

Beaufort County 250 Committee
Short Stories of Beaufort District
In the Revolutionary War

*The Militia In
Beaufort District*

*By
Dr. Lawrence Rowland
And
Dr Stephen Wise*

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SOUTH CAROLINA

The Militia in Beaufort District

The typical image of combat during the American Revolutionary War is neat lines of Continental soldiers in blue facing British regulars in their scarlet coats. But in South Carolina—and especially in the Beaufort District—the war often looked very different.

Here, the conflict was often fought not by professional armies, but by hastily raised local militia units. These militias represented both Patriots and Loyalists from broad territories, and the fighting frequently resembled a brutal civil war. Neighbors faced neighbors. Towns turned against nearby towns. Families were divided for generations.

Militia service in the Beaufort District drew men from every level of society. Wealthy planters served alongside farmers, craftsmen, merchants, sailors, and laborers. Religious backgrounds varied widely, as did nationalities and ethnic origins. This diversity reflected the region itself—and made the conflict deeply personal.

African Americans, both enslaved and free, also served in militia units. One notable example was Jim Capers. Enlisting at age 33 in 1775, he fought in engagements ranging from Savannah to Port Royal Island and Eutaw Springs. Capers joined the partisan forces under General Francis Marion in 1780 and continued fighting until he was severely wounded in 1782.

Native American warriors also played a role. Members of the Catawba Nation served in mounted ranger units and fought alongside Beaufort District units, bringing their own skills and experience to the conflict.

The region's Jewish population also contributed. Figures such as Abraham Mendes Seixas fought for American independence in South Carolina and later became important leaders in Charleston's early Jewish community.

Even members of the colonial elite took up arms. Thomas Heyward Jr., a wealthy planter educated in London, signed the Declaration of Independence in 1776. He later served as a captain in the Charlestown

Battalion of Artillery and was wounded during the 1779 Battle of Port Royal Island.

Not everyone chose the Patriot cause. Loyalist leaders such as Andrew DeVeaux IV and Nicholas Lechmere actively supported the British. Initially a Revolutionary, DeVeaux, from a prominent Beaufort family, assisted British forces after their arrival on Port Royal Island. He later became a major in the Loyalist Royal Granville Militia Regiment. His rivalry with Patriot leaders fueled violence, including the burning of Sheldon's Prince William Parish Church in 1779. Evacuating to St. Augustine after the British evacuation of Charleston, DeVeaux successfully led an expedition that recaptured Nassau and the Bahamas Islands from the Spanish.

Militiamen from the Beaufort District fought far beyond their local territory, participating in over one hundred battles and skirmishes—from Sullivan's Island, East Florida, and Savannah to Charleston, Camden, and Eutaw Springs.

Even after peace was declared in 1783, the wounds remained. Reports of attacks on Loyalist families as late as 1785 reveal just how deep—and lasting—the divisions in the Beaufort District had become.