

The Patriot and the Real Francis Marion

Guerilla Warfare in the South

Hadyn B. Call

Abstract

Movies under the genre of historical such as the recent *Lincoln* (2012) attract people to theaters all over the nation and ignite national interests in history. Although good for the profession and history as a subject, movies often perpetuate untruths that damage the veracity of historical events and people's perceptions of the past. *The Patriot* (2000) is one of America's best examples. Many have heard of Benjamin Martin—the loving father, the unfortunate widower, the caring and kind employer of freedmen, the noble veteran of the French and Indian War, and the heroic leader during the American Revolution. This fictional character played by Mel Gibson, nevertheless, comes from a true historical foundation. This paper takes a look at the movie *The Patriot* and breaks down fact from fiction. It clarifies the story of the Revolution portrayed by Hollywood, by expounding on the actual events of the past, including Francis Marion, the Swamp Fox and illusive guerilla fighter of South Carolina, of whom Benjamin Martin was loosely based.



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“The Patriot” and the Real Francis Marion

Movies categorized under the historical genre such as the recent *Lincoln* (2012) attract people to theaters all over the nation and ignite national interests in history. Although good for the profession and history as a subject, movies often perpetuate untruths that damage the veracity of historical events and people’s perceptions of the past. *The Patriot*, (2000) is one of America’s best examples. Many have heard of Benjamin Martin¹—the loving father, the unfortunate widower, the caring and kind employer of freedmen, the noble veteran of the French and Indian War, and the heroic leader during the American Revolution. Benjamin Martin is in fact fictional, a person created by the makers of the Hollywood film called *The Patriot*, released in 2000. The film stars Mel Gibson and Heath Ledger, both of whom are extraordinary actors that did a superb job in this motion picture.

Southern farmer Benjamin Martin, born and bred in South Carolina, a war veteran, hero, and widowed father of seven, tries desperately to keep his family from the evils of a violent war. Benjamin must deal with his patriot son, Gabriel, who goes against his father’s wishes and enlists in the Continental Army. Gabriel finds out quickly the horrors of war by losing a best friend. He eventually returns home, wounded, with important dispatches to deliver. When Colonel Tavington, played by Jason Isaacs, passes through the Martin Plantation, Gabriel foolishly gives away his relation to Benjamin, and is taken away to be hung as a spy. Benjamin’s home is burned for helping the enemy of the Royal Army, and when Gabriel’s little brother Thomas, naively tries to save his brother, Tavington shoots and kills him. Benjamin’s vow of nonviolence quickly dissipates and he and two sons arm themselves and head into the woods they know so well, to save their beloved son and brother. After successfully saving Gabriel, Benjamin too, joins the Continental Army under his friend and former leader Harry Burwell played by Chris Cooper. Benjamin immediately asks for Gabriel to be put under his command. Despite Gabriel’s objections, Burwell makes it happen. Soon, father and son split up to recruit men for their South Carolinian militia. With much success, they meet in the swamps and form a camp. Along the journey, Gabriel falls in love and marries, but his hopes and dreams are soon crushed by Colonel Tavington’s malicious war tactics, and Gabriel has yet another reason to seek revenge. Benjamin loses another son, and realizes his worst nightmares are becoming a reality. He continues to fight with passion and zeal and in the end becomes once again, a victorious war

¹ Mel Gibson plays the role of Benjamin Martin.

leader, while remaining the compassionate, loving father, and perhaps again, a loving husband.

The story is very loosely based on Francis Marion, a South Carolinian patriot and militiaman who will be described more thoroughly later in this article. The motion picture was filmed on location in South Carolina with the help of the Smithsonian Institute in an attempt to make the movie historically accurate.² Thanks to their cooperation, some aspects of the film are historically accurate, nonetheless, David Hackett Fischer writes, “egregious errors appear in every scene.” Although many aspects of the film are done superbly, such as costumes and photography, much is not. “Mr. Gibson plays a reluctant hero named Benjamin Martin, a widower with seven perfect children, a ‘Gone with the Wind’ plantation and a work force of free and happy Black Folk who toil in his fields as volunteers.”³ He goes on to explain that “some inaccuracies are introduced to create an illusion of authenticity. Tavington, for example, is dressed in a red coat. In fact, Tarleton's mounted legion wore green, but these are the Redcoats, and red their coats must be.”⁴

