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COLONIALS COLLIDE AT BLOODY MARSH

On a sultry summer day in 1742, a handful of British and Spanish colonial troops faced each other on a Georgia coastal island and decided the fate of a colony.

It was probably inevitable that the imperial claims of Spain and Britain would clash in what is now the southeastern United States. Spain's flag had flown over Florida for 200 years, during which time Britain had established a dozen fledgling colonies along North America's Atlantic coast.

In 1732, the southernmost outpost of British America was South Carolina, and its seaport of Charleston was already a bustling trade center. But Carolina was vulnerable to persistent Yamassee Indian raids from across the Savannah River to the south, encouraged by the Spanish. Also alarming was the growing threat from French Louisiana. Since 1715, the French had manned Fort Toulouse, where the Coosa and Tallapoosa rivers meet in present-day Alabama.

A solution to the problem was offered by a group of English businessmen. General James Oglethorpe, Sir John Percival, Dr. Thomas Bray and others had a vision of a vigorous buffer colony to protect South Carolina from enemy attacks.

Oglethorpe, the 36-year-old son of an influential English family, had seen combat in Europe in the service of Britain. As a member of Parliament, he reamed of a friend's death in a squalid debtors' prison and spearheaded an investigation of the British prison system. He regarded the American project as a way to provide a refuge for England's debtors and poor, as well as German and Scottish refugees, who would all settle the colony.

The project was soon implemented. A board of trustees consisting of 20 English businessmen was formed to oversee the colony, and Oglethorpe, a leading board member, agreed to accompany the colonists to America.

The trustees envisioned a military colony between the Savannah and Altamaha rivers, to be populated by white yeoman farmers doubling as ready militia. Slavery was outlawed, as was liquor. Each colonist was to be given 50 acres of land.

After securing a royal charter from King George II, for whom the new colony would be named, the trustees began recruiting colonists. They screened applicants to weed out those not of good character. Few debtors actually signed on.

On January 13, 1733, 113 colonists arrived in Charleston on the sailing ship Anne after spending two months and one week at sea. They were warmly welcomed by the Carolinians, who were anxious to see a buffer colony to their south. Carolina's governor, Robert Johnston, offered military assistance. Oglethorpe discovered a suitable site for the initial settlement about 18 miles up the Savannah River on a high bluff, well positioned for defense. On February 12, the first colonists landed there. At Yamacraw Bluff, the Georgia settlers built their principal town and seaport, Savannah.

The first few months of the Georgia settlement were harrowing. About one third of the original colonists died from malaria and other diseases. By March 1734, however, 91 log houses had been built, and the little colony thrived thereafter.

Oglethorpe saw that winning the goodwill of the Indian tribes was essential to the success of the colony. Fortunately, he won the friendship of Tomochichi, the 90-year-old Yamacraw chief, whose dwelling lay near Savannah. Tomochichi was impressed by Oglethorpe's fair and open manner and by his tolerance for Indian ways. The two men became good friends, and Tomochichi remained a stalwart British ally all his life. Tomochichi also wisely advised Oglethorpe to make contact with the Creeks, the major tribe in the area. In May 1733, some 56 Indians from the Creek towns, including eight chiefs, arrived in Savannah for a peace conference. The meeting was cordial, and the conference ended with an agreement of friendship.

Much of England's success in Georgia stemmed from Oglethorpe's energy, self-confidence and enthusiasm. The hot-tempered general was called egotistical and overbearing--he had once killed a man during a drunken brawl--but he was fair-minded and insisted on a type of frontier equality that won over colonists and Indians alike. And he willingly shared the same hardships as his colonists.

Oglethorpe ate Indian food, respected their practices, and observed that they were "of an excellent temper." Rum and revenge, he remarked, were the Indians' greatest weaknesses.

The general courted the friendship of the Cherokees of northern Georgia, as well as the Chickasaws, who lived in what is now Alabama and Mississippi. The Chickasaws rumored Oglethorpe to be part red man; Oglethorpe responded that indeed he was "an Indian, in my heart, that is I love them; do they love me the worse for that?"

Oglethorpe intended to build military outposts to secure the southern frontier. To accomplish that, he depended on a handful of ranger companies recruited from the toughest veterans of the frontier. The rangers braved the steaming heat of Georgia's coastal lowland, the pesky sand fleas and mosquitoes, and the fear of death from unseen enemy muskets. They built a string of wilderness forts from present-day Augusta on the Savannah River, southward to Fort King George on the St. Johns River, and westward to Fort Okfuskee on the Tallapoosa.

