

General Andrew Pickens: Backcountry Warrior

America's recent experience of war in Viet Nam, Iraq, and Afghanistan, has renewed public and professional interest in the practice of guerrilla warfare. This type of fighting has an old history although the term "guerrilla" (little war), referring to popular resistance actions, did not appear until Napoleon's campaigns in the Iberian Peninsula. Throughout most of the 18th century, war was conducted by states with professionally trained armies.¹ The American Revolution proved to be a significant exception to that established way of war. Long before such 20th century promoters of partisan war as T. E. Lawrence and Nguyen Giap, Francis Marion, the "Swamp Fox," Thomas Sumter, the "Gamecock" and Andrew Pickens, the "Fighting Elder," all of Revolutionary South Carolina, demonstrated the military effectiveness of irregular forces. Of that trio of partisan leaders, Andrew Pickens, called by the Cherokee *Skyagunsta*, "Wizard Owl", earned his sobriquets by prudent and tenacious leadership in brutal backcountry conflicts. He had special connections to events in Georgia, during the wars and after, as his military and political skills helped shape a new nation. .

Early Years

Andrew Pickens grew up in the backcountry he later fought in. He was born on 13 September 1739 in Pennsylvania; his family moved down the Great Wagon Road to Augusta County, Virginia. By the time Andrew entered his teens, his family, along with other Scots-Irish, mostly Presbyterian, families, had settled in the Waxhaw area (modern Lancaster County) of South Carolina. Named for his father, young Andrew received only limited schooling, a fact he later lamented. Settlers led a hardscrabble existence but tough and persistent work brought a measure of prosperity to the Pickens family. The elder Pickens' diligence and intelligence earned the respect of his neighbors as he presided over a local court. The senior Pickens became one of the organizers of the Waxhaw Presbyterian Church, the first church formed in upcountry South Carolina. Young Andrew's mental and moral formation took shape under the influence of his father's example and the long sermons preached by stern Presbyterian ministers.² The relationship of the white settlers with nearby Indians provided another important context of his life.

As a frontiersman, Andrew learned about the Indian way of life and later observed with misgivings the constant white encroachment on land the Indians used. Nevertheless, Indian attacks on white settlers, such as the Long Canes massacre of February, 1760, that killed twenty-three settlers, including members of the Calhoun family, brought quick and deadly armed response. Pickens served as an officer in a militia that combined with British regulars in punitive expeditions against the Lower Cherokee towns in 1761. As he later wrote: "I was young, fond of a gun & an active life and was much out in that war." Conflict between whites and Indians was "a merciless exchange of raids, assaults, and reprisals" that brutalized the nature of war in the backcountry. But this combat experience proved valuable to the men who a few years later provided military leadership to the Revolutionary cause.³

Among the refugees who fled from Long Canes near the Savannah River to Waxhaws where the Pickens lived was Rebecca Calhoun. Andrew Pickens met Rebecca in 1761 but by the time Andrew got back to the Waxhaws from campaigning, the Calhouns had returned to the Long Cane settlement in present day Abbeville County. Now that both his parents had died, Andrew decided to sell his inherited Waxhaw property and take up land (about 22 miles from the fort at Ninety-Six) near the Calhouns. On March 19, 1765, Andrew and Rebecca were married. They established a home and built a blockhouse near Abbeville. The Pickens family helped found a Presbyterian church of which Andrew became a long-serving elder. Over a decade, through a

combination of inheritance, marriage, and personal hard work, Andrew Pickens became one of the prosperous and influential men of the Carolina "Upcountry". A good deal of his wealth was based on trade with the Cherokee, selling tools, metal ware, guns and powder, for deer hides and other animal pelts. He farmed with slave labor, raised and sold livestock, and served his community as justice of the peace and militia officer. Largely self-made men of the Up Country, like Andrew Pickens, resented the lack of law enforcement and the control of legislation by the Low Country gentry. Political disputes between these two still smoldered when the Low Country leaders moved toward conflict with the British colonial administration.⁴

Revolution Comes to the Carolina Backcountry: Whigs vs. Loyalists, 1775

As the Low Country revolutionaries (Whigs or Patriots) formed a Provincial Congress and Committee of Safety, many in the upper backcountry of South Carolina did not support rebellion but remained loyal to the king (Tories or Loyalists). In the summer and fall of 1775 the Committee of Safety sent representatives into the backcountry to contact key "men of influence" to bring them to the Whig cause. Tories (Loyalists) also organized. Dynamic and ambitious men formed such armed factions from among their neighbors and kinsmen. The revolutionaries sought control of outlying forts and their ammunition and contact with friendly Indians. Action to these ends triggered conflict between rival backcountry Loyalist and Whig factions. Responding to attacks, Captain Andrew Pickens and Major Andrew Williamson assembled patriot militiamen from the region of Ninety-Six. They fought Loyalists in what became known as the "snow campaign" of 1775. The Loyalists lost in these initial rounds of fighting; some of the defeated simply laid low while others fled into Cherokee land or made for Florida.⁵ The British, meanwhile, failed to retake control of Charleston, temporarily disheartening the Loyalists in South Carolina.

