

Two Santee Boys' Story and Struggles ~

With the surrender of Charlestown on May 11, 1780, the British, led by Colonel Banastre Tarleton, began a reign of terror in the countryside and the war moved into the parish of St. James Santee. Back in early May, the British, in a skirmish at LeNud's Ferry on the Santee River, established a post while on their way to Georgetown. They took all the cavalry horses with them, but didn't count on the boldness of two teenagers, Francis G. Deliesseline and Samuel DuPre, who recovered fourteen of the horses and delivered them to Major Jamison in Georgetown. This is the story, told by letter, from Deliesseline, of what happened on that May 6th Day:

"I was born at my father's plantation, St. James Santee, about forty miles from Charleston. My grand and great grandfather were Huguenots who fled from the persecution of Louis 14th at the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, and with many others, settled there among the Indians about the year 1685, and that part of the country has ever since, unto this time, been called French Santee. My father died when I was very young, leaving my mother a widow with a handsome estate of slaves, lands, and other property; that when the war commenced, I had just entered my fourteenth year; that I volunteered my services in the company of Capt. John Barnett and with other company to protect the coast from the mouth of the Santee to Sewee Bay and Bull's Island, from the English privateers who were plundering and carrying off the slaves and other property of the Inhabitants; that our company remained on this service for some time, then marched off to Winyaw Bay, near Georgetown, at Cat Island Fort, where we were enrolled under the glorious old banner of thirteen stripes, commanded by Capt. Davis, a Continental officer. At that time period, I had just entered my fifteenth year; my company, after some time, was marched back to our former station at Santee and Sewee, where I continued on duty in very active and fatiguing service, seldom permitted to visit home until the arrival of Sir Henry Clinton, with a large fleet and army for the invasion of South Carolina, first of year 780; that he invested Charleston by sea and land; that Tarleton with his legion and other troops overrun and had possession of all the country from Charleston to Santee River, a distance of forty miles. As soon as this took place, our company as well as all others, broke up, and every one shifted as well as they could for themselves; my brother and three others and myself encamped in the river swamp opposite my mother's plantation, a little below Santee Ferry, to avoid Tarleton as well as the Tories who were daily joining the British standard.

Soon after Col. Washington arrived on the north side of the Santee with a large corps of horse from Virginia on their way to Charleston to aid Gen. Lincoln, but finding all the country on the south of the Santee in possession of the enemy, they remained on the north side waiting events. It was not long, however, when they suddenly crossed the river at Lenud's Ferry and made a foray of about twenty miles down to Col. Ball's [John Coming Ball's] plantation, surprised a British guard of fourteen men who were left with Ball to assist in collecting horses for Tarleton as well as to guard him. Col. Ball made his escape over the fence into Wambaw Swamp, near his house, and where he had stables built for the horses he collected, and at the time, had a large number; he mounted one of the fleetest and pushed across the country for Strawberry Ferry, on Cooper River, the headquarters of Col. Tarleton, and informed him of the capture of the guard, &c., that active officer with great promptitude proceeded with all his Legion and mounted infantry for Lenud's Ferry, thirty miles distant, to intercept Washington and White' before they could recross, and arrived just as the flat with the prisoners on board was leaving the shore, rescued his guard, and in a little time totally defeated, killing and making prisoners of all who had not the good fortune to make their escape, all the horses with all their equipments, without exception, were taken as well as what baggage they had; the horses were grazing in the old field with bits out of their mouth, with all their equipments on, but could not be got ready in time to mount, they were abandoned. Col. Washington, Major Jamison, and those who could swim, plunged into the river to escape the swords of Tarleton, and after crossing with those of the dragoons who got over safe, had to foot it to Georgetown, a distance of twenty miles.

Some few were drowned in the river; this was a complete and total defeat of all our cavalry then in the State. In the great confusion, carnage and noise which was going on, some of the cavalry horses got alarmed and broke off and took the road down, they were pursued by two British dragoons and overtaken a few miles below at a Whig's plantation, a neighbor of my mother's.

This lady immediately, by note, informed her of the defeat and that some horses were left in her stable and with orders to let no one take them away, that they would soon be back for them, this was communicated to us without delay—my brother being absent. I determined instantly to cross over and get possession of the horses, and bring them off to our camp in the swamp.

