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ALEXANDER CAMERON, BRITISH AGENT AMONG THE CHEROKEE, 1764-1781

JOHN L. NICHOLS*

ALEXANDER CAMERON WAS THE FIRST COMMISSARY appointed by Captain John Stuart of Charleston after Stuart became the royal superintendent of Indian affairs for the southern district on January 12, 1762.¹ Stuart, who likely had observed Cameron serving at Fort Prince George during the Cherokee War of 1759-1761 and recognized his empathy with the Indians, was confident Cameron would be able to reconcile the disaffected Cherokee to the English government. The Cherokee, already severely punished for their revolt, harbored additional grievances because Governor Thomas Boone continued the embargo on their trade initiated by Governor William Henry Lyttelton in 1759.² Cameron, who had been a soldier in both Georgia and South Carolina for many years, was well qualified by experience and temperament to deal with this situation.³ He knew the Cherokee well and they were genuinely fond of the man they called "Scotchie," one of the few white men they ever fully trusted.

Cameron performed a significant service for South Carolina during the decade between the French and Indian War and the outbreak of the American Revolution. The peaceful relations he established with the Cherokee during that troubled period made it possible for the colony to expand its western borders and develop a profitable trade without major Indian problems. Cameron's importance grew during the American Revolution as British and Americans alike vied for the support of the Cherokee. Americans raged that Cameron was arming the Indians and

*Independent scholar of Gunbarrel City, Texas. The staff of the *South Carolina Historical Magazine* were saddened to learn that Mr. Nichols died between the time his paper was accepted for publication and when it could be edited. A few of his citations could not be confirmed. The editor would like to thank Frederick C. Holder of Pickens and John Harrimon of the William Clements Library, University of Michigan, for their assistance in preparing this article for publication.

¹Earl of Egremont to Jeffrey Amherst, Jan. 12, 1762, C.O. 5/214, British Public Record Office, Kew (hereafter BPRO). C.O. references are to Series 5 and the appropriate volume number of the Colonial Office records, A.O. to Audit Office records, W.O. to War Office records. Stuart did not take responsibility for Indian affairs until his commission reached him in February 1763. John R. Alden, *John Stuart and the Southern Colonial Frontier* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1944), p. 136.

²Thomas Boone to Jeffrey Amherst, June 25, 1762, C.O. 5/62, BPRO.

³Larry Ivers, *British Drums on the Southern Frontier* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1974), p. 208.

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encouraging them to attack white settlers. Despite his denials, evidence suggests that Cameron eventually did just that. And yet Cameron himself never has received the attention of historians that would be expected of one who played such a major role on this state's northwest borderlands.

NOTHING IS KNOWN OF CAMERON'S EARLY LIFE, EXCEPT THAT he was a native of Scotland. He was probably a member of the Cameron family of Erracht, a well-known clan of the Lochaber district in the western region of the country. He would name his home in what is now northern Abbeville County after that district. Cameron came to Georgia in the fall of 1738 as a private with General James Oglethorpe's new Forty-second Regiment and served there for a number of years. When the Forty-second was disbanded in 1749, he was among a number of the officers and enlisted men who volunteered for three independent companies being raised in South Carolina.⁴ Cameron received a commission as ensign in one of these companies on February 25, 1761; a note to the commission indicates he was advanced to fill a vacancy in the company left by the promotion of Ensign Lachlan McIntosh to lieutenant in January 1760. McIntosh, another veteran of Oglethorpe's Forty-second Regiment, was sent to take command of Fort Prince George, near the Keowee River in what is now western Pickens County. Cameron joined him at the fort in September 1762 and served with him until both men were mustered out of the service as half-pay officers at the peace of 1763.⁵

How Stuart and Cameron became acquainted is not certain, but in the spring of 1759, when traveling from Charlestown to Fort Loudoun, Stuart spent some time at Fort Prince George recuperating from a gout attack. Although both men belonged to the St. Andrew's Society in Charlestown

⁴Murtie June Clark, *Colonial Soldiers of the South, 1732-1774* (Baltimore, Md.: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1986), p. 975. Gen. Alan Cameron told of spending the winter of 1774-1775 at Long Canes and identified Alexander as a very near relative. Alan Cameron Memorial, Feb. 27, 1784, A.O. 12/56, BPRO. There were two Alexander Camerons among Oglethorpe's forces. One, of the Highland Independent Company, Darien, was killed at Fort Mosa in 1740. The Alexander Cameron under consideration in this article was on a roster of men given grants of land in St. Andrew's Parish, Ga., in 1745. Clark, *Colonial Soldiers*, p. 980.

⁵W. R. Williams, comp., "British-American Officers, 1720 to 1763," *South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine* 33, No. 4 (October 1932), p. 295; Ludowick Grant to Jeffrey Amherst, Jan. 17, 1761, C.O. 5/61, BPRO. Cameron may have served with McIntosh when the latter commanded the fort between 1757 and 1759, possibly as a non-commissioned officer. This is difficult to verify for War Office records rarely mention enlisted men. Cameron probably was one of the six sergeants serving at Charleston on Jan. 31, 1760. Lt-Col. Probart Howarth, Return of the South Carolina Independent Companies, W.O. 34/35, BPRO.

and may have met earlier, Stuart's stay at the frontier outpost is the only occasion he is known to have observed Cameron on command.⁶ When he reported Cameron's appointment to General Thomas Gage, Stuart said of him:

I have prevailed upon Ensign Alex. Cameron of the Independents lately reduced in this Province, to go as far as Chote and Manage Matters with the principal Warriors there. This Gentleman was some years upon Command at Fort Prince George where he acquired considerable influence among the Indians. I hope Your Excellency will not disapprove of his going upon this Service, time would not admit of my first applying for your approbation, and I confide much in his discretion and abilities.⁷

There was danger of a general Indian uprising when Stuart assumed control of Indian affairs in February 1763. Northern tribes, under the leadership of Pontiac, had risen against the English, and in Florida the Creek and Choctaw were resisting English occupation of territories the French had surrendered by the Treaty of Paris. Even as Stuart was meeting with their leaders, defiant Creek warriors murdered fourteen white settlers in the Long Canes area of South Carolina. Stuart was in desperate need of qualified help to avoid a costly war with the Creek when he addressed a letter to Cameron in April 1764:

I request of you to undertake this Service having a thorough dependence on your knowledge of the Cherokees in general as well as of their principal and Leading Men in particular....

What in a more particular manner I recommend to your attention, is to foment the Jealousies subsisting between these Indians & the Creeks & use your utmost endeavors to prevent any growing Friendship or connection between them: but this must be done with great delicacy & without appearing to have any end or View to answer by it.⁸

⁶Alden, *John Stuart and the Southern Colonial Frontier*, pp. 63, 165n; *South-Carolina Gazette*, Dec. 23, 31, 1763.

⁷John Stuart to Thomas Gage, Apr. 11, 1764, Military Papers of General Thomas Gage, William Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor (hereafter Gage Papers).

