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Major General Nathanael Greene: Study in Leadership Culminating at the Battle of Guilford Courthouse

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Major General Nathanael Greene, an American Revolutionary officer whose background as the son of a Quaker preacher, would not suggest that he was destined for military greatness. Greene's exceptional leadership and innovative battle techniques during the Southern Campaign motivated his men to believe in his command as well as their capabilities as soldiers. General Henry Knox said of Greene, "He came to us the rawest, most untutored being I ever met with, [and in less than a year], was equal, in military knowledge, to any General officer in the army, and very superior to most of them." [2] Greene delivered a significant blow to a professional aristocratic officer, General Charles Lord Cornwallis, through innovation and determination. Many historians considered General Greene second only to General George Washington in military leadership abilities among Continental officers during the war for American independence.

[1] I am indebted to several people for their recommendations and assistance in refining this essay, including an anonymous reviewer's comments for the *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies.* Among those that I must recognize individually are Dr. Raymond A. Millen, Lyle Ourada, Thomas Jackson, and Professor Richard Wiersema with the Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies (NESA). I would also like to thank Lawrence Swiader, with American Battlefield Trust, for supporting and assisting with the supporting maps.

[2] As quoted in Terry Golway, *Washington's General: Nathanael Greene and the Triumph of the American Revolution* (New York: H. Holt, 2005), p. 67.

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Greene effectively won the campaign in the southern states, although he never won a battle for the Continental army. His adaptive style of leadership, grounded in an excellent understanding of battlefield logistics, keen insight, and the use of irregular forces during conventional warfare, achieved a strategic victory for the Continental army. History remembers Cornwallis for his infamous surrender at Yorktown, Virginia. However, what is often missing from the annals of Yorktown are the events leading to this surrender, most significantly, the British Southern Campaign in North America. The campaign was the prelude to the Battle at Guilford Courthouse (15 March 1781), which contributed to the surrender at Yorktown and the British army's eventual defeat in North America. While it is true that Partisan leaders in the Carolinas, notably Francis Marion, Andrew Pickens, and Thomas Sumter, were adept on the tactical level and displayed an affinity for disrupting British interior supply and communication lines, they were never able to engage the British strategically nor dislodge them from key strongholds. This manuscript will argue that Greene possessed this ability to coordinate on a larger scale and challenge British dominance in the region. As executed during the months leading up to Guilford Courthouse, his adaptive leadership style effectively signaled the nadir of British supremacy in the south. That is not to suggest that the British abandoned the south entirely. They retained vital bases such as Wilmington, North Carolina (November 1781) and Charleston, South Carolina (December 1782), well after the engagement, though the lure of controlling the American south dissipated.

Greene's leadership style was a culmination of his resourcefulness, demonstrating innovative use of irregular forces to augment the capabilities of his army. His attention to detail and tendency to micromanage the details of his campaign, combined with his voluminous communications, aided his keen understanding of the environment. Greene's solutions to complex, wicked problems of supplying an army, and evading a better trained and equipped army through difficult terrain, was the deciding factor in the campaign. Furthermore, his grasp of logistics contributed to his strategic victory over the British in the south, though he lost the tactical battle at Guilford Courthouse. Cornwallis provides a stark contrast to Greene's leadership style, tactics, and personality. The paper opens by providing a brief history of Cornwallis, with a short vignette of The Battle of Guilford Courthouse. The following section summarizes the British war in the south, establishing the context as Greene assumed command in December 1780. The Battle of Kings Mountain (7 October 1780), and

Cowpens in January 1781, set the stage for the intense months in the Carolinas as Cornwallis pursued the Continental army. A brief analysis of the battle, along with the career highlights of each leader, will conclude the paper.

During the late afternoon of 15 March 1781, in an open field in front of a Court House near modern Greensboro, North Carolina, a significant battle took place. The British army in the Carolinas, led by General Cornwallis, was engaged in brutal bayonet close combat, fighting for their lives. General Greene and the Continental army, outnumbering the British two to one, although at the time, Cornwallis thought it was closer to five to one, were prepared for battle after six weeks of evading the British. Greene evaded an engagement with two wings of his army as they retreated over three sizable river systems, the Catawba, Yadkin, and the Dan River. This frustrating experience drove Cornwallis into a frenzy. He was eager for battle. Even though Cornwallis faced a larger force, he felt confident that his elite soldiers would prevail. Smoke filled the air amid a roar of gunfire and deafening screams. The smell of blood and gunpowder permeated the atmosphere. Atop his horse, Cornwallis stared out at the field in despair. After months of chasing the Continental army through the Carolinas, he felt the shadow of failure over his shoulder. His men were starting to retreat under the pressure of the Continental line. Sensing defeat, he directed his artillery to load their cannons with grapeshot. Cornwallis ordered artillery to fire on Washington's cavalry and Continental dragoons, though some retreating British Guardsmen were most likely also hit by grapeshot.[3] However, the old canard that the draconian Cornwallis intentionally ordered cannon fire into the backs of his men is mistaken, originating in Henry Lee's *Memoirs* and repeated by several subsequent historians. Cornwallis narrowly secured a victory, forcing the Americans to leave the field of battle. How did Cornwallis, one of the best British field commanders in North America, narrowly escape defeat by an untrained American Continental, Nathanael Greene? Lawrence E. Babits and Joshua B. Howard hint at the formation of the perfect storm. They wrote,

> Cornwallis made the fateful decision to stop chasing Nathanael Greene across the Carolinas, instead deciding to march into Virginia and destroy

[3] Lawrence E. Babits & Joshua B. Howard, *Long, Obstinate, and Bloody: The Battle of Guildford Courthouse* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), p. 162.

> what he perceived as his opponent's supply base. Guilford, therefore, was one step, admittedly a huge step, in the British army's path to Yorktown.[4]

A more important question is why Cornwallis was driven to act irrationally by emotion rather than reason? It is helpful to understand the man before becoming a leader in America to understand his character better.

Figure 1: Charles Cornwallis, 1st Marquis and 2nd Earl Cornwallis

Source: John Jones copy after Daniel Gardner, Mezzotint on paper, National Portrait Gallery

[4] Ibid., p. xi.

Historian Andrew O'Shaughnessy described Lord Cornwallis as the most aristocratic British general of the American Revolution. [5] Born into the British aristocracy with extensive military heritage, Cornwallis became a member of the House of Lords in his early twenties. He was promoted to lieutenant colonel at age 24 while completing his study at the famed Eton College. [6] He studied military tactics extensively, advancing rapidly through the ranks. He traveled around Europe and attended the military academy at Turin. Upon his arrival in America in 1776, he was a major general. He disapproved of the British policies towards America, openly opposing the Stamp Act (22 March 1765) and the Declaratory Act (18 March 1766). However, he was strongly motivated by a sense of duty to his country. Cornwallis became more intolerant of the rebellion just a few weeks upon arriving on the continent. He was also influenced by his personal experience with raucous American mobs and public animosity towards England which rapidly altered his opinion.[7]

Cornwallis' first American duty was commanding the reserve at the Battle of Long Island in August 1776, serving under General Sir William Howe in the British New Jersey campaign. In the latter, he received criticism from General Sir Henry Clinton for allowing General George Washington to escape after the Colonial victory at the Battle of Princeton (3 January 1777), even though they were peers at the time. Clinton assumed the role of the Commander-in-Chief of North America from Howe on 24 May 1778. Cornwallis' wife became ill, forcing him back to England at the end of 1778. He returned to America only after her death in February 1779.

Cornwallis participated in Clinton's siege of Charleston, South Carolina (28 March 1780, through 12 May 1780). As the war progressed and he grew more accustomed to the unique nature of warfare in America, Cornwallis became adept at beating Continental officers. The British perception of the officers of the Continental army was markedly low. The humiliation of Generals Benjamin Lincoln and Horatio Gates solidified Cornwallis' low image of the American leadership. This mistaken assumption contributed to a series of poor decisions accumulated in Cornwallis, culminating with the British defeat during the American Revolution.

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[5] Andrew Jackson O'Shaughnessy, *The Men Who Lost America: British Leadership, the American Revolution, and the Fate of the Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), p. 249.
[6] Ibid., p. 249.
[7] Ibid., p. 251.

The northern campaign for the British was essentially a stalemate. The revised British stratagem hinged that "South Carolina was the richest colony in North America—and some attempt should be made to retain it."[8] The government in London was steadfast in concentrating British efforts in North America, primarily in the south. At first, the British appeared to be winning, driving Clinton's decision that directed Cornwallis to secure Charleston and all of South Carolina. Clinton was clear with Cornwallis, indicating that he could proceed with the invasion of North Carolina *only if* he first maintains control of the southern colonies.[9] British leaders were confident that another decisive blow would force the rebels to capitulate. Previously, Cornwallis attempted to secure North Carolina but withdrew on 14 October 1780, to South Carolina, when he realized that the region's backcountry was unstable.[10]

Lord George Germain, British Secretary of State for America, thought about a lengthy campaign in the southern colonies from the inception of the conflict. Once France entered the war in 1778, he began to plan in earnest for the conquest of the region. Germain was entrenched in the "Americanization" of the war, which started in the south, gradually working northward.[11] He considered the proposal the only way to win the war in America. *Americanization* meant that loyal Americans would maintain security and policing duties to pacify the population. British troops would operate in regions that contained rebels or those disloyal to the Crown. The soldiers would eliminate, or remove the rebels from the area, facilitating the ability of local authorities to maintain control. Then, they would move to another region. Germain wrote Clinton in March 1778, stressing that Americans, not British or Hessian soldiers, must hold power and arms that guaranteed law and order.[12] The population would be pacified, promoting further loyalty to the King. The policy was aimed at stabilizing the population to secure towns, promoting devotion to the Crown. The action would begin in Georgia while gradually moving north towards Chesapeake, Virginia. This plan had several faulty assumptions. First, the British believed that most of the population

[8] Babits & Howard, *Long, Obstinate, and Bloody,* p. 4.
[9] Ibid., p. 307.
[10] W.J. Wood, *Battles of the Revolutionary War: 1775-1781* (New York: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 1990), p. 206.
[11] John Shy, *A People Numerous and Armed: Reflections on the Military Struggle for American Independence,* Rev. ed. (Ann Arbor, Mich: University of Michigan Press, 1990), p. 200.
[12] As quoted in Ibid., p. 200.

wanted to serve the King. The second was that loyalists were capable of policing and protecting the rest of the community. These general assumptions, however, conflicted with the views of General Clinton.

Clinton believed that the loyalists required a firm guiding hand. If they were left to their own, they too would become lawless. They would undermine his goal of stability within the communities. Clinton thought that without proper monitoring, arming the population would ultimately ruin the Americanization program. He wrote to Germain, stressing this point. Despite his reservations with the strategy, Clinton pursued it vigorously, even adopting a leniency policy for all rebels. He pardoned all Americans currently on parole, provided they swore allegiance to the King. This act enraged many loyalists, thus undermining Clinton's intentions.

Clinton issued several proclamations granting clemency for everyone between 22 May 3 June 1780. However, he promised severe punishment for those who harassed loyal subjects (This mixed message would work against him in the months to follow). Not long after the announcement, Clinton turned the command over to Cornwallis and sailed for New York. He did not wait long enough to observe the public reaction to his new policy.

On the surface, the British were on the verge of victory from Georgia to South Carolina. North Carolina and Virginia were next. However, all was not what it seemed, and trouble was fomenting in the backcountry across the region. After years of vicious conflict between patriots and loyalists, a civil war was brewing. As John Buchanan pointed out, militia units had spent five years violently suppressing tory neighbors, which began reaching a boiling point in 1780.[13] Clinton left Cornwallis with just under 10,000 provincial regulars, though Charleston's garrison only contained 3,000 troops. As Buchanan wrote,

> But the king's men were spread thin in separate garrisons in South Carolina and Georgia: Georgetown, Charleston, and Savannah on the coast; the river posts of Fort Motte, Fort Watson, and Fort Granby guarding the line of communications and supply between Charleston and the near Back

[13] John Buchanan, *The Road to Charleston: Nathanael Greene and the American Revolution* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2019), p. 17.

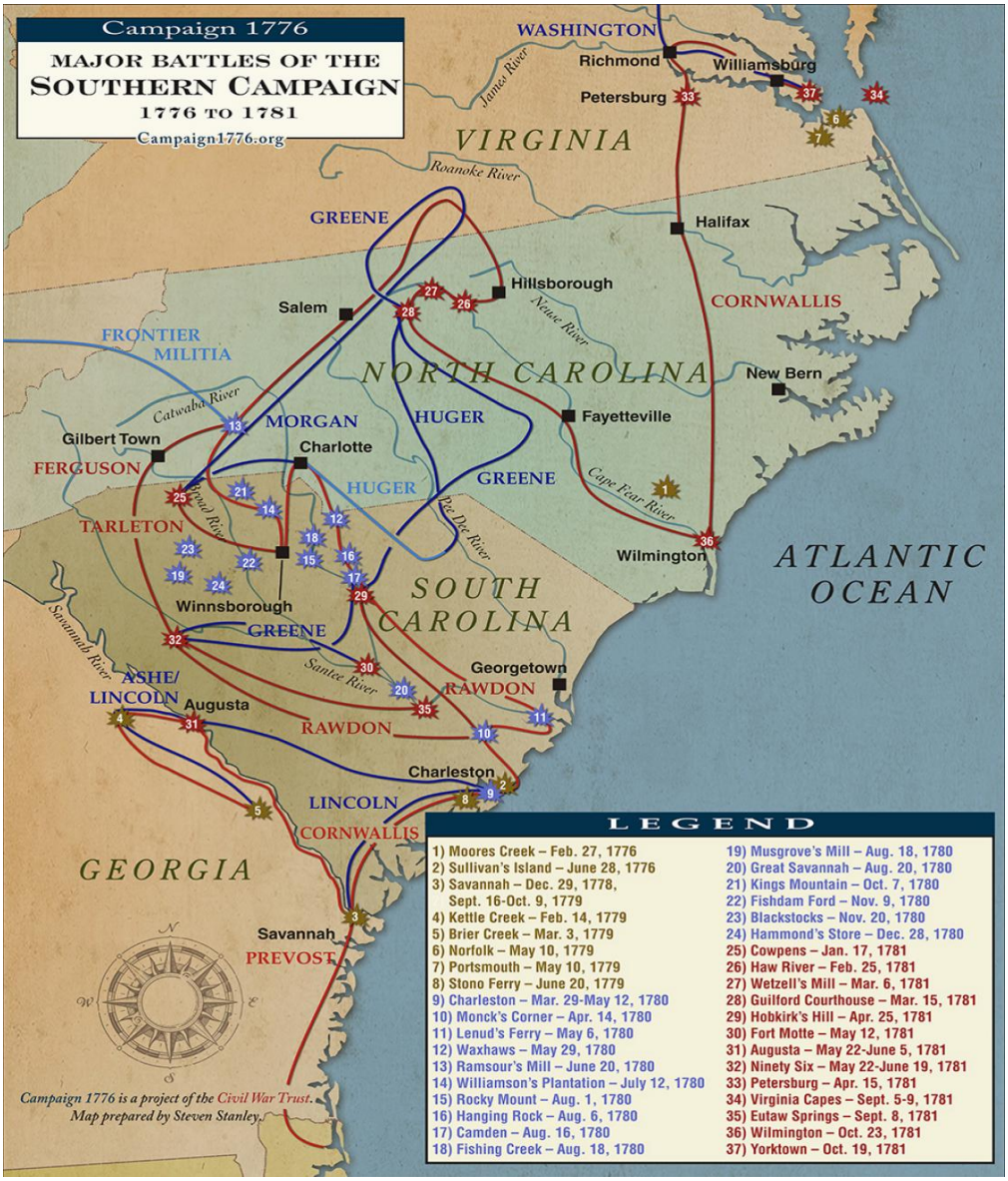
> Country garrisons at Camden and Orangeburg; and in the far Back Country Ninety Six and Augusta.[14]

In Clinton's mind, Cornwallis had to continue to execute the plan in South Carolina before moving into North Carolina. He had all the resources that he required to secure the American south. It appeared that the British were nearing victory, and the only remaining regions that needed to be controlled were North Carolina and Virginia.

