

Tarleton's Chase November 7, 1780

Location: From Richardson's Plantation to Ox Swamp (26 miles)

On November 7, 1780, British Lt. Col. Banastre Tarleton was on the hunt for Francis Marion and his men. There had been other death squads sent to put an end to their nemesis. Tarleton tried to lure Marion into battle, but the careful Marion was not easily tricked.

Tarleton lit bonfires at Col. Richard Richardson's Plantation designed to give the impression that he was burning the home of the late revered patriot's family. (He actually did burn it later.) In the meantime he wheeled out two small artillery pieces capable of a kind of firepower Marion's men were not used to facing. Then, knowing Marion's penchant for making surprise attacks at night, Tarleton hid in the woods with his force of four hundred and waited for Marion to come to him.

Marion nearly took the bait. Seeing the light near Richardson's, he thought that it was the plantation house on fire and that Tarleton was there. Not knowing the size of the enemy force, he crept forward, deliberating over his next move. On his way he was met by a son of the late Col. Richardson. He brought information that Tarleton was camped a couple of miles away with one hundred cavalry and three hundred dragoons. The young Richardson, a thirty-nine-year-old militia major, had been taken prisoner at Charleston, paroled, and returned to service after being exchanged. By slipping away to alert Marion, he was risking his life. He also reported that Tarleton had two artillery pieces - a grasshopper (a light brass cannon, named for the way it jumped backward on firing) and a small field howitzer. He further informed Marion that one of Marion's men had deserted to the enemy and was now serving as a guide for Tarleton.

Realizing that Tarleton held the advantage, including artillery, which his men had not yet faced, Marion decided he needed to depart the area at once. He took his men on a fast ride in darkness through a major swamp, not stopping until they were past Richbourg's Mill Dam on Jack's Creek six miles away.

The next morning, November 8, Tarleton was puzzled over Marion's failure to attack, so he sent a few men to find out why. They brought back a prisoner who had managed to escape from Marion's brigade during the previous night's mad dash. He informed them that Marion would have attacked him had some "treacherous women" (the widow Richardson and others) not smuggled out an emissary to warn Marion of Tarleton's actual number.

Tarleton immediately ordered his men to their arms and mounts, but they soon discovered that Marion had already flown from his camp at Jack's Creek in the direction of Kingstree.

Tarleton then embarked on a seven-hour hunt for his intended victim, trudging through 26 miles of miserable swamps and narrow gorges. Marion in turn took his men on a 35 mile route, up to the banks of one creek, down along a river and then across another creek, through bogs, always staying beyond shouting distance of his pursuers. Tarleton reported to Cornwallis that due to Marion's headstart and "the difficulties of the country," he was unable to catch him. He abandoned the chase at Ox Swamp, outside of present-day Manning, S.C. which was wide, mucky, and without roads for passage. It was there Tarleton is said to have uttered the words that gave Marion his now famous nickname. "Come my boys! Let us go back, and we will soon find the Gamecock [Thomas Sumter]. But as for this damned old fox, the Devil himself could not catch him."

Sources:

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- Oller, John, *The Swamp Fox, How Francis Marion Saved the American Revolution* 2016
- Simms, William Gilmore, *The Life of Francis Marion* 1844