



# Colorado Military Historians

Newsletter

LII, No. 5

May 2026



# News and Views

*Message from CMH Secretary  
Eric Elder*



Thank you to David Manley and John Carter for your articles this month.

West Wars, is coming up May 16-17. We have limited space for additional games, but contact Greg or myself to let us know if you have a game you want to run at the convention. I have included in this newsletter the latest listing of games we have received full information for. Send the game information listed below to us if you want to run a game:

- Game title
- A short description of the game
- Game rules
- Game scale
- Time slot requested (Sat 9-1, Sat 2-6, Sun 1-5)
- Table size needed (5' X 6') (5' X 8') (6' X 7.5') (10' X 6')
- Maximum number of players you can accommodate
- Name of the Game Master



# April

## Unit of the Month

Sponsored by Tom Dye



Each month, at the monthly meeting, CMH members bring their latest painted figures and models to the meeting to display their latest efforts.

CMH Member	Scale	Manufacturer	Era	Unit
Eric Elder	15mm	Freikorps	1859	Austrian Cavalry
Greg Skelly	28mm	Perry+Old Glory	AWI	Luzon's Legion, 4 <sup>th</sup> Cont. Dragoons
<b>JEFF LAMBERT</b>	15mm	Micro Art Studios	WW2	Norman Buildings
Dave Manley	28mm	Perry	AWI	42nd/71 <sup>st</sup> Highlanders

**Winner in RED**

# April

## Game of the Month

Sponsored by Tom Dye



Each month CMH members host games at the monthly meeting. This award is for the effort put out by the host.

CMH Member	Scale	Rules	Description
Matt Vigil	20mm	Memoir 44	WWII Pacific
<b>DAVID NEWPORT</b>	28mm	Status Red Chicken: Yankee Doodle Style	AWI: Battle for the Crossroads
John Brown	15mm	ADLG	Open Gaming
Greg Skelly	1:600	Beer & Pretzels Ironclads	ACW Ironclads

**Winner in RED**

# The Turn of the Tide in the Southern Backcountry

*Article by CMH Member*

*David Manley*

## Introduction

The interval between the Battle of Camden (August 16, 1780) and the Battle of Kings Mountain (October 7, 1780) marks one of the most consequential operational reversals of the American Revolutionary War. In less than two months, British arms in the South moved from apparent dominance to strategic dislocation in the Carolina backcountry.

Drawing primarily upon Kings Mountain by Phillip Thomas Tucker, this article examines British strategic assumptions, the dynamics of Loyalist mobilization, and the sequence of events that culminated in the destruction of Major Patrick Ferguson's command. It argues that Kings Mountain was not an isolated militia success but the product of structural weaknesses in British strategy combined with the adaptive and decentralized character of Patriot resistance.

## Camden and the Apex of British Operational Success

The British victory at Camden stands among the most decisive tactical successes of the war. Under Charles Cornwallis, British regulars and provincials routed the American army commanded by Horatio Gates. The rapid collapse of the Patriot line, particularly the flight of militia units, effectively destroyed organized Continental resistance in the southern theater.

As Tucker emphasizes, Camden appeared to validate the core assumptions of the British "southern strategy," which rested on three propositions:

1. That Loyalist sentiment in the Carolinas was substantial and politically reliable.
2. That British regular forces could secure key urban and logistical centers.
3. That Loyalist militia could pacify the interior with limited direct British oversight.

In the immediate aftermath of Camden, these assumptions seemed justified. Yet this apparent success masked deeper structural vulnerabilities, especially the difficulty of asserting sustained control over the interior countryside.

## The Southern Strategy and Its Structural Weaknesses

British strategy in the South depended less on battlefield victories than on political consolidation. Following the capture of Charleston and the victory at Camden, British planners envisioned a progressive restoration of royal authority extending northward through the Carolinas.

To implement this vision, Cornwallis detached Major Patrick Ferguson to organize Loyalist forces in the western backcountry. Ferguson's mission was both military and administrative:

- To recruit and organize Loyalist militia.
- To suppress Patriot partisan activity.
- To secure the western flank of Cornwallis's advancing army.

Tucker identifies a central contradiction in this approach. Loyalist mobilization required convincing the loyalist countryside that British authority was both durable and protective. Yet the forces tasked with securing that authority were thinly dispersed, operationally isolated, and vulnerable to rapid countermobilization.

Moreover, British enforcement policies, particularly loyalty oaths and punitive expeditions often proved counterproductive. Rather than stabilizing the region, they alienated neutral or ambivalent populations and intensified resistance.

## **Ferguson's Campaign and the Escalation of Resistance**

Ferguson was an energetic and capable officer who initially achieved success in dispersing Patriot militia and rallying Loyalist support. However, his campaign relied as much on coercion as on persuasion.

