

# The Battle of Bloody Marsh

(Source: [www.worldnet.net](http://www.worldnet.net), an independent educational website)

The growth of empires throughout the history of world civilization has always included imperial nations taking possession of other nations or establishing new colonies. Nations such as Great Britain and Spain fought to gain new territories in the New World that had been discovered by explorers sent out to find new lands or new trade routes. In many cases, this struggle over expanding empires brought imperial nations into conflict one with another. At times, certain important events took place that decided the direction that the push for new colonies would go in. The English and the Spanish had colonies in the New World for more than two hundred years when a battle on St. Simons Island off the coast of Georgia changed the course of history forever. This battle was the Battle of Bloody Marsh.

By the 1730's, Spain's flag had flown over Florida for two hundred years. During this time, Britain was establishing twelve colonies along the Atlantic Coast. In 1732, the border of British America was South Carolina. Charleston, a seaport city in South Carolina, had already become a very popular trade center. Carolina, however, was vulnerable to attacks by the Yamassee Indians from across the Savannah River to the south. The Spanish often encouraged these raids. The British colonies were also being threatened by the growing French Louisiana. The French had established Fort Toulouse in 1715 in what is now present day Alabama.

In between the colonies of the French, Spanish, and British laid an area now known as the state of Georgia. This area became crucial to the British because of the threats from the French, Spanish, and Indian presence to the south and west. The British had to do something to help ensure the safety of their fledgling colonies. General James Oglethorpe and a group of English businessmen offered a solution. Their idea was to create a buffer colony between Florida and South Carolina to help protect the British interest in South Carolina.

After presenting their plan, they received a charter from King George II. The name Georgia was given to the colony in honor of King George II. The group of trustees began to recruit colonists and on January 13, 1733, 113 settlers from Germany, Scotland, and many other countries arrived in Charleston and immediately went about to set up a town that came to be called Savannah. The colonists faced many difficulties while setting up this new town. By May of 1733, one third of the colonists had died of malaria and other diseases, but ninety-one log houses had been built and treaties with the Creek Indians had been established.

In 1735, the Spanish launched a surprise attack on Savannah. After this attack, General Oglethorpe decided it would be best to build and maintain several outposts and forts to help guard against another such surprise attack. With the help of the colonists and local Indians, forts such as Fort Frederica, Fort St. Simons, Fort St. Andrew, Fort Prince William, and Fort Amelia were built.

The War of Jenkins' Ear (1739-1742) was an ongoing struggle between Britain and Spain caused by disputes over the slave trade and the clash over the boundary of Spanish Florida. The War of Jenkins' Ear was given its name from Robert Jenkins, the captain of an English ship, who supposedly had one of his ears cut off by Spanish coast guards. Although not solely concentrated in the southern colonies, it had repercussions there.

In May of 1740, Oglethorpe, along with two thousand other men, advanced on the Spanish and their leader, Don Manuel de Montiano, at St. Augustine. Oglethorpe and his men captured a couple of forts but he was unable to capture St. Augustine. Oglethorpe, who was sick with fever, withdrew his men.

The new colony of Georgia became seriously threatened by a Spanish attack that could happen at any moment. With the colony in such jeopardy, the trustees who were beginning to doubt

Oglethorpe's leadership abilities questioned his credibility. Many colonists in South Carolina grew angry for fear of a Spanish attack, and many members of Parliament in Britain began to think of Georgia as an expensive problem area. Oglethorpe, however, knew that Montiano was planning an attack. Once he had recovered his strength, Oglethorpe began to try to gain support to fight the Spaniards again, undaunted by those who had given up on the buffer colony.

It was obvious that in 1741 Georgia was on its own to fight against the Spanish. The Spanish launched an attack against the British on Cumberland Island, which lies just south of St. Simons. On June 28, the main fleet of the Spanish was spotted off the coast of St. Simons Island.

At 3:00 p.m. it began to rain just as the Spanish reached the marshes of St. Simons. Oglethorpe's troops used piles of logs and brush as barricades to protect against the Spanish onslaught. When the Spanish soldiers stepped ahead to try to advance, they were bombarded with musket fire. As the battle continued, the marsh became thick with smoke.

Oglethorpe had just returned from an expedition to find more troops to help fight against the Spanish when he heard the firing. He rushed back fearing what he would find when he saw to his surprise that the troops had been successful at holding off the Spanish for almost an hour. The Spanish had no way of knowing just how many men were hiding in the woods and behind the makeshift barricades. To Oglethorpe's amazement, the Spanish retreated. Supposedly after the battle was over the marsh was red with the blood of the dead soldiers. This is where the name Bloody Marsh came from.

Montiano lingered on St. Simons for about a week. On July 10, he tried attacking again, and again, he was driven back by the troops at Fort Frederica. Finally on July 14 Montiano gave up and retreated to Florida.

Not satisfied with having held off the Spanish at the Battle of Bloody Marsh, Oglethorpe tried once again to capture St. Augustine, and, again he was unsuccessful. However, the Battle at Bloody Marsh marked the end of threats against Georgia by the Spanish. After the battle there were no further attempts by the Spanish to try to obtain Georgia. In 1748, Britain and Spain signed the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle, which officially ended the Anglo-Spanish hostility over Georgia. With the fighting officially over, many of the forts and outposts used by Oglethorpe and his men during the campaigns against the Spanish were abandoned and left for ruin.

The end of the battles with the Spanish also meant the end of Oglethorpe's career as a military leader in America. He returned to England where he married in 1744. He continued to work in politics upon his return to England. He also led British troops against Scotland in 1745.

After the American Revolution, President John Adams visited London as an Ambassador to Britain. His first visit was with an 88 year-old man who had lived to see Georgia, the little buffer colony he had once envisioned and helped to establish officially become a state of the United States of America. That man was General James Oglethorpe.



Brass Marker on the Bloody Marsh Monument, St. Simons Island, Ga.

