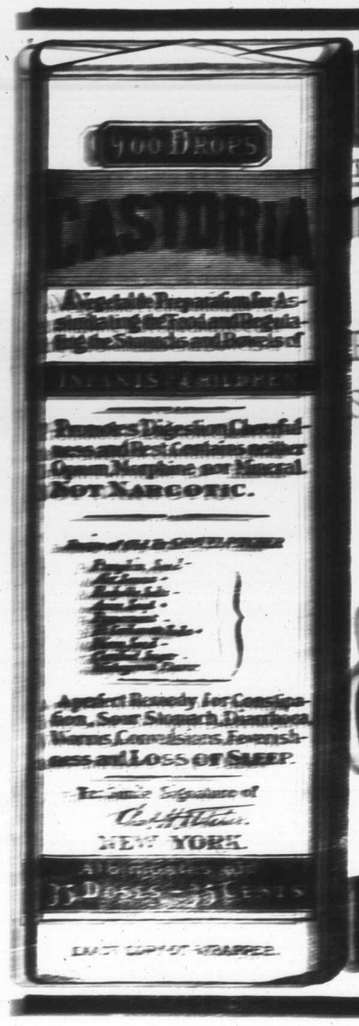

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Washington's Dispatch

How It Was Delivered and the Reply That Was Brought Back

By ETHAN TOMLINSON

It was the winter that the American patriots were dying like sheep at Valley Forge. Washington's headquarters were at Morristown, N. J.

One day Captain Alexander Hamilton went hurriedly into his office without stopping to knock. Washington looked up at him, surprised at his manner of military defiance. But he soon changed his expression.

"The French are going to join us, general," said Hamilton.

The general sat thinking. A great many matters hinged on this information.

"Captain," he said at last, "our enemies will strain every nerve to win their cause before our allies can reach us. Of the different ways they will make the one I fear most is attempts to induce our people by offering liberal terms for a surrender of our independence. They will try to win over some of our most prominent patriots, not only by such promises, but by offers of money and position if they will use their influence to induce our people to submit to the king. The place from which these offers will emanate is Philadelphia, now occupied by General Howe, surrounded by many sympathetic Tories. I shall send a message to those of our prominent men there urging them to stand steadfast, and with this help of the French our independence will be achieved."

When toward evening the message was ready, Washington handed it to his aid, saying:

"It is too important to trust to an ordinary post rider. It must be carried through the British lines into Philadelphia."

"Yes, general, and coming from you, it will doubtless have a great effect. General Howe would give half his army to intercept or delay its reaching those for whom it is intended before he has a chance to corrupt them. As to the messenger, young Janeway is your man, by all means he who carried the message through to our friends in New York when no men on Long Island."

That night Walter Janeway, a young officer of the Continental army, mounted on the best horse that could be found, started to make the distance of eighty miles between Morristown and Philadelphia in as short a time as possible. He had nothing to fear for some distance, for the region immediately was patriot ground. Nevertheless, he was dressed for the whole journey, or rather, for his entrance into Philadelphia, and since the city was the home of the Quakers, he had chosen their garb.

He rode all night and breakfast at Trenton, which place was more than half way to his destination, and was as far as his horse could go on a stretch. After resting and feeding the animal he proceeded more leisurely, for he was now on British and Tory territory and had a part to play.

At Trenton young Janeway changed the Quaker to the farmer's dress of the period and proceed his way down the right bank of the river through Pennsylvania. Midway between Trenton and Philadelphia, reaching a small village, he stopped for dinner at a tavern.

Being now within ten or fifteen miles of Philadelphia, there he met officers, patriots and Tories, with here and there a British soldier. A member of General Howe's army coming in said to an old opposite him at table.

"Where come you, neighbor?" he asked of Janeway.

"From the College of New Jersey, where I am studying," replied Janeway.

"And whither go you?"

"Home to my father's plantation in Maryland."

"Princeton is not far from Morristown, where they say is the headquarters of the rebel Washington. Has he many troops with him?"

"I have not been away from college so I can form no opinion as to that. One can find out by going there yourself."

"I am not on that business. My object is to look out for commodities coming from the rebels to our army with communications to prominent sympathizers in Philadelphia. To which side do you belong?"

"How can I, who believe that those who are the equal are sinners, bring to either side?"

"Well, I shall return this afternoon and, as far as our paths lie together, would like your company."