To understand the background of the American Revolution in the southern states, as Greene assumed command in December 1780, it is essential to review the larger picture and status of British operations south of Virginia. The period between December 1778 and December 1780 witnessed significant American losses. The Southern Campaign began in 1776. Figure 1 provides a snapshot of all critical battles, many of which are referenced in this paper. However, only four covered in any detail, the Battles of Waxhaws, Kings Mountain, Cowpens, and Guilford Courthouse.

[14] Ibid., p. 56.

Figure 2: Major Battles of the Southern Campaign



Source: American Battlefield Trust (www.battlefields.org).

Almost two years earlier, on 29 December 1778, the British captured Savannah, Georgia. A British force under Clinton (with Charles Cornwallis as his deputy) sailed from New York with 13,500 troops and sailors and joined the British Charleston garrison, and along with reinforcements from the king's garrison in Georgia, conducted a siege of Charleston, South Carolina (29 March 1780, to 12 May 1780). The assault

forced General Benjamin Lincoln to surrender his 5,600 soldiers.[15] The magnitude of this defeat is difficult to fathom, even today. The American surrender at Charleston was the largest surrender to a foreign army. It would remain so until World War II. With the staggering defeat at Charleston, over 2,000 loyalists flocked to the city to swear allegiance to King George III, as England's domination over the southern colonies surged.[16] Colonial residents who supported the King were labeled loyalists or the more derogatory term, *Tory*. There were so many volunteers inundating the British military that General Sir Henry Clinton dedicated one soldier to its organization. He appointed Major Patrick Ferguson to lead the militia in the south. He was charged with recruiting, organizing, and training recruits. Ferguson was to report to Cornwallis, though Clinton neglected to consult or even notify Cornwallis of the appointment.[17] Clinton's letter to Cornwallis dated 8 May 1780, from Charles Town (Charleston) informed the latter of Ferguson's new role. Clinton wrote, "As your Lordship will, of course, see Major Ferguson, he will tell you that I have appointed him Inspector of Militia and major commandant of the first battalion that shall be raised." [18] Ferguson reported to Cornwallis two days later.

Up until this period, at least superficially, both generals got along very well. They were amiable, though Clinton was a complainer by nature. General Clinton was the commander of all the King's men in North America (though he soon left for New York). Clinton had requested permission from King George III to give up his command. He desperately wanted to return to England, although the King turned him down. Cornwallis had friends in London who kept him informed of Clinton's letters. He also regularly wrote to Germain, corresponding without Clinton's knowledge or approval. Cornwallis would often inform Germain about Clinton's actions or inaction in the Carolinas. Cornwallis would also inadvertently mention critical issues that he learned

[15]Jim Piecuch, "The Southern Theater: Britain's Last Chance for Victory," in *Theaters of the American Revolution: Northern, Middle, Southern, Western, Naval*, James Kirby Martin and David L. Preston, eds. (Yardley, Pennsylvania: Westholme Publishing, LLC, 2017), pp. 117,124-125. Gates is infamous for his three-day 170 mile "pony express" ride to Hillsborough, North Carolina before he stopped.
[16] Piecuch, "The Southern Theater: Britain's Last Chance for Victory," p. 117.
[17] John Buchannan, *The Road to Guilford Courthouse: The American Revolution in the Carolinas* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1997), p. 80.
[18] Clinton to Cornwallis, 28 May 1780, Charles Cornwallis, *The Cornwallis Papers: The Campaigns of 1780 and 1781 in the Southern Theatre of the American Revolutionary War,* edited by Ian Saberton, 6 vols. (East Sussex: Naval & Military Press, Ltd, 2010), p. 1:53.

from Germain in casual conversation with his superior, Clinton. This infuriated Clinton, generating intense friction between the two men. When Cornwallis learned that Clinton's request to resign was not accepted, he began refusing to consult with him, even going so far as requesting an independent command. Understandably, their communication dropped off significantly. Clinton suspected that Cornwallis sought to replace him, which he did. Both generals worked diligently to ensure strict loyalty within his inner circle of command.

The net result of Ferguson's appointment by Clinton was that Cornwallis instantly viewed Ferguson as an avid Clinton supporter, pushing him away. This action would have consequences a mere six days later. A superb commander, Ferguson, was an energetic and competent officer who was very enterprising. He secured a patent on a new breech-loading, rapid-fire rifle (2 December 1776) that was very dependable in wet weather than the traditional Brown Bess musket. Support for his breech-loader was mixed, not being adopted outside Ferguson's unit. There were only 200 mainly manufactured because the Ferguson rifle was many years ahead of its time.[19]

After the fall of Charleston, Colonel Abraham Buford led the only American Continental unit remaining in South Carolina. A significant battle between the British and an American unit in South Carolina took place at the Battle of Waxhaws (29 May 1780). British troops under Lieutenant Colonel Banastre Tarleton that included a large number of cavalry using sabers with great effect along with light infantry bayonets quickly dispatched Buford's patriots. What came next sent shockwaves throughout the Carolinas for several months. When Buford's men attempted to surrender, the redcoats approached with bayonets, killing most Americans. The exact point when Buford tried to surrender, and Tarleton's actions to restrain his men, are very convoluted and unclear, as many historians admit.

Nevertheless, the "Waxhaws Massacre" was the name given to the action by patriots. Tarleton won a significant victory, with only 200 of his total men present for the actual battle. Over 100 Americans were killed, with 200 taken prisoner. [20] Tarleton's name became recognizable on both sides of the Atlantic, although it was synonymous with butchery. His action derisively labeled "Tarleton's Quarter" drove many neutral

[19] Wood, *Battles of the Revolutionary War*, p. 188.
[20] Piecuch, "The Southern Theater: Britain's Last Chance for Victory," p. 118.

citizens away from the crown towards the rebels. This also established his nickname of "Bloody Ban." According to historian W.J. Wood, this battle sparked a deterioration among the patriots and loyalists in the Carolinas, generating a civil war, notable for the absence of British troops, with four vicious and bloody battles.[21]

To bolster the American cause, the Continental Congress appointed General Horatio Gates, the *Hero of Saratoga* (without consulting Washington and much to his chagrin), to take command in the south. They hoped that he would inspire locals to volunteer, stemming the wave of defeats. On July 25th, 1780, Gates arrived to take command. Despite being short of supplies, he marched to Camden, South Carolina. Gates had 4,000 troops under him but was soundly defeated on August 16th, 1780, by Cornwallis, with surprisingly only 2,200 soldiers. Gates would lose his entire army, though most militias escaped, returning home. The British captured 1,000 Americans, while Gates evaded capture. He fled the field in disgrace. The humiliating American defeat following Charleston drastically shattered morale. The result of Gates's defeat was that "The British Legion nearly doubled in size after Camden and, coupled with backcountry militia that was raised, provided a screen of light troops to help secure the frontier and stabilize it."[22] The British were on the cusp of victory.

A minor American success occurred when Colonel Thomas Sumter, a local South Carolina militia leader, attacked the British column with American prisoners and supplies, capturing many prisoners and supply wagons. This frustrated Cornwallis. He sent Tarleton to recapture the men and defeat Sumter, which he did at the Battle of Catawba Ford (18 August 1780). Cornwallis would experience many frustrating days as the partisan militia leaders impeded his couriers, supply routes and attacked his soldiers with impunity.

Despite all the American setbacks, there was one bright spot for the cause in the south. Nine hundred American militia surrounded British Major Ferguson with his loyalist regiment numbering 1,000 men at the Battle of Kings Mountain (7 October 1780). A few days before the battle, Ferguson captured a rebel and released him. The man was instructed to notify the community that Ferguson would lay waste to the countryside with "fire and sword" if they did not stop supporting rebels. Ferguson also

[21] Wood, *Battles of the Revolutionary War*, p. 176.
[22] Babits & Howard, *Long, Obstinate, and Bloody*, p. 8.

said that he would hang all the rebel leaders, abusing the wives and daughters of all involved. This threat did not work as Ferguson intended. The warning infuriated the local population, who came armed days later to meet Ferguson at Kings Mountain. Some historians consider this battle the inception of the turning tide for the Continental army in the south. However, state legislatures, particularly in South Carolina, concluded that militia alone would suffice to defeat the British, effectively canceling any requests to raise Continental regiments.[23] The victory worked against Greene's efforts to raise an army.

The one unusual fact about the battle is Ferguson requested additional troops but did not receive any support from Cornwallis. On 20 September 1780, Cornwallis wrote to Ferguson indicating that he ordered Tarleton to march to Charlotte though he became very ill.[24] Ferguson's letter to Cornwallis from the previous day suggested that the threat from the rebels was minimal. He wrote, "The reports from Nolachuki are that 800 men are to come over the mountains under a Colonel Shelby, but if they come, it is not thought that there will be 200." [25] However, over the subsequent weeks, the conditions turned against Ferguson. Cornwallis wrote to Ferguson on 28 September telling him that he might need to support British operations near the Dutch Forks (in modern Lexington and Newberry counties, South Carolina). However, on the same day, Ferguson wrote that the situation had changed dramatically. He wrote, "We are in the center of a variety of rebel partys [sic], who, if their report were to be believed, *exceed us in number six to one*." [26] It is only at this juncture that he expresses concern for a potentially precarious situation. Simultaneously, a letter from Cornwallis, dated 5 October, directs Ferguson to come to Armer's Ford just below the forks to meet a British force to augment his men. Ferguson was attacked two days later.

Historian Jim Piecuch notes that the reasons are obscure as to why Cornwallis did not support Ferguson's request, although this is not the case.[27] Charles Stedman, Cornwallis' quartermaster and later a historian, wrote a very detailed and widely-known account of the American Revolution. He noted that the messengers from

[23] Ibid.
[24]Cornwallis to Ferguson, 20 September, 1780 Cornwallis Papers, II: p. 153.
[25] Ferguson to Cornwallis, 19 September 1780, Ibid., II: p. 155.
[26] Ferguson to Cornwallis, 28 September 1780, Ibid., II: p. 159.
[27] Piecuch, "The Southern Theater: Britain's Last Chance for Victory," p. 124.

Ferguson never arrived at the British headquarters.[28] This is explainable and consistent with Stedman's loyalty towards Cornwallis. Cornwallis was very influential in England even after the War. Stedman's awareness of Cornwallis's reputation was reason enough to omit some facts from his exhaustive tome on the revolution. The truth was that Cornwallis had received Ferguson's letters. As late as 6 October Cornwallis was ill with a fever. He responded to Ferguson's message from the previous day, "Tarleton shall pass at some of the upper Fords and clear the Country; for the present, both he and his corps want a few days' rests."[29] What is not clear is the reason why he did not select another unit to reinforce Ferguson. It could have been due to his previous mistrust of Ferguson, his relationship with Clinton, his faith in Ferguson, or thoughts of an exaggeration, or perhaps his judgment was clouded by fever. Cornwallis never mentions it again, despite all the attention it received in both England and America. Cornwallis was the consummate professional. He most likely did not consider the rebels a severe threat, thinking Ferguson could easily defeat any opposition. The letters demonstrate that Ferguson did not believe he needed support until the end of September, but it was too late by then.

Ferguson was confident, thinking that the vast plateau on the hill, surrounded by trees and rocks on the mountainside, would protect his men. However, the terrain worked to the advantage of the patriots, who climbed the mountain, hiding behind the trees and rocks as they avoided loyalist gunfire. The easy victory that Ferguson calculated failed to materialize. With his signature checkered shirt over his uniform, Ferguson attempted to rally his men to no avail. His shirt and shattered right arm that clung lifelessly to his body made Ferguson stand out as he clutched his sword in his left hand. He was not difficult to identify during the battle. The patriots riddled his body with bullets and bayonet thrusts, reportedly urinating on his corpse as a final insult. The irony is that this battle in the American Revolution was closest to an actual civil war because it involved neighbors fighting one another. The struggle was exclusively Americans fighting and killing other Americans (the only participant not born in North America was the Englishman Ferguson). There were reports that the patriots

[28] Charles Stedman, *The History of the Origin, Progress, and Termination of the American War in Two Volumes*, 1794, Reprint (New York: Scholar Select, 2012), II: p. 222.
[29] As quoted in Mark M. Boatner III, *Encyclopedia of the American Revolution* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1994), p. 578.

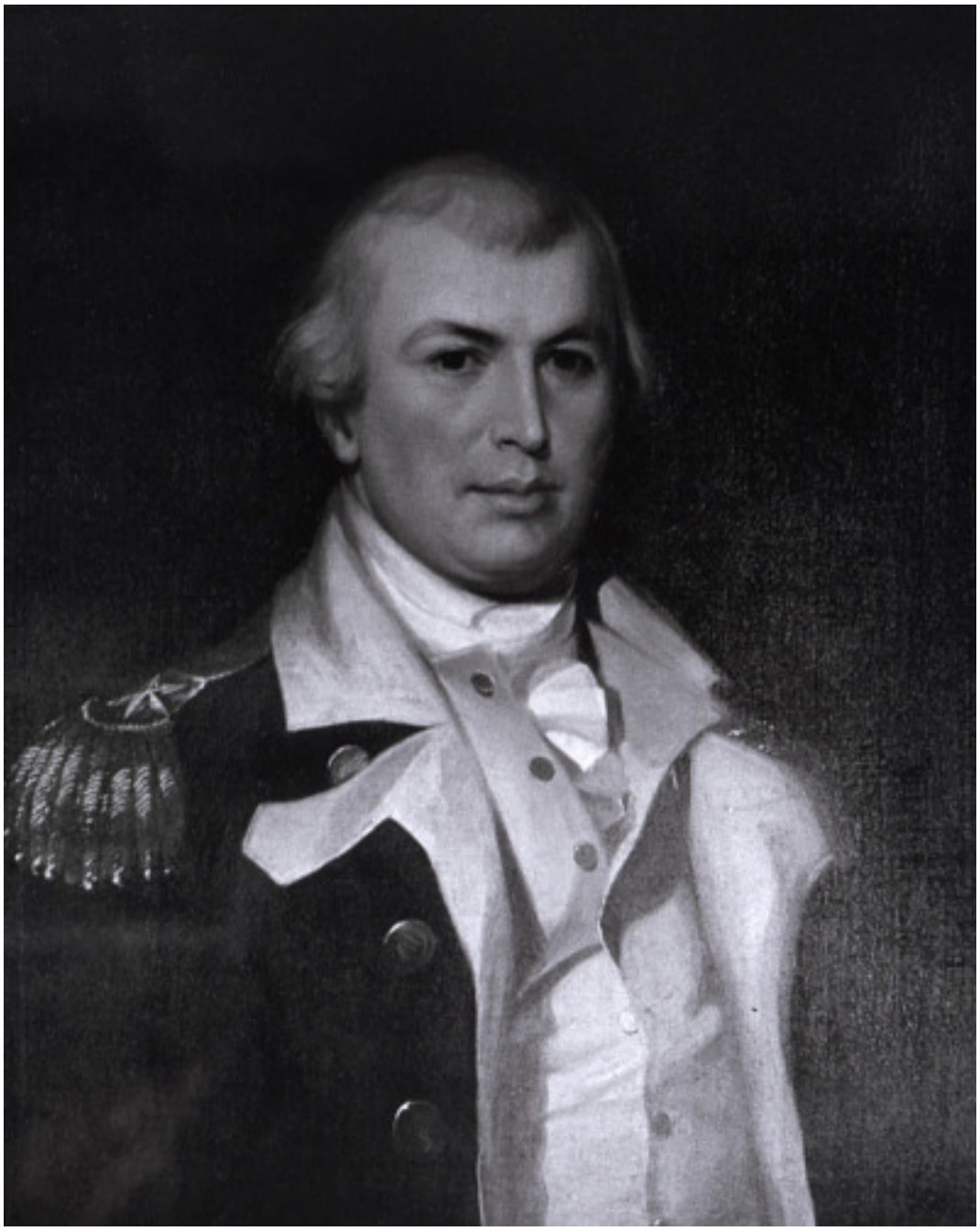
bayoneted wounded loyalists attempting to surrender as they shouted, "Tarleton's Quarter."[30] Ferguson's death reverberated through the British army. It did not help that the Americans captured 700 tory or loyalist prisoners. This battle in North Carolina "altered the whole course of the war in the South" for Cornwallis.[31] Years later, Clinton would write that the partial victory at Kings Mountain was "the first in a chain of evils that followed each other in regular succession until they at least ended in the total loss of America."[32]

