"The British soldier trembles When Marion's name is told." -- Bryant. The movie "The Patriot" was filmed in Chester, York, Charleston, and Georgetown counties in South Carolina. The biggest part was filmed on the Guy Darby Farm on the Chester/York county line. Just as the movie portrays, Joseph Willis and General Francis Marion also operated out of the South Carolina swamps.

Joseph Willis was a Patriot during the Revolutionary War. Joseph and a friend from Bladen County, Ezekiel O’Quin, left North Carolina for South Carolina to join up with General Francis Marion, the "Swamp Fox." Marion operated out of the swampy forest of the Pedee region in the lower part of South Carolina. His strategy was to surprise the enemy, cut his supply lines, kill their men and release any American prisoners they might have. He and his men then retreated swiftly back again to the thick recesses of the deep swamps. They were feared, very effective and their fame was widespread.

They also took great pride in themselves. Marion’s orderly book states, "Every officer to provide himself with a blue coatee, faced and cuffed with scarlet cloth, and lined with scarlet; white buttons; and a white waistcoat and breeches…also, a cap and a black feather…" Joseph would later proudly tell the family, "We were called Marion men." The lessons learned with Marion would serve him well his entire life. Joseph was proud of his service under Marion, and risk his life to be a Patriot, for at the time in Bladen County, 1777, it was estimated that two-thirds of the people were Tories. An oath of allegiance to the state was required in North Carolina and those refusing to take it were required to leave the state within sixty-days.

How did Marion, a scrawny, semi-literate man, become one of the greatest generals of the American Revolution? The American colonists
and soldiers loved him and he earned the nickname "Swamp Fox" from the British soldiers. Marion was so popular that children and cities were named after him.

Francis Marion was born in 1732 in what was to become South Carolina. As a baby, Marion was tiny, frail and sickly, and it was said he was no bigger than a lobster. It is probably not surprising that he was a sickly child due to the swampy areas around which he grew up.

As Marion got older, he enjoyed playing in the swamps. He learned about the local Indians, how they fought and survived in the swamp. He knew the swamps like the back of his hand and it was said that he never got lost. Little did he realize how much this would help him in the future.

At the age of 15, Marion wanted to become a sailor. So, against the wishes of his family, he set sail on a ship bound for the West Indies. On his first voyage, the ship sank and Marion, along with several other crewmen, were adrift at sea for a week before their lifeboat finally drifted aground. It was lucky for Marion, who didn't know how to swim.

By 1760, the Cherokee War hit South Carolina and Marion became a lieutenant in the militia. He proved himself to be a good horseman and marksman, again qualities that were to be of use in the future. After this brief war, Marion retired to the life of a farmer, becoming quite successful and owning lots of land.

But the growing storm that was to become the Revolutionary war brought Marion out of retirement. Like many others, he considered himself a Patriot and loved his freedom. Based on past experience, Marion was made Captain in the Continental Army. Because of his success, he climbed the promotional ladder to Major, Colonel, and, eventually, to General.

Marion decided the only way to effectively battle the British was with guerrilla tactics. Many of his officers and men questioned this style of
fighting at first. To them, it wasn't honorable to strike, then retreat without giving a full fight to the English army. Eventually, they realized that this was a smart way to fight and was the best suited to their style of warfare.

Marion and his soldiers would concentrate their attacks on British supply camps and the supply lines themselves. They would rest during the day and march at night, quite often attacking at midnight. Marion was able to cut the supply lines linking the British occupied cities and chased and harassed various British leaders, most notably Colonel Banastre Tarleton.

Marion displayed a natural talent for strategy and tactics and was known for his personal bravery. He is considered by most to be the father of the U.S. Army Special Forces because of his unique innovations.

For example, scouts would always ride ahead to prevent ambushes. Some of them would hide in the top of tall trees and signal with shrill whistles. This was done at night when Marion would march and attack. If a bridge had to be crossed near an enemy post, blankets would be laid on the wooden planks to muffle the horses hoofs. A campfire was never used twice and when planning a raid, Marion kept the target to himself until the last moment.

This strategy bewildered the British who would chase after Marion into the swamps, only to lose him. The British complained that it was an unfair method of fighting a war and they felt that the Americans didn't play by the rules of "civilized warfare."

Eventually, British Colonel Tarleton, who often chased Marion into the swamps, gave Marion the nickname of the "Swamp Fox."

"The devil himself could not catch that old fox," said Tarleton. This name stuck and colonists thought it was humorous that their hero was compared to a fox.
As the Revolutionary War raged on, Marion's success grew. He fought in battles at Kings Mountain, Cowpens, Guilford Courthouse, Georgetown, and finally Eutaw Springs in August 1781. All of this led up to the British surrender in October of that same year.

After the war, Marion retired back to his plantation where he married Mary Videau. Marion also showed his love and loyalty to country by serving terms in the South Carolina Senate until South Carolina became a member of the union Marion lived the rest of his life on his farm. He was loved by the community and often helped his fellow veterans in time of need. As the memory of war faded, Marion's exploits became more famous. What were once small skirmishes turned into big battles. He became a hero of the Revolution, second only to George Washington.

On Feb. 27, 1795, Francis Marion died at the age of 63. He was remembered as an honorable citizen as well as a gallant soldier. Marion epitomized the successful citizen-soldier. For this reason, years after the war, thousands of parents named sons Francis Marion. Not only were children named after him, but scattered over the present United States, there are over 29 cities and towns and 17 counties named after Marion.

If you'd like to learn more about Francis Marion, there is a complete history available: [http://foclark.tripod.com/revwar/marion.html](http://foclark.tripod.com/revwar/marion.html)

Notes:

Over the years, numerous descendants of Rev. Joseph Willis have asked me if any "absolute" proof exist of Joseph Willis' service in the Revolutionary War. Most have desired this information to join: [Sons and Daughters of the American Revolution](http://www.sdadnr.org), [National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution (NSDAR)](http://www.ndsar.org) and/or [National Society of the Sons of the American Revolution (NSSAR)](http://www.nssar.org).
Marion's troops were basically a guerrilla force, raised irregularly from the backwoods of South Carolina, no roster was kept. The only published record of the men who fought under him comes from the claims that were later filed for militia pay against the state of South Carolina. Joseph Willis, Richard Curtis and Ezekiel O'Quinn said they fought under Marion in the Revolutionary War; but none of them filed for militia pay.

William W. Broddie compiled a book, from the stub indents of the militia pay, entitled "Marion's Men, A List of Twenty-five Hundred" (1938). Only those who filed for militia pay are in it. Several early-1800 and mid-1800 authors, including W.E. Paxton, recorded that Joseph was a Marion man; but more important is Joseph Willis' own testimony to his friends, children and grandchildren.

In addition, many courthouses with vital records were lost, eight decades later, in the Civil War as a result of General Sherman and other northern forces burning the courthouses.