

Beaufort County 250 Committee
Revolutionary Retrospectives

Revolutionary Naval Warfare Along the Southern Coast Centered In Beaufort District

A Complete Chronology

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SC 250 ANNIVERSARY American Revolution | BEAUFORT COUNTY SOUTH CAROLINA

NAVAL WARFARE ALONG THE SOUTHERN COAST 1775–1782

Between 1775 and 1782, the coastal waters stretching from Charleston through Beaufort and Savannah to St. Augustine became a remarkably active theater of Revolutionary War naval warfare. Unlike the great fleet engagements of the Atlantic, this was largely a war of shallow rivers, tidal creeks, winding channels, sounds, and coastal estuaries, fought by an extraordinary assortment of vessels. State navies operated armed galleys and smaller gunboats, while state-commissioned privateer galleys, privately owned merchant privateers, scout boats, barges, schooners, sloops, and armed launches carried the conflict into waterways inaccessible to larger warships.

The main and most effective instruments of war were South Carolina's shallow-draft naval galleys. They were particularly well suited to this geography and environment. Combining sail power, oar power, and capable of mounting relatively heavy cannon, they could maneuver independently of the wind, navigate confined waterways, exploit tidal conditions, and bring formidable firepower against vessels considerably larger than themselves. Their captains and crews understood the intricate geography and submarine terrain of the Lowcountry's waterways, where local knowledge could prove even more valuable than superior armament.

The result was a distinctive form of naval warfare in which conventional advantages of size, broadside weight, and sailing performance were frequently neutralized. In the shallow waters of the southern coast, South Carolina's armed galleys could turn geography into a tactical weapon, challenging British naval superiority through mobility, surprise, and concentrated firepower.

THE OPENING NAVAL WAR IN BEAUFORT DISTRICT 1775–1776

June–July 1775

The naval war in this region begins in Beaufort District, not Savannah. On a spur of land named Bloody Point from the Yemassee ambush and massacre of the citizens' militia lookout camp there in 1728, the newly-formed official district unit of the South Carolina colonial militia and scout boat squadron established their blockhouse and palisaded fort with a clear view of the mouth of the Savannah River and the Southern approaches to the colony's waters.

South Carolina authorities learned that the merchant ship *Philippa*, formerly *Magna Charta*, was bringing a large cargo of gunpowder, arms and ammunition toward Georgia. Captains John Barnwell and John Joyner, the latter an experienced Port Royal-area pilot, were ordered to prepare armed boats at Beaufort. Assembling about forty armed men in two barges/scout boats, they departed Beaufort and landed at Bloody Point on southern Daufuskie Island. Significantly, Bloody Point was being deliberately used as a naval intercept station as early as 1775.

Acting on the same intelligence, Georgia meanwhile converted the merchant schooner *Elizabeth* into the armed schooner *Liberty*, mounting approximately ten carriage guns, apparently six-pounders, plus small arms. Oliver Bowen and Joseph Habersham were associated with her command.

July 7–10, 1775 - The *Philippa* Affair

Philippa, about 270 tons, Captain Richard Maitland, arrived off Tybee carrying approximately 13,000–16,000 pounds of gunpowder, small arms, musket balls and 700 weight of lead sheets. Royal Navy schooner *St. John.* under Lt. William Grant. had been in the vicinity, but the appearance of the Patriot *Liberty* and the Beaufort boats helped induce Grant to withdraw.

On July 8 Philippa was sighted moving into Beaufort District waters. The scout boats sat in the mouth of Mungin Creek along the southern shore of Daufuskie Island, while *Liberty* positioned herself in Lazaretto Creek behind Tybee Island with a clear view of Daufuskie Island in the distance. The evening of July 8, Philippa set anchor off low-tide Tompkins Island waiting for a pilot to board the next day. When *Philippa* attempted to proceed upriver, *Liberty* signaled her to stop. Maitland saw that the schooner was crowded with armed men and carried ten carriage guns. The Patriots displayed their distinctive, white and red-bordered “Liberty” flag.

With the Beaufort boats approaching his stern and helping to close his options of flight, and with additional Patriot manpower gathering at Tybee, Maitland could not realistically fight his way through. He halted *Philippa*, she was boarded by the Patriots, and the military cargo was seized. Some 5,025 pounds of Georgia's share of the powder and over 4,000 pounds of South Carolina’s share, eventually went north to support the Continental war effort and enabling General George Washington’s army at Boston sustain the siege in progress long enough to force the British evacuation. It was not a trivial incident. It was a strategically important acquisition of munitions at precisely the moment Washington's army desperately needed it and Continental Congress called for contributions from the Colonies.

July–August 1775

South Carolina armed the sloop *Commerce* under Clement Lempriere for the expedition against British powder shipments. She sailed from Charleston on July 26 and reached Beaufort on July 28, where Lempriere landed stores, cleaned/and refitted the vessel, and signed on Beaufort men for the voyage. From Beaufort he was ordered south toward St. Augustine. On August 8 near St. Augustine, he intercepted the brigantine *Betsey* and removed 111 barrels of gunpowder, a half barrel and 37 small kegs of powder (12,000 pounds) plus other military stores. The prize was taken to Charleston to stock and replenish the dwindling Patriot supplies there.

So, within weeks of the *Philippa* affair, Beaufort was already functioning as a naval staging and refitting point for Colonial naval forces.

March 1776 – Battle of the Rice Boats

Following the harsh winter of 1775-76 and the costly Siege of Boston, dwindling food supplies caused the British high command to send a small fleet south to buy provisions from the Loyalist governments there. In late January 1776, the fleet anchored off Tybee Island and sent envoys into Savannah to negotiate for the sale of rice and other commodities. Royal Governor Wright of Georgia was at odds with the increasingly Patriot-dominated Assembly and wanted to stock the Briths ships for their return north. The Assembly ran Wright out of town, and he had to take refuge on one of the ships at Tybee.

