



Daniel Morgan was trying to elude a British trap when he marched his army onto this field on the afternoon of January 16, 1781. That morning, as his men cooked breakfast in camp on Thicketty Creek, scouts brought news that Banastre Tarleton had crossed the Pacolet River, six miles south, and was coming up fast. Morgan broke camp immediately and ordered his soldiers down the road. Their destination: the Cowpens, a frontier pasturing ground on the road to a ford across the Broad River six miles away. Morgan was in a precarious position. If he crossed the river, most of his militia would probably desert him. If Tarleton caught the Americans on the road or astride the river, they could all be cut down. Morgan chose to stand and fight, and the terrain at the Cowpens offered him some advantages.

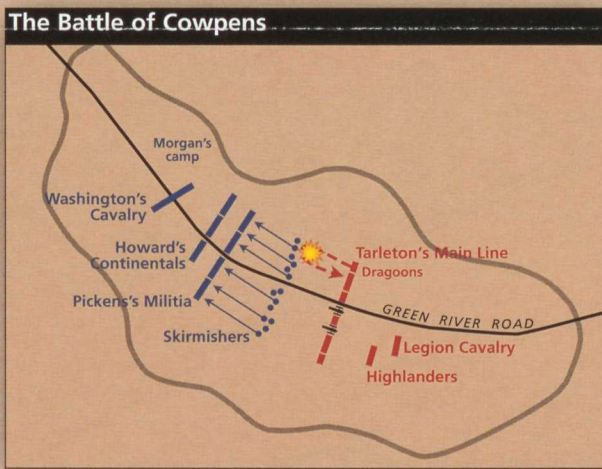
Daniel Morgan was a self-made man. Before he was 20 he was hauling freight on poorly defined roads over the mountains of Virginia. During the French and Indian War he served as a teamster in the British army and accompanied Gen. Edward Braddock's ill-fated 1755 expedition against Fort Duquesne. In 1756 he struck a British officer and was sentenced to 500 lashes with a cat-o'-nine tails, a punishment that had killed lesser men. He later claimed that the British still owed him one lash. When the Revolutionary War began, he led a unit of Virginia sharpshooters to Boston, where they joined the Continental Army and, in the winter of 1775, took part in an abortive attack on Quebec. Captured and exchanged, Morgan recruited another unit of Virginia sharpshooters and joined Maj. Gen. Horatio Gates's army in time to play a decisive role in winning the two battles of Saratoga on September 19 and October 7, 1777. In July 1779, bothered by rheumatism and sciatica, he took a leave of absence and returned to Virginia.

Morgan rejoined the army in September 1780 after Gates, who had been given command of Continental forces in the South, suffered a disastrous defeat at Camden, S.C. Promoted to brigadier general, Morgan was commanding a corps of light troops when Maj. Gen. Nathanael Greene replaced Gates in early December and set about recovering American military fortunes. Greene's strategy was to divide his own army and force the British to split theirs. To accomplish this, he sent Morgan with a detachment known as the "flying army" into western South Carolina to operate on the British left flank and rear, threatening their outposts and giving "protection to that part of the country and to spirit up the people."

To remove the threat that Morgan's presence created, the British commander in the South, Maj. Gen. Charles Cornwallis, sent Banastre Tarleton with the British Legion and some of his best light troops. Tarleton, the son of a British merchant, had purchased his commission in the British Army. The Legion was known for its brutality in cutting down unarmed or fleeing soldiers. Tarleton himself was widely hated in South Carolina, having earned the nickname "Bloody Tarleton" after his troops butchered Col. Abraham Buford's surrendered Continentals at Waxhaws in May 1780. When Cornwallis sent his 26-year-old cavalryman after Morgan, he helped set the stage for a confrontation between two of the Revolutionary War's most colorful commanders.

Morgan knew that Tarleton's force was approximately double his own. To help even the odds, he sent for militia units from South Carolina, North Carolina, and Georgia—men who had fought at Musgrove's Mill, Kings Mountain, Kettle Creek, and Williamson's Plantation, men who had fought in fierce hand-to-hand combat with Indians to protect their homes. These were men of great courage and experience, but Morgan knew they were no match for British battle tactics. The rifles they carried would not mount a bayonet, making them defenseless in the face of a bayonet attack or a mounted charge by dragoons with slashing sabers. Their strength lay in their prowess with their rifle, a weapon of far greater range and, in their hands, deadlier and more accurate than the British muskets. Morgan kept this in mind as he devised a plan of battle to match the strengths of his men and the terrain.

Morgan chose to fight in an open wood on ground that sloped gently toward the south, the direction from which the British would approach. At the far end of the field were two low crests separated by a wide swale. A dirt road curved through the area. Morgan formed his troops in three lines straddling the road. In the front line he placed 315 sharpshooters in small groups. Their job: slow Tarleton's advance with well-aimed fire, then fall back. A hundred fifty yards behind the skirmishers he put the Carolina and Georgia militia, under Andrew Pickens. Morgan asked them for two volleys at a killing distance, and then they were free to file off the field. About 150 yards behind Pickens, stretching along the forward crest, were his crack Maryland and Delaware Continentals and veteran Virginia militia, about 600 men commanded by John Eager Howard.



