

GEN. DANIEL MORGAN RECOUNTS THE VICTORY AT COWPENS IN A LETTER TO GEN. NATHANIEL GREENE



January 19, 1781: The troops...have been so fortunate as to obtain a complete victory over a detachment from the British army... The action happened on the 17th ...at Cowpens...on the 14th, having received certain intelligence that Cornwallis and Col. Tarleton were both in motion... I abandoned my encampment...and...took possession of a post (near) the...Broad River...My situation at the Cowpens enabled me to improve any advantages...

...On the evening of the 16th... one of my scouts returned and informed me that (the British) had advanced within 5 miles of our camp. On this information, I hastened to form as good a position as circumstances would admit, and...we were soon prepared to receive (them).

The infantry, commanded by Lieut. Col. Howard, and the Virginia militia...extended a line in front. The 3rd regiment...were posted at such a distance in their rear as not to be subjected to the line of fire directed at them, and to be so near as to be able to charge the enemy should they be broken. The volunteers of North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia... were situated to guard the flanks...

The enemy drew up in single line of battle, 400 yards in front of our advanced corps. The first battalion of the 7th Regiment was opposed to our right, the 7th Regiment to our left, the infantry...to our center, the light companies on their flanks...The disposition of battle being thus formed, small parties of riflemen were detached to skirmish with the enemy... When the enemy advanced to our line, they received a well-directed and incessant¹ fire. But their numbers being superior to ours, they gained our flanks, which obliged² us to change our position. We retired in good order about fifty paces, formed, advanced on the enemy and gave them a fortunate volley³, which threw them into disorder. Lieut. Col. Howard, observing this, gave orders...to charge...which was done...they fled with the utmost precipitation⁴, leaving their fieldpieces in our possession. We pushed our

¹ Incessant: nonstop

² Obligated: forced

³ Volley: bombardment of fire

⁴ Precipitation: speed

Primary Source
Battle at Cowpens

advantage so effectually that they never had an opportunity of rallying...Lieut. Col. Washington...pushed forward and charged them with such firmness that instead of attempting to recover...[they] broke and fled.

The enemy's whole force were now bent solely in providing for their safety in flight⁵.....As I was obliged...in the morning to secure the prisoners, I cannot be so accurate as to the killed and wounded of the enemy as I could wish. From the reports of an officer...there were 100 non-commissioned officers and privates and 10 commissioned officers killed...2 standards, 2 fieldpieces, 35 wagons... Their baggage, which was immense, they...destroyed.

Our loss is inconsiderable⁶...we fought only eight hundred men, two-thirds of which were militia. The British, with their baggage-guard, were not less than 1,150, and these veteran troops...Such was the inferiority of our numbers that our success must be attributed to the justice of our cause and the bravery of our troops...

⁵ Flight: retreat

⁶ Inconsiderable: small