## <u>Skirmish at Nelson's Ferry</u>     August 24, 1780

## (Also known as Skirmish at Great Savannah)

Location: North side of Nelson's Ferry on the Santee River, Clarendon County

Commanders:     American  –  Col. Francis Marion

British  – Capt. Jonathan Roberts

Casualties:     American – 0 killed

British –      24 killed


Shortly before the Battle of Camden, Col. Francis Marion and his militia fighters offered their services to Patriot Major General Horatio Gates. Gates, thinking this rag tag group not worthy of fighting with his Patriot Regulars, tasked Marion with destroying boats along the Santee River to block a British escape to Charleston. Marion and his local militia were successfully carrying out their mission when Marion learned of the devastating Patriot defeat at Camden. Fearing that his men would mutiny and disperse, he kept the demoralizing news to himself.

Marion received two other pieces of information that stirred his anger toward the enemy. He heard from a deserter that the British had just burned his home, Pond Bluff, below Nelson's Ferry, and he was also informed that British Captain Jonathan Roberts's detachment of the 63rd Regiment of Foot was holding 150 Continental prisoners from Camden at Thomas Sumter's abandoned plantation, Great Savannah, near Nelson's Ferry.

"As is common in battle, things did not go exactly according to the script. In the darkness Col. Pete Horry's men stumbled upon a British sentinel who fired at their shadows and alerted the rest of the guard. Their cover blown, Horry did the only thing he could: he immediately led a mounted charge down the lane that led to the front of the house. To his surprise and delight, he discovered that the enemy had left all of their muskets carelessly piled outside the front door. Horry's patrol seized the weapons and burst inside, soon joined by Marion. The fight was over in minutes. Before the astonished British even has time to react, two of their number were killed, five were wounded, and twenty were taken prisoners. (The rest apparently fled for their lives.) Marion had none killed and only two wounded. His men had retrieved all of the 150 American prisoners. The victory, though small, was complete." (John Oller)

One of the prisoners was wounded. Ironically, of the freed Continentals, 85 refused to be liberated. They decided to accept whatever fate awaited them rather than be bound to Marion's ragtag militia. Although the remainder of the freed men followed Marion, all but three had deserted him by the time he reached his camp. Their loss had little effect on Marion's band of warriors, who remained devoted to their commander and his effective guerilla tactics.

This is thought to be the first time Lord Cornwallis heard of Col. Francis Marion.

Sources

American Battlefield Trust : https://www.battlefields.org/learn/revolutionary-war/battles/great-savannah

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