

# Guilford Courthouse

NATIONAL MILITARY PARK • NORTH CAROLINA



*Practice Safety  
Enjoy Your Visit*



*On March 15, 1781, Britain's Earl Cornwallis won a costly victory over Gen. Nathanael Greene's American forces at Guilford Courthouse. So costly was this victory that the weakened British army soon marched off to Yorktown and final surrender.*

In 1780, as the Revolution dragged into its fifth year, British troops seized Charleston. Already they occupied Savannah and much of Georgia. Now they would move into the Carolina interior, rally Loyalists to their standard, pacify the countryside, and then march into Virginia. Once they secured the southern colonies, the British could strike northward to crush the rebellion. From Charleston, Cornwallis' troops moved north to Guilford Courthouse, to find Green's forces awaiting them.

Stationing his American army in three separate lines, Greene ordered the first two—mostly

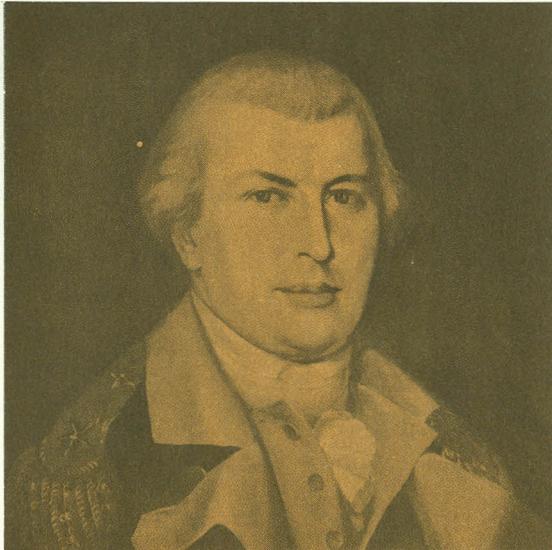
untrained North Carolina and Virginia militia—to fire on the battle-wise British army and fall back behind the trained regular Continental troops of the third and last line. Attacking this third line, the British drove off one American regiment. Then the veteran First Maryland mounted a bayonet charge, supported by Lt. Col. William Washington's cavalry. With the battle going against him, Cornwallis ordered his cannon to fire into the mixed American and British, thus halting the Continental counterattack.

The Americans withdrew, allowing the British to claim success. Yet the winner suffered so severely that Charles James Fox, a British statesman, declared, "Another such victory will ruin the British Army." Having lost a fourth of his army, Cornwallis withdrew to Wilmington, and from there went on to Yorktown and eventual surrender.

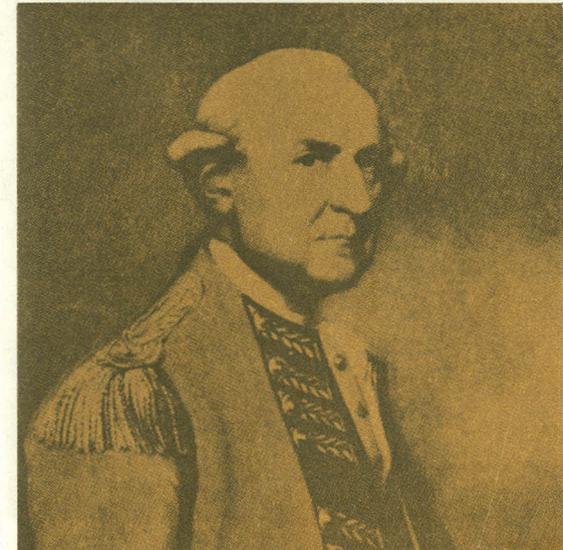
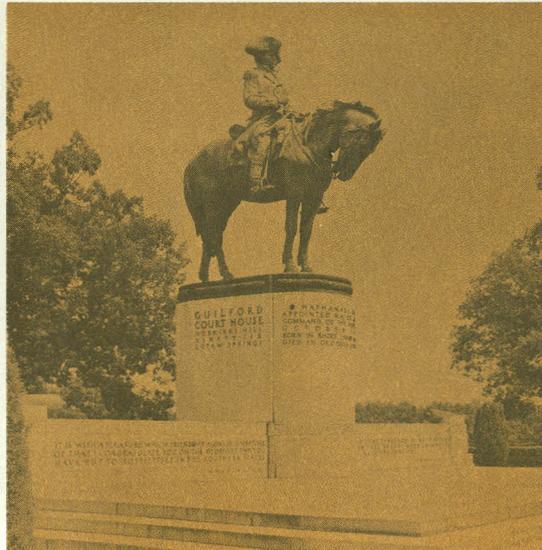
## ABOUT YOUR VISIT

In the visitor center, located at the site of the American Second Line, museum exhibits and an audiovisual program explain the battle. Groups can receive special services by making advance arrangements with the superintendent. A 40-page illustrated handbook about the Battle of Guilford Courthouse can be purchased at the park, or from the Superintendent of Documents, Washington, DC 20402, for 35 cents.

