

= Charles Town expedition =

The Charles Town expedition (September 1706) was a combined French and Spanish attempt under Captain Jacques Lefebvre to capture the capital of the English Province of Carolina , Charles Town , during Queen Anne 's War (as the North American theater of the War of the Spanish Succession is sometimes known) .

Organized and funded primarily by the French and launched from Havana , Cuba , the expedition reached Charles Town in early September 1706 after stopping at St. Augustine to pick up reinforcements . After a brief encounter with a privateer the *Brillant* , one of the expedition 's six ships , became separated from the rest of the fleet . Troops landed near Charles Town were quickly driven off by militia called out by Governor Nathaniel Johnson when word of the fleet 's approach reached the area , and an improvised flotilla commanded by Colonel William Rhett successfully captured the *Brillant* , which arrived after the other five ships had already sailed away in defeat .

= = Background = =

News of the start of the War of the Spanish Succession had come to southeastern North America in mid @-@ 1702 , and officials of the English Province of Carolina had acted immediately . After failing in December 1702 to capture St. Augustine , the capital of Spanish Florida , they launched a series of destructive raids against the Spanish @-@ Indian settlements of northern Florida . French authorities in the small settlement at Mobile on the Gulf coast were alarmed by these developments , since , as allies of the Spanish , their territory might also come under attack .

The idea of a combined Franco @-@ Spanish expedition first arose in 1704 , when the governor of Florida , José de Zúñiga y la Cerda , discussed the idea with a French naval captain as a means of revenge for the Carolina raids ; however , no concrete action came of this discussion . Pierre LeMoyne d 'Iberville , the founder of Mobile and an experienced privateer who had previously wrought havoc against English colonial settlements in the Nine Years ' War , in 1703 developed a grandiose plan for assaulting Carolina . Using minimal French resources , d 'Iberville planned for a small French fleet to join with a large Spanish fleet at Havana , which would then descend on Carolina 's capital , then known as Charles Town . The expedition was to be paid for by holding other English colonial communities hostage after destroying Charles Town . It was not until late 1705 that d 'Iberville secured permission from King Louis XIV for the expedition . The king provided ships and some troops , but required d 'Iberville to bear the upfront cost of outfitting the expedition .

= = Prelude = =

Two small fleets , one headed by d 'Iberville , who was to lead the expedition , left France in January 1706 , totalling 12 ships and carrying 600 French troops . They first sailed for the West Indies , where additional troops were recruited at Martinique , and d 'Iberville successfully ransacked English @-@ held Nevis . D 'Iberville then released part of his squadron , and sailed for Havana . There he attempted to interest Spanish authorities in supporting the expedition , with limited success , due in part to a raging epidemic of yellow fever . In addition to decimating the expedition 's troops , Spanish Governor Pedro Álvarez de Villarín died of the disease on July 6 , and d 'Iberville himself succumbed on July 8 . Before he died , d 'Iberville handed control of the expedition to Captain Jacques Lefebvre .

Lefebvre sailed from Havana with five ships , carrying about 300 French soldiers under the command of General Arbousset , and 200 Spanish volunteers led by General Esteban de Berroa . The fleet first made for St. Augustine , where Governor Francisco de Córcoles y Martínez provided a sixth ship , another 30 infantry , and about 50 " Christian Indians " from the Timucua , Apalachee , and Tequassa tribes .

The French fleet sailed from St. Augustine on August 31 . During the passage a sloop was spotted , and the *Brillant* gave chase ; she consequently became separated from the rest of the squadron . The sloop was a privateer sent out by Carolina governor Nathaniel Johnson to intercept Spanish

supply ships ; its captain quickly returned to Charles Town with word of the fleet 's movement . The countryside and town , then also suffering the ravages of a yellow fever epidemic , rallied in response to Governor Johnson 's calling out of the militia . The exact number of militia mustered is not known ; of the non @-@ slave population of 4 @,@ 000 , an estimated 900 men served in the colonial militia . Anticipating that a landing would be attempted on James Island , which guarded the southern approach to the harbor , Johnson posted the militia there under the command of Lieutenant Colonel William Rhett . The northern point of James Island was fortified by Fort Johnson , which housed a few cannon whose range was inadequate to prevent ships from entering the harbor . The militia also improvised a small flotilla of ships , which even included a fire ship .

= = Attacks = =

The Spanish fleet arrived off the harbor bar on September 4 (this date is recorded in contemporary English documents and histories as August 24 due to differences between the Julian calendar then in use in the English colonies , and the modern Gregorian calendar) . Despite the absence of the *Brillant* , which carried much of the French force , including " the campaign guns , shovels , spades , shells , and the land commander " (the latter being General Arbousset) , Captain Lefebvre and his fleet crossed the bar on September 7 , and delivered an ultimatum the next day . He demanded a ransom of 50 @,@ 000 Spanish pesos , threatening to destroy Charles Town if it was not paid . Governor Johnson contemptuously dismissed the demand as paltry , claiming the town was worth 40 million pesos , and that " it had cost much blood , so let them come " .

On September 9 the invaders landed two separate forces . One large force , numbering about 160 , plundered some plantations near the Charleston neck , but was recalled when the Governor Johnson sent militia out in boats to oppose them . A second smaller force was landed on James Island , but was also driven away by the threat of opposition . Late that night Johnson received word that the party on the neck was still active , and sent Lieutenant Colonel Rhett with 100 men to investigate . Arriving around daybreak on the 10th , they apparently surprised the invaders . The invaders fled after a brief skirmish , but about 60 were captured , and as many as 12 invaders were killed along with one of the defenders . On September 11 Lieutenant Colonel Rhett sailed the colonial flotilla out to find the invaders , only to discover that they had sailed off .

The next day the *Brillant* showed up , unaware of what had just transpired . Her captain had misjudged the distance from St. Augustine and had made landfall further north before turning around . General Arbousset landed his troops east of Charles Town , but the *Brillant* was captured by the colonial fleet ; Arbousset and his men surrendered after suffering 14 ? 30 killed in a brief battle with the English militia . The prisoners included 90 to 100 Indians ; most of these were " sold for slaves " .

= = Aftermath = =

Carolina officials declared October 17 a day of thanksgiving for their successful defense . The large number of prisoners , however , caused them some trouble . They sent about one third of them off to Virginia , expecting that they would be transported to England . However , by the time the prisoners arrived in Virginia , the annual merchant fleet had already sailed . Virginia authorities were unhappy that they now had to hold the prisoners , who would otherwise have been set free with the ship they arrived on .

In response to the Franco @-@ Spanish expedition , Carolinians led Indian raiding expeditions that besieged Pensacola , one of the few remaining Spanish outposts in Florida . They also mobilized Indian forces to attack Mobile , but these efforts were frustrated by French diplomatic activities in the Indian communities and also by false rumors of another Franco @-@ Spanish expedition .