

IN STORAGE

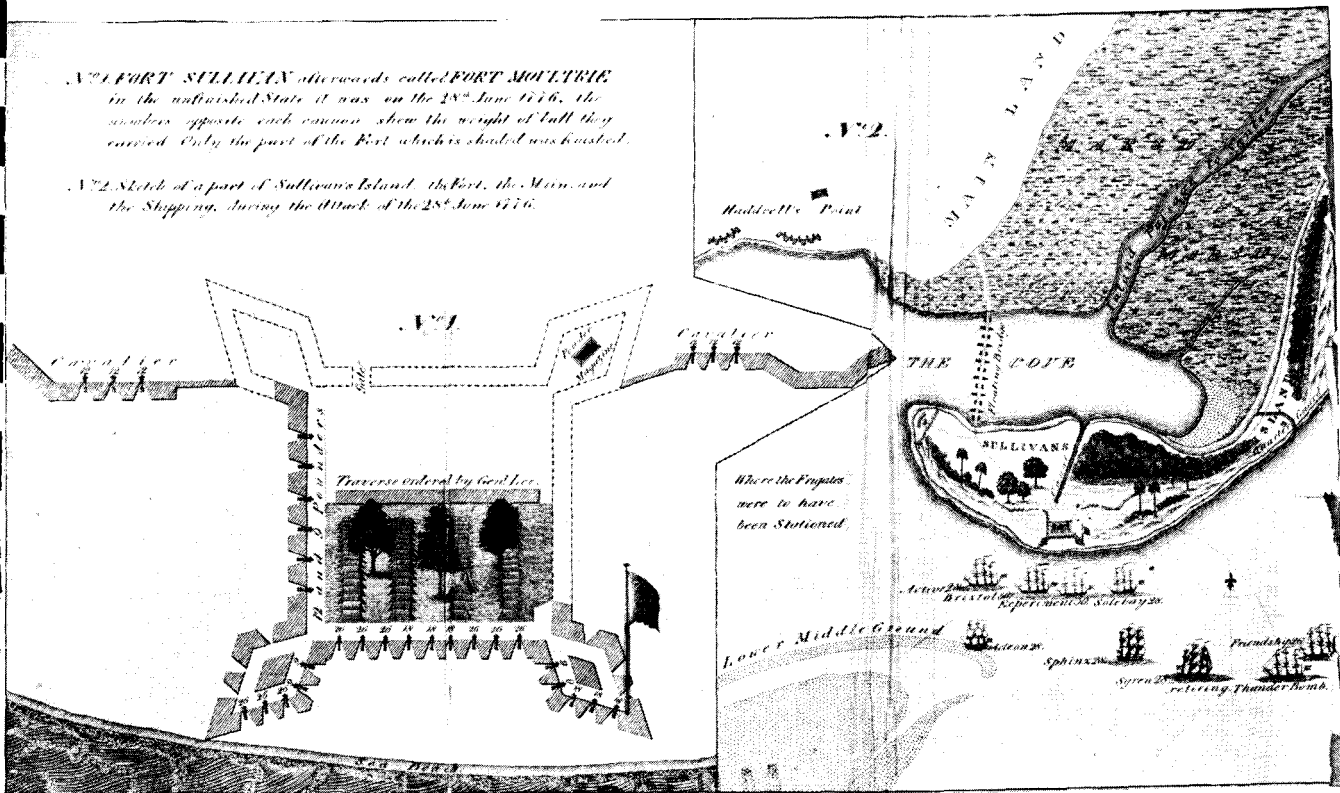
# THE BATTLE OF SULLIVAN'S ISLAND

JUNE 28, 1776

(FORT MOULTRIE, SOUTH CAROLINA)

1776. FORT SULLIVAN afterwards called FORT MOULTRIE in the united States it was on the 28<sup>th</sup> June 1776, the soldiers opposite each cannon show the weight of ball they carried. Only the part of the Fort which is shaded was hoisted.

1772. Sketch of a part of Sullivan's Island. The Fort, the Mains and the Shipping, during the Attack of the 28<sup>th</sup> June 1776.



