



British Units at the Cowpens

Most of the British units which fought in the Battle at the Cowpens had participated in earlier battles of the American Revolution. All but the Seventh Regiment of Foot, Royal Fusiliers, had been created as a result of the urgent need for the British government for more troops to quell the rebellion. During the southern campaign, the units were under the command of Charles Lord Cornwallis. They enjoyed hard-won victories at Savannah, Charleston, and Camden, but became increasingly desperate after the British defeat at Cowpens and eventually Yorktown. Yet, on the whole, their record speaks well of them as combat units.

The **Seventh Regiment of Foot, Royal Fusiliers**, under Major Newmarsh was "one of the of the oldest and most distinguished in the British Army." At the time of the battle at the Cowpens, it consisted mostly of recruits as a result of six years of warfare. As the battle line formed, some of these recruits exhibited their inexperience by firing before the order was given. It was also one of the units which broke rank and charged into the supposedly retreating American forces. They suffered heavy casualties as the American made their stand and fired into the charging line of British troops.

The **Seventeenth Light Dragoons** left England in May of 1775 with less than 300 men to support the struggling British forces in Boston. During the battle at the Cowpens, Lieutenant Colonel Tarleton ordered the Seventeenth to charge on the retreating American militia, but they were out-numbered and repulsed by Lieutenant Colonel William Washington's dragoons. After rallying, the Seventeenth supported Tarleton in his attempt to save the 71st Highlanders, but was repulsed by the charging militia and retreated with Tarleton down the Green River Road. This was the only British unit that retired from the field "in order."

The **Seventy-First Regiment**, known as **Fraser's Highlanders**, was raised in 1775 at the start of the Revolution. Major McArthur's battalion of the Seventy-First was held in reserve by Tarleton at the Cowpens to support the Seventh in outflanking the American forces. As the fighting came to a standstill, the Seventy-First was ordered forward to sweep around the right flank of the American line. Caught by the unexpected volley of the "retreating" forces, the Seventy-First lost many of its men but continued to fight. Once cut off on three sides, the remaining members broke rank and retreated in disorder. It was the first time that a Highland regiment had fled from an enemy as well as being their first defeat. The officers of the Highlanders blamed Tarleton and not their men for the defeat because of the lack of reconnaissance and preparation for the battle. Their dissatisfaction with Tarleton was taken to Lord Cornwallis in a request that they "not be employed again under the same officer." Cornwallis complied with their request. This regiment has since been disbanded.

The **British Legion**, a mixed regiment of light dragoons and infantry units in green uniforms, was Tarleton's unit. Sir Henry Clinton created it in July 1778, when Tarleton, who soon would become known as the "Green

Dragoon," was promoted to lieutenant colonel and given command of the unit. The majority of Legion members were deserters from the American army or Loyalists. Under Tarleton, the British Legion gained many victories, especially during the campaign in the South, but it also gained a reputation for its harsh treatment of the enemy. During the battle, the Legion's infantry was a part of the main line that received a devastating volley from the Americans. The dragoons, lacking in strict discipline, fled from the field rather than staying with Tarleton and the seventeenth.

A fifty man **British Artillery** unit manned the two three-pounder cannons at the Cowpens. Wearing the traditional blue uniforms, this unit was lost to a man at the Cowpens. They were praised by both sides for their uncommon valor in remaining with the cannons to the end.