

# THE WINNING OF INDEPENDENCE, 1777–1783

**T**he year 1777 was perhaps the most critical for the British. The issue, not necessarily understood clearly in London or America at the time, was whether the British could score such success in putting down the American revolt that the French would not dare enter the war openly to aid the American rebels. Yet it was in this critical year that British plans were most confused and British operations most disjointed. The British campaign of 1777 therefore provides one of the most striking object lessons in American military history of the dangers of divided command.

## The Campaign of 1777

With secure bases at New York and Newport, Sir William Howe had a chance to get the early start in 1777 that had been denied him the previous year. His first plan, advanced on November 30, 1776, was probably the most comprehensive put forward by any British commander during the war. He proposed to maintain a small force of about 8,000 to contain Washington in New Jersey and 7,000 to garrison New York, while sending one column of 10,000 from Newport into New England and another column of 10,000 from New York up the Hudson to form a junction with a British force moving down from Canada. On the assumption that these moves would be successful by autumn, he would next capture Philadelphia, the rebel capital, then make the southern provinces the “objects of the winter.” For this plan, Howe requested 35,000 men, 15,000 more effective troops than he had remaining at the end of the 1776 campaign. Lord George Germain, the Secretary of State responsible for strategic planning for the American theater, could promise Howe only 8,000 replacements. Even before receiving this news, but evidently influenced by Trenton and Princeton, Howe refined his plan and proposed to devote his main effort in 1777

to taking Philadelphia. On March 3, 1777, Germain informed Howe that the Philadelphia plan was approved but that there might be only 5,500 reinforcements. At the same time Germain and the king urged a “warm diversion” against New England.

Meanwhile, Sir John Burgoyne, who had succeeded in obtaining the separate military command in Canada, submitted his plan for an advance south to “a junction with Howe.” Germain and the king also approved this plan on March 29, though they had earlier approved of Howe’s intention to go to Philadelphia. Because of the lag in communicating across the Atlantic, Germain and other senior planners in London viewed themselves merely as coordinators and providers of resources, not as operational commanders. Operational decisions, they felt, should be made by the commanders on the scene. They seem to have expected that Burgoyne and Howe would work together without direction from London. Specifically, they believed that Howe would be able to form his junction with Burgoyne by the warm diversion or that he would take Philadelphia quickly and then turn north to aid Burgoyne. In any case, they felt sure that Howe’s drive south would draw Washington and most American troops away from Burgoyne. Once Germain approved the two separate plans, difficulties in communicating in a timely manner left Howe and Burgoyne to go their separate ways.

Howe’s Philadelphia plan left only enough force in New York under General Sir Henry Clinton for what the latter would call “a damn’d starved offensive,” but Clinton’s orders called upon him only to assist Burgoyne’s drive. His first priority remained the safety and security of New York City and its outposts. There is no question that Burgoyne knew before he left England for Canada that Howe was going to Philadelphia, but ambitious “Gentleman Johnny” was determined to make a reputation in the American war. Never one to doubt his own abilities and having enjoyed swift victory by driving the Americans from the Ticonderoga complex with minimal effort, Burgoyne quickly convinced himself that he could succeed alone. Even when he learned certainly on August 3, 1777, that he could not expect Howe’s cooperation, he persisted in his design. As Howe thought Pennsylvania was filled with loyalists, Burgoyne cherished the illusion that legions of Tories in upstate New York and western New England were simply awaiting the appearance of the king’s troops to rally to the colors.

Again in 1777 the late arrival of Howe’s reinforcements and supply ships gave General George Washington time that he sorely needed. Men to form the new Continental Army came in slowly, and not until June did the Americans have a force of 8,000. On the northern line, the defenses were even more thinly manned. Supplies for troops in the field were also short, but the arrival of the first three ships bearing secret aid from France vastly improved the situation. They were evidence of the covert support of the French government; a mission Congress sent to France was meanwhile working diligently to enlist open aid and to embroil France in a war with England. The French Foreign Minister, Charles Gravier, the Comte de Vergennes, had already decided to take that risk when and if the American rebels demonstrated their serious purpose and ability to fulfill it by some signal victory in the field.

With the first foreign material aid in 1777, the influx of foreign officers into the American Army began. These officers were a mixed

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blessing. Most were adventurers in search of fortune or of reputation with little aptitude for adjusting themselves to American conditions. Few were willing to accept any but the highest ranks. Nevertheless, many brought with them professional military knowledge and competence the Continental Army sorely lacked. When the misfits were culled out, the knowledge and competence were used to considerable advantage. Louis DuPortail, a Frenchman, and Thaddeus Kosciuszko, a Pole, did much to advance the art of engineering in the Continental Army. Casimir Pulaski, another Pole, organized its first genuine cavalry contingent. Johann de Kalb and Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben, both Germans, and Maj. Gen. Gilbert du Montier, the Marquis de Lafayette, an influential French nobleman who financed his own way, were all to make valuable contributions as trainers and leaders. But as the 1777 campaign began, these foreign volunteers had not yet had time to make much of an impact on the Continental Army.

In the spring of 1777 Washington's army occupied high ground at Middlebrook, New Jersey, in a position either to bar Howe's overland route to Philadelphia or to move rapidly up the Hudson to oppose any northward advance. Washington confidently expected Howe to move north to form a junction with Burgoyne but decided he himself must stay in front of the main British Army wherever it went. Following the principle of economy of force, he disposed a small part of his army under Maj. Gen. Israel Putnam in fortifications guarding the approaches up the Hudson, and at a critical moment detached a small force to aid Maj. Gen. Philip Schuyler against Burgoyne. The bulk of his army he kept in front of Howe in an effort to defend Philadelphia. Forts were built along the Delaware River, and other steps were taken to block the approach to the Continental capital by sea.

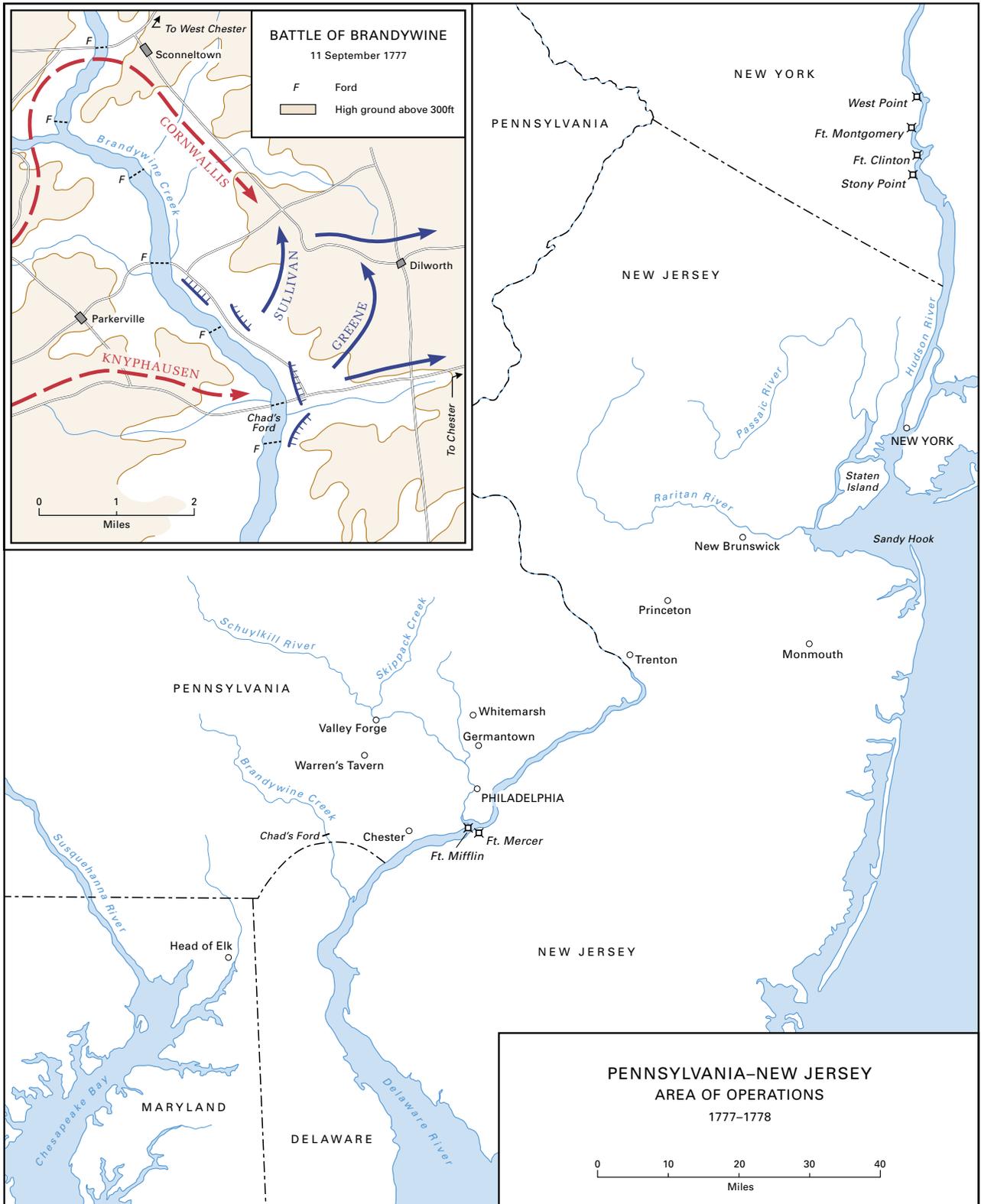
In the effort to defend Philadelphia, Washington again failed but hardly so ignominiously as he had the year before in New York. With American forts and a galley squadron blocking a direct advance up the Delaware River, in August Howe put most of his army on board ship and sailed down the coast and up the Chesapeake Bay to Head of Elk (now Elkton) in Maryland, putting himself even farther away from Burgoyne. (*See Map 7.*) Surprised by Howe's movement, Washington did not oppose the landing but rapidly shifted his own force south and took up a position at Chad's Ford on Brandywine Creek, blocking the approach to Philadelphia.

There, on September 11, 1777, Howe executed a flanking movement reminiscent of his tactics on Long Island the previous year. He sent Lt. Gen. Wilhelm van Knyphausen's largely Hessian column directly against the American position at Chad's Ford to fix the American attention on that part of the battlefield. During the predawn darkness Howe and Lord Charles Cornwallis took the larger part of the British army north by back roads and crossed the Brandywine at unguarded lesser fords miles upstream, hoping to take Washington from the flank and rear.

Confusing reports caused by inadequate reconnaissance befuddled Maj. Gen. John Sullivan, who commanded the American forces on that flank. Washington himself realized what was happening only at the eleventh hour. He immediately ordered Sullivan to lay a trap, set up a reverse slope ambush on high ground, and shifted reinforcements



Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben  
*Charles Willson Peale, 1782*



## NATHANAEL GREENE (1742–1786)

A Quaker with no prior military experience, Nathanael Greene rose through the ranks of the Continental Army and became one of George Washington's most trusted generals. In 1777 Greene became the Continental Army's Quartermaster, though he longed for a battlefield command. That opportunity came in August 1780, when General Gates, the hero of Saratoga, was resoundingly defeated by the British at Camden in South Carolina. As commander of the southern campaign of 1780–1782, Greene brilliantly combined conventional and unconventional fighting. His strategy forced the decisive battle of Yorktown, which broke the back of British control in the southern colonies.



