

The Battle of Bloody Point

July 4, 2026

Special bonus post from the Daufuskie Island Historical Foundation in honor of the nation's 250th birthday.

Happy Birthday, America!

Our recent post presented a bit of the history of Daufuskie Island during the Revolutionary War period, and how the island came to be known as "Little Bermuda" because of the majority royalist population. The strong economic ties of local planters to the British market, combined with the proximity to Savannah, which was occupied by British forces for most of the War, led to a relatively undistinguished period on Daufuskie, the melodramatic events of our last post notwithstanding.

However, the relatively strategic position of Daufuskie, providing an ideal lookout position for traffic around the Savannah River, as well as its line of sight to the goings on around Hilton Head, did result in some more exciting military activity nearby well before the vengeful raiding parties of individual families going back and forth across Calibogue Sound.

One specific event that became known as the Battle of Bloody Point occurred on July 9th and 10th, 1775. Also known as the Philippa Affair, this skirmish, involving patriot militia from South Carolina and Georgia, provided not only a psychological boost to American forces, but also a true valuable boost to needed supplies for the Revolutionary Army.

April 19, 1775, is generally recognized as the beginning of armed conflict between American and British forces, with the battles of Lexington and Concord. During the summer of 1775, intelligence reached the 13 member South Carolina Council on Safety, which was the governing body of the colony established by the First Provincial Congress in June 1775, that a shipment of gunpowder was on its way to Savannah aboard a British vessel, to be supplied to the Indians. The most feared, and most likely threat to South Carolina from the British at that time was the arming of the Cherokee and Creek Indians so that they could lay waste to frontier settlements.

The Council dispatched two armed barges, commanded by South Carolina Captain John Barnwell of the Beaufort district militia, and Captain John Joyner, the Port Royal harbor pilot, to intercept the shipment. (Barges were shallow draft, flat bottom, heavily armed vessels used extensively in rivers, lakes and bays. They had tactical advantages in shallow water where larger Royal Navy ships could not maneuver.) The two Captains established a

vantage point off Bloody Point on Daufuskie to monitor the mouth of the Savannah River for arriving ships.



(Royalist) Governor Wright of Georgia learned of the deployment from South Carolina, and dispatched an armed schooner, the *Philippa*, to Tybee Island to escort the arriving powder ship to Savannah.

Barnwell and Joyner encouraged Georgia commanders to supply a vessel equipped with carriage guns and swivels. (Carriage guns were larger cannons mounted on wooden-wheeled carriages and required a dedicated crew. Swivel guns were smaller weapons, about 3 feet in length, mounted on a swivel attached to the pivot on the ship's railing.) Georgia responded with the schooner *Liberty*, commanded by Captain Oliver Brown.

At this point, there are two distinct versions of the "battle" that seem to be irreconcilable. We'll present both and you can choose the version you like best.

Version 1

On July 7th, Joseph Habersham, who had assumed command of the Georgia patriots, and Captain Brown, chased the British schooner *HMS Philippa* out to sea. As the *Philippa* escaped, the British packet ship, *Little Carpenter*, commanded by Captain Maitland, arrived at Tybee carrying 16,000 pounds of gunpowder. Sensing trouble, Captain Maitland immediately attempted to turn the ship and head back out to sea. The powder ship was overtaken by Habersham's *Liberty* and the two barges. The ammunition and supplies were confiscated from the *Little Carpenter*.



Version 2

The Georgia schooner Liberty saw the two ships (Philippa and Little Carpenter) at anchor on July 8th and anchored 4 miles from their location. On the following day, the harbor pilot arrived to guide the British ships to Savannah, and the Carolina/Georgia fleet made its move on the Philippa. Captain Maitland observed the approach of the Liberty, and saw that the ship had ten carriage guns, as well as several boards removed below deck that indicated preparation for small arms at close quarters. At roughly 4 o'clock, the Liberty fired muskets at the Philippa and demanded that Captain Maitland identify himself. A small white flag with a red border was hoisted with the words American Liberty. The seizure was quickly over, and the ships anchored beside each other that evening. In the morning, the Philippa was ordered to proceed to Cockspur Island, where South Carolina provincials waited. They rowed out to the ship, demanding papers from the British captain, and learning of the ship's cargo, proceeded to confiscate 16,000 pounds of gunpowder, "seven hundred weight of leaden bullets", as well as all the lead bars, sheet lead, Indian trading arms and shot that were on board.



Regardless of the version you like best, both appear to agree that the Carolinians and Georgians divided the captured ammunition between them. Both appear to agree that shots were fired but there were no deaths associated with the "battle". The South Carolina share of the gunpowder was taken to Tucker's Island, where a schooner was loaded with 5,000 pounds (or 3500 pounds depending on the version) and sent to the Continental Congress in Philadelphia, eventually making its way to supply General Washington's army in the siege of Boston. Both Georgia and South Carolina gifted 1000 pounds of gunpowder to the Indians on behalf of the peoples of their respective states, making it clear that it was not coming from the British crown, in an attempt to prevent them from siding with the British.

The Battle of Bloody Point is recognized as one of the earliest naval confrontations in the Revolutionary War. The Battle of Machias (Maine) is often referred to as the first naval battle of the Revolutionary War and occurred only one month earlier (June 11-12, 1775). These were not classic engagements with large heavily armed ships exchanging broadsides of cannon fire, but they do represent the formative stage of a patriot "navy" which would contribute significantly to the war effort.

Taken together with the earlier post on "Little Bermuda", Daufuskie appears to be a stage for the very earliest, and the very last, actions in the Revolutionary War.

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