The general depended on men like Patrick Mackay, a down-on-his-luck Scottish gentleman who came to Georgia with his wife, his infant daughter and three brothers in September 1733. Oglethorpe commissioned him captain of a company of rangers in March 1734 and gave him the task of building an outpost in the Creek Country. It was Oglethorpe's hope to cement a lasting peace with the Creeks, and he intended Mackay to regulate the civilian traders operating out of Carolina. That caused some friction with South Carolina-- especially when Mackay later chastised and expelled some of the traders from the Georgia country when he caught them selling rum to the Indians.

Carolina merchants accused Mackay of overstepping his authority and refused to cooperate with him. Their hostility made it difficult for Mackay to purchase horses and supplies. Nevertheless, the rangers built and garrisoned Fort on the Tallapoosa River, not far from the French Fort Toulouse.

Having already antagonized the Carolina traders, Mackay aroused friction with Spain as well. In May 1735, he provoked an unauthorized raid by pro-English Indians on a Spanish outpost on the St. Johns River. There was retaliation a month later. A Yamassee war party from Spanish Florida surprised a group of Yamacraw on the Altamaha and killed seven of them.

The Spanish had claimed the Georgia region, which they called Guale, since the 16th century, when their missionaries first penetrated the area. The Florida-Georgia frontier was vital to Spanish interests and helped protect Spain's valuable naval supply link with Mexico.

Alarmed at the prospect of provoking a war with the Spaniards, the trustees instructed Oglethorpe to remove Mackay from his post, and in February 1736, Oglethorpe reluctantly complied. He retained the rangers, however, expanding them to five units similar to Mackay's--a total of 50 men--to provide security for the southern frontier and to man additional outposts south of the Savannah.

Darien, a small village on the north bank of the Altamaha, was settled and garrisoned by Scots led by Hugh Mackay, brother of Patrick. More than 170 men and women arrived there, dressed in their picturesque Highland garb, in January 1736.

Colonists from London built and settled Fort Frederica on the northern end of heavily wooded St. Simons Island. Fort Frederica was square in shape, measuring 124 by 125 feet, surrounded by a moat and flanked by a bastion on each corner. Its walls were constructed of a hard material called "tabby," a mixture of lime, seashells, sand and rock. The settlement was named for Frederick, Prince of Wales, the eldest son of King George 11.

Oglethorpe encouraged his men to bring their families, and some did. There was a small village adjacent to the fort, and Frederica at its height had 1,000 residents. The general's only real home in Georgia was at Frederica, a modest cottage that he called "The Farm." Tomochichi and his nephew and adopted heir, Toonahowi also joined Oglethorpe at Frederica, pledging their loyalty.

Oglethorpe built a narrow military road, just wide enough for two to walk abreast, connecting Frederica to a smaller outpost, Fort St. Simons, at the southern end of the island. The general established additional outposts to protect Frederica and Darien. He sent rangers and scouts to construct two forts on Cumberland Island, 20 miles to the south of St. Simons. Fort St. Andrew, a 65-by-130-foot earthen fort in the shape of a four-

pointed star, with a bastion on each point, was soon finished. Fort Prince William was built on the southern end of the island. Even farther south, Amelia Fort, on Amelia Island, was built and garrisoned by a small party of Highlanders.

In May 1733, a contingent of red-coated British regulars arrived in Savannah--the 42nd Regiment of Foot, heavily Scottish at first, composed of recruits enlisted for seven years. Oglethorpe encouraged the soldiers to bring their wives and families to Georgia, subsidizing them with free transportation, one year's subsistence, and grants of land.

Despite some initial friendly overtures between Oglethorpe and the Spanish in Florida, hostilities broke out in September 1739, when Spain declared war on England. In October 1739, Tomochichi died at age 97, following a lengthy illness.

The War of Jenkins' Ear between Spain and Britain was a naval and colonial extension of the war of Austrian Succession in Europe. The claim by a British merchant seaman named Jenkins that Spanish officers had cut off his ear--later found to be the work of freebooting pirates, not Spaniards--gave the conflict its name.

Hostilities in North America began in November 1739 with a dawn raid by a Yamacree war party on the Highland outpost on Amelia Island. The warriors surprised and shot two Highland settlers who had left the safety of the fort to gather firewood. They cut off the victims' heads and carried them off as they withdrew to the south. Two weeks later, there was another raid.