The victory of the patriot militia at Kings Mountain encouraged some colonists in the Carolinas to join Greene and Morgan while severely deflating the resolve of British officers on the value of using militia. While many British officers questioned the value of Loyalist militias before King's Mountain, the sentiment became almost universal after the battle. The American situation in the southern colonies could not have been bleaker when Greene replaced Gates on 3 December 1780. Fortunately, Gates arranged for Morgan's promotion and convinced him to return to the Continental army. Morgan arrived only after Gates's defeat at Camden.

Morgan had established his reputation as the "Old Wagoner," driving supplies for the British during the French and Indian War while serving under General Edward Braddock. Sometime after the campaign, he was accused of striking a British officer. He received 500 lashes, barely surviving the ordeal. Morgan often told his men that the British miscounted, and he only received 499. The punishment naturally generated an intense hatred of British officers. Morgan's experience as a woodsman, leading irregular militia would prove invaluable to Greene during the campaign.

[30] Robert Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause: The American Revolution 1763-1789* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 468.
[31] Wood, *Battles of the Revolutionary War*, p. 206.
[32] As quoted in Ibid., p. 206.

Figure 3: Nathanael Greene



Source: Thomas Sully copy after Charles Wilson Peale, oil on canvas, National Portrait Gallery

General Nathanael Greene came from a very devout and strict Quaker family. The religious order abstained from weapons and violence of any kind. His father was a Quaker preacher and ironworker, instilling the value of hard work and discipline in his

children. Early in his life, Greene injured his knee severely, causing him to limp for the rest of his life. The Quakers abhorred violence. He was suspended from the Quakers when he participated in a military parade.[33] Greene joined the Rhode Island militia, raising men, though he was not selected to lead the men due to his pronounced limp. He continued to be involved with militia units, answering the call to join the Continental army with little experience on 8 May 1775. He was appointed a brigadier general in the Rhode Island militia. This commission transferred to the Continental army when it was established shortly after that on 14 June 1775. Greene's early career was a learning experience. He was mainly responsible for the disaster at Fort Washington (November 1776), though he was not present for the actual surrender. He watched helplessly from across the Hudson River as the American cause received one of its first devastating blows after the Battle of Long Island (August 1776), though it was far more costly due to the loss of over 2,800 men. Earlier, Greene insisted to Washington that he could defend the post or evacuate if necessary although he was proven wrong. It might appear surprising that this event did not ruin his career.

On the contrary, Greene learned from his mistakes, and Washington allowed him to grow from the experience. Greene continued to serve under General Washington, performing capably at Brandywine (11 September 1777) and at the Battle of Monmouth (28 June 1778). Although not an expert tactician, he learned from his subordinates and had an eye for detail, gradually earning Washington's trust. When Washington became frustrated with the management of the quartermaster department, he nominated Greene to lead the organization. He would write later that the assignment "was humiliating to my military pride." Greene longed for recognition in battle because "no body [*sic*] ever heard of a Quarter Master [*sic*] in History [*sic*] as such or in relating any brilliant action."[34] He reluctantly accepted the assignment.

Greene ran a small business before the War. Still, his strong work ethic and attention to detail, some might say his tendency to micromanage, helped him transform the quartermaster department within the Continental army. His vast responsibilities meant that he had to manage a staff of 3,000 men with a plethora of skills. Greene had

[33] Andrew Waters, *The Quaker and the Gamecock: Nathanael Greene, Thomas Sumter, and the Revolutionary War for the Soul of the South* (Philadelphia: Casemate Publishers, 2019), p. 22.
[34] Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause*, p. 522.

to be mindful of details with his immense team of wagonmasters, foragemasters, auditors, clerks, and suppliers.[35] His understanding of the nuances of logistics and skills he honed would pay dividends throughout his career. Greene was exceptionally thorough, establishing supply depots, created contracts for civilians to serve as wagoners rather than rely exclusively on continental soldiers. He reorganized the department with uncanny efficiency.[36] Washington noted the improved efficiency of the supply system in the Continental army and the man responsible. Greene's reputation for organization and efficiency spread, though his post was not as gallant as he would have liked. His performance during this assignment made him Washington's first choice when looking for a capable officer to replace Gates in the south.

Greene became a leader with a band of soldiers who were demoralized. Most of them were sad, pitiable men. When he arrived in Hillsboro, he saw that they were almost naked; many did not even have shoes. The men blamed Gates for their lack of self-respect. A few days later, Greene rode into Charlotte, determined to raise a regular army. Greene found out that his men were also a public nuisance. Many of them were plundering and terrorizing the citizens. He gained control swiftly, issuing strict orders. He had to set firm examples, trying a man who just returned from a lengthy period of being absent without leave. The soldier was found guilty and sentenced to death. He was hanged in front of the entire army to serve as an example.[37]

Greene learned quickly that North Carolina received money from Congress for recruiting militia.[38] The local leaders were not interested in raising Continental regiments. The region was unique for several reasons. In fact, "At the beginning of the conflict, long-standing political and economic differences between the Piedmont and the Tidewater marred relationships and divided the Carolinas."[39] This environment would have likely broken most of the Continental officers, though Greene did not write to complain about his challenges, unlike many of his peers. However, he also knew that

[35] Dan L. Morrill, *Southern Campaigns of the American Revolution* (Baltimore: The Nautical & Aviation Publishing Company of America, 1993), p. 115.
[36] Curtis F. Morgan Jr., "Nathanael Greene as Quartermaster General," *Journal of the American Revolution* November 18, 2013, https://allthingsliberty.com/2013/11/nathanael-greene-quartermaster-general/ [accessed 19 May 2020].
[37] Buchanan, *The Road to Charleston*, p. 32.
[38] MiddleKauff, *The Glorious Cause*, p. 473.
[39] Babits & Howard, *Long, Obstinate, and Bloody*, p. 1.

he was in a desperate situation in the Carolinas. Greene needed a screen for his small army. His 'can do' attitude found a solution using militia, which had been less than effective in the past. However, he would use them to augment his regular Continentals and provide reconnaissance and harass the British.

Greene's entry into the Carolinas allowed him to integrate into a fragmented militia system under some of the best guerilla leaders fighting for the American cause. His attention to detail and letters provide insight into his character. There are 770 letters to and from Greene between 26 December 1780, and 29 March 1781.[40] Bear in mind that he was often on the move during this ninety-five-day period. However, his letters average eight per day, serving to underscore the importance of intelligence and information representing a cornerstone of his leadership. Many of the letters focused on securing supplies, enemy troop movements, and the terrain, including the status of the vital waterways.

Superior British forces dictated that Greene required every available man that he could find with a weapon. He invented a term for the upcoming campaign. He called it a "fugitive war," focusing more on a Fabian strategy of evasion, much like the Roman statesman and general of the third century B.C. Quintus Fabius Maximus Verrucosus, who frustrated the legendary Carthaginian General Hannibal Barca for fifteen years.[41] Although Greene was forced to avoid a direct British engagement until he had sufficient troops, his use of militia to harass the enemy would prove crucial during the six weeks in the Carolinas. Technically, the strategy was known in Europe as a *petite Guerre* or little war. It was essentially guerrilla warfare, focusing on small units raiding and harassing the enemy, which several militia leaders proved to be exceptionally proficient. His fugitive War would depend on the irregular militia supporting the main army. Continental officers were accustomed to augmenting regulars with the militia, though they maintained central control. After reporting to South Carolina governor John Rutledge, Greene began assessing the existing logistics infrastructure, corresponding with other Governors such as Thomas Jefferson and Abner Nash, along

[40] Nathanael Greene, Nathanael, & Richard K. Showman, ed. *The Papers of General Nathanael Greene: 13 Vols.* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1976-2205), VII: p. xi. (though some were lost and others omitted that were deemed irrelevant)

[41] Ibid., p. 474. For more detail see Paul Erdkamp, "Polybius, Livy and the 'Fabian Strategy,'" *Ancient Society* 23 (1992): pp. 127–147. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/44079478. Accessed 13 Mar. 2021.

with local partisan leaders who often acted independently of any higher authority. Greene essentially inherited and adjusted a decentralized command structure *without* making changes as *all* his peers would have demanded to streamline the process. Although he regularly corresponded with militia leaders, he was wary of telling anyone about the main army's exact route or dictating specific actions of partisan militia leaders that might have raised their hackles. Greene gently directed factional leaders to threaten British-held areas, to get Cornwallis to meet these raids, detaching elements from his main force. This would make Cornwallis weaker while posing less of a threat to the primary Continental force.

Greene corresponded with all the local militia leaders, requesting their support in the Carolinas. He wrote to men like Isaac Shelby, a local partisan guerilla leader who was instrumental at the Battle of Kings Mountain, requesting help and intelligence for his army. Greene also wrote to Colonel Francis Marion, a Continental officer known as the Swamp Fox, who effectively led raiding parties against the British. Marion would ultimately work with legendary cavalry commander Henry Light-Horse Harry Lee, future father of Robert E. Lee, who operated a missed force of cavalry and light infantry. On 8 January 1781, Greene wrote to Brigadier General Sumter, a South Carolina militia leader, who earned the nickname Carolina Gamecock for his fierce temper and guerilla tactics. He was an expert in the rugged South Carolina terrain. Greene emphasized the importance of militia, referring to them as partisan strokes. He wrote,

> Partisan strokes in War are like the garnish of a table. They give splendor to the Army, and reputation to the officer, but they afford no substantial national security. You may strike a hundred strokes and reap little benefit from them unless you have a good army to take advantage of your success. The enemy will never relinquish their plan, nor the people be firm in your favor until they behold a better barrier in this field than a volunteer militia, who are one day out and the next at home.[42]

[42] Official Correspondence Between Brigadier- General Thomas Sumter and Major- General Nathanael Greene, from A.D. 1780 to 1783 : from Original Unpublished Letters of Genl. Sumter, in the Possession of the Misses Brownfield, and Certified Copies of Letters of General Greene, in Possession of Gen. Edward McCrady, President. No place, unknown, or undetermined: N.p., 1899.

While Greene referred to militia disparagingly in the past, at other times, he was inclined to praise them for their contributions to the war. How does one explain this contradiction? As John Buchanan pointed out, even though Greene's overall attitude towards militia was negative, he was, in the end, a realist.[43] From the inception of the war, Greene viewed militia as a placeholder until regulars could be recruited and trained. However, during his tenure in the Carolinas, Greene was forced to set this notion aside to salvage the American army in the south, without which he would have never stood a chance of engaging Cornwallis.

Lieutenant Colonel Light-Horse Harry Lee and his legion arrived at Greene's camp on the Pee Dee River on 8 January. Marion and Lee left Greene's camp on 10 or 11 January to wage a *petite Guerre* against the British at Georgetown, South Carolina. Surprisingly, the combination of Lee and Marion proved effective. Lee, who had a substantial ego and quest for fame, might suggest that he would have instantly clashed with the techy Marion with whom he was to work closely. Still, they were surprisingly amiable, though they were unable to take the town without artillery.[44] On 12 January 1781, Greene he wrote soon after he left urging him to quickly "carry into execution your project at George Town. . . Take your measures so as not to fail if possible; but if you should, with as little loss as may be, for a misfortune at this time would be little less than fatal [as e]very thing in this Country depend upon opinion."[45] It is clear from his letters that Greene leaves little to chance and overcommunicates to his subordinates and meticulously coordinated Continental and militia troops.

Greene's relationship with Sumter was particularly strained given his irascible nature, and he consistently demonstrated an ability to recruit militia. In fact, "His ability to raise large numbers of men in the darkest hours, even after his debacle at Fishing Creek on 18 August 1780, was one of the reasons Cornwallis considered Sumter his most dangerous foe."[46] However, very early in the campaign, the relationship was more amiable. Soon after taking command, Greene visited Sumter, who was recovering

[43] John Buchanan, "Nathanael Greene and the Partisans," in *General Nathanael Greene and the American Revolution in the South,* eds. Gregory D. Massey and Jim PIecuch (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2012), p. 120.
[44] Ibid., p. 122.
[45] Greene to Henry Lee, Greene, 12 January 1780, *The Papers of General Nathanael Greene, Vol*. VII: p. 104.
[46] From Francis Marion, 14 January 1781, Ibid., VII: p. 121.

from wounds that he received at The Battle of Blackstock's Farm (20 November 1780), where Sumter delivered a costly tactical defeat to Tarleton, though he was forced to withdraw that night.

Unfortunately, Morgan and Sumter did not get along as well as Lee and Marion. Greene dispatched Morgan to join Brigadier General William Davidson, a former Continental officer, with his North Carolina militia along with Brigadier Sumter's South Carolina militia. However, Greene told Morgan, "I give you the entire command in that quarter, and do hereby require all Officers and Soldiers engaged in the American cause to be subject to your orders and command."[47] When Greene gave General Daniel Morgan authority over the South Carolina militia, this incurred Sumter's wrath, which would prove enduring. Greene assumed that he gave up field command until the Gamecock could take the field though Sumter thought otherwise. They would get along amiably for a very short time (it would take Sumter three months to recover). During the campaign, Greene would write to Sumter often, often striving to assuage the man's pride. For example, on 3 February 1781, Greene wrote Sumter, "In what respect General Morgans [sic] command embarrassed you I am at a loss to imagine; but I dare say I coud'd [sic] explain it to your perfect satisfaction in a few minutes, could I have the happiness to see you."[48] Greene would write many similar letters during the early months of 1781. Sumter was a moody man, frustrating Greene's best efforts. Sumter went as far as directing his subordinates not to acknowledge Morgan's authority or direction unless it went through him.

