

What a Character!

AMERICAN  
WAR HEROES

Notable Lives from History



Marilyn Boyer

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# The American War of Independence

Officially, the War of Independence, often called the American Revolution, began on July 4, 1776, when the Continental Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence. However, the bloodshed had begun the previous year on April 19 with the battles of Lexington and Concord.

Tensions had been rising between the thirteen English colonies in North America and the mother country for many years. Colonists accused King George and Parliament of having violated their rights as English subjects. Although modern history texts rank taxation without representation in Parliament as the cause of the war, in fact the Declaration lists twenty-seven reasons the colonies were

choosing to separate from the British Empire and form a new nation. Among these other reasons were the Crown's interference with American courts and local governments, inciting the Indian tribes to fight against the colonists, and the quartering of British troops in private homes against the wishes of the owners. Finally, enough colonists believed that their rights were safe only under a new government, and Congress had voted for independence.

The British march from Boston on the morning of April 19, 1776, had two purposes. The first was to arrest colonial leaders John Hancock and Samuel Adams who were staying at a private home in Lexington. The second purpose was to advance to nearby Concord where arms, ammunition, and supplies were believed to be stored for the purpose of opposing the British regulars with force if it became necessary. However, American spies had learned of the plan and messengers had ridden through the night of the 18th to give warning to the patriots. Adams and Hancock fled well ahead of the king's troops and colonists streamed to Concord to move the supplies and stop the Redcoats. After a fight at Concord, the British were driven back to Boston and besieged there. Even after this early bloodshed, the colonies sent petitions to the king and Parliament asking for peace and a restoration of their rights. However, diplomacy failed and the king's next actions — including the hiring of mercenaries from other nations — to bring the colonies back under control, made it clear to Congress that independence was the only way to preserve American rights.

After seven years of war, the colonies won their independence and soon had established a new nation. In 1789, the Constitution was ratified and the United States of America was born.



1

# Ethan Allen and His Green Mountain Boys

May 10,  
1775

During the battles at  
Lexington and Concord

The news of the battle at Lexington and Concord in Massachusetts had spread across the colonies rapidly. There had been trouble between the king of England and his American colonists for many years, so the news did not surprise many people on the farms and in the towns of New England. Few were as prepared for war as Ethan Allen and the Green Mountain Boys.

### **Trouble Brewing**

Ethan Allen was a farmer. Born in the Connecticut colony in 1738, he had become a leader in what is now Vermont after moving there and establishing his farm. There was conflict in those days because both New York and New Hampshire claimed the right to sell the land to settlers. The men from Connecticut had bought their farms from New Hampshire. When the government of New York told them they had to pay the New York colonial government for the land as well, trouble was sure to follow.

Allen organized his neighbors into a **militia**. They called themselves the Green Mountain Boys. When New York sent a sheriff or other

**militia:** A military force raised from the civil population to be called up on short notice

official to make the settlers pay a second time for their land, Ethan and the Boys sent them packing. It was the trouble with New York that had caused the Green Mountain Boys to organize in the first place, and it was part of their training for the war with England that would soon follow.

They were not well-trained like the British soldiers. They did not look much like soldiers. They had no uniforms, so every man wore whatever clothing he had. When they gathered for a meeting or a fight, they



looked like most other frontiersmen of their time.

**Lindsey-woolsey** shirts, **buckskin** moccasins, fringed buckskin hunting coats, and homespun breeches were common. They wore all sorts of hats, made at home by mothers, sisters, and wives. These might be in any shape and made from the skins of beaver, squirrel, raccoon, or bear.

They did not have regular army equipment, either. There was not a **bayonet** on any gun they carried. But for the type of fighting that would take place when the war reached their mountains, the Green Mountain Boys were very fit. Though they lacked bayonets, their guns were still deadly.

While the British army still used smooth-bore muskets, the frontiersmen mostly carried rifles. Muskets were not accurate. They could only be used at close range. That was one reason why the British soldiers relied on their bayonets so much. The rifles of the Green Mountain militiamen, however, had grooved, or “rifled” barrels. They were much more accurate than muskets and the frontiersmen had depended on them to shoot game for themselves.