Oglethorpe reacted to those incursions by going on the offensive. In January 1740, he led about 200 of his rangers, regulars, militia and Indian allies on a retaliatory foray across the St. Johns River into Spanish Florida. His troops surprised and burned one Spanish outpost at Fort Picolata and captured another of at Fort Pupo, 21 miles' north of St. Augustine. Leaving a small garrison at Fort Pupo, he resumed to Georgia to prepare for a major offensive.

Oglethorpe then went to Charleston to request troops. He had assurances of cooperation from British naval vessels in the area, and he was confident that with a sufficient land force he could capture St. Augustine. He even hinted that Havana, Cuba, could be the next target.

Charleston's response was not as enthusiastic as Oglethorpe had hoped. South Carolina provided a regiment of 500 men, a troop of rangers, and an armed schooner. About 200 Indians, mostly Cherokee, participated in the invasion. Despite the Creeks' apparent eagerness to support Britain, they were not willing to be drawn into a major European conflict, and few of them joined the expedition. Oglethorpe commanded about 400 men of his own 42nd Regiment, as well as several troops of English and Highland rangers, for which he himself paid most of the cost.

In May 1740, Oglethorpe, with his invasion force of about 2,000 men, advanced on St. Augustine. He planned a joint land and naval operation against the Spanish settlement. Gracia Real de la Teresa de Mose, a fort garrisoned by free black militiamen that protected the outskirts of St. Augustine, was overrun by the British invaders, who began to encircle the town.

Oglethorpe faced an able opponent, Don Manuel de Montiano, who had become governor of Florida in 1737. Traditionally, governors of that remote Spanish colony exercised much military and political independence. In early 1740, Montiano had only about 600 troops to

defend St. Augustine, but his main fortress, the imposing Castillo de San Marcos, was a strong position, defended by 50 cannons.

Montiano had regular Spanish troops as well as Florida militia at St. Augustine, and in July 1740, reinforcements arrived from Cuba. The settlement had been attacked before, in 1728, so the Spanish were prepared for a siege. The Castillo withstood 38 days of bombardment, which did little damage to the massive fortress due to the distance of the British guns.

On June 15, Spanish troops made a daring surprise attack on Fort Mose and recaptured the outpost. Meanwhile, Oglethorpe's Carolina troops were threatening to return home, since their term of enlistment had expired and many of them were ill with malaria. Seeing that his bombardment of St. Augustine had proved fruitless, Oglethorpe, himself ill with a fever, lifted the siege and withdrew his forces. He returned to Georgia bitterly disappointed and critical of the Carolinians, whom he accused of refusing to obey orders.

Oglethorpe himself came under scathing criticism for the failure of the St. Augustine expedition. His credibility was damaged and the security of the Georgia colony jeopardized. His supporters among the trustees were despondent, the South Carolina government was hostile, and Parliament began to regard Georgia as an expensive liability.

True to his aggressive character, Oglethorpe soon returned to the attack. Once he had recovered from his fever, the general began drumming up support for the Georgia colony, since he realized that Montiano would probably begin preparations for a counteroffensive. He raised the terrifying specter of Spanish-instigated slave revolts from Carolina to Virginia if the Georgia colony should fall. Despite his vigorous efforts, however, by autumn of 1741 it was clear that Georgia was on her own and could expect very little help.

Meanwhile, Montiano was indeed preparing to invade Georgia. Juan Francisco de Guemes, the governor-general of Cuba, promised him 30 ships and 1,300 troops, to which Montiano would add soldiers from the St. Augustine garrison. He probably commanded about 2,000 men when he moved northward in June 1742.

Guemes also made it clear that the main target of the Spanish offensive was Carolina. He expected Montiano to neutralize Oglethorpe's thin ranks and move on Port Royal, and anticipated that slave uprisings should, indeed, be incited throughout the South Carolina countryside.

Oglethorpe was short of men and had practically no support from South Carolina or England. Nevertheless, as he waited for the Spanish invaders to come, he promised to "give them a warm reception and make them sick of it." He grimly cautioned Lieutenant Governor William Bull of South Carolina that if Georgia was overrun, Bull must reinforce his position at Port Royal. "If there's any trifling in this," the general warned, "you may depend you are answerable for it."

In addition to a lack of troops to defend Georgia Oglethorpe also had a critical need for ships to protect the coast from Spanish privateers. He formed his own provincial navy of three small vessels to do the job--the schooner Walker and the sloops Faulcon and St. Phillip, all heavily armed with cannons and swivel guns and capable of carrying large complements of troops. Oglethorpe accompanied them in some actions against Spanish vessels.

