

THE RELUCTANT PARTISAN: NATHANAEL GREENE'S

SOUTHERN CAMPAIGNS, 1780-1783

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Nathanael Greene spent the first five years of the American Revolution serving as a line and field officer in the Continental Army and developed a nuanced revolutionary strategy based on preserving the Continental Army and a belief that all forces should be long-service national troops. He carried these views with him to his command in the southern theater but developed a partisan approach due to problems he faced in the region. Greene effectively kept his army supplied to such an extent that it remained in the field to oppose the British with very little outside assistance. He reluctantly utilized a partisan strategy while simultaneously arguing for the creation of a permanent Continental force for the region.

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PREFACE

Graduate students seeking thesis topics often attempt to find some obscure subject to research in order to insure their ability to achieve an original contribution. I was no exception, choosing to study logistics in the American Revolution. In researching a paper on financier Robert Morris, I came across a letter from him to Nathanael Greene, in which he lauded the general for managing to keep his army in the field with almost no money or outside resources. I later read Greene's response and was transfixed by his intellect, style, and deep understanding of the nature of the war. From that moment I determined to study Greene and thus exchanged a relatively obscure topic for one of the most written-about campaigns in the War for American Independence.

This thesis deals with the logistics and strategy of Nathanael Greene's southern campaign. It is not an account of the campaign, but an attempt at a systematic study of how he kept his army in the field, and his plan to utilize these forces to achieve the military and political objectives of the war in his theater. It is informed by the approach of the "new military history," which seeks to examine warfare within the context of social, political, and cultural interaction. The conduct of the war by the Americans is viewed within the milieu of the Atlantic World, with the American way of making war considered as a derivative of European methods.

As this is a work of military history, a few key terms need to be elucidated in advance. Logistics is the military activity associated with raising and supporting a military force, and includes men, materiel (supplies and munitions), and transportation. Strategy is a nebulous concept, and means different things according to the level of warfare discussed. The word is used in this work primarily in association with campaign strategy, or the commander's plans and

policies to achieve specific objectives in a given space and time. Exhaustion is a form of strategy which seeks to gradually erode the enemy nation's will or means to continue prosecuting the war, and attrition is a subset of exhaustion strategy aimed specifically at steadily weakening the combat power of the enemy army. The word tactics refers to the military science that deals with securing objectives set by strategy, especially the technique of deploying and directing troops. It is important to realize that logistics, strategy, and tactics are different aspects of the same activity, each one influencing, and being influenced by the other. The term Whig is used to denote Americans who favored independence, and Tory or Loyalist is used to identify those who did not. Militia and Partisans are used interchangeably in the text and refer to part-time citizen troops called out by a state to serve for a period of weeks, typically near the regions they live in. Provincials are semi-professional troops employed on a more regular basis that served in the British army but were distinguished from regulars. Regulars are professional long service troops in the main army.

For two centuries a debate has raged about the tactics of militia and the early American way of war. Debate has focused on the development and utilization of uniquely American tactics based on Indian methods of aimed fire and the use of cover, and the effectiveness of this mode of warfare against linear European massed fire tactics. Greene, a professional soldier, disliked militia, although his principal qualm with the use of these forces was not primarily tactical but logistical in basis. Nevertheless, the campaign in the South was fought in large part by militia forces, many acting independently. However, since the focus of this work is on the situation in which Greene found himself, the plan he developed, and the previous experiences that informed his strategy, the militia's appearance on these pages is limited to their role in his strategy.

INTRODUCTION

The year 1780 was critical in the struggle for American Independence. In 1775, when the conflict began with a popular uprising of Massachusetts militiamen, no one expected a prolonged war. Five years later, national and state currency was almost valueless, the war in the North had ground to a stalemate, and the promise of foreign aid had produced few tangible results. Under these circumstances, Nathanael Greene rode south to take command of a destitute army charged with halting the British advance and, if possible, driving back the invaders. The subsequent campaign he conducted rekindled the war effort and changed the course of American history.

The *Rage Militaire*, or passion for arms, that gripped the thirteen rebellious colonies in 1775 was short lived. By 1776 it had vanished and did not return. As the war progressed, the American effort began to look less like an armed populace motivated to defend their homes and more like a distinct body of soldiers forming an increasingly professionalized European modeled army; an army separated from society.¹

The same ideological forces that led the Americans to oppose British centralization of the Empire hamstrung administration of the war by the Continental Congress—Commonwealth or Whig ideology and the desire for local political autonomy. Whig ideology inspired a conspiratorial view of the staff departments whose job it was to enable the army to function, and localism prevented the adoption of taxes to support the war effort and the orderly collection of supplies from an economically diverse nation.²

¹ Charles Royster, *A revolutionary People at War: The Continental Army and the American Character*(Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1979), 25.

² E. Wayne Carp, *To Starve the Army at Pleasure: Continental Army Administration and American Political Culture, 1775-1783* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 14.

On the battlefield, the Continental Army could point to few victories. British Commander in Chief Sir William Howe handily defeated George Washington at Long Island, White Plains, and at the forts on the Hudson River in 1776. The raids on Trenton and Princeton came at a crucial juncture, when the will of the Americans was at low ebb, but in 1777 Howe resumed the offensive and captured Philadelphia.

American forces scored an important victory in northern New York at Saratoga in October 1777, which led to the Treaty of Amity and Commerce with France. However, Washington's army languished in Valley Forge during the next winter due to transportation and supply system woes, but more importantly, currency failure.

The Continental Congress relied on emitting various currency vehicles to finance the war and relied on the states to reduce the supply through taxation. The state legislatures, however, were generally more interested in courting popular opinion than testing their strength by raising taxes to support a war sparked by taxation issues. By late 1779, Congress decided it could not issue any more currency and determined to institute a system of supplying the army through requisitions of agricultural products in kind. The system proved to be a total failure and the army languished.³

Upon the entry of France and Spain into the war, the conflict became global in scale. Increasingly British attention focused on the sugar islands of the West Indies and Caribbean. The desire to establish naval bases nearer to these islands, the stalemate that developed in the North, and especially domestic political considerations led the British to focus increasingly on the southern colonies as their primary objective. In 1779 they successfully invaded Georgia, and in the next year they decided to increase their exertion.

³ E James Fergusson, *Power of the Purse: A History of American Public Finance, 1776-1790* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1961), 24-48.

Thus, 1780 loomed as a critical year in the war. The currency crisis deepened, the army languished in Morristown enduring cold and privations unequalled even during the more infamous camp at Valley Forge, a failed attempt by Spain and France to invade southern England left them questioning their commitment to the war, and a combined French and American effort to retake Savannah failed with heavy losses.

In May 1780 Charleston, South Carolina fell to a British siege and an army of between 3,500 and 5,500 men was captured. Later that month two Connecticut regiments of the Continental Army mutinied, and by January 1781 Pennsylvania troops would attempt to march on Philadelphia to demand pay. In June the British defeated a second southern army at the Battle of Camden, and in September Benedict Arnold was revealed as a traitor and narrowly escaped capture. These events, combined with the woeful state of the currency, destitution of the Continental Army, and precarious situation in the courts of American allies in Europe marked the low point of the conflict. The country needed something to revive lagging public support, but the war in the North was stalemated with Clinton secure in New York and Washington unwilling to offer a decisive battle.

The defeat of Horatio Gates at Camden marked the decline of an anti-Washington faction in Congress and enabled the Commander in Chief to select anyone he pleased as the successor to the discredited Gates. He chose former quartermaster General Nathanael Greene, who rode south and took command of the remnants of Gates's shattered army in December 1780, and commenced a campaign in which he reluctantly utilized partisan forces as an integral part of his strategy.

Greene's army numbered almost 2,500 men on paper, but fewer than 800 could be viewed as fit for active duty. He needed to rebuild morale and outfit his forces, but could not completely

abandon the offensive. Greene's first action was to split his meager army in the face of a superior enemy, sending a detachment west under the command of Daniel Morgan, and traveling southeast with the remainder of his forces to the Peedee River to establish a camp of repose. This decision to divide his forces is typically viewed as the crucial choice in the campaign, and is easily the most controversial move of Greene's command in the South. Post-Napoleonic military critics chide Cornwallis for not utilizing his interior lines to defeat Greene's widely separated armies in detail, as his subordinate Colonel Banastre Tarleton proposed at the time. Cornwallis believed if he moved on Greene that Morgan could attack the crucial posts at Ninety-Six and Augusta, and that if he attacked Morgan, Greene could take Charleston. Recent historians of the campaign accept this assessment of the situation and laud Greene for ignoring orthodox military practice and placing the British General in an impossible situation.

The decision to split the southern army, therefore, is typically interpreted as a stratagem designed to force Cornwallis into a similar division of forces, which he did. By focusing on Greene's logistical situation, however, an alternative interpretation becomes apparent. Rather than a brilliant stratagem, the decision to divide the army should be viewed as the only option available to a general who had to encourage the will of the people of the southern states with whatever forces he could put in the field.⁴

Cornwallis initially responded to Greene's division by dividing his army into three components. He sent his protégé Tarleton with the cream of his army to pursue Morgan while he waited with the remainder of his forces for a junction with General Alexander Leslie, whom he had initially dispatched to Camden but quickly recalled. Morgan won a victory over Tarleton at Cowpens, initiating a hasty retreat by both divisions of the American army, which reunited at

⁴ Mark Mayo Boatner, *Encyclopedia of the American Revolution* (New York: David McKay Company, INC., 1966), 1018.

Guilford Courthouse and moved on to Virginia. At this point Cornwallis, who had burned his baggage in order to quicken his pursuit, retired to Wilmington. Greene then re-crossed the Dan and offered Battle at Guilford Courthouse, scoring a strategic victory despite suffering a tactical defeat. After the battle, Greene turned his back on the British and marched to South Carolina, and Cornwallis moved north to Virginia and his date with Washington at Yorktown. Greene meanwhile fought battles at Hobkirk's Hill and Eutaw Springs and reduced the British chain of defensive forts in South Carolina and Georgia.

Greene's campaign accomplished several purposes for the Americans. The victory at Cowpens boosted public support, and his effective resistance to Cornwallis forced the British to commit increasing resources to an attack on American lines of communication and supply in Virginia. The battle at Guilford Courthouse and Greene's subsequent movement convinced the British commander to abandon the Carolinas, move into range of Washington, and operate in an area that made him vulnerable to French naval power. Meanwhile, Robert Morris put governmental finances in order to a great extent and enabled Washington to conduct the siege at Yorktown, as well as keep his army in the field for the next year and a half until the close of the conflict.

This thesis details the logistical situation of Nathanael Greene during his southern campaign and demonstrates the effect it had on his strategy. Political, economic, social and military circumstances forced Greene, as professional a soldier as the Revolution produced, to assume a partisan strategy he viewed as wasteful and ineffective while continually exerting his influence to establish a regular Continental force in the South. Greene realized before he arrived in the Southern Department that he would have to utilize partisan forces at least temporarily, until the regular force he argued so vociferously for could be raised and equipped. He did not, however,

believe that utilizing partisan forces with guerilla tactics was the optimal method of conducting the war in the South.

Greene's campaign has attracted great attention from scholars and especially popular historians for a number of reasons. As mentioned previously, Charles Royster has demonstrated that the Revolution began with a groundswell of popular support, which quickly faded. The army and populace became antagonistic forces, with the army seeing itself as the last citadel of a virtue that had long since given way to luxury and vice. By the end of the war the people, on the other hand, viewed the army as the last enemy to be eliminated. Royster argues that at the close of the conflict the people abolished the army and positioned themselves as the "pillars of future glory." In order to do so, they had to prove that they had actually won the war; and what better example than the southern campaign where, in the popular mind, partisans rose up after the inept army suffered two crushing defeats and redeemed the country. Many professional soldiers attempted to counteract this interpretation, and by the turn of the century the prevailing belief was that the army had won despite the militia, whose presence only prolonged what should have been an open and shut campaign. During the period following World War II a reassessment took place in which the militia again began to rise in prominence. The argument that they provided some useful service grew until the belief that they were the dominant instrument in victory again gained prominence. This view is held by the editor of Greene's papers, Dennis Conrad.

The campaign and Greene's Revolutionary War career offer many insights into the nature of the war as it relates to the early republic. Greene died several years before the advent of the Federalist Party, but like many Continental officers he developed strong nationalist views during the conflict. The war as a driving force for the movement to abandon the Articles of Confederation and adopt the Constitution is a fertile field in the historiography of the period, and

this study of Greene's struggles with the decentralized war effort will, I hope, shed some light on this issue. Nathanael Greene reluctantly integrated partisan forces into his southern campaign strategy because Congressional ineptitude and the inability or unwillingness of the southern representative assemblies to field regular troops forced him to so.

CHAPTER 1:
QUARTERMASTER IN HISTORY: THE APPRENTICESHIP OF THE SECOND BEST
GENERAL OF THE WAR

History has been unusually kind to Nathanael Greene. British historian Sir John Fortescue declared that this general, who never won a tactical victory during his monumental campaign, “seems to me to stand little if at all lower than Washington as a general in the field,” and few would argue the point. Little of Greene’s life prior to the outbreak of the rebellion gives any clue that such a glorious career lay in his future; in fact he displayed scant interest in the military before 1773. Despite this fact, he quickly parleyed his appointment as a general of Rhode Island troops into an envied position as George Washington’s trusted advisor and close associate, and the foremost choice when Congress relented and let his Excellency appoint a successor for Horatio Gates to retrieve the hopeless situation to the southward. During the course of the conflict, he transformed himself from a military neophyte into one of the most professional officers in the Continental Army. The basis for his reputation as an officer lay almost exclusively on his actions in the Southern Department from 1780-1783, but he was far from inactive in the first five years of the war. During this period, from 1775-1780, Nathanael Greene developed strong nationalist views, an aversion to militia, a nuanced understanding of revolutionary strategy, and the technical knowledge necessary to carry out a successful campaign based on mobility while serving as a line and staff officer in the Continental Army.¹

Nathanael Greene was born on July 27, 1742, the second of six children in Potowomut, Rhode Island. Nathanael Sr. owned a forge and was a fervent Quaker. His namesake accepted

¹ Quoted in Christopher Ward, *The War of the Revolution* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1952), 844; Don Higginbotham wrote “Of all those selected, except for Washington, Greene would become the most distinguished.” Don Higginbotham, *The War of American Independence: Military Attitudes, Policies, and Practice, 1763-1789* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1983; reprint of 1971 edition), 91.

and was defined in his early life by such beliefs and virtues as universal salvation, direct communication with God, and the Quaker heritage of overcoming adversity through perseverance. Greene labored in his father's forge from a young age, but despite his Quaker background he also displayed remarkable self-initiative in reading outside his religious tradition. Later in life he would lament "very early when I should have been in the pursuit of knowledge, I was digging into the bowels of the earth after wealth."² At the age of twenty, his father placed him in charge of the family forge in Coventry, Rhode Island, which "gave him a position of relatively autonomous responsibility that contributed to his growing confidence and competence."³

Greene read a wide variety of books that both laid a foundation for his Whig leanings in the years leading up to the conflict and prepared him to be a highly effective revolutionary general. A foundational book in Greene's early education was John Locke's *Essay on Human Understanding*, which initiated a process of questioning his Quaker beliefs that ultimately led to his expulsion from the Society of Friends. He also read the classics, including Horace, who taught the virtues of equanimity in the face of good and evil, moderate tastes, and personal and public virtue.⁴

In addition to Enlightenment rationalism and the classics, Greene's interests drew him to several political books that had a great influence on how he came to perceive the growing tensions within the British Empire, as well as the type of society most suitable for an independent America. Charles Rollin's *Ancient History* influenced Greene in the notion of

²Nathanael Greene to Samuel Ward, Richard K. Showman ed., *The Papers of General Nathanael Greene* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1976), 1: 48. Hereafter cited as *Greene Papers*.

³David A. Tretler, "The Making of a Revolutionary General: Nathanael Greene, 1742-1779." PhD. Dissertation, Rice University, 1986. 43, 48, 91; Theodore Thayer, *Nathanael Greene: Strategist of the Revolution* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1960), 25; George Washington Greene, *The Life of Nathanael Greene: Major-General in the Army of the Revolution* (New York: G.P. Putnam and Son, 1867), 1: 19-22. Hereafter cited as *Life of Greene*.

⁴Thayer, *Nathanael Greene*, 21. Tretler, "The Making of a Revolutionary General," 64, 74.

history as an object lesson and the view that a hierarchical society dominated by natural elite was the most beneficial social organization. Paul de Rapin Thoyra's *The History of England, As Well Ecclesiastical as Civil* stressed the value of a limited, disinterested monarchy, public virtue, and the right to a democratic government. Blackstone's *Commentary on the Laws of England*, an influential book throughout the colonies, espoused the value of inalienable natural rights, minimum restrictions of liberty, and a democratic and representative government, and decried interest, ambition, corruption and faction. Historian David A. Tretler claims that these readings prepared Greene to accept the ideology of the Radical Whigs prevalent in the Revolutionary Era.⁵

Commonwealth, or Radical Whig, ideology is widely recognized as a crucial component in the advent of the independence movement. It originated in the English Civil War and Commonwealth period and is associated with the writings of John Milton, Algernon Sidney, John Trenchard, Thomas Gordon, and Richard Price. These writers and pamphleteers railed against the steadily increasing corruption they perceived in the ministries of men like Sir Robert Walpole and Lord Bute. Whig ideology was based on the belief in the opposite and competing forces of power on the one hand, with its "endlessly propulsive tendency to expand itself beyond legitimate boundaries," and liberty on the other.⁶ The most influential Whig writers in the American colonies were Thomas Gordon and John Trenchard, whose *Cato's Letters* were "quoted in every colonial newspaper from Boston to Savannah."⁷ Gordon and Trenchard argued that absolute power will "turn a state to ruin" and that all men are prone to corruption. Greene concurred with Cato, writing to Samuel Ward in 1774 that "self love" was "the primary mover

⁵ Tretler, "The Making of a Revolutionary General," 103, 114, 123, 129.

⁶ Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, enl. ed. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992), 56.