The hard-working families in their rough log homes needed

the meat from the forest to survive. These men had become experts at hitting a target even a hundred yards away.

They would soon prove to be deadly enemies to British regulars in the bright red coats which made such easy targets in the woods.

**Lindsey-woolsey:**

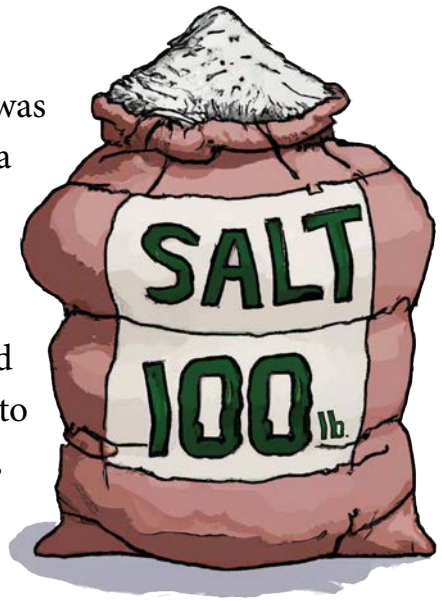
A strong coarse fabric of linen and wool

**buckskin:** Made from the skin of a male deer

**bayonet:** A blade fixed to the muzzle of a gun



Ethan Allen was proud of his men, and he was just the sort of leader they needed. He was a big, tough man. He stood well over six feet tall, much taller than the average American at that time. It was said that he was so strong he could pick up a 100-pound sack of salt with his teeth and sling it up onto his back. He knew how to influence people, and his men were glad to follow him and were very loyal. He also knew how to talk to his enemies. He could **bluff** and



threaten with the best of them when that was what was needed. When news of the war against England came, the men and their leader were ready.

**bluff:** Trick

When the story of Lexington and Concord came to the Green Mountains, Allen immediately called his men to assemble. He later said, “The first systematic and bloody attempt at Lexington to enslave America thoroughly electrified my mind, and fully determined me to take part with my country.”<sup>1</sup> The Boys were quick to answer the call. Buckskin-clad men left their hayfields, picked up their long rifles, and headed for the meeting place. Less than a month after the Battle of Lexington, the militia was ready for a fight.

### **Fort Ticonderoga (ti-con-dero-ga)**

Allen set his sights on Fort Ticonderoga on Lake Champlain. In those days, armies often had to travel and move supplies by water, and the waterways of Champlain, the Hudson River, and Lake George could all be controlled by the guns of Fort Ticonderoga. Since the British held

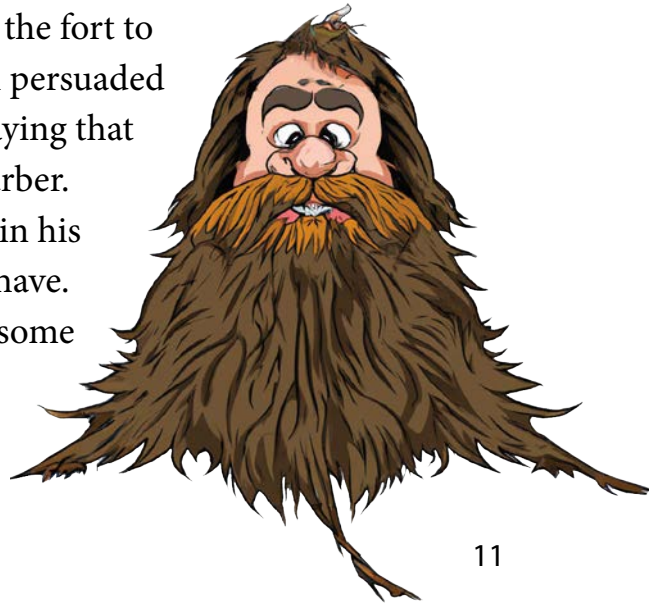
Canada, this fort could prevent an attack from that direction. First, the fort had to be taken from the British.