June 30, 1968

RECEIVED  
JUN 30 1968  
HISTORICAL PARK SERVICE

# **The Battle Of Sullivan's Island and The Capture Of Fort Moultrie**

**A Documented Narrative and Troop Movement Maps  
Fort Sumter National Monument**

**South Carolina**

**by**

**Edwin C. Bearss**

**DIVISION OF HISTORY  
Office Of Archeology And Historic Preservation**

**June 30, 1968**

**National Park Service**

**U.S. Department of the Interior**

## FOREWORD

This report has been prepared to satisfy the research needs as enumerated in Historical Resource Study Proposal, FOSU-H-5, Troop Movement Maps, Battle of Sullivan's Island. As proposed by Superintendent Paul C. Swartz, this report is designed "to provide documentary detail of troop (and ship) dispositions in the Battle of Sullivan's Island and other Revolutionary War engagements aimed at the capture of Fort Moultrie." In addition, this study is directed at explaining why the British failed in 1776 to capture Sullivan's Island and why they succeeded in capturing Fort Moultrie and Charleston in 1780.

A number of persons have assisted in the preparation of this report. Particular thanks are due Superintendent Paul Swartz and Historian John Dobrovolny for their assistance at the site; to Dr. William James Morgan and Robert I. Campbell of the Naval History Division of the Navy Department for permitting me to examine and make use of unpublished source materials collected for the monumental *Naval Documents of the American Revolution Series*; to Frank Sarles for reading the report and his valuable editorial suggestions; and to Dorothy Junkin for the hours she spent typing this manuscript.

Edwin C. Bearss

Washington, D. C.  
October 1968

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

		Page
Chapter I	The British Move Against Charleston	1
Chapter II	The Americans Gird for the Test	25
Chapter III	The Americans Man Their Battle Stations	45
Chapter IV	Sir Peter Parker and General Clinton Have Their Disagreements	63
Chapter V	The Battle of Sullivan's Island	74
Chapter VI	The British Withdraw From the Area	99
Chapter VII	The British Capture Fort Moultrie and Charleston	112

LIST OF MAPS AND ILLUSTRATIONS

<u>Plates Included in Text:</u>	<u>Following Page</u>
I      The Battle of Sullivan's Island, June 28, 1776, 10 a.m. - Noon	77
II     The Battle of Sullivan's Island, June 28, 1776, Noon - 3:30 p.m.	82
III    The Battle of Sullivan's Island, June 28, 1776, 3:30 p.m. - 9:30 p.m.	87
IV     Operations Against Fort Moultrie, April 8 - May 7, 1780	135

Following Bibliography on -

V      View of the Fort on the Western End of Sullivan's Island, June 28, 1776	
VI     View of Charleston from <u>Bristol</u> , June 29, 1776	
VII    A Sketch of the Environs of Charleston, South Carolina, February 10 - May 10, 1780	
VIII   Operations Against Sullivan's Island, 1780	

## CHAPTER I

### The British Move Against Charleston

As early as the summer of 1775, the British Government had been led to believe by its Royal Governors, especially Josiah Martin of North Carolina and Lord William Campbell of South Carolina, that the Loyalists in the Southern Colonies could destroy the Rebels with the aid of several regiments of British Regulars. They wrote the Earl of Dartmouth, Secretary of State for the American Department, urging him to champion this course of action. Dartmouth was impressed by what he read, and, in September 1775, he suggested that Sir William Howe, who in October was named the British Commander-in-Chief in North America, dispatch an expedition from his base at Boston to assist the Southern Loyalists.

The force to be committed to this enterprise was soon increased. When Dartmouth informed King George III of his plans in mid-October, the King was asked to sanction an expedition which was to include not only troops from Howe's army but also additional units to be transported direct to the Southern Colonies from Great Britain. George III approved Dartmouth's proposal and ordered five regiments (the 15th, 37th, 53d, 54th, and 57th Regiments of Foot) to be readied to assist the Loyalist in North Carolina. These units were to be commanded by an officer designated by General Howe and were to be reinforced by such regiments as Howe could spare from Boston.

The regulars to be dispatched from the British Isles were to rendezvous at Cork in Ireland, and the Government hoped that they would be ready to embark by December 1. They were to sail for the mouth of the Cape Fear River in North Carolina, where they would join their general and the force embarked at Boston. The Ministry trusted that, with the aid of these soldiers, North Carolina first and then the other Southern Colonies in turn would be restored to their loyalty to the Crown.

