

THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR IN FLORIDA

At the end of the Seven Years War in 1763, Spain ceded Florida to Great Britain and the British held the east coast of Florida during the American Revolution. There were three engagements between the Americans and the British and Tories during the War for Independence.

BATTLE OF THOMAS CREEK

The most southern engagements of the American Revolution were fought in Florida. There was a British settlement at Cow Ford, now known as Jacksonville. In the spring of 1777, Colonel Samuel Elbert of Savannah planned an American invasion of Florida in an attempt to capture St. Augustine.

Meanwhile, a separate detachment under Colonel John Baker with 109 mounted Georgia Militia advanced to Cow Ford, where they were ambushed by some 400 British Regulars, Tory Florida Rangers, and Creek Indians at Thomas Creek which now separates Nassau and Duval Counties. Colonel Baker's American patriots were routed by the loyalist forces, with eight men killed, nine wounded and 31 captured, with 15 of those captured being massacred by the Indians.

There is an historic marker on U. S. Highway 1 where it crosses Thomas Creek that reads:

BATTLE OF THOMAS CREEK

When the American War of Independence began, the new British colonies of East and West Florida remained comparatively free from serious fighting throughout the course of the Revolutionary War. In the summer of 1777, however, Americans initiated an invasion aimed at capturing St. Augustine. The expedition was composed of Continental Army troops and Georgia Militia forces under the command of Lt. Col. Samuel Elbert.

Preparations for the defense of East Florida involved the East Florida Rangers and Indian allies.

On May 17, 1777, a portion of the invading American expedition was attacked by a detachment of British Regulars under Colonel Thomas Brown and Indians. The battle took place at a site on Thomas Creek south of its confluence with the Nassau River. After suffering heavy casualties, the Americans, already discouraged by lack of supplies and the heat, began their retreat from Florida. Only one more unsuccessful invasion of East Florida occurred during the remaining years of the American Revolution. The Battle of Thomas Creek took place in what is now a part of the Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve/St. Johns River Valley under the national Park Service, U. S. Department of the Interior.

SKIRMISH OF ALLIGATOR CREEK

There is also an historical marker located on the east side of U.S. Highway 1 in the town of Callahan in Nassau County that reads:

SKIRMISH OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

June 30, 1778, a force of 300 American Cavalry commanded by Colonel Elijah Clarke, participating in General Robert Howe's invasion of Florida, attacked a column of British at this place (Alligator Creek Bridge), but were unable to penetrate the nearby entrenchments of 450 British Regulars and South Carolina Royalists under the command of Major James Marc Prevost. In this skirmish, Colonel Clarke was wounded and the Americans withdrew. The next day, the British retired in the direction of the St. Johns River.

Casualties: Americans 13 British 9

Erected by Jacksonville Chapter, Florida Society

Sons of the American Revolution

The engagement took place on the north side of Callahan where U.S. Highway 301 joins with U.S. Highway 1.

THE TORIES OF COW FORD

American privateers roamed the Atlantic Coast from Canada to the Caribbean Sea, capturing enemy merchant vessels and effectively blockading the east coast of Florida. The Tory residents of Cow Ford (Jacksonville) were unable to obtain supplies and so fled northward into Bullock County, Georgia.

Captain William Cone (1745-1815), of the Richmond County Militia of Georgia, gathered a party of men in 1781 and drove the Tories back into Florida. But then Captain Cone, William Williams, and two of his men were captured by the British and imprisoned in the fort [Castillo de San Marcos] in St. Augustine.

In 1783, Captain Cone and his men managed to escape. For his work in driving the Tories back into Florida, Captain Cone and his men were granted 200 acres of confiscated land on the south side of the Great Ogeechee River [in northeastern Georgia].

Three signers of the Declaration of Independence from South Carolina, Thomas Heyward, Jr., Arthur Middleton, and Edward Rutledge, were captured by the British and held in the State House in St. Augustine; they were released in 1781.

Two Compatriots of the Jacksonville Chapter, SAR, have written books on the southern engagements of the Revolutionary War: Judge Burton Barrs, FLSSAR President in 1934-1938 and the late U. S. Congressman Charles E. Bennett, penned *Southernmost Battlefields of the Revolution*.