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BACOT'S DEVICE

The battle of Camden had been fought on Aug. 16, 1780, and among the prisoners taken by the British in that engagement were Captain Peter Bacot, John Starke, a young man of 19, and an old continental from Connecticut, Simon Jones by name.

The three men were marching in a band of 30, who, three days after the battle, were being forwarded by Colonel Rawdon to Charleston, and when they thought of the dungeon awaiting them there their hearts were heavy.

The band of prisoners had just entered upon the lonely road which led through a forest, and, grateful for the cooling shade on that hot day, guards and prisoners halted for a rest.

Young John Starke, who had been wounded in the thigh and had pluckily continued on the march for fear of worse evils if he fell out of the ranks, turned and looked upon the men in the company, and the sight was not one to cheer him. Truly his situation was a desperate one, and with a heavy heart he said to Captain Peter, "Not very much hope here, is there, captain?"

"No," replied Peter Bacot briefly. "It's Rawdon's way, I guess," drawled the Yankee Simon. "He's grown tired of hanging and shooting helpless men, and he thinks by sending 'em in to the Charleston dungeon he'll do just as well and save himself all the trouble. It'll be the same thing in the end."

"They say there is lots of smallpox, John."

"And they say truly," replied Peter. "They don't half feed the men, and with the smallpox and fever and foul air they don't have to look after any of the men very long."

"It saves time and money and guards, I guess," drawled Simon again. "I don't mind seem 'em economical. It's what I was brought up to myself."

John looked quickly at the old soldier, but his face was expressionless. He could not tell whether his indifference was real or assumed, but whatever the cause John had little sympathy with it.

He could not repress a shudder as he turned again to Captain Peter and said: "Is there no hope? Can't we make a break and get out of this? We'd better be shot than die the death we'll have to at Charleston."

His companion gave no reply except to glance expressively at the guard, and John, too, was silent as he observed the men. What a desperate band they were! Surely no mercy was to be expected from them, and the young soldier groaned as he realized his helplessness.

"My sister Nancy lives up the road here," he said at last. "She's the only sister I've got, and she's disgraced the family by marrying a Tory. He keeps the public house up at the Corners. I wonder what she'll think of it when she sees her own brother carried away by her husband's friends?"

The word to march on again was given, and he had no opportunity to make further inquiries, but he noticed that Peter Bacot was thoughtful and several times turned to Simon and spoke to him in low tones. Simon was interested, too, in the captain's words, for, although the expression upon his face did not change, John knew from his manner that some project was in his mind. What it was, however, he could not conjecture.

On marched the men, the silence broken only occasionally by a growl from some redcoat or the sharp word of Captain Faust, the leader of the guard, to some loitering prisoner. The heat of the sun was intense, and the insects that steadily followed them increased the discomfort of all. The prisoners uttered no complaints, but the murmurings of the guard grew louder and more frequent. Captain Faust was beginning to fear that he would lose control of his men when a public house came into view, and a halt was ordered.

"Is this where your sister Nancy lives?" inquired Peter of John Starke.

"Yes," replied John, "but I don't know that she'll do us any good."

"I think she will," said Peter, and in a few moments they were again on their way.

few low words he explained his plan. John listened attentively, and for a moment felt hopeful, but a glance at the noisy redcoats brought back all his fears, and he said: "It may be well enough to try it, but I haven't much hope. Here's my sister, now, and I'll see what can be done."

Nancy was approaching and looking with curious interest at the band of prisoners. Suddenly her glance fell upon John, and she was about to utter a startled exclamation when a warning sign from her brother caused her to be silent.

Still she approached, and John knew by the expression upon her face that he could depend upon her to do her utmost for him, for even in those desperate times "blood was thicker than water."

"Why, John, how came you here?" "Hush, Nancy!" whispered John. "Come close a minute and I'll explain it."

In a few words John hurriedly told his sister of their desperate plight and explained the plan which Peter Bacot had devised. Nancy listened attentively, and then hesitated before she answered. It was only for a moment, however, for she quickly said: "I'll do it, John. You stay right here, and I'll try my best for you."

His sister was gone in a moment, and John stretched himself upon the ground with his companions to await the result. Not a word was spoken by the prisoners, but each was watching intently the movements of the guard.

