

# Cowpens victory critical to patriots

EVENING HERALD - 15 JAN 1981

On Jan. 17, 1781, one of the most important and momentous battles of the American Revolution took place on South Carolina soil. For want of a more glorious name, the historic battle has become known as the Battle of Cowpens.

In October of 1780 the British had suffered their first real defeat at Kings Mountain. The decisive victory by Maj. Patrick Ferguson and his corps of "backwatermen" made the sagging spirits of the patriots soar. The British efforts to conquer North Carolina had been, for the time being, thwarted.

After the disastrous defeat of the patriot forces at Camden in June 1780, Maj. Gen. Nathaniel Green was made commander of the Southern Army. Greene in turn put Brig. Gen. Daniel Morgan in charge of the troops in western North Carolina.

In December, a short time after taking command, Gen. Green decided to split his army into two units and to march into South Carolina from his base at Charlotte. One of the armies under the command of Gen. Morgan moved westward to conduct operations in the area between the Pacolet and Broad Rivers.

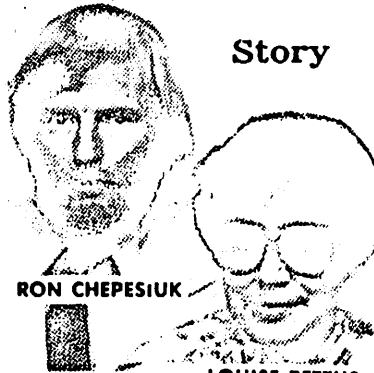
In early January 1781, Morgan learned that a British force under Lt. Col. Banastre Tarleton had been sent after him. Morgan's initial reaction was to flee, but he soon realized that the British were advancing too swiftly. He had to make a stand.

The site which Morgan chose was known as Hannah's Cowpens. The area, situated in upper Cherokee County near the North Carolina border, was mainly pasture land for farmers who grazed their cattle before driving them to the coast to market.

Morgan's choice of a battle site did not appear to be a particularly good one. With the Broad River in his rear, there was little chance of escape. Morgan later defended himself by saying that he chose the site

## South Carolina's

## Story



RON CHEPESIUK

LOUISE PETTUS

of Winthrop College faculty

to prevent his troops from running from battle.

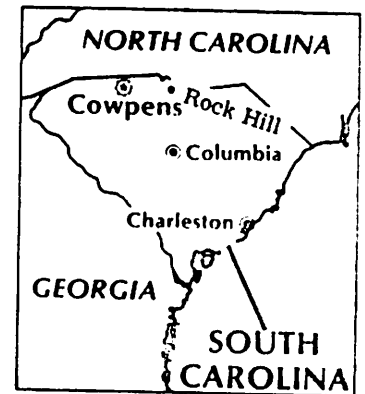
On the morning of Jan. 17, Tarleton and his force arrived, expecting an easy victory. Indeed, it seemed that the British would surely win. Compared to the patriots, they were better trained, fed and clothed. In addition, Morgan would have a small force of a little over 800 men to combat a British army totaling 1,150 soldiers.

In planning for battle, Morgan devised a clever and unorthodox strategy. He made use of both the strengths and weaknesses of his troops.

Morgan ordered three lines to be formed about 150 yards apart. The most unreliable troops were placed in the front. In the back, over the hill and out of sight of the enemy, stood the cavalry. The patriots would make the best of their firepower without trying to engage the enemy in hand-to-hand combat.

The battle lasted about an hour. Morgan made brilliant use of his cavalry and threw the enemy into a panic. The British were completely routed.

When the fighting stopped, the patriots had lost 12 men, and only 61 were wounded. Tarleton, however, had lost nine-tenths of his force, including 110 killed and 830 taken prisoner. Tarleton barely managed to



escape with 200 of his men.

The American victory caused widespread jubilation throughout the rebellious colonies. Cowpens was another great morale booster to the patriots, turning the tide of the battle completely in their favor.

A few months later in March the Continental Congress passed a resolution thanking Gen. Morgan and his troops "for their fortitude and good conduct displayed in the action at Cowpens."

In honor of the battle, a portion of Cowpens battlefield area was established as an historic site in 1929. In 1972 the area was made a National Battlefield site, with 845 acres set aside to protect and preserve the historic area.