

Beaufort County 250 Committee
Revolutionary Retrospectives

*Prevost's March
to Charlestown - 1779*

*Engagements and Operational Maneuvers
from the Savannah River through the
South Carolina Lowcountry and
Back to Savannah*

*By
Richard E Thomas*

SC250
ANNIVERSARY
American Revolution

BEAUFORT COUNTY
SOUTH CAROLINA

Prevost's March to Charlestown - 1779

Engagements and Operational Maneuvers from the Savannah River through the South Carolina Lowcountry and Back to Savannah

The British capture of Savannah on December 29, 1778, fundamentally altered the military situation in the southern states. Georgia's principal port became a British base from which forces could move northward into South Carolina, threaten the communications of the Continental and militia forces defending the Lowcountry, and ultimately place Charlestown itself in danger. During the months that followed, British operations expanded from the Savannah River into Beaufort District and then across the South Carolina Lowcountry. What developed was not simply a collection of isolated skirmishes but a connected campaign in which ferries, bridges, plantations, river crossings, roads, naval movement, and access to provisions shaped military decisions as much as battlefield tactics.

The campaign culminated in Major General Augustine Prevost's rapid march toward Charlestown in the spring of 1779. Although Prevost failed to capture the city, his advance demonstrated the vulnerability of the South Carolina Lowcountry and foreshadowed the much larger British campaign that would capture Charlestown the following year. The operations also produced a succession of engagements involving many of the best-known officers of the Southern Department, including Benjamin Lincoln, William Moultrie, Francis Marion, John Laurens, Casimir Pulaski, Lachlan McIntosh, John Maitland, and Prevost himself.

The Port Royal Diversion

British operations north of Savannah began almost immediately. On January 1, 1779, Lieutenant Colonel Archibald Campbell moved toward Zubly's Ferry on the Savannah River. Campbell, commanding elements that included light infantry of the 71st Regiment, used deception to obtain boats needed for crossing operations. Patriot raiders from Beaufort District and Georgia had captured Loyalist slaves on the south side of the river and were in the process of ferrying them across. By giving a trusted black servant a musket and having him run to the Georgia shore saying that more escapees wanted to join the refugees, the Patriots thought that they could only enrich their venture by returning. Hiding in ambush near the riverbank, at the sound of a pre-arranged signal, the British leapt out and surprised the raiders, killing several and capturing not only the stolen slaves but the boats for transporting their number across. Campbell's force secured the craft without further incident. The episode involved little conventional combat and produced no reported military casualties, but British forces recovered or seized eighty-three enslaved people. The incident demonstrated from the outset how military operations in the Lowcountry were inseparable from the region's enslaved population and plantation economy.

Later that month, Augustine Prevost ordered a more ambitious diversion into Beaufort District. A force of approximately 200 British regulars, principally from the 16th and 60th Regiments and commanded by Major William - sometimes identified as Valentine - Gardiner, sailed toward Port Royal Island. The expedition was intended to distract American attention from operations farther inland and test Patriot defenses around Beaufort.

The threat was taken seriously. Brigadier General William Moultrie moved approximately 300 South Carolina troops toward Beaufort, assisted by local militia under Brigadier General Stephen Bull. The British expedition reached the Port Royal area at the end of January and beginning of February.

The expeditionary force under Gardiner towed a dismantled schooner serving as a troop transport and gun platform by rowed longboats through the shifting and hazardous channels in the inland passage behind Daufuskie and Hilton Head Islands into Port Royal Sound. Some scholars believe that Gardiner was led through the shoals by Beaufort Loyalist Andrew DeVeaux, IV, a former Patriot turned against the cause due to family conflict with neighbor Stephen Bull, commander of the Beaufort District militia forces. After raiding on Hilton Head and Pinckney Islands for two days, the force proceeded up the Broad River to Euhaw Creek and the land and home of Declaration of Independence signer Thomas Heyward, Jr at his Whitehall Plantation,

Plundering the Heyward property and nearby, on February 2 Gardiner landed his troops on Port Royal Island near Laurel Bay, apparently on or near DeVeaux property. His men then moved through the countryside, raiding Patriot plantations. Their primary target was the property of General Stephen Bull, whose house was plundered and burned. A British detachment, likely under recently arrived Captain Banastre Tarleton, also attempted to threaten the strategically important Port Royal Ferry crossing, which controlled the principal land route connecting Port Royal Island with the mainland, but found it well defended by militia and failed to seize it.

