

## **Skirmish of Fort Fairlawn    November 17, 1781**

**Location:**            Moncks Corner, Berkeley County, SC

**Commanders:**    American – Cols. Isaac Shelby and Hezekiah Maham (Marion's officers)  
                              British – Capt. McLean

**Casualties:**        Americans – 0  
                              British – 150 captured

After the surrender of Lord Cornwallis at Yorktown, large numbers of Continental soldiers were dispatched to South Carolina to help send the last of the British forces back to Charleston and on to England. In addition, nearly 600 over-mountain men (from over the mountains of North Carolina) augmented Francis Marion's brigade, so Brig. Gen Nathanael Greene directed his amassed forces against Fort Fair Lawn, a British post a few miles east of Moncks Corner. The estate was so large that it was a small village in itself, with outbuildings, mills and a landing on the Cooper River, protected by a redoubt (earthenworks or small fortification). The British were using the large brick mansion as a hospital.

The redoubt was guarded by 50 men under the command of Capt. McLean but was soon fortified by reinforcements who had seen the Americans on their way to Fair Lawn. When Marion arrived, he sent some of the over-mountain men under Colonels Hezekiah Maham and Isaac Shelby to storm the house first, expecting that McLean would leave the protection of the redoubt and fight in the open. Badly outnumbered, McLean refused to be lured from his stronghold and allowed about 150 British soldiers and doctors to be taken prisoner. Those who were able were marched off; those who were too ill to be moved were paroled. The Patriots also captured a good deal of supplies and arms there.

What happened next is certain – the Colleton House burned to the ground. How it happened is a mystery, with each side blaming the other. Several theories and justifications have been put forth, each one as plausible as the next. The senior surgeon on duty, Dr. Dowse, testified at a court of inquiry that the house was in flames no more than 20-30 minutes after the Americans first arrived. Colonels Maham and Shelby, on the other hand, claim that they were the last men to leave and there was no sign of smoke or fire at that time. The Colleton family held the British responsible.

Another unproven act was that Col. Maham forced the dying patients from the hospital to be taken to the swamp to expire there, a direct contradiction of Francis Marion's orders throughout the war. Marion abhorred unnecessary violence of any kind. The outcome of these matters is not known.