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A Frontier Biography: William Campbell of King's Mountain

David George Malgee

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A Frontier Biography: William Campbell of King's Mountain

by

David George Malgee

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

The University of Richmond

In Candidacy for the Degree of

Master of Arts in History

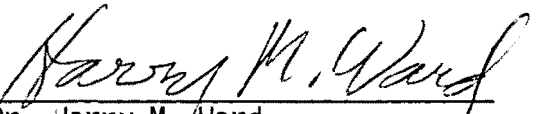
August, 1983


A Frontier Biography: William Campbell of King's Mountain

Thesis Submitted to the
Department of History
of the Graduate School of the University of Richmond

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Introduction	1
Chapter I: The Early Years	3
Chapter II: Captain Campbell	22
Chapter III: The Outbreak of the American Revolution	39
Chapter IV: The Quiet Years, 1777 - 1778	56
Chapter V: The Critical Months, April 1779 - June 1780	75
Chapter VI: Prelude to Fame	97
Chapter VII: William Campbell of King's Mountain	119
Chapter VIII: Between Campaigns, November - December 1780	179
Chapter IX: The Guilford Courthouse Campaign	196
Chapter X: General William Campbell, April - August 1781	225
Conclusion	246
Bibliography	250

Introduction

In 1964, in a peaceful ridge cemetery near Chilhowie in southwestern Virginia, a local chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution replaced the weather-beaten tombstone of Revolutionary War General William Campbell. The original slab had a somewhat curious history. Although Campbell died in 1781, his burial in Hanover County prevented the return of his remains to his home until 1823. In that year the general's body was exhumed by his son-in-law, Francis Preston, and reinterred in the graveyard at Aspenville, the family homestead. The present memorial bears a "true copy" of the 1823 inscription:

Here lies the remains of Brigadier General William Campbell, born in the year 1745 and died in the defense of his country, 1781, in the camp of General Lafayette near Richmond. By the unanimous election of his brother officers he commanded at King's Mountain. For his heroism and gallant conduct on that occasion the Congress of the United States tendered to him and the officers and privates under his command the following resolution: 'Resolved, that the Congress entertain a high sense of the spirited and military conduct of Colonel Campbell and the officers and privates of the militia displayed in the action of October 7, in which complete victory was obtained over superior numbers of the enemy advantageously posted on King's Mountain in the state of North Carolina. And that this resolution be published by the Commanding General of the Southern Army in general orders.' At the head of his regiment he brought on the battle of Guilford and was the last to quit the field. His zeal, talents and services were awarded by high testimonials of his country's gratitude and have inscribed his name on the history of the REVOLUTION.¹

¹ William Campbell's tombstone, Seven Mile Ford, Va.

Campbell's epitaph touches only sparingly upon the highlights of a military career which lasted from 1774 to 1781. In much the same manner historians have largely neglected his role in Virginia's Revolutionary history. Appointed captain in 1774, Campbell served in Dunmore's War on the Point Pleasant expedition, an action acknowledged by the 60th Congress as a battle of the Revolution.² In 1775 he commanded a company in Patrick Henry's First Virginia Regiment and the following year helped expell Governor Dunmore from his Gwynn's Island refuge. Campbell returned to the frontier later in 1776 to fight Indians and played a prominent role in the suppression of two tory insurrections on the New River in 1779 and 1780. After commanding the over-mountain army at King's Mountain and serving under Henry Lee at Guilford, Campbell was appointed a brigadier general of militia. His death soon after was a sudden end to his brief career.

The purpose of this thesis is to tell William Campbell's biography, simultaneously examining not only his better known military achievements, but also his contributions as a frontier justice, member of the House of Delegates, and an American patriot. Nearly all documentary evidence concerns Campbell's life after 1770. Thus, the primary object of this paper is his last decade, his period of public prominence. Since Campbell's fame was wrought to a large degree by the events of the American Revolution, a major objective of this thesis is to determine Campbell's impact on that struggle for independence.

²

Walter H. Hendricks, A History of Abingdon, Virginia (n.p., n.d.)

Chapter I. The Early Years

William Campbell's ancestry and roots seem as unsettled as the era of American Revolution itself. The Campbells were Scotch-Irish and a cousin later remembered William to be a member of "the true Caledonian race by the maternal line as well as that of the father."¹ Hailing originally from Inverary, Argyllshire, Scotland, one of the Campbell clan had been a friend of Robert the Bruce. This kinsman, goes the legend, once decapitated the largest boar in the country with one blow of his sword, thus earning the right to display the boar's head which adorns the family crest.²

In the 1600s the Campbell emigrated from Scotland to Northern Ireland where John Campbell married Grace Hay, who bore ten or twelve children.³ The oldest son, Patrick, married and his wife gave birth to a son, Charles, William Campbell's father. However, when John Campbell moved to the American Colonies in 1726 his extended family migrated also,

¹ Arthur Campbell's Biographical Statement on William Campbell, n.d., 8 DD 78, Draper Manuscripts, Virginia State Library, Richmond.

² Lyman C. Draper, King's Mountain and its Heroes: History of the Battle of King's Mountain, October 7, 1780, and the Events which led to it (Cincinnati, 1881), 376; George W. Cleek, Early Western Augusta Pioneers (Staunton, Va., 1957), 311.

³ David Campbell to Lyman C. Draper, Dec. 12, 1840, 10 DD 6, Draper Manuscripts.

settling in Dongola, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania.⁴ Here Patrick served as constable in 1729.⁵

In 1733 the Campbells moved again, this time west into the Augusta Valley where they settled near Bellefont in Orange, later Augusta County, Virginia.⁶ However, it was not until February 28, 1739 that Patrick Campbell testified in Orange County Court that his family had paid for their Atlantic passage to America. This entitled them to use the public land.⁷

John Campbell died sometime before 1741 and Patrick obtained 1,546 acres of land on Beverley Manor, a large grant which was parcelled up and

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J. Lewis Peyton, History of Augusta County, Virginia, 2nd. ed. (Bridgewater, Va., 1953), 307; Fran Russell, "A Commentary on the Life of General William Campbell," Northern Neck Historical Magazine, IV (Dec. 1954), 339.

5

Draper, King's Mountain and its Heroes, 378.

6

David Campbell to Draper, Dec. 12, 1840, 10 DD 6 and Robert Latham's Biographical Sketch of William Campbell, Dec. 18, 1879, 17 DD 26, Draper Manuscripts; Peyton, History of Augusta County, 307.

7

Mr. and Mrs. William Wayt King, Augusta County, Organized 1745 (typescript of selected county records in Staunton City Library, Staunton, Va.), 2.

sold by William Beverley at a rate of one English pound per forty acres to such notables as James Patton, William Preston, and William Christian.⁸ Part of this land was willed to Charles Campbell when Patrick Campbell died, and when the former entered his will in court in 1761 he listed his home as "Manner Beverly."⁹

Sometime after his arrival in the Augusta Valley Charles Campbell met and married Margaret Buchanan, the daughter of his militia commander, Colonel John Buchanan.¹⁰ William Campbell was born to them in 1745, probably during the summer since he was baptised on September 1 by John Craig, pastor of the Tinkling Spring Church where the Campbells worshipped and where William received his religious instruction.¹¹

Although the red-haired, blue-eyed William was an only son, he had four younger sisters who later accompanied him to southwestern Virginia

8

Howard McKnight Wilson, The Tinkling Spring (Verona, Va., 1974), 424; Edward Aull, Early History of Staunton and Beverley Manor in Augusta County, Virginia (Staunton, Va., 1963), 8-9.

9

Charles Campbell's Will, March 17, 1767, Augusta County Will Book No. 3, Virginia State Library, Richmond, 492-494.

10

Peyton, History of Augusta County, 304; List of John Buchanan's Militia Company, 1742, 1 QQ 12, Draper Manuscripts.

11

H. M. Wilson, The Tinkling Spring, 471.

where they all married "over-mountain" men. Elizabeth married John Taylor, "an industrious farmer on a very fine plantation on New River," Jane married Thomas Tate and settled on the North Fork of the Holston River, Margaret married a cousin, Arthur Campbell, and Ann married Richard Poston of Wolf Hill. Poston, whose log house still stands in Abingdon, later became a drunkard and, as Judge David Campbell recalled, "led his wife a most wretched life."¹²

In 1748 when William was a lad of only three years, his destiny was largely shaped when his father acquired lands in southwestern Virginia. In the spring of that year Colonel James Patton organized an expedition to survey and explore a 150,000 acre tract recently granted to Patton's Woods River Company. Charles Campbell and John Buchanan were among those who acted as surveyors for Patton and who were promised choice land in return for their services.¹³ There is a tradition that the surveyors came upon a hunter who bargained to show them the finest lands in the Holston River region in exchange for a parcel of land for himself.¹⁴

¹² David Campbell to Draper, March 30, 1842, 10 DD 14, Draper Manuscripts.

¹³ Patricia Givens Johnson, James Patton and the Appalachian Colonists (Verona, Va., 1973), 68-69.

¹⁴ T. L. Preston, Historical Sketches and Reminiscences of an Octogenarian (Richmond, Va., 1900), 14.

Charles Campbell selected a 330 acre tract on the North Fork of the Holston near where Saltville, Virginia now stands, but his choice was a poor one. Called the "Buffalo Lick" because of the salt deposits found there, nearly two-thirds of the property was covered with swamps. However, the Buffalo Lick was a favorite retreat of buffalo, elk, and deer, the stopping place of migrating geese, and the popular resort of hunters even into the nineteenth century.¹⁵ Charles Campbell was also at this time promised a 1,400 acre tract on the North Fork which became known as "Campbell's Choice."¹⁶

After some additional exploration which carried the party as far west as the Cumberland Gap, Charles Campbell returned to Manor Beverley where he served as an Augusta County militia captain in 1752.¹⁷ He farmed his land with his young son William and seems to have become rather prosperous. By the time of his death in 1767 Charles Campbell owned twelve cows, six calves, four steers, twenty-four sheep and fourteen lambs, six mares, and a black "trotting horse." He also owned two slaves, an adult male and a young girl.¹⁸ In a study of Staunton and Beverley Manor made by Edward

¹⁵

Ibid., 42.

¹⁶

William Campbell's Will, n.d., Washington County Will Book No. 1, Virginia State Library, Richmond, 20.

¹⁷

Draper, King's Mountain and its Heroes, 380.

¹⁸

Inventory of Charles Campbell's Estate, Nov. 20, 1767, Augusta County Will Book No. 4, Virginia State Library, Richmond 63-65.

Aull in 1963 it is reported that very few Augusta pioneers owned slaves, even after 1790. Thus it appears that Charles Campbell was quite well established.¹⁹ However, the Campbells' wealth was relative only to their agrarian existence, and it is probable that Charles was like his brother David, "a farmer in moderate circumstances, living well, but having at his command but small pecuniary means..."²⁰

Nevertheless, Charles Campbell continued to acquire western lands. In 1752 he purchased one thousand acres which had originally been patented by John Buchanan during the Patton expedition. Located on the Holston's Middle Fork, the tract was called the "Asp Bottom" and was destined to become William Campbell's home from 1767 to his death in 1781.²¹ The following year (1753) "Campbell's Choice" was finally patented as was the Buffalo Lick. The patent for the Buffalo Lick was located and published by William Campbell's grandson, Thomas L. Preston, in his book Historical Sketches and Reminiscences of an Octogenarian.²²

19

Aull, Early History of Staunton and Beverley Manor, 16.

20

David Campbell to Draper, Dec. 12, 1840, 10 DD 6, Draper Manuscripts.

21

Memorandum Concerning Sale of Land to Charles Campbell and John Buchanan, Nov. 29, 1952, 1 QQ 69, Draper Manuscripts.

22

T. L. Preston, Historical Sketches and Reminiscences, 42.

At least once Charles Campbell considered selling his Buffalo Lick property. Jailed on a trip to Orange Court House because of delinquent taxes, Charles wrote to his wife requesting that she sell the frontier real estate to raise his bail. However, Margaret Campbell assured her husband that if he would remain for a short while in jail, "I will pay the taxes." She then raised the money by spinning flax into thread and carrying it to market on horseback. She sold her thread, brought her husband home from jail, and distributed bits of leftover thread to her children as a reminder of her perseverance in the face of adversity.²³

Charles Campbell died early in 1767. By then William was twenty-two years old and had developed the characteristics that would distinguish him until his death. He was grave in his countenance and had a "masculine and well proportioned" physique. His cousin Arthur Campbell later observed that "nature had formed him for a commander in military capacity."²⁴ While no portrait of William Campbell was ever painted, a grandson, William Campbell Preston was said to be an image of him. If so, Campbell had a long, straight, romanesque nose. Thomas L. Preston described his grandfather's primary characteristics:

His complexion was fair and fresh, without being ruddy, and his eyes were light blue and full, though not prominent, and varied in expression with every emotion. His brow was smooth and full, and his hair light brown

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Draper, King's Mountain and its Heroes, 380; T. L. Preston, Historical Sketches and Reminiscences, 50.

²⁴

Arthur Campbell's Biographical Statement, n.d., 8 DD 78, Draper Manuscripts.

with a tinge of red. In repose his mouth and chin, which were firmly shaped, expressed decision of character; and when his countenance lighted up with pleasure of affection, the smile was soft and sweet as a woman's. But when raised to anger, there were few who did not quail under the concentrated gaze of those brilliant eyes.²⁵

Certainly, William Campbell's temper was a well-known feature, and Theodore Roosevelt wrote that he was "subject to fits of raging wrath that impelled him to any deed of violence."²⁶ Granted, Campbell was capable of deep hatred and was merciless to his enemies, but his acts of violence were mostly premeditated ones. Arthur Campbell, who wrote a short biographical sketch of his cousin, simply stated that when William's "ire was excited he showed in his countenance the fury of an Achilles."²⁷

There is little documentary evidence of William Campbell's early life, but as an only son it is likely that he was educated by the best

²⁵

Nellie C. Preston, Paths of Glory, A Simple Tale of a Far-Faring Bride, Elizabeth, Sister of Patrick Henry (Richmond, Va., 1900, 45; T. L. Preston, A Sketch of Mrs. Elizabeth Russell, Wife of General William Campbell and Sister of Patrick Henry (Nashville, Tenn., 1888), 10-11.

²⁶

Theodore Roosevelt, The Winning of the West (New York and London, 1889), II, 228.

²⁷

Arthur Campbell's Biographical Statement, n.d., 8 DD 78, Draper Manuscripts.

teachers and it is believed that he was privately instructed by David Robinson, a well-known Augusta tutor.²⁸ Young William was thus exposed to several branches of mathematics and developed an interest in both ancient and modern history. Campbell also learned the proper usage of the English language, being "thoughtful and reserved" in his conversation and "expressive and elegant" in his written communications.²⁹ Indeed, Campbell's literary skills were acknowledged by his grandfather, John Buchanan, who while preparing a biblical discourse on the third chapter of St. James, requested that William edit and dedicate his composition. Although his work was "read for the Press," Buchanan admitted to Campbell that he "dare not venture to show it to any person before I have your Approbation with a dedication for the same done be some masterly hand and who so capable as yourself By annexing a few words With Additions by W.C."³⁰ Also, Campbell learned farming techniques from his father and was introduced to surveying and western exploration. He was a deeply religious man, having been raised

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Draper, King's Mountain and its Heroes, 376.

²⁹

Arthur Campbell's Biographical Statement, n.d., 8 DD 78, Draper Manuscripts.

³⁰

John Buchanan to Charles Campbell, n.d., Campbell-Preston Papers, Virginia State Library, Richmond, I.

in the strict Presbyterian manner of John Campbell, and in later life William became a lay minister.³¹

Charles Campbell's passing provided a pivotal point in his son's life. Although "Campbell's Choice" was divided equally between the four Campbell girls and the Buffalo Lick was left to Mrs. Campbell, William received the Asp Bottom with the stipulation that his mother could use five hundred acres "to dwell on Occupy Cultivate and Improve" during her natural life.³²

In November 1767 Campbell produced an inventory of his father's estate for the Augusta Court and immediately made plans to move his family to the Asp Bottom land.³³ This, however, was a prolonged affair, and for several years Campbell travelled back and forth between his mother's Augusta home and his own land on the Holston's Middle Fork. While on the frontier Campbell was occupied by building a small log house, planting several fields with crops, and making fence rails to enclose all his land. However, four years after first arriving at the Asp Bottom Campbell still

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"Campbells of Holston," Folder 32-7-5, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, 2.

³²

Charles Campbell's Will, March 17, 1767, Augusta County Will Book No. 3, 492-494; Margaret Campbell's Will, n.d., Washington County Will Book No. 1, 7.

³³

Inventory of the Estate of Charles Campbell, Nov. 20, 1767, Augusta County Will Book No. 4, 63-65.

had "a considerable number" of rails to split before he could finish planting all his fields.³⁴ Nevertheless, he was pleased enough with his limited first harvests to wish that his livestock (which had remained with Mrs. Campbell) could graze on the new rich land. "I assure you," Campbell wrote his mother one of the first springs, "the food is better here at this instant than I ever remember to see it in Augusta at any season of the year."³⁵

Although Campbell was mainly concerned with building his new home, one of his most unpleasant tasks following Charles Campbell's death was the settlement of his father's debts. This was concluded by May 19, 1769 with the exception of a small amount still owed to John Buchanan. For this William penned an I.O.U.: "I promise to pay or Cause to be paid to Colo John Buchanan an(d) his heirs....the just & full sum of sixteen pounds ten shillings & sixpence on Demand with Lawful Interest from this Date for value recd as witness my hand this 18th Day of May, 1769."³⁶

³⁴

William Campbell to Margaret Campbell, May 1, 1772, Campbell-Preston Papers, I.

³⁵

Ibid.

³⁶

Certificate Concerning the Settlement of Charles Campbell's Estate, May 19, 1769, Preston Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond.

After spending the winter of 1771-1772 in Augusta County, Campbell returned to the Asp Bottom to make final preparations for his family's move there. However, in late April when he arrived, Campbell found that two squatter families had settled on his property. Although one agreed to leave "after wrangling awhile," the other family was determined to remain until fall at the earliest. Despite the intention of the one family to stay upon the land, Campbell expressed his hopes to his mother that "I shall be able in a little time to drive off."³⁷ This must have been the case, because two weeks later Campbell directed his mother and sisters to prepare to move to their new home. "Whatever things you and my sisters wants for the journey," he wrote to Margaret Campbell on May 1, "I hope you will provide and have them ready before I go down." Campbell also explained to his mother that he was hopeful to make the move soon because the harvest season was quickly approaching. "Should I wait untill that time," he warned, "we need not expect the least assistance from any of our ...friends or Neighbors, whereas if we move before that time we may probably get some help from them."³⁸ Sometime that year the six Campbells settled into their frontier home.

William's family were not the first Campbells to settle on the Holston frontier. In 1765 John Campbell, the eldest son of William's great uncle David, explored the western wilderness and patented land for himself

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William Campbell to Margaret Campbell, May 1, 1772, Campbell-Preston Papers, I.

³⁸

Ibid.

at a place he called Royal Oak, now Marion, Virginia. He built a house there the following year and moved west with his children and grandchildren.³⁹

William Campbell's land was seven miles west of Royal Oak, thus the ford of the Holston's Middle Fork on his property became known as "Seven Mile Ford." The Asp Bottom itself was renamed by Campbell, "Aspenville." The site is marked today by a monument on State Route 642 just west of Seven Mile Ford and stands on a pronounced ridge facing the Iron Mountains to the south. The land is owned by Mr. and Mrs. Robert Walker who firmly believe that a delapidated clapboard house standing a hundred yards east of the marker is the original Campbell home. Although the house is in good condition for one built in the 1760s, the clearly visible log frame and fieldstone foundation suggest that it is not impossibly the one built by William Campbell.⁴⁰ However, according to one local story the original house burned down in the nineteenth century and was replaced by a replica built by William Campbell Preston, who used the surviving logs to build a hog pen.⁴¹ Nevertheless, even into the 1960s Mrs. Pearl T.

³⁹

Goodridge Wilson, Smyth County History and Traditions (Radford, Va., 1976), 20; "Campbell's of Holston," 2.

⁴⁰

Interview with Mrs. Robert G. Walker, Route 2, Marion, Va., Nov. 6, 1978.

⁴¹

G. Wilson, Smyth County History and Traditions, 364.

Walker (who lived there until her death in 1976) received mail addressed to "Aspenville!"⁴²

William Campbell's first years on the Holston were concerned primarily with turning Aspenville into a profitable plantation, and various transactions were made to accomplish this. On March 21, 1772 Campbell purchased a slave named Romeo from Samson and George Matthews for eighty pounds, and several months later he bought a black horse from Humphry Hogan for nine pounds ten shillings.⁴³ The following year Campbell raised money to run his farm by renting the Buffalo Lick to William Crabtree. Crabtree was allowed to farm the land for one year in return for the payment to Campbell of forty barrels of "good sound Corn at Christmas next if then demanded or at any time next winter." Crabtree was also responsible for the construction of rail fences around the fields and liable to pay fifty pounds if he did not fulfill his obligation to William Campbell.⁴⁴

While Campbell was establishing himself as a farmer he was also gaining a certain social respectability. By 1770 he had become friends with William Preston, a Botetourt County justice and later County Lieutenant of

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Interview with Mrs. Robert G. Walker, November 6, 1978.

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Samson and George Mathews' Certificate of Sale to William Campbell, March 21, 1772, Campbell-Preston Papers, I; Humphry Hogan's Certificate of Sale to William Campbell, June 5, 1772, Campbell-Preston Papers, I.

⁴⁴

Document Concerning Rental of the Buffalo Lick to William Crabtree, March 18, 1773, Ibid.

of Fincastle and Montgomery Counties. On July 21 of that year Preston, who was planning a trip west after the August court at Botetourt Courthouse, requested Campbell's company on that journey "as I should be very fond of your company and assistance."⁴⁵ Since Campbell served on a grand jury at the August court, there is no reason to doubt that he returned to Aspsville in the company of William Preston.⁴⁶

Campbell's participation on the grand jury (which heard a case of trespass) was his first public service on the frontier. In the next two years he served as a grand jurist a number of times, but judicial particulars must be examined with caution. There was another William Campbell living in Botetourt County who served as a judge until well after Campbell's death in 1781. However, it would seem that during the two years that Campbell served Botetourt the most interesting achievement of the "other" William Campbell was the opening of an ordinary at his home, an act which would have abhorred his religious namesake!⁴⁷

In 1772 John Buchanan died and William Campbell and William Preston were appointed executors of his estate. They were instructed to build a "decent and commodious House" for Mrs. Buchanan at Harmon's on the New River,

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William Preston to William Campbell, July 21, 1770, Preston Papers.

⁴⁶

Botetourt County Order Books, Part 1 (1770-1771), Virginia State Library, Richmond, 135.

⁴⁷

Ibid., 189.

and to furnish it as they saw fit. Among other things, the executors were to pay off Buchanan's debts, first by selling his "back lands" and if necessary, by selling his livestock.⁴⁸ In April Campbell and Preston paid William Rind seventeen shillings to advertise the sale of Buchanan's property.⁴⁹

Although responses to Rind's advertisement were good, Campbell and Preston were rather slow to respond to inquiries. When Evan Shelby offered to buy two tracts of Buchanan's land in 1772 he could not even get an answer from them. On November 9 Shelby finally warned Campbell that he was "quit Tyerd of staying" and if the latter did not acknowledge his interest he would purchase property from one Baker instead.⁵⁰ This moved Campbell and Preston to action and soon afterward they sold Shelby and Isaac Barber 1,946 acres on Beaver Creek for 608 pounds. Half the price was to be paid by April 1, 1773 and the remainder was due when "Legal Title can be made by the Executors."⁵¹

48

John Buchanan's Will, June 5, 1769, Campbell-Preston Papers, I.

49

Memo for the Advertisement of John Buchanan's Estate, April 25, 1772, Preston Papers.

50

Evan Shelby to William Campbell, Nov. 9, 1772, Campbell-Preston Papers, I.

51

Article of Agreement between Preston and William Campbell and Shelby and Isaac Barber, n.d., Ibid.

Not only were Campbell and Preston slow in executing their duties, but it also appears that they were involved in something less than the proper dispensation of their responsibilities. In 1773 when one of Buchanan's sons was engaged and wished to pay a dowry with some of his late father's land which Preston had taken the liberty of selling, Campbell informed his friend that he would obtain a release for the property by Mrs. Buchanan's signature. This, he assured Preston, would be "a means of securing ourselves from trouble hereafter."⁵²

In the fall of 1772 the Holston and New River settlers petitioned the Governor and Council to form a new county because of their remoteness from Botetourt Courthouse. In December, when Fincastle County was formed according to their wishes, Aspenville was located in the new county and at first Fincastle court held at the Lead Mines on the New River in January 1773, William Campbell played a prominent role, and was recommended (on January 6) with James McCorkle as "fit persons to Execute the Office of Justices of the Peace for this County."⁵³

When Fincastle was formed there was some contention among the Holston settlers as to the location of the county road, and on March 3

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William Campbell to Preston, May 1, 1773, Preston Papers; Lewis Preston Summers, Annals of Southwest Virginia, 1769-1800 (Abingdon, Va., 1929), 594.

⁵³

Ibid., 595-596.

Campbell was ordered with Arthur Bowens, John Hays, Benjamin Logan, and Thomas Ramsey to view the several ways proposed for the road and make a report on the "Convenience and Inconveniences attending the same respectively and the distances to the next court."⁵⁴ On July 6 the commissioners reported the best route to be from the Town House on the Holston to Eighteen Mile Creek in Lower Fincastle. William Campbell was subsequently appointed overseer of the section of the road from Seven Mile Ford to "the Big Spring below Capt. Thompson's on the Old Way."⁵⁵ Later that same day (July 6) Campbell was accepted with fifteen others to serve as justices of the peace and of oyer and terminer.⁵⁶

Although Campbell was an important individual in the formation of Fincastle County, his attendance at court was quite irregular. He failed to attend the April court and, while he hoped to be present at the May session, he informed William Preston that "as my business lies a good deal behind, I find myself disappointed."⁵⁷ Campbell was not even present when

⁵⁴

Ibid., 597.

⁵⁵

Lewis Preston Summers, History of Southwest Virginia, 1746-1786, Washington County, 1777-1870 (Baltimore, 1966), 133; Summers, Annals of Southwest Virginia, 608-609.

⁵⁶

Ibid., 609.

⁵⁷

William Campbell to Preston, May 1, 1773, Preston Papers.

the new justices were sworn in on July 7, and had to wait until September 7 to take the oath.⁵⁸ Even then, Campbell missed the next day's session and, in fact, would not again attend court until the May term in 1774. Then the necessary boredom of civil matters would be subordinated to a more exciting, though deadly business of frontier defense.

58

Summers, Annals of Southwest Virginia, 611.

Chapter II. Captain Campbell

William Campbell's seventh spring on the Holston frontier was darkened by the prospect of a bloody and sorrow-filled summer. The Overhill Cherokees on Fincastle's western boundary had become so alarmed at white encroachments onto their hunting grounds that by the fall of 1773 their attacks had become quite frequent. Eleven settlers were killed in Fincastle alone that year, one of the more famous incidents being the murder of James Boone and five companions in Powell's Valley that October.¹ Thus by May 1774 when Campbell rode the fifty-odd miles east from Aspsville to the Lead Mines to attend the county court for that month a general frontier war was feared by the Fincastle pioneers.

To the north, the Shawnees were likewise concerned about incursions of Virginians and Pennsylvanians onto their land. They too attacked any hunting and survey parties which ventured across the Ohio. There was good reason for alarm during the winter of 1773-1774 when the Shawnees attempted to form a defensive confederation with the Cherokees, Choctaws, and Creeks, but Indian plans were fortunately foiled by the diplomatic efforts of John Stuart, British Indian Commissioner in the South.² Never-

¹ Summers, History of Southwest Virginia and Washington County, 143; Patricia Givens Johnson, William Preston and the Alleghany Patriots (Pulaski, Va., 1976), 125.

² Ray Allen Billington, Westward Expansion (New York, 1963), 167.

theless, scattered incidents by both sides built up until late May, when County Lieutenant William Preston first learned that hostilities had broken out near Fort Pitt.³ When thirteen settlers were killed near there in June, Virginia Governor Dunmore responded by declaring war on the Shawnees and their allies.⁴

Although Colonel Preston was able to quiet the Cherokees' outrage over the June murder of "Cherokee Billy," a distant relative of one of their chiefs, he nevertheless enforced the invasion law in Fincastle County, alerted all militia companies to the danger, and ordered that a third of the soldiers in each company be prepared to march to the frontier "on shortest notice."⁵ Also, Preston directed Captains Evan Shelby, William Russell, and Daniel Smith to send scouts out to the frontier.⁶

In late June Colonel William Christian returned from a trip to Williamsburg with confirmation that war had broken out with the Shawnee, but understandably the immediate concern in Fincastle was the Cherokee menace.⁷

³

Preston to unknown, May 24, 1774, Campbell-Preston Papers, I.

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Billington, Westward Expansion, 168.

⁵

P. G. Johnson, William Preston, 125; Preston to unknown, May 24, 1774, Campbell-Preston Papers, I.

⁶

Ibid.

⁷

Summers, History of Southwest Virginia and Washington County, 149.

A council of Fincastle's militia officers was called for June 25 to meet at the Lead Mines and discuss the situation. Since Campbell had almost certainly been appointed captain in the emergency, this meeting was his first military function. Colonel Christian presented orders from the Governor which directed him to stop frontier settlers from fleeing their homes and to correct as best as possible the "present defenseless Situation of the Frontier Inhabitants of the County of Fincastle." To accomplish this it was proposed to send a small expedition to the Clinch River, where settlers could be protected and enemy movements screened simultaneously. This seemed especially necessary because other frontier counties had failed to adopt similar measures.⁸

Two days later Preston heard that seventy Cherokees were traveling north toward the Shawnee towns. He immediately ordered Christian to organize and command the expedition to the Clinch. Christian was to take fifty men each from his own, Walter Crockett's, and William Campbell's militia companies, as well as any "Necessary Officers." As for Campbell and Crockett and other subordinates, Christian was assured by Preston that they were "none but the choicest officers."⁹

Perhaps because he was a new officer who had not had time to raise a company, William Campbell had to ask his cousin Arthur Campbell, senior

⁸

Preston to William Christian, June 27, 1774, 3 QQ 47, Draper Manuscripts.

⁹

Ibid.

captain on the Holston, for additional troops. Arthur informed William that extra men were on their way to the Town House, the rendezvous point for the expedition, from Crockett's, Robert Doack's, and his own companies, "that we may be prepared to support the lower settlement with vigour." In the meantime, however, William Campbell was directed to send two "spies" to the Nolichucky region and three or four others to the Big Bend of the Broad River to watch Cherokee movements.¹⁰

William Campbell's company rendezvoused with the others at the Town House on the Holston early in July. The men furnished their own horses--Campbell's frontiersmen always fought as dismounted cavalry--carried rifles, and took provisions enough to last "a month or six weeks." At the Town House Christian decided to march to the Clinch in divided columns and there "range together in separate parties & at such places as you Judge most likely to discover & repulse the Enemy on their Approach to our settlements." It was decided that Campbell would march beyond Cumberland Mountain to the head branches of the Kentucky River.¹¹

Although Preston had warned Christian that a Cherokee war was "not reduced to a Certainty," the County Lieutenant was forced to issue additional orders to Christian on July 3 after hearing that forty Shawnees were in the Cherokee camps advising their brothers to "fall upon the People of Holston

¹⁰

Arthur Campbell to William Campbell, 1774, 8 DD 2, Ibid.

¹¹

Preston to Christian, June 27, 1774, 3 QQ 47, Ibid.

immediately." Christian was still to march to the Clinch, but more troops were to be raised for the defense of Fincastle while Christian was on the frontier. William Campbell, who in the first days of July was occupied with outfitting his men for the Clinch expedition, was now ordered to raise forty additional soldiers "besides those already Draught for the Defense of the Settlements on Clinch."¹²

Nevertheless, Campbell marched from the Town House a day or so later with "odds of forty men." He passed through the lower Holston settlements near the Long Island and marched through Mocassin Gap. Christian and Crockett crossed the mountains thirty miles off Campbell's route, and joined the latter at William Russell's Fort near Castle Woods on the Clinch. There Christian was bewildered by varied reports of the Indians' whereabouts, but was thinking of sending Crockett in one direction and Campbell in another toward Cumberland Gap or the lower Clinch settlements, positioning himself "about half way betwixt him & Crockett that I may march either way in case of need."¹³

On July 6, before Christian had taken any definite steps, Arthur Campbell wrote to his cousin William. Since he had raised a goodly number of recruits on the Holston, Arthur thought it possible for William to release several men on the Clinch who were hard-pressed to return home. Arthur was

¹²

Preston to Christian, July 3, 1774, 3 QQ 51, Ibid.

¹³

Reuben Gold Thwaites and Louis Phelps Kellogg, eds. Documentary History of Dunmore's War 1774 (Madison, Wis., 1905), Christian to Preston, July 9, 1774, 76-77.

especially concerned about Charles Bowen, whose wife had told him that their crops would be lost or suffer if Bowen was not allowed to return. Arthur also informed William that the Cherokees seemed to want peace "if there is no fresh provocation given," and added that "The Shawnees will be what will now engage our attention."¹⁴

William Campbell's exact movements over the next few days are unknown, but by July 12 the three companies (totalling only ninety-nine officers and men) were back in camp at Russell's Fort. Possibly they were too ill-prepared to carry on Christian's more ambitious operations, having neither beef nor flour and few cooking kettles. However, pack horses were sent to Wolf Hill for supplies, there was an abundance of corn along the Clinch, and a beef herd was located twelve miles from camp. Also, an ammunition reserve was "lodged" for the expedition at Aspenville.¹⁵

Christian's relative inactivity reflected Arthur Campbell's opinion that the Cherokee troubles were at an end. He decided not to march to the Kentucky as first ordered, choosing instead to stay at Russell's Fort and await the return of any traders and surveyors who might escape from Cherokee country. Meanwhile, he was content to send William Campbell and "a Party"

¹⁴

Arthur Campbell to William Campbell, July 6, 1774, Campbell-Preston Papers, I.

¹⁵

Christian to Preston, July 12, 1774, 3 QQ 63, Draper Manuscripts; Thwaites and Kellogg, ed. Documentary History of Dunmore's War 1774, Christian to Preston, July 9, 1774, 76.

ranging twenty miles down the Clinch toward Cumberland Gap, and another force under Lieutenant William Edmiston upriver about fifteen miles. However, this movement had no real strategic purpose, and was explained by Christian as being "better to keep the men moving slowly, than to have them remain in camp."¹⁶

Before Campbell and Edmiston could march, the officers gathered to discuss "what is best to be done." They decided that 120 to 200 men could easily march the 165 miles to the lower Shawnee towns. William Russell offered to raise thirty men from the Clinch settlements and it was thought that seventy-five more could be recruited on the Holston to compliment those already in the field under Christian's command.¹⁷ This plan, however, was not adopted by William Preston. Not only did he receive word from Overhill Chief Oconostota that the Cherokees definitely wanted peace, but Christian's contingent was ordered home to join the invasion of Shawnee country planned by Lord Dunmore.¹⁸

Dunmore's plan called for a two-pronged invasion. The Governor would command a northern wing and march from Fort Pitt to the Ohio, while a southern wing composed of Augusta, Botetourt, and Fincastle militiamen

¹⁶

Christian to Preston, July 12, 1774, 3 QQ 63, Draper Manuscripts.

¹⁷

Ibid.

¹⁸

P. G. Johnson, William Preston, 127.

commanded by General Andrew Lewis gathered at the confluence of the Great Kanawha and Ohio Rivers. Lewis' orders were to "Wait no longer for them to attack you, but raise all the men you think willing and able to go to the south of the Great Kanaway, and there build a fort, and, if you think you have forces enough that are willing to follow you, proceed directly to their towns."¹⁹

Lewis notified the county lieutenants of Dunmore's plan and directed his southern column to rendezvous at a place on the Great Kanawha about 160 miles from the Ohio designated "Camp Union." William Christian, commander of the Fincastle battalion, was ordered to assemble his troops and march for Camp Union by August 30.²⁰

Christian established his headquarters at New River Ford and opened recruiting stations at Castle Woods, Wolf Hill, Royal Oak, and at William Campbell's home near Seven Mile Ford.²¹ Nearly 200 men were raised at these

¹⁹

Virgil Lewis, History of the Battle of Point Pleasant (Charleston, W. Va., 1909), 24; Robert Douthat Stoner, A Seed-Bed of the Republic: Early Botetourt (Radford, Va., 1962), 62.

²⁰

Lewis, History of the Battle of Point Pleasant, 25.

²¹

Ibid., 26.

places and the confusion can well be imagined as the Fincastle captains competed to fill their companies before Christian marched. Arthur Campbell was appalled by the "irregular proceedings" used to accomplish this, which concerned all his officers. On August 13 when William Preston authorized David Long to form a company because William Campbell had filled his own, he still thought it wise to warn Long to "by no means attempt to engage any one man in any Company that has promised to go with either Capt. Shelby or Capt. Campbell."²² Meanwhile, however, William Campbell had violated Preston's advice to Long by allowing Joseph Drake to enlist nine men into his company who had previously signed on with other officers. When Arthur Campbell questioned the status of Drake's men the nine violators protested so vehemently that he ordered Drake and his soldiers out of his cousin's company. William Campbell was left to report the whole incident to Preston.²³

Recruiting was additionally complicated by the death of Captain Robert Doack. When Preston appointed Captain William Herbert to take his place, for some unknown reason "not a man" in the company would serve under their new captain. Proposals were even made to disband the company and to distribute the soldiers among William Campbell's and Walter Crockett's troops, but before this could be accomplished the militant militiamen accepted Herbert as their new commander.²⁴ Nevertheless, as organizational problems continued and dis-

²²

Preston to David Long, Aug. 19, 1774, 3 QQ 140, Draper Manuscripts.

²³Arthur Campbell to Preston, Aug. 12, 1774, 3 QQ 75, Ibid.²⁴Arthur Campbell to Preston, Aug. 10, 1774, 3 QQ 72, Ibid.

satisfaction grew among the officers and men, Arthur Campbell's main task was to "humour" all parties until they left for the rendezvous of the Fincastle battalion at the Lead Mines on August 30. His hope was that Preston might "fall on some method then for the best."²⁵

On August 19 Captains William Campbell, Evan Shelby, and William Herbert march "in High Spirits" from their camp at Royal Oak with upwards of eighty men. They passed the New River Ford and marched on to the Lead Mines (near present day Wytheville) where they joined the companies commanded by William Russell, Walter Crockett, Anthony Bledsoe, and John Floyd. There was also a detachment of Kentuckians under Captain James Harrod.²⁶

Once at the Lead Mines, William Campbell made the final bid to add Drake's men to his own company. This was certainly necessary because the number of men actually raised for service was far below Colonel Preston's orders and William Campbell's expectations. Indeed, on August 19 Arthur Campbell had complained to Preston that Joseph Drake, apparently recruiting on his own, had "done hurt to...Billey Campbell."²⁷ In an effort to refill his depleted ranks William Campbell produced a muster list which showed that eight of Drake's nine men had been with him on the Clinch, and he asked Arthur Campbell to go to their camp at the Town House to inform them that if they returned promptly to his company "former faults or breeches of their

²⁵

Arthur Campbell to Preston, Aug. 19, 1774, 3 QQ 80, Ibid.

²⁶

Christian to Preston, Sept. 3, 1774, 3 QQ 89, Ibid.

