

Arthur Fairies Journal of the Expedition against the Cherokee Indians

In the summer of 1776, encouraged by both the British and by the Shawnee Indians, the Cherokee launched a long-feared series of attacks on backcountry settlements from Georgia to Virginia. In August 1776, a force of 5000 whites, many from North and South Carolina and Virginia, led by Major Andrew Williamson and Major Andrew Pickens, launched a vicious war against the Cherokee. The Cherokee offered targeted resistance, not massive defensive action, as this account demonstrates. Whites proceeded through Indian country, plundering and destroying villages abandoned by fleeing Cherokees. On September 19, 600 or so Cherokee warriors ambushed Williamson's force in what is now Macon County, North Carolina. The ensuing battle was called the Battle of the Black Hole. A soldier in Williamson's force, Arthur Fairies (pronounced Faris) kept a diary of the expedition. Fairies' account reveals the difficulties of the campaign, the brutality of the fighting on both sides, and the role played by African-Americans who were caught up in the fighting.

July the eighth day, being Monday, we assembled at Captain Peter Clinton's in the province of South Carolina, on or by the waters of Ellison's creek, to engage the Indians, on account of the insurrections they made on the white inhabitants, killing and plundering all they came to. This express occasioned us to rise to stop them in their present undertaking. ... [W]e started, and marched to William Hall's and encamped after a day's march of about fourteen miles.

Tuesday, the ninth day of July, 1776, we marched over Broad River, about two miles, and meeting a party of our men, it gave us fresh fortitude in the pursuing of our heathen enemies. We encamped here after a day's march of about eighteen miles.

Wednesday, the tenth, we started, and marched twenty-five miles to one Moor's. We continued our march next day, fifteen miles to one Mr. Wofford's fort, on Lawson's fork [creek], hearing that the Indians had persisted as far as Princes's fort... killing and plundering all before them, hurried us on in our march to the aforesaid fort, where we arrived Friday, the twelfth instant. We found no enemy there. We stayed there two days; then hearing our enemies harbored and encouraged at the house of one Perris's,¹ we started and marched within two miles, being joined with, or assisted by Colonel Thomas's regiment, in all about three hundred men. We encamped on a hill all night, in order to attack the house and inhabitants there in the morning. When daylight came, we surrounded the house, but, contrary to our expectations, we found no Indians there, for they had left that place. ... [W]e took [Perris's] wife and daughter, and, in short, all his family, as likewise some Tories that harbored there; so taking all prisoner, and committing his house to the flames, we took his effects, as free plunder, driving cows, steers and horses, and brought all to our camp at Prince's fort. ...

Saturday, the fifth [of August], ... We continued our course to strike an Indian town, called Estatoe. When within about two miles of the same, we parted in divisions as follows: Colonel Thomas ordered his men to the right flank to surround our enemy's towns, and the light horse of both regiments to the left, and us, to Colonel Neel's regiment, in the front or center. We marched very carefully till coming within sight of the town, then rushed in with all speed possible, but, contrary to our expectation or desire, we got no Indians there save one that escaped with being shot in his thigh. After this we set the houses on fire, and marched as quick as possible to another town, called Qualhatchee: and our enemies having left that also, we committed it to the flames, and started ... to another town called Taxaway. And the inhabitants thereof being deserted, we stayed there but a short time, and left it on fire to warm themselves by at their return....

Thursday, the eighth, we started in our turn, scouting the Cane Brakes that was confined by the aforesaid Savannah river, and continued to Taxaway, where we routed a camp of Indians in the said town. In discovering us they all fled.... The rest of us continued hunting for more of such game [Indians], and came along the said Savannah river to a town called Chittiogo, where we ... killed one squaw and captivated a squaw and two negroes, and got information from the captives of an Indian camp up in the mountains, where was confined old Mrs. Hite, and her two daughters, whom they took prisoners, when they killed the remainder of the family. ...

So on Friday, the ninth, we started about daylight, and marched down to their camp, but they were all fled, and had carried Mrs. Hight [sic] about one hundred yards from their camp, and had killed her there, leaving her on her face, naked. After burying her, we ransacked the camps, getting some plunder, they not having time to carry it all off. ...

Friday, the thirtieth, in the morning, a little after the wagoners started to hunt their horses, our camps were surprised by a negro of Captain Ross's,² who had lately arrived from hunting [for the horses], who gave us the following relation, viz: That after hunting for his horses some time, he finding them by a thicket, distant from the camp about one mile, and when mounting on one of them, there was a shot fired from the thickets, and he casting his eyes about, perceived a sturdy Indian rushing out therefrom and making to him [heading toward him], who when he perceived, trusting to his horse for safety, set off with all speed possible, and kept his distance pretty well for about one hundred yards, but, on a sudden, the horse fell dead, occasioned by the aforesaid shot; which, when the Indian perceived, increased his pace, thinking to have had a negro to wait on him. But contrary to his expectation, the boy being supple and unwilling to have an Indian for his master, he cleared himself, and came to the camps. After this account, we instantly started in pursuit of them, though all in vain, for we could not find them...

Thursday, the nineteenth day of September, 1776, we started to the vallies [where some Cherokee settlements were located], and a most difficult road it was, marching along the Tinnesty River or branch, called Cowechee; the path or road we marched led us into a long valley, or rather a hollow, surrounded by mountains on all sides, only the entrance. This place goes by the name of Black Hole, and well it deserves that title. But to proceed, on our entering, our front guard, commanded by Captain Ross, was about half through these narrows, and seeing some very fresh signs of Indians, had a mind to halt, until the two wings, that is, Colonel Sumpter and Colonel Hammons's would come up even with him. ...³ But to be as short as possible: as I informed you, the aforesaid Captain, being about half through these narrows, the enemy was all ambuscaded around us, and not being discovered until Captain Hampton, ... had ascended up the mountain, when he espied Indians behind a tree. After this discovery, he instantly fired at them. This alarm opened or rather emptied our enemy's guns. To our surprise they poured down their bullets upon us beyond the standing of any common soldiers; but we being resolute, were determined not to be conquered, which plainly appears by our valor and magnanimity, our noble Colonel Neel being partly in the front, fought most admirably, considering his age and frailty; but casting these infirmities away, and putting on the coat of invincibleness, and rushing through his enemies like a Hercules or one fearless of danger, with his men at his back, determined to fight while there was one of them, and by our obedience to his orders we, though mercy, defeated our enemies, with the loss of thirteen gallant men. A merciful escape, considering the wonderful form these heathens were placed in. ... This engagement may be spoken of as a miracle, considering the multitudes of enemies, and an admirable place they had to fire on us, that we were not almost all killed; for nature never formed such an advantageous place for our enemies. ... The number of Indians that fought us that day, by

information, was six hundred; the number of them that was killed is not exactly known. ... We had a camp near all night on account of burying our dead and on attending the sick and wounded. [A] most dreadful sight to behold our fellow creatures massacred by the Heathens for there was three of our men sculpt (scalped) and one sadly speared and tomahawked. ...

Source: E. F. Rockwell, *The Historical Magazine and Notes and Queries* (Morrisania, NY: Henry B. Dawson, 1867), 212–220.

¹ The Perris family were apparently Loyalists who were encouraging the Cherokee to attack suspected Whigs.

² It was common to leave horses free to forage while the men camped at night; each morning the wagoners' first task was to round up the horses. The Negro that Fairies referred to was apparently the slave of Captain Ross, one of the men in Williamson's force. He worked as a wagoner on the on the expedition.

³ Apparently he intended to wait until other militia units could join him before proceeding.