Excepts for The Decision to Fight at Cowpens

**Excerpt 1: Letter From Nathanael Greene to Daniel Morgan**

This excerpt provides the basic understanding of what Greene wanted Morgan to do. Analysis of the two secondary sources is based on the evidence provided in this excerpt.

*It is not my wish you should come to action unless you have manifest superiority and a moral certainty of succeeding. Put nothing to the hazard, a retreat may be disagreeable but not disgraceful. Regard not the opinion of the day. It is not our business to risque too much, our affairs are in too critical a situation and require time and nursing to give them a better tone.*

**Excerpt 2: From *Kings Mountain and Cowpens: Our Victory Was Complete***

This excerpt is from a recent book that discusses the battle of Cowpens. It uses the information provided in Excerpt #1 and uses it as a basis to analyze Morgan’s course of action.

*Morgan was caught in a conundrum in the worst sort of way. He knew that Tarleton and Cornwallis were moving to eliminate his force. His camp at Grindal Shoals was vulnerable to being entrapped by the coordinated movements of Cornwallis and Tarleton. The logical solution would be to abandon the position, retreat northwestward toward the upper Broad or Catawba Rivers and save his army to fight another day. To retreat would cool the spirit of the people to take the field and would abandon the local Patriots to the whims of the Loyalists. In fact, early Morgan biographer James Graham contends that a retreat would have been little less disastrous than a defeat. Morgan also had an additional problem: the enlistments of many of his militia were running out. These men wanted to go home, and only a personal plea by Morgan caused them stay the course. Additionally, the Broad and Pacolet Rivers were considered boundaries by many of the militia groups. If Morgan went south of the Pacolet, part of his force would leave and return home; if he went north of the Broad, another portion of his little corps would likewise leave. Morgan had no good options at this point but determined that it was best to move northward, where he could supply his men and search for an advantage to exploit.*

Brown, Robert W. Jr., *Kings Mountain and Cowpens: Our Victory Was Complete*, (History Press: Charleston. 2009), p.100

**Excerpt 3: From *Cowpens Staff Ride and Battlefield Tour***

This excerpt provides a triumphal view of Morgan’s decision to fight at Cowpens. It provides a different interpretation of why Morgan chose his course of action from that in the previous source.

*Greene had expected Morgan to harass the enemy,“ to fall upon the flank or into the rear of the enemy” as the situation dictated; Tarleton, however, instead moved to force a decision. Morgan could flee, demoralizing his troops and exposing them to piecemeal destruction, or he could test his strength against the Green Dragoon in pitched battle.*

*Morgan chose to fight. Violating the strict letter of his original instructions, he had several advantages that amended the circumstances envisioned in their writing. First, he chose the ground, giving him the advantage of an ambusher. Second, he knew by reputation the methods-and therefore the weaknesses---of his opponent. Third, allowing Tarleton the time to close the gap between the two armies gave the Americans an opportunity to assemble on a battle site of Morgan’s choosing, prepare their positions, rest, and eat before the contest of the following day. Tarleton’s troops would have none of these advantages. Greene sent Morgan a letter on 13 January that implied Morgan had permission to fight the battle.*

Moncure, John. *Cowpens Staff Ride and Battlefield Tour*, (Combat Studies Institute: Ft. Leavenworth. 1996), p.52

**Triple Venn Diagram**

This diagram is used for students to organize the information from the sources as well as visualize how the information from each source compares and contrasts.



**Excerpt 4: From *A History of the Campaigns of 1780 and 1781in the Southern Provinces of North America***

This primary source helps to clarify what the British strategy was as well as how Morgan’s decision thwarted that plan. This source also provides some key information about the future course had Morgan not fought at Cowpens.

*When I advance, I must either destroy Morgan’s corps, or push it before me over the Broad river towards Kings Mountain. The advance of the army should commence (when your Lordship orders it to move) towards Kings Mountain.*