⁷ Ibid., 36.

and first principle of them all,” and traced all virtuous and brave acts to this motivation.⁸ A major component of Whig thought was a conspiratorial mindset that led such men as Thomas Jefferson and John Adams to view the actions by the British ministry as “a deliberate design—a conspiracy—of ministers of state . . . to blot out, or at least severely reduce, English Liberties.”⁹

One important aspect of Radical Whig theory that Greene did not accept was the belief that standing armies were the enemy of liberty in all circumstances. Greene steadily moved into the camp of opponents to perceived British tyranny throughout the early 1770s. His readings, friendship with opposition leaders, and the radicalism of Rhode Island newspapers played no small role in his stance on the conflict. In addition, Greene was involved in the *Gaspee* affair in Rhode Island, after he was erroneously charged with being among the raiders who set fire to the ship and wounded its commander, Lieutenant William Dudingston, in 1772. Dudingston had seized *Fortune*, a Greene family ship, for smuggling, providing Nathanael with a motive, but he was not convicted in the affair. These events and the aforementioned ideological influences led Greene to believe by 1774 that “The Ministry seems to be determined to embrace their cursed hands in American blood, and that once wise and virtuous Parliament, but now Wicked and weak Assembly, lends an assisting hand to accomplish their hellish schemes.”¹⁰ Once he determined that bloodshed was imminent Greene began preparing himself for a military career that would mark him as a clear proponent of the belief that a “standing Army is undoubtedly an enemy to

⁸ Thomas Gordon and John Trenchard, *Cato's Letters: essays on liberty, civil and religious, and other important subjects* (New York: De Capo Press, 1971), I: 201.

⁹ Bernard Bailyn, *The Origins of American Politics*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), 11. E. Wayne Carp, *To Starve the Army at Pleasure: Continental Army Administration and American Political Culture, 1775-1783* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 9-13. George Washington Greene, *Life of Greene*, 1: 56.

¹⁰ NG to Samuel Ward, *Greene Papers*, 1: 65.

civil liberty, but when the liberties of a people are invaded from abroad there is no other alternative but to submit to one or establish the other.”¹¹

The first record of Greene’s involvement in martial affairs was his attendance at a military fair in Plainfield, Connecticut, in summer 1773. The East Greenwich Monthly Meeting expelled him from the Society of Friends a short time later, after he refused to renounce his disavowal of pacifistic Quaker teachings. Greene promptly began a study of any military texts he could purchase, many from Henry Knox’s London Bookstore in Boston. His biographers cite him as reading Sharp’s *Military Guide*, Marshal Saxe’s *Reveries*, the memoirs of Marshal Turenne, Humphrey Bland’s manual on tactics, *The Instruction of Frederick the Great for His Generals*, and Caesar’s *Commentaries*. The influence these writings had on his generalship in the southern theater will be discussed in a later chapter.¹²

In the autumn of 1774, Greene helped found and train a Rhode Island volunteer military organization called the Kentish Guards, but was rejected as an officer because of a limp from a childhood injury, which some viewed as “unbefitting an officer of the guards.”¹³ Yet, by the next summer he would serve as Brigadier General of the Rhode Island troops around Boston. Historians have found no definitive evidence to explain his selection. He had some powerful connections in the assembly, as did others. Many promising young officers commanded militia companies or volunteer military organizations like the Kentish Guards, but the assembly chose Nathanael Greene, a private, to lead its brigade north to Boston.¹⁴

¹¹ Quotation in NG to William Greene, *Greene Papers*, 2: 302; Thayer, *Nathanael Greene*, 37-38; Tretler, “The Making of a Revolutionary General,” 137-138.

¹² Thayer, *Nathanael Greene*, 24, 40, 47; Tretler, “The Making of a Revolutionary General,” 180.

¹³ Thayer, *Nathanael Greene*, 44-45.

¹⁴ Francis Vinton Greene, *Nathanael Greene* (New York: Chelsea House, 1983; reprint of 1897 edition), 21; Thayer, *Nathanael Greene*, 50; George W. Greene, *Life of Greene*, 1: 80; “Appointment as Brigadier General of the Rhode Island Army,” *Greene Papers*, 1: 78-79.

Greene gained experience in the camp around Boston that would prove exceedingly valuable when he took command of Gates's shattered army in 1780. The fledgling general found his troops "in a great commotion," but devised "several regulations for introducing order."¹⁵ His efforts at instituting discipline quickly drew the attention of Washington, who favored Greene from their first meeting. Alexander Hamilton wrote that Washington's "discerning eye . . . marked him out as the object of his confidence. . . . He gained it, and he preserved it amidst all the checkered varieties of military vicissitude."¹⁶

Independence was not declared until several months after the British evacuation of Boston, but Greene was increasingly prepared to sever all ties to the Empire. He left the option of continuing the connection open in September 1775, but by the next month declared to Samuel Ward Sr. "I would make it a treason against the state to make any further remittances to great Britain. . . . We had as good begin in earnest first as last, for we have no alternative but to fight it out or be slaves." By December Greene wrote that the King had "shut the door on reconciliation," and expressed the hope that George III's latest speech would "induce the congress to raise one large Continental Army proportionable to the extent of our undertaking."¹⁷

The development of Greene's revolutionary war strategy during this period was limited by the nature of the American military force and the nature of the siege. He believed that only a large regular army could effectively oppose the enemy and that the primary goal of British Commander in Chief William Howe would be to engage and destroy this army. Greene also wrote in January of 1776 that New York City would be a chief target of the British and that the city should be garrisoned or burned, preferably burned, because of what he perceived as declining Whig sentiment among the populace and the strategic importance of that state to the

¹⁵ NG to Jacob Greene, *Greene Papers*, 1: 85.

¹⁶ Thayer, *Nathanael Greene*, 65.

¹⁷ NG to Deputy Governor Nicholas Cooke of Rhode Island, *Greene Papers*, 1: 119.

patriot cause. After the occupation of the Dorchester Heights and subsequent evacuation of Boston in March 1776, Greene and his troops proceeded south to New York in an attempt to defend it. This campaign would provide many lessons for Greene and also serve as the scene of his greatest fiasco.¹⁸

Greene arrived late to New York, but played a minor role in the preparation for the defense of Long Island. Unfortunately, he became violently ill and missed the engagement. Henry Knox and John Adams believed his absence altered the outcome of the battle, perhaps a greater testament to his growing esteem than to their assessment of the situation. Following the defeat at Long Island, Greene took command of Fort Washington, a fortification on the Hudson River designed, in conjunction with Fort Lee, to prevent British shipping from moving up the river.¹⁹

Generals Washington and Charles Lee questioned the value of the fort prior to the Battle of White Plains after British vessels easily passed the stronghold. Greene argued that the position obliged Howe to maintain a force nearby to cover the fort, which proved correct when 5,000 men under Lord Cornwallis remained behind and were not engaged at White Plains. After the battle, Washington again wrote Greene arguing that he was “inclined to think it will not be prudent to hazard the men and stores at Mount Washington,” but would leave the final decision to Greene’s discretion. Greene’s decision against evacuating the position resulted in the capture of the fort and 2,000 of his men. Greene was also late in evacuating Fort Lee, which resulted in the loss of valuable matériel. In his decisions involving Forts Washington and Lee, Greene had shown extraordinarily bad judgment²⁰

¹⁸ NG to Samuel Ward, Sr., *Greene Papers*, 1: 176-178.

¹⁹ Thayer, *Nathanael Greene*, 85,105; Tretler, “The Making of a Revolutionary General,” 245.

²⁰ Ward, *War of the Revolution*, 274; Tretler, “The Making of a Revolutionary General,” 251-254; Boatner, *Encyclopedia of the American Revolution*, 388.

The debacle at Fort Washington served as a valuable lesson for Greene and had “the good effect of adding caution to his list of military attributes.”²¹ His strategic views evolved toward the belief that a war of attrition was the best policy for the American Army and that maintaining the Continental Army in the field should be the primary motivation in the conduct of the war. This preference for a strategy of attrition was already evident in December 1776, when he instructed Governor Nicholas Cooke of Rhode Island that in preparing defenses against a possible British invasion he should not try defend the shoreline but rather “drive back the stock from the shores and make a disposition to cover capital objects.”²² Greene also began to pay attention to the moral factors in war during this period. He complained that patriots treated loyalists too leniently while Howe made examples of Whigs who “fall in his way.” He believed that “Many who are now well affected will be induced from the risque [*sic*] and danger on the one side and the apparent security on the other to change their sentiments.”²³

The opinion that the central government should take precedence over state governments that Greene developed early in the conflict gained strength during this period. He wrote to Governor Cooke in an attempt to persuade him to combat the localism pervading that state, arguing that if “every state was to neglect the completion of the continental regiments and prepare for their own security” no single state could resist the enemy’s force.²⁴ Greene went further to argue that the state regimental designations within the Continental Army should be abolished, and there should be no troops except those on a Continental footing.²⁵ He also deplored a proposed plan of the New England states to give an additional “bounty of ten pounds to every private that engages in

²¹ Thayer, *Nathanael Greene*, 123.

²² NG to Nicholas Cooke, *Greene Papers*, 1: 375.

²³ NG to John Hancock, President of the Continental Congress, *Greene Papers*: 1: 374.

²⁴ NG to Nicholas Cooke, *Greene Papers*, 2: 10.

²⁵ NG to John Adams, *Greene Papers*, 2: 52.

the Continental service during the war,” because such preferential treatment of a part of the army would undermine morale.²⁶

In the defense of Philadelphia against Howe’s invasion of 1777 Greene increased in stature as a confidant to Washington in the development of strategy and as a battlefield commander. Thus Greene’s status as trusted advisor had not been permanently diminished as a result of his mishap on the Hudson River. Thayer argues that he served as “the principal architect of Washington’s strategy” and was able to “fully justify Washington’s confidence in him.”²⁷ While this is almost certainly an overstatement, and Historian Douglas Southall Freeman states that “Washington conducted the Brandywine operation as if he had been in a daze,” Greene undoubtedly gained experience, as well as influence, as evidenced by his assignment to serve in the center of the line at the battle of Brandywine in September 1777.²⁸

Greene vacillated between aggressiveness and prudence during the campaign. In late August, for example, he wrote that the army was in good spirits, not inferior to Howe’s, and likely to give the British a “deadly wound.”²⁹ After the battle he predicted that the next engagement would “ruin Mr How [*sic*] totally.”³⁰ Once Howe occupied the capital, however, he argued against a winter campaign and an attack on the city writing “The King of Prussia, the greatest General of the age, strongly protests attacking troops by storm in villages, much more in large regular brick cities.”³¹ He also began to show signs that the best interests of the war effort did not always take precedence over his own glory. Greene wrote that General Phillip Schuyler had laid the “foundation of all General Gates successes” before the latter arrived, and that Gates

²⁶ NG to Nicholas Cooke, *Greene Papers*, 2: 14.

²⁷ Thayer, *Nathanael Greene*, 192, 211.

²⁸ Freeman quoted in Boatner, *Encyclopedia of the American Revolution*, 110.

²⁹ NG to Jacob Greene, *Greene Papers*, 2: 149.

³⁰ NG to Catharine Greene, *Greene Papers*, 2: 162.

³¹ NG to George Washington, *Greene Papers*, 2: 231.

showed up just in time to “reap the laurels and rewards.”³² He also lamented that Washington’s army deserved just as much credit because they faced a mightier foe.³³

During winter 1777-1778, when the Continental Army encamped at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, the loss of confidence in the currency combined with a poor transportation system for the army to create conditions of severe privation that have become synonymous with that place. Greene clearly perceived that the outcome of the war would largely depend on the finances of Congress. He wrote, “This war I am perswaded [sic.] will terminate in a war of funds, the longest purse will be triumphant,” and went on to argue that “the militia are such a drain upon our Provisions and military stores of all kinds that . . . the present mode of prosecuting the war will ruin our cause if the enemy does nothing at all.” Greene came to believe that only a system of taxation at the national or state level would reduce the quantity of competing American currencies and solve the financial crisis.³⁴

As the supply situation deteriorated, Greene began to question the character of quartermaster Thomas Mifflin, who he believed was negligent and avaricious. He alleged that intrigues and cabals in Congress were the fundamental cause of the army’s distress, despite his earlier statements about the financial situation. This mind-set was widespread and indicative of the paranoia of conspiracies that dominated the Whig outlook. Members of Congress and the public in general directed a similar attitude toward Greene after he assumed direction of the Quartermaster Department in March 1778.³⁵

³² NG to Miss Susanna Livingston [?], *Greene Papers*, 2: 195.

³³ NG to Henry Marchant, *Greene Papers*, 2: 199.

³⁴ NG to William Greene, *Greene Papers*, 2: 302. Ibid, 304; Thayer, *Nathanael Greene*, 224.

³⁵ NG to Jacob Greene, *Greene Papers*, 2: 243; Ibid., 2: 248; NG to Christopher Greene, *Greene Papers*, 2: 261; NG to Nicholas Cooke, *Greene Papers*, 2: 255; Tretler, “The Making of a Revolutionary General,” 548.

In December 1777, Washington asked Greene to “organize the effort to secure food and forage for the troops at Valley Forge and to push it to every extremity.”³⁶ Greene set forth rules and regulations for impressing supplies and issuing receipts for future compensation. This system of supplying the army almost exclusively by systematic daily requisitions would later form the basis of his army’s supply in the Southern Department. He proved so effective at organizing and executing this task that the Commander in Chief persuaded him in March 1778 to accept the post of Quartermaster General.³⁷

Greene very reluctantly agreed. Staff officers in general accepted their positions for a variety of reasons such as republican zeal, esprit de corps, or the belief that it would improve their reputation, allowing them to overcome any stigma attached with the station and serve the cause in a manner consistent with their abilities. In Greene’s case it was primarily because Washington personally persuaded him. During their conversation Greene reportedly complained “nobody ever heard of a Quartermaster in history.”³⁸ He was quite concerned that he would fade into obscurity while other generals basked in glory. Greene maintained that he would only serve if he could keep his commission as a general of the line, although not an active command, a stipulation that would eventually play a major part in his resignation. The job compensated him on the basis of a 1 percent commission on all departmental expenditures that he agreed to divide equally with his assistants, Charles Pettit and John Cox.³⁹

Upon assuming the reigns of the department, Greene wrote a letter to the citizens of the United States. He acknowledged that the staff officers of the Quartermaster and Commissary Departments had acquired a bad reputation over the previous two years of the war effort. In an

³⁶ Ward, *War of the Revolution*, 548-549.

³⁷ Greene, *Life of Greene*, 1: 552.

³⁸ Greene, *Life of Greene*, 3: 466.

³⁹ Carp, *To Starve the Army at Pleasure*, 167; *ibid.*, 157; NG to Joseph Reed, *Greene Papers*, 2: 307.

attempt to reverse the prevailing attitude which led to the refusal of many farmers and merchants to deal with supply officers Greene reassured the populace that he would “remedy the manifold inconveniences . . . and guard against abuses in the future.”⁴⁰

The quartermaster in an eighteenth century army had duties similar to those of a modern chief of staff. He typically traveled with the army, and his primary responsibility was coordinating transportation. In addition, he was often responsible for the gathering of information, construction of troop quarters, certain procurement duties, and the distribution of supplies. The quartermaster had to be not only a competent officer but also a talented administrator and flexible businessman who could ascertain the resources of the nation and efficiently draw them out. Greene proved to be the most effective officer to occupy the post in the duration of the war.⁴¹

Under Greene’s direction, the Quartermaster Department became a “sprawling, loose organization with a Quartermaster General, 2 assistant quartermasters general, 28 deputy quartermasters general, and 109 assistant deputy quartermasters general.” The conspiratorial interpretation of Radical Whig theory continued to dominate congress and supported the suspicion that much of the nation’s economic woes lay in corruption within the supply departments rather than in economic issues such as the abundance of currency and lack of taxes to remove it from circulation. This view led to a wave of reform legislation aimed at the departments that frustrated him throughout his tenure and eventually acted as a catalyst in his resignation.⁴²

⁴⁰ “To the Inhabitants of the United States,” *Greene Papers*, 2: 324.

⁴¹ Thayer, *Nathanael Greene*, 242; Erna Risch, *Supplying Washington’s Army* (Washington D.C.: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1981), 29-30; James A. Huston, *The Sinews of War: Army Logistics, 1775-1953* (Washington D.C.: Office of the Chief of Staff of Military History, United States Army, 1966), 10.

⁴² Risch, *Supplying Washington’s Army*, 45.

While Greene found his time as Quartermaster General to be, on the whole, loathsome, it did prove to be an excellent apprenticeship for his campaigns in the Southern Department. The most important experience Greene gained during his tenure came during new British Commander in Chief Sir Henry Clinton's retreat from Philadelphia during 1778. This was the first and only active movement of the army during his time as Quartermaster General. Greene spent the early months of the year preparing a chain of magazines from Pennsylvania into New Jersey, collecting wagons and forage, and procuring horses from the state of Pennsylvania. He was forced to endure significant confusion with Congress, writing to President Henry Laurens of the "great inconvenience I labor under for want of a knowledge of the Acts of congress. . . .If Congress will afford me the means of knowing their laws I will endeavor to have them executed."⁴³ In addition, Greene tried to reduce unnecessary expenditures in his department by ensuring that his deputies only purchased horses and matériel of good quality.⁴⁴

The movement of the Continental Army was chaotic and beset by supply problems despite Greene's best efforts. He wrote numerous frantic letters describing the urgent need for forage and wagons for transporting supplies. While marching on a parallel route to the British through New Jersey, Greene wrote Moore Furman, Deputy Quartermaster for that state, that he had "Not a barrel of flour in camp and a monstrous family to supply."⁴⁵ His improvisations succeeded and Washington lauded his efforts. Washington praised the supply department only on two occasions, once in 1776 and the other after the Monmouth Campaign when he had been able "with great facility to make a sudden move with the whole army and baggage from Valley Forge in pursuit of the enemy."⁴⁶

⁴³ NG to Henry Laurens, *Greene Papers*, 2: 421.

⁴⁴ George Washington to NG, *Greene Papers*, 2: 392-393; NG to Colonel Robert L. Hooper, *Greene Papers*, 2: 418.

⁴⁵ NG to Moore Furman, *Greene Papers*, 2: 441.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 443; Ward, *War of the Revolution*, 572; Risch, *Supplying Washington's Army*, 65.

