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Guilford Courthouse National Military Park

Runners pass through the Guilford Courthouse National Military Park on New Garden Road in Greensboro, North Carolina, jogging across the very ground on which our ancestors fought for our freedom and changed the course of history. Nearby, the old farm buildings stand decrepit but tall, while fallen soldiers lay in their graves a few miles away next to their comrades' monuments (National Park Service - Monuments; Markos). I chose this site because I drive through this park often and have never stopped to appreciate the impact that it had on the Revolutionary War. It is a site common to many people in Greensboro, but I was still astonished by what I found while researching the significance of Military Park.

This national military park was the site of the battle between Lord Cornwallis who fought for the British and General Nathanael Greene who led the Patriots. The British forces entered the Battle of Guilford Courthouse with 2,385 men to fight against Greene's 4,400 soldiers on March 15, 1781 (American Battlefield Trust). Britain needed to win this battle in order to secure support in North Carolina before attempting to end the war in Virginia (National Park Service - History and Culture). The Patriot soldiers lined up in rows, allowing each row to fall back to reveal the remaining rows, in a strategy known as "defense in depth" (American Battlefield Trust). Greene positioned his best men in the third and last row, ready to fight against the British when the first two rows were breached. By the time Cornwallis's army reached the third row, his men were disorganized and unable to fight as a unit, almost losing the battle before those fighting the remaining Patriots in the second row soldiers came to help. Greene was forced to fall back, giving the victory to Cornwallis.

This victory came at a steep price for the British, as Cornwallis lost a quarter of his men and was forced to withdraw forces to Wilmington, North Carolina (American Battlefield Trust). As Cornwallis was in Wilmington, Greene took the vital opportunity to destroy Loyalist and British forces in the rest of the state, allowing the Patriots to win the state of North Carolina (McGrath). The British army, now severely diminished in numbers, decided to focus their efforts on Virginia with what little resources they had remaining (American Battlefield Trust). This put Cornwallis at a major disadvantage and would lead to Britain's final defeat at Yorktown (McGrath). Had Greene not fought Cornwallis at Guilford Courthouse, severely weakening British defenses, Cornwallis could have taken North Carolina, resulting in forces strong enough to win at Yorktown. Greene's actions drove Cornwallis to defeat, and without his leadership and bravery, it would have no doubt changed the entire course of the war. Cornwallis's "victory" allowed those that valued their freedom to secede from Britain much faster.

Although the park is now mainly used by the citizens of Greensboro to enjoy a sunny day, I have discovered, through my research, a sense of pride in knowing that a place so close to home had such an important role in securing our independence from Britain. Although they lost the battle, the Patriot forces won in numbers and it proved "ruinous to the enemy" (McGrath). Today, Cornwallis would have been viewed as a failure and a disappointment for not being able to win the war even when he won at Guilford Courthouse, while Greene would be seen as more heroic because he fought for the American people's freedom, and today, freedom for everyone is valued more than ever. Greene's fortitude helped him turn his defeat into victory, making him even more heroic and inspirational.

The military park commemorates General Greene with a statue, and Cornwallis is remembered in the name of a street here in Greensboro. Now, when I see that statue I am

inspired by Greene's courage and bravery. This scholarship has given me the opportunity to explore a vital part of the birth of this country and the historical importance of my hometown in Britain's defeat in the Revolutionary War.

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