

Otis James

# With the Swamp Fox: A Story of General Marion's Young Spies



James Otis

**With the Swamp Fox: A Story of  
General Marion's Young Spies**

«Public Domain»

**Otis J.**

With the Swamp Fox: A Story of General Marion's Young Spies /  
J. Otis — «Public Domain»,

## Содержание

CHAPTER I.	6
CHAPTER II.	12
CHAPTER III.	18
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	22

**James Otis**  
**With the Swamp Fox / A Story of**  
**General Marion's Young Spies**

"Thank God I can lay my hand on my heart and say that, since I came to man's estate, I have never intentionally done wrong to any."

(General Francis Marion's last words, spoken February 27th, 1795.)

## CHAPTER I. MY UNCLE, THE MAJOR

He who sets himself down to write of his own deeds in order that future generations may know exactly what part he bore in freeing the colonies from the burdens put upon them by a wicked king, must have some other excuse, or reason, than that of self-glorification.

Some such idea as set down above has been in my mind from the moment Percy Sumter – meaning my brother – urged that I make a record of what we did while serving under General Francis Marion, that ardent patriot and true soldier, who was willing to make of himself a cripple rather than indulge in strong drink.

I question if there be in the Carolinas any one who does not know full well the story of that night in Charleston, when, the door being locked upon him in order that he might be forced to drink, General Marion – then only a colonel – leaped from the window, thereby dislocating his ankle, rather than indulge in a carousal which to him was unseemly and ungentlemanly.

This is but a lame beginning to what it is intended I shall tell regarding those days when we two lads, Percy and myself, did, as it has pleased many to say, the work of men in the struggle against foreign rule; yet however crude it may appear to those better versed in the use of the pen, it is the best I can do. My brother and myself went into General Marion's camp before our fourteenth birthday, and since that time have studied the art of warfare instead of letters, which fact is due to the troublous times rather than our own inclination, for my desire ever was to improve my mind until I should be at least on equal terms with those lads who were more favored as to country.

First let me set down that of which we two – meaning Percy and myself – can honestly claim without fear of being called boastful.

Our mother was sister to those noble gentlemen, John, William, Gavin, James and Robert James, who one and all devoted their fortunes and their lives to the cause of the independence of the Carolinas. She married a Sumter, who died while yet we twins were in the cradle, and, therefore, we were come to look upon ourselves as true members of the James family, rather than Sumters, priding ourselves upon that which every true Carolinian is ready to declare, that "he who rightfully bears the name of James is always ready for the foe, the first in attack and the last in retreat."

I am coming to the beginning of my story in a halting, and what may seem a boastful, fashion, yet to my mind there is no other way of telling plainly what Percy and I were so fortunate as to accomplish under General Marion, than that of explaining why it was we two lads, less than fourteen years of age, should have been given such opportunities.

Now I will write particularly of my uncle, the major, in order that it may be further understood how we lads came to be known as scouts in the service of the "Swamp Fox," and while so doing much which is already well-known must be repeated.

When the city of Charleston was captured by the British, thousands of Carolinians who were true to the cause of independence voluntarily made of themselves exiles, despairing of being able to wrest their native colonies from the hands of the king, and willing to assist those in the north whose possibilities seemed bright.

To the men who were left at home, the proclamation of Sir Henry Clinton, offering pardon to the inhabitants and a reinstatement of all their rights, seemed most honest.

When, however, Sir Henry's second decree was issued early in August, in the year 1780, declaring that we who accepted "pardon" must take up arms against those of the northern colonies who were yet holding their own against oppression, the condition of affairs seemed suddenly to have changed, and the gentlemen of the Carolinas asked themselves how these two proclamations could bear relationship.

Such question could only be answered by those high in authority under the king, and that the matter might be made plain, the people of Williamsburg, in the colony of South Carolina, chose my uncle, Major John James, to represent them in asking for an explanation.

The nearest post was at Georgetown, and the commandant one Captain Ardesoif.

To this officer my uncle presented himself with the question as to what might be meant by the demand that the people of South Carolina "submit themselves to the king," and if, after having done so to the satisfaction of his majesty, they would be allowed to remain at their homes.

The British captain was one who looked upon the colonists generally as slaves who should be whipped into subjection, rather than men who were able and willing to defend their lives, and taking such view of the Carolinians, he made answer much in this fashion:

"His majesty offers you a free pardon, of which you are undeserving, for you all ought to be hanged: but it is only on condition that you take up arms in his cause."

Had this redcoated captain known my uncle better, he might have selected his words with greater wisdom; but, unacquainted with our family, he could have made no greater mistake, and proud am I to set down that which I know to be my uncle's answer:

"Sir, the people whom I am come to represent will scarcely submit to such condition."

Then it was that Captain Ardesoif flew into a passion, giving no heed to the possibility that it might be dangerous to allow his tongue free rein.

"Represent!" he cried in a fury. "You insolent rebel, if you dare speak in such language I will have you hung up at the yard-arm," and the redcoated captain pointed to his ship, which lay in the harbor.

I had never set myself down as a member of the James family if such words had been allowed to pass unnoticed, but those who know my uncle could have told the captain that he was most unwise in attempting to *force* us into any agreement.

The king's officer was armed, and my uncle, clad in a garb such as is worn by us of Williamsburg, carried no weapons. This fact, however, had no weight with Major James.

