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EAST FLORIDA IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION, 1775-1778

The loyalty of East Florida to the British cause during the War of the American Revolution subjected her to occasional raids, and caused her governor not only to take measures for her defence but also to plan retaliatory expeditions. The best information on the subject may be derived from the letters and reports of the period.

On the 18th July, 1776, Governor Patrick Tonyn reported to the Right Honourable Lord George Germain, Secretary of State, that "a Detachment of His Majestys Troops composed of a Captain and Seventy private were sent to Saint Marys River to protect the Loyal Inhabitants in those parts with some Circumstances, which then happened." Governor Tonyn continues :

It is hardly possible to make your Lordship conceive the difficulty there is in making people remain in their Plantations upon this Occasion ; I should scarcely have believed it, if I had not had the experience of pretty near the same Conduct at my Arrival here when some disturbances had happened with the Indians, and a War with them was expected. Several Planters in those parts notwithstanding all I could do have quitted their Plantations, and some few whose Principles were before Suspected, have gone into Georgia, and joined the Rebels.

Governor Tonyn was alarmed at his inadequate resources. He described the garrison at St. Augustine as "composed chiefly of foreign recruits refractory, and mutinous inclined, which is not uncommon with

new Levies, untill they settle to the Corps, exclusive of them not many above two hundred Veterans fit for Duty, who are fully employed in Necessary Works, and with the new Levys: Your Lordship will evidently perceive the impossibility of forming a Chain of Posts to guard effectually especially from horsemen the Frontiers of a Province extending three hundred miles when you have no Cavalry.”

On the 1st of July, there had been an invasion:

On the first instant a Rebel Lieutenant and twelve men having crossed near the Source of Saint Marys River came to Mr John Wilkinson's Plantation a Merchant in London, situated West of St. John's River, they kept concealed in the Woods, and were not observed untill they arrived at the Plantation whence they took upwards of thirty Negroes, and a Family from an adjoining Plantation.

I dispatched an Express immediately to the Cowkeeper, and a party of Indians, that were between here, and St Marys, and to His Majestys Troops there in Order to cut off these Rebels in their retreat to St Marys. From hence a party of Rifle Men were sent instantly for the Plantation with directions to follow the Track of the Robbers. If these directions had been followed it is probable they would have been intercepted, but the Agent for the Plantations turned the Indians from their direction and placed them on black Creek to guard the Plantations remaining on the West of St. Johns River, and sent the Rifle Men to join the Kings Troops.-The Rebels escaped with their Booty.¹

The following month there was another invasion.

¹ Public Record Office: Colonial Office 5/557, pp. 161-172. Stevens and Brown Library of Congress Transcripts.

Governor Tonym reported to the Lords Commissioners of Trade and Plantations :

Whereas this His Majestys Province in the Month of August last past was invaded by a number of Rebels from the Neighbouring Province of Georgia, whereupon it was thought expedient to employ some Armed Vessel either to defend the Frontiers, or to carry dispatches from time to time to such of His Majestys Commanders of His Ships of War upon the American Station as occasion might require *These are therefore to Certify*, That on the Sixth day of August last past, I did order and direct Captain George Osborne of the Governor Tonym Private Sloop of War, mounting ten Carriage Guns, and forty men then lying in the port of Saint Augustine to proceed with all dispatch to the River Saint Mary in this Province to join His Majesty's Troops under the command of Captain Graham, or wherever else the said Troops should then be posted, or to follow such directions, and obey such Orders, as might be given him by Thomas Bishop Esquire Commander of His Majesty's Ship Lively (then off this Port) That the said George Osborne did accordingly proceed to Sea, and joined His Majesty's said Ship Lively, and was then Ordered to proceed with dispatches for the Commander of His Majestys Ships in the River Savannah in the Province of Georgia, which he accordingly executed. ²

While Governor Tonym's sloop lay at Cockspur in the Savannah River, some rebels were dislodged at a place called Bloody Point, opposite Cockspur and in South Carolina. Captain Osborne led the attack ; there was a stubborn resistance, in which several of the

² P. R. O.: C. O. 5/557, pp. 63-64. Stevens and Brown L. C. Trans.

