

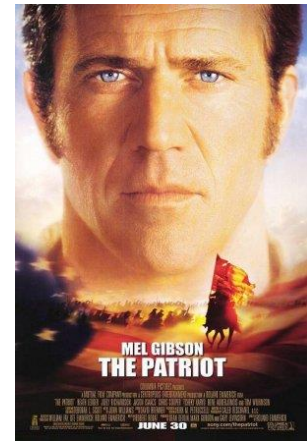
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The Patriot

Columbia Pictures Corporation, 2000; directed by Ron Emmerich

Major Character	Actor/Actress
Benjamin Martin	Mel Gibson
Gabriel Martin	Heath Ledger
Colonel Tavington	Jason Isaacs
Lord General Cornwallis	Tom Wilkinson
Charlotte Selton	Joely Richardson
Anne Howard	Lisa Brenner
Major Jean Villeneuve	Tcheky Karyo
Colonel Harry Burwell	Chris Cooper



What to Watch For

The making of this film was an unusual experience in Hollywood, as the production company collaborated with the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of American History on the costumes, weapons, military tactics, household articles, and much more. Actors were trained to shoot the colonel-era reproduction weapons, and Mel Gibson spent many hours practicing hand-to-hand combat. Authentic uniforms were either made or rented, and sets like the Gullah maroon village were carefully constructed, with the houses made out of wattle-and-daub construction common to that time period. Despite this collaboration, however, some compromises were made—such as the uniforms of the green Dragoons, which were changed to mostly red in order to identify them clearly as fighting on the British side.

Note the tactics of eighteenth-century warfare, which are accurately portrayed in the film. Each army basically lined up and face each other while firing and marching forward. While some film critics have denounced the amount of bloodshed shown in the movie, tis was probably the norm for battles of this type.

Many of the main characters are based on real people in history. Colonel Tavington of the Green Dragoons is based upon Lieutenant Banastre Tavington, who was known as the Butcher for his orders to kill any American troops who surrendered, even if they had put down their arms. Benjamin Martin is a composite of several Revolutionary-era heroes.

Note the animosity between Martin and Major Jean Villeneuve, a French officer serving in the militia. French aid was instrumental in winning this war, although American national pride tends to downplay the role of the French and emphasize national heroes like George Washington and Francis Marion.

Slaves who fought on either side in the Revolution were not guaranteed freedom after the war was over. Some slaves fought in place of their masters and were sometimes granted freedom for this, but the issue of freedom and liberty for all was not fully resolved by the Revolutionary War. Can you see any conflict between this cause that Benjamin Martin fights for in this film and the America that evolved after 1781?

Vocabulary

dragoons

French and Indian War

Gullah

Loyalists

maroon

militia

regulars

Questions Based on the Film

1. What was the difference between the militia and the regular army?
2. How do the Rebel army commanders view the militia's performance in conventional battle formations? What alternative uses does Benjamin Martin suggest for them? How do the British view these tactics?
3. Why is there ill will between Benjamin Martin and Major Villeneuve? Why does Benjamin Martin not "trust the French"?
4. Why do you think the filmmakers made Benjamin Martin a composite figure of many Revolutionary War heroes? What kinds of latitude did this give them?
5. How does the portrayal of the British officers demonstrate the British class system of the time period? Contrast this with the American structure of forces.
6. Why did the filmmakers choose the title *The Patriot* for this film? Would this be an appropriate title for a British audience?
7. Keeping in mind that an important historical institution collaborated in the making of this film, comment on one scene that gave you new insight into colonial life.

**THE PATRIOT
PORTFOLIO ASSIGNMENT**

TASK: FROM THE FOLLOWING PAGES OF READING, DETERMINE WHICH TWO AMERICAN REVOLUTIONARY HEROES BENJAMIN MARTIN CAME FROM.

THEN, FIND ATLEAST 4 EXAMPLES FROM THE READING PACKET THAT EVENTS IN THE MOVIE WERE BASED ON. BE DESCRIPTIVE, WHEN SHOWING THE PARALLELS BETWEEN THE MOVIE AND WHAT REALLY HAPPENED.

FINALLY, LIST 4 EVENTS IN THE MOVIE THAT YOU THINK MAY NOT HAVE BEEN HISTORICALLY ACCURATE, AND DESCRIBE WHY YOU THINK THAT IS THE CASE.