Greene's understanding of revolutionary strategy also progressed during the campaign of 1778. He wrote to Washington that "it is not the real value of cities as places that gives the public a good or bad impression but the imaginary estimation given them."⁴⁷ Thus, Greene agreed with a unanimous council of war that the Americans should not attack the British while they occupied Philadelphia. He later wrote to Washington that the entry of the French into the war precluded rash actions by the Americans, but that he believed taking up a position from which to harass the British should they march overland to New York would be far from rash. Four days before the battle, he wrote in a private letter to his Commander in Chief that he was "not for hazarding a general action unnecessarily but . . . clearly of opinion for making a serious impression with the light troops and for having the army within supporting distance."⁴⁸ Greene obviously understood that the existence of the Continental Army should not be risked, but that encouraging public opinion through some show of force was essential. During the battle at Monmouth, Greene served as a line commander, maintaining an important position on Comb's Hill that directed an effective enfilade fire on the British until Cornwallis personally led a massive attack that dislodged him.⁴⁹

After the Monmouth campaign the war in the North stagnated. Greene took part in the failed attempt to dislodge the British from Rhode Island and moderated a dispute between General John Sullivan and French Admiral D'Estaing. The movement of the Convention Army, captured during the Saratoga campaign, south to Virginia, and the transfer of 10,000 casks of rice from South Carolina occupied much of his attention in 1779. Throughout that year and into

⁴⁷ NG to George Washington, *Greene Papers*, 2: 357.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 447.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 384; *Ibid.*, 439; Boatner, *Encyclopedia of the American Revolution*, 724-725.

1780, Greene became the target of public speculation of corruption in the Quartermaster Departments.⁵⁰

Historians have long debated the extent to which Greene took advantage of his position to advance his personal fortune. Historian E. James Fergusson claims that Greene “thought it only proper that he should refurbish his commercial affairs, which his duties as a combat officer had forced him to neglect,” but goes on to say that he was “at least as innocent” as other high ranking officers.⁵¹ Erna Risch states that he “took care of family interests when he became Quartermaster General.”⁵² Thayer exonerates Greene of all charges of corruption involving a secret company he formed with Commissary General Jeremiah Wadsworth and Barnabas Deane that was involved in some aspects of supplying the army. Certainly Greene engaged in numerous business ventures based on knowledge he obtained as a result of his position, but Fergusson argues that the concept of conflict of interest had not fully formed during the revolutionary era, although charges of corruption during the conflict set the stage for its development in the early republic. Actual and perceived corruption, common in any war, was exacerbated by the conspiratorial explanations prevalent in Whig theory and the belief that the mercantile profession was not an honorable trade. In the years after the war, agrarian-minded reformers sought to eliminate a practice that men such as Robert Morris and to some extent Greene saw as an example of selfish ambition benefiting the common good.⁵³

The worsening financial crises in late 1779 led Congress to introduce several reforms. The most significant of these reforms to Greene’s future exploits in the Carolinas was the adoption in February 1780 of the system of specific supplies. In this system the states donated quantities of

⁵⁰ Tretler, “Making of a Revolutionary General,” 369; NG to George Washington, *Greene Papers*, 500.

⁵¹ Fergusson, *Power of the Purse*, 95, 97.

⁵² Risch, *Supplying Washington’s Army*, 426.

⁵³ Thayer, *Nathanael Greene*, 230-238; Ferguson, *Power of the Purse*, 70.

specific supplies in kind to the staff departments for consumption by the army. In effect Congress virtually abdicated its power to the states. When Greene received word of the new plan he wrote Washington:

The measure seems to be calculated, more for the convenience of each state, than for the accommodation of the service. The aggregate quantity ordered, though far short of the demands of the army is proportioned on the states in such a manner, that it would be difficult, if not impossible, to draw it into use: and this difficulty will increase, as the scene of action may change, from one extreme of the continent to another. . . . The principles of war, or the circumstances of an army seem not to be perfectly understood by the different legislatures. . . . there is no plan of delivery, nor penalty on failure—the prices being fixed, and every state attentive to it's own particular interest, they will wish to provide the articles at such seasons . . . that at some seasons there will be a great redundancy, while at others, we are left quite destitute of support.⁵⁴

The system of specific supplies proved to be a disaster, as Greene predicted, and was a major factor in his supply troubles in the Southern Department. As congress passed legislation that established the system of specific supplies it was also passing resolutions dealing with structure of the staff departments. These laws and friction over Greene's role in the army soon led to his resignation from his post.

As public clamor over perceived abuses in the department grew, Congress took steps that it believed would combat corruption. In June 1779 it passed a resolution that praised Greene but implied abuses among senior members of his staff. One month later, Congress passed a list of officers of the line that did not include Greene among its ranks. A furious Greene tried to get Washington and the other Major Generals to back his claims, writing "If I am to be excluded from the honors of the line I shall quit the department immediately."⁵⁵ Washington did not support Greene in his claim, writing that Greene's stipulation of maintaining his rank did not

⁵⁴ Carp, *To Starve the Army at Pleasure*, 171; NG to George Washington, *Greene Papers*, 450-452.

⁵⁵ NG to Charles Petit, *Greene Papers* 4: 256.

equate with a position on the line, but merely that he could resume his station upon his resignation from the Quartermaster Department; and that the command he had executed at Monmouth was an “occasion of an extraordinary nature, and by special appointment.”⁵⁶

Greene reached his breaking point when Congress issued a reorganization plan designed to economize the staff departments by radically cutting down on their personnel in early July, just as the campaign season was about to begin. He resigned on July 26, 1780, and referred to Congress as the “administration” in his resignation letter, a term that carried strong negative connotations in Revolutionary America. Many in Congress sought to revoke his commission as a Major General, but tempers cooled and Washington appointed him as the commander of American forces at West Point in early October after Arnold’s treason left the position vacant. Shortly thereafter word of Gates’s crushing defeat at Cowpens arrived. The anti-Washington faction in Congress lost sway and that body gave the Commander in Chief carte blanche in his choice of a successor. He immediately chose Greene, and within a month the Major General was on his way to the South and the pages of history.⁵⁷

Nathanael Greene’s first five years of service in the Continental Army were marked by the development of a nuanced revolutionary strategy based on preserving the Continental Army in the field at all costs and a keen understanding of the need to maintain the support of the people. Greene developed organizational skills at Boston, Valley Forge, and as a staff officer that would enable him to rebuild a shattered army and conduct a campaign based on movement in an environment with a poor transportation infrastructure. He came to believe that the militia was a drain on sparse resources and that all troops should be on a Continental footing. In addition,

⁵⁶ Thomas L. Wells, “An Inquiry into the Resignation of Quartermaster General Nathanael Greene,” *Rhode Island History*, 24 (1965), 41-48; George Washington to NG, *Greene Papers*, 359.

⁵⁷ Wells, “Inquiry,” 48; Thayer, *Nathanael Greene*, 279-280.

Greene learned well what he could and could not expect under the congressional administration and the system of specific supplies. This close experience with the central administration fostered strong nationalist views, which would be further strengthened in the southern campaign.

CHAPTER 2: SUPPLYING NATHANAEL GREENE'S SOUTHERN ARMY, 1780-1783

Nathanael Greene arrived in the southern theater to find a broken and destitute army, a countryside ravaged by civil war, and the absence of Whig government in two of the states in his department. Lord Charles Cornwallis's planned invasion of North Carolina suffered a temporary setback with the loss of the light troops and loyalist militia at the Battle of Kings Mountain, two months prior to Greene's arrival, but preparations to resume the offensive pressed forward. In the course of six months Greene would drive Cornwallis from the Carolinas and begin the restoration of civil government. In order to achieve this he needed to devise a system to provide for his ragged troops despite numerous obstacles. Nathanael Greene adequately supplied his haggard army, largely through impressments and captured supplies, to such an extent that it remained operationally effective through December 1781, by which time he had penned the British within Charleston and its immediate environs. He accomplished this feat despite his location at the end of a long, vulnerable and undisciplined supply line under attack by enemy forces, his dependence on the ill-conceived system of specific supplies, and the incredible waste of the large number of militia forces operating in the theater.

Eighteenth century military treatises and histories offered Greene little of relevance to his situation in the South. Marshal Saxe warned in his *Reveries* that discipline is the soul of armies, and that without it the troops "will be only contemptible, armed mobs, more dangerous to their own country than the enemy."¹ Frederick the Great cautioned his reader that "without supplies no army is brave, and a great general who is hungry is not a hero for long."²

¹ Marshal Maurice de Saxe, *My Reveries Upon the Art of War* in Thomas R. Phillips ed. *Roots of Strategy: A Collection of Military Classics* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: The Military Service Publishing Company, 1940), 245.

² Frederick the Great, *The Instruction of Frederick the Great for His Generals*, 1747, in Phillips, *Roots of Strategy*, 315.

Military practice in Europe also did not present a template for Greene. Historian Martin Van Creveld argues that modern accounts of mammoth tails of supply wagons limiting movement and arguments of mobility being restrained by attachment to magazines are exaggerated, since armies lived off the countryside to a much greater extent than is traditionally acknowledged in the pre-Napoleonic Era. Forces gained supplies in part through contracts, but to a greater extent by laying towns under contribution and using the proceeds to purchase local supplies and thereby lessen transportation difficulties. The biggest problem for European armies was that they were too large to remain in one area for any length of time before they exhausted the resources of the region. Forage was often the most crucial aspect of supply and the greatest limitation on movement. In many ways, Greene found himself in uncharted territory. He could obviously not contemplate laying a town under contribution and knew he could expect little out of the system of specific supplies. His army was a fraction of the size of a contemporary European army, but geographical and demographic considerations forced on him a similar problem of moving from region to region as his troops exhausted local provisions.³

The population of the southern states during the War for American Independence was spread over a wide area. In the back country, where most of Greene's campaign took place, local farmers remained largely self sufficient and produced few surpluses. In addition, underdeveloped roads and bridges and the scarcity of navigable rivers rendered transportation in the region extremely difficult. Because most non-food related supplies, and all manufactured goods came from the northern states, Greene's army operated at the end of long lines of communication. Continental and state supply officers often unmercifully raided supply trains destined for armies in winter quarters or conducting operations in the field, and the enormous

³ Martin Van Creveld, *Supplying War: Logistics from Wallenstein to Patton* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 27, 33, 37, 38, quotation on 46; Second quote in Jeremy Black, *War for America: The Fight for Independence* (Phoenix Mill, England: Sutton Publishing, 1991), 55.

distances supplies traveled exacerbated this common problem. The southern climate negated the practice of campaigning only in the campaigning season and denied Greene the ability to reconstitute his forces and build up supplies upon his arrival in December.⁴

In addition to these numerous difficulties, large numbers of Loyalists and disaffected people resided in the southern backcountry. The disaffected or neutral population was often more wary of Whigs than Tories. Recent German Moravian settlers contrasted the Tories, who asked for bread by night, with Whigs who “ate and drank as they pleased and seized oats, pottery, corn, and whatever came to hand,” robbing and beating up farmers and their wives in the process.⁵ Greene wrote Washington that in the comparison between serving in the Northern and Southern Departments “one bears but a small proportion to the other whether from the make of the country, the divisions among the inhabitants, the difficulty of obtaining supplies or the unequal force we have to contend with.”⁶

The major source of Greene’s difficulties in obtaining provisions was the system of specific supplies that Congress enacted the summer before he took over the southern army. As discussed previously, this system relied on providing quotas of supplies delivered to the army by each state. Problems associated with a lack of planning dogged the system from the outset, with transportation to the armies as a primary culprit. Congress also apportioned its quotas without taking into account what type of agricultural products a state produced or any special circumstances within a state that might prevent quota fulfillment. Many states, especially Rhode Island and Delaware, flagrantly disregarded the quotas and put their own welfare above that of

⁴ Higginbotham, *War of American Independence*, 304; Paul D. Escott and Jeffrey J. Crow, “The Social Order and Violent Disorder: An Analysis of North Carolina in the Revolution and Civil War.” *The Journal of Southern History*, 52 (August, 1986), 373-402. 376; Carp, *To Starve the Army at Pleasure*, 59. Risch, *Supplying Washington’s Army*, 416.

⁵ Escott and Crow, “The Social Order and Violent Disorder,” 388.

⁶ NG to George Washington, *Greene Papers*, 7: 181.

the Continental Congress. The reliance on local authorities who had no idea of the army's needs and refused to cooperate with the service departments also greatly impeded the orderly execution of gathering supplies.⁷

The most serious problems facing the Continental Army supply system in 1780 involved finances. As Greene rode south the financial situation of the United States remained increasingly bleak, as "state treasuries were empty, towns bankrupt, Continental currency worthless, and the marketplace glutted with Quartermaster and Commissary certificates."⁸ The Carolinas had a reputation as one of the most liberal printers of fiat money throughout the colonial and revolutionary era. In addition the state governments during the Revolution found it more pressing to court popular opinion than levying taxes to support the war effort. Greene noted that the typical southern state government "is so feeble that it is next to nothing; and the popular plan that influences the councils greatly weakens the well affected."⁹ The weakness of these governments was reflected in the weakness of the currencies they issued. Inhabitants of the thirteen states increasingly refused to exchange goods for the worthless monetary vehicles.¹⁰

As the war progressed, soldiers in the Continental Army came to view the apathy of the American people as the primary cause of the fact that they languished in the midst of agricultural plenty. Historian Charles Royster argues that the army increasingly began to regard themselves as the lone repository of virtue in an increasingly avaricious society.¹¹ Indeed, Joseph Reed complained to Greene that the army was "at this moment in a state of the most shameful imbecillity [*sic*] tantalized with the show of plenty which was never more conspicuous and yet destitute of the means of procuring the smallest articles." Carp argues that the full weight of

⁷ Carp, *To Starve the Army at Pleasure*, 181-186.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 186.

⁹ NG to Joseph Reed, *Greene Papers*, 200.

¹⁰ Fergusson, *Power of the Purse*, 10, 30.

¹¹ Royster, *A Revolutionary People at War*, 285.

blame should not rest entirely on Congress and a greedy populace, however, as negligence, dishonesty and greed within the army also played a role.¹²

The woeful state of supply that engendered the Nationalist Movement of 1780-1783 and the resulting improved conditions in the northern army had little effect on Greene's Southern Department. Robert Morris's system of supplying the army through a European style contract system did not spread to the southern army until mid 1782 and remained limited in scope. While Morris built up an "orderly regime" in the North, Greene's army "lived on a hand-to-mouth basis without money, relying upon scanty deliveries of specific supplies, otherwise subsisting by impressments."¹³ Morris sought to streamline the war effort in an attempt to achieve the country's first balanced budget and saw in the southern army an opportunity to economize. Greene was as well prepared for the task that faced him as any man in the Continental Army, due to his studies, practical experience with organizing and supplying an army through impressment, and realistic expectation of what he could and could not expect from the Continental supply organizations. He was not prepared, however, for the actual condition of the army he arrived to lead.¹⁴

Greene took command of a southern army encamped at Charlotte, North Carolina, that included 2,400 officers and enlisted men on paper, with 1,500 present. Among these only 800 could be described as properly clothed and fed. Greene wrote Washington and described his command:

"Nothing can be more wretched and distressing than the condition of the troops, starving with cold and hunger, without tents and camp equipage. Those of the Virginia line are literally naked and a great part totally unfit for any kind of duty, and must remain so until clothing can be had from the northward."

¹² Joseph Reed to NG, *Greene Papers*, 201; Carp, *To Starve the Army at Pleasure*, 66.

¹³ Fergusson, *Power of the Purse*, 133.

¹⁴ Carp, *To Starve the Army at Pleasure*, 213-214; NG to George Washington, *Greene Papers*, 6: 396.

The officers were habitually negligent and the enlisted men unruly. Greene believed that if he could not find a method to procure clothing of some kind he would never be able to restore any semblance of order. He faced a similar but more severe situation to that of the camp around Boston in 1775, but with several important differences. Defeat at Camden had destroyed the morale of the army, whereas the force around Boston perceived the damage inflicted on the British Column at Lexington and Concord as a victory. Secondly, the Rage Militaire of 1775 had long since faded, and Greene dealt with an unsupportive populace.¹⁵

Horatio Gates, hero of Saratoga, has been roundly criticized for his conduct as commander of the Southern Department in 1780. The sentiment is best summarized by Alexander Hamilton who wrote:

“was there ever an instance of a General running away as Gates has done from his whole army? And was there ever so precipitous a flight? One hundred and eighty miles in three days and a half. It does admirable credit to the activity of a man at his time of life.”¹⁶

While some have argued that Gates did an admirable job in the aftermath of the Camden defeat in holding his army together and restoring its morale and strength, the state of the army on Greene’s arrival clearly demonstrates that his efforts in this regard were not entirely fruitful.¹⁷

The southern army busily established its winter camp at Charlottesville despite the fact that there was no hope of supplying itself in that region. Greene began assessing the supply situation immediately upon his arrival, and North Carolina Commissary General Thomas Polk declared that by the next morning he “understood the supply situation better than Gates had during the

¹⁵ Huston, *The Sinews of War*, 60; M.F. Treacy, *Prelude to Yorktown: The Southern Campaigns of Nathanael Greene, 1780-1781* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1963), 60. NG to George Washington, *Greene Papers*, 6: 543.

¹⁶ Harold Syrett, ed., *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 2: 421.

¹⁷ Paul David Nelson, “Horatio Gates as a Military Leader: The Southern Experience,” in W. Robert Higgins, ed., *The Revolutionary War in the South: Power, Conflict, and Leadership* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1979), 132, 158.

whole period of his command.”¹⁸ He dispatched engineer Thaddeus Kosciuszko to scout a new location for a camp. Meanwhile the British were collecting supplies in preparation for a renewed offensive into North Carolina.¹⁹

The British Army, while more regularly supplied than the American, also experienced logistical difficulties. The command of a greater land area, protected by a string of forts extending into the South Carolina and Georgia backcountry enabled Cornwallis to feed his army off the land with far greater success than Generals Howe or Clinton ever experienced. Cornwallis tried several unique ideas for organizing the conquered territory, including appointing John Cruden as Commissar of Sequestered Estates and charging him with growing food for the army on captured plantations. After Sir Henry Clinton returned to New York following the siege of Charleston and took the majority of the army’s wagons with him, Cornwallis instituted a shuttle service utilizing navigable rivers to supply several of his posts. There were problems with British supply operations, however. A shortage of arms for Loyalists played some factor in their suppression at the hands of Whig militia. In addition, the need to forage led to plundering against neutral inhabitants thereby driving them into the Whig camp. Nevertheless, Greene most likely envied Cornwallis’ supply situation prior to the race to the Dan, as he struggled to provide for his army within the system of specific supplies.²⁰

The chaos of the specific supply system is amply demonstrated in Greene’s attempts to supply his army throughout the campaign in the Carolinas. He held the conviction even before arriving in the Southern Department that virtually all supplies must come from north of the

¹⁸Thayer, *Nathanael Greene*, 290-291.

¹⁹ Hugh Rankin, *The North Carolina Continentals* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1971), 261; Treacy, *Prelude to Yorktown*, 64.

²⁰ Franklin and Mary Wickwire, *Cornwallis: The American Adventure* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1970), 138-141, 311; R. Arthur Bowler, *Logistics and the Failure of the British Army in America, 1775-1783* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 80, 89, 145, 242.