The Cherokee War of 1776

As the British force in South Carolina ebbed, their Cherokee allies mounted ill-timed but fierce attacks on frontier settlers from Georgia to Virginia. This war was "small-scale, savage, and unsparring in its cruelty". Indians conducted surprise attacks on isolated homesteads where "white and black inhabitants were tortured, mutilated, and murdered without regard for age or sex."⁶ Horrifying stories of Indian atrocities slowly swelled the ranks of the militia. The Long Canes militia under Captain Andrew Pickens joined Major Williamson's of Ninety-Six in a devastating campaign of reprisals against the Indian towns in the western parts of South Carolina and North Carolina. Fourteen Indian settlements were utterly burned out; their stunned survivors fled without food or shelter. On the night of August 12 [the date differs in various accounts], Andrew Pickens was leading a detachment of 25 men to destroy Tamassee when they were ambushed by a Cherokee force of about 150 men and surrounded in an open field. Pickens ordered his men to form a double circle in the tall grass so that one ring could fire while the other reloaded. The Indians also formed a larger circle and the two blasted away at close range. The fight ended with close combat as tomahawk and knife spilled blood. The "Ring Fight", fought within view of the place Pickens later chose for his final home, was one of the largest of the campaign. After the fight, Pickens' men burned the village of Tamassee.

Williamson next conducted a campaign into Georgia and North Carolina to wipe out the Cherokee Middle and Valley towns. Andrew Pickens was commissioned major in this expedition of systematic destruction of 36 towns and villages. The Cherokee War of 1776 so weakened this tribe that when the British returned in 1779/80, they could not count on really effective support.

For the Whigs or Patriots, these 1776 expeditions gave experience and schooling in tactics—ambush, hit and run, strike and evade-- for later use against Loyalist and British forces. For these purposes, light infantry and light cavalry were desirable. Militiamen supplied their own horses and equipment or obtained arms from the Whig authorities. They rode to battle sites and then fought dismounted: if armed with rifles they needed a stable platform for accuracy. As forward or flanking troops riflemen could place deadly fire on British or Loyalist officers and sergeants. Since rifles could not be fitted with bayonets, riflemen carried tomahawks and knives for close quarter fighting. Most militiaman, armed with musket and bayonet, had to gain experience in close order fighting where volley firing and the bayonet charge could be effective. The Patriots' cavalry, whether light or heavy (dragoons), armed with pistols, carbines (shortened muskets) and sabers, could fight on horseback. They were used in surprise actions, against retreating infantry, and as reserve forces to take advantage of mistakes by the enemy or to cover a breakdown in their own forces. The Cherokee War of 1776 provided practical experience in developing these tactics of partisan warfare. This conflict also established Andrew Pickens' personal stature; he displayed those qualities of leadership which attracted men who trusted his abilities and who would follow his orders. "In short he was almost a clan leader among a clannish people."⁷

An Interlude of Peace and a March to Georgia

South Carolina was spared much in the way of military activity for more than two years. During part of this time, Major Pickens could attend to his neglected family, plantation, and business. But he received a call in April 1778 to join Colonel Williamson. They were to aid the Georgians in what proved to be their disastrous second Florida expedition. It was a bad summer campaign. Bickering between Continental General Howe and the Georgia and South Carolina militia officers, along with the heat, disease, pesky insects and wily British/ Loyalist resistance doomed the patriot's effort in the swamps of south Georgia and northeastern Florida. This revelation of Patriot weakness paved the way for the seizure of Savannah by the British in December. Nevertheless, as reward for their efforts in the Florida expedition, the governor of South Carolina promoted Williamson to the rank of brigadier general and Pickens to that of colonel of the Upper Ninety-Six regiment.

Pickens and the British "Southern Strategy"

The capture of Savannah in December, 1778, set in motion the British design for a "Southern strategy" to retake the former colonies from the bottom up as it were. General Sir Henry Clinton had ordered Lieutenant Colonel Archibald Campbell to join with Major General Augustine Prevost and the Kings Rangers commanded by Colonel Thomas Brown from East Florida in that successful action. Now their task was to finish the conquest of Georgia and rally the Loyalists to the royal standard. To that end Campbell dispatched Loyalist Colonel John Hamilton up the Savannah River to Augusta in early January, 1779. Campbell himself followed with 1,700 British regulars to occupy Augusta and pressure the population into British support. In addition to Hamilton and Campbell, a Loyalist Colonel Boyd busily recruited in the Carolinas and in northeast Georgia bringing troops to the British cause. The passions of Loyalists and Whigs thus aroused soon brought the upper Savannah River region of Georgia and South Carolina to bloody civil war.

The Battle of Kettle Creek

Across the Savannah River, the South Carolina Whigs organized for defense. General

Williamson sent Colonel Andrew Pickens with about 200 men from Ninety-Six to link up with Wilkes County, Georgia, patriots led by Colonel John Dooly and Lieutenant Colonel Elijah Clarke. Pickens insisted, and the two Georgia men agreed, that Pickens would have over-all command of the combined forces. Pickens told the men he “was determined to be obeyed, to which they all heartily agreed”. The patriots first objective was to capture Colonel Hamilton and almost succeeded at Carr’s Fort before news of Colonel Boyd’s approach reached them. Their major objective then became to intercept Boyd’s Loyalist force before he could join the Augusta group. Some days followed of confused marching up and down and crossings and re-crossings of the Savannah River as each side sought to grapple with or evade the other. After a brief clash on February 11 at Vann’s Creek, just north of Cherokee Ford on the Savannah, Boyd headed southward. Two days later, Colonel Pickens learned that Boyd’s unit (about 600 men) was in present day Wilkes County.⁸ By this time Pickens’ command may have totaled 360 patriot militia. The opposing forces actually made camp the evening of February 13 within a few miles of each other. Both were up early the next morning.