Ticonderoga had been a French fort until the end of the French and Indian War. When the British took over there, they had not kept the fort in good repair. Its position still made it a barrier to any ship attempting to sail past. Every patriot in New England understood that Ticonderoga needed to be conquered early in the war. In Allen's home colony of Connecticut, some leading patriots took action to help. They persuaded the colony's leaders to take 300 **pounds** from the treasury for the task. It was sent to Ethan Allen to buy powder and bullets and to pay his men.

**pounds:** British money

Allen was moving ahead with his preparations, acting with the energy that people had learned to expect from him. He had first gathered all the Green Mountain Boys in the area of Bennington. Then a rider was sent to bring down other Boys from the north. He wanted a large force in place for the attack on Ticonderoga, which he had decided to launch on May 10. The Boys were to gather on the shore of Lake Champlain at a place called Hand's Cove.

The militia leader had sent a spy into the fort to report on conditions inside. The man persuaded the British soldiers to let him in by saying that he needed the services of the fort's barber. His bushy beard had grown too long in his wilderness travels, and he wanted a shave. He got one, and along with it, he got some useful information from the barber, who seemed to enjoy chatting with his customers.



During the shave, he learned that the post was held by only 50 British troops. That was enough to keep the barber busy, but not enough to keep such a large fort secure. He also found out that the fort was in a very bad condition.

The report was encouraging, but Allen knew that 50 British soldiers could hold the fort against a larger force outside. They had the advantage of the fort walls and many cannons. The attack on Ticonderoga would need the element of surprise.

All through the moonlit night of May 9, 1775, the Green Mountain

Boys drifted into Hand's Cove. One by one or in small groups, they appeared from the woods with their deadly long rifles and as much food as they could carry. Ethan

Allen was waiting for them with plenty of gunpowder and lead bullets. They stood chatting in the shadows of the trees, leaning on their rifles and waiting for orders from their leader.



Shortly after midnight there came the sound of galloping hooves and a rider appeared in the camp. The young officer was wearing a Connecticut uniform and he demanded to see Ethan Allen. He was taken to the campfire where Allen was talking with some of his leading men. The stranger announced that the

**commission:** A formal document issued to appoint a named person to high office

Committee of Safety in Cambridge, Massachusetts, had placed him in command of this expedition. He waved a paper which he called his **commission**. He demanded that Allen turn over command to him.

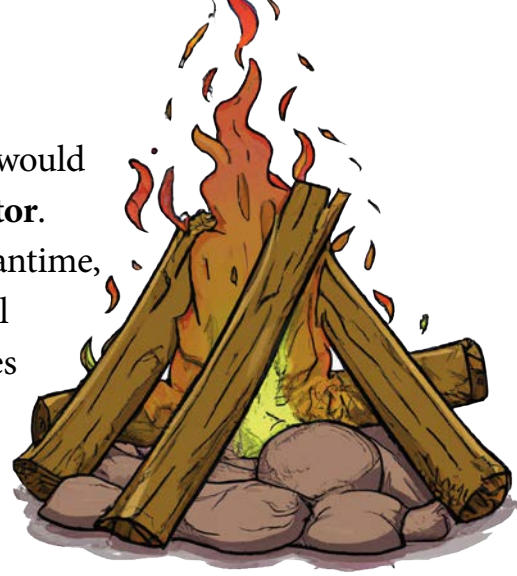
The man's name was Benedict Arnold and he would someday become America's most famous **traitor**.

However, that was far in the future. In the meantime, he would become an officer in the Continental Army and would fight bravely in several battles before going over to the enemy.

The mountain men standing around the campfire only knew that they were loyal to their leader, Ethan Allen, and they did not like the newcomer's attitude. They had volunteered to fight under Allen, and they declared that they would fight for him or not fight at all. Looking around at the grim, weathered faces of these pioneers, Arnold lost some of his confidence. When Allen offered to share command with him, Arnold accepted. No one doubted that Ethan Allen was in charge.

It was still dark when Allen packed 85 of his men into two boats and began the crossing of Lake Champlain to Ticonderoga. He had 200 men ready and eager to fight, but most would have to stay behind. There were only two boats, and the sky would be growing light before they could return for more soldiers. Surprise was the key to success.