Americans were killed, their camp burned, and their guard houses destroyed. Osborne was shot through both thighs.³

In a letter written 2nd April, 1777, Governor Tonyn speaks to Lord Germain of depredations committed by the patriots within the East Florida borders as early as the spring of 1776:

Although, my Lord, my zeal for His Majesty's Service and Government is great, and I ardently wish for an active part, in distressing, and bringing our deluded Neighbours to return to their Allegiance, I have ever paid particular attention to preserving the Plantations of this Province, and maintained peace on the borders, untill the Rebels entered the Province last Spring and drove off all the Cattle on this side St Mary River, and in June a large Rebel Party carried off, Mr Jollie, Mr Bethune, Mr Kennedy and other Planters, and a Party advanced to Nassau River, and took of Negroes and Horses.

The campaign by sea had extended as far down as St. Augustine. In the same letter, we read:

In August 1775, a Rebel Privateer took our Ordnance Stores. off this Bar. No invasion was made on our parts, untill after these hostilities were committed, when it became necessary to retaliate.⁴

For purposes of defence and retaliation, Governor Tonyn busied himself outfitting his Rangers and the neighbouring Indians ; he also engaged a sloop called the Rebecca, to secure the inland water passage between Georgia and the St. John's River. In his own words :

³*Ibid.*

⁴P. R. O.: C. O. 5/557, pp. 263-264. Stevens and Brown L. C. Trans.

I have the honour to acquaint your Lordship that, at the Critical time, when an expedition was planned and commenced against this province, and when depredations were made by the Rebels as far as Saint John River, to secure that Barrier, and the Plantations and Provisions on that River, as there was not at that time any of the Kings Vessels of force in the province, I was, my Lord, under the absolutely necessity, of commissioning and employing the Sloop Rebeca Captain Mowbray for three months certain to secure the inland water passage to Saint John River from Georgia.

The regular Troops, my Lord, without scouting Parties of Rangers and Indians, who I employed in repelling the incursions of the Rebels, and supplying this Town with Cattle and the Garrison, were not sufficient for these purposes, nor fit for such services.

Considerable expence, my Lord, is already incurred from maintaining these parties, the want of a sufficient fund, has prevented me from throwing it, into last Years accounts.

There are numbers of fugitives from the Neighbouring Provinces, many of whom without a little assistance, have not where withal to support themselves, there are a number of Runaway Negroes from Georgia, whom I relieved the Captains of the Navy of, to whom they fled for protection, and twenty eight Prisoners taken by Lord Dunmore, and sent here to be kept in custody, I have committed them to the Fort untill these unhappy differences terminate.

In all circumstances, my Lord, the most salutary remedies, have been adopted, for the security

of the Plantations and Inhabitants, and for the good of His Majestys Service.⁵

The above letter was dated, St. Augustine, 18th October, 1776. On the 30th of the same month, Governor Tonyn acquainted Lord Germain with his measures for frustrating invasion :

My Lord,

I have the honour to acquaint your Lordship, that the intended expedition of the Rebels against this Province and their investing this Garrison has proved abortive, and I am credibly informed is laid aside. General Lee had collected about two thousand five hundred men in the southern Colonies in rebellion, and had advanced as far as Sunbury on his way to this Province. Lee was suddenly called to the North: the Troops then under the rebel Generals Armstrong and How were sickly, ill provided within military stores, and were backward in advancing.

What chiefly contributed to frustrate this scheme was information that the Cherokees had declared in favour of Government, and that two thousand had actually commenced hostilities on the back Settlements and that I had a considerable Body of Indians not only to cooperate in repelling them, from this Province, but to let loose and lay waste the frontiers of Georgia.

I have the honour of enclosing to your Lordship, a Plan of the Fortifications and. Lines of this Town, which are finished and may at a small expence be kept in repair, they will be a security in case of war or insurrection, and will in time of Peace render this Capital respected by Savages, and the more than Savages, Woodsmen.

⁵ P. R. O.: C. O. 5/557, pp. 2-3. Stevens and Brown L. C. Trans.