⁸Alden, *John Stuart and the Southern Colonial Frontier*, p. 186; John Stuart to Alexander Cameron, Apr. 26, 1764 (quotation), enclosure in John Stuart to Thomas Gage, May 20, 1764, Gage Papers.

Stuart ordered his new deputy to keep him informed of significant events within the Nation and to learn the identity of individuals trading with the Cherokee, their character, and what licenses they held. The superintendent also wanted to know how these traders treated the Indians and the Indians' reaction to that treatment.

CAMERON FIRST MADE HIS HEADQUARTERS AT KEOWEE, BUT he later moved to Toqua to be nearer the Cherokee capital at Chota. After spending some time in the Cherokee towns, Cameron offered his observations in reports empathizing with the Cherokee: "It is shocking to express the tearing cheating & horse stealing that have been committed among the Indians by the Traders and Packhorsemen last winter in this Nation.... [I]t is no wonder that the Cherokees should withdraw their affections from us, when we allow such villains to trade or reside amongst them." Often he offered his observations about the traders in colorful terms: "No nation was ever infested with such a set of villains and horse thieves. They are enough to create disturbance among the most civilized people. A trader ... will invent and tell a thousand lies; and he is indefatigable in stirring up trouble against all other white persons that he judges his rivals in trade."⁹

During 1764-1765 the activities of white poachers endangered the friendly relations Cameron had established between the Cherokee and the English. These persons, scornfully referred to as "Crackers" by the Indians, had little regard for boundaries or laws. After a time their illegal activities became such a problem that Ensign George Price, commander of a detail of Royal Americans stationed at Fort Prince George, encouraged the Cherokee to seize the poachers' furs and traps and then drive them off Indian lands.¹⁰ It was difficult for Cameron to prevent bloodshed under these circumstances, and he often was in danger of physical assault from such men. In a report to Captain Gavin Cochrane in 1765 Cameron wrote:

I have been threatened hear by Severals of the Cracking Traders for taking a halfwited pack horseman into Custody; for infusing bad Notions into the heads of the Indian; I was Also Collared in the Presence of Mr. [James] Mayson & Savage for Offering to rectify Matters between them & the Indians in which they were Intirly in the wrong; without

⁹Alexander Cameron to John Stuart, June 1, 1766, in William L. Saunders, ed., *Colonial Records of North Carolina* (hereafter CRNC), Vol. VII (Raleigh, N.C.: Josephus Daniels, 1890), pp. 215-216 (first quotation); John P. Brown, *Old Frontiers* (Kingsport, Tenn: Southern Publishers, 1938), p. 125 (second quotation); C.O. 323/23, Fol. 254, BPRO.

¹⁰George Price to Gavin Cochrane, Jan. 24, 1765, enclosure in Gavin Cochrane to Thomas Gage, May 16, 1765, Gage Papers.

Some Authority of this kind, I cannot act properly in my Capacity....¹¹

Cameron often spoke of attacks of fever and ague (malaria), and he was experiencing such an illness when a group of drunken Indians broke into his house at Toqua to harass some traders staying there. He wrote:

I was unwell & very loath to get out of my bed, but the Dread of their Tomahawks obliged me to rise & you must needs think I had my Pistols at hand as they threatened a good deal before They broke in, crying for the Death of their Relations in Virginia & those who were Killed about Keowee last War; Saying, now was the time to take Satisfaction; I made up Matters at last & I turn'd them off.... Some of the Traders had Blows & Knocks but were obliged to put up with them.¹²

His attempts at diplomacy sometimes required extra persuasion. For instance, at a 1765 meeting with several principal chiefs, he brought out his "Great Beloved Pipe." He wrote, "altho I served them round with it myself, some of them would not have it into their Mouths, However I pushed it in, untill I went all round."¹³

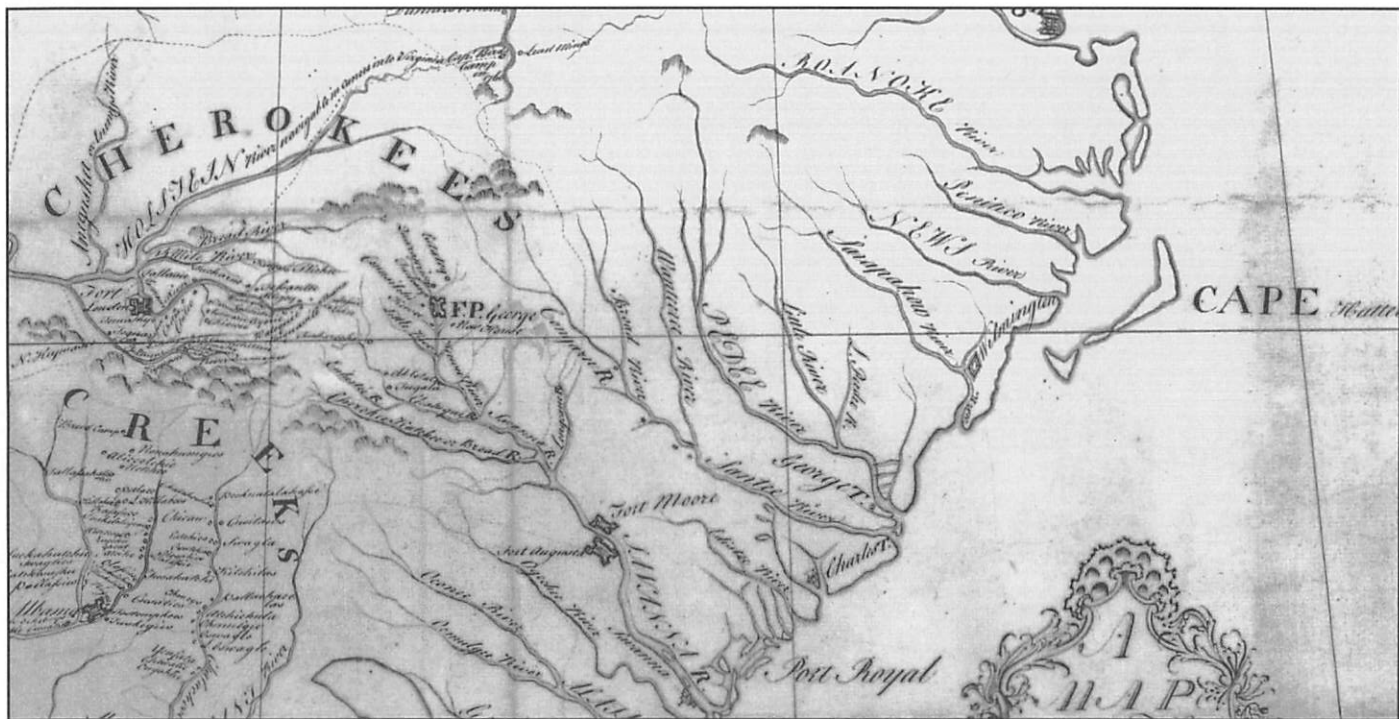
Cameron participated in at least three negotiations to secure cessions of land from the Cherokee between 1765 and 1771 in order to reshape the 1763 proclamation line into a more realistic boundary between the Cherokee and the white settlements. The Indians were not happy about some of these negotiations, but Cameron was able to manage them peacefully. The first such cession was surveyed in the spring of 1766. The line established still forms the southeast boundaries of Anderson and Greenville counties. During this survey Cameron selected a tract of 2,000 acres in Upper Long Canes and claimed it for himself by reason of his military service. He later purchased an additional 450 acres. The tracts were on Penny Creek, which flowed into the Little River from the northwest, and here he built a house. Cameron's plantation, called Lochaber, was open to the Indians; he maintained a blacksmith shop where they could bring their guns and implements to be repaired.¹⁴

¹¹Alexander Cameron to Gavin Cochrane, Feb. 3, 1765, enclosure in *ibid.*

¹²Alexander Cameron to George Price, June 15, 1765, enclosure in *ibid.*, Aug. 5, 1765, Gage Papers.

