



The morning of March 15, 1781, was clear and cold. A light frost had disappeared under the first rays of the Sun, but the ground underfoot was still spongy from winter rains and snows. In the damp woods west of Guilford Courthouse, hub of an isolated little farming community on the main road through North Carolina, some 4,400 American troops, in all kinds of uniforms and country clothes, waited for battle.

It was a long, suspenseful morning. About 12:30 the enemy—some of the best regiments of His Majesty George III—in campaign-worn, faded columns of crimson, blue, and green, marched into sight where the road from Salisbury emerged from woods into a clearing. When the Americans opened fire on them from two cannons astride the road, an engagement opened that lasted more than two hours—and greatly hastened the end of the war. The generals who brought it to pass were well-matched. Both were energetic, talented, and experienced. But the one who chose the ground lost the day—and the one who kept the field lost the war.

The ground had been chosen by Nathanael Greene, commanding general of the Continental Army's Southern Department. He was an ironmaster by trade, self-taught in the art of war. His opponent, Charles, Earl Cornwallis, now coolly deploying his troops, was a scion of English nobility, a professional soldier and every inch an aristocrat.

A basic shift in England's strategy for suppressing the American rebellion had brought both men from com-

mands in the northern colonies to this field. By 1778 it was apparent to the British high command that the war was stalemated. The rebellion was continuing and even growing, and the rebels had made an alliance with France. In a complete turnabout of military policy, the British ordered the Army to break off the war in the North and throw its full force into a campaign to retake the South. Such a campaign had been tried in 1776 and failed. But, by late 1780, both Georgia and South Carolina were in British hands, and Cornwallis was ready to drive northward through the Carolinas into Virginia. He was set back in October when backwoods militia wiped out his left wing at Kings Mountain. He fell back temporarily to a base at Winnsboro, but by the time Greene arrived in Charlotte, N.C., in December to take over what was left of the American forces in the South, Cornwallis was poised to resume his thrust northward.

Greene was too weak to come to grips with Cornwallis. Hoping to lead his adversary to scatter his superior strength, thus securing for himself an undisturbed encampment and time to find recruits and subsistence, Greene split his small army. He moved its main body southeast to Cheraw, S.C., on Cornwallis's right flank and sent Gen. Daniel Morgan with 600 men westward to threaten his enemy's left. Greene's risky stratagem succeeded. Cornwallis divided his force into three parts. One he positioned at Camden to watch Greene. Another, under Banastre Tarleton, he sent to attack Morgan. He himself resumed his original course toward North Carolina. It was January 24, 1781, when Greene learned that Morgan had

chopped up Tarleton's troops on January 17 at the Cowpens in western South Carolina. Recognizing that Cornwallis would try not only to destroy Morgan but also place himself between Greene and Virginia, whence he knew Greene expected fresh troops, Greene ordered all his forces to join at Guilford Courthouse for a general withdrawal into Virginia.

Through rain and snow, Greene led his foe a bewildering chase. Cornwallis burned most of his baggage to speed his pursuit, but at the end of three torturous weeks, he found Greene safely beyond the swollen Dan River in possession of all his boats and he himself worn down, hungry, and ill-equipped, 230 miles from his base at Winnsboro. Disconsolately he turned back to Hillsborough, N.C., hoping to raise reinforcements among the loyalists of the region. A few days later, reinforced by Virginia militia, Greene recrossed the Dan. For three more weeks, the armies sparred, seldom more than 20 miles apart, their detachments skirmishing regularly. Cornwallis hungered for a general action, but Greene, anticipating additional forces, bided his time. By March 14, with the arrival of new troops, he was ready to attack.

Greene spent an uneasy night worrying that rain might fall and render his muskets useless or that Cornwallis (camped on Deep River 12 miles away) might attack in the night and demoralize his militia. But when the morning of

the 15th dawned quiet and clear, Greene, learning of the British approach, laid down his lines of battle.