As Pickens later recalled: “we pursued on as fast & with as much caution as possible---About 10 o’clock [Feb. 14] we heard their Drums a mile ahead—This was the first time they had beaten their Drum or hoisted the colours, since they had crossed Savannah River—I then halted, examined & had our guns fresh picked & primed... I then made arrangements for the attack expecting to come up with them upon their march—Coln Dooley had the right division, Lieut Coln Clark the left, with orders when we came up with their [Boyd’s] rear to press forward on their flanks while I would press forward upon their rear...” As usual in warfare, the action did not go exactly as planned; the element of surprise was lost. Boyd’s men, dispersed in various tasks, were hastily assembled. Pickens related: “Boyd being a man of courage & action, advanced immediately with a party of men... I [then] advanced to the center to the top of the hill where Boyd was concealed... ---We were within thirty yards before they fired or we discovered them... --They immediately fled down through the cleared ground to their main body—Fortunately for us when Boyd had run about 100 yards, three balls passed through him—The action then became general and warm....”

Clarke outflanked the enemy on the right allowing Pickens to hit the center. Many of Boyd’s men fled in panic; Dooly and Clarke pursued and captured 150 of them. About 70 of Boyd’s men were killed; Pickens’ group suffered 9 killed and 21 wounded. Several post-war accounts show Pickens returning to the field to pay his respects to the dying Boyd who allegedly rejected the pious elder’s offer of prayers but did ask Pickens to take some personal items to his wife. Pickens did not retail that story himself. Years later in retirement, Pickens reflected: “The severest conflict I ever had with the disaffected or tories was in Georgia at Kettle Creek in 1779. ...I believe it was the severest check & chastisement the tories ever received in South Carolina or Georgia.”⁹ In his post-war memoirs, General Henry “Light Horse Harry” Lee echoed that assessment: “This single, though partial check, was the only interruption of the British success from the commencement of the invasion.”¹⁰

Check and Mate

Although partially checked, the British and Loyalists, aided by Continental General Benjamin Lincoln’s unwise deployment of Revolutionary troops, repaid the patriots with a defeat at Briar Creek, about 35 miles from Augusta, on March 3, 1779. Georgia now seemed firmly restored to the British Empire. South Carolina was the next target. British General Augustine Prevost, making use of a small number of boats, transported troops toward Charleston. His forces occupied John’s Island, separated from the mainland by the Stono River; he also fixed an outpost with over 500 men at Stono Ferry. Colonel Andrew Pickens and General Williamson’s militia

joined General Lincoln's combination of forces in a march to Charleston's defense. In mid-May, 1779, Lincoln's troops arrived; he made plans to attack the British post at Stono Ferry.

On the night of June 19 and the morning of June 20, the Americans tangled with the British force that included Highlanders of the 71st Regiment. Pickens and his men had groped their way through thick woods to encounter heavy fire. After a severe fight in which both sides lost upwards of 150 killed or wounded, Lincoln decided to withdraw. The Highlanders came out in hot pursuit but Colonel Pickens covered the retreating patriots successfully although his horse was shot from under him. In the aftermath, Prevost returned to Savannah but left a garrison on Port Royal Island.¹¹ He now had the information that would make a later attempt on Charleston successful. Pickens and his militiamen left the coastal wetlands and returned to the backcountry.

Pickens and the upcountry men dealt with Indian threats but spent several useful months on their farms. During the summer months, a disaffected group of Cherokees, "the Chickamauga," began attacks on Georgia and Carolina settlements. Pickens called up his regiment in the Ninety-Six on August 10, 1779. He hastened northward with Williamson's main body of troops in pursuit of Indians and their white allies. Pickens and Williamson destroyed eight Indian towns and 50,000 bushels of corn. The Chickamauga had only brought ruin to many of their innocent kindred. Pickens returned home by September 11, 1779.¹²

Williamson and some of the backcountry militia went to join Continental General Benjamin Lincoln and French forces in a siege of Savannah. According to historian Ferguson, "there is no evidence that Pickens accompanied Williamson" to Savannah; instead, Pickens and some of his regiment remained on guard in the frontier. In November Pickens was elected to the South Carolina Assembly but did not attend. In the event, the Franco-American siege of Savannah failed with heavy casualties. By late October the French had sailed away and General Lincoln pulled his army back to Charleston. The British now turned their attention to South Carolina.¹³

The Empire Strikes Back

The British aimed to take Charleston as prelude to the pacification of the Carolina interior. This latter would be accomplished by sending sufficient British regulars with Loyalist units into the backcountry; they would establish forts and strong points as a way to reassure the Loyalist population and bring over the disaffected to the royal cause. General Sir Henry Clinton arrived for the investment of Charleston with 5,000 men and the warships of Admiral Arbuthnot in February 1780. Later arriving reinforcements from New York brought his troop strength above 12,000. Clinton achieved a brilliantly conceived and executed entrapment of the American defenders. On May 11, 1780, General Lincoln surrendered 2,650 Continental and 3,034 militia along with nine generals, nine colonels and fourteen lieutenant colonels. The fall of Charleston became one of the great disasters in the history of American arms. All the troops and people within the state were covered in the articles of capitulation.¹⁴ Clinton returned to New York. He left behind Major General Lord Charles Cornwallis and young Lieutenant Colonel Banastre Tarleton, commander of a British Legion, a mixed force of British regulars and Loyalist cavalry and light infantry. Their job was to pacify the interior: in today's terms the British task was counter-insurgency.

