

## Chapter 14. Battle of Bloody Marsh – July 1742

COLONIAL GEORGIANS by Jeannette Holland Austin

Oglethorpe wrote the Trustees his fears:<sup>1</sup> “The Spanish Invasion which has long time threatened the Colony, Carolina, and all North America has at last fallen upon us and God hath been our deliverance. General Horcasilas, Governour of the Havannah, ordered those Troops who had been employed against General Wendworth to embark with Artillery and everything necessary upon a secret expedition. They sailed with a great fleet: amongst them were two half Galleys carrying 120 men each & an 18 pound Gun. They drew but five feet water which satisfied me they were for this place. By good great Fortune one of the half Galleys was wrecked coming out. The Fleet sailed for St. Augustine in Florida. Captain Homer the latter end of May called here for Intelligence. I acquainted him that the Succours were expected and sent him a Spanish Pilot to shew him where to meet with them. He met with ten sail which had been divided from the Fleet by storm, but having lost 18 men in action against them, instead of coming here for the defence of this Place he stood again for Charles Town to repair, and I having certain advices of the arrival of the Spanish Fleet at Augustine wrote to the Commander of His Majesty’s Ships at Charles Town to come to our assistance....I drew the Garrison from St. Andrews, reinforced Fort William, and returned to St. Simons with the Schooner.

“Another Spanish Fleet appeared on the 28<sup>th</sup> off the Barr: by God’s blessing upon several measures taken I delayed their coming in till the 5<sup>th</sup> of July. I raised another Troop of Rangers, which with the other were of great service.

...I imbargoe’d all the Vessells, taking their men for the service, and gave large Gifts and promises to the Indians so that every day we increased in numbers. I gave large rewards to men who distinguished themselves upon any service, freed the servants, brought down the Highland Company, and Company of Boatmen, filled up as far as we had guns. All the vessels being thus prepared on the 5<sup>th</sup> of July with a leading Gale and Spring Tide 36 sailed of Spanish vessels run into the Harbour in line of Battle.

“We cannonaded them very hotly from the Shipping and Batterys. They twice attempted to board Capt. Thompson but were repulsed. They also attempted to board the Schooner, but were repulsed by Capt. Dunbar with a Detachment of the Regiment on board.

“I was with the Indians, Rangers, and Batterys, and sometimes on board the ships, and left Major Heron with the Regiment. It being impossible for me to do my duty as General and be constantly with the Regiment...I therefore appointed Major Heron to be Lieut. Colonel...

“...The Spaniards after an obstinate Engagement of four hours, in which they lost abundance of men, passed all our Batterys and Shipping and got out of shot of them towards Frederica. Our Guard Sloop was disabled and sunk: one of our Batterys blown up, and also some of our Men on board Capt. Thomson...”

The General resolved to march to Frederica and destroy its provisions, vessels and artillery so it might not fall into the enemy’s hands, and, simultaneously defend the town. When favorable wind came about, he boarded Capt. Thomson’s vessel, and went to sea, with the Guard Schooner and Prize Sloop following. The latter two vessels he sent to Charles Town.

The Spanish in St. Augustine waited two years to respond to the attack and when they did, landed on St. Simon’s Island, bringing with them a fleet of thirty-six ships and some 2,000 soldiers. In early July of 1742, Spanish ships forced a passage of Jekyll Sound, and fired on Fort St. Simons. The soldiers landed unopposed at Gascoigne Bluff, near the home of Capt. James Gascoigne, where he had resided since 1735. Here, they went unopposed, and proceeded overland to capture Fort St. Simons. Their approach was seen, so just before the Spanish arrived at the fort, Oglethorpe’s soldiers retreated northward, joining the troops at Fort Frederica.

While Oglethorpe landed at Frederica, the enemy was landing on St. Simon’s Island. He sent scouting parties in all directions, to survey the movements of the landed enemy and to retard advances.