²⁷

Arthur Campbell to Preston, Aug. 19, 1774, 3 QQ 80, Ibid.

Words would now be overlooked."²⁸

According to his cousin's request, Arthur Campbell and William Bowen visited the Town House on August 28. At first they were successful in convincing the eight soldiers to rejoin William Campbell's company without Drake, but Drake and one Lyman began to cause trouble "according to their usual mode of whispering one thing and speaking out another just matter into confusion." Drake openly challenged Preston's orders to remain behind and boasted that he would march his men to the Ohio alone! Arthur Campbell was shocked. "If Colo Preston lamely submits to these insults," he wrote to William Campbell the following day, "I expect we shall have precedent enough of a similar nature in a short time from people of the lowest class in the county." However, he still hoped that Drake would "go home" and that his men would join their proper officers.²⁹ This, it appears by William Campbell's muster on September 6, is exactly what happened.³⁰

On September 1 Colonel Christian marched the Fincastle battalion away from the Lead Mines toward Camp Union. However, progress was slowed because the cattle herd had to be rounded up each morning, and by September

²⁸

Ibid, Arthur Campbel to Preston, Aug. 28, 1774, 3 QQ 85, Ibid.

²⁹

Arthur Campbell to Preson, Aug. 29, 1774, Campbell-Preston Papers,

I.

³⁰

Lewis, History of the Battle of Point Pleasant, 27.

3 when the command camped on Rich Creek it was evident that it would take several more days to reach Camp Union.³¹

While camped on Rich Creek some of Campbell's men complained that an unlikable character, John Read, was drawing the pay of an ensign although Colonel Preston had promised for some reason that he would not serve in that capacity. The details of this incident are unknown, but according to Campbell's muster of September 3 Read was not serving as an ensign.³²

On September 4 the battalion proceeded through Symm's Gap in Peter's Mountain and in the next few days marched across what is now Monroe County, West Virginia, arriving at Camp Union on the evening of Tuesday, September 6. The next day Campbell reported his company to contain a lieutenant (William's eldest cousin, John Campbell), three sergeants, and forty men "fit for duty." This compares with Russell's forty-two men, Crockett's forty, Herbert's thirty-eight, Shelby's thirty-two, and the twenty-two Kentuckians of Harrod's detachment. Ironically, Harrod's small company had the only chaplain, butchers, and commissary in the Fincastle battalion.³³

The immediate concern of Christian and his officers was that they might not see action. On the day of their arrival Colonel Charles Lewis had marched for the Ohio with 600 men of the Augusta battalion, and Christian was

³¹

Christian to Preston, Sept. 3, 1774, 3 QQ 89, Draper Manuscripts.

³²

Ibid.

³³

David Campbell to Draper, Jan. 12, 1843, 10 DD 28, Ibid; Lewis, History of the Battle of Point Pleasant, 27.

prompted to write that "I would not for all I am worth be behind crossing the Ohio, and that we would miss lending our assistance. I believe in my heart that our men would all turn home if they thought they could not be with the foremost."³⁴

Christian's hopes of "lending Assistance" seemed diminished on September 12 when General Lewis marched with the Botetourt battalion for Point Pleasant, the camp established by Charles Lewis at the confluence of the Great Kanawha and Ohio Rivers. Although the General promised Christian that he need have no apprehensions that the Ohio would be crossed without him, the latter was not happy with his orders to await the return of Lewis' pack horses and the arrival of flour before marching "some days after him" with supplies.³⁵ "What to do I don't know," Christian lamented, "when our men hears they are to stay behind."³⁶ As for William Campbell, he probably deemed Evan Shelby and William Russell extremely fortunate since they marched with Lewis on September 12.

During the next seventeen days at Camp Union Campbell's men slept in the open or in hastily constructed shelters because there were "but few Tents" among the Fincastle troops. As supplies filtered steadily into camp

³⁴

Christian to Preston, Sept. 7, 1774, 3 QQ 92, Draper Manuscripts.

³⁵

Lewis, History of the Battle of Point Pleasant, 36; Christian to Preston, Sept. 12, 1774, 3 QQ 146, Draper Manuscripts; Thwaites and Kellogg, eds. Documentary History of Dunmore's War 1774; Christian to Preston, Sept. 12, 1774, 198.

³⁶

Christian to Preston, Sept. 12, 1774, 3 QQ 146, Draper Manuscripts.

Campbell was informed of Christian's intention to march by the 25th or 26th of September.³⁷ Meanwhile, other officers must have complained about Drake's men rejoining Campbell's company but an interim solution was reached which ended the bickering. "The affair with Capt. Campbell is not yet settled about the men," Captain Floyd informed Preston on September 18, "it is to lie over until we return & be settled then."³⁸

Although Herbert's company led the advance to Point Pleasant on September 23, it was not until six days later than Christian followed with three of his four remaining companies, leaving Bledsoe's men at Camp Union to await additional supplies. With Christian marched eighty Culpepper "minutemen" and Harrod's Kentuckians (who were not officially part of the Fincastle battalion), perhaps 400 men total.³⁹

Little is known about Christian's march other than it was made more quickly than those of Charles and Andrew Lewis. The command reached the mouth of the Elk River on October 6 and halted there until the 8th, when the river was crossed. The following day the column reached the Red House Shoals on the Great Kanawha, about twenty-five miles from Point Pleasant.⁴⁰ Still hoping to join Lewis before he crossed the Ohio, Christian pressed forward on October 10 with plans to reach Point Pleasant the following day.

³⁷Ibid.³⁸Ibid.³⁹Lewis, History of the Battle of Point Pleasant, 38.⁴⁰Ibid., 40.

However, late in the day when still "about 10 or 15 miles off" gunfire was heard in the distance, and not long after a messenger arrived with news that General Lewis had been attacked at Point Pleasant by the main Shawnee war-party under Chief Cornstalk.⁴¹

Christian made a forced march to get his 400 men up for Lewis' relief, but it was not until midnight that the weary command arrived at "the point." There they were told that the battle--fought against a mixed group of Shawnees, Delawares, and Mingoes--had ended in a decided advantage to Lewis several hours before. However, there was no rest for Christian's men. They worked long into the morning hours of October 11 erecting breastworks for the protection of the wounded after the army crossed the Ohio. Even after completing their section of the entrenchments it is likely that Campbell's men got little sleep, for as Christian reported several days later, "The cries of the wounded prevented our resting any that night."⁴²

Throughout the morning of October 11 Campbell's company assisted in the burials of dead comrades, but they left the Indian dead exposed -- even though the army stayed at Point Pleasant another six days! Concern for the wounded was undoubtedly great though on October 15 Christian wrote to Preston that they were "really in a deplorable situation had doctors, few medicins, nothing to eat or dress with proper for them."⁴³

41

Christian to Preston, Oct. 15, 1774, Preston Papers.

42

Ibid.

43

Ibid.

On October 17 Campbell crossed the Ohio with the rest of Lewis' army, but disease had reduced his company to only thirty-two men.⁴⁴ By the 22nd the army was encamped on the Kinnickinnick River, fifteen miles from Camp Charlotte, the bivouac of Dunmore's northern column. There word was received that the Governor had concluded a treaty with Cornstalk on October 19. Lewis nevertheless pushed on via Congo Creek and marched the remaining four and a half miles to Camp Charlotte on October 23.⁴⁵

After two days rest Lewis marched back to the Ohio, arriving at Point Pleasant on October 29.⁴⁶ With hostilities over the southern army quickly disintegrated and the Fincastle battalion--minus Russell's company which remained at Point Pleasant to build a fort--returned home. As the troops neared Fincastle County they abandoned the column and rushed to their homes in such disarray that Christian noted on November 8 that "The Army is scattered from Elk to the levels, perhaps, from Point Pleasant to the Warm Springs, all in little Companies."⁴⁷

44

"Orderly Book of James Newell," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, XI (Jan. 1904), 249.

45

Lewis, History of the Battle of Point Pleasant, 55, 58.

46

Ibid., 58.

47

J. Allen Neal, Bicentennial History of Washington County, Virginia, 1776-1976 (Dallas, Tex., 1977), 60.

Thus ended William Campbell's first large scale military venture, a rather ignominious beginning to a later distinguished career. Forced by circumstances to play the part of a bystander, Campbell probably coveted the action which William Russell and Eyan Shelby saw in the battle of Point Pleasant. Certainly, the only Indians Campbell saw on the campaign were those who stalked Christian's battalion on the way to Point Pleasant and those who had been killed in the battle itself!⁴⁸ However, during the campaign Campbell gained practical experience in military organization and tactics that would, no doubt, be of value to him during the Revolution.

Although Campbell had little personal influence on the outcome of the Point Pleasant campaign, its affects determined much of his later career. The cession of vast amounts of communal hunting land by the Shawnees to Virginia incensed the Overhill Cherokees on Fincastle's frontier and as surveyors and hundred of settlers poured into the "disputed" territory, and such speculators as Richard Henderson--a North Carolina judge who obtained 32 million acres for 10,000 pounds worth of trade goods by the Watauga Treaty in 1775--bargained for vast western acreage, the Cherokee were virtually forced to side with the British in the Revolution.⁴⁹

⁴⁸

Christian to Preston, Sept. 12, 1774, 3 QQ 146, Draper Manuscripts.

⁴⁹

Denise Pratt Morrison, Joseph Martin and the Southern Frontier (Knoxville, Tenn., 1973), 9; P. G. Johnson, William Preston, 16.

Chapter III: The Outbreak of the American Revolution

While the Virginia frontiersmen were occupied with the Indians, events of more continental importance were taking place throughout the colony. Virginia had become part of the friendly "Association" with the design to relieve the Boston blockade by pursuing a non-intercourse economic policy against Britain. Also, the First Continental Congress urged that committees be formed "in every county, city, and town" for protection and correspondence between the colonies.¹ William Campbell had hardly returned from the Ohio when plans were made in Fincastle County to carry out this suggestion, and on January 20, 1775 the freeholders of the county assembled at the Lead Mines to elect a committee of safety.

William Campbell and fourteen others were chosen for the committee. His colleagues included Colonels William Preston and William Christian, newly-promoted Major Arthur Campbell and Major William Ingles, Captains Stephen Trigg, Walter Crockett, John Montgomery, James McGavock, Daniel Smith, William Russell, Evan Shelby, and future brother-in-law Thomas Madison, as well as Lieutenant William Edmiston. The committee's composition reflected the martial spirit kindled by the Point Pleasant victory. Of the fifteen committeemen, only the Reverend Charles Cummings was not a soldier.²

¹ Neal, Bicentennial History of Washington County, 61

² William Barksdale Harwell, ed. The Committees of Safety of Westmorland and Fincastle: Proceedings of the County Committees, 1774-1776 (Richmond, Va., 1956), 17.

The business at hand was quickly concluded. Christian was elected chairman and David Campbell was appointed clerk. This done, the Fincastle patriots composed their famous statement on liberty addressed to the Virginia delegates to the First Continental Congress in Philadelphia:

Gentlemen.--Had it not been for our remote situation and the Indian War which we were lately engaged in to chastise those cruel and savage people for the many murders and depredations they have committed against us, now happily terminated under the auspices of our present worthy Governor, His Excellency the Right Honorable the Earl of Dummore, we should before this time have made known to you our thankfulness for the very important services you have rendered from the other Provinces. Your noble efforts for reconciling the mother country and the Colonies, on rational and constitutional principles and your pacifick, steady and uniform conduct on that arduous work entitle you to the esteem of all British America, and will immortalize you in the annals of your country. We heartily concur in your resolutions, and shall, in every instance, strictly and invariably adhere thereto.

We assure you, gentlemen, and all our countrymen, that we are a people whose hearts overflow with love and duty to our lawful Sovereign, George the Third, whose illustrious House for several successive reigns have been the guardians of the civil and religious liberties of British subjects, as settled in the glorious Revolution; that we are willing to risk our lives in the service of his Majesty for the support of the Protestant religion and the rights and liberties of his subjects, as they have been established by compact, law and ancient charters. We are heartily grieved at the differences which now subsist between the parent state and the Colonies, and most ardently wish to see harmony restored on an equitable basis and by the most lenient measures that can be devised by the heart of man. Many of us and our forefathers left our native land, considering it as a kingdom subjected to inordinate power and greatly abridged of its liberties; we crossed the Atlantic, and explored this then uncultivated wilderness bordering on many nations of savages and surrounded by mountains almost inaccessible to any but those very savages, who have incessantly been committing barbarities and depredations on us since our first seating the country. These fatigues and dangers we patiently encountered, supported by the pleasing hope of enjoying those rights and liberties which had been granted to Virginians, and

were denied us in our native country, and of transmitting them inviolate to our posterity; but even to these remote regions the hand of unlimited and unconstitutional power hath pursued us, to strip us of that liberty and property with which God, nature and the rights of humanity have vested us. We are ready and willing to contribute all in our power for the support of his Majesty's government, if applied to constitutionally, and when the grants are made by our own Representatives, but cannot think of submitting our liberty or property to the power of a venal British Parliament, or to the will of a corrupt Ministry. We by no means desire to shake off our duty or allegiance to our lawful sovereign, but, on the contrary, shall ever glory in being the loyal subjects of a Protestant prince, descended from such illustrious progenitors, so long as we can enjoy the free exercise of our religion as Protestants, and our liberties and properties as British Subjects.

But if no Pacifick measures shall be proposed or adopted by Great Britain, and our enemies will attempt to dragoon us out of those inestimable privileges, which we are entitled to as subjects, and to reduce us to a state of slavery, we declare that we are deliberately and resolutely determined never to surrender them to any power on earth but at the expense of our lives.

These are our real, though unpolished, sentiments of liberty and loyalty, and in them we are resolved to live and die.

We are, gentlemen, with the most perfect esteem and regard, your most obedient servants.³

The Fincastle Resolutions were agreed to unanimously, and it is often pointed out that they were drafted a full three months before Lexington. Nevertheless, in March the committee saw fit to thank Dunmore for his previous services and offered a wish that "the present disturbances may be amicably settled."⁴

³

William J. VanSchreeven and Robert L. Scribner, eds. Revolutionary Virginia, The Road to Independence (n.p., 1973-1977) Resolutions of the Fincastle County Committee, Jan. 22, 1775, II, 254-256.

⁴

Harwell, The Committees of Safety of Westmorland and Fincastle, 17.

That spring, most likely before news of Lexington and Concord reached the frontier, William Campbell had a brief respite from his committee duties. A man named Lewis had stolen "a part" of Campbell's horses and had fled west into Powell's Valley. Campbell chased Lewis for "a day or two" through the valley and was able to recapture his horses. What became of the horsethief is uncertain, but in light of later incidents in Campbell's life, it is not unreasonable to suppose that the culprit was hanged.⁵

By late April, when war broke out between Britain and America, William Campbell had emerged (through service on the committee) as a firm advocate of independence. "His patriotism," remembered Arthur Campbell, "was not of a timid cast. He never balanced between his military duty and prudential maxims."⁶ Thus William Campbell must have approved when the Fincastle committeemen censured Dunmore for removing the powder from the Williamsburg magazine that April. They openly attacked "the late sanguinary attempt" as well as "preparations of the Kings troupes in the colony of Massachusetts Bay" and called upon the colonies--"even the most distant and

5

John Redd, "Reminiscences of Western Virginia, 1770-1790," VMHB, VII (July and Oct. 1899), 119.

6

Arthur Campbell's Biographical Statement, 8 DD 78, Draper Manuscript.

interior parts...to prepare and be ready for the extreme event, by fixed resolution, and a firm and manly opposition, to avert ministerial cruelty, in defense of our just and reasonable rights and liberties."⁷

In late July the Virginia Convention ordered 425 soldiers to the frontiers, and 100 of them were stationed in Fincastle County under the command of militia officers appointed by the Fincastle Committee of Safety.⁸ Since William Campbell was not selected for this task, he was understandably sympathetic with William Christian when the latter resigned his committee chairmanship to accept a field command in eastern Virginia on October 10.⁹ Campbell responded by raising a company of frontier riflemen to join Christian in Williamsburg. His were the first troops raised in southwestern Virginia and among the first in the colony to answer Patrick Henry's "call to arms."¹⁰

⁷ VanSchreeven and Scribner, eds. Revolutionary Virginia, Resolutions of the Fincastle County Committee, July 10, 1775, III, 278.

⁸ Stephen Trigg to William Fleming, July 26, 1775, William Fleming Papers, Virginia State Library, Richmond.

⁹ Harwell, The Committees of Safety of Westmorland and Fincastle, 20.

¹⁰ Mr. Daniel, Report From the Committee on the Library Concerning "A Monument to Memory of William Campbell", 60th Congress, 1st Session (Washington, D.C., 1908), 4.

In Williamsburg Christian was appointed lieutenant colonel in Patrick Henry's First Virginia Regiment, and the men which Campbell had enlisted were mustered into the same unit. By October 21 they were in Williamsburg, camped on the grounds of the college of William and Mary.¹¹ William Campbell was not, however, present. He was busy recruiting the remainder of his company in Bedford, Botetourt, Fincastle, and Pittsylvania Counties, and did not report to Colonel Henry until the second week in December.¹² His captain's commission in the Continental Line is dated December 15.¹³

Only after coming to Williamsburg was Campbell enabled to write to his mother. Then he related his recent experiences as a recruiting officer:

I have been very disagreeably employ'd for a great part of the time since I left home; in the first place, the difficulty I found in compleating my Company caused me a good deal of Chagrin.--Upon the completion of my

¹¹

Publications of the Historical Society of Washington County, Virginia (Abingdon, Va., n.d.), 58; Robert Douthat Meade, Patrick Henry, Practical Revolutionary (Philadelphia and New York, 1969), 86; John H. Gwathney, Historical Register of Virginians in the Revolution (Richmond, Va., 1938), 126.

¹²

Virginia Gazette (Purdie, pub.), Williamsburg, Dec. 15, 1775.

¹³

Gwathney, Historical Register of Virginians in the Revolution, 126.

Company I had then to find out the Dispositions of People to whom I was an entire stranger, & to make myself agreeable to all; this you may be assured was no easy task; tho' I have now I think, rendered myself so to the greatest part of my soldiers.¹⁴

Soon after his arrival in Williamsburg Campbell met Elizabeth Henry. She had come to the capital to visit her sister Anne (William Christian's wife) and to keep house for her brother Patrick. Elizabeth was twenty-six years old, of medium height with blue eyes.¹⁵ She was quite a handsome woman (though in later life she was afflicted with so much facial hair that she had to shave daily) and she quickly became a sensation among the young officers in Williamsburg.¹⁶ However, Elizabeth could not help but be infatuated with the tall and rugged William Campbell when he visited her brother's home.¹⁷

The friendship between William and Elizabeth quickly blossomed into love, and Campbell spent three days at the Henrys' Scotchtown home during the Christmas holidays. Yet when Campbell somewhat prematurely asked Patrick Henry for his sister's hand, the patriot answered (according to Campbell

¹⁴

William Campbell to Margaret Campbell, Jan. 15, 1776, Campbell-Preston Papers, I.

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Meade, Patrick Henry, Practical Revolutionary, 86.

¹⁶

William Martin to Draper, Dec. 1, 1842, 14 DD 113, Draper Manuscripts.

¹⁷

Meade, Patrick Henry, Practical Revolutionary, 86.

tradition), "As friend to a friend, Captain Campbell, I congratulate you. But as brother I must wait until her mother knows of this. As officer to officer, I beg you to await the outcome of this serious affair which His Excellency has forced upon us."¹⁸

In January Campbell's company was transferred to Hampton, where he seemed most impressed by the value of slaves. "Negroes are exceeding dear in this part of the Country," Campbell wrote his mother on January 15, 1776, "100 pounds and from that to 130 or 140 is given for Negro wenches: indeed * they can be bought much cheaper in any of the back Counties than here."¹⁹

The most remarkable event of Campbell's stay in Hampton was the bombardment of Norfolk by the British fleet. On January 1 the cannonade began and that evening Campbell watched the smoke from burning houses in the city. During the nights that followed "the fire was so great the Clouds above the town appear'd as red & bright as they do in the evening at sun setting--There was almost a constant firing of Cannon which we heard distinctly at Hampton for some Days...."²⁰ Meanwhile, Campbell's men were amused by a small British vessel which constantly cruised in sight of Hampton, occasionally firing on small parties of soldiers who, from the little damage done by the ships guns, soon began to "despise" their enemies.²¹

¹⁸

N. C. Preston, Paths of Glory, 82.

¹⁹

William Campbell to Margaret Campbell, Jan. 15, 1776, Campbell-Preston Papers, I.

²⁰

Ibid.

²¹

Ibid.

Campbell did not remain at Hampton for long, and soon found himself back in Williamsburg faced with the more fatiguing prospect of garrison duty. Christian had replaced Patrick Henry as colonel of the First Virginia when the latter resigned to become governor, and the regiment was placed under General Andrew Lewis, Campbell's commander in the 1774 campaign and commander-in-chief of Virginia's forces.

Some of Campbell's duties can be determined by Lewis's orders to his officers. In March they were ordered to "attend to the morals of their men, and endeavor to train the youths under their particular care as well in a moral as military way of life."²² Other directives must have frustrated Campbell and his buckskinned riflemen. Not only were the officers to see that "their beards are close shav'd and as clean and decently dressed as their situation will allow," but on April 3 it was recommended that soldiers "appear as uniform as possible in their dress, and that their Hatts should be cut, all cocked in Fassion, and their Hair is likewise cut exactly the same length." Also, the officers and men were to dye their shirts uniformly "when under arms."²³ It was most likely in response to this suggestion that Campbell lodged an order with Robert MacFarlaine to sew cuffs and capes on twenty-four hunting shirts for his men.²⁴

²²

Charles Campbell, ed. The Orderly Book of that Portion of the American Army Stationed Near Williamsburg, Va., Under the Command of General Andrew Lewis, From March 18, 1776 to August 28, 1776 (Richmond, Va., 1860), 4.

²³

Ibid., 8, 13.

²⁴

William Campbell's Order for Munitions to Robert Macfarlaine, n.d., Campbell-Preston Papers, I.

Campbell also acted as his own company quartermaster, and his receipts from the regimental store reveal the purchase of items ranging from butter to blankets, hats, shoes, and silk stockings.²⁵ Once Campbell even spent five pounds of his own money to purchase a rifle for John Sommers, one of his enlistees.²⁶ Nonetheless, Campbell's only special service from March until August 1776 was to serve as one of two "officers for fatigue" on April 11.²⁷

Campbell's relative boredom was briefly interrupted by his marriage to Elizabeth Henry. Mrs. Henry had given her consent to the couple and they were engaged soon after Christmas. Their marriage took place on April 2, 1776 at the Hanover County home of Colonel Samuel Meridith, Jane Henry's husband.²⁸ According to a Henry family tradition, Patrick Henry rode from Williamsburg to attend the wedding and there met his future wife, Dorathea Dandridge.²⁹

²⁵

William Campbell's Receipt for Goods Purchased From the Regimental Store, Dec. 11, 1775, Ibid.

²⁶

William Campbell's Receipt for Purchase of a Rifle, Nov. 27, 1775, Ibid.

²⁷

C. Campbell, ed. Orderly Book, 21.

²⁸

N. C. Preston, Paths of Glory, 114-115; Virginia M.S. English, "The Campbell Bible," Hanover County Historical Society Bulletin, No. 16 (May 1977), 2.

²⁹

Meade, Patrick Henry, Practical Revolutionary, 86.

Campbell returned to Williamsburg alone after his wedding and in May was again transferred to Hampton, which he found to be that spring "a most delightful part of the country and remarkably healthy."³⁰ From there Campbell participated in the campaign to dislodge Governor Dunmore from Gwynn's Island in July. Campbell had watched Dunmore's fleet sail menacingly off Hampton since mid-May, although on the 24th Arthur Campbell had assured Elizabeth Campbell that she need not fear for her husband's safety because "no danger is apprehended."³¹ Nevertheless, on June 18 Arthur Campbell informed William Campbell that, while Colonel Christian could say nothing positive about his departure, the First Virginia would most certainly march for Gwynn's Island, Dunmore's stronghold, within one or two days.³² Little is known of William Campbell's role in this episode, but it is said that when his frontier riflemen approached the British positions the redcoats shouted that "The Shirtmen are coming!" and hastily retreated.³³

Meanwhile, Campbell had informed his mother of his marriage, and having finally been paid for his military service in 1774, had sent home

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N. C. Preston, Paths of Glory, 114-115.

³¹

Arthur Campbell to Elizabeth H. Campbell, May 24, 1776, Campbell-Preston Papers, I.

³²

Arthur Campbell to William Campbell, June 18, 1776, Ibid.

³³

Draper, King's Mountain and its Heroes, 182; Publications of the Historical Society of Washington County, Virginia. 58; Russell, "A Commentary on the Life of General William Campbell," Northern Neck Historical Magazine, IV (Dec. 1954), 341.

enough money to build a second chimney and employ cousin David Campbell to lay a new floor in the loft at Aspenville. He was concerned with the management of the farm but admitted to Mrs. Campbell that "It is altogether out of my power to give any particular instructions about the plantation." For the time being, he was content to have his mother purchase another "Hand" to help out at Aspenville.³⁴

Aspenville's productivity was not Campbell's only worry. Not only had he seen Elizabeth less than two weeks in the two months since their marriage, but Campbell realized that his ambition to give his mother an "agreeable and happy" life was impossible to accomplish as long as he stayed in the army. "It is highly probable," he wrote Margaret Campbell on May 23, "I shall quit the service as soon as the year for which I engaged is up, and retire from all the noise and hurry of public business. I now begin to find 'Tis nothing but vanity and vexation of Spirit' and am convinced that it is only in retirement that true content is to be found."³⁵

By late summer Campbell's most pressing concern was for the safety of his family on the frontier. As early as June 18 he had been warned that the Cherokees were preparing for war with the backing of British Indian Superintendent John Stuart and his deputy, Alexander Cameron.³⁶ On July 31

³⁴

N. C. Preston, Paths of Glory, 114-115.

³⁵

Ibid.

³⁶

Arthur Campbell to William Campbell, June 18, 1776, Campbell-Preston Papers, I.

Campbell received word from Arthur Campbell that the Cherokees had attacked the Fincastle frontier, and although he had been informed of Chief Dragging Canoe's defeat on July 20 at the battle of Long Island Flats, William Campbell still felt "the most dreadful apprehensions for the people of that Country from the barbarous disposition of the Enemy, which is no doubt rendered more so than usual, by those Wretches who have instigated them to this Cruelty."³⁷ Indeed Campbell must have been upset by reports in the Virginia Gazette that between 600 and 800 savages were attacking the frontiers.³⁸ As for his mother, Campbell only hoped that "the old woman will be prevailed upon to return to some place of safety."³⁹

Since Campbell considered the Cherokee menace and his family's safety "the most urgent Reasons" to resign his commission, he now felt certain that he could do so with honor. However, he first had to wait for the return of General Lewis, who had taken a trip to the Potomac.⁴⁰ On August 14 Campbell finally applied for "leave to go home," but his request was turned down by Lewis, who ordered the frontier captain to remain on duty

³⁷

Arthur Campbell to William Campbell, Aug. 1, 1776, 9 DD 4, Draper Manuscripts.

³⁸

Virginia Gazette (Dixon and Hunter, pubs.), Williamsburg, Aug. 17, 1776.

³⁹

Arthur Campbell to William Campbell, Aug. 1, 1776, 9 DD 4, Draper Manuscripts.

⁴⁰

Ibid.

in Williamsburg until his term of service expired in October.⁴¹

Campbell spent the remainder of his service in camp at the college of William and Mary, and because of absence or illness among the officers in the First Virginia, Campbell commanded the regiment for a short time. However, a third of the 200 men under his command were incapacitated by sickness, and even his two ensigns were on detached duty at Jamestown. There was a shortage of writing paper and other luxury items, but Campbell was supplied with "necessaries" in packages sent by his wife. For a time Campbell was quartered in the house where he had first met Elizabeth, and on August 18 he romantically revealed to her that he loved being there because it was "from that happy moment I date the hour of all my bliss."⁴²

Campbell's constant concern remained for his mother and sisters on the Holston. More than twenty settlers had been killed during the summer and one Cherokee war party had gotten within a half mile of Aspenville before being repulsed with heavy losses. Although he was somewhat relieved when the settlers gathered at Aspenville to build a stockade, Campbell still asked Colonel Christian (who had returned home to command an expedition

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William Campbell to Margaret Campbell, Aug. 14, 1776, Campbell-Preston Papers, I.

⁴²

William Campbell to Elizabeth H. Campbell, Aug. 18, 1776, Ibid.

against the Indians) to station a permanent garrison there.⁴³ He also admonished his mother for being "some time too regardless of danger," and warned her "do not be so now."⁴⁴ Ironically, Campbell was fascinated enough by a three week old Cherokee scalp brought to Williamsburg by an express rider that he promised Elizabeth he would show it to her on their next meeting.⁴⁵

On October 9, Campbell was discharged from the army.⁴⁶ He returned immediately to Fincastle County with his wife, taking the "Negro foot Road" to Louisa, where they followed the "Three Chopt Trail" west toward the Blue Ridge. The Campbells spent one night with Elizabeth's sister, Lucy Wood, and another at Thomas Jefferson's home near Charlottesville. There Campbell supposedly promised his wife that he would build "something like Monticello" after the war.⁴⁷

From Staunton the Campbells--minus two slaves Sarah Henry had given them as a wedding present and a wagon load of belongings that were left in

43

Ibid.

44

William Campbell to Margaret Campbell, Aug. 14, 1776, Ibid.

45

William Campbell to Elizabeth H. Campbell, Aug. 18, 1776, Ibid.

46

Gwathney, Historical Register of Virginians in the Revolution, 126.

47

N. C. Preston, Paths of Glory, 119-121.

Richmond--followed the Wilderness Trail down the Shenandoah Valley.⁴⁸

They crossed the James, Roanoke, and New Rivers and finally reached the Middle Fork of the Holston. In 1800 Elizabeth recalled her first view of Aspenville:

We galloped gaily into the setting sun and rounded a bluff by the roadside, came into view across a small creek a stockade of pointed poles close set together. Inside these outer walls stood a log house, a storey and a half with an open space between two rooms...Small outbuildings lay behind. Two brand new, I realized were for the blacks. Barns, cribs and stacks stood not far away.⁴⁹

The Campbells moved in with William's mother and his only unmarried sister, Ann. Elizabeth had no trouble making friends among the Holston settlers, who revered Patrick Henry. Indeed, at a camp meeting she attended soon after her arrival Elizabeth was loudly cheered and crowded by such large numbers of admirers that she was forced to find refuge on a convenient tree stump.⁵⁰

William Campbell's return to the frontier was too late for him to join William Christian's expedition against the Cherokees, but it was of importance to him because it largely removed the Indian menace. Christian had assembled 1,450 Botetourt, Augusta, and Fincastle militiamen in September,

⁴⁸

Sarah W. Henry to William Campbell, Aug. 6, 1777, Campbell-Preston Papers, I; William Campbell's Receipt from unknown, 1776, Ibid.

⁴⁹

N. C. Preston, Paths of Glory, 133.

⁵⁰

Laura Copenhaver, "Madame Russell," Scribner's Magazine, LXXXIII (June 1928), 728.

and by mid-October had crossed the French Broad River, destroyed a number of villages on the Little Tennessee and Tellico Rivers, and had "patched up a kind of peace" which called for treaty negotiations the following April.⁵¹

Christian's expedition proved significant to William Campbell. Although only one of Christian's soldiers was killed, the expedition quieted the Indians with the exception of Dragging Canoe, a maverick Overhill chief who seceded from the Cherokee nation with his militant followers.⁵² Thus despite Dragging Canoe's frequent, though limited, ravages, by the winter of 1776-1777 the fearful burden of his family's safety had been apparently removed from William Campbell's heart. At the same time, the period of quietude ushered onto the frontier by Colonel Christian's truce allowed the Fincastle settlers to enjoy a period which resembled the normalcy of the pre-war frontier. Still removed from the "real" war in the east, the Fincastle pioneers again found themselves pre-occupied with their private lives, civil affairs, or in the case of William Campbell, fulfilling the duties of a public servant.

⁵¹

Christian to General Griffith Rutherford, Aug. 18, 1776, Virginia Executive Papers, Virginia State Library, Richmond; Virginia Council Journal, Jan. 18, 1777, Preston Papers.

⁵²

Christian to Patrick Henry, Oct. 6, 1776, Executive Papers; H. R. McIlwaine, ed. Official Letters of the Governors of Virginia (Richmond, Va., 1932), Patrick Henry to R. H. Lee, March 20, 1777, I, 126.

Chapter IV: The Quiet Years, 1777-1778

With the Cherokee threat greatly reduced, one consideration of the Holston frontiersmen in the fall of 1776 was the subdivision of Fincastle County. The western settlers of Fincastle resented their remoteness from Fincastle Courthouse and petitioned the General Assembly on October 8 to create a more convenient county. Three days later the House of Delegates resolved that the measure was necessary "in order to entitle them to such representation and other benefits of government." After several revisions of the bill, on December 7 Fincastle was divided into Washington, Montgomery, and Kentucky Counties.¹ This division would provide the stimulus for the true emergence of William Campbell as a public figure and influential revolutionary.

Aspenville was now in Washington County, and William Campbell was prominent in the formation of the new county government. On January 28, 1777 when the first Washington County Court was held at Joseph Black's Fort at Wolf Hill, Campbell was commissioned Justice of the Peace and Oyer and Terminer with Arthur Campbell, Evan Shelby, Daniel Smith, William Edmiston, John Campbell, Joseph Martin, Alexander Buchanan, John Coulter, John Snoddy, George Blackburn, and Thomas Mastin. Mastin and William Campbell administered the oath of office to Arthur Campbell--the first one named in the Governor's commission--and Arthur then did likewise for his colleagues.²

¹ Neal, Bicentennial History of Washington County, 66.

² Washington County Minute Book No. 1, Virginia State Library, 2.

On the same day Arthur Campbell produced a commission from Governor Henry appointing him County Lieutenant, and the county militia was organized into the Seventieth Virginia Militia Regiment.³ William Campbell presented a commission appointing him Lieutenant Colonel, and a day later Evan Shelby was commissioned Colonel of the regiment.⁴

Arthur Campbell's position as Washington County Lieutenant was a seemingly politic one for William Campbell. In 1772 or 1773 the two cousins had become in-laws when Arthur married William's sister Margaret--"a woman of excellent mind & of uncommon beauty and sprightliness."⁵ However, this union may have also been something of a liability. Few historians of southwestern Virginia fail to mention the rivalry that existed between the two cousins--a rivalry that became so severe that they agreed to campaign alternately instead of simultaneously!⁶ At least one Campbell descendant

3

Ibid: David Campbell's Statement on the Organization of the 70th Militia Regiment, n.d., 8 DD 19, Draper Manuscripts.

4

Washington County Minute Book No. 1, 2-3.

5

"Campbells of Holston," 5; David Campbell to Draper, Dec. 12, 1840, 8 DD 6, Draper Manuscripts.

6

Russell, "A Commentary on the Life of General William Campbell," Northern Neck Historical Magazine, IV (Dec. 1954), 142; David Campbell to Draper, Feb. 1, 1843, 10 DD 34, Draper Manuscripts.

blamed the familial differences on Margaret. Writing in 1840 Judge David Campbell alleged that:

This young wife encouraged her husband and urged him forward in all his plans by which he might acquire distinction and reputation as a public man. Her whole mind seemed to be devolved to this one object to which she made every other bend--No privations, however great, in the smallest degree dismayed her, if she believed it was in consequence of her husband's efforts to acquire either military or civil distinction. Her extreme promptings to push her husband up the ladder of fame, caused him sometimes to make false steps & involved him in unnecessary altercations with his brother-in-law and others.⁷

However, one student of Arthur Campbell's career, Robert L. Kincaid, found nothing in his research to indicate the truth of such difficulties, but did not question David Campbell's allegations in a biographical sketch of Arthur Campbell written in 1965.⁸

William Campbell performed a number of services as a Washington County Justice. In January 1777 he was directed to give a list of tithables to Jacob Anderson and Aaron Lewis, surveyors of the road from Mill Creek to Seven Mile Ford and from the latter place to the Big Spring respectively.⁹ He also served during the year at a number of hearings. One of his more interesting cases was that of Edward Bond. On February 25 Campbell helped acquit Bond of the murder of Thomas Jones. However, the following day there

7

David Campbell to Draper, Dec. 12, 1840, 10 DD 6, Ibid.

8

Robert L. Kincaid, Colonel Arthur Campbell: Frontier Leader and Patriot (Abingdon, Va., 1965), 14.

9

Washington County Minute Book No. 1, 3.

was evidence enough to accuse Bond of stealing a bay horse owned by the Commonwealth. Bond was remanded to gaol until he could be transferred to Williamsburg and tried at the April session of the General Court.¹⁰

One of Campbell's more tedious tasks was to make arrangements for the distribution of salt which was allotted to Washington County by the Governor and Council. Appointed commissioner with William Edmiston, John Anderson, and George Blackburn on January 29, Campbell's responsibilities included providing transportation for the salt allotments from Williamsburg to Black's Fort. This required Campbell to make several trips to and from the capital, and is ironic because rich salt deposits were later discovered on his Buffalo Lick property, a few miles north of Aspenville.¹¹

At the April Court Campbell was appointed with Joseph Martin, John Kinkead, John Coulter, Gilbert Christian, and Thomas Mastin commissioner to distribute flour contributed by Augusta and nearby counties "for the distressed inhabitants of the County and to have wagons to bring the same to said County."¹²

Also, Campbell was commissioned a trustee with Martin and Coulter, Daniel Smith, William Edmiston, and Robert Craig to dispose of 120 acres of land near Black's Fort which had been given to the county by Joseph Black, Thomas Walker, and Samuel Briggs. Any four of the six trustees had it in

¹⁰

Ibid., 4, 6.

¹¹

Ibid., 3; Draper, King's Mountain and its Heroes, 384.

¹²

Washington County Minute Book No. 1, 8.

their power to sell lots and apply the money to the erection of "publick Buildings in this County."¹³ Sometime later, possibly in 1777, Campbell viewed several locations for the county seat and officially recommended Black's Fort as the most proper site for the town. "It is our Opinions," reported Campbell, James Thompson, William Cocke, and Evan Shelby, "that the place proposed by Samuel Briggs and Joseph Black is more Convenient for a town than any other places that have been shown us."¹⁴

Thus advised, in October 1778 the Virginia Legislature established the town of Abingdon near Black's Fort as the seat of Washington County. Campbell, Daniel Smith, Evan Shelby, William Edmiston, Robert Craig, and Andrew Willoughby were appointed trustees to supervise the sale of any remaining plots of county land "for the best price that can be had" at public auction. To prevent speculation it was required that houses be built on the lots within four years and that they be "at least twenty feet long and sixteen feet wide, with a brick or stone chimney."¹⁵ Again, the

¹³

Ibid., 9

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Undated Document Concerning the Selection of the Site of Abingdon, Folder 6658, Aronheim Collection, Manuscripts Department, Alderman Library, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville.

¹⁵

William Walker Henning, ed. The Statutes at Large: Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia, From the First Session of the Legislature in the Year 1619 (Philadelphia, 1823), IX, 556.

trustees applied the money arising from the auction to the erection of public buildings. A log magazine and jail were built and a log courthouse was erected in Black's Fort. However, the courthouse was not finished until late 1778 and the jail was not occupied until 1779.¹⁶ At any rate, Campbell was directly concerned with the organization of Washington County and the establishment of Abingdon, still the county seat.