Pickens had no role in the actions at Charleston. General Williamson had sent Pickens and his men into Georgia to harass Loyalists along the lower Ogeechee River. Pickens drove south to Midway and skirmished with a Tory band led by Daniel McGirth. He also had a fight with a

“body of armed Negroes” and killed 60. He successfully blunted a probe by a British-led detachment from Savannah. Pickens actually occupied Royal Governor Wright’s plantation and burned 350 barrels of rice. The Whig authorities of Georgia permitted Pickens to sell all captured slaves that had belonged to Loyalists .¹⁵

Williamson finally informed the militia officers of General Lincoln’s surrender at Charleston and the British offer of parole to militiamen. After some delay, Pickens agreed to accept parole. He took the oath not to take up arms and felt honor bound to keep it unless the British violated the terms on their part of affording protection. He returned to his farm and attended to the pressing duties of a frontier planter. For some time disciplined forces under Lieutenant Colonel John Harris Cruger at Fort Ninety-Six kept the area quiet. Pickens refused pleas to take up arms, even after Lieutenant Colonel Banastre Tarleton’s bloody slaughter of surrendering patriots at the Waxhaws in May, 1780. He remained quiet through the revolutionaries’ appalling disaster at Camden in August, and the Whig preparations for the Battle of Kings Mountain in October. Pickens thus did not immediately follow the examples of Thomas Sumter and Francis Marion in partisan action. But Tory behavior in the Ninety-Six district finally broke the thin illusion of British protection.

Throughout South Carolina (and Georgia) the British arrogantly demanded, on pain of hanging, active support by paroled and passive Whigs. Cornwallis and Tarleton tried ruthless enforcement of loyalty oath-taking, confiscation of estates, and permitted Loyalists to wreak revenge on their Whig neighbors. Not good order, but social chaos, violence and plundering resulted. More stick than carrot, this counter-insurgency policy backfired: it stimulated outrage, resistance and civil war.¹⁶ Pickens at last personally felt the sting of Loyalist violence.

In November, 1780, a band of Tories led by James Dunlap plundered the Pickens home and destroyed much of his property. An angry Andrew Pickens went to see Captain Kerr, British commandant at nearby White Hall (Williamson’s plantation), who had become a personal friend. Colonel Pickens told Kerr the destruction of his farm absolved him of the terms of his oath of parole. Kerr begged Pickens to reconsider because he knew, if captured, Pickens would be hanged. The Colonel refused but thanked the British officer for his kindness.¹⁷

Early in December Pickens sought contact with the new commanders of the Continental forces in the South—General Nathanael Greene and General Daniel Morgan. The Congress had relieved inept General Horatio Gates of his command; Washington choose Major General Greene to head the Southern Department. Washington also secured a promotion for Daniel Morgan to brigadier general and added him to Greene’s army.

The Battle of Cowpens

Generals Greene and Morgan had the daunting task of rescuing the Southern theater of the Revolutionary War from the calamity caused by General Horatio Gate’s rout at Camden. But Greene’s thinned out ranks at Charlotte, North Carolina, were dispirited, poorly supplied, and poorly armed. The British seemed likely to firmly control South Carolina and drive into North Carolina. Greene decided to preempt Cornwallis. He divided his force, marched one section to Cheraw in South Carolina and sent Morgan with another toward Ninety-Six. Cornwallis, situated at Winnsboro with about 3,500 men, faced a dilemma. If he moved against Greene in Cheraw he would leave Ninety-Six and Augusta open to Daniel Morgan. If he moved against Morgan, he risked an attack by Greene or by Greene in combination with Francis Marion. .

Such was the situation by the time Pickens linked up with Daniel Morgan on Christmas Day,

1780, at Grindal's Shoals on the Pacolet River. General Morgan, a tough and canny frontier warrior, understood the backwoods militia and how to motivate them. Pickens on his part understood the tactical need to closely cooperate with the Continental Army. Morgan confirmed to General Greene: "Colonel Pickens is a valuable, discreet and attentive officer and has the confidence of the militia."¹⁸ Morgan assigned the militia from Georgia and the Carolinas to Pickens' overall command. After some evasive maneuvering Pickens' militia and other forces under Morgan's command assembled at the Cowpens. It was Pickens who convinced Morgan to fight on the South Carolina side of the Broad River. Morgan's army included Continental dragoons under Lieutenant Colonel William Washington, militia from Georgia, the Carolinas and Virginia, armed with muskets and with rifles, and battled-hardened Continental infantry from Maryland and Delaware. This combination of about 1,000 effectives would soon be tested.

Cornwallis ordered the fiery and aggressive Colonel Banastre ("Bloody Ban") Tarleton to push westward to attack Morgan. When his scouts reported Morgan's location, Tarleton marched his 1,100 man force throughout the cold night of January 16, catching up with Morgan about 6:30 on the morning of January 18, 1781. Morgan, the "Old Wagoner," had prepared well for the battle. His first line of militia riflemen were to fire twice and retire back to a second line under the command to Colonel Pickens. This line of 300 militiamen Pickens ordered to wait until the British came with 40 or 50 yards before firing. "Mark the epaulette man," he told his men, meaning they were to target the officers and NCOs. After firing at least two shots they could retire *en echelon* through prepared gaps in the third or final line of Continentals and reform. Colonel Washington's cavalry and some Virginia riflemen held the flanks.