Allen stood in the bow of the first boat, sword in hand. Behind him was Benedict Arnold. The rest of the boat was crowded with men talking in low tones as the muffled oars propelled them along to their appointment with history. After a mile of rowing, the dark walls of the fort appeared above them through the mist. Allen gathered his men on the shore and made a brief talk.



**traitor:** One who betrays his country

With Allen and Arnold leading the way, the Boys began climbing the hill toward the fort. Little was heard besides the quiet shuffling of feet and the wild cry of a **loon** in the distance. In the eastern sky, the first

**loon:** A large black and white bird with red eyes

faint glow of dawn could be seen. Men were almost holding their breath. Would the surprise work? The wicket gate was just ahead; they would soon know.



### The Capture

Through the gloom, Allen made out the form of a sentry, lying on a bench beside the gate. Rasping snores told him that the man was asleep. Then someone stepped on a twig and suddenly the sentry, with a gasp, leaped up and threw his musket to his shoulder. Allen leaped forward, attempting to knock the barrel of the gun aside with his sword. But the musket misfired! Only the powder in the pan flashed, lighting up the faces of the sentry and several Green Mountain Boys.

For just an instant they were all blinded by the flash, then they were running, shouting after the sentry. The man was yelling a warning to the fort, but it was too late. Before the sleeping **Britishers** could rouse themselves and come pouring out of the barracks, the Boys

**Britishers:** Native inhabitants of Great Britain

were at the door. One redcoat leaped out and tried to stab one of the attackers with his bayonet, but Allen knocked the Britisher down with the flat of his sword. The man begged Allen

not to kill him. He would live, Allen told him, if he would lead the Green Mountain Boys to the fort commander's door.

The frightened man led them up a flight of stairs in another building. Pounding on the door, Allen demanded, “Come out of there!” A British officer opened the door. Ethan Allen demanded that he surrender the fort immediately.

“By whose authority do you enter this fort?” the officer demanded.

In reply, Allen roared, “In the name of the great Jehovah and the Continental Congress!”<sup>2</sup>

He demanded an immediate and complete surrender. He claimed the fort and everything that belonged to it. If the demand was not granted, he said, not a man would be left alive. The captain surrendered his sword.

The other Green Mountain Boys had been busy **routing** the redcoats out of their beds, and they now stood in their nightclothes on the parade ground, unarmed. The fort had been taken without a shot being fired. After all their guns were collected, the men were returned to their barracks under guard.

**routing:**  
Defeating and causing to retreat in disorder

The fort had become American property in only about an hour. The mountain men were a wild and rowdy lot, shouting and firing off their guns in celebration. The fort’s cannons and provisions would be a great gift for Washington’s new army. Riders were quickly sent out to spread the news. Soon the whole country was celebrating the victory.

The money from Connecticut had been well spent. Allen wrote to Governor Trumbull, telling him he was making him a present of a



major, a captain, and two lieutenants in the regular establishment of George the Third. He had hopes they would serve as a **ransom** for

**ransom:** Release of a prisoner in exchange for a sum of money or another captive

some of their captive friends held in Boston.

The fort's flag was sent to Congress in Philadelphia. It was in their name and the name of the Great Jehovah that it had been captured by Ethan Allen and the Green Mountain Boys.





# 2

## Daniel Morgan and His Sharpshooters

1775–1781

The Battle of Cowpens During  
the Revolutionary War

## Morgan's Early Years

Daniel Morgan, while fighting with the colonists and the British in the French and Indian War, distinguished himself as a fearless fighter and able leader of men. He came very close to dying when shot through the back of his neck in battle. The bullet went through his mouth and came out, knocking out all his teeth on the left side. He hovered between life and death for months, but finally recovered.

At the end of the French and Indian War, he returned home to his farm in Virginia. Soon after returning, he met and married Abigail Bailey, a loving Christian woman who inspired and encouraged him to change his rough ways and try to live a life that demonstrated that he was now a Christian man. She taught her husband to trust in God and become a man with an active prayer life.