Serious hostilities began with Spanish attacks against the British outposts on Cumberland Island. Oglethorpe was forced to evacuate Fort St. Andrew, but he reinforced Fort William before withdrawing to St. Simons Island.

On June 28, the main Spanish invasion fleet--36 ships--was spotted off the coast of St. Simons Island. On the following day, Montiano anchored about 10 miles off the coast and planned an amphibious landing. An attempt to land troops on the southeastern beach of the island on July 1 was thwarted due to a sudden squall, which upset the small landing craft.

Montiano decided on a more daring course of action, opting to sail past the guns of Fort St. Simons and make the landing on the southwestern end of the island in calmer waters. The passage was accomplished on July 4. Although there was a heavy exchange of fire, the Spanish fleet was piloted through the channel by an experienced ex-Carolinian, Alexander Parris, and suffered no serious loss.

Oglethorpe's southern position was now outflanked. During the night of July 5, he evacuated Fort St. Simons and withdrew his forces to Frederica.

The general was now clearly on the defensive. He called in his Highland company from Darien, recalled his rangers from their nearby stations, and once again appealed to his Indian allies for support. He armed indentured servants and promised them their freedom. He mustered possibly as many as 900 men to face the coming Spanish attack.

Montiano occupied Fort St. Simons on July 6. Although eager to launch an attack on Oglethorpe, he still hesitated because he was unfamiliar with the terrain. Several trails led through woods to the north; and Montiano did not know which one was Oglethorpe's military road leading to Fort Frederica.

At about 6 a.m. on July 7, two separate Spanish patrols left Fort St. Simons to scout the trails northward. Captain Nicholas Hernandez, with 25 scouts and 40 Yamacraw Indians, followed one trail; Captain Sebastian Sanchez, with 50 regulars, scouted another.

The two patrols joined forces when Hernandez's group made a wrong turn on the path they were following and ended up on the same trail as Sanchez's party. The Spanish force continued northward through marshy wetlands until, at about 9 a.m., they were within 1 1/2 miles of Frederica.

The Spaniards and Indians surprised five mounted Georgia rangers patrolling the trail southward. Veteran ranger William Small was shot and killed in the exchange of gunfire, but his four companions were able to escape, dashing at a gallop to Frederica to warn Oglethorpe of the enemy's rapid approach. Oglethorpe, fearing a general attack, knew his best chance lay in meeting the Spanish on the narrow trail before they could reach the cleared area near town and deploy for battle.

The general gathered up as many ready troops as he could--his Highland company, two companies of rangers, an assortment of Yamacraw, Chickasaw and Creek warriors--and led the way back down the road. About a mile south of Frederica, at a place called Gully Hole Creek, they ran headlong into the Spanish advance guard at a bend in the trail.

The clash was sudden and violent. The Spanish were surprised and quickly overcome. Both Captain Hernandez and Captain Sanchez were taken prisoner by Oglethorpe's men. During the melee, Toonahowi was shot in his right arm by a Spanish officer; he deftly

drew his pistol with his left hand and shot his opponent through the head. The battle was over in a matter of minutes, as the Spanish force evaporated into the woods and retreated back down the trail.

Oglethorpe and his mounted rangers carried out a vigorous pursuit, chasing the retreating Spaniards about two miles down the trail, then stopped to evaluate their situation. The Spanish had lost 36 men killed, captured or missing at the Gully Hole Creek engagement. The balance of their force either was lost in the woods or retreating to Fort St. Simons. The only British casualty was a Highland ranger who had fallen victim to heat exhaustion.

In spite of the positive outcome of the Gully Hole Creek battle, Oglethorpe wasted no time in preparing for another Spanish attack. The general chose a site about five miles down the trail from Frederica. At that point the trail left the woods and entered a boggy lowland area called Bloody Marsh. The Spanish would have to cross a narrow causeway of brush and logs when they entered the woods from the marsh.

The British forces fanned out into the woods on either side of the narrow trail, facing Bloody Marsh to the south. A company of the 42nd Regiment, about 60 regulars under Captain Raymond Demere, took the eastern side of the trail, while Captain Charles Mackay's 30 or 40 Highlanders took the western side. Oglethorpe left his regulars and Highlanders to hold their position and block any Spanish advance while he rode back to Frederica to gather the rest of his army.

Back at Fort St. Simons at about noon, Montiano was stunned to find members of the ill-fated scouting party resuming from Gully Hole Creek. He dispatched Captain Antonio Barba with three companies of elite grenadiers from the Habana Regiment (somewhere between 150 and 200 men) to collect the survivors of the day's earlier action and to screen their withdrawal.