Tarleton's men, tired and hungry after their overnight march, formed up with infantry to the front, light cavalry behind them, heavy dragoons on the flanks and the 71st Highlander Regiment on his left rear. As the British infantry reached killing range, Morgan's front rank militia got off two good volleys before retiring. Colonel Pickens' line of militia now fired into the on-coming British infantry taking special aim at officers and sergeants. When Pickens' men retired as directed, Tarleton's dragoons thought the Americans were retreating and rushed forward. Washington's cavalry and the Virginia riflemen tore into them. As the British marched into range of the Continentals they found themselves in a real kill zone. Tarleton then ordered the Highlanders into the fray. The Americans, mostly Continentals, held firm, fired at close range, then surprised the British with a bayonet charge. Some of the Highlanders fled, others asked for quarter. Tarleton attempted a desperate cavalry charge; he was met by Washington's own saber-wielding horsemen. Tarleton and his remnant fled the field.¹⁹

In about an hour Pickens and Morgan won a complete victory at Cowpens over the notorious "Bloody Ban" Tarleton. Over 100 of Tarleton's infantry were killed, including 39 officers, and over 500 captured. In addition, the Americans gained 100 horses, 800 muskets, and wagons of supplies. Cowpens was truly a great victory. Morgan commended Pickens in his report to Congress. On March 9, 1781, Congress ordered a sword to be presented to Pickens "in testimony of his spirited conduct" at Cowpens. The governor of South Carolina promoted Pickens to the rank of brigadier general.²⁰

North Carolina Campaigning

Morgan pulled his forces across the Broad River and Pickens escorted the 500 prisoners into North Carolina. Soon Cornwallis hotly pursued Morgan and Greene's army across North Carolina. Pickens was in constant movement from January 17 until March 8, 1781, confusing the British and suppressing Loyalists. While Greene crossed the Dan River into Virginia, Pickens had the task of rallying militia recruits in North Carolina to the Whig cause. He pulled together

about 700 men but found it hard to keep them in service. The South Carolinians and Georgians wanted to go home and many left without orders. Pickens continued on to Guildford Court House, reaching there on February 18, 1781. But Greene again dispatched him to harass Cornwallis and Tarleton in a series of hit and run actions. Pickens linked up with Colonel Henry “Light Horse Harry” Lee and his green-coated Legion.

General Pickens and Lee were ordered toward Hillsboro on February 24. On the way, they encountered two officers of John Pyle’s Tory militia who were on their way to join with Tarleton’s Legion and other Loyalist units. The Tory officers, assuming Lee’s green uniformed men were Tarleton’s, were easily taken in tow. Pickens had his men hidden in the woods out of sight of the confused Tories. Lee, pretending to be a British officer, learned from the men that Colonel Pyle and 300 Loyalists were on the road to his front. Lee and his column passed the entire befuddled Loyalist line and were about to reach Pyle when the charade was discovered. Lee’s legionnaires, the militia and Continental detachments then fell on the Tories. Greene reported that Lee and Pickens “made a most dreadful carnage” of Pyle’s band.²¹ Nevertheless, Tarleton and his Legion successfully eluded Lee and Pickens.

During the next two weeks, Pickens maneuvered to screen Greene’s movement back into North Carolina and toward Guildford Court House. A serious battle at Wetzell’s Mill ended badly with resulting mass desertions of patriot militia. Pickens wrote to Greene that the militia were “in a miserable plight, not one to be met with a second shirt.” Some had been in service since the fall of Charleston. Greene agreed on March 6 to send Pickens home. Thus Pickens was not present for the Battle of Guildford Court House (March 15); he was back in South Carolina by March 20, 1781.

Liberating South Carolina and Georgia

After the Battle of Guildford Court House, Cornwallis, unable to follow up his victory, withdrew toward Wilmington, North Carolina. Greene then struck once more into South Carolina, forcing Cornwallis and later, Lieutenant Colonel Lord Francis Rawdon, into a war of attrition. Greene ordered his partisan commanders, Sumter, Marion, and Pickens, into action. Pickens had the task of dealing with enemy foraging parties from the Loyalist posts at Ninety-Six and Augusta. After conferring with Sumter, Pickens formed a juncture with Colonel Elijah Clarke and his Georgians. Clarke’s men had just fought and captured a party under Tory Major James Dunlap—the same man who had plundered Pickens’ plantation in 1780. As the Tory prisoners were marched to Gilbert’s Town, North Carolina, Major Dunlap “disappeared.” General Pickens was not at all pleased by Dunlap’s murder and offered \$10,000 reward for the capture of the guilty party. It was never claimed.

Pickens wrote Colonel John Cruger, British commander at Ninety-Six, informing him “with what horror and detestation American Officers looked on the act”, but he also said British “barbarous massacres” had stimulated this retaliation. Dunlap’s murder was just one example of war in the backcountry where “quarter was seldom given.”²² The killing of wounded or surrendered prisoners became routine.

By the beginning of April, 1781, Pickens had gained loose control over the northwestern area of Ninety-Six and began to tighten his net. He also set out to isolate Augusta and its commander, Lieutenant Colonel Thomas “Burnfoot” Brown. Greene got word of a big supply of provisions being moved up the Savannah River to Galphin’s Fort, just below Augusta, on the South Carolina side of the river. Greene therefore ordered Pickens, Lee’s Legion, Clarke’s Georgia militia and a North Carolina regiment and artillery element under Major Pinketham Eaton, to quickly capture

Augusta while he moved other forces to the Ninety-Six siege.

Pickens sent elements of Lee's Legion to Galphin's Fort while Clarke's men and Eaton's North Carolina regiment were to interdict any effort by Brown to aid the defenders of Galphin. No sooner had Fort Galphin been captured than the victors began to dispute the distribution of the captured supplies. Lee wanted all the provisions for the Legion but Greene, warning against "prejudicial jealousies," intervened, and authorized Pickens to divide the goods as he saw fit.²³

(Second) Battle of Augusta, May-June, 1781²⁴

The straggling frontier settlement of Augusta was defended by two forts: Fort Grierson, named for the Loyalist lieutenant colonel who commanded its garrison, and the larger and better constructed Fort Cornwallis. This fort, about half-mile distant from Grierson, on the northwestern side of Augusta, was commanded by Brown. Brown had his Kings Rangers, 236 men, about 330 Loyalist militia and 300 Creek warriors at his command. Pickens outmatched him with a total of about 1,500 troops, consisting of his South Carolina militia, Elijah Clarke's militia, Henry Lee's Legion (a Continental force) and Eaton's North Carolina regiment. For artillery he had one 6 pound canon. Pickens faced a new and difficult task: how to keep militia used to constant movement on horseback settled into a siege action.

