Siege of Fort Watson   May 15, 1781

Location: Near Summerton, SC in Clarendon County

Commanders: American - Gen. Francis Marion, Col. Henry (Lighthorse Harry) Lee

                   British – Lt. James McKay

CasualtiesL   American – 2 killed, 6 wounded

                   British – 120 captured

Named for its builder, British Col. John Watso -Tadwell Watson, this outpost was constructed on top of an old Indian mound at Wright's Bluff on the Santee River. Its location made it a major supply and communications link between Charleston and Camden.

Marion used different tactics in his attempt to take the fort. Together with Col. Henry Lee, he laid siege to the post. Partisan bands traveled light and without the artillery necessary to barrage the fort, so Marion had to devise alternate methods of forcing a surrender. He first cut off their water supply, but the British simply dug a well. Starving the British out would take months. Col. Hezekiah Maham, of Marion's brigade, came up with an idea. He took a number of men into the woods to fell trees, remove their branches, and notch the ends as though they were going to build a log cabin – something most of them had experience with. During the night, they carried the logs next to the fort and constructed a square tower that rose to a height of 50 feet, 10 feet higher than the fort walls. When dawn broke, riflemen standing on a platform in the tower rained a deadly fire into the fort. Its commander, Lt. James McKay, quickly surrendered. The device was so effective that Maham's Tower, as it was thereafter known, was used in other sieges in the Southern Campaign. The victorious Americans captured over 100 British and their supplies and then destroyed the fort. Marion reported two killed and six wounded on his side in the siege. It was the first fort captured from the British.

Sources:

Barbour, R.L., *South Carolina's Revolutionary War Battlefields,* 2002

Oller, John, *The Swamp Fox, How Francis Marion Saved the American Revolution,* 2016