

### **Bridges Campaign of Francis Marion March 6 – 20, 1781**

**Location:** Wyboo Swamp to Mount Hope Swamp to Kingstree to Sampit Bridge

**Commanders:** American – Gen. Francis Marion, Col. Peter Horry  
British – Col. John Watson Tadwell Watson

**Casualties:** Unknown

General Francis Marion heard that British Col. John Watson-Tadwell Watson had been sent as yet another death squad after Francis Marion, the major nemesis of the British. Aware that Watson was moving from Fort Watson to attack his camp at Snow's Island, Marion left a small detachment there to guard the base and moved out with most of his men towards the Fort. Soon the two forces met up at Wyboo Swamp, an area now under the waters of Lake Marion.

Watson approached from the west, 50 yards away from the Wyboo Bridge, on elevated land. The bridge had been dismantled; he could only cross by wading a shallow ford nearby. With the Patriot sharpshooters in place, Watson pulled out his artillery pieces. From the elevation, there was no way to aim the cannon down far enough to hit their target. Shots easily sailed through the tops of the pine trees. After firing back and forth with rifles, Watson finally called retreat. He collected his dead and retired to Witherspoon's Ferry.

A few days later, Marion attempted to prevent the British advance at Mount Hope Swamp. He had his men take up the planks of the bridge, and he posted a unit of riflemen under Col. Peter Horry to slow down the progress of the enemy. Watson was delayed several hours waiting for his artillery but was eventually able to break through.

Next, Watson moved towards Kingstree, but Marion engaged him once again at Lower Bridge over the Black River. Again, Watson's artillery was not as successful. Marion's men destroyed the bridge and picked off the British as they made every possible effort to advance. They even made retrieval of the wounded difficult for the enemy. Watson's forces were slowly and systematically depleted as he retreated towards Georgetown.



At Sampit Bridge on March 20, Col. Peter Horry, sent by Francis Marion to destroy that span, had arrived in time to accomplish the task. Marion had spent the first part of the campaign tearing up bridges to impede his British pursuers; now he was doing the same to prevent them from escaping.

Watson's desperate soldiers plunged into the river. Still, before retreating, the American Riflemen managed to inflict heavy damage on the enemy. Watson got his men across the river, but 20 of them were killed and nearly twice that number wounded. His own horse was shot out from under him.

Marion suffered a single loss. Watson left his dead where they lay, loaded up two wagons full of wounded, and limped back to Georgetown.

**Sources:**

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