

Sybil Ludington sat by the fire on an April evening in 1777. The Revolutionary War was in its third year. Colonel Ludington, of the Dutchess Seventh Militia of New York, had just brought his regiment home from duty.

At sixteen, Sybil was the oldest of the twelve Ludington children. She was a strong, gentle girl. She could clean house and bake bread, but her greatest joy was helping care for her father's horses.

"Father, will you let me keep the yearling for a saddle horse?" she asked one day.

Colonel Ludington answered slowly. "I don't rightly know, Sybil. With the country at war, it's hard to plan ahead."

"All the children love the yearling," Sybil's mother said. "And Sybil dearly loves to ride him on errands for me."

Suddenly they heard the sound of a horse galloping up to the house. As Colonel Ludington opened the front door the exhausted rider, a young soldier, was already dismounting.

"Colonel Ludington, I've been sent to warn you. General Tryon has made a surprise attack just across the state line at Danbury."

"Danbury is only fifteen miles away," Mrs. Ludington whispered. "The British may already be marching this way."

Colonel Ludington's soldiers were scattered over thirty miles of countryside. Every soldier had gone back to his farm.

"We'll call the regiment immediately," Colonel Ludington said. Then he paused. "But who can call my men? I must be here when they come, and neither this soldier nor his horse can travel further tonight."

At that moment Sybil spoke. "You have me and my yearling to call your men."

Colonel Ludington shook his head. A ride of thirty miles through the night was impossible for a youth of sixteen and a barely broken young horse.

"There is no one else to ride," Sybil's mother said. "If Sybil promises to be careful, she can go."

"Come, and I'll help you dress," she told her daughter. A few minutes later Mrs. Ludington slipped a warm cloak around the girl and kissed her.

When Sybil reached the barn, Colonel Ludington was waiting with the saddled yearling. He gave her quick directions as she mounted. She must ride down to Carmel and through Lake Mahopac to Tompkins Corners, then north to Stormville, then through Peckville, and then back home. "This is a brave thing you're doing, Sybil," he said.

"We won't tire, father," Sybil said, and they were off down the lane onto the pike.

Sybil traveled from farm to farm, arousing the soldiers. On and on they traveled, the yearling loping swiftly and easily. Whenever she reached a small settlement, she would stop at the first house and ask the man to warn his neighbors. Stretching ahead of her now was a dark and lonesome road through dense forests and around lakes.

A storm is coming, Sybil thought, as she saw the sky grow even blacker. For the first time she felt tired, and the colt was breathing heavily. She slowed him to a walk to rest for a while.

The first drops of rain came and then a downpour. Sybil had a difficult time trying to see what lay ahead. Just as she was giving up hope, a flash of lightning lighted the whole

countryside. She saw the settlement of Mahopac just ahead. After rousing the settlers there she headed her weary horse north towards Tompkins Corners.

Sybil knew they were scarcely halfway, but as the rain gradually stopped, she felt her courage rise. On they traveled, to Stormville, then to Peckville, and finally toward home.

Light was showing in the east as Sybil rode into the lane. The meadow was filled with soldiers ready to march.

"Here's our Sybil," her father said. "No soldier could have been braver or done better."

Sybil's mother took her into the house and

put her to bed, but before Sybil went to sleep, she thought she heard shots. It was the first battle for many of the farmer soldiers. They had no uniforms, and gunpowder was short. The British outnumbered them ten to one. But they fought from behind trees and walls. They fought the surprised redcoats with such bravery that they gave them a lesson in spirit and courage.

Sybil Ludington's ride on the dark night of April 26, 1777, was a sign of a young country's courageous spirit. The girl and her horse had awakened a whole regiment to fight for the free America they believed in.

CHECK YOUR READING

- 1. Sybil Ludington was**
 - A the youngest of twelve children
 - B the oldest of twelve children
 - C an only child
- 2. Sybil's favorite task was**
 - A cleaning house
 - B helping care for her father's horses
 - C baking bread
- 3. Colonel Ludington had to rouse his men because**
 - A the British had made a surprise attack
 - B General Washington was coming to see them
 - C the British had surrendered
- 4. Contacting his men was a problem for Colonel Ludington because they had all**
 - A been captured by the British
 - B gone off to Canada
 - C gone back to their farms
- 5. Sybil offered to alert the men because she**
 - A wanted to ride the yearling
 - B knew no one else could go
 - C wanted to take a night ride
- 6. Sybil had to ride**
 - A thirty miles
 - B ten miles
 - C fifteen miles
- 7. When Sybil reached a small settlement, she**
 - A stopped to rest
 - B told one man to spread the news
 - C had supper
- 8. Sybil started to feel tired when she**
 - A thought she wouldn't make it
 - B knew she was halfway home
 - C realized a storm was coming
- 9. Sybil's spirits rose when**
 - A she saw Meads Corners
 - B the rain gradually stopped
 - C the yearling began to run faster
- 10. When Sybil returned home, the soldiers**
 - A hadn't gotten there yet
 - B had already left
 - C were ready to march