces from the Watauga-Nolichucky settlements arrived and were combined with men from that area already with the army to form a battalion under the command of Major Evan Shelby.<sup>47</sup> These troops brought the total number ready to pursue the Cherokee to more than 1700.<sup>48</sup>

Although the army remained at Six Mile Camp for two more days, the commander still hoped that they could reach the French Broad River by October 15. According to some traders who had recently left the Overhill towns, the Cherokee would make a stand at that stream. Colonel Christian believed that even if they did so, he and his troops could defeat them and return to the Long Island within five or six weeks.<sup>49</sup> On the sixth of October the army broke camp and headed south. Christian, having secured the services of the trader Isaac Thomas as a guide, was able to get his army to the French Broad two days earlier than he had anticipated.<sup>50</sup>

Shortly before the expedition reached the river, a white trader came in under a flag of truce with a peace message from the Raven of Choté, the beloved town of the Cherokee. Colonel Christian replied to the chief that no settlement would be considered until the Cherokee had laid down their arms, delivered up Alexander Cameron, and released the prisoners.<sup>51</sup>

Once at the bank of the French Broad, Christian ordered his army into camp and then sent scouts in search of suitable crossing places. When a passable ford was discovered downstream from the camp,

<sup>46</sup> Mrs. N. E. Clement, "Tithables of Pittsylvania County, 1767," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, XXIV (March, 1916), 273n.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* The Virginia Council evidently had approved the use of these troops, notwithstanding the unresolved question of jurisdiction over the Watauga and Nolichucky lands. See William Preston to the Virginia Council, August 9, 1776, Draper Collections, Preston Papers, IV, 68. Major Shelby was a resident of the North Holston settlement, then considered to be in Fincastle County, Virginia, but after the survey of the boundary line in 1779 found to be in North Carolina (now Tennessee). Williams, *Tenn. in the Rev.*, 16.

<sup>48</sup> General Return of the Troops under Christian at Six Mile Camp, October 6, 1776, Draper Collections, Virginia Papers, VIII, 72; James Thompson to William Preston, October 6, 1776, *ibid.*, Preston Papers, IV, 74.

<sup>49</sup> William Christian to Patrick Henry, October 6, 1776, NCCR, X, 837-39.

<sup>50</sup> Lewis P. Summers, *History of Southwest Virginia, 1746-1786* (Richmond, 1903), 243. Isaac Thomas was later granted 100 pounds for his services. See *Journal of the House of Delegates of Virginia, 1775*, 97, 102.

<sup>51</sup> William Christian to Patrick Henry, October 14, 1776, NCCR, X, 844-45.

Colonel Christian led twelve hundred men across on the night of October 14. He found only deserted enemy camps.<sup>52</sup> The Cherokee had not made their stand.

Within a few days another message of peace came in from the Raven, this time carried by a trader named Nathaniel Gist. Gist revealed that the peace overture was not completely sincere, for Alexander Cameron had upbraided the savages for their cowardice and had forced them to agree to fight. Whatever Cameron may have said or the Indians may have promised, there was no battle; the Virginians moved without incident from the French Broad to the Little Tennessee (then called the Tennessee).<sup>53</sup> Christian and his men then moved down the Little Tennessee to a village known as the Island Town, which was the Dragging Canoe's settlement and thus the center of the war faction in the nation.<sup>54</sup>

From his camp near the Island Town, Colonel Christian sent word to the Raven and the other chiefs that they must comply with his terms or be destroyed. If they were willing to accede, Christian would raze only those of the remaining villages which had strongly supported the Dragging Canoe and the British,<sup>55</sup> plus a town in which a white boy had been burned to death.<sup>56</sup>

By this time the Cherokee were ready to negotiate. Alexander Cameron had sought refuge in the Creek country; so no British official was left in the nation. At the approach of Christian's army, most of the Indians had fled their towns and hidden in the mountains, leaving behind them "Horses, Cattle, Dogs, Hogs and Fowls. . ."<sup>57</sup> Christian wrote that in the villages through which he had passed, his men had seen but not destroyed, except in the Dragging Canoe towns, "between forty and fifty thousand bushels of Corn and ten or fifteen thousand

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*; *Virginia Gazette* (Dixon and Hunter), November 1, 1776, p. 3.