Another problem is the looseness of Mel Gibson’s character. Not only is Benjamin Martin based on Francis Marion, but also Daniel Morgan, Elijah Clark, Thomas Sumter and Andrew Pickens. All five historical men are blended into one perfect character that never existed.⁵ Daniel Morgan, like Francis Marion, fought in the French and Indian War. Although he was born in New Jersey, he ended up in the South, specifically Virginia. After many years of experience serving in the military, he became a Colonel in the Continental Army and served part of his time in the Carolinas.⁶ Elijah Clark was a southerner from Georgia. He was an Indian fighter and was a part of guerilla warfare in the South during the Revolutionary War.⁷ Thomas Sumter was also a veteran of the French and Indian War, a southerner from Virginia, and was pursued by Lieutenant

² Mark Deming, AMG Overview, accessed July 1, 2009, <http://www.sonystyle.com/webapp/wcs/stores/servlet/ProductDisplay?catalogId=10551&storeId=10151&langId=-1&partNumber=CTR13729DVD>.

³ More accurately, blacks toiling in the fields were unpaid slaves, working not for themselves but for a slave owner reaping the benefits of the unjust institution.

⁴ David Hackett Fischer, “Hubris, But No History.” *New York Times*, July 1, 2000.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ “Patriot Resource,” accessed July 14, 2009, <http://www.patriotresource.com/people/morgan.html>.

⁷ Robert Scott Davis Jr., “Elijah Clarke (1742-1799)” accessed July 1, 2009, <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Article.jsp?id=h-668>.

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Colonel Banastre Tarleton.⁸ Andrew Pickens was born in Pennsylvania but soon moved to South Carolina with his family. There, he farmed and had a family, but also participated in several wars, including Indian fighting and the American Revolution.⁹ Bits and pieces of each of these men’s lives and accomplishments are obviously mingled together to become the perfect Benjamin Martin.¹⁰ The makers of *The Patriot* do not stop there. Several battles too, are mixed and mingled. The Battle of Cowpens and Guilford Courthouse, for example, become one in the scene where Benjamin Martin defeats Cornwallis and kills Tavington. Historically, Tarleton was never killed and Cornwallis was nothing but victorious in the Carolinas.¹¹

Francis Marion, the true southern hero and main source for Mel Gibson’s character, Benjamin Martin, was born in late 1732 in midwinter at Goatfield Plantation, in St. John’s Parish, Berkeley County, South Carolina.¹² The events of Marion’s childhood are not well documented, but he lived in South Carolina as a child and stayed a South Carolinian until his death. Like others in the area, Marion was a natural woodsman. It was important to know the land, the whereabouts of game, and how to survive off of one’s surroundings if need be. Hunting and following game trails were a part of Marion’s life, naturally aiding in his ability to shoot, to track, and to travel quickly and quietly. All of these skills learned throughout childhood and early adulthood eventually made Marion the man, the leader, the hero, and the immortal that is respected today.

“The Revolutionary War battles in the northern colonies tend to receive the most attention in the history books, but the fighting in the south was even more bitter and divisive.”¹³ Francis Marion played a major role in the skirmishes that took place in the south, mainly in his own colony of South Carolina. “Ultimately, more battles and skirmishes were fought in South

⁸ “Patriot Resource,” accessed July 14, 2009, <http://www.patriotresource.com/people/sumter.html>.

⁹ “Patriot Resource,” <http://www.patriotresource.com/people/pickens.html>.

¹⁰ The loose interpretation of a character like Benjamin Martin, although known by most as fictional, becomes problematic as real life events intertwine with Hollywood fabrication and the line between goes gray. Viewers untrained in history no longer know fact from fiction.

¹¹ David Hackett Fischer, “Hubris, But No History.” *New York Times*, July 1, 2000.

¹² Robert D. Bass, *Swamp Fox: The Life and Campaigns of Francis Marion*. (Orangeburg: Sandlapper Publishing Inc., 1989), 5.

¹³ Paul A. Thomsen, “The Devil Himself Could Not Catch Him,” *American History* 35 (August 2000): 48.

