

A Battle of the Minds

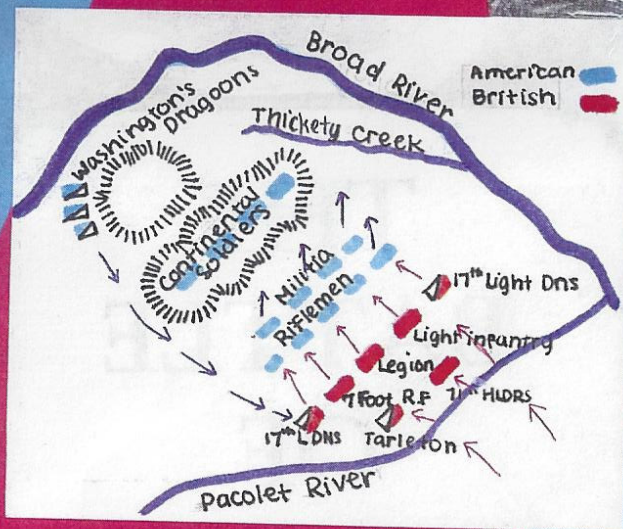
The success of the Battle of Cowpens helped decide the fate of the United States. On January 17, 1781, British Colonel Banastre Tarleton's troops were closing in on the Patriot forces under the command of General Daniel Morgan and Lieutenant Colonel William Washington. Outnumbered in terms of experienced men, General Morgan had to draw up a plan. Through his clever strategy, the British were defeated, raising the spirits of the soldiers, and showing how effective a mind can be against even the largest of groups.

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THE BATTLE OF COWPENS

The
Map
of
the Battle of
COWPENS



A New Way of Fighting

After marching for two days without food and barely any sleep, Colonel Tarleton's force of one thousand one hundred and fifty soldiers came to the Broad river where Morgan's troops awaited them. Little did they know that Morgan had a new and original idea for this battle.

Morgan placed his men in three lines. In the first line, he placed his sharpshooters. Behind them, the militiamen; they were to only fire two rounds before retreating and reforming. Finally, his well-trained Continental soldiers, intended to defeat the British troops once and for all. Simultaneously, the reformed militia and the American cavalry, under Lieutenant Colonel Washington would attack the British from their left and right flanks.

Upon sighting of the American militia – the first line of men – Tarleton ordered his cavalry and infantry to charge. The sharpshooters simply targeted the officers, shot and withdrew. As the British march on, the militia shoots their two volleys and also retreated. Tarleton, sensing victory, sent British dragoons after them, but the Patriot cavalry successfully steered them away from the militia, and the battlefield. Finally, the British came face to face with the Patriot Continentals.

An order from Tarleton sent the British cavalry and the Royal Fusilier Highlanders against the American's right flank. The Continentals were ordered to turn and face the attack, but in the commotion of the battle, word was twisted and they begin to retreat. The misunderstanding dawning over Morgan, he quickly instructed them to halt and fire. Surprised, the British broke formation, for they thought the Continentals were retreating, only to have turn and fight once more. After a final bayonet charge, the British begin to flee and surrender. The results of the battle clearly favored the Patriots. Only sixty Americans were wounded and a mere twelve killed, compared to the one hundred and ten dead, two hundred wounded and eight hundred twenty nine captured British men.

The Battle of Cowpens revealed the importance of quick and alert minds. If not for Morgan's plan, the Patriots would not have been able to overcome the British. When the right flank of the Continentals misunderstood their orders and were corrected, they hastily fixed their mistake. Finally, Morgan knew his opponents well, and planned accordingly. Would the course of the United States have gone differently if the clever and attentive officers and soldiers in the Battle of Cowpens had been different? The answer: yes.