

## *British invasion fleet arrives off Cape Fear, North Carolina, March 12, 1776*

On this day in history, March 12, 1776, a British invasion fleet arrives at Cape Fear, North Carolina, intending to capture the rebellious territory and march on to take Charleston, South Carolina, the largest port city in the south. British Major General Henry Clinton's plans were thwarted though, when he learned that a local army of Loyalist supporters had been destroyed a few weeks before at Moore's Creek Bridge.

Clinton sailed south from Boston in January with 1,200 men. He was to meet another fleet sailing from Ireland under the command of Sir Peter Parker. Parker's fleet would carry 2,000 soldiers under the direction of Lieutenant General Charles Cornwallis. In addition, North Carolina Governor Josiah Martin was raising a Loyalist army to join Clinton. The overall objective was to quickly subdue the rebellion in the south, with the help of what was believed to be large numbers of southern Loyalist supporters, and restore colonial rule in the southern colonies so the army could focus on the more rebellious north.

Clinton arrived off the coast of Cape Fear on March 12. He quickly realized his plan would not work when he learned of the defeat of Governor Martin's Loyalist army at the Battle of Moore's Creek Bridge. In addition, Parker's fleet, which was supposed to have left Ireland in December, had not yet arrived. Clinton was forced to wait off the coast until the first of the fleet arrived on April 18. The rest of the fleet, which had been battered by a rough crossing and scattered, was not fully present until May 31.

Clinton met with the governors of North and South Carolina and Captain Parker. Due to the loss of the Loyalist army, they decided that disembarking in North Carolina at this time would be unwise. Instead, Parker suggested a direct assault from the sea on Charleston. His scouts had learned that the fort at the opening of Charleston's harbor was only

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partially complete and he believed it would be easily taken, giving them complete control of the harbor.

When Clinton and Parker sailed from North Carolina, with Governor Martin on board, royal rule in North Carolina was essentially over. General Cornwallis would not make another attempt to re-establish British rule there until 1780 during the southern campaign, which ultimately failed as well.

When Clinton and Parker reached Charleston and attacked Fort Sullivan, Colonel William Moultrie successfully repelled the attack from the unfinished fort. The stunned and humiliated Clinton and Parker were forced to abandon their attempt to retake the south. Instead, they sailed north and joined General William Howe's invasion of New York. The British would not return to the south until 1778, when they began a new southern campaign with the capture of Savannah in December of that year.