

## the Enemy

got down to the river, he saw that  
ady seized the chance to escape from  
o the British ship. Then Lund heard  
or service. Bring us food and drink,  
ie plantation!

he news, he didn't seem too upset  
ut he was horribly ashamed that his  
s to the invading enemy. As he told  
st concern, is that you should go on  
furnish them with refreshments. It  
rcumstance to me to have heard, that  
pliance with their request, they had  
ntation in ruins."

## War?

s troubles, here was his biggest one:  
s going to be another wasted year—  
attack on the British.

d his army were camped just north  
ch army of about 4,000 men, under  
to his friends as the Count de Ro-  
n hoping that this year, finally, the  
unch a serious attack on the British  
on and Rochambeau spent most of  
studying the British forts in New  
find a weak spot to attack. There  
ough.

Washington was used to disappointments, but this one really got  
him down. How could he ever win this war? He was having a hard  
enough time just holding his army together.

And that's when it happened—Washington suddenly saw a way  
to win the American Revolution. And he could do it right now! He  
just had to race his army 450 miles south to a place called Yorktown,  
Virginia.

Why the race to Yorktown? That question really needs a nine-  
part answer.

## Part 1: The King Tries the South

**T**he first thing we have to do is to take a look at things from King  
George's point of view.

Mighty Great Britain had been fighting these pesky Americans  
since 1775, and all they had to show for it was control of New York  
City. The war was costing Britain a fortune—so much that the govern-  
ment had to raise taxes.

King George was feeling the heat. More and more people in Britain  
were sick of war. They wanted to bring the army home and forget  
the whole thing. But you know George—he was still absolutely com-  
mitted to victory over the Americans. So starting in 1779, the king  
decided to try a new strategy: the British army would destroy the  
Revolution by capturing the southern states. The famously stubborn  
King George honestly believed that most people in the South were  
still loyal to him.



## Part 2: Bad Peaches, Bad General

**A**t first, it looked like Britain's "southern strategy" was actually going to work. The British quickly captured big chunks of Georgia and South Carolina.

Then Congress put Horatio Gates (the Saratoga hero) in charge of the American army in the South. Gates showed up in camp in July 1780 and saw that his soldiers were starving and exhausted. So what did he decide to do? He ordered them to march right toward the British!

Hungry enough to eat anything, the men spotted unripe green peaches growing along the road. They feasted—and quickly paid the price. The meal had "painful effects," said Colonel Otto Williams. That was a polite way of putting it. Let's just say the peaches didn't stay in those hungry bellies for very long.

Gates pushed his weakened soldiers on. And on August 16, they ran into the British general Charles Cornwallis and his army at Camden, South Carolina. While Cornwallis was crushing the Americans, General Gates panicked and fled from the battlefield, leaving his entire army behind. He was next seen 180 miles away.

"Was there ever an instance of a general running away, as Gates has done, from his whole army?" wondered Alexander Hamilton, Washington's young assistant.

*So far, so good*, thought King George.