Roanoke River. Greene paid a visit to several of the state legislatures and the Continental Congress on his way south from New York, attempting to persuade the states to meet their quotas. He realized that personal influence, especially from Washington, would be a key factor in actually getting supplies from the states, and was not above begging.²¹

Internal factors within each state's economy undoubtedly played a part in their ability to meet their quotas, but Greene soon noted that the amount of supplies he received from a given state within his department had a direct relationship to the threat posed to them by the British. He wrote to Washington after the victory at Cowpens "We never can be fortunate but that it operates to our disadvantage; and above half the pleasure that results from the victory is lost in the apprehension that it will relax the preparations for the support of the war."²² The North Carolina and Virginia governments provided the vast majority of supplies, leading Governor Thomas Jefferson to lament "Is half the burden of opposition to rest on Virginia and North Carolina?"²³

In addition, supplies the states did provide came primarily when they perceived the enemy threat to be greatest. Greene wrote Joseph Reed in early May, one month after the Battle of Guilford Courthouse, that Virginia "exerted herself greatly on the Enemies approach this last winter, but have left us to ourselves ever since."²⁴ Greene was writing as General William Phillips ravaged much of the Virginia low-country, but prior to Lord Cornwallis' march north from the Carolinas. Virginia leaders decided that public stores within their state would be better directed toward the defense of British raiding parties, despite the wishes of the Continental commander directing the defense of the region.

²¹ Robert Middlekauf, *The Glorious Cause: The American Revolution, 1763-1789* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 465; Treacy, *Prelude to Yorktown*, 56; NG to George Washington, *Greene Papers*, 6: 396.

²² NG to George Washington, *Greene Papers*, 7: 181.

²³ Thomas Jefferson to NG, *Greene Papers*, 7: 273.

²⁴ NG to Joseph Reed, *Greene Papers*, 8: 200.

Regarding the other significant possible source of supply, Greene wrote that Maryland “has neglected us altogether, nor can I hear of any exertions there equal to the pressing emergency of the Southern States. They fall short of what I expected and even what they ought to perform agreeable to the federal union.”²⁵ Mordecai Gist responded to Greene’s increasingly aggravated queries that the “empty treasuries” of Maryland and Delaware were an enormous embarrassment, and that it would require a great deal of time to raise taxes and purchase supplies. Meanwhile in threatened Virginia and North Carolina, state impressments gathered supplies to enable Greene to defend the persons and property of the southern states.²⁶

The system of specific supplies as it operated in the southern states during the occupation of South Carolina and Georgia, and invasion of Virginia produced a chaotic supply situation. Rather than supplies coming from areas that remained relatively safe and un-distressed by enemy operations to those areas under attack, preferably in time to equip a force that could resist the invaders, peaceful areas remained idle. Meanwhile distressed states such as North Carolina and Virginia were left to fend for themselves.

Greene’s army also occasionally received some supplies from the national government, primarily by petition to the Board of War and through the influence of friends in states outside his department. On his journey south he asked Joseph Reed of Pennsylvania to lend his army 4,000 stand of arms and 100 wagons, to be repaid from Continental magazines, and received a portion of this request. Samuel Huntington assured him that the staff department heads would furnish him with any articles the states could not, although Greene’s request for a war chest went unheeded. He primarily sought wagons and arms from the Quartermaster Department. While supplies remained scarce and the needs of the northern army always took precedence over those

²⁵ NG to the Board of War, *Greene Papers*, 8: 189.

²⁶ Mordecai Gist to Nathanael Greene, *Greene Papers*, 7: 288.

of the southern, Greene did receive a shipment of forty wagons, shoes, and a company of artificers from the Continental Congress in early 1781.²⁷

In addition to the struggle of getting supplies from the states and national government, the structure of the staff department for the southern army also presented significant problems for its commander. The organization of the department was “virtually nonexistent,” and Greene wrote to his successor as Quartermaster General, Timothy Pickering “Your department in this state is deranged. There is no deputy appointed; nor anyone to direct or conduct the business.”²⁸ In mid-January, Greene wrote Nicholas Long, the Deputy Quartermaster for North Carolina, detailing the overall structure of the supply departments. He concluded by writing “In future when you make returns endeavor [*sic*] to class the articles in your possession under the several foregoing heads; and make as many distinct returns if possible.”²⁹ The fact that circumstances forced the commanding general of the Southern Department to write such a letter speaks volumes about the state of the supply organization upon Greene’s arrival.³⁰

Greene recruited two very able officers to head his supply operations. He believed the Deputy Quartermaster for the Southern Department serving under Gates to be a “very honest young man but his views have been confined altogether to mere camp issues and Artificers concerns.” The supply situation demanded great changes and an “able conductor in this country.” Greene chose Colonel Edward Carrington, and Pickering acceded to his request that the field deputy be granted powers extending throughout the department. He immediately dispatched Carrington to scout the rivers of North Carolina in an unsuccessful attempt to

²⁷ NG to Joseph Reed, *Green Papers*, 6:455; Samuel Huntington to NG, *Greene Papers*, 6: 451; NG to S. Huntington, *Greene Papers*, 6: 436; John Matthews to NG, *Greene Papers*, 6: 565.

²⁸ NG to Timothy Pickering, *Greene Papers*, 6: 495.

²⁹ NG to Nicholas Long, *Greene Papers*, 7: 65.

³⁰ Carp, *To Starve the Army at Pleasure*, 95.

establish a water based supply route, and then sent him to Virginia to aid Baron von Steuben in collecting and forwarding supplies to the army.³¹

The other crucial appointment Greene made was William R. Davie as his Commissary General. Davie previously served as a partisan militia leader and had extensive experience in foraging for supplies. After hearing Greene out in his proposal, Davie reportedly protested that he knew nothing of finance or bookkeeping. Greene replied that “as to money and accounts, he would be troubled with neither; that there was not a single dollar in the military chest nor a prospect of obtaining any,” and that Davie would supply the army through impressment.³² Later in the campaign, Greene gave Davie instructions on how to function under the specific supply system, urging him to “press forward and repeat your demands again and again and persevere and persist in them until you tire out the legislators with your applications and this and this only will rouse them to due attention to our wants and difficulties.”³³

Obtaining supplies and organizing an effective staff department out of the chaos he inherited certainly plagued Greene in the weeks after he arrived in the South, but transporting the supplies was a problem of equal or greater magnitude. The loss of men and morale at the Battle of Camden constituted only a portion of the ill effects of that engagement. In addition to the almost total annihilation of his army, Gates lost “Twenty ammunition wagons, and the entire baggage, stores, and camp equipage of the Americans.”³⁴ Colonel Alexander Martin lamented to Greene that a new state tax of specific provisions in North Carolina would provide adequate food if transportation could be had, but the “late defeat near Cambden [*sic*] deprived us of too many

³¹ NG to Edward Carrington, *Greene Papers*, 6: 516. Dennis Conrad, “Nathanael Greene and the Southern Campaigns,” Ph.D. Dissertation, Duke University, 1979, 42.

³² Greene, *Life of Greene*, 3: 77.

³³ NG to William R. Davie, *Greene Papers*, 9: 629; Conrad, “Nathanael Greene and the Southern Campaigns,” 57.

³⁴ Ward, *War of the Revolution*, 731.

wagons.”³⁵ Thomas Jefferson took measures to impress 100 wagons for Greene’s army in late November of 1780, but after three weeks collected only eighteen.³⁶ Greene applied to the Quartermaster’s Department for wagons, but complained to his former assistant John Cox that he received “not the least aid from government in the business of transportation and not a shilling of money to help myself.”³⁷

As Quartermaster General, Greene learned the value of supplying troops by water and early on tried to utilize this mode of transporting provisions in the South. Washington also advised him to pay particular attention to this mode of transport. Greene dispatched Carrington and Edward Stevens to scout the rivers in an attempt to move supplies to his new camp on the Peedee River. He also directed Kosciuszko to have artificers build boats, but their chief function in the campaign was in transporting the army across the Dan River, and he was ultimately frustrated by the nature of the rivers in the Carolina backcountry in his efforts to transport supplies by water.³⁸

Even when he did obtain supplies and transportation for his army, Greene faced the difficulties of the outright plunder of his provisions by State and Continental officers along the supply route. Greene complained to the Board of War that he had “taken every possible step to prevent the issues of stores coming for the use of the southern army from being issued at the different posts on the route,” but had no success in doing so.³⁹

Greene tried two approaches to combat the problem. He asked that a greater quantity of supplies than were actually necessary be forwarded in anticipation of the appropriation of stores in route. Greene also proposed to the Board of War that in order to prevent this practice they

³⁵ Alexander Martin to NG, *Greene Papers*, 7: 44.

³⁶ NG to George Washington, *Greene Papers*, 6: 486.

³⁷ NG to John Cox, *Greene Papers*, 7: 82.

³⁸ George Washington to NG, *Greene Papers*, 6: 470; NG to Edward Stevens, *Greene Papers*, 6: 512; Conrad, “Nathanael Greene and the Southern Campaigns,” 42.

³⁹ NG to the Board of War, *Greene Papers*, 8: 3; *Ibid.*, 9: 87; *Ibid.*, 8: 188.

should establish a chain of posts, have a single wagon bring the stores the entire route, inspect the wagons at each post, and have the wagon masters held accountable for their contents. The board deemed his plan unworkable and ignored it. Baron von Steuben and the Marquis de Lafayette tried to combat appropriation in Virginia, but with little success, primarily because the British attack on Greene's lines of communication consumed their attention.⁴⁰

Well aware of Greene's logistical plight, Sir Henry Clinton focused his attention on the Chesapeake. British naval dominance and the erratic support of the French fleet ensured that American lines of communication had to remain land based. These lines were most vulnerable in Virginia between the Allegheny Mountains and Chesapeake Bay. In December of 1780 the British sent a force under Benedict Arnold to the region in order to "capture stores and impede reinforcements," in short to "clamp a tourniquet on the artery of American supplies."⁴¹

This first wave of the British invasion of Virginia had a disconcerting effect on Greene's efforts to establish an orderly supply department, but was not as devastating in the amount of stores actually destroyed. Carrington wrote to Greene that "Had it not been for the invasion, I should have had this state under such an arrangement as would, I think, have brought forth her resources more regularly and amply than hitherto."⁴² From Von Steuben's accounts of the invasion under Arnold, the regulars and militia successfully removed most of the public stores from the path of the British army, although Arnold did burn a foundry and boring mill in Westham. Historian William B. Willcox claims that Arnold was "largely inactive, and

⁴⁰ Ibid.; Marquis de Lafayette to NG, *Greene Papers*, 8 : 281. Baron von Steuben to NG, *Greene Papers*, 8: 283.

⁴¹ William B. Willcox, "The British Road to Yorktown: A Study in Divided Command," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 52, No. 1 (Oct., 1946), 1-35, 4-5.

⁴² Edward Carrington to Nathanael Greene, *Greene Papers*, 7: 114.

consequently of little use to Cornwallis.”⁴³ Clinton therefore deduced that a greater effort would produce more decisive results.⁴⁴

In late March 1781, Clinton sent General William Phillips with 2,000 troops to join Arnold and supercede him in command. With nearly 4,000 troops at his disposal, Phillips resumed desultory operations against Greene’s center of communications and supply. These attacks proved much more destructive and disrupted Greene’s main supply of gunpowder, the laboratory at Prince Edward Courthouse. By late May, Cornwallis had joined forces with Phillips’s Army and increased the attack, after leaving Greene in South Carolina opposed by roughly 8,000 British and Loyalist provincial troops.⁴⁵

Greene wrote Lafayette reminding him that the destruction of stores was the principle object of the enemy, but the situation was quickly becoming chaotic. In June the Frenchman reported to his commander that despite his repeated orders to remove all stores from Charlottesville, the state legislature formed a magazine there to ensure that state and continental supplies did not mix, which subsequently fell into British hands. Clinton eventually instructed Cornwallis to abandon his depredatory raids and establish a strong position at a harbor suitable for ships of the line. The resulting Yorktown siege further consumed supplies that would otherwise have gone to Greene. Carrington, at the siege, wrote Greene that he was trying to forward supplies, but that they remained scarce. Washington reassured him that after the successful completion of the operation, he would forward men and supplies. Morris told Greene that the siege had occupied

⁴³ Baron von Steuben to NG, *Greene Papers*, 8: 76-78; *Ibid.*, 8: 98.

⁴⁴ Willcox, “The British Road to Yorktown,” 10.

⁴⁵ Nathan Irish to Nathanael Greene, *Greene Papers*, 8: 287; Thomas Jefferson to the Virginia Delegates, William T. Hutchinson, and William M. E. Rachal, eds. *The Papers of James Madison*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963.), 3: 68; Baron von Steuben to Thomas Jefferson, Julian P. Boyd, ed. *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1952), 5: 66.

him fully, but that Greene was not forgotten and that he would forward some money when possible.⁴⁶

The vagaries of the system of specific supplies, lack of transportation, poor discipline along supply lines, and effect of British incursions on his lines of communication forced Greene to adopt expedients in order to feed, arm, and clothe his troops. In March 1781 he asked Jefferson to collect cattle and stall feed them so that they might be “ordered on in droves of about one hundred each.”⁴⁷ He made similar requests to North Carolina officials. Greene sought to utilize this practice for a number of reasons. First was the savings in transportation and preservation that driving live cattle to the army would ensure. Second was the ability to avoid establishing large magazines that might be a target for enemy raids. Davie proved resourceful in providing meal and flour collected from the countryside, and Carrington secured food and forage in South Carolina.⁴⁸

As the campaign progressed and the army took up a stationary position around Charleston, supplies of food and especially salt grew more scarce. By mid October, just as the Yorktown siege drew to a successful conclusion, Greene was desperate for salt, inquiring of Marion if any local supply could be found. He wrote Davie that “an army which has had no pay for more than two years, distressed for want of clothing, subsisted without spirits and often short in the usual allowances of meat and bread will mutiny if we fail in the article of salt.”⁴⁹ Acting Governor of North Carolina Alexander Martin helped alleviate Greene’s distress with a shipment of cattle and

⁴⁶ NG to Lafayette, *Greene Papers*, 8: 18; Lafayette to NG, *Greene Papers*, 8: 428-429; John Pryor to NG, *Greene Papers*, 9: 79; Edward Carrington to NG, *Greene Papers*, 9: 347; George Washington to NG, *Greene Papers*, 505; Robert Morris to NG, *Greene Papers*, 9: 523.

⁴⁷ Quote in NG to Thomas Jefferson, *Greene Papers*, 7: 471.

⁴⁸ NG to Governor Thomas Burke of North Carolina, *Greene Papers*, 9:166; William R. Davie to NG, *Greene Papers*, 8:137; *Ibid.*, 8: 154; Edward Carrington to NG, *Greene Papers*, 8: 145.

⁴⁹ NG to William R. Davie, *Greene Papers*, 9: 451.

salt in November, but the supply of food and salt remained problematic until the army withdrew in mid 1783.⁵⁰

Supplying guns and ammunition proved to be more distressing than finding food for Greene during his campaign. He was unable to repair many of his muskets because Congress had provided no mechanics and too few resided in the Carolinas. The Battle of Guilford Courthouse consumed such quantities of ammunition that the army was reduced to roughly ten cartridges per soldier by early April. One factor in Greene's inability to reduce the fort at Ninety-Six before British General Lord Rawdon relieved it was a lack of powder that forced him to call on Andrew Pickens to send some from the operations drawing to a close near Augusta, Georgia. Furthermore, a lack of ammunition played a major role in Greene's decision to withdraw from the Battle of Eutaw Springs. By early 1782, with only 800 soldiers in his camp, Greene's army was reduced to only four rounds per man, and he had no recourse but to let British foraging parties from Charleston pass unopposed.⁵¹

Clothing remained the most problematic of Greene's many distressing supply problems. When Greene arrived in the Southern Department he found some of his troops "literally naked," and others wearing only a strip of cloth in the "Indian fashion."⁵² He sent a number of badly needed Virginia troops home until they could be properly clothed. Greene repeatedly begged for clothing for his cavalry from April through July 1781 and finally received a small shipment in August. In some cases, charity proved more beneficial than the supply structure. In May 1781 James McHenry forwarded 340 homespun shirts that the "ladies of Baltimore" had made for the men. Such expedients would not clothe an army however. The major problem for Greene in his

⁵⁰ NG to Francis Marion, *Greene Papers*, 9: 447.

⁵¹ NG to the Board of War, *Greene Papers*, 9: 197; NG to William R. Davies, *Greene Papers*, 8: 81; NG to Andrew Pickens, *Greene Papers*, 8: 332; Rankin, *The North Carolina Continentals*, 375; Conrad, "Nathanael Greene and the Southern Campaigns," 299.

⁵² NG to George Washington, *Greene Papers*, 6: 543.

search for an adequate supply of clothing rose from the fact that many of the state governments had come to rely on an uncertain source of supply for such manufactured articles— French aid.⁵³

Europe served as the major source of manufactured goods for the Continental Army and the French supplied the bulk of the merchandise. During the early months of the campaign Jefferson expected John Paul Jones to arrive with a shipment of clothing from France, based on a contract of the previous spring. Washington also turned his eyes eastward in expectation of support. Jones arrived in February 1781, bringing a loan and quantity of arms and ammunition, but no clothing. Greene grew increasingly despondent as the year progressed. He wrote to Joseph Reed, “If our good ally the French cannot afford assistance to these Southern States in my opinion there will be no opposition on this side Virginia before fall.”⁵⁴ A shipment of money and clothing arrived a short time later, and Lafayette wrote Greene that he was “well satisfied,” but it was not enough to alleviate the supply problems. French military aid enabled the victory at Yorktown and allowed Washington to send some captured supplies from the siege to Greene. However, French provisions did little to ease Greene’s supply problems.⁵⁵

Captured supplies also served as an important source of provisions for the southern army. Daniel Morgan took 800 stand of arms, two three-pound cannon and most importantly thirty five wagons at the Battle of Cowpens. Greene’s subordinates and the South Carolina militia officers also captured significant quantities of provisions as they seized the string of British fortifications. The fall of Fort Watson replenished badly needed ammunition supplies just days before the

⁵³ NG to Thomas Jefferson, *Greene Papers*, 573; NG to Board of War, *Greene Papers*, 8: 45; James McHenry to Nathanael Greene, *Greene Papers*, 8:329.

⁵⁴ NG to Joseph Reed, *Greene Papers*, 8:201.