Carolina than in any other state during the war,”¹⁴ making Marion’s role in guerilla warfare pivotal. Throughout his military career during the Revolution, Marion wrote and received various letters, most in 1782, which document his role as a leader and his needs as a soldier. Marion was also mentioned in various letters written by others during the War, including the commander-and–chief George Washington. In a letter to Nathaniel Greene written on June 1, 1781, Washington wrote:

*My dear Sir, The difficulties, which you daily encounter and surmount with your small force, add not a little to your reputation; and I am pretty well assured, that, should you be obliged finally to withdraw from South Carolina and even from North Carolina, it will not be attributed to your want either of abilities or of exertion, but to the true cause, the want of means to support the war in them. I feel for your mortification at the loss of the day before Camden, after it seemed so much in your favor; but I hope you will have found, that the enemy suffered severely, as in their publication of the affair in New York they confess the loss of two hundred. The reduction of Fort Watson does honor to General Marion and Colonel Lee.*¹⁵

Nathaniel Greene, in a letter to George Washington dated December 28, 1780 mentioned that, “two slight skirmishes have been fought with the enemy, since my last, one by a party under Colonel Marion, upon the Santee, and the other by Colonel Few, near Ninety Six. About twenty or thirty were killed and wounded on each side.”¹⁶ In another letter dated February 9, 1781, Greene wrote to Washington, “I have the honor to inclose a copy of a letter from Lieutenant-Colonel Lee, extracts of two letters from General Marion, and a copy of a letter from a well-informed gentleman, respecting the operations at Wilmington.”¹⁷ Nineteen days later he wrote to Washington:

¹⁴ “British Maneuvers in the South Led to America’s First Civil War,” *American History* 44 (April 2009): 52.

¹⁵ *The Writings of George Washington Being His Correspondence, Addresses, Messages, and Other Papers, Official and Private, Selected and Published from the Original Manuscripts*. Vol. VIII, Jared Sparks, 1839, accessed July 1, 2009.

http://www.familytales.org/dbDisplay.php?id=ltr_gwa4480.

¹⁶ *Correspondence of the American Revolution; Being Letters of Eminent Men to George Washington, from the Time of His Taking Command of the Army to the End of His Presidency*, Volume III., Jared Sparks, 1853, accessed July 1, 2009,

http://www.familytales.org/dbDisplay.php?id=ltr_nag3709.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, http://www.familytales.org/dbDisplay.php?id=ltr_nag3713.

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*I have received no accounts from General Sumpter; but wish he may be able, in conjunction with General Marion, to destroy some of the enemy's small posts in South Carolina, and prevent the accomplishment of their designs in that country.*¹⁸

Greene's descriptions in letters to Washington give light to the whereabouts and doings of Marion. Dated May 14, 1781, Greene wrote Washington:

*On the 12th, Fort Mott surrendered to General Marion. The garrison consisted of upwards of one hundred and forty men, one hundred and twenty of whom were British and Hessian, and seven or eight, officers. The place was invested on the 8th, and the approaches carried to the foot of the abatis before it surrendered. The redoubt was exceedingly strong, and commanded by Lieutenant Macpherson, a very gallant officer. Great credit is due to General Marion, and the few militia that continued with him in the reduction of this post. Lieutenant-Colonel Lee's legion, and the detachments serving with him under Major Eaton, Captains Finley, of the artillery, and Oldham and Smith, of the infantry, were indefatigable in prosecuting the siege. There were taken at the fort, one carronade, about one hundred and forty stand of arms, a quantity of salt, provisions, and other stores, returns of which shall be forwarded hereafter.*¹⁹

From a letter from Greene to Washington, it is clear that Marion took prisoners of war, a fact not always depicted in “The Patriot.” In one scene, Benjamin Martin and some of his recruits that fought previously in the French and Indian War are shown killing British soldiers at point blank while holding up their hands in a plea of surrender. The courageous and honorable oldest son Gabriel then comes in telling his father and the other men that they are better than that, and should always take prisoners when showing a willingness to surrender. The letter, dated August 26, 1781, clearly stated “General Marion and Colonel Lee have taken a few prisoners since I wrote before, in the whole between twenty and thirty, three or four of whom are officers.”²⁰ Another letter from Greene to Washington dated October 25, 1781, stated, “The enemy are all in the lower country; and nothing material has happened since my last, except a number of prisoners who have been taken by our light parties sent out by

¹⁸Ibid., http://www.familytales.org/dbDisplay.php?id=ltr_nag3715.

