The Cherokee Nation, with a population of 36,000 controlling more than 140,000 square miles across the Southeast, saw its numbers reduced to 7,000 by the 1770s due to European settlers. In 1776, during the American Revolution, Cherokee warriors, who had previously traded with British traders, elected to protect their society by joining forces with the British. The conflict came after the Treaty of Sycamore Shoals, which opened Kentucky to settlement. Cherokee village councils discussed going to war against settlers demanding land cessions.

By 1770, European settlers were moving onto lands previously designated for the Cherokees. The Cherokee strategy was a three-pronged attack aimed at cutting off communication and isolating frontier settlements. They warned settlers of their plans, giving them enough time to construct stockades. The Cherokees burned what they could not carry, aiming to destroy the commercial and political centers, reducing the Middle Towns to ashes and causing death and destruction.

Griffith Rutherford, a brigadier general of the Salisbury District militia, called for volunteers in North Carolina’s expedition against the Cherokee. Rutherford gathered about 2,500 men and enough supplies for forty days. The Cherokees, anticipating the expedition, abandoned many of their settlements and withdrew, sparing extensive loss of life.

Rutherford and his corps, commanded by Colonel Andrew Williamson, met to destroy thirty-six Cherokee villages. Together, the two armies were responsible for destroying thirty-six Cherokee villages, leaving no homes, crops, or livestock. The remaining Cherokee, through representatives, signed peace treaties the following year.

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