Meanwhile, the first affects of the Revolution were felt on the frontier and loyalism began to manifest itself in Washington County. By the summer of 1777 tory spies were traveling frequently through the Holston country with messages to the Cherokees from the British authorities in the east. One of these spies was discovered by Campbell one Sunday on the latter's return from church with his wife and some friends after preaching a lay sermon. Campbell's party encountered the spy--disguised as a workman with a bundle of sticks thrown over his shoulder--walking west, and Campbell's suspicions were aroused when the traveler suddenly veered off the road into some woods. Noting this peculiar behavior, Campbell and several mounted companions galloped ahead in a direction most likely to intercept the stranger. The spy realized his predicament, dropped his bundle of sticks, and fled toward a small river. Although he was able to wade across the stream before Campbell's arrival, he was quickly overtaken in an ivy cleft by Campbell and his now dismounted friends.

The spy was taken back to the road, where the party was joined by another group of church-goers. When questioned about his sudden departure

¹⁶

Summers, History of Southwest Virginia and Washington County, 269.

into the woods the spy pretended to be of feeble mind and claimed that he was going to the back settlements where there was plenty of land. By his quick answers Campbell was convinced that his suspect was a man of good sense, though one engaged in "some vile service" for the King. The spy was then searched.

Although a pass was found in the spy's pocket and nothing but a suit of old clothes was found in his discarded bundle, Campbell was suspicious of the new shoes which the stranger wore. Campbell carefully examined the shoes and then ripped open each of the soles with his pocket knife. He found several letters, each waterproofed in a bladder and addressed to the "King of the Cherokees." The documents urged the Indians to attack the Virginia frontier in conjunction with the British military efforts in the northeast. Colonel Campbell read the letters and held a brief council with his patriot friends. There could be but one solution. It was decided to summarily execute the captive, and when Campbell informed the spy of his fate a full confession was given, after which the spy was hanged to the nearest tree.¹⁷

The tory threat grew so worrisome during the summer that in August a number of Washington justices were ordered to tender oaths of allegiance (to Virginia) to both soldiers and citizens of the county. Campbell administered the oath to the militiamen in Aaron Lewis' company, but was apparently quite selective in deciding upon who should take the oath.¹⁸ When a friend,

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Redd, "Reminiscences of Western Virginia, 1770-1790," VMHB, VII (Oct. 1899), 119-121.

¹⁸

Washington County Minute Book No. 1, 4.

Mitchell Scott, came to Aspenville to declare his allegiance, Campbell scarcely paused from his plowing and exclaimed to the known patriot: "Why Scott, you know I did not intend that notice for you, or for such men as you are, but for those secret Tories and half-hearted patriots. We must find out who they are, and make them do their duty or rid the country of them."¹⁹ As for Campbell himself, on September 13, 1777 he took the oath of allegiance before his cousin and brother-in-law, Arthur Campbell.

Certainly, by 1777 William Campbell was already known for his hatred of tories and "half-hearted" patriots, and one incident that summer reveals both the temper and patriotism which loyalists on the Holston feared. One day when Campbell was away from home, a known tory stopped at Aspenville to plead with Elizabeth that she intercede with her husband on his behalf. However, in the midst of the interview Campbell unexpectedly returned. He unsheathed his Scottish broadsword--"Andrea de Ferrara"--and took a violent sweep at the tory's head. The blow missed its mark when Elizabeth pushed aside her husband's elbow, and the unwelcome visitor escaped out the door. Campbell was left standing with his sword in hand, the tip of which was bent

¹⁹

T. L. Preston, A Sketch of Mrs. Elizabeth Russell, Wife of General William Campbell and Sister of Patrick Henry (Nashville, Tenn., 1888), 19.

²⁰

William Campbell's Certificate for Taking the Oath of Allegiance, Sept. 13, 1777, Campbell-Preston Papers, I.

on the heavy lintel of a door by the force of his deflected blow. Although he later apologized to his wife for his unthinking attempt to shed blood in their home, Campbell still argued that the fate he had planned for the tory was a proper one.²¹

Word of Campbell's merciless treatment of his enemies spread among the tories, who frequently placarded the gateposts at Aspenville with their threats. One of these warnings, issued after Campbell had captured a loyalist and threatened to execute him, reveals the hatred which embroiled Washington County during the Revolution:

To Cornl Will the bloody tyrant and murderer of Washington county and Court we desire you to prepare yourself for death. For we hope that vengeance is pursuing you fast and if not by law it must be according to your desarts for the Scripture saith that whosoever spillith man's blood by man shall his blood be split, therefore prepare yourself for deth, for as you rule by arbitrary powers by that power you must expect to be tried.²²

While tory sympathizers undermined the Washington County patriots, a temporary solution to the Cherokee problem was reached. First, the General Assembly sought to remove tension by investigating the acquisition of Indian land by Virginians. William Campbell was one of those appointed to take depositions relative to Richard Henderson's Watauga purchase of March 1775, and he witnessed Samuel Wilson's testimony that Chiefs Oconostota and The Raven signed a treaty with Henderson which gave the North Carolinian legal title

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T. L. Preston, A Sketch of Mrs. Elizabeth Russell, 19.

²²

Tory Threat on William Campbell's Life, n.d., Campbell-Preston Papers, I.

to the land obtained in 1775.²³

Also, in January 1777 William Christian, William Preston, and Evan Shelby were appointed peace commissioners with instructions to establish "a firm and lasting peace" with the Cherokees.²⁴ Preparations were made in accordance with Christian's plans of the preceding winter to negotiate a treaty in April. Because it was uncertain where the negotiations would be held, when Arthur Campbell ordered William Campbell to muster a third of the militia on the Holston to protect the commissioners, the latter was instructed to assemble his troops at Black's Fort. From there they could march either to the Long Island of the Holston or to the Clinch River "as the exigency may require."²⁵ Campbell's men gathered at Black's Fort on April 16, and informed that the parley was to be held on the Holston, proceeded on to the Long Island. However, peace efforts were hindered by Alexander Cameron, who spread the rumor that the treaty negotiations were only a ruse to capture the leading Cherokee chiefs. Thus, when only thirty Indians appeared at the appointed date the conference had to be postponed

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Julian P. Boyd, et al. The Papers of Thomas Jefferson (Princeton, N. J., 1950-), Deposition of Samuel Wilson taken before William and Arthur Campbell, 1777, II, 96-97.

²⁴

Virginia Council Journal, Jan. 18, 1777, Preston Papers; McIlwaine, Official Letters. Instructions to the Commissioners Appointed to Treat with the Cherokee Indians, June 3, 1777, I, 96-97.

²⁵

Arthur Campbell to William Campbell, April 12, 1777, Campbell-Preston Papers, I.

until June 26.²⁶ By that date all the important chiefs (with the exception of Dragging Canoe) had arrived, as well as four negotiators from North Carolina.²⁷

Although negotiations were embittered by the murder of a Cherokee fisherman by a Virginian, a preliminary treaty was signed on June 30 which positively ceded the Holston, Watauga, and Nolichucky regions to either Virginia or North Carolina. Virginia was also given the right to build forts in Cherokee territory and Joseph Martin was commissioned Virginia Indian Superintendent with instructions to distribute trade goods and supplies among the Indians.²⁸ To William Campbell the most immediate result of the treaty was an agreement that a boundary should be clearly established "betwixt them and Virginia in the best manner you can in the Interest of the frontier so that you can at the same time do justice to the Indians."²⁹ The commissioners selected William Campbell, an accomplished surveyor, to complete this task.

²⁶

James H. O'Donnell, Southern Indians in the American Revolution (Knoxville, Tenn., 1973), 56.

²⁷

Walter Clark, ed. State Records of North Carolina (Winston, N.C., 1896-), Governor Caswell to Patrick Henry, April 11, 1777, XI, 447; John Page to Caswell, April 17, 1777, Ibid., 451.

²⁸

Morrison, Joseph Martin, 16.

²⁹

McIlwaine, ed. Official Letters, Instructions to the Commissioners Appointed to Treat with the Cherokee Indians, June 3, 1777, I, 156-157.

Before Campbell could survey a boundary however, another job had to be undertaken. The secessionist Chief Dragging Canoe had not signed the Long Island treaty, and he raided the frontier with his 400 followers. The attacks continued throughout the summer of 1777 and patrols of ten and twenty militiamen scoured the frontier in search of the Indian marauders.³⁰ Campbell's immediate task was to supply the small frontier forts with enough flour to sustain the patrols and feed the garrisons in case of attack. On August 13 he delivered 156^{wt} of flour to Henry Hamilton at Cowen's Fort, and on the same day Captain Isaac Shelby stopped at that garrison to receive 225^{wt} which Campbell had also brought along.³¹

Campbell was also concerned enough about the quantity of powder that was being sent to the frontier posts to propose an alternate plan. He argued that the powder should be stored in magazines far from the frontier, but this proposal was condemned (and apparently vetoed) by Colonel Evan Shelby. Indeed, the merits of Campbell's plan seem dubious at best since Indian attacks were both vicious and rapid, yet Shelby's sentiments may have stemmed from the fact that he was stationed at Rich Land, a frontier fort at the time.³²

³⁰

Carol S. Driver, John Sevier, Pioneer of the Old Southwest (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1932), 22.

³¹

William Campbell's Receipt for Powder Delivered to Cowans' Fort, Aug. 13, 1777, Campbell-Preston Papers, I.

³²

Evan Shelby to unknown, Aug. 22, 1777, Ibid.

Perhaps because of an invitation from Sarah Henry to get the two slaves which Campbell had left in Scotchtown in 1776, but more probably because he attended the October Court at Black's Fort, Campbell did not pack his father's surveying equipment and ride west to survey the boundary until late that fall.³³ He was most likely aided by other surveyors and was certainly guarded by a detachment of Washington County militiamen.³⁴ Campbell, whose orders do not appear in Council, extended Virginia's western border from the mouth of Big Creek to the High Knob on Cumberland Mountain, a few miles east of the gap.³⁵ The survey was meant to reduce border disputes between the Indians and whites but it may have had the opposite effect. Many Cherokees were dissatisfied with the idea of any survey at all, while others were concerned because Campbell had included the Long Island within the limits of Virginia. And while they had allowed Nathanael Gist and Joseph Martin to "sit down upon it" for the time being, the Cherokees made it clear that the Island was still theirs.³⁶ This, coupled with the July death of the peace advocate, Chief Atackullakulla, and the urgings of the Shawnees and Thomas Brown (British Indian Superintendent in the Atlantic District,

³³

Sarah W. Henry to William Campbell, Aug. 6, 1777, Ibid; Washington County Minute Book No. 1, 18.

³⁴

David Campbell to Draper, Dec. 3, 1845, 10 DD 55, Draper Manuscripts.

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Draper, King's Mountain and its Heroes, 384.

³⁶

John P. Brown, Old Frontiers (Kingsport, Tenn., 1938), 148.

1779-1784) to make war on Virginia, was to drive a number of Indians into the camp of Dragging Canoe's confederates.³⁷

William Campbell nonetheless returned home, no doubt satisfied that he had performed a valuable service for the Commonwealth. Sometime that fall, perhaps after his survey, Campbell met George Rogers Clark. Clark was traveling with a young lawyer, John Gabriel Jones, from Kentucky to Richmond to gain approval from the Governor for his plan to attack Vincennes and Kaskaskia in the Illinois country. The two men usually stopped at the nearest house when evening approached and it was in this way that they met William Campbell. Clark and Jones spent one night at Aspenville and reportedly paid Campbell a shilling and sixpence for a bed and breakfast and feed for their horses.³⁸

As the reputable frontier historian, Lyman C. Draper, has quite correctly observed, Campbell seems not to have been involved in much "special service" during 1778. Indeed, the year was such a quiet one for Campbell that it seems to be a watershed between his early frontier services and his career as a Revolutionary soldier. Only a few significant incidents concerning Campbell in 1778 have come to light.

On March 17 Campbell was continued as a Washington County justice, having been recommissioned on July 23, 1777.³⁹ The following day his mother's

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O'Donnell, Southern Indians, 93, 106.

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Summers, History of Southwest Virginia and Washington County, 386.

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Washington County Minute Book No. 1, 18, 22.

will was entered in court on the motion of her son, who also served as an executor with Patrick, John, and Robert Campbell.⁴⁰ Also, a "partition agreement" was finally reached between Campbell's four sisters and their husbands concerning the equitable division of Charles Campbell's North Fork property as provided for in his 1767 will. Mrs. Campbell sanctioned her daughters' decision in court.⁴¹

Having attended all four sessions of the March court, Campbell was also present on April 21 for the first session of that month. His attendance that day is particularly noteworthy because at Aspenville Elizabeth gave birth to the Campbell's first child, a daughter named Sarah Buchanan Campbell after her two grandmothers, Sarah Henry and Margaret Buchanan Campbell.⁴² Although William Campbell returned the twenty miles to Aspenville that night and missed the remaining two sessions of the month, he was reappointed commissioner to distribute the county salt, this time to "the most necessitous of the frontier inhabitants of Clinch and below the North Fork." His instructions were to reserve enough salt for the militia on duty and sell any that remained at prices which might defray the initial cost of the salt to Washington County.⁴³

⁴⁰

Ibid., 26.

⁴¹

Ibid.

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Virginia M. S. English, "The Campbell Bible," Hanover County Historical Society Bulletin, No. 16 (May 1977), 2.

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Washington County Minute Book No. 1, 31.

In the early days of May Arthur Campbell became ill and asked his cousin to conduct his business while he was incapacitated.⁴⁴ However, possibly because William Campbell stayed at home to care for Elizabeth, he missed an important hearing at Black's Fort on May 4. Examined that day was Francis Hopkins, a "bold and daring" outlaw whose gang of twenty or thirty ruffians kept the Washington inhabitants in such fear that it was almost impossible to obtain evidence against them.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, Hopkins was apprehended and charged with erasing and altering "sundry treasury notes" of the Commonwealth. Hopkins pled "not guilty", but a number of witnesses (whose fines or debts to the county were canceled for their testimony) convinced the jury that he was guilty. Hopkins was ordered to appear before the court on May 21 to answer the charges.⁴⁶

Campbell was the presiding judge on May 21 when the court ordered Hopkins into the custody of the sheriff "untill he gives sufficient Security before a Magistrate for his appearance at the August Court."⁴⁷ Later Hopkins

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Arthur Campbell to William Campbell, May 1, 1778, Campbell-Preston Papers, I.

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David Campbell to Draper, n.d., 10 DD 43, Draper Manuscripts.

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Washington County Minute Book No. 1, 31.

⁴⁷

Ibid., 35.

was tried, found guilty of counterfeiting, and sentenced to six months in the jail at Cocke's Fort on Spring Creek "untill the County Gaol is completed." Hopkins' brother William and three partners, Zeckhariah and George Wolsey and Frathias Wall, paid fines of 200 pounds each, but were subject to significant increases if Francis Hopkins escaped before his sentenced was served.⁴⁸ Early in 1779 Hopkins did indeed escape, and blaming the Washington patriots for his troubles, organized a band of tories and outlaws who stole horses and intimidated settlers with their threats. William Campbell was a particular object of their malice and notices posted near Aspsenville warned the colonel that a terrible fate would befall him if he continued his persecution of loyalists.⁴⁹ Hopkins freely roamed the county for several months, but there was a day in the future when he would be brought to task for his crimes in a face to face confrontation with William Campbell.

Early that summer (1778) the Shawnees made a minor foray into Washington County. As early as March Campbell had been ordered to send out scouts and alert his men of the threat, but when Chief Logan crossed the Ohio in May, Campbell's only recourse was to send "a part" of Captain John Snoddy's company in pursuit of the raiders.⁵⁰ On June 3 Snoddy reported to Campbell from Moore's Fort that he, Captain John Blackmoore, and Ensign Alexander Ritchie

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Ibid., 41

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Summers, History of Southwest Virginia and Washington County, 276.

⁵⁰

Arthur Campbell to William Campbell, March 20, 1778, Campbell-

Preston Papers, I.

had chased the Indians as far as the Rye Cove, but were unable to overtake them. With his letter, Snoddy sent James Wharton, a man who had supposedly aided a deserter named Russell who had since been cleared of the charge by Arthur Campbell. Snoddy was certain that Wharton was a "well wisher to the Cause" but sent him to William Campbell under guard in response to the latter's orders. However, to insure the acquittal of Wharton, Snoddy enclosed a deposition sworn by a neighbor, William Trimbel. Trimbel had assured Snoddy that Wharton was not guilty of any offense and that Russell had never really deserted anyway!⁵¹

William Campbell's summer was interrupted by the death of his mother. The exact date of her passing is unknown, but by September Campbell was settling her debts with money raised by the sale of 120 acres on the Buffalo Cow Bottom and 300 acres "lying on Chesnut Creek a Branch of New River."⁵² William, who served with his cousin Arthur as executor of Margaret Campbell's estate, benefited rather handsomely from his mother's death. He received legal title to the Buffalo Lick and all the cattle and horses and stock, with the exception of three cows and three calves left to Ann Campbell Poston. Also, any debts that William had contracted prior to January 1, 1777 were paid with money arising from the sale of her estate.⁵³

⁵¹John Snoddy to William Campbell, June 3, 1778, Ibid.⁵²Hugh Johnson's Receipt for Land Sold by William Campbell, Sept. 30, 1778, Ibid.; Margaret Campbell's Will, Washington County Will Book No. 1, Virginia State Library, Richmond, 7.⁵³Ibid.

The remainder of Campbell's public service in 1778 may be quickly summarized. On August 20 he and Arthur Campbell were nominated by the court and recommended to the governor to fill the office of sheriff. However, Arthur--perhaps because he could easily consolidate the position with that of County Lieutenant- was selected for the job. He took the oath of office in February 1779.⁵⁴ William Campbell attended all four sessions of the November court and entered the minutes (in place of Arthur) on three of the four days. On November 20 he was ordered to take a list of tithables "from the County Line to the Lower end of Capt. Lewis Company & Capt. Neils."⁵⁵ Thus quietly ended William Campbell's public service in 1778, the quietest of the two years which, despite a number of accomplishments and incidents which kept them far from dull for William Campbell, represent a brief period of relative calm before the stormy commencement of Campbell's Revolutionary career.

⁵⁴Ibid., 41, 47.⁵⁵Ibid., 47

Chapter V: The Critical Months, April 1779-June 1780

By 1779 William Campbell had established a favorable reputation on the Virginia frontier. He had publicly served three counties, aiding substantially in the creation of Fincastle, Washington, and the town of Abingdon. He had served in armies defending first the English Crown and then the Revolution in Virginia. Yet despite these accomplishments, William Campbell was still a rather obscure character to most Virginians in the spring of 1779. However, three critical events between April 1779 and June 1780 were to provide Campbell with the rank, notoriety, and military success necessary as groundwork for the event that would rocket him to fame a few months later.

Campbell's actions during the early part of 1779 are relatively obscure. He missed the first court of the year in March and had only minor importance in April, swearing witness to land transactions between William Christian and Benjamin Estill and William Russell and David Campbell. He also produced a list of tithables for William Bates (surveyor of "the Main road from the County Line to the westward Branch of Jacob Anderson's meadow.")¹

Campbell took no part in Evan Shelby's expedition against the Cherokees in April, though 300 Virginians aided Shelby in burning twelve villages, capturing 25,000 pounds worth of supplies, and killing six of Dragging Canoe's warriors.² However, on April 18 four Indians who had evaded

¹ Washington County Minute Book No. 1, 54.

² Thomas Jefferson to George Washington, June 19, 1779, McIlwaine, ed. Official Letters, II, 13.

Shelby's column were sighted near Aspsville, and the next day Campbell was instructed by the county lieutenant to investigate their presence. If the threat was a real one, Campbell was to send detachments from John Campbell's and Aaron Lewis' companies ranging toward Walker's Mountain and send a man to Abingdon to requisition lead for his soldiers.³

As it turned out, the Indian threat was the least of Campbell's worries. For nearly a year the patriots of Washington and Montgomery Counties had feared a tory uprising in the New River region. On April 8 these fears became a reality when Colonel Walter Crockett uncovered a plot to capture Chiswell's Lead Mines, a chief source of shot for Washington's army. The tory ringleader, Duncan O'Gullion, had offered his men money and 450 acres of land in return for service to the king. The Montgomery County militia had, however, moved swiftly enough to disperse the tories and capture O'Gullion near the Lead Mines by April 15.⁴

Meanwhile, in Washington County William Campbell began his own investigation of loyalists. About the time that Crockett's Montgomery militia was moving against O'Gullion, Campbell took the sworn statement of Michael Hennigar, a tory informant who named a number of leaders in the New River plot. Among those named was a potter who Campbell imagined to be Frederick More, a man named Crimm, and another named Razor. Campbell still

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Arthur Campbell to William Campbell, April 19, 1779, Campbell-Preston Papers, I.

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P. G. Johnson, William Preston, 218.

feared that many more "may not yet be apprehended nor suspected" and warned William Preston on April 19 that "you are, it seems yourself a principal Object of those Wretches hellish Contrivance." Nevertheless, Campbell could only propose to his friend that those tories named in Hennigar's deposition be arrested and that he would insure Hennigar's appearance to give testimony at the next Montgomery court.⁵

In the next two months while the threat of loyalism hung over the southwestern frontier, Campbell was involved in two court cases against tories. The first was against Francis Hopkins' brother William, who was charged on June 17 with "Treasonable practices against this State and the United States of America" in connection with his brother's escape from Cocke's Fort. The court confiscated Hopkins' property.⁶

Two weeks later Campbell presided at the examination of Robert Kerr. Accused of "levying war" against Virginia and the United States, Kerr pled "not guilty" but "divers witnesses" convinced the court that he should be held and tried at the next General Court in Williamsburg. It might be noted that two of Kerr's associates were told that if they testified against Kerr their fines of 5,000 pounds would be revoked.⁷ Such were the methods used by Campbell and his colleagues to convict loyalists in Washington County.

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William Campbell to Preston, April 17, 1779, Preston Papers.

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Washington County Minute Book No. 1, 65.

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Ibid., 66-67.

The above measures did not, however, stop the tory menace. Some insurgents from Carolina had crossed the mountains and captured Robert Johnson, a patriot settler. Also, in early July twelve tories crossed the New River to question one of Stephen and Daniel Trigg's negroes about the fate of a captive loyalist named Carr. When told that Carr had been taken to Williamsburg to stand trial, the tories expressed their disappointment and said that it was "a Pity" that the Triggs were not at home to account for their patriotism.⁸

By mid July it was rumored that 500 loyalists were gathering in Montgomery County for an attack on the Lead Mines.⁹ They were led by a ruffian named Coyle, more of an outlaw than a tory, who took three militia captains prisoner and detained two whig "spies" for twenty-six hours. Although William Preston learned on July 18 that the insurgents were only 105 in number, the people along the New River were "greatly alarmed," and William Campbell responded by raising a company of forty-eight men and marching to the Lead Mines.¹⁰ This was apparently an independent action and Preston (who had feared that his Washington neighbors were "too busy" to come to his aid) was "heartily and sincerely rejoiced when I heard you had

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James McGavock to William Campbell, July 14, 1779, Campbell-Preston Papers, I.

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P. G. Johnson, William Preston, 224.

¹⁰

Preston to unknown, July 18, 1779, 3 ZZ 17, Draper Manuscripts.

come to readily and timeously to our aid."¹¹ Preston was particularly enthusiastic because, as he wrote Campbell on July 19, "Your coming from another County with a Company must convince those stupid wretches that they have more Counties than one to contend with and consequently deter them from any future attempts of that kind."¹²

Campbell arrived at the Lead Mines on July 16 while the manager of the Mines, Colonel Charles Lynch, was away on patrol. He therefore stayed at the Lead Mines for several days, guarding the installation and awaiting reinforcements under Colonel Crockett which were expected at any time. Meanwhile, it was feared that tory ranks were getting dangerously stronger each day. Indeed, on the 18th Preston wrote that "I am really apprehensive that they will be Joined by numbers from this County Washington & Carolina & of course, become formidable unless an immediate stop be put to their career."¹³

To accomplish this Preston ordered Colonel Ingles and four or five companies to the Lead Mines. Apparently Ingles' sincerity as a patriot had been previously questioned, and by giving him command Preston hoped to vindicate Colonel Ingles while at the same time discourage the insur-

¹¹

Preston to William Campbell, July 19, 1779, Preston Papers.

¹²

Ibid.

¹³

Preston to unknown, July 18, 1779, 3 ZZ 19, Draper Manuscripts.

gents who may have counted on his support.¹⁴ However, that evening (July 18) Preston received information from William Campbell--"the first certain Account I had got from that Quarter"--that enough men had gathered at the Lead Mines to pursue the tories up the New River. Since Campbell assured him that more troops were on their way to the Lead Mines, Preston canceled Ingles' orders and communicated his hopes that Campbell would apprehend "the Arch-Robber Coyle & his Gang of Freebooters."¹⁵

Meanwhile, Campbell had been contacted at the Lead Mines by a tory informant named Cox who testified against a number of his neighbors. Cox had not appeared sooner because he had been watched "almost constantly" for some time and had feared for his life and property. Now, however, Campbell was able to identify the Montgomery County tories named in Cox's deposition, which was rushed immediately off to Preston.¹⁶

Several days later Captain John Cox, an escaped captive from the camp of the insurgents (and not to be confused with the tory Cox) recounted his story to Campbell at the Lead Mines. On or near July 10 Cox had been siezed at his home by a band of twenty-five tories led by Joseph Caldwell and William Atkins. They took Cox's guns and some food, and forced Cox to

¹⁴

Ibid.

¹⁵

William Campbell to Preston, July 16, 1779, Preston to William Campbell, July 19, 1779, Preston Papers.

¹⁶

William Campbell to Preston, July 16, 1779, Ibid.

carry some corn for them. After riding eight or ten miles Cox was asked to either join their ranks or swear that he would not reveal any information he had learned since his capture. Cox refused both alternatives, but was released with the assurance that he would later stand "farther trial." A few days later, "Coyle and his Party" came to Cox's home, stole his money, his horse, and a saddle, but left the patriot under a "parole of honor." However, 130 insurgents later returned to use the patriot's home as a base of operations, launching raids and patrols and sending messages which urged tories to "seize and secure the Principal Officers in the parts or districts in which they should rise."¹⁷

With the information provided by the two Coxes and the arrival of some eighty militiamen under Walter Crockett, Campbell and Crockett started up the river on patrol. As word spread that the patriot colonels were actively in the field the insurrection quickly fell apart, and entire gangs of tories reportedly dispersed on the very mention of Campbell's name!¹⁸ Nevertheless, on July 23 when William Christian informed William Fleming that

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"Preston Papers," VMHB, XXVII (July and Oct. 1919), William Christian to Preston, Aug. 30, 1780, 323-325.

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Draper, *King's Mountain and its Heroes*, 384; Russell, "A Commentary on the Life of General William Campbell," Northern Neck Historical Magazine, IV (Dec. 1954), 342.

"the greater Part had scattered" he added that "some (of the tories) still kept to gether."¹⁹ In searching for those tories Campbell and Crocket complemented each other's ruthlessness. Their men lived on stolen loyalist stock and grain and forced even old, inactive sympathizers of the crown to join the American army.²⁰ There was little mercy for the few tories who were captured, and as Christian reported that July, "Our People shot one, Hanged one, and whipt several; and next Monday are to have a Sale of the Tories Estates."²¹

Christian, at least, thought that the march up the New River had been decisive. "I expect this Affair will settle the Tories for a While," he wrote, and he felt certain that Campbell would return home the last week in July.²² This was not to be. For several weeks he and Crocket roamed Montgomery County and finally crossed into North Carolina to discover a tory band which had sought refuge in the Black Lick Valley. A dozen loyalists were captured and summarily dispatched on the limbs of two large white oaks.

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Christian to Fleming, July 23, 1779, 2 ZZ 81, Draper Manuscripts.

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P. G. Johnson, William Preston, 224.

²¹

Christian to Preston, July 23, 1779, 2 ZZ 81, Draper Manuscripts.

²²

Ibid.

These trees stood well into the nineteenth century and were known afterward to the local inhabitants as the "Tory Trees."²³

By mid-August the tory uprising was satisfactorily crushed and Campbell was back home in time to attend court (August 17-20) at Abingdon.²⁴ However, small tory gangs continued to harass Campbell and placards again warned him that "justice" would bring him to task for the mistreatment and execution of the New River tories. One notice cautioned:

Ere long, you will be catch by the head in the boughs of an oak and there expire between heaven and earth--you are as Saul in the hands of David... your end is by and by when the big tree shoots forth buds. When you know that summer is near you can sow tears and reap wheat, no, but that which you sow you shall also reap. You may expect that your death warrant is already signed and no way to reprieve it but by a speedy reformation.²⁵

Such threats as this were not idle ones, and William Campbell's neighbors considered him to be "in more danger from the assasin, than any other persons."²⁶ One of his more vocal enemies was the escaped counterfeiter,

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H. J. Eckenrode, The Revolution in Virginia (Boston and New York, 1916), 236.

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Washington County Minute Book No. 1, 64, 81-72, 75.

²⁵

Tory threat against William Campbell, 1779, Campbell-Preston Papers,

II.

²⁶

David Campbell to Draper, n.d., 10 DD 43, Draper Manuscripts.

Francis Hopkins. Angered because Campbell had by chance presided at court when he was sentenced, Hopkins threatened Campbell's life, family, and property, and apparently meant what he said. Soon after Campbell returned from North Carolina his cousin, John Campbell, was stopped one night by Hopkins, who guessed him to be William Campbell. The incident occurred two miles east of Abingdon on Eleven Mile Creek. John Campbell, riding from Royal Oak to Abingdon, grew suspicious when two mounted men passed him without speaking; then alarmed when they returned from the opposite direction. They seized the bridle of his horse and demanded to know who he was. "I am John Campbell," was the reply, and because he recognized the voice of one abductor, Campbell inquired, "Are you Silas Enyart?" Convinced now that it was not William Campbell before him, Enyart answered affirmatively and released the bridle. Although he recognized Francis Hopkins as the other rider, Campbell did not question their explanation that they had stopped the patriot because he might be "some rascal passing through the country." After wishing Campbell goodnight, the two Tories rode off, no doubt discouraged by the mistake they had made.²⁷

John Campbell undoubtedly related the incident to his cousin at the first opportunity, and one Sunday soon after, William Campbell met Hopkins face to face. Returning from the Ebbing Spring Church with his wife and some neighbors, Campbell saw a man on horseback coming toward him reverse directions as the party crested a hill. At first Campbell did not recognize the horseman but someone shouted "That's Frank Hopkins!" and remarked that he must be re-

²⁷Ibid.

turning from a horse stealing expedition. Campbell was carrying his infant daughter on a pillow in his lap, and at once handed the child to his slave, John Broady, with the orders: "Take care of her and your missus, John!"²⁸

Campbell dashed after Hopkins with the shout to William Edmiston and several others to "Follow men!" The chase continued for several miles and Campbell gained on Hopkins as the others fell farther behind. The outlaw faltered when he jumped his horse into the Middle Fork of the Holston, and Campbell succeeded in throwing Hopkins' pistols into the river. The two enemies wrestled into the water where Campbell was nearly drowned by the more muscular Hopkins. However, Edmiston soon arrived with more men and Hopkins was overcome and dragged onto the riverbank. After a short council Hopkins was hanged with one of his own halters to a sycamore on the bank of the Holston. Very shortly Campbell and Edmiston were joined by Elizabeth's party. "What did you do with him, Mr. Campbell?" asked his wife. "Oh, we hung him, Betsy, that's all" was the reply.²⁹

Not everyone on the Holston approved of such harsh justice. Even John Campbell, who had been threatened by Hopkins only days before, condemned

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T. L. Preston, A Sketch of Mrs. Elizabeth Russell, 16.

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David Campbell to Draper, March 30, 1842, 10 DD 43, Draper Manuscripts; T. L. Preston, A Sketch of Mrs. Elizabeth Russell, 16-18.

his cousin's "lawless acts."³⁰ Also, loyalists who were unable to stop William Campbell by extralegal means now protested to the Virginia government that the summary measures taken by Campbell and Crockett that summer were, in fact, illegal. Their complaints were so loud that Thomas Nelson introduced a resolution to the October session of the General Assembly which would protect the two patriots from prosecution.³¹ Entitled "An Act to indemnify William Campbell, Walter Crockett, and others, concerned in suppressing a late conspiracy," the resolution was not only protective, but actually complimentary to Campbell and Crockett.

Whereas divers evil disposed persons on the frontiers of this Commonwealth had broke out into open insurrection and conspiracy, and actually levied war against the commonwealth, and it is represented to the present general assembly, that William Campbell, Walter Crockett, and other liege subjects of the commonwealth aided by detachments of the militia and volunteers from the county of Washington, and other parts of the frontiers did by timely and effectual exertion, suppress and defeat such conspiracy: and whereas the necessary measures taken for that purpose may not be strictly warranted by law, although justified from the immediate urgency and imminences of the danger; be it therefore declared and enacted, That the said William Campbell, Walter Crockett, and all other persons whosoever concerned in suppressing the said conspiracy and insurrection, or in advising, issuing or executing any orders or measures taken for that purpose stand indemnified and clearly exonerated of and from all pain, penalties, prosecutions, actions, suits and damages on

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David Campbell to Draper, March 30, 1842, 10 DD 14, Draper Manuscripts.

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Journal of the House of Delegates of the Commonwealth of Virginia (Richmond, Va., 1827-1828), I. Session Beginning Oct. 4, 1779, 27.

account thereof; and that if any indictment, prosecution, action or suit shall be laid or brought against them, or any of them, for any act or thing done therein, the defendant or defendants may plead in bar, or the general issue, and give this act in evidence.³²

While the General Assembly was condoning his behavior, Campbell was busy on the frontier. That October a complaint was made against Ensign Alexander Ritchy for not attempting to rescue Bryce Russell's daughters following their capture by Logan's Shawnees. The Washington County Lieutenant ordered Campbell to arrest Ritchy and to "appoint a Court Martial for his trial at such time as you may judge most proper and convenient." Although there is no record of the proceedings, the outcome of Ritchy's trial might be guessed by Arthur Campbell's sentiments. On October 23 he confided to William Campbell that there was no worse crime than for an officer to "let slip a favourable opportunity to relieve his fellow citizens."³³

Also in October, William Campbell was ordered to prepare a subscription notice "in Order to set a high price on the Head of Shawnee Logan." The notice solicited individual donations for the establishment of a 1000 pound reward for the marauding Indian. For this Arthur Campbell pledged thirty pounds if Logan was brought in dead and fifty pounds if the chief was captured alive.³⁴

³²

Ibid.

³³

Arthur Campbell to William Campbell, Oct. 23, 1779, Campbell-Preston Papers, I.

³⁴

Ibid.

William Campbell's activities during the latter part of 1779 and the first months of 1780 may be easily summarized. He attended both sessions of the October court, as well as the last court of the year on November 16.³⁵ The fact that the winter was uncommonly cold may have influenced Campbell's non-appearance at the first court of 1780 held in Abingdon on January 18.³⁶ Court was not convened in February. This was a blessing to Campbell because it allowed him to remain at home with his wife, who was recuperating from the birth of their second child on February 8, a son named Charles Henry after William's father and Elizabeth's family.³⁷ Nevertheless, Campbell was on hand the following month for the first session of court on March 21 and he entered the minutes on March 22. The main business that day was the cancellation of the general militia muster scheduled for April "on account of the Apparent Danger from the Enemy & other Distressing circumstances of the County." Both Dragging Canoe's Cherokees and the New River Tories were rumored to be preparing for a springtime assault against the frontier, and to gather the militia in one place would have leave the back-country garrisons dangerously weak and the Washington settlers suicidally exposed.³⁸

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Washington County Minute Book No. 1, 81-82.

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P. G. Johnson, William Preston, 228; Washington County Minute Book No. 1, 83.

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English, "The Campbell Bible," Hanover County Historical Society Bulletin, No. 16 (May 1977), 2.

³⁸

Washington County Minute Book No. 1, 86.

The two-day April court was of more importance to Campbell, although on April 18 only he and two other justices appeared and business had to be postponed until the next day.³⁹ Before that session was over, Lieutenant Colonel William Campbell had become Colonel William Campbell, "in the Room of Col Evan Shelby who is now a Citizen of the State of North Carolina."⁴⁰ Command of the Washington County militia had been won by default! Earlier that year the Virginia North Carolina boundary had been redrawn and those Virginians who lived between Walker's and Henderson's survey lines suddenly found themselves living in another state. Four of the twenty Washington militia captains--John Shelby Sr., James Shelby, John Anderson, and James Robertson- became North Carolinians and relinquished their commands, as did Evan Shelby, who had purchased 1,000 acres in 1775 which was thought to be in Virginia.⁴¹ William Campbell visited his former colonel the second week in March to congratulate "the old gentleman" on his election to the North Carolina General Assembly and possibly to apologize for the recent turn of events.⁴² At any rate, on April 19, 1780, Campbell took

³⁹

Ibid.

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Ibid., 87.

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David Campbell to Draper, n.d., 8 DD 19, Draper Manuscripts; Unknown to unknown, April 29, 1780, Shelby-Hart Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

⁴²

Journal of the House of Delegates, I, Session Beginning May 1, 1780,

Shelby's militia rank and assumed command of the Washington County militia. Major Daniel Smith filled Campbell's vacated lieutenant colonelcy and Captain William Edmiston was promoted a rank in Smith's stead.⁴³

The county court on April 19 is not without its ironies. Although Campbell attained the highest rank in the Washington militia, the court session that day was the last one he ever attended. His appointment as colonel seems more surprising when Campbell's March election to the General Assembly is considered. Elected to the House of Delegates with Aaron Lewis for Washington County, Campbell had barely accepted his colonelcy when he left for Richmond.⁴⁴ The exact date of his arrival in that city is unknown, but the Assembly--scheduled to convene on May 1--was not called to order until eight days later because there were not enough members present to conduct the business at hand.⁴⁵

On Tuesday, May 9, William Campbell took his seat in the House of Delegates. Benjamin Harrison was Speaker of the House, and Campbell was

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Washington County Minute Book No. 1, 86.

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Earl G. Swem and John W. Williams, A Register of the General Assembly of Virginia 1776-1918, and the Constitutional Conventions (Richmond, Va., 1918), 9.

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Journal of the House of Delegates, I, Session Beginning May 1, 1780, 5.

appointed to a fifty-six man Committee of Propositions and Grievances, the purpose of which was "to meet and adjourn from day to day, and to take into their consideration all Propositions and Grievances that shall come legally certified to this Assembly, and to report their proceedings, with their opinions thereupon, to the House...." Any eleven committeemen could act on an issue.⁴⁶

The main concern of the General Assembly in May was the siege of Charleston. In February 1780 a British army commanded by Sir Henry Clinton and Lord Cornwallis had landed at John's Island near that city and since then had tightened the cordon around General Benjamin Lincoln's large American garrison. "The News and Politicks of this place," Campbell reported to William Preston in early May, "are both at this time chiefly relative to the Blockade of Charles Town. General Lincoln is there coop'd up with about 5,000 Men; the Communication with the Country cut off." Campbell, however, seemed optimistic after hearing that 6,500 militiamen from Virginia and North Carolina and 2,000 Continentals were being raised for Lincoln's relief. He could have spared himself hopes that "such Exertions will be made as will relieve that place," for on May 12 Charleston's garrison surrendered to the British.⁴⁷

⁴⁶Ibid.⁴⁷

William Campbell to Preston, May 1780, 5 QQ 29, Draper Manuscripts.

