

= Battle of Kettle Creek =

The Battle of Kettle Creek (February 14 , 1779) was a major encounter in the back country of Georgia during the American Revolutionary War . It was fought in Wilkes County about eight miles (13 km) from present @-@ day Washington , Georgia . A militia force of Patriots decisively defeated and scattered a Loyalist militia force that was on its way to British @-@ controlled Augusta .

The victory demonstrated the inability of British forces to hold the interior of the state , or to protect even sizable numbers of Loyalist recruits outside their immediate protection . The British , who had already decided to abandon Augusta , recovered some prestige a few weeks later , surprising a Patriot force in the Battle of Brier Creek . Georgia 's back country would not come fully under British control until after the 1780 Siege of Charleston broke Patriot forces in the South .

= = Background = =

The British began their " southern strategy " by sending expeditions from New York City and Saint Augustine , East Florida to capture the port of Savannah , Georgia in late 1778 . The New York expedition , under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Archibald Campbell , arrived first , landing at Tybee Island on December 3 , 1778 , and successfully captured Savannah on December 29 , 1778 .

= = = British occupation of Augusta = = =

When British Brigadier General Augustine Prevost arrived from Saint Augustine in mid @-@ January , he assumed command of the garrison there and sent a force under Campbell to take control of Augusta and raise Loyalist forces .

Leaving Savannah on January 24 , Campbell and more than 1 @,@ 000 men arrived near Augusta a week later , with only minimal harassment from Georgia Patriot militia on the way . Augusta had been defended by South Carolina General Andrew Williamson leading about 1 @,@ 000 militia from Georgia and South Carolina , but he withdrew most of his men when Campbell approached . His rear guard briefly skirmished with Campbell 's men before withdrawing across the Savannah River into South Carolina .

Campbell started recruiting Loyalists . By February 10 , 1779 , about 1 @,@ 100 men signed up , but relatively few actually formed militia companies , forming only 20 companies of the British Army . Campbell then began requiring oaths of loyalty , on pain of forfeiture of property ; many took this oath insincerely , quickly letting Williamson know their true feelings . Early in his march , Campbell dispatched Major John Hamilton to recruit Loyalists in Wilkes County and Lt. Colonel John Boyd on an expedition to raise Loyalists in the backcountry of North and South Carolina . Boyd met with success and recruited several hundred men . As he traveled south back toward Augusta , more Loyalists joined his company until it numbered over 600 men in central South Carolina . As this column moved on , the men plundered and pillaged along the way , predictably drawing angered Patriots to take up arms .

= = = American response = = =

The Continental Army commander in the South , Major General Benjamin Lincoln , based in Charleston , South Carolina , had been unable to respond adequately to the capture of Savannah . With only limited resources (he was short of both men and funds) , he was able to raise about 1 @,@ 400 South Carolina militia , but did not have authorization to order them outside the state . On January 30 , he was further reinforced at Charleston by the arrival of 1 @,@ 100 North Carolina militia under General John Ashe . These he immediately dispatched to join Williamson on the South Carolina side of the Savannah River near Augusta .

The Georgia banks of the Savannah in the Augusta area were controlled by a Loyalist force led by Colonel Daniel McGirth , while the South Carolina banks were controlled by a Georgia Patriot militia

led by Colonel John Dooly . When about 250 South Carolina militia under Colonel Andrew Pickens arrived , Pickens and Dooly joined forces to conduct offensive operations into Georgia , with Pickens taking overall command . They were at some point joined by a few companies of North Carolina light horse militia .

On February 10 , Pickens and Dooly crossed the Savannah River to attack a British Army camp southeast of Augusta . Finding the camp unoccupied , they learned that the company was out on an extended patrol . Suspecting they would head for a stockaded frontier post called Carr 's Fort , Pickens sent men directly there while the main body chased after the British . The British made it into the fort , but were forced to abandon their horses and baggage outside its walls . Pickens then besieged the fort until he learned that Boyd was passing through the Ninety Six district of South Carolina with seven to eight hundred Loyalists , headed for Georgia . He reluctantly raised the siege and moved to intercept Boyd .

Pickens established a strong presence near the mouth of the Broad River , where he expected Boyd might try to cross . However , Boyd , his force grown by then to 800 men , chose to go to the north . He first tried Cherokee Ford , the southernmost fording of the Savannah River , where he was met with some resistance known as the Engagement at McGowen 's Blockhouse . The encounter consisted of a detachment of eight Patriots commanded by Capt. Robert Anderson with two small swivel guns in an entrenched position , who thwarted Boyd 's approach to Cherokee Ford . Boyd moved north upstream about 5 miles (8 @ .@ 0 km) and crossed the Savannah River there , skirmishing with a small Patriot force that had shadowed his movements on the Georgia side . Boyd reported losing 100 men , killed , wounded , or deserted , in the encounter .