¹³Alexander Cameron to Gavin Cochrane, June 6, 1765, in *ibid.*

¹⁴Alden, *John Stuart and the Southern Colonial Frontier*, Ch. XIII, "Politics and Land, 1765-68," pp. 215-239; Memorial Books, Vol. 9, p. 131, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia (hereafter SCDAH). (Volume 9 has an improper description of Penny Creek, which actually runs into the Little River northwest of Long Canes Creek.)



ALEXANDER CAMERON

British Indian superintendent John Stuart apparently first became aware of Alexander Cameron in 1759 when Stuart stopped at Fort Prince George while traveling from Charlestown to Fort Loudoun in what is now Tennessee. Cameron originally made his headquarters at Keowee, near Fort Prince George, but later moved to Toqua, near Fort Loudoun, to be nearer the Cherokee capital at Chota. Eventually he built his Lochaber plantation in what is now Abbeville County, South Carolina. Detail of 1766 map of the Southern Indian Territory by William G. de Brahm courtesy of the William Clements Library, University of Michigan.

Cameron took as his wife during those early years of his career the daughter of Saloue, "The Young Warrior of Estatoe and Tugaloo." Although her Indian name is unknown, he apparently called her Molly. She resided at Lochaber and Cameron reputedly gave her a sumptuous life with fine clothing and furnishings. Molly bore Cameron three children. Their first, a son named George, was born in 1767; the other two were daughters: Susanna, born about 1770, and Jane, born about 1776. In 1787 the girls attended school in England under the guardianship of Cameron's brother Donald; the boy lived with Donald.¹⁵ Nothing more is known of them.

Cameron and his son were mentioned in a speech by Ouconnostotah, war chief of the Cherokee, at the Hard Labor conference in 1768:

I am now going to talk to you concerning Mr. Cameron. He has lived among us as a beloved man. He has done us justice. He has told us the truth. We all love and regard him, and hope he will not be taken from us. When a good man comes amongst us we are sorry to part with him.... Our beloved brother Mr. Cameron has got a son by a Cherokee woman. We are desirous that he may educate the boy like the white people, and cause him to be able to read and write, that he may resemble both red and white, and live amongst us when his father is dead. We have given him for this purpose a large piece of land, which we hope will be agreeable to our father.¹⁶

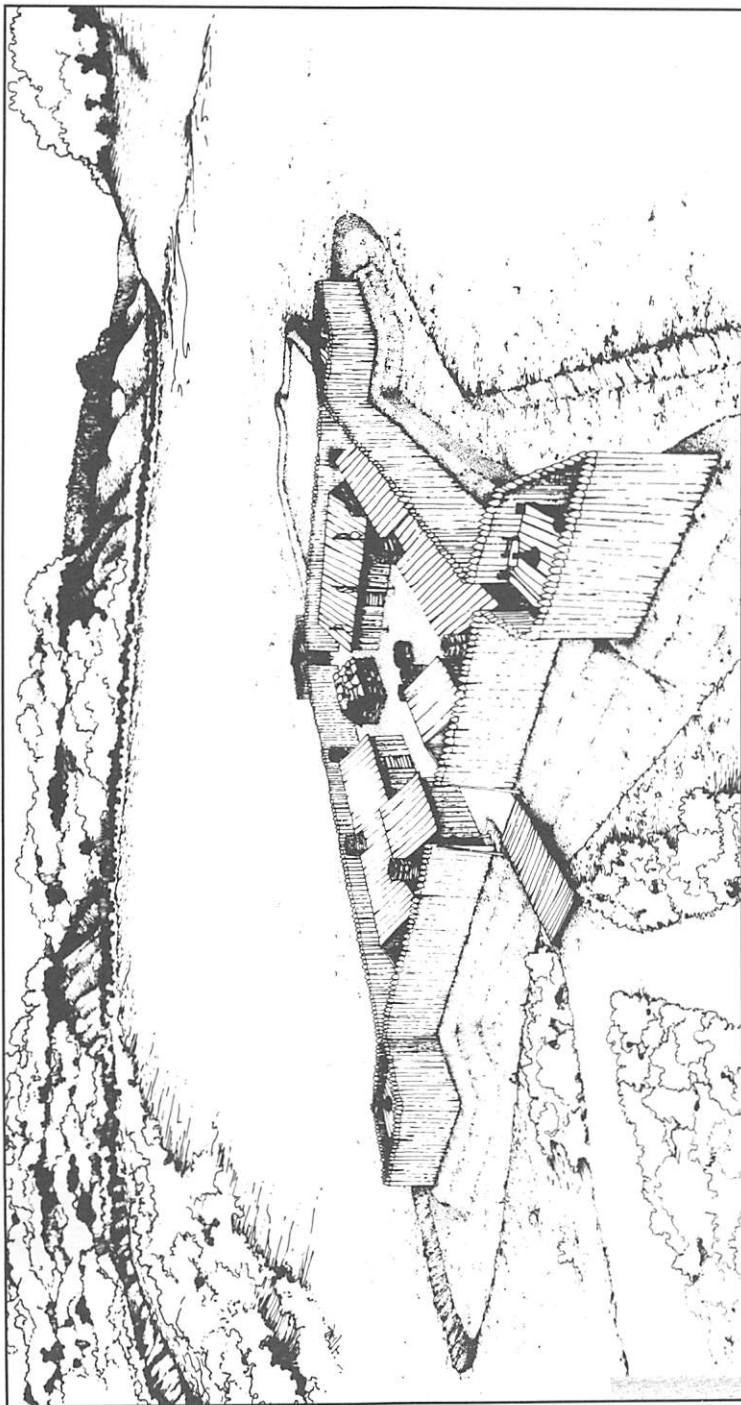
This oration reveals the Cherokee admiration for Cameron. Ouconnostotah despised the British, but he exempted Cameron from that hatred. The land offered Cameron's son was in the Saluda River valley within the Cherokee territory; the offer prompted the only discovered accusation of impropriety ever made against Cameron. In his defense he swore on his "honor as a gentleman" he had not solicited the gift.¹⁷

Ouconnostotah's speech and the proposed land transfer were no doubt prompted by a report that Cameron might be taken from them. The ministry had decided to return control of the Indian trade to the colonies in

¹⁵Alexander Cameron to John Stuart, Jan. 23, 1771, C.O. 5/72, p. 215, BPRO; Alexander Cameron to Andrew McLean, Aug. 16, 1775, in R.W. Gibbes, *Documentary History of the American Revolution* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1855; repr., Spartanburg, S.C.: The Reprint Co., 1972), Vol. I, p. 143; Capt. Hugh McCall, *The History of Georgia* (Atlanta: A.B. Caldwell Publishing Co., 1909), p. 310; A.O. 12/50, BPRO; Loyalist Claims, Vol. 55, pp. 556-565, Audit Office 13, BPRO; June 1788, A.O. 12/109, p. 238, BPRO.

