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THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR COMES TO THE SOUTH

A Sketch of the Operations before Charlestown the Capital of South Carolina.

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Published… According to Act of Parliament by I.F.W. Des Barres Esq.,

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Physical description
Large engraved, and stipple-engraved, map on two joined sheets; with contemporary hand-colour in full, minor repaired marginal tears, occasionally crossing the neatline, some toning to the join, which is strengthened on verso.

Dimensions
1097 by 792mm (43.25 by 31.25 inches).

Notes
During the Revolutionary War, the first real test of the British forces' campaign in the South, would

be to capture the port city of Charleston, South Carolina. Des Barres's map, is the "most useful single plan for interpreting this campaign. The very large scale enables depiction of the military information pertaining to Clinton's successful siege of Charleston in great detail. The British Forces are shown by regiment, keyed to the lengthy descriptive references. the parallels of the investment and defensive lines are clearly shown. British troops are coloured red, Americans yellow. The ships of both fleets are illustrated; the legend names them and indicates number of guns for each" (Nebenzahl). Additionally, there is a detailed inset of "Charlestown Harbour".

The map extends to cover Charleston Harbor, the area north to Hobcaw Creek, and south as far as part of James Island. The approach of the British forces, the final troop positions of both armies, and navies, a detailed plan of the town, wharves, and outlying plantations are all shown. An extensive key, identifies by name, number of guns, and troops, everything from: "Fortifications, Outworks & Ships of the Ennemy Under the Command of Lieu.t General Lincoln"; "Encampments and Approaches Of the Kings Army under ye Command of Lt. Gl. Sr. Hen. Clinton K.B."; "The Kings Ships, under the Command of Vice Adm.l Mariot Arbuthnot"; to "Redouts Approaches & Batteries". A note at the end records: "Charlestown having surrendered by Capitulation the 12th May the Garrison laid down their Arms at Z. between the Abbattis in front of the Hornwork".

The siege of Charleston, took place in the winter and spring of 1780. Control of Charleston Harbor was important to the British forces because it "would provide them with a key base from which to launch operations on the southern front. Sir Henry Clinton (1730-1795) departed New York on December 26, 1779, and, after a difficult thirty-eight-day journey fighting severe storms and strong currents, landed at North Edisto Inlet, about thirty miles southwest of Charleston. He proceeded toward St. James Island, taking possession of poorly reinforced Fort Johnson, and headed northwest. Anticipating the British would cross the Ashley River at Ashley Ferry, the Americans concentrated their efforts on the opposite bank, unaware that the enemy had positioned themselves at Drayton's plantation, three miles above Ashley's Ferry. The British crossed the Ashley unnoticed on March 29, went down Charleston Neck, and entrenched themselves about eight hundred yards from the American defenses outside the city. Meanwhile, Vice Admiral Marriot Arbuthnot, commander of the royal navy, sealed off the harbor" (Taliaferro).

Under the command of Sir Henry Clinton, the British forces began to advance down a narrow neck of swamps and orchard farms leading into Charleston. They came upon the defenses that would be "the last chance the Americans had of holding onto the rebel town. A large fortress-like structure was the centerpiece of the fortifications protecting Charleston, the fourth largest populated city in the colonies and whose port provided the southern colonies with access to rich imports from the West Indies and beyond. Measuring six hundred feet across the front wall, the imposing site was a freestanding structure with angular points (horns) enclosing a ground area, consisting of demibastions (a half wall or partial rampart) and curtain walls (connecting two structural positions). A massive ditch of thirty-four feet wide was dug in front it to dispel enemy attacks. The forward defenses, built mainly of wood and earth, consisted of a series of redoubts and batteries connected by a strong line. In front, toward the enemy, was at least one, and probably two, rows of abatis [rough wooden defences]. Just beyond the abatis was a twelve foot wide canal stretching across the mile-wide peninsula to the marsh creeks that emptied into the Ashley and Cooper rivers. Clinton's men accessed the situation and began digging their siege trenches with the site of Charleston's Horn Work to be the roadblock from claiming their prize […] It was the northernmost link in a chain of fortifications that surrounded the city. At the time of the Siege, the Horn Work straddled the "Broad Path" (now King Street) just north of Charleston's Boundary (now Calhoun) Street. The gate in King Street (referred to as "the White Gate") was flanked to the east and west by pair of horn-like half-bastions that projected northward, away from the town. The flanks of the city, along the Ashley and Cooper rivers, and the tip of the peninsula were protected by various batteries and forts to give

Charleston a strong perimeter defense to prevent British ships from sailing up and enfilading the defensive works. The Americans scuttled eight ships in a line across the Cooper River as a further preventative measure. The British would be forced to contend with these measures, along with the shallow sandbars and shoals that made the harbor dangerous for inexperienced naval captains. Clinton landed his army on Simmons and Edisto Islands, south of Charleston, on February 11″ (American Battlefield Trust online).

Vastly outnumbered, the Americans were surrounded on three sides. General Benjamin Lincoln, commander in charge of the Southern Department, expected reinforcements to arrive from the east, the direction of his only open supply line, but Clinton dispatched Lieutenant Colonels Banastre Tarleton and James Webster to tighten the hold.