Frustrated at their inability to purchase the rice, the commander decided to take it by force. On March 2, the fleet progressed upriver, discharged some troops onto land and attempted to take control of 12 rice boats loaded with grain. The Patriot militia had mounted four cannon on Yamacraw Bluff below the city on the river and they opened fire on the ships. American land forces from both sides of the river converged and three of the British vessels proceeded away from the fire upriver. There they were met by a combined force of about 500 militia from GA and SC who fired form shore and set a boat afire to let it drift downriver to the approaching British ships.

On March 3, the fireship ignited one of the British vessels which also turned into a fire ship while the sailors aboard jumped overboard to swim to land, where they were met by the militia and killed or captured. The remaining Briths ships captured three of the rice boats and turned out to sea, ending what was called the Battle of the Rice Boats

BUILDING THE BEAUFORT–GEORGIA GALLEY SYSTEM 1777–1778

February 28, 1777 - Sloop *Beaufort* ordered to Beaufort

South Carolina's armed sloop *Beaufort* had originally been confiscated for illicit trading among Savannah, Beaufort and St. Augustine. On February 28, 1777, she was ordered to Beaufort so a local shipbuilder identified as Mr. Black (James Black) could refit and complete her. Her eventual armament included: 6 carriage guns and 10 swivel guns.

May 1777 - The *Beaufort Galley*

South Carolina Navy Board documentation establishes a separate vessel to be based in Beaufort, *Beaufort Galley.* under Captain James Dohartie/Doharty. The Navy Board wanted the galley completed before launching and required Doharty to recruit at least twenty seamen. Later in the summer the sloop *Beaufort* was ordered to supply the galley with: cordage, sails, and other naval stores. So by mid-1777 Beaufort had something approaching a small naval station rather than one armed boat.

Later in the summer, after loading with rice at its home port, *Beaufort* was ordered to sail to Hispaniola or another French Caribbean port to sell the rice and purchase: rum, naval stores, and, if money remained, duck cloth for sails. This documented mission indicates that Beaufort was

well integrated into the Caribbean supply network supporting the South Carolina naval establishment.

1777-78 - Privateering expands

South Carolina's Governor issued **37 letters of marque between August 1776 and April 1777 alone**. Contemporary naval histories characterize South Carolina's small navy and privateering establishment as unusually active, implying that the surviving named engagement records almost certainly undercount actual Beaufort–Savannah activities.

April 1778 - British intelligence assesses Beaufort's naval defenses

Patriot Lt. Col. Thomas Brown reported British intelligence that the Beaufort fortification (Fort Lyttleton) carried: 3 × 24-pounders. the remainder of 21 mounted cannon being 9- and 12-pounders, 4 field pieces.\and 2 six-inch cohorn mortars, with approximately fifty artillerymen. Knowledge of the fortification and its strength in specific armaments undoubtedly supported British strategy regarding taking the port and explains the raiding and overland penetration tactics that would follow.

August 16, 1778 - Capture of *Sally*

The British merchant vessel *Sally*, under Captain Samuel Wilkins, was sailing from Jamaica to Glasgow with a cargo of 140 hogsheads of rum when she suffered storm damage and came into Port Royal Sound. She surrendered to Patriot forces near Beaufort on August 16, 1778 and was converted into an American privateer. Four months later she fought a naval engagement at Port Royal.

November 28, 1778 - another South Carolina privateer action

The South Carolina state ship *General Moultrie*, Captain Downham Newton, encountered a Jamaican privateer commanded by a Captain Smith off Port Royal Sound on the South Carolina coast. The vessels fought. Smith reportedly received seven wounds but refused to surrender. Eventually *General Moultrie's* men boarded the British privateer and captured her. This incident is one lone example of the extraordinary density of privateering immediately offshore from Beaufort during precisely the period Stoney and Stone were operating.

1778 - Georgia galley warfare demonstrates the importance of the inside passage

British naval officers complained that American galleys could disappear into the maze of marsh channels and back rivers where deep-draft British vessels could not follow. One British report states explicitly that the marshes were so cut by channels that the American galleys could escape through back rivers at high water and move beyond British reach, and this observation will affect the subsequent conduct of the entire British naval war.

December 16, 1778 - Battle of Port Royal Harbor

The newly acquired American privateer *Sally* was commanded by Captain Benjamin Stone of Beaufort. On December 16 Stone encountered what appeared to be a large British transport at the entrance to Port Royal Harbor. Stone closed to approximately 25 yards. Then the apparent transport revealed armed men concealed aboard. They opened a devastating musket fire into *Sally*. The American casualties were substantial: 6 killed, 12 wounded. Among the dead was Captain Francis Johnson.

With little or no wind, Stone could not maneuver effectively under sail, so the Americans resorted to the differentiating tactic of Lowcountry naval warfare: they rowed the vessel away from the British ship. Stone succeeded in getting *Sally* beyond effective fire and eventually returned to Charleston. The encounter happened only thirteen days before Savannah fell.

The sequence of events surrounding *Sally* appears to have been a remarkable and interconnected naval campaign. August 16, 1778 - British *Sally* captured near Beaufort and converted to Patriot privateer. December 16 - *Sally* fights British vessel in Port Royal Harbor; 18 Americans killed/wounded. December 29 - Savannah falls. December 31 - British supply vessel reportedly captured in St. Helena Sound. January–February 1779 - Gardiner/*Vigilant* counteroffensive moves from Savannah through Hilton Head into Port Royal.

