

## **Battle of Sullivan's Island      June 28, 1776**

<b>Location:</b>	<b>Sullivan's Island, Charleston County,</b>
<b>SC Commanders:</b>	<b>American- Col. William Moultrie</b>
<b>British</b>	<b>Sir Henry Clinton, Adm. Sir Peter Parker</b>
<b>Casualties:</b>	<b>American - 10 killed 22 wounded</b>
<b>British</b>	<b>64 killed, 141 wounded</b>

On June 4, 1776, Maj. Francis Marion was ordered to help build Fort Sullivan on Sullivan's Island, just north of Charleston. The only materials at hand were palmetto trees and sand, both in plenteous supply. Only the front of the fort (facing the beach) and one side were completed, leaving the rear open when battle commenced. Gen. William Moultrie commanded 400 American troops of the 2nd South Carolina Regiment, Francis Marion among them.

Adm. Sir Peter Parker of the British Navy began the battle at 11:00 am on June 28, 1776 with nine warships. The Thunder delivered 13-inch shells into the fort. Soon the Acteon, the Bristol, and the Experiment joined in. The Solebay and the Active sent solid shot into the ramparts, doing little damage. As the cannon fire reached Fort Sullivan, the effect was useless when the cannonballs embedded themselves in the soft, spongy trunks of the palmetto logs.

A British infantry force landed on Isle of Palms to assault the fort from the rear. Intelligence reported a depth of 18 inches in Breach Inlet, easy to ford. When the soldiers arrived they found a depth of 7 feet. Unable to ford the inlet, the British tried an amphibious landing, but riflemen repelled them with the British suffering heavy losses. Among those driven back was a young volunteer officer and law school dropout named Banastre Tarleton, then on his first mission in America.

A frigate ball severed the 2nd Regiment's colors from its flagstaff, sending it over the wall. Patriot Sgt. William Jasper safely leapt down into a rain of shot and shell to rescue the

fallen flag. Cutting it from the broken staff, he attached it to another staff and climbed safely back into the fort. He planted the staff on the summit of Fort Sullivan.

Sgt. Jasper is remembered today for his bravery.

Exasperated at his lack of progress, Adm. Parker ordered three of his ships through the channel and past the fort. There they ran aground on a sandbar; two even collided with one another, and while Sir Henry Clinton was suffering from “unspeakable mortification” at his predicament, Parker was experiencing his own embarrassment. He was wounded in the “hind part” of his breeches which were shot away, which laid his posterior bare. (Legend has it that this is the origin of the expression, “We beat the pants off them.”)

Maj. Francis Marion commanded the left wing of the fort, in which were emplaced some of the heaviest cannon. Boldly, he directed his batteries throughout the day, and the battered ships began to slip their cables and withdraw at sunset. One legend is that Maj. Marion asked Col. Moultrie if he might fire a last shot.

“Yes,” supposedly yelled the Colonel. “Give them a parting kick.” Aiming one of the largest guns carefully, Marion touched a match to the powder, and watched the ball rip into the flagship. Sir Henry Clinton failed to renew the battle.

By early evening, all hope for a British victory had vanished. Parker's frigates fired some 7,000 rounds and burned more than 12 tons of powder – 220 barrels between Bristol and Experiment alone – compared to 960 shot and 4,766 pounds for the Americans. Yet overwhelmingly the damage fell hardest on the king's ships.

Because of the surprise effect of the Palmetto logs protecting American soldiers at Fort Sullivan, the Palmetto Tree was later added to the flag of the State of South Carolina and declared the South Carolina State Tree.

#### **Sources:**

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