

The Battle of Fort Charlotte ends, March 13, 1780

On this day in history, March 13, 1780, the Battle of Fort Charlotte ends when Spanish Governor of Louisiana and General Bernardo de Galvez takes the city of Mobile, Alabama, which was then part of British West Florida. Mobile was originally a French settlement and Fort Charlotte was built in 1723 to guard the city. Britain gained control of West Florida in 1763 after the French and Indian War.

When Spain officially allied with the United States against Great Britain in 1779, Spanish Governor of Louisiana, Bernardo de Galvez, set about driving the British out of the Gulf Coast. He quickly took control of the southern Mississippi River and then set his sights on Mobile before attempting to take Pensacola, the capital of West Florida. He sailed from New Orleans in January of 1780 and arrived at Mobile Bay on February 13.

Captain Elias Durnford was in charge of the British garrison at Mobile with about 300 men. He had already been strengthening Fort Charlotte's defenses after hearing of Galvez's campaign in Louisiana. On the arrival of Galvez's fleet, Durnford quickly sent word to Pensacola requesting reinforcements.

Durnford also burned down the entire town of Mobile, causing great distress to the inhabitants, in order to prevent the Spanish foes from using the houses and shops of Mobile for cover or as a base of operation. A large British force from Pensacola was sent overland to help, but they got bogged down in the swampy bayou. It soon became apparent that no reinforcements would arrive.

Meanwhile, Galvez built entrenchments around the fort and began a cannon siege on March 10. With no reinforcements, Captain Durnford knew his 300 men would not be able to stand long against Galvez, whose force was more than twice the size of his own. Within a few

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days, the walls of Fort Charlotte were breached. Captain Durnford surrendered the garrison on March 13, ending British rule in Mobile, forever.

Governor de Galvez renamed Fort Charlotte Fort Carlotta and began making plans to conquer Pensacola, the last British stronghold in West Florida. The British made an attempt to retake Mobile the following January when Galvez was gathering together his Pensacola invasion force in Havana, but this attempt was quickly repulsed. Pensacola fell to Galvez March 9, 1781 bringing British rule in West Florida to an end forever.

The foundations of Fort Charlotte were discovered in downtown Mobile and about one third of it was reconstructed in the 1970s. Today, the site goes by the name of Fort Conde, which was the French name for the fort, and houses the official welcome center for the city of Mobile.