⁵⁵ Thomas Jefferson to NG, *Greene Papers*, 7: 273; George Washington to NG, *Greene Papers*, 7: 99; Charles Pettit to NG, *Greene Papers*, 7: 314; Marquis de Lafayette to NG, *Greene Papers*, 9: 121.

crucial Battle of Hobkirk's Hill. The fall of the forts around Augusta also provided desperately needed supplies. These forts yielded medicine, arms, ammunition, rum, and salt.⁵⁶

French aid and captured British stores by no means made up for the shortages in supply that Greene's army labored under due to the system of specific supplies and undisciplined and embattled supply lines. In order to avoid starvation Greene's army took the necessities it needed for survival. Impressment served as the primary method of supplying Greene's army, since state governments often seemed as if they would rather lose the war than violate the sanctity of private property. Continental Army officers undertook the practice with little reluctance because they faced a superior enemy and the burden of a civilian population uninterested in supporting the army, and yet held the view that without the army's existence there would be no liberty or property. By 1781, most of the states had stopped impressments, but for Greene's men, it was often the only alternative to starvation and his army, according to Davie, "took what they wanted without ceremony or accountability."⁵⁷

From the period immediately after his arrival in the Southern Department until Carrington began to get a workable supply system in place, Greene provided his army with food through "small daily collections made by the credit and influence of individuals." The food consisted primarily of "Indian meal and beef."⁵⁸ Greene wrote to Pickering that the army could not be supplied without force and that he had chosen to "let the inhabitants suffer" rather than "swell the public expenditure."⁵⁹ For a time in mid 1781 the situation improved, thanks to the work of

⁵⁶Treacy, *Prelude to Yorktown*, 111; Ward, *War of the Revolution*, 814; Conrad, "Nathanael Greene and the Southern Campaigns," 175; Ng to Henry Lee, *Greene Papers*, 8: 273; Andrew Pickens to NG, *Greene Papers*, 8: 335.

⁵⁷ Carp, *To Starve the Army at Pleasure*, 87. Middlekauf, *The Glorious Cause*, 519; Escott and Crow, "The Social Order and Violent Disorder," 387.

⁵⁸ NG to John Cox, *Greene Papers*, 7: 82.

⁵⁹ NG to Timothy Pickering, *Greene Papers*, 7:49.

Carrington and Davie, but by 1783, with the British evacuated from Charleston, Greene again took to supplying the army “at bayonet point” in order to avert starvation.⁶⁰

In addition to food, Greene’s army also found it necessary to impress horses. After the race to the Dan, his cavalry sorely needed new mounts. Greene urged Thomas Jefferson to “consider the necessity and act accordingly.”⁶¹ Jefferson and the legislature acceded to the requested impressments of horses, and Greene’s troops carried them out, issuing receipts for future payment. Almost immediately, uproar arose from the Virginia Assembly. Greene’s men, it was charged, impressed horses outside of the designated area and “transgressed extremely” in the quality of horses that they impressed. Jefferson then wrote Greene a confidential letter in which he admitted the folly of the legislature’s actions and confessed that he feared a detrimental effect on Greene’s operations if he complied.⁶²

Greene responded to Jefferson that he had inspected the impressed horses and ordered the return of two or three horses of the quality that the legislature mentioned. On the whole, he added, the quality of the horses was inferior to the needs of his cavalry. One month later, Lafayette wrote Greene to inform him that British officers Banastre Tarleton and John Graves Simcoe had ravaged the state, seizing every horse they could come across. Joseph Reed quipped to Greene,

Virginia at this time affords the most remarkable Instance of Imbecility and Pride that I believe the World ever exhibited . . . the fine Horses which could not be spared for the Cavalry of our own country have served to mount their Enemies and to enable them to traverse the state in every direction.⁶³

⁶⁰ NG to Benjamin Lincoln, *Greene Papers*, 12: 402; NG to Abner Nash, *Greene Papers*, 7: 64.

⁶¹ NG to Thomas Jefferson, *Greene Papers*, 7: 289.

⁶² Thomas Jefferson to NG, *Greene Papers*, 7: 467.

⁶³ Joseph Reed to NG, *Greene Papers*, 8: 396; NG to Thomas Jefferson, *Greene Papers*, 8: 58; Marquis Lafayette to NG, *Greene Papers*, 8: 281.

Troop strength remained a problem for Greene throughout the campaign in North Carolina, and the professional officer who developed an aversion to militia early on was often forced to largely rely on these temporary troops often. Greene continually pleaded with the governors of states in the Southern Department to fill out their Continental lines to little avail. Steuben trained and forwarded a small number of regular troops from Virginia and Washington directed Generals Arthur St. Claire and Anthony Wayne with 2,000 Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Delaware Continentals south after the siege at Yorktown, but they did not arrive until January 1782, long after the majority of active operations ceased.⁶⁴

One plan that did help Greene to an extent, and which received his wholehearted approval was a proposal to draft the North Carolina militiamen who fled the field at Guilford Courthouse into Continental service for the duration of the war. Greene wrote Governor Abner Nash that the “penal laws you enclosed me were the first of the kind I ever saw; and in my opinion are the best calculated to render the Militia useful.”⁶⁵

The large slave population in South Carolina never played a direct role in alleviating Greene’s troop shortages. He suggested utilizing them, as some other states had done on a small scale, but South Carolina elites would hear nothing of it. Historian Dennis Conrad argues that Greene’s suggestion had less to do with covert abolitionism, as some Greene supporters have argued, than with his need for reinforcements, citing Greene’s hearty acceptance of the plantation lifestyle after the war.⁶⁶

⁶⁴Baron Steuben to NG, *Greene Papers*, 8: 253; Russell F. Weigley, *The Partisan War: The South Carolina Campaign of 1780-1782* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1970), 71; Boatner, *Encyclopedia of the American Revolution*, 1032.

⁶⁵ Abner Nash to NG, *Greene Papers*, 8: 42; Quote in NG to Abner Nash, *Greene Papers*, 8: 89.

⁶⁶ Boatner, *Encyclopedia of the American Revolution*, 775-776. Conrad, “Nathanael Greene and the Southern Campaigns,” 307.

The slaves did, however, play an indirect role in supplying troops. In April 1781, Militia General Thomas Sumter wrote Greene that he had devised a plan to raise a corps of mounted militia for ten months service. His plan was to pay the men in bounty taken from Tories—one slave for ten months service for a private. Greene initially approved of the plan in a letter to Francis Marion and was excited to have more troops on at least a semi-permanent footing. Sumter raised 1,100 troops, but also managed to rekindle the brutal civil war that raged in the Carolina backcountry.⁶⁷

The integration of the militia into his overall plan of campaign, a step that marked Greene as distinct among southern commanders also presented him with a massive dilemma that exacerbated his supply problems. Militia posed numerous difficulties, ranging from the manner in which they embodied, or came out for service, to their short term of enlistment. In addition to supplies such as forage and ammunition that Greene provided to militia, and thereby denied his Continentals, the thousands of militiamen that operated independently and ravaged the countryside during the bitter internecine conflict competed with Greene's army for scarce resources.

One of the biggest problems facing Greene with his large militia force was the fact that they turned out on horseback. Daniel Morgan, in command of the light troops before the Battle of Cowpens wrote Greene:

We have to feed such a number of horses that the most plentiful country must soon be exhausted. . . . Could the militia be persuaded to change their fatal mode of going to war, much provision might be saved, but the custom has taken such deep root that it cannot be abolished.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Thomas Sumter to NG, *Greene Papers*, 8: 66; NG to Francis Marion, *Greene Papers*, 8: 227; Jerome J. Nadelhaft, *The Disorders of War: The Revolution in South Carolina* (Orono: University of Maine at Orono Press, 1981), 61-61.

⁶⁸ Daniel Morgan to NG, *Greene Papers*, 7: 127-128.

Greene praised the spirit of the militia in his department, but claimed that their practice of embodying on horseback was the “greatest folly in the world,” and laid waste to the countryside.⁶⁹

The lack of discipline exhibited by the militia was most evident in their waste of scarce arms and ammunition. Greene wrote to Governor Abner Nash of North Carolina that he thought it was an “endless task to arm and equip all your militia. Such a waste of arms and ammunition as I have seen . . . is enough to exhaust all the arsenals of Europe.”⁷⁰ He complained that all the muskets Steuben had sent him were given to militia, “few of which will ever be had again.”⁷¹

Greene was by no means solely responsible for supplying the militia forces in his department. He chose to support them to the extent that he did in order to integrate them fully into his design for the campaign. The decision to do so created numerous problems of organization for the commander. He never knew his exact force and the militia, “ordered into the field from such different authority and supplied through such different channels” complicated his task immensely.⁷² Greene was left with no choice but to integrate the militia, as the “two misfortunes” of the fall of Charleston and destruction of the army at Camden “rendered it unavoidable.” However, he warned that if this manner of prosecuting the war continued, “the Inhabitants are inevitably ruined, and the resources of the Country rendered incapable of affording support to an army competent to its defense.”⁷³

Numerous supply difficulties confronted Greene as he attempted to mount an effective defense of Cornwallis’ planned invasion of North Carolina and eventually expel the British from the southern states. He operated in a region with a greater number of disaffected citizens than he

⁶⁹ Nathanael Greene to James Varnum, *Greene Papers*, 7: 188.

⁷⁰ Daniel Morgan to NG, *Greene Papers*, 7: 127-128.

⁷¹ NG to Baron Steuben, *Greene Papers*, 7: 464.

⁷² NG to the Board of War, *Greene Papers*, 8: 3.

⁷³ NG to Alexander Hamilton, *Greene Papers*, 8: 88.

had experienced in the North. The economic woes of the country continued to worsen, and even when the financial house began to be put back in order, he experienced little benefit. Greene labored to provide for his army within the faulty system of specific supplies and endured being at the end of long undisciplined lines of communication that came increasingly under attack by British forces. Despite these myriad difficulties, he maintained an untidy, nearly destitute fighting force that nevertheless remained effective enough to expel the British from the countryside of the Carolinas and Georgia. He never solved the financial or supply problems he faced in the South. What he succeeded in doing was continually grasping at straws like a drowning person wherever he found them. Not only did Greene supply his Continental force, but he also integrated militia into his plan of campaign and supply system, despite their attendant waste. Greene disliked militia in general, but the chief complaints in his correspondence dealt with the ridiculous cost of maintaining this temporary fighting force. Despite this aversion, he utilized them in his fluid strategy that would enable a half-starved, naked army to outlast the mighty British army in the field.

CHAPTER 3: STRATEGY IN NATHANAEL GREENE'S SOUTHERN CAMPAIGN

The debate about the early American way of war as it relates to the American Revolution typically focuses on two important events that took place during the course of the war: the Saratoga campaign and the southern campaigns of Nathanael Greene. The historiographical debate on the southern campaign has evolved into four distinct views over the past two hundred years. The first argument, associated with the period from the war itself to the turn of the twentieth century, states that the Americans gained victory despite the detrimental effects of militia, who fled the battlefield at the first sighting of a bayonet. Had it not been for these woeful troops Greene “would have destroyed Cornwallis’s army and terminated the southern campaign at one blow.”¹

After World War II, interest in the War for Independence resumed, following a half century of focus on class and economic issues dominated by the progressive school of American history. A reappraisal of the conflict occurred during this period, and historians, taking a more favorable stance on the militia, argued the reasonable position that neither they nor the army could have defeated the British alone, and that there was “glory enough for all.”²

The view that the militia contributed to success in the campaign opened the path for several historians to argue that these part time troops proved the decisive element in American victory. These historians argued that the many skirmishes in the southern theater convinced the British to abandon their hopes of pacification and leave the South. Dennis Conrad best summed up this

¹ Francis Vinton Greene, *Nathanael Greene* (New York: Chelsea House, 1983; reprint of 1897 edition), 214. Robert Pugh summarizes the arguments of Greene and other historians such as Avery Upton in Robert Pugh, “The Revolutionary Militia in the Southern Campaign, 1780-1781,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., Vol.14, No. 2 (April, 1957), 154-175.

² John R. Alden, *The South in the Revolution, 1763-1789* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1957), 267; other historians who take this position include, Pugh, “The Revolutionary Militia in the Southern Campaign,” 175; Royster, *A Revolutionary People at War*, 322.

argument, stating, “there was no critical battle. However, the numerous and often forgotten skirmishes fought between the Tory and Patriot militia in the back country of South Carolina, and the disruption of British supply and communication lines by these partisan groups were to prove decisive.”³

The fourth view in the militia-versus-regulars debate is that while the militia was not detrimental to the effort, “American guerrillas did not defeat Cornwallis, nor would they ever have been able to defeat him decisively.”⁴ A common comparison associated with this argument is with Napoleon and the Duke of Wellington in the Peninsular Campaign. Had the French been able to disperse their army they could have effectively dealt with the guerrillas, but when they were forced to concentrate by the British expeditionary force partisan violence flared up again.⁵

Comparisons of Greene’s campaign and guerrilla tactics have been numerous. Historian Russell Weigley made an early comparison between Greene’s campaign strategy and modern unconventional warfare; and historian John Morgan Dederer pushed the comparison farther with his analysis of the campaign and Maoist revolutionary war doctrine. Dederer argued that Greene’s campaign strategy was a precursor of mobile war, an intermediary stage between guerrilla war and conventional war defined as a “transitional form of fighting in which guerrilla and conventional strategies and tactics were used interchangeably, depending upon circumstance,

³ Proponents of this position include Jac Weller, “Irregular But Effective: Partizan Weapons Tactics in the American Revolution, Southern Theatre” *Military Affairs*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (Autumn, 1957), 118-131; Hugh Rankin, “Greene and Cornwallis: The Campaign in the Carolinas, 1780-1781,” Masters Thesis, University of North Carolina, 316; Quote in Dennis Conrad, “Nathanael Greene and the Southern Campaigns,” PhD. Dissertation, Duke University, 1979, 84.

⁴ John Shy, “British Strategy for Pacifying the Southern Colonies, 1778-1781,” in *The Southern Experience in the American Revolution*, ed. Jeffrey J. Crow and Larry Tise, 155-173 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1978), 171.

⁵ Wickwire, *Cornwallis*, 133; For the comparison of Greene and Wellington see Piers Mackesy, *The War for America, 1775-1783*(Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1964), 404; Weigley, *The Partisan War*, 4.

to wage a war of quick maneuver utilizing regular troops alone or in conjunction with guerilla bands.”⁶

Historian Don Higginbotham cautioned his readers about exaggerating the comparison between modern unconventional war and the Revolutionary War, but even he admitted that Greene’s campaigns resembled Maoist mobile war. Certainly, Mao’s famous quote that “the enemy advances, we retreat; the enemy camps, we harass; the enemy tires, we attack; the enemy retreats, we pursue,” fits well with Greene’s movements against Cornwallis in the stages leading up to the Battle of Guilford Courthouse.⁷

Militia played an integral role in the American effort to rid the South of the British, but their most important contribution involved keeping the spirit of resistance alive. Without a comprehensive plan and assistance from a force strong enough to face the British field army in battle, they could not have expelled the enemy. Nathanael Greene was reluctant to pursue a partisan strategy but came to do so in order to preserve the Continentals in his army, while continually striving to convince southern state legislatures to recruit a large regular force. Victory in the theater resulted from essential contributions of both Continentals and militia, but the regular forces proved the decisive instrument in the conduct of the campaign.

Domestic political factors played a major role in the decision of the British ministry led by Lord George Germain to focus on the southern states in its effort to restore political control to the colonies. In 1778, opposition to the growing expense of a three-year war that had recently expanded to global proportions, both in the general public and within Parliament, forced the

⁶ John Morgan Dederer, *Making Bricks Without Straw: Nathanael Greene’s Southern Campaign and Mao Tse Tung’s Mobile War* (Manhattan, Kansas: Sunflower University Press, 1983), 9.

⁷ Willard M. Wallace, *Appeal to Arms*, 230; Russell F. Weigley, *The Partisan War*, 2; Don Higginbotham, *War and Society in Revolutionary America: The Wider Dimensions of the Conflict* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988), 169; Mao Tse Tung quoted in John Shy and Thomas W. Collier, “Revolutionary War,” in *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, ed. Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 840.

cabinet to think of a new approach to the application of force. The conflict focused on ceasing the endless number of reinforcements continually committed to the effort.⁸

The inquiry in Parliament into the conduct of former Commander in Chief Sir William Howe played a major role in the development of a southern strategy. Howe believed a policy of reconciliation the only proper solution to the problems in America, even as he served as the commander charged with putting down the rebellion by force. Testimony provided in his defense convincingly demonstrated to many legislators his belief that the war in America could not be won with the number of troops currently engaged, the lack of which he blamed for his failure. The inquiry ended inconclusively, but was important because Germain “perfected an argument for continuing the war based upon the support of American Loyalists.”⁹

The British strategy for restoring political control of the colonies from south to north was based on the belief, fostered by exiled Royal governors from the region, that Loyalists constituted a majority in the southern states. The plan involved conquering a colony with British regular forces, establishing order, turning over defense of the colony to Loyalist provincial regiments, reestablishing civil government and demonstrating the benefit and leniency of restored British rule to the rebellious subjects. Once the British army had quashed resistance and provincials kept the peace, the regulars could move on to the next colony and America would be rolled up from south to north. The strategy also promised to deprive the rebels of valuable staples that the European powers exchanged for war matériel and provide a naval base to pursue operations against islands in the West Indies that might offset American losses.¹⁰

⁸ Paul H. Smith, *Loyalists and Redcoats: A Study in British Revolutionary Policy* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1972, reprint of 1964 edition), 115; Mackesy, *The War for America*, 305.

⁹ Ira D. Gruber, *The Howe Brothers and the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1972), 355-356; Quotation in: Smith, *Loyalists and Redcoats*, 121.

¹⁰ Shy, “British Strategy for Pacifying the Southern Colonies,” 138; Mackesy, *The War for America*, 184, 252. Ira Gruber “Britain’s Southern Strategy,” *The Revolutionary War in the South: Power, Conflict, and Leadership*, ed. W. Robert Higgins, 205-237 (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1979), 221.