A light rain began to fall, and at about 3 p.m. the white-coated Spanish grenadiers reached the causeway crossing Bloody Marsh. As Barba led his column up the trail, he was unaware of the British ambush awaiting him, but several survivors of the routed scouting party sensed that something was wrong. They noticed piles of logs and brush in the woods on the north side of the marsh, which Oglethorpe's troops had erected as barricades to protect them from enemy fire. When Barba sent a few soldiers ahead for a closer look, they were greeted by a fusillade of musket fire from the woods. Several Spanish soldiers fell dead, and Barba hustled his troops into the woods on the south side of the marsh to fan out and return fire.

After several volleys, the marsh was thick with smoke, held close to the ground by the steady drizzle. The noise, confusion and poor visibility caused Demere's regulars to panic, thinking the Spanish had broken across the marsh. Three platoons of the 42nd Regiment spilled out of the woods and fled back up the trail toward Frederica. Demere fled with them. About two miles up the road they were met by Oglethorpe, who had heard the sound of the firing and was returning with more troops to the scene of the battle. The retreating redcoats told the general that his entire force at Bloody Marsh had been routed, but Oglethorpe could still hear musket fire to the south. He ordered Demere and his men to go forward with him toward the sounds of the firing, and all but one officer obeyed.

Oglethorpe dreaded to think what he might find at the marsh, but when he arrived he found the situation was not nearly as bad as he had feared. He was relieved to find one platoon of about 15 men of the 42nd under Lieutenant Patrick Sutherland and Sergeant John Stewart, still doggedly holding their position in the woods on the east side of the

trail. on the other side, Mackay and his colorful Highlanders, intractable as ever, had no intention of retreating.

The tiny British force had held the Spaniards at bay for about an hour, keeping the enemy troops pinned down on the other side of the marsh. Oglethorpe then discovered, to his sheer surprise and delight, that the Spanish force had retreated!

Barba had no way of knowing either the small size of the enemy force across the marsh or the fact that about half of them had withdrawn. With his ammunition spent, he ordered a retreat to Fort St. Simons at about 4 p.m. He had lost seven men killed and two captured.

The battle for St. Simons Island was over, but Oglethorpe could not know it at that point. He had to brush aside his euphoria over the rout of the Spanish grenadiers and marshal his own forces for an advance on Fort St. Simons, hoping to check any additional Spanish move that day.

But there were to be no further Spanish offensives. Montiano had had enough. Alarmed by the day's failures, he lingered about a week in Fort St. Simons. on July 10 he attempted one more foray, by ship, up the western side of St. Simons Island, only to be driven back by British cannon fire from Frederica. When his men spotted five British vessels off the northern end of the island, Montiano feared a confrontation with a larger naval force. Finally, on July 14, he withdrew his forces to Florida.

Montiano must have spent some anxious nights thinking up an explanation for his rout in the face of the small British force. Lack of familiarity with the terrain of St. Simons Island, as well as lack of intelligence about the numbers of the enemy, probably played a part in his failure to take the initiative. Also, as he explained later, Governor Guemes had insisted that he be very cautious and not jeopardize the entire Spanish operation by leaving Cuba vulnerable to British attack.

While Montiano and Guemes tried to blame each other for the failure of the St. Simons expedition, Oglethorpe made one more attempt, in March 1743, to capture St. Augustine, but he failed to take it, or to draw the Spanish out of the stoutly defended Castillo de San Marcos. As in 1740, he was ultimately forced to withdraw to Georgia.

The two brief engagements at Gully Hole Creek and Bloody Marsh ended the Anglo-Spanish conflict over Georgia; there were no further Spanish attempts to reclaim the region. In 1748, Britain and Spain signed the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle (Aachen), and with the passing of the military threat to Georgia, the ranger outposts Oglethorpe had struggled to build and maintain were allowed to fall into ruin. The ranger companies were disbanded, and in 1749, the 42nd Regiment was withdrawn. The trustees' original vision of Georgia as a military buffer outpost was soon overshadowed by her development as a plantation colony when the use of black slaves was legalized in July 1749.

For James Oglethorpe, the end of his military adventure in Georgia also ended his career in America. With the Spanish threat over, he resumed to England. He married in 1744, commanded British troops during the Jacobite Rebellion in Scotland in 1745, and resumed his involvement in British political life.

