



Sons of the American Revolution  
Michigan SAR  
Jeremiah Clark Chapter



## America 250 Monthly Minute – July 2024

### **July 1: At the instigation of British agents, the Cherokee attack along the entire southern frontier 1776**

(1776). The Cherokee War of 1776 was an early episode in the Revolutionary War. In the summer of 1775 John Stuart, British superintendent of Indian affairs for the southern district, left his home in Charleston and moved to Florida. From there he worked to preserve the allegiance to Great Britain of the Cherokees and other Native American tribes. Stuart's assistant superintendent, Alexander Cameron, established a base of operations among the Cherokees and directed their actions against the Whigs. Combined with backcountry Loyalists, the Indians would prove a formidable force to be used against the rebels.

The Cherokees were the most powerful tribe in the region and the first to take action. The start of the Cherokee War dates from July 1, 1776, when the Cherokees struck along the western frontier. Isolated farmsteads in Ninety Six and Spartan Districts were overrun and the inhabitants killed. The backcountry militia leaders Andrew Williamson, Francis Salvador, and Andrew Pickens gathered their units and marched against the Cherokees. At Lyndley's Fort on July 15, settlers near the Saluda River were besieged by the Cherokees and Loyalists. The attackers were driven off and several men captured. On examination they were discovered to be white men dressed and painted in Cherokee fashion.

Under directions from Charleston, Williamson and other upcountry militia captains undertook a campaign to destroy Cherokee resistance. Whig militia traveled from town to town destroying buildings and crops and dispersing the populations. By the end of the summer, Cherokee resistance was broken and the British plan to direct Indian allies against the Whigs was defeated.

The summer campaign produced two notable engagements. On August 1, 1776, a combined Loyalist and Cherokee force, led by Alexander Cameron, ambushed Andrew Williamson at Esseneca Ford, also called Seneca Old Town. Williamson's command of 330 faced as many as 1,200 Cherokees and Loyalists, who hid behind palisades. Initially driven back, the Whigs lost one of their leaders, Captain Francis

Salvador of Ninety Six. Lieutenant Colonel Leroy Hammond and a troop of horsemen counterattacked and held off the Cherokees long enough for Williamson to regroup. The timely arrival of Andrew Pickens with reinforcements turned the tide of battle. Cameron and his force retreated but were pursued by the Whigs, who burned every Cherokee village and field they discovered.

About two weeks after the Esseneca battle, Williamson was made a colonel of militia and given command of a combined force of Georgians and South Carolinians. His command systematically destroyed the lower towns of the Cherokees. On August 12 Andrew Pickens and twenty-five men were ambushed by the Cherokees at Tamasee, in present-day Oconee County. As the Cherokees emerged from the woods, Pickens ordered his men to form a defensive circle. Hand-to-hand fighting and high casualties on both sides marked the "Ring Fight" as the most desperate of the war. Pickens lost eleven men, and the Cherokees suffered sixty-five killed and fourteen wounded warriors left behind.

By the fall of 1776 the major campaign of the war had concluded. The Cherokees lost as many as two thousand killed and, despite continued British support, could fight no longer. The following spring a Cherokee delegation led by Attakulla Kulla met with officials from North and South Carolina, Georgia, and Virginia at Dewitt's Corner, in Ninety Six District. They signed a treaty on May 20, 1777, that included a cease-fire and a cession of much of the Cherokee lands within present-day Anderson, Oconee, and Pickens Counties. A few Cherokees refused to recognize the treaty. They continued raids along the Carolina-Indian border until the conclusion of the Revolutionary War.

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