¹⁹Ibid., http://www.familytales.org/dbDisplay.php?id=ltr_nag3719.

²⁰Ibid., http://www.familytales.org/dbDisplay.php?id=ltr_nag3723.

General Marion.”²¹ This correspondence and the following letter dated March 9, 1782 also from Greene to Washington reiterates the fact that Marion took prisoners. It stated, “The enemy have been out lately, in considerable force, in St. Thomas's. They routed General Marion's command, and killed, took, and wounded, upwards of twenty men.”²² Marion also talks about taking prisoners in his own writings. On April 22, 1782, Marion ordered Peter Horry, “to make prize of said vessel, cargo, &c., &c., and the captain, crew and passengers to put in close confinement, without suffering any person whatever to visit or speak to either of said prisoners, until my further orders.”²³

Other issues plagued military leaders in the Revolutionary War. Taking and caring for prisoners was definitely a concern, but soldiers faced greater struggles. In a different letter, Greene wrote Washington about some of these struggles, specifically mentioning Marion. Dated August 29, 1782 he wrote:

*The enemy made a descent upon Santee, some little time since, to collect rice, in which they were but too successful. The situation in which it lay, prevented General Marion from giving them any considerable interruption. The rivers of this country are very favorable for this kind of enterprises; but I am in hopes the enemy will get but little by their present expedition.*²⁴

In his last letter mentioning Marion, dated October 4, 1782, Greene wrote Washington:

²¹Ibid., http://www.familytales.org/dbDisplay.php?id=ltr_nag3725.

²²Ibid., http://www.familytales.org/dbDisplay.php?id=ltr_nag3729.

²³ Documentary History of the American Revolution Consisting of Letters and Papers Relating to the Contest for Liberty, Chiefly in South Carolina, from Originals in the Possession of the Editor, and Other Sources, 1776, accessed July 2, 2009, http://www.familytales.org/dbDisplay.php?id=ltr_frm3907&person=frm.

²⁴ Correspondence of the American Revolution; Being Letters of Eminent Men to George Washington, from the Time of His Taking Command of the Army to the End of His Presidency, Volume III., Jared Sparks, 1853, accessed July 1, 2009, http://www.familytales.org/dbDisplay.php?id=ltr_nag3731.

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This army has been exceedingly sickly in the months of August and September, and remains so still, as your Excellency will see by the returns. The enemy have been equally so. After I wrote to you of the enemy's operations to the southward, General Gist took one of their galleys. Major Frazer attempted a surprise upon General Marion, but was repulsed, with the loss of one officer killed, two wounded, and ten or twelve dragoons killed and wounded. These are all the military occurrences which have happened since that period. I have the honor to be, with great respect, your Excellency's Most obedient and most humble servant, Nathaniel Greene.²⁵

Marion's successes and failures were both due in part to his fighting techniques and the company he kept. Marion and his men, mainly local farmers, would attack British posts and soldiers, using techniques Marion learned while fighting Indians with the British during the French and Indian War, as well as with the instincts incurred throughout his life as a South Carolinian. *The Patriot* shows how the local farmers would often leave their military duties to take care of home, family, and farm during times of need. Marion indeed, allowed his men to leave when their homes were threatened or when their fields were ready for planting and harvesting. Marion would simply have them return with all possible speed, trusting they would be honorable and do so. Many, as in *The Patriot* did return and fight. Because of this "...the number of men under his command varied widely, ranging from only a handful to around 500."²⁶ This type of fluctuation was hard to deal with and frustrating for Marion but he was able to overcome diversity, and continue to lead whatever men he had with success. Nonetheless *The Patriot* fails to show the realities of desertion and glorifies the return of every soldier. Throughout the War, desertion was an issue all military leaders had to deal with. Marion was no exception. In a letter to Peter Horry dated April 9, 1782, Marion wrote:

²⁵ Ibid., http://www.familytales.org/dbDisplay.php?id=ltr_nag3732.

²⁶ Thomsen, "The Devil Himself Could Not Catch Him." 50.