The Battle of Augusta began in earnest on May 24 when Pickens' troops assaulted Fort Grierson from the north and west sides while Major Eaton attacked from the south. The post was captured without too much difficulty; about 80 defenders tried to fight their way out but the Whig troops cut them down: about 40 killed and 45 prisoners taken. Lieutenant Colonel James Grierson, Major Henry Williams and a few men made it safely to Fort Cornwallis. Pickens took light casualties but the wounding and death of Major Pinketham Eaton was a serious loss.

Pickens, Lee and Clarke now settled into a textbook siege operation against Brown at Fort Cornwallis. The patriot forces dug lines of trenches on opposite sides of the fort. They erected a "Maham tower" to provide an elevated platform for artillery and riflemen. Brown made two sorties by night against his attackers; his men were beaten back only after bloody hand to hand contests; both sides suffered heavy casualties. On May 31, Pickens and Lee offered surrender terms to the Tory commander who bluntly rejected the offer.

Brown made desperate efforts to blow up or burn down the Maham tower but each attempt failed. By June 2 the tower reached a height of 20 feet. Only 150 yards from the Fort, the militia riflemen and artillery piece could now fire directly over its walls and disable Brown's canon. Brown resisted the inevitable until June 5 when he proposed terms for surrender. After some modification, Pickens and Lee accepted; the garrison was allowed to "march out with shouldered arms and drums beating." Brown and other officers of the Kings Rangers were quickly marched off under strict guard to be paroled in Savannah; the 300 men or the ranks became prisoners. Other Loyalist officers were not so lucky.

On June 6, a day after the surrender, a partisan militiaman rode up the house where Lieutenant Colonel Grierson was held and shot him; Major Williams, another captive officer, was wounded the same day. Pickens, dismayed at the outburst of hatred and lust for revenge, informed General Greene of this "very disagreeable and melancholy affair." He gave Grierson a funeral with military honors. Pickens' observance of the "honors of war" was little imitated by militiamen who had suffered at the hands of the Loyalists. Greene's offer of a large reward for the capture of the "perpetrator of this horrid crime" was never claimed.

All across the backcountry of Georgia and South Carolina Patriot and Tory bands now murdered and plundered. Greene ordered Pickens to suppress the disorders by capital punishment. He also requested that Pickens stay in Georgia for some days to “restrain those growing evils that will soon if let alone become a national curse.” Pickens wrote: “I almost despair of totally suppressing it.”²⁵ Nevertheless, the capture of Augusta allowed the formation of a civil government in Georgia. This success became a link in a chain of actions in the backcountry.

Stalemate at Fort Ninety-Six

Hardly a week after Augusta, on June 12, Pickens reported to Greene busy with the siege of Fort Ninety-Six. This fort was the only interior post still under British control and was well defended. It remained under the command of Colonel John Harris Cruger. Shortly before General Pickens arrived, his brother, Captain Joseph Pickens, had been hit with a Tory rifle shot and died within a few days. Andrew had no time to mourn his brother’s death. Greene commanded his partisan chiefs, Pickens, Sumter, and Marion, to strike Lord Rawdon’s relief expedition headed to the fort. Greene ordered the partisans to “skirmish with the enemy all the way they advance.... It is my wish to have the enemy galled as much as possible...before they get to this post”.²⁶ Greene actually hoped to capture the fort before reinforcements arrived but the defenders were well positioned and determined not to surrender. Greene made the bitter decision to withdraw and quickly marched his troops northward. He ordered Pickens to protect the wagon train of supplies during the retreat and raise more troops.

After some weeks of skirmishing and maneuvering Greene retired to the High Hills of Santee without risking a direct confrontation with Rawdon. At this point the British order to evacuate Fort Ninety-Six gave Greene a belated win. Greene ordered Pickens to harass the retiring troops of Colonel John Harris Cruger. As the British force left the backcountry, many Loyalists now started surrendering; Pickens had the additional burden of protecting them from their vengeful Patriot neighbors. Plundering on a large scale led Greene to suggest martial law “if there is no other mode by which the evil may be remedied.”²⁷

The Battle of Eutaw Springs

By late July, 1781, Greene was ready to resume the offensive. He gave orders to Pickens to bring his men down state to join him just south of the Santee. The combined Patriot forces numbered about 2,300 men. Greene’s army included two battalions of Maryland Continentals and one company of Delaware Continentals. He also had five battalions of Virginia and North Carolina Continentals, Lee’s Legion and William Washington’s dragoons. Greene combined Pickens’ and Sumter’s brigades under Pickens’ command. Militia units from North Carolina added more manpower.

The British replaced Lord Rawdon with Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Stewart. His forces numbered about 2,200 almost equal to the American number. The British mix included regular troops of the 63rd and 64th Regiments, the 3rd Regiment of Foot (“the Buffs”) and two battalions of New York Loyalists (one commanded by Colonel John Cruger of Fort Ninety-Six), as well as New Jersey and South Carolina Loyalist units. Stewart took up positions at a plantation near Eutaw Springs on September 5, 1781, about 35 miles from Charleston.