In Richmond, a disappointed Assembly resumed its "normal" legislative proceedings. William Campbell voted on two issues during the session. He cast an affirmative vote with the majority on May 31 for a bill that allowed the sheriff in the county where the General Assembly was meeting to summon a grand jury and fix and pay the assemblymen's "allowance."⁴⁸ On June 6 Campbell again followed the majority, this time negatively, in defeating an amendment to a financial bill designed to raise taxes for a sinking fund that would finance the war in 1781.⁴⁹ Although Richard Henry Lee served with Campbell on the Committee of Propositions and Grievances, he opposed Campbell on both votes, and it would appear at first glance that the less astute frontier colonel may have followed either the majority or leads by his brother-in-law, Patrick Henry.

It was during this term (May-July 1780) that Thomas Jefferson was elected Governor, and on the same day that Henry, Lee, and John Page were selected to notify Jefferson of his appointment, it was resolved by the Assembly that the election certificates of the delegates from Washington and ten other counties were not made "in the form prescribed by law." However the Committee on Privileges and Elections subsequently investigated the certificates in question, adjusted them, and Campbell's election was legalized.⁵⁰

While Campbell was occupied in Richmond, war with the Indians was again brewing on the frontier. Not only had Shawnee renegades under Chief

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Ibid., 36-37.

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Ibid., 32.

Logan continued their raiding, but the Butlers from New York with 600 rangers and Indians were on their way to the Ohio country to attack patriot forts.⁵¹ So greatly alarmed by this were the Virginia frontiersmen that on May 8 William Preston called a council of militia officers from Montgomery, Washington, Botetourt, Rockbridge, and Greenbrier Counties to plan an expedition against the Shawnees and their Huron, Mingo, and Delaware allies. A plan was formulated that would "by our Capitol Stroke put the State in possession of that Extensive Country, Settle a lasting Peace with the Savages by reducing them to obedience, or driving them from thence and at the same time ruine and destroy the interest and Influence of our British Enemies among the many nations of Indians that inhabit the Country about the Lakes and the Banks of the Mississippi." The plan called for a rendezvous of troops at Walker's Meadow in Greenbrier County and a march up the Greak Kanawha to Point Pleasant. After leaving 200 men to garrison the fort there, the expedition would cross the Ohio and engage any troublesome Indians. Preston rushed the plan off to Governor Jefferson with the recommendation that William Campbell be placed in command. Colonel Samuel Brown of Greenbrier and Major Hugh Crockett of Botetourt were recommended as subordinates.⁵²

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"Preston Papers," VMHB, XXVII (Jan. 1919), Arthur Campbell to William Preston, June 7, 1780, 46.

⁵²

Ibid., Proceedings of Officers in Botetourt County, May 8, 1780, 42-45.

While preparations were made to attack the Indians on Virginia's northwest frontier, the Cherokee Chief Dragging Canoe continued to operate against the settlers from the Chickamauga Towns on the Tennessee River. Although Dragging Canoe's raids had been frequent and unpunished for more than a year, there was now a general belief that Cornwallis had convinced the Cherokees to attack the frontier in conjunction with his summer campaign in North Carolina. This would be of major strategic importance because militiamen who would otherwise be able to fight the British in the east would be tied down on the frontier.⁵³ Therefore, Governor Jefferson was quick to authorize an expedition against the renegades' bases in the Chickamauga Towns.

Possibly because Campbell was in Richmond cultivating members of the General Assembly, but more likely because of his newly acquired rank, service against the tories in 1779, and Preston's recommendation that he command the expedition to the Ohio, the Governor thought Campbell was best suited to lead the expedition against the Chickamaugas. By June 15, 1780 Campbell was tentatively selected for the task, and three days later he was authorized to draw 1,000 pounds of lead from the state arsenal in Richmond for the expedition. At the same time, Campbell also drew 500 pounds of powder and 1,000 flints for William Preston and was empowered to "superintend the sending from this place the necessary articles of other kinds."⁵⁴

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Joseph Martin to Thomas Jefferson, Dec. 12, 1780, Boyd, ed.

Jefferson Papers, IV, 200-201.

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Ibid., Jefferson to Preston, June 15, 1780, III, 448-449; Campbell's Order for Powder and Flints From the State Arsenal, June 18, 1780, Campbell-Preston Papers, II.

Although still not officially named to command the expedition, Campbell obtained leave on Wednesday, June 21 to be absent from the House of Delegates for the remainder of the session.⁵⁵ The next day Governor Jefferson informed Campbell that "You are hereby authorized to take command ..." and issued his instructions. Arthur Campbell and William Preston had each been ordered to raise 250 men for the venture and it was rumored that North Carolina was planning a similar expedition. "Should the Carolinians not have at present such an expedition in contemplation," Jefferson wrote William Campbell, "if you can engage them to concur as volunteers, either at their own expense or that of their State it is recommended you do it." The Commissary and Quartermaster of the Southern Department were placed at at Campbell's disposal, orders were lodged with William Preston and William Fleming for 1,500 pounds of powder, and Campbell was assured that if "for the purpose of dispatch" his men would furnish their own horses, any that were appraised beforehand and were killed in the service would be paid for by the government. Although Campbell was allowed great latitude in his orders, Jefferson emphasized one important object: "Take great care to distinguish the friendly from hostile part of the Cherokee nation, and to protect the former while you severely punish the latter."⁵⁶

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Journal of the House of Delegates, I, Session Beginning May 1, 1780, 57.

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Robert Wilson Gibbes, Documentary History of the American Revolution (New York, 1971), Jefferson to William Campbell, June 22, 1780, II, 135.

With these orders William Campbell returned to Aspenville in late June, commander of a major expedition against the Indians. In a little more than a year the value of his stock, so to speak, had increased sharply. He had gained valuable field experience against the Tories during the summer of 1779, and a good bit of notoriety as well. He had (although by chance) won the top grade in the Washington County militia, immediately elevating his military status so that an appointment such as the one to command the Chickamauga expedition was, if not probable, at least possible. Finally, Campbell had won a seat in the House of Delegates which not only introduced him to the political bosses of Revolutionary Virginia, but also allowed him to cultivate their friendship, if not his own cause, among them. In short, Campbell's appointment to command the Indian expedition in June of 1780 (which would have been impossible the previous year) is not the least bit surprising, and constitutes the first of several events that year which would lead, finally, to his command of the patriot troops at King's Mountain that fall.

Chapter VI: Prelude to Fame

William Campbell returned home from Richmond to find three major developments. First, to enhance his efforts at launching the expedition down the Tennessee, only three companies from Washington County had been sent north to watch the Ohio Indians.¹ Secondly, Campbell found his attempts to enlist North Carolinians totally defeated. Immediately after his return from Richmond Campbell had applied to the officers of Washington and Sullivan Counties in North Carolina for additional men. Although they seemed quite willing at the time to furnish troops for the expedition, the North Carolinians were soured by the prospect of being commanded by a Virginian. They finally agreed to confer on this point and inform Campbell of their decision. "I have since waited," Campbell complained to Jefferson early in July, "without hearing a word from them on the subject, and from some hints that were dropped to me, I believe if they join us at all, they wish to do it as a separate corps under the command of their own officers." However, Campbell was especially worried about rumors that 500 militiamen were already engaged from Washington County, North Carolina, to attack the friendly Cherokee villages. Should this occur Campbell feared that war would break out with "those Indians who I think wish to live in friendship with us" and that he might be censured for the actions of the North Carolinians. He nevertheless explained to the Governor that "If I have the command of men

¹
"Preston Papers," VMHB, XXVII (Jan. 1919), Arthur Campbell to Preston, June 23, 1780, 47.

that will be governed I am willing to be answerable for their conduct."²

A third development Campbell encountered was another rising of the New River Tories. On June 24 Walter Crockett had warned Preston that the insurgents were assembling near Flower Gap on the New River and in Surry County, North Carolina. They had already killed nine patriots and robbed five more, but their true object was suspected to be an attack on the Lead Mines. To protect against this Colonel Crockett called upon the militia officers in Montgomery County to muster their men and attack the Tories before they had time to organize themselves.³

On the same day that Crockett wrote to Preston, Arthur Campbell was also informed that "the Tories have embodied themselves up New River." Although Jefferson had previously warned him not to send any troops out of Washington County that would be taken away from William Campbell's command, Arthur Campbell correctly deemed it more important to protect the Lead Mines than to destroy Dragging Canoe's Tennessee bases. He therefore ordered detachments from Beattie's, Dysart's, Montgomery's, Edmiston's, Lewis', Neil's, and John Campbell's companies to march to the Lead Mines.⁴

² William Campbell to Jefferson, Boyd, ed. Jefferson Papers, III, 517-518.

³ "Preston Papers," VMHB, XXVII (Jan. 1919), Walter Crockett to Preston, June 24, 1780, 49.

⁴ Arthur Campbell to William Edmiston, June 30, 1780, 9 DD 21, Daper Manuscripts.

William Campbell must have encountered the Washington militia detachments on his return from Richmond when he stopped at Fort Chiswell on June 30 to discuss the situation with James McGavock. He almost certainly doubted the importance of the Cherokee expedition. Noting that most Tories had left their homes but had not taken their belongings Campbell probably concluded, as did McGavock, that there was the "greatest reason to believe that the Tories will be shortly back." Campbell asked McGavock to tell William Preston that unless additional soldiers were not sent to the Lead Mines immediately, the insurgents would "make a vigorous attempt to distress the people in this County." McGavock complied with Campbell's wishes and informed Preston that the Washington colonel had returned home to raise 100 men to march "upon the shortest notice, to our assistance."⁵

Any plans Campbell may have harbored to aid Montgomery County had to be postponed. He still had orders to invade the Chickamauga towns, and within a week he assembled 400 Washington militiamen and marched down the Holston toward the Tennessee. Campbell may have wondered about the strength and reliability of his North Carolinian reinforcements should they arrive. There was good reason for this. Jefferson did not even write to Governor Abner Nash on the subject until August 12, and then his letter was nothing more than a polite entreaty to prevent unnecessary aggression if any "shoud

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"Preston Papers," VMHB, XXVII (April 1919), James McGavock to Preston, June 30, 1780, 160.

have been meditated."⁶ As it turned out, Campbell could have spared himself any apprehensions about the North Carolinians. After reaching the Nolichucky River he was joined by two companies under Captain James Smith and James Barnett who brought negative intelligence about the situation on the New River, and after a short council with his officers, Campbell decided to march no farther while the loyalist insurrection threatened their rear.⁷

Meanwhile, in Montgomery County William Preston deemed the danger of a tory attack on the Lead Mines great enough to summon the militia of that county and Washington and Botetourt to meet there for its defense. In Richmond Jefferson finally realized the importance of the Lead Mines and conceded that Preston's measures were "as wise as could have been advised" but warned the County Lieutenant that he could expect no reinforcements because 5,000 Virginia militia were being sent to join General Gates in North Carolina. The best that the Governor could do was to cancel William Campbell's orders to attack the Indians and direct him against the New River tories. "As it now appears more necessary to turn his arms against our

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Jefferson to Abner Nash, Aug. 12, 1780, Boyd, ed. Jefferson Papers, III, 544-545.

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Samuel Cole Williams, Tennessee During the Revolutionary War (Knoxville, Tenn., 1874), 137.

internal enemies," Jefferson wrote Preston on July 3, "I write him to do so, former experience having proved him very equal to such a duty."⁸

That same day, Jefferson authorized Campbell's independent decision to abandon the Chickamauga expedition and directed him to march to the Lead Mines to quell "a dangerous Insurrection on New River." When Campbell returned from the Nolichucky to Aspenville he found that he was to command all the militia from Washington, Montgomery, and Botetourt Counties which Preston had raised to protect the Lead Mines, and "apply to this Object the Means and Powers put into your hands for the Indian Expedition." Again Campbell was given great latitude in his orders: "As this is an Object requiring more immediate attention than the one which you were lately appointed, I am to devise you will a second time take in hand those Parricides; and if they have proceeded, as we have heard, to actual murder, to recommend that you take such effectual Measures of Punishment as may secure the future safety of that Quarter."⁹

On July 12, possibly before Campbell had received his new orders from the Governor, Arthur Campbell wrote to his cousin that forty or fifty

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Jefferson to Preston, July 3, 1780, Boyd, ed. Jefferson Papers, III, 480-481.

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Jefferson to William Campbell, July 3, 1780, Virginia Executive Communications, "Letters Received," Virginia State Library, Richmond.

tories were near the Lead Mines. They had plundered two houses and were primarily doing "mischief outside as robbers." Because Arthur thought that plunder was the "real object" of the tories, when he directed William to march to the Lead Mines that day he advised Campbell and his men to do so "without overmarching themselves."¹⁰ Nevertheless, upon receipt of Arthur Campbell's letter William Campbell moved, as one historian has written, "with the usual dispatch."¹¹ He immediately wrote to Captain William Edmiston, James Dysart, and Aaron Lewis directing them to order fifteen men from each of their companies to assemble at Aspenville the following day, fully equipped to march to the Lead Mines. Campbell also requested that John Campbell and ten of his men join the command at Royal Oak. The men gathered, as William Campbell recalled, "as early as I could expect" on the appointed day, and at noon or soon after marched for Montgomery County.¹²

Campbell's fifty-five militiamen marched twelve miles that day and camped the next day at Radcliffe's Marsh. There the command halted to

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Arthur Campbell to William Campbell, July 12, 1780, 8 DD 3, Draper Manuscripts.

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P. G. Johnson, William Preston, 240.

¹²

William Campbell to Arthur Campbell, July 1780, 8 DD 4, Draper Manuscripts.

await the return of some men who had been detached the previous day "to apprehend some persons that were much suspected." Thus detained, Campbell did not arrive at the mines until early evening of the following day.¹³

At the Lead Mines Campbell learned that William Preston had sent two spies among the tories "to discover, if possible, the designs of the insurgents."¹⁴ The spies were expected back that night but did not return until an hour and a half before dawn of the next day. They had been detained as prisoners but were released when a number of tories left for their homes. However, the spies brought information that 105 tories from the districts of Captains Cox and Osborne were in arms up the New River. There was also "a considerable number" without weapons. In addition to their information the spies delivered a threat against William Preston signed by the Insurgents.¹⁵

With tory resistance pin-pointed in Cox's and Osborne's companies, Campbell was determined to march his Washington militia up the river. However, some Montgomery militia officers at the Lead Mines suggested that they collect "as many men that day as they possibly could, and be in readiness to march early next day." Campbell agreed to this and some eighty men joined

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Ibid.

¹⁴

P. G. Johnson, William Preston, 240.

¹⁵

William Campbell to Arthur Campbell, July 1780, 8 DD 4, Draper Manuscripts.

his command in the next twenty-four hours. Early the next morning Campbell started up the New River with 140 mounted militia.

The command marched sixteen miles without receiving any helpful intelligence, and the following day marched through "the most populous part" of the New River settlement but found no people at home except women, children, and "a few very old men." However, that evening the patriot column arrived at Captain John Cox's house and learned that two hours before forty tories had crossed the river and captured Cox's son. Campbell immediately started up the north side of the New River in pursuit and, as he later learned, luckily escaped a tory ambush which had been planned on the river's south bank. Nevertheless, the Americans picked up the trail and followed it "in the best manner we could...untill it became so dark that we could no longer follow their track." After nightfall Campbell turned off the road and made camp about a quarter of a mile away. But he was certain that the insurgents were not far off and sent "a few men" ahead as scouts. They soon returned with no information of value.

Campbell now began a guessing game. He knew there was a patch of woods ahead known as the Big Glade, or Round Meadows, and felt that if the tories were nearby they were probably camped there. Hoping to surprise them if the insurgents were indeed in the glade, Campbell awakened his troops two or three hours before dawn, and leaving their horses tethered in camp, marched forward on foot. Still uncertain what to expect, Campbell halted his men after walking a mile and dispatched four or five "very trusty men" to reconnoiter. They took with them a tory who had been captured the preceding day and whose brother was in the insurgent camp. Campbell warned the tory that he would be

executed if the enemy bivouac was not discovered! This threat must have been effective because within the hour the party returned with information that the tories were indeed encamped at the Big Glade and that their camp was visible from a quarter of a mile away. The scouts had themselves crawled to within twenty yards of the enemy.

Having correctly guessed the whereabouts of the tories, Campbell now supposed to know their design. He assured his officers that the insurgents were awaiting the arrival of "a considerable number" of their comrades, after which they would barricade themselves in a defensible position such, "that the lives of a great many good men must be lost in an attempt to dislodge them." Unwilling that "such worthless wretches" should achieve this end, Campbell held a council with his officers and decided to return for their horses and attack the enemy camp as quickly as possible.

It was still dark when the patriots again set out for the Big Glade, but the sun was peering over the mountains when they approached the tory encampment. However, because the morning was extremely foggy the good visibility reported by Campbell's scouts was nil. Nevertheless, the militia rode through the fog and into the woods to discover that the enemy had left camp and escaped "with the greatest precipitation." In their haste the insurgents had left behind young Cox and everything "excepting their arms." The command halted shortly while a horse was procured for Cox, who had overheard the route which the tories proposed to take. Campbell subsequently followed the fleeing tories "with all expedition, we could upon the trace."

The outnumbered insurgents soon learned that Campbell was on their trail and immediately dispersed. Some hid among the nearby "Bushes and weeds," but most fled into the mountains where the laurel grew thick enough to prevent Campbell's pursuit on horseback. Only one tory was caught that morning but he was immediately shot without giving the patriots any helpful information. Therefore, Campbell recalled his men and returned to the enemy camp at the Big Glade, where the hungry militiamen breakfasted on the tories' abandoned morning meal. Campbell now paused to consider the morning's events. "You cannot conceive my chagrin," he confided to Arthur Campbell, when I saw the situation of the enemy's camp. I found that had I known it myself, it was in my power to have destroyed nearly the whole of them, though it may perhaps be better ordered, as I believe most of them are now well convinced of their folly, and may yet become very good citizens."¹⁶

More likely because he considered it "to no purpose to search for those people in that mountainous country" than because of his confidence in his enemies to become "very good citizens," Campbell composed and signed (with Hugh Crockett) a proclamation addressed to the families in Captain Cox's and Osborne's districts.¹⁷ Campbell first described his successful "campaign:"

Whereas a most daring Conspiracy and Insurrection have been formed by many disaffected Persons, most of them resident within the bounds of Captains Cox's & Osborne's Companies, with the design of subverting the present

¹⁶

Ibid.

¹⁷

P. G. Johnson, William Preston, 241.

Government, and disturbing the peace & tranquility thereof; the Actors in which that were embodied have been happily dispersed, and one of their party most justly put to death.

The proclamation then reads forgivingly that the persons involved in the conspiracy were influenced "rather from...ignorance than Malevolence of Heart," and that they had only to take an oath of allegiance to be fully pardoned. Osborne's men were required to meet with Campbell at their captain's home on the following Wednesday and Cox's soldiers were instructed to do likewise on the next Thursday.¹⁸ Several days later Campbell reported the results of his proclamation to his cousin Arthur: "It has had the wished for effect, only a few of the principals having refused to come in."¹⁹

There was harsh justice for persistent loyalists. Campbell whipped two men and witnessed the execution of another at the Peach Bottom on the New River. The condemned was Zachariah Goss, a member of "Plunderin Sam Brown's" gang of outlaw-tories. He had been captured by Colonel Benjamin Cleveland of North Carolina and was hanged in the presence of both Campbell's and Cleveland's commands.²⁰ Later, Campbell traveled from house to house

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William Campbell's Orders for Tory Suspects to Come Take Their Oaths, 1780, Campbell-Preston Papers, II.

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William Campbell to Arthur Campbell, July 1780, 8 DD 4, Draper Manuscripts.

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Draper, King's Mountain and its Heroes, 388.

confiscating tory property. He took all livestock except one milk cow and a horse per family, and Campbell was able to boast that after this most tories were afraid "to venture from their own houses."²¹ Campbell's officers subsequently petitioned for the confiscated property to be sold at auction and for the proceeds to be divided equally "among the soldiers and officers on that expedition."²² Unsure what course to take in this matter, Campbell wrote to Jefferson requesting instructions. Although the executive replied on August 9 that he had no power to condone the distribution of confiscated tory property among Campbell's soldiers, Campbell must have been pleased by the complimentary letter. "We are well pleased," wrote the Governor, "with the spirited manner in which the insurrection of the tories has been suppressed."²³

Contrary to Jefferson's belief, the threat of the New River tories was not yet removed. Late in July Hugh Crockett had learned from two spies that "a very great number" of insurgents had gathered near Fort Chiswell for

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Summers, History of Southwest Virginia and Washington County, 292.

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Document Relating to the Tory Uprising, 1780, Campbell-Preston Papers, II.

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Jefferson to Arthur Campbell, August 9, 1780, McIlwaine, ed.

Official Letters, II, 158.

an attack on the Lead Mines. Planned for July 25, the attack was merely the first step of an ambitious plan which included arming the Convention prisoners at Charlottesville and working in conjunction with British troops in North Carolina to subdue the whole state of Virginia. Though a bold proposal, it was easily frustrated. The two spies were given a list of the tory officers involved, a fortunate stroke of luck which "allowed the militia to capture many."²⁴

William Preston responded by convening a court of magistrates from Montgomery, Botetourt, and Washington Counties "to occasion Witnesses and enquire fully into the Conduct of those deluded Wretches In which we have been Engaged...."²⁵ The court was occupied with the examination of Colonel William Ingles and more than forty other tories during the early part of August.²⁶ Indeed, on August 8 Preston was convinced the hearings would last "at least a fortnight: because "there are Prisoners brought in every hour and New Discoveries making."²⁷ The court meted out punishments ranging in severity

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Preston to Jefferson, Aug. 8, 1780, 5 QQ 50, Draper Manuscripts.

²⁵

Ibid.

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P. G. Johnson, William Preston, 252.

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Preston to Jefferson, Aug. 8, 1780, 5 QQ 50, Draper Manuscripts.

from fines, imprisonment, and enlistment in the Continental Army to confiscation of property and thirty-nine lashes with the whip.²⁸

Campbell was in attendance at the court, held at James McGavock's near Fort Chiswell, for several days in early August, but other developments soon called him away. On August 6 Walter Crockett informed Preston that two tories, Meek and Nicholas, had murdered a settler named Letcher and that six horses belonging to a militia officer had been stolen. A "negroe fellow" had been threatened in a woods and Crockett thought it prudent to send troops along Greasy Creek and towards Flower Gap on patrol. Crockett had raised 250 men and marched to the New River, where he awaited the arrival of reinforcements from Bedford and urged Preston to send William Campbell to his aid. Crockett planned to march into a hollow at the head of Fisher's River where "it is generally believed a large body of those wretches are collected."²⁹

Campbell and Crockett roamed the country in search of tories for more than a week until the former was recalled to Washington County. Arthur Campbell had been informed that 700 tories and Cherokees were preparing an assault against the Virginia-North Carolina frontier and had asked William

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P. G. Johnson, William Preston, 252; Proceedings of Tory Trials, Aug. 1780, 5 QQ 73-79, Draper Manuscripts.

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Walter Crockett to Preston, Aug. 6, 1780, 5 QO 48, Ibid.

Campbell on August 13 to return home as "speedily" as possible. Although the county lieutenant later added a postscript that the Sullivan County militia and some Wataugans had relieved the danger by marching against the enemy, William Campbell must have been impressed by his cousin's warning that the North Fork region "may suffer" from the Indian invasion.³⁰ Consequently, Campbell returned to Aspenville.

Campbell's visit to Aspenville was brief, and within two weeks he was again in the field. This was influenced by two primary factors. First, Campbell received word that General Gates had been decisively defeated by Cornwallis at Camden on August 16 and that the American army was retreating 160 miles to Hillsborough, North Carolina. Somehow this negative intelligence seemed to bolster Campbell's energies. "We must exert ourselves, to retrieve, if Possible that Misfortune," he advised Preston on August 22.³¹

A more immediate factor causing Campbell's return to active service was the backlash resultant from the New River uprising. Campbell, Crockett, Cleveland, and others had chased a number of the insurgents across the state line into Surry County, North Carolina, and even before his return home Campbell was aware that Colonel Martin Armstrong of that county had requested assistance from Montgomery County. County Lieutenant William Preston mustered some

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Arthur Campbell to William Campbell, Aug. 13, 1780, 8 DD 5, Ibid.

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William Campbell to Preston, Aug. 22, 1780, 5 QQ 61, Ibid.

militia at the Lead Mines for this purpose and, assured of Campbell's disposition by his letter of August 22, offered Campbell the command of the expedition to North Carolina. "You will please to give orders to the officers accordingly," instructed Preston on August 24, "who, with the soldiers, are hereby strictly commanded to obey such orders as they may receive from you on this tour of duty."³² Arthur Campbell's sentiments in regard to his cousin's service in another state are not known, but it is probable that he, like Preston, thought the expedition to be "absolutely necessary for the safety of this and our sister state of North Carolina."³³

It seems most likely that William Campbell did not raise any additional troops for the venture, but merely joined detachments of Washington militia which had been left at the Lead Mines to protect Montgomery County. On August 26, only two days after writing to Campbell, Preston informed Martin Armstrong that "The advanced Party marched from here (the mines) last Fryday under the command of Colo William Campbell an Experienced Officer."³⁴ It would have been a remarkable feat for even one company to have

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Preston to William Campbell, Aug. 24, 1780, Gibbes, ed. Documentary History of the American Revolution, II, 137.

³³

Ibid.

³⁴

Preston to Martin Armstrong, Aug. 26, 1780, 5 QQ 61, Ibid.

been raised, equipped, and marched the thirty-odd miles from Aspenville to the Lead Mines in less than two days! The size of Campbell's command is undetermined, but fifty men followed him on August 25 and at least two additional companies marched from the Lead Mines to North Carolina, probably on August 27 or 28. Campbell's second in command was Major Joseph Cloyd of Montgomery County.³⁵

The conscientiousness of Campbell and his men should be appreciated. All the soldiers had small farms or plantations like Aspenville and the harvest season was near. Indeed, as Preston warned Armstrong, "As these men were raised at this critical Season, they cannot stay long on duty."³⁶ Also, tory marauders incensed by the purge of their New River confederates roamed both Montgomery and Washington Counties in search of plunder and revenge. The latter motive came uncomfortably close to making William Campbell its victim. On or about August 26 Campbell's slave, John Broady, carried some letters from Aspenville to William Christian's Montgomery County home. As Broady neared the Sinking Spring on his return trip, five tories made him their captive. They had watched Christian's house since the previous day in hopes of intercepting dispatches, and were obviously displeased when they opened the letters Broady was taking from Christian to Campbell and found them to contain nothing but personal business. As the slave stood before the mounted tories he was informed that he would be hanged as soon as they joined

35
Ibid.

36
Ibid.

the rest of the loyalist gang on Peek Creek, and that from there they would go to Aspenville to kill Elizabeth and William Campbell, who had "injured" them in the past! Broady was saved by the unexpected approach of some wagons, the rumble of which drove the nervous tories away. Three hours later the negro arrived back at Christian's to describe his experience, but the colonel seemed doubtful of its credibility when Stephen and Daniel Trigg's search party failed to confirm it. "We are not fully satisfied about the whole story," Christian wrote Preston on August 30, "but believe the boy was frightened some how or other. He persists in his story & I suppose will scare his Mistress from home with it, if she has confidence in the Boy's Integrity." Unlike the tories who had stopped Broady, Christian knew that Campbell was in North Carolina. He therefore sent a guard home with the slave and requested Preston to billet another with Mrs. Campbell until her husband's return.³⁷

In the meantime Campbell had crossed the mountains and marched into North Carolina, although he had still not received any certain instructions from Martin Armstrong. On August 26 Colonel Preston had requested that Armstrong "give them such Instructions as will keep them well employ'd during their stay," but it was not until August 30 that the Surry County Lieutenant could comply.³⁸ Armstrong asked Campbell to send "a Detachment of your light horse," into Captains Wooldrage's and Scott's districts to capture tory bands

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"Preston Papers," VMHB, XXVII (July and Oct, 1919), William Christian to Preston, Aug. 30, 1780, 323-325.

³⁸

Preston to Martin Armstrong, Aug. 26, 1780, 5 QQ 62, Draper Manuscripts.

led by George Gudspeth, Edward Clanton, Thomas Clark, James Deal, John Enyard, Frances Barber, Benjamin Burke, Thomas Pettit, and Hezekiah Wright. At the same time, Campbell was urged to send "a larger Body of your light horse" into the districts of the Bostick's and Captains Halbert, Meridith, and Cloud. Armstrong promised that Surry County guides would lead the Virginians on their missions. Major Joseph Phillips was to march with the first detachment--probably led by Major Cloyd--for this purpose, while Captain Cloud accompanied Campbell's "larger Body." When not chasing Tories the Virginians were to gather provisions for North Carolinians in service either with Gates or with Colonels Charles McDowell's, Isaac Shelby's, and John Sevier's partisan militia. Any men which Campbell did not need in the field were to be stationed at Salem "where they may be Servicable in Watching the Motions of the people in the lower Parts of the County...."³⁹

Campbell, billeted at the Moravian town of Bethabara, had hardly received Armstrong's instructions when conflicting orders arrived from General Gates and Governor Nash. The former wished Campbell to march to the Yadkin River where the dispirited survivors of Camden could be supported. The latter asked Campbell to march to Charlotte and join a partisan army composed of Shelby's, McDowell's, and Sevier's North Carolinians, Colonel Elijah Clark's Georgians, and some South Carolina militia under Colonel James Williams.⁴⁰ Reflecting on the "very severe blow" of Camden which rendered useless limited partisan successes at Thicketty Fort (July 20), Cedar Spring

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Armstrong to Preston, Aug. 30, 1780, Campbell-Preston Papers, II.

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Nash to William Campbell, Sept. 2, 1780, Ibid; Driver, John Sevier,

(August 8), and Musgrove's Mill (August 18), Governor Nash hoped Campbell would "join these heroes & aid them in dispersing & harassing the Enemy until our broken army can be again in condition to face them..."⁴¹ Possibly hoping to influence Campbell's acceptance of this course, Nash asked the Virginian to believe "I have a very proper sense of your public spirit on this occasion & that I am very much obliged to you and the Genl. volunteers of your party for your timely aid."⁴²

Campbell was now in a quandary. He had three separate requests or orders, each of which conflicted with the others. His understandable response was, therefore, to comply with none of them! On September 6 he informed Gates that his men could not possibly serve on the Yadkin because they had been enlisted for a short tour of duty only and for the sole purpose of preventing "the Insurrections which they feared might be made among them by their internal Enemies." Campbell also explained that his men had left their homes on "a very short Notice" and with their affairs in disorder, and that even should they stay, the Virginians did not have "sufficiency of Cloathing for the ensuing Season." Although he declined to march to the Yadkin, Campbell nevertheless offered to join the partisan militia army at Charlotte, and while no letter

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Wilma Dykeman, With Fire and Sword: The Battle of King's Mountain (Washington, D.C., 1978), 24; Nash to William Campbell, Sept. 2, 1780, Campbell Preston Papers, II.

⁴²

Ibid.

from him to Nash has been found, it is probable that he used the same arguments to defend his decision which he had communicated to Gates.⁴³

Campbell came closest to following his original instructions from Martin Armstrong. He headquartered at Bethabara for the next two weeks, sending out daily patrols in search of tories. One group of insurgents was dispersed above the Shallow Ford of the Yadkin, and two companies of tories were surprised and attacked one night by a detachment of Campbell's Virginians.⁴⁴ In this raid Captain Nathan Reed and seventeen loyalists were captured. Reed was subsequently tried by Campbell, found guilty of treason, and hanged, but the sentence was pronounced only after the tory captain refused to serve in the Continental Army for the duration of the war.⁴⁵

Exactly when Campbell returned from North Carolina is not known. Samuel Newell, a militiaman who spent July, August, and the first half of September on guard duty at the Lead Mines, stopped to see Campbell at Aspen-

43

William Campbell to Gates, Sept. 6, 1780, Clark ed. State Records of North Carolina, XIV, 594-595.

44

P. G. Johnson, William Preston, 241; Draper, King's Mountain and its Heroes, 388.

45

Ibid.

ville on his return from Montgomery County to his home west of Abingdon. Since Newell was the last man in his detachment to be discharged he was somewhat surprised to find that Campbell was not yet home.⁴⁶ Newell's return roughly coincided with a letter from William Preston to Martin Armstrong on September 18 which discussed a plan to raise 1,000 riflemen for Gates' army. This plan had been formulated "Before Colo Campbell returned"⁴⁷ Thus, the only thing that can be ascertained about Campbell's return is that it was sometime before September 18. It might also be supposed that Campbell came home certain that he had arrested tory activities along the New River and in Surry County for the remainder of 1780. He had dispersed a number of loyalist gangs in both places, hanged or shot several of the most notorious tories, and sent the remainder meekly back to their homes. Indeed, after three months of constant campaigning it must have appeared to William Campbell that he might enjoy a quiet fall at Aspenville with Elizabeth and their two children.

This was not to be.

⁴⁶ Samuel Newell's Statement, April 24, 1823, 3 DD 219-224, Draper Manuscripts.

⁴⁷ Preston to Armstrong, Sept. 18, 1780, Campbell-Preston Papers, II.

Chapter VII: William Campbell of King's Mountain

While Campbell was chasing Tories in North Carolina events had occurred which eventually would lead to the battle of King's Mountain. In the weeks that followed the Camden disaster, the partisan army which Governor Nash had urged Campbell to join had offered only weak resistance to British forces in western North Carolina. Their primary antagonist was Major Patrick Ferguson, a Scottish veteran of European wars who had invented the first breechloading rifle used by the British army, seen active service in the West Indies, and had supposedly saved Washington's life at Brandywine by commanding his troops not to fire when the rival general rode too close to their lines. Ferguson was thirty six years old in 1780.¹

Immediately after Camden Ferguson had closely pursued Shelby, Sevier, and McDowell, but after Cornwallis occupied Charlotte the Major was summoned to learn Cornwallis' plans for the subjugation of North Carolina. British strategy involved a three-pronged thrust through the state. Cornwallis was to command the main and middle column while a supporting force guarded his coastal right flank and protected supply bases. On his left flank, Cornwallis was most concerned with the over mountain region west of the Blue Ridge where Campbell, Sevier, Shelby, and McDowell lived. He therefore ordered Major Ferguson with his loyalists and rangers to subdue the troublesome backcountry, destroy Whig property, enlist Tories for an invasion of Virginia, and finally rejoin Cornwallis at Charlotte.²

¹ Dykeman, With Fire and Sword, 28-31.

² Ibid., 27, 35.

Ferguson marched from Ninety-Six and easily recruited Tories who had enthusiastically received the results of Camden. Because of this and the impossibility of keeping patriot militia in the field while their crops needed harvesting the American partisans dispersed and retreated over the mountains to northwestern North Carolina and southern Virginia.³ Isaac Shelby and "Chuck Jack" Sevier fled to their homes while Charles McDowell and 160 militiamen camped on the Watauga River.

Swelling ranks and an intimidated enemy gave Ferguson unwarranted confidence. Hoping to complete his apparent success, Ferguson paroled a captive Whig, Samuel Phillips, who carried an ultimatum to the over-mountain men. If the patriots did not "desist from their opposition," warned Ferguson's proclamation, he would march his army over the mountains, hang their leaders, "and lay their country waste with fire and sword."⁴ As one National Park Service historian has observed, and as Ferguson was soon to realize the first of two fatal mistakes of the King's Mountain campaign was Ferguson's underestimation of the over-mountain patriots.⁵

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Sylvia Wrobel and George Grider, Isaac Shelby: Kentucky's First Governor and Hero of Three Wars (Danville, Ky., 1974), 43.

⁴

Summers, History of Southwest Virginia and Washington County, 306.

⁵

Dykeman, With Fire and Sword, 16.

Phillips delivered Ferguson's ultimatum to Isaac Shelby, a distant relative of the messenger. Shelby immediately traveled forty miles to Seiver's home on the Nolichucky, near where Jonesborough now stands.⁶ Finding "Chuck Jack" at a horse race, Shelby discussed with him the situation and Ferguson's threat. They decided that, if the Washington County Virginians would join them in their venture, they would call for a rendezvous of the refugee partisans and patriot militia on September 25 at Sycamore Shoals on the Watauga to attack Ferguson before he had time to make good his threat. Entreaties to join the expedition were rushed off to Arthur and William Campbell.⁷ The messenger to Arthur Campbell, a Mr. Adair, soon returned with word that the Washington County Lieutenant would cooperate with Shelby and Sevier.⁸

It was more difficult to win William Campbell's support. Not only had Tories again threatened his family, but Campbell had already been warned

⁶ Draper, King's Mountain and its Heroes, 169-170.

⁷ Clark, ed. State Records of North Carolina, Account of King's Mountain by Isaac Shelby, n.d., XV, 106; Draper, King's Mountain and its Heroes, 169-170.

⁸ Clark, ed. State Records of North Carolina, The Battle of King's Mountain--A Fragment, by Arthur Campbell, n.d., XV, 133.

of the impending danger from the south by Colonel McDowell. He had begun raising men to march to the North Carolina border and there await Cornwallis' advance.⁹ Therefore, when Shelby's brother Moses arrived at Aspenville to request Campbell's assistance, the Virginian only replied that he would "Pursue his Original intention of marching his regiment over on the Southern Borders of Virginia...."¹⁰

Campbell's response was understandable because the enemy was not yet in Virginia, but Isaac Shelby nevertheless was "much disappointed" by it. He therefore dispatched his brother with a second letter which emphasized the gravity of the situation. If the Washington militia did not take the field, Shelby explained, the North Carolinians would not have enough men to simultaneously attack Ferguson and still defend the frontier from the restless Cherokees.¹¹ Reflecting upon this, Campbell agreed to join the expedition. He immediately rode to Abingdon where a conference was held on September 22 for the Washington militia officers. They decided to send 200 men to Sycamore Shoals under William Campbell's command.¹²

9

T. L. Preston, Historical Sketches and Reminiscences, 129; David Campbell to Draper, 1843, 10 DD 40, Draper Manuscripts.

10

Moses Shelby Statemen, Feb. 22, 1823, 11 DD 78, Ibid.

11

Ibid.

12

Summers, History of Southwest Virginia and Washington County, 307.

The troops began gathering that afternoon at Samuel Newell's on Wolf Creek, west of Abingdon.¹³ Arthur Campbell later remembered that "All ranks seemed animated with the same spirit, and the quota was raised and equipped in a few days."¹⁴ By the morning of the 24th the command was ready to march, but before leaving the Reverend Charles Cummings (pastor of the Ebbing Spring Church, 1773-1780) held a short religious service. Afterwards he presented a clod of dirt to William Campbell as a reminder to the men that, while they were fighting in North Carolina, they were protecting their Washington County homes. Campbell carried the dirt on the Kings' Mountain campaign and brought it back to Abingdon, where it is preserved today in the Washington County Historical Society.¹⁵ The troops marched the thirty miles to Sycamore Shoals via the Watauga Road, arriving there on the following day.¹⁶ Campbell, however, did not accompany the troops, but

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Interview with Mrs. Fred Davis 165 E. Main St., Abingdon, Virginia, November 7, 1978.

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Clark, ed., State Records of North Carolina, Official Report of the Battle of King's Mountain, from the Virginia Gazette, Nov. 18, 1780, and the Massachusetts Spy, Nov. 30, 1780, XV, 163-165.

¹⁵

Neal, Bicentennial History of Washington County, 384; Interview with Mrs. Fred Davis, No. 7, 1878.