*As it is possible the enemy may make another excursion in the country, you will send me every horse you have, that can be of the least service, as I am determined to oppose them at all events. There are only two officers, and twenty-eight non-commissioned and privates here the rest have been sent away by the officers on frivolous pretences. Mr. Lesesne is absent without leave, Mr. Wragg also; if he is a volunteer he must be discharged, and not suffered in future to be on the Commissary Department. Mr. Guerry is absent without leave, and must be dismissed. I expect every officer and private will be sent me that is able to act. I have had no answer from the General respecting the reduction of the corps, and have again wrote him on that subject yesterday.*²⁷

Desertion, although an ongoing problem, was only one of many issues leaders like Marion had to deal with. Marion, along with other leaders of the Revolutionary War, had to constantly make do with a lack of supplies and therefore constantly petitioning for more. April 12, 1782, in a letter to Peter Horry, Marion pleaded, "I have some accounts of the enemy's coming over to St. Thomas , and wish I had every horse you have that can be of any service, as I find I am under the necessity of attacking them."²⁸ The next day, in another letter to Peter Horry, Marion wrote, "for want of forage and subsistence, I shall remove to-day above Murray's Ferry, in St. Stephens ; indeed, I shall be obliged to move often, to prevent the enemy forming any plan against me."²⁹ Again, five days later Marion wrote Peter Horry, "I shall send Col. Maham for the horses of your corps as soon as I hear from you. I intend to leave you thirteen, but they must not be the best. I will send you arms as soon as I get them from the high hills of Santee."³⁰ When there was an excess in supplies, they would be immediately sent to where they were needed. In his letter dated April 24, 1782, Marion said to Peter Horry, "I will send fifty stand of arms, and pouches with ammuniton. Col. Moultrie will want some of them, and you are to take what he may not want at present, until I get more from Gen Greene."³¹ Six days later, he again wrote Horry, "A wagon, with fifty stand of arms, is on its way from High Hills for you. Should you want ammuniton, send to Mr. William Richardson."³² The techniques Marion had learned and perfected in war worked for him and his men despite

²⁷ Documentary History of the American Revolution Consisting of Letters and Papers Relating to the Contest for Liberty, Chiefly in South Carolina, from Originals in the Possession of the Editor, and Other Sources, 1776, accessed July 1, 2009, http://www.familytales.org/dbDisplay.php?id=ltr_frm3900&person=frm.

²⁸ Ibid., http://www.familytales.org/dbDisplay.php?id=ltr_frm3902&person=frm.

²⁹ Ibid., http://www.familytales.org/dbDisplay.php?id=ltr_frm3904&person=frm.

³⁰ Ibid., http://www.familytales.org/dbDisplay.php?id=ltr_frm3905&person=frm.

³¹ Ibid., http://www.familytales.org/dbDisplay.php?id=ltr_frm3908&person=frm.

³² Ibid., http://www.familytales.org/dbDisplay.php?id=ltr_frm3910&person=frm.

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feelings of inferiority and disrespect from other leaders, mainly those in the regular army.

Continental soldiers openly made fun of the militia. South Carolina’s Colonel Francis Marion was ‘attended by a very few followers...most of them miserably equipped; their appearance was in fact so burlesque, that it was with much difficulty the diversion of the regular soldiery was restrained by the officers; and the general himself was glad of an opportunity of detaching Colonel Marion, at his own instance, toward the interior of South Carolina.’³³ Unfortunately, animosity existed between the militia and the Continental Army. The lack of support from the Continental army directly affected the militia’s success in battle.

Despite ill support from the regulars, Marion continued to do his part, to lead his men, and confuse the British. After a quick attack, Marion and his men would retreat into the southern swamps, regroup, recover, and plan the next confrontation. The British were not used to this kind of fighting, they hated it. The British had an extremely hard time dealing with the terrain that was the common stomping ground for Marion and his men. The southern swamps were dark, full of mosquitoes, and a treacherous place to travel. Native to the area, Marion and his men were seasoned, and could handle that type of abuse. The British were not so lucky. The British wanted to do something about this guerilla style warfare, but, “in the swamps of the coastal plain, Francis Marion had assembled a band of intrepid men who would cause the British even more military headaches.”³⁴ Although guerilla warfare started with the battles of Lexington and Concord in the north, it was perfected and continually used in the south. Fighting under the cover of trees, rocks, and bushes seemed natural. Spreading out and not lining up in perfect formation seemed logical. At that time, rules of war, gentlemanly ways, and long held traditions kept many soldiers from participating in this kind of warfare; a mistake that would help men like Marion win skirmishes throughout the eight year war.