¹⁶Ouconnostotah to John Stuart, Oct. 13-17, 1769, C.O. 1435, BPRO.

¹⁷Alexander Cameron to John Stuart, Jan. 23, 1771, C.O. 5/72, p. 215, BPRO.



Alexander Cameron was expected to enforce the royal proclamation of 1763 and the many laws enacted by the southern colonies to regulate the Indian trade. His tasks became more difficult after the Royal Americans were evacuated from Fort Prince George in June 1768. Archaeological findings suggest that the fort may have looked like this. Courtesy of the South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology.

1768 and Stuart was ordered to discharge his commissaries. To avoid losing his most capable and dependable aide, Stuart named Cameron his deputy superintendent.¹⁸

Included among Stuart's responsibilities were enforcement of the Royal Proclamation of 1763 and the many laws enacted by the southern colonies to regulate the Indian trade. Often crippled by gout, he became increasingly dependent upon his deputy to represent him. Cameron's task became more difficult after the Royal Americans were evacuated from Fort Prince George in June 1768. He found himself forced to rely on his wits and the goodwill of his Indian friends to maintain his authority over the many lawless elements which overran the Indian country following the French and Indian War.¹⁹

Complying with Stuart's order that he provide intelligence about events occurring among the Cherokee, Cameron proved himself a prolific correspondent who sometimes wrote two reports in a single day. These detailed accounts provide useful information about his daily life among the Indians as well as the problems he faced. They also reveal a man of courage, possessing a pragmatic acceptance of the harsh realities of life, accompanied by a wry humor. In a report to Stuart he told of a Chickasaw named Pyamingo Eulixi, a notorious troublemaker, who had come back from the Ohio country with eight white scalps. Pyamingo boasted these were the scalps of Frenchmen he had killed there. As he was returning home he was killed and scalped by enemy Indians. Cameron dryly added to his report: "for which I return them Thanks."²⁰

Cameron led a busy, productive life during the years before the Revolution. His Lochaber plantation prospered and he was a well-respected member of the Long Canes community. Andrew Williamson and John Lewis Gervais, the owners of plantations in the Ninety-Six region, were his particular friends, even though the approaching conflict would find them on opposing sides. The Quaker naturalist William Bartram, who was Cameron's guest at Lochaber in May 1775, described him as "the agreeable and liberal Mr. Cameron [who gave me] ample testimonials and letters of recommendation to the traders in the nation."²¹

The convivial side of Cameron's nature surfaces in an incident reported in November 1774. While serving as the foreman of a grand jury at Ninety-Six, he signed a presentment which denied the English Parliament the right

¹⁸John Stuart to William Hill, Earl of Hillsborough, Sept. 15, 1768, C.O. 5/69, BPRO.

¹⁹Thomas Gage to Lewis Valentine Fuser, June 25, 1768, Gage Papers.

²⁰Alexander Cameron to John Stuart, July 26, 1774, enclosure in John Stuart to Thomas Gage, Sept. 14, 1774, Gage Papers.

²¹Mark Van Doren, ed., *Travels of William Bartram* (New York: Dover, 1934), p. 268.

to tax or bind the colonists in any way; it also called upon South Carolina to cooperate with her sister colonies in defense of American rights. General Gage was furious when he learned a Royal officer had signed such a document and demanded an explanation from Stuart. When Stuart asked Cameron to justify his action, the embarrassed deputy told his superintendent, "from the Tenor of my Oath I thought (tho I might be wrong) that I could not Recede from any Bill or Instrument to which the Jury had unanimously agreed, even if my Sentiments did not Concur with theirs." However Stuart learned the jurors had consumed over one hundred bottles of port while deliberating, and that Cameron was so drunk he remembered neither the bill nor signing it. Gage accepted this explanation and the matter went no further.²²

THE YEAR 1774 PROVED EVENTFUL FOR THE DEPUTY superintendent. It began with the threat of war with the Creek in January, after which Cameron was ordered by Stuart to stay close to the Cherokee to prevent them from encouraging the Creek. He was also to restrict the Cherokee allowance of gunpowder and shot to just enough for their own needs so they would have no surplus to provide the neighboring Creek.²³

Stuart's caution yielded an unexpected benefit when war broke out between Virginians and the Ohio Valley tribes that summer. Edward Wilkinson, later the South Carolina Revolutionary Indian agent, wrote Cameron in mid-June to advise him that a group of northern Indians was attempting to persuade the Cherokee to join them. The Cherokee refused because they had no ammunition and would have to fight with hatchets. Wilkinson also warned Cameron of a party of Coweta, said to be on the way to kill him and destroy the fort he had built at Lochaber. George Galphin, a Georgia trader, had told the Coweta that Cameron had criticized them to Captain Stuart. Another problem developed that summer when a letter from Ouconnostotah reported the unprovoked murder and scalping of a young Cherokee by a white man. This happened during a gathering to race horses at Watauga. Ouconnostotah's confidence that Stuart and Cameron would see justice done undoubtedly prevented bloody reprisals for the murder.²⁴

²²Alexander Cameron to John Stuart, Dec. 24 1774, enclosure in John Stuart to Thomas Gage, Jan. 18, 1775, Gage Papers; *South-Carolina Gazette*, Dec. 12, 1774. Cameron did not plead drunkenness as an excuse for signing the presentment.

²³Alexander Cameron to John Stuart, July 4, 1774, enclosure in John Stuart to Thomas Gage, Aug. 8, 1774, Gage Papers.

²⁴Edward Wilkinson to Alexander Cameron, June 26, 1774, enclosure in John Stuart to Thomas Gage, Aug. 8, 1774, Gage Papers; Alexander Cameron to John Stuart, Feb. 4, 1774, C.O. 5/75, Fol. 57, BPRO; Ouconnostotah to Alexander Cameron, June 1774, in John Stuart to Frederick Haldimand, Aug. 8, 1764, Gage Papers.