I looked around and asked of the three or four who were present who would go with me; all declined, stating the undertaking to be too difficult, and hazardous

in the extreme—a young lad much attached to me at length, when I was about departing alone, agreed to accompany me, we crossed the river in our canoe, being armed with our swords only—we proceeded through the woods to the plantation three miles; after viewing all around from a high fence—and seeing no enemy, we rushed, and with many threats of punishment we alarmed the servants who through fear opened the stable doors and turned out the horses there were thirteen of Washington's and one 'British Dragoon horse. Fourteen in number. We mounted two and with the others before us, we made all speed for the river by taking through by-ways, arrived safe and found a flat which had I had ordered to be ready at a private place, concealed by bushes, we soon got all over in safety at our camp in a canebreak, where was plenty of good food, the second day we started for Georgetown and arrived a little after Major Jamison and a few other officers had come in. I offered Major Jamison the horses, he was rejoiced to see some of his cavalry again, but said he had no money to buy them or would gladly do so, as he had not a horse to cross. I told him he must receive these for the service of the country and make use of them. He then valued them at two hundred dollars specie each and offered me a certificate on the government for the payment and remarked that the country was so poor it was impossible to say when it would be paid. I told him I would decline receiving the certificate, but would wait for happier times, when I would see about it; with many thanks from him and his good wishes we parted, and we returned once more to the swamp in our canebreak.

Tarleton was busy with his Legion, traversing without opposition all the country between Charleston and Santee, plundering and destroying all the property of the Whigs, with an unsparing hand; he came after to my mother's in search for my brother and myself, and turning his cavalry into the fields, eat up and trampled and destroyed the crop as well as other provisions that were housed, robbing her of all her plates and jewels, a great deal of which had been brought from France by our forefathers, cut up with swords the furniture in her house, ripped feather beds, strewed the feathers in the yard, and carrying off the ticking, all of her slaves carried away except seven or eight, she literally in want, eating of the coarsest food, and often not enough.

Charleston was captured, Gen. Lincoln and the whole American army became prisoners of war. Lord Cornwallis immediately marched with ten thousand men for Camden, and on his way, encamped at Lenud's Ferry a few days, issuing his proclamation, inviting all his Majesty's subjects to come in and take the oath of allegiance, but should there be any who preferred to be paroled, that upon their

surrendering themselves it would be granted for them to remain quietly at their houses until duly exchanged as prisoners of war. We consulted in our camp what we should do. My brother and myself only, agreed to surrender, the rest departed to their homes and joined the British standard. My brother and myself crossed the river, and entered the British camp, as prisoners, there was a stand erected near the ferry house under a large oak tree, and a Major administering the oath of allegiance to a great crowd, who were tossing up their hat and huzzah-ing for King George, to the great amusement and delight of the British officers, who were standing near, as well as to Lord Cornwallis and General O'Hara in the piazza of the ferry house. As soon as our opportunity offered, we presented ourselves to the Major and told him we surrendered as prisoners of war and wished parole. The Major wondered about it, but gave him (my brother) his parole, first making him sign his name in a book for that purpose. I then offered myself, when he tendered to me the oath, which I refused and desired a parole; he endeavored to persuade me out of that motive but I persisted and told him I would never desert my country, upon which I was vilified and abused by Col. Webster, as well as by the Tories—some threatening us with death as Rebels and outlaws to King George. I got my parole and we both returned home, where we remained quietly and peacefully, until the defeat of Gen. Gates, when, immediately after Lord Cornwallis supposing the whole country conquered, issued his second proclamation, sending them all over the country, first nullifying all the paroles he had previously given, then ordering to turn out, every one capable of bearing arms and for the oath of allegiance to be administered to all—and all such as did not comply to have them seized and sent to the prison ships or shot as Rebels and outlaws, we were without delay summoned to comply or abide the consequences, expecting momentarily to be arrested or shot for not complying, and our being particularly obnoxious to the Tory officers as great rebels, we once more had recourse to the swamp and canebreak where we remained to await events, but the Whigs were hunted by armed bodies of Tories, some were killed in the swamps and some carried to the prison ships at Charleston. Being thus situated, and our lives in continual jeopardy and no army whatever to fly to for help, we agreed to separate and seek security among those in a part of the country who were friendly. I mounted my horse and travelled along through the wilds of North Carolina, avoiding the King's highway to avoid the Tories, who were assembling in many places to join the King's standard, taking my course with the sun by day, and by the stars at night, through bogs and swamps, sleeping among the bushes and in swamps, with but little food; except from a log cabin at times some little nourishment; at length after many days of peril, hunger and fatigue, I found myself at the head of the Whitemarsh, a

little below Wilmington, a distance of 220 miles from our swamp encampment on the Santee. To my great joy I found that Col. Marion had just arrived with a few followers, having, on the defeat of Gates, made his way to this place for safety, and to gain strength; several from South Carolina followed him, and a few from North Carolina, when he returned to South Carolina and encamped at Snow's Island on Great Pee Dee, from thence we issued against the Tories, and defeated and broke them up in all their gatherings, with great slaughter in many battles—also fought the British regiments sent after him at different times, under the command of Watson and Weyms and McIlrath, he kept his foothold in South Carolina until the return of Gen. Greene from the pursuit of Lord Cornwallis in Virginia. Gen. Greene then sent Col. Lee with his legion and some infantry in search of Gen. Marion, formed a junction with him and began to act offensively, took several British posts and interrupted their supplies or arms and other necessities on their way from Charleston to Lord Rawdon at Camden.

