Battle of Cowpens, South Carolina, 17 January, 1781

This Volley & Bayonet scenario has been developed by Paul Reynolds.

Background:
After General Gates was defeated at Camden General Greene took over command of the American Southern Army. To delay Cornwallis' advance into North Carolina he decided to split his small army.

Brigadier General Morgan took the Light Corps and threatened Cornwallis' left flank and rear, particularly the back country forts at Ninety-Six and Augusta. It was hoped that this would disrupt communications and even encourage the South Carolina Militia to take the field in large numbers.

Cornwallis ordered Lt Colonel 'Bloody Ban' Tarleton to pursue Morgan's force and destroy it before it could achieve any mischief. Tarleton aimed to attack Morgan and drive him northeast over the Broad River. For two weeks Tarleton drove his force hard in pursuit of Morgan but thanks to reports from local patriots Morgan's force managed to avoid battle.

On 16 January Tarleton crossed the Pacolet River forcing Morgan to break camp and head for Cowpens and the Island Ford across the Broad River six miles further on. At dusk as his tired force reached Cowpens his scouts brought alarming news, the Broad River was badly swollen, Morgan's Corps was trapped. Before the battle Morgan went from group to group exhorting his Militia men, “Just hold up your heads, boys, give them three fires, and you will be free.”

At three in the morning of 17 January Tarleton's force set off to catch and destroy Morgan as he tried to cross the Broad River and before he could be reinforced by a contingent of 'Over-mountain Men', experienced troops after their success at King's Mountain.

Wargame:
This wargame recreates this key battle of the Southern campaign of the American War of Independence (or Revolution). We are using the 'Volley and Bayonet' rules at Wing scale.

- Each stand of troops represents between 50 and 150 men
- Each turn represents 15 minutes
- 1 inch (25mm) on the table represents 25 yards (23m)
The table reflects the actual terrain and the forces available to the players are those that fought in the battle. The players have the freedom to change history by using different deployment and tactics.

The game lasts 4 hours, so 16 turns.

Scenario:

Victory Conditions:
The Americans win a minor victory if the British force is exhausted and a major victory if the British force collapses.

The British win a minor victory if they exhaust 2 of the 3 American brigades without collapsing themselves, and a major victory if they exhaust all 3 American brigades or cause 2 of the 3 American brigades to collapse without collapsing themselves.

Game Length:
The game continues for up to 16 turns (4 hours). The real battle was settled very quickly, but the longer game duration allows for some more imaginative tactics on the part of the British. The Americans move first (as this allows their skirmish riflemen one fire combat before the British close and force them to retreat).

The actual battle began at 7 a.m., so you can go for more than 16 turns, but the 16 turn limit makes the British player "rush" his attack as Tarleton did. The real battle was over in about an hour (4 turns).

Deployment:
The Americans deploy first in the north-western portion (upper) 36" of the table.

The British deploy in the south-eastern portion (lower) 18" of the table.

The upper right corner is north.

Terrain:
The ground to either flank of Cowpens is marshy, limiting the frontage available for action.

Wooded Areas: treat as Forest.
Small Streams: treat as Stream (half move to cross).
Hills (two levels): the hills impact on line of sight, but are not steep enough to have an impact on any unit's movement (no movement penalties).

Some of the contours on the south-western edge of the map have been omitted as they were a gradual down slope and would not impact line of sight or movement.

Map Size:
Each square on the map equals 12", 300 yards using the Wing Scale ground scale.

The overall map is 3’ x 5’. This was a small battle even for VnB’s Wing Scale.

Sources:
A number of sources have been used in developing this scenario, particularly work done by the late Greg Novak, Jeff Glasco and David Bickley.
American Light Corps
Cowpens, South Carolina, January 17, 1781
Brig. Gen. Daniel Morgan WC

Continental Brigade
Exhaustion: 6

Maryland/Delaware Light Battalion - 243 men
Kirkwood’s Delaware Company (63), Anderson’s 1/7 Maryland Company (60), Dobson’s 2/4/6 Maryland Company (60) and Manger’s 3/5 Maryland Company (60)
3-6 FI Sh NE S, 2-6 FI Sh NE S

State Troops Battalion - 100 men
Lawson’s Virginia Company (40), Connely’s North Carolina State troops (20), Wallace’s Virginia Continentals (20), Buchanan’s Augusta Riflemen (20)
2-5 FI NE S

Triplett’s Virginia Militia Riflemen Battalion - Major Francis Triplett - 155 men
Tate’s Augusta Virginia Riflemen (50), Comb’s Fauquier County Virginia Riflemen (40), Gilmor’s Rockbridge Virginia Riflemen (40) & Beatty’s Burke County NC Militia Riflemen (25)
UC, 3x 1-5 FI NE SS

South Carolina Militia Brigade
Exhaustion: 6

1st Spartan South Carolina Militia Regiment - Col. John Thomas Jr. - 200 men
2-4 FI PT NE Thomas’ 1st Battalion
2-4 FI PT NE Roebuck’s 2nd Battalion

2nd Spartan (Fair Forest) South Carolina Militia Regiment - Col. Thomas Brandon - 100 men
2-4 FI PT NE

Hayes’ Little River, South Carolina Militia Regiment - Lt. Col. Joseph Hayes - 150 men
3-4 FI PT NE

McDowell’s North Carolina Riflemen - Maj. Joseph McDowell - 100 men
Surry & Wilkes County North Carolina Riflemen (60), Lincoln & Rutherford County North Carolina Riflemen (40)
UC, 2x 1-5 FI NE SS

Cunningham’s Battalion (Riflemen) - Maj. John Cunningham - 115 men
Cunningham’s Georgia Militia Battalion (55), Hammond’s South Carolina State Company (60)
UC, 2x 1-5 FI NE SS

Cavalry Brigade
Exhaustion: 2

Continental Dragoons - 82 men
Parson’s Troop/1st Dragoons (27), Jones’ Troop/3rd Dragoons (28) & Barrett’s Troop/3rd Dragoons (27)
2x 1-6 MC

State Dragoons - 30 men
Nelson’s Virginia State Dragoons (15), Clark’s North Carolina State Dragoons (15)
1-4 LC PT

McCall’s South Carolina Dragoons - 45 men
Jolly’s Georgia Dragoons (20), McCall’s South Carolina Dragoons (25)
1-4 LC
**Tarleton's Column**

**Cowpens, South Carolina, 17th January, 1781**

**Exhaustion: 12**

**17th Light Dragoons** - 102 men
- 2x 1-6 LC  
17th Light Dragoons (50), British Legion 52

**Royal Artillery** - 2 3lb light guns
- 2-6 Lt

**British Converged Light infantry** - Capt. Fraser - 135-160 men
- UC, 3x 1-6 FI  
4 Companies: 1st Bn/71st Highlanders (35), 2nd Bn/71st Highlanders (34), 16th ROF (41), Prince of Wales American Regiment (25-50)

**7th Foot, Royal Fusiliers** - Maj. Newmarsh - 167-180 men
- UC, 2x 2-5 FI

**1st Battalion, 71st Foot** - Maj. Alexander - 263 men
- UC, 3-5 FI Sh, 2-5 FI Sh

**British Legion Dragoons** - Capt. Ogilivy - 200 men
- UC, 4x 1-5 LC

**British Legion Infantry** - Capt. Rouselette - 200 men
- UC, 2x 2-5 FI NE S