Foundation Forward

Daniel Morgan

By David Streater, Ph.D.
Burke County

This is an American history educational moment of those who made a difference during the Revolutionary War era and how they served our Country.

Born in Hunterdon County, New Jersey, Daniel Morgan was the fifth child of James and Eleanor. He left home at 17 after a brawl with his father. Morgan, functionally literate, led an early rowdy and violent lifestyle. Daniel was a hard worker—a skillful card player who drank large amounts of whiskey. His initial jobs were as a farm and sawmill laborer, then as a teamster hauling supplies and war materials during the French and Indian War.

Daniel, already detesting the British, knocked down an officer for insulting him and then assaulted him with a sword. In an immediate summary court-martial, Morgan's instant sentence was 500 lashings, a punishment commonly causing death. In 1757, Morgan organized a company of riflemen—they defeated a band of French soldiers in the Seven Years' War. This success earned Morgan a commission as an ensign from Virginia's governor and impressed Washington.

While following orders to deliver dispatches, Daniel and his troops were ambushed. Morgan was seriously injured by being shot, losing several teeth, and his squad killed. Fortunately, this is the only wound Daniel sustained in battles. Daniel built his farm in Berryville, Virginia, from the early 1760s to the mid-1770s, named it "Soldier's Rest," and married Abigail Bailey. Then, he re-entered the Army to assist Benedict Arnold's expedition. Morgan and his troops did this because General Montogomery was killed, and Arnold was seriously wounded. Morgan was a POW and received parole during the Battle of Quebec. He next commanded the Provisional Rifle Corps helping Horatio Gates during the Saratoga Campaign. Morgan also participated in various other battles and was eventually promoted to brigadier general. Working with Nathanael Greene, Morgan led troops in the Upstate region of South Carolina. Morgan's ultimate success came at the Battle of Cowpens in South Carolina. His unprecedented battle maneuvers won "the Continental Army's most decisive victory of the Revolutionary War." Daniel was known as the "Hero of Cowpens" and as a competent officer who despised injustice and discrimination. For his democratic leadership style and accomplishments at Cowpens, Daniel was awarded the Congressional Gold Metal. Though his first attempt failed, Morgan was elected to Congress in 1797.

The distinguished Morgan died July 6, 1802, in Winchester, Virginia, and is documented as "one of the most skilled tacticians of the Continental Army." Daniel Morgan, an authentic American patriot, is an admired military chevalier. He continues to be honored by namesakes at various places, including Morganton, NC, this writer's residence.

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Dr. David Streater is the director of education for Foundation Forward. He is a retired college instructor and administrator, and a retired probation and parole officer/administrator. David is a criminologist who has an acute history interest, served in the Navy, and is a resident of Burke County, NC.

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