The courthouse at Guilford stood alone in a clearing by the "Great Road" (New Garden Road). From it the road sloped westward through woodlands of oak and other hardwoods to Little Horsepen Creek, a mile away. Beyond the creek it disappeared in dense timber. On the near side of the creek, on both sides of the road, lay cornfields a quarter-mile deep, their upper boundaries marked by a zig-zag rail fence. Cornwallis would have to come east on the road to the creek and up through the fields. Behind the fence, backed against the woods, Greene placed the center of a half-mile-wide line of North Carolina militia with skilled rifle companies, Delaware regulars, and cavalry on its wings. In the road he placed two 6-pounders. To the rear of this line, on a slight knoll within the woods, he formed a second line of Virginia militia. About 500 yards behind this line, on an open hill in front of the courthouse, he placed his crack troops, Continentals from Virginia and Maryland, in a large V, with his two remaining field pieces in the center.

The 1st Marylanders were some of the best troops in the Continental Army. They were tough, disciplined, and led by good officers. The private soldier loading his musket at left wears regimental dress.

Drawings by Don Troiani

A British Victory Dearly Bought

The Sun had begun to slant westward when the British advanced from the woods and approached the creek. The fieldpieces in Greene's front line opened fire. For 30 minutes the British answered with their guns. Then, according to plan, Greene's artillery galloped their guns to the rear. By then the enemy ranks were moving forward. Drums snapping, bagpipes skirting, bayonets glinting, they came at a measured pace across the cornfields toward the rail fence on which a thousand American guns rested. When they were 150 yards from the fence, the militia opened its first crashing round of fire. The British line, with great holes torn in it, staggered but re-formed and continued uphill, stepping over its dead. At musket range, the redcoats delivered a volley, gave a huzza, and rushed at the North Carolinians with leveled bayonets. The Carolinians had been told they might fall back after delivering two rounds and leave the engagement to the second and third lines. Some of the militia got off another round, but many broke and fled, flinging away their weapons. The American flanks held longer, and, as Cornwallis threw regiments against them, separate combats drifted far into the woods.

With the American flanks driven aside, the re-formed British ranks strode into the woods to engage Greene's



Charles, Earl Cornwallis, short, heavyset, and also afflicted with a bad eye, was 42 in the spring of 1781. Though sympathetic with American political thought, he loyally volunteered for service in America in 1775 and fought with distinction in the North. Adept at politics, he was able by 1781 to ignore his commander in chief's wishes and propose to London war plans of his own. His soldiers, saw him as brave, just, and compassionate. National Portrait Gallery, London

second line. In the heavy underbrush, their files were broken, their bayonets of little use in the tangled surroundings. Fighting savagely, the redcoats drove through to Greene's last line. There, in cleared fields, the action swayed back and forth, and there, for the first time that afternoon, Greene's cavalry came slashing into the fight. Until now Cornwallis had had the best of it, but suddenly he saw he was checked and in danger of defeat. Attacked from the front and flank by infantry and cavalry, he directed his artillery to fire grapeshot into the American horsemen. This was a difficult decision, knowing that some of his best troops would be trapped in the indiscriminate fire. His cannon fire did its work: the American cavalry charge was checked, the infantry driven back. Then more British units poured from the woods and there was fighting close in. Greene had lost his fieldpieces to the enemy when he got word British infantrymen were working around to his rear. By now he could see that the tide was turning against him. He ordered his regiments to disengage. They withdrew "leisurely" from the smoky field, covered by a skillful rearguard.