According to Tucker, Ferguson's most consequential misstep was his ultimatum to the frontier settlements west of the Appalachian Mountains. He warned that failure to submit would result in the destruction of their communities. As he put it, he would come across the mountain and eliminate their homes and towns by "fire and sword."

Instead of deterring resistance, this threat galvanized it. Frontier leaders, including William Campbell, Isaac Shelby, and John Sevier, mobilized militia forces from across the trans-Appalachian region.

These "Overmountain Men" represented a distinctive military culture characterized by:

- Tactical mobility and endurance.
- High levels of individual marksmanship.
- A decentralized command ethos shaped by frontier conditions.

As Tucker underscores, this mobilization was not directed by the Continental Congress or by any organized military command structure but emerged organically from local networks of leadership and shared threat perception developed from years of fighting Indians. The southern campaign, in this sense, functioned as much as a civil war as a conventional imperial conflict.

## **Operational Convergence: From Cowpens to Kings Mountain**

By late September 1780, Patriot militia forces had assembled and advanced into the Carolina Piedmont with remarkable speed and coordination. At Cowpens, Patriot commanders made a critical decision: to select approximately 900 of their most capable fighters for a rapid pursuit of Ferguson.

This decision reflected a sophisticated appreciation of operational tempo and terrain. The Patriots aimed not merely to confront Ferguson, but to overtake and destroy his force before it could rejoin Cornwallis.

Ferguson, aware of the growing threat, began withdrawing eastward. However, his movement was constrained by difficult terrain, uncertain intelligence, and a degree of overconfidence in his ability to defend a strong position.

He ultimately chose to make a stand at Kings Mountain, a narrow, wooded ridge along the Carolina border. The position appeared defensible, but it also limited maneuver and offered the attackers ample cover.

# **Tactical Analysis: The Battle of Kings Mountain**

## **Terrain and Disposition**

Kings Mountain's steep slopes and dense tree cover negated many of the advantages associated with conventional linear tactics. Ferguson deployed his Loyalist militia along the crest, relying on musket volleys and bayonet charges to repel attackers. He recognized that any conventional attack up the steep slopes would be disorganized and easily repulsed. What he did not recognize was the threat that was approaching him.

## **Patriot Plan and Execution**

The Patriot force, under the overall direction of Campbell, advanced in multiple columns and executed a coordinated envelopment of the mountain.

Tucker identifies several decisive elements in their success:

- Encirclement: Patriot units formed a tightening ring, denying Ferguson any avenue of escape.
- Use of Terrain: Riflemen advanced under cover, exploiting trees and uneven ground.
- Accuracy of Fire: Targeted shooting disrupted Loyalist cohesion and leadership.
- Tactical Flexibility: Militia units withdrew in the face of bayonet charges and quickly re-engaged once the momentum of the attack dissipated.

This adaptive method transformed the engagement into a close-range, irregular battle in which Loyalist advantages in discipline and bayonet use were largely neutralized.

## **Collapse of the Loyalist Position**

Ferguson attempted to rally his men and personally led several counterattacks. His death during an attempted breakout proved decisive. Deprived of centralized leadership and surrounded, Loyalist resistance quickly collapsed.

The battle, though brief, resulted in the near-total destruction of Ferguson's force.

## **Orders of Battle**

### **Loyalist Forces**

Commander: Major Patrick Ferguson

Strength: Approximately 1,000–1,100

Composition:

- South Carolina Loyalist militia
- North Carolina Loyalist militia
- Frontier Loyalist detachments

Weapons:

- Smoothbore muskets with bayonets

Command Characteristics:

- Centralized leadership
- Mixed levels of training and cohesion

## **Patriot Forces**

Overall Commander: William Campbell

Subordinate Commanders:

- Isaac Shelby
- John Sevier
- Benjamin Cleveland
- Joseph Winston
- Edward Lacey
- William Chronicle

Strength: Approximately 900

Composition:

- Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina militia
- Overmountain riflemen

Weapons:

- Rifles (high accuracy, slower rate of fire)

Command Characteristics:

- Decentralized structure
- High tactical adaptability

## **Strategic Consequences**

The destruction of Ferguson's force had immediate and far-reaching consequences. It crippled Loyalist recruitment in the backcountry, disrupted British operational planning, and forced Cornwallis to reconsider his advance into North Carolina.

Equally significant was the psychological impact. Coming on the heels of defeats at Charleston and Camden, Kings Mountain restored Patriot morale and demonstrated that British success in conventional engagements did not guarantee control of the countryside.

## Historiographical Significance

Recent studies, including Tucker's work, emphasize the decentralized and locally driven nature of the southern campaign. Kings Mountain exemplifies this interpretation:

- It was fought almost entirely by colonial militia forces on both sides.
- It emerged from local political and social dynamics.
- It demonstrated the effectiveness of irregular tactics against conventional forces.