## Part 3: British Behaving Badly

**I**f only the king knew how badly some of his soldiers were behaving in the South.

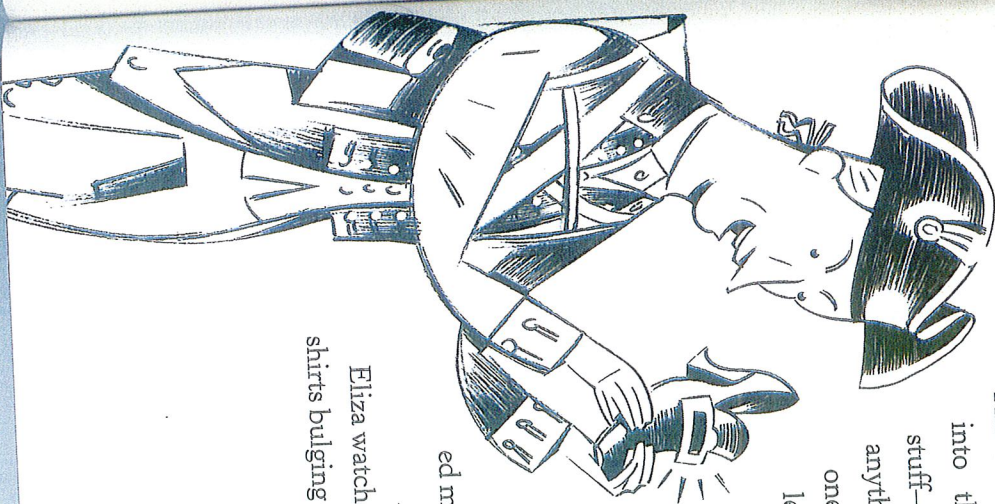
One morning in 1780 a frightened girl came running up to Eliza Wilkinson's South Carolina home. "O! The King's people are coming!" shouted the girl. "It must be them, for they are all in red!"

Moments later Eliza saw a group of British soldiers riding up to her house. "Where're these women rebels?" they cried, waving swords and pistols.

The soldiers jumped off their horses, ran into the house, and started stealing stuff—jewelry, clothes, pretty much anything that wasn't nailed down. Then one of the soldiers saw the silver buckles on Eliza's shoes. "I want them

buckles!" said he, and immediately knelt at my feet to take them out, which, while he was busy about, a brother villain, whose enormous mouth extended from ear to ear, bawled out, 'Shares therel! I say, shares!' So they divided my buckles between them."

A few minutes later, it was all over. Eliza watched the British soldiers ride off, their shirts bulging with loot.



This kind of thing was happening a lot. And as you can imagine, the British bandits were not exactly winning new friends for King George in the South. In fact, more and more southern Patriots began rising up against the invaders.

## Part 4: The Swamp Fox

That brings us to a South Carolina Patriot named Francis Marion. Marion started leading small bands of militia men—bers on quick, surprise strikes against British soldiers. Marion would march through the night, attack sleepy British soldiers at dawn, then disappear into the forests and swamps, using paths and hiding places the British could never find. “Marion never encamped over two nights in one place,” said Tarleton Brown, one of Marion’s men.

The British hated Marion, but they couldn’t help respecting his creative and daring style. They even gave him a nickname: the Swamp Fox.

Even Continental army soldiers hardly ever got a good look at the Swamp Fox. When Colonel Otho Williams met Marion and his swamp team, he was surprised to see a bunch of hungry-looking men in rags. “Their number did not exceed twenty men and boys,” said Williams, “some white, some black, and all mounted [on horses], but most of them miserably equipped.”

Miserably equipped, but very effective. With folks like the Swamp Fox around, the British army was never able to gain control of the South.

## Part 5: Fight, Lose, Fight Again

General Nathaniel Greene took command of the American army in the South at the end of 1780. And like the Swamp Fox, Greene knew how to use geography to his advantage. His strategy was simple: “We fight, get beat, rise, and fight again.”

Doesn’t exactly sound like a formula for success, does it?

Actually, it was brilliant. Greene knew his small army wasn’t strong enough to actually beat the British. So instead, he decided to lead the enemy on a long and tiring chase all over the vast spaces of North and South Carolina. Once in a while, he’d turn and fight a small battle. And he didn’t mind losing these fights, because he knew he was wearing the British down.

Don’t get the idea that Greene’s army was having a great time, though. Facing the usual Continental army food shortages, the soldiers ate frogs, alligators, or anything else they could catch and cook. And with all the marching and camping, the men wore completely through their clothing by summer’s end. “At the battle of Eutaw Springs,” said General Greene, “hundreds of my men were naked as they were born.”

Well, at least it was warm.

## Part 6: Cornwallis Gets Tired

Over in the British camp, Greene’s strategy was having its intended effect.