Morgan recounts that just before the final attack of the fort at Quebec near the start of the Revolutionary War, he knelt in the cold, drifting snow and pled with God for the courage and strength to fight. His own soldiers attested to how after the victory at the Battle of Cowpens, which we shall explain

later, they recalled him stopping his horse to pray aloud and with tears streaming down his face, thanking God for the victory. His soldiers also said his men never **scoffed** at their leader's

**scoffed:** mocked

prayers, because they noticed that the harder "Old Dan Morgan," as they lovingly called him,



prayed, the more certain they were that they were about to be engaged in a fearsome battle and they therefore welcomed his prayers to God.

Dan Morgan nor his wife had much formal schooling as children, but they **endeavored** to make up for lost time by **procuring** books and studying both early and late each day. Dan and his wife had two little girls and enjoyed building a Christ-centered atmosphere in their little home.

**endeavored:** To try hard to achieve something

About nine years later, a storm began to brew in the colonies for a war of independence from the British. Morgan watched carefully, and after the Battles of Lexington and Concord, the Continental Congress called for ten companies of soldiers from Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia. Dan Morgan received a commission as captain five days after the Battle of Bunker Hill, which took place in Boston.

**procuring:** Acquiring

In less than ten days, Morgan, at the head of 96 expert **riflemen** from Virginia, set out for Boston. They marched the 600 miles in only 21 days without the loss of a single man.

**rifleman:** An infantry soldier armed with a long-rifled gun

### **Expedition to Quebec**

Late in the fall of 1775, Morgan and his men, a band of **sharpshooters**, marched with about a thousand other troops, joining up with Benedict Arnold's ill-fated expedition to Quebec, Canada. In the attack on Quebec, Arnold was wounded and carried off the battlefield, and

**sharpshooters:** Elite corps of riflemen who provided precision shooting

General Montgomery, who was also leading the attack, was killed in action. Morgan took Arnold's place and fought like a hero. He forced his way into the city so far that he and all his men were surrounded, captured, and put into prison.

A British officer, on seeing Morgan's charge, greatly admired his courage and visited him in prison, offering him the rank and pay of colonel in the British army. Morgan quickly answered, "I hope, sir, you will never again insult me in my present distressed and



**scoundrel:** A dishonest person

**regiment:** A military unit consisting of up to 10 companies

**harass:** To make small scale attacks on the enemy

**outposts:** A detachment of troops stationed at a distance from a main force to guard against surprise attacks

unfortunate situation, by making me offers which plainly imply that you think me a **scoundrel**.”<sup>3</sup>

Congress voted Morgan a colonel's commission with orders to raise a **regiment** shortly after he was released from prison on a prisoner exchange.

That regiment reported for duty in Morristown, New Jersey, during the long, hard winter of 1776.

Five hundred of the best riflemen were chosen from various regiments to be under Colonel

Morgan's command. Morgan's men, as they were

known, were to always be at the front, watching

every movement of the enemy, furnishing prompt

and accurate information about the enemy to

General Washington. Part of their job was to

**harass** the British, fighting with the enemy's

**outposts** for every inch of ground.

British General Burgoyne, meanwhile, in the fall of 1777, marched down from Canada with a large group of British, **Hessians**, and Native Americans through the Hudson Valley. Although Washington could hardly spare Morgan's men, he felt compelled to help drive back the invaders, so sent Morgan's men on that mission.

There were two great battles that helped to seal Burgoyne's fate — the Battle of Freeman's Farm and the Battle of Saratoga. The British officers, clad in their bright red uniforms, were easy targets for Morgan's sharpshooters. Morgan's men became a terror to the Hessians. As Morgan proclaimed, "The very sight of my riflemen was always enough for the Hessian **pickets**. They would scamper into their lines as if the devil drove them, shouting in all the English they knew, 'Rebel in da bush! Rebel in da bush!'"<sup>4</sup>

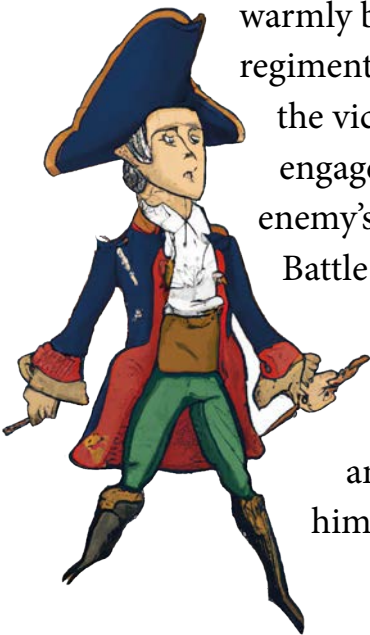
**Hessians:** German troops hired by the British to help fight against the Americans