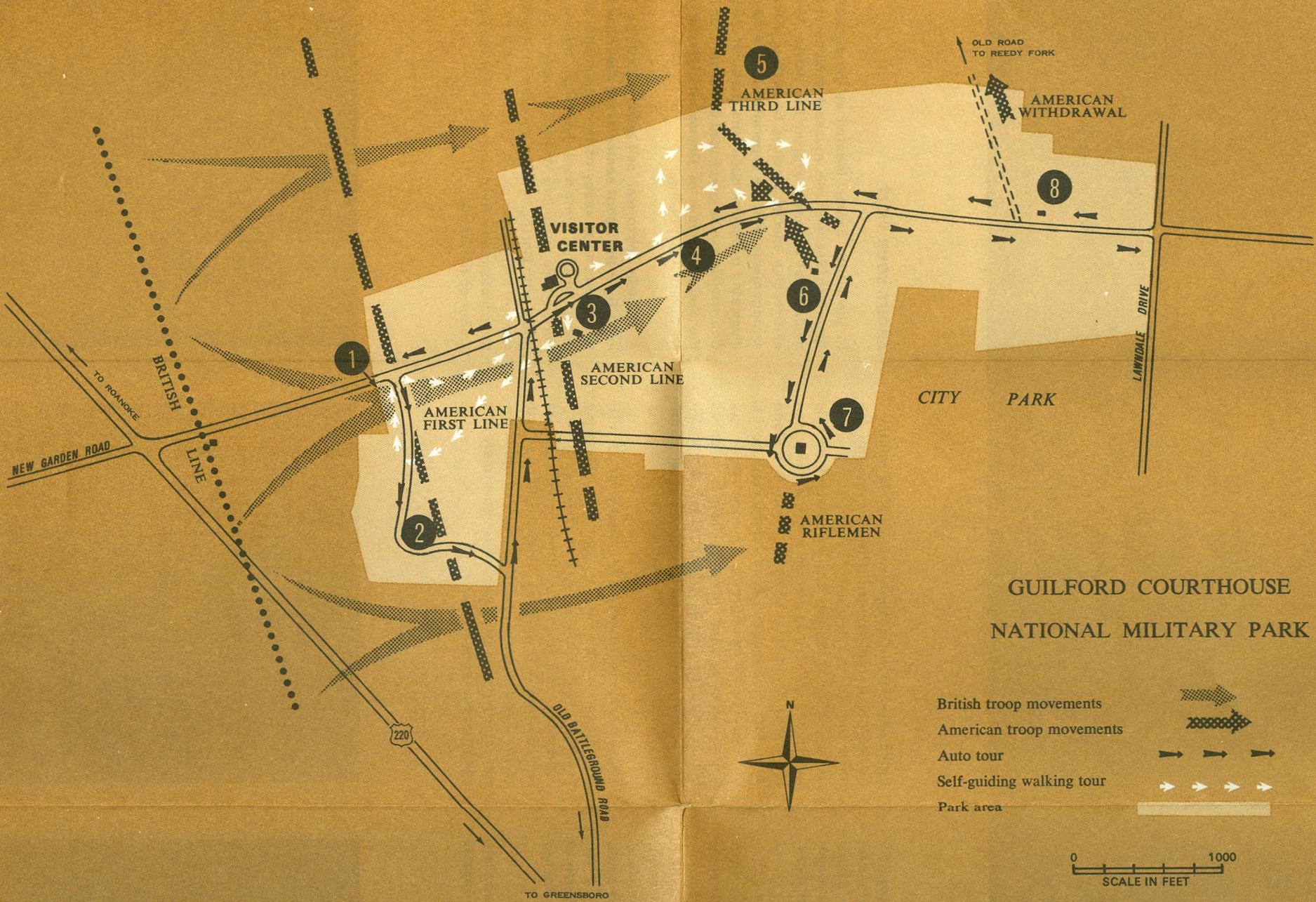
A 1/2-mile historical self-guiding walking trail leads from the visitor center to the American First Line area and to many of the monuments in the park. Several prominent historical figures are buried here, including William Hooper and John Penn, both North Carolina signers of the Declaration of Independence. A similar trail, .08 mile long, leads to the Third Line—scene of the fiercest action of the battle.



