GENERAL WAYNE MARCHES SOUTH, 1781

BY GEORGE W. KYTE*

MUCH of the fighting in the War for American Independence was done by militia. The militia usually enlisted for terms of ninety days, and they generally fought within the boundaries of their own states. When occasionally they did fight beyond those boundaries, their short enlistments made it difficult for them to operate far afield. Congress needed, in the circumstances, troops who could fight anywhere they were required and whose terms of enlistment were such that they could remain in the field throughout a campaign. Such troops came to be provided by each state and were called, appropriately enough, Continentals. There was still heavy reliance upon militia for home defense after Continental regiments had been formed, but Continental soldiers became the backbone of the American army and of the garrisons at such fortified posts as Albany, Pittsburgh, and West Point.

Pennsylvania, like the other states, was defended by both Continentals and militia. Pennsylvania's armed forces, regulars and militia alike, saw their share of active service, and they were heavily engaged in 1777 when the Philadelphia area was the scene of severe fighting. Of course, the state's Continentals did not always behave well; many soldiers of the Pennsylvania Continental Line mutinied on the first of January, 1781.

It is not our purpose to discuss the mutiny of the Pennsylvania Line. That event has been described in Carl Van Doren's fine book, *Mutiny in January.* Suffice it to say that the soldiers revolted because of a variety of grievances and marched from their camp in the vicinity of Morristown, New Jersey, toward Philadelphia. Their officers, including Brigadier General Anthony Wayne, tried to persuade them to return to duty, but the soldiers brushed the

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officers aside and threatened to kill them if they should attempt to interfere with their movements.

We can hardly condone the revolt of the Pennsylvanians, even though some of their grievances were well founded, but it is possible to say in their behalf that they declined to go over to the enemy even though offers of money and an amnesty were made to them by agents sent by Sir Henry Clinton, commander in chief of the British army. It may also be said that the mutineers were kept under strict discipline by their sergeants. They committed no excesses as they marched through the Jersey countryside, and their conduct was exemplary when compared with that of such earlier mutineers as the Spanish who had sacked Antwerp in 1576.

The Pennsylvania mutineers had intended to march at least as far as Trenton, but they halted at Princeton, occupied the college buildings there, and prepared to negotiate with Pennsylvania’s civil officials for redress of their grievances. President Joseph Reed—whose title today would be “governor”—traveled to Princeton to negotiate with the committee of sergeants which represented the mutineers. Reed was reluctant to grant any concessions, but he was afraid to risk a showdown between the Pennsylvania militia and 1,500 Continentals who were armed with artillery as well as with muskets and bayonets. Consequently, he capitulated to the demands made by the committee of sergeants.

It would be unfair to blame Reed for capitulating to the mutineers. He was unable to raise the forces which would have been required to support a refusal of the terms laid down by the sergeants. His capitulation was unfortunate, however, because it resulted in the temporary dissolution of the Pennsylvania Line. The sergeants had demanded that every soldier who had served for more than three years should be granted his discharge at once. Some 1,348 soldiers were discharged before the end of January, and only 1,200 men remained with their regiments. Most of the soldiers who had been discharged declined to re-enlist, and the


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ANTHONY WAYNE

*From an etching after a John Trumbull original.*
From the collections of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania
Pennsylvania Line was so shattered by the beginning of February that it was no longer an effective fighting force.

President Reed commenced to work toward the reconstruction of the Line as soon as he had completed his settlement with the committee of sergeants. Major General Arthur St. Clair was put in charge of the recruiting of men and the gathering of arms, clothing, and equipment, and Wayne was given the responsibility of training the recruits and reorganizing the Line into a fighting force. Reed, St. Clair, and Wayne worked hard to reconstitute the Pennsylvania regiments in time for the season of active campaigning, but a shortage of funds hampered their work so severely that Wayne was unable to take the field until after the middle of May.