The Battle of Eutaw Springs was, untypically, a set-piece engagement and the last such in South Carolina during the Revolutionary War. Greene’s battle plan placed the militia (Marion’s, Sumter’s and Pickens’ plus some North Carolinians) in the forward first line. The second line of Continentals followed; cavalry forces under Lee and Washington held the flanks. The battle was

joined on September 8, 1781. Pickens' militia faced the British "Bufs", Stewart's own regiment. The militia performed superbly, aiming, firing, advancing, reloading, and continuing forward to fire off seventeen rounds. They faced a hail of return fire. General Pickens was hit by a musket ball and fell, some feared, to his death. But the shot had struck his sword buckle, driving it into his chest. It left a painful wound he carried the rest of his life. When the militia faltered, Greene sent the Continentals forward and they pushed the British back.

As the redcoats fell back, some of Greene's "tatterdemalion" (Greene's word) troops fell upon the barrels and boxes of supplies, including rum, in the British camp. They stopped to enjoy real food and drink for the first time in weeks. The American forward motion was thus lost, giving the British time to regroup and bring heavy fire on the attackers. It now became the Americans turn to fall back as Stewart's forces retook the field. The battle lasted three hours in September heat and both sides took heavy losses. Indeed, it was the bloodiest battle of the Revolutionary war. Each side suffered more than 600 losses (killed, wounded, missing). Greene had no reinforcements and pulled his shrunken army back, eventually into the High Hills. Stewart had no real reserves and decided not to pursue Greene. Although this battle may have ended as a draw, strategically Greene's forces still controlled South Carolina.²⁸

Despite the indecisive results of the Battle of Eutaw Springs, Greene had high praise for Pickens and the other militia commanders. He extravagantly compared the militia's conduct under fire as worthy "of the great King of Prussia." Historian Ferguson notes that Pickens' militia "approached equality with British regulars in their own eighteenth century style of classic warfare."²⁹ The backcountry men had developed into a strong fighting force and had driven the British out of interior South Carolina; the Union Jack waved only over Charleston..

Disorders After Eutaw Springs

South Carolina Governor Rutledge conferred with Pickens, Sumter and Marion on reorganizing the state's militia and dealing with the Loyalists. Rutledge offered amnesty to Loyalists who would take an oath of allegiance to the American cause and serve six months in the state militia. Loyalist families who would not swear allegiance were to be sent on to the British sector around Charleston. Pickens returned to Ninety-Six district to put the policy into action and bring repentant Tories into patriot service. But some Tories remained recalcitrant. In October, 1781, a Loyalist leader known as "Bloody Bates" led a party of Cherokees and whites painted like Indians in an attack on patriots at Gowen's Fort on the Pacolet River. Outnumbered the defenders soon surrendered. They were massacred by the Bates gang. Pickens immediately retaliated. With two regiments of mounted troops, he drove through the Cherokee settlements on the upper tributaries of the Chattahoochee, killing and taking prisoners. He completed this action in eleven days.³⁰

While Pickens chased Bates, another Loyalist band, led by William "Bloody Bill" Cunningham, invaded Ninety-Six. He struck a company of Pickens' brigade in present Saluda County. After using up all their ammunition, the Patriot company surrendered; all but two who escaped were butchered on the spot. Pickens' brother, John, fell into the hands of one of Cunningham's groups. Pickens went after Cunningham but he headed for the Cherokee country and eluded the General. Cunningham turned over his prisoners, including John Pickens, to the Indians for gruesome torture and death. Remnant Loyalist banditti and their Indian allies remained persistent problems for Pickens.³¹

The 1782 Cherokee Campaigns³²

Pickens began planning in February 1782 for a punitive expedition against the Cherokee and

appealed to Sevier in Tennessee and Clarke in Georgia to join him. With 275 troops gathered in March, Pickens pushed down the Hiwassee River into Tennessee. For whatever reason, Sevier failed to link with Pickens. Heavy spring rain impeded the expedition. The few Indian settlements were largely abandoned and supplies nonexistent. Even so, 40 Cherokees were killed and thirteen villages burned during March and April. Pickens had to pull back to the Coosa River in Georgia. In June the brigade returned to Long Cane.

A hiatus in the war with the Cherokee lasted most of the summer of 1782. In August, General Pickens prepared for another march against the Indians. While merciless toward Indian warriors, Pickens wanted to “conduct a humane campaign.” He ordered the death penalty for killing women, children, or others unfit to bear arms. As his men were short of ammunition, he asked local blacksmiths to make swords. He would outfit his men as dragoons for the campaign. Some authorities argue that Pickens’ use of cavalry against Indians in 1782 was an important innovation in frontier war.

In the midst of these preparations, the brutal conflicts between “Whigs” and “Tories” (often self-applied labels to what were in reality plundering bandit gangs) continued. The governor of South Carolina was unable to respond to Pickens’ appeal for law enforcement and courts. Pickens improvised: he ordered William Butler, son of the Captain Butler murdered by William Cunningham, to recruit a “mounted constabulary” and impress needed supplies from the population (but give receipts for property taken). Butler was ordered to “do all in his power to destroy William Cunningham’s band.”

Pickens could now return his attention to the Cherokees. On September 10 Pickens made a juncture with Clarke and about 100 Georgia troops at Cherokee Ford. Some North Carolina militia added to his manpower which now totaled just over 400 men. Still short of ammunition, one-third of the men were armed with their crude blacksmith swords. A major aim of this campaign was to capture Loyalist Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Waters who had put together an armed band of white renegades and Indians. Shortly after crossing the Chattahoochee River Pickens’ men captured a couple of Indians who acted as guides. The invaders marched all night and hit an Indian town at daylight but Waters, warned in time, escaped. Pickens’ campaign continued to the town of Sauta (Saiita) on a tributary of the Oconee River.