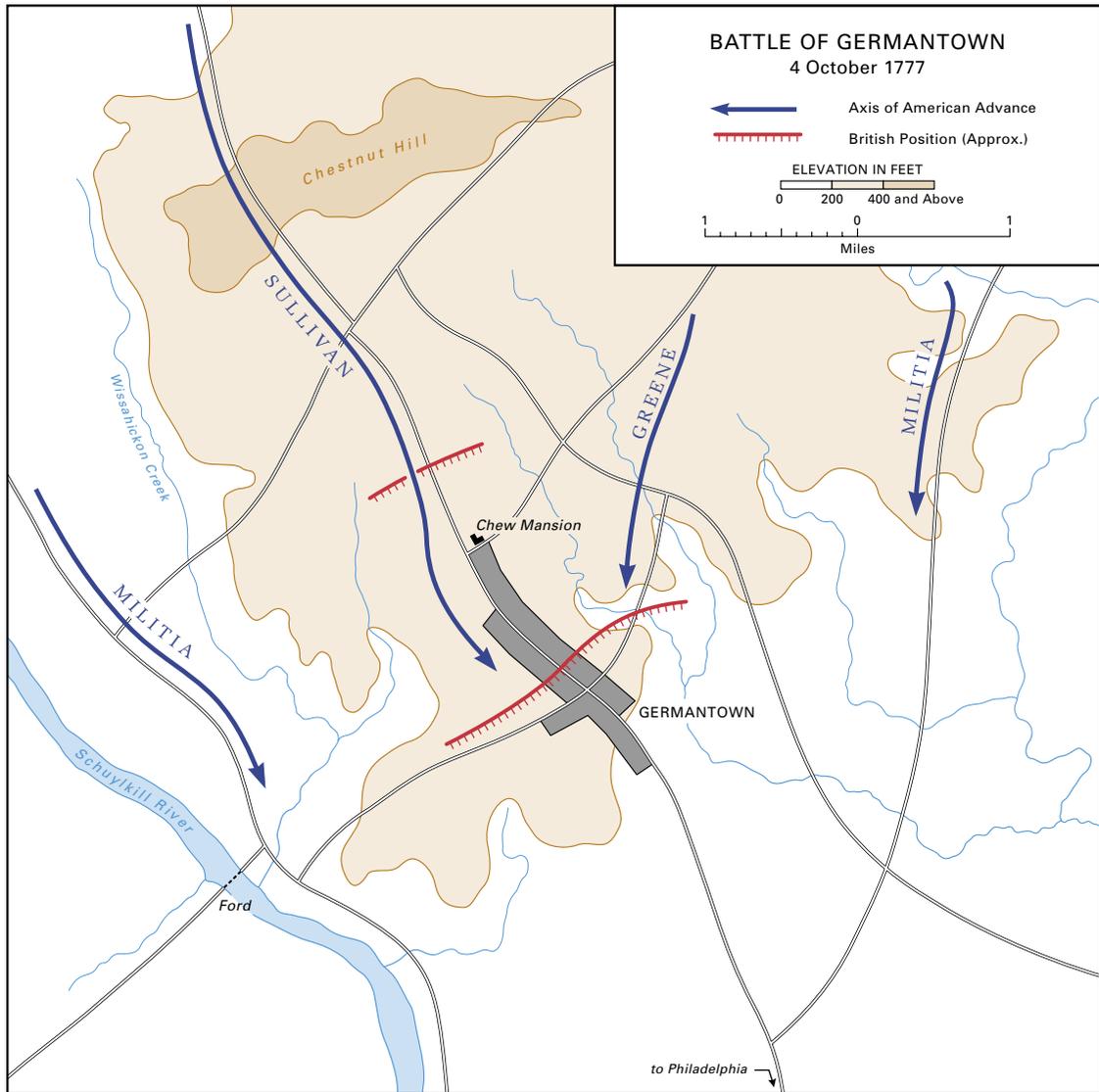
Nathanael Greene  
*Charles Willson Peale, 1783*

under Maj. Gen. Nathanael Greene from positions facing Knyphausen to extend Sullivan's line. Cornwallis and Howe moved slowly, preventing the British plan from working as intended; ironically, that very slowness worked to their advantage. Because the Americans lacked iron discipline, they kept creeping up to the crest of their ridge to look for the British. Alert scouts, mostly Hessian jaegers (woodsmen armed with rifles), noted the movement; and Howe avoided walking into the trap.

What followed was one of the most intense battles of the war. In a series of five separate attacks, the British drove Sullivan off the high ground in some confusion. General Greene with two brigades of Virginians allowed Sullivan's men to fall back through their lines and then carried out a valiant rear-guard action lasting until dark. Once he could hear the sounds of the fighting, Knyphausen drove across the ford and struck Brig. Gen. Anthony Wayne's defenses that had been weakened by the transfers, forcing the Americans to fall back. Darkness and the heavy, bloody fighting left Howe's men too exhausted to pursue, and the Continental Army retired in good order to Chester. However, the way to Philadelphia was now left open to Howe.

Howe followed his victory at the Brandywine with a series of maneuvers comparable to those he had executed in New York and entered Philadelphia with a minimum of fighting on September 26. A combined attack of British Army and Navy forces shortly afterward reduced the forts on the Delaware and opened the river as a British supply line.

On entering Philadelphia, Howe dispersed his forces, stationing 9,000 men at Germantown, north of the city; 3,000 in New Jersey; and the rest in Philadelphia. As Howe had repeated his performance in New York, Washington sought to repeat Trenton by a surprise attack on Germantown. The plan was much like that he used at Trenton but involved far more complicated movements by much larger bodies of troops. Four columns (two assault forces of continentals under Sullivan and Greene and two flank security forces of militia), moving at night over different roads, were to converge simultaneously on Germantown at dawn on October 4. (*See Map 8.*) The plan violated the principle of simplicity, for such a maneuver would have been difficult even for well-trained profes-



Map 8

sions to execute. The two columns of continentals arrived at different times and fired on each other in an early morning fog. Despite losing the element of surprise, the Americans drove forward and smashed two elite battalions of British light infantry.

Initial success rapidly turned to disappointment. Part of a British regiment took cover in Cliveden, the Chew family mansion, and opened a galling fire on Americans attempting to move up or join the advance. Instead of isolating and bypassing this annoyance, the inexperienced American generals held up a large portion of the Maryland Division while they argued whether they could leave a “fortress” in their rear. The British, though surprised, had better discipline and cohesion and were able to re-form and send fresh troops into the fray. Once Washington realized that he had lost the chance for a decisive victory,

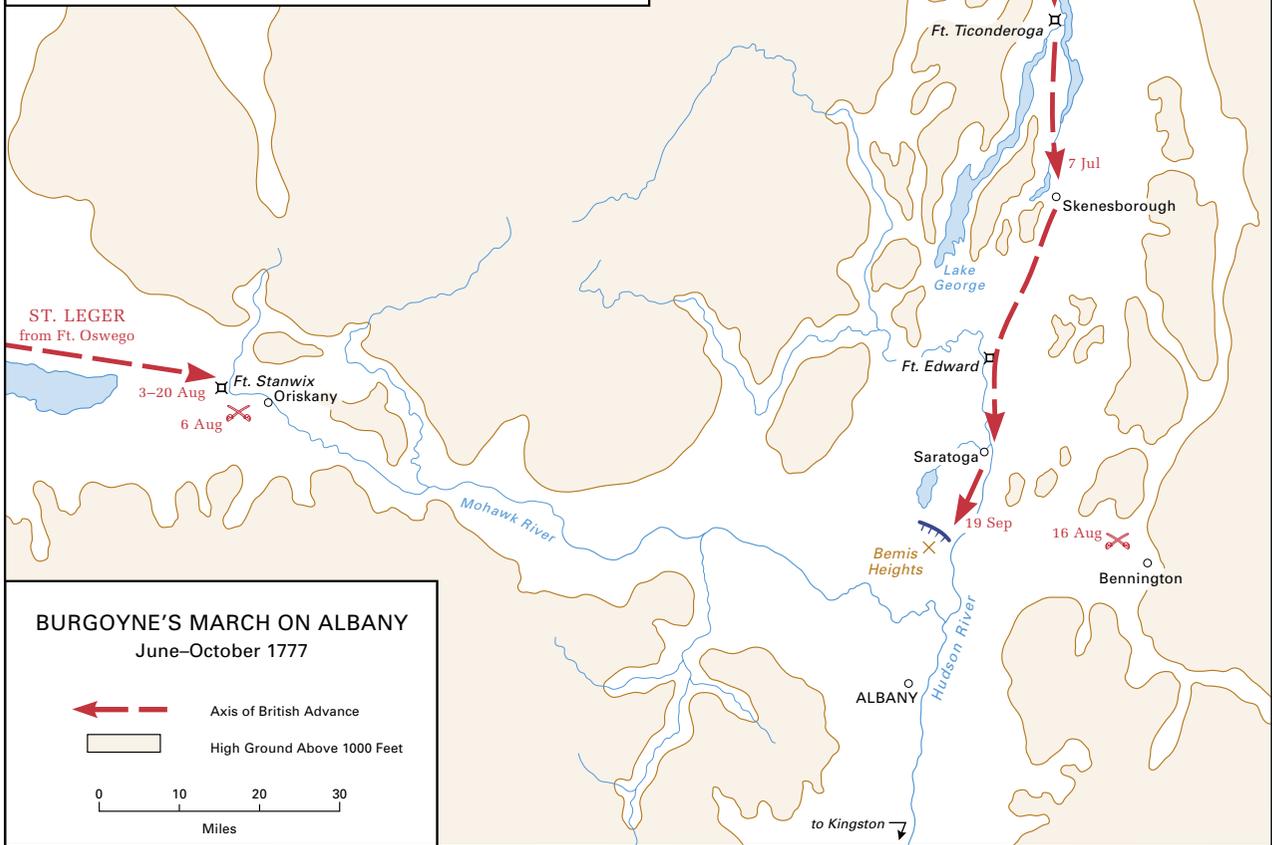
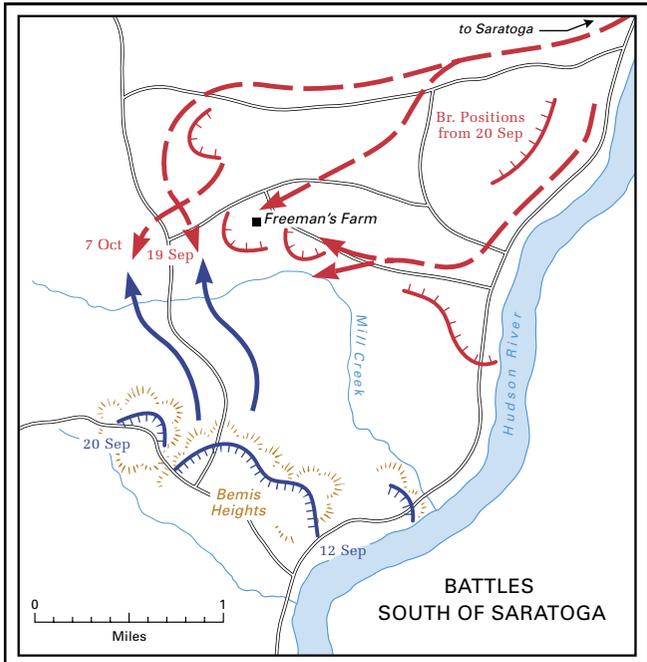
he wisely chose to avoid risking his army and broke contact. The Americans retreated about 8:00 a.m., leaving Howe's troops in command of the field.