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The Pennsylvanians were needed at the fighting front before St. Clair and Wayne had completed their work of recruiting and regrouping. Virginia had been invaded by more than 4,000 British troops, and the militia and a small force of Continentals commanded by the Marquis de Lafayette had been unable to contain them. The American commander in chief, General George Washington, had decided in the circumstances to order Wayne and his Pennsylvanians to march to Virginia as soon as they were ready for action. Wayne worked frantically to complete his preparations while Lafayette bombarded him with appeals to hurry southward. The British, meanwhile, carried out a series of raids in which they inflicted considerable damage upon Virginia's economy through the destruction of flour mills and tobacco warehouses.

Lafayette's plight worsened in May when Charles, Lord Cornwallis, who had been campaigning in North Carolina, marched into Virginia at the head of a force of about 2,000 men. Cornwallis assumed command of all the British forces in Virginia and launched an offensive into the interior of the state. Lafayette was obliged to retreat in order to preserve his army from destruction, and Cornwallis was able to send raiding parties to the westward of Richmond to destroy flour, tobacco, and military stores. Large quantities of arms and ammunition were captured or destroyed by the British at Charlottesville and Point of Fork. Moreover, several of Vir-
ginia's legislators were captured at Charlottesville, and Governor Jefferson escaped from his home at Monticello only a few minutes before the arrival of a detachment of British cavalry which had been sent to seize him.

Wayne was aware of Lafayette's plight and was eager to lead his brigade southward to reinforce the defenders of Virginia. Some of the soldiers were not so eager to march as Wayne was to lead them, and the spirit of mutiny began to spread among the Pennsylvania Line for the second time in less than six months. A number of the mutineers—if, indeed, they really intended to mutiny—made insulting and derisive remarks about their officers in the presence of the latter. Wayne decided to take drastic action to prevent his brigade from being paralyzed by a new mutiny, and several of the malcontents were seized and summarily executed. He then ordered the remainder of his soldiers to commence their march to Virginia. The troops were sullen and resentful, but they obeyed orders and departed from their camp at York on the first of a long series of marches to the interior of Virginia.

The Pennsylvania Line commenced its march on the 26th of May. Wayne had intended to depart from York on the 23rd but, as he wrote to Lafayette, the troops had been "retarded four days by a succession of extreme wet weather." The troops had been retarded by a near-mutiny as well as by rain, but Wayne said of the former only that "harmony & discipline again pervades the whole, to which a prompt & exemplary punishment was a necessary tho' shameful prelude."

Wayne's brigade was pitifully small when compared with the Pennsylvania Line as it had been constituted before the mutiny in January. There had been more than 2,700 officers and men in the Line at the end of 1780, but there were fewer than 1,200 under Wayne's command at the end of May. Moreover, the morale of many of Wayne's soldiers was low because of the exemplary punishment their commander had just administered.

Meanwhile, Lafayette continued to be hard pressed by the British. He wrote from the "forks of the Chickahominy" on May 27: "Hasten to our Aid . . . and Remember that should We be overtaken Before you Arrive We will soon Vanish into a very

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*Wayne to Lafayette, May 26, 1781, Wayne Manuscripts, XIII.*
small army. The Continental detachment I have is Excellent but so very Weak that it cannot Afford of losses unless they answer a Valuable end." He wrote with even more urgency next day: "Lord Cornwallis moved in the night up the road to Richmond and obliged our advanced parties to retire. We are falling back as he comes near us, and untill you arrive it would be madness to engage."

Wayne responded to Lafayette's pleas by driving his troops hard. The soldiers marched through warm, humid weather and were subjected to the discomfort of being drenched repeatedly by spring rains. Nevertheless, the troops and their artillery and baggage had reached the Potomac by the 31st of May. Wayne took immediate steps to gather boats and barges, and he informed Lafayette that he hoped to ferry his brigade across the river on the evening of the 31st and the morning of the 1st of June.

The Pennsylvanians crossed the Potomac on schedule, but they encountered difficulties and dangers in so doing. The river, usually rather sluggish at the point at which the crossing was made, had become swollen and turbulent as result of heavy rains. It would have been difficult to ferry the artillery and baggage across the river if it had been placid, and to transport fieldpieces and ammunition wagons across the Potomac when it was running swiftly was perilous. Wayne decided to accept a considerable degree of risk, however, and he ordered his troops to cross even though they had what he described as "four Little boats" as their sole means of transportation. Most of the troops and baggage succeeded in crossing the river safely, despite the swift and turbulent current, but one of the four boats overturned and sank with the loss of some ammunition and a number of men who were drowned.