THE BRITISH TAKE SAVANNAH AND STRIKE BEAUFORT 1778–1779

December 29, 1778 — Savannah falls

On December 28, Lt Colonel Archibald Campbell landed about 3,000 British regulars on the coast south of the city, stormed a bluff defended by about 100 Continental soldiers and militia, and with the help of a refugee slave from a nearby plantation, discovered a hidden path through a swamp to come up on the flank and rear of the American defenses. The maneuver resulted in a a partial rout and the main defenses of the city were undermanned, allowing the British to take control of the port. This British capture of Savannah reverses the strategic geography, and Savannah becomes the principal British base from which vessels can move north through the inland passage into Port Royal Sound

December 31, 1778 - British vessel captured in St. Helena Sound

Local Revolutionary chronologies report that a British supply vessel, apparently displaced by weather, entered St. Helena Sound and was captured by Patriots. This incident occurred only two days after Savannah fell. The vessel's name, master, cargo and captors remain to be discovered.

GARDINER'S AMPHIBIOUS EXPEDITION
LATE JANUARY - EARLY FEBRUARY 1779

27 or 28 January 1779 - *Vigilant* leaves Savannah

Major William Gardiner - often incorrectly identified as Valentine Gardiner - commanded the expedition moving 220 Regulars and supplies in eight vessels.to probe Beaufort's western approaches and attempt to take the city if possible. British planners calculated that a diversionary effort at the least would probably hold general Benjamin Lincoln from deploying his force against Savannah.

The most extraordinary naval component was *Vigilant*, an old vessel converted into a floating battery and sufficiently cumbersome that she had to be towed by longboats. Local turncoat Andrew DeVeaux, IV may have assisted as a local pilot or guide to help the British ships avoid the bars and shoals along the way. The expedition carefully followed the inland waterways north.

As a separate amphibious action, the expedition stopped at Hilton Head, where troops landed – possibly as a training exercise in local waters for their Port Royal Island landing - encountered Patriot resistance, and burned property, captured slaves and stole livestock. It is reported that Banastre Tarleton's legion, which had lost most of its horses overboard in the storms enroute from New York, was able to restore most of its mounts in the raids.

January 29-20, Skull Creek and Pinckney Island raids

The flotilla proceeded north, looting and burning plantations along Skull Creek and Pinckney Island for the next two days, establishing this phase of the expedition as a systematic coastal raid preceding an invasion.

From the coast of Pinckney Island the British entered the Broad River system moved north to anchor off Euhaw Creek and send longboats upstream with a raiding party to the plantation of Thomas Heyward Jr, signer of the Declaration of independence. There they burned his home, Whitehall, to the ground, destroyed crops, and stole slaves and livestock. They then crossed Port Royal Sound and anchored near the plantation of General Stephen Bull. Captain Patrick Murray took troops ashore while British vessels bombarded plantation property, and they went ashore on the adjacent land belonging to DeVeaux, plundered and burned Bull's home, and stole food and valuables from other area Patriot homes.

January 31 - Fort Lyttleton abandoned

Captain John DeTreville, knowing of the approach of the British fleet and believing the fort indefensible against the naval force, and unaware of the approach of general Moultrie and his force, ordered its cannon spiked and portions of the works destroyed. The garrison withdrew to join Moultrie as they learned of his arrival as they were withdrawing. The evacuation of the main fort protecting Beaufort meant that the British achieved one of their main naval objectives without firing a shot or besieging the installation.

February 2–3 - Landing and Battle of Port Royal Island

Moultrie's force had crossed from Port Royal Ferry and advanced to Beaufort the day before the British arrived. Knowing of the British landing and raiding near Laurel Bay, Moultrie gathered men from local guard posts and marched with about 300 militia and a handful of Continentals to a position on high ground midway between Port Royal Ferry and the town of Beaufort along the Old Shell Road. There they met Gardiner and his 200 Regulars, and for the first time in the war in South Carolina, Patriots defeated the British on land in an hour-long battle and saved Beaufort from capture. After the battle Gardiner's force retreated toward its landing and naval support.

BRITISH NAVAL OCCUPATION OF BEAUFORT - 1779

March 1779 - *Lee* becomes *Vindictive*

The British galley *Comet* captured the Georgia galley *Lee* off the coast of Savannah. Rather than destroy her, the British incorporated her into their own galley force as *Vindictive.* That vessel subsequently appears at Beaufort and anchors in the bay with its guns offshore of the town.

Summer 1779 - Beaufort becomes a British naval station

Vigilant lay in Beaufort Bay from approximately July through September, where she was joined by *Vindictive* and *Scourge*. *Vigilant* was then dismantled into a shore-and-barge weapons system. Approximately 24 guns were removed from *Vigilant* and some went into earthen batteries around Port Royal Island. Others were mounted aboard large flat-bottomed troop barges, effectively transforming one obsolete floating battery into an entire network of mobile and fixed artillery/

July 23 - British sloop wrecked and burned at Hunting Island

An unnamed British sloop carrying approximately 216 enslaved people taken from the Charleston area to resale in the West Indies grounded near Hunting Island. The crew began unloading supplies and guns. Local Patriot militia sighted the action from the shore and attacked. The sloop was burned, its cargo seized, and more than 200 enslaved people recovered from British control.

July 23 — William Jasper's Savannah River operation

The same day, Sergeant William Jasper and a small Georgia detachment moved up the Savannah River in boats on the lookout for Loyalist raiders who had stolen slaves in Beaufort District. They captured 7 Loyalists and recovered 12 enslaved people who had been carried away.

August 30 — Ash's Point, Daufuskie

Lt. Paul Hamilton led Patriots in boats from Hilton Head across Calibogue Sound against a British/Loyalist picket at Ash's Point. The Patriots amphibious landing at night surprised the

post, killed several defenders and drove off the rest, narrowly missing the capture of the Captain's Guard, who were billeted at the nearby Ash plantation.

