

The Battle of Charlotte Historical Marker

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On the corner of Trade and Tryon Street of Charlotte, North Carolina, stands the historical marker commemorating the Battle of Charlotte on September 26th, 1780. A day often overlooked when teaching about the American Revolution, yet possibly one of the most representative battles for the fighting spirit of the American colonies.

On September 26th, 1780, the British forces, under Lord Cornwallis, entered the hamlet of Charlotte, North Carolina. Unbeknownst to them, American forces, under the command of Colonel William R. Davie, lay in wait behind the stone wall of the town courthouse. Colonel Davie had been ordered to keep his cavalymen in Charlotte to protect the retreating American foot soldiers who were withdrawing to Salisbury (Anderson). The American cavalry managed to repel the British Legion, led by Major George Hanger, twice before being pushed out of Charlotte by the British light infantry. Even after Cornwallis occupied Charlotte, his forces faced violent resistance and were forced out of the area. After only 16 days, British troops left the area, during which Cornwallis was reported to have said, "Let's get out of here; this place is a damned hornet's nest." (Norris and Barefoot), spawning the local nickname of the hornets.

The Battle of Charlotte is relatively minor, even dubbed "a trifling insignificant skirmish" (Graham and Davie) by Major Hanger. It is also considered a British victory. However, it was a case of the overpowered American rebels defending themselves against the British troops, a common theme when studying the American Revolution. This brief encounter between British and American forces "symbolized the resolve of the people of Mecklenburg County" (Norris and Barefoot). The American desire for independence is arguably the most important factor that led

to an American victory during the Revolution. That desire and sheer refusal to give up is well illustrated by the Battle of Charlotte and the following weeks.

Initially, the urban legend behind Charlotte's famous nickname interested me more than the actual battle. However, after researching I realized the rich history that goes into building a city and the local culture. The hornet's nest is a common epithet for Charlotte, yet the history behind that name is largely unknown, even for people who have lived in the Charlotte area their whole lives. The city's nickname, seal, and sports teams were all influenced by a seemingly insignificant confrontation that is rarely mentioned. It shows how even the smallest of actions can have unpredictable consequences.

Strictly speaking, the Battle of Charlotte was not an American victory. Its only major significance in the American Revolution was Cornwallis being pushed out of North Carolina due to local resistance. Even by today's standards, the battle is a trifling confrontation. Yet, it is also a symbol of the resolve and resistance of the American people, especially those of Mecklenburg County. One could also argue that it is an example of the ingenuity of American militia leaders like Colonel William R. Davie. Despite being outnumbered and outgunned, Davie managed to hold back British soldiers due to the strategic placement of his troops. "Davie positioned three rows of militia at and north of the courthouse, with one behind the stone wall, and placed cavalry companies on the east and west sides of the courthouse..." (Graham and Davie). This positioning allowed Davie to cover the roads leading out of Charlotte and brought British troops into a crossfire as they advanced. Even when the militia was forced to retreat, the soldiers continued to protect the retreating foot soldiers. Today, the ingenuity and resolve of Davie and other American soldiers are often considered an influential factor in winning the war.

The Battle of Charlotte is one of the most symbolic displays of American resilience and resolve. It shows that even the most insignificant moments have unpredictable outcomes, the aftermath of the battle spawned the Hornets nickname, and it represents the ingenuity of American militia leaders. Despite its many accomplishments, the Battle of Charlotte is still seen as an unimportant skirmish and is often overlooked in the Revolutionary War history of North Carolina. Yet, it is still a part of the rich history of our state that has inspired me to further investigate the history and culture of North Carolina.

Works Cited

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