Rather than a peripheral engagement, the battle is now widely recognized as a strategic turning point that set the stage for subsequent Patriot successes at Cowpens and Guilford Courthouse.

## Conclusion

The period between Camden and Kings Mountain reveals both the strengths and the limitations of British strategy in the American South. Camden demonstrated the effectiveness of British forces in conventional battle, but Kings Mountain exposed the fragility of a system dependent on Loyalist mobilization and territorial control.

As Phillip Thomas Tucker argues, the destruction of Ferguson's command marked a decisive shift in the war's trajectory in the southern theater. It was not merely a tactical defeat but a strategic rupture—one that reshaped the balance of power in the Carolinas and foreshadowed the eventual collapse of British ambitions in the region.

## References

Kings Mountain — Phillip Thomas Tucker

Buchanan, John. *The Road to Guilford Courthouse*

Babits, Lawrence E. *A Devil of a Whipping: The Battle of Cowpens*

Boatner, Mark M. *Encyclopedia of the American Revolution*

Lumpkin, Henry. *From Savannah to Yorktown*

Ward, Christopher. *The War of the Revolution*

American Battlefield Trust

Encyclopaedia Britannica

# Historic Location of the Month

## *Cape St. Vincent*

### *Portugal*

There have been at least eleven sea battles off the Cape St. Vincent since 1337. One of the famous battles was the Battle of Cape St. Vincent in 1780 between the British and Spanish with the British winning the battle.



# Spain and the Independence of the United States

*Book Review by CMH Member*

*John Carter*



This book seeks to let us know all the good things Spain did to help our revolution, which was a lot. Everybody wants a “Glorious Past.” This can lead to overstatement of accomplishments. State history is notorious for that sort of thing. And Mr. Chavez has, to an extent, fallen into that trap.

This book is meticulously researched, as witness the extensive footnoting. But, he often makes statements based on assumptions: They probably, almost certainly, undoubtedly, etc. He sometimes overstates accomplishments. Like the US could not have won the Revolution without Spanish assistance. An outrageous example is where he tries to parley the British victory at Cape St Vincent, 1780, aka The Midnight Battle, into a partial Spanish victory. Compare his account to other accounts. Where he outright blows it is when he states that Napoleon’s brother Joseph, as king of Spain, gives Louisiana to the French in 1808? Who then sells it to the US as the Louisiana Purchase. You may recall that we bought Louisiana in 1803.

What this book makes clear is that Spain was having a serious resurgence under the capable Carlos III and in his desire to reassert Spain in the world, after the defeats of the Seven Years War, found it useful to support American independence. This did in fact benefit the Americans with large amounts of supplies and the distraction of the British with Galvez’ operations on the Gulf coast.

All that being said, he does convey a great deal of useful information. But he is a source to be used with care.

# West Wars 2026

Below is the event listing for West Wars as of April 29. To keep up to date with event changes up to the start of the convention, please check our West Wars web page:

<https://cmhweb.org/cmhconvention/>

**May 16**

**9am - 1pm**

- **Battle of Dogger Bank**
  - January 1915: The German Navy's battle cruiser squadron departs port to raid installations on the British coast. Unbeknownst to them, the Royal Navy code breaking department (Room 40) has decrypted German signals, and Admiral Beatty's RN battle cruiser squadron is deployed to intercept them. Can the British squadron engage the enemy and prevent them from escaping?
  - rules: General Quarters Fleet Action Imminent
  - scale: 1:2400
  - players: 6
  - GM: John Owen
- **Tom Kippur War**
  - They caught the Israelis after they got across the Suez canal, can they destroy them? The weather is clear air strikes will happen! It will include "tank to tank", "fighter bomber to tank", and "portable anti-tank weapons to tank" combat in the desert!
  - rules: Close and Destroy 1 and 2 (Tactical Air Force supplement)
  - scale: 1:285
  - players: 8
  - GM: Deborah Schouten and Jeff Tate
- **Fighting Seabees**
  - WWII Pacific: Skirmish level action between the Navy's construction battalion (CBs or SeaBees) and the Japanese.
  - rules: Home Grown
  - scale: 28mm
  - players: 6
  - GM: Greg Skelly
- **Rats in a Factory**
  - Stalingrad October 1942; The German attack on the Russian Industrial District.
  - rules: Memoir '44 Overlord (boardgame)
  - scale: 20mm
  - players: 4
  - GM: Matt Vigil
- **Game 5**