After Germantown Howe once again concentrated his army and moved to confront Washington at Whitemarsh, hoping to lure the Virginian into a rash attack. The ploy failed, so he withdrew to winter quarters in Philadelphia without giving battle. Washington chose the site for his own winter quarters at a place called Valley Forge, twenty miles northwest of the city. Howe had gained his objective, but it proved of no lasting value to him. Congress fled west to York, Pennsylvania. No swarms of loyalists rallied to the British standards. And Howe had left Burgoyne to lose a whole British army in the north.

Burgoyne set out from Canada in June, his object to reach Albany by fall. (*See Map 9.*) His force was divided into two parts. The first and largest part (7,200 British and Hessian regulars and 650 Tories, Canadians, and Indians under his personal command) was to take the route down Lake Champlain to Ticonderoga and thence via Lake George to the Hudson. The second (700 regulars and 1,000 Tories and Indians under Col. Barry St. Leger) was to move via Lake Ontario to Oswego and thence down the Mohawk Valley to join Burgoyne before Albany. In his preparations, Burgoyne evidently forgot the lesson the British had learned in the French and Indian War: In the wilderness, troops had to be prepared to travel light and fight like Indians. He carried 138 pieces of artillery and a heavy load of officers' personal baggage. Numerous ladies of high and low estate accompanied the expedition. When he started down the lakes, Burgoyne did not have enough horses and wagons to transport his artillery and baggage once he had to leave the water and move overland.

At first Burgoyne's American opposition was very weak: only about 2,500 continentals at Ticonderoga and about 450 at old Fort Stanwix, the sole American bulwark in the Mohawk Valley. Dissension among the Americans was rife; the New Englanders refused to support Schuyler, the aristocratic New Yorker who commanded the Northern Army, and openly intrigued to replace him with their own favorite, Maj. Gen. Horatio Gates. Ticonderoga fell to Burgoyne on June 27 all too easily. The American forces dispersed, and Burgoyne pursued the remnants down to Skenesborough. Once that far along, he decided to continue overland to the Hudson instead of returning to Ticonderoga to float his force down Lake George, though much of his impedimenta still had to be carried by boat down the lake.

The overland line of advance was already a nightmare, running along wilderness trails, through marshes, and across wide ravines and creeks swollen by abnormally heavy rains. Schuyler, who had wrestled with supply problems during the French and Indian Wars on this very ground, adopted the tactic of making it even worse by destroying bridges, felling trees into Burgoyne's path, and digging trenches to let the waters of swamps onto drier ground. The British were able to move at a rate of little more than a mile a day and took until July 29 to reach Fort Edward on the Hudson. By that time Burgoyne was desperately short of horses, wagons, and oxen. Yet Schuyler, with an unstable force of 4,500 men discouraged by continual retreats, was in no position to give battle.



Map 9

Washington did what he could to strengthen the Northern Army at this juncture. He first dispatched Maj. Gen. Benedict Arnold, his most aggressive field commander, and Maj. Gen. Benjamin Lincoln, a Massachusetts man noted for his influence with the New England militia. On August 16 he detached Col. Daniel Morgan with 500 riflemen from the main army in Pennsylvania and ordered them along with 750 men from Putnam's force in the New York highlands to join Schuyler. The riflemen were calculated to furnish an antidote for Burgoyne's Indians who despite his efforts to restrain them were terrorizing the countryside.

It was the rising militia, rather than Washington, that was to provide the Northern Army with the most numerous reinforcements. Nothing worked more to produce this result than Burgoyne's employment of Indians. The murder and scalping of a white woman, Jane McCrea, dramatized the Indian threat as nothing else probably could have. New England militiamen now began to rally to the cause, though they still refused to cooperate with Schuyler. New Hampshire commissioned John Stark, a colonel in the Continental Army and a veteran of Bunker Hill and Trenton, as a brigadier general in the state service (a rank Congress had denied him), and Stark quickly assembled 2,000 men. Refusing Schuyler's request that he join the main army, Stark took up a position at Bennington in southern Vermont to guard the New England frontier. On August 11 Burgoyne detached a force of 650 men under Hessian Col. Friedrich Baum to forage for cattle, horses, and transport in the very area Stark was occupying. At Bennington on August 16, Stark annihilated Baum's force and nearly did the same to a second column of reinforcements Burgoyne sent to rescue Baum. Burgoyne not only failed to secure his much-needed supplies and transport but also lost about a tenth of his command.

Meanwhile, St. Leger with his Tories and Indians had appeared before Fort Stanwix on August 2. The garrison, fearing massacre by the Indians, was determined to hold out to the bitter end. On August 4, the Tryon County militia under Brig. Gen. Nicholas Herkimer set out to relieve the fort but was ambushed by the Indians in a wooded ravine near Oriskany. The militia, under the direction of a mortally wounded Herkimer, took cover in the woods and fought a bloody, ferocious, close-quarters battle all afternoon in a summer thunderstorm. Both sides suffered heavy losses; and though the militia was unable to relieve Stanwix, the losses discouraged St. Leger's Indians, who were already restless in the static siege operation at Stanwix. More significantly, the Continental garrison of the fort sallied out during the Oriskany fight and destroyed most of St. Leger's camp and siege supplies.

Despite Shuyler's own weak position, when he learned of the plight of the Stanwix garrison he courageously detached Benedict Arnold with 950 continentals to march to its relief. Arnold devised a ruse that took full advantage of the dissatisfaction and natural superstition of the Indians. Employing a half-wit Dutchman, his clothes shot full of holes, and a friendly Oneida Indian as his messengers, Arnold spread the rumor that the continentals were approaching "as numerous as the leaves on the trees." The Indians, who had special respect for any madman, departed in haste; and St. Leger was forced to abandon the siege and retreat to Canada.

## BENEDICT ARNOLD 1741–1801

Benedict Arnold was one of the most talented American generals of the Revolutionary War, a man whose energy was matched only by his ego. He was instrumental in defeating the British at Saratoga, a victory that gained the fledgling United States the open support of France. In 1780 Arnold commanded West Point, a fort situated on a bluff overlooking a tricky double bend in the Hudson River. All vessels had to pass the guns of West Point, and its possession would have assured the British easy communication between their forces in Canada and those occupying New York City. Smarting at Congress' lack of appreciation for his role at Saratoga three years earlier, Arnold plotted with Maj. John André of the British Army to deliver West Point to the enemy. André, wearing civilian clothes, was captured after one of their meetings and subsequently hanged as a spy; Arnold escaped to command British coastal expeditions during the closing years of the war. He died in London in 1801.

Image  
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Benedict Arnold  
*Copy of Engraving by H.B. Hal  
After John Trumbull*

Bennington and Stanwix were serious blows to Burgoyne. By early September he knew he could expect help from neither Howe nor St. Leger. Disillusioned about the Tories, he wrote Germain: "The great bulk of the country is undoubtedly with Congress in principle and zeal; and their measures are executed with a secrecy and dispatch that are not to be equaled. Wherever the King's forces point, militia in the amount of three or four thousand assemble in twenty-four hours; they bring with them their subsistence, etc., and the alarm over, they return to their farms." Nevertheless, gambler that he was, Burgoyne crossed the Hudson to the west side on September 13 and 14. A victim of his own preconceptions and already seeking to protect himself politically, Burgoyne now stated that his orders required him to get to Albany at all costs. While his supply problem daily became worse, his Indians, sensing approaching disaster, drifted off into the forests, leaving him with little means of gaining intelligence of the American dispositions.

The American forces were meanwhile gathering strength. Congress finally deferred to New England sentiment on August 19 and replaced Schuyler with Gates. Gates was more the beneficiary than the cause of the improved situation, but his appointment helped morale and encouraged the New England militia. (Washington's emissary, General Lincoln, also did his part.) Gates did not change Schuyler's tactics and continued to take full advantage of Burgoyne's plight. He advanced his forces four miles north and took up a position, surveyed and prepared by the Polish engineer Kosciuszko on Bemis Heights, a few miles below Saratoga. Against this position, Burgoyne launched his attack on September 19 and was repulsed with heavy losses. In the battle, usually known as the First Battle of Freeman's Farm, Arnold persuaded Gates to let him go forward to counter the British attack. Colonel Morgan's riflemen, in a wooded terrain well suited to the use of their specialized weapon, took a heavy toll of British officers and men.

After Freeman's Farm, the lines remained stable for three weeks. Burgoyne had heard that Clinton, with the force Howe had left in New York, had started north to relieve him. Clinton in fact had finally received reinforcements from Europe and launched a lightning strike against Putnam's weakened Highlands Department. The British stormed Forts Clinton and Montgomery on the Hudson on October 6 and forced a path through the mountains. Clinton could not do more because he received explicit orders from Howe to send the reinforcements on to Philadelphia. He took a chance and sent out a small diversion to Kingston but returned to New York when that probe indicated it could do nothing of value.

Burgoyne was left to his fate. Gates strengthened his entrenchments and calmly awaited the attack he was sure Burgoyne would have to make. Militia reinforcements increased his forces to around 10,000 by October 7. Meanwhile, Burgoyne's position grew more desperate. Unable to hold his supply line open, Burgoyne faced a choice. He could cut his losses and fall back toward Canada and safety, or he could stay and fight. He chose to stay and fight in hopes of defeating the army in front of him and pushing on to Albany. Food was running out; the animals had grazed the meadows bare; and every day more men slipped into the forest, deserting the lost cause. With little intelligence of American strength or dispositions, on October 7 Burgoyne sent out a reconnaissance in force to feel out the American positions. On learning that the British were approaching, Gates sent out a contingent including Morgan's riflemen to meet them; a second battle developed, usually known as Bemis Heights or the Second Battle of Freeman's Farm. Although Gates intended to fight a cautious, defensive battle, he lost control of his own men. Arnold, an open supporter of Schuyler and critic of the cautious Gates, had been placed under house arrest for insubordination. When Arnold learned of Burgoyne's probe, he impetuously broke arrest and rushed into the fray, distinguishing himself before he was wounded in leading an attack on Breyman's Redoubt. The British suffered severe losses, five times those of the Americans, and were driven back to their fortified positions.

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Two days after the battle, Burgoyne withdrew to a position in the vicinity of Saratoga. Militia soon worked around to his rear and hemmed him in from the north as well. His position hopeless, Burgoyne finally capitulated on October 17 at Saratoga. The total prisoner count was nearly 6,000, and great quantities of military stores fell into American hands. The victory at Saratoga brought the Americans out well ahead in the campaign of 1777 despite the loss of Philadelphia. What had been at stake soon became obvious. In February 1778 France negotiated a treaty of alliance with the American states, tantamount to a declaration of war against England.