Like many plans this one looked to its sponsors, who were armchair strategists, as if it must succeed. But, in the final analysis, it was dependent on the cooperation of the Loyalists in large numbers. Dartmouth recognized this. If the Tories did not rise en masse, all the British could hope to accomplish was to land and occupy a base on the coast from which to make raids into the hinterland.

Dartmouth had reason to expect success. The Royal Governors' reports were optimistic; the long, cold New England winter would curtail military operations around Boston. General Howe could therefore spare several of his veteran regiments, and Dartmouth hoped that these, in addition to the ones assembling at Cork, could reduce the South and rejoin Howe before the summer campaign commenced.

The diversion of a force, respectable in point of numbers, to the Carolinas can scarcely be defended on military grounds. Lord North's Ministry, as has been pointed out, had been induced to undertake it by the expectation of support from the Loyalists of that region. That there were large numbers of these in the Carolinas cannot be disputed; but while military operations must take into consideration political conditions, the latter should not be permitted to overbalance sound strategic doctrines.

Nevertheless, in October, Lord Sandwich, the First Lord of the Admiralty, named Commodore Sir Peter Parker to command the naval force assigned to the expedition.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, the army's commitment had been increased by two regiments, making a total of seven. Because of these additions, fears were voiced that it might prove impossible to land all the troops at Cape Fear. The officer in charge of the soldiers would accordingly determine if the regulars were to be disembarked in North Carolina, or if they should be diverted to one of the harbors in South Carolina, Charleston or Beaufort.

---

1. Eric Robson, "The Expedition to the Southern Colonies, 1775-1776," *English Historical Review*, LXVI (Oct., 1951), pp. 538-548; George F. Scheer and Hugh F. Rankin, *Rebels and Redcoats* (New York, 1959), pp. 145-146; William L. Clowes, *The Royal Navy: A History from the Earliest Times to the Present*, 5 vols. (London, 1898), Vol. 3, pp. 371-372; Joseph Allen, *Battles of the British Navy* (London, 1842), Vol. 1, p. 224.

On December 1 the fleet was not ready to sail from Cork. Another month was needed to assemble the regiments, ordnance, transports, stores, and the warships Parker needed as escorts. Preparations, however, continued to drag, and it was February 12, 1776, before the fleet hoisted anchor and stood out to sea. This delay was to be costly, because the expedition reached the American coast too late to subdue the Southern Colonies and still join General Howe for the beginning of his summer campaign.<sup>2</sup>

The passage from Cork was to take three months. Though lengthy, the trip across, one of the officers reported, "was not disagreeable, after we got out of the Bay of Biscay, where we met with the worst weather ever known at sea, and continued in that situation for sixteen days." Thereafter the weather had improved, although they were becalmed four or five days.<sup>3</sup>

General Howe in the meantime had selected Maj. Gen. Henry Clinton to command the Southern Expedition. Clinton, born into an aristocratic

---

2. Robson, "The Expedition to the Southern Colonies, 1775-1776," *English Historical Review*, LXVI, pp. 538-548. The two additional regiments assigned to the expedition were the 28th and 46th Regiments of Foot. John S. Fortescue, *A History of the British Army* (London, 1902), Vol. 3, p. 180.

3. William Falconer to Anthony Falconer, July 13, 1776, found in Robert W. Gibbes, *Documentary History of the American Revolution*, 3 vols. (New York, 1853-57), Vol. 2, pp. 19-20.

family, had gained his military experience on the Continent during the Seven Years' War.<sup>4</sup>

In 1775 he had been ordered to Boston, where he had participated in the Battle of Bunker Hill. Having had several disagreements with Howe on strategy, Clinton welcomed an escape from the immediate supervision of his superior.<sup>5</sup> Just before the expedition sailed, however, Clinton began to have reservations about Dartmouth's plan and seemed to dread shouldering responsibility for its success.<sup>6</sup>

Despite these doubts, Clinton sailed from Boston on January 20, 1776, with a small force numbering not more than 1,500 soldiers. Reaching New York on February 4, Clinton remained there for over a week before resuming the southward voyage. He stopped in Virginia to discuss the military situation with the royal governor, the Earl of Dunmore, who had been compelled by the Patriots to flee Williamsburg and live aboard a warship in Hampton Roads. Dunmore had scant information for Clinton. Before the fleet could sail on, high winds

---

4. *The American Rebellion, Sir Henry Clinton's Narrative of His Campaigns, 1775-1782, With an Appendix of Original Documents*, edited by William B. Willcox (New Haven, 1954), xiii-xvi. (Cited hereinafter as Clinton, *American Rebellion*.)