Seizing the chair upon which he sat he rushed upon the insolent Britisher, striking him senseless with a single blow, and then making his escape at once, for the king's soldiers were there in force, he mounted his horse and fled from the town.

All possibility that we of Williamsburg would "submit" had vanished, and within four and twenty hours came the enrolment of that body of true gentlemen and noble soldiers who were afterward known, and the memory of whom will live so long as the history of these colonies are told, as "Marion's Brigade."

It was the major, as a matter of course, who took command of these volunteers, and they were divided into four companies, each under a captain.

The first was led by William M'Cottry; Henry Mouzon had command of the second. John of the Lake – another branch of the James family, and an uncle to the major – was captain of the third, while John McCauley stood at the head of the fourth division.

These gentlemen, who had come together within less than four and twenty hours after my uncle's interview with the representative of his majesty at Georgetown were all residents of the district of Williamsburg, and were rendezvoused on the banks of Lynch's Creek nearby where it joins the Great Pedee River within less than two miles of my mother's home.

All this is set down by way of explanation, so that whosoever in the days to come shall read what I am so lamely doing, may understand how it chanced that we two lads played so important a part – for circumstances put it in our way to do good work – in the struggle which finally freed the Carolinas, as well as the other colonies of America, from the burdens which the king put upon them.

Percy and I had seen somewhat of warfare, or at least we believed we had, and watched keenly the movements of this brigade which my uncle commanded, expecting that such deeds of valor would

be performed by him and his soldiers as must give new impetus to the Cause throughout all the colonies.

Then, to our great surprise, we learned that General Marion was appointed chief over the forces raised in the Williamsburg district, and our hearts were filled with disappointment because it appeared to us that thereby had Major James lost the opportunity to show himself the valiant and skillful officer we believed him to be.

As a matter of course we had heard much regarding this soldier who leaped out of a window at the expense of breaking his bones, rather than join a party of gentlemen in their drinking, and were burning with curiosity, which as I have said, was mixed with deep disappointment, to know what kind of an appearance he might present.

The men of the command were by no means as captious regarding him as we two nephews of the man whom we believed to be the rightful commander.

Those Carolinians who took part in the defense of Charleston knew him to be a brave colonel, and expected much of him as a general; but we lads were more than disappointed in the appearance of the soldier who had already made for himself a worthy name.

We saw a small, swarthy gentleman, walking with a decided limp, wearing a round-bodied, crimson jacket, and, perched upon his head was a leathern cap ornamented with a silver crescent on which were inscribed the words "liberty or death."

While we were not disposed to compare the king's soldiers with our own brave men to the disparagement of the latter, we had seen officers from many countries, and had rather more than a vague idea of what a uniform should be. Therefore this grotesque costume – for I can call it by no other name – impressed us unfavorably, although in a very few days we came to learn better than ever before that something more than clothes are needed to make the man.

When General Marion arrived at Lynch's Creek on the 12th of August, the men of Williamsburg had a military organization numbering, perhaps, four hundred, and not a man that could boast of a complete equipment.

Our Carolinians were armed with whatsoever weapons they owned, some carrying shot-guns and others muskets, while M'Cottry's company were provided with small-bore rifles. Each man had, perhaps, his horn filled with powder; but no more than that, and, as I have heard my uncle say time and time again, when the brigade first went into camp there was not of ammunition sufficient to sustain an engagement lasting half an hour.

The variety of missiles was as great as that of weapons. A few had muskets or rifle balls which they themselves had molded; others carried buck-shot, and some were provided only with bird-shot.

As for swords, bayonets and pikes, we had none, and the first order which General Marion issued after arriving at Lynch's Creek, caused me to have a higher opinion of him than I had at first believed would be possible.

Word was given that the force disperse in squads of from five to a dozen men, and set about sacking the saw mills in the immediate vicinity. Nothing was to be taken away from them save the saws, and these it was proposed should be beaten by the blacksmiths of the district into sabres.

Now in such work as this two lads like Percy and myself could do as much as men, and, without asking the privilege of volunteering, we set out, forming an "independent command of two," as Percy put it, bound for a certain mill owned by one Pingree, who had announced again and again that a Carolinian who would set himself in defiance against the king deserved nothing better than hanging.

It was no brave adventure which we started upon, and yet it led to our being brought into direct, and I might almost say close, contact with General Marion himself.

There was little need that we two lads should ask permission from our mother to join in the work of saw gathering, for the major was at the head of the family in good truth, and whatsoever he might do, was, in the opinion of even the most distant relatives, worthy of being copied.

It was only necessary Percy and I should announce that we counted on aiding the major so far as might be possible, and our mother at once saw that we were provided with such amount of provisions as would serve to keep hunger at bay during at least two days.

Perhaps my uncle might have objected to the plan had he been informed of it; but such information we were not minded to give lest the venture should be a failure, and we become a butt for his mirth.

Therefore it was we set out secretly, so to speak, armed with the rifles which during no less than half a dozen years had served us in all the turkey-hunts and deer-stalking parties we were allowed to join.

Because this venture of ours was not important, save in what it led up to, there is no reason why I should use many words in the telling of it. Suffice it to say that after a tramp of ten miles or more, when we had crossed the Pedee River at Port's Ferry and were at Pingree's Mills, we learned, greatly to our surprise and considerably to our fear, that we should not be allowed to dismantle the building.

There we were met by a lad of our acquaintance whose home was in Kingstree. Samuel Lee was the name of this fellow, with whom we had had little intercourse because of his associating much with the king's soldiers; there had never been any bad blood between us, but we held aloof from him, and now I was less inclined than ever to give him my confidence.