This soon compelled Lord Rawdon to evacuate Camden and retreat, first putting fire to the town, and making his way to Santee, crossed with all his army and hordes of Tories over Nelson's Ferry on the south side where he fixed his headquarters, and soon after departed for Europe, leaving Gen. Stuart, Commander-in-Chief.

Not long after, the 8th of September, 1781, the battle of Eutaw took place when the British were compelled to retire down to Moncks Corner, where they were reinforced and much hard fighting and bloodshed took place on both sides, being pressed by Generals Greene, Marion, and Sumter, they gradually fell back with great reluctance until they reached Charleston neck in the vicinity, when they were hemmed in—Gen. Greene on the south and Marion on the north, while they were preparing to evacuate the city; on the 1st December, last December 1782, they went on board their ships sent them from New York, and all their Tory friends. The Americans following close after, saw them depart, and the old banner of thirteen stripes once more floated on the ramparts of our beloved city, and with loud acclamations of joy and greetings to their friends so long absent from them.

In a few months after, in 1783, peace was declared, when Gen. Marion disbanded his little army and everyone went the way he thought proper.

I returned to my mother and, destruction all around, gathered the remnants of what remained and with what was available, removed to Charleston, and in my 20th year, commenced business and was very successful, got ahead in the world and

continued so generally, filled many offices of profit and trust such as warden of the city, Director of the Bank of the State of South Carolina, and Sheriff of the District, finding myself far advanced in life and having made enough to gratify the reasonable wants of man; if not rich, comparatively so, I had made my arrangements to retire from the drudgery of business and spend the evening of my days in ease and quiet retirement, but I was sadly disappointed, suddenly I was overwhelmed with heavy responsibility, which would take all I had so long toiled for, chagrined, mortified and with feelings harrowed and impossible to describe, I turned my back upon my native State and my beloved and unconsolable family, and with two servants and horses arrived near to St. Mary's, Georgia, a voluntary exile, leaving to the creditors all, consisting of plantations, slaves, and city property, to sell and satisfy as far as it would go.

With great economy, striving against the ills of life for many years, without any hope of success, I now turn my eyes to my country in my eighty-fourth year, imploring her aid, praying that she would grant me compensation for services rendered in the War of the Revolution and payment for cavalry horses recaptured.

And now, I must confess, that when I reflect upon those scenes of the Revolution, so long past and gone, my soul is buoyed up within "a holy flame," to think though unimportant my services, I did all in my power for the good of my country, and that I lent a willing hand in erecting that grand and noble edifice on patriotism, dedicated to Liberty and Independence, and which is cemented with the blood of those heroes and statesmen of the Revolution and the glory and pride of all true Americans, as well as the admiration and wonder of all civilized nations.

Edited by Keith Gourdin

Resource: Dr. William C. Ravenel, "*A Narrative of the Life and Services of Francis G. Delieseline during the War of the American Revolution*," Transactions of the Huguenot Society of South Carolina, No. 8 (1901), pp. 27-34.



A group of onlookers watch as a ferry full of passengers crosses the Santee River at Lenud's Ferry, circa 1930. The ferry was one of several that existed prior to the Revolutionary War and continued to operate into the 20th century. The Santee RR bridge can be seen, upper right. The site was the location of a Revolutionary War battle between Lt.-Col. Banastre Tarleton and Col. Anthony White on May 6, 1780.

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Lenud's Ferry – May 6, 1780

Patriots commanded by Lt. Col. Anthony Walton White and Lt. Col. William Washington occupied a camp at Lenud's Ferry on the banks of the Santee, including British prisoners recently captured at Wambaw Plantation. Discovering that White had not posted security for his camp, the British Legion, commanded by Lt.-Col. Banastre Tarleton, charged full speed into the camp, routing the Patriots. With their backs to the Santee River, the Patriots faced gunfire and slashing swords from the mounted enemy. The Patriot forces had 11 killed, 30 wounded, and 67 captured, and almost all of White's horses were captured earlier. White and Washington swam across the Santee to avoid capture and could only watch the slaughter from the other side of the river.