5. *Ibid.*, xvii-xviii.

6. *Ibid.*, xviii.

damaged one of the transports, making repairs necessary. The small fleet finally cleared Hampton Roads on February 27.<sup>7</sup>

Clinton did not reach the Cape Fear until March 12. There he was surprised to discover that Parker's fleet had not arrived, as he still believed it had sailed at the beginning of December.<sup>8</sup> He also received evil tidings from Governor Martin. In January, Martin had called on the Highlanders in the North Carolina Piedmont to assemble under Donald McDonald near Cross Creek. They would then march for the coast and assist the troops coming from Ireland in crushing the forces of rebellion in the colony. When organized, about February 15, there were about 700 Highlanders, 700 Loyalists, and 100 Regulators. On February 27, at Moores Creek, the Highlanders engaged a Patriot force led by Col. Richard Caswell. The Americans routed the Loyalists, who fled leaving 30 killed or wounded on the field and 85 prisoners, while the Patriots suffered only two casualties. British hopes for the assistance of a large number of Loyalists had been dashed, and Clinton was compelled to re-evaluate the situation. North Carolina, the original goal of the expedition, could not be returned to obedience to the Crown at this time.<sup>9</sup>

---

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 24-25. Among the units accompanying Clinton was the 33d Regiment of Foot, two companies of light infantry, and a few Highlanders.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

9. Christopher Ward, *The War of the Revolution*, edited by John R. Alden, 2 vols. (New York, 1952), Vol. 2, pp. 662-664.

There was nothing Clinton could do now but wait for the fleet from Ireland. He had been at the Cape Fear for more than a month before the first transport from Cork arrived on April 18.<sup>10</sup>

On May 3, 1776, Sir Peter Parker reached Cape Fear with three warships (Bristol, Acteon, and Solebay), the storeship Sybella, and 16 transports, ordnance ships, and victuallers. While the ships anchored off the bar, Parker, who flew his broad pennant from Bristol, established contact with those ashore and learned, much to his relief, that the frigate Sphinx, the hospital ship Pigot, two transports, and a victualler had crossed the bar and had anchored in the Cape Fear River on the 1st. There they had found His Majesty's sloops Falcon, Cruizer, and Scorpion, the schooner St. Lawrence, and several transports. Five transports, one ordnance ship, and two victuallers that had become separated from the fleet during the stormy passage across the Bay of Biscay were missing, however. Two vessels, Syren and Mercury, had been detached by Parker on May 2 to search for the missing ships. Syren would cruise three to 15 leagues off Frying Pan Shoals, while Mercury would cover the sea from Frying Pan Shoals to Cape Romaine.

Parker by mid-May had succeeded in getting all his ships, except his flagship, across the bar and into the river. For

---

10. Clinton, *American Rebellion*, p. 28.

convenience in communicating with General Clinton, Sir Peter transferred his pennant to the frigate Solebay.<sup>11</sup>

As supplies were short, Parker put the squadron on two-thirds rations of bread, beef, and pork. A week's provisions were transferred from the army's victuallers, which carried stores to last for 12 weeks, to the fleet. John Read, Bristol's purser, was able to purchase flour and rice from several of the prizes, which helped alleviate the situation. General Clinton had brought with him a large quantity of rum purchased in Virginia, a few hogsheads of which he promised to share with the navy.<sup>12</sup> To assist Parker, Clinton organized a large foraging party. A battalion of light infantry and the 33d and 37th Regiments of Foot were embarked in flat-bottomed boats. Some provisions were secured by this force, but not as many as anticipated.<sup>13</sup>

As if these were not troubles enough, Lord Charles Cornwallis, who was in charge of the troops embarked at Cork, notified Clinton

---

11. Parker to Stephens, May 15, 1776, English Records, Admiralty I, Vol. 486, p. 105. Copies of the records of the British Admiralty cited in this study are on file at the Naval History Division, Department of the Navy.

12. *Ibid.*

13. John Drayton, *Memoirs of the American Revolution*, 2 vols. (Charleston, 1821), Vol. 2, p. 278.