## Valley Forge

The name of Valley Forge has come to stand, and rightly so, as a patriotic symbol of suffering, courage, and perseverance. The hard core of continentals who stayed with Washington during that bitter winter of 1777–1778 suffered much indeed. Supply problems caused some men to go without shoes, pants, and blankets. Weeks passed when there

## VALLEY FORGE

After a disappointing fall campaign that ended with a British army occupying Philadelphia, George Washington cast about for winter quarters for his troops. He found a site among the thickly wooded hills around Valley Forge. The American camp lay somewhat to the north, but within easy striking distance, of the main road from Philadelphia to York, where the Continental Congress had taken refuge. This allowed his army to provide protection for the revolution's governing body. Valley Forge lay in a rich agricultural region that the contending armies had picked over extensively during the previous year. Dependent almost entirely on a wretchedly mismanaged supply system, the Americans were chronically short of food and clothing through much of the winter until Nathanael Greene, one of America's ablest commanders, took over as Quartermaster General. Steuben's drill instruction has received wide credit for bolstering American morale, but Greene's efficiency proved equally important. When in June 1778 the Continental Army finally marched out of Valley Forge to face the British again, it was well prepared in mind and body for what would follow.

was no meat, and men were reduced to boiling and eating their shoes. It was no place for "summer soldiers and sunshine patriots."

The symbolism of Valley Forge should not be allowed to obscure the fact that the suffering was largely unnecessary. While the soldiers shivered and went hungry, food rotted and clothing lay unused in depots throughout the country. True, access to Valley Forge was difficult, but little determined effort was made to get supplies into the area. The supply and transport system had broken down. In mid-1777 both the Quartermaster and Commissary Generals resigned along with numerous subordinate officials in both departments, mostly merchants who found private trade more lucrative. Congress, in refuge at York, Pennsylvania, and split into factions, found it difficult to find replacements. If there was not, as most historians now believe, an organized cabal seeking to replace Washington with Gates, there were many, both in and out of the Army, who were dissatisfied with the Commander in Chief; and much intrigue went on. Gates was made President of the new Board of War set up that winter, and at least two of its members were Washington's enemies. In the administrative chaos at the height of the Valley Forge crisis, there was no functioning Quartermaster General at all.

Washington weathered the storm, and the Continental Army would emerge from Valley Forge a more effective force than before. With his advice, Congress instituted reforms in the Quartermaster and Commissary Departments that temporarily restored the effectiveness of both agencies. Washington's ablest subordinate, General Greene, reluctantly accepted the post of Quartermaster General. The Continental Army itself gained a new professional competence from the training given by Steuben.

Steuben appeared at Valley Forge in February 1778. He represented himself as a baron, a title of dubious validity, and as a former lieutenant general on the staff of Frederick the Great. (In reality he had been only a captain. The fraud was harmless, for Steuben had a broad knowledge of military affairs and had the ability to communicate with the American soldiers and teach them the basics of their new craft.) Appointed by

Washington as Inspector General in charge of a training program, Steuben vigorously drilled the troops that remained under arms during the winter of 1777–1778 at Valley Forge. He taught the Continental Army a simplified but effective version of the drill formations and movements of European armies and the proper care of equipment and supplemented American marksmanship with instruction on the use of the bayonet, a weapon in which British superiority had previously been marked. All through the training, Steuben never lost sight of a major difference between the American citizen-soldier and the European professional. He early noted that American soldiers had to be told why they did things before they would do them well, and he applied this philosophy in his training program. His trenchant good humor and vigorous profanity delighted the Continental soldiers and made the rigorous drill more palatable. After Valley Forge, continentals would fight on equal terms with British regulars in the open field.

### First Fruits of the French Alliance

While the Continental Army was undergoing its ordeal and transformation at Valley Forge, Howe dallied in Philadelphia, forfeiting whatever remaining chance he had to win a decisive victory before the effects of the French alliance were felt. He had had his fill of the American war; and the king accepted his resignation from command, appointing General Clinton as his successor. As Washington prepared to sally forth from Valley Forge, the British Army and the Philadelphia Tories said goodbye to Howe in a series of lavish parties. However, Clinton already had orders to evacuate the American capital. With the French in the war, the strategic situation had changed dramatically. England now had to ensure the safety of the long ocean supply line to America, as well as its valuable commercial possessions in other parts of the world, in particular the rich sugar plantations of the Caribbean. Clinton's orders were to detach 5,000 men to the West Indies and 3,000 to Florida and to return the rest of his army to New York by sea. He was then to give thought to recovering the southern states, where once again ever-hopeful refugees insisted the majority of the population would rally to the royal standard.

As Clinton prepared to depart Philadelphia, Washington had high hopes that the war might be won in 1778 by a cooperative effort between his army and the French Fleet. Charles Hector, the Comte d'Estaing, with a French naval squadron of eleven ships of the line and transports carrying 4,000 troops left France in May to sail for the American coast. D'Estaing's fleet was considerably more powerful than any Admiral Howe could immediately concentrate in American waters. For a brief period in 1778, the strategic initiative passed from British hands; Washington hoped to make full use of it.

Clinton had already decided, before he learned of the threat from d'Estaing, to move his army overland to New York prior to making any detachments, largely because he lacked sufficient transports to make the voyage by sea. On June 18, 1778, he set out with about 10,000 men. Washington, having gathered by that time about 12,000, immediately occupied Philadelphia and then took up the pursuit of Clinton. His council of war was divided, though none of his generals advised a

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*A fellow Virginian presented these English-made pistols (manufactured about 1749) to General Washington as a token of esteem in March 1778.*

“general action.” The boldest, General Wayne, and the young General Lafayette urged a “partial attack” to strike at a portion of the British Army while it was strung out on the road. The most cautious, Maj. Gen. Charles Lee, who had been exchanged and had rejoined the army at Valley Forge, advised only guerrilla action to harass the British columns. On June 26 Washington decided to take a bold approach, though he issued no orders indicating an intention to bring on a general action. He sent forward an advance guard composed of almost half his army to strike at the British rear when Clinton moved out of Monmouth Court House on the morning of June 27. Lee, the cautious, claimed the command from Lafayette, the bold, when he learned the detachment would be so large.

In the early morning Lee advanced over rough ground that had not been reconnoitered and made contact with the British rear, but Clinton reacted quickly and maneuvered to envelop the American right flank. Lee, feeling that his force was in an untenable position and underestimating the training transformation of the American Army during the encampment at Valley Forge, fell back in confusion. Washington rode up and, exceedingly irate to find the advance guard in retreat, exchanged harsh words with Lee. He then assumed direction of what had to be a defense against a British counterattack. The battle that followed, involving the bulk of both armies, lasted until nightfall on a sultry day with both sides holding their own. For the first time the Americans fought well with the bayonet as well as with the musket and rifle, and their battlefield behavior generally reflected the Valley Forge training. Nevertheless, Washington failed to strike a telling blow at the British Army, for Clinton slipped away in the night and in a few days completed the retreat to New York. Lee demanded and got a court-martial at which he was judged, perhaps unjustly, guilty of disobedience of orders, poor conduct of the retreat, and disrespect for the Commander in Chief. As a consequence he retired from the Army, though the controversy over his actions at Monmouth was to go on for years.

Washington meanwhile sought his victory in cooperation with the French Fleet. D’Estaing arrived off the coast on July 8, and the two commanders at first agreed on a combined land and sea attack on New York; but d’Estaing feared he would be unable to get his deep-draft ships across the bar that extended from Staten Island to Sandy Hook to get at Howe’s inferior fleet. They decided to transfer the attack to the other and weaker British stronghold at Newport, Rhode Island, a city standing on an island with difficult approaches. They agreed that the French Fleet would force the passage on the west side of the island and an American force under General Sullivan would cross over and mount an assault from the east. The whole scheme soon went awry. The French Fleet arrived off Newport on July 29 and successfully forced the passage; Sullivan began crossing on the east on August 8, and d’Estaing began to disembark his troops. Unfortunately, at this juncture Admiral Howe appeared with a reinforced British Fleet, forcing d’Estaing to reembark his troops and put out to sea to meet him. As the two fleets maneuvered for advantage, a great gale scattered both on August 12. The British returned to New York to refit and the French Fleet to Boston; d’Estaing decided to move on to tasks he considered more pressing in the West Indies. Sullivan was left to extricate his forces from an untenable po-

sition as best he could, and the first experiment in Franco-American cooperation came to a disappointing end with recriminations on both sides.

The fiasco at Newport ended any hopes for an early victory over the British as a result of the French alliance. By the next year, as the French were forced to devote their major attention to the West Indies, the British regained the initiative on the mainland; the war entered a new phase.

## The New Conditions of the War

After France entered the war in 1778, it rapidly took on the dimensions of a major European as well as an American conflict. In 1779 Spain declared war against England, and in the following year Holland followed suit. The necessity of fighting European enemies in the West Indies and other areas and of standing guard at home against invasion weakened the British effort against the American rebels. Yet the Americans were unable to take full advantage of Britain's embarrassments, for their own effort suffered more and more from war weariness, lack of strong direction, and inadequate finance. Moreover, the interests of the European states fighting Britain did not necessarily coincide with American interests. Spain and Holland did not ally themselves with the American states at all, and even France found it expedient to devote its major effort to the West Indies. Finally, the entry of ancient enemies into the fray spurred the British to intensify their effort and evoked some, if not enough, of that characteristic tenacity that has produced victory for England in so many wars. Despite the many new commitments the British were able to maintain in America an army that was usually superior in numbers to the dwindling Continental Army, though it was never strong enough to undertake offensives again on the scale of those of 1776 and 1777.

Monmouth was the last major engagement in the north between Washington's and Clinton's armies. In 1779 the situation there became a stalemate and remained so until the end of the war. The defense system Washington set up around New York with its center at West Point was too strong for Clinton to attack. The British commander did, in late spring 1779, attempt to draw Washington into the open by descending in force on unfinished American outpost fortifications at Verplanck's Point and Stony Point, but Washington refused to take the bait. When Clinton withdrew his main force to New York, the American commander retaliated on July 15, 1779, by sending General Wayne with an elite corps of light infantry on a stealthy night attack on Stony Point, a successful action more notable for demonstrating the proficiency with which the Americans now used the bayonet than for any important strategic gains. Thereafter the war around New York became largely an affair of raids, skirmishes, and constant vigilance on both sides. Twice in 1780 large British forces pushed into northern New Jersey in foraging operations intended to lure Washington into the open, but both times the flexible American defensive belt repulsed them easily.

Clinton's inaction allowed Washington to attempt to deal with British-inspired Indian attacks. Although Burgoyne's defeat ended the

threat of invasion from Canada, the British continued to incite the Indians all along the frontier to bloody raids on American settlements. From Fort Niagara and Detroit, they sent out their bands, usually led by Tories, to pillage and burn in the Mohawk Valley of New York, the Wyoming Valley of Pennsylvania, and the new American settlements in Kentucky. Although local defense was primarily the responsibility of state governments and the militia, the pressure on the Mohawk frontier soon prompted a Continental response. In August 1779 Washington detached General Sullivan with a force to deal with the Iroquois in Pennsylvania and New York. Sullivan laid waste the Indians' villages and defeated a force of Tories and Indians at Newtown on August 29. Although Sullivan's mission did not end Indian frontier raids, it essentially broke the back of Iroquois power and ensured the flow of supplies to the army from these fertile areas.

