

Lawrence E. Babits and Joshua B. Howard. *Long, Obstinate, and Bloody: The Battle of Guilford Courthouse*, 2009, i-xix and 300 pp., Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, Hrdbk: \$30.00, ISBN: 978-0-8078-3266-0.

"The battle of Guilford Courthouse was not preordained. Instead, it resulted from strategies that had been initially put in play during the first stages of the American War of Independence" (p. 1). With that statement, Lawrence E. Babits and Joshua B. Howard begin their odyssey that unravels how and why the blood bath at Guildford Courthouse occurred, and why Guildford was *the* battle that led to Cornwallis' surrender at Yorktown. Like two forensic "archaeo-historians," thread by thread, Baits and Howard skillfully unravel the circumstances that lead to Guilford, each and every tactical (and not so tactical move) made by the Brits and Loyalists (and their various mercenary and conscripted captives), and the Continentals (and various state militia), as well as the outcome and significance of the Guilford engagement. As a result, Baits and Howard dissect each musket shot, canon volley, troop movement and counter movement, saber blow by saber blow for each and every action taking place at Guilford (no, Guilford was not a single, limited, small-scale battle on the 'courthouse green'). It was, however, a geographically extensive battle protracted over very diverse environs and topographies. Its horrors of war focused throughout an area about one mile square. As a result of smoke generated by muskets and

canon fire by two very large armies, as well as the spatial expanse of the battlefield, no one individual commanded the battle from a clear, single, vantage. Yet, in the aftermath, Babits and Howard meticulously combined their historical and archaeological sleuthing to bring together, in a necessary but almost overly *ad nauseum* hierarchal analysis, wonderful strands of carefully weighted field information written by persons who experienced the battle. The data, whether in the form of officer reports, written immediately following the engagement, pension seekers writing many years after the war, or by button and buckle artifact distributions still present on the battlefield, Babits and Howard combined their historical talents to create *THE* most definitive description of any engagement of the American Revolution, what led up to the battle, what occurred during the battle, and how the outcome of that battle resulted in Cornwallis' hopeless attempt at Yorktown.

The organization and layout of *Guilford* is as meticulously thought out and thorough as is the analysis of the historical and archaeological evidence about the battle itself. The preface of the book is a "must read." In it, the author's set forth their plan of presentation, levels of analysis, and justification of their methodological approach. The book is divided into sections dealing with what led up to Guilford, what took place during the battle, and the aftermath following the battle. Within these organizational headings, the authors reveal a plethora of information that recreates detail from both the British and Colony perspectives. Presenting friend and foe tactical and logistical information for both sides in a synchronic fashion allows the reader

to place themselves on the battlefield, and on both sides of the battle line.

The acknowledgement section reads like a 'who's who' list of prominent Revolutionary War scholars, and includes notable historians, theorists, and re-enactors, as well as various staffs at noted archival facilities from both sides of 'the pond.' I was particularly impressed that the authors consulted with well known members from the Brigade of the American Revolution ( B.A.R.), and the Northwest Territory Alliance (N.W.T.A.). Indeed, with one foot in the academic world, and one in the world of historical reenactment (scholarly and academic in its' own right), the book is rightfully dedicated to Don Higginbotham, "scholar of the Revolutionary War...[who] never forgot the men in ranks."

The book chapters, listed in order include the "Race to the Dan," "From the Dan to Guilford Courthouse," " Green's Army," " The British Army Advances," " The First Line," " The Second Line," "The Battle within a Battle," "The Third Line," " The Aftermath," and "The Guilford's 'Crossroads'." At the end of this wonderful manuscript are three "Appendices" that provide specific information about the "Order of Battle," "Battle Casualties," and "Postwar Location of Pensioners by State of Service." The book contains a wonderful glossary for readers who may not be up on their 18<sup>th</sup> century military jargon. Another section contains a wonderful series of descriptions of sources and archives consulted (like most researchers, a very close study of this particular section proves to contain that one lead you have been searching for most of your professional career). The bibliography contains one

of the very best collections of references to be assembled for American Revolutionary research, be it book, journal, diary, pension application, microfilm collection, or published or unpublished article or recorded oral history.

Although many particulars from the book can be addressed in this review as an exercise of "what did you learn by reading this book" (e.g., analysis of battle plans, supply logistics, troop movements, arguments about the quality of Continental troops vs. local militia, the role of Southern Loyalists, or lack thereof), I will address only one item that stands out to me, and which is extremely important to current military endeavors in Afghanistan. Two hundred plus years ago, Cornwallis stumbled his way through the rain and mired clay roads of North Carolina, and was consistently out-witted and out-maneuvered in the field by Continental leadership. This occurred not because Cornwallis was a poor tactician, or because the Continentals were superior combatants, it occurred because the Continentals were the 'home' team and the Continentals knew the local terrain better, much better (i.e., which river ford to cross during torrential rains when you need to get your army out of harm's way); Cornwallis did not have the benefit of field intelligence or field conditions to the degree that the "local" Continentals did. As a result, wrong field movements by Cornwallis' army consistently created additional obstacles with which his weary army had to contend. Without the "ease" of supplies, movement, and not having the support from Loyalists for which he had planned, Cornwallis' fate, while fighting a battle of 'geographical

attrition" may have been his undoing, a point well argued throughout the book. But the lesson to be learned and applied (whether in Viet Nam or Afghanistan) as our troops fight overseas, is the fact that locals, fighting in their back yard, know their geography better than do foreign invaders. And, as such, the logistics of battle, troop movements and supply, impact field command and the outcome of field decisions, especially when superior armies exhaust themselves on the terrain and not on the field of battle.

Graphics used throughout the book, although sparse, are of excellent quality, and are very detailed; maybe too detailed. As an example, it's wonderful to have a map (e.g., maps 2 and 3) of army movements from river ford to river ford, but it is unfortunate that neither of those two maps illustrate actual troop movements...only place names...had an arrow or indicator of Cornwallis' or Green's troop movements been included on those wonderful graphics, the book would be improved. This suggestion, however, is a minor critique, yet the authors need to be reminded that because this is an excellent manuscript, the book will be read by non-North Carolinians and "we," like Cornwallis, "are not familiar with the geography of North Carolina." Having said that, I'm not insensitive to the conversations between publisher and author where authors are reminded about cost and other types of book preparation restrictions. Been there; done that! Major battle plan graphics, such as maps 7-9, created by Mark A. Moore of the North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, were absolutely superb.

As for the importance of this piece of published research, I will go out on a limb (it's a big, thick limb and I feel quite safe being prophetic), and predict that the Babits and Howard Guilford has set the new standard for Rev War military historical analysis, and that their work will prove to be one of the most thorough works of the 21<sup>st</sup> century dealing with the American Revolution. I can only add that the editor that approved the Babit and Howard book prospectus should be given a raise. This is a remarkable book that will have a major impact on 'how' historical military history should be accomplished. Moreover, if marketed among historical re-enactors, historians, genealogists, military historians, and lay persons, as well as among the descendants of those who participated at Guilford Courthouse, this book will become one of UNC Press' finest academic sells.

This book is a must read. It is superbly written, edited, and researched, and it sets a comprehensive standard that will change the expectations of analysis, source materials, and writing of military history.

Reviewed by:

Kenneth C. Carstens, Ph. D., *Professor emeritus*  
Department of History  
Murray State University  
Murray, Kentucky 42071