



Lieutenant Colonel Thomas “Burntfoot” Brown – May 27, 1750–August 3, 1825¹

“Brown was among the most notorious Loyalist commanders in the South during the Revolutionary War. In one of David Ramsey’s histories of the war, Brown wrote an impassioned defense of his conduct in reply to charges of cruelty. Brown died on his St. Vincent Island plantation on August 3, 1825.”²

Thomas Brown was a thirteen year old boy in Whitby, England when Florida was ceded to England under the 1763 Treaty of Paris following the French and Indian War. He did not immigrate to East Florida, instead he “acquired large tracts of “Ceded Lands” near Augusta, Georgia in 1774.”³ “Brown obtained the rights to several thousand acres of land near Augusta by sponsoring the passage of settlers from England to the colony.”⁴

There were no lands in Georgia ceded to England by Spain or France as Georgia had become an English colony on February 12, 1733, when General James Oglethorpe and a group of settlers established the city of Savannah. The colony was officially chartered in 1732 by King George II, after whom the colony was named. Georgia was the last of the original thirteen American colonies established by Great Britain.

In 1736, Augusta, Georgia was established by James Oglethorpe⁵ along the Savannah River to protect the colony from Spanish Florida and hostile Native America tribes who did not accept the loss of hunting grounds. Initially, the Georgia settlers had treaties with the Creek and Cherokee tribes and in 1739 the Treaty of Coweta was signed.

The Treaty of Coweta⁶ was significant because it helped secure peaceful relations between the English settlers and the powerful Creek Confederacy at a critical time for Georgia’s expansion. It allowed the English to extend their settlements further inland, particularly around Augusta, while fostering trade and maintaining security in the region. However, as with many treaties between Native Americans and European colonists, tensions would later arise as settlers continued to push for more land. It was under this background and the availability of land that brought Thomas Brown to Georgia in 1774.

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Thomas Brown came from “a prosperous merchant family.”⁷ He was a young man ready to migrate to Georgia and with “£3,000 of family capital, he established the community of Brownsborough and a 5,600 acre plantation northeast of present-day Augusta, anticipating life as a gentleman planter.”⁸ Instead, “Brown soon found himself embroiled in the coming revolution.

On 2 August 1775, a crowd of 130 Sons of Liberty confronted him at his house and demanded he pledge himself to the Patriot cause. Brown requested the liberty to hold his own opinions, saying that he could “never enter into an Engagement to take up arms against the Country which gave him being”, and finally met their demands with pistol and sword. The crowd seized him and struck him with the butt of a musket, fracturing his skull. Taken prisoner, he was tied to a tree where he was roasted by fire and scalped before being tarred and feathered. Brown was then carted through a number of nearby settlements and forced to verbally pledge himself to the Patriot cause before being released. This mistreatment resulted in the loss of two toes and lifelong headaches.⁹

Is it any wonder that, after enduring the horrific abuse at the hands of the Sons of Liberty, Thomas Brown would dedicate himself to seeking revenge? The brutal ordeal he survived left him with not only physical scars but a deep, unshakable resolve to punish those who had wronged him. It’s no surprise that, as commander of the East Florida Rangers and later the King’s Rangers, Brown showed little mercy to his enemies—or to any who opposed the Crown. His thirst for retribution was fueled by the memory of the mob’s cruelty, driving him to ruthlessly pursue Patriot forces until his eventual capture and imprisonment. His actions were not just those of a loyalist defending King George II but of a man who had suffered greatly and wanted to make his enemies pay.

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The 25-year-old Thomas Brown would have had no idea of what awaited him in Georgia. He was probably thinking about the challenge of starting a new life in America and excited that he was able to bring fellow men and women from Whitby, Yorkshire, Great Britain to his land grant near Augusta, Georgia. His father was a successful merchant in Whitby and sponsored his settlers to Georgia. The Crown was anxious to expand its presence in Georgia which had been organized as a buffer between South Carolina and Spanish East Florida.