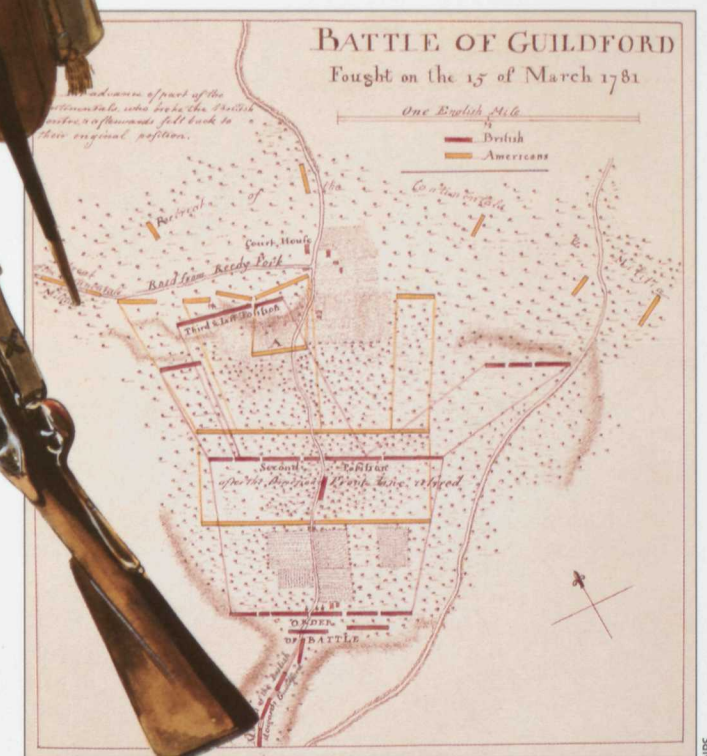
As the afternoon turned sharply cold and a storm moved in, Greene marched toward an old camp 15 miles away. Chilled to the bone, hungry, and exhausted, Greene re-

viewed the events of the day with conflicting emotions. He was disgusted by the panic of the Carolinians but proud of the way his army as a whole had stood against the disciplined British veterans. He was pleased that his regulars had not run and that Cornwallis had not dared a close pursuit. But as contests at arms are measured, no matter how savagely his army had fought, he knew he had suffered a defeat.

In camp he discovered that he had been more successful than he had dared hope. His losses were relatively light, while those of Cornwallis were overwhelming. This view was confirmed when, a few days later, Cornwallis began a painful retreat toward Wilmington on the North Carolina coast.

Greene for a short time shadowed him, before making the crucial decision to move southward and reconquer South Carolina and Georgia. Cornwallis did not follow him. Instead, still obsessed that a conquest of Virginia would assure the fall of all the States to the south, he convinced himself that his garrisons strung across South Carolina could handle the wily Rhode Islander. In April he obstinately set out again for Virginia. He hoped that Greene would be drawn after him. Aware that American troops were assembling in Virginia, Greene left it to them to confront Cornwallis.

These two decisions—Greene's for South Carolina and Cornwallis's for Virginia—set the stage for the final collapse of British power in the South. Greene, using hard-hitting local partisans, brilliantly regained South Carolina in the ensuing months. Cornwallis, committed to an unsonorous operation, fought through a hapless summer that ended with his surrender at Yorktown, October 19, 1781—seven months after his "victory" at Guilford. Although the war technically dragged on until 1783, its outcome was settled when Nathanael Greene's great adversary in the Carolinas surrendered in Virginia.



This map, sketched shortly after the battle by a British engineer, was submitted with Cornwallis's reports to his commander, Sir Henry Clinton. It clearly shows Greene's advantages of terrain and position. The American first line—held by militia—looked across cleared fields. Behind them 350 yards, in dense forest discouraging alike to cav-

alry and infantry formations, stood a second line of Virginia militia. Five hundred yards farther on, the advancing British ran into Greene's Continentals deployed along the brow of a hill to the left of the New Garden Road. Although knowing little about his foe's numbers or deployment, Cornwallis nevertheless chose to attack.