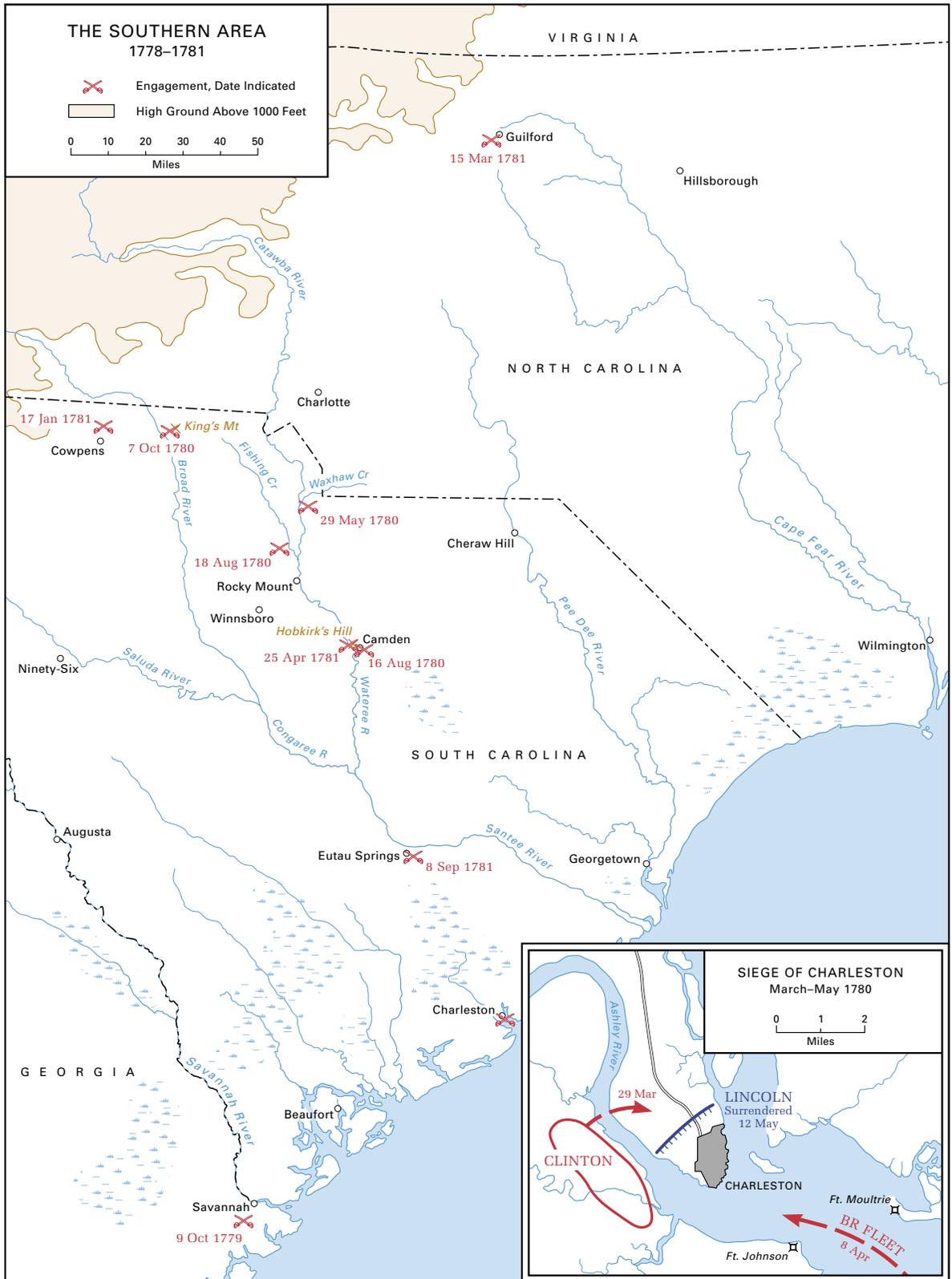
In the winter of 1778–1779, the colony of Virginia had sponsored an expedition that struck a severe blow at the British and Indians in the northwest. Young Lt. Col. George Rogers Clark, with a force of only 175 men ostensibly recruited for the defense of Kentucky, overran all the British posts in what is today Illinois and Indiana. Neither he nor Sullivan, however, was able to strike at the sources of the trouble—Niagara and Detroit. Indian raids along the frontiers continued, though they were somewhat less frequent and less severe.

### **British Successes in the South**

Late in 1778 the British began to turn their main effort to the south. The king's ministers hoped to bring the southern states into the fold one by one. From bases there, they would strangle the recalcitrant north. A small British force operating from Florida cooperated with the first reinforcements sent by Clinton and quickly overran thinly populated Georgia in the winter of 1778–1779. Alarmed by this development, Congress sent General Lincoln south to Charleston in December 1778 to command the Southern Army and organize the southern effort. It hoped that he could repeat his performance during the Saratoga campaign as a leader who could mix Continental regulars and militiamen. Lincoln gathered 3,500 continentals and militiamen; but in May 1779, while he maneuvered along the Georgia border, the British commander, Maj. Gen. Augustine Prevost, slipped around him to raid Charleston. The city barely managed to hold out until Lincoln returned to relieve it.

In September 1779 Admiral d'Estaing arrived off the coast of Georgia with a strong French Fleet and 6,000 troops. Lincoln hurried south with 1,350 Americans to join him in a siege of the main British base at Savannah. Unfortunately, the Franco-American force had to hurry its attack because d'Estaing was unwilling to risk his fleet in a position dangerously exposed to autumn storms. The French and Americans mounted a direct assault on Savannah on October 9, abandoning their plan to make a systematic approach by regular parallels. The British in strongly entrenched positions repulsed the attack in what was essentially a Bunker Hill in reverse, with the French and Americans suffering staggering losses. D'Estaing then sailed away to the West Indies, Lincoln returned to Charleston, and the second attempt at Franco-Ameri-

**Although Burgoyne's defeat ended the threat of invasion from Canada, the British continued to incite the Indians all along the frontier to bloody raids on American settlements.**



Map 10

can cooperation ended in much the same atmosphere of bitterness and disillusion as the first.

Meanwhile Clinton, urged on by the British government, determined to push the southern campaign in earnest. In October 1779 he withdrew the British garrison from Newport, pulled in his troops from outposts around New York, and prepared to move south against Charleston with a large part of his force. With d'Estaing's withdrawal, the British regained control of the sea along the American coast, giving Clinton a mobility that Washington could not match. While Clinton drew from New York and Savannah to achieve a decisive concentration of force (14,000 men) at Charleston, Congress had sent only piecemeal reinforcements to Lincoln over difficult overland routes.

Applying the lessons of his experience in 1776, Clinton this time carefully planned a coordinated Army-Navy attack. First, he landed his force on John's Island to the south, then moved up to the Ashley River, investing Charleston from the land side. (*See Inset, Map 10.*) Lincoln, under strong pressure from the South Carolina civilian authorities, concentrated his forces in a citadel defense on the neck of land between the Ashley and Cooper Rivers, leaving Fort Moultrie and other harbor defenses lightly manned. On April 8 British warships successfully forced the passage past Moultrie, investing Charleston from the sea. The siege then proceeded in traditional eighteenth century fashion, and on May 12, 1780, despite a masterful delaying defense that humiliated Clinton, Lincoln had to surrender his entire force of 5,466 men in the greatest disaster to befall the American cause during the war. Meanwhile, Col. Abraham Buford with 350 Virginians was moving south to reinforce the garrison. When he learned of the garrison's fate, Buford tried to withdraw; but Lt. Col. Banastre Tarleton with a force of British light cavalry and infantry took Buford by surprise at the Waxhaws, a district near the North Carolina border, and slaughtered most of Buford's men after they attempted to surrender. This brutality shocked most Americans and, as had happened with the Jenny McCrea incident, motivated the militia forces to take to the field in ever-increasing numbers.

After the capture of Charleston, Clinton returned to New York with about a third of his force, leaving General Cornwallis with 8,000 men to follow up the victory. Cornwallis established his main seaboard bases at Savannah, Beaufort, Charleston, and Georgetown. In the interior, he extended his line of control along the Savannah River westward to Ninety-Six and northward to Camden and Rocky Mount. Cornwallis' force, however, was too small to police so large an area, even with the aid of the Tories who took to the field. Though no organized Continental force remained in the Carolinas and Georgia, American guerrillas, led by Brig. Gens. Thomas Sumter and Andrew Pickens and Lt. Col. Francis Marion, began to harry British posts and lines of communications and to battle the bands of Tories. A bloody, ruthless, and confused civil war ensued, its character determined in no small degree by Tarleton's action at the Waxhaws. In this way, as in the Saratoga campaign, the American grass roots strength began once again to assert itself and to deny the British the fruits of military victory.

On June 22, 1780, the Maryland Division (two understrength brigades) from Washington's army arrived at Hillsborough, North Carolina, to form the nucleus of a new Southern Army around which mi-

## FRANCIS MARION (1732–1795)

When Charleston, South Carolina, fell to the British in 1780, organized American resistance broke down, initially leaving the defense of the southern colonies in the hands of guerrilla bands. One of the most famous guerrilla leaders was Francis Marion, who became known as the Swamp Fox for his tactic of hiding in back-country marshes before sallying forth to harass the British with lightning raids. Marion and other guerrillas played a key role in General Greene's Southern Campaign, pinning down British units while Continental Army regulars prepared for the decisive battles to come in 1780–1781.

litia could rally and which could serve as the nerve center of guerrilla resistance. In July Congress, without consulting Washington, provided a commander for this army in the person of General Gates, the hero of Saratoga. Gates soon lost his northern laurels. Gathering a force of about 4,000 men, over half of them militia, and ignoring the advice of his subordinates who were more familiar with the terrain, he set out to attack the British post at Camden, South Carolina. Instead of taking a more circuitous route that could be supported logistically, Gates marched through a district already denuded of food. Cornwallis hurried north from Charleston with reinforcements, and his army of 2,200 British regulars made contact with Gates outside Camden on the night of August 15.

In the battle that ensued the following morning, Gates deployed his militia on the left and the continentals under Maj. Gen. Johann de Kalb on the right. Morning fog, compounded by the smoke muskets, prevented each of the two parts of the American force from seeing what was happening to the other. The militia was still forming when Cornwallis struck, and they fled in panic before the British onslaught. On the other side of the field, de Kalb's continentals drove back the British forces opposing them. At this point the British who had driven the militia from the field wheeled on the continentals and brought an end to the valiant but hopeless fight. Tarleton's cavalry pursued the fleeing Americans for thirty miles, killing or making prisoner those who lagged. Gates himself fled too fast for Tarleton, reaching Hillsborough, 160 miles away, in three days and leaving his men to fend for themselves. To add to the disaster, Tarleton caught up with General Sumter, whom Gates had sent with a detachment to raid a British wagon train, and virtually destroyed his force in a surprise attack at Fishing Creek on August 18. Once more South Carolina seemed safely in British hands.