“Thomas “Burnfoot” Brown (27 May 1750 – 3 August 1825) was a British Loyalist during the American Revolution. Intending to become a quiet colonial landowner, he lived, instead, a turbulent and combative career.”¹⁰ Thomas Brown arrived in Georgia as a different kind of man—one who was not a soldier but a capable leader, skilled in managing people, as evidenced by his success in establishing his settlement. However, the brutal attack he suffered on August 2, 1775, transformed him completely.

The man who emerged from that brutal experience was profoundly transformed by the violence he endured. The mob’s actions turned a peaceful farmer into a relentless fighter, one who would go on to inflict significant harm on hundreds, if not thousands, of Patriots..

After being paraded through various settlements—either marched or transported in a wagon—where he was repeatedly shamed and possibly beaten again, Thomas Brown eventually fled Georgia. To make his escape into East Florida, he must have received much needed help from several people, as his injuries were severe. The pain from the burns, scalping, and the loss of two toes must have been excruciating, and medical attention was likely scarce or unavailable. It remains unclear whether he was taken directly to St. Augustine or cared for elsewhere before finally arriving there to complete his recovery.

After Brown arrived in St. Augustine, and had fully recovered from the torture by the Georgia Sons of Liberty, he met with Governor Tonyn, and “volunteered to raise a regiment of rangers who would ride with the Indians against the people on the frontier, in conjunction with the invasion of British troops along the coast. Governor Tonyn became an ardent advocate of the plan, sometimes known as the “southern strategy.”¹¹ Tonyn liked the plan, as did General Sir Henry Clinton, the British Commander-in-Chief in North America. “Tonyn commissioned Brown as a lieutenant colonel of the Florida Rangers in June 1776.”¹² This appointment as militia commander was highly unusual, given that Brown had no formal military training. What he did possess, however, was a capacity for ruthlessness so extreme that it fueled his every action with a desire for vengeance.

Governor Tonyn organized the East Florida Rangers in 1774 shortly after he arrived. It was organized to protect East Florida. “The men who made their mark or signed their name to join the provincial corps was engaged to serve a three-year enlistment and received one shilling a day along with clothing and provisions.”¹³ Tonyn planned to raise one company at Turnbull’s settlement. At this point he tells Lord Germain, “we shall be able to raise four black Companies, to which must be given double or treble white Officers, in proportion to the Officers of the white Companies.”¹⁴

Very little information has been uncovered acknowledging enslaved individuals serving in the East Florida Rangers. There is also a lack of recognition for their willingness to risk their lives in service to King George II. Tonyn does not hesitate to use Enslaved people but demands that more white officers be in command. This lack of acknowledgment highlights the broader erasure of Enslaved people's roles in shaping the military defense of East Florida during a turbulent era in American history.

The East Florida Rangers repelled Georgia patriots advance in several important battles. The first was at Thomas Creek on May 17, 1777. Thomas Creek is near present-day Callahan, Florida and is a tributary of the Nassau River. Although it was a smaller battle it served its purpose by letting the Georgians know that taking East Florida was not going to be easy. During this battle the Patriot forces from Georgia was led by General Lachlan McIntosh. Another Scotsman in the fray and McIntosh County was probably named in his honor.

McIntosh was leading Georgia troops and the 2nd Continental Light Dragoons. They were ambushed by Colonel Brown leading British regulars, Loyal militia and allied Native Americans. When the Georgia force were trying to cross Thomas Creek, Brown’s forces attacked and inflicted heavy casualties to the Continental troops. Many of them were killed or captured. There

are no written reports this author can find, but it seems to me Colonel Brown would have looked at the field of battle afterwards and could have said to himself, “That’s for burning, scalping and tar and feathering me.”

The Battle of Thomas Creek demonstrated the challenges the Patriots faced in extending their capture of British-held Florida and the effectiveness of Loyalist and Native American forces in defending the region. The battle left East Florida as a base for British operations against Georgia and the southern backcountry.