Backcountry Battles

Early in the Revolution, during 1775-76, patriot forces either gained or maintained control in the South, and, for the most part, 1777 came and went as a quiet year in the Southern theater. The quiet was shattered in 1778, when Maj. Gen. Robert Howe (no relation to the British general and admiral) took command of patriot operations in the south. His plan to capture St. Augustine, Florida, disintegrated when militia commanders refused to cooperate. As we saw in Chapter 21, "Southern Exposure" the British were able to mount countermoves that resulted in the fall of Savannah. From this point on, the South became a very bitterly contested theater of combat.

Massacre at Waxhaws



The year 1780 brought yet more American defeats in the South. The British forces in America had few aggressive leaders, but one exception was Banastre Tarleton, who had participated in the capture of Gen. Charles Lee and Basking Ridge, New Jersey, in December, and, from that point, was steadily promoted.

Tarleton came into greatest prominence during the Charleston Campaign of 1780. The patriots lost Charleston, South Carolina, and Lincoln surrendered his army during this action. The fall of this great southern port city was devastating, but Tarleton understood that it hardly wiped out rebel resistance in the Carolinas. He was assigned to mop up patriot forces in the countryside. Monck's Corner (April 14, 1780) was Tarleton's first victory, resulting in a major defeat for Gen Isaac Huger. Next came the Battle of Lenud's Ferry, South Carolina, on May 6, an action against survivors of Monck's Corner

and fresh troops under Col. Anthony White. White had captured an officer and 17 men of Tarleton's command, but was in turn surprised by a sudden cavalry charge Tarleton led. Not only were the prisoners liberated, but five American officers and 36 men were killed or wounded, and seven officers and 60 dragoons were captured.

Abraham Buford's 3rd Virginia Continentals, about 300 men, were marching to reinforce Charleston during Clinton's siege against the city. The city fell before Buford reached it, and this American commander now found himself leading the only substantial body of organized American troops remaining in South Carolina. Gen. Charles Cornwallis, having taken Charleston, was determined to wipe out all insurrection in South Carolina, and he ordered Tarleton (and others) to pursue Buford's unit. Learning that Buford had halted at Waxhaw Creek to rest, Tarleton galloped to intercept with 40 men of the 17th Dragoons, 130 cavalry, and 100 infantry, mostly Tories of the Loyal Legion. For the sake of speed, many of the infantrymen rode double with the cavalry, and, in the Carolina heat of late May, this proved fatal to many of the horses. Tarleton stole replacement mounts and pressed on.

By the early afternoon of May 29, Tarleton reached the tail end of Buford's column, having ridden 105 steamy wilderness miles in 54 hours. Tarleton sent an emissary to Buford under a flag of truce. He exaggerated his numbers and demanded immediate surrender. "If you are rash enough to reject the terms," Tarleton wrote in his note, "the blood be upon your head." Buford replied: "I reject your proposals and shall defend myself to the last extremity."

Camden Disaster

After Gen. Lincoln's capture, George Washington nominated the capable Nathanael Greene as his replacement, but the Continental Congress overrode the commander in chief and put in overall command of the South the man who had been given credit for the victory at Saratoga, Gen. Horatio Gates.

Gates marched against Camden, South Carolina, held by 2,200 troops under Lord Cornwallis's personal command. Along the way Gates acquired militia reinforcements to augment his Continentals, amassing a force of 4,100. Through wishful counting, Gates persuaded himself that

he had not 4,100 men, but 7,000. Moreover, Gates dismissed his officers' warning that many of the men were sickly, so that only half were fit and ready to fight, with the remark that "there are enough for our purposes."

Then Gates made his men even sicker. Lacking the rum ration that eighteenth-century officers believed indispensable to the smooth functioning of an army, Gates ordered a distribution of molasses as a substitute. This, combined with generally bad food, created a sudden, urgent epidemic of dysentery among the ranks. By nightfall of August 15, 1780, Gates's men were "much debilitated." Nevertheless the general ordered a nighttime march to Camden. By coincidence, Cornwallis had ordered his troops out of that town to search for the Americans. The two armies met at about 2:30 on the morning of August 16.

A Congressional inquiry in 1782 cleared Horatio Gates of wrongdoing, accepting his claim that his reason for departing the field had been to reach safety so that he could rebuild his army. Whether prudence or cowardice, the flight of the 52-year-old general from Camden to Hillsboro, 180 miles in three days, was truly remarkable. He made the first leg of the journey, 60 miles to Charlotte, on the fastest horse he could find. The rest of the trip was made on a relay of mounts.

The defeat at Camden effectively ended Gates's career, although he was permitted to rejoin the army at Newburgh, New York, for the final days of the war.