¹⁶

Samuel Newell's Statement, April 24, 1823, 3 DD 219-224, Draper Manuscripts; "Notes and Querries," VMHB, LX (Jan. 1952), 174.

rode south instead to confer with Evan Shelby at Sapling Grove. Campbell rejoined his men at the rendezvous site most likely on September 25.¹⁷

At Sycamore Shoals Campbell met Isaac Shelby and John Sevier with 240 men apiece, and the 160 Burke and Rutherford County volunteers under Charles McDowell and Andrew Hampton.¹⁸ More troops filtered into camp throughout the day, and by nightfall of the 25th nearly 1,000 back-country riflemen had assembled on the Watauga.¹⁹ Campbell's Virginians differed from the North Carolinians in that they were equipped by the county, and later, state authorities. Shelby's and Sevier's men, on the other hand, were privately outfitted by John Adair of Washington County, North Carolina.²⁰ Corn for the troops was ground at Mathew Talbot's mill on the Watauga and powder was provided by Mary Patton, who made it on a branch of Buffalo Creek.

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Summers, History of Southwest Virginia and Washington County, 109.

¹⁸

Clark, ed., State Records of North Carolina, Official Report of the Battle of King's Mountain, from the Virginia Gazette, Nov. 18, 1780, and the Massachusetts Spy, Nov. 30, 1780, XV, 163-165.

¹⁹

Walter T. Bruce, The Battle of King's Mountain, Folder A5, Guilford Courthouse National Military Park, Greensboro, N. C., 1.

²⁰

Summers, History of Southwest Virginia and Washington County, 309.

Beeves and horses were procured at nearly every farm in the area.²¹

Although Charles McDowell was the senior colonel, he exercised no real authority because the expedition was a volunteer venture.²² The army therefore being composed of independent commands, the commanding officers of each detachment jointly decided on strategy, and agreed to leave Sycamore Shoals the next morning. However, before they could march on September 26 the army was surprised by the arrival of Arthur Campbell and 200 additional militiamen from Washington County. David Campbell told Lyman C. Draper years later that William Campbell had "made requisition" for the reinforcements while still at Samuel Newell's. It is generally accepted that the County Lieutenant brought them on his own initiative.²³ At any rate, William Campbell now commanded almost half the militia in Washington County and the largest contingent at Sycamore Shoals. His

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Dykeman, With Fire and Sword, 41.

²²

Isaac Shelby to William Hill, Mar. 4, 1814, Shelby-Hart Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

²³

David Campbell to Draper, May or June 1843, 10 DD 40, Draper Manuscripts.

"regiment" was composed of six companies led by Captains James Dysart, Robert Craig, Andrew Colvill, David Beattie, William Neil, and William Edmiston. Major William Edmiston was Campbell's second in command and the twenty-two year old William Russell Jr. served as his aide-de-camp.²⁴

After Arthur Campbell's arrival the Reverend Samuel Doak preached a sermon on Gideon's conquest over the Midianites with untried men (Judges 6 and 7). Afterwards, the army adopted Doak's text as their justification. Their battle cry became "The sword of the Loard and of Gideon!"²⁵

After Doak finished speaking Arthur Campbell returned to Abingdon to supervise the defense of the frontier against possible Indian attacks. The over-mountain army, meanwhile, left Sycamore Shoals for Gilbert Town, North Carolina, where it was supposed Major Ferguson's army lay. Although most of the frontiersmen were mounted, their progress was slowed by the cattle herd which accompanied them, and when the column stopped for lunch at Talbot's Mill, only three miles had been covered. The afternoon brought better luck. The patriots moved up Gap Creek, crossed the Little Toe River, and after a days march of twenty miles, camped for the night at the Shelving Rock, a well-known landmark.²⁶

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Washington County Militia Returns, Sept. 1780, Campbell-Preston Papers, II; List of King's Mountain Officers, Washington County, 8 DD 18, Draper Manuscripts.

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Dykeman, With Fire and Sword, 44.

²⁶

Draper, King's Mountain and its Heroes, 176.

On the morning of September 26 the command was delayed considerably by a stampede of the cattle herd, after which the several commanders decided to slaughter enough meat to last until they got to North Carolina and send the remaining cattle back to the Watauga.²⁷ This done, the army started into the mountains on, as one of Campbell's militiamen recalled, "a very bad road."²⁸ They followed Bright's Trace into the gap between Yellow and Roan Mountains and stopped at a table land near the top of the latter height called the "Bald Place," or the "Bald of the Yellow."²⁹ At the Bald Place the army halted for lunch and paraded in front of their officers.³⁰ Following the parade the troops marched down the mountain into Elk Hollow, where they encountered some early winter snow.³¹

27

Dykeman, With Fire and Sword, 45.

28

Clark, ed. State Records of North Carolina. An Account of the March and Battle of King's Mountain by an Unknown Member of Campbell's Regiment, n.d., XV, 135.

29

Draper, King's Mountain and its Heroes, 177; Williams, Tennessee During the Revolutionary War, 147.

30

Draper, King's Mountain and its Heroes, 177.

31

Dykeman, With Fire and Sword, 46; Draper, King's Mountain and its Heroes, 178.

Probably before leaving the Bald Place the commanders discovered that two men, James Crawford and Samuel Chambers, had deserted. Campbell, Shelby, Sevier, and McDowell guessed that the deserters would go directly to Ferguson, who was still ignorant of the patriots' presence in the field. Should this be the case, the commanders agreed to divide their army and, to confuse Ferguson, march on a more northerly route than the one previously planned.³²

The command marched together on September 28 four miles down Roaring Creek to its confluence with the North Toe, and thence down the river to a small spring on the Davenport farm, where the noon meal was eaten. In the afternoon the patriots continued on to Cathey's Plantation at the mouth of Grassy Creek, a small tributary of the North Toe. Having marched some twenty miles, the command bivouaced there for the night.³³

On Friday the army followed Grassy Creek into Gillespie's Gap in the Blue Ridge. In the gap, the command finally was divided. McDowell, Sevier, and Shelby led their troops in an easterly direction over an old trace to the North Cove on the North Fork of the Catawba. Campbell marched six or seven miles south to Henry Gillespie's home in Turkey Cover.³⁴

³²

Ibid., 177-178.

³³

Ibid., 179.

³⁴

Ibid., 180.

Gillespie, a neutral, was detained overnight but released after convincing Campbell that he knew nothing of Ferguson's whereabouts. Campbell also visited the Turkey Cove settlement and tory Colonel William Wofford's "fort," but again could learn nothing about his enemy.³⁵

On Saturday, September 30 Campbell marched in an easterly direction toward the Catawba, where he rendezvoused with McDowell, Sevier, and Shelby. After their junction the united command- undoubtedly relieved to be through the mountains- marched down the west bank of the Catawba, crossed the mouth of the Linville River, and moved on to McDowell's home, Quaker Meadows. There Benjamin Cleveland and Major Joseph Winston arrived with 350 Wilkes and Surry County militia.³⁶

The first day of October dawned sunny and warm and the army had an enjoyable march past Pilot Mountain. However, when showers developed in the afternoon the commanders ordered an early bivouac in the South Mountain Gap, near where Cane and Silver Creeks intersect.³⁷ That evening Colonel

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Ibid., 181-182.

³⁶

Shelby to Hill, March 4, 1814, Shelby-Hart Papers; Clark, ed. State Records of North Carolina. Official Report of the Battle of King's Mountain, from the Virginia Gazette, Nov. 18, 1780, and the Massachusetts Spy, Nov. 30, 1780, XV, 163-165.

³⁷

Draper, King's Mountain and its Heroes, 187.

John Williams and his South Carolinians joined the army.³⁸

That night a fateful decision was made by the commanders which, on the following day, would give command of the army to William Campbell. Primarily because the independent officers and their varied commands constituted, as Shelby put it, "a mere confused mass, incapable of performing any great military achievement," Campbell, Shelby, Cleveland, Hampton, Winston, and John Lord composed a letter to General Gates which requested a general officer to take command of their army.³⁹ The letter explained that the mountain men had taken the field without orders from their state executives and that "being all militia and but little acquainted with discipline," a general of Daniel Morgan's calibre was necessary "to keep up a proper discipline without disgusting the soldiery."⁴⁰ Colonel McDowell carried the

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Shelby to Hill, March 4, 1814, Shelby-Hart Papers.

³⁹

Ibid: Summers, History of Southwest Virginia and Washington County, 313.

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Benjamin Cleveland and Others to Horation Gates, Oct. 4, 1780, Folder A5, Guilford Courthouse National Military Park, Greensboro, N. C.

dispatch to Gates while the remaining officers agreed to jointly decide strategy and to daily appoint an officer to carry out their decisions until a general officer arrived.

There have been various explanations of why McDowell, the senior colonel, left the expedition and why William Campbell was given command of the predominately North Carolinian army on October 2. The official report on the King's Mountain campaign tactfully states that "no one officer" had "properly a right to command in chief," but Shelby may have come closer to the truth when he said that McDowell was "unpopular."⁴¹ Perhaps McDowell's unpopularity stemmed from the recognition that he was "too slow" for the venture, or as William Edmiston put it, his own incapacity.⁴² At any rate, it is generally accepted that when McDowell volunteered to carry the letter to Gates he did so for the good of the expedition, being aware of the animosities his presence might breed.⁴³

⁴¹

Clark, ed. State Records of North Carolina, Official Report of Battle of King's Mountain, from the Virginia Gazette, Nov. 18, 1780, and the Massachusetts Spy, Nov. 30, 1780, XV, 163-165; Shelby to Hill; March 4, 1814, Shelby-Hart Family Papers.

⁴²

William Edmiston's Certificate, 1813, 8 DD 38 (5), Draper Manuscripts.

⁴³

Draper, King's Mountain and its Heroes, 180; Shelby to Hill, March 4, 1814, Shelby-Hart Papers.

The rain which had begun the previous day continued on October 2, and while the men lounged in their South Mountain Gap camp Isaac Shelby had time to consider the situation. Still believing that Ferguson was sixteen miles away at Gilbert Town, Shelby was not satisfied with the inefficient agreement to choose a daily commander to lead the army. He therefore summoned the other officers and proposed that the decision to appoint a different "officer of the day" each day be abandoned and that William Campbell be elected to command the expedition until a general officer arrived from Gates. At first glance, the proposal seems ironic. Not only was Shelby the most senior colonel after McDowell, but at Musgrove's Mill he had commanded several of McDowell's own officers.⁴⁴

Shelby's reasons for suggesting Campbell soon became clear. Campbell seemed embarrassed by the offer and took Shelby aside to decline it and recommend that Shelby take command himself. However, after Shelby explained that the Virginian's leadership might induce jealousy between the North Carolina officers and that because Campbell commanded the largest contingent he was the logical choice any way, Campbell agreed to lead the army if elected by his brother officers.⁴⁵ After presenting the above arguments to the other officers and pointing out that, besides being "a man of good sense," Campbell had served in the Virginia regulars, the election was held. Unquestionably, the fact that Campbell was a full colonel who had enjoyed marked successes

⁴⁴Ibid.⁴⁵

Clark, ed. State Records of North Carolina, Isaac Shelby's Account of King's Mountain, n.d., XV, 106.

against the tories influenced the other officers to vote affirmatively. One officer who voted for Campbell, William Edmiston, later gave two accounts of the incident. Although in 1812 he stated that Campbell received all the votes cast, Edmiston recalled a year later that only "most of the votes" were for Campbell.⁴⁶ It is now generally accepted that Campbell was elected unanimously. "He was elected," wrote John Craig, a soldier within hearing distance when the vote was taken, "without a dissenting voice."⁴⁷ With or without a unanimous decision, the point of Campbell's election to the command has been capably viewed by S. C. Williams in his Tennessee During the Revolutionary War as "a temporary expedient, a tactful mode of bridging an awkward situation."⁴⁸

Before marching on October 3 the army was assembled in a large circle and addressed by Colonel Cleveland. He told the men that the enemy was at hand and that a "hard" battle was ahead, but if any man wished to go home he need only take a step backward. No one did. Cleveland also emphasized Campbell's titular leadership--the colonels still met daily to decide

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William Edmiston's Certificate, July 25, 1812, 3 DD 135, William Edmiston's Certificate, 1813, 8 DD 38 (5), Draper Manuscripts.

47

John Craig Certificate, n.d., 3 DD 211, Ibid.

48

William, Tennessee During the Revolutionary War, 149.

strategy--and told the men that when the battle was fought, "Let each one of you be your own officer."⁴⁹ The troops were then given three hours to eat their breakfast and prepare for the march, and the command moved on to the mouth of Cane Creek. On this march, as on all subsequent ones following Campbell's election, the Washington County regiment led the way with Campbell at its head.⁵⁰ One of Campbell's soldiers noticed a difference in the ranks since his colonel took command: "The whole army appeared to be renovated; discipline was more strict; and our troops appeared more like a well organized army...our marches were more rapid, and the whole force seemed to gain new animation."⁵¹

Either during the night or on the morning of October 4 Campbell received information on Ferguson's movements. Having been informed on September 30 by the two whig deserters that a huge "ghost" army of mountain men was in the field, Ferguson sent urgent requests for help to Cornwallis at Charlotte

49

Draper, King's Mountain and its Heroes, 196.

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James Crow's Statement, May 6, 1813, 3 DD 198-201, Draper Manuscripts.

51

Samuel Newell's Statement, April 24, 1823, 3 DD 219-224, Ibid.

and Colonel J. H. Cruger at Ninety-Six.⁵² He then withdrew from the Broad River to Gilbert Town, and from there to the farm of a loyalist named Tate. Although the patriot officers supposed Ferguson to be marching as far south as Ninety-Six, the British major had, in fact, wandered somewhat aimlessly for several days, unsure whether to join Cornwallis or await the arrival of reinforcements. Aware of the speedy marches of Campbell's riflemen and of his own encumbering wagon train, Ferguson was probably already considering the prospect of finding refuge on the rocky slopes of King's Mountain, sixteen miles away.

Meanwhile, on the morning of October 4 the patriots slaughtered some beeves near their Cane Creek camp and marched for Ninety-Six. Near Gilbert Town they were joined by thirty of Elijah Clark's Georgians, and later that day, at Probit's Place on the Broad River, the mountain men were reinforced by Major William Chronicle and twenty men from the south fork of the Catawba.⁵³ The army crossed the Broad River at Denard's Ford and marched into Gilbert Town, arriving there, as Shelby remembered, "two or three days" after Ferguson's departure.⁵⁴

⁵²

So1 Stember, The Bicentennial Guide to the American Revolution (New York, 1974), III, 100; Dykeman, With Fire and Sword, 49.

⁵³

Draper, King's Mountain and its Heroes, 214.

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Shelby to Hill, March 4, 1814, Shelby-Hart Papers.

Still guessing that Ferguson was retreating to Ninety-Six, Campbell's army marched twelve or thirteen miles on October 5 south to the Green River. However, that evening Colonel William Lacey of South Carolina rode into camp with news that Ferguson was near King's Mountain with more than a thousand men. It was immediately decided to select the best horses and mounted men to pursue and overtake the tory army, while the foot militia and poorly mounted troops followed at a more leisurely pace. The officers spent the entire night selecting men and horses to march the following morning to the Cowpens, where Lacey promised to rendezvous with 100 South Carolinians.⁵⁵

At daybreak the army marched in a southerly direction on a ridge road through Sandy Plains to the Cowpens, a total of about twenty-one miles. On the way a strong tory detachment was discovered and two forays were led against it by Ensign Robert Campbell and Captain Colvill. Although the patriots were unsuccessful in catching and defeating the tories, they did prevent them from joining Ferguson.⁵⁶

At the Cowpens the American riflemen shot and cooked several head of cattle grazing there which were owned by a tory, and the hungry militiamen were said to have harvested and devoured fifty acres of corn in ten minutes!

⁵⁵

Ibid; Draper, King's Mountain and its Heroes, 215-217, 220.

⁵⁶

Ibid., 223.

Soon after, a crippled spy, Joseph Kerr, brought Campbell information that Ferguson was camped at Peter Quinn's, six or seven miles from King's Mountain. Several scouts were sent out to confirm this and one of them, Enoch Gilmer, returned that night with news that Ferguson was near King's Mountain. Later that night when Colonel James Williams and 400 reinforcements arrived at the Cowpens, they too had heard that Ferguson was on or about King's Mountain.⁵⁷ In fact, Ferguson had camped earlier that day (October 6) on Kings' Mountain, a position he thought must be impregnable. He had arrogantly stated that he was "King of the Mountain," and that "God Almighty could not drive him from it."⁵⁸

Campbell called a council of "the principal officers" during which "it was then thought advisable to pursue the enemy that night with 900 of the best horsemen, and leave the weak horse and footmen to follow as fast as possible."⁵⁹ After this further selection of manpower and horseflesh, 910 men--about half of the entire army--marched off at eight o'clock that evening. Campbell again commanded the largest contingent, there being 200 Washington County militiamen selected. Other detachments included Shelby and Sevier

⁵⁷

Ibid., 223-226; Shelby to Hill, March 4, 1814, Shelby-Hart Papers.

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Stember, Bicentennial Guide to the American Revolution, III, 100.

⁵⁹

Clark, ed. State Records of North Carolina, Official Report of the Battle of King's Mountain, from the Virginia Gazette, Nov. 18, 1780, and the Massachusetts Spy, Nov. 30, 1780, XV, 163-165.

with 120 men each, Cleveland's 110 men, Lacey's 100 men, and Joseph McDowell's 90 soldiers. Joseph Winston led 60 militiamen, as did James Williams, whose command had been pared down to virtually nothing.⁶⁰

The men marched in two columns through the dark and rainy night in hopes of "stealing a march" on their enemies, but Campbell, leading his 200 Virginians on alone, lost his way, and by morning it was ascertained that not more than five miles had been made.⁶¹ Early that morning Campbell was joined by the main patriot force under Cleveland, and together the army marched in an easterly direction toward King's Mountain. The intermittent rain of the previous night had become steady at sunrise and lasted the entire march. The army crossed the Cherokee Ford of the Broad River (eighteen miles from the Cowpens and fifteen miles from King's Mountain) and halted three miles farther on to eat lunch. However, after Isaac Shelby declared that he would not stop until night "if I follow Ferguson into Cornwallis' lines," the army moved on to Solomon Beason's farm.⁶²

At Beason's Campbell learned that Ferguson was indeed camped on King's Mountain. The men were therefore quickly started on their way once

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Draper, King's Mountain and its Heroes, 227.

⁶¹

James Crow's Statement, May 6, 1813, 3 DD 198-201, Draper Manuscripts.

⁶²

Draper, King's Mountain and its Heroes, 229.

more, and as Campbell moved off at the head of his troops, a young whig girl ran alongside his horse and asked Campbell "How many of you are there?" The colonel replied that he had enough men to "whip" Ferguson "if we can find him," whereupon the girl pointed to Ferguson's position and shouted "He is on that mountain!"⁶³

The army marched on in two main detachments commanded by Campbell and Cleveland. After riding a few miles to the house of a known tory where Enoch Gilmer's horse was tied, the army halted while Campbell confronted his scout, who was sitting at dinner with some loyalist women. In a mock fury designed to fool the women into believing that any information they had divulged to Gilmer would remain secret, Campbell roared at Gilmer that he was a "damned rascal" and that "we have got you!" The scout replied that he was "a true King's Man, by God," and a noose was immediately placed around his neck. However, Major Chronicle convincingly argued that Gilmer should be executed far away to prevent his ghost from haunting the tory women. Once out of sight Gilmer was released and he confirmed that Ferguson was on King's Mountain, only three miles away.⁶⁴ After marching another mile three more tories were captured, and after each revealed Ferguson's presence and approximate strength, they were impressed to pilot the patriot army to King's Mountain.⁶⁵

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Summers, History of Southwest Virginia and Washington County, 318.

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Draper, King's Mountain and its Heroes, 231.

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John Craig's Statement, n.d., 3 DD 211, Draper Manuscripts.

With this information, Campbell called a council of his officers and it was decided to encircle the tory army and attack Ferguson by surprise if possible. While the troops were forming for the march Campbell was approached by Colonel William Graham, who asked permission to leave the column to visit his seriously ill wife. Although Campbell replied that Graham should remain until the battle was successfully concluded and carry news of the victory to his wife (which, he said, should have the best possible effect on her), after Major Chronicle advised Campbell to let Graham go because "it is a woman affair," leave was granted and Chronicle took charge of Graham's troops.⁶⁶

The army moved on that afternoon under strict orders to maintain silence. The troops passed Whitnant's Mill Creek and followed a ridge road southeast to Ponder's Branch of King's Creek. They crossed Ponder's Branch and marched up a ravine between two rocky knobs to the foot of King's Mountain. It was three o'clock on the afternoon of October 7, 1780.⁶⁷

Some of Campbell's more experienced soldiers must have noticed the poor choice of Ferguson's position. It was on a ridge running for 600 yards in a northeasterly direction and varying in width from 60 to 120 yards, actually a small spur of the sixteen mile King's Mountain range. The tory camp was at the widest point on the northeast end of the ridge, and because

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Draper, King's Mountain and its Heroes, 232.

⁶⁷

Ibid., 234; Summers, History of Southwest Virginia and Washington County, 318; Shelby to Hill, March 4, 1814, Shelby-Hart Papers.

of Ferguson's confidence in defending it, had not been fortified.⁶⁸ In fact, the wooded, rock-strewn slopes which Ferguson thought would aid in his defense, made the position, as Henry Lee later observed, "more assailable by the rifle than defensible by the bayonet."⁶⁹ In The South in the Revolution, John Richard Alden agreed with Lee and stated that only a formal assault over clear ground could have failed at King's Mountain.⁷⁰ With these arguments in mind, and the fact that Cornwallis was thirty-five miles away at Charlotte, nineteenth-century historian Benson Lossing found it difficult to understand why Ferguson was there at all!⁷¹

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Stember, Bicentennial Guide to the American Revolution, III, 101.

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Henry Lee, Memoirs of the War in the Southern Department of the United States (New York, 1969), 200.

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John Richard Alden, The South in the American Revolution, 1763-1789 (n.p., 1957), 250.

⁷¹

Benson Lossing, The Pictorial Fieldbook of the Revolution (New York, 1860), II, 423.

At the foot of King's Mountain--"some distance from their Camp"--Campbell ordered the men to "Dismount and tie your horses."⁷² A number of men were then detailed to guard the horses and the army was divided into four columns which would encircle Ferguson. Campbell and Shelby commanded the right and left-center columns respectively. Sevier led the right flank column consisting of his, Winston's, and a part of Cleveland's regiments, and the left flank column, which included Williams' sixty men and the remainder of Cleveland's regiment, was commanded by the latter officer.⁷³ The deployment of the troops was made easier by a convenient fork in the road, and was recalled by one of Campbell's privates: "When we came nigh to the mountain the road forked; Col Campbell (with Sevier's flank column no doubt) took the right hand, which was the bridle way across the mountain; the left (taken by Shelby and Cleveland) was the wagon road round the end of the mountain."⁷⁴

Before starting up the mountain the whigs placed slips of paper in their hats as identification, the loyalists having done the same with pine

⁷²

James Crow's Statement, May 6, 1813, 3 DD 198-201, Draper Manuscripts.

⁷³

Clark, ed. State Records of North Carolina, Official Report of the Battle of King's Mountain, from the Virginia Gazette, Nov. 18, 1780 and the Massachusetts Spy, Nov. 30, 1780, XV, 163-165.

twigs.⁷⁵ Campbell himself stripped off his coat, rolled up the sleeves of his shirt, and tied a red handkerchief around his head.⁷⁶ He also gave his rifle to his servant, John Broady, and ordered the slave to take his black horse, "Bald Face" to the rear because it had been skittish.⁷⁷ Mounting a bay horse, Campbell then visited the deployed commands and reminded each unit that the signal for the general attack would be the Cherokee Indian yell. "Here they are my brave boys," he called out, "shout like hell and fight like devils!"⁷⁸

Campbell returned to the Washington regiment, placed himself at its head, and ordered his men to "Follow me."⁷⁹ One soldier recalled that the regiment "rushed on impetuously with the Colonel at our head."⁸⁰ Because the forenoon was wet and Campbell had "proceeded so precipitately on his march

75

Dykeman, With Fire and Sword, 63.

76

George Rutledge to David Campbell, May 27, 1813, 8 DD 37, William Moore's Statement, June 5, 1823, 3 DD 239, Draper Manuscripts.

77

James Keys' Affidavit, June 17, 1723, 8 DD 28 (9), Ibid.

78

James Craig's Statement, n.d., 8 DD 68, Ibid.

79

James Crow's Statement, May 6, 1813, 3 DD 198-201, Ibid.

80

Benjamin Sharp's Certificate, n.d., 8 DD 214, Ibid.

that we came on them with surprise," the patriot army was able to advance to within a quarter of a mile of Ferguson's camp before being discovered.⁸¹ By that time, Shelby's men had already surprised an enemy picket post without firing a shot, and both Shelby's and Campbell's columns were in their appointed positions to launch their attacks. However, because the encircling flank columns under Cleveland and Sevier took somewhat longer to reach the designated points for their attacks, when enemy pickets fired on Shelby's advancing troops, Shelby and Campbell were left alone for five or ten minutes to fight the alerted tory army.⁸²

With the element of surprise gone and the tories rushing from their tents to the sound of Shelby's firing, Campbell halted the Washington regiment and, as James Crow recounted, "ordered his men to raise the Indian hollar. We immediately made the woods ring."⁸³ Campbell then ordered his

81

Isaac Shelby to Arthur Campbell, Oct. 12, 1780, Campbell-Preston Papers, II; Clark, ed. State Records of North Carolina Account of the March and Battle of King's Mountain by an Unknown Member of Campbell's Regiment, n.d., XV, 136., Official Report of the Battle of King's Mountain taken from the Virginia Gazette, Nov. 18, 1780 and the Massachusetts Spy, Nov. 30, 1780, XV, 163-165.

82

Draper, King's Mountain and its Heroes, 245; Clark, ed. State Records of North Carolina, Official Report of the Battle of King's Mountain taken from the Virginia Gazette, Nov. 18, 1780, and the Massachusetts Spy, Nov. 30, 1780, XV, 163-165.

83

James Crow's Statement, n.d., 8 DD 68, Draper Manuscripts.

men forward "very fast," and continued on, as one man remembered, until the whigs and tories saw each other. Then, he said, "The action commenced at long fire. We advanced and fired until some of our men were in thirty yards of them."⁸⁴ The first heavy firing on Campbell's front came about half-way up the ridge, when he ordered Major Micajah Lewis (of Cleveland's regiment) to charge the main British guard. This was done successfully and Campbell's soldiers swarmed past the position and on toward the British camp on the summit.⁸⁵ Campbell later described what followed. "The firing then became general and as heavy as you can conceive for the number of men."⁸⁶

Campbell's regiment ascended the ridge at its most precipitous point, but the men crept forward from tree to tree, behind rocks and bushes, in comparative safety. However, Campbell was in much greater danger, riding at least three times "backwards and forwards in advance of our lines, in the space between us and the enemy, with his sword in his hand, apparently calm and collected, and...exclaimed 'Boys, remember your liberty!'"⁸⁷ Therefore Campbell was probably justified when he wrote of "The advantageous situation

⁸⁴

Ibid.

⁸⁵

John Witherspoon's Certificate, n.d., 8 DD 213, Ibid.

⁸⁶

William Campbell to Arthur Campbell, Oct. 20, 1780, Campbell-Preston Papers, II.

⁸⁷

Benjamin Sharp's Certificate, n.d., 8 DD 214, Draper Manuscripts.

of the enemy," which, "being on top of a steep ridge--obliged us to expose ourselves exceedingly, and the dislodging of them was equal to driving them from strong breastworks."⁸⁸

It was while Campbell and Shelby were heavily engaged that Cleveland's "line" first "fell in" with enemy pickets on the wagon road. Although the subsequent shooting and shouting which signaled the completion of Ferguson's encirclement heartened Campbell's troops, it worried those Tories who had faced the mountain militia before King's Mountain. "These things are ominous," Captain Abraham DePeyster warned Ferguson, "These are the damned yelling boys."⁸⁹

It is an arguable fact that once Ferguson's camp was surrounded the defense of the loyalist position was an exercise in futility. Ferguson did not have enough men to repel attackers on four sides simultaneously, and was forced to jockey whole companies back and forth as each patriot column assailed his position from a different direction. It was only a matter of time before the mountain men coordinated their attacks.

Nevertheless, some hard fighting still followed. One bloody skirmish took place when Ensign Robert Campbell attacked a rock outcropping which some

⁸⁸

William Campbell to Arthur Campbell, Oct. 20, 1780, Campbell-Preston Papers, II.

⁸⁹

James Crow's Statement, n.d., 8 DD 68, Draper Manuscripts.

tory sharpshooters had turned into a rifle pit. This peripheral contest raged for much of the afternoon, and ended only with the withdrawal of the defenders to another part of the field. It was not until after the battle was over that the grim harvest of this action became known. Ensign Campbell's well-directed sniping had killed eighteen tories. Each one was shot through the head!⁹⁰

There was also continued firing on William Campbell's front, where the casualty rate was proving particularly high among the officers. Yet despite the deaths of Captain William Edmiston, three lieutenants, and five ensigns in the Washington regiment, Campbell rode the line "frequently during the engagement...encouraging and exhorting the men in the hottest of the engagement and directly under the enemy's fire." He continued this dangerous activity until his horse tired, after which Campbell dismounted and fought on foot until the end of the battle.⁹¹ This, however, did not put an end to Campbell's audacity, and at one point he climbed onto a rock from which he could see the enemy position more clearly.⁹²

There were a number of tory counter-attacks during the battle on each patriot column. Captain Alexander Chesney, one of Ferguson's officers, remembered how he fought Cleveland, Shelby, and finally, Campbell. Although

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Draper, King's Mountain and its Heroes, 256; Summers, History of Southwest Virginia and Washington County, 327.

⁹¹

David Beattie's Certificate, 1813, 8 DD 38 (6), Draper Manuscripts.

⁹²

Draper, King's Mountain and its Heroes, 268.

he opposed Campbell "with success," Chesney wrote that "By this time the Americans who had been repulsed regained their position, and sheltered by the trees poured in a destructive fire. In this manner the engagement was maintained for an hour, the mountaineers flying when in danger from a bayonet charge, and returned as soon as the British faced about to repel another of their party."⁹³

Three times the tory militia and Provincial Rangers made counter-attacks on Campbell's Washington column, each time driving the patriots back down the sloping ridge. "Our guns being rifles," wrote one militiaman, "we were obliged to retreat."⁹⁴ In the first charge "The Washington regiment... was met by the British regulars (Provincial Rangers) with fixed Bayonets and forced to retreat to the foot of the mountain where they were rallied by their gallant commander and some of his active officers...."⁹⁵

Because each tory charge was recalled to defend the ridge in another spot, the attacks were only "partial checks" to Campbell's advance.⁹⁶ Indeed,

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Katherine Keough White, The King's Mountain Men: The Story of the Battle with Sketches of the American Soldiers who Took Part (Baltimore, 1966), 111-112.

⁹⁴

James Crow's Statement, n.d., 8 DD 68, Draper Manuscripts.

⁹⁵

Isaac Shelby to Arthur Campbell, Oct. 12, 1780, Campbell-Preston Papers, II.

⁹⁶

Samuel Newell's Statement, April 24, 1823, 3 DD 219-224, Draper Manuscripts.

one of Campbell's privates, James Crow, later wrote that "the moment we started back, the enemy returned to their post on top of the mountain. We ran down the mountain a small distance, not more than twenty or thirty paces."⁹⁷

Nevertheless, Campbell was active in stemming the retreat of his soldiers. In the charges up the mountain one man recalled that Campbell was "so much advanced in front as to be in danger from the fire of his own men."⁹⁸ In the subsequent retreats down the ridge, another private remembered, he was "on foot, pursuing his men at a quick gait, calling upon them to halt."⁹⁹ Major William Edmiston later wrote that Campbell was "gallantly rallying the men" in three tory charges, and private William Moore also recounted that this service was performed in "the most gallant manner."¹⁰⁰ He was, wrote Moore, "during the whole time...busily engaged in encouraging his men, and leading them up the mountain."¹⁰¹

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James Crow's Statement, May 6, 1813, 3 DD 198-201, Ibid.

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Samuel Newell's Statement, April 24, 1823, 3 DD 219-224, Ibid.

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Henry Dickenson's Statement, May 27, 1823, 3 DD 206-210, Ibid.

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William Edmiston's Certificate, n.d., 3 DD 215, Ibid.; William Moore's Certificate, June 5, 1823, Ibid.

¹⁰¹

Ibid.

Campbell was most influential in stopping the third, and final, tory charge. The Washington regiment was thrown down the ridge to a small creek at its base. At first, Major Edmiston endeavored to rally the fleeing troops, "but did not succeed until Col. Campbell came along the lines...." Campbell immediately ordered his men to "Halt!" and to "Return my brave fellows, and you will drive the enemy immediately." To at least one of Campbell's soldiers "it appeared as soon as they heard his voice they halted, returned, renewed the attack and drove the enemy along the mountain."¹⁰²

Although the patriot riflemen were pressing Ferguson on four sides, it was some time before Captain DePeyster (his second in command) could convince him that the only way to save the command was by an orderly retreat through a weak portion of Campbell's extended lines.¹⁰³ But Ferguson, not wanting to fall into the hands of the over-mountain men he had previously threatened, tried to escape on horseback with a handful of companions down the southeast part of the ridge. However, a wounded mountaineer named Gilliland saw Ferguson's flight and asked a nearby rifleman, Robert Young, if he could kill the British officer. "I'll try and see what Sweet Lips can do," replied Young, who apparently found his mark, along with a half dozen others.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰²David Campbell's Statement, n.d., 8 DD 68, Ibid.¹⁰³Draper, King's Mountain and its Heroes, 274.¹⁰⁴Summers, History of Southwest Virginia and Washington County,

After Ferguson's death the tory resistance quickly fell apart. Campbell's final charge carried his regiment up the ridge to the summit, where he engaged DePeyster in the last major action of the battle. "Come on--come on, my brave fellows," shouted Campbell, "another gun--another gun will do it...we must have them out of this."¹⁰⁵ With his men and some of Shelby's that were "all mixed together," Campbell "was pressing on with all speed he could towards the enemy."¹⁰⁶ A fire fight developed at forty yards which grew into the hottest part of the entire engagement, but Campbell's rifles finally forced DePeyster's muskets to retire toward their camp on the northeast end of the ridge.¹⁰⁷

With Cleveland, Shelby, and Sevier converging with Campbell on the camp, the tory retreat soon turned into a rout. The loyalists passed through their camp and on to their wagon park, "where they formed and fired a few rounds" from behind the wagons, but they were soon driven down into a little hollow where many were killed and the remainder were demoralized.¹⁰⁸ Finding themselves surrounded--they had run directly into Cleveland's men--some

¹⁰⁵

Samuel Newell's Statement, April 24, 1823, 3 DD 219-224, Draper Manuscripts.

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Rutledge to David Campbell, May 27, 1813, 3 DD 204, John McCulloch's Certificate, May 22, 1813, 3 DD 203, Ibid.

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Draper, King's Mountain and its Heroes, 278

¹⁰⁸

James Crow's Statement, n.d., 8 DD 68, Draper Manuscripts; Draper, King's Mountain and its Heroes, 279.

tories raised white handkerchiefs on swords or muskets and called for quarter. Most of them, however, "grounded their arms and raised the white flag," but as Private Crow remembered, "the flag fell immediately and another was raised."¹⁰⁹

Henry Dickenson, a rifleman, saw the first white flag and called to Campbell that the enemy had surrendered. "He walked up to me quickly," wrote Dickenson, "took me by the hand, and seemed glad by his manner that I was safe."¹¹⁰ There was little time, however, to linger over the safety of acquaintances, because the disorganized patriots continued to fire indiscriminately into the huddled mass of tories. Some, having lost their officers, shot down their enemies because they knew not what else to do. Others were urged to murder tories by memories of the Waxhaws massacre the previous summer, and some were even heard to shout, "Give them Buford's pay!"¹¹¹ The most excusable reason for the killings was that Ferguson had cut down two

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Summers, History of Southwest Virginia and Washington County, 324-325; James Crow's Statement, May 6, 1813, 3 DD 198-201, Draper Manuscripts.

¹¹⁰

Henry Dickenson's Affidavit, May 27, 1823, 3 DD 206-210, Ibid.

¹¹¹

Summers, History of Southwest Virginia and Washington County, 324-325.

white flags earlier in the action, and many patriots really were not quite sure if the surrender was for real.¹¹²

Campbell did his best to stop the butchery. Seeing one of his men, Andrew Evans, about to fire into the tory ranks, Campbell knocked his gun into the air and cried, "Evans, For God's sake don't shoot--it is murder to kill them now, for they have raised the flag!"¹¹³ Then, a "very hoarse" Campbell rushed along the lines waving his sword and calling out to "Cease firing! For God's sake, cease firing!"¹¹⁴ When this exhortation failed to stop the shooting, Campbell and a few others "rushed through among us" and "engaged in securing the prisoners."¹¹⁵ With several of their own officers among the tories, the patriots finally ceased firing.

Soon afterward, Captain DePeyster asked one of Campbell's soldiers, David Beattie, "Where is your General?" Beattie pointed to his colonel,

¹¹² Draper, King's Mountain and its Heroes, 282.

¹¹³ Andrew Evans' Certificate, June 27, 1823, 8 DD 46, Draper Manuscripts.

¹¹⁴ George Rutledge to David Campbell, May 27, 1813, 8 DD 37, Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid: David Campbell's Statement, n.d., 8 DD 68, Ibid.

still unhorsed and in his shirtsleeves, collar open and covered with sweat and the grime of battle.¹¹⁶ DePeyster and several other tory officers approached with their swords, "holding them about the middle, with the hilt down." Henry Dickenson watched Campbell hold out his hand to receive them "when the officers drew back apparently as if they did not intend to deliver the swords to him--supposing, as I presume, that he was not the commander by his dress...." Dickenson saw Campbell's "countenance alter" and became apprehensive that "he would use some violence which they might return," so he put his rifle to his shoulder, at the same time mentioning that Campbell was his commander. The officers then bowed to Campbell and delivered their swords, which the patriot colonel tucked under his arm.¹¹⁷

Captain DePeyster then confronted Campbell with the disgraceful murder of the surrendering prisoners. "Col. Campbell," he said, "It was a damned affair." Campbell was aware of the atrocities his men had committed but chose to ignore the remark instead of answering it. When DePeyster repeated it Campbell breeched the conversation by ordering the tory officers to "Rank by yourselves." He then told the prisoners to "take off your hats," and then to "sit down."¹¹⁸ Campbell then met Ensign Robert Campbell, who was

¹¹⁶

David Beattie's Certificate, n.d., 8 DD 38 (6), Ibid.

¹¹⁷

Henry Dickinson's Affidavit, May 27, 1823, 3 DD 206-210, Ibid.

