

Lexington and Concord, Bunker Hill, Trenton and Princeton, Saratoga, Yorktown – the stuff of legend, THE American Revolution as we learn it. George Washington, Israel Putnam, Henry Knox and Horatio Gates are just a few of the legendary heroes who gained their fame battling the British to a stalemate in the northern colonies of England’s American Empire. But wait! General Gates forced the British surrender at Saratoga in 1777, and General Washington forced a surrender at Yorktown in 1781. What happened in between, from 1778 to 1781?

Who are the heroes of *those* years, and where did *they* fight? How did *they* force the British to retreat to Yorktown, and to eventually accept such a humiliating defeat in this war for American independence? This is an introduction to *that* story.

The capture of General Burgoyne’s army at Saratoga and the resulting Continental-French alliance forced the English high command to come up with a new plan that would allow them to win the war quickly, with as much of their American colonial empire intact as possible. Believing there were huge numbers of Loyalists in the South who would join the fight against the “rebels”, Britons switched their focus in 1778 to securing control of Georgia, South Carolina and North Carolina. These colonies were the source of many of the raw materials needed to supply the powerful British navy, and to ensure the well being of their Caribbean sources for sugar, molasses and rum. If things went well the British could use North Carolina as a base of operations against the northern colonies; if “rebel” resistance was greater than expected as the British entered Virginia they could “trade” northern colonies their independence for an end to the war, with England keeping control of Georgia and the Carolinas. Political and economic pressure to end the war continued to escalate in England; political and economic pressure on the Continental Congress also suggested that Americans were desperate to find some way to end the war. Diplomatic hints from the French implied that they would accept that sort of compromise between the Continentals and England.

It seemed a very good plan to the British high command as they began to implement it, and it started out well. In December, 1778, British forces captured Savannah, Georgia; a month later they took control of Augusta, GA, without any significant fight from the rebels. In the next few weeks more than a thousand Americans joined British ranks, some coming from as far away as southern North Carolina. But at Kettle Creek advancing Brits and their Loyalist allies ran into a rebel force led by South Carolinian Andrew Pickens, and though outnumbered, the rebels won the day after a tough, two-hour battle. This was the first setback for the British and marked the beginning of the road to surrender at Yorktown 2 ½ years later.

That “road” led through South Carolina’s “backcountry”, where vicious guerrilla warfare was the rule of the day. Loyalist fathers told British authorities where to find their own rebel sons; rebel soldiers refused to give aid to badly wounded Loyalist relatives (one man coldly told his dying brother-in-law to, “Look to your own friends for help” and walked away, leaving the man to die) [1]; Loyalist neighbors looted or destroyed rebel neighbors’ homes while they were away and vice versa. Both sides ignored previously heeded “rules of war” and escalated the brutality of their attacks, hoping to terrorize the other side into giving up the fight. Though most of the battles lasted only a few minutes, there were notable exceptions such as Ninety Six, where rebel forces failed to drive British forces from their fort after a long siege and a massed attack; or Cowpens, where wily Dan Morgan set a nearly perfect trap for British-Loyalist pursuers and killed or captured nearly all

of the 1200 out to get him and his men. Fighting was so deadly that, in 1780, a full *two-thirds of all American battle deaths were in South Carolina, and 90% of the wounded* went down in South Carolina combat [2]. Men died of gunshots, cannon blasts and sword slashes; they also died of heat stroke, exhaustion, starvation and disease.

But it paid off. Nathaniel Greene's small Continental force, augmented by partisan bands headed by many, many local leaders, continued to confound British attempts to control Georgia and the Carolinas. British frustration mounted with the number of casualties they suffered, and though they claimed to be winning they controlled only Charles Town and Savannah, and little of the countryside. Rebel partisans won 31 of 35 battles against the British in South Carolina, and inflicted three times as many casualties as they took from the enemy [3]. Huck's Defeat, King's Mountain, the Cowpens, Camden, Thicketty Fort, Musgrove's Mill, Guilford Courthouse; William Washington, Nathanael Greene, Daniel Morgan - these are places and names that now are all but forgotten. But they should be as familiar to us as those of George Washington and Yorktown.

This is your chance to investigate that part of the story. Over the course of the next few days you'll look into one of the battles of that part of the war, or check into the role played by one of the heroes who helped corner the British at Yorktown in 1781. Sit tight! Your teacher has the details for you now!

[1] "Brother Against Brother".Cowpens National Battlefield Curriculum Guide.

[2] Edgar, Walter. Partisans and Redcoats: The Southern Conflict That Turned the Tide of the American Revolution. New York: Perennial, 2001, p. 137.

[3] Edgar, p. 143.