

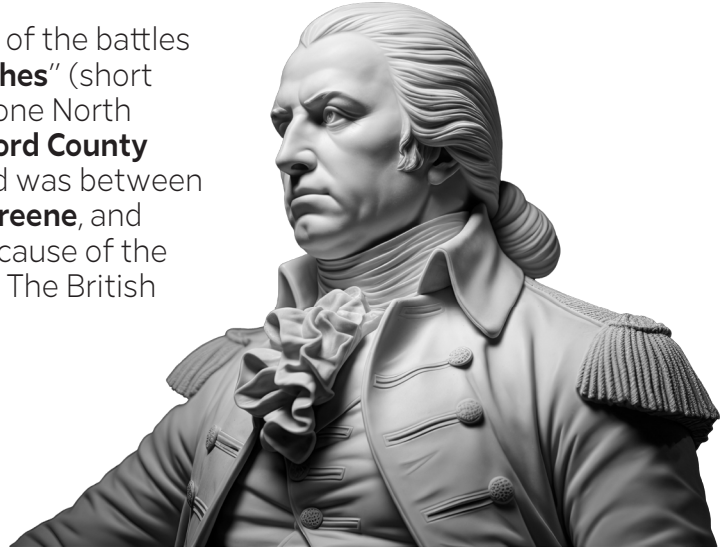
THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION IN NORTH CAROLINA

THE BATTLE OF GUILFORD COUNTY COURTHOUSE: A LOSS THAT ALLOWED THE PATRIOTS TO WIN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTIONARY WAR

- ◆ **Learning Outcome:** Students can explain how the Battle of Guilford County Courthouse helped the American Patriots to win the American Revolutionary War. ◆

During the American Revolutionary War, many of the battles that took place in North Carolina were “**skirmishes**” (short battles between small groups of soldiers). But one North Carolina battle stands out — the Battle of **Guilford County Courthouse**. It took place on March 15, 1781, and was between American **Patriots**, led by **General Nathanael Greene**, and British soldiers, who were called “**Redcoats**” because of the red jackets they wore as part of their uniforms. The British army in North Carolina was commanded by **General Charles Cornwallis**, the second-highest British general in the war.

A place where a battle is fought is called a **battlefield**. At that time, when two armies fought at a certain place, the army that controlled the battlefield afterwards was considered to be the winner. Based on this



General Nathanael Greene

VOCABULARY WORDS

- ◆ Skirmishes
- ◆ Patriots
- ◆ Redcoats
- ◆ Battlefield
- ◆ Courthouse
- ◆ Retreat
- ◆ Surrendered
- ◆ Peace treaty

PEOPLE

- ◆ General Nathanael Greene
- ◆ General Charles Cornwallis

PLACES

- ◆ Guilford County Courthouse
- ◆ Greensboro

way of thinking, the American Patriots lost the Battle of Guilford County Courthouse, since after a few hours of fighting, they left the battlefield. However, this battle helped the Patriots win the war just seven months later. How could a battle that the Patriots lost help them win the war?

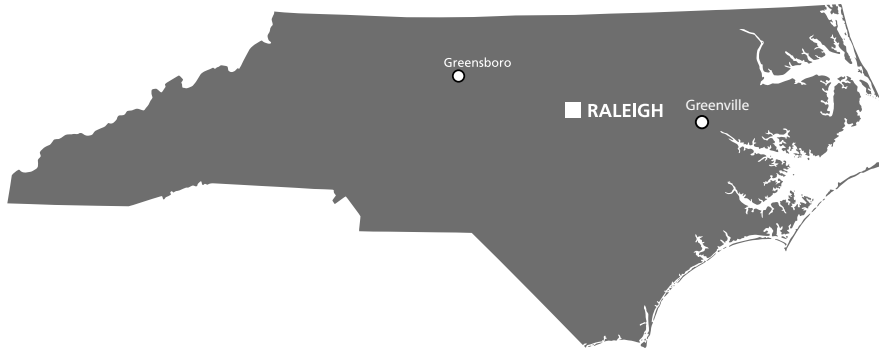
The short answer to this question is that the British army fighting in North Carolina had fewer soldiers than the Patriots and couldn't easily replace the soldiers who died or were wounded in each battle. Many experienced British soldiers were killed or wounded during the Battle of Guilford County Courthouse, and the Patriots captured British weapons and supplies. These losses weakened General Cornwallis's forces, which made it easier for the Patriots to defeat them seven months later at the Battle of Yorktown.

HOW THE BATTLE OF GUILFORD COUNTY COURTHOUSE TOOK PLACE

General Cornwallis's army had been chasing General Greene and his soldiers throughout South Carolina and North Carolina. General Cornwallis thought that if he could defeat General Greene's army once and for all, the British could take full control of the southern states (Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Virginia) and then begin attacking the rest of the United States from the south.

However, as the British got farther from their bases on the coast, it became more and more difficult for them to get the food and supplies that their soldiers needed to continue fighting. By contrast, the Patriots were fighting in their home state, so it was easier for them to get the food and supplies they needed and to find new soldiers to replace those who died or were wounded in battle.

North Carolina is divided into counties. Guilford County is located in the middle of North Carolina, west of Raleigh and Durham and east of Winston-Salem. Like all counties, it had a **courthouse** where trials took place when someone in the county was accused of a crime. There was a large



North Carolina cities named after General Nathanael Greene

field in front of the Guilford County Courthouse. General Greene chose to organize his soldiers in the field in front of the courthouse and wait for the British army to find him. When General Cornwallis's soldiers found the Patriot army in front of the courthouse, the battle began.

The battle lasted only around two hours, but many soldiers on both sides were wounded

or killed. After two hours, General Greene ordered his soldiers to **retreat** (to leave the battlefield), and the British took over the land around the courthouse. The British had lost many experienced soldiers who could not easily be replaced, and in return, they gained a field. On the other hand, General Greene's retreat saved the lives of many of his soldiers.

After the battle, Cornwallis's exhausted soldiers marched slowly into Virginia, hoping to rebuild their strength. They headed for the city of **Yorktown** on the Virginia coast. When they arrived at Yorktown, the Patriot army attacked and defeated them. In October 1781, General Cornwallis and his army **surrendered** (gave up) and returned to Great Britain. This was the last major battle of the American Revolutionary War. Two years later Great Britain and the United States signed a **peace treaty** ending the war. In this agreement, Great Britain officially accepted the United States as an independent country.

In appreciation of General Greene's leadership during the American Revolution, the city that grew up around the Guilford County Courthouse was named **Greensboro**. Another town in eastern North Carolina was named Greenville, also in honor of General Greene. Throughout the original 13 states that existed at the time of the American Revolution, you can find many cities and towns named after this brave and clever leader.

READING REVIEW QUESTIONS:

During the American Revolutionary War, why was the British army chasing General Nathanael Greene and his soldiers throughout South Carolina and North Carolina?

What disadvantages (weaknesses) did General Cornwallis's army have in North Carolina? What advantages (strengths) did General Greene's army have in North Carolina?

Immediately following the Battle of Guilford County Courthouse, why did many people think that the Patriots lost the battle?

Explain how the outcome of the Battle of Guilford County Courthouse helped the Patriots win the American Revolutionary War.
