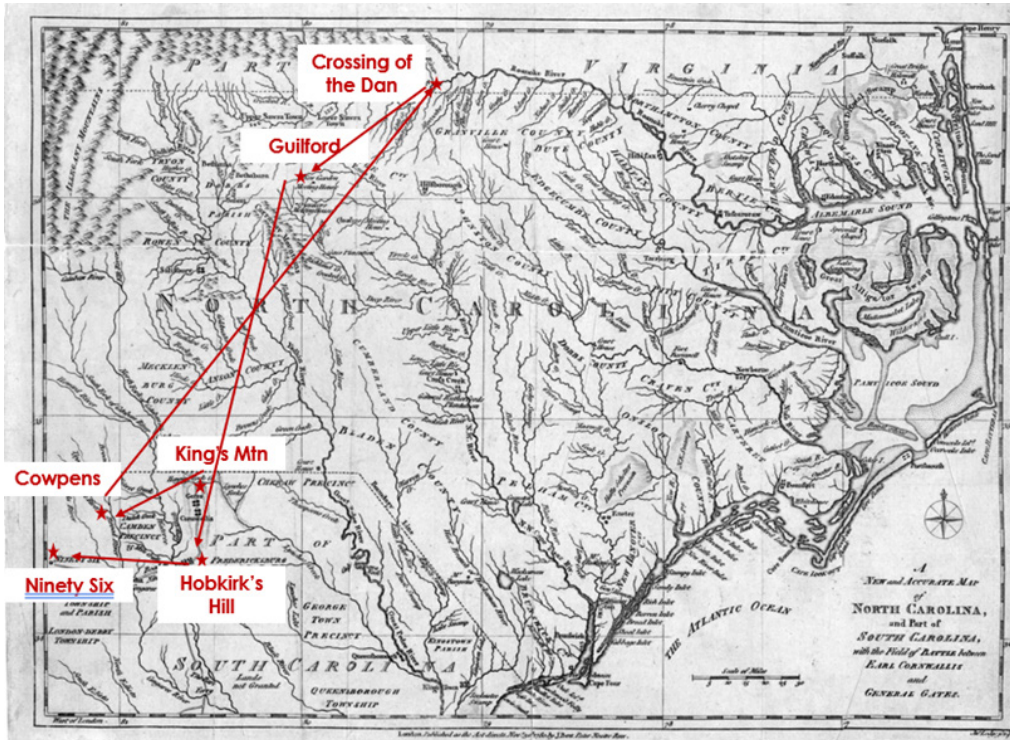


BACKGROUND: Battle of Guilford



"A New and Accurate Map of North Carolina, and part of South Carolina with the Field of Battle between Earl Cornwallis and General Gates," published in The Political Magazine (London: J. Bew, 1780), MC.150.1780b, State Archives of N.C.

The British turned their attention to the South in 1778, after little success in the mid-Atlantic and New England colonies, for two reasons.

1. South Carolina was the wealthiest colony and a priority for England to keep.
2. The British believed many loyalists in the region would join to fight the Continental army.

After patriot defeats in South Carolina and Georgia, Washington urged Congress to appoint Nathanael Greene as commander of the Southern Army in 1780. Greene's strategy was to lure the British Army, led by Lord Charles Cornwallis, into a chase from the S.C. border through the N.C. Piedmont, to the Dan River in Virginia. With many loyalists exiled after the 1776 Battle of Moores Creek Bridge, there was little support for British troops under Lord Cornwallis five years later. Both armies, especially the British, struggled to supply troops with food, leather for shoes, and ammunition. After two months of marching, Greene turned south again, and the two armies engaged in battle at Guilford Courthouse on March 15, 1781. Officials reported the number of dead as 93 British and 79 Continental soldiers, with hundreds more wounded. British officer Charles O'Hara wrote in a personal letter that, despite newspaper reports of British success at the battle,

I wish it had produced one substantial benefit to Great Britain, on the contrary, we feel...the sad and fatal effects of our loss on that Day, nearly one half of our best Officers and Soldiers, were either Killed or Wounded, and what remains are so completely worn out, by the excessive Fatigues of the Campaign in a march of above a Thousand Miles, most of them barefoot, naked and...living upon Carrion...and three or four ounces of unground Indian Corn has totally distroy'd this Army... every part of our Army was beat repeatedly.

The legacy of Greene's heroic leadership grew after the Revolution. He died at age 44 in 1786, and many towns and counties honored him with names. In N.C.:

- Greenville, renamed 1784
- Greene County, renamed 1799
- Greensboro, formed 1808



Major General Nathanael Greene, 1783, by Charles Wilson Peale, Independence National Military Park



Lt. General Lord Charles Cornwallis, 1783, by Thomas Gainsborough, NPG 281, National Portrait Gallery

Quick Fact Check

1. Which colony produced the most wealth for Great Britain?
2. What support did the British expect in N.C.?
3. Did more British or Patriot troops die at the Battle of Guilford Courthouse?
4. How long did the armies march through the N.C. Piedmont before the Battle of Guilford?