The "Old Wagoner"

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Born in 1736 in Hunterdon County, NJ, Daniel Morgan suffered an unpleasant childhood and left home at seventeen for Winchester, VA. Illiterate and often drunk, Morgan gambled and fought. Morgan eventually became a wagoner transporting goods between the frontier and the market. Morgan's experiences, knowledge of the land and logistics earned him the nickname "Old Wagoner."

When the French and Indian War began, Morgan's wagons transported supplies up and down the frontier battle lines. On one occasion, he aggravated a British officer, who hit Morgan with the flat of his sword. Morgan retaliated, knocking out the officer with one swipe of his fist. The British sentenced Morgan to receive 500 lashes, but the person whipping him miscounted and Morgan only received 499 lashes. Morgan endured the lashing, though with pieces of flesh hanging in strips from his back. Later, Morgan said he "owed good old King George one more." The officer who initiated the fight realized he was wrong, and he made a public apology. Morgan forgave him, but not Britain as he suffered from sciatica for the remainder of his life. Later in the war, a bullet passed through the back of Morgan's neck, knocking out all of the teeth on the left side of his jaw, and exiting his cheek. Miraculously, the bullet did not injure his jaw. It was the only wound Morgan would ever suffer in military service. After the war, Morgan retired and married.

When the Revolution started, Morgan joined the army as captain of a rifle company, "Morgan's Riflemen." The technology of their rifles, which were more accurate and lighter than muskets, set Morgan's men apart. Morgan sought to eliminate British command and control and his snipers harassed the British at every opportunity, killing their officers and sowing confusion in the ranks. Morgan's men served during the siege of Boston, the invasion of Canada, Saratoga, Freeman's Farm, and Bemis Heights. At Bemis Heights, Morgan changed the tide of battle when he ordered his best sniper to shoot British General Simon Fraser as Fraser was rallying the British line. Morgan's men then attacked Saratoga again, ending in British General Burgoyne's surrender. After Saratoga, Morgan retired until late 1780 when he rejoined the army as a Brigadier General and moved south under the command of General Greene.

Morgan's greatest victory came at Cowpens. Morgan consulted his men and inspired them before the battle. Morgan's battle strategy lured the British into combat with the regular army by using lines of militia who fired and retreated to draw the British in while Morgan used his snipers to eliminate British command and control. Morgan's plan was effective, but the British broke through Morgan's right flank due to a mistaken order to retreat. Morgan rode over and asked the American soldiers if they were beaten. The commanding officer avowed they were not. Morgan ordered him to face about and fire a volley in unison. This volley took an immense toll on the British who had sensed victory and broke ranks in wild pursuit of the Americans. Their strength broken, the British line collapsed and the battle was over. After the one hour battle, British losses amounted to 110 dead, 200 wounded, and 500 captured; American losses were only 12 dead and 60 wounded. Morgan's heroism won the day, but the campaign cost Morgan his health and he retired from the war.

Word Count 495.

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