THE FRENCH FLEET ARRIVES SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 1779

On September 1, 1779 a large French fleet of approximately 51 ships arrives off Tybee Island from the West Indies to aid the American army in an attempt to retake Savannah. Between Savannah and Beaufort communications became extremely hazardous once d'Estaing controlled the approaches. American forces intercepted at least one set of British instructions in the Skull Creek region. The ordinary water route was effectively cut, but D'Estaing did not deploy any of his ships to monitor the inland route as he assumed general Lincoln's forces would patrol that channel … which they did with the established scout boat network.

September 12 - Maitland evacuates Beaufort

The British garrison under Lt. Col. John Maitland, left when General Augustine Prevost moved his army from Charles Town to Savannah earlier that year, numbered roughly 900 men. Prevost had advised Maitland of the French approach as of Sep 3, but when recall orders arrived, Beaufort Bay suddenly filled with embarking troops. They boarded *Vigilant*, *Scourge*, *Vindictive* and smaller craft

Maitland reached the southern end of Daufuskie on the evening of September 16 but found the normal Savannah River route controlled by the French. According to early Georgia histories, the local Black fishermen revealed that small boats could pass through Wall's Cut via Skull Creek at high tide. A favorable tide and heavy fog concealed the movement, but the way was blocked by numerous marshes, mud flats and shoals that had to be crossed, and going was slow. British naval dispositions specifically placed *Comet*, a galley, and *Keppel*, an armed brig, below Mud Flat to protect Maitland's movement "from Port Royal, through Wall's Cut."

As accounts tell, as Prevost's council of war is assembled in Savannah the afternoon of September 17, debating whether to accept the terms of surrender offered by D'Estaing, Maitland, normally a reserved and properly attired British officer, bursts into the room, his uniform covered in plough mud, and slams his sword down on the table stating that anyone voting to surrender will face the wrath of his sword The arrival of those approximately 900 men materially strengthened Savannah just as d'Estaing was demanding its surrender.

The siege ensues until, following a disastrous assault on October 9 in which over 1,000 casualties are sustained by the Allies, between October 18 and 20 D'Estaing's fleet and Lincoln's army withdraw and the French fleet moves northward to obtain medical care for D'Estaing.

THE HILTON HEAD NAVAL ACTION - SEPTEMBER 24, 1779

Experiment approaches Hilton Head

HMS *Experiment* under Sir James Wallace was carrying General George Garth, military funds and substantial supplies. On September 24 at Hilton Head she encountered a cartel that reported roughly twenty sail nearby. At 3:45 p.m. three large vessels appeared and gave pursuit. At about 4:30 two more appeared from the west. Wallace attempted to escape northeastward. At approximately 8 p.m., the pursuers raised French colors. *Sagittaire* closed and delivered two broadsides. Wallace initially managed to pull away but *Experiment* was ultimately disabled and captured by the French squadron.

During the same action the French ship *Cérès* captured a merchant vessel sailing under *Experiment*'s protection and the Hilton Head action involved multiple captures, not merely *Experiment*.

From September 25 onward, American galleys attempt to bombard Savannah American galleys entered the Savannah River and shelled British positions. A British battery near Trustees' Garden drove them back. Given the American harassment and unable to contest d'Estaing at sea, the British transformed vessels into defensive obstacles. Ships including *Rose*, *Savannah* and transports were sunk in the channel. A boom further obstructed the river, and naval artillery and sailors were transferred ashore to strengthen Savannah's fortifications.

February 1780 - Port Royal Island reoccupied

British troops again occupied Port Royal Island during Clinton's Charleston campaign, commandeering horses and provisions

THE PRIVATEER WAR REVIVES - 1781

April 14, 1781 - Howell and McCleur capture *Britannia*

American privateer captains John Howell and John McCleur of Georgia learned that the British ship *Britannia* lay at the mouth of the Great Ogeechee River. At night they rowed their privateers alongside with muffled oars, grappled the ship, boarded and demanded surrender. The British captain, Wade, was ashore with a boat crew. *Britannia*, loaded with rice for the West Indies, surrendered.

April 24 - *Cormorant* attempts to recapture *Britannia*

While Howell was off Doboy Sound with his prize, the British *Cormorant* under Captain McEvoy appeared. *Britannia* could not escape and struck. But while British boats were approaching to take possession, Howell ran down on them and opened fire, forcing them away. He then slipped *Britannia*'s cable and moved her close inshore toward Blackbeard Island.Unable to defend the prize indefinitely, Howell eventually burned *Britannia*, paroled the prisoners, and landed them on the island. \

June 4 - Howell's Sunbury raid

Howell entered Sunbury inlet and encountered a Black fisherman who told him that British civil and military officers were dining with customs collector Mr. Kitchins in celebration of the King's birthday. Howell selected 12 men. With muffled oars, they passed Fort George unnoticed at night. At approximately 11 p.m., Howell surrounded Kitchins's house and captured 12 British officials/officers, including Colonel Roger Kelsall. Howell then escaped back downriver without loss.

August 1781 - capture of the brigantine *Dispatch*

A British armed brigantine, ***Dispatch***, associated with the Savannah–Charleston communications system, was captured by Beaufort privateers in the **Coosaw River** area. Modern reconstruction describes her as approximately a **12-gun vessel**.

September 18, 1781 - *Dunmore* versus Braddock's galleys

The 12-gun brigantine *Dunmore*, Captain Caldeleugh, departed Sunbury for Jamaica. Immediately after crossing the bar she was attacked by two American galleys, one commanded by Captain Braddock. A close action continued for approximately four hours. *Dunmore* escaped but was so badly damaged she had to enter Savannah for repairs. When she resumed her voyage, Braddock attacked her again. Again she escaped.

October 20 - American galley *Tyger* lost off Hilton Head

The American galley *Tyger* under Captain McCumber was caught in a gale off Hilton Head. She capsized or was lost. Two crewmen drowned. Thirty survived in two small boats. Early the next morning a passing galley under Captain John Howell noticed the boats and the thirty survivors joined privateer captain John Howell.