In the fall of 1774 Cameron was ordered to attend a meeting between Cherokee leaders and a group of land speculators who called their enterprise the Louisa Company. This group, led by Judge Richard Henderson of North Carolina, wanted to buy a huge tract of land in present-day Tennessee and Kentucky. Cameron was ordered by Stuart to do everything possible to prevent the Cherokee from selling their land, but he arrived too late to prevent the transaction. On March 4, 1775, before he could get there, Attakullakulla, Oucnostotah, and a number of other chiefs had sold twenty million acres of land to Henderson's group for a cabin full of trade goods.²⁵

The young dissident named Dragging Canoe spoke forcefully against the sale but failed to prevent it. In a report to Stuart in mid-1774 Cameron said of him, "The Dragging Canoe is the only Young Warriour of Note now over the Hills." Though a strong friendship existed between Cameron and Dragging Canoe — Cherokee legend says they went through the Indian ritual to become blood brothers — Cameron's assessment was hardly biased.²⁶ Dragging Canoe's hatred of the white men who were stealing their land would soon divide the Cherokee nation, and make him an implacable enemy of the Americans.

THE CONFRONTATION BETWEEN BRITISH TROOPS AND American militia at Lexington on April 19, 1775, suddenly ended the comfortable lives of John Stuart and Alexander Cameron. Considered enemy agents because of their well-known loyalty to the royal government and their influence with the Indians, Stuart was obliged to flee to Savannah to avoid arrest. Rumors circulated in Charleston that he had orders from the English ministry to incite a slave revolt and bring down the Indians upon the province. Stuart attempted to clear himself of these charges by inviting members of the Savannah Committee of Safety to inspect his official correspondence in mid-June. This proved a mistake because the committee found a suspiciously worded communication from Cameron among his correspondence that led them to believe the Indians were ready to fight the Americans when Stuart issued an order for Cameron to lead them.²⁷

²⁵John Stuart to William Legg, Second Earl of Dartmouth, Sept. 3, 1774, C.O. 5/75, BPRO; Alexander Cameron to John Stuart, Mar. 2, 1775, C.O. 5/76, BPRO. The Louisa Company was renamed the Transylvania Company on Jan. 6, 1775.

²⁶Alexander Cameron to John Stuart, June 18, 1774 (quotation), enclosure in John Stuart to Thomas Gage, July 3, 1774, Gage Papers; John P. Brown, "Eastern Cherokee Chiefs," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 16, No. 1 (March 1938), p. 19.

²⁷Alden, *John Stuart and the Southern Colonial Frontier*, p. 170; Gibbes, *Documentary History*, Vol. I, pp. 102-104.

When the contents of his letter became known to the people of Long Canes, Cameron fled into the Indian country. From the safety of Keowee he wrote Stuart on July 21, "Mr. [Andrew] Williamson Declared to me, that he never heard my Name mentioned in Congress, or any where else untill the Extracts of your letters returned from Georgia, which sett the Whole Body of the People in a flame against You & me also, and as Soon as they were informed that I came to the Nation, The Settlement was Struck with panick; that I sett out on Purpose to march down the Indians upon them."²⁸

Alarmed by such rumors, the Council of Safety at Charlestown made an attempt to recruit Cameron to the American side. His friend Major Williamson was sent to offer him a position with a salary equal to what the English were paying him, along with their assurance that he would lose nothing by resigning his position. Cameron flatly refused to accept "any Emolument, Reward or Gratuity ... in Consideration of such resignation." Williamson wrote that he had been assured Cameron "never could be the Means of inducing them [the Indians] to fall upon defenceless women and Children, and believes before he would execute such Orders, should they be given him, he would resign his office." Williamson pledged himself that Cameron was sincere.²⁹

Cameron soon reported the council's offer to Stuart, and also told of an incident when "a Whiteman arrived from Saludy," announcing that he was on his way to kill Cameron. "The Good Warrior to whom the news was first brought ... threw away his hoe, ran for his Arms; & Sett up the war Whoop. In 5 Minutes he had every man in Seneca fit to bear Arms about him.... [A]ll the Indians in the lower Towns, were here that afternoon, [and] Declared to a man, that if I had been kill'd or carryed off, they would follow to the Settlements, and fall upon every thing that fell in their way."³⁰ As the Council of Safety grew increasingly concerned about Cameron's influence, they wrote Richard Pearis, a frontier trader and speculator, and Edward Wilkinson, a trader at Keowee who had worked with Cameron earlier. Both were asked to use their "utmost endeavours" to "counteract [Cameron's] Scheme & projects." William Henry Drayton apparently wrote Cameron about the same time demanding that he remove himself from the Nation — far enough away that he could no longer influence the Cherokee. Cameron once more refused to desert his post and forthrightly reprimanded Drayton

²⁸Alexander Cameron to John Stuart, July 21, 1775, Clinton Papers, William Clements Library, University of Michigan. This was the first of several letters Cameron wrote to Stuart after he fled into the Indian country.

²⁹Andrew Williamson to John Lewis Gervais, July 12, 1775, enclosure in Andrew Williamson to Council of Safety, July 14, 1775, in David R. Chesnutt, ed., *The Papers of Henry Laurens*, Vol. 10 (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1985), pp. 223-224.

³⁰Alexander Cameron to John Stuart, July 21, 1775, Clinton Papers.

for telling the Indians that he “spoke to the Indians with two Tongues.”³¹

Rumors and speculation to the contrary, it appears Cameron told his friend Williamson the truth about having no orders to incite the Cherokee to attack.³² Several letters between Stuart and his deputy were intercepted, and ongoing correspondence became virtually impossible for a time because the trader who usually carried their exchanges was closely watched.³³ Official correspondence of that period reveals that Stuart had no orders to use the Indians against the American rebels until he received them in directive from General Gage dated October 1775. These orders did not reach Cameron in the Overhill country until April 1776. His ignorance of Gage’s order is evidenced by a letter to Stuart in November 1775:

In your letter of the 14th August you desire that I will assure the Indians that there is no intention to involve them in any difficulties by the dispute subsisting between Great Britain and her Colonies. I pray God that may be the case for should the Indians be persuaded to take up the Hatchet against the colonies the Issue of it would be terrible, as they could not be restrained from Committing the most inhuman barbarities on Women and Children. The People in Carolina would not believe that I am averse to acts of this nature, but they dont know the feelings and tenderness of my heart, tho my Duty to my Sovereign exceeds all other Considerations.... I think I could not lead the Indians against Friends, Neighbours and fellow Subjects but more especially against Women and

³¹John Stuart to Alexander Cameron, Dec. 16, 1775, C.O. 5/77, p. 22, BPRO; Council of Safety to Richard Pearis, Oct. 24, 1775, and Council of Safety to Edward Wilkinson, Oct. 29, 1775, in Chesnutt, *The Papers of Henry Laurens*, Vol. 10, pp. 502, 506; Alexander Cameron to William Henry Drayton, Oct. 16, 1775, in Gibbes, *Documentary History*, Vol. I, pp. 207-208. This letter shows a measure of respect for the American position, but Cameron reprimands Drayton for implying he was a liar and challenged him to make good that assertion. He boasted he would wait on Drayton and make him prove this if he came within thirty miles of Keowee. Alexander Cameron to John Stuart, Nov. 8, 1775, Clinton Papers.