At first, General Charles Cornwallis was determined to catch up to Greene. He ordered his men to toss away all their extra supplies—tents, clothing, even barrels of rum. He hoped this would let his army

march faster (and it did, though the soldiers were very angry about the wasted run).

But Greene always managed to stay a step ahead of Cornwallis. And by the summer of 1781, Cornwallis was frustrated, angry, and exhausted. He reported, "With a third of my army sick and wounded, the remainder without shoes and worn down with fatigue, I thought it was time to look for some place of rest."

So Cornwallis decided to push his army north. Maybe, he hoped, the British would have better luck in Virginia.

## Part 7: Spying on Cornwallis

Soon after the British entered Virginia, a twenty-one-year-old named James Armistead decided to help kick them out. But first he had to get permission from his owner—Armistead was held as a slave on a farm near Williamsburg. The owner agreed, and Armistead marched to the American camp.

Armistead met with a young French general, the Marquis de Lafayette (only twenty-three himself). Lafayette explained that what the army really needed was more information about the location and movements of Cornwallis's army. Would Armistead be willing to take a massive risk to get that information?

A few days later, Armistead walked into General Cornwallis's camp and told British soldiers he was an escaped slave looking to earn some cash. The British put him to work. This young guy proved to be very useful to the British. His detailed knowledge of the local geography helped the soldiers find their way around. All the while, James Armistead was sending reports back to Lafayette in the American camp.

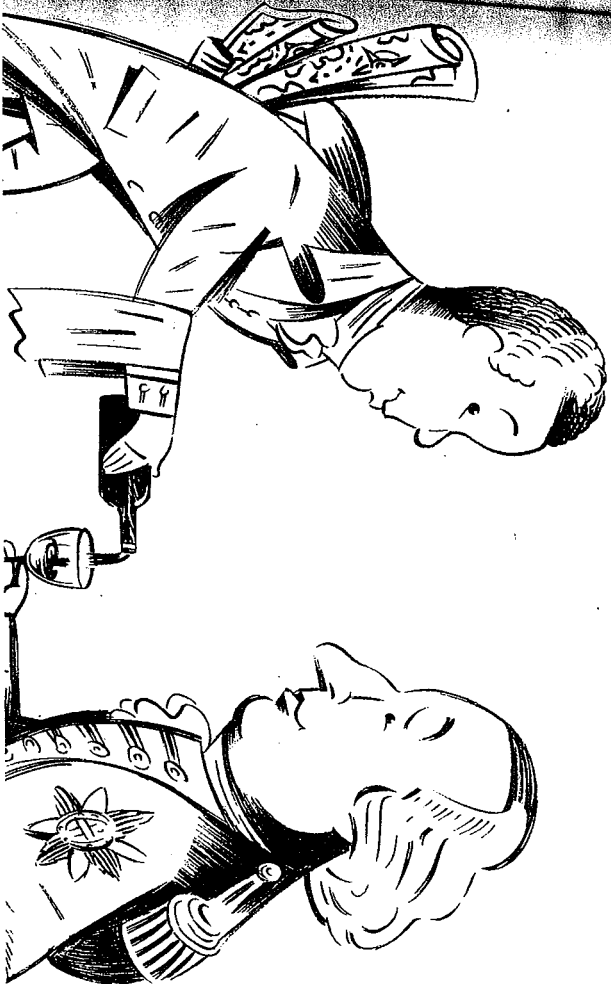
Then Armistead took an even bigger risk. He gained the trust of

## The Great Race to Yorktown

General Cornwallis and took the job of Cornwallis's personal waiter! This was the perfect position for a spy. Serving food and walking around the dinner table, Armistead was able to see and hear everything that went on in Cornwallis's own tent.

Armistead always had a hard time getting a close look at official maps and plans because Cornwallis was so careful with his papers. As Lafayette explained: "His Lordship Cornwallis is so shy of his papers that my honest friend says he cannot get at them."