Nevertheless, at this juncture, Sumter was a reluctant partner, and his relationship with Greene even improved slightly after the Battle of Cowpens. (After initially amenable during the early part of 1781, some partisan militia leaders would prove especially difficult complying with Greene's requests, particularly Sumter. However, that would be in the future.) Greene was supportive of the militia, acknowledging that they were crucial for his success. He would need to depend on irregular soldiers to augment his army.

He also wrote to local politicians and state officials to request supplies for his men. Within a few weeks, the condition of the army was incrementally improving and

[47] As quoted in Buchanan, "Nathanael Greene and the Partisans," p. 124.
[48] Greene to Thomas Sumter, 3 February 1781, Greene, *The Papers of Nathanael Green*, VII: p. 245.

gaining recruits daily. Greene also began reorganizing his quartermaster and commissary sections, ensuring that only the most capable officers were in charge. He found only the most capable men to entrust this crucial operation, appointing Colonel Edward Carrington of Virginia as deputy quartermaster general and Colonel William Richardson Davis as commissary general.[49] These men would prove invaluable, serving Greene well during their tenure. Greene reviewed the amounts that were on hand, finding no records, very little ammunition, and only three days' worth of provisions. Greene understood foraging led to plundering. The soldiers had established a poor reputation around the town due to their actions against local farmers. This would work against his recruiting objectives in the Carolinas. He issued many orders to curb theft from the local population. He wrote to Sumter advising him that "Plunder and depredation prevail so in every quarter [that] I am not a little apprehensive all this Country will be laid waste."[50] He quickly got to work, created new policies to track equipment inventory while severely punishing soldiers for taking civilian property. However, the militia was often forced to resort to these tactics so it would prove difficult to eradicate. In fact, some partisan soldiers joined specifically for the benefits associated with raiding tory communities.

Greene's most prescient action was to establish supply depots at critical junctions along the many rivers in the Carolinas. He wrote a letter early in January directing Georgia and South Carolina militia to secure and protect the provisions and forage near Kimboro's Mill while also writing him back with the exact account of what was located there. He conducted a detailed reconnaissance of the region. He learned of the numerous waterways in the area, which were not always fordable. Some rivers were impenetrable obstacles without boats, even when the waters were low. He learned that heavy rains, along with the swollen mountain stream, could flood the rivers. Some might rise over twenty-five feet within a day. [51] He wrote to Morgan,

> As the rivers are subject to sudden and great swells, you must be careful that the enemy to not take a position to gain your rear when you can neither retreat by your flanks or front. The Pedee rose 25 feet the Last week in 30 hours. I am preparing boats to move alway's [sic] with the army.

[49] Buchanan, *The Road to Charleston*, p. 59.
[50] Greene to Thomas Sumter, 8 January 1781, Greene, *The Papers of General Nathanael Greene,* VII: p. 75.
[51] Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause*, p. 474.

> Would one or two be of use to you? They will be put upon four wheels and may be moved with little more difficulty than a loaded wagon.[52]

This fact meant that boats were not just ideal but mandatory, often more valuable than horses. Greene immediately grasped this logistical nuance.

Greene wanted to be aware of the location of the British, the terrain, the condition of the rivers, and the status of supplies. He desperately needed maps with updated particulars on the rivers and fordable locations. He dispatched Carrington to the Dan River and Major General Edward Stevens and Colonel Kosciuszko to the Yadkin and Catawba rivers to secure vital information.[53] These men were instructed to secure and transport additional available flat-bottomed boats, which would move with Greene's army.

Greene realized that his forces were growing daily. He suddenly had almost 2,500 men in his army. The Charlotte community would not be able to support his large army for long. Although traditional tactics warned against dividing an army because it would leave each element more vulnerable to attack, Greene knew that feeding his men had to be his priority. There is some disagreement among scholars over the decision to split the army. There is some evidence that Sumter might have suggested this to Greene.

Nevertheless, Greene reluctantly decided to divide his men between himself and Morgan, even though the British outnumbered him three to one. He also had to force Cornwallis to split his force. He wanted Morgan's men to march towards the British base at Ninety Six, ensuring that Cornwallis was aware of his movements. Greene planned to move southeast towards the Pee Dee River, feigning a potential attack of Camden. It was a long shot, but Greene's plan to wear down, gradually attriting the British, would take time. Greene was aware of the limitations of his troop, focusing on his fugitive war concept. His instructions to Morgan were simple, "The object is to give protection to that part of the county and spirit up the people, to annoy the enemy in that quarter; to collect the provisions and forage out of the way of the enemy."[54] Due to

[52] Greene to Daniel Morgan, 19 January 1781, Greene, *The Papers of General Nathanael Greene,* VII: p. 147.
[53] Wood, *Battles of the Revolutionary War*, p. 228.
[54] As quoted in Piecuch, "The Southern Theater," p. 126.

a scarcity of resources, Greene could not concentrate his army because of the scarcity of resources and forage. He mentions this often in his letters.

Morgan left Charlotte on 21 December, with 620 men heading southwest, while Greene and his army moved southeast. Of Morgan's men, 430 were Continentals, 100 were cavalry, with the rest militia.[55] They both needed to recruit local militia and grow their forces as well as harass the British. Greene wanted to ensure that he gave Morgan enough flexibility to operate at his discretion. He added that Morgan was to "either act offensively or defensively as your prudence and discretion may direct, acting with caution and avoiding surprises [*sic*] by every possible precaution."[56] However, he stressed that if the British approached him en masse, they would merge forces to attack Cornwallis's rear or flank. He wrote often and encouraged his leaders to do the same while also maintaining a detailed accounting of available supplies. On 29 December, Greene told Morgan, "Do not be sparing of your Expresses but let me know *as often as possible* your situation. I wish to be *fully informed* of your prospect respecting *provisions*, and the number of Militia that has joined you" (emphasis added).[57] Throughout the campaign, Greene was aware that his Fabian strategy would present challenges, and opinions of his army would wane. He wrote, "It is not a war of posts but a contest for States dependent upon opinion."[58]

When Cornwallis learned that Morgan was moving, he grew concerned that the patriots might attack the vital British outpost, Ninety-Six, in South Carolina. This prompted him to dispatch Tarleton with a flying column to intercept Morgan, dividing his army much as Greene had anticipated. Cornwallis had every reason to be confident. The British quickly defeated the Continental army in Savannah, Charleston, and Camden. He had no reason to believe that he could not triumph over Greene just as quickly. Greene's defeat would solidify his aspirations of replacing Clinton in North America, completing Lord Germain's plan for the south.

On 19 January, responding to Morgan's letter four days earlier, Greene told Morgan that Tarleton would visit him. Greene stressed caution with Morgan. He wrote,

[55] Ibid., p. 126.
[56] As quoted in Buchanan, *The Road to Guilford Courthouse*, p. 296.
[57] Green to Daniel Morgan, December 29 1780, Greene, *The Papers of General Nathanael Greene,* VII: p. 22.
[58] As quoted in Buchanan, "Nathanael Greene and the Partisans," p. 75.

"It is not my wish that you should come to action unless you have a manifest superiority . . .. Put nothing to the hazard, --a retreat may be disagreeable but not disgraceful. Regard not the opinion of the day. It is not our business to risqué [sic] too much."[59] He then reminded Morgan that the current American position was dangerous, requiring more time and troops before engaging Cornwallis's entire army. Morgan immediately began making defensive preparations at an old Cherokee trading camp, known as Hannah's Cowpens, in South Carolina. Tarleton learned of Morgan's location at Cowpens. He anticipated a devastating victory. With an open field allowing for the use of his cavalry, and a river behind it to prevent a rebel retreat, it seemed like the perfect trap.

The terrain at Cowpens was an open field, with very few shrubs. It was almost ideal for traditional eighteenth-century warfare. However, it was not an ideal defensive position, and Morgan later admitted that the ground was too open and poor ground to defend. However, it did prevent his men from retreating, as the Broad River forced them to stand; he thought of the Patriot slaughter as they fled at Buford's corner.[60] The Cowpens was a misnomer as there were no stalls or pens. The site was used as a resting place for cattle drivers, on their way to Charles Town, northeast of modern Spartanburg, South Carolina. Along the eastern edge of the field were a swamp and a ravine, with a creek along the west side. Several swales could obscure large groups of men from a distance due to their depth. Morgan used a small hill to hide Washington's Cavalry, which he planned to deploy at a critical juncture of the battle of overwhelming Tarleton. Morgan knew that Tarleton was very aggressive, which would provide an ideal opportunity for Morgan to select the location of the battle and set up a defensive perimeter. He did not want to be surprised, so he positioned skirmishes along the Pacolet and Broad Rivers to ensure he would be aware of Tarleton's approach. He also wanted to force Tarleton into a region that was devoid of supplies, forage, and further away from General Cornwallis and potential reinforcements.

Morgan recruited considerable numbers of militia to augment his forces. His reputation assisted his recruiting efforts as the militia flocked to join him. Shortly after

[59] Greene to Daniel Morgan, January 19 1781 , Greene, *The Papers of General Nathanael Greene*, VII: pp. 146-147.
[60] Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause*, p. 477.

the battle on 19 January 1781, in a letter to Greene reporting the victory, Morgan singled out the brave and valuable Colonel Pickens who guarded his flank with militia from North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia. He then describes the NC volunteers posted on the flanks who poured well-directed fire into the enemy.[61] Morgan was also working to lure the British into an area that gave the Americans an advantage. He knew that he could not expect inexperienced men to withstand highly trained British regulars. Morgan decided to adapt his tactics to their predisposition to flee at the sight of the enemy. He would use this to his advantage while making the British think they were routing the Americans. Morgan arranged his men in three lines, with the most inexperienced in the first rank. He instructed them to fire a few volleys, then fall back to join the second rank behind them. Years later, he wrote that, at the time, he placed men in the third rank with orders to shoot anyone who fled the battlefield. He would have preferred to have Tarleton surround him with cavalry to accomplish the same dreaded task.[62] He also walked among his men before the battle. Years after the engagement, many men mentioned that Morgan was up all night circulating among the men by the campfires, talking to them about what he needed them to do the next day.[63] Morgan went to great lengths to ensure that every soldier knew the plan and what he expected of them. Many of the militia under Morgan fought with legendary militia leader General Thomas Sumter at the Battle of Blackstock's Farm (20 November 1780), where Tarleton was tactically defeated.[64]

On 17 January 1781, Tarleton, with his 1,100 men, attacked Morgan's small group of 800 to become known as the Battle of Cowpens. On the day of the battle, Morgan's army had swelled with the militia. His official reports list his army strength as 800 Continentals, though detailed studies indicate that he also had roughly 1,000 militia as well. Morgan's reports consistently omit references to militia involvement, even neglecting to mention militia casualties on the battlefield. His letters and records only reference regular troops. Detailed research by noted historian Lawrence Babits revealed

[61] Daniel Morgan to Nathanael Greene, 19 January 1781. Greene, *The Papers of General Nathanael Greene* VII: pp. 153-154.
[62] Davis, *The Cowpens-Guilford Courthouse Campaign*, p. 25.
[63] Morrill, *Southern Campaign of the American Revolution*, p. 127.
[64] Andrew Waters, *The Quaker and the Gamecock: Nathanael Greene, Thomas Sumter, and the Revolutionary War for the Soul of the South* (Philadelphia: Casemate Publishers, 2019), p. 36.

that Morgan must have had at least 1,800 men, perhaps more.[65] This number also coincides with Tarleton's report shortly after the battle.

Morgan had placed his militia with their backs to the Broad River, which made retreat impossible.[66] The initial American ranks broke and fell back. The British assumed that they were routing the Americans once again, pursuing them through the woods. At the last minute, Morgan's men turned around, firing. This cut Tarleton's men down, generating confusion within Tarleton's lines. What ensued were Tarleton's efforts, in vain, to rally his men. Although he tried desperately to stem the wave of defeat, he failed. Tarleton was almost captured himself. Morgan's tactics set the stage for the first significant American victory in the south, quickly garnering General Lord Cornwallis's wrath (though many historians would also argue that the first key American victory took place earlier at King's Mountain). This defeat would haunt Tarleton for years, leaving Cornwallis's favorite leader disgraced; the British were humiliated. Tarleton's official report listed 800 men in Morgan's army, though he would later write that Morgan had over 1,900 men, which seems closer to the actual number.[67] A few days later, Morgan wrote that famous expression in a letter to a friend, saying that he gave Tarleton "the devil of a whipping."[68] These words resounded around the colonies with excitement and pride for the Continental Army.

Stedman, a British soldier serving on the campaign, later wrote of Tarleton's defeat, "During the whole period of the war, no other action reflected so much dishonor upon the British arms."[69] He then underscored its significance by mentioning that for the British, Tarleton's defeat, not Saratoga, was one of the keys that led to America's independence and the British loss at Yorktown.[70] This disaster was a driving force in Cornwallis's action to abandon his carefully detailed plans for the southern campaign (and Sir Clinton's instructions). An American prisoner watched as Cornwallis learned of Tarleton's defeat. His Lordship was leaning forward on his sword, listening. When

[65] Lawrence E. Babits, *A Devil of a Whipping: The Battle of Cowpens* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), p. 150.
[66] Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause*, p. 477.
[67] Buchanan, *The Road to Guilford Courthouse*, p. 319.
[68] Babits, *The Devil of a Whipping*.
[69] Ibid., p. 324.
[70] Ibid., p. 325. This account was written a few years after the fact and a solid account from the British perspective on the American Revolution.

he heard the report, he pressed down on his sword, snapping it in half. He began screaming that regardless of the cost, he would free Tarleton's captured men.[71] This anger would lead Cornwallis to act rashly in his pursuit of Greene and Morgan while coming close to losing his Army, much like British General John Burgoyne did at Saratoga in 1777. When Tarleton returned, he was devastated. The next day he requested a court-martial, though Cornwallis denied his request. He needed everyone under his command. To rebuild Tarleton's confidence, Cornwallis wrote in blustery language, "Your disposition was unexceptionable; the total misbehavior of the troops could alone have deprived you of the Glory, which was so justly your due."[72] Cornwallis had regularly praised Tarleton many times in the past. He might have needed to bolster his confidence as much as that of his most-trusted subordinate.

As late as 18 January, Cornwallis wrote to Clinton, explaining that "nothing but the absolute necessity shall induce me to give up the important object of the Winter's Campaign."[73] He did not write to Clinton for three months after this letter as he conducted operations that violated Clinton's explicit instructions. Later that same day, shortly after he wrote his letter to Clinton, he learned of Tarleton's defeat. He began preparations for a campaign and would begin his campaign the next day. Previously, Cornwallis led operations into North Carolina and had recently withdrawn. Cornwallis made no effort to revise his letter or send an update to Clinton.