³²A number of affidavits concerning Cameron’s activities among the Indians were made during this period. These appear to be based on gossip and rumor rather than on any first-hand knowledge. Cameron bitterly referred to such stories in a letter to John Stuart, Nov. 8, 1775, Clinton Papers.

³³As examples, see Alexander Cameron to Andrew M’Lean, Aug. 16, 1775, John Stuart to David Taitt, Aug. 29, 1775, and “John Stuart’s Talk to the Cherokee,” Aug. 30, 1775, all in Gibbes, *Documentary History*, Vol. I, pp. 143, 159, and 161, and Council of Safety to William Henry Drayton, Sept. 5, 1775, in Chesnutt, *The Papers of Henry Laurens*, Vol. 10, p. 366.

Children, altho the behaviour of the people would almost justify me in doing it."³⁴

When in December 1775 Stuart had not heard from Cameron for seven months he sent a letter marked "Secret and Confidential" to Cameron at Chota by Stuart's brother Henry. The courier did not reach Chota until May 1776. Stuart's letter repeated Gage's order to use the Indians "to distress His Majesty's Rebellious Subjects by all practicable means."

Altho' I do not construe this Instruction as an Order to attack the frontier Inhabitants of the Provinces indiscriminately by which Means the innocent might suffer and the guilty escape, yet in Consequence of it my Duty requires that no Time be lost in employing the Indians of the Different Nations to give all the Assistance in their Power to such of His Majesty's faithful Subjects as may already have taken or shall hereafter take Arms....

I desire and expect that you will prevail upon them to march as soon as possible to the Assistance of such of His Majesty's faithful Subjects as may already have taken, or shall hereafter take Arms in Defence of His Majesty's government and laws, and that you will dispose them to join and cooperate with such other Indian Tribes as shall be willing to contribute their Assistance against the Rebels.³⁵

When Henry Stuart reached Chota, the Cherokee, infuriated by continued trespasses and the defiant attitude of white squatters in the Watauga settlement, already were preparing for war. The squatters refused to move off Cherokee land and threatened to kill Cameron if he tried to force them. Despite their affection for Cameron, Dragging Canoe and the other chiefs assembled at Chota had little interest in helping the English. The war between the king and his American subjects had given them an excuse as well as the means to drive the white squatters from their land. Stuart reported that he and Cameron tried to persuade Dragging Canoe to delay his attack on the Wataugans because of "the impossibility of their being able without a Body of White People to join them to make any distinction" between their friends and enemies. Dragging Canoe, openly contemptuous of Henry Stuart, would not listen to him, but he revealed in conversation with Cameron that "they would always pay attention to whatever he

³⁴Alexander Cameron to John Stuart, Nov. 9, 1775, C.O. 5/77, p. 87, BPRO.

³⁵John Stuart to Alexander Cameron, Dec. 16, 1775, C.O. 5/77, p. 22, BPRO. This is the first written order for Cameron to use Indians against American rebels. Henry Stuart carried verbal orders as well.

advised." Warned that his life was in danger because of Dragging Canoe's hostility, Stuart left for Pensacola. He later reported that Cameron remained at Chota to restrain the Indians. Actually Cameron may have left for the Lower towns with a large group of white men and Indians several days before Stuart left for Pensacola.³⁶

Soon after Stuart left Chota, James Colbert, another royal deputy, arrived there with one hundred horseloads of ammunition and other provisions ordered by Cameron and Stuart. This gave Dragging Canoe the supplies he needed to start a war. Cameron would write to his superintendent, "all our Rhetoric could no longer diswade them from taking up the Hatchet."³⁷ Three traders were sent by Nancy Ward, the well-known Beloved Woman of the Cherokee, to warn the Wataugans of an impending attack. After reaching Watauga these men described the activities at Chota. According to their affidavit, Cameron tried to persuade Dragging Canoe to delay the attack for twenty days. When he refused to wait, Cameron promised to supply him with ammunition as long as he continued the war. According to observers, "Cameron desir'd them not to bring any more Prisoners in alive but kill as they went."³⁸ If true, these instructions indicate that Cameron had put aside any personal reluctance to use the Indians against his friends and neighbors by early 1776.

The South Carolina Council of Safety, convinced the Cherokee would not remain neutral while they were under the influence of Cameron, sent a party of volunteers led by Captain James McCall into the Cherokee Lower towns in June to remove him forcibly. According to McCall's report this party was attacked in an Indian town they believed to be friendly. He and several of his men were captured. Some of these were tortured to death while McCall was forced to watch. Although Cameron was in the town at the time, he refused to speak with McCall. The captain later managed to escape and provided an eye-witness account of Cameron's involvement.³⁹

On the first day of July 1776, war parties from the Lower towns struck the frontier settlements of north Georgia and both Carolinas; it was reported

³⁶Henry Stuart to John Stuart, "Mr. Henry Stuart's Account of his Proceedings with the Cherokee Indians about going against the whites," Aug. 25, 1776, in *CRNC*, Vol. X, pp. 763-785 (quotations pp. 774, 781).

³⁷Alexander Cameron to John Stuart, July 9, 1776, C.O. 5/77 p. 331, BPRO.

³⁸Letter from Charles Roberson and James Smith, July 13, 1776, in *CRNC*, Vol. X, pp. 665-666. This affidavit is the only first-hand account of Cameron's activities during the spring and summer of 1776. Nancy Ward, the niece of the prominent Cherokee diplomat Attakullakulla, first married King Fisher, and second an English trader. Bryant Ward. Grace Steele Woodward, *The Cherokees* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1984), pp. 91, 94; Pat Alderman, *Nancy Ward: Cherokee Chieftainess/ Dragging Canoe: Cherokee-Chickamauga War Chief* (Johnson City, Tenn.: The Overmountain Press, 1990, 2nd ed.), pp. 4, 44.

³⁹McCall, *History of Georgia*, pp. 311-313.

that Cameron personally led a band of 200 white loyalists and Indians. Those faithful to the crown and rebel alike were killed in these raids; many loyalists discovered the "Passover Poles" (peeled logs wrapped with white cloth), which they had been told to erect before their homes to attest to their loyalty, failed to protect them.⁴⁰ In mid-July three large war parties left the Overhills towns to destroy the Watauga and Holston River settlements. Only the warning sent by Nancy Ward saved these settlements from destruction. Cameron would report these attacks to Stuart, saying, "although the Cherokee Chiefs have precipitately been lead by the Norwards, The Dragging Canoe and the young fellows, to raise the Hatchet in defence of the King, as well as themselves but as it tends greatly to the Suppression of Rebellion I hope you may think it necessary to order the Creeks to join them...."⁴¹