Shouts and noises soon could be heard and among the soldiers they could see a woman moving here and there, and al-

ways with a jug in her hands. An hour had passed, and the three prisoners were just beginning to hope that they might be able to make some attempt when Captain Faust appeared in the doorway and in a thick voice ordered the men to form and advance.

"It was no good," said John despondingly.

"You can't tell yet," replied Peter. "Here comes your sister."

"John," said Nancy as she approached, "I've done all I could and will hope for the best. Here, take these bottles," she added as she drew three black bottles from the folds of her dress and handed them to her brother. "Be careful. Maybe you can work your plan yet. Good-by," she whispered as she turned and left them.

John thrust one of the bottles into his pocket and gave his companions the others, and then they arose to take their places in the ranks. The march was at once resumed, but the lines of the guard were very uneven now, and the murmurs had given place to shouts and songs.

"Steady, there! Steady!" called out Captain Faust as he looked back at the men.

"He thinks the troubles are with them," said Simon. "He'll have to look out or the ground will hit him in the face. It's all right, and we'll make a try pretty quick."

"Hark! What's that?" inquired John sharply.

The sound of a bugle could be heard in advance of them. The three prisoners looked at one another in dismay, for doubtless the approaching drum was redcoats, and their coming meant the downfall of all their hopes. Faust, too, had heard the sound and realized that he was in no fit condition to be seen by any of his superior officers.

"Here, Captain Faust," said Peter Bacot quickly, "you take my hat and coat and give me yours and your sword, and I'll help you out. Be quick. You haven't a minute to lose."

"Glad-to—have ye," said the leader thickly, at once carrying out the suggestion.

The transfer had hardly been made and the men formed in line by the roadside before Colonel Cruget's band of redcoats, escorting supplies and re-enforcements for the present stations, appeared in the road.

"Present arms!" called Captain Peter, and the men, who were too stupid to perceive the change in officers, obeyed, and also carried out his order to salute the newcomers.

"Who's in command of these men, and what are they?" inquired Colonel Cruget as he drew rein on his horse.

"Captain Faust's in command," replied Peter, saluting, "and these fellows are prisoners for Charleston."

"Good place for them," replied the colonel. "You'd better hurry on, though, for if night overtakes you in the woods the men may get away."

"We'll hurry," replied Peter, watching the colonel as he and his men passed on. Then Peter restored the sword and belongings to Captain Faust, and the march was resumed, though the lines of the guard were still unsteady, and the men plainly were almost overcome.

"Their guns ain't drunk," whispered Simon, shaking his head in reply to Peter's suggestion that they should start and run into the woods, and the three prisoners kept on after the others.

Night overtook them in the woods, and the band took up their quarters in a deserted log house by the roadside. Then the prisoners were placed in one room, with a door opening into the hall and a window into the yard, while the drunken Tories and sober American officers were all left in the hall together.

The three prisoners soon began to work. The sounds that rose about them showed that most of the men were sleeping. They whispered together, and then Simon began to use the bottles that Nancy had given.

The sounds of the sleeping guards became louder, and soon it was manifested that all but the sentinels of the three prisoners had forgotten the hard march of the day and were sound asleep.

"Will you please get me a drink of water?" Simon said to the sentinel in the hall.

The sentinel grumbled, but went for the water and held out the gourd as he returned. With one quick blow Simon knocked the gourd from his hand, and the water splashed over the gun and into the face of the astonished Tory. Instantly Peter and John were by his side, and the sentinel was secured and gagged.

Then the three men hastily secured the guns; but, though their efforts were not heard by the drunken Tories, the prisoners in the other room had heard and were leaping out of the window into the yard. The outside sentinel was aroused and fired, but the noise of the report only served to awaken the drunken men in the hall and quicken the pace of the escaping prisoners.

"I'll tend to that sentinel," said Simon, quickly leaving the hall and presenting his gun before the soldier could reload.

The dazed Tories meanwhile had been roused, only to find themselves without guns and facing the barrels of their own muskets. In a few minutes the three resolute men completed their work and paroled the Tories and disappeared.

John Starke concealed himself in the woods and was fed and cared for by Nancy till he was strong enough to make his way to Sumter's army. Captain Peter Bacot became an officer in the regulars of South Carolina, but of Simon no word was ever received.

After the war, when John Starke used to relate the story for his grandchildren, he would close by saying, "It's the only time in all my recollection I can remember that drunken men ever did any good."

—Boston Globe.

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