The Americans responded quickly. Local forces associated with Captain John DeTreville and the defenses around Fort Lyttelton joined the developing resistance, while Moultrie and Bull concentrated their forces between the British landing area and Beaufort.

On February 3 the opposing forces met at a slight rise called Grays Hill in what became the Battle of Port Royal Island. Gardiner commanded roughly 200 British regulars; Moultrie and Bull had approximately 300 Patriot troops, including a “handful of Continental soldiers”, a company of about 20 Jewish soldiers from Charleston, several African-American drummers and matrosses, and two signers of the Declaration of Independence, including Heyward whose home had been burned two days earlier..

The engagement developed into an organized artillery and infantry action along both sides of the Old Shell Road, which lasted approximately forty-five minutes. American artillery and musketry proved effective, the British were unable to break Moultrie’s position, and as ammunition was running out on both sides, Gardiner ordered his force to withdraw toward its boats at the same time Moultrie was giving the order to prepare for withdrawal to his troops.

Casualty estimates vary considerably. Moultrie reported six to eight Americans killed and approximately fifteen wounded. Some modern estimates place total American casualties at approximately thirty, including ten killed, and British losses at fifty-two, while other accounts suggest British casualties may have reached seventy-five. Whatever the exact figures, the engagement was significant enough to compel the British expedition to abandon its immediate objective and retreat from Port Royal Island.

The action deserves recognition as a battle rather than merely a skirmish. Both sides committed organized bodies of troops under general or field-grade officers; infantry maneuvers and artillery were employed in sustained combat; casualties were substantial in relation to the numbers engaged; and the engagement produced a clear tactical decision. The British withdrew from the battlefield and subsequently abandoned the expedition.

The victory temporarily secured Beaufort and Port Royal Island, but it did not eliminate the larger British threat.

Brier Creek and the Strategic Opening

The military situation shifted dramatically a month later at Brier Creek in Georgia. Major General Benjamin Lincoln, commander of the American Southern Department, sought to regain the initiative by operating against British positions in Georgia. Brigadier General John Ashe of North Carolina was stationed near Brier Creek with a force that included North Carolina militia and Continental troops.

On March 3, British forces executed a skillful maneuver against Ashe. Lieutenant Colonel Mark Prevost led the principal British striking force while Lieutenant Colonel William Macpherson conducted diversionary activity. Archibald Campbell had helped devise the broader operation. By maneuvering around the American position and approaching unexpectedly, the British caught Ashe's army before it could establish an effective defense.

Brigadier General Samuel Elbert of Georgia attempted to organize resistance, and approximately 900 Americans formed for battle, but the position rapidly collapsed under British pressure. Many of the militia fled toward the creek and surrounding swamps. Others were trapped against the water, where some drowned attempting to escape.

British casualties were remarkably light—approximately five killed and eleven wounded. American losses were devastating. Roughly 150 were killed and approximately 227 captured, with over 85 additional men drowned or dispersed. Total American losses are often placed around 450. Brier Creek effectively destroyed a substantial portion of the American force operating in Georgia. More importantly, it restored British freedom of movement. Lincoln still commanded a sizable army, but he now faced the difficult problem of protecting South Carolina while attempting to recover Georgia.

In mid-April, Lincoln moved approximately 3,000 men northward toward Augusta, hoping to threaten British communications and perhaps draw the enemy away from the lower Savannah River. The decision left the approaches to the South Carolina Lowcountry dangerously exposed. Approximately 1,200 troops, many of them militia, remained scattered through the Purysburg—Black Swamp area under Moultrie and other commanders. Augustine Prevost recognized the opportunity.

Across the Savannah and Into Beaufort District – Purysburg

On April 28–29, Prevost crossed the Savannah River into South Carolina with approximately 2,400 to 3,000 British, Loyalist, and allied troops. What may initially have been intended as a large-scale foraging expedition quickly developed into something much more ambitious.

The American defenses around Purysburg were too weak to oppose the crossing effectively. Colonel John Stewart of the 5th South Carolina Regiment was positioned at Purysburg, while Moultrie operated farther north around Black Swamp. Colonel Lachlan McIntosh commanded troops in the immediate area but had only a few hundred men available, who were camped loosely south of town at a bend in the river, to contest Prevost's advance. A British advance force of about 300, led silently by Creek warriors through a swamp – which was thought to be impassable by the Americans – located immediately to the north of the Patriot camp, surprised the sleeping men just before dawn.

