

Kings Mountain

NATIONAL MILITARY PARK

Cowpens

NATIONAL BATTLEFIELD SITE • SOUTH CAROLINA

The battles of Kings Mountain and Cowpens, small in terms of modern warfare, whittled down Lord Cornwallis' British army and helped pave the way to Yorktown.

By 1780 American military fortunes in the Southern States were low. For 2 years the British campaign in the sparsely settled South had gone unchecked. Georgia had fallen quickly to a sea-born British force and, except for roving bands of partisans, American troops evacuated the colony. A second British column of well-led, well-trained, professional British and German soldiers had landed at Charleston, seized the city, and began spreading into South Carolina. With them went auxiliary light troops of American Loyalists. Competently officered and well equipped, the green uniformed Loyalists were not as disciplined as the British or Germans; their brand of warfare spread terror and hatred through Georgia and the Carolinas.

Into this maelstrom came a handful of Delaware and Maryland soldiers of the Continental Line commanded by Gen. Horatio Gates. This little army, the only American Regulars in the South, marched and countermarched, gathered militia where it could, fought and fell back, and fought again. Yet Gates soon showed that he was no match for the able British Lieutenant General Charles Earl Cornwallis.

Gates' disastrous handling of the Camden campaign in July and August 1780 opened the way for Cornwallis to clear the Carolinas and march into Virginia. Then Cornwallis miscalculated. He sent Maj. Patrick Ferguson with 1,100 Loyalists into northwestern South Carolina to secure the countryside. Ferguson, an experienced, capable British Regular officer, was confident of success, but he misjudged the temper of the American frontiersmen. It cost him his life.

To the "over mountain men" of the Watauga Settlements, Ferguson sent a message commanding them to declare allegiance to Britain or he "would march his army over the mountains, hang their leaders, and lay waste their country with fire and sword." The frontiersmen, who had no intention of submitting, immediately rallied under Colonels Isaac Shelby and "Nolichucky Jack" Sevier and, with Col. William Campbell's Virginia troops, marched eastward on horseback. Soon they were joined by North Carolinians under Col. Benjamin Cleveland.

After several days of searching, the frontiersmen located Ferguson's Loyalists on Kings Mountain. On October 7, 1780, they swarmed up its slopes, but were driven down at bayonet point. They went up again, and again the Loyalists drove them back. Still again the frontiersmen skirmished their way up the hill. This time they surrounded the Loyalists, and in 1 hour the battle was over. Ferguson lay dead, and his surviving soldiers were herded northward to prison.

The Kings Mountain disaster warned Cornwallis that he would have no easy march into Virginia,

and he withdrew southward. Nearly simultaneously, the Continental Congress relieved the unfortunate Gates, replacing him, at Washington's suggestion, with Nathanael Greene. The toughminded Greene began to rebuild the battered American army. Among his competent junior commanders was Brig. Gen. Daniel Morgan, whose rheumatism did not prevent him from being one of the gamest scrappers in the American service.

Greene trusted Morgan to create a diversion while the American force moved into a "camp of repose" to reorganize and refit. Both Greene and Morgan realized the danger of this calculated risk, for if Cornwallis chose to ignore Morgan and move on the main American army instead, the campaign, and possibly the war, would be over. But Cornwallis took the bait. As Morgan marched his 600 men into northwestern South Carolina, the British commander detached 1,100 men under Col. Banastre Tarleton to follow the Americans.

About 30 miles from Kings Mountain at Cowpens—and it was once a cow pasture—Tarleton met the Americans. On January 17, 1781, his crack troops struck Morgan's Regulars and militia. Taking one charge and withdrawing, the Americans faced about, and in a slashing counterattack on both British flanks, overwhelmed Tarleton's force. The battle was over in 50 minutes, with only 200 of Tarleton's cavalry escaping. As at Kings Mountain, Cornwallis lost a fair number of irreplaceable soldiers.

These two battles, however, did not end the campaign, and Cornwallis would march and countermarch across the Carolinas, winning a costly victory over Greene at Guilford Courthouse, then marching into Virginia. There the road would end with his decimated army laying down its arms at Yorktown.

ABOUT YOUR VISIT

Kings Mountain is best reached from Charlotte, N.C., by Int. 85; from Spartanburg, S.C., by U.S. 29; and from York, S.C., by S.C. 161.

We suggest you begin your visit at the visitor center, where museum exhibits will help you understand the battle. From the visitor center a park road and a trail climb the southwestern slope of the ridge to the upper parking area; here a foot trail leads to the chief features of the battlefield.

Camping is permitted only in Kings Mountain State Park, which adjoins the National Military park on the east. You can also swim (in season) and picnic in the State park.

Cowpens is 11 miles northwest of Int. 85 at Gaffney and 2 miles southeast of U.S. 221 at Chesnee, S.C., at the intersection of S.C. 11 and 110. There is no attendant regularly on duty at the site. Information concerning the battle can be obtained at Kings Mountain.

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FOR YOUR SAFETY

Pedestrians viewing the battlefields can become forgetful and inattentive to traffic. Drivers should proceed slowly and with great care.

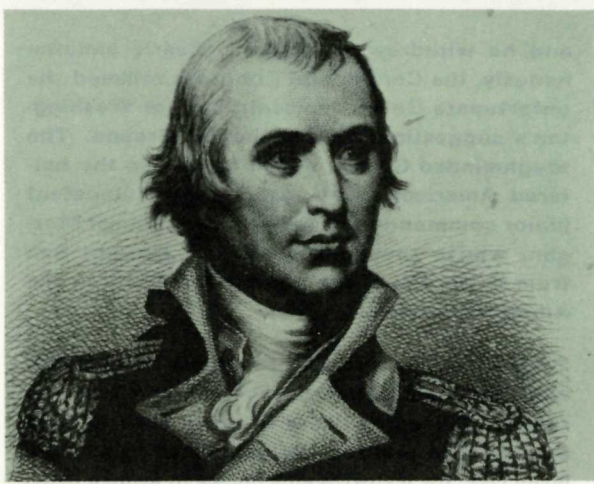
ADMINISTRATION

Kings Mountain National Military Park and Cowpens National Battlefield Site are administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. The Superintendent of Kings Mountain, whose address is Box 31, Kings Mountain, N.C. 28086, is in charge of both areas.

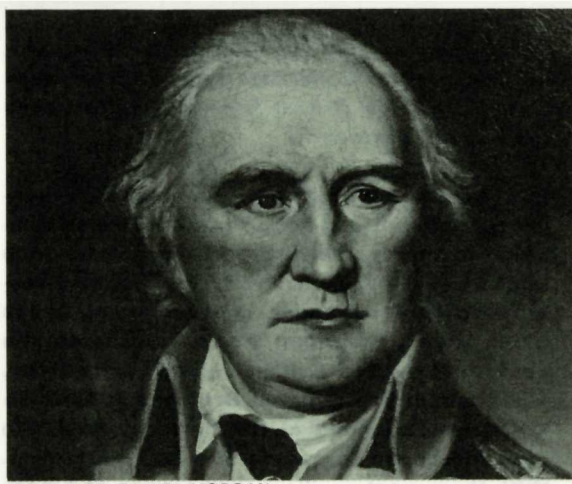
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National Park Service

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR



GEN. NATHANAEL GREENE



BRIG. GEN. DANIEL MORGAN



COL. BANASTRE TARLETON



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