

**Francis Atkinson**  
***People of London Town, Maryland***<sup>1</sup>

On December 18, 1736, a laborer named Francis Atkinson “with force & arms” broke into the “Mansion House” of an Ann Arundel County planter. Though sentenced to death, he was given a pardon by Charles Calvert, 3rd Lord Baltimore, Lord Proprietor of Maryland. The Proprietor wrote in his pardon that Atkinson would not “suffer any Corporall Punishment therefore but that he shall Stand and be in the same Plight State & Condition to all Intents & purposes as if the said felony [he] hath been Convict had Never been Done or Committed.”<sup>2</sup> The Governor and the Council of Maryland accepted the Proprietor’s pardon entirely.<sup>3</sup>

Already spared from the noose, Atkinson’s life took a sharp turn a few years later. With the outbreak of the War of Jenkins’ Ear, Britain began recruiting a regiment in nine of the American colonies including Maryland. He joined Captain Thomas Addison’s Company in the Fourth Battalion of Gooch’s American Regiment, sometimes named Gooch’s Marines. He and thousands of other Americans in redcoats were destined to sail for the Caribbean.

Perhaps the reality of facing Spanish bullets and cannonballs made him nervous, maybe he feared the notoriously deadly diseases in the West Indies, or Atkinson may have only be interested in the enlistment bonus and never intended to serve. Whatever the cause, he fled from the regiment before they left Maryland.

Governor Samuel Ogle issued a proclamation on September 20, 1740 offering a reward for the capture of numerous deserters from the Maryland companies of Gooch’s regiment. In his proclamation, Ogle described Francis Atkinson: “Francis Atkinson about twenty five years of Age five feet Eight Inches high very well known about South River where he is supposed to lurk.”<sup>4</sup> Atkinson either surrendered or was arrested, and returned to the regiment.

He soon found himself in the Cartagena, where he hacked through the jungle and built artillery batteries with the other soldiers of Gooch’s Marines as the siege dragged on. He joined in the doomed night attack on Fort San Lazaro. In preparation for the attack, the American soldiers were stripped of their guns. Some were given packs filled with wool to fill in a fifteen-foot-wide and six foot deep moat. Others were handed twenty-five-foot-tall ladders to scale the thirty-foot-high wall. A few were given heavy iron hand grenades, in the hope they could lob them over the Spanish walls.<sup>5</sup>

Captain John Lloyd, a Maryland officer, described the attack:

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<sup>1</sup> As the research into colonial London Town’s inhabitants is an ongoing process, the caveat is offered that additional information may be found at any time and that a correction of information might also occur at any time.

<sup>2</sup> Maryland State Archives, *Provincial Court Land Records, 1731-1737*, Archives of Maryland Online, volume 698, page 512, accessed February 21, 2019, <<http://aomol.msa.maryland.gov/000001/000698/html/am698--512.html>>.

<sup>3</sup> Maryland State Archives, *Proceedings of the Council of Maryland, 1732:1753*, Archives of Maryland Online, volume 28, page 120, accessed February 21, 2019, <<http://aomol.msa.maryland.gov/000001/000028/html/am28--120.html>>.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, page 227, accessed February 21, 2019, <<http://aomol.msa.maryland.gov/000001/000028/html/am28--227.html>>.

<sup>5</sup> For more on the attack on Fort San Lazaro, see Lee G. Offen, *America’s First Marines: Gooch’s American Regiment, 1740-1742*.

ye: Enemie kept an Incessant fire on us while we advanced & at 4 wee got under ye Walls & began our ffire which we Contined till 8 of ye: Clock when wee found it Impracticable to Continue any longer & was Obliged to Retreat with great Preciptation while our Enemie kept ffireing on us Wee had Killd or Wounded near 700 Men but ye: greatest part Kill'd Dead on ye: Spott wee was so Near ye: Walls that wee Coud here our Enemies say in English Words God Dam You why dont you lower ye: Muzells of ye: Guns lower ye: Muzells & fire away. I am sorry that some of our Subjects Eys are not as yet Open.<sup>6</sup>

Private Francis Atkinson survived the attack and joined the humiliating retreat. The last known record of the unfortunate soldier is his boarding the army transport *Worcester* on May 18, 1741.<sup>7</sup> The fleet set sail for Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, where many more would die of disease than Spanish guns. Whether he ever returned to “South River where he is supposed to lurk,” or was buried in the Cuban sand, is not yet known.

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<sup>6</sup> “Lot 3: [Militaria] Unpublished Journal of Marylander John Lloyd during the 1741 Siege of Cartagena,” *invaluable*, accessed February 21, 2019, <<https://www.invaluable.com/auction-lot/militaria-unpublished-journal-of-marylander-j-C7D38B4D43>>.

<sup>7</sup> Murtie June Clark, *Colonial Soldiers of the South 1732-1774*, Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1987, page 235.