I have, my Lord, established and armed the Companies of militia, who may be employed in ease of invasion, and will be at all times useful in keeping in awe the Negroes who multiply amazingly.

I have the satisfaction of acquainting your Lordship, that I have been able to secure the affections of the Creek Indians, who are well disposed when called upon, to assist His Majesty in attacking and suppressing the rebels. I had a considerable body of them in readiness to cooperate with the regular Troops had the intended invasion taken place, and I might have sent them to lay waste the Province of Georgia, but knew not how far such a step might interfere with the measures of the Commander in Chief.

I have my Lord employed them with a Company of Rangers to repel the small plundering Parties of Rebel Bandity from Georgia, and to drive cattle from that Province to this. This my Lord is not a very honourable method of making war, but my Lord it is the only one left for supplying this town and Garrison with fresh provisions, as the Georgians would not allow the Cattle belonging to the Butchers who supply this Market to be drove hence. Besides, my Lord, the love of Plunder, engages many daring Fellows, instead of joining with, to oppose the rebels, and by their means, and a small naval force, I was obliged to engage, I have been able to secure the Settlements on the south of St John River: for my Lord the regular Troops are not well calculated for such moroding services.

By means of the Sloop Rebecca whom I commissioned and stationed at St John River, the inland water passage from Georgia is secured: the Plantations on that River who were greatly alarmed, do now unmolested, and free from the apprehensions of danger employ their Negroes in pro-

viding lumber and naval stores for the West Indies, having raised sufficient provisions for the ensuing Year, a proof of which is, their purchasing new Negroes. The state of provisions to the southward is not less favourable: and this town my Lord has it's coast at last well defended, Lord Howe having sent the Lively twenty Gun Ship to order a disposition of Ships so as to protect this Province, and by their means my Lord and by employing transports to be got in this Province, I expect to be able under the orders of General Howe, to make an advantageous diversion of Indians, and Regular Troops into Georgia, should an attack upon the Southern Colonies, in the Course of the Winter be projected.

This might be effected now, but the force that could be sent from this Garrison would not be sufficient to, preserve, what might be acquired. ⁶

Slowness of communication with Great Britain was a handicap, and Governor Tonyn was compelled to act on his own judgment. As he informed William Knox, 1st November, 1776, "The State of this Province in this Unnatural time of rebellion, necessarily incurred many extraordinary Services, consequently extraordinary Expences. From these Causes I found myself in perplexed difficulties to relieve the necessitous demands for the publick Safety, and unless the proper means were applied, the Country must be over-run, and the Plantations destroyed by the Scouting Rebel Parties." As we have seen, he secured a sloop - of fourteen guns, by the way-and some armed boats ; since "without this Salutary Measure the Rebels with small Boats might have effected the destruction of all our Plantations." A great deal of work was done on the fort at St. Augustine. "The Earl of Dunmore sent

⁶ P. R. O.: C. O. 5/557, pp. 21-24. Stevens and Brown L. C. Trans.

from Virginia a Number of His Majestys distressed Loyal Subjects some Prisoners of War, and some Negroes, all of them destitute, they also incur a heavy Expençe for Provisions. A great number have also arrived in equal distress from Georgia, and others from the Back Country of Carolina." The task of securing the loyalty of the Indians was difficult and expensive. They were not only provided with ammunition but supplied with presents.

Without a Body of Rangers it would have been impossible to protect the Province from the Rebels, they were as necessary to watch their Motions, as the Armed Vessels to guard the Rivers, and have succeeded in driving Cattle to the South of St John's River, they have also attended the Indian Scouting Parties.⁷

Governor Tonyn's contract with Captain Mowbray for the sloop "Rebecca" was renewed monthly, in the hopes of the arrival of protection from the Naval Department. In April, 1777, when it was learned that the patriots had actually assembled at Sunbury with the object of invading Florida by the inland waterway and attacking the province by sea, in addition to the armed land-forces, the contract for the "Rebecca" was renewed for four months. On the 19th July, 1777, Governor Tonyn memorialised the Lords Commissioners of His Majesty's Treasury to give an order for 3461 / 15s. / 1 1/4d., for the hire of the sloop and the smaller vessels as well as for the damages sustained by attacks.⁸

The problems which Governor Tonyn had to face were evidently underestimated. When the Governor

⁷ P. R. O.: C. O. 5/557., pp. 189-196. Stevens and Brown L. C. Trans.