Though not important in the eyes of many Continentals, British soldiers and leaders felt that the guerilla warfare of the colonial militia was something that had to be dealt with. After Major James Wemyss’s failures,

³³ Lawrence E. Babits, *A Devil of a Whipping: The Battle of Cowpens*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 29.

³⁴ Walter B. Edgar, *Partisans and Redcoats: The Southern Campaign that Turned the Tide of the American Revolution*. (New York: William Morrow, 2001), 107.

Lieutenant Colonel Banastre Tarleton was put in charge by Lord Cornwallis of capturing or killing Marion and his illusive swamp dwelling soldiers. Tarleton, also known as “Bloody Tarleton”, “Tarleton’s Quarter” or “Bloody Ban,” was known for his destructive and brutal war tactics. It was not uncommon for Tarleton to refuse quarter to any, even the compliant soldiers willing to surrender. He was obviously willing to break the long war traditions and gentlemanly ways of the British. This willingness to break tradition and to lose favor amongst British nobility was a major reason Cornwallis replaced Wemyss with Tarleton. In a letter dated December 3, 1780, Cornwallis wrote to Henry Clinton:

Colonel Marion had so wrought on the minds of the people, partly by the terror of his threats and cruelty of his punishments, and partly by the promise of plunder, that there was scarcely an inhabitant between the Santee and Pedee that was not in arms against us. I therefore sent Tarleton, who pursued Marion for several days, and by convincing the inhabitants that there was a power superior to Marion, who could likewise reward and punish, so far checked the insurrection, that the greatest part of them have not dared openly to appear in arms against us since his expedition.³⁵

Tarleton, in his pursuit of the South Carolinian swamp dwellers, was the man that came up with the nickname that has forever labeled Marion, “The Swamp Fox.” In the movie *The Patriot*, actor Jason Isaacs plays the role of “Colonel William Tavington,” who is a fictional character depicting the real Lieutenant Colonel Banastre Tarleton. The movie dramatizes the brutality of Tarleton in the scene where Tavington burns down a church full of townspeople. Although overdramatized, Tarleton did cause damage to many southern homes, farms, and other properties. David Hackett Fischer explained “something remarkably like this event [the burning of the church] actually happened, but not in South Carolina during the American Revolution.” It happened during World War II on June 10, 1944 in a French village known as Oradour-sur-Glane. Not only 18th Century events have been mingled into the movie, but events from the 20th Century.³⁶ Tarleton’s brutality was first looked at as ungentlemanly, but after Marion’s continued success, Tarleton was given free rein on the South Carolina guerilla soldiers. Victory became more

³⁵ Correspondence of Charles, first Marquis Cornwallis, Vol I, Charles Ross, Esq., London, 1859, accessed July 2, 2009,

http://www.familytales.org/dbDisplay.php?id=ltr_cor6978&person=cor.

³⁶ David Hackett Fischer, “Hubris, But No History.” New York Times, July 1, 2000.

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important than chivalry. Surprisingly, Tarleton was still successful in England after the war, despite his brutality as a military leader.

Marion, an enemy to Tarleton, was truly a master at what he did. Author William Gilmore Simms, one of the best known scholars on Francis Marion wrote:

Marion is proverbially the great master of strategy—never to be caught, never to be followed,—yet always at hand, with un conjectured promptness, at the moment when he is least feared and is least to be expected. His pre-eminence in this peculiar and most difficult of all kinds of warfare, is not to be disputed.³⁷

Tarleton’s opinion was not so different. He once said to his men, “Let us go back, and we will soon find ‘The Gamecock,’ [Sumter] but for this damned old fox, the devil himself could not catch him.”³⁸ Marion was truly a talented fighter and leader, and he caused much frustration amongst the leaders and troops of the British Army. That being said, these frustrations of the British were in part their own fault:

Pockets of loyalist support dotted the Carolinas, but Generals Henry Clinton and Charles Cornwallis overestimated its strength in the backcountry, where a European ethnic mix complicated the political landscape. The British also underestimated the effectiveness of patriot guerillas, including General Francis Marion, the “Swamp Fox,” in disrupting operations.³⁹

This overestimation and underestimation would essentially cost the British the war. After an unsuccessful attempt at finding the “Swamp Fox,” Lord Cornwallis took his troops north to the Virginia Peninsula. This regretful mistake was expressed in a letter written by Cornwallis to Henry Clinton dated October 11, 1781:

³⁷William Gilmore Simms, *The Life of Francis Marion: The Swamp Fox*. (Digital Antiquaria, 2004), 8.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 84.

