



Beaufort County 250 Committee
Revolutionary Era
Battle Summaries

*The Battle
of Bloody Point
Also Known As
The Philippa Affair*

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SOUTHERN PLUNDER, NORTHERN PROVIDENCE:

The Seizure Of The Philippa And The Siege Of Boston

Much is known about the *Gaspee* Affair of July 9, 1772, one of the earliest in the sequence of significant events leading up to the Revolutionary War. A Royal Navy customs schooner enforcing the laws in the waters off Newport, RI ran aground and was plundered and burned by a group of rebellious men, partially in retaliation for the Boston Massacre in 1770. However, little is known about a significant event in Beaufort County, perhaps the first incidence of large-scale, armed conflict between British and Patriot forces in the Revolutionary War in SC, called the *Philippa* Affair. It had a powerful role in shaping the course of affairs in the Northern Campaigns of the British armies.

In late April of 1775, the Secret Committee of the SC Council of Safety received word that the former SC merchant ship, *Magna Charta*, which had brought two and a half chests of tea into Charleston on June 26, 1774 causing the so-called second Charleston Tea Party, had been refitted and renamed the *Philippa*. The report stated that *Philippa* was one of three ships bearing cargos of arms to St Augustine, to be transferred to the Indian allies of the English there for use against SC and GA. At the end of June, after receiving a report that the fleet was approaching from the north, William Drayton, President of the Secret Committee, ordered Colonel Stephen Bull of the Beaufort District Militia to attempt to intercept any British ships in Beaufort waters or entering Savannah and to confiscate their cargos if possible. Bull commissioned Captains John Joyner and John Barnwell, along with two scout boats carrying 20 men apiece and armed with swivel guns for the mission.

Late on July 7, 1775 *Philippa* was sighted entering Beaufort waters, and by July 8 she had anchored off Bloody Point on Daufuskie Island near Tomkins Island, awaiting a pilot to guide her into Savannah harbor. The two Patriot scout boats rowed to the mouth of Mongin Creek where it enters the New River at its mouth on the Atlantic and positioned their boats at anchor in clear view of the *Philippa* to the south.

Learning of the shipment at roughly the same time, the Georgia Council of Safety had refitted the trading schooner *Elizabeth*, at anchor in Savannah harbor, with ten cannon and smaller swivel gun armaments. The ship was renamed *Liberty* and put under the command of Oliver Bowen and Joseph Habersham. *Liberty* had sailed offshore on July 6 to watch for the small fleet heading south. Sighting *Philippa* off Tybee Roads heading to her Daufuskie anchorage on July 8, *Liberty* sailed to anchor in the mouth of Lazzaretto Creek behind Tybee Island with an open view to the

North Channel entrance to the Savannah River and Bloody Point in the distance to the north.

At 10 AM on July 9, the pilot had boarded and *Philippa* was making way toward the North Channel of the Savannah River. *Liberty* closed rapidly and fired two shots across her bow, causing the *Philippa* to halt on her approach. The scout boats rowed quickly toward her stern to cut off any seaward withdrawal with their swivel guns. From the deck of *Liberty*, Bowen advised Maitland that he would pilot *Philippa* himself and, once on board, he steered her not to Savannah but to anchorage off Cockspur Island, where she was soon surrounded by nearly 300 GA and SC militiamen in small boats they had rowed from camps on Cockspur and Tybee Islands

Bowen demanded the cargo manifest, and after reading it, he informed Maitland that he would remove all munitions and weapons the following day and posted a heavily armed guard on *Philippa* for the night. The morning of July 10, Bowen advised Maitland that he held orders from the GA Assembly to confiscate 7.5 tons (16,000 pounds) of gunpowder, 700-weight of lead sheets, several barrels of formed bullets, and various weapons. Given his experience with the seized tea in Charleston, Maitland retorted that he would deliver the munitions to their rightful owners and would yield them to Bowen only if those owners so authorized him to do so. Bowen responded that the *Philippa* “belonged to Savannah” and it was the owner, and he issued orders to his men to remove the cargo. With the British at gunpoint, the Patriots confiscated the munitions.

The gunpowder was split between GA and SC. 8,000 pounds to each, of which 1,000 pounds of each share (2,000 pounds total), was presented to the Indians as a gift not from the Governor or the Crown, but from the People of GA and SC. South Carolina’s 7,000 pounds was taken and stored in a concealed chamber in the Bull family burial vault in the Prince Wm Parish Church at Sheldon. In mid-August, in response to a call for arms from the Continental Congress to support Washington’s army in the North, 3,500 pounds of gunpowder and half the other munitions were sent to Charleston for shipment north. The vessel carrying the plunder was a new brigantine owned by William Drayton and Miles Brewton, both Beaufort District members of the SC Council of Safety, and was captained by James Doharty of Bear Island off Hilton Head.

Shipped first to Philadelphia, the munitions were then loaded on smaller ships and sailed up the Hudson River to Fort Ticonderoga, where they were unloaded and prepared for transport overland to Boston. Other weapons (cannons), hundreds of thousands of bullets and ammunition (cannon shot) from the American capture of the fort from the British were also there awaiting shipment overland. Records show

that some of the munitions arrived in late September and that they were loaded on dogsleds, along with two cannons weighing 5,000 pounds each, and escorted to Washington's army on the western edge of the city of Boston by Henry Knox and his Green Mountain Boys.

At the end of August it had been reported that the Boston siegeworks had only 36 barrels of gunpowder on hand, and, had the British forces made a concerted attack at the time, the Patriot defenses would have been easily overwhelmed. Even after the cargo arrived, the shortage of arms and ammunition persisted to a certain degree, but it is certain that the munitions seized from the British by Patriots of the GA and Beaufort District militias in the waters off Daufuskie Island had a decisive role in the successful Siege of Boston. On March 17, 1776, when the British forces admitted defeat and evacuated Boston, the American triumph could be traced in considerable measure to *Philippa's* confiscated cargo.

Additionally, the gunpowder had a direct impact on the course of the war. It enabled Washington to sustain the siege long enough to reclaim the strategically critical port. It provided a symbolically important early American victory. And it prevented the British from scattering the American army in its infancy at Boston