¹¹⁸

James Crow's Statement, May 6, 1823, 3 DD 198-201, Ibid.

searching the ridge for wounded patriots. The two men shook hands, after which the colonel ordered the ensign to "mount one of the enemy's horses and bring in all the men I could to guard the enemy."¹¹⁹

The captives were soon surrounded by mountain militia four ranks deep, and Campbell subsequently proposed three huzzas for liberty. About this time 100 tory foragers returned to their camp with muskets blazing. Campbell reasoned that Banastre Tarleton was at hand with his cavalry and that the patriot army could not fight Tarleton's advance while more than 600 prisoners, who could easily procure weapons that were scattered about, endangered his rear. Campbell's reaction was exactly like that of Henry V's had been at Agincourt in 1415. He ordered Thomas Brandon and James Williams to fire company volleys on the prisoners, and a "considerable" number (estimated as high as 100 men) were killed.¹²⁰

However, even before the imagined threat of Tarleton's cavalry was discovered to be an insignificant tory foraging party, Isaac Shelby argued with Campbell that the killing of the prisoners would only force them to fight back. "Good God!" cried Shelby, "What can we do in this confusion?" The logic of the query made sense. The killings were stopped and the surviving prisoners were marched to a spot where they could not easily reach their discarded arms.¹²¹

¹¹⁹

Robert Campbell's Statement, n.d., 8 DD 68, Ibid.

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Draper, King's Mountain and its Heroes, 284-285.

¹²¹

Ibid., 286.

The attack by the tory foragers was easily beaten off about sixty-five minutes after the battle began. Afterwards, the spoils of battle were taken by the officers on a first come, first serve, basis. Shelby obtained the silver whistle which Ferguson used to signal his troops, Joseph McDowell got Ferguson's silver dinner service, and Sevier got the major's silk sash and commission and DePeyster's sword. Campbell procured only a portion of Ferguson's correspondence.¹²²

A search was subsequently made for the dead and wounded and it was ascertained that the tories had lost 7 officers and 218 men killed, 163 wounded, and 648 were taken prisoner.¹²³ Patriot casualties are uncertain. Lyman C. Draper estimated that 26 mountaineers were killed and 36 were wounded. However, higher casualty figures are generally accepted which place the American losses at around 90 men.¹²⁴ J. W. Fortescue placed the whig casualties at 88, and added that "the only marvel is that it should have been so great, for their exploit was as fine an example as can be found of the power of woodcraft, marksmanship, and sportsmanship in war."¹²⁵

¹²²

Ibid., 307-308.

¹²³

Clark, ed. State Records of North Carolina, Official Report of the Battle of King's Mountain taken from the Virginia Gazette, Nov. 18, 1780 and the Massachusetts Spy, Nov. 30, 1780, XV, 163-165.

¹²⁴

Draper, King's Mountain and its Heroes, 305; Bruce, The Battle of King's Mountain, 4.

¹²⁵

J. W. Fortesque, A History of the British Army, 2nd ed. (London, 1911), III, 329.

One certainty about the patriot casualties is that a third of the wounded and half of the dead were from the Washington regiment. Among those killed were a captain, three lieutenants, and five ensigns.¹²⁶ Campbell himself lost "several of my brave friends, whose death I much lament," and he was especially saddened by the deaths of Captain William Edmiston, Robert Edmiston, and Lieutenant Reese Bowan.¹²⁷ Campbell had, in fact, witnessed William Edmiston's passing. He had found the mortally wounded captain after the battle, and had knelt beside him long enough for Edmiston to kiss his hand and then expire.¹²⁸

Of more importance than the casualties at King's Mountain are the affects of the battle on the American Revolution. Cornwallis, wrote John Alden in The South in the Revolution, envisioned a massive rising of backwoodsmen and retreated to Winnsboro, where British operations stalled until General Alexander Leslie's arrival with 2,200 men in December.¹²⁹ Fortescue likewise felt that King's Mountain "shattered" Cornwallis' plans "at a stroke," adding that the loss of Ferguson and 1,100 tories was irreparable.¹³⁰

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Publications of the Washington County Historical Society (Abingdon, Va., n.d.), 23.

¹²⁷

William Campbell to Arthur Campbell, Oct. 20, 1780, Campbell-Preston Papers, II.

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Draper, King's Mountain and its Heroes, 256.

¹²⁹

Alden, The South in the Revolution, 250-251.

¹³⁰

Fortesque, History of the British Army, III, 330.

However, while the battle did influence Cornwallis' movements, it did not decide his ultimate strategy, and merely delayed the British advance through North Carolina and into Virginia for three months.¹³¹

Nevertheless, while the victory of October 7 encouraged the patriots to reorganize for a new offensive against the British army, it stalled Tory recruiting in the south. King's Mountain, recorded Banastre Tarleton, "communicated fear" to the loyalists and totally ruined his enlistment of backwoods Tories.¹³² Cornwallis noted this same affect, and shortly after the battle wrote to Sir Henry Clinton that his militia was "so totally dispirited by Ferguson's defeat that in the whole District, I cannot assemble one hundred men."¹³³

Personally, King's Mountain gave William Campbell historical notoriety, additional military advancement, and the promise of a career in politics. Carl S. Driver, Sevier's biographer, might have been writing about Campbell when he wrote that the battle "introduced him (Sevier) to the country

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Brue, The Battle of King's Mountain, 4.

¹³²

Banastre Tarleton, A History of the Campaigns of 1780 and 1781 in the Southern Provinces of North America (New York, 1968), 166.

¹³³

Lord Cornwallis to Sir Henry Clinton, n.d., 8 DD 43, Draper Manuscripts.

at large and made him a respected character in all parts of the nation."¹³⁴ Likewise, two of Shelby's biographers wrote that military prizes, political appointments, and elective office "flung themselves like magnets against his sudden glory."¹³⁵ Although Campbell himself reaped several benefits from his success at King's Mountain, because he died less than a year later the results of his fame could never be fully realized.

Although Campbell probably never knew it, there was, for him, an adverse result of King's Mountain, which stemmed from a minor incident in the battle. It will be recalled that early in the action Campbell sent his servant, John Broady, to the rear with his horse. However, instead of riding the horse to safety, Broady halted just 200 yards behind the lines and watched the progress of the battle. It is possible that because most officers "knew Campbell by his bald faced black horse," both Shelby and Sevier mistook Broady for Campbell and thought that, for at least part of the fight, Campbell was a "respectable distance" from the action.¹³⁶ It is more probable, however, that the North Carolinians mistook Campbell because of his uncanny resemblance to the tall Broady, a mulatto. The resemblance between the two men was, in

¹³⁴

Driver, John Sevier, 60.

¹³⁵Wrobel and Grider, Isaac Shelby, 60.¹³⁶

Samuel Newell to Francis Preston, May 1823, 3 DD 225-229, Draper Manuscripts.

fact, something of a joke in the patriot army. Colonel Cleveland had once even pretended to mistake Campbell for his slave. "Helloo, Jack," he called out, "Did you take good care of my noble Roebuck when you fed your master's horse?" Then with mock surprise--"Ah! I ask your pardon, Colonel Campbell; you and your servant look so much alike, led to the mistake!"¹³⁷

At any rate, for many years after the battle both Shelby and Sevier harbored animosity toward Campbell, yet it was kept silent in respect for their dead comrade. However, in 1801 an incident occurred which reawakened their dormant antagonisms. In that year the Virginia Legislature resolved to purchase a horse, a sword, and a brace of pistols for William Campbell Preston, Campbell's eldest grandson.¹³⁸ When Shelby learned about this he wrote two bitter letters to Sevier. Each one recalled how "Campbell had remained 200 yards behind the lines" at King's Mountain, and how Shelby and Sevier were more deserving of credit than was Campbell. Although the letters were private they were printed after Sevier's death in 1815 by a Tennessee historian who had access to Sevier's papers. The allegations could only be received one way. "The public mind was astounded!"¹³⁹

¹³⁷Draper, King's Mountain and its Heroes, 267.¹³⁸

James Monroe to Robert Livingston, Dec. 15, 1801, 8 DD 45,

Draper Manuscripts.

¹³⁹William Martin to Draper, Dec. 1, 1842, 14 DD 113, Ibid.

W. C. Preston's response was to collect and publish (in 1822) a number of certificates by participants in the battle. On November 5 of that year the Richmond Enquirer carried Preston's "Documents referred to in the defense of Col. Campbell against the charges of Governor Shelby," which presented statements by John McCulloch, James Keys, James Snodgrass, James Crow, and David Beattie which Preston supposed would vindicate Campbell.¹⁴⁰ Each certificate testified either to Campbell's "fearless intrepidity" in the "most dangerous and exposed situations" or the fact that the insinuations of his cowardice were unknown until "the unfortunate controversy."¹⁴¹ Other certificates were also produced which attested to Campbell's bravery, but one stands out more than the others. On May 28, 1823 Benjamin White, a veteran of King's Mountain who also fought at Germantown, Princeton, Brandywine, and in Indian battles from 1774 to 1813, stated that in all the above actions he "never saw a braver man than Colonel Wm. Campbell."¹⁴²

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Ibid; "Documents Referred to in the Defense of Col. Campbell Against the Charges of Governor Shelby," from the Richmond Enquirer, Nov. 5, 1822, 17 DD 26, Ibid.

¹⁴¹

David Beattie's Certificate, n.d., 8 DD 38 (6), Ibid; James Snodgrass' Certificate, May 4, 1813, 8 DD 28 (8), Henry Dickinson's Affidavit, May 27, 1823, 3 DD 206-210, William Moore's Certificate, June 5, 1823, 8 DD 50, Ibid.

¹⁴²

Benjamin White's Certificate, May 28, 1823, 8 DD 54, Ibid.

Naturally, Preston's efforts to clear his grandfather's name initiated a rebuttal by Shelby. "He went to work," remembered William Martin, "procured and published a good many Contradictory Certificates" in an 1823 pamphlet "and, I believe, there was a rejoinder or two; but after awhile, all died away (everybody being tired of talking about it) leaving Campbell's character as pure as it found it."¹⁴³ Indeed, when John Campbell asked Thomas Jefferson if he remembered hearing allegations against Campbell, the ex-governor replied negatively and added: "the descendents of Col. Campbell may rest their heads on the pillow of his renown; History has consecrated, and will forever preserve it in the faithful annals of a grateful country."¹⁴⁴

If Shelby and Sevier had doubts about Campbell's bravery on the night of October 7, 1780, the men in the ranks did not. One, David Beattie, heard "a number of men" profess their admiration for Campbell's actions in the battle.¹⁴⁵ Another, though unknown, soldier wrote soon after that "Too much cannot be said in praise of our brave commander, who exerted himself

¹⁴³

Martin to Draper, Dec. 1, 1842, 14 DD 113, Isaac Shelby's Pamphlet, April 1823, 7 DD 6, Ibid.

¹⁴⁴

Jefferson to John Campbell, Nov. 10, 1822, 3 DD 205, Ibid.

¹⁴⁵

David Beattie's Certificate, May 4, 1813, 3 DD 196, Ibid.

animating the men to victory."¹⁴⁶ Still another, Samuel Newell, who was left with the wounded several days after the battle near Burke Courthouse, complimented his colonel in a discussion among a group of North Carolinians: "Boys, he told them, "I believe you all did your duty, and deserve well for it; but let me tell you, had it not been for Campbell and his Virginians, Ferguson would have been on the mountain yet...."¹⁴⁷

Certainly, if Shelby was upset by what he supposed to be Campbell's cowardice he did not show it, and after the prisoners were safely corralled under a heavy guard, he and Campbell toured the patriot bivouac together.¹⁴⁸ They halted near Dysart's company and sat down by a camp-fire for a moment.¹⁴⁹ They did the same near Colvill's company. One of Colvill's wounded soldiers saw Shelby and Campbell approach, and asked a man who was attending him to

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Clark, ed. State Records of North Carolina, Account of the March and Battle of King's Mountain by an Unknown Member of Campbell's Regiment, n.d., XV, 136.

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Samuel Newell's Statement, April 24, 1823, 3 DD 219-224, Draper Manuscripts.

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Summers, History of Southwest Virginia and Washington County, 328.

¹⁴⁹

Israel Hayter's Certificate, Nov. 19, 1822, 8 DD 51, Draper Manuscripts.

pull out two saddles for the officers to sit on. "Now," said Campbell when he seated himself, "this is the first time I have seated myself since yesterday morning before day, except on my horse's back."¹⁵⁰

Later, Campbell must have had eerie memories of the night he had spent nearly six years before at Point Pleasant. The men slept amid the cries of the wounded, both those patriots who had been tended and the tories who "were left weltering in their gore."¹⁵¹

Sunday, October 8, dawned sunny and warm, the first pleasant morning in several days. Still anticipating the arrival of Tarleton's calvary, the army quickly prepared to march away from King's Mountain.¹⁵² The wounded were placed on horse-litters and the prisoners were made to carry two of their own flintless muskets. One prisoner, a camp follower sometimes alleged to be Ferguson's mistress, was soon discovered. The other officers urged Campbell to treat her as a prisoner of war, but he argued that the woman should be paroled. "She is only a woman," he explained. "Our mothers were women. We must let her go." The female prisoner was subsequently marched with the other captives to Burke County, and there paroled to Charlotte.¹⁵³

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Samuel Newell's Statement, April 24, 1823, 3 DD 219-224, Ibid.

¹⁵¹

Shelby to Hill, March 4, 1814, Shelby-Hart Papers.

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Draper, King's Mountain and its Heroes, 316.

¹⁵³

Dykeman, With Fire and Sword, 68.

Before the army marched Campbell ordered William Snodgrass and a companion to ride ahead to inform the footmen who had been left at the Cowpens that the battle was won, and that they "need not hurry" to Campbell's assistance.¹⁵⁴ He also directed Colonel Cleveland that if Tarleton appeared, the prisoners should immediately be killed.¹⁵⁵ After the seventeen captured tory wagons (which would impede the column's progress) were dragged over the camp-fires and burned, the army moved off at ten o'clock. A prisoner, Captain Alexander Chesney, described the plight of the tories on this march: "We marched at a rapid pace towards Gilbert Town between double lines of Americans, the officers in the rear and obliged to carry two rifles each, which was my fate although wounded and stripped of my shoes and buckles...."¹⁵⁶

Campbell himself did not march with the column, but remained behind with "a few patriots and a few tories" to bury the dead. They dug large, though shallow, pits near Ferguson's camp, but no proper burials were

¹⁵⁴

William Snodgrass to David Campbell, Dec. 15, 1846, 3 DD 242, Draper Manuscripts.

¹⁵⁵

Draper, King's Mountain and its Heroes, 320.

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White, The King's Mountain Men, p. 112.

performed, the dead being simply covered with blankets and a light mantle of dirt and stones.¹⁵⁷ Indeed, Campbell's contingent was able to rejoin the main army by evening on the east bank of the Broad River at the Cherokee Ford.¹⁵⁸

The following day the prisoners received their first provisions in two days, and the army made only slow progress, marching two and one-half miles up the Broad River.¹⁵⁹ However, on October 10 the army made twenty miles. The next day the army marched twelve miles, through Gilbert Town and on to Colonel John Walker's on the east side of Cane Creek, five miles from Gilbert Town. On this march the prisoners were detailed to walk ahead of the patriot army, near Campbell and his officers, and 200 privates were ordered to "mount guard" around them each morning. The unruly mountain men had apparently disturbed the prisoners on previous marches, even to the extent of killing several, and Campbell's Orders of the Day requested "the officers

¹⁵⁷

Snodgrass to David Campbell, Dec. 15, 1846, 3 DD 242, Draper Manuscripts.

¹⁵⁸

Ibid.

¹⁵⁹

Clark, ed. State Records of North Carolina, British Account of King's Mountain from Scots Magazine, Charleston, S.C., Jan. 1781, XV, 183.

of all ranks to endeavor to restrain the disorderly manner of slaughtering and disturbing the prisoners. If it cannot be prevented by moderate measures, such effectual punishment shall be executed upon delinquents as will put a stop to it."¹⁶⁰

The army remained in camp at Walker's on the 12th and 13th, primarily to make arrangements for the wounded who, it was decided, would be left behind to allow the column to move at a faster pace. Campbell ordered each company to make preparations for the billeting of its wounded, and instructed the regimental quartermasters to "call upon the companies to which the wounded belong for any necessary assistance for their removal."¹⁶¹

On Saturday, October 14, the army marched from Walker's to Bickerstaff's Old Fields, six miles northeast on Robertson's Creek and miles from Rutherfordton. The day was an eventful one. Campbell sent "small parties" out to secure provisions and ordered that the ammunition captured at King's Mountain be "properly issued to the troops who have not yet drawn any of it."¹⁶²

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Ibid; Campbell's Orders of the Day, Oct. 11, 1780, 115.

¹⁶¹

Ibid.; Campbell's Orders for the Day, Oct. 13, 1780, 118.

¹⁶²

Draper, King's Mountain and its Heroes, 328; Clark, ed. State Records of North Carolina, Campbell's Orders of the Day, Oct. 14, 1790, XV, 118-119.

Also, to curtail desertions and felonies "committed by those who desert," Campbell asked his officers to "exert themselves in suppressing this abominable practice, degrading to the name of soldier, by keeping their soldiers close in camp, and preventing their straggling off upon our marches." To accomplish this Campbell called for "proper regimental returns" every morning.¹⁶³

Sometime during the day Campbell was approached by Cleveland and Shelby, with several other North Carolinians, who complained that there were a number of murderers and horse thieves among the prisoners who deserved to die.¹⁶⁴ It was "well known" to the patriots that "after Gates' defeat the British commander, Cornwallis, set the example in a summary way without trial," but they were probably more angered by news received at Gilbert Town that eleven whigs had been hanged several days before.¹⁶⁵ Sevier produced a copy of North Carolina law which authorized two state magistrates to summon

¹⁶³

Ibid.

¹⁶⁴

Draper, King's Mountain and its Heroes, 330.

¹⁶⁵

Arthur Campbell to David Campbell, Oct. 18, 1810, 8 DD 36,

Draper Manuscripts.

a jury and exercise the power of execution. Campbell, a Virginian, could not officially sanction Cleveland's and Shelby's actions, but had no choice but to comply when a twelve-man court was convened to examine the accused tories.¹⁶⁶

Although the trials were conducted under nominal civil authority, a number of officers were, like Cleveland, also magistrates, and the examinations were little better, wrote one tory prisoner, than a "mock court-martial."¹⁶⁷ By evening on October 14, thirty-six men were condemned to die.

The harsh sentences have been justified by several explanations. Arthur Campbell, who in 1810 secured documents "to explain and justify" the Bickerstaff executions, viewed them as necessary retaliatory measures. Isaac Shelby agreed that after the British realized what could happen to the King's Mountain prisoners, they stopped hanging patriots in the Carolinas.¹⁶⁹

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Draper, King's Mountain and its Heroes, 331-332.

¹⁶⁷

Clark, ed. State Records of North Carolina, British Account of the Battle of King's Mountain from Scots Magazine, Charleston, S.C., Jan. 1781, XV, 183.

¹⁶⁸

Arthur Campbell to David Campbell, Oct. 18, 1810, 8 DD 36, Draper Manuscripts.

¹⁶⁹

Wrobel and Grider, Isaac Shelby, 58.

William Johnson may have presented the best argument in The Life and Correspondence of Nathanael Greene. Not only would the prisoners have been exchanged to commit additional atrocities at a later date, but beside that fact, wrote Johnson, "capture in the arms does not exempt murderers and deserters."¹⁷⁰

The patriot militia formed square four ranks deep around a large oak near camp, and the condemned were brought forward by torchlight in groups of three until nine had been executed. Five of the nine men were officers, and each one denounced American liberty and proclaimed his allegiance to George III before hanging.¹⁷¹ Tory Lieutenant Anthony Allaire described their ends: "They died like Romans."¹⁷²

When the next three captives were brought forward one of the condemned, Isaac Baldwin, was embraced by his brother, who also cut his bonds. That the two men were able to bolt through four ranks of Americans is usually attributed to the touching scene between the two brothers that had

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William Johnson, Sketches of the Life and Correspondence of Nathanael Green (New York, 1973), I, 311.

¹⁷¹

James Snodgrass' Certificate, n.d., 3 DD 255-257, Draper Manuscripts.

¹⁷²

Anthony Allaire, Diary of Anthony Allaire (New York, 1968 reprint), 32.

reduced the entire patriot command to tears.¹⁷³ Nevertheless, Baldwin's two companions were prepared for execution. However, Shelby stepped forward and proposed that the executions be stopped; that enough of an example had been made. This was agreed to, but again Campbell had no official say in the commutation of the sentences. He had, in fact, little to say about the whole incident, and James Snodgrass, a guard for the condemned men who stood close to Campbell during the executions, "did not hear him make any particular remark."¹⁷⁴

There is an interesting sidelight to the Bickerstaff executions. Many years later one of Campbell's grandchildren was breakfasting at an inn near King's Mountain. While eating he noticed an old woman turn frequently to look at him. At length he enquired as to what caused the woman's peculiar behavior, and she replied that he resembled the man she feared most on earth. "And who is that?" he asked. To his astonishment the reply was, "Colonel Campbell, that hung my husband at King's Mountain."¹⁷⁵

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Draper, King's Mountain and its Heroes, 342.

¹⁷⁴

James Snodgrass Certificate, n.d., 3 DD 255-257, Draper Manuscripts.

¹⁷⁵

Lossing, Field Book of the Revolution, II, 426.

The commutation of the sentences at Bickerstaff's had one immediate effect. At two o'clock on the morning of October 15 one of the men who Shelby had saved visited that officer's tent to warn Shelby that a loyalist woman had informed him that Tarleton's Legion was close at hand. The camp was immediately roused to prepare for the march, which began at five o'clock that morning. Although rain fell "incessantly" during the day, the army pushed on "without stopping" to the Catawba, which was crossed at the Island Ford, and camped at Quaker Meadows, thirty-two miles from Bickerstaff's.¹⁷⁶

On the morning of October 16 the Americans were relieved to discover that the Catawba had swollen beyond fording levels during the night. Now safe from Tarleton's advance, it was agreed to send home Lacey's South Carolinians, Shelby's and Sevier's North Carolinians, and the footmen of the Virginia regiment, while the mounted men of Campbell's, Cleveland's, and Winston's commands (and any others who wished to stay) remained.¹⁷⁷ As it turned out, the safety Campbell had found by crossing the Catawba was from an imaginary foe. Tarleton had not started from Charlotte until October 10. His orders were to join Ferguson, but retreat "if after the junction advantage could not be obtained over the mountaineers." After learning of Ferguson's

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Clark, ed. State Records of North Carolina, Isaac Shelby's Account of King's Mountain, n.d., XV, 109.

¹⁷⁷

Draper, King's Mountain and its Heroes, 349; Clark, ed. State Records of North Carolina, Isaac Shelby's Account of King's Mountain, n.d., XV, 110.

defeat Tarleton was, on October 14, recalled to Charlotte, from where he retreated with Cornwallis to Winnsboro, South Carolina.¹⁷⁸ As one of Campbell's men recalled amusingly, "...Lord Cornwallis was running in fright in one direction, and we mountaineers as eagerly in the other."¹⁷⁹

On the 16th the army marched to the head of the Yadkin, forded Upper Creek, and camped at a tory plantation near John's River. Tory escapes were multiplied and Campbell was forced to issue orders to kill any prisoners who were caught escaping.¹⁸⁰ There were two reasons for the increased escapes. First, since Bickerstaff's the hardships of the march had been "incredible to relate." Anthony Allaire later related that the prisoners were forced to pay thirty-five "Continental dollars" for a single ear of corn, and forty for a drink of water, not being allowed to drink even when fording a river! Furthermore, the undisciplined patriot militia continued to kill or injure tories by walking among them and striking them with their swords "at will."¹⁸¹

178

Bass, The Green Dragoon, 108.

179

Draper, King's Mountain and its Heroes, 346.

180

Ibid., 350.

181

Anthony Allaire's Account of King's Mountain, from Rivington's Royal Gazette, Feb. 24, 1781, 4 DD 6, Draper Manuscripts.

Perhaps too, the prisoners had heard Campbell's orders to kill them when Tarleton attacked.¹⁸² A second reason for tory escapes was because the patriot army was hardly stronger than the tories it guarded. Indeed, as Shelby observed, the command was rapidly disbanding "like all other partisan bodies, called out for a peculiar emergency."¹⁸³

On October 17 the army marched fifteen miles through Happy Valley and over Warrior Mountain, and the following day forded Elk and Warrior Creek and camped on the west bank of Moravian Creek, just west of Wilkes Courthouse. On the 19th the army marched through Wilkes Courthouse, and having marched sixteen miles, bivouaced at Haygood's Plantation on Brier Creek.¹⁸⁴ Here Campbell discharged more of his Virginians, who left on the following morning for Washington County. They carried with them Campbell's dispatch for Arthur Campbell. "Ferguson and his party are no more circumstances to injure the citizens of America!" it began. Campbell then described the battle of King's Mountain, and lamented (or boasted) that "My

182

Clark, ed. State Records of North Carolina, Campbell's Orders of the Day, Oct. 14, 1780, XV, 119.

183

Ibid., Isaac Shelby's Account of King's Mountain, n.d., 110.

184

Draper, King's Mountain and its Heroes, 350.

regiment has suffered more than any other in the action." He informed his cousin that he was uncertain exactly what his destination was, merely admitting that "I must proceed with the prisoners until I can dispose of them. Probably," he added, "I may go to Richmond in Virginia."¹⁸⁵

During the next several days the army marched slowly to Scalles' Plantation, through Salem, and on to Bethabara, arriving at that place on October 24. There, "certain prisoners" were allowed on DePeyster's recommendation to Campbell, to go without guards and find lodging in "Different Houses."¹⁸⁶ Lieutenant Allaire and Dr. Uzal Johnson were billeted together in a Bethabara house when they found there freedom abruptly interrupted. They were "turned out of our bed at an unreasonable hour of the night and threatened with immediate death if we did not make room for some of Campbell's officers."¹⁸⁷ Fortunately for Allaire, while the whig captain was "strutting about in a cowardly manner," he was able to escape to Colonel Campbell, who was awakened and had "the ruffian turned out of the room."¹⁸⁸

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Gibbes, Documentary History of the American Revolution, William Campbell to Arthur Campbell, Oct. 20, 1780, II, 141.

¹⁸⁶

Draper, King's Mountain and its Heroes, 350; Allaire, Diary of Anthony Allaire, 33; Allaire's Account of King's Mountain from Rivington's Royal Gazette, Feb. 24, 1781, 4 DD 6, Draper Manuscripts.

¹⁸⁷

Ibid.

¹⁸⁸

Allaire, Diary of Anthony Allaire, 33.

At Bethabara, Campbell, Cleveland, and Shelby (who had chosen to stay with the army) wrote their official report on the army's progress from September 26 to October 7, and it was decided that Campbell should visit Gates' headquarters at Hillsborough to "receive General Gates' directions" on the disposal of the prisoners.¹⁸⁹ On October 26 Campbell therefore issued his last orders to the army. He directed his officers to remain in camp after eight o'clock in the evening until "after guard mounting" each morning. He also ordered that full rations be issued to the prisoners and expressed his desire that neither insult nor violence "unmerited" would be "offered to them" and that "no unnecessary injury" be done to the area's inhabitants. Campbell gave command of the army to Colonel Cleveland. However, while Cleveland was empowered to "issue such orders as may be necessary," he would do so only "until I return," and Campbell reserved for himself the right to direct the army by letter.¹⁹⁰ It would therefore appear that since King's Mountain Campbell had gained something more than the nominal control he was given before the battle.

¹⁸⁹

Clark, ed. State Records of North Carolina, Official Report of Battle of King's Mountain taken from the Virginia Gazette, Nov. 18, 1780 and the Massachusetts Spy, Nov. 30, 1780, XV, 163-165; Gibbes, ed. Documentary History of the American Revolution, William Campbell to Jefferson, Oct. 31, 1780, II, 141.

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Clark, ed. State Records of North Carolina, Campbell's Orders of the Day, Oct. 26, 1780, XV, 172.

Campbell started off for Hillsborough on October 26. He carried with him the official report and a letter from DePeyster to Cornwallis ("to inform his Lordship of our having fallen into your hands.") which Gates was to forward to the British commander.¹⁹¹

Campbell arrived in Hillsborough on the night of October 30. There he was informed that Gates had written to William Preston on October 12 to build a barracks for the King's Mountain prisoners in Montgomery County.¹⁹² However, on October 27 Preston had denied Gates' request for reasons of "Age and Inability for such service," and because Montgomery County was a poor place to confine the prisoners since it had more tories "than any other I know in Virginia."¹⁹³

Gates was faced with two alternatives. One was to find a secure place like, as Preston suggested, Botetourt Courthouse, farther up the Valley to confine the prisoners. The second alternative was suggested by William Campbell, who felt that the "spirit of the tory captives" was broken so completely that "they will agree to any terms." He therefore proposed that the prisoners should be marched north--"away from their country"--to be enlisted

¹⁹¹

Ibid., Abraham DePeyster to Gates, Nov. 3, 1780, XIV, 724.

¹⁹²

Draper, King's Mountain and its Heroes, 352.

¹⁹³

Preston to Gates, Oct. 27, 1780, 5 QQ 84, Draper Manuscripts.

for service in or near Washington's army. This, he was certain, would discourage the tories from deserting after their enlistment in the Continental Army.¹⁹⁴

Gates decided to adopt neither Preston's nor Campbell's plan, but instead to send Campbell to Richmond, where the matter could be referred to Governor Jefferson. Thus ended William Campbell's field service in the King's Mountain campaign. Exactly thirty-six days had passed since the gathering of the mountain men at Sycamore Shoals. In that short time Campbell had been influential in keeping the patriot army together and in order. He had undoubtedly helped in the formulation of campaign strategy, and in the encircling tactics of the battle itself. At King's Mountain he had personally led the largest American unit and nominally commanded the entire patriot army in a decisive victory that was, at the least, astounding. Still, the campaign was a joint effort, not only by Campbell, Cleveland, Shelby, Sevier, and the other American commanders, but by the individual frontier farmers in the ranks as well. Indeed, before Campbell left Hillsborough he sent a congratulatory message from General Gates and Sumner which "transmitted...a State of the Provings of our little Party to the westward." Understating the campaign and his own role in the victory, Campbell summed up the battle of King's Mountain. "I flatter myself," wrote Campbell on October 31, "we have much relieved that part of the country from its late distresses."¹⁹⁵

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Boyd, ed. Jefferson Papers, Jefferson to Samuel Huntington, Nov. 7, 1780, IV, 98-99.

¹⁹⁵

William Campbell to Preston, Oct. 31, 1780, Campbell-Preston Papers, II.

Chapter VIII: Between Campaigns, November-December 1780

William Campbell left Hillsborough, probably on November 1. With him he carried Gates' victory proclamation of King's Mountain (addressed to Washington and the Congress), his own "Authentic and Particular Account of that affair," and Gates' letter of thanks to "the officers commanding in the late defeat of Maj. Ferguson."¹ The latter document expressed Gates' "infinite satisfaction" with their "glorious behavior in the action," and requested Campbell to acquaint the men "with the sense I entertain of the great service they have done their country."²

Two or three days later Campbell arrived in Richmond where, according to one visitor in the city, he "very deservedly acquired universal Applause." Certainly, he added, "his success has...been productive of the most extensive & Happy Consequences."³

Campbell visited Governor Jefferson but found him to be "much at a loss what should be done as to the prisoners taken at King's Mountain."

¹ Gates to Jefferson, Nov. 1, 1780, Boyd, ed. Jefferson Papers, IV, 86; William Campbell to Jefferson, Oct. 31, 1780, Campbell-Preston Papers.

² Clark, ed. State Records of North Carolina, Campbell's Orders of the Day, Oct. 11, 1780, XV, 115.

³ Thomas Madison to Preston, Nov. 9, 1780, 5 QQ 86, Draper Manuscripts.

Jefferson agreed that Montgomery was an improper place to house the captives "because it is very disaffected," but had little to say about Gates' proposal (which Campbell had brought) to "get rid of the Burthen now upon Our Hands" by exchanging the prisoners.⁴ The Governor did admit that of the three suggestions Campbell's was the "least objectionable," and ordered the prisoners north into Virginia.⁵ Meanwhile, he referred the matter to Congress and awaited instructions on where their final destination would be.⁶

It was most likely while conferring with Jefferson that Campbell was first informed that he had been selected to command a volunteer militia corps for Gates' army. The plan to raise this corps had been devised in September by William Preston and "the officers in Montgomery County to raise

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Clark, ed. State Records of North Carolina, Isaac Shelby's Account of King's Mountain, n.d., XIV, 108-109; Gates to Jefferson, Nov. 1, 1780, Boyd, ed. Jefferson Papers, IV, 87.

5

Ibid., Jefferson to Samuel Huntington, Nov. 7, 1780, IV, 98-99.

6

Clark, ed. State Records of North Carolina, Isaac Shelby's Account of King's Mountain, XV, 108-109.

500 or even 1,000 choice Riflemen in the Counties of Augusta, Rockbridge, Botetourt, and Washington..." for three months service under the command of "an officer appointed by the government."⁷

However, on September 21 when the Council accepted the corps, it did so with a number of conditions. Not only would the militiamen be subject to the "Continental rules of war," but only two companies would be allowed to carry rifles. The corps itself was to be composed of fifty-man companies "to be commanded by Colonels William Christian and William Campbell if there be two regiments and if but one, then that one by Colonel William Christian, and Colonel Campbell to have command of the militia called from the neighboring counties."⁸ It was uncertain whether one or two "regiments" would be raised, and Jefferson wrote to Campbell the following day that "We shall be exceedingly glad if the two battalions of volunteers can be raised, as we are very desirous of availing ourselves of your personal service."⁹

7

Preston to Armstrong, Sept. 18, 1780, Campbell-Preston Papers; Preston to George Skillern, Sept. 10, 1780, 5 OQ 80, Draper Manuscripts.

8

Preston's Plan to Raise a Rifle Corps for the Southern Army, Archibald Blair, In Council, Sept. 21, 1780, 8 DD 8, Ibid.

9

Jefferson to William Campbell, Sept. 22, 1780, Boyd, ed. Jefferson Papers, III, 654-655.

The plan as revised by the Council was unacceptable to the frontiersmen for several reasons, but the main fault was that the men were to fight with "Muskets and bayonets" if these weapons could be procured. "If your men were all to carry rifles," the Governor wrote to Campbell on September 22, "they could only Store them a way under guard till their Discharge...."¹⁰ As William Campbell viewed it, this was a "high indignity to myself and the people in this and neighboring counties" "Our usefulness as a riflemen will be taken entirely away," he complained to Preston on September 29, "when muskets are stopped into our hands, and we shall be no better than a mixed multitude picked up for the regular service."¹¹

While Christian had once had "a sincere desire" to command the militia corps, he was determined not to lead it because of the Council's revisions and the misconception that Campbell would be his superior. Not only were there other, more senior, officers in the counties other than Campbell, Christian argued, but to serve under an officer who had formerly been under his command, "I consider as treatment too scornful to submit to."¹² Thus it would seem that Campbell was again offered a command, as at King's Mountain, largely by default, yet when he reached Richmond in November most

¹⁰

Ibid.

¹¹

Christian to Preston, Sept. 29, 1780, 8 DD 7, Draper Manuscripts.

¹²

Ibid.

people were pleased with the prospect. "Respecting the volunteers," wrote Colonel George Skillern from Richmond, "the brave Colo Campbell is to Command them."¹³

This, however, was not to be. Soon after his arrival in Richmond Campbell informed Jefferson that "he cannot proceed shortly to the south," and Jefferson advised Preston on November 11 that "the Lt. Colo and major may therefore suffice for the command till Colo Campbell can come on."¹⁴ Very soon afterward Campbell decided not to accept the command at all, and informed Jefferson of this in a short, concise letter: "I must beg leave to inform your Excellency that I cannot at this time accept the command you are pleased to offer me, although I entertain the highest sense of the honor done me in appointing me with it. My domestic affairs call for my attention at this time, as I have entirely neglected them."¹⁵

Although Campbell was in Richmond primarily to confer with Jefferson, he nevertheless remembered his duty as a delegate to the Legislature, and he sat for thirteen days in the House of Delegates. Considering the circumstances,

¹³

Skillern to Preston, n.d., 5 QQ 88, Ibid.

¹⁴

Jefferson to Preston, Nov. 1, 1780, 5 QQ 87, Ibid.

¹⁵

William Campbell to Jefferson, n.d., 8 DD 9, Ibid.

the session was an eventful one for Campbell. On November 6 he was appointed to the Committee of Propositions and Grievances. Later that day, Campbell, with Patrick Henry and R. H. Lee, among others, were directed to prepare a bill "for a better defense of the southern frontier."¹⁶

Probably the most important business in the Legislature as far as Campbell was concerned, was personal. On November 10 the House of Delegates adopted the following resolution:

Resolved that the thanks of this House be given to Colonel William Campbell, of the County of Washington, and the officers and soldiers under his command, who spontaneously equipped themselves, and went forth to the aid of a sister State; and suffering distress under the invasion and ravage of the common enemy, and who, combined with some detachments from the neighboring States, judiciously concerted and bravely executed an attack on a party of the enemy commanded by Major Ferguson, consisting of about 1,105 men, British and Tories, strongly posted on King's Mountain, whereby, after a severe and bloody conflict of upwards of an hour, the survivors of the enemy were compelled to surrender themselves prisoners of war; and that Colonel Campbell be requested to communicate the contents of this resolution to the gallant officers and soldiers who composed his party.¹⁷

Joseph Jones, R. H. Lee, and William Fleming were appointed a committee to communicate the resolution to Campbell, and it was further resolved that "a good horse, with elegant furniture, and a sword be purchased at public

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Journal of the House of Delegates, I, Session Beginning Oct. 16, 1780, 7-8.

¹⁷

Ibid., 13.

expense, and presented to Col. William Campbell, as a further testimony of the high sense the General Assembly entertain of his late important services to his country."¹⁸

Five days later the Senate of Virginia passed a resolution similar to the one passed by the House of Delegates on November 10:

Resolved, nemine contradicente, that the thanks of this House are justly due to Colonel William Campbell, of Washington County, and the brave officers and soldiers under his command, who, with an ardor truly patriotic in the month of September last, without waiting the call of the Government, voluntarily marched out to oppose the common enemy, at the time making depredations on the frontiers of North Carolina, and on the seventh day of October, by a well-timed judicious and spirited attack, with a force inferior to that of Major Ferguson's, then advantageously posted on King's Mountain with upwards of eleven hundred men, and by a perserverance and gallantry rarely to be met with, even among veteran troops, totally defeated the whole party, whereby, a formidable and dangerous scheme of the enemy was effectually frustrated.¹⁹

On the same day, Joseph Jones reported for the committee of the 10th that the vote of thanks had been communicated to Campbell, who returned the following answer:

I am infinitely happy in receiving this public testimony of the approbation of my country, for my late services in South Carolina. It is a reward far

¹⁸

Ibid.

¹⁹

Virginia Senate's Vote of Thanks to William Campbell, Nov. 10, 1780, 8 DD 42, Draper Manuscripts.

above my expectations, and I esteem it the noblest a soldier can receive from a virtuous people. Through you, gentlemen, I wish to communicate the high sense I have of it to the House of Delegates. I owe, under Providence, much to the brave officers and soldiers who served with me; and I shall take the earliest opportunity of transmitting the resolve of your House to them, who I am persuaded, will experience all the honest heartfelt satisfaction, I feel myself on this occasion.²⁰

If Campbell truly felt his reward was "far above my expectations, he was in for yet another surprise, for on the same day (November 15) the United States Congress also adopted a resolution which praised Campbell and his soldiers. It read that

Congress entertain a high sense of the spirited and military conduct of Colonel Campbell and the officers and privates of the militia under his command, displayed in the action of October 7, in which complete victory was obtained over superior numbers of the enemy advantageously posted on King's Mountain in the state of South Carolina. And that this resolution be published by the Commanding General of the Southern Army in general orders.²¹

Campbell left Richmond soon after November 15. However, before leaving he lodged a claim with the Legislature for payment for his services following King's Mountain. His claim was approved on December 29, and Campbell was paid 252 pounds for the trip from Hillsborough to Richmond and more

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Journal of the House of Delegates, I, Session Beginning Oct. 16, 1780, 18.