### Nadir of the American Cause

In the summer of 1780 the American cause seemed to be at as low an ebb as it had been after the New York campaign in 1776 or after the defeats at Ticonderoga and Brandywine in 1777. Defeat in the south was not the only discouraging aspect of patriot affairs. In the north, a creeping paralysis had set in as the patriotic enthusiasm of the early war years waned. The Continental currency had depreciated virtually out of existence, and Congress was impotent to pay the

soldiers or purchase supplies. At Morristown, New Jersey, in the winter of 1779–1780, the army suffered worse hardships than at Valley Forge. Congress could do little but attempt to shift its responsibilities onto the states, giving each the task of providing clothing for its own troops and furnishing certain quotas of “specific supplies” for the entire Army. The system of specific supplies worked not at all. Not only were the states laggard in furnishing supplies, but when they did it was seldom at the time or place they were needed. This breakdown in the supply system was more than even General Greene as Quartermaster General could withstand; in early 1780, under heavy criticism in Congress, he resigned his position.

Under such difficulties, Washington had to struggle to hold even a small Army together. Recruiting of continentals, difficult to begin with, became almost impossible when the troops could neither be paid nor supplied adequately and had to suffer such winters as those at Morristown. Enlistments and drafts from the militia in 1780 produced not quite half as many men for one year’s service as had enlisted in 1775 for three years or the duration. While recruiting lagged, morale among those men who had enlisted for the longer terms naturally fell. Mutinies in 1780 and 1781 were suppressed only by measures of great severity.

Germain could write confidently to Clinton: “so very contemptible is the rebel force now ... that no resistance ... is to be apprehended that can materially obstruct ... the speedy suppression of the rebellion ... the American levies in the King’s service are more in number than the whole of the enlisted troops in the service of the Congress.” The French were unhappy. In the summer of 1780 they occupied the vacated British base at Newport and moved in a naval squadron and 4,000 troops under the command of Lt. Gen. Jean Baptiste Donatien de Vimeur, the Comte de Rochambeau. Rochambeau immediately warned his government: “Send us troops, ships and money, but do not count on these people nor on their resources, they have neither money nor credit, their forces exist only momentarily, and when they are about to be attacked in their own homes they assemble ... to defend themselves.” Another French commander thought only one highly placed American traitor was needed to decide the campaign.

Clinton had in fact already found his highly placed traitor in Benedict Arnold, the hero of the march to Quebec, the naval battle on the lakes, Fort Stanwix, and Saratoga. “Money is this man’s God,” one of his enemies had said of Arnold earlier; evidently, he was correct. Lucrative rewards promised by the British led to Arnold’s treason, though he evidently resented the slights Congress had dealt him; and he justified his act by claiming that the Americans were now fighting for the interests of Catholic France and not their own. Arnold wangled an appointment as commander at West Point and then entered into a plot to deliver this key post to the British. Washington discovered the plot on September 21, 1780, just in time to foil it, though Arnold himself escaped to become a British brigadier.

Arnold’s treason in September 1780 marked the nadir of the patriot cause. Yet in the closing months of 1780, the Americans somehow put together the ingredients for a final and decisive burst of energy in 1781. Congress persuaded Robert Morris, a wealthy Philadelphia merchant, to accept a post as Superintendent of Finance; Col. Timothy Picker-

**Arnold’s treason in September 1780 marked the nadir of the patriot cause.**

ing, an able administrator, would replace Greene as Quartermaster General. Greene, as Washington's choice, was then named to succeed Gates in command of the Southern Army. General Lincoln, exchanged after Charleston, was appointed Secretary at War; and the old board was abolished. Morris took over many of the functions previously performed by unwieldy committees. Working closely with Pickering, he abandoned the old paper money entirely and introduced a new policy of supplying the army by private contracts, using his personal credit as eventual guarantee for payment in gold or silver. It was an expedient but, for a time at least, it worked.

### Greene's Southern Campaign

It was the frontier militia assembling "when they were about to be attacked in their own homes" who struck the blow that actually marked the turning point in the south. Late in 1780, with Clinton's reluctant consent, Cornwallis set out on the invasion of North Carolina. He sent Maj. Patrick Ferguson, who had successfully organized the Tories in the upcountry of South Carolina, to move north simultaneously with his "American Volunteers," spread the Tory gospel in the North Carolina back country, and join the main army at Charlotte with a maximum number of recruits. Ferguson's advance northward alarmed the independent-minded "over-mountain men" in western North Carolina, southwest Virginia, and what is now east Tennessee. A picked force of mounted militia riflemen gathered on the Catawba River in western North Carolina, set out to find Ferguson, and brought him to bay at King's Mountain near the border of the two Carolinas on October 7. In a battle of patriot against Tory (Ferguson was one of only a handful of British soldiers present), the patriots' triumph was complete. Ferguson himself was killed, and few of his command escaped death or capture. Some got the same "quarter" Tarleton had given Buford's men at the Waxhaws.

King's Mountain was as fatal to Cornwallis' plans as Bennington had been to those of Burgoyne. The North Carolina Tories, cowed by the fate of their compatriots, gave him lame support. The British commander on October 14, 1780, began a wretched retreat in the rain back to Winnsboro, South Carolina, with militia harassing his progress. Meanwhile, Clinton, acting on guidance from London, launched an expedition of 2,500 men under Benedict Arnold to establish a base in Virginia to reinforce Cornwallis.

## KING'S MOUNTAIN

Sir Henry Clinton remembered King's Mountain as "the first ... of a Chain of Evils that ... at last ended in the total loss of America." On October 7, 1780, when only a few continentals and isolated guerrillas blocked the restoration of British rule in the south, 1,400 "over-mountain men" and militia surrounded and overran the wooded hilltop position of 1,100 Tories and killed their leader, Major Ferguson. The victory not only gave the patriots time to regroup for the campaign that eventually led to Yorktown but also proved a major patriot victory in the vicious struggle for political allegiances in the south.

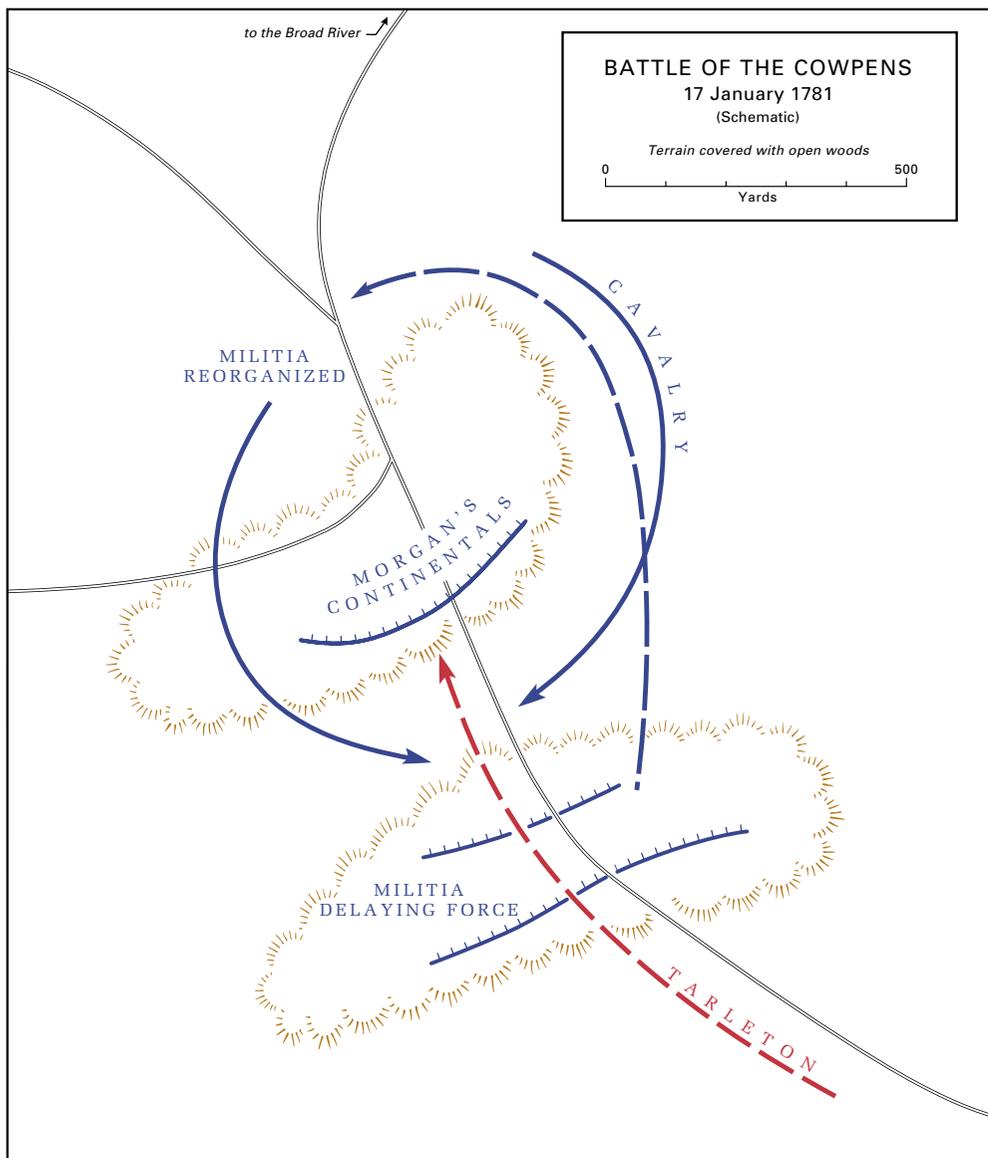
The frontier militia had turned the tide; but having done so, they returned to their homes. To keep the tide moving against the British was the task of the new commander, General Greene. When Greene arrived at Charlotte early in December 1780, he found 1,500 men fit for duty, only 949 of them continentals. The army lacked clothing and provisions and had little systematic means of procuring them. Greene decided not to engage Cornwallis' army in battle until he had built up his strength, instead to pursue delaying tactics to wear down his stronger opponent. To accomplish this goal, he built on Gates' earlier dispositions. Gates had created a mobile screening force from his best troops. Greene first took the unorthodox step of dividing his army in the face of a superior force, moving part under his personal command to Cheraw Hill and the augmented light screening forces under Brig. Gen. Daniel Morgan west across the Catawba over 100 miles away. It was an intentional violation of the principle of mass. Greene wrote:

I am well satisfied with the movement... It makes the most of my inferior force, for it compels my adversary to divide his, and holds him in doubt as to his own line of conduct. He cannot leave Morgan behind him to come at me, or his posts at Ninety-Six and Augusta would be exposed. And he cannot chase Morgan far, or prosecute his views upon Virginia, while I am here with the whole country open before me. I am as near to Charleston as he is, and as near Hillsborough as I was at Charlotte; so that I am in no danger of being cut off from my reinforcements.

Left unsaid was the fact that divided forces could live off the land much easier than one large force and would constitute two rallying points for local militia instead of one. Greene was in effect sacrificing mass to enhance maneuver.