⁸ P. R. O.: C. O. 5/557, pp. 521-524 Stevens and Brown L. C. Trans.

ordered the Rangers and Indians to push within the American posts, he applied to Colonel Prevost, stationed at St. Augustine, for a detachment of troops to assist in bringing cattle from Georgia for the supply of the town and garrison. In a letter to Colonel Prevost, 13th January, 1777, he outlined his plan:

Sir,

As you desire a description of the Operations I proposed for procuring a provision of live Cattle for this Garrison, which at this time is become a very essential Object, the Rangers and Indians having drove into this Province all the Cattle that were to be found without the Rebel Out posts.

Upon a general view of the Province of Georgia, the whole force consists at this time from the best intelligence of 274 Men of their Battalion at Savannah 100 Carolina Rangers at Barrington on the Altamaha to which it is said there are joined 50 Rangers Georgians. Of these Rangers a detachment of 50 are posted on the Banks South of Saintilla River 30 Miles distant from Altamaha River, and relieved once a fortnight by the like number from the Altamaha.

To answer your questions in the first Instance, These Posts I am informed have no Artillery. At Saintilla the Situation is on a rising Ground, there is no Fort, but each Man has thrown up a Covering, and drove a pecket to rest his rifle upon to fire.

It may not be requisite to Attack the Post. Their Horses graze round the Post - the first step should be to endeavour to secure by surprise all their Horses - A few of the Rangers and Indians can effect this while the Troops may dress an Ambuscade for the Rebels should they come out to save their Horses - I am assured 2000 heads of Cattle may be collected in a couple of days at Saintilla and drove off, should the detachment

fail in the Attempt to seize the Horses, they must take a proper post, and employ the Rangers and Indians to collect the Cattle--If the Rebels attempt to save the Cattle, they must quit their Station, when the Cattle are collected they are to be drove to the South side of St John's River by a few Rangers the Troops and remainder of Rangers and Indians serving as covering Parties.-There will be from forty to fifty Rangers - There are now with the Rangers about 25 Indians. But I expect the Indians of two Townships to arrive every day to relieve those of the two Towns just returned. What Ammunition you require shall be delivered from the Magazine-The Rangers and Indians find their own Provisions, they have no scarcity of fresh Meat-When they enter Georgia it is a plentiful Country for all kinds of Provisions, but rice may be necessary for the Troops on their March from St John's to St Mary's River of which there is plenty in this Province.-The Rangers, shall have directions to give all Assistance in killing wild Cattle and Deer for the supply of the Troops.

In order to execute this plan, the Governor desired a detachment of troops "of such Numbers as to defy the whole rebel force in Georgia"-not less than 125 private sentries and a proportionate number of officers.

If difficulties arise as to the Provisions to be found this Corps on their March, I can only say, it is full as proper for them to famish in a laudable attempt to supply his Majesty's Garrison with a Competency of fresh Beef as to remain in Garrison, and the whole to famish without any trial of Relief.

* * * * *

You know Sir the state of Provisions in the

Garrison. I have been indefatigable in my endeavours to procure plenty, although frustrated in them by various unforeseen means, yet we have hitherto been well supplied.-It will give my pleasure to concert with You, and the Officers which may have the Command of this Corps, should you deem it necessary.⁹

Colonel Prevost, in his reply (16th January, 1777), stated that his men were unfit to undertake an expedition of a hundred miles' distance with the danger of being cut off, "little dependance being to be put for their Subsistence on People who have no discipline." He said it would be time to go in search of provisions into hostile territory when actual want was felt. Governor Tonyn's proposed detachment he considered "either a too large party to surprise the Enemy or a too small one to perform the proposed Expedition." He promised to have a party ready to meet the opposition of the enemy, however, as soon as possible.¹⁰

In answer, Governor Tonyn (17th January, 1777) reminded Colonel Prevost that he had suggested 125 men for the Georgia expedition as a minimum number, but that the garrison would be sufficiently strong if as many as three or four hundred men were sent. As to the Indians and the Rangers, he considered them thoroughly dependable:

I have been obliged to Check the Spirit of the Indians who were desirous of making incursions into the Province of Georgia lest they should in their Savage manner Butcher all indiscriminately,

⁹ P. R. O.: C. O. 5/557, pp. 269-272. Stevens and Brown L. C. Trans.