The Indian attacks aroused bitter resentment against Cameron, who was believed responsible for the action. Rebel and loyalist alike hated him. Many persons previously loyal to the crown as well as many who had hesitated to take sides came over to the rebel cause as a result of the atrocities committed by the Indians and the Tories who accompanied them. On the first day of August 1776, Colonel Andrew Williamson led 1,100 South Carolina militiamen into Indian country to punish the Cherokee and destroy their towns. As they passed through the Long Canes area his troops burned Lochaber and seized Cameron's slaves and livestock.⁴² When the army reached the ruins of Fort Prince George, scouts reported that Cameron and Dragging Canoe were camped at Oconoree Creek with thirteen white men and a large party of Cherokee. Williamson sent his aide, Colonel Leroy Hammond, with a large contingent of mounted rangers on a forced march to surprise and capture him, but Cameron somehow learned of their approach. As Hammond's men forded the river near Seneca Town, a number of rangers and horses were killed or wounded by heavy fire from the apparently deserted village. When the surprised rangers hesitated, Colonel Hammond saved the day by rallying them and leading a desperate charge into the Indian positions. The Indians fled into the hills, and Cameron and Dragging Canoe escaped to the Overhill towns.⁴³

Soon after that, traders reported Cameron urging the Cherokee with bribes and threats "to defend their country against a parcel of rebels." Cameron's efforts accomplished little. As armies from Georgia and the Carolinas converged on the Cherokee Lower and Valley towns, destroying homes and crops, the destitute survivors fled. Within a few weeks, another

⁴⁰Alderman, *Nancy Ward/Dragging Canoe*, p. 48; James M. Richardson, *History of Greenville County, South Carolina* (Atlanta, Ga.: A.H. Cawston, 1930), p. 55.

⁴¹Alexander Cameron to John Stuart, Aug. 31, 1776, C.O. 5/78, Fol. 23, BPRO.

⁴²Alexander Cameron will, A.O. 12/55, pp. 562-563, BPRO.

⁴³Brown, *Old Frontiers*, pp. 155-158.

large army from Virginia and northwestern North Carolina, commanded by Colonel William Christian, was coming down the Holston River valley to attack the Upper towns. Cameron wrote from Toqua, "the Valley Towns will not assist in defending their country, the Cherokee are divided." His influence was definitely on the wane after the destruction of the Lower towns and he would soon find it expedient to leave the Cherokee country. George Galphin, the new Revolutionary Indian commissioner for Georgia, reported to his superiors: "the lower Cherokees are all drove off & their Towns burnd & a great many killed.... [I]n all about 300 men went to the Cherokees burnd 2 Towns & killed about 20 men & women they kill all make no prisoners they took a white prisoner & tells them that Mr. Cameron is afraid of being killed every day by the Indians, is obliged to keep in the Woods...." Even considering their losses, Cherokee loyalty to the English remained intact. Traders leaving the Overhill towns told Colonel Christian the Indians would fight desperately, as they had promised Stuart.⁴⁴

The Cherokee resolve had eroded considerably, however, when Christian's army arrived at Chota. Starving refugees from the Lower towns were crowding into the town, food was scarce, and their chiefs were weary of fighting a losing war. Only Dragging Canoe and his followers continued to listen as Cameron urged them to move south and continue the fight. Christian, aware of Cameron's influence with the dissident faction, demanded the Cherokee leaders surrender Cameron, "that enemy of the white man and the red," before talking of peace. It is significant that Attakullakulla and Ouconnostotah, both of whom had been Cameron's friends for years, agreed to surrender him. They also warned Christian they could no longer control Dragging Canoe. After concluding a peace agreement with the leading Cherokee chiefs, Christian posted a reward of £100 each for Cameron and Dragging Canoe. Cameron, who had gone to Pensacola to confer with Stuart, did not learn of the price on his head until he received a written message from Dragging Canoe informing him of the danger.⁴⁵

DURING THE WINTER OF 1776-1777 DRAGGING CANOE SPLIT with the Cherokee peace party and moved south with his followers who became known as the Chickamauga. Cameron joined them and supplied arms and ammunition to continue the fight. He also made it known that only those who continued to fight the rebels would receive supplies from

⁴⁴Alderman, *Nancy Ward/Dragging Canoe*, pp. 50-51, 52; Alexander Cameron to John Stuart, Aug. 31, 1776, C.O. 5/78, Fol. 23 ("the Valley Towns"); George Galphin to Edward Barnard, Aug. 18, 1776, C.O. 5/78, Fol. 5, BPRO ("the Lower Cherokees"); CRNC, Vol. X, p. 884, Vol. VII, pp. 22, 995.

⁴⁵CRNC, Vol. XXII, p. 995; Alderman, *Nancy Ward/Dragging Canoe*, pp. 51-55 (quotation p. 51); Dragging Canoe to Alexander Cameron, Nov. 14, 1776, C.O. 59/4, Fol. 157, BPRO.

the British. The Chickamauga harassed the Holston, Nolichucky, and Watauga settlements to such an extent that, as the British had hoped, the colonists felt it necessary to assign two companies of militia and recruit four companies of rangers to guard these areas.⁴⁶

Early in 1777 Cameron was warned of yet another plot to assassinate him and fled to Georgia. There he joined David Taitt and John McIntosh, two of Stuart's other deputies, at the home of Alexander McGillivray at Tallassie. McGillivray, the son of a Scottish trader and a Creek woman of the Wind Clan, was a Creek chief of such influence that Stuart made him a deputy to the Creek Nation.⁴⁷

The four British agents worked during 1777 to coordinate a joint Cherokee, Creek, and Choctaw attack on the southern frontiers. An invasion of Georgia was to be led by General Augustin Prevost from East Florida. George Galphin, Cameron's old enemy and Georgia's Indian commissioner, used every possible means, including bribery, to persuade the Creek to remain neutral and expel the British agents. Eventually Cameron and Taitt were obliged to flee to safety at Pensacola when they learned Galphin was leading a large party of Creek to their headquarters at Tallassie to assassinate them.⁴⁸

By March 1778 Cameron was the captain of one of three troops of mounted rangers called the Loyal Refugees, composed of loyalist traders who had fled to Pensacola. For the next two years Cameron's company expended most of its efforts among the Chickamauga Cherokee, directing their attacks on the southern frontiers. For some time, Henry Hamilton, the lieutenant governor of Detroit, and John Stuart had been planning a joint attack by northern and southern Indians on the frontiers from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico. Cameron's Cherokee were to play an important part in this plan. The action was abandoned when Hamilton was captured by George Rogers Clark at Fort Vincennes.⁴⁹

WHEN JOHN STUART DIED AT PENSACOLA ON MARCH 21, 1779, General Henry Clinton appointed Cameron to succeed him, but other forces were at work against the deputy superintendent. Governor Peter Chester

⁴⁶Alderman, *Nancy Ward/Dragging Canoe*, pp. 51-55.

⁴⁷Henry Stuart's report of Aug. 25, 1776, also tells of two attempts to kill Cameron at Chota. CRNC, Vol. X, pp. 763-783. Arthur Preston Whittaker, "Alexander McGillivray, 1783-1789," *North Carolina Historical Review* 5 (April 1928), p. 181.

⁴⁸David Taitt to George Germain, Aug. 6, 1779, C.O. 5/80, Fol. 234, BPRO.