Wayne's column hurried on to Leesburg as soon as it had crossed the Potomac. The baggage was left behind, and the troops were committed to forced marches with the hope that they would be able to reach Fredericksburg before Cornwallis could destroy a large ironworks which was located there. It soon became ap-

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7 Lafayette to Wayne, May 27, 1781, *ibid.*, XIII.
8 Lafayette to Wayne, May 28, 1781, *ibid.*, XIII.
9 Wayne to Lafayette, May 31, 1781, *ibid.*, XIII.
10 Wayne to Lafayette, June 1, 1781, *ibid.*, XIII.
11 *Ibid.* The ironworks was located at Falmouth, across the Rappahannock from Fredericksburg.
parent that his lordship was not marching upon Fredericksburg, however, but was determined to destroy the depots of arms and military stores which had been taken westward from Richmond to Point of Fork, Charlottesville, and Albemarle Old Court House. The arms depots were as important as the ironworks, and Wayne hurried toward Culpeper and the upper reaches of the North Anna River to join Lafayette before the British could lay waste to Charlottesville and the arms depots and plantations of Albemarle County.

Mounted and lightly armed British troops (dragoons and light infantry) succeeded in raiding Charlottesville and Point of Fork before Wayne could join Lafayette. Large quantities of arms and ammunition were destroyed by the raiders, and several of Virginia's legislators were captured at Charlottesville. The surviving legislators fled to Staunton, and Albemarle County was left temporarily to the mercy of the invaders.

Wayne's Pennsylvanians marched hard to reach the county before Cornwallis's raiders could complete their work of destruction, but rain, warm weather, and high humidity made the forced marches a grim experience for the men in the ranks. A few soldiers deserted, and a number of others had to be left behind because of sickness. Most of the men remained with their regiments, however, and Wayne pushed them on day after day until they had reached the banks of the South Anna River. There, on June 11, the weary Pennsylvanians joined Lafayette's army, having marched some 200 miles from their base at York.

It is probable that Wayne would have joined Lafayette a day or two sooner if heavy rains had not turned the roads into quagmires and the rivers into raging torrents. The brigade was obliged to halt for a while on the banks of the Rappahannock because what Wayne described as "the Deluge of rain which fell last Night" had rendered the river impassable. Even the upper reaches of the North and South Anna Rivers had been turned into formidable

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14 Wayne to Lafayette, June 6, 1781, Wayne Manuscripts, XIII.
barriers by the spring rains, and the Pennsylvanians were subjected to difficulty and discomfort in fording them.

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The Pennsylvania Line became a part of the army commanded by the Marquis de Lafayette as soon as it had arrived at the Frenchman’s camp on the South Anna. It is not our purpose to describe in detail the part which the Pennsylvanians played in Lafayette’s campaign against the British, because an able historian, Dr. Louis Gottschalk, has written an excellent account of it in his book, *Lafayette and the Close of the American Revolution*. A brief summary of the campaign should be useful, however, to indicate how important was the part played by Wayne and his Pennsylvanians.

Lafayette had had to retreat before Cornwallis until the arrival of Wayne’s brigade because the British had enjoyed a numerical advantage. Cornwallis had been reinforced by a detachment sent from New York by sea, and the British army in Virginia numbered more than 7,000 officers and men in June. All of the British were regulars, and nearly 5,000 of them were in the field under Cornwallis’s direct command. Lafayette had only some 4,000 men, three-quarters of whom were Virginia militia, under his command before the arrival of Wayne’s Pennsylvanians. The addition of the Pennsylvanians to Lafayette’s army had strengthened the latter until it numbered more than 5,000 officers and men (of whom nearly 2,000 were Continentals), and the marquis was able to stiffen his opposition to the British immediately.

Lafayette’s first move after being reinforced was to make a forced march to Albemarle Old Court House. Large quantities of arms and military stores had been concentrated at the Old Court House, and the marquis was afraid that Cornwallis would destroy them. It was risky for an army made up partly of militia to challenge one of equal size which was composed entirely of regulars, but the Frenchman decided to accept the risk of a battle in order to protect his stores.