He was curious to know what brought us so far from home, and on our part we wondered what had led him out of the district.

Neither Percy nor I had any particular reason to fear Sam Lee; yet instinctively we closed our mouths on his approach, which was at the very moment when we were about to wrench the saws from the fastenings, and awaited his speech.

"What are you two hunting?" he asked with an unwarranted assumption of familiarity which Percy at once resented by closing his mouth closely, while I, little dreaming what information it was possible for him to give, replied in a tone intended to repel his advances:

"Any game which comes our way is not unwelcome."

"Are you expecting to find fur or feather in Pingree's Mill?"

I was tempted to reply roughly; but without knowing why it should be done, I put a curb upon my tongue and spoke him fairly, even against my inclination.

"When one has traveled far under such a blazing sun as shines to-day, any shelter from the heat is grateful."

"And may at the same time be dangerous for some lads," he said in a tone which caused me to believe it was within his power to give some information of value to us.

"Why should it be dangerous for some, and not for others?" I asked.

"Because all who live in the Williamsburg district do not boast of their relationship to the James family, great though it may be."

Now was I certain he had it in his mind to do us a mischief, and was capable of carrying it out, else the cowardly lad who called himself a Loyalist would never have spoken so boldly.

There was a similar thought in Percy's mind, as I understood from the meaning look he gave me, and then I was resolved to know all Sam Lee could tell.

By way of provoking him to further speech I said boastingly:

"If you know of another family hereabout who have greater reason to be proud of its members, than ours, I would like much to hear the name."

"Those who are wrapped up in their own conceit fail oftentimes of seeing the good which is in others, and I have heard it said that not one of the James tribe would admit that even the king was higher in position than he."

"You might have heard it said with equal truth that not a James, or a true Carolinian would admit that such a king as now claims the right to rule over us, was even our equal." Percy replied hotly, and this seditious remark had the effect which I was hoping to bring about.

It stirred Sam Lee to anger, and he cried menacingly, but taking good care meanwhile to move off at a safe distance.

"Before many days you will learn that the James family cannot even take care of themselves!"

"But who shall teach us that lesson?" Percy asked with a sneer.

"No less a man than Major Gainey himself."

"And how can he, who is now in Charleston, teach us so odd and sudden a lesson?"

"The major is at Britton's Neck!" Sam cried triumphantly. "In command of a body of Loyalists so large that the people of Williamsburg will soon be on their knees begging protection from the king's troops."

"He will need have more Tories at his back to do that, than have ever been found in the Carolinas," Percy cried, now almost boiling with rage.

"It may be that you Sumter lads, who hang to the skirts of Major James because of the great deeds he claims to be able to perform, have yet much to learn regarding the Loyalists of the Carolinas! What say you to two thousand well-armed and well-drilled men?"

"Two thousand?" Percy repeated with a laugh of scorn. "You know full well, Sam Lee, that such a number of Tories cannot be gathered in these colonies."

"There is at this moment, ready to march upon your wonderful General Marion, near to that number of men, and before a week has passed every James around Williamsburg will be in custody of the king's forces."

"If all you say be true, and I doubt seven-eighths of it, why are you so far afield from those of your kidney? After all that has taken place in this colony, a Tory would do well to have a care over his steps lest he blunder into evil," and now it was that I began to lose control over my temper.

"It is you who are blundering, Bob Sumter, for I have but to raise my voice and an hundred soldiers will answer me."

Percy laughed derisively; but I am willing to confess that there was something very like timorousness in my heart as the Tory lad spoke, for I knew full well he had not dared say so much unless friends were close at hand.

Now I felt positive there were no such number of Tories under Major Gainey as Sam Lee had said, yet was I equally certain there must be a strong gathering in the neighborhood, and he would have been a dull lad indeed who could not realize how important it was that my uncle, the major, have immediate information regarding the assembly.

Once this fact had gained lodgment in my mind I was burning with anxiety to retrace my steps.

There was no longer any desire in us to bring back a goodly store of saws that our neighbors might praise us for having been industrious.

There remained only the question of leaving Sam Lee as quickly as might be, without arousing his suspicions as to where we were going.

It was not a simple matter, however, to give him the slip.

He must have read in my face that his information disturbed me, and, like a fool who believes that by multiplying words he gives yet further weight to his argument, the fellow launched forth in praises of this vast body of Tories who were to work us of Williamsburg so much injury.

My impatience increased until it seemed no longer possible to stand there listening to what was little less than threats, and, seizing Percy by the hand lest in his anger he should leap upon the braggart, I said with so much of friendliness as could be assumed:

"As you have said, Master Lee, we are far from home, and it behooves us to retrace our steps before sunset, more particularly if there are so many traitors to their country in this vicinity as you would have us believe. We bid you good-day, and trust that the time may speedily come when it will not be so simple a matter to part company."

"You may be certain that day is near at hand," he replied in a menacing tone. "Before a week has passed I venture to predict the king's enemies in Williamsburg will be under close guard, powerless to say when they will go or come."

As the Tory spoke Percy wrenched himself free from my grasp, and leaped upon him.

To flog such a coward as Sam Lee was a simple matter, and I stepped aside lest it should afterward be said that two of us set upon one, thinking that while it might be imprudent for my brother to mete out the punishment which was merited, it was a duty which could not with honor be avoided.