Despite the condition of Gates's men, he enjoyed an advantageous position, but taking no chances personally, he withdrew to the rear, leaving other officers, including Baron De Kalb, in charge. De Kalb's skill, however, had little effect on the sickly Virginia and North Carolina militiamen of the left flank, who panicked and caved at the first British onslaught. The American right wing, manned by seasoned Maryland and Delaware troops, ignored the panic on the left and stood their ground. But after the two American officers, Ortho Williams and De Kalb were wounded—De Kalb fatally—the situation turned hopeless, becoming a terrible rout.

Of 4,100 American troops engaged, only 700 reached the safety of Hillsboro three days later. As many as 1,900 Americans died, and nearly 1,000 were taken prisoner. British losses, by comparison, were light: 68 killed, 350 wounded. Horatio Gates had fled the field after the collapse of his left wing.

King's Mountain and Cowpens



Gathering of Overmountain Men at Sycamore Shoals, a black and white reproduction of Lloyd Branson's 1915 depiction of the Patriot militias joining up.

Lord Cornwallis left Camden on September 8, 1780, having driven the American army from South Carolina. His objective now was North Carolina, and he moved northward in three columns. While he took the main force, Tarleton headed up the British Legion and the regular light infantry, and Maj. Patrick Ferguson led the Tories.

In North Carolina, the British met stiff resistance from diehard patriots. They took Charlotte, North Carolina, on September 26, 1780, but, in the process, suffered substantial losses inflicted by patriot militia under Col. William Davie. Having taken Charlotte, Cornwallis found it tough to maintain communication with his base in Camden. His supply lines were continually subject to patriot attack, as were *foraging parties*¹. The war in the Carolinas, like the war in New Jersey, New York, and other northern states, was dissolving into a series of local feuds between patriot and Tory neighbors.

In an effort to recruit into the regular British army some of the many Tories who were undertaking guerrilla activities against their patriot neighbors, Cornwallis assigned Ferguson to lead the Tories along the foothills. Observing this, a group of patriot militia leaders, colonels Charles McDowell, John Sevier, Isaac Shelby, William Campbell, and Benjamin Cleveland, attacked Ferguson,

¹ **Foraging parties** were small groups of soldiers sent to find food and other supplies in the field. Even well-supplied armies tried as much as possible to live off the land.

who retreated to the Catawba River and then up King's Mountain, on the border between North and South Carolina.

Here Ferguson took his stand on October 7—and was completely surrounded by the patriot forces. Ferguson was slain in the act of killing an American officer. The Tory force surrendered having lost 400 killed and wounded. The patriots suffered 88 casualties. Seven hundred Tories became prisoners, 12 of them summarily hanged for British executions of Tory deserters who had taken up arms against their former comrades. For the Americans, King's Mountain was a gloriously welcome triumph on the heels of a string of disasters. Cornwallis's advance was not only stopped, the British general pulled his troops back into South Carolina. Even more important, the battle ended Tory influence in North Carolina once and for all.

There was more good news for the patriots in the South. After the failures of Lincoln and Gates, Washington at last succeeded in appointing Gen. Nathanael Greene to overall command of the region. If anyone could salvage the South, Washington believed, it was Greene, a commander at home with conventional military forces as well as guerrillas.

Appointed to command in October, Greene did not reach the field until December 1780. In the interim, South Carolina *partisans*² continually harried the British forces. Cornwallis relied on Tarleton to handle the guerrillas, even though he did so with ever-decreasing effectiveness.

Part of Greene's competence as a leader was knowing when *not* to make changes. Arriving in the theater of operations, he recognized that Cornwallis outnumbered him and that, therefore, it was best to pursue the guerrilla tactics that had proven effective so far. The best guerrilla leader Greene knew of was Daniel Morgan, a man some historians have deemed the only military genius to emerge from the Revolution. Greene assigned Morgan to harass British positions in the western wilderness of South Carolina while Greene himself supported the operation of partisans in the north-central portion of the state.

But Morgan did more than merely harass. Recognizing that Greene had divided his forces, Cornwallis dispatched

Tarleton to take care of Morgan while he personally led an attack on Greene. On January 16, 1781, Morgan, commanding 1,000 men, learned that Tarleton was nearby with 1,100 Tories and regulars. Retreat for Morgan was out of the question, because for militiamen, retreat was an invitation to disband and go home. If there was to be a fight, it would have to be now. Morgan decided to make a stand at the Cowpens, little more than a backwoods South Carolina cattle pasturage, and proceeded to intentionally violate every tenet of military common sense. To begin with, he positioned his men so that the Broad River cut off any retreat. It would be do or die. Second, he put his rawest militiamen in the front line, baking them up with the Continentals and seasoned men from Virginia. Farthest to the rear, he held his cavalry—conventionally, front-line troops—in reserve.