Cornwallis, at this point in his career an aggressive commander often prone to act before thinking, had determined to gamble everything on a renewed invasion of North Carolina. Ignoring Clinton's warnings, he depleted his Charleston base by bringing almost all his supplies forward. In the face of Greene's dispositions, Cornwallis divided his army into not two but three parts. He sent a holding force to Camden to contain Greene, directed Tarleton with a fast-moving contingent of 1,100 infantry and cavalry to find and crush Morgan, and moved cautiously with the remainder of his army up into North Carolina to cut off any of Morgan's force that escaped Tarleton.

On January 17, 1781, Tarleton caught up with Morgan west of King's Mountain at a place called the Cowpens, an area of open forest near the Broad River. (*Map 11.*) Morgan chose this site to make his stand less by design than by necessity, for he had intended to get across the Broad. Nevertheless, on ground seemingly better suited to the action of regulars, he achieved a little tactical masterpiece, making the most effective use of his heterogeneous force, numerically equal to that of Tarleton but composed of three-fourths militia. Selecting a low hill as the center of his position, he placed his Continental infantry on it, deliberately leaving his flanks open. In front of the main line he posted militia infantry in two lines, instructing the first line to fire two volleys



Map 11

and then fall back on the second, the combined line to fire until the British pressed them, then to fall back to the rear of the continentals and re-form as a reserve. He placed Lt. Col. William Washington's cavalry detachment behind the hill, ready to charge the attacking enemy at the critical moment. Every man in the ranks was informed of the plan of battle and the part he was expected to play in it.

On finding Morgan, Tarleton ordered an immediate attack. His men moved forward in regular formation and were momentarily checked by the militia rifles; but, taking the retreat of the first two lines to be the beginning of a rout, Tarleton's men rushed headlong into the steady fire of the continentals on the hill. When the British were well advanced, the American cavalry struck them on the right flank, broke

**Caught in a classic double envelopment, the British surrendered after suffering heavy losses.**

the British cavalry, and then wheeled on the infantry. The militia, having re-formed, charged out from behind the hill to hit the British left. Caught in a classic double envelopment, the British surrendered after suffering heavy losses. Tarleton managed to escape with only a small force of cavalry he had held in reserve. It was on a small scale and with certain significant differences a repetition of the classic double envelopment of the Romans by a Carthaginian army under Hannibal at Cannae in 216 b.c., an event of which Morgan, no reader of books, probably had not the foggiest notion. But it was a clever use of the terrain and troops by one of the American Army's most intuitive and inspirational commanders.

Having struck this fatal blow against Tarleton, Morgan still had to move fast to escape Cornwallis. Covering 100 miles and crossing two rivers in five days, he rejoined Greene early in February. Cornwallis by now was too heavily committed to the campaign in North Carolina to withdraw. Hoping to match the swift movement of the Americans, he destroyed all his superfluous supplies, baggage, and wagons and set forth in pursuit of Greene's army. The American general retreated through North Carolina into southern Virginia and crossed to safety behind the Dan River. Cornwallis' exhausted forces began to retreat into North Carolina to reach their depot and replenish their supplies. As the British started south, Greene recrossed the Dan and followed, keeping just out of reach of his adversary to avoid any battle he did not wish. Finally, on March 15, 1781, at Guilford Court House in North Carolina, on ground he had chosen himself, Greene gave battle. By this time he had collected 1,500 continentals and 3,000 militia to oppose the 1,900 regulars the British could muster. The British nominally won this contest because they managed to hold the field after a hard-fought battle, but they suffered disproportionate casualties of about one-fourth of the force engaged. It was like Bunker Hill a Pyrrhic victory. His ranks depleted and his supplies exhausted, Cornwallis withdrew to Wilmington on the coast to once again rebuild his army. Then he decided to move north to join the British forces General Clinton had sent to Virginia.

Greene, his army in better condition than six months earlier, pushed quickly into South Carolina to reduce the British posts in the interior. He fought two battles—at Hobkirk's Hill on April 25 and at Eutaw Springs on September 8—losing both but with approximately the same results as at Guilford Court House. One by one the British interior posts fell to Greene's army or to militia and partisans. By October 1781 the majority of the British had been forced to withdraw to their two strongholds along the coast, Charleston and Savannah. Greene had lost battles but won a campaign. In so doing, he paved the way for the greater victory to follow at Yorktown.

### **Yorktown: The Final Act**

As Howe and Burgoyne went their separate ways in 1777, each seemingly determined to satisfy only personal ambitions, so Clinton and Cornwallis in 1781 paved the road to Yorktown with their disagreements and lack of coordination. Clinton was Cornwallis' superior in this case, but the latter enjoyed the confidence of Germain to an extent that Clinton did not. Clinton, believing that without substantial

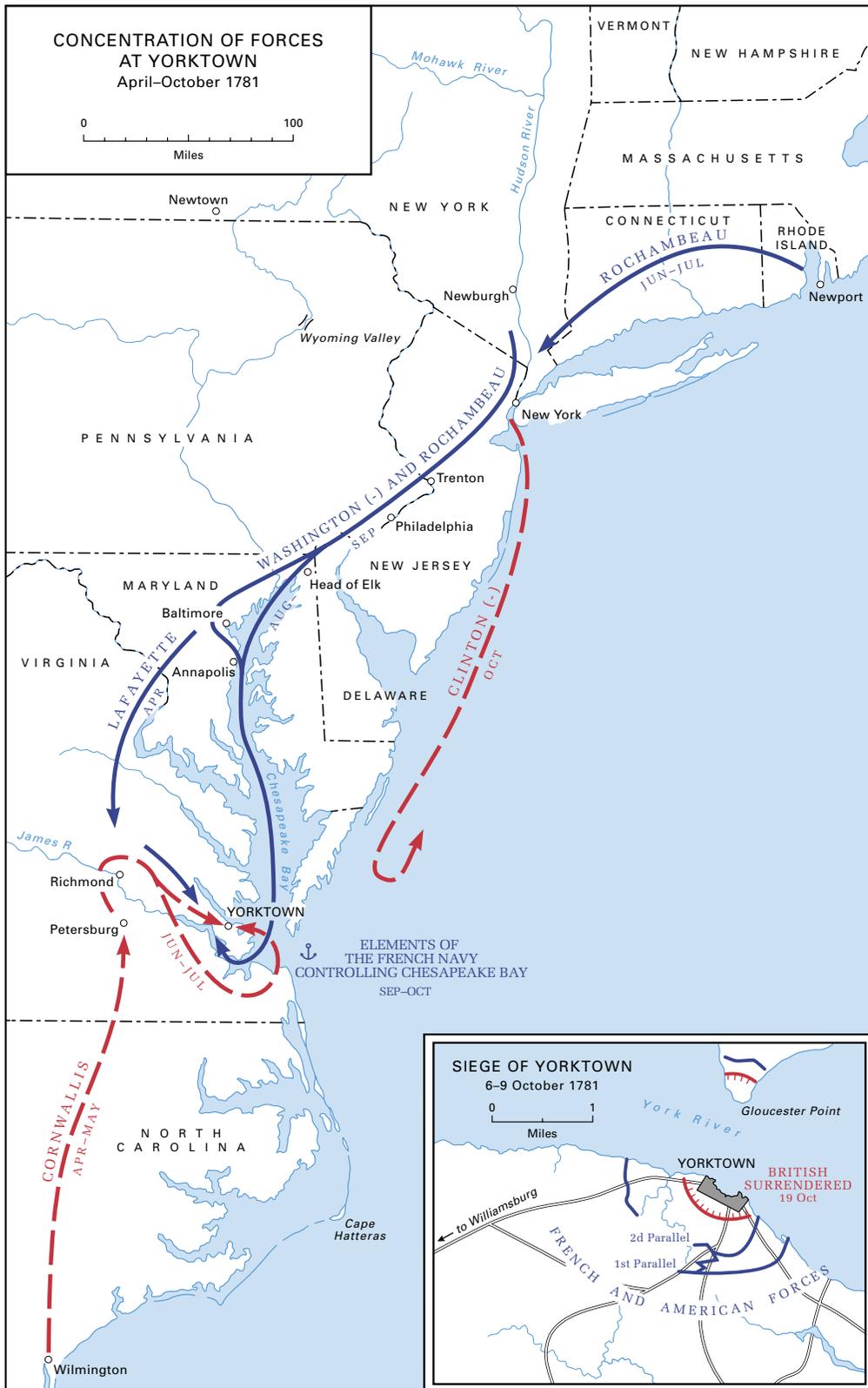
reinforcements the British could not operate far from coastal bases, had opposed Cornwallis' ventures in the interior of the Carolinas. When Cornwallis came to Virginia, he did so without even informing his superior of his intention.

Since 1779 Clinton had sought to paralyze the state of Virginia by conducting raids up its great rivers, arousing the Tories, and establishing a base in the Chesapeake Bay region. (*See Map 12.*) He thought this base might eventually be used as a starting point for one arm of a pincers movement against Pennsylvania for which his own idle force in New York would provide the other. A raid conducted in the Hampton Roads area in 1779 was highly successful; but when Clinton sought to follow it up in 1780, the force sent for the purpose had to be diverted to Charleston to bail out Cornwallis after King's Mountain. Finally, in 1781 he got an expedition into Virginia, a contingent of 1,600 under the American traitor, Benedict Arnold. In January Arnold conducted a destructive raid up the James River all the way to Richmond. His presence soon proved to be a magnet that drew forces of both sides to Virginia.

In an effort to trap Arnold, Washington dispatched Lafayette to Virginia with 1,200 of his scarce continentals and persuaded the French to send a naval squadron from Newport to block Arnold's escape by sea. The plan went awry when a British fleet drove the French squadron back to Newport and Clinton sent another 600 men to Virginia along with a new commander, Maj. Gen. William Phillips. Phillips and Arnold continued their raids, which Lafayette was too weak to prevent. Then on May 20 Cornwallis arrived from Wilmington and relieved Phillips. With additional temporary reinforcements sent by Clinton, he was able to field a force of about 7,000 men, about a quarter of the British strength in America. Washington sent down an additional reinforcement of 800 continentals under General Wayne; but even with Virginia militia, Lafayette's force remained greatly outnumbered.

Cornwallis and Clinton were soon working at cross-purposes. Cornwallis proposed to carry out major operations in the interior of Virginia, but Clinton saw as little practical value in this tactic as Cornwallis did in Clinton's plan to establish a base in Virginia to launch amphibious raids along the Chesapeake Bay. Cornwallis had no respect for his superior's military skills and saw no reason to give up his independent command. Instead, he did his level best to ignore Clinton's orders. Cornwallis at first turned to the interior and engaged in a fruitless pursuit of Lafayette north of Richmond. Then, on receiving Clinton's positive order to return to the coast and return part of his force to New York, Cornwallis moved back down the Virginia peninsula to take up station at Yorktown, a small tobacco port on the York River just off the Chesapeake Bay. In the face of Cornwallis' insistence that he must keep all his troops with him, Clinton vacillated, reversing his own orders several times and in the end granting Cornwallis' request. Lafayette and Wayne followed Cornwallis cautiously down the peninsula, lost a skirmish with him at Green Spring near Williamsburg on July 6, and finally took up a position at Williamsburg to keep an eye on Yorktown.