That afternoon, they captured two schooners loaded with rice and carrying thirty enslaved people bound for the West Indies. But before Howell could remove the prizes, British Captain Scallan appeared with one galley, two boats and approximately 60 men. Howell could not defend both schooners. He therefore set them on fire and escaped in his boats with the thirty enslaved people. Scallan's men concentrated on saving the vessels and succeeded in extinguishing the fires. The diversion gave Howell time to escape

Royal Navy records show Lieutenant M. Scallion/Scallan was commanding the 8-gun HM Galley *Arbuthnot* by 1782. And *Arbuthnot* later participated in the destruction of Sunbury, Georgia, during the British withdrawal in April 1782. This makes it highly likely that the galley with which Scallan attacked Howell's force at Hilton Head in October 1781 was *Arbuthnot* or a vessel immediately preceding his formal command of her.

The increasing frequency of British and Loyalist shipping and naval traffic in the period of British control in the Lowcountry drove and increase in the volume of both state and private vessels disrupting British shipping and taking valuable plunder from those ships.

HILTON HEAD-DAUFUSKIE CIVIL WAR
OCTOBER-DECEMBER 1781

October 19 - British/Loyalist raids on Hilton Head

In response to two earlier incidents in which Patriot and Loyalist leaders were attacked at their homes in early 1781, local chronologies record British/Loyalist retaliatory raids on Hilton Head on the very day Cornwallis surrendered at Yorktown. These operations formed part of an increasingly vicious island-to-island partisan struggle that depended on amphibious tactics..

October 22 - Broad Creek Ambush / Charles Davant

Three days after the Skull Creek raids, a report was received that more raids would come that night from the British-Loyalist militia from Daufuskie Island. The Hilton Head Patriot militia mounted two patrols that night from the muster house at the headwaters of Broad Creek. Having not sighted any approaching threats, the patrols returned and disbanded. Two members, Charles Davant and Michael Andrews/Andress, were neighbors, so they rode together to the far side of the creek to their homes. When they reached Big Gate, the cattle gate blocking the entrance to the western bank road along Broad Creek, shots rang out as Davant leaned down to unlatch it.

British Major Maxwell and regulars for Savannah along with Loyalist militia from Daufuskie under Captain Philip Martinangele had rowed with muffled oars in the darkness up Broad Creek and set up an ambush, Davant was mortally wounded but managed to hang onto his horse as it galloped the nearly two miles to his home, Two Oaks. As he lay in his wife's arms, with his dying breath he uttered "Get Martinangele" as he had glimpsed his assassin at the ambush. It would lead to a retaliation two months later.

On December 23, Hilton Head Patriots crossed Calibogue Sound to Daufuskie, and targeted Loyalist Philip Martinangel, Captain of the Daufuskie Royal Militia, and executed him at or near Bloody Point.

DEVEAUX AND THE LATE GALLEY WAR
1781-82

Andrew DeVeaux's Royal Foresters were given access to captured British-service galleys including HMS *Adder* and HMS *Scourge*.

Adder was an 8-gun Royal Navy galley**,** and her commander in this period was Lieutenant James Every. An original ordnance order dated 29 November 1781 directs Royal Artillery commissary George Wray to issue guns, ammunition and stores to "Lieut. James Every" for "His Majesty's Armed Galley *Adder* under his Command."

This is important because *Adder* was not merely a vessel casually loaned to DeVeaux. She was a commissioned Royal Navy galley with a naval lieutenant commanding her. DeVeaux's Royal

Foresters could be transported or supported by her, but Every's naval command was superior unless DeVeaux would happen to be aboard.

The muster evidence shows Every commanding her from 1780 through 1783 and reveals something extraordinary about her manpower: during July 1782 at least thirteen enslaved men who escaped Patriot owners, recorded under names including Quash, Ned, Billy, Harry, Sam, Caesar, Joco, Jacob, Snow, London, George, Jack and Bristol**,** entered *Adder*. The galley normally had only about eighteen to twenty men at this stage, so Black sailors and oarsmen could constitute a very large portion of her effective manpower. Royal Navy muster evidence independently confirms both vessels and shows that Black maritime labor was important aboard them. There is also an 83-year-old sailor, Joseph George**,** recorded serving aboard *Adder* in 1782. That tells us something about the desperate manpower conditions under which these late-war British galleys operated

The British muster record indicates that *Scourge* was operating in the southern theater in 1779–80 and employed substantial numbers of Black maritime workers. Twenty-seven enslaved shipwrights/caulkers are documented working aboard her, and the Port Royal archaeological survey independently places *Scourge* at Beaufort in 1779, together with *Vigilant* and *Vindictive*. So, *Scourge* had a long connection with the Beaufort station rather than suddenly appearing with DeVeaux in 1782.

February–March 1782: The Port Royal Sound Galley Campaign

By early 1782 the British strategic position was deteriorating badly. Savannah remained British, but General Anthony Wayne was constricting the garrison and attempting to deprive it of rice, livestock and forage. The Savannah River rice plantations therefore became military objectives.

Andrew DeVeaux's Royal Foresters were exceptionally useful because DeVeaux knew the Savannah–Beaufort water system intimately and specialized in waterborne raiding.

February 24 - DeVeaux surprises Edward Barnwell

Sent from Beaufort by General Stephen Bull, Colonel Edward Barnwell led a detachment of Beaufort District militia toward the lower Savannah River plantations to prevent British/Loyalist forces from obtaining rice. On the causeway leading to the fields, DeVeaux surprised Barnwell's detachment. Reported Patriot losses were 6 killed and 5 captured. It was not an isolated inland skirmish as is sometimes suggested. Its objective was control of the rice supply feeding British Savannah.

