



The Swamp Fox: Lessons in Leadership from the Partisan Campaigns of Francis Marion

Scott D. Aiken

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As one of the Patriot leaders in the Carolinas, the partisan campaign conducted by Brigadier General Francis Marion and his irregular force during the American Revolution prevented South Carolina from completely succumbing to British control during the period between the capture of Charleston in May 1780 and the start of Major General Nathanael Greene's campaign to recover the Southern Colonies in December 1780. During substantial segments of this period he alone held eastern South Carolina from the British and became known as "The Swamp Fox" for his exploits and elusiveness in harassing the British with his guerilla tactics.

Upon the arrival of Greene's Continental Army of the Southern Department, Marion's forces then reverted in part to an important supporting role in South Carolina for the duration of the war. He later assisted in the establishment of the authority of the State of South Carolina and contributed to its post-conflict termination. If General Marion had not taken action during the American Revolution, there is a good possibility that eastern South Carolina would have succumbed to British intent. That, coupled with the British occupation of Charleston, may have provided the British with the requisite momentum needed to conquer the South. Thankfully, General Marion's call to action both militarily and politically prevented such momentum from existing.

The multifaceted aspect of the American Revolution serves as an excellent case study for the conflicts of the Twenty-first Century: joint and combined operations, civil war, insurgency/counterinsurgency, global superpowers, civil-military relations, this conflict's got it all! Many of Marion's partisan actions were forerunners of today's tactics, showing his great innovativeness and foresight as a military leader. His incessant activities diverted British and Loyalist forces, inflicted British and Loyalist casualties, supported operations of the Continental Army during its Southern Campaign, and sustained the American Revolution in South Carolina. He was extremely effective across the range of military operations, from guerilla warfare to storming forts. He was equally inept in what today would be considered information operations and even participating in the linear tactics of the day in pitched battles. Such similarity makes Marion's partisan campaign worth study by current military and political leaders. Aiken's portrayal of Brigadier General Marion's partisan actions describes the forerunners of tactics common of today's global security environment, tactics used by, and against, United States forces.

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