Sam shrieked lustily, and before he had received half a dozen well-aimed blows I heard a great trampling in the underbrush; then came into view two score or more of men in the king's uniform, and for an instant I believed that the Tory's threat was about to be made good.

## CHAPTER II. GENERAL MARION

Not until I had warned him, was Percy aware of the danger which menaced.

Intent only upon the task which he set himself, with a view of performing it in the shortest possible space of time, the lad gave no heed to anything else, and but for the fact of my being on watch, so to speak, I believe of a verity he would have been taken prisoner.

Even as it was, he did not cease his labors until the Tory crew were come within fifty yards of him, and then with one vigorous, well-directed blow by way of parting, Percy took to his heels.

I had at that moment started toward him, believing the lad was minded to give battle even though the odds were twenty to one, for the James family of Williamsburg are not given to counting cost when the chances are heavily against them.

Then, seeing what was his inclination, I wheeled about almost at the very instant when the Tories sent a volley of bullets after us, and I do truly believe there was a blush of shame upon my cheek that men of Carolina should show themselves such wretched marksmen, for not a missile hit us, although the range could not have been above forty yards.

We were not minded to run in the open where the traitors might practise at shooting, with us as targets; but, bearing sharply to the left, we plunged into the thicket, where I felt certain such as those who would consort with Sam Lee could not come up with us.

Percy, whose blood had been warmed by the punishment given the young Tory, burned with a desire to halt and give battle.

"It would be folly for us to set ourselves against such odds when no benefit may be derived from the battle," I said, speaking as we ran.

"If the odds are great, so much more thorough the lesson, and these skulking traitors surely need a check just now, when the fortunes of war seem to be in their favor."

"Ay, but it is not for us to play the schoolmaster with less than half a horn of powder and five bullets," I replied, checking back the mirth which came upon me when the dear lad spoke of making an attack almost empty-handed upon the Tories of Williamsburg.

It was such a suggestion as might be expected from a James of the Carolinas, and certain it is Percy would have halted with a smile upon his face and a sense of deepest satisfaction in his heart, even though by so doing we brought ourselves face to face with death.

He always looked upon me as a leader, however, and now it was well he had been accustomed to do so, otherwise I doubt if we should ever have left that place alive.

"Since we must perforce return empty-handed, for there are no other mills to be sacked in this neighborhood, I would give much for the privilege of showing those fellows how to shoot, else will this day be wasted," he said after a pause.

"In that you are making a mistake, lad. The day would surely be spent in vain if yonder band of Tories suffer no greater loss of numbers than we could inflict; but by running away now it may be possible to crush out the whole nest."

"Then you have some plan in mind?" he cried eagerly.

"No more than this: After the reverses which have come to our people at Charleston something in the nature of success is necessary to revive the faint-hearted, and it can readily be done if we carry to General Marion word of what has been done. Unless I am much mistaken in our commander, we shall soon have ample opportunity of showing these traitors how to shoot."

Now, and for the first time, Percy understood what might be the result of this day's failure, so far as we were concerned, to secure material for sabres.

It was no longer necessary for me to urge him to make greater speed in the retreat.

Halting only when forced to do so that we might regain breath, and giving no thought whatsoever to fatigue, the race was ended in a little more than two hours, when we stood before our uncle, the major, telling him of what we had seen at Pingree's Mill.

"It is a fortunate chance for us, lads," he said in a tone of satisfaction. "Scantily equipped as this force is, we need something to inflame the courage of our men."

"Sam Lee would have had us believe there were two thousand Tories nearabout, sir," I ventured to suggest, and the major looked at me searchingly for an instant.

"Do the odds make you timorous, lad?"

"Not so, sir. But that I believed it necessary General Marion should know of the encampment, Percy and I would have given them so much of a lesson as might be possible with five bullets. In fact, I found it somewhat difficult to force him along with me, so much averse was he to running away."

My uncle's stern, questioning gaze disappeared on the instant, and gripping both of us lads by the hands, he said in a most friendly tone:

"I had no reason whatsoever to question your courage, for you are members of our family; yet for the merest fraction of time it seemed as if you might perchance show the white feather when our enemies were in such force. Come with me to the general, and you shall see whether any account be taken of numbers, for now has the Cause fallen into such sore straits that every man who holds to it must consider himself equal to a dozen of the king's minions."

Our brigade was set down, rather than encamped, in the woods; there were no shelters other than such as the men made for themselves with pine boughs, and the command bore but little semblance to a military organization.

Therefore it was that we were not troubled to gain audience with the commander.

The crimson jacket could be seen a long distance away under a huge live-oak tree, nearby where were three or four men building a camp-fire, and toward that gleaming spot of color we made our way.

"I would introduce to you two members of my family, sons of the Widow Sumter," the major said as he saluted, and I was surprised at the change which passed over that serious, almost gloomy-looking face when a friendly expression came into his eyes.

It was as if he had thrown off the mask, and shown us a countenance almost the opposite to that which we had previously seen.

Nothing more was needed to tell me, that now indeed, we had a leader who was worthy to supersede my uncle.

"It pleases me to meet with those who are akin to such a true patriot as Major James," the general said most courteously, and one needs remember that he was speaking to two lads, in order to understand how much such words meant.

"I can answer for it they will be true to any trust you may repose in them," my uncle said, and Percy gripped me by the hand that I might understand how well pleased he was at such words of praise. "It was not simply to bring the lads to your notice that I have thus introduced them, General; they have information of greatest importance."