Rather than allow his small force to be enveloped or destroyed, McIntosh withdrew. Lieutenant Colonel Francis Marion and Colonel John Stewart played important roles in the hurried retreat providing a rear guard for the fleeing troops as the British advanced. There was no major battle at Purysburg and no reliable casualty figure, but strategically the withdrawal opened the road into Beaufort District.

A Stand at Coosawhatchie

Moultrie attempted to collect his scattered forces while maintaining contact with the advancing British. The Coosawhatchie River crossing was the greatest natural obstacle in the path of the Kings Highway as it led to Charlestown and it presented the most favorable terrain for defense or delay. By May 1 he had reached Coosawhatchie, where he was joined by retreating elements from Purysburg. Recognizing that Prevost's army was too strong to confront directly, Moultrie moved his main body about two miles to the east, toward the high ground at Tulifinny Hill and established a field headquarters there. He left approximately 100 handpicked men to watch the bridge at the Coosawhatchie and delay the British.

During the same period, scattered clashes occurred around Turkey Hill near the Savannah River. These encounters were primarily Patriot rear-guard and British foraging actions not far from the Savannah crossing rather than formal battles. They nevertheless slowed the British and provided intelligence about the direction and strength of Prevost's advance. No dependable casualty totals survive.

Prevost now had a major operational decision to make. He could return toward Savannah after gathering supplies, or he could continue deeper into South Carolina. The weakness of the opposition encouraged him to advance.

Laurens at Coosawhatchie

One of the most notable actions of the march occurred at Coosawhatchie on May 3. Moultrie needed to determine the strength and intentions of the British vanguard and sent a detachment of approximately 350 men toward the crossing to retrieve the rear guard unit he had left there earlier.

Lieutenant Colonel John Laurens volunteered for the mission. Laurens, the son of former Continental Congress president Henry Laurens, was already well known for his service on George Washington's staff and for his advocacy of arming enslaved African Americans in return for freedom. Accompanying him were officers including Major John Barnwell Jr. and Captain William Hazzard Wigg, together with Beaufort District militia cavalry and other troops.

The British advance guard was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel John Maitland, one of the most capable British officers operating in the southern theater.

Rather than escort the river guard back to Tulifinny Hill as ordered by Moultrie, Laurens decided to take his force, now numbering 450, and dig in to oppose the advance. His aggressive decision exposed the detachment to a much stronger enemy. Behind hastily erected defenses on the eastern bank of the river, they faced the British force of 2000 who had taken cover in and among the houses on the western bank. The Redcoats poured disciplined rifle and cannon fire on the virtually defenseless Americans at point blank range across the river. Fighting became sharp, and Laurens was wounded severely in the arm while his horse was shot beneath him.

As Laurens lay wounded on the battlefield, William Hazzard Wigg, on his 18-hand, Roan warhorse Independence, so named because he was born on July 4, 1776, hauled Laurens up onto his saddle and galloped him to the field hospital Moultrie had established at Tulifinny Hill. Undergoing treatment, Laurens told Moultrie that it would be futile to try to oppose the overwhelming number in Prevost's column without the benefit of well-prepared defenses.

Laurens's action failed to halt the British advance, but it provided Moultrie with valuable information. Maitland's force was not simply conducting a minor raid. Prevost's army was continuing eastward in strength. Moultrie therefore abandoned the idea of making a major stand at Tulifinny. On May 4 he withdrew rather than risk having his smaller force trapped or destroyed. Again, there was no significant casualty return because the movement was primarily strategic rather than a major engagement.

The Americans lost three killed and eight wounded. British casualties appear to have been light, although no reliable total survives.

The Race Across the Lowcountry – Salkehatchie and Fishpond Bridge

The campaign now became a race toward Charlestown. Prevost advanced through a landscape divided by tidal rivers, swamps, creeks, and narrow causeways. Moultrie attempted to delay him without allowing the Patriot force to become decisively engaged.