Several problems hampered the execution of the British southern strategy. The plan depended upon the ability of the British to shuttle troops between the northern and southern theaters, which the newly established French naval base in Rhode Island threatened. Poor administration of British naval resources by Lord Sandwich, who kept too many ships of the line tied down in the channel fleet, exacerbated this problem. In addition, historian Paul Smith has estimated from a study of British provincial regiments that the total percentage of the population that could be termed Loyalist was 19.8 percent. Even though the ratio of Loyalists in the south was greater than that in the north, it still did not approach the levels expected by British political planners.¹¹

British actions upon arriving in the South also hindered the execution of the plan. Shortly after his successful siege of Charleston, Sir Henry Clinton issued two proclamations, the first pardoning and paroling any rebel taken prisoner in Charleston who took an oath of loyalty to the crown; the second requiring active support of British measures by those who took the oath. This second proclamation enraged the Whigs, and many who would have remained neutral declared their parole invalid and took up partisan resistance against the crown. Cornwallis later wrote that the proclamations “did not contribute at all to the success of my operations.”¹² Instead of restoring order to the colony, the British fomented a bloody civil war because they proved unable to control the pent up hatred of the Tories, who had felt the wrath of the Whigs for three years and now saw an opportunity for retribution. Clinton hamstrung Cornwallis by taking most of the cavalry and supply wagons to New York when he departed. The British have also been

¹¹ Shy, “British Strategy for Pacifying the Southern Colonies,” 162, 166; Mackesy, *The War for America*, 194; Paul H. Smith, “The American Loyalists: Notes on Their Organization and Numerical Strength,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd. Ser., Vol. 25, No. 2 (Apr., 1968), 259-277; 268.

¹² Charles Ross ed, *Correspondence of Charles, First Marquis Cornwallis* (London: John Murray, 1859), 48;

criticized for not digesting the territory they acquired and not adequately protecting the Loyalists in order to give the southern strategy a “full trial.”¹³

Several historians have argued that the British southern strategy had failed before it was even initiated. This argument centers on British treatment of Loyalists throughout the war. In 1776, Clinton and Cornwallis planned an invasion of North Carolina. When Loyalists learned of the plans, they rose up, only to be soundly defeated at Moore’s Creek Bridge by Whig militia. The southern Loyalists then received scant attention from the British army until 1779. Paul Smith and Clyde R. Fergusson argue that by that time it was too late. Patriot militia had spent three years dominating Loyalists and had proven to be far superior at political intimidation.¹⁴

It is difficult after more than two hundred years to imagine a scenario in which the United States failed to gain independence. The desperate situation of 1780 should, however, not be forgotten. The financial chaos and increasing dependence on forceful means to maintain the war effort disillusioned many as to the true benefits of independence. Actions of South Carolinians immediately after the initiation of the British southern strategy also did not auger well for the Whig cause.

In 1779, following the fall of Georgia to British forces, General Augustine Prevost took advantage of a movement by American General Benjamin Lincoln toward Augusta and marched on Charleston, lightly defended in Lincoln’s absence. Prevost demanded the surrender of the garrison of 1,000 troops. Governor John Rutledge and his council countered with the astounding proposal that if the British would spare the city the Carolinians would remain neutral for the remainder of the war and swear allegiance to the victor. Prevost was bluffing and could not have

¹³ Black, *War for America*, 190; Higginbotham, *War for American Independence*, 355; Wickwire, *Cornwallis*, 135; Gruber “Britain’s Southern Strategy,” 237.

¹⁴ Smith, *Loyalists and Redcoats*, 173; Clyde R. Fergusson, “Carolina and Georgia Patriot and Loyalist Militia in Action, 1778-1783,” in *The Southern Experience in the American Revolution*, Crow and Tise ed., 174-202; 175, 194.

held the city with his force, but the mindset of Charleston patriots is instructive. In addition, after the fall of Charleston in 1780 was followed by the losses at Camden and the defeat of Thomas Sumter at Fishing Creek many partisans laid down their arms, including Francis Marion who fled the state.¹⁵

South Carolinians demonstrated that serious setbacks could cause them to question further resistance. It was vitally important for Greene, therefore, to avoid the crushing defeat of a third American southern army. He proved able to retrieve the bleak situation in the Carolinas in part because of the nature of his opponent.

Lord Charles Cornwallis was a fighting general who preferred to defeat the Whigs in battle rather than slowly wear down their resistance. Clinton's instructions to Cornwallis stated that the latter was to regard the safety of Charleston and Georgia as his primary concern and that any offensive operations should be conducted secondarily. The general developed a conviction that Charleston could not be held without the conquest of the hinterlands, a belief that ultimately led him to Yorktown. William B. Willcox argues that Cornwallis's failure as a general in the South can be traced to his ignorance of the use of the navy. The British owned the coastline, but Cornwallis chose to fight in the back country, where his "problem of supply was so great that minor defeats became major ones, and victories were rendered fruitless."¹⁶

Cornwallis's other major weakness was his thinly veiled contempt for his Commander in Chief. He believed throughout the early phases of southern operations that any day he would be appointed as Clinton's successor. When word arrived that Clinton's resignation had not been accepted, Cornwallis virtually ceased communicating with his commander. He began to develop his own ideas on how the British should prosecute the war and sought to force them on his

¹⁵ John Pancake, *This Destructive War: The British Campaign in the Carolinas, 1780-1782* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1985), 33-34; Treacy, *Prelude to Yorktown*, 43.

¹⁶ Alden, *The American Revolution in the South*, 247. Willcox, "The British Road to Yorktown," 6, 7.

superiors. When Cornwallis was faced with a skillful adversary, his pride and arrogance toward Clinton played a significant part in the outcome of the war.¹⁷

Nathanael Greene's objective upon assuming command in the southern theater was to reestablish American political control in Georgia and South Carolina and prevent further incursions of Cornwallis's army into North Carolina. The reestablishment of civil government became imperative in mid 1781 when Greene received word of a possible compromise peace based on the principle of *Uti Possedetis* (each belligerent would retain the land possessed at the cessation of hostilities). In order to accomplish this objective, he would have to defeat the British or in some manner convince them to withdraw from the occupied areas of the two southernmost states.

His first priority was to discern the nature of the war in the South, as opposed to that in the North. Greene quickly perceived that the passions of the citizens were inflamed to a much higher degree, noting to Hamilton "The division among the people is much greater than I imagined, and the Whigs and Tories persecute each other, with little less than savage fury. There is nothing but murders and devastations in every quarter."¹⁸ He realized that it would be difficult to harness this fury toward the accomplishment of his objective without rendering the Carolinas a desert. In addition, it seemed to Greene that "more of the Inhabitants appear in the Kings interest than our own." As noted earlier, Greene was shocked at the state of his army upon arriving in the South, in terms of numbers, condition, morale, and discipline. He also realized that the

¹⁷ Hugh Rankin, "Charles Lord Cornwallis: Study in Frustration," in *George Washington's Generals and Opponents: Their Exploits and Leadership*, ed. By George A. Billias, 193-232 (New York: De Capo Press, 1969), 202; Willcox, "The British Road to Yorktown," 14.

¹⁸ NG to Alexander Hamilton, *Greene Papers*, 7: 88.

southern governments, which he viewed as motivated more by popularity than a desire to effectively prosecute the war would be of little assistance.¹⁹

The conflict in the North educated Greene in the moral factors of revolutionary war. He understood that in order to rekindle effective opposition to the British he would have to somehow “spirit up the people.” This would not be easy considering the state of his forces in the South. In addition, he would have to restore his army’s morale, discipline, and confidence in themselves and their commander after the defeat at Camden and Gates’s subsequent flight.²⁰

With these considerations in mind, Greene determined to pursue a flexible exhaustion-based strategy with the principal goal of harassing the British while maintaining and augmenting the existence of the Continental regular forces under his command, but also offering conventional battle at advantageous opportunities. When he arrived, only partisan forces remained in the field opposing the British, and Greene integrated the militia into his strategy despite his longstanding aversion to them for primarily logistical reasons.

As noted earlier, many historians have compared Greene’s tactics to those of modern guerilla fighters. Comparisons between Maoist mobile war and Greene’s strategy in the southern campaigns are valid, but problematic as an analytical tool. They tend to limit discussion of the campaign to factors that are analogous between the two strategies and downplay those that are not. In addition such arguments are typically geared more toward proving a viable link than illuminating Greene’s strategic decisions in light of his prior knowledge and experiences and the circumstances in which he found himself. In placing Greene’s strategic options and choices within a context of the period, a comparison with the views on guerrilla war of one of his contemporaries is insightful.

¹⁹ NG to Samuel Huntington, *Greene Papers*, 8: 130.

²⁰ NG to Daniel Morgan, *Greene Papers*, 6: 589.

Historian John Shy has argued that Charles Lee presented a radical alternative to the conservative, European based strategy advocated by Washington. Lee believed that opposing the British in a decisive engagement on open ground was suicidal. He advocated a plan of defense based solely on harassing and impeding the enemy. Lee saw the war as a “free fight by free men for their natural rights,” and sought to incite a “popular war of mass resistance. . . . that would use the new light-infantry tactics already in vogue among the military avant-garde of Europe.” The basis for Lee’s plan would be a broad based militia force, and the strategy in action would resemble the response of the New England minutemen to the Lexington and Concord raid on a nationwide scale. Shy argues that Washington’s military conservatism buffered the social and political conservatism of the Revolutionary Era, and had Lee’s vision been realized the war could easily have ended in a chaotic situation similar to the French Revolution, which would have been an impediment to national unity. He also claims that Nathanael Greene’s campaigns in the south “conform to Lee’s prophetic insight”²¹

There are important differences, however, between Lee and Greene’s visions for the conduct of the war. Lee saw a strategy based on a conventional European approach and advocated abandoning it for a radical, broad based guerrilla war. Greene, on the other hand, inherited a guerrilla war and worked mightily to reestablish a conventional approach based on regular forces. Greene recognized that the loss of the Continental troops at Charlestown and the “defeat of General Gates, perhaps, rendered the embodying of the Militia absolutely necessary,” but argued that this mode of resisting the British was so “inefficient” and “ineffectual” that “the evil

²¹ John Shy, *A people Numerous and Armed: Reflections on the Military Struggle for Independence* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1990), 133-162. Quotations in: *Ibid.*, 161.

should be remedied, as soon as possible.”²² In his oft quoted, impassioned plea to Thomas Sumter to cooperate with the Continental Army in his operations Greene wrote:

The salvation of this Country don't depend upon little strokes; nor should this great business of establishing a permanent army be neglected to pursue them. Partizan strokes in war afford no substantial national security. They are matters which should not be neglected, and yet they should not be pursued to the prejudice of more important concerns. You may strike a hundred strokes, and reap little benefit from them, unless you have a good Army to take advantage of your success.²³

Greene's views on the nature of warfare and the formation of campaign strategy did not develop haphazardly as the war progressed, but were informed in part by the military treatises he read in the years preceding his arrival to the Southern Department. As mentioned earlier, Greene began studying military theory and history after visiting a military fair in Plainfield, Connecticut, in 1773. His biographers claim that he read several works, but he mentions only Julius Caesar, Marshal Maurice of Saxe, and Frederick the Great in his letters. Historian Ira Gruber argues that these writers, along with Vegetius, were the most often read and influential sources of a confused strategic heritage among British officers in the War for Independence. Gruber argues that Caesar advocated the destruction of the main enemy army as the surest path to victory, a strategy commonly associated with Napoleon and the military theorists he inspired. Greene adopted this view until the defeat of the American army at Long Island, and his personal defeat at Fort Washington convinced him, along with Washington, that a reassessment was needed.²⁴

Following the New York defeats, Greene adopted views more in line with Marshal Saxe and Frederick the Great. Saxe, a mid-eighteenth century German in the service of the French Army

²² NG to Abner Nash, *Greene Papers*, 7: 63.

²³ NG to Thomas Sumter, *Greene Papers*, 7: 74-75.

²⁴ Ira Gruber, "British Strategy: The Theory and Practice of Eighteenth Century Warfare," in *Reconsiderations on the Revolutionary War: Selected Essays*, ed. Don Higginbotham, 14-31 (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1978), 14-16; Tretler, "The Making of a Revolutionary General," 202.

advocated views prevalent during the age of limited warfare in many instances, but also presaged several future trends. Saxe advocated the use of light troops, or skirmishers, who “have spent their life firing at a greater distance, who are not drawn up in close order, and who fire at ease,” rather than by volley.²⁵ In the realm of strategy, Saxe reflected the age of limited war, when armies were inordinately expensive to raise and equip, and objectives in warfare remained limited. Saxe presented the opposing argument to Caesar, stating:

I do not favor pitched battles, especially at the beginning of a war, and I am convinced that a skillful general could make war all his life without being forced into one. . . . Frequent small engagements will dissipate the enemy until he is forced to hide from you.²⁶

As the war progressed, Greene increasingly began to think in terms that Saxe would have approved of. Once he realized, with Washington, that maintaining the existence of the Continental Army was the key to continued resistance, and that Continentals could not easily be replaced, he took a similar view to that which Saxe offered in his *Reveries*. Saxe did not, despite his statements to the contrary, always avoid battle. During the War of the Austrian Succession he fought a massive engagement at Fontenoy in 1745. After skillfully maneuvering the British and enticing them to attack him on ground of his choosing he carefully positioned his forces on and behind a hill. The British commander, the Duke of Cumberland attacked the position and, despite a valiant effort, was repulsed by a French counter attack at the crucial point in the engagement.²⁷

Frederick the Great, in many ways, represented the middle ground between Caesar and Saxe. Frederick’s strategic thinking “remained within the old limits of the war of position,” but he was far from passive, favoring the offensive or an active, challenging defense. Frederick’s

²⁵ Phillips, *Roots of Strategy*, 221.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 298.

²⁷ Robert Doughty and Ira Gruber ed., *Warfare in the Western World*, (Lexington, Massachusetts: D.C. Heath and Company, 1996), 85-87.

Instructions was the most often quoted treatise in Greene's letters, and the Prussian had much advice of relevance to the American commander.²⁸

Frederick stressed discipline as the key to military success, as had Saxe, and stated that the "greatest secret of war and the masterpiece of a skillful general is to starve his enemy."²⁹ Frederick placed great emphasis on the administrative functions of a general, such as supply issues and choosing a camp. Of particular note to Greene would have been Frederick's admonition that "in neutral countries efforts should be made to win over friends," but at the very least a body of partisans should be formed, and added that "the friendship of a country is gained by requiring the soldiers to observe good discipline and by picturing your enemy as barbarous and bad intentioned."³⁰ Frederick advised his generals to abide by the "ancient rule of war" and keep their forces together, avoiding detachments."³¹ He also declared, in antithesis to Saxe, that "War is decided only by battles and is not finished except by them. Thus they have to be fought, but it should be opportunely and with all the advantages on your side."³²

By 1780, when he devised the campaign strategy for the South, Greene had developed a complex understanding of revolutionary warfare. He realized early in the conflict that an exhaustion strategy focused on maintaining the army, while scoring morale-building victories and wearing down British forces when possible, was the key to victory. Thus, Greene's southern strategy mirrored in many ways the overall war strategy laid forth by Washington. Greene's desire to maintain the integrity of the regular army outweighed his desire for victory in battle and glory among his countrymen. In a sense, he was motivated by a desire not to lose more than to

²⁸ R.R. Palmer, "Frederick the Great, Guibert, Bülow: From Dynastic to National War," in *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, Peter Paret ed., 104; See NG to George Washington, *Greene Papers*, 2: 235; NG to Abner Nash, *Greene Papers*, 6: 533; NG to the Board of War, *Greene Papers*, 6: 549 for three examples.

²⁹ Phillips, *Roots of Strategy*, 321

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 356

³¹ *Ibid.*, 344

³² *Ibid.*, 391.

win. This is the primary reason Greene lost two of the three major engagements he fought in the southern theater.

A letter from Nathanael Greene to Governor Thomas Burke is illustrative of the attitude the General took in his campaign strategy. Greene wrote that “the enemy can never conquer the country whilst we keep the shadow of a regular force in the field, provided the militia are well armed, and no general action can prove totally ruinous, tho’ it may bring upon us many misfortunes.” He applied the same strategy to the offensive, telling Burke that the Tories in North Carolina could only be defeated by “routing the enemy from Wilmington.” If the British regulars could be defeated, he argued, and leniency shown to the Tories, then Burke would “feel little injury from this class of people.” In two of the three major battles, Guilford Courthouse and Eutaw Springs, Greene was forced to decide between a final drive to destroy the enemy or withdrawal; in both cases he chose to withdraw.³³

Greene also understood, however, that he could not simply run from the British. His awareness of the moral factors in war drawn from military treatises and practical experience informed him that action must be taken to ensure and encourage the support of the people. Public opinion was especially important to Greene due to the nature of the war. Because his supply system relied on a decentralized scheme of state requisitions, undertaken by legislatures more interested in maintaining broad support than ensuring a successful war effort, Greene needed demonstrable success despite his precarious situation. “Everything here depends on public opinion,” he wrote to Henry Knox, “and it is equally dangerous to go forward as stand still for if you lose the Confidence of the people you lose all support,” but if he rushed into battle he would “lose everything.”³⁴ Greene described the war as a “contest for states dependent on

³³ NG to Thomas Burke, *Greene Papers*, 9: 166-167.

³⁴ NG to Henry Knox, *Greene Papers*, 7: 547

opinion.”³⁵ Losses on the battlefield he wrote were “but a small part of the injury; it is the effect it has upon the people at large, both in matters of finance and the power of opposing the enemy.”³⁶

The two factors of maintaining and augmenting the regular army and buttressing public opinion informed Greene’s strategy throughout his tenure in the Southern Department. An examination of the major decisions Greene made demonstrates how he utilized a flexible exhaustion-based campaign strategy that *reluctantly* incorporated militia forces as an integral element to defeat the British.

Moreover, Greene formed definite views on how he would conduct the campaign before he ever arrived in the Southern Department. Washington gave him no particular instructions other than to use prudence and good judgment and “avoid embarrassments.”³⁷ Greene planned on forming a “flying army of 800 horse and 1,000 infantry” that he would utilize to confine the enemy to its present limits and render it difficult for Cornwallis to subsist off the countryside until a larger force could be trained and equipped.³⁸ In addition, he planned for this force to “head and encourage the militia” before he ever arrived and learned the actual condition of his wretched army. He understood the effect on the southern theater of the two major losses in battle and realized means that he otherwise would have shunned were necessary. Washington approved of the plan and advised him to build large flat-bottomed boats that could be transported with the army to enable river crossings. Greene’s principal fear was that Cornwallis would draw

³⁵ NG to Thomas Sumter, *Greene Papers*, 7: 75.

³⁶ NG to Richard Caswell, *Greene Papers*, 7: 295.

³⁷ George Washington to Nathanael Greene, *Greene Papers*, 6: 425.

