



Response by John Oller to James Mc Intyre's review of *The Swamp Fox: How Francis Marion Saved the Revolution* [MiWSR 2017-087]

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James Mc Intyre's review of *Swamp Fox*, my biography of Francis Marion, makes two principal criticisms: first, that I ignore the historical literature about the Waxhaws battle and assert that Banastre Tarleton "did in fact commit an atrocity." He claims I fail to recognize that "most historians" dismiss the clash "as a very confused engagement where some of the British Legion lost control." Secondly, he writes that I deny that "both forces"—the militia and Continentals—"were essential to victory." Both claims are inaccurate.

On the Waxhaws, I acknowledge that some historians argue that "Tarleton's Legion committed no atrocities at the Waxhaws at all," while others "allow that irregularities may have occurred, but were brief in duration, and resulted not from any bloodthirsty order by Tarleton but from confusion on the part of his men" (84)—the very theory the reviewer puts forward. I cite Jim Picuch on this "confusion" theory (284), the same authority Mc Intyre references. I conclude that "something" atrocious happened at the Waxhaws, which is hardly disputable, but not necessarily that Tarleton, as opposed to his men, was personally guilty of atrocities. To say that I pushed one, simplistic theory without noting competing viewpoints is a gross misrepresentation.

Mc Intyre also states that I "[do] not even address" the idea that the "*perception*" that a massacre occurred galvanized the militia to return to the field. To the contrary, I write that "Whatever the truth of what happened at the Waxhaws, to the patriots Tarleton became known as 'Bloody Ban' ... who mercilessly slaughtered his foes." I also specifically point out that the patriots later used the phrase "Tarleton's Quarter" (meaning "take no prisoners") as a rallying cry (84–85).

As for "both forces" being essential to victory, I write that Marion himself recognized that "the Continental army and the militia needed each other" (103), that "The [Georgetown] operation also proved that the militia and regulars could work together" (118), and that the Continental army focused on liberating "the largest garrisons," while the militia was responsible for recovering "the smaller posts" (145). I acknowledge that Nathaniel Greene's Continentals were the primary force at the battle of Eutaw Springs, but state that "the final liberation of South Carolina was largely in the hands of Greene and Marion" (208, my emphasis). In other words, I make clear that *both* were "essential to victory."

To suggest that I somehow romanticize the militia and omit its shortcomings is also untrue. I note that Marion was often dissatisfied with the militia (e.g., 79, 142, 156) and "just as frustrated with what he called the militia's 'diffidence' as was Greene" (103), who quipped that "the militia ... were 'of no more use than if they were in the moon'" (102).

Mc Intyre has repeatedly disregarded or misconstrued what I actually wrote, in favor of his own theories. I hope readers will judge the merits of *Swamp Fox* for themselves.