February 26–27 — Wayne strikes the Savannah rice resources

Wayne's forces simultaneously attacked the British provisioning system closer to Savannah. On February 26 Colonel James Jackson, with about thirty mounted men, drove in a British picket and destroyed Governor James Wright's rice barn, approximately half a mile southeast of Savannah. The objective was straightforward: deny Savannah rice and forage before the British

could remove it. Barnwell and DeVeaux's fighting farther north belonged to the same struggle over the lower Savannah agricultural supply system.

DEVEAUX'S BEAUFORT EXPEDITION - MARCH 1782

Instead of remaining on the defensive around Savannah, he carried the war back into Beaufort District. His expedition consisted of approximately two galleys, one sloop and approximately 80 Loyalist troops. With Barnwell's 60 men still at the Savannah River rice plantations with Wayne, He entered Beaufort on March 4, 1782 and seized the town. Contemporary chronologies generally give an occupation extending approximately to March 25,

Mid-March - two American galleys destroyed

The Savannah *Royal Gazette* reportedly records members of the Royal Militia destroying two American galleys on Port Royal Island.

March 13 - *Adder* and the recapture of a British schooner near Beaufort

The modern Beaufort chronology identifies a naval action involving ***Adder*** and a vessel rendered variously as ***Scavenger***, with a British schooner retaken near Beaufort.

March 15 - DeVeaux ambushed

A Loyalist ship grounded n Station Creek just landward of Bay Point and DeVeaux rode with a party to retrieve the ship. As operations were underway, a Patriot raiding party approached from their rear and ambushed the group.

FINAL BRITISH FORAGING OPERATIONS AUGUST–SEPTEMBER 1782

August 1782 - British flotilla enters the Combahee

British forces were increasingly confined to coastal bases and desperately needed food. A naval/army expedition moved into the Combahee River to collect rice and provisions from plantations. The Combahee flotilla reportedly consisted of 18 vessels, including *Balfour*, *Shark*, another galley, three brigantines and other craft, supporting roughly 300 British regulars and 200 Loyalists. This culminated in the actions around Tar Bluff and Combahee Ferry

August 27 - Combahee / Laurens

American forces attempted to interfere with the British withdrawal and foraging operation. Colonel John Laurens was killed during the fighting. British galleys and transports remained essential to extracting the foraging parties and their supplies.

PORT ROYAL FERRY - SEPTEMBER 1, 1782

After the Combahee operation, Gist pursued Brereton toward Port Royal Ferry. British galleys *Balfour and Shark* guarded the crossing. Gist brought up a six-pounder; both galleys slipped their anchors under fire, but *Balfour* grounded. Her crew hastily spiked her guns and abandoned her. The Patriots captured the vessel together with beef, rice and poultry**,** repaired her, armed her with two nine-pounders**,** and placed her under Lieutenant Adams**;** *Shark* escaped.

THE EVACUATIONS

July 11, 1782 - British evacuate Savannah

By summer the British position in Georgia was untenable. The evacuation of Savannah ended nearly four years of British occupation. Loyalists, soldiers, officials, enslaved people and refugees left by ship.

Autumn 1782 - remaining coastal foraging and evacuation traffic

British naval activity increasingly centered upon extracting supplies and preparing for the Charleston evacuation, and the September 2 loss of *Balfour* at Port Royal Ferry illustrates how far British freedom of movement had deteriorated.

December 14, 1782 - evacuation of Charleston

The British finally evacuated Charleston on December 14, 1782. The Port Royal archaeological survey treats this as the endpoint of the Revolutionary military phase in the region. Andrew DeVeaux and other Beaufort-area Loyalists departed with the British. DeVeaux assembled a fleet in St Augustine with his cousin William Lyford and subsequently used precisely the sort of amphibious warfare he had learned in the Carolina Sea Islands to recapture the Bahamas from the Spanish in 1783. His reward would be the award of Cat Island and other lands in the Bahamas, where he lived in exile until later returning to New York.

THE CONTINUITY OF NAVAL WARFARE

The naval war between Beaufort and Savannah had not been a peripheral collection of boat skirmishes. It was a continuous campaign lasting more than seven years. The progression is striking:

1775: Beaufort scout boats establish Bloody Point as an interception station and help seize *Philippa*.

1777: Beaufort possesses an armed sloop, shipbuilding capability and a dedicated *Beaufort Galley*.

1778: American galleys exploit the inland passage so effectively that British naval officers complain they cannot follow them through the marsh channels.

1779: Savannah becomes a British base; *Vigilant* is towed north; Hilton Head, Pinckney Island and Broad River plantations are attacked; Fort Lyttleton is neutralized; Beaufort becomes a British naval station; Hunting Island produces a major sloop capture; Maitland escapes through Daufuskie and Wall's Cut; and a major French-British naval action occurs off Hilton Head.

1780: British control predominates, but privateering continues and we have the still-unresolved *Ceres* capture.

1781: the situation becomes a remarkable littoral guerrilla war—Howell and McCleur capture *Britannia*; Howell raids Sunbury; *Dispatch* is taken; Braddock attacks *Dunmore* twice; *Tyger* is lost off Hilton Head; Howell captures the two rice schooners; Scallan counterattacks; and Hilton Head and Daufuskie militia raid one another across Calibogue Sound.

1782: DeVeaux and the Royal Foresters use galleys to raid the Savannah River/Sea Islands and actually recapture Beaufort; *Adder* and *Scourge* appear in the fighting; American galleys are destroyed; British foraging flotillas operate on the Combahee; and finally Gist's artillery captures

Also, a developing network of Patriot privateer and British galleys had increased naval capability on both sides, though the overall British capability, which included ships of the line was far superior

The British galley network became visible

By late 1781–82 an interconnected force operating from Charleston/Savannah through Beaufort was obvious and is becoming documentable:

Adder - 8 guns — Lt. James Every
Arbuthnot - 8 guns — Lt. M. Scallion
Comet - 8 guns — Lt. Andrew Law
Dependence - 8 guns — W. Donaldson
Scourge - 8 guns
Vindictive - 8 guns
Balfour - armed galley, master Edward Mason
Shark - galley.