Behind that crest, he stationed the cavalry, 125 men under William Washington, with orders to protect the militia and be ready to ride into the fight.

Just before dawn the British came into full view of the Americans. After sending cavalry forward to drive in the skirmishers, Tarleton formed his line of battle—infantry astride the road; on each flank, 50 dragoons; in reserve, a brigade of Highlanders and 200 cavalry. It was still dark when Tarleton started his men toward the American line 400 yards away. As the British came within range, the militia delivered a deadly fire, dropping two-thirds of the officers, then funneled back through the Continental

line. The dragoons on the British right pursued the militia for a ways but were driven back in a fierce charge by Washington's cavalry.

The British surged onto the third line, and the fighting became pitched. When the advance faltered, Tarleton ordered up the Highlanders, who soon threatened to outflank the American right. At this point began a confused tangle of events that soon brought the fighting to a dramatic conclusion. When Howard ordered his right to fall back and form a new front, the order was misinterpreted and the whole line began to retreat.

Seeing this maneuver, Morgan rode up and chose new ground for the Continentals to rally on. Reaching that point, they faced about and fired point-blank at the closing redcoats, then plunged into the staggered ranks with bayonets. As this was happening, Washington's cavalry rode again into the swirling fight, while on the British left, Pickens's militia opened a galling fire on the dragoons and Highlanders. British resistance quickly collapsed. A few dragoons rallied to Tarleton, but they could do nothing effective and followed the Legion cavalry, which never got into the fight, in a pell-mell dash off the field.

The battle was over in an hour. British losses were staggering: 190 dead, more than 200 wounded, and nearly 600 captured. Also captured with the British were a number of German mercenaries and slaves. Morgan's losses were 24 killed and 104 wounded. The "Old Waggoner's" unorthodox tactical masterpiece had indeed "spirited up the people," not just those of the backcountry Carolinas but those in all the colonies. In the process, as Morgan later told a friend, he had given Tarleton and the British a "devil of a whipping."

Cover: Howard's Continentals slash their way through Banastre Tarleton's infantry at the Battle of Cowpens. Painting © by Don Troiani, Southbury, Conn.

## The Southern Campaign, 1778-1781



### New Hope for the Revolution

By the time the Battle of Cowpens was fought, the lower South had become the decisive theater of the Revolutionary War. After the struggle settled into stalemate in the north, the British mounted their second campaign to conquer the region. British expeditionary forces captured Savannah in late 1778 and Charleston in May 1780. By late that summer, most of South Carolina was pacified, and a powerful British army under Lord Cornwallis was poised to sweep across the Caro-

linas into Virginia. This map traces the marches of Cornwallis (in red) and his wily adversary Nathanael Greene (in blue). The campaign opened at Charleston in August 1780, when Cornwallis marched north to confront Horatio Gates moving south with a Continental army. It ended at Yorktown in October 1781 with Cornwallis's surrender of the main British army in America. In between were 18 months of some of the hardest campaigning and most savage fighting of the war.



The Continental Congress voted to award silver medals to Howard and Washington and a gold to Morgan for their service at Cowpens. The medal shown here is a bronze reproduction of the one to Morgan. The original was lost.



# Chain of Command



Daniel Morgan

## The Generals

Morgan was an explorer and settler, a teamster by trade, experienced at fighting Indians, and something of a genius at leading men in battle. When, at the age of 45, he took command of Nathanael Greene's light troops in 1780, he was already well-known for his military abilities, having fought with distinction at Quebec in 1775 and at Saratoga in 1777. After Morgan left the army in February 1781 due to illness, Greene remarked: "Great generals are scarce—there are few Morgans to be found."

Tarleton had a reputation for being ruthless and fearless in battle. An offspring of British gentry, he was schooled at Oxford University, and at 21 became an officer of dragoons. He volunteered for service in America and campaigned with some distinction in the north. In his mid-20s he found himself commander of the British Legion, a mobile striking force of mounted infantry whose ruthlessness earned him the nickname "Bloody Tarleton." He was disliked by most of his fellow officers.



Banastre Tarleton

## Morgan's Army



Andrew Pickens  
Militia Commander

**Militia**  
Morgan's militia were tough and experienced. Some 200 were ex-Continentalists from Virginia under Maj. Francis Triplet. Others were recruited from Georgia and the Carolinas commanded by that wily partisan Col. Andrew Pickens. Morgan knew the worth of these troops and deployed them in a way that made the most of their strengths and minimized their weaknesses. They rewarded him with a victory still marveled at more than two centuries later.



John Eager Howard  
Continental Commander

**Continentalists**  
Lt. Col. John Eager Howard's mixed battalion of Maryland and Delaware Continentalists fought with great courage at Cowpens and afterwards. Nathanael Greene called Howard "as good an officer as the world affords." The Maryland Continentalists was one of the few regiments to fight in both the Northern and Southern campaigns. By war's end, the Delaware Continentalists attained a reputation as one of the elite light infantry units of the Southern Army.