Cornwallis held the initial advantage in what could have become a race to Albemarle Old Court House. Cornwallis’s army was encamped many miles closer to the Old Court House than was Lafayette’s force, but the earl failed to make use of his
advantage. It is probable that his lordship had become over-
confident after pursuing Lafayette as far into the interior of Vir-
ginia as Albemarle County; in any case, he neglected to make 
haste in his march toward the county’s old court house. The 
marquis led his army westward in a breakneck forced march, and 
he arrived at his objective before the British.15

Lafayette formed his army on a wooded slope and prepared 
to fight, but Cornwallis declined to risk a battle on terrain which 
was thickly wooded and well suited to the style of fighting at which 
Virginia frontiersmen were adept. It is debatable whether Corn-
wallis was wise or unwise to forego an attack upon the arms depot 
at Albemarle, but he was evidently convinced that his raiding 
parties had already done tremendous damage in their attacks upon 
Charlottesville and Point of Fork. In any case, he turned his back 
upon Albemarle County and commenced a leisurely retreat down 
the valley of the James toward his base at Portsmouth.

Lafayette followed cautiously at the heels of the British army. 
He knew that Cornwallis was not running away from him, but he 
tried to make it appear as if the British were being driven out 
of the interior of Virginia. “Cornwallis had the disgrace of a re-
treat.” Lafayette wrote to Washington on July 20, “and this 
State being recovered, government properly reestablished, the ennemy are under protection of their works at Portsmouth.”16

Moreover, Cornwallis’s invasion of Virginia had been less destruc-
tive than his lordship had intended it to be. Cornwallis had failed 
to destroy the ironworks located near Fredericksburg and had 
desisted from his plan to destroy the stores at Albemarle Old Court House. The arms which Cornwallis had thought that his soldiers had destroyed at Point of Fork had, according to Lafayette, “been taken out of the water,” and they had been found to be undamaged.17

It was one thing for Lafayette to pretend that he was chasing 
Cornwallis, but it was something else again for the “pursuer” to 
risk a battle with the earl’s compact and formidable force. The 
marquis was careful to keep a respectful distance from the British,

16 Lafayette to Washington, July 20, 1781, Louis Gottschalk, ed., The 
Letters of Lafayette to Washington, 1777-1799 (New York: Privately 
Printed by Helen Fahnestock Hubbard, 1944), 205.
17 Lafayette to Washington, June 28, 1781, ibid., 203.
but he sent his light troops to skirmish with Cornwallis's rear-guard and to cut off detachments and foraging parties. Some minor skirmishing took place during Cornwallis' long retreat from the interior of Virginia to the seacoast, but only one clash of real consequence took place in the 130 miles between Point of Fork and Williamsburg.

The collision between Lafayette's forces and a portion of Cornwallis's army took place at Spencer's Ordinary, a tavern located at a crossroads near Williamsburg, on the 26th of June. Wayne, who was in command of the American van, had been stalking a British foraging party commanded by Lieutenant Colonel John Simcoe, and a part of Wayne's brigade had intercepted Simcoe at Spencer's Ordinary. Some Virginia militia and a detachment of Pennsylvania Continentals commanded by Colonel Richard Butler attacked Simcoe's corps, and a bloody clash followed between some four hundred British and a considerably larger number of Pennsylvanians and Virginians. Simcoe's men might have been overwhelmed if they had had no artillery, but they had brought a fieldpiece with them, and its fire held off Butler's Pennsylvanians at a critical moment when a company of British infantry was delivering a bayonet attack upon some Virginia sharpshooters. The British Rangers succeeded in driving their tormentors away from the crossroads, but their victory was won at a cost of 37 officers and men killed and wounded.18

It is probable that Butler's detachment would have given a better account of itself if it had been supported by one or two fieldpieces. In any case, the Pennsylvanians and Virginians had fought well and had inflicted a considerable number of casualties upon the infantry and cavalry of the Queen's Rangers, the cream of the light troops of the British army.