Banastre Tarleton thought that Cowpens would be the perfect place for a bayonet charge, which had so terrified the provincial troops at Camden. Tarleton had not counted on the genius of Morgan, who had positioned his men perfectly and had coached them well. "Look for the epaulets!" he had commanded his riflemen, describing just when to fire on an advancing line. "Pick off the epaulets!" After firing in this manner, the American front line, the green recruits, sheared off to the left and around to the rear. Now the British moved against the second line, the seasoned men. Tarleton's troops were overconfident and attacked in very poor order. This was a blunder, and, in a brilliant action, Morgan offered his green troops, who had returned to the American rear, to swing out and behind Tarleton's left while he put his cavalry into motion at last, around to rear of Tarleton's right.

It was a classic double envelopment. Deep in the southern wilderness, Morgan had emulated the tactics the great Carthaginian general Hannibal had used to defeat the Romans in 216 B.C. But it was, of course, more than a classical victory. Cowpens saved half of Greene's army and cost Cornwallis 100 killed, 229 wounded (and captured), engaged, 39 died. American losses, in contrast, were 12 killed and 60 wounded. Moreover, Morgan's victory had pulled the American forces from the brink of dissolution and despair. From this point, patriot fortunes in the South turned upward, and the myth of invincibility that had gathered around Banastre Tarleton was shattered.

² **Partisans** are guerilla fighters that are not members of an organized militia or other military unit.

Exploits of the Swamp Fox

Daniel Morgan may or may not have been the only military genius the Revolution produced, but he was not the only effective guerilla leader among the southern patriots. Francis Marion, grandson of fiercely independent Huguenots who had settled in South Carolina as early as 1690, was “small enough at birth to be put into a quart mug.” Indeed, he grew up sickly and frail, and was always short and slight—anything but the figure of a military man.

By 1761, he was active in the local militia fighting Indians, and in 1775 he was active in patriot politics, as a delegate to the South Carolina Provincial Congress. Named captain of the 2nd South Carolina Regiment in June 1775, he took part in the defense of Charleston the following year and was promoted to major and then lieutenant colonel.

Marion fought gallantly in two American disasters, the ill-fated defense of Savannah and the disastrous Battle of Camden. In the first, he led his regiment in a spectacular but unsuccessful assault. At Camden, he provided a ray of hope in a hopeless battle. On August 20, 1780, following the American defeat, a detachment of Tories and British regulars escorting a large number of American prisoners was hit fast and hard by men who suddenly materialized out of the swamp. The attack came so swiftly that the Tory and British soldiers released their prisoners and ran, assuming they were about to fall pretty to a major force. In truth, it was diminutive Francis Marion at the head of no more than 17 men. By this time, Tories and patriots alike were calling him the Swamp Fox.

Tearcoat Swamp

The action at Tearcoat Swamp (in South Carolina, near where present-day U.S. 301 crosses the Black River) is vintage Swamp Fox action. By this time, Marion had managed to recruit 150 men, which he deployed against a Tory militia on the night of October 25, 1780. Surprise, as usual, was total. Marion and his men simply appeared out of the swamp and routed the Tories, leaving three dead, 14 wounded, and taking 23 prisoners, together with 80 horses.

The action was sufficiently dramatic to put down a Tory uprising—and convert a good many Tories impressed by the Swamp Fox to the patriot cause.

Halfway Swamp

In the ‘Battle’ of Halfway Swamp, December 12-13, 1780, Marion and an uncharacteristically large force of 700 mounted men descended upon a British column escorting recruits from Charleston to Winnsboro.

The British lines began to cave when their commander, Maj. Robert McLeroth, sent a message under a flag of truce, protesting the manner in which Marion’s sniper picked off *pickets*³.

The Swamp Fox coolly replied that he would shoot pickets as long as the British burned houses. McLeroth had also dared Marion to come out and fight in the open. To this challenge, the Swamp Fox replied: “If Major McLeroth wishes to see mortal combat between teams of twenty men picked by each side, I will gratify him.”

It was an incredible moment, and both sides chose their champions. The contest was called off by the British officers, however, who ordered their men off the field. In the end, Halfway Swamp was anticlimactic. American militia captain James Coffin had assumed a position with 140 men at a modest homestead called Singleton’s Hill. His troops, who had the drop on McLeroth, fired but a single volley—then ran. To the British, this was inexplicable. What they didn’t know was that the American’s had learned of the presence of another enemy. The Singleton family were all down with smallpox.

