

HISTORY ALIVE

AN INTERACTIVE JOURNAL THAT CONNECTS YOU TO FELLOW CLUB MEMBERS

Heroes

Gen. Washington's Confidant

BY MEMBER MICHAEL P. PROCTER

When one thinks of the significant military figures of the American Revolution, names like George Washington, Marquis de Lafayette, Comte de Rochambeau, and even Benedict Arnold come to mind. One of the most important figures of the war, Maj. Gen. Nathanael Greene, is usually overlooked or forgotten. However, Greene played such an important role in the war that, arguably, without him, it may not have concluded the way it did.

Nathanael Greene was born in the town of Warwick, R.I., on Aug. 7, 1742, to parents who were Quakers. His father was a farmer and blacksmith, but not wealthy enough to send young Nathanael to school. Greene, who was fond of reading, was self-educated, studying mathematics and law. He also was a student of the history of military tactics.

Later in the Revolutionary War he became a member of Washington's inner circle of advisors and, eventually, Washington's most trusted subordinate. Although he suffered losses at Fort Mifflin and Fort Mifflin in 1776, it was Greene who advised Washington not to attack Philadelphia in the late autumn of 1777 after the defeats at Brandywine and Germantown. While Washington was strongly inclined to initiate such an attack on the British, most historians agree it would have been a disaster. Instead, the Conti-

ental Army retreated to Valley Forge.

In 1780, after resigning from his post as quartermaster general and serving briefly as commander of West Point (replacing Benedict Arnold), he took control of the southern group of the Continental Army after the defeat of



Horatio Gates at Camden, S.C. Over the next 20 months, Greene rallied the southern army and led a campaign of harassment and mini-skirmishes against the British commander, Lord Charles Cornwallis, eventually forcing him to retreat to Yorktown, Va. Cornwallis'

subsequent surrender there marked the last major battle of the war.

Without Greene's tactical cunning, Cornwallis' defeat was unlikely. After Yorktown, Greene's army continued its campaign throughout the Carolinas, eventually returning civilian control of the governments in late 1781.

Greene was far from wealthy at any point in his life. During the campaign in the Carolinas, he was given plots of land and monetary awards by the governments of North and South Carolina, which he promptly used to finance the war effort. Moreover, he personally signed for loans to further equip and supply his troops. While many of his peers on both sides of the war sought to further enhance their fortunes, Greene did not. Instead he chose to put aside personal fortune in pursuit of his countrymen's ultimate goal: independence from Great Britain. Due to the dealings with a dishonest business partner, he was virtually penniless by war's end. The Georgia legislature presented him with a gift of a large tract of land known as Mulberry Grove, outside of Savannah, to thank him for his service.

After the war, Greene began growing rice at his farm. It was there he died of sunstroke on June 19, 1786. His grave is marked by a memorial in Johnson Square in downtown Savannah.

Greene's early death (at age 44) causes one to wonder to what he might have aspired had he lived longer. Regardless, his efforts and love of country were decisive factors in the victory for independence over Great Britain. He is a true American hero.

Member MICHAEL P. PROCTER is from Jacksonville, Fla.