The action at Spencer's Ordinary had given the men of the Pennsylvania Line a chance to show their mettle for the first time since the mutiny in January. The Pennsylvanians had shown that they could fight, but they had failed to win great distinction in their brush with Simcoe's detachment. They won laurels for themselves shortly after the fight at Spencer's Ordinary, however, and it was well for them that they did so, because they would

undoubtedly have been annihilated if they had fought halfheartedly
or had fallen into confusion on the field of battle.

Lord Cornwallis engineered the supreme test of the fighting
quality of the Pennsylvania Line through his use of a stratagem.
He retreated from Williamsburg toward his base at Portsmouth
early in July. Lafayette followed him, and Wayne was assigned
the dangerous task of leading Lafayette’s van. Wayne hurried
toward the James River in pursuit of the British, and Cornwallis
decided to lure his pursuer into a trap by leaving a small rear-
guard behind with the bulk of the British army in hiding within
supporting distance of the rear-guard.

Cornwallis’s stratagem might not have worked if Wayne had
been a cautious man, but Wayne was impetuous, and he rushed
into the trap which had been set for him. His skirmishers en-
countered Cornwallis’s pickets on the north bank of the James
and drove them onto a wooded island. Wayne then led his Penn-
sylvanians and some Virginia riflemen across a narrow causeway
which linked the island with the mainland. He had jumped to the
conclusion that the island was defended only by a small rear-guard,
but the British army had remained on the island and was hidden
in some woods situated a few hundred yards beyond the causeway.\(^1\)

Several regiments of British infantry, accompanied by field
artillery, advanced from the woods shortly after Wayne’s Penn-
sylvanians had crossed the causeway. The Pennsylvanians were
outnumbered four to one and their situation was desperate. Wayne
remained calm, however, and his soldiers showed no sign of panic.
Wayne realized that most of his men would be unable to retreat
after the British had launched an attack, and he decided to throw
his adversaries off balance by attacking them. He ordered his
infantry to charge, and his soldiers responded by advancing and
firing into the ranks of the British at a range of a few yards. Two
battalions of British infantry fell into disorder and yielded ground,
and Wayne then drew his Pennsylvanians off and commenced an
orderly retreat to the mainland.\(^2\)

The British recovered quickly and advanced to attack the Penn-

\(^{10}\) Cornwallis to Clinton, July 8, 1781, Benjamin Franklin Stevens, ed., The
Campaign in Virginia, 1781 (2 vols., London, 1888), II, 58-59, and Tarleton,
History, 353-354.

\(^{20}\) Wayne to Washington, July 8, 1781, Papers of George Washington,
Vol. 179. See also, Tarleton, History, 354.
sylvanians, but Wayne's audacious attack had bought a few precious minutes in which to make preparations for a retreat. Wayne ordered some companies to make a stand while others filed across the causeway. The rear-guard companies, supported by three fieldpieces, held their ground heroically against overwhelming numbers of British infantry. Wayne risked his life repeatedly to steady his soldiers and to direct the retreat of each company as it was extricated from the furious fighting. Lafayette rode up in time to participate in the last few minutes of the battle, and the Frenchman and the Pennsylvania brigadier succeeded in drawing off the rear-guard without leaving any large number of prisoners in the hands of the enemy.

Wayne and his Pennsylvanians had risen to the heights of military achievement in their brush with Cornwallis's army. They had extricated themselves from a trap in which they could have been annihilated, but they had paid a high tuition for their lesson in how to escape from an ambush. They had left two fieldpieces in the hands of the British, and they had lost 130 officers and men killed or wounded and 9 captured. The British, who had enjoyed a marked superiority in numbers throughout the action, suffered a loss of about 75 officers and men killed or wounded.\footnote{Lafayette to Jethro Sumner, July 10, 1781, Walter Clark, ed., \textit{The State Records of North Carolina} (26 vols., Goldsboro, N. C.: Nash Brothers, 1886-1907), XV, 522-523, and Tarleton, \textit{History}, 354.}

The action on the banks of the James, generally known as the battle of Green Spring Farm, had taken place on the 6th of July. It was the only action in the campaign in which the Pennsylvania Line suffered almost all the casualties on the American side. Some Virginia militiamen had fought at Green Spring Farm, to be sure, but they had participated only in the preliminary skirmishing against the British pickets. The Virginians had melted away when the main British army had appeared, and the Pennsylvanians had had to fight alone against Cornwallis's battle-hardened veterans.