At the Salkehatchie on May 5–6, Moultrie's rear guard damaged the bridge to slow Maitland's advance. British troops repaired the crossing and continued forward. Major Pierce Butler operated with the American rear guard and became involved in an action against a British foraging or mounted party in the vicinity of Bull property and the road toward Roupell's Ferry. The fighting was limited, and no trustworthy casualty total survives, but such encounters imposed cumulative delays on the British column.

At Fishpond Bridge on May 7 another mounted American party struck elements of the British advance. Contemporary accounts indicate that an Indian accompanying the British and two other men were wounded. The engagement was small, but it exemplifies the continual harassment that accompanied Prevost's march. Another poorly documented encounter occurred around Horse Shoe or Ashpoo, where local militia confronted British foragers or advance troops. Casualties are unknown.

By May 8 the British reached Parker's Ferry. Although sometimes included in engagements associated with the campaign, Parker's Ferry was principally an operational halt rather than a major battle. American troops, including elements associated with Francis Marion, watched the British movement and sought opportunities to delay or harass the column, while Prevost rested and reorganized his army before continuing toward Charlestown. No significant combat casualties are known from the stop itself.

It is important not to conflate this 1779 engagement at Parkers Ferry with the August 30, 1781 encounter in which Marion's 445 men set an ambush along the road leading to the ferry crossing, killing over 125 British and wounding another 80.

The cumulative effect of these 1779 withdrawals and small delaying actions was important. Moultrie could not defeat Prevost in open battle, but neither did the South Carolina force disintegrate. Bridges were damaged, crossings contested, detachments harassed, and information carried ahead toward Charlestown. Every delay gave the city additional time to prepare.

The Ashley River and Pulaski's Legion

By May 11 Prevost was approaching the defenses of Charlestown. One of the final significant clashes occurred near the Ashley River ferry. Ordered by General Benjamin Lincoln to guard the crossing and the main road into Charlestown, Brigadier General Casimir Pulaski, the Polish cavalry officer serving the American cause, led his Legion against the British vanguard. Pulaski attempted to establish an ambush, but the position was at least partly discovered before it could be fully executed.

The British advance, most often associated with Lieutenant Colonel Mark Prevost, attacked aggressively and drove Pulaski's troops back. Among those killed was Colonel Michael Kovats, an experienced Hungarian cavalry officer who had helped shape American mounted forces and was serving with Pulaski. Casualty figures are disputed. One working chronology places British losses at approximately forty-five and American losses at thirty. Other accounts estimate thirty to forty Americans killed, wounded, or captured while assigning lower casualties to the British. Whatever the precise numbers, the engagement demonstrated that the British had reached the immediate approaches to Charlestown. Yet Prevost's opportunity was disappearing almost as quickly as it had appeared.

Prevost "At the Gates of" Charlestown

When the British first approached, Charlestown was vulnerable. South Carolina officials, including Governor John Rutledge, feared that the city might not be able to resist a determined

assault. Moultrie and other officers worked urgently to strengthen the defenses while militia and Continental detachments arrived.

Prevost briefly possessed considerable psychological leverage. Negotiations took place, and the possibility of surrender was seriously discussed. But the strategic situation was changing by the hour. Benjamin Lincoln, having learned of the British movement, was marching rapidly back toward the coast. American strength around Charlestown increased. Prevost lacked the heavy siege equipment necessary for a prolonged attack against prepared defenses, and his army had marched a considerable distance through hostile territory, while its communications with Savannah were increasingly vulnerable. A direct assault now carried serious risks. If Prevost became fixed before Charlestown while Lincoln approached from the rear, the British army might itself be trapped.

Then Prevost received word that Lincoln and 6000 men on land, and a French fleet from the West Indies by sea, were on the way to attempt to recapture the city of Savannah, the only true existing British stronghold in the South. Weighing all the options and known situation, sometime on May 12–13, Prevost abandoned the immediate attempt against Charlestown and began withdrawing southwestward. There was no single battle marking the decision and consequently no discrete casualty return. Nevertheless, the withdrawal represented the strategic turning point of the expedition. Charlestown had survived.

Prevost did not simply retrace his inland route. Instead, the British moved through the sea islands and coastal waterways, to where Royal Navy might provide support, access to boats and greater security. However, though he requested ships and boats to aid the return to Savannah from General Clinton, none ever came. He would have to execute a complex withdrawal through the sea island and across tidal rivers without adequate amphibious equipment.