William Washington  
Cavalry Commander

**Cavalry**  
Few officers saw more combat than Lt. Col. William Washington, a distant cousin of the commanding general. A veteran of numerous battles and skirmishes, he and his Third Continental Dragoons were the main reserve at Cowpens. Posted in rear of the northernmost ridge, where ground cover was sufficient to protect them from hostile observation and fire, they were sufficiently near "as to be able to charge the enemy, should they be broken."

## Tarleton's British Legion

**Legion Cavalry**  
This green-uniformed unit was the mounted arm of Tarleton's British Legion. As constituted at Cowpens, it was a mixture of Tories and former American soldiers enlisted after Camden and armed with saber and pistol and attitude.

**16th Light Infantry**  
This specialized detachment from the 16th Regiment of Foot was composed of men selected for their agility and endurance. These were all crack troops, most of whom had been fighting in America since the beginning of the war.

**7th Royal Fusiliers**  
Although drawn from the 7th Regiment of Foot, one of the oldest regiments in the British Army, this battalion was composed of untested new recruits whose only previous military experience had been as garrison troops at Ninety Six.

Legion Cavalry

Light Infantry

Royal Fusilier



Royal Artillery

Highlander

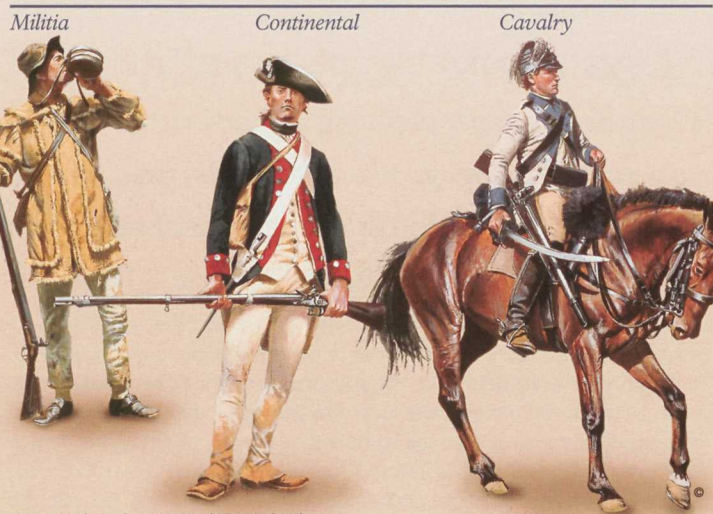
Dragoon



**Royal Artillery**  
Eighteen royal artillerymen were responsible for the two light cannons that accompanied Tarleton's force. These guns, which may have been captured from the patriots at the Battle of Camden, helped to boost Tarleton's confidence in confronting Morgan at Cowpens.

**71st Highlanders**  
Known as Fraser's Highlanders, this elite regiment was raised specifically for duty in America and saw extensive service in the Northern Theater before being transferred to the South in 1780. The regiment fought valiantly at the siege of Savannah and in subsequent operations in South Carolina.

**17th Light Dragoons**  
The excellence of this regiment made it the first cavalry corps selected for service in America in 1775. Detachments were present in most of the important engagements throughout the war. The men were a model of discipline for other cavalry troops raised by the British in America during the war.



Morgan: Independence National Historical Park  
Tarleton: National Portrait Gallery, London  
Pickens: National Portrait Gallery, Washington, D.C.  
Howard: Maryland Historical Society  
Washington: Independence National Historical Park  
Soldiers: All Don Troiani



## Getting Around Cowpens Battlefield



Cowpens National Battlefield is 11 miles northwest of I-85 and Gaffney, S.C., and two miles southeast of U.S. 221 and Chesnee, S.C. The entrance is southeast of the intersection of S.C. 11 and 110. The park is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily.

Make your first stop the visitor center, which contains a fiber optic map program and a museum with authentic Revolutionary War weapons and a full-size reproduction of a British 3-pounder "Grasshopper" cannon. An audio-visual program, "Daybreak at the Cowpens," is

shown on the hour from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. daily for a small fee.

The three-mile loop road around the perimeter of the battlefield features wayside exhibits, overlooks with short trails to the historic Green River Road, and the battlefield. The loop road and picnic area are closed at 4:30 p.m.

A 1.5-mile self-guiding Battlefield Trail walking tour begins and ends at the rear of the visitor center. The historic Green River Road along which the battle was fought is part of the walking trail. It is the only

portion of the original road that still exists.

### Regulations and Safety Tips

- Use caution driving the loop road. Please remember that you share the road with pedestrians, bicyclists, delivery trucks, tour buses, motor homes, and motorcycles.
- Park only in designated areas.
- Bicycling is a popular activity. Bicycles are allowed on the loop road and parking areas only. Bicyclists must wear helmets and must travel in the same direction as traffic. A bicycle rack is provided in the visitor center parking lot.
- Pets are not allowed in

the buildings and must be leashed and attended at all times. Failing to crate, cage, or restrain a pet on a leash is a violation of federal law. Leashes must not exceed six feet in length. Picnics are permitted only in the picnic area. It is a violation of federal law to climb on monuments.

**For More Information**  
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 864-461-2828  
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