**May 16**

**2pm - 6pm**

- **Legend of Black and White Lions**
  - Victorian to Post Victorian Colonial Era: Exploring the Jungle? Intrigued by the Big Game Hunt? Safari Guide Bill Daniel will lead you on a expedition with roaring laughter. It might be roaring of Lions and laughter of hyenas.
  - rules: Modified The Lion Eats Tonight by Howard Whitehouse
  - scale: 28mm
  - players: 6
  - GM: Bill Daniel
- **Battle of Borodino**
  - Alternate history, Napoleon has split his army; the Russians have done the same. The part commanded by Marshal Ney meets the part commanded by Russian General Barkley de Tolly in front of Moscow for a knock down drag out battle. Plenty of Infantry, Cavalry and artillery interaction!
  - rules: Napoleon's Battles 4th edition
  - scale: 15mm
  - players: 8
  - GM: Jeff Tate and Deborah Schouten
- **American Revolutionary War Action**
  - American Continentals and Militia face off against the British Regulars and some of their Hessian Allies.
  - rules: Status Red Chicken Yankee Doodle Style
  - scale: 28mm
  - players: 6
  - GM: David Newport
- **Battle of the Barents Sea**
  - “What if” variant of the naval battle between the German Kriegsmarine and British ships escorting Convoy JW51B on December 31. 1942. Winter weather conditions are in effect.
  - rules: General Quarters III
  - scale: 1:4800
  - players: 5
  - GM: John Carter and Doug Wildfong
- **Game 5**

May 17

9am - 11:30am

- **Swap and Sell Meet**
- 

12pm - ~1:00pm

- **Club meeting**
- 

~1:00pm - 5:00pm

- **Battle of Kings Mountain**
  - AWI - 1780 • 250th USA Celebration Themed game. Pits Patrick Ferguson's Loyalist Militia against the Patriot Militia in North Carolina.
  - rules: modified Sharpe's Practice
  - scale: 28mm
  - players: 6
  - GM: Dave Manley
- **Battle of the Hawaiian Islands**
  - It's a Sunday morning and Yamato's Battleships/cruisers/destroyer force covering Nagumo's carriers and his supply convoy run into an early morning training sortie of American battleships (Arizona and Oklahoma)/cruisers/destroyers and chaos ensues. The Japanese carrier strike aircraft are committed to the Pearl Harbor attack so are unavailable to attack the US ships!
  - rules: Seekrieg 4th edition
  - scale: 1:2400
  - players: 8
  - GM: Deborah Schouten
- **ADLG Tournament**
  - The Theme is Armies and Enemies of the Achaemenid Persians. Players can choose from Army Lists 4, 8, 17, 19, 28, 32, 39, 57, 59, 60, 63, 64 65, 66, 67, 68, 76, 79. Loaner armies can be made available; contact John Brown if you need a loaner.
  - rules: L'Art de la Guerre
  - scale: 15mm
  - players: 12
  - GM: John Brown
- **Bomb Alley – Port San Arlos, 1982**
  - As the British player, defend the landing of your troops and supplies in San Carlos (with your air and naval assets) during the 1982 Falklands War. As the Argentine player, attempt (with your air force assets) to disrupt the amphibious landings.
  - rules: Harrier (Don's home grown rules)
  - scale: 1:600
  - players: 4 (playtesters)
  - GM: Don Cygan
- **Game 5**

# Colorado Military Historians, Inc.

Colorado Military Historians (CMH) is a non-profit organization whose purpose is to promote historical wargaming and the study of military history. Founded in 1965, CMH meets monthly on the second Sunday of the month, except in May when the meeting is deferred to the third Sunday. The meeting starts at noon at the Baker Recreation Center, 6751 Irving Street (just a few blocks west of Federal Blvd), Denver, Colorado. The club also hosts gaming at least one Friday night a month, called "Friday Night Fights" (FNF) at 7:00 p.m. Friday meetings will be held at a future determined location. See groups.io site for latest information.



CMH maintains ties with numerous local, regional, and national groups to help promote the hobby. CMH is governed by member-elected officers serving on the Board of Directors (executive board). Terms of office are one year, with elections held at the May meeting. New members are accepted after attending three CMH functions and a vote of the membership. Dues are \$60.00 per year, payable in January. Members wishing to receive a snail-mailed newsletter subscription must pay an additional fee of \$15.00 per year. Authors retain ownership of articles and graphics published. CMH reserves the right to edit or reject submissions to the newsletter.

One year Adult Membership: \$60.00  
Half year Adult Membership: \$30.00  
(For NEW members who join after June 30)  
Family Membership: \$60.00 (one Adult and any number of offspring)  
Student Membership: \$30.00 (16 to 22 years old)  
Children: free (younger than 16 accompanied by member)

## Club Links:

Groups.io Group: <https://groups.io/g/cmhweb>

- Our Groups.io page is the best way to see what our club is up to.

Web Site: <https://cmhweb.org/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/cmhgamers/>

Discord: <https://discord.gg/DAP2Gn>

## CMH Newsletter

The CMH Newsletter is a monthly newsletter published by the Colorado Military Historians. Views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of all CMH members.

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