Withdrawal Through the Sea Islands

The retreat produced a new phase of the campaign. British troops moved onto the islands southwest of Charlestown, using waterways as defensive barriers while gathering provisions and maintaining communications with naval vessels.

On May 20 a particularly violent episode occurred at Mathews Plantation on Johns Island. Captain James Doharty was in command of an American detachment while Captain Edward Barnwell was temporarily absent. British troops surprised the position in a night attack.

Doharty was killed. Sixteen-year-old Robert Barnwell was severely wounded several times but survived. Edward Barnwell and other Patriots were captured, and some were subsequently confined aboard the prison ship *Pack Horse*. Precise American and British casualty totals remain uncertain, but the action demonstrated the vulnerability of small Patriot detachments operating among the islands.

The British continued consolidating their position around Stono Ferry. Here Maitland established a fortified bridgehead protecting the British withdrawal route. The position included earthworks

and was supported by disciplined regular troops, including the 71st Highlanders, Hessian elements, and Loyalists.

Lincoln recognized an opportunity to attack before the British completed their withdrawal.

Stono Ferry

On June 20, Lincoln advanced against Maitland at Stono Ferry with approximately 1,200 to 1,500 men. The American force included Continental troops, militia, and cavalry and represented one of the largest engagements of the campaign.

Lincoln organized his attack in two principal wings under Brigadier Generals Isaac Huger and Jethro Sumner. Pulaski's cavalry and other troops were held for mobile support. Lieutenant Colonel William Henderson commanded light infantry, while Colonel William "Danger" Thomson of the 3rd South Carolina Regiment and officers such as Daniel Horry and Thomas Pinckney participated in the action.

Maitland commanded the British defenses. Among the British and Loyalist officers associated with the position were Duncan McPherson and John Hamilton.

The Americans advanced against prepared works in difficult terrain. Initially they made progress, driving in British outposts and pressing toward the fortifications. Fighting became intense as the Patriot lines approached the main British position.

Maitland's disciplined troops held. British counterattacks and concentrated fire eventually checked the American advance. Lincoln, recognizing that continued attacks would produce increasingly heavy casualties without guaranteeing success, ordered a withdrawal.

American losses were substantial: approximately thirty-four killed, 113 wounded, and 155 missing, producing a total of roughly 302 casualties depending upon how the missing are classified. British losses were approximately twenty-six killed, ninety-three wounded, and one missing.

Among the American officers mortally wounded was Colonel Owen Roberts, a prominent South Carolina artillery officer. His loss was particularly significant to the state's military establishment.

Stono Ferry was tactically a British victory because Maitland retained the position and repelled Lincoln's attack. Strategically, however, the British were already committed to withdrawing from the Charlestown area. The battle protected that withdrawal rather than reversing it.

Through St. Helena Sound and Back to Beaufort

Despite Prevost's movement to the coastal islands, Royal Navy support, though requested, did not materialize. The known approach of a French fleet from the West Indies was accorded higher priority, so the British retreat through the coastal islands had consequences extending far beyond

conventional military casualties. Large numbers of enslaved people left plantations and followed or sought protection from British forces, hoping that British occupation offered a path toward freedom.

As British forces moved southward through St. Helena Sound in early July, hundreds of these people were concentrated on islands and along the coastal route. Around July 7–9, in the vicinity of Otter Island, given the absence of adequate boat transport across St Helena Sound, supplies and formerly enslaved refugees had to be abandoned or stranded when the British continued their movement. The resulting humanitarian catastrophe was severe. Disease, hunger, exposure, and the inability to obtain transportation caused deaths described in contemporary and later accounts as numbering in the hundreds, although an exact figure cannot be established. These deaths do not appear in conventional battlefield casualty returns, but they were among the most serious human consequences of the campaign. Bleached white human bones littered the beaches of Otter Island as late as 1795.

By July 17 the British occupied Beaufort with approximately 900 men, perhaps as many as 1,000. Maitland commanded the force, which included a substantial component of the 71st Regiment. The occupation demonstrated how much the strategic situation had changed since February. Five months earlier Moultrie and Bull had defeated Gardiner's expedition and driven the British from Port Royal Island. Now a much larger British force occupied Beaufort as part of a coastal withdrawal supported by naval power. There was no major battle accompanying the occupation and consequently no significant combat casualty return. The British position served instead as a temporary base from which Maitland could protect the southern coastal route, obtain supplies, and maintain communications with Savannah.