**pickets:** Soldiers posted on guard ahead of the main force

When Burgoyne eventually surrendered, he took Morgan warmly by the hand and said, "Sir, you command the finest regiment in the world."<sup>5</sup> For the next year and a half, after the victory at Saratoga, Morgan and his men were engaged in **incessant** attacks on the enemy's outposts. Just prior to the Battle of Monmouth, Morgan had an attack of **sciatica**, brought on by constant exposure to the weather and hardships, which forced him to leave the army for a while.

**incessant:** Something repeated without pause

**sciatica:** Pain affecting the back, hip, and outside of the leg



After General Gate was defeated at Camden, however, Morgan declared that no man should have any regard for himself when his country was in peril. He hurried down south and took his old position as colonel. After his performance at the Battle of King’s Mountain, Congress made Morgan a **brigadier general**.

**brigadier general:** An officer of the army, who holds a rank junior to a major general but senior to a colonel, usually commanding a brigade

**upland:** Hilly ground above sea level

**garrisons:** Permanent military installations

**wagoner:** A person who drove a wagonload of supplies across the mountains

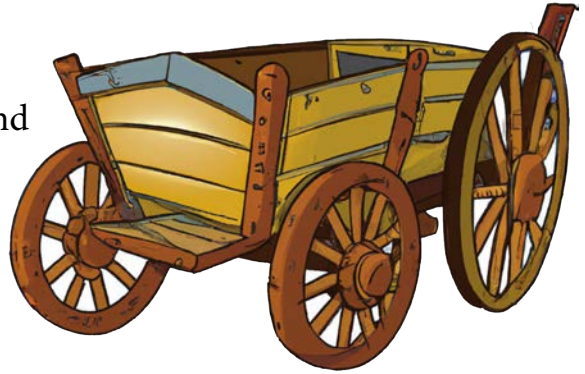
### The Battle of Cowpens

The Battle of Cowpens, however, became his glorious victory, one in which he was able to plan as well as fight. It’s been said that as to the tactics used, this was perhaps the most brilliant battle of the war for independence.

Cowpens was in **upland** South Carolina and so named as it was a pasture where local farmers penned their cattle. General Nathaniel Greene, in an effort to cut Cornwallis off from the seacoast, gave Morgan command of one thousand men, with orders to march to the southwest and threaten inland posts and their **garrisons**.

Cornwallis, the English earl, hardly knew which way to turn, but decided to follow Greene’s example by dividing his army as well. He sent Colonel Banastre Tarleton, known for his cruelty in battle, to crush Morgan. Tarleton was confident he could do so and set up to pounce upon “the old **wagoner**” and crush him with a single blow.

Tarleton called Morgan this because one of Morgan's jobs in the French and Indian War had been wagoner for the British army.



Morgan skillfully began to fall back until he found a place that was well-suited and would give his men an advantage in fighting. Cowpens was that place.

A broad, deep river lay in the rear and would serve to cut off all hope of retreat. Morgan said he chose this so that his men would know they had no option to run away, but must fight or die.

The patriot army at Cowpens encamped the night before the expected battle, but a trusty American acting as a spy was sent to Tarleton to say that the Americans had **faced about**, waiting to fight sometime the next day. That night Morgan went around the many campfires of his men encouraging them with comforting, fatherly words. "Stand by me, boys, and the old wagoner will crack his whip for sure over Tarleton tomorrow."<sup>6</sup>

**faced about:** To turn and face in the opposite direction

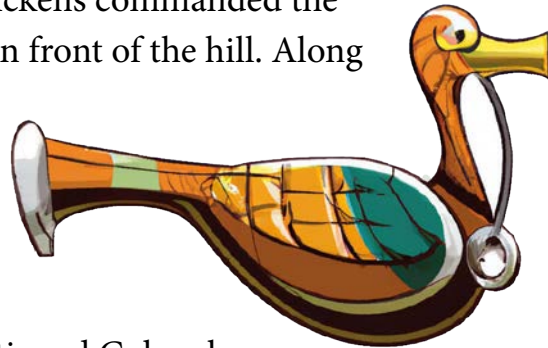
Tarleton, eager to get an early start, put his army in motion by three in the morning. However, that was not early enough to catch the old rifleman napping. Morgan rested his men at night, gave them a hearty breakfast early, and when Tarleton and his men showed up at sunrise, he found the patriots waiting and ready.