³⁹ “British Maneuvers in the South Led to America’s First Civil War,” *American History* 44 (April 2009): 52.

Cochrane arrived yesterday. I have only to repeat what I said in my letter of the 3rd, that nothing but a direct move to York River, which includes a successful naval action, can save me. On the evening of the 9th the enemy opened their batteries, and have since continued firing without intermission with about forty pieces of cannon, mostly heavy, and sixteen mortars from eight to sixteen inches. We have lost about seventy men, and many of our works are seriously damaged. With such works, on disadvantageous ground, against so powerful an attack, we cannot hope to make a very long resistance.⁴⁰

Cornwallis's assumptions were correct, leading to his surrender at Yorktown.

Marion and his men continued to wreak havoc on the British. His war tactics and illusive style paid off in the end, for Francis Marion lived through the war, witnessing the birth of a new country, a free and independent nation. The only great suffering Marion experienced during the Revolution was the loss of his nephew Gabriel, who too, had been fighting for the patriot cause. Loyalists fighting against rebel forces had captured and killed Gabriel. Gabriel was like a son to Marion, for Marion did not have children and was not married until after the Revolutionary War. This close relationship shared between Gabriel and Marion was the inspiration of Heath Ledger's role in *The Patriot* as Benjamin Martin's oldest son. Gabriel was a staunch patriot and portrayed as such in the movie. Gabriel never did serve under his uncle; therefore, Heath Leger's role as Gabriel serving under Benjamin Martin was a Hollywood creation.

Though not married at the time of the Revolution, Marion did eventually marry. In 1786 he married Mary Esther Videau, a wealthy first cousin. At the time, Marion was 54 years old, a weathered, seasoned soldier ready to settle down. The two never had children. After his services in the military, Brigadier General Marion continued to serve the public, becoming a state senator. "His health, sacrificed to years of warfare under the most wretched of conditions was failing rapidly."⁴¹ About a year after he retired completely from his years of public and military service, "Francis Marion died at Pond Bluff on February 27, 1795. Mary Esther, other members of

⁴⁰ Correspondence of Charles, first Marquis Cornwallis, Vol I, Charles Ross, Esq., London, 1859, accessed July 2, 2009, http://www.familytales.org/dbDisplay.php?id=ltr_cor7028&city=yorktown.

⁴¹ William A. Simpson, "The Swamp Fox and Nelson's Ferry." Virginia Society, Sons of the American Revolution. Website: <http://www.revolutionarywararchives.org/marion.html>.

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his family, and friends buried him in the family cemetery on Gabriel’s Plantation at Belle Isle estate.”⁴² He was “well on his way to becoming a legend.”⁴³

Marion became a national hero after his death, with towns and counties across the nation being named after him, and the Marion of legend became the inspiration for works of popular culture from a poem by William Cullen Bryant to the movie *The Patriot*.⁴⁴ The U.S.S. Francis Marion, Francis Marion University, and the Francis Marion Charleston Hotel, just to name a few, were all named in honor of the “Swamp Fox.” Even Walt Disney created a show called “The Swamp Fox,” portraying the life of Francis Marion. He was a legend in his own time and continues to be today. Americans revere and honor him for the accomplishments and contributions he made on behalf of his country.

⁴² Robert D. Bass, *Swamp Fox: The Life and Campaigns of Francis Marion*. (Orangeburg: Sandlapper Publishing Inc., 1989), 18.

⁴³ Paul A. Thomsen, “The Devil Himself Could Not Catch Him,” *American History* 35 (August 2000): 52.

⁴⁴ South Carolina Library, University of South Carolina. “From Partisan Commander to Legend: Francis Marion,” accessed July 2, 2009, <http://www.state.sc.us/scdah/exhibits/revolution/francismarion1.htm>.

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