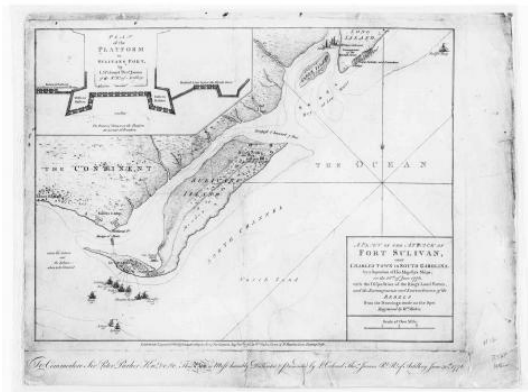




In 1776, at the mouth of the entrance to Charleston Harbor, a geographic obstacle called Sullivan's Island beckoned the Patriots as a reasonable place to build a fort. If troops could erect it fast enough, such a fort (made of sand and palmetto logs) would protect the harbor's entrance from British warships.

But the work did not proceed quickly, and Captain Peter Horry described the growing fort as "an immense pen 500 feet long, and 16 feet wide, filled with sand to stop the shot."

In late May, British ships arrived to scout the area. On the 8th of June, when the fort was half-finished, General Henry Clinton ordered the Patriots to give up or face military action. He spoke from a position of strength, possessing numerous ships and troops to force the Patriots to surrender if they decided to fight. Over four hundred men, commanded by Colonel William Moultrie, would not give up.

On the morning of June 28th, while Thomas Jefferson was finalizing the Declaration of Independence in Philadelphia, the British turned their guns on Ft Sullivan. Heavy fire from the warships could barely be returned by the fort's gunners. One thing the British hadn't counted on, however: The sand and palmetto logs, used to make the fort, actually smothered many of the British cannonballs before they exploded.

General Clinton sent about 2,000 troops ashore, believing they could wade through eighteen inches of water. Instead of shallows, however, the men encountered depths of six to seven feet. The crossing Redcoats became easy targets for the patriot militia on Sullivan's Island. The wading Brits had two choices: die or turn back. They turned back.

Meanwhile, the fort's guns stayed busy, targeting two large man-of-war ships, the *Bristol* and the *Experiment*. Another, the *Acteon*, was hung-up on a sandbar. At sunset, the British fleet sailed out of range.

The victory of June 28th did more than keep Charleston free from British occupation for three more years. It helped General Washington avoid fighting a war on two fronts (the North and South) during the early years of the conflict.

At the time of the 1776 attack, Charleston was the fourth-largest city in the colonies, and South Carolina was the Crown's richest possession in America. As the war dragged on, however, South Carolina became the scene of more battles, ultimately enduring 214 before the fighting ceased.

In 1780, at the lowest point in their struggle for independence, the Americans lost Charleston. The British would keep it until the war was over.

Click on the image to see a much-larger version.

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Linked above: *Charleston, 28 June 1776*, by H. Charles McBarron, U.S. Army Center of Military History, *Soldiers of the American Revolution*.

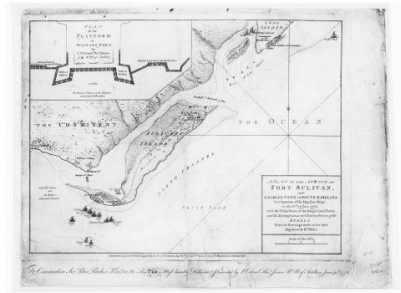
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