Late on the night of 18 January, marching from Charleston, Major General Alexander Leslie arrived in Cornwallis's camp with 1,200 soldiers.[74] The next day, Cornwallis took his force of 2,500 men, composed of mostly regulars, from Turkey Creek northwest towards the Little Broad River. Between 19 and 22 January, Cornwallis utilized 400 dragoons who had escaped with Tarleton to scout the area to determine Morgan's whereabouts.[75] Tarleton was particularly incensed and hoped to cut Morgan

[71] Davis, *The Cowpens-Guilford Courthouse Campaign*, p. 25. One would expect to find this detail in Charles Stedman's thorough account as he was with Cornwallis for much of the war. In fact, after the war they had a very close and amiable relationship that continued to thrive after the war. Hence, Stedman's work is biased to ensure that Cornwallis is painted in the most positive light possible and he omits any potential actions or words that would be construed as negative.
[72] As quoted in Buchanan, *The Road to Guilford Courthouse*, p. 333.
[73] As quoted in Ibid, p. 334.
[74] Babits & Howard, *Long, Obstinate, and Bloody*, p. 14.
[75] Ibid., p. 15.

off to release his men captured during the Cowpens disaster. In addition to the prisoner's release, Cornwallis's objective was to prevent Morgan's men from linking up with Greene's army. His army marched in the wrong direction for two days. Eventually, Lord Cornwallis was informed of his error. He adjusted his movement towards Ramsour's Mill, twenty miles north of the South Carolina border in modern Lincolnton, North Carolina. Cornwallis approached Salisbury, though he did not realize how close he was to the rebels because he undervalued the use of intelligence and underestimated the abilities of American military leaders. Morgan learned that the British were only ten miles away, prompting him to quicken his march. He had to send his extensive body of prisoners north to Virginia to move more rapidly. When Cornwallis eventually arrived at Ramsour's on 25 January, he discovered that he had missed Morgan by a mere 48 hours.[76] Cornwallis's army covered thirty miles in three days. While this was appalling, the rapid pace of Morgan's army shocked Cornwallis because, in five days, he had covered a hundred miles through dense woods and crossed two rivers, which was much more rapid than Cornwallis could move his bloated traditional army, even if he moved at an average pace of 12-15 miles per day.[77]

Morgan was leading by example, pushing his men through the day and night. He was very aware of the dangers of being trapped by the larger British army. Cornwallis traveled as most eighteenth-century regular troops did, with a large baggage train and many noncombatant camp followers. He was determined to catch Morgan, but he had to eliminate the supply train to speed up his army. Cornwallis concluded that he would miss the rebel army with his standard order of march.

Additionally, the Americans knew that he was actively pursuing them. Hence, the element of surprise was gone. The only other factor he could influence and capitalize on was speed. He made the tough decision to destroy all the provisions that his army could not carry, and they spent two days burning tents and supplies, determined to forage for whatever supplies and food his forces required.[78] Even more difficult for his men, he issued the last of the rum, destroying the remaining hogsheads. Today, the importance of rum is challenging to fathom, but, in the eighteenth century,

[76] Wood, *Battles of the Revolutionary War*, p. 227.
[77] Ibid., pp. 227-228.
[78] Ibid., p. 228.

rum was a typical ration. The soldiers considered it more important than water. A lack of rum drastically affected the morale of his men. Cornwallis should have sent hundreds of women, children, and other camp followers back. This might have created even more dissension in his ranks which was already displeased with a lack of rum. It is not surprising that he retained the camp followers, which contained both women and children. The extra people did nothing but slow his rate of movement. Consequently, Cornwallis was not going to match the speed of the patriot army under any circumstances.

Once Greene learned of Morgan's victory that nearly eliminated all of Cornwallis's cavalry support, he knew he must join Morgan. Greene took an aide and a few cavalry guards and rode through 120 miles of hostile loyalist territory to personally meet with Morgan, arriving at the latter's camp on 30 January.[79] Morgan suggested that they escape to the mountains or head to Georgia to avoid the redcoats. When Morgan told him that Cornwallis destroyed his supply wagons, Greene was elated and realized that Cornwallis was throwing caution to the wind to engage him. Greene thus demurred with Morgan about escaping. He pointed out that British actions were reckless, and they might be prone to making other tactical mistakes.[80] Greene knew that the British logistical support was in the south, while the Americans received supplies from the north. He devised a plan to just stay in front of the British as they retreated towards Virginia (but not too far to make them break contact). His goal would be to nibble away at the British strength while drawing Cornwallis away from his supply bases. He had to find a way to press the advantage with another victory before Cornwallis could replenish his cavalry. Greene needed to provoke Cornwallis into acting rashly, much like Tarleton. Morgan expressed extreme concern about this plan, also emphasizing the safety of the army. Greene told Morgan that he would assume all responsibility if it failed, "for I shall take the measure upon myself."[81]

Once Cornwallis reduced his number of wagons, his rate of movement improved. He anticipated catching the rebel army. He planned to utilize two crossings at the Catawba River, Beattie's Ford and Cowan's Ford, five miles below it.[82] Cowan's

[79] Morrill, *Southern Campaigns of the American Revolution,* p. 140.
[80] Wood, *Battles of the Revolutionary War*, p. 229.
[81] As quoted in Ibid., p. 229.
[82] Ibid., p. 230.

Ford was four feet deep, over 500 yards wide, surging with a fast and powerful current due to rains. Locals told Morgan of these two potential fording locations that could be used by the British. On 31 January, Greene held a meeting with Morgan and key militia leaders at Beattie's Ford to review options to contest the impending British crossing of the Catawba because the rains subsided and the waters were falling.[83] Greene's options were limited, with only 800 men to guard the fords between Morgan and Brigadier General Davidson, a former Continental officer and North Carolina militia commander (Davidson would be shot through the chest and killed instantly during the British contested crossing).[84] Morgan's men would secure Sherrald's Ford and Davidson, and the militia would guard the lower fords and fall back to Salisbury if pressed.[85]

Davidson's militia was stationed from Beattie's Ford to a minor crossing five miles south known as Cowan's Ford. As it turned out, the British planned to cross at Cowan's Ford, which had two crossings, a lower wagon ford and one designated for horses just above it. He ensured that he stationed troops at each location. As the British began to cross the river, they came under fire from militia lookouts stationed on the opposing shore. The musket fire from the opposite shore unnerved the local tory guide, who panicked, fleeing to a shallow area where the river forked. He did not communicate the fact that this was the only safe area to cross. The river in front of the main British column was much deeper and faster flowing. Unfortunately, the main body continued forward through the deeper crossing. The British lost many supplies and men to the swift waters.[86] This disaster caused numerous delays as civilians and soldiers had to be rescued. Cornwallis's official reports listed four dead, thirty-six wounded, though he must have vastly underestimated the calamity. A few local Tories, Nicholas Gosnell and Robert Henry, reported watching helplessly from the bank as many British soldiers drowned. Other locals reported seeing bodies of British soldiers on Thompson's fish-dam and along the banks over the following weeks.[87]

Although Cornwallis eventually got his army across the Catawba, he lost valuable time, men, and supplies. To further reduce his wagons before crossing,

[83] Babits & Howard, *Long, Obstinate, and Bloody*, p. 17.
[84] Ibid., p. 19.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Ibid., p. 231.
[87] Buchanan, *The Road to Guilford Courthouse*, p. 348.

Cornwallis ordered the destruction of more wagons and supplies. Greene recorded the event in a letter to General Isaac Huger on 1 February. He wrote from Oliphant's Mill, N.C., "The British crossed the Catawba River this morning. They burned a great number of their wagons yesterday and seem to be prepared for forced Marches."[88] The disaster at Cowan's Ford cost Cornwallis more time. Two major rivers, the Yadkin and the Haw, still stood between both armies before the Dan River, the gateway to Virginia. General Charles O'Hara, Cornwallis's deputy, later wrote that "Cornwallis was resolved to follow Greene's army to the end of the World."[89] After the Catawba River crossing and Tarleton's dispersal of militia, Greene did not receive support from the North Carolina partisans.

Nathanael Greene's Fabian tactics were creating problems recruiting militia. He wrote to Thomas Jefferson, governor of Virginia, "I know the People have been in anxious suspense waiting for the event of an Action."[90] Greene was stuck between a proverbial Scylla and Charybdis as he did not have enough troops to fight, but the act of retreating guaranteed that he would never recruit enough militia. As expected, a winning general or even a hint of a victory would be enough to encourage militia from all the surrounding regions to join the American cause. An American army scurrying to retreat did not inspire confidence and almost suggested a disaster looming around the corner. Greene also shared his concerns with Morgan. On 15 January, Morgan also mentioned the challenges of the sparse supply infrastructure for the region. Pickens was working closely with Morgan, although his men were independently minded and expressed a desire to conduct their activities in South Carolina which supplies and forage were more plentiful. This fiercely independent streak was a common trait among many local piedmont volunteers, as both Morgan and Greene discovered. They would come and go as they pleased, which created many problems as Pickens wrote to Greene, "I am sorry to acquaint you of the fast desertion rate that prevails and am afraid that in a very few days there will hardly be a man belonging to the Salisbury district remaining."[91] It was hard to find fault with them given that they had to supply and feed

[88] Greene, *The Papers of General Nathanael Greene: Vol. 7*, p. 231.
[89] As quoted in O'Shaughnessy, *The Men Who Lost America,* p. 168.
[90] As quoted in Buchanan, "Nathanael Greene and the Partisans," p. 127.
[91] As quoted in Ibid., pp. 128-129.

themselves off the land, and plunder was discouraged though nearly impossible to control, much to Greene and Morgan's chagrin.

Many militias roamed the countryside and swamps with horses. They were reluctant to dismount and fight, let alone move far away from their mounts, given that a hasty retreat was a given and their lives depended on the ability to move rapidly. It was a matter of survival. This characteristic made the partisan warriors in the south such a thorn in Cornwallis's side. Cornwallis's deputy and commander, once he departed after Guilford Courthouse, Lieutenant Colonel Francis, Lord Rawdon, suggested that rebel mobility was the reason that "we have never been able to force them to a decisive action."[92] Greene's efforts to secure horses from militia to support his cavalry would remain one of the unresolved issues during his campaign. As Buchanan wrote about the friction over horses between Continental officers and partisans,

> The bad feelings came to a head after the action at Weitzel's Mill, North Carolina, on March 6, 1781, when Cornwallis pursued and tried to cut off Colonel Otho Holland Williams's light troops. Cornwallis's advance was engaged by backcountry riflemen, who provided covering fire while Williams's light infantry crossed the Reedy Ford Creek.[93]

The militia suffered much higher casualty rates than the Continentals and complained that they were sacrificed to spare the regulars. The rift between the partisan warriors and Continental troops was growing. This only compounded Greene's recruiting efforts as word began to spread of the incident.

Greene understood he did not possess an army large enough to engage the British, though it is unclear if he knew that the speed of his withdrawal was partly to blame. Despite this challenge, Greene's attention to detail was superb during the campaign. He wrote to partisan militia leaders and contacted local guides daily to ensure that he confirmed the actual location of British troops and the conditions of the rivers. It is notable that William Lee Davidson, an American officer, was present at many of Greene's leadership meetings, noting, "Though General Greene had never seen the Catawba before, he appeared to know more about it than those who were raised on

[92] As quoted in Ibid., p. 130.
[93] Ibid., p. 131.

it."[94] This would be true of Greene many times during the campaign. Even a minor detail missed could spell disaster for his army; he could leave nothing to chance. The Americans raced to cross the Dan River, which sits in Virginia and North Carolina. At the same time, the British tried to eliminate the last American army's vestiges in the south. Historians know these events as the famous Race-to-the-Dan, though some refer to it as the Piedmont Campaign.

As the British army marched through small towns trying to beat the Americans to the Yadkin River, Cornwallis still ineffectively attempted to get locals to join the British army. He was guilty of the King and Parliament's same error: consistently overestimating the extent of support through the colonies since the beginning of the conflict. The characterization that roughly one-third of the population was always uncommitted and awaiting confirmation of victory, while the remaining two-thirds were divided between loyalists and patriots is an exaggeration, with far fewer numbers loyal to the King.[95] Reports of soldiers burning and looting local citizens further exacerbated Cornwallis's frustrations. He was keenly aware that his men were undermining his recruiting ambitions. Their actions had to be controlled. Cornwallis issued an order labeling the perpetrators "disgraceful," requesting his officers administer severe punishment to the guilty soldiers.[96] Although the vandalism of his men slowed, his mandate did not eliminate the problem.

Cornwallis realized that his main army did not stand a chance of catching the American army. He divided his army again, placing O'Hara in charge of a mobile mounted infantry exclusively on horseback. This structure was called a flying column, which theoretically should intercept Greene's army as it could move faster. This would leave his main army vulnerable, without any scouts on horseback. He could be surprised by an attack from partisan militia or Greene himself. He was willing to accept the risk for an opportunity to catch the Continental army. Cornwallis and his army were severely slowed by the recent rains that made the soft red Carolina mud even

[94] As quoted in Buchanan, *The Road to Guilford Courthouse*, p. 344.
[95] John Adams introduced this statistic in a 1775 letter; he repeated it later, which might confirm the number. However, while negotiating with the Dutch Republic he mentioned that no more than a tenth of the population supported England. See O'Shaughnessy, *The Men Who Lost America*, pp. 190-191.
[96] Davis, *The Cowpens-Guilford Courthouse Campaign*, p. 94.

more difficult for wagon wheels. To further increase the pace of his main army, Cornwallis then strangely ordered an additional reduction of wagons and supplies.

O'Hara and his men raced to catch the Quaker and his army, closing on them at the Trading Ford on the Yadkin River on 3 February. After days of rain, the swollen river waters were too high and swift to attempt any crossing. O'Hara and his men could only stare across the river at the patriots on the other side. They had arrived as the last wave of American units made their way across the treacherous river. Even more frustrating, though hardly surprising, the Americans had utilized or destroyed all the available boats. As the British gazed across the surging brown water with large trees occasionally swept downstream, they realized that they would have to wait days for the river to become passable. O'Hara's only option to deter the patriots was to use the small field artillery cannons he brought with him. The artillery was readied and fired. However, the distance was too great. It was to no avail. It did little except give the British a mechanism to discharge their frustrations. The weary British soldiers rested for a few days while the Americans pressed on.

While the British army's main body was at Salisbury, Lord Cornwallis spent time collecting information from local tories about the possible route of his foe Nathanael Greene. Greene surprised him, anticipating his every move. Cornwallis realized that he must find a way to outwit the rebel commander. The Americans had already crossed two significant rivers, always staying one step ahead of the British. The Yadkin River was the next obstacle. Locals informed him that there were a few very easily fordable areas. There was little chance that Greene would be delayed as he crossed the Yadkin. The next significant barrier that would slow Greene's army was the Dan River. Cornwallis wanted to trap Greene's army with its back to the Dan, as they were defenseless, preparing to cross the river. He received a report that there were very few boats along with the Dan.

Cornwallis used Shallow Ford, twenty-five miles above Trading Ford on the Yadkin River, to navigate the river. He acted on reports that indicated Greene was marching north as he left Trading Ford. However, Greene only marched a few miles north, long enough to ensure that tories spotted his movement. He then secretly shifted and began moving east towards Guilford Courthouse, covering a fantastic forty-seven

miles in two days.[97] His men were exhausted and hungry after the grueling march. Greene let them rest until General Isaac Huger (who he sent out earlier) and his men arrived from their reconnaissance the next day.[98] Cornwallis and his men continued toward the Dan River, unaware of Greene's deception.

The road conditions and weather was appalling for both armies. Days of rain made the red clay roads miserable, slowing the march to one mile per hour as the cold temperatures further exacerbated the suffering soldiers. Cornwallis was not aware that Greene was transporting a large assortment of boats with his army. His Lordship directed his army to march towards the fords at the upper Dan River, assuming that Greene would be forced to utilize this crossing for at least part of his army.