²¹

Summers, History of Southwest Virginia and Washington County, 338.

than 400 pounds for the journey from the capitol to Aspenville. He also received 35 pounds per day for the thirteen days he spent in the House of Delegates in November.²²

On his arrival at Aspenville Campbell drafted a letter of thanks to "Colonel Preston and others," for their aid in defeating the New River conspiracy the previous summer. In it Campbell admitted that he owed much "to the salutary advice of the officers who were with me," and praised the Montgomery officers for their cooperation. "The cheerfulness with which they submitted to my commands gave me the greatest satisfaction," wrote Campbell, "and I shall always entertain the most lively sense of it." He ended on an inspirational note: "May the Almighty Disposer of all events always provide ample means for the preservation of our liberty and lives; and may the breast of every American be inspired to render that tribute of gratitude and praise which is justly due to Him who is the source of all our blessings, and in whose hands we are but the instruments of his will."²³

Even before William Campbell's return to Washington County, Arthur Campbell had made plans for another expedition against the Cherokees. Al-

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Record of William Campbell's Day, Oct.-Nov. 1780, Dec. 29, 1780, Campbell-Preston Papers, II.

²³

William Campbell to Col. Preston and Others, n.d., 8 DD 6 (6), Draper Manuscripts.

though the men from the Clinch settlements had not participated in the King's Mountain campaign for fear that a Cherokee attack was forthcoming, since William Campbell had abandoned his Cherokee expedition in July the threat posed by Dragging Canoe had been largely dormant.²⁴ However, in early December Joseph Martin returned from a visit to Cherokee country with information that several war parties were in motion toward the frontier, and William Christian warned Jefferson on December 12, "Great will be the Distress of the Frontier Inhabitants Soon if something vigorous is not Soon Set on Foot to Subdue the nation."²⁵

Plans were laid for Arthur Campbell, with some Washington and Montgomery militia to rendezvous with 300 North Carolinians under John Sevier on the Broad River, and together march into Dragging Canoe's Chickamauga domain. Sevier, however, marched without orders across the Broad and won a skirmish on December 16. Although the Virginians critically felt that Sevier's action warned the Cherokees of the general American advance, it did allow Sevier to overtake an Indian war party on Boyd's Creek, where twenty-eight Cherokees

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Williams, Tennessee During the Revolutionary War, 182; Petition of the Clinch Settlements to Preston, 1780, Preston Papers.

²⁵

Arthur Campbell to Preston, Dec. 5, 1780, Ibid; Joseph Martin to Jefferson, Dec. 12, 1780, Boyd, ed. Jefferson Papers, IV, 200-201.

were killed in an American ambush. Afterward, the North Carolinians returned to the Broad River to await the arrival of Arthur Campbell's contingent.²⁶

Nevertheless, William Campbell was not quite certain if the Cherokee threat was a serious one. Although he informed William Preston on December 12 that a treaty had been concluded in Georgia between the Indians and the British in which "this Country was given to that tribe, if they would conquer it," and that "the Raven has said he will come in here," Campbell admitted that whether "they will actually commence Hostilities upon us this winter I cannot determine." Still, he did add that "from every circumstance a war with them seems inevitable."²⁷

Whatever doubts Campbell might have entertained were dispelled three days later when the "trail" of twenty Cherokees was discovered thirty miles south of Gilbert Christian's. "This I conclude," guessed Campbell, "may be the advance of a large body; consequently we will have fighting nearer than the Towns."²⁸ Therefore, Campbell was probably not surprised

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Driver, John Sevier, 24-26.

²⁷

William Campbell to William Preston, Dec. 12, 1780, "Preston Papers," VMHB, XXVII (July and Oct. 1919).

²⁸

Extract of Letter by William Campbell, Dec. 15, 1780, 8 DD 20, Draper Manuscripts.

when, on December 17, he received word from Arthur Campbell that, after talking to "the most intelligent of the traders" who had escaped from Cherokee country, the County Lieutenant was "fully satisfied we need not look for anything also but War with the whole of the Cherokees."²⁹

Because Arthur Campbell had marched for the Broad River with only "a few Men," William Campbell was ordered to raise additional troops "in the most pressing manner" for his cousin's reinforcement. Although the County Lieutenant desired "all Men that are fit for the Service with at least some Hay & provisions for themselves and a bushel of corn for each Horse," he thought that "if ours and Montgomery would only furnish 300 to go besides the Guard necessary to leave on the frontiers we would have force enough...to defend the Country from the depredations of the enemy." At the time Arthur Campbell had, beside his own small detachment, 300 Wataugans and Sevier's 200 North Carolinians.³⁰

William Campbell started recruiting even before he was ordered to do so by Arthur Campbell, and by December 15 he had already requested 150 Washington militiamen to "hurry down...as well provided with provisions as

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Arthur Campbell to William Campbell, Dec. 17, 1780, Campbell-Preston Papers, II.

³⁰

Ibid.

possible." However, Campbell's efforts were hindered by especially cold weather which moved him to write "I am sorry and ashamed of the tardy preparation of our Militia for War--They must exert themselves or the Country will be subjected to great desolation."³¹

Two days later, when Arthur Campbell was writing to William to raise troops, the latter officer requested Colonel Preston "to aid us with about 150 of your Militia if you can conveniently do it, or indeed if you could only send 100, it would be very considerable Assistance." Preston was urged to send them with "all convenient dispatch" on horseback, with "eight or ten Days" provisions for themselves and their horses--Campbell would provide them with additional provisions on the march. The Montgomery troops were asked to bring their own ammunition "as it is not in our power to supply them with it here." To encourage Preston's response Campbell sent the deposition of William Springstone, recently escaped from the Cherokee towns, "which will discover to you the Disposition of the Cherokees for War." However, he also expressed his apprehension that the coldness of the season "will deter our Militia from engaging in it, so that nothing more can be done this Winter, than to protect our Frontiers in the best manner we can."³²

³¹

Extract of Letter by William Campbell, Dec. 15, 1780, 8 DD 20, Draper Manuscripts.

³²

William Campbell to Preston, Dec. 17, 1780, 5 QQ 89, Ibid.

On December 19 Campbell warned Major William Edmiston that "unless we at this time make vigorous Efforts in our defense, our frontier must be depopulated." Once again he commented on the inclement weather and the difficulty of raising enough men to undertake the Indian expedition, but Campbell's argument for doing so was well-taken. "If the enemy are not reoelled," he wrote, "before they get leave to penetrate into the Country this Winter we must the ensuing Summer be subjected to the depredations of a savage Enemy." Campbell therefore ordered Edmiston to go to the Clinch "to see that settlement put into a posture of defense," and to help "Spirit up our brave Militia to make another Effort to save their Country."³³

Campbell may have doubted the success of the venture. A week had passed since he had written to Preston for aid, yet by December 19 only thirty men under Colonel Walter Crockett had marched from Montgomery County. They being "all that I have yet heard are coming," Campbell rushed off a second entreaty to the Montgomery County Lieutenant "for some Assistance."³⁴ Meanwhile, Campbell perhaps wondered about the usefulness of Crockett's small company, who were temporarily camped at Royal Oak. The vulgar militiamen, Margaret Campbell informed her brother, "insulted me a good deal and gave me the worse Language ever I got from anyone that traveled the road."

³³

William Campbell to William Edmiston, Dec. 19, 1780, 9 DD 23,

Ibid.³⁴Ibid.

Although Margaret offered the troops her husband Arthur's corn, they took her oats and fodder "as much as they pleased."³⁵

Although Margaret asked William to punish the troublesome Montgomery militiamen, it is likely that Campbell simply apologized for their behavior and spirited them on their way to the frontier.³⁶ They probably marched with the Washington County reinforcements at the end of the month. This contingent, however, was too late to join Arthur Campbell before he crossed the Broad River. Despite this, William Campbell directed Captain John Stevens, who commanded the troops, "to proceed with all possible dispatch to join the Troops now in Cherokee country." He also advised Stevens to "keep a small advance party, and such a Guard at night as your party will admit of--your own prudence will dictate to you the measures most conducive to you. Security upon your march, and this is the principal thing you have to attend to, beside your joining the troops who are now out."³⁷ As for Campbell himself, he chose to stay behind to supervise the defense of Washington County.

³⁵ Margaret Campbell to William Campbell, Dec. 1780, Campbell-Preston Papers, II.

³⁶
Ibid.

³⁷
William Campbell to Capt. John Stevens, Dec. 29, 1780, Ibid.

Stevens' contingent never reached Arthur Campbell's main column, but William Campbell's recruiting efforts must have surprised everyone. When Arthur crossed the Broad River on December 22, his force (including the Wataugans and North Carolinians) totalled 1,390 men!³⁸

Arthur Campbell, ironically, in charge of the men William had commanded at King's Mountain, feinted toward Dragging Canoe's village, the Island Town, but divided his command and marched to Chota, the Cherokee capital, to punish the many Indians who had joined the secessionist Cherokees. By December 28 Chota and two other villages were in ashes and the North Carolinians marched home the following day. Campbell, however, marched on to Hiwassee, where an Indian revealed a British-inspired plan to ambush the Virginians. It was decided not to challenge the Indians, and after issuing a warning to the renegade Cherokees on January 1, Arthur Campbell started his army for home.³⁹

In spite of the fact that Dragging Canoe continued raiding, the expedition for which William Campbell had extensively recruited was a great success. Six important Cherokee chiefs were invited to parley with Joseph Martin at the Long Island and supplies were promised to any Cherokees who

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Williams, Tennessee During the Revolution War, 121.

³⁹

Arthur Campbell to Jefferson, Jan. 15, 1781, Boyd, ed. Jefferson Papers, IV, 359-363.

made peace.⁴⁰ By February 1781 Chief Hanging Maw and 400 followers surrendered to Martin and camped on the Long Island.⁴¹

While Arthur Campbell was certain that peace could be easily obtained "with a surrender of such extent of Country that will defray the Expenses of the War," others thought differently. "The burning of their huts, and the destruction of their corn," wrote William Fleming in mid-January, "will I fear make the whole nation our irreconcilable Enemies, and force them for Sustenance to live altogether by depredation of our frontiers."⁴² Nevertheless, the expedition was the last large effort to be launched against the Overhills during the Revolution, and although Joseph Martin took 200 men into Cumberland Gap that March and burned three Cherokee towns, the Washington frontier was never again seriously threatened by the Indians.⁴³ And once again, William Campbell had been a factor in the successful defense of Washington County. Having again defeated the Cherokee threat from the west, the Washington patriots could now turn south in comparative safety to meet a new, more dangerous menace, an army of British regulars under Lord Cornwallis.

⁴⁰ Ibid., Arthur Campbell to Jefferson, Jan. 27, 1781, 457-458.

⁴¹ Ibid., Joseph Martin to Jefferson, Feb. 7, 1781, 551-552.

⁴² Ibid., V, 363, IV, 407-408.

⁴³ Ibid., V, 304-305, 367.

Chapter IX: The Guilford Courthouse Campaign

While the Virginia frontiersmen were defeating the Cherokees, more important events were taking place in the south. The major development, as far as the patriots were concerned, was the replacement of Gates with Nathanael Greene. Arriving at American headquarters in Charlotte on December 2, the new general was faced with a number of problems. He had no heavy cannon and complained to Baron von Steuben that "Our force is so small...that it is of the highest importance Reinforcements should come forward as fast as they can be equipped for Service."¹ The few troops which Greene had in Charlotte were "literally naked and undisciplined."² Therefore, when Green took command he was sorry to learn that "All the Prisoners taken by Col. Campbell at King's Mountain are enlarged upon different Conditions except about 130," most having been paroled or enlisted into the Continental Army. "They would have been of the utmost Importance in the Exchange with Cornwallis," lamented Greene to the President of the Congress on December 7.³

¹ Nathanael Green to the Board of War, Dec. 6, 1780, Nathanael Greene Papers, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Greene to Baron von Steuben, Dec. 28, 1780, Ibid.

² Greene to the Board of War, Dec. 6, 1780, Ibid.

³ Greene to the President of the Congress, Dec. 7, 1780, Ibid.

Despite such negative conditions Greene made effective use of the demoralized Camden survivors. On December 20 he divided his small army in an effort to split the British army, thus destroying Cornwallis' offensive punch. He sent Francis Marion and Thomas Sumter on their usual guerilla raids to the south, while Daniel Morgan conducted a westward sweep with 1,100 troops. Cornwallis sent Tarleton after Morgan with a comparable force and followed with much of his main army, leaving Alexander Leslie to watch Greene's main contingent on the Cheraw River.⁴ However, before Cornwallis could support Tarleton, the latter officer was decisively defeated on January 17 by Morgan's army at the Cowpens.

Cornwallis tried to retrieve his loss by pursuing Morgan, who was soon after joined by Greene and a pitiful escort of four cavalrymen. Greene and Morgan subsequently rejoined the main American army under General Isaac Huger and, in the famous "race" to the Dan, retreated across upper North Carolina and into Virginia. Cornwallis, minus much needed supplies and reinforcements, was compelled to retreat to Hillsborough.⁵

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Courtland T. Reid, Guilford Courthouse (Washington, D.C., 1961), 10; R. Earnest DuPuy and Trevor N. DuPuy, The Encyclopedia of Military History, Revised Edition (New York, 1970), 719.

⁵

John Richard Alden, A History of the American Revolution (New York, 1969), 462; Reid, Guilford Courthouse, 10.

Meanwhile, Greene wrote urgent letters to local militia officers for reinforcements, but he sent his most earnest plea to William Campbell. On January 30 Greene wrote that he could not confront Cornwallis until substantially reinforced, and he therefore asked Campbell to "bring to our assistance 1000 good volunteer militia from the mountains engaged to serve one month, after they arrive at Head Quarters." If "such a force joined to what we have in the field," explained Greene, Cornwallis could be defeated and Campbell would "prove the worth and the proof of bravery of the mountain militia."⁶

North Carolina Governor Abner Nash had - similar idea, and wrote to Thomas Jefferson on February 5 to authorize such an expedition to his state. Cornwallis, Nash supposed, could not be contained in North Carolina by the "poor unpractised and unarmed" militia which opposed him. Nash therefore asked Jefferson to send to Greene's aid "a few Hundred of your Mountain Heroes under their distinguished Commander Col. Campbell."⁷

On the day Nash sent his entreaty to Jefferson an express rider stopped at Aspenville with Greene's letter of the 20th. Campbell was, however, in Abingdon on business, and the letter was opened and read by his wife.

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Greene to William Campbell, Jan. 30, 1781, Greene Papers.

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Nash to Jefferson, Feb. 2, 1781, Boyd, ed. Jefferson Papers, IV, 504.

The express then started off for Abingdon with the letter, "but happening," as Campbell related to Preston two days later, "to return home late at night, I missed of the Man, and the Letter is not yet come to my hand." Nevertheless, because he had "not any Reason to doubt of What my Wife informs me," Campbell explained to Preston Greene's instructions to raise 1,000 "of the Back Country Militia of this State."⁸

Apparently thinking that he had been given ultimate authority to comply with Greene's request, Campbell ordered Preston to call out 350 Montgomery militiamen "to march by the 20th of this month at the farthest and to proceed with all possible Expedition to join the Grand Army to the Southward." He recommended that every two or three men take along an additional horse to carry their supplies and help them across the Yadkin River, after which the horses would be returned home by a special detachment enlisted for that purpose. Campbell also urged that each man supply at least two pairs of shoes. "Soldiers," he advised, "especially at this season of the year are altogether unfit for service if they want that Article of dress."⁹

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William Campbell to Preston, Feb. 7, 1781, Campbell-Preston Papers,

II.

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Ibid.

Preston was quick to act and on February 17 he marched for Greene's army with "about three hundred men," promising Campbell that he would be notified of "any interesting news I may receive on my march."¹⁰ The following day Preston sent word to Greene and Jefferson that Campbell intended to march the next Wednesday, when "a Party of Botetourt Militia" would also leave.¹¹ Preston marched to join General Pickens' light division, but before his arrival Pickens summoned him on. "Greene says to hurry," the General informed Preston on February 20. "If Colonel Campbell is not up with you write him to leave his foot and bring on his horse night & day till he gets up. General Greane's dependence lies greatly on the mountain men."¹²

Greene, however, was depending on the wrong man. Although William Campbell was certain that "men will turn out with proper Spirit...when it is obvious to every one that there is the greatest probability of doing especial Service to our Country," he failed to consider Arthur Campbell's opposition to the plan.¹³ Still mindful of Cherokee attacks upon the Washington frontier,

¹⁰

Gibbes, ed., Documentary History of the American Revolution, Preston to William Campbell, Feb. 17, 1781, III, 22-23.

¹¹

P. G. Johnson, William Preston, 280; Preston to Jefferson, Feb. 18, 1781, Campbell-Preston Papers, II.

¹²

P. G. Johnson, William Preston, 281-282.

¹³

William Campbell to Preston, Feb. 7, 1781, Campbell-Preston Papers, II.

the County Lieutenant refused to sanction Greene's request and apparently denied William Campbell's suggestion to draft, instead of enlist, the desired troops.¹⁴

Thus left to his own designs, William Campbell probably raised a few volunteers before he wrote to Greene on February 20 to inform the General that Arthur Campbell had effectually frustrated the attempt to reinforce him from Washington County. "I am persuaded," answered Greene on February 24, "you have made use of every exertion to reinforce the army & am only sorry the circumstances have prevented you from joining no sooner."¹⁵ Two weeks later Charles Magill, the Commissary General of Greene's army, bluntly informed Jefferson that "...every obstacle was by the County Lieutenant thrown in the way to prevent the men's crossing."¹⁶

William Campbell was not comforted by Greene's entreaties to join him. On February 11, after receiving unsound information that Campbell was on the march with "a large body of riflemen," Greene informed Campbell that a "union" must be effected before Cornwallis could be attacked. "It is my earnest desire," wrote Greene, "that you should join us, as soon as possible."¹⁷

¹⁴
Ibid.

¹⁵
Greene to William Campbell, Feb. 24, 1781, Greene Papers.

¹⁶
Charles Magill to Jefferson, March 10, 1781, Boyd. ed. Jefferson Papers, V, 116.

¹⁷
Greene to William Campbell, Feb. 11, 1781, Greene Papers.

Even after Campbell failed to appear, Greene was "not without hopes" of effecting Cornwallis' ruin "if Col. Campbell joins us as I have near reason to expect, by the account from the upper country."¹⁸ He therefore sent a dispatch to Campbell which urged him to "push on with all imaginable dispatch," and confided to Pickens that "everything depends on it."¹⁹

On February 22 Greene learned that Campbell could not be across the mountains until the 27th.²⁰ Two days later the General again wrote to Campbell that the army was in "a most critical situation," and asked that he "Force a march to join us as soon as possible" with an many provisions as practical "without interfering with your march." After flattering the Colonel that "my greatest dependence is on the force with you," Greene outlined the situation: "The enemy are at Hillsborough refreshing themselves. Could we collect our force in time, we should have it in our power to give them a partial stroke, if not totally win them. But, without your aid, we are too weak to attempt anything."²¹

The above letter--Greene's last and most detailed to Campbell in February--could not have been written at a more appropriate time. The

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Greene to Major Conwell, Feb. 20, 1781, Ibid.

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Greene to Andrew Pickens, Feb. 21, 1781, Ibid.

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Greene to Joseph Martin, Feb. 23, 1781, Ibid.

²¹

Greene to William Campbell, Feb. 24, 1781, Ibid.

previous day Arthur Campbell had received instructions from Jefferson to send William Campbell with some Washington militia to Greene's aid. Two days later the latter officer left Abingdon with 100 men, all that could be raised in so short a time. The County Lieutenant apologized to the Governor for the small number of troops, writing on February 28 that "A larger number would have gone were it not for the daily apprehensions of attacks from the Northward and Southern Indians."²²

Campbell's small contingent marched to the Lead Mines, where a few Botetourt and Montgomery men joined, and on to Bethabara, North Carolina. In Bethabara Campbell found "a quantity of provisions" which he had been promised by Martin Armstrong on February 22.²³ Soon after, Campbell received a dispatch from one of Greene's aide-de-camps which informed him of recent enemy movements and that Greene's army was camped at the High Rock Ford on the Haw River, seventeen miles from Guilford Courthouse. "The General," the aide wrote, "hopes you will continue to make use of every exertion to form a junction with us as early as possible."²⁴

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Arthur Campbell to Jefferson, Feb. 28, 1781, Boyd, ed. Jefferson Papers, V, 20.

²³

Martin Armstrong to William Campbell, Feb. 22, 1781, 8 DD 22, Draper Manuscripts.

²⁴

Burnett to William Campbell, Feb. 28, 1781, Campbell-Preston Papers, II.

Although Campbell had been urged to "advise" Greene of his "numbers and Situation," he failed to do so. Perhaps Campbell was too embarrassed to report his strength to Greene since, because of some unknown reason, his small command had shrunk to only sixty militiamen. There was no indication in Greene's camp that the hoped for 1,000 riflemen would not come. Indeed, before Campbell's arrival at High Rock Ford on March 2, Magill wrote to Jefferson that, while he expected no more than 600 men, the reports said that Campbell had as many as 1,100 men.²⁵

The reaction in Greene's army can well be imagined when, later that day, Campbell, "...flushed with the capture of an entire army on King's Mountain...almost desperate with mortification, presented himself with only sixty followers."²⁶ Both Charles Magill and General Greene commented on their disappointment. "The considerable reinforcement," wrote Magill on March 5, had dwindled to almost nothing as a result of Arthur Campbell's opposition.²⁷ Greene was more detailed on March 10, when he wrote, "I have been very much disappointed in the reinforcement that I expected from Washington County under Colo. Campbell. Only sixty have joined our army whereas

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Magill to Jefferson, March 2, 1781, Boyd, ed. Jefferson Papers, V, 44.

²⁶

W. Johnson, Sketches of the Life and Correspondence of Nathanael Greene, I, 469.

²⁷

Magill to Jefferson, March 5, 1781, Boyd, ed. Jefferson Papers, V, 63.

I had strong expectations of receiving at least one thousand. I cannot pretend to account for this deficiency or direct steps to find out the cause."²⁸

Campbell's riflemen were attached to the light division under Colonel Otho Williams, whose orders were to keep between Cornwallis and Greene. Williams was also reinforced by Preston's contingent, released from Pickens' command, which was rested for several days after Campbell's arrival.²⁹ Williams' screening force maneuvered near the British army, sometimes camping as close as three miles to the enemy camp. There was continuous sparring between the advance parties of both forces, but no real confrontation until March 6.³⁰

On the night of March 5 Williams had camped east of Wentzill's Mill on the Reedy Fork, nine or ten miles from Greensboro and seven miles from Greene's encampment at Boyd's Mill.³¹ Late that night, when Cornwallis received intelligence that Williams was nearby, he saw the opportunity to either destroy Greene's advance guard or draw the main American army into a decisive battle. At three o'clock on the morning of March 6 Tarleton was sent forward in a heavy fog, supported by Colonel James

²⁸

Ibid., Greene to Jefferson, March 10, 1781, 111-112.

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Burke Davis, The Cowpens-Guilford Courthouse Campaign (Philadelphia and New York, 1962), 135.

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Stember, Bicentennial Guide to the American Revolution, III, 140.

³¹

Summers, History of Southwest Virginia and Washington County, 351.

Webster's brigade consisting of the Hessian Regiment du Bose and two battalions of British Guards. Cornwallis followed with the remainder of his army and baggage wagons.³²

Fortunately for Williams, a party he had sent to attack a small enemy outpost captured two British soldiers who warned him of Cornwallis' advance.³³ At least some of the American camp was awakened in time to engage Tarleton and Webster at about 6:30 A.M. However, Campbell's bivouac on the American left flank was taken by surprise because proper security measures had not been taken. Henry Lee later noted that Campbell had neglected to post pickets that morning, and observed that the riflemen were "better suited...for the field of battle than for the security of camp."³⁴

Once aroused, however, Campbell's riflemen and Colonel William Washington's cavalry covered the left flank while Williams retired across the Reedy Fork with his main force of Georgia and South Carolina militia.

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Tarleton, History of the Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, 238.

³³

Henry Lee, The Campaign in the Carolinas: With Remarks Historical and Critical on Johnson's Life of Greene, to Which is Added an Appendix of Original Documents Relating to the History of the Revolution (Spartansburg, S. C., 1975), Official Report of Co. O. H. Williams, March 7, 1781, 160-161.

³⁴

Lee, Memoirs of the War in the Southern Department, 265.

Henry "Light Horse Harry" Lee's Legion and Preston's riflemen covered the American right flank.³⁵ The rear guard twice repulsed the British advance, thus enabling Williams to cross the slippery-bottomed Reedy Fork "without interruption."³⁶ Williams positioned his militia on the north bank of the creek, two hundred yards downstream from Wentzill's Mill, where he covered the subsequent withdrawal of Campbell, the Legion infantry, Preston, and finally, Lee's cavalrymen.³⁷

Williams, however, soon discovered that his position was indefensible. Not only were there fords both above and below the mill, but the British brought up two small artillery pieces to disperse the Americans.³⁸ Lee was left in command on Campbell's and Preston's riflemen while Williams again retreated to a more defensible position. With orders to "retard the enemy as long as it was practical, without hazarding serious injury," Lee

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Hugh F. Rankin, Greene and Cornwallis: The Campaign in the Carolinas (Raleigh, N. C., 1976), 66.

³⁶

Lee, The Campaign in the Carolinas, Official Report of O. H. Williams, March 7, 1781, 160-161; Summers, History of Southwest Virginia and Washington County, 352.

³⁷

Lee, Memoirs of the War in the Southern Department, 265.

³⁸

Rankin, Greene and Cornwallis, 66.

drew up his men in a single line, supported by the Legion cavalry. His right flank rested on the road and his center fronted the Reedy Fork. Campbell and Preston were placed on the left flank in a heavy copse of trees.³⁹

There was an old log schoolhouse near Campbell in which the mud between the logs had fallen out, and Lee ordered twenty-five "select marksmen of King's Mountain militia" into the building to act as sharpshooters. Their effectiveness, however, was questionable, and when Colonel Webster led his men into the Reedy Fork, even whole volleys from the rifles of Campbell's soldiers failed to hit Webster or his horse.⁴⁰ Indeed, Banastre Tarleton later commented that Campbell's flank "did not oppose the right wing of the British so steadily as the left."⁴¹

Nevertheless, the British gained the north bank on the American right flank first, and got control of a ridge which dominated Lee's retreat route. The American flank collapsed and the Legion infantry retreated to Williams' rearward position. Campbell and Preston again "served to cover the retiring troops," but at length were compelled to withdraw with support from Lee's cavalry.⁴² "The enemy," Williams reported the following day,

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Lee, Memoirs of the War in the Southern Department, 266.

⁴⁰

Ibid., 267; Davis, The Cowpens-Guilford Courthouse Campaign, 137.

⁴¹

Tarleton, History of the Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, 238.

⁴²

Lee, The Campaigns in the Carolinas, 160-161.

"pursued at some distance; but receiving several checks from small covering parties, and being awed by our cavalry, he thought proper to halt."⁴³ Certainly, the withdrawal was, as Lee said, a "clean" one and the wounded were "brought off" without further fighting.⁴⁴

Williams reported to Greene that his losses were "inconsiderable," there being only twenty Americans killed (as opposed to twenty-one British).⁴⁵ However, at least one of Campbell's riflemen recalled that his contingent was "whip'd and much cut to pieces," but that Campbell "acted with his usual courage."⁴⁶

Wentzill's Mill was not without effects on Greene's situation. It disheartened the Georgia and South Carolina militia to such an extent that Pickens was authorized to take them back to their home states to fight.⁴⁷

43

Ibid.

44

Ibid.

45

Ibid., Stember, Bicentennial Guide to the American Revolution, III, 140-141.

46

John Craig Statement, n.d., 8 DD 68, DRaper Manuscripts.

47

Rank, Greene and Cornwallis, 67.

This probably helped convince Greene that he would have to wait for additional reinforcements before meeting Cornwallis in battle. Fortunately, between March 10 and 12 Greene was joined by two brigades of North Carolinians and 1,000 Virginia militia under Generals John Butler, Thomas Eaton, and Robert Lawson respectively.⁴⁸

Personally, Wentzill's Mill might have turned Campbell against Lee. Apparently some of Campbell's men felt that Lee extricated his Legion infantry at the expense of the backwoodsmen. "On the late Skirmishe," Magill informed Jefferson on March 10, "the Riflemen complained that the Burthen and heat of the Day was entirely thrown upon them, and that they were to be made a sacrifice by the Regular Officers to screen their own Troops."⁴⁹ Indeed, General Greene later admitted to Jefferson that "They were chiefly riflemen who were engaged in it."⁵⁰

Nevertheless, when Otho Williams declined to continue commanding the light corps after Wentzill's Mill, Campbell was placed under Lee's command.⁵¹

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Davis, The Cowpens-Guilford Courthouse Campaign, 141.

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Boyd, ed. Jefferson Papers, V, 115-116.

50

P. G. Johnson, William Preston, 289.

51

Magill to Jefferson, March 10, 1781, Boyd, ed. Jefferson Papers, V, 115-116.

He received his orders on March 10 to "join Lt. Colonel Lee, commandant of the Legion, and act with him upon the left Wing of the British Army."

Campbell sent to Lee for a guide to "pilot" his riflemen "to his Corps and form a junction with him as soon as possible."⁵² Campbell's immediate commander was William Washington, who was in charge of Lee's right flank.⁵³

Lee performed the same duties that Williams had done, and "still hovered around the enemy" for several days. However, on March 13 Cornwallis made a sudden thrust from his camp at Bell's Mill toward New Garden, twelve miles west of Guilford Courthouse. One of Lee's cavalry patrols found the camp at Bell's Mill abandoned and followed Cornwallis' trail until discovering that the enemy baggage and escort had become separated from the main British column. Lee received this intelligence late that night, and immediately sent the Legion cavalry and two companies of Campbell's "mounted infantry" in pursuit. Unfortunately, the patriot guides became lost in a thick woods and Lee was compelled to halt before he became too far removed from Washington and Campbell, who were following with their troops."⁵⁴

Lee gave up the pursuit the next morning after hearing that the enemy baggage train had safely rejoined Cornwallis at New Garden. Soon after, Washington and Campbell arrived with orders from Greene to retire to the main

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Greene to William Campbell, March 10, 1781, Greene Papers.

⁵³

Magill to Jefferson, March 10, 1781, Boyd, ed. Jefferson Papers, V, 115-116.

⁵⁴

Lee, Memoirs of the War in the Southern Department, 269-271.

American camp at Guilford Courthouse. Lee encamped his light corps that day several miles in front of Guilford with orders to "resume his accustomed duties."⁵⁵ Meanwhile, Greene prepared his army to fight a defensive battle on the carefully selected ground near Guilford, a small clearing on the Salisbury Road.⁵⁶

At about two o'clock in the morning on March 15 Lieutenant James Heard of the Legion was scouting five miles west of Lee's camp when he discovered a large contingent of enemy cavalry riding east on the Salisbury Road toward Guilford. Although Heard could not possibly know that Cornwallis had learned of Greene's position and was marching with his entire army to give battle, he sent a dispatch to Lee and monitored British progress in letters to his commander every half hour. It was not until two hours later that Greene dispatched Lee to investigate Heard's reports.⁵⁷

Guessing now that Tarleton's cavalry lay ahead, Lee set out at the head of his mounted Legionaires and thirty mounted riflemen under Captain James Tate of Augusta.⁵⁸ He was followed by the Legion infantry and the remainder of Campbell's riflemen, who at first had formed with Washington's cavalry "at our encampment, to support their retreat back."⁵⁹

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Ibid., 272.

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Rankin, Greene and Cornwallis, 70.

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Lee, Memoirs of the War in the Southern Department, 273.

⁵⁸

Ibid.; Gibbes, ed., Documentary History of the American Revolution,

William Campbell to Rev. Charles Cummings, March 1781, II, 139-140.

⁵⁹

Ibid.

Lee advanced two miles until he met Heard's patrol, then engaged in "a sharp conflict" in which, Tarleton remembered, "...the fire of the Americans was heavy, and the charge of their cavalry spirited."⁶⁰ In an effort to draw Tarleton's cavalymen within range of Lee's advancing riflemen, the Americans withdrew and "continued fighting and retreating for about half-an-hour."⁶¹ After retiring for a considerable distance, Lee unexpectedly ordered his men to reverse their direction and charge the British, which threw the enemy troopers into disorder. In the short rout which followed, Tarleton was wounded in the right hand and "some dragoons" were killed and captured by the Americans, who suffered no casualties.⁶²

Lee followed the retreating British for some time until he was met by Colonel Webster's advancing enemy brigade near a Quaker meeting house. The subsequent fighting, recalled Lee, "became very sharp, and was barely maintained on both sides."⁶³ Reinforcements rushed forward on both sides. The Legion infantry appeared on Lee's left, and was soon joined by Campbell's riflemen, who fired several volleys into the more numerous British ranks.⁶⁴

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Tarleton, History of the Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, 277-278.

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Gibbes, ed. Documentary History of the American Revolution, William Campbell to Cummings, March 1781, II, 139-140.

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Bass, The Green Dragoon, 169; Lee, Memoirs of the War in the Southern Department, 275.

⁶³

Ibid.

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Charles E. Hatch, Jr., Guilford Courthouse (Washington, D.C., 1971),

However, the appearance in force of British units confirmed Lee's belief that Cornwallis was marching to Guilford to fight Greene. He therefore "drew off his infantry; and, covering them from any attempt of the British horse, retired toward the American army."⁶⁵

Although Lee had retreated, neither side gained any real advantage from the skirmish. It did buy Greene some additional time to deploy his army for the major battle which he knew would follow, but no noticeable harm was done to the British army. Lee reported that there was "little injury" to his light troops, but Tarleton wrote that during the American withdrawal "Colonel Campbell's mountaineers were dispersed with considerable loss."⁶⁶ Since the best accounts of the action were left by Lee and Tarleton, a reader must decide which account by the two Colonels is most acceptable.

Lee retreated three quarters of a mile beyond his morning encampment to where the American army was deployed for battle. Greene had drawn up his army in three lines. The first line consisted of Eaton's and Butler's North Carolina militia brigades, which had orders to fire two volleys and retreat to Greene's second line. The second line was composed of 1,200 Virginia

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Lee, Memoirs of the War in the Southern Department, 275.

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Hatch, Guilford Courthouse, 26; Tarleton, History of the Campaign of 1780 and 1781, 278.

militia and the final line was made up of the reliable Continentals of the First and Second Maryland regiments and two regiments of Virginians. By Greene's troop dispositions it is determined that the General was planning a battle similar to Cowpens.⁶⁷

Lee was dispatched to Greene's left flank with his Legion and Campbell's riflemen under orders to "hold safe the flank." Although supposedly a "corps of observation" for the entire army, Lee's contingent was really a continuation of the American first line.⁶⁸ Campbell (like Charles Lynch on the right flank) was posted on a thickly wooded ridge.

Lee had not been in the line "above ten minutes," before, as Campbell related, "the cannonade began in the centre, which lasted about twenty minutes, in which time the enemy was forming their line of battle, by filing off to the right and left, and then immediately advanced upon our troops, upon which the firing of the small arms began."⁶⁹

When the British advanced against the American first line the Legion infantry (on Campbell's right) fired into the Seventy-first Highlanders, forcing them to veer off into the North Carolina militia in Greene's center.

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Stember, Bicentennial Guide to the American Revolution, III, 143; Davis, The Guilford Courthouse Campaign, 149.

⁶⁸

Lee, Memoirs of the War in the Southern Department, 276.

⁶⁹

Gibbes, ed. Documentary History of the American Revolution, William Campbell to Cummings, March 1781, II, 139-140.

On the extreme left, Campbell was charged by the Hessian Regiment du Bose under Colonel Christian DuPuy. A confusing struggle ensued between the Germans and riflemen in thick undergrowth which "rendered our bayonets of little use."⁷⁰ Fighting hand to hand, Campbell's men moved from tree to tree using rifle butts and hatchets against the Hessian bayonets.⁷¹ It was a bloody beginning of an action that "raged without intermission" for two hours, in which Lee's infantry "and the dangerous courage of Campbell and his riflemen, continued to repel General Leslie...."⁷²

Meanwhile, the American first line fired two volleys and, according to Greene's orders, retreated. The design of this manoeuver, which left the flank units to fight against great odds, was unknown to Lee and Campbell, who viewed the flight of the North Carolinians with "infinite distress and mortification."⁷³ "Many," reported Campbell after the battle, "...never fired their guns, and almost the whole of them threw away their arms, and fled with the greatest precipitation."⁷⁴ Although a few of General Eaton's

⁷⁰ Rankin, Greene and Cornwallis, 76; Williams, Tennessee During the Revolutionary War, 197.

⁷¹ Davis, The Cowpens-Guilford Courthouse Campaign, 154.

⁷² Lee, The Campaign in the Carolinas, 176.

⁷³ Lee, Memoirs of the War in the Southern Department, 277.

⁷⁴ Gibbes, ed. Documentary History of the American Revolution, William Campbell to Cummings, March 1781, II, 139-140.

militiamen took refuge with Campbell and fought for the rest of the day, Lee later blamed the North Carolinians for losing the battle.⁷⁵

Until the American front line cracked, the British right flank was in serious danger of being repulsed by Lee and Campbell, to the extent that General Alexander Leslie called forward his reserve, a battalion of British Guards. However, after the militia in Greene's center fled, Leslie was able to move the Guards and the Hessians against Lee's right flank, pushing the entire American left flank south and east away from the main battle.⁷⁶ As Lee related, "One party had disregarded the retreat of their comrades, the other had not followed the advance of theirs, and they were left to decide a distinct contest."⁷⁷

While Lee and Campbell were pushed slowly to the southeast, the American second line collapsed after a half-hour defense and reformed behind the Maryland and Virginia Continentals. In the final phase of the main fighting, two battalions of British Guards attacked the First and Second Maryland regiments. A dangerous counter-attack by the First Maryland was repulsed only after Cornwallis fired grapeshot into the mixed ranks of his own men and the Americans. This probably saved the day for Cornwallis; in the subsequent British attack the Second Maryland withdrew from the line, and

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Davis, The Cowpens-Guilford Courthouse Campaign, 156.

⁷⁶

Ibid.

⁷⁷

Lee, The Campaign in the Carolinas, 176.

Greene, not wanting to risk another counter-attack that could decisively lose the battle, retreated.⁷⁸

Meanwhile, the fighting continued on Campbell's front. The exact course of this action is unknown and, as Burke Davis noted, is surrounded by "mystery and controversy."⁷⁹ Roughly, Lee and Campbell, borne off to the left by the attack by the regiment du Bose and the Guards, had fallen back a half-mile past both the American second and third lines. Once it became clear to Cornwallis that the American flank was no longer a factor in the battle he dispatched Tarleton to recall the Guards, which then participated in the final charges against Greene's last position.⁸⁰ Lee, however, held an opposite opinion. "All apprehensions of a defeat in this quarter being removed" by the withdrawal of the Guards from his front, Lee marched north with his cavalry to join the main battle.⁸¹ Very soon after, Lee recalled the Legion infantry and, though he supposed Campbell would follow,

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Davis, The Cowpens-Guilford Courthouse Campaign, 161-162;

Reid, Guilford Courthouse, 22.

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Davis, The Cowpens-Guilford Courthouse Campaign, 163;

Reid, Guilford Courthouse, 17.