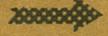
Nathanael Greene

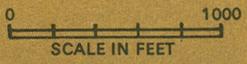


Lord Charles Cornwallis



**GUILFORD COURTHOUSE  
NATIONAL MILITARY PARK**

- British troop movements 
- American troop movements 
- Auto tour 
- Self-guiding walking tour 
- Park area 



## A TOUR OF THE BATTLEFIELD

Begin the self-guiding auto tour at the visitor center. Exhibits and signs identify the battlefield's historic sites.

- 1. American First Line.** To your right, raw North Carolina militiamen rested their flintlocks on a rail fence and intently peered across the open field. Somewhere beyond the far woods the British were coming. General Green ordered the militiamen to fire two volleys; then, said he, they could fall back. About 1:30 p.m. the Carolinians saw a colorful motion in the trees. It was Cornwallis' men forming for battle. Then, a few rounds from the Royal Artillery, and the mass of infantry came out of the trees at a quickstep. On they came, in battleworn red, blue, and green uniforms, across the plowed field. The line halted and fired a volley, and a thousand and more muskets erupted in one great roar. Again they came on, bayonets outthrust, in nearly perfect alignment. Some of the Carolinians managed to get off their two rounds before the bayonets crossed the fence.
- 2. Along the Front Line of Battle.** Any defense line's flank is a position of danger; it must be manned by good troops. Here, holding the left of the American first line, stood the veteran light infantry and cavalry of "Light-horse" Harry Lee's Legion. Alongside were William Campbell's tough Virginia riflemen

who had helped bring the British to bay at King's Mountain. Once more, their galling fire punished the enemy. As Lee's and Campbell's men fell back, still fighting stubbornly, they drew after them troops that Cornwallis could well have used elsewhere. For the rest of the battle they fought their own, almost separate fight.

- 3. American Second Line.** Virginia militiamen stood in this heavy timber, manning the second line. Relatively untrained, they were nevertheless stiffened by veteran officers and some old soldiers. They could not hold their position in the face of a bayonet attack, but they made the British pay a high price for the ground they took.
- 4. Royal Artillery.** As the Virginians fell back, Lt. John McLeod, of the Royal Artillery, brought his two guns to this position. Opening another stage of the battle, McLeod's guns would become a decisive factor in the last part of the engagement.
- 5. American Third Line.** Stationed at the far edge of this field, then considerably larger, was the third American line, composed of Continental troops—American regular army soldiers. Their story is one of repulsing a British attack, counterattacking, repulsing still another attack, and counterattacking a second time with infantry and cavalry. The

final counterattack became a grim struggle with bayonet and saber, ended by McLeod's artillerymen firing into the melee. Still the fighting continued until Greene ordered the Americans to disengage.

- 6. Start of the American Cavalry Charge.** From here Lt. Col. William Washington's cavalry launched its sweep against the attacking British. The monument honors Peter Francisco, probably the most famous private in the Revolutionary army. Perhaps an orphan, perhaps a child kidnapped from a wealthy home in Spain or Portugal, he was undoubtedly an immensely strong young giant. Tradition has it that in this charge, while wielding a sword large enough to do justice to a Crusader, he cut down 11 British soldiers.
- 7. Last Shots by the American Riflemen.** Near here Lee's and Campbell's men, cut off from the main encounter, ended their fight, firing the last shots of the battle.
- 8. Site of Guilford Courthouse.** In many parts of the rural South there were few towns away from the navigable rivers. County authorities, needing a seat of government, would pick a central location and there build a courthouse. The courthouses, and the hamlets that sometimes grew up around them, were known by the county names; thus Guilford Courthouse, the courthouse for Guilford County.

## **ADMINISTRATION**

Guilford Courthouse National Military Park is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is Box 9334, Plaza Station, Greensboro, NC 27408, is in immediate charge.

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has basic responsibilities for water, fish, wildlife, mineral, land, park, and recreational resources. Indian and Territorial affairs are other major concerns of America's "Department of Natural Resources." The Department works to assure the wisest choice in managing all our resources so each will make its full contribution to a better United States—now and in the future.

**U. S. Department of the Interior**

**National Park Service**