Greene and Morgan reached Guilford on 7 February, where they were finally united in a central location. The muster rolls only carried the names of 2,036 soldiers, though 600 militia were "poorly armed."[99] Greene walked the ground around Guilford Courthouse and thought that it was defensible. Several weeks earlier, Greene had written a letter to Morgan, arguing that retreat was disagreeable but never disgraceful, though he seemed to change his mind at this critical juncture.[100] Greene held a meeting with his officers recorded in his 9 February Proceedings of a Council of War. The consensus was that the British had between 2,500 and 3,000 men, though they were exhausted.

Nevertheless, they all voted against fighting the British there, as Greene wanted to do. Greene wrote, "[I]t was determined unanimously that we ought to avoid a general Action at all Events, and that the Army ought to retreat immediately over the Roanoke River."[101] He reluctantly continued to move his army toward Virginia. However, he knew the proximity of the redcoats would force his hand in an engagement for which he was unprepared.

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[97] Wood, *Battles of the Revolutionary War*, p. 233.
[98] Ibid., p. 234.
[99] Buchanan, *The Road to Guilford Courthouse*, p. 352.
[100] Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause*, p. 484.
[101] Proceedings of a Council of War, 9 February 1781, Greene, *The Papers of General Nathanael Greene*, VII: pp. 261- 262.

To protect his main army, he was forced to rely on deception with a smaller diversionary force. He selected a very mobile rear guard of 700 men, many on horseback, to protect his main body and provide a decoy and deceive Cornwallis about his true objective, the ferries of the lower Dan.[102] Greene had asked Morgan to lead this group, but Morgan suffered from hemorrhoids, rheumatism, and sciatica throughout the campaign. His pain was no longer tolerable, and he could no longer even sit on a horse. Greene gave him a letter authorizing his return home to Virginia.[103] He left the next morning. On 10 February, Greene placed Colonel Otho Williams in charge of the 700 men, while Greene and his army headed towards the lower Dan River. The next day, Williams reported to Greene that the enemy was six to eight miles away.

On 12-13 February, each army was moving on parallel roads north toward the Dan River, unbeknownst to one another. Greene was leading the main army in a column to the west. Leading a 700-man rear guard, Williams was slightly behind his formation, though moving parallel to his unit. The British formation trailed somewhat, just to the east of Williams, as it advanced northerly towards the Dan River. Surveillance indicated a large American formation to Cornwallis's west, so he kept his main body moving north. He detached a small group to move northwest to intercept the Patriots. As the British approached, they almost surprised Williams and his men as they finished breakfast. Luckily, a local farmer warned the Americans that the English were only five miles away. They left quickly, narrowly escaping.[104] Williams continued towards Dix's Ferry to maintain the deception, but he was forced to shift towards Irwin's Ferry. He grew concerned about Cornwallis cutting him off and being unable to cross behind the main Patriot army. Both the Patriots and the British pushed through the cold, wet weather, neither resting for more than an hour through 14 February. At noon on that day, Williams received a note from Greene dated the previous evening. It indicated that the main army had crossed the Dan and was waiting for him.[105] He breathed a sigh of relief as he drove his party of 700 men over the remaining fourteen miles to Irwin's Ferry.

[102] Wood, *Battles of the Revolutionary War*, p. 234.
[103] Ibid., p. 234.
[104] Ibid., p. 236.
[105] Ibid., p. 237.

Cornwallis knew that his army was falling further behind. At one point, he had been as close as ten miles to Greene's army, though the patriots were quickly extending their lead. He took one last gamble. Cornwallis had forced his men to march into the night daily. On the night of 14 February, he decided that this was not enough. Cornwallis needed to push his men just a bit more. He made another fateful decision to leave all water supplies and support wagons. The men were going forward with just what they could carry, to include the meager amount of water in canteens, covering twenty-five miles on 15 February.[106]

Meanwhile, O'Hara was still out searching for the patriot army. He pushed his men forty miles in a day but arrived once again too late, just as the last of William's men crossed the Dan late on 14 February. He and his men could only stare out at the deep river and empty shores in frustration. He had lost the race. The Dan River was an impenetrable obstacle between the British and American armies. Cornwallis was not aware that O'Hara had lost the race, continuing to push his men on forced marches to link up with O'Hara late on 15 February. The British consistently marched up to thirty miles a day, despite the rain and mild snow of the North Carolina winter and consistent ration shortages.[107] When Cornwallis arrived, a sense of quiet desperation overwhelmed him as he learned that Greene had escaped him again. He had pushed his men to the limit. They were no longer fresh troops, ready for battle. They were worn out to a breaking point. He knew that he could not push them any further. Many of his men were starving, requiring new clothes and leather for shoes.[108] His army was on the verge of collapse.

Cornwallis decided to return to friendlier territory. He could have continued his pursuit, marching to an upper portion of the Dan River where there were a few fordable crossings. However, tories reported that General Baron von Steuben was in Virginia organizing regiments. Greene's forces would only grow while in Virginia, while Cornwallis' troops were dwindling.[109] His sense of invulnerability suddenly left him with the stark reality of his situation. His closest supply base at Camden was 240 miles away, his army on the brink of starvation. His men needed food and rest. He must

[106] Davis, *The Cowpens-Guilford Courthouse Campaign*, p. 100.
[107] Wood, *Battles of the Revolutionary War*, p. 235.
[108] Davis, *The Cowpens-Guilford Courthouse Campaign*, p. 144.
[109] Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause*, p. 484.

return to friendlier territory. After relentless marches chasing Greene around the Carolinas, he issued a proclamation encouraging those loyal to the King to join his army (provided they brought ample supplies). A few curious locals stayed for a few days, leaving just as quickly as they came.[110] Cornwallis had done everything he could think of to engage the patriot army, but Greene was ahead of him at every step. It was time to return south. He began to move his army to Hillsborough, North Carolina, along the Dan River's south side. He would not cross the river and go north into Virginia.

Cornwallis was still in a precarious situation. He needed to augment his force with loyalist militia from the Carolinas. On 25 February, loyalist Colonel John Pyle miraculously assembled a group of 300 men between the Haw and Deep Rivers to join the King's army in a wild and unexpected turn of events. They would provide the needed replacements for Tarleton, who was expected to escort them back to the main British lines within the next few days. Greene's cavalry commander, Colonel Lee, had partnered with Andrew Pickens's South Carolina militia to scout the area for the American army when they learned that Pyle's loyalists were in the area waiting to join Tarleton's cavalry. When Lee and Pickens saw the familiar green jackets in the distance, they could not believe their luck.

Pyle assumed that he belonged to Tarleton's men, as both units wore the same green jackets and black helmets. Lee's men formed up along the road while Pyle's loyalists rode past. As Pyle's men rode past, each group began greeting each other. Lee reported that he was going to request Pyle's surrender without bloodshed. However, firing erupted near the back of Lee's formation. Even as the killing began, many of the loyalists were confused. They shouted that they were on the same side. They shouted, "Everyone here is fighting for the King." They assumed it was a friendly fire incident rather than a deception. The result was that fewer than fifty men escaped alive. Most of the loyalists were killed or wounded. Tories labeled it "Pyle's massacre." The net effect was that fewer and fewer men were turning out to rally to the British standard.[111] This event impacted loyalist morale in the southern colonies for many months, though encouraging some to join the rebels. When news of the disaster reached the community

[110] Ibid., 485.

[111] Wood, *Battles of the Revolutionary War*, 241.

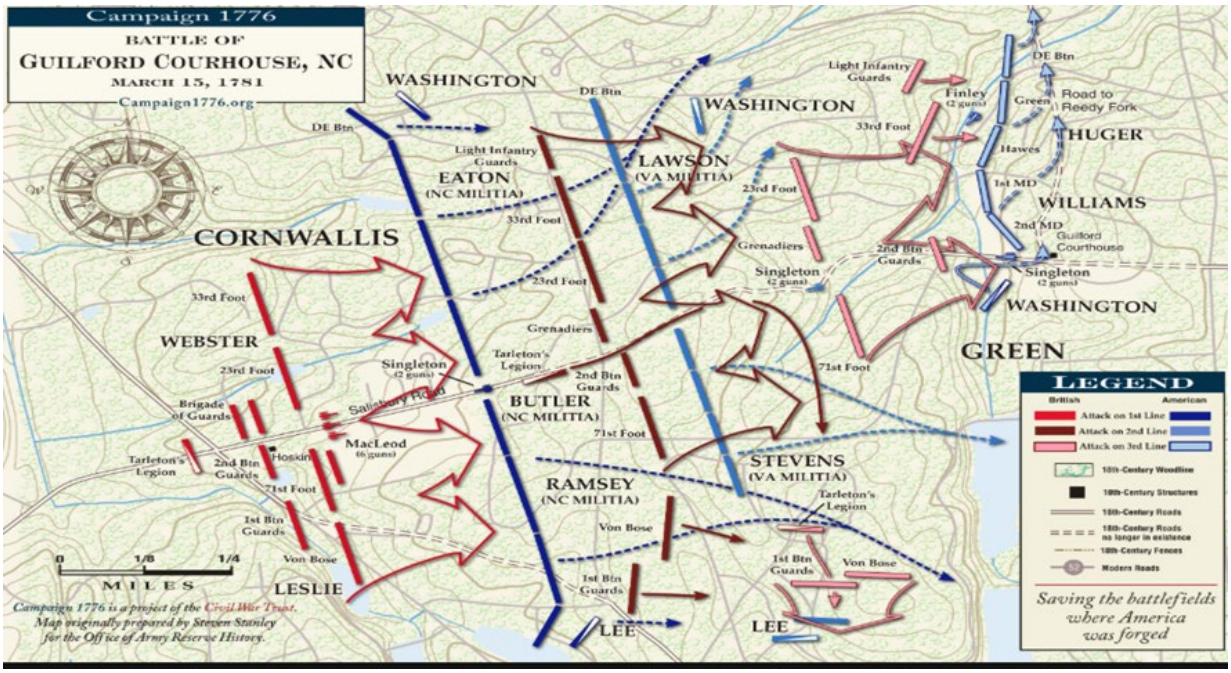
of Hillsboro, Cornwallis found his difficult task of recruiting now impossible. He slowly began to move his army south, back towards South Carolina.

Greene had beat the redcoats in the Race-to-the-Dan. His army was safely in Virginia. However, his objective was to wear down the British forces or capitalize on a British error. Once Greene learned that Cornwallis was not planning to cross the Dan River, he made plans to cross the Dan River and return south. First, he needed to rest his men, gathering more militia at the same time. He would continue to harass Cornwallis as the British marched south. He utilized groups of men to cross back over the Dan River to trail the redcoats south, again operating as a *petite Guerre*. As Greene and his men rested and enjoyed the abundant food in Virginia, his army continued to grow. Von Stueben sent 400 Continentals, with almost 1,700 militia. This meant that Greene's army had swelled to 4,400 men, though some men had barely functional muskets,[112], Greene had a very limited time to act. Many of the militia had only agreed to serve for six weeks. The Quaker felt that this was the best window to challenge Cornwallis. He directed that his entire army re-cross the Dan River, moving south towards Guilford Courthouse, ahead of the Cornwallis's slow-moving army. Greene ensured that Cornwallis knew that the patriots were assembling around Guilford Courthouse.

Greene thought that, although Cornwallis was dispirited, he might still be desperate enough to attack. Due to inaccurate reports, Cornwallis thought Greene had between 7,000 to 9,000 men. Due to attrition, Cornwallis only had 1,900 effective men.[113] With such a potential overmatch of forces, most leaders would have avoided a direct engagement. However, Cornwallis was a stubborn leader who would not be intimidated. He was aware that he had been gradually losing men through minor skirmishes or accidents crossing the rivers. He wrote that he only lost 101 men in this campaign before Guilford Courthouse, although his rolls in February just before the battle reflect that he lost 217 during that month alone.[114] On 14 February, Cornwallis learned that Greene was at Guilford Courthouse, only twelve miles away from his camp. He directed that his men prepare for battle.

[112] Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause*, p 485.
[113] Wood, *Battles of the Revolutionary War*, p. 243.
[114] Davis, *The Cowpens-Guilford Courthouse Campaign*, p. 143.

Figure 4: Map of the terrain and unit arrangement at Guilford Courthouse on 15 March 1781.



Source: American Battlefield Trust (www.battlefields.org).

On 14 March 1781, Greene's army arrived at Guilford Courthouse. They quickly began to establish defenses. Figure 4 illustrates the terrain, the deployment of troops, key leaders, and unit movements on the day of the battle. Greene received reports that Cornwallis was preparing his army as well.

The Court House was part of a small village located on a hill with a densely wooded valley to the southwest and a New Garden Road, which ran east to west that led to Salisbury. A road ran north of the Court House, Reedy Fork Road, which Greene designated a potential route of retreat if he needed it. Greene utilized Morgan's tactics from Cowpens with three lines organized, following Morgan's suggestion. The front rank was reserved for the most inexperienced men. Greene placed the more seasoned militia in the second rank. The third rank would be his first rank of Continentals.[115] Even though he had over 4,000 men, only 1,400 were seasoned Continentals, and the rest were untrained militia and local volunteers. Morgan's tactic was the best way to minimize this vulnerability. He knew that he could not count on inexperienced men to

[115] Wood, *Battles of the Revolutionary War*, p. 244.

face a highly-trained army nor stand during a typical British bayonet assault. He only needed them to fire from a partially protected position. Greene understood the limitations of militia and their best utilization. His only option was to use them as pickets. Raw troops would naturally flee, deceiving the British into assuming the Americans were retreating. He used this to his advantage. In an earlier letter dated 20 February, Morgan advised Greene to keep the militia in the center of the formation while placing some veterans behind them to shoot the first man who broke formation.[116] Greene elected to ignore his suggestion.

Eighteenth-century infantry tactics were predicated on men moving and firing in tight formations, as they moved almost shoulder-to-shoulder, around the battlefield. The proximity instilled a sense of cohesion. The men could talk and encourage each other, which would have assuaged fears. The British were known for being very vocal during battle. Their *huzzahs* served to unify and promote those whose confidence might falter. The Americans quickly adopted this practice very early in the War. At Guilford Courthouse, the biggest obstacle to coordination among units was the dense trees that prevented units from seeing one another or even assembling in such a fashion. This could work to Greene's advantage, as each line would not witness the retreat of the other. It could also work against him, making each unit feel more isolated and alone, stimulating a new withdrawal.

Greene was aware of these challenges. To mitigate them, he attempted to generate some excitement in his men by riding up and down the lines talking to his men. He instructed them that they had to fire two rounds before they could leave, returning home to their families and farms.[117] Although Greene was not an inspirational, charismatic leader like Morgan, reports from that day indicated that he removed his hat as he wiped the sweat from his brow. He spoke to some of the more inexperienced men about the importance of liberty and honor.[118] His men all respected him. They were accustomed to seeing him often in camp as he moved about, greeting men daily. Greene also told his regulars to allow the militia to retreat, passing through the lines unmolested. These actions illustrate his ability to know his men. He had

[116] John Buchanan, *The Road to Guilford Courthouse,* p. *370.*
[117] Wood, *Battles of the Revolutionary War*, p. 246.
[118] Buchanan, *The Road to Guilford Courthouse*, p. 373.

realistic expectations of what they could accomplish. Greene was not the same naïve leader who defended Fort Washington.