³⁸ NG to George Washington, *Greene Papers*, 6: 448.

him into a “war of Posts,” because he possessed no heavy cannon, could not conduct a siege with the British field army nearby, and could not hold a post even if he did succeed in taking one.³⁹

After arriving in Charlotte and taking command of his ragged army on December second, Greene made one of the most controversial and highly debated decisions in the military history of the United States. He realized that much of his army could not undertake operations of any kind until they were properly clothed, fed and equipped; and morale and discipline were restored. In addition, his northern experience informed him that the winter camp Gates had begun to establish at Charlotte was untenable, so he dispatched Kosciuszko to find a new location. Realizing the local inhabitants would interpret the move as a retreat and wishing to resume operations on some level, Greene decided to divide his small army, sending 600 men west into the Ninety-Six district with General Daniel Morgan, while 1,100 moved with him to a camp in the Cheraws on the Peedee River.

Historians have interpreted the decision in a number of ways. Most recognize that supply and morale constituted the major factors in the decision. Weigley argues that the maneuver was primarily a stratagem designed to confuse Cornwallis’s planned invasion, and Conrad states that the move was less an offensive threat than a plan to position his army on the two flanks of a British column preparing to advance. Dederer claims that the move is an early example of Vo Nguyen Giap’s principle of “advancing very deeply then withdrawing very swiftly.”⁴⁰

Greene was well aware of the principle of mass, the dangers of making detachments, and consequent risk of a defeat in detail. He also realized that “the art of command is to make

³⁹ Nathanael Greene to Samuel Huntington, *Greene Papers*, 6: 459; George Washington to NG, *Greene Papers*, 6: 470; quotation in NG to the North Carolina Board of War, 6: 549.

⁴⁰ Ward, *War of the Revolution*, 750; Wallace, *Appeal to Arms*, 232; Weigley, *The Partisan War*, 28; Conrad, “Nathanael Greene and the Southern Campaigns,” 73; Quotation in: Dederer, *Making Bricks Without Straw*, 50.

choices in the midst of ambiguity,” and that no principle applies to every situation.⁴¹ Greene’s decision to divide his army is best viewed in light of his supply situation and his preconceived ideas on the proper course to pursue in the South. He wrote to Abner Nash that the troops sent “with Gen. Morgan are composed of our best Troops, & are intended as a flying army.”⁴² He sought to implement the plan he proposed to Washington, but a substantial portion of his army was so destitute that they could not participate in active operations and therefore had to retire to a camp of repose. Greene found himself forced by circumstances to “make detachments that nothing but absolute necessity could authorise [*sic*] or even justify.”⁴³

The southern commander instructed Morgan to “give protection to that part of the country and spirit up the people, annoy the enemy, collect provisions and forage and establish magazines.” Greene cautioned his subordinate that “should the enemy move in force towards the Peedee you will move in such a direction as to enable you to join me as necessary or fall upon the enemy flank and rear.”⁴⁴ He wrote the President of Congress that “the object of the detachment is to straighten the Enemy’s limits upon that quarter, keep up the spirits of the people, give protection to the well affected and collect provisions.”⁴⁵ Clearly, Greene’s intent in dispatching Morgan was to have him carry out morale building raids and collect provisions; and he wanted Morgan to remain within supporting distance of the main army in case of a sudden move by Cornwallis against it. He also fully realized the dangers of such a disposition. Greene wrote that “to detach one half of the army for subsistence will leave the other a prey to the

⁴¹Michael I. Handel, *Masters of War: Classical Strategic Thought* (London: Frank Cass, 2003; reprint of 1992 edition), 8.

⁴² NG to Abner Nash, *Greene Papers*, 7: 64.

⁴³NG to James Varnum, *Greene Papers*, 7: 188.

⁴⁴ NG to Daniel Morgan, *Greene Papers*, 6: 589

⁴⁵ NG to Samuel Huntington, *Greene Papers*, 7: 8.

enemy,” and he wrote to the southern state governments that they must send him reinforcement so that he could mount a more effective resistance⁴⁶

The commander apparently hoped that he could reap greater benefits from splitting his forces than merely building up stores:

“It makes the most of my inferior force, for it compels my adversary to divide his, and holds him in doubt as to his own line of conduct. He cannot leave Morgan behind him to come to me, or his posts of Ninety-Six and Augusta would be exposed. And he cannot chase Morgan far, or prosecute his views upon Virginia, while I am here with the whole of the country open before me. . . . But although there is nothing to obstruct my march to Charleston, I am far from having such a design in contemplation in the present relative positions and strength of the two armies.”⁴⁷

Greene sought to utilize the threat of force to unbalance Cornwallis as a secondary objective for his division of forces. The army on the Peedee, as Greene himself admitted, was too weak to make any movement toward Charleston, especially with the chain of defensive forts protecting the city. With no cannon and Greene encamped and unable to quickly render aid, Morgan’s 600 regulars (supported by Andrew Pickens’ militia) could hardly lay siege to Ninety-Six, though it was much weaker at this point than when Greene failed to reduce it with his entire army later in the year, or the complex of forts around Augusta.

In this sense, the interpretation that the move was a stratagem is correct, but the weakness of Greene’s force and his instructions to Morgan seem to preclude it as his primary purpose. The argument that Greene sought to position himself on the flanks of Cornwallis’s army in anticipation of his advance northward seems improbable in light of the fact that Greene sent all the best troops west with Morgan and kept the naked and hungry soldiers in need of discipline in camp with himself. The view that Greene sought to make a deep incursion to entice Cornwallis to pursue him strains the evidence. Nowhere in Morgan’s instructions or his subsequent

⁴⁶ NG to the North Carolina Board of War, *Greene Papers*, 6: 575.

⁴⁷ NG to an Unidentified Person, *Greene Papers*, 7:175.

explanations of the move does Greene mention such a ruse. He did send out scouting parties to survey rivers for supply reasons and to prepare for a possible retreat, but the race to the Dan was a response to circumstances produced to the west.

Cornwallis feared the threat against Ninety-Six more than that posed by Greene due to its location near the homes of the over-mountain men who had destroyed Patrick Fergusson and derailed the invasion the previous campaign. He detached Banastre Tarleton to pursue Morgan and reinforce the post, resulting in the Battle of Cowpens, an embarrassing loss for the British.⁴⁸

The total defeat of the British light troops at Cowpens initiated the famous race to the Dan. During the retreat, Greene left the half of the army on the Peedee under General Isaac Huger and proceeded across North Carolina to personally take command of Morgan's force.

Upon hearing that Cornwallis had burned his baggage in an attempt to convert his entire army into a type of light infantry, Greene reportedly exclaimed "then he is ours."⁴⁹

Greene initially instructed Huger to meet him at Salisbury and told him that he wished "to avoid an action until our force is collected." After failing to delay Cornwallis's crossing of the Yadkin River at Cowan's Ford, Greene changed the rendezvous point to Guilford and informed Huger that he wanted to collect the militia there and prepare for an offensive or defensive engagement. He wrote Huger that he believed it was "not improbable from Lord Cornwallis's pushing disposition, and the contempt he has for our army" that the Americans might "precipitate him into some capital misfortune."⁵⁰

Upon arriving at Guilford Courthouse, Greene called his first and only official council of war during the campaign. He posed the question whether the army should risk an engagement,

⁴⁸ Charles Stedman, *The History of the Origin, Progress, and Termination of the American War* (1794; repr., New York: Arno Press, 1969), 324.

⁴⁹ William Johnson, *Sketches in the Life and Correspondence of General Nathanael Greene, Major General of the Armies of the United States in the War of the Revolution* (New York: Da Capo Publishers, 1973), 1: 376.

⁵⁰ NG to Isaac Huger, *Greene Papers*, 7: 219-220; *Ibid*, 7: 251-252; Johnson, *Life of Greene*, 1: 707.

and it was “determined unanimously that we ought to avoid a general Action at all events, and that the Army ought to retreat immediately over the Roanoke River.”⁵¹ Conrad argued that Greene called the council in order to give official sanction to his decision to the governments of North Carolina and Virginia. At this point, Greene adopted a stratagem that enabled him to safely reach Virginia. He posted General Otho Holland Williams and a detachment of light troops as a screening force with orders to mislead the British as to the proposed location of the crossings and “retard their march with all in his power.” The boats built by Kosciuszko and the diligent planning of Carrington enabled Greene to reach Virginia and safety “without loss of either men or stores.”⁵²

During the Race to the Dan, Greene demonstrated his foresight and flexibility. His intent was not to provoke Cornwallis into a precipitous flight, but he was well prepared to do so because of the reconnaissance missions of Carrington and Stevens and the boats Kosciuszko constructed for supply purposes. He twice contemplated giving battle, but thought better of it. He also showed political savvy in calling for a council of war with an eye toward future relations in obtaining supplies from the states. Cornwallis declined to pursue Greene because the loss of his baggage and the rate of his march combined to exhaust his men compelling him to retire to Hillsboro to regroup. Greene had preserved his army, but there was now no organized resistance below Virginia.

At this point in the campaign, Greene intuitively discerned that he had arrived at the culminating point of defense, which is reached when “the defender must make up his mind and

⁵¹ Proceedings of a Council of War, *Greene Papers*, 261-262.

⁵² NG to George Washington, *Greene Papers*, 7: 293. Conrad “Nathanael Greene and the Southern Campaigns,” 132; The Dan River is an upper fork of the Roanoke River.

act, when the advantages of waiting have been exhausted.”⁵³ He could not allow the British free reign to “impress the idea of conquest on the minds of the disaffected and perhaps occasion those who were wavering in their sentiments to take an active and decisive part against us.” In addition, his cavalry had replenished its supply of horses through impressments and militia were embodying and flocking to his army. Greene re-crossed the Dan River in mid February and commenced a series of maneuvers designed to keep his force in action while allowing the maximum number of militia possible to join him, and again employed the tactic of a light infantry screening force under Williams utilized to great effect in his hasty retreat.⁵⁴

In mid march, Greene decided that he had reached the zenith of available combat power and, sensing “the probability of not being able to keep long in the field, and the difficulty of subsisting men in this exhausted country,” took up a position at Guilford Courthouse upon a field he had scouted during the Race to the Dan.⁵⁵ Greene wrote that he was “persuaded that if we were successful it would prove ruinous to the enemy, and if otherwise, it would only prove a partial evil to us.” The battle was a tactical defeat for Greene, but he scored a strategic victory by rendering the British unable to continue operations due to the effects of the march and costly victory.⁵⁶

Sun Tzu wrote in *The Art of War* that

Whoever is first in the field and awaits the coming of the enemy will be fresh for the fight; whoever is second in the field and has to hasten to the battle, will arrive exhausted. Therefore the clever combatant imposes his will on the enemy, but does not allow the enemy’s will to be imposed on him.⁵⁷

⁵³ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 383;

⁵⁴ NG to Thomas Jefferson, *Greene Papers*, 7: 419-420.

⁵⁵ NG to Joseph Reed, *Greene Papers*, 7: 449;

⁵⁶ NG to Samuel Huntington, *Greene Papers*, 7: 433

⁵⁷ Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, in Phillips, *Roots of Strategy*, 33.

From the moment Greene re-crossed the Dan, he imposed his will on Cornwallis. At Guilford Courthouse he had chosen a field of battle suited to his forces.

Greene's dispositions and conduct on the battlefield illustrate his overall strategy of preserving his army, even at the expense of victory. He placed his troops in three lines in a manner that mimicked Morgan's at Cowpens, with militia in front and Continentals in the rear. Unlike Morgan, however, Greene's regulars were so far in the rear that they were out of supporting distance. George Washington, touring the battlefield in 1793 with Thomas Jefferson, stated that if Greene would have placed cannon and regular troops near the defile that the British marched through at the front edge of the field he would have annihilated them. In addition, Greene has been criticized for not ordering a final exertion at the crucial stage of the battle. Both these decisions reflect the extent to which his emphasis on preserving the army and defeating the enemy in an exhaustion strategy took precedence over annihilating the British army.⁵⁸

Cornwallis remained at the site of the battle for a few days and assessed his situation.

Charles Stedman records that when

“the extent of the British Loss was fully ascertained, it became too apparent that Lord Cornwallis was not in a condition either to give immediate pursuit, or to follow the blow the day after the action. Added to its other distresses, the army was almost destitute of provisions. Under such circumstances, although a victory had been gained, a retreat became necessary towards that quarter from whence supplies could be obtained.”

He retreated to Wilmington where he could be supplied by water via the Cape Fear River.

Greene, contemplating his strategic choices, made the most important decision of the campaign.

He turned his back on Cornwallis and marched south.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Conrad, “Nathanael Greene and the Southern Campaigns,” 152; Washington remark from an editor's note in *Greene Papers*, 7: 436.

⁵⁹ Quotation in Stedman, *The History of the American War*, 347.

Greene wrote that he came upon the decision because “this will oblige the enemy to follow us or give up their posts there.”⁶⁰ If they followed, the war would be drawn out of North Carolina, Cornwallis’s invasion would be thwarted, and the Whigs could gain men and supplies from the state. If the British did not follow, Greene believed he could capture their posts in South Carolina, and supply his army in enemy occupied territory; thereby feeding his army on provisions the British would otherwise have had access to.⁶¹ Henry Lee heartily agreed with the decision, writing that he was “decidedly of opinion with you that nothing is left for you, but to imitate the example of Scipio Africanus.”⁶² Thus, Greene exchanged his role as the southern Fabius for that of Scipio.⁶³

The news that Greene had marched to South Carolina “rendered the situation of the British commander more embarrassing than ever.”⁶⁴ Cornwallis persuaded himself that he could not reach Camden in time to relieve a siege and save Lord Rawdon, the senior British commander in South Carolina. He decided instead to march north to Virginia and assume command of General Phillips army there. He wrote Phillips that the campaign had been “uniformly successful,” but that Cornwallis’s effective army had “shrunk from something under four thousand to one thousand exhausted men.” He wrote to Sir Henry Clinton and pleaded with him to transfer the seat of the war to Virginia, “if necessary at the price of abandoning New York,” to which Clinton replied that such a plan would certainly end the war quickly, by annihilating the British forces in America in a single campaign season. Upon learning the particulars of Cornwallis’s situation and

⁶⁰NG to George Washington, *Greene Papers*, 7: 481.

⁶¹ NG to Baron von Steuben, *Greene Papers*, 7: 8: 23-24.

⁶²Henry Lee to NG, *Greene Papers*, 8: 28.

⁶³ Fabius Maximus was a Roman General who faced Hannibal during the Second Punic War and, unable to oppose him in battle conducted a delaying campaign based on movement and designed to wear down the Carthaginian Army. In the second phase of the war, Scipio Africanus left Hannibal on the Italian Peninsula and invaded his homeland, destroyed Carthage, and ended the war.

⁶⁴Stedman, *The History of the American War*, 353.

decision Clinton wrote that the general's "principal reason for this last extraordinary move is to avoid the disgrace, as he calls it, of going by sea to Charleston."⁶⁵

It is not clear whether knowledge of Cornwallis's character directly influenced Greene's decision to turn south. It is evident from the tone of his letters that Greene realized that his move put Cornwallis in a precarious situation in a strictly military sense, but more importantly in the battle of public opinion raging in the South. In addition, he realized the monumental nature of this decision within the campaign, writing Gates in October 1781 "The southern States have been in a most critical situation; and if they are saved, it will be owing to our moving into South Carolina last spring." Once Cornwallis moved north to Virginia, Greene faced a serious question involving the allocation of his resources.⁶⁶

Greene decided soon after his arrival that the southern campaign should take precedence and the effort in Virginia ought to be his economy of force operation, devoting the least amount of men and matériel to the effort as feasible from a political standpoint. He wrote Steuben, on January 13, 1781, when Arnold was raiding South Carolina, "I am persuaded it is more essential to form the barrier strong here than it is to guard the state there. For this reason it is my desire you should hasten on the troops as soon as possible." As the weight of the British effort began to bear down on the American lines of communication and supply, Washington began to personally make decisions regarding Virginia. He sent the Marquis de Lafayette with a detachment in February, and tried to persuade the French Navy to make concerted efforts with the young Frenchman there.⁶⁷

⁶⁵Willcox, "The British Road to Yorktown," 12, 15.

⁶⁶NG to Gates, *Greene Papers*, 9: 426.

⁶⁷Quotation in: NG to Baron von Steuben, *Greene Papers*, 7: 109-110; George Washington to NG, *Greene Papers*, 7: 364;

Greene still tried to focus resources on liberating South Carolina and Georgia. In March, he wrote Steuben to have all Continental guards and troops serving on detachment to be replaced with militia and sent southward. The turning point for Greene in his allocation of resources came when Cornwallis moved into Virginia. He wrote to Lafayette that he was “sensible the prosecution of the war to the southward will have its advantages but Virginia is a capital link in the chain of communication and must not be left to sink under the oppression of such formidable attacks as are making upon her.”⁶⁸

Greene still faced a sizable British force in South Carolina and Georgia, but realized that if his lines of communication were cut, he would be isolated and defeated in the lower south. As the conflict in Virginia moved toward the climactic Yorktown siege, Greene continued his campaign to rid South Carolina and Georgia of the enemy. British troops in the two southernmost states numbered almost 8,000 regulars and provincials stationed in numerous posts extending in an arc roughly 100 to 140 miles from Charleston. He wrote to the President of Congress that the “Enemy have got a firmer footing in the southern states than is generally expected.” Greene sought to attack as many of the posts as possible simultaneously in order to prevent their reinforcement. He dispatched Lee with Marion and Pickens and tried to compel Sumter to cooperate in the destruction of the outposts. Greene moved his army south to Camden, the strongest of the British forts.⁶⁹

Upon arriving at Camden, Greene realized that the stronghold was much too powerful for him to storm or reduce by siege. He took up a position on Hobkirk’s Hill between Camden and Charleston. Greene expected Marion, Lee, and Sumter to join him and interdict Rawdon’s supply lines. The position on Hobkirk’s Hill was taken with the intent to “draw the enemy out,

⁶⁸ NG to Marquis de Lafayette, *Greene Papers*, 8: 366.

⁶⁹ NG to Samuel Huntington, *Greene Papers*, 8: 130-131.

after being fully satisfied that the town could not be stormed, the works being too strong.”

Rawdon attacked Greene before he could assemble his partisans, achieving tactical surprise despite Greene’s best efforts to prepare his men for an attack.⁷⁰

Greene had again offered battle only under circumstances that favored his overall strategy and wrote “the disgrace is more vexatious than anything else.”⁷¹ He wrote Marion instructing him to “take measures to have the account contradicted and the public properly informed. By mistake we got a slight repulse. The injury is not great, the enemy suffered much more than we did.” After the battle, Greene wrote “we fight, get beat, rise, and fight again. We have a bloody field but little glory.”⁷² The loss meant that he would be forced to “again resume the Partisan War.”⁷³

Rawdon had a temporary advantage, but partisan actions against his lines of communication and supply and the fall of intermediary forts compelled him to withdraw from Camden. Greene tried unsuccessfully to lay siege to the fort at Ninety Six, but was forced to retire in part because he had to wait for powder to arrive from Augusta. The British later evacuated the post and Greene moved his weary army to a camp in the High Hills of Santee.