Neither King’s Mountain nor Cowpens, nor the guerilla skirmishes of the “Swamp Fox,” were major battles in a military sense, but their combined effect on British public opinion made them crucial in deciding the outcome of the war. The British were growing weary of an expensive worldwide conflict that endangered valuable possessions outside the colonies. Only a quick victory in the Carolinas would convince British policy makers that the war in America was worth fighting.

³ **Pickets** are guards, troops sent in advance of a main column or assigned to guard a camp or other position.

[A Battle at Guilford Courthouse](#)



Following Cowpens, Cornwallis was hardly idle. He stripped his remaining troops of the baggage that encumbered British armies in the American wilderness: wagons, tents, certain provisions. Supplies were restricted to what the men could carry on their backs. Thus streamlined, Cornwallis pursued Greene's army northward, all the way to the Dan River, near the Virginia border.

Once across, Greene took all the boats with him. Cornwallis found himself on the near shore of the river, desperately low on supplies. He returned to Hillsboro for resupply. In the meantime, Greene assumed the initiative. He recrossed the Dan into North Carolina and harassed Cornwallis's lines of communication. Yet Greene was careful to avoid an all-out action until he had assembled enough men. In the meantime, operations against local Tories—including a massacre of 400 of them by Gen. Andrew Pickens—largely deprived the British general of his base of loyalist support.

At last, on March 14, 1781, Greene picked his battle site: Guilford Courthouse, North Carolina. He aimed to duplicate the success of Daniel Morgan at the Cowpens, so he put his greenest troops up front, with the more seasoned veterans backing them up. The battle commenced the next day, with Greene ordering the frontline militia to fire two volleys before withdrawing to the rear.

Unfortunately, the militia, having discharged its volleys, did not retire in an orderly fashion, but rushed back chaotically. This prevented their getting into position for

the envelopment Morgan had pulled off at the Cowpens. Nevertheless, had Greene now launched his cavalry, running it around the rear of the British positions, he might have still forced the surrender of Cornwallis's army. But it didn't happen that way. An able general, Greene lacked Morgan's willingness to gamble. He did not want to risk his cavalry in a single bold stroke. This provided Cornwallis the opportunity to retaliate. He raked the enemy with grapeshot, managing to kill not only American soldiers, but many of his own men as well. Guilford Courthouse ended in a technical victory for the British, in the sense that Cornwallis had not been driven from the field. Yet the battle cost him a fourth of his army, and he decided to vacate the interior of North Carolina.

Continuing a patriot resistance, manifested in the battles of late 1780 and early 1781, made it doubtful that the Carolinas would be quickly subdued. In many ways, the political consequences of these battles were more important than their military importance. Given time, Cornwallis could have crushed patriot resistance. Yet the public would not give him time. Greene knew that if the British commander ventured north into Virginia, he would meet Washington. Rather than pursue, Greene resolved to turn south and reclaim South Carolina and Georgia. Indeed, Cornwallis now marched to Virginia and to battle with the forces of George Washington.

[The Least You Need to Know](#)

- Beginning late in 1778, much of the focus of the Revolution moved southward.
- The Waxhaws Massacre and the Battle of Camden were major American defeats in the southern backcountry. The tide in the South was turned by two battles: King's Mountain and Cowpens.
- The Battle of Guilford Courthouse (North Carolina) was so costly for Cornwallis that he marched into Virginia, setting the stage for Yorktown.
- The campaigns in the Carolinas convinced many British voters and members of Parliament that the war in America could not be easily won. Faced with rising opposition to the war at home, Cornwallis embarked on the risky, and ultimately fatal, invasion of Virginia.

MOVIE REVIEW

NAME _____

DATE _____

TITLE OF MOVIE _____

STARRING: _____

THE BASIC PLOT OF THIS MOVIE WAS: _____

2 THINGS I LIKED ABOUT THIS MOVIE: _____

2 THINGS I DISLIKED ABOUT THIS MOVIE: _____

2 THINGS ABOUT THIS MOVIE THAT LOOKED HISTORICALLY ACCURATE _____

2 THINGS ABOUT THIS MOVIE THAT LOOKED HISTORICALLY INACCURATE _____

ON A SCALE OF 1-5 STARS, I WOULD GIVE THIS MOVIE _____ STARS

BECAUSE _____

I WOULD OR WOULD NOT RECOMMEND THIS MOVIE TO A FRIEND BECAUSE