Thirteen months later, June 30, 1778, near the same location as Thomas Creek, the Battle of Alligator Bridge was fought and once again Colonel Brown defeated the Georgia and South Carolina Patriot force. Georgia and South Carolina saw British-held East Florida as a potential target. East Florida was not only a haven for Loyalists but also served as a base for British operations against the rebellious southern colonies. The presence of loyalist settlers, British regulars, and Native American allies in East Florida made it a strategic concern for the Patriots.

The Battle of Alligator Bridge was a tactical victory for the British Loyalists under Colonel Brown and marked the failure of the Patriot invasion of East Florida. This battle, along with other unsuccessful Patriot campaigns in the region, highlighted the difficulties of conducting military operations in the swampy, remote terrain of East Florida and underscored the resilience of Loyalist forces in the southern colonies during the Revolutionary War.

The list of military units involved in the defense of British East Florida include the Minorca Volunteer Company - East Florida Militia. The Minorcan community had only arrived in St. Augustine in late 1777, after nine years in the New Smyrna colony. To have a Minorca Volunteer Company fighting in the Revolutionary War within about six months speaks to the strength and resilience of the Minorcan people.¹⁵

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The only mention of Lt. Colonel Thomas Brown in the James Grant letters is in a December 29, 1777, letter from Governor Patrick Tonyn to Lord George Germaine, praising the ability of Brown, saying: “And I will affirm to your Lordship, that the part Lieutenant Colonel Brown has taken in this affair has done him great honour. Had the persecuted friends of Government in America taken the active part he has, the flames of rebellion would have been extinguished.”¹⁶ By the time Brown is mentioned in these letters, he had won the Battle of Thomas Creek and continued to destroy Patriot activity in East Florida.

After the British captured Georgia in 1778, Brown left the East Florida Rangers and became a key figure in the Southern campaign. He led loyalist forces with same ferocious determination he had serving under Patrick Tonyn. “As commander of the King’s Rangers, he conducted raids against Patriot settlements, striking fear into his enemies. His intimate knowledge of the land, combined with his relentless pursuit of those who had once tortured him, made him a formidable adversary in the conflict. Brown’s role in the British counteroffensive in Georgia was crucial, and his brutal tactics left a lasting impact on the southern theater of the Revolutionary War.”¹⁷

After Georgia was reconquered by the British in 1778, Tonym's East Florida Rangers were disbanded and Brown organized the King's Rangers. He fought to defend Savannah and then Augusta. One story tells of his hanging thirteen captured Patriots after they took up arms after their capture and release. Others say this did not happen. Regardless, he was captured after the Patriots defeated the King's Rangers at Fort Watson.

"Brown was allowed to return to British territory as part of a prisoner exchange. He returned to British-occupied East Florida, but not for long. Britain ceded that colony to Spain in the treaty that ended the war. Brown then moved across the British Caribbean until finally settling in St. Vincent. There he received a large land grant, but spent two years imprisoned on a charge of fraud. He died on his Caribbean plantation in 1825, never ceasing in his loyalties to the British."¹⁸

The Minorcan community that fled to St. Augustine in 1777 must have seen Colonel Brown and his mounted Rangers on many occasions and heard the stories of his exploits. This could have stimulated some of the Minorcan men to serve under his command.

Robert P. Jones
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¹ [LTC Thomas “Burntfoot” Brown \(1750-1825\) - Find a Grave Memorial](https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/172676075/thomas-brown#:~:text=Brown%20came%20to%20the%20English%20colony%20of%20Georgia%20where%20he)

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/172676075/thomas-brown#:~:text=Brown%20came%20to%20the%20English%20colony%20of%20Georgia%20where%20he>

² [Brown, Thomas | South Carolina Encyclopedia \(scencyclopedia.org\)](https://www.scencyclopedia.org/sce/entries/brown-thomas/#:~:text=Finding%20refuge%20in%20British-held%20St.%20Augustine,%20Florida,%20Brown%20was%20commissioned)

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³ Ibid

⁴ [Thomas Brown | The American Revolution Experience \(battlefields.org\)](https://american-revolution-experience.battlefields.org/people/thomas-brown#brown-mob) <https://american-revolution-experience.battlefields.org/people/thomas-brown#brown-mob>