⁴⁹John Stuart to George Germain, Apr. 13, 1778, C.O. 5/79, Fol. 81, BPRO; Henry Hamilton to Commander at Natchez, Jan. 13, 1779, C.O. 5/597, Fol. 61, p. 235, BPRO. Hamilton explained that in the spring there would be an expedition against Virginia by Cherokee, Shawnee, and Delaware from the south and Mingos, Miami, Wyandott, Seneca, and other northern tribes.

of West Florida immediately appointed a commission to perform the duties of the Indian superintendent, and on July 25 Cameron was notified the southern Indian department was being divided. He would be superintendent of the western division that included the Choctaw, Chickasaw, and smaller tribes of whom he knew little. The eastern division, which included Cameron's beloved Cherokee, was given by recommendation of Governor Patrick Tonyn to Colonel Thomas Brown of the East Florida Rangers.⁵⁰

These appointments hurt the British war effort because Cameron resented being separated from the Cherokee and did little to support Brown's authority. Official correspondence reveals that Cameron spent much of 1779 and 1780 bickering with either the governor's commission or General John Campbell, the military commander of West Florida who held inexplicable hostility toward Cameron. During that time Cameron did his best to keep enough Indians at Mobile and Pensacola for defense, but Campbell's stinginess so offended the Indians that they were absent when needed.⁵¹ Without their help, the Spanish easily took both British bases in 1780.

A governor's commission of May 1779 ordered Cameron "to assemble a large party of Cherokee to attack the frontiers of Georgia, or South Carolina, and join the King's troops there." Cameron followed these orders, but the leading party commanded by David Taitt was routed at Fulsom's Fort on the Ogeechee River by South Carolina militia. While the Chickamauga were with Cameron in Georgia, a force of 600 volunteers from North Carolina and Virginia invaded their country and burned their towns.⁵²

In spite of such setbacks Cameron was determined to carry out his mission to support the British invasion of Georgia. He sent a message to the

⁵⁰Alexander Cameron and John Stuart to George Germain, Mar. 23, 1779, 5/80, BPRO; Alden, *John Stuart and the Southern Colonial Frontier*, p. 140n; George Clinton to George Germain, May 3, 1779, C.O. 5/97, Fol. 233, BPRO; George Germain to Henry Clinton, July 9, 1779, C.O. 5/97, Fol. 333, BPRO.

⁵¹Alexander Cameron to George Germain, May 10, 1779, C.O. 5/80, p. 343, BPRO; Alexander Cameron to George Germain, Apr. 5, 1779, C.O. 5/82 Fol. 105, BPRO. Cameron was not prohibited from dealing with the Cherokee, and was told to form a Chickasaw, Cherokee, and Creek alliance to defend Mobile. Cameron was told he was not capable of being superintendent as he lacked education. John Campbell to George Germain, Dec. 15, 1779, C.O. 5/597, Fol. 115, BPRO. The governor's commission claimed Cameron's Refugee Companies were unfit to serve among the Indians. May 28, 1779, Gov. Guy Carleton Papers 30/55/16, Doc. 2022, BPRO. Alexander Cameron to Lord Germain, Sept. 20, 1779, C.O. 5/82 Fol. 88, BPRO.

⁵²The Indians were to be restrained from committing atrocities. Commission on Indian Affairs to Alexander Cameron, May 20, 1779, C.O. 5/81, Fol. 87, BPRO. *South-Carolina Gazette*, Apr. 7, 1779; James Grierson to David Taitt, May 24, 1779, C.O. 5/80, Fol. 250, BPRO.

Cherokee Middle towns in July demanding they join in a concerted effort against the rebels. According to General Griffith Rutherford, "Cameron, the Tyrant Superintendent in Indian Affairs, is building a Fort in the middle grounds between the Cherokees & the Creeks, and has sent a runner to the middle settlements demanding them to join; if not, that they will come and destroy them." Apparently the Indians took him at his word because in August Cameron and Dragging Canoe once more led a large war party to the South Carolina frontier. They withdrew without a fight after being met by a large party of South Carolina militia. Cameron then urged the Cherokee to attack the Watauga settlements in October 1780 while their men were away fighting at King's Mountain. This plan likewise failed; the Watauga returned in time to ambush and defeat the war party before it reached the settlements.⁵³

In April 1780 Lord George Germain issued a directive making the Indian superintendents subordinate to the military commanders of their districts. Perhaps this development prompted the old and ailing Scot to ask Germain for permission to resign his post in October 1780. Soon after that he went to Savannah where he owned a house. It was reported he died there after a lengthy illness on December 27, 1781.⁵⁴

ONLY CAMERON COULD HAVE TOLD WHY HE TURNED SO savagely upon his adopted country in 1776. His correspondence indicates he may have done so because of mistreatment by the people of Long Canes and a desire to ingratiate himself to his superiors and retain his position. In late 1775, when writing of his desire to keep the Indians out of "the dispute subsisting between Great Britain and her Colonies," he added, "my Duty to my Sovereign exceeds all other Considerations." Though Cameron was responsible for the deaths of many innocent people, it remains debatable whether he made any appreciable impact on the course of the war. There were no eulogies by his superiors when he died and even his last resting

⁵³Griffith Rutherford to Richard Caswell, July 17, 1779, in *CRNC*, Vol. XIV, p. 162; Alexander Cameron to George Germain, Dec. 18, 1779, C.O. 5/80, Fol. 250, BPRO; Brown, *Old Frontiers*, pp. 190-195.

⁵⁴George Germain to John Campbell, Apr. 4, 1780, C.O. 5/97, Fol. 148, BPRO; Alexander Cameron to George Germain, Oct. 31, 1780, C. O. 5/82, Fol. 111, BPRO. Cameron wrote that his property had been destroyed by the rebels, and he wanted to be able to live in the manner of a gentleman. General Campbell's attitude, he wrote, had alienated the Indians and put him in an impossible situation, but he said he would remain in office if the king so desired. Bethune Farquar to George Germain, Jan. 28, 1782, C.O. 5/82, Fol. 289, BPRO. Edward J. Cashin offers a date of December 29, 1781, for Cameron's death. Cashin, *Lachlan McGillivray, Indian Trader: The Shaping of the Southern Colonial Frontier* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992), p. 297.

place is uncertain.⁵⁵ It was an ignominious end for a man who had played such a major role as mediator between the British government, Cherokee communities, and white traders and settlers. Yet he is remembered not as a mediator, but as a participant, not as one who mended fences, though he often did that, but as one who inflamed passions. Inevitably, the American rebels he fought against remembered him harshly. Henry Laurens prophesied in the first year of the Revolutionary War, "the name of Stuart & Cameron will for ever be detestable in Carolina."⁵⁶

⁵⁵Alexander Cameron to John Stuart, Nov. 9, 1775, C.O. 5/77, p. 87, BPRO. A search of all available records has failed to determine the cause of Cameron's death or where he was buried. A small tombstone in the southeast corner of Savannah's colonial graveyard, bearing only the initials "A.C." may mark his final resting place, but this is by no means certain.

⁵⁶Henry Laurens to John Laurens, Aug. 21, 1776, in David R. Chesnut, ed., *The Papers of Henry Laurens, Vol. 11* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988), p. 260.