At dawn on September 19 the militiamen, armed with their roughhewn swords, mounted their horses. Pickens once more warned his men not kill women and children but “all braves” were to be killed. Clarke’s Georgians took a position at one end of the village, Pickens at the other. They charged at the same time taking the enemy by surprise. Pickens’ horsemen ran down the Indians. One of his troopers, a “very large and powerful man, had a sword of great size,” and could “cleft upon the heads of the flying Indians like so many pumpkins.” Another of his men disgusted Pickens when, after killing the Cherokee, he bashed the dead Indian’s head with his gun barrel. Between 30 and 40 Cherokee were left dead, approximately 50 females and children and a few white Loyalists became prisoners. Among the latter was David Pickens, a Loyalist cousin of General Pickens. The General sent Clarke and the Georgians on an unsuccessful pursuit of the escaping Waters.

Pickens wanted to capture all the white renegades living among the Indians. He blamed “evil whites” for inciting the Indians. He let the Cherokee know that if they brought in the Tories to his camp at Long Swamp and returned captured Patriots, he would free the Indians he had made prisoner. If they refused this offer, Pickens would continue his campaign of destruction. After a few days delay, the Indians brought in six Tories. On October 17, several chiefs and warriors came to Long Swamp and signed a treaty ceding land south of the Savannah River and east of the

upper Chattahoochee to Georgia. They agreed to meet later with Georgia commissioners in Augusta to ratify the treaty. Pickens believed he had at last settled the Cherokee problem. He returned home and disbanded his men on October 22, 1782. General Andrew Pickens had indeed waged his last military campaign. .

War's End.

The British forces evacuated Savannah on July 11 and left Charleston on December 14, 1782. For much of the preceding eighteen months the British had effective control only over the harbor towns and their immediate vicinity. Andrew Pickens and the other partisan commanders, effectively collaborating with the Continental Army, had already liberated the Carolina and Georgia backcountry. They thereby weakened any British territorial claims during the peace negotiations. From initial skirmishing between Whigs and Loyalists in 1775 to the completion of the Cherokee campaigns of 1782, Andrew Pickens became an improviser of the techniques of irregular warfare in "one of the first guerrilla campaigns of modern history".³³ He successfully demonstrated how small units, moving rapidly and striking with surprise, could harass and confuse a well ordered traditional enemy force. Although characterized as personally "dour" and forbidding, he certainly possessed the personal qualities that enabled his leadership of headstrong frontiersmen. Andrew Pickens, "the Fighting Elder" became one of those who established the independence of the United States of America.

Hugh I. Rodgers

NOTES

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3 Ferguson, 10-12; Gordon, 11-13.

4 Pickens, *Skyagunsta*, 5; Gordon, 18-19; Rachel Klein, "Frontier Planters in the American Revolution in the South Carolina Backcountry 1771-1782, in *An Uncivil War: The Southern Backcountry during the American Revolution* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1985), 37-69.

5 Ferguson, 20-27.

6 Gordon, 44-57; Ferguson, 30-35. An excellent account, with maps, of the Cherokee War of 1776 in James K. Swisher, *The Revolutionary War in the Southern Backcountry* (Gretna: LA: Pelican Publishing Co., 53-84; Henry Lumpkin, *From Savannah to Yorktown: The American Revolution in the South* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1981), 19-26.

7 Ferguson, 41-42.

8 There are many published accounts of the Battle of Kettle Creek. A clear and concise account of the men and action can be had in Christine R. Swager, *Heroes of Kettle Creek 1779-1782* (West Conshohocken, PA: Infinity Publishing, 2008). An impressively detailed and documented account is by Robert S. Davis, "The Battle of Kettle Creek", *Southern Campaigns of the American Revolution*, III, No. 2 (February 2006), 30-37; also Steven J. Rauch, "Kettle Creek Battlefield", *ibid.*, 38-44 with documentary extracts. <http://southerncampaign.org/V3n2.pdf> (accessed 15 Jan 2013).

9 Andrew Pickens letter to Henry Lee, 28 Aug 1811, reprinted in "General Andrew Pickens: An Autobiography," Lynda Worley Skelton, ed. (Clemson, January 1976), 11-17.

10 Henry Lee, *Memoirs of the War in the Southern Department of the United States* (New York: Universitiy Publishing Co., 1870, re printed 1996), 121.

11 Gordon, 67-69; Waring, 29-31.

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13 Lumpkin, 27-50.

14 Gordon, 71-85.

15 Ferguson, 90-96. As a form of "moveable property" slaves were victimized by both sides.

16 Gordon, 90-108.

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20 Ferguson, 142, 151.

21 Pickens, *Skyagunsta*, 81-87; Ferguson, 172-178.

22 Ferguson, 196-198; Pickens, *Skyagunsta*, 89-90.

23 Ferguson, 210-202, 209-212.

24 Steven J. Rauch, "'A Judicious and Gallant Defense': The Second Siege at Augusta, Georgia," *Southern Campaigns of the American Revolution*, III, Nos. 6, 7, 8, (June, July, August, 2006), 32-56, detailed with maps and illustrations. <http://www.southerncampaign.org/III> (accessed 20 Oct 2012).

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26 Waring, 80-86; Ferguson, 228.

27 Pickens, *Skyagunsta*, 101-104; Ferguson, 237-238.

28 Gordon, 164-167; Ferguson, 244-247; Lumpkin, 218-220; Terry Golway, *Washington's General: Nathanael Greene* (New York: Henry Holt, 2005), 280-284.

29 Ferguson, 249.

30 Ferguson, 252-254.

31 Waring, 101-102.

32 Waring, 111-119; Ferguson, 263-276; Pickens, *Skyagunsta*, 116-122.

33 Weigley, 2.