---

<sup>1</sup> Frederica, July of 1742

On the 7<sup>th</sup> a party of their's marched toward the Town, our Rangers discovered them and brought an account of their march, on which I advanced with a party of Indians, Rangers, and the Highland Company, ordering the Regiment to follow, being resolved to engage them in the Defiles of the Woods before they could get out and form in the open Grounds..."<sup>2</sup>

The Spaniards marched down Military Road. This road was built in September of 1738 in only three days by Oglethorpe himself and a handful of settlers. A path was cut through the woods and marshes, and as the road crossed the marsh and Gully Hole Creek, Oglethorpe felt it necessary to build a clapper or wooden foot bridge across a watery savanna near half a mile across; otherwise, people would have to wade up to their knees to get into Frederica. The clapper was constructed by Samuel Davison, who was paid 6 pounds for the work. Oglethorpe rewarded the workers by taking them to a tavern and buying them drinks. The Spanish came within a mile of Frederica, but before they were able to clear the woods and deploy into the open savanna, Oglethorpe attacked. The Spanish attack was led by Captain Antonio Barba, followed by about 100 Grenadiers and 200 foot soldiers, about twenty Spanish pioneers and forty Yamassee Indians, with an equal number of negroes. They took one prisoner, a Captain, then pursued the retreating remnant.

The Spanish commander was Manuel de Montiano. He cautiously sent a reconnaissance of 200 men along the Military Road in the direction of Fort Frederica. However, before they arrived outside the gates of town, General Oglethorpe sent a column of his own troops out to meet them. The skirmish took place in a wooded thicket east of the fort, where the road crossed Gully Hole Creek. And this is where the Georgian's sprung their trap, firing a volley of bullets on the front line of the Spanish troops. This maneuver completely took the Spanish by surprise, and they immediately retreated to Fort St. Simons. Enthused by the retreat, Oglethorpe went in pursuit. Montiano sent reinforcements to his first column of soldiers, but by now they were surprised by ambush.

When the Georgians reached an open glade, they concealed themselves, and while the enemy was passing through the meadow under fire, Oglethorpe hastened to send back to Frederica to prepare the Rangers and Marchine Company for action.

The hiding soldiers, however, were soon discovered and ambushed by another Spanish detachment. Then, a group of Highlanders under Lieutenants Southerland and Mackay suddenly executed a flank movement, getting to the rear of the Spaniards and saved the day.

In another open glade, about two miles from Fort St. Simons, the Spaniards, on their return, obligingly marched out into this open glade and stacked their arms, thinking to rest from the excitement of their victory. The Highlanders now took advantage by rushing them, killing about two hundred.

Capt. Noble Jones and his detachment of regulars and Indians on a scouting expedition, surprised a small detachment of the advancing enemy, taking prisoners, from whom they learned that the whole Spanish army was advancing. So they sent an Indian runner to the General, who detached Capt. Dunbar with a company of grenadiers to join with the regulars and Indians, and commence harassing the advancing army. However, they were able to form an ambush near the marsh. As luck would have it, suddenly the Spaniards decided to make camp. As they made fires and prepared their kettles for cooking, one of the soldiers observed one of Jones' men, and gave the alarm. The Spaniards rushed for their arms which had just been stacked, but they were shot down. While Major Horton arrived with reinforcements, many Spaniards fled without muskets.

These skirmishes filled the atmosphere with gunsmoke and a sheet of rain wetted the grass. Some of the Platoons thought the troops were being routed, and while retreating found Captain McCall. They erroneously told him that Lieutenant Sunderland had been killed. McCall

---

<sup>2</sup> Collections of Georgia Historical Society, Vol. III, page 133

ordered them back into battle. Captain Demere and Ensign Gibbon obeyed the command, but one officer did not, instead returning to town. McCall hastened to the scene of action, finding the Spaniards entirely routed by one Platoon under Lieut. Sunderland, and another being routed by the Highland Company under the command of Lieutenant Charles MacKay.

The battle was so savage that the grassy meadow was painted red. Almost all of Barba's party lay dead in a pool of blood. This is how the event became known as the *Battle of Bloody March*. Oglethorpe's valiant Highlanders were the heroes of the day, as they fought, sword in hand, guerrilla-style in the wood, until (except for a handful of prisoners) the whole company was slain.

The fighting only lasted for about an hour, before the Spanish retreated again. Montaino did not know the terrain, or the numbers of his enemies, so he gathered his forces and sailed to Florida.

The severely wounded Capt. Antonio Barba was taken prisoner. Oglethorpe then marched the entire regiment down to a causeway over the marsh near the Spanish camp. The enemy were camping in the ruins of a fort. Oglethorpe reported they were about 4,000 men, and he sent out a party of Indians and Rangers to harrass them.

Thereafter, an enemy vessel attempted to land on St. Simon's Island. On the 11<sup>th</sup> of July they fired their cannon on the *Great Galley* and two little ships as they sailed up the river towards town and did not cease firing until the vessels retreated.