¹⁰ P. R. O.: C. O. 5/557, pp. 273-275. Stevens and Brown L. C. Trans.

and they not being of sufficient Strength and unsupported might be cut off.¹¹

Much correspondence passed between Colonel Prevost and the Governor; the military man alleged the lack of equipment and supplies and his distrust of the savage allies, the Governor avowed his confidence in the Indians and his belief in the importance of the expedition. Tonyon's comments on the Indians in his letter of 27th January, 1777 are of particular interest, as they introduce the Cowford into the narrative:

I must Sir in justice to the Indians observe that they have in general ever expressed a desire of going into Georgia to Attack the Rebels, and have on several Occasions fought bravely, as early as the time to which you refer in your letter, when Captain Graham commanded the detachment of the King's Troops on St Mary's River, a Party of Indians were in Georgia and preserved the Rangers from a total defeat. And a large body of them from the Nation, were on their way to our Assistance in case Lee and How's Expedition had taken place, and from this paragraph of a Talk they sent to Savannah upon my informing them of the threatned Expedition against this Province you may judge how hearty they were in their professions, That they declared if the people in Georgia attempted to go against St Augustine they would make the Grass grow in the Streets of Savannah as now in their old trading paths to Augusta, which are grown up no more to be seen.

The Indians by themselves forced back the Rebels when they had advanced as far as the Cowford, and had they not discovered men dressed in red at their fires in the night time, they would have

¹¹ P. R. O.: C. O. 5/557, pp. 277-280. Stevens and Brown L. C. Trans.

surprised them, these were those Cloathed in the Regimentals of the Soldiers taken at the Cowford, the Indians however pursued them until they passed St Marys River, and I must acknowledge that they are very intelligent, and usefull Spies in observing the movements of the Rebels.¹²

The Georgia patriots were eager to enlist the support of the inhabitants of East Florida ; and in April or May, 1777, Button Gwinnett, president of Georgia and a signer of the Declaration of Independence, issued the following proclamation to the inhabitants of East Florida :¹³

Georgia A Proclamation	By the Honourable Button Gwinnett Esquire President and Commander in Chief of the said state.
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Whereas the Southern Frontiers of this State have been frequently alarmed by the Inroads and Depredations of sundry Persons, Inhabitants of the Province of East Florida, and acting under the Commission, and Authority of Patrick Tonym Esquire Governor of the said Province. And Whereas it has pleased divine Providence to bless the American Arms in an unexampled Manner, so that there is every reason to expect we shall be enabled to repel those Enemies of Liberty and Mankind and intirely to drive them off from this vast united Continent. Taking these Premises into consideration and being unwilling to destroy or distress any that are disposed to accept of the Protection of the United States ; I therefore by virtue of the Power vested in me, Do issue this my Proclamation, signifying my intentions to all the Inhabitants of the

¹² P. R. O.: C. O. 5/557, pp. 315. Stevens and Brown L. C. Trans.

¹³ P. R. O.: C. O. 5/558, pp. 570-572. Stevens and Brown L. C. Trans.

Province of East Florida, and acquainting them with the motives of my appearing among them, with an Army sufficient for the reduction of the said Province.

