

## **Siege of Fort Mott**

**May 6 - 12, 1781**

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| <b>Location:</b>   | <b>Near the town of Fort Motte, Calhoun County, SC</b>   |
| <b>Commanders:</b> | <b>American – Gen. Francis Marion, Col. Henry (Lighthorse Harry) Lee</b><br><b>British – Lt. McPherson</b> |
| <b>Casualties:</b> | <b>American – Unknown</b><br><b>British – 150 captured</b>   |

Rebecca Brewton Motte had prominent Charleston family connections. Sister to Miles Brewton and widow of the long-serving provincial treasurer, Jacob Motte, Rebecca nevertheless removed to her plantation, Mount Joseph, on the Congaree River following the British occupation of Charleston. The British soon took over the house and fortified it with earthworks and abatis (sharpened poles imbedded in the ground at an angle), and strong palisades for use as an outpost along their supply line from Charleston. Mrs. Motte was forced to take up residence in the overseer's house.

It was May 6, 1781, when Francis Marion and Lighthorse Harry Lee arrived after their success at Fort Watson, ready to mete out the same punishment to the British posted here at Fort Motte. As fate would have it, the fort had been recently reinforced and now held 150 men under Lt. McPherson. Marion had one artillery piece with him and prepared to lay siege to the fort. He had his men dig trenches along a natural ravine in an effort to get as close as possible before launching an all-out assault.

In the meantime, Lord Francis Rawdon was on his way from Camden, only 35 miles north and Marion quickly realized that more expedient measures were called for. He decided to set the house on fire and, being a gentleman, consulted Mrs. Motte before taking action. She not only consented but provided Marion with the means necessary to put his plan to work. She gave him some "fire arrows" that ignited on impact, which her late husband had procured on his worldly travels. She may have also provided the bow with which to shoot them, although the Patriots could have quickly fashioned their own bow or even shot the arrows from their muskets. Either way, the hot, dry, wood-shingled roof was soon ablaze. The British tried to tear off the shingles but were discouraged by Marion's artillery fire, and Lt. McPherson was forced to surrender. Formalities of the capitulation were delayed while



That evening, she served dinner to officers of both sides in the part of her house that had survived the fire. Another account says that she served the dinner under an arbor in front of her cabin. As they dined, Marion was in exceedingly high spirits, but as he mingled and chatted, he saw a British soldier run up and whisper something to McPherson. Greatly agitated, the lieutenant relayed the message to Marion. The little brigadier sprang up, grabbed his sword, and ran downhill toward his camp. On turning the corner of the garden, he saw a grisly scene. Two men lay dead on the ground and a notorious Tory named Levy Smith was swinging by the neck from the beam of the garden gate. Marion ordered him cut down immediately. He would not tolerate the killing of prisoners.

Although Rawdon had seen the entire affair from across the river, Marion's forces prevented him from coming to the aid of his compatriots. He moved toward Moncks Corner, while Marion continued his endeavor to capture the British outposts that dotted South Carolina's midlands.

**Sources:**

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Bass, Robert D., *The Swamp Fox, The Life and Campaigns of General Francis Marion* 1959