Nathanael Greene, a Rhode Island Quaker, proved himself an able, aggressive, and cunning soldier. He was robust and commanding in appearance, though he walked with a tiring limp, struggled against asthma, and suffered from a recurrent eye infection due to a smallpox inoculation when a youth. He was 38 in the fall of 1780 when George Washington handpicked him for command in the South. Independence National Historical Park

Touring the Battlefield

The best way to see the park is by taking the following self-guiding auto/bicycle tour traced on the map below. From the visitor center walk to Stop 1, then take the 2¼-mile driving road around the park. Allow about an hour for the tour, depending on your interests. Foot trails at the stops lead to many features you would otherwise miss. Include Tannenbaum Historic Park, part of the battle's first line action, in your visit.

For Safety's Sake: Use caution driving the tour road. Watch for bicycles and cross carefully at intersections of Old Battleground Road. Do not climb on cannons or monuments. Pets must be leashed and attended at all times.

1. American First Line On both sides of New Garden Road, about 150 yards away, were more than 1,000 North Carolina militiamen divided into two brigades. They held a position behind a rail fence overlooking three muddy farm fields. Though Greene knew these untested citizen-soldiers were no match for veteran redcoats, he hoped they would get off a few shots each and at least slow the British attack. But when the British rushed forward after taking the first American fire, part of Eaton's brigade on the right of the road fled, beginning a panic that quickly spread down the line.

2. Fragmented Attack As the rest of the first line dissolved into the woods behind, some of the North Carolinians in Butler's brigade on the American left joined with the forces of "Light-horse Harry" Lee and William Campbell. These units withdrew to the southeast taking two of Cornwallis's regiments with them.



This monument marks the graves of William Hooper and John Penn, two of the state's signers of the Declaration. Hooper headed North Carolina's delegation to the Continental Congress from 1774-77. Penn served in Congress from 1775-1780 and later on North Carolina's Board of War, which helped supply the state's militia.

3. Sustained Firefight Two brigades of Virginia militia waited in the deep forest behind the first line. Gen. Edward Stevens, south of the road, and Gen. Robert Lawson, holding the line north of the road, kept up a long fight in the woods until the British finally broke through to the third line. A foot trail leads to the Greene Monument along the line that Stevens's Virginians defended.

4. Expanding Battle The monument to Maj. Joseph Winston honors those Surry County riflemen who fought stubbornly under Lee and Campbell on the American left. As Tarleton's cavalry ended this separate fight far to the southeast, one of Winston's men, Richard Taliaferro, was shot; he may have been the last American

soldier killed in the battle. Winston and a fellow soldier, Jesse Franklin, are buried nearby.

5. Battlefield Preservation The preservation of the Guilford Courthouse battlefield began in 1887 by David Schenck and the Guilford Battle Ground Company. Using information then available, they erected memorials and marked battlefield locations. Since then, extensive research and technology, providing a wealth of new information, have been used to correct battlefield locations and enhance historical interpretation. The 1909 monument to the American cavalry specifically honors the service of the legendary Peter Francisco, William Washington, and the Marquis de Bregigny, a French volunteer fighting for American independence.



In battle, drums conveyed orders and signals to the infantry. This drum, donated by the local DAR, was carried by Luther W. Clark in the battle. It is part of the park's collection and, along with other artifacts of the battle and the war, is on exhibit at the park. Photograph courtesy of NPS Museum Management Program



The Turner Monument pays tribute to Kerrenhappuch Norman Turner. One of her sons was badly wounded in the battle, and she is said to have ridden on horseback from her home in Maryland to Guilford Courthouse to nurse him back to health. The statue shows her holding a cup and towel, her tools of healing.

6. Guilford Courthouse and the Third Line The battle took its name from the first county courthouse built in 1775 on the brow of a hill near the "Great Salisbury Wagon Road" (New Garden Road). President George Washington visited here in 1791. The community began its decline in 1808 when the decision was made to move the county seat six miles south. Nothing remains of either the small wood-frame building standing here in 1781 or the town that was later named "Martinville."