By the time Pickens learned that Boyd had crossed the river , he had himself crossed into South Carolina in an attempt to intercept Boyd . He immediately recrossed into Georgia upon learning of Boyd 's whereabouts . On February 14 , Pickens caught up with Boyd when he paused to rest his troops near Kettle Creek , only a few miles from Colonel McGirth 's Loyalist camp .

= = Battle = =

Boyd was apparently unaware that he was being followed so closely , and his camp , even though guards were posted , was not particularly alert . Pickens advanced , leading the center , with his right flank under Colonel Dooly and his left under Georgia Lieutenant Colonel Elijah Clarke . Gunfire between Patriot scouts and the camp guards alerted Boyd to the situation . Boyd formed a defensive line near the camp 's rear and advanced with a force of 100 men to oppose Pickens at a crude breastwork made of fencing and fallen trees . Pickens , whose advance gave him the advantage of high ground , was able to flank this position , even though his own wings were slowed by the swampy conditions near the creek . In heavy fighting , Boyd went down with a mortal wound , and the small company retreated back to the main Loyalist line .

The Patriot flanks then began to emerge from the swamps . The Loyalists , led by Boyd 's second in command , Major William Spurgen , engaged the Patriots in battle for 90 minutes . Some of the Loyalists crossed the creek , abandoning horses and equipment . Clarke alertly noticed some high ground across the creek that they seemed to be heading for and led some of his men there , having his horse shot from under him in the process . The Loyalist line was eventually broken , and its men were killed , captured , or dispersed .

= = Aftermath = =

= = Treatment of prisoners = = =

Pickens took 75 prisoners , including most of the wounded , and between 40 and 70 Loyalists were killed . He suffered 7 to 9 killed and 14 @-@ 23 wounded or missing in the battle . Many of Boyd 's men (including some that escaped the battlefield and others that Pickens paroled) returned home . A significant number were either captured or surrendered themselves to Patriot authorities in the

days following the battle , and the fate of some of his men is unknown . Lieutenant Colonel Campbell reported that 270 of Boyd 's recruits eventually joined him . He organized them into the Royal North Carolina Regiment .

When Pickens approached the mortally wounded Boyd after the battle , the Loyalist leader , who had lived in South Carolina before the war and was known to Pickens , asked the Patriot leader to deliver a brooch to his wife and inform her of his fate . This , Pickens eventually did .

Of the Loyalist prisoners , only about 20 survived their wounds . Pickens first took them to Augusta , and then Ninety Six , where they were held along with a large number of other Loyalists . Seeking to make an example of them , South Carolina authorities put a number of these Loyalists on trial for treason . About 50 of them were convicted , and five men , including some of the men captured at Kettle Creek , were hanged . British military leaders were outraged over this treatment of what they considered prisoners of war , even before the trial was held . General Prevost threatened retaliation against Patriot prisoners he was holding , but did not act out of fear that other American @-@ held British prisoners might be mistreated . His invasion of coastal South Carolina in April 1779 , a counter @-@ thrust against movements by General Lincoln to recover Georgia , prompted South Carolina officials to vacate most of the convictions .

= = = British reaction = = =

In a council held in Augusta on February 12 , Campbell decided to abandon Augusta and began the withdrawal to Savannah on February 14 at 2AM , the morning of the battle . Contrary to opinions expressed by some historians , Campbell did not leave because of the battle 's outcome . He did not learn of the battle until after he had already left Augusta ; his departure was prompted by the arrival of 1 @,@ 200 of patriot General John Ashe 's forces in General Andrew Williamson 's camp across the Savannah River , a shortage of provisions , and uncertainty over whether Boyd would be successful in his mission . The success of Kettle Creek was undone to some extent by the subsequent British victory at the March 3 Battle of Brier Creek , which took place during Campbell 's retreat in present @-@ day Screven County .

Augusta was latter recaptured by the British in June 1780 after Patriot forces collapsed in the aftermath of the Siege of Charleston . It was retaken by siege by Patriot forces on June 5 , 1781 .

= = Legacy = =

The Kettle Creek Battlefield has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places . Most of the battlefield is owned by Wilkes County , although the full extent of locations where the action took place has not been identified . It is located off Tyrone Road in Wilkes County .