Armistead kept working, though, and he kept feeding badly needed information to Lafayette. This helped the Americans keep a close watch on Cornwallis as he marched his army around Virginia. But exactly where was Cornwallis headed?



## Part 8: Pick a Port, Any Port

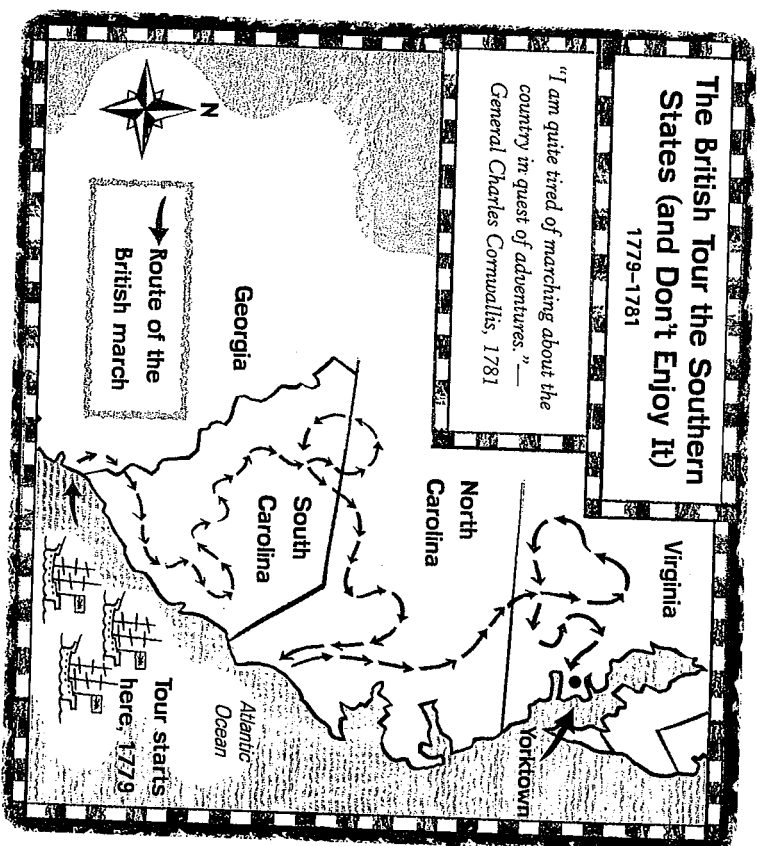
The truth is, even Cornwallis didn't know. All summer long, he exchanged angry letters with General Henry Clinton, the British commander in New York City. Like most top British generals in this war, these two guys couldn't stand each other. Clinton wanted Cornwallis to come north to New York, because he was sure Washington was about to attack him there. Cornwallis wanted Clinton to come south to Virginia, because he was convinced the British could capture this important state.

They finally agreed on a compromise: Cornwallis would take control of a port town on the Virginia coast. That way, British ships could move soldiers quickly back and forth between New York and Virginia.

So Cornwallis started looking for a good port. He picked a tiny town near the Chesapeake Bay. Welcome to Yorktown, General Cornwallis.

## Part 9: The French Sail North

Now there's just one last piece of the Yorktown puzzle. As Cornwallis was settling in at Yorktown, a fleet of French warships started sailing north from the Caribbean Sea. The commander of the fleet, Count de Grasse, thought he might be able to help with the war. His destination: the Chesapeake Bay.



## Now Back to Washington

And at last, we're ready to return to George Washington. Last we saw him, his face was bright with excitement. And this is why: down in Yorktown, Cornwallis and his entire army were in a trap. And the best part was, they didn't know it!

It was just a question of timing. If Washington could quickly march his army south to Virginia, he could surround Yorktown by land. And if the French warships took control of the Chesapeake Bay, they could surround Yorktown by water. Of course, all this had to happen before Cornwallis realized the deadly danger of his position. "We have not a moment to lose," Washington said.

The race was on.