Be it therefore known to all the Inhabitants of East Florida, that the American Standard is now erected among them, to the Intent, that all who will repair to the same, and take an Oath of Allegiance to the Free and Independent States of North America, shall receive the Protection and Assistance of the said States, and shall be secured in their Persons and Property. And least any Person or Persons should be deceived by the insinuations of our Enemies, and induced to disbelieve the Proposals now offered unto them, I therefore by the Authority of the State of Georgia, Do assure them, that I do not come to destroy, but to protect, and receive them as our Friends, and Brothers, and as Men engaged in the most glorious Cause of asserting our Rights, and Privileges in opposition to the oppressive Schemes of Tyranny. All therefore, that will on this occasion faithfully join, and adhere unto us, agreeable to the Terms abovementioned shall receive every indulgence, and Encouragement, and be intitled to all the rights and Priviledges of the rest of our fellow Citizens. And further I would request every person who may have an opportunity of perusing the Contents of this Proclamation, seriously to consider, and reflect, what they can propose to themselves in standing out in opposition to the United States of America ; since the God of Armies has so remarkably appeared in our Favour, and the Period cannot be far off, when the Enemies of America will be cloathed with everlasting Shame, and Dishonour.

Given under my hand, and Seal the
day of One thousand Seven hundred
and Seventy Seven.

(Signed) Button Gwinnett.

By His Honours Command

(Signed) Edward Langworthy Secretary.

In May, 1777, there was another invasion of East Florida. Governor Tonyn notified Lord Germain that

“an advanced Body of Rebel Horsemen, under the command of a Colonel Baker crossed Saint Mary River, on the 10th May proceeding towards Saint John River. The 15th-a skirmish happened, several Rebels were wounded, two of them left on an Island on Nassau dangerously, on our part an Indian killed, who the Rebels Scalped, cutting off all his Features, and mangled his Body, which greatly exasperated the Savages. The 16th, at one in the morning, a Detachment of the Kings Troops passed Saint John River with the Rangers and Indians, intentionally to cut off this rebel Corps, that had marched into a neck of Land, between trout Creek, and a branch of Nassau River. The 17th after great fatigue and a very long march, they came up with attacked and totally defeated the Rebels, those who were saved by the most precipitate flight were pursued, and drove over Saint Mary River, and were seen by some of our Scouts, who had concealed themselves in a thicket on the other side of Saintilla River who counted them and they informed me there were only forty two Rebels of this Corps returned.”¹⁴

It should be noted that Governor Tonyn pays a high

¹⁴ P. R. O.: C. O. 5/557, pp. 481-482, Stevens and Brown L. C. Trans.

tribute to Prevost in this encounter. He said that "the success of this Expedition is, in a great measure to be ascribed to the Judgement and good conduct of that experienced Officer, and to his humane and polite behaviour in preserving the greatest harmony through every department of this Corps of Troops, and his gaining the affections of the Rangers and Indians." He also commended the skill of Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Browne, who had charge of the Rangers and Indians.¹⁵

Lieutenant Colonel Browne's account of the attack is valuable source information. In a letter dated "St. Johns May 18th 1777," addressed to Governor Tonym, he says:

I am happy to inform your Excellency that the intention of the Rebels to ravage this Province is in a great measure, if not entirely frustrated.

On the 16th the Regulars, Rangers, and Indians passed the River St Johns, and marched to Ralph's place, where we received intelligence from our Scouts, that the Rebels had passed Thomas's in a direction through the Woods towards Saint Marys road from which we concluded that they were retreating in consequence of the repulse they met with on the 15th from the Indians.

After a Conference with the Major a few Rangers were ordered to reconnoitre and the Rangers and Indians under my Command set off with the utmost Expedition to harrass the Rebels, and retard their March.

At nine in the night our Scouts brought us intelligence, that the Rebels had not passed the Road from whence we concluded they were encamped a short distance from us in our rear-at four in the morning we received intelligence that the Rebels

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 484.

were encamped on the South West branch of Nassau, the Major received the same information:- We proposed a Meeting to fix the plan of Operation.

Having met, and fixed the Mode of Attack, I advanced with the Rangers and Indians to Annoy the Rebels, and keep them engaged untill the arrival of the regulars in order to surround them.

At nine oClock we perceived the Rebel horse on their March, upon which I ordered the Rangers and Indians to take post in their front, leaving a small party in a branch of a Swamp, that commanded their flank, and would of necessity compel the Rebels to retreat towards the regulars, whose arrival we expected every minute.