The trail leads to the hillside position held by the southern flank of Greene's Continentals. British units, farther to the north, were the first to assault this line. In the low ground in front of this position, part of connected fields that half-cir-

led this area in 1781, British Guards and grenadiers clashed with the veteran 1st Maryland and William Washington's cavalry. On the opposite side, Cornwallis's order to his artillery to fire into the American horsemen stopped them but inflicted casualties on his own Guards.

7. The British Soldier at Guilford Courthouse Frequent firefights in the woods and gullies slowed the British army as it fought its way toward the American Third Line. Trails take you to several monuments, including one honoring a British officer killed in the third line fighting. Other trails lead to the historic New Garden Road and the American Third Line.

8. Greene Monument The trail at this stop leads to the Greene Monument, the most impressive one in the park. The historic New Garden Road, the axis of the battle, divided the Virginia militia that held the woods on the American Second Line. On this side of the road British Gen. James Webster's infantry struck Gen. Robert Lawson's brigade, breaking through after turning its northern flank.

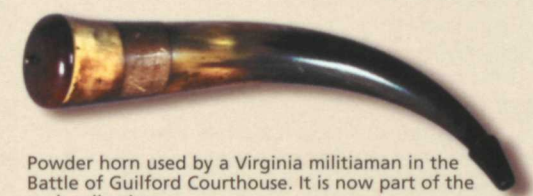
Tannenbaum Historic Park This Greensboro Parks and Recreation site on New Garden Road preserves a portion of Joseph Hoskins's farmstead, where Cornwallis's troops formed for battle. Ironically, Hoskins had left Pennsylvania after his farm suffered damages during the Philadelphia campaign. Exhibits in the Colonial Heritage Center and historic buildings depict life before, during, and after the Battle of Guilford Courthouse.

About Your Visit Guilford Courthouse National Military Park is six miles north of downtown Greensboro, N.C., off U.S. 220 on New Garden Road. The visitor center, near the American First Line, has information, exhibits, a half-hour film on the battle, an animated battle map program, and a Revolutionary War bookstore. Ask about special activities and seasonal programs; groups should contact the park in advance. Follow the signs for self-guiding tours by car, bicycle, or on foot. A narrated auto tour of the battlefield is also available for sale in the bookstore. West of the park, Tannenbaum Historic Park has historic buildings and exhibits on civilian life at the time of the battle.

