

# Colonists threw all into Charleston battle

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On the day after Christmas in 1779, a fleet of 150 British ships set sail from New York. More than 5,000 British and Hessian troops under the command of Sir Henry Clinton were on their way to attack Charleston, then the capital of South Carolina.

With no progress being made in the North, the British hoped to make some gains in the South by capturing the port city, thereby opening up the Carolinas and possibly Virginia to conquest.

After a rough journey, the fleet temporarily set sail in British-held Savannah. A plan had been worked out. Five thousand British troops under the command of Brigadier General James Patterson would attack Augusta, Ga., in the hope of diverting the patriots.

While Patterson moved toward Augusta, Clinton and his fleet set sail for John's Island, located about 30 miles from Charleston. By late March 1780, Clinton had moved across the island and was in a position to threaten Charleston. Quickly, he set up his artillery around the city and harbor and cut off the inland approaches to the city.

The patriots prepared for the defense of the city. Charleston was a key military position, and the patriots did not want to lose it.

Practically every military unit in the South was called into Charleston. This included 2,600 Continentals and 2,500 militiamen. The slaves in the city were mobilized to build an extensive system of fortification around the city.

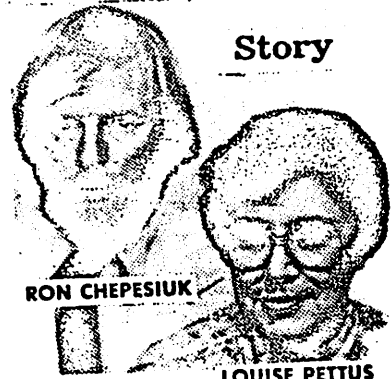
By early April, the British felt that they were in a good enough military position to ask the city to surrender. The civil authorities refused, believing that it would be bad for morale if the capital of South Carolina were abandoned.

Clinton then began a daily bombardment of the city. The city began to go up in flames, and some civilians were killed. As the shelling continued, the British managed to inch their way closer to the city's fortifications.

Finally on April 21, Major General Lincoln, the military commander of Charleston, gave another surrender offer. In return for giving up the

South Carolina's

Story



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city, Lincoln requested that he and his troops be allowed to leave the city. But the city was in no position to negotiate, and Clinton refused. The fighting continued.

Again there was a truce. This time Lincoln said that Charleston would surrender if the citizens of the city, including members of the militia, would be allowed to return to their houses and be given 12 months to dispose of their property if they didn't want to remain in Charleston.

The British didn't like these terms either and began a massive bombardment of Charleston. More than 200 pieces of artillery were fired simultaneously and relentlessly.

As the city burned, the Charleston authorities realized the hopelessness of the situation.

On May 12, 1780, the city surrendered. It was a great victory for the British. Almost 5,400 American troops were captured, along with a large amount of ammunition and supplies, including 400 cannon and 10 warships. The biggest port south of Philadelphia was now under British control.

The fall of Charleston was a tremendous setback to the patriot cause. Many of the colonists who had been patriots now became loyalists, taking up arms for the British.

The back country of South Carolina was now open to British invasion. By June 1780, practically all of South Carolina and Georgia was under British control. Victory for Britain appeared imminent.