General Marion turned toward us inquiringly, and in as few words as might be I told him of the encounter.

"A force of two thousand?" he said half to himself, and added as he looked me full in the eye. "Can you depend upon the truthfulness of the lad who made the boast?"

"Indeed we cannot, sir. I would have been inclined to doubt the entire story, had not forty or more appeared in response to Sam Lee's cries for help."

"Are you positive he spoke of Major Gainey as being in command?"

"Ay, sir; I remember well the name."

"Are you lads enlisted with this force?"

Instead of answering the question I looked toward my uncle, and he replied without hesitation:

"They are, General, if it please you to accept lads as young as they."

"It is the will and the courage, rather than the age, which we need, Major James, and unless I have made a mistake in reading their faces, these sons of the Widow Sumter may do men's work in the task which is set them."

Percy and I made our best salute, as can well be fancied and from that moment counted ourselves as being enlisted under that true general and valiant soldier, to whom the butcher Tarleton gave the name of "Swamp Fox."

The general, having acknowledged our salute, turned toward my uncle in such manner as gave us to understand that he wished to speak with him privately, and we withdrew a short distance, to where Gavin Witherspoon, an old acquaintance, was making ready for the eating a string of fish.

"Are you two lads come to see how soldiers live?" the old man asked with that peculiar grin which had earned for him the name of the "big mouthed."

"If we had, it would seem that we were come to the wrong place," Percy replied with a laugh. "Surely you are not counting yourself a soldier, Gavin Witherspoon?"

"I am allowin' I'll come as nigh to it as many who wear the king's uniform. It isn't always him who stands the stiffest that can bring down the most game, an' there's no need of my tellin' two lads by the name of Sumter that we of Williamsburg are not given to wastin' ammunition."

"Of that I am not so certain," Percy retorted, "for within the past three hours, forty, who might perhaps claim this district as their home, had fair shot at us, and within fifty-yard range, therefore you can see for yourself whether the ammunition was wasted or not."

"Forty?" Gavin cried excitedly, forgetting for the instant his camp duties at this mention of the enemy.

I was not minded to keep the old man in suspense, therefore at once told him of what we had seen, whereupon he ceased his labors as cook and began overhauling the long, smooth-bore rifle, in the use of which he might truly be called an expert.

"Are you going out single-handed in search of them?" Percy asked banteringly.

"Hark you, lads! I served under General Marion in '75, when he was only a captain, and know full well what manner of man he is. Neither he nor Major James would remain here idle after such a story as you have brought, and I venture to say this mess of fish won't be needed until they are past cookin'."

Gavin Witherspoon had no more than spoken, before we heard the word passed from man to man around the encampment that an immediate advance was to be made.

Now to the credit of the men of Williamsburg, let me set down this fact, that without the least show of hesitation, although it was understood the enemy which we had reported far outnumbered us, every member of the brigade set about his preparations for the journey with apparently as much pleasure as if bent on some merry-making.

We were not well supplied with provisions, yet there were others than Gavin Witherspoon who left the food by the fires, lest perchance they should be among the last who were ready.

I think no more than twenty minutes passed from the time of our arrival until everything was in readiness – every man mounted, except the commanding officers, and Percy said to me mournfully:

"It is like to benefit us but little, this having been enlisted under General Marion, for how may we keep pace with the horsemen?"

I had asked myself that question, and decided that on this expedition, which rightfully belonged to us because of the discovery, we must perforce be left behind.

"All appear to have forgotten us; even Gavin Witherspoon no longer looks our way," Percy continued, and it was then that our uncle called us by name.

It can well be imagined that we lost no time in obeying the summons, and, approaching to where he was standing in company with the general and a captain, we heard that which gave us much pleasure.

"Captain Mouzon has generously offered you lads a mount. His spare horses are to be found back here in the thicket, under care of the servants," my uncle said. "You will overtake us as soon as may be, and report at once to me. The general has been pleased to detail you for special duty."

While speaking he mounted his horse, the others doing the same, and as Percy and I hurried away the word was given for the command to advance.

Even at the expense of telling over-much that may seem like dry reading, I must make especial mention of the advantage we had over the enemy, in the way of horses.

The Carolinians dearly loved a thoroughbred, and in Williamsburg district every soldier was mounted in kingly fashion.

The heavy, lumbering work-horses which were sold to the redcoats, were like snails compared with the blooded stock our people rode, and because of these did General Marion owe much of his success in the days to come, when we dashed here and there over the country, striking a blow at night twenty miles or more away from where we had hurled ourselves upon the foe in the morning.

Now we two lads knew that Captain Mouzon had in his stables not less than thirty beasts which had no superiors in the neighborhood, and therefore were we positive of being astride such as would carry us well in the advance, however mad might be the pace set.

We found old Jacob, the captain's chief groom, in charge of four clean-limbed, noble beasts as ever wore a saddle, and it was not an easy matter to persuade him we had authority to select such as we chose, for he claimed that until a lad had had much experience in the hunting field, he was not to be trusted with a choice of mounts.

Threats would have availed us but little, for despite the old fellow's dark skin, he had a brave heart when the welfare of his stable was at stake, and therefore we spoke him fairly, using soft words rather than harsh, until, coming to believe we were but repeating the words of his master, he saddled the horses we had selected.