<sup>53</sup> According to Captain Joseph Martin's Orderly Book of the Cherokee Expedition, the camp (on the present Little Tennessee) was 112 miles distant from the fort. See Draper Collections, *Virginia Papers*, VIII, 72.

<sup>54</sup> William Christian blamed the Dragging Canoe for the war. See William Christian to [Patrick Henry], October 23, 1776, "Virginia Legislative Papers," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, XVII (January, 1909), 61-64. See also Alexander Cameron to John Stuart, July 9, 1776, CO5/77, 167.

<sup>55</sup> Christian to [Henry], October 23, 1776.

<sup>56</sup> The commander of the North Carolina companies in the expedition reported that five towns were burned. See Colonel Joseph Williams to the President of the North Carolina Congress, November 6, 1776, *NCCR*, X, 892; *Journal of the North Carolina Provincial Congress*, December 3, 1776, *ibid.*, 951.

<sup>57</sup> Christian to [Henry], October 23, 1776.

Bushels of Potatoes."<sup>58</sup> Indeed, Alexander Cameron had described these same crops as the "finest Crops of Corn they ever had. . . ."<sup>59</sup>

The Cherokee leaders agreed to capitulate under the following terms: to give a number of hostages; to deliver Stuart, Cameron, and other King's friends, if possible; to cede a portion of their lands to meet the expenses of the war; to release all property and persons, white or black, that had been captured in North Carolina or Virginia and to deliver them at the Long Island of Holston by February 10, 1777; and finally, to bring to Keowee in the Lower towns as soon as possible all goods and captives taken from South Carolina or Georgia. William Christian and the chiefs agreed that after the release of the prisoners, no whites should be allowed in the towns. All other matters were left to the deliberations of five Cherokee chiefs and several commissioners from Virginia who would meet in the spring of the following year.<sup>60</sup>

After the truce was made, the troops began their return toward Fort Patrick Henry. Once his army had reached that post, Colonel Christian reorganized his forces and left six hundred men to garrison the fort.<sup>61</sup> As a precaution against unrest and in accordance with the terms of the truce, he forbade any person to go into the Overhill towns without his consent or that of the proper officials in Virginia or North Carolina. Consequently, when James Robertson asked permission to go into the towns after some horses, Christian refused, explaining that the "people will git [*sic*] their Horses as well without going, and those who go will be suspected of having some Evil views."<sup>62</sup>

The Virginia expedition against the Overhill Cherokee was the culmination of a highly successful and significant cooperative military venture by the southern states. More than four thousand troops plus thousands of pounds in currency had been committed to the task. As a

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> See Alexander Cameron to John Stuart, August 31, 1776, CO5/78, 72-78.

<sup>60</sup> *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie's), November 29, 1776, p. 2.

<sup>61</sup> Summers, *History of Southwest Virginia*, 245. The Virginia House of Delegates urged Christian to take all measures necessary to insure the defense of the frontier against future attacks. See *Journal of the House of Delegates of Virginia*, 1776, p. 27.

<sup>62</sup> William Christian to William Russell, November 12, 1776, Miscellaneous Papers, Series I (Raleigh, N. C.). Robertson was later appointed North Carolina agent to the Cherokee in accordance with the terms of the treaties of peace negotiated with Virginia and North Carolina commissioners by the Cherokee, minus the seceding element under the Dragging Canoe, at the Long Island of the Holston in July, 1777. Archibald Henderson (ed.), "The Treaty of the Long Island of the Holston, July 1777," *North Carolina Historical Review*, VIII (January, 1931), 51-116.

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result one of the most powerful Indian nations in the South had been defeated and its supplies destroyed. Not only was the danger of Cherokee attack lessened for a number of years but also the story of the treatment of that tribe proved an effective bit of propaganda in Indian diplomacy. The Continental commissioners to the Creeks, for example, often reminded their charges that they would suffer similarly if they stood with the British. The lesson was not lost on the Creeks or the other Southern tribes. This was one of the major reasons why the British were never able to bring the combined force of the Southern Indian warriors against the rebellious provinces. Furthermore, the intimidation of the Southern tribes decreased the probability of a simultaneous attack on the coast by a fleet and an army and on the frontier by the red men and the Loyalists. Had the Patriots not taken action against the Cherokee in 1776, the story of the War for Independence in the South might have been a different one indeed.