



## General William Moultrie



William Moultrie (1730-1805), one of South Carolina's leading Patriots in the American Revolution, is most famous for his June 28, 1776 victory over British naval forces on Sullivan's Island. After the war, he was a prominent political leader in the formation of the state, including serving two terms as governor.



*Will Moultrie*

### Moultrie's Early Life

Born in Charleston in 1730, William Moultrie was the son of Dr. John Moultrie and Lucretia Cooper Moultrie. At age 19, Moultrie married Elizabeth Damarius de St. Julien and the couple had three children, one dying in infancy. In 1752, he was elected to Commons House of Assembly, beginning a political career that lasted until 1794. By 1761, he owned a rice plantation and about 200 slaves. The same year, during the 1759-61 Cherokee War, Moultrie was

commissioned a captain in the South Carolina Militia. By 1774, he held the rank of colonel. A biographer described him as "a gentleman of position and substance, who had a large interest in the welfare of the country." Moultrie's military experience and social status would result in his playing an important role in South Carolina during the Revolutionary War.

### Revolutionary Charleston

As relations with Great Britain worsened in the 1770s, the American colonies prepared for war and independence. As South Carolina's capital, Charleston became a center for revolutionary activity, even hosting an event similar to the Boston Tea Party where South Carolinians dumped British-imported tea into Charleston harbor. In 1775, a Provincial Congress was formed and elected Moultrie as a member. In June he was made colonel of the 2<sup>nd</sup>

South Carolina Regiment. At the time, there was no official American or South Carolina flag, so Moultrie designed one for his command. The dark blue flag resembled the color of his men's uniform coats, with a white crescent in the top left corner. Moultrie proudly wrote in his memoirs that his flag became a symbol of defiance of the British and the "first American flag . . . displayed in South Carolina."



Charleston in 1780 from the Cooper River

## The Fort on Sullivan's Island

Sullivan's Island was a strategic location at the mouth of Charleston Harbor. From the island, Patriots could deny British warships entrance to the harbor. In December 1775, a company of Moultrie's regiment was ordered to secure the island and prevent British troops, on two ships blockading the harbor's entrance, from landing. When the colonel arrived on the island and assumed command in March 1776, he found a, "great number of mechanics and negroe laborers" at work using thousands of palmetto logs and sand to build a fort sufficient for 1000 men.

Major General Charles Lee, commander of Charleston's Patriot forces, believed that the large British cannons would easily destroy the fort's walls. Colonel Moultrie replied to Lee, "We will lay behind the ruins and prevent their men from landing."

On the morning of June 28, 1776, ten British warships, commanded by Commodore Sir Peter Parker attacked the incomplete fort on Sullivan's Island.

Armed with only 31 cannons, Moultrie's command faced over 270 British cannons. The fort's palmetto log and sand walls absorbed most of the British cannonballs and suffered little damage. Inside the fort, Moultrie and his officers calmly smoked pipes and ordered their men to return fire. After 9-½ hours, the British attack was defeated including the loss of one ship. The battle of Sullivan's Island ended in a decisive Patriot victory.

Several days later, South Carolina's legislature honored Colonel Moultrie's defense of Charleston by officially naming the fortification Fort Moultrie. In September 1776, Moultrie was promoted to brigadier general in the Continental Army.

After the battle and his promotion to general, Moultrie continued to defend South Carolina against the British. During this time his wife died. In 1779, he married Hannah Motte Lynch, the widow of Thomas Lynch. This marriage produced no children.



*The Battle of Fort Moultrie* by John Blake White (1781-1859), oil on canvas, 1826. Colonel Moultrie is pictured among the group of officers holding a sword. Image courtesy of the United States Senate.

## Captured

In April 1780, the British returned to Charleston Harbor. This time they successfully avoided Fort Moultrie, entered the harbor, and captured the city. General Moultrie was among the 274 American officers held as prisoners at Haddrell's Point in Mount Pleasant. Later, he was moved to Snee Farm with Colonel Charles Cotesworth Pinckney where he had "excellent quarters." While a prisoner, a Loyalist acquaintance encouraged Moultrie to enlist in the British Army. Moultrie responded,

"When I entered into this contest, I did it

with the most mature deliberation, and with a determined resolution to risque my life and fortune in the cause. The hardships I have gone through I look back upon with the greatest pleasure and honor to myself: I shall continue to go on as I have begun, that my example may encourage the youths of America to stand forth in defence of their rights and liberties."

General Moultrie remained true to the Patriot cause. Paroled in November 1781, he was promoted to major general in October 1782.

## After The War

With the end of the war in 1783, Moultrie returned to politics serving in the South Carolina House and Senate, as lieutenant governor, and governor in 1785 and 1792. In 1802, Moultrie published his memoirs titled, *Memoirs of the Revolution As Far As It Related to the States of North and South Carolina*.

William Moultrie died in 1805 at the age of 74 and was buried outside Charleston, in the family cemetery on his son's property at Windsor Hill Plantation.

The exact location of his body was unknown until 1977 when it was found by archeologists.

On June 28, 1978, the remains of this Revolutionary War hero and early leader in South Carolina history were reinterred on Sullivan's Island near the water at the Fort Moultrie Visitor Center. Today, William Moultrie's grave is marked by a flagpole and a tombstone enclosed by iron fencing.

## For More Information

Today Fort Moultrie is administered by the National Park Service as a unit of Fort Sumter National Monument. Here you can learn about the entire 171-year history of the fort and seacoast defense in the United States. Fort Moultrie is located at 1214 Middle Street on Sullivan's Island, South Carolina and is accessible by automobile. Hours of operation are daily from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., except for New Year's Day, Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Day.

For more information, write to:  
Superintendent  
Fort Sumter National Monument  
1214 Middle Street  
Sullivan's Island, SC 29482

You can also call (843) 883-3123 or visit us on the World Wide Web at:  
[www.nps.gov/fosu](http://www.nps.gov/fosu)