Bestride such animals as could not well be excelled in the Carolinas, Percy and I set forth in pursuit of our friends, confident that we would be able to give a good account of ourselves, although sadly lacking an outfit.

"Unless it so be we can borrow powder and ball, I fear our share in the punishment of the Tories will be slight indeed," my brother said mournfully, and I laughed at his gloomy face.

"Two hours ago, when we were hastening back from Pingree's Mill, you would have said that with steeds like these we should be equipped in most kingly fashion, and now that we have under us the choice of Captain Mouzon's stud, you find yet further necessities."

"I leave it to you to say if five bullets and half a horn of powder make any very formidable outfit under such leaders as General Marion and our uncle, the major, both of whom are like to show a greediness for fighting?"

It was a matter which could not be remedied, this lack of ammunition, until we were come up with some acquaintance who had a larger store than he needed, and such an one might be difficult to find in the district of Williamsburg, for we who held to the Cause were poor in everything save the desire to aid our country.

That exhilaration which comes with the stride of a horse when one is in the saddle was upon me, and, for the time being, I gave little heed to our necessities, save that I remembered with regret the fish Gavin Witherspoon had wasted.

After a tramp of twenty miles Percy and I stood in need of food, and but for our own foolhardiness we might have eaten our fill from the different messes which the men left behind, instantly the word was given that the enemy were in such position as invited attack.

When we were come up with the command, Major James beckoned for us to join the general and himself, and then it was we learned what work had been cut out for us.

"It is my desire," General Marion said as if speaking to comrades, "that you two lads seek out the haunts of the Tories in this vicinity, and do not let it be known you are enlisted with us. While our

numbers are few, the blows must be quick and frequent, therefore it is necessary we have constantly in advance searchers, or scouts, whichever you may choose to call them."

"Are we to bear no share in the fighting, sir?" I ventured to ask, and a great disappointment came into my heart that we were to be of so little service.

"No more than absolutely necessary. You can serve the Cause to better purpose otherwise, for two lads like yourselves are less liable to suspicion when venturing in the enemy's country."

"Any who know us as members of the James family will understand full well that we have no sympathy with the Tories," Percy cried, whereat the general laughed heartily as, turning to the major, he said:

"The ties of kinship are drawn more closely in the Carolinas than elsewhere in all the world, I believe, and well it should be so." Then he added, looking directly at me. "We shall stir up the nest which you two found, and perhaps give you a share of the fighting, but only because Britton's Neck is, from this point, on the direct road to another quarter I would have you visit. You may, if you please, join us in the first attack, and then I shall expect you to ride toward Indian Village, where I have reason to believe certain enemies under one Captain Barfield may be found. You will gain so much of information as is possible, and report to me somewhere on the east bank of Cedar Creek."

So that we were to join in this first attack I gave little thought for the future, and said to myself that if we proved our metal in one case we might find further opportunities.

The general dismissed us with a friendly nod, and we rode down the line, hoping to find some friend who would loan us powder and ball.

In this last quest we were so far successful as to obtain, perhaps, sufficient for five charges more, and then we had even a larger store than many a man who rode with the brigade.

It was within an hour of sunset when we set out for Britton's Neck, on the first ride Percy and I had ever undertaken for the Cause, and it would please me much to repeat all the incidents of that night's journey, for they are so deeply impressed upon my memory as never to be effaced by whatsoever of adventure may come to me later in life.

It is not well that I devote so much space, however, to what others may think uninteresting, and, therefore, acting on Percy's advice, I shall say no more concerning the journey when our brigade, only four companies strong, rode through the silent hours of the night at a slow trot, eager to measure strength with an enemy known to be several times greater in numbers than we could muster.

The gray light of the early dawn was just becoming tinged with that yellow tint which betokens the near approach of the sun, when at a signal from Major James we came to a halt.

Not until that moment could I see any signs of the enemy, and then, gazing in the direction indicated by General Marion's outstretched hand, I saw dimly amid the mist the outlines of an encampment so large, that for the moment I had no question but what Sam Lee told us only the truth when he said the force of Tories to be full two thousand.

It may have been one minute or ten that we remained there, horses and men silent, and motionless as statues; so great was my excitement that I could not count the passage of time. Only this do I know, that it seemed as if we wasted all that early time of morning twilight before the signal was given.

Then it was my uncle raised his hat, waving it above his head at the instant he gave rein to his horse, and so eager were our men to be at the throats of the enemy, that before the major's steed had fairly made the first bound, every member of the brigade was riding forward in mad haste.

The onward rush of that body of horsemen must have presented a singular spectacle, had any one been near at hand to look at it calmly.

In the gray light four hundred or more men riding at full speed in perfect silence, save for the thud of the horses' feet upon the sward, and with them in their very midst, thanks to the fleetness of Captain Mouzon's steeds, were Percy and I.

My one thought was that to prove myself a worthy follower of such a commander, I must in this attack appear the equal of any man in the ranks, and, having such aim in view, I urged the willing steed forward.

Percy was not minded to be left behind when there was a chance one might be accused of timorousness, and side by side we rode as if on a wager, soon outstripping all save two who were leading the advance.

These two were the major, our uncle, and Captain Mouzon, owner of the horses we bestrode.

We four were well up to the edge of the encampment by the time I understood we were comparatively alone, and not until then, when the first word was spoken, did I fully realize the situation.

"The Mouzon stables lead!" the captain cried triumphantly, thinking even at that moment of peril more about his horses than himself.