Janeway accepted the offer, since he could not well do so without exciting suspicion. On the way the trooper who was evidently had much to say about the number of communications passed between the rebels of New York and New Jersey and their fellows in Philadelphia. When they reached the outskirts of Philadelphia Janeway told him of a desire of the good that he must bid his guide, since the way to his home in Maryland lay to the southward. The trooper asked why he did not go into Philadelphia, stay one night and go on from there in the morning. Janeway replied that he had so many relatives in Philadelphia that if one of them heard he had been there and had not been to see him it would give offense.

"The trooper, satisfied with this, left the couple and proceed apace in the direction of Philadelphia, leaving Janeway to pursue alone the tenor of his journey.

"Then a footpath entered Janeway's head. The trooper might turn his steps, return to the city and detect the deception. Once in the city he would be safe, for he could, in order to get rid of the man, be decided to go in with him. So he continued with apparent reluctance, saying that he had intended to report to the committee for the relief of some farmer friends whose home in the city he must be put to the trouble of an inn.

When they reached the British outposts they halted the trooper. "Hello, Connors! Back again?"

"Yes, I've ended a long errand and have learned some things of the rebels. I have a young relative with me, a fellow traveler."

"He'll have to see the officer of the guard to gain admittance."

"All right. Call him."

The officer was called. Connors took him aside and after a brief conversation Janeway was allowed to join him.

"But how am I to get out in the morning?" he asked.

"Oh, we'll have to see one sight first," replied the scout. "General Howe is mighty particular about people leaving the city. They go in little to our information to the rebels."

So Janeway inquired where he could find his friend, but that he desired his assistance, but to keep his confidence. Once having got his friend in the city, he had only himself to get out of it. Bidding his friend good night, telling him that he would need him on the morrow, instead of going to an inn he rode into the middle of the town to where he bore the message. Then, having removed the dispatch from its hiding place, going to the front door, he knocked and told the colored servant who admitted him, in reply, to his master that a student of the College of New Jersey desired to see him. When the two were alone together Janeway produced Washington's dispatch for the prominent patriots of Philadelphia to stand fast for independence.

At 3 o'clock in the morning a British officer on the outskirts of the city opening the road to Trenton, hearing a horse coming toward him from the east, supposed that an unsuspecting emissary with the message was about to fall into his hands. He stood at attention, ready to bring his sword to a position of salute. The horseman rode past him without signing.

"Halt!"

The sentry had no sooner uttered the word than he brought his piece up to his shoulder and when the stranger changed his horse a shot from a rifle in a group fired after him. Janeway, who had chosen this mode of carrying Philadelphia, was crouched down upon his horse's neck, and the bullet got a hit in the back of his coat. Hearing the shot, the mounted sentry, to whom, being concealed by a hedge, he had been invisible, rode down to the place where the fugitive was supposed to be. But as soon as he had passed over it he caused the animal's feet and rode down under it. There he waited, clinging to his horse's mane, so as to prevent a sudden fall in a few minutes heard the clip of hoofs approaching with a dozen of his men.

Janeway, who knew he would be followed, dismounted for the sister of horses' hoofs. He could, by remaining and hid in the wood beside the road, but he knew he would have given away his locality. He determined, therefore, to run the risk of trusting to the animal's ability to outstrip his pursuers. He had at least an hour till dawn before he could be seen and hoped by that time to have entirely lost them. Unfortunately for him, he had mistaken the distance he was from Philadelphia and, as it was discovered that he was unable to defend for forty miles, he was caught, and if so his identity as a soldier in the Continental army would be established, and, being here, in the business of a soldier within the enemy's lines, he would be hanged as a spy.

The couple in gray were drawing nearer, while in the east was a faint streak indicating the coming dawn. Within an hour, or two at most, he would be seen. He was evidently coming to the conclusion of abandoning his horse and, taking to the woods where he was before, hiding in a wooden hollow beyond which the road made a curve, being a target. A subterfuge flashed into his brain. Riding over the crest, his horse, he turned and made a leap over it, he caused the animal's feet and rode down under it. There he waited, clinging to his horse's mane, so as to prevent a sudden fall in a few minutes heard the clip of hoofs approaching with a dozen of his men.

He had now a good chance for his life. His pursuers had unknowingly heard him passing the hollow, and the fact of their not detecting footfalls would, if not discovered, lead to the conclusion that he had passed on. But every were at hand and a search would be made. Janeway, half a dozen mounted men, came close