⁵ [History of Augusta, Georgia - Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Augusta,_Georgia#:~:text=Augusta,%20Georgia%20was%20founded%20in%201736%20as%20part%20of%20the)

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⁶ [Treaty of Coweta 1739 - Search \(bing.com\)](https://www.bing.com/search?q=Treaty+of+Coweta+1739&cvid=7dfbc23ddb074833a9dfdfecbd0e3856&gs_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUyBggAEEUYOTIICAEQ6QcY_FXSAQg5NTE5ajBqNKgCALACAQ&FORM=ANAB01&adppc=EDGEESS&PC=HCTS)

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⁷ [Thomas Brown \(loyalist\) - Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Brown_(loyalist)#Early_life) [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Brown_\(loyalist\)#Early_life](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Brown_(loyalist)#Early_life)

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ [About: Thomas Brown \(loyalist\) \(dbpedia.org\)](https://dbpedia.org/page/Thomas_Brown_(loyalist)#:~:text=Thomas%20%22Burntfoot%22%20Brown%20(27%20May%201750%20%E2%80%93%203%20August%201825))

[https://dbpedia.org/page/Thomas_Brown_\(loyalist\)#:~:text=Thomas%20%22Burntfoot%22%20Brown%20\(27%20May%201750%20%E2%80%93%203%20August%201825\)](https://dbpedia.org/page/Thomas_Brown_(loyalist)#:~:text=Thomas%20%22Burntfoot%22%20Brown%20(27%20May%201750%20%E2%80%93%203%20August%201825))

¹¹ [Thomas Brown - New Georgia Encyclopedia](https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/thomas-brown-1750-1825/#:~:text=Tony%20commissioned%20Brown%20as%20a%20lieutenant%20colonel%20of%20the%20Florida) [https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/thomas-brown-1750-](https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/thomas-brown-1750-1825/#:~:text=Tony%20commissioned%20Brown%20as%20a%20lieutenant%20colonel%20of%20the%20Florida)

[1825/#:~:text=Tony%20commissioned%20Brown%20as%20a%20lieutenant%20colonel%20of%20the%20Florida](https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/thomas-brown-1750-1825/#:~:text=Tony%20commissioned%20Brown%20as%20a%20lieutenant%20colonel%20of%20the%20Florida)

¹² [Thomas Brown | American Battlefield Trust \(battlefields.org\)](https://www.battlefields.org/learn/biographies/thomas-brown#:~:text=Born%20in%20England%20on%20May%2027,%201750,%20Thomas%20Brown%20grew)

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¹³ [East Florida Rangers – Emerging Revolutionary War Era](https://emergingrevolutionarywar.org/2020/12/02/east-florida-rangers/) <https://emergingrevolutionarywar.org/2020/12/02/east-florida-rangers/>

¹⁴ [East Florida Militia, Tony to Germain, 1776 \(royalprovincial.com\)](https://www.royalprovincial.com/military/rhist/eastflmil/efl millet1.htm)

<https://www.royalprovincial.com/military/rhist/eastflmil/efl millet1.htm>

¹⁵ [Battle of Alligator Creek Bridge - Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Alligator_Creek_Bridge) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Alligator_Creek_Bridge

¹⁶ [Thomas Brown | American Battlefield Trust \(battlefields.org\)](https://www.battlefields.org/learn/biographies/thomas-brown#:~:text=Born%20in%20England%20on%20May%2027,%201750,%20Thomas%20Brown%20grew)

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¹⁷ [Thomas Brown | American Battlefield Trust \(battlefields.org\)](https://www.battlefields.org/learn/biographies/thomas-brown#:~:text=Born%20in%20England%20on%20May%2027,%201750,%20Thomas%20Brown%20grew)

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¹⁸ [Thomas Brown | The American Revolution Experience \(battlefields.org\)](https://american-revolution-experience.battlefields.org/people/thomas-brown#brown-modern-day-legacy) - <https://american-revolution-experience.battlefields.org/people/thomas-brown#brown-modern-day-legacy>