



Tennessee, and American, his

Photographs by Bill Carey

Some of the more important events in Tennessee history didn't occur in Tennessee.

On March 27, 1814, an army led by Gen. Andrew Jackson and consisting of, among others, nearly 2,000 volunteer soldiers from Tennessee attacked a Creek stronghold in what is now Tallapoosa County, Ala. The victory by Jackson's army at Horseshoe Bend meant the end to the Creek nation's power east of the Mississippi River and resulted in the annexation of 23 million acres of land for the United States. It also resulted in immediate fame for Jackson and was his first major step toward the presidency.

So why did the Battle of Horseshoe Bend take place? It's a long story. Keep in mind that it took place during the War of 1812 — in which the British encouraged Native Americans to fight against the United States. It happened a couple of years after Shawnee chief Tecumseh came south and encouraged other Native American tribes to fight against whites. And it occurred when the American government was trying to "civilize" Native American tribes and blaze a new road through Creek territory — steps to which many Creeks objected.

Not all of the Creeks took up arms against the American Army in 1813 and 1814. Those who did are generally referred to as Red Sticks, and starting in February 1813, there were several military engagements between Red Sticks and Americans.

Prior to Horseshoe Bend, the best-known of these took place at Fort Mims, near what is now Mobile, Ala., in August 1813. At Fort Mims, an army of about 1,000 Red Sticks killed an



In the Battle of Horseshoe Bend, Gen. Andrew Jackson's army attacked a Creek stronghold — protected on three sides by the Tallapoosa River — near present-day Alexander City, Ala. Photograph courtesy of the National Park Service.

estimated 250 settlers — among them women and children. "Remember Fort Mims" thus became the rallying cry for Americans who came to fight the

Creeks.

By March 1814, the Red Sticks, led by a warrior named Menawa, had set up a stronghold near a Creek town called Tohopeka. Surrounded on the west, south and east by the Tallapoosa River and protected on the north by a long log barricade, Menawa's 1,000 warriors believed their defenses to be more than adequate. But only about a third of them possessed muskets; the rest were armed with bows, arrows, tomahawks and warclubs.

Jackson's army of 3,300 men consisted of several parts: regular army soldiers of the 39th regiment of the U.S. Infantry, militia from Tennessee, 500 Cherokee warriors and about 100 Creek warriors opposed to the Red Sticks.



Jackson decided to blast the log barricade using the two small cannons in his army's possession and then attack the barricade with the infantry. If and when the Creeks tried to retreat across the river, they would be met by sharpshooters from Tennessee, commanded by Gen. John Coffee, and the Cherokee warriors.

Jackson, wary of deserters and undisciplined soldiers, told his men in advance that he would not tolerate disobedience. "Any officer or soldier who flies before the enemy without being compelled to do so by superior force and actual necessity shall suffer death," he told his men in advance of the battle.

Things didn't, however, go according to his plans.

At 10:30 a.m., Jackson's cannons opened fire. For nearly two hours, shells landed on or near the barricade but did

Though not actually in Tennessee, Alabama's Horseshoe Bend National Military Park is important to Volunteer State history. His success in the Battle of Horseshoe Bend thrust Gen. Andrew Jackson into the national spotlight and was his first step toward the U.S. presidency.





History made at Horseshoe Bend

not appear to blast holes in it, as Jackson had hoped they would.

But as soon as they heard the cannon fire, the Cherokee and Creek warriors allied to the Americans decided to cross the river and attack on their own, which they did with considerable success. Jackson only became aware of this when he saw smoke rising from the burning Tohopeka village. Jackson then ordered his infantry to attack the barricade on foot.

Fighting was fierce, most of it hand-to-hand. "Arrows, spears and balls were flying," one participant later wrote. "Swords and tomahawks were gleaming in the sun." One of the first Americans killed in this charge was Maj. Lemuel Montgomery. His tombstone is now the only marked grave on the battlefield.

Creek warriors at the barricade were soon overwhelmed, and those who weren't immediately killed retreated — some to protect their village from the Cherokee attack that had come from the rear and some to get away from the American assault in the front. The battle soon deteriorated into a slaughter. Many Creek warriors found it impossible to defend their village and, unwilling to surrender, tried to cross the Tallapoosa River. Practically all of them who tried to cross the river were shot by Coffee's sharpshooters. So many died crossing the river, in fact, that the river is said to have been red with blood.

Today we estimate that about 800 Creeks died — the largest death toll for Native Americans in a single battle in American history. On the American side, 26 men were killed along with 18 Cherokees and five Creeks who fought for the Americans.

A few months later, in August 1814, the Creeks signed what is known as the Treaty of Fort Jackson, ceding much of what is now central and southern Alabama and southern Georgia to the American nation.

Now for a few points of interest about this battle:

- Practically none of the Creek warriors surrendered; they



During the attack on their village at Horseshoe Bend, many Creek warriors tried to escape across the river only to be cut down by the sniper fire from Gen. John Coffee's Tennessee sharpshooters.

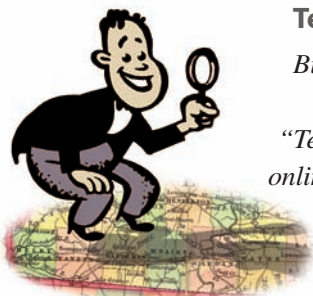
either managed to escape or chose to fight to the death. However, many Creek women and children in the village of Tohopeka did surrender.

- The American army apparently left the dead Creek warriors, unburied, on the battlefield and buried their own dead (other than Maj. Montgomery) in the Tallapoosa River.
- Among the Americans who attacked the Creek barricade that day was a young officer named Sam Houston. He fought on in spite of the fact that he was hit by an arrow in his thigh, then was hit twice by bullets. Houston was later elected governor of two states: Tennessee and Texas.
- During the Indian removal of the 1830s, many Cherokees bitterly recalled how Cherokee warriors fought with Andrew Jackson at the Battle of Horseshoe Bend. There is no question that the Cherokees played an important part in the battle. However, there is no evidence that Cherokee warrior and chief Junaluska saved Jackson's life at Horseshoe Bend (nevertheless, some people still believe that Junaluska did). During the battle, Jackson was not believed to be in any personal danger, remaining in a safe place to direct his army.
- Coffee County is named for Gen. Coffee. Montgomery County, Ala., is named for Maj. Montgomery (Montgomery County, Tenn., is named for someone else.)



The tombstone of Maj. Lemuel Montgomery, one of the first Americans to fall in the battle, is the only marked grave at Horseshoe Bend.

It's a long drive from Tennessee to Horseshoe Bend National Military Park, which is near Alexander City, Ala. If you can't visit Horseshoe Bend, there are two ways to bring the battle to your classroom. One is to check out the Tennessee History for Kids virtual tour of the park at www.tnhistoryforkids.org/places/horseshoe_bend. The other is to get a copy of a wonderful new DVD that illustrates the battle. To do so, call the park at 256-234-7111.



Tennessee History for Kids

Bill Carey is a Nashville author and executive director of "Tennessee History for Kids," an online Tennessee history textbook.

For more great stories of Tennessee history, go to www.tnhistoryforkids.org.