Meanwhile, Washington had been trying to persuade the French to cooperate in a combined land and naval assault on New York in the



Map 12

summer of 1781. Rochambeau brought his 4,000 troops down from Newport and placed them under Washington's command. The prospects were still bleak, since the combined Franco-American regular force numbered but 10,000 and would still be outnumbered by Clinton's 17,000 in well-fortified positions. Then on August 14 Washington learned that the French Fleet in the West Indies, commanded by Admiral Francois de Grasse, would not come to New York but would arrive in the Chesapeake later in the month and remain there until October 15. He saw immediately that if he could achieve a superior concentration of force on the land side while de Grasse still held the bay, he could destroy the British army at Yorktown before Clinton had a chance to relieve it.

The movements that followed illustrate most effectively a successful application of the principles of the offensive, surprise, objective, mass, and maneuver. Even without unified command of Army and Navy forces, Franco-American cooperation this time was excellent. Admiral Louis, the Comte de Barras, immediately put out to sea from Newport to join de Grasse. Washington sent orders to Lafayette to contain Cornwallis at Yorktown. Employing an elaborate deception to convince Clinton that the Americans were about to attack New York, on August 21 Washington started the major portion of the Franco-American army on a rapid secret movement to Virginia via the Chesapeake Bay, leaving only 2,000 Americans under General Heath behind to watch Clinton.

On August 30, while Washington was on the move south, de Grasse arrived in the Chesapeake with his entire fleet of twenty-four ships of the line and a few days later debarked 3,000 French troops to join Lafayette. Admiral Thomas Graves, the British naval commander in New York, meanwhile had put out to sea in late August with nineteen ships of the line, hoping either to intercept Barras' squadron or to block de Grasse's entry into the Chesapeake. He failed to find Barras; and when he arrived off Hampton Roads on September 5, he found de Grasse already in the bay. The French admiral sallied forth to meet Graves, and the two fleets fought an indecisive action off the Virginia capes. Yet for all practical purposes the victory lay with the French, for while the fleets maneuvered at sea for days following the battle, Barras' squadron slipped into the Chesapeake and landed heavy artillery for the siege. Then de Grasse got back into the bay and joined Barras, confronting Graves with so superior a naval force that he decided to return to New York to refit.

## **Surrender of Cornwallis**

When Washington's army arrived at Williamsburg on September 26, the French Fleet was in firm control of the bay, blocking Cornwallis' sea route of escape. A decisive concentration had been achieved. Counting 3,000 Virginia militiamen, Washington had a force of over 9,000 Americans and 6,000 French troops with which to conduct the siege. It proceeded in the best traditions of Marshal Sebastien Vauban under the direction of French engineers. Cornwallis obligingly abandoned his forward position on September 30, and on October 6 the first parallel was begun 600 yards from the main British position. Artillery placed along the trench began its destructive work on October 9. By October 11 the zigzag connecting trench had been dug 300 yards forward and

**Image Not  
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in Internet Version**

Surrender of Lord Cornwallis at Yorktown, Virginia, October 19th, 1781  
*John Trumbull, 1820*

work on the second parallel had begun. Two British redoubts needed to be reduced to extend the line to the York River. Washington brilliantly carried out that action by using a surprise attack at bayonet point just after dark: Americans under Lafayette took Redoubt 10; and Frenchmen under Lafayette's brother-in-law, the Viscount Louis-Marie Noailles, secured Redoubt 9. This accomplished, Cornwallis' only recourse was a desperate attempt to escape across the river to Gloucester Point, where the allied line was thinly held. A storm on the night of October 16 frustrated his attempt to do so, leaving him with no hope except relief from New York. Clinton had been considering such relief for days, but he acted too late. On the very day, October 17, that Admiral Graves set sail from New York with a reinforced fleet and 7,000 troops for the relief of Yorktown, Cornwallis began negotiations on terms of surrender. On October 19 his entire army marched out to lay down its arms with the British band playing an old tune, "The World Turned Upside Down."

So far as active campaigning was concerned Yorktown ended the war, though neither side realized it at the time. Both Greene and Washington maintained their armies in positions near New York and Charleston for nearly two years more, but with only some minor skirmishing in the south. Cornwallis' defeat led to the resignation of the British Cabinet and the formation of a new government that decided the war in America was lost. With some success, Britain devoted its energies to trying to salvage what it could in the West Indies and in India. The independence for which Americans had fought thus virtually became a reality when Cornwallis' command marched out of its breached defenses at Yorktown.

### **The Summing Up: Reasons, Lessons, and Meaning**

The American victory in the War of the Revolution was a product of many factors, no one of which can be positively assigned first impor-

tance. Washington, looking back on the vicissitudes of eight years, could only explain it as the intervention of “Divine Providence.” American historians in the nineteenth century saw that divine providence as having been manifested primarily in the character and genius of the modest Commander in Chief himself. Washington’s leadership was clearly one of the principal factors in American success; it seems fair to say that the Revolution could hardly have succeeded without him. Yet in many of the events that led to victory—Bennington, Saratoga, King’s Mountain, and Cowpens, to name but a few—his personal influence was remote.

Today many scholars stress not the astonishment that Washington felt at the victory of a weak and divided confederation of American states over the greatest power of the age but the practical difficulties the British faced in suppressing the revolt. These were indeed great, but they do not appear to have been insuperable if one considers military victory alone and not its political consequences. The British forfeited several chances for military victory in 1776–1777, and again in 1780 they might have won had they been able to throw 10,000 fresh troops into the American war. American military leaders were more resourceful and imaginative than their British counterparts, and they proved quite capable of profiting from British blunders. In addition to George Washington, Nathanael Greene, Henry Knox, Daniel Morgan, and Benedict Arnold showed remarkable military abilities; of the foreign volunteers, Steuben and the young Lafayette were outstanding. The resourcefulness of this extraordinary group of leaders was matched by the dedication to the cause of the Continental rank and file. Only men so dedicated could have endured the hardships of the march to Quebec, the crossing of the Delaware, Valley Forge, Morristown, and Greene’s forced marches in the southern campaign. British and Hessian professionals never showed the same spirit; their virtues were exhibited principally in situations where discipline and training counted most.

The militia, the men who fought battles and then went home, also exhibited this spirit on many occasions. The militiamen have been generally maligned as useless by one school of thought and glorified by another as the true victors in the war. Any balanced view must recognize that their contributions were great, though they would have counted for little without the Continental Army to give the American cause that continued sustenance that only a permanent force in being could give it. It was the ubiquity of the militia that made British victories over the continentals in the field so meaningless. And the success with which the militia did operate derived from the firm political control the patriots had established over the countryside long before the British were in any position to challenge it—the situation that made the British task so difficult in the first place.

For all these American virtues and British difficulties and mistakes, the Americans still required French aid—money, supplies, and in the last phase military force—to win a decisive and clear-cut military victory. Most of the muskets, bayonets, and cannon used by the Continental Army came from France. The French contested the control of the seas that was so vital to the British and compelled them to divert forces from the American mainland to other areas. The final stroke at Yorktown, though a product of Washington’s strategic conception, was possible only because of the temporary predominance of French naval power

off the American coast and the presence of a French army. The French entered the war for reasons of their own national interest, but they were no less instrumental in the winning of American independence.

French aid was doubly necessary because the American war effort lacked strong national direction. The Revolution showed conclusively the need for a central government with power to harness the nation's resources for war. It is not surprising that in 1787 nearly all those who had struggled so long and hard as leaders in the Continental Army or in administrative positions under the Congress were to be found in the ranks of the supporters of a new constitution that created such a central government with a strong executive and the power to "raise armies and navies," call out the militia, and directly levy taxes to support itself.

The strictly military lessons of the Revolution were more equivocal. Tactical innovations were not radical; but they did represent a culmination of the trend, which started during the French and Indian War, toward employment of light troops as skirmishers in conjunction with traditional linear formations. By the end of the war both armies were fighting in this fashion. The Americans strove to develop the same proficiency as the British in regular line-of-battle tactics, while the British adapted to the American terrain and tactics by employing skirmishers and fighting when possible from behind cover. Washington was himself a military conservative, and Steuben's training program was designed to equip American troops to fight in European fashion with modifications to provide for the increased use of light infantry. The guerrilla tactics that characterized many actions, principally those of the militia, were no product of the design of Washington or his leading subordinates but of circumstances over which they had little control. The American rifle, most useful in guerrilla actions or in the hands of skirmishers, played no decisive role in the Revolution. It was of great value in wooded areas, as at Saratoga and King's Mountain; but for open-field fighting, its slow rate of fire and lack of a bayonet made it inferior to the musket.

Since both militiamen and continentals played roles in winning the war, the Revolutionary experience provided ammunition for two diametrically opposed schools of thought on American military policy: the one advocating a large Regular Army, the other reliance on the mi-

## BADGE OF MILITARY MERIT

In 1782, near the end of the Revolutionary War, General Washington created the Badge of Military Merit, an individual award for enlisted men. Exceptional gallantry or extraordinary fidelity and essential service, documented by local commanders and approved by General Washington, qualified a soldier for a heart-shaped, purple-cloth badge with the word "MERIT" embroidered in the heart's center that the recipient wore over the left breast. Only three men, all from Connecticut units, received the Badge of Military Merit: Sgts. Daniel Bissell, Jr., William Brown, and Elijah Churchill in 1783. The award fell into disuse after the Continental Army disbanded. Despite assertions that the Purple Heart created in 1932 was a revived Badge of Military Merit, the only connection between the two awards was some similarity in design and color.

litia as the bulwark of national defense. The real issue, as Washington fully recognized, was less militia versus regulars—for he never believed the infant republic needed a large standing army—than the extent to which militia could be trained and organized to form a reliable national reserve. The lesson Washington drew from the Revolution was that the militia should be “well regulated,” that is, trained and organized under a uniform national system in all the states and subject to call into national service in war or emergency.

The lesson had far greater implications for the future than any of the tactical changes wrought by the American Revolution. It balanced the rights of freedom and equality proclaimed in the Declaration of Independence with a corresponding obligation of all citizens for military service to the nation. This concept, which was to find explicit expression in the “nation in arms” during the French Revolution, was also implicit in the American; and it portended the end of eighteenth century limited war fought by professional armies officered by an aristocratic class. As Steuben so well recognized, American continentals were not professional soldiers in the European sense and militia even less so. They were instead a people’s army fighting for a cause. In this sense then, the American Revolution began the “democratization of war,” a process that eventually led to the new concept of a nation in arms.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What were the flaws in the British plan of 1777? Would the offensive have been successful if it were implemented as planned?
2. List the reasons behind Burgoyne’s defeat at Saratoga. How could he have done things differently? Could he have been successful?
3. Why were the British not more successful in rallying Tory support to the Crown?
4. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of a guerrilla army such as that formed in the south by Sumter, Pickens, and Marion? Can guerrilla forces alone defeat regular troops?
5. What were the critical elements of the American victory at Yorktown?
6. How crucial was foreign support in the American victory in the Revolution?

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