The Return to Savannah

During the summer of 1779 the British remained divided between Savannah and their advanced positions along the South Carolina coast. This deployment became increasingly dangerous when a major French fleet under Vice Admiral Charles Hector, Comte d'Estaing, appeared off the coast in September.

The arrival of the French transformed the strategic situation. French troops, ships, and artillery combined with Lincoln's American army to threaten Savannah. British commanders urgently needed every available soldier to defend the city. Maitland therefore received orders to evacuate Beaufort and return to Georgia. His force of roughly 900 men faced a difficult movement through the coastal waterways and islands while French naval power threatened the approaches to Savannah.

The withdrawal was carried out with considerable skill. Maitland moved through the intricate coastal geography across marsh islands and through mud flats and eventually succeeded in reaching Savannah with his troops. Contemporary account state that as a council of war was deciding whether or not to accept terms of surrender, Maitland, his uniform covered with mud and disheveled, burst into the room and slammed his saber on the table vowing to skewer any man who would dare to vote to capitulate. There were no significant combat casualties during the

movement itself, but the strategic consequences were substantial. Maitland's arrival materially strengthened the Savannah garrison just before the Franco-American siege reached its climax.

In October, French and American forces launched a major assault against Savannah. The attack failed with heavy Allied losses numbering over 700, and the British retained the city. Pulaski was killed leading a charge, D'Estaing was severely wounded – later causing him to take his fleet back to France at a sensitive time, and the hero of Sullivan's Island in 1776, Sergeant William Jasper, was killed bearing South Carolina colors as he led the troops up the rampart of the Spring Hill Redoubt. Maitland's return from Beaufort therefore became one of the important links between Prevost's spring campaign and the successful British defense of Savannah in the autumn.



Prevost's March through Beaufort District, marked by yellow boundary lines, and retreat to Savannah is indicated by the red line. Yellow bursts are battles and skirmishes along the route.

Conclusion

Prevost's 1779 march to Charlestown was far more than an unsuccessful raid. It was a sustained operational campaign extending from the Savannah River through Beaufort District and across

the South Carolina Lowcountry to the gates of Charlestown, followed by a prolonged withdrawal through the sea islands, St. Helena Sound, Beaufort, and finally back to Savannah.

The campaign began in an environment already shaped by British probes into South Carolina. Campbell's seizure of boats at Zubly's Ferry and Gardiner's expedition to Port Royal Island demonstrated British willingness to exploit waterways and strike at weakly defended points. Moultrie's victory over Gardiner on February 3 was the first Patriot victory on land against British forces in the war in South Carolina and showed that determined Patriot forces could defeat British regulars when properly concentrated.

Brier Creek then transformed the strategic balance. Mark Prevost's devastating victory over John Ashe weakened American power in Georgia and encouraged Lincoln to move northward, leading Augustine Prevost to exploit the resulting weakness by crossing the Savannah River with between 2,400 and 3,000 troops.

From Purysburg onward, the campaign became a contest between British momentum and American delay. McIntosh, Marion, Stewart, Moultrie, Laurens, Barnwell, Wigg, Butler, Pulaski, Kovats, and numerous local officers participated in the effort to preserve Patriot forces while slowing the British advance. Coosawhatchie, Tulifinny, Salkehatchie, Fishpond Bridge, and the other crossings were individually small actions, but collectively they bought time.

Prevost reached Charlestown but could not convert his rapid advance into the capture of the city. The defenders strengthened their positions while Lincoln returned toward the Georgia coast, leaving Prevost with the prospect of being trapped between the city's defenses and a redirected American army. His decision to withdraw was militarily prudent but marked the failure of the expedition's most ambitious possibility.

The fighting did not end with the withdrawal. The clashes demonstrated the violence of the sea-island phase and the resilience of determined defenders, while Stono Ferry became a major battle in its own right. Maitland's defense there inflicted approximately 300 casualties on Lincoln's attacking force while sustaining roughly 120 British casualties. The campaign also had a profound civilian dimension. Plantations were raided, houses destroyed, food and livestock seized, and enslaved people repeatedly became participants, refugees, laborers, prizes of war, or victims. The deaths associated with Otter Island underline the inadequacy of measuring the campaign solely through military casualty lists.