Cornwallis resumed his retreat toward Portsmouth on the day after the battle at Green Spring Farm. He reached Portsmouth after making a leisurely retreat from the James, but he remained there for only a short time before returning to the Williamsburg Neck. His superior, Sir Henry Clinton, had ordered him to
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Wayne marches south, 1781

Evacuate Portsmouth and to establish a base at Old Point Comfort for the protection of the ships-of-the-line of the Royal Navy. The anchorage at Old Point Comfort was too extensive to be commanded by Cornwallis's artillery, however, and his lordship decided to occupy and fortify Yorktown and Gloucester at the mouth of the York River.

The story of the siege of Yorktown has been told and retold many times, and it is not our purpose to repeat it here. Suffice it to say that a formidable fleet from the French West Indies arrived in the Chesapeake and blockaded Cornwallis's army during September and October, 1781. General Washington led the main Franco-American army overland from the banks of the Hudson to those of the York to carry out a siege of Yorktown. More than 16,000 troops, half of whom were French, and 100 pieces of heavy artillery were assembled for the attack, and Cornwallis's hastily-erected earthworks were bombarded until they had been rendered indefensible. His lordship was obliged to surrender, and his army marched out of Yorktown and laid down its arms on the 19th of October.

Wayne's Pennsylvanians played a useful and honorable role in the siege. They took their turn in the trenches and suffered a number of casualties. But they were not so heavily engaged as they had been in their collision with the British at Green Spring Farm. The action at Green Spring had turned into a private quarrel of the Pennsylvanians with Cornwallis's Redcoats, but the siege of Yorktown was carried out by 16,000 men—among them Frenchmen, New Englanders, and Virginians, as well as soldiers from Pennsylvania.

The siege of Yorktown was the last action on the grand scale in the War for American Independence. The war was far from being over, however, and there were many skirmishes on land and actions at sea in the year following Cornwallis's surrender. The Pennsylvania Line participated in some of the skirmishes which


took place in 1782, but it was not engaged in any actions comparable to the battle at Green Spring Farm.

The story of the participation of the Pennsylvanians in the closing campaigns of the war would require as many pages as we have already devoted to their part in the campaign in Virginia. The Pennsylvania Line was ordered to march southward after Cornwallis's surrender to reinforce the army commanded by Major General Nathanael Greene. General St. Clair led the troops on their long march from Yorktown to the vicinity of Charleston, South Carolina, and Greene incorporated them into his army until the British had evacuated Charleston in December, 1782.

St. Clair departed from South Carolina after his troops had joined Greene's army, and Wayne took command of the Pennsylvania Line. Wayne was unable to remain with his brigade, however, because he was ordered by General Greene to take command of an army of Georgia and South Carolina militia operating in the vicinity of Savannah. The brigadier and his militiamen were hard pressed by Tory light troops and Indians, but they won a number of victories and held their ground until the British evacuated Savannah in July, 1782.24 The Pennsylvanians, meanwhile, saw less action than did Wayne's militiamen, but their presence in the vicinity of Charleston helped to prevent British foraging parties from roaming freely over the South Carolina countryside. The Pennsylvanians paid a heavy price for their stay in the swampy and mosquito-infested lowlands, however; many of them were stricken with "fevers" (probably malaria) during the summer sickly season, and some of the victims died far from their homes and loved ones.25

The achievements of the Pennsylvania Line in the campaigns in Virginia and the Carolinas were remarkable. Generals St. Clair and Wayne had performed miracles in reconstructing the Line after it had been shattered by the mutiny in January. Wayne had then led it into Virginia where it had played an important role in saving the stores at Albemarle Old Court House. It saw almost

continuous action in Virginia until Cornwallis's surrender, and it was then sent to South Carolina to serve under General Greene's command. It returned to Pennsylvania in 1783 after the British had evacuated Charleston and Savannah and thereby had demonstrated that they had relinquished their hopes of reconquering Georgia and the Carolinas.