Greene was unaware of when Cornwallis would attack, though he knew that it would take place soon. He directed Lee's Legion of roughly 150 dragoons as well as 60 Virginia militia under Colonel William Campbell to serve as advance warning three miles west of the courthouse, along the Great Salisbury Road. However, he did not deploy enough to serve as skirmishers.[119] At approximately 0730 in the morning, these men would fire the first shots of the conflict as Tarleton's dragoons approached the New Garden Meeting House, four miles west of the courthouse, though no soldiers were hit.[120] Two additional skirmishes took place along the road, not far from the location of the first, and a few British and Americans were killed, though the fighting was brief. Still, British casualties for the latter small actions record 30-40 men injured, while Americans were similar with 35-40.[121] The length of time of the short engagements is debated but generally agreed to have lasted between thirty minutes up to just under two hours. Nevertheless, the sound of distant gunfire gave Greene time to make final adjustments to his lines.

Greene arranged his first line, which was composed of 1,000 North Carolina militia, on both sides of the road, with Butler's militia on the right, while Eaton was on the left. They were mainly behind a zigzag rail fence that stood in front of an open field with several small ravines and gentle swales extending for 500 yards along the western end. The eastern side of the road was covered with trees, underbrush, and shrubs. He placed two six-pound guns along the middle of the road. His right flank was anchored with 200 Virginia riflemen and 110 Continentals under Colonel William Washington's cavalry (a distant cousin of George Washington) supporting them. He placed 200 Virginians and 150 of Henry Lee's Legion (roughly half of the men were mounted) positioned obliquely along his left flank.[122] Three hundred yards to the rear of the first element was the second line of 1,200 men under Brigadier General Edward Stevens on his militia's right. General Robert Lawson's militia was on the left. This entire formation was located and protected in a dense line of trees. The last formation of Continentals

[119] Babits & Howard, *Long, Obstinate, and Bloody*, p. 51.
[120] Ibid., pp. 51, 53.
[121] Ibid., pp. 55-56.
[122] Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause*, p. 486.

was roughly five-six hundred yards behind the second line in an open field. They were poised to engage the British as they pursued the fleeing Americans from the first two lines.[123] General Huger's men were on the right side with 800 Virginia Continentals; sitting angled off to the left of his formation was General Otho Williams with his 600 Maryland Continentals. Morgan had advised Greene earlier to break the militia up and put them in the ranks with the regulars, telling him "put the riflemen on the flanks, under enterprising officers who are acquainted with that kind of fighting, and put the militia in the center with some picked troops in the rear with the order to shoot down the first man than runs." [124] Unfortunately, Greene did not follow Morgan's unconventional suggestion. Many of Greene's peers would indicate that Greene's only tactical error was not keeping a reserve force after the battle. This force would have proven decisive at Guilford Courthouse to support a crumbling line, conclusively defeating the British. However, it was not in Greene's plan of battle that day.

Scouts reported the American army was in the region of Guilford Courthouse, while Lord Cornwallis, only twelve miles away, and began immediate preparations for battle. Early on 15 March, Cornwallis's army broke camp without breakfast because they were out of flour. They conducted a rapid march to cover the twelve miles to Guilford Courthouse. Just as planned, the first British troops with their bright red uniforms came down the hill into the valley at approximately one in the afternoon. American six-pounders opened up while the British artillery shifted into a position to reply. This cannonade was primarily inconsequential but took place for twenty minutes, working on the nerves of some of the more inexperienced volunteers.

As the British entered the valley, Cornwallis formed his line with the right composed of the regiment of Bose (a Hessian regiment), the 71st, and the First Battalion of Guards under Major General Leslie in command. The area to the left was more open, allowing Cornwallis to concentrate his forces better. Lieutenant Colonel Webster commanded the 23rd and 33rd regiments, grenadiers, and the 2nd Battalion of Guards.[125] Cornwallis placed O'Hara in charge of the rear guard, composed of Tarleton and his cavalry, the Hessian jaegers, and light infantry. Cornwallis directed the right side to

[123] Stedman, *The History of the Origin, Progress, and Termination of the American War in Two Volumes*, II: p. 338.
[124] As quoted in Babits & Howard, *Long, Obstinate, and Bloody*, p. 58.
[125] Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause*, p. 488.

advance first because the area was less wooded. The British crossed the 330 yards of an open field, often opened advances at the quickstep, meaning 120 paces per minute, meaning that the men traversed the open area in roughly two minutes.[126] As the Redcoats came to within 150 yards, the North Carolinians sent a devastating volley, creating significant gaps in the formations, with perhaps one-half of the men falling immediately.[127] As Leslie's Highlanders approached the first line of American militia, they charged with bayonets. At least 1,000 Carolinians were terrified at the sight and lost all bearing. The men almost ran over each other as they broke, dropping everything, from muskets to cartridge boxes and canteens. They all ran and returned home. Babits and Howard researched pension records that underscored that "A great many North Carolina militiamen broke and ran. Seventeen-year-old Josh Warren … admitted in his pension application."[128] However, many did fire their two rounds before retreating. The Colonial militia on the right side of the road poured active fire into Webster's men as he rode in front of the 23rd regiment, shouting, "Come on, my brave Fusiliers" to inspire his men. They charged the American lines, which immediately fell back into retreat.[129] As the massing red formation approached a fence line, a significant gap opened between the 23rd and the 22nd in the center of the British lines but was quickly filled when O'Hara brought up the 2nd Guard Battalion and grenadiers.[130]

As the British stragglers fell in along the fence, working their way towards the woods, they could see and hear signs that men were waiting for them. As the redcoats formed up, entering the woods crossing the 400 yards to the second line, they became disorganized. The dense brush broke their single cohesive line. Unit integrity broke down. The British had to advance, fighting in small detachments rather than in a cohesive traditional line. They attempted a bayonet charge as they approached the second line, manned by the Virginia militia. Lee and Campbell's men were fighting an independent, hotly contested action, supporting the American lines' far edge. In the dense woods, Cornwallis had his horse shot out from under him. He remounted a

[126] Babits & Howard, *Long, Obstinate, and Bloody*, p. 101.
[127] Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause*, p. 489. Wood indicates that the initial volley was delivered at too far of a range and more of a rolling fire and not nearly as effective as a typical Continental concomitant barrage. In *Battles of the Revolutionary War*, p. 248.
[128] Babits & Howard, *Long, Obstinate, and Bloody*, p. 111.
[129] Quoted in Wood, *Battles of the Revolutionary War*, p. 250.
[130] Babits & Howard, *Long, Obstinate, and Bloody*, p. 114.

horse, attempting to organize British ranks. However, in confusion, he began to head towards the American lines. He would have been captured if left to his own devices. Sergeant Roger Lamb of the Royal Welch Fusiliers, recorded later in his diary, that he saw Cornwallis, seemingly confused. He ran out, barely pulling him back to the safety of the British lines.

The Virginians in the woods were well protected, though delivering their volleys more haphazardly due to the terrain until they too fell back. The first Redcoats to emerge from the woods were led by Webster and consisted of mostly the 33rd and 23rd Foot. The formation began to cross the open field as the Continentals stared and waited. The American line consisted of Virginia and Maryland regiments. These men had their backs to Reedy Fork Road if they had to conduct a hasty retreat. The third mainline was where the bulk of the savage fighting took place. After the first volley, the Continentals charged with bayonets, sending the redcoats back in confusion. Unfortunately, the 2nd Maryland regiment was inexperienced, fleeing without a shot. This opened the American line, although it was quickly closed as Washington's cavalry moved forward.

Nearly 600 yards behind the second line, the Continentals waited for an hour as they could see nothing but heard the roar of battle in the distance distinctly. They anticipated the British wave would not crash into them for a while, though surprisingly, the battle line was broken into six distinct elements that would arrive at different times.[131] The third line is more easily represented as it took place more orderly and in the open. The 33rd Regiment arrived first and was driven back by Continental infantry and artillery fire, while the 2nd Battalion of Guards crossed the vale, routing the 2nd Maryland.[132] Webster led the 33rd along with the Ansbach jaegers and Guards light infantry into a vale. While they charged uphill, it became obvious that Webster had overlooked the 1st Maryland on his right flank that poured devastating musket fire into his line, forcing the British to retreat.[133]

A wounded Brigadier General O'Hara personally led the 2nd battalion of Guards across the vale towards the American artillery and 2nd Maryland, forcing them to

[131] Ibid., p. 144.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Ibid., p. 145.

break.[134] The 1st Maryland poured musket fire into the Guards' left flank while Lieutenant Colonel William Washington and his dragoons attacked the Guards from the rear.[135] Washington's dragoon charge began to turn the tide. This action between "[T]he 1st Maryland and the 2nd Guards Battalion was the climactic moment of the battle. Two of the best, perhaps the finest, veteran battalions in the British and Continental armies were locked in a brief, bloody, hand-to-hand combat."[136] The British were giving ground just opposite the Court House itself. It appeared that they were beginning to lose momentum and might be forced to retreat. Cornwallis rode up, quickly seeing the danger. He knew that he was on the verge of defeat. He then directed a young Lieutenant, John McLeod, to fire his six-pounders loaded with grapeshot into the group of Americans. As mentioned earlier, the canard that Cornwallis ordered cannon grapeshot fired into the backs of his men while Brigadier O'Hara lay bleeding from multiple wounds on the ground pleading for him to stop is pure fiction concocted by Henry Lee and repeated by William Gilmore Simms in *The Life of Nathanael Greene, Major General of the Revolution* and reiterated subsequently in secondary sources to contemporary historians.[137] Babits and Howard argued that O'Hara nor Cornwallis ever allude to the event (though one might expect Cornwallis not to for obvious reasons). Simultaneously, Lee was not involved in the melee because he was engaged in a battle over a quarter of a mile away.[138] Stedman's account of the battle was more thorough and written over a decade later. In his extensive two-volume narrative of the American Revolution, he does not mention it either, which suggests that it was not commonly cited at the time or contained little truth. Stedman was very supportive of Cornwallis and would have gone to some length to address any disparaging depiction of his former commander or at least cast Cornwallis's actions in a more favorable light had he been aware of the allegations at the time. The fact that Stedman omits any reference to the event in his coverage of the battle suggests that it did not make an impression on eyewitnesses with whom he would have been better acquainted than Lee. However, Babits and Howard focus their attention on Lee, perhaps justifiably so.

[134] Ibid., p. 147
[135] Ibid., pp. 152-153.
[136] Ibid., p. 155.
[137] Davis, *The Cowpens-Guilford Courthouse Campaign,* pp. 162-164.
[138] Ibid., p. 162.

Greene witnessed the action, growing concerned about losing more of his best soldiers. He knew that his Continentals were invaluable. Despite his growing reliance on the militia, Continentals were the core of his army. He would not press the battle to lose more of his men. Greene saw from the field that there were many more mangled bodies with red uniforms than blue. He ordered a retreat. By now, it was late in the afternoon. The next day Greene knew that he had inflicted heavy losses upon the British. He wrote to Joseph Reed, "We were obligd [*sic*] to give up the ground and lost our artillery. But the enemy has been so soundly beaten, that they dare not move towards us."[139] As each side collected their dead and wounded under a flag of truce, Cornwallis sent Greene a note that he should surrender, given that he had abandoned the entirety of his cannon on the field of battle. Greene tersely replied, "I am ready to sell His Lordship another field at the same price."[140] The reality of British losses seemed to weigh heavily on Lord Cornwallis.

The result of the battle was a British victory. As Cornwallis had predicted, his highly trained force was sufficient, even when facing overwhelming numbers. Throughout the day, the fight could have gone either way. The British military was well known for using the bayonet, but it was useless in the dense woods and shrubs, as Cornwallis later admitted.[141] Riding around the battlefield that day, he was exposed to enemy fire on many occasions. Cornwallis was desperate for victory. Due to many wounded, he opted not to pursue Greene, later writing to a friend, Major General Phillips, in Virginia, "I am quite tired of marching about the country in quest of adventures."[142]

Guilford Courthouse was a pyrrhic British victory, although much like the famed Bunker Hill, it cost the British more soldiers than they could afford to replace. Greene's loss was significantly less, with only 79 killed, 184 wounded, with 885 missing (mostly North Carolinian militia who fled); 263 causalities out of his army of 4,400 soldiers

[139] Buchanan, *The Road to Guilford Courthouse*, p. 382.
[140] Davis, *The Cowpens-Guilford Courthouse Campaign*, p. 161
[141] In fact, after the battle the British reported that due to the dense brush, the bayonet was useless. See Robert Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause: The American Revolution 1763*-1789, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 490.
[142] As quoted in Ibid., p. 493.

physically involved in the battle.[143] However, Greene's reports are incomplete and largely gloss over militia numbers, suggesting that his losses were probably 15-20 percent higher than he reported.[144] In the end, of Cornwallis's 1,924 men,[145] 93 were killed, 413 wounded, and 26 missing, a total of 532 men with a 28 percent casualty rate.[146] These were the numbers listed in His Lordship's official report. However, O'Hara indicated privately that British losses were more significant. There is some validity to this argument, because strangely, a few days after returning from the battle, Cornwallis lists 397 wounded and 436 men sick.[147] Officially, Cornwallis suffered thirty-seven percent casualties, but the truth might have horrified all of London. In all, 184 British soldiers died on the battlefield or shortly after the battle. However, 833 men were suffering from various wounds a few days after the battle, totaling 1,017 men, or almost seventy percent. In contrast, the Americans had a mere six percent, although it was probably worse than reported, though unlikely more than ten percent. A few days after the battle, two battalions of the Guards Brigade had only one captain and five soldiers fit for duty.[148] It is not hard to see why Cornwallis wanted to paint a better picture for his superiors.

Nearly a month after the battle, Cornwallis wrote to Lord Germain claiming that he could not intercept Greene earlier due to "defective intelligence, bad roads, and the passage of many deep creeks and bridges destroyed by the enemy's light troops."[149] Back in London, even with the official lower casualty report, Cornwallis was severely criticized. Charles Fox announced to Parliament that "Another such victory would be the ruin of the British army." Horace Walpole derisively sneered, "Lord Cornwallis has conquered his troops out of shoes and provisions, and himself out of troops."[150] It is no

[143] Ibid.
[144] Babits & Howard, *Long, Obstinate, and Bloody*, p. 175.
[145] Stedman, *The History of the Origin, Progress, and Termination of the American War in Two Volumes*, II: p. 344. Stedman was actually at the Battle of Guilford Courthouse and on Cornwallis's staff. He indicates that the cavalry were not included in the total men as they were not involved in the battle. The AG rolls for the day reflected 1,445 present for duty.
[146] Babits & Howard, *Long, Obstinate, and Bloody*, p. 173.
[147] Davis, *The Cowpens-Guilford Courthouse Campaign*, p. 181.
[148] Piers Mackesy, *The War for America: 1775-1783* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), p. 407.
[149] As quoted in Babits & Howard, *Long, Obstinate, and Bloody, p.* 36.
[150] Davis, *The Cowpens-Guilford Courthouse Campaign*, p. 175.

wonder that the Earl tried to downplay any loses and errors in the campaign. Despite his friends and influence in London, they wanted a scapegoat. He must have realized that victory was illusory. His minor skirmishes around the Carolinas had reached a tipping point. He would have been better off falling back. The rules of eighteenth-century warfare proved unforgiving, with substantial losses.

