

Skirmish at Black Mingo September 4, 1780

Location: Near Rhems, Georgetown County

Commanders: American – General Francis Marion

British Loyalist – Col. John Coming Ball

Casualties: Americans – 2 killed, 8 wounded

Loyalists – 3 killed, 1 wounded, 13 captured

In early September, 1780 Francis Marion took his men to Great White Marsh, NC to rest and escape British Maj. James Wemyss' death squad that had been sent to neutralize him. After the American loss at Camden, the British then traveled across South Carolina, plundering and destroying Patriot properties. Concern for the property and lives of his people, Marion returned on September 24, 1780. He was alerted to the presence of a large number of Loyalists near Black Mingo Creek, (also known as Shepherd's Ferry) then 15 miles away. While the reports indicated that the Loyalist numbers were larger than his own, the enthusiasm of his men prompted him to agree to an attack.

In the dark of night, Marion approached. Some accounts say that as they crossed a bridge over Mingo Creek near Dollard's Tavern, they covered the bridge with blankets to muffle the sound of hooves on the wooden planks. Regardless, a sentinel fired a shot. The Tories in the tavern were alerted by the sound and Tory Col. John Coming Ball sent his men into an open field in formation to face their attackers.

The darkness and absence of moonlight made it difficult for either side to see each other. After the first volley by the Tories, their position was revealed and battle ensued. After about 15 minutes, the Tories took to the woods and swamps, leaving all guns, ammunition, baggage, and horses behind. Marion took the Tory commander's steed for himself and in a rare display of humor, renamed him "Ball" and rode him the rest of the war. Many of the Tories turned to join Marion's men.

Sources:

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

Simms, William Gilmore, The History of South Carolina 1840

Black Mingo Attack, a Hot Little Battle, taken from James A. Rogers (Florence Morning News, May 5, 1974)