

The Ingenious General

Few would have guessed that the limping, diminutive South Carolina plantation owner was the ingenious patriot commander and guerilla fighter who possessed the unique nickname "Swamp Fox." A French and Indian War veteran, Brigadier General Francis Marion employed unusual tactics he learned from fighting the Cherokees to catch the British off guard and disrupt their supply convoys. His lightning raids and infuriating habit of vanishing into the swamp afterwards quickly earned him his nickname. These raids kept supplies out of British hands and provided his brigade, who often fought with only two shots per man, much-needed munitions. Cunning as a fox, Marion cleverly exploited the British's weaknesses, thus proving himself an ingenious commander.

Almost always facing larger forces than his own, Marion relied on ingenious tactics to surprise the British. For example, on August 18, 1780, Marion received word of a disastrous defeat suffered by the American army. He cleverly guessed the British convoy would assume local patriots were cowed into submission. Instead, Marion attacked immediately. In the dark night of August 20, he surprised the unwary British by dividing his force, freed the American prisoners, and captured the British troops. Unused to surprise attacks, the British never could react quickly to Marion's ambushes. Marion employed the battle plan of swift strikes coupled with high mobility to keep the British off guard, forcing them to divide their troops to scour the country-side in search of him. During the American Revolution, Francis Marion harassed the British forces deployed in South Carolina.

Francis Marion could not only escape from the British; he could outwit them in battle. Employing his favorite tactic, Marion often rode to the top of a hill in plain view of a nearby British column. British officers, anxious to capture the notorious "Swamp Fox," almost always

charged up the hill with their horsemen. However, they would soon be ambushed by concealed Americans whom Marion had placed along the way, and few British ever survived. Marion's brigade always fought with very little ammunition and swords beaten out of plowshares, but Marion nearly crippled the British army by interrupting their supply chains. Soon he turned his sights toward British forts that guarded British supply and communication routes. First he besieged Fort Watson. Lacking cannon with which to breach the palisade, Marion ingeniously built a wooden tower overnight at the suggestion of a subordinate, enabling the patriots to shoot down into the courtyard. Confronted with this threat, the commanding officer quickly capitulated. Impressed by his daring, General Cornwallis said that Marion "carried terror to the very gates of Charleston."

Brigadier General Francis Marion, with his ragged brigade of backwoodsmen, employed ingenious tactics to outwit the professional British army. His selfless service helped achieve the goal he cared so much about -- independence for the American colonies -- and was recognized with a Congressional Citation for wisdom and bravery. Against overwhelming odds, he brilliantly defended South Carolina against the British Army. Today, his ingenuity serves as an example to every American.

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