Operationally, Prevost's march revealed both British strengths and Patriot vulnerabilities. British regulars could move rapidly through the Lowcountry, repair bridges, cross major rivers, live partly from the countryside, and exploit naval mobility. American forces, fragmented among Continental units and militia commands, often lacked the concentration necessary to confront them directly.

Yet the campaign also demonstrated the value of strategic withdrawal, intelligence gathering, local resistance, and delaying tactics. Moultrie's refusal to sacrifice his smaller force in an unnecessary general engagement helped preserve the defenders of Charlestown. Laurens's aggressive reconnaissance at Coosawhatchie, Marion's and Stewart's work during the retreat

from Purrysburg, the destruction and defense of bridges, and the repeated harassment of British detachments all contributed to slowing Prevost sufficiently for the defense of the capital to stiffen.

The British learned from the expedition as well. Prevost's march provided a practical reconnaissance of the roads, waterways, ferries, plantations, and military obstacles between Savannah and Charlestown. When the British returned in overwhelming strength in 1780, they did so with greater resources, strong naval support, siege artillery, and a much more systematic plan. In that sense, the 1779 campaign foreshadowed the successful Charlestown expedition of the following year.

The outcome of Prevost's march was therefore mixed. British forces won several tactical engagements and demonstrated their ability to penetrate deeply into South Carolina. They devastated Patriot positions at Brier Creek, drove American forces from the Savannah River corridor, reached the outskirts of Charlestown, defeated Lincoln at Stono Ferry, and ultimately returned a substantial body of troops to Savannah. But they failed in the campaign's greatest potential achievement. Charlestown remained in American hands. The Patriot army survived. The British advance had been slowed and ultimately turned back.

Seen as a whole, the campaign illustrates the distinctive nature of warfare in the South Carolina Lowcountry. Geography dictated operations. Ferries, causeways, tidal rivers, plantations, bridges, and naval routes were strategic assets. Major battles such as Port Royal Island and Stono Ferry were connected by a chain of smaller actions whose importance lay less in casualties than in the hours and days they gained or lost.

Prevost's march consequently deserves to be understood as a single connected campaign rather than as a miscellaneous collection of Revolutionary War engagements. From the first British movements along the Savannah River through the fighting on Port Royal Island, the catastrophe at Brier Creek, the crossing at Purrysburg, Laurens's stand at Coosawhatchie, Moultrie's retreat through Beaufort District, Pulaski's clash near the Ashley, the confrontation before Charlestown, the battle at Stono Ferry, and Maitland's eventual return to Savannah, each phase influenced the next.

Together they formed one of the most revealing campaigns of the Revolutionary War in the South - a campaign that exposed the strategic importance of Beaufort District, tested South Carolina's defenses, preserved Charlestown for another year, and helped prepare both armies for the far greater struggle that would engulf the Lowcountry in 1780.

Selected Sources and Bibliography

American Battlefield Trust. "Battle of Brier Creek." *American Battlefield Trust*.

American Battlefield Trust. "Battle of Stono Ferry." *American Battlefield Trust*.

Heidler, David S. Studies and reference works concerning the Revolutionary War in South Carolina and the Southern Campaign.

Howard, Joshua B. *Studies of the Revolutionary War in South Carolina and the Southern Campaign*.

Moultrie, William. *Memoirs of the American Revolution, So Far as It Related to the States of North and South Carolina, and Georgia*. 2 vols. New York: David Longworth, 1802.

Norton, Louis Arthur. "The Battle of Beaufort: American Victory on Port Royal Island." *Journal of the American Revolution*, 2018.

O'Kelley, Patrick. *Nothing but Blood and Slaughter: The Revolutionary War in the Carolinas*. Vol. 1. BookLocker.com.

Rowland, Lawrence S., Alexander Moore, and George C. Rogers Jr. *The History of Beaufort County, South Carolina. Volume 1, 1514–1861*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press.

South Carolina Battleground Preservation Trust / Liberty Trail. Historical materials relating to Coosawhatchie, Tulifinny, and Revolutionary War operations in the South Carolina Lowcountry.

South Carolina Lowcountry Tourism Commission / South Carolina 250. Historical materials concerning Revolutionary War sites and events in Beaufort District.

The American Revolution in South Carolina. Carolana historical reference materials.

Wilson, David K. *The Southern Strategy: Britain's Conquest of South Carolina and Georgia, 1775–1780*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2005.