When the Rebels had advanced within fifty Yards a general firing commenced on the side of the Rangers and Indians-a part of the rebels retreated in disorders, others demounted to attack the Rangers, and were warmly received ; the rangers on their flank charged them with extraordinary resolution, and obliged them to take to their horses, and alter their route in a direct line to the regulars, who were advancing with great Spirit under the direction of the Major in three Columns -the Rebels struck with the utmost consternation at the appearance of the regulars fled with the greatest precipitation, the three Columns keeping up a hot fire during their retreat-the horses of the Rebels preserved them from total destruction.

Many of the Rebels were wounded in the beginning of the Engagement-some killed by the Indians-others made Prisoners by the Rangers, and some who fled to the regulars for Protection.

Captains Few and Williams fell into our hands, I have got possession of the Colonels Baggage, Commission and Papers, which I have enclosed con-

taining a plan of the proposed Invasion of the Province agreeable to the, information Your Excellency has from time to time received and communicated to me, and which I flatter myself will be protracted at least by the defeat they have a second time sustained-I have no doubt, but their Troop of horse, which consisted of One hundred and fifty men are reduced to less than One hundred.* *

We have Seven Prisoners in Custody- the Major will send a party by Water to secure Bryan, and two Rebels at a Doctors house on an Island in Nassau, one of which was wounded in the Skirmish between Sherards, and big Creek-Ten deserted with an intention of proceeding-two rangers were conducting them-the Indians fell on with them, killed three, and drove the remainder into the Swamp.¹⁶

Simultaneously there was activity on the water. In the same letter in which are described the incursions of May, 1777, Governor Tonyn says:

The rebel main Body under the command my Lord, of Colonels Elbert, Stirk, and White, with the Galley's and other Vessels, commanded by Commodore Oliver Bowen, were arrived at Saint Mary River, and had passed up to Amelia Narrows which they could not get through, expecting to be joined by the Corps of Horsement.

My Intentions were that Captain Mowbray with the Rebecca and all the armed Ships and Vessels should sail into Saint Marys, while the Troops marched by the main scouring the Islands in their march, and by a well concerted attack, I was certain of giving the Rebels a total overthrow. Towards this object the Rebecca and Hawke armed

¹⁶ P. R. O.: C. O. 5/557, pp. 493-496. Stevens and Brown L. C. Trans.

Ships were ordered to fall down Saint John River, and to anchor without the Bar: the Meredith, and the smaller armed Vessels to be ready to go out to join them on the first notice. A storm of Wind, my Lord, forced the Rebecca and the Hawke to Sea, the former fell in with an engaged a rebel Brigantine of sixteen Guns, and crowded with men, and after a brisk running Fight maintained by the Rebels, the Rebecca silenced their fire for eight minutes and was bearing down upon the Brigantine to Board, when they renew'd their fire, an unlucky shot carried away the Sloop Topmast and rent the mainsail, which gave the Brigantine the advantage in sailing and an opportunity of flight. The Sloop engaged to leeward and the Brigantines Decks were much exposed to the fire from the sloop, two men were seen to fall killed from the Sloop, two men were seen to fall killed from the Tops into the Sea, and many must have been killed on the Decks. The Rebecca had a Man killed and nine wounded. In this Affair Captain Mowbray's spirited conduct deserves uncommon applause, indeed, my Lord, his zeal, activity, and unwearied industry, on all the different parts of service, in choking up Creeks, assisting in erecting Batteries, and cooperating on all occasions of service with the greatest assiduity for the good of the Kings service, cannot be too much commended. Lieutenant Findley of the 60th Regiment, and a detachment of this Garrison on Board the Rebecca, behaved with great resolution and courage, and it is to their behaviour Captain Mowbray ascribes his superiority over the Brigantine, The Rebecca returned in a too shattered condition to proceed to Saint Mary's and before she could be repaired to pursue the intended operations, the

rebels had time to retire, after they had attempted to cut a passage through Amelia Narrows.¹⁷

On the 3rd of July, 1778, Governor Tonyn wrote a letter to the Honourable John Stuart, describing "a formidable Invasion by the Rebels by Sea and land:"