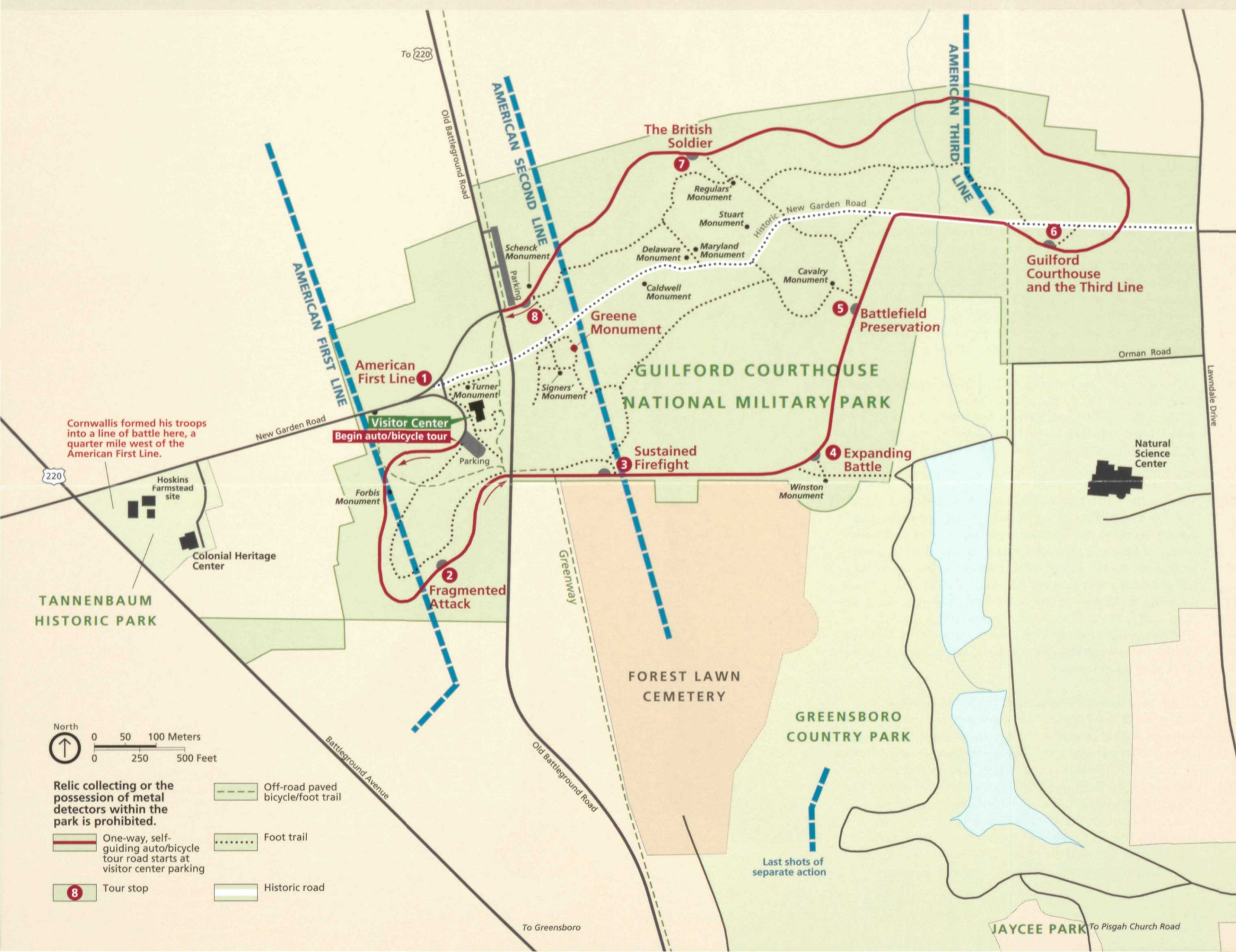
For More Information Guilford Courthouse National Military Park 2332 New Garden Road Greensboro, NC 27410 336-288-1776 www.nps.gov/guco

Guilford Courthouse National Military Park is one of more than 380 parks in the National Park System. The National Park Service cares for these special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage. Visit www.nps.gov to learn more about parks and National Park Service programs in America's communities.

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Powder horn used by a Virginia militiaman in the Battle of Guilford Courthouse. It is now part of the park collection. Photograph courtesy of NPS Museum Management Program



"The battle was long, obstinate, and bloody. We were obliged to give up the ground and lost our artillery, but the enemy have been so soundly beaten that they dare not move towards us since the action, notwithstanding we lay within ten miles of him for two days. Except the ground and the artillery, they have gained no advantage. On the contrary, they are little short of being ruined."

—Nathanael Greene

GUILFORD COURTHOUSE
HOBKIRKS HILL
NINETEEN-SIX
EUTAW SPRINGS

NATHANAEL GREENE
APPOINTED MAJOR GENERAL
COMMAND OF THE ARMY
OCTOBER 1781
BORN IN RHODE ISLAND
DIED IN GEORGIA

The large equestrian statue of Nathanael Greene near tour stop 8 is a fitting monument to the strategist of the Southern Campaign. As early as 1848 local citizens were thinking of raising a monument to Greene's memory. Congress appropriated money for a monument in 1911. The commission went to Francis H. Packer, a student of Augustus Saint-Gaudens, the American realist. The monument was unveiled on July 3, 1915. Photograph by Griffin-Lusk Studios