



A Gallant Defense: The Siege of Charleston, 1780

Carl P. Borick

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In 1779, Sir Henry Clinton and more than eight thousand British troops left the waters of New York to try a new tack in the war against the American patriots - capturing the colonies' most important southern port. Clinton and his officers believed that the capture of Charleston, South Carolina, would change both the seat of the war and its character. The British were correct on both counts but the effect of the charge was defeat. In this comprehensive study of the 1780 siege and surrender of Charleston, Carl P. Borick offers a full examination of the strategic and tactical elements of Clinton's operations. Suggesting that scholars traditionally have underestimated its importance, Borick contends that the siege was one of the most wide-ranging, sophisticated, and critical campaigns of the war. While striking a devastating blow to American morale, it transformed the war in South Carolina from a conventional eighteenth-century conflict into a partisan war. Borick examines the reasons for the shift in British strategy, the efforts of their army and navy to seize Charleston, and the difficulties the patriots faced as they defended the city. He analyzes the actions and decisions of key figures in the campaign including Benjamin Lincoln, William Moultrie, Sir Henry Clinton, Lord Charles Cornwallis, and Banastre Tarleton. Borick also delves into the effect of the campaign on South Carolina civilians. He suggests that while British leaders had expected to find multitudes of loyalist sympathizers in the south, the conduct of British soldiers and sailors there actually served to arouse more antipathy than allegiance. Drawing on letters, journals, and other records kept by American, British, and Hessian participants, Borick relies on an impressive array of primary and secondary sources relating to the siege. He includes contemporaneous and modern maps that depict the British approach to the city and the complicated military operations that led to the patriots' greatest defeat of the American Revolution.

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