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Davis, The Cowpens-Guilford Courthouse Campaign, 163.

⁸¹

Lee, The Campaign in the Carolinas, 177; Lee, Memoirs of the War in the Southern Department, 281.

left the riflemen alone to fight the Hessians.⁸²

The regiment du Bose drove Campbell back to a sloping ridge, but were repulsed when some riflemen appeared on DuPuy's rear and began picking off his men.⁸³ Forced by accurate fire to withdraw, the Bose was "still annoyed" by "the rifle corps under Campbell."⁸⁴ Therefore, Cornwallis sent Tarleton forward with his dragoons to disperse the riflemen. But, as Lee remembered, "the contest had long been ebbing before his corps arrived," Campbell had already begun to withdraw his "corps," and Lieutenant-Colonel Tarleton found only a few resolute marksmen in the rear of Campbell, "who continued to fire from tree to tree."⁸⁵ However, "The excessive thickness of the woods," wrote Cornwallis, "...enabled the broken enemy to make frequent stands, with an irregular fire, which occasioned some loss...."⁸⁶ Samuel Houston, a rifleman who kept a journal during the campaign, described the charge: "But presently their light horse came on us, and not being defended by our light horse, nor reinforced,--though firing was long ceased in

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Davis, The Cowpens-Guilford Courthouse Campaign, 163; Lee, Memoirs of the War in the Southern Department, 281.

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Davis, The Cowpens-Guilford Courthouse Campaign, 163.

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Lee, Memoirs of the War in the Southern Department, 281.

⁸⁵

Ibid., 283.

⁸⁶

Williams, Tennessee During the Revolutionary War, 197.

all other parts, we were obliged to run, and many were sore chased and some cut down."⁸⁷

During Tarleton's charge Campbell saw, or thought he saw, Lee's cavalry standing across an open field not 200 yards away, but Lee did not commit his horsemen in Campbell's defense. Thus, after a number of his men --"wholly unsupported"--were killed and Tarleton recaptured some prisoners from the Bose and Guards taken by the riflemen, it was an infuriated Campbell who abandoned the field and rejoined Greene on his retreat from Guilford.⁸⁸

Greene reached his camp at Speedwell's Iron Works, ten miles east of Guilford on Troublesome Creek, on March 16. He quickly threw up breastworks and reported to Jefferson that while the army was in good spirits, "the militia are leaving us in great numbers to return home to kiss their sweethearts."⁸⁹ This, it might be argued, they righteously deserved. Although most of the reported patriot losses were "missing" soldiers who had deserted Greene's army, the Americans had nevertheless killed and wounded more than 500 British troops. Having thus lost twenty-eight percent of his army, Cornwallis did not pursue Greene, but retreated to Wilmington instead.⁹⁰

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Hatch, Guilford Courthouse, 89.

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"Robert Rankin, Private, Volunteer for the Day," Folder A15, Guilford Courthouse National Military Park, Greensboro, N.C.

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Davis, The Cowpens-Guilford Courthouse Campaign, 168.

⁹⁰

Ibid., 169, 171; Alden, The South in the American Revolution, 309.

William Campbell's men played a conspicuous part in Cornwallis' disablement. Not only had the action on the American left flank occupied four British units at various times, but Campbell's riflemen inflicted heavy casualties upon each of them. The Bose regiment, as acknowledged by Cornwallis in Dispatch Number 8 to Lord George Germain, was the most courageous of his units at Guilford.⁹¹ The Hessians lost two captains, two lieutenants, and eighty other casualties, more than the Twenty-Third and Seventy-First, the German Jaegers, and Tarleton's Legion. Only the Brigade of Guards suffered more, and one of two Guard battalions in the battle was engaged with Campbell for a substantial time.⁹² Henry Lee felt that Campbell's riflemen were one of the patriot contingents which balanced the superiority of the British regulars, and General Greene reported that Campbell "did great execution."⁹³ Arthur Campbell too gave much credit to the mountaineers. "Had all the militia behaved with the same firmness and courage as on the wing where General Campbell commanded," Arthur wrote long afterward, "the British army must have met with a total defeat."⁹⁴

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Tarleton, The Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, 309.

⁹²

Davis, The Cowpens-Guilford Courthouse Campaign, 172; Tarleton, The Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, 310-311.

⁹³

Lee, Memoirs of the War in the Southern Department, 597.

⁹⁴

Arthur Campbell's Biographical Statement, n.d., 8 DD 78, Draper Manuscripts.

Despite all such praise the battle of Guilford "left the most bitter feelings" with William Campbell.⁹⁵ He was extremely indignant about Lee's failure to support his riflemen during Tarleton's charge, and "on the day after the action...spoke freely of Lee's conduct."⁹⁶ Lee only admitted that Campbell did make "some complaint of the kind," but that "nothing" was made of it. He nevertheless defended his abandonment of the riflemen by writing that had the Legion stayed in the wooded position the cavalry would have been exposed to the "United British army," certainly an overstatement.⁹⁷ However, Fran Russell, who did some biographical research on Campbell, made a strong point by recognizing Lee as "a brave man and a good soldier" and noting the possibility that Campbell's temper was aroused in the heat of battle by the merciless butchery by Tarleton of his friends.⁹⁸

Hard feelings or not, on March 17 Henry Lee sent a congratulatory letter to Campbell on the battle of Guilford:

I am very happy in informing you that the bravery of your battalion, displayed in the action of the 15th, is particularly noticed by the General. It

95

William Campbell to Draper, July 10, 1840, 8 ZZ 1, Ibid.

96

W. Johnson, Sketches of the Life and Correspondence of Nathanael Greene, II, 16-17.

97

Lee, The Campaign in the Carolinas, 202, 174.

98

Russell, "A Commentary on the Life of General William Campbell," Northern Neck Historical Magazine, IV (Dec. 1954), 348.

is much to be lamented that a failure took place in the line which separated us from the main body and exposed our retreat. I hope your men are safe and that the scattered will collect again.

Lee apparently had no doubt that Campbell would continue serving under him, for he closed the letter by asking Campbell for "a return of your loss," and ordering him to "prepare your men for a second battle."⁹⁹

Greene however, had other plans. Two days later he wrote apologetically to Campbell that, "Most of the riflemen having gone home, and not having it in my power to make up another command, you have my permission to return home to your friends...." Nonetheless, Greene promised that "...should the emergency of the southern operations require your further exertions, I will advertise you."¹⁰⁰ Greene's letter, whether intentional or not, breeched an uncomfortable situation between Lee and Campbell. Accordingly on March 20, the latter officer resigned and left the American camp for home.¹⁰¹

Despite the valiant service which Campbell had performed by raising troops (however few) and fighting in the actions of March 6 and 15, it would ironically appear that Campbell's military reputation was tarnished by mis-

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Gibbes, ed. Documentary History of the American Revolution

General Howe to General Rutledge, Oct. 6, 1776, II, 41-42.

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Greene to William Campbell, March 19, 1781, 8 DD 26, Draper Manuscripts.

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Draper, King's Mountain and its Heroes, 395.

understanding. However, Campbell had certainly played an important part at Wentzill's Mill and Guilford Courthouse, and just as the allegations of his cowardice at King's Mountain would be proven false, Campbell was soon to win tacit vindication for his disgracing resignation.

Chapter X: General William Campbell, April - August 1781

Campbell reached Aspenville on March 26. "I returned from my little excursion into South Carolina," he informed the Reverend Cummings on March 31, "and had the happiness of finding my family in good health."¹ Campbell also found that, although he had resigned his commission on March 20, when the Washington County militia was reorganized two days later into two battalions, Campbell was appointed to command the first battalion. His immediate subordinates were Lieutenant Colonel William Edmiston and Major Aaron Lewis. Colonel Daniel Smith commanded the second battalion.²

Campbell, however, had no intention of obtaining another commission. "The resignation of my Militia Commission," he wrote to Daniel Smith on March 31, "which I could no longer hold with Honor after the Treatment I have receiv'd, puts it out of my Power to serve my Country as an Officer." Nevertheless, Campbell, "from the Respect I owe the People of Washington County," still wished "to devote the small Abilities I am Master of to their Service, in some Capacity or other...."³ His term in the House of Delegates having expired on March 22, Campbell therefore announced his candidacy for his own

¹ Gibbes, ed. Documentary History of the American Revolution, William Campbell to Cummings, March 1781, II, 139-140.

² Washington County Minute Book No. 1, 109.

³ William Campbell to Daniel Smith, March 31, 1781, 16 DD 20, Draper Manuscripts.

vacated seat.⁴ He asked at least one influential Washingtonian for his support. On March 31 he wrote Daniel Smith that

I have determined to offer myself as a Candidate at the next Election for Representatives of this County in General Assembly, and if you think I merit your Confidence and Esteem, I shall be much obliged to you for your Interest on that Occasion... If the Indians are not troublesome in your Quarter, at the time of the Election, you may perhaps prevail upon the People to come over to it--Of the time I expect you will be notified by the Sheriff's Advertisement.⁵

Campbell might well have gotten Smith's support, for he was re-elected to the House of Delegates the following month.⁶

Probably because of his election Campbell refused to accept a commission as Sheriff of Washington County on April 17. He had been recommended the preceeding November with Smith and Edmiston "as fit and proper persons" to execute that office, and his commission had been granted by the Council of the State on February 17, 1781.⁷ Now Campbell's name was withdrawn, Joseph Martin was nominated in his place, and Smith and Edmiston were renominated to fill the position.⁸

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Swem and Williams, Register of the General Assembly, 11.

5

William Campbell to Smith, March 31, 1781, 16 DD 20, Draper Manuscripts.

6

Summers, History of Southwest Virginia and Washington County, 358.

7

Washington County Minute Book No. 1, 104, 110; H. R. McIlwaine, ed. Journal of the Council of the State of Virginia (Richmond, 1832), II, 295.

8

Washington County Minute Book No. 1, 109.

Meanwhile, Campbell had received information that British General Benedict Arnold, who had invaded Virginia in January, had been reinforced by General William Phillips. Campbell admitted that the augmentation of British forces in Virginia was "rather unhappy" for the Americans, but could not help believing that "Providence designs a Larger Sacrifice of British Barbarians."⁹

Campbell, who probably left Aspenville late in April to attend the General Assembly's first session on May 7 in Richmond, might have guessed that the British would threaten that city. Indeed, on April 18 General Phillips left Portsmouth with several small ships and twenty-three troop transports, with orders to disperse some patriot militia near Williamsburg and destroy American supply bases on the south side of the James that Arnold had neglected to capture in January. On April 25 Phillips landed at City Point and fought a battle near Petersburg, with the obvious intention of moving on Richmond. However, when Phillips arrived five days later on the south bank of the James opposite Richmond he found to his dismay that 3,300 American troops under the Marquis de Lafayette were there.¹⁰ The British General decided not to risk an attack, and sullenly withdrew down the James.

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William Campbell to Smith, March 31, 1781, 16 DD 20, Draper Manuscripts.

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Harry M. Ward and Harold E. Greer, Jr., Richmond During the Revolution, 1775-1783 (Charlottesville, Va., 1977), 88.

Although the immediate threat to Richmond appeared to be ended when Phillips returned to Petersburg, Lafayette decided not to fight a battle unless it was on his own chosen ground, which apparently meant that the Marquis would not defend Richmond in the future unless tactically sound. The General Assembly responded on May 10 by adjourning until the 24th at Charlottesville.¹¹

The Assemblymen who actually went to Charlottesville were so few in number that the House of Delegates resolved forty members sufficient to constitute a quorum.¹² Thus it was no particular honor when, on May 31, Campbell was appointed (with R. H. Lee, Patrick Henry, John Page, and a brother-in-law, John Syme) to the nineteen member Committee on Privileges and Elections, the job of which was to examine returns of "this present General Assembly" and report "from time to time" on "all such matters as shall come in question touching returns." The committee was empowered to call witnesses and produce reports for their investigations.¹³

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Ibid., 90.

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Journal of the House of Delegates, II, Session Beginning May 7, 1781, 1, 10.

¹³

Ibid., 8.

In the first days of June the General Assembly was directly affected by the British invasion of Virginia. Ten days after the Legislature's flight from Richmond, Cornwallis arrived at Petersburg and took command of British forces in the state, 8,000 men including the garrison at Portsmouth.¹⁴ He selected a field force "to dislodge Lafayette near Richmond and with my light Troops destroy any Magazines or Stores in the Neighborhood."¹⁵ On June 1 a patrol from the British Legion intercepted a dispatch which revealed the Assembly's meeting place, and after receiving authorization from Cornwallis, Tarleton moved on Charlottesville two days later.¹⁶

The Assembly was saved by John Jouett, a Louisa militia captain who watched Tarleton's raiders--180 troopers from the British Legion and Seventeenth Light Dragoons and seventy mounted infantrymen from the Twenty-third Regiment--pass his home.¹⁷ Jouett rode ahead to Charlottesville and

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Dupuy and Dupuy, Encyclopedia of Military History, 720.

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Charles E. Hatch, Jr., "The Affair Near James Island (or The Battle of Green Spring)," VMHB, LIII (Jan. 1945), 174.

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Bass, The Green Dragoon, 178.

¹⁷

Ibid., 179; Tarleton, History of the Campaigns of 1780 and 1781,

alerted the Assemblymen, who adjourned on June 4 to meet in Staunton three days later. Notwithstanding Jouett's warning, Tarleton was able to capture seven Legislators and barely missed surprising Governor Jefferson at Monticello. The raiders also broke 1,000 firelocks and captured some military accoutrements, some tobacco, and 400 barrels of powder.¹⁸

Safely in Staunton but keenly aware of the British threat to Virginia, the General Assembly (after finally achieving a quorum on June 10) moved actively to expell the invaders. It was resolved to invite the sickly Daniel Morgan back into service to fight "the enemy on the present emergency," and on June 12, to raise a corps of volunteers to join Lafayette.¹⁹ Two days later a motion was made, by whom is not recorded, "That William Campbell, Esq., be Appointed a Brigadier General in the militia of this Commonwealth and that the Governor elect do commission him accordingly." The motion was received and read a second time, whereupon John Page was appointed to carry the resolution to the Senate.²⁰

Although the obvious design of the Assembly was that Campbell should command the "corps of volunteers" provided for on June 12, Campbell's career

¹⁸
Journal of the House of Delegates, II, Session Beginning May 7, 1781, 10; Tarleton, History of the Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, 297.

¹⁹
Journal of the House of Delegates, II, Session Beginning May 7, 1781, 9-10, 15.

²⁰
Ibid., 17.

as a Delegate was not yet concluded. Later on June 14 he was appointed with Henry, Page, and six others to ammend "An Act for regulating and disciplining the militia," and the following day he was appointed to a committee of twelve to prepare a bill for the enlistment of an undetermined number of volunteers to serve for two years or the duration of the war.²¹ He was also ordered with two other Delegates to prepare a bill "to regulate the department of the War Office," and later on June 15, Mr. Page presented the recommendations to ammend "the act for regulating and disciplining the militia."²²

Also that day, it was reported to the House of Delegates that Campbell's appointment as a Brigadier General had been approved by the Senate, and the following day Campbell was granted a leave of absence for the remainder of the session.²³ However, before leaving Staunton Campbell silenced allegations that he had taken his Virginians to King's Mountain without proper authorization. On June 16 he issued a certificate which outlined the orders for Campbell's unfinished Cherokee expedition and attested to Jefferson's subsequent instructions "to apply to that purpose the same means and powers which I was invested with for carrying on the Cherokee expedition, under which directions I marched a number of mounted militia to King's Mountain, S.C."²⁴

²¹ Ibid., 19

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 20.

²⁴ "Certificate of William Campbell Concerning King's Mountain, June 16, 1781," VMHB, VII (Jan. 1901), 326.

Two days later, the resolution for Campbell's appointment was read before the Council and a commission was granted "empowering the said William Campbell to act as Brigadier General of Militia during the present invasion."²⁵

By the time of Campbell's appointment the situation in eastern Virginia had improved markedly. Early in June Lafayette had moved with his limited force north of Richmond. Meanwhile, Cornwallis realized the difficulty of drawing Lafayette into a major battle and withdrew his army to Richmond. On June 21 he started down the James toward Williamsburg, where Cornwallis would await further orders from Sir Henry Clinton.²⁶ Made confident by the enemy withdrawal, Lafayette divided his forces for several days, reuniting west of Richmond on June 23 with plans to move chiefly at night. However, because he had been reinforced by Anthony Wayne's 1,000 Pennsylvania Continentals, a small contingent under the Baron von Steuben, and a goodly number of militia, Lafayette felt he was strong enough to fight Cornwallis' rear guard.²⁷

Nevertheless, Lafayette was unable to draw the British into a battle. "We have been pressing his rear, with our light parties, supported by the

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McIlwaine, Journal of the Council of the State of Virginia, II, 348.

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Charles E. Hatch, Jr., Yorktown and the Siege of 1781, (Washington, D.C., 1957), 3.

²⁷

Gilbert Chinard, ed. Lafayette in Virginia, Unpublished Letters from the Original Manuscripts in the Virginia State Library (Baltimore, 1928), Lafayette to Jefferson, June 26, 1781, 17.

army," wrote the Marquis to Governor Benjamin Harrison on June 26, "but his Lordship has proceeded so cautiously, and so covered his marches with his cavalry, that it has been, under our circumstances, next to impossible to do him any injury."²⁸ Ironically, on the same day Lafayette wrote to Harrison, Cornwallis (who had repaired to Williamsburg on June 25) sent Colonel J. G. Simcoe and 400 dragoons of the Queen's Rangers west to capture some small boats that were tied near Lafayette's army on the James. Simcoe, however, ran into the American vanguard under Colonel Richard Butler near Spencer's Ordinary. Butler's cavalry charged Simcoe's horsemen and then fell back on "the battalions of riflemen who came to their support," which forced Simcoe to retreat to Williamsburg. Although both sides had sent forward substantial reinforcements, there was no general action at Spencer's Ordinary.²⁹

Two days later Lafayette moved cautiously to Tyree's Plantation, twenty miles northwest of Williamsburg, to watch British movements. There, with harvest time fast approaching, Lafayette was compelled to consolidate his three militia brigades into two, and reported that "...you might as well stop the flood tide as to stop militia whose times are out--the Riflemen are determined to go out and take care of their harvest so that I shall be left with the Continentals."³⁰

²⁸

Ibid.

²⁹

Louis Gottschalk, Lafayette and the Close of the American Revolution (Chicago, 1942), 261.

³⁰

Chinard, ed. Lafayette in Virginia, Lafayette to Jefferson, July 1, 1781, 18.

Meanwhile, General William Campbell had left Staunton and probably returned to Washington County to recruit additional troops and collect contingents already raised in response to the act of June 12. By the latter part of June when Campbell started for Lafayette's army, 600 riflemen marched with him.³¹

Very little is known about Campbell's march, but it can be determined that it was by a southerly route that carried the mountain men through Cumberland County and Richmond. While marching through Cumberland, Campbell billeted his troops one night near the home of an old English parson named McRae, "who had been drawing his 16,000 pounds of tobacco for many years and was quite wealthy." Campbell himself spent the night at the home of an acquaintance nearby. On his return to camp the next morning he was informed by his officers that "Old Macray had been down and said all that he could to discourage the Solgers." The patriots, McRae had said, did not have "the most distant idea" of the danger ahead; that Cornwallis had "a very large army composed of the finest troops that had ever left England," and that "Lord Cornwallice would slaughter them like a parcell of beeves." Campbell immediately sent three soldiers to "fetch" the parson, who was subsequently told by Campbell that, while he deserved corporal punishment for what he had said, he would be spared physical injury because of his age. However, Campbell promised to show McRae "how his men would serve Lord Cornwallice."

³¹

Hatch, Yorktown and the Siege of 1781, 4.

One of Campbell's friends, John Redd, related what transpired:

When the regiment was ready to start Campbell commanded Macray to lay down & stretch himself out full length across the road, as soon as the Parson was stretched out full length every man stepped over him, Campbell informed him that was the way he intended to serve his Lord Cornwallice.

Redd remembered that the incident left Campbell in "ill humor" and that McRae's "prays" did not accompany the patriots on their way.³²

It is not known for certain when Campbell joined the American Army. Henry Lee erroneously remembered that it was in mid-June at Albermarle Courthouse that Lafayette "...was reinforced by Colonel Campbell, one of the heroes of King's Mountain, with his rifle militia."³³ The first real indication of Campbell's presence came in a letter from the Marquis to Governor Harrison on June 28. After noting that the limited success of Spencer's Ordinary "has given great satisfaction to the troops, and increased their ardor," Lafayette matter-of-factly added that "I have put the riflemen under Campbell."³⁴

Lafayette gave Campbell command of 180 light militiamen, which with the men he had brought from the frontier, were brigaded into an "advanced corps" of 780 men. Only Peter Muhlenberg's brigade of 800 Continentals was

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Redd, "Reminiscences of Western Virginia, 1770-1790," VMHB, VII (Oct. 1899), 121-122, (July 1899), 5.

³³

Lee, Memoirs of the War in the Southern Department, 427.

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Charlemagne Tower, LL.D., The Marquis De La Fayette in the American Revolution (New York, 1970); II, 356.

more numerous than Campbell's. which compared in strength to the brigades of Anthony Wayne (750 Continentals) and Generals Stevens and Lawson (650 and 750 Virginia militia respectively).³⁵

Word spread quickly of Campbell's arrival at Tyree's Plantation. On July 2 a Hanover County militia colonel had learned of Campbell's presence and enquired if he had need of his services. "I have just been informed you are present at camp," the colonel wrote, "& have command of the Light Infantry."³⁶ Nevertheless, Campbell's arrival seemed to create no special stir. On July 2 an army surgeon, Samuel Finley, described Lafayette's pursuit of Cornwallis in a letter to a friend, Jacob Hall. It has been accomplished, wrote Finley, only "After being sufficiently reinforced by the junction of the Pennsylvania Line & meriads of Militia under General Morgan, Lawson, Campbell & Stevens."³⁷ Likewise, Dr. Robert Honeyman, who kept a daily journal of economic, military, and political events in wartime Virginia, treated Campbell's arrival quietly. On July 6 he merely mentioned that "Brig:

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Charles Campbell, ed. The Bland Papers: Being a Selection from the Manuscripts of Colonel Theodorick Bland, Jr., of Prince George County, Virginia (Petersburg, 1843), Christian Febiger to Theodorick Bland, July 3, 1781, II, 71-72.

³⁶

Unknown to William Campbell, July 2, 1781, Campbell-Preston Papers, II.

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"Samuel Finley to Jacob Hall, July 2, 1781," WMQ, 2nd. Ser., XXIII (July 1914), 46.

Gen: Will: Campbell (formerly Col: Campbell) has taken command of the riflemen," and eight days later entered the following information: "The Generals with our Army are Major Gen: the Marquis, Major Gen: the Baron de Steuben, Brig: Gen: Wayne, & B. G. Muhlenburgh, B. G. Lawson, B. G. Stevens, B. G. Campbell, & B. G. Morgan."³⁸ Nevertheless, while contemporary journals and letters are notable for not mentioning Campbell with any frequency, Arthur Campbell later wrote that his cousin "became a favorite of the gallant nobleman," Lafayette.³⁹

On July 1 Campbell was ordered "in front" of the American army to Byrd's Ordinary, sixteen miles from Williamsburg, with orders to send out patrols to watch Cornwallis.⁴⁰ Four miles behind Campbell was deployed Colonel Christian Febiger's 425 Virginia regulars, and one and one-half miles behind Febiger were Wayne's and Muhlenberg's Continentals. They were supported by the militia brigades of Stevens and Lawson and the artillery park.⁴¹ Thus was the American army poised to either attack or pursue the enemy, according to British movements.⁴¹

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Richard K. McMaster, ed. "News of the Yorktown Campaign: the Journal of Dr. Robert Honeyman," VMHB, LXXIX (Oct. 1971), 408-409.

³⁹

Arthur Campbell's Biographical Statement, n.d., 8 DD 78, Draper Manuscripts.

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Hatch, "The Affair Near James Island," VMHB, LIII (Jan. 1945), 181.

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C. Campbell, ed. The Bland Papers, Febiger to Bland, July 3, 1781, II, 71-72.

Campbell posted twelve or fifteen riflemen on picket duty at Three Burnt Chimneys, a spot about midway between the American camp and Williamsburg. On several successive mornings Simcoe's Rangers attacked and drove in the picket, and Campbell saw the opportunity to lay an ambush. Campbell therefore led a company of mounted riflemen to a grove of trees by the roadside and slightly behind Three Burnt Chimneys. Having instructed the pickets to retire as usual when the British attacked, Campbell waited silently in the trees as the patriots retreated before Simcoe's horsemen. However, when the enemy cavalry passed Campbell's position a surprise volley rang out that disabled twenty British dragoons and forty horses, and forced Simcoe to retire to Williamsburg.⁴² Quite understandably, Simcoe made no mention of the ambush in his journal.

Simcoe's attacks on Campbell's pickets may have been designed to screen Cornwallis' preparations to evacuate Williamsburg. On June 26 Cornwallis had received orders from Sir Henry Clinton to concentrate his army in New York. To accomplish this the British had to march to Portsmouth, where they could embark in ships and transports. In early July Cornwallis sent his baggage train toward that place.⁴³ Nevertheless, on July 3 Colonel Febiger rode the four miles down to Campbell's bivouac to find that, while matters remained "in status quo," Campbell's pickets had discovered the de-

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Russell, "A Commentary on the Life of General William Campbell," Northern Neck Historical Magazine, IV (Dec. 1954), 349.

⁴³

Alden, History of the American Revolution, 469.

parture of the enemy baggage. "There is some indication," wrote Febiger to Theodorick Bland, "of their intending at least...a partial embarkation."⁴⁴

On July 4 the American army celebrated the fifth anniversary of the Declaration of Independence by staging a review, and Lafayette gave a dinner for his officers which Campbell must have attended. The same day, the British evacuated Williamsburg and marched to James Island, the first step toward Portsmouth and the most convenient crossing place on the James.⁴⁵ Cornwallis immediately sent the Queen's Rangers across the river and, on July 5, sent his baggage wagons across. He planned to cross with the remainder of his army on July 7.⁴⁶

Meanwhile, Lafayette responded to the evacuation of Williamsburg by moving his army on July 5 to Chickahominy Church, and the next day dispatched Wayne and 500 men to Green Spring Farm, a mile or so from James Island.⁴⁷ Guessing Lafayette's intention to attack his rear guard after the main British army crossed the James, Cornwallis sent three paid "deserters" to the French Marquis, who was told that all British units with the exception of a small rear

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C. Campbell, ed. The Bland Papers, Febiger to Bland, July 3, 1781, II, 71-72.

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Gottschalk, Lafayette and the Close of the American Revolution, 263-264.

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Tower, The Marquis De La Fayette in the American Revolution, II, 356.

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Gottschalk, Lafayette and the Close of the American Revolution, 264.

guard had crossed the river. General Wayne was immediately sent forward with three detachments of cavalry, half the Pennsylvania Line, three field pieces, and 150 riflemen.⁴⁸

The deception was soon discovered. Wayne charged an abandoned enemy field piece--left by Cornwallis to entice such an effort--but was met by the Seventy-sixth and Eightieth regiments and repulsed.⁴⁹ The British advance that followed forced Wayne to leave behind two cannons and fall back on two battalions of Continentals in reserve. Although reinforcements raised Wayne's force to 800 men, the American army was outnumbered four to one, and Lafayette was compelled to withdraw to Chickahominy Church, nine miles from James Island.⁵⁰ His losses were 28 killed, 99 wounded, and 12 missing, while Cornwallis lost only 75 men.⁵¹ The battle was the most costly one of the Yorktown campaign, but was largely for naught, since Cornwallis made no attempt to follow up his victory.

⁴⁸ Tower, The Marquis De La Fayette in the American Revolution, II, 357-358, 361.

⁴⁹ J. G. Simcoe, A Journal of the Operations of the Queen's Rangers (New York, 1968 Reprint), 239.

⁵⁰ Tower, The Marquis De La Fayette in the American Revolution, II, 63; Gottschalk, Lafayette and the Close of the American Revolution, 266.

⁵¹ Hatch, "The Affair Near James Island," VMHB, LIII (Jan. 1945), 82; Hatch, Yorktown and the Siege of 1781, 6.

It is uncertain what William Campbell's role was, if any, at James Island. Certainly, Wayne's corps was "chiefly composed of Pennsylvanians and some light infantry, but 150 of Campbell's riflemen did fight in the battle and were praised in Wayne's official report.⁵² A few riflemen were wounded and Colonel John Boyer of "Campbell's Corps" was captured.⁵³ There is some evidence that Campbell was himself present at James Island. In 1832 one of his riflemen swore in a deposition that Campbell fought there, and L. C. Draper later talked with an old Pennsylvanian who had been told by a veteran of James Island that "Campbell participated in the attack and fell back firing as he retired."⁵⁴

As Cornwallis retreated to Portsmouth, Lafayette rested his army at Malvern Hill, midway between Richmond and Williamsburg. Several days later, however, Wayne and Campbell were sent across the James to Goode's Bridge, on the east side of the Appomattox River.⁵⁵

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James McHenry, A Sidelight on History, Being the Letters of James McHenry, Aide-de-Camp of the Marquis Lafayette, to Thomas Sim Lee, Governor of Maryland, Written During the Yorktown Campaign 1781 (n.p., 1931), Wayne's Official Report of James Island, July 8, 1781, enclosed in a Letter From James McHenry to Thomas Sim Lee, July 11, 1781; 26; Gottschalk, Lafayette and the Close of the American Revolution, 207.

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Tower, The Marquis De La Fayette in the American Revolution, II, 366.

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"Depositions of Revolutionary Soldiers," VMHB, IV (April 1897), 414.

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J. Bennett Nolan, Lafayette in America (Baltimore, 1934), 190; Tower, The Marquis De La Fayette in the American Revolution, II, 410.

Campbell arrived at Goode's Bridge on July 18, and for the next ten days was "without any thing to do more than to deter the enemy from coming up into this part of the country in small parties." He was unsure how long he would stay there, but informed Samuel McDowell on July 28 that "it will be until the enemy make some movement to determine our future operations."⁵⁶ But for the time being, Campbell complained that "We have not the least news from any quarter," and lamented the fact that his brigade had been reduced to 400 men "from the expiration of the term for which many of the militia were ordered out."⁵⁷

Campbell was heartened by news that the great European powers were about to convene a conference "to settle the war" and that "America will be included in the treaty." Nevertheless, when McDowell informed Campbell of the proposed peace convention he also expressed his opinion that the 1781 campaign would determine "our future happiness." "We ought," wrote McDowell on July 25, "...drive off the enemy or pen them up in as small bounds as in our power." As for Campbell, he was "much obliged" to McDowell "...for the hope you give me, that there is a prospect of the war being speedily terminated. I pray God that our exertions may be under Providence, as will make the end of it happy and honourable to our country."

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Gibbes, ed. Documentary History of the American Revolution,
William Campbell to Samuel McDowell, July 28, 1781, III, 122.

⁵⁷

Ibid.

Meanwhile, on July 30 Cornwallis embarked at Portsmouth for Yorktown, a position judged indefensible by Sir Henry Clinton.⁵⁹ However, when Lafayette learned of the move the following day, he supposed Cornwallis' destination to be Baltimore! He therefore ordered his army to concentrate near Richmond and to march from there to Fredericksburg, within striking distance of Maryland.⁶⁰ On August 2, Campbell, still at Goode's Bridge, received his orders from General Wayne. "I have this moment received orders from the Marquis Lafayette," wrote Wayne, "to march towards Fredericksburg; the enemy are expected, having sailed up the bay. You will therefore cross the Apomattock at Petersburg, and proceed in the most direct route for West Ham, on the James; should we have crossed it before you arrive, you will follow in our track."⁶¹

By August 6, the day Lafayette learned that Cornwallis was entrenching at Yorktown instead of sailing up the Chesapeake, Campbell had already passed through Richmond into Hanover County. However, when his rifle corps

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Hatch, Yorktown and the Siege of 1781, 7.

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Gottschalk, Lafayette and the Close of the American Revolution, 280; Tower, The Marquis De La Fayette in the American Revolution, II, 413.

⁶¹

Gibbes, ed. Documentary History of the American Revolution, Anthony Wayne to William Campbell, Aug. 2, 1781, III, 124.

moved down the James to join the rest of the American army at West Point on the Pamunkey, thirty miles northwest of Yorktown, Campbell did not accompany his men.⁶² He had been disabled several days before by "a complaint in his breast, which obliged him to retire from the army to a friend's house in the country..."⁶³

The "friend's house" was Rocky Mills, the residence of John Syme, son of Sarah Winston Syme Henry, and the half-brother of Campbell's wife, Elizabeth. Located on the South Anna River in Hanover County, Rocky Mills was built of imported English bricks and had served as a billet for the American army in June.⁶⁴ Various historians have attributed Campbell's demise to a number of illnesses ranging from "a severe attack of dysentary" to "lung fever" which developed from the pain in his chest.⁶⁵ Whatever the

⁶² Tower, The Marquis De La Fayette in the American Revolution, II, 416.

⁶³ Arthur Campbell's Biographical Statement, n.d., 8 DD 78, Draper Manuscripts.

⁶⁴ Stan V. Henkels, ed. Patrick Henry Papers and Other Important Historical Documents (Richmond, 1910), 63; William Feltman, The Journal of Lieutenant William Feltman of the First Pennsylvania Regiment (Philadelphia, 1853), 5.

⁶⁵ Copenhaver, "Madame Russell," Scribner's Magazine, LXXXIII (June 1928), 730; Publications of the Washington County Historical Society, 58.

ultimate causes, on August 22, 1781, General William Campbell died at Rocky Mills. He was thirty-six years of age.

When Lafayette heard of Campbell's death he issued the following bulletin to the army:

The general has no doubt that the army will unite with him in regretting General Campbell's death, an officer whose services must have endeared him to every citizen, and in particular to every American soldier. The glory which General Campbell acquired in the affairs of King's Mountain and Guilford courthouse does his memory everlasting honor and insures him a high rank among the defenders of liberty in the American cause.⁶⁶

Although the Marquis wished "it had been possible for himself and the officers of the army to pay him those honors to which his rank, but particular his merit, so highly entitle him," the distance between West Point and Rocky Mills rendered it impossible. Instead, he ordered the Hanover County Lieutenant to "assemble a corps to pay military honors to the deceased general," and sent four field officers that were named by General Edward Stevens to Rocky Mills. Their mission was to, "in the name of the army, pay General Campbell their last respects."⁶⁷

This done, Campbell's remains were buried nearby.

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Summers, History of Southwest Virginia and Washington County, 359-360.

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Ibid.

Conclusion

Campbell's career had been surprisingly short. It was only eleven years before his death that Campbell had first served the public interest in Botetourt County Court, and only seven years since being granted his first military commission. Yet since that time Campbell had surpassed in notoriety such prominent southwest Virginians as William Christian, William Preston, and Arthur Campbell.

Surely, William Campbell had been lucky. As a close relative of Arthur Campbell, positions in the county government and militia were easily attained. Thus neither his appointment as a justice nor as lieutenant colonel in the militia seem very surprising. His promotion to colonel was purely by default, following Evan Shelby's re-establishment in North Carolina. This in turn gave Campbell the timely command of local troops sent to quell the New River tories in 1779. His success against the loyalists on this occasion won Campbell the recognition and distinction necessary to win election to the House of Delegates in 1780, and undoubtedly influenced his appointments to command the Chicamauga and New River expeditions of the same summer. Likewise, Campbell's election to command during the King's Mountain campaign followed closely his success against the New River tories, although realistically the final reason for that decision was to defuse the potential powder keg of jealousies among the North Carolinian colonels.

At the battle of Guilford Courthouse luck again played its role in the success of Campbell's career. Having arrived in Greene's camp with only

sixty soldiers, Campbell immediately found himself in command of several hundred of William Preston's riflemen--and thus in command of a major contingent in this notable battle. These troops were given to Campbell because William Preston had become ill! This continuation in Campbell's chain of good fortune helped earn his re-election to the House of Delegates and promoted his appointment as a brigadier general. Campbell's rising star set suddenly with his death, which alone prevented him from sharing in the final patriot victory of Yorktown.

The success of Campbell's career can be argued from both negative and positive angles. Negatively it can be said that Campbell frequently missed court sessions in Washington County and later served with mediocrity in the House of Delegates. As a soldier, despite his two campaigns against the Cherokees in 1774 and 1780, Campbell never actually engaged the Indians in battle. After joining the Virginia regulars at the outbreak of the Revolution, Campbell was so disenchanted with army life that he applied for leave to go home before his term had expired. His two most important battles, King's Mountain and Guilford Courthouse, are marred by unfortunate controversy, whether truthful or false. Finally, Campbell's generalship was not fairly launched before he became ill and died.

The positive viewpoint can more readily be taken. Campbell's frequent absence from court is excusable, in fact, expected, because of the long distances between Aspenville and Botetourt and Fincastle Courthouses, Fort Chiswell, and, in foul weather, even Abingdon. Politically, while it cannot

be argued that he was a great, or even good, politician, Campbell's dedicated attendance in the House of Delegates was creditable, especially on his visit to Richmond after King's Mountain when he undoubtedly had more personal matters on his mind.

Campbell's military capacity must be measured largely by his "dangerous" courage, a martial trait that few eyewitness accounts of his battles fail to mention. The impression made on his peers and their subsequent recounting of Campbell's deeds alone seem to dispell the unlikely rumors after the battles of King's Mountain and Guilford Courthouse. Nonetheless, Campbell's military record is most impressive. He was among the first frontier officers to volunteer for service when the Revolution began, and fought in the first Virginia battle, Gwynn's Island. His ruthless methods and patriotic persistence was influential in quieting tory resistance in Washington and Montgomery Counties and parts of North Carolina. Later, at King's Mountain, while Campbell exercised only titular command, his bravery and successful rallying of his men contributed greatly to the final American victory. At Wentzell's Mill and Guilford Courthouse Campbell led his men under adverse or infuriating circumstances with what had become expected (by his troops) bravery. In the final analysis, whatever negative judgments against Campbell are suggested, the fact remains that he led the over-mountain men to victory at the battle of King's Mountain, the turning point of the Revolution in the south. For this alone William Campbell merits a warm room in the historical heart of America.

Campbell, however, was much more than just a soldier. As a farmer, surveyor, lay minister, frontier settler and justice of the peace, member of the House of Delegates for two terms, and trustee for the founding town of Abingdon, Campbell might well personify the early American spirit. God-fearing, hard working, and intensely patriotic, Campbell could be viewed as a capsule of the interests and achievements symbolic of Revolutionary America.

In 1908, a Virginia Senator noted Campbell's relative obscurity in a report to the United States Congress for the Committee on the Library "Concerning a Monument to the Memory of William Campbell." After recounting Campbell's accomplishments, the Senator commented on the General's historical anonymity and concluded his speech with a simple summary of Campbell's career which appropriately described the rugged Virginian.

You ask me his name, and I answer, 'General William Campbell of the Holston,' and you reply, 'Who was General William Campbell?' Let me answer: 'A Virginian by birth, a Scotch-Irish Presbyterian by ancestry and conviction, an innate lover of freedom and liberty, a sworn enemy of the Tories, a border chieftain, and the hero of the greatest military triumph of the Revolutionary War, the battle of King's Mountain.'¹

¹ Mr. Daniel, Report From the Committee on the Library Concerning "A Monument to the Memory of William Campbell," 60th Congress, 1st Session (Washington, D.C., 1908), 2.

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