The documentary evidence for *Balfour* is particularly good. An original ordnance order dated November 12, 1781 issued shot, cartridges, muskets, powder and other equipment to Edward Mason, master of the galley *Balfour*. Ten months later *Balfour* would be captured by Gist at Port Royal Ferry.

These were not ad hoc plantation boats commissioned by landowners or merchants. They formed a recognizable British shallow-water naval force specifically adapted to the Carolina–Georgia tidal country and were controlled for the most part by the Royal Navy.

By 1777 Beaufort becomes a privateering support base

The February 28, 1777 Navy Board orders are particularly revealing. Captain John Mercier was instructed to proceed with dispatch to: “Beaufort, Broad River, or Savannah” while the sloop *Beaufort* was being fitted out at Beaufort. The archaeological reconstruction tells us that *Beaufort* had originally been seized for illicit trading between Savannah, Beaufort and St. Augustine. She was then converted for state service at Beaufort by the shipbuilder Mr. Black, eventually carrying: 6 carriage guns and 10 swivels.

This is revealing because the revolutionary government was essentially appropriating the existing smuggling/trading network and its vessels for wartime maritime operations. The same waterways used before the war to move contraband became privateering routes. And *Beaufort* supplied the separate *Beaufort Galley*. So, by summer 1777, Beaufort offered a privateer or armed vessel, repair facilities, shipwrights, cordage and sails, naval stores, rice and provisions, armed protection, and access to the state galley. That is approaching the description of a privateering station, even if contemporary documents never formally call it one.

Hilton Head may have been its forward operating base

As a prime example, Stoney's position makes particularly good operational sense. A privateer lying at Beaufort was protected but relatively far inland. A privateer at Hilton Head could watch the actual traffic. From Broad Creek or Skull Creek, From his deepwater dock at his plantation Otterburn, Stoney could emerge into Calibogue Sound and with brief exposure there he could move behind Daufuskie and approach the Savannah River without necessarily exposing himself in the Atlantic.

This suggests a useful distinction between Beaufort and Hilton Head.: Beaufort offered fitting-out, repair, supply and prize port while Hilton Head offered a forward cruising/intercept base.

Privateers were not necessarily commissioned by the South Carolina Navy. In fact, more often they were outfitted by groups of merchants or plantation owners to ensure the safety of their goods or crops during shipment to markets. A genealogical compilation quotes the Charleston Gazette of December 30, 1778, describing *Sally* as: “one of the vessels fitted out by the merchants to scour the coast” That tells us that organized merchant-sponsored privateering was a factor, not merely individual adventurers operating opportunistically or private vessels doing military duty. And it suggests there were multiple vessels doing it beyond the number that received government letters of marque.

The emerging Patriot privateer network

It is possible to identify at least three Patriot privateering centers in our immediate theater, with a fourth slightly to the south of Savannah.

Base/area	Known or probable operators	Operational purpose
Beaufort/Broad River/ Port Royal Sound	Benjamin Stone/*Sally*; numerous merchant-sponsored armed vessels; State sponsored *Beaufort* and *Beaufort Galley*	Shipbuilding, Repair, fitting-out, prize handling, defense of Port Royal
Hilton Head/Calibogue Sound/Daufuskie Island	John Stoney/*Saucy Jack*; later Howell and other small craft	Intercept Savannah traffic; rapid access to Tybee and Port Royal Sound
St. Helena Island/ACE Basin Rivers/Outer Islands and Sounds	unidentified local Patriot/privateer craft	Intercept Charleston–Savannah coastal traffic and storm-damaged British vessels

And to the south:

Wassaw Sound/Ogeechee–Sunbury/Ossabaw/St Catherines became another major privateer operating area, closely connected with the same Savannah traffic and especially the St Augustine sea lanes.

Beaufort–Savannah privateering roster, 1777–1781

Captain/operator	Vessel	Period	Local status	Evidence / activity
John "Jack" Stoney	***Saucy Jack and Jack's Favorite***	1776-1782	**LOCAL - HILTON HEAD**	Confirmed privateer and letter-of-marque holder. Revolutionary government licensed him to take British shipping between Charleston and Savannah; Hilton Head became his home/base. Later operated privately owned second privateer, Jack's Favorite, which operated occasionally in Caribbean waters
Benjamin Stone	***Sally***	1778	**LOCAL - PORT ROYAL**	Confirmed Patriot privateer captain. Fought British vessel in Port Royal Harbor Dec. 16, 1778 - 6 killed, 12 wounded.

Captain/operator	Vessel	Period	Local status	Evidence / activity
Unknown Patriot captor	***Sally***	Aug 16, 1778	**UNKNOWN-BEAUFORT**	Captured British merchant *Sally* near Beaufort; vessel subsequently became Stone's privateer. Identity of captor remains unresolved.
John Braddock	Armed Galley name uncertain in 1781	1779-1781	**LOCAL-BEAUFORT/ PORT ROYAL/ HILTON HEAD**	Captain of Company of Seamen at Beaufort in Apr 1779; by Sept. 1781 commanded one of two American galleys attacking *Dunmore*.
James Doharty	***Beaufort Galley***	1777-1779	**LOCAL — BEAUFORT**	State naval agent rather than proven privateer; important part of local privateering support infrastructure; later Commander of all Beaufort District Militia South of the Broad River
John Joyner	Scout boats; unnamed privateers; later SC and US Navy commands	1775-1782	**LOCAL - BEAUFORT/ ST. HELENA/HILTON HEAD/DAUFUSKIE LATER - REGIONAL**	Maritime officer; early privateer commission; District Militia commander; XO and Later Commander of Frigate South Carolina Captured at Battle of Delaware Capes 1782
John Mercier/Mercer	sloop ***Beaufort***	1777	**BEAUFORT-BASED**	State naval commander. Ordered Feb. 28 to Beaufort/Broad River/Savannah; vessel refitted at Beaufort by James Black.
Unknown Local Patriots	British supply vessel	Dec. 31, 1778	**LOCAL - ST. HELENA SOUND**	Captured storm-driven British supply vessel. Vessel and captors still unidentified.
Samuel Spencer	***St. Louis*** and later heavily-	1777–81	**REGIONAL – GEORGIA /SAVANNAH COAST**	Important privateer; *St. Louis* captured schooner *Industry* May