"But the tribe of James are riding them!" the major shouted, and then, as if he had come up through the earth, a Tory horseman appeared directly in front of us.

Two pistols were discharged almost in our very faces – so near that the mane of my horse was singed by the fire, and then this particular enemy was in full retreat.

"It is Major Gainey!" our leader shouted as he struck the spurs into his steed, and before one had time to realize anything more we four were in the very midst of the Tory band, while around us, forming a circle of fire, were the flashes of burning powder.

## CHAPTER III. THE TORY CAMP

It was the first time Percy and I had ever taken part in a deadly encounter, and, perchance, had there been opportunity for us to consider the situation, one or both might have shown the white feather.

As it was, however, and I have since noted the fact on every similar occasion, there was no opportunity for fear; the fever of excitement was upon us; the odor of burned powder mounted to one's brain, as it were, and we became more like brutes than human beings.

There was to me a certain sense of satisfaction in the danger; a savage delight in shooting, with intent to kill, at the enemies of our country, and above all, the knowledge that we were proving ourselves worthy a place in the James family.

I saw Captain Mouzon's horse fall, and looked with a certain curiosity to see how he might extricate himself from the weight of the animal.

I also wondered where Sam Lee might be, hoping it would be my good fortune to come upon him. Then suddenly, when my musket was empty, a redcoated Tory rushed toward me with upraised saber.

I tried to ward off the blow with my gun, knowing full well that I could not hope to be successful in such an encounter, and then the man suddenly fell to the ground as if stricken by a bolt of lightning.

It was Percy who had brought the Tory down, thus saving my life, and I heard him, as one hears from afar off, cry impatiently:

"My last charge of powder is gone!"

It is impossible for me to say, and I have pondered over the matter again and again, why it was that the scene suddenly changed, or how we three – for now that Captain Mouzon was on foot he did not count as one of our squad – emerged from that tangle of men, and found ourselves in pursuit of the fleeing, panic-stricken enemy. I remember clearly that one moment it was as if we were entirely surrounded, and the next, all was clear before us, save for that blotch of red in the distance which we pursued at the full speed of our horses, Major James shouting now and again as if to give us lads courage:

"If it so be that we ride hard they cannot escape us! Spare not your horses, lads, and we shall soon clear Williamsburg district of the nest of vipers that should have been crushed out years ago!"

I was near to smiling, despite the fact that this was a race in which human life had been put at stake, because our uncle should suggest that we might take any part in wiping out the "vipers," when our last charge of ammunition was expended, and we carried no other arms than muskets.

Yet did we press on at his heels with all the speed of which Captain Mouzon's steeds were capable, eager to gain the advance if that might be, lest he should for a single instant fancy we had grown faint-hearted.

It was the first time we had had an opportunity of proving that the James blood ran in our veins, and had I been certain death awaited me at the end of that mad chase, I would have spurred my horse on yet faster, exulting in the thought that I might come to my end in such noble fashion as now, when following the lead of Major James!

Percy shouted like one who is without sense, and yet there was no thought in my mind of chiding him, for I understood full well why it was that the sound of his own voice seemed necessary – it was but the natural vent of the excitement that had taken hold of him like as a fever, and I have since been told that I also cried out unmeaning words; but yet was unconscious of having done so.

Then suddenly the scene changed again, and with this transformation came into my heart what was very like fear.

One moment it was as if we had the whole of General Marion's force at our heels, and the next we were alone, riding down into that mass of fleeing Tories who outnumbered us two hundred to one, while not a friend of the Cause could be seen in the rear.

I saw Major James glancing over his shoulder, and involuntarily I copied the movement, although for thirty seconds or more had I known we were so far in the advance as to be practically cut off from our friends.

There was no change of expression in my uncle's face when he realized that we were come into sore danger – for now we were well upon the heels of the enemy; – but he looked at me as if asking whether the knowledge of our situation brought timorousness into my heart.

I have ever been proud because at that instant I answered his inquiring look with such words as tickled his fancy mightily:

"There be three of us, Major, and more are not needed."

It was the speech of a braggart, but yet under such circumstances the words gave my uncle more confidence in our courage than almost anything else could have done, and an expression, which for the moment I took to be affection, came over his face as he replied in a ringing tone:

"God bless the sister who gave to me such nephews!" Then, waving his saber and shouting at the full strength of his lungs as if he had a thousand men behind him, he cried, "Here they are, boys! Here they are! Come on!"

I believe of a verity that the Tories fancied he was calling to a large force, rather than to two lads who were practically weaponless, for their panic increased, if that could be possible, and they crowded upon each other's heels until the advance was impeded.

With fifty well-armed men at that time I venture to say we might have wiped out Major Gainey's entire force, and that officer himself was nigh to being taken prisoner when my uncle, spurring his horse into the very midst of the fugitives, singled out the leader as if challenging him to mortal combat.

Major Gainey, although he was a Tory, had never been called a coward; but on this morning he absolutely refused the challenge, and instead of halting to meet the foe as he would have done had his cause been just, he forced aside the weaker of his following, and succeeded in making good an escape.

"It was shame enough that one from Williamsburg should be a Tory," my uncle cried, brandishing his saber in impotent rage; "but that a Gainey would show himself a coward as well, I have never believed until this hour."

It was strange indeed that of all the enemy we pursued so hotly and so closely, none turned upon us.

It would have been a simple task for a dozen of them, armed as we knew they were, to have allowed us to come into their midst, and then, closing, taken all three prisoners, or shot us down as might best have suited their fancy.