Intelligence was received from Oglethorpe's Indians that the Spanish had lost 4 captains and 200 men at Bloody Marsh, and many were killed at sea. The Spanish were in a state of disarray. When Oglethorpe learned this, he seized this opportunity to make a night attack, taking his regiment within a mile of camp. It was his intention to leave the troops there until he had well-reconitred the enemy's disposition.

In the meantime General Montiano had torched Captain Horton's house and outbuildings on Jekyll Island.<sup>3</sup> Afterwards, as he sailed his Augustine Squadron to Cumberland Sound, Captain McCall and his scouts followed. McCall discovered many Spanish sails anchored at Ft. St. Andrew, so he sent word to Lieut. Stuart, commander of a squadron at Ft. William on Cumberland Island to defend himself. Capt. McCall's scout boats were discovered and the enemy assumed that Indians had landed. The Spanish quickly burned houses and killed 40 horses before boarding their galleys and small craft to run the inland water passages. They attempted to land near Ft. William, but were repulsed by Oglethorpe's Rangers. For three hours the enemy lay off shore, raining cannons and small arms upon the fort. But Lieutenant Alexander Stuart defended so bravely, that they sailed towards St. Augustine. Some of Oglethorpe's boats followed them into the St. John's River.

Oglethorpe was now determined to dislodge the enemy from St. Augustine, and he wrote King George audaciously requesting permission to order troops, artillery and other necessities to sufficiently defend the frontier. He asked for a force of between six and seven hundred men and vessels to dislodge an army of nearly five thousand Spanish troops, supported by a powerful fleet. While he waited, Oglethorpe hastened to fortify the works at St. Simons, Jekyll and Cumberland Islands, as well as Frederica.

The enemy's stronghold at the castle at St. Augustine was formible, as they defeated all parties of Indians sent against them. Also, they strengthened their position by sending a large detachment towards the river St. Mattheo, preparing for reinforcements expected from Havana in the spring.

During March of 1743 Oglethorpe took a detachment from the Highland Company of Rangers, and a portion of his regiment, with many Creek warriors, into Florida, driving the St.

---

<sup>3</sup> Horton rebuilt the house before going to Savannah where he died. The historical marker at the archeological ruins (Jekyll Island) state that he is buried near the house overlooking a creek. A cemetery, fenced with wrought iron stands on the site.

Mattheo party back to the lines of St. Augustine. Now Oglethorpe would try Augustine again.

The small force was taken to the gates.  
COLONIAL GEORGIANS by Jeannette Holland Austin

He advanced towards the castle, intending to skirmish and draw out the garrison.

However, his army was considerably weakened when the enemy would not leave the fort, and they were compelled to start a four day retreat back to Frederica, which was a distance of 96 miles.

Again, Oglethorpe had counted on a concentration of Carolina vessels to New Inverness (Darien), but the naval forces at Charles Towne did not respond to his requisitions.

Further preparations for strengthening the forts continued, as Oglethorpe was convinced the Spanish would retaliate. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of March a general alarm sounded in Frederica when the magazine was blown up. The inhabitants were frightened, but little damage was done, and three thousand well embedded bombs went unharmed. It seems that the Spanish were nowhere in sight, and that a vagabond Irishman was suspected.

Once again Oglethorpe attempted to route the Spaniards from Georgia, even marching his whole force of 500 troops down the coast to surprise the enemy, but these plans were frustrated by the desertion of a Frenchman who carried to the Spaniards news of the weakness of Oglethorpe's forces. Oglethorpe tried a stratagem. He released a Spanish prisoner with a letter written to the French deserter, indicating that the Frenchman was not a deserter, rather a spy. In the letter the Frenchman was instructed to lead the Spanish fleet up towards Frederica where masked batteries could better destroy it, and to induce the Spaniards to remain on St. Simons Island at least three more days, during which time 2,000 infantrymen and six man-of-war would arrive.

The Spanish were not gullible. They did not believe the stratagem. The Spanish forces were made up of regulars, volunteers, Indians and Negroes. But after discussing the possibilities of English reinforcements and the difficulties of the terrain over which they must travel, as well as Oglethorpe's infuriating resistance, they decided to give up the fight and sail away before the approaching hurricane season.

The departure occurred in July of 1743, but before going the Spanish torched the fort at St. Simons. This withdrawal was a remarkable move, especially since they outnumbered Oglethorpe's forces four to one.

Relief came to the American continent, with every Governor from New York to North Carolina thanking Oglethorpe for delivering the mainland.

Rev. George Whitefield exclaimed "The deliverance of Georgia from the Spaniards is such as cannot be paralleled but by some instance out of the Old Testament."