They have advanced with their Army to this Side of St Mary's River with a Train of Artillery drawn by Oxen. Lieu. Col. Brown was compelled to retreat and arrived within a short Distance of Major Prevost's Post at Allegator Bridge on the 30th June when a Body of Rebels near 900 Men attacked them, a few of the King's Troops near a Spot in an Entrenchment assisted the Rangers, and the Rebels were drove off - nine men were left dead, but the Rebels had time to carry off all their wounded on Horseback and several others that were supposed to be killed, as the Rangers had been marching for several days and Nights successively, they were too much fatigued to reap further Advantage of the Enemy, and the Corps under Major Prevost were all at work and their Horses all grazing and could not be collected in time-It is apprehended the Rebels have suffered in this more than is in general Imagined, a Man has come in from them since, that reports Col. Scriven is wounded in the Belly-They have five Gally's, three armed Vessels and several Store Ships in St Marys Sound. It would have been a happy thing for his Majesty's Service if the Body of Indians that were ready to come here with Perryman had been allowed to come down, the Invasion would probably have been prevented by a proper diversion into Georgia, they could not have assembled their Army on the Altamaha.

¹⁷ P. R. O.: C. O. 5/557, pp. 482-484. Stevens and Brown L. C. Trans.

I trust however some of the Indians will arrive in time to be of Service-A part of the Seminolies have just joined Col. Brown and I have sent to the Cowkeeper and Ocony King to rouse all the Rest and to come to our Assistance forthwith.¹⁸

Further facts are revealed in Tonym's letter of 18th July. There we discover that

"the check given to the Rebels at Allegator Bridge the floating Batteries and naval Armament in St John's River, the dispositions in posting his Majesty's Forces and the Difficulties thrown in their way have made the Rebels from all present appearances relinquish their Design against this Province.

* * * * *

The Enemy advanced three formidable Corps under the Command of General Howe, Govr Houston and Andw Williamson each governing a Division seperately to the South of St Mary's River; from the Obstacles they had to surmount, and the Danger in consequence of a Defeat they have judged it not prudent to advance, and on the 15th Inst. Genl Howe with the Carolinian Continental Troops repassed that River on their Return and the Divisions of Houston and Williamson were preparing to follow their Example-The Gallies were fallen back to Cumberland Sound-His Majesty's Ship Perseus and the Otter, with the Germain, Dreadnought and Thunderer Provincial Armament were taking Measures of Pursuit in cooperation with the King's land forces-I had fortunately succeeded in well guarding St. John's River by a Naval Force from the Mouth of it to Pantons Store -The Seminoly Indians guarded the West of St.

¹⁸ P. R. O.: C. O. 5/558, pp. 447-449. Stevens and Brown L. C. Trans.

John's from Doctor's Lake, to the Store and to Latchaway and the Cowkeeper by this time is I hope in conjunction with the Troops at the Heels of the Rebels.

The fate of the "Otter", as well as Governor Tonyn's further preparations for defence and offence, may be found in His Excellency's letter to Lord Germain, the 20th of August, 1778:

I am sorry to inform your Lordship, that the Otter Sloop of War, and the George armed Schooner armed for the service of this Province were lately lost off cape Carnaverel, in a violent Storm the Crews only are saved. They sailed from this Port in pursuit of a rebel Privateer which carried off thirty Negroes from the Smyrnea Settlement. A party of Troops is stationed there for the protection of that port of the Country in future, and captain Moncrief is engaged to fortify the Post.

I have applied to Lord Viscount Howe for some Cannon of heavy metal for our Gallies and for other Posts for our defence.

Your Lordships approbation of my increasing the Corps of Rangers gives me great satisfaction and I am happy that the event of the several Expeditions of the rebels against this Province have evinced their utility.

It may be proper still to increase them as I am convinced they are useful in protecting this Province and with the Indians in infesting the rebellious Colonies. However as the command of them has been a Subject of dispute and altercation between me and Brigadier Prevost, I have intirely given up the command to him, untill I have the honour of your Lordships answer to my letter of the 1st of May No 56.¹⁹

EDGAR LEGARE PENNINGTON

¹⁹ P. R. O.: C. O. 5/558, pp. 436-437. Stevens and Brown L. C. Trans.