The fever of fear, however, was upon them until there was no thought in the minds of any save of individual safety, and during ten minutes or more we rode upon the heels of that retreating rabble, taunting them with such words as should have turned the faintest-hearted at bay.

There were seconds during that chase when I trembled with what was like unto a fear, realizing all which it was possible for them to do, and then that sensation would pass away while rage took possession of me because of my inability to do other than lash the miserable Tories with my tongue.

Then Major James wheeled suddenly about, for we had come to the edge of Pedee Swamp, and, by his gesture rather than words, we understood that it was our turn to retreat.

The Tories were forced, because of the water, to ride more slowly, and should we still press upon them they must, even like rats, turn at bay; when, as a matter of course, the end would have come for us.

We had shown them what a man could do whose cause was just, and it would have been folly to continue on to the useless sacrifice of our own lives.

We turned about, as I have said, in obedience to my uncle's signal, and rode to the rear faster than we came, for now was there fear some of the cowardly foe might shoot us in the back, and before drawing rein we came upon General Marion and Captain M'Cottry.

These two were, like ourselves, far in advance, and by reining in his horse the general forced us to halt.

Now occurred that which I shall ever remember with the most intense pride and satisfaction so long as the breath remains in my body.

He who was to be afterward so well-known as the "Swamp Fox," he who was the bravest among all the brave men in the Carolinas, leaning forward in the saddle held out his hands, one to each of us lads, and said in a tone so hearty that there could be no mistaking the sentiment in his heart:

"I have ever believed the members of the James family to be true to their country, their friends, and to themselves; but never before had I expected to see two boys ride at their kinsman's call straight into what seemed certain danger. I am proud indeed that you were eager to seek service under my command, and promise that if my life be spared you shall have fitting opportunity to show your devotion to the Cause."

We lads were unable to speak because of the pride and pleasure which filled our hearts to overflowing; but my uncle, taking off his hat with more of homage than I had ever seen him bestow upon any other man, made reply:

"When General Marion is pleased to speak such words to members of my family, he places under obligation every one of us."

"There can be no sense of obligation, Major, when the praise has been won so handsomely."

"In that I agree with you, General, and more particularly because neither of my nephews had a charge of ammunition. After the first rush they followed bravely, although virtually weaponless, and I am happy to be able to call them my sister's sons. The ride is completed, and we now await your orders."

"Have all the force escaped?" the general asked.

"Ay, sir, all save those who may have been rendered unable to continue the retreat. They are in Pedee Swamp where it would be worse than folly to make any attempt at following them."

The general wheeled his horse around, motioning Percy and I to ride by his side, and together we returned to where the main body of our brigade was halted.

Here after a short time we learned that a captain and nine men had been killed from among the Tory force, while our loss amounted to only two wounded, and it was safe to say that many days would elapse before Major Gainey's regiment could be got into fighting shape again.

There was no reason why any of us should longer suffer from hunger, for we were in possession of the Tory camp where were provisions in abundance, and during an hour we feasted, Percy and I, as only lads can who have been without food nigh on to four and twenty hours.

Then, when believing it would be possible to return to our home for a short time – and we were eager to tell our mother of the proud distinction we had won – word was brought by one of the troopers that General Marion would speak with us.

I venture to say there was not a man in the brigade who did not envy us two lads as we went toward that portion of the thicket where the commander was seated under a live oak tree with his officers clustered about him, and I am also quite certain that of all the force, we two had the least right to be praised or singled out for preferment.

Among those who served the Cause in the Carolinas there were no cowards; it appeared much as if the timorous ones turned Tories because, by professing to serve the king, a colonist is not required to bear so many hardships or encounter so many dangers, as those who would throw off his majesty's yoke. Therefore it was that when an officer like General Marion selected two from among all that gathering, it was indeed a great distinction, and we understood by his sending for us that we were like to be called upon for an especial service, as he had already intimated.

Although unused to such a life as we had so suddenly embarked upon, Percy and I contrived to salute the general in something approaching military fashion, and he, returning it, asked in the tone of a friend rather than of one who commands:

"Are you lads minded to set out on a venture which has in it much of danger?"

Percy looked at me as if to say that I should act as spokesman, and I replied more readily than perhaps was courteous, fearing lest it might be fancied we hesitated:

"Aye, sir; that we are, and the more of danger the more readily do we set out. I say this last not in a boasting manner, but to show you, sir, that we are right willing to lay down our lives for the good of the Cause which our uncle serves."

"It is well spoken, young sir. I had no doubt of your willingness; but rather made mention of the danger that you might have an opportunity to draw back honorably, if it so be you shrank in any degree from the task, for it is one through which little honor can be gained, although the service must be performed."

"We are ready for whatsoever pleases you, sir," I said, and Percy laid his hand in mine that it might be understood he repeated the words.

"Between here and Dubose Ferry – the precise location you must yourselves determine – one Captain Barfield lies encamped, having under him a force not less than four hundred strong. Our purpose is to advance upon him immediately; but having learned that there is a possibility his men may far exceed ours in numbers, it is necessary we have full information before venturing an attack. Are you minded to seek him out, and learn all that may be ascertained within a few hours, returning to us before nightfall?"

"We will set out at once, sir. Captain Mouzon lent us horses that we might join in the march, and perhaps he will allow us to use them in this service," I said, turning toward the captain, who replied readily:

## **Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.**

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.