Leaders of eighteenth-century armies were accustomed to casualty rates of roughly a third of the total troops engaged in battle which is a stark contrast from the military expectations today.[151] At the time, soldiers and equipment for armies were expensive and considered a resource that must be protected. Kings and ministers preferred that their generals win or lose a battle with minimal losses. British soldiers were significant investments. Soldiers typically signed up for life, not short-term enlistments of a year or two. Their experiences and training made them invaluable assets on the battlefield against raw troops. Most leaders disdained a victory that was purchased with a substantial loss of life. Lessons learned from Bunker Hill highlighted the need to remain tactically cautious, although Cornwallis allowed his anger to alter his reasonable caution.[152] British troops in America were becoming even more of a precious commodity. England had to field soldiers from India to the Caribbean, so those lost in America could not be easily replaced.

Guilford Courthouse was a tactical loss for America, although a strategic victory, which prompted the British to rethink their plan for controlling the south. Until the Battles of King's Mountain, Cowpens, and Guilford Courthouse, the series of British tactical victories appeared to portend a strategic win in the southern theater. These three battles reversed the tide for America. Washington praised General Nathanial Greene for his gallant retreat and race to the Dan River and his performance at Guilford. The six grueling weeks forged the Quaker's character in iron. He wrote to General Washington that he now felt confident meeting the British on the field of battle, although unusually and in a rare show of vanity, Greene wrote that he would never achieve a solid military reputation with a history of retreats.[153] He had become a confident leader who knew his capabilities. More importantly, he knew the abilities of

[151] O'Shaughnessy, *The Men Who Lost America*, p. 100.
[152] John Shy covers this issue well in Chapter Nine of *A People Numerous and Armed: Reflections on the Military Struggle for American Independence*, (New York: Oxford University Press), 1976.
[153] Davis, *The Cowpens-Guilford Courthouse Campaign*, p. 168.

his men, rebuilding their esteem, which was lost in many of the battles around the south up until that time. Greene continued to wage war against the British, including three significant battles from April to September 1781.

The British continued to maintain a base at Wilmington, North Carolina, until November 1781, conducting raids to remind them that they still maintained a footprint in the region. The British did not abandon the plan in the south wholesale, though it was not the focus of their efforts. Lord Germain's Americanization plan had lost its luster. The British would hold Augusta, Georgia, until June 1781, while the Battle of Yorktown (28 September – 19 October 1781) signaled the end. Nevertheless, the British held out in the southern states of Savannah until July 1782 and Charleston until December 1782, even while the Treaty of Paris was being drafted in November of 1782. However, it would not be signed until 3 September 1783.

Greene's use of a decentralized command structure and his ability to demonstrate patience and assuage the egos of partisan militia commanders allowed him to succeed and incorporate an existing fragmented system militia system. This allowed him to harass the British while gathering critical intelligence about the quickly changing terrain. Faced with the challenge of raising an army with southern leaders more interested in militia bounties than traditional Continentals, Greene rose to the occasion. He had to overcome his strong bias based on previous experience that the militia was unreliable. In a difficult situation, his communication with militia leaders proved invaluable during the campaign, with intelligence being the most crucial resource. His attention to detail and voluminous correspondences ensured that he was aware of all resources vital to his success and survival, such as boats, supplies, and forage. Greene honed his logistics understanding, ensuring that his men had food, clothing, and essential war materiel. He fought an irregular campaign with his regular army, marching through the day and into the night. It also helped that Morgan humiliated one of Cornwallis's most capable and trusted officers, Tarleton. Even more telling, the British recognized that Greene had pulled off a significant feat, masterfully leading his men through the Carolinas. Banastre Tarleton later wrote of the action,

> Owing to an excellent disposition, which was attended to with some fortunate contingencies, General Greene passed the whole Army over the river without their receiving any material determined from the King's

> troops. Every measure of the Americans, during their march from the Catawba to Virginia, was judiciously designed and vigorously executed.[154]

The result of the grueling chase was that Greene deceptively and deftly outmaneuvered Lord Cornwallis. Greene more efficiently learned the nuances of the terrain, the weather, and the unique river systems. This allowed him to recognize that equipment like boats would be indispensable. He also utilized his knowledge of supply to improve his logistics infrastructure, ensuring that he had adequate amounts staged or available to support his army as he moved through the region. Greene was a very flexible leader, adroitly adapting his tactics to anticipate the Earl at every turn. He was always mindful of the two principal elements of engagement, speed, and surprise, bidding his time until he had enough troops to confront General Cornwallis. Greene effectively drew out the campaign, reducing Cornwallis's army while his grew.

General Greene was a dedicated leader who was often the first to be up in the morning and one of the last to go to bed at night. His men observed his discipline firsthand. There were many tense days and sleepless nights in Greene's camp during February and March 1781. American officers knew Greene's habit of waking up early every morning to scout the area before his men got out of bed. Greene knew that the British could annihilate his small army at any moment. This would cost the patriots in ways beyond the loss of the last of the Continental Army in the south. This seemed to push him even harder. Greene adapted his tactics, rising to the occasion. There was a story told by Colonel John Greene (no relation), who was snoring loudly one evening. Greene woke him, asking him how he could be sleeping so soundly with the enemy so close. He reportedly responded, "Why General, I knew you were awake."[155] This story captured the feeling of the men serving under Nathanael Greene, illustrating his dedication and character during the campaign. Greene knew the importance of an army that was well-supplied and provisioned. This was always his top priority, which paid dividends for him throughout the long, arduous campaign. After he resolved his logistical issues, he focused on the detailed survey of the area to ensure that he was never surprised. Even minor mistakes could spell disaster for Greene. Greene often lectured his leaders on the "evils of civil war" and was aware of the implications if his

[154] Piecuch, "The Southern Theater: Britain's Last Chance for Victory, pp. 115-116.
[155] As quoted in Davis, *The Cowpens-Guilford Courthouse Campaign*, p. 140.

officers failed to control the men, even the loosely aligned militia when they foraged for supplies. If the men destroyed property and laid the land waste, the consequences would harm their cause.[156]

After the battle, General Cornwallis did his best to proclaim victory, though he knew that the Carolinas would be too costly to hold with the lackluster tory support he received. He learned a valuable lesson about the ability of a trained Continental army writing, "Such fighting I have not seen since God made me. The Americans fought like demons."[157] Cornwallis shifted his focus north to Yorktown, for which he is most widely known. On 25 April, he began moving towards Virginia, abandoning all hope of controlling the Carolinas. He would later admit to Lord George Germain that the loss of his light troops at the Battle of Cowpens drastically reduced his ability to collect intelligence. This loss hampered his pursuit of Greene. He had to utilize his regular regiments of the line, who were very traditional, and ended daily marches at dusk to pitch tents and resume the journey only the following day.[158]

Lord Cornwallis made mistakes from the beginning, ignoring his orders from Sir Clinton, whose priority was the security of South Carolina. Cornwallis had plans to invade North Carolina in a prolonged and orderly fashion, securing critical towns in the area before moving north towards Virginia. These plans were discarded when he learned of Tarleton's defeat at Cowpens. Revenge and anger clouded his judgment. He did not think much about his troops' support and mindlessly eliminated his supplies, counting on local tory support to sustain his army. Historian Robert Middlekauff captured Cornwallis's tough lessons well:

> Cornwallis confessed to feeling disappointment at the absence of loyalist support—the Carolinians neither joined his Army nor fed it willingly. Worse, they did not give him, or his successors, information about his enemy's movements. Instead, Carolinians ambushed his dispatch riders, attacked his supply trains, and wiped out the Tory forces that dared to show themselves.[159]

[156] Buchanan, *The Road to Guilford Courthouse*, p. 304.
[157] As quoted in Davis, *The Cowpens-Guilford Courthouse Campaign*, p. 171.
[158] Buchanan, *The Road to Guilford Courthouse*, p. 340.
[159] Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause*, p. 501.

Surprisingly, he never grasped these problems even as he struggled to sustain his army. He was a brilliant man who was blinded by arrogance and whose judgment was clouded by anger. Even when he learned from his quartermaster, Stedman, that supplies were scarce in the area, Lord Cornwallis did not adjust his strategy. The patriots were systematically capturing them. He continued his pursuit, following Greene through the eviscerated lands.

Cornwallis never attempted to modify his traditional tactics to better suit the terrain and be more in line with his adversary Greene who operated a flying column. Cornwallis remained wedded to fighting a conventional war, as he would have in the European countryside. He conducted his campaign just as he had learned at the academy at Turin, failing to recognize the need for change.[160] The rough trails, roads, and challenging rivers in the Carolinas, the terrain and situation, dictated a change. He never thought to eliminate the camp followers and women who significantly slowed his pursuit. He also continued to transport heavy, cumbersome wagons full of artillery. He acted as though his grand caravan were coursing on developed roads in Europe. His rash actions of eliminating supplies to speed up his army meant that the army had to forage in a land that could not sustain them. Only as a last resort did he mobilize O'Hara and split his army to form a mounted unit that could travel more quickly to isolate Greene's army. Despite all the rivers and heavy rains, he always acted after securing boats and recon areas to cross the rivers. He continually relied on flawed intelligence, never understanding that he could not count on loyalist support. He did not effectively utilize Tarleton's cavalry, which had implications for the grueling six-week chase through the Carolinas with both intelligence and forage availability. Had Cornwallis conducted a thorough survey of each area, he would have known about the availability of boats, as well as Greene's adroit use of them.

Although his emotions clouded his judgment in the weeks leading up to the battle, General Cornwallis was a capable commander. After the campaign, however, his painful lessons on the importance of supply and logistics did not immediately sink in. When he moved his army to Virginia, he should have recognized the value of controlling terrain to allow for ground movement and logistics support, rather than a plan that relied exclusively on the support of His Majesty's Navy. His actions at

[160] Davis, *The Cowpens-Guilford Courthouse Campaign*, p. 185.

Yorktown highlight another one of his significant shortfalls as a military leader. As historian Andrew O'Shaughnessy mentioned, "Cornwallis never indicated any appreciation for the importance of naval support and the perils of his situation in the event of an appearance of a larger enemy fleet." After the stunning defeat at Yorktown, Cornwallis's military career should have been ruined. The irony is that he returned to England a celebrated hero due to his political connections and influence in the government (as well as perfect timing).[161] Lord Frederick North, the Prime Minister of Great Britain (1770-1782), deferred most of the Strategy in North American to Lord George Germain, was removed from office by a vote of "no confidence," opening the door to Cornwallis's influential friends. Cornwallis was in London when Lord North left the government office. His Lordship was present as his friends took power. He had always been a favorite of King George III, who decided that Cornwallis was not responsible for Yorktown, awarding him a Governorship and command in Bengal in 1786.[162] He invaded and conducted campaigns, though, as historian John Buchanan notes, Cornwallis learned his lesson and never again burned "his entire baggage train."[163] He was successful and returned to England in 1793 as the 2nd Earl and awarded a marquessate and title of Master General of Ordnance, later becoming Lord Lieutenant of Ireland in 1798.[164] It seemed that throughout his life, Cornwallis always landed on his feet.

After Guilford Courthouse, Greene continued his campaign in South Carolina through September of 1781, remaining true to his creed, "We fight, get beat, rise and fight again."[165] He continued to lose in the Carolinas, but he was tenacious, perfecting the art of fighting, then disappearing to escape near-disasters. He helped win the war in the south without ever winning a battle. He would struggle to maintain the support of factious partisan leaders, attempting to placate them often to enlist their cooperation with his army and one another. Greene became almost as successful as Washington in assuaging militia leaders and their wounded egos. Late in the war, he signed personally for supplies for his soldiers, writing to the Continental Congress to correct the issue

[161] This was also true of Gage, the Howe brothers, Clinton, and Burgoyne who all enjoyed success careers after the war.
[162] Buchanan, *The Road to Guilford Courthouse,* p. *389.*
[163] O'Shaughnessy, *The Men Who Lost America*, p. 262.
[164] Buchanan, *The Road to Guilford Courthouse,* p. 390.
[165] As quoted in Ibid., p. 397.

several times, to no avail. This debt haunted him into retirement. He died, never achieving financial peace and stability for his family. His final chapter was tragic, given all his efforts fighting for the American cause.

The lives of Cornwallis and Greene, like their personalities, could not be more starkly contrasted. It says something of America as a country that men like Nathanael Greene could rise from a simple background and humble beginnings and go-to-toe with men like Cornwallis, members of the social elite best training and education, who never knew misfortune. Cornwallis was arrogant and allowed his emotions to dictate his actions. Not accustomed to defeat, his anger caused him to make rash decisions, almost losing his army. On the face of it, with the vast experience and education, Cornwallis should have anticipated a simple Quaker, defeating him. Cornwallis was a typical leader of his time and accustomed to reasoning as his peers would rather than thinking like a desperate enemy. Privileged leaders like Cornwallis are less admired. Many historians might be instantly drawn to the underdog—men like Nathanael Greene. Morgan and other partisan leaders would heavily influence Greene with his irregular tactics. Greene gradually realized that militia commanders were experts with the local terrain and irregular tactics that would distract the British. He used these local leaders to significant effect, allowing them to operate freely, with what we would call today, decentralized command. These units provided invaluable intelligence, supporting his main army. During the first few months of the campaign, the lessons he learned served him well during his tenure as leader of the Continental Army in the south.

Although the American victory at Yorktown eclipsed General Nathanael Greene's accomplishments in the southern theater, his contributions to the American Revolution are now more widely known. Greene captures the spirit of America. He was a simple man, a competent leader who approached problems with vigor, solving them in unique ways, always ready and willing to learn from subordinates. General Nathanael Greene taught his army and America an invaluable lesson about adaptability. He effectively adapted the use of militia to augment the Continental army. Despite his frustration over using militia, Greene set aside his bias and integrated very prickly partisan leaders into his army, enhancing the fractured command structure with great effect. Although he often found militia leaders exasperating, Greene learned that they were indispensable to his success and the survival of the Continental Army as it

Raced to the Dan to evade British efforts to destroy the last remnant of the American army in the south. Although Greene was frustrated with his efforts to achieve tactical success, his adaptive approach led the Continental army to achieve a strategic victory in the southern states.

Nathanael Greene restored confidence to the Continental soldiers. As the noted military historian Burke Davis wrote:

> An American army had, at last, come to look upon the enemy without fear because it was no longer awed by superior reputation, by allegedly superior arms, training, tactics, uniforms, and a long tradition of military superiority.[166]

Greene was never a dashing or elegant man like General Washington or William, Lord Stirling, Alexander. After the Race-to-the-Dan, Greene's sentiments towards militia pivoted 180 degrees from the inception of the American Revolution when he first wrote his brother Jacob in 1776. He said of militiamen who come and go every month; "A military force established upon such principles defeats itself. People coming from a home with all the tender feelings of domestic life are not sufficiently fortified with natural courage to stand the shocking scenes of war."[167] Greene's thoughts about militia and war itself would transform between 1776 and 1780. The evolution of his ideas and strategic insights would continue to grow and culminated during the Battle of Guilford Courthouse. Greene was crucial to the Continental army, representing the best of the many men who served, whose names were barely recognized until recently. The Battles of Cowpens and Guilford Courthouse shook the foundation of the professional British army steeped in aristocratic military traditions. Cornwallis might have publicly claimed victory, but deep down knew that a simple Quaker had out-Generaled him.

[166] Davis, *The Cowpens-Guilford Courthouse Campaign*, p. 195.
[167] As quoted in John Buchanan, "We must endeavor to keep up a Partizan War," p. 119.

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