Shortly after the American Revolution, John Adams, United States ambassador to Britain, arrived in London. His first visitor was 88-year old James Oglethorpe, an extraordinary man who had lived to see Georgia, the little colony he had founded and fought so hard to protect, become an American state.

MAP: A map by Thomas Silver, dated June 20, 1740, of the British encampment and positions at the stoutly defended Spanish city of St. Augustine, Fla. An ailing Oglethorpe abandoned the siege soon afterward.

PHOTO (COLOR): On the morning of July 7, 1742, a Spanish force invading Georgia runs headlong into the colony's British defenders, in Jackson Walker's Encounter at Gully Hole Creek (Jackson Walker).

PHOTO (COLOR): Built near Darien Fort King George was one of several outposts established to guard Georgia--and South Carolina--from Spanish invasion, but it never came under direct attack.

PHOTO (BLACK & WHITE): RIGHT: Although hot-tempered and egotistical, General James Edward Oglethorpe could imbue those he led with his enthusiasm and confidence.

PHOTO (BLACK & WHITE): BELOW RIGHT: Tomochichi, aged chief of the Yamacraw, with his nephew and heir, Toonahowi. Their friendship with Oglethorpe was essential to ensuring the success of the Georgian colony.

PHOTO (BLACK & WHITE): Following up on their success at Gully Hole Creek, Oglethorpe's Highlanders engage Captain Antonio Barba's Habana Grenadiers at Bloody Marsh. Although confusion reigned on both sides, after an hour the Spanish troops withdrew--never to return.

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By Thomas G. Rodgers

Thomas G. Rodgers teaches history in Ellijay, Ga., and has published a number of articles on American military history. For additional reading: *British Drums on the Southern Frontier: the Military Colonization of Georgia, 1733-1749*, by Larry E. Ivers; and *Oglethorpe in America*, by Philip G. Spalding.

#### **SPANISH BUFFER OUTPOST BY T.G.R.**

While Britain envisioned Georgia as a buffer colony and a haven for debtors, Spain encouraged buffer outposts to the north of St. Augustine, which were to be garrisoned by runaway slaves. Spanish policy generally had been to give safe haven to groups of slaves who had escaped from Carolina, on the expectation that they would fight for Spain in the conflicts with Britain. Black runaways seized the opportunity to win their liberty, maintain their family ties, and carve out an independent frontier existence by declaring loyalty to Spain.

Established about two miles north of St. Augustine in 1738, Gracia Real de la Santa Teresa de Mose--better known simply as Fort Mose--is the only known example of a free black town in the southern colonies. With a population of about 100, the town consisted of a walled fort enclosing the thatched huts of the freedmen, who also planted fields outside the fort. The four-sided fort was described as being built of stone and surrounded by a ditch. Captain Francisco Menendez, himself a former runaway, commanded Fort Mose for 40 years.

Governor Don Manuel de Montiano was confident that his black militia would prove themselves dependable in an English attack. The freedmen swore to sacrifice, if need be, their "last drop of blood in defense of the Great Crown of Spain and the Holy Faith."

The British invaders, commanded by General James Edward Oglethorpe, overran Fort Mose in May 1740, and her black defenders were evacuated to the safety of St. Augustine. Oglethorpe stationed a "mobile party" of regulars, Carolina militia, Highlanders and Creeks at the fort.

On June 15, Spanish regulars, supported by black militia and Yamasee Indians, conducted a pre-drawn raid on Fort Mose that caught the British mobile party completely by surprise. The British defenders put up a desperate hand-to-hand fight; and many of the Highlanders fell swinging their broadswords. Nevertheless, the Spaniards recaptured the fort and killed 63 of its British occupiers. Two wounded survivors were decapitated and their bodies mutilated, but it is not known whether that was done by Spanish soldiers, Indians or blacks. The recapture of Fort Mose was a blow to British morale and helped convince Oglethorpe to withdraw from Florida. Captain Menendez received a special commendation from Montiano for his role in St. Augustine's defense.

Black militia played a prominent part in Spain's 1742 military expedition against Georgia. They served under their own officers and functioned as independent cavalry and guerrilla companies. Several hundred black and mulatto militiamen are said to have accompanied Montiano in the invasion of St. Simons Island. If the operation there had been successful and Carolina had been laid open to Spanish attack, as he hoped, Montiano intended to employ his black troops to foment slave insurrection in the countryside.

In 1763, Florida was transferred to British control at the conclusion of the Seven Years' War. The black settlers of Fort Mose were evacuated to Cuba. While in Florida, however, the fort's militia established a precedent for the United States in the future--as the first organized black military formation in America.

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