The British crossed the Stono River onto James Island on February 25, and by March 10, had made it safely to the mainland. "They advanced to Middleton Place and Drayton Hall on March 22 and crossed the Ashley River to the Charleston peninsula on March 29 […] By April 21, Lincoln communicated to Clinton that he was willing to consider terms of capitulation. However, Charleston civilians informed Lincoln that if an attempt were made to abandon the city, they would open the gates to the enemy. Lincoln had no choice but to remain bottle-necked. The British unfolded their third parallel on April 28 within a few yards of the Horn Work's canal. Seeing this, the Americans improved their fortifications by closing in the rear of the Horn Work and constructing redoubts to the left and right. On May 2, the British pushed a trench up to the canal in front of the city's defenses to drain it. At this point, the Americans were beginning to run low on valuable supplies. To compound matters, Fort Moultrie, located east on Sullivan's Island, ignominiously surrendered to the British Navy on May 7 without firing a shot" (American Battlefield Trust online).

The Charleston garrison was unable to retreat and Lincoln formally surrendered on May 12. In terms of numbers, the surrender at Charleston was the heaviest loss for the Americans during the war.

The rare first state: printed on Bates paper, and with the imprint intact, for inclusion in the 'Atlantic Neptune', part III, number 18. Only two examples are recorded at auction since 1990, both in later states.

The Atlantic Neptune
This chart is part of a very large body of work known as the 'Atlantic Neptune', commissioned by The Admiralty, funded by the British Government, and undertaken by Des Barres, it is one of the greatest hydrographic achievements of the eighteenth century. Though most of the charts were prepared primarily for navigational purposes, this chart of the Siege of Charleston shows the fortifications of both British and American troops and their corresponding fleets. With new charts and plates added to the 'Atlantic Neptune' as they were completed, no two copies are entirely the same.

The French and Indian War (1756-1763) awakened the British government to the need for better maps of its North American empire, and with the advent of peace, a program was established for mapping the entire Eastern seaboard. To accomplish this, "the colonies were divided north and south at the Potomac River and a surveyor general appointed for each district – William De Brahm for the Southern District. An expedition was also sent to chart the course of the Mississippi River with a view to gaining access to the Gulf of Mexico for frontier traders. Extensive plans were even drawn for linking the Mississippi and Iberville rivers to bypass the Isle of Orleans and reach the Gulf through Lake Pontchartrain, the southern boundary of Britain's North American territory. Additionally, the British Admiralty gave desultory support to a program for charting the St. Lawrence River, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and parts of New England. These surveys produced remarkable results. Des Barres charted the entire coast of Nova Scotia and parts of New Brunswick

and New England. His chart of Sable Island was two years in the making, but well worth the effort. In 1774 he returned to England to edit and publish his charts. Samuel Holland worked with teams of surveyors to produce maps of Prince Edward Island, Cape Breton, and the inhabited parts of Canada and New England. His name is also used in connection with maps of New York and New Jersey. As instructed, De Brahm concentrated his efforts on the Florida peninsula south of St. Augustine. His were the first scientific surveys of the peninsula, which heretofore appeared on most maps of the area as a collection of narrow islands, and he produced the first printed map of the Gulf Stream.

"The disturbances culminating in the War of American Independence prevented Holland from completing his survey of the Northern District of North America, but the information already acquired proved invaluable in Britain's war effort. So desperate was the British Navy for detailed surveys of the New England coast that Des Barres printed many of his charts before they were half finished. Some lacked titles and topographic features. Others were mere outlines of small sections of the coast. In an effort to extend the coverage of his atlas, Des Barres compiled and edited the surveys of Holland, DeBrahm, and others, but he eventually compromised the quality of his work by inserting siege and battle maps, some of which possessed little or no nautical value" (Sellers).

The mapmaker
Joseph-Frédéric Vallet Des Barres (1721-1824) was born in Switzerland. In 1752 or 1753, under the patronage of the Duke of Cumberland, "he entered the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich (London), England, and there immersed himself in the study of fortifications, surveying, and drafting. Des Barres broke his ties with Europe in 1756 when he left for North America to begin a military career as a lieutenant with the Royal Americans (62nd, later 60th, Foot). Within two years he was serving as an assistant engineer at the siege of Louisbourg, Île Royale (Cape Breton Island). His ability there impressed his superiors, and he was commissioned to prepare a chart of the St. Lawrence River, which was used by James Wolfe. His success led to further surveys in the Quebec area while he was participating in the campaigns of 1759 and 1760 as an assistant engineer, followed in 1761 by work on the Halifax defences under the supervision of John Henry Bastide. The next year Des Barres acted as an assistant engineer at the recapture of St. John's, and after the French surrender carried out surveying tasks in Newfoundland in conjunction with James Cook" (Morgan).

Des Barres returned to England in 1774, and began work on the 'Atlantic Neptune'. Of course costs escalated, and it wasn't until 1794, when Des Barres was 72, for the complicated accounts to begin to be settled to Des Barres's satisfaction.

In the meantime, in May of 1784, it was decided that Cape Breton would be separated from Nova Scotia and made an independent colony. Des Barres put himself forward for the appointment of lieutenant governor in "partial compensation for the 20 years spent on surveys and the Neptune, which he claimed had cost him money and military promotion (he had become a captain only in 1775)" (Morgan). Unfortunately, Des Barres's commission was a failure, and he returned to England after only two years. Nevertheless, in May of 1804, when he was 82, he was appointed lieutenant governor of Prince Edward Island. This commission was more of a success, "retiring" to Halifax in 1817. "His vitality was far from exhausted, for he continued trying to prod the British government into paying more of his claims, and spent a great deal of time on his land problems. It is reputed that he celebrated his hundredth birthday by dancing on a table top in Halifax. There he died one month short of 103" (Morgan).

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