

How Bloody Point Got its Name- The Rest of the Story

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Back in December, we posted a story about how Bloody Point on Daufuskie got its name. The story focused on a single conflict at the southern end of Daufuskie, which was only part of the story. Bloody Point was actually the site of a series of bloody battles, and, as one of our readers rightly pointed out, the last battle which we described ignores some important history that led up to that point in time.

To properly set the scene for the battles we need to review some of the early history of Daufuskie, when occupation transitioned from Native American to European colonial.

- The first Europeans to arrive on the island were the Spaniards, in 1521. They did attempt to establish a colony somewhere between today's Port Royal and Savannah, but it failed.
- French Huguenots arrived in what is now Port Royal in 1563 and established Charlsfort, but it was also unsuccessful and abandoned in 1564.
- Spain attempted to establish Santa Elena to be the second capital of La Florida (St. Augustine being the first) on what is now Parris Island. The colony lasted until 1587, when the Spaniards returned to St. Augustine.
- William Hilton explores the area around the current Hilton Head Island in 1663. Robert Sandford sails through the Calibogue Sound in 1666. First English settlers follow but move to the Ashley River area to avoid the Spanish threat.
- The Scots arrive to settle Port Royal in 1684. (Stuarts Town) Spain destroys the settlement in 1686. Arrival of English at Daufuskie in 1684 with the consent of resident Yemassee Indians in the area.
- The Yemassee revolt against the Spanish missions in 1687. Yemassees from Florida migrate to the Carolina colony and establish 10 towns in the Beaufort area.
- The Colonial Assembly establishes Fort Passage (a clapboard hut and crude tower) at Bloody Point as a lookout for Spanish threats in 1701.
- First recorded land grant is to Thomas Cowte in 1707 for 500 acres.
- A 1707 state act defined the boundaries of the 'Yamosee Settlement' as being the area from the Combahee River on the north to the Coosaw, Port Royal and Savannah Rivers on the south. This reservation was aimed at ending conflicts between the Yemassee and an increasing flux of settlers.
- James Cockran appointed Commissioner of the Indian Trade in 1709, receives land grant for 1000 acres on Daufuskie in 1711.

We can draw a few conclusions based on this chronology. The area from Port Royal to St. Augustine was in dispute between the Spanish and English for a significant amount of time. The Yemassee Indians occupied the coastal area in dispute (along with other tribes), and they were generally friendly with the European arrivals. When a dispute arose between the Yemassee and the Spanish, the Yemassee in the Spanish territories fled to the English settlements and initially remained on friendly terms with the English, establishing towns to facilitate trading. The Yemassee also helped to facilitate trade along the western frontier and were active in the procurement of Indian slaves for the West Indies.

The Indian trade was inherently exploitative, with the Indians trading deerskins for European products; cloth, firearms, metal tools and utensils, upon which they were becoming increasingly dependent. Depletion of deerskins and the decline of the Indian slave trade left the Yemassee. by 1711, with a debt to South Carolina traders of 100,000 deerskins. By 1715, the debt increased to 50,000 pounds, Carolina currency, or 10,000 pounds sterling. Faced with an insurmountable debt, and an ever-increasing number of settlers, the Yemassee began to fear that they would become enslaved to pay their debts. As a result, in 1715, the Yemassee, along with other tribes in similar circumstance, rose against the English, initiating what became known as the Yemassee War. On Good Friday, 1715, Yemassee warriors attacked white traders and their families in their (Yemassee) villages. More than 100 settlers were killed in these attacks. Over the next 13 years, the Yemassee continued their raids on and off, retreating to the protection of the Spanish in St. Augustine.

Now we can examine the incidents that gave the southern end of Daufuskie the name Bloody Point. In late August 1715 South Carolina militia forces learned that eight to ten Yemassee war canoes had come up the inland passage from Georgia and were in the Port Royal area. A small fleet of piraguas (pirogues) with swivel guns was positioned at the southern tip of Daufuskie Island knowing that they would have to pass by that point on their return to Georgia. Also believing that the warriors would abandon their canoes if attacked and swim ashore, troops were stationed along the beach to prevent their escape. In the ensuing encounter, 35 Yemassee were killed and two taken prisoner. Two canoes escaped.

This battle became known as the "Daufuskie fight" and was not the battle that gave Bloody point its name, according to history scholars. Yemassee raids in the Port Royal area continued and a lookout post was established at the southern end of Daufuskie. This location was considered to be one of the most important with its expansive view of the entrance to the Savannah River and St. Augustine creek behind Tybee Island.

A second skirmish was reported involving Indian raids of plantations along Skulk (Skull) Creek on Hilton Head. Angry settlers were allegedly informed by friendly Indians that the raiders would be celebrating their conquests along the beach at the southern end of Daufuskie Island. The settlers had supposedly anchored their boats at the northern end of Daufuskie to surprise the Indians, wading to the southern end. Surprising the celebrating party, the settlers killed 28, with two escaping. As the story goes, the two escapees swam to Tybee Island. (This story seems a bit far-fetched given that Daufuskie is 5 miles long but so goes the account.)

It is the third event that is credited with fixing the name Bloody Point to Daufuskie. In January 1728, a Yemassee raiding party massacred the entire crew of the scout boat crew camped at Daufuskie Island, except for the captain, Captain Barnabas Gilbert, who was taken prisoner and transported to St. Augustine. The name Bloody Point does not appear to have been in common use prior to this battle at the site, but this last attack forever sealed the name to the beaches at the southern tip of Daufuskie.

This last battle happened after an expeditionary force, led by veteran Indian fighter John Palmer, had been directed by the colonial Commons House to pursue the Yemassee and put an end to the raids of Port Royal and the surrounding areas. They had not yet set out when the massacre at Bloody Point occurred.

Palmer was reputedly the mastermind behind the "Daufuskie fight". Leading a force of 110 men and friendly Indians he traveled to St. Augustine, where the Yemassee had established a village near the castillo, retreating from their Carolina towns to the protection of the Spanish fort. Arriving on March 9, 1728, his forces surprised the village at dawn the following day, killing 30 warriors and taking fourteen prisoners. They remained in the area for three more days plundering and destroying the lands surrounding the Spanish fort, essentially laying siege to it. Demanding beef and provisions from the Spanish for their return voyage, which the Spaniards provided, the forces returned, suffering only light casualties, two Indian warriors wounded, during the encounter.

Palmer's raid effectively ended the Yemassee raids on Port Royal.

And now you know "the rest of the story".