Captain/operator	Vessel	Period	Local status	Evidence / activity
	armed private vessels			8, 1777. Later operated Medway/Sapelo against British occupation.
Oliver Bowen	***Liberty*** and later various private armed vessels	1775-81	**REGIONAL – SAVANNAH COAST**	Former Georgia naval commodore; subsequently among private-armed-vessel operators attacking British provisioning traffic.
John Howell	At least two privately owned armed vessels	1780-81	**REGIONAL – HILTON HEAD/SAVANNAH/ GEORGIA COAST**	Major privateer. *Britannia* capture; Doboy fight; Sunbury raid; Hilton Head schooner action. Sources say he converted two of his own merchant vessels into privateers.
John McCleur	***Hunter*** by July 1781	1781	**REGIONAL**	Howell's partner in *Britannia* capture; later sailed 10-gun, 50-man *Hunter* into Charleston Harbor and took *Brier*.
Captain Antony	Unnamed vessels	1781-82	**REGIONAL OGEECHEE/OSSABAW**	Privateer captain; took 20 men in boats upriver to seize rice schooner; intercepted by Scallan's British galley.
William Maxwell	Private armed vessel	1779	**REGIONAL GEORGIA SEA ISLANDS**	Named among privateers attacking British provisioning operations; contemporary tradition says he commanded his own armed vessel and was captured in 1779.
Job Pray	Private armed vessel(s)	1776–80	**REGIONAL — SAVANNAH**	Georgia maritime operator; also appears as bondsman in an actual Feb. 28, 1778 letter-of-marque bond for *Delaware*.

Captain/operator	Vessel	Period	Local status	Evidence / activity
John Hardy	Galley Washington; private armed vessel; Georgia Navy galley service	1778-80	**REGIONAL**	Named among coastal private-armed-vessel commanders. Commander of Georgia galley *Washington*
John Lawson	private armed vessel	1780	**REGIONAL GEORGIA COAST**	Named by McCall/Jones among Georgia private-armed-vessel captains attacking British provisioning traffic.
Joseph Stiles	private armed vessel	1780	**REGIONAL GEORGIA COAST**	Same privateer network; vessel name unknown
Captain Samuel Spencer	Privateer, ***St Louis***	1779	**REGIONAL MEDWAY/SAPELO AND CARIBBEAN**	Captured schooner ***Industry*** in 1778 and sold her in Havana. Later captured British officers at Belfast via Medway River Later captured a British 6-gun vessel in Sapelo Sound.

Conclusion

The naval war along the southern coast between 1775 and 1782 was far more than a succession of isolated maritime encounters, privateering adventures, and amphibious raids. Though British ships of the line could operate virtually without opposition in the deepwater channels, it was a sustained and strategically important struggle for control of the rivers, sounds, tidal passages, and coastal approaches connecting Charleston, Beaufort, Savannah, and St. Augustine. From the seizure of the *Philippa* in July 1775 to the final British foraging expeditions and evacuations of 1782, the waterways of the Carolina and Georgia Lowcountry became an extraordinarily active theater of the American Revolution. Here, naval warfare was inseparable from the campaigns ashore. Armed vessels transported troops, supplied garrisons, intercepted commerce, attacked plantations, protected strategic crossings, and frequently determined whether military operations succeeded or failed. Beaufort, St Helena, Port Royal, Hilton Head, Daufuskie, and the surrounding Sea Islands were not peripheral outposts of this struggle, but important operating bases and battlegrounds at the center of it.

Perhaps the most significant characteristic of this maritime conflict was the degree to which geography could overcome conventional naval superiority. Although the Royal Navy possessed overwhelming advantages in ships, guns, and resources, its larger vessels were frequently constrained by the very waterways they sought to control. South Carolina's shallow-draft galleys, scout boats, and armed privateers, propelled by both sails and oars and commanded by men intimately familiar with the region's complicated hydrography, could exploit channels, shoals, tides, and marsh passages that larger warships could not safely navigate. Their ability to concentrate substantial firepower in confined waters gave them a tactical advantage that conventional measures of naval strength often failed to recognize. The British eventually adapted by developing their own formidable galley force, a telling acknowledgment of the effectiveness of the American approach to warfare in this distinctive environment.

The surviving record also reveals the remarkable importance of local maritime enterprise. Shipbuilders, pilots, merchants, plantation owners, privateer captains, enslaved and free Black watermen, and ordinary sailors all contributed to the conduct of a war in which military and civilian maritime activity frequently overlapped. The same waterways that had sustained the region's commerce before the Revolution became its principal avenues of military movement, economic disruption, and resistance. In the end, the contest for the southern waterways demonstrated that naval power was not measured solely by the number or size of warships, but by the ability to employ vessels suited to the environment in which they fought. In that context, he shallow-draft galley became the defining warship of the Lowcountry Revolution, and mastery of its intricate waterways became one of the decisive elements in the struggle for the southern coast.