He broke camp and attacked Alexander Stewart, the commander of British forces after Rawdon left the theater because of illness, at Eutaw Springs. He seemed to have his first victory in the southern theater in hand, but his weary and hungry troops chased the British through their camp, lost all discipline and fell into looting the provisions. Greene decided against attempting a counter attack on a British position inside a brick house because he did not wish to risk his army.

⁷⁰NG to Henry Lee, *Greene Papers*, 8: 227; Boatner, *Encyclopedia of the American Revolution*, 1030.

⁷¹NG to Henry Lee, *Greene Papers*, 8: 225.

⁷²Third quote: NG to Marquis de Lafayette, *Greene Papers*, 8: 18.

⁷³NG to Francis Marion, *Greene Papers*, 8: 160.

Stewart won the field, but he was severely weakened and forced to withdraw to Monck's Corner.⁷⁴

Continued partisan activity by Marion, Sumter, and Lee hounded the British communications and supply lines and forced them to withdraw from the remaining posts in South Carolina. Greene now restricted the British to the immediate environs of Charleston. In addition, actions by Pickens and Lee against Augusta in mid 1781, and Anthony Wayne in January 1782, drove the British in Georgia within the fortifications of Savannah.

The campaign strategy employed by Greene during the second phase of his operations, after he turned his back on Cornwallis and moved into South Carolina, comprised a twofold approach. The first aspect involved utilizing the able partisan commanders, and Sumter when he would cooperate, to wage an effective dispersed action against British fortifications and lines of communication and supply. With his main field army, Greene sought to engage and if possible destroy the main British force in the region in the actions at Hobkirk's Hill and Eutaw Springs. He was not willing, however, to gamble with the existence of his Continentals to achieve this goal, and when again presented with the decision to hazard his army in one final exertion at Eutaw Springs he "ordered the attack to be pushed no further."⁷⁵ Greene had not reverted to the view of Caesar which he held early in the war. His was closer to the approach of Frederick, who advocated battle if fought "opportunely and with all the advantages on your side."⁷⁶

As he expelled the British army from their hold on South Carolina and Georgia, Greene turned his attention to restoring civil government to the two southernmost states. This aspect of his mission gained importance when he learned of events in the courts of Europe. In 1779 France and Spain expended great resources in a massive effort to invade England. The plan was

⁷⁴ Boatner, *Encyclopedia of the American Revolution*, 1031.

⁷⁵ NG to Samuel Huntington, *Greene Papers*, 8: 419-421.

⁷⁶ Phillips, *Roots of Strategy*, 391. Boatner, *Encyclopedia of the American Revolution*, 1030-1032.

not to strike at London, because the French Foreign Minister, the Comte de Vergennes, feared that “the other powers would take fright at so resounding a victory.” The proposal involved gaining control of the English Channel with fifty ships of the line and seizing the Isle of Wight, Portsmouth, and possibly other towns in an attempt to destabilize faith in what Vergennes viewed as an “unstable credit system based on public confidence.”⁷⁷

The utter failure of this massive venture, along with the public appearance of English negotiators in Madrid, caused Vergennes to contemplate his options, and he turned to Russian mediation. He and Foreign Minister Floridablanca of Spain agreed on a “middle-of-the-road” solution to their desire to pull out of the war. They proposed a compromise peace on the basis of *Uti Possidetis*, which stated that the belligerents would keep all territory they controlled at the cessation of hostilities. In January 1781 the French made it known that they would accept such a treaty with the exception of New York, which must go to the Americans.⁷⁸

Samuel Huntington, the President of congress informed Greene and encouraged him to make “the most vigorous exertions at this critical juncture to drive the enemy from all their interior posts and if possible to expell [*sic*] them from these states.”⁷⁹ Greene had already put a plan in motion to establish a council and begin the task of re-establishing civil government in Georgia. He now instructed the delegates to the Continental Congress from Georgia, who had remained in the body while the state was occupied, that they form a constitutional legislature as soon as possible. In South Carolina, Greene played an instrumental role in convening the Jacksonboro Assembly, and chose the site for the meeting because he wanted it to be as near to Charleston as possible in order to demonstrate the tenuous position of the British there. After the siege of

⁷⁷Mackesy, *The War for America*, 279-281.

⁷⁸Samuel F. Bemis, *The Diplomacy of the American Revolution* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1957), 105, 106, 182.

⁷⁹Samuel Huntington to NG, *Greene Papers*, 7: 342.

Yorktown, the threat of losing the southern states in a compromise peace vanished, but Greene had another reason to restore civilian control quickly. He wrote to Thomas Burke “Civil Government must be reestablished, and enabled to correct and restrain the most licentious abuses which are now raging in this Country.”⁸⁰

The violent civil war in the Carolinas and Georgia, as noted previously, was primarily the result of the encouragement of pent up loyalist aggression and the inability of the British to contain the violence. The chaos that reigned in much of the backcountry threatened not only to render the country a desert and make it difficult to supply Greene’s army, but more importantly, to destabilize the region in the peace that followed. Widespread violence alarmed the southern commander, and he took numerous steps to contain it. Greene favored a lenient policy toward the disaffected, and tried to encourage his officers and the civilian population to accept them back into their local communities.⁸¹

Greene realized that military success was not sufficient, and noted to John Rutledge that he could “depend upon it that many unruly spirits will require bridling in this country to make the people feel a happiness in the success of our arms.”⁸² He also understood that it was primarily up to the southern army to control the violence, because the British “stand idle spectators and behold with calm philosophy the horrid scene they have set on foot. . . . If a stop cannot be put to those private massacres this country will be depopulated in a few months more.”⁸³ He urged Georgia militia leader Elijah Clarke to put a stop to “private murders and plundering,” and issued

⁸⁰ NG to James Wilkinson, *Greene Papers*, 8: 386; NG to the Georgia delegates in Congress, *Greene Papers*, 9: 35; NG to Elijah Clarke, *Greene Papers*, 9: 70; Quotation in: NG to Thomas Burke, *Greene Papers*, 8: 490-491. Mark A. Clodfelter, “Between Virtue and Necessity: Nathanael Greene and the Conduct of Civil-Military Relations in the South, 1780-1782,” *Military Affairs*, Vol. 52, No. 4 (Oct., 1988), 169-175; Edward Cashin, “Nathanael Greene’s Campaign for Georgia in 1781,” *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 61, No. 1 (Spring, 1977), 43-58.

⁸¹ Nadelhaft, *The Disorders of War*, 58; Higginbotham, *War and Society in Revolutionary America*, 167; Conrad, “Nathanael Greene and the Southern Campaigns,” 316; Clodfelter, “Between Virtue and Necessity: Nathanael Greene and the Conduct of Civil-Military Relations in the South, 1780-1782,” 170-172.

⁸² NG to John Rutledge, *Greene Papers*, 8: 256.

⁸³ NG to William R. Davies, *Greene Papers*, 8: 298.

orders to his officers to search their men's backpacks, confiscate any plunder, and punish offenders severely. He also urged the Jacksonboro Assembly to be lenient to the Tories. They did not heed his advice, confiscating many Loyalist estates.⁸⁴

The nature of the civil war in the backcountry played a significant role in Nathanael Greene's utilization of the militia in his southern strategy. When Greene arrived in the Southern Department, the only forces in the field opposing the British were partisan bands of militia. The contributions of these fighters to the outcome of the campaign were numerous. Before Greene arrived in the South, "Over-Mountain Men" under leaders such as Isaac Shelby converged on King's Mountain and destroyed Cornwallis's light troops under Patrick Fergusson. This defeat forced Cornwallis to abandon his invasion and ensured there would be the remnants of a southern army for Greene to command. In addition, partisan forces also dealt many defeats to the Tories, such as the one at Kettle Creek in 1779 that set back the British effort to organize the Loyalists and carry out their strategy for the Americanization of the war. Conrad and historian Hugh Rankin argued that these operations actually won the South for the Americans. According to this view, the numerous small engagements convinced Cornwallis that further efforts in the south were futile.⁸⁵

The fact remains, however, that Cornwallis's army lingered in the Carolinas until Greene embarrassed him with his maneuvers of splitting his army, retreating swiftly to the Dan, offering Battle at Guilford Courthouse, and most importantly, confidently turning his back on the British general and leaving him with no attractive options. Cornwallis was a battle-oriented commander. He abandoned the Carolinas only when confronted by a foe who could outmaneuver him and who would not allow his force to be drawn into in a decisive battle.

⁸⁴NG to Elijah Clarke, *Greene Papers*, 8: 356; General Greene's Orders, *Greene Papers*, 9: 270.

⁸⁵ Boatner, *Encyclopedia of the American Revolution*, 573-582; Hugh Rankin, "Greene and Cornwallis," 316; Conrad, "Nathanael Greene and the Southern Campaigns," 84.

Greene believed that the only sure way to attain victory over the British was to establish a strong permanent force upon a Continental footing. Before he even arrived in the South he wrote to Governor Nash, “nothing will deter the enemy but a well appointed army upon a permanent establishment.” Greene confided to his friend Henry Knox “the mode of conducting the war which is most to the liking of the people is the least likely to offer them safety.”⁸⁶

The plan of defense for the southern states that Greene wanted to adopt involved “a small but well apportioned army; organized so as to move with great celerity. It should consist of about 5,000 infantry and from eight hundred to a thousand horse.” He advocated the creation of such a force to anyone in power that would listen. Indeed, Greene became so strident in his criticism of administering and prosecuting a war with militia forces that he was cautioned by several of his associates.⁸⁷ James Varnum warned Greene that he was gaining few friends by constantly expressing “political sentiments on the nature of armies in this country.” Joseph Reed likewise cautioned Greene that his “private letters are not always made good use of here, that is they are shown with too much freedom.” The contents of these letters had convinced many in the North that Greene held “the militia in contempt” and was “too much inclined to attribute failures to them.”⁸⁸ Greene responded, protesting that he only represented the situation in the South as it was known to him, and that he was far from despising the militia.⁸⁹

Greene understood the value of militia to the effort and utilized them effectively, but never considered their contributions to be the primary instrument in the conduct of the war. Whereas Gates ignored the militia, Greene encouraged them and detached parts of his regular force to operate with them. When he arrived in the South he immediately contacted Francis Marion and

⁸⁶ NG to Abner Nash, *Greene Papers*, 6: 504; NG to Henry Knox, *Greene Papers*, 6: 547.

⁸⁷ NG to Alexander Hamilton, *Greene Papers*, NG to James Varnum, *Greene Papers*, 7: 278.

⁸⁸ Joseph Reed to NG, *Greene Papers*, 8: 396-397.

⁸⁹ NG to Joseph Reed, *Greene Papers*, 9: 135.

assigned him duties to collect intelligence and supplies. He wrote Thomas Jefferson that militia was very useful if not depended on as a principal force but employed as auxiliaries.⁹⁰

The militia played two important roles in Greene's campaign strategy— augmenting his forces before battles and dispersing to attack lines of communication and supply during the reduction of the string of British posts in the Carolinas. While Greene utilized these forces readily, he also experienced many problems because of them. General Thomas Sumter, for example, while commanding state forces in South Carolina, continually ignored Greene's attempts to coordinate resistance to the British, preferring to operate independently. Greene told Davie, "Sumter refuses to obey my orders, and carries off with him all the active force of this unhappy state on rambling predatory expeditions unconnected with the operations of the army."⁹¹

Barring the Battle of Guilford Courthouse, the loss of which Greene blamed on the North Carolina militia, he rarely complained about tactical deficiencies among the militia. His biggest complaints concerned the decentralized nature of American resistance and the attendant waste of utilizing militia forces. Greene became increasingly frustrated with Virginia officials in this respect during the early stages of the British incursions into that state. He wrote to Steuben that if the "views of a state are opposed to the general plan of operations, and the force in the field can only be employed at such points as they shall think proper, no officer can be safe in his measures, nor can the war be prosecuted upon a general scale." Greene complained to the President of Congress that the issue must be settled with the states because nothing could "be

⁹⁰ Clyde R. Fergusson, "Carolina and Georgia Patriot and Loyalist Militia in Action, 1778-1783," 175, Pancake, *This Destructive War*, 196; Hugh Rankin, *Francis Marion: The Swamp Fox* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1973), 57, 37; NG to Thomas Jefferson, *Greene Papers*, 6: 492.

⁹¹ Recollections of a conversation between General Nathanael Greene and William R. Davie, *Greene Papers*, 8: 225.

more ruinous to the public welfare, and dangerous to the public safety than to have orders issued from partial considerations destructive of the general welfare.”⁹²

Yet Nathanael Greene was above all a pragmatist. Despite his misgivings about the militia system in general as being inefficient and harmful to the general conduct of the war, he reluctantly utilized the partisans in his campaign. Facing a British army whose goal was to obliterate American resistance and turn peacekeeping duties over to provincials and Loyalist militia, but whose commander was more interested in battle than winning hearts and minds, Greene utilized an exhaustion based campaign strategy focused on maintaining the existence of the Continental Army, building popular support, and restoring civil governments supportive of his military efforts. He offered battle only in situations that were conducive to these goals, and despite never winning a tactical victory, never lost in a strategic sense.

⁹²NG to Baron von Steuben, *Greene Papers*, 8: 60.

CONCLUSION

Nathanael Greene rekindled the war effort at a time when a morale building victory was absolutely essential. The war in the North had ground to a stalemate, with Clinton safe in New York and Washington unwilling to risk a decisive engagement in that theater. Greene went south and scored an improbable strategic victory by outlasting the British, re-establishing civil government, and taking measures to end the internecine conflict raging in the back country. He gained these accomplishments despite little outside support for the southern army.

Greene's first five years of service in the Continental Army were marked by the development of a nuanced revolutionary strategy focused on preserving the army in the field at all costs and a keen understanding of the need to maintain the support of the people. During his tenure as a Brigadier, Major, and Quartermaster General he developed the organizational skills involved in creating an effective fighting force, as well as the ability to rebuild the morale of troops discouraged by neglect and defeat. He also gained knowledge of the abilities and limitations of the Continental supply system that would enable him to conduct a campaign of movement in challenging terrain with a poor transportation infrastructure. As Greene matured as a military leader, he came to view militia as a drain on irreplaceable materiel. It was because of their attendant waste, rather than tactical deficiencies, that Greene came to believe that all American troops should be on a long term, Continental footing. This belief that only long-service Continental troops could conduct the war in an efficient manner led to the formation of strong nationalist views that would only be strengthened as Greene struggled to supply his southern army within the system of specific supplies.

Numerous supply difficulties confronted Greene as he attempted to mount an effective defense of Cornwallis's planned invasion of North Carolina, and eventually expel the British from the southern states. The civil war raging among the Whigs and Tories decimated the countryside and its agricultural produce, and plundering by both sides engendered a disaffected populace that became resistant to supporting the southern army. The financial crisis of the nation in general also continued to worsen, and even when Robert Morris began to put the national finances in order he was unable or unwilling to offer substantial help to the southern army. Greene utilized all his political and administrative abilities to provide for his army within the faulty system of specific supplies to little effect. He also proved largely unable to institute discipline among the staff officers along his extended supply lines.

Despite these numerous difficulties, he maintained his nearly destitute fighting force and managed to blunt the British advance and eventually drive the enemy from their chain of defensive posts in the Carolina and Georgia backcountry. While he never found a permanent solution to the supply crisis, he succeeded in keeping his army from disintegrating through expedients such as impressments and captured supplies from the enemy. Greene not only supplied the Continental forces under his command in this manner, but also integrated militia forces into his campaign strategy and supplied them despite their incredible waste, which he continually decried in his correspondence.

In the southern theater Greene became a reluctant partisan who utilized militia as a major component of his fighting force. His much-lauded decision to split his forces in the face of a superior foe was primarily an attempt to initiate his preconceived strategy of creating a flying army with the portion of his force fit for such duty. Greene showed great adaptability in accepting the circumstances and not attempting to let his wishes of a well-apportioned regular

army cloud the reality of the situation. The fact that a professional soldier such as Greene was forced despite his best efforts to adopt a partisan approach, as well as the deep seated attachment of the southern people to their militia traditions, gives some indication that the desire to emulate European methods may have been dominant only among a military elite.

Greene certainly wished for glory, but accepted his duty and held to his notions of how the war should be conducted despite the allure of committing all his forces to achieve a clear victory at Guilford and Eutaw Springs. The most important decision of the campaign, marching south and leaving Cornwallis, is often overlooked or misinterpreted. He did leave an enemy who threatened his lines of communication and supply in his rear, but realized that this was the only way to maintain the initiative and utterly embarrass the proud Cornwallis, who could not bear to abandon another invasion northward in defeat. Greene utilized an exhaustion based campaign strategy focused on building popular support and maintaining the existence of the Continental Army. By offering battle only in situations that did not hazard the existence of his army, Greene maintained popular support and aided the reestablishment effective civil governments in South Carolina and Georgia despite never winning a tactical victory.

Greene's experiences in the war reveal much about the total ineptitude of the government under the articles during wartime, and the fundamental flaw that the states could not be compelled by congress into contributing for their mutual defense. This fact exasperated Greene and other Continental officers and proved the major reason so many turned to the Federalist Party in the Early Republic. In addition, the army was clearly a factor in assisting the healing process between Loyalists and Whigs in the deeply divided South and thereby contributed to national unity. Despite his best efforts, Greene could not convince the southern governments that abandoning the militia based defense system would save them money in the long run. The

custom of this system had taken root too deeply for even a crisis of the magnitude experienced during the British occupation to overturn such longstanding social and cultural forces.

Following the war the popular interpretation of its outcome in the South deemphasized Greene's contribution to American victory, a belief that has again become fashionable. The forces under Greene's command were the dominant instrument in the triumph of the independence movement. His utilization of an exhaustion based campaign strategy that offered battle only at opportune times and held the continued existence of the regular southern army as its primary goal drove Cornwallis from the region and eventually penned the British within Savannah and Charleston. Greene did not believe, as Charles Lee did, that a popular based guerilla strategy was the proper mode of conducting the war. He reluctantly adopted partisan troops as a part of his campaign strategy because he was forced to do so by congress and the southern representative assemblies.

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