**strategically:** In a way that relates to a military advantage

Morgan **strategically** placed his riflemen in the **skirmish line**. These were men so skilled they could bring a squirrel

**skirmish line:** A preliminary battle involving troops in front of the main force

down from the tallest tree. Colonel Pickens commanded the militia which was in place 300 yards in front of the hill. Along the **brow**, 150 yards behind the militia were **veterans** of the



**brow:** The top part of a hill or the edge of something high such as a cliff or rock

**veterans:** Men who had fighting experience

**Continental:** Regular armed forces

**decoy:** Imitating a turkey call to lure a turkey toward the hunter's position

**cocky:** Arrogant

**volley:** When an attacking army lets loose a barrage of bullets all at once

Continental line. Beyond the brow of the hill, Morgan stationed Colonel William Washington with his cavalry, out of sight and poised to move in an instant's notice.

Orders to the militia were to be firm: keep cool, take good aim, give two volleys at killing distance, and then fall back. Morgan encouraged the **Continental**s not to lose heart when the skirmishers and militia fell back. "Stand firm, and fire low. Listen for my turkey call."<sup>7</sup> Morgan often used a small turkey call that hunters would use to **decoy** turkeys. He would blow it in the heat of battle to tell the boys he was there, alive, and watching them fight.

Tarleton, **cocky** as ever, marched his men all night through the mud. They were exhausted and hungry. Tarleton, anxious to start the battle, informed his men that they could eat breakfast only after they crushed "the old wagoner."

When the battle began in earnest, the militia fired their well-aimed **volley**, and then fell back behind



the Continentals, who fell slightly back to save their **left flank**, when Tarleton sent his full force upon them. The veterans stood their ground and kept pouring on a heavy fire. Morgan then saw his **golden chance**.

**left flank:** Side, generally a weaker spot

The shrill whistle of the turkey call rang out and Morgan's voice was heard to say, "Face about! One good fire and the victory is ours!"<sup>8</sup> Like a thunderbolt, Colonel William Washington's troops swept down in a semi-circle around the hill and charged the enemy's right flank. Instantly,

**golden chance:** An excellent chance to accomplish a goal

the veterans faced about, opened up a deadly fire, and charged the confused British line with bayonets. It was over in just a few minutes. The old wagoner had set his trap and the British were caught.

Six hundred British surrendered and threw down their guns, crying for **quarter**. The rest, including Tarleton himself, fled by horseback. In the Battle of Cowpens, the British lost 230, killed and wounded. The Americans had only 12 killed and 61 wounded.

**quarter:** Mercy

Morgan, having just accomplished this amazing victory, did not rest yet, however. He knew Cornwallis and Tarleton

would try to crush him again before he could manage to join up with General Nathaniel Greene's men.

Morgan and his men got to the Catawba River two days ahead of the British and, with

Greene's help, managed to cross it with all their men and **booty**.

**booty:** Enemy equipment or property captured on the battlefield



Before his service to the army ended, Morgan took part in campaigns with Mad Anthony Wayne and Lafayette, which led to the capture of Cornwallis at Yorktown. Morgan had taken part in 50

**Alleghenies:** The western part of the Appalachian Mountains; extending from northern Pennsylvania to southwestern Virginia

battles and was elected to Congress twice and so served his country in both war and peace.

If you ever have the opportunity to visit Spartanburg, South Carolina, be sure to look for the figure of Daniel Morgan, under which is inscribed these words